



MORTIMER
History Society

MORTIMER *Matters*

Give me back my inheritance

Elizabeth de Burgh was determined to hold on to her inheritance despite opposition and ill-treatment from Edward II. In the second of two features Society Trustee Kirsten Lawton-Smith describes how Elizabeth finally won the day.

A cold Christmas

The festive court at York for Christmas 1322 was one of triumph and riches for King Edward II and his favourite, Hugh Despenser the Younger (d.1326). With the Contrarians vanquished and much of their lands and wealth in the crown's hands, it would have been a glittering affair. Edward's war against the Scots may have been proceeding badly, but there was always time for a little gloating that the domestic war had been comprehensively won.

For newly-widowed Elizabeth de Burgh, summoned to attend, there seemed to be at last some hope that, as the king's cousin, she would be received once more with favour and restitution. She had been released from Barking Abbey after finally yielding to the king and accepting an exchange of lands: her lordship of Usk and Caerleon for the less valuable lordship of Gower now held by Hugh Despenser. The king had promised to make up the

difference in value by granting her further lands. There was no doubt to the destination of Usk and Caerleon; they were to be attached to larger lordships of Glamorgan and Gwynllwg held by Despenser.

Elizabeth really had little choice in the exchange. It had been made clear that refusal would result in the loss of her entire inheritance. Further humiliation came when Elizabeth arrived at the Christmas court. Instead of being received as a niece and guest, she was immediately put under guard and isolated from her advisors and household. The king demanded from her a further quitclaim over Usk and a letter granting him the rights to her remarriage and her lands, contrary to her rights as a widow. Elizabeth was outraged and tried to leave York, but again was threatened with a total loss of her inheritance. Elizabeth was powerless against the King's threats and duly signed "against my will". Predictably the lands she had been promised alongside Gower never materialised.



"The condition.... being that I should agree to exchange the land of Usk and all my inheritance in Wales with Sir Hugh le Despenser the younger in return for the land of Gower."

Hugh Despenser, in a contemptuous letter to the sheriff of Glamorgan, now ordered the exchange of his lordship of Gower to Elizabeth with the rather repugnant proviso that Gower should be stripped of all its assets and moveable goods before Elizabeth could secure it. Hugh also irritably demanded the sheriff to have the wet nurses currently residing at Usk

In This Issue

Features

Give me back my inheritance	1-3
Recovering Wigmore's history	4-5
Wigmore roll translation	6-7
Back to school in the March	8-9

Society News:

New members	12
Progress at Wigmore Castle	14
Anthology writers	16
Marcher Lordships Vol.2	
– Coming soon	15-16

Events

700th Mortimer Anniversary	3
New online talks	11
Book launch	
– Mortimer Landscapes	9
Keep the date	10
AGM at Orleton	12
Academic seminar group	13

Recommendations and reviews

Bookshelf	17
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removed to Gower, which indicates that at least someone at court was trying to help with the practicalities, mostly likely Elizabeth's sister Eleanor Despenser. The reference to wet nurses may imply that Elizabeth had recently given birth to a posthumous child of Damory.

"Soon after I was seized of Gower, Sir William de Braose through the abetting, help and maintenance of the aforesaid Sir Hugh brought a writ of novel disseisin against me naming the land of Gower, contrary to the law of the land which does not allow the king's writ concerning any free tenement to run in Wales."

Ongoing exploitation

If Elizabeth felt she had assuaged the rapacious Hugh with this unequal exchange, she was to be jolted from any form of complacency within two years. It was Hugh's pursuit of Gower from William de Braose (d. 1326) that had precipitated the marcher lords' attacks on Glamorgan and the Despenser lands in 1321, and Hugh had not ceased in his desire for it since then; he had merely been biding his time. We know Elizabeth had been recognised as holding Gower, for within a charter concerning Penrice she was called the Lady of Clare and Gower but in April 1324, the now reputedly senile William de Braose was coerced by Despenser into bringing a lawsuit against Elizabeth. William claimed the rightful ownership of Gower and that he had been unlawfully evicted (*novel disseisin*). With the king and the courts in his pocket, Hugh organised for the justices to find in de Braose's favour and Elizabeth was dispossessed of Gower in a matter of months. Braose promptly granted Gower to Hugh Despenser the elder, now the earl of Winchester, who inevitably granted the lordship to his son. As Seymour Philips, biographer of Edward II states, "whatever the Despensers wanted they were likely to get."

Whether by threat, violence or political manipulation Hugh acquired far more lands in south Wales than any other marcher lord before him. Widows, wards, lords and ladies were all a target for "his covetousness of their lands" and he was only matched in his greed by the King, who colluded in his crimes. Elizabeth probably retreated to Clare, but even here she was not left unmolested as she later protested that the king deprived her of wood in her chase at Tonbridge. She did not give in to this constant harassment, vainly bringing petitions to parliament.

"Restore my goods and secure my right to the lands that are wrongly detained until the time that grace may be more open and the law of the land better maintained and common to all."

Regime change and a way out

There seemed to be no end in sight to this diabolical twosome of King and magnate. Elizabeth's sister Margaret was still incarcerated in Sempringham nunnery and other widows were even more abused than they. Elizabeth was fortunate to be living at her estates in Clare, although she felt under constant surveillance. But she did risk a dangerous protest in the spring of 1326 at Clare; she had her clerk, John de Radenhale, write a lengthy protest, an explanation in full of the unlawful seizure of her Welsh estates and the threats made against her. Why did she risk this at this point? Across the North Sea, Queen Isabella and her son, the young Prince Edward, were rumoured to be preparing for an invasion of England to replace Edward II with his heir. It was of vital importance to set out in a legal document, properly witnessed, that Elizabeth's claims to her inheritance were valid if she was to be successful in mounting a lawsuit against any remaining Despensers in the event of King Edward's fall. Though for now it was in secret, she was protecting herself and her own heirs against further legal chicanery in the future.

The summer of 1326 was blistering hot: rivers dried up and crop fires broke out. The weather was matched by the equally feverish mood of the country as invasion rumours spread and speculation remained rampant. Queen Isabella eventually landed on the 24th September at Orwell in Suffolk, a mere 30 miles from Elizabeth at Clare. Letters flew from Elizabeth to her estates recalling her most trusted advisors including Sir Thomas Cheddeworth and her accounts show her sending out messengers to both the Queen in Suffolk and the King back in London, no doubt to hedge her bets. By October London had revolted, declaring for the Queen and the young Edward, forcing the king to flee westwards with the Despensers. Only then did Elizabeth feel safe to send an armed force to join the Queen's pursuit of Edward II to Wales, where on 16 November he was captured along with the hated younger Despenser.

Before the king's capture, Elizabeth's men had already taken back possession

of Usk and Caerleon castle at their lady's command. Without waiting for anyone's permission for the return of her inheritance, Elizabeth swiftly journeyed to Usk herself to personally take control by late November. Her right to the lordship of Usk was never again questioned by the new regime or any other.

The news that her bitter rival Despenser had been tried and executed on the 24th November in Hereford is likely to have been joyously received. What she thought of Hugh's death, being hanged, castrated and his body cut into four pieces was not recorded, but there must have been some grim satisfaction that his head was now firmly fixed on London Bridge.



The execution of Hugh Despenser at Hereford

A happier Christmas

With the new regime and as Queen Isabella's friend, Elizabeth was now safe after years spent in fear. Christmas was held at the repossessed Usk castle, with the Lady of Clare spending lavishly on festivities to celebrate the return of her inheritance. Her accounts recorded a feast held for several hundred people, with hundreds of extra dishes and cups ordered, along with 230 gallons of ale and 34 gallons of fine wine for her more important guests. Food included a dazzling amount of beef, pork, boar, deer and mutton followed by swans, herons, geese, egrets and other poultry. The shopping list alone cost over £3. It was a stark contrast to the miserable Christmas spent at York in 1322.

