

The Clifford Family

In the fourth article in our Marcher lordships series, John Fleming tracks the career of the Cliffords to show how an enterprising Norman family could make great gains in the Welsh Marches using initiative and guile.

The lordship and castle of Clifford were created by William fitz Osbern, first earl of Hereford. It was part of the three earldoms granted by William the Conqueror in order to establish a buffer between the newly conquered England and Wales. When fitz Osbern died in 1071, the earldom passed to his son Roger de Breteuil. Roger was involved in a failed rebellion against William, forfeiting his lands in the process. The Clifford lordship was granted to Ralph de Tosny (d.1102), a prominent Norman baron who had

fought at Hastings, who held it directly from the crown. He is shown as the holder in the Domesday survey, which states that Clifford lay in England but was not subject to any of the Hundred or other customary duties. Thus, it was already exhibiting its status as a Marcher lordship. Ralph de Tosny spent almost no time in England, and Domesday records that a certain Drogo fitz Pons held land in Clifford castle from de Tosny. This Drogo was most likely an uncle of Richard fitz Pons (d.1129) who was the progenitor of the Clifford dynasty.



The lordship and castle of Clifford were created by William fitz Osbern

In This Issue

Features

The Clifford family – Marcher lords	1-4
Sitting down with Professor Saul	5-6
The Mortimer Lordship at war	8
A tax on virginity	9
A Mortimer Christmas	11-12

Society News

Taking you to the Tower	6
Mortimers on Zoom	7
Upcoming events	8
Welcome new members	13

Reviews and recommendations

Four for your bookshelf	10
A Marcher must-read	12
Domesday online	13



Men raised from the dust

The end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th century were profitable times for enterprising Normans such as Richard fitz Pons, who secured for himself large lordships in the Marches. Richard was a key vassal of Bernard of Neufmarché. Bernard was the son-in-law of Osbern fitz Richard of Richard's castle and a major landowner in western Herefordshire. Following the death of William the Conqueror, who did not sanction large-scale incursions into Wales, there was a noticeable change in Norman attitude. His successor, William Rufus, saw Wales as a place to reward service and distribute patronage. Bernard took advantage of this by slowly conquering an area of Wales up the Wye and Usk valleys, building castles as he went. Richard fitz Pons must have been an important part of this conquest as he was rewarded with the Welsh *cantref* of *Selyf*, holding it from Bernard, the new lord of *Brycheiniog* (modern south Breconshire). When Henry I succeeded William Rufus in 1100, he took a far more hands-on approach to the Welsh borders. He rewarded his loyal followers with lordships across the entire region. Many of these men were not from aristocratic backgrounds but became lords through Henry's patronage. Richard fitz Pons benefitted from this policy for he used his base in *Cantref Selyf* to move west and establish his own Marcher lordship in *Cantref Bychan*. The Welsh Brut chronicle reports that by 1116 he had built a castle there and Henry had affirmed him as lord. This lordship was in a precarious geographical position, being landlocked in the eastern edge of Carmarthenshire. Whilst the castle held out in an earlier Welsh revolt, it fell in 1137 and the lordship was lost for a time.

The rise of Clifford

The son of Ralph de Tosny (d.1102), another Ralph (d.1126), took more interest in England, but appears to have left Clifford castle in the care of stewards. One of those stewards was the son of Richard fitz Pons, Walter fitz Richard (d.1190). Walter married Margaret, the sister of Ralph de Tosny and dropped the name 'fitz Richard' and started using the name Clifford instead. Whether this was because Margaret brought the lordship with her or, more likely, he just decided to style himself lord of Clifford, the name change worked!

Like many of the Marcher lords, Walter was a supporter of Henry I's daughter, the Empress Mathilda, in her civil war with King Stephen. He was therefore in a favourable position when Mathilda's son Henry became King Henry II in 1154. Walter continued to slowly assimilate the Clifford lordship into his own possession. Despite the fact that the de Tosny family complained that the lordship had been unlawfully taken from them, the king confirmed Walter as lord of Clifford and compensated the de Tosny's with lands elsewhere. Henry II looked to bring law and order back to the realm and the Cliffords received their lordship of *Cantref Bychan* back early in his reign. However, being Marcher lords, the Cliffords are recorded in the *Brut* as having taken spoil and killed the men of the Lord Rhys. The Lord Rhys had by this time become the most powerful prince in south-western Wales and would soon become *de facto* ruler there. Receiving no satisfaction from the king for this breach of peace, the Lord Rhys took matters into his own hands and took Llandovery castle, the main castle of *Cantref Bychan*, in 1157. The Cliffords were never able to regain it. Walter did

have some good fortune in that his daughter Rosamund was extremely beautiful and caught the interest of Henry II. She became his mistress and is celebrated as the 'Fair Rosamund' of English folklore. Legend has it that she died at the hands of Henry's wife Eleanor in 1176, but nothing can be substantiated. Walter did receive a grant of a lordship in north Shropshire in 1177, possibly as some kind of compensation.

When Walter Clifford died in 1190, his heir was Walter 'the Elder' Clifford (d. 1220). However, the then King Richard I granted some of Walter's manors in Shropshire to Walter's brother Richard for 300 marks thus dividing the lordship. Perhaps this was in revenge for the affair that Walter's sister had had with his father. However, it's just as likely that Richard was doing what he did best – raising money wherever he could to finance his upcoming Crusade. The matter was finally settled during the reign of King John, who sold the Shropshire manors back to Walter for 300 marks, with his brother receiving a manor in Gloucestershire as compensation.

