Mortimer History Society

MORTIMER Matters

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Forthcoming Events

Saturday 10th February 2018	**Medieval Pilgrimage in the Welsh Marches** A morning of talks in St Laurence's church, Ludlow ***The Medieval Pilgrimage Experience*** - Dr Kathryn Hurlock ***Pilgrims' Progress: Cures, Cults & Canonisation*** - Dr Harriett Webster Full details and how to book are given on the next page.
Saturday 17th March 2018	**Medieval Leominster** Grange Court, Leominster (near the Priory) - use public car parks 10.00 AGM 11.00-12.30 Duncan James will speak and lead a tour of medieval buildings in the town. Members free - non-members welcome (£5 on the door)
Saturday 19th May 2018	**Religion and Faith at the time of the Mortimers** Our Spring Conference will be held at Leominster Priory. ***Religious Structures in the Middle Ages*** - Dr Ian Mortimer ***Monasticism in the Welsh Marches*** - Prof. Janet Burton ***The Role of the Bishop in 13thC England*** - Dr Sophie Ambler ***Saints and Miracles in the Welsh Marches*** - Ian Bass ***Templars and Hospitallers in the Marches*** - Prof. Helen Nicholson ***Churches, Chantries and Chapels: the Religious Patronage of the Mortimers in the 13thC*** - Prof. Nigel Saul ***The Personal Experience of Medieval Religion*** - Dr Ian Mortimer For full details and booking **click here**

Medieval Pilgrimage in the Welsh Marches

Two talks to be held on the morning of

SATURDAY 10th FEBRUARY 2018 in St Laurence's Church, Ludlow

in aid of the Conservation Trust for St Laurence

Programme

10.00 Registration and refreshments

10.30 **The Medieval Pilgrimage Experience**

Dr Kathryn Hurlock, *Senior Lecturer in Medieval History, Manchester Metropolitan University*

Dr Hurlock's talk will look at the sensory experience of going on pilgrimage, from the journey to the arrival at the shrine site. She will explore how the senses were manipulated to create the right sort of setting for pilgrimage and to give pilgrims an "authentic" (and thus successful) experience. Dr Hurlock will draw on many examples from Wales and the Welsh March, and essentially walk the listener through the pilgrim journey. Dr Hurlock has just finished a book on Medieval Welsh Pilgrimage and has published various books and articles on both pilgrimage and crusading, in and from Britain and Ireland.

11.20 **Pilgrims' Progress: Cures, Cults, and Canonisation in the later Middle Ages**

Dr Harriett Webster *Lecturer in Medieval History, University of Wales Trinity St David*

St Thomas de Cantilupe and his cat

This talk is based on the research that Dr Webster undertook in the Vatican Library, Rome for the '*City Witness: Place and Perspective in Medieval Swansea* project. It will examine the changes to the process of saint making and the changes seen in pilgrimage practice following the greater involvement of the papacy, using the canonisation of Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford as a case study. Dr Webster's published works include *Mediating memory: recalling and recording the miracles of St Thomas* Cantilupe and her paper *The resuscitation of the twice-hanged man: miracles and the body* is going to press next month as part of a collection entitled *Body Matters: Exploring the Materiality of the Human Body.* Dr Webster's edition and translation of the William Cragh miracle will be published in 2019.

12.10 Panel Session & Discussion

12.30 Finish

Ticket Prices

Standard Price £12; Members of MHS £8; Ludlow Palmers £8

Parking

The largest car park is Galdeford (pronounced Jailford) in the centre of the town. This is easily reached from the A49 which bypasses the town. Leave the A49 at the more southern of the two roundabouts, by the supermarket and petrol station, and follow Sheet Road down, under the railway bridge and then up the hill. As you turn right at the top of the hill, the entrance to the car park is immediately on the left. NB the car park is on sloping ground and parking is cheaper at the lower levels. Make sure that you are in Zone B. The postcode for satnav is SY8 1QF.

