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Part of a page from the Wigmore Chronicle in Chicago  
The chronicle will feature in our next event on 16th February  
in Hereford

## Forthcoming MHS Events

**Saturday 16th February 2019 - *On the Record: Writing the Mortimer Family into History***

Medieval chronicle writing - College Hall, Hereford - see next page for details and booking

**Saturday 16th March 2019 - *The Medieval Castle and Borough of Richards Castle***

AGM at 10.00; talk by Philip Hume at 11.00 - Richards Castle Village Hall - see later page for details

**Saturday 18th May 2019 - *The Mortimers to 1330: from Wigmore to ruler of England***

Our Spring Conference at Leominster Priory

**Saturday 29th June 2019 - *The Mortimer Inheritance: Key to the Yorkist Crown***

Joint conference with Richard III Society at Ludlow Assembly Rooms and St Laurence's Church

**This will be a popular event - Booking opens 1st December 2018 - see our website**

**Wednesday 4th September 2019 - *Members' Visit to Wigmore Castle and Wigmore Abbey***

**Saturday 5th October 2019 - *The Ludlow Castle Heraldic Roll: A Window into Tudor Times***

**Saturday 30th November 2019 - *Lordship and Enduring Influence: the Mortimers in Medieval Ireland***

**SATURDAY 16TH FEBRUARY 2019  
COLLEGE HALL, HEREFORD CATHEDRAL**



Photo: K. Lawton-Smith

**ON THE RECORD: WRITING THE MORTIMERS  
INTO HISTORY, 1066 TO 1425**

**Programme:**

- 9.15am Registration & Refreshments
- 10.00am **Writing and Reading Chronicles in Medieval England**  
**Dr Michael Staunton** - University College Dublin
- 10.45am **Chronicles & Colleges: Constructing the Image of the Mortimers in the Middle Ages** **Dr Philip Morgan** - University of Keele
- 11.30am Questions
- 11.40am Refreshments
- 12.10pm **The Mortimers in the Writings of Iolo Goch & Adam Usk**  
**Professor Helen Fulton** - University of Bristol
- 12.55pm Questions & Finish at 1.00pm

Hereford Cathedral Library have kindly promised a private display of medieval manuscripts and books, some relating to Wigmore Abbey, for those attending the conference to view throughout the morning.

**Ticket Prices:** members £9; non-members £13

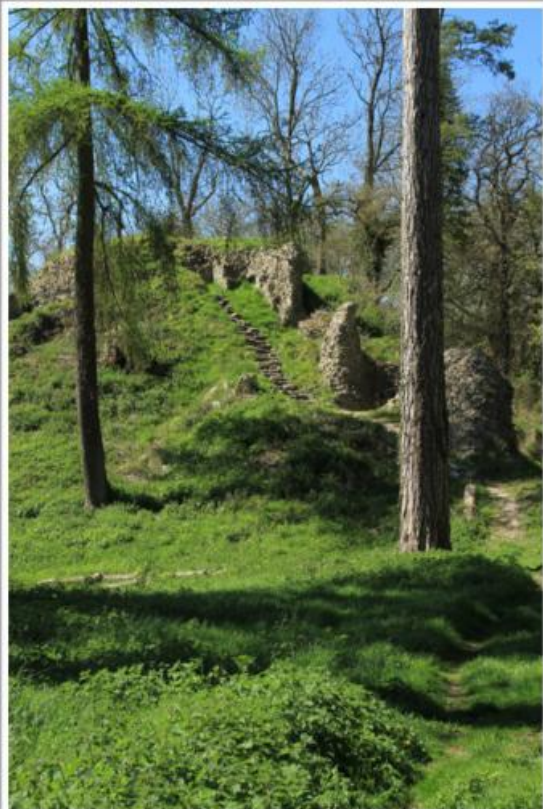
**For more information and booking** [click here](#)

