


Society for Medieval Archaeology Newsletter

Issue 36 (Special Anniversary Edition)

December 2006

ISSN 1740-7036

EDITORIAL



By the time this Newsletter ends on your doormat, the Society will be a matter of days from celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. In this no-expense-spared, Technicolour, edition, we break with our familiar format to present a series of retrospectives charting some ways in which the Society for Medieval Archaeology and its founding members have shaped the discipline we know and love today. Richard Hodges takes a characteristically internationalist view by focusing upon the inspirational role played by John Hurst in the establishment of overseas institutions alongside which our Society now shares the European stage. In celebration of the lively diversity of approaches defining the modern discipline, we also cast a biographical eye over a precocious clutch of institutional offspring actively promoting the study of castles, churches, settlements, pottery and small finds. Finally, our regular guide to *medievalia* in popular culture scans the film archive to see how evocations of medieval life have changed on the Big Screen over the past fifty years and beyond.

Looking ahead, we also release further details on a varied programme of anniversary events and initiatives scheduled for 2007. In relation to one such initiative, the editor would like to draw readers' attention to the footer appearing at the bottom of this page proudly emblazoned with the address of the Society's re-launched website, further details on which can be found within.

All comments, reports and news to **Gabor Thomas, Classical & Archaeological Studies, School of European Culture & Languages, Cornwallis Building, University of Kent, Canterbury, CT2 7NF, Email G.Thomas@kent.ac.uk**

COMMENT with *Duncan Brown*

One of the problems with moving house is that some things seem to move of their own accord, so they are no longer where you thought they were. For this bumper anniversary edition I was going to write a retrospective of the Newsletter, but in last year's move all my back issues seem to have entered a different dimension. No doubt they'll turn up as soon as I've sent this off to our esteemed editor, but in the meantime I'll have to rely on a

few recollections and a different documentary source.

John Oxley and I produced the first issue, and my diary entry for the 13th of September 1989 reads; 'To London with John for Medieval Soc. Council Meeting'. We'd been invited to lay out our plans, and allay any concerns that we'd be issuing anarchist propaganda, or anti-establishment diatribes (nothing was further from my mind! honestly!). The Council were completely behind us from the beginning, and it is difficult now to think of the Society managing without it.

Talking of different dimensions, the early Newsletters were far removed from the polished product to which we have become accustomed. We had computers in the late 1980s, but nobody sent us computerised copy, and there was no such thing as e-mail. We had to type in all the copy ourselves, print it out, then cut it to size and paste it together. Any illustrations were photocopied down to size and glued into place on the page. For some reason this represented, to us, camera-ready copy. Goodness knows what the printers thought, but they never came back to us with any queries or complaints, so it must have worked. Well it did work, because we were still making the newsletter five years later. We produced the first one together, then John moved to York. Thereafter we made two a year, doing one issue each. I've still got a photocopy of the pasted-up version for April 1993, and actually I think it looks pretty good, though some things never change. My editorial begins 'A year ago I bemoaned the depressed state of our profession...'. Once you got past that, however, you would find, among news of research funds, meetings and publications, reflections on Medieval Europe 1992 from Judit Tamasi in Budapest, a review of the 1992 AGM, and news from the Compton Bassett area research project.

It's good to see that this mix of copy has been maintained and improved upon over the years. We originally envisaged the Newsletter as a means not only of sending out information, but also stimulating debate. In that respect my favourite issue must be No.2, the first one I produced on my own. At the height of the Rose Theatre affair, I

www.medievalarchaeology.org

included a piece from the town planning officer involved, which I think gave perhaps the most informed and balanced view I'd yet encountered. As Mark Hall's 'More Movie Madness' piece in the last issue (No. 35!) shows, there's always a fresh angle, and I hope future Newsletter editors continue to search for it. As editor, and now as a regular contributor (much easier), I've tried to seek out issues and challenges, as well as address the position our discipline occupies both archaeologically and culturally. It's good that there's a place where we can sound out our views and sound off our opinions. I hope there will always be people willing to do both.

I think John and I did five years worth, at which point not only did we feel we'd had enough, but we were also pretty certain the readers too had had enough of us. It will always be hard work, not least in finding copy. The editor will never find it easy. My 1990 diary records for the 7th March; 'Finally sent off the Med. Soc. Newsletter. Looks all right. Frantic telephone call from the Membership Sec. – I think I calmed her down'. Months of run-in and I still left it to the last minute! Plus ça change....

REMINISCENCES

John Hurst and Fifty Years of the Society for Medieval Archaeology

I always associate the Society for Medieval Archaeology with John Hurst. John was the champion of medieval archaeology whose scholarship influenced the making of similar societies and periodicals in France, Germany and Italy. When the Society met in Southampton in 1974, I set out the Hamwic imported wares (that I was then studying) and Hurst, as many called him, patrolled the benches, inching his thick-framed glasses up to eye the sherds more closely. Every few paces he mumbled and then, stuttering as was his way, he instructed me to visit him in Fortress House to see his reference collection and then he would issue directions to De Bouard in Caen, to Chapelot in Paris to Janssen in Bonn, and so on. He was every bit a general. Every single sherd mattered and deep down he was a Cambridge prehistorian in a medievalist's vestments, curious about trade and urban origins. So, he was benignly patient of my New Archaeology, its jargon and controversy when the Society met on its 25th anniversary at Cambridge. There was a twinkle in his eye after my lecture. 'Didn't understand much of that!' he said, which in Hurst speak meant 'rather fun'!

