

## Destrier and courser: The landscape of horse studs in medieval England



The warhorse is the iconic animal of the Middle Ages, with the image of the mounted knight central to aristocratic identity and inextricably bound up with concepts of chivalry. But despite being well-known, some aspects of medieval horses and horsemanship are poorly understood. With this in mind, medieval equines are now the subject of a three-year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project entitled **Warhorse: The Archaeology of a Military Revolution?**

**B**ased at the universities of Exeter and East Anglia, this project represents the first systematic attempt to analyse the archaeological evidence for medieval horses, with a focus on the classic martial horse, the destrier. It comprises three research strands. The first is the examination of medieval horse bones recovered from archaeological excavations across England and Wales, with a view to analysing horse size and conformation and patterns of wear or trauma that might indicate activity during life. Second is the analysis of horse armour from national and international collections as well as items of horse apparel, such as bridles, bits, stirrups and harness pendants. These items are now being recovered in considerable quantities by metal detectorists and recorded via the



**Knight and warhorse from the Westminster Psalter c.1250.**

Portable Antiquities Scheme. Third, the project is investigating the equine landscapes of the Middle Ages; the places where horses were bred and trained; especially the evidence for

horse studs. Although this is primarily an archaeological project, this strand requires sustained use of the voluminous documentary material held in The National Archives at Kew and

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the project team at the University of East Anglia has been trawling the financial accounts of the royal studs and stables. While still early days, this part of the project is currently the most advanced and starting to yield some results.

## Clusters, networks and detailed breeding programmes

So far over one hundred and fifty horse studs of all kinds – royal, baronial and ecclesiastical, in the period from the tenth to the sixteenth century have been identified. Some interesting patterns seem to be emerging. In the period 1290-1360 the number of royal studs seems to have increased, before dropping markedly thereafter, until only a handful remain during the reign of Henry VIII. Quite why this might be the case is currently being explored, but seems to be connected with an attempt on the part of the three Edwards to raise the size and quality of their horseflesh in the first half of the fourteenth

century, before later changes in the composition of English armies during the Hundred Years War led to smaller, lighter, 'coursers' being favoured over their bigger counterparts and leaving many studs somewhat redundant.

The project has emphatically confirmed the fact that medieval horse studs were housed within the bounds of deer parks. But analysis of the royal stable accounts show that studs are best thought of as 'clusters', in that their constituent parts were spread across the landscape, albeit in close proximity. At Rayleigh in Essex for example in the 1320s, the stud occupied the parks at Rayleigh, Eastwood, Hadleigh and probably at Thundersely, with the horses rotated from pasture to pasture. What also emerges very clearly from the documents is that each stud formed part of a wider network in which specialised horse breeding was practised. At the largest studs there were usually one or two resident stallions and an associated group of mares and foals. But at other places specific animals were grouped together;

Odiham in Hampshire for example seems to have served primarily as an enclosure for colts, while Osney in Oxfordshire seems to have been reserved for foals.

What the documents reveal in astonishing detail are the conditions in which elite horses were raised and kept. Payments for fodder, straw, ropes and iron for horseshoes are the most common, but it is the unusual payments that catch the eye, such as those for firewood to keep stables warm over the winter, liquorice (presumably used a purgative – an early worming treatment?) and canvas for tester canopies that were placed above horses in stables in order to stop bugs in the thatched roof falling onto the animals below. As there is also a tendency for the names of stallions to be recorded, it means that horse itineraries can start to be recovered. One such horse – one Bayard de la Tache – is known to have been at the royal stud at Knowle in 1291 and at Woodstock in 1295, before being taken to a hospital in Oxford that year as he was recorded as suffering from leprosy.

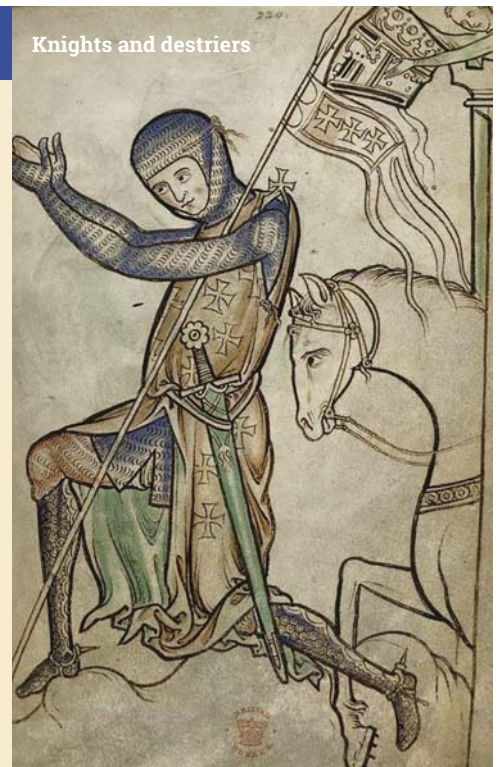
## Stables, stud houses and enclosures

About the buildings that formed part of the studs themselves the documents say little, but slowly the picture is becoming clearer. At Princes Risborough in Buckinghamshire we hear of 'the great stable' in the 1360s, while at Blandsby at Picking in Yorkshire in the 1320s there are references to the 'stud house'. Direct evidence of structures associated with breeding come from Knaresborough and Burstwick in Yorkshire in 1359, where enclosures 'in which the king's mares may be covered' are explicitly mentioned. There are other, more archaeological techniques that we can use to shed light on the nature of the built environment at stud sites. Lidar is one such possibility and at Mere in Wiltshire, a suggestive pattern of building platforms and enclosures may indicate the stud of Richard earl of Cornwall, active in the late thirteenth century.

Of course studs are more than just the passive remains of stables and enclosures; they also represent evidence for the relationships between man and beast. Any horseman or horsewoman today will tell you that there is often a mutual bond between horse and rider and, albeit obliquely, we can see this in the medieval sources. The oldest horse so far identified is a stallion of 28 years, a good age even by the standards of today. You would hope, too, that the payments made for a separate enclosure for the 'old mare' who was suffering from murrain signified a fondness for this particular animal and not just a sensible quarantining measure.

The Warhorse project is really only at its start, but the potential for study is huge and, by investigating further, the team hopes to substantially advance our understanding of the medieval horse.

Knights and destriers



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# Hello!

Welcome to this edition of Mortimer Matters. I hope you'll find plenty to interest you in these days of enforced seclusion! We may all have to stay home, but we can still enjoy history and discovering more about the Mortimers and Marches.

