

ROGER de MORTEMER

Lord of Mortemer-sur Eaulne

(fl. 1054 - 1078)

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The origins of the De Mortimer family can be traced back to the early 11th century in the region of Normandy, France. During the 9th and 10th centuries, Viking raiders from modern day Scandinavia terrorised most of mainland Europe and the British isles. The French province of Neustria in North Western France suffered increased invasions and, by 911, the King of France, Charles III "the Simple" had no choice but to cede the area of the Seine valley and coastal regions to the Viking Chief Rollo (Hrolfr). The Duchy of Normandy "Land of the North-men" was created. The Vikings rapidly integrated into the Frankish majority, adopting their customs and language. Within a few generations they became the Normans and by the mid 11th century their power was so great that the King of France decided to crush the fledgling Principality and its young Norman duke William (the Conqueror).

The genealogy of the early De Mortimer family is extremely difficult to trace. According to some sources Roger may have been a son of Hugh (the Bishop of Coutances). His mother may have been a relative of Gunnor, the wife of Duke Richard I. Other sources suggest that Roger was closely related to the Fitz Osbern clan which might explain why the Mortimers gained the fief of Wigmore when Roger Fitz Osbern fell foul of Duke William in 1075.

Roger de Mortemer came from Mortemer-sur-Eaulne, near Neufchâtel-en-Bray/Brai (Pays de Caux) on the Duchy's Eastern frontier with France. The name 'Roger de Mortimer' is first mentioned by the chronicler Orderic Vitalis as having led "omnes Caletenses" (the men of the Pays de Caux) in the campaign against the French King, culminating at the battle of Mortemer in 1054. Roger was part of the Norman defence force which routed the invading army of the King of France at the Battle of Mortemer (Roger's hometown/fief). Roger captured Ralph de Crépi (Count of Montdidier), who was actually his father in law and also his feudal lord for lands within the French kingdom. When Roger subsequently released the Count, without the consent of the Duke, William was outraged at the release of an important prisoner without ransom.

Orderic Vitalis commented that Duke William said: "I banished Roger from Normandy for this offence, but became reconciled with him soon afterwards." Roger's castle at Mortemer was confiscated and granted to "Guillelmo de Guarenna" (William de Warenne), who was related to Roger according to the sources of Robert de Torigny and William de Jumièges. Roger's lands were subsequently restored to him with the exception of Mortemer. He then lived at St Victor-en-Caux where he founded a priory that was raised to abbey status in 1074. He also contributed to the invasion of England in 1066, his son Ralph becoming the first lord of Wigmore. Roger died in 1074 but the link between the Mortimer family and their Normandy homeland remained strong until the Duchy was lost to the French in 1204.

Sources :

Orderici Vitalis Historiæ Ecclesiasticæ (Paris)

Chronique de Robert de Torigni, abbé de Mont-Saint-Michel (Rouen),

Rouen Sainte-Trinité

William de Jumièges.