Sherds and sites mattered to him; but so did the expansion of his mission. So when the Society met at the British School at Rome in April 1992, he and Maurice Beresford were in fine fettle. Two old boys on vacation, they nattered with everyone while the Italians approached them gingerly as if they were knights of the realm. Hurst wanted to see Santa Cornelia. Thirty years before he had instructed Glyn Daniel, his old Cambridge tutor, who had been approached by John Ward-Perkins then Director of the British School at Rome, about selecting the young David Whitehouse to study the extraordinary ceramics from the Santa Cornelia excavations. Whitehouse's ground-breaking work became the cornerstone of medieval archaeology in Italy. Within a decade *Archaeologia Medievale* had been founded and thirty-two years later it is perhaps the most active of all Hurst's legacies.

After Santa Cornelia we visited Siena University, the home, in a sense, of medieval archaeology in Italy and then journeyed around the twisting roads through the chestnut woods of western Tuscany to a final destination that I gauged might surprise the Society. As the coach halted and the ensemble tumbled out into the bright spring afternoon, I waited upon Hurst. We were at Rocca San Silvestro, a Pisan mining village clinging to a rock beyond which lay, illuminated by shafts of sunlight, the glistening Tyrrhenian Sea. Here was the Wharram Percy of the Mediterranean; a village that conjured up walking through Montailou. The palpable and unalloyed joy in Hurst's face as he adjusted his eyes to the rings of roofless 12th-century dwellings below the castle was an expression not just for this marvellous place, but for the scientific spirit which had brought it back to life.

The Society for Medieval Archaeology has evolved more slowly than its Italian sibling, perhaps clinging to establishment ways, much as Hurst did in his exceptional career. But as a parent, it can reflect cheerily on the achievements of the initiatives of its many diverse siblings and equally reflect upon the fortune great scholars like John Hurst afforded it and, in their generosity, accorded to all of us.

Richard Hodges

Institute of World Archaeology
University of East Anglia

Castle Studies

When the Castle Studies Group (CSG) was formed back in 1987 its remit was to examine the castle in its broader society and landscape. The CSG reflected a renaissance in castle studies which had been kick-started by Patrick Faulkner in the late 1950s with his work on domestic planning, by Brian Davison in the 1960s with his new ideas on the development of mottes and ringworks, and in turn taken up by the Royal Archaeological Institute (RAI) in its 'Five castle excavations' project (published 1978) designed to examine the origins of castles.

Whilst acknowledging their huge debt to the likes of G.T.Clark with his meticulous architectural drawings of castles in the 1880s, and of course to Ella Armitage in the early 20th century with her disentanglement of the Anglo-Saxon burh and Norman castle, post-war scholars were able to move the subject forward step by step. David King, Judge Perks and Leslie Alcock did the fieldwork, particularly along the Welsh marches; R. Allen Brown formulated a typological sequence (subsequently modified in his 1984 *The Architecture of Castles: A Visual Guide*); Arnold Taylor documented the great Welsh building campaigns of Edward I and proposed an iconographic scheme for Caemraron. Key sites were excavated; Abinger, Ascott Doilly, Farnham, South Mimms, Castle Acre, Hen Domen and so on.

However, much of this mid-20th-century work was still predicated around a basic assumption that the primary role of the castle was a military one. The task of scholars over the last twenty years has been to break down this assumption and to realise the full potential of earlier ideas suggested by the likes of Faulkner and Taylor. A handful of sites have provided data for challenging debates (e.g. Coulson, Everson, Johnson and Goodall on Bodiam). A new co-ordinated approach to research priorities is just emerging with the publication of the various regional Archaeological Research Frameworks. The castle sections of these indicate that some of the issues of the 'Five castle excavations' project are still there but that they are now placed within a wider study remit: priorities include the investigation of the innumerable lesser sites that dot the countryside, the precursors to castles (i.e. what is going on in the late Saxon period), and the landscape context.

The CSG has acted as a broker in this broadening of castle studies, bringing together field

archaeologists, academics, heritage professionals, and interested amateurs from across the British Isles and Europe. The role of castles as symbols of lordship, as local employers, as focal points for community and religion, has been explored via the conference network. Field-visits have taken in sites that would have been excluded from the castellologists's conscience in earlier ages for not conforming to the castle norm. The CSG has also fed into and disseminated the debates of the bi-annual Chateau Gaillard international conferences, the theme of which in 2006 was the past and future of castle studies. British members reflected upon the growth in landscape studies and the wide contextualisation of castles, the need to move away from a focus upon terminology and fixed morphologies, earthwork measuring and counting, and instead the need to explore the role of castles in literature, art and both elite and popular cultures.

