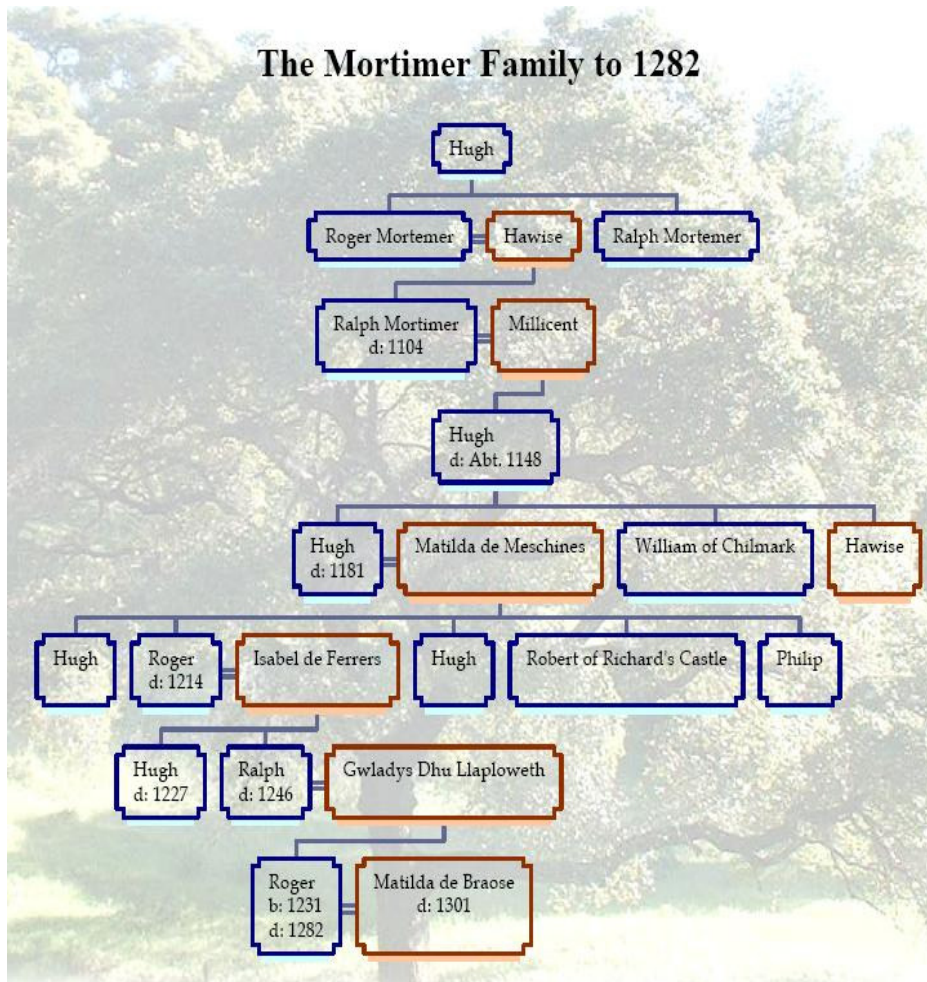


The Mortimer Family

Sometime before William conquered England, one of his followers, Roger, gave himself a surname. He took it from the village and castle he owned at Mortemer-en-Brai (or mortuum mare in Latin) in the Pays de Caux in Normandy. Although Mortemer-en-Brai was given to Roger's nephew (the 1st Earl of Surrey) by William the Conqueror, the family kept the name Mortimer. Roger transferred his chief seat to Saint-Victor-en-Caux, where he created an abbey in 1074. This had a direct influence on our village of Mortimer because the abbey's priory at Clatford had the right to appoint the priest to the church in Mortimer until 1348.



Although Roger was too old to fight at the battle of Hastings it is possible that his son Ralph did so. Ralph inherited his father's estates in Normandy and England, but acquired most of his lands in Shropshire and Herefordshire from William the Conqueror in 1074. Although Ralph spent much of his time extending his territory on the English-Welsh border and defending his lands in Normandy, he was also the first Mortimer to take arms against the King when he fought against William Rufus in 1088. As with later Mortimers, though, when it became more advantageous, he sided with the King.

It is not clear whether his successor, Hugh, was his son or grandson, but either way he continued the family business of fighting to defend his interests and extend his territory. In one of his border feuds, Hugh was captured and it is said that he was held prisoner at

Ludlow Castle in Mortimer's Tower - unfortunately this was built a couple of centuries later. Henry II was sufficiently worried about the growing power of the Mortimers to besiege some of his towns on the English-Welsh border, but although this reduced Hugh's political activity (he turned to setting up Wigmore Priory in Herefordshire), his son Roger continued the fighting.

Roger Mortimer's wife, Matilda de Broase, brought with her extensive estates in Brecon and Radnor and elsewhere. The Mortimers came to dominate the border areas and Roger engaged in a lengthy armed struggle with Llywelyn ab Gruffydd, Prince of Wales - his mother's brother's son. At times Roger fought for King Henry III, and at others he sided with the barons against him. His political importance is shown by the fact that he was one of the regents governing England on behalf of Edward I whilst the country was waiting for his return from the Crusades between 1272 and 1274. Perhaps surprisingly, illness rather than warfare killed Roger Mortimer in 1282.