Booking

You can pay online, by bank transfer or by cheque,
but **first please complete the BOOKING REGISTRATION FORM** by **clicking here**

Methods of Paying

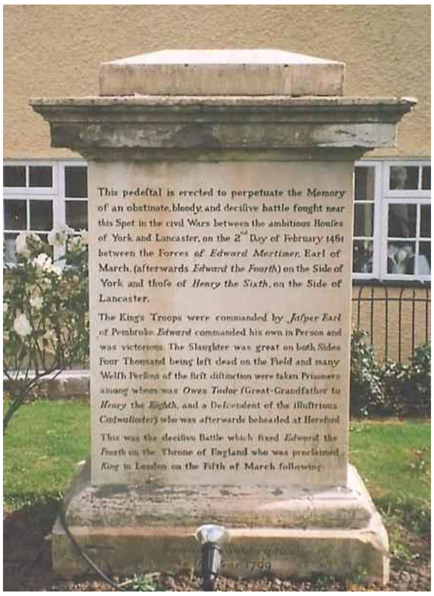
1. By cheque made out to 'Mortimer History Society' and sent to the Philip Hume, Waterloo Lodge, Orleton Common, Ludlow SY8 4JG - Make sure that you have already completed and submitted the booking registration form so we have all your details.
2. By direct bank transfer to Mortimer History Society, Lloyds Bank 30-94-99 account number 01255435 - Make sure that you have already completed and submitted the booking registration form so we have all your details.
3. By Paypal, credit or debit card. Use the link below. Make sure that you have already completed and submitted the booking registration form so we have all your details. **If you are booking for several people who come in different categories** (Ludlow Palmer, MHS member or non-member) deal with one category at a time and use the "Continue Shopping" option to return and book for other categories. **Link to online payment**

To access the **BOOKING REGISTRATION FORM** **click here**

News Items

Mortimer's Cross Battlefield Project

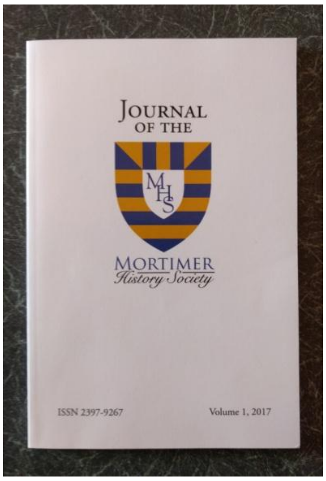
The Battlefields Trust are very pleased to announce that a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant of £84,400 has been awarded to the locally-run Mortimer's Cross Battlefield Project. This exciting project will investigate the site of this key battle in the 'Wars of the Roses' and raise awareness of its historic importance in leading Edward IV, the first Yorkist King, to the throne. Very little is known or written about this battle, but battlefield specialists, alongside local volunteers and students hope to piece together a more accurate picture of this significant event. Landscape and battlefield archaeologists will provide training for volunteers, with a view to uncovering the secrets of the site. Work will begin in the New Year and finish in 2021 when visitor information will be completed. The project will set historic interpretation panels at key points in the landscape and provide a permanent visitor information display at the Mortimer's Cross Inn for the many visitors to the site. Battlefield walks, regular events and activities for schools will tell the story to young and old alike. For more information **click here** or ring the Secretary on 01584 831654.



Memorial to the battle at Kingsland

Launch of the MHS Journal

We are proud to announce the publication of the first volume of the MHS Journal. Edited by our President, Dr Paul Dryburgh, it includes the best five essays submitted for the 2016 MHS Essay Prize. Whereas the quarterly *Mortimer Matters* contains news and 'popular' articles, the arrival of our academic journal adds a new dimension to the range of publications produced by the Society. All our members receive a free copy of the Journal but it can also be purchased at a cost of £5 plus postage.



The total cost of a single copy posted to a UK address is £6.50 If you'd like to order one **click here**. If you want to buy more than one copy or you would like a copy posted to an address outside the UK **click here** and we'll contact you with details of postage costs.