If you are interested but don't have a computer ring Hugh on 01584 876901



# MORTIMER *History Society*

## **THE AGM LECTURE 2019** **RICHARDS CASTLE VILLAGE HALL** **SATURDAY 16th MARCH 2019**



### **Programme:**

**9.15am Refreshments**

**10.00 AGM Mortimer History Society 2019**

**11.00 Talk: The Medieval Castle & Borough  
of Richards Castle - [Philip Hume](#)**

**12.00 Finish**

**Venue: Richards Castle Village Hall, SY8 4EQ**

**Parking on Site**

**£5.00 non-members MHS members free  
Pay on door**

**All members & non-members welcome to  
attend the AGM or just the lecture at 11.00am.**

**Further details: see below**

### **THE MEDIEVAL CASTLE & BOROUGH OF RICHARDS CASTLE**

**PHILIP HUME - AUTHOR OF 'ON THE TRAIL OF THE MORTIMERS'**

First built in the early 1050s by Richard fitzScrob, Richards Castle is one of the oldest castle sites in the country - one of only four castles built before the Norman Conquest. A flourishing settlement developed around the castle, at one point nearly as large as neighbouring Ludlow. As the castle fell into disuse, however, the town declined becoming an example of a failed borough. This talk charts the development of the castle and town, along with the history of the lords of Richards Castle and their role as Marcher lords, including the newly discovered family connection between the 13th century Mortimers of Richards Castle and the Mortimers of Wigmore. It's a history that includes the mysterious death of Hugh Mortimer, lord of Richards Castle, together with his knights, all poisoned allegedly by his wife Matilda, and the repeated attempts to bring her to justice. The talk concludes by exploring the reasons for the decline of the castle and the failure of its borough.

### Membership and subscriptions - some important changes

#### Subscription rates

These have remained unchanged since the Society was formed nearly ten years ago. Over that period the Society has grown to around 325 members and we are involved in a wide range of worthwhile activities, including a much fuller programme of events, the essay prize, the MHS journal and the schools programme. Recognising the need to put the finances of the Society on a more secure footing, the 2018 AGM approved a modest increase in subscription rates. We believe that the new rates still represent exceptional value for money.

These changes are effective from November 24th:

Individual membership	£15
Joint membership	£20 (two adults at the same address)
Junior membership	£5 (all under 18s at one address)

NB Junior memberships can be held either independently or in tandem with individual or joint memberships.

Where there are several members at one address, the Society will communicate directly with just one nominated person and we will only supply one copy of the MHS journal.

#### Renewal of subscriptions

In future all memberships will be due for renewal on May 1st each year. We will send all members a reminder in good time.

#### New members

New members will pay a full year's subscription at the time of joining and will then be advised when they will need to renew.

### Proposed change to our Constitution

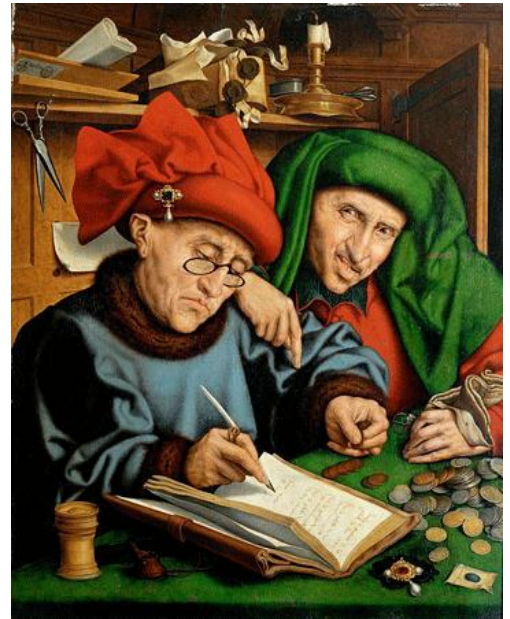
As a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, one of the most important aspects of our constitution is the 'Objects' which set out the purpose of the Society and the parameters within which we can operate. The Charity Commission ensures that the 'Objects' meet the statutory requirements of charitable organisations. You can see the current 'Objects' of the Society here [link to the Objects](#)

In essence these are all concerned with advancing education and fostering interest in the history of the Mortimers and the Welsh Marches between 1066 and 1500. However some recent events have highlighted a possible gap in the Society's 'Objects'. For instance, there is currently no access to the shell keep at Wigmore castle because the steps are considered unsafe. We'd like to be able to actively encourage a speedy resolution of this problem on behalf of the public generally. Looking ahead, it's possible that important conservation, or other, issues could arise about which the Society might reasonably be expected to have an opinion. Our present constitution doesn't allow us to become involved in local issues in this way.

