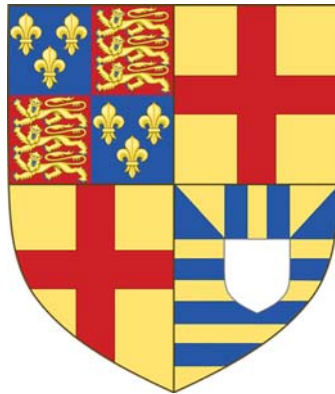


The white rose of York... ...or Mortimer?

It is well established that the white rose was a heraldic badge used by the house of York during the Wars of the Roses. But what were its origins?

It's hard to overestimate the importance of the Mortimer ancestry to the Yorkist's claim to the English throne. Their descent from Edward III's third son, albeit through the female line, made their claim potentially superior to that of the Lancastrian kings, who were descended from his fourth. On the death of Edmund Mortimer (d.1425), fifth earl of March and the last male Mortimer heir, that claim passed to his nephew, Richard Plantagenet, third duke of York. York also inherited most of his wealth from the Mortimers, including Ludlow and its castle, where he and his family spent time and his sons Edward and Edmund had their own separate household.

Indeed, much of the symbolism we now think of as 'Yorkist' originates from the Mortimers. As well as being earls of March, they were also earls of Ulster, and both Richard, duke of York and his son Edward added Mortimer and de Burgh (Ulster) to their coats of arms.



Edward's coat of arms before he became Edward IV combine the Mortimer and de Burgh arms with the royal arms of England.

Edward also adopted the white lion of the earls of March, alongside the sun in splendour, a sunburst allegedly inspired by the parhelion that heralded his victory at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross, but also associated with both Edward III and his grandson Richard II, as whose heirs the Yorkists styled themselves.

When Edward IV incorporated Ludlow as a parliamentary borough in 1473



The Yorkist rose en soleil

(having set it as the headquarters for the Council of Wales the year before) he combined the Mortimer white lion with the three white roses already on the town's coat of arms. So, what was happening here? Was Edward merging existing Yorkist symbolism into Mortimer heraldry, or was he seizing his Mortimer heritage and reinventing it as Yorkist?

Misericords and marcher churches

The parish church of St Laurence in Ludlow dates back at least to Norman times, but it was substantially rebuilt after Richard, duke of York inherited the

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Mortimer titles and lands. Part of this building work, which started in 1433 and was completed around 1455, was to install additional misericords and a new ceiling in the chancel. Both are decorated with Yorkist heraldry, including York's personal badge, the falcon and the fetterlock, the white hind at rest of Richard II and a rose within a fetterlock.



Ludlow misericord showing rose within a fetterlock and twisted ring

Is this evidence of the white rose of York being imported into the Welsh Marches? Not so hasty. The misericord with the rose and fetterlock was actually reconstituted from fragments. It is unclear if the twisted ring next to the main carving once contained another image, or even whether the two carvings always belonged together as they are now completely separate. However, the church of St Mary Magdalene in nearby Leintwardine might offer a clue. Among the church's treasures are wooden misericords and choir stalls, two of which are carved with a twisted ring encircling a five-petalled rose, bearing a striking resemblance to the Ludlow misericord.

In the middle ages the rose, associated with Christ and his mother, was a common decorative and heraldic image, used by, among others, Henry III's queen, Eleanor of Provence, her son Edward I and Edward, second duke of York (Richard Duke of York's uncle). However, the rose and ring motif is repeated in a prominent location on the church's ceiling, indicating that it had something more than simply



Leintwardine choir stall showing rose in a twisted ring

decorative significance. So, could this be a white rose of York?

Probably not. Unlike Ludlow, Leintwardine lacks any explicitly Yorkist symbolism. In fact, some of the choir stalls bear the antelope gorged and chained, a heraldic badge associated with the Lancastrian king Henry V (d.1422) and especially his son Henry VI. This badge is also found on a Ludlow misericord that is thought to predate the Yorkist rebuilding, which suggests that the choir stalls and ceiling at St Mary Magdalene were installed before Richard, duke of York, had established himself as earl of March and Lord Mortimer. So, the rose that came to be so prominent a symbol for the house of York could well have earlier Mortimer associations.

The white rose of Mortimer

There's some evidence to support this idea. The Mortimers were the dominant family in the area and funded much of the building work at St Mary Magdalene over the centuries, including a chantry chapel. A white rose is given in Writhe's Garter Armorial as the badge of Roger Mortimer (d. 1360) and the seal of Edmund Mortimer (d. 1381) show his arms suspended from a flowering rose bush. Moreover, a list, allegedly dating from c. 1460 and itemising heraldic

badges used by Richard duke of York, associates the sunburst with Richard II and the white rose with the Mortimers. It has also been claimed that a pedigree roll of Edward IV, which shows his descent from the Mortimers, depicts a rose (albeit not coloured in this case).

However, while there are indications that Richard, duke of York used a rose badge, it is most closely associated with his son Edward. In Yorkist propaganda he was referred to as 'Rose of Rouen' (after his place of birth) and a poem about the Battle of Northampton (July 1460) distinguishes between 'the Rose (Edward, then earl of March), the Fetterlock (Richard, duke of York), the Eagle (Ralph, earl of Salisbury) and the Bear (Richard, earl of Warwick)'. So, what should we make of all this?

It would seem that the youthful years Edward spent with his brother at Ludlow left a deep impression on him. After all, he later established his son's household there, operating on a similar routine to his own. Perhaps those years also inspired him to brand the house of York by marrying a rose badge used by his Mortimer ancestors with the sunbursts of Edward III and Richard II, just as Henry VII would later brand the Tudors by marrying the white rose of York with the red rose of Lancaster to create the red-and-white Tudor rose.

While there's no definitive proof, it would make sense. Medieval nobles were often spoilt for choice when it came to arms and badges. Thanks to complex intermarriages, they often chose to emphasize those badges associated with their most illustrious connections. In Edward's case, that would have been the ancestors from whom he inherited his claim to England's throne – Edward III and the Mortimers. As the historian John Ashdown-Hill has stated, the marrying of the white rose with the sunburst to create the Yorkist rose en soleil can be interpreted as "a powerful legitimist statement in symbolic form".

About the author: Nina Kefer is an amateur historian and member of the Richard III Society. She became interested in Richard's life and times when his remains were discovered under a car park in Leicester and is now a regular contributor to *The Cittie Herald*, the journal of the Richard III Society's Cittie of London branch. A more in-depth version of this article appeared on her blog *Ricardian Loons* <https://ricardianloons.wordpress.com> earlier this year.

From your editor

Hello!

Lockdown and its aftermath may have prevented many of our summer meetings, but at least we can still meet in the pages of *Mortimer Matters*! I hope you'll find plenty to interest and distract you in this edition.

We've now had three issues of *Mortimer Matters* in its new format. Why not drop me a line and let me know what you think? We're always looking for ways to make *Mortimer Matters* a must-read for our members, so let us know what you'd like to see more of and what you think we can do better. We aim to include a mix of Society news, interesting articles about the Mortimers and the Marches, along with book reviews and information about upcoming events. Get in touch with me at mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk if you'd like to comment or especially 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 late October and will start planning in early September, so please get in touch with your ideas as soon as you can!



Like kings in their own domain

The liberties of the Marcher lords

Society Secretary, Philip Hume, investigates the regal-like powers of the Marcher lords who, for 450 years, ruled like kings in the Welsh border lands.

Earlier articles in this series examined the evolution of the Marcher lordships in the two hundred years following the Normans' arrival on the Welsh borders. Now, we turn our attention to the remarkable, regal-like powers the Marcher lords came to enjoy within their border territories; powers that set the Marches apart from any other English lordship. Indeed it can be said that, from the late 11th century to the abolition of their powers in the 1530s, the Marcher lords ruled like kings in lordships where the authority of the English Crown was severely limited and the king's writ did not run.

