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MORTIMER History Society

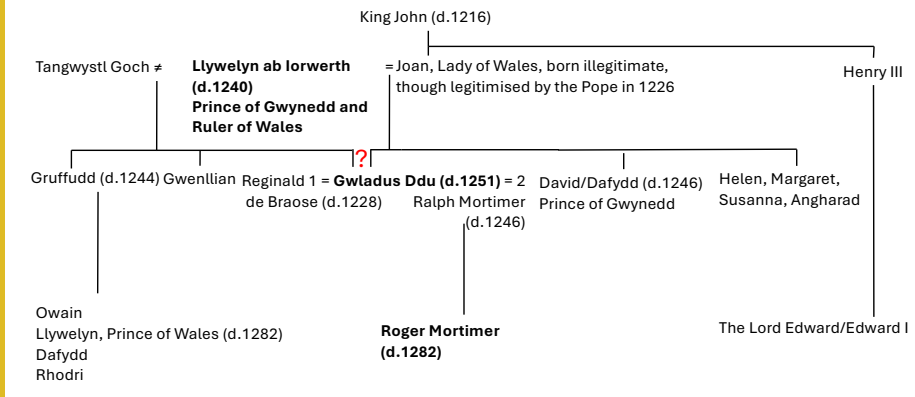
MORTIMER Matters

Cherchez la Mère: Who was the mother of Gwladus Ddu?

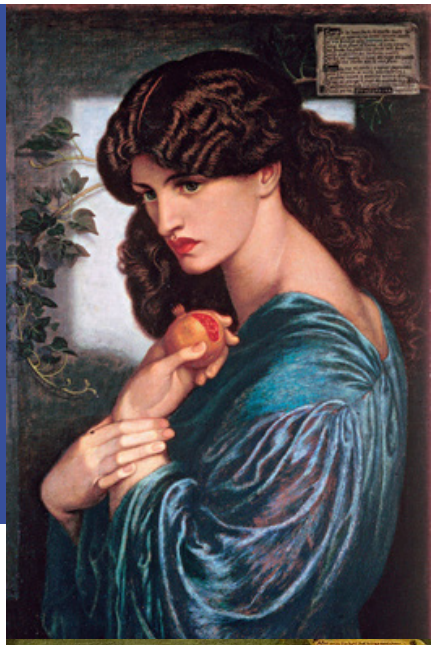
MHS chairman, Philip Hume, has been researching the identify of Gwladus Ddu's mother. So your editor caught up with him to find out what he's discovered so far. First, I asked him to explain who Gwladus Ddu herself was, and why she's important.

Philip: Thanks, Annie. As you can see from the simplified family tree below, Gwladus Ddu was the daughter of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, the prince of Gwynedd who established his rule across most of Wales for the first four decades of the 13th century. In 1230, she married Ralph Mortimer, lord of Wigmore, becoming the mother of Roger Mortimer who was lord of Wigmore from 1246 to his death in 1282. It was Roger who propelled the Mortimer family to the forefront of national affairs.

Because women appear less often in the official records (Gwladus is sometimes referred to as a nameless daughter of Llywelyn), it's important that we discover



Simplified family tree



Dark haired Gwladus, and perhaps her redhead mother Tangwystl Goch

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as much as we can about them and reveal the important roles they played. Moreover, by the late 14th century, over 150 years after her marriage, Gwladus's position in the Mortimer family tree became enormously important. During the 1390s, when Richard II was both childless and deeply unpopular, Roger Mortimer, 4th earl of March (d.1398), began to burnish his claim to the throne. In this context, Ralph Mortimer's marriage became supremely important as, through Gwladus, the Mortimers could claim descent from the ancient lineage of the princes of North Wales, tracing their ancestry back to King Arthur, and through him to Brutus, the Trojan exile who founded Britain, and beyond him to Adam.

Annie: What prompted you to investigate Gwladus' mother?

Philip: You can see from the family tree that, while we know for sure who her father was, it's less clear who was her mother. I've been aware that English medieval historians assume that Gwladus's mother was the Lady Joan, the illegitimate daughter of John, king of England, who married Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in 1205. I was also aware that many Welsh medieval historians assume she was Tangwystl Goch, who had been the (unmarried) partner of Llywelyn in the years before his marriage to Joan. So the idea had been rumbling around in the back of my mind for a few years. It was brought to the front when a colleague pointed out that a mid-16th century historian, Humphrey Llwyd, in his *Cronica Walliae* (completed in 1559), records that Gwladus was the daughter of Joan. Moreover, Llwyd points out that, as a legitimate daughter of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, her son, Roger Mortimer, had a better claim to be prince of Gwynedd than his cousin, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Llywelyn's father, Gruffudd, had definitely been a child of Tangwystl and Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, and therefore, in the eyes of the church, illegitimate. Llwyd says that Roger Mortimer *shulde of right bene Prince of Wales*. This provided the motivation to investigate further.

Annie: Can you explain why many English historians assume that Gwladus's mother was the Lady Joan?

Philip: There's no contemporary, or near-contemporary, record for Gwladus's date of birth or who her mother was. Frustratingly, many of the English historians simply say that Gwladus's mother was Joan without saying why or citing a reference. However, the two or three who do cite a manuscript which is now called Chicago MS 224, which was compiled by the Mortimer family at the end of the 1390s. The key purpose was to bolster their claim to the throne by demonstrating, by their heroic deeds and actions, their capability to rule, and that their diverse genealogical descent made them the ideal family to rule England, Wales and Ireland.

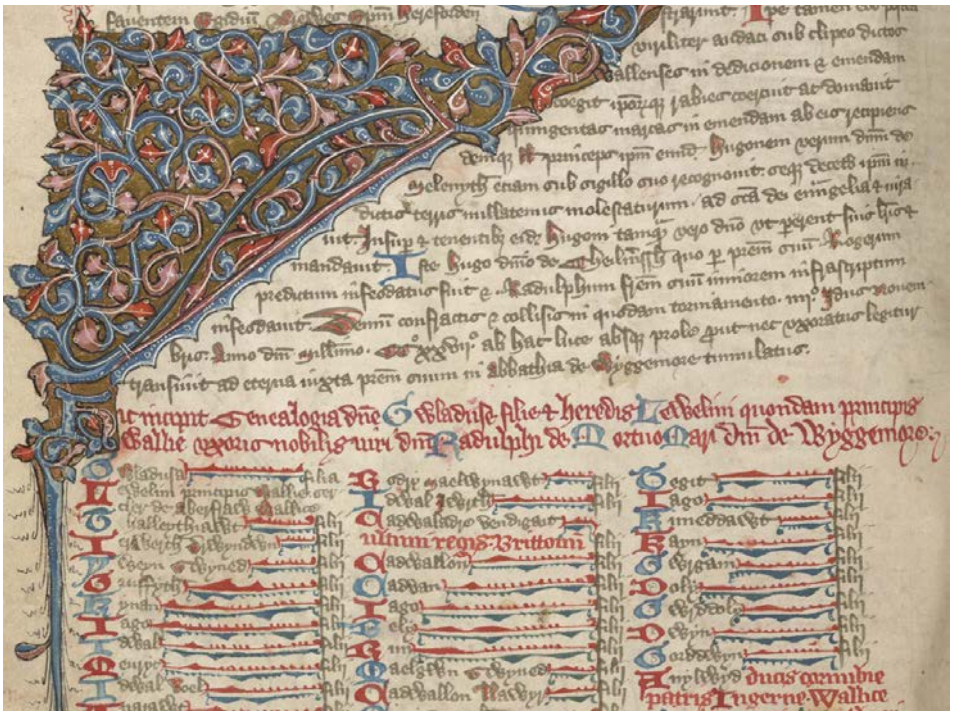
Lady Joan, daughter of King John and candidate to be Gwladus mother

The manuscript, which was almost certainly compiled at Wigmore Abbey, contains an account of the founding and early history of Wigmore Abbey, a Brut history of Britain, genealogies of the princes of north and south Wales, and a chronicle of the history of the Mortimer family. The latter section is sometimes referred to as the 'Wigmore Chronicle' (though that can be confusing as the term is also used for other Mortimer family histories) and was transcribed by William Dugdale in the 17th century, who called it the *Fundatorum Historia*.

It's in this section that Gwladus is presented centre stage and honoured with one of the manuscript's two colourful illustrations. Her full paternal lineage is listed through her father Llywelyn ab Iorwerth right through to Adam. This is followed by her full maternal lineage through her 'mother', Joan, the wife of Llywelyn, to King John, and again back to Adam.
Historians have shown how the genealogies contained in Chicago MS 224, along with the Mortimer family history, influenced those in the famous chronicle of Adam Usk, who was a Mortimer family protégé. That influence continued into the genealogies produced by the Yorkist dynasty, whose right to rule was derived from their Mortimer ancestry. In turn, when Henry VII married Elizabeth of York, eldest daughter of Edward IV and a Mortimer great granddaughter, it was incorporated into Tudor genealogies and became the standard English tradition.