Elizabeth's brave protest in the end was not needed. The Despensers' rapid and rapacious acquisitions were legally dismantled in early 1327 and the letter Elizabeth was forced to sign preventing her from remarrying or settling her



A medieval feast

estates as she chose, was reversed in March. She chose though to remain until her death the very epitome of a merry widow, continuing to entertain her family and close friends at Usk and Clare until her death in 1360. Her inheritance, so fiercely protected, was passed on without quarrel to her granddaughter, another Elizabeth de Burgh, married to the royal Prince Lionel of Antwerp. It would eventually be inherited by the Mortimers.

Kirsten Lawton-Smith is a trustee of the society and has a MA in Medieval Studies from Birmingham University.



All quotes are from Elizabeth de Burgh's protest and are taken from *"Women of the English Nobility and Gentry 1066-1500"*, translated and edited by Jennifer Ward, Manchester University Press, 1995

700th Anniversary – tickets now on sale!

Tickets are now on sale for our celebration of Roger Mortimer's great escape from the Tower of London in August 1323. Held in the Armouries Banqueting Suite at the Tower on Tuesday 1 August, this will be the biggest event in our Society's history. Book early to secure your place.

At this half-day conference a series of high-profile speakers will reveal the details of Roger's life, from his early promise to his rebellion against Edward II, his daring escape and what came next. Look out in the next issue of *Mortimer Matters* for the full programme.

We'll also celebrate the publication of *The Mortimers of Wigmore Through the Ages, 1055 – 1485: Dynasty of Destiny*. A collection of Mortimer essays commissioned by the Society. You'll be able to buy your copy – and perhaps get some of the contributors to sign it!



Tour the Tower

Our programme closes after lunch at 1:30pm. Afterwards, you'll be free to tour the Tower at your leisure. In fact, the cost of access to the Tower (normally £30) is included in your ticket price for this event.

Tickets are just £40 and can be ordered now at www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk

Mortimer History Society recovers a year of Wigmore's history

Your Society is proud to have acquired the account roll for the honour of Wigmore for the year 1387 to 1388. The document, previously in private hands, will be made available for study and view by academics, historians and members of the public. Yve James of the Society's Medieval Documents Group describes the acquisition, why it was made and what happens next.

Once it was discovered the honour of Wigmore account roll was to be auctioned at Cirencester in July, the Society's trustees unanimously decided to bid for it. It was quickly realised that the funds we had to hand were unlikely to be adequate, but the generous pledges by members, plus a donation from Herefordshire Archives and Record Centre (HARC), made the purchase possible. It must have been a stressful time for Kirsten Lawton-Smith who was bidding on behalf of the Society because, when the bidding started, it became evident that another person was equally keen to purchase the roll. In spite of a guide price of £200-£300, it was eventually acquired for £2,100.

"This is a really important acquisition for us to have made," says Paul Dryburgh, Society President and Principal Record Specialist at The National Archives. "Documents of this kind are extremely rare and few survive for Wigmore".

Written in Latin, it was made for Roger Mortimer, 4th earl of March and lord of the Honour of Wigmore. It is an account roll for the year 1387-88, showing the amount of money owed by the earl's bailiff and the keepers of the honour and the rents and other sums to be paid by the tenants during that year. The Mortimers were one of the most powerful families in the kingdom at this time with close connections to the

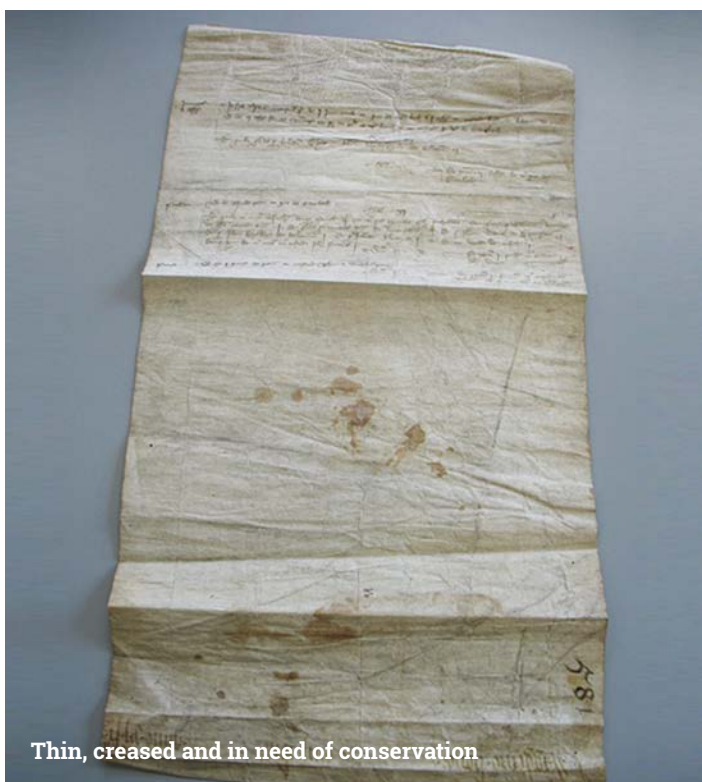
Crown. Roger was a grandson of Edward III, and a subsequent Mortimer heir would become King Edward IV in 1461.

Conservation and study

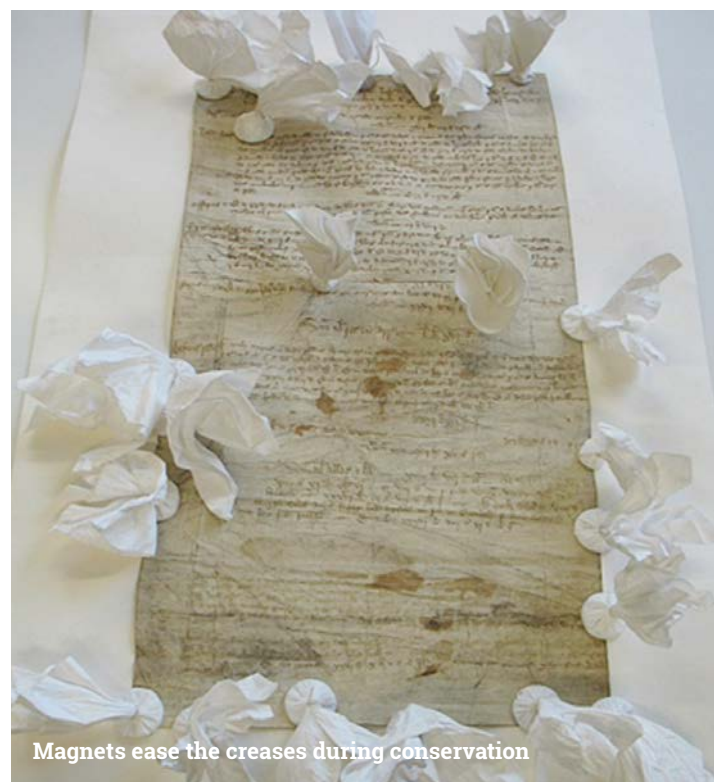
A charitable aim of the Society is to enhance public access to information, not only about the Mortimers but also the Welsh March. Once properly accessioned, the roll will be made available to any researcher at HARC where it will be safely stored.

Meanwhile, following its acquisition, the roll was taken to Liz Bowerman, Chief Conservator at HARC, for her to assess how best to conserve it. Though in reasonably good condition, the parchment was both thin and creased.