Since the 17th century, historians have debated how these extraordinary powers, known as 'the liberties of the March', came about. Some have argued that they derived from the free hand given by William the Conqueror to the lords he established on the border to serve as a defensive barrier between England and the Welsh. Others claim that the Marcher lords took over the powers of the Welsh rulers in the cantrefs and commotes that they conquered and annexed. The reality was probably a mixture of the two, with the powerful added ingredient of forceful opportunism!

As described in earlier articles, the creation of the Marcher lordships was, first and foremost, a military exercise in a period when authority derived from pragmatism and strength rather than constitutional theory. This is summed up very concisely in *The Doomsday Book* when, in reference to the lands of Osbern fitz Richard (Lord of Richards Castle) in Rhwng Gwy a Hafren, it says; "He has what he can take – nothing more."

Attempts to explain and justify the liberties of the March came later, partly in response to the development of constitutional ideas in England and particularly during those periods when the kings of England felt themselves strong enough to attempt to constrain the prerogatives of the Marcher lords and their scope for independent action. However, even then the existence of these prerogatives and privileges were never in dispute. Even Royal correspondence recognised the Marcher lords as 'lords royal' with 'regal jurisdictions'. The Crown was, however, understandably keen that liberties enjoyed in the Marches should not be extended to other territories. In the 1170s when some Marcher lords began to acquire lands in Ireland, Henry II rushed there to assert the rights of the English Crown and ensure that the same degree of independence could not take root.

So, exactly what were the liberties that the Marcher lords so proudly proclaimed and jealously guarded?

Law and the courts

It's been pointed out that the Marcher lords' claim that the king's writ did not run in their lordships is a negative. That, of course, is because it was a sentiment most frequently expressed in response to perceived interference from the Crown – as was the case in 1337, when the men of Montgomery declared they were not bound to answer or obey the sheriff of Shropshire or any of the king's ministers. To turn the expression into a positive, one need only say that, within a Marcher lordship, the lord's writ applied, rather than the king's.

In legal matters the English courts had no authority in the Marches. Instead, responsibility for the law, the judicial structure and the exercise of justice belonged to the Marcher lords. The courts were theirs and they could try all crimes, with the exception of treason. That included even the most serious crimes, such as arson or murder which, in England, could only be brought before the king. Marcher lords could also pronounce the death sentence and order it to be carried out on their own gallows.



Marcher lords held power of life and death

Marcher lords could be zealous in protecting their judiciary rights. For example, for a lengthy period Montgomery was a royal Marcher lordship, which meant that the king himself was its Marcher lord. When Edmund Mortimer (d.1304) tried and executed, within his own lordship, a felon from Montgomery, Edward I, as Lord of Montgomery, was furious, seeing this as a usurpation of his right to hang the individual. Mortimer was fined and made to provide an effigy of the dead man so that it could be hung on the royal gallows at Montgomery.

The Law of the March, and how it differed from the Law of England, will be discussed in a later article, but it's important to note here that the fines levied by the courts went, of course, into the coffers of the Marcher lord, rather than the Crown via the king's sheriff, as was the case elsewhere. This was a lucrative source of income, often the richest within a lordship. In the

14th century, for example, the courts provided over sixty percent of the total income the Mortimers received from their lordship of Maelienydd.

Taxation and commerce

As the effective sovereign within their territories, the Marcher lords enjoyed the same rights in relation to taxation and commerce as the king did elsewhere. This included the right of *primer seisin*, which gave the lord the profits from lands after the death of the tenant until the heir had paid an appropriate relief to take up their inheritance. In cases where the heir was underage, the lord would have prerogative wardship or custody of the lands as well as control of the heir's wardship and marriage.

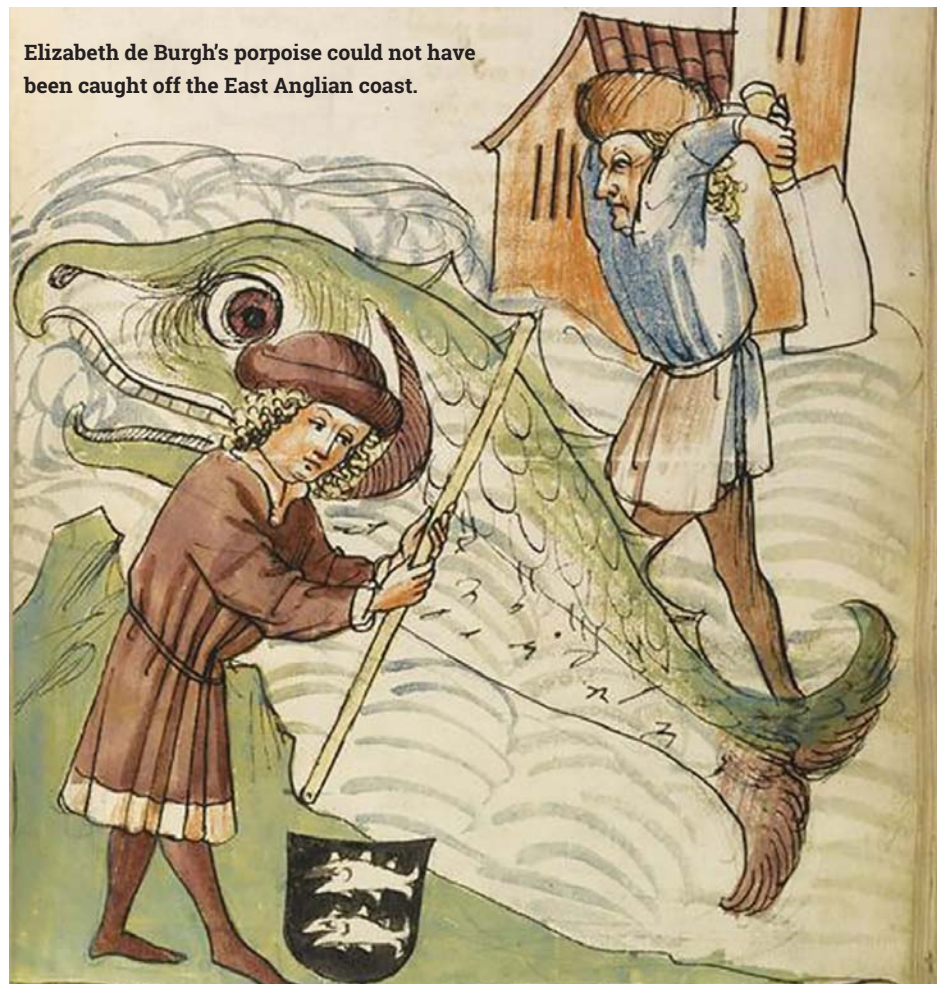
In terms of commerce, the lord had the right to create boroughs; establish markets and fairs, and take profits from the tolls levied on them; to regulate trade; to take profit from mills; to control weights and measures; to grant warren (to have and hunt game) and to create forests with forest law; the rights of wreck of the sea, treasure trove and mines; to impose tolls and to exempt

men from paying them and the right to capture royal fish such as porpoises or sturgeon. An example of the latter can be found in the accounts of Elizabeth de Burgh (d.1360), Lady of Usk who, in 1350 – 51, transported a porpoise from her Marcher lordship of Usk to Clare in East Anglia, along with salmon, lampreys, herons and sparrow hawks. She would have had no rights to capture that porpoise from the coast of East Anglia!

One particularly unusual Welsh custom that also became incorporated into the laws of the March was the *amobr* or virginity tax, which was levied when a woman first had sexual intercourse. Roger Mortimer (d.1330) was particularly noted for extracting the profits of *amobr* in Maelienydd.

All of these powers related to taxation and commerce were highly profitable and, in addition, Marcher lordships were typically exempt from taxes levied by the kings of England. There was an exception in 1292 when Edward I requested and received a tax. However, the Marcher lords made it clear that their agreement to pay the tax should not set a precedent and, indeed, it was never repeated.