Annie: Surely then, as they American's would say, this is a 'slam-dunk'. The Mortimers must have known who Gwladus's mother was!

Philip: Perhaps, but there are several reasons to be cautious about this claim. Apart from it being common for oral



Chicago MSS 224, which includes the marriage of Ralph Mortimer and Gwladus Ddu, followed by Gwladus' paternal lineage*

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family history to mutate across a period of 160 years, there were dynastic and political reasons in the 1390s for the Mortimers to claim that the mother of Gwladus Ddu was Joan. We know that the first part of the family history in the final manuscript was copied from a manuscript written in 1262. Written nearest in time, it doesn't even mention the marriage between Ralph Mortimer and Gwladus, let alone her lines of descent. It's in the sections written in the 1390s, when both the marriage and her descent have become dynastically important, that she is presented centre-stage. Moreover, this section of the family history contains several historical inaccuracies. However, even allowing for these caveats, there would be no reason to discount Joan as Gwladus' mother unless there was some evidence to the contrary.

Annie: Does that now bring us to why many Welsh historians think that her mother was Tangwystl?

Philip: Yes. There's a strong tradition in the medieval Welsh genealogies, which maintains that Gwladus was the daughter of Tangwystl. Again, they're not contemporary, though they were drawing on earlier sources. We see it most clearly in the genealogies compiled by Gutun Owain towards the end of the 15th century. Gutun was a highly respected genealogist who had significant influence on Welsh genealogical writing in the 16th and 17th centuries, with his opinions commanding great respect. Indeed, Gutun was a member of the commission appointed by Henry VII to trace the genealogy of his grandfather, Owain Tudor. As such Gutun will have been aware that Henry VII had enthusiastically adopted the Mortimer ancestry of his wife, Elizabeth of York. Yet Gutun went against this tradition in naming Tangwystl as the mother of Gwladus.

Annie: Ok. So, not a slam-dunk, more like a score draw with two separate traditions, neither of which is contemporary. What other information have you investigated?

Philip: I started by considering whether there are any clues to Gwladus's maternity in the circumstances of her early life. For example, when you look at the family tree at the start of the article, you see that the children we know to have been off-spring of Llywelyn and Tangwystl were given Welsh names, Gruffudd and Gwenllian. Adding Gwladus, with its phonetic similarities, gives a nice alliteration. In contrast the children of Llywelyn and Joan were given names that had both English and Welsh variants, for example David/Dafydd. Indeed, one might argue that his marriage to the daughter of the English king was so important to Llywelyn, that it would deter him from using an unambiguously Welsh name for the firstborn of that union.

The date of Gwladus's first marriage to Reginald de Braose in 1215, which is well documented, may also point to her mother being Tangwystl. Llywelyn married Joan in 1205, therefore, even if she had been their first child, Gwladus could have been no older than nine when the marriage took place. While it is not impossible that in 1215 Llywelyn's pressing need for a political and military alliance with Reginald outweighed any consideration of his daughter's young age, it's more likely than not that Gwladus was older than this when married to Reginald.

Llywelyn, definitely the father of Gwladus Dhu

Annie: Are there any other circumstances from Gwladus's life which can shed light on who her mother was?

Philip: Yes, there are two aspects which modern genealogists have used to say that Gwladus was the daughter of Joan. However, I would argue that both are mistaken and, when viewed correctly, at least one points to Tangwystl. Around 1220, Llywelyn claimed that he had been given the manors of Knighton and Norton (near Wigmore on the borders of Wales) in free marriage, i.e. as part of Joan's dowry. Subsequently, when Gwladus married Ralph Mortimer in 1230, Llywelyn granted the same towns to them (the Mortimers had long coveted them). We know that Joan and Llywelyn gave other manors that had been part of her dowry to her daughters when they married. Therefore, some genealogists have claimed that this is evidence that Gwladus was the daughter of Joan. But, and it is a big 'but', there is no evidence that Knighton and Norton were part of Joan's dowry, and there is no evidence that Llywelyn held the manors in the years after 1205. Whereas there is strong evidence that Knighton and Norton were held by English barons in the period, including Roger Mortimer (d.1214) for a short period. They probably came into Llywelyn's control by conquest when he seized the neighbouring cantref of Maelienydd from the Mortimers in 1215. When, in around 1220, Llywelyn claimed that he had received them in free marriage, it was in the context that Hugh Mortimer (d.1227) was asserting his right and claim to them. Moreover, in the charter by which Llywelyn settled the manors on Ralph and Gwladus in 1230, he directly contradicted his earlier statement, strongly indicating that he had been 'economical with the truth' ten years earlier.

The second instance is most likely a case of mistaken identity. A series of entries in the Close and Patent Rolls in 1229 have been used to say that Gwladus was a full sister to Dafydd, the son and heir of Llywelyn and Joan. The entries, which concern the arrangements for Dafydd to travel to London to give homage to Henry III, refer to an unnamed sister. As Gwladus was in London at the time, an assumption has been made that the unnamed sister was Gwladus. However, a closer examination of the entries and the wider context shows that it is far more likely that the unnamed sister was the young Susanna, an attested daughter of Joan and Llywelyn. This is particularly significant because the entries refer to this daughter on one occasion as the king's kinswoman and on another as the king's niece.

Annie: Can you explain why that is significant?

Philip: To do so, I need to refer you back to the family tree. As the daughter of King John, Joan was half-sister to Henry III, and her children were the king's nephew and nieces. There's plenty of evidence in royal letters that Henry referred to Joan as his sister, to Dafydd as his nephew, and Susanna as his niece. In contrast, even though, as

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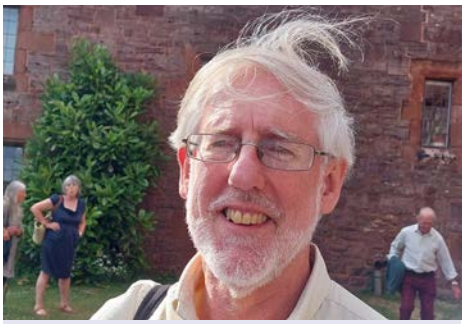
the wife and widow of two prominent Marcher barons, Gwladus features far more in the official records, there is no reference to her being a kinswoman of the king, which strongly indicates that she wasn't Joan's daughter.

This silence becomes even more telling when we turn to her son, Roger Mortimer (d.1282). As you can see on the family tree, if Gwladus had been the daughter of Joan, Roger would have been first cousin once removed to Edward I. There is plenty of evidence that, as young men, Roger and Edward formed a close friendship, which continued until Roger's death in 1282. Given the emotional depth of their friendship, if they had also been linked by blood, surely there would be at least one surviving royal letter or charter which referred to Roger as 'my beloved cousin' or 'kinsman'. There isn't. And, although this is an argument based on silence, sometimes the silence can become deafening.

Annie: If, and you make a convincing case, Gwladus was the daughter of Tangwystl, does this affect her position?

Philip: Not at all. If anything, it makes her more intriguing. She was a powerful woman in her own right, and her ancestry, which became critically important in the 15th and 16th centuries, still makes her a gateway ancestor to the lineage of the princes of north Wales, and through them to King Arthur and Brutus. Though, if, as I argue, she was a daughter of Tangwystl, she is clearly not a gateway ancestor to King John and the Plantagenets, which I know will disappoint some members. However, as a daughter of Tangwystl, Gwladus gives us many insights into Marcher culture and customs. Perhaps it's best to give the last word to Gwladus. In his report of his visitation to Wigmore Abbey in 1531, the Lancaster Herald, William Fellows, described the burial places in the abbey church of some of the Mortimers, lords of Wigmore, adding: 'Also in the cloyster of the sayde church lyeth buryed Gladius Diew, doughter to Llywellyn Prynce of Walys the which Gladius the Welshmen take for a goddesse.'



About the author

Philip, Chair of the Mortimer History Society, is studying for a PhD at Swansea University, focussing on the life of Roger Mortimer (d.1282). He is the author of *The Welsh Marcher Lordships I: Central and North; and editor of the Marcher Lordship series, On the Trail of the Mortimers' and On the Trail of the Mortimers in the Welsh Marches.* He also co-authored *The Ludlow Castle Heraldic Roll,* and *The Mortimers of Wigmore 1066 - 1486: Dynasty of Destiny.* He writes regularly for various history journals.

*Wigmore Abbey Chronicle and Brut Chronicle, Manuscript Code Ms 225 Hanna Holbein Gray Special Collections Research Centre University of Chicago Library.

