



NEWSLETTER 25

April 2016

BOOK NOW - SPRING CONFERENCE IN HEREFORD - SATURDAY 14th MAY - DETAILS BELOW

IN THIS EDITION

Forthcoming Events

Launch of 'On the Trail of the Mortimers' on 12th May [link](#)

New Members of the Society [link](#)

The Spring Conference and Visit to Moccas Deer Park on 14th/15th May [link](#)

The Launch of the Mortimer History Society Essay Prize [link](#)

Schools Project on the Mortimers and Medieval Life [link](#)

Editor's Notes [link](#)

'Mortimer's Deep' [link](#)

Clebury Mortimer in the Middle Ages [link](#)

News from the AGM - Charitable Status [link](#)

News of the Ludlow Castle Heraldic Roll of 1574 [link](#)

The Archaeological Excavations at Wigmore Castle [link](#)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS - MHS Events in Bold

Thursday 12th May - Launch of our first book - 'On the Trail of the Mortimers' by Philip Hume

7.30 in Ludlow Library (next to Galdeford Car Park (SY8 1QF) behind the Feathers hotel). Free event; refreshments; no booking, just come. For more information about the new book [click here](#)

Saturday 14th May - Spring Conference - 'Sport, Culture and Intrigue: Glimpses into Medieval Life'

09.30 to 16.45 Hereford Academy, Marlbrook Road, Hereford HR2 7NG. For more details [click here](#)

Sunday 15th May - Visit to Moccas Deer Park with Tim Hoverd - For details [click here](#)

Sunday 12th June - 'Arthur and Katherine: Prince and Princess of Wales'

A talk by Alison Weir. 5.30 St Laurence's Church, Ludlow

Tickets £10 from Ludlow Assembly Rooms Box Office or online or on the door.

Thursday 16th June - 'The Mortimers and the English Crown in the 14th & early 15th Centuries'

A talk by Professor Chris Given-Wilson of the University of St Andrews

7.30 in the Beacon Room at Ludlow Castle. Members £5, non-members £6.50

To book [click here](#) or to register your interest email secretary@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk and pay on the door

Saturday 25th June - 'Window on a Parish: The Stained Glass of St Laurence, Ludlow'

Day conference featuring top speakers from across the country. For full details [click here](#)

Saturday 16th July - Field Trip - On the Trail of the Mortimers

Philip Hume will introduce the day and then lead a tour, in owners' cars. Bring your own lunch.

10.00 Richard's Castle Village Hall (on B4361, 4 miles south of Ludlow). Visit some of the places with close associations with the Mortimers including Richard's Castle, Orleton, Kingsland, Pembridge, Shobdon & Pipe Aston. £2.50 (members), £3.00 (non-members). Register your interest by emailing trail@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk

Thursday 25th August - Coach Tour covering Presteigne, Mortimer's Cross, Wigmore, Knighton & Pilleth

With Philip Hume. 10.30 - 13.00 Starting at Presteigne. Part of the Presteigne Festival.

Visiting Wigmore Castle and the site of the battle of Bryn Glas. For booking [click here](#)

Saturday 1st October - MHS Autumn Symposium

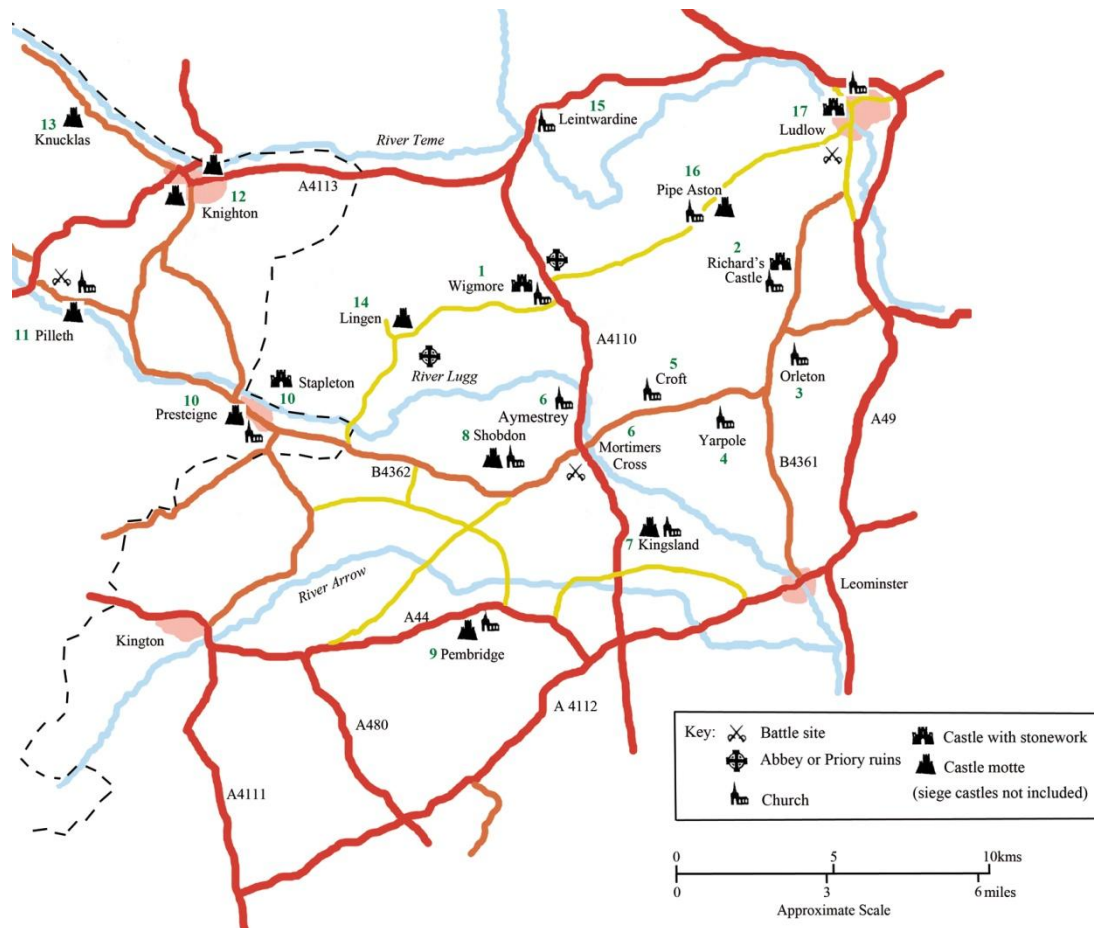
Keynote Speaker: Dr David Stephenson on *Resistance to Conquest: Eastern Wales in the 13th century*

