



Mortimer History Society

Newsletter No.7 November 2011

Chairman's Diary - John Grove

I am sure you are eager to know news of the sale of Wigmore Castle. Well, meetings have been held with English Heritage who are guardians of the castle, and Hereford Nature Trust who have a special interest in the flora and fauna of the limestone grass unusual in Herefordshire. We, of course, represent the Mortimer dimension.

The castle may have first been built by William Fitz Osbern, and soon occupied by Ralph, the first Mortimer to settle in England. Certainly it is recorded as his in the Domesday book. Paul Remfry writes in his book *Wigmore Castle Tourist Guide and the family of Mortimer* that the whole castle was built and lived in by the Mortimer family. They even used it after their move to Ludlow around 1314. The future of our Society is bound closely up with the future of the Castle. The good news is that all 3 organisations are focused on the need to keep it a 'romantic ruin', and also to see that the whole site is managed properly, to make the history and ecology more accessible to the community, especially young people. For our part we would like to help develop more explanatory materials, not just about the castle but covering the whole related Mortimer history. Maybe we could make them available online, and in some nearby education centre. (See opposite for ideas)

The main discussions focus on the purchase price, fundraising and legal responsibilities for ownership and management. Our committee are involved in these discussions. Mortimer History Society can play the role of history adviser in all this, but our presence in the possible partnership has been well received. We promise to keep you informed in future months by online newsflashes and this Newsletter.

Finally, another Mortimer shield has been spotted in St. John's Cardiff, as part of a memorial tracing the genealogy of the Marquis of Bute's family. Do send in notes of any new Mortimer sightings!

SOME MORTIMER CASTLES

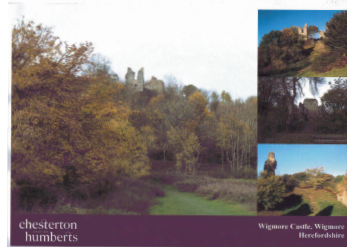
Illustrated colour booklet listing 20 castles connected to the Mortimers, plus a short overview of Wigmore Mortimer history and family tree. Also grid references for your visits.

24 A5 pages amended reprint

Available from Margot Miller

Price £3.50 + 50p p&p for MHS funds

margotmiller@live.co.uk



FOR SALE
WIGMORE
CASTLE
Guide Price
£499,995

Wigmore Castle Concept Ideas for developing the castle and its site:

The Mortimer History Society would like to help in the future, providing group party guides, designing and producing a good information leaflet, and linking the MHS website *Wigmore Castle* description with the English Heritage and Hereford Nature Trust websites. Wigmore would become an interesting ecological and historical visitors centre.

Educational Resources

Hereford Nature Trust and Mortimer History Society could develop ecology and historical materials with similar formats. MHS could produce leaflets about the castle site and its history; a Mortimer history trail; Wigmore Guide and video (with English Heritage); a school study pack (with HNT); a new Wigmore website; occasional group guided tours; educational lectures on request - all to be available perhaps from a Wigmore school or Teme Valley Youth Centre, with facilities for school groups and the co-operation of Wigmore villagers.

Dates for MHS Events 2012

AGM and General Meeting
Saturday 11 February 10.30 am
Earl Mortimer College, Leominster
Contribution from the new
Dress & Textiles Group

Spring Meeting
Saturday 12 May, 2012
All -day meeting 10 am to 3.30 pm
Themes: Edward I, Roger Mortimer,
Simon de Montfort & Prince Llewelyn
Keynote speaker: Marc Morris, author
of *Edward I - a Great & Terrible King*
Plenary sessions and discussion groups
at Earl Mortimer College, Leominster

Field Visit to New Radnor Saturday 16th July

Paul Remfry led an interesting and enjoyable field visit to New Radnor last July. Paul's introductory talk in the Victorian church gave us plenty of details of Mortimer history. Paul then took us out into the church hallway to show us two very worn and ancient effigies of a Welsh prince (*below left*) and a lady - possibly Matilda de Broase, Lady of Radnor (*see report of Medieval Ladies*).



Leaving the church, we walked up the footpath behind the church and toured around the lumps and bumps of the castle ramparts (*top right*). From the far side of the grassy ruins, we walked down the lane into the town and toured the remains of the walls (*right*) that once protected the town from invaders from the Welsh valley to the West. Then we enjoyed a good lunch in the pub together.