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Spring is here, so it's time to get active! So we've got news of an exciting programme of events that's going to fill up your summer. Next up is our Spring Conference focused on Saints and Sinners, then our Annual John Grove Memorial Lecture, delivered this year by Professor Janet Burton. I'm especially excited by our summer study trip, which will take us to the final resting place of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, Cmwhir Abbey – both historic and beautiful. This year we're also supporting the inaugural Ludlow History Festival, with an August afternoon dedicated to Ludlow's medieval power couple – Richard duke of York and Cecily Neville. And, further afield, MHS Vice President Ian Mortimer, along with myself, will be presenting at the Tewkesbury History Festival. It's great to see the MHS supplementing its own exceptional events programme with forays into other arenas.

I'm also grateful to our contributors this quarter, who've provided some wonderful features for you. Our Chairman Philip Hume unravels the mystery of Gwladus Ddu's parentage, MHS member Eimeara Stapleton gives us her view on Roger Mortimer's regency, and MHS Bursary winner Tristan Wood introduces us to the fascinating Aífe of Leinster and the March. Finally, and ahead of her appearance at our Spring Conference, Dr Marion Gibson talks about her career in witchcraft and magic.

In Society news, we give an update on our Bursary Appeal and reveal the winner of our annual Essay Prize. Most importantly though, we're asking for your support. With an ambitious programme of events and activities anticipated over the next four years, we need a new influx of volunteers ready to contribute their skills to our work. See our appeal on page 15 and challenge yourself to get involved!

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

Annie Garthwaite

Meet Marion Gibson, Professor of Witchcraft and Magic

The keynote speaker at our May conference has a job title straight out of Hogwarts, but a very real-world conviction that her field of study offers priceless insights into the lives of real women and the medieval mindset.

Ahead of her conference appearance, I sat down with Marion to talk about how her extraordinary career has shaped up.

So, Marion, how did it all begin?

By accident, really. Growing up on the Isle of Wight my horizons were limited, and I assumed that my love of books would lead me to a career in librarianship. So off I went to Exeter University to study English literature. But I was quickly lured towards medieval history and started looking for ways to combine the two. The only course available in the English department that would get me even close involved studying magic in Renaissance Literature. Of which there is a great deal! And that was it, really. The passion was ignited.

What was it that fascinated you so?

Well, of course there's something subversive about studying witchcraft and magic – the sheer weirdness of it all. But let me say straight away that I don't actually believe in witchcraft, magic or even religion. My interest lies in the humans caught up in it. Most especially the women. Let's face it, between 75% and 90% of people accused of witchcraft in most trials are women, often poor women with little status or power. The only time such women's voices – or their lives – are recorded are during their trials, when their words are assiduously written down, noted and kept. Their testimonies may be given under torture or duress, they may contain confessions of questionable veracity, but as well as their witchy practices, they talk about their lives – their families, their homes, their communities and their work. These are rare insights, and a precious resource for any historian.

So when was your career in librarianship derailed in favour of witchcraft?

Well, I continued with my English degree, but veered ever more towards history. When it came to my PhD – still within Exeter's English department – I fudged it a little by studying witch trial accounts as literary texts. I was fortunate enough to then get a job at Exeter as a lecturer, then Professor of Witchcraft and Magic – my official title is Professor of Renaissance and Magical Literatures. I kept drawing history and literature together by teaching students from both departments – I'm a great believer in multi-disciplinary study. I was at Exeter for over thirty-five years in total – as student and academic. Then, last year, I took the giant leap into independent work. I'm now a historical consultant on all things witchy and magical! It means I can spend more time writing (I've a book out this summer and two more in the works) and speaking to lovely groups like the Mortimer History Society! I'm still an Emeritus Professor at Exeter though, so I remain connected.

It's easy to assume that witchcraft was little more than an unjust charge fired at women, but were there witches in medieval England and what was their practice?

I don't believe in witches, but I do believe there were individuals, frequently healers of some kind, before, during and after the middle ages, who believed what they were doing was witchery, supernatural or magic. In some cases clearly so. For example, there are accounts of witches diagnosing an illness simply by examining – and saying incantations or charms over – an article of clothing belonging to the patient. That's clearly not 'medicine', herbal or otherwise! Many, if not most, saw themselves as doing God's work and their incantations were frequently taken directly from scripture. They saw no wrong in it. And, after all, where does religion end and magic begin? How different is a prayer from a charm?

Remember, too, that in medieval times, the distinction between religion and magic was blurred. The 'magic' of alchemy (the transformation of one thing into another) is at the centre of the Catholic mass, when the bread and wine become, quite literally, the body and blood of Christ. Though it must be said, that particular piece of magic was strictly reserved to male priests and the church preferred not to describe it as magic.

Yet because of this tolerance of mystical thinking, magic and witchcraft were, in many ways, viewed more sympathetically in Catholic England than in protestant England. Protestantism was an altogether more rational religion, which eschewed the idea of transubstantiation, along with other religious mysticism. Witches often thought themselves to be in contact with fairies or spirits too, which may, of course, hark back to earlier, pagan religions.

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In the common imagination witches would take to the air in company with their demons

Charges of witchcraft have been weaponised against women for centuries. What makes the charge so potent?

Two things I think. First, particularly in Protestant England, that it's the worst crime imaginable, to be in league with the Devil or in some way to subvert God's authority. More cynically, I'd say an accusation of witchcraft is very easy mud to throw – a fine way of bringing down an enemy or someone you feel has wronged you. You don't need much evidence after all, just a strong accusation. My cow died, so the witch must have cursed it. My wife is dead, and it must have been the witch's medicine. That sort of thing. If you accuse someone of another crime, let's say theft, you have to prove your loss and their possession of the goods. By comparison, the burden of evidence for witchcraft is very slight.

Do you see magic as something separate to witchcraft? Where do the boundaries blur?

Yes, they are different. For example, astrology was considered magic, but because it was typically undertaken by educated men in holy orders, it was socially acceptable and usually not thought demonic or reprehensible – although there were circumstances where that could change. There was a belief in alchemy too, what we'd think of as chemistry, but this was also practised by educated men. And, as I've said, Catholic religion was a kind of magic – totally acceptable and a tenet of faith. Things changed, though, when Protestantism removed the 'magic' from religion, and it's from this point that the persecution of witches escalated.

You've written a history of witchcraft in 13 trials that spans centuries. When do you consider was the most dangerous time to be a witch?

In England it was certainly during the 1580s and 90s. The early reformation was over by then and Protestantism firmly in charge. Then again in the 1640s, around the time of the Civil War, when the Puritans were in charge – Protestantism on steroids! Added to that, the 1640s were a time of civil conflict and lawless, when many of the normal checks and balances of functioning judicial systems were removed. That allowed vigilantes and self-styled witchfinders to flourish and practise unchecked.

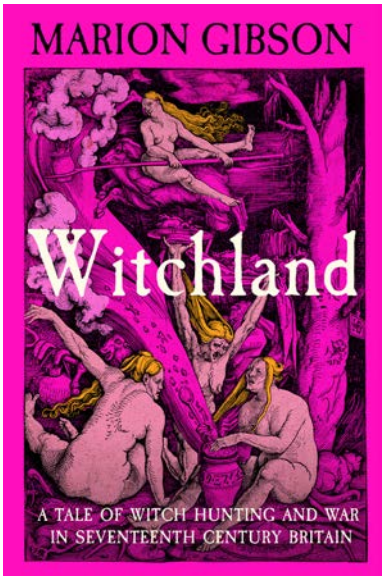
Matthew Hopkins, the scourge of Puritan East Anglia

That leads us to your new book, I suppose, out this summer. Tell us about that.

It's called *Witchland: A tale of witch hunting and war in 17th century Britain*. And, I guess, that's exactly what it's about. But I'm very definitely NOT writing about the witchfinders – Matthew Hopkins and his ilk. More than enough has been said about them. I'm interested in the people accused of witchcraft and their accusers, who were often their neighbours and friends. Around 200 people were executed for witchcraft in East Anglia alone at this time, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. This was a countrywide phenomenon, with severe outbreaks as far north as Scotland and Newcastle.

You're speaking at our May conference; give us a taster of what you'll be talking about?

Yes. For the most part I'll be comparing two witch trials. The first is the case of Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester in the 15th century, who was tried along with her 'witch' accomplice, and imprisoned in 1441. The second takes us out of the medieval period into 17th century Ludlow, when a townswoman was accused by a family from Richard's Castle. These cases throw up some interesting contrasts; one very highborn lady, one working class woman, one under Catholic jurisdiction, the other Protestant. The accusation of Eleanor is very clearly motivated by high politics, Margaret's by local vindictiveness. I'm studying Margaret's case for another book I'm writing, and I'm hoping that some members of the Mortimer History Society might have come across her!



We'll find out! Marion, it's been a joy to speak with you and we can't wait to welcome you in May!

Marion Gibson will speak at our May Conference, Saints and Sinners of the March of Wales, on Saturday 16 May. See page 18 for full details and book your ticket at **www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/events**.

Conquest and coexistence: Aífe of Leinster and the March

2025 MHS Bursary recipient, Tristan Wood, reveals the life of a 12th century Irish princess who became a lady of the Welsh March.

