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INTRODUCTION
'THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM' AND OTHER TALES OF MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY

By Roberta Gilchrist *and* Andrew Reynolds

This volume celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Society for Medieval Archaeology (established in 1957), presenting reflections on the history, development and future prospects of the discipline. The papers are drawn from a series of conferences and workshops that took place in 2007–08, in addition to a number of contributions that were commissioned especially for the volume. They range from personal commentaries on the history of the Society and the growth of the subject (see papers by David Wilson and Rosemary Cramp), to historiographical, regional and thematic overviews of major trends in the evolution and current practice of medieval archaeology.

In order to place British medieval archaeology in comparative perspective, contributions were invited from medieval archaeologists working in southern Europe, a region which has experienced rapid change in disciplinary practice in recent decades. Papers by Andrea Augenti, Gian Pietro Brogiolo, Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo and Florin Curta present critical overviews of the development of medieval archaeology in Italy, Spain and south-eastern Europe. Although very different nationalist frameworks were created by mid-20th-century Fascist and Marxist regimes in the respective countries of southern Europe, some common ground can be found with the character of medieval archaeology that emerged in post-war Britain (see papers by Christopher Gerrard). All of these regions share a long tradition of interest in the medieval past, but the formation of a distinct discipline of medieval archaeology is an invention of the past 50 years, or even more recently in some countries (such as Spain). The Society's future engagement with historiography should seek comparison with the development of medieval archaeology in central and eastern Europe, where the discipline is developing at a swift pace, and with our neighbours in north-western Europe, with whom we share a rich antiquarian heritage.

Wilson and Cramp participated in the birth of the subject first-hand, and their personal perspectives stress the youth and pioneering spirit of the first decades of medieval archaeology across Europe. Cramp underlines the importance of data-gathering in the early years, at a time when the subject was regarded as having very little evidential support. In northern and southern Europe, medieval archaeologists

struggled to establish an independent disciplinary identity, and the history of the subject tells of intellectual and methodological wrangles especially with the disciplines of history, art history and classical archaeology. The biographies of medieval archaeology in southern and northern Europe share an uneasy relationship with archaeological theory, and emphasize an initial concern to amass a sound body of evidence that would provide the foundation for the subject. Curta concludes that culture-history remains the dominant approach to medieval archaeology in south-eastern Europe; although the processualism of the 1970s and 1980s by-passed the region, the current generation is more receptive to new theoretical ideas. In contrast, Brogiolo reveals the stubborn resistance to post-processual approaches in contemporary Italian medieval archaeology, despite the strong international character of the subject in Italy. In commenting on the challenges facing medieval archaeology today, there is remarkable unanimity of opinion (see Gardiner and Rippon for the British perspective). In Britain, Italy and Spain, the fragmentary nature of medieval archaeology is considered the major threat to the future of the discipline. Greater co-ordination, communication and confidence are called for in: i) progressing research and teaching in medieval archaeology; ii) gaining research value from developer-funded, rescue and conservation work; iii) enhancing public understanding of the medieval past; and iv) establishing the importance of the study of medieval material culture within the social sciences.

Looking back just 25 years demonstrates that the subject has been transformed in some key respects, while in other ways we continue to display a surprising degree of insecurity as a discipline. The conference proceedings that resulted from the Society for Medieval Archaeology's 25th anniversary contain 15 short contributions on the 'state of the art' as it existed in 1981 (Hinton 1983). With the exception of Richard Hodges's paper, the proceedings lacked any international perspective, with the emphasis placed instead on balancing the Anglo-Saxon, English and 'Celtic' archaeologies of Britain. Rather than thematic overviews, there were reports from the respective interest groups — the Urban Research and Churches Committees (of the Council for British Archaeology), and the Research Groups devoted to the Medieval Village, Moated Sites and Medieval Pottery. There were offerings on 'New Approaches' from veteran archaeologist Philip Rahtz, who had recently established a department of medieval archaeology at the University of York, and 'young turk' Hodges, who was shortly to publish a ground-breaking book on early medieval trade and the origins of towns (Hodges 1982). Although tremendous progress had been made in the first 25 years of the subject (see reviews by Cramp, Gerrard, Rippon), very little interpretative or synthetic work had yet been undertaken. Numerous county-based surveys of medieval archaeology appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but the first national overviews available for students of early medieval archaeology appeared only from the mid-1970s (eg Wilson 1976, Graham-Campbell 1980), with the first digests of later medieval archaeology published nearly a decade later (Clarke 1984; Steane 1985).

In the early 1980s the most vibrant areas of research to emerge were urban archaeology and church archaeology, stimulated by the contemporary climate of rescue and threats to the growing numbers of redundant medieval churches. Twenty-five

years later, thematic study in Britain and Ireland has shifted more to landscape and burial archaeology (see papers by Reynolds, Brady, Rippon, Hansson and Hadley), and very significant progress has been made in the archaeology of housing and in the study of medieval material culture (see papers by Roesdahl, Egan and Hinton). Data gathering and analyses have been transformed by the onset of digital technology and computing. Medieval archaeology in southern Europe has seen a similar focus on the study of settlement types — towns, castles, churches, villages and so on — but there are also distinctive sub-disciplines devoted to Late Antique, Byzantine, Early Christian and Islamic archaeology. Landscape and burial archaeology also feature prominently in the recent development of medieval archaeology in southern Europe, as does 'the archaeology of architecture' (termed 'buildings archaeology' in the UK). The fragmentation of interest groups that was obvious in the early 1980s remains a major concern for the coherent intellectual development of the subject across Europe (expressed by Gerrard, Reynolds, Augenti, Brogiolo and Castillo).