Elizabeth de Burgh's porpoise could not have been caught off the East Anglian coast.



Castle building and the conduct of war

The Marcher lords also had military rights. They could build castles without acquiring a license from the king, as required elsewhere, which, unsurprisingly, contributed to the proliferation of castles across the Marches that still intrigue us today. They could also raise their own armies in order to settle disputes with other Marcher lords or (before 1282) with the native princes of Wales, either by securing treaties or waging war. And, when they did go to war, they had the right to take one third of their soldiers' plunder.

As we can see, being a Marcher lord brought both regal powers and profitable sources of income. Hardly surprising then that they were so jealously defended, vigorously sought after and determinedly fought for, both on battlefields and in the courts. In the

next issue of *Mortimer Matters* we'll look at one particularly colourful Marcher family, the Cliffords, who were lords of Clifford, Cantref Bychan and Cantref Selyf. It was Walter Clifford (d.1263) who made one of the more

dramatic and vivid defences of his Marcher liberties when, during a dispute with the king over his rights, he forced a royal messenger to eat the royal writ, wax seal and all!



Philip's book *The Welsh Marcher Lordships: Central & North* will be published by Logaston Press, February 2021.

Autumn events

We've put together a prestigious list of speakers for our October and November conferences. We're hoping they'll be able to go ahead as planned, but if not we plan to take these exciting events online!

You've surely shared your committee's disappointment that so many of our summer events had to be cancelled because of the Coronavirus pandemic. We're still hopeful that our autumn events will go ahead in their physical venues, as intended. However, if Government restrictions and good old common sense don't allow that to happen, we're developing plans to take our October and November conferences online. We'll keep the technology as simple as we can and hope to give you the opportunity to

join the events live or watch them later on 'catch up'. Our speakers have agreed to take part on this basis and we're fairly convinced we can manage the technology – we're just waiting to see how the situation develops.

As soon as we have a clear way forward we'll be in touch to let you know what's planned, how to book and, if the online option wins out, how to join in live or access later. Please bear with us and keep these dates in your diary.

'The King's Writ Does Not Run Here': The Medieval Welsh Marcher Lordships

Saturday, 3 October, Ludlow

Examining the operation and unique independence of the Marcher Lordships.

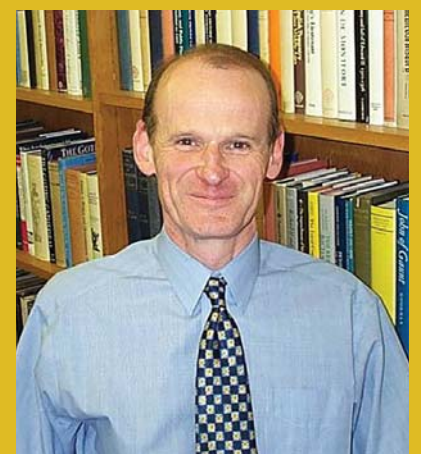
Decorated in Glory: Churches, church building and people in Herefordshire in the 14th century

Saturday, 19 November, Hereford

Book launch

Online or onsite, our November conference will see the launch of Professor Nigel Saul's long-awaited book *Decorated in Glory: Church building in Herefordshire in the fourteenth Century*. The first in an occasional series of Society papers, it explores the extraordinary flowering of architecture, art and sculpture that took place in Herefordshire and the central Welsh Marches during the first half of the 14th century.

Pre-order with free delivery from www.logastonpress.co.uk



Nigel Saul

Mortimer arms around a window

Hugh Wood and Ruth Butler set out to solve a Mortimer mystery in the south-east window of St Peter's church in Martley, Worcestershire

St Peter's church, Martley is already of great interest to students of the Mortimers as it contains the effigy of a 15th century knight, thought to be Sir Hugh Mortimer of Tedstone Wafre, who died fighting for Richard, duke of York at the Battle of Wakefield in 1460. Around his neck Sir Hugh wears a chain bearing the Yorkist insignia of 'the sun in splendour' and the 'rose en soleil'.

But there's other evidence of Mortimer involvement at Martley. The church is justly renowned for its extensive wall paintings, which date from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. Amid their colourful imagery it's easy to miss the strange painting on the window jambs of the easternmost window on the south side. There's a repeating image up the centre, of a diagonal square split into four triangles, two light in colour and the other two red with a lighter criss-cross pattern. However, the triangular gaps at the sides have been filled with half of the coat of arms of the Mortimers of Wigmore. Who was responsible for this painting, and what might it mean?



St Peter's highly painted south-east window



Close up showing detail of Mortimer arms

The Victoria County History (VCH) says the painting in this window displays the quartered arms of Mortimer, Despenser, Clare and Cornwall. All four quarterings are not visible in this image, but the mention of Despenser is interesting.

The manor of Martley was held by the Despensers for over 200 years and was still in their hands during the times of both the elder and younger Hugh Despensers, who were hunted down and executed by Roger Mortimer and Queen Isabella in 1326. Roger Mortimer then acquired the Despenser estates, including Martley, but the following year the manor was granted to one of his supporters, John Wyard. Following the fall of Roger Mortimer in 1330, everything changed again. Hugh Despenser the Younger's son, another Hugh, regained Martley by 1341 but, fifty years later and after a legal battle, it had been granted to John Wyard's

heirs. Sometime after 1393 it came into the possession of Maud Harley and her husband, Roger Mortimer of Tedstone Wafre (d.1402). This Roger Mortimer was the great-great-grandson of Roger Mortimer of Chirk (d.1326) and his wife Lucy la Wafre. Martley remained in Mortimer hands for the next 100 years, until the death of John Mortimer in 1504. So, for most of the first 500 years after the Conquest, either the Despensers or the Mortimers owned the manor of Martley.



The Despenser arms

The main square pattern around the window does look very like squashed Despenser arms. But to identify them as such raises some serious questions. Firstly, all the Despenser and Spenser arms, right down to Winston Churchill and Princess Diana, have a strong black 'bend' across the shield from top left to bottom right. There's no sign of this bend in the window jamb. And then there's the question of why anyone would want to juxtapose in this way the coats of arms of two bitter enemies, emphasising Despenser at the expense of Mortimer. It's hard to imagine either a Despenser or a Mortimer choosing to include the arms of the other family!

Thinking about it logically, the most likely reason for putting together two coats of arms like this is a marriage. We don't know the name of Sir Hugh Mortimer's mother so, could these be her arms? Hugh's father, Sir John Mortimer, died at Agincourt in 1415. Perhaps his wife was an unknown Despenser? Eighty years had now passed since Roger Mortimer ordered the Despenser executions, and there had been 'unpleasantness' regarding the ownership of Martley but, even so, a Despenser/Mortimer marriage can't be ruled out.



The Dutton arms

There is, however, another possible candidate for Sir John Mortimer's wife; a member of the Dutton family of Cheshire. The Dutton coat of arms is identical to that of the Despensers but lacks the black bend. In the example shown here the fretwork is slightly different, but early examples had the criss-cross pattern just like the Despensers. So far we've been unable to find any Dutton daughter who might have married Sir John, but we'll continue the search once research opportunities have returned to normal.

There's a further clue to the dating of

this wall painting. The VCH says that the Cornwall arms are included on the window jamb somewhere. If so, then the painting is likely to have been done either during or after Sir Hugh Mortimer's time, as he married Eleanor Cornwall.

Although the hypothesis set out above seems quite likely, there is one significant concern. The coat of arms of the main line of Mortimers of Wigmore has, at its centre, a small plain silver shield, and that's what we see here at Martley. But Sir Hugh and the other Mortimers who owned Martley were descended from Roger Mortimer of Chirk, whose arms were slightly different. As a younger son in

the 13th century, he had differenced his arms to distinguish them from those of the main Mortimer line. He made the small central shield ermine, with a pattern of black markings, instead of just plain silver like his father's. This small ermine escutcheon was passed down through all the Mortimer descendants of Roger of Chirk, and then on to their heirs the Wests, barons de la Warr, and eventually to the Dudleys, earls of Warwick and Leicester in Elizabethan times. The absence of this ermine escutcheon on the Mortimer arms at Martley leaves a serious question mark. We plan further research and another visit to Martley, when it reopens.

