

**Short paper for the Regional Historian, St Mathias Campus, UWE.  
"Crusader Knights in Bristol and the West Country"**

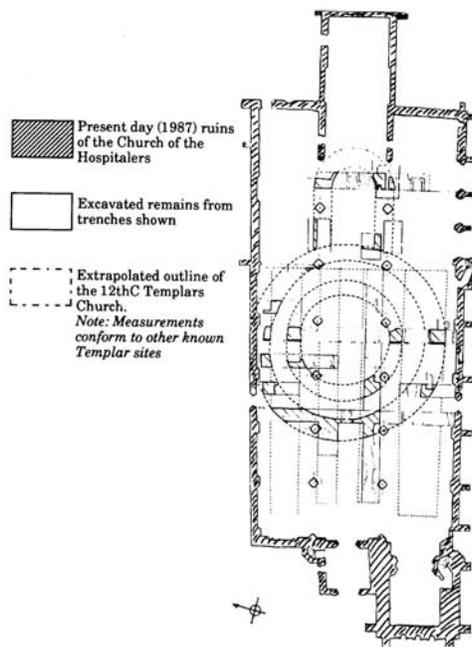
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How many people travelling through Bristol's main railway station Temple Meads, ever wonder why it is so called? Similarly, how many people realise that the area of the city extending from the south of Bristol Bridge through to the present day Temple Meads was once an estate of not one but two orders of Crusader Knights. Nowadays although there are very few clues to its swashbuckling past, they are still there if you know where to look. Mention of crusaders or more specifically, Knights Templar usually conjures up mental images of mounted knights fighting the Saracen for possession of the Holy Land, or protecting pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. What has this got to do with Bristol, and why would they have an estate here, so far from the Holy Land? The explanation as well as providing a fascinating insight into Bristol's history helps us to understand why they were both renowned for bravery and courage but suffered from terminally bad PR.

Before explaining about the reason for their presence in Bristol a very brief background about their order might help. The Christian capture of Jerusalem from the Egyptians by the first crusade in 1099 AD allowed pilgrims from Western Europe to travel to Jerusalem. However the way was long and perilous and many fell by the wayside before ever reaching the Holy city. In about 1118 a small group of French knights were invited to establish a presence in Jerusalem and to provide a guard for pilgrims en route. Ten years were to pass before their sponsorship by Count Fulk of Anjou and Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, at the Council of Troyes in Champagne led to their official recognition as a monastic order to be known henceforth as The Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon of Jerusalem, known vernacularly as 'The Templars'. As an order of 'Soldier Monks' they were governed by a Master and a set of monastic rules, and wore a white robe as a symbol of purity emblazoned with a red cross to remind them of their oath to be ready to shed their blood in defence of Christendom. Formed as a monastic order with the usual vows of poverty and chastity their order differed because they were allowed to bear arms. Although guarding pilgrims to the Holy land is the recorded reason for their formation, much has been made of unrecorded activities of the small group of founding knights in Jerusalem for almost a decade before they were officially recognised. In recent years they have been the subject of many conspiracy theories usually involving buried treasure, improbable lineages and privileged access to arcane knowledge. A cynic might comment on the direct connection between the more outlandish theories and access to publisher's dollars.

So, what were they doing in Bristol? To answer that question and to learn what if any impact their presence had on the



development of the city we need to look how their order grew from a group of nine knights empowered to guard pilgrims en route to Jerusalem to one of the most powerful and richest of monastic orders. With the opening up of the pilgrim route a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land was seen both as a Christian ideal and as a way of completing a penance. As a papal monastic order they attracted donations and gifts of land that often came from pious landowners who were encouraged to offer these as an acceptable alternative to undertaking a pilgrimage themselves. Bristol's first recorded involvement with the Crusaders began when in 1145 Robert De Berkeley granted them sufficient land on part of his Manor of Bedminster, in the bend of the Avon, just south of Bristol to build a small church, a communal hall and twenty-eight adjacent premises. Other than documentary records, modern day evidence is restricted to the results of archaeological investigation and place names. However the outline of their twelfth century church can still be seen today inside the bombed ruins of the later fourteenth century Temple Church, now under the custodianship of English Heritage. The foundations of their circular church are marked out in gravel. The reason for the Templars' round churches is that they were inspired by the Anastasis of the Church of the

Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and examples can still be seen in London, Cambridge, Garway in Herefordshire, and at Little Maplestead in Essex.

