

IN THIS ISSUE

Forthcoming Events

News Items

- The Ludlow Castle Heraldic Roll
- Visit to Wigmore Abbey
- The Battle of Evesham
- Horses in the Medieval Period
- Changing role for Hugh Wood
- New coin: the White Lion of Mortimer
- New Members

Articles

- An Early Mortimer Charter and Seal
- *Philip Hume*
- Some Medieval Pilgrims to Santiago
- *John Hopkins*
- Introducing the Mortimers 10:
Sir Edmund Mortimer (d.1408/9) and
Edmund Mortimer, 5th E. of March (d.1425)
- *Hugh Wood*



A Rose Noble of Edward IV (1464-1470)

In the early years of Edward IV, heavy English gold coins were worth more on the Continent than at home, so many left the country, causing a shortage of gold. Lighter coins were introduced including this new coin worth 30 shillings. It was unpopular and lasted only a few years.

Forthcoming MHS Events

Our programme of events for the coming months features some of our favourite speakers, including Dr Colin Veach, Prof. Matthew Strickland, Dr David Stephenson, Dr Sophie Ambler and Prof. Dan Power.

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

A morning mini-conference to be held in Church Stretton High School - [see next page](#)

Saturday 15th February 2020 - *Kings, Lords, Soldiers and Horses: the Reality of Medieval Warfare*

A morning mini-conference with optional afternoon practical sessions on armour, the longbow and crossbow. Speakers include Prof. Matthew Strickland and Dr Andy King. At Moor Park School near Ludlow.

Saturday 28th March 2020 - *AGM and Talk on the Medieval History of Weobley*

The AGM is open to all. Afterwards MHS member Andrew Stirling Brown will talk about Weobley which was the *caput* of the Lacy lordship of Weobley, which included Ewyas Lacy and Ludlow.

Morning only - In Weobley Community Hall.

Saturday 16th May 2020 - *Mayhem, Murder and Marriage: The Mortimers and the Welsh Princes*

A whole-day joint conference with the Radnorshire Society. In Knighton Community Centre, Powys.



LORDSHIP & ENDURING INFLUENCE:

THE MORTIMERS IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Trim Castle ©Andrew Parnell

SATURDAY 30TH NOVEMBER 2019 10AM - 1PM
CHURCH STRETTON HIGH SCHOOL

Programme:

9.15am Registration and Refreshments

10.00am Welcome & Address

'Disputed Isle: The Foundations of Mortimer Power in Ireland'
Dr Colin Veach

10.45am **'A Task too Great for One Dynasty? The Mortimers & Ireland, 1340-1398'**
Dr Simon Egan

11.30am Questions followed by refreshments

12.10pm **'The Unravelling of Ireland and the Downfall of Richard II'**
Emeritus Professor Nigel Saul

12.55pm Questions & End of Programme

Tickets: Members £9; non-members £13

Booking - for more details and online booking [click here](#)

If you prefer to pay by cheque

- 1) first phone the Secretary on 01584 831654 to check availability and secure your tickets, then
- 2) send a cheque made out to Mortimer History Society to the address below giving the names of those attending, and clearly indicating whether or not they are members of MHS.

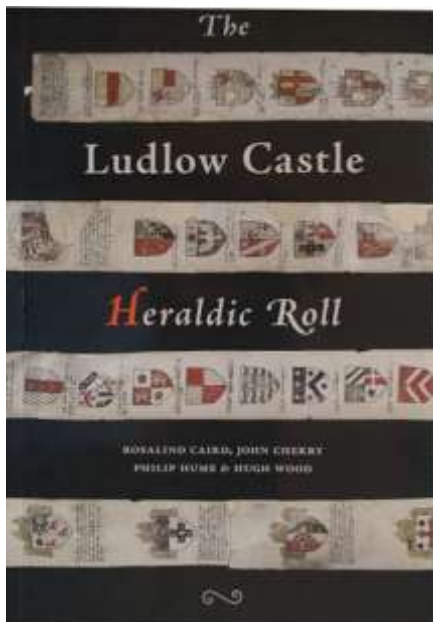
Hon. Secretary, Waterloo Lodge, Orleton Common, Ludlow SY8 4JG

News Items

The Ludlow Castle Heraldic Roll of c.1576 - An Update

Members may remember that four years ago, in October 2015, we discovered the existence of a roll of parchment just 4 inches wide but 15 feet long. It is a record of coats of arms set up in the chapel in the inner bailey of Ludlow castle in 1574 by Sir Henry Sidney KG, Lord President of the Council in the Marches. The original shields are long gone, so this was a find of great significance for Ludlow.

