



MORTIMER
History Society

MORTIMER *Matters*

Could the real Magna Carta please stand up

Exploring the evolution of Magna Carta from 1215, Professor David Carpenter clarifies the Great Charter's complicated naming and identifies the 1225 Charter as the one that counts.

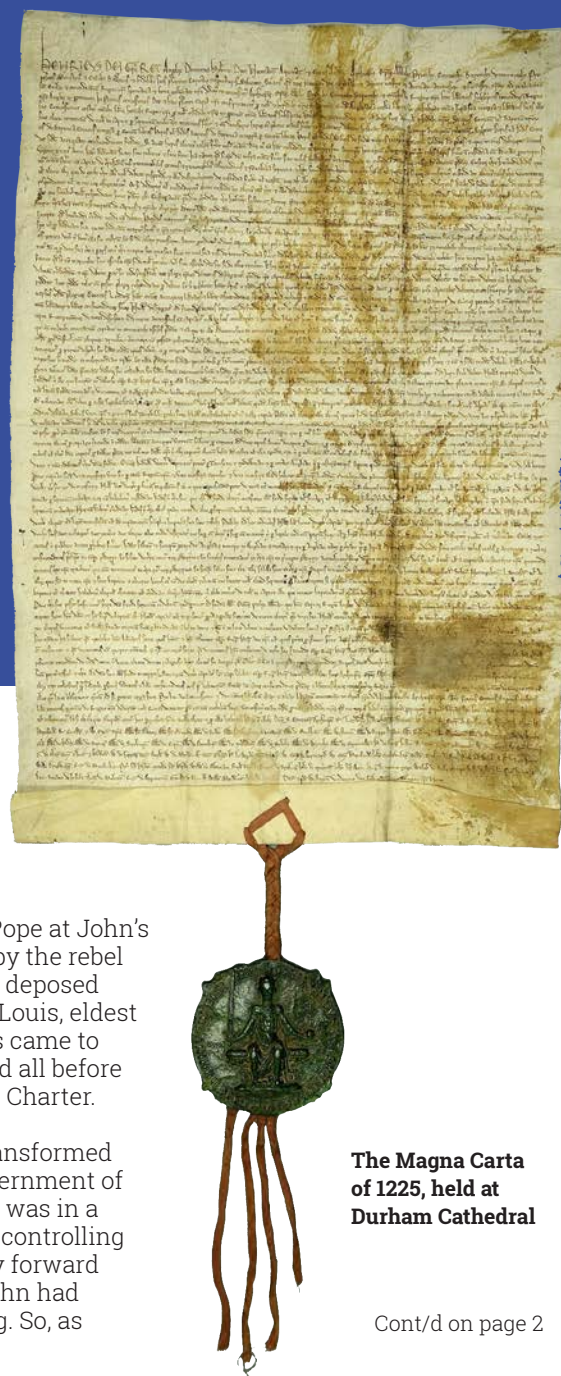
2025 sees the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. This statement alone might seem perplexing, for surely the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta was marked in 2015 when the great and the good of the realm gathered at Runnymede to celebrate the Charter King John issued there in 1215.

The fact is, in the centuries after 1215, the name Magna Carta was rarely given to John's Charter. Magna Carta, rather, was the Charter issued by his son, Henry III, at Westminster on 11 February 1225. Although Henry's Charter was based on his father's, the 1215 Charter was usually called simply 'the Charter of Runnymede'. When, therefore, in 1297 and 1300, Henry's son, Edward I, confirmed Magna Carta, he confirmed the Charter of 1225 rather than that of 1215, and the same was true of all later confirmations. Indeed, it is chapters of the 1225 Charter that remain on the UK's statute book today.

Origins

How then did the Charter of Runnymede become Magna Carta in 1225? At the end of 1215 the Charter of Runnymede appeared to have failed, quashed by the Pope at John's behest and largely abandoned by the rebel barons. Instead, the barons had deposed John and offered the throne to Louis, eldest son of the King of France. Louis came to England in May 1216 and carried all before him, but said nothing about the Charter.

John's death in October 1216 transformed the situation. The minority government of his nine-year old son, Henry III, was in a desperate situation, with Louis controlling much of England. The only way forward seemed to be to accept what John had rejected and Louis was ignoring. So, as



The Magna Carta of 1225, held at Durham Cathedral

Cont/d on page 2

In This Issue

Features

1225 Magna Carta – 800 years on	1
A Pilgrims Map – Mappa Mundi	4
Templars and Assassins	6

Society News

Meet Kathy Cowell	8
New members	8
MHS Bursary	9
Wars of the Ross Memorial Database	12

Events

Autumn conference review	10
November conference programme	11
Keep the date	11

Reviews and recommendations

Bookshelf	13
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The Runnymede Charter, from an 18th century engraving

almost the new government's first move, on 12 November 1216, a new version of the Charter was issued in Henry's name. The most controversial and radical provisions of 1215 were omitted, but the great bulk of the 1215 Charter remained. The concession had its effect. Although there were no immediate desertions from Louis' side, at the decisive battle of Lincoln in May 1217, the rebel barons hardly fought very hard. None were killed

and most simply surrendered. With a version of the 1215 Charter accepted, they could think their cause was won. In time Louis abandoned his claim to the throne and returned to France. In return, the minority government restored the rebels to their lands and, in November 1217, issued a new and improved version of the 1216 Charter. This time, moreover, the Charter was accompanied by an entirely new Charter regulating the running of the Royal Forest. It was now that the term Magna Carta (The Great Charter), made its first appearance. It referred not to the Charter's grandeur but to its physical size, the point being to distinguish the physically larger Magna Carta from the smaller Charter of the Forest. Henceforth those two would always be linked together.

