MORTIMER *Matters*

Heraldry at Boxgrove reveals Mortimer connections

Hugh Wood examines Tudor wall paintings in the priory church of Boxgrove that reflect a cherished Mortimer past and a close relationship between the West family and the Mortimers.
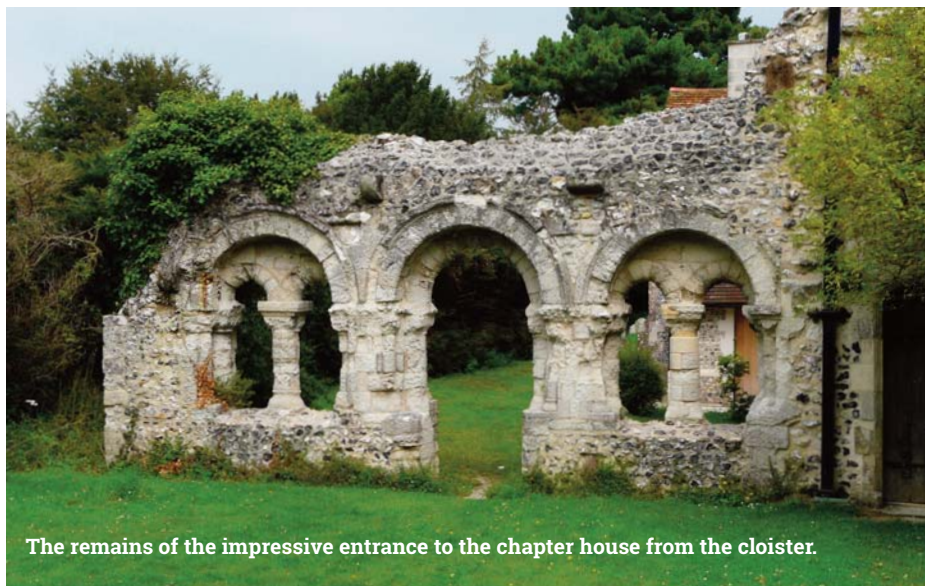
Nestling on the edge of the South Downs in West Sussex, close to Chichester and just off the busy A27, lies the little village of Boxgrove. It was catapulted to national prominence in 1993, when workers in a local gravel pit discovered an early shinbone, identified as belonging to the species, or sub-species, *homo heidelbergensis*. Coming from a direct ancestor of both modern humans and Neandertals, the bone is 500,000 years old, making Boxgrove Man the oldest human ever found in Britain.

But there is much more of historical – and Mortimer – interest in Boxgrove. Around 1117 Robert de la Haye, lord of nearby Halnaker, invited the Benedictine abbey of Lessay in Normandy to establish a daughter house there. Boxgrove priory started in a small way, with just three monks, but medieval piety ensured that it flourished. Alien monasteries were always under threat when the relationship between England and France broke down, and in 1339, during the early stages of the Hundred Years War, the priory cut its ties with Lessay to avoid being taken over by Edward III.

Now, let's fast forward a century or two...

On the death of his father in 1525, Thomas West (1472-1554) became the 9th baron de la Warr and 6th baron West. He was lord of the manor of Halnaker, having married the heiress Elizabeth Bonville, whose family home it had been. Boxgrove Priory was his local religious house and, as owner of

Halnaker, he inherited the priory founder's privileges. In 1532 he commissioned the well-known local painter, Lambert Barnard, to cover the vaulting of the chancel with floral designs incorporating a range of heraldry and badges associated with his family. A few years later he built a lavish chantry chapel, covered in heraldry, where masses could be said for the souls of himself and his family.

The remains of the impressive entrance to the chapter house from the cloister.

In This Issue

The chantry chapel

Almost immediately after the 9th baron de a Warr set up his elaborate chantry chapel and painted the ceiling, the priory was dissolved. Luckily, he gained ownership of the priory lands and managed to arrange for the chancel of the church to be saved and used as the parish church, so we are still able to see what he achieved there.

The heraldry at Boxgrove is chiefly of interest to us because the 9th baron's coat of arms includes a Mortimer quartering. The 9th baron was the heir of his uncle Sir John Mortimer (d1504), the last direct legitimate male descendant of Roger Mortimer of Chirk (d1326). So, while the male line of Mortimers of Wigmore died out in 1425, the Chirk line continued for a further 80 years or so. Moreover, through Thomas West the 'Chirk' version of the Mortimer arms, with the central escutcheon *ermine* rather than *argent*, continued to pop up as a quartering for many more years appearing, notably, on the arms of Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester (d1588).

The arms of the 9th baron de la Warr with Mortimer quartering. The usual blue and gold changed to green and gold, presumably to match the floral design

Sir Hugh Mortimer's arms in a window at Ockwells

This Chirk branch of the Mortimers were no mere country cousins. Sir John's father, Sir Hugh Mortimer of Kyre Wyard and Martley was clearly very well-connected. Though they were only very distant cousins, Sir Hugh Mortimer was a close colleague and supporter of Richard, 3rd duke of York. In the 17th century, both Hugh's and Richard's coats of arms were to be seen in windows in Great Malvern Priory, though Hugh's arms are no longer there. More surprising, perhaps, is his connection to Sir John Norreys, a prominent member of Henry VI's court, who successively held a range of positions including Keeper of the Wardrobe. Around 1450, Sir John rebuilt Ockwells manor near Maidenhead in Berkshire, described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner as 'the most refined and the most sophisticated timber-framed mansion in England'. One of the outstanding features of the house is the wealth of heraldic glass in the hall. It's not clear how or why Norreys and Mortimer became friends, but a whole window there is taken up with Sir Hugh's coat of arms.

The ceiling of the chapel

Sir Hugh died in 1460, presumably alongside Richard of York at the battle of Wakefield. At the time of his father's death, John was a very small child as Sir Hugh had married only five years earlier. John himself later married Margaret, daughter of John Neville, 1st marquess of Montagu, and niece of Warwick the Kingmaker, both of whom had rebelled against Edward IV and died at the battle of Barnet in 1471. John was appointed sheriff of Herefordshire twice during Edward IV's reign and twice again under Henry VII. His attitude to Richard III is not clear but, just two years after Bosworth, he was fighting for the new king against the Yorkist rebels aiming to put Lambert Simnel on the throne. Stoke Field is considered to be the final battle of the Wars of the Roses. Sir John Mortimer was a knight banneret in this victory and it's interesting to note that his commander that day was Sir William Norreys, son of his father's friend, the builder of Ockwells.

About the author: Hugh Wood is a founder member of the Mortimer History Society with an interest in Mortimer genealogy and heraldry, He has held the positions of treasurer, membership secretary and editor of *Mortimer Matters.* He remains responsible for the website.

The interesting life of Thomas West

Thomas West, the 9th baron de a Warr who commissioned the painting at Boxgrove, went on to live a full and interesting life. Here are just a few highlights. He took part in the coronation of Henry VIII in 1509, was knighted while fighting in the French wars and attended Henry at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. In 1539 he was one of the panel of peers summoned to condemn Anne Boleyn, but he became increasingly unhappy with the king's religious reforms. He held firmly to his Catholic beliefs, and came close to disaster when he became a 'person of interest' in connection with the Courtenay Plot of 1538. Interrogated and moved to the Tower of London, he was released due to insufficient evidence. For the rest of his life, he was a significant figure at court, managing to drift politically with the tide. He was made a Knight of the Garter by Edward VI and, avoiding any involvement in Dudley's attempt to put Lady Jane Grey on the throne, actually received a pension from Queen Mary.

The 9th baron's heir presumptive, his nephew William West, hoping to secure his position and move time on a little quicker, attempted to poison his uncle. He was disinherited and put in the Tower, but was later pardoned, and the de la Warr barony was recreated for him. His grandson, the 12th baron, was made Governor and Captain-General of the colony of Virginia for life, and Delaware is named after him – indeed 'de la Warr' is pronounced 'dell-aware'. In 1761 the 16th baron was created Earl de la Warr, and in 1813 the family name changed to Sackville-West, when the 5th earl married a Sackville heiress and thereby acquired their wonderful home at Knole in Sevenoaks.

