

Society for Medieval Archaeology Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

If there has been some concern about the health of artefact studies, the amulet recovered in 2009 from Lejre, possibly depicting Odin, is testimony to the contrary. Readers will also find in this issue of the Newsletter lots of object-related material, including PAS-related approaches suggesting the relevance of artefact studies to understanding landscape more generally. David Hinton, in turn, reviews how museums exhibit the Middle Ages today.



Niall Brady
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CONFERENCES & EVENTS, forthcoming

To advertise conferences/events in the Newsletter, contact: *Dr Oliver Creighton*,
email o.h.creighton@exeter.ac.uk

NOVEMBER: The Society's Career day, scheduled for **10 November** has been postponed until **the Spring**. Check the Society's website, or contact Jill Campbell at medieval.archaeology@googlemail.com

13 November, Corning Museum of Glass, New York State, on **Medieval Glass Illuminates what Art and Reason Reveal, a Celebration of Meredith Lillich's Passionate Legacy**. Contact Florian Knothe at knothef@cmog.org

13–14 November, Institute of Archaeology, University College London: **Local Churches and Lordship in the European Middle Ages**; looking at the role of the aristocracy in private and local churches in medieval society. www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/events/conferences/lordship-2010/ or write to J. Sanchez-Pardo, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY.

18–19 November, Perth, Western Australia, **Australian Early Medieval Association 7th Annual Conference: Courage and Cowardice**, <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~medieval/conference2010/>

27 November, Dept of Archaeology, University of Exeter, **Wallingford Burh to Borough Research Project Workshop. Townscapes in Transformation: Debating Urbanism c. AD 800–1200**, an AHRC-funded project. <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/archaeology/conferences/wallingfordworkshop.shtml>

DECEMBER: The Society's AGM will take place at the **Institute of Archaeology, London**, on **6 December** at 6pm. See Society News.

8–10 December, Århus University: **Houses – shaping dwellings, identities, and homes**, a conference on European housing culture from the Viking Age to the Renaissance. Contact Mette Svart Kristiansen, markmsk@hum.au.dk

17–19 December, TAG conference in **Bristol**. www.nomadit.co.uk/tag/tag2010/

2011: FEBRUARY: Archaeology of Wooded Landscapes. Meridian Hall, East Grinstead, **12–13 February**. www.sussexpastshop.co.uk

APRIL: Castle Studies Group 2011 Conference, Marks Tey, Essex, **7–10 April**. www.castlestudiesgroup.org.uk/

MAY: 46th International Congress on Medieval Studies will take place at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, **12–15 May**. www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/index.html

JUNE: The Vernacular Architecture Group, **tour to Norway, 16–26 June**, to visit some of the notable timber buildings. Open to non-members of the group. www.vag.org.uk/norway2011.pdf

22–25 June, the University of Liverpool's Centre for Manx Studies and Manx National Heritage will hold a vernacular architecture conference in **Douglas, Isle**

www.medievalarchaeology.org

of Man, on New Light on Vernacular Architecture: Studies in Britain, Ireland and the Isle of Man. Contact Dr Catriona Mackie, c.mackie@liverpool.ac.uk, or call 01624 695 777.

JULY: Leeds International Medieval Congress. An interdisciplinary forum for all aspects of Medieval Studies **11–14 July**. www.leeds.ac.uk/ims/imc/imc2011_call.html

CONFERENCE REPORTS

45th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, USA, 13–16 May, 2010. With more than six-hundred sessions covering a mind-blowing array of medieval topics, speakers and delegates flocked from America, Europe and as far away as Taiwan to partake in this medieval revelry. The scope and diversity of the papers at the Congress enabled participants many opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary discussions throughout the conference.

The society sponsored a session on the topic of **New Directions in Castle Research**, which included papers on ‘Norman Imposition: The Medieval Castle and the Urban Space’ by Michael Fradley of Exeter University and ‘Debating Lordly Landscapes: The Deerpark of Earlspeak, Loughrea, County Galway’ by Kieran O’Connor and Fiona Beglane of the National University of Ireland, Galway. Scattered throughout the four-day Congress were papers on archaeological topics, ranging from ‘Medievalism, Post-1848 Czech Nationalism, and the Beginnings of Medieval Archaeology in Bulgaria and Ukraine’ by Florin Curta of the University of Florida, to ‘The Archaeo-metallurgy of Lombard Swords: From Artefacts to a History of Craftmanship’ by Vasco La Salvia of the University degli Studi “G. d’Annunzio” Chieti e Pescara, and many others.

To everyone’s delight the exhibition halls brimmed with booksellers from publishers worldwide, replica medieval instruments, jewellery and chain mail. If wine receptions hosted by medieval groups on campus, strolls through down-town Kalamazoo or a quick stop

at the ‘Irish Bar’ were not enough, the organisers of ICMS invited everyone to enjoy a number of medieval festivities including film screenings, dancing and traditional music.

On a more serious note, with medieval revelry and book-haggling aside, it continues to be important to present archaeology at such international and interdisciplinary medieval fora. Through such venues, archaeology gains kudos as a crucial and fundamental approach in the investigation of the medieval past. Archaeology at Kalamazoo 2010 was a complete success. Moreover, it was exciting to see established academics and emerging young researchers voicing new contributions, creating lively discussion and gaining important international ground for the study of Medieval Archaeology.

Lisa Brundle and Sira Dooley-Fairchild
Durham University

‘Space and Settlement’ Conference at Trinity College, Dublin, 28–29 May 2010. A very successful two-day international conference on medieval settlement, with an emphasis on the contribution of GIS systems was held in Trinity College, Dublin. The Trinity Long Room Hub which co-ordinates research in the humanities in Ireland supported it financially. There were over 90 participants, both interested members of the public as well as academics, students and commercial and state archaeologists. There were over 20 speakers, many of whom are members of our Society. Our Assistant Editor, Oliver Creighton, gave the keynote address, on the subject of designed elite landscapes of the Middle Ages, an area in which he is an acknowledged expert.

The Academic Director of the Trinity Hub, Professor Poul Holm, a world-famous environmental economic historian, gave an inspirational welcome address in which he outlined the contribution that the Trinity Hub would make to the furtherance of research in the humanities. He also mentioned some exciting new research projects in environmental history. There is not the space here to give an account of each paper, but the feedback from the conference was extremely positive, and

every paper was of a consistently high standard.

There were four major linked themes, and in the first on 'Mapping', Sarah Gearty of the Royal Irish Academy outlined the ways in which the Irish Historic Towns Atlas (IHTA) uses maps in its analysis of urban space, as well as exploring the less obvious potential that published maps and texts offer cartographic study and digital interaction. Mark Hennessy of Trinity College Dublin then revealed that there had been a lay subsidy in 1292 in Ireland, a fact that no other scholar seems to have noticed to date. As the only other surviving medieval taxation return for Ireland was the early 14th-century Ecclesiastical Taxation, this finding is potentially very significant.

The second section was on 'Boundaries', and Charles Doherty of University College, Dublin discussed the extensive vocabulary for roads in early Irish literature, which provided an infrastructure that facilitated communication for social, military and economic purposes. Two research students from Trinity – Erin Britton and Linda Shine – outlined important aspects of their settlement research, in Kilkenny and Cavan, and East Galway respectively. Edel Bhreathnach of the Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute of University College, Dublin spoke on research relating to two major projects, the long-standing Discovery Programme's 'Tara Project' and the Heritage Council supported INSTAR research project 'Mapping Death: boundaries, territories and people in Ireland, 1st to 8th centuries AD' (see Newsletter 42), and considered *fertae* burial of Lehinch, Co. Offaly.

