



**NEWSLETTER 18**

**September 2014**

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#### **FORTHCOMING EVENT**

##### **Saturday 4th October - Richard III, Ludlow and the House of York**

A day conference organised by the Conservation Trust for St Laurence, Ludlow in association with the Mortimer History Society. This event is attracting a good number of participants but there are still vacancies. See Newsletter 17 for full details

Venue - Ludlow Assembly Rooms

Timing - 9.00 to 5.00

Lunch - participants make their own arrangements

Price - £35 (NB £45 combined ticket including evening concert)

Booking - Ludlow Assembly Rooms in person or click [here](#)

#### **RECENT EVENT**

##### **Visit to Stapleton Castle, Herefordshire on 16th August 2014**

Stapleton is just a short distance from Presteigne, close to the Welsh border. The castle mound is owned by MHS member Trefor Griffiths who kindly conducted a group of 12 fellow-members round the impressive site on a rather cold blowy August day. Today the hilltop is dominated by the tottering ruins of an Elizabethan house of the early 17th century, but the history of the site goes back many centuries before that. It is quite possible, indeed, that the hill was populated in the Iron Age, but this has not been confirmed. It was in the 12th century, however, that work began on creating the medieval castle.

At the southern end of the hilltop is a wide raised area, clearly the site of the original motte but presumably flattened later to accommodate the extensive Elizabethan mansion. To the north there is an area about 8 feet lower, with all the appearance of an inner bailey. There are still deep ditches to the east and west of the motte that presumably continued across the north side originally. Beyond the inner bailey, to the north, is an extensive outer bailey at a still lower level.

There was a castle at Richards Castle in Herefordshire even before the Norman Conquest and the Barony of Richards Castle (or Honour of Burford) consisted of 9 castles by the 13th century. It was Baron Hugh FitzOsbern or his son Osbern FitzHugh who built the castle at Stapleton during the "Anarchy". Osbern's mother, Eustachia, was from the well established family of Say (cf. Stokesay and Hopesay near Craven Arms) and Osbern and his brother adopted the surname of Say.

When Baron Hugh de Say died about 1195 his daughter Margaret became his heiress. As her second husband, she married Robert Mortimer of Essex who thereby became Baron of Richards Castle (or Burford) in the right of his wife. He died in or before 1219 and, although Margaret married a third time, Robert's son, Hugh de Mortimer, eventually succeeded to the barony. Stapleton was held by the Mortimers of Richards Castle until the male line failed in 1299.

Stapleton then passed by marriage to the Cornwall family and it was during their time that the medieval castle was converted into a mansion. During the Civil War it was 'defaced' to stop it being utilised by the Parliamentarians and in 1706 the site was acquired by the Harleys of Brampton Bryan. Despite the fact that almost nothing remains above ground of the medieval buildings, the clearly-defined earthworks and romantic ruins evoke strong echoes of the lives of those across the centuries who made this place their



The remains of the Elizabethan house on the site of the medieval keep at Stapleton



Trefor Griffiths explaining the intricacies of the site

## **AN APOLOGY - RENEWING SUBSCRIPTIONS ONLINE**

Despite herculean efforts by our website technicians we have been unable to make the membership and subscription software on our website work properly. This has mainly affected the online renewal of subscriptions. We have now reluctantly decided to simplify matters by keeping our membership information quite separate and hope to have the new system up and running within a few weeks.

## **MORTIMER FAMILY HISTORY**

Several members are interested in their own Mortimer history and we have decided to set up a section on the website where those members can publish their own genealogies and see those of other members. We hope that this will encourage the formation of a new special interest group where interested members can discuss related matters. If you would like to publish the results of your own family research send a message using the 'Website' option on the 'Contact Us' page.

