

MORTIMER
History Society

MORTIMER *Matters*

Isabella of France. Rebel Queen

2026 marks the 700th anniversary of Isabella's invasion of England, and the deposition of her husband, Edward II. To mark the occasion, we've invited Kathryn Warner, Isabella's biographer, to share her thoughts about the woman who partnered with a Mortimer to bring down a king.

Isabella, daughter of Philip IV of France and Joan I of Navarre, married Edward II of England in January 1308 when she was just twelve and he was twenty-three. Though their marriage ended disastrously, it was much more successful and for a longer time than is often supposed, despite the clear existence of Edward's male 'favourites'.

The most famous of these favourites is Piers Gaveston, executed by some of England's disgruntled barons in 1312. Queen Isabella, still very young at the time, seems to have accepted Gaveston's importance in her husband's life, and Edward's later male favourites, knights of Oxfordshire called Roger Mortimer and Hugh Audley who were influential at court between 1315 and 1318, also caused the queen few problems. She and Edward enjoyed a mutually supportive, affectionate marriage for over a decade.

Enter Despenser...

Everything changed when Edward II's nephew-in-law Hugh Despenser the



Isabella with her father, Philip IV of France. Her brothers Charles and Philip to her left, her brother Louis and uncles Charles of Valois to her right

Younger, lord of Glamorgan, became chamberlain of the royal household in 1318 and worked his way into the king's affections. Edward's infatuation made Despenser rich and inordinately powerful, and his dominance at court triggered a rebellion in 1321/22 led by the

Marcher lords, in which Roger Mortimer of Wigmore took part. Mortimer was imprisoned when the rebellion failed, though he escaped and fled to the Continent in August 1323, where he joined other baronial exiles from England.

Cont/d on page 2

In This Issue

Features:

Isabella of France: Rebel Queen	1-3
Glyndŵr's People	4-5
Mapping the March	6-7
A Tast of Loyalty	8-9

Society News:

MHS Bursary fundraiser	10
Meet John Fleming	11
Medieval Documents Group	12
New members	13

Events:

Keep the date	4
2026 AGM	12
January conference	13
Spring conference preview	14

Reviews and recommendations:

Bookshelf	15
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With his enemies dead, in prison or in exile, Hugh Despenser came to dominate English government entirely. He did his utmost to reduce Isabella's longstanding influence over her husband and, according to the queen herself, even intruded into their personal relationship: 'I feel that marriage is a joining together of man and woman... and that someone has come between my husband and myself trying to break this bond,' she stated. Isabella had gained a reputation as a peacemaker and often interceded with Edward, but as of 1322 vanishes almost entirely from written record. Edward began to treat his wife and the mother of his children as though she were his enemy and in September 1324 he even confiscated her lands.

Isabella's revenge

Isabella, daughter of the Iron King of France, Philip IV, was not a woman to tolerate such disrespect. War broke out between Edward II and his brother-in-law Charles IV of France in July 1324, and in March 1325, Isabella travelled to her homeland to negotiate a peace settlement between her husband and brother. Six months later, Edward sent their eldest child Edward of Windsor (b. November 1312) to France as well to pay homage to Charles for the French territories, Aquitaine and Ponthieu,

to England unless he expelled Hugh Despenser, whom she loathed and feared, from court. Edward, however, refused the ultimatum, which gave Isabella little choice other than to remain at her brother's court in France with her son. She made an alliance with her husband's and Despenser's enemies, the English knights and noblemen who had fled overseas in 1322/23, including Roger Mortimer, who was the highest ranking of them and was seen as their leader. Edward's angry response was to cut off Isabella's funds. In a letter to the archbishop of Canterbury in February 1326, Isabella set out her reasons for refusing to return to Edward, whom she still referred to, most unconventionally, as her 'very dear and very sweet lord and friend'. She stated her fear that Despenser, a ruthless, manipulative and dangerous individual, might physically harm her, and clearly believed that her husband would not protect her.

If Edward thought Isabella would be helpless without an income and would have to trail back to England, he was wrong. The queen and her allies travelled to the county of Hainault in the summer of 1326, and Isabella arranged with Willem, count of Hainault, that in exchange for his third daughter, Philippa, marrying the future king of England, Isabella's son Edward of Windsor, he would provide ships and soldiers for an



Isabella is greeted by her brother Charles IV when she arrives in France in 1325

which were ruled by the kings of England in this period.

Having her son, the king's heir, in her custody handed Isabella a vitally important piece on the chessboard. She played it to great effect, telling Edward II that she and her son would not return

invasion. Isabella and her forces arrived in Suffolk on 24 September 1326, and the queen was greeted with joy by most of the populace; Edward II, an incompetent ruler, was by now grossly unpopular, and Hugh Despenser's extortions and oppressions, aided by Edward, had made both men a host of powerful enemies.

Rebellion and abdication

The rebellion of a queen against her husband the king is remarkable and unique in English history, though exactly when Isabella decided to move against Edward II, and whether this had long been her goal or if she at first intended merely to destroy Despenser, us unknown. It is possible that when she travelled to France in March 1325, she had some idea of using her stay in her homeland to negotiate a change in her circumstances. It is also possible that Edward II's subsequent forced abdication was not considered as an option until as late as Christmas 1326, a month after Isabella had Despenser subjected to a traitor's death in Hereford, when it must have become apparent to the queen and everyone else that the king had lost the support of almost the entire English political class and could not continue to reign.



In the foreground Isabella greets Roger Mortimer, in the background, Hugh Despenser suffers brutal execution at her command

Edward and Isabella's 14-year-old son succeeded as Edward III in January 1327, and the deposed and disgraced former king was held in captivity at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire. He probably died there in September 1327, or perhaps was kept alive and claimed to be dead. Either way, Isabella was now officially a widow. Unfortunately, we rarely have any way of knowing how anyone felt about anything in the 14th century and Isabella's attitude towards her husband's downfall and subsequent death is hard to ascertain. One Continental chronicle states that she fell to her knees before Edward and begged for his forgiveness after her invasion, but he refused even to look at her. This story, however, does not appear in any English source, and according to the evidence we have, Edward II and Isabella of France never met again after she departed from England in March 1325.