We then moved to another fascinating presentation, by Rory Sherlock of the National University of Ireland, Galway on the spatial attributes of Irish tower-house halls, which vary widely. The variation appears to derive from both the multi-faceted role of the tower house in late medieval Irish society and from the evolution of tower-house architecture over time. He argued that tower-house halls should not be examined in isolation, but should be

compared to halls in larger castles on stylistic and functional grounds, and that this process highlighted a number of interesting parallels in hall design and decoration. There was another presentation on tower houses, this time by Gillian Eadie of the Queen's University, Belfast, in which she examined gate-house type tower houses of Co. Down, which show striking similarities in form. This offers substantive evidence for a thriving regional building school in the 15th century, but how far do these similarities translate into similarities in function? She examined three of the best-preserved examples of the gate-house type and analysed the function of these buildings with a focus on the individual balance of priorities behind their construction. Although the buildings may look very similar, they each served slightly different purposes.

In case the audience thought that they had heard enough on tower houses, the most impressive stone monument surviving throughout Ireland of the later middle ages, there was another excellent paper by Vicky McAlister of Trinity. In it she tried to determine to what extent changes in trading activity influenced the abandonment of the Irish tower house through the first half of the 17th century, also using Co. Down as a case study. As well as employing several historical sources in this quest she emphasised the role of archaeology in determining the shift. There were three more ground-breaking papers by research students in Trinity: Emma Arbuthnott, who examined the historic landscapes surrounding ringwork castles in medieval Leinster and Meath; Grace O'Keefe, on changing fortunes and functions of the Hospital of St John the Baptist belonging to the Crutched Friars; and Rebecca Wall, who tackled the complex issues of spatial integration and urbanisation, by addressing conceptual problems and drawing on evidence from the kingdom of the Déisi, roughly modern Co. Waterford in south-eastern Ireland.

Damian Shiels, of Headland Archaeology Ltd, presented a paper on 'Reconstructing Battlefield Landscapes' in which he examined the historical and archaeological merit of reconstructing battlefield landscapes and, through

examples such as the Battle of Kinsale in 1601, outlined the techniques employed in such reconstruction.

Niall Brady of the Discovery Programme gave a presentation on the deserted medieval village of Castlemore, Co. Carlow, which can now be identified with the medieval manor of Forth. It is all too rare in Ireland to study a deserted village in association with a run of manorial and borough accounts which, in this instance, relate to the period 1279–80 to 1287–88 when the manor was part of the larger estate of one of the great magnates of his time, Roger IV Bigod (1245–1306), earl of Norfolk. An assemblage of small finds has been collected from the ploughsoil, and the range of pottery complements the late 13th-century insight into the manor's investments and activities, which are recorded in the accounts. The later pottery speaks to the manor's decline and abandonment.

Linda Doran of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland surveyed water and road transport in the Middle Ages in the Kingdom of Meath, where most journeys of any distance necessitated a combination of travel by road and water. The presence of the River Shannon, a major inter-regional waterway, with the *Slighe Assail*, an inter-regional roadway, permits a persuasive consideration of this journey in the region covered by modern Co. Longford. Using the Petty Barony maps of the 17th century her paper examined the evidence for medieval communication routes and associated settlements in this area, and the rise of Gaelic Irish markets. I had the almost hopeless task of attempting to sum up the conference in a few short words, so I concentrated on the positive impact that GIS systems would continue to have on medieval settlement studies in the future. It is hoped to publish the proceedings of this conference in the near future.

Terry Barry

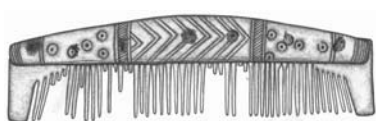
Early Medieval Finds from the British Isles: methodological and practical approaches to material culture, Oxford, May 2010. The aim of this conference was to explore current research in the field of artefact studies. Presentations from academics, curators and finds

professionals, together with post-graduate student posters, highlighted approaches to metalwork, sculpture, coinage, pottery and bone, and attracted a large number of post-graduates and academics from across the UK.

In her introduction to the conference, Helena Hamerow (University of Oxford) drew attention to the rise in academic interest in early medieval material culture over the last decade. Stimulated by a wealth of new data, as well as targeted research funding, the field is expanding dramatically, as demonstrated by the enthusiastic uptake in conference places. In 'The difference that the PAS makes: the theoretical benefits of using PAS data', Helen Geake (University of Cambridge/Portable Antiquities Scheme) explored how biases in artefact survival and recovery create differences between PAS and conventionally recovered data. As predominantly accidental losses uncovered in rural areas, PAS artefacts help to 'people' the early medieval countryside; they expose differences between objects worn and used in everyday life, and those selected for formal deposition, for instance, in graves. Continuing the focus on small finds, Ellen Swift (University of Kent) gave a paper entitled 'Interpreting Roman dress accessories'. This questioned how site contexts and contexts of loss or deposition, in addition to the form, material and style of an artefact, influence our understanding of Roman-period finds. Discussion followed on how such approaches could be applied to the early medieval period, and whether artefact assemblages could be used to define types of site.

In 'Pottery and Early Medieval Archaeology', Ben Jervis (University of Southampton) warned against the exclusive use of pottery as a dating tool. Drawing on his research from Chichester, as well as previous work, Ben demonstrated that pottery could be used to elucidate a number of key themes in the early medieval period, including trade, mobility and social identity. In part, this was due to the range of sophisticated analytical techniques, such as distribution and petrographic analysis, now available to researchers. The use of scientific methodologies to open up new

lines of enquiry into existing material assemblages was a theme developed further by Steve Ashby (University of York), in his paper 'Craft. Design. Technology. Three Perspectives for the Study of Early Medieval Worked Bone Industry'. He showed how new provenancing techniques are exposing differences in the distribution patterns of combs in elk, reindeer and red deer respectively. Compared with other stylistic criteria, this method helps to establish previously unrecognised patterns in the regional production and use of bone combs, highlighting, in turn, social and group identities.



Bone comb from York (Ashby Type 8a), illustrated by Hayley Saul

In 'Developing approaches to finds research' Jackie Keily (Museum of London) provided a history of research within early medieval archaeology, examining how changes in post-excavation finds analysis and publication in the 1970s and '80s motivated a shift away from interpreting artefacts as mere dating or typological tools, towards an increased understanding of their wider significance. She argued that material held in museum stores, particularly in the Museum of London, offered researchers a rich and largely untapped resource for archaeological study, which could be used alongside the large corpus of grey literature. Aleksandra McClain (University of York) gave a paper entitled 'Moving beyond style: methodological and theoretical approaches to the archaeology of stone sculpture'. It examined how large-scale studies of sculpture, incorporating landscape contexts and patterns of communication, could be harnessed to reveal elite identities and power structures in Late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England. In examining stone sculpture from both before and after the Norman Conquest, Aleksandra demonstrated intriguing continuities in some forms of commemorative traditions, including the use of hogback shapes and sword emblems. These, in turn, have much to reveal about the

patronage, function and meaning of sculpture in the Middle Ages.

In 'Archaeologies of early medieval coinage', John Naylor (Ashmolean Museum/PAS) argued that coinage, now a vast archaeological dataset, could be studied from a number of different perspectives to illuminate trade, identity, religion and political power. Symbols employed on coinage could, for instance, relate to contemporary Christian ideals of Kingship and morality, posing interesting questions about the contexts of coin production. John's talk stimulated debate about current levels of engagement by non-numismatists with coin data, with experiences varying regionally. The final talk of the conference, by Gabor Thomas (University of Reading), also investigated themes relating to a much expanded material dataset. In 'PAS and peopling Later Anglo-Saxon England' he indicated how forms and styles of metalwork could be studied to reveal cultural encounters. Drawing on native Anglo-Saxon metalwork, as well as items in Scandinavian and Continental styles, his paper questioned how cultural allegiances, as expressed through dress, shifted over time and place. David Hinton (University of Southampton) summed up proceedings, remarking that the dramatic increase in new finds, coupled with developments in scientific and theoretical applications, would ensure an exciting and vibrant future for early medieval finds research. Audio CDs of all the Conference papers are available through the conference organiser, Jane Kershaw (Randall Maclver Student in Archaeology, Queen's College). Thanks to the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity and the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford, for their financial support.