The contents of this first issue are:

Miraculous Marches: The Cult of Thomas de Cantilupe and the Mortimers
by Ian Bass [winner of the 2016 Essay Prize]

Legal Culture in a Marcher Lordship: an Analysis of the Dyffryn Clwyd Court Rolls
by Angharad Jones [runner-up]

Heartless, Witless, Graceless, Thriftless: Roger Mortimer and the Scots, 1326-1328
Ethan Gould [highly-commended]

Networking the March: A History of Hereford and its Region from 11thC to 13thC
Matthew Lampitt [highly commended]

How to Make an Entrance: an Overlooked aspect of Native Welsh Masonry Castle Design
Craig Jones [highly commended]

The Mortimers in the Time of Richard II
Ian Mortimer

Open Day at Clifford Castle

Clifford Castle sits high above the River Wye close to the Welsh border in Herefordshire, just a few miles downstream from Hay-on-Wye. It came into the hands of the Mortimers of Wigmore at the end of the 13thC but seems to have been largely neglected thereafter. It was open to the public on 8th September and several MHS members took the opportunity to visit it.

This is how it probably looked in the 13thC. The massive motte was built by William FitzOsbern in the 1060s, while the gatehouse and walls of the outer bailey are thought to be mid 13thC.

The remains are privately-owned and are not normally open to the public.

Rosamund Clifford was the daughter of Walter de Clifford. For many years, until her death around 1176, she was the mistress of King Henry II, known for her beauty as 'Fair Rosamund'. In 1233 her nephew, another Walter de Clifford, rebelled against King Henry III who besieged Clifford castle. Walter capitulated, made his peace with the king and led his troops against Prince Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, his own father-in-law.

This is how the castle looked a few years ago - overgrown and crumbling. The two mounds in the foreground are all that is left of the gatehouse.

The present owner is working closely with English Heritage to stabilize the structure.

Mickie O'Neill and Philip Hume
in the shell keep on top of the motte

Work being done to stabilise the foundations
of the gatehouse

New Members

We welcome the following members who have joined the Society since the last edition.

Eddie & Linda Ashman, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire
Sebastian Bowen, Ashford Bowdler, Shropshire
Carolyn Brettle, Ludlow, Shropshire
Megan Ellis, Wigmore, Herefordshire
Nancy Hutten-Czapski, Haileybury, Ontario, Canada
James & Caroline Jamison, Richards Castle, Shropshire
Susan Jones, Ludlow, Shropshire
Elwyn Manuel & Jane Love, Knighton, Powys, Wales
Guy & Ann Loveday, Knowbury, Shropshire
Tony Mason, Ludlow, Shropshire
Robin Mortimer, Brisbane, Australia
Jean Mulholland, Wellington, Shropshire
Rhiannon Powell, Sutton St Nicholas, Herefordshire
Rose Raine, Leominster, Herefordshire
Jamie Ritchie & Kate McLean, Willesden, London
Stella Seaton-Sims, Stourport-on-Severn, Worcestershire
George Stephens, Ludlow, Shropshire
Molly Twomlow, Caerwent, Monmouthshire, Wales
Kathryn Warner, Dusseldorf, Germany
Gareth Williams, Ludlow, Shropshire
Mel Wilson-Claridge, Brimfield, Herefordshire

News of MHS Members

An intrepid Marion Moulton, determined to get a good view of Wigmore Abbey

Our Chinese members, Charlotte Hua and Adonis Gemini visiting Ludlow Castle

Anne Blandford received the Order of St Ethelbert for outstanding service in the Hereford Diocese

Blanche Mortimer's Tomb at Much Marcle, Herefordshire

The church of St Bartholomew in Much Marcle in Herefordshire contains one of the most beautiful medieval tombs in England. The monument commemorates Blanche Mortimer, 12th and youngest child of Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, and Joan de Geneville. She married Peter de Grandisson in 1330, the same year that her father was executed, but died in 1347 while still a young woman. Blanche's memorial has long been famous, not only for its architectural design, but for the beauty of her stone effigy. In 2013 a group of members of MHS re-created her costume and this has been exhibited many times since that time.

It became clear, however, that this important memorial was in need of urgent conservation if it were not to deteriorate further. The cornice had started to crumble and there were many open joints, together with many joints filled with concrete, thus not allowing the tomb to breath and causing damage. In 2010 the Parochial Church Council decided to commission a full conservation report which meant they had to find the best possible conservator of sculpture. They were fortunate to find Michael Eastham, one of England's top conservators, who had undertaken all the work on the tombs at St Mary's Abergavenny. When Michael undertook his original investigation he found the tomb to be 90% moisture! It had been built into the outer wall of the Church and stood on the earth floor. Michael removed the effigy and it was placed on a purpose-built trolley to dry out. Work commenced to remove the earth and rubble beneath and to remove the front panels.

