

# Medieval Archaeology

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY FOR MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY

## Bede's World, Jarrow, South Tyneside: the current situation



Many members will have been aware through the press and internet of the recent and sudden closure of Bede's World, Jarrow in early 2016. Since the 1980s, Bede's World has provided Tyne and Wear with a museum and educational facility designed to promote learning on the early medieval heritage of the region. Dedicated to promoting the history and archaeology of the twin monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow as well as the life of their most famous incumbent the Venerable Bede, the museum has had a distinct impact on the region through its educational role.

To put the closure in context, The Bede's World Trust had over the last ten years become increasingly dependent on South Tyneside Council for its running costs even though it had been very successful in

achieving funding for specific projects and posts. During 2015 the Trust put forward, as requested, various proposals to the Council for its future structure. In February, however, the Council announced that there would be no future funding. The suggestion from the Council was that the Trust should go into insolvency forthwith, the buildings revert back to the Council and that they would then put a new operator in place, who could be more commercially successful than Bede's World had been. Groundwork had already been identified as this operator. Given the fact that the only funds BW Trust had at that time were restricted there was no option other than to comply.

The handover to Groundwork was to take place smoothly and in a short space of time. Initially the proposed idea seemed to be to

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It is with joy that our contents extend to fill 16 pages once again, and this is surely a sign of the busy nature of Medieval matters. As we see on page 1, however, the need to be ever-vigilant is clear, and we applaud the efforts from across a wide geography to safeguard the treasure that is Bede's World. May the right decisions be made in due course and, for such to happen, the pressure needs to be maintained. There is much else in the present Newsletter to interest members, which ends strongly with a piece by Mark Hall that draws connections between our shared medieval past and how this continues to attract film makers and storytellers of the present.

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*Left:  
Bede's World. Permission given for  
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Williams, University of Chester.*

concentrate on the ‘Farm’ and Jarrow Hall and to leave aside the museum and its finds (which are on long-term loan from St Paul’s Church), and also to play down any association with Bede. There was luckily a storm of protest locally, nationally and internationally and this seems to have had an effect. When South Tyneside issued its news bulletin for ‘a new future for South Tyneside heritage attraction’ on March 2nd the statement was that the new operator would ‘carry on the work of celebrating Bede and the Borough’s Anglo-Saxon history and introduce a range of new services and facilities to strengthen the appeal of the site’. This seemed an excellent, if somewhat more limited, aim and it could be helpful if all of those who are interested in the early medieval world would monitor the progress of this.

The site has been closed and the Council is looking after the animals and the security of the museum and Jarrow Hall.

The problems of closing down one Trust and transference to another have I think proved more difficult than anticipated, and no date can be given for the reopening.

This has obviously had an effect on the many educational events and exhibitions which had been planned for this season.

At the moment although the site is closed there is every intention of opening it as soon as possible, and there seems to be good will on all sides. I hope that the celebration of the AD 716 anniversary of Ceolfrith’s journey to Rome with the Codex Amiatinus, will take place in early July, with the exhibition opening and conference as planned. Further dates and details will be circulated in due course.

**Professor Dame Rosemary Cramp**

## Life in Early Medieval Wales

A research project for Bangor University funded by the Leverhulme Trust

**N**ancy Edwards (Professor of Medieval Archaeology, Bangor University; Vice President Society for Medieval Archaeology) has been awarded a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship (2015–18) to enable her to investigate Life in early medieval Wales.

The period from the collapse of Roman rule to the coming of the Normans was formative in the evolution of Wales, its language and identity. Yet we know less about Wales c. AD350–1050 than any other part of Britain and Ireland. To enable wide-ranging comparison, the research will be set within the broader framework of recent developments in early medieval European archaeology. The growing body of archaeological evidence for Wales will then be interrogated alongside the sparse written sources in order to analyse how people lived – their settlements, economy, society and beliefs, and how these changed over time.

Wales should not be viewed in isolation. It was part of the

Roman Empire but situated on its edge. It was never conquered by Germanic peoples but gradually became drawn into the Anglo-Saxon and Viking worlds. This research aims to address major themes and questions in early medieval European archaeology. What was the impact of the collapse of Roman rule and the Roman economy and what kind of society emerged in the aftermath? How did people live and how did their lives change over the period concerned? Why did the economy in Wales remain overwhelmingly rural and relatively undeveloped compared with England and Ireland and many other parts of Europe? What can archaeology tell us about belief, conversion to Christianity and the growing power of the Church? To what extent is it possible to recognise changing patterns of identity, power and authority in the archaeological evidence?

**Nancy Edwards**  
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An early medieval house with fields at Rhuddgaer, Dwyran, Anglesey, recently excavated by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust in partnership with Bangor University. Project grant-aided by Cadw, Welsh Government. © GAT.



# Monumentalising Kingship: places of royal residence and the making of Early Medieval British Kingdoms AD 500-800

A new academic network funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

Supplying some of its most iconic and enduring excavations – Yeavinger, Cheddar, Cadbury ‘Camelot’ and Dinas Powys – the theme of early medieval royal residence occupies a special place in the development of medieval archaeology in the UK. The significance of this pioneering work cannot be overstated: it provided long-awaited authentication that the mead-hall culture portrayed in heroic literature such as *Beowulf* was based on reality not just literary imagination, while concurrently providing a host of new insights into the material expression of kingship at a formative period in the emergence of post-Roman kingdoms.

In spite of this auspicious start, relatively limited progress has been made in this field in intervening years because the evidential base has remained slim and geographically patchy. The situation is now set to be transformed thanks to a fresh generation of research spear-headed by five archaeological projects, each examining or seeking to reassess a royal site on an ambitious scale, and four of which are located in regions where such phenomena were previously unattested: Lyminge, Kent (Gabor Thomas, University of Reading); Rhynie, Pictland (Gordon Noble, University of Aberdeen); Sutton Courtenay/Long Wittenham, Oxfordshire (Helena Hamerow, University of Oxford); Rendlesham, Suffolk (Chris Scull, University of Cardiff/University of London); and Yeavinger, Northumberland (Sarah Semple/David Petts, Durham University).

