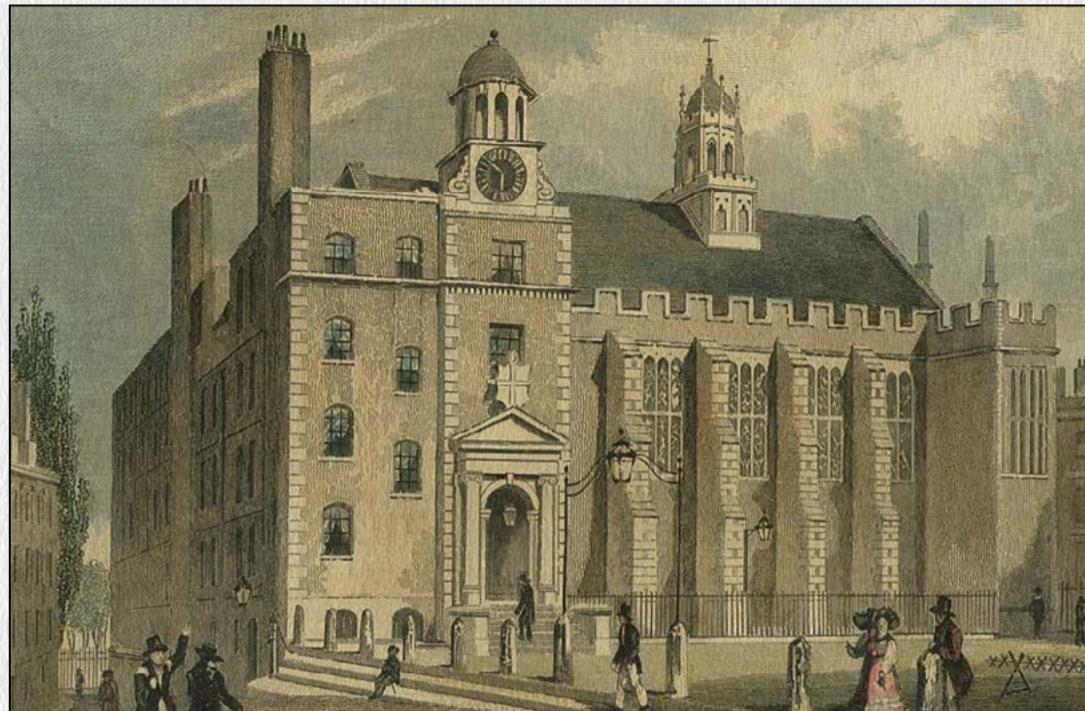


# The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple

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**T**he Honourable Society of the Middle Temple is one of the four Inns of Court in London, institutions exclusively entitled to Call their members to the Bar of England and Wales.

Today, it is proud to provide support, education and accommodation to barristers at every stage of their careers. Many of the Inn's activities and traditions stretch back to its medieval origins.

The Inn first emerged as a society of lawyers in the mid-fourteenth century, renting land and buildings previously in the hands of the Knights Templar, who had been dissolved in 1312. The Templars had left behind two Halls, one, the innermost hall, by the Temple Church, and one roughly in the middle of the Temple precinct. It is thought that these two halls gave rise to the two Societies of the Middle Temple and the Inner Temple: communities of lawyers living, dining and working together.

By the early 1400s, the society had begun to take on students in the law, who would undertake a gruelling curriculum, combining lectures, practical exercises, and collegiate dining. By the end of the century, the Inn had coalesced into a well-established and prestigious institution, with distinct traditions and practices.

In the time of Queen Elizabeth I, legal education was not the only form of learning and improvement available for students at the Inn. Young men would hone their skills in dancing, music, conversation and self-promotion, making useful contacts and gaining an understanding of politics and society. The physical location of the Inn was a crucial factor here – located on the edge of the bustling and dynamic City of London, but close to Westminster and the Royal Court.

As admission numbers boomed and the Inn flourished, the antiquated Hall inherited from the Knights Templar was increasingly insufficient,

and so construction began on a new Hall, which was completed in 1573 under the auspices of the Treasurer, Edmund Plowden. Plowden was a favourite of Elizabeth I, who is known to have visited the Hall a few years later to inspect the new building.

At the outbreak of the English Civil War, much of life at the Inn ground to a halt, with dining suspended, Readings no longer given and the departure of many

senior Royalists in the society. Many activities, particularly the educational curriculum, would struggle to recover even after the Restoration of the monarchy. Educational activity thus began a slide into stagnation, the curriculum being described by Sir William Blackstone in the early 18th century as 'a tedious lonely process'.

The nineteenth century, however, saw a revolution in legal education, with the establishment of the Council of Legal Education in the 1850s and the introduction of innovations such as lectures and compulsory examinations. In 1919, the first woman was admitted to an Inn of Court – Helena Normanton, admitted as a student of Middle Temple on Christmas Eve.

During the Second World War, the Inn suffered terrible damage, including, in October 1940, an attack causing an explosion which ripped a hole in the east gable of the Hall, destroying the wall and smashing the Elizabethan screen and minstrels' gallery to smithereens. Many other buildings were totally destroyed. The Hall was restored by 1949, the occasion being celebrated with a grand dinner attended by the King and Queen.

The Inn has boasted many notable members throughout its history, including several figures associated with the American Revolution such as John Dickinson and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, explorers and navigators such as Walter Raleigh and Martin Frobisher, national leaders including Edward Akufo-Addo, Lee Kuan Yew and Mia Mottley, writers and dramatists such as Henry Fielding, Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, and polymaths including Elias Ashmole and John Evelyn.

Today, the Inn continues to provide education and accommodation for lawyers, and strives to support its members at all points in their careers. Hall continues to sit at the heart of the Middle Temple's activities, providing a home for the collegiate and educational activities just as it did when its doors were opened 450 years ago.



# The Honourable Society of the Middle Temple Additional notes

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**Further Reading:** History of the Middle Temple, edited by Richard O. Haverty. Hart Publishing, 2011.

The History of the Temple, London, from the Institution of the Order of the Knights of the Temple to the Close of the Stuart Period, by J. Bruce Williamson. John Murray. Second edition, 1925.

<https://www.middletemple.org.uk/archive/history>