The Mortimers continued to be involved in all the wars of Edward I and Edward II. Another Roger Mortimer (the family were never particularly inventive about names) fought at the battle of Bannockburn (1314) in which Robert the Bruce's Scottish army defeated the English. This Roger also turned against his King and Edward II had him imprisoned in the Tower of London where he died in 1326.

The most important of all the Mortimers was another Roger, who was born in 1286 or 1287. He was placed in the wardship of Piers Gaveston (later the favourite of Edward II) and married Joan de Genville who brought with her Ludlow and lands in Ireland. Roger first went to Ireland in 1308 and thereafter Ireland became a preoccupation of the Mortimer family. Edward II created Roger Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and he successfully stopped Robert Bruce's, Edward, from taking control there.

Roger also turned against the King, though, and was imprisoned in the Tower of London with his uncle Roger. On the night of 1 August 1324 the guards' drinks were drugged and a hole cut in the cell wall. Using a rope ladder and a great deal of daring Roger was able to get down to the River Thames where a boat was waiting to take him across to the Surrey bank. There fast horses took him to the coast and then a ship that had been made ready took him to France. Whilst he was in France, Roger formed a political and personal alliance with Isabella, wife of Edward II and in 1326 he returned to England at the head of an invading force. Edward II was deposed in favour of his son, Edward III, but effectively Roger ruled England through Isabella. Although Roger held no formal position there was great hostility towards him for his ostentatious display of wealth and his political dominance. The young Edward III also objected to his relationship with his mother and finally Roger was arrested at Nottingham Castle and taken to Tyburn, in London, where on 29 November 1330 he was hanged, drawn and quartered.

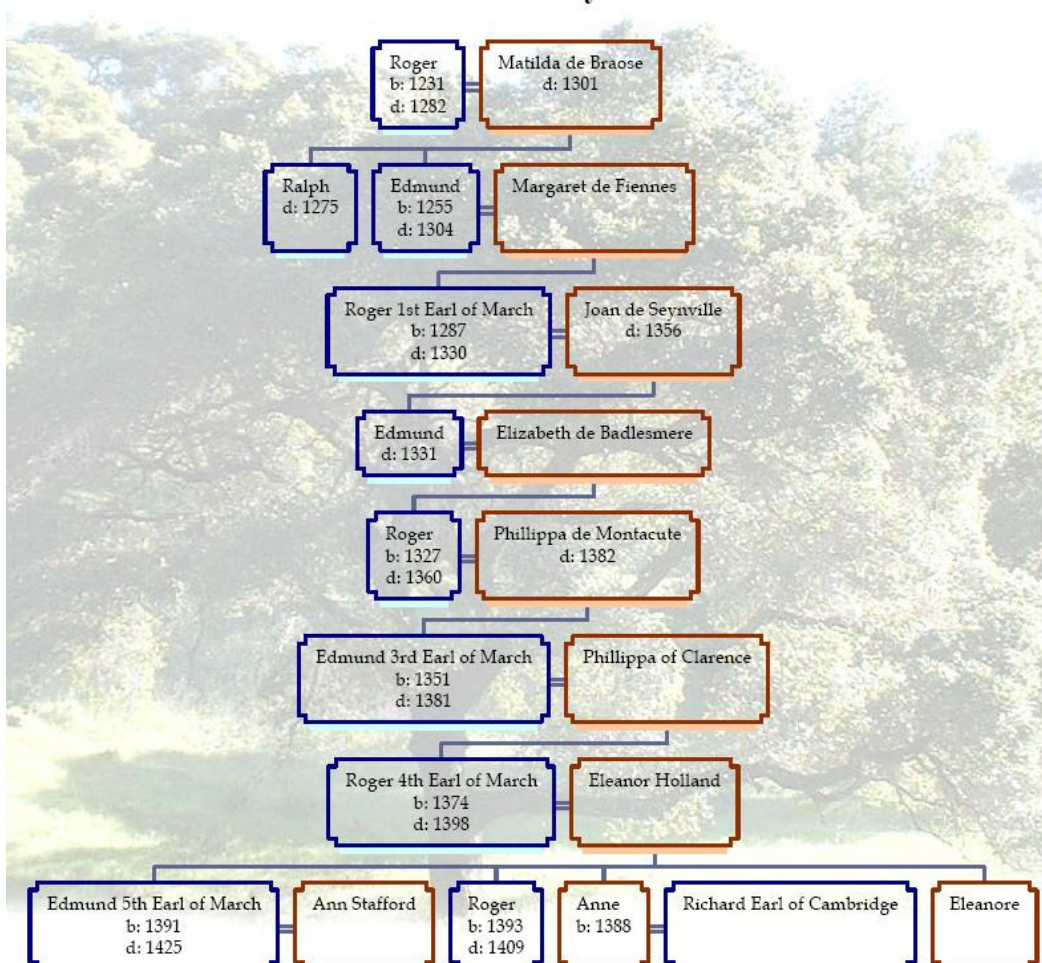
It is much to the credit of Roger Mortimer's grandson, yet another Roger, that he was able to reacquire the family's estates after his grandfather's treason. This Roger fought loyally for

Edward III, taking part in the invasion of France in 1346 and the battle of Crecy. Roger finished his days as the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.

