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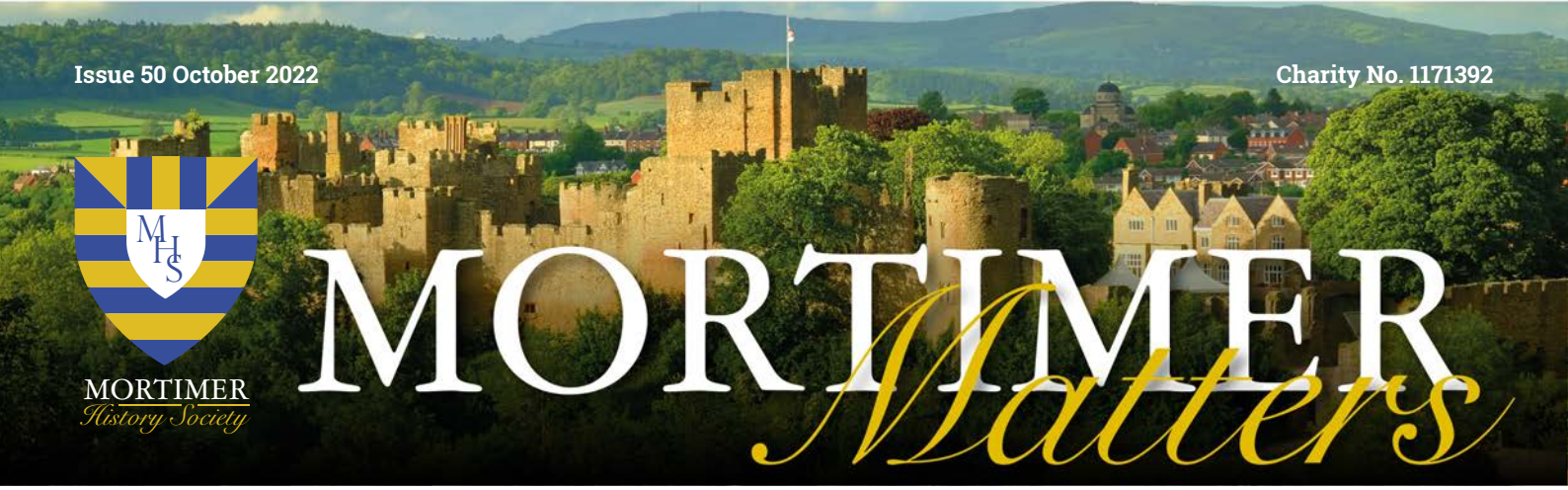

MORTIMER History Society

MORTIMER Matters

Major academic study to focus on the Welsh March

A major academic study is set to deliver a revelatory vision of the medieval Welsh March – its culture, its politics and its unique identity. Its leader Helen Fulton, Professor and Chair of Medieval Literature at the University of Bristol, tells the Mortimer History Society about the project's ambitious scope and its potential to re-write our understanding of this unique borderland.

Where is the border between England and Wales? The political border dates back to the reign of Henry VIII, but before that it was a matter of topographical and traditional convenience. Right up until the middle of the 20th century, some residents of border towns such as Shrewsbury were convinced that they lived in Wales rather than England. My early childhood was spent in Cheltenham, and although I was never in any doubt that we lived in England, I was aware that another country lay beyond the Malvern hills, a place where we spent holidays amidst luscious landscapes and sandy beaches. As an adult, I read the novels and criticism of Raymond Williams and recognised in myself that sense of having a border identity which was nothing like Homi Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity' but something altogether richer and more complex.

The creation of the March

The medieval March of Wales was penetrated by Norman barons after 1066, and although the Welsh fought to retain their ancient kingdoms, the Normans were securely entrenched in the March by the middle of the 13th century. In 1282–3, the English king Edward I finally conquered the remnant of independent Wales lying beyond the March, killing the most powerful princely ruler of Wales, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd. Those areas of Wales which had been under Llywelyn's rule, in the north and west of the country, became Crown possessions, known collectively as the Principality, while many smaller parcels of land in eastern and southern Wales, once owned by Welsh princes, were now distributed to Marcher lords. Thus a new 'Marcher aristocracy' came into being which shaped the political and cultural history of the March for the next three centuries. With the Act of Union of 1536, which formally annexed Wales to England as part of the Tudor English kingdom, Henry VIII divided the whole of Wales into seven counties administered according to a uniform system of English law. The old distinction between the Principality of Wales and the Marcher lordships was swept away and a fixed political border between Wales and England was set in place.

Helen Fulton

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Valle Crucis Abbey, Denbighshire. Founded by the Welsh prince Madog ap Gruffydd in 1201, and a major centre of manuscript production.

Having read and written about the literature of the medieval March for much of my career, I wanted to know more about its history and cultural production, particularly from the viewpoint of place, identity, and manuscript transmission. Where exactly were the boundaries of the different lordships, and how did the lords and their people identify themselves? Were there networks of Welsh and English families who shared a multilingual culture? Would it be possible to define a distinctive 'Marcher' culture that was neither Welsh nor English but something *sui generis*, of its own particular type?

A literary geography

In April 2022 I was fortunate to be awarded research funding to help me answer these questions. The project is called *The Medieval March of Wales, 1282–1550: Mapping Literary Geography in a British Border Region*, abbreviated to MOWLIT. It was initially funded by the European Research Council Advanced Grant scheme as a five-year project with a value of €2.5 million (now converted under the UKRI Frontier Research Guarantee to a value of slightly over £2 million). The project, which will start on 1 May 2023, will employ two postdoctoral fellows and an administrative assistant, and will also support a PhD student to write a thesis on a topic related to the project.

The project aims to create the first holistic cultural history of the medieval March of Wales as a multicultural and multilingual space. Its main aims are to uncover and analyse the literary texts and manuscripts produced and circulated in the medieval March, and to create an original series of digital maps of the Marcher lordships at various date points during the period. The texts and the maps will then be linked by means of a prosopography – that is, an annotated index of the main historical figures associated with the Marcher lordships. The built environment will also be mapped, using a visualisation of the major castles, gentry houses, abbeys, and towns, and the literary evidence will be shown as a distribution of the texts/manuscripts across the maps indicating where they were produced and who read/owned them. Outputs from the project will include not only the digital maps, but also printed maps, articles, and book-length studies of Marcher history and culture.

The texts and manuscripts which comprise what might be called 'the Matter of the March' are written in Welsh, English, French, and Latin, and come from both sides of what is now the border between Wales and England. One of the most innovative and challenging aspects of MOWLIT is that it will bring together a large body of manuscripts and texts which have not previously been considered together, thereby defining and illuminating a distinctive Marcher culture as a geographic identifier shared across what is now the modern border.

The contents of Marcher manuscripts are rich and varied, comprising poetry, prose, history, scientific literature medical tracts, travel literature and prophecy, often gathered together in multilingual manuscripts. As a cultural totality, this literature has not been previously defined and has therefore been comparatively neglected by scholars, yet it provides an unparalleled source of information about the history, politics, and culture, not simply of Wales, but of medieval Britain and Europe.

Texts from the March include Welsh praise poetry, Arthurian romance, and Middle English verse romances such as the *Seege or Batayle of Troye*, a 14th century poem based on the Trojan legends which was written in or near Shrewsbury, perhaps at the abbey whose patron was the Marcher lord, the earl of Hereford. The early 14th century Anglo-Norman prose romance, *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, tells of a historical family of Marcher lords, the lords of Whittington, near Ludlow, who flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The romance, tracing the fortunes of the family over several generations, not only details the border disputes and rivalries between Marcher lords and native Welsh rulers, but also includes information relating to local history and folklore. More significantly, the only surviving manuscript copy of this French text, British Library MS Royal 12 C xii, was produced in or near Ludlow in Shropshire, in the March, and contains works in English and Latin as well as French. Ludlow was the centre of a group of Marcher lordships, held by the Geneville family after 1284 and then absorbed through marriage into the estates of the powerful Mortimer family.

As a further example, the famous 14th century poetic romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, contains a very realistic description of the geography of north Wales and the Wirral. Research for the MOWLIT project, placing this poem and its unique manuscript (London, British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x) in the larger context of the March and its inhabitants, aims to add new information about the patron who commissioned the manuscript, the provenance of which is so far unknown but may well lie within the March.

A moving map

One of the most important and innovative objectives of MOWLIT is to produce a series of layered digital maps which will show the boundaries of the Marcher lordships as they evolved from 1282 to 1536. As Marcher lords increased their holdings through war or marriage, or lost lands due to escheat or penalty, the borders of the lordships changed over time, often from one decade to the next. At the same time, owners of the

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Raglan Castle, built by Sir William ap Thomas, father of William Herbert (d. 1469), the first Earl of Pembroke, whose support of the Yorkist king Edward IV gave him political success in the 15th century.

lands also changed, as families died out or their lands were appropriated by the king for political reasons.