About the authors: A founder member of the Society with an interest in Mortimer genealogy and heraldry, Hugh has held the positions of treasurer and membership secretary and remains responsible for the website. Ruth is interested in Mortimer women and their role in strengthening the dynasty. She is currently researching Mortimer churchmen, Limbrook and Aconbury priories, and Wigmore abbey.

Parallel lives

Society Secretary, Philip Hume compares the careers of Roger Mortimer (d.1330) and his five-times great-grandson, Richard III and finds striking similarities.

"Proud traitor Mortimer, why dost thou chase
Thy lawful king, thy sovereign, with thy sword?"

This quote from Christopher Marlowe's play, *Edward II*, is uttered when Roger Mortimer, later 1st earl of March, returns from French exile in 1326. His return, in alliance with Queen Isabella, set unprecedented events in motion - the forced abdication and replacement of a reigning monarch. Roger's five-times great-grandson, Richard III also disrupted the succession to the English throne when, in 1483, his brother King Edward IV's sons were put aside in his favour. This is certainly the most dramatic similarity between these two men, but it is very far from being the only one. In this article I'll highlight some of the other fascinating ways in which Richard III's life paralleled that of his famous ancestor.

Strong, stable marriages

Richard's marriage to Anne Neville, the Kingmaker's daughter, brought him clear dynastic and material benefits. At the same time, the couple seem to have shared a genuine affection and a stable family life until Anne's untimely death, which came fast on the heels of their only son's. Likewise Roger and his wife Joan de Geneville. The Mortimer family had been settled at Wigmore in north Herefordshire since soon after the Conquest and, by this time, had become one of the country's most prominent baronial families operating at the forefront of national



Drawing of Roger Mortimer, 1st earl of March, by and © Ethan Gould.

politics. Roger's marriage to the local heiress Joan added considerably to the family's estates in the Welsh Marches, Ireland and the west of England. It also brought them half of nearby Ludlow, including its castle. The marriage, made in 1301 at the respective ages of fourteen and fifteen, was clearly a dynastic arrangement between the two families. However, until their lives were torn apart twenty years later, they seem to have enjoyed a close and, possibly, loving relationship. Joan frequently travelled with Roger to administer their lands across three countries and accompanied him on visits to the royal court. One important difference, however. While Richard had only a single son, Roger and Joan had a flourishing family of twelve children.



Richard III from the c. 1483 Rous Roll. © The British Library

Early careers marked by loyal, capable service

Richard was noted for his loyalty to his royal brother Edward IV, his bravery as a soldier and commander, and for his abilities as an administrator and governor. In the same way, Roger's early career was characterised by loyal, capable service to the Crown. Up to 1320 much of his time was spent in Ireland, where he was one of the largest English landowners. Initially he focused on managing his own estates but, when the Scots invaded Ireland under Edward Bruce, Roger was appointed the King's Lieutenant to defeat Bruce and restore effective

administration. Although Bruce was not finally defeated until October 1318, after Roger had been recalled back to England, he achieved much during his period in office and was reappointed in 1319. When he returned again to England in September 1320, he was formally commended by the citizens of Dublin.

During his spells in England, Roger acquitted himself well in the wars with Scotland and in dealing with difficulties and rebellions in the Welsh Marches. It was between his two periods in office in Ireland that he became prominent in the turbulent English politics of the period as relationships between Edward II and his barons became fractious. In July 1318, Roger was one of the barons who oversaw negotiations between Edward II and Thomas of Lancaster, then became a member of the standing council appointed under the terms of the Treaty of Leake, and also served on a commission to reform the royal household. By the time he returned from Ireland in 1320, however, circumstances had turned against him.

Fortune's wheel changed the trajectory of both lives

Edward IV's unexpected death triggered a chain of events that transformed Richard's life. Forced to make difficult decisions in exceptional circumstances, balancing his loyalty to his dead brother with the need to protect his own interest and possibly his life, Richard saw events escalate fast, culminating in his assumption of the throne. In similar fashion, events beyond his control catapulted Roger's life onto a new trajectory.

When Roger returned to England in 1320 he found the Despensers, both father and son, using their position as royal favourites to ruthlessly acquire land and power. Given their interest in the southern Welsh Marches the Despensers were a threat to all Marcher lords, but Roger in particular, as the Despensers were also seeking vengeance for the death of their father/grandfather who, it was said, had been killed by Roger's grandfather at the Battle of Evesham in 1265. When, in order to protect his interests, Roger

ravaged Despenser lands, he put himself in opposition to the king. Forced to capitulate, he and his uncle, Roger Mortimer of Chirk were tried and condemned to death in March 1322, though the sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. In August 1323 Roger became one of very few people ever to escape the Tower of London, fleeing into exile in France.

Accused of an inappropriate relationship

In April 1325, by which time Roger was two years into his French exile, Queen Isabella, wife of Edward II and sister to the king of France, arrived at her royal brother's court in Paris. When her son, the young Prince Edward joined her to do homage on behalf of his father, Isabella refused to return to England, accusing the Despensers of alienating her from her husband and making her life intolerable. A close alliance grew between Roger and Isabella and, by 1326 it was claimed in England that they were lovers.

Again, there is a parallel with Richard. After the death of his wife in March 1485, childless Richard needed to marry again to secure the succession. Rumours emerged that Richard had designs on his niece, Elizabeth of York, the eldest daughter of Edward IV. Richard, who was negotiating a Portuguese marriage at the time, was forced to publicly deny the rumours. In contrast, the rumours about Roger and Isabella were probably true.

Instrumental in a dispute over the crown

The sequence of events that led from Edward IV's death and Richard's ascension to the throne instead of his nephew, Prince Edward, is well known. Likewise, 157 years earlier, Roger was instrumental in putting aside a king when Edward II was forced to abdicate. When, in September 1326 Roger and Isabella landed in England with a small army they met with strong support from an aristocracy that had grown resentful of Despenser power. Within weeks Edward II was captured and, in January 1327, agreed to abdicate in favour of his young son, who was crowned Edward III. For almost four

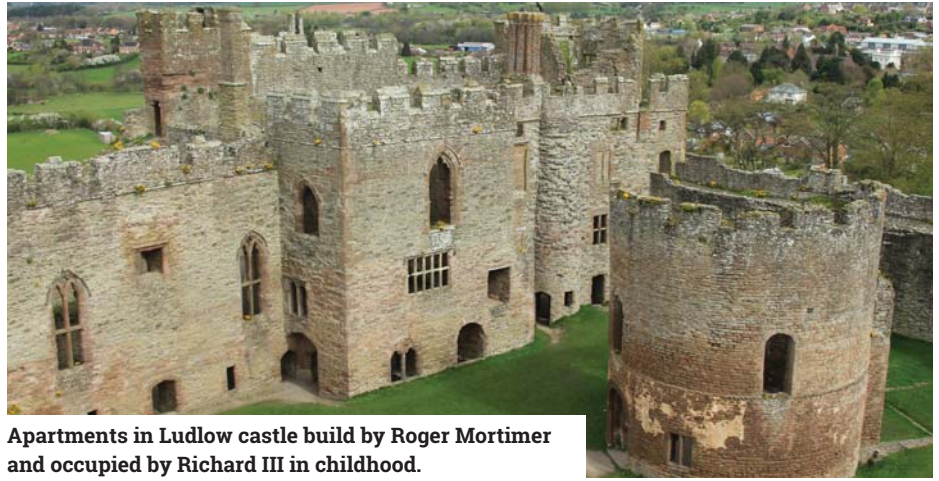
years, during the young king's minority, Roger alongside Isabella dominated the rule of England.