The chronological span of the discipline has also increased beyond the traditional confines of the medieval period. In the 1980s, attention was given to the boundary with sub-Roman archaeology, while today the border between later medieval and early modern is the focus of equal attention (eg Gaimster and Stamper 1997; Gaimster and Gilchrist 2003). This broadening of boundaries has fostered a creative new engagement with historical (post-medieval) archaeology — an even younger discipline — but it may have contributed to the disjointedness that has grown up between the sub-disciplines of early and later medieval archaeology. The distinction between early and later medieval archaeology is much less clear-cut than it was perceived to be 25 or 50 years ago, largely owing to the substantial archaeological contribution made to the realization that so many aspects of society and culture can be found either side of the Norman invasion of 1066.

We are more troubled in the 21st century by factors resulting from the professionalization of archaeology — tensions between commercial units and universities, the competing pressures of development and heritage management, and how to harness the research value of developer-led archaeology conducted on medieval sites. It is salutary to recall the warning of Peter Sawyer in the early 1980s that archaeological excavation and analytical techniques were becoming 'so expensive that archaeologists will be reduced to playing with models' (Sawyer 1983, 46). To the contrary, who could have foreseen the explosion of developer-funded archaeology that began in England just seven years later, with PPG16 (1990)? In comparison with 25 or 50 years ago, we enjoy an embarrassment of riches in the form of medieval archaeological data. Have the interpretation and synthesis of these data progressed at a similar pace? Do the strategies employed in developer-funded investigations address coherent research priorities?

The formation of the Society for Medieval Archaeology in 1957 involved substantial negotiation and cooperation between competing disciplines, and there was appropriate attention given to the visibility of the 'Celtic west' (see first paper by Gerrard). At the Society's conference in 1981, a diplomatic fine line was still being brokered with regard to representation. The 1983 proceedings published no fewer than three 'Historians' Views' by Peter Sawyer, Wendy Davies and P D A Harvey.

Today, most medieval archaeologists regard the subject as inherently interdisciplinary, and as possessing its own research agenda which is distinctive from that of medieval history. The historiographical chapters in the present volume highlight the extent to which the first decades of research conformed to an agenda established by medieval history, for example in charting the impact of the Black Death on medieval villages (see paper by Rippon). Although there were no papers commissioned from historians for the 50th anniversary conferences, it might be argued that history remains 'the elephant in the room'[1] for medieval archaeology. Most of the papers in this volume — whether commenting on traditions of medieval archaeology in southern or northern Europe — betray a lingering insecurity regarding the discipline's relationship to history. We are less concerned today with documenting this dialogue than we were during the 'growing-pains' of the 1980s (eg the debate between Driscoll 1984 and Rahtz 1984, or the discussion by Austin 1990). Nevertheless, as Grenville Astill argues in reviewing the study of towns, the long-standing relationship with history is still the dominant influence.

With maturity, medieval archaeology has learned to work in concert with history, providing complementary and alternative approaches, or asking different questions more suited to material data (see papers by Gardiner and Rippon, Gilchrist, Reynolds). Some medieval historians now make full use of archaeology as a complementary source for writing medieval history, or collaborate on an equal basis with archaeologists, although they remain exceptional (eg Astill and Davies 1997; Dyer 1994; Jones, Dyer and Page 2006; Wickham 2005; 2009). One area of discord certainly remains: the disputed role of archaeological theory in the interpretation of medieval archaeology. This long-standing divide was characterized at the 1981 conference as a 'debate between those who favour new approaches and those for whom traditional frameworks remain the best'. There is no doubt that medieval archaeology has since developed its own research agenda, in part through increasing engagement with archaeological theory. Roberta Gilchrist (this volume) argues that over the past 25 years theory has changed the questions that we ask about the Middle Ages, and how we study medieval archaeology. The rise of post-processual approaches may be one reason for the shift away from core topics such as urbanism, towards landscape and burial archaeology. Processualism encouraged grand narratives on themes such as trade and state formation, while the post-processual interest in agency has promoted the study of social identity, gender, religious belief, sensory perception and spatial experience. Studies of churches/monasteries, burials and castles have demonstrated particular theoretical innovation, with the latter attracting dogged resistance from some historians (see the debate between Platt 2007 and Creighton and Liddiard 2008; and Hansson, this volume).

A steadfast antipathy towards theory remains in some branches of the discipline, a resistance explained by Matthew Johnson as 'the discourse of the familiar' (Johnson 2007, and 2008 lecture reported in Gardiner and Rippon). Because we believe that we already understand the social experience of the Middle Ages, we are less inclined to apply anthropological approaches that may yield new perceptions. If 'familiarity' is indeed the primary obstacle to progress, we can take inspiration from the accelerated development of theoretical perspectives in historical archaeology. Just a decade ago,

'the discourse of the familiar' was identified as the main impediment to interpretative maturity in historical archaeology, covering the period from *c* 1500 to the present day (Tarlow and West 1999). Today, historical archaeology demonstrates an active dialogue with theory, an interest in narrative approaches of interpretation and a well-connected international network of historical archaeologists. Its source materials include oral history and living cultures, as well as archaeology and documents. The crucial difference seems to be in the active engagement of historical archaeology with *contemporary* experience and practice (for example, the archaeology of the Cold War), promoting more social and interpretative approaches (Hicks and Beaudry 2006). Medieval archaeology is more firmly grounded in antiquity, and the romantic myths and legends of the Middle Ages are thoroughly entrenched in our imaginations. To break down popular and academic preconceptions about the Middle Ages requires more critical engagement with how interpretations of the medieval past impact on contemporary perception (Biddick 1998); medieval archaeology is uniquely placed to bring fresh perspectives to many aspects of medieval society. Mark Hall's paper in this volume is especially welcome for encouraging us to consider the reception and relevance of the Middle Ages today through its portrayal, manipulation and appropriation in films.