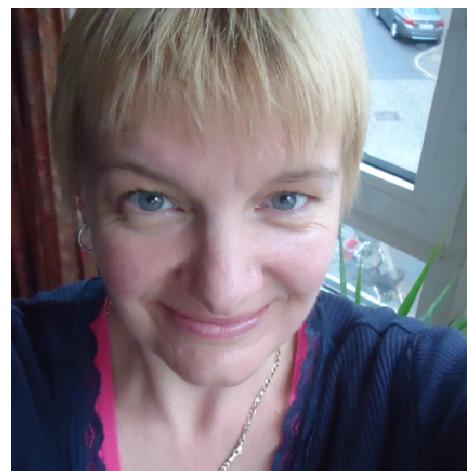
The coming of a king

A regency council of four bishops, four earls and six barons was appointed to govern in the underage Edward III's name, and Isabella was not part of it. Her closeness to her son meant, though, that she could continue to intercede with the young king as she had done with his father, and to wield considerable influence over him and over the governance of the realm. Likewise, her personal relationship with Roger Mortimer gave Roger a great deal of political power and wealth, even though Roger had no official position within the English government, and both he and the queen were entirely unaccountable. Although it is frustratingly difficult to pin down exactly who was doing what during Edward III's minority from January 1327 to October 1330, as letters and commands were sent in the young king's name and we cannot prove who in fact issued them, contemporary chroniclers assumed that Isabella of France and Roger Mortimer were the people truly in charge of governing the realm. It does seem very likely that this was indeed the case, and Edward III's arrest and execution of Roger in the autumn of 1330 indicates that he held Roger responsible, alongside Queen Isabella. Pope John XXII, on hearing of

Roger's arrest, urged the young king to remember all that his mother had done for him and to hold her in reverence, and Edward did treat his mother leniently, despite talking a few days after arresting Roger of all the 'oppressions and hardships' which had been 'inflicted upon many men of his realm by certain persons who have been his ministers' during his minority.

After a brief period under house arrest, Isabella led a conventional life as a dowager queen for many years, in regular contact with her children and grandchildren, travelling around her extensive estates, and spending considerable sums on clothes, jewellery, food and entertainment. Later in life, she proved to be a valuable diplomat and mediator between her son and her French relatives in the early stages of the Hundred Years War. It is not true, as sometimes claimed, that Edward III held Isabella prisoner at Castle Rising in Norfolk. She died at Hertford Castle on 23 August 1358 at the age of 62 or 63. She was buried at the Greyfriars' church in London with the clothes she had worn at her wedding to Edward II half a century earlier, but not, as also sometimes claimed, with Roger Mortimer's heart on her chest or lying beside him. In 1326/27, this fascinating

and enigmatic royal rebel achieved what no-one else in England had done before: she brought down a king, her own husband.



About the author

Kathryn Warner grew up in the Lake District, and holds two degrees in medieval history from the University of Manchester. She is the author of many books on 14th century history, including biographies of Edward II, Isabella of France, Hugh Despenser the Younger and Philippa of Hainault.

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Welcome to 2026 and your first *Mortimer Matters* of the new year! We've got a wonderful twelve months ahead for you, with an impressive events programme, including our January and May conferences – see details in these pages. This is a special year for the Society, as we stand on the brink of a series of significant anniversaries. In September we'll mark the 700th anniversary of Isabella of France's invasion of England, which displaced her husband Edward II and brought her son to the throne. Roger Mortimer, then a royal rebel, later 1st earl of March, came to England at her side and, to some extent, ruled England alongside her for the next four years until his execution in 1430. Between now and the end of the decade we'll be revisiting some of the key events of that tumultuous period. We begin with this issue's cover feature, in which historian Kathryn Warner introduces us to the history-changing French queen who brought down an English king.

Also in this issue we have Dr Rhun Emlyn on the people of Glyndwr's rebellion and Professor Helen Fulton on her project to map the medieval Welsh March. We're grateful to all our contributors.

In Society news, we're kickstarting this year's Bursary Fund appeal and bringing you up to date with our event plans for the year. It's not too late to book your ticket for the first of those. See details of our 31 January conference on page 13.

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



Annie Garthwaite

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 April and will start planning it soon, so please get in touch with your ideas quickly!

Glyndŵr's people

Owain Glyndŵr led Wales' most famous rebellion against the English. But he didn't do it alone. Dr Rhun Emlyn introduces us to the people who powered his defiance.

Some historical figures stand out as larger than life characters, those who had a deep impact on their period and whose names reverberate across the centuries. One such figure is Owain Glyndŵr, who in the early years of the 15th century led the most significant Welsh rebellion against English rule. Over later generations his name would invoke horror for some, while others would be inspired by his vision of a Wales with its own parliament, archbishop and universities.

There is, however, a danger that focussing on one individual can obscure the vital contribution of others. Many men and women played key roles in the Glyndŵr Rebellion and it's important that we explore their lives and experiences; acknowledging their contribution, considering what this tells us about the rebellion and reflecting on how we might respond to them today.

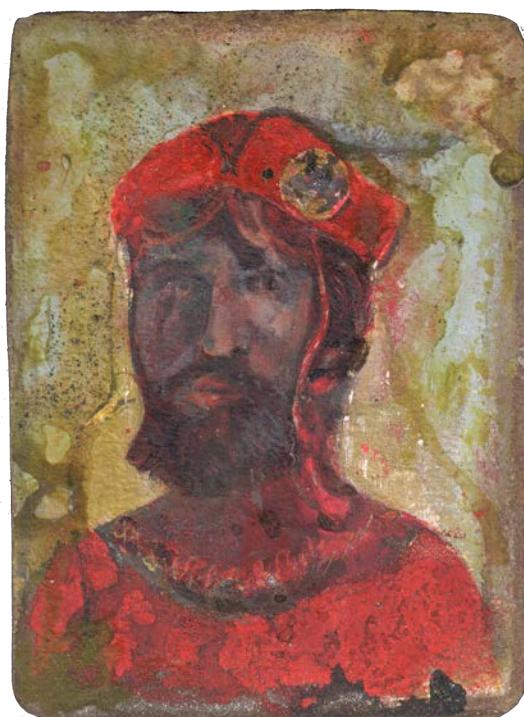
In a recent collaboration between renowned artist Dan Llywelyn Hall, myself and Gruffydd Aled Williams we have aimed to redress this imbalance, resulting in the publication of *Llys Glyndŵr: A Creative Response to the Lives of Owain Glyndŵr's Supporters* (Ravenmade, 2025). The project uncovered the lives of nineteen individuals who played a prominent role in the rebellion. You'll have heard about some of them – including Sir Edmund Mortimer (d. 1409) – but others have received less attention. We aimed to go beyond the biographies alone and encourage creative responses to these characters. Dan Llywelyn Hall has painted nineteen portraits (several of them shown here) of the men and women featured in the book, while twenty poets – including Mererid Hopwood, Menna Elfyn, Robert Minhinnick, Gillian Clarke and Myrddin ap Dafydd – have written poetic responses.



Sir Edmund Mortimer

Pillars of the Establishment

One message that comes through clearly in the volume is how many pillars of the English establishment in Wales became rebels. Glyndŵr's fellow instigators, brothers Rhys and Gwilym ap Tudur, had captained soldiers in English campaigns, held local offices (Rhys had even been sheriff of Anglesey) and were pensioned to remain with Richard II for life. Rhys Ddu had been sheriff of Cardiganshire, while Bishop John Trefor of St Asaph had served the crown as ambassador as well as chamberlain, or chief financial officer, of Chester and Flint.



