



GRAND MASTER'S COUNCIL
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COMMEMORATIVE ORDER OF
ST. THOMAS OF ACON

20TH ANNIVERSARY GALA BANQUET

COMMEMORATING THE 850TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE MARTYRDOM OF ST THOMAS A BECKET

– THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6TH, 2020 –

850TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MARTYRDOM OF ST THOMAS A BECKET

It is the custom of our Order annually to make a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral to commemorate the venerable memory of St Thomas of Acon (Thomas a Becket). On this occasion, the program is conducted with readings of the historical lessons taught in our Order, the relevant historical excerpt is included for your edification.

Thomas a Becket entered the Church and became secretary to the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was brilliant in his work and was appointed Chancellor to King Henry II. The King and Thomas worked as a team for the good of the kingdom and when the Archbishop of Canterbury died, Henry nominated Becket to the Archbishopric, assuring himself that Becket was his right-hand man. But such was not the case, for no sooner was Becket on his Episcopal throne than he took up with all vigor the side of the Church against the King, who issued in AD 1164 his famous Constitution of Clarendon.

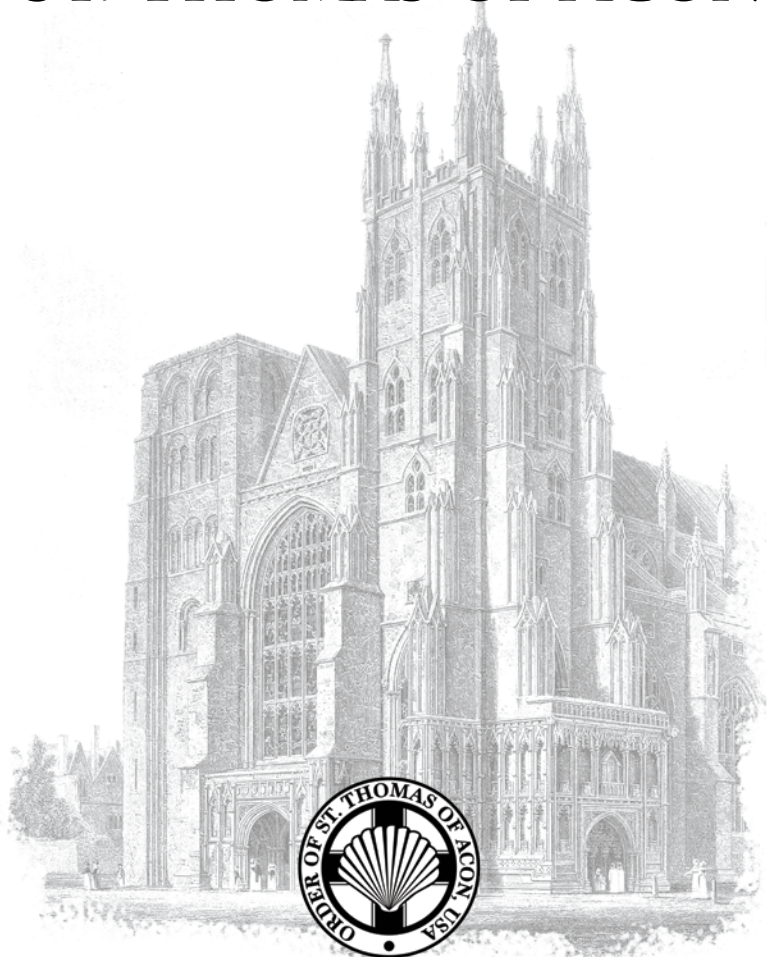
Their main dispute was that the Church claimed exclusive jurisdiction over any person who belonged to the ranks of the clergy, including what was practically the lay fringe of that body, and inflicted on them penalties which, from the lay point of view were grotesquely inadequate. The King could not tolerate this, and a fierce quarrel arose between him and Becket. Becket fled to the Continent and stayed there for six years. Then in AD 1170 the King and Becket seemed to be reconciled and the Archbishop returned to England.

Now during the time that Becket had been away, the King had his eldest son crowned as his successor by the Archbishop of York. This action was bitterly resented by Becket as an infringement of his See. Upon his return to England, he foolishly excommunicated all the clergy who had taken part in the crowning of the young prince. These Clergy went to France and appealed to the King. Then came that well known burst of anger when Henry was reported to have said: "Who will deliver me from this low born priest?"

Four Knights left the Council Chamber, hurried to the coast, took ship for England and went straight to Canterbury. There, on the 29 day of December 1170, they found the Archbishop in the Cathedral just at the time of Vespers, and there and then slew him before the Altar. The nation was shocked at the crime and almost overnight, Becket became regarded as a saint.