The group of papers on scientific developments in medieval archaeology is refreshingly confident in its assertion of progress and innovation, as scientific analysis has 'emerged from the appendices' over the past 25 years. New methods, data and standards for recording have transformed our understanding of medieval health and disease, diet and industry (see papers by Roberts, Müldner, Sykes, Bayley and Watson). These papers survey selective aspects of scientific archaeology, but many other fields have achieved significant contributions to medieval archaeology during this period, notably the dendrochronological dating of timbers from standing buildings and the radiocarbon-dating of skeletal remains from early medieval cemeteries. It is interesting to note that here, too, social perspectives have received particular attention, for example in the harnessing of isotopic analysis to study issues of gender and age in individual life-histories (see Müldner). The study of zooarchaeology has experienced a radical realignment in recent years, with questions coming to the fore of the social meaning of animals, human-animal interactions and the symbolism of food. But these contributions also echo the call for the greater integration of medieval archaeology, and specifically the need for improved communication between medieval archaeologists and scientific specialists (see Sykes, Bayley and Watson).

In addition to surveying the development of medieval archaeology over the past 50 years, these papers outline challenges and priorities for the future of the subject. Specific recommendations are made in the regional and thematic overviews, but a number of overarching points can be identified. There is concern that the complexity and scope of our discipline perpetuate its fragmentation into sub-disciplines and interest groups, perhaps to a greater degree than is experienced in other branches of archaeology. Greater communication and integration is needed to achieve the holistic study of the Middle Ages — spanning the early and later medieval boundary, the social and scientific divide, and the borders between typologies of materials and settlements. A deeper understanding of the formation of academic disciplines and

their respective paradigms is required to appreciate the artificial nature of the currently disjointed study of the past (eg Smail 2008). Improved collaboration is needed across Europe to place our regional perspectives within more meaningful frameworks; many pioneering field projects of this nature are already underway and ambitious pan-European syntheses are appearing (eg Graham-Campbell with Valor 2007; Carver and Klapste in prep). Despite this encouraging progress, more regular international (and national) congresses are needed to improve communication and to foster a stronger disciplinary identity. Medieval archaeology faces the same political and funding challenges that beset other areas of the wider discipline, such as the imperative to maximize the research value of developer-funded archaeology, and the real threat to archaeological employment in the face of global economic recession (2009). Great progress has been made in the advancement of new methodologies and in the recording of large corpora of medieval archaeological data. Major challenges remain in the interpretation and presentation of medieval archaeology, and in examining its meaning and relevance to contemporary society. The hurdle to be overcome is not the relationship of medieval archaeology to history, or to archaeological theory. 'The elephant in the room' is medieval archaeology's lack of confidence in our own discipline's ability to write distinctive narratives — archaeological tales that will enhance the social and cultural value of the medieval past to the present.

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NOTE

[1] 'The elephant in the room' is an English idiom first used in the late 1950s to refer to a controversial issue or obvious truth that is ignored or remains unaddressed, despite the fact that it looms so large that it cannot be overlooked.

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PART I

50 YEARS OF MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY

CHAPTER 1
THE FOUNDATION AND EARLY YEARS OF THE SOCIETY FOR MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY

By DAVID M WILSON

The Society was conceived as the result of a conversation between John Hurst and me in the old Iron Age Gallery in the British Museum at some time during the autumn of 1956. John had started a very successful newsletter for his Deserted Medieval Village Group and I was organizing informal seminars of professionals interested in the early medieval period in Britain and Western Europe (a seminar which in much altered form survives today as a joint seminar of the BM and University College London). There was good deal of overlap between the two groups, and John Hurst bridged both. My group held monthly meetings, usually on Saturday afternoons in the same disused, dusty and draughty gallery — followed by bring-your-own-bottle parties, fortified by dishes of 'spag Bol' and cheap red wine, in one or other of our very modest flats, to which we invited many of the people involved in John's side of the story. Although we met in London, we drew on postgraduates and young professionals — mostly from Oxford, Cambridge and London — as well as visitors from other parts of the British Isles, the Republic of Ireland and the Continent (for example, Egil Bakka from Bergen was an early member).

At that time, in the United Kingdom as in most of Europe, prehistory and classical studies dominated academic archaeology. There were practically no posts in universities for medieval archaeologists; those who had jobs in medieval archaeology worked either in museums, in the Royal Commissions or in the Ancient Monuments section of the Ministry of Works. One or two aspiring archaeologists held university jobs, but not in archaeology (which they taught on the side). Rosemary Cramp, for example, was an English don at Oxford and Vera Evison was similarly employed at Birkbeck; others were historians or geographers, or were making a living in equally dubious ways outside academe.

