

A summary by Anne Blandford of a talk given at the 2014 Spring Conference by
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Dr Smith researches and writes about English intervention in medieval Ireland, which began in 1170. He is interested in the colonial society which developed in Ireland in the centuries after the English arrived, the relationship between natives and newcomers, and that between colonists and the home country. He places the Irish experience in a 'British Isles' context which invites comparison with the experience of the Scots and Welsh, who also felt the force of English expansionism in the Middle Ages.

The process of conquering Ireland began in the 1160's when barons with interests in South Wales responded to an invitation by the exiled king of Leinster, to come to Ireland. Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare (d1176) 2nd Earl of Pembroke (nicknamed *Strongbow* like his father) arrived in Ireland in 1170. The invading forces had initial successes and in 1171 king Henry II arrived in the country to ensure that all parties, both native and newcomer, recognised him as their ultimate overlord. In the next fifteen years Henry introduced into Ireland families such as the Lacys, Butlers, Burghs and Verdons which greatly extended the power of the English in Ireland. The principles of common law and rules with regard to inheritance were introduced and it was due to these changes that the Mortimer family came to have an Irish dimension.

Gilbert de Clare had married the daughter of Dermot MacMurrough and their daughter, Isabella, inherited the lordship of Leinster. In 1189 she had married William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke. Although this marriage produced 10 children, the extinction of the male line meant that the Leinster lordship was distributed among William Marshall's five daughters and their heirs and in 1245 a host of new English lords found themselves with significant Irish estates. In 1247 Roger Mortimer of Wigmore (d1282) married Matilda de Briouze (or Braose), the granddaughter of William Marshal. He inherited lands in the Welsh Marches as well as part of the lordship of Leinster known as Leix and its castle of Dunamase.

Though he owned estates there, Roger Mortimer (d1282) never visited Ireland and nor did his son Edmund (d1304). It was Edmund's son Roger (d1330), later the 1st Earl of March, who was the first lord of Wigmore to become personally involved in Ireland. He married Joan de Geneville and in 1308 Joan's grandfather, Geoffrey de Geneville transferred most of his English and Irish lands to her and her husband. This brought them half of the massive lordship of Meath, centred on Trim, which had been originally bestowed by King Henry II on Hugh de Lacy in 1171. They sailed to Ireland and after 60 years a Mortimer of Wigmore at last appeared on Irish soil.

Roger Mortimer returned to Ireland twice before the end of 1312 and was there again in 1315 attempting to shore up the English position in the face of an invasion by Edward Bruce, the brother of Robert Bruce. In December of that year Roger's forces were defeated by Bruce and he had to flee to Dublin. In 1317 he returned with a huge army and in the next 12 months he dealt with a whole host of problems. Finally, in October 1318, Edward Bruce was killed and his forces defeated. Roger's record in Ireland in 1317-18 was one of which he could be proud and he was appointed Justiciar in 1319. On leaving in 1320 he was commended by the citizens of Dublin for "saving and keeping the peace". Roger was never to go back to Ireland and it was another sixty years before a head of the Mortimer family was to return.

After Roger's execution in 1330, his widow Joan argued that her lands, including those in Ireland brought to her husband by marriage, should not be confiscated. She fought numerous lengthy court cases to protect her inheritance from the servants of the King. Some cases she lost but she was able to keep the core of her Geneville inheritance. In 1347 Joan handed over the castle of Trim and the family property at Drogheda to her grandson Roger. By the time of his death in 1360, aged just 32, he had recovered almost all of the estates assembled by his grandfather and in 1354 he had been allowed to reclaim the title Earl of March.

Roger married Philippa, daughter of Earl of Salisbury and their son Edmund (d1381) was betrothed to Philippa, daughter of Lionel of Antwerp, 2nd son of Edward III. She was Countess of Ulster in her own right and was heiress to a large portion of the lands of the Clare family in England, Wales and Ireland. By the time of the marriage in 1368, Edmund Mortimer became the greatest landowner outside of the Royal family.

In 1379 Edmund was appointed lieutenant of Ireland and went there in 1380, his first port of call being Trim castle. He spent two months fighting against the Irish families that had usurped the English authority in Ulster and Donegal and in 1380 he campaigned in the south of Ireland. In 1381 he died of plague at Cork, leaving a seven-year-old son and heir, another Roger (d1398). Following his father's death, Roger was made

lieutenant in his place, despite his age. He remained in Ireland until 1383 and in 1393, aged only 19, he was given full custody of his estates in Ireland, one year before being granted his English estates.

Roger returned to Ireland in October 1394 in the entourage of Richard II. He used Trim as a base to subdue the Irish of Meath and south Ulster and in 1395 the great Irish Lords submitted to Richard II and also acknowledged Roger as Earl of Ulster, promising to return to him Mortimer estates they had 'acquired' over the years. However Roger was later to lose the trust of the king and he was due to be replaced as lieutenant by his brother in law, the Duke of Surrey, when he was killed in a skirmish with the Irish aged just 24. His mangled body was returned to Wigmore Abbey for burial.

Roger's son Edmund (d1425) was seven at his father's death and in 1413 he was declared of age and allowed to succeed to his estates. His marriage to Anne, daughter of the earl of Stafford, produced no children. He was appointed lieutenant of Ireland in 1423 but did not visit until 1424 and died of plague at Trim in January 1425 when his estates passed to his 13 year old nephew Richard, Duke of York.

The Mortimer Lords were land owners in Ireland for 178 years between 1247 and 1425. Over that period a Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore, was in Ireland for only about 10 years in total. The highest concentration of time was in the 18 years between 1380 and 1398 when a Mortimer Lord was in Ireland for a total of five and a half years. Three successive earls died in Ireland but none of them chose to be buried there. They did not found any religious institutions nor build any new castles, nor did they establish any cadet branches of the family in Ireland.

The member of the family with the closest connection with Ireland was actually Thomas Mortimer (d1399), illegitimate half-brother of Edmund the third Earl of March who, on the unexpected death of the earl, effectively ran the country in the name of his seven year old nephew. Back in England, Thomas headed the council that kept the Mortimer inheritance in good condition during young Roger's minority. Unfortunately Thomas fell foul of Richard II and was forced to hide out in Ireland. He was convicted of treason at Shrewsbury and fled to Scotland where he died in 1399.

The Mortimers saw their estates as a single unit of lordship and were very proud of them. They transported timber from their Welsh estates to Ireland for bridge building and shipped cattle and other spoils from Ireland to Wales as a gift to the Abbot of Wigmore. The fourth Earl diverted any surpluses raised in Wales to Ireland, leading to the decay of the stud and parks that had previously flourished in Denbigh. Many servants of the earls travelled between Ireland and the Marches estates and stood in for an absent Earl of March in their official duties.

The Mortimers offered patronage to English settlers in Ireland and these families became increasingly important within the heartland of the area around Dublin known as the Pale. Their loyalty to the Mortimer name and what it stood for long outlasted the demise of the last Mortimer Earl in 1425.