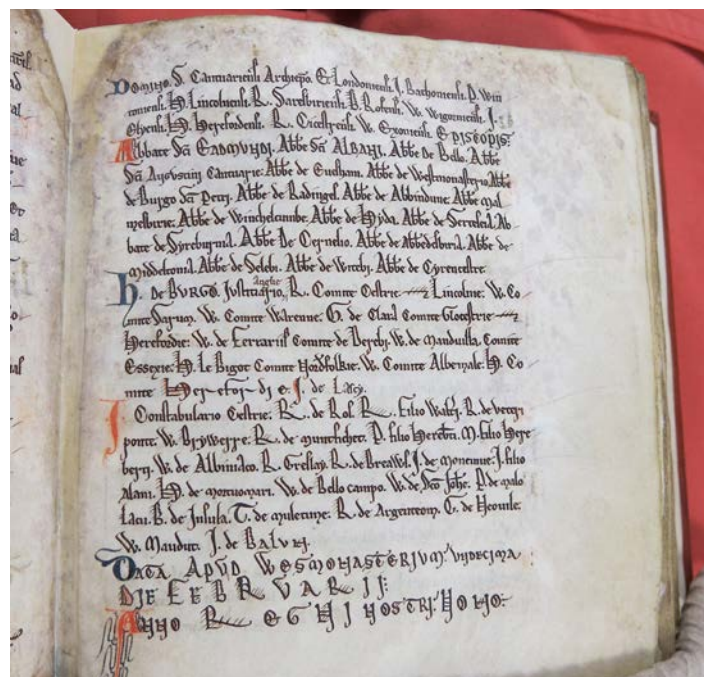
Questions of validity

But the 1217 Charters remained problematic. How could they be trusted when issued by a ten-year-old king still lacking his own seal? And might it not be claimed that the Charters were invalid as they were extracted from the king by rebellion? In 1225 a crisis overseas created an opportunity to put these problems right.

In 1224, Louis, now king of France, overran the county of Poitou. Gascony to the south, the king of England's one remaining continental possession, seemed likely to fall too. A gigantic effort would be needed to save it and for that money was needed, which could only come from a tax levied on the whole kingdom. Such a tax had to be sanctioned by a great council, the kind of assembly soon to be called parliament. But how to secure the council's consent? The answer was for the king to concede, in return for the tax, new versions of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest that put right the deficiencies of their predecessors. The great tax saved Gascony, which remained in English hands until 1453.

The makers of the Charter

Two men, acting from very different motives, were responsible for negotiating the deal which led to the 1225 Charters. They were the justiciar, Hubert de Burgh, at the head



Witness list to the 1225 Charter. Its elaborate artistry signals an appreciation of its importance

of government since the death of William Marshal in 1219, and the archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton. For de Burgh the Charters were simply a practical necessity. For Langton they corresponded to deeply held ideas about the need for rulers to be limited by the law.

The texts of the 1225 Charters, crafted by Langton and de Burgh, had new preambles and conclusions. In the preamble, the king (now aged seventeen) was said to act 'of his spontaneous and good will', a statement found in neither of his previous Charters, or that of King John. The conclusion to the Charters rebutted the charge that they had been extracted from the king by force, for they stated that, in return for his concession, he had been granted his great tax. The charge of coercion was thus laid to rest.

The consensual nature of the Charters was further demonstrated by the lists of witnesses who affirmed their granting. The earlier Charters had no witness lists to speak of, whereas, in 1225, the good and great of the land, whatever their stance in the civil war, bore witness.

Langton, responding to ideas about how just rule should benefit the whole community, also did something to make Magna Carta more inclusive. The concessions in the earlier Charters had only been made to people who were free, thus excluding the unfree peasantry who made up the largest part of the population. In 1225 this changed and the preamble states that the provisions of the charter were granted to 'everyone in the kingdom'.

Outside the actual texts, Langton moved decisively to bring the church in full square behind the Charters. In 1215, he had felt unable to excommunicate those who contravened John's Charter, in part because it was clearly the product of rebellion. Now, with the 1225 Charters being clearly consensual documents, he and his fellow bishops sentenced to excommunication all who breached them. This set a precedent and further sentences of excommunication were promulgated in 1237 and 1253. Churchmen could profit, as much as laymen, from many of Magna Carta's provisions but,

in particular, they treasured the very first chapter, which guaranteed the freedom of the church.

Further developments

The 1225 texts became the final and definitive versions of Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest, but this didn't mean they were without flaw. Despite acting 'of his spontaneous and good will', Henry had still issued the Charters before coming of age at 21, a defect that had to be put right in a proclamation of 1237. More serious was the fact that the Charters set out no constitutional means of enforcement. The 1215 Charter had given twenty-five barons the power to enforce its provisions. But the twenty-five were omitted from the subsequent versions of the Charter and nothing was put in their place. While the sentences of excommunication elevated the status and publicised the texts of the Charters, their practical effect is unclear. Not surprisingly, there were constant complaints that the Charters were being broken.

Perhaps people protested too much. Some key chapters of Magna Carta were obeyed. The inheritance tax paid by earls and barons became a £100 rather than the hundreds and thousands of pounds sometimes demanded before 1215. For the most part, widows of barons and knights were not forced into remarriage. Justice was no longer openly sold. The Forest Charter saw substantial areas removed from the Royal Forest. In general, the rule

of Henry III was less abrasive and extortionate than his father's. The texts of the Charters also became widely known and thus sank deep roots into English society. By the end of the 13th century, Magna Carta was firmly established at the heart of the English polity and was well set for its long later history.

The misnaming of Runnymede

In that history, one question remains. How and when did the Charter of Runnymede become universally known as Magna Carta? For that we can thank an 18th century lawyer named William Blackstone. In his *The Great Charter*, published in 1759, he printed for the first time an authentic text of the 1215 Charter. He did so under the heading 'Magna

Carta Regis Johannis'. Likewise, his introduction referred continuously to the 'Great Charter' of King John. Blackstone, it seems, was unaware that the word 'Magna' had originally referred simply to the physical size of the 1217 and 1225 Charters as against the Charter of the Forest. For him it meant 'great' in terms of status and was thus very much applicable to the Charter of 1215, the parent, as he showed, of Henry III's later Magna Carta. Blackstone's terminology stuck.

It's certain that, without John's Charter, the Henrician versions would never have existed. Yet, the Charter of 1225, consensual in a way its predecessors were not, placed Magna Carta on new and firmer foundations. Without the 1225 version, Magna Carta's future would have been far less secure. The Charters of 1215 and 1225 should always march together.



About the author

David Carpenter is Professor of Medieval History at King's College London and has published widely on Magna Carta and the reign of Henry III including: *A New Commentary* published in the Penguin Classics series, and a two-volume biography of Henry III published by Yale University Press.