## ROGER MORTIMER (d1282) and the CARBUNCLE

Chambers dictionary gives two meanings for the word 'carbuncle', a pleasant one and an unpleasant one. It is described as either a 'mythical self-luminous gem' or as 'a local inflammation of the skin and subcutaneous tissues caused by bacterial infection'. But there is a third use of the word. A carbuncle, or escarbuncle, is a heraldic term that was in use from an early period. In his *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer describes the coat of arms of Sir Topaz in this way:

His shield was all of gold so red, a carboucle beside, and therein was a bores hed

This heraldic carbuncle was a device with eight spokes radiating from a central boss, said to derive from the metal bands sometimes fixed on shields to strengthen them.

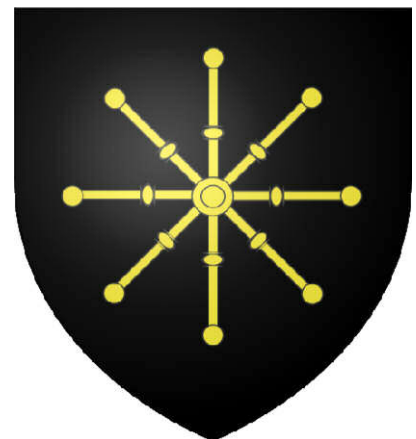
A variation of the carbuncle occurs when the ends of the spokes are joined together, presumably to provide even more strength to the shield. The arms of the kingdom of Navarre, centred on Pamplona in northern Spain, have displayed this kind of carbuncle since early in the 13th century. To see how Roger Mortimer came to have anything to do with the carbuncle, we need to understand something of the history of the monarchy of Navarre.

From 905 to 1234 Navarre was ruled by the Jimenez dynasty and the last Jimenez king was Sancho VII. He was a great soldier and over 2 metres tall he was called 'Sancho the Strong'. One of his sisters, Berengaria, married Richard the Lionheart and the youngest was called Blanche. Blanche had married Theobald III, Count of Champagne in 1199. but within two years Theobald had died, leaving her pregnant. For the next 21 years, Blanche ruled Champagne as Regent until her son Theobald IV came of age. In later life her brother Sancho VII developed bad leg ulcers and became obese. Ashamed of his appearance he retired from public life and his nickname changed to 'Sancho the Retired'. He had no sons, so Blanche stepped up again, ruling as Regent of Navarre because of Sancho's incapacity, until her death in 1229. On Sancho's death in 1234, the crown of Navarre passed to Blanche's son, the Count of Champagne, who thus became the first French king of Navarre, Theobald I.

The story now moves to Theobald's second son Henry I of Navarre who succeeded his brother Theobald II in 1270. He was married to Blanche of Artois and they had two children, a boy and a girl. Unfortunately their infant son and firstborn, Theobald, perished when he fell from the battlements of the castle of Estella in Navarre. Nicknamed 'Henry the Fat' the king died in 1274 supposedly suffocated by his own fat. He left a wife and one-year-old daughter, Joan, who immediately became Joan I, queen of Navarre, with her mother acting as Regent. Because of the perceived weakness of the minority and regency there was great unrest in the country and Blanche took Joan to France to live under the protection of her kinsman king Philip III.



A modern re-enactor's shield showing five reinforcing radial strips



The arms of the commune of Arquian in Central France  
*sable a carbuncle or*



A modern shield showing reinforcing around the edge

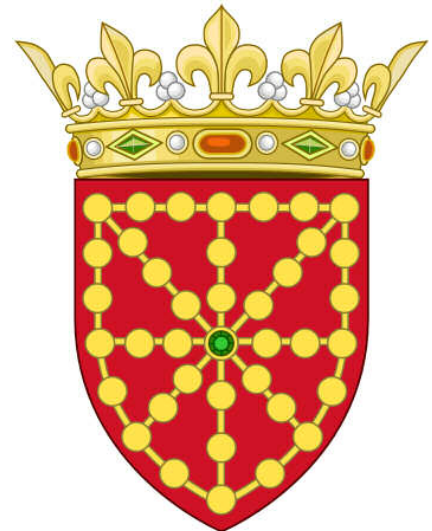
Now to affairs in England. Roger Mortimer (d1282) had been a great supporter of Prince Edward, later king Edward I of England, during the rebellion of Simon de Montfort and was in the forefront in the battle of Evesham in 1265 where Simon met his end. In 1279 After he was knighted by the king, Roger hosted a tournament at Kenilworth.