10.00-4.00 Ludlow Assembly Rooms (Note the date - more information later) [Return](#)

THE LAUNCH OF 'ON THE TRAIL OF THE MORTIMERS'

The Mortimer History Society, Logaston Press & Philip Hume invite you to celebrate the launch of **On the Trail of the Mortimers** at 7.30pm on Thursday 12th May at Ludlow Library (car park SY8 1QF - behind The Feathers) with a short talk by Philip Hume. Refreshments included. The book is paperback, 144 pages with over 75 colour photographs as well as maps and family trees and is priced at £7.50.

This book both gives a history of the Mortimers (notably in their actions and impact on the central Marches) and suggests a tour that explores the surviving physical remains that relate to the family. Partly through the good fortune of having an unbroken male succession for over 350 years, and also through conquest, marriage and royal favour, they amassed a great empire of estates in England, Wales and Ireland; they played key roles in the changing balance of power between the monarchy and nobles; they deposed a king and virtually ruled the kingdom for three years; then became, in later generations, close heirs to the throne through marriage and finally seized the throne through battle, when a Mortimer grandson became King Edward IV.



The tour details what there is to see at 17 locations connected with the Mortimers. These include substantial remains of stone-built castles as well as mottes of several smaller castles, churches and tombs, depictions of individual members of the family and their heraldic coats of arms in stained glass, and buildings and art patronised by the family. A Quiz and an I-Spy have been designed to give pleasure to families wishing to find out more, with the successful completion of the latter leading to a certificate issued by the Mortimer History Society.

You can order the book directly from a bookseller or by emailing trail@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk [On the Trail of the Mortimers, Logaston Press, ISBN 978 1 910839 04 1 £7.50] [Return](#)

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members

Jenny Beard, Leintwardine, Herefordshire, UK
 Michael Beazley, Ludlow, Shropshire UK
 Martin Bradford, Orleton. Herefordshire UK
 Rosalind Caird, Caynham, Shropshire UK
 Lynne Eaves, Kings Pyon, Herefordshire UK
 Robert Hanson, Canada
 Robert Hodge, Hopton Wafers, Shropshire UK
 Gary Mortimer, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

Lyle Mortimer, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
 Mark North, Richards Castle, Herefordshire, UK
 Margaret Owens, Oswestry, Shropshire UK
 Paul Rogers, Ludlow, Shropshire UK
 Andrew Smith, Nelsonville, Ohio, USA
 Justin L Smith, Prestonburg, Kentucky, USA
 Doris Wood, Ludlow, Shropshire UK

[Return](#)

THE SPRING CONFERENCE - SPORT, CULTURE & INTRIGUE: GLIMPSES INTO MEDIEVAL LIFE

Saturday 14th May 2016 at 9.30 at Hereford Academy, Marlbrook Road, Hereford HR2 7NG

Main Speakers

Herefordshire Deer Parks: An Archaeological Perspective

Tim Hoverd, Archaeological Projects Manager, Herefordshire

Intelligence and Intrigue in the March of Wales: Maud Mortimer and the fall of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd

Dr Emma Cavell, University of Swansea

The Tourneying Society of the High Middle Ages

David Crouch, Professor of Medieval History, University of Hull

Life in the Gentry Manor House (c1280-c1330)

Peter Coss, Professor of Medieval History, Cardiff University

Dance in the Time of the Mortimers

Passamezzo Early Dance

Tickets are £25 (members) and £30 (non-members).