In service of the king

Walter 'the Elder' and his son Walter 'the Younger' (d. 1263) were both active in the service of the king. The Elder was sheriff of Herefordshire at the end of the 12th century. His son held the same role in 1215. Both Walter 'the Younger' and his brother Roger were household knights of King John. They also both remained loyal to King John although they were also men of William de Braose. When de Braose and his family were persecuted by King John in the early 13th

century the Cliffords wisely chose to stay on the side of the king. They were rewarded by having their lordship of *Cantref Selyf* reaffirmed to them by King John in 1211-12, which they had held from the lord of Brecon (de Braose).

Following the death of the senior Clifford in 1221, the Younger Walter Clifford was very much a king's man, campaigning with the new young king Henry III in Brittany and Normandy. He was also a key defender against the resurgent Welsh under Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. As for many Marcher lords at this time, the threat of the much more powerful Welsh resulted in high costs to upgrade the defences of his Marcher castles, which led to considerable debts.

In 1233 Walter was caught up in the uprising of Richard Marshall, the earl of Pembroke and sided against the king. His uprising didn't last long and, after his castles were subdued, he submitted to the king's authority. Walter could be cantankerous. He refused to attend court after assaulting and imprisoning men of a rival and, more famously, forced a royal official to eat a royal writ, wax seal and all! This last action got him into trouble, and only payment of a fine returned him to the king's good graces. Walter the Younger's sole heir was his daughter Matilda by his wife Margaret, the daughter of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth. It was quite common for a Marcher lord to marry a daughter of a Welsh prince. In theory, this should have created some bond that would promote peace. In reality, these bonds could become secondary and wars would be waged from time to time. That also happened with Walter the Younger and his father-in-law.

Llandovery – the main castle of Cantref Bychan



Matilda became baroness of Clifford around 1263. She had been married to William Longespee III, who died in 1257. As the heir to Clifford, she was an attractive proposition for any potential suitor and the rising John Giffard of Brimpsfield in Gloucestershire took the initiative. He captured Matilda at one of her manors in Wiltshire and raped her before abducting her to Brimpsfield. She managed to get a letter to King Henry pleading for rescue. Whilst Henry III was on his way to free her, another letter arrived saying that there was now no need for a rescue as she had married her captor! The male Clifford line ended at that point and John Giffard became lord of Clifford until his death in 1299.

Somewhat ironically, following the first Edwardian conquest of Wales in 1277, *Cantref Bychan* was finally restored to the Clifford dynasty in the person of John Giffard, now also a Marcher lord there. There was a junior branch of the Clifford family established by a grandson of Walter de Clifford (d.1221) in 1264 in the Scottish Borders. Their main residence was at Appleby castle in Westmorland and it stayed in the Clifford family for nearly 400 years.

In conclusion, the Clifford dynasty is a good example of how a family could make its fortune on the Welsh frontier. They were

represented in the earliest conquests into Wales and used this to carve out a Marcher lordship in eastern Carmarthenshire at *Cantref Bychan*. Through a fortuitous marriage and some daring nomenclature adjustment they also became lords of Castle Clifford. They stayed close to various kings and received grants of land and money on a regular basis. Like most Marcher families, the Clifford line died out when they failed to produce a male heir in the middle of the 13th century.

Into Mortimer hands

The lordship of Clifford eventually came into possession of the Mortimers. When John Giffard died in 1299 it passed to the only child of Matilda and William Longespee, Margaret. She had married Henry de Lacy, 3rd earl of Lincoln and their only child Alice married Thomas of Lancaster. Thomas was executed in 1322 for his part in the rebellion against Edward II and the Despenser family. Following Thomas's execution, Hugh Despenser the Younger acquired through extortion a revisionary interest in many of Alice de Lacy's estates, including Clifford and Glasbury. After Hugh Despenser met the same fate in 1326, Clifford reverted to the Crown. It was then granted in 1330 to Roger, 1st earl of March (d.1330).

From your editor

Hello!

As winter approaches I'm sure you'll enjoy bedding down with the latest issue of *Mortimer Matters*. There's lots to keep you occupied in this edition and more to look forward to in the year ahead. The ongoing Covid-19 situation has encouraged us to think of new ways to bring members together – not just through the pages of *Mortimer Matters*, but with online events via Zoom. You'll find our 2021 events calendar inside, as well as news of an exciting event for 2023 – never say your Society isn't forward thinking!

We'd love to hear what you think about this issue – and how you're getting on with Zoom events. Why not drop me a line at mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk and let me know your thoughts and any suggestions for improvement? And, remember, this is your newsletter so also, drop me a line if you're keen to:

- Recommend a topic you'd like to see covered in *Mortimer Matters*
- Volunteer to write a book review or feature
- Tell us about a news item or event you'd like us to mention

I'll then get in touch to discuss your ideas and give you some useful tips on submitting your copy. We plan to publish our next issue in January and will start planning in early December, so please get in touch with your ideas as soon as you can!

About the author: After a long career in banking, John took an MA in Medieval history at King's College London, achieving his degree, 'with distinction' in 2010. Since then he's been a keen amateur historian, dividing his time between castle visits and rounds of golf. John is a Trustee of the Mortimer History Society and is working on the south-west volume of the Marcher Lordships trilogy.

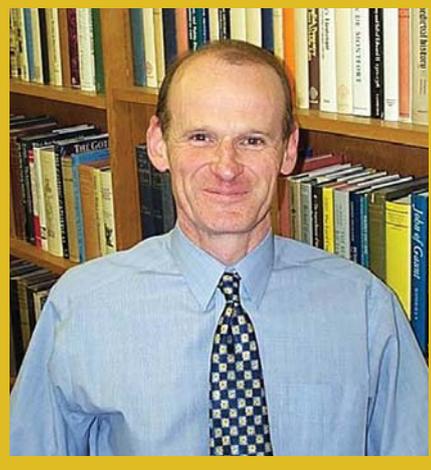


A (virtual) sit down with Professor Nigel Saul

Ahead of publication of his latest book, Professor Saul sits down with Mortimer Matters' assistant editor Connor Williams to discuss the glories of Herefordshire's 14th century churches.