From your editor

Hello!

Summer is here at last and we're looking forward to some face-to-face events in the second half of the year. There's news in these pages of a wonderful study day that will get us all out and about and, in October, the conference we've waited so long for. Examining the Second Barons' War and held in partnership with the Simon de Montfort Society and the Vale of Evesham Historical Society, our October conference promises to be a revelatory event!

By the way, even with restrictions lifted, we'll still continue with some virtual events, too, giving access to members across the country and overseas.

I'm grateful to all our contributors, and constantly amazed by the wealth of knowledge and experience we're able to draw upon. It seems that, with every issue, we uncover more erudition in our ranks!

We'd love to hear what you think about *Mortimer Matters.* 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 too, so get in touch if you're keen to:

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

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

Exploding the myth:
Women and Power in the Middle Ages

Historian Joanna Laynesmith reveals that medieval women exercised more power than you might imagine, and frequently held authority over the men of their households. Here she reveals the subtle arts of 'ladyship'.

"It is agreed that a woman is subject to the power of a man, and has no authority; nor is she able to instruct nor to be a witness nor to make a promise nor to make a legal judgement." This summary of women's exclusion from power comes from Gratian's *Decretum*. It was the most influential collection of medieval canon law. It had been shaped by many earlier ideas: Greek scholars, Aristotle and Galen, had argued that the difference between the sexes could be understood as a consequence of "deformity" or "mutilation" in the "female state" which made women weaker. The Christian authors Augustine and Aquinas were unwilling to imagine that God had deliberately created something imperfect. Instead, they argued that women's (unquestioned) weakness was divinely ordained to facilitate hierarchy and order in human society. For women's own benefit, Aquinas explained, they should be governed by men whose "rational discernment is by nature stronger". This ideology about natural order underpinned the medieval legal codes in which women had scarcely more independence than children.

Despite this, the idea that only exceptional medieval women exercised power has been thoroughly exploded by scholars in recent decades. Letters, court records, chronicles, parliament rolls, and financial accounts all bear witness to the significant influence some women wielded in all manner of contexts. The underlying assumptions about what women were capable of would always make their exercise of power more complicated than men's, more open to criticism and more fragile. And we should not allow the detailed portraits of powerful women who did exist to mislead us into forgetting that medieval society was securely, often brutally, patriarchal. But women of power were sufficiently commonplace that we can assume every man of substance had some acquaintance with at least one.

Margaret Paston and her respectful husband, John

Married women were not permitted to own property, bring lawsuits, engage in trade in their own right, or even make wills without their husband's consent. Fortunately, many medieval men were willing to respect and trust their wives' judgement. A classic instance of this is the Norfolk gentleman John Paston. In June 1465 he sent his wife Margaret a letter in which he thanked her for dealing with an "unruly fellowship" who had challenged the family's rights to some land and stolen some sheep and cattle. He went on to let her know that he was selling the wool and malt that she had sent to London, referring to it as "your wool" etc. He encouraged her to "make men with force to take the cattle again" with warrants of *replevin* he was sending to her. It is a tiny snapshot of their long and constructive partnership in which she managed their estates while he spent much of his time as a lawyer in London. It is worth mentioning that Margaret came originally from a rather wealthier family than her husband. Quite often where we can see married women wielding significant influence, their social status had been higher than their husband's. This is perhaps one reason why so many widowed noblewomen chose men of rather lower social status as their second husbands.

Lucy de Thweng's unfortunate marriages

Being an heiress or a wealthy widow could, however, make a woman especially vulnerable to attempts at forced marriage. Bridget Wells-Furby explores this in a fascinating study of the Yorkshire heiress Lucy de Thweng. Lucy had been a royal ward and was married off at 15 to the son of one of Edward I's household men. After nine years of marriage, she sued for divorce on the grounds that she was too closely related by blood to her husband. But within months of finally becoming free of that union, she was kidnapped and forced into a second marriage which she seems to have been unable to escape. According to Wells-Furby, women sued for annulments more often than men. Those who did so were almost always either heiresses or were already on their second marriage and had dower from their previous union, so they would have some financial security when the marriage ended. Lucy de Thweng's story shows that support from the men in her family and from local churchmen was also crucial to extricating herself from her first marriage. It gives a sense of how powerfully the odds were stacked against women's influence. Some of the widows who took vows of chastity in the Middle Ages very likely did so to ensure that they could not be forced into marriage in this way. With an appropriate penance it was usually possible to extricate oneself from the vow if circumstances changed.

The benefits of wealthy widowhood

It was only as wealthy widows that women could really exercise power that resembled men's. Quite often their authority was described as 'lordship' but some, like Cecily, duchess of York, preferred to call their agency 'ladyship'. Women could not sit in parliament or on the king's council, they would never be called to defend their king on the battlefield or be able to provide military roles for men in their service. Consequently, this distinction between 'ladyship' and 'lordship' makes sense. Noble widows would routinely meet up with their council (all men) to plan the running of their estates and their household. When problems arose in the administration, letters would be sent in the lady's name, followed up by visits from councillors or other officers. Occasionally the lady would summon those involved to visit her and, with lawyers at her side, attempt to negotiate a settlement in person. Ladyship, like lordship, involved a complex web of networking where who you knew, and who you were related to, was crucial. When Cecily, duchess of York, wanted to protect the interests of one of her chaplains as prior of Folkestone she enlisted both her son, Edward IV, and her cousin the archbishop of Canterbury, to write letters on the chaplain's behalf.

Cecily, pictured here (2nd from right) with her mother and sisters, came from a family of exceptionally influential women.

Sometimes this web of influencers could prove costly for a less powerful petitioner. In the early 1460s, the widowed Elizabeth Lady Grey (née Woodville) asked her distant kinsman, William Lord Hastings to help her reclaim rights to her son's inheritance which her mother-in-law was withholding. In exchange for his help, Hastings expected a share in the profits of the lands recovered and a commitment for Elizabeth's son to marry his (as yet unborn) daughter. In the event, Elizabeth's sudden marriage to the king prevented Hastings from benefiting from this deal.

Persuasion and law

Very often it seems women preferred (or were enlisted) to negotiate with other women: Queens Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville both on occasion negotiated with the wives or mothers of powerful lords to persuade those men to do as they (or the king) wished.

Henry VI's queen Margaret of Anjou used her powers of persuasion to ensure her husband's wishes were met.

When persuasion failed, recourse to the law courts was also possible for a widow. Cecily, duchess of York, took successive sheriffs of Yorkshire to court for failing to pay her an annuity that the king had promised her. She also took a couple of her own officers to court for debt or breach of contract when she felt they had failed in their obligations to her. This resort to hard power was, however, rare for women.

One of the clearest illustrations of the similarities between a noble widow's status and a lord's is to be found in the many manuscripts of the household guidance and estate management that Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, drew up for Margaret de Quincy, countess of Lincoln, in the thirteenth century. These rules swiftly came to circulate as general guidance used by men as often as women. They are also a reminder that women of power were not only exercising authority on their own or their children's behalf. They had responsibility for the wellbeing of up to a 120 household staff and many more officers and tenants employed on their estates. Indeed, as a result of their wealth and social status they were exercising the same sort of beneficent governance that Aquinas had assumed men should exercise over women.

Joanna Laynesmith's biography of Cecily, Duchess of York is now available in paperback and at a 35% discount for Mortimer History Society members. Simply enter the discount code **GLR TW7** when ordering from **www.Bloomsbury.com** to buy your copy for £19.49 (RRP £29.99)

Society member Joanna Laynesmith is the prize-winning author of *Cecily Duchess of York* and *The Last Medieval Queens*. She has taught at the Universities of Oxford, York and Huddersfield and is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Reading. She has published extensively on medieval women.

From necessary defences to luxurious homes: Castles in the central and northern Marches

From very early days the Welsh Marches have had more than their share of castles. Here, Society Secretary Philip Hume summarises the role and evolution of the castle from pre-conquest to the present day.