There are few women whose personal experiences reflect how Irish, Welsh, and Norman groups clashed and coexisted in the late 12th century quite so well as Aífe of Leinster. Despite her elite status as the daughter of the king of Leinster, Diarmait Mac Murchada, and his second wife, Mór Ua Tuathail, very little is known about her before her marriage to Richard 'Strongbow' de Clare, earl of Pembroke, in 1170. Her marriage was hardly unorthodox. It would have been expected that she would marry into an elite family, just as her sister Órlaith did when she married Domnall Ua Briain, king of Munster. However, the arrival of Norman forces into Ireland that came with conquest drastically changed Ireland's political and social scene for centuries, and Aífe's marriage into a Norman family was a step into a new future.

In 1166, Diarmait had been exiled from Ireland on account of his abduction of Derbforgaill, the wife of the king of Bréifne in 1152 and his unpopularity within Leinster. During his exile, he intended to raise support in England and Wales to retake Leinster. According to Anglo- and Cambro-Norman sources, like the writings of Gerald of Wales, he had offered Richard marriage to Aífe as his heir and the rulership of Leinster after his death in return. Unfortunately, Irish sources say little on the agreement between Diarmait and Richard to suggest alternative narratives, although Aífe certainly perpetuated the narrative that she was Diarmait's heir following her marriage. It is unclear if she accompanied her father during his exile. The Norman French poem *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland* noted that her mother, Mór, had accompanied Diarmait, and so there is scope to suggest that Aífe may have also travelled with him.

Daniel Maclise's 1854 painting, *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife*

After receiving a promise of aid from Richard whilst in the Welsh Marches, Diarmait returned to Ireland, and the first of the Norman forces arrived in 1169. In 1170, Richard's own forces arrived at Waterford and defeated the Irish. He married Aífe soon after. It's here that Irish annalists, such as the author for the *Annals of Loch Cé*, lamented the arrival of the 'Saxon Foreigners' that had since refused to leave the island. The moment has since been immortalised in Daniel Maclise's 1854 painting *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* and shows Richard stepping on an Irish cross as Aífe is pushed towards him by Diarmait whilst Waterford burns in the background. Their union had certainly been a turning point in the conquest of Ireland, as the Norman forces gradually expanded beyond Leinster. It would also become a turning point for Aífe, as she would begin exerting influence in Ireland, Wales and England as a result.

Aífe and the Church

Through her marriage, Aífe engaged with the complex cross-border social and political relationships that were typical of other Marchers. Like her peers, she had connections to lands in the March and England. Richard held lands in Pembrokeshire and Chepstow as the earl of both Pembroke and Strigoil, as well as in various English counties including Wiltshire and Essex. However, her reach to Ireland was arguably more unusual in the 1170s. Her presence within sources concerning Ireland, Wales, and England is intermittent, but they demonstrate the experiences of someone at the heart of a number of cross-cultural connections.

Three charters reflect Aífe's involvement in the assent and confirmation of grants given to religious institutions in Ireland and England – two relate to Leinster and one to Cambridgeshire. The first of these charters concerns a grant of land by Richard to the abbey in Glendalough, County Wicklow. Here, she appears as a witness to the charter as 'Eva the Countess' alongside Lorcán Ua Tuathail, Archbishop of Dublin. Lorcán, conveniently, was also her uncle through her mother, Mór. Having both Lorcán and Aífe as witnesses to the grant would have been fundamental to Richard's legitimacy in issuing the charter. Not only did it reflect his newfound connectedness to the political and ecclesiastical elite of Leinster, but it also reaffirmed his authority as its ruler following Diarmait's death in 1171. Aífe was needed to provide a link between Richard and the previous king, but the Archbishop's support would have asserted that he was the legitimate authority in Leinster. Aífe's half-brother Domnall Cáemánach Mac Murchada had contested her legitimacy, and so Lorcán's recognition of Aífe's claim would have been central to counteracting alternative power sources.

Women's involvement in grants and donations to religious institutions was also a central aspect of many elite Irish women's lives. Aífe's half-sister Derbforgaill had been involved in the donation of lands to St. Mary's Abbey in Dublin alongside her husband Domnall Gilla Mocholmóc around the same time. Nor was it uncommon within the Anglo-Norman circles Aífe inhabited following her marriage. A 1309 record of a charter granted by Aífe to the Benedictine nuns in Ickleton,

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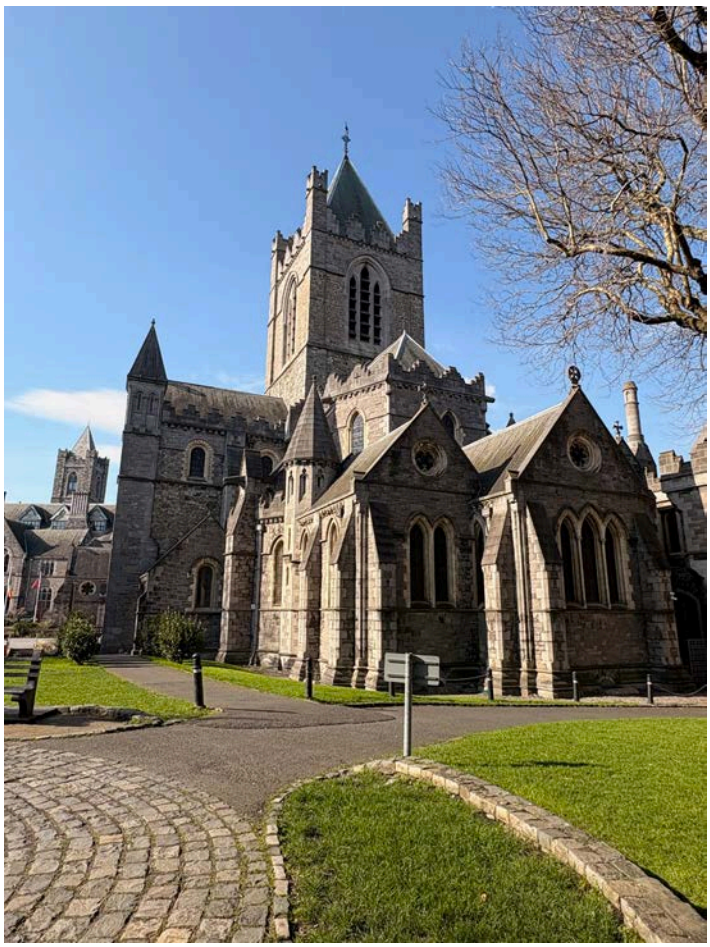
Cambridgeshire shows her involvement in her dower lands. Here, Aífe permitted the usage of her nearby mill in return for payment. It was also noted that the mill's usage was permitted in part for the salvation of the souls of herself, Richard, and their son Gilbert, dating the charter to sometime after the latter's birth in 1173. Her actions here were entirely within Anglo-Norman legal parameters concerning women's rights involving land, but were arguably intrinsically reflective of her relatively newfound Marcher status.

She was expected to manage her responsibilities within both Irish and English contexts and the sociocultural differences that accompanied them. Whilst it would not be accurate to describe her marriage to Richard as liberating, it did facilitate her ability to exert influence over a significantly larger geographic area than she had been able to before.



Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin where Richard de Clare is buried and Aífe's uncle, Lorcán Ua Tuathail, had been the Archbishop.

Aífe's later charter confirming the rights of Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin is therefore significant in exploring her ability to engage with Irish society whilst living in the Welsh March. The confirmation can be dated to sometime after 1181 as it includes a reference to John Comyn, Lorcán's Anglo-Norman successor as the Archbishop of Dublin. By this time, Dublin was firmly under the control of the king of England. Before his death, Richard had surrendered his control of Dublin and Waterford to Henry II in return for reclaiming his lands in Wales, England and France. Richard's death in 1176 also meant that Aífe had been widowed for at least five years by the time she confirmed the charter for Christ Chuch. Within the charter, Aífe identified herself as the countess, although there is no reference to whether she meant countess of Pembroke or Strigoil. Additionally, she firmly depicted herself as Diarmait's heir in Leinster, as Richard had many years prior when dealing with Glendalough.

The need to emphasise her relationship to Diarmait may have in part been because her father's lands had been absorbed into those held by Henry. It may also have been partly because of her children's minority. Aífe's son Gilbert had become the Earl of Pembroke following his father's death, and by 1185 he was in the king's custody, not Aífe's. It is unclear where their daughter Isabella was, but by 1189 she had married William Marshal and the lordship of Leinster passed to him. As Gilbert was arguably too young to hold authority in the matter, it would have been logical to turn to Aífe as the best person to ratify the charter, as she had clearly been largely successful in situating herself as Diarmait's heir. Domnall Cáemánach's death in 1175 would have likely helped her reinforce her heiress status further by limiting potential threats to her legitimacy. In doing so, Aífe was able to legitimise her own authority as a result of the perception that she was Diarmait's heir, even if others like Henry may have had some claim to being able to issue the confirmation themselves.