Although a Tudor roll, it includes the coats of arms of some previous owners of the castle including several Mortimers and Yorkists. The project to acquire the roll, and copy, research and conserve it, was mainly undertaken by four members of MHS: Rosalind Caird, John Cherry, Philip Hume and Hugh Wood.



The new book about the roll

We launched an appeal to raise the necessary funds and exhibited the roll in Ludlow. The project clearly captured the imagination of many people. Donations were received from individuals and organisations in and around Ludlow and we were awarded significant grants from a number of national bodies. Particularly important were the donations received from MHS members in Britain and abroad and we are most grateful for your support.

Since acquiring the roll, we have had several excellent copies made on paper, one of which will be on permanent display at Ludlow Castle and another is used as part of our history programme in local primary schools. Much work has been done on the original roll to conserve it and to analyse the pigments used.

Equally important has been the research that we have conducted into the heraldry itself and into the people whose arms appear on the roll. We've also used the opportunity to find out more about Sir Henry Sidney himself and the role of heraldry in the 16th century.

Four years on, the results of all our efforts have come to fruition in three significant events.

1. **The conference** held jointly with the Friends of Ludlow Museum on 5th October which proved most interesting and attracted almost 100 people.
2. **An exhibition** about the roll in the Shropshire Museums Collection Centre in Ludlow, running until 3rd January 2020 - do visit if you can.
3. **The launch of a book** about the roll, written jointly by the four members of MHS listed above and published by Logaston Press. As well as being a detailed guide to the people on the roll and their coats of arms, it sets this important document within its Tudor context, with articles on the castle itself, on Sir Henry Sidney and his family, on the Council in the Marches and on the display of heraldry in Tudor times.

This beautiful and fascinating book has 250 pages and is lavishly illustrated. It costs £12.95 and is available from booksellers, but also through the shop on our website.

Members' Visit to Wigmore Abbey



On 4th September over 100 members visited the site of Wigmore Abbey, founded by Hugh Mortimer in 1179. Here our Patron, John Challis, is explaining the layout of the monastery in front of his home, which is the former abbot's lodging. With the adjacent gatehouse, this is the only significant medieval building remaining.

The Battle of Evesham 1265



This year, for the first time, MHS had a stand at the Battle of Evesham Medieval Festival. Here are some of the Freeman of Gwent, including MHS members Jane Thomas and Tony Jones. At the battle in 1265, Simon de Montfort was slain by Roger Mortimer (d1282)

Horses in the Medieval Period

In this age of mechanised transport, it's easy to forget the fundamental importance of horses throughout the ages. The use of the horse in the medieval period is a subject of great variety and interest, embracing the different types and uses of horses; their feeding and care; their training; riding techniques; jousting and warfare; saddlery and armour etc.

How tall was a destrier? When did women start riding side-saddle? How much was a warhorse worth? What's the difference between a courser, rouncy, palfrey, sumptuary and destrier? What are the various riding techniques?

MHS member Lindsay Smith has studied this subject for many years and wonders whether there are any other members with a similar interest. If so, she'd love to hear from you - lindsaysmith2017@gmail.com or 07989 674475.



Here is Richard Marshal, 3rd Earl of Pembroke unseating Baldwin de Guines during a skirmish before the battle of Monmouth in 1233.

Hugh Wood

Some of you will be aware of the many roles that Hugh has had within our society over the years - Treasurer for a time, and most recently Membership Secretary, Editor of Mortimer Matters and Webmaster to name a few, and of course his recent work on the Ludlow roll – a stalwart of our Society during its 10-year history. As Hugh steps down from his roles as Membership Secretary and Editor of Mortimer Matters - though remaining a valued member of our committee and still responsible for the website - I'd like to take the opportunity to thank him for all that he has contributed. Without his hard work and dedication, the Society would not be quite the success that it is today. I for one am grateful for his support and thoughtful reflections as we plan the way forward for the Society at each meeting.