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Grace Before Dining

The Pious Memory, offered by Sir Joseph of Toftingall, KC, Grand Prior

Guinness and Cheese Soup

The Memory of the Primus Grand Master, Sir John of Dorkington, KH,
offered by Sir Aaron of Muhlenberg, KC, Grand Marshal

Mixed Green Salad

The Mother Grand Master's Council of the Order,
offered by Sir Andre of Byron, KH, Most Worthy Past Grand Master (USA)
A response from Sir Melvyn of Wud Plumton, KH, Most Worthy Grand Master

Short Rib of Beef, Crispy English Potato with Pancetta

The Primus Class of American Knights,
offered by Sir Joseph of Gloucestershire, KH Most Worthy Past Grand Master (USA)
A response from Sir Reese of Bexar, KH, Most Worthy Past Grand Master (USA)

Strawberry Trifle

The Grand Master's Council for the United States of America,
offered by Sir William of Seattle, KH Most Worthy Past Grand Master (USA)
*A Response from Sir Matthew of Philadelphia, KH,
Most Worthy Grand Master (USA)*

Grace After Dining

GRAND MASTER'S COUNCIL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
COMMEMORATIVE ORDER OF ST. THOMAS OF ACON

2019-2020 GRAND OFFICERS

M.W. Grand Master	Sir Matthew (Dupee) of Philadelphia, KH
W.E. Grand Prior	Sir Joseph (MacIntyre) of Toftingall, KC
G.Prec. North West	Sir Charles (Schubert) of Garden Grove
G.Prec. Pennsylvania	Sir Allen (Moyer) of Hamburg
G.Prec. South East	Sir Berry (Rigdon) of Sonoma
G. Prec. Texas	Sir James (Elliott) of Midlothian, KC
G.Mar.	Sir Aaron (White) of Muhlenberg, KC
G.Treas.	Sir Christopher (Dalrymple) of Brenham
G.Reg.	Sir Douglas (Moore) of Wesley Chapel
G.Sec.	Sir Seth (Anthony) of Edinboro
G.Hist.	Sir Jerry (Hamilton) of Glenside
Dep.G.Mar.	Sir Brian (Sample) of Norfolk
G.Alm.	Sir Orville (Armstrong) of Rogersville
G.War.Reg.	Sir Christopher (Dalrymple) of Brenham
G.Sw.B.	Sir Wilmer (Hall) of Berkshire
Dep.G.Sec.	Sir Terry (Plemons) of Chattanooga
G.B.B.	Sir Jerry (Kirby) of Avalon
Asst.G.Mar.	Sir Donald (McAndrews) of Manassas
G.Her.	Sir David (Grindle) of Ardencaple
G.Org.	Sir Christian (Jessen) of Highgate
G.Dk.	Sir Aaron (Shoemaker) of Summit
G.Cel.	Sir Lawrence (Tucker) of Bellaire
G.Cel.	Sir Bryan (Hill) of Delabole
G.Cel.	Sir Jeremy (Vaughn) of Antisalagi
G.Cel.	Sir Jackie (Matthews) of Midland
G.Cel.	Sir Terry (Pritt) of Waxhaw
G.Rep.	Sir Leslie (Bale) of Wealas-ieg, KC



Murder in the Cathedral

A DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

At the conclusion of our gala banquet this evening, we will enjoy a brief dramatic program which was excerpted from all T.S. Eliot's, ***Murder in the Cathedral***.

Murder in the Cathedral is a verse drama by T.S. Eliot, first performed in 1935, that portrays the assassination of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral during the reign of Henry II in 1170. Eliot drew heavily on the writing of Edward Grim, a clerk who was an eyewitness to the event.

The action occurs between 2 and 29 December 1170, chronicling the days leading up to the martyrdom of Thomas Becket following his absence of seven years in France. Becket's internal struggle is the main focus of the play.

The Interlude of the play is a sermon given by Becket on Christmas morning 1170. It is about the strange contradiction that Christmas is a day both of mourning and rejoicing, which Christians also do for martyrs. He announces at the end of his sermon, "it is possible that in a short time you may have yet another martyr". We see in the sermon something of Becket's ultimate peace of mind, as he elects not to seek sainthood, but to accept his death as inevitable and part of a better whole.

Part II of the play takes place in the Archbishop's Hall and in the Cathedral, 29 December 1170. Four knights arrive with "Urgent business" from the King. These knights had heard the King speak of his frustration with Becket and had interpreted this as an order to kill Becket. (from Wikipedia)

Cast

This adaptation was coordinated and produced by Sir George of Lancaster (George Hindson) and Sir Christian of High Gate, G.Org. (Christian Jessen). All brethren participating in the Cast are listed below. We are fortunate to have such talented members who are willing to contribute so generously of their time and talent.

Thomas a Becket	Thomas R. Labagh	
Priest.....	John Bridegroom	Sir John of Phoenicia
1st Knight	Jerry Hamilton	Sir Jerry of Glenside, G.Hist.
2nd Knight	Josh Parmer	Sir Josh of Lancaster
3rd Knight	Todd Bennicas	Sir Todd of Lancaster
4th Knight.....	Anthony Dintino	





From Acre to America

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE MASONIC ORDER OF ST. THOMAS OF ACON INTO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

MATTHEW D DUPEE, KH, GRAND MASTER

In June 9, 1999, in a small Masonic Lodge room in the Nepean, Ontario, a spontaneous conversation between two English Masonic brethren, Keith Ansell (*Sir Keith of March*) and David Price (*Sir David of Ful Wode*) and Reese Harrison and me, would change the course of Masonic relationships in the appendant orders between England and the United States in the most unforeseen and fundamental ways. The occasion was a meeting of the St. Lawrence Seaway Assemblage of the Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviers, Plasterers and Bricklayers (hereinafter “the Operatives”) where Reese Harrison and I were attending to receive the I - IV Degrees.

