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Forthcoming MHS Events

MHS Summer Lecture

WILLIAM HERBERT AND THE MARCH OF WALES

POLITICS AND POETRY IN THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Helen Fulton

Professor of Medieval Literature, University of Bristol

7.30 Thursday 21st June 2018 at the Market Theatre, Ledbury



*Take now the men of Wales
constable from Barnstaple to Anglesey
Take Glamorgan and Gwynedd
make them into one from Conwy to Neath
If England and its dukes are angry
Wales will turn to you in need*

Guto'r Glyn

The central topic of this talk

is the poetic image of William Herbert, earl of Pembroke (c.1423–1469), who died fighting for Edward IV against the earl of Warwick and his rebel forces during the Wars of the Roses. The talk traces the growing enmity between Herbert and Warwick, both of whom were Marcher lords, and touches on the significance of the Mortimer estates on the March of Wales which were vital to Edward's success. Welsh poets positioned William Herbert as a Welshman in opposition to the forces of English treachery, but the politics of his rise and fall were regional rather than national, reflecting the importance of the March in putting first Edward IV and then Henry VII on the throne.

Tickets

Members £5; non-members £8

Venue

The Market Theatre is in Market Street in central Ledbury

Parking

St Katherine's Car Park HR8 1EA - on leaving, turn left into Bye Street, then left again into Market Street

Facilities

Bookstall and bar from 7.00

Helen Fulton has published extensively on medieval literature in English and Welsh and her current research focuses on literary activity on the March of Wales during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Helen completed the Diploma (M.Phil.) in Celtic Studies at Oxford and has a Ph.D. from the University of Sydney. Before moving to Bristol in 2015, Helen held chairs of medieval literature at Swansea University and the University of York. Recent publications include the edited collections, *Companion to Arthurian Literature* (2009) and *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales* (2012). She is the co-editor of the *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, to be published in 2018.

Booking Your Place

[Click here to link to online registration and ticket information](#)

If you do not use the internet please express your interest by contacting the Secretary, Philip Hume on 01584 831654 or write to him at Waterloo Lodge, Orleton Common, Ludlow SY8 4JG.

MHS Study Visit

CEFNLlys CASTLES and ABBEY CWM HIR

Sunday 22nd July 2018

Cefnllys Castle was built by the Mortimers around 1242 on a hill just outside Llandrindod Wells in Powys, Wales,, but it had a very chequered history. In 1262 it was destroyed by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd but was rebuild on an adjacent site in 1268 where it survived till it was once again sacked by the Welsh around 1294. Though little remains of the castles, it is an evocative place and an important site in Mortimer history.



The two castle sites at Cefnllys can be clearly seen here



The remains of the long nave of Cwm abbey

The Cistercian Cwmhir Abbey was founded in 1176 by Cadwallon ap Madog. Cadwallon was murdered by Roger Mortimer (d1214) in 1179 and the disruption caused by the ongoing struggles between the Mortimers and the Welsh meant that the abbey never flourished. There was to have been a huge church, but the building project was abandoned after the 14-bay nave had been completed. It is said that the headless body of Llywellyn ap Gruffudd was buried in the church after he met his death in 1282.

Itinerary for the day

Before the climb up to Cefnlllys castles, MHS trustee Mike Beazley will demonstrate the use of the crossbow and explain its role in attacking and defending castles. MHS Chairman, Jason O'Keefe will demonstrate the use of the longbow.

The group will then make the steep ascent to the hilltop castle sites. After a picnic lunch, the group will travel to Abbey Cwm Hir.

Arrangements

1. Bring a packed lunch and wear shoes that are suitable for the rough terrain at Cefnlllys.
2. Meet behind the Lakeside Pavilion at Llandrindod Wells at 10.00am (LD1 5HU). There is plenty of parking by the lake.
3. Share cars to travel to Cefnlllys & Abbey Cwm Hir.

Booking

Places on this visit are strictly limited so pre-booking is essential.
Members £5.00; non-members £8.00



The memorial to Llywellyn ap Gruffudd at Abbey Cwm Hir

[Click here to link to online registration and ticket information](#)

If you do not use the internet please express your interest by contacting the Secretary, Philip Hume on 01584 831654 or write to him at Waterloo Lodge, Orleton Common, Ludlow SY8 4JG.