There has not yet been any attempt to produce accurate maps of the Marcher lordships. A beautiful set of hand-drawn maps of south Wales was produced by the historian William Rees in 1932, portraying his interpretation of the historical landscape of south Wales in the 14th century (**mappingwelshmarches.ac.uk/maps/5-rees-maps/**). I am looking forward to working with Scott Lloyd and Jon Dollery, from the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, who will produce digital mapping layers, based on historical sources, to provide a clear geographical and chronological view of the Marcher lordships. These maps, the first of their kind, will be illuminating in themselves while also providing visual representations of the centres of manuscript production and the travels of individual manuscripts from place to place.

I am excited to be starting this project to document and define the distinctive culture of the medieval March and its geo-cultural politics. My hope is that MOWLIT will draw new attention to the modern March of Wales and help to establish it as a distinctive region in the UK with its own cultural, linguistic, and political history. I hope to involve local communities and organisations such as the Mortimer History Society in the project and work with tourist agencies on both sides of the border to promote the March as a very special place that transcends national jurisdictions. I am starting to compile a mailing list of people interested in following the project, which will have a website and social media presence, so please email me if you would like to be added to the mailing list.

Stay in touch with Helen's research. Join the mailing list at helen.fulton@Bristol.ac.uk.

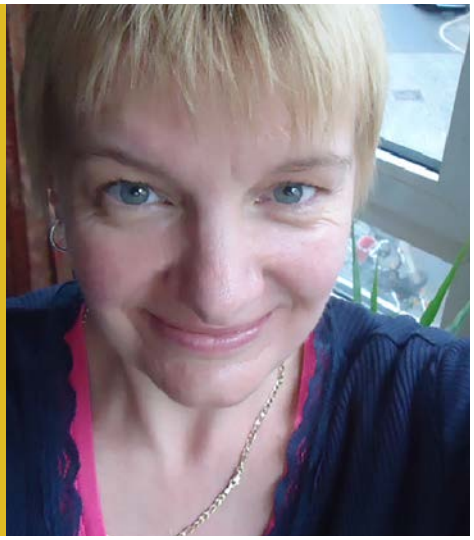
Chirk castle, built by the Mortimers on land granted to them by Edward I in the 13th century.

About the author:

Helen Fulton is Professor and Chair of Medieval Literature at the University of Bristol. She trained as a Celticist at the University of Oxford and completed her PhD at the University of Sydney on the 14th century poet, Dafydd ap Gwilym. Before coming to Bristol, she held chairs at Swansea University and the University of York. She has published widely on medieval Welsh and related literatures, with an interest in comparative literary history, literature as politics, and the literature of place. She is the co-editor of *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature* (2019) and editor of *Urban Culture in Medieval Wales* (2012). She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and Fellow and Vice-President of the Learned Society of Wales.

The joys of medieval sex...

Kathryn Warner's latest book reveals the truth about medieval sex and sexuality. How to have sex , when and what it's for. And, ladies, while it's all about procreation, you'll be pleased to know that your pleasure and consent are an essential prerequisite.



The long-lived John Gaddesden (c.1280-1361), a graduate of the University of Oxford, is perhaps the most famous English physician of the later Middle Ages. In his *Rosa Anglica* ('English Rose') of the 1310s, he wrote the following explicit paragraph about women's sexual pleasure:

"To excite and arouse a woman to intercourse, a man ought to speak, kiss and embrace [her], to touch her breasts, to caress her breasts and to touch the whole [area] between her perineum and her vulva, and to strike her buttocks with the purpose that the woman desires sex [...] and when the woman begins to stammer, then they ought to copulate."

In stark contrast to the opinions of later centuries, medieval England believed that women experienced more pleasure in intercourse than men, and that women's need for intercourse was insatiable and stronger than men's. Another common belief was that both men and women emitted seed that united to create an embryo, and it followed that if a woman felt a 'lack of pleasure' she did not emit this 'sperm' and therefore, no conception could take place. Medical belief in the Middle Ages, by holding that women must orgasm in order to conceive a child, followed Galen. A further idea was that male seed was precious and should not be wasted, while female seed was both prodigious and potentially lethal unless frequently purged. Menstruation was held to achieve this, as did intercourse, and masturbation was recommended to avoid the dangers of a woman storing up her 'seed'. If she did not, she would suffer from an affliction called 'uterine suffocation', which would cause her to have difficulty breathing and to endure fainting fits and convulsions. John Gaddesden stated:

"If the suffocation comes from a retention of the sperm, the woman should get together with and draw up a marriage contract with some man. If she does not or cannot do this, because she is a nun and it is forbidden by her monastic vow or because she is married to an old man incapable of giving her due, she should travel overseas, take vigorous exercise and use medicine which will dry up the sperm... if she has a fainting fit, the midwife should insert a finger covered with oil of lily, laurel or spikenard into her womb and move it vigorously about."

A woman's orgasm is deemed essential

When and why of sex

The three related texts about women's medicine known as the *Trotula* (meaning 'little Trota', a woman's name), written in Salerno in the twelfth century, were well-known in medieval England both in the original Latin and in Middle English translation. The *Trotula* stated that women who wanted but were not permitted to have carnal intercourse, because they were nuns or widows or otherwise vowed to chastity, risked "grave illness". As a remedy, such women were advised to anoint some cotton with pennyroyal oil and insert it in the vagina, or if they had no such oil, to dissolve trifera magna with a little warm wine and to place it in the vagina with cotton or damp wool. This, the authors confidently asserted, would cause the women's desire for intercourse to recede.

The medieval Church had much to say on the topic of sex. Intercourse that was not between a husband and wife, in the missionary position, and intended for procreation was frowned on.

Sex is for procreation, says the church

In addition, intercourse was forbidden even for married couples during Lent, Advent and Pentecost; on feast days; on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays; during menstruation, pregnancy and lactation; and for forty or so days after giving birth. The Church did not deny that a married couple had a right to sexual pleasure, albeit only because it was deemed necessary to conceive a child. It was often held that a married couple owed each other a "marital debt", i.e. an obligation to have sex. Thomas Mareschal confessed in 1344 that he had had an affair with his sister-in-law before he married Isabella Foxle, and had received no dispensation and therefore committed incest when he married Isabella. Pope Clement VI told Isabella that she was "freed from the conjugal debt" as a result of her husband's actions, though it transpired that she was "too modest to exact" the debt from him anyway. The marital debt was something each spouse owed to the other, not something deemed to apply only to men being owed sex from their wives. In 1472, Pope Sixtus IV declared

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that Thomas Lessy of London, who married Agnes Cokkeson and consummated the marriage but subsequently left her, had deprived Agnes of her conjugal debt.

Controls, cautions and the law

In the Middle Ages, a sharp distinction was made between procreative and non-procreative sex. Same-sex relations of course fell into the latter category, but so did much opposite-sex sex, and all non-procreative intercourse was condemned by the Church. The categories applied by medieval theologians and jurists to sexual acts deemed to be part of luxuria, lust or lechery, also called the "sin against nature" (*peccatum contra naturam*) were *ratione generis* or bestiality; *ratione sexus*, relations with a person having the genitalia of the same sex; and *ratione modi*, having intercourse with a member of the opposite sex but in the wrong orifice, or in a manner that precluded procreation.

According to medieval canon law, girls could marry and consummate their marriage at age twelve and boys at age fourteen. The First Statute of Westminster in 1275 is considered to have set the age of consent in English law at twelve, where it would remain for exactly 600 years; it was raised to thirteen in 1875 and then to sixteen in 1885. An age is not specifically given in the 1275 statute, but it states that the king forbade anyone to "ravish or take by force a maiden within age", either with her consent or without. "Within age" is generally assumed to have been under twelve years old. This does not, however, mean that everyone, or even many people, did marry and have sex at the age of twelve, just as in modern Britain few people get married when they turn sixteen just because they are now legally able to do so. Regardless of what canon and civil law might have said, and what is commonly believed about the Middle Ages today, few medieval people considered a girl of twelve or thirteen to be a viable sexual partner.

Consent mattered

The wording of the First Statute of Westminster of 1275, that nobody must "ravish or take by force a maiden within age", either with her consent or without, makes clear that later medieval England was aware of the need for consent. To give just one example, in September 1328, someone acting on Edward III's behalf – Edward was then only fifteen years old – sent three men to search for Joan Breton, and to determine "whether it was against her will" that she was "ravished" in Clipstone, Nottinghamshire. In the First Statute of Westminster, the punishment for rape was set at a mere two years' imprisonment and a fine, and the statute referred to it as "ravishment or taking by force". This was, however, a deliberately low sentence because the law on rape was undergoing a major change, and the Second Statute ten years later imposed the death penalty as the maximum sentence. For the first time in English history, the Statutes of Westminster gave women the right to prosecute their attackers. In 1322, for example, Joan Eston prosecuted a clerk named Master Richard Bachiler of Warwickshire for rape before the King's Bench.