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Welcome to the autumn edition of *Mortimer Matters*. The nights are drawing in, but there's lots to keep you occupied, with thrilling reads about the Magna Carta and the *Mappa Mundi* as well as Templars and Assassins. Thanks so much to Professor David Carpenter, new MHS bursary recipient Jonathan Moore, and Dr Stephen Tibble for their contributions.

In *Society* news we reveal the two laudable recipients of this year's bursary and bring you up to date with our event plans for the rest of the year. On 4 October our autumn conference celebrated the 800th anniversary of the 1225 issue of Magna Carta and trustee John Fleming brings us a review.

We'd love to hear what you think about *Mortimer Matters* and the activities it

reports on. Why not drop me a line at mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk and let me know your thoughts? 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 January 2026 and will start planning it soon, so please get in touch with your ideas quickly!



Annie Garthwaite

The Pilgrim's Map: The Hereford Mappa Mundi

PhD student and MHS Bursary recipient Jonathan Moore reveals the spiritual goal of pilgrimage – and the map that guides it.

What's the difference between a pilgrimage and an expedition, a holiday or a military tour? Truly, they all share a fundamental principle: groups or individuals take a journey from point A to point B. There's a destination to be reached from an established starting point, wherein each traveller will find their goal and a map often guides the route. A military tour requires the purpose of defence or conquest, a holiday has relaxation as an end goal and an expedition implies scientific discovery, yet a pilgrimage feels somewhat more nebulous.

The question of pilgrimage requires a degree of spiritual direction. For the medieval Herefordian pilgrim, that came in the form of a regular canon standing before a great wall-mounted map in their home cathedral, offering instruction.

This well-known piece of 'theo-geographical' art, which hangs in Hereford Cathedral's cloisters, is a rare breed indeed. There have been numerous well-researched assessments of the *Mappa's* history and many examinations of its content, including its inaccurate geography, mislabelling of continents, its depictions of monstrous beasts, and anachronistic, mythological events. The conclusions certain scholars have drawn from this are that medieval pilgrims were a superstitious, a-scientific bunch. This, I argue, is a misunderstanding of genre. Despite the cartographic field now being one dominated by geographic maps, the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* more importantly seeks to communicate the tangible reality of deep mystical meaning.

Firstly, to provide some context, the *Mappa Mundi* was an essential

component of Hereford's pilgrimage economy. Unlike the famous healing shrine of St Thomas of Hereford, which was the end of a pilgrimage, the *Mappa* was the starting point. It was an educational tool used by the canons of the cathedral to instruct aspirant pilgrims as to how to journey, not just through the geographical planes but also the spiritual. Not simply a process of going but becoming.

The *Mappa* is a rare breed in its survival, but not necessarily in its genre. Rather, a number of these *mappaemundi* were used in the schools, abbeys and newly-founded universities to instruct students as to the meaning of the world as God's creation. Thankfully for us, a few of these lectures and texts survive, which give us a glimpse into their meaning, specifically those from the Anglo-French school. Dan Terka, the author of the well-dog-eared *A Critical Companion to English Mappae Mundi* (2019), in his article about Anglo-French Cartography (2013), proposed that a key influence on *mappae* theology was Hugh of St Victor (d. 1141). The famous mystic and theologian of the Abbey of St Victor in Paris, whose daughter abbey was that of Wigmore (of Mortimer fame and patronage). Hugh's works on the *Mappae Mundi* were a key influence on my understanding of how one should read the *Mappa* in Hereford. Thus, there is sense in reading his *mappaemundi* lectures to learn something of the instruction given before our own home *Mappa*.

The Hereford *Mappa Mundi*



Jerusalem and the cross – the centre of the earth and the fulcrum for every pilgrimage

Cont/d on page 5

At the centre of the Hereford *Mappa* lies Jerusalem, both the earthly realm of Christ-trodden earth and the New Jerusalem, the foundation of eternal promise which shall be made here at Christ's triumphant return. When the pilgrim plots his path, Jerusalem is the orienting point, the axis mundi around which the earth turns. The medieval version of a magnetic north. This is the point of the Crucifixion and, therefore, salvation. The end of the pilgrims' route.

During one of Hugh's *mappaemundi* lectures, an unnamed student poses this question to the master: "Where is Paradise?" It is from here that the pilgrim's curiosity must begin, for how can one be a pilgrim without knowing where one is going? Note here that it is Paradise which is mentioned, not some earthly realm or crusading goal. Instead, it is the search for Eden and the reversal of the effects of the Fall, which marked the entry of sin into the world, and death itself. It is not merely a physical pursuit of the old garden, but a spiritual pursuit of the nourished garden to come.

Hugh responds to his student: "Your entry is in the east; there is the tree of life that you desire". East (the top of the map), where the sun rises, is the beginning point of time, Eden, the Fall and the slow change of mankind into the monstrous form which outwardly shows their sinful, beastly state.

Just as mankind entered the world in the East (Eden), so too does the pilgrim by spiritually assessing their own sin in pursuit of conquering it and becoming perfectly human once more.

Beyond Eden, beyond the very bounds of the world itself, lies the destination



The judgement seat – the pilgrim's final destination

mankind is to journey towards, the final judgement where one is either welcomed into Paradise or cast into the Inferno. This is the goal for the pilgrim. It is a pilgrimage through time as much as it is through space. The destination is the judgment seat, for this is where sin's effects are cast away.

Thus, the pilgrim need not memorise every mountain and sea to remember where they are going. Rather, they must set their compass according to the Cross, orient themselves from Hereford towards the spiritual east and journey on towards the goal.

Therefore, to answer our initial question about the defining nature of a pilgrimage, it is a journey where one seeks not only to go somewhere, but to

become someone sanctified before God. It is a journey where salvation is the goal. In taking up this pilgrim's charge, those standing before the mappa must plot their way, taking the cross as the orienting point, the still point in the changing world, and then venturing east to the dawning of a new day. Upward. Beyond the border of the world itself and towards the throne of eternal glory.



About the author:

Jonathan Moore is a PhD student at St Andrew's University and a recipient of this year's MHS Bursary (see page 9). His MLitt studies at the same university involved a dissertation investigating the Hereford Mappa Mundi as geographical cartography.

All images have been published by kind permission of The Hereford Mappa Mundi Trust and the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral.



