

Templar sites to visit in southern England

From Helen J. Nicholson, *The Knights Templar on Trial: the Trial of the Templars in the British Isles* (The History Press, 2010), Appendix 2: List of Templar properties in the British Isles that were mentioned during the trial; and from material submitted by Helen J. Nicholson to *BBC Countryfile* magazine.

Addington, Surrey

Location: Lat. 51.3575, long.-0.0410. To the south of London, 2.5 miles SE of Croydon in Surrey, next to a major route (now the A233).

Background: Addington Temple may have been built on the land given by Walter de Merton and his wife to the Templars in 1241. Before January 1308 the Templars had leased Addington to John Blebury or Bloebury for life.

After the trial, in 1324: Parliament assigned Addington with the Templars' other properties to the Hospital of St John, which recovered it from John Blebury and held it until the Dissolution of the monasteries in England and Wales in 1540.

Today, the former Addington Palace is a hotel and conference centre; the estate grounds are a golf course.

Bisham, Berkshire

Location: Lat. 51.5565, long. -0.7812. Beside the River Thames near Marlow, midway between Windsor and Reading.

Background: Bisham was founded by Robert de Ferrers, earl of Derby, before 1139.

Today, Bisham Abbey is the headquarters of the UK National Sports Council. The Templars' hall, dating from around 1260, survives as part of the modern house. The abbey itself is not open to the public, but is used as a conference centre

Bristol: Temple Meads church

Where is it? Lat. 51.452, long. -2.5868, in a public park. The building is now in the care of English Heritage. It can be visited at all reasonable hours, but the interior is unsafe and is closed to the public.

What is here? The remains of the Hospitallers' church. The line of the foundations of the Templars' church is marked on the ground within the church. In the twelfth century the Templars built a church here, with a small circular nave. The Hospitallers rebuilt it in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a magnificent perpendicular building. The tower was completed in around 1460; its inadequate foundations caused it to lean even as it was being built, and it is now 1.64m out of the vertical. The nave of the church was destroyed by fire during WW2, but the tower survived.

What were the Templars doing here? Earl Robert of Gloucester, son of King Henry I, gave the Templars land in the marshy area by the Avon. This was cheap land which the Templars could develop and make profitable.

Temple Combe, Somerset

Where is it? Lat. 50.9973, long. -2.4160.

What is here? A private house and farm: not open to the public. Dendrology evidence taken in 1996 for 'Timeteam' revealed that the house now on the site was constructed in the early 17th century, and that the site of the commandery buildings lay to the north of the modern

house. The village church did not belong to the Templars. The famous painting of a head which is now in Temple Combe church appears to show the head of St John the Baptist. This suggests a connection to the Hospitallers, who held Temple Combe commandery after the Templars.

What were the Templars doing here? The house was founded by Serlo fitz Odo before 1185, but land was also given by the famous knight William Marshal. The commandery stood at the junction of two locally important routes, now where the modern A 357 road crosses the cross country road from Gillingham to Sherborne. By the early fourteenth century this was the Templars' main administrative centre for their houses in south west England. The Hospitallers gained the site after 1312.

Temple Cressing, Essex

Where is it? Lat. 51.8363, long. 0.6100, in central Essex.

What is here? Cressing is now most famous for its enormous 13th-century barns. There is still a farm on the commandery site; the Templars' commandery buildings and chapel no longer exist, although some foundations have been excavated. The barns are in the care of Essex County Council and are open to the public.

What were the Templars doing here? In short, making money. Cressing was part of the lands of the counts of Boulogne and was given to the Templars by the heiress to the county, Matilda of Boulogne, in 1136/7. To judge by the great barns, the Templars' main activity here was grain production.

Dinsley (Temple Dinsley), Hertfordshire

Location: Lat. 51.9099, long. -0.2830. Just E of the village of Preston, about 4 miles S of Hitchin in Herts., and 30 miles NE of the city of London.

Back-ground, Given to the Templars by Bernard de Balliol in 1147: K&H, p. 295; see also *VCH Hertford*, vol. 4, ed. William Page, pp. 445-6; Lord, pp. 56-60. By 1266, the English provincial chapters were being held here: *CPR, 1258-66*, pp. 586-7.

Today, there is a girl's school on the site, Princess Helena College. Originally founded in Ealing, London, in 1820, the school moved to Temple Dinsley in 1935.

Ewell (Temple Ewell), Kent

Location: Lat. 51.1625, long. 1.2718. 3 miles inland from the major port of Dover, just E of the Roman road from Dover to London, now the A2. The Templars also owned Temple Ewell village church.

Back-ground, Given to the order before 1185: K&H, p. 295. On Ewell, see the very brief notice in *VCH Kent*, vol. 2, ed. William Page, p. 175; and Lord, pp. 126-8. The church was also appropriated to the Templars: L&K, p. 173.