The event is recorded in the Wigmore Chronicle and included in Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* (vol.6 p 350) and then retold with minor variations in various 19th century publications.

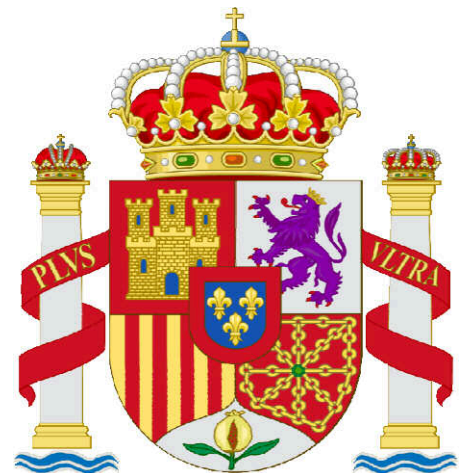
This extract from *The History of Ludlow and its Neighbourhood* (p.217) by Thomas Wright (1852) is fairly typical. It has been slightly rewritten to improve its clarity.

'After being knighted by king Edward I, Roger held a great tournament at Kenilworth and a 'round table', entertaining sumptuously for three days a hundred knights, with as many ladies, at his own expense; and having himself gained the prize of a lion of gold, on the fourth day he carried all his guests to Warwick. As was the custom, the tournament had been proclaimed in foreign countries and the fame of Roger's gallantry was spread through distant lands. The queen of Navarre is said to have fallen in love with him, and to have sent him wooden vessels, bound with gilt hoops and wax, as flasks of wine, but which, when opened, proved to be filled with gold. These 'flasks' were long preserved in the abbey of Wigmore: and for the queen's love Roger de Mortimer added a carbuncle to his arms during his life.'

It's a colourful tale but the reality is probably not quite so romantic. In 1279 the queen of Navarre, Joan, was just five years old! What the above narrative does not tell us is that, following the death of her husband Henry I of Navarre, Blanche of Artois married again, this time to Edmund Crouchback, king Edward I's younger brother. Edmund certainly attended the tournament and it is reasonable to assume that Blanche and Joan lived in England and attended the tournament with him. Moreover, as the widowed queen of Navarre and the present Regent, it is quite possible that the 'queen of Navarre' mentioned in the Wigmore Chronicle refers to Blanche rather than the actual queen, Joan.



The arms of the Kingdom of Navarre  
*gules an escarbuncle or, centre vert*



The present arms of Spain including the  
arms of Castile, Leon, Aragon and Navarre

In her book *The Tournament in England 1100 to 1400* Juliet Barker states that

'Roger Mortimer...held a great Round Table...at Kenilworth, the home of his close associate Edmund, duke of Lancaster, the younger brother of Edward I.....According to the Wigmore Chronicle, Blanche, queen of Navarre and wife of Edmund, presented Mortimer with several wine barrels filled with gold as her contribution to the expenses and thereafter, in token of his gratitude, he bore a carbuncle on his armour.'

No mention of love in this account, but, no doubt, a very welcome contribution to the funds.

Joan I of Navarre went on to marry king Philip IV of France and was not only the mother of three kings of France (Louis X, Philip V and Charles IV) but also of Isabella the Fair, later to achieve fame and notoriety as Edward II's queen of England.