Accused of killing the rightful king

I have no intention of debating here the fate of the Princes in the Tower during Richard's reign. Suffice to say that he has been accused of the murder of his nephews, the eldest of which was regarded by some as the rightful king Edward V. Similarly Roger was accused of Edward II's murder. After his forced abdication, Edward II was held in the custody of Roger's son-in-law, Thomas Berkeley, at Berkeley castle in Gloucestershire. In September 1327 it was announced that he had died of natural causes. Stories quickly emerged that Roger had ordered his murder and by lurid means, including the use of a red-hot poker, now discredited. Opinion on Edward's fate remains divided. Some historians believe Roger and Isabella to be responsible. Others argue that Edward didn't die at Berkeley, but was allowed to live as a hermit on the continent for at least another fifteen years. As with the Princes in the Tower, the fate of Edward II continues to provoke strong passions among historians.

Strong regional powerbases

During the 1470s Richard became the pre-eminent noble man in the north-east and far north-west of England, building a strong powerbase and loyal following. Similarly, by the early 14th century, the core of Mortimer power lay in the Welsh Marches. Roger's ancestors had used their base at Wigmore to push deep into central Wales, conquering Maelienydd, Gwerthyrnion and Cwmwd Deuddwr. Further lordships had been acquired by marriage and as rewards from the Crown, including Chirk, which had been granted to Roger's uncle. After the coronation of Edward III, Roger secured for himself the Marcher lordships of Denbigh, Oswestry, Clun, Montgomery, Builth, Chirk, Blaenllyfni and custody of several others. He was also appointed justiciar of the principality of Wales



Apartments in Ludlow castle build by Roger Mortimer and occupied by Richard III in childhood.

and, when raised to the rank of earl in 1328, chose the title earl of March. This was the first time the title earl was linked, not to an English county, but to an entire region.

Accused of misrule and tyranny

With both men coming to power in unusual circumstances, not surprisingly there was opposition to their regimes. Within weeks of Edward II's capture, Roger ensured the removal of supporters of the old regime, including the hated Despensers. Roger, however, never took an official position in the governance of the country. Instead he used his relationship with the queen and young king to have his allies appointed to great posts. As a result he was accused of manipulating events and bypassing the Council. Difficult political decisions, such as the pragmatic but controversial peace treaties with Scotland, compounded by Roger's accumulation of wealth and flaunting of his royal connections, led to growing opposition. This was intensified by the execution of the young king's uncle, the earl of Kent on charges of plotting to rescue his brother from captivity. Some see this as evidence that Edward II was alive at the time, others think Kent was duped into believing his brother alive in order to remove him.

Ignoble ends

Richard III was hacked to death on the battlefield of Bosworth, suffering humiliating wounds, some of which, it is now known, were inflicted *post-mortem*. Roger's end was even more

ignoble – hanged as a common traitor. Opposition to Roger and Isabella mounted over time and, eventually, even the young king was alienated by Roger's arrogance, breaches of etiquette and flaunting of power. In 1330, chafing under Mortimer's control, the seventeen-year old king abetted a plot to gain entry to Nottingham castle and arrest Roger. The king issued a proclamation that he was taking power into his own hands, while Roger found himself, once again, captive in the Tower. Fourteen charges were brought at his trial before Parliament, including the murder of Edward II, assumption of royal power and the government of the realm. Given no opportunity to answer the charges he was found guilty and condemned to die. He was hanged at Tyburn on 29 November 1330.

Tarnished reputations

Both men had their reputations distorted by Elizabethan playwrights. Shakespeare's distorted portrayal of Richard is well known. Roger Mortimer fell victim to Christopher Marlowe. In his play *Edward II*, Marlow portrays Roger as a low-grade, self-serving character, whose relationship with the queen undermines the natural order, and whose ambition leads to the deposition and murder of a king.

It seems fair to conclude that Richard and Roger were men of their time who, in unprecedented circumstances, made hard choices when there were no right ones. They both seem to have paid a reputational price that has long outlived them.

Demystifying Cwmhir abbey

A new community heritage project

Abbeycwmhir Heritage Trust has launched a four-year community heritage project to 'demystify' Cwmhir Abbey. Project Leader Mel Walters, outlines progress so far and explains how the project might help us understand the abbey's archaeology, its place in the national heritage of Wales and its operation through history, including the time when the Mortimer family held sway in the Welsh marches.

Cwmhir has firmly established Mortimer connections. It is located in the ancient province of Maelienydd, which lies west of Wigmore and was claimed by the Mortimers soon after the Norman Conquest. Control of the area passed between the family and the area's native Welsh princes for over four hundred years. The abbey church, whose vast nave is generally considered to be the longest Cistercian nave in Europe, was endowed by Roger Mortimer (d.1214) in the early 13th century in a gift which included a generous amount of land.

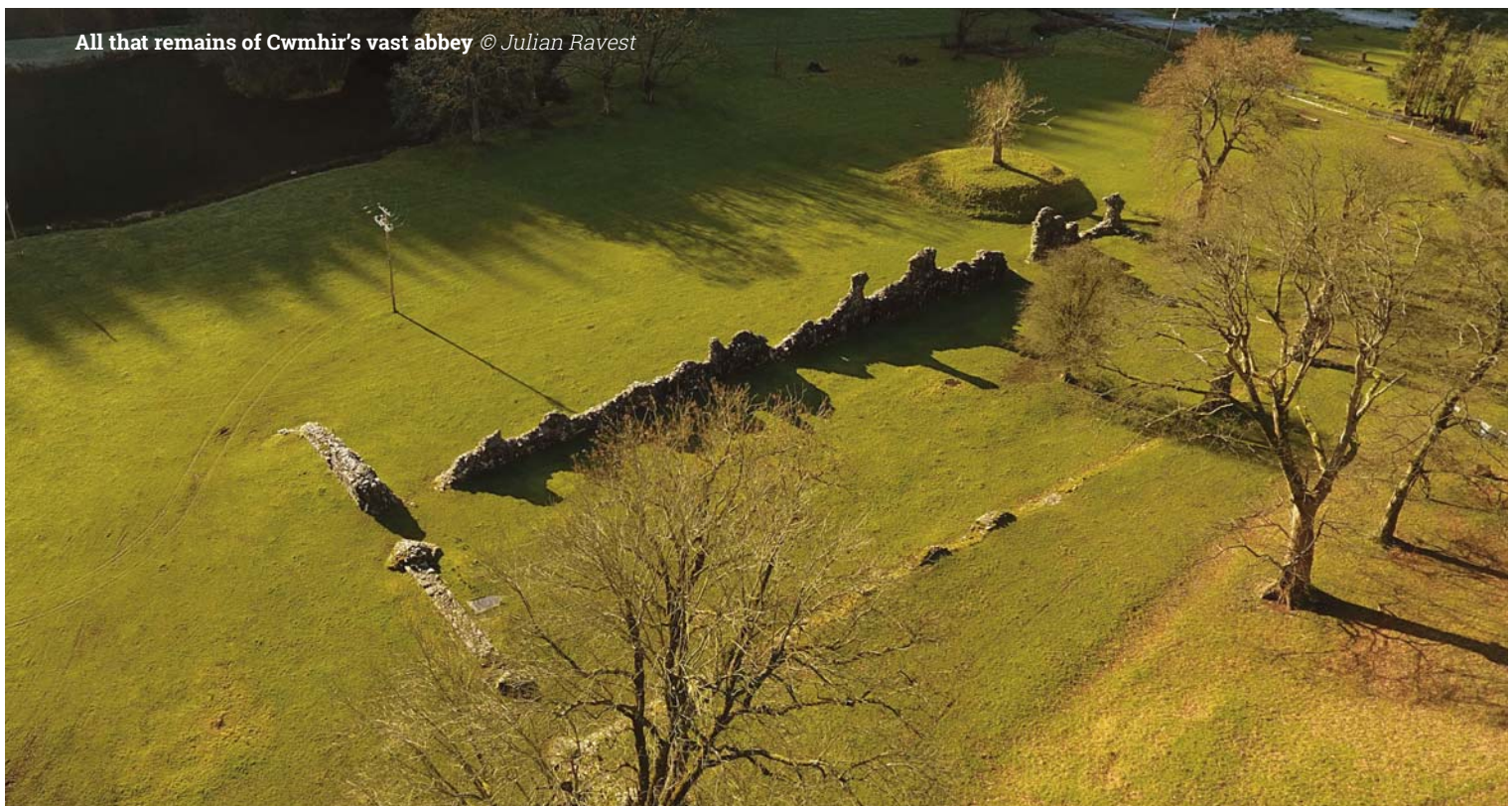
The Demystifying project, which involves collaborative research with Professor David Austin's Sacred Landscapes team