Many people tell me their interest in medieval history was sparked when their parents took them on visits to ruined castles and abbeys. That was certainly the case for me. Fifty years on, I have vivid memories of my father taking me to the famous sites in North Yorkshire – Scarborough, Pickering, Helmsley and Bolton castles; Whitby, Rievaulx, Fountains and Byeland Abbeys. A ruined castle evokes an enduring fascination for most of us, perhaps because they provide a dynamic link to our country's dramatic past and enable us to sense the lives that were lived in these great buildings.

Much of my life has been spent in the north of England, where there is no shortage of castles. However, when we moved, nearly seven years ago, to live near Ludlow, I was immediately struck by the vast number of castle sites in the area. These range from small motte and bailey sites (often, now, not much more than a bump in a field), to majestic earthworks such as Radnor, Painscastle, Caus, Old Hall Camp; to evocative and commanding ruins such as Wigmore, Clun, Richards Castle and Montgomery; to the extensive remains at Rhuddlan and Denbigh. Not to mention those that have remained as functioning homes down the centuries, such as Powis and Chirk.

In Wales and the Marcher lordships there is a greater concentration of castles than anywhere in Europe – most estimates put the number at over 500. One factor contributing to the density of fortifications was that, as explained in a previous article, Marcher Lords had several extraordinary powers compared

Richards Castle, a rare pre-Conquest castle first built c.1050. The masonry castle dates from about 100 years later; © Philip Hume

to their peers elsewhere in England. One, was the freedom to build castles without reference to the crown. And, because they could, they simply did! In large part, of course, castles were built because they were needed and remained relevant for much longer in the Marches than elsewhere - a consequence of the instability along the border region between England and Wales during the 200 years after the Norman conquest of England.

In earlier periods – Iron Age, Roman, Saxon – fortifications obviously existed, but were communal, established to defend a town or a community. The

castle, as a fortified residence for the lord and his family, or for a knight, was a Norman innovation. Consequently, virtually all the castles in the Marches (and, indeed, in England) were built after 1066. Though a handful were built prior to the conquest, they were of still of Norman origin.

King Edward the Confessor, who reigned from 1042 to 1066, was brought up in exile in Normandy. When he became king of England he brought his Norman relatives, friends, and customs with him. He gave them lands in Herefordshire (probably to provide a counter for the powerful Saxon earls in the area, as well as to aid with the defence of the border region with Wales), with permission to build castles. One of them, Richard fitz Scrob, began construction of a castle in about 1050 at Overton – Richards Castle – to the south of modern-day Ludlow. The foreign innovation of building private castles raised considerable resentment and was one of the factors that led to the banishment of some of the Normans in 1052, though not Richard fitz Scrob.

An explosion of castle building

Richards Castle was the forerunner to an explosion of castle building in the Marches in the years after 1066. Post-conquest, the Normans stamped their control across the country, with the castle as the visible sign of their power and domination. The border region with Wales followed the same pattern. In the five years before his death in 1071, William fitz Osbern, earl of Hereford, had started construction of a string of castles from Chepstow in the south, to Clifford and Wigmore.

Castell Dinas Bran. Built by the rulers of northern Powys it was abandoned and burnt soon afterwards in 1277, before the arrival of the English army; © Philip Hume

While all of the fitz Osbern castles continued for a number of centuries as the caput of a Marcher lordship, many first-generation castles were short-lived forts, solely designed to gain a foothold in an invaded land and to act as a springboard for further advance. For example, the string of castles established by Roger of Montgomery, earl of Shrewsbury, as he moved westwards from Montgomery along the Severn Valley to Moat Lane, and possibly further west. Control of the Severn Valley enabled Roger's forces to mount raids for plunder into south-west Wales in 1073 and 1074. It was also the route taken when he and his sons used the Severn Valley to drive into the heart of Wales in 1093, sweeping down through Ceredigion and on to Pembroke.

With a few exceptions, the first castles built by the Marcher lords utilised earth ramparts and mounds and made good use of the area's plentiful supply of timber in the construction of wooden palisades, and buildings. The most familiar examples are motte and bailey castles introduced to England by the Normans. The motte was a conical mound of earth (sometimes natural, but often constructed) crowned with a timber tower that acted as both a central strongpoint and accommodation. The bailey was the area surrounding the motte, encircled by a timber wall. Timber was the cheapest and most easily available building material and, given sufficient labourers, a castle could be constructed in a matter of months. While less durable than stone, all the evidence suggests that timber castles were formidable. Nearly all minor castles remained as timber structures, but so did some lordship ones, such as Presteigne until it was destroyed in 1262 by the forces of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.

Whilst the military purpose of a castle in the Marches, as a defensive stronghold and a base for offensive operations, remained important for over two centuries, other aspects emerged. The castle became a residence for the lord, baron, or knight and an administrative centre from which the surrounding estates could be run. A venue for the collection of rents, for example, or for the dispensing of justice through the courts. Two forces can be said to have driven the continuing enlargement and development of castles; first, the need to incorporate the latest improvements in fortification and defence; second to meet the need for more comfortable, even luxurious living accommodation. Thus, as time and money allowed, the magnificent stone structures, whose ruins we admire, began to be built.

Princely Welsh and Royal English Castles

Although castles were a Norman innovation, they were soon copied by the native rulers of the Welsh regions. We are fortunate that excellent examples survive in our area, including Castell Crug Eryr on a hilltop with commanding views across Maelienydd; Mathrafal and Castell Dinas Bran that were built by the rulers of Powys; Dolforwyn that was built by Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1273; plus Caergwrle and Ewloe castles in the north.

Many people would argue that castle building reached a peak with the string of imposing castles built by Edward I to enforce his domination after the conquests of Wales in 1276 – 77 and 1282 – 83 that ended native rule. The line of royal castles along the north coast included Flint, Rhuddlan and Conwy. The king was also actively involved in the design and construction of the lordship castles at Denbigh, Ruthin and Chirk.

Denbigh Castle built in the years after 1282 to secure the new Marcher lordship. © Paul R Davis

The demise of the castle

Although the proliferation of castles continued in the Marches for 200 years, the extinction of native rule in Wales following Edward I's conquests meant that many had lost their military and strategic function, so consequently fell into disuse during the fourteenth century. Those that were the centres of lordship administration and provided the household accommodation for the lord and his family continued in use for much longer. Gradually, however, these too fell into disuse, largely for two reasons. First, because the development of gunpowder and the improvements in cannon technology rendered their defences obsolete; and second, because more comfortable accommodation could be provided in new buildings rather than by adapting old castles. However, there are two castles in the region that break this general rule – Powis and Chirk castles have remained occupied across the centuries. Chirk in particular provides visible evidence of design and fashion in household fittings across nearly every era.

Within the scope of this short article, it has been possible to give only a brief overview of the castles in the central and northern region of the Marcher Lordships. Future articles will explore castles within other regions. However, we'd also like to take a 'deep dive' into castles of particular interest. So, if there's a castle in the Marches that you'd love to know more about, do let us know. Simply email the editor at **mm@mortimerhistorysociety. org.uk** to say which castle you'd like to see featured and why.

A medieval Welsh View of the Shropshire Marches

Deborah Gentry's MA dissertation looks for evidence of the intended audience envisaged by the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy,* one of the medieval Welsh prose tales known as the Mabinogion. Here she discusses the geographical and historical scene-setting in the opening of the story.

S ometime in the mid-twelfth century, a Welshman called Rhonabwy and two companions form part of a force dispatched across medieval Powys by its king Madog to search for his errant half-brother Iowerth Goch. Their search takes them to Dudleston, today in northwest Shropshire, but then part of the lordship of Oswestry controlled by Madog. There they find squalid quarters for the night in the house of a man named Heilyn Goch. Falling asleep, Rhonabwy has a vivid, not to say technicolour dream in which he meets king Arthur and his troops, described in terms of heraldic splendour, on their way to fight the battle of Badon.