14th & 15th September 2018 **Members' Visit to London and the National Archives**
All places now taken

Saturday 6th October 2018 **MHS Autumn Symposium**
10.00 to 16.30 in Ludlow Methodist Church, Broad Street
Prof. Sarah Hainsworth - *How did Richard III die?*
Dr. David Simpkin - *The Mortimer Retinue for War: 1277-1421*
Anne O'Brien - *Elizabeth Mortimer in fact and fiction*
Ethan Gould - *Scottish Intrigue and Interference in Wales: 1315-1327*
Members £12, non-members £15; full details and booking later.

Saturday 10th November 2018 **Castles in the Welsh Marches**
10.00 to 13.00 - more details later
Dr John Kenyon - *Native Welsh castles*
Will Davies (CADW) - *Early Castles in mid-Wales*
Bill Zajac (CADW) - *Anglo-Norman stone castles in the central Marches*

Some of the events celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Mortimer History Society

Saturday 18th May 2019 **MHS Spring Conference - The Mortimers to 1330**
Speakers include Dr Ian Mortimer, Dr Emma Cavell, Andrew Spencer, Paul Dryburgh & Kathryn Warner

Saturday 29th June 2019 **Joint Conference with the Richard III Society**
- The Mortimers & the House of York 1330 - 1485
To be held in Ludlow

News Items

Subscriptions

There has been no increase in subscription rates since the Society was founded in 2009. At the AGM held on 17th March 2018, the members present approved a proposal that annual subscriptions should be increased from £12 to £15 for single membership and from £18 to £20 for joint membership with effect from January 2019. This increase may, however, be deferred to later in 2019 as we are also considering another change. At present we have a 'rolling' subscription year, with each member renewing on the anniversary of the day they joined. We are looking at possibly changing to a fixed date of renewal for all members.

Recent Events

Medieval Pilgrimage in the Welsh Marches

This event was organised by MHS for the benefit of the Conservation Trust for St Laurence, Ludlow. On 10th February about 100 members and non-members heard two superb talks. Dr Kathryn Hurlock spoke on *The Medieval Pilgrimage Experience* and Dr Harriett Webster's lecture was entitled *Pilgrim's Progress: Cures, Cults and Canonisation in the later Middle Ages*.

From left to right the photograph shows Philip Hume, Secretary of MHS, Dr Harriett Webster, Dr Kathryn Hurlock and Rory Chase, Chair of the Conservation Trust for St Laurence.



Medieval Leominster

Duncan James is the leading expert on old buildings in Herefordshire. After our AGM on 17th March, he gave a fascinating talk on the medieval buildings remaining in Leominster. Despite the return of the 'beast from the east', he then led a hardy group of enthusiasts on a bitterly cold, but most interesting tour of the town centre.



MHS Conference - Faith & Religion in the time of the Mortimers

On 19th May a total of around 130 members and non-members attended this highly successful conference in Leominster Priory.



Prof. Janet Burton speaking about monasticism in the Welsh Marches



MHS Essay competition runner-up, Matt Raven receiving his prize from MHS Chairman Jason O'Keefe.



Interested in Mortimer Heraldry?

The coat of arms of the Mortimers of Wigmore is a fascinating subject and we are setting up a new network of members who are interested. If you look closely at several Mortimer shields it soon becomes apparent that there are many variations. Commonly the number of horizontal and vertical bars changes and the yellow and blue colours are often switched. More significantly, perhaps, differences were introduced to distinguish the shields of younger sons from the main coat.



From the Wigmore Chronicle in Chicago - the silver escutcheon has lost its colour over the years



Colours reversed in this 14th century window at Boughton Aluph church in Kent

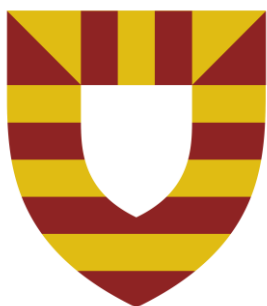


Robert Mortimer and Isabel Howard - note the 3 nails on the escutcheon for difference



Mortimer of Chirk from the ceiling of Boxgrove Priory, West Sussex - the green may just be artistic licence

The arms of Mortimer occur as quarterings in other shields and it is absorbing to study the family history and find out exactly why they are there. We also find other families that seem to have based their arms on those of the Mortimers.