Jason O'Keefe, Chairman

A Short Response from Hugh

In conversation, a few people have mentioned my retirement from MHS and I've had to put them straight. I will be remaining a very active member of the Society, but am taking a step away from the day-to-day administration. In 2020, I plan to lead a project to develop a brand-new website which will have additional features like mapping. I'd very much like to hear from any member with recent experience of setting-up websites. My main interest is in Mortimer heraldry and genealogy, but this has had to take a back seat till now, while I've been so busy on other things. We used to have a thriving heraldry group within the Society which organised several trips. Please get in touch if you know something about heraldry and would like to help me get that up and running again. hugh@hughanddoris.co.uk or 01584 876901.

New Coins from the Royal Mint - The White Lion of Mortimer

The Queen's Beasts Collection is a series of ten coins from The Royal Mint, inspired by the ancestral beasts of heraldry, myth and legend that have watched over Her Majesty The Queen throughout her extraordinary reign, from her coronation to her Sapphire Jubilee. The queen is descended from the Mortimers and this coin shows the white lion of Mortimer which is usually shown sitting, as here, rather than rampant. The shield includes the *rose en soleil* badge associated with Edward IV.

See <https://www.royalmint.com/queens-beast/> for more information.



New Members

We welcome the following new members to the Society.

Lynda Baker	Worcestershire UK	Michael Heslop	Surrey UK
John Bibby	Shropshire UK	Elizabeth Lloyd	Herefordshire UK
Jane & Philip Brown	Herefordshire UK	Joyce Marston	Herefordshire UK
Patrick Clifford	Wiltshire UK	Liz Molyneux	Powys, Wales UK
Lauren & Martyn Fewings	Herefordshire UK	Howard Mortimer	Cheshire UK
John Freeman	East Sussex UK	David Snowden	Worcestershire UK
Dawn Hall	Shropshire UK	James Vant	Herefordshire UK
Linda Hart	Worcestershire UK	Robert Young	Worcestershire

An Early Mortimer Charter and Seal

By MHS Secretary Philip Hume

This is the oldest extant charter of Abbey Cwm Hir. In this article, Philip Hume sets this grant of lands from the Mortimers in its historical context.



A digital image of UCL Special Collections MS DEEDS/LAT/1 - The Charter granted by Roger Mortimer to Abbey Cwm Hir in 1200

The image shows an original charter with its seal that was issued in 1200 (by modern calendar) by Roger Mortimer (d.1214) to the monks of Abbey Cwm Hir. The charter confirms the lands already held by the Abbey along with new grants of land. After the standard clause that the grant was for the salvation of the souls of Roger and his family, there is a further, very unusual addition that the grant is also for the salvation of the souls 'of his men who lost their lives in this very conquest'. Roger Mortimer had gained the patronage of Abbey Cwm Hir through conquest, and this clause reflects the 100 years of war and bitter conflict that had preceded the victory.

The Norman barons placed in the border region after 1066 were determined to conquer new lands in Wales, and the Mortimers were no exception. Based at Wigmore in north Herefordshire, the obvious target for their expansionist ambitions lay immediately to the west - the Welsh district of Maelienydd in the area known as Rhwng Gwy a Hafren (literally, the lands between the Wye and the Severn).

It is likely that it was Ralph Mortimer (d.1115-27) who first conquered lands in Maelienydd in the 1090s when the Normans poured through central Wales and onto south-west Wales. Strong Welsh resistance soon followed, and it is possible that they regained the more upland areas of Maelienydd. Ralph returned to Normandy and there is no record of a Mortimer present in England for the first thirty or so years of the twelfth century. During this period of absence, Maelienydd was almost certainly fully regained by the Welsh as the chronicles record that in 1144 Ralph's

son, Hugh Mortimer (d.1181-85), 'repaired the castle of Cymaron, and a second time gained possession of Maelienydd.' The fight for control of Maelienydd became a violent, drawn-out feud between the Mortimers and the native Welsh rulers, for example, in 1146 Hugh killed Maredudd ap Madog ab Idnerth.

