

1326 TO 1330:

# WHEN MORTIMER WAS THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE

Between 2026 and 2030,  
the Mortimer History  
Society will mark a series  
of events that, 700 years  
ago, re-shaped England,  
its monarchy, Parliament,  
law and history.



*Roger Mortimer, St Laurence's Church, Ludlow*



MORTIMER  
*History Society*



1326 to 1330 was a period of high drama to rival even *Game of Thrones* for intrigue (both political and sexual), reversals of fortune, corruption on a grand scale, gruesome executions and mysterious deaths. And the Mortimer family – from their heartland in the Welsh Marches – were in the thick of it all. You could say that, for a time, Roger Mortimer of Wigmore ruled England.

#### Its high points include:

- The first successful invasion of England led by a woman
- The first forced abdication of an English king since the Conquest
- Effective rule of England by a Lord of the Welsh March
- The creation of the Earldom of March for Roger Mortimer – the first earldom named for a region rather than a county or county town



Roger Mortimer greets Queen Isabella at Hereford

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## 700 YEARS AGO



It all began in September 1326, when Roger Mortimer of Wigmore – soon to be elevated to the highest ranks of the nobility as the first Earl of March – arrived home from exile in France to turn the country upside down. It ended in 1330 with his ignominious execution as a traitor. Between times, he helped bring about the first abdication of an English monarch since the Conquest, incited an extension of Parliament's role and power, acted as quasi-regent for Edward III (who would go on to become England's most successful military king) and – eventually – alienated the entirety of the English aristocracy. Which led, of course, to his downfall.

Beside him, in 1326, came Isabella, Queen of England, daughter of France and mother to the boy who would go on to become Edward III.

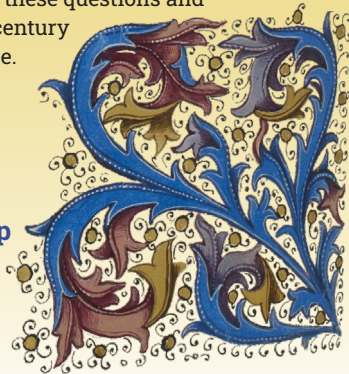
The period from 1326 to 1330 is one of the most dramatic – and consequential – periods of English history, peopled by characters whose reputations and ambitions – not to mention their sexual predilections – have been subjects of rabid controversy and myth-making for 700 years.

- Was Roger Mortimer a power-hungry baron, or a good man trying to do the right thing? And did he have his old friend the king murdered?
- Was Edward II homosexual, bi-sexual or neither? Was he really murdered in the aftermath of his abdication, or did he survive in hiding? And how did a myth about the means of his death (a red hot poker inserted where it has no place to be) become so widely accepted?
- Was Isabella, Edward's queen, a morally dubious she-wolf and a traitor to her husband's throne, or a politically capable mother determined to salvage England's crown for her son?
- How much blame can be laid at the feet of others? Was Hugh Despenser the Younger, Edward's final favourite, the real reason for the collapse of his reign?

Over the course of these four years, through a programme of events, publications, visits to key locations and talks by leading historians, we'll examine these questions and many more, providing you with a window into a tangled 14th century world of high-stakes politics, sex, rumour, violence and intrigue.

**If you want to know more about the years when England was ruled from the March, join the Mortimer History Society and have access to everything we discover.**

**[www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/membership](http://www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/membership)**



# MOMENTOUS MOMENTS

- |                  |                                                                                                                                                                           |                  |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sept 1326</b> | Roger and Queen Isabella arrive in England with an invasion force.                                                                                                        | <b>Oct 1328</b>  | Roger Mortimer of Wigmore becomes the first Earl of March.                                                                                                             |
| <b>Oct 1326</b>  | Execution of Hugh Despenser the Elder, who, along with his son of the same name, were the key targets of the invasion.                                                    | <b>Sept 1329</b> | Roger and Isabella host a great tournament at Wigmore Castle, attended by the young king, Edward III.                                                                  |
| <b>Nov 1326</b>  | After fleeing the invading army, Edward II and Hugh Despenser the Younger are captured in South Wales. Hugh is subsequently executed – in gruesome fashion – in Hereford. | <b>1330</b>      | Roger Mortimer completes construction of St Peter's chapel at Ludlow Castle as thanks to God for his escape from the Tower of London in 1323.                          |
| <b>Jan 1327</b>  | Edward II is forced to abdicate in favour of his son, who becomes Edward III under the quasi-regency of his mother and Roger Mortimer.                                    | <b>Jan 1330</b>  | The Earl of Kent, Edward II's half brother, claims his brother is still alive and leads a rebellion to reinstate him.                                                  |
| <b>Feb 1327</b>  | Coronation of Edward III.                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Mar 1330</b>  | The Earl of Kent is captured and executed.                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Sept 1327</b> | The 'official' month of Edward II's death. Whether he actually did die then, either by foul means or natural causes, is still hotly debated.                              | <b>Oct 1330</b>  | Now come of age, the young Edward III rises against Roger Mortimer, imprisons him and begins to rule on his own behalf. Isabella is also arrested, but later released. |
| <b>Dec 1327</b>  | Edward II is buried in St Peter's Abbey (now Gloucester Cathedral).                                                                                                       | <b>Nov 1330</b>  | Roger Mortimer is executed at Tyburn for, among many other crimes, the usurpation of royal power and the murder of Edward II.                                          |
| <b>May 1328</b>  | Roger Mortimer and Isabella visit Ludlow Castle for feasting and celebration following the marriage of two of Roger's daughters.                                          |                  |                                                                                                                                                                        |



Edward II crowned – he later became the first English king to abdicate  
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The Mortimer History Society is the only society dedicated to the study and celebration of the medieval Mortimer family and the Welsh Marcher lordships. Our publications and programme of events are open to everyone – professional or amateur historians, and those who just want to find out more. Through various programmes, including an annual research bursary and essay prize, we encourage and support academic study of the medieval March.

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