Adam and Eve expelled from Eden (left) become the beasts seen at the right of the image

Assassins and Templars – Lies, Legends and Lacys

Steve Tibble's new book *Assassins and Templars: A Battle in Myth and Blood* tells the story of the medieval world's two most extraordinary organisations, tracing their origins, strategies, violent clashes and enduring legacies in myth and memory. Here he introduces us to the men bound together by the promise of death – and to the Marcher lord who joined their ranks.



During the crusades the winning formula was to put enormous amounts of money and energy into acquiring big armies. All the major players did it. The huge quantities of young, reckless men that this required were the underlying drivers for two centuries of war and criminality. They were also the basic building blocks upon which (almost) all power structures were built.

But if the major players struggled to build these voraciously expensive and disruptive armies, how did the minor players, the ones without the big budgets or pulling power, survive?

The short answer is that in most cases they did not. The majority of the smaller Turkic players and their city states gradually got rolled up into the bigger political entities that were forming around them – super-states such as Saladin's Ayyubid empire or its Mamluk successors. The old ruling families survived as long as they could, but only as vassals. Before long almost all of them were swept away.

Almost all. But not quite.

Murder and Minnows – Honing the Strategy of Death

Amongst the minor groups that contemporaries in the medieval Middle East would initially have nominated as 'least likely to succeed' were an unpopular band of religious enthusiasts. For most of their early history in the Holy Land they lacked a clear territorial or political base. They were small in number and without obvious economic assets. And they were widely despised by their powerful Sunni Muslim neighbours as heretics and traitors.

This obscure, and presumably doomed, breakaway sect later became known, by their enemies at least, as the Assassins.

Their roots lay in the Fatimid empire. This was a state founded in religious inspiration, as an Ismaili offshoot from Shi'ism, which was itself an offshoot of Islam. And, as if the splits from Sunni Islam and mainstream Shiism were not disruptive enough, in 1094 the Ismailis in Egypt split once more.

A group known as the 'Nizari Ismailis' fell out with the Fatimid authorities, left Egypt and fled to Persia, where they chose to regroup rather than disband. Under the extraordinary leadership of Hasan, their first leader in Persia, the Nizari Ismailis (or 'Assassins' as they became known), waged a nationalistic, religious and revolutionary war against the Sunni Seljuk Turks.

The Assassins were a tiny, unpopular group that many considered heretical, but they had established their own sect, free from the constraining control of Egypt. The time was right for them to branch out to Syria, where they established a series of imposing castles and were led by a leader with a similarly imposing title – The Old Man of the Mountain.

It was here that they clashed, and consorted, with crusaders and Templars – including men from the Welsh Marches.

Murder and Mayhem

Against all the odds, the Assassins survived – and they did so by refusing to play the same game that everyone else was so swept up in. They knew that they couldn't raise big armies. The regional demographic arms race was pitched at such a level that they could not even begin to compete. So, rather than fail in doing the same as everyone else, they focused instead on succeeding by doing something very different.

Their solution was murder. Unstoppable murder. And with that, the legends began.

The Assassins often had an extremely fractious relationship with the Templars. Ostensibly they had nothing in common. They had vastly different reputations and cultural backgrounds. And yet in some ways they were strikingly similar. Both groups were outnumbered. Both were surrounded. And each possessed no significant technological advantage over their enemies. They had to resort to fanaticism, focus and reckless bravery to redress the balance.

Both the Assassins and Templars had some of the characteristics we normally associate with being a cult. And in each case, the cult was formed around the promise of death, and both groups embodied the liberation, commitment and finality that accompanied death's acceptance. They looked for the death of their opponents and, although not wilfully suicidal, embraced the strong possibility of death themselves. Death was their promise and that promise lay at the heart of their power.

Each group also found a vital role as 'state-builders'. This was an essential life raft for religious minorities in an often intolerant age – the Christian communities of the Middle East and the Nizari Ismaili Shi'ite minority, both nestling in the shadow of a potentially overwhelming Sunni empire, were always vulnerable. Both sects, Templars and Assassins alike, had, in effect, ambitions to create a state within a state.

Vitality for their image and the methodology of fear that they eventually became famous for, both were unusually structured – unlike most political entities in that time and place, they were *corporations* rather than the more typical 'family-run businesses'. They knew that the death of a carefully chosen individual (a successful

Cont/d on page 7

leader, say, a wife or a beloved child) would have a profound effect on the dynastically-centred states of their enemies, while they themselves were impervious to such threats.

These ostensibly opposite but strangely parallel groups kept bouncing off each other over a period of two centuries - and, up to the present day, have become endlessly conjoined in our memories. Their reputations have each taken a similar arc, morphing from hard-nosed reality into absurd legends, and from champions of their communities into pantomime villains.



The Templars – stuff of legend and film-making

Playing A Different Game

The methodologies they invented were different but parallel. The Assassins' threat was death when you least expected it – poisoned daggers in the mosque, hidden murderers emerging from the shadows. The Templars' threat was death exactly when you did expect it. When you saw them charging straight at you there was no bluster, no war cries, just the power of death on horseback speeding onwards like an implacable force of nature.

The message, and the fear it provoked, were the same. Whether facing the Assassin hit squads (the elite *fidais*) or a squadron of Templar knights, you knew you had a problem – these were people you needed to take far more seriously than their numbers would otherwise warrant.

This was not a strategy calculated to improve their popularity. As one contemporary Muslim historian unequivocally put it, the Assassins were “rabble and scum, persons without intelligence”. His was a far from isolated view. The crusaders and the Turks, indeed all of Sunni Islam, disagreed on many things - but about the Assassins they were agreed.

Marches and Menace

Intriguingly for Mortimer History Society members, the Assassins almost

certainly had run-ins with one of your own local marcher lords.

Gilbert of Lacy, son of Roger of Lacy, was a particularly generous and prolific patron of the Templars, giving them major estates in Gloucestershire, including property in Winchcombe and Holeford and much of the land that later formed the Templar estate at Guiting.

Gilbert went out to fight in the Latin East and, at some point after 1157–8, even became a brother knight himself. He quickly rose through the Templar ranks. By 1160 he was in a position of authority and acted as one of the witnesses for the peace treaty between King Louis VII of France and Henry II of England. His distinguished career in the order culminated in him becoming the commander of the Templars in the county of Tripoli (broadly what we now call Lebanon).