Visit to Moccas Deerpark with Tim Hoverd

Sunday 15th May 2016 from 10.45 to 12.30

Stout footwear required. Charge £5 in aid of Moccas church. Pre-booking essential.

Moccas is on the south side of the River Wye on the B4352 about 13 miles (and 30 minutes) west of Hereford on the way to Hay-on-Wye. Look out for the MHS logo at the parking spot.

Booking

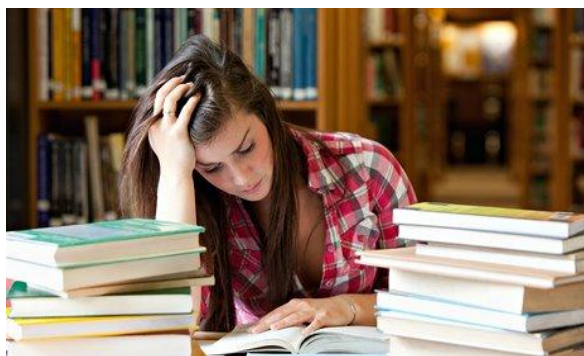
For full details of both events and online booking [click here](#)

To book by post for either or both of these events, write to Hon. Secretary, Waterloo Lodge, Orleton Common, SY8 4JG enclosing your cheque made out to Mortimer History Society and stating your full contact details and any special dietary requirements. [Return](#)

THE LAUNCH OF THE MORTIMER HISTORY SOCIETY ESSAY PRIZE

We are happy to announce the establishment of a prize of **£750**. This will be awarded for the best essay submitted and a runners-up prize of **£300** will also be awarded. We expect the winning essay, runner-up and some of the commended ones to be published in the Journal of the Mortimer History Society (ISSN 2397-9267). The winner, the runner-up and any other commended entrants will be awarded three years' free membership of the Society and we may also invite the best entrants to present their papers at our conferences and other events.

The aim of the competition is to promote and stimulate scholarly research into, and popular interest in, the history of the medieval Mortimers and the Marches. The competition has been widely publicised within university history departments, but it is **open to all**. Essays must be original work and no longer than 8000 words; the closing date is 16th December 2016.



Submissions will be accepted on:

- any aspect of the medieval Mortimer family of Wigmore (and its cadet branches, eg Chirk, Chelmarsh) and its impact on the history and culture of the British Isles, and/or
- any subject relating to the history, economy, society and culture of the medieval Marches of Wales, between 1066 and 1500.

The submitted essays may, therefore, reflect any disciplinary perspective.

The Judging Panel for 2016 will be chaired by Prof. Chris Given-Wilson of the University of St Andrews. The other members of the panel are Prof. Louise Wilkinson of Canterbury Christ Church University, Dr Ian Mortimer, President of MHS, Dr Paul Dryburgh of the National Archives and Philip Hume, Secretary of MHS.

Full details are on our website [click here](#)

[Return](#)

SCHOOLS PROJECT ON THE MORTIMERS AND MEDIEVAL LIFE

In previous newsletters we have mentioned that Philip Hume and Jason O’Keefe have been meeting with a number of local schools to explore the possibility of working together to develop curriculum content on the Mortimers and medieval life. This work is now coming to fruition: this summer eight schools, involving 300 children, are going to be delivering a range of activities and classroom sessions, with help from members of the Society.

The 8 schools are Orleton Primary, Wigmore Primary, Kingsland Primary, Leintwardine Primary, Luston Primary, Shobdon Primary, Ludlow Infants and Moor Park. Most of the schools will be delivering the content with years 5 and/or 6 (9-11 year olds) though some are doing so with year 2 (6-7 year olds) as well.

The National Curriculum requires children in primary schools to study aspects of local history. Given the richness and importance of the medieval history in this area and also the constant contemporary references to the Mortimers – a forest, a restaurant, a medical practice, a village shop, a gardening service and many more – the schools have been excited about the scope to find out more about our ‘Mortimer Heritage’. To do this, eight curriculum sessions have been developed which the schools will deliver in the second half of the summer term. The topics have been chosen so that they will enable the children to develop not only historical knowledge and skills but also to take in design and technology, geography, art etc

The eight sessions are:

An overview of medieval life – each school will choose its own perspective on this. Possibilities include contrasting rich and poor in medieval society; food and diet; contrasting the possessions of Roger and Isabella Mortimer in 1322 with what people own today.

Living History Camp/Re-enactment on 9th June at Ludlow Castle for all 8 schools/300 children – Jason and Philip have planned an exciting day to bring alive the times of the Mortimers. A medieval lord will greet the children on arrival; they will then rotate in groups of 50 round 6 activities/demonstrations – a medieval knight will demonstrate weapons and armour; a lady will explain the role of women and how they really ran the castle; Jason will talk about the skills and craft of archery; a barber-surgeon will demonstrate his craft in ‘tending’ the injured; Philip will explain the layout and functions of the castle buildings; There will be a session on the intricacy of medieval dance. Lunch will start with a dance display which will be interrupted by the arrival of a knight on horseback demanding entrance to the castle and who will challenge the other knight to a fight.