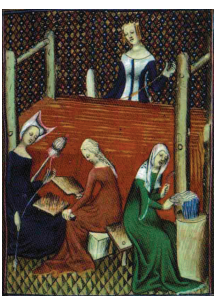
New MHS Group - Dress & Textiles

If you are interested, email Nila on monckton621@btinternet.com or write to Margot Miller, 25 Nover Wood Drive Fownhope, Herefordshire HR1 4PN

The first meeting of the MHS Dress & Textile Group was held at Fownhope on Friday 7 October, the evening before the Ewyas Harold conference. Several members gave information on various aspects of clothes and textiles: Nila gave an illustrated description of the clothes depicted on Blanche Mortimer's effigy in Much Marcle church; Margot gave out a sheet about the changes in dress between the 11th and 14th centuries; Jenny Jones described the medieval tapestry which hangs at the National Trust Montacute House including details of how the precious wall hanging was made, came to Montacute and how it is preserved. Members had a try at carding fleece taken from the fence at Holme Lacy, and simple spinning the carded wool on a stick - the primitive form of spindle used before the invention of medieval spindle & whorl and the spinning wheel.

The illustration (below left) shows women stitching tapestry, spinning on a spindle and whorl, carding fleece and teasing fleece with a teazle. The picture lower left shows a boy having his under-pants pulled off; men's underpants were called 'braies' and in medieval times were simple breeches - material wrapped around and through the legs and tucked into a waistband. Both pictures taken from Ian Mortimer's best-selling book "The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England" Vintage 2009.

After discussion about future activities, the group decided [1] on a project to recreate Blanche Mortimer's dress, beginning with a feasibility study and budget; [2] a visit to the Herefordshire dress and textile collection at the Museum Store in Hereford; [3] to visit the medieval section of London V&A Museum, and [4] to arrange a workshop on felt-making, which may possibly lead to hat-making. Some members are finding out about the wool trade in Leominster and the preservation of the local Ryeland sheep flocks.



Blanche Mortimer's effigy in Much Marcle Church is being refurbished. Here the effigy is removed from under the canopy.



Members of the MHS Dress & Textile Group are studying other effigies in local churches and at Hereford Cathedral.

Future plans for the Mortimer History Society

Stella Mason's Report
commissioned for
the MHS Committee

Thanks to everyone who replied to my survey about the future direction of the society. I have now compiled my discussion paper and the committee are considering my recommendations. My thoughts centre on widening participation and building up our knowledge of and around the Mortimers and the history of the March. I plan to bring a summary to the AGM but you can still offer any ideas or comments to me at

stellamason1@btinternet.com
or 01584810505

MHS AUTUMN MEETING - REPORT

8th October 2011 at Ewyas Harold Memorial Hall

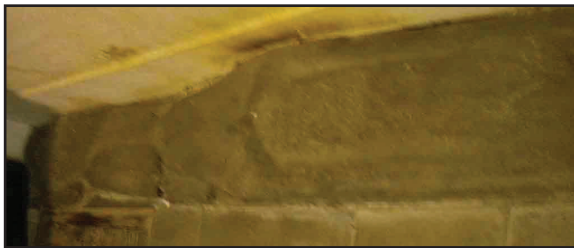
Mortimer Ladies - Talk by Dr Paul Dryburg - report by Fran Norton

Dr Paul Dryburgh's express train of information went at such a speed that it took most of the audience's breath away. However, the journey was well worth it! Paul highlighted the role of women in the medieval age which is invariably overshadowed by men. Through the teachings of the church women were perceived as 'Daughters of Eve' weak, sinful creatures. The daughters of the Marcher lords were married into other noble families so that more land, power and status was added to their dynasty. The main tasks of these women were to produce heirs and spares, and to manage the vast estates.

The unreported roles played by noble women are aptly demonstrated through lives of three generations of Mortimer women:-

Margaret Fiennes, mother to Roger Mortimer (IV, referred to as 'the Roger Mortimer'), c.1270-1334 - married to Edmund (I), bore him eight children, widowed for 30 years 1304-1334

Matilda [Maud] de Braose, grandmother to Roger Mortimer (IV), daughter and co-heir of a powerful Marcher baron, William de Braose, married to Roger Mortimer (III), bore him seven children, widowed 19 years 1282-1301, Lady of Radnor - may have returned to be buried at Radnor*.



**Very ancient and worn effigy which possibly represents the figure of Matilda (Maud) de Braose, Lady of Radnor - in the corner of the entrance hall of the Victorian New Radnor Church - removed indoors from the graveyard.*

Joan de Geneville [Joinville], wife of Roger Mortimer (IV), daughter and heir of Geoffrey Lord Geneville, bore 'the' Roger twelve children, often travelled with him - including to Ireland, lived twenty six years until 1356 - after her husband was executed in 1330.