It was late in the morning session, most likely between the II and III degrees, that I was speaking with Keith Ansell (at the time, unbeknownst to me, serving as Deputy Grand Marshal of the Order of St Thomas of Acon) and to whom I was relating the conversation I had with Bro. Bill Box, at Mark Masons Hall in 1992, when I was first invited to join the Operatives. When Box presented me with a petition for the Operatives, I was uncertain as to whether it was a legitimate Masonic Order in the eyes of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and deferred responding for seven years.¹ Keith, being a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic Mason with extensive experience in some of the smaller, lesser known private Orders within the Craft, immediately called over David Price to join us. They asked me if I had ever heard of the Order of St. Thomas of Acon and, after having confessed I did not, began to explain its historical significance, as the only English order of chivalry which fought in the Crusades.

Not wishing to repeat experience with the Operatives in 1992, I inquired about the possibility of American Knights Templar, under the Jurisdiction of the Grand Encampment of United States of America, becoming members and was told that they saw no reason why we would

¹ More about this facet of the story will be covered in the author's forthcoming monograph titled, "The Ambassadors", detailing the introduction of many of the smaller Masonic orders into the United States of America.





not be enthusiastically welcomed. Serendipitously, being aware that Reese Harrison, who was then serving as the Governor General of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America², was planning a trip in October 1999, I immediately invited him to join our conversation. After discussion, it was decided that this would be an opportune time to introduce Americans to St. Thomas and, given Reese's national eminence within American masonry, this would be a great springboard for the introduction of the Order to the United States of America.

Upon leaving Canada, Reese immediately embarked upon making the necessary plans to include initiation into the Order of St. Thomas of Acon for those traveling with him in October 1999. Simultaneously, as I was uncertain that I could travel with the Harrison delegation in October, I communicated with Secretary John W. Mitchell, KC and submitted my Petition to join the Order.

On October 23, 1999, as a part of an enjoyable, whirlwind Masonic itinerary³ through England, the following brethren we admitted to Blackheath Chapel, TI (listed in numerical order on the roster of the Grand Masters Council UK):

Sir Matthew of Philadelphia	<i>Matthew David Dupee</i>
Sir Thomas of Houston	<i>Thomas Barnes Johnson *</i>
Sir Reese of Bexar	<i>Reese Lenwood Harrison, Jr.</i>
Sir Bryan of Lewisburg	<i>Bryan Lee Berry</i>
Sir Fred of Mount Pleasant.....	<i>Fred E Allen *</i>
Sir Thomas of Mifflinburg	<i>Thomas John Reimensnyder</i>
Sir Andre of Byron	<i>Andre Ernest Lovas</i>
Sir John of Milton.....	<i>John Ammon Brouse</i>
Sir Robert of Columbus	<i>Robert Roy Neff</i>
Sir Robert of Sabine	<i>Robert Paul Walker</i>

2 Among his many leadership roles, Reese also went on to serve as Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Texas (2004-5)

3 On this date, with dispensation granted by Reese Harrison in his capacity as Governor General, a select group of qualified Masons were admitted into the York Rite Sovereign College of North America in an abbreviated ceremony.





Sir John of Groveport.....*John Andrew Busic*
Sir Jack of Port Lavaca*Jack E. Beeler*
Sir John of Clintwood*John Boyd Kendrick*
(*Deceased)

Immediately upon return from United Kingdom, Reese Harrison, having explored with the Grand Master, Barry Clarke, KH, (*Sir Barry of Ilford*) the possibility of setting up Chapels of the Order in the United States, contacted [who?] to discuss his proposed plan to establish two chapels: one comprised of Knights Templar who resided in the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction for the Scottish Rite and the other composed of those who resided in the Southern Jurisdiction. The rationale for this apportionment of jurisdiction was to create a large enough pool of candidates to create viable Chapels, while simultaneously avoiding allowing either jurisdiction to dominate the future development of the Order in the United States. the latter concern was especially important since all of the initial candidates, with the exception of Andre Lovas from Georgia, came from the jurisdictions of Texas and Pennsylvania.

Despite my personal reservations about moving so quickly, Reese, with indefatigable energy and persuasion, convinced me that we needed to do this sooner rather than later while we had the permission and the enthusiasm for the introduction of a new Order into the United States⁴. Prior to the introduction of St. Thomas of Acon in 2000, the last orders that were introduced from a foreign jurisdiction were those that became the “Masonic week” organizations in the 1930’s.⁵

Perhaps, most significantly, Reese suggested Andre Lovas to serve as the Secretary of both Chapels so that we would have a solitary conduit through which to communicate with the Grand Master’s Council in England, as well as to ensure uniformity of practice as the Order developed in the United States. In the succeeding years, having become an expert on the ritual, custom and practices of the Order through his long-standing dedicated service , Andre

⁴ I have had and still have a great reluctance to moving quickly with the introduction of new orders, beyond a select group of people who have the necessary experience to understand the ritual, customs and, perhaps, most importantly, the culture of the respective order

⁵ An invaluable history of the introduction of these orders is found in "The Innovators", Collectanea Vol. 9 Part 2 (1970), published by the Grand College of Rites





was recognized as both the Primus Grand Preceptor of our Province and the Primus Grand Master when we were given sovereignty from the Mother Grand Council.