Jane Kershaw

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'A House Such As Thieves Will Knock At'. The Tower as Late Medieval Lordly Residence. School of History and Politics, University of Stirling. 19–20 June 2010.

In 1581, William Forbes of Corse in Aberdeenshire reputedly said (in the aftermath of a raid), 'I will build me such a house as thieves will need to knock at ere they enter'. This pithy and apposite

motivation for tower building was appropriated as the title for this recent conference. Contributions ranged from western Ireland to central Poland, and from the 12th to the 17th centuries.

There was an impressive depth to the numerous Irish contributions, particularly where they touched on the often understudied Gaelic Irish lordships. Rory Sherlock addressed the problematic dating of late medieval Gaelic and Anglo-Irish tower houses, and proposed the promising hypothesis that there were parallel developments on the east and west coasts. Gillian Eadie analysed tower houses in five study areas with regard to uses of internal space, identifying considerable regional variation; there is greater evidence of defensive display in Down and Galway, for example, whereas space within Limerick towers strongly emphasised their use as *loci* of hospitality. Tom Finan reviewed the excavations of an intriguing 13th-century Gaelic bishop's hall-house at Kiltasheen, Co. Roscommon, set within an enclosure containing *c.*150 medieval burials. Niall Brady described the Discovery Programme's survey and excavations at Tulsk, also in Roscommon, which revealed that the O'Connor castle built in 1406 was a substantial tower house raised on a long-occupied rath. Paul Naessens' study of the O'Flaherty tower houses of western Galway demonstrated the wealth derived from the provision of services to Atlantic fisheries in the 15th–16th centuries, revealing the vitality of Gaelic lordship in areas of low agricultural potential.

While contributions from elsewhere in Europe were limited in number, their quality was evident throughout. Joachim Zeune assessed the vast number of Bavarian towers that range from the 11th–16th centuries, and great sophistication was much in evidence, as the rare find of a hypocaust-like system at Sulzberg (*c.*1130) demonstrated. Taco Herman's paper on Dutch towers of the 13th–14th centuries ranged across the country, and showed how many were located adjacent to newly reclaimed land. The mid-15th century Yellow Tower of Gwent at Raglan was the showpiece of Welsh country squires who became

English magnates, as John Kenyon showed. Its construction by William ap Thomas and by his son, William Herbert evidently drew on French and Breton influences. Lammerside Castle in Cumbria is the subject of ongoing research by Erik Matthews. The 14th- to 15th-century gate tower was the focal point of a manorial centre, but the reuse of the castle as a 16th-century hunting retreat was revealed by a number of modifications to the tower and the surrounding landscape. Przemyslaw Nocun's fascinating account of the tower of Siedlecin demonstrated Polish, German and Bohemian influences on the 14th-century Silesian duchy, but Siedlecin's mural paintings depicting Lancelot of the Lake are apparently unique outside the Anglo-French world.

The revival of Scottish castle studies was much in evidence. Charles McKean reinterpreted the chronologies of tower houses in the West March and Fife in a wide-ranging paper, suggesting that we could profitably re-examine many of the common assumptions made about 15th- and 16th-century towers. Ewart demonstrated that James IV's tower at Stirling was closely integrated into his contemporary palace block, now concealed within James V's palatial Renaissance residence. Gallagher reinterpreted the 16th-century north-west tower at Holyrood, suggesting that the 'burning' of the palace in 1544 plainly did not involve this tower. Derek Alexander looked at two 14th-century island towers, reinterpreting his excavations at Old Lochnaw in the light of Tabraham's celebrated work at Threave. His findings demonstrate that, despite the great social differentiation of their builders, such sites could exhibit considerable similarity. Richard Oram, inspired by a fortuitous find by 2008 Chateau Gaillard participants, has reinterpreted the 'perfected castellar construction' of Doune. He found that this apparently late 14th-century residence was actually built within an earlier enceinte, and highlighted both the sophisticated arrangement of the accommodation and some remaining puzzles over the use of internal space. Shannon Fraser's paper on the House of Muchall was read in her absence by Tom Addyman. This 'statement of fitness for rank' was raised

on an earlier tower by the 1st Lord Fraser prior to his ennobling by Charles I. The expansion and embellishment of this fine tower into a courtyard residence with outer courts and gardens was diligently charted. Addyman's own contribution reviewed a number of recent surveys and excavations at Scottish towers which reveal hitherto-unsuspected variety. To take two significant examples, the amount of medieval fabric within the 19th-century Brodick Castle is much greater than was suspected, and the confection of Craigevar has proven to have been not a *de novo* construction, but the rebuilding of a more prosaic tower house. The potential cross-fertilisation of ideas derived from this conference has been most rewarding, and it is encouraging to note that the organisers hope to repeat their success.

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NEWS & VIEWS

Odin (Óðinn) from Lejre

The round of excavations undertaken at Lejre, Denmark, during 2008–09 has led to the discovery of yet more buildings, including one 60m in length (making it the largest yet known from Southern Scandinavia during the first millennium). The discoveries will provoke renewed interest in this Iron-Age and Viking-Age settlement complex. For the moment, interest has focused on one of the small finds unearthed in 2009: an amulet, made of silver with niello inlay, that appears to represent the god Odin (Old Norse Óðinn) enthroned on his high seat, backed by a pair of beasts and flanked by a pair of ravens. A report on that object by Tom Christensen has appeared in the 2009 issue of *ROMU*, the annual journal of Roskilde Museum (pp 7–25). It includes over two dozen images showing the object and some items that help to contextualize it. For the convenience of persons without easy access to the journal (or a knowledge of Danish), an English summary, drafted by Carl Edlund Andersen and myself and accompanied by a selection of images, is posted at my personal website: <http://www.english.wisc.edu/jdniles> Reports and studies relating to the excavations

undertaken at Lejre up to the year 2006 are published in Niles 2007.

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*Amulet from Lejre, Roskilde Museum/
Ole Malling*

The Backrest Beasts of Óðinn from Lejre

The question of the identity of the occupant of the Lejre high chair has been mooted on the world wide web. Among the features that help support an identification of that figure as Óðinn are the highly naturalistic birds perched on the armrests. These could well be understood as Óðinn's ravens, Huginn and Muninn. In this context, it has also been speculated that the two beast heads on the backrest of the Lejre high chair could represent wolves. As is well known from the poem *Grímnismál* (verse 19) in the Poetic Edda, Óðinn is the master of two wolves named Geri and Freki. Snorri Sturluson likewise included and expanded on this information in the *Gylfaginning* section of the Prose Edda, and the names of both wolves also appear in skaldic poetry as terms (*heiti*) with the generic sense “wolf” (Jesch 2002, 255).



*Amulet from Lejre, rear view,
Rune Knud/Zoomorphic*

With this in mind, it may be worth recalling other possible Viking Age artistic representations of – if not

definitely Óðinn's wolves – pairs of wolves or wolf-like beasts. For example, Christensen has observed that the armrests of the silver chair figurine from Hedeby could be lions or perhaps wolves (2009, 10); the latter animal, at least, might have been familiar locally to Scandinavians. The Böksta rune-stone (U855 in Uppland, Sweden) includes a depiction of a spear-wielding man on horseback in the company of two dog- or wolf-like beasts and two birds. This was interpreted by Silén (1983, 90) as representing Óðinn in the company of his wolves Geri and Freki, as well as his ravens Huginn and Muninn. Of course, as is so often the case with such pre-Christian Scandinavian artefacts, interpretation is neither clear-cut nor without controversy. For example, Vierck interpreted the Hedeby chair as not Óðinn's high-seat but a throne functioning as a platform from which a *völva* (female witch) practices *seiðr* (magical arts).