Mortimer of Chelmarsh, a cadet branch of the Mortimers of Wigmore



On the memorial to John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland in St Mary's, Warwick - his wife was descended from Roger Mortimer of Chirk



Arms of Richard de Boys of the Sheet, Ludlow, (d1302).. What was the connection?

We'd like to create a database of Mortimer arms and map where they can be seen around the country. It would also be fascinating to learn much more about the various differences and their significance. MHS member Alan Mortimer has spent many years 'collecting' examples of Mortimer coats of arms and drawing them out. He is happy to be the focus of a new group of members who are interested. The aims of the group will be:

1. to search for, collate, research and catalogue all Mortimer coats of arms and other coats that contain a Mortimer quartering;
2. ultimately to create a catalogue of all known Mortimer coats of arms and map them geographically.

To achieve this we'll probably need to establish links with such organisations as the Heraldry Society, the Institute of Heraldic Studies and the College of Arms. If helping with this appeals to you, please contact Alan directly at alan.mortimer2@ntlworld.com

More Success for Ian Bass

Ian Bass was the winner of the first MHS Essay Prize in 2016, and a speaker at our Spring Conference this year in Leominster. He has now won another prestigious prize. In August 2017 the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East created an annual essay prize in honour of the former president and current honorary president, Professor Bernard Hamilton. Ian submitted a piece based on one of his PhD chapters regarding three recensions of 'Articles of Inquiry' that were used by bishops and other agents to enquire into English crusaders.

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Society

Daniela Bergman	Herefordshire UK	Natasha & Mark Lawrence	Herefordshire UK
Alan Bond	London UK	Mark McEvilly	Herefordshire UK
Ken & Gill Bourne-Turner	Worcestershire UK	James Donald Mortimer	Wyoming USA
Richard Catt	Herefordshire UK	Pat Oxley	Knowsley, UK
Rachel Clewley	Worcestershire UK	Graham Saunders	Herefordshire UK
Bronwyn Fraley	Somerset UK	Ed Shine	London UK
Barbara Gittings	Herefordshire UK	Stephen Southerland	Texas UK
Philip Healy	Herefordshire UK	Osborne & Jane Vaughan	Herefordshire UK
Mike & Jill Holland	South Africa	Julia Wells	Herefordshire UK
Krysia Kolodziejek & David Kennedy	Herefordshire UK	Julian Wontner	Herefordshire UK

Ribbesford House and its Mortimer connections

Among the estates listed in Domesday Book as belonging to Ralph Mortimer is Ribbesford which is a small place just outside Bewdley on the River Severn in Worcestershire. Sir Henry Herbert (d1673) acquired the 16th century Ribbesford House in 1640 and it recently came up for sale by auction. Having been requisitioned by the military during the Second World War, it was used as a base for the training of Free French soldiers and Charles de Gaulle paid a visit. Unfortunately this impressive mansion has suffered serious neglect over the past few decades. It's now a hugely depressing, dilapidated place, much of it falling down, but with a few rooms that were still occupied till quite recently. It has 20 bedrooms, some unsafe to visit. The asking price of just £500,000 says it all.



Surviving from the days of the Herberts is this stone coat of arms. Surprisingly, on the sinister side of the shield (right as we look at it) are the arms of Mortimer of Wigmore. One is tempted to think that this might just be an affectation, a desire to allude to the original ownership of Ribbesford. But closer examination suggests that there is more to it than that. The dexter half of the shield has the arms of Herbert with his quarterings. The sinister side contains the arms of Henry Herbert's wife Susan Sleaford. Including the arms of Mortimer of Wigmore in quarters 2 & 3 tells us that, at some point, one of Susan's Sleaford ancestors married a Mortimer lady who had no surviving brothers. As an heraldic heiress she was entitled to pass the Mortimer arms to her children.

The Sleafords came from Woolsthorpe in Lincolnshire which had been a Mortimer possession in 1180. Some nifty research by our Vice-President, Dr Ian Mortimer, has confirmed that, five generations before Susan, a Thomas Sleaford married an Anne Mortimer, the daughter of Ralph Mortimer. What is not yet clear is who this Ralph was. The arms suggest that he was descended from the Mortimers of the Kyre Wyard and Tedstone Wafre area of Herefordshire.

