



The Medieval Settlement Research Group in 2004

<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/msrg/>

This was a busy year for the MSRSG on many fronts. Spring 2004 saw two sizeable academic gatherings: from 6-8 February there was the MSRSG-sponsored conference at Rewley House in Oxford, overseen by Prof Chris Dyer, on the theme '*Villages and Landscapes in the Middle Ages. Recent Surveys and Explorations*'. The 110 delegates were treated to a host of excellent speakers including Peter Fowler, David Stocker, Paul Everson and Stephen Rippon. From 7-9 May, the MSRSG teamed up with the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement at their 33rd Annual Regional Conference in County Carlow, examining in depth the history and archaeology of medieval Carlow; this was fully informed by tours of the town and region.

The Whittlewood Project, funded largely by the AHRB but with strong MSRSG support, entered its final field season in 2004 (see www.le.ac.uk/elh/whittlewood/research.htm). The season focussed on the villages of Wicken and Silverstone, both previously test-pitted, and with new work also at Pottersbury. The project workforce included undergraduates from a number of universities, including Southampton and Leicester. At Silverstone work in the central fields was very productive of medieval pottery, notably under the ridge and furrow; trial trenches indicated the presence of linear features under the headlands of the ridge and furrow, although the pottery overall did not go back before the twelfth century. Many members and interested locals attended the Whittlewood Project's Annual Meeting and Review in Wicken Village Hall in February, and the Open Day for the MSRSG in July. Fieldwork results, plus reviews of studies on placenames, buildings, and environmental corings were outlined and reviewed. An exciting array of data has been accumulated and the project team are well on target with both the final paper and electronic publications. Reports on the 2004 work will appear in this year's MSRSG *Annual Report*.

The Annual General Meeting was held on 4 December in the Centre for English Local History at the University of Leicester. This included the election of new committee members and election also of a new president, since Paul Everson was standing down. Paul was warmly thanked for his excellent running of the Group over the past three years. The new president is Dr Mark Gardiner of Queen's University Belfast, who has published much recently on medieval standing domestic buildings and salt marshes. After the well-attended AGM, the Winter Seminar was convened with the theme of '*Diet and Health in the Medieval Countryside: The Archaeological Evidence*'. Speakers were Richard Thomas (Leicester) who analysed archaeozoological data to assess dietary trends in the medieval period; the role of archaeobotany in elucidating the rural diet was considered by Lisa Moffett (English Heritage – Birmingham); and Simon Mays (English Heritage – Portsmouth) gave a vivid overview of diet, health and death amongst the villagers of medieval Wharram Percy.

A new initiative for 2004 was the John Hurst MA Dissertation Prize, an annual award of £200 to honour the memory of John and his achievements with the MSRSG. The prize is for the best Masters dissertation awarded in that year on a theme related to medieval rural settlement in Britain and Ireland. The first award winner is Triona Nicholl of the Dept of Archaeology, University College, Dublin, for her thesis, '*The Use of Domestic Space in Irish Early Medieval Roundhouses: An Experimental Archaeological Approach*', an innovative analysis of internal space as conditioned by light, heat and smoke. A summary of the dissertation will appear in this year's MSRSG *Annual Report*.

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