There are too many key contributors to castle studies in the second half of the 20th and early 21st century to mention them all here. If all have built upon the work of their forbears, they have nonetheless demonstrated that there is much life in castles yet. With new techniques (e.g. GIS), new theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches, castle studies looks set to make an increasingly valuable contribution to the study of medieval society and landscape.

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Sarah Speight

University of Nottingham

Medieval Settlement Research Group (M.S.R.G)

The origins of the present group date back to August 1952 when Maurice Beresford, Gerald Dunning, John Hurst and Bill Singleton (architectural historian), all interested in deserted medieval villages from different standpoints, decided to set up a new inter-disciplinary research group. At the same time historians were becoming increasingly aware of the potential of late medieval settlement desertion for the study of demography (M.M.Postan) and for local and regional landscape history (W.G. Hoskins). Primary objectives in the early years of the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group were to compile county lists, garner evidence of relative size and wealth from lay subsidies, visit sites and

record, if only in sketch form, what remained on the ground. If J.K.S. St Joseph could build the aerial photography of sites into his flying programme from Cambridge, so much the better. By 1960 an impressive file collection of sites had been built up and over seven hundred new DMVs had been added to the 1300 or so listed by Maurice Beresford in his pioneer work of 1954 *The Lost Villages of England*.

By then the evidence from excavations at Wharram Percy, Yorkshire, and several other sites, was beginning to make an impact on traditional hypotheses. Wharram showed that the idea that medieval villages sat neatly above their Anglo-Saxon foundations was a myth. Medieval archaeology was revealing the complexity of rural settlement origins and evolution. Families and communities moved both within and between settlements over long periods of time. Christopher Taylor wrote his seminal paper on polyfocal origins. It became clear that desertion could not be studied in isolation but had to be seen within the context of local and regional settlement patterns. It was this development which led the original group to drop the term 'Deserted' and to widen the brief to include not only existing villages but dispersed hamlets and farms. Moated sites, meanwhile, were the concern of the Moated Sites Research Group, 1971-1986.



For reasons both academic and pragmatic these two groups merged in 1986 to form the M.S.R.G., a title which recognises the need for inter-disciplinary research on *all* forms of medieval settlement. At the same time the membership was widened to include not only professional specialists but an increasing number of people working in local societies. Formally constituted, the new Group gained additionally from the benefits of charitable status. It now acts as an 'umbrella' for a wide range of medieval settlement research. The Wharram Percy excavation (end of publication now in sight) has been succeeded by the wider Whittlewood Project (muti-disciplinary

research into origins and development of settlements and landscapes on the Bucks/Northants border) and a new project on perceptions of medieval landscapes and settlements is now under way. While we lament the recent deaths of the prime movers, John Hurst and Maurice Beresford, we can be pleased that they lived to see the achievements of the Group that they initiated over fifty years ago and the new projects for on-going research.

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Website: www.britarch.ac.uk/msrg

Robin Glasscock
University of Cambridge

Church Archaeology

The last fifty years has witnessed remarkable developments in the area of church archaeology. However, the concept of 'church archaeology' as a discrete discipline is a recent innovation. As Warwick Rodwell has noted in his article *Landmarks in church archaeology*, church buildings before the early 1970s had largely been the remit of art historians, with the occasional foray by 'medieval' archaeologists on lost or ruined sites (Church Archaeology, 1 1996: 5). Prior to this period a great deal of work had been carried out on a wide range of important and prominent ecclesiastical sites but research priorities had been largely aimed at functional and descriptive interpretations focussing, for example, on the establishment of plan-forms and chronological development.

The introduction of the Pastoral Measure 1968, which relieved the Church of England of many of its ruinous and redundant churches, and the subsequent setting up of the Council for British Archaeology Churches Committee (1972), provided ample opportunity for the below-ground investigation of formally protected church sites. During this period, pioneering work was carried out at well-known sites such as Brixworth, Deerhurst and Rivenhall. Significantly, these projects provided the opportunity for the development of new approaches including a closer synthesis between excavation and the comparative analysis of the standing fabric. Archaeologists were also beginning to study the church as a component of a wider landscape setting, such as the Raunds Area project set up in the mid-1980s.

For the first time, the complete and relatively undisturbed late Anglo-Saxon church and graveyard at Raunds presented an opportunity for a detailed and statistical analysis of the sequence and structure of a medieval cemetery. Such projects had unarguably laid the foundations for the fledgling discipline of church archaeology.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the often fast-moving evolution, and application, of high-quality surveying and recording techniques such as photogrammetry and geophysical prospection, plus the development of related computer techniques such as CAD and GIS. Such developments have greatly enhanced our understanding of ecclesiastical sites and in some cases led to the re-evaluation of many earlier studies. More recently, influenced largely by the application of social theory in principally prehistoric contexts, church archaeologists have begun to focus on what the construction, organization and embellishment of churches can tell us about social structure and the actual nature of religious experience enacted within their spaces. Coupled with this, the last decade has seen a closer relationship between the work of some historians and art-historians, who have focussed their studies on the reassessment of surviving documents and their value to the physical study of church fabric and fixtures.



