



The Medieval Settlement Research Group in 2007

The *Medieval Settlement Research Group* (MSRG) continues to be fully engaged in terms of productive and informative conferences and seminars. Key in 2007 was the innovative programme of workshops engineered and promoted by MSRG Vice-President Professor Chris Dyer (Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester). Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) from its 'Landscape and Environment Programme', the workshops were gathered around the theme entitled '*Perceptions of medieval landscapes and settlements*' (*POMLAS*). Its target was to enhance communication and debate between specialists in medieval rural settlements and landscapes and prompt new research angles as well as academic connections; to encourage debate, the workshops featured compact groupings of invited speakers, regional and theme specialists, plus postgraduates. Four workshops were held in Belfast, Exeter, Edinburgh and York across the year and there was a plenary meeting in Leicester in December. Workshop themes comprised: *Planning and Meaning*; *Working and Sharing*; *New People, New Farms*; *Belonging and Communicating*; summaries of sessions were posted on the MSRG website, and extended summaries will appear in the 2008 *Annual Report*. The venture was seen as a great success and certainly helped in stimulating both debate and potential new ventures.

Whilst there was no specific MSRG Spring meeting this year, Committee and general members had been invited to attend the '*Anglo-Saxon Landscapes*' conference organised by Nick Higham held at Manchester University from 11-13 April; the MSRG contributed funds for a set of postgraduate bursaries for this conference. This was a very well attended conference with prominent academic speakers and a good set of postgraduate papers. Lively debates in and out of the conference rooms highlighted how the Anglo-Saxon period remains a highly active research arena.

The *Annual Report* no.21 published in October 2007 contained various useful reports and news including extended summaries of the papers from the 2006 Winter Seminar on 'Beyond Region and Place', papers on Leicestershire Historic Village Cores, the Ness Archaeological Landscape Survey, excavations in Trelech, and a transcript of a fascinating discussion of medieval villages and Wharram with John Hurst. There are also obituaries of Alan Davison (Norfolk) and of former MSRG President, Harold Fox, who died in August 2007. The Group will be dedicating the 2008 Winter Seminar to the memory of Harold, with papers on themes centred around the landscape and economy. This will be a joint seminar with the Society for Landscape Studies.

The MSRG Annual General Meeting was held on 1st December at the University of Leicester during the course of the plenary session of the noted *POMLAS* workshops. This saw the re-election of the Committee officers, four new Committee members elected, and the election of Paul Stamper as the President from 2008 – taking over from Mark Gardiner, who all members agreed had served the MSRG excellently, initiating important new actions, most notably the revision and updating of the *Policy Statement on Medieval Rural Settlements* (on research directions and targets, heritage issues, academic and public roles), and the detailed *Research Review* for 1996-2006, both documents appearing with the *Annual Report*, and with the Policy Statement sent to all national bodies, museums and units. The AGM also saw the editor, Carenza Lewis, standing down from this position (the new editor is Sam Turner); the outgoing President warmly thanked Carenza for all her hard work on producing the *Annual Report* and promoting the Group.

The prize winner of the 2007 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) is Michael Busby (MA in English Local History, University of Leicester). His thesis entitled '*Leicestershire Settlements through the Late Fourteenth Century Poll Tax Records – Urban or Rural?*', sought to define and qualify markets and settlements in a specific Midlands region; interrogation of the various strands of evidence and the use of GIS made this a valuable approach to the medieval economic landscape. A summary of the dissertation will appear in this coming year's MSRG *Annual Report*.

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