It was at this point that Blanche's body was found in a lead wrap, lying on a stone wall well above ground level. It is quite normal for the body of the deceased person to be buried some distance away from their memorial, usually in the same church but sometimes even hundreds of miles away. Michael was shocked and excited to find Blanche's body actually inside the tomb. This was the first time he'd seen this in 30 years of his professional working life. The conservation work took four years to complete because of all the permissions that had to be obtained once Blanche's body had been found. The completed tomb is a masterpiece for all to see and the church is open daily during daylight hours. The success of this important conservation project is due to many people. One of these is Janet Chapman who played a key role in overseeing the work, together with her husband John. There is a very good booklet in St Bartholomew's Church, Much Marcle called *The Tomb of Blanche Mortimer, Lady Grandisson* and copies can be posted to interested parties at a cost of £5.00 plus postage - email Janet on reddingendfruit@gmail.com On 15th October Janet was honoured for all her work, being presented with the Order of St Ethelbert at Hereford Cathedral.

Janet Chapman with her award

Introducing the Mortimers - Part 3: 1181 to 1246

The story of the Mortimers spans the whole of the later medieval period from the 11th to the 15th centuries. With 15 generations of Mortimers it is difficult to get one's head around which Roger, Edmund, Hugh or Ralph we are talking about and how they relate to each other. In successive editions of *Mortimer Matters* we are publishing a simple introduction to the Mortimers of Wigmore in short chunks, to help new members build a picture of this colourful and important family. In these articles, Mortimers with the same first name are not being distinguished by numbers, but by their dates. It is probably as easy to remember Roger Mortimer (d.1330) as to remember which is Roger Mortimer IV and less open to misinterpretation.

We come now to the third of the Mortimer lords of Wigmore, **Roger Mortimer (d1214)**. His date of birth is not known but, as his father Hugh lived to a ripe old age, Roger must have been an active adult for many years before inheriting the lordship of Wigmore. He first appears on the scene in 1174, fighting on the side of king Henry II during the great rebellion of the king's eldest son Henry, 'the Young King'. For one reason or another, however, Roger seems to have spent more time in disgrace than most of the Mortimers. The Welsh Prince Cadwallon was ambushed and killed by the Mortimers in 1179 while travelling under a 'safe conduct' from Henry II. Roger was personally blamed for the murder, though his father was still alive at that time, and was imprisoned for 2 or 3 years in Winchester by an angry king.


Henry, the 'Young King', being served at table by his father Henry II after his coronation

Having previously fought for the king against the supporters of his older sons (Henry, Richard and Geoffrey), Roger seems to have preferred the younger son, John, and he was to remain remarkably loyal to King John during his disastrous reign. In 1191, after the death of Henry II, Roger was suspected by the Justiciar, William de Longchamp, of plotting with the Welsh on John's behalf, against the largely absent new king, Richard I. William confiscated Wigmore and exiled Roger for 3 years.

Problems with the Welsh continued during his lordship but Roger made great efforts to regain lost ground. In 1194 he recovered Maelienydd and rebuilt Cymaron. But there were setbacks: in 1196 he joined forces with Hugh de Say of Richard's Castle but they were heavily defeated by Rhys ap Gruffydd at New Radnor with great loss of life. By 1200 he had conquered Maelienydd again and issued a new charter to the abbey at Cwm Hir that had been founded by Cadwallon. But the peace was never very stable and in 1202 his castle at Gwerthrynion was destroyed.

On the wider stage, things were not going well. In 1204 King John finally lost Normandy. Roger had less to lose in France than some barons and he continued to support John. In 1205 he was captured in Normandy and imprisoned, probably for organising resistance. By 1207 he was back in England having been ransomed.

According to the Wigmore Chronicle, Roger was married twice. By his first wife, Millicent, he had a son, Hugh, who succeeded him. By his second wife, Isabel, he had three boys, the eldest of whom, Ralph, became lord of Wigmore when his half-brother Hugh died without children.