At the AGM in March, the trustees will propose that we add a further 'Object' of the Society. The wording is not finalised but it will be something like:

**'promoting the preservation, conservation, and public accessibility of objects, buildings, and places related to the history of the medieval Mortimer family'**

If you have any views on this proposed addition to the Society's 'Objects' please email them to [secretary@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk) or telephone Philip on 01584 831654



*16th century tax collectors*



*Steps to the shell keep at  
Wigmore castle*

## The Wigmore Church Project

We have received the following notice from the project team:

“Sadly the project to transform St James Church in Wigmore into a heritage and community centre has been cancelled. The project was working closely with Wigmore School and would have used their car park for events but, despite this, planning permission was refused on transportation grounds. The organisers were also experiencing difficulties with some of the amenity bodies and finding it ever more difficult to raise match funding. Costs involved with adapting Grade I buildings are significant and funding is proving ever more difficult to obtain. The organisers would particularly like to thank the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Rector, the many supporters and everyone who has given their time freely to try and save this important building. For now the future of the church looks very bleak indeed but maybe someone else will pick up the mantle in the years to come.”

## Wedding Costumes for Roger Mortimer and Joan de Geneville?

Roger Mortimer and Joan de Geneville were married in Pembridge church in Herefordshire on 20th September 1301. With support from several people, Ann Butcher and MHS member Bob Anderson have recently designed and made wedding costumes to give an idea of the kind of clothes they might have worn at their wedding.

Of course we don't actually know what Roger and Joan wore. In creating these costumes, the Bob and Ann studied contemporary funeral effigies.

They were also influenced by the clothes listed in the inventory of Roger and Joan's effects, which were seized when Roger was arrested in 1322.



### Roger

- Two short jackets of green velvet
- A tunic, two super tunics (topmost garments) and a tabard (sleeveless tunic) of scarlet, without fur or hood.
- A tunic, two super tunics, tabard and hood of mixed brown cloth without fur.
- A tunic of indigo velvet.
- A super tunic and tabard of scarlet red for summer without hood.
- A tunic, two super tunics, tabard and hood of mulberry brown.
- A super tunic of green with a quarter yellow or grey, and hood lined with red muslin.
- One black hat lined with high grade lambskin.

### Joan

- Two tunics of 'Cloth of Thars' of which one is green and the other brown. (*Cloth of Thars was a rich silk from Tarsia in Turkistan, often highly patterned with Islamic designs*).
- Two super tunics of indigo silk without fur.
- Three super tunics of brown silk without fur.
- One tunic and two super tunics of red 'cloth of Thars'
- One uncut violet wool cloth.
- One tunic, two super tunics, one mantle and one hat without fur, of mixed brown cloth.
- One new fur of miniver for a super tunic and another for a hood.
- Twenty two ells of linen cloth
- Two red Irish Fallains (cloak)
- One old white Irish fallain (cloak)

## New Members

Since the last edition of *Mortimer Matters* in September, we've seen an unprecedented flood of new members, some encouraged by the news that subscriptions are going up shortly and that this is an excellent time to join. We welcome

Stephen Abbey	Shropshire UK	Mark Ingle	Shropshire UK
David Atkins	Shropshire UK	Lottie James	Shropshire UK
Virginia Bird	Herefordshire UK	Clive Jenkins	Oxfordshire UK
Colin Bower	West Yorkshire UK	Martin & Lesley Knowles	Shropshire UK
Barbara Burns	Shropshire UK	Hazel Mancini	Shropshire UK
Bridget Cherry	Shropshire UK	Joan Mason	Shropshire UK
John Cutler	Herefordshire UK	Lorraine Munn	Herefordshire UK
Rosamund Ditchfield	Worcestershire UK	Gail & John Peacock	Newport, Wales UK
Charles Edwards	Shropshire UK	Ian Richards	Lot et Garonne, France
Mary Epke	Gloucestershire UK	Moyra & Colin Sutherill	Herefordshire UK
Peter Ford	Herefordshire UK	Mary Jane Thomas	Herefordshire UK
Peter Furneaux	Herefordshire UK	& Anthony Jones	
Janet Gough	Shropshire UK	Barbara Tribe	Berkshire UK
John Hargreaves	Herefordshire UK	Christine Tustin	Herefordshire UK
Joe & Caroline Hillaby	Herefordshire UK	Janet Verasanso	Shropshire UK

## MHS Visit to Medieval London and the National Archives

*by John Fleming*

*MHS members John Fleming and Stella Mason organised a hugely enjoyable visit to London in September*

On September 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> a group of intrepid Mortimer History Society members descended upon London for a two-day visit. The objective of the visit on the first day was to view sites in London with a Mortimer connection and to see some of what remains of medieval London in order to get a feel for how London might have looked in the time of the Mortimers.