Henry Dwnn

An intriguing case is Henry Dwnn. He was a rich landowner and man of authority in the Marcher lordship of Kidwelly who faithfully served his Marcher lord, John of Gaunt, for decades, governing the lordship on his behalf and fighting under him in France. And yet he became a committed and unrepentant rebel, throwing himself into the campaign against Henry IV who was none other than John of Gaunt's son and direct lord of Kidwelly.

In the July 2025 issue of *Mortimer Matters* David Stephenson outlined the rise of the Welsh administrative elite during the reign of Edward I: members of distinguished Welsh families who became loyal – and powerful – servants of the new regime in Wales. By the early 15th century many of their descendants and successors provided the core support and local leadership that the rebellion required across Wales. In doing so they could use their expertise as administrators, soldiers and diplomats for the benefit of Glyndŵr's fledgeling principality.

Cont/d on page 5

Once they had transferred their allegiance, many remained committed to the end, ending their lives in exile or at the hands of the executioner. The larger-than-life Henry Dwnn somehow survived and was pardoned after a period in prison; once released he proceeded to terrorise those who had remained loyal to the crown.

A Rebellion in the March

Of course, there was no clearer figure of the establishment in Wales than Sir Edmund Mortimer. His life, and the lives of others in the volume, shows how the rebellion not only touched and received support from all corners of Wales but also extended further. The March, on both sides of the modern border, played a key role in the rebellion.

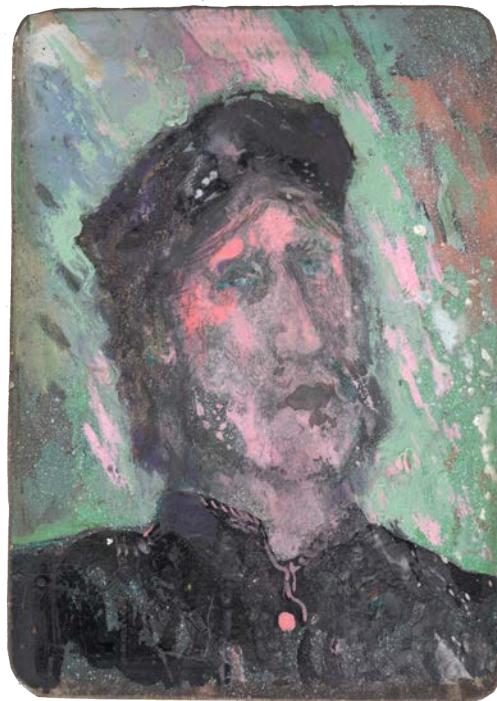
"There was no clearer figure of the establishment in Wales than Sir Edmund Mortimer"

It was prominent members of Marcher society that gathered together to proclaim Glyndŵr prince of Wales in 1400. One of those was Hywel Cyffin, dean of St Asaph and landowner in the lordship of Chirk. He will be discussed in the forthcoming issue of the *Mortimer History Society Journal* and at the Saints and Sinners in the March of Wales conference, which the MHS will hold on 16 May.



Glyndŵr's daughter and Mortimer's wife, Catrin

As the rebellion grew, it found allies in unexpected parts of the March. The story of Sir Edmund Mortimer's capture at the Battle of Bryn Glas in 1402 and subsequent marriage to Glyndŵr's daughter Catrin will be familiar to many members of the MHS. Less familiar will be the twists and turns of the career of Sir John Skydmore of Kentchurch Court and The Vern, near Bodenham. This respectable MP and sheriff for Herefordshire was given responsibility for Kidwelly, Carreg Cennen and Carmarthen to hold back the flow of the rebellion in those areas, but there were rumours that he was a closet supporter of Glyndŵr. The claims of a cattle thief that Sir John had been responsible for transferring nearly £7,000 from England to Glyndŵr weren't believed, but the execution of his brother Philip as a rebel in 1410 or 1411 would have raised suspicions about Sir John's loyalty. It eventually transpired that he had secretly married Glyndŵr's daughter Alys and they may have hidden and protected Glyndŵr during the last years of his life.



Sir John Skydmore

Bringing the Past to Life

How can we respond to Hywel Cyffin, Catrin, Alys, Sir Edmund Mortimer and the others? With no contemporary depiction, Dan Llywelyn Hall has given faces to these men and women, allowing us to glimpse something of these distant figures as he introduces his interpretations of who they might have been. Some of his portraits seem to stare at us clearly while others are less clear, expressing the difficulty of pinning down their true identities.

The poets have given voice to their possible experiences and desires, and the reason they might have rebelled. In his poem *Stockholm Syndrome* Peredur Lynch seeks to answer the mystery of Sir Edmund's change of allegiance while Gruffudd Owen reflects on the vision of Wales that may have spurred John Trefor's actions. Many of the poems explore the complexities of trying to gain insights into people who lived 600 years ago – can we really know who they are? Do we admire them or feel uncomfortable with their actions?

Historical sources provide a template that allows the artist and the poet to explore these characters, enriching our appreciation of the women and men who made the rebellion possible.

For details of *Llys Glyndŵr: A Creative Response to the Lives of Owain Glyndŵr's Supporters* and where you can get your copy go to page 15.



About the author:

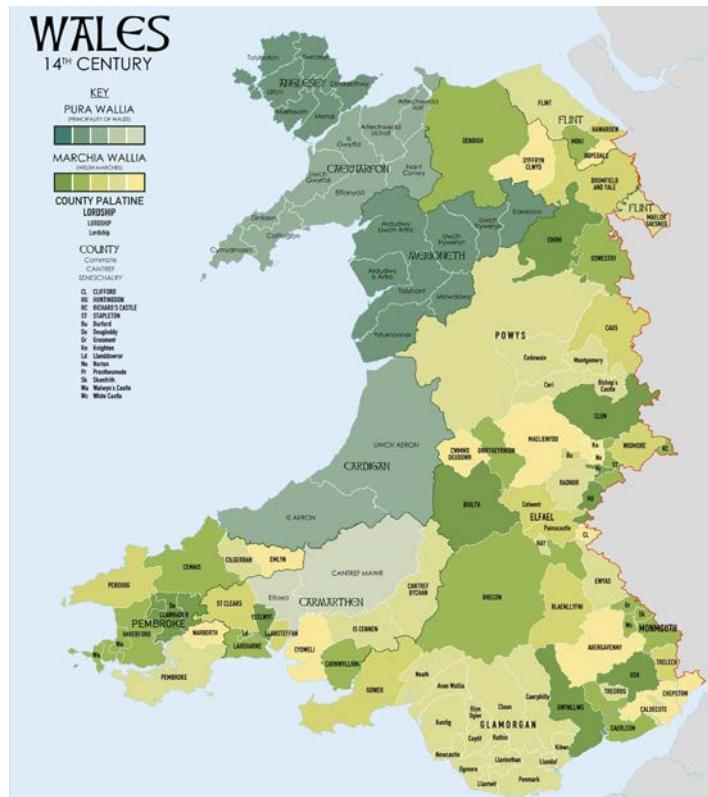
Dr Rhun Emlyn is a lecturer in medieval and Welsh history at Aberystwyth University. He has specialised in the careers of medieval Welsh students and clergy and is currently exploring the involvement and role of clergy in the Glyndŵr Rebellion.