These Mortimer women supported the family throughout their lives and even when Roger was dubbed 'traitor', his wife's and mother's undying loyalty never waned. They were the glue which held the family together through times of danger and adversity. She accompanied her husband to Ireland when he reclaimed lands inherited from her grandfather, Geoffrey de Geneville [Joinville], and also brought the erring Irish back under English rule. Roger's success at this time was undoubtedly aided by Joan, both as a devoted wife and mother to their growing brood. Other duties would be to oversee household accounts, provisioning and act as hostess to the fractious Irish chieftains. Facts point to a period of family harmony and happiness during this period.

On Roger's return to England, he became involved in all the squabbles at court. Roger and his uncle opposed the king and the de Spencers, which brought the Mortimers into great danger. Both Rogers were captured and the king's wrath fell on the entire family. Joan and their children were parted and imprisoned in various locations around the country. Wigmore and Ludlow were stripped and confiscated by the Crown and the Mortimer women - through actions beyond their control, made to suffer. The law offered no redress, as women were not recognized in many instances of injustice. During their adversity the Mortimer women proved strength of character and loyalty. When Roger escaped from the Tower, he fled to Europe - but all through this period, letters from his mother demonstrate her untiring efforts on his behalf. What she felt about his infidelity with the king's wife, Isabella - there is no record and what she said to him privately would be interesting to know. Joan could have played the part of cuckolded wife, but remained dignified and silent. Details of presents received from her erring husband, point to the fact that their relationship had not broken irrevocably. There is no doubt that Joan struggled for years to obtain her husband's body after execution to bury him at Wigmore or Ludlow. The search for Roger's body continues into the 21st century, where there is much speculation to the exact whereabouts of his final resting place.

At the time of his death, Roger's children had married into many of the most prestigious families of the English nobility. Three were Countesses - Warwick, Pembroke, and Norfolk. His youngest daughter, Blanche was married to Sir Peter Grandison of Herefordshire. Blanche inherited de Geneville lands at Much Marcle where her beautiful effigy is being restored in the church. Edward IV was a direct descendant of 'the infamous Roger Mortimer'. How different the fortunes of the Mortimer family would have been but for the outstanding qualities of their womenfolk. The plight of many noble women through the reign of Edward II suffered for the 'sins' of their husbands, sons, and fathers. The Magna Carta only stipulated laws concerning lands and inheritance for dowagers and widows. Sadly, the lot of women continued to deteriorate during the reign of Edward III to worse than during the reign of his grandfather Henry III, almost a century before. I feel we are all more aware of the important role played by the Mortimer women after Paul's detailed research on this fascinating subject and on behalf of the MHS extend a heartfelt - thank you!

- **Fran Norton**

MHS AUTUMN CONFERENCE - REPORT
 8th October 2011 at Ewyas Harold Memorial Hall
 illustrated talk and guided tour around Kilpeck Church
 by Dr Steven Blake on The Herefordshire School of Sculpture
 "Saints and Serpents"

In an excellent talk with plenty of illustrative slides, Dr Steven Blake held MHS spellbound as he whizzed around Herefordshire, other counties and off to France and Spain to discuss points of contention about the derivation and influences of the medieval Romanesque carvings. The connections between the Herefordshire School carvings and the churches along the pilgrim trail to Santiago de Compostella are well-known, but Dr Blake also drew our attention to many other influences - Saxon, Celtic, Anglo-Norman and French. He used recurring details in various churches to make the point - for example, the drooping paw (see Stretton Sugden's Samson and the Lion), the beaked bird corbels (see Kilpeck), dragons, soldiers, signs of the zodiac, patterned bands and flowers, and more.



*Leominster Priory
 soldier and lion*

Oliver de Merlimond, Hugh Mortimer's steward definitely had a hand in introducing the School to Mortimer estates, but it is impossible to be sure whether Shobdon was the first sacred building in the Marches to be decorated with these carvings. Dr Blake also discussed other mysteries surrounding the school of sculpture - arguing each point with examples from different churches. He gave us a 3 page list of different places that have examples - plenty of trips to take to admire, compare and study: 12 churches in Herefordshire, others in Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, plus three examples in Wales.



*Stretton Sugwas Church
 tympanum -
 Samson and the Lion*

Dr Blake also gave us some indications of the meanings and iconography of the creatures and characters that appear over and over again in the carvings. But to understand and relish these beautiful carvings and their settings, it is not necessary to have great knowledge of the medieval meanings - it is enough to look and enjoy - which is what MHS members did in their afternoon tour of the Herefordshire treasure - Kilpeck Church.