As for the Lejre figurine, it is by no means certain that the animals represented were intended to be wolves. The beasts wear collars (or neck-rings), suggesting domesticated animals, though perhaps Viking Age Scandinavians might have expected Óðinn to equip his wolves with collars or rings. It might have been no more than a desire for symmetry of form that dictated the placement of two beast heads on either side of the backrest of the Lejre figurine's chair. Nevertheless, the possibility that the Lejre chair figurine might feature not only two ravens but additionally two wolves would provide further significant reasons to identify its occupant as Óðinn.

Carl Edlund Anderson

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References

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Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies.

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The **Staffordshire Hoard**; a response to the report by Mark Hall in the Society's Newsletter, 43: few recent archaeological discoveries have given rise to so many rumours as the Staffordshire Anglo-Saxon hoard but one ill-informed item even found its way into your recent Newsletter. Although several parish boundaries in the area do follow the Roman Watling Street, which was then still in use, the 'out-stepping parish boundary on which the field sits', a location suggested to have been of possible ritual significance, is that of the West Midlands county, actually drawn up only in 1974. This actually ran through the area of the 19th-century extra-parochial and later parish, coincidentally passing close to the find-spot. Enough said!

Della Hooke, University of Birmingham

Hornby Castle Fieldwork: 2010 Season.

Hornby Castle near Bedale North Yorkshire was constructed in the late 13th century on the site of an earlier structure dating back at least into the early 12th century. It was substantially expanded into the courtyard castle seen today by Sir John Conyers KG in the mid 15th century before being further altered by William Lord Conyers at the turn of the 15th/16th centuries with the construction of the famous Hornby Portal(now in the Burrell Collection Glasgow). It subsequently became the country house of the Earls of Holderness in the late 17th century, and then the Osborne Dukes of Leeds in the late 18th century, when significant refurbishment work took place, before being gutted and partially demolished in 1930 to pay the debts of the then owner the 11th Duke of Leeds.

The Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland

are currently engaged in an on-going programme of fieldwork incorporating building recording and excavation at the site. The Post-Medieval aspects of the work have already been dealt with elsewhere. Building recording so far has identified the remains of the Chapel gallery in the chamber below the former Great Hall documented as dating to the late 1440s, together with a curious arrangement of deliberately created voids or resonance chambers within the Great Hall wall to improve its acoustics, a feature normally associated with monastic sites. The exterior of the surviving South Tower and South Wing retains elements of a scheme of heraldic decoration advertising the piety of Sir John Conyers, a major figure in the region, together with his political connections in the run up to the Wars of the Roses.



Heraldic scheme of decoration on the South Tower, Hornby Castle

The excavation which has been focussed on the area of the former Country House tip has identified a number of features from the original castle building which were stripped out and tipped during the mid 18th century refurbishment by John Carr and “Athenian” Stuart for the 4th Earl of Holderness. These have included quantities of dressed stone and roof tile of medieval origin, a frame for a tapestry or wall hanging and most notably a wrought iron weather vane which formally stood on a turret or belvedere to the rear of the Great Hall incorporating a Conyers heraldic shield as a counterweight. Elsewhere within the area of tipping there are significant quantities of pottery dating to the mid to late 15th century appearing as surface scatter. These include local fabrics such as Brandsby, Scarborough and Humber

ware and also items from further afield such as Saintonge ware and early German stone wares. Some sherds retain evidence of staining from their previous contents and a piece of a Humber ware aquamanile in the form of a dragon has also been retrieved from the ground surface. Within the main excavation trench a number of medieval items including sherds of Brill Boarstall ware pottery and two sherds of Florentine drinking glass have been recovered as residual finds amongst the later material. However quite unexpectedly and below the later tipping, part of a formal garden layout in the form of a stone revetted raised bed has recently been uncovered. This has been dated by a sherd of Scarborough ware pottery in the area behind together with a sherd of Saintonge ware pottery from the construction cut to the mid 15th century. The discovery came as a considerable surprise in view of the relative distance from the Medieval castle but would be entirely consistent with some of the garden scenes from illuminated manuscripts such as ‘Les Tres Riches Heures’ which show the castle building as distant backdrop. Work continues to be on-going and new discoveries will be reported in due course.

Erik Matthews rubyna.matthews@btinternet.com

SOCIETY NEWS

Annual General Meeting

The Society’s AGM will take place on **Monday 6th December at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL, 6pm**, followed by the **Annual Lecture** to be given by our president, **Leslie Webster**, entitled ***Fecit or Fake it? Anglo-Saxon Forgeries, ancient and modern.*** The faking of Anglo-Saxon antiquities has had a long, and sometimes surprising, history. Not all imitations were made to deceive, though some innocent ones have done – and not all deliberate forgeries were made for monetary gain.

At a time when the faking of Anglo-Saxon artefacts appears to have been enjoying a revival, this lecture will review the history of such forgeries, ancient and modern, with case studies of some of the bolder examples, and an examination of

the contexts in which they were conceived. *Cave emptor!*

Please note: the venue for the AGM has changed since the last Newsletter. It will be at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY.

Website: Readers may be aware that the **Society's website** is being overhauled for the better. Amanda Forster has been steering the revamp, which we hope will make for a more user-friendly interface and provide you with up-to-date info on Society news and events. We would be delighted to receive your comments to: medieval.archaeology@googlemail.com

Feedback: We are still keen to hear **comments and feedback on your membership of the Society**, and of its journal, publications and events. Please visit the Society website to access the feedback form.

SPECIALIST GROUP REPORTS, 2009

Castle Studies Group (CSG)

In April 2009 the 23rd AGM and Annual Conference of the CSG took place in Limerick. The conference, with the theme *Castles of North Munster*, was organised by Brian Hodkinson and Kevin O'Brien. The introductory lecture by Denis Power was on the castles of Co. Limerick, and Ken Wiggins presented on the 1642 Siege of King John's Castle, Limerick. The itinerary included King John's Castle, Beal Boru ringwork, Lisbunny Hall House, the bawn at Ballingarry, tower houses at Lackeen and Bunratty, the Desmond Hall and tower at Askeaton, great towers at Adare and Nenagh, Shanid motte and bailey as well as other sites at Clonshire, Carrigogunnell, Newcastlewest, and Quin (where the castle is largely hidden under a late medieval Franciscan friary). The speakers at the sites were Tom McNeill and Dan Tietzsch-Tyler as well as Kevin and Brian. CSG would like to thank the OPW for facilitating visits, especially Askeaton, which was closed to the public for conservation, and the various landowners who let us onto their sites.

Details of CSG activities, members' interests and updates on castle research

can be found in the *CSG Journal* edited and produced by Neil Guy (latest vol. 23), and by visiting www.castlestudiesgroup.org.uk, where members of the committee can be contacted by email. Castle-related publications for the year are listed and reviewed in CSG Bibliography No. 21, compiled by John Kenyon. An interim Newsletter was also distributed in August, edited and compiled by Peter Burton.



The CSG visiting Adare Castle, Co. Limerick

Readers are reminded that undergraduate and postgraduate students who are writing dissertations or theses on a castle-related theme may apply to attend the Annual Conference at half price. The CSG also awards small grants to group projects on castle research. Details of these awards and application forms can be found on the CSG website or by contacting the Hon. Sec.

Pamela Marshall

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Finds Research Group (FRG)

This year's meetings of the FRG were on very different themes. The first in Sheffield explored 19th- and 20th-century finds, while in Lincoln we celebrated irons from their production to uses.

(i) *Finding the Familiar: dealing with artefacts of the Modern Age* was held on 9 May and hosted by ARCUS in Sheffield. The workshop was intended to provide researchers with an introduction to the material culture of the more recent past, particularly those of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Artefacts of the last couple of centuries have not traditionally been an area of interest, but the growing quantities of material culture being excavated and kept – particularly from urban sites – are forcing archaeologists to pay closer attention. The workshop was attended by an encouraging number of people from a broad spectrum of archaeological and historical interests.