A significant development within the field of church archaeology was the founding in 1996 of the Society for Church Archaeology which aims to promote the study of churches and other places of worship for all faiths and denominations. The Society encourages the application of archaeological and art-historical expertise to

matters such as the investigation and protection of religious buildings, their material culture, burial grounds and environs. On a consultative basis and together with other interested organisations, the Society contributes to the development of national policies for the management and interpretation of religious sites. It seeks a constructive balance between conservation and proposals for change that reflects ongoing pastoral and liturgical requirements within all types of active places of worship. The Society also aims to provide a wider dissemination of the results of current research and discoveries through annual conferences and the publication of its own journal, *Church Archaeology*. Past conferences have focussed on the Archaeology of Ecclesiastical Landscapes, Church Interiors, and the Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon church. A forthcoming conference in 2007 will examine aspects of church archaeology in Scotland. Membership of the Society helps support the campaign for better protection and conservation of our ecclesiastical heritage and enables members to learn about new research and discoveries. Membership costs £20 (£25 from 1st Jan 2007) for waged, and £10 (£12 from 1st Jan 2007) for unwaged/students. Members receive the annual journal and newsletter and also receive special rates for conference attendance.

For details about the Society and its activities visit the Society's website at <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/socchurcharchaeol/>

Simon Roffey

University of Winchester

The Medieval Pottery Research Group

The MPRG was founded in 1975, at a time when lots of people were founding lots of societies and groups – only a few years later the prototype of the IFA emerged, and look where that ended up! Those were heady times, when anything seemed possible, but I doubt if the founding members could foresee how successfully the MPRG would develop. We are now a registered charity, we've merged with the Study Group for Early Anglo-Saxon Pottery, and extended our period of interest into the post-medieval (when did the medieval period end? don't get me started...). The MPRG also supports a number of regional groups, some more active than others, which hold local meetings. This structure proved invaluable during the research stage of Maureen Mellor's English Heritage project that resulted in *Medieval Ceramic Studies in England* (1994). That work made eleven recommendations that provided a sort of

shopping list for the MPRG for the following years. We are now able to tick off quite a few of those that are within our remit, including the production of national standards, a guide to pottery forms and our on-line bibliography, at <http://ntserver002.liv.ac.uk/mprg/>.

The aim of the Group is still, as it was back then, to promote the study of post-Roman ceramics, and we do this in many ways. The membership of 250 individuals and institutions offers a pool of knowledge and experience that can be accessed for information and opinion. In my time as Secretary I received enquiries that ranged from the specific (what's this?) to the general (tell me everything I need to know about pottery), and passed them on to members who were best placed to answer. The Group was also, and still is, consulted on various documents and initiatives of national importance.

Our primary purpose, as with any research group, is to disseminate information about medieval pottery and develop our understanding of the subject. We have our annual journal *Medieval Ceramics*, which is now an academically refereed publication of a very high standard. The emphasis is on providing a platform for specialised articles that may not be accepted in other journals, and there have been many notable contributors over the years, covering a wide range of topics. Volume 1, for instance, contained pieces on Neutron Activation Analysis, and *Annotations on Anglo-Saxon Pottery*, while Volume 27 offered *Sparrowpots in Greater London* alongside recent research into Surrey whiteware clays. We also have our Newsletter, which is now available on-line through the MPRG website; www.medievalpottery.org.uk. The MPRG has produced the odd separate publication, such as conference proceedings (*Ceramics and Trade*, 1983) and this has now been formalised into our Occasional Papers series, which includes *A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Pottery Forms* (No. 1) and *Minimum Standards for the Processing, Recording, Analysis and Publication of Post-Roman Ceramics* (No. 2). These works ably demonstrate our commitment to improving our methodologies; we do not gather with the sole aim of going 'ooh!' at nice pieces of pottery (as if you thought we did!).

We hold a conference each year, alternating a three-day event one year with a one-day meeting the next. This year we had a very successful three-day conference near Chester, considering the

theme of pottery from medieval institutions, that attracted contributors from Belgium, France, Ireland and Italy, as well as the UK. A few years ago we shared our conference with the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, and we've also had meetings in Holland and Dublin. We're now planning a conference in Siena for 2008. These occasions have brought in many new members, and have also given opportunities for newcomers to the subject to give papers and meet other members.

As we all know, the life-blood of any group like ours is the input of those who are willing to work on the committee, and if we do not attract new members, then we'll run out of steam. Our conferences have proved a very good way of broadening the appeal of the group, and thus increasing the membership. On the other hand, we're very aware that, since the rise of commercial archaeology, opportunities for younger pottery specialists are decreasing, mainly because assemblages are sent out to established freelance practitioners. The MPRG is hoping to improve this situation by developing training opportunities and also through establishing a bursary for a medieval pottery specialist within the new IFA/HLF scheme (see www.archaeologists.net). Initiatives such as these, with the continuation of our core activities such as the journal and conferences, will keep the Group busy and hopefully flourishing, for years to come. If there's one area that might need improving it is in the relationship between the MPRG and the rest of archaeology, including the Society for Medieval Archaeology.



Groups such as ours do not figure prominently in the Medieval Archaeology website, nor are they referred to explicitly as related organisations. There surely cannot still be a perception of specialists, especially those who work with finds, as slightly outside the mainstream business (whatever that is) of our discipline; can there? This issue notwithstanding, it's a great pleasure to contribute to this celebration issue. Congratulations to the Society, and here's to the next 50 years.