I began drafting invitation letters and preparing the other requisite formalities for the meeting that would be held on the morning of February 17, 2000 in Washington DC. During the course of planning for the initial meetings, and the fact that the initial invitations would be strictly limited numerically due to the requirements of the ceremonies, logistics and the other considerations, we decided to locate the meetings away from the Masonic Week hotel. The site selected was the Metropolitan Club of DC, the oldest club in the capital and a venue which would provide us with the requisite privacy and space to hold a buffet breakfast, ceremonial meetings and Chapel consecrations. 37 new members were initiated into the Order at this meeting, 15 joining Pilgrim Chapel and 22 joining Trinity Chapel.

Grand Master Barry Clarke appointed Keith Ansell as the Consecrated Commissioning Officer from the Grand Master's Council to undertake the consecrations of Pilgrim #11 (NMJ) and Trinity #12 (SJ), together with the team which included David Price, Donald Newton and Leslie Bale . In accordance with the customs of the Order, the Primus Master of each Chapel must be a Past Master. Therefore, John Bray (*Sir John of Leeds*) , an experienced brother from Yorkshire who would later serve as both a Grand Preceptor and Grand Secretary, was selected to be the Primus Master of both Chapels. Fred Allen served as the Primus Prior of Trinity Chapel and Matthew Dupee served as the Primus Prior of Pilgrim.

One of the novel elements of the Commemorative Order of St. Thomas of Acon is the tradition that members progress to the Chair, if they are willing and capable, in the order in which they were at middle to their respective Chapels. Given the national basis for the Order at its inception, it was almost unique among Masonic national organizations to see senior level national Masons serve in subordinate capacities to those who entered before them. A conspicuous illustration of this is the fact that Sir Reese of Bexar did not preside in Trinity Chapel until 2004, allowing three other brethren to preside before he occupied the oriental chair.





From this auspicious but small beginning, the Order took hold and grew rapidly. While the third Chapel, Tahoma (Washington State), was not formed until 2004, the consecrations of Lone Star Chapel and Tejas Chapel on September 11, 2005 led to the formation of a Province for the United States of America , with the following Primus Provincial Grand Officers:

Rt. Wor. Grand Preceptor	Sir Andre of Byron	Andre E. Lovas
Rt. Em. Provincial Grand Prior...	Sir Reese of Bexar	Reese L. Harrison, Jr.
Prov. Grand Marshal	Sir Matthew of Philadelphia	Matthew D. Dupee
Prov. Grand Treasurer	Sir Fred of Mt Pleasant.....	Fred E. Allen
Prov. Grand Registrar	Sir John of Groveport.....	John A. Busic
Prov. Grand Secretary	Sir William of Seattle.....	William R. Miller
Prov. Deputy Grand Marshal	Sir Bryan of Lewisburg	Bryan L. Berry
Prov. Grand Almoner.....	Sir Robert of Columbus.....	Robert R. Neff
Prov. Grand Sword Bearer	Sir Thomas of Houston.....	Thomas B. Johnson, Jr.
Prov. Deputy Grand Secretary	Sir Loyd of Sulphur Springs	Loyd L. Chance
Prov. Grand Banner Bearer	Sir Thomas of Mifflinburg.....	Thomas Reimensnyder
Prov. Assistant Grand Marshal ...	Sir Thayer of Buckner Stanton...	Thayer Brown
Prov. Asst. Grand Secretary.....	Sir James of Midlothian.....	James Roy Elliott
Prov. Grand Herald.....	Sir Edward of Belle Vernon	Edward H. Fowler, Jr.
Prov. Grand Organist.....	Sir William of Hopkinsville	William G. Hinton
Prov. Grand Doorkeeper	Sir Harry of Bremerton	Harry O. Houston
Prov. Grand Cellarer	Sir Ted of Piedmont.....	Ted H. Hendon
Prov. Grand Cellarer	Sir Donald of Mildred	Donald J. Panichi
Prov. Grand Cellarer	Sir Joseph of Toftingal.....	Joseph W. MacIntyre
Prov. Grand Cellarer	Sir Bernard of Houston.....	Kenneth B. Fischer
Prov. Grand Sentry	Sir Ronald of Ruston	Ronald E. Sharp

During its existence within the mother Grand Masters Council, our Province was led by two Grand Preceptors, Sir Andre of Byron (2005-10) and Sir Reese of Bexar (2010-2015).





By 2015, the province of the United States grew to 25 chapels in 12 states, with the total membership of more than 730 Sir Knights. Given the increasing geographic expanse of the Province, the increasing demands this growth placed on the administrative officers both here and in England, and the desire to keep the United States as a single jurisdiction, the Grand Master's Council decided to enter into a Concordat and form an independent Grand Master's Council of the United States, thus giving sovereignty over the Order within our borders to its American members.

In recognition of the high regard with which the American leadership was held by our Mother Grand Council, it was decided that Sir Andre of Byron, KH and Sir Reese of Bexar, KH would be our Primus Grand Master and Grand Prior respectively, with founding member Sir Matthew of Philadelphia, KH as Grand Marshal. Sir William of Seattle, KH and Sir Joseph of Gloucestershire, KH also served as Grand Masters of the Grand Master's





Council (USA) in recognition of both their preeminent status as national Masonic leaders and their long-standing service to the Order. Since the introduction of our Order, we have also benefitted from the advice and service of Sir Leslie (Bale) of Wealas-ieg, KC, who continues to serve as our Grand Representative to the Grand Mastwers Council in England.