The day began with a number of short, thought-provoking presentations, commencing with Alasdair Brooks, Leicester University, who used a case study on 18th- and 19th-century pottery recovered from Huntingdon, Cambs., to reveal the gap in knowledge of material culture of this date in British archaeology compared to Australia and North America, which is ironic since much of the material culture was manufactured in the UK. This gap in knowledge was also highlighted by Linzi Harvey of ARCUS and Märit Gaimster of Pre-Construct Archaeology. Both spoke from the point of view of commercial post-excavation and highlighted the fact that there are many types of more modern artefacts that researchers sometimes struggle to recognise. Due to the lack of archaeological publications for this type of artefact, they often have to look to the internet for the websites of amateur enthusiasts. Lance Mytton spoke on the history of bottle manufacture from a collector's perspective; Eddie Birch of the Historical Metallurgical Society introduced the workshop to the National Slag Collection housed at Ironbridge, which holds samples from over 200 sites; Joan Unwin, archivist for the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire, discussed the use of bone in Sheffield's once-thriving cutlery industry, while Oliver Jessop, ARCUS, highlighted problems of archive storage and curation in commercial archaeology. Pauline Webb, Manchester's Science and Industry Museum, spoke about museums specialising in material from the modern

period and its importance in understanding a local past.

The final session of the day featured a discussion chaired by Sarah May of English Heritage, which explored the possibilities of setting up a research group for the material culture of the modern period. During this, it became clear that a group encompassing all aspects of modern archaeology – buildings, finds, and technology – was needed due to the increasing number of excavations and surveys focussing on the more recent past. It was suggested that a list be made up of groups and individuals with relevant specialisms, so that they can be contacted as a point of reference, and the development of an online forum for this purpose was proposed. It was largely agreed that, in the first instance, the new group should be developed under the auspices of the already-established FRG.

If you would like to join the 'Finding the Familiar' JISCmail mailing list or would like more information about events, contact Julie Cassidy, Finds Liaison Officer (Northamptonshire), email: jucassidy@northamptonshire.gov.uk, or Dr Alasdair Brooks, Teaching Fellow in Historical Archaeology, University of Leicester, email: amb72@le.ac.uk
Julie Cassidy

(ii) *A Celebration of Irons: their production and uses* was hosted by The Collection, Art and Archaeology in Lincolnshire, on Saturday 24 October. The conference aimed to provide an introduction to iron, covering its manufacture, the various properties of different irons and how they were used functionally and aesthetically between AD 700-1700.

The morning covered the manufacturing processes from smelting to the primary smithing of iron bars and the afternoon considered how the bars were turned into artefacts, utilising the individual properties of the different types of iron, for specific functions and appearance. The lunch time video of Jake Keen undertaking a smelt in a bloomery furnace was followed by a demonstration by Hector Cole (Master of the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths)

using his portable medieval hearth, who smithed iron from a bloom produced by Jake Keen. While we watched Hector create first an arrowhead and then a whittle-tanged knife using his wooden hearth, he explained the hearth was lined with clay to prevent it from burning. It was fascinating to watch him work and interesting to observe that very little archaeological evidence, apart from hammerscale, would have been left behind from his activities. In addition, there were displays of Hector's pattern-welded knives, swords and spearheads, x-rays and corroded iron objects to highlight the importance of x-raying, plus some examples of different types of slag.



Hector Cole and his portable wooden forge. (Images © Robbie Bean)

Gerry McDonnell reviewed the processes involved in iron production; the different alloys, the importance of iron within societies and the potential of archaeological analysis. Sarah Paynter discussed in more detail the smelting of iron using the bloomery process, covering the chemical processes involved and detailing the differences between the different furnaces and the archaeological evidence for them. Peter King gave a thorough consideration of the early Post-medieval iron-making processes.

The afternoon session shifted focus to finished artefacts. Eleanor spoke on the different irons used in the production of Saxon knives, and the techniques used by iron smiths, such as heat treatments, revealed by her metallographic analysis. Hector Cole explained the process of pattern-welding and handed round some of his own fine examples for close inspection. Dave Starley spoke about Saxon weapons; drawing on his study of spearheads, he considered the different meanings of weapons in graves. He regretted the loss of stored iron artefacts

from corrosion over the last 20 years, which have reduced the material available for study.

Kate Sumnall

The FRG Datasheet 41 'Cast copper-alloy cooking vessels' by Roderick Butler, Christopher Green and Naomi Payne was published in 2009, edited by Steve Ashby. Copies of the Datasheet and Datasheet Books I and II are available from Katey Goodwin, Four Winds, 8 St Anne's Vale, Brown Edge, Staffordshire ST6 8TA. Details of prices and p&p are available from Katey, email: jandkgoodwin@talktalk.net, or see our website.

Annual membership of the FRG costs £6 (£10 or €15 for overseas members), for which members receive two mailings a year and are invited to attend two (usually free) day conferences. Datasheets are sent out free to members. The Group is in a healthy financial position and membership is currently around 400.

Jane Cowgill

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Medieval Pottery Research Group

(MPRG) In June the MPRG met at the headquarters of the British Geological Survey near Nottingham for its one-day conference and AGM. *Science and Ceramics: Recent developments in analysis and interpretation* was dedicated to the memory of Alan Vince and featured a wide range of papers covering developments in ICP, microanalysis, TL and C14 dating as well as papers investigating post-medieval slipwares, Icelandic pottery, Roman foodways and ceramic fragmentation. It was good to see the event attended by so many.

Looking back over the year events seem to have been dominated by the passing away of notable stalwarts of the Group; we were all shocked to hear of the death of Sarah Jennings last September, followed by the sad news of Walter Davey's death in January. Many

members were in attendance at both funerals. Wally had been a supporter of the MPRG from its earliest days as well as being a founding member of the SPMA; Sarah had been a long time and active supporter of the Group, for a time as Secretary and as a champion for ceramic studies through her work at English Heritage.



The MPRG at its CPD day on pottery production

In February the MPRG held a joint conference with the Society for Medieval Archaeology – *Things Medieval: A conference in tribute to Alan Vince*. This was very well attended and proved an excellent opportunity for Alan's friends and colleagues to pay tribute to his work. It was especially pleasing to have Alan's family attend a day that featured the presentation of a range of superb papers focusing on trade, towns and pottery that showcased Alan's contribution to the profession so well. The conference raised £526 which was donated to the St. Barnabas Day Hospice in Lincoln. Thanks should be given to Duncan Brown for his work to make the event such an excellent day. The work to safeguard Alan Vince's Archive has been completed – many thanks to Anne Boyle, Jane Young and Kate Steane for their work on this and to English Heritage for funding the work. Alan's thin sections are now lodged with the British Museum and his digital archive is with ADS, where it should hopefully be available online soon.

English Heritage has agreed to fund the work required to carry out the new MPRG Research Strategy and Agenda. The aim of this project is to reassess the state of medieval pottery studies since 1994 and the publication of *Medieval Ceramic Studies in England; A Review for English Heritage* by Maureen Mellor.

Work is progressing well: a resource assessment has been undertaken to identify published works, internet and other resources – this is ongoing and will be added to, using information collected during regional meetings and through a questionnaire.

So far there have been 48 responses to a questionnaire aimed at those working on or with an interest in post-Roman ceramics and the deadline for returns has been extended to the end of July in the hope that more people will contribute. Mini surveys aimed at journals, contracting units, local government archaeologists, museums and universities have also been circulated with good response rates for most. A round of consultation meetings in England, Scotland and Wales will take place in June and July 2010. These will discuss and prioritise objectives for each region and for the group as a whole. The first of these, covering London and South East and South Central, took place in London in June. Once the consultation meetings are finished, a document will be produced incorporating the information gathered. This will be circulated and a single consultation meeting to discuss it will be held in London.