The tour started at the Museum of the Order of St. John, where members received a guided tour and an excellent overview from Stella Mason. Roger Mortimer, later Earl of March, stayed on these premises with his troops in 1321 when he visited London to attend parliament. The crypt of the church has been well preserved and wouldn't have looked far different to Roger. We then proceeded to St. Bartholomew's Hospital Museum, where we viewed some interesting medieval documents. This was followed by a visit to St Bartholomew-the-Great church. This church was founded as an Augustinian priory in 1123 and is one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in London (having survived both the Great Fire and the Blitz). We then moved to Temple Church, which was where William Marshall and his son were buried in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Mortimers benefited greatly when the last Marshall male heir



*Effigy in Temple Church thought to be of William Marshall*

passed away without issue and the inheritance was divided between the daughters and granddaughters, one of whom was married to Roger Mortimer (d.1282). There was an introductory discussion on the tomb effigies that are in the church and whether they might actually represent the Marshalls or whether that is a myth that has developed over time. Finally, the group proceeded to the Tower to discuss the daring

escape of Roger Mortimer. Members had to use their imagination, as there are only ruins of the buildings that would have housed the kitchen from where Roger escaped.

On day two, members gathered in Kew at the National Archives. There was a brief and entertaining introduction as to how members could best make use of the National Archives for research. This was followed by a discussion and inspection of around 15 documents from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, most of them with a Mortimer connection. The Society's president Dr. Paul Dryburgh expertly guided our tour through Pipe Rolls, Charter Rolls, Marriage Charters, Court records and many other fine medieval documents. Everybody who was there was struck by the direct connection to the Mortimers that these documents provide. 'Humbling' and 'awe inspiring' were just some of the expressions that members used to describe the experience.

I think everybody who was on the tour would agree that we all came away from both days with a much more informed view of medieval London and the world of the Mortimers.



John Ferguson examining a pipe roll with Paul Dryburgh



Mortimer and other seals on a document of 1316 (see the next article)

## Introducing the Mortimers 7: Edmund Mortimer & Roger Mortimer, 2nd Earl of March

**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.*

### Edmund Mortimer (d.1331)

Despite the 1st Earl of March's closeness to Queen Isabella in the final years of his life, he and his wife Joan had previously had 20 years of successful marriage, which included 12 children. The oldest boy, Edmund, was probably born in 1302. At the age of 14 he was married to Elizabeth de Badlesmere who was just 3 years old. Following his father's arrest and subsequent exile, Edmund was imprisoned with his brothers, first in Windsor castle and then in the Tower. Freed on Roger's triumphant return to England with the queen, he was knighted with his brothers by the young Edward III. A year later, in 1328, his wife Elizabeth gave birth to their first child, another Roger.

Following the Earl's trial and execution in 1330, his extensive estates and the earldom of March were forfeit. The Mortimers of Wigmore were then living in very reduced circumstances. Perhaps contrary to expectations, however, the new king proved charitable and forgiving. Roger's widow, Joan, was treated kindly and most of her lands were eventually given back to her. As early as 1331, various lords were urging



*Impressive document of 1316 in which Edmund Mortimer assigns dower to his young wife Elizabeth de Badlesmere*

the king to be generous to Roger's son Edmund and in October he restored Wigmore to him, together with Maelienydd and other lands in Wales. And he went further: a month later Edmund was called to attend parliament and is consequently held to have become Baron Mortimer, a new creation distinct from that forfeited by his father.

Things were looking good and Edmund must have hoped that he would gradually recover more of his father's lands and significance. Tragically, within a month of the parliament, he died of a fever. Aged about 28 when his father died, Edmund was the last lord of

Wigmore to be an adult when he succeeded his father. From now on until the male line failed in 1425, it is a story of successive lords dying young, to be succeeded by minors. Over that period, the last four lords of Wigmore had direct control of their estates for a total of only 41 of the 94 years.

### **Roger Mortimer, 2nd Earl of March (1328-1360)**

Just 3 years old when his father died, and with his grandfather's execution and attainder in the background, things didn't look very promising for Roger. Yet by the time of his death at the young age of 31 he had completely restored the family fortunes and become one of the greatest magnates in England, much lamented by the same king who had executed his grandfather.