Overview of the Mortimers – this will give an understanding of the importance of the Mortimers both locally and nationally and highlight some of the most interesting and colourful Lords of Wigmore.

Castles – each school will plan its own session on how castles developed and the functions of different parts of the castle – good opportunities for design and technology.



Weapons and battles – most of the schools are inviting Jason to share his expertise on archery, armour and battles. There will be a focus on the three local conflicts that involved the Mortimers or famous national ones that involved them eg Bannockburn

Heraldry – Hugh Wood will explain how heraldry developed to identify knights in battle or at tournaments. The students will learn how to blazon a simple shield and will practise designing and blazoning coats of arms. They will see how the various family members differentiated their shields from each other and will also learn to recognise and describe the very complicated coat of arms of Mortimer of Wigmore.

Script and illuminated letter writing – again each school is developing its own perspective on this, creating opportunities for art and design work.

The links between the Mortimers and each school’s town or village – Philip is working with each school to develop awareness of their village or town’s connection to the Mortimers and to focus on a



specific Mortimer relevant to their location. As the last session will be unique to each school they are going to use their material to produce an A3 sheet to report on what they have found out. The eight sheets will then be combined with pages reporting on the event at Ludlow Castle to form a ‘Mortimer Chronicle’.

[Return](#)

EDITOR'S NOTES

As you will see from the contents of this newsletter, our Society has taken several big leaps forward in the past few months. Building on the inspiration of our founder, John Grove, we are launching our first book, *On the Trail of the Mortimers* detailing 17 sites of Mortimer interest in North Herefordshire, South Shropshire and Eastern Wales. Our new Secretary, Philip Hume, has personally turned the idea into reality and all members are invited to the launch in Ludlow Library at 7.30 on Thursday 12th May. Philip has also established strong links with primary schools in the area. We have worked with teachers to devise local history units based on the Mortimers and several of us will be helping to deliver these in the second half of this term.

Another notable innovation is the launch of The Mortimer Essay Prize. Though open to all, it is aimed primarily at history graduates and those in the early stages of their careers. For a first prize of £750, entrants can submit essays on any aspect of the history of the Mortimers of Wigmore or of medieval life in the Welsh Marches. The best submissions will be published in our Journal and also be available on the website.

This year we are increasing the number of events held in our local 'Mortimer' area, with more one-off lectures, tours of the History Trail and a new whole-day event in Ludlow on October 1st. See the 'Forthcoming Events' section above for information about these.

Different ways you might like to become more involved with the Society

Now is a great time to become more involved with the running and development of the Society and there are quite a number of ways you might contribute.

1. With the increasing number of original documents and translations now available on the internet, our President, Dr Ian Mortimer, has suggested that there may be members who would be interested in doing some work with these. One idea is to build up a list of primary sources for display on our website. Another is to search charters, inquisitions, pipe rolls and other documents looking for references to 'Mortimer' or, as the name often appears, 'Mortuo Mari'. If you think this is the kind of thing you might like to do, please let me know (contact details below). If we have enough people we might organise some training, so you don't need to have any previous experience. Apart from this, please let me know if you are interested in learning how to decipher medieval writing.
2. Are you interested in a particular person or subject? Could you share some of the knowledge you've acquired? Why not submit a short article for publication on the newsletter and possibly the website? Producing an article forces you to collect all the relevant information together, structure it carefully and then present it in an articulate, logical way. It's a great way to really learn stuff as you can't explain it to others until you understand it yourself. Let me know if you are interested.
3. Seen something in the newsletter that you feel is incorrect, or to which you can add something? Have you any suggestions or do you want to complain? I'd like to start a 'Letters to the Editor' section. Do get in touch.
4. As the Society develops, it needs to strengthen the team running it. Would you be prepared to help? We're not looking for committee members who just turn up to meetings, but for people who will work as part of a close-knit management team to take the exciting MHS Project forward.
5. Last and very much least, look out for strange uses of the name 'Mortimer'. We've found quite a few but haven't room to include them in this newsletter. Let's restrict this to examples you've actually seen and photographed yourself, not ones you've lifted from the internet. The best will find their way onto any spare space in the newsletter.

Hugh Wood newsletter@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk
01584 876901 38 Charlton Rise, Ludlow SY8 1ND

[Return](#)



MORTIMER'S DEEP

As our President, Ian Mortimer, has suggested, it seems quite likely that the Mortimers of Attleborough were descended from Robert Mortimer, a younger son of Ralph Mortimer of Wigmore (d>1115).

In his article on the Mortimers of Scotland, MHS member, Dr John (Ian) Mortimer says:

In 1126, a young Anglo-Norman knight, Sir Alan Mortimer, came north into Scotland, to Aberdour, on the north bank of the Firth of Forth in the County of Fife, to marry Anicea, daughter and sole heiress of Sir John Vipont, or Vieuxpont. It is not completely clear who this Alan Mortimer was, but it is thought probable that he was a younger son of one of the Mortimers of Attleborough.

