

The Hospitallers taught that the four arms of the cross represent the four virtues—*Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude* and *Justice* while the eight points of the cross represent the eight blessings or Beatitudes (from the Sermon on the Mount)—

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*
- *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*
- *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*
- *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy*
- *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*
- *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*
- *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*



The Knights Hospitallers

—Who were they?

*A brief history of the Knights Hospitallers who built the Commandery in Carbrooke
—who they were and what happened to them*

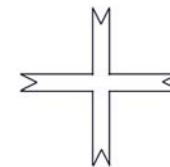
Compiled by

Helen Riley

A more detailed history of the Order can be found in Eric Puddy's book *A Short History of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in Norfolk* which is long out of print but some copies are available in local libraries.

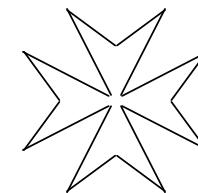
Templars cross would have been retained in some areas that may have wanted to keep their links with the Templars.

From these earlier forms the Hospitaller's cross changed over the years into an eight pointed cross, which then evolved into the form we know today and which has been the proud badge of the Knights Hospitaller's for many centuries. An intermediate form which is seen occasionally is the more elongated shape of the eight pointed cross (illustrated below).



Early Eight Pointed Cross

The final form is known and recognised today as the Maltese Cross, so called because of the long and close association of the Order with the island of Malta (since 1530) when they were given a home there following the loss of Rhodes to the Turks in 1522.



The Maltese Cross

Today we can only speculate as to how the Maltese Cross (illustrated above), evolved from the earlier forms. Was it a development of the Templar's cross patée after the Hospitallers were given the Templars' assets, or an extension of the fish tail symbolism from the original Hospitaller's cross potent (as shown at Carbrooke), a combination of both, or did it evolve totally independently? We may never know for certain.

*Published by Helen Riley on behalf of Carbrooke Church
as part of the Carbrooke Heritage Project
Cover design by Angela Weatherill*

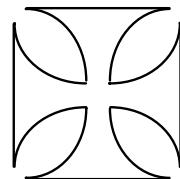
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Kingdom of Jerusalem—and Jerusalem was the location of the first Great Hospital which the Order founded and ran.

At the base of the cross, instead of a fourth arm is what appears to be a fish tail. The symbol of the fish also has a great significance to Christians and the Christian faith.

The members of the Hospitaller's Order were dedicated to the care of the sick. In addition to the normal monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience they also took a unique fourth vow to be *the serf and slave of our lords the sick*. In consequence, it seems totally in keeping that they should have chosen to make their cross out of the top of a crutch, symbolising their support of the sick and their links with Jerusalem, while using the fish tail to symbolise their support of the Christian church and faith.

The Hospitaller's cross should not be confused with that of the Knights Templar, which was quite different and known as a *cross patée*. Although similar in shape to that of the Hospitallers, the arms of the Templar's cross did not end in a flat bar like the top of a crutch (see illustration below).



Templars Cross or cross patée

When the Pope dissolved the Templars as an organisation in 1312 and transferred all their property to the Hospitaller's Order, it is likely that (along with the property and land) the

The Knights Hospitallers, or to give them their full name, *The Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem*, were formed in 1099, shortly after the Crusading Armies had recaptured Jerusalem. A group of Benedictine monks, led by a Brother Gerald, returned to the Holy City and found themselves with a full time job tending those who had been wounded in the fighting and caring for the poor and sick.

The monks founded and ran a Hospital and a Hospice (place of hospitality) for strangers. From this base they cared for the sick and wounded, offered hospitality to pilgrims and travellers to Jerusalem and looked after the poor. They cared for anyone who needed help, regardless of their nationality, religion or sex. They would send out servants to search for those who were too ill or infirm to get to the hospital unaided and have them carried in and admitted (the earliest form of an ambulance service perhaps?). The monks operated an outreach service to support mothers in their own homes who were too ill or poor to care for their babies and also took in, cared for and educated abandoned children and orphans.

The first Hospital was located next door to the church of St. John the Baptist so the Hospital, and the Order, took their name from this (*the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem*). A charter, officially recognising the foundation of the Hospital and giving it corporate status, was granted to Brother Gerald in 1113 by Pope Paschal II, in gratitude for the services which this Hospital had rendered to the crusaders. He also took the Order and its possessions under his personal protection.

A number of Frankish knights were so impressed by the devotion of the brothers that they put aside their weapons and joined the Brotherhood. Others endowed the Order with lavish gifts of manors, estates and money in their homelands,

enabling the Order to acquire more buildings in Jerusalem including the church of St. John the Baptist.