Medieval Pottery Research Group,
c/o Museum of London Specialist Services,
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Duncan H. Brown, Meetings Secretary

Finds Research Group AD 700- 1700

Formed to promote the study of artefacts through the exchange of ideas, the establishment of the Finds Research Group 700-1700 can be traced to a rather informal meeting in Norwich in 1983. The principle begetters were John Cherry of the British Museum and Sue Margeson of Norwich Castle Museum, both of whom continued to play a guiding role for many years. A constitution and organising committee followed, but the essential ethos of the group remained - and remains to this day - informality.

The group holds regular meetings hosted by members, mostly at institutions across the UK but also in Dublin and shortly in Cork (Spring 2007). Consisting of papers, finds viewings and informal interaction, past meetings have explored, for example, Finds from Periods of Transition (Dublin), Fishing and Fishing Implements (Norwich), The 14th Century (London), Finds and their Contexts from the North East (Newcastle upon Tyne) and, this year, The Mystery of Meols (Liverpool) and Pots and Pans : Domestic Artefacts of Base-metal (Taunton) Every attempt is made to avoid any regional bias and to make the group's meetings accessible to the widest membership. In addition, informal trips to exhibitions and galleries have included those to Paris, Belgium and London.

Designed to be informal, informative and reflect current, on-going research, the Datasheet series has proved to be both popular and long lived thanks to the high standards of both the authors and the Group's dedicated editors. Transcending their original ephemeral aim to encourage communication during the course of research,

many of the Datasheets still represent ready reference material for both researcher and museum curator. The first 24 Datasheets were consolidated into a volume in 1999 and it is planned to publish a second volume drawing together the 15 or so produced since then. Titles published in 2006 were *A 15th-16th-century Copper Alloy Enigma* by Brian Read and *Rotary Querns c.700-1700* by Susan Watts.



The Group is open to anyone interested in finds of the period and includes those who have longstanding careers and those just starting out, volunteers and those paid for their efforts, researchers, curators, metal detectorists and other interested individuals. Membership, which stands just short of 400, shows the combination of continuity and change essential to all thriving groups and is by no means restricted solely to the UK. All members receive two mailings a year with details of forthcoming meetings, summaries of recent meetings, news, book reviews and discounted offers.

That a fairly informal grouping has thrived and grown against a sometimes difficult archaeological environment for twenty three years is in great part due to the efforts of various committee members over the years, those members who have hosted meetings, written datasheets, attended and contributed at meetings. It is a testament to the continuing need for interaction, debate and the exchange of ideas between those interested in

finds recognised by Sue Margeson, John Cherry and the other founding members.

Membership - Information on joining the group and datasheets can be obtained from the Membership Secretary, Katey Goodwin, The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 3DW (e-mail: katey.goodwin@stoke.gov.uk). **Annual Subscription £6.00** (£10.00 or €15 for overseas members), www.frg700-1700.org.uk

Christine McDonnell, Chair with thanks to Arthur MacGregor

SMA 50TH ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

Weekend Conference on Medieval Archaeology, Oxford

23.03.07-25.03.07

As part of the celebrations of the 2007 fiftieth anniversary of the Society's foundation, there will be a joint weekend of lectures staged by the Society for Medieval Archaeology and Oxford University Department for Continuing Education (OUDCE), at Rewley House, Oxford, on 23-25 March. This is a landmark event, so members of the society are strongly encouraged to attend.

'Medieval Archaeology: from Dark Age to Renaissance'

The last half-century has seen a transformation of the way in which we see and understand the archaeology and history of the medieval centuries. This weekend will review the development of medieval archaeology, including a look at some of the most exciting recent and current excavations and research projects. With an emphasis on changing themes, technologies and ideas, it will provide a unique look forward to the next 50 years.

The speakers will consist of members of the society's council and other senior medieval archaeologists, including: Martin Carver, Roberta Gilchrist, Christopher Gerrard, Andrew Reynolds, David Griffiths, Dawn Hadley, Niall Brady, Stephen Rippon, Paul Barnwell, Peter Yeoman and Tom Beaumont-James. We also plan to have a stall from at least one major bookseller.

As a joint event, attendance at this weekend is not restricted to members of the society, and it will therefore also be advertised in OUDCE's own publicity in the autumn of 2006. Standard

OUDCE weekend fees apply. To be sure of securing a place, society members are encouraged to book as early as possible.

To book a place (and accommodation/meals if required), please contact Mrs Hazel Richards, Department for Continuing Education, Rewley House, Oxford OX1 2JA. Tel. 01865 270380; email: ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

Scottish repeats of AGM lecture

14.05.07-15.05.07

Members not able to attend the AGM in London will be delighted to hear that, in association with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Professor Roberta Gilchrist will be taking her Presidential Lecture, 'Magic for the Dead: the archaeology of magic in later medieval burials' on a mini Scottish tour, with dates in Edinburgh and Aberdeen on Monday 14th and Tuesday 15th May respectively.