Alternatively, as Ian Mortimer points out, Alan might have been another younger son of Ralph Mortimer of Wigmore. Whoever he was, this Sir Alan Mortimer was the ancestor of the Mortimers of Aberdour.



Inchcolm, Mortimer's Deep and the Fife Coast



Inchcolm Abbey

Just off the Fife coast near Aberdour is the little island of Inchcolm (or St Colm's island) on which was an abbey. This Sir Alan Mortimer, or a descendant of the same name, is said to have bequeathed a tract of land near Aberdour to the monks of Inchcolm on the condition that he could be buried in the abbey church on the island. Things didn't turn out quite as he planned, however.

According to one report:

the monks carrying his corpse in a coffin of lead, by barge, in the night time, to be interred within their church, some wicked monks did throw the same in a great deep, betwixt the land and the monastery, which to this day by the neighbouring fishing-men and salters is called 'Mortimers Deep'.

[The History of the Sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross, Sibbald, 1802 p.92]

The island and abbey can be visited by boat from South Queensferry near the Forth Bridge. It's a lovely trip in the 'Maid of the Forth' on a good day, but the nesting gulls can be quite aggressive in Spring. [Return](#)

CLEOBURY MORTIMER IN THE MIDDLE AGES

After our AGM in March, Robert Hodge, Chairman of the Cleobury Mortimer & District History Society, gave a fascinating talk about the history of the town. These notes are based partly on Robert's talk and partly on information drawn from *The Mortimers* by Hopkinson and Speight and partly on Ian Mortimer's *Outline Genealogy of the Mortimers of Wigmore* which members can consult on the website.

Cleobury Mortimer is one of the smallest towns in Shropshire and it is situated in the south-east corner of the county, close to the border with Worcestershire. Although only ten, or so, miles east of Ludlow, the towns are separated by the Clee Hills. Several local settlements including Clee St Margaret and Cleestanton, take their names from these hills and Cleobury Mortimer appears to be another. It was the main centre of the Mortimers in Shropshire, just as Wigmore was in North Herefordshire and in the early 14th century these two towns were of similar size.

There are significant earthworks from the Neolithic and early Bronze Ages and the sites of two Roman forts not far from the town, with evidence, also, of a Danish camp.



Robert pointed out that, unlike Ludlow, there are very few surviving early documents relating to the town. It is also very difficult to understand why a town was built there at all. There are no obvious reasons for it being established where it is. It may have been because of the constant supply of good water from springs.

It is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Claiberie* or *Cleberie* and before the Norman Conquest it was owned by Queen Edith, the wife of King Edward the Confessor. There was probably a Saxon church on the site of the present one. By the time of the Domesday Book, Cleobury had been granted to Ralph Mortimer (d>1115), the first Mortimer to live for any length of time in England. Cleobury had about 200 inhabitants and the immediate vicinity included as many as 31 separate manors with woodland fattening for about 500 pigs.

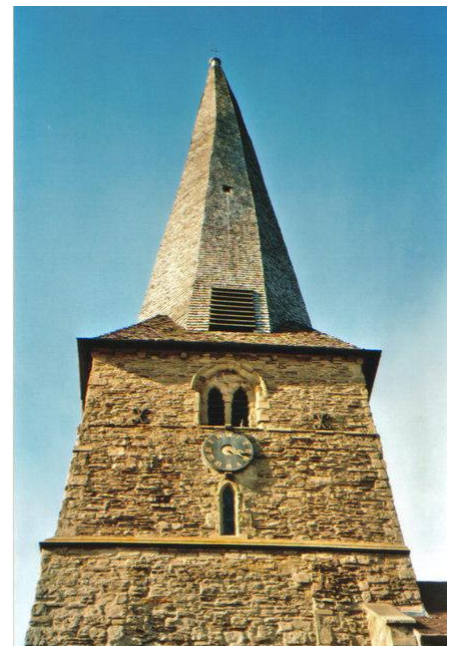


It also seems to have had two castles. One of these was in the town centre and only earthworks remain. It was referred to in one document as 'the castle of the Mortimers'. The other site, called Castle Toot, is outside the town in a bend of the River Rea and it still has an impressive motte. The history of the castles and their relationship to each other are rather obscure. One thing that is quite clear, however, is that one or both of them were largely destroyed by the forces of King Henry II in 1155. During the Anarchy following the death of King Henry I in 1135, while Stephen and Matilda were fighting for control of the country, several former royal castles managed to come into the hands of various barons. For instance, Hugh de Mortimer (dc1181) had acquired Bridgnorth castle in Shropshire. On his accession to the crown in 1154, King Henry II determined that these castles should be returned

to the Crown. This was a very unpopular move and, like other magnates, Hugh Mortimer refused point blank. To establish his authority, King Henry sent an army to Bridgnorth to besiege the castle. As a further punishment, he also besieged Hugh's castles at Cleobury and Wigmore and laid waste much of Hugh's estates in the area. At least one of the castles at Cleobury Mortimer was largely destroyed at this time. Hugh Mortimer was firmly put in his place and had to formally submit to the king before a gathering of magnates in Bridgnorth. Henry II was magnanimous in victory, however, recognising the importance of the Marcher lords to the defence of England against the Welsh, and he granted Wigmore and Cleobury back to Hugh. There is documentary evidence for a 'castle of the Mortimers' in Cleobury being rebuilt in 1179, possibly on a different site. Around 1172, Cleobury had become the main residence of the ageing Hugh Mortimer. He died here between 1181 and 1185 and was buried at Wigmore Abbey. A contemporary account says that one of his grandsons was buried at Cleobury Mortimer.