The main aim of the Royal Residence AD 500-800 Network is to deliver a step-change in understanding by promoting

collaborative working across these five projects, to pool expertise, question past assumptions and develop new interpretational approaches. To effect a thorough, interdisciplinary re-evaluation of the field, the Network will draw historians and place-name specialists into the conversation and engage with international scholars who have intersecting interests in the material practices of early medieval power, to develop comparative, supra-regional perspectives.

The primary vehicle for delivering these aims will be three international workshops hosted at different venues over the course of 2016, each examining a theme of cross-cutting relevance: site dynamics and trajectories (University of Reading); ritual action, performance and the built environment (Durham University); and situating residential sites within wider spheres of social, political and economic interaction (University of Aberdeen). The proceedings of each workshop, including presentations and group discussion, will be recorded for dissemination via the Network website, augmented by regular posts on the Network blog to promote wider engagement with public and academic audiences during the life of the project.

## Further information

Principal Investigator: Dr Gabor Thomas, University of Reading

Co-Investigator: Dr Gordon Noble, University of Aberdeen

Website: <http://royalresidencenetwork.org/>

Blog: <http://royalresidencenetwork.org/blog/>





## Waiting for the End of the World: The Archaeology of Risk and its Perception in the Middle Ages

### The **SMA's** Annual Conference, 2-4 December 2016

### Rewley House, Oxford

This interdisciplinary conference will explore what happened when natural disasters affected medieval European societies (AD 500-1550). The focus is archaeological and historical but we also aim to bring together geographers, seismologists, climatologists and others to discuss the impacts of rapid onset disasters such as geophysical and hydro-meteorological hazards, among them severe weather, storm surges and flooding, drought, slope failures, volcanic eruptions, seismicity and its secondary effects such as tsunamis and seismic-induced landslides.

The roll-call of disasters during the medieval period was a lengthy one. Not only did communities respond continually to environmental hazards, their effects were also felt sometimes across the whole of Europe in a way that has not been observed in modern times. In 1258 the largest volcanic eruption of the last 7,000 years affected the entire continent, while in 1315-1321 the most serious famine in recorded European history was driven by a prolonged period of low temperatures and heavy summer rainfalls associated with abnormally warm North Atlantic

sea temperatures. Other events such as the most powerful earthquake in central Europe in 1356, river floods, tsunamis in the Mediterranean and sea surges along north-western coastlines all affected specific regions so that responses by different communities can be usefully compared over a millennium. How did hazards become disasters, how did societies perceive these events and how did they react and evolve to reduce their vulnerability?

The conference will be organized around a number of sessions; some will explore the impacts and societal responses related to different categories of hazard, while others will focus on religious responses and perceptions of risk. It is the intention of the conference organizers to publish the proceedings as a monograph of the Society for Medieval Archaeology. Expressions of interest for speakers and posters are welcome. Please send these and any other queries to [medieval.disasters@dur.ac.uk](mailto:medieval.disasters@dur.ac.uk).

**Paper and poster proposals are required by 17 June 2016. This weekend conference is open to all.**

## Website

[www.medievalarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.medievalarchaeology.co.uk)

The website continues to improve.

Send us your comments:

[medieval.archaeology@googlemail.com](mailto:medieval.archaeology@googlemail.com).

## Apply for a Grant

The Society is in the happy position of being able to offer grants for research and for travel. For information on how to apply for a Society grant/award, see our website,

[www.medievalarchaeology.org](http://www.medievalarchaeology.org).

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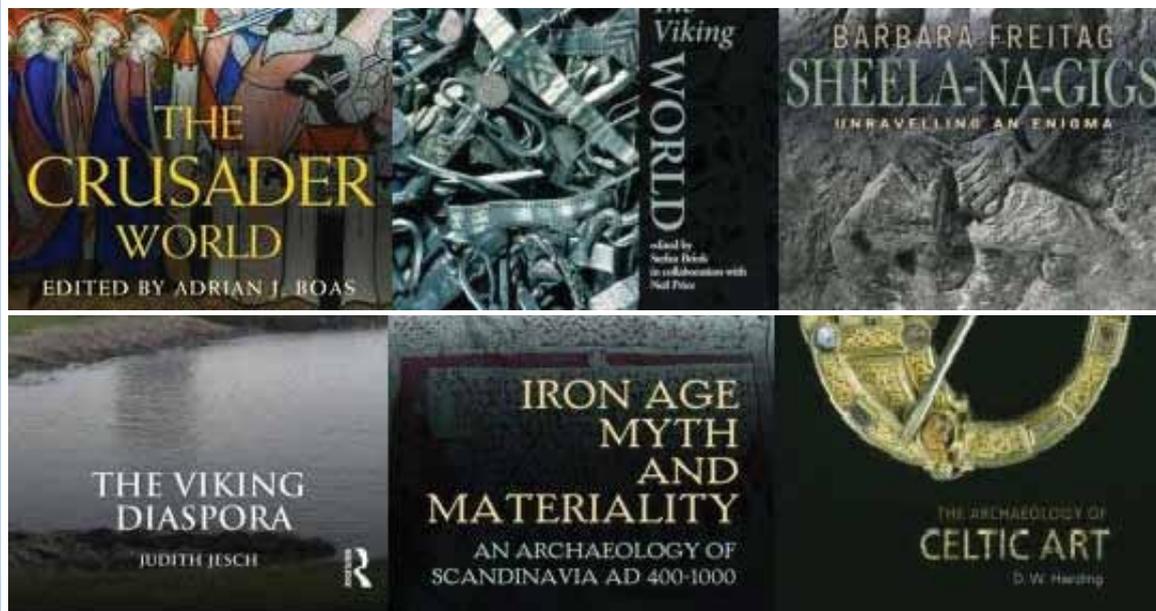
# Society News

The **AGM** will be followed by the **Annual Lecture**, which will introduce the **Annual Conference**, to be held in Rewley House, Oxford, on **2 December 2016**.