*Kilpeck Church
 corbels, Green man*



Heraldry of the Mortimers - an appeal for help and information

Because of my interest in heraldry, I've been asked to act as the "lead" for the study of Mortimer heraldry for the Society. It would be more accurate to describe myself as a knowledgeable amateur rather than an expert, so I'm hoping that there are others out there who will be willing and able to help in researching this fascinating subject. You could be forgiven for wondering in what way the heraldry of the Mortimers could be described as "fascinating". We've all seen the coat of arms and is there anything more to be said? Well – yes there is.

Let's start with a basic Mortimer shield – [Figure 1](#) is taken from the 14th century window in St Laurence's church, Ludlow showing the arms of Maud, sister to Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March. As her brother, he can be expected to have these arms too. I've included labels to give the names of the various components. There are three colours on the shield: blue, yellow and white, termed *Azure*, *Or* (or Gold) and *Argent*. In the same church, the 19th century west window also shows Roger's coat of arms side by side with the arms of his wife, Joan de Geneville (see [Figure 2](#)). On close inspection we can see that they are not quite the same as in [Figure 1](#) – the *azure* and *or* have been reversed. Presumably the colours in the 14th century window are correct - there's an identical window in Tewkesbury Abbey - so how did the colours get reversed in the Victorian window?

When heraldry was first used on shields, it was important to identify individuals easily on the battlefield. In order to achieve this, different members of the same family needed to "difference" their coats of arms in some way and the study of these variations is very rewarding. Roger Mortimer of Chirk, the uncle of Roger Mortimer, differenced his arms by changing the inescutcheon in the middle of the shield from argent to ermine, which is a fur that appears as white with a pattern of little black tails. [Figure 3](#) shows this coat on a medieval tile in Bredon church, Worcestershire. Other branches of the family put other things on the inescutcheon, to difference themselves from the main line.

Other inconsistencies also occur in the Mortimer coat of arms. The number of pallets and the number of horizontal bars can be quite variable and sometimes slight differences are seen in the arms of a single individual. Which of these variations is a significant "difference" and which are of no consequence is a question requiring some research.

Relatively few examples of bone fide Mortimer coats of arms, from their heyday in the 13th-15th centuries, are easily accessible to us. To build a detailed picture we will probably have to consult the early lists (or rolls) of arms that survive from that period. The Mortimer arms did, however, survive well after the main male lines had become extinct. Mortimer heiresses married into other noble families and the Mortimer arms subsequently appear as quarterings in several coats of arms, notably in the 16th and 17th centuries.

One example occurs in the arms of Dudley and it can be seen on the 1580 tomb of Ambrosia Sidney, also in St Laurence's, Ludlow. Ambrosia's mother was a Dudley ([Figure 4](#)). Notice that the inescutcheon is ermine but also that the colours have been reversed from the earlier examples in figures 1 & 3. Is this what led the Victorians to mistakenly reverse the colours in the west window?

How can you help?

We'd like to build up a list of examples of Mortimer coats of arms, especially early ones. Everyone can help by keeping an eye open for the Mortimer shield on tombs, in windows, in documents and so on, and by studying them in detail. I'd be delighted to know where there are and to receive photographs and other details. Also, if you have a good working knowledge of heraldry and would like to be part of a team working on this, please let me know.

Hugh Wood, hugh@hughanddoris.co.uk
38 Charlton Rise, Ludlow, SY8 1ND. 01584.876901

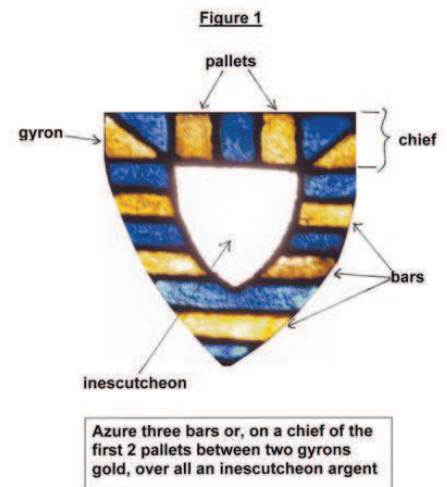


Figure 2 - Arms of Roger Mortimer and Joan de Geneville

Figure 3 - Tile from Bredon Church with arms of Roger Mortimer of Chirk



Figure 4
After the end of the male line, the Mortimer arms appeared on inescutcheons of female descendants.