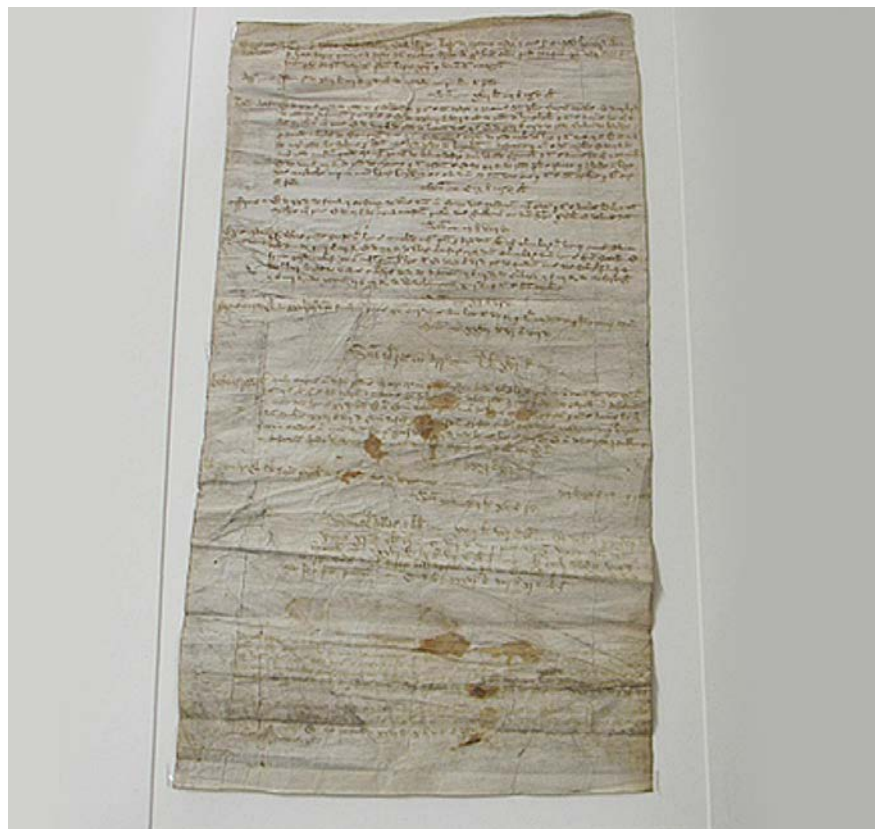
To prevent unnecessary future wear and tear as the document is handled and used, Liz decided to use Neodymium magnets to hold the creases and folds in a flatter position. These are small, strong, circular magnets, tiny enough to position accurately and were wrapped in an inert material, allowing the conservators to have a clear view as work proceeded. As the creases eased the magnets were moved. Once conservation was complete, a mount and backing board were made for the roll for safe handling in the future.



Thin, creased and in need of conservation



Magnets ease the creases during conservation



Safely mounted and ready for view

Having been conserved, copies were made of both sides of the roll, and these were sent to the Medieval Documents Group to be transcribed and translated. The group meets on a regular basis via Zoom, aiming to work on as many old documents relating to the Mortimers as possible. In the future it is intended to put them on the Society's website, making them available to everyone.

Areas of the parchment had patches of stain, making it difficult to read. Kirsten went to HARC and using an ultra-violet lamp on the roll managed to improve some of the areas. It took several weeks for the whole document to be read and transcribed under the careful guidance and knowledge of Paul Dryburgh and Helen Watt, Research Fellow in History at the University of York.

A draft transcription and translation of the roll has been produced. The translation can be viewed alongside this article, and both the translation and transcription are available on the Society's website.

Several items need further

research. Place names can be very different from today's spelling – Ailmondestre for Aymestrey for example. Or strange words such as Solughsilver and Rapsilver need clarification. These are apparently fees due in commutation for services in ploughing and reaping; indeed, the term solughsilver seems to be unique to this roll and another from a few years earlier already held by HARC (reference A 31/25). In the New Year three members of the Documents Group will go to HARC to carry out further research. Clearly the group has only made a start by producing the draft and more time is needed to try to provide answers to at least some of the puzzles. One idea for the future is to produce a map showing as many of the places as possible and a list of the words no longer in current use.

Another project for the future could be to study the roll HARC possesses and compare and contrast it with the Society's. This is an earlier account roll for the honour of Wigmore dating to 1384-5, and it could be an interesting exercise to discover what differences there are.

Thanks to Yve and to the following for contributing to this article and the Society's work on the roll, Liz Bowerman, Dr Paul Dryburgh, Philip Hume, Kirsten Lawton-Smith and all members of the Medieval Documents Group.

To read a translation of the roll, go to page 6.

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Happy New Year!

We're kicking off 2023 with the launch of two exciting new initiatives – a series of online evening lectures and a series of seminars for academics with an interest in the Mortimer and the Marches. Never let it be said that we let the grass grow under our feet!

And there's news about new books on the way, progress towards the re-opening Wigmore Castle and the story of how we've saved for posterity a whole year of Wigmore's historical record – find out what we acquired and what it tells us. I'd like to give a special thank you to for our feature writers: Kirsten Lawton-Smith for wrapping up her account of Elizabeth de Burgh's pursuit of her inheritance, and Dr David Thompson for taking us back to school on the medieval March.

We'd love to hear what you think about *Mortimer Matters*. Why not drop me a line at mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk and let me know your thoughts and any suggestions for improvement? And, remember, this is your newsletter too, so get in touch if you're keen 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 early May and will start planning in soon, so please get in touch with your ideas quickly!



Translation of the 1387 to 1388 Wigmore Honour Roll

This working translation of the Wigmore Roll has been created by the Society's Medieval Documents Group. To see this alongside a full transcription of the Roll, go to www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk

Wigmore Honour

The account of John Chaundeller [Chandler], bailiff of the liberty of Roger Mortimer and his associates, servants of the keeper of the honour there by letters patent of the King, from the feast of St Michael the Archangel in the eleventh year of the reign of King Richard the second after the Conquest to the same feast then next following, that is to say in the twelfth year of the aforesaid king for one whole year [29 September 1387 – 29 September 1388].

Arrears

The same [person] answers for £17 4s 9½d for the arrears on the last account there for the preceding year.

Sum – £17 4s 9½d

Rents of Assise

And for 19s 11d of rent of Pedewardyn [Pedwardine] per year at the terms of Saint Martin [11 November] & the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist [24 June] equally. And for 3s 1d of rent of Atforton [Adforton] per year at the said terms. And for 28s 8½d of rent of Lyngebok [Limebrook] per year at the terms of the Annunciation of the Blessed [Virgin] Mary [25 March] and Saint Michael [29 September] in equal portions. And for 8s of rent of Lecton [Letton] at the said two terms. And for 13s 4d of rent of Brian de Harley [Harley] for the fair and the market of Brampton Bryan at the said two terms. And for 26s 8d of rent of the mill of Lye [Lye] per year at the said two terms. And for 2d of an increment of rent of Richard Atkyns [Atkins] for a certain messuage formerly of John de Kaynham [Caynham] in Atforton [Adforton] per year at the term of Saint Michael. And for 2d for an increment of rent of a certain parcel of land by the bridge of Ailmondestre [Aymestrey] demised to William Pyninch per year at the terms of the Annunciation of the Blessed [Virgin] Mary & Saint Michael. And for 8s 4d of rent of Morcote [? Moorcot] per year at the same terms. And for 12d of rent of John James for 1 'helde' in Leye [? Lye] called 'Merbache' lately in the hand of Henry Daywyn thus demised to him for the term of his life per year at the term of Saint Michael as per the roll of the court of the preceding year.

Sum – 109s 4½d

Farms

And for 20d of the farm of two Crofts of the demesne of the lord in a field called Neweton [Newton] by the Castle per year at the terms of the Annunciation of the Blessed [Virgin] Mary and Saint Michael in equal portions. And for 2s of the farm of a certain pasture called Bukkemour [Buckmoor] thus demised to Roger Partrich [Partridge] at the will of the lord.

