



Medieval Intrigue: Decoding Royal Conspiracies

Ian Mortimer

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In this important new work Ian Mortimer examines some of the most controversial questions in medieval history, including whether Edward II was murdered, his possible later life in Italy, the weakness of the Lancastrian claim to the throne in 1399 and the origins of the idea of the royal pretender. Central to this book is his ground-breaking approach to medieval evidence. He explains how an information-based method allows a more certain reading of a series of texts. He criticises existing modes of arriving at consensus and outlines a process of historical analysis that ultimately leads to questioning historical doubts as well as historical facts, with profound implications for what we can say about the past with certainty. This is an important work from one of the most original and popular medieval historians writing today.

Medieval Intrigue: Decoding Royal Conspiracies Details

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From Reader Review Medieval Intrigue: Decoding Royal Conspiracies for online ebook

Elizabeth Ashworth says

I've come to realise that a lot of what I was taught at school was misinformation. I used to believe all sorts of things - that ostriches buried their heads in sand, that squirrels hibernated in winter, that camels carried water in their humps - and that Edward II was murdered at Berkeley Castle with a red hot poker.

I know that the first three of these statements are untrue and having read Ian Mortimer's book I'm pretty much convinced that the last one is untrue as well. The myth about the red hot poker is definitely nonsense even though it is often repeated as fact. There is convincing evidence that Edward II lived beyond 1327, and a lot of people believed he was still alive, including his half brother the earl of Kent who tried to rescue him from Corfe Castle.

In a series of essays Ian Mortimer discusses and weighs the known evidence for and against the survival of Edward II. I found some parts of the book more interesting than others but I would recommend it to anyone who is open minded enough to wonder whether a good story sometimes gets in the way in the truth.

Rose says

My Review:

As we have learned repeatedly throughout history (most recently with the unearthing of Richard III), history is almost always written by the victor. In this book, we look at another Plantagenet King in Edward II - with an equally if not exceedingly thrilling history cloaked under a shroud of mystery/historical propaganda. I have read Mortimer before quite enjoyed his take on the King's tumultuous reign.

-Rose

David Elkin says

a read for a history buff. Somewhat detailed and speculative historical detective work. You best really be interested in Edward II and Richard III.

Vivienne says

I granted this 4-stars even though I had difficulty reading it. It is not the author's fault that I lacked the background in order to appreciate his arguments.

I picked this book up in the library because I was curious to learn more about the controversy surrounding the death of Edward II and the Fieschi Letter following my reading of Ken Follett's *World Without End* and

watching its TV adaptation. My expectation was that it would be similar in style to his Time Travellers Guides; that is accessible to a layperson. I soon realised that it was scholarly in its approach and content and much more suited to an academic readership than to someone like myself.

I could recognise its worth and did take on board the issues being discussed but was aware that I didn't have the background in Historiography required to be able to follow Mortimer's arguments for his innovative information method, which seeks to apply a scientific model to the study of primary sources. Frankly, I knew I was out of my depth.

I spoke to one of the librarians at our local branch when I returned the book and she was going to pass it on to one of her colleagues who is a medieval scholar for his opinion.

My feeling is that while I was able to understand that Edward II's death and other issues addressed within are highly contested subjects that I wouldn't really re-visit this book unless I decided to study medieval history as a discipline.

Kathy Petersen says

Mortimer has taken as his mantra "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" and goes about castigating any critic who disagrees. Rather than using evidence as examined by historians (and others), he has developed an "information stream" system that he explains (or not) at great length. I would not have imagined that history could be boring until I read this book.

Andrea Hickman Walker says

Far heavier on theory and methodology than I either expected or wanted.

Denise says

Such a fascinating subject, and yet I was left spectacularly bored by this book. The reason for that is not a lack of facts or interesting theories (it certainly has both), but the excessively dry writing and the fact that the author tends to discuss the credibility of his sources to death and drown his text in annotations. Maybe it should come with a "hardcore scholars only" label. (I don't think I've ever seen anyone manage to cram 209 annotations into 45 pages of text before - a bizarrely fascinating achievement, really.)

Jessica O'Toole says

I started with Ian Mortimer's books back with 'The Greatest Traitor', and so was well familiar with his Edward II fake-death scenario (which I ascribe to). Though the cover does suggest a more light reading or pop-history-mystery kind of book (after 'Time Traveller's' it's not an unwarranted expectation), Ian Mortimer

is still a professional historian, and so it was of little surprise to find a book full of more academic-based essays, to reply to all the backlash of his view about Edward II. Welcome, in my humble opinion.

I bloody loved it. I devoured it almost non-stop in fact, and one question after another in my head was answered about the puzzle of Edward II, questions that built up since 'The Greatest Traitor' and the incredible twisted web of secrecy in the Middle Ages. I bought the book primarily for the sections on Edward II (surely history should have remembered him as the Poker King, right?) but found the intrigue of the cover in the sections of royal pretenders and blurry lines of succession just as fascinating, as I knew little about those subjects and how deep they went in the Middle Ages. The poker thing is so astonishingly boring in comparison to the finely woven lines of a secret survival!

I'm inclined to enjoy scholarly texts just as much as popular literature, but if you base your purchase of this volume only on your love of the Time Traveller series, then I highly recommend familiarising yourself with both 'The Greatest Traitor' and 'The Perfect King' first (and even 'The Fears of Henry IV' considering the succession sections), for necessary background on the author's attentions and an ease into the drier aspects of this work. They are balanced and readable factual books, and you might find yourself much more sucked in by the hardcore history of this one afterwards. Plus, Plantagenets. 'Nuff said.

