



A BEAUCEANT!!

NO 28

A little Knight Templar news does you good

Staying in touch

Dear Brother Knights

What a delight it has been in recent weeks to be able to travel beyond our local area and to see friends and family more easily once again. As our sense of being detached - and even isolated - recedes, so (I suspect) does the need for this newsletter to appear quite so frequently.

Over the past year, I like to think that it has played an important part in keeping us all in touch and together as a closely knit group of friends and it has certainly provided us with a wide range of knightly topics to fill some of our spare time.

We shall continue to keep the newsletter going well into the autumn, when more normal times will have returned I hope - and the need for such a frequent bulletin will have declined.

In the meantime, I hope to see as many of you as possible this month at the annual meeting of the province - which will be an online meeting, thanks to our friend Zoom. The date and time is Wednesday 26th May at 7pm and the link invitation will be with you very soon.

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

On Wednesday 19th May, one week before the Provincial meeting, is the annual meeting of Great Priory, when the Most Eminent and Supreme Grand Master will confer Great Rank on the following Brother knights.

R E Kt Revd Malcolm Clifford George Lane re-appointed as Great Prelate

R E Kt Ryan Andrew Williams re-appointed as Great Vice-Chancellor

E Kt Carl Douglas Davies re-appointed as Deputy Great Marshal

E Kt Harry John Randell promoted to the rank of Past Great Registrar (and therefore a V E Kt)

E Kt Richard John Phillips appointed as Past Great Aide-de-Camp

E Kt Dr Anthony John Strachan appointed as Past Great Warden of Regalia

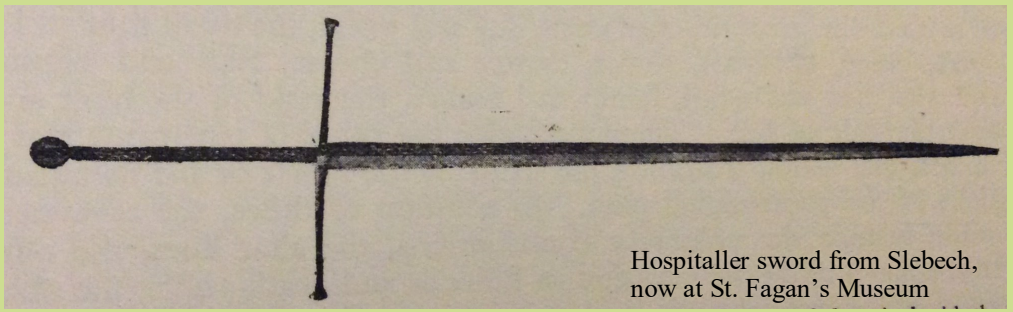
E Kt Peter John James appointed as Past Great Captain of Guards

Warmest congratulations to all of the above

But what has not been mentioned until now is that R E Kt Dr Vivian Thomas is to receive the rare distinction of being made a Knight Commander of the Temple on that day - a great joy. Your attendance and support, via Zoom, on this special occasion will be most welcome.



The Order of St. John or Knights Hospitaller in Swansea and Gower.



Hospitaller sword from Slebech, now at St. Fagan's Museum

This is a subject that has really set pens to work over recent months and I am pleased to bring you another instalment in the series. This time it is thanks to the research of E Kt Tony Jones who writes as follows:

I am grateful to my fellow researcher, Kt Jonathan Morgan, for introducing the subject of the Hospitaller Commandery of Slebech, as this will save me explaining a great deal. Suffice to say, it is a subject that I've been interested in for some time, and its a gift that keeps on giving.

Sources indicate that by the middle of the 12th Century, approximately one third of all usable land in Europe was under the control of the Roman Catholic Church, either directly or indirectly through the Abbeys, Monasteries, Friaries and other religious houses. The importance of the Slebech Commandery, therefore, cannot be overstated. It was the richest Hospitaller establishment in Wales, the second richest Hospitaller establishment in the British Isles, after the Priory of England based at Clerkenwell, London, and the fourth richest of all the religious houses in the realm at one point. This was an enormous undertaking by any measure.

There is no clear cut evidence that the Hospitallers were in possession of lands at Slebech prior to 1147, with a firmer date being 1176. Nagging doubts, however, persist that they may already have been present, in the area, albeit in smaller numbers than at the later date, as early as 1113 - 1115, having been recognised, as an Order, by Pope Paschal II, in 1113 for their work in Jerusalem. At this time, of course, their transition to a Military Monastic Order was still in the future.

The reasoning behind the 1113-1115 date is based on episcopal correspondence regarding the appointment of Clergy to churches in the area, which was within the See of St. David's. Wilfred Bishop of St. David's (died 1115), conceded to the Order the right to remove at will any chaplain or clerk in its churches. This does not necessarily imply that they were settled in the Diocese at this early date, but the concession could have but little meaning unless they were already represented there.

The Slebech Estate that exists today, in secular hands, and as a 5* Hotel and Leisure complex is but a very small rump of the extensive holdings that once were part of the Slebech Commandery.



Clearly, the Manors, churches and landholdings were accrued over a period of time during the medieval, crusading era, and grew commensurately with the prestige of the Order's conduct and achievements in the Levant.

