

Mortimer History Society

Newsletter No.1 September 2009

Mortimer History Society Proposal

In May John Grove proposed the idea of forming the Mortimer History Society when he gave a very interesting talk on the Mortimer mediaeval dynasty to a packed audience at Much Marcle* Memorial Hall. He dashed through five centuries of Mortimer history - from 1020 to 1485, showing how generations of Mortimers played a major role throughout mediaeval times: Norman knights, Marcher lords, feudal family, royal servants, Earls of March, Knights of the Garter, ruler of England for 3 years and heirs to the throne.

Then John Grove showed an array of slides of significant places and burial sites - Mortimer roots in Normandy; Wigmore, Ludlow and Usk castles; and tombs in Gloucester and Bristol.

Draft Constitution and Aims

The aims of the Mortimer History Society are:

- To promote an academic and practical appreciation of the local and national history associated with the Mortimer family, and all aspects of the history of the Marcher Lords, mediaeval history and culture of the border areas,
- To look at buildings, sites, artefacts and documents linked with the Mortimers,
- The activities of the Mortimer History Society will be aimed to reach out to a wide and diverse audience with emphasis on Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Powys, in particular to young people, students and researchers.

Interim Committee

A small interim committee has been formed from people interested in starting up the Mortimer History Society. This committee includes: John Grove from Ledbury, Mortimer expert and enthusiast - chairman; Dr. Martin Toms of Birmingham University, and Paul Remfry, prolific author of castle books - deputy chairmen. A group of founding members of the Mortimer History Society have provided the seed money to create an interactive website.

Mortimer History Society

Interactive Website with Gazetteer

The website is being set up to provide and gather information interactively, to be a forum for discussion, research articles, correspondence and news. On the website, members - including all those interested in local and mediaeval history as well as academic researchers - will be able to find what they need to know about the Mortimers and also to add their own knowledge. An important part of the website will be a Mortimer gazetteer of religious, military, geneological information, people and places.

Other Activities

Visits and regional activities are planned, including an inaugural National Conference next year - on 8 May 2010 in Ludlow. Other social, musical, arts and crafts events are envisaged. Schools and museums will be invited to make links, organise projects and events around mediaeval Mortimer topics.

Blanche's Memorial
in Much Marcle Church*



"The tomb-chest and effigy of Lady Grandison (d.1347) at Much Marcle are superb - this is the finest memorial in any Hereford church... The tomb-chest is in a recess, with a gorgeous canopy of cusped arches with an array of shields above... The effigy is exquisite: the face beautiful, the hands delicate, the drapery natural, and flowing over the sides of the tomb-chest in an endearing manner."

- John Leonard in "Churches of Herefordshire & their Treasures" Logaston 2000

Blanche is presumed to be the youngest of Roger & Joan Mortimer's 12 surviving children, although her birthday could have been any time between 1314 and 1322; named after her de Geneville aunt, Joan's sister of Ludlow. Blanche married Piers de Grandison before June 1330 and she died in 1347. The de Grandisons were minor Herefordshire lords centred around Stretton Grandison; Blanche received the manor of Much Marcle from her grandmother Margaret Mortimer, possibly as dowry. We do not know if Blanche was affected or not by her father's downfall in 1322.

Welcome to New Members

from Ian Mortimer, Honorary President
of the Mortimer History Society

For me, personally, the history of the Mortimer family has been the most challenging and rewarding education. As a child, studying the mediaeval Mortimers revealed not only the basic outlines of mediaeval politics but also the necessity of sympathising with them, for it was obvious that their point of view was always air-brushed out of the history books. Thus I grew up seeing history as multi-layered, complex - and endlessly questionable. The mediaeval Mortimers taught me about the huge wealth that the mediaeval magnates managed - with estates covering large portions of Ireland, the Marches, and lordly interests in almost every country in 1398. They opened my eyes to many of the myths that society repeats about the distant past - that mediaeval people did not travel far, that they were predominantly illiterate. The fact that so many of them did not live beyond thirty-five, taught me to ponder on the vagaries of life.

Welcome, then, to the Mortimer History Society. Welcome to a new way of looking at mediaeval England - and understanding how mediaeval England lives on in subsequent centuries, and even in us. - Ian Mortimer

Mortimer History Society Foundation AGM

Saturday 24th October 2009

Wigmore, Herefordshire

2pm Meet at, and guided walk around Wigmore Castle

4pm AGM and talk by Ian Mortimer

at Teme Valley Community Resource Centre

6pm Inaugural Dinner (optional - max.30 - £12)

RSVP and cheques to:

John Grove, 9 Preston Brook Close, Ledbury,

Herefordshire HR8 2FL johnusk@supanet.com

Honorary Presidents

Carol & John Challis

Paul Dryburgh

Ian Mortimer

Inaugural National Conference

8th May 2010 at Ludlow



*Wigmore Castle - the seat of Sir Roger Mortimer, how it might have looked in the mid 14th century after the completion of Roger's rebuilding programme
Reconstruction drawing by Brian Byron*

Membership

enquiries to:

Dr Martin Toms,

Green Farm, Tedstone Wafre,

Nr. Bromyard, HR7 4PP

m.r.toms@bham.ac.uk 01885.488477



Wigmore Castle - Roger's seat - engraved by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck in 1731, ninety years after its partial demolition. Both pictures from Ian Mortimer's book 'The Greatest Traitor, The Life of Sir Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, ruler of England 1327-1330' by Ian Mortimer, published by Cape 2003