THE KNIGHTS TOWER

The origins of the Knights of Malta

They are members of a religious and military order, founded at the beginning of the XIth century. They established a monastery and a hospital in Jerusalem, intended for pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. They were first called "the Hospitalers of Saint John of Jerusalem".

In 1130, Pope Innocent the 3rd charged them with defending the Christians from the Infidels. The following crusade led them first to Saint John of Acre in the Holy Land in 1191, then to Rhodes a century later.

In 1312, King Philip Le Bel and Pope Clement the 5th granted the Knights the possessions of the Templars Order in all the Christian lands except Spain. In 1530 they were ousted from Rhodes and settled in Malta, where they built a powerful fortress and took the name "the Order of the Knights of Malta".

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte's army, preparing for an invasion in Egypt, landed in Malta and seized the city. The Order surrendered its rights on Malta and on the neighbouring islands.

Malta came under British control in 1800.

Their organisation

The order is governed by a Grand Master and divided according to several languages or nationalities including: Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Germany, Aragon, Castille and England. Each nationality had its own commander and was further subdivided into a number of different commanderies and priories.

The Knights were real monks but to combine both religious and military disciplines, they were given a certain freedom. They swore vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and integrity - and added one of welcoming, looking after and guarding the pilgrims.

They were divided into three classes:

The nobles or knights bore arms, to be qualified to do so they had to be ennobled for four generations on both sides, and to have their coats of arms.

The priests or chaplains were nobles responsible for the religious organization.

The friars helped the Knights and the priests.

The regular clothing was a black robe with a white cross on the heart ; and for special occasions they had a battle dress.

The Commandery of Homps

In the middle of the 12th century, Homps became the seat of a commandery. It was built on the former site of a Gallo-roman villa. Homps then was a cross roads of an old commercial tin route, the pilgrims route to Saint James of Compostela, and of the Romieu way.

In 1148 the archbishop of Narbonne gave the Order the Church of Saint Etienne, which later became Saint Michael's church. The commandery would have received several properties on its territory as well as funds.

Bertrand de Saint Gilles (son of Count Raymond the 4th of Toulouse), before travelling to the Holy Land, founded a hospital dedicated to the pilgrims who were on their way to or from the Holy Land.

This hospital later became a great priory of the Knights of Malta ; with Homps becoming an annexe. This commandery was located on a large plain and owned important properties in other districts.

The Homps building was formerly surrounded by a big wall and protecting moats. The few local people took refuge there in event of an attack.

The Homps commandery is now only a small part of what it has once been. It has been progressively demolished over the centuries. There is only one wing left which is now divided into flats, and the tower on which once flew the Knights red flag with its white cross.

This building is believed to have been constructed in the middle of the 12th century.

The present-day Order is based in Rome.

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