And if you've time on your hands, why not drop me a line and let me know what you think about this edition? We're always looking for ways to make Mortimer Matters a must-read for our members, so let us know what you'd like to see more of. We aim to include a mix of Society news, interesting

articles about the Mortimers and the Marches, along with book reviews and information about upcoming events. Get in touch with me at [mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk) if you'd like to:

- Recommend a topic you'd like to see covered in Mortimer Matters
- Volunteer to write a book review or feature
- Tell us about a news item or event you'd like us to mention

I'll then get in touch to discuss your ideas and give you some useful tips on submitting your copy. We plan to publish our next issue in late July and



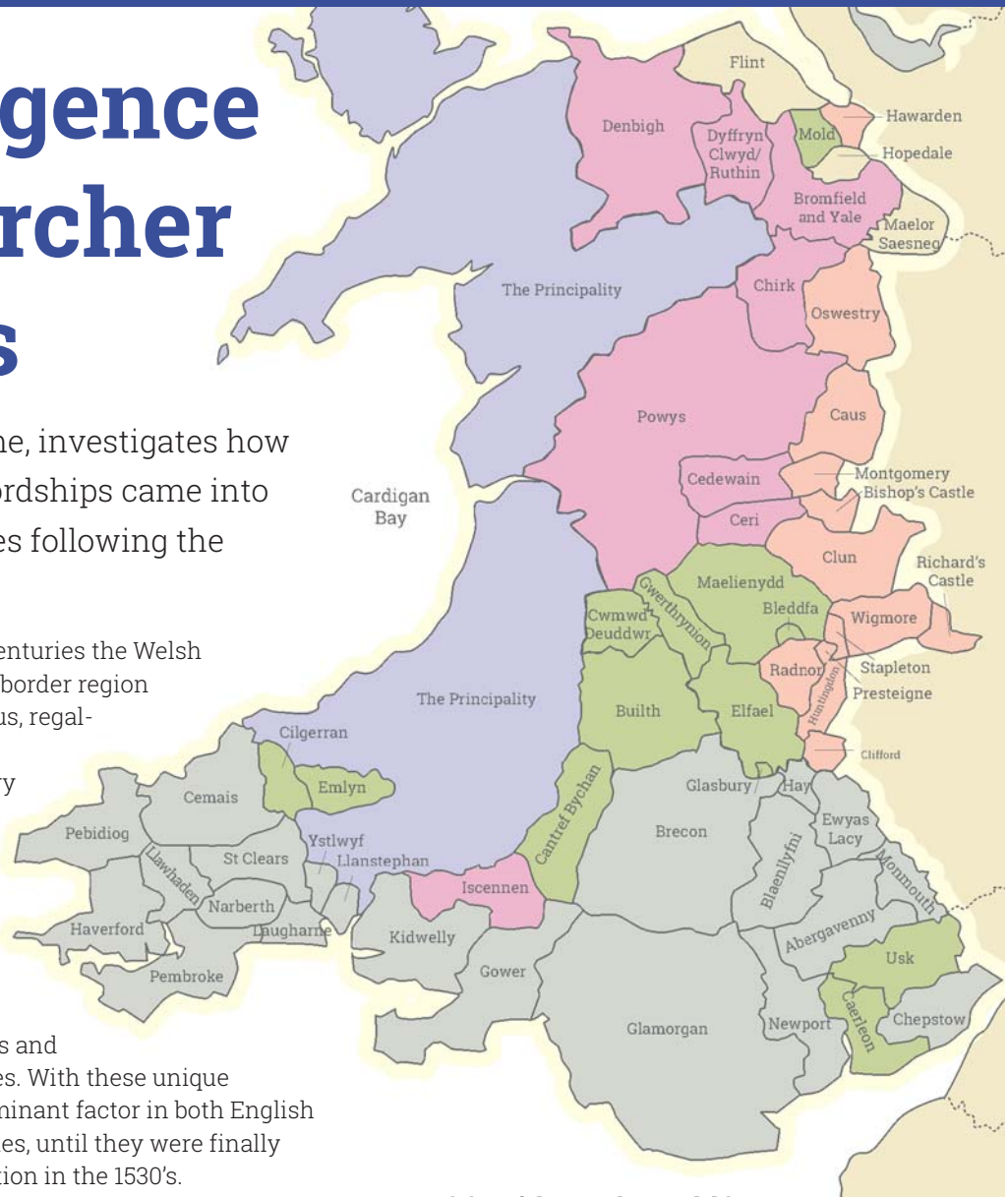
will start planning in early June, so please get in touch with your ideas as soon as you can!

# The emergence of the Marcher Lordships

Society Secretary, Philip Hume, investigates how the unique Welsh Marcher Lordships came into being during the two centuries following the Norman Conquest.

**D**uring the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Welsh Marches emerged as a distinctive border region made up of nearly fifty autonomous, regal-like lordships stretching, by the late thirteenth century, from the Dee estuary in the north to the Severn estuary in the south and across south Wales to Pembrokeshire. Known as the **Marchia Wallie**, to distinguish it from the **Pura Wallia**, or 'native Wales', it became politically separate from both England and Wales, each lord having access to independent power, resources and the right to raise their own armed forces. With these unique rights the Marcher Lords became a dominant factor in both English and Welsh politics for over four centuries, until they were finally incorporated into the shire administration in the 1530's.

The Marcher Lordships evolved over a period of two hundred years following the arrival of the Normans on the borders of Wales, reaching their fullest extent after the final conquest of **Pura Wallia** by Edward I in 1282 to 1283. While each Marcher Lordship was autonomous, it's possible to describe them in four broad categories, based on how they came into existence and developed.



Origins of the Marcher Lordships.

### Key

- Border Lordships withdrawn into the March
- Lordships Conquered early that remained mainly in Anglo-Norman control, though upland areas sometimes controlled by Welsh
- Disputed Lordships fought over for 200 years with large periods of Welsh control
- Lordships created by Edward I, 1277-82
- The Principality of Wales
- England (nb: Flint, Hopedale and Maelor Saesneg formed the county of Flintshire under the jurisdiction of Chester)

## Border Lordships withdrawn from the scope of English royal administrative and judicial structures

**T**hese Lordships were born out of William I's response to the circumstances facing the Normans when they arrived on the Welsh border. That response was shaped by three factors: the geographical and political fragmentation of Wales; the overlordship of the native Welsh rulers that had been claimed (and sometimes exercised) by Anglo-Saxon and English kings before the invasion; and the fact that Wales stood on the periphery of his extensive landholdings that spanned the English Channel. These three factors combined made outright conquest of Wales both unnecessary and prohibitively expensive.