As descendants of Roger Mortimer of Chirk, the escutcheon on their shield would be ermine, not argent. No evidence of the ermine remains, though it might have been there originally. But there is another intriguing possibility. Only seven miles from Woolsthorpe lived the Mortimers of Helpston. It's just possible that Anne came from that family. Their coat of arms is different from the Mortimers of Wigmore, but the latter might have been included in error. After enduring a depressing tour of the house, it was very clear that it will need many millions spent on it to make it habitable. Even at the giveaway price of £500,000 it didn't seem an attractive proposition. Nevertheless it sold for £810,000 at auction, so it may look forward to better days.

Introducing the Mortimers 5: Edmund Mortimer (d1304) and Roger of Chirk (d1326)

by Hugh Wood. 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.

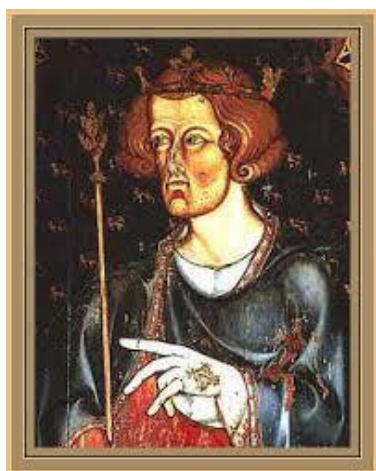
Roger Mortimer, the subject of the previous article in this series, had five sons. The heir apparent was Ralph, an impressive young man, displaying all the knightly arts. In 1273 he was sheriff of Shropshire and Staffordshire. From an early age the next son, Edmund, was destined for the church. He was sent to Oxford to study and, at the age of 15, he was appointed as the nominal Treasurer of York by Henry III. Living in the house of the Archbishop of York in Oxford, he had his head down studying theology while his older brother was enjoying himself at tournaments. Promised promotion within the church, Edmund had a glittering career awaiting him. The next son after Edmund was Roger, who was to become a great soldier, destined to play a significant role on the national stage; he is known to us as Roger Mortimer of Chirk.

So, in the evening of his life, Roger Mortimer could feel content that, on his death, the lordship of Wigmore would be safe in Ralph's capable hands. But everything changed in 1279 when Ralph died. Edmund had his sights set on his career in the church and he had not been groomed or prepared in any way for managing the Mortimer estates or, indeed, fighting the Welsh. His reluctance to accept his new position is obvious from the fact that he remained in Oxford after his brother's death, rather than immediately moving home to Wigmore. When his father died in 1282, Edmund had no option but to give up the church and take up the reins.

Edmund Mortimer (d1304) was around 30 when his father died and he was Lord of Wigmore for about 22 years. He wasted no time in turning from religion to more violent activities. Less than two months after his father's death, he hatched a plot with his brothers and some other knights to entrap Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Through trickery and astute tactics they separated Llywelyn from his main force which was then defeated. While attempting to rejoin his troops, Llywelyn was stopped by the English forces and run through with a sword. It was only later that Llywelyn's corpse was recognised. So died the great Welshman who had been such a thorn in the flesh of the English, just a few weeks after his Mortimer cousin. Roger of Chirk took Llywelyn's head to Rhuddlan castle to show King Edward I. His death effectively drew to a close that period of the Welsh struggle against the English.



This coat of arms in the chancel in York Minster is dated c.1399. Could it commemorate Edmund's connection with the church? Is the lack of symmetry at the top a way of differentiating his arms as he was a second son?



King Edward I

So Edmund became a soldier. Knighted by Edward I in 1283, he was given custody of Oswestry. With the Earl of Hereford he was custodian of Carmarthen and Cardigan castles and he was heavily involved with Roger of Chirk in mobilising troops to suppress the revolt of Rhys ap Maredudd in South Wales in 1287.