As a senior military leader, Gilbert commanded the army that heavily defeated the forces of Saladin's overlord, Nur al-Din, in 1163 at a place “commonly known as La Boquea [the Beqaa Valley]”, wrote William of Tyre. Even the normally critical William described the English Templar in glowing terms. Gilbert was, he wrote, “a nobleman of high rank, an experienced warrior and commander of the Knights Templar in these parts”. Nur al-Din himself was said to have been lucky to escape with his life. He fled, leaving his baggage train and personal goods behind.



Masyaf Castle. This captured fortification in Syria because the Assassins defacto capital

When Sinan, the Assassin leader who became the first Old Man of the Mountain (and is now famous for his role in the video game *Assassin's Creed*) took over their castles in Lebanon in 'the

middle of the 1160s it was Gilbert and his men that he had to deal with. Bizarrely, the English Marcher lord was now the biggest player in what were probably the strangest March of the Middle Ages.

From Pariah to Legend

A thousand years later, we're still talking about the Templars and the Assassins – they were legends in their own lifetimes, and those legends have multiplied. It is possible to portray the Assassins as a breakaway sect, certainly, but also as an eccentric, relatively minor community; as one of many persecuted religious groups in the medieval Middle East or as ordinary citizens. The elite devotees that made up their famous hit squads, the *fidais*, were, after all, just a tiny minority of the sect's population - most of them were hard-working and law-abiding peasants, cotton workers or merchants.

Both portrayals are true. But there is a very different story too. One which is partly based on the extraordinary cult which they used to further their ends, and the hit squads which struck fear into their enemies throughout the Middle East. It is the result of a compelling PR campaign, based on “the promise of death” – a campaign which they, like the Templars, used to transform their bloody activities, already remarkable, into legendary status.



About the author

Steve Tibble, an honorary research associate at Royal Holloway, University of London, is one of the foremost academics currently working in the field of the crusades. His recent publications include *Crusader Criminals: the Knights who went rogue in the Holy Land*, and *Templars: the knights who made Britain*. His books are available instore and online or direct from www.yaleuniversitypress.

Meet your trustees: Kathy Cowell

Introducing you to the people who, behind the scenes, do so much to keep the MHS on the up and up. Our trustees are elected to oversee the society – its activities and operations, and to be accountable to its members – you!

This month, meet Kathy Cowell...



Kathy, how long have you been a member of the MHS and when did you become a trustee?

I've been a member of the Mortimer History Society since 2018 and a trustee from January 2022. As a retired teacher it was natural for me to become involved with the Society's educational outreach so, on becoming a trustee, I took over the Schools Programme. It's been a wonderful experience. I've so enjoyed going into schools to talk about Mortimer history and sharing the excitement of our annual School's Day at Ludlow Castle, where we give upwards of 200 primary school children hands-on experience of life in medieval Ludlow. Actually I've recently handed responsibility for the schools programme to MHS member Alan Dowdy because, this year, I became a Ludlow Town Councillor and Deputy Mayor. As you can imagine, that's now taking up a good deal of my time!

But you remain very active in the Society still?

Absolutely! You'll always find me at Society events in an organisational role, often taking care of logistics and practicalities. This summer I organised the catering for our first Summer Soiree

at Wigmore Abbey, which was a joy. I'm particularly proud of my role in creating the Mortimer poster, which we created to mark the 600th anniversary of the death of Edmund Mortimer, 5th earl of March in 1225. The poster shows the Mortimer family tree alongside key events in the family's history – and the nation's. You can buy your copy at www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/shop.

How did your interest in the Mortimers and the Marches arise?

On moving to Ludlow I discovered that my Mortimer ancestors were based here, so it was an obvious decision for me to join the society. I can trace my family tree back to the Mortimers through Richard, 3rd duke of York and his eldest daughter Anne. Anne married Sir Thomas St Leger, a firm Yorkist who fought at both Barnet and Tewkesbury. Following Edward IV's death, he attended Richard III's coronation in July 1483, but soon joined Buckingham in a failed rebellion that led to his execution. Anne herself died in 1476 giving birth to their only child, another Anne. She was a great heiress who married George Manners, 11th Baron de Ros about 1490.

Where did your love of history come from?

At school I found it hard to decide my career path. I was then, and still am, fascinated by archaeology and seriously considered that as a possibility. However, I thought that architecture might be a better route to follow and completed two years of a degree course before deciding to give it up and train as a maths teacher. But my fascination with history, with archaeology and architecture has been abiding through all of those changes. Not too long ago, I wrote a series of articles about church architecture for Mortimer Matters. You may have read them!

Tell us a little about your other history-related interests and passions.

I always wanted to be active in retirement and joined the choir at St Laurence's Church when I arrived in Ludlow. From this I was encouraged to become a steward, both in the church and in the Assembly Rooms. My interest in history was noted, and I was asked to become a town tour guide. This has now developed to include a crimes and misdemeanours tour of the town and, more recently, involvement in the Lantern Walks and the creation of a triptych in support of the Town Walls Trust.

Welcome to new members

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

Paul Bevand	Worcester	Christine and Nigel Evans	Ludlow
Jennifer Bishop	Ludlow	Judith Graci	Ohio, USA
Hannah Boston	London	Jonathan Moore	St Andrews
Adam Chenaf	London	Deryn Poppitt	Wrexham
George Cobb	Gastonia, USA	Tristan Wood	Aberystwyth
Jennifer Craine	Builth Wells		

MHS Bursary success

We're delighted that once again we've been able to offer not one, but two bursary places to students undertaking post-graduate doctoral research or research-led MA programmes. Today, we reveal the successful candidates. They are...

Jonathan Moore, who is studying for a PhD in Divinity at the University of St Andrews, and Tristan Wood, who is studying for a PhD in History at Aberystwyth University. They will each receive £1,000 to support their studies this year.

Jonathan's application was applauded by the Judges for its intellectual rigour and its potential to make an original and important contribution to religious history; Tristan's for its significant Marcher perspective and its focus on primary evidence. For both recipients, the judges recognised the need for financial assistance to fund research trips and archival visits.