However, William recognised that, despite the fragmentation of Wales, individual native rulers had periodically managed to assert power over large parts of the country. He would have been very much aware of the recent example of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn who, twenty years before 1066 had violently asserted his rule from Gwynedd and Powys across the whole of Wales. Dominant in his home country, he had become strong enough to launch devastating raids across the border into Shropshire and Herefordshire, as well as interfering in

English affairs through alliances with powerful earls. Although the unity he imposed didn't survive his death in 1063, memory of the threat he posed to English security would have been vivid.

To prevent a repeat of such developments, William I installed trusted companions as earls in the strategic border locations of Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford, and granted them enhanced powers to secure the border region. In turn, those first earls granted compact blocks of land to their knights and followers, creating a linked chain of lordships along the border.

The structure of these first lordships was modified after two of the earldoms, Hereford and Shrewsbury, were discontinued following failed rebellions in 1075 and 1102 respectively. In their place, the lords of the smaller holdings became 'tenants-in-chief' holding their lands directly from the Crown. It's likely that they had more powers than other similar lordships, derived from the authority given to the first earls. However, they became fully Marcher Lordships during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as their lords succeeded in withdrawing them from the shire administration and royal judicial structures of England,



**William the conqueror didn't bring the fight to Wales**

effectively pushing the boundaries of the March further east into England.

Later claims by these lords that the king's writ did not run in their lands because they had conquered them by the sword were somewhat disingenuous. Edmund Mortimer (d. 1304) was not averse to bending the truth in this way. In 1293 he claimed that the king's writ did not run in Wigmore because jurisdiction there had belonged solely to the lord of the liberty for time immemorial. In fact, it had been only thirty years since his father had absorbed Wigmore into the March. In addition to Wigmore, other examples of Marcher lordships in this group include Clun, Caus, and Oswestry.

## Conquered lordships taken during early expeditions into Wales

Although the first earls and their knights had license to make opportunistic raids into Wales and annex land to their control, they were, in fact, constrained by royal policy. William I and his successors continued the approach of earlier Anglo-Saxon and English kings; establishing their overlordship of native Welsh rulers while recognising their rights and position. Effectively that meant the Norman barons could only take their opportunities in disputed lands or where there was no recognised native ruler.

There were occasions, however, when the king did allow large scale campaigns into Wales, such as those led by the

Earl of Chester and Robert of Rhuddlan, which swept across north Wales in the decades after 1066, or those of 1093 which followed the death of Rhys ap Tewdwr of Deheubarth, which sparked large scale expeditions through central Wales to the coast and southwards. New Norman lordships were established some of which, such as Pembroke, were never retaken by the Welsh. The reign of Henry I in the early twelfth century saw further military expeditions across south Wales. From Gwent in the east to Pembrokeshire in the west, a continuous pattern of Marcher lordships emerged, including Ewyas Lacy, Abergavenny and Pembroke, which restricted the native Welsh to the uplands.



## Disputed lordships fought over for two hundred years

**T**he comparatively limited resources of individual Marcher lords often made it difficult for them to sustain conquest or annexation of land, especially when the Welsh were able to take refuge in hostile, upland terrain before striking back. The Marcher lords' ambitions were also frustrated during periods when the Crown explicitly recognised the position and rights of native rulers, leaving them chafing at their inability to regain land they had come to consider theirs. Good examples of this are the Welsh districts of Elfael, Maelienydd,

Gwerthrynion and Cwmwd Deuddwr. Although claimed by the Normans (including the Mortimers in the case of Maelienydd) during early incursions at the end of the eleventh century, they were soon won back by the Welsh. Although the Marcher lords at times succeeded in reconquering them, they were under native rule for long periods. For example, the Mortimers only controlled Maelienydd for around eighty of the almost two hundred years between the Normans' arrival and the first campaigns of Edward I.

## Lordships newly created by Edward I in 1277 to 1283

**F**rom William I onwards, English kings sought to establish overlordship of native Welsh rulers. The Crown's military expeditions into Wales, such as those of Henry I, Henry II and King John, were mainly designed to stop Welsh expansionism and usually resulted in some land being ceded back to the Crown with payments of tribute and oaths of fealty. During the thirteenth century, however, this began to change. Change was driven first by the loss of most of the Crown's continental landholdings during the reign of King John, with subsequent rulers, therefore, more focused on the British Isles. The impact of this, however, was delayed by the weakness of the Crown during much of the thirteenth century – the strife between King John and his barons, the long minority of Henry III and the second barons' war.

The second driver of change was the rise to dominance across all Wales during the thirteenth century of two powerful princes of Gwynedd – Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and his grandson, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. They posed a more significant threat to England than an array of divided and feuding princes and rulers. With the recovery of the Crown's strength on the coronation of Edward I in 1274, conflict became inevitable. Edward's campaign of 1276–77 defeated Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and confined him to his ancestral lands in Gwynedd. When rebellion broke out in 1282, Edward decided on total conquest, extinction of native Welsh rule and annexation of **Pura Wallia** to the English crown.

Although Edward strongly asserted the rights of the Crown throughout his reign, he also created one new Marcher Lordship in south Wales, Iscennan, and several in north-east Wales. These he granted as rewards to his loyal commanders and supporters; Ceri, Cedewain, Chirk, Denbigh, Ruthin/Dyffryn Clwyd, Bromfield and Yale. Powys was also included but is distinctive in that it was granted to its existing Welsh ruler in return for service to the English Crown.



**Edward I ended native Welsh rule**

Although the Marcher Lordships originated in different ways, one thing they all had in common was the range of extra-ordinary regal-like powers wielded by their lords within their lordships. These powers will be explored in the next edition of **Mortimer Matters**.

# Keep the date!

Essential diary dates for 2020. Keep a look out on Twitter, Facebook and [Mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk](http://Mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk) for more information.

Our events programme for the first half of the year is thinner than we'd like it to be. That's because, in light of the coronavirus situation, we've cancelled the AGM, which was due to take place on 28 March, and the **Mayhem, Murder and Marriage** conference, which was scheduled for 16 May. It was a tough decision to make, but inevitable as the restrictions on social gatherings became more severe. The conference will now take place on 15 May next year. If you've already bought your ticket, your reservation will be carried across automatically. We'll set a new date for the AGM as soon as we're able and let members know by email.