A dedicated 'wiki' website has been created for the project <http://mprg.wikispaces.com/> The format was chosen as it allows data to be added quickly and easily. This is constantly being updated and contains details of the research, meetings and the questionnaire.

2010 saw the completion of the latest round of professional training days organised by the Group. These were generously supported by English Heritage and were focused on developing the skills and knowledge base of professional ceramic specialists working with medieval ceramics. This year the two-day workshops have covered: ceramic fabrics, the technology of pottery production and medieval imports. The courses were very well attended and were a credit to Victoria Bryant and Sarah Jennings who did much of the hard work to organise them.

The John Hurst Travel Fund was awarded a grant to Rebecca Bridgman

in order to allow her to travel to Ca' Foscari University in Venice to present two papers on her doctoral research into Almohad pottery in south-west Iberia at the IX Congresso Internazionale sulla Ceramica Medievale nel Mediterraneo. The Fund honours the contribution made by John Hurst to the study of medieval and post-medieval pottery in the UK and Europe. It offers travel grants of up to £200 each to MPRG members who need financial support to carry out their research. Grants are awarded annually; the next closing date for applications is 23 March 2011.

Volume 30 of the Group's journal *Medieval Ceramics* was published in June 2009 and was a double volume, meaning that the cover date and contents of the journal now reflects the previous year's conference. This bumper issue featured three papers on pottery production sites from Northern England and Scotland, on the cargo of a ship wreck in the Mediterranean, and on how we can use ceramic evidence to tell us about people who were using it in their everyday lives (surely our *raison d'être* as a Group); there were also excellent reports on assemblages from Flanders, Portugal and the medieval Mudéjar ceramics from Paterna, Spain.

The Group is in a secure financial position and membership remains healthy at around 300 members. The coming year will see the MPRG develop a Strategy document in order help set out the Committee's work for the coming few years; hopefully they will all be as productive as this year.

Andrew Sage

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Medieval Settlement Research Group

(MSRG) The MSRG continues to be proactive in its activities, offering informative conferences and seminars, and promoting fieldwork and student input.

The MSRГ Spring meeting was held at Leicester on the 4–5 April on the theme of 'Monks in the Midlands. Medieval Monasteries in Town and landscape in the Midlands', organised by Deirdre O'Sullivan and Neil Christie (University of Leicester). It was well attended and received; nine excellent papers were presented, exploring recent archaeological and documentary investigations and analyses on sites and settings. Case studies of urban abbeys and friaries were on Leicester, Coventry and Chester; and of rural seats, cells and priories, papers centred on Barlings, Bordesley, Coton, Thorney and Lincolnshire; we were also highly appreciative of the summing-up by James Bond. Excellent weather blessed the Sunday fieldtrip which included site visits to Grace Dieu and Breedon-on-the-Hill; we were grateful to Pete Liddle for his very knowledgeable guiding on the day.



View of the early medieval and medieval church (and former abbey) of St Mary and St Hardulph at Breedon-on-the-Hill in Leicestershire

The Group's Winter Seminar was held on 12 December at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, and was organised by Chris Thornton on the theme of 'Marshland Landscapes, Settlement and Economy'. Papers presented explored Pre-Domesday farming on the Thames (*Ros Faith*); Early medieval fish weirs in Britain and Ireland (*Aidan O'Sullivan*); Medieval reclamation and settlement on Romney Marsh (*Luke Barber*); Late medieval flooding of the Thames marshes (*Jim Galloway*).

As a follow-up, the 2010 theme is on medieval bridges and rivers – the event to be held in Leicester on Saturday, 4 December.

Core to the 89-page volume 23 of the MSRГ journal – now renamed as *Medieval Settlement Research* – published in October 2009, were a set of research papers exploring a series of topical themes, such as Anglo-Saxon reuse of prehistoric monuments (*Vicky Crewe*), estates and landscape control (papers by *Ros Faith* and by *Angus Winchester*, exploring NW England), and archaeologies of occupied medieval rural sites (*John Thomas*, considering Leics. and Rutland; and *Carenza Lewis* on the HEFA CORS project results); and outside of UK landscapes, two papers offered summaries of recent research in Boeotia, Greece (*Athanasios Vionis*) and Sweden (*Eva Svensson* et al). We are keen to expand the coverage of the journal and to encourage debate and thus want to encourage potential contributors of research papers especially to contact the editor, Dr Sam Turner (sam.turner@ncl.ac.uk) with their ideas and proposals.

For the John Hurst MA Dissertation Prize for 2009, there was a joint award of the prize shared between Patrick Gleeson and Niamh Arthur (respectively from MA programmes at the University of York and University College Dublin), each of whom had written on Irish themes (early medieval kingship and landscape; and the nature and placing of Viking Longphorts), and summaries of these dissertations will be included in this year's journal.

The Group initiated student membership – at a mere £6 per annum (half the cost of full membership) this is a bargain to MA and PhD students pursuing work in the fields explored by the MSRГ. Please see the website for the membership form. As well as a copy of the journal, members are eligible to apply for fieldwork grants and conference bursaries – see details in the journal of how to apply to the various awards.

Neil Christie

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GRANTS AND AWARDS

A grant of £233 was received in 2010 from the **Eric Fletcher Fund** to aid research which aims to expose the visualist bias inherent in traditional studies of the art and architecture of medieval pilgrim churches and their visitors, and to establish an alternative sensory and social perspective on them as synth-aesthetic experiences created for and by a diverse range of ritual participants. The grant was used to attend the 'Looking Like: Mimesis/Imitatio in the Art and Architecture of the Middle Ages' conference at the Courtauld Institute of Art on the 1 March. Additionally, it supported attendance and participation at the International Medieval Congress Leeds, 12–15 July, where the paper entitled 'The Monumental and the Private: the sensory experience of medieval devotional space' was presented.

The topics discussed at the Courtauld conference were particularly significant to further understand whether specific models were drawn upon in the formation of the styles and designs of the architectural and decorative cycles of the medieval church. Particular themes discussed included two papers on the concept of mimesis as evoking and creating the sanctity of the artistic elements of portable devotional objects such as reliquaries and the surrounding space, and how these developed throughout the middle ages, thus, imitating significant artefacts of the past in order to construct and establish a sanctity in them.

The paper presented at the IMC contributed to a discussion of how medieval saints' cults were represented and promoted by powerful visual and literary propaganda, much of which adorned the church in which the cults were situated. The particular focus of my paper was to show the importance of sensory experience and bodily participation in the divine during the medieval period, and how this was reflected in the architectural and visual structure of a saintly site, by comparing York Minster and Canterbury Cathedral primarily, illustrating the importance of the *multi-sensory* involvement in the corporeal experience of such locations.

This led me to another session on the following day which examined the role and use of graffiti in the medieval church. After discussion with the presenters (Becky Williams and Jenny Alexander), it was brought to my attention how important graffiti was as an output of the 'sensorial' experience of medieval devotion and, consequently, the topic is to become a significant consideration of my own research. Miss Williams and I are currently in discussion about amalgamating our research topics by chairing a session at the IMC in 2011 on the subject of interactive worship.

Emma Jane Wells, Durham University

For information on how to apply for a Society grant/award, see our website www.medievalarchaeology.co.uk/awards.htm

MEDIA AND EXHIBITION

Medievalism Engalleried

When I worked at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in the late 1960s, 'career development' did not exist. My formal training consisted of the Keeper telling me one day after I had been there for a couple of years to go and look at the medieval objects in the Museum of London. It was the new displays there that I focused on, though; the rat's tail disappearing into the reeds on the floor of a medieval kitchen was more informative about household conditions than any number of pots on a glass shelf. I collected some charred wood from a bonfire, spread it on the floor of a case in the Ashmolean, and sat a cooking-pot in the middle. It wasn't the best replica of a hearth that you would ever have seen, and I did not have a rat to hand, but I thought it served its purpose.