Aífe the Marcher

Out of the scarcity of documents which followed Aífe's life, only one directly addresses her acquisition of a Marcher status in any capacity. Aífe's residence at Chepstow castle is substantiated by an entry into English financial records for 1183 to 1184 whereby she was given £20 to maintain herself and likely the castle. The fortifying of castles would have been integral to maintaining Anglo-Norman control in a colonised location like Chepstow, and the receipt of money indicates that she was liable to do so. This £20 was a significant increase on the £4 she had received three years prior. There are no records of her perspective on events, but there is some irony in her aiding in the Anglo-Norman reinforcement of Chepstow, as she helped reinforce the colonisation of Wales by the same group who were simultaneously colonising her homeland. Her experiences here were not unique. Gwenllian, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth's daughter and wife of William de Lacy (d.1233), was recorded as being present in Lough Oughter, County Cavan in 1224. William had been involved in the Anglo-Norman governance of Meath and had himself been

Tintern Abbey, Monmouthshire, where Aífe is buried along with her daughter, Isabella de Clare.

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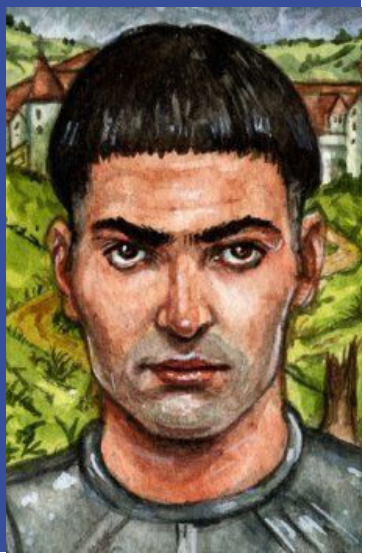
the son of an Anglo-Norman father, Hugh, and an unnamed daughter of Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht. As a result, Aífe's involvement in the fortification of Chepstow and religious institutions in Leinster and England reflected her status as a Marcher, as she held numerous lands across a wide geographic region. She was not native to her home in the 1180s, yet she upheld its conquest despite parallel efforts for domination in Leinster, her children were Hiberno-Norman, and she interacted with a number of cultures simultaneously. It isn't clear if she truly embraced being a Marcher, but she certainly embodied the expected cross-cultural relationships as she acquired them.

Despite her centrality to the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland, Aífe's death was not recorded. There is once again an irony that she likely died in Chepstow as she was buried in Tintern Abbey, whereas Richard died in Leinster and was buried in Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin. Whilst she may only survive to historians in snippets of documents, the implications of her experiences dramatically changed Anglo-Irish relations in the long term. Ultimately, Aífe reflected the sociopolitical situation of the Welsh March and Hiberno-Norman Leinster in the twelfth-century, and her contributions to the dramatic political and social developments in Ireland, Wales, and England should not be underestimated.

About the author:
Tristan Wood is a PhD student at Aberystwyth University. His research focuses on native Irish and Welsh women and their relationship to agency and identity in the 12th and 13th centuries as a period of significant social and political change.

The Regency of Roger Mortimer: Tyranny or fair dealing?

We're continuing to mark the 700th anniversary of a Mortimer-supported invasion of England that forced the abdication of Edward II. In partnership with Edward's queen, Isabella, Roger Mortimer (died 1330) invaded England in September 1326. What followed is now recognised as one of the most dramatic – and controversial – periods in English history. But who was Roger Mortimer? England's appointed regent? An ambitious tyrant out to rule in his own right? Or simply a man in a hard place, whose actions were shaped by the political realities of his time? MHS member Eimeara Stapleton gives us her view.



Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, rose from Marcher Lord to de facto ruler of England during the minority of Edward III. Chroniclers at the time depicted him as an overbearing subject, with an ambition so huge it bordered on tyranny. But I believe his regency deserves a closer analysis that takes into account the political environment he was compelled to operate within. Let's take a look at how Roger, in collaboration with Queen Isabella, came to consolidate power after the deposition (or forced abdication) of Edward II, the military and administrative challenges he faced and the extent to which he departed from traditional patterns of baronial governance of his day.

To understand Mortimer's regency, it's important to consider the political and historical context of the time. The kingdom was emerging from the disastrous reign of Edward II, and having to face the uncertainties inherent in a minority rule. Moreover, no king of England had ever left his throne in quite these circumstances. Whether deposed or forced to abdicate, there can be no doubt that Edward II didn't give up his reign willingly and, of course, he remained alive, at least as his son's minority began. These were, to say the least, unchartered waters.

So, who was Roger Mortimer? Let's take a look at his origins. Roger was born at Wigmore in the Welsh Marches to Marguerite of Fiennes and Sir Edmund

Wigmore Castle, Roger Mortimer's birthplace

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Mortimer, head of one of the most influential families in the March. Having served the king faithfully for many years, he came to the point of rebellion. He led a failed revolt against Edward in 1322, was imprisoned in the Tower, and escaped to France a year later, where he joined forces with Isabella to launch an invasion. There's no time here to go into the details of those dramatic events but, suffice to say, the invasion was successful. Edward II was forced to abdicate and his court favourite, Hugh Despenser the Younger, along with his father, was executed.

Roger and Isabella invade England in 1326

The consolidation of authority

The new regime made efforts to bring stability to the kingdom following this period of chaos. Thirteen-year-old Edward III was declared king and a regency council established to govern during his minority. Roger Mortimer rose quickly to become the dominant figure in the administration.

One of the charges brought against him at his eventual trial in 1330 was that he ignored the regency council, took royal power and government to himself, appointed (and sacked) members of the household and royal ministers at will, and used his close association to the young king's mother, Queen Isabella, to assert unreasonable power.

Most chroniclers of the time reported that the deposition of Edward, while irregular, was entirely legal and carried out with the assent of all involved – church and state. Nor do we have clear information about the regency council, who was on it or how it was constituted, whether its membership rotated or was fixed? We simply don't have the Parliamentary records to tell us.

Some chroniclers suggest that Roger (and Isabella) were, in fact, members of the Regency Council. It's unclear, but certainly Roger had relevant experience. He was appointed to Edward II's council in 1318 under the Treaty of Leake, which negotiated a peace between Edward II and his fractious cousin, Thomas of Lancaster. Certainly Roger would have been a difficult person to ignore or pass over. He had vast governmental as well as military experience, including serving two stints as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland during Edward II's reign. So, whilst there is no direct evidence to confirm it, it seems not unlikely that he was asked to act as regent and acted legitimately within that role.

If, on the other hand, Roger and Isabella were not members of the regency council, but somehow bypassed its authority to assert their own power, one has to wonder why no actions were taken by the council to curb them, as happened with 14th century Queen Ingeborg of Norway who, having abused the royal seal as regent for her son Magnus Erickson, had her powers curbed. Her legislative decisions had to be ratified by the regency council.

The accumulation of power

After the overthrow of the Despensers, their large estates were available for redistribution. Certainly, they were granted to Roger and his allies and, in 1328, Roger was created 1st earl of March, a new title that displayed his growing influence, and a controversial one because it placed him above other Marcher lords. Historians since have viewed both the redistribution of lands in Mortimer's favour, and his acquisition of this new title, to be evidence of excessive greed. However, it should be noted that they served a vital function. Land, patronage and personal allegiance strengthened authority in medieval society. Therefore, If power and loyalty were to be maintained, possession of substantial estates was a necessity.

During Edward III's minority, writs were issued under the king's authority and both the chancery and exchequer functioned in his name. Mortimer didn't dismantle existing structures, but rather worked through them, reinforcing at least the impression of lawful governance. Certainly it's impossible to ignore the influence Mortimer wielded. Appointments to key offices displayed his preferences and justice was often exercised in ways that strengthened his position and weakened that of his rivals. But Mortimer was not the first to appoint and sack ministers. During the minority of Henry III a hundred or so years earlier, Peter Des Roches was ousted from his post as the king's guardian by the regent Hubert De Burgh for fear that he would use Henry III's authority to destroy his enemies or control the central government.

Nor was Roger the first to gather knights and men at court. Hubert De Burgh did likewise during Henry III's regency. It is arguable that Roger did it in order to prevent Henry of Lancaster from abducting the young king.

The avoidance of threat

Foreign policy posed immediate difficulties for the new regime. The wars with Scotland had drained resources during Edward II's reign and the north of England in particular was severely destabilised. In 1328 the Mortimer government made peace with Robert the Bruce, concluding the Treaty of Edinburgh that, much to the annoyance of the English nobility, recognised Scottish independence. But it is hard to see another way in which the threat of Scotland could be managed and, I believe, it would be a mistake to describe the regency as oppressive or chaotic. Large scale baronial revolt was avoided, trade continued and administration functioned. All of this points to relative internal stability. Yet, despite this, resentment towards Mortimer, based on a perception that he was exercising excessive authority and accumulating too much wealth and lands, grew.