In its heyday, the Slebech Commandery not only controlled land and property in Pembrokeshire, but also in Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, Breconshire, Radnorshire, and in Gower. So, there is much to be said. In the current analysis, however, I shall restrict myself to considerations of Swansea and Gower.



In some cases, prior to and, in any event, following on from the Dissolution of the Monasteries and other Religious Houses in England and Wales by 1540; Manors, Churches and Landholdings were devolved from the Commandery by lease, reclaim by donor families or sold and dispersed by the Royal Commissioners. Some of these properties are easier to research than others, and some have greater interest to latter day investigators such as myself.

During research into the Knights Templar, in Wales, a separate work in progress, I had previously looked at the Slebech Estate and Commandery, until I began work on it as a separate project, I had no real grasp of the vast extent of the holdings concerned, and was completely unaware that these holdings were represented in Swansea. Even then, I was amazed to find that the Order had holdings in Cwmbwrla!! I was born in Cwmbwrla. The roundabout on Carmarthen Road, adjacent to the Three Sisters Public House, was once the location of a street of houses and my entry into this world was in one of them.

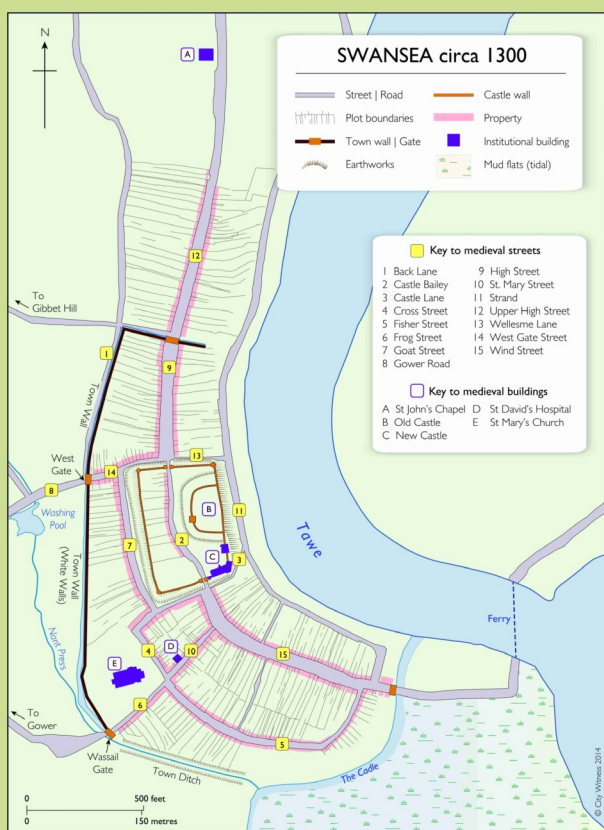
The Hospitaller holdings in and around Swansea were administered as the Hospitaller Lordship of Millwood and St. John. This has been viewed, in later times, as a sub-division of the Lordship of Gower, and so it may have been as the years stretched by.

As measuring the extent of Slebech's holdings is problematic, so is measuring the extent of the parts that constitute the whole. Chasing down specifics so far after the event is something of a fool's errand as sometimes research peters out to no more than historic place names and their modern remains, if any.

Having established the Hospitaller's presence in Swansea and Gower, further research revealed that the Order had built a Chapel of St. John and a Hospital Complex to house the administration of their Lordship; but where was it? There are, and were, a number of St. John's Churches in the locality. None in contemporary records, however, was billed as a Chapel of St. John. Medieval records are very hit and miss, assuming in the first place that you know who has possession of them. Even with no physical presence to pore over, persistence pays off. Reviewing the various "St. John" options available, it becomes apparent that the St. John Juxta Swansea Parish has idiosyncracies worthy of pursuit.

Correspondence with the West Glamorgan Archive Service confirmed that the church serving this parish began its existence as St. John's Chapel, and was the property of the Hospitallers, referred to in 1307, and in those days stood a little way outside the North Gate of the town. Sometimes, when you go mining for coal, you discover diamonds, and so it was that I happened on "medievalswansea.ac.uk" and there, almost miraculously, was a map of Swansea c.1300, clearly showing the Chapel of St. John. Sure enough, outside the North Gate; until I started this research, I didn't even know that the medieval town had a wall and gates, pretty obvious when you think about it. Now we know exactly where they were.

The original chapel was constructed on what is now the site of St. Matthews church in High Street, Swansea, across the road from the railway station. The Knights, at that time, owned the Manor of Millwood, described by the archivist as “roughly the Manselton - Hafod area of Swansea today”. We don't know exactly when St. John's became a parish church, but the information available indicates that the church would have stood outside its parish boundaries; but more on the landholdings and geography later. In 1879, the Vivian Family (no strangers to freemasonry) were the benefactors of a new church building. This solved the boundary issue, as the new church was built in Odo Street, Hafod, where it still stands today. What a wonderful medieval name, Odo, just the sound of it conjures up the time of the crusades, but its currently unknown if this had any bearing on the location in Victorian times. The new church was, of course, dedicated to St. John the Baptist.