Our programme for the rest of the year remains in place, including our Annual Summer Lecture on 17 June. If we're forced to make further cancellations we'll let you know.

## **Wednesday 17 June: Mortimer History Society Annual Summer Lecture**

This year's lecture will be given by Daniel Power, Professor of Medieval History at Swansea University. Join us at Grange Court, Leominster from 7pm.

## **Sunday 19 July: Study Visit to Hellens, Much Marcle and Kempley.**

A tour of three locations with proven Mortimer connections.

## **Saturday 3 October: 'The King's Writ does not run here': The Medieval Welsh Marcher Lordships**

This full day conference in Ludlow will examine the operation and unique independence of the Marcher Lordships.

## **Saturday 21 November: Decorated in glory: Churches, church building and people in Herefordshire in the 14th century**

A half-day conference. Join us between 10am and 1pm in College Hall, Hereford Cathedral.

# Rupture of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy

Our Annual Summer Lecture considers cross-Channel fall out as Anglo-Norman lords lost land in France



**D**aniel Power, Professor of Medieval History at Swansea University and an expert in French and British history during the High Middle Ages, will deliver the Society's 2020 Annual Summer Lecture on 17 June. His theme will be the rupture that occurred among the Anglo-Norman aristocracy following the loss of Normandy during the reign of King John. Most of the aristocracy lost lands in one country or the other, but some, including Marcher families such as the Mortimers and the Marshals, fought hard to hold on to lands and connections in both countries. Daniel will consider the compromises they were forced to make to do so and the political insecurity they suffered as a result.

"We're delighted to welcome Professor Power to speak on this important subject, which has been the subject of his recent research," says Society Secretary Phil Hume. Between 2016 and 2018 Daniel held a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship to investigate the

disintegration of political and social ties that had been established between England and Northern France during the Anglo-Norman period. "We will be among the first to hear his considered views on the fall out of this critical rupture, which shaped English identity and our relationship with Europe for centuries to come," says Philip.



**Professor  
Daniel Power**

This year's lecture will be held at Leominster's seventeenth century Grange Court, a Grade II listed timber-framed market hall that once housed the town's weekly butter market. Now it is owned by the people of Leominster and operates as a community, heritage and enterprise hub. Visitors will have the opportunity to view the building and enjoy the sunshine (hopefully!) in its beautifully restored knot garden overlooking the public green and Leominster Priory.

To reserve your place go to [www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk). If you don't have online access, or prefer not to pay online, email [philip.r.hume@gmail.com](mailto:philip.r.hume@gmail.com) or call him on **01584 831654**. Tickets are £5 for members and £7.50 for non-members and include drinks and nibbles.



# One day, three venues

Our July study day tours a Jacobean house and two fine medieval churches – all with excellent Mortimer credentials.

## Join us on Sunday 19 July 2020

**L**isted in Simon Jenkins' **England's Thousand Best Houses**, Hellens is a fine and fascinating Jacobean house, still in private ownership. Our study day will begin with an exclusive, guided tour of the house and gardens, showcasing a wealth of exceptional interiors, paintings and antiques dating from the Tudor and Jacobean periods, as well as the stories behind them. Hellens is situated within the boundaries of the medieval manor of Much Marcle, initially owned by the Mortimer family and passed down to the Audleys. Walter de Helyon, a local landowner who gave Hellens House its present name, leased the manor from the Audley family in the fourteenth century.



**Hellens – one of England's finest Jacobean houses**

We'll continue on to St. Bartholomew's church at Much Marcle, the final resting place of Blanche Mortimer (d. 1347) and Walter de Helyon (fl. 1357), whose contrasting and rare tombs are displayed in the church. A short talk on Much Marcle's Mortimer associations will be given in St Bartholomew's, after which there'll be time to explore the church and its monuments at leisure and to see the remains of the medieval motte of Mortimer's Castle from the church graveyard.



**Blanche Mortimer's tomb in St Bartholomew's**

Our final stop will be the little church of St Mary's in Kempley. Founded by Hugh de Lacy, Marcher lord of Ludlow, Weobley & Ewyas Lacy (d.circa 1115), this jewel box of a church has some of the finest, surviving medieval wall paintings in Europe, many dating, incredibly, from the early 1120s. There'll be a brief talk about the Lacys and their connections to this church, which will reveal some surprising medieval discoveries. The day will end with time to examine the church's early medieval treasures at leisure.



**12th century wall paintings at St Mary's Kempley**

## All you need to know

This will be a self-drive tour and start at 10.30am. There'll be time for a decent lunch break (BYO) at Much Marcle village hall, which provides parking. We hope people will be able to car share from the village hall car park as there is limited space at St Mary's church in Kempley.

Full details will be available on our website closer to the event. Tickets will be £10 per person, available via TicketSource nearer the time. If you wish to put your name down in advance, please email Jean de Rusett at [jeanderusett25@gmail.com](mailto:jeanderusett25@gmail.com)



# Horses in the medieval military

We're all aware of the importance of horses in medieval society, not only as a means of transport, but as an engine of war. But we're often baffled by the names given to them, which designate, not their breed, but their use and purpose. Mortimer Society member and equine expert, Lindsay Smith provides a useful guide.

**H**orses have been used in warfare throughout history, especially in the Far and Middle East, and, of course, Roman armies were famed for their cavalry. After Rome's withdrawal from Britain the Anglo-Saxons emerged as enthusiastic breeders of horses, but not for war. Anglo-Saxon warriors, like their counterparts in Europe, typically fought on foot. Fighting on horseback became significant again in Europe following the ninth century raids of the Hungarian Magyars on the continent's eastern borders. From this point the European knightly tradition and training began to emerge, but not in the British Isles.

The first recorded instance of horses being used in pitched battle in Britain came in 1066, when King Harold's men faced William I's force of mounted knights at the Battle of Hastings. The battle, as we all know, did not end well for the English. From this point, the breeding and training of horses for war in England became a serious business.

Over the following centuries several categories of horse developed, each suited to a different purpose. The important thing to remember is that these were not breeds of horses in the way we think of breeds today, such as the Arabian, the Shire or the Andalusian. Rather they were types of horses, bred to have particular physical and temperamental qualities that would suit them to their work.

Here's a brief introduction to the key medieval horse types and their military uses.

## The sumpter

A pack horse or mule used as a common beast of burden. In a military scenario, sumpters would be used extensively for the transportation of arms, armour and supplies.

## The rouncey

This was a robust, all-purpose horse used for riding in military and non-military scenarios. Think of it as the Ford Fiesta of the fighting horse, a good all-rounder used by poorer knights, squires and men-at-arms. A wealthy knight might provide rounceys for his retinue.