He was fortunate in having good connections. Following the death of his father, his mother married William de Bohun, one of Edward III's close companions. Another of Edward's friends, William Montagu took practical steps to help him as did Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel. In 1341 he was allowed to take control of Radnorshire and the following year, aged just 13 he recovered Wigmore, with further Welsh estates following.

But it was Roger's character and personal qualities that were to make the real difference. 25 years earlier, Hugh Despenser had sworn eternal enmity against Roger's grandfather, the 1st Earl, because Despenser's grandfather had been slain by the 1st Earl's grandfather in 1265 at the Battle of Evesham. Given the fate of his own grandfather, it would not have been surprising if relations between Roger and the king had been strained, to say the least, or even if he had chosen to oppose the monarch. So it is quite surprising that he became one of Edward's most loyal and trusted supporters and lieutenants.

Roger's teenage years were a time when Edward III was ramping up his claim to the throne of France. In a provocative move he changed the royal coat of arms, adding the arms of France to the lions of England, and the pursuit of this claim was to result in the Hundred Years War. Roger's potential as a soldier became clear at an early age. He was only 15 when he distinguished himself at a tournament held in Hereford in 1345, taking part alongside many of the most noble lords in England. Only 2 years later, aged just 17, he crossed to France as part of the king's army and was knighted by the Black Prince at La Hogue. He fought alongside the king at the battle of Crécy and was rewarded by being given livery of all his lands in Herefordshire and the Marches.

The following year, 1348, Roger was summoned to parliament as both Baron Mortimer and Baron Mortimer of



*The Battle of Crécy in 1346 as imagined by Froissart in the 15th century. He's made a mistake with the French arms as the fleurs-de-lys on the French flag weren't reduced to three till 1376*



Wigmore. He was further honoured by being selected as one of about 25 founder knights of the Order of the Garter, a distinction which remains the highest order of chivalry in the United Kingdom. In 1354 he was successful in securing the reversal of his grandfather's attainder, allowing him to gain control of all his the 1st Earl's estates except those held in dower by his mother and grandmother, both of who were to die in 1356. Even more significantly as far as his image was concerned, he was able to inherit his grandfather's earldom and become the 2nd Earl of March.



*Roger Mortimer, 2nd Earl of March in his Garter robes, as painted by William Bruges around 1430-40. The shields in the box represent successor knights who used the same garter stall as Roger after his death.*

Meanwhile he was continually active as a soldier both in France and against the Scots. In 1354 he was in Avignon as part of the unsuccessful peace negotiations brokered by the Pope. The following year he was at Roxburgh when Edward Balliol finally surrendered his claim to the throne of Scotland. Roger was one of Edward III's key commanders in the 1358 invasion of France, being given the role of constable and personally leading a force of 600 men-at-arms and 1000 archers, mostly recruited from his own estates in Wales.

He was now one of the most powerful men in England. With the death of his grandmother he acquired Ludlow castle which became a favourite residence. Trusted and appreciated by the king, he was awarded the positions of constable of Montgomery, Bridgnorth and Corfe castles as well as keeper of Clarendon forest, Dover and the Cinque Ports. However not everyone was delighted by the rehabilitation of the Mortimers. Several families had benefited from the fall of the 1st Earl of March, but they now had to cope with these gains being unceremoniously taken away from them and given to the young Mortimer. These included the Berkeleys, Talbots and Montagus, but Edward III was not interested in listening to their complaints. Roger had married William Montagu's

daughter Philippa, but the relationship between the two men was subsequently soured by a bitter feud over the lordship of Denbigh.

Roger and Philippa are recorded as having 4 children but a fifth child, Thomas, may have been legitimately born around the time of Roger's death. Thomas may, however, have been illegitimate, but either way he was to play a big part in the later Mortimer story.