Not only the Church, but sometimes the secular authorities as well, clamped down on what they called "immorality", and between 1401 and 1439 the mayor, sheriff and aldermen of London decided to arrest everyone who was discovered committing adultery. Adulterers were frequently caught and arrested in the middle of the night, either in their own home or their lover's, which gives an impression of busybody officials creeping around the London streets in the early hours, peering into windows. John Warham, chaplain of the church of St Michael Queenhithe, was found with his lover Margaret Wyver, a widow, at about three in the morning on 10 January 1427, and Ralph Wengrave, chaplain of the College of St Michael in Crooked Lane, was caught in bed with Agnes, wife of John Hebell from Southwark, between four and five in the morning on 31 October 1429. The punishment for adultery was to be put on the pillory, usually for an hour at a time on two consecutive days. The pillory was a wooden framework with holes in which the victim's head and hands were locked, and there were at least two pillories in medieval London. The tailor Richard Dodd was locked in the pillory for three straight hours, an unusually long time, in December 1407, after acting as a "bawd", i.e. a pimp, between his wife Margaret and a chaplain named William Langford. The authorities took a very dim view of anyone "procuring" adultery, such as Agnes Tikell, accused in June 1406 of being

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Hello!

This is a real bumper issue of *Mortimer Matters* with features tackling everything from medieval sex to the history of Narberth! Thank you to all our feature contributors, Helen Fulton, Kathryn Warner, Kirsten Lawton-Smith and John Fleming.

And there's lots of news from your Society, including a new publication of *On the Trail of the Mortimers*, the launch of an online seminar group for academic historians, and a meeting of our Medieval Documents Group. We're working towards Christmas of course, so look out for medieval celebrations coming your way and for the first outline of our 2023 event programme. Lots to look forward to!

We'd love to hear what you think about *Mortimer Matters*. Why not drop me a line at **mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk** to 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 January and will start planning in soon, so please get in touch with your ideas quickly!

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a *baude*, procurer, between Geoffrey Briggewater, who was unmarried, and Agnes Wyche, married.

Adultery was prohibited, fornication not so

The authorities did not care about unmarried people having sex, only if at least one partner was married, or if one was a member of the Church; they were not clamping down on fornication, but only on adultery. In November 1406, married woman Alice Gyboun was arrested for committing adultery with John Marchall, unmarried, and in August 1429, John Couper and Katherine Frensshe, both married to other people, were arrested and taken before the mayor and aldermen. Roger Cokke, unmarried, was "taken in adultery" with Isabella, wife of John Blosme, on 28 January 1404. The chaplain Herman of Verona was "taken in adultery with Agnes Bramptone, a married woman" on 13 July 1439, and on the same day, Joan Wakelyn, Margaret Hathewyke and Margery Bradlee were indicted before Stephen Broun, Mayor of London, for "diverse acts provoking to public immorality". In 1277/78, prostitutes were officially forbidden to reside within the city walls of London, and over the decades and centuries this prohibition was frequently repeated as the authorities attempted to force them to work in the stews or brothels of Southwark on the south bank of the Thames, which was called Stewysside or "stew side". In December 1310, for example, Edward II ordered the Mayor and the two sheriffs to take measures for "the suppression of houses of ill-fame" in London. In the seventh year of Richard II's reign, June 1383 to June 1384, the London authorities issued regulations for the "punishment of whoremongers, bawds, unchaste priests and adulterers".

Telling it like it is...

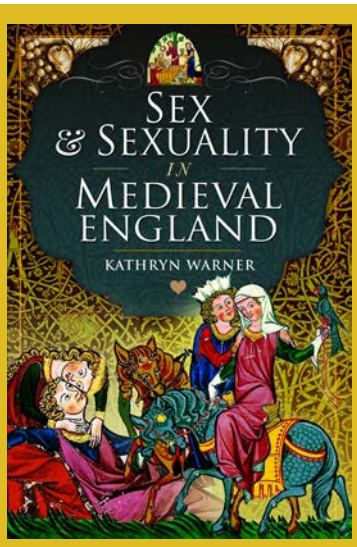
In the late fifteenth century, a verse whose modern title is *A Talk of Ten Wives on their Husbands' Ware* was written. The women sit in a tavern, and because they are bored and have nothing else to talk about, mock their husbands' privates and sexual performance. The second wife states that she met her husband *[w]hen he was in his moste pryde*, i.e. in his greatest glory, *[t]he lenghte of thre bene* (length of three beans). Another woman's husband's penis is the *lenghte of a snayle* (snail), and another complains that her husband *pysses his tarse every yere*, i.e. only ejaculates once a year, and compares him to an archer whose shots always fall short (*hys schote woll troke*).

They don't grow on trees you know. Or perhaps they do?

The sixth wife's spouse is impotent and his penis *lythe styll* and may *not ryse* despite her efforts to arouse him, and the seventh's is a *sory pyne* [sorry pin] *that schuld hengge bytwen his leggis* but instead is a *sory laveroke satt on brode opon two adyll eggis*, "a sorry lark sitting on a nest on two addled eggs". Another wife says that when her *syre breche* or sire's breeches are torn, *hys pentyll pepythe owte beforn lyke a warbrede*, meaning "his penis peeps out before like a maggot".

Geoffrey Chaucer's bawdy and farcical *Miller's Tale* of the late 14th century also uses deliberately earthy language. Nicholas, the clerk who lusts after his landlord's young wife Alisoun, makes his feelings known to her in a very physical way: *he caughte hire by the queynte*, i.e. her private parts.

It seems like even then, talk about sex was often ribald, earthy and, often, not terribly kind!



Kathryn Warner's book *Sex and Sexuality in Medieval England* is available at **www.pen-and-sword.co.uk**. Use the discount code **MORTIMER25** to get a generous 25% discount off the full price of £20 – you pay just £15

Are you a social media expert?

The Society is already active on Facebook and Twitter but, honestly, we feel we could do more. We're looking for someone with expertise in this area who would be prepared to help us – your board of trustees – use social media more effectively to promote our activities and connect more widely.

If you think you've got the right skills and would be prepared to share some of your time and expertise, please contact me at **mm@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk**.

"Give me back my inheritance"

Elizabeth de Burgh was determined to hold on to her inheritance despite opposition and ill-treatment from Edward II. This is the first of two features by Society Trustee Kirsten Lawton-Smith that investigate how Elizabeth was driven to desperate action.

Elizabeth de Burgh

"In the Name of God, I Elizabeth de Burgh, one of the sisters and heirs of Sir Gilbert de Clare late earl of Gloucester, and formerly wife of Sir Roger Damory, wish that it be known by all people..."*

Elizabeth de Burgh was 30 years old and already thrice-widowed when she sat in her private chapel in Clare Castle on 15 May 1326 and recited an extraordinary protest in French to her Hereford clerk, John de Radenhale. With her in secret were her close advisers, Sir Thomas de Cheddeworth and Sir John Diccus to bear witness to her wish *"to make this protest openly and publicly as civil law demands, if fear of royal power with the peril that could follow did not stop me".*

Why should Elizabeth, a niece of the present king and granddaughter of Edward I, so fear to publicly state her situation and what was the peril that could follow such a protest?

Three sisters

Elizabeth was the fourth child of Gilbert de Clare, 7th earl of Gloucester and his second wife, the royal princess Joan of Acre. She was only a few months old when her father died in 1295. She had three older siblings by this marriage; two sisters Eleanor and Margaret, and a brother, rather unimaginatively named Gilbert (b.1291). As the only son, young Gilbert was heir to a vast inheritance encompassing lands in South Wales, Ireland and England, which was to provide him with an income of £6,000 a year and ensuring him a place as one of the country's leading magnates.

All three de Clare sisters married between 1306 to 1308; firstly Eleanor to Hugh Despenser the younger (d. 1327), then Margaret to Piers Gaveston, earl of Cornwall (d. 1312) and lastly Elizabeth to John de Burgh, the young heir to the earldom of Ulster in Ireland. Eleanor's match with the untitled young Despenser was curiously underwhelming for a grand-daughter of Edward I, in marked comparison

Elizabeth's brother Gilbert died at Bannockburn

to her two sisters, who became countesses of the highest rank. However, both Margaret and Elizabeth were widowed in quick succession in 1312 and 1313 respectively. Their lack of husbands when Gilbert their brother died at the battle of Bannockburn in June 1314 was to open both widows to potential exploitation and eventually cause all three sisters immense anguish in the following 15 years.

Manoeuvered into marriage

Edward II, keen to utilise the marriage market potential of the heiresses, recalled Elizabeth back from Ireland in 1316 where she had to leave her young son. She had barely set foot in England when she was abducted and married forcefully to Theobald Verdon, a minor Marcher lord and baron of Alton in Staffordshire. Verdon had obviously hoped to receive a large part of the Gloucester patrimony and was willing to risk the king's anger by marrying such an important heiress without license. Eleanor's husband Despenser meanwhile, hectored the court and parliament for his share in 1316, but his lack of status at court meant little success for him or his wife. It took over three years to divide the inheritance between the three heiresses, as Gilbert's widow claimed to be pregnant the entire time; a rather ludicrous assertion but one that suited the crown who enjoyed the Gloucester revenues in the meantime.