One of the most powerful and favoured barons during King John's reign was William de Braose. A powerful Marcher Lord, he held the lordships of Abergavenny, Builth, Radnor, Brecon, Kington and several others. When it came, his fall from grace was spectacular. He felt the full force of John's animosity and went on the run, eventually dying in France in 1211. His wife and sons were incarcerated and starved to death. One of William's daughters, Eleanor (or Annora) de Braose married Hugh de Mortimer (d1227), grandson of the one who rebelled against Henry II. Although King John imprisoned Eleanor for several years, Hugh and his father, Roger (d1214) remained loyal to John. During the reign of Henry III, Hugh de Mortimer was beset with problems caused by the strength and ambition of the Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Iorweth. He was one of the witnesses to the re-issuing of Magna Carta in 1225 and one of his last acts was to secure from the king the right to hold an annual fair in Cleobury. He is said to have been killed in a tournament.

Cleobury features in the Mortimer story again in 1266. A staunch supporter of the young Prince Edward (later Edward I), Roger Mortimer (d1282) played a huge part in the Battle of Evesham and the defeat and death of Simon de Montfort. As one of the rewards for his support, he was granted a charter by



The crooked spire of St Mary's church

which his estates at Cleobury and Chelmarsh were to be united into one single manor. The terms of the grant established this new estate as independent of the County or Hundred courts. In effect it became a new Hundred and Roger interpreted this newly-created manor of Cleobury and Chelmarsh as including no less than twenty individual manors in the area. He established his central court at Cleobury and the town's annual market also dates from this time. It is clear that Roger took full advantage of this charter to create, in effect, a new Marcher lordship, outside the

normal county administration, though this had probably never been intended or foreseen when the charter was granted. By 1274 there were complaints about Roger's court in Cleobury taking to itself royal powers. It is about this time that Roger started claiming that the Wigmore estate, too, was his own Marcher lordship, outside the control of the king's officers and the Sheriff of Shropshire. The fact that he seems to have got away with this sharp practice speaks volumes about how he was perceived by the Crown. Not only did Henry III and Edward owe him a great debt for his loyalty and support, but he was a personal friend of the prince. Even later, when Edward I was energetically asserting his rights, he never seems to have tackled Roger about it, perhaps recognising the importance of keeping sweet such a strong and loyal bulwark against the Welsh.



19th century window in St Mary's showing a Mortimer knight at prayer

The church of St Mary's dates from around 1160. Its chief feature of Mortimer interest is the chapel of St Nicholas. There is documentary evidence that the chantry of St Nicholas was established by Roger Mortimer, the son of Edmund Mortimer. Unfortunately this is ambiguous. Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March (x1330) was the son of Edmund Mortimer (d1304) but Roger Mortimer, 2nd Earl of March (d1360) was the son of Edmund Mortimer (d1331). The architectural evidence suggests that the chapel of St Nicholas was built at the time of the 1st earl, but he may not have got around to establishing the chantry before his fall from power and execution in 1330. The earliest record of a chantry priest of St Nicholas seems to be in 1349, when the next Roger was regaining his grandfather's estates. There appear to be parallels here with the situation at Ludlow castle and at Leintwardine. In both places the elder Roger obtained permission to donate lands in mortmain to establish chantries, but it was left to his grandson to actually make it happen.

Hugh Wood

[Return](#)

IMPORTANT NEWS FROM THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society held its 8th Annual General Meeting on 12th March in Cleobury Mortimer. The important news is that the members approved the Committee's recommendation that we should apply for charity status as a Charitable Incorporated Institution. This will be a benefit to us in a number of ways. Firstly it protects the individual trustees (committee members) if claims are ever made against the Society. Secondly it will allow the Society to receive Gift Aid contributions (tax rebates) on subscriptions from any members who are UK tax payers. Opting into this costs the member nothing but will turn each £12 subscription into an income of £15 at current rates. To have charitable status may also become important in the future if the Society ever wishes to apply for grants for specific projects. [Return](#)