A striking example of the Mortimers' attachment to King John occurred in 1208. Roger's son **Hugh Mortimer (d1227)** was married to Eleanor or Annora, daughter of King John's favourite, William de Braose. When John turned against William things became rather difficult for the Mortimers. William fled and Hugh's wife Annora was imprisoned for a time, suspected of conspiring against John. Despite his wife's incarceration, Hugh and his father Roger remained loyal to the king even as the majority of English barons turned against him.

Corfe Castle - Maud de Braose, mother of Hugh's wife Annora, was starved to death in the dungeon here by King John

On the death of his father in 1214, Hugh became the 4th Mortimer Lord of Wigmore. Though not present at the signing of *Magna Carta* at Runnymede, he was clearly a trusted supporter. When the young King Henry III succeeded John in 1216, Hugh was chosen to be a member of the Regency Council and he is listed as one of the witnesses to the re-issue of *Magna Carta* in 1225. During Hugh's lordship he also had to cope with the resurgent Welsh under Prince Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (Llywelyn the Great). All his father's good work was undone as Maelienydd fell to the Welsh, together with the border town of Knighton. In 1223 a

Archbishop Stephen Langton was an implacable enemy of King John and an energetic leader of the barons. He continued to support them under Henry III

confident Llywelyn made incursions into Shropshire, capturing Kinnerley and Whittington castles. In the hope of establishing a lasting peace, Archbishop Stephen Langton organised a meeting in 1224 between Henry III and Llywelyn in Ludlow Castle. Though there is no evidence to support this, it seems not unlikely that, as a powerful local supporter of the king, Hugh would have been present at that meeting.

Hugh Mortimer died in his prime in 1227 while competing in a tournament. As he had no children, the lordship of Wigmore passed to his half-brother **Ralph Mortimer (d1246)** who became the 5th Lord of Wigmore. Ralph has been described as a vigorous and warlike man. He fought against the French and was captured, but for most of his life he was concerned primarily with the Welsh problem.

Having been successful in regaining large areas of Wales previously held by Marcher lords, Llywelyn sought to strengthen his position. He married several of his daughters into Marcher families including Gwladus Ddu ('the dark-eyed') who married Reginald de Braose, Lord of Brecon & Abergavenny. After Reginald's death, she married again, this time to Ralph Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore. Gwladus's mother, Joan, was thought to be an illegitimate daughter of King John, so this marriage linked the Mortimers not only to the Welsh rulers of Gwynneth but also to the English Crown.

Clun Castle in Shropshire

Despite this marriage, there seems to have been no love lost between Llywelyn and Ralph who remained determined to regain his Welsh possessions. In 1228, Henry III ordered him not to break the truce by taking hostile action against Llywelyn. By 1231, however, Llywelyn was carrying out daring raids into England and Ralph was appointed custodian of Clun castle, tasked with protecting the King's lands. The death of Llywelyn in 1240 was a turning point and Henry III began a campaign to win back all the lands lost over the previous 20 years. He granted Maelienydd to Ralph and acknowledged the right of Marcher lords to wage war on the Welsh. Ralph regained Maelienydd by force and rebuilt Cefnllys and Knucklas castles. Just before his death in 1246 he was being ordered to harass the Welsh between Brecon and Shrewsbury and enforce a trade embargo. Throughout his life he was a loyal and effective supporter of the king: someone who could be completely relied upon in difficult times.

Castles and Rebellions in Anglo-Norman England

In this article, Hugh Wood draws together some of the main threads from the outstanding talk given to the Society by Prof. Matthew Strickland on 11th July 2017 in Leominster.

When we think of a castle, most of us will inevitably picture an impressive stone structure, tall, solid and threatening, like Dover, Ludlow, Pembroke or the Tower of London. Castles on this scale just did not exist in Britain before the Norman Conquest. It is true that there were a few fortifications that counted as defensive castles before 1066, notably Hereford, Richard's Castle and Ewyas Harold, but it was the Normans who introduced the concept of the castle as a fundamental instrument of invasion and subjugation. The establishment of a fortified, easily-

Caerphilly Castle

defensible castle in a newly-conquered area enabled a relatively small number of the invaders to impose their will on a much larger number of natives in the surrounding region.