Society President Professor Helena Hamerow will give the presidential address as the Annual Lecture, entitled 'Fire, Flood and Famine: The archaeology of natural disasters in Early Medieval Europe'.

Details of the AGM will be included in the Autumn Newsletter and will also be posted on the Society's website, [www.medievalarchaeology.org](http://www.medievalarchaeology.org)

**The Society for Medieval Archaeology is pleased to announce that Routledge is offering our members an exclusive discount on all products when you order through their website. Click [here](#) for more details and to receive your discount.**



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# Society Grants 2015

## Pottery Production in Late Saxon Newark

In the late ninth century England witnessed a revolution in pottery production. For the first time since the Roman period, pottery was wheel-thrown and produced on a near industrial scale. After their introduction to a small number of primary industries, wheel and kiln technologies spread, with a second wave of so-called daughter industries being established in the tenth century. Research into this ceramic revolution has focused on chronology and, in particular, whether these technologies were introduced before or during the period of Scandinavian settlement. Little attention has been paid to the mechanisms that allowed this technology to spread once it had arrived. By focusing on the relationship between a daughter industry – Newark-on-Trent (Nottinghamshire) – and its parent industry – Torksey (Lincolnshire), this research sheds light upon the mechanisms that enabled these technologies to spread throughout the East Midlands and East Anglia.

Evidence of production in Torksey was first recognised in 1949 when Spencer-Cook excavated a kiln just south of the modern village. In the 1960s, excavations carried out by Maurice Barley revealed a further six kilns. More recently, developer-funded excavation has brought the total to fifteen. This industry – producing so-called Torksey ware – was among the first to employ the re-introduced wheel and kiln. Its foundation seems to have coincided with the overwintering of the Viking Great Army in Torksey of AD872/3, as recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with production continuing until the later eleventh century. Torksey ware was traded widely, and Torksey supplied Anglo-Scandinavian York with much of its pottery.

The Newark industry was founded a century after Torksey's – in the late tenth century. It was considerably smaller than Torksey's, with the remains of just a single production site being identified in the course of a watching brief in 1994, on Kirk Gate in the town centre. The pottery is so similar to Torksey ware that it has been suggested that the Newark industry was started by a potter who had previously worked at Torksey. The aims of this study are two-fold: to ascertain whether a Torksey potter did indeed relocate to Newark and to consider the impetus for this relocation.

Support from the SMA funded a range of analyses that were necessary to fulfil the first aim. A programme of geological

sampling, thin-section petrology and microstructural analysis using scanning electron microscopy provided insights to the potter's clay choice, forming operations, firing regimes, and firing temperatures, enabling their production sequence to be reconstructed. This sequence was compared with that followed by potters working in Torksey, which had already been fully characterised by research for the Viking Torksey Project. These analyses demonstrate that Newark and Torksey's potters followed exactly the same sequence, from the types of clays that they selected and their locations in the landscape, through to nuances in forming and finishing operations and the control of conditions inside the kiln. It is highly likely that a Torksey potter did relocate to Newark in the later tenth century and founded this daughter industry.

The reasons for this relocation are currently being investigated. Drawing on a range of evidence, including archaeological excavation, numismatic evidence, historical documents, and patterns of pottery distribution, the foundation of this daughter industry is being placed in context with contemporary local, regional, political, social and economic developments. It seems that the industry was founded during a period of growth that saw zoning of industrial activities within the town, the establishment of a cemetery and a putative church, and the foundation of a mint. Early findings have already been disseminated at number of conferences, including the 2016 Richard Hall symposium and the Medieval Pottery Research Group's annual conference and, the results are being prepared for publication.

**Gareth Perry**

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*Fingertip impressions on the base of a jar produced in late Saxon Newark.*



*A thin section showing naturally occurring inclusions in the ceramic fabric of a jar produced in late Saxon Newark.*

## Rendlesham evaluation: analysis and reporting

Specialist analysis work, including radiocarbon dating and Bayesian modelling funded by the Society has been carried out on material recovered from small-scale excavation in 2013 in two fields (RLM 054 and RLM 055) within the major Anglo-Saxon complex at Rendlesham, Suffolk. The excavations provide some confirmation and clarification of the interpretation of the survey work conducted between 2008 and 2014, principally systematic metal-detecting and magnetometry. The survey has identified the location of Bede's 'vicus regius' at Rendlesham as an extensive poly-focal settlement complex covering 40-50ha and dating from at least the fifth to the eighth century. There is exceptional evidence for external contacts and high status material in the sixth to early eighth centuries.

Excavation at RLM 054 identified early-middle Anglo-Saxon features and deposits, including a midden layer containing much animal bone. Pottery was predominantly hand-made with some Ipswich ware, suggesting a mixture of sixth- to eighth-century material, and the radiocarbon dates give a terminus post quem for deposition within the range cal AD 590-670 (at 95% probability). There are indications of iron-smithing in the vicinity but only traces of cereal processing; soil micromorphology also indicates latrine deposits and chalky cob debris from buildings. Cattle were the predominant domestic species, followed by pig and sheep, with a high proportion of young. Wild fowling and falconry

are also indicated. Metal-detected finds include items of the highest quality. The evidence overall shows that RLM 054 is within a high status settlement of the sixth to eighth centuries.

Material culture and radiocarbon dating have confirmed fifth and sixth century settlement and burials in field RLM 055. One grubenhaus and a group of cremation burials can be dated to the late fifth- to early sixth-century on the basis of pottery, a brooch and vessel glass. A second grubenhaus and adjacent pit contained mainly later, probably sixth-century, pottery. Bayesian modelling of radiocarbon dates from the pit sequence suggest that it was backfilled cal AD 420–620 (at 95 % probability). Three cremations, probably fifth-century, were an infant, a child, and an unsexed adult; a fourth, probably sixth-century, was a mature or older adult, probably female. Metal-detected finds, some high-status, suggest continued activity here in the seventh and eighth centuries but this was not represented in the very small excavated sample.

