

Mortimer History Society



Newsletter No.10 Oct. 2012

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COMMITTEE 2012: Yve James, Stella Mason, Hugh Wood INTEREST GROUPS: Dress & Textiles, Heraldry

MHS 2013 PROGRAMME

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

- 16 FEBRUARY** **AGM**
Saturday, 10.30 - 1.00
Earl Mortimer College
Leominster
- 9 MARCH** **Blanche Mortimer's Dress
and Tomb**
Saturday, Meeting
10.15 - 3.45
Much Marcle Village Hall
£10 inc. donation to the
Restoration Fund
- 20 APRIL** **Visit to Usk Castle
Meet at 11 am
led by John Grove**
- 11 MAY** **May Meeting - all day**
Saturday, Earl Mortimer
College, Leominster
Theme: Richard II -
his life and times
- JULY** **MHS at Ludlow Festival**
- 12 OCTOBER** **Study Day on Heraldry**
Bishop Mascall Centre
Ludlow 10 am - 3 pm
Introduction to Mortimer
and related heraldry by
Hugh Wood and
Peter Crocker

Dear Friends,

On a recent visit to Dublin, I managed to visit the magnificent ruins of Trim Castle. It has had an expensive restoration with EU money, and is well worth a visit. It is the largest medieval castle in Ireland, and was under Mortimer control from 1306 till 1425. The full story of the Mortimers in Ireland has yet to be told, but Roger the first Earl of March had some success as Edward II's representative there, and at least two Mortimers died in Ireland.

It is a good reminder to us all that much needs to be done as we begin to unravel and research the full story of the Mortimers.

Nearly 40 of our members also enjoyed this October a full tour of the remains of Wigmore Abbey and the Abbot's house, under the guidance of one of our presidents, John Challis. Here again we need a member to write up for us the story of Wigmore Abbey.

I invite members to contact me if they would like to help in researching a small but important part of the Mortimer heritage and connections. I would be able to recommend a number of towns, castles, and events with Mortimer connections that need further investigation.

John Grove

chairman@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk

Re-enactment of the Battle of Mortimers Cross (1461) at Hampton Court Castle 15 & 16 September

The Battle of Mortimers Cross re-enactment took place this year in the beautiful gardens and fields around Hampton Court castle at Hope-under-Dinmore. The weather was good this time which added to the enjoyment and spectacle. Pictures of Jason, and of the Passamezzo medieval-dance group. We all joined in their final dance.



MHS Visit to the Herefordshire Museums Resource & Education Centre, Hereford

On Tuesday 18 September, ten members of the MHS were shown a table-load of mediaeval artefacts held at the Herefordshire museums store in Friar Street, Hereford, by Judith Stevenson, the archeology curator. She showed us a selection of pottery, bone tools, a few fragile pieces of glass, metal items such as knives, buckles, purse frames, book clasps, a thimble, and one or two bits of rare leather - a beautiful polished leather container which was used by the priest to carry the communion chalice and patten dish to take the last rites to parishioners' homes. Most of the finds come from digs in and around Hereford - including a bone of a bear's leg, which may well have belonged to a performing bear in the town. Judith has done some experimental archeology trying to find out how scuttlefish were used as moulds for shaping moulten metal into small pieces such as brooch pins and buckles.(see picture)



The Blanche Mortimer Dress Project

At the September meeting of the MHS Dress & Textile Group, a small group were able to have a good discussion about choice of materials, colours, buttons, the toile, accessories and jewellery for making a copy of Blanche Mortimer's dress. We read again the 'rare' list of Joan de Geneville/Mortimer's (Blanche's mother) of clothes etc which were confiscated when Roger and the family were imprisoned, which appears in Ian Mortimer's book *The Greatest Traitor*. Here are some of items which are of interest to the group, especially about colour and materials:

Joan de Geneville Mortimer's Belongings:

One wall-hanging, four carpets, one benchcover of a fashion, with the Mortimer arms ... three chequered bedcovers, one red bedcover, one mattress covered with fine linen, two mattresses covered with canvas, eight blankets, one red cover furred with miniver, one fustian for the bed, one counterpain for the bed, 15 pairs of linen sheets, three pairs of muslin curtains, one pair of striped muslin curtains, one pair of curtains of striped linen, one pair of red linen curtains, one curtain of white pannelled lined, two tunics of 'cloth of Thars', of which one is green and one other brown, two supertunics of indigo silk without fur, three supertunics of brown silk without fur, one tunic and two supertunics of red 'cloth of Thars', one uncut violet wool cloth, one tunic, two supertunics, one mantle and one hat without fur of mixed brown cloth, one new fur of miniver for a supertunics, and another for a hood, two red Irish fallaings, one old white Irish fallaing, one piece of cloth for three altar cloths, one table cloth for a dinner table, two 'double' towels, three small towels, 22 ells of linen cloth, one long towel, three sanap cloth [table under-cloths], one small piece of linen cloth of double thickness, two wool cushions of stitched work;

one psalter, four books of 'romances' [stories of chivalry], two chests of which one contains two striped red velvet cloths, one comb, one ivory mirror, one small ivory image of the Virgin Mary, one ivory scourge [whip?], one belt decorated with enamel and precious stones belonging to one of her daughters. The second chest contains one enamelled mirror, and one set of ivory chessmen, one empty strong box, two wash basins. Lastly, two silver basins, six silver dishes, four silver salt cellars and two silver cups found with Lady Mortimer.

October Visit to Wigmore Abbey

Tea with MHS Presidents John & Carol Challis

Hugh de Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore probably founded the Abbey around 1150. His steward Oliver de Merlimond went on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella in 1124, and may have been inspired by churches he visited along the way and brought back stonemasons with him - thus helping to introduce the distinctive style sculpture into Herefordshire. The Norman priests took some time to settle and build their abbey on the flat land beneath Wigmore Castle.