But problems were brewing at home. King Edward had to cope with recurring difficulties in Wales and Scotland at the same time as he was forging a military alliance on the Continent against France. He needed to raise a lot of money and, having been granted a tax in 1291, he then departed from tradition and decided to also tax the Welsh. Like other Marcher lords, Edmund had estates in England, in Wales and in the March. Accused of having resisted the collection of the tax in England, he made the now-famous statement that, as the liberty of Wigmore is

outside the county, the 'king's writ does not run there'. He grudgingly paid the tax on his Welsh lands but secured a royal document guaranteeing that the Welsh tax would not set a precedent.

From 1294 the king's calls for more and more taxation became crippling and there was growing opposition from the barons to his demand for military service in Gascony. Things came to a head in 1297. Edmund Mortimer supported the earls of Norfolk and Hereford in their resistance to the king and the stage seemed set for a civil war. Surprisingly perhaps, the situation was saved by the defeat of the English at Stirling Bridge. The potential threat to the security of England focused the minds of king and barons. Edward approved the *Confirmatio cartarum* a re-issue of Magna Carta and the Forest Charter and the barons agreed to serve with him in a new Scottish campaign.

It is said that Edmund served with the king in Scotland, though, unlike his brother Roger of Chirk, he is not listed as being present at either the Battle of Falkirk in 1298 or the Siege of Caerlaverock in 1300. He was injured in a skirmish near Builth and died at Wigmore in 1304.

Although never a lord of Wigmore, **Roger Mortimer of Chirk (d1326)** thoroughly deserves to be included in this catalogue of important Mortimers. The third son of Roger Mortimer, lord of Wigmore, (d1282) he was everything his cerebral, theologically-trained older brother Edmund wasn't. Knighted in the lifetime of his father, he was a great soldier with a well-earned reputation for severity and intransigence. You would certainly rather have him with you than against you.

As a young man he obviously impressed Edward I. Soon after Roger's father died, the king wrote to him expressing the hope that he would recover in the son something of what he had lost by the death of the father. He urged him to continue his father's work by strenuously combating the Welsh uprising.



Chirk castle near Wrexham

For his support he was granted lands in the area around Chirk, part of the estates forfeited by the rebellious Welsh, thus creating a new Marcher lordship dominated by the impressive castle he then built at Chirk. As noted in the previous article, Roger of Chirk was with his brother near Builth when Llywelyn ap Gruffudd met his end. Also killed on that day was Llywelyn ap Gruffudd ap Madog,

the man who had previously owned the lands round Chirk that had been granted to Roger.

He has been described as a lecher and he certainly had a roving eye. No less a person than the Archbishop of Canterbury accused him of adultery with, among others, Margaret, the wife of Roger of Radnor. When a chaplain attempted to reprove him for his sins, he put him in gaol and this was typical of his high-handed autocratic way of dealing with people.

Roger was heavily involved in suppressing the 1287 revolt of Rhys ap Iaredudd in South Wales. In 1294 he took part in Edward I's expedition to Gascony and was made joint Governor of the riverside towns of Blaye and Bourg after their recapture. It is interesting to note that in 1297, while his brother Edmund, lord of Wigmore, was joining the opposition to the king's increasingly exacting demands, Roger was again in Gascony, well away from the trouble. The following year he was back home raising troops in Wales to fight against the Scots. He sent 600 Welshmen to fight at the Battle of Falkirk in 1298 and his coat of arms is included on the Falkirk Roll and on that commemorating the siege of Caerlaverock in 1300.



Bourg on the Dordogne estuary

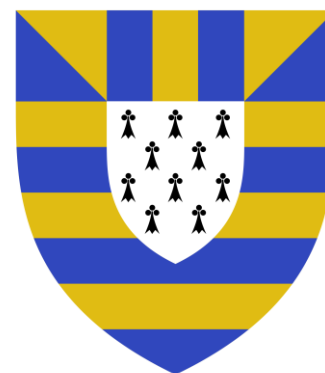
Roger was summoned by the king to a parliament in 1299, thereafter being termed Baron Mortimer of Chirk. Unfortunately his relationship with Edward I ended on a sour note. In 1306 he went with his

nephew, Roger Mortimer, the future 1st earl of March, on a new campaign against the Scots. They incurred the king's wrath by leaving without his permission and both had their lands confiscated for a time.