Targeted excavation has tested and refined interpretations drawn from geophysics and metal-detector survey, and has confirmed both archaeological potential and the applicability of the sampling and analytical techniques used. Work continues on bringing the results to publication and framing an assessment of potential and research agenda for the site.

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Anglo-Saxon Rendlesham is the subject of a dedicated conference sponsored by Suffolk CC on Saturday 24 September 2016, see page 16.



The excavation in RLM 054 on the midden and associated features at Rendlesham with the River Deben valley in the background.  
 © Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service.

# Investigating the dead in Early Medieval Domburg



**D**omburg is a small coastal town on the former island of Walcheren, Dutch province of Zeeland, the Netherlands. The name Domburg ('the dune fortress') refers to a circular fortress constructed here in the later ninth century AD, within the dune edge between low-lying salt marshes and the mouth of the river Scheldt, connecting the North Sea with the prosperous Flanders region. Previously, during the seventh to early ninth centuries, an emporium (commonly known as Walichrum) was situated further northwest (Van Dierendonck 2009; Ten Harkel 2013).

The remains of Walichrum have largely been destroyed by the sea, but since the seventeenth century its remains were exposed periodically, nowadays on the beaches of Domburg and nearby Oostkapelle. Local antiquarians identified several associated grave fields, settlement remains and a wealth of artefactual evidence (Deckers 2014). The last remnants of the cemeteries reappeared in the 1920s, when two partial skeletons – still inside the remains of their oak coffins – came to light near Oostkapelle and were subsequently excavated. They are the only two preserved fragmentary skeletons from the beach site, and are now part of the Zeeland Archaeological Depot collections of the Stichting Cultureel Erfgoed Zeeland (SCEZ, 'Zeeland Foundation for Cultural Heritage', Middelburg). The skeletons were never subjected to scientific analysis. With the help of a Society for Medieval Archaeology Research Grant, one of the skeletons (ZAD\_00066), still in situ on its original coffin base, has now been radiocarbon dated and subjected to stable isotope analysis ( $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) (fig. 1).

The analysis was part of a bigger research project entitled, Investigating the dead in Early Medieval Domburg (the Netherlands), which included dendrochronological analysis of the oak coffin remains (funded by the Province of Zeeland); radiocarbon dating and stable isotope analysis ( $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) of skeletal material from the ringfort (funded by the Medieval Settlement Research Group); and stable isotope analysis ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $\delta^{87}\text{Sr}/\delta^{86}\text{Sr}$ ) of tooth enamel to shed light on population mobility (funded by the Viking Society for Northern Research). Additional physical anthropological analysis and investigation of previous use of the coffin wood as ship timbers will complement this.

Research questions focus on the relative chronology of the different burial foci and the possible influences of the so-called 'marine reservoir effect', an aspect arising from a diet with a strong marine component that can cause radiocarbon dates to appear too 'old'. This can be addressed through analysis of  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$

stable isotopes, which are generally enriched in individuals who consume a high proportion of marine foods. Additional questions focus on the likely geographic origin of the buried individuals, addressed through analysis of  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $\delta^{87}\text{Sr}/\delta^{86}\text{Sr}$  isotopes.

The SMA-funded results of the radiocarbon dating and stable isotope analysis of skeleton ZAD\_00066 remain preliminary. Michael Dee (Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit) carried out the analyses. The sample was from the right ulna. The uncalibrated  $^{14}\text{C}$  date (yr BP) is  $1265 \text{ BP} \pm 27$ , resulting in a calibrated date range of AD 689-768 ( $1\sigma$  or 68% probability) or AD 666-859 ( $2\sigma$  or 95% probability). The  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values are relatively enriched, suggesting some influence from the marine reservoir effect. In combination with the dendrochronological analysis, a date in the eighth century seems most probable. Results will be published more fully once all the component parts of the project have been completed.

## Acknowledgements

With special thanks to Pieterjan Deckers, whose research has provided the context for this project, to Henk Hendrikse for rescuing and conserving the Oostkapelle burials, and to Raphaël Panhuysen for preliminary identification of the skeletal remains. Petra Doeve of BAAC carried out the dendrochronological analysis; thanks must go as well to Esther Jansma for her advice in this respect. Michael Dee is funded by a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship.

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## References

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# Other Granting bodies

## Castle Studies Trust



Pembroke Castle from the air. © RCAHMW.



Caus Castle from the air. © Shropshire Council 2007.

Progress continues apace at the **Castle Studies Trust (CST)**. In February 2016, it decided on its third round of grants. As in the preceding years, the Trust was heavily oversubscribed with nine applications asking for a total of £38,000. This year we awarded two grants that will advance our understanding of two important castles:

- **Pembroke Castle** – geophysical survey of the castle's interior. Best known for its massive round keep built by William Marshal, the greatest knight of his age, little else is known about what exactly was in the castle's interior. Dyfed Archaeology Trust with the guidance of well-known castle expert Neil Ludlow will use the latest geophysical techniques including Ground Penetrating Radar to try and reveal some of the secrets.

- **Caus Castle** – earthwork, geophysical and photogrammetric survey of the castle. Frequently referenced in medieval research as an example of a Marcher castle and associated failed borough on the Welsh borders, nobody has done any proper analysis of one of the most important medieval sites on the Anglo/Welsh border. This first detailed archaeological analysis will be carried out by Dr Michael

Fradley who has previously undertaken ground-breaking surveys of castles at Wallingford (Oxon), Sudeley (Glos), and Newhall (Ches) and Giles Carey. The focus of the project will be on the outer bailey where the medieval borough was situated.

For further information about these and other projects you can visit our website at [www.castlestudiestrust.org](http://www.castlestudiestrust.org)

As the high calibre of the projects that the Trust has supported shows, as well as the number and quality of projects we could not, there is so much work still to do. To do so requires your help.

