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A BEAUCEANT!!

NO 26



A little Knight Templar news does you good

Dear Brother Knights

Staying in touch

“Light” is the new theme, it seems.

The hours of daylight are getting longer as we enter Spring and the end of the long pandemic tunnel seems to be approaching too, thank goodness.

Since the last issue of the newsletter was published, an online conference has been held attended by the Registrars of our Preceptories and together we have started to discuss plans for a possible re-opening after the summer.

I will let the Registrars tell you about what was discussed but the last four months of this year could be a very busy time. It seems that we have at least eight candidates waiting to enter the Order and a number of applications for Joining membership. The big event could be the Provincial Malta meeting in November as well as a remarkable celebration of 150 years existence by Gwent Preceptory.

Virtual Business Meetings continue to grow in popularity. Last month, successful such events were hosted by Sant Madoc, Gwent and Fforest Preceptories and March sees similar meetings organised by St David's, Cefn Ydfa and St John of Cardiff Preceptories. They offer a good opportunity for staying in touch and dealing with business matters.

In addition, you will be as pleased as me to hear that I had a magnificent response to the gauntlet that I threw down, asking for more Templar Quizmasters to step forward. Some of their questions appear in this issue as do some fascinating articles that have been sent in by readers – read on. Keep responding, keep reading and keep in touch.

Yours in the bonds of the Order
R E Kt Paul Calderwood

The Hospitallers in South Wales

When E Kt Paul Jenkins kindly sent me an article about the Templar connections with Garway and its surrounding area, he unwittingly started off what has become a fascinating series of articles about the presence in Wales of the military religious Orders. Afterwards, E Kt Henry Barnes sent me an article about their connections with The Gower and E Kt Barry Stubbings added to our knowledge about this subject.



Now - we have the following impressive article written by historian Kt Jonathan Morgan describing the important Hospitaller estate at Slebech in West Wales.

If you (like me) had not realised just how significant the Slebech presence was then you will find this item riveting reading.

The Knights Hospitaller Commandery at Slebech

The origin of the word Slebech is thought to be an Old Norse word meaning 'Stoney Beach' and in the later Middle Ages it was the home and headquarters of the Knights of St John in South Wales.



At its foundation land was donated to the Hospitaller Order and this grant was made sometime between 1148 and 1176.

It is stated in some sources that the Commandery was established in 1176 following grants of land made by Walter Fitz Wizo. He was a local lord of Flemish origin and was born in Wiston Castle Pembroke, in 1135.

It appears that Walter's father, Wizo, had granted lands in Pembrokeshire from his own holdings to St Peter's Monastery in Gloucestershire. However after Wizo died Walter considered his father's actions far too generous and took the lands back for himself much to the annoyance of the monks of St Peter's.

What followed was a series of disputes involving Henry I, the Bishops of St Davids and Exeter and even the Pope. The disagreement was finally resolved with Walter granting the disputed lands to the Hospitaller Order to establish a Commandery in West Wales. This was on the proviso that the Order paid £7 per annum in rent to the Priory in Worcester to which the lands had been handed by the monastery of St Peter's. This dispute was finally resolved by Bishop Anselm in 1230 who confirmed the Hospitaller rights to these lands and possessions in West Wales.

This meant that the Hospitaller Commandery was to continue to develop and Slebech became the third richest of all the religious houses in Wales and was said to be the richest Hospitaller Commandery outside of London.

Slebech grew and expanded because it was an important meeting point and stopping off location for pilgrims travelling to and from St Davids. Pope Calixtas II (c1065-1124) had decreed in the 12th century that two pilgrimages to St Davids were equivalent to one to Rome and that three pilgrimages there were equal to one to Jerusalem.

As more and more pilgrims made the journey to West Wales and back so the burden fell on the Hospitallers to house and feed them on their travels to and from St Davids or even Strata Florida. Often this was seen as something of a financial burden as stated by the preceptor in 1338. This seems somewhat churlish as by this date Slebech had the highest income of any Hospitaller house other than Clerkenwell near London.

This wealth and importance may seem somewhat odd because the Commandery was granted lands by both local Welsh princes such as Lord Rhys of Deheubarth and a number of Anglo-Norman Lords that had conquered and settled in South Wales.

It is interesting that both Welsh Princes and Anglo-Normans of Wales both gave grants and lands to Slebech because it was in an area of Wales where control and ownership were often disputed. It is perhaps to do with the fact that both parties tended to support the Hospitaller Order because until the 1250s, the kings of England tended to support their rivals, the Templars.

Whilst native Welsh princes and their Anglo-Cambrian Norman neighbours were often not on the best of terms there were longer periods of peace, intermarriage and grudging co-existence than there were periods of war and conflict. Both parties also sought to limit the power and influence that the English Crown might seek to impose on them.