Introducing Professor Nigel Saul

Professor Saul is a medieval historian who graduated from the University of Oxford in the 1970s. Benefitting from the tutelage of several influential historians such as John Armstrong, Gerald Harriss and Maurice Keen, he has become one of his generation's pre-eminent scholars on medieval gentry and the reign of Richard II. He spent his professional career at Royal Holloway, University of London, before retiring in 2015 and becoming Emeritus Professor. Recently he's turned his attention to the churches of Herefordshire. *Decorated in Glory: Church Building in Herefordshire in the 14th century*, is the first in series of occasional papers published on behalf of the Mortimer History Society and is a must-read for anyone with an interest in medieval churches, Herefordshire history and, of course, the Mortimer family.



Connor: Professor Saul, for the benefit of our members, could you tell me how this book came into being?

Prof. Saul: I've been intrigued by medieval buildings since boyhood and

have fond memories of visiting churches and making brass rubbings in my youth. As a scholar, I've published extensively on the concepts of faith and chivalry amongst the medieval gentry. On the release of my book *Lordship and Faith*, in 2017, I was approached by MHS secretary Philip Hume to speak at the Society's spring conference the following year. My paper, *Churches, Chantries and Chapels: the Religious Patronage of the Mortimers in the 14th Century*, was well received and I was asked whether I intended to publish it. It was too long for a journal article and too short for a full-length book, so, after some discussions with Logaston Press, it was decided that I would extend its coverage and publish it as the first in a series of occasional papers on behalf of the Society.

Connor: the book highlights the importance of material culture. How significant is material culture to your research and our understanding of history?

Prof Saul: I suppose it goes back to my interest in brass rubbing! I've always been intrigued by artefacts, which I see as an expression of the religion and beliefs of the person they were created for. For some time now, I've been pioneering the use of material culture as a lens through which the history of the gentry and baronage can be viewed. For a long time, buildings were overlooked in favour of documentary evidence but, over the last twenty years or so, a dialogue has been opened between mainstream medievalists, historians of material culture, and to a lesser extent art historians. I make no claim to be an expert on architecture or art, but I believe it's important to use such artefacts to improve our understanding of the past and contribute to the telling of history.

Connor: How unique was church building in Herefordshire during the early 14th century?

Prof. Saul: Herefordshire is remarkable for its well-preserved churches and, because of their rural location, many remain open despite current Covid-19 restrictions. Definitely worth a visit! Most important among the standout factors of Herefordshire's churches is the prevalence of the ballflower design. The ballflower was an artistic device used to decorate the exterior of churches and cathedrals, and in no place is it more popular than in Herefordshire. We see it first in the rebuilding of Wells Cathedral, whose master masons then went to work on the rebuilding of Hereford Cathedral's central tower in the early 14th century. When work dried up on that project, many of these masons were employed by local landowners, who paid for the rebuilding of churches across the county. They took the ballflower with them, making it a staple of many projects, including churches in Leominster, Ledbury and Weobley.



Herefordshire's characteristic ballflower resembles a ball enclosed in a globular three-petalled flower.

Eventually the Decorated style fell out of favour, and in Herefordshire and south Shropshire the last examples of it are found in the 1340s. The Black Death drove the final nail in the coffin, because labour was now expensive, and patrons could no longer afford expensive carving. By the time wages had stabilised at the end of the century, styles had moved on and the Decorated style was yesterday's news.

Connor: What was the role of the Mortimer family in church building?

Prof. Saul: The Mortimer's were extremely important to church building in Herefordshire at this time, and many of the best surviving examples come from their patronage. However, not only were they themselves patrons of building projects, their tenants also appear to have been important church builders too. Although it's uncertain who influenced whom, it's clear the Mortimer family were at the centre of a period of local and cultural expression amongst Herefordshire landowners at the start of the 14th century.

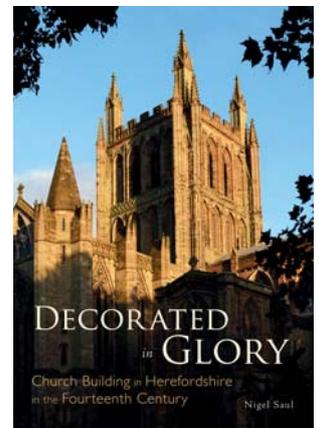


Pembridge church – among several re-built by the Mortimer family

It's also fascinating that Mortimer women were important patrons of church building. The Decorated style seen at churches such as Pembridge and Kingsland was almost certainly down to Lady Margaret, the widow of Sir Edmund Mortimer and mother of Roger Mortimer, first earl of March. Thanks to her extensive dower she had the resources and desire to commission such works and, since they occurred on estates where she was resident, they were probably for her use.

As for Roger Mortimer, Margaret's son, this book has been remarkable for uncovering elements of his piety. While current scholarship sees Roger as an avaricious man, he was also an influential patron of church building. However, his piety is remarkably conventional for the time. Like many other individuals in the late middle ages, such as Hugh Despenser or William de la Pole who have also been accused of less than exemplary behaviour, Roger was clearly concerned for the welfare for his soul. In the 14th century, a quick-fire way to save your soul was to found a chantry to pray for you and your family, as Roger did at this time in Leintwardine. The level of his activity clearly suggests he was concerned about some of his actions, so used his resources to give himself a leg up in the afterlife.

Professor Saul's book, *Decorated in Glory: Church building in Herefordshire in the 14th century* will be published by Logaston Press in November 2020. Its launch will be marked at the Society's conference on Saturday, 21 November.