Sum – 3s 8d

Issues of the Manor and Customs of Sales

For the herbage of the garden of the castle nothing this year because [?] it is enclosed within the park for the wild beasts of the lord. For the issue of the dovecote nothing here because it is ruinous. However, the site demised for 3s 4d. And for 12d of the herbage of the close around the said dovecote demised this year to Richard Boterell [Botrell]. For the fruit of the garden enclosed as above within the park nothing this year. And for 10s 6d received from a certain custom called 'Solughsilver and Rapsilver' levied from the below-written vills, that is to say from Atforton [Adforton] 2s 4d, from Overliegh [Upper Lye] 2s 4d, from Netherleigh [Lower Lye] 2s 4d, from Yetton 2s 4d, from Wodehampton [Woodhampton] 14d per year at the term of Saint Michael.

Sum - 11s 6d

Perquisites of Courts

And for £27 6s 8d from the fines and perquisites of fifteen [sessions of] courts held there this year, as appears by the rolls of the same examined upon this account

Sum - £27 6s 8d

Sum total of receipts with arrears - £50 16s

Rents which are wanting

From which he accounts in the default of the rent of six acres of land in Pedewardyn [Pedwardine] formerly of John le Turnour [Turner] because it is in the hand of the lord, from which there are no issues per year, 2s 0¾d, in the terms of St Martin and the Nativity of St John [the Baptist]. And in the default of the rent of a messuage formerly of Adam the chaplain in Atforton [Adforton] which is in the hand of the lord this year, 12d, from which there are no issues. And in the default of the rent of the mill of Lye because it has been completely flattened, per year in the terms of the Annunciation of the Blessed [Virgin] Mary and St Michael, 26s 8d. And in the default of the rent of a certain croft below the Castle called Neweton [Newton], recently of Hugh Pepyn, falling into the hand of the lord in this the fourteenth year above 12d, levied there from this year, 8d. And in the default of the rent of a Stokkyng in Atforton [Adforton] formerly of William [Maister] [in] the hand of the lord this thirteenth year, 18½d, from which there are no issues.

Sum - 31s 11¼d

He answers for delivery of monies

And £12 15s 1d is delivered by one tally to Roger Partrich [Partridge] of Dorston, receiver of Wigmore.

Sum – £12 15s 1d

Sum total of allowances and liveries – £14 7s 0¼d – And he owes £36 8s 11¼d, and 8d for one foal sold outside the account. Sum of the debt together – £36 9s 7¾d – Of which 8d are allowed to him in the expenses of various assistants chasing the beasts agisted in the park of Gatley by Richard Boterell [Botrell], namely for the value of the aforesaid foal – And he owes £36 8s 11¾d

Of which 40s are placed in respite, and there remains 100s of the penalty adjudged to him upon [several words illegible] that he should enroll the said penalty to the use of the lord so that he ought not further contract with Joanna Watyes, his kinswoman, under the aforesaid penalty which he refused, as is said, upon his good behaviour until it is known by the great council of the lord what ought to be done about this. And 40s from the remaining 100s of the various amercements of William Bailly [Bailey] of Stanwey [Stanway], poor tenant of the lord, for certain trespasses of the lord's tenants there, committed by him, upon his good behaviour to the same lord concerning his tenants for the lord's council upon this account. Sum respited, iiii li. And he owes clear debts of – £32 8s 11¾d

And 78s 6d of the remaining £6 17s of the mainprise of Richard Merlowe [? Marlow] for the chattels of Ralph de Bukton [Buckton] forfeited to the lord etc., to be paid at the feast of All Saints [1 November] next, and 40s from the remainder of the various amercements of William Bailly [Bailey], to be paid in the two years next following at the feasts of the Invention of the Holy Cross [3 May] and St Matthew [21 September] equally. And thus £26 10s 5¾d without delay, of which £10 at St Clement [23 November], £10 at the Purification [2 February] and the rest at the Invention in a year's time.

Mares & affers

The above-written accountant answers for one mare in Gatley park and one affer in the custody of the bailiff of Letton of the remainder. / And for two affers who strayed, as appears in the roll of the court of this year in the custody of the parker of Gatley

Sum - 4

Two of which have been appraised by Julian Elys [Ellis] and John Abydawhile of Orleton

Sum - 2. And there remains two affers in Gatley park

Foals

And of the remainder in Gatley park

Sum – 11 proved

Two of whom could not be skinned as they had rotted by accident in summertime. And one is appraised by Walter Leynthal [Leinthal] as his own chattel. And two are appraised by the tenants of the lord of Lye in the same manner. And one by John Wyns of Brampton. And one by John Brewere [Brewer] of Adforton. And one by Julian Elys [Ellis]. And one sold as above. And by Jo And one [died] in the murrain in the custody of John Puttes.

Sum: 10 And one foal remains in custody of / John Hurre proved

Piglets

And for one piglet of the remainder in the custody of Thomas Wodehampton' [Woodhampton].

Sum: 1

And there remains one piglet in the custody of the said Thomas [?] by a certain person of Upper Lye

Wigmore Honour..... the account there at the end of the eleventh year

Editorial conventions

Abbreviated words are extended within square brackets
 S – **shillings** • D - **pence** • Atkyns [**Atkins**] – **standardised forms of personal and place-names** • [?] – **uncertain readings**



Members of the Medieval Documents Group with the Wigmore Roll

January conference took us back to school

Our 2023 events programme kicked off with a lively learning experience focused on education in medieval Wales and the March. Among the speakers at our first event of the year was Dr David Thomson, an expert in medieval manuscripts, texts and their use in education. Reviewing surviving documents, he described an age in which schooling and literacy were growing fast – in English as well as Latin.

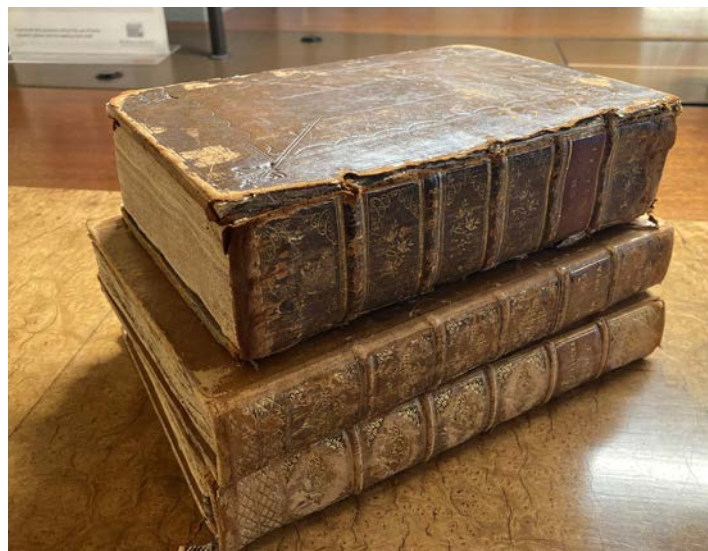
Life in the medieval March wasn't all about mayhem and murder," says Dr Thomson. "Though there was a fair bit of that about. More people were literate than you might imagine, and used that literacy for purposes both practical and poetic, religious and romantic, scientific and scurrilous."

His talk introduced us to several surviving manuscripts, allowing us to see what they looked like and how they were made. We also had a go at reading their handwriting, learned a bit of Latin and mangled our tongues around the Herefordshire dialect of the day. Most importantly, we gained through them a glimpse of how people lived and learned in those days.

A curate's work

One group of three manuscripts presented by Dr Thomson belonged to Sir John Davyys, "Sir being the title not of a minor noble, but of an ordained clerk without a university degree," he explained. We might call Sir John Davyys the curate of Pencoyd, a parish south of Hereford in the 1490s. His books are a compilation of material, often written in single quire paper booklets, that encompassed his stock in trade as a parish priest, and which he annotated and added to over time.

