

KNIGHTS TEMPLARS

commemorate St George's Day 2007, in Dover

• • • by Fr Peter Sherred • • •

*"I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot;
Follow your spirit; and, upon this charge
Cry God for Harry, England and St George!"*

(HENRY V ACT 3 SCENE 1)

The Shakespeare quote highlights the link between a Saint and our Country yet, increasingly, there seems to be a feeling the English do not acknowledge or celebrate their Patron Saint.

The Kent Preceptory of the Knights Templar decided to do both and with the kind hospitality of the proprietor of Cullins Yard, Jim Gleeson, a party including Preceptor Michael Kennedy, Emeritus Grand Prior Denys Le Fevre and his wife Barbara, Fr Paul Christian of Temple Ewell Church and his wife Hilary, Fr Peter Sherred (chaplain) and his wife Mary and others sat down to a traditional English lunch on the nearest Saturday to St George's Day (April 23rd).

At a table decorated with the flag associated with St George and England (and miniature standards of the same) the party enjoyed a 'traditional' English menu of homemade soup, roast beef and seasonal vegetables, followed by apple pie and custard with suitable associated beverages. So enjoyable and successful was the event it is intended to repeat it annually.

However, what of the Saint and the connection between the Templars and the St George's commemoration and the Templars connection with the locality?

Little is known for certain about St George save that he appears to be

associated with a Roman tribune, of noble birth, who was beheaded on the order of the Emperor Diocletian on 23 April 303 after identifying himself as a Christian and raising a protest about the Roman Emperor's treatment and persecution of the group known as Christians, followers of "The Way", Jesus Christ.

Following martyrdom, St George became the subject of stories and legends the most famous of which, arguably, being that of the slaying of a dragon, as depicted by the Royal Mint on a half sovereign. St George became venerated for his chivalry, his courage and his principles, for being a protector of the poor and followers of the Christian faith. How this person from the Middle East, believed to be buried in Lod, became the Patron Saint of England, (for which we do not have exclusivity), is still unclear although it is likely this was due to the influence of the Crusades and in particular those returning from them for, by the fourteenth century, during the reign of Edward III, George seems to have supplanted Saint Edmund as the Patron Saint and the rest is, as is often the case, "history".

Numerous aspects of our country's life are associated with Saint George. Windsor Castle chapel is dedicated to this Saint and soldier and is the setting for the Order of the Garter ceremony each year founded to

honour knighthood and chivalry. Shakespeare promotes the image of St George as a national figure and the scouting movement has had a close association with the memory of the Saint from the days of Baden-Powell, its founder. Medals such as the George Cross and George Medal, civilian awards for gallantry, perpetuate the Saint's legend of the dragon. Most significantly, in the days of devolution, an emblem of St George (in the form of a white flag with a red cross on it) has become almost iconic especially at sports events and on his day of commemoration in April. Certainly, from the late thirteenth century it became the national flag of England though, perhaps, supplanted in seventeenth century by the Union flag. Some but not many such flags were to be seen in and around Dover on 23rd April this year. The flag of St George is also that of an Admiral in the Royal Navy about which the Senior Service is very protective. The St George Cross was thought to have been adopted (again at the time of the Crusades) for soldiers and in particular, a special group known as the Knights Templar so we can begin to knit together a reason for a commemoration of the Saint by the Knights Templar.

With the publication of books like *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Last Templar* there has been a revival of interest in the Knights Templar with inevitable embroidery and mystery attached to them. Their origins lay in a chivalric Christian association founded, in the twelfth century, to protect those travelling to the Holy Land and for the defence of the Holy Land itself. St Bernard of Clairvaux provided the Rule of the Templars who derive their name from the fact they were installed on part of the



Knights Templar

site of Solomon's Temple hence Knights of the Temple (or Templars) and papal recognition was given to the Order with a twelfth century pope granting the Templars their white cloak and another pope the distinctive eight pointed red cross representing purity of intention and personal sacrifice respectively. After the fall of Jerusalem and Acre the Templars initially withdrew to Cyprus then established a head quarters in Paris. They became very powerful and affluent and in the fourteenth century a jealous king of France (Philip le Bel) exerted pressure on the papacy to suppress the Order, the last Grand Master being burnt at the stake in Paris. The nineteenth century saw a resurgence of the Order in Europe and in

the 1960s the modern Order was re-established in England and Wales, based on chivalric notions of the earlier Christian Order, with a view to increase an understanding of other faiths, to assist people making pilgrimages, preserving Christian holy sites in the Holy Land and providing humanitarian relief to those in need among other objectives. In essence the Knights and Dames of the Order strive to uphold, in an increasingly consumer orientated and secular world, standards of Christian morals, ethics and principles. So the Templars and the Saint are identified, in symbolic terms, by red crosses on white backgrounds and with an underlying foundation of chivalry in the context of Christian principles. But why a celebration in Dover by one for the other?

The modern Order of Templars (which has no connection with Freemasonry) is centred on the Grand Priory but local arrangements are organised by Preceptories one of which, the South East Preceptory of St Augustine, covers Sussex, Surrey and Kent as well as the Channel Islands. Another is the Templar Pilgrimage Trust (which provides grants to the young and the disabled to travel on pilgrimages) the Guild Church is St Peter and St Paul Church in Temple Ewell. This fine local church has had a connection with the Knights Templars for over 800 years (other local Templar connections are associated with the Western Heights). The church was in the manor of Ewell and seems to have been accorded its prefix of Temple (Templar) from the twelfth century. Soon after the suppression of the Templars in Europe Edward II took all English Templar property into Royal ownership and the Templars were ruthlessly suppressed.

The manor of Temple Ewell passed, in history, through numerous hands but evidence of the Templar presence and

connection with the church is found in an engraved Templar cross on an upright stone slab just inside the south porch door where it was placed during the nineteenth century when it was removed from the chancel. A contemporary connection with the modern Order of Templars is evidenced by the annual presence of Knights and Dames of the Order in a procession with the choir, congregation and vicar, through the village to the church on Palm Sunday. In 2007 Members of the Order were joined by the Grand Prior, Simon Le Fevre, in the procession commemorating Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The Preceptor of the St Augustine Preceptory, Michael Kennedy, is a worshipping member of Temple Ewell church.

So it was felt appropriate that members of a chivalric Order, (who cut impressive figures in their white cloaks (mantles) with the large red eight pointed cross emblazoned on them), having a close association with the local church of St Peter and St Paul Temple Ewell should meet together to commemorate a Saint identified in history with chivalric standards. The commemorative lunch, in the presence of the vicar of the church that has such long association with the Order, was an attempt to raise awareness of both the Patron Saint and the Order in Dover by acknowledging and celebrating, in public, the identity of the former. Appreciation goes to Jim Gleeson and the staff at Cullins Yard for entering into the spirit of the occasion. Members of the Order and their guests look forward to a like celebration in 2008. Will you be there to join them?

"Non nobis, Domine, non nobis; sed nomine tuo da gloriam."

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to your Name give the glory" (Psalm 115 v.1)