We're taking you to the Tower

Tuesday, 1 August 2023: Hold that date for a unique Mortimer History Society event in the Tower of London

It's a long way off, but we're making big plans early! 1 August 2023 marks the 700th anniversary of Roger Mortimer's dramatic escape from the Tower of London. On the night of 1 August 1323 guards, who were celebrating the feast of St Peter ad Vincula (St Peter in Chains), were drugged and Roger's accomplices forced open his prison door. Freed from confinement, he climbed up through the chimney to the roof. From there he climbed down the walls into the outer ward before scaling, with the aid of a rope ladder, the outer walls. Boats were ready to row Roger across the Thames to meet his men-at-arms, who had horses waiting to speed him to the coast, from where he sailed to France.



This event is going to be one of the most ambitious the Society has ever staged. Dr Ian Mortimer has already agreed to recount Roger's daring escape, and we'll be working hard over the next couple of years, to put together a first class programme. On the day we'll have exclusive use of a suite in the New Armouries building inside the Tower itself. Rest assured, you won't be in a dungeon, and you won't have to break your way out (though you will have access to explore other parts of the Tower)!

Look out for news of our 700 year escape event in future issues of *Mortimer Matters* and, if you think you might like to go, please register your interest with Philip Hume at secretary@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk The suite holds a maximum of 200 people and we expect high levels of interest, so it would be helpful to have an early idea of who would like to join us.

Who's Zoomin' Who?

Covid-19 restrictions have made it impossible for us to hold physical events in 2020, but we're using Zoom technology to bring us altogether online! The reaction has been extremely positive, with members enjoying the Zoom experience and applauding our efforts to provide them with their history fix against all odds! It's been a learning experience for us all, but we're proud to be among the first of the UK's history societies to adopt Zoom for events.

On 16 September our first ever Zoom event drew an online audience of thirty for a presentation by Connor Williams on the fractious relationship between Roger Mortimer, 4th earl of March and his king, Richard II. Connor's talk detailed a fascinating relationship that was destined to be difficult, not least because Roger, as a direct descendent of Lionel, duke of Clarence, had a legitimate claim to be Richard's heir-presumptive. Connor revealed that, though Richard made real efforts to court Roger, these were foiled by dynastic politics, opposing agendas and the vexed question of Ireland.

October conference

Our October conference, *'The King's Writ Does Not Run Here': The Medieval Welsh Marcher Lordships* examined the operation and unique independence of the Marcher Lordships, with presentations from Dr David Stephenson, Dr Sara Elin-Roberts, John Fleming, Philip Hume and Kirsten Lawton-Smith. Philip started the morning with an introduction to the historical context in which the Marcher lordships emerged and their unique royal-like powers. David gave us an insightful view of the March from a Welsh perspective revealing a level of collaboration and assimilation among the Anglo-Norman lords and their Welsh populations, as well as with the Welsh lords of the native polities to the west and north. This was appropriately followed by Sara, a specialist in Welsh law, who went on to describe the development of a Marcher legal system that drew on both Welsh and English models. In the afternoon we took a deep dive into two particularly interesting areas of the March. Kirsten's presentation examined the determined efforts of the house of Gwynllŵg to hold onto its inheritance in the Usk Valley – a story of revenge, murder and poisonous feuds. John rounded off the day by taking us to Pembrokeshire to meet the powerful earls that dominated the area from the Norman Conquest to the mid-13th century.

Over 100 people joined us online, escaping a wet Saturday morning to revel in the dramatic and much contested history of the Welsh borders.

Richard II – destined not to get on with Roger Mortimer



Both Connor's presentation and the September conference are now available to watch again on the Society's website and YouTube channel.

Keep the date!

We're anticipating that, for the rest of this year and early 2021 at least, our events will continue to be held via Zoom. But we'll get back to normal as soon as we can. Make sure you've got these dates in your diary and look out on Twitter, Facebook and www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk for more details.

Saturday, 21 November

Decorated in Glory: Church building in Herefordshire in the 14th century

This half-day conference will include the launch of Professor Nigel Saul's book (see page 5). His talk will celebrate the golden age of church building in the Herefordshire, why it occurred and who were its patrons.

Saturday, 15 February

The Lives of Medieval Women

A half-day conference featuring presentations by Dr Emma Cavell, a specialist in the women of the great Marcher families, and Dr Cordelia Beattie, Senior Lecturer in Medieval History at the University of Edinburgh and founding director of its Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.

Saturday, 27 March

Annual General Meeting

Including a presentation on the Mortimer's Cross 1461 Battlefield Project by its Programme Director, Gary Ball.

Saturday 15 May

Mayhem, Murder and Marriage: The Mortimers and the Welsh Princes

Held off from May 2020, our Spring Conference will examine the relationship between the Mortimers and the native princes of Wales, and will be held in partnership with the Radnorshire Society.

Saturday, 22 June

Annual Summer Lecture: Perceptions of the past in the March of Wales

Huw Pryce, Professor of Welsh History at Bangor University, explores what's known about the medieval writers of Welsh histories and chronicles, and the reasons why they made their records.

Saturday, 2 October

The Barons' Wars and the Battle of Evesham

Our first joint conference with the Simon de Montfort Society and the Vale of Evesham Historical Society will include presentations by Dr Sophie Ambler on Simon de Montfort and Louise Wilkinson on Eleanor de Montfort. Sophie is Lecturer in Later Medieval British and European History at Lancaster University. Louise is the recently appointed Professor of Medieval Studies at Lincoln University. Look out for more speakers as we develop the programme.

We hope to hold a series of study visits during summer 2021, but these will be dependent on Covid-19 restrictions. Watch this space!

A Comital Empire:



The Mortimer Lordship at War, 1360-1425

Patrick McDonagh's upcoming PhD thesis will offer an embracing and substantial analysis of the Mortimer Lordship across Britain and Ireland – perhaps for the first time. As his work reaches its half-way mark, he summarises the scope of the project and its significance.