## WIGMORE ABBEY

*by Ruth E. Richardson, M.Phil., a respected author, archaeologist and historian who has published several carefully researched books. See: [www.blancheparry.com](http://www.blancheparry.com)*

Augustinian (or Austin) Canons Regular of Wigmore Abbey were also priests, when most monks were not. They followed the Rule of St. Augustine of Hippo and could, therefore, serve local churches in the same way as clergy in the Saxon / Mercian Churches. The Augustinians had several sub-groups, including the Victorines, named after the Augustinian abbey of St. Victor of Paris, founded 1113. This abbey became famous for the scholars, mystics, and poets it fostered, even though the teaching focused on using knowledge to enhance personal virtue and was not acquired for its own sake. The Victorines reverted to being main-stream Augustinians in 1173.



Part of the south transept survives to a good height

In Herefordshire the Victorines are known to have had houses in Wigmore and Wormsley. Augustinian sites included two nunneries for canonesses, at Aconbury and Limebrook. The canons were also found at Flanesford (near Goodrich) and Holme Lacy (Praemonstratensian, another sub-group). The other Augustinian sites at Aymestrey and Shobdon, were apparently earlier sites for the canons who finally settled at Wigmore.

Initially, a prior and two canons, from the Abbey of St. Victor, built a stone church at Shobdon (near Leominster) in 1141. Interestingly, this was when Robert de Bethune was Bishop of Hereford and he had been abbot at the Augustinian Abbey of Llanthony. However, the first Shobdon site was not a success, one problem being a lack of water. So they moved to Eye, near Aymestrey, then to a site in Wigmore village, and then apparently to Bethune (?Byton) though this may be a confusion with the Bishop's name. More certainly, they then returned for a while to Shobdon, on the site of the present restored church, before finally settling at Adforton, north of Wigmore. There is a suggestion, probably unprovable, that this last site, on a spur of land into Wigmore Mere, may, unknown to the canons, have been similarly used in Saxon / Mercian times.

Instigated by their patron Hugh Mortimer of Wigmore (d.1181), the building of the final Wigmore Abbey started in 1172, a year before the Victorines reverted to being main-stream Augustinian. However, this did not seem to bother Hugh Mortimer and the new church, dedicated to St James, was consecrated in 1179 by Robert Foliot, Bishop of Hereford. Bishop Robert encouraged fine craftsmanship and evidence for the influence of the Hereford School of Sculpture can be seen at both Shobdon and at Wigmore.

In 1179 the complement of Wigmore Abbey was apparently the abbot, prior and seventeen canons. As with most monastic foundations, numbers would have risen considerably over succeeding decades, and then declined. When it was surrendered, at the 1538 Dissolution of the Monasteries, it was staffed by the prior, sub-prior and eight canons.

The church survived the destruction of the monastery by the Welsh in the reign of King John. The community's buildings were rebuilt by Edmund Mortimer 3rd Earl of March, c.1379. He was the monastery's patron and the Mortimer family considered the abbey to be their mausoleum. He granted lands worth 2,000 marks (c.£585,624 in modern money) a year to pay for the rebuilding. In his 1380 Will he bequeathed the abbey beautiful vestments, altar cloths, images, plate and relics. These included an enormously expensive piece of the True Cross, the body of St. Seiriol and bones from St. Richard of Chichester, St. Thomas Becket and St. Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford.



It is probable that there was a Mortimer vault, housing many generations of the family, and this may survive. Documents have provided eleven names but there would have been other men, as well as women and children. Graves in the floor of the church were found in recent excavations. However, it is debatable if any of these internments included Roger Mortimer 1st Earl of March, the lover of Queen Isabelle wife of King Edward II, who was executed at Tyburn in 1330. The abbey did have extensive records but after the dissolution they were housed in the old, decayed, and unfortunately damp, chapel of Wigmore Castle. As a result, by 1574, three-quarters of the documents were recorded as destroyed.