Jonathan's PhD explores the theology of the mystic and schoolmaster Hugh of St Victor (1096 to 1141) and his notion of humanity's spiritual journey towards wisdom through sacramental participation. "Hugh stands," says Jonathan, "at a pivotal moment in the development of sacramental theology." He points out that the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* reflects an outworking of Hugh's theology, shaped in part by the nearby Victorine Abbey in Wigmore (founded by the Mortimers), where Hugh's theology was taught. "My study will contribute to our understanding of the spiritual life of the March and the Mortimers in the 12th and 13th centuries," concludes Jonathan.



I'm immensely grateful for this bursary, which will be a great help as I travel to essential archives, particularly the Chained Library in Hereford. I'm especially excited to be connected with a society whose historical roots overlap so meaningfully with my work: Wigmore Abbey links directly to the theological tradition I study, as it was a daughter-Abbey of that in St Victor where Hugh taught. I hope my research will offer some insight into the spiritual and intellectual world that shaped the Mortimers. I look forward to meeting you all."

Tristan's PhD focuses on the influence of agency on elite native women's identities in Ireland and Wales across the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries. "In the past historians have looked at the experiences of elite Anglo-Norman women who married into native families," Tristan explains. "My study will focus on native women's experience directly, allowing for comparative analyses of women's lives under the changing political, social and cultural scenes instigated by conquest." The ultimate

aim of Tristan's research is to create a more nuanced and less static depiction of women that focuses on themes across cross-cultural relationships during conquest." His research also allows for consideration of women who lived on frontiers such as the Welsh March – women who directly faced the effects of colonialism on their agency and identity.



"I'm incredibly grateful to receive the MHS Bursary as it will help fund research trips across the UK and Ireland. And, of course, membership of the MHS means that I have more opportunities to develop as a researcher!"

Yve James, who chairs the Bursary Committee, says, "I'm thrilled to see the MHS Bursary programme go from strength to strength, supporting five students so far across the three years of its operation. We couldn't do it without the commitment and generosity of MHS members the world over so, thank you! Both of these students are working in fascinating areas that will break new ground and enhance our understanding of the Welsh March – and they are both enthusiastic to share their knowledge with the Society. Expect to hear them speak at MHS events in the future, and to read about their findings in our publications.

"I'm so grateful to our judges, Professors Helen Fulton of the University of Bristol, Janet Burton of the University of Wales Trinity St David and Annie Garthwaite, Vice Chair of the Mortimer History Society," says Yve. "Their diligence and care makes my role as chair so much easier than it might otherwise be!"

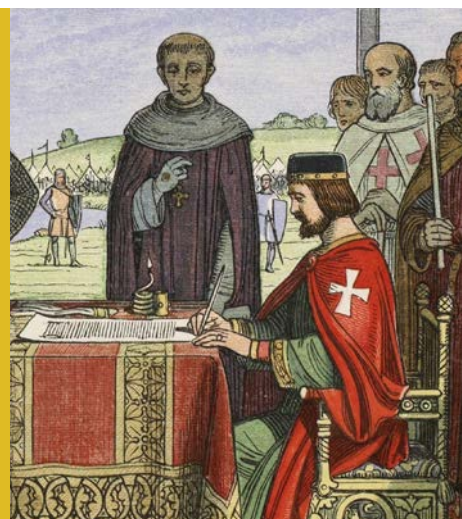
Invaluable support

As for so many students, finances are constrained for our bursary recipients. Tristan is self-funding his studies and, though Jonathan has a scholarship, he must also hold down a job to meet living expenses. This means the £1,000 bursary monies will be more than useful! Their award also includes free membership of the MHS which will, they confirm, provide an opportunity to engage with scholars, researchers and society members that have valuable experience in the field.

Finally, both are excited to contribute to future issues of *Mortimer Matters*, so you can expect to share in their investigations here as their work progresses. Indeed, you'll find a piece from Jonathan on the Hereford *Mappa Mundi* on page 4 of this issue.

Magna Carta 1225: The start of 800 years of constitutional change

Our 2025 autumn conference celebrated the 800th anniversary of the 1225 Magna Carta, mapping its impact on Crown, people and Parliament in the years that followed. Here MHS Trustee John Fleming reviews an eventful day!



Professor David Carpenter of King's College, London, established the supremacy of the 1224 version of the Charter in England's constitutional and democratic history.

He also explained that the earlier Charter (1215) was limited in power and influence, since it concerned itself only with 'freemen' at a time when much of England's population was 'un-free', and was annulled by the pope within months of its creation. Furthermore, he pointed out, the 1215 Charter was granted by a king under duress in the midst of a baronial rebellion, while that of 1225 embraced both free men and un-free, and was granted with the king's full consent. Nor, he concluded, did the term Magna Carta come into use until 1225. The earlier Charter was known by its contemporaries as the Charter of Runnymede and not referred to as Magna Carta Regis Johannis (the Great Charter of King John) until it was named so by Sir William Blackstone in 1759.

Taking over from Professor Carpenter,



Dr Andrew Spencer of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, examined the development of the English parliament in the two centuries following Magna Carta. He began with a

detailed description of the January 1227 parliament which, since it transferred kingship from the deposed Edward II to his son Edward III, became a touchstone event of the 14th century. Dr Spencer went on to explain that the medieval parliamentary system, designed to bring a king and his subjects together to discuss issues of war and tax, was enshrined in Magna Carta from 1215. The medieval Parliament was, he explained, more of an occasion (usually

annual) than an institution, raising the question of whether we now have rather too much parliament!



After lunch **Helen Carr**, historian, TV presenter and author of the bestselling *Sceptred Isle: A New History of the Fourteenth Century*, discussed 14th century kings – both

good and bad – with MHS President, Dr Paul Dryburgh. Since the reigns of two of those kings – Edward II and Richard II – ended in deposition, their conversation naturally explored the changing nature of kingship and the mechanisms the barons could then use to remove kings, just as they had tried and failed to do with King John once the 1215 Charter was annulled. This 'in conversation' format was well received by our audience, with many positive comments.