Mapping the March c. 1282 to 1550



Three years ago, Professor Helen Fulton, Chair of Medieval Literature at the University of Bristol, introduced us to an ambitious project to map the culture, politics and identity of the medieval March of Wales. Now, at something like the halfway point, we've asked her to update us on progress and discoveries so far.

MOWLIT is a five-year project to map the March between medieval Wales and England in the period 1282 to 1550. Its aim is to produce a history of the medieval March by bringing together the people, places, and manuscripts with connections to the region. We also aim to produce accurate historical maps of each of the Marcher lordships that existed between 1282 and their dismantling after 1536, when the first Act of Union between England and Wales changed the geography of Wales into a system of counties with a firm jurisdictional border between the two nations.



Map of the Marcher Lordships, c. 1400

(courtesy of Chris Diamond)

So far, we've built a large database of individual people, places, and manuscripts, with links to show the many connections between them. Eventually, these entities will be transferred to a website, where users can do their own searches to find items of interest and trace their connections. We have collected more than 6,000 entities and made about 6,000 separate lines of connection between them, organised into network diagrams. We've also mapped 14 of the historic counties of Wales, which will form the basis of the maps of the Marcher lordships, and we have created network diagrams. You can see how these work in the illustration top right, which maps the connections of Sir John Scudamore the younger.

What is becoming clear from our work so far is the extent to which the prominent families of the March, including the Welsh gentry and the English barons, were connected to each other by ties of marriage, geographical proximity, political affiliations, and cultural pursuits, such as the commissioning of Welsh praise poetry and the gifting, purchase, and borrowing of manuscripts. Although this process of interconnectivity had been in operation since the Norman conquest, we see an intensification of the process during the 15th century, when relationships between Welsh and English families were being built more quickly and definitively in the context of war – namely the Hundred Years War and the Wars of the Roses.



The network of Sir John Scudamore the younger

The Scudamore family – demonstrating connections

To take one example, we can look at the Scudamore (or Skidmore, or Sgudmor) family from the Marches. Born in the late 14th century, Sir John Scudamore the elder (d. 1435) was from an English family based at Kentchurch Court (Llan-gain) in Herefordshire who had acquired property through marriage within the lordship of Abergavenny. When the rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr broke out in 1400, Sir John remained loyal to the king, Henry IV, but one of his relatives, Philip Scudamore of Troy, supported the rebels and was executed after the battle of Shrewsbury in 1409, indicating the extent to which the rebellion broke families apart.



Kentchurch manor house, home of the Scudamore family

Given his loyalties to the king, it is something of a surprise to know that Sir John married one of Owain Glyndŵr's daughters, Alys, and it may have been in one of Sir John's homes, most likely Monnington Straddel in the Golden Valley, that Owain Glyndŵr spent his final days, cared for by his daughter. As members of the Marcher gentry, Sir John and Owain clearly knew each other in the days before the rebellion, but Sir John's marriage to Alys made him vulnerable. He was for a long time protected by his English aristocratic connections, but when Henry VI came to the throne in 1429, buttressed by powerful men such as Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and Cardinal Henry Beaufort, Sir John fell victim to earlier legislation passed by Henry IV preventing any man married into a Welsh family, especially Owain Glyndŵr's, from holding office in Wales. In 1433, Sir John lost his stewardships of the castles of Monmouth, Kidwelly, Grosmont, and White Castle in Monmouthshire.

The younger Sir John

Sir John's son, Sir John Scudamore the younger, was, like his father, a royalist, and during the turbulent years of the Wars of the Roses he supported the Lancastrian faction on behalf of Henry VI. This brought him into contact with the Welsh hero Jasper Tudor, son of Owain Tudor and uncle of the future Henry VII. Sir John the younger fought alongside Jasper at the battle of Mortimer's Cross in 1461 where the Lancastrians were defeated, enabling Edward IV to take the throne. Two of Sir John's sons, Henry and James, were killed in the battle. In the same year, Sir John held the Lancastrian stronghold of Pembroke Castle on behalf of Jasper Tudor against the Yorkists but was forced to surrender it to William Herbert of Raglan on 30 September 1461. His lands, including the Kentchurch estate, were confiscated and given to Herbert's brother Richard, and he was excluded from the general pardon offered to Lancastrians by Edward IV. It was only

in later generations that the Scudamore lands were returned to Sir John's heirs.

Sir James – and a marriage of Marcher aristocracy

Before Sir John died in 1461, his son James had married Maud, the daughter of Gruffudd ap Nicolas (d. 1460) of Newton, Dynevor. This was a marriage of Marcher aristocracy. Gruffudd ap Nicolas was a royal official operating mainly in Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire and, as far as we can tell, given his frequently disruptive and anti-authoritarian behaviour, a Lancastrian loyalist. His high status among the Marcher gentry is indicated by the number of praise poems addressed to him by Welsh poets including Dafydd ab Edmwnd and Lewys Glyn Cothi. Gruffudd was also the grandfather of Sir Rhys ap Thomas (1449–1525), who supported Henry Tudor on his march to Bosworth in 1485 and was rewarded with stewardships of most of the major lordships of south Wales including Brecknock and Builth. The union of the Scudamores and Gruffudd's family was typical of the alliances formed among the Marcher gentry.

The next generation

Belonging to the same generation as Sir Rhys ap Thomas, James and Maud Scudamore's son Thomas was sufficiently aligned with Welsh interests on the March to have a praise poem addressed to him. One of the most famous court poets of the mid-fifteenth century, Hywel Daf, who sang to many of the Marcher gentry, including Sir William Herbert of Raglan, composed an elegy on the death of 'Tomas ap Siâms ap Syr Siôn Sgudmor Ieuanc' ('Thomas, son of James, son of Sir John Scudamore the younger'), celebrating Thomas's Welsh connections 'ym min Lloegr', 'on the English border'.

The elegy is full of references to Thomas's family, the 'Ysgudmoriaid', as distinguished Marcher gentry. Thomas

belongs to 'gwaed Urien', 'the blood of Urien', an illustrious Welsh ancestry through his mother Maud. His uncle (James's brother John) had fought in France in 1441 under the duke of York, and his arrows were like 'byllt o dân gwyllt Owain gynt', 'Owain's bolts of wildfire long ago', referring to Thomas's descent from Owain Glyndŵr through his great-grandfather's marriage to Owain's daughter Alys.

The poem therefore alludes to almost every generation of Thomas's family, establishing the Scudamores as longstanding inhabitants of the March whose links to Welsh history were, according to the poet, as strong as, if not stronger, than their links to English gentry.