Melisende d'Outremer says

I am finding it a little 'wordy' and find myself saying - will you just get to the point. This title is a little of a misnomer - in that this really heavily focuses on the mystery surrounding the life & death of Edward II. Would have liked a few more characters featured.

Sarah says

This book is very dense, and oftentimes, it feels as if the author is just throwing a long string of names, dates, and places at you. It's a lot of information to absorb, so if you aren't a major history buff, this probably won't be your cup of tea. I would actually recommend not reading it cover to cover, as each chapter could be a stand alone article in an academic journal.

Other than that, it is an interesting read, and encourages readers to think twice about the "facts" that have been decided as truth by historians over the centuries. Mortimer offers new ways of thinking about historical events that have more than a little uncertainty surrounding them.

Jane Walker says

If you picked this book up thinking it was like Mortimer's other popular books (and the cover and title certainly suggest that) you'd be disappointed. This one is hard work and not really for the general reader. Mortimer has worked long and hard at the theory that Edward II was not murdered in Berkeley Castle, but was sent off into exile and ended his days in Italy. He is hugely frustrated that "scholars" dismiss his ideas without even troubling to engage with the arguments. The bulk of "Medieval Intrigue" (which includes previously published articles) is devoted to presenting the evidence and refuting his critics, in very academic terms. I'm convinced, but Mortimer knows that the history establishment has too much invested in the

murder narrative to accept his views.

As an amateur historian I'm still puzzled by Mortimer's argument that there is a difference between his method, based on "information streams", and the conventional method of researching history.

Kris says

I'm going to have to get back to this one. It wasn't what I expected going in, which is okay--I adjusted. I also set it down, though, and haven't got back to it. When I dive back in, I'll post my thoughts.

Nicky says

Fascinating.

Not a book for the casual reader, you really have to know the topics tackled to appreciate Ian Mortimer's work.

Dr Mortimer reveals some of the inner workings of peer reviewed research, and few come out of it well. Several historians are exposed as biased and unable to accept new thinking, even when presented with well thought out work and carefully constructed arguments based on evidence and not opinion. One feels the injustice of this on his behalf.

The research presented is specific and detailed and should form part of the study of anyone interested in Edward II. The facts presented are, to my mind, irrefutable. There is not enough extant evidence to disprove Dr Mortimer's findings. And they are FINDINGS as much as they are beliefs.

However, as well as being a fantastic factual history book, the real value of this book is as a studying in how to research history correctly and objectively, how not to believe something is so simply because you wish it to be. Ignoring or dismissing any document that disagrees with you in the face of evidence distinctly to the contrary is the preserve of the lazy historian, and there are too many of them, (and most appear to have commented on Edward II!)

Anyone embarking on a study of history, about to start university or even A-Level, should read this book and take its methodology to heart. Then maybe the historian of the future will be able to look beyond the hackneyed old opinions and find the truth.

Xenia0201 says

I had read Mortimer's A Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England and really loved it so I didn't hesitate picking up Medieval Intrigue.

This book I found more difficult to process as it was composed in a thesis format, complete with hypotheses in charts. Mortimer even has an entire chapter dedicated to coming to a degree of certainty with historical evidence before we dive into the true subject matter of the book. Here, he gives a basis of how he comes to certain conclusions and why this is based on factual information and not his opinion as a historian. His intent

is to come to the truth and not to re-write history based on point of view. Medieval Intrigue is concerned with the theories and rumors surrounding scandalous events occurring in the reigns of Edward II, Edward III and Richard II. The subject matter is absolutely captivating but difficult for the average reader to process in the language used. Mortimer, as always, is scrupulous in his research and provides step by step exactly why he comes to his deductions for each subject. It's truly an exceptional account but exudes a scholarly approach geared towards a reader with advanced familiarity of the history discussed.

Deborah Pickstone says

A very interesting book! It's a collection of historical articles, really, that together demonstrate a methodology for historical enquiry. Mortimer opens with an explanation of his method and then follows with a series of articles about (mainly) the death/disappearance of Edward II. All of the items are linked, even if not directly about this.

So, we analyse Mortimer's hypothesis that the 'death' was a huge conspiracy. Now, the later Plantagenets are not my main field of interest, so I can't criticize factually like I would with the early P's but I have said for years that Edward II's supposed murder via a red hot poker reads like a conspiracy theory. I learned that it very easily could be - but of a completely different sort and the poker was dreamed up sometime later. As was the murder, which he posits never happened.....

It's all delightfully complex and Mortimer builds a very convincing case, I have to say - and this from Ms Cynical who despises conspiracy theories! Howsoever, there is a big difference between an actual conspiracy and conspiracy theory.

My only complaint is that Mortimer includes a section discussing the response of other historians to his work and he does come across rather arrogantly in it. I get that it is very annoying when people pour scorn, damn with faint praise and generally behave obstructively towards any change. And historians are generally resistant to revisionist thinkers - this we know! So, I do have sympathy with his....annoyance and open rebuttal of what has been said etc re his work. I guess I felt he was descending to their level, which is a pity. They certainly do come across as a blinkered lot! But this is a small issue, really - the book is absolutely excellent, he has given me some new lenses to view history through and I will be reading as much of his work as I can lay hands on - I would say he is an outstanding and talented historian and I am delighted to see anyone produce revisionist work on any historical subject - but particularly with regard to something about which the 'traditional' story sat so ill with me in the first place!

NB I see on reading reviews quite a few comments that this is 'hard to read'. It's certainly no Idiot's Guide but I was absolutely riveted by it and lost the whole of Saturday to this book!