**The palfrey was a prized riding horse for men and women**

## The palfrey

The palfrey was highly valued as a riding horse in the Middle Ages. Light weight and smooth-gaited it could cover long distances at speed with minimal discomfort for the rider. This smooth gait gave this horse its alternative name of 'ambler'. The amble is about the speed of a trot, but uses a four-beat instead of a two-beat rhythm. It means simply that the horse has only

one foot all the way off the ground at any time. The ability to 'amble' was genetic and horses bred with this ability were prized. Though not used in battle, knights would use them to travel comfortably and at speed to reach battle fields.

## The courser

Typically known for their running gait, from the Old French **course**, meaning 'to run', coursers were light, fast, strong and manoeuvrable. For all those reasons, they were highly prized as cavalry horses carrying lightly armed riders. They were often used as messenger horses. Though costly, they were less expensive than the destrier or warhorse. They also had a particular agility and a bold, forward temperament that made them ideal for the joust. A horse needs a very special kind of courage to gallop head-on, at around thirty miles-an-hour, towards another horse travelling at similar speed, carrying a man with a lance pointed, seemingly, straight at it. Most horses would turn aside; the courser could not afford to.

## The destrier

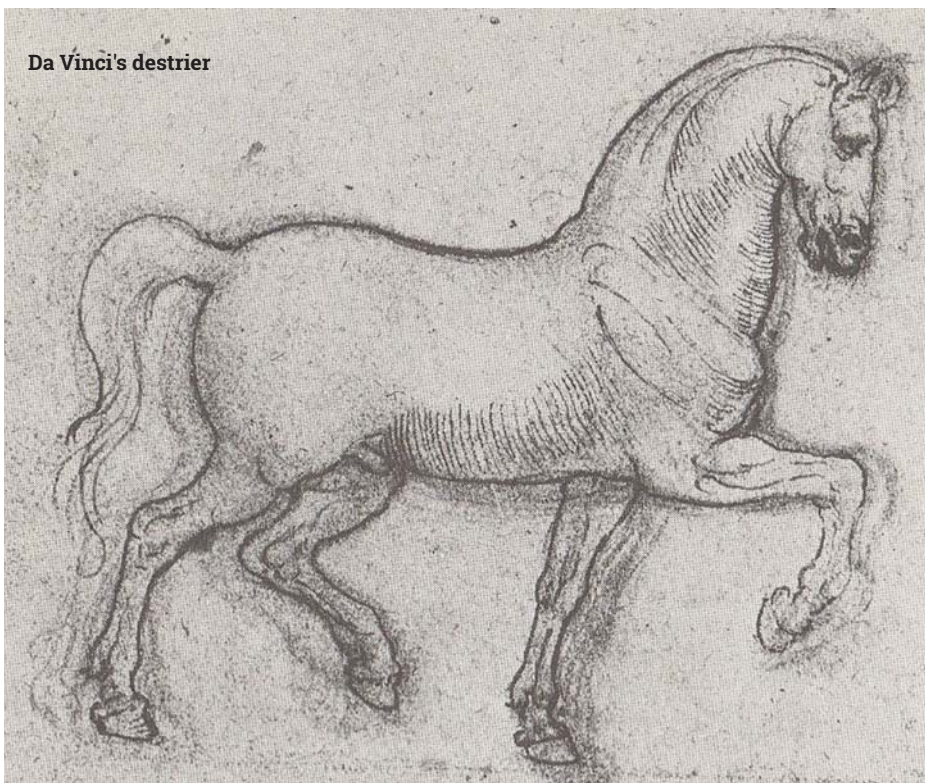
Bred specifically for war, the destrier was never used for general riding.



**Knight riding a built-for-speed courser**



Da Vinci's destrier



**About the author:** Lindsay Smith is a qualified riding instructor and has successfully bred, trained and competed horses in several disciplines, including side-saddle, for over 30 years. She was assisted in writing this feature by fellow Society member, Fran Norton.

Exclusively stallions, these were heavy cavalry horses, bred to carry a man wearing full plate armour into battle. Surprisingly, they were rarely used in tournaments or jousts. This may have been because of their great expense. The loser in a joust would frequently be required to forfeit his horse to the victor. With the cost of a destrier typically

seven times that of other horses, it's no wonder coursers were preferred in the lists.

It is a common myth that the Shire horse was the destrier of the medieval period. This is not so, since the Shire didn't emerge as a breed until the seventeenth century. Bear in mind too

that the average medieval knight was a mere five feet six inches. Taking this into account, it's reasonable to assume that the destrier might be between 14 and 15 hands. A 15-hand horse would stand around five feet at its withers or shoulder.

### What made a good destrier?

Though later, this Da Vinci study of horses for the Trivulzio monument is a prime example of an ideal destrier. They required good conformation for balance, and dense bone structure for strength. Large, widely spaced eyes gave extensive vision and a high arched neck aided the rider for security and defence. A short, strong back, coupled with muscled loins, meant the horse could move quickly and easily into defensive and offensive positions. Extensive training involved developing speed of movement and quick response to the knight's commands. All such horses were killing machines, whose primary role was to defend their riders in battle.

### A horse retinue

A well-prepared knight would typically have several horses, including at least two that were 'battle ready', either destrier or courser. They would also have a palfrey for long distance riding and would typically provide rounceys for their retinue. Add to this the sumpters for moving goods and equipment, and the number quickly mounts!

## Horse pendant find places the Mortimers in Dorset

Connor Williams investigates the finding of a horse pendant bearing Mortimer heraldry far from the Welsh Marches.

**O**n a stormy February morning in Ludlow, the Mortimer History Society was treated to a very informative paper from Dr Robert Liddiard on medieval horse stud farms.

Among the artefacts Dr Liddiard introduced us to were illuminated heraldic pendants, which were commonly attached to horses' harnesses. As fate would have it, a few days later Society member Hugh Wood received an enquiry from a detectorist about a horse pendant found in Winterbourne Steepleton, Dorset. Bearing Mortimer heraldry, the pendant clearly fell from a horse whose owner was of the Mortimer family or affinity, and its discovery has been met with much excitement amongst society members. But how

this pendant came to lie so far from Mortimer country and to whom might it have belonged?