The marriage of Roger's son Edmund to Philippa, daughter of the Duke of Clarence, son of Edward III, brought the Mortimers back into political life at the highest level. Edmund's main interests lay in Ireland and he was relatively successful in bringing a measure of peace to the troubled island. His end was, though, hardly glorious as he caught a cold crossing a river in winter and died on 27 December 1381.

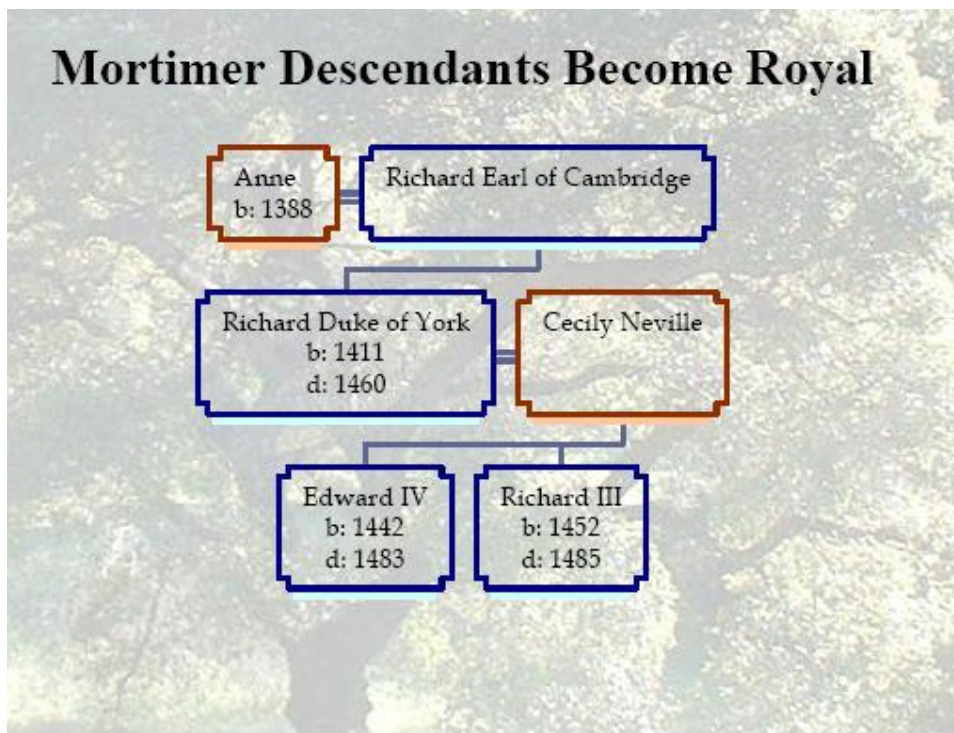
Edmund and Philippa's eldest son, Roger (of course), was named by Richard II as heir to the throne of England in 1385. Roger continued the family interest in Ireland and died there in a skirmish at Kells in 1398. His younger brother, Edmund returned to the political intriguing of his ancestors. Initially Edmund fought to subdue Owen Glendower in Wales, but after he was captured he made common cause with Glendower and married his daughter. In 1405 Edmund Mortimer put forward the plan to deprive Henry IV of his kingdom and divide it into three parts: the Mortimers taking southern England, the Percies the north and Glendower Wales. Henry IV proved to be sufficiently powerful to stop this and Edmund Mortimer died in the siege of Harlech Castle in 1409.

The Mortimer Family 1282 to 1409



The last in the direct line of male Mortimers was another Edmund Mortimer. He was the son of Roger Mortimer (1374-1398) and born in 1391. When Henry IV deposed Richard II in 1399 Edmund and his brother Roger were placed under armed guard at Windsor. Henry IV named his own son as heir to the throne removing Edmund's chance of holding the crown. Edmund proved to be a faithful fighter for Henry V and went with him to France in 1415. He caught dysentery at Harfleur and so had to return home while the rest of the army fought the battle of Agincourt. Edmund continued to fight for Henry V, principally in Ireland, where he died of plague in 1425.

Since there were no more male Mortimers the title passed through Edmund's sister, Anne, to her son. He was Richard, Duke of York, father of the future Edward IV and Richard III. Thus it was that the Mortimer estates became part of the holdings of the crown.



There is no evidence that any of the Mortimers visited Stratfield Mortimer and their affairs there were run by their bailiffs. This neglect meant that Mortimer remained poor, but it did stay peaceful.