The CST is entirely reliant on donations from the general public. You can make a donation at <https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/castlestudiestrust>. You will be helping directly to continue the Trust's work and gain an opportunity to come along to one of our exclusive open days later in 2016, open only to donors to the Trust.

If you have any questions about any of the projects or the Trust in general please do not hesitate to contact the chair of Trustees, **Jeremy Cunnington**, at [admin@castlestudiestrust.org](mailto:admin@castlestudiestrust.org).

# Other News

## Rare Frankish gold coin resurfaces



© NMI

After 150 years a seventh-century Frankish gold coin found in Ireland has been re-discovered and has been acquired by the National Museum of Ireland.

The coin, known as a *tremissis* (equal to one third of a *solidus* and to the shilling of Anglo-Saxon England), is based on coins issued by the late Roman and Byzantine emperors and copied by successor states in Western Europe, including the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons.

Measuring only 12mm across and weighing 1.16g, one face bears the image of a human head shown in profile wearing a crown or diadem and inscribed BELLO FAETO, the name of the mint Beaufay, which is a town in mid-France lying north-east of Le Mans. The opposite face bears an equal-armed cross set on three steps and the name of the moneyer FREPOMVND.

The coin was first mentioned by the Cork-based coin collector John Lindsay in 1860, when he described it as being in the cabinet of the Very Reverend Richard Butler, Dean of Clonmacnoise, and was said to have been found at Trim. The gold coin was not part of Butler's collection of coins, medals, seals and other antiquities that came to the Royal Irish Academy on his death. It subsequently dropped out of sight and, although cited in the literature, its whereabouts was unknown.

Thanks to the keen eye of Drs Arent Pol of the Faculty of Archaeology, University of Leiden in the Netherlands, we now know the subsequent history of the coin. It was acquired by John Lindsay and was listed in the sale of his collection in 1867. It was later sold by an Amsterdam dealer, Jacque Schulman in 1912, by which time its Irish provenance had been lost. It disappeared from sight and resurfaced in the United States in the collection of Frederick S. Knobloch of New York in 1986 when it was acquired by Dr Lawrence A. Adams of Los Angeles. Drs Pol noticed that the coin was being offered for sale by a US on-line auction house in October 2015, and alerted the National Museum of Ireland. He noted that only six coins are known which bear the mint name and moneyer found on the Trim coin, five of which are in public collections. The description of the coin by John Lindsay matched the coin being offered for sale and so the Museum made a successful bid for it.

Gold *tremissis* coins are common on the Continent and in Anglo-Saxon England (some were found with the Sutton Hoo ship burial) but rare elsewhere – only one is known from Scotland. There are only two examples from Ireland – this one from Trim and a second found near Portlaois, now in the British Museum. The Portlaois coin was minted in Le Mans, not far from where the Trim example originated. These two coins are the only post-Roman and pre-Anglo-Saxon coins known from Ireland and are therefore of immense archaeological, historical and numismatic importance.

We cannot be certain when they were in circulation in Ireland or when they were deposited. While it is possible that the coins were imported into Ireland during the Viking Age when silver and gold coins and bullion were in circulation in the context of a bullion economy from the early ninth century, the possibility remains that they were in circulation much earlier.

Both can be dated broadly to the seventh century. The fact that both come from mints in central France is significant and their presence in Ireland may be linked to the general trade with Gaul, represented for example by the presence of imported glass and E-Ware pottery on sites in Ireland. Neither coin was adapted for use as jewellery and their bullion weight is minimal. It allows for the possibility that they were treasured as amulets or keepsakes, combining the symbolism of imperial Rome and kingship (in the form of the bust) and Christianity (the cross). The coins may have been given as diplomatic gifts by a foreign trader or aristocrat. One potential candidate might be the young Frankish prince, Dagobert, who was sent to Ireland in 656 to be educated in the monastery of *Rath Melsigi*. As Dagobert II he briefly ruled the eastern Frankish kingdom of Austrasia (a territory including much of north eastern France and the lower Rhineland) between 676 and 679. The site of Rath Melsigi has been identified variously as Clonmelsh, Co. Carlow or Slane, Co. Meath; the provenancing of this rare Frankish coin to the neighbourhood of Trim, only 10 km southwest of Slane, might argue for the latter as the monastery where the young prince Dagobert was educated.

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## St Patrick's Chapel, Whitesands Bay, Pembrokeshire. Early medieval coastal cemetery

Two phases of excavation were undertaken at St Patrick's Chapel, on the west coast of Pembrokeshire. The buried remains of the chapel are within sand dunes immediately above the high tide level at Whitesands Bay. An historic reference to the site, written around 1600, describes the chapel as 'wholly decayed'. Excavations in 1924 uncovered the foundations of a small, stone-built structure and several burials.

Coastal erosion has been active since the 1920s, with anecdotal evidence of burials being exposed in the dune face in the decades following the first excavation. In 1970, concerns about erosion prompted a small-scale excavation, recovering five well-preserved skeletons, some of which were in long-cist graves. A cross-incised stone was also recovered.

During the winter of 2013-14 the coastal defences were destroyed by severe storms. Since then two seasons of excavation have taken place, with the intention of removing all deposits at threat from coastal erosion. Owing to the deep and complex stratigraphy a third season of work will be required to achieve this. All elements of the deeply stratified site are not yet fully understood; the following provides a working outline.

At some time in prehistory, possibly in the 2nd millennium BC, sand began to accumulate as a dune measuring up to 1.5m thick. The dune then stabilised and a deep soil developed. Charcoal from the surface of the soil indicates human activity; and it has been sampled for radiocarbon dating. Up to 30cm of sand then accumulated over the soil. A structure or building composed of massive beach boulders was constructed on the sand. Only the western end of this lay in the excavated area and it has not been fully excavated. Its function and date are not currently known, but it is unlike any known prehistoric structure in the region. The lack of artefacts associated with it suggests that it is not of Roman date. It may be early medieval, although it predates seventh- to ninth-century burials.