As *Orderic Vitalis* writing in the 12th century says: "For the fortifications called castles by the Normans were scarcely known in the English provinces, and so the English – in spite of their courage and love of fighting – could only put up a weak resistance to their enemies"

Of course, not all the natives gave in easily: "At that time [1067] there lived a powerful thegn Eadric [the Wild]. The Hereford castle garrison ... frequently laid waste his land which he refused to hand over to the king, but whenever they attacked him they lost many of their knights and soldiers. Thereupon ... Eadric, calling on the kings of the Welsh Bleddyn and Rhiwallon, laid waste to Herefordshire up to the bridge over the river Lugg and brought back great spoil." (*The Chronicle of John of Worcester*)


The crossbow, introduced here by the Normans

Also "[In 1069] the Welshmen and the men of Chester besieged the royal stronghold at Shrewsbury and were assisted by the native citizens, the powerful and warlike Eadric the Wild and other untameable Englishmen." (*Orderic Vitalis*). It is significant that, though Eadric and his allies caused considerable damage both in Hereford and Shrewsbury, they were unable to take the castles, nor establish themselves in either place on more than a temporary basis.

So the native English had no real answer to the new heavily-fortified castles. But they also had to face other challenges that they were not used to, notably the crossbow and the use of heavy cavalry. Taken together with the castle these made resistance even more difficult. But, from the point of view of the monarch, there was a serious downside to the proliferation of baronial castles. They strengthened the position of the earl or baron, as they were intended to do, but that strength could equally well be used against the king himself. It became much more difficult to maintain royal authority in difficult times, as confidence in their almost impregnable castles encouraged disaffected earls and barons to take up arms in rebellion.

King William I had plenty of experience of this problem as a young man. Members of the Norman aristocracy were already well established in their castles when his father, Robert I, Duke of Normandy died in 1035. Despite becoming Duke of Normandy, his youth and the fact that he was a bastard made it difficult for him to impose any authority, as his barons fought among themselves for supremacy and influence. Two of the most dangerous rebellions he had to face were centred on major castles (those of Brionne and Arques) which made him acutely aware of the threat such fortifications might pose in the hands of dissident nobles. It was to be many years before he overcame these problems and was generally accepted, but securing greater control over castle building in the duchy was a key factor in strengthening his position as ruler.


The castle at Arques-la-Bataille built shortly after 1037

In England, William I and his successors faced a series of insurrections starting with the rebellion of the earls in 1075. This was led by Roger, Earl of Hereford, Ralph, Earl of East Anglia and Waltheof, Earl of Northumberland, the last Anglo-Saxon earl. Despite the failure of the rebellion, Earl Ralph’s wife remained in Norwich castle and successfully held it until granted a safe conduct, while Ralph himself escaped to Brittany where he successfully resisted King William. Ralph Mortimer seems to have been active on the king's side as he was rewarded with many estates at this time, including Earl Roger's castle at Wigmore, and it was from this time that Wigmore became the principal seat of the Mortimers.

The significance of the castle is well illustrated in this report in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* of the major rebellion in 1088 against William Rufus. This time Ralph Mortimer was one of the rebels.


Medieval plundering

"This conspiracy was formed in Lent. As soon as Easter came, then they went forth and harried and burned and wasted the king's farms, and they despoiled the lands of all the men that were in the king's service. And each of them went to his castle and manned it and provisioned it as well as they could. Bishop Geoffrey and Robert de Mowbray went to Bristol and plundered it and brought the spoil to the castle. Afterwards they went out of the castle and plundered Bath and all the land thereabout."

After successfully putting down a rebellion of this sort, the problem for the king was what to do with the rebels. His decision obviously varied. For his part in the rebellion of 1075 Earl Waltheof was one of the few in this period to suffer the death penalty. Not infrequently the rebels seem to have got off fairly lightly. Having formally submitted to the king and possibly paid a fine, they were often just allowed to return to their castles and their former lives.

The Anarchy during the reign of Stephen is well-named. The absence of strong central leadership and control encouraged powerful local magnates to enrich themselves at the expense of the monarchy. Hugh Mortimer took the opportunity to take over the royal castle of Bridgnorth. Soon after his accession in 1154 King Henry II sought to recover the monarchy's estates and privileges but met with considerable resistance, especially from Hugh Mortimer. This was a battle Henry needed to win. Here are two contemporary reports.