John suggested that we did for the generality of medieval archaeology what he had been doing for Deserted Medieval Villages: disseminating information by putting out a cyclostyled newsletter on work in progress. However, I was more interested in producing a journal — more or less on the lines of the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*. I was about to become Director of the British Archaeological Association

and, with a group of like-minded young people, intended to reform it (in fact, we did rather a good job). But it was clear that neither it nor the Royal Archaeological Institute, both from their origins strongly grounded in the medieval period, could possibly cope with the increasing interest in the 'dirt archaeology' of that period. Nowadays, of course, societies and journals are founded at the drop of a hat and themed monographs emerge in ever increasing numbers. In the mid-1950s this was not the case. Only the occasional *Festschrift* provided an opportunity for focused publication, and *Festschriften* were few and far between — now one seems to appear every day! One of the best *Festschriften* of the period was a volume dedicated to the memory of E T Leeds, entitled *Dark Age Studies*, impeccably edited by Donald Harden of the Ashmolean Museum. Harden coincidentally was at that time moving from Oxford to become head of the London Museum and was, perforce, giving up the editorship of *Oxoniensia* (then one of the most professional of the local archaeological journals). Although Harden was basically a classicist, *Oxoniensia* included many articles on medieval subjects; we wondered whether he would help us. We approached him and he willingly agreed to edit the sort of journal we had in mind. He was man of some seniority and it was quite a coup to get him on board, as he was a respectable denizen of the corridors of power of the small archaeological world.

We were now well on our way to founding the society. Seldom has an idea been so enthusiastically received. The world of British — and indeed European — archaeology was very small, and almost 19th-century in its organization. Everybody knew, or could easily have contact with, specialists of all periods from the Palaeolithic onwards. John and I were young and enthusiastic and, with Donald's greater experience and wide network of colleagues, we were able to reach out to a large number of people. The great man of the time was Sir Mortimer Wheeler, Secretary of the British Academy and, since 1954, President of the Society of Antiquaries. The three of us went to see him and he agreed to chair a meeting in the Society's rooms. After much preliminary discussion and correspondence we circulated friends and acquaintances and summoned a meeting on 16 April 1957 (see the following paper by Christopher Gerrard). At least 85 people came, all of whom — bar one — approved the idea, and, at a further meeting in June (again chaired by Wheeler) the Society was formally founded. Rupert Bruce-Mitford, Keeper of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum, was elected President; Donald Harden became Editor, I became Secretary and John became Treasurer. We elected four knights, Cyril Fox, T D Kendrick, F M Stenton and Wheeler as honorary Vice-Presidents (which gave us quite a bit of street-credibility in those hierarchical days). The vice-presidents were W F Grimes, Director of the London Institute of Archaeology, Ralegh Radford (*éminence grise* of medieval archaeology) and Dorothy Whitelock, Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge. The Council consisted of Howard Colvin (architectural historian and Fellow of St John's College, Oxford), Gerald Dunning (pottery expert and Inspector of Ancient Monuments), H P R Finberg (Head of the Department of Local History at Leicester University), W G Hoskins (Reader in Economic History, Oxford), Nowell Myres (Anglo-Saxon pottery specialist and Bodley's Librarian), Brian Hope-Taylor (freelance archaeologist), William Pantin (lecturer in medieval Archaeology and

History and University archivist, Oxford) and Robert Stevenson (Keeper of the National Museum of Scotland). Martyn Jope (Reader in archaeology at Queen's University, Belfast) was elected a member of the editorial committee, although he was very much an absentee. This was a very strong field, remarkably so when set against the junior status of John and myself; we could not have achieved it without Harden's influence.

We had no ready source of funds and had to rely on our friends and ourselves to finance the project. A casual conversation with Eric Fletcher (a lawyer, MP and amateur archaeologist) resulted in an anonymous gift of the enormous sum of £250 — the first of his many benefactions to the Society. Christopher Blunt, the numismatist, gave us £25. With a few smaller benefactions we accumulated close to £300 (a sum — labelled 'reserve' — which remained as a separate entry in the accounts for many years). Members were asked to guarantee £5 a head to back any bills in case of problems; otherwise we relied on our subscriptions — £389 in our first year. For the rest we managed on calendarization, publishing the first few volumes in the year following the receipt of subscriptions — a slightly dicey piece of creative accounting. When we went to press with the first volume we had 387 members (of whom 93 were libraries — we had worked hard to get these institutional members), paying a subscription of two guineas (with various adjustments for students and joint members). John Hurst managed our money skilfully (he was paid the princely honorarium of £25) and was much helped by our honorary auditor John Cowen, amateur archaeologist, an executive director of Barclays Bank and later Treasurer of the Society of Antiquaries.

The cost of publication of the first volume exceeded the total assets of the Society for its first year and we had to seek grants from the Council for British Archaeology and various government bodies — the Ministry of Works, the Royal Commission, and the Northern Ireland Finance Ministry — in order to keep solvent. This meant that the Journal's contents were sometimes overbalanced with excavation reports — as was pointed out at the conference celebrating the first 25 years of the Society's existence (Hinton 1983). But we survived; although, due to various complications, including a printer's strike, we had to publish a double volume for 1962–63, which finally enabled us to catch up both in publishing and financial terms. Our ambitions went further. In 1959 Donald Harden persuaded an American friend and amateur archaeologist, J Dunscombe Colt — whose money came from the revolver which bore his name — to give an annual sum to establish a travel fund (initially £100). By 1962 the grant was increased to £300. It continued until Mr Colt's death in 1972. Three years later Eric (now Lord) Fletcher generously replaced it with an annual grant of £500.

