



The Medieval Settlement Research Group in 2006

The *Medieval Settlement Research Group* (MSRG) maintained its run of productive and informative conferences and seminars in 2006. On 8-9 April, the Northumberland National Park HQ at Hexham provided the venue for the Spring Conference on the theme of *Medieval Settlement Studies in Northumberland* organised by Rob Young, Park Archaeologist. Rob Young has been a major engineer of the region's Historic Villages Atlas, exploring the past of seventeen communities (www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk/historicvillageatlas). Talks were given by regional field professionals and university academics alike, on themes ranging from the royal palace site of Ad Gefrin, to settlements of medieval lordships, deserted settlements, and marginality. The conference developed in particular some of the aspects of early medieval and medieval land use and ownership highlighted in the excellent volume *Archaeology in Northumberland National Park*, edited by Paul Frodsham (CBA Research Report 136, 2004). Attendees also benefited from expert guidance on field tours within the Park on the second day of the conference.

An important venture in 2006 was the application by Prof Chris Dyer (English Local History, University of Leicester) on behalf of the MSRG to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and its 'Landscape and Environment Programme', which offered potential funds to set up either Research Workshops or Research Networks. Prof Dyer submitted a successful Workshops application entitled '*Perceptions of medieval landscapes and settlements*' (*POMLAS*). Its target is to run a set of workshops to improve communication between specialists in medieval rural settlements and landscapes and establish new academic debates as well as academic connections. Four workshops are programmed to be held in Belfast, Exeter, Edinburgh and York in 2007, culminating in a plenary meeting in Leicester. Workshop themes comprised: *Planning and Meaning; Working and Sharing; New People, New Farms; Belonging and Communicating*. Dissemination will be via the MSRG website, an extended Annual Report, two articles in refereed journals and a popular journal paper.

The *Annual Report* no.20 published in 2006 contained various useful papers including an overview by Carenza Lewis of the innovative and highly popular and rewarding HEFA-prompted 'Field Academies' programme (Discussed more fully in this edition of *Medieval Archaeology*); and John Naylor and Julian Richards outlined approaches to interpreting early medieval sites through portable antiquities. The *Annual Report* also contained a selection of rural settlement-oriented PhD summaries.

Of major significance was the prompt publication in 2006 of the synthetic discussion of the overall results of the AHRC-sponsored Whittlewood Project (2000-05), headed by Prof Dyer: Richard Jones & Mark Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape. Beginnings and Ends* (Windgather Press, Macclesfield).

The MSRG Annual General Meeting was held on 2 December in the McDonald Research Centre at the University of Cambridge. This saw the re-election of the Committee officers and election of Prof C Dyer as Vice-President – a vacancy following the sad bereavement of Prof M Beresford. The AGM included discussion of the Membership Questionnaire results, which showed members very happy with the output and running of the Group, whilst offering useful ideas on additions to the Annual Report and on possible future Spring Conference and Winter Seminar themes. After the well-attended AGM, the 2006 Winter Seminar was convened with the

title *'Region and Place/Place and Region: Debating Wrathmell and Roberts'*. Five papers were presented which reflected on the impact of and revisions to the important but controversial 'Regions and Places' thesis by Stuart Wrathmell and Brian Roberts, both of whom gave papers. A busy audience with good questions made for a stimulating seminar.

The prize winner of the 2006 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 MSRSG) is Tudur Davies (MA in Landscape Archaeology, University of Sheffield). His thesis entitled *'Llanfor and the Dee valley: early medieval landscape study'* examined the problems of locating, interpreting and dating early medieval sites in north Wales; strong engagement with field evidence was shown by Tudur's undertaking of gradiometer surveys on a variety of potential sites. A summary of the dissertation will appear in this year's MSRSG *Annual Report*.

Finally we report that the President, Dr Mark Gardiner, identified the need for the MSRSG to produce a revised and updated *Policy Statement* on Medieval Rural Settlements (on research directions and targets, heritage issues, academic and public roles), the last edition of which was produced in 1996. A detailed *Research Review* for 1996-2006 has also been initiated. Both documents will be made available and circulated to members and key institutions and bodies towards the end of 2007.

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