

## **Mark King (History PhD) - Research Trip to Wales, 2012**

My PhD concerns the royal policy of King Richard II of England (1377-99) towards the march of Wales - the borderlands that were not part of the late medieval principality of Wales and were divided into numerous private lordships. These estates were held by many of the principal noble families of the realm; indeed, earlier in the same century, Aymer de Valence, the husband of the college's foundress, had held one such group of lordships through his tenure of the earldom of Pembroke. However, unlike elsewhere in England, these estates were held with sub-regalian jurisdiction. In other words, the marcher lord had exclusive rights over his tenants, both judicially and militarily, and, although he held his domains from the king, his authority within them was supreme. This made these men especially powerful, but under normal circumstances their power was used in the service of the king who stood at the head of their system of government and guaranteed their own position. It was not a threat to the king. Indeed, on previous occasions when one or several marchers had stepped out of line they had soon found themselves isolated and had either made their peace with the king or been crushed.

Unlike previous monarchs, Richard II did not understand that his subjects' power was a resource upon which he could call; he thought it was a threat. During the final two years of his reign, the tyranny of 1397-9, the king created a vast private landed estate for himself in the northern march of Wales, based upon the principality and the neighbouring royal earldom of Chester, and ruled the realm through military force recruited from this new powerbase. During this time he rode roughshod over the law, which it had been established in Magna Carta that the king should be subject to, and seized arbitrarily many of his subjects' lands. He was eventually deposed after doing this to the greatest landed inheritance in the realm, the duchy of Lancaster, thereby proving that nobody was safe from his machinations.

I believe that a similar pattern of behaviour can in fact be seen throughout the king's entire reign and that he was actually trying to construct a powerbase for himself within this politically sensitive region from a much earlier date. To investigate this, I am carrying out a sustained local study of the entire Welsh borderlands during this reign, looking at the interaction between royal and private noble power and the extent to which Richard attempted to exclude certain of his noblemen and their affinities from local government. I am also looking at the wider balance of geopolitical power in this region and the way in which this changed as the reign progressed. To study this I needed to consult numerous collections of manuscripts from the period, many of which are held in the National Archives in Kew, or in the British Library, but there are also extensive collections elsewhere.

In August and September 2012 I made three separate trips to Hereford, Bangor in north Wales, and Gloucester, respectively. To help with the combined costs of these trips the college generously awarded me a research bursary. In Hereford and Gloucester I went to visit the county archives, which contain many formerly private collections of manuscripts that have since been left to the public. In Bangor, by comparison, I went to consult one particular collection held by the university's archives. In Hereford and Bangor I consulted the few surviving records from some of the lordships held by one prominent marcher family, the Mortimer earls of March. These helped me to prove that, when the family had suffered a minority in the 1380s and the king had held custody of their estates, Richard had abused these lands, replacing the Mortimers' officials and squeezing as much money as possible out of the lordships in order to pay for the spiralling costs of his own household. In Gloucester I worked on a much wider group of manuscripts, all of which concerned the administrations of various notable Gloucestershire families from my period. These helped me to trace the local connections of many prominent Gloucester gentrymen, as well as their links with the nobles who held land in this county, and to develop further my understanding of local society in Gloucestershire during the late fourteenth century. When some of these connections were applied to a political dispute I had uncovered from the 1390s concerning a particular county office, it became apparent that the king was deliberately excluding one such nobleman, Thomas, Lord Berkeley, and supporting the royal household knight, Sir Guy de Brien, in a quarrel with Berkeley over the actions of their retainers. Such behaviour has long been suspected on the king's part in the 1390s but has rarely been demonstrated.