Verdon was not to enjoy his nefarious action: he died several months after his marriage, leaving Elizabeth pregnant. This time King Edward did not linger and arranged for both de Clare heiresses to marry. With worrisome predictability, his choice of bridegrooms for both Margaret and Elizabeth showed no political acumen and he bestowed the matrimonial prizes on his latest infatuations and court favourites, Hugh Audley and Roger Damory respectively. The higher magnates, including the permanently grumpy earl of Lancaster, already enraged by the antics of these new upstart favourites in 1317, must have felt their marriages as an insult. With the partition of the Gloucester estates finally proceeding in November 1317, Audley found himself the new lord of Gwynllwg and Damory, a 'poor and needy knight", the presumptive lord of Usk.

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For all three husbands of the de Clare sisters, the sudden influx of money and prestige must have gone to their heads. What was apparent almost immediately was the jockeying, each at the expense of the other, for further lands and power in south Wales, as well as pursuit of control of the king and his court.

"Certain disagreements occurred between our Lord, Edward king of England and several great men of his land... on account of certain oppressions which caused them grievance, contrary to the law of the land [and] my lord Sir Roger [Damory] was one of those great men, and was harried and oppressed so that he died."*

The rise of Despenser

And what of Despenser? Through his wife Eleanor he had inherited the lordship of Glamorgan, the most valuable and prestigious of the marcher lordships in south Wales only rivalled by Brecon of the de Bohun earls of Hereford. Despenser was also to benefit from another extraordinary stroke of luck. By the end of 1318 the magnates had out-manoeuvred the court favourites Damory and Audley, removing them Edward's side. Hugh himself replaced them, an apparently steady, unassuming pair of hands in the form of a new chamberlain. In fact, they could not have chosen a more terrible candidate. In a manner that still baffles historians to this day, Despenser charmed and seduced Edward and became the king's closest confidant, advisor and putative lover within several months. It was an obsession on the part of Edward that he maintained to the end of his life. Damory and Audley were never to return to favour.

Despenser used his position with ruthless efficiency, controlling access to the king and the largesse of the crown. His major focus was to obtain and then surpass the position and power of the earldom of Gloucester in south Wales to the detriment of his sisters-in-law and their husbands, as well as other Marcher lords. His first target was the Audleys' possession of Gwynllwg, which lay to the east of Glamorgan. He strong-armed the couple into exchanging this lordship for lands of lesser value in England. He also expanded westwards, with the acquiescent Edward granting him Dryslwyn and Cantref Mawr, upsetting John Giffard, a neighbouring Marcher lord, in the process. However it was to be Despenser's pursuit of the lordship of Gower that was to cause uproar in the southern March in 1320. The rapidly ageing owner of Gower was William de Braose (d.1326) who had no male heir. He was also broke. Though he had promised the lordship to his daughter's husband, John de Mowbray, he was also secretly offering Gower for cash to a number of interested parties, including the earl of Hereford, Roger Mortimer and of course, Hugh Despenser. By 1320, it became apparent to Mowbray that Despenser was close to acquiring Gower at his expense. Outraged he precipitously occupied Gower in 1320. Despenser in retaliation persuaded Edward to seize Gower pending a crown enquiry and for the lordship to be temporarily kept in his guardianship. The other Marcher lords were under no illusion that this would be mere formality before Despenser would be found to be the legal owner, a violation they thought of the laws of the March.

The hatred towards Despenser by the Marcher lords became violent in May 1321 with Mowbray, the earl of Hereford and others primarily invading Glamorgan and other Despenser lands. Damory, who had become lord of Usk after the early death of Gilbert's widow in 1320, joined them as he felt distinctly threatened with Despenser as a neighbour. To what extent Elizabeth was supportive of this action is unknown, but as she was to be fierce in her fight for her inheritance later we can only assume she was broadly supportive. For the moment though she was to remain an observer of the events unfolding.

The Marchers seemed triumphant in the summer of 1321, forcing a humiliated Edward to exile both Hugh Despenser the younger and his father. They handed Glamorgan to Damory for safe-keeping and Mowbray was returned to Gower. However, this illusory victory was brief. By the end of the year the Despensers had returned and, with the king determined to exact revenge on behalf of his favourite, together they launched a counter-offensive against the rebels, who were at this point known as the Contrariants. Resistance to the king crumbled and while some Marchers surrendered to the Crown, others including Damory, fled north from the March in a forlorn bid to join the other rebels under the earl of Lancaster.

"I [Elizabeth] was captured in the castle of Usk, part of my inheritance, by power and command of the king and taken to the abbey of Barking, where after my lord's death I remained imprisoned more than half a year."*

Elizabeth imprisoned

Elizabeth and her children were abandoned at Usk Castle. The king's men arrested her within days of Damory's flight and she was transferred as a prisoner along with her children to Barking Abbey in Essex to await the king's judgement. It was probably here that she learned her third husband had died of wounds received whilst fighting at Burton-on-Trent sometime between 12 and 14 March 1322. The other Contrariants, including Hereford and Audley, had managed to reach the earl of Lancaster, but all were defeated in battle on 16 March at Boroughbridge. Hereford died in the fighting, Lancaster was publicly humiliated and executed, whilst Audley was sentenced to imprisonment, his life spared after the frantic pleading of his wife Margaret to the king. Margaret herself was bundled off to imprisonment at Sempringham Priory in Lincolnshire. The king now seized and held two thirds of the Gloucester patrimony and both he and Despenser were triumphant.

With the Contrariants comprehensively vanquished, there was little opposition by the remaining nobility to ameliorate the king's and Despenser's vengeance. Rebels were viciously executed, lands seized and anyone associated with the late rebellion thrown into prison. It was a time of fear. Elizabeth could only nervously wonder what her own fate would be. Edward ordered her not to marry again, obviously not wanting a repeat of the Verdon abduction, though in reality Elizabeth was in no place to prevent anything in prison. Her position, her children and her inheritance were in grave peril and she was about to endure an anxious wait to apprehend what the king and his favourite required from her.

The story of Elizabeth's imprisonment and struggle to regain both her freedom and inheritance will appear in the next edition of *Mortimer Matters*.

Kirsten Lawton-Smith is a trustee of the society and has a MA in Medieval Studies from Birmingham University.

** All quotes are from Elizabeth de Burgh's protest and are taken from "Women of the English Nobility and Gentry 1066-1500", translated and edited by Jennifer Ward, Manchester University Press, 1995*

The Marcher lordship of Narberth

One of the most westerly Marcher lordships, Narberth has a contested history. John Fleming traces its origins, its time as a Mortimer holding and its eventual absorption into English crown lands.

It is well documented that the Mortimer family was one of the, if not the, most successful families in the Welsh March. Largely helped by their production of an unbroken string of male heirs over a 300-year period. This good fortune allowed them to create a dynasty that spanned the entire March, holding over one-third of all its lordships by the end of the 14th century. Their power base was centred around their home lordship of Wigmore and, through shrewd political manoeuvring and martial enterprise they were able to establish a solid grouping of lordships in the central March, which made them a powerful family on the national stage too. Indeed, when Roger Mortimer (d.1330) was raised to the rank of earl, he chose the unconventional title of 'earl of March', reflecting the source of his political power and influence. However, The Mortimers also held lordships beyond the central March. Narberth in Pembrokeshire became their most westerly holding and they in turn became part of its complex history.