For a second time, Mortimer control was brief. By the 1150s another son of Madog ab Idnerth, Cadwallon, was in control of Maelienydd. In large part this was as a result of the weakness of the English crown during the civil wars between King Stephen and his cousin the Empress Matilda. Cadwallon ap Madog and his sons, however, were able to keep control of Maelienydd for the next 40 years, particularly during the period when Henry II adopted a policy of recognising the positions of the native Welsh rulers. Secure in his rule, Cadwallon founded Abbey Cwm Hir in 1176 on the western edges of Maelienydd. The personal animosity, however, lingered and deepened. In 1179, Cadwallon whilst returning from the English court with letters of safe conduct, was set on and murdered by the men of Roger Mortimer (d.1214), Hugh's son and heir. Roger was punished with three years in prison.

Roger had to wait another nearly twenty years before he was able to reconquer Maelienydd in the mid-1190s, expelling the sons of Cadwallon, and thus acquiring the patronage of Abbey Cwm Hir. At the turn of the century, when he granted the charter, Roger Mortimer will have assumed that, after a century of conflict, Maelienydd was finally and permanently under Mortimer control. However, this was not to be as Welsh rule was restored around 1215. Control continued to pass back and forth until the final conquest of Wales by Edward I in 1282-83 when the Mortimers finally gained permanent rule of Maelienydd.

There is an interesting story about the charter that recounts how, in 1956, someone bought some parchment in Battle, Sussex, intending to use it to make a lampshade. When they got home with their purchase, they decided that it was far too small (it measures 200 x 230 mm) for that purpose. Thinking that it could be historically important, they took it to the library at University College, London, where it was recognised as the earliest known charter of Abbey Cwm Hir. The charter is now held in the archives of University College, London where it can be viewed by arrangement.



Some of the haunting remains of Abbey Cwm Hir

Some Medieval English Pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela

By MHS Member John T Hopkins

This article (without the photographs taken by the author) was first published in the Bulletin of the Confraternity of St James, No. 82, June 2003. The author would like to thank the CSJ for permission to reprint the article.

The twelfth century was the golden age of English pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. The first known pilgrim was Ansgot of Burwell in Lincolnshire who returned sometime between 1093 and 1123; at the same period, Richard Mauleverer went from Yorkshire. St Godfric of Finchale, former pedlar, sailor, merchant and possibly pirate, visited Santiago en route from Jerusalem. In the mid-twelfth century, Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester, abbot of Glastonbury and a brother of King Stephen, made a pilgrimage. Matilda, daughter of Henry I, went to Compostela in 1125 and was said to have been given a hand of St James as a relic for Reading Abby, which house she made the centre of the Santiago cult in England.



*The 11th century pilgrims' bridge at
Puente la Reina on Navarre ©John Hopkins*

It is possible that close ties with France and the influence of the Cluniac order facilitated English pilgrimage to Galicia by land, though the direct sea route seems to have been popular too. The murder of Becket in 1170, and his subsequent canonisation, made Canterbury a major shrine for English pilgrims, but for those wanting a more demanding experience, Santiago, Rome and Jerusalem remained prime goals. Henry II vowed to go to Santiago as a penance after 1170 and requested a safe conduct from Ferdinand II, king of León, though Henry never in fact went.

The archbishop of York in 1222 and the bishop of Worcester in 1271 both journeyed to Compostela. In 1283, a priest of Chichester was ordered by the Archbishop of Canterbury to travel to Santiago as a penance. After a conviction for adultery, Mabel de Boclande was given the choice around 1330 of making a pilgrimage to Galicia or enduring six floggings.

A charter recorded in a Duchy of Lancasteroucher book (held at the National Archives in Kew, ref DL 42/2) records a gift by Ranulph II, earl of Chester, of Wattleia (is this present day Wheatley, in Nottinghamshire?) to his elder half-brother, William Roumare, earl of Lincoln, on the latter's return from pilgrimage to Santiago – "...redivit de itinere sancti Iacobi apostoli in crastina die post festum sancte Crucis, quod celebrantur mense Septembri..." He returned from his trip to Santiago the day after the feast of the Holy Cross, which is celebrated on 15 September. There are transcripts of this deed in the Harleian MSS, Lansdowne MSS, Dugdale MSS, Rawlinson MSS and Towneley MSS.