In conclusion, it is difficult to understate how a random conversation in a small meeting in Canada that occurred with two English Masons, whom we had never met before, could have blossomed, not only into the development of our Grand Master's Council with more than 30 chapels and 960 members, but also into a watershed event in the transatlantic development of Anglo American masonry. The Order of St. Thomas of Acon enabled English and American Masons, for the first time, to interact and work together within the same organization, not as representatives of their respective grand jurisdictions. The process was not always frictionless, but was enriching for both sides: the Americans learning the formality of English practice and greater emphasis on ceremony (as opposed to ritual) and the British becoming exposed to the challenges of running a nationwide order with extensive geographic borders and customs which vary from region to region and, at times, jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Within ten years of its introduction into the United States, the friendships and shared experiences brought about a fraternal bonding between brethren of both transatlantic jurisdictions that resulted in more frequent international visiting, the development and propagation of the Order into new territories and jurisdictions, and the introduction into the United States of the Ancient Masonic Order of the Scarlet Cord, the Worshipful Society of Operatives, the August Order of Light, the Hermetic Chapter of Spiritual Knights, the Order of Pilgrim Preceptors and the Masonic Order of Athelstan.

When I depart the office of Grand Master, I will be the last of the thirteen original US members who joined the Order in October 1999 to preside in a leading role. The future of our Order—as it should be— will be left to a future generation of Knights, inspired by Humility and Charity, the precepts of our Order, as handed down by our ancient and modern predecessors who, while putting on their knightly habiliments and arms, did not fail in their Christian duty “to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked and serve the distressed.”





The Commemorative Order of St. Thomas of Acon

HISTORY

TAKEN FROM THE ORDER'S WEBSITE AND REFERENCING THE AUTHORITATIVE
WORK OF BY PAST GRAND MASTER DAVID KIBBLE-REES'

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMEMORATIVE
MASONIC ORDER OF ST. THOMAS OF ACON



That we have a revival of this very English Order of Chivalry is due to the untiring efforts of our first Grand Master, Sir John of Dorking (the late John Walker who was Secretary General of the S.R.I.A. for many years). John spent more than twenty years searching the archives of the Guildhall Library for information about the Order of St. Thomas of Acon, intending initially to write its history. Happily, he discovered the report of the Installation of the Master in 1510, an account so unusual and so typically English, that he felt compelled to revive the Order, albeit Masonically, rather than attempt to compete with the many histories of these Islands - some, alas, more lurid than accurate-which vie for public attention.





In former times, few could read or write so that memories were better developed than ours. Pythagoras forbade all writing, considering it “the destroyer of all memory”; fortunately most people were more tolerant. It was not necessary to record what was to be spoken, nor to give more than headings of the order of events; such clues as have survived require imaginative interpretation. Good stories, on the other hand, (such as those of Becket, father and son), were written down for use as homilies by priests.

The Third Crusade began in 1189 A.D., and on the 8th June 1191 King Richard I (Richard Coeur de Lion) arrived with his forces, before the seaport of Acre, and captured the city in 5 weeks. Amongst the English force was one, William, the Chaplain to the Dean of St. Pauls, who when he saw the corpses of the Christians about the walls of Acre, had compassion on them. With the aid of a few helpers he buried a large number of the dead, and tended the wounded. Seeing that his actions were being appreciated, William formed an Order for the express purpose of burying Christian Knights who fell in battle in the Holy Land.

To this first purpose he added a second, the raising of monies to redeem ransomed captives captured by the Saracens. The Order being formed at Acre its name was incorporated in the title (the Anglicized version of Acre being Acon). The Order was so successful that William was able to build a church and churchyard, which he dedicated to St. Thomas, a Becket, thus the Order became entitled the Commemorative Order of St. Thomas of Acon.

Through disease and death of the other knights fighting in the Holy Land, this Order of English monks was pressed into service as replacements, and became an Order of military monks, (it was also at this time circa 1279 that the Prior lost his pre-eminent position, this being accorded to the Master), fighting alongside the Knights of the Temple, the Knights of the Hospital of St. John the Almsgiver, the Knights of the Hospital of Lazarus and the Teutonic Knights of the Hospital of St. Mary. King Richard I rewarded their valour by according them the status of an Order of Chivalry.

Of all the five noble Orders of knights in the Holy Land at this time, ***only this Order had a purely English foundation*** - a fact of which we should be justly proud. In England the Order acquired the property of the Becket family in Cheapside where they built a Chapel





and a headquarters. Following the battle of Acre, the Order of St. Thomas of Acon merged temporarily with the Order of the Temple.

When the knights were subsequently driven out of Cyprus, the Chapel of the Order of St. Thomas was the only church on the island permitted to ring its bells. Remains of this church can still be visited. Old records are sparse, the last admission into the Order being recorded on the 2nd. February 1367, but that the order continued is not in doubt as the records of the Installation of a Master in 1510 mentioned above demonstrate and it was listed as one of the Orders dissolved by Henry VIII.