### A remarkable survivor

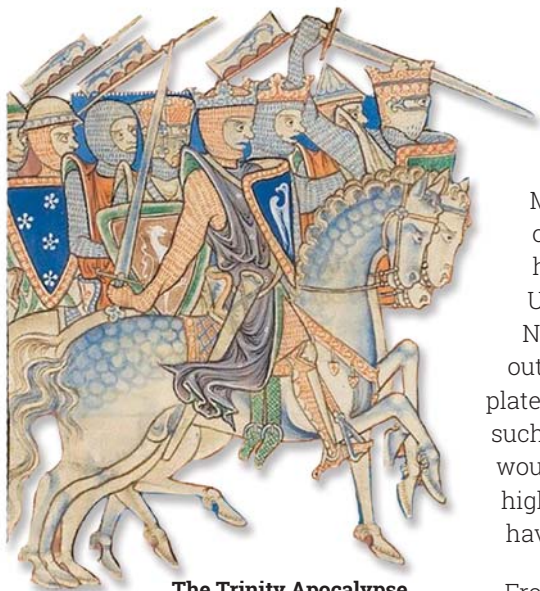
The Mortimer pendant has survived remarkably well, with the **azure** (blue) keeping much of its colour, though the **or** (gold) has mostly deteriorated. The mount is made of copper alloy and the colouring is probably enamel rather than plating. The cheapness of the material makes it

The Mortimer pendant



Cont/d...





**The Trinity Apocalypse showing heraldic pendants adorning the horse's harness**

difficult to determine the identity of its original owner. As Dr Matthew Ward, an expert on livery badges and heraldry at the University of Nottingham, has pointed out, had the pendant been plated in a rich material such as silver or gold, it would have indicated a high-born owner, who may have been easier to trace.

From the large quantity of horse pendants found and recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme, it's clear

that most were cheaply made; probably because they were destined to be worn by a beast rather than a man, and because they were susceptible to falling from the harness and being lost. The cheap material also suggests that the pendants were mass produced for attendants, for the use of horse pendants did not come under the restrictions, introduced in the late fourteenth century, which curtailed the use of other livery badges.

## How was the pendant worn?

There's no clear consensus about how pendants such as these were attached to a horse's harness. However images from manuscript sources, such as the Trinity Apocalypse, held at Trinity College, Cambridge, suggest that several pendants could be attached to the front of the harness, where they would hang like keychains across the horse's breast.

It's noticeable that pendants are often missing from other images of horses in full armour, as we can see in an image from the Luttrell Psalter. This could suggest that pendants were more of a fashion choice than standard attire. It could also be the case that such pendants were considered too delicate to wear into battle and served a more ceremonial purpose. By the way, any concerned parties should be reassured that such pendants were unlikely to cause any discomfort to the horse!



**The Luttrell Psalter showing no pendants**

## Mortimers in Dorset?

So, how might this Mortimer pendant have found its way to Dorset, so far from the Welsh Marches? It should be remembered that the Mortimers actually held landed interests in over twenty counties in England by the late fourteenth century, including Dorset. The pendant was found in Winterbourne Steepleton, which was a manor brought into the Mortimer estate by the marriage between Philippa, granddaughter of Edward III, and Edmund Mortimer, 3rd earl of March in 1368/9. The manor was subsequently granted to a Sir John Devereux, whose ancestors had been local rivals to the Mortimers during the thirteenth century but became loyal Mortimer retainers in the fourteenth century.

In 1265 the Devereux family had been involved in the rebellion of Simon de Montfort, while the Mortimers famously supported the royalist faction. Following the Battle of Evesham that year, William Devereux lay dead and his lands forfeit. They were then granted to the Mortimers, but later returned to Devereux's son as part of the Dictum of Kenilworth (1266) after payment of a heavy fine to Mortimer and the Crown. The fine greatly impoverished the Devereux family, who were forced to alienate many of their lands, including their main residence at Lyonshall in Herefordshire. The Devereux family fractured in the following century and a cadet branch, which settled at Frome, Somerset, buried the hatchet with the Mortimer family. At some point, they gained the manor at Winterbourne Steepleton and would hold it until 1419, when it passed out of the family following the failure of male heirs. The 1399 **Inquisition Post Mortem** of Roger Mortimer, 4th earl of March, show the Mortimers were owed one knight's fee and the advowson of the church at Winterbourne Steepleton.

We can conclude then, that the pendant most likely was dropped at some point between 1368 (Philippa and Edmund's marriage) and 1425 (death of the last earl of March). It's unlikely that it belonged to one of the Mortimer earls, but it may have belonged to a Devereux or some other Mortimer agent. Whatever the ownership, the pendant should be considered an extremely important find. It is a physical marker of the Mortimers showing interest in their outlying estates beyond the Marches, Ireland or Clare. It is also a clear indicator of the Mortimer family endowing their agents with symbols of their lordship, showing them actively involved with the heraldic practices of the period.

Anyone interested in looking at more horse pendants or similar artefacts should check out the Portable Antiquities Scheme at [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk), which has a catalogue of similar finds. And you can find out more about Rob Liddiard's horse studs project on the front page of this newsletter.

**About the author:** Connor Williams is a postgraduate student at the University of Nottingham specialising in nobility, kingship and society in fourteenth century England.



# Discovering Mortimer's Cross

The Mortimer's Cross Community Battlefield Archaeology Project is searching for the site of Edward IV's great victory.

A few miles south of the Mortimer stronghold of Wigmore castle, beyond the constricting hills that shoulder the village of Aymestrey, is a bridge over the river Lugg. Here roads cross and local history has long associated the nearby Inn with the battle of Mortimer's Cross.

Primary sources tell us that it was 'in a faire playne, nere to Mortimers crosse' and 'at Mortymer ys Crosse' that this lesser known battle of the Wars of the Roses was fought, in the middle of winter, well outside the normal campaign season. It took place when the Yorkist army of Edward, earl of March, intercepted a Lancastrian force under Jasper Tudor, earl of Pembroke, that was marching into England from South Wales in an attempt to join the forces of Margaret of Anjou in the north.

On 2 February 1461 (though some

sources claim the 3rd) Edward deployed the Yorkist army, probably on the ground of his choosing and engaged the enemy. They defeated the Lancastrian army, though we know nothing of the detail of the action, although accounts tell us that a number of Tudor's commanders, including Jasper's father Owen, were captured and later executed in Hereford.