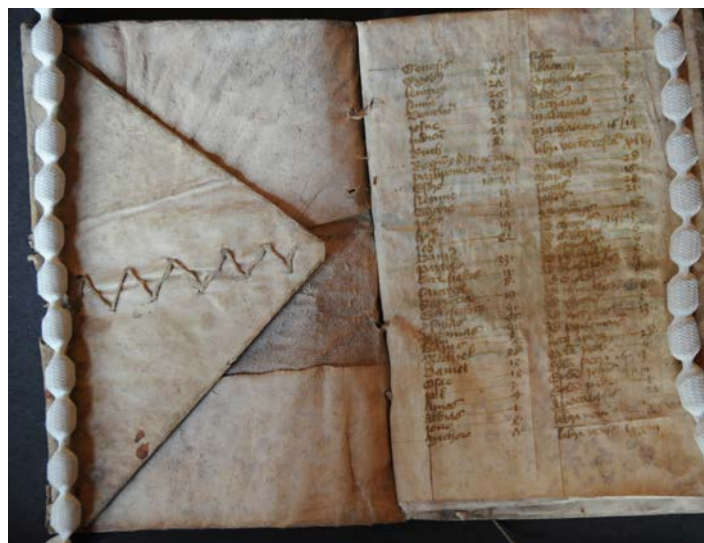
Two big treatises provide a set of sermons for the whole year and instructions on how to do his job, including important duties such as taking confession. Others explain the special feasts and liturgies of Hereford Diocese. Still others are the texts he would use to teach Latin to his parishioners, presumably children.



The books of John Davyys. Photo Dr David Thomson

Learning Latin

While Davyys's books were used to teach and instruct, the next manuscript we examined was used to learn. A small manuscript, now held in the Hereford Cathedral archives, it was probably the notebook of an early-career clerk who, in the first half of the 15th century, was being taught how to embellish his Latin by an older clerk, who had himself learned it at Oxford. "Developing his Latin skills would have been an important career development exercise for a young clerk, who may have aspired to correspond on behalf of his cathedral," Dr Thomson explained. Sadly this remnant breaks off incomplete, perhaps the plague, which ravaged the country at this time, took its toll?



A clerk's notebook. Hereford Cathedral Archives MS 3169 f1r. Photo: Rosemary Firmin

Finally we examined two manuscripts linked to Cistercian monasteries in mid-Wales, Basingwerk and Valle Crucis. The first was written by John Edwards the Younger of Chirk, a gentleman and son of the receiver and chief forester of Chirkland in the late 15th century, presumably during the course of his education. The second is the work of Thomas Pennant who, some twenty years later (1481 to 1552), went on to be abbot of Basingwerk and was perhaps in charge of the abbey school as he records the payment of pupils there. Both contain texts a school master would need, in English as well as in Latin, describe "Inn how mony manerys schall thu begynne to make (Latyn) by ryghtfull ordur of construction". And much more, of course. There is also material to support the liturgy of Hereford Diocese, so whoever compiled them must have looked in that direction.

David's talk then zoomed out to make links between this local and elementary material and the high culture and learning of the day, which was particularly rich in these parts, especially in the field of science. "It's impossible to overstate the pace of technology-driven change in this period," said Dr Thomson. "For example, paper started to be widely available in the 14th century. This, along with the development of the printing press a little later, would be a dramatic spur to literacy and book ownership." Indeed we generally see the introduction of printed books as marking the end of the medieval and beginning of the modern era. They also changed the culture

as instead of each master making their own books, texts became standardised and less idiosyncratic.

"The English language was also starting to be used much more widely in formal settings including education," Dr Thomson concluded. "This, alongside significant efforts by the church to 'learn the laity,' made for an age of rapidly growing schooling and literacy in English as well as Latin. And of course of English literature: these are, after all, the days of Chaucer, Gower, and Piers Plowman."



About the author:

Dr Thomson is a life-long medievalist with a special interest in manuscripts and education. He is a previous Bishop of Huntingdon and a current Honorary Fellow in History at the University of Durham. At Durham he is part of a team working on a new edition of the scientific writings of Robert Grosseteste, many of which had their genesis in Hereford.

Book Launch: Mortimer Landscape of North Herefordshire



Join us in Leominster on Thursday 2 February for the launch of this fascinating book by museum curator and conservator Kate Andrew – a deep delve into the bedrock of Mortimer History.

In her book, Kate Andrew examines how geology and landscape have shaped the history of the Mortimers, showcasing artefacts and finds in regional museums that attest to their story.

Kate has lived in Mortimer country for the last thirty years. She was curator at Ludlow Museum for eight years from 1985 and then moved to Hereford to head up the County Museum Service for ten years, which also meant supporting the many volunteer-run museums in the county. More recently her work has been connected with the care and conservation of churches in the region and heritage consultancy. She has always been interested in how geology impacts landscape, settlement and history. During the very cold snap in December 2010 she witnessed an impressive sunrise parhelion over Hereford. This, together with the story told by museum artefacts and finds reported to the Portable Antiquities

Scheme rather than the usual archival resources provided the starting point for a new angle on the battle of Mortimer's Cross, Wigmore Castle and the Mortimer landscape of North Herefordshire.

Mortimer Landscapes is the second in a series of three books celebrating Herefordshire history commissioned by Society member and regional property specialist, Bill Jackson. The first in the series, *One thousand years of High Sheriffs in Herefordshire*, was written in the year that Bill himself was High Sheriff of the county.

Join us in Leominster

The launch of *Mortimer Landscape of North Herefordshire* will be held at Grange Court, Pinsley Road, Leominster HR6 8NL on Thursday, 2 February and is free of charge for all Mortimer History Society members. Arrive at 7pm for drinks and nibbles. Kate's talk begins at

7:30pm. Please confirm attendance in advance to angelailiff1945@gmail.com.

The book, priced £5, will be available for purchase at the event and afterwards from Jackson International, 45 Bridge Street, Hereford HR4 9DG, or by emailing the author direct at geologicalkandrew@gmail.com



Grange Court

The new year is here and we're thrilled to present you with our 2023 event calendar. Diaries at the ready people!

**KEEP
THE DATE!**

Saturday, 28 January
Education and learning in medieval Wales and the Marches

Online afternoon event exploring aspects of medieval education. Followed by four evening talks throughout February.

7:30pm, Wednesday, 1 February
Adam Usk (c. 1350 to 1430): Clerk, lawyer, Welshman, traitor

1st of our online evening talks on education, given by Professor Chris-Given Wilson, Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of St Andrews.

7pm, Thursday, 2 February
Book launch: Mortimer Landscape of North Herefordshire

Join us at Grange Hall, Leominster for the launch of a fascinating new book. See page 9 for details

7:30pm, Wednesday, 8 February
Nobody shall be a justice without learning: Legal learning in medieval Wales

2nd of our online evening talks on education, given by Dr Sara Elin Roberts, a historian specialising in the law, literature and culture of medieval Wales.

7:30pm, Wednesday, 15 February
Gerald of Wales: A 12th century writer and cleric

3rd of our online evening talks on education, given by Dr Georgia Henley, Assistant Professor of English at Saint Anselm College, Manchester, USA.

7:30pm, Wednesday, 22 February
Walter Brut: Astronomer, farmer, heretic, rebel

Last of our online talks on education, given by Dr Rhun Emlyn, Lecturer in Welsh History at the University of Aberystwyth.

Saturday, 25 March
AGM

Morning event to be held at St George's Parish Church, Orleton. AGM business will be followed by two talks, the first on church chests (including those at Orleton) given by historian Rachel Sycamore, and the second on the Mortimers and Orleton, including the mystery of Orleton's carved stone heads given by Society Secretary Philip Hume. For details see page 12.