In the summer of 1380, an army led by Edmund Mortimer, 3rd earl of March and earl by marriage of Ulster, led a devastating campaign in western Ulster, achieving a temporary military settlement. His son, Roger would achieve a similar settlement in the mid-1390s, and his grandson, Edmund would die of plague in Trim awaiting the submissions of the Gaelic-Irish lords of Ulster. In all three cases, the premature death of the earl would undo all their achievements in Ireland, as the Mortimer lordship endured vulnerable minority after vulnerable minority. These long-forgotten activities form a strand of my research on the military lordship of the Mortimers from 1360-1425, the time of the last three Mortimer earls of March.

Despite their recognised pre-eminence in England, Wales, and Ireland during this era, and a veritable forest of documentary material, no substantial work exists on the Mortimer lordship after the death of Roger, 1st earl of March. My chosen period and research will illuminate the military consequences of the union of the earldoms of March and Ulster. The marriage in 1358 of Edmund Mortimer, the future 3rd earl, and Philippa Plantagenet, daughter of Lionel of Clarence, would, unforeseeably, unite these earldoms.



Arms of Roger Mortimer, 1st earl March, *Wigmore Chronicle*

Providing a future claim to the English throne, Philippa's vast inheritance would also bring valuable lordships such as Usk and Clare into Mortimer hands. It also brought the broken earldom of Ulster in Ireland. Combined with existing Mortimer holdings in Ireland, the Mortimers from 1368 onwards found themselves theoretically masters of over half of Ireland, fatally tying them to the island.

Excellent articles exist on certain aspects of the later Mortimer lordship in this period. One brilliant example would be Rees Davies' article *The Life, Travels, and Library of an Early Reader of Piers Plowman* which examines the career of the tireless and much travelled Walter de Brugge, receiver general of the Mortimer lands in the 1380s and 90s.

Yet much of the existing secondary literature approaches the Mortimer lordship piecemeal, rarely offering an all embracing and substantial analysis of the whole lordship across Britain and Ireland.



Arms of Roger Mortimer 4th earl of March, showing the arms of his earldoms of March and Ulster, *Wigmore Chronicle*

My thesis aims to reduce this neglect and offer an analysis of the Mortimer lordship's ability to organise and conduct war in theatres of conflict that include Ireland, England, and France. This will involve work on the conduct of individual campaigns; such as the 5th earl's involvement in the conquest of Normandy from 1417 onwards. The raising of armies by the Mortimers and their transport to conflict zones shall form another strand of work; the army raised in 1374-1375 for the disastrous Breton campaign for example is rich in documentary material. The perennial problem of defending lands, particularly in Ireland, during the long minorities of this period will also be examined. Unifying these strands will be a study of the military affinity of the Mortimer earls, the men who advised the earls, raised and led their armies, and carried out their will; individuals such as Sir John Bromwich, a life retainer of the 3rd earl, who served as justiciar of Ireland in advance of the earl's personal arrival on the island. The affinities continuity or disintegration through periods of minority will form a key element of this research. When completed, this work will provide the first major study of the later Mortimer lordship across England, Wales, and Ireland.



About the author: Patrick is three years in to his PhD studies at Trinity College Dublin. He has edited the international *Trinity Postgraduate Review*, organised an international postgraduate conference and been Research Officer for the University's Graduate Student Union.

Taxing Virginity – the *amobr* payment

An article by Philip Hume in the July 2020 issue of *Mortimer Matters* discussed the liberties of the Marcher Lords. He referenced *amobr*, describing it as a 'particularly Welsh custom'. It was, in fact, more than that – a basic concept within the Welsh law of women, found in all versions of *Cyfraith Hywel*. Its survival in the March suggests it was a very well-known payment. Here, Dr Sara Elin Roberts, a specialist in medieval Welsh law, explains how it worked.

Marriage according to medieval Welsh law was a contract in which several payments changed hands. The bridegroom would receive his new wife, and in a full, formal marriage she was expected to be a guaranteed virgin. The woman herself would receive particular payments, and the *amobr* would go to the lord, for her virginity. *Amobr* was paid by the person giving the woman, usually her father or a senior male family member, but there were other options too, as the law stated: "Whosoever gives a woman to a man, it is for him to pay her *amobr*, or else let him take sureties from her for paying it. And if she gives herself, let her pay her *amobr*."

All of this describes the fullest 'gift-and-transfer' formal marriage contract, but naturally not all women were married following this procedure, and indeed, other less formal unions are recognised in Welsh law. Steps were therefore taken to ensure that every possible *amobr* payment could be collected: "In three ways *amobr* becomes due for a woman: by gift and transfer, although she be not slept with; and the second, by sleeping openly, although there be neither gift nor transfer; and the third, by her pregnancy."

In earlier versions of the texts, rape is also included as a sexual union, with typical disregard for the woman's feelings: "If it happens that a man admits raping a woman, let him pay twelve kine as *dirwy* [fine] to the King, and her *amobr* to her lord."

However, in later and more developed texts, it is made clear that the lord would not receive *amobr* if a woman is raped, as he had a duty of care to the women in his lordship: "If it happens that a maiden is raped...and the lord claims *amobr* and she says that there is no right to it from her...the law says there that her *amobr* is extinguished because he could not keep her from rape when he was bound to keep her."

Early origins

The idea of the lord as protector of the young women in his kingdom may explain the origin of the payment, and an even earlier concept is the traditional link between kingship and fertility. Indeed, there is a reference to the heir-apparent in Welsh law, the 'edling' (from Old English *aetheling*) as the person with the duty of testing whether a girl is a virgin or not in cases where there may be doubt. Another early passage refers to the chief poet's role in wedding feasts, for which he would receive a fixed fee, and he also had the very special right to receive the *amobr* of the daughters of the *cerddorion* (musicians, poets) under him, as a sort of head of profession. The chief poet was also linked to fertility.