The Church site is on the north of the cloister area and extends into the field. The site is largely undisturbed with parts of the walls, dating from c.1172, still standing. It had glazed tiles and, as wasters were found, these were made on site in a nearby kiln. Excavations in 1906-1907 found the original church plan was presbytery, transepts and a nave without aisles. The 13th-14th centuries rebuild, when the seven-bay nave was vaulted in stone, added side aisles to the presbytery and eastern chapels to the two transepts and, importantly, a chapel behind the high altar. These changes coincided with the rising power of the Mortimers and may indicate further burial areas for the family. The fabric design was Early English and the stained-glass windows depicted the coats-of-arms of the Bohun, Mortimer, Montacute, and Badlesmere families, with borders formed of white roses, castles, and fleurs-de-lis.



Owner of Wigmore Abbey and MHS President, the actor John Challis

The present house, altered 17th / 18th / 20th centuries, incorporates the abbot's lodging, additional buildings and undercroft. It stands on the line of the western, cellarer's, range of the abbey. Carved stone, roof trusses and supporting timbers of the 14th century, a 14th century two-light window, and a 15th century three-light window with panel tracery survive. The garden and lawn area marks the site of the cloisters. Most of the surviving walls of the church and monastic buildings date from 1172 but there was rebuilding in the 13th-14th centuries. Among the changes the presbytery was rebuilt and extended. Foundations of other monastic buildings, including those of the frater, or dining-room, are on the southern side of the cloister area. The eastern monastic range foundations extend into the field. This long range had a chapel, perhaps for the infirmary. Adjacent to the abbot's lodging was the 14th century gatehouse, much of which still stands. An external gatehouse to the whole complex, with medieval features, also survives. A fireplace was found where the chapter house could be expected. The separate 14th century building, on the access road, may have been the gate chapel for laity and women.



The layout of the monastic site included farm buildings, precinct walls, fishponds, and ridge and furrow farmland. A comparative site can be seen at Llanthony Prima in Monmouthshire. However, the site of Wigmores Abbey was also a factor in the prestige layout of Wigmores Castle, which included a large deer park. The castle was sited on high ground and enhanced by its reflection in the shallow water of the mere. Visitors, especially from Wales, were intended to be impressed. From 1172 Wigmores Abbey was closely connected with the fortunes of the Mortimers.

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*For further information see:*

*The Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club, especially vol. XLIV 1983.*

*Ruth E. Richardson & Chris Musson, 'Herefordshire Past and Present, An Aerial View', Logaston Press 2004, reprinted 2012. There is an aerial photograph of the abbey site.*

*Charles Hopkinson & Martin Speight, 'The Mortimers, Lords of the March', Logaston Press 2002.*

*J. W. Tonkin, 'Herefordshire', B.T.Batsford Ltd. London, 1977.*

*For a summary of details see the website: Herefordshire Through Time.... follow directions to*

*- Herefordshire Historic Environment Record Database*

*- Monuments Search*

*- Wigmores Parish, Medieval, and then click on individual sites.*

*Herefordshire Archives and Records Centre, at Rotherwas, has copies of the aerial photographs taken by Chris Musson 2003.*

## THE THREE ELIZABETH DE BURGH

Elizabeth de Burgh is a name that is familiar from the story of the Mortimers of Wigmore as she was the mother-in-law of Edmund Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March. But there were two other Elizabeth de Burghs living in the early 14th century. They were sisters-in-law and they both had very colourful lives.

The Earldom of Ulster was created for the second time in 1264. The second earl was Richard Og de Burgh (d1271), also known as the *Red Earl*, who was a close friend of King Edward I. Richard and his wife Margaret de Bourough had ten children among whom were Elizabeth (our first Elizabeth de Burgh) and John. John married Elizabeth de Clare (who thus becomes our second Elizabeth de Burgh). John and Elizabeth's granddaughter inherited the title as 4th Countess of Ulster and she is our third Elizabeth de Burgh.