The bare bones of a story

Such are the bare bones of the medieval Welsh prose tale Breuddwyd Rhonabwy ('The Dream of Rhonabwy'). Although included in the canon of stories known as the *Mabinogion, Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* stands out as an exception amongst the other texts in several respects, most significantly in being the innovative work of a single author without apparent legendary or folkloric origins. By employing the plot device of the dream of an otherwise unknown everyman, the story's creator is able - in modern terms - to 'reboot the Arthurian franchise'. In doing so, he departs from Arthurian tradition by having Arthur encamp on the banks of the Severn somewhere near present-day Buttington and postponing his decisive battle against the Saxons.

Sadly, this means that the 'Arthur of the Marches' as a folkloric figure with a background of local legendary stories, the evidence for whom is derived from this text, existed only in the imagination of the author. However, this is far from meaning that *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* is without importance in the cultural history of the medieval March. Let me explain...

King Arthur, as he may have appeared in Breuddwyd Rhonabwy

From the story, the audience

The story was intended to be read, or perhaps more likely, performed, to an audience. The expected composition of that audience probably influenced the author when he composed the story. Therefore, an examination of the text and its background opens up the possibility to discern the nature and character of its audience.

The audience was clearly expected to be very familiar with the recent history and geography of northern Powys and the adjacent March. Both Madog and his half-brother Iorwerth Goch are historical figures and the scenario presented in the story, whereby a fraternal argument over lordship rights leads Iorwerth to engage in border raiding as far as England, while not attested in extant records, is completely realistic in the historical context. Rhonabwy's journey in search of him is described in some detail as he travels from Halictwn (Halton) just north of Chirk in the area of Aber Ceiriog, where the river Ceiriog meets the river Dee,

southeast to Didlystwn (Dudleston), three and a half miles northeast of Chirk, and four miles northwest of Ellesmere. Dudleston might appear a relatively insignificant location, but in the poem *The Fall Of Powys, by Cynddelw*, Madog's court poet, it is named as one of the sites where Madog with his warband were victorious in battle, marking the eastern extent of his influence.

To continue with the story, Rhonabwy's party find their quarters in the home of Heilyn Goch. Later genealogies show that someone of this name, whose father lived at Dudleston, lived in nearby Pentreheilin in the middle of the thirteenth century, a likely date for the story's composition. His family's residence in this location can be traced back to the Norman Conquest, so that its presence in this disputed area was of long-standing. It is also possible that there may have been someone in the same family also named Heilyn Goch alive at the time the story is envisaged as taking place.

However, the very realism of the story's background raises a fundamental issue of the extent to which the author manipulated historical facts for his own purposes and how his audience viewed his presentation of the past. Was the period of Madog's rule to be regarded as 'the good old days' or 'the bad old days' and why? Commentators have been undecided. On the plus side, Madog was the successful and influential ruler of a united Powys which fragmented after his death, although this was because of the early death of his intended successor Llywelyn rather than the result of any dispute with Iorwerth.

On the other hand, it seems as if the audience is being encouraged to share the views of *Gerald of Wales* in his Description of Wales on the social conditions among the medieval Welsh. Composed in 1188 by someone who was himself one quarter Welsh but three-quarters Anglo-Norman, it was hardly very flattering to the inhabitants of Wales. Gerald noted among their less praiseworthy habits that the Welsh lived on plunder, not only from foreigners but also from each other, while their desire to hold land was such that, amongst brothers, arguments over the division of property led frequently to fratricide.

On a positive note, Gerald recorded that generosity and hospitality were the greatest virtues of the Welsh: guests who arrived early in the day were entertained by young girls playing the harp until the evening meal was prepared, when the whole family waited upon them. The food offered was plain, but the bread was freshly baked, and if there was a shortage, the hosts went without. The sleeping arrangements were uncomfortable, consisting of a communal bed laid against one wall, stuffed with barely-sufficient rushes and a hard sheet over them.

In the story, Rhonabwy's reception is a parody of this description. Instead of finding a harp-playing maiden, he is met by an old crone who ignores him, and the hosts, when they arrive, greet him coldly, offering him a poor supper of barley bread, cheese and watered-down milk. His sleeping quarters are ankle-deep in cow-dung, the bed consists of the flea-infested ends of straw and twigs (everything else having been eaten by the cattle) and the tattered sheet has large holes in it.

Needless to say, it is highly unlikely this picture in any way reflected the reality of Heilyn Goch's house. From the genealogy set out in the story, it would have been obvious to a knowledgeable local audience that Heilyn Goch was a descendant of Rhys Sais, an ancestor claimed by many noble families in the area. Amongst his other descendants were Roger de Powys and his brother Ionas, contemporaries and associates of Iorweth Goch and, like him, the recipients of payments for border services from Henry II.

The scene setting of Rhonabwy's dream forms only a small part of the overall tale, the meat of which is his encounter with King Arthur. What that episode can reveal about the unusual Welsh audience envisaged by the author is beyond the scope of this article, but this enigmatic story remains a highly entertaining one is its own right.
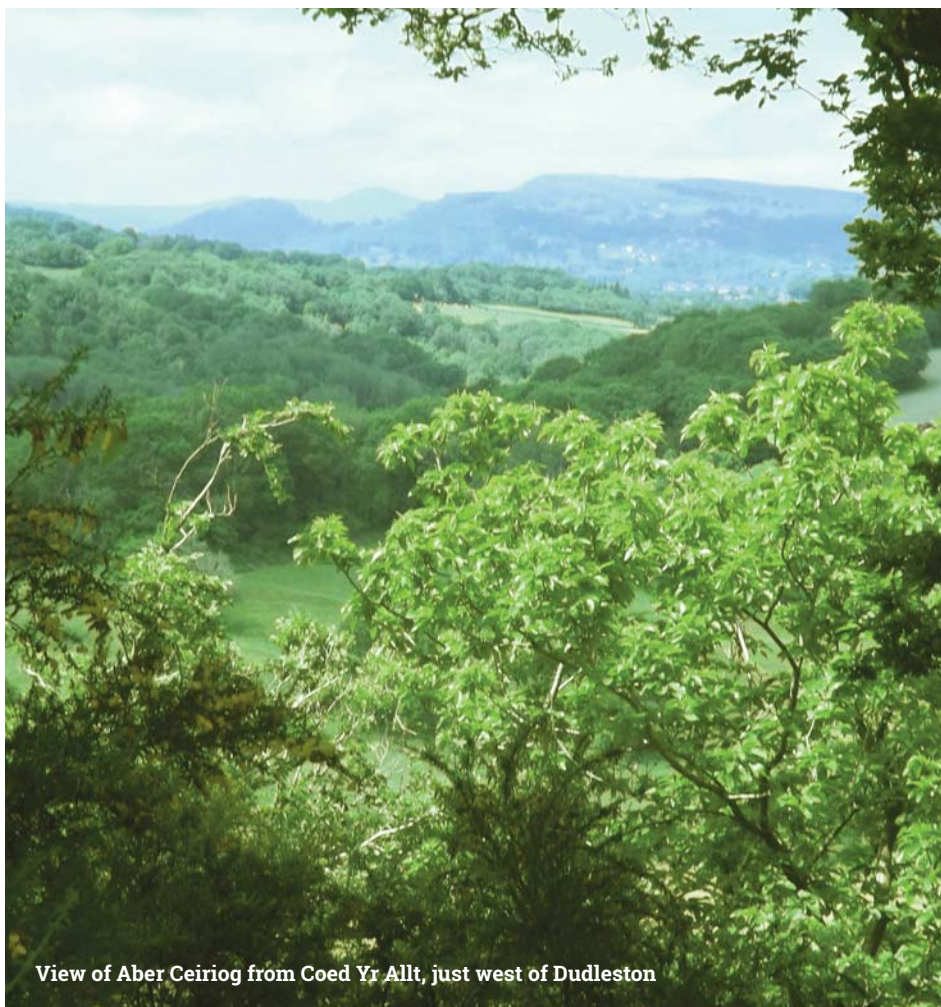
View of Aber Ceiriog from Coed Yr Allt, just west of Dudleston

About the author: Deborah Gentry is completing a dissertation on *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* as the final part of an MA in Celtic Studies with the University of Wales Trinity St David, Lampeter.