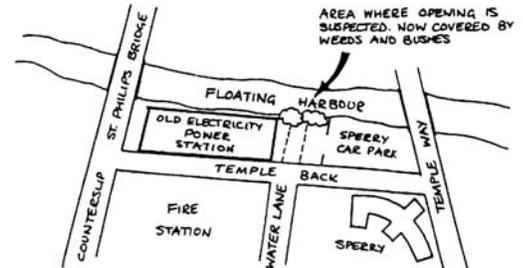
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What would have been the role of the Bristol establishment? Well, it is unlikely that it was ever a hotbed of deeds of crusading 'derring do'. Although the order grew rich through benefactions it still needed substantial earned income to support its increasing infrastructure and the long pilgrimage routes. Establishments such as that at Bristol were used to provide the day to day income of the order by agriculture and related activities. However in the case of Bristol it is more likely that the site was chosen initially for its logistic location rather than for cash crops, especially as the land situated in the bend of the at that time tidal River Avon was soft and marshy, (a feature that accounts for the spectacular lean of the tower of Temple Church – a landmark near Bristol Bridge). Bristol was probably used as port for the shipment of wool from the Cotswold estates. The west-country centres of crusader influence mapped across the wool production areas give us from Just below Gloucester, SE to Wooton Bassett, Salisbury, Bradford on Avon, Bruton, Shepton Mallet, Tiverton, Wells, Bristol, Vale of Severn and back to Gloucester, thus putting Bristol in a key location.

Direct evidence for its logistic importance arose during the 1980s when my group, Temple Local History Group, started to research the history of Bristol's Temple Parish. During 1980 I noticed that the map by Jacobus Millerd, dated 1673, although long after the Templar era, showed a small inlet or creek at the end of the present day Water Lane. The artist F.G. Lewin RWA also included it in one of his 1920's panoramic sketches of the area, but this time complete with a small ship moored at a dock in the inlet. It was not possible to find any justification for these topographical interpretations, and the official response was that it was probably artistic licence, Lewin having probably taken his lead from Millerd's map. A breakthrough came with the discovery by one of our members, Michael Baigent, who whilst carrying out his own research in the La Rochelle port rolls, came across the names of two of the Templars' own ships, named La Templere and Le Buscard, both registered at Bristol. As a result of this discovery a more detailed search for evidence of a creek or dock was undertaken. However it was a chance conversation with Joseph Bryant who was researching his family's rope making business at the adjacent Temple Back that provided the necessary corroboratory evidence. His family papers contained a ninety-nine year lease to a carpenter, Samuel Whiting on the land adjacent to the River Avon at Temple Back, subject to him build (a) a new dwelling, (Rope making house) and (b) Arch over the dock at the east end of Water Lane, (effectively culverting the dock). The lease was dated 1673, which tied in with Millerd's map. Armed with this information, permission was gained from the South Western Electricity board, to examine the river bank at that point, (since the nineteenth century it was part of the Temple Back Electricity generating station). A boat was also used to examine the stone walled river bank at that point. The arched outlet of what must have been the creek and dock is still visible. Following this other circumstantial but supporting evidence for the dock on a small creek flowing into the River Avon was also found and these were reported in Bristol Past revisited<sup>i</sup>.



Having demonstrated that the Templars had the capability of shipping wool from their Cotswold estates from Bristol on their own vessels, they would have needed storage space, and perhaps part of their hall was used as a warehouse. Although the time when cloth working started at Bristol hasn't yet been determined, and at what stage the Templars decided to process the wool at Bristol is not known, however evidence from other Templar sites shows that they had the technical knowledge. For example it is worth looking at <sup>ii</sup> the following examples from the inquest as they are representative of the issues that would have been applied to the Crusaders in the West Country. The Temple Manor of Witham, an inquest of 20<sup>th</sup> April 1309 <sup>iii</sup> refers to Molendium Aquaticum fullaris [A water mill for Fulling]. Similarly two acres at Impnells in Halstead<sup>iv</sup>, (now in Little Maplestead, Essex), also included a Fulling Mill with Dye facilities. It has been suggested that it was the Templars who introduced the fulling mill to England, which would further explain their choice of a site by the fast flowing River Avon and the development of cloth working in Bristol's Temple district.

