

FORTEAN TIMES 199 (August 2005)

The Templars and the Grail

Knights of the Quest

Karen Ralls

Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House

Pb, 261pp, ind, bib, notes, illus, £18.99, ISBN 0835608077

A lot has been written about the Templars, and some of it is even worth reading.

Considering the group of knights officially existed only for a couple of centuries, a lot of people seem to have a lot to say.

And then you throw in the Holy Grail for good measure, something else people seem to have a lot of theories about... Two topics with a whole back-catalogue of pure fiction and some facts that need someone to cut through to sort out the wheat from the chaff – particularly now that people are seeking out more of this sort of information in a post-DA VINCI CODE world. Fortunately for us, Karen Ralls enters the scene, wielding her sword of truth.

Ralls is an Oxford-based mediaeval historian, who has served her time as a postdoctoral fellow at Edinburgh University (Celtic Studies) and Deputy Curator of the Rosslyn Chapel Museum exhibition.

As befits the topic, Ralls has wisely chosen to produce a book of two halves. The first is a no-nonsense history of the Knights Templar and the second is an overview of the Templars and the Grail Quest.

The history is an engaging read full of facts, backed up with appropriate references for those who wish to follow through. And this takes us up to 1312 and it is for the second section to go beyond the official date of the demise of the Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon. (Is it any wonder we know them as Knights Templar?)

The second section looks at the Grail romances and the presence of the Templars, as well as the continued existence of the Templars in the world after 1312.

From early journeys to the New World to visions carved in stone in a small Scottish church, from searches for the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant, it's all there, and more.

If you've ever wondered who the Templars were and what the fuss was all about then this is the book for you. Well written, well researched and, well, just a good read.

Kevin McClure

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
TEMPLARS 101, AT LONG LAST