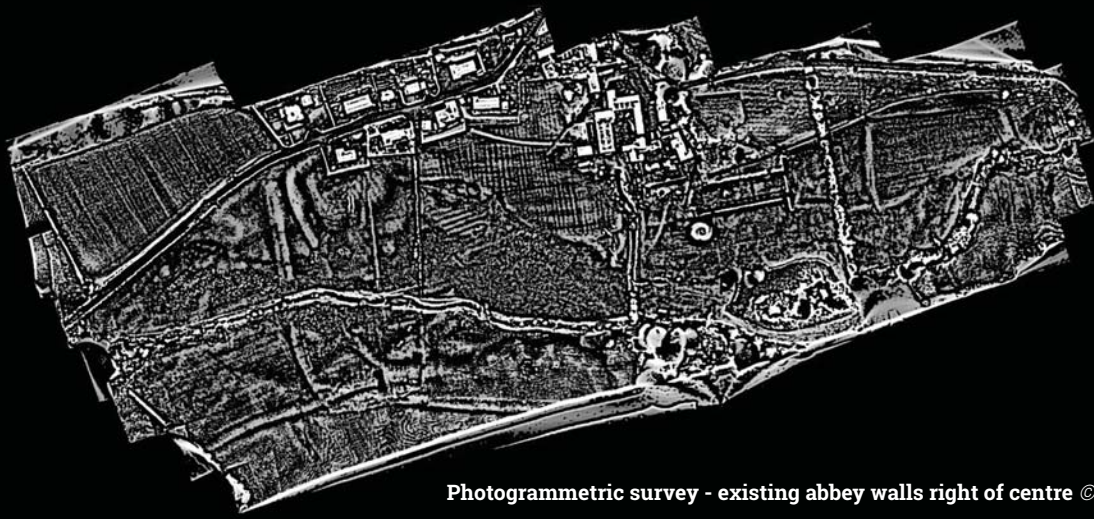
at Strata Florida¹, is seeking to understand the monastery and its granges, particularly the Home Grange of Golon, by studying its topography. This topographical study will be set alongside the history, archaeology and geography of the estate's economy and political patronage. This ongoing work will include documentary research to re-examine the boundaries of Golon and other granges and to study the ancient settlements within them. For example, we're looking at what early charters and other documents, such as estate records, perambulations, enclosure awards, dissolution surveys and place names can tell us about the fortunes of the abbey and its estate. Based on this desk-based research, we plan to conduct field investigations of some of

the medieval sites, including walk-over, geophysical and drone surveys.

As a precursor to the demystifying project, Julian Ravest, an expert in drone surveying and photogrammetry, conducted a photographic and photogrammetric survey of the Cwmhir Abbey precinct and its adjoining areas using a drone². Nearly two hundred detailed photographs were taken and used to create a 3-D digital model of the precinct area. Areas of particular interest were covered at very high resolution, with the drone flying low over the ground. Various computer processes were then used to reveal previously unknown aspects of the site. Together, they show the complex impact of human activity over some 850 years.

All that remains of Cwmhir's vast abbey © Julian Ravest





Photogrammetric survey - existing abbey walls right of centre © Julian Ravest

New discoveries

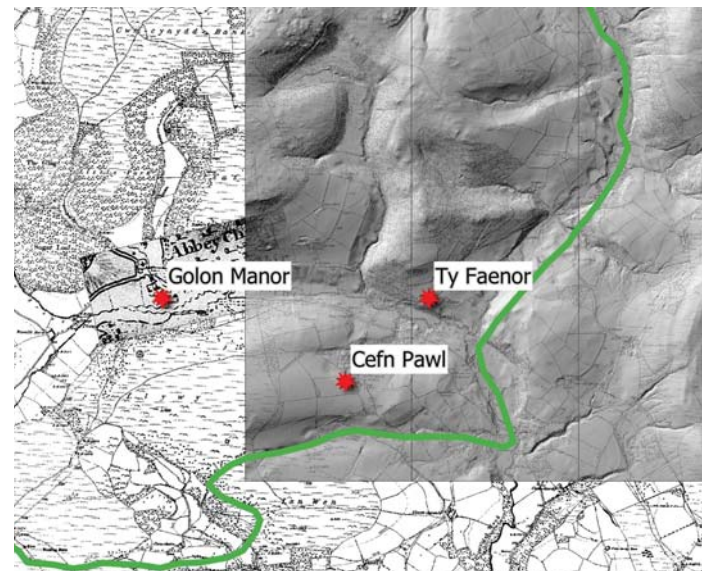
Two newly discovered features are particularly noteworthy. The first are the marks of walls in the transept area to the east of the abbey ruins. These walls, despite being sub-surface, subtly alter the shape of the surface and can be picked up by the very sensitive photogrammetric techniques used. It's thought that the rectangular building they form is most likely a post-reformation house. We hope to make it the subject of further study.

The second feature is marks found at either end of the precinct. These may simply be part of the precinct boundary or, as Julian Ravest has suggested, could be defensive earthworks put up by the Royalist garrison during the Civil War. When the Parliamentarians captured the abbey in 1644, they despoiled the site, removing any possibility of it being fortified again. The present state of the abbey, with its reduced walls, is most likely due to that action.

The photogrammetry, along with other information, is being assimilated using a free and open source Geographical Information Systems called QGIS, which will help us interpret the data effectively. The project's volunteers are working with Dr Jemma Bezant of the Sacred Landscapes project to learn how to harness the software's extensive potential. We're also collating and layering many publicly available maps, including Ordnance Survey, tithe maps, estate and enclosure maps, as well as Lidar images and curatorial information.

The picture right demonstrates how the GIS system helps us make sense of these various sources. It uses the 1st edition

Ordnance Survey map as its base, with a section of the Surveyor's drawing of 1817 and a Lidar image. This is overlain by the definition of the Golon Grange boundary (green line), as identified by David Williams in his 2001 book *The Welsh Cistercians*, as well as the location of Golon Manor and two nearby farms belonging to the abbey.



Composite map of part of the extensive Abbey Cwmhir estate³

The Abbeycwmhir Heritage Trust is still in the early stages of this community heritage project, but we're already discovering new aspects of medieval life at Cwmhir Abbey and expect to make important additions to the historical record for this important Welsh site. We'll be sure to keep the society posted of any significant Mortimer-related discoveries!

If you'd like to find out more about the Demystifying the Abbey project, please go to www.abbeycwmhir.org or www.abbeycwmhirhistory.org.uk. You can also contact the project leaders direct at history.cwmhirabbey@gmail.com.

