

# The Wigmore Chronicle

The term ‘Wigmore Chronicle’ is fairly loosely used. I have to admit that, like many others, I’ve been inconsistent in the way I’ve employed the title over the course of my career. Unsurprisingly, various people have asked me ‘what is the Wigmore Chronicle?’ This note is simply to answer that question.

The term is used simply to describe a chronicle that has a significant amount of Wigmore and Mortimer evidence, and therefore was probably written at Wigmore Abbey. This means there are at least four chronicles that could be described ‘the Wigmore chronicle’. They are all distinct works. The first is the most unusual, being a family chronicle (rather than a monastic, national or local one), and it is this one that people most usually mean when they say ‘the Wigmore Chronicle’. It is also the most important text – even though it contains some significant errors and misunderstood associations, which have led some writers (like the compilers of the *Complete Peerage*) wholly to ignore it.

Readers wanting a more detailed view of the various Mortimer chronicles should consult Chris Given-Wilson’s article ‘The Chronicles of the Mortimer Family, c. 1250-1450’, in R. Eales & S. Tyas (eds), *Family and Dynasty in Late Medieval England* (2003), pp. 67-86.

## 1. The ‘Fundatorum Historia’ (Latin. Published by Dugdale. Available here as a pdf: <http://www.mortimer.co.uk/wigmore/Wigmore%20chronicle%20from%20Dugdale.pdf>)

This is a short chronicle of the Mortimers of Wigmore, clearly written by a canon of Wigmore Abbey. Although unique, the manuscript is not the original, which has been lost. In fact, what we have today is not even an original copy.

The extant manuscript was copied in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century from an original written up in the 1390s. This 1390s original incorporated the text of an earlier chronicle composed in 1262 (as shown by the reference to Roger Mortimer (1232-1282), son of Ralph Mortimer (d. 1246), having been lord of Wigmore for sixteen years at the time of writing). This early date of composition makes it very important. Its references to the *reconquest* of Maelienydd by Hugh and the killing and blinding of named Welsh princes by him in the 1140s, which are supported by Welsh sources, demonstrate some of its early evidence is sound. Furthermore, although the *Complete Peerage* editors set the document aside because it suggests (a) Hugh Mortimer was lord of Wigmore for more than eighty years (which they did not believe) and (b) he married Matilda, the daughter of William ‘Longsword’ (whom they assumed was the tenth century Norman count of that name), recent research has shown that the editors were wrong on both accounts. Hugh really did live a very long time (circa 1100-1181) and he really did marry a Matilda, whose father was indeed a William (le Meschin), who may well have been nicknamed ‘Longsword’. Thus the text actually turns out to be more reliable on the early history of the family than the *Complete Peerage*.

The text of the chronicle, updated in the 1390s, would have found its finished form in a lavishly produced high-quality text, illustrated with genealogical tables, to demonstrate the Mortimer claim to the throne. Adam Usk (see below) refers to the document in describing the death of Roger Mortimer in 1398. Therefore the revised version was presumably drawn up sometime

between Roger's first claim to be heir to the throne (1394) and his death. Later interpolations were made in the original; these were copied into the extant manuscript, along with crude copies of the genealogical tables.

The extant manuscript is now in Chicago University Library (MS 224); a B&W microfilm of the original manuscript is available to purchase from that library. The text was edited and published in the original Latin by William Dugdale in his *Monasticon* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and republished by the editors of the second edition of *Monasticon* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars sometimes refer to it with the title that Dugdale gave it: 'Fundationis et Fundatorum Historia'. I refer to it in my recent work on the early generations of the family as 'Fundatorum Historia'.

The above link will allow you to download this chronicle together with the one below, in the form in which Dugdale printed them in the seventeenth century. Mary Giffin's description of the whole Chicago manuscript, published in the National Library of Wales Journal in 1952, is freely available here: <http://welshjournals.llgc.org.uk/browse/viewobject/llgc-id:1279553/article/000037892>

## **2. The Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Wigmore Abbey** (French. Published. Available here: <http://www.anglo-norman.net/cgi-bin/and-getloc?filename=wigmore-apps.xml&loc=419>)

This is to be found in the same manuscript as the 'Fundatorum Historia', in Chicago University Library. It is a detailed account of the foundation of the abbey, originally written in Latin but now only known from the French translation. I believe that the original was composed at Wigmore within the lifetime of the earliest canons of the priory (as it was then), around 1200. Prof Chris Given-Wilson says much the same thing, in his article 'The Chronicles of the Mortimer Family'.

It has been published three times. Dugdale included it in his *Monasticon* in the seventeenth century, and it was republished in the nineteenth-century edition of that work. It was edited again by J. C. Dickinson and P. T. Ricketts as 'The Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Wigmore Abbey', *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club*, vol. 39 (1967-9), pp. 413-45.

## **3. The Wigmore Annals** (Latin. Published in original and in translation.)

This is a short but unique set of annals (annual lists of events, arranged year by year) in John Rylands University Library (Latin MS 215 ff. 1-8). It covers local events from 1105 to 1306 (there are earlier entries taken from other general chronicles).

A Latin transcript was printed in the back of B. P. Evans, 'The Mortimer family' (PhD, University of Wales, 1934). Paul Remfry published a transcript and translation in his book, *The Wigmore Chronicle 1066-1377* (2013).

## **4. The Wigmore Chronicle** (Latin. Published in original and in translation.)

This manuscript is in Trinity College Dublin (MS 488 ff 295-9). It is a set of extracts from a chronicle covering the years 1360-1377. The original from which they were taken was probably compiled at Wigmore during the years in question. The original Latin was reproduced by John Taylor but a transcript and an English translation appears in Remfry's book mentioned above, *The Wigmore Chronicle 1066-1377*.

As well as the above four Wigmore chronicles, those interested in the medieval Mortimers and their adherents should be aware of two other chronicles that have a particular leaning towards the family.

#### **Adam Usk's Chronicle** (Latin. Published in the original and in translation)

This is a famous and very full chronicle written by a protege of the Mortimers, Adam Usk, who was born in Usk, part of the Mortimer estates. It covers the years 1377-1425 and has been edited by Chris Given-Wilson for Oxford Medieval Texts.

Usk is very sympathetic to the Mortimers but is not really concerned with Wigmore: there is only one mention of Wigmore Abbey, on p. 46, and that is in fact a section where he is quoting the text of 'Fundatorum Historia'. However Usk was a far-travelled and well-connected man, and his work is particularly useful for his presentation of the Mortimer claim to the throne. In this respect it has much in common with the 'Fundatorum Historia' and, as Usk clearly knew that document, it is possible he was involved in having it updated in the 1390s.

#### **The Ludlow Annals** (Latin. Unpublished.)

This manuscript in the British Library, Cotton Nero MS A iv, is a unique set of annals that have been added to a manuscript to 'The Llandaff Chronicle'. The annals – which go from the Birth of Christ to 1338 – were composed at Ludlow in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and put together with the Llandaff chronicle in or after 1399. It deals with local events from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Prof Given-Wilson believes the annals were not actually started until after the last date, 1338, and were compiled from notes. He describes it as a 'chronicle of a region' rather than a family chronicle.

If anyone knows of any other Mortimer or Wigmore-related chronicles, I'd be grateful if he or she would let me know.

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