Saturday, 20 May
Marriage, sex and dynasty building

Our spring conference will be held at Ludlow Assembly Rooms and is dedicated to all things related to the family, from sex to marriage, childrearing and the Mortimer approach to dynasty building.

21 June
John Grove memorial lecture: Conflict, acculturation and integration in the medieval March of Wales

The second of our annual lecture series commemorating the life of our Society's founder will be held at Powis Castle and include an afternoon tour of the castle so central to Mortimer history. In the evening Dr David Stephenson, Honorary Research Fellow in the School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences at Bangor University, will talk about conflict, acculturation, and integration in the medieval March of Wales.

Tuesday, 1 August
Marking the 700th anniversary of Roger Mortimer's escape from the Tower of London

This very special event will look at all aspects of Roger's imprisonment and escape. It will also mark the launch of the Society's most ambitious publication yet - *The Mortimers of Wigmore in the Middle Ages, 1066-1485: Dynasty of Destiny* an anthology of Mortimer-related essays. Speakers include Dr Ian Mortimer, Dr Laura Tompkins, Jeremy Ashbee, Professor Chris Given-Wilson and Society President, Paul Dryburgh. For details see page 3.

Saturday, 7 October

Autumn symposium. Details to be confirmed.

November – date and venue to be confirmed
Writing the past: Lessons from historical fiction

This half-day conference will feature three historical fiction writers talking about the challenges of re-imagining the past and about the fertile ground that lies between historical fact and artistic creation.

For updates to our events schedule see future issues of *Mortimer Matters* or visit our website, www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk.

Education and learning in Medieval Wales and the Marches – four online talks

Our first event of 2023 tackled aspects of medieval education. During February we'll extend our interest in this subject with a series of four online talks designed to warm up your winter evenings. Join us during February to learn more about learning!



Adam Usk (c. 1350 to 1430): Clerk, lawyer, Welshman, traitor
Professor Chris Given-Wilson
Wednesday 1 February, 7:30pm

Professor Chris-Given Wilson is Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of St Andrews and author of twelve books on 14th and 15th century history. In the first of our talks he will investigate Adam Usk, a Welshman whose education was supported by the Mortimers whose career spanned Rome, France, Wales and England.



Nobody shall be a justice without learning: Legal learning in medieval Wales
Dr Sara Elin Roberts
Wednesday 8 February, 7:30pm

Sara is a historian specialising in the law, literature and culture of medieval Wales. In this talk she'll look at the role of the lawyer, how lawyers were training and the law books they created and used. She'll show how lawyers in turn learned their craft and applied their learning.



Gerald of Wales: A 12th century writer and cleric
Dr Georgia Henley
Wednesday 15 February, 7:30pm

Dr Georgia Henley is Assistant Professor of English at Saint Anselm College in Manchester in New Hampshire USA. She is also co-editor of *Gerald of Wales: New Perspectives on a Medieval Writer and Critic*, published by University of Wales Press. Georgia will introduce us to Gerald examining his background, education, reception and significance as a writer. In particular she'll explain how his writings have influenced our understanding of 12th century life.



Walter Brut: Astronomer, farmer, heretic, rebel
Dr Rhun Emlyn
Wednesday 22 February, 7:30pm

Dr Rhun Emlyn is a lecturer in Welsh history at the University of Aberystwyth, with a special interest in ecclesiastical and political history. He'll round off our series of talks with an examination of one of the most intriguing figures of the Marches – Walter Brut, who likely authored an astronomical textbook, fought on a naval expedition, was tried for heresy and executed for his part in the Glyndwr Rebellion.

Sign up!

Sign up for one, two, three or all four talks via our website. Members and non-members are all welcome.

Single talk: Members £3 Non-members £5

All four talks: Members £8 Non-members £11

Do join in and, afterwards, tell us what you think. If they go well, we may plan more!

Annual General Meeting

Society AGM to be held at 10am on Saturday 25 March in St George's Parish Church, Orleton – a church and village with a long and close association with the Mortimer family.

The manor of Orleton was acquired by Ralph Mortimer (d.1115–27) in the late 1070s. Domesday Book, compiled in 1086, records that he owned Orleton in Wolfhay Hundred and that the previous owner had been Queen Edith, the widow of King Edward the Confessor. Queen Edith, who died in December 1075, had owned a number of manors in north Herefordshire, most of which were given to Ralph Mortimer. Three hundred and fifty years later, there are records of Edmund Mortimer, 5th earl of March, taking an interest in the affairs of Orleton and its church in the years before his childless death in 1425.

It seems only fitting then, that one of two talks that will follow the formal business of the AGM will focus on fascinating Mortimer artefacts in the church.

The Orleton heads

Society Secretary Philip Hume will talk about the Mortimers, Orleton and some curious artifacts that remain in St George's Church. These include six controversial stone-carved heads that date from around the 1330s. Three of the heads are on the walls of the nave, and three are around the chancel arch. A recent local story says that the lordly head that sits on top of the chancel arch depicts Roger Mortimer, the de-facto ruler of England for nearly four years before his execution in 1330. In his talk, Philip will assess the evidence for that



The head of Roger Mortimer? (C Philip Hume)

being true, but certainly the story poses an intriguing question – will our 2023 AGM take place with Roger Mortimer staring down at us?

Church chests

The second talk will be given by Society member, Rachel Sycamore, who will

talk about two rare dug-out chests to be found in the church. Throughout the Medieval period, church chests were used for the secure storage of documents and church valuables, with many extant in parish churches today. Dug-out chests (those made from the hollowed-out trunk of a single tree) are among the rarest, with only fifteen remaining in Herefordshire. St George's is one of very few churches fortunate enough to have not one but two! Rachel will discuss how the chests were constructed and used, and how modern technology has allowed them to be accurately dated.

The AGM is open to all members and we do encourage you to attend. In addition to these two fascinating talks, it's the place where the important business of your Society is discussed and decisions made!



One of two rare chests in Orleton's church

Welcome to new members

Welcome to new members. Our membership continues to flourish. Nineteen new members have joined since the last edition of *Mortimer Matters*. Welcome all! We hope you're enjoying your membership and look forward to meeting you soon!

Sylvia Bestwick	Welshpool	Gail Petersen	USA
Stephen and Denise Briggs	Leeds	Edward Powell	Cambridge
Catherine Clarke	Cheswardine	Tracey and Ian Silvester	Cardiff
Natasha Coombs	Welshpool	William Ransford	Kerry
Barry Gandy	Orleton	Pamela Thom-Rowe	Bridgnorth
Rosemary Harvey	Cheltenham	Faith and Stephen Tibble	Ashperton
Philip Lee	Worcester	Beth Williams	USA
Ellen Marchese	USA	Martha Wooldridge	Llandrindod Wells

Announcing our first programme of online seminars for academics and students

In the last edition of Mortimer Matters we told you about plans to establish a unique online seminar series targeted at established and early career historians. We're delighted to announce the first series of events. Focused on the history of medieval Wales and the Marches, the seminar series will help deepen understanding of this vital area of history within the academic community.

The first seminar took place in January and will be followed by...

A new frontier? Lord Edmund and the English Crown in the March of Wales, 1267 to 1272

Speaker: Dr Alastair Ayton, St Leonard's Associate at the University of St Andrews.

Chair: Philip Hume, Secretary of Mortimer History Society.
7pm, Thursday, 16 February.

An exploration of the early career of Henry III's second surviving son, Lord Edmund (d.1296) It argues that Edmund's introduction into the March heralded a change in the royal approach towards Wales, while bolstering the crown's ongoing pursuit of power in the region.

Na wna Glawdd Offa'n ddiffaith (Don't make Offa's Dyke a wasteland): Offa's Dyke in Welsh language texts before c.1600

Speaker: Dr Dylan Foster Evans, Head of School of Welsh, Cardiff University.