King Stephen

"Hugh de Mortimer, a very arrogant man presuming in his own strength, fortified his castles against the king. Accordingly King Henry besieged all his castles, namely Bridgnorth, Wigmore and Cleobury, and after some time he took the last of these and destroyed it .... On 7th July [1155] Hugh de Mortimer made his peace with King Henry and received back the castles of [Cleobury] and Wigmore." *Robert of Torigni*


The scanty remains of Bridgnorth Castle

"At Easter that year one of the nobles of England, Hugh de Mortimer, a powerful man but, more than that, exceedingly able, rich and vigorous in warfare, estimating the king to be a mere boy and indignant at his activity, fortified his castles and refused to submit himself ... to the king's orders. When this was announced to the king, he gathered a sizeable force of knights and besieged Hugh in his castle at Bridgnorth. He completely encircled it with a ditch and rampart and, with the situation neatly reversed, he shut up all hope of Hugh's getting out. ... Shortly thereafter the king forced Hugh to surrender. ..... peace was made between the king and Hugh." *Chronicle of Battle Abbey*

Again it is significant that, apart from forcing Hugh to publicly submit to his authority and give up Bridgnorth, there appears to have been no further punishment.

In summary, the kind of castles introduced by the Normans were unknown in England before the Conquest. They were to have a long-term effect on the political landscape of the country. While they were initially most important as a means of subduing a defeated people, they soon became the secure bases for a powerful and arrogant aristocracy that from time to time would threaten the monarchy itself.

'Peace was made where war had been':
The wedding of David Bruce and Joan of the Tower, 17th July 1328

Ethan Gould's entry for the MHS 2016 Essay Prize was highly commended. His subject was 'Roger Mortimer and the Scots 1326-1328'. Here he expands on one very controversial aspect of Roger's strategy.

Marriages amongst members of the nobility during the middle ages were often arranged for political reasons, but few were as politically charged as that of David Bruce and Joan of the Tower in 1328. Intended as a physical manifestation of the recently concluded peace between England and Scotland, the match was widely resented by the English political community, who saw it as symptomatic of the disregard that those who had assented to the marriage held for the good of the realm, the dignity of King Edward III, and the welfare of the young bride. The group of individuals who were eager to see peace established between England and Scotland were led by Roger Mortimer, Lord of Wigmore, and Queen Isabella.

Mortimer had been the driving force behind the peace negotiations with the Scots. His experiences during the Weardale Campaign of 1327 and the subsequent Scottish threats to annex parts of Northumberland were enough to convince him that further continuation of the Scottish War was futile. Beset by plots to free and restore to power the deposed Edward II, Mortimer sought to negotiate a removal of the Scottish threat so that he could secure his unofficial rule over England alongside Isabella. The Scottish King, Robert Bruce, had always been open to negotiation with the English if it gave him what he wanted, namely the recognition of his kingdom's independence and his right to rule that kingdom. But in his negotiations with Mortimer he spelled out other conditions which would have to be accepted if he were to contemplate peace. Amongst these was the arrangement of a marriage between his son and heir David to the sister of Edward III, Joan of the Tower.

The unsuccessful Weardale Campaign. The Scots surprised the English at Stanhope Park, killing several hundred before returning to Scotland avoiding a pitched battle. Mortimer and the young King Edward were humiliated.

Bruce's motivations for securing such a marriage are readily understandable. Joan was, after all, the daughter of Edward II and Isabella of France, both of whom were of impeccable royal pedigree and had familial connections to royal houses across Christendom. Such an illustrious marriage for his son would therefore provide some much needed legitimacy to his rule, and that of his son. Most of the English considered Bruce himself to be a sacrilegious murderer, a forsworn traitor, and an upstart usurper with no right to Scotland's crown. The marriage of his son to the queen of England's sister would inject some undeniably royal English blood into the Bruce dynasty, and would also, Bruce hoped, forge a fraternal bond between David and Edward III that may avert future conflict between the Royal houses of England and Scotland, which would be linked by blood. The fact that Joan was only seven and David just four was no impediment. The two children would be married to cement the peace between their respective kingdoms. Mortimer, along with the bride-to-be's mother, Queen Isabella, agreed to the marriage and Bruce's other terms, forcing the ratification of the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton in May 1328. In early July that year they would travel north to the border town of Berwick-upon-Tweed to fulfil their obligations and witness the marriage of Joan to David Bruce. They journeyed with an entourage of their supporters including John