Origins

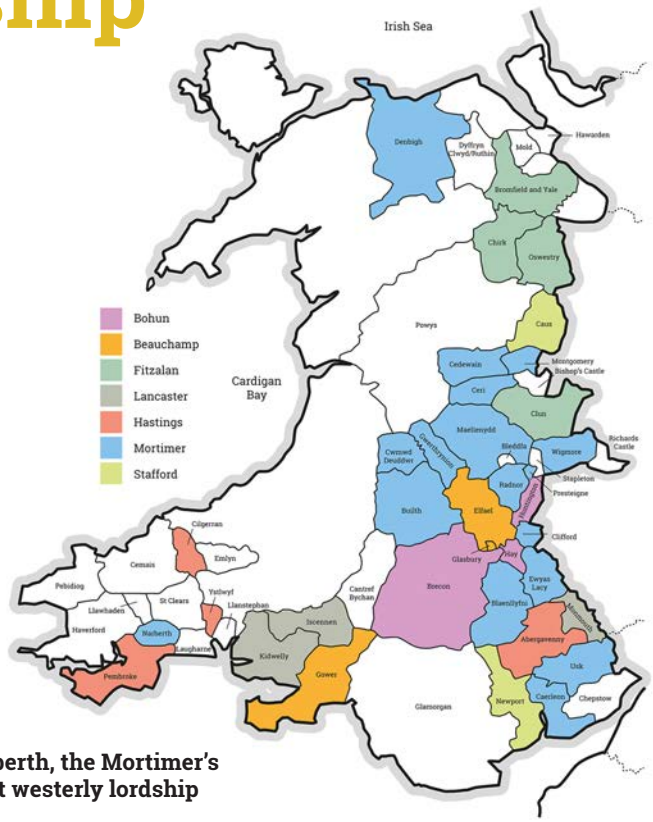
The lordship of Narberth came into existence following the Norman invasion of south-west Wales in 1093, firstly as part of the Montgomery family's conquests and then under the royal control of king Henry I following the former's fall from grace in 1102. The reign of Henry I was a time of expansion for the Norman conquerors and the settlers of south-west Wales. Imported Flemish immigrants and other settlers pushed the native Welsh almost entirely out of the far south-west in the first decade of the 12th century. However, lordships such as Narberth that were established nearer the local Welsh population were in a more precarious position. As the Welsh uprising of 1116, led by the son of the slain ruler of Deheubarth, Rhys ap Tewdwr (d.1093), demonstrated. The *Brut* gives us our first documented evidence of the Norman castle in Narberth.

"The following year (1116) Gruffudd ap Rhys... in his first battle attacked the castle that was close to Arberth (Narberth) and burned it."

This setback was short-lived, and the Norman hold over the region remained strong until the death of Henry I in 1135. Many of the leading figures amongst the Norman settlers in the south-west were descendants of Gerald of Windsor and his wife Nest, who was the daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr and therefore the sister of the leader of the Welsh uprising. This connection to the leading Welsh family of Deheubarth would have given the settlers some legitimacy, as was to be demonstrated later. It was around the time of king Henry's death that an illegitimate son of Nest (also called Henry and sired by none other than king Henry I himself!) became the lord of Narberth.

Times of conflict

Records for the lordship are scarce during this period, but it was a time of civil war in England and of Welsh resurgence. This made the Marcher lords' hold on their gains precarious.



Narberth, the Mortimer's most westerly lordship

Narberth, however, and its neighbouring castle of Pembroke remained in the hands of their Norman conquerors throughout, as there is no record of their being sacked during this time. This is possibly because of the connection to the Welsh princess Nest. Henry lord of Narberth, died in an ill-fated expedition to assist the Welsh campaign of king Henry II in 1157. There is no record of the next lord of Narberth, but the following period was one of Welsh superiority again under Lord Rhys, the ruler of Deheubarth. The death of Henry II in 1189 set off another series of Welsh attacks, and Narberth would not have been spared in the raids that followed. The arrival of a new earl of Pembroke, William Marshal (d.1219), began a period of settler resurgence, particularly after his lightning campaign of 1204, which recaptured much of what the Welsh had taken in the previous fifteen years. The English civil war that resulted from Magna Carta in 1215 offered the Welsh another opportunity for conquest that they did not pass up. In that year, Narberth was burned again as part of a larger campaign that saw most of south-west Wales returned to Welsh control under the formidable leader of Gwynedd, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth. However, the son of William Marshal (d.1230) struck back in 1223 and retook the conquered territory, bringing it back into the sphere of the lords of Pembroke. Narberth was now a lordship within the lands of the earl of Pembroke and was to enjoy a period of stability.

The transfer to Mortimer

In 1245, the last male of the Marshal family died without producing an heir. Thus, the Marshal lands were divided between the daughters and granddaughters, with Narberth passing to Roger Mortimer (d.1282) by right of his wife Maud de Braose, daughter of Eva de Braose (nee. Marshal). As an aside, the Mortimers also received a third of the nearby lordships of Haverford and St. Clears.

After years of relative quiet, the uprising of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1257 saw Narberth again burned and the garrison slain. Evidence suggests that it was after the sacking that

Cont/d from page 9

Narberth Castle, built in stone by Roger Mortimer

Roger Mortimer rebuilt the castle in stone, as the design was in keeping with the style of other castles built around the middle of the 13th century.

Roger continued to hold Narberth until his death in 1282, when it was briefly taken into the king's hands. It was soon restored to Roger's widow Maud, who granted it to her younger son, Roger Mortimer of Chirk. The final Welsh wars of Edward I did not touch Narberth, nor did the rebellions that sprang up in its aftermath. However, whilst Roger of Chirk was campaigning in Gascony in 1299, some men destroyed the castle and slew the garrison, most likely because Mortimer was an unpopular lord. Nevertheless, he retained the lordship and rebuilt the castle.

Roger Mortimer of Chirk was dispossessed of Narberth when he rose in rebellion and was captured and sent to the Tower in 1322, dying there in 1326. The lordship was forfeit to the king, who appointed a steward, Rhys ap Gruffudd. Rhys was granted the lordship for life in 1326 but lost it temporarily when Roger Mortimer of Chirk's nephew, another Roger (d. 1330), became the de-facto ruler of England.

Roger's downfall and execution in 1330 brought the lordship back into Crown hands. A grandson of Roger of Chirk, John Mortimer, petitioned on behalf of his grandfather and failed, with the lordship remaining with stewards throughout this period. In 1354, a grandson of Roger Mortimer

Mortimer heir Edward IV brought Narberth into royal hands

(d.1330), Roger (d.1360), was granted the forfeited Mortimer lands and given the title of the 2nd earl of March. Shortly thereafter, the Mortimers of Chirk relinquished their claim to Narberth. When Roger died in 1360, Narberth was assigned to his widow Phillipa who held the lordship until her death in 1382. Because she outlived her son Edmund by a few weeks, her heir was her grandson Roger Mortimer, the 4th earl of March (d.1398), who was a minor at the time of her death. He came into his inheritance in 1394 and, three years later, gifted Narberth to his brother Sir Edmund Mortimer. Sir Edmund joined the Welsh rebel leader Owain Glyn Dwr in 1402 and his lands were forfeit. After a period in which Narberth was again in Crown control, the lordship reverted to Sir Edmund's nephew, another Edmund who was the 5th earl of March. His heir was his nephew Richard, duke of York, who held Narberth until he was killed at the battle of Wakefield in 1460. Along with all the other Mortimer and York lands, Narberth passed to Richard's son, Edward, and when he was crowned king Edward IV, it merged into the properties of the Crown.

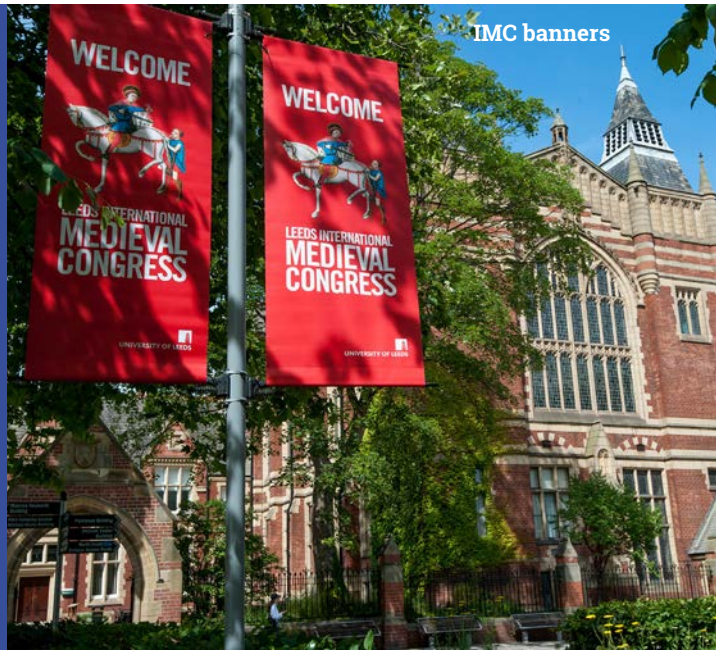
Narberth was a Marcher lordship carved out of the initial Norman conquest of south-west Wales at the end of the 11th century. Its inland position meant that it was vulnerable to attack from the Welsh during times of unrest. This would have been one of several reasons why a large settlement was never established there. Consequently, the lordship was never of much value monetarily compared to lordships that had larger settlements, although the revenues were still worthwhile. After the demise of the Marshal family and the coming of the Mortimers, Narberth was ruled by its absentee lords. This was not unusual and indeed became the norm in the March. As Marcher lords, everything in the lordship was theirs and was ruled by their will. They would have had locals that administered proceedings on their behalf, but a Mortimer would have rarely, if ever, visited.

Over time, as the threat of invasion receded and without a lord present, the castle fell into a state of disrepair. The lordship still had value for the Crown though, as it could be granted to favourites as a reward for loyalty and services rendered. Narberth was incorporated into the county of Pembrokeshire by the Laws in Wales Acts of 1536 and 1542.

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.