At this time the Hospitallers were a normal monastic Order, the brethren taking the standard vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and a unique fourth vow, to be *the serf and slave of our lords the sick*. The main role of the Order became the building, furnishing and improvement of hospitals, research in medicine and the training of doctors and surgeons. Further Hospitals were established in the Holy Land, including one at Acre.

Despite the recapture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, the Holy Land remained a dangerous place for travellers, especially unarmed pilgrims. Around 1119 a Frankish knight, Hugh de Payns, inspired a number of other fighting men to take monastic vows in defence of the Holy Land. His organisation grew into the Knights Templars, and gained formal recognition in 1128. They were called Templars because their headquarters (given to them by King Baldwin II of Jerusalem and formerly part of his palace) was located in the Temple compound.

The combination of fighting skills and monastic discipline proved so successful that the Hospitallers later adopted it also. Under their next leader, Warden Raymond du Puy, they added to their duties the task of defending pilgrims and undertook military escort duties in support of this. At the same time the Order adopted a new Rule and Constitution which was of a more open, Augustinian nature compared to the relatively cloistered Benedictine rule. The new office of Constable of the Hospitallers was created and by 1126 the military development of the Hospitallers had begun. The Rules of the Order were amended to include *the defence of the Holy Land* and that the Hospitallers must wear *the sign of the cross on their cloaks*.

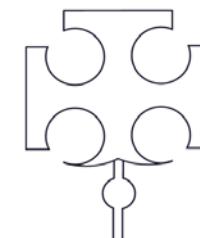
The Hospitaller's Cross

The emblem of the Hospitaller's has always been their distinctive white cross, worn on their robes and mantles and later on their surcoats in battle.

One of the earliest forms of this cross can be seen on the two tombstones which lie in the floor of the chancel of Carbrooke church. They are believed to be those of Matilda, Countess of Clare, the founder of Carbrooke Commandery, and her younger son Jacob, who was known to have been sickly as a child.

The style of cross used by the Order at this time is carved down the centre of each of the tombstones (believed to date from around 1217). It is described by Eric Puddy as a *cross potent*, from the old English word potent meaning a support or crutch. Three arms of the cross end in a flat bar, symbolising the upper part or top of a crutch (see illustration below). He illustrates this by a quote from Chaucer:

*"so old she was, that she ne went
Afoot, but it were by potent"*



Hospitaller's Cross from Carbrooke Church

Eric Puddy also points out that the cross potent does not indicate decrepitude but support, it was also the symbol of the

The reaction in England was to form an independent, National Order and in 1858 *the Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in the British Realm* was formed. This was responsible for establishing and administering three charitable foundations, namely:-

- The St John Ambulance Association, founded in 1878 and responsible for instruction in First Aid.
- The Ophthalmic (Eye) Hospital, established in Jerusalem in 1882.
- The St John Ambulance Brigade of uniformed men and women, which was established in 1888.

By 1888, the English Order was flourishing. It acquired the Priory Gatehouse (all that was left of the Priory of St. John at Clerkenwell) as its permanent home and received a Foundation Charter from Queen Victoria who, on 14th May 1888 became its Sovereign Head. Her eldest son, the Prince of Wales, became its Grand Prior.

Today, the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (as it is known now), and its charitable foundations have once again grown into an international Order, administered by a Chapter General. Soon this will be replaced by a Grand Council made up of the Prior or Chancellor of each National Priory, including the English Priory centred in St John's Gate, Clerkenwell (the old Priory gatehouse). Its Sovereign Head is Her Majesty the Queen.

It is this Order of St. John which we see and know today mainly for its First Aid work and Ambulances. Its members wear their distinctive black uniforms with a white Maltese cross and every year the Norfolk Branch holds its special services in Carbrooke church.

Since the Order already required their cloaks to be of a sombre colour, this soon standardised into a white cross on a black background. A white cross on a red background was also adopted by the Knights as their flag or Standard. Later (after 1248) this was also borne on their shields and worn on their surcoats as their battle dress.

In association with the Knights Templars, the Knights Hospitallers helped to form a standing army of Crusaders who defended the Holy Land and became the finest fighting force in the East. Both of these Organisations also took vows to use their military skills only against the Moslem infidels and not against other Christians.