While the explanations and early rules regarding the payment suggest a link to an early society and mythological ideas, the payment itself was certainly long-lasting, mainly due to its being a useful source of income for the ruler. This is apparent in its inclusion in a list of more than thirty payments to the lord found in a later, Marcher manuscript, under the heading 'the many ways by which the lord is entitled to his man's goods lawfully'. It might be better described as a slush fund for the lord!



Sex could be expensive in medieval Wales...

Amobr was, however, a very useful tax, and this no doubt explains its survival in the March, and in later medieval Wales. There are references to it in the post-1282 court rolls from *Dyffryn Clwyd*, and there was even an office, the *amobrydd*, a man responsible for collecting this payment. R. R. Davies states that 'the surveyor of Denbigh in 1334 calculated the return on *amobr* at £41 annually; in Kidwelly in 1395 it realised £21 6s. 8d.; in Clun it was farmed for 15 marks a year...'

It was possible, however, to go too far in exploiting this particular income source. The law texts are clear that *amobr* can only be claimed once, "...it is right that a woman should pay only one *amobr*...", and this seems rather obvious when it is seen as a tax on virginity. However, with typical Marcher adaptability, some lords extended the payment to increase profitability, claiming it every time a woman had illegal intercourse with different men. This happened in Bromfield in 1336, and it clearly became financially crippling for some women's families: it is recorded that three particularly sociable women were given white rods, declaring them as prostitutes, *ne amplius parentele eorum calumpnientur de amobr* (so that their kinsfolk would not henceforth be troubled for *amobr*).



About the author: Dr Sara Elin Roberts is an academic specialising primarily in medieval Wales. She has published widely on various aspects including women, medieval Welsh law, and 14th century Welsh poetry.

Four for your bookshelf

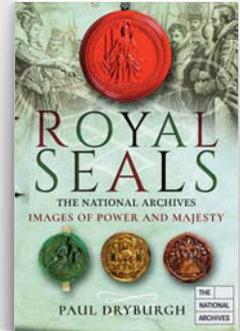
Books we're bringing to your attention for winter 2020 include a compendium of royal seals, a life of Joan, Lady of Wales, and two novels by Society members. Enjoy!

Royal Seals: Images of Power and Majesty

By Paul Dryburgh – Pen & Sword, October 2020

An introduction to the seals of the kings and queens of England, Scotland and latterly the United Kingdom, as well as the Church and nobility. Ranging from medieval times to modern day, it uses images of impressive wax seals from the National Archives to show the historical significance of these beautiful works of art. A comprehensive and lavishly illustrated guide.

Available from www.pen-and-sword.co.uk for special introductory price of £20 valid until end November (RRP £25)

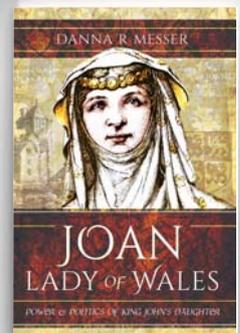


Joan, Lady of Wales: Power and Politics of King John's Daughter

By Danna R Messer – Pen & Sword, September 2020

This, the first ever study of Joan, Lady of Wales, is an important contribution to our understanding of the role and influence of women in medieval society. The illegitimate daughter of King John and wife of Llywelyn the Great, Joan was the most well-known royal lady of her time with a life story marked by family turmoil, divided loyalties and political intrigue

Available from www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, RRP £25

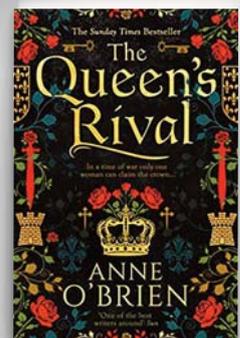


The Queen's Rival

By Anne O'Brien – Harper Collins, September 2020

The latest novel from this best-selling author and Society member features the Yorkist matriarch, Cecily Neville, duchess of York. From the battle of Ludford Bridge to the crowning of her son as Richard III, it charts her quest to claim the throne for her family during the violence and tragedy of the Wars of the Roses.

Available online and from all good bookshops, RRP £20

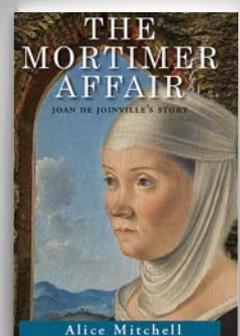


The Mortimer Affair: Joan de Joinville's Story

By Alice Mitchell – You Caxton Publications, 2020

An intriguing fictionalised account of events leading up to and including the deposition of Edward II and his alleged murder at Berkeley Castle told from the point of view of Joan de Joinville. Joan, the wife of Roger Mortimer, first earl of March was married at fifteen and bore her husband twelve children before his rebellion against the crown. His actions brought her great hardship and humiliation, but she found courage to survive it all.

Available at Ludlow's Castle Bookshop and from www.youcaxtonpublishing.co.uk/bookshelf, RRP £12.99





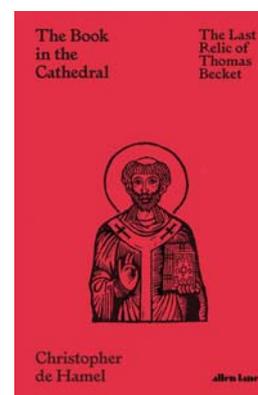
What's under the Mortimer Christmas tree?

As the festive season approaches, Kirsten Lawton-Smith goes on a medieval treasure hunt for Christmas gifts.

