



Mortimer History Society – towards a strategy for the future: Summary

January 2012

A. Introduction

This document is a shortened version of a report prepared for the MHS committee. Members are invited to consider the main recommendations given below as B and read pages 2-4 for the context:

B. Summary of main recommendations

B.1 Organise an occasional meeting outside the region or with another organisation.

B.2 Broaden the appeal of the society to include people with a general interest in the medieval history of the Marches, possibly changing the title to Mortimer and the Marches History Society.

B.3 Develop greater links with Wigmore and Ludlow – castle and community – including them in a regular structured field visit/activity programme.

B.4 Current conference format is old-fashioned and members want more informal events with participation and an activity or visit included. Establish a programme committee to coordinate events and activities.

B.5 Hold a Mortimer Basics study day/s to create a shared knowledge base (this can develop to a Marches History study day and a Mortimers in France study week-end); and

attract university history departments by involving them in new Mortimer projects, and instituting an annual Mortimer award.

B.6 Website requires further development and investment to attract members and provide a platform for future resources such as the further work on the gazetteer and the creation on-line learning materials.

B.7 The society should decide to attract a reliable core membership with a general interest in the medieval history of the Marches, and then target other audiences through projects and joint partnerships.

B.8 Develop a bank of educational resources – Mortimer materials – possibly based on Wigmore Castle. This could be expanded into a Mortimer and the Marches informal curriculum which could form the basis for a targeted learning activity, especially with local history groups and schools in mind.

B.9 Create a clear identity for all marketing, publishing and publicity purposes.

B.10 Ensure that there are members on the committee from each county to improve communication locally and a representative from any active subgroups, e.g. textiles, etc.



MHS visit to Radnor, 2011

C. Background

The Mortimer History Society (MHS) was established in 2009 to act as a focus for academic research and general interest in the history of the medieval Mortimer family and its impact on local, national and international history. It started with 30 founder members which increased to 90 in 2010. The current target area for membership and area of activity is Herefordshire, Shropshire and Powys; there are some wider UK and overseas members.

D. Regional Strategy

The society has already carried out an ambitious events programme and has a website that supports and promotes the work of the society and its members. The chairman and committee are looking ahead and want to see how MHS can develop in a realistic and sustainable way. A new member of the committee, Stella Mason, was asked to review the options consulting widely. A draft was produced in June 2011 and circulated to the committee; this document is a summary taking into consideration comments received from the committee. Since June 2011 there have been a number of developments which have been mentioned in the text where appropriate.

E. Summary of issues discussed

E. 1 Scope

E.1a Geographical spread

The area of activity is Herefordshire, Shropshire and Powys. If the aspirations of the MHS is national and as the Mortimers influenced national politics then why limit the focus on the Marcher counties. A meeting elsewhere or with another organisation from time to time would raise the profile nationally and give members outside the region something.

E.1b Subject area

Mortimers – the subject is less well-known nationally than Richard III. If the intention is to

have more activities which are inter-disciplinary (music, art, etc.) i.e. a wide scope within the medieval time framework, then why not broaden the stated subject area? There is a mission to improve understanding of Marcher and Mortimer history and that should be clear in the society's branding.

E.1c Outputs

Currently the MHS has the following outputs: conferences, an AGM, a series of field visits, newsletters, website and a journal. This is an ambitious programme is it successful in supporting the society's aims?

Conferences – The current 'conference' format is old-fashioned and members want more informal events with participation and an activity or visit included. The recent meeting at Ewyas Harold was a move in the right direction. It is proposed that next year a study day or series of study days are held to provide a Mortimer shared knowledge base which will give all members a basic understanding of the subject. In further years there could be a Marches study day and a Mortimers in France study week-end.

AGM – attended by hard core of membership (45) suggest combine with a meeting or have a speaker to attract members.

Field visits – this is a popular activity and there is scope for further development. This could include: regular visits to Wigmore and Ludlow Castles as core Mortimer locations is desirable, (Wigmore may require a sustained commitment in the future); links with other societies, museums and record offices could be used to offer a field visit with an introduction to archeological method, how to read a medieval church or trying your hand at paleography; activities led by specialist interests within the society.

With a lot of opportunities for a varied programme, it is proposed that a programme sub-committee is formed to drive and coordinate the programme of events.

Newsletters – in paper and by email also available for reference on the website for members only but why members only at this early stage in the development of the society?

Website – contains society information and a gazetteer but requires further development and investment to be attractive and provide a platform for future resources.