The structure began to decay; wind-blown sand accumulated in and around it and graves began to be dug into it. Many were in long-cist graves typical of the early medieval period in western Britain, Ireland and north-west France. A cross-incised, cross-shaped headstone was found in situ with one of these burials. Sand continued to accumulate and more graves were dug on top of the earliest ones, and then more sand and more graves. Eventually the dilapidated walls of the rectangular structure were covered by sand, but its location survived as a raised area. Stone rubble and boulders were placed over this area; into this a number of infant graves were

dug. Great care had been taken in the construction of some of these, with three having white quartz pebbles entirely covering their surface, rather than being capped with stone slabs, and one having a cross-incised stone, face-up as a lintel. The final use of early medieval cemeteries exclusively for infants is something that has been recognised in Ireland and elsewhere in Pembrokeshire. A Hiberno-Norse ring-pin, probably made in Dublin, was also found in the layer of rubble.

The stone-built chapel was constructed on the rubble. It proved to be more complex than previously thought, consisting of three phases, the first being more of a cell than a useable chapel. This was extended to the north, with a doorway created between the first and the second phase wall. In the third phase the doorway was blocked. The chapel, which probably dates from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, is the one recorded as 'wholly decayed' in 1600.

Analysis continues, the following results are for the 2014 excavations only. Bone preservation was particularly good, enabling a range of analyses. Approximately 50 articulated skeletons have been excavated, along with a large quantity of loose, unarticulated bone. Four radiocarbon determinations from human bone have been processed, revealing the cemetery to be in use between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Osteological analysis shows that most of the adult burials are female or of unknown sex. The age profile of the population so far is consistent with what one would expect for the period; this may change when the skeletons recovered in 2015 are analysed, almost all of which were infants or very young children. Fourteen skeletons have been sampled for stable isotope analysis: the results to date indicate a largely terrestrial diet. Strontium and oxygen data show that some individuals were probably local, while others came from elsewhere in the British Isles and further afield.

The excavation was carried out by volunteers from the local community and elsewhere supervised by staff from Dyfed Archaeological Trust, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and The University of Sheffield. The work was funded by Cadw, the Nineveh Trust, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and the University of Sheffield. Interim reports are available at [www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk/projects/stpatricks.htm](http://www.dyfedarchaeology.org.uk/projects/stpatricks.htm)

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## A medieval gold ring from Catterick, North Yorkshire



Finger ring from Catterick, showing (from L-R): Wrythen hoop composed of fifteen elements and flat interior; the bezel featuring St John the Evangelist holding a chalice with a serpent emerging from it; and a lateral view of the hoop and bezel.

© Northern Archaeological Associates.

In July 2014, a gold finger ring was found by a staff member of Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd during archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping operations associated with the upgrading of the A1 dual-carriageway to motorway status through Catterick, North Yorkshire. It was subsequently reported to the Finds Liaison Officer for North and East Yorkshire and the local coroner, and is to be donated by Highways England (the landowner) to The Yorkshire Museum.

Catterick is well known for its prehistoric, Roman and Anglian archaeology. However, apart from excavations at the nearby medieval hospital at St Giles Farm (Cardwell 1995), there is little published evidence for the later medieval archaeology of the area. The ring was found within a field adjacent to Catterick Road and lay amongst archaeological features forming the southern periphery of the Roman town of Cataractonium. No other medieval finds or archaeological features were identified in the vicinity, so it most likely represents an isolated loss by a passing traveller.

Cleaning and investigative conservation was undertaken at the York Archaeological Trust Conservation Laboratories, while X-ray Fluorescence (EDXRF) analysis of the metal was carried out at Durham University Department of Archaeology (Wilkinson 2015). Five EDXRF analyses from separate points across the ring gave an average composition of 86.96% gold, alloyed with small amounts of silver and copper.

The gold ring has a 'wrythen' hoop composed of fifteen elements and a flat interior. There was no evidence for enamelling on the oval bezel. The bezel shows a saint who may be identified as St John the Evangelist, holding a chalice with a serpent emerging from it. This refers to the story in the Golden Legend (de Voragine 1993, 53) that John the Evangelist was able to drink poison to demonstrate to the high priest Aristodemus that his God was the true God.

A comparison for the gold ring is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) (registration no. V and A 689-1871). This ring has an oval bezel showing St Christopher bearing the Christ child across a river. It is illustrated by Marian Campbell (2009, 82, plate 86), who dates it to 1380-1400. It would appear from the illustration there that the knobs on the hoop are more defined and separate than those on the Catterick Road ring. The V&A example is elsewhere described as a decade ring, which is a ring that has ten knobs, each one of

which would be touched when reciting a prayer as part of the devotions of the rosary (although it is described by Oman in 1930 as having 11 knobs (Oman 1993)). The protrusions on the Catterick Road ring are larger in number though still a multiple of five but less defined, and so the hoop on this ring may be simply a reflection of this practice.

Both rings belong to the category known as iconographic rings showing saints and other religious scenes, which were popular in England between the end of the fourteenth century and the early sixteenth century.

Dere Street Roman road and its successors have continued to provide the main north-south route through North Yorkshire, although at Catterick the modern A1 diverges from the ancient route to bypass the modern village. The find-spot was at some distance from the Roman road. It is believed that for much of the medieval period following the final collapse of the Roman bridge over the River Swale, people travelling north along the Roman road had to detour westwards to the medieval Brompton Bridge, located 1.5km upstream (Cardwell 1995, 109-10). This route would have taken them past the find-spot of the ring. The bridge at Catterick was replaced in stone in 1422; however, this westward route also took travellers towards St Giles Hospital, Easby Abbey and the important castle and town at Richmond, and explains the deposition context for the ring.

