

SAUNDERSFOOT AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The final lecture of the 2017-18 programme was given by Howard Rudd whose chosen subject was William the Marshall, the most famous knight in history.

We know a great deal about the Marshall because after his death in 1219 his family commissioned a biography in the style of a courtly romance, *La Histoire de Guillaume le Mareschal*, that provides an important source of much that we know of aristocratic life in the period, and particularly about warfare and the tournament. The Marshall was born around 1147, the fourth son of John, a minor nobleman and marshall of the royal household. The family appear to have adopted the title of Marshall, more usually described as *The Marshall* or *Le Mareschal*, as a surname at this time.

William, as a younger son, needed to make his own way in the world; he entered the service of the Chamberlain of Normandy as a young man and rapidly gained a reputation for prowess in the tournament and with it modest wealth. He moved on to the court in Aquitaine and was soon moving in royal circles, serving Eleanor and her son Henry. After Henry's death William went on Crusade to the Holy Land where he forged a lifelong interest in the Knights Templar. On his return he entered the court of Henry the Second, receiving a grant of land at Cartmel in Cumbria and thus becoming a landed knight.

He supported Henry against his rebellious son, Richard, though he was later to serve on Richard's regency council when that king was away on campaign. William's social position changed greatly when in one of his last acts Henry allowed William to marry the royal ward Isabella, heiress of the earl of Striguil, a union which brought with it substantial lands in southern Gwent, Pembrokeshire and Leinster. The title of earl of Pembroke was initially withheld though he was later to receive the honour. He was now a landed magnate of some importance.

The Marshall continued to serve the Plantagenet line though increasingly in opposition to King John and as a supporter of the barons' revolt. He was instrumental in the re-writing of Magna Carta in response to papal objections and would go on to lead the regency in the minority of Henry the third. William the Marshall died in 1219 and was buried in the Temple Church in London. His remarkable career saw him rise from landless younger son to one of the most powerful and influential men of his age, his life encompassing the reigns of five kings.

Our speaker was warmly thanked by the Society's chair, Mrs. Mary Cavell, who then reminded members of forthcoming trips. On Thursday, 17 May we will be visiting the Gwili railway arriving at 12.30 in time for the departure of the steam train at 1.00 pm. On June 20 we will be exploring the Magpies' Nest museum near Templeton, arriving at 2.00 pm; the museum is located on the Reynalton road, the turning for which is immediately before the Boar's Head, and is located in the yard of KP Thomas.