Chair: Dr Sara Elin Roberts, Visiting Lecturer in History, University of Chester.
7:30pm, Thursday, 2 March.

A consideration of Welsh-language engagements with the Dyke in a range of texts and genres, seeking to understand how it was conceptualised as a physical space and as a political, jurisdictional or cultural border.

Observing and marvelling: Sun Dogs in the Margam Annals

Speaker: Professor Giles Gasper, Deputy Executive Dean (Research), Durham University and Brian K Tanner, Emeritus Professor of Physics, University of Durham

Chair: Dr Ben Guy
7:30pm, Thursday, 9 March

An exploration of sun dogs in the Cambridge and Dublin manuscripts of the annals from the Cistercian house of Margam. Why the manuscript's authors, copyists and were so struck by these phenomena, and their links with the Marches and beyond.

Sealing (in the) border: Seals and sealing practices in the medieval Welsh Marches

Speaker: Dr Elizabeth New, Reader in Medieval History at Aberystwyth University.

Chair: Dr Emma Cavell, Senior Lecturer in Medieval History at Swansea University.
7pm, Thursday, 16 March.

An examination of sealing culture under Anglo-Norman influence with a particular focus on the manufacture and availability of seal matrices, who used them and what they reveal about trade, communication and identity.

Marcher perspectives on the Welsh past

Speaker: Dr Georgia Henley, Assistant Professor of English at Saint Anselm College, Manchester, USA.

Chair: Dr David Stephenson, Honorary Research Fellow in the School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences at Bangor University.
7:30pm, Wednesday, 22 March

A study of what Marcher baronial literature of the thirteen and fourteenth centuries reveals about interest in Wales and its past.

Academics only

If you'd like to be involved in the group please email secretary@mortimerhistorysociety.org. However, please be aware, this series is designed specifically for academics and students, and will consist of established historians reading their academic papers.

Making progress at Wigmore Castle

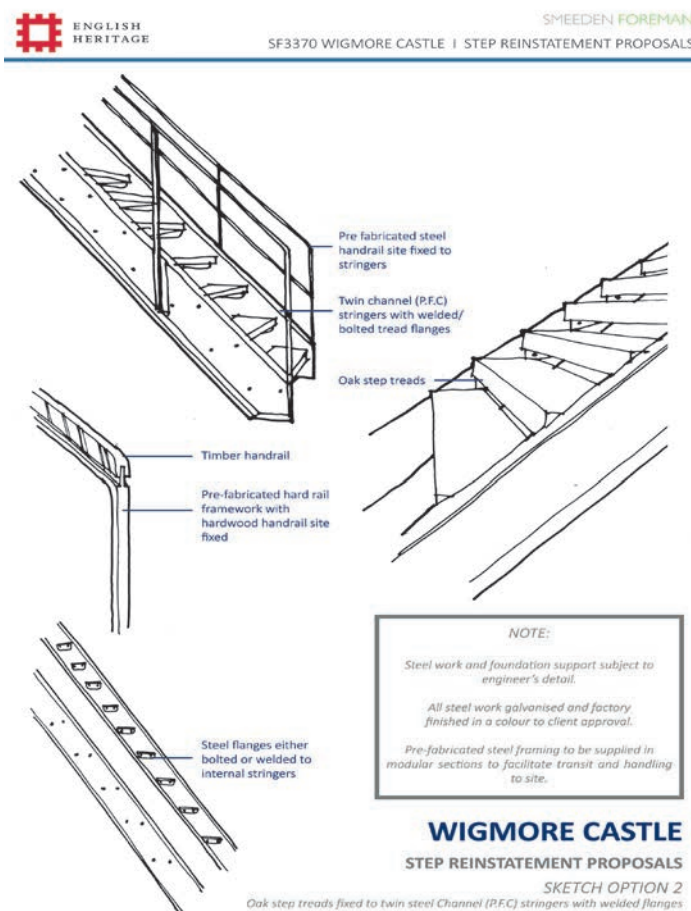
In the July 2022 Mortimer Matters we reported that the Society has been working constructively with English Heritage towards replacing the access to the very top of Wigmore Castle. We can now report that Society members Hugh Wood and Mike Beazley visited the site in December, and that plans are progressing well, as Hugh explains...

It's now several years since the steep wooden stairs, which gave access to the shell keep at the top of the mound at Wigmore, were condemned as unsafe, and removed. Subsequently, visitors to the castle have had a quite limited experience of this iconic home of the Mortimers. For some time now, your Society trustees have been encouraging English Heritage to create a new way for visitors to reach the top, and some months ago we were delighted to hear that funds had been allocated for this project.

A further significant step was taken on 19 December, Mike Beazley and I had an on-site meeting with three staff from English Heritage and an independent landscape consultant. After considering a number of alternatives, English Heritage has decided that the best solution is to reinstate a flight of steps straight up to the top. The present proposal is for a light steel structure with handrails, though English Heritage is very aware of the need to avoid anything that clashes with the environment around it. So it is proposed that both the treads of the steps and the top of the handrail are wooden. Further benefits can also be achieved by moving the foot of the stairway over to the right: not only will this make the slope a little less steep but, by allowing the vegetation to grow up



Mike Beazley with Bernard Walker of English Heritage and landscape architect, Ian Birtwistle



Artists impression of one option for the access stairs

alongside the steps, they will effectively be screened from anyone looking up from the castle bailey. Also included in the project will be new steps to help visitors access different areas of the shell keep.

All in all, this seems an excellent solution. English Heritage is committed to a route that will merge easily into the landscape while being robust and safe. Once detailed plans have been created, they will need to be approved by Historic England before work can begin. We'll need to be patient for a while longer but we will certainly keep you informed!

The Welsh Marcher Lordships Volume II – coming soon!

Series editor, Philip Hume looks forward to the publication of the second of three books examining the history of the Welsh Marcher Lordships, which is now in the latter stages of production. This time, it's the Lordships of the south-west that will be brought into focus by Society member and author John Fleming.



Philip Hume

As you read this article our publisher Logaston Press is putting the finishing touches to the book and getting ready to press the button to print. Publication is expected in late March or early April. As soon as we know the exact date, we'll be sending you details of an online launch and in-person reception. Judging by how many times I get asked when Volume II is coming, I know many Society members are looking forward to it just as much as I am!

When I first had the ideas that led to Logaston Press agreeing to publish this three-volume series, I was confident there would be a strong interest in books that provided the general reader with a broad-ranging synthesis of the fascinating history of the Marcher Lordships. This confidence has been rewarded with strong sales. The first volume, which focussed on the central and northern Lordships, has sold out twice since its publication in March 2021, the first time after only 5 months and now a second time after a further 16 months. This is a clear demonstration of a great and growing interest in the Marcher Lordships and their lords, who were at the centre of events that affected the history of England and Wales for nearly 500 years. Many positive reviews confirm that we've not only succeeded in satisfying the needs of the general reader, but that we're also providing a useful introduction for scholars new to the subject.

The series seeks to answer important questions such as: what were the medieval Welsh Marches? What defined a Marcher Lordship and how did they evolve during the two centuries from the first arrival of the Normans on the Welsh borders to the Edwardian conquests of

Wales in the 1270s and 1280s? What were the distinctive powers of Marcher Lords and how did they develop? Why did the Marcher Lordships become an anomaly that led to the abolition of their powers in the 16th century during the reign of Henry VIII?

John Fleming describes a group of Lordships defined by common origin and shaped by conquest.

Today, when people envisage the Welsh Marches, it's often the picturesque area that straddles the central part of the English/Welsh border in Shropshire and north Herefordshire that comes to mind. There are indications that, in the 11th century this was also the perception; however, during the next two centuries, it greatly expanded to encompass a region



John Fleming

that ran from north Wales and the Dee estuary down to the Severn estuary, and across south Wales to the south-west and the coast of Pembrokeshire.