Many argue that Mortimer held on to power for too long and even that he had no intention of giving it up to the young king. Some even feared that he intended to make himself king, or to kill Edward III and act as regent for his son, the infant Black Prince, thus extending the scope of his regency for another eighteen years or so. This would have been an ambitious plan indeed, particularly in the politically fragile medieval era in which lifespans were short. Aged 43 in 1330, Roger Mortimer would have been considered advanced in years. And he could have grasped that nettle earlier had he wished to. Edward III's brother John was four years younger than the young king, which means Roger could, had he chosen, have killed Edward III before 1330 and extended his regency through John.

On the other hand, many other regents have been in no hurry to relinquish power. This doesn't necessarily indicate a sinister intention on their part. Some, like Queen Melisende of Jerusalem, refused to relinquish her regency to her son Baldwin when he came of age in 1151/52. She did so on the grounds that he was too inexperienced. Judging by his subsequent military failures, she may have been right. Similarly, Hubert De Burgh didn't hand over power until Henry III was 24 years old, years past the age of majority and even though, at age 15, he had been deemed fit to rule by papal decree.

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It is not unreasonable to surmise, therefore, that Mortimer and Isabella might have thought Edward III a little too young to rule alone, and may even have feared that he would prove vulnerable to manipulation or worse. A view reinforced in the light of Henry of Lancaster's uprising in 1329 and his attempt to kidnap the king.

The fear that Mortimer intended to make himself king was fuelled by his appearance with Isabella as Arthur and Guinevere at a tournament held at Wigmore in 1329. But this is surely fantasy. Roger, a second cousin of Edward II, had no royal claim that England's nobility would recognise or respect. And, if he had attempted to kill and usurp Edward III this would surely have been met with swift retaliation. To have any chance of success, he'd have had to imprison or kill everyone who stood in his way. And yet, in 1330, everyone who might have opposed him still lived, with the exception of the young king's uncle, the Earl of Kent. By 1330, murmurs against Mortimer were growing. On top of the Scottish settlement and Roger's accumulation of land and wealth, there was a fresh grievance. The execution of Edmund earl of Kent led many to believe that Roger's regime would tolerate no opposition and sought to rule by fear.

After hearing rumours that the deposed king was alive, Kent joined a plot to free him and reinstate him as king. When the plot failed, Roger chose not only to prosecute Kent, but to execute him too. And yet it is strange that Mortimer would choose to read out to the court a letter in which Kent stated his belief that Edward II still lived. Surely this was a supposition he'd have been keen to suppress? However controversial Kent's execution was, it was carried out with due process.

The tunnel into Nottingham Castle that gave access into the royal apartments

Surely a man with evil intentions would have been more likely to reach for poison or an assassin's quiet blade?

Downfall and execution

Never the less, the execution of Kent served only to fuel fears of Mortimer's long term intentions, certainly in the mind of the young king and several of his young nobly-born contemporaries. In October 1330, seven months after Kent's execution, a plan was hatched to storm Nottingham Castle through a tunnel into the royal apartments. Mortimer was overpowered and subsequently executed. He went to his death accused of the usurpation of royal power and even the murder of Edward II. And yet, there is a body of evidence to suggest that Edward II was in fact not murdered, but survived long beyond Roger's own demise. A subject for another day, perhaps, but certainly his fate remains one of history's most compelling unsolved mysteries.

For many, Roger's story will always be that of a villainous nobleman, a tyrant brought to justice. But, as ever, there is another reading of his actions that begs a more sympathetic conclusion. Either way, Mortimer's regency offers a valuable insight into the dynamics of medieval governance, the fraught tensions of 14th century politics, and the difficulties of ruling in the name of a young king. More than anything, it is a salutary lesson into how a meteoric rise to power can end in a quick and calamitous fall.

About the author

Eimeara Stapleton is a civil servant with a BA in history and linguistics, an MA in cybersecurity and a passion for Roman and medieval history. She has been a member of the Mortimer History Society, as well as her own local history society, for some years.

Applications for 2026 Bursaries Opening Soon!

We're proud to announce that the MHS Bursary Programme will once again offer two £1,000 bursaries to students undertaking post-graduate doctoral research or research-led Masters programmes in the history of the Mortimers, the medieval Welsh March or its lordships. Applications will open on Monday 4 May for the academic year 2026 to 2027. Thank you to everyone whose donations have made this possible – it's fantastic that we've maintained our fundraising achievement this year.

Yve James, Chair of the judges

The bursaries will support two students whose studies will help develop knowledge and understanding of the Mortimers and the Marches, covering any aspect of their history – social, religious, linguistic, cultural, artistic, legal or political. Applications will be judged by a panel of historians and Society trustees and the successful candidates will be announced by the end of July.

Yve James, Chair of the Bursary judging panel and MHS Trustee, says; "I urge students to apply for this valuable bursary. It's not just about the money, recipients also receive one-year's membership of the MHS, which introduces them to a valuable network of historians and scholars, and offers both publishing and speaking opportunities."

Under Yve's chairwomanship, our Bursary panel is made up of Helen Fulton, Professor and Chair of Medieval Literature at the University of Bristol, and Janet Burton, Professor of Medieval History at the University of Wales Trinity St David, alongside Society Trustee Annie Garthwaite.

How to apply

If you're a student – or planning to become one – you can find everything you need to know about applying for the MHS Bursary at **www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/bursary**. Remember, applications open on 4 May and you'll need to have submitted your application by 29 June. **Good luck!**

A single winner for the 2025 MHS Essay Prize

2nd prize success for Andy King, Lecturer in History at the University of Southampton.

We're delighted to announce a winner in our 2025 Essay Prize competition. And Andy certainly deserves all the accolades. His fascinating entry, *Once Upon a time In the Borders*, draws comparisons between the medieval marches of Scotland and Wales. It explores how each took on very different identities, shaped by the contrasting natures of the Welsh and Scots polities, which, in turn, drove Anglo-Welsh and Anglo-Scottish relations in very different directions.

"This resulted in widely different seigneurial and governmental institutions," Andy points out. "Though both had their origins in war, they had little else in common beyond the designation of 'March'." About winning the Prize Andy says, "It's so heartwarming to have received this recognition and to be able to publish my essay in the society's journal." He also speaks highly of the Essay Prize's value to the academic community. "It provides great encouragement for academics and scholars researching the history of the Marches of Wales and borders more generally."

We think so too, Andy. Long may it continue!

Andy will receive a cash prize of £300, along with free membership of the Society for three years. His essay will be published in a future edition of the MHS Journal.

Watch out in the next issue of *Mortimer Matters* for details of the 2026 Essay Prize.

Our winner – Andy King

A Celebratory (and future focused) AGM

This year's AGM celebrated past achievements and looked ahead to a promising future – and was followed by a medieval celebration at Wigmore Abbey.

At our 2026 AGM, held on Saturday, 28 March at Wigmore Village Hall, we looked back over a year of solid achievement and forward to four-year period of opportunity. Opening the meeting, Chairman Philip Hume reminded us of the many ways in which the MHS continues to extend its reach and the contribution it makes to both academic and popular appreciation of Mortimer and Marcher History. He then challenged us to focus our thoughts on four exciting years that lie ahead of us.

As new trustee Anna Dunne explained, the period from 2026 to 2030 marks a series of significant Mortimer 700th anniversaries. These begin with Roger Mortimer's support for Isabella of France in the invasion of England that led to the forced abdication of Edward II (1326), and culminated in Roger's execution and the commencement of Edward III's majority (1330). Your trustees are busy developing a programme of activity that will both celebrate the Mortimers and raise the society's profile. Look forward to hearing more about all of that in future issues of *Mortimer Matters*.

Getting on with business, Mike Beazley then delivered the Treasurer's and Membership Secretary's reports, signalling a healthy balance sheet and strong community. We look forward to seeing both continue to flourish.

Hello and goodbye

Eleven existing Trustees were reconfirmed in their roles. We had one new addition and one departure. As new trustee, Anna Dunne was appointed, we said au revoir (but not goodbye) to MHS stalwart, John Fleming. As a founding member of the MHS, John has been a trustee since the get-go and has contributed his skills and energy (not to mention

Philip Hume presents John with a gift of thanks from a grateful society

A boar's head feast in the abbey's undercroft

financial resources) with great generosity and a big heart. He promises to stay close, but we miss him already!

You may remember that John appeared in our Meet the Trustee feature in the January issue of Mortimer Matters. If not, do go back and read.

Music and a feast

Following the AGM we retired to the glorious 12th century Wigmore Abbey, deep in Mortimer heartland. We were treated to a festival of medieval music both religious and secular by professional singers of considerable skill and experience, as well as a delicious medieval feast, featuring the obligatory boar's head!

The music was, without a doubt, a highlight of the day. Because the event was hosted in an abbey, and held at the start of Holy Week, we indulged in some glorious sacred music, appropriate to the season. Many of the songs would have been familiar to Roger and Isabella, and some may even have been sung in Wigmore.

