



community occupying the site, indicating he had already been made religious leader in the 1140s, a few years after being saluted a hero of the Battle of the Standard and awarded the barony of Fowlis by a grateful king, David I of Scotland.

However, William le Riche is not recorded on charter and in history, as a man who has renounced the secular life, instead during his time as Father of Sacro Nemore and religious master, he is known as a knight, Lord of Fowlis, a crusader, even after death.



ABOVE: Decorating the second, early-form (pre 1200) 'high-waisted' shaped bell, is a shield, sitting between the initials 'V' and 'LR', believed to be William le Riche's personal arms.

William le Riche was born around 1120, and sometime between 1124 and 1130, William's father, *Robert le Riche*, companion knight to David I, relinquished his Yorkshire title of *Lord of Hatton de Cleveland* to his brother, Stephen, and his barony in Midlothian to religious cause, leaving his first-born son without inheritance. William married, probably in the late 1130s, producing two daughters, *Christiane* and *Cecilia*. Following his father's will and ancestral tradition, he took up the cause of crusade, within holy orders between 1140 and 1153, as a *fratre conjugati* (married brother), along with other members of his confraternity.

BY 1154, William le Riche had established a religious convent near the banks of Cluden Water, a tributary of the River Nith, near Dumfries, Scotland. The house was called *Sacro Nemore*, meaning 'Sacred Grove,' a Latinised version of Anglo-Saxon, *halig* and *wode*, or 'Holy-wood'.

It is probable an Anglo-Saxon monastic house already existed on the site when William established the convent, setting his bell into the belfry of a church or chapel, bearing his initials, *VLR*, for *Villelmus le Riche*, together with his armorial; a chevron, between three Latin long crosses.

By the early 1160s, William had made improvements to the site and built a new church, re-siting the existing bell together with a new bell, inscribed with the declaration of his dignity, 'Abbas' ('Father'), and a pronouncement of his twenty-two years as 'Dominus' ('Master') over the religious



ABOVE: The older, site-cast, 'high or long-waisted' bell, carrying William's personal armorial and his initials 'V LR'.

William le Riche, sometime before 1141, adopted the title, '*Masculus*' in preference to his already noble name. *Masculus*; a legal declaration of the holder's religious dignity, in terms of the Church's expectation and ideal of hegemonic masculinity, cites him an exemplar Christian warrior. The title is shared in close association with *at least* six other Scottish knights. It is an honorific already carried by 11th and early 12th century Norman-French noble knights, serving the church as senior secular clerics. The Scottish confraternity of knights acts as both witness on charter and surround David I of Scotland. Their title sets them apart from other knights, as a religious communal brotherhood, secular canons (the origins of the military orders), but dies out by the early 13th century, during a period of both religious reform and the holders' expiration.



ABOVE: William le Riche's (*willielmus lerich*) name presented as epigraphical contraction. In 12th century Lombardic lettering, the inscription reads 'W(ler)ICH'. The 'W' has a tool cut on the far right serif (much like an apostrophe) representing contraction of the name, *Willielmus*, whilst the second letter, or beginning of William's last name is a bespoke character, resembling a Gothic 'e', is a space saving combination of the Gothic letters 'l', 'e' and 'r'.

William le Riche, also known as William Masculus, Knight Templar

With only a legend as a knight, soldier, and crusader, while concurrently declared in religious life, William le Riche, aka William Masculus could only be contained within a *military* religious order. His origins from Midlothian and his father's bequest, most likely to the Templars, indicates William le Riche, and those associated by his shared title, are members of *The Knights of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon*, known in Scotland by the end of the 12th century as *The order of the Temple in the land of the king of Scots*.



ABOVE: One of the abbey's original stone wall plaques, discovered beneath the current church floor in 1963.

William's religious house, Sacro Nemore was likely established around 1150, primarily as a hospice for ageing members of the Temple in Scotland and particularly returning ill, dissolute, and impaired Templar soldiers from the catastrophic failures of the *Second Crusade*. By the beginning of the 13th century, with a diminishing population as convent members died out, and a shift in Templar organisation, within a changing political environment, Sacro Nemore was relinquished to another religious order. However,

William le Riche's Templar bells remained in use for nearly nine hundred years, as they continued to serve successive religious communities through a protracted period of war, the spiteful actions of sovereigns and regional lords, and a highly destructive religious reformation, up to transference to a new church built on the same site in the 18th century, from the remains of the dilapidated original Templar-built church.



ABOVE: One of the Holywood Church bells, carrying the inscription, *✠ Jesus Christ Saviour, William le Riche, Father of the Sacred Grove, had me made ✠ Twenty-fold and two years as master.*



ABOVE: The final part of one of the bells' 12th century Lombardic inscriptions; 'A D QVIGESIMO' - *Annos Dominus Quum Vigesimo*. There is a final character of Roman numerals representing the number 'two', completing the inscription as 'Twenty-fold and two years as master'. The mark above the character 'I' is a bellmaker's mark, one of three similarly placed marks on the stringline above the inscription.

The bells of Holywood exist today as the oldest provenanced Christian church bells in the world, unique Templar artefacts, testament to survival and a hidden history.

Why has this history been hidden from the public until now?

- ✘ The bells of Holywood, William le Riche, the honorific *Masculus*, including the early establishment of Templar kind in Scotland had escaped prior scholarly attention.
- ✘ The 'traditional' view regarding the Holywood bells, and the understanding of the title *Masculus*, was the product of superficial and ill-considered hypotheses by two Victorian antiquarians.
- ✘ The 'accepted' record, allowed to remain unchallenged for over one hundred years, has corrupted subsequent historical and genealogical works.
- ✘ A three-year focused examination by a historian, and trained archaeologist, with the assistance of international palaeographers, bell historians, the *College of Arms*, and other specialists, is the first time the bells and their sponsor have been properly considered within a competent, collaborative investigation.
- ✘ The conclusion of the study, dismantling the current accepted academic view, restores the integrity of the bells' first official governmental record within the *First Statistical Account of Scotland*.