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Although no records of Fulling Mills have been found for their Bristol estate, Temple Fee, evidence for the Templars' introduction of cloth working at Bristol come from the Knight Hospitallers who inherited the Templar's site in Bristol.

Over the period 1390s to 1460 the Hospitallers replaced the Templars round church with their own church, (the leaning tower of which you can still see today), which had a chapel dedicated to St Catherine, the Patron Saint of the Weavers. However the grant of the weavers chapel dates back to the time of the Templar's occupation, when in 1299 Edward I gave the land for the "for their [Weavers'] use forever". This dedication, on a wall inscription, in the church, implies that it was initially the Templars who granted the land to the Weavers' Guild. There is further evidence of Bristol Templars possible involvement in weaving and cloth making. In Bristol the district's involvement with the cloth trade in its various forms can be seen in street names. There is still a Tucker street, which is a dialect corruption of Touker Street, the district where the immigrant cloth workers from Le Toque in Normandy came and settled in the in the 1330s. This street led off Bath Street, just to the south-east of Bristol Bridge, adjacent to the river with its plentiful supply of water needed for their processes. The Rack Close for stretching and tentering the cloth, was still shown on maps of Temple as late as 1673<sup>v</sup>, There were also Fullers in the adjacent St Thomas parish, where a large vat believed to have been used for dyeing was unearthed in excavations in the 1980's. Archaeological excavations in Temple Street revealed evidence of post holes in houses for weaving looms, until nineteenth century industrialisation a domestic activity. It seems therefore that apart from place names such as Temple Meads, which means Temple Meadows, and a gravelled outline of their round church, the legacy that the Templars left in the district was that of weaving and cloth working, which in turn led to other supportive trades and professions moving into the district which possibly even provided the future workforce for the nineteenth century industrialisation.

How big would the Bristol establishment been and what did it comprise? We do know that the original bequest was for a Church, a hall and a number of dwellings and a dock together with the infrastructure necessary to service their ships and handle the wool, or subsequently, cloth. It is possible that either part of the hall was used as a warehouse, or there were other buildings not mentioned in the original grant. But what about the Templars Hall? Typically there could be: 31 men entitled to eat in hall, comprising: 5 brothers, 3 Corrodories, (pensioners), six at esquires table, plus 17 tenant labourers. As Bristol was a port, there would also need to be accommodation for ships' crew. Often the smaller preceptories such as at Bristol would have been in the control of a single knight, often a retired crusader, or maybe a corrodary. Corrodaries were also paid to those who had worked for the Order as a way of providing for them in their old age.



*Image of Temple Fee "Douglas Proctor 1986 for TLHG*

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The earliest records for Temple Street are 1248. This we know because of a tragic accident which made legal history. Early Bristol Charters<sup>vi</sup> tell of a boy who was killed in Temple Street by a pillory that fell on him. It seems that two of the Templars' horses had been tethered to it; and something caused them to bolt, pulling over the pillory. In accordance with the law of the land, when an inanimate object caused a death, a fine based upon the valuation of the object was payable for the departed, in this instance ten shillings for the horses and two shillings for the pillory. This was to appease the wrath of God. The payment was known as a Deodand. However in this instance, a problem arose because the Templars did not recognise any local authority and refused to appear before the local justices<sup>vii</sup>. The issue was finally resolved by their agreeing to make an ex gratia payment of 12s to the sheriff, an amount equivalent to the Deodand. The Templars, as a monastic order, were only answerable to Papal Authority which overruled any other. Because of this they were exempt from all local tithes and were not answerable for their actions. Although Bristol Histories make general reference to the "continued conflicts between the Burgesses of Bristol and the Templars" to date the legal issue over the deodand is the only one found worthy of recording in the charters, and importantly it provides an early recorded name for Temple Street. Another reason for their unpopularity was the fact that their legal immunity from the local authorities also extended to their (non-templar) tenants. So a situation could arise, (and probably did!), where their secular villeins could commit an offence north of Bristol Bridge, and flee back over the bridge to the sanctuary of Temple Fee. No wonder the Burgesses of Bristol appealed to the King to give them control over the inhabitants south of the Avon!