Things improved for Roger of Chirk following the accession of Edward II. In 1308 he was appointed as Justiciar of both North Wales and South Wales, posts that he held, on and off, until 1322. As the chief representative of the monarch in Wales he became extremely powerful. Active in sorting out problems and putting down rebellion, he made many enemies due to the severity of his 'rule'.



The seals of Edmund Mortimer and Roger Mortimer of Chirk on the Barons' letter to the Pope of 1301. Roger differenced his arms by changing the central escutcheon from argent to ermine



A modern image of the arms of Roger Mortimer of Chirk

The growing significance and power of the Despensers and their high-handed acquisitiveness brought them into direct conflict with the the Mortimers and other Marcher lords including Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford. As the king's favourite, Hugh Despenser the Younger literally got away with murder. Edward II's failure to control him eventually led Roger of Chirk and his nephew Roger, now lord of Wigmore, to join a baronial alliance against the Despensers led by Thomas of Lancaster. The barons were successful in forcing the Despensers into exile for a short time, in 1321, but a lack of unity among them encouraged the king to go on the offensive.

One of the most important and powerful men in North Wales was the Welshman, Sir Gruffydd Llwyd. A strong supporter of the English he had been appointed, at various times, as sheriff of Caernarvonshire, of Anglesey and of Merionethshire. He acted as the king's commissioner of array and had repeatedly raised troops for him to fight in Flanders and Scotland. An arrogant and egotistical man, Roger of Chirk saw Gruffydd as something of a competitor. Recognising his popularity and influence in the region, Roger had him imprisoned in Rhuddlan castle on two occasions. Sir Gruffydd's revenge must have been very sweet. In January 1322, at the request of Edward II, he marched at the head of a force of Welshmen to join the king's army, capturing Chirk castle on the way. Completely outnumbered, Roger of Chirk and his nephew surrendered. They were spared execution but imprisoned in the Tower of London. Though his nephew escaped, Roger of Chirk ended his days there dying in 1326.

Roger of Chirk 's marriage to Lucy le Wafre brought him estates in Wales and England, including Tedstone Wafre in east Herefordshire. After his death, however, most of his lands were taken by his acquisitive nephew, whose star was now in the ascendant. Roger of Chirk's son, another Roger, just retained those estates that came through his mother. He was never called to parliament and the barony of Mortimer of Chirk ceased to exist.



Rhuddlan Castle

The last surviving descendent in the direct male line from Roger of Chirk was Sir Hugh Mortimer of Martley & Tedstone Wafre who died fighting for Richard, Duke of York at the battle of Wakefield in 1460.

Who was Gwladus Ddu? - a personal reflection on an enigmatic lady

by Anna Belfrage. A Swedish member of MHS, Anna is an author of historical fiction with many highly-successful titles to her name. The nine books in her 'Graham Saga' are set in Scotland and America. In her series 'The King's Greatest Enemy' she explores the life of Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, as seen through the eyes of his faithful captain. The third book in the series 'Under the Approaching Dark' won Gold in the 2018 Independent Publisher Book Award (Europe) for non-fiction.

Who was Gwladus Ddu? A personal reflection on an enigmatic lady

In 1230 Ralph Mortimer, lord of Wigmore and up and coming Marcher lord, married Gwladys ferch Llywelyn (usually known as Gwladus Ddu), the daughter of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, the ruler of most of Wales. It was a good match for Ralph in that it established some sort of alliance with the mighty Llywelyn. However, while Gwladus undoubtedly was Llywelyn's daughter, there have been some doubts as to who was her mother. Llywelyn married Joanna Plantagenet, King John's illegitimate daughter in 1205. At the time the bride was around fifteen or so while Llywelyn was approximately thirty-two. He was already a father, his eldest son Gruffydd being seven. Gruffydd's mother was Llywelyn's long-time mistress Tangwystl and quite a few have put forward the idea that Gwladus was Gruffydd's full sister, i.e. she was Tangwystl's daughter.



Stone sarcophagus in the church in Beaumaris, said to have contained the body of Joanna, natural daughter of King John

We don't know when Gwladus was born, which complicates the birthmother issue. What we do know is that in 1215 Gwladus married Reginald de Braose, another Marcher lord. This, according to some, means she must have been born at the latest around 1202, so as to be of marriageable age in 1215. And if Gwladus was born in 1202, she could not be Joanna's daughter as Joanna and Llywelyn were wed in 1205, ergo Ralph Mortimer married an illegitimate Welsh princess.