William had been made earl of Lincoln in 1140 or 1141 and had an active political and military career. The Complete Peerage states that his pilgrimage was in 1152 or 1153, without giving any reason or source. Geoffrey Barraclough argued that "this suggestion has little to recommend it". Judging from the witnesses to the charters, and what we know of their active years, William's pilgrimage may have been some years earlier. One witness, Robert Grevesac, is not known of after 1146.



The 12thC arches at Shobdon

©Noriko Horiuchi

Waleran of Meulan, earl of Worcester from about 1138, is known to have been to Santiago in 1144 or 1145 – he announced his intention in a charter relating to Bec in Normandy and referred to his pilgrimage (peregrinacio) in an order issued to the sheriff of Worcestershire. The Complete Peerage suggests that it "might not be fanciful to suggest that Earl William went at the same time". Waleron went on a crusade in 1147 to 1149, surviving a shipwreck off southern France. He was a benefactor to several West Midlands religious foundations, such as Worcester Cathedral, Gloucester Abbey and Leominster Priory in Herefordshire.

In Herefordshire, there developed in the twelfth century a fine school of church decoration. Rivalries among Norman marcher or border lords may have prompted competition to build impressive churches in the new style and to impose the new regime and develop its cultural credentials. At Wigmore, Lord Hugh Mortimer appointed as his chief steward Oliver de Merlimond who supervised work on several churches in Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire. He was given the manor of Shobdon by Sir Hugh. After major works were planned at Brinsop and Shobdon, Oliver "had the great wish to undertake a pilgrimage to Saint James and entrusted to a knight, Bernard, all the responsibility for the work with the necessary

funds", according to the chronicle of Wigmore Abbey. He made his pilgrimage in 1130 or 1139 and probably returned via western France as he is known to have stayed en route at the abbey of St Victor in Paris, from where two canons were sent to assist in the consecration of Shobdon church. It is likely that he had gone to Santiago with a sculptor to make sketches of the stone carvings at the cathedral, or brought some sculptors back with him to Herefordshire.



12thC portico of the former church of Cerzo de Riotirón, Burgos, Castille

© John Hopkins

At the Romanesque masterpiece of Kilpeck in the southern part of the county, some of the chancel arch figures

bear a strong resemblance to forms in the Puerta de las Platerias at Santiago Cathedral. Uwe Geese, however, saw any strong influences here as being “largely drowned out by the decorative idiom of the English Romanesque, and little can be established of their provenance”. However, he cites Bredekamp’s view that the sheela-na-gig at Frómista was the inspiration for that at Oliver’s church at Kilpeck, and that Oliver probably saw the Spanish carving on his journey. Kilpeck’s carvings are in fact not typically Norman – there are Celtic and Norse influences and the style has pagan elements and uses plant forms. A juggler figure on the stringcourse at Kilpeck is similar to several carvings in France and Spain. De Merlimond founded several St James’ churches in Herefordshire. There are about ten in the county, mostly in the east. It remains one of the finest areas in England for enjoying twelfth century church architecture and sculpture. It is a happy thought that a Santiago pilgrimage may have inspired this.

Bibliography

G Barraclough *Early Cheshire Charters* (Lancs and Cheshire Record Society, 1957) and *Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester, c1071-1237*

H Bredekamp *San Martín in Frómista* (Berlin, 1991)

G E Cockayne *The Complete Peerage* (Alan Sutton, 1982)

J C Dickinson and P T Ricketts *The Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Wigmore Abbey* (Transactions of Woolhope Naturalists’ Club, vol. 39, 1969)

U Geese *Romanesque Sculpture* (in *Romanesque: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting*, ed R Toman, (Konemann 1997)

E Mullins *The Pilgrimage to Santiago* (Secker and Warburg, 1974)

G Ormerod *History of the County Palatine of Chester* (ed 1879)