The final days. These arguments continued until the early fourteenth century when matters came to a head. By this time although the Templar Order had become amazingly powerful, (their financial acumen was such that they were lending money to Kings), they had lost control of the Holy Land. In 1291 when the Mamelukes took Acre, the Templars' days were numbered. One notable and dangerous creditor was King Philip IV of France, who put pressure on the Pope, Clement V, to dissolve the Order and confiscate all their wealth. The main arguments put to the Pope for their suppression, were not that Philip owed them a lot of money, but that they had indulged in obscene and sacrilegious practices. Eventually in 1307 the Pope acquiesced and signed the secret order for the simultaneous apprehension of all Templars wherever they were. Thus the age of the Knights Templars had lasted from 1118 until 1307, and as a web search will show a lot of books have been written on the theories of the dissolution of the order. From many of these one could gain the impression that upon the dissolution which took place in 1312 the estates and property of the Templars were just handed on a plate to the older but surviving order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem, 'The Knights Hospitaller'. However this is a simplification and in some instances properties were not transferred until the 1330s, by which time much of the Templar estates, such as those at Guiting, Bristol & Temple Combe, had been plundered by the crown. In order to understand why the Hospitallers didn't always get as much of the Templar estates as they hoped for there follows some examples from the archives of what actually happened. This is how the Hospitallers came to own Bristol's Temple Fee and why the leaning church tower that you can see today, although still known as Temple Church, was in fact built by their successors, the Knight Hospitallers, who continued on the site until their order was swept away in the Reformation of King Henry VIII.

Where did all the Templars wealth go? After the dissolution and arrest of the Templars in 1307, an inquest of all their estates was carried out, by which time many of the remaining preceptories were in a state of decline and apathy. The houses were unmaintained and after the final dissolution, in order to gain absolution (from their alleged sins), the surviving Brothers were despatched by the Church to serve penances at monastic houses around the country. In England there was an initial reluctance for King Edward II to enforce the arrest of the Templars; similar to Philip of France the Papal Bull of 13<sup>th</sup> March 1312 for the Dissolution of the Order of the Knights Templar gave the King a solution to many of his financial problems. The Papal Bull provided the King with a licence to plunder their estates in order to clear his debts, pay for campaigns and reward friends and favourites. For example the King shipped £360 worth of Templar fleeces to Ballard of Lucca as part payment of a debt. He also used the funds and their remaining supplies to pay outstanding bills from his Scottish campaigns such as Bannockburn. However much of Templars' wealth in England was used buy the loyalty of feudal barons, and reward favourites, Piers Galveston being the most infamous. As an example of the sums involved, the Scottish campaign took £464, nearly double the total amount of the

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annual returns of all the Warwickshire Templar manors. Much of the Templars' wealth came from bequests such as the gift of the Bristol estate by Robert De Berkeley. Some, probably not an inconsiderable amount, came from tenants estates. It is not generally realised that the Templars as Landlords had a very unpopular clause included in their tenancy agreements – the 'Obit' or Death Duty. At that time the law of the land was that after settling any debts the residue of a persons estate was divided as follows: one third to Wife, one third to children, and the remaining third could be disposed of by will, UNLESS, the deceased had been a Templar tenant, when they were forced by Templar regulations to will the remaining third to their Templar Lord.

This unpopularity at literally grass roots level could explain why at the dissolution, when the leaders had all been rounded up, arrested, and carted off to the 'Gate' jails at London before any caretaker landlords had been put in place Templar property started to vanish. Their former villains indulged in understandably opportunistic looting. For example at nearby Norton St Philip, the inspectors found that about dozen doves were missing from the Dove Cote. Some other recorded losses were: 1 foal, 7 calves, 5 lambs, 2 cocks, 3 hens, 13 cheeses, ½ Gallon of butter, a side of bacon, 2 shoulders of beef, 100 herrings, 1 salt cellar, 2 keys, 1 tankard, 1 wine cask. At another preceptory, one quarter of wheat, 4 bushells of mixture, 2 quarters of malt, 4 stones of cheese, 12 young doves, 1 pig, 30 stones of wool, and a cask of cider went missing. One gets the image of the Templars being led away in chains, and before they had even vanished over the first hill, anything movable was disappearing out the back door!