A life in academia

Dr David Stephenson, one of the country's most revered Welsh history scholars gives us an insight into his life as an academic and his revelatory assessment of Wales in the Middle Ages.
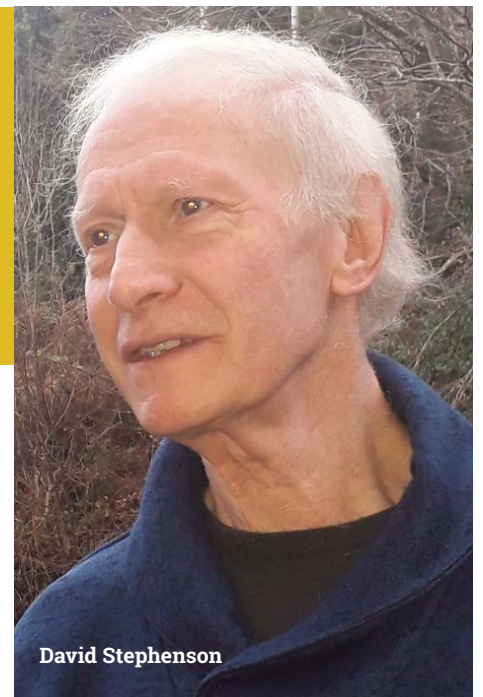
David Stephenson

I've not had an entirely conventional academic career. My undergraduate and post-graduate studies were at Oxford, where I wrote my DPhil thesis addressing a problem hitherto thought insoluble: 'How did the thirteenth-century princes of Gwynedd become so dominant in Wales?' This was subsequently published by University of Wales Press in 1984 as The Governance of Gwynedd (republished in a second edition as *Political Power in Medieval Gwynedd* in 2014). After a spell as a lecturer at Colchester Institute and then a return to Oxford where I had been elected to the Maurice Bowra Senior Research Fellowship at Wadham College, I moved to Cambridge, where my career took a different direction. I combined part-time university teaching with running an independent college which I had founded. For nearly twenty years I worked mainly on contemporary history and politics, of the UK, of the Soviet Union and its successor states, of the Soviet satellite states, and of the People's Republic of China. That time was certainly not wasted: I'm sure that my experience of Soviet satellite states has helped me to understand the complexities *mutatis mutandis* of the situation of medieval Powys. The work I was doing in contemporary British and communist and post-communist regimes was fascinating, but I began to feel the need to get back to full-time work on medieval Wales, and when Bangor offered me an honorary Research Fellowship I left Cambridge, and came to live in mid-Wales. My work in Wales has, *inter alia*, combined research and writing with teaching adult classes on medieval Welsh history.

Focus on Wales

My writing has focused almost entirely on medieval Wales – the single greatest exception being a history of Llanidloes, the small town where I live with my wife Jan. The local bookshop asked me to write this in 2010, and it was an interesting challenge to produce a survey of the town's development from the early middle ages to the twenty-first century. It was a diversion from my more serious endeavour to rewrite the story of the medieval period in Wales.

Much of the research and writing on medieval Welsh and Marcher history had previously centred on the role of Gwynedd, seen as the power-house of Wales in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The South-west, the realm of Deheubarth was noticed by historians when it was in the hands of the Lord Rhys – as it represented for a time in the twelfth century the principal driving force in the creation of a Welsh hegemony. That had for long been a dominant element in Welsh medieval history. Taking a lead from Sir John Edward Lloyd in his magnificent *History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, the whole story of Wales had been compressed into an account of the progress of great leaders like Owain Gwynedd and the Lord Rhys in the twelfth century and the Llywelyns in the thirteenth towards a united principality of Wales.

Some of David's best-known titles

Challenging the narrative

In my doctoral thesis, I had by implication bought in to the Gwynedd-centred narrative of Welsh medieval history – a narrative of valiant attempts to construct a principality of Wales under the leadership of the rulers of Gwynedd, which was eventually cruelly terminated by the brutal conquest of Edward I. Ironically, it was shortly after the completion of my thesis that I began to have doubts about the validity of that narrative. It was not totally wrong, of course, but it neglected the evidence that in much of Wales, including Gwynedd itself, there were many who resisted what I later described as Gwynedd imperialism, and sought instead the survival of smaller, regional

polities, while even after the Edwardian conquest, there were many Welshmen, in both *pura Wallia* (pure native Wales) and the March, who settled easily and prosperously into the new order of things. First among these was Powys, and after an initial exploration, published in 1984, of parts of Powys, I returned to this subject when I came to Wales in 2002. It took fourteen years, and some thirty preparatory articles in the learned journals, before I published *Medieval Powys: Kingdom, Principality and Lordships, 1132-1293* in 2016. The impact of this book has been considerable with one reviewer commenting that I had 'almost single-handedly changed the historiographical landscape.' I was particularly pleased when Medieval Powys was awarded the Francis Jones prize in Welsh History by Jesus College, Oxford, in 2017.

Even before *Medieval Powys* was published, I was commissioned by University of Wales Press to write the inaugural volume in the series 'Rethinking the History of Wales', which appeared in 2019 under the title *Medieval Wales c1050-1332: Centuries of Ambiguity*, in which I have tried to emphasise the numerous contradictory trends in the history of that period. Later this year, my next book, *Patronage and Power in the Medieval Welsh March: One Family's Story* is scheduled to be published, again by University of Wales Press. It tells the story of a single Welsh family from the Marchland, Hywel ap Meurig and his descendants, who played a central role in the politics of the March, Wales, and increasingly England, between the thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries.

Acknowledging the greats
In terms of academic influences on my work, I count myself very lucky that I was supervised by Rees Davies. It became clear that there was no-one in Oxford who could provide effective supervision and so I was introduced to Rees, who was then a young lecturer at University College, London. My periodic visits to UCL to discuss progress were always a delight – with serious work interspersed with gossip about London,

Wales and Oxford. When Rees (or Professor Sir Rees Davies, as he had become) died in 2005, I acquired a number of his books, in which I still find little scraps of paper with my name on them and some reference which Rees wanted to pass on to me. His insistence on buttressing every point of an argument with detailed references has stayed with me, and his demonstration that no category of evidence should be neglected has been a constant inspiration. Indeed, I think that the integration of diverse types of material for the reconstruction of medieval events and situations has been a characteristic of my own research. I have published articles on medieval Welsh Law and legal process, on medieval Welsh poetry as historical source material, on Welsh chronicles and their importance, on Welsh castles and their landscapes as well as on political and social developments in general and the impact of persons who seem to me to have been particularly significant.

In Colchester I was introduced to the work of J. H. Round (d. 1928). Round has a somewhat evil reputation as a vicious controversialist, but his work is always a revelation in terms of his insistence on accuracy and thoroughness. He was justly regarded as one of the figures who moved medieval history forward from a literary pursuit, often with little concern for accuracy and the proper treatment of sources, to a more professional study. It was Round, more than any other figure, who 'frightened a whole generation into historical accuracy'. I sometimes wonder if my early enthusiasm for his work has contributed to what one reviewer of *Medieval Powys* described as my 'lively but courteous combativeness.'

Passing knowledge on
Teaching has focused on adult classes, which have developed steadily in recent years, first under the auspices of Aberystwyth University, and then as an independent enterprise. Classes have covered many aspects of Welsh history, from the post-Roman period to the fifteenth century – a span of around a

thousand years. In addition, we have developed the habit of spending one term of each academic year looking at topics significantly beyond Wales and the March, but still focused on the medieval period. These have included such diverse topics as the following: the Valois dukes of Burgundy in the 14th and 15th centuries; Medieval West Africa; the Kingdom of the Isles; the 12th and 13th centuries in Ireland; the Mongol empire in the 13th and 14th centuries. These adventures in time and place have certainly been eye-openers to many members of the classes, as they often involve the destruction of popularly accepted stereotypes.

I greatly enjoy teaching adult classes. The members of the adult groups that I lecture to – between 80 and 100 people attend, every week – in three or four classes per week, bring such a variety of experience, interests, knowledge and perspectives to the classes, which ensures that lectures are very fulfilling. Classes have had a distinct impact on my work – with many terms providing ideas that have resulted in publications of my own and, even more exciting, those of members of the History groups. The difficulties of the Covid pandemic have actually had one very positive result, in that they have meant that for several terms classes have been held by Zoom. This has opened entry to classes to those who live a long way from my physical base in the upper Severn valley in mid-Wales. As of now I even have class-members who live in the USA – from Chicago and even California, as well as members from many parts of the UK and Ireland.