### The first Elizabeth de Burgh (1289-1327)

She was the third child of Richard Og de Burgh, 2nd Earl of Ulster. When she was about 13 years old, Elizabeth became the second wife of Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick being married at Writtle, near Chelmsford, Essex when he was at the English royal court. Four years later Robert and Elizabeth were crowned King and Queen of the Scots at Scone. Robert sent Elizabeth to Kildrummy Castle for safety. In due course, the castle was besieged and Robert's brother Niall was captured and executed. Elizabeth escaped death but was held under house arrest for eight years. After Bannockburn in 1314, Elizabeth was moved to York and then to Carlisle. Eventually an exchange of prisoners was permitted by Edward II and Elizabeth returned to Scotland. Elizabeth had four children - Margaret, Matilda, David II King of Scots, and John.



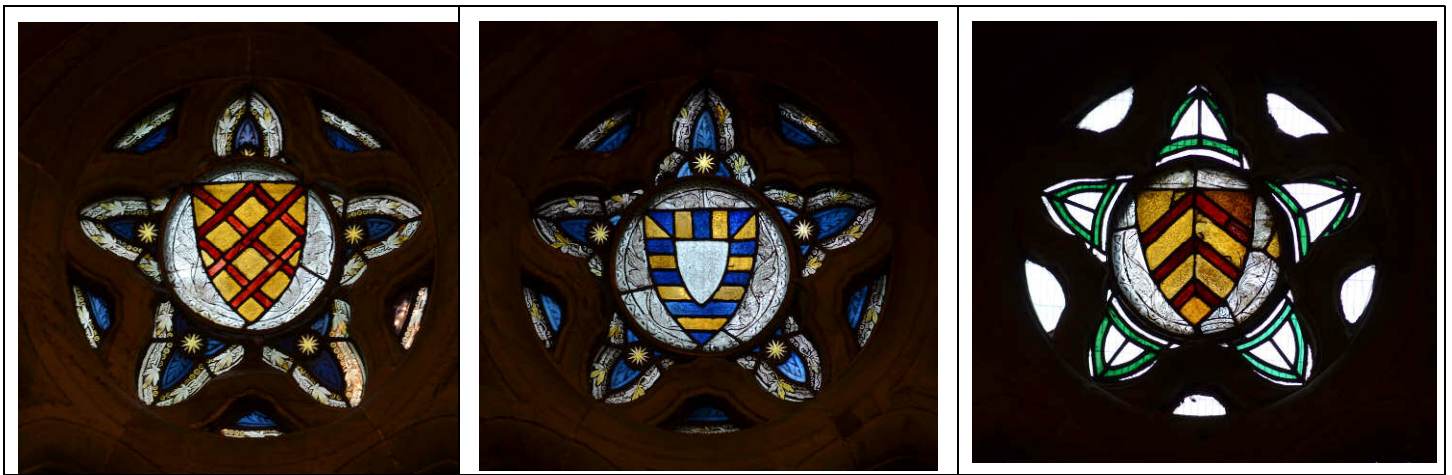
Robert the Bruce and Elizabeth de Burgh  
from the Seton armorial

### Elizabeth de Clare (1295-1360) - the second Elizabeth de Burgh

She was the daughter of Gilbert de Clare (1243-1295), 6th Earl of Hertford and 7th Earl of Gloucester, and the young Joan of Acre (1272-1307), daughter of king Edward I. When Elizabeth was 13 years old she was sent to Ireland with her brother Gilbert de Clare to be married respectively to John de Burgh and his sister Matilda, children of Richard Óg de Burgh and siblings of our 1st Elizabeth de Burgh. Elizabeth de Clare thus became Elizabeth de Burgh, giving birth to a son in 1312. In 1313 her husband was killed unexpectedly in a minor skirmish. Elizabeth stayed in Ireland until the next great family tragedy - her brother Gilbert, the de Clare heir, was killed at Bannockburn in 1314. The three de Clare sisters Eleanor, Margaret and Elizabeth then became joint heiresses.