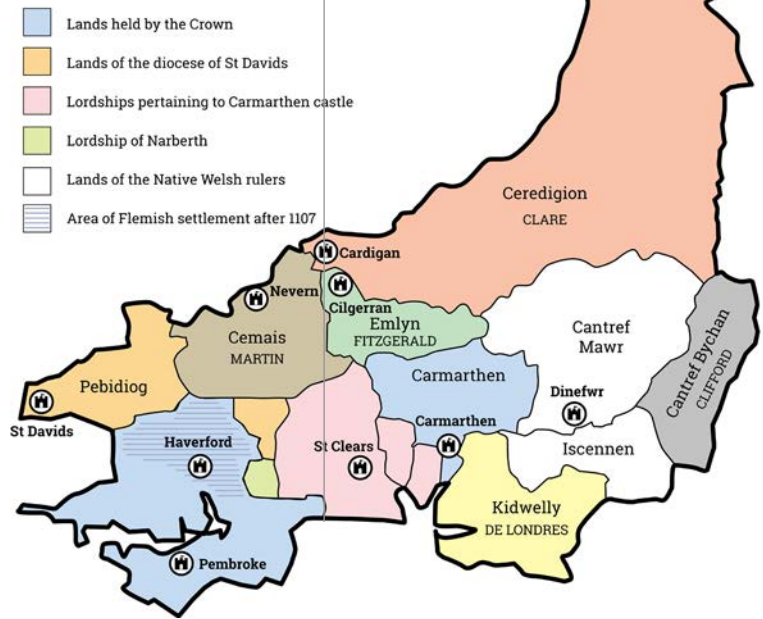
To provide a focus on the distinct geographical areas that different readers may be interested in (and to ensure the books are of a manageable size!), the series consists of three volumes – the first covered the Marcher lordships in the northern and central regions; the second those in the south-west; and the third (yet to come) those in the south-east. Volume III is being written by Society member Kirsten Lawton-Smith and is due to be published in spring 2024. Overall, each of the regions has a distinct narrative. Certainly, as the author, John Fleming describes below, the development and nature of the Marcher lordships in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire (a region which many people, indeed, don't realise was part of the medieval March of Wales) was very different to those in the central and northern regions.

When Philip, the Series editor, asked me if I'd be interested in writing a book about the Marcher lordships of south-west Wales, I immediately said yes. What I hadn't realised at the time was how neatly the Marcher Lordships of this region were able to be described as distinct, sharing a common theme that differentiated them from the other Lordships described in volumes I and III. As laid out in the early chapters of volume I, there were several different ways by which Marcher Lordships were formed. Those of the south-west were by and large created by conquest at the end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th centuries, which meant they were bound together by a common origin. The story doesn't

just stop there though. From the early years following the initial Norman invasion until the Edwardian conquest at the end of the 13th century, this was a land punctuated by long periods of violence and strife. Indeed, there were many decades where the Welsh held the upper hand and some of the early Lordships were lost by the Anglo-Normans. This goes a long way to explain why south-west Wales has one of the highest concentrations of castles in Britain.

Volume II therefore sets out to explain how the Normans were able to conquer this corner of Wales and for the most part retain what they'd gained. As one might expect, the narrative is dominated by the strong characters of the time, including an early Welsh princess married to the Norman castellan of Pembroke, a Welsh ruler who dominated the second half of the 12th century with the support of an Anglo-Norman king, and the first earl of Pembroke who became possibly the most famous knight to have ever lived. This is a book about the history of the Marcher lordships, but more importantly it's about the people, Marcher lords and Welsh princes, who made that history.

Marcher Lordships of south-west Wales and their controllers - circa 1130



Anthology writers...

In 2023 the Society celebrates the 700th anniversary of Roger Mortimer's escape from the Tower by publishing *The Mortimers of Wigmore in the Middle Ages, 1066-1485: Dynasty of Destiny*. This anthology of Mortimer-related essays will be revealed to the world at a very special event at the Tower of London. Here one of our contributing scholars, Laura Tompkins, gives us an insight into her contribution.

Laura Tompkins is the Research Manager at Historic Royal Palaces and an Associate Fellow of the Institute of Historical Research, who specialises in the political history of England in the 14th century.



Laura Tompkins

Roger Mortimer's escape from the Tower

Laura's essay will explore the legend of the escape of Roger Mortimer from the Tower of London on the night of 1 August 1323, a pivotal event in the reign of Edward II that would ultimately result in the king's forced abdication and death. Mortimer's escape is a remarkable tale that could be straight out of any action-adventure, complete with poison, ingeniously crafted rope ladders, and a daring flight across the sea! With the passage of time, however, the narrative has become distorted, with a number of myths emerging. To address this issue, Laura brings together the contemporary chronicle sources with government records to illuminate the details of what is actually known – and what is not – about what happened. In doing so, she offers an analysis of the specific reasons behind the timing of the escape and the identity of a variety of potential collaborators, including the queen, Isabella of France, with whom he would later form his infamous alliance. Finally, Laura draws upon the research of architectural historians to tackle the mystery of the exact location of Mortimer's incarceration within the Tower complex and the route he took to gain his freedom, focusing not – as might be expected – on the White Tower, but on the largely lost medieval palace.

The anthology, slated for publication by Logaston Press will be launched at the Tower of London on 1 August 2023, when the Society will meet to commemorate Roger's daring bid for freedom.

For your bookshelf

Four titles for the new year...

The Burgundians

By Bart Van Loo, trans by Nancy Forest-Flyer

A compulsively readable history of Burgundy, extinguished as a state at the end of the 15th century. It covers a thousand years of ambitious aristocrats, family dysfunction, treachery, luxury and madness. It is about the decline of knightly ideals, the awakening of individualism and of cities, and the struggle for dominance in northern Europe.

Published by Head of Zeus. Available in bookshops and online. RRP £12.99.

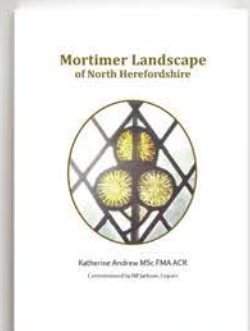


Mortimer Landscape of North Herefordshire

By Katherine Andrew

An examination of Mortimer-related landscapes in North Herefordshire with specific reference to Wigmore Castle and the battle of Mortimer's Cross – the last major engagement to be fought on Herefordshire soil and the starting point for a Yorkist royal dynasty.

Published by No1LHA. Available priced £5 from Jackson International, 45 Bridge Street, Hereford HR49DG, or by emailing the author direct at geologicalkandrew@gmail.com.

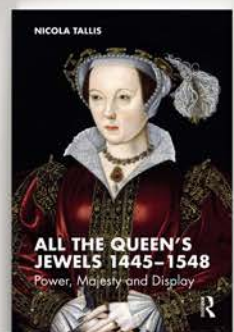


All the Queen's Jewels, 1445–1548: Power, Majesty and Display

By Nicola Tallis

From Margaret of Anjou to Katherine Parr, *All the Queen's Jewels* examines the jewellery collections of the ten queen consorts of England between 1445–1548 and investigates the collections of jewels a queen had access to, as well as the varying contexts in which queens used and wore jewels.

Published by Routledge. Available in bookshops and online. RRP £24.99



Woodville Women

By Sarah J Hodder

Three generations of women linked by their name, and family relationship; Elizabeth Woodville, Edward IV's queen, her daughter Elizabeth of York, the first Tudor Queen and Elizabeth Grey, granddaughter of Elizabeth Woodville and Countess of Kildare.

Available in hardback from www.pen-and-sword.co.uk for £20