International Medieval Congress, 4 to 7 July 2021

Society President, Paul Dryburgh reflects on our second successful sponsorship of this prestigious event.



IMC banners

Regular readers of *Mortimer Matters* will need no persuasion about the vibrancy of the history of the medieval marches of Wales. Your Society is now working hard to bring this to the attention of a global audience, and to raise the profile of exciting, innovative research, conducted inside and outside academia that bring the lives of the people and communities on the medieval March into greater focus.

This July, and for the second time, we sponsored a strand focused on the Medieval Welsh March at the International Medieval Congress (IMC), hosted by the International Medieval Institute, University of Leeds. We also awarded bursaries to early career researchers, allowing them to present their research in person.

A global fixture

The IMC is an important fixture in the academic calendar and attracts around 3,000 delegates. For the first time in its history, the 2022 IMC staged hybrid physical and digital sessions, allowing speakers and audience members around the world to come together. Under the umbrella theme of Borders, speakers familiar and new, established and in the early stages of their career, contributed to two fascinating sessions in the MHS strand on Tuesday 5 July, which I was proud to chair. The borders theme inspired eight diverse but complimentary papers.

A syncratic society?

Kicking off the first session to a packed seminar room, Dr Deborah Youngs of Swansea University considered whether the medieval March constituted a culturally syncratic border society, taking testamentary evidence from the Diocese of Hereford. Her paper examined the influence of the Church on the everyday lives of the people of the eastern March within the jurisdiction of the bishops of Hereford. This spans not simply the English county of Herefordshire but also the lands towards the west and the deaneries, particularly, of Archenfield, Clun, Leominster and Pontesbury where 'English', 'Welsh' and 'March' abut and overlap. She examined probate records found within the fifty surviving Consistory Court office act books of the diocese (the originals of which are in Herefordshire Archives and Records Centre, Rotherwas, and which have been translated into summarised English entries in *Calendar of Probate and Administration Acts in the Consistory Court of the Bishops of Hereford, 1407-1550*, ed. M.A. Faraday (2008)), and estimates that of around 1,040 probate acts for the deaneries of the diocese, there survive 131 wills for the Welsh areas. This can be supplemented by wills in other archives, notably the Prerogative Court of Canterbury held by The National Archives. Using these as her source base, Dr Youngs examined patronymic surname evidence to demonstrate – tentatively – that there were high concentrations of "ap" (son of) and "verch" (daughter of) around Michaelchurch, Churchstoke and Discoed. Likewise, she estimates that around 19% of surviving wills were for female testators, though only 21 of 201 survive in the original. Only around a quarter of women's wills were proved by named husbands even though around 42% of those making probate acts were married. While this paper represented the first step in Dr Youngs' research in this area, her tentative findings are fascinating and promise important additions to our knowledge of the place of women in the late-medieval March.

The importance of Chester

Two papers on the place of Chester in the late Middle Ages followed. While Pamela Powell, a doctoral student at the University of Nottingham, looked at the city's role in the Welsh rebellions of the early 15th century, Professor Barry Lewis of University College Dublin revealed the holy cross, the Rood of Chester, in the church of St John the Baptist as a centre of pilgrimage and cross-cultural encounter, particularly as a focus for contemporary Welsh poets. From both papers, Chester emerged as a place of migration and immigration from northeastern Wales, a vibrant entrepot for Welsh products as diverse as cattle, cheese, sea coal and millstones, and of religious importance to communities and poets in Wales and England.

Interaction and conflict

The tension between interaction and conflict on the March permeated the papers too. Anti-Welsh legislation by the government of Henry IV in 1401 and 1403 in Chester, a city devoted to its deposed and murdered patron Richard II, sought to outlaw property ownership in English border towns, Welsh officeholding, assemblies within the city and an end to the practice of intermarriage between English and Welsh. Conversely, the Chester rood shared a similar place in Welsh bardic poetry as another holy rood in Carmarthen, another borough with a predominantly English population. This suggests that Welsh writers were not transgressive in the sense of trying to counter English-only vernacular in discussing English urban spaces but conveying a sense

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of the sacred regardless of location. Patronage for Welsh praise poetry came from the Welsh clergy and gentry, while an English audience appreciated the performance if not the actual poetic language.

What was Owain Glyn Dwr doing?

Building on the theme of urban society and rebellion, Dr Matthew Stevens of Swansea University contributed a fascinating paper on why Owain Glyn Dwr burned the towns of Wales during his rebellion at the turn of the 15th century. Having proclaimed himself Prince of Wales, Owain burnt Ruthin on 18 September 1400 and then proceeded to torch around half of the remaining 100 towns of Wales, many of which had substantial Welsh populations. Dr Stevens perceptively questioned how we square the 'national redeemer' narrative traditionally attributed to Owain with this picture as an 'economic destroyer'. He similarly asked whether weakness should be equated with urbanity in medieval Wales and the March or whether towns, as locations for castles, defensive and administrative structures, were collateral damage in a strategic guerrilla campaign. Ruthin, one of the most ethnically integrated boroughs in Wales, had been burnt, it is argued, in a property dispute with its lord Sir Reginald Grey, while any evidence of ethnic cleansing of English burgesses is limited to isolated incidents, such as the execution of fifty burgesses in Carmarthen. As with most questions surrounding this rebellion, the answer is, it seems, that it is complicated!

IMC bookfair

Lordship and identity

A second session brought together four speakers who examined lordship and identity in the medieval marcher lordships. Dr Alistair Ayton of the University of St Andrews explored the 'troublesome trends' of rebellion in the 13th century. This was at its most acute during 1263 which witnessed uprisings by many 'of the Welsh tongue' adhering to Henry III's Welsh enemies to destroy the lands of those faithful to the beleaguered king. Indeed, reports reached the king that Llywelyn ap Gruffudd had taken the homage and fealty of many tenants; Llywelyn also attacked Mortimer estates as part of a policy of territorial expansion. There were also fears of an attempt to cross the River Usk and take Gwent.

In her contribution, Dr Sadie Jarrett (Bangor University), one of the strand's convenors, investigated identity in the later marcher lords of north Wales in the century after the Glyn Dwr rebellion, taking the activities of the Salesburys of Rhug and Bachynbyd in Meirionydd and Denbigh as a case study. By the early 16th century this gentry family, which originated as English settlers into Denbighshire, could claim Welsh ancestry and were Welsh speakers immersed in Welsh religious practice. In 1549 Robert Salesbury even bought Glyndyfrdwy, the ancestral manor of Owain Glyn Dwr and the location of his declaration as Prince of Wales in 1400. Culturally though, this was a complicated association: by the 16th century English chronicle sources were increasingly critical of the revolt and Owain came to be seen as a 'trickster hero'; while pleading in the London law courts, the Salesburys carefully distanced themselves from the ancestry they cherished and promoted in Wales itself.

A focus on Denbigh

The strand's other convenor, Dr Adam Chapman of the Institute for Historical Research chronicled the political history of the lordship of Denbigh. He noted that prior to the Glyn Dwr Revolt the lordship was one of the most economically buoyant in the March, returning over £903 a year into the coffers of the Mortimer earls in 1398. The revolt created a brutal economic downturn, as accounts of royal ministers to c. 1440 reveal. Many of its prominent tenants adhered to Glyn Dwr, though not all were Welsh. This meant that, when the lordship submitted to Henry of Monmouth in 1406, a fine of £607 was paid into the Westminster Exchequer, two-thirds of its estimated value just six years previously. Political loyalties, then, were fluid and generated an array of responses.

Challenging monastic decline

The later Middle Ages are sometimes portrayed as an age of decline, as endemic warfare and disease ravaged society in repeated waves. In the final paper, Amy Reynolds, a doctoral student at Bangor University, weighed up evidence for a widely perceived decline in monasticism, focussing on the Cistercian Order in mid-Wales in the 15th century. She convincingly showed that the Order, always an innovator, continued to adapt to changing circumstances and remained active in art, architecture and vernacular literature. Valle Crucis Abbey, founded as a native Welsh house, ensured its survival and development by also embracing marcher patronage. It was an active site for the translation and compilation of Welsh manuscripts but reached out more widely for the redevelopment of the Church with alterations to the Nave and the addition of a beautiful Rose window. The 15th century abbey was far removed from the austerity the Order originally set out to achieve in the 12th century, even in rural mid-Wales. As recipient of one of the Society's bursaries, Amy's paper will appear in the MHS Journal in due course.

Emerging from all papers was a clear sense that when we talk of the Marches of Wales in the Middle Ages we are talking about a culturally, linguistically, politically and legally diverse region of many marches, not a single, homogenous unit. Jurisdictions overlapped and intersected, from the seigneurial to the ecclesiastical. Warfare and rebellion are not simple to disentangle from broader cultural forces, though dividing on crude ethnic, cultural or legal lines is fraught with difficulty. After the success of the last two years, the Society's sponsorship of a strand at the IMC will now become annual. Plans are already afoot for sessions at the 2023 Congress, which has the similarly enticing theme of "Networks and Entanglements". The Society is again offering bursaries and will hope to see the fruits in submissions to the Essay Prize and the Journal.