Had Gwladus been of marriageable age in 1215, Reginald would probably have claimed his marital rights. In view of her future fertility, Gwladus should therefore have borne Reginald a child or two, but she never did. Not that Reginald needed children. At the time of his wedding with Gwladus he was pushing forty with heirs to his body (among which was a certain William de Braose whom Llywelyn would hang in 1230 for having engaged in adulterous relations with Llywelyn's wife, Joanna. All very complicated, isn't it?)

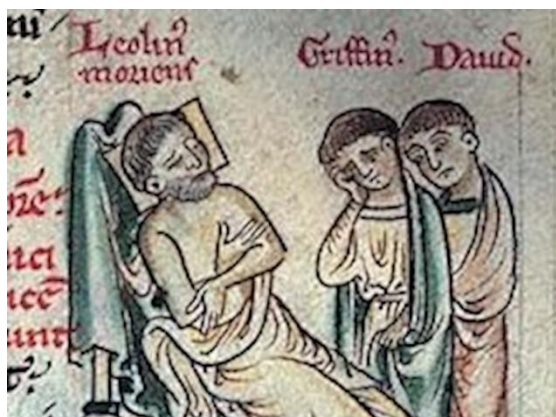
The above supports the theory that Reginald married Gwladus for political reasons, and in such cases the age of the bride was not as relevant. Assuming the marriage with Reginald de Braose was a political



13th century architecture at Brecon Priory where Reginald de Braose was buried in 1228

alliance, Gwladus would have been worth much more as a political pawn if she was the legitimate daughter of a Welsh prince and the granddaughter of an English king than if she were the daughter of Llywelyn and the irresistibly named Tangwystl.

When King John gave his daughter in marriage to Llywelyn, he also had Llywelyn promise that it would be the children he had with Joanna who would be his heirs. This was not in accordance with Welsh custom which in general supported every child's right to inherit, no matter if the child was conceived within or without the marital bed. By agreeing to John's demands Llywelyn effectively disinherited little Gruffydd. Over time, this would sour the relationship between Llywelyn and his firstborn, but also between Gruffydd and his half-brother Dafydd. However, at the time of Llywelyn agreeing to John's demands there was no Dafydd (except as a twinkle in his father's eye) so we can leave that sad story of brotherly strife.



*Gruffydd and Dafydd beside their dying father
Llywelyn ap Iorwerth*

Gwladus seems to have had a good relationship with both her brothers. When a very young Dafydd rode to London in 1229 to visit his young uncle, Henry III, Gwladus rode with him. Dafydd undertook this little trip to present himself before the entire English court as Llewelyn's recognised heir, thereby formally acquiring his uncle's support against his half-brother's claim. The fact that Gwladus accompanied him may indicate they were full siblings—her presence at this event indicates that she supported Dafydd at the expense of Gruffydd.

At the time of her little jaunt to London, Gwladus was recently widowed. Reginald de Braose had passed on in 1228

and Gwladus was now free as a bird—well, as free as any woman of good birth was in the 13th century. In Gwladus' case, her father now had the wherewithal with which to make a new alliance by marrying his daughter where it best served his interests.