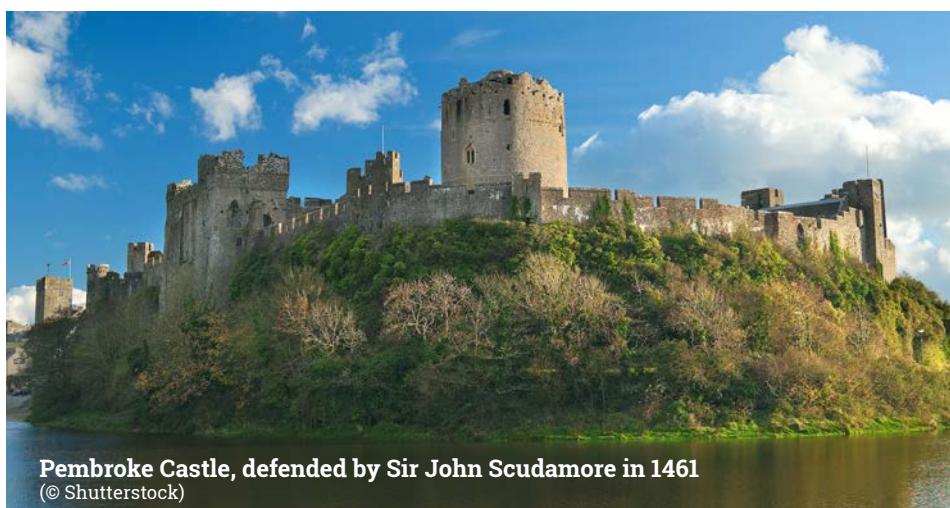
These are the kinds of connections that Mapping the March is aiming to uncover, building a large-scale picture of the rich culture and identity of the medieval March of Wales.

MOWLIT was selected by the European Research Council Advanced Grant scheme, and funded by UKRI, and we are based in the School of Humanities at the University of Bristol. We welcome comments and contributions. Find out more about MOWLIT at <https://blog.mowlit.ac.uk>. To contact the project or join our mailing list please email: mapping-the-march@bristol.ac.uk



About the author

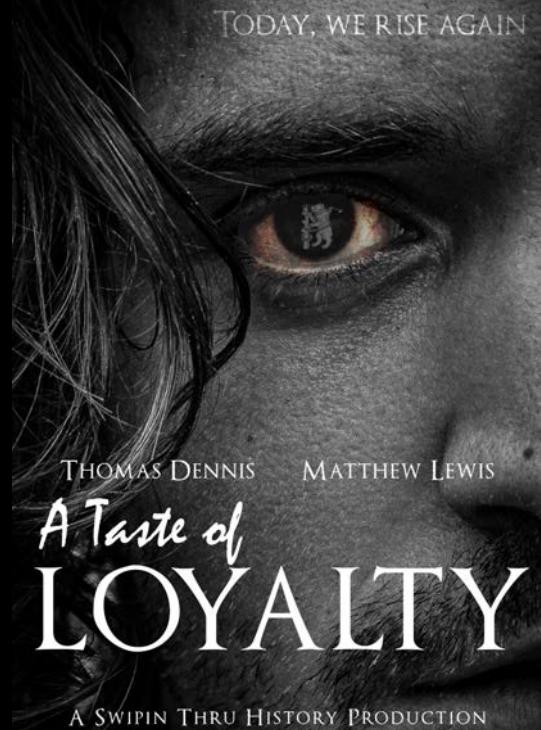
Helen Fulton is Professor and Chair of Medieval Literature at the University of Bristol. She trained as a Celticist at the University of Oxford and completed her PhD at the University of Sydney. Before coming to Bristol, she held chairs at Swansea University and the University of York. She has published widely on medieval Welsh and related literatures. She is the co-editor of *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature* (2019), editor of *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales* (2012), a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and Vice-President of the Learned Society of Wales.



Pembroke Castle, defended by Sir John Scudamore in 1461
© Shutterstock

A Taste of Loyalty - coming to a castle near you!

On 3 March, Warwick Castle will host the premiere of *A Taste of Loyalty* – a new short film that brings the 1471 Battle of Barnet to life in a way never seen before. The film, starring and directed by Thomas Dennis and based on a novel by historian Matt Lewis, is a proof-of-concept for a full length movie that's intended to bring the life of Richard III to the big screen.



When I spoke to actor/director Thomas Dennis at the end of 2025, filming for *A Taste of Loyalty* was already complete and the long work of post-production editing was about to begin. He told me how the short film will set a new standard for history on screen and give investors a tantalising hint of what might be achieved with a full length movie. Filmed using over 70 re-enactors, five stunt performers and a core cast of actors including Thomas himself and Tristan Alexander as Edward IV, it focuses on historical authenticity, not just in terms of the facts of the story, but

also the pure physicality of 15th century life and warfare. "We're taking our audience to the real Battle of Barnet," says Thomas. "Not some Hollywood director's idea of what the Battle of Barnet should have looked like. This truly is a film for the history community – and that community has absolutely been involved in its creation."

Historical authenticity and pure drama

A Taste of Loyalty will have all the colour, pageantry and richness of 15th century battle as well as the violence –

the physical push and shove. "Fight scenes in full armour with heavy weaponry do carry certain risks," says Thomas. "But they are risks my fellow performers and I were prepared to take for the sake of the authenticity and the power of the story." It's a testament to its authenticity that Thomas himself was injured during the filming. "Nothing serious," he says. "But the blood you'll see on screen is absolutely real!"

Around 15 minutes in length, the film will feature the Battle of Barnet and its immediate aftermath, seen through the eyes of young Richard, then Duke of



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Gloucester. Aged just 18, this was his first major battle. Barnet was a Yorkist victory, certainly, but, for Richard, its cost was the life of his cousin and mentor, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, who fought on the opposing side. "We'll see the conflicting loyalties Richard is forced to wrestle with at this early stage of his career," says Thomas. "Caught between his devotion to his brother, Edward IV and his affection for his old friend Warwick, he makes decisions at the Battle of Barnet that will define the rest of his life."

The battle scenes were filmed during two exhausting days in October, when around seventy men and their camp followers took to the Oxfordshire hills to fight it out. "I, along with the other actors and re-enactors, was in full armour for ten hours straight," says Thomas. "And that's real armour, of course, not the lightweight plastic versions actors frequently wear." Thomas is full of praise for his fellow performers who, he says, gave so much, so unstintingly. "It was exhausting and incredibly physically demanding, as all involved will testify," he confirms.

Further scenes, set in Edward IV's tent immediately after the battle, were shot in a film studio a few weeks later. In these scenes, the visual focus is on the richness of the royal tent, and the glimmer of candlelight on gold embroidered surcoats marred and mired in the blood and mud of the battle. Edward's relief at victory and his brother's survival is contrasted with Richard's genuine grief at the cost of war and the death of his mentor.

The business of money

A Taste of Loyalty is based on the novel, *Loyalty*, written by Matt Lewis, historian and long term friend of the Mortimer History Society. Following its Warwick premiere, the film will tour short film festivals in the UK and further afield in the hope of attracting the eye of investors who will finance Thomas and the team to create the full length feature film. "We raised over £16,000 to pay for the short," says Thomas. "It will take significantly more to scale this project to a full length movie."