From the beginning it was agreed that the Journal should be central to the function of the Society, and I shall discuss this below. We considered that there were already enough lecture meetings in London, so decided to have only one lecture a year, after the Annual General Meeting. This provided a platform over a three-year period for a Presidential lecture, a lecture by a foreigner and a lecture on a major piece of British work. Conferences, however, we considered to be important — both academically and socially. The RAI and BAA conferences had fallen into disrepair

and we wanted to have something more academic, to create a greater opportunity to follow up new work and meet our colleagues. All conferences were to be outside London and were to be multi-disciplinary. They were hugely enjoyable and expressed the excitement generated by the new subject, even to me as conference organizer.

I should perhaps provide a little personal background since John Hurst and I were probably more influential than anyone else in leading the Society's activities and direction. John was rather older than me; nevertheless, we overlapped at Cambridge, where we both read archaeology, first under Dorothy Garrod and then under Grahame Clark. After postgraduate work in Sweden, I became Grahame Clark's research assistant and then an assistant keeper in the BM. John meanwhile had moved into the Ministry of Works as an assistant inspector of ancient monuments, where he had a lot of influence, particularly in funding excavations, and had started work at Wharram Percy. Our background in formal archaeology was thus very different from that of most of our fellow medievalists, who had read classics, history or English, although a few had taken the postgraduate diploma at the London Institute of Archaeology. There were few scientists (although Martyn Jope had read biochemistry), but quite a few brilliant amateurs. John had worked with Jack Golson (another Cambridge archaeologist — originally a medievalist) on a number of projects, including excavations on the town walls of Norwich, and in 1952 had started work with Maurice Beresford at Wharram Percy. Although I had published one or two excavations, as a museum curator I was very much an objects man, and indeed was to publish a paper in the first volume of *Medieval Archaeology* on a Merovingian folding-stool. We were much influenced by Grahame Clark's *Prehistoric Europe, the Economic Basis*, which examined prehistory from a completely different angle from that hitherto encountered in the pages of most English archaeological journals (save *PPS* and *Antiquity)*. John had produced a great deal of medieval pottery from his excavations at the manorial site of Northolt (excavations which began in 1950), and this led him to establish good contacts with contemporaries in the Low Countries and France, while I was very conscious of ongoing archaeological work in Germany and, more particularly, Scandinavia.

Until the Society's foundation, the sort of thing that interested us had battled for publication space in the main archaeological journals — although the *Archaeological Journal* did admit some 'dirt archaeology' into its antiquarian pages. In view of the increasing amount of excavation — including work on development- and bomb-damaged sites in towns — a vast amount of new archaeological evidence was being produced, which had to be put into context, both economic and chronological. This triggered John's interest in imported pottery, following work by Gerald Dunning, which led to a reassessment of the sort of evidence based on Henri Pirenne, Michael Postan, W G Hoskins and others in the field of economic history. Similarly, Charles Thomas started to publish his work on the imported pottery found on immediately post-Roman sites in western Britain, where Bruce-Mitford had done innovative work at Mawgan Porth in Cornwall. Philip Rahtz was starting to undertake serious excavations for the Ministry of Works and Brian Hope-Taylor beavered away at Yeavering (see Rosemary Cramp's paper in this volume for discussion of these excavations). Medieval numismatics was undergoing a revolution, particularly led by

Christopher Blunt and Michael Dolley, who developed ideas from such influential historians as Sir Frank Stenton. Their work was an essential component of the chronological framework needed for the artefacts found in excavations and hoards, which enabled us to date contexts closely. To the same end, I used numismatic evidence to build up a stylistic chronology of later Anglo-Saxon metalwork, based on the work of Sir Thomas Kendrick.

Cross-disciplinary work was central to much of what we were doing in those stirring times. Numismatists worked with historians and fed the archaeologists, who provided them with new finds. Stylistic studies of manuscript material — pre-eminently those of Francis Wormald, Julian Brown and Rupert Bruce-Mitford — provided further chronological and cultural pointers in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies. Adventurous economic historians — like the formidable Eleanora Carus-Wilson of the London School of Economics (later a president of the Society) — led us into examination of burghal plots and (in our first volume) into the byways of textile production; while Billy Pantin (another president) tied us into vernacular architecture — on which subject the Journal published some of the earliest papers on dendrochronology, as well as Cecil Hewitt's marvellous analyses of medieval carpentry. Rosemary Cramp summarized her BLitt thesis on '*Beowulf* and archaeology', introducing philology to the Society in the first volume. John Dodgson, an enthusiastic proponent of place-name studies and archaeology, attended our conferences and published in the Journal. Leo Biek wrote on the technique of pattern-welding and Bruce Proudfoot on the economy of the Irish rath.

The Journal was designed with some care. Here we had specialist help from Finberg, who in a previous incarnation had been publisher of a small press. He discussed typefaces, measured the length of the lines and decided on the number of lines to the page and the size of the font. Donald Harden drew up the style sheet, which lasted until 2007. The title of the Journal was much discussed. Wheeler insisted that the society should have a snappy title and that we should not get what was then called the 'Dark Ages' into it, or call it 'The Society of post-Roman and Medieval Archaeology' (too negative). So, to emphasize that the medieval period included the period after the end of the Roman Empire, we put a vignette of the Alfred Jewel on the cover. Drawn by my wife, it survives to this day, although now grossly magnified beyond the intended 1:1 scale on the original cover. The contents list was printed on the back page, for ease of use. It was agreed that reviews should be substantial and of international breadth, and we soon recognized that there was need for a reviews editor — a post filled for many years with great energy by Mike Thompson. This attention to detail paid off. The format endures to this day, as do the major elements of its design. The only change made in the first years was in the quality of the card used for the cover. Our debt to Finberg was enormous. Never an easy man, he unfortunately later fell out with the Society and in 1963 resigned in a huff.

The Society would survive or fall on the contents of the Journal and we worked hard at providing a varied menu.[1] Hints of past study inevitably crept in. Out of *pietas* we published in the first volume a posthumous and, it must be admitted, rather old-fashioned article by the doyen of Anglo-Saxon studies, E T Leeds, which was tactfully edited by Sonia Chadwick (soon to be Sonia Hawkes). But in the same

volume hints of future developments were present. The Leeds *Festschrift* was reviewed by our first foreign contributor, the Swede, Holger Arbman. Another interesting review was that of Hamilton's major publication of the Pictish and Viking site at Jarlshof by Richard Atkinson, a prehistorian widely held to be the best contemporary excavator in Britain. Our international outlook was boosted by Ralegh Radford, who wrote a good article on the Saxon house, based on the only major rural site then known, Sutton Courtenay, in Berkshire. Radford put this into a European context, introducing many English people to some of the major continental sites — Warendorf, Tofting and so on (his paper coinciding roughly with a similar, but unpublished, lecture by Gerhard Bersu to the British Academy).

John's original newsletter idea was adapted to produce the continuing section on recent work in medieval archaeology, a summary of digs and finds. John and I edited the first few compilations. Later John's wife, Gillian, took over the post-Conquest section, while I survived as compiler of the pre-Conquest section until 1971, when Leslie Webster took it over. This compilation has proved immensely valuable.[2] Two examples from my own field demonstrate this. In the first volume the account of Brian Hope-Taylor's excavations at the Northumbrian royal site of Yeavering remained the only quotable printed account until the publication of the excavations in 1977. Similarly, the account of Old Windsor in the second volume is one of the very few printed sources concerning this enormously important — and still unpublished — site. In those days reviews of books were often rather short and summary; we decided to limit their number and make them longer and less narrative.

It would be tedious to examine the contents of the early volumes in too great a detail. But in order to understand how we tried to fulfil our aims, we might glance at them. Probably because both John and I had missed out on early travel because of the war and currency regulations, we very much wanted to bring in an international dimension, to serve as a model to our elders and betters. We worked hard to achieve this aim. Articles by continental scholars were encouraged. In Volume 2 Günther Haseloff, from Würzburg, published an article on a puzzling Anglo-Saxon hanging-bowl, while in the following volume another German, Fritz Tischler, combined with John Hurst, Myres and Dunning to write up a symposium on Anglo-Saxon pottery which included the first proper summary of imported pottery from English sites. In the same volume, Asbjörn Herteig wrote on the initial excavations on the Norwegian Hanseatic site at Bryggen, Bergen, perhaps the most important waterlogged medieval site ever discovered in western Europe. This was neatly followed in Volume 5 by A van de Walle, who wrote on the Antwerp excavations. This international emphasis was important in a period when travel was expensive and slow (and sometimes constrained by currency regulations), so that personal contact was much more difficult. Involvement with foreign colleagues, quite a few of whom became members, helped our sales to overseas libraries and institutions. Foreign books were particularly sought out and reviewed at some length — a feature still evident today.

Martin Carver in a recent *Antiquity* editorial (vol. 81, 21–24) has criticized the present-day Journal for departing from its internationality. In one sense he is right; but there are now so many involved in the dissemination of European ideas and material in the multitude of co-edited books, that it is surely right that the present

officers should continue to give great weight to the British material in *Medieval Archaeology*, a Journal which is read throughout the world.[3] Otherwise it would get too diverse, as indeed has happened with *Antiquity*. Further, as a direct result of our foundation, three European journals were started which to a great extent modelled themselves on *Medieval Archaeology* — namely *Archéologie médiévale*, *Zeitschrift für Archäologie des Mittelalters* and *Archaeologia medievale*, which allow us to keep abreast of much of what is going on in continental Europe.

I have mentioned that in the initial stages of our existence we had to chase grants; so the Journal was perhaps over-weighted with excavation reports, because they often came with a grant for publication. These reports departed from previous models, however, even when reporting on Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, which had been a staple diet of antiquarian journals for more than a century. The report on the Finglesham cemetery, for example, was highly significant in the then current climate. But we turned more and more to economic and settlement archaeology — to the Cheddar royal manor, the Cassington kilns and the Meaux tile-kilns; to town excavations and fortified sites like Lismahon in Co. Down and Corfe Castle in Dorset. Medieval housing and villages got their fair share of space — Garrow Tor in Cornwall, and Riseholme in Lincolnshire, for example, as did churches and monasteries, North Elmham, for example. Sites and subjects like these had previously made appearances in the multi-period journals, but we did our best to make sure that as many as possible were now published in *Medieval Archaeology*. Stuff was pouring in, and the only constraining factor was length, which Harden's brilliant editing and editorial decisions helped to limit.

There were also survey papers — Peter Gelling on shielings in the Isle of Man, the medieval pottery symposium mentioned above, Sonia Hawkes and Gerald Dunning on the post-Roman settlement period, Martyn Jope on the medieval building-stone industry and Charles Thomas on imported 'dark-age' pottery. These in many cases broke new ground and more than balanced out the excavation reports. We published quite a few non-archaeological think-pieces — Nora Carus-Wilson on the trade of the Wash, Billy Pantin on secular housing, Christopher Blunt on coins, John Dodgson on place-names — really contributing to the cross-disciplinary growth of the subject and, at the same time, educating ourselves and our colleagues in neighbouring disciplines in many new areas. Personally, I benefited greatly and in 1960 published, very daringly, the first edition of a now long-forgotten synthetic book called *The Anglo-Saxons*, which ventured into many of these areas in a manner which would now be impossible, and which was completely different from the type of book on the period published earlier. Ignorance and my involvement in the Society certainly gave me courage!

The monograph series was an innovative breakthrough. This was before the days of BAR — and academic publications of digs were sometimes difficult to place. Fortunately for the schema, I had a possible monograph on hand — a report which I had written on Gerhard Bersu's excavations on Viking graves in the Isle of Man. This made a splendid first volume and one which sold out quickly. We had to appoint a paid editor for this project — Ann Morley — who was already indexing the volumes: trained by Donald Harden, she was ideal. The series continues despite all the

challenges from other series producers. More than 20 volumes have now been published — not bad considering their cost and consequent outlay in an under-capitalized society.

I have already said that the world of British — and even European — archaeology was very small, and I would like to re-emphasize that statement. By the time John and I had left Cambridge, I would reckon that we had met more than half the professional archaeologists then working in Britain. Having attended the International Congress of Pre- and Protohistoric Sciences meeting in Madrid in 1954, I had met a large number of the active figures in European archaeology — mostly prehistorians, although a few were medievalists — particularly among the Irish, German, Scandinavian and Dutch delegates. Among them were younger colleagues — all, however, somewhat older than me — who were beginning to make a mark in what was basically a new subject — Brian Hope-Taylor, Maire Macdermott (later de Paor), Charlotte and Martin Blindheim and Märta Strömberg, for example — all of whom became involved in one way or another in our Society. The only later medievalist from this country I remember as being present at the Congress was Brian O'Neill — then the senior English specialist on castles and Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, who was to die young (49) in the same year.

The annual conference of the Society afforded not only opportunities for net-working and getting to know a region, but also to hear lectures relevant to the region, or important updates on major projects. As Secretary, I organized the conferences based on hard work by local secretaries. For the 20 years I ran them, we tended to alternate between the early and later medieval periods, starting with a conference centred at Sheffield in 1958: 120 people attended. It was a real 'rag-bag', based on the theme 'The relationship of archaeology and history in the study of the medieval period'. Based in the university, we were introduced to the region by a group of local scholars, followed by lectures on themes which were to become familiar over the next few years. Brian Hope-Taylor lectured on Yeavering and John Hurst and Maurice Beresford on Wharram Percy. Billy Pantin read a paper on 'monuments and muniments' which was followed by a general discussion in which Christopher Blunt, Gerald Dunning, Arnold Taylor and H P R Finberg were among the participants. An excursion filled most of Sunday, when, *inter alia*, we visited the cruck barn at Cartledge Hall — crucks were all the rage at that time — a Norman ring fort, some Anglo-Saxon carvings and the ruined Wingfield manor-house. The conference fee was 7s 6d (37p). The excursion cost about £1 and accommodation for two nights, together with meals, was £1 4s 6d (rather less than £1.25). We made a profit of some £17 on the event!

The conferences were enormously successful. They were also great fun — the membership of the Society was relatively young — and among all the roistering a great deal of networking was achieved. At Southampton in the following year, a conference on 'The growth of the medieval town' attracted among other things a lecture by Sir Frank Stenton on 'The Anglo-Saxon town', one by John Wacher on medieval Southampton and one by Gerald Dunning on the medieval trade of the south coast. Charles Thomas gave us great publicity by means of a BBC broadcast, and one of our major future supporters, Michel de Bouard, turned up from France.

Two years later we ventured overseas to the Isle of Man, where there were rather more Europeans present, including a lecture by Holger Arbman on the Viking sculpture of Man.

The Kings Lynn conference of 1962 was of exceptional importance as it resulted in the foundation of a committee chaired by Eleanora Carus-Wilson, on which I sat, to excavate medieval sites in the town; excavations which were published by Helen Clarke in our monograph series (Clarke and Carter 1977).

Our first international conference took place at Caen in 1963. Michel de Bouard, then an influential Dean of the Faculty at the university, was the local secretary. David Douglas, a most distinguished Norman scholar, talked on Anglo-Norman relations from 911–1204; de Bouard and Arnold Taylor lectured on castles. P Héliot lectured on the Anglo-Norman Gothic and Adigard des Gautiers lectured on the toponomy and anthropology of England and Normandy in the 10th to 13th centuries — one of the most Delphic lectures I have ever heard! Visits to the Bayeux Tapestry and various churches, mottes and castles were interspersed with good Norman food and drink.

Two years later the conference went to Bergen and Oslo — a really splendid trip. Three lectures by Norwegians — Gerhard Fischer, Asbjörn Herteig and Robert Kloster — introduced a series of visits to sites, churches and museums. It was quite splendid to see how scholars from the two countries reacted with each other. I particularly remember a spirited exchange between the venerable Gerhard Fischer and the deeply learned — if sometimes eccentric — Christopher Hohler on the bases of the columns in Bergen cathedral. There were also memorable receptions and meals.

Conferences in my time included Scottish, Welsh and Irish venues. But perhaps one stands out more than any other, and of this I have been reminded by James Graham-Campbell. I think, more than anything else, it spells out the all-embracing nature of the Society in the archaeological community at a time before 'the end of archaeological innocence' (Clarke 1973). In 1968 James was graduating from Cambridge and came to see me. Let me tell it in his own words:

> I applied to David Wilson at UCL to undertake post-graduate research on the Vikings, but he said: 'Go away to Norway for a year and we can talk about it!' 'But', he added, 'you must come back for the SMA conference in 1969 because it's going to be held in Orkney and Shetland and EVERYONE will be there.' And it wasn't just everyone in Viking studies, it included both the Christopher Hawkeses and both the Graham Clarks of Oxbridge. (J Graham-Campbell, pers comm)

It was indeed an all-embracing conference with people from Scandinavia and from all areas of archaeological and related disciplines. Sverri Dahl from the Faroes lectured on his archaeological work there; Ralegh Radford appeared in Scottish mode to talk on Norse houses in Scotland, Stuart Cruden lectured on St Magnus's Cathedral and (for once) I lectured to the conference — on the St Ninian's Isle Treasure. We visited islands (although the weather was too rough to get to Wyre and Egilsay) and sites on Mainland; we flew to Shetland to have tea with the Provost of Lerwick and looked at sites there. But tea was not the only drink we had. Most memorable was involvement in the late stages of an Orkney wedding which was drawing to a raucous conclusion. But this paper deteriorates into anecdotage and I must draw it to a close.

ENVOI

The Society has helped to mould the study of medieval archaeology both in this country and abroad. The subject has come a long way and the Society has been deeply involved, often in innovatory mode, in its development. From its foundation the Society's work was firmly based in an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, an approach which has led to a vast increase in understanding and interpretation as methods have changed and publication has increased.

Excavation (mostly 'rescue' work, but also of a research nature) has, particularly in the last decades of the 20th century, completely revolutionized the basis of the subject. The method of excavation changed almost as the Society was founded; the grid and trench method initiated by Pitt-Rivers and Wheeler in the late years of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, was varied according to the nature of the sites available. Open area excavation, influenced from Denmark, came to medieval England in the mid-1950s. It had been used on English prehistoric sites before the war, but was probably first used in a modern fashion on a medieval site by Brian Hope-Taylor at Yeavering (from 1953). It soon became almost the norm, often to give a much more coherent view of an excavated site. Excavation, funded on a much grander scale from the late 1960s onwards, produced a vast quantity of finds and different types of site. Few sites were chosen against a planned policy, but enough were sampled to provide a new matrix for an understanding of the totality of medieval Britain, although knowledge is still very patchy.

Thus there developed a need to assemble and order all this new material and set it in a realistic chronological framework. At first there was a great dependence on typology and style-history — methods developed in the first half of the century — and these methods were examined and developed more rigorously as excavators provided the material, particularly metalwork and pottery, and demanded more critical chronological guidelines. Scientific dating methods were introduced gradually. Radiocarbon dating, developed less than a decade before our foundation, was still in its development stages, and was only of general use to medievalists. It was, however, used for very coarse dating. The revolutionary development of an understanding of minting cycles in Anglo-Saxon England enabled students of hoards to date their deposition to within a few years and provided clues to the date of the deposition of archaeological deposits. Rather different, but at least as important, was the development of dendrochronology, first used extensively in the Dublin excavations, but discussed in its early stages of development in our Journal. Residual magnetism and thermoluminiscent dating soon followed, so that by the 1980s there was a firm chronological framework in archaeology for the medieval period.

Influenced at the beginning by a developing interest of economic and social historians in the potential use of archaeological evidence, it became possible to develop a more holistic picture of the medieval period. Archaeology provided industrial sites and analysed processes of extraction and manufacture. The anatomy of towns and rural settlements was greatly boosted. Landscape archaeology was enthusiastically developed. The study of agriculture progressed quickly. The use of flotation provided fresh knowledge about crops to strengthen evidence provided by

the examination of grain impressions on pottery and pollen analysis. Developments in the study of both animal and human skeletal material led to population studies and paved the way for applications of DNA and trace element analysis.

The Society and its members have been involved in all these innovations and more; I am confident that it will continue to be as innovative as it was in those early years.

NOTES

[1] Articles mentioned here can be consulted in the online archive of the first 50 volumes, made accessible for the Society's anniversary in 2007 http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/med_arch/index.cfm?CFID=615449&CFTOKEN=57428789

[2] From Volume 51 (2007), a 'Highlights' section was introduced to cover a selection of major findings or research projects. The full listing is available as an online searchable database with the Archaeology Data Service.

[3] The journal has long had associate editors, many of whom are based in, or represent, other regions of Europe. In 2007, the journal introduced French, German and Italian translations of abstracts.

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