Slebech's importance to the Hospitallers is shown by the fact that the pickled hearts of knights slain fighting in the Holy Land were buried in the crypt and that from the C14th the Head of the Commandery was always a senior knight who had held high office within the order. The suppression of the Templars in the early C14th saw the Hospitallers' wealth and power grow as many of their assets were transferred to the surviving order. Slebech itself was granted lands and holdings from the Templars of Templeton and again its power and wealth rose accordingly. Whilst sources from later eras are somewhat slight with reference to Slebech in the C15th there is comment made by the native Welsh poet Lewys Glyn Cothi (c1420-1490) in one of his poems about a journey he made to Slebech. He wrote about crowds flocking to the altar of St John as the faithful hoped to secure divine healing for their ailments and forgiveness for their sins.

However and unfortunately in History there is always a sting in the tale. The 1530s saw dispute arise between Henry VIII and the Roman Catholic Church over his desire to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry the much younger Anne Boleyn. This in turn led to the suppression of religious orders in England and Wales and the famous 'Dissolution of the Monasteries'.

In 1538 the Barlow Family were recorded as renting Slebech and in 1546 it was bought by Roger and Thomas Barlow. Roger was a powerful Tudor gentleman and a close friend of Henry VIII. The sale of monastic lands such as at Slebech was a well-used policy of Henry VIII as he sought to secure loyalty from both the gentry and nobility who might have opposed his break with Rome. These men knew they could secure new lands and wealth from Henry because he was able to sell off old monastic estates at often bargain prices following the 'Dissolution' of the 1530s.

The Barlow family owned Slebech until the C18th. But it passed out of their hands to Sir William Hamilton when his wife, Catherine Barlow, died. His second wife was the famous Lady Hamilton who of course was to become romantically involved with Lord Nelson. When Sir William died he was buried next to Catherine Barlow in the old churchyard at Slebech.

Sir Rhys ap Thomas upset the Hospitallers before Henry VIII sold off their lands. Despite his illustrious military career serving Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, in putting down rebellions in the 1490s and serving with distinction when Henry VIII sent troops to invade France in 1513, Sir Rhys ap Thomas was not a man without some scandal associated with him. Towards the end of his life in 1520 he was accused of certain crimes by the Head of the Commandery at Slebech. Sir Rhys was said to have unlawfully taken timber belonging to the Order, of extorting large sums of money from the tenants living and working on land belonging to the Hospitallers and it was even claimed that Sir Rhys' men had broken into the residence that belonged to the local head of the order. Whether these crimes really happened or not we do not know as no case was ever proved against Sir Rhys in his lifetime.



Slebech is currently a hotel in this setting.

The low price of regalia ? !

By Kt Gary Lillywhite

Most of us, when joining our first K.T. Preceptory - and having to source a full set of regalia - have probably thought "This lot is costing me a fortune. I bet it didn't cost this much years ago". If you have thought along these lines, yes you are basically right but in reality our K.T. Regalia now in 2021 is actually only a fraction of the cost that it was in 1900.



This will probably come to most of you as a bit of a surprise. In 1900, there were few Masonic regalia makers and suppliers. There were no package deals on offer and no E-Bay. Back in 1900 all of the items had to be purchased individually. Today, there are numerous sources to purchase Masonic Regalia from - both new and secondhand.

A new full set of K.T. Regalia as a complete package can now be purchased for around £300. Let me now present you with some interesting figures.

Today in 2021 the average U.K. earnings are around £300 per week.

In 1900, weekly earnings for most workers were less than £1. Research shows that in 1900 the average annual earnings in Britain was £42-7/-.

I own a 1900 copy of a George Kenning regalia price list. For comparisons I will give the 1900 prices for K.T. Regalia from Kenning and the 2021 prices from Toye Kenning & Spencer. I will leave you to do the maths.

GEORGE KENNING 1900

- TUNIC 21/-and £1-5/-
- MANTLE 25/- and £1-III/6d
- CAP 15/-AND 21/-
- K.T. CROSS JEWEL in base metal 10/6d and in silver 15/-
- K.T. STAR only available in silver. But offered in 3 sizes.
Sml. 17/6d Med. 21/- Lge. £1-5/-
- SASH 10/-and 15/-
- SWORD BELT AND FROG 7/6d
- SWORD 18/6d 21/- and £1-5/-

TOYE KENNING & SPENCER 2021

- TUNIC £68-60p
- MANTLE £80-25p
- CAP £37-50p
- K.T. CROSS JEWEL only available in base metal £22-15p
- K.T. STAR only available in base metal and in one size £37-30p
- SASH £33-25p
- SWORD BELT AND FROG £51-90p
- SWORD £75-00p

I hope that you find this information both interesting and enlightening. These price comparisons run much the same for regalia of all other Masonic orders.

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THE TEMPLAR QUIZ

To see if you have been paying attention, Kt Tony Biella sent me the following (just click on the link)

[The Knights Templar Quiz | 10 Questions \(funtrivia.com\)](https://www.funtrivia.com/quiz/10-questions-the-knights-templar-quiz)



Many thanks Tony.