## A lost battlefield

Unfortunately, this is one of the most poorly documented of all the battles of the Wars of the Roses and we cannot be sure exactly where the action was fought. The battlefield landscape has also, in parts at least, been transformed since 1461. Hedged enclosures have replaced open field and meadow on the low-lying land, while the route of the London to Aberystwyth road across the battlefield has been completely abandoned and replaced by eighteenth

century turnpike routes. The river which flanks the valley has meandered over the centuries and today is constrained by modern field boundaries. However, a study of the historic terrain is allowing the earlier pattern to be recovered and a continuing survey for the archaeology of the battle may resolve some of the questions about the location and nature of the action.

The project is led by the Battlefields Trust in partnership with the University of Huddersfield and has been funded by the generosity of local supporters and a grant from the Heritage Fund. It aims to raise awareness of the wider historical importance of the Battle of Mortimer's Cross and highlight its great significance in bringing Edward IV to the throne. In so doing, it aims to promote battlefield visits and ultimately enhance the experience of visitors by producing high-quality interpretation and visitor information for use on-site and online. With the academic research and field surveys being overseen by Dr Glenn Foad, Reader of battlefield archaeology at Huddersfield, and the historic landscape research led by Dr Tracey Partida, we have also received a great deal of support and contributions from our community of project volunteers. Our three-year project, which began in 2018 aims to provide information on the battlefield's extent and character, enabling more effective conservation management and further supporting the case for its addition to the national Battlefields Register.

As a community project we have run public events, exhibitions and young people's game days to engage and encourage the next generation of battlefield historians. Despite a large cohort of enthusiastic volunteers from across the country we have been

Cont/d...



A parhelion – the appearance of three suns in the sky heralded the start of the battle. Is that Wigmore castle in the background?

hampered by the ever-changing climate in our field work, which underpins much of the project. The long dry summer of 2018, although producing some stunning parch marks, hampered the ability of the detectorists, likewise the subsequent winter floods. We require an additional season of field work through to 2021 to complete the surveys.

The current global pandemic has also had a major impact on this and future events which have regrettably been postponed. The project plans to launch a new dedicated website in the Spring to bring together related articles, blogs, videos and future events. This and general information will be available via the Battlefields Trust page at [www.battlefieldstrust.com/MX1461/](http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/MX1461/) or you can contact us via email at [mx1461cbap@gmail.com](mailto:mx1461cbap@gmail.com)

**About the author:** Gary Ball is Project Director with the Battlefields Trust and responsible for the implementation of the Mortimer's Cross 1461 Battlefield Project. A specialist in heritage interpretation and volunteer management, he's worked on programmes spanning from prehistory to the Great War, with a focus on the Wars of the Roses.



**Dr Glenn Foard is applying the same methodology that resulted in him locating the Bosworth battlefield.**

## 2020 Essay Prize opens for entries soon...

...and we're extending the scope of the prize, creating new opportunities

As in previous years, essays on any aspect of the Mortimer family and its cadet branches, or on the medieval Marches of Wales from 1066-1542, will be accepted for consideration. This year we're also broadening the entry criteria to include essays on any aspect of Medieval Borderlands, which could include a comparative analysis. There will be a first prize of £750, a second prize of £300 and a third prize of £200. Also, this is a great opportunity to have your work published in our 2021 academic journal if you're selected by our esteemed judges led by Chris Given-Wilson, Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of St. Andrews. Further details and entry requirements can be found on our website.

We'll be accepting entries for the 2020 prize soon – keep a look out at [mortimerhistorysociety.co.uk](http://mortimerhistorysociety.co.uk) for details. If you wish to enter the competition and need guidance accessing primary sources in these difficult times, please email our journal editor Paul Dryburgh at [Paul.Dryburgh@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.Dryburgh@nationalarchives.gov.uk) or the Society's secretary Philip Hume at

[secretary@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk). They'll be able to help with online resources and any further queries you may have. Many of the committee members have extensive personal libraries on the Mortimers and the marches of Wales and are willing to help.

### By the way...

The winner of the 2018 essay prize, Sara Elin Roberts with her important and superb paper on the laws of the March, can be found in our just-published 2019 journal, which was mailed to members in February. You'll also find there stimulating essays on the Marcher conquest of Maelienydd, the Mortimer retinue for war, Cwmhir Abbey and the chronicles of the Mortimer family. Plus, two recent books on Simon de Montfort and Medieval Wales c.1050-1332 are reviewed by Nigel Saul and Sara Elin Roberts respectively. The society owes a huge debt of gratitude to our editor (and president) Dr Paul Dryburgh for producing this valuable resource to our members and scholars of medieval Welsh history.



# The Brothers York: An English Tragedy

By Thomas Penn, Allen Lane, 2019

Thomas Penn's latest book is a roller-coaster account of the twenty-five year period when 'the brothers York' ruled England. But its academic rigour is doubtful.

**T**he book opens with Richard, Duke of York's defeat at the Battle of Wakefield and follows the tumultuous story of his three sons – Edward, George and Richard. Two of them would become kings, two would die violently and, within a quarter of a century, all three would be dead. The Yorkist dynasty, and the Mortimer claim to the throne on which it depended, would come to a bloody end at Bosworth Field.

It's a thrilling tale, rich in drama, intrigue and treachery. And it's a complex story too, which Penn tells with fluency and a narrative drive that any novelist would envy. The book's three protagonists are larger than life characters: the conquering hero Edward who becomes a drunkard and a lecher; touchy, hot-tempered, treacherous George; and finally Richard, serious, pious, and a coldly ambitious murderer who gets his comeuppance at the hands of Henry Tudor.

If all of this sounds like the history you were taught in school thirty years or more ago that's because it is. For Penn it's as if recent historians' careful re-evaluation of the house of York and, especially of Richard III's reign, has never taken place.

For sure, there's plenty about the history of the Yorks' that's difficult to be sure about. Contemporary accounts contradict one another and, inevitably after five hundred years, are open to interpretation. But, there are some grievous factual errors in Penn's account that are hard to ignore. Matthew Lewis, a recent biographer of Richard III has identified several, all of which paint Richard, and on occasion his brother Edward, in a very dim light. He points also to Penn's reliance on Tudor sources to the almost total

exclusion of all others, his tendency to misquote and misrepresent, and his presentation of chronicles written long after the event as if they were eye witness accounts. Polydor Vergil, for example is quoted as having based his reports on 'independent interviews with eye witnesses', while the fact that he wrote his history of England at the request of the Henry VII – with inevitable bias – is ignored.