M Thurlby *The Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture* (Logaston Press, 1999)

G Zarnecki *English Romanesque Sculpture 1066-1140* (London, 1951) and *La sculpture romane des “Marches Gauloises”* (Bayle, 1997)



Celtic & Norse influences at Kilpeck

Introducing the Mortimers 10: Sir Edmund Mortimer (1376-1409) and Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March (1391-1425)

by Hugh Wood. *In successive editions of Mortimer Matters we have been 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. This is the final chapter.*

The Wars of the Roses between the houses of York and Lancaster are usually said to have begun in 1455 when Richard, 3rd Duke of York, defeated and captured King Henry VI at the 1st Battle of St Albans. But the seeds of civil war can be seen at least 80 years earlier, in the friction between Edmund Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March, and John of Gaunt, 1st Duke of Lancaster. Later, the unilateral seizure of the crown in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke, the 2nd Duke of Lancaster, polarised the country. The unpopularity of his reign as Henry IV caused many to support an alternative, Mortimer, claim to the throne. So, for first 25 years of the 15th century the Lancastrian kings had to be always on their guard against the Mortimer threat. Strangely, the one Mortimer who doesn't seem to have been too enthusiastic about a Mortimer take-over seems to have been Edmund, the 5th and last Mortimer Earl of March.

Edmund is a name that occurs repeatedly in the history of the Mortimers of Wigmore. This article is about two Edmund Mortimers, so it's important to distinguish clearly between them. The later Mortimer Earls of March were:

- Edmund Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March, mentioned above;
- Roger Mortimer, 4th Earl of March who had a younger brother Sir Edmund, who is the subject of the first half of this article;
- Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March who is the subject of the second half.

Sir Edmund Mortimer, the younger brother of Roger, 4th Earl of March, was born in Ludlow in 1376. His father died soon after his 5th birthday but left him well provided for. He was very close to his older brother, who subsequently granted him various estates, so he was very wealthy, for a younger son. In 1397 he served as his brother's lieutenant in Ireland but, his brother dying the following year and his uncle Thomas the year after, he soon became the only surviving adult male Mortimer of Wigmore.



King Henry IV

In 1399, Henry Bolingbroke was in exile on the Continent when his father, John of Gaunt, died. Richard II then made a fatal mistake: he seized Bolingbroke's estates and denied him his inheritance. With little to lose, the new Duke of Lancaster now returned to England. The king was away in Ireland and Lancaster met no opposition as people were horrified by the actions of the king and sympathetic to Lancaster's situation. Sir Edmund Mortimer could see the way things were going and swore allegiance to him in Hereford. Later in the same year Richard II was deposed and Lancaster was crowned as Henry IV.

Also supporting Henry of Lancaster against Richard II had been the Percys: Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and his son Sir Henry Percy, nicknamed Hotspur. Although Hotspur was 12 years older than Edmund Mortimer, a strong bond developed between them. Hotspur served in Ireland with Edmund's brother Roger, the 4th Earl of March, and he was married to their older sister Elizabeth. In 1400, Owain Glyndwr declared himself *Prince of Wales* and rebelled against English rule. Many of the native Welsh actively supported him, and he rapidly took control of extensive areas of northern and central Wales. Hotspur was already High Sheriff of Flint but, in March 1402 he was appointed the king's Royal Lieutenant in North Wales, charged with defeating Glyndwr and restoring English rule.

When Owain Glyndwr started to threaten Mortimer estates in Central Wales, Sir Edmund Mortimer raised a strong force from among the men of Herefordshire and Maellienydd and moved against him. On 22nd June 1402 the two armies met at Pilleth, just to the west of Knighton and Presteigne. The English army was heavily defeated and Sir Edmund Mortimer was captured.