Cardiff Lecture

06.09.07 & 08.09.07

University of Cardiff

Professor John Hines will be delivering the following lecture (in both Welsh and English)

'Trefstadaeth archeolegol a'r Canol Oesoedd Caerdydd a'rcylch' (Thursday 6th)

'Archaeological heritage and the Middle Ages in the Cardiff region' (Saturday 8th)

Perth Lecture

22.06.07

Perth Museum and Art Gallery

A lecture by **Professor Tom Beaumont James** (former Deputy Director Perth Excavation Committee 1976) *'Hunting for Heritage: the Perth Excavations of 1976'*, designed to coincide with Perth Archaeology Month 2007.

Tickets offered on first come, first-served, basis. Contact: Mark A Hall, History Officer, Perth Museum & Art Gallery, 78 George Street, Perth, PH1 5LB, Tel: 01738 632488, email: mahall@pkc.gov.uk, Fax: 01738 443505

SMA sponsored sessions and major reception at Medieval Europe Conference, Paris.

03.09.07-08.09.07

The sessions will cover medieval landscapes, buildings and material culture; medieval health and diet; and medieval people. Further details will be announced in a forthcoming newsletter; preliminary details on *Medieval Europe, Paris* can be found at the following link:

http://medieval-europe-paris-2007.univ-paris1.fr/MEP%202007_fichiers/frame.htm

OTHER EVENTS

The Early Medieval Archaeology Student Symposium

School of History & Archaeology, University of Cardiff

17.05.07-18.05.07

Call for papers

This symposium will create a constructive and multi-disciplinary forum for researchers to express, discuss and explore *new* research and ideas in a positive and interactive environment. The symposium will explicitly aim to cross traditional period/institutional/theoretical divides to allow discussion between researchers of diverse expertise and perspectives. This symposium will aim to provide a forum for researchers to present ideas and thoughts informally without the pressure of producing complete research ready for publication.

Sessions will consist of 20-minute papers followed by open discussion and debate chaired by leading specialists in each field. As wide as possible a range of topics will be selected, and papers may cover all areas of Early Medieval research and discourse. Academics, professionals and undergraduates are invited to attend and give support and comments. Poster presentations are welcome from those unable to attend or speak on the day.

Our intention is to theme the sessions according to the proposals that delegates submit; papers relating to theory, method and practice in Early Medieval Archaeology are particularly welcome.

For all enquiries and to submit paper titles and abstracts contact Andrew Seaman: seamanap@cardiff.ac.uk

http://www.cf.ac.uk/hisar/archaeology/news/conferences/early_med_symp/index.html.

Disease, Disability and Medicine in Medieval Europe AD 400-1200: Concepts of Health and the Healthy Body

School of English Studies, University of Nottingham

06.07.07-07.07.07

Call for papers

The second conference on *Disease, Disability and Medicine in Early Medieval Europe, AD 400-1200* will focus on questions of what constitutes a

healthy body in the medieval world, health care, cure and the language of care. The meeting aims to be a forum for scholars working on the topic in a variety of disciplines and regions of Northern Europe, including all aspects of disease, disability and medicine. The conference aims foster interdisciplinary approaches and we invite contributions from archaeology, palaeopathology, history of medicine, as well as history of religion, philosophy, linguistic and historical sciences. Please send abstracts (no more than 300 words) to Dr Christina Lee [Christina.lee@nottingham.ac.uk] by 28 February 2007.

Perceptions of Medieval Landscapes and Settlements

23.2.07-1.12.07

Organised by the Medieval Settlement Research Group (MSRG) as a series of seminar workshops around Britain, concluding with a plenary conference held in Leicester which will provide an overview of the seminars.

-Planning and meaning - Belfast, 23 February 2007. Organisers: Mark Gardiner and Keith Lilley.

-Working and sharing - Edinburgh, 20 April 2007. Organiser: Piers Dixon

-New people, new farms - Exeter, 6 July 2007.

Organisers: Oliver Creighton and Stephen Rippon.

-Belonging, communication and interaction - York, 21 September 2007. Organisers: Kate Giles and Julian Richards.

-Plenary conference, which will bring together all of these themes, will be held on 1 December 2007 at Leicester. The workshops will be small-scale seminars, and anyone with a particular commitment to a theme should approach the local organisers. The plenary conference will be a larger event, and will provide an overview of all of the seminars. It will be widely publicised. For more information contact Prof Christopher Dyer at Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester, 5 Salisbury Road, Leicester LE1 7QR, email cd50@le.ac.uk.

NEWS & VIEWS

Moving Pictures, Still Lives: Cinematic Visions of the Medieval Past

I was delighted to be asked to contribute to this special edition of the Newsletter and offer my perspective on the first fifty years of the Society for Medieval Archaeology. Instead, and in keeping with my regular column on popular culture excursions into medieval territory, I have opted for

a broad and sketchy look at how medieval times have been portrayed in the cinema over the last 50 years (and more). It is now widely recognised that such films comprise one of the arenas where popular culture and public archaeology interface in acts of public and private contestation and consumption (which can be a complex socio-economic act) and negotiate their relationships to and understanding of the past and their present.

