

Timber

Henry III (1216-1272) is renowned for his interest in building. During his reign he spent, on average, £3,000 a year (or 10% of his total income) on it. His two greatest achievements were the construction of Westminster Abbey and Westminster Palace. To further this work, master John of Gloucester (a stonemason) and Master Alexander of Westminster (a carpenter) were appointed 'Chief Masters of the King's Works' in 1256.

Master Alexander was instructed to inspect personally the materials bought for the King's works and it is likely that shortly after his appointment he visited Stratfield Mortimer to buy timber. The transaction between Henry III and Roger Mortimer is mentioned twice in the Calendar of Liberate Rolls (26 May 1257 and 2 November 1259) and once in the Calendar of Patent Rolls (29 April 1257).

Roger Mortimer was instructed to deliver 44 marks [£29/6/8] worth of timber to Master Alexander for the King's works at Westminster. The wood would have been carried by land and water to Westminster, though it is unclear who was to bear the cost of carriage.

The initial order was made to Roger Mortimer on 29 April 1257 and was repeated on 26 May 1257 with the additional note that the work at Westminster must not be delayed for lack of timber and if it was, the King "*would have to betake himself seriously to the Sheriff*". Although delivery was important, the King did not feel such a sense of urgency in paying for the timber. It was not until 2 November 1259 that Roger Mortimer's debts at the Exchequer were offset by the 44 marks for the sale.

It is difficult to ascertain the cost of timber in the 1250's, but the building accounts of Henry III suggest that a single oak tree could be bought for about one shilling. If this figure is applied to this transaction, Roger Mortimer sold over 500 trees to Henry III. The fact that delay in delivery of the timber was a serious concern suggests that the timber was to be used green rather than weathered.