Give a book

Ludlow's Castle Bookshop specialises in books related to the Mortimer family, both fiction and non-fiction, as well as history books of the Welsh marches. Just published and available to buy is *The Mortimer Affair* by Alice Mitchell (RRP £12.99), a novel that follows the story of Joan de Joinville, Roger Mortimer's overlooked wife and the heiress to Ludlow Castle. Stanton, the bookshop's ever helpful owner, also recommends novelist Fran Norton's *The Secret, the Sword & the Seal*, due to be published this autumn, which tells the story of Eve de Clavering, married four times including twice to de Audley cousins during the 14th century. Stanton stocks a wide selection of stationery and calendars and is always available to help on 01584 872562 or email castlebookshop@btconnect.com.

Looking beyond the Welsh Marches, other historical books that may be of interest include the excellent *A Short History of the World According to Sheep* by Sally Coulthard (Head of Zeus, RRP £16.99) which cheerfully chews the cud through several millennia of humans and sheep and how both have benefited from each other. Historian Seb Falk's first book *The Light Ages: The Surprising Story of Medieval Science* (Penguin, RRP £20) takes us on an illuminating journey through medieval innovation with the real 14th century monk, John of Weskwyk as our tour guide, a hitherto neglected medieval, English scientist. And unlike a terrified historian from a M.R. James horror story, only good things happen to Christopher de Hamel in libraries and archives. Both James and de Hamel were fortunate enough to work in the Parker Library at Cambridge University, where a psalter



book on the shelves takes de Hamel on a detective hunt for a surprising previous owner. *The Book in the Cathedral* (Allen Lane, RRP £9.99) is elegantly clad in crimson cloth and sweetly-sized to slip into a stocking or two.

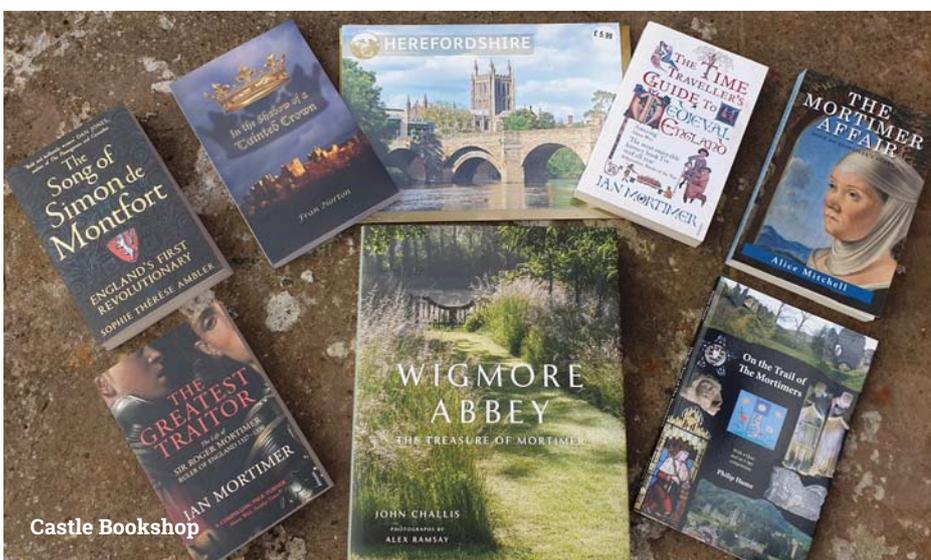
We do of course we recommend all these wonderful books be contained in a Mortimer History Society book bag, available via our website for only £6. We post anywhere in the world.



Signed, sealed and delivered

Want to be a marcher lord and eat the king's seal like Walter Clifford? Well, here's your chance! The National Archives shop produces a delicious replica of the Great Seal of Henry VII in Belgian chocolate (£10). Only a few of these are still available so gobble one up before they go.

And hot off the press from the National Archives and published by Pen & Sword Books, is the sumptuously illustrated book *Royal Seals*, written by Society President, Dr. Paul Dryburgh. See





January 2021 edition of *Mortimer Matters* for a full review.

Speaking of seals, if you are feeling wildly extravagant and wish to give an authentic medieval seal of approval to your Christmas envelopes, why not invest in a piece of history in the shape of a personal seal? This one, featuring three fishes, is a chess piece style seal from around the 13th century and retails at £395.00 from www.antiquties.co.uk.



Most people are familiar with pilgrim badges, but badges produced in the medieval period could also be satirical and scurrilous.



New from Lionheart Pewter Replicas is a badge featuring the Society's favourite queen, Isabella, beating her son, the future Edward III with a big stick and holding out her hand for money. Obviously produced at the height of Isabella's regency and critical of her greed, it's not difficult to envisage Roger Mortimer standing right behind her. This is a faithful copy of the original in the British Museum and costs £7 from www.lionheartreplicas.co.uk

The Grinch may not have quite stolen Christmas yet but he's definitely been causing havoc with our holiday plans. As long trips abroad fade in the memory, why not treat yourself or family and friends with a historical

short-break at one of the Landmark Trust's fascinating buildings? Properties that caught our eye in the Welsh marches include Plas Uchaf, a rare surviving 14th century hallhouse in the Dee Valley and reputedly the seat of the barons of Cymmer who were descended from Madog ap Maredudd, king of Powys. Or there's Stockwell Farm in Old Radnor and Monkton Old Hall, a guest house of the Benedictine priory just opposite Pembroke Castle. Finally there's the stunning Llwyn Celyn in the wild and beautiful valley of Llanthony – a chance to follow in the footsteps of Gerald of Wales who passed through there in 1188. Landmark can provide gift vouchers by post or email from £25.00 upwards.

www.landmarktrust.org.uk



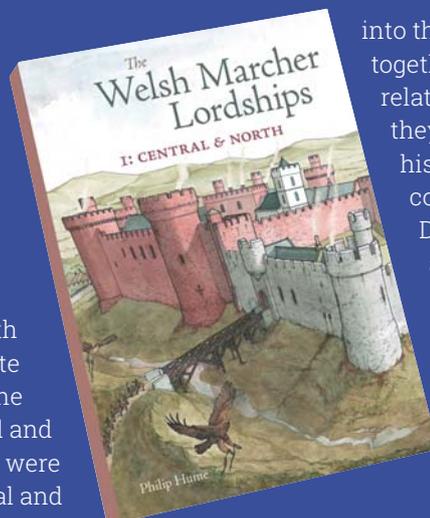
Monkton Old Hall

However you spend Christmas; have a happy – and safe – holiday season!

