

Middle Temple Visit

Friday December 16th 2022

Thanks to our member Mayo Walters, a retired judge, barrister and Member of Middle Temple, a group of 60 TASHE members were able to enjoy a Christmas lunch in the historic and sumptuous Middle Temple Hall. Lunch was preceded by a guided tour of the Middle Temple and followed by a visit to Middle Temple Church, enabling us to unravel the story behind this mysterious medieval complex between Fleet Street and the Embankment.

Middle Temple is one of the four Inns of Court, the only institutions authorised to call members to the bar – in other words, to create barristers. Think of the Inns as universities on a par with Oxford and Cambridge but specialising in the law and only taking graduate students (mostly law graduates, but not exclusively). Its mission, to provide education and accommodation for lawyers, dates back to the 1608 charter set by James I.



Look at the amazing hammerbeam ceiling.

Left, here's the dining hall on a busy day (full of tourists!) and below, laid out ready for our celebration meal.

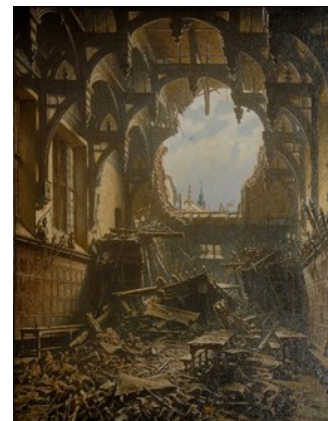


When we had lunch, many students and professors were there with us, dining casually on what was the last day of term. The hall survived over 4 centuries of plague, fire and war until October 1940, when a bomb ...



Restored minstrels' Gallery

caused an explosion which ripped a hole in the East gable, destroying the wall and smashing the minstrels' gallery and screen.



Following the explosion

But why is this Inn called Middle Temple?

The site itself dates back to the 12th century and was originally the headquarters of the Knights Templar in England. They built the Temple church starting in 1160,

modelling it on the round Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. That circular part of the church still symbolically represents Jerusalem. Several Knights Templar are buried in the church, including William Marshall, the 'hero of Magna Carta' who as regent for the young Henry III rescued and reissued the Magna Carta after it was annulled by the Pope at King John's request.

After the order of Knights Templar was dissolved, the Temple lands were officially transferred by the Pope to the Knights Hospitaller, who however had no use for the land themselves and began to let the property out. Henry VIII's reign spelled the end for the Knights Hospitaller in England, and their properties, including the Inn, passed to the Crown.



'Jerusalem' in the Temple Church

Tomb of William Marshall



Middle Temple flourished under the Tudors and declined in the 18th century, but was reformed in the 19th. Under empire, many students came from overseas and especially from America. Today its members come from all corners of the world, even if their native legal systems differ substantially from those in Britain.

The Inns have senior members called Benchers who are entitled to sit at the top table for meals and dinners. They include judges and senior KC's and many notable persons not involved in the law, and members of the royal family. The former Elizabeth, Queen Mother was an important Bencher, as was Diana, Princess of Wales. Her son Prince William, the Prince of Wales, is also a Bencher.

We visited reception rooms, or lounges – in the Main Hall building which were called the 'Queen's Room' and the 'Prince's Room', hung with appropriate portraits. The Hall wall is decorated with the individual shields of former Treasurers.

After lunch we visited the Temple Church where a most entertaining and informative talk was given by the Master of the Inn, about some of the history of the Templars.

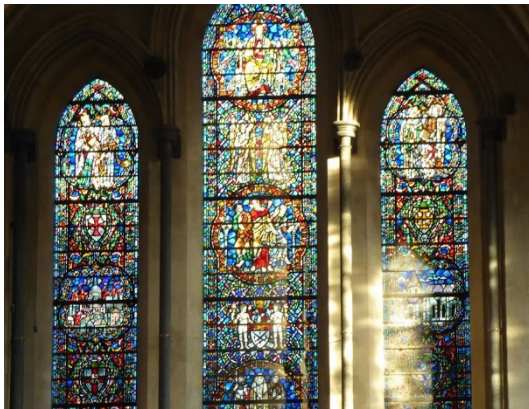
There is so much more to tell about our stimulating visit and about this institution, so bound up with the religious and royal history of England, so elegant in its architecture and spacious gardens beside the embankment. But perhaps these few pictures will say more than words.

Ready to set out from the rugby club in Harpenden



Arriving at the hall

Inside the church



Crest of a noble member