So, writing books and articles, examining masters and doctoral theses, doing peer-reviews for publishers, book reviewing, acting as the Programme Secretary for the Powysland Club and lecturing all make for a pretty hectic life.

For more information about David's history courses for adults – several Mortimer History Society members already attend – just drop him a line at **stephenson824@msn.com**.

Dr David Stephenson is Honorary Research Fellow in the School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences at Bangor University. He is also a prize-winning author and is currently completing a book on a prominent medieval Welsh Marcher family.

The making of a prince...

Our October conference dives deep into the Second Barons' War (1258 to 65). A period of turmoil for the country, it was also the crucible in which the character of Edward I – one of our great medieval kings – was tested and forged. So says Dr Andrew Spencer, one of our eminent conference speakers. Ahead of the conference, *Mortimer Matters* editor Annie Garthwaite quizzed Andrew on the details of this most compelling coming of age story.

Dr Andrew Spencer

Edward, says Andrew, enjoyed one blessing denied to most medieval kings – the opportunity to test himself, make mistakes and learn his craft before he came to the throne. It's a good point. By contrast his father became king at the age of nine and his growing pains were both evident and very consequential. When the period of reform and rebellion that led to the Second Barons' War began in 1258, Edward was just 19 years old, his father had been on the throne for almost forty years and had almost a decade and a half of life left. Edward's time at the top was still to come and, as young men do, he was questioning everything – his understanding of kingship, his relationship with his father, his respect for the royal establishment and his tolerance for reform. The Second Barons' War gave him all the answers he needed.

By the time the Battle of Evesham brought the war to an end, Edward's character was set, defined by loyalty to his father, protectiveness of his royal rights and a determination never to be on the losing side again. "During this period," claims Andrew, "Edward developed the mindset and skills of a consummate politician; a preparedness to lie for advantage, to build bridges with former enemies, and a self-confidence that allowed him to be both flexible or immovable, as the occasion demanded."

Much of Andrew's talk will focus on the pivotal year between 1264 to 65, which saw a defeated Edward, alongside his father, became the puppet of his former much-admired friend and uncle, Simon de Montfort. "Forced to give up his Marcher lands and his Lordship of Chester, imprisoned, impoverished and humiliated, Edward faced a dark night of the soul," says Andrew. "When he at last emerged into the light of morning, and triumphed against the odds at Evesham, he was determined never to be put in such a position again."

Nor was he. Edward remains one of only two medieval English kings never to face armed rebellion from his subjects during his reign. In this way, the Second Barons' War was the making of a prince: Edward I – a lion of fierceness and pride.

Andrew's fascination with Edward I began in childhood, when this great warrior king impressed him as the most glamorous character in his *Kings and Queens of England* picture book. It became a serious pursuit when, studying for his degree at King's College London and inspired by fellow speaker David Carpenter, he focused in on Edward's kingship and became a determined medievalist.

Today he's a senior tutor at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and an affiliated lecturer in history. His monograph, *Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England: the earls and Edward I, 1272 – 1307* examines the role the nobility played in politics and governance under Edward I. Andrew has published widely on politics, war and the constitution in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and is a current co-editor of the *Thirteenth Century England series*.

The Second Barons' War and the Battle of Evesham
Three societies – one glorious conference

Our 2 October conference brings together the Mortimer History Society, the Simon de Montfort Society and the Vale of Evesham Historical Society to investigate the Second Barons War, which began in the 1250s and concluded with the Battle of Evesham in 1265. This dramatic series of events was critical in determining the future course of England and pivotal to the fortunes of the Mortimer family. Society Secretary Philip Hume explains why.

In 1246, when an under-aged Roger Mortimer came into his inheritance, the Mortimers were significant barons in the Welsh Marches, but very much in the second tier of the national barony. By the time of Roger's death in 1282, he had propelled his family to the forefront of national politics. Much of his success grew from his support to the crown given during the wars.

Shortly after inheriting, Roger married the heiress Matilda de Braose, who brought important lands and Marcher lordships to the Mortimer family. However, during the 1250s Roger experienced setbacks and, by his reckoning, was the loser in some decisions made by the Crown. Indeed, as opposition to the rule of Henry III took shape towards the end of the decade, Roger sided first with the baronial faction before being won over to the royal cause.

Once won over, he became a staunch supporter. Indeed, it was Roger who engineered the escape from captivity in Hereford of the heir to the throne, the Lord Edward. Roger commanded a division of the royal army at Evesham and personally slew Simon de Montfort, subsequently dispatching Simon's severed head to Wigmore as a trophy for his wife, Matilda. Fifteen years later, when the Lord Edward went on crusade, Roger was among those named as trustees for his children and estates. When the old king died during the Lord Edward's absence, Roger and two others of the trustees acted as his virtual regent for two years. He was also the commander of one of the three armies assembled for the invasion of Wales in 1276 – 77. Alongside forging a position as one of the most powerful barons in the country and a friend of the king, Roger was rewarded handsomely with lands, Marcher lordships and new powers, making the Mortimer family one of the most prominent in the land.

From the viewpoints of the war's key players

Our conference explores the Second Barons' War through the perceptions and actions of its key players – Henry III, Simon de Montfort, Eleanor de Montfort, the Lord Edward and, of course, Roger Mortimer.

Henry III: the Captive King 1264 – 5
Presented by Professor David Carpenter, Henry III's biographer and Professor of Medieval History at King's College London.

St Simon de Montfort and the battlefield cult at Evesham
By Dr Sophie Ambler, Lecturer in Later Medieval History at Lancaster University and author of *The Song of Simon De Montfort: England's first revolutionary and the death of chivalry.*

A Rebel Princess: Eleanor de Montfort, Countess of Leicester and Pembroke, and the Second Barons' War
By Professor Louise Wilkinson, Professor of Medieval Studies at the University of Lincoln and author of *Eleanor de Montfort: A rebel countess in medieval England.*

The Leopard Prince: Lord Edward in the Second Barons' War
By Dr Andrew Spencer, Senior Tutor at Gonville and Caius College and an Affiliated Lecturer in History at Cambridge University. Author of *Nobility and Kingship in Medieval England: the earls and Edward I.*

'And With His Lance he Struck Him Through the Neck': Roger Mortimer and the Second Barons' War
By Dr Andy King, Lecturer in History at the University of Southampton and author of *Edward I: A new King Arthur?*

Investigate Evesham

This character-led conference will be held at Prince Henry's High School in Evesham on 2 October. Registration opens at 09:15am and we'll be all finished by about 16:15, leaving you free to investigate historic Evesham.

Booking for this event will open soon – an email will be sent to all members of the three societies with all the details you need.

Keep the date!

At time of writing, we are very much hoping that Government Covid restrictions will be lifted on 19 July. Based on that assumption, we are pressing ahead with physical events. What a relief it will be to finally see each other! We'll meet in person for the first time for our August Study Day and then for our Autumn Conference in October.

Sunday 15 August

Study day visit to Hellens House, St Bartholomew's church in Much Marcle and St Mary's church, Kempley – a fine Jacobean House and two medieval churches. A self-drive tour setting off from Hellens House in the morning. There'll be time for a decent lunch break (BYO) at Much Marcle village hall, which provides parking. We hope people will be able to car share from the village hall car park as there is limited space at St Mary's church. To secure your place please go to **www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk/events**.

Saturday, 2 October
'The Murder of Evesham for Battle it was None': The 2nd Barons' War and the Battle of Evesham 1258 to 66

Our first joint conference with the Simon de Montfort Society and the Vale of Evesham Historical Society will include presentations by Professor David Carpenter on Henry III, Dr Sophie Ambler on Simon de Montfort, Dr Andy King on Roger Mortimer (d1282), Louise Wilkinson on Eleanor de Montfort, and Dr Andrew Spencer on the Lord Edward. Each speaker will tell the story of the 2nd Barons' war and the battle of Evesham from the viewpoint of their character. To secure your place please go to **www.mortimerhistorysocietey.org.uk/events**.

