

An Interview with the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar's Grand Master Sir Mark Borrington

By **Gabriel Massinger**

A relatively new Order when compared to the Knights Templar's rich 894 year history, the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar – the GCKT - was constituted in 2010 as a Chivalric Organisation of like-minded individuals who demonstrate the admirable principles & practices of chivalry, honour, integrity, humility, courtesy, wisdom & charity.



Sir Mark Borrington – First Grand Master of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar

So who were the Knights Templar? Originally conceived between Baudouin I, King of Jerusalem, Hugues de Payens and eight fellow noblemen circa 1117, these nine knights (aka “The Poor Knights of Christ”) are chronicled as being charged as protectors of pilgrims who, whilst journeying to the Holy Land, were in mortal danger from Saracen ambush. King Baudouin II gave these men the al-Aqsa mosque and the adjacent area called Solomon’s Stables on the Temple Mount for their headquarters and by 1122, Pope Callistus II officially recognised them as the Sacred and Military Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. In 1129, at the Council of Troyes, the now Knights Templar (named after their headquarters location) were granted their Latin Rule of Order under the guidance of St Bernard of Clairvaux.

Notwithstanding a somewhat chequered history, including false accusation and fragmentation of the Order in 1312, it is these rules that this modern day Templar Order models itself upon. Sir Mark Borrington, the Order’s newly elected Grand Master based at GCKT headquarters in London, England, says “the medieval Templar Order ended up with over 650 rules by the turn of the 14th century but in essence, I was able to narrow these down to our modern seven core principles which means, quite simply put, doing the right thing, by yourself and others, and seek the truth at all times”. Mark states that he founded a new Templar Order, alongside eight other individuals to try to show that convictions such as chivalry and honour, commitment and dedication still have a place within the modern world – following exactly on the same principles the original nine noblemen had back in 1117.

Rolls are somewhat different for the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar when compared to their 900 year old predecessors. Thankfully, gone are the days when Templars were charged to take up arms and fight in Holy Wars. Mark goes on to say “The world is packed full of diversity, different ideals, philosophies, good and evil. Our battles today are not military in nature against those who do not happen to follow the same religious beliefs. We are no longer told that it is God's will to kill our fellow brothers or sisters. Our modern day battles are more spiritual in nature and we actively fight against hatred, intolerance and prejudice within the world whilst helping our fellow mankind by promoting peaceful co-existence and acts of humanitarian work and aid.”

The Order has been very active in supporting and promoting the Ark^o Foundation since it began, a not for profit movement encouraging Acts of Random Kindness around the world - *inspiring others to be kind and getting them to think differently about the way life should be lived*. The idea is that the ARK card is given to (or left for) an individual following an Act of Random Kindness performed by a GCKT member. The idea being, when someone receives an Act of Random Kindness, they are encouraged to *pay it forward* to someone else when they feel ready to do so. An ARK can be anything from donating sleeping bags to the homeless to volunteering your time to help raise money for worthy causes. “It’s an incredibly simple concept really” Mark explains. “There is too much negativity and pessimism in today’s society. We are constantly force fed a staple diet of negativity every time we switch on and listen to the news and a lot of people have come to believe that they only need think about themselves. I think that’s an incredibly bleak and dark picture to paint of humanity and it’s

simply only a case of switching the light back on. We believe negativity cannot survive in a positive environment, just as darkness cannot survive in light.”

Aside from its charitable efforts, these new Templars are keen to be a hands-on Order and key members are now undergoing training in emergency rescue work. “I envisage that, should future humanitarian crisis occur, we will have a team that can be called upon to effectively make a difference in the immediate aftermath” Mark comments. “Just as the original Templars under Hugues de Payens were asked to protect the pilgrims crossing into the Holy Land, I want the GCKT to be asked to preserve life in any man-made or natural disaster.”

It is this social aspect to the GCKT that also allowed it to gain registration with the United Nations as a Non-Governmental Organisation with non-consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. Mark explains “This is something we feel incredibly proud of and it is my hope that, by 2014, we will have gained consultative status due to the humanitarian work we will have achieved”.

So who exactly does or can join the modern Knights Templar? “Technically, anyone over the age of eighteen can apply to join the GCKT” states Mark. “We do have very strict entry criteria however and only individuals who can demonstrate the highest moral fibre will be allowed entry and then, after normally two years membership, can they progress onto becoming full Knights Templar. We look for individuals who demonstrate our seven core conditions throughout their everyday life and can show a continuing level of commitment and dedication to what we are trying to achieve.”

“We’re definitely not a card carrying membership and it certainly isn’t about titles and fancy robes although you may occasionally find me in medieval Templar armour at the occasional town parade or show promoting the Order” Mark laughs. “Members do feel proud to be able to wear their formal robes for special ceremonial occasions, as it gives us a sense of nostalgia, but for the most part, GCKT members just look like everyone else, trying to do their bit to better the world we live in”.

Anyone interested in learning more about the GCKT or becoming a member can visit their website at <http://www.knightstemplar.gckt.org> or calling their London headquarters on +44 207 183 8428.

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