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# Media & Exhibition

## Here and in a galaxy far, far away:

a miscellany of medievalisms



Recent months have brought two significant exhibitions at the British Museum dealing with elements of the medieval past revealed through the interpretive study of surviving evidence of that past. *Celts: Art and Identity* (a BM/NMS co-production, currently on show at NMS, Edinburgh) is a British-perspective look at the idea of Celtic culture, avowedly how ‘Welsh, Scottish and Irish identities came to be given the name Celtic and their relationship to a wider European story’. The second exhibition provocatively overlapped with the showing of *Celts at the BM: Egypt, Faith After the Pharaohs* charted the various religious transitions and syncretisms or entanglements in Egypt between 30BC and 1000AD, so focussing on Roman paganism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, each to varying degrees hybridised onto the stock of ancient Egyptian beliefs. Both exhibitions deal with a key academic and ‘popular’ discourse on the medieval past; namely its religious entanglements, particularly Christianity.

With *Celts*, we are given a very clear expression of how early medieval ‘Celticity’ might be defined through the forms and decoration of Christian monuments and artefacts. It recognises the influence and

inheritance of Rome in this and the role of a fusion of ideas and art styles but nevertheless cannot escape its perhaps inadvertent conjuring of the ghost of a Celtic church. Its valuable rhetoric on the application of the term Celtic as a label applied after the medieval period is left unresolved as the exhibition does not confront head-on the question of language and its fundamental importance to the definitions of Celtic and Celticity, and despite its use of a rich array of inscribed Celtic objects in a range of languages. The arena of Egypt as a case study of late antique and medieval religious interaction and entanglement makes for a more successful exhibition in terms of the space and focus it had to look at these issues. It also succeeds in communicating the importance of writing as a technology and so as a critical element of archaeological evidence.

The final section of *Celts* deals with the Celtic Revival in terms of contemporary culture and politics, including the expression of identity through a re-imagined medieval past. This is sometimes situated in a parallel universe, as with the Irish mythic hero Cúchulainn or ‘The Irish Wolfhound’ guardian of the Book of Kells hidden at Newgrange after an alien invasion, in the alternate universe of Marvel’s

*Double bill at the British Museum: Celts and Egypt. Photo by Mark Hall.*



Souvenirs for the Celtic pilgrim the British Museum showing of Celts. Photo by Mark Hall.



Kylo Ren from Star Wars VII The Force Awakens.

Guardians of the Galaxy. Another parallel universe is occupied by the worlds of Star Wars, defined as much by a series of medieval tropes as anything else. That universe returned to our cinema screens at Christmas 2015, with *Episode VIII: the Force awakens*. Perhaps the key trope in this medievalism of the future is the light-sabre, weapon of the Jedi Knights, symbolising the medieval knight and his sword in a series of linkages that essentially runs light-sabre = sword = medieval knight = hero. This is played with in the latest film with the appearance of a light-sabre with hilt guards giving the cruciform appearance of a medieval sword and in the context of a new manifestation of the Dark Side, The First Order and its so-called Knights of Renn, the explicit opponents of the Jedi Knights and drawing on darker strains of Templars and Crusaders. Jedi Knights also wear hooded robes – a monastic habit trope – as a key element of their attire, allowing them to symbolise a religious element of their function. The film's final, triumphant medievalism is the reveal of Skellig Michael as the hermitage retreat of Luke Skywalker. Religion and belief are as crucial to identity in a galaxy far, far away as they are in our own medieval past and its exhibited present.

My second example of a future or parallel universe medievalism is the 2013 Russian film *Hard to be a God*. The science fiction novel on which it is based, by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, was published in 1964, and is one of a series of novels set in the Noon Universe. It is the very definition of a dystopian vision, in which the medieval past is a future

hell, here on a distant planet where, as in Star Trek, a team of earth scientists have been sent to observe its transition into a benign Renaissance era. However this turn is eschewed in favour of a bloody, visceral, filthy nightmare of persecution by The Order in which the scientists cannot intervene but must remain as witnesses. The placing of the camera and its constant movement has the effect of making the viewer part of the team, forced to observe. The film has a sticky, bowel-movement texture and a compelling privileging of the sense of smell. But ironically its vision of anti-Renaissance hell is drawn from three of its greatest North European artists, Bosch, Brueghel and Dürer. Every frame of the film is imbued with their inheritance. Not only does it reflect a concentrated painterly reality of the bloody conflicts in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, but uses this imagined medieval setting as a metaphor for the cultural persecution of artists, writers and free-thinkers in the Russia of Stalin and his successors. It is thus part of a select sub-group of films that depict a dystopian, mucky Middle Ages primarily as a symbol of the abuse of power both then and now and the now is generally that of the Soviet Empire. Examples include the Czech films *Marketa Lazarova* and *Valley of the bees* and the Russian masterpiece *Andrei Rublev*, which also distills its vision through that of a great medieval artist. A notable exception is the partially medieval set *Westworld*, which uses the medieval past to critique the capitalist present.

My final choice of film stays with Brueghel and brings

Scene of persecution from *Hard to be a God*.



Painting, film reenactment *The Mill and the Cross*.





Brueghel as archaeologist, *The Mill and the Cross*.

us back to our own world (which we never really left) with a contemporary exploration of the medievalism of Brueghel. Released in 2011, Polish film-maker Lech Majewski's *The mill & the cross* is a tribute to Room 10 of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, where its Brueghel collection is displayed. The film is an exquisite meditation on Brueghel's work, principally *The procession to Calvary* (1564) but also drawing on several other paintings, including, *Children's games*, elements of which occur throughout the film. The film weaves the paintings into a single narrative around Christ's Crucifixion by Spanish mercenaries in a sixteenth-century Flanders landscape. A tone of survival and optimism is struck by its ending: a peasant dance before the camera fades to black and then pulls back to reveal and place us in room 10 of the Kunsthistorisches Museum with Brueghel's paintings adorning its walls. The film also deploys an immersive technique fusing live-action actors with a CGI-animated background taken from the paintings. The foregrounds are filmed on location in Poland, Czech Republic and Austria, using a range of historic sites and sets, both filled with costumed actors. These live-action elements draw on materiality and material culture studies to recreate the costumes and domestic interiors of Brueghel's figures and places. There is a rich, surreal imagination at work that takes us into the texture of the paintings. One of the most noticeable features of *The procession to Calvary* is a windmill on an isolated rocky pinnacle that dominates the landscape. This 'miller in the sky' becomes a surrogate for God and the film takes us inside this mill, which extends down into the hollowed-out rocky pinnacle, where the giant cog-wheels of