*The Abbot's House at Wigmore Abbey:
The Abbot's rooms on the 1st floor;
the inside of the undercroft -
the servants' quarters*

John Challis showed MHS members around the grounds of the Abbot's house, the gatehouse, gardens, and the reconstructed abbey chapel arch. Only this archway and few bits of wall remain of the abbey church. Nothing is left

of the nave except weeds and grass-covered mounds from the excavations done at the turn of the last century. Then, one grave was discovered which soon disintegrated. However, it is likely that many Mortimers have been buried here - perhaps even Roger, executed in 1330. We know that his wife Joan de Geneville tried to retrieve the remains of Roger's body to be buried at Wigmore Abbey. If she succeeded, her husband's remains were probably lost later when the Abbey was destroyed in the 16th century, and attacked again after the Dissolution of the Monasteries by raiders who hated the Abbot.

Beyond the lost abbey church, boggy fields stretch out where you can see the banks and hollows where there were once ponds fish-farmed by the monks. They brought water to the ponds from the mill leat and dug a channel from the River Teme. John said that the surrounding gardens and parterre "celebrate a romantic decay" which they do very well. The main remaining piece of chapel wall was unsafe and had to be supported and made secure. After over 2 years' negotiations with English Heritage architects and engineers, the arch was reconstructed - not in stainless steel - but in stone from the Forest of Dean, which is beautifully coloured, speckled with iron ore. Digging out the base of the arch, the builders found the original medieval base-stone; this is now cleverly displayed beside the wall rubble that has become a charming lavender-covered hillock alongside the new archway.

John described the Abbot's house and gatehouse as "a badly wrapped parcel" held together not by string, but with a series of iron rods and supports. Bits and pieces from earlier constructions and adaptations - carved stones, tiles, chevrons and so on - have been incorporated in the 'parcel' - making the whole a rich and fascinating package. Inside the Abbot's House, the Challis' have beautifully conserved the fabric of the building as it has changed and been altered over the centuries. They showed the MHS group around the first floor rooms where the Abbot lived, and into the undercroft - a lovely candlelit hall which used to be the servants' quarters and kitchens. John served tea to the party in this room, and we ate a wide selection of delicious cakes all made by Carol Challis.

MHS Website - calling all photographers

A group of us are working on the new MHS website and we are seeking attractive & relevant illustrations to populate the text. Rather than using many images from national collections, with copyright issues, we would like to have examples from around the region. If you have good images of misericords, heraldic tiles, details of effigies, stained glass, or sculpture, please email them to me. If the item has a Mortimer connection that would be terrific, but we would also like to use images of social life, military and agricultural life from the 11th - 15th centuries to add variety.

Thanks very much - Stella Mason stellamason1@btinternet.com

Discover Shropshire Day

Shirehall Shrewsbury 29 September



Fran Norton behind the MHS table at Shrewsbury

MHS was amongst 30 local history groups represented at the very successful "Discover Shropshire Day", which was introduced with a talk by Shrewsbury archeologist Nigel Baker. He argued that historical records and results of archeological excavations complement each other in uncovering past life and lives - in this case - the medieval history of Shrewsbury town. Even where records and digs may appear to produce contradictory historical facts, this can trigger new investigations and rethinking. Nigel Baker explained that each form of research uses different methods and sources to produce their own specific type of historical data.

To research everyday life in Shrewsbury town, the main source of historical records used were individual and household inventories for tax collection, covering treasure (silverware, rings, brooches, coins), clothes and linen, and firewood. Few household goods have survived for Shrewsbury archeologists to dig up - some utensils, bones from working and food animals, loads of pottery, and indications of home industries such as tools, forges, and tanning.

Investigating the homes of Shrewsbury's medieval upper class, the oldest parts of surviving houses date from the 13th century. Records show that only a third of the population paid tax, and the elite of that population consisted of only 9 people. So the historical facts that emerge from these records give a picture of a very small group of wealthy and important people in the town. It is much more difficult to find out about the lives of the lower classes, and archeologists uncover more evidence from rubbish pits near the town wall than from the footsteps of medieval tenements.

Researching medieval urban Shrewsbury, the most fruitful records are the toll tickets from payments for people, goods and animals going to market through the town gates. However, dendrochronological measurements from old house timbers have given new information on Shrewsbury's medieval economy. The last big house was built in 1467 and then there appears to have been a recession in Shrewsbury 1450 through to 1580.

When Macdonalds was built on one of these sections on the edge of town, archeologists and local historians found that around 1400 the town council sold land on the town wall area for private building. Nigel Baker commented on the lack of knowledge about the suburbs of Shrewsbury - and the need for research & archeology on the outskirts of the town. He thinks it is difficult to place the results of Shrewsbury historical records and archeological excavations in the wider medieval Marcher context. For example, when the new buildings were being constructed on the town wall at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, the Glyndwr Rebellion was raging in nearby Welsh borders 1400-1408.

- Margot Miller

MORTIMER HISTORY SOCIETY MAGNIFICENT 2013 CALENDAR

Now available in aid of MHS funds

12 lovely colour pages of Mortimer places - Usk to Ludlow
A5 on spiral binder - £5 each plus £1 postage or 2 copies post free

Please send cheque made out to Mortimer History Society to
Margot Miller, 25 Nover Wood Drive, Fownhope, Herefordshire HR1 4PN
Margot is moving house 25 October to 6 Fairfield Green, Fownhope HR1 4NL
so phone and email address may not be active for some time!

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