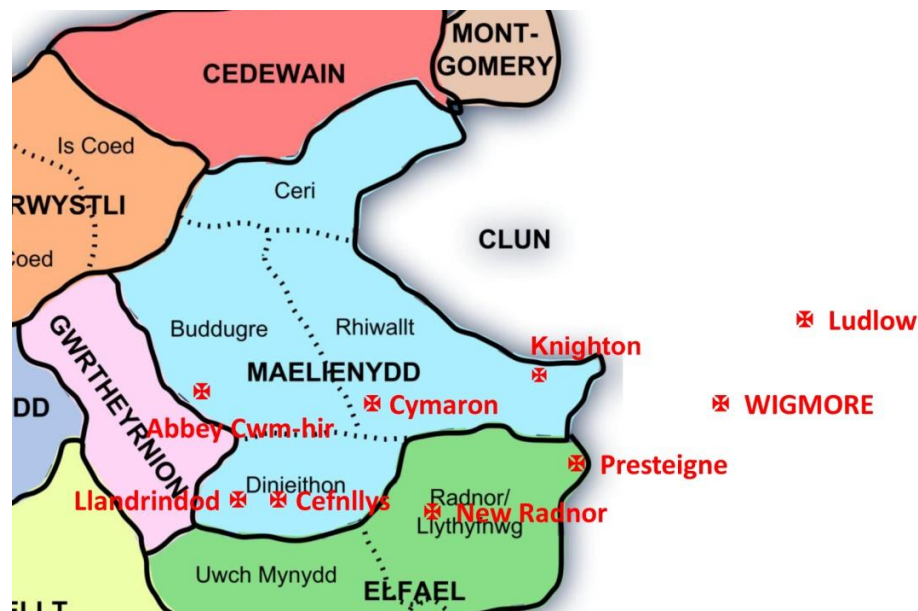
All was looking good for the young earl when he suddenly died at Rouvray near Avalon in Burgundy. According to Froissart, Edward III loved him dearly and was greatly upset by his death.

### **The Mortimers in Maelienydd: Cefnlllys Castle and Abbey Cwm Hir**

*by Philip Hume. In July a group of members and non-members enjoyed a study trip to Cefnlllys Castle and Abbey Cwm Hir, two sites with strong Mortimer connections near Llandrindod Wells in what became western Radnorshire. Several people taking part requested that Philip Hume's introduction to the history of each site be written up in Mortimer Matters.*

In very contrasting ways, Cefnlllys and Abbey Cwm Hir are both fascinating and beautiful sites. The earthworks at Cefnlllys, which include the buried remains of two successive masonry castles, occupy either end of the summit of a steep and dramatic ridge. They provide commanding views over the surrounding countryside, giving a strong sense of domination and control. In contrast, the ruins of Abbey Cwm Hir, located in a long tranquil valley (Cwm Hir translates as 'long valley'), give off a sense of calm and peacefulness.

The context for the Mortimer involvement in both Cefnylls and Abbey Cwm Hir is the near 200-year struggle for control of the district of Maelienydd. At the time of the Norman Conquest of England, there were two dominant principalities in Wales – Gwynedd in the north and Deheubarth in the south. Lying between these two, in central Wales, was an area known as Rhwyng Gwy a Hafren (literally the lands between the Wye and the Severn, roughly equivalent to modern Radnorshire) ruled by the descendants of an early 11<sup>th</sup> century prince, Elstan Glodrydd. Located only a few miles to the west of Wigmore, the district of Maelienydd within Rhwyng Gwy a Hafren was an obvious target for Mortimer ambitions to conquer more land to help establish themselves as Marcher Lords.



*Map of Maelienydd showing Cefnlllys and Abbey Cwm Hir in the west together with neighbouring parts of England*

When the major Norman incursion into Wales happened in the 1090s, Ralph Mortimer [d.1115-27] claimed conquest of Maelienydd and probably first built the castle at Cymaron as his chief castle in the district. A second castle was built at Dinieithon, a mile to the north of Cefnlllys, to control the River Ithon, a key waterway that linked central Wales with the River Wye, itself an important communications artery with England. Despite this early acquisition reinforced by new castles, it took a further 190

years for the Mortimers to secure permanent control of Maelienydd. Indeed, during this long period the Mortimers held the district for only 80-90 years, control being contested by the native Welsh princes with power moving back and forth.

There is not enough space in this short article to recount all the conflicts between the Mortimers and the Welsh princes for control of Maelienydd, so I will highlight those most relevant to Cefnlllys and Abbey Cwm Hir.

Shortly after that first conquest in the 1090s, Ralph Mortimer returned to Normandy and it appears that no Mortimers were present in England for 30-40 years. In their absence, Maelienydd was regained by Madog ab Idnerth with Dinieithon Castle destroyed. It may have been rebuilt c1165 by Madog's son, Cadwallon, but if this was the case it had a short lifespan as the last recorded reference to the site dates from 1179.