Today: The site of the commandery was in a field next to Temple Farmhouse, Singledge Lane, to E of the modern A2. The present parish church at Ewell, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, dates largely from the time of the Templars' ownership in the 12th century, and the earliest recorded priest there, John *sacerdos*, was appointed by the master of the Temple in England in 1185.

Temple Church, London

Where is it? Lat. 51.5131, long. -0.1105. Situated just outside Ludgate, the west gate of

the city of London, on land west of the River Fleet, between Fleet Street and the north bank of the River Thames.

What is here? The Templars' church. This is now the private church of the Middle and Inner Temple, which stand on the site of the Templars' commandery. Although it is privately owned, the church is open to the public during the legal terms (see the website).

What were the Templars doing here? Before 1144 the Templars were given a site in Holborn, outside the city of London, but they in 1161 they sold this and transferred their London base to this new site, just outside Ludgate and on the River Thames. It became known as the New Temple. As a safe-deposit, it played a significant role in London commerce; the church was open to the public at certain times; royalty and nobility lodged in the house; a public right of way ran through the house from Fleet Street to the Thames. After the dissolution of the Templars the Hospitallers eventually gained control of the property, but leased it to lawyers who used it as a depository for legal documents.

Rockley, Wiltshire

Location: Lat. 52.7055, long. -1.1477. Around 3 miles NW of Marlborough, on the Marlborough downs.

Background: Given to the Templars in 1155 by John Marshal, ancestor of the earls of Pembroke: Evelyn Lord, *The Knights Templar in Britain* (2001), pp. 117-18.

After the trial, Rockley passed to the Hospitallers. In 1338 no Hospitallers were resident, but a chaplain, a bailiff and a harvest overseer were employed there: L&K, p. 187.

The site of the Templars' house was at Temple Farm, about a mile WNW of Rockley village.

Sandford on Thames, Oxfordshire

Where is it? Lat. 51.7127, long. -1.2315, on the Thames south of Oxford.

What is there? Oxford Thames Four Pillars Hotel stands on the site and incorporates the surviving Templar buildings. Park in the hotel car park and have a cup of coffee in the medieval hall.

What were the Templars doing here? The local landowner, Thomas son of Thomas of Sandford, gave his lands here to the Templars in around 1240, and the Templars moved their main Oxfordshire commandery from Cowley to this site. The commandery was a local administrative centre for the Templars, and included a farm and a chapel which was used by both the Templars and outsiders. After the dissolution of the Templars in 1312, the Hospitallers took over the site.

Shipleigh, Sussex

Where is it? Lat. 50.9840, long. -0.3703. Shipleigh lies on the upper reaches of the River Adur, which in the Middle Ages was navigable to this point.

What is here? The commandery has vanished, but the Templars' beautiful twelfth-century church, dedicated to Christ's mother Mary, still stands and can be visited. There is parking space in the village.

What were the Templars doing here? Farming. The Templars were given Shipleigh by Philip de Harcourt when he became Dean of Lincoln in around 1139.

In Sussex, the Templars also had property at **Saddlecombe** and at **Sompting** (where they held the church).

Strood (Temple Strood), Kent

Location: Lat. 51.3895, long. 0.4894. Approx. 2 miles NW of the cathedral city of Rochester. Strood lies on the Roman road from Dover to London (now the A2 trunk road), on the north bank of the River Medway. It is now in the middle of an industrial estate, next to the railway.

Background: see S.E. Rigold, *Temple Manor: Strood, Rochester, Kent* (London, 1990). The Templars' house at Strood may have acted as lodging for Templars travelling between London and Dover; it may also have lodged other travellers.

After the Templars were dissolved in 1312, Strood was briefly in the hands of the Hospitallers, and then granted to the countess of Pembroke, who gave it to the nunnery she had founded in the former Templar house of Denney in Cambridgeshire.

Today: the surviving hall belongs to English Heritage: check the website for opening times.

Temple, Cornwall

Where is it? Lat. 50.5294, long. -4.617. In the centre of Bodmin Moor, just to the south of the main road from Launceston to Bodmin, now the A30 (T). The main road now bypasses the village. Park in the village, at the top of the lane leading down to the church: the lane is too narrow for cars, and there is no where to turn a vehicle!

What is here? A nineteenth-century church dedicated to St Catherine, built on the site of the church which was given to the Templars. A few remnants from the medieval church are built into an outside wall, and there is a medieval font.

What were the Templars doing here? Probably the local landowner wanted them to set up a house here to care for travellers. In the same way, the Hospitallers were given Trebeigh on the south side of the moor, where in the fourteenth century they were incurring considerable expenses giving accommodation to travellers. After the dissolution of the Templars in 1312 the Hospitallers took over the site.

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