Medieval costume epic is almost as old as cinema itself. Victor Hugo's neo-gothic literary re-imagining of medieval Paris, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, was filmed as early as 1906, with the title *Esmeralda*, closely followed by other filmings of the same novel, Fritz Lang's filming of the *Nibelungenlied* in the mid 1920s and several adaptations of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in the court of King Arthur*. The impact of World War II brought four of the most enduring cinematic imaginings of our medieval past – *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *Alexander Nevsky* (all 1939) and *Henry V* (1944). Still, it was not until the 1950s that things really took off with a veritable explosion of medieval costume epics: *Ivanhoe*, *The Vikings*, *The Knights of the Round Table*, *The Virgin Spring*, *The Seventh Seal*, *The Court Jester*, *The Seven Samurai* and innumerable Robin Hoods. It would be easy to put this down to the quest by studios for box office receipts, which the safe, colourful (especially with the now widespread use of colour film stock), heroic past could provide but there are other factors at play including a collective, social desire to leave behind war-time austerity and a growing interest in and study of the medieval past (of which the foundation of the Society in 1957 was, of course, symptomatic) and which found expression in other fields of popular culture (including Angus Wilson's 1956 novel *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*). This "medieval momentum" was successfully maintained into the 1960s with the likes of *The War Lord*, *El Cid*, *Siege of the Saxons*, *Lancelot and Guinevere*, *Camelot*, *Taras Bulba*, *Alfred the Great* and perhaps what remains the finest cinematic expression of medievalism, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Roublev* (USSR 1966) – I defy any medievalist not to be moved by the magnificent bell-casting sequence.

There is something of a tailing off in the 1970s and 1980s as society shifted focus away from 1960s liberalism, though these years still managed to produce some key masterpieces, most notably Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*, Tavernier's *La*

Passion Béatrice, Gaup's *Pathfinder*, Vigne's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Ward's *Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey* (a stand out movie in which Ward's apocalyptic vision of the Black Death and its arrival in a remote Cumbrian mining community successfully links 14th-century Cumbria with modern-day Australia) and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. All of these in some sense ran counter to the prevailing culture and used their perceptive medieval recreations to question a complacent nostalgia about the past. They are not typical of their decades and the 1980s in particular went down something of a *cul de sac* with the Dark Age stereotype influenced sword and sorcery epics defined by *Conan the Barbarian* (itself derived from the original pre-war stories by R E Howard, later adapted into comic book form). The interest in more mainstream medievalism resumed in the 1990s and continues in our present decade, though with no noticeable qualitative improvement alongside advances in sfx and period detailing. Certainly the finest achievement of the 1990s is Leslie Megahey's *The Hour of the Pig*, a perceptive, well-conceived evocation of the medieval world-view as other to our own (revolving around the trial of a pig for murder in a remote French village).

Undoubtedly the most consistent thread to cinema's appropriation of the Middle Ages (usually via literature and pulp fiction) is its resolute reliance on certain mythologized characters, in particular King Arthur (closely followed by Robin Hood and then probably Joan of Arc). Virtually every decade has produced two or three versions, generally of dubious artistic merit but useful barometers on their times of production rather than the period of Arthur. The most recent (leaving aside the contemporary Grail fantasy *The Da Vinci Code*), *King Arthur* (2005) claims to be an accurate reflection of current archaeological thinking on Arthur but proves to be woefully inadequate as both popular exposition and popular narrative. It supports a wider point already hinted at that if you take all these films and more together there is no readily apparent upward curve of improving representation. Films not only reflect the concerns of the times in which they are made but the varying ignorances and economic exigencies of their makers. British critics are often very quick to deplore the often woeful ignorance exhibited by US film-makers (e.g. *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves*, *King Arthur* and *Tristan + Isolde*) but it is a British film (though US financed) that remains one of the worst offenders, not least for a title that rivals *Krakatoa East of Java* in its

misleading inaccuracy, *The Viking Queen* (1967), which purports to be about Queen Boudicea.

The contemporary relevance of the pursuit of the medieval past is documented to some extent by the pseudo-medievalism of such films as *The Da Vinci Code* and *National Treasure* but far more rewarding is *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, still fantasy but with a solid foundation. It manages to pull off the trick of archaeologist as adventurer because of its meaningfully exaggerated real historical context – the 1930s Nazi collecting drive to acquire medieval relics and other artefacts. This aspect also forms an effective back-drop (with the relics including the spear of Longinus) to the comic book inspired *Hellboy*. In both films the perceived supernatural power of these relics is matter-of-factly accepted but in a way that is appropriate to the narrative arc of their respective films and not as duplicitous artifice.

The modern, contemporary context of engagement with the medieval past through the practice of archaeology and education is only seen in a handful of films. *Indiana Jones* is, of course, an archaeologist and all three films in which he appears show him engaged in fieldwork, collecting artefacts for the university museum and teaching undergraduates. Somewhat more realism is brought to bear in the post-war Ealing comedy *Passport to Pimlico*, in which Margaret Rutherford plays a venerably eccentric local historian who identifies the treasure and documents uncovered by an unexploded bomb going off as 15th-century Burgundian. This enables Pimlico to legally and politically redefine its identity – a consummate film essay in nested identity triggered by material culture long before it was fashionable in academic circles. Towards the end of the War Powell and Pressburger gave us one of their great portraits of war-time life in England with *A Canterbury Tale*, which deliberately evoked Chaucer's original but very much focussed on the then of war-time Britain. Set predominantly in a small town near Canterbury (though the Cathedral does get its turn) its local JP and museum curator uses Roman and medieval antiquities to teach soldiers stationed near the town about local history.