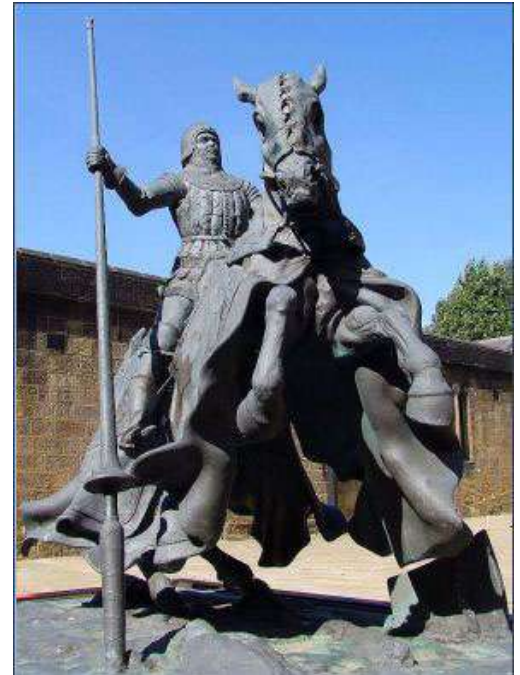
The Welsh were in a strong position on top of Bryn Glas, the hill on the right

Given the scale of the defeat, there has been speculation that Mortimer's Welsh soldiers may have changed sides, and Sir Edmund's personal commitment to the battle was seriously questioned in the light of future events. He was taken to Glyndwr's homeland in Snowdonia where he was treated well. Cynical about Mortimer's loyalty, Henry IV forbade the Percys from ransoming him and, in October of the same year, he started to seize his lands and give them to others.

Any remaining loyalty Edmund might have had then disappeared completely and he threw in his lot with Glyndwr. In November, he married Owain's daughter Catherine, and in December he was back in Maelienydd. There he publicly announced that he had joined Glyndwr and that their objective was to restore Richard II, if still alive, or to confer the throne on Sir Edmund's nephew, Edmund, 5th Earl of March.

Increasingly disillusioned with Henry IV, in the following year the Percys joined Glyndwr and Mortimer in open rebellion. In July 1403 Hotspur met Henry IV in battle at Shrewsbury. Despite the non-arrival of Hotspur's father, with his forces, the battle was evenly fought until Hotspur was killed by an arrow, when the tide turned. The king was eventually victorious, though his army sustained heavy losses.

This was not the end of the rebels' activities, however. In February 1405, Owain Glyndwr, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and Sir Edmund Mortimer signed a Tripartite Indenture which carved up England and Wales into three parts: Glyndwr was to have complete overlordship of Wales, Percy was to control all of northern England and some counties in central and eastern England, while Sir Edmund Mortimer was to have the rest of southern England. But it was not to be: when Northumberland took up arms again in May 1405, this second rebellion was to prove as unsuccessful as the first.



Statue of Hotspur at Alnwick

Sir Edmund now dropped into the background, and the situation returned once again to Glyndwr and the Welsh against the English king. From 1406 onwards, Henry IV gradually regained more and more control of Wales and Glyndwr's cause declined. This was a bad time for Sir Edmund Mortimer. He was in Harlech castle during the eight-month siege by Henry IV's son, Henry, Prince of Wales and died there in some distress in late 1408 or early 1409.

Edmund Mortimer, 5th Earl of March was born in Ireland in 1391. He was only six when his father was killed and there were just 15 years between himself and his uncle, Sir Edmund Mortimer. Having usurped the throne in 1399, Henry IV was very conscious of potential threats to his position. Ever since the 3rd Earl of March married Philippa, the daughter of Edward III's 2nd son, the Mortimers had been seen by many as legitimate heirs to the throne. Working on the premise that it is wise to "keep your enemies near you" he placed the young Edmund, Earl of March under strict supervision at Windsor Castle with his brother Roger. They appear to have been treated well and were brought up with the king's own children. While campaigning in North Wales, the king had the boys temporarily transferred to Berkhamsted.



The motte at Berkhamsted Castle

Opposition to the rule of Henry IV began as early as December 1399 with the ill-fated Epiphany Rising. One of those executed for being involved was Thomas le Despenser, previously Earl of Gloucester. His wife Constance of York was daughter of Edmund of Langley, 4th son of Edward III and, consequently, first cousin to Henry IV. The wisdom of keeping the boys close to him was underlined when it became absolutely clear that Sir Edmund Mortimer had defected to Glyndwr and was proclaiming his intention of placing his nephew on the throne.