The Border Bridge and the scanty remains of Berwick Castle, largely demolished in 1844 to make room for the railway station which sits on the site of the Great Hall where the wedding feast was held de Warrene Earl of Surrey, William de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, and the Bishops of Lincoln, Ely and Norwich. Notably absent was Edward III, sullen and resentful of the peace with the Scots, which had been arranged in his name but not with his assent. He refused to attend, making it clear that his sister's marriage to David Bruce had been agreed to by Mortimer and his mother, but not by him. Robert Bruce, despite his eagerness for the wedding, also declined to attend. While his health was questionable, his reluctance to attend seems less related to his health and more related to his sense of honour. If the boy-king would not attend, neither would he. In his stead, Bruce left his nephew, Thomas Randolph Earl of Moray, an accomplished statesman and diplomat, to greet the English at Berwick and oversee the celebrations. Randolph was joined by his comrade-in-arms James Douglas, a man who had earned a fearful reputation amongst the English.

Bruce had gone to great lengths to ensure that the ceremony was a suitably lavish and decadent affair, as befitted a royal wedding. He had charged a Flemish trader called Peter the Machinist with obtaining on the continent luxury items for the wedding. Peter purchased vast quantities of luxuries including cloth, canvas, linen, fruits, almonds, rice, various spices, sugar, wax, and wine, which were transported to Berwick in preparation for the celebrations. Bruce had also delegated a clerk of the Royal Exchequer named Thomas Charteris to travel to Bruges to purchase other, unnamed, luxuries for the event. Bruce's purchases totalled well over £1,500, and reveal his determination that the wedding reflect his majesty and bounty. For their part, Mortimer and Isabella took steps to ensure that the proceedings went smoothly. They brought with them extravagant gifts for their hosts, including a lion from the Tower of London. The wedding was apparently a genial affair at which Scot and Englishman mixed happily enough. The ceremony itself was conducted on 17 July 1328, presumably in the Church of the Holy Trinity where a churchyard wall was thrown down in some unexplained way by the revellers. After the young pair were married the subsequent feast was probably held in the great hall of Berwick Castle. Barbour notes that 'the wedding took place right there with great feasting and solemnity; you could see joy and gladness there, for they had very long festivities there [when] English and Scots were together in joy and relaxation, with no harsh words between them.' The poet remarked happily that with the wedding 'peace was made where war had been.'


The skull of a Barbary Lion found at the Tower

After the wedding was concluded, Mortimer, Isabella and the other guests were escorted across the Tweed on 22 July 1328 before Randolph and Douglas conducted the newlyweds to Bruce's residence at Cardross to meet the king. It had been Mortimer's third venture into Scotland, and it would prove his last. While in Scotland the wedding between Joan and David was considered a triumph and a peaceable conclusion to a war they had at long last won, the wedding was not well received by contemporary English commentators. Seen as a particularly unseemly part of the 'shameful peace,' it was viewed as a mark of national disgrace and humiliation which besmirched the honour of the king and of Joan herself. Several English chronicles poked fun at the young groom, relating the defamatory story that as a baby, David Bruce had fouled the altar at his baptism, earning him the name 'defecator' or 'altar-shitter.' When discussing the bride, the English chroniclers were more sympathetic. The Brut Chronicle, written by a commentator hostile towards Mortimer and Isabella, reported the rumour that the Scots had given Joan the derogatory nickname of 'makepeace,' and noted how the wedding was 'disparaging' to both Joan and to her brother, stating that the princess had been 'taken into our enemy's hands.' Another chronicler remarked dramatically how the marriage was 'greatly harmful and imperilling to all the King's blood from which that gentle lady had come.' Mortimer and Isabella had blatantly disregarded public opinion and approved the marriage as part of the widely detested peace with the Scots. This contributed to their growing unpopularity which would ultimately lead to their downfall. The wedding was intended as a tangible demonstration of the peace between the two kingdoms, though this peace was fragile and would collapse after only four years.