Although one can assume that there would have been no mercy shown to any of the villeins caught with any of these items, to put it in perspective, consider this list of Templar property appropriated by King Edward to support his Scottish campaign: Wheat 1,000 Quarters, Oats 1,000 Quarters, Peas & Beans 200 Quarters, Wine 300 Tuns, Honey 3 tuns, Salt 200 Quarters, Stockfish (salt Cod) 1,000, as well as large quantities of grain and livestock.

In a further example of the way in which he used plundered lands to pay off arrears of salary; he made a grant of land and its income to a clerk until the amount owing to him for past service as Chamberlain of Scotland had been paid. Nicholls & Taylor<sup>viii</sup> refer in the late nineteenth century to a charter then in the vestry of Temple Church. In the twelfth year of King Edward II, 1318, Sir Richard Amory granted to the prior and fraternity of St. Augustine an acre of land adjacent to what is now Temple Gate. Their assumption was that because he granted the land he was probably a former Templar. What is more likely is that it was a possessory lien,<sup>ix</sup> similar to the above mentioned Chamberlain of Scotland, he had the use of the land for the eight years and his grant to the St. Augustinians in 1318 signified the end of the lien.

In this way, including the aforementioned gifts to his favourites, about half the Templar property ended up with the King and his Barons, and after many years the remainder, such as the Bristol estate, was eventually obtained by the Hospitallers who themselves lost it all at the reformation. Because Temple Church became a parish church, it survived until it was burnt out by incendiary bombs during a blitz of the Second World War, which is why today the only reminders of the Templars are names such as Temple Meads and the landmark of leaning church tower.

Word Count: 3,585

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**Optional Chronology:**

- A.D. 1145                      Templars at Bristol, land granted.
- 1242    Two of the Templars' horses, tethered to pillory in Temple Street, pulled pillory over, crushing boy to death. Deodand of twelve shillings paid, being the value of the horses and pillory.
- 1247/8 Bristol Bridge built - unites Bristol, Redcliffe and Temple.
- 1299    Chapel in Temple Church dedicated to St. Catherine, Patron Saint of Weavers (may date back to 1229).
- 1307    Apprehension of Templars, confiscation of lands.
- 1312    Templar estates at Bristol conferred on the Order of St. John; their preceptor at Templecombe having the privilege of the market in Temple Street with assize of bread and ale.
- 1330    Seventy families of clothworkers arrive from the Netherlands.
- 1390    Bernard Obelly and Reginald Taylor bequeathed money for a tower for the new Temple (Holy Cross) Church.
- 1460    Third stage of tower added after strengthening of foundations and attempt to correct lean; still a notable landmark in Bristol to-day.
- 1472    Tuckers Guilds - account books available from this date.
- 1525    Stallage Cross rebuilt.
- 1541    Possessions of the Order of St. John confiscated during the Re-formation. Bristol Corporation petitioned for a grant of Temple lands and the advowson of Temple Church.
- 1550    Royal Patent granted for Temple to hold an eight day fair on the feast of St. Paul. Profits to the Parish Poor and for maintenance of Temple Conduit.
- 1561                              Temple Pump erected in Temple Street.

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<sup>i</sup> TLHG Publication, Bristol Past revisited, J. Lea-Jones, Chapter 6, The Water Lane Mystery. Edn 1 1989, Edn 2 1990. ISBN 0 951 0068 6 X BRO Acc No. 40198

<sup>ii</sup> Cartulary of KT of St John in England

<sup>iii</sup> Ff83 Royal Inquest of Temple Manor of Witham, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1309

<sup>iv</sup> Ff 673 Impnells in Halstead

<sup>v</sup> Map of Bristol by Jacobus Millerd, 1673, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

<sup>vi</sup> Pleas of the Crown for the Hundred of Swineshead and the Township of Bristol, in the fifth year of the reign of King Henry III 1221, pp95, 95 Deodand, transcribed, E. J. Watson, Pub.W Crofton Hemons, Bristol, 1902.

<sup>vii</sup> Somersetshire Pleas No. 798 n<sub>2</sub> Rolls of Gloucestershire eyre 5 Hen III 1221, Prof Maitland's transcript pp 116, 155.

<sup>viii</sup> Bristol Past & Present, Nicholls & Taylor, Vol II Ecclesiastical History, pp140, 141. Arrowsmith, Bristol, 1881

<sup>ix</sup> Osborn's Concise law Dictionary, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp204, J. Burke, Sweet & Maxwell.