Images courtesy of International Medieval Congress 2022, University of Leeds.

Creating a forum for historians and academics

Your Mortimer History Society is to establish a unique online seminar series focused on the history of medieval Wales and the Marches. Bringing together established and early career historians and scholars, it will help to deepen understanding of this vital area of history and provide a valuable online space where knowledge, research and insights can be shared.

The seminar group is being spearheaded by the Society in partnership with the Universities of Bristol and Swansea. This will be the only group of its kind focused on medieval Wales and the March.

'This initiative is absolutely in line with the Society's commitment to encourage enable and support research into the Welsh Marcher Lordships and the Mortimers," says Society Secretary, Philip Hume. 'This can only be done within the context of medieval Wales."

Three members of the Society, Dr Sara Elin Roberts, Dr Emma Cavell and Philip Hume will be co-convenors of the group. Professor Fulton and her team, whose research project into the cultural history of the March is our cover story, will provide administrative support.

Sara Elin Roberts, Emma Cavell and Philip Hume are co-convenors

The online seminar will in some ways seek to replicate the success of a seminar series mounted by the Institute of Historical Research in London. "The difference," says Philip, "is that our virtual seminars can be attended by scholars wherever in the world they're based and, while the Institute's series covers all aspects of early and late medieval history, we have a particular focus that absolutely reflects the interests of our Society."

A multi-disciplinary community

"The first seminars will take place in spring 2023," says Philip. "During autumn and winter, we'll be inviting appropriate scholars and academics to join the group. Our plan is to create a multi-disciplinary community of people working on the cultural, literary, legal and political history of medieval Wales and the Marches. We'll also be inviting scholars to submit and deliver papers during the 2023 seminar series." The number of seminars to be held will be dependent on how many papers are submitted of course, but Philip points out that the ambition is to build towards three or four seminars per academic term.

The group will benefit Society members in many ways, says Philip. "Papers delivered at the seminars will provide a rich source of articles for the MHS Journal and/or Mortimer Matters, as well as being possible topics and talks for our conferences and events. Further, the online seminar group will provide an excellent opportunity for the many early career scholars and mature students who are members of the Society to share their work with their peers." Whilst the online seminar group will consist of scholars reading and discussing their academic research work papers, all MHS members can attend."

KEEP THE DATE!

As the year draws to its end, our 2023 programme is starting to take shape. Here are some vital dates for your diary. More details to come.

Saturday, 3 December
A medieval Christmas

This half-day conference has a festive theme, and examines how Christmas was celebrated during the Middle Ages. Holy Trinity Church, Hereford. Details on page 17.

Saturday, 28 January

A virtual afternoon conference followed by a series of online evening talks exploring aspects of learning and education in medieval Wales.

Saturday, 25 March
AGM

Morning event to be held at St George's Parish Church, Orleton. AGM business will be followed by two talks, the first on church chests (including those at Orleton) and the second on the Mortimers and Orleton, including the mystery of Orleton's carved stone heads.

Saturday, 13 May
Sex, marriage and dynasty building

Our spring conference is dedicated to all things related to the family, from sex to marriage, childrearing and the Mortimer approach to dynasty building.

June (date tbc)
John Grove memorial lecture

Second in our annual lecture series commemorating the life of our Society's founder. Our speaker will be Dr David Stephenson, who will talk about conflict, acculturation and integration in the medieval Welsh March.

Tuesday, 1 August
Marking the 700th anniversary of Roger Mortimer's escape from the Tower of London

This very special event will look at all aspects of Roger's imprisonment and escape. And will mark the launch of the Society's most ambitious publication yet - *Dynasty of Destiny: the Mortimers of Wigmore in the Middle Ages, 1066-1485* an anthology of Mortimer-related essays. Speakers include Dr Ian Mortimer, Dr Laura Tompkins, Professor Chris Given-Wilson, Dr Jeremy Ashbee and Dr Paul Dryburgh.

Saturday, 7 October

Autumn symposium featuring talks by Mortimer History Society members.

For updates to our events schedule see future issues of *Mortimer Matters* or visit our website, www.mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk.

Anthology writers...

Next year the Society celebrates the 700th anniversary of Roger Mortimer's escape from the Tower by publishing *Dynasty of Destiny: the Mortimers of Wigmore in the Middle Ages, 1066-1485*. This anthology of Mortimer-related essays will be revealed to the world at a very special event at the Tower of London. Here one of our contributing scholars, Barbara Wright, gives us an insight to her contribution.

Barbara is a researcher and palaeographer of almost forty years standing and has been studying and transcribing texts relating to the 13th and 14th century Mortimer families for three decades. Early collaborations were with English Heritage for their in-house survey of Wigmore Castle when they acquired guardianship of it (2002), and with the BBC (House Detectives at Large: *Wigmore Abbey*: 2002). Her own papers and discoveries have provided factual contributions to many other people's publications. She is currently engaged in developing an enhanced version of *The Black Book of Wigmore*, the damaged and deficient Mortimer cartulary held in the British Library.

Barbara Wright

The execution and burial of Roger Mortimer, 1st earl of March (1287 to 1330)

Barbara's contribution to the anthology will put the execution and burial of Roger Mortimer in context. 1280-1352 was a time of considerable reform and consolidation of English law, against a background of rebellion, usurpation, and social disruption. Deaths in conflict and by semi-judicial execution were rife, and the families of those killed had varying degrees of success in recovering their kin for burial. Descriptions of the fate of Roger Mortimer's corpse are many, varied, and unsatisfactory, and often written decades after the event. To arrive at any kind of truth, it's necessary to understand the legal framework, the religious requirements, and the immediate circumstances surrounding the execution of certain felons, and how treason came to be the capital offence created by statute in 1352. Barbara will examine why and how executions happened, and who had access to the corpse afterwards. She'll also look at how the demeanour of the king, and the family circumstances of the offender, contributed to the fate of a body. Her research concludes that Mortimer's resting place was not with his ancestors at Wigmore Abbey, but in what was, at the time of writing, a municipal car park in Coventry. Richard III, it seems, was not the first!

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.

Medieval Documents Group plans study weekend for February 2023

Want to learn how to read medieval manuscripts and use archives for research? The Society's Medieval Documents Group is planning two days of learning for its existing and new members.

Held in Leominster on 25 and 26 February next year, the weekend will mean a welcome return to face-to-face meetings for the group after the restrictions of Covid. For some time meetings have been held every two or three weeks by Zoom, but now it's possible to get together again at last! Everyone is welcome – whether you're an existing member of the group or keen to join and make a start.

"This friendly group has members of all abilities and experience, and new joiners are always welcome," says the group's administrator Yve James. "There's no pressure to contribute more than you wish to, and you can participate and learn at your own speed. For new members, the weekend will provide a useful introduction to the group and its work."

The Medieval Documents Group studies, transcribes and translates medieval documents written in Latin, many of which are in some way related to the Mortimer family. Occasionally Anglo-Norman documents are also studied. The group is tutored by Dr Paul Dryburgh, President of the Society, and Helen Watt, an archivist and historian with expertise in medieval government and manorial records.

There is no fee to attend the weekend, though you will need to meet your own travel, accommodation and food costs. If you're interested in coming along, email **medievaldocs@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk**.

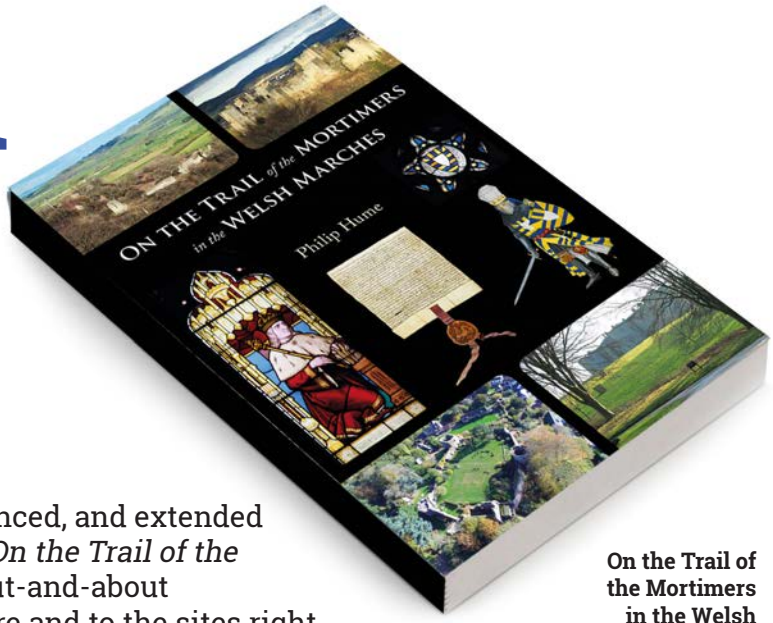
Are you descended from the medieval Mortimers

Society Chair Hugh Wood is compiling a list of members interested in sharing their connections to the medieval Mortimers. Interested?