THE HERALDIC ROLL OF LUDLOW CASTLE

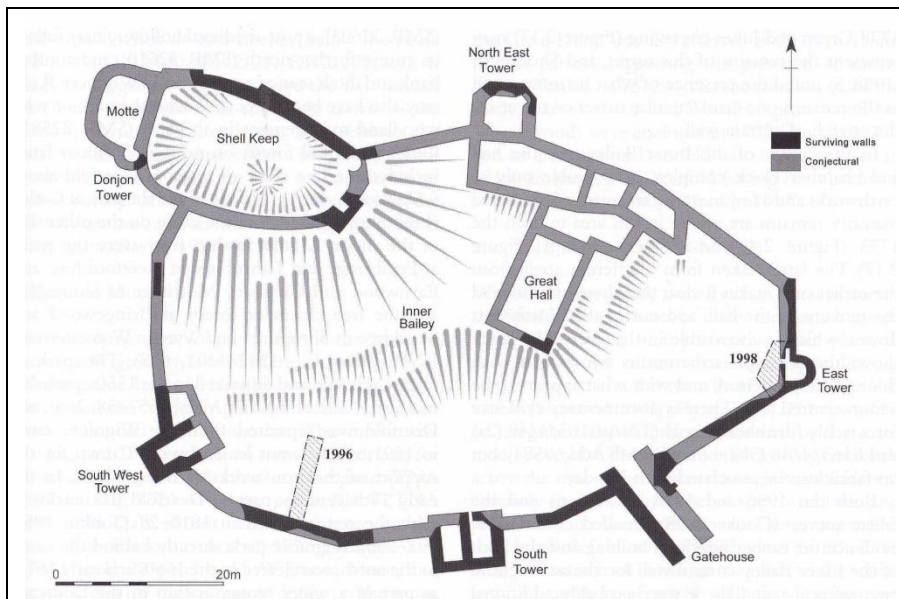
In the last edition of this newsletter we reported that a roll of arms dating from around 1574 has come to light and is for sale. It shows the coats of arms of 42 individuals associated with the history of the castle: its owners from the earliest times (including Mortimers) down to Queen Elizabeth I, several Lord Presidents of the Marches and 22 members of the Council in 1570. The roll was on display in Ludlow on 24th March and then sent to the Herefordshire Archives for assessment by a conservator. A committee was been established, including five members of MHS, and the decision has been taken to purchase the roll and to display it permanently in Ludlow. The roll, which is 15 feet long but only 4 inches wide, will also be digitized so that we can create a facsimile copy for educational purposes as well as use the images in literature and displays. Once we've done the ground work, we will be mounting an appeal to turn the dream into reality. [Return](#)

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT WIGMORE CASTLE

2015 saw the publication of *Wigmore Castle, North Herefordshire: Excavations 1996 and 1998* by Stephanie Ratkai, published by the Society for Medieval Archaeology as 'Monograph 34' and available from Oxbow Books for £30 ISBN 978-1-909662-19-3

As Wigmore was the *caput honoris* of the Mortimer family from the 11th century right down to 1425, this volume is potentially of great interest and importance to members of our Society. There are good reasons why it is best, however, not to expect too much in the way of new revelations or insights from these excavations.

In 1988 a large portion of the south curtain wall of the inner bailey collapsed. When English Heritage took over the guardianship of the castle in 1995, they undertook a major project designed to understand why the collapse had occurred and to stabilise the structure. Accordingly, the excavations of 1996 and 1998 were not designed to yield the maximum information about the history of the inhabitants of the castle, but to understand, as far as possible, the causes of the instability of the inner curtain wall. The plan shows the position and small extent of the excavations in the inner bailey - if you've sharp eyes.



Given that both of the small excavated areas appear to have been some way away from the main buildings, it is surprising that the archaeologists have managed to come up with anything of particular interest to the Mortimer enthusiast, but some of their findings do challenge previous assumptions about the history and importance of the castle.

As one might expect, much of the monograph is made up of highly-technical chapters focusing on a detailed analysis of all the animal, vegetable and mineral finds, together with such things as methodology, stratigraphy and taphonomy (whatever that may be).

While the bulk of the book is of interest only to the specialist there are very good reasons, however, why both Mortimer enthusiasts and those interested in medieval castles should consider buying it.

Chapter 2 was contributed by Carol Davidson Cragoe who has produced a first-rate introduction to the history and architecture of the castle, interwoven with the story of the Mortimers as it relates to Wigmore. For anyone interested in Wigmore and the Mortimers it is probably worth buying the book for this chapter alone. The final two chapters draw together the results of the excavations and summarise their significance, placing them within the context of other similar castles.

Anyone visiting Wigmore Castle will have been struck by the build-up of debris within the gate into the inner bailey. Some of us, at least, have to duck quite low to pass through an archway that must have been big enough for a loaded cart originally. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that there used to be large gatehouse stretching out from the existing gateway. At the time of the Council of the Marches this is thought to have been extended and used as a prison. The collapse or destruction of this gatehouse may account for some of the raised floor level by the gate, but probably not all.

