

## Medieval Rural research topics and priorities

### Demography

Where excavation is possible, cemetery studies are required to better understand population structure and to trace population movement.

Demography including the identification of minority or immigrant groups. DNA profiling has much to offer in this area of research.

Assessment of populations and population structure through time.

Quantification of population density and mobility.

### Economy

Rural industries require further study – milling, potteries, iron works etc.

Rural production centres for pottery should be targeted for excavation.

Agricultural production and regional variation requires further research.

### Infrastructure

Communications – the main routes need to be established, including roads and river transport, the identification of riverside docks, bridges, fords, etc. This would act as a base for information on the distribution of site types by period and contemporary environment.

The development and hierarchy of roads and other ancient routes require further study, including their origins, their role as a focus of occupation etc.

### Culture and religion

A big gap in previous frameworks is the absence of anything about churches and other religious structures and features. Churches and their associated land parcels are a major part of the medieval settlement pattern, as well as being one of the major pivots of medieval social life.

Impact of Christianity: There is a need to systematically record evidence of the structural development of parish churches when the opportunities arise.

Rural monastic establishments require further study. There is a tendency to believe that they conform to standard layouts, but this is not always the case. Such studies should consider the entire monastic precinct as the unit of administration, rather than focusing on the church and cloister. Further study of the relationship between monastic houses and their estates and land-holdings is required in order to better understand their role in the medieval landscape.

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### Landscape and settlement

The origins and development of the different rural settlement types need further research, along with the dynamics of medieval settlement.

Are there regional or landscape variations in settlement location, density or type?

How far can settlement forms be related to agricultural regimes?

How far can the size and shape of fields be related to agricultural regimes?

What is the relationship between rural and urban sites?

What is the role of non-towns such as Lidgate which has burgesses and burgage plots?

What is the role of rural markets and fairs?

It is important to relate site-specific archaeological evidence to the wider landscape.

Changing climatic and environmental conditions throughout the medieval period are not fully understood and evidence should be sought to address this.

Palaeoenvironmental sampling and the dating of extant historic landscape features such as field boundaries is recommended.

Settlement change, evolution and abandonment requires further study, particularly with reference to the evolution of greens and green-side settlements. Are there regional variations?

Greens, tyes and commons – research into their origins and development needs to take account the different types of common pasture that are represented in this broad grouping; can more be done to bring together both archaeological and documentary evidence?

Surveys should be undertaken of coastal grazing marshes and the earthworks within them.

Surveys should be undertaken of ancient woodlands, heaths and valley-bottom pastures. Important considerations are the locations of these in the landscape, edge definition and internal divisions.

The 'Gipping Divide' and other sub-regional divisions – how true are these, can we further define them, and how can we explore their origins?

The church-and-hall complexes – can we provide more conclusive evidence for their origins and development?

The dispersed settlement pattern – its origins need further exploration as does the question of its 'archaeological visibility' in earlier periods; what are its implications for social organisation and landscape development across the medieval period?

Moated sites – can more be done to clarify their dating and to elucidate the variety of forms and sizes?

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### Built environment

The form of farms and farmsteads: what form do farms take, what range of building types are present and how far can functions be attributed to them? What about non-farmstead farm buildings such as sheepcotes, hay barns, pounds, etc.?

The dendro-dating of buildings is recommended to refine chronologies (both overall and relative).

Building materials need assessing, including the quarrying and distribution of stone and the manufacture of brick and tiles.

Further research is required on infill materials used in medieval timber-framed buildings, which not only have an important role in influencing regional building methods and trends, but also provide potential for the study of medieval cereal-types.

Fixtures and fittings in buildings (and their archaeological visibility) need to be recorded. These range from integral features such as staircases and doors to portable features such as late medieval coffers in churches.

The number of archaeologically explored medieval houses is still surprisingly small – do we need to refine excavation techniques for identifying them and understanding their construction methods?

Synthesis of evidence for above-ground and below-ground built environment needs to be encouraged.

Where building recording is part of the planning process, the recording of individual sites should be accompanied by a process of synthesis, collating and considering the results of the surveys.

Syntheses are required of the significance, economic and social importance of classes of historic buildings within an area.

Many of the region's minor/rural castles are still not well understood in archaeological or historical terms, and further work is required in this area.