Marcher lordships – A must read for 2021

The first in a series of books celebrating the Marcher lordships will be published in February 2021, written by Society Secretary, Philip Hume.

For nearly 500 years the Marcher lordships and the Marches were scenes of conflict, devastation and conquest. The region was defined by the nearly fifty Marcher lordships that extended from north Wales and the Dee estuary down to the Severn estuary and across south Wales to the coast of Pembrokeshire. It became a unique area with its own laws and with exceptional powers, politically separate from both Wales and from England. The Marcher lords were barons of England and held their lordships from the king, yet were not subject to many of the institutional and legal structures of the English Crown. This first book of the series gives an insight



into the unique aspects of the Marcher lordships together with the historical context of the turbulent relationships between England and Wales in which they emerged and developed. It also provides brief histories of the lordships in the traditional Welsh counties of Radnorshire, Montgomeryshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire, together with the adjacent lordships in Shropshire and Herefordshire that also became Marcher lordships.

It's not available until February, but you can pre-order now and benefit from a special discount for Society members of only £14.50 (RRP £15.99). Delivery within the UK is free

of charge. Go to www.logastonpress.co.uk to order your copy, entering the code MHS21.

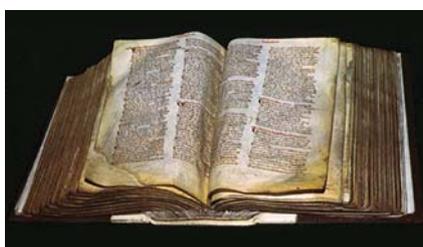
Dip into Domesday

Visit the first ever free online copy of one of the most important historical records ever made – The Domesday Book.

Domesday is Britain's earliest public record. It contains the results of a huge survey of land and landholding commissioned by William I in 1085. Domesday is by the far the most complete record of pre-industrial society to survive anywhere in the world and provides a unique window on the medieval world.

Now you can take a tour of the original Domesday folios detailing the number of households, the economic resources, landowners and the valuation for almost any settlement in England at that time – along with an interactive map to take you to every place in Domesday that can still be located today.

A quick search for Ralph of Mortimer reveals the origins of Mortimer landholdings in Britain. Roger is listed as a 'tenant in chief' – holding land directly from the Crown. He is associated with 159 locations post-Conquest, from Yorkshire in the North, Hampshire in the South as well as Hereford and Shropshire in the west.



Domesday Book – housed in the National Archives, available to you online.

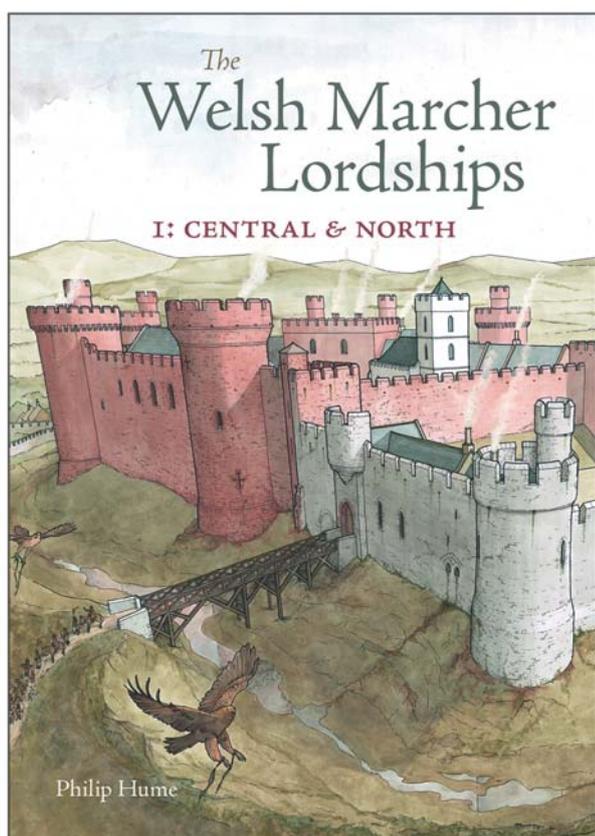
Go online and investigate at www.opendomesday.org.

Welcome to new members

Fourteen new members have joined the Society since the last edition of Mortimer Matters, bringing total membership to 467. Welcome all! We hope you're enjoying your membership and look forward to seeing you soon.

Hugh Brodie	Cardiff
Peter Elliott	Lancaster
Lisa Gravett	Weymouth
Nathan Greaves	Weston-super-Mare
Eoghan Keane	Dublin
Oliver Lewis	Whitney-on-Wye
John and Juliet Lewis	Whitney-on-Wye
Barbara Lloyd	Glasbury
Maureen Lloyd	Builth Wells
Ken Marrable	Ipswich
Jayne Matthews	South Okenden
Elizabeth Newman	Dolau
Eimeara Stapleton	Dublin

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.



LOGASTON PRESS 

The Welsh Marcher Lordships

I: CENTRAL & NORTH

Publication 1 Feb 2021

RRP £15.99

Mortimer History Society Offer
Only £14.50 (incl. free UK delivery)
with code **MHS21** from

www.logastonpress.co.uk