Later in the afternoon, we celebrated the arrival of summer (the clocks would change to mark British Summer Time later that evening), with some secular songs from the troubadour tradition, including the eternal favourite, Summer is Icummen In.

Wigmore Abbey is a private home, not open to the public. But we were given special access by the generous owners Steve and Andrea Vizard who, as members of the society, are developing quite a passion for all things Mortimer! Thank you to Steve and Andrea. And a very special thanks must also go to Anna Dunne, Kathy Cowell and all their helpers – including our chef William Pendlebury and the singers, led by Edward Dunne.

Medieval music from the time of the 14th century Mortimers

Even (perhaps especially) the chef needs some refreshment – is that mead or wine?

Mike's home-made mead packed a punch!

A wonderful afternoon – thanks to everyone who made it possible

Make your mark in the Mortimer History Society

If you're enjoying all the good things the society has to offer, why not join the team that makes them happen?

Since its founding in 2009 the MHS has become one of the UK's biggest and most progressive historical societies. It's been the passion and talent of our trustees and committee members that have brought us this far. Can you help take us to the next level?

We're looking for people with time, talent and skills to support key areas of the society's work. From maintaining our website, to managing our accounts. From keeping us topical on social channels to editing our newsletter and planning our events. This is especially important now, as the Society prepares to mark a series of seven-hundred year anniversaries over the next four years.

"The years 1326 to 1330 saw Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, alongside Queen Isabella, invade England and force the abdication of Edward II,' says MHS Chair, Philip Hume. 'You might say that, during this brief period of time, a Mortimer ruled England. Certainly a Mortimer changed the shape of England's monarchy for ever. Your busy team of trustees is spinning a lot of plates as it prepares to mark some of the key events of those years. We need people to work alongside us, not just to take on some of the workload, but, to bring the oxygen of new ideas that will help your society take this opportunity to grow and evolve.

Most particularly:

- Our treasurer, Mike, needs a second in command to manage our financials. If you've got experience of book keeping or accounts, you could be the one.
- We need people to support Clive on our website – posting information, editing copy and keeping things topical. If you have website skills (or are prepared to learn them) let us know.
- The editor of *Mortimer Matters* is looking for someone with writing and editorial knowhow to help bring this newsletter together every quarter.
- Our events team is looking for volunteers to support logistics – from sourcing speakers to booking venues, planning publicity and just helping things run smoothly on the day.
- Support for our Society Secretary would also be welcome, for administrative tasks such as mailings to members.
- Finally, if you're experienced with social media, join the team that's growing our presence across Instagram, Facebook and X.

Please don't think that opportunities are limited to these roles. We're looking for people with initiative, energy and, most importantly, time to help in all sorts of ways. If you'd like to get involved let us know – it may be that you have skills and experience that will spark new ideas!

Interested? To kick off a conversation (no commitment, no ties) email: **chair@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk**.

"Perhaps you're at that point in life where you're eager for a new challenge," says Philip. "Or maybe that you have some spare time you'd like to dedicate to something positive. It could be that you just want to work alongside people who love history as much as you do. Whatever, get in touch!"

John Grove Memorial Lecture focuses on religious rule and foodie indulgence

The 2026 John Grove Memorial Lecture will be given by Janet Burton, professor of medieval history at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David on the evening of Wednesday 17 June at Grange Court at Leominster. It will examine the role of smaller religious houses in the Middle Ages. And, if that sounds too saintly for you, here's a little sin... Her talk will be proceeded by an indulgent cream tea with jam and scones – the very thing a summer evening is crying out for.

The evening will begin with tea at 6pm before Janet's talk at 7pm dives into the role of the smaller monastic houses, their religious and community purpose. "Medieval monasteries varied in size and wealth in the Middle Ages," Janet says. "But smaller communities generally receive a bad press. I'll take a look at whether they actually deserve it."

Janet Burton

Janet Burton is professor of medieval history at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. She researches medieval monasticism, religious orders and congregations. She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Historical Society and the Learned Society of Wales.

Join us just for the lecture, or indulge in our special cream tea. Go on, treat yourself. Book your ticket at **www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk**.

St Cenydd's, Llangenydd, is just one of the religious houses that will feature in Janet's talk

MHS Hosts Yorkist Power Couple at inaugural Ludlow History Festival

Matt Lewis and Annie Garthwaite bring Richard Duke of York and Cecily Neville to life.

The Mortimer History Society is working with a number of organisations, including Ludlow Assembly Rooms, St Laurence's Church and Ludlow Castle, to deliver a ten-day history festival that brings the town's long and illustrious past to life. From 21 to 30 August, the festival will immerse visitors in Ludlow's history through a vibrant programme of theatre, music, comedy, story-telling, guided-walks, lectures and hands-on activities.

Richard and Cecily – Ludlow's 15th century power couple

On Friday 28 August, we'll host an afternoon programme that investigates one of the most powerful partnerships in medieval England. Richard Duke of York and his wife, Cecily Neville, led the house of York during the Wars of the Roses, ultimately overthrowing the Lancastrian regime. Two of their sons became kings of England – Edward IV and Richard III – and their bloodline has flowed through the royal succession ever since. But who were Cecily and Richard? What were they like? What made their partnership so powerful? And why was Ludlow their most prestigious powerbase?

Matt Lewis

Richard, duke of York: King by right

In 1476, a man who had been dead for over fifteen years was reburied as a king. His effigy had a crown held tantalisingly above his head for, though he had never actually been a king, Richard, 3rd Duke of York, was styled in death as King By Right. His son, King Edward IV, was seeking to boost his legitimacy by leaning on his father. So who was Richard, Duke of York, and how did he become known as a man who ought to have been a king? Author, historian and podcaster Matt Lewis explains the story of a man closely linked with Ludlow, who almost became the King of England.

Cecily, Ludlow's Greatest Lady

On 13 October 1459, at the height of the Wars of the Roses, the castle and town of Ludlow were sacked by Lancastrian forces. Richard Duke of York and his sons had already fled for their lives, leaving Richard's wife, Cecily, to face down an army alone. It was an act of courage typical of this great lady, who survived to build a dynasty and see two of her sons crowned king. Novelist Annie Garthwaite reveals Cecily in all her complex glory: Wife, mother, politician, traitor, fighter and – ultimately – survivor. She'll talk about Cecily's life, her ambitions and her fateful connection to Ludlow.

Annie Garthwaite

These fascinating talks will be followed by a free-flowing discussion about Richard, Cecily and their fateful children, not least the two Yorkist kings, Edward IV and Richard III. For details of this event and the whole festival programme go to **www.ludlowassemblyrooms.co.uk/ludlow-history-festival/**

Welcome to new members

Sixteen 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!

Steve and Julia Bellamy	Seifton	**Rosalie McCarthy**	Unley, South Australia
Victoria Brain	Telford	**Michael and Imogen Mortimer**	Pontesbury
Kerry Follis	Shorelines, USA	**Christopher and Mary Moore**	Fownhope
Tony Hughes	Cheltenham	**Mike and Jane Nutt**	Ludlow
Penelope Joy	Ystrad Meurig	**Tina Rogers**	Wrexham
Eleanor Mason	Bromyard	**Vicky Taylor**	Telford

Join us at the Tewkesbury History Festival

MHS Vice President and Vice Chair to speak at inaugural Tewkesbury History Festival

TEWKESBURY HISTORY FESTIVAL

Tewkesbury has long been a premier location for history events, with its annual Medieval Fayre being the biggest in Europe. Now, under the leadership of the Tewkesbury Borough Council and the John Moore Museum, the town is launching its very own history festival – and your Society will be right up there, with appearances by Vice-President Ian Mortimer and Vice-Chair Annie Garthwaite.

On the evening of Friday 19 June Ian Mortimer will present a sweeping A-Z of English history – ranging from architecture to the class system to the importance of speed and ideas of 'progress', and from the benefits of literacy to the virtues of the English. His talk will shine a light into fascinating and meaningful corners of our nation's history – some sad, some surprisingly funny.

Ian Mortimer

Annie Garthwaite

On Sunday afternoon, 21 June Annie Garthwaite will introduce us to the powerful women on the Wars of the Roses. Accounts of the Wars are too often dominated by men – kings and kingmakers, traitors and tyrants. Annie will show that they were equally shaped by women, who drive the action and risked their lives to secure the throne for their sons. From Cecily Neville, matriarch of House York, to Margaret Beaufort, mother of the Tudor dynasty, Annie will reveal the risks they took and the prices they paid.

These are just two highlights of the Tewkesbury Festival. There are some fabulous historians appearing over four days from 18 to 21 June, including Society friend Matt Lewis, Nicola Tallis, Alison Weir, Elizabeth Norton, Sarah Dunant and Susannah Lipscombe. View the full programme (and book your tickets) at **www.johnmooremuseum.org/events**

KEEP THE DATE!