However the boys were successfully abducted from Windsor on 13th February 1405. Constance of York is said to have been behind the escape, with the objective of enabling them to join their uncle in Wales. Unfortunately they were recaptured near Cheltenham and were then placed under stricter supervision at Pevensey castle. Edmund remained in custody until the death of Henry IV in 1413 by which time he was 21.



The Roman west wall at Pevensey

The new king, Henry V, was just 5 years older than Edmund. They had known each other for many years and clearly got on well together. Despite renewed calls for the Mortimer Earl of March to inherit the throne, the king released him from his detention, knighted him on the eve of his coronation and allowed him to inherit his estates. When he married without the king's approval, Henry fined Edmund 10,000 marks, but the two remained close. Mortimer was involved in the preparations for Henry's invasion of France and witnessed his will at Southampton.

Edmund's sister Anne Mortimer was married to Richard of Conisbrough, brother of the 2nd Duke of York and of Constance, mentioned above. Richard continued the Yorkist vendetta against the Lancastrians and conspired with two others to kill Henry V and place his brother-in-law, the Earl of March, on the throne. It is not clear when and how Edmund found out about the plot, or whether he was initially involved, but on 31st July 1415 he revealed it to the king at Portchester. Henry accepted that Edmund was blameless and, indeed, appointed him onto the commission to try the conspirators. The members of the Southampton Plot, as it is called, were all executed.

On paper Edmund was a rich man, but his estates in both Wales and Ireland had suffered severely from rebellious incursions. In 1415, deeply in debt, he joined the king's expedition to Normandy and the rest of his life is a record of unblemished service to the crown. He led a group of 59 men at arms and 160 archers but, having contracted dysentery during the siege of Harfleur he was repatriated and missed Agincourt. For the next five years or so, he was involved in the war. In 1416 he returned to Harfleur with the king's brother, John, Duke of Bedford, to support the garrison there. The following year he took a further force of 100 lances and 300 archers to France and was put in charge of the large fleet patrolling the seas. He was appointed King's Lieutenant in Normandy in 1418 but received few profits from the position.



*Richard of Conisbrough
3rd Earl of Cambridge*



*The Wedding of Henry V and
Catherine of Valois*

Despite the ongoing war, Henry V married Catherine de Valois, youngest daughter of Charles VI of France. They were married at Troyes on 2nd June 1420 and Edmund travelled back to England with the happy couple for the queen's coronation. In October 1421 he was with Henry when he laid siege to Meaux. This was to be the king's last campaign as he became ill and died suddenly at the end of August.

Questions remain about what kind of a man Edmund was, and about how he was regarded by Henry V and by the other nobles. The hazy picture that we do have suggests a straightforward, uncomplicated, basically honest man without personal ambition whose behaviour and personality encouraged people to trust him and who was not seen as a threat to the crown. Though lacking the ability and confidence to be a strong leader, he was certainly entrusted with several significant roles during the war.

Henry VI was still a babe-in-arms when his father died. Edmund was appointed as a member of the Regency Council to rule in the king's name during his minority. But despite Edmund's loyalty and his position at the centre of government, for others the dream of having a Mortimer on the throne clearly remained. In 1424 Sir John Mortimer was tried for treason and executed. He was convicted of plotting a rising in Wales to put Edmund on the throne. It is not clear who this John Mortimer was, but it's an interesting footnote to the life of the last Mortimer Earl of March, given the traumatic civil war which was still to come.

By this time Edmund seems to have begun to assert himself more. He had a violent quarrel with the Duke of Gloucester about the size of his retinue and he may even have been suspected of being complicit in Sir John Mortimer's plot. So it could have been convenient to get him out of the way. Whatever the reason, in 1423 he was appointed King's Lieutenant in Ireland. He certainly needed to visit his ravaged estates there. He eventually sailed in 1424 but died at Trim the following year, of plague, aged 33. He had no children and, with his death, the direct senior line of the Mortimers of Wigmore came to an end. The Mortimer estates and the earldom of March passed to his nephew Richard, the 3rd Duke of York and thence to the Yorkist kings before becoming subsumed within all royal estates and titles from Henry VIII onwards.