the mill are housed along with the living quarters of the miller and his wife. The God-like abilities of the miller include the freezing of time and the making of the bread of life. The combining of mill and cross in the painting inspired the title of Michael F Gibson's ground-breaking study of this particular painting: *The mill and the cross: Peter Brueghel's 'Way to calvary'*, published in 2000. Majewski was so taken with this study that Gibson became his script collaborator for the film.

The film is an eloquent reminder to archaeologists that art is also material culture and that if we want to understand medieval material culture, how people embodied it and were entangled with it, we have to incorporate and contend with the vision of medieval artists. That materiality is demonstrably linked to craftsmanship and dwelling practices and the film is fuelled in much of its visualisation of this materiality as much by archaeological experimentation and reconstruction as by art historical analysis, with detailed recreations of buildings and costumes and a sense of how they were inhabited and performed. The Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Brueghel collection essentially symbolise the past. The cinematic exploration of both Museum and artist through this film reflects how medieval material culture tells us about that world that has gone and how its surviving fragmentary presence helps to sustain life today through intellectual, emotional and sensory engagements and entanglements.

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# Conferences & Events

— FORTHCOMING —

To advertise conferences/events in the Newsletter contact:

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We welcome submissions relating to current research projects in Ireland, the UK and on the continent. Submissions must not exceed 800 words, and should ideally be within 500 words.

Do not embed pictures in Word/text files but do send pictures/plans as separate high quality JPEG files. The preferred format for site plans/maps is EPS, with layers clearly indicated and unlocked, and any linked files attached.

Email the Newsletter Editor:  
[niallbrady100@gmail.com](mailto:niallbrady100@gmail.com)

Due dates for receipt of copy are:

### Spring Newsletter:

15th February

### Autumn Newsletter:

15th August

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### 29 April – 1 May

'Recent research in CORS in Easter England – archaeology in and with rural communities'. Medieval Settlement Research Group Spring conference, U Lincoln, UK.  
Email Carenza Lewis: [clewis@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:clewis@lincoln.ac.uk)

### May:

#### 10-12 May

10th Annual Early Medieval Archaeology Student Symposium (EMASS). Chapter House, Bristol Cathedral. Showcases research by postgraduates and early career researchers.  
Email: [earlymedievalarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:earlymedievalarchaeology@gmail.com)

#### 12-15 May

51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, USA. Annual gathering of 3,000+ scholars & over 550 sessions. Web: <http://www.wmich.edu/medievalcongress>

#### 23-24 May

Bayscapes: Shaping the Coastal Interface through Time', COST Oceans Past Platform conference, Trinity College Dublin.  
Web: [www.tcd.ie/history/opp/events/](http://www.tcd.ie/history/opp/events/)

### June:

#### 27 June – 2 July

'The Viking World – Diversity and Change'. Centre for the Study of the Viking Age, University Nottingham. The conference captures the diversity of and change in the Viking Age and its aftermath.  
Website: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/groups/csva/news-events/the-viking-world-2016.aspx>

#### 19-23 June

4th Symposium for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, St Louis University, MO.  
Website: <http://smrs.slu.edu/>

### July:

#### 30 June-2 July

30th Irish Conference of Medievalists, to be hosted this year by NUI Maynooth.  
Website: [www.irishmedievalists.com](http://www.irishmedievalists.com)

#### 4-7 July

'Food, Feast & Famine': International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, UK. A key calendar event for all medievalists with over 405 sessions, four keynote lectures, a range of excursions and professional development workshops. Website: [www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/imc/IMC2016](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/imc/IMC2016)

### September:

#### 24 September

Annual Deerhurst lecture: 'The Road to Deerhurst: 1016 in English and Norse Sources' by Matthew Townend (University of York). The 2016 lecture celebrates the millennium of the peace-meeting held on an island in the River Severn at Deerhurst. The lecture will take place at 7.30pm in St Mary's Church, Deerhurst (tickets £5 at the door, students £3). Website: <http://deerhurstfriends.co.uk>

#### 24 September

'Anglo-Saxon Rendlesham, a royal centre of the East Anglian kingdom'. 1-day conference presenting the results of archaeological work 2008-14. The Apex., Bury St Edmonds, Suffolk.  
Website: [heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendlesham-conference-2016](http://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendlesham-conference-2016)

### December:

#### 2-4 December

'Waiting for the End of the World: The Archaeology of Risk and its Perception in the Middle Ages' SMA Annual Conference, Rewley House Oxford. Call for Papers and Posters ends 17th June 2016.  
Website: [medieval.disasters@dur.ac.uk](mailto:medieval.disasters@dur.ac.uk)

— ON THE HORIZON —

### 11-17 September 2017

The **Ruralia XII Conference** will take place in Ireland, based in the southeast region (Kilkenny), with a post-conference excursion to the northwest (Roscommon), [www.ruralia.cz/](http://www.ruralia.cz/). The conference theme will look at Transitions and Transformations in the Medieval and Early Modern countryside. As with all Ruralia conferences, this two-yearly event promises to be very productive, informative and enjoyable. It will attract rural specialists from across Europe (North, South, East and West), and is an ideal forum to meet keen thinkers and an energetic network. The Call for Papers and Posters is now active via the website and also through the National Representatives. The National Representatives in Britain are Mark Gardiner and Piers Dixon, and in Ireland it is Niall Brady. The conference proceedings will be published in a peer-reviewed volume, and will sit alongside the eleven volumes published already.