



## The Medieval Settlement Research Group in 2005

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

The *Medieval Settlement Research Group* (MSRG) maintained its run of productive and informative conferences and seminars in 2005. On 9-10 April, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge, was the venue for the Spring Conference on the theme of *The Medieval Village in 'Woodland' and 'Champion' Landscapes* organised by Sue Oosthuizen. A record attendance of 160 delegates enjoyed the day of lectures and the full day of visits, which benefited much from the expert guidance of Chris Taylor. Even more substantial was the MSRG-supported and English Heritage-sponsored conference organised by Prof Chris Dyer and his team at the University of Leicester which celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of W.G. Hoskins' ground-breaking book *The Making of the English Landscape*. Running with parallel sessions across three days (7-10 July), the participants were treated to papers under themes such as *Rural Settlement, Buildings in the Landscape, Mapping the Landscape, Status/Designed Landscapes*, and *Britain before the English*, and featuring keynote lectures by Fiona Reynolds, Chris Taylor and Elisabeth Zadora-Rio. Crucially the conference's scope was not just to revisit Hoskins' work, but to highlight advances made across the whole of Britain, and to show the avenues that Hoskins failed to explore but which have since been investigated through archaeology especially. The editing of the volumes of conference papers is making good progress, and the medieval and post-medieval volumes will be published by Windgather Press in 2007.

Excellent progress was meanwhile made on the final (paper and electronic) publications related to the highly successful and innovative AHRB-funded Whittlewood Project which saw its final field season in 2004 (see the MSRG *Annual Report* and the Project website for season summaries and key findings: [www.le.ac.uk/elh/whittlewood/research.htm](http://www.le.ac.uk/elh/whittlewood/research.htm)). The Whittlewood monograph will be published by Windgather Press late in 2006. The generous support and enthusiasm of locals to the Project have encouraged the directors to pursue some new, small-scale archaeological investigations in the Wicken area in 2006.

Note can be made of the MSRG-supported exhibition at Malton Museum, which displays a vivid overview of the life and death of the villagers of medieval Wharram Percy, including through facial reconstructions of some of the inhabitants examined from the site's busy cemetery.

The MSRG Annual General Meeting was held on 3 December in the Centre for English Local History at the University of Leicester. This included the election of four new committee members (Ros Faith, Andrew Reynolds, Bob Silvester and Sam Turner); the president Dr Mark Gardiner warmly thanked those retiring committee staff (Richard Jones, Keith Lilley, Sue Oosthuizen and Rob Wilson-North). After the well-attended AGM, the Winter Seminar was convened with the theme of *'Finds in the Landscape: From Saxon to Medieval'*. This took as its brief the growing impact of, in particular, metal-detectorists' finds in helping to fill out our knowledge of landscape usage and settlement. Speakers comprised Andrew Rogerson (Norfolk County Council) who tackled the new data gathered in East Anglia for the Saxon period; John Naylor (York University) who presented the first stages of analysis of a project supervised by Prof Julian Richards seeking to chart more fully Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian settlement trends in England as a whole from metal-detected finds (see <http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/arch/vasle/index.html>); and Geoff Egan (Museum of London) who considered the theme of medieval finds in the landscape.

The second prize winner for the John Hurst MA Dissertation Prize (initiated in 2004 as an annual award of £200 to honour the memory of John and his achievements with the MSRG) was Jonathan Kinsella (MA in Landscape Archaeology, School of Archaeology, University College, Dublin). His thesis, *'Locating the Poor and Unfree of Early Medieval Ireland'*, examined a sizeable segment of society which is too frequently ignored by archaeologists and historians alike due to a lack of coherent data; here Jonathan aimed to reinterpret both the settlement data and the material culture to show that such people can be made visible. A summary of the dissertation will appear in this year's *MSRG Annual Report*.

Finally it can be reported that a Membership Questionnaire was circulated this year to seek the views of our members regarding the Group's role, its seminars and conferences, website, and *Annual Report*. The returned questionnaires were very supportive of the Group and offered useful ideas for conference themes and for enhancing the MSRG publication; a summary of the responses will appear in the *Annual Report*.

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