Summer's coming – and our events programme is warming up!

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. See details on page 18.

Wednesday, 17 June
John Grove Memorial Lecture

This year's John Grove Memorial Lecture will be held at Grange Court in Leominster. It will be given by Janet Burton, professor of medieval history at University of Wales St David, and preceded by a delicious cream tea. See page 15 for details

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. See page 19 for details.

Friday, 28 August
Ludlow History Festival

This 10-day festival runs from 21 to 30 August at the Ludlow Assembly Rooms. Friday 28 August is Mortimer History Society day, with novelist Annie Garthwaite and historian Matt Lewis hosting an afternoon of presentations and discussion around Ludlow's ultimate power couple – Richard Duke of York and Cecily Neville. See page 16 for details.

Saturday, 10 October
Autumn Conference: The Bayeux Tapestry: the story of the Conquest

Marking the arrival of the Bayeaux Tapestry in Britain and the opening of a major London exhibition. We investigate the Conquest of 1066 and the transformation of the country. Join us at the Ludlow Assembly Rooms.

Saturday, 21 November
Autumn Conference: Medieval Manuscripts

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.

Saints and Sinners of the March of Wales

Ludlow Assembly Rooms
Saturday, 16 May 9:15am to 4:45pm

Whether you're a saint or a sinner, you'll find lots to interest you in our first major conference of the year. We'll investigate witches and rebel priests, before looking at how spiritual journeys were defined by liturgy and illuminated by church paintings.

Witches: Magic and Power in the Middle Ages and Later

Dr Marion Gibson, one of the country's foremost experts on the history of witchcraft and magic, explores two witch trials, one from the Middle Ages, and a second (located in Ludlow itself) from the 17th century, to trace patterns and developments in the way these trials came about and were executed under the law. Find out more about Marion – and witchcraft – one page 5.

Hywel Cyffin, the 'Hawk in Holy Orders': Champion of the Welsh Church or Reprehensible Rebel?

Rhun Emlyn, Lecturer in Medieval History and MHS Essay Prize winner is currently researching the role of the clergy in Owain Glyndŵr 's rebellion. His presentation introduces us to one of the rebellion's key instigators – a larger-than-life defender of the rights of clergy who had no problem challenging the moral expectations of the church. Meet Hywel Cyffin!

The Hereford Use: How Liturgy Forged Saints from Sinners in the Marches

PhD student and MHS Bursary recipient **Jonathan Moore** explores the distinct medieval liturgy of Herefordshire and how it shaped the spiritual life of the March. The Hereford Use provided a framework for devotion and a guided journey towards God that could draw even the lowliest sinner into holiness.

Maps of Mercy or Menace: the significance of the locations of paintings of saints and sinners in parish churches

Tanya Heath, doctoral student at Oriel College Oxford, is an expert in medieval wall paintings. Her presentation will unlock our understanding of the topography of saint and sinner images within churches – how they were chosen, how they were placed and the response they were designed to elicit.

Who Saved William Cragh? Lay Devotion, Aristocratic Agency, and the Making of a Saintly Miracle

Dr Harriet Webster of University of Wales Trinity St Davids investigates the salvation of Welsh brigand, William Cragh. Was he saved by his own prayers to Thomas de Cantilupe, or by the intervention of Mary de Briouze? Set in the fraught landscape of the March, his story explores how the lay devotion of elite women could transform criminals into vehicles of divine power.

Attend in person or on Zoom

This mind-expanding conference can be attended in person or via Zoom. For details of ticket prices and to reserve your place, please to go **www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk**.

Study trip to Abbey Cwmhir

Join us for a summer visit to one of the most iconic religious locations in Wales.

Unravel the mysteries of the abbey's ruins

On Saturday, 11 July the Mortimer History Society will take you on a visit to this 12th century Cistercian Abbey, so rich in history. Cwmhir sits in a remote area between the Wye and the Severn, on the Eastern flank of the Cambrian Mountains, and is believed to be the final resting place of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, the last Welsh-born Prince of Wales. The Abbey remains are now a shadow of their past glory, but the work of the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust, whose experts will host our visit, is revealing its history and will share many of its findings with us.

See **www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/events** for full details and to book your tickets. Lunch and tea are optional, so you'll need to let us know if you'd like to be included when you book.

We're so grateful to the Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust for hosting our visit. It promises to be a very special day indeed! Do join us.

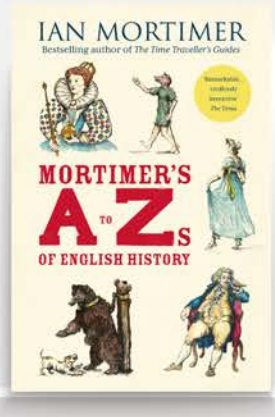
Our programme:

10:30	Arrival tea/coffee
11:00	Welcome by Julian Lovell, Secretary and History Lead for Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust.
11:15	Setting the scene for the day, Trustee Julian Ravest will give an overview of the abbey building and precinct – a taster for the tours that will follow in the afternoon
12:00	The Abbey Foundation and Grant Giving: Mel Watters, Project Lead for the trust's Demystifying the Abbey programme, assisted by trustee Carrie White, will outline recent research that throws light on Mortimer and Welsh grants to Cwmhir.
12:30	Post Monastic Landscapes: Julian Ravest will provide a pictorial background to the history of the village and St Mary's Church, a prelude to his afternoon tour.
12:25	Lunch
13:30	Two tours will focus on the Abbey remains and on the village and church (you'll have time to attend both tours)
15:30	Refreshments and cake
16:00	Departure

Roger Mortimer's (d. 1214) charter granted land to Abbey Cwmhir

For your bookshelf

Summer's coming and we need to do some reading. Our selection has a health focus this time, with a guide to healthy living, a guide to the good life and an examination of childbearing. And, to broaden our scope, Ian Mortimer's lettered ride through English history. Enjoy!

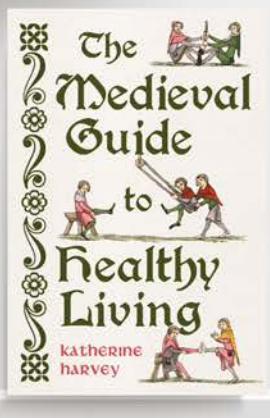


Mortimer's A to Z of English History

By **Ian Mortimer**

From how the introduction of buttons changed medieval life to why Regency Londoners drank so much port. MHS President Ian reveals the weird, the wonderful and the utterly fascinating from four classic periods of English history – from the Middle Ages to the Elizabethan Age, the Restoration to the Regency. The Sunday Times calls Ian 'a historical truffle hound'. We can't help but agree. Delicious!

Published by Old Street Publishing, October 2025. Available from bookshops and online. RRP £25

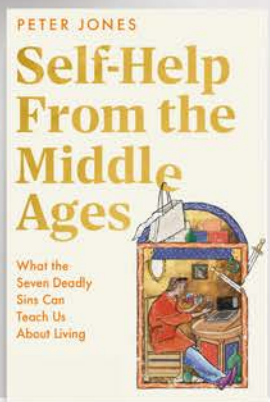


The Medieval Guide to Healthy Living

By **Katherine Harvey**

We think of medieval medicine as strange, unhygienic and unscientific. This book reveals a richer story. Long before modern wellness trends, people in the Middle Ages were trying to live well; followed detailed health regimens, balanced diet with exercise, and tried to avoid illness through routine care. Discover the practical – and relatable – ways they cared for body and mind.

Published by Reaktion Books, April 2026. Available online and in bookshops. RRP £20.

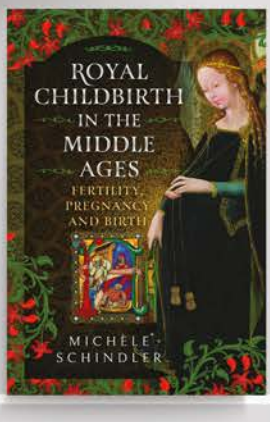


Self-help from the Middle Ages: A Journey into the Medieval Mind

By **Peter Jones**

This bold and original history explores how the Middle Ages understood the Seven Deadly Sins as a practical guide to living well. Jones delves into poems, confessions, paintings, erotic literature, and dozens of unpublished manuscripts to reveal a rich and complex moral psychology. With a blend of scholarship and storytelling, Jones shows how this medieval framework might guide us toward happier, healthier lives today.

Published by Hutchinson Heinemann, April 2016. Available online and in bookshops. RRP £20.



Royal Childbirth in the Middle Ages: Fertility, pregnancy and birth

By **Michèle Schindle**

The history of medieval royal childbirth and reproductive health has always seemed to me to be cloaked in mystery. I guess men just haven't wanted to write about it. Which is why we must all be grateful to Michèle. Her book reveals the details of pregnancy and birth, and the methods used by women to increase their chances of bearing children.

Published by Pen & Sword Books, Nov 2025. Available online and in bookshops. RRP £25.