Roger Mortimer (d1330) 1st Earl of March had a sister Maud (or Matilda) who was married to Theobald de Verdon, 2nd Baron Verdun. Maud died in 1312 and Theobald became "engaged" to the widowed Elizabeth de Clare (de Burgh). Wanting to keep control of the de Clare empire, however, her maternal uncle, king Edward II, recalled Elizabeth to England in 1316 to arrange her second marriage and put her in Bristol Castle 'to keep her safe'. From here she was abducted by Theobald de Verdon but they were married for only 6 months when Theobald died of typhoid at Alton in Staffordshire. Pregnant, Elizabeth fled to Amesbury Priory in Wiltshire where her Aunt Mary was a nun;. Her daughter, born at the priory in 1317, was named Isabel after Queen Isabella, Elizabeth's friend and supporter.





The arms of Theobald de Verdon (d1316), his first wife Matilda Mortimer (d1312) and second wife Elizabeth de Clare (d1360), widow of John de Burgh (d1313) in 14th century windows in the north aisle of St Laurence's church, Ludlow which Theobald probably rebuilt. ©Shaun Ward

Elizabeth was soon married again, this time to Roger D'Amory, who had been in her brother Gilbert's service and was a favourite of the Edward II. Their daughter Elizabeth D'Amory was born in 1318. Roger was reckless and violent, and became caught up in the power struggles at the royal court. He changed sides and joined the rebel faction opposed to Hugh Despencer (which included Roger Mortimer and Thomas, Earl of Lancaster). This unsettled time culminated in 1322 at the Battle of Boroughbridge. Roger D'Amory was captured and subsequently died; Elizabeth was captured and imprisoned with her children at Barking Abbey. Elizabeth was deprived of her lands, including Usk Castle, but with the return of her friends Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer in 1326, her fortunes improved.

Elizabeth lived to enjoy a long and fruitful widowhood, managing her estates and castles, and doing much entertaining. In later years she became a nun and patroness to various religious houses until she died aged 65 in 1360. Her most substantial gift was the endowment of Clare College, Cambridge. The original University Hall was set up in 1326 but ran into financial difficulties. Generously endowed by Elizabeth, the college was re-founded in 1338 as Clare Hall - consisting of 20 fellows and 10 students. The original buildings cannot be seen, but the Old Court frames the famous Kings College Chapel.

### **The 3rd Elizabeth de Burgh (1332-1363)**

While married to her first husband, Elizabeth de Clare gave birth to a son, William Donn de Burgh who succeeded his grandfather as 3rd Earl of Ulster. William had only one child, our 3rd Elizabeth de Burgh. Elizabeth was born at the royal castle of Carrickfergus near Belfast, but her father was murdered the following year, making her the Countess of Ulster in her own right before she had reached her first birthday. Elizabeth became the sole legal heir to all the de Burgh wealth and lands, but for several years her kinsmen continued to fight over the inheritance – the "Burke Civil War" of 1333-38.

Elizabeth left these troubles behind her when her mother took her to the English court of Edward III. As a child in London, Elizabeth was betrothed to Lionel of Antwerp, the second son of king Edward, who was six years younger than her. Despite their ages, Lionel was allowed to enter into possession of all Elizabeth's Irish inheritance and he was styled Earl of Ulster from 1347. The couple were eventually married, aged 20 and 14 respectively, at the Tower of London. Their marriage lasted for just eleven years before Elizabeth's death at the age of 31. She was buried at Clare Priory in Suffolk.

The couple had just one child, Philippa who, on the death of her mother, became Countess of Ulster in her own right at the age of eight. Philippa married Edmund Mortimer (d1381) 3rd Earl of March and their son Roger Mortimer (d1398) became 4th Earl of March and 6th Earl of Ulster. Roger's ancestry as a great-grandson of king Edward III was to become one of the planks of the Yorkists' claim to the throne during the Wars of the Roses.