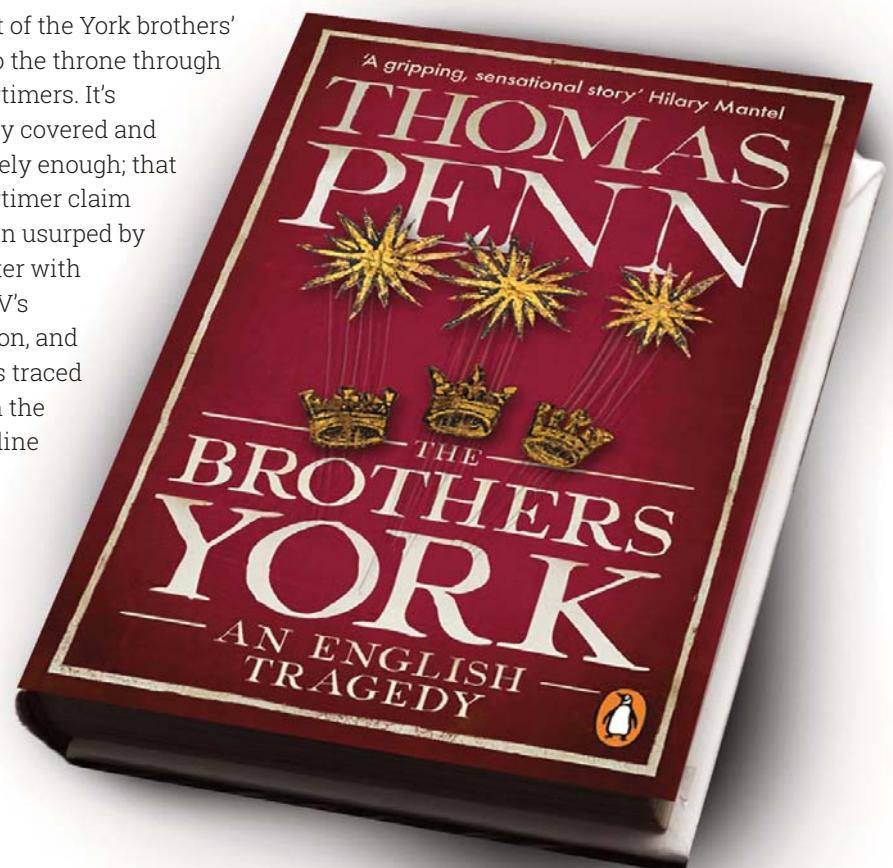
I'd love to be able to speak more favourably of **The Brothers York**. It's a thrilling read, loaded with colour and vivid detail. It transports the reader into a fifteenth-century tableau that's wholly engaging and deeply immersive. If it were a work of fiction, I would likely praise it to the skies. As a historical study, however, it leaves much to be desired.

It would be remiss of me to conclude this review without any mention of Penn's account of the York brothers' claim to the throne through the Mortimers. It's certainly covered and accurately enough; that the Mortimer claim had been usurped by Lancaster with Henry IV's accession, and that it is traced through the female line from

Edward III's second son, in contrast to Henry's claim, which is traced through the male line from the fourth. The Mortimer claim was, says Penn, airbrushed from history by Lancastrian lawyers and omitted from their genealogies but, he points out, "the idea of Mortimer had lingered: an ancient imperishable right." All good. But it's a pity that this important foundation stone for Edward's kingship is passed over in a single paragraph, and that its impact on Edward's conduct as king is ignored. Edward is presented to us by Penn very much as 'king by conquest' rather than 'king by right'.

So, would I advise you to read **The Brothers York**? Probably not. Unless you promise to have a very large pinch of salt at hand. It's a cracking read for sure, but its history, sadly, is cracked.

**About the reviewer:** Annie Garthwaite is Editor of **Mortimer Matters**.





## It's membership renewal time!

Just a reminder that annual Mortimer History Society membership subscriptions are due for renewal on 1st May 2020.

You'll be pleased to hear that the rates for membership remain unchanged

**Individual membership** £15

**Joint membership** £20  
(two adults at the same address)

**Junior membership** £5  
(all under-18s at one address)

Also note that, if you are a new member and joined the Society after 1 December 2019, you don't have to renew your subscription until next year – 1 May 2021.

### How to pay

If you haven't yet made arrangements to pay your subscription for 2020, you can find all the information you need at <http://mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/index.php/renewing-1>. There are several ways to pay, but we hope you'll choose to set up a standing order, as this very much reduces the pressure on our treasurer and admin team. If you've already made that arrangement – thank you!

If you don't have a computer you can:

- Set up either a standing order or a single payment directly with your bank. Our bank details are Mortimer History Society, sort code 30-94-99, account number 01255435.
- Send a cheque made out to Mortimer History Society to The Treasurer, Old Gate House, Old Street, Ludlow SY8 1NS

It would be very helpful to us if you could deal with this promptly. We really value your ongoing membership and support.

# Meet the Mortimers on



Did you know you can see presentations from recent Society conferences and events on YouTube? Here's how.

To mark its 10th anniversary the Society decided to start its own YouTube channel and post videos of presentations made at its events during this important year. You can view them now simply by going to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and searching for Mortimer History Society. Then, just click the presentation you want to watch from the list. There's also a link to the videos from [www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk). Just go to 'online lectures' and follow the links.

Posting presentations on YouTube means people who attend our events can listen again at their leisure, and that no one need miss out, even if they can't attend on the day. "The presentations are also a valuable educational tool and, by making them available online, we're extending access to them globally," says Society Chairman, Jason O'Keefe.

In 2020 we'll be posting presentations from Our Summer Lecture (17 June) and our November conference. Presentations from our February conference, **Kings, Lords, Soldiers and Horses**, are already available to view.

Please also note that you can also leave comments on the discussion board on our YouTube channel. Tell us what you think about the presentations, add your insights to what you've heard or raise a question. This is your chance to start a discussion with the potential to reach a huge audience.

## Welcome to new members

Eleven new members joined the Society in the first three months of 2020, bringing total membership to 443. Welcome all! We hope you're enjoying your membership and look forward to seeing you at upcoming events.

**Doreen Bowen** Powys, Wales UK

**Simon Egan** Glasgow, Scotland UK

**Karen Goodwin** Herefordshire, UK

**Andy King & Claire ETTY** Oxfordshire, UK

**Graham Manning** Herefordshire, UK

**Paul Mortimer** Essex, UK

**Michele O'Shea** Warwickshire, UK

**James Parker** Shropshire, UK

**Nigel & Maggie Percy** Arizona, USA

We're always interested to hear what new members think about the Society so, if you've any comments about your membership experience or ideas about what you'd like from us, please email [membership@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:membership@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk).