



The Medieval Settlement Research Group in 2008

The *Medieval Settlement Research Group* (MSRG) continues to be a well supported and highly active body, offering both informative conferences and seminars and outputs. The MSRG Spring meeting was held on Saturday 29th March, 2008 at the McDonald Institute, Downing Street, University of Cambridge, and was entitled *The Multiple Estate Revisited: Territories, Resources and Society in Early Medieval Britain*. Glanville Jones developed the concept of the multiple estate in a series of papers during the 1960s and 1970s, arguing that there was a basic form of land structure which could be found in many parts of Britain. The multiple estate combined the arable areas of the lowlands with the pastoral uplands into an administrative and economically integrated region. As this idea developed, Jones concluded that the estate structure must have Celtic origins and that it survived in its purest form in the west Britain where it was recorded in early Welsh laws. This wide-ranging and influential model was not without its critics, however. This MSRG seminar re-visited Glanville Jones' original ideas and explored how far the multiple estate still provides a useful way of thinking about territories, society and resource exploitation. In this well-attended day conference, the model and idea of the multiple estate were cleverly discussed by both Mark Gardiner and Dawn Hadley, and new angles explored by Ros Faith and Alex Woolf; in the afternoon, Stuart Brooks and Angus Winchester considered evidence from diverse zones – Kent and Cumbria and Lancashire respectively. All was brought together in an excellent summing up by Chris Lewis.

The Group's 2008 Winter Seminar, jointly run at Leicester University with the Society for Landscape Studies, was held on 6th December, and was in memory of former MSRG President, Harold Fox, who died in August 2007. A series of papers on themes centred around the landscape and economy were assembled under the seminar banner *Fishing, Transhumance and Woodland in Medieval Britain*. Stimulating papers by Andrew Fleming, Della Hooke and Nicola Bannister explored in particular trees and wood pasture from Wales to the Weald; issues of transhumance – its visibility, the bases of the shepherds, its modes of practice – were discussed by Peter Herring, Angus Winchester and Mark Gardiner, with coverage from south-west and northern England to Northern Ireland; and James Barrett opened up the much-understudied world of medieval sea-fishing. Publication is planned of papers from both this seminar and a separate conference also held in Leicester in summer 2008 centred on Harold's research interests.

Core to the 80 page *Annual Report* no.22 published in October 2008 were the extended summaries of papers and discussions from POMLAS – '*Perceptions of medieval landscapes and settlements*' – the innovative programme of workshops engineered and promoted by MSRG Vice-President Professor Chris Dyer (Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester) and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) from its 'Landscape and Environment Programme'. Workshops on themes such as 'Planning and meaning', 'Working and sharing' 'New people, new farms' succeeded greatly in stimulating discussion and raising extra issues and debates, which we hope will be the prompt for new projects and meetings. The *Annual Report* also included summaries of recent fieldwork activities, such as at Hazleton and in the Mendips; Carenza Lewis, meanwhile, reported on test-pitting work in East Anglian villages; and there was an extended summary of the 2007 John Hurst MA Dissertation Prize winning thesis by Michael Busby on 14th-century poll tax records for medieval Leicestershire.

The MSRG Annual General Meeting in December (framed between the Winter Seminar morning papers and the enticing lunch!) – overseen by new President Paul Stamper – saw the re-election of the Committee officers, the election of three new Committee members, and reported on a new venture, a projected edited volume on medieval rural settlement in Britain, drawing on the expertise of past and present Committee and other members.

Whilst no John Hurst MA Dissertation Prize (initiated in 2004 to honour the memory of John Hurst and his achievements with the MSRG) was awarded for 2008, the Group funded two fieldwork

grants; the Group has also introduced a bursary fund, linked to the name of Maurice Beresford, for younger scholars to apply to for conference or related attendance. Please see the webpages or *Annual Report* for details of how to apply to the various awards. Finally, the MSRG editor, Dr Sam Turner, is overseeing a redevelopment of the *Annual Report*, with the aim of attracting fuller research articles on the Group's core interest area of medieval rural settlement. Potential contributors should contact the editor with ideas of papers.

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