At the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, he offered the Chapel of the Order for sale, and, in memory of St. Thomas (Thomas `a Becket being canonized barely two years after his death during the Lintern period in 1173) , and in view of the association of his father, Gilbert, with their trade, the Worshipful Company of Mercers purchased it. The Chapel in Cheapside was destroyed in the Great Fire of London and the present Mercers Hall and Chapel were built on the site.

This is a matter of historical record; lengthy articles have been published in the "Historical Review", which is available in most public libraries and in several books. All that remains today to remind us of that building is the recumbent statue of Christ, which lies at the entrance of the new Mercers' Chapel. Additionally, the Church of St. Thomas, in the City of London, was built in honor of St. Thomas `a Becket, and the Mayor, on the day of his Installation, always attended Mass in that church, before proceeding to St. Paul's.



Order of St. Thomas of Acon

EXCERPTED FROM ARTICLE FOR THE MASONIC GLOBE

BY J.H. BRAY

The Order was formed to give a Christian burial to those Knight Templars who had fallen in battle. It was formed to tend the wounded. The original Prior also had a third remit: to ransom captives kept by Saladin. The Order had its being between 1189 and 1538. Then, as part of the process of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, King Henry VIII sold the Order and its properties to the Mercer's Company, who had been using some of the order's premises since the mid 1400s.

The records of the Order had always been deposited in the library at Guildhall, London. They survived the Great Fire of London and in 1950 were rediscovered by John E.N. Walker. He was in fact in course of researching certain historical aspects of the four original Lodges but came across so many references to the order of St. Thomas of Acon that he decided to forgo his original intentions and followed up on these details.

For the next 20 years he spent each lunch time searching them out in the Library of the Guildhall, London. His assiduity to the task included teaching himself medieval French and Latin. By 1970 he had extracted all the details of the order from the records - including a complete ceremony of the Installation of the Master. At the completion of such a project one then has to ask the simple question "well, what do we do now with the information?", and it was because of the unique nature of the Order that it was decided to revive it as a Masonic Order. The unique nature being the fact that of all the Orders of Knighthood that were fighting in the Holy Land during the Crusades - and most particularly during the third Crusade - this was the only Order to have an English Foundation - the original monks have come from the City of London.

Certain very well-known masons then assisted in the preparation of the present day ceremonial, which delights so many. The basic story relates firstly to Gilbert Becket and then to Thomas Becket, his son, later Archbishop of Canterbury who two years after his murder in 1170, in





THE ORIGINAL STAIN-GLASS WINDOW IN THE CATHEDRAL ©P.E.BLANCHE 1998
— REF: [HTTP://WWW.DIGISERVE.COM/PETER/BECKET](http://www.digiserve.com/peter/becket) —



Canterbury Cathedral, was made a Saint. The influence of Becket was formidable with people revering his name and calling upon him to cure all manner of their ills. This influence extended in an every day sense over the next 150 years and his story is still of the greatest interest today. As a story line therefore this fitted perfectly with the time frame of the third Crusade.

The first meeting of the revived Order, now a Commemorative Order of St. Thomas of Canterbury of Acon, (abbreviated to the Order of St. Thomas). The opening few lines of the minutes perhaps give a flavor to the background. "The Chair was taken by J.E.N. Walker who explained the purpose of the Meeting especially in regard to the founding of the Fraternity of Masons in Ironmonger Lane in the City of London in the Church of St. Thomas somewhere between 1170 and 1338, most probably 1240. He suggested that since the only Knightly Order of an English foundation which took part in the Crusades was that of St. Thomas, it was his idea that a Masonic version of that Order be formed. The difficulty of placing an exact date for the commencement of the Order, which some authorities place as early as 1190, it is perhaps shown by two articles, both of which may be accessed by the Internet by simply putting in the question panel - Order of St. Thomas of Acon. This will show up two headings, "The City Livery Companies and their Heraldry" by L.G. Pierson, and "The Order of St. Thomas of Acre" by Dr. Alan Forey, Emeritus Professor at the University of Durham. Dr. Forey appears to deal with the second phase of the Order's evolution. The generally received wisdom on the matter would suggest that whilst the monks left London prior to the Third Crusade and were present at the siege of Acre in their normal capacity, that of the first translation to a Nursing Order, or Order of a Hospitaller nature, occurred by command of King Richard I a short period afterwards. Thereafter a further period ensued before a second translation to being a Military Order, with finally the third translation occurring when King Richard I created them into a Chivalry and ordered certain of his Knights Templars to protect the new Chivalry.

To interject a further historical note, - the time frame for these events is interesting; King Richard I arrived in the Holy Land in June 1191 and concluded the siege of Acre on the 12th. July 1191, and after having fallen out with Duke Leopold of Austria, both the Duke and King Phillippe of France soon returned home. Richard on the other hand killed the prisoners taken at Acre, marched down the coast to Jaffa, winning a victory at Arsuf en route. However his





forces were unable to penetrate inland to Jerusalem and in September 1192 he was obliged to conclude a treaty with Saladin. He endeavored to return to Europe in October 1192; en route his ship was wrecked, he was taken prisoner for 15 months, and was eventually released, returning to England in March 1194, but left again in May 1194 never to return. He died at Chalus on the 6th. April 1199 aged 41 years. This historical note tends to suggest that the elevation to being a Chivalry must have taken place either before October 1192 or between 1194 and 1199. It is probable therefore, that Dr. Forey is reporting on an existing situation when mentioning 1220. For 100 years the Templars, the Hospitallers, the Teutonic Knights and the Knights of St. Thomas et al held Acre, the occurred the battle for Acre, at which the Order's history can be traced, since at the battle on the 12th. May 1291, which resulted in its loss, the Master and nine of the Knights of St. Thomas were killed. (see Official History of the British Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem by E.J. King(1934) , page 32.