You won't see anything like that hearth in any of the four new medieval galleries that have opened in the last couple of years. Even the Museum of London now sits its cooking-pot on glazed tiles, a dubious association, and the kitchen display has lost its rat's tail; two incongruously clean toy mice sit in the case instead. A wood-pigeon and a rabbit have survived, but they look a trifle embarrassed to be in such sanitized surroundings.

The Middle Ages are everywhere presented as so clean! Even in my day we could not put guttering oil-lights into the cases, and it was not easy to let a bit of dust build up inside them because we had very efficient and sometimes frightening ladies in the galleries who kept the outsides spotless, and expected the curators to keep the insides respectable. But the displays were our responsibility; no designers told us where to put things or how many words we were allowed on labels. Some of us might be a bit quirky and a few went strange – hoarding the best objects in your office was often the first sign that it was time to go – but a bit of individuality did not hurt.

Designers are not all bad. The new displays in the medieval rooms in the Victoria and Albert Museum look wonderful, and I was very impressed by the religious procession led by a wooden donkey. What's more, a lot of the objects are clearly visible; the Gloucester candlestick, for instance, stands in a pillar case of its own, close enough to the glass for the detail on all four sides to be viewed comfortably. Some of the other things are a bit too far back, but in general even with my eye-sight I found little to complain about.

The Royal Gold Cup in the British Museum has never looked better either. Spot-lights make the enamels glow, and again a free-standing case means that all four sides can be seen. Its labelling is good also, with pictures to show which scene is which. The new later medieval gallery (sponsored by Paul and Jill Ruddock, who also sponsored some of the V and A galleries, as did other members of their family) has been restored so that much of the lighting is day-light from the roof lantern; spots then emphasize things that might otherwise be missed, such as the details of the Lewis Priory sculptures. Some of the cases are a bit empty, and purists might object to floor-tiles being wall-mounted, but at least they are on display. What is not on display is much sign of the peasantry: no cooking-pots, no dirt. Some enamelled soda-glass is beautifully presented, but no flaking Forest potash urinal gets in.

The earlier medieval gallery in the BM, including the Sutton Hoo display, looks a

trifle dowdy by comparison, but that is the price of being comprehensive. There are no empty spaces, except high up where a large photo of the ship could be used to advantage. Furthermore, the labelling is informative.

The Museum of London's revamp has included its early medieval collection. It includes a replica of an everyday timber building, inhabited by a story-teller when I visited; it's comforting to know that the next generation of well brought up children will still know how Alfred burnt the cakes, but sad that only in that museum will they get any idea of what medieval buildings were like. The Alfred tale was the only thing not directly to do with London that I experienced, for the displays focus on the city through the ages. So it is good to see the Floral Street composite gold and garnet disc brooch presented in the context of the development of the *wic*, not just as an art object. The V and A has one from Milton; not much is made of its significance, but it is admirably clear to view in detail, even the tiny garnet chips in the outer circumference.

The 'pair' to the V and A's brooch is in the Ashmolean, though you won't see much beyond the outline in the murky desk-case that it is in. Whoever put the Ashmolean display together should have been given the training that I was. The Museum of London has a very good technique for showing a large number of small things, by mounting them on vertical perspex sheets placed close to the show-case glass so that the objects can be seen properly, while larger things like pots are further back, the view of them little impeded by the perspex.

Perspex did not exist in my time, but magnifying glasses did, and it is a pity that none of the four new displays makes much use of them – the reflecting lens from an old microscope can do an excellent job of showing the back of a small object. Other new technology is used sparingly; the Museum of London has a few touch-screens, and a video presentation about the Black Death, which is not too intrusive. The V and A has audio loops, most of which give general background, but the one that allows you to sit down and learn about

the panels on a reredos in front of you is splendid. The Ashmolean has such things in the popular conservation display, but not in the medieval gallery. But I must stop calling it that, as it contains some of the knick-knacks attributed to Tudor royals, and a bust of Henry VIII stands guard over the Alfred Jewel. Furthermore, some medieval objects are in other galleries, so you have to hunt round to find the Bodleian Bowl and a few other things of note. One, the Odda stone with its Latin inscription, would have been better in the 'Reading and Writing' display accompanying the Scandinavian runestone there, rather than cramped up on the floor behind the Alfred Jewel where it is liable to get kicked.

I am fairly sure that the first sentence on the label with the Alfred Jewel is also the first sentence in the Handbook that I rewrote for the Museum a couple of years ago – the 'probably' in it is sadly characteristic. There is no reference to the Handbook on the label, however, which is the first Great Lack in all four displays – only once, in the BM, did I see any hint of where further information could be obtained, and that was a reference to Kevin Leahy's *Anglo-Saxon Crafts*, not in the new gallery, but the old one, which was also the only place where I saw a drawing being used to clarify detail. The second Great Lack therefore is that all the work that goes into archaeological illustration is not put to effect; there is no point in asking on a label if the visitor can see an animal if you do not offer a guide to how to answer.

That question is in the Ashmolean; who is it aimed at? Indeed, who is the whole display aimed at? It is a University museum, but it is now quite unsuited to university teaching. Far too much space is wasted, with a vast time-line, blown-up images, and a map of early medieval migrations, something that the last twenty years' research has shown to be impossibly simplistic to do with arrows in a single monochrome. This one has the Saxons making a short crossing from the Low Countries to East Anglia, presumably narrowly avoiding ships laden with Jutes heading for the Thames estuary, while the Lombards travelled direct from modern Sweden to Italy, not

from the River Elbe region via Hungary. One cremation urn and a very small selection of grave goods is not enough even for today's undergraduate students, and for the later period only two pots are shown, both glazed jugs; there are other pots in other galleries, but nothing to indicate that most medieval pots were unglazed, and with labels that draw attention to their crudity, not to their economic or social significance.

Labelling is an 'issue'; how many people look at them? How well I recall the first day of a new exhibition for which I had spent many hours devising labels that told the world all that it could possibly want to know about each object. I hung about in the gallery with bated breath to hear visitors' reactions. The first two came in, looked at something, one asked 'What's that?', and the other replied 'I don't know'. They then passed on, my label which would have answered that question in such loving detail completely disregarded. So my third Great Lack is not just lack of information, though all four museums are not overwhelmed with its supply, but about the means of communicating it.

Some information needs to be aimed at children like those who will in due course pass on the folklore of Alfred and the cakes. Here I think is the fourth Great Lack, of show-cases that go down to floor level; it was in the bottom of one of those that I was able to construct my hearth all those years ago, and parties of school-children sat on the floor around it doing their drawings and listening to stories about King Alfred – or am I maudlin? Anyway, children are probably not allowed to sit on floors nowadays, but a few things at their head levels would save them craning their necks all the time, and older people can look down. You can get more into a tall case, and even if the things at the bottom are not Great Art, they are at least on display.

Children nowadays expect to get their information from new technology; video loops, audio trails and touch-screens are all well and good, however, but expensive to set up and maintain, and they take up space. All the museums have bookshops, but little in them is specifically about

objects in their collections. Most of what is for sale is expensive, like the Museum of London catalogues; even the Ashmolean Handbooks are £8 or so. Ironically, it is new technology allied to one of the oldest that could be the way forward, for colour xeroxing means that an attractive, illustrated A4 sheet of paper can offer a lot more information than a label, in a format that is much easier to read and absorb, if not in front of the object, then over a cup of coffee in one of those museum cafés that are so ubiquitous; the Museum of London has one sponsored by the Sackler family, and as they also sponsored the new library for art and archaeology in Oxford that freed up rooms in the Ashmolean, they must approve of reading as well as coffee-drinking. Anyway, a 20p donation more than covers the cost of an A4 sheet of paper – no need to go through the tills in the shop, just a donation box in the gallery, alongside the sheets. Who would not give 20p to learn more about the Franks casket, or to have as a souvenir of the Fishpool hoard? A few people might omit to donate, but some would be more generous. Perhaps the fourth Great Lack is time; modern collections managers do not have a lot of it. But here a solution is to hand. The world has suddenly become awash with retired curators of medieval collections. What pleasanter way of spending retirement than idling away a few hours on a leaflet that might enlighten all those hundreds of people asking 'What's that?' who still do not spot the label to tell them the answer.

