



## The Medieval Settlement Research Group in 2012

First news to highlight for the *Medieval Settlement Research Group* in its 2012 review is the election as President of Professor Stephen Rippon of the Department of Archaeology, University of Exeter. Stephen Rippon is a widely respected landscape archaeologist with interests focused on the Roman and medieval periods in Britain and mainland NW Europe; with earlier work on wetland archaeologies, he has done much to develop interdisciplinary approaches (e.g. archaeological, cartographic, documentary, place-name and architectural evidence) to landscapes and related settlement. His current research explores regional variation in landscape character, as detailed in his recent publications *Beyond the Medieval Village: The Diversification of Landscape Character in Southern Britain* (OUP, 2008), and *Making Sense of An Historic Landscape* (OUP, 2012). Stephen takes over from Paul Stamper, who presided over a very productive term which included publication of our flagship monograph on *Medieval Rural Settlement. Britain and Ireland, AD 800-1600* (Windgather/Oxbow, 2012).

A second key item regards the successful digitisation of back issues of the MSRG journal and Annual Report, and the availability of these as a searchable resource via ADS at York (see [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/msrg\\_2012/](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/msrg_2012/)). This initiative, we hope, can be followed up in the coming year with scanning and digitisation of the reports of the previous MVRG as well as the Moated Sites Research Group – important especially because few complete printed runs of these remain available.

In terms of activities and events run, overseen or contributed to by the MSRG in 2012, working in reverse, the start of December 2012 marked the AGM and Winter seminar held at St Edmund's Hall in the University of Oxford. Hosted and organised by Dr Stephen Miles, the seminar gathered together some prominent local names to outline and debate '*Oxfordshire in the First Millennium*': there was a set of five well illustrated and very informative papers, ranging from two period-based analyses by Prof John Blair ('Anglo-Saxon West Midlands in its broader social and economic context') and Prof Helena Hamerow (on 'The Origins of Wessex Project'), to an outline of the new, innovative South Oxfordshire Project (discussed by Stephen Miles) and two engaging papers on economic strategies ('Livestock and land-use: woodland and downland compared' by Ros Faith) and on identities ('English landscapes and identities: a national view' by Chris Gosden). A relaxed atmosphere enabled the generation of many questions and much good discussion across the afternoon. A follow-up Second Millennium Oxfordshire seminar event is now duly planned!

For its 2012 Spring event, the MSRG was delighted to collaborate with English Heritage and the University of York in the running of the conference 'Wharram Percy: past, present and future', held from 23rd-25th March at the Department of Archaeology of the University of York. The conference, attended by 120 delegates, celebrated the 60 years since Beresford and Hurst began their remarkable collaboration at Wharram and launched the new volume *Wharram XIII*, the last in the publication series. The importance of the event was flagged in the keynote speech by Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, and by the opening paper on the early years at Wharram Percy by Paul Stamper, recent President of the MSRG. The roll-call of speakers in the Saturday sessions was impressive: pre-medieval Wharram was assessed by Steve Roskams, before Stuart Wrathmell tackled 'Wharram's village origins and the repopulation of the Wolds in the Anglo-Saxon period' – both stressing continuity of relict and working features in the landscape. The pre-AD1000 community was also addressed by Ian Riddler, assessing Continental and Irish influences in the artefact assemblage, and by Julian Richards who sought village formation in the regional Anglo-Scandinavian context. Chris Dyer was one of the few speakers to examine the medieval heyday of the

village, but questioned (from documents and finds) just 'How poor were medieval peasants?', while Al Oswald made people realise how much more can now be read from the actual village earthworks. David Neave's paper on Wharram and the Wolds in the 16th to 18th centuries took the story beyond the village, before Elisabeth Zadora-Rio reiterated just how influential the excavation was and has been in discussing 'The Wharram project in the context of European medieval settlement studies'.

The (oversubscribed) fieldtrip on the Sunday, led by Al Oswald, was of course to the site of Wharram Percy, where warm sunshine made for ideal photography of field monuments and of delegates alike (see photo below). In the afternoon Susan Harrison and Kevin Booth conducted a tour of English Heritage's store at Helmsley.



*Delegates to the Spring Conference on tour at Wharram Percy – MSRГ Treasurer Dr Robin Glasscock is leading the charge up the hill (Photograph by Richard Gray of NUI Galway, one of four recipients of MSRГ Beresford Bursary awards for attending the conference)*

An important new step for the MSRГ was the creation of a Student Committee Member, to help encourage young/new scholars in the field. Our reduced rate student membership has attracted in a good number of new members undertaking PhDs and MAs and the Student Representative will hopefully find ways to promote their involvement in the Group (via a Facebook Group, student web pages, and a Student-led day conference or workshop). The Group welcomed Susan Kilby, PhD student in English local History at the University of Leicester, as the first representative (serving for a two year term). Susan rapidly engaged in redesigning the poster advert for the Group's John Hurst MA Dissertation prize (of which she was the winner for 2010!)

MSRГ membership stands at a healthy level (c. 475 members). Membership remains a very affordable £12 (£6 per annum for student membership) and includes the journal, *Medieval Settlement Research* (published in October/November each year). Please see the webpages for the Membership Form. Note that any member is eligible to apply for fieldwork grants (awards of up to £500) and students can apply for the conference bursaries – see details in the journal or on the webpages. A final reminder also that there is an MA Dissertation Prize in honour of John Hurst (*entry date*: 31 December).

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