Following such a grave loss to an Order, which was never numerous, perhaps by reason of its function, the Order merged with the Order of the Temple for the period of its journey from Cyprus back to London when it again became independent buying its own properties etc. The order's eventual demise in 1538 has already been described. There is inter alia some interesting information in connection with Peter de Roches, Bishop of Winchester which the reader will find fruitful to pursue. Let it just be said - events could have turned out differently!

So now, turning to the modern era and to the Commemorative Order; events since 1974 moved slowly, there being but one Chapel, Blackheethe Chapel T.I. located at Blackheath, London, and the main preoccupation in the early stages was one of evolving and refining the ceremonial and the contribution of many senior masons is acknowledged.. It may be of interest to note that in the present ceremonial the commemorative Order preserves both the Military and the Monastic aspects of the original Order. The first Most Worthy Grand Master, J.E.N. Walker, retired to give way to A.B. Stephenson who in turn retired from office in 1997 - at which time the membership was 38, and it was the present Most Worthy Grand Master Sir Barry of Ilford (B.Clarke), who decided to expand the Order.

This took effect on the 29th. August 1998 when 38 candidates were admitted to the Order and were give the simple invitation to "go, form chapels".





The Order of St Thomas of Acre

BY DR. ALAN FOREY
UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM, EMERITUS

Although the date of the foundation of St. Thomas of Acre and the identity of its founder have in the past been disputed, there is little doubt that it was created in the Holy Land at the time of the Third Crusade, and the members of the Order came to regard the English King Richard I as their founder. Its dedication reflects the growing cult of Becket at the end of the twelfth century.

Up to the 1220s, St Thomas housed a group of regular canons, who according to contemporary sources devoted themselves to the care of the poor, the burial of the dead and the ransoming of captives in the East. Although the foundation received some patronage in the early thirteenth century, especially in England, it did not flourish, and its poor state persuaded Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, to effect a reform when he was in the Holy Land in the later 1220s.

After the canons had been removed, he transformed it into a military order, which adopted the rule and customs of the Teutonic Knights. This was done with the counsel of the patriarch of Jerusalem and magnates in the East, who would no doubt have stressed the military needs of the crusader states. The bishop of Winchester also transferred the house in Acre to a new site in the northern quarter of the city. The order's military activities during the rest of the thirteenth century have left little trace, but it did seek to imitate the larger military orders in the terminology used to describe officials, and in structure. As it acquired more property and privileges, it began to create a provincial organization at least in the British Isles, with the master of its subsidiary London house having charge of the Order's properties throughout England and Ireland and with subordinate preceptors administering more distant properties in these countries.

As Alexander IV noted in 1257, however, the foundation still lacked adequate resources. In 1279 it was appealing for aid to Edward I, and a number of sources refer to debts. It was





apparently this situation which occasioned proposals in the second half of the thirteenth century for an amalgamation with the Templars. Many details of the Order's history in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries are obscure, but an agreement was finally reached, on the basis of which the Templars sought to take over the Order's house in London. But St Thomas continued to maintain an independent existence in the East; presumably some of its members there opposed union.

Opposition was definitely present in England, where members of the London house appealed to Edward I against the Templars' action, and they further protested against an attempt by Edward II to subject them to the convent of Bonhommes at Ashridge, gaining a decision in their favor in the king's council in 1315. In the meantime, those in the East had migrated to Cyprus after the fall of Acre in 1291, and in the early fourteenth century there was schism, with both the master in Cyprus and the master of the London house claiming authority over the whole Order.

The situation of those in Cyprus was, however, precarious, and they took steps to transfer the Order's headquarters to London. The master in the East, Henry of Bedford, came to England shortly before 1320 and ousted the head of the London house; he also nominated a deputy to exercise authority in Cyprus. The brothers who had remained in Cyprus soon rejected Henry's authority, but this action seems to have been occasioned by personal animosity; the brothers appear at that stage to have accepted that London should be the Order's headquarters.

In the second quarter of the fourteenth century there was again a mast in Cyprus claiming jurisdiction over the whole Order, and attempts were being made to maintain St Thomas' status as a military order in the East. Its financial situation had, however, declined further in the fourteenth century--the London house was said to be in ruins in 1330--and it was not long before any military pretensions were abandoned and the Order's headquarters were established permanently in London. Nothing is heard of a master in Cyprus after the 1360s.