The Order had now become *the Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem*, but the Hospitallers had not forgotten their other key role—caring for the sick and poor. They continued with this work and proceeded to enlarge the Great Hospital in Jerusalem (which was also known as the *palais des malades*). The Hospital received its Statutes in 1182 and these remain the most ancient Hospital regulations known today. In 1160 it was reported to have 2,000 beds, each with a feather mattress and its own special set of sheets and coverlet. Each patient was provided with a cloak and sandals, to protect them when they went to the latrines. In the obstetric ward, each bed was provided with its own individual cot for a baby.

The Order was very enlightened in its outlook, not only in its facilities to care for the sick but also in having nuns as nursing Sisters, affiliated to the Hospital and owing allegiance to the Order. The Sisters had been a part of the Order from the early days, tending to sick women pilgrims, expectant mothers and the babies born to them in the Holy Land, in their Hospital of St Mary Magdalen in Jerusalem.

By 1160, the Order was an international organisation, having land and estates in almost every country in the Western civilised world of that time. The main administrative headquarters was in Jerusalem and called the Convent (from the word convention—a coming together). There were also several daughter houses and smaller hospitals maintained in a number of European cities which lay on the Pilgrims' route to the Holy Land.

The Order was headed by a Master and its land and estates were organised into administrative areas called Tongues (from their name in French *Langues*), according to the language spoken. Each Tongue had a Priory of the Order as its headquarters. The Prior (later to become Grand Prior) who ran this was responsible for collecting in the *responsions* (money or goods given in lieu of money) from the Commanderies below him and forwarding these on to the Great Hospital in Jerusalem. The Priory in charge of the English Tongue was the Priory of St John at Clerkenwell in London.

A *Commandery* (also known as a *Preceptory*) was run by a Commander, was subordinate to the Priory and was the basic administrative unit of the organisation. Its role was to collect in rents for its properties and alms and gifts from the people, deduct as much as was essential for its own support and forward the remainder to its Priory. A Commandery also recruited and trained new members for the Order, offered hospitality to travellers, cared for the sick and infirm and helped the poor in its locality.

In 1187 the Crusading Army was defeated by the Saracens, under their great leader Saladin, and the subsequent fall of Jerusalem meant the loss of the Great Hospital.

remained loyal to the Pope in Rome. He suppressed the Hospitallers and seized all their land, goods and money for his Treasury (which was always in need of funds).

In 1540 these included the Priory at Clerkenwell and all the Commanderies that comprised the English Tongue of the Hospitallers. Carbrooke Commandery was but one of around nineteen holdings in total, some consisting of multiple estates. The various lands and estates were given or sold to Court favourites or kept by the King and the result of this was the English Tongue ceased to exist in England.

When the Catholic Queen Mary ascended the Throne in 1553, the English Tongue of the Order revived briefly in England. However, she could only restore the land and property that was still owned and retained by the Crown (only ten Commanderies out of all those seized). The Carbrooke Commandery had been given to Sir Richard Gresham and Sir Richard Southwell, so was not one of those restored.

Mary was succeeded by Elizabeth I, a Protestant Queen. Under her all properties of the Order were again confiscated by the Crown, but the Order itself was not suppressed. However, with no property or assets and very few members, the Order again effectively ceased to exist in England. The biggest barrier to re-establishing it was the fact that it remained a Roman Catholic Order, owing allegiance to the Pope in Rome.

It was not until Queen Victoria's reign that there were further attempts to restore the English Tongue on its original basis, but with no restrictions on the religious denomination of its members. This led to a ruling by the Rome-based Order in 1843 that only Roman Catholics could be admitted as members of the Order and, by implication, to the English Tongue.

hold out against the attack for over four months, until relief forces finally arrived. It is known as the Great Siege of Malta and thereafter the Knights became known as the Knights of Malta. They built a new capital city and called it Valetta, after their Grand Master at the time Jean de la Valette. By this time, the Order was a mixture of all the European nations—a foreign legion of militant Christians described as “*the most remarkable body of religious warriors the world had ever seen*” capable of defending their faith on land and at sea.

So closely has the history of the Order been entwined with the Island of Malta over the last few centuries that the eight pointed cross, which had become the emblem of the Order, is known today as the Maltese Cross, and is also the emblem of the Island of Malta.



The Maltese Cross

The Hospitallers stayed in Malta and over the years changed into an organisation that was more ceremonial than military. In 1798, Napoleon overcame the garrison in two days, with almost no bloodshed, and expelled the Order. They drifted in disarray for many years, until in 1834 with the support of Pope Gregory XVI, they re-established their headquarters in Rome.

The *Sovereign and Military Order of the Knights of Malta* still exists today. There is an English branch of this Roman Catholic Order, still Rome based, which maintains the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth at Hampstead, in London.

