

ROGER MORTIMER

by Mary Somerville

Reproduced from her article in the Steward of

Roger Mortimer, Lord Wigmore, 3rd Baron Mortimer, 1st Earl of March (25 April 1287 – 29 November 1330) inherited his titles and wealthy estates in the Welsh Marches from his father and from his advantageous marriage to Joan, 2nd Baroness Geneville. He was the second cousin twice removed of King Edward II and he held several important offices during the king's reign. Mortimer was also a distant relative of Isabella of France, and Queen of England (known as the 'she-wolf of France') who was to become his lover. Their heads are placed close together looking towards each other on the west side of the pulpitum.

In 1321 Mortimer joined a revolt against Edward II. He submitted to the king in 1322 and was sentenced to 'life imprisonment' in the Tower of London rather than being executed. This mistake on the King's part would lead to his downfall, as Mortimer managed to engineer his escape to France. Here he met Isabella, who had travelled to France on a diplomatic mission. They allegedly became lovers and plotted to depose the king. Isabella and Mortimer returned to England with a small mercenary army in 1326 and swiftly conquered England.

Isabella declared herself 'Regent' on behalf of her 12 year old son and Edward II was forced to abdicate from the throne in the first deposition of a monarch in British history. It is alleged that Mortimer and/or Isabella then arranged for the ex-king to be murdered in Berkeley Castle.

Mortimer, with Isabella, was now *de facto* ruler of England. All attempts to upset or curtail his power were defeated until October 1330, when Mortimer, in the King's name, summoned Parliament to attend him at Nottingham. It was here that Edward III's loyal Knights were conducted into a secret underground passage leading up through the rock and into the castle by the Constable of the Castle. Contrary to the popular myths and romance that surround Mortimer and Isabella, the passage led not into the couple's bedchamber, but into the Inner Bailey of the Castle. Mortimer and his men put up a desperate fight but they were overpowered, Mortimer was arrested and Isabella was placed under armed guard. We can only assume that this 'local' link is the reason that he features on the pulpitum!

At his trial Mortimer was found guilty of 14 crimes, against the king and country. Consequently, he was sentenced to a traitor's death and to be hung, drawn and quartered. In a much disputed act of clemency, the King commuted the sentence to one of being 'hung by the neck until dead'. On the morning of the 29th November 1330, Mortimer became the first nobleman to be hanged at Tyburn as a common criminal.