The importance of communicating and understanding the medieval past is unexpectedly promoted in the serial-killer fable *Seven*, in which police research includes the library-based reading of several medieval (particularly religious) texts to get a handle on the killer. Most of us though would find more familiar the founding inspiration of

Timeline, a hilariously bonkers time-travel adventure in which a group of archaeologists find themselves in the middle of the Hundred Years War. They work on a site in the middle of France (an international project with US corporate funding) before being transported back to that site in the 14th century, when it was contested ground between the French and the English.



The look of the site under excavation is good, with its discrete areas of operation and state of the art equipment but it then falls down on its generally unrealistic portrait of teacher-student relations and its indulgence in the hoary old stereotype of studying the past as a means of escaping the present. Popular culture never misses an opportunity to undermine the role of the expert and here they go one better by having an expert undermine himself by choosing to remain in the past.

The final film I wish to consider here is, at the time of writing, the most recent. *The History Boys* (adapted by Alan Bennett's from his play) has a strong emphasis on the teaching and learning of medieval history. We see in particular the classroom teaching of the dissolution of the monasteries backed up by a field-trip to Fountains Abbey. It effectively demonstrates the value of studying the medieval past and sets this in the wider debate about the purpose of education – should it be for itself (its intrinsic worth – not a popular concept these days) or because of its relevance and application to other purposes and to passing exams? As to the film future, 2007 is set to bring us a new version of *Beowulf* and *Pathfinder*, the Hollywood take on the *Vinland Saga*. Hold onto your hats!

Mark A Hall
Perth Museum & Art Gallery

SOCIETY NEWS

Website Developments

The Society for Medieval Archaeology is proud to announce the launch of its new website. We hope that you'll agree that the revamp has a much slicker and more accessible feel which should help to boost the popularity of the site amongst the membership and the World Wide Web community at large. With your help, we hope that the website will excel as an informative and educational resource but also act as a shop window for attracting a new generation of web-literate members.

Some of you out there have already kindly sent in fresh material relating to your own research and projects, in some cases backed up by some stunning photographic material. This is very much the direction the site wishes to move in: along with the standard contact information, updates on funding, awards, meetings, conferences, newsletter releases and grants details, the Society for Medieval Archaeology seeks to promote a virtual environment where visitors and society members alike can take pleasure in browsing fresh, lively and stimulating content.

So, if you are currently involved in an exciting medieval archaeological project, then send me some information and photos (with captions) for galleries and slideshows.

Please send all information to webmaster@medievalarchaeology.co.uk and if you have any suggestions then please do pass them on.

Alex Langlands
SMA Webmaster

Journal developments

With the publication of Volume 52 in 2008 you will notice some changes to the journal: modernisation of our house style and some modest modifications to its appearance. We're introducing an explicit editorial cycle, with an annual deadline for submissions of 28 February 2006 (among other things, this enables us to assess the Martyn Jope award for the best article in advance of publication). The most obvious change to our house style will be the introduction of Harvard references to our footnotes.

We positively encourage you to contact the Editor to discuss possible contributions or drafts before submitting a finished typescript, particularly if the proposed contribution is likely to be over 12,000 words:

- outline the proposed paper's content
- state what contribution it makes to the issue or problem addressed (with reference to the Society's objectives)
- indicate the paper's likely word length, including footnotes, and number of illustrations
- identify when it would be submitted
- tell us whether or not its publication would be grant-aided (such funding is not a pre-requisite for publication, but there is an expectation that papers resulting from commercial work undertaken by us and by major public bodies will bring funding).

Meantime, there are no changes to Volume 51 (2007) which is in progress, but we ask the indulgence of contributors already 'on the books' as we go through a period of transition.

Full details can be found in revised Notes for Contributors on www.maney.co.uk, or contact the Editor for advice: sally.foster@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

NEW BOOKS

Cefnlllys Castle, Radnorshire by David M. Browne & Alastair Pearson

Notice is given of a free publication issued by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales on recent survey work focusing upon the medieval castles at Castle Bank, Cefnlllys. The 21-page article integrates the results of a photogrammetry-aided field survey with historical accounts to present an updated three-phase constructional sequence spanning the mid 13th to the 15th centuries. Copies can be downloaded in PDF format from the RCAHMW website: <http://www.rcahmw.gov.uk> or else ordered from the Commission's office: Plas Crug, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, Wales, SY23 1NJ, Tel: +44(0)1970 621200.

Congratulations to our President, Roberta Gilchrist and her co-author Barney Sloane, for topping the poll in the 'Scholarly Publication' category of the 2006 British Archaeology Awards for their book *Requiem: the Medieval Monastic Cemetery in Britain* (2005, Museum of London Archaeology Service).