So, an investor is very much needed. But, as well as deep pockets, they'll need to share Thomas and Matt's vision. "We want to show that on-screen history can be both authentic and thrilling," says Thomas, "that the truth of history doesn't need to be sacrificed for Hollywood glamour." Quite right. It's not as if the 15th century wasn't glamorous enough!



Historical authenticity is one thing, but you need to care for your armour between takes!



Tristan Alexander plays Edward IV

The money to create *A Taste of Loyalty* short was raised from within the history community, via a crowdfunding

programme. "We've been amazed by how generous people have been," says Thomas. "We beat our initial target within 48 hours of the crowdfunder going live. And, in addition to hard cash, many people have donated their expertise, resources, professional skills and passion. "We couldn't be more impressed by the dedication and commitment everyone has shown towards this project," says Thomas. "From actors and re-enactors to production people – everyone has given their all."

But, as you can imagine, there's so much more to be done. Taking *A Taste of Loyalty* on its festival tour and getting it in front of investors, will all cost money, and so the fund raising effort continues. If you'd like to make a donation to the future of *Loyalty*, or to secure tickets for the premiere in Warwick Castle on 3 March, please go to <https://tinyurl.com/yjb7udjs>.

MHS Bursary enters its fourth year

Launched in 2023, the MHS Bursary Programme has now supported five students. We hope to keep the ball rolling in 2026 – can you help?

The MHS Bursary programme is a keystone in our commitment to support and enable new research into either the medieval March of Wales and the Marcher lordships in general, or the medieval Mortimers in particular. In 2025 we granted two awards of £1,000. We're hoping to repeat that in 2026 – and do more, if we can!

The more money we can raise, the more students we can help, so please, be generous!

Our fund raising appeal opens on Friday 30 January. To donate, go to www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/donation-form. Please remember to select 'Bursary Fund' in the drop-down menu.

See what your money can do – meet last year's bursary recipients, Jonathan Moore of the University of St Andrew's, and Tristan Wood of Aberystwyth University



Jonathan Moore

"Since September last year, the MHS bursary has allowed me to travel to both Oxford and Hereford to carry out essential research for my PhD. It has also opened up opportunities to share my work more widely, including a public talk on how to read the Hereford Mappa Mundi, which was kindly advertised by the MHS."

2026 is bringing new opportunities for Jonathan to share his work. "The bursary will help me travel to two major conferences this year, the International Medieval Congress in Leeds, where I'll be taking part in the MHS panel session, and the MHS Spring Conference in May, where I've been invited to give a talk (see details on page 14). It will also make a trip to London in the spring possible, when I'll consult manuscripts that are crucial for my research.

"Overall, the MHS bursary not only makes my PhD research financially possible but also gives me the chance to present my work, explore wider interests, and be part of a welcoming community of people who share my passion for medieval history in the March."



Tristan Wood

"Having the MHS Bursary has meant I've been able to plan trips to a number of archives that I'd have otherwise struggled to afford. I'm currently planning a visit to the National Library of Ireland to view a number of charters that have had very little academic attention, as well as viewing a number of documents in the National Archives and the British Library. I'm so grateful to have the chance to give these documents the attention they deserve!"

Association with the MHS is helping to advance Tristan's career in other ways, too, including speaking opportunities. "I'm excited to have the opportunity to present some of my research at the MHS Marcher Miscellany conference, which will be held online on 31 January (see details on page 13). And, I'm also working with the MHS to give a paper at the International Medieval Conference in Leeds in 2026."

Donate NOW so that we can help this year's students achieve their ambitions and improve our knowledge about the medieval March. Go to www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/donation-form and donate before 13 April.

We'll announce the results of our fundraising efforts in the April edition of *Mortimer Matters*, and applications for students will open in early May. All Bursary recipients are required to share their learning with the Society by writing for this e-zine and the Journal, and by speaking at our events. So, be very sure, we get at least as much out of it as our winners!

Meet your trustees: John Fleming

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 John Fleming...

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

I first became involved in the early 2010s, when John Grove, founder and then president of the society, introduced himself to me, as I'd shown a particular interest in Wigmore Castle, which was for sale at the time. Nothing came of Wigmore, but we struck up a friendship and he asked me to join the MHS Committee. The society was new and finding its way then. It's been great fun to be involved from such an early stage and to watch the society flourish and become such a force for learning and research.

What's your role in the Society?

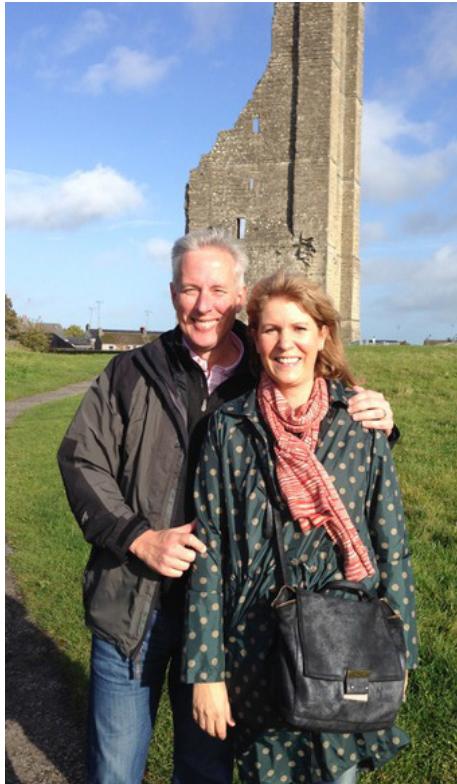
I've been a trustee since those early days, but I live in Kent, which means I'm unable to be as 'hands on' at MHS events as I'd like. I attend as many as I can though, and help out. One project I've been very involved with from the beginning is the Essay Prize. It was always a good idea for our society to set up a forum for academic writing that could be used in our journal and attract the leading historians to us. I was able to provide a 'little push' that got the project up and running, and it has been a big success. (Ed: John is being unduly modest – he generously financed the prize in its early years).

What have been the greatest pleasures and the biggest challenges?

Mostly I love that the MHS is so focused on a segment of history (medieval) that I am passionate about. Being in a room with so many people who share this passion is always a buzz. The challenge is how can I help the society achieve its goals when I live so far away. I'm still working on that!

How did your interest in the Mortimers and the Welsh March come about?

Well, it may seem a cliché, but one of the first medieval history books I ever read



John and wife Inge on MHS trip to Trim Castle, Ireland in

was Ian Mortimer's *The Greatest Traitor*. I loved it and wanted to learn more. It was almost as if you couldn't have made up things that were, indeed, factual. I then took the family on a visit to Ludlow and Wigmore and fell in love with the area. I try to get back as often as I can.

Where does your love of history come from?