So, what happened to the Chapel? It seems that when it was abandoned by the Parish, the building that was then standing was of inferior construction, the medieval Chapel having long since gone. This remaining Church of St. John was demolished, and was replaced by St. Matthews Church which stands there today and is currently in use as a feeding centre for homeless and vulnerable people in Swansea area; aims and ambitions truly in keeping with those of our ancient Hospitaller brethren.

St. Matthew's Church closed to worshippers in 2004, and the building may now be found as Matt's House or Matt's Cafe. Between 2008 and 2015, the Swansea Masonic "Feed the Homeless" committee had a project run in conjunction with this establishment, closing the circle of time and purpose. Of course, when one finds or confirms information of this nature, its not the end of the journey but the stimulus to further discovery.



St John's Church, Odo Street, Hafod, Swansea.

Exactly what and where was Millwood.?? The limited extent confirmed by the County Archivist, may well have been true at one or more points in antiquity. However, this may also have been demesne land, with other tracts and parcels of land as outliers. Even so, other research shows that the land between Landore and Fforestfach was within its curtilage, and this extends the reach significantly. In the 13th Century, the land at Cwmbwrla and Cwmfelin was added. The descriptions of these grants included the names of Borlakesland and Burlake; the etymology of Cwmbwrla, finally established as late as 1967 being another surprise to me. It begins with Burlakesbrok in the 12 Century, wanders through Cwm Bwrla in 1641, regressed to Cwm Burla in 1729, before eventually coalescing to the modern Cwmbwrla in 1967.

Research continues, and it is hoped that a clearer and greater understanding will prevail on the extent of the Manor, and on the other Commandery holdings in Gower, Swansea notwithstanding. The Order was responsible for far more, although many of these other grants were more widespread and less cohesive than the previously recorded dominions.

In the Twelfth Century, Henry de Newburgh granted land in Loughor and Swansea. Einon and Goronwy, brothers, and sons of Llywarch, Robert son of Walter and John de Penrice also granted lands in Swansea. Robert de Mara granted lands in Porteynon and Oxwich. Helia(s) Tortesmaris also granted land in Oxwich. William de Turberville gave the church and chapel of Walterston in Llanrhidian, the church in Landimore (Cheriton), and the church, rectory and lands in Rhossili.

In the Thirteenth Century, John de Breos granted the Church of St Illtyd and its rectory in Ilston. He also granted "Millwood" and Cwmbwrla (Borlakesland). Robert Bured granted "All his land in Cwmbwrla" (Burlake). John de Penrice built and granted the "Hospital of St. John the Baptist of Sweynsey". Robert de Penrice also granted the Church of St. Andrew at Penrice. John Blaencagnel granted the Church of St. John the Baptist, with its rectory and 24 acres of sanctuary land in Penmaen.

Regards churches, some of which are mentioned in the land grants above, the Hospitallers at one time controlled:
St. Andrew's Church at Penrice,
St. Illtyd's Church at Ilston,
St. John the Baptist's Church at Penmaen,
St. Cattwg's Church at Porteynon,
St. Mary's Church at Rhossili,
St. Cenydd's Church at Llangennith,
St. Rhidian and St. Iltyd's Church at Llanrhidian, St. Cadoc's Church at Cheriton (Landimore) and St. Madoc's Church at Llanmadoc.



St. Illtyd's Church Ilston, mostly 13th Century

These nine churches make up the majority of the seventeen Gower churches included in the publication "In the Steps of the Saints", A Trail of Gower Churches, published with sponsorship from the Diocesan Mission Fund of the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon.

Not previously mentioned above is the Church of St. Michael in Loughor, also gifted to the Hospitallers with a rectory and 12 acres. Across the road from the Church, heading towards Swansea, is a large "House" called The Sanctuary. This house is 18th Century with 19th Century updates, but the original building was supposed to have been built by the Hospitallers in 1165.

This research has much further to go and is very much a work in progress. The concept and operation of Sanctuary is itself a complex issue. However, when time permits, it is my intention to create my own guide to the Slebech Commandery Estates and, when the law allows, possibly organise a tour or two.

THE TEMPLAR QUIZ

by Kt Stephen Roberts

A Templar Word Puzzle to enjoy along with your coffee.

See how many of the following words you can find:

KNIGHT TEMPLAR PRIOR
SWORD PROVINCIAL CRUSADE
HOLYLAND PILGRIMAGE TEMPLE MOUNT
HUGUES DE PAYENS KNIGHT OF MALTA CONSTABLE
PRECEPTORY EMINENT COMPANION
PRECEPTOR MARESCHAL RHODES
PRIORY REVERENTIAL ROYAL ARCH
SEPULCHRE OBLIGATION SHIELD
HEMLET HOSPITALLER CANDIA
MELITA VALIANT ADDRESS

In case you get stuck, the solution will be published in the next edition of *A Beauceant* - so you have plenty of time.

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U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	S	A	T	E	A	B	Y	C	D	O	E	L	F
C	I	N	U	T	N	E	G	P	H	D	M	I	J	A	K	M	L	E	M
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