Dr Kathryn Maude of The National Archives used a fascinating case study to demonstrate the evolution of administrative records in the 13th century. She began

with an overview of the important research documents of the time from the chancery and exchequer, focusing particularly on Pipe Rolls, Close Rolls, and Patent Rolls. Created in the 1200s, they facilitated ever more complex and comprehensive methods of administration in the post Magna Carta era. Using these sources, she traced the history of the settlement of Ravenser Odd (or Ravensrodd) in Yorkshire, a sandbank promontory that had formed in the Humber estuary in the 1230s, and grew to become a flourishing market town with more than 100 houses and two members of Parliament by the time

it was granted a borough charter in 1299. During the 14th century, however, the sandbank eroded and, by the early 1360s, Ravenser Odd has disappeared beneath the estuary. An exhibition – Ravenser Odd: The Sunken Island of the Humber – is currently touring.



The day's final talk, delivered by MHS trustee **Dr Ian Bass**, focused on the role of the English Church in the production, enforcement, and preservation of Magna Carta in the

13th century. He showed that the Church had been instrumental in the issuing of Magna Carta from 1215 onwards. Of the twenty-six surviving copies (known as engrossments) of the Charter almost a third were preserved at cathedrals such as Lincoln, Salisbury, Durham, and Hereford. It seems likely that England's cathedrals all held an issue of Magna Carta at one time or another. As far as enforcement is concerned, the archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, first introduced the use of excommunication as a means to keep the king within the Charter's limits. Through a dramatic ritual involving the burning, then extinguishing, of candles causing the room to fill with smoke and acrid smells, the Church hoped to remind everyone of the infernal jeopardy their souls would be exposed to should they infringe Magna Carta.

In conclusion, it was a fascinating day with five well-constructed and very fascinating talks. Look out on our YouTube channel in the coming weeks, where we'll be uploading videos of all five presentations.

Sanctity and Society: Expressions of Faith in the Medieval World

Online conference
Saturday, 15 November 2pm

The arrival of winter is marked by our first online conference of the season. We'll be investigating aspects of faith within the March and the wider world. Don't miss it!



KEEP THE DATE!

Autumn has arrived. Mellow fruitfulness and lots to look forward to in the MHS events programme...

Saturday, 15 November

Online half-day conference: Sanctity and Society.

See full details on this page.

Saturday, 31 January 2026

Marcher Miscellany Conference

This half-day online conference features talks from scholars and historians within the society's membership. Details to come.

Saturday, 28 March

AGM and Spring Soiree

Soak up Mortimer History at Wigmore Abbey which, this year, will be the location of our AGM and... a party!

Saturday, 16 May

Spring Conference: Saints and Sinners

Our first in-person conference of the year looks at medieval good guys and bad guys, saints and sinners. An exploration of how the medieval mind understood (and lived) religion. Ludlow Assembly Rooms. Details to come.

Saturday, 3 October

Autumn Conference: 1066 and the Bayeux Tapestry

Marking the arrival of the Bayeux Tapestry in Britain and the opening of a major London exhibition we investigate the the Conquest of 1066 and the transformation of the country. Venue and details to come.

Saturday, 21 November

This half-day online conference takes a deep dive into the magical beauty of medieval manuscripts.

For details of all Mortimer History Society events go to www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/events



The Crown of Thorns: An unexpected triumph

Faith Tibble, author of *The Crown of Thorns: Humble Gods and Humiliated Kings*, will talk about the imagery of the Crown of Thorns in Passion iconography – and blow all our assumptions along the way. Instead of seeing the images of torture, humiliation and suffering we're acquainted with, we'll see a triumph in which a serene Jesus is gently crowned with laurel by a Roman soldier. Prepare to be surprised.



But You're Not a Monk! Lay residents and workers at medieval monasteries

Louise Furse, a specialist in medieval religious history and a PhD researcher at the University of Swansea, introduces us to the male religious communities of the Marches, both their religious and lay members. In this way, she'll present a nuanced picture of the diversity of the lived experience within the medieval religious precinct and help us understand how the presence of the laity affected the religious brethren.



An Ecclesiastical Mortimer: The career of Edmund Mortimer in the church

Ian Bass, independent scholar and MHS Trustee, reveals the dual career of Edmund Mortimer (d, 1304) as both churchman and Marcher Lord. A second son, he was destined for the church, but gained the lordship after the death of his brother and father. Though most attention has focused on his lordly career, his time in the church was eventful and revealing, as we'll discover.

View from wherever you are

This fascinating conference will be held via Zoom only. For details and to reserve your place, please go to www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/events.

Wars of the Ross Memorial Database launched to media fanfare!

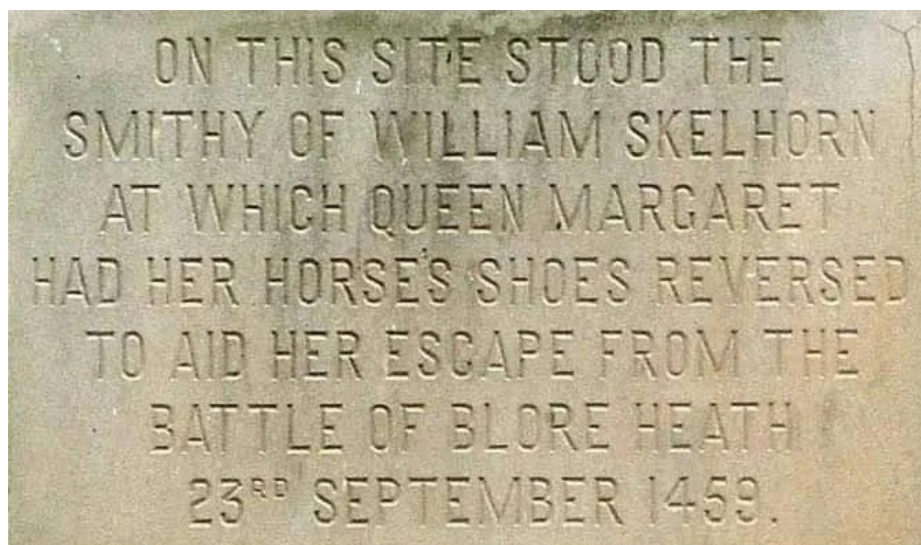
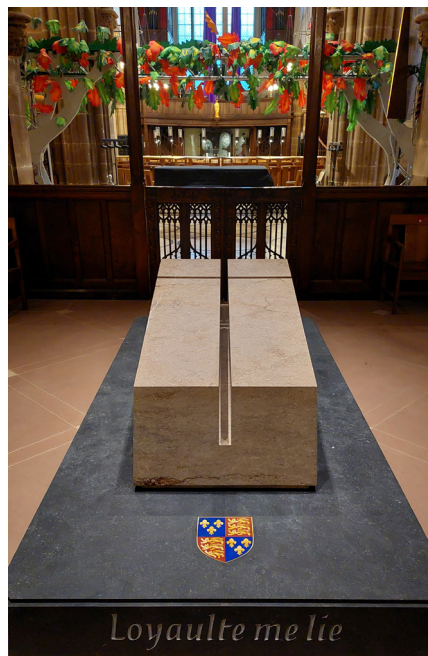
The MHS is one of a coalition of history societies that has created a new online resource for Wars of the Roses historians, scholars and enthusiasts. Its launch this month caused quite a stir!

As you'll have read in previous editions of *Mortimer Matters*, the MHS has for some months been collaborating with other historical organisations to create a searchable database of all memorials associated with the Wars of the Roses. We're thrilled to tell you that the Wars of the Roses Memorial Database was launched on 15 October to great media fanfare at Delapré Abbey – the site of the 1460 Battle of Northampton, generating coverage on BBC TV, radio and online.

The Wars of the Roses Memorial Database is a new online resource that highlights the significant and long-lasting impact of the Wars on the country and its population with a guide to the many monuments that mark this critical but often overlooked historical period. This intermittent series of battles and rebellions against royal authority has left an indelible mark on the English landscape, its churches, and our historical imagination, not least in Shakespeare's works, modern TV dramas such as *Game of Thrones*, and novels such as our own Annie Garthwaite's *Cecily* and *The King's Mother*.

While some memorial chapels were dedicated at the time for those killed in the Wars, memorialisation has been a piecemeal affair, its extent underestimated and many memorials lost or forgotten. Yet, as this new database reveals, anyone walking the streets of Britain today may encounter monuments or markers that provide a direct link to the people, places and events of the Wars of the Roses. Ranging from 15th century funerary monuments and later memorials dedicated to some of the major protagonists and events, to stained glass windows, plaques and more recent interpretation panels at noteworthy locations. The online guide allows users to search for these by memorial type, allegiance, or location.

Simon Marsh, Research Coordinator for the Battlefields Trust said, 'The Wars of the Roses Memorial Database is a crowd-sourced heritage resource that can be used, and added to, by everyone interested in this period of history. We're hoping that over time the database will become an important resource to help the study of the Wars and encourage visits to these memorials'.



Entries in the database range from the iconic, such as the recently installed tomb of Richard III in Leicester Cathedral, to the idiosyncratic, including the Blore Heath Smithy plaque, which records the legend of a local blacksmith reversing the shoes on Queen Margaret's horse to aid her escape after the battle of Blore Heath in September 1459. With over 150 records online at present, the site invites further submissions from the public for consideration.

Investigate the Wars of the Roses Memorial Database now at www.battlefieldstrust.com/wotrmemorial.

In creating the database the MHS has worked with The Battlefields Trust, the Richard III Society, Tewkesbury Battlefield Society, the Yorkist History Trust and the Northamptonshire Battlefields Society.

For your bookshelf

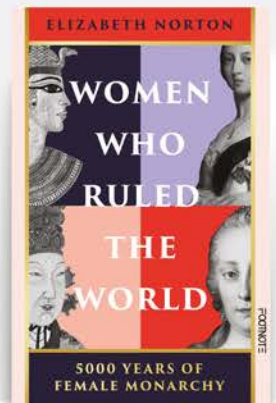
Heading into winter, we all need a good book. From powerful religious factions to power wielding women and power hungry men, we've got everything you need to get through cold days and dark nights.

Women Who Ruled the World

By Dr Elizabeth Norton

If you think Kingship is men's work, think again. With depth and scope, this ground-breaking work renders the achievements of female rulers visible and vivid, offering a panoramic exploration of five millennia of regnant queens. This isn't just history; it's an inspiring exploration of female vision, courage and power.

Published by Bonnier Books, September 2025. Available online and in bookshops. RRP £25.

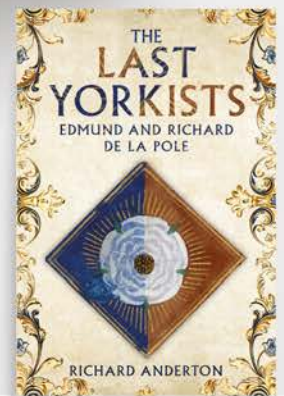


The Last Yorkists: Edmund and Richard de la Pole

By Richard Anderton

This tale of the last two Yorkist claimants to England's throne is told with dramatic flair – a tale of desperate intrigue, ferocious courage and desperate measures as the de la Pole brothers fight to regain England's throne. Along the way, we explore some of the lesser known aspects of Henry VII and Henry VIII's rule, including their foreign wars and duplicitous dealings with European monarchs.

Published by Amberley Press, September 2025. Order online at www.amberley-books.co.uk. RRP £25.

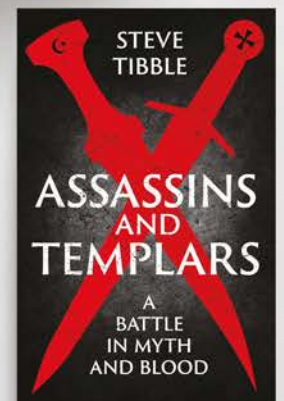


Assassins and Templars: A Battle in Myth and Blood

By Steve Tibble

Read Steve's article on page 6 then buy this book – a fascinating account of two of history's most legendary groups from their origins to their ultimate destruction. Their fanaticism changed the medieval world and, even to the present day, in video games and countless conspiracy theories, they have become endlessly conjoined in myth and memory.

Published by Yale University Press, September 2025. RRP £20, but MHS members will receive a 25% discount. Just enter the offer code TIBBL when ordering at www.yalebooks.co.uk. Includes free postage.



Margaret Beaufort: Survivor, Rebel, Kingmaker

By Lauren Johnson

Lauren Johnson is among a growing group of young female historians determined to shine a light on the importance and political significance of women in the shaping of English history. In this highly readable biography, she reveals Margaret as she truly was – a shrewd political operator, calculated risk taker and successful dynasty builder.

Published by Head of Zeus, November 2025. Pre-order online and in bookstores. RRP £30.