Saturday 20 November

Half-day online conference exploring the reign of Edward III and the contribution of the Mortimers.

Saturday 12 February 2022
### People of the March

A half-day online conference.

Saturday 26 March

AGM to be held in Weobley, followed by a talk about medieval Weobley.

Saturday 14 May
Murder, Mayhem and Marriage

Cancelled in 2020 because of Covid, this event, held in partnership with Radnorshire Society will be held at last in Knighton.

See future issues of *Mortimer Matters*, plus our web and social media pages for updates to our event schedule as our plans develop.
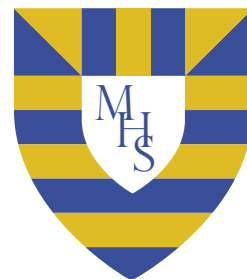
Mortimer History Society Essay Prize 2021

Now open for entries!

The Essay Prize goes from strength to strength and we're delighted to confirm that we're maintaining for 2021 the extended entry criteria introduced last year.

The competition welcomes essays that relate to:
- Any aspect of the history, geo-politics, topography, laws, economy, society and culture of the medieval borderlands, including comparative studies, between 1066 and 1542.

Or...
- Any aspect of the medieval Mortimer family of Wigmore, including its cadet branches and its impact on the history and culture of the British Isles.

There will be a first prize of £750, a second prize of £300 and a third prize of £200. Also, this is a great opportunity to have your work published in next year's 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.

The closing date for entries is 1 March 2022. Further details about the prize and entry requirements can be found at **www.motimerhistorysociety.org.uk**.

The Journal – coming soon!

Volume 4 of the Mortimer History Society Journal will be published and distributed to members later this summer. It will include previous prize-winning essays from Dr Simon Egan of Glasgow University, Connor Williams and Doreen Bowen.

The Red Prince:
The life of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster

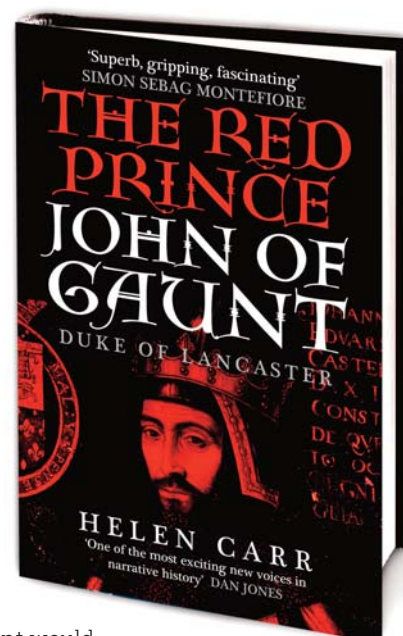### By Frances Helen Carr, Simon & Schuster, April 2021

Helen Carr's debut biography, *The Red Prince*, gives a compelling account of one of the fourteenth-century's most controversial figures.

John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, was the founder of the royal house of Lancaster, which ruled England for the first half of the fifteenth-century. Although well known in academic circles, he remains a cloudy figure in wider public discourse and Carr has certainly made a good job of bringing his story to the fore. Carr takes a dual approach to her narrative. First, she explains the wider context of the fourteenth-century, with its key events including the Hundred Years' War, Castilian Civil War and Peasants' Revolt, then explains Gaunt's role and importance to the period. Time and again, Gaunt is at the centre of political controversy and foreign diplomacy, which Carr does an excellent job of contextualising. Furthermore, her prose is faultless and very easy to read, making The Red Prince very difficult to put down once begun.

As many Society members will know, John of Gaunt and the Lancastrian's were themselves powerful marcher lords, with John of Gaunt inheriting half a dozen castles in Wales including Grosmont and Kidwelly. However, it was arguably his son, Henry Bolingbroke, (Henry IV from 1399), who did most to enhance the Lancastrian's marcher holdings through his marriage to a de Bohun heiresses in 1381 – an event which Gaunt was instrumental in orchestrating.

Sadly for we Mortimer enthusiasts, Wales and the Marches play only a small role in Carr's narrative. Naturally enough she focuses on Gaunt's national political importance on a national and international stage. For anyone interested in the Hundred Years' War, the House of Lancaster or medieval history in general, this book will be a must read.

Other important marcher figures who make cameo appearances in Carr's book include Edmund Mortimer, third earl of March, and his steward Sir Peter de la Mare, central figures in the Good Parliament of 1376, which John of Gaunt was forced, due to the age of his father and the illness of his elder brother, to oversee as the next most senior royal. The Good Parliament was a humiliating episode for the crown, and Peter de la Mare as the house speaker and Commons' representative was at the centre of it, while the earl of March was selected to act as a go-between between the Commons and the Lords due to his support for the Commons' demands. Gaunt would not forget this, and, at the first opportunity, was instrumental in reversing all of the Good Parliament's decisions at the Bad Parliament the following year. Peter de la Mare was arrested and interred at Nottingham Castle, while Edmund Mortimer was stripped of the Marshalcy and sent into political exile as the new Lieutenant of Ireland, where he died of an unknown illness at the end of 1381.

Despite its eloquence, there are some issues with Carr's narrative. There are several factual errors throughout the book. Although forgivable individually, their number suggests a lack of editorial care. A couple of examples include stating Richard II was the king in 1376 when in fact it was Edward III; that Simon Burley was the Duke of Lancaster's steward when in fact it was Richard Burley; and that the earls of Wiltshire and Surrey were amongst the counter-appellants in 1397 when, in fact, neither of those previous titles were in use at the time. There is also a lackadaisical approach to footnoting.

Carr also fails to critically engage with the chronicle sources she leans on heavily. Though valuable, chronicles can be misleading and disproportionately bias towards their patrons. Carr, however, appears to take their accounts at face value without challenging the context and for their viewpoint. This is especially problematic for the reign of Richard II, whose deposition in 1399 was followed by a rewriting of history designed to justify the Lancastrian usurpation. Several negative chronicles were re-written or existing writings changed. When discussing Richard II as a king, and his relationship with his uncle John of Gaunt, Carr propagates the pro-Lancastrian view of these chronicles that Richard was tyrannical and avaricious throughout his reign. This allows Gaunt to appear as an elder statesman, forced to keep his petulant nephew under control for the prosperity of the realm. More recently scholars such as Saul, Bennett and Fletcher have challenged this viewpoint in favour of a more revisionist stance.

Nevertheless, *The Red Prince* is a great read for anyone interested in learning more about the Lancastrians or the Hundred Years' War. I look forward to seeing what else Carr produces both academically and publicly.

About the reviewer: Connor Williams is a PhD student at the University of Nottingham, specialising in wardships in 14th century England.

For your bookshelf

Some great reads this issue – from the first Edward and Henry to kings who might be called usurpers. Enjoy!