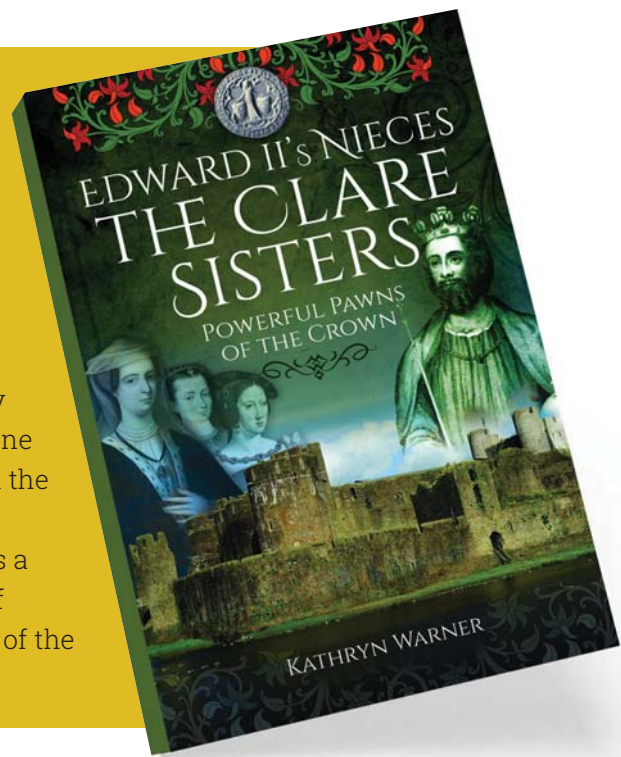
About the author: Mel Walters is Project Leader for Abbeycwmhir Heritage Trust's 'Demystifying the Abbey' project.

- 1 Arts and Humanities Research Council funded Sacred Landscapes of Medieval Monasteries project, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David.
- 2 J. Ravest, New Perspectives on Abbey Cwm Hir: A Photogrammetric Survey. *The Transactions of the Radnorshire Society*. 2019 Vol. LXXXIX p56-77.
- 3 Ordnance Survey six-inch to the mile (or 1:10,560) County Series © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited 2020. All rights reserved. [1881]; Ten-mile to an inch scale (1:633,600) Ordnance Survey 1817; Lidar data, 2m resolution © Natural Resources Wales and Database Right. All rights reserved. Point data derived from the Historic Environment Record, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust.

Edward II's Nieces: The Clare Sisters, Powerful Pawns of the Crown

By Kathryn Warner, Pen & Sword Books, 2020

Medieval British history is bewitched, bothered and be-devilled by the failure of male heirs in royal and aristocratic families. When one as rich and powerful as the de Clare earldom of Gloucester fails in the male line, the resulting fallout can destabilise whole regions and power structures. Kathryn Warner, familiar to Society members as a conference speaker and author of several books about the reign of Edward II, looks at the repercussions for the three de Clare sisters of the death of their childless brother, Gilbert, at Bannockburn in 1314.



As Warner rightly points out, “married women of the 14th century tend to disappear from the written record, sadly, and it can be frustrating for author and reader alike to have to delve frequently into a welter of ‘probablys’ and ‘she might haves’, and to run the risk of writing what amounts to a biography of the women’s husbands.” Warner valiantly attempts in this engaging account of Eleanor, Margaret and Elizabeth de Clare to separate out their stories and to ensure they’re not overwhelmed by the highly dramatic accounts of their husbands’ lives.

The eldest daughter, Eleanor was born in 1292. Her first marriage in 1306, to Hugh Despenser the Younger (d.1326), then a minor lord, was a curiously low-key match for a grand-daughter of Edward I, who was still on the throne at the time. Eleanor would see her younger sisters become rich countesses ahead of her, but her husband’s rapid rise to power in the 1320s would make her England’s second lady, the only woman, other than the queen, to be afforded the courtesy of *ma dame*. Warner deftly addresses the rumours surrounding Eleanor that she, along with her husband, may have had a sexual affair with Edward II which, if true, would have resulted in a surprising and toxic *menage a trois*. Eleanor is certainly complicit in her husband’s vicious actions against her sisters and others,

according to Warner, and she obviously did something to enrage the Queen as, after 1326, we see Isabella maliciously turn against Eleanor and her children under the regency. Nor was Eleanor to enjoy her widowhood, being abducted and married against her will to William Zouche, also known as William Mortimer of Richard’s Castle.

Margaret, the second daughter, was married first to the biggest joker in Edward II’s early reign, Piers Gaveston, earl of Cornwall. She is rightly identified as the quietest sister and the hardest to reconstruct. She was later married to another court favourite, Hugh Audley, one of the few Contrarians to survive the reign. One rare instance of her personal intervention came when she pleaded to Edward II for her husband’s life after the Battle of Boroughbridge in 1322. Luckily for Audley, she succeeded, though she had to endure imprisonment at Sempringham Priory, Lincolnshire for the rest of the reign along with Gwenllïan ferch Llewellyn and, later, Joan Mortimer.

The most engaging sister, and the one we most know about, is the youngest. Elizabeth Burgh, often known as the lady of Clare, was married and widowed three times before her 27th birthday and enjoyed an agreeable life for thirty years as the lady of both Clare and Usk. The book’s section on

Elizabeth’s brave protest against Hugh Despenser in 1326, preserved in the Black Book of Wigmore, is curiously muted by Warner as it is an important document written by a woman in fear of her life. The reasons why a woman would go to such lengths and what she hoped to achieve are not sufficiently explored by the author, though Elizabeth’s experiences of abuse, along with those of other women, form some of the important articles of accusation against Despenser at his trial.

Warner, with her consistent and meticulous research, has constructed at times almost a monthly account of the three sisters’ lives with a wealth of material. Rules of dower, forced marriages, phantom pregnancies, litigation, the rather bizarre ‘courtesy of England’ where a man could enjoy his wife’s inheritance for his life beyond her death, and the role of damsels are just some of the enjoyable features revealed in this book. Where relationships can be reconstructed, positive or not, Warner has strived to bring the sisters’ world to light.

Those familiar with Warner’s blog will be conversant with some of the material and will recognise where it has been stitched together in the text. Unfortunately, this means material is often repeated. Warner’s love of research can also overwhelm the narrative at times with superfluous

Cont/d...

details and distant family relationships expounded. The editorial decision to not include family trees really hampers the casual reader, who may be bewildered with multiple children and marriages within these aristocratic families.

The chronological structure of the book, as so often with biographies, means important and interesting details Warner unearths are not explored effectively. It would have been interesting to have some thematic chapters on the sisters' use of cultural patronage, the structure of their households, their political agency or lack thereof throughout their lives. Though Warner mentions Alice de Lacy, another unfortunate heiress, it would have been useful to have more comparisons with other aristocratic women of the early 14th century.

What isn't brought out in the text is the fact the sisters were Marcher heiresses, why their inheritances were so desirable and why Hugh Despenser was as fanatical as others before him in building a power base in the southern Marches. As Edward II's allowance of Despenser's abuses in Wales and elsewhere would be a fundamental element to his fall in 1326, this would have been useful to those not familiar with the political landscape. The sisters' lives are deeply rooted in the polity of the Marches. For instance, it is missed that Theobald Verdon (d. 1316) who abducted Elizabeth Burgh was a Marcher lord; he held a moiety of Ewyas Lacy along with Roger Mortimer, the 1st earl. Also, it would have also been beneficial to explore Elizabeth Burgh's role as a Marcher lord in her own right with her tenure over Usk and

Caerleon from 1326 until her death in 1360. It would have been a powerful rebuttal to the idea that women such as the de Clares were always pawns of the crown and powerful men.

This aside, there is plenty to engage both the casual and the committed reader in Warner's book. There is a wealth of information on the lives of 14th century aristocratic women and the issues that faced them during turbulent times. Warner writes in a clear and appealing style and she has added another vibrant and much-needed account to her *oeuvre*, bringing a different perspective to the compelling events surrounding Edward II.

About the Reviewer: Kirsten Lawton-Smith is an historian, author and trustee of the Mortimer History Society

Researching the Mortimers

In early 2019, Society President Dr Paul Dryburgh, proposed the creation of a research group to examine the many fascinating medieval documents that relate to the Mortimer family, starting with the Wigmore branch then moving on to others. Kirsten Lawton Smith reports on progress.