In the later Middle Ages the brethren of St Thomas based in London no longer followed the rule of the Teutonic Knights, but instead adopted that of St Augustine. Some charitable





work appears to have been maintained, and a grammar school was established at St Thomas in London, possibly in the mid-fifteenth century. The London house also established links with the Mercers' Company, which was holding its meetings and worshipping there from the later fourteenth century. The Mercers later became the patrons of the house, and when St Thomas of Acre was dissolved in Henry VIII's reign, the Mercers' Company bought the Order's property. Bibliography Forey, A. J. "The Military Order of St Thomas of Acre," *English Historical Review*, 92 (1977), pp. 481-503. Vincent, N. *Peter des Roches: an alien in English politics, 1205-1238*, Cambridge, 1996. Watney, J. *Some Account of the Hospital of St. Thomas of Acon, in the Cheap, London, and of the Plate of the Mercers' Company*, London, 1892.





The Recumbent Statue of Christ

AN OVERVIEW OF THE REDISCOVERY

WITH PHOTOS TAKEN BY A WORTHY MASTER OF OUR ORDER
AT MERCERS' CHAPEL, IRONMONGER LANE
LONDON, ENGLAND
ON MONDAY SEPTEMBER 27, 2010



The Recumbent Statue of Christ c.1500-1520

This remarkable Statue was discovered 5 feet beneath the floor of the site of Mercers' Chapel on 30 April 1954 during the building of the third Mercers' Hall. The second Mercers' Hall had been destroyed on the night of 10/11 May 1941 during the Blitz.

Sir Jerry of Glenfide, Grand Historian and the Statue in 2010

The Statue had presumably been hurriedly buried during the Reformation and no documentary evidence exists as to the circumstances of its

burial, the precise date of carving or the identity of the sculptor. The quality of carving is exceptional, depicting the dead Christ, his body markedly showing the cruel effects of crucifixion, lying on a purple robe.

The Statue is 6 feet 5.5 inches long and 2 feet 3 inches wide. It is made of oolitic stone, a mixture of sandy limestone and glauconite.

Three separate inscriptions around its base read as follows:

"THE NAS REX IUD (JESUS OF NAZARETH KING OF THE JEWS)"

"IN PACE FACTUS EST LOCUS EIUS (HE MADE HIS ABODE IN PEACE)"

"HUMILITAVIT SEMITIPSUM ET FACTUS OBEDIENS USQUE AD MORTEM MORTEUM AUTEM CRUCIS PAULUS EPT AD PHILIPPENS (HE HUMBLD HIMSELF AND MADE HIMSELF OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH EVEN THE DEATH ON THE CROSS - ST PAUL EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS)"





The main article written about the statue is 'A Statue of Christ from the Ruins of Mercers' Hall' by Joan Evans and Norman Cook, *The Archaeological Journal* Volume CX1 July 1955. The discovery of the statue is also discussed in *The Mercers' Hall* by Jean Inray (LTS 1991).

The statue was featured in the first episode of *A History of British Art* on BBC2 on 21 April 1996, and appears in the book of the series by Andrew Graham Dixon published by BBC Books on 25 April 1996.

- 1118 Thomas Becket born on Ironmongers Lane, London
- 1170 Becket is murdered at Canterbury by four knights
- 1191 Order of St Thomas of Acon formed at Acre after the Third Crusade
- 1227 Hospital of Saint Thomas built on Ironmonger Lane, London
- 1394 Mercers' Company Chartered in London
- 1512 Mercers' Company buys property on Ironmonger Lane
- 1524 A Chapel is Consecrated at the Hospital . In this chapel there is a recumbent statue of Christ
- 1538 Monasteries and Churches destroyed by Henry VIII Mercers' Company gains control of Chapel
- 1666 Great fire of London destroys Mercers' Hall and Chapel.
- 1676 Second Hall Opened
- 1941 Second Hall destroyed in the London Blitz
- 1954 Recumbent Statue of Christ discovered during construction of the present Mercers' Chapel.

"When the statue was first pulled out of the ground- from underneath where the altar had been - the coloring was quite breath-taking. I cannot remember whether or not the whole figure was flesh colored - I rather think it was - but my most vivid memory was of His auburn hair, and the blood red of his lips and the wound under His right breast, with the blood running down. It was all so realistic. His robe lay at the base of emerald green (grass I imagine), and there was a purple covering with writing in gold. All the coloring was so vivid one could never forget" Reverend Mark Wathen, Senior Member of the Court of the Mercers' Company .



Within twenty four hours of the discovery these colors had almost entirely disappeared. Today the statue shows very little outward sign of its once dramatic colorings.





Phase I of the Mercers' Company Chapel Restoration was completed in July 2008. This involved re-arranging the liturgical area, re-mounting many historic fragments from an earlier chapel built shortly after the Great Fire of London and salvaged from 1940s bomb wreckage, as well as providing elegant new ecclesiastical seating. This is the only Livery Company still retaining a private chapel. All the new church seating includes a representation of the Mercers' familiar emblem, the Maiden, individually carved by Colin Mantripp.



The Recumbent Statue lies in the rear of the restored Chapel on a beautiful table altar. It is possible to approach the statue and view the ringlets of hair and the veins of the body. The right arm and feet of the statue were found to be damaged when rediscovered and no effort has been made to restore the original colors.



There are other examples of the Recumbent Christ also preserved, but no other can be traced to the early sixteenth century. Most statues of the dead Christ show his grieving Mother appealing to pity or "Pieta" in Latin as in Michelangelo's carving of 1499



PROGRAM DESIGN BY SIR JOHN (BRIDEGROOM) OF PHOENICIA