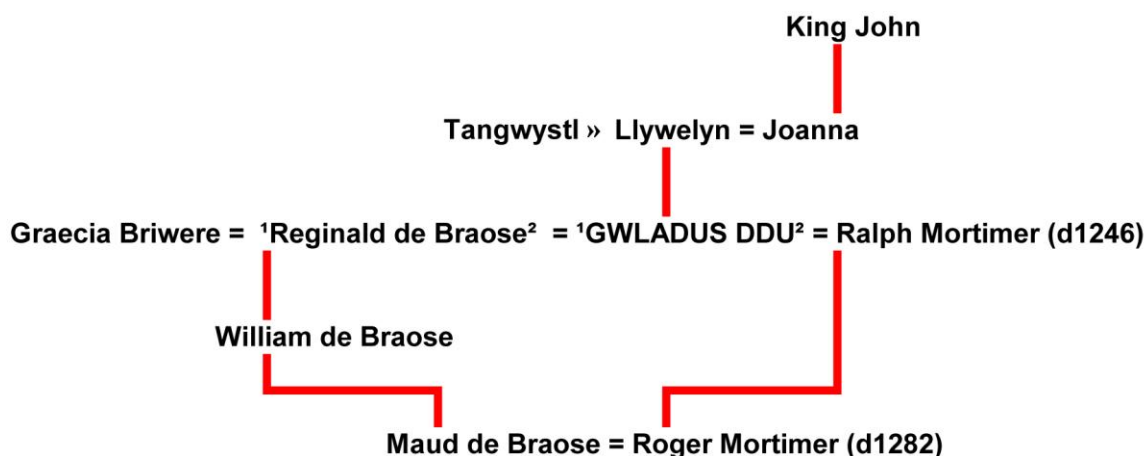
It did not take long for Llywelyn to find a new husband for his widowed daughter. This time, Gwladus was dispatched to wed Ralph Mortimer of Wigmore, a man some years her senior who'd become heir to the Mortimer lands upon the death of his older brother. The Mortimers were as covetous and power-hungry as all the Marcher Lords and while Ralph definitely wanted heirs, he also wanted valuable alliances. I seriously doubt he'd have wanted Gwladus—no matter how beautiful she might have been—unless she was not only the daughter of Llywelyn but also the niece of Henry III. Or maybe Ralph had already got the measure of the young English king and decided it was more important to keep the Welsh wolf at bay than pacify the English lion cub.

Some things point to Gwladus having been Joanna's daughter: when Joanna wed Llywelyn in 1205, her father dowered her with several manors. Upon Gwladus' marriage to Ralph, some of these manors were used to dower Gwladus. I imagine Joanna would have been very displeased had Llywelyn used her dower lands as dowry for his illegitimate daughter. It may even have rankled with the English king, and Llywelyn was too wise a ruler to take any such risks.



The site of Knighton Castle - Knighton and Norton were dower lands of Joanna that were passed on to Gwladus

Whatever the case, Ralph and Gwladus seem to have hit it off. Over the first nine years of married life, she gave birth to six known children, among them the very competent Roger Mortimer who would go on to become a loyal servant of the king, behead Simon de Montfort at Evesham and marry Maud de Braose, daughter of the man his Welsh grandfather once hanged for adultery. For his service to Edward I he also became the first Baron Mortimer.



Leaving aside the issue of her maternity, we know nothing about Gwladus beyond who her father was, who her husbands were, who her children were. She is defined not by *who* she was but by *what* she was: daughter, wife, mother. We have no depiction or description of her, all we have is her epithet, Ddu, which is Welsh for black. I guess this probably means that Gwladus was dark rather than fair, and I picture her with long dark braids and eyes the colour of a deep forest tarn. For some reason, I imagine she was of a serious disposition – but that is entirely fanciful, and for all I know, Gwladus may have been the life and soul of any medieval party she might have been invited to.

In 1246, Ralph died, leaving Gwladus yet again a widow. She never remarried, dying five years later while visiting with her maybe-uncle, Henry III, in Winchester.

Through Gwladus the blood of the Royal House of Gwynedd would pass down the Mortimer line, the Welsh Dragon lying dormant until that very distant descendant of hers, Edward IV, claimed the throne. Through Edward's daughter, Elizabeth of York, that rather diluted drop of Welsh blood would join other drops of Welsh blood that have made it all the way down the line to the present Queen. I rather like that, and I think it makes Gwladus' father smile in his heaven.

As to who her mother was, I tend to lean towards Joanna of England. I can't really see either Reginald de Braose or Ralph Mortimer wedding the illegitimate daughter of Llywelyn and besides, there's Gwladus' dowry, comprising lands passed through Joanna into Llywelyn's control. However, there is one thing I am one hundred percent certain off: Gwladus herself knew who her mother was. I hope it was a good and loving relationship, preparing her for the life that lay ahead for any little medieval girl born as the daughter of a very powerful man.

Postscript

MHS Member, Peter Smith has reported that Heidelberg University have digitised 3000 medieval and early modern documents forming the *Biblioteca Palatina* and made them accessible online.

To visit their website and browse these documents just [follow this link](#)