I've often been asked that! The truth is, I didn't choose medieval history. It chose me! From the first books that I read, I was enthralled by the characters and the times and just wanted to learn more.

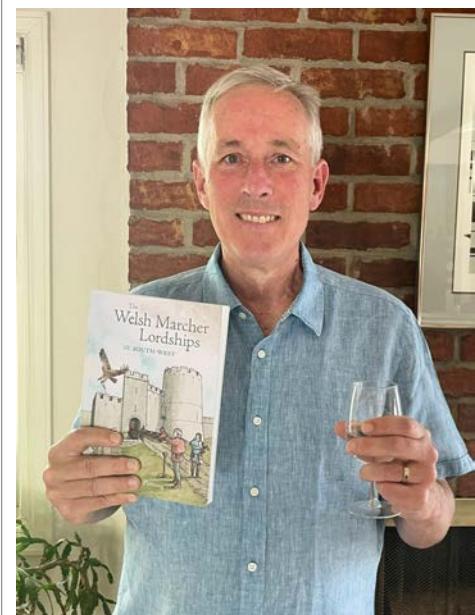
Tell us a little about your history-related interests and passions

Travelling to sites of historical interest (particularly medieval) is one of my great passions. I drag my long-suffering wife, Inge, to view ruins that sometimes require quite a lot of imagination. She's

a good sport though and even seems to enjoy it on occasion. And she's a regular at many MHS conferences and events.

Tell us a little bit about life outside of history – what about your career?

I was fortunate enough that my banking career brought me to London from the US in the 80's. It was a fun and rewarding time, but in 2008 it was time for me to leave the City and look into other interests. My enthusiasm for all things medieval was entrenched by then, so I approached King's College London with a view to doing an MA. Thankfully I was accepted onto the programme. This has given me such a better understanding and I continue to pursue the subject today. I'm very grateful to our President Philip Hume, who suggested that I write the second in the Society's series of books on the Welsh Marcher Lordships. If I'd known how hard that was going to be, I might have thought twice about accepting, but I jumped straight in and, with a lot of help from Philip, *The Welsh Marcher Lordships Volume 2* was published in 2023.



John celebrates publication of The Welsh Marcher Lordships Volume 2

2026 Annual General Meeting

This year's MHS AGM is scheduled for 2pm on Saturday, 28 March in Wigmore Village Hall, and will be followed by an early spring soirée at the gloriously historic Wigmore Abbey. Can you think of anything more Mortimer than that?!

During the soirée, we'll be treated to delicious canapes and a programme of medieval music by professional local singers. "Most of the songs we'll hear would have been familiar to Roger Mortimer and Queen Isabella, who famously spent time at Wigmore in the 1320s," says organiser Anna Dunne. "And some will have a religious overtone, perfect for the day before Palm Sunday."

Wigmore Abbey is an absolute cornerstone of Mortimer history. Its founding was first contemplated by Ralph Mortimer at the end of the 11th

century, and brought to fruition by his son, Hugh Mortimer. It was finally consecrated in 1179. It is thought that, at the time, this was the largest monastery in the county, followed by Abbey Dore and Leominster Priory. The abbey church, like the church at Wigmore, was dedicated to St James and many members of the Mortimer family lay buried there, including three earls of March. The abbey continued to flourish until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century and, since then, has been a private home. We are very grateful to its current owners, Stephen

and Andrea Vizard, for opening their home to us for this very special event.

The AGM will begin at 2pm and we expect it to finish by 2:45pm, giving you time to drive to the Abbey for the soirée at 3:30pm. Members and non-members of the MHS are welcome to attend both the soirée and the AGM, though only members will be able to vote on AGM business. Do be aware that the soirée will be a strictly limited-ticket event, so it's vital you book well in advance. Book to attend either or both at www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/events.



"We encourage all members to attend the AGM. After all, it's where all the important business of your Society is discussed and decisions made!"

Philip Hume, MHS Chair

Medieval Document Group Weekend Event

The Medieval Document Group will meet on the weekend of 14 to 15 March 2026 in Leominster when we shall be reading a variety of old documents, mainly in Latin.

"We are a friendly, welcoming group who would be pleased to see you if you're interested," says the group's coordinator Yve James. "It's not necessary to have a good knowledge of Latin or be a fluent reader of a medieval script. The weekend is intended to improve these abilities. Each day starts at 10am and finishes at 4pm, with breaks for coffee/tea and lunch at appropriate times."

If you are interested and would like some more information, please do not hesitate to contact Yve at medievaldocs@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk



Start your year with a Marcher Miscellany

It's not too late to book your place at our first conference of the new year! This one takes place online, and brings together expert MHS members to talk about lost castles, Gerald of Wales and patterns of settlement in north east Wales. A real mix to stir up your thoughts!

Online conference: **Saturday, 31 January, 2pm**



Conflict and Co-existence in North-East Wales in the Latter Middle Ages

Dr D Hugh Owen, formerly an archivist and administrator at Aberystwyth University and Keeper of Pictures and Maps at the National Library of Wales, analyses tenurial trends through a series of late medieval surveys, rentals and financial accounts. He'll pay particular attention to the Lordship of Denbigh, looking at how native families were displaced as settlers moved in. He'll explore the rise of gentry families and of a flourishing bardic tradition.



The Lost Castles of the Marcher Lordship of Gower

Dr Caroline Bourne, a visiting research fellow at the University of Reading with a reputation for challenging long-held beliefs about the Anglo-Norman Conquest of Gower is on the hunt for lost castles. Piecing together documentary hints and interpreting the landscape, she reveals where long-forgotten earth and timber fortifications may have stood, and their role in establishing Anglo-Norman power in the region.



'An Inconstant Creature' and the 'Nobly Born': Gerald of Wales, Derbforgaill ingen Maeleachlainn, and Nest ferch Rhys

Tristan Wood, 2nd year PhD student and MHS Bursary recipient, explains how Gerald of Wales, one of Britain's most prolific medieval writers, wrote about native Irish and Welsh women including, Derbforgaill and Nest. Comparing Gerald's accounts with native Irish and Welsh sources, he'll question how Gerald's accounts legitimised colonial narratives, particularly around female agency. As both a product and eyewitness of conquest, Gerald's works have become academic staples, but perhaps they need to be reconsidered through a decolonial lens.

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!

George Cobb	Gastonia, USA
Paul Bevand	Worcester
Jennifer Bishop	Ludlow
Helen Boston	London
Adam Chenaf	London
Jennifer Craine	Builth Wells

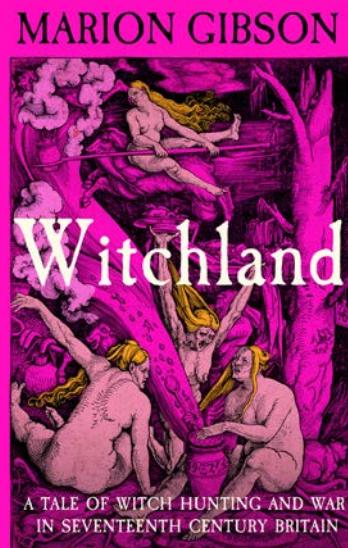
Nigel and Christine Evans	Ludlow
Judith Geraci	Ohio, USA
Jonathan Moore	St Andrews, Scotland
Deryn Poppitt	Wrexham
Tristan Wood	Aberystwyth

Get ready to join the saints and sinners

Spring conference

Saturday, 16 May, 2pm

Ludlow Assembly Rooms



Marion Gibson's exploration of witch hunting and war will be coming soon!