Edward I and Wales, 1254-1307

**By David Pilling**, Pen & Sword Books, June 2021

This latest study of Edward I's Welsh wars draws upon previously untranslated archive material, allowing a fresh insight into military and political events. Edward's personal relationship with Welsh leaders is also reconsidered. Traditionally, the conquest is dated to the fall of Llywelyn in December 1282, but this book argues that Edward was not truly the master of Wales until 1294. In the years between those two dates he broke the power of the great Marcher lords and crushed two more large-scale revolts against crown authority.
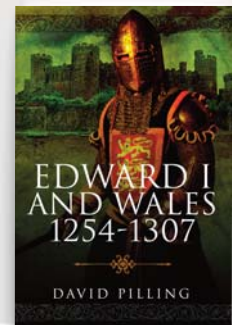
The White Ship: Conquest, Anarchy and the Wrecking of Henry I's Dream

By Charles Spencer, William Collins, June 2021 (paperback)

The sinking of the White Ship on 25 November 1120, killing Henry I's only legitimate heir is one of the greatest disasters England has ever suffered, unleashing two decades of civil war. Written to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the sinking, this book evokes the tragic and brutal story of the Normans from Conquest to Anarchy.
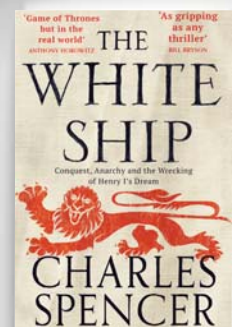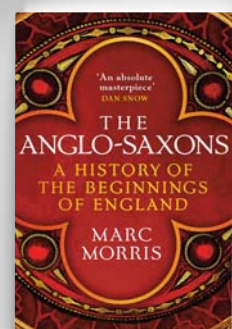
Available via all online and high street book retailers. RRP £25 (hardback) and £9.99 (paperback)

The Anglo-Saxons: A History of the Beginnings of England

By Marc Morris, Hutchinson, May 2021

1,600 years ago, Britain left the Roman empire and swiftly fell into chaos. Into this unstable country came foreign invaders from across the sea, who established themselves as the new masters. The Anglo-Saxons traces the turbulent history of these people across six centuries as a new society, a new culture and a single, unified nation came into being. It illuminates a period of history that is only dimly understood, separates truth from legend, and shows how the foundations of England were laid.

Available via all online and high street book retailers. RRP £25.

Usurpers: A New Look at Six Medieval Kings

By Michele Morrical, Pen & Sword Books, September 2021

Medieval England had to contend with a string of usurpers who disrupted the monarchy and ultimately changed the course of European history by deposing reigning kings and seizing power for themselves. They included, William the Conqueror, Stephen of Blois, Henry Bolingbroke, Edward IV, Richard III and Henry Tudor. This book considers whether these six individuals deserved the title usurper, or were they unfairly vilified by royal propaganda and biased chroniclers.
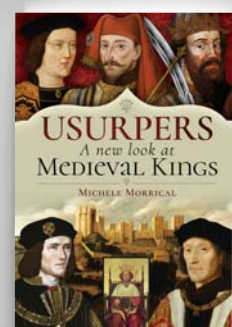
Available to pre-order now from www.pen-and-sword.co.uk at the special introductory price of £20 (RRP £25).

Anthology writers...

As reported in the last issue of Mortimer Matters, the Mortimer History Society will mark the 700th anniversary of Roger Mortimer's escape from the Tower by publishing an anthology of Mortimer-related essays by respected scholars. Here two of those scholars, Dr David Stephenson of Bangor University and Melissa Julian-Jones of Cardiff University give us a sneak preview of their contributions.

The Mortimers and their social circle
Dr Melisssa Julian-Jones

"I'll be looking at the Mortimers' social circle in the thirteenth century, placing them in the context of the Marches and events during the reigns of Henry III and Edward I," says Melissa.

"This was a time when hostilities between the Marcher Lords, though not unheard of, were much less common than in previous years. The strength of particular families and their allies, forming power centres in particular regions, may have had a lot to do with this, as well as increased interactions and intermarriage with Welsh rulers.

"The extent to which such networks were instrumental in the power constructions of particular regions and in informing the culture of the Welsh Marches as a whole is something that's been touched on in the historiography, mainly in the context of what Marcher lordships were, how they were formed and expanded, and economic and legal questions. Marcher women and their involvement in politics is a growing area of study, not just in the context of marriage and inheritance, but also in terms of espionage and direct influence.

"The deeper, more focused study of social structures and networks is a much less studied area," says Melissa, "That includes social connections to and interactions with the clergy in this part of the world – who was inviting the bishop to dinner, versus who was imprisoning the bishop's men – and how this played into the power dynamics of a lordship and the families involved."

Melissa's article will take a cursory look at the social connections of the Mortimer family, identifying a few key allies and the impact this allegiance had on the stability and consolidation of their grip on their lands, and how they were embedded into the March's political and sociocultural landscape.

The Mortimers and their tenantry
Dr David Stephenson

"I'll be writing about the Mortimers and their Welsh tenantry and followers," says David. "A relationship that seems to have played a considerable part in the establishment and continuation of Mortimer power in the March and in Wales."

He explains; "The first signs of that relationship come with a group of Welsh witnesses to the Mortimer charter of 1199, an early manifestation of the recognition by Marcher lords that the Welsh nobility of their lordships should be integrated into the structures of governance. In the next generation we see the first appearance of one particular family – that of Hywel ap Meurig - amongst the several Welsh witnesses to Mortimer charters of c.1241. Hywel ap Meurig himself went on to become a major figure in the politics and administration of Wales and the March, acting as Roger Mortimer's steward, as well as the steward of Edward I, and of Humphrey de Bohun, lord of Brecon. Hywel's sons were prominent supporters of Roger Mortimer, first earl of March, and their careers flourished and suffered in parallel with that of their patron. But as well as involvement with the developing Welsh administrative elite, the Mortimers were able to rely on their numerous Welsh tenantry to intimidate opponents even as far as London. In numerous ways then, the Welsh of the Mortimer lordships of the March were a key element in the family's success."

The anthology, slated for publication by Logaston Press will be launched at the Tower of London on 1 August 2023, when the Society will meet to commemorate Roger's daring bid for freedom.

For you! Discounted access to nationwide local history events

Your Society has recently become a member of the British Association for Local History (BALH). As a result, all our members are eligible to attend BALH events at a generously discounted rate.

The BALH is a national organisation focused exclusively on local history. It's members are historians, interested amateurs and local history organisations such as our own. You can find out more about BALH and its activities – including its events programme – at www.balh.org.uk.

If an event takes your fancy and you want to access your discount, simply enter this code when booking your place F-32236V.

'We're constantly searching for new benefits and advantages we can offer to members of the Society,' says Mortimer History Society Secretary, Philip Hume. 'This one seems like a real bonus – access to a vibrant events programme that complements our own.'

The BALH also offers a range of publications and an excellent online 'Ten Minute Talks' programme available through its website.

Coming up in the next issue of Mortimer Matters

Our autumn issue will be arriving on your screens or doormats in early November, with some great pre-Christmas content. Look out for:

- **Out and About: The Mortimers and the Marches.**
  Philip Hume and Paul Dryburgh offer a comprehensive introduction to the Mortimers and the March. Think of it as a boot camp for beginners!
- **International Medieval Congress 2021**
  Paul Dryburgh reviews this global event, hosted by the university of Leeds and, for the first time, sponsored by The Mortimer History Society.
- **Looking towards 2022**
  News of our 2022 events programme, which will blend both in-person and virtual events. Our aim is to keep everyone connected and involved.
- **The Mortimer Anthology**
  Insights from two more writers contributing to the anthology your society is creating to mark the 700th anniversary of Roger Mortimer's escape from the Tower.
- **Book Review:** *Matilda – Lady of Hay: The life and legends of Matilda de Braose by Peter Ford.*

All this and more. Aren't you glad you're a member of the Mortimer History Society?

Welcome to new members

Our membership continues to flourish! Twenty-nine new members have joined since the last edition of *Mortimer Matters*. Welcome all! We hope you're enjoying your membership and look forward to meeting you soon at some of our long-awaited in-person events!

David Boddington	Bromyard
Sarah Bowman	London
Alastair Dunn	York
David Green	Harlaxton
Sandra and John Harvey	Stourport-on-Severn
Rod and Rosemary Hawnt	Marden
Margaret Haycock	Aberystwyth
Elizabeth Hill	Brinsop
Rachel Jenkins	Hereford
Caroline Johnson	Camberley
Sheila Jones	Wirral
Howard Lambert	Amersham
Ann Lawrence	Montgomery
Stella Martin	Sherborne
Shaun David McGuiness	Waltham-on-the-Wolds
Sarah McNamer	Washington DC, USA
Frank Mitchell	Claverdon
Keith Molyneux	Leominster
Paul Newman	Cardiff
Sandra Pinchbeck	Bryneglwys
Michael Ray	Brighton
Barbara Rowe	USA
Jane Stewart	Sawmills
Michael Tree	Knighton
Patrick Valerie	Tenbury Wells
Linda Vines	Ipswich
Diane Williams	Barry