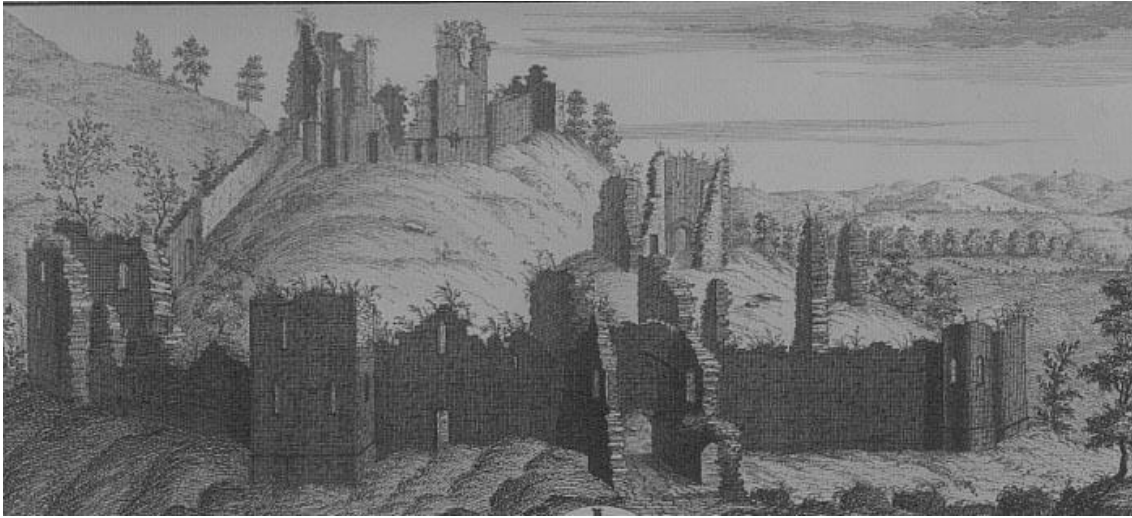


Just inside the inner bailey is an area of fairly flat ground stretching around the base of the steep hill on the top of

which sits the shell keep and *donjon*. The excavations of 1996 revealed that, while this flattish area appears now to be a natural part of the landscape, this is not really the case. The archaeological team had to dig down an almost incredible 8 metres (26 feet) before reaching the natural level, causing significant problems for them in terms of safety and lighting. It appears, therefore, that the hillside coming down from the shell keep at the top originally continued on downwards at a similar steep angle and the present flattish area is largely man-made. One can only wonder at the engineering skill and sheer effort involved in building the huge curtain wall and then infilling behind it with so much material. Presumably the movement of these large quantities of earth also had the beneficial effect of deepening defensive ditches or creating new ones around the castle. Even to a layman with no specialist knowledge, it seems probable that the inherent instability of such huge deposits of earth could account for both the wall collapse of 1988 and the accumulation of extra material under the gateway.

Considering the excavations overall, the finds were fairly typical of other castles. While recognising possible limitations due to the small extent of the excavations and their positions, it is interesting to note that the team

discovered nothing among the pottery finds that would mark Wigmore out as a castle of high status. Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March was keen on display and finery, but even from his time, there is an absence of the kind of highly-decorated wares one might expect to find. During the early years of the castle, the pottery was locally-made, utilitarian and austere. Even at that time, however, the inhabitants clearly had a very high-status diet with lots of evidence of pigs, cattle and deer from the adjacent deer park.



This engraving of the castle in the 18th century shows just how steep is the ascent from the inner curtain wall to the shell keep.

In this monograph, an attempt is made to marry the archaeological findings to surviving documentary evidence. This is particularly difficult in this case as relatively few Mortimer records have survived. The team did come up with one conclusion, however, that was strikingly at variance with the impression gained from some documents. It has been widely assumed that the 1st Earl's acquisition of Ludlow Castle in 1308 marked the beginning of a steady decline in the fortunes of Wigmore. It is clear from the excavations, however, that there was in fact an upsurge in building works at Wigmore in the 15th century. In subsequent years, while the castle may have been described as 'very ruinous' or as producing no income, it is clear from the evidence of high-status eating that it was still flourishing in the later medieval period. While it might have been thought of as just a hunting lodge, it was a powerful symbol of the lineage of Richard, Duke of York (d1460) and even in these limited excavations there was evidence of an exchequer and other administrative functions. Nevertheless, nothing found here hints at the enormous wealth of the Earls of March.

Finally, the book gives some key dates for the castle:

- 1223 Henry III granted 20 marks for work on Wigmore.
- 1233 Henry III visited Wigmore, Leominster and Shrewsbury at a time of considerable strife with the Welsh.
- 1264 Wigmore fell to Simon de Montfort.
- 1265 The escape of Prince Edward (later Edward I) to Wigmore and then Ludlow, following his capture after the Battle of Lewes.
- 1283 Edward I stayed at Wigmore.
- 1329 Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March held an Arthurian-themed tournament at Wigmore. Edward III and his mother Queen Isabella were there with most of the nobles.
- 1331 Following the execution of the 1st Earl, Wigmore was granted to his son Edmund, who died soon after.
- 1332 Edward III stayed at Wigmore
- 1342 Wigmore was granted to the 1st Earl's grandson, Roger Mortimer (d1360) who subsequently became 2nd Earl of March.

Nothing very much happened at Wigmore after about 1601 when the castle was bought by the Harleys of Brampton Bryan. It is thought that the Harleys, as Parliamentarians, may have slighted the castle during the Civil War to prevent it being of service to the Royal forces. Maybe it was the Harleys who obstructed the gateway.....