Ralph's son, Hugh Mortimer [d.1181-85], is recorded as gaining possession of Maelienydd in 1144 for a second time for the Mortimers, and repairing Cymaron Castle. However, this didn't last long and in the 1150s Cadwallon ap Madog regained control. Cadwallon's position as prince of Maelienydd was recognised by the English king Henry II. Hugh Mortimer was then punished for raids into Maelienydd, and his son, Roger Mortimer [d.1214], was imprisoned for the murder of Cadwallon by his followers in 1179. Three years before his death, Cadwallon ap Madog had founded a Cistercian Abbey at Cwm Hir dedicated to St Mary. According to some accounts an abbey had



*The peaceful setting of Abbey Cwm Hir*

been established in 1143 but failed to prosper. However, there is no evidence for this earlier stage in Cwm Hir's existence and the abbey was founded, traditionally on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1176. The following year, Cadwallon's brother, Einion Clud ap Madog, prince of Elfael, gave a grant to Abbey Cwm Hir.

It wasn't until the mid-1190s that the Mortimers were able to regain control of Maelienydd, when Roger Mortimer succeeded in expelling Cadwallon's sons, Maelgwn and Hywel, taking the lordship for the Mortimers again. Patronage of the abbey passed to Roger who, in 1199, issued a charter of protection for Cwm Hir, in which he 'commends to God the souls of his family and the men who had died in the conquest (in 1195)'. About the same period, the records of the General Chapter relate how the *conversi* rose in rebellion when the abbot tried to stop them drinking ale – a not infrequent complaint – and the *conversi* showed their displeasure by stealing the abbot's horses. When Roger Mortimer died in 1214, King John took the abbey into royal protection and granted it a charter of confirmation, which was re-issued by Henry III in 1232.



*The sparse but evocative remains at Abbey Cwm Hir*

knights' horses became bogged down in the mud. In revenge, the king burnt the grange buildings; the Abbey itself was only saved by paying a fine of 300 marks – a huge amount.

The stone structures that we see today at Abbey Cwm Hir date from this period in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The nave has been estimated at 242 feet long and 80 feet wide. A transept was begun but not completed, being bricked off in 1234. This was an enormous church built on a grand scale as one of the largest in England and Wales. To give some comparisons, the nave at Valle Crucis Abbey, near Llangollen, is around 100 feet; at the Abbey of Strata Florida the nave is 135 feet; the nave of Westminster Abbey is around 235 feet in length. Indeed, only Durham and Winchester Cathedrals had longer naves. The Abbey was built with sandstone from a quarry at Grinshill, 12 miles north east of Shrewsbury.

Until recently, it had been thought that this impressive church was built by Llywelyn ab Iorwerth when under his control, but more recently Dr David Stephenson has argued persuasively that it was more likely built in an earlier period under the patronage of Roger Mortimer in the 14 years between 1200 and his death in 1214.

When Llywelyn ab Iorwerth took Maelienydd in 1215, he demolished the castle built by the Mortimers at Cymaron. Llywelyn's death in 1240, however, once again opened the door to Maelienydd for the Mortimers. With control secured in 1241 by Ralph Mortimer [d.1246], he gave responsibility to his 11-year old son, Roger [d.1282], to build a new castle on the northern end of the escarpment at Cefnlllys, to replace the castles at Dinieithon and Cymaron that had been destroyed by the Welsh. Within 20 years, however, Llywelyn's grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was extending his dominance across much of Wales, and in 1262



*Remains of the extremely long nave*

The death of Roger Mortimer in 1214 happened when Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, prince of Gwynedd, was extending his power across much of Wales. In 1215, Llywelyn reconquered Maelienydd for the Welsh, retaining control until his death in 1240. During one of the wars between Henry III and Llywelyn in 1231, the monks from an Abbey Grange were accused of misdirecting Henry's army into an ambush in a marsh where the

Cefnlllys castle was taken from Roger's steward, Hywel ap Meurig. The attackers scaled the walls, slaying the gatekeepers 'by treachery', according to the Welsh Bruts. Hywel, his wife, sons and daughters were imprisoned, with the castle fired by the victorious rebels who sent messages to summon aid from Llywelyn. Roger Mortimer assembled a force to retake Cefnlllys but was heavily outnumbered as Llywelyn had come south with his entire host. It was calculated that the Welsh army stood at some 300 heavy cavalry and 30,000 foot. The action was short, and Roger Mortimer was forced to take refuge in the ruined and unprovisioned walls of Cefnlllys castle.