In England, the Order had a more chequered history. Following his break with the Catholic Church in Rome, Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries, and persecuted any Order that

Sisters of the Hospital were evacuated and sent to various Nunneries of the Order in Europe, but the captured Knights Hospitallers and some of their fellow Templars were not so fortunate. Saladin regarded them as fighting fanatics and offered them the choice of conversion to the Moslem faith or death. The two hundred and thirty captives refused to convert and all were executed. This ended the second Crusade and initiated the third, in which King Richard I (the Lionheart) was heavily involved and faithfully supported by the Hospitallers.

In 1244 Jerusalem was lost for good and the defending armies crushed in the defeat at Gaza. This was followed by a long drawn out retreat over the next 47 years and in 1291, after the loss of Acre and its Hospital, the Holy Land was permanently evacuated by the Knights. The remnants of the Hospitallers and Templars sailed for Cyprus, but the inhabitants saw them as a threat and they were tolerated but not made welcome there.

Eventually (in 1310) the Hospitallers seized the island of Rhodes built a new Hospital and began a new lease of life with the building, maintenance and defence of this. They set about creating a fleet of galleys, to halt the spread of the Turks by sea, and became a maritime force to be reckoned with in the Mediterranean. They moved their Headquarters to the island and remained there until 1522, becoming known as the Knights of Rhodes.

On Rhodes, their military role changed from cavalry to that of marine commandos and their skill and bravery enabled them to establish a command of the Mediterranean Sea, preventing the Turks from overwhelming Europe by this route. They also released many Christian captives who were being forced to man the Turkish galleys as slaves, nursing them and others back to health in the Hospital at Rhodes.

The Templars were less fortunate. With the loss of the Holy Land they had nothing to defend and many lost their way. The reason for their existence had gone and they became demoralised and disorganised, with many drifting back to their homelands. The phrase *to drink like a Templar* became a common saying to describe regular heavy drinkers who got into fights and brawls. In France they were arrested and the Order discredited by officers of the crown. The Pope dissolved the Templars organisation in 1312, and ordered all their property to be transferred to the Hospitaller's.

During their time on Rhodes, the Hospitallers restructured the Order. It changed from being a single, centralised organisation where all official appointments were made by headquarters at the Convent, to become a loose federation of national societies (the Tongues), who sometimes had widely differing interests. Each Tongue took full charge of its own affairs, including promotions to any vacancies that arose. The number of Tongues increased and at the head of each was a Conventional Bailiff, known as the *Piliar* of that Tongue, who resided permanently at the Convent (now located on Rhodes). Each Tongue also had its own meeting place on Rhodes, known as an *Auberge* or Inn. It was on Rhodes that the Master of the Order effectively became its Sovereign Head, minting his own coinage and sending his ambassadors to Royal courts. He was first called *Grand Master* during the 1430's.

Over the years the Hospitallers successfully fought off several attempts by the Turks to take the island of Rhodes. In 1480 the Commander of Carbrooke Commandery, Sir John Wakelyn, was killed in the first great siege of Rhodes. The era ended in 1522, when the Turks, under Suleiman, began an assault on the island with an army totalling some two hundred thousand men. The Hospitallers could only muster four hundred Knights and

four and a half thousand paid troops. They managed to hold out for five months and repulsed several frontal attacks. The Knights were eventually forced to capitulate when the Turks changed their tactics from direct, frontal attacks to starving out the island garrison. One of the heroes of Rhodes was the English Knight Sir Nicholas Hussey, who later became a Commander at Carbrooke.

With the loss of Rhodes in 1522, the Order was again homeless and began the search for a new base. In March of 1530 Emperor Charles V, of Germany and Spain, gave Malta to the Hospitallers "*in order that they may perform in peace the duties of their Religion for the benefit of the Christian community and employ their forces and arms against the perfidious enemies of the Holy Faith*". Malta at this time was described as a barren rock, and the fertile island we know today is due in large part to the work of the Order.

In return for Malta, the Order were to pay an annual fee of one falcon, on All Saints Day, to the Emperor's Viceroy in Sicily. This was the origin of the phrase "*the Maltese Falcon*".

Once settled in to their new home, the Hospitallers soon set about building a new Hospital for the sick, re-establishing their Convent and setting up new Inns or Auberges for each of the Tongues. They also set about fortifying the Island and soon commanded the sea from the new headquarters in Malta, as they had done from Rhodes.

Strategically, Malta was a much better base to control the Mediterranean sea routes from and the Order rapidly became a thorn in the side of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. This led to the Sultan sending a large Armada against the Island in 1565, to crush the Order once and for all. The Knights managed to