Quite a few Society members have traced their ancestry back to the Mortimers, and may be prepared to share their pedigrees and learn about others. While MHS is not a family history society, we are happy to facilitate communication between Mortimer descendants. So, if your family tree goes back to the medieval Mortimers, and you'd like to share it and learn about other Mortimer descendants, please prepare an outline family tree for yourself, showing key marriages etc. Then send it, with any accompanying notes, directly to Hugh at **chair@mortimerhistorysociety.org.uk**

Hugh will then collate and share all contributions with relevant email addresses. Each member of the group will then be free to contact any other member directly, if they wish. It goes without saying that the information supplied will not be distributed beyond the family history group itself.

Hit the trail with the Mortimers



On the Trail of the Mortimers in the Welsh Marches book cover

October sees the publication of the revised, enhanced, and extended edition of the society's seminal book, now titled *On the Trail of the Mortimers in the Welsh Marches*, your reliable out-and-about guide to the medieval Mortimer family of Wigmore and to the sites right across the Welsh Marches that were important to them.

When first published in spring 2016, *On the Trail of the Mortimers* introduced readers to the history of the medieval Mortimers of Wigmore, interwoven with the castles, churches, battle sites, and other physical remains associated with them within a rough ten-mile radius of their castle at Wigmore. The new edition extends across the whole of the Marches with two comprehensive tours. The first includes the original locations close to Wigmore, plus new ones in central and western Radnorshire (the Welsh cantref of Maelienydd). The second or outer tour extends to new sites right across the Marches – reflecting the Mortimers' domination of the region, which was the source of their great wealth and power. The section on the family's history has also been updated and extended.

A best seller and a trusted guide

"We partnered with publishers Logaston to create *On the Trail of the Mortimers* back in Spring 2016, confident that there would be an appetite for an accessible history of the family and the dramatic locations that still connect us to its members," says author and Society Secretary, Philip Hume. "Nonetheless, we've been amazed by its popularity and success." Two thousand copies of the book were sold within two years of publication, and many more since. "More importantly," says Philip, "people consistently report that the book has encouraged and enabled them to visit many of the fascinating sites described in its pages."

At the start of summer 2022, when it became evident that the third print would be sold out by the autumn, the decision was taken not just to reprint the book but to recreate it, extending across the Marches to reflect the Mortimers' extensive reach.

Two tours

The new book uses physical sites and remains to give an insight into how the Mortimer family came from Normandy, became established in Wigmore and, over the centuries, rose to be one of the most powerful families in the land. Partly though the good fortune of having an unbroken male succession for 350 years, and also through conquest, marriage and royal favour, they amassed a great empire of estates in England, Wales and Ireland; played key roles in the changing balance of power between the monarchy and the nobility; deposed a king and virtually ruled the kingdom for three years; became, in later generations, close heirs to the throne through marriage; and seized the throne through battle when a Mortimer grandson became King Edward IV.

Throughout the medieval period, the Welsh March encompassed an area that ran from the north-east coast of Wales, down to the Severn Estuary, and across all of south Wales to the west coast of Pembrokeshire. The territory was defined by the 50 or so powerful, independent Marcher Lordships that formed a region between the lands of England and the Principality of Wales. By the late 14th century, the Mortimers owned or controlled a third of the March. "Indeed," says Philip, "when Roger Mortimer (d. 1330) was elevated to the rank of Earl, he chose for himself the title Earl of March. Though controversial at the time, it accurately reflected the source of his power, wealth and influence."

King of Folly (a drawing of Roger Mortimer d.1330) (C) Ethan Gould

On the Trail of the Mortimers in the Welsh Marches by Philip Hume is available now from **www.logastonpress.co.uk** at the specially discounted price of £11 for Society members (rrp £12.99). Just enter the discount code **TRAILMHS** when ordering online.

A medieval Christmas!

Come to our final event of 2022 and find out what people in the Middle Ages thought about Christmas and how they made merry. Some ideas for your 2022 celebrations perhaps?

Join us at Holy Trinity Church in Hereford on Saturday 3 December to get into the mood of Christmas in times gone by. We'll have two fascinating talks, plus musical diversion from period musicians, Pease Pottage

Medieval Christmas customs

Most of the Christmas we're familiar with emerged in Victorian times, While the medieval Christmas also involved greenery, gift-giving and lots of food it also includes lots of customs unfamiliar to us today, from boar's head processions to bean kings, boy bishops and more. Professor Giles E M Gasper of Durham University explores the distinctive aspects of medieval yule-tide and their connections to the early church. And we'll find out what they ate, too!

Chants and carols: Medieval Christmas and the church

The medieval experience of Christmas was structured around the rituals and ceremonies of the Church. Dr Sigbjørn Sønnesyn, Lecturer in Medieval Christianity at the University of Bristol reveals the imagery and rhythm of Christmas and evoke the shared traditions that made this feast so special. And he'll redefine what 'feast' means – not just a fine meal, but a moment in time when normal habits are suspended and people unite to celebrate.

Talks will be interspersed with music from period music due Pease Pottage, who will bring the carols of medieval Christmas back to life.

Special thanks to Society member Bishop David Thompson for his help and support in hosting this seasonal half-day event. We'll begin at 10am on Saturday 3 December and finish at 1pm. Entry for Society members and parishioners of West Hereford will be £12. For everyone else, £16.

Welcome to new members

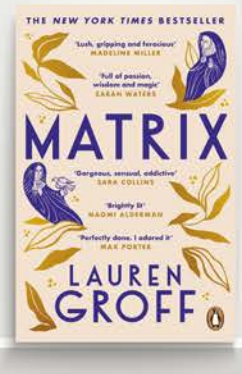
Our membership continues to flourish. Twenty two new members have joined since the last edition of Mortimer Matters. Welcome all! We hope you're enjoying your membership and look forward to meeting you.

John & Sheelah Barnes	**Kington**	**Jan & David Malins**	**Hereford**
Judith Cuddihey	**Thetford**	**Susan Mattheus**	**Ludlow**
John Davis	**Henley-in-Arden**	**Martin and Linda Prescott**	**Faringdon**
Thomas Howell Evans	**Llanwrtyd, Wales**	**Andrew Scarisbrook**	**Ormskirk**
James Hasekman	**Texas, USA**	**Beth Shannon**	**Georgetown, USA**
Catherine Hawkins	**Manchester, USA**	**Robert and Shiona Smith**	**Monmouth**
Gloria Johnson	**Wem**	**Penelope Williams**	**Bridgend**
Linds Law	**Wolverhampton**	**Molly Yates**	**Burscough**
Matt Lewis	**Six Ashes**	**Sapphire Zagni**	**Pembridge**

For your bookshelf

We've focused on fiction this time. Here are four great novels set in the Middle Ages we think you'll enjoy...

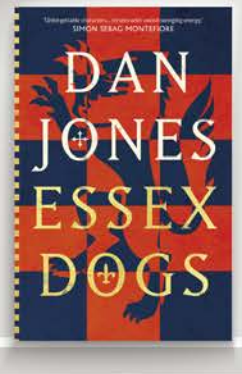
The Matrix
By **Lauren Groff**



Marie of France is cast out from the royal court and sent to an impoverished English abbey, where she pines for the decadent comforts of France and the arms of her lover. Yet she finds, though tied to a life of duty, she can wield incredible power. Fearless and visionary she inspires her sisterhood to claim their own greatness. This dazzling novel gathers currents of violence, sensuality and ecstacy in a mesmerising portrait of passion and womanhood.

Published by Penguin and available now in bookshops and online. RRP £9.99.

Essex Dogs
By **Dan Jones**



Bestselling historian Dan Jones makes his historical fiction debut with this story of fighting men during the Hundred Years War. Rooted in historical accuracy, and told through an earthy cast of archers, men-at-arms and misfits, *Essex Dogs* delivers the stark reality of medieval war in the round – and shines a light on ordinary people caught in the storm.

Published by Head of Zeus and available now in bookshops and online. RRP £16.99.

Joan
By **Catherine J Chen**

A challenging retelling of the life of Joan of Arc, who survives a violent childhood to claim an extraordinary – and fragile – place at the head of the French army. Joan is under threat from everyone, and from her own ambition. A vivid and convincing re-imagining of a story we think we all know.

Published by Hodder & Stoughton and available now in bookshops and line. RRP £16.99.

The Daughter of Time
By Josephine Tey

Originally published in 1951 this classic detective novel by one of the great Queens of Crime has been re-published by Penguin seventy years after her death. It investigates the case against Richard III for the murder of the Princes in the Tower and, if you've never read it, it's an absolute must.

Republished by Penguin and available now in bookshops and online. RRP £8.99.