Llywelyn did not merely wait to starve out Roger Mortimer but, with Cefnlllys surrounded, he sent out forces to take and destroy Roger's castles of Knucklas, Presteigne, Knighton and Norton. With no relief coming, Roger accepted an offer of free passage back to England, and the site of the ruined Cefnlllys castle remained in the hands of Llywelyn.

By 1267, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd was at the height of his power, a fact recognised by the Treaty of Montgomery, which acknowledged his title of Prince of Wales. The treaty, however, contained some ambiguous aspects, not least in relation to Maelienydd and Cefnlllys:



*It's a short but steep climb up to Cefnlllys castle*

*'In the land of Maelienydd the noble man Roger Mortimer shall be allowed to erect or to build a castle as he wishes; let restitution of that castle and that land be made to Llywelyn, if he claims a right therein and if it is adjudged to him.'*

It was agreed, therefore, that Roger Mortimer could re-occupy Maelienydd and rebuild Cefnlllys castle on condition that once this was done the right as to who should hold the land should be settled between Roger and Llywelyn. By the end of 1268 Llywelyn had complained to the king that although Roger had rebuilt the castle he had received no justice concerning the ownership of it or the land. In July 1273 or 1274 Llywelyn again pressed his case, and further complained that Roger had also built a new castle on the site, the current southern castle. Llywelyn's deputations brought him no satisfaction and Cefnlllys was still a Mortimer castle when Llywelyn was defeated in 1277.



*The complicated earthworks at Cefnlllys with the first castle at the far end and its replacement of c.1273 at this end, all probably within an Iron-Aged hillfort*

The new castle appears to have been garrisoned but to have seen little action during the Welsh wars of 1277 and 1282, which resulted in the final defeat and death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Despite its commanding position, however, in late 1294 Cefnlllys Castle again succumbed to the men of Maelienydd who rose in the general rising of that year.

Cefnlllys remained in the hands of successive Mortimers, appearing in lists of their holdings throughout the 14th century, reverting briefly to the Crown on several occasions such as the 1322 dispossession of Roger Mortimer [d.1330] and during the lengthy minorities of the Mortimer heirs. It was also often held by Mortimer dowagers. The castle was under Crown control when the Glyndwr rebellion broke out in 1401, being garrisoned during the uprising and may have been 'burned and wasted by the Welsh rebels' in 1405, although this has been disputed.



*All that remains of the keep of the second castle*

Following the death without an heir of Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March in 1425, Cefnlllys passed to his nephew, Richard, duke of York, who took up his inheritance in 1432. Although he may never have visited it, the castle was possibly repaired in the 1430s. Ownership of the site passed from Richard, duke of York to his son Edward, who was crowned Edward IV in 1461, thus delivering Cefnlllys into the ownership of the Crown. In

1493 the site was among a number granted to Prince Arthur, firstborn son of Henry VII, and a few years later it was described as 'now downe' by John Leland in the early 16th century. In 1687 it is mentioned as 'the ruins of an old castle'.

Returning to the history of Abbey Cwm Hir, after Llywelyn ap Gruffudd's death in 1282 his head was sent to London to be exhibited at the Tower, but it is believed that the Monks of Cwm Hir took his body and buried it in the Abbey, and this is commemorated by a modern stone plaque set in the ground at the eastern end of the nave.

Despite the magnificent size of its church, Abbey Cwm Hir was never a large or wealthy community. In 1291 it was assessed for taxation purposes at £35:12s per annum; 90 years later there were 4 monks, two of English origin, two of Welsh, though by 1390 this had doubled to 8.

In 1400, during Owain Glyn Dwr's War of Independence, Abbey Cwm Hir was unable to give open support because of its Mortimer patronage and it is reported that the Abbey buildings were 'spoiled and defaced' by Glyn Dwr's men. As with Cefnlllys, the Abbey became Crown property in 1461 on the accession of Edward IV.

In the 1530s, there were three monks and the income of Cwm Hir was far less than £100. During the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, it was one of the first to be dissolved. The abbot at the time was John Glyn who had previously been abbot of Dore, from which office he had been deprived for negligence in 1528/9.

In the decades and centuries after the dissolution, much of the stone from the Abbey was used to build farms and local churches, and particularly, in 1830, the Hall on the hillside opposite. Five arches from the Abbey nave were used to enlarge Llanidloes Church in 1542, where they can still be seen.



*The memorial to Llywelyn ap Gruffudd at Abbey Cwm Hir*