

What was a Preceptory?

A Preceptory was an estate where the Templars lived, worshipped and trained. They farmed the land, both to feed and clothe the local Templar community and also to generate income to support the Order's members in the Holy Land.

Preceptories followed a basic pattern, as can be seen in the illustration overleaf. They were led by an officer, called a Preceptor, who carried out the administrative duties and oversaw the daily work of the Templar community. Wherever possible, Preceptories were built on the highest suitable land available. There was a dormitory, refectory, hall and chapel for the Templars – knights, sergeants and chaplains – who lived there. In many cases, there was also a lookout tower and gatehouse with an enclosing wall. Outside; farms, barns and tenant cottages were ranged, generally close by but sometimes several miles away.

Preceptories were self-sufficient communities, providing work, security and pensions for their workforce. It was this community that formed the link between the Knights Templar and the local population, who were their servants and tenants. Preceptories therefore included the necessities for daily life: fishponds, vegetable gardens, stables, storehouses, brewery and smithy.

The Knights Templar in the British Isles were particularly skilled at farming, predominantly of sheep and grain. They had watermills for grinding their corn and fulling cloth. As privileged landlords they had favourable tax terms for their wool sales, and their wool was much sought after by foreign merchants. They were often given the rights to hold local fairs, receiving fees from the stallholders.

The Templars also earned rents from tenant farms and cottages, and income from letting fishing rights along their river frontages. All these sources of income produced much needed revenue to support the Order's work.

The Knights Templar were always at the cutting edge of technology: for instance, using a three-wheeled plough drawn by a horse, instead of a two-wheeled plough drawn by oxen; and utilising a fulling mill rather than a dozen or so men.

What can we see today?

The Knights Templar first came to the British Isles in 1128. Over the next two centuries their Preceptories were woven into medieval life. They were far more than just knights who fought and prayed.

They have left us a unique legacy...and the remains of their Preceptories - from a few lines of stones in a bare field, to the solid walls of their remaining chapels, to impressive timber barns – can be found scattered across the British Isles.

This information leaflet, "The Knights Templar and their Preceptories" is an educational initiative of the Templar Heritage Trust (THT). ***The Templar Heritage Trust was founded on chivalric principles, and works to increase understanding of the history of the Knights Templar and to preserve their rich heritage for future generations.***

The THT currently operates as part the Charities Aid Foundation (Registered Charity 268369). For more information please visit the website: www.knight-templar.org.uk

Or write to: 62 Northdown Street, Islington, London N1 9BS

[Text and Artist's Impression of Templar Preceptory © THT](http://www.knight-templar.org.uk)

The Knights Templar & their Preceptories



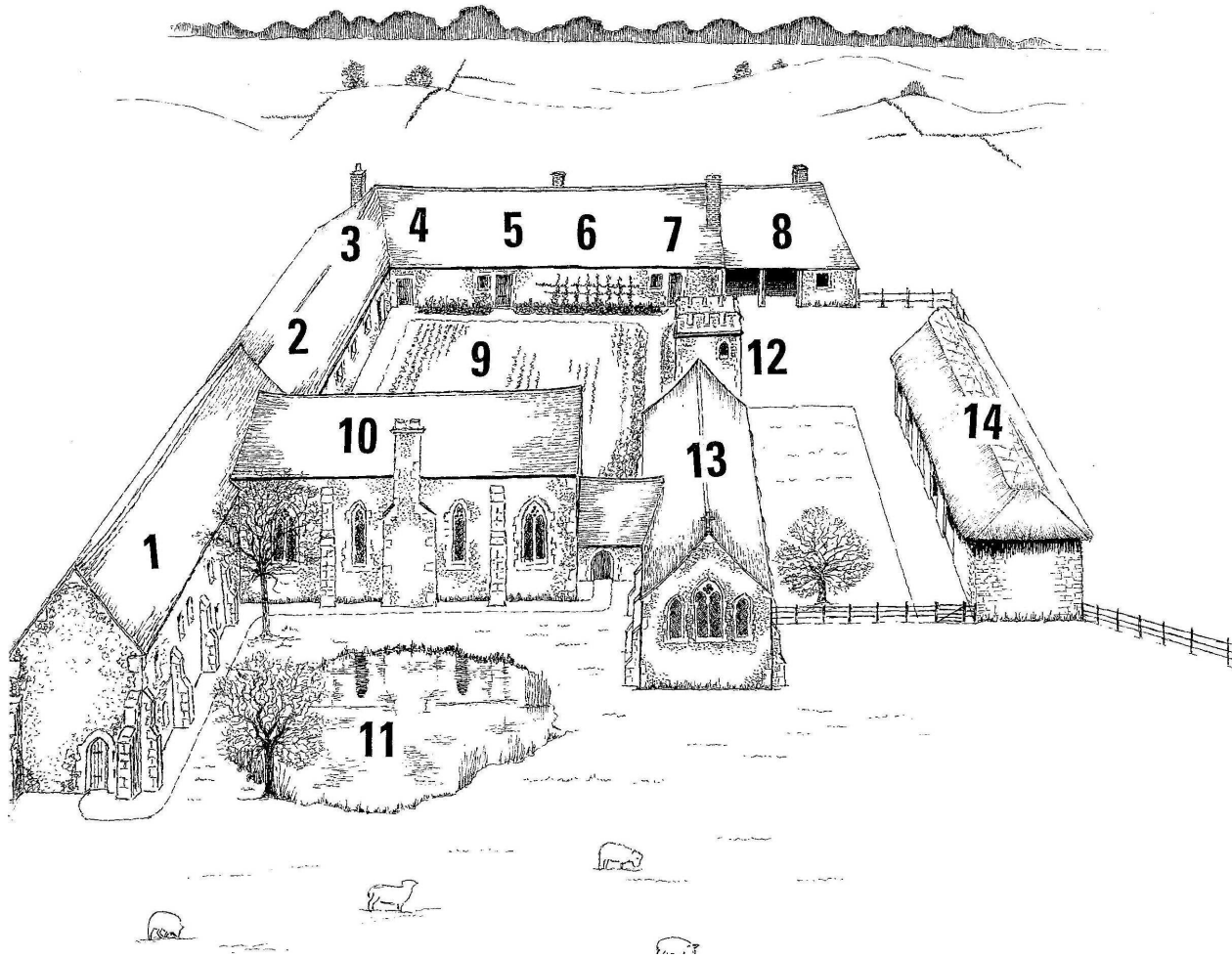
Who were the Knights Templar?

The medieval Knights Templar were founded around 1119 in Jerusalem by Hugh de Payens and eight companions. The Templars original purpose was to protect pilgrims and sites sacred to Christianity in the Holy Land.

In 1128 the Templars were recognised by the Pope as a military and monastic Order. Their history was to last for nearly 200 years, during which time they became experts in other roles as farmers, military engineers, castle builders, bankers and diplomats; and also commanded land and sea forces across Europe and the Mediterranean during the period of the Crusades.

After the fall of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, the medieval Templars were disbanded in 1314.

Artist's impression of what a large Templar Preceptory may have looked like.



Key to layout:

1. Dormitory
2. Refectory
3. Kitchen
4. Food & Grain Store
5. Brewery
6. Wool Store
7. Workshop
8. Smithy
9. Herb & Vegetable Garden
10. Preceptory Knights' Hall
11. Fish Pond
12. Watch Tower
13. Chapel
14. Stables

Outside the main enclosure were areas for sheep and heavy crops for the wider community.