Journal – unattractive presentation and lack of illustrations – is it a learned publication or a membership publication?

E.1d Partnerships

MHS has joined with some local history societies e.g. Kington for the visit to Wigmore. These make sense, but why not raise the stakes and contribute to some of the regional initiatives. An obvious one is the Ludlow Festival – one of the lectures could be organised by the MHS. Another one is Hay Literary Festival – join with either the Wales or Herefordshire stand. This would reach a wider audience and give some publicity/status to the society. Recent developments at Wigmore Castle may give an opportunity for a long-term regional partnership.

E. 2 Membership

E.2a Statistics and profile (provided by the MHS Secretary)

| | | | % |
|----|--------------------------------|----|------|
| 1 | Herefordshire | 26 | 63.3 |
| 2 | Shropshire | 17 | |
| 3 | Powys | 7 | |
| 4 | Worcestershire | 7 | |
| 5 | Rest of Wales and West England | 14 | 15.6 |
| 6 | East England | 9 | 10 |
| 7 | Scotland | 3 | 3.3 |
| 8 | Overseas | 6 | 6.7 |
| 9 | <i>Unknown</i> | 1 | |
| 10 | <i>not renewed</i> | 29 | |
| 11 | <i>joint</i> | 8 | |

E.2b Target audiences

Fundamental to any forward plan is what sort of membership does the MHS want to attract and therefore what sort of society is it? Is it a learned society or is it a general interest society? Does it have a mission – a wrong to right or a perception to change? Does it want to protect heritage? Can it be all things to all people? It is proposed that the society should agree to attract a reliable core membership and then target other audiences through projects and joint partnerships. Membership in Shropshire, Powys and Worcestershire must be boosted and it is proposed that regional representation on the committee might help to increase wider sustainable membership.

E.2c Membership benefits

Current membership benefits are outlined in outputs – non-members can attend conferences and trips but at an increased price. Members not in the region should have solid benefits for their subscription. Lack of contact and communication will lead to a fall off of members. Above all, from this viewpoint, medieval history should be about fun and learning for such a society as this. Academics earn their crust with new research and publications but members of MHS engage with their interests to enrich their lives. Within the MHS there are members with special interests, e.g. Textiles, heraldry; these should be encouraged and promoted.

E.2d Young people

The chairman has an aspiration to attract young people; at the moment this is not happening. History is taught at key stage 2 and can be included in stage3 but not in 4. Pressure will mean that teachers will need information packaged in a useable format that ticks all the boxes for the curriculum. There are cross-curriculum possibilities on a case by case basis. It is suggested that it is important to concentrate on building a core membership and organising an active programme of events – Mortimer study day, visits, etc. and develop a

Mortimer and the Marches informal curriculum. Then from that it would be possible to develop ideas for a targeted learning activity for Key Stage 3 and hope to attract and involve older students to our activities.

E. 3 Marketing

E.3a Branding

Branding needs to mean business and show it is in touch with current trends. We do need a clear identity for all marketing and publicity purpose. The brand should be attached to all the society produces. Does the current format work for the society?

E.3b Publicity

So far there has been some good local publicity in the Country Life county spin-offs and local press. How can the society attract national coverage? Should it make better use of Ian Mortimer and John Challis? Participating in higher-profile events, as suggested in Partnerships, would rub off positively on MHS. All the society's events and activities are publicity. There has not been any national coverage.

E.3c Website

Website is discussed above; an attractive and informative website is essential for publicity and communication but it does have serious cost implications.

E. 4 Governance

E.4a Chairman and committee

The Chairman is the founder and driving force of the society. While this is essential at the start the measure of a successful society is that the chairman is only one of a number of individuals who have raised their head above the parapet. It is proposed that there are members on the committee from each area to improve communication and local knowledge. This would help with local organisation of visits and meetings. Representatives from the various

sub-groups should also attend committee meetings.

E.4b Status

Many societies are charitable trusts such status helps when attracting funding. Others are charities by association. For future consideration as the society develops.

E. 5 Finance

E.5a Current finances

The society currently has a balance of £2,000. For planning purposes, an annual budget is essential to identify funding shortfalls against planned activity and opportunities for securing external funding for key projects.

F Acknowledgements

Stella Mason would like to thank all members who responded to the survey and commented on the draft document – members, committee, non-members consulted and other societies. A full list is given in the main document, available on request.



Wigmore Castle