The aim of the Mortimer History Society's research group is not just to read Mortimer-related documents but to transcribe them and make them available for all to enjoy on the Society's website. It's hoped they will provide a valuable resource for anyone studying or interested in the Mortimers, as many of the documents are difficult to read in the original and, in any case, rarely seen.

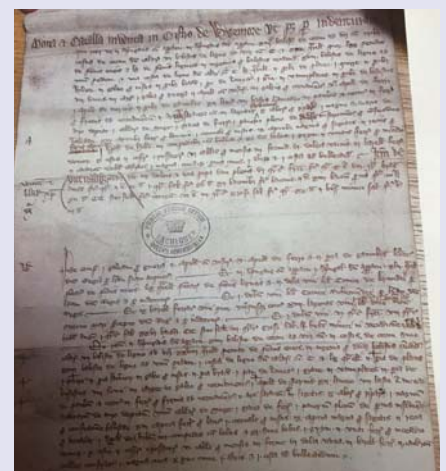
With this in mind, Paul, ably assisted by Helen Watt from the University of York, led training sessions for over forty Society members over the course of two weekends last year. As Yve James, trustee and coordinator of the research group reports "we quickly realised this was a long-term project because people have to learn, not only how to read very different forms of handwriting, but also to contend with Latin and the many abbreviations

employed by the various scribes of the original documents."

Therefore, over the course of a wild, wet and windy weekend in February this year, 12 die-hard members came together with Paul and Helen once again at Grange Court in Leominster. There they grappled with some truly appalling handwriting, some questionable parsed Latin and quite a large body of livestock, including a peacock, all suffering from murrain. One medieval clerk was obviously a frustrated interior decorator, as he had decided opinions on whether Roger Mortimer's curtains found at Wigmore Abbey were 'shabby' or of 'good and subtle work'.

The group was planning a re-match with these medieval scribes in July, but due to Coronavirus, this has been delayed. Paul is looking at the

possibility of having the brave troops working on-line in some capacity to maintain momentum. We hope to update the society with progress later on in the year.



Typical of the complex documents the group is examining – an inventory of goods found at Wigmore Abbey belonging to Roger Mortimer, 1st earl of March in 1322

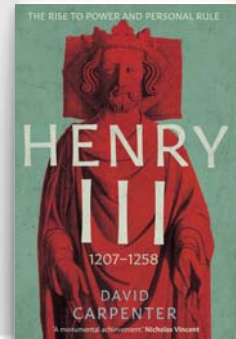
Four for your bookshelf

There's been a rush of significant new books focused on medieval Wales and England recently that should be of great interest to Society members. Here we recommend four titles for your bookshelf.

Henry III: The Rise to Power and Personal Rule 1207 – 1258

By David Carpenter - Yale University Press, 2020

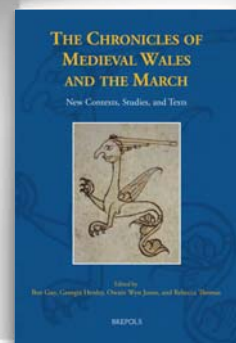
The first in a ground-breaking two-volume history of Henry's rule. Eminent historian David Carpenter brings to life Henry's character and reign as never before stressing his achievements and failures while offering an entirely new perspective on the intimate connections between medieval politics and religion.



The Chronicles of Medieval Wales and the March

Edited by Ben Guy, Georgia Henley, Owain Wyn Jones, Rebecca Thomas - Brepols 2020

A collection of new studies supported by synoptic pieces placing the tradition of chronicle writing in Wales within the context of historical writing on a broader scale. This book retails for £72 plus VAT, but a 20% discount – plus free postage and packing – is available for Society members. See the flyer delivered with your edition of Mortimer Matters.



Medieval Welsh Genealogy: An introduction and textual study

By Ben Guy - Boydell & Brewer, 2020

Ben Guy gives us the first integrated study of and comprehensive introduction to genealogy in medieval Wales, setting it in the context of genealogical writing from Ireland, England and beyond, and tracing its evolution from the eighth to the 14th century.

This book retails in hardback and e-book at £90, but a 40% discount is available for Society members. Simply quote the offer code BB870 when ordering at <https://boybrew.co/MWG> or when calling **01243 843 291**.

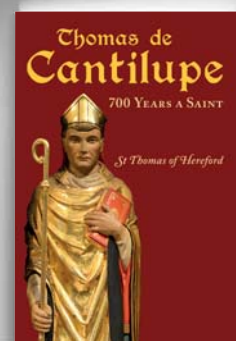


Thomas de Cantilupe – 700 Years a Saint

By Michael Tavinor and Ian Bass - Logaston Press, 2020

Thomas Cantilupe (1218 – 82) was one of a group of medieval bishops canonised during the 14th century. Marking the 700th anniversary of his being made a saint, this book tells the story of his colourful life as scholar, politician, priest and bishop, and charts his long struggle to sainthood.

Available in paperback for £7.50 with free delivery from www.logastonpress.co.uk



Look out for extensive reviews of all four books in the 2020 edition of the Mortimer History Society Journal, due to be published later this year.

Get a head start on Thomas Cantilupe...

Ian Bass, author of *Thomas Cantilupe – 700 Years a Saint* was the winner of the first Mortimer History Society Essay Prize in 2016 and spoke at our 2018 Spring Conference about the saints of the Marches. If you want to read more of his work on Thomas Cantilupe, he's happy to provide access to two recently published articles for Society members.

The first is *Rebellion and Miracles in the Welsh March: Accounts in the Miracle Collection of St Thomas de Cantilupe*. Based on his talk to the Society in 2018, this article explores the miracles performed by St Thomas for those living in Wales and on the Welsh Marches. It challenges previous ideas that some miracles in the Cantilupe cult could be seen as an imprinting of 'cultural imperialism' of the new English rulers over the recently conquered Welsh. It was published in the December 2019 edition of *The Welsh History Review*.

The second is *St Thomas de Cantilupe's Welsh Miracles*, published in *Studia Celtica*. This is a companion article to the one published in WHR and includes transcriptions and translation of St Thomas' miracles.

For access to the articles simply drop Ian an email at ian.bass@uwtsd.ac.uk.

And finally, congratulations to Ian on his appointment, in February this year, as an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Wales Trinity St David, Lampeter.



On the borders. 2020 Mortimer History Society Essay Prize

Entries are now open for the fifth round of the Society's annual prize

As in previous years, essays on any aspect of the Mortimer family and its cadet branches, or on the medieval Marches of Wales from 1066-1542, will be accepted for consideration. This year we're also broadening the entry criteria to include essays on any aspect of Medieval Borderlands.

First prize
£750

Second prize
£300

Third prize
£200

This is a great opportunity to have your work published in our 2021 academic journal if you're selected by our esteemed judges led by Chris Given-Wilson, Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of St. Andrews.

All entries must be submitted by 1 March 2021. Prizewinning essays will be published in *The Mortimer History Society Journal*. For full details about how to enter visit: www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/essayprize2020.

Welcome to new members

10 new members have joined the Society since the last edition of *Mortimer Matters*, bringing total membership to 453. Welcome all! We hope you're enjoying your membership and look forward to seeing you soon.

Stephen Chanko	Connecticut, USA
Natasha Coombs	Powys, Wales
Joseph Goldsmith	Herefordshire, England
Erica Jones	Gloucestershire, England
Christopher Jones-Jenkins	Glamorgan, Wales
Mr & Mrs Martin	Shropshire, England
Paul Mortimer	Essex, England
Sophie Ogilvie	Kent, England
Melanie Walters	Powys, Wales

We're always interested to hear what new members think about the Society so, if you've any comments about your membership experience or ideas about what you'd like from us, please email membership@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk.