Medieval Rural

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National overview

The medieval period forms an important bridge between the study of the remote past, where archaeological data dominates, and the more recent past, where the written record dominates. There are, however, very distinct archaeological and historical streams of medieval research and it is still rare to find syntheses that span both streams with confidence and ability. The medieval period is also the period where the archaeological approach to buildings strongly meets the architectural approach, with again a tendency for the two streams to run in parallel rather than in combination.

In 2012 the Medieval Settlement Research Group co-ordinated the publication of *Medieval Rural Settlement. Britain and Ireland, AD 800-1600* (Christie and Stamper 2012), which is the most comprehensive and up-to-date statement of knowledge of the rural side of this period's archaeology. This follows a review of research undertaken nationally for the period 1996–2006 (Gardiner 2006) and a research and management framework for medieval rural settlement and landscape (MRSG 2007), which is currently under revision. A similar review process was carried out by