David A. Hinton

Return of the Hoodie: re-imagining Robin Hood for the 21st century

As a rule archaeology does not seek to approach the individual but this is changing – the application of the cultural biography approach to archaeology does require an attempt to wrestle with individual as well as social agency and the recent triple exhibition programme at the British Museum (presenting, separately Hadrian, Montezuma and Shah Abbas) focussed on three 'great men of history', presenting them as men of their times and with a rich material culture evidence base. Both embolden me to focus this column on a fictional/ fictionalised character, Robin Hood: he

is hugely important to the imaginative understanding of the Middle Ages and has been the subject of three recent retellings of his story, in novel, in graphic novel (or comic book), both published in 2009, and in film, released in 2010.

The novel, *Hodd*, by Adam Thorpe, adopts the well-constructed conceit of being a lost medieval manuscript (rescued from a ruined church on the Somme) written by a monk. Following WWI, amateur scholar Francis Belloes, prepares a full scholarly edition but this never appears because a fire destroys Belloes' home and the original manuscript. The novel therefore takes the form of the rediscovered transcription of the original, complete with emendations, omissions and scholarly footnotes. The title though is something of a misnomer as Hodd, here a former priest branded as a heretic who sets up his outlaw band in the wooded waste near Doncaster, is only a significant supporting character. The main character is the medieval author, a novice monk captured and forced to join the outlaw band where he is immersed in the blood-letting and thievery before making his escape 6 years later, returning to the cloistered life, to make amends. We do not learn his real name, as he writes his story 80 years later in Whitby Abbey, but his outlaw-fellows christen him, Moche (i.e. Much, the miller's son). Unlikely to become Hollywood-fodder, it is a complex, intelligently written tale but certainly not a merry one. It is very much about the medieval period as dark, dank and pain-ridden and apart from the occasional fart-gag is totally bereft of humour further confirming its bleak tone. Though there is a distant echo of enforced cross-dressing recalling *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), there is far less heroic derring-do than a sense of *Heart of Darkness* / *Apocalypse Now* transposed to a medieval setting, with Hodd the Kurtz character and Moche the Willard character. Other influences are deftly woven in including *The Canterbury Tales*, *Narziss and Goldmund* and *Anchoress* (the 1993 film based on the life of the anchorite Christina, the original source for which is also referred to in *Hodd*).

The comic book, *Outlaw The Legend of Robin Hood A Graphic Novel*, is the work

of Tony Lee (text), Sam Hart (illustrations) and Artur Fujita (colourist) and of the three re-configurations reviewed here is perhaps the most narratively sharp, punchy and morally direct. It commences in 1180 with a prologue episode in which a young Robin witnesses the execution of an outlaw which psychologically determines his future as a heroic outlaw. The main tale picks up in 1192 with Robin's return from the Crusades to take on the Sheriff of Nottingham, with a plot that veers little from that of the film, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. It comes with a coda written by Allen Wright, tracing the biography of the character of Robin down to our own times (see also his website www.boldoutlaw.com). Wright has also been the adviser to several recent film adaptations (the others still in the pipeline). The graphic novel has some interesting by-ways of re-imagined material culture. The range of artefacts depicted in the comic book includes several gold coins. One might describe them as fantasy pieces, a term used by Wren (1992, 70) to describe those invented coins of the 18th and 19th centuries, made to fill the perceived gaps in the English coinage series – a gap that collectors needed to fill. The graphic novel only shows the reverse of its gold coin – bearing a design of a voided short cross with 4 pellets in each quarter and the inscription, ABEL ON LUNDE, 'Abel of/at London'; Abel the moneyer is known to have minted short cross silver penny types spanning the years 1204–1242 (C R Wren, 1992 *The Short-Cross Coinage 1180–1247*, 51–62). He is thus an inappropriate choice for a moneyer working in the early 1190s (the novel is set in 1192) but a clear signal from the authors that they are inventing. The gold is another invention – later medieval gold coins begin with the penny of Henry III, issued 1251–72 and carrying the reverse inscription WILEM ON LVND[EN] with a voided long cross and a rose between 3 pellets in each angle of the cross.

Every decade since cinema began has seen at least one Robin Hood film adaptation (e.g. see D. Turner, 1989 *Robin Hood of the Movies*). The earliest is probably *Robin Hood and his Merry Men*

(1908). The 1990s saw three – *Robin Hood* (1991), which benefited from a perceptive sense of language, character and location, *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves* (1991), notorious for its wilful, US audience-need dominated, ignorance of geography and landscape and which in large part prompted the delightful, satirical, savage riposte from Mel Brooks *Robin Hood Men in Tights* (1993). This new version of the Hoodie is actually the third this decade. In *Shrek* (US 2001) Robin and his merry men appear as a group of ambushing French brigands with an eye for the ladies and a catchy rap. Here Robin is very much a fairytale character in a film that adopts a Revisionist stance on fairytales and creates a fairytale world with a decidedly medieval hue. 2009 saw the release of the Canadian-made *Robin Hood Beyond Sherwood Forest*, which is awful beyond words not least because it adds a were-dragon and very dodgy special effects into the equation.

In the 2010 version Russell Crowe assumes the “Antipodean” mantle worn so triumphantly by Errol Flynn in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and reunites him with director Ridley Scott who used him so skilfully in *Gladiator*. The film is Scott’s third foray into matters medieval – in 2005 his Crusader epic, *Kingdom of Heaven*, was released and before that he made the medieval fantasy *Legend* (1985). Scott’s *Hood* eschews the normal territory of the legend in favour of looking for the back-story, the roots of Robin. However, even here it lacks a spark of originality, as in so many areas of the film, for it begins with the idea of Robin as returning crusader in Richard I’s army, already established cinematically in 1991. It does give us a slightly different chronology. Richard I is dispensed with early (at the siege of Challus) and Robin Longstride, a lowly archer, takes on the guise of Robert of Loxley, to get back to England and deliver the Crown to John, against a French plot by Philip of France. He retains his new identity to help Robert’s father and wife (Marian) and gets involved in the revolt of the Northern Barons and drafting Magna Carta before helping to defeat the French invasion on the Yorkshire Coast (presumably Robin Hood’s Bay). Despite gutsy performances

(especially Cate Blanchett as Marian) and a brief addition to the cultural biography of the Bayeux Tapestry it is fairly hard going thanks to a script and treatment that is far too earnest and down-beat and with overly complicated political sub-text. Its lack of humour is surprising given it is scripted by Brian Helgeland, who gave us the very funny *A Knight’s Tale* (2001). It also has a series of banal flaws – Nottingham as a village (a look, complete with stone crosses, echoing *Sword of Sherwood Forest* [1960]) whose parish priest is the mead-making Friar Tuck (a wacky idea lifted from . . . *Beyond Sherwood Forest*), the cremation of a nobleman in the 13th century, the presence of the White Horse of Kilburn and a French invasion using wooden troop landing craft straight out of D-Day. When confronted by the latter I felt a renaming of the film coming on, *Ye Olde Saving Private Ryan* – it is symptomatic of how the film lazily fills its imagination gap by a scatter-gun of film references including *The Da Vinci Code*, *National Treasure*, *Peter Pan*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Braveheart*, *The Lion in Winter* and *The Return of Martin Guerre*. The film ends with the treacherous King John declaring Robin an outlaw and he, Marian and company take to Sherwood Forest. I doubt we will be spared the sequel.

Mark A Hall

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