We're close to finalising the speaker line-up for our first in-person conference of 2026. Full details will be included in the April edition of Mortimer Matters, but we couldn't resist whetting your appetite now!

Our theme will be Saints and Sinners, looking at the great and the (not so) good of the medieval March. Our speakers include an expert in witchcraft, an MHS Essay Prize winner and Welsh clergy expert, and an expert on medieval theology, church history and liturgy who was awarded an MHS bursary last year.

Highlights

Professor Marion Gibson is our queen of witches! Fascinated by witch trials for 30 years, she's the author of *Witchcraft: A History in 13 Trials* and her next book, *Witchcraft: A Tale of Witch Hunting and War* will be out in July. She'll be talking to us about witches, magic and power in the Middle Ages and tracing the progress of witch trials over centuries – including one held close to home in Ludlow.

Dr Rhun Emlyn of Aberystwyth University is currently exploring the involvement of clergy in Owain Glyndŵr's rebellion. His talk will focus on one charismatic and controversial cleric who was a key instigator of that struggle. Hywel Cyffin was a larger-than-life figure who defended the rights of his fellow clergy while challenging the Church's moral expectations. Was he a saint or sinner? Rhun's work on Hywel secured him the 2025 MHS Essay Prize.

Jonathan Moore, a PhD student of divinity at St Andrews University – and an MHS bursary winner last year – will introduce us to the distinctive medieval liturgy of Herefordshire and describe how it shaped the moral and spiritual life of Marcher people.

We've a couple more names to add to our programme for the day. And believe me, we're moving heaven and earth to tie them down! I'm sure you'll agree though, this is already looking set to be a glorious day! Look out for more details coming soon, but make sure the date is firmly in your diary!

KEEP THE DATE!

There's an exciting year ahead, time to add some dates to your new calendar!

Saturday, 31 January 2026
Marcher Miscellany Conference

This half-day online conference features talks from scholars and historians within the society's membership. See page 13 for details.

Saturday, 28 March
AGM and Spring Soiree

Soak up Mortimer History at Wigmore Abbey which, this year, will be the location of our spring soiree following our AGM at Wigmore Village Hall. See page 12 for details.

Saturday, 16 May
Spring Conference: Saints and Sinners on the March of Wales

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.

Wednesday, 17 June
2026 John Grove Memorial Lecture

Janet Burton, Professor of Medieval History at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, delivers this year's commemorative lecture on the religious houses of the medieval Welsh March in Grange Court, Leominster. Full details in the April edition of Mortimer Matters.

Saturday, 11 July
Study Day: Abbey Cwm Hir

Our summer study day takes us to Abbey Cwm Hir. Investigations of this Cistercian monastery are revealing so much about medieval Welsh culture.

Saturday, 3 October
Autumn Conference: The Bayeux Tapestry: the story of the Conquest

Marking the arrival of the Bayeux Tapestry in Britain and the opening of a major London exhibition we investigate 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.

Put these dates in your diary and look out for details of these and all Mortimer History Society events at www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk.

For your bookshelf

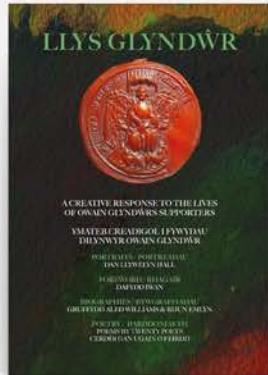
New year, new books! Our selection reveals ideas of nationhood through poetry and women's stories, recovers a heartbreak royal journey and delves into the history of Denbigh's Lordship.

Llys Glyndŵr: A creative response to the lives of Owain Glyndŵr's supporters

By Dan Llywelyn Hall, Dr Rhun Emlyn and Professor Emeritus Gruffydd Aled Williams

A must read for anyone interested in Glyndŵr's rebellion, this exciting book breaks boundaries by combining historical insights with contemporary poetry and art. With contributions from some of today's most influential Welsh poets and artworks by Dan Llywelyn Hall, Llys Glyndŵr breathes new life into the men and women who powered Glyndŵr's rebellion. (Read Rhun Emlyn's feature on Owain's supporters on page 4)

Published by Ravenmade Ltd, September 2025. Available from www.danlhall.com/product-page/llys-glyndwr-the-court-of-glyndwr-creative-responses. RRP £25

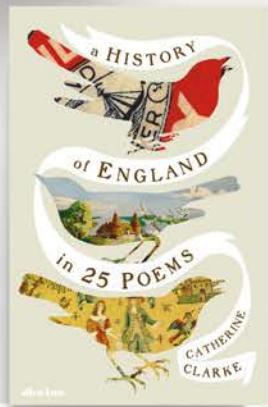


A History of England in 25 Poems

By Catherine Clarke

25 poems, written between the 8th and 21st centuries, provide a portal to the past, filled with vivid voices and surprising stories. Catherine Clarke takes us inside each poem and the times they encapsulate, offering thoughtful insights and new perspectives on how our nation has dreamed itself into existence.

Published by Allen Lane, September 2025. Available online and in bookshops. RRP £25.

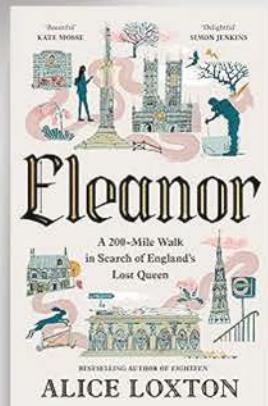


Eleanor: A 200-Mile Walk in Search of England's Lost Queen

By Alice Loxton

This book follows the journey of Eleanor of Castile's funeral cortege from Lincoln to London, a solemn procession marked in stone. At each stopping point, Eleanor's bereft husband Edward I commissioned twelve magnificent Eleanor Crosses. Alice Loxton traces the route on foot, uncovering the extraordinary life of this formidable but little spoken-of queen.

Published by Pan Macmillan, November 2025. Available online and in bookshops. RRP £22.



Legenda: The Real Women Behind the Myths That Shaped Europe

By Janina Ramirez

Janina Ramirez reveals how the stories of medieval women, including Joan of Arc, Lady Godiva and Isabella of Castille, have been twisted in the interests of nation building. By questioning established narratives and searching for the real women behind the legends, she shines a light on how history is so often hijacked to serve the ideological and political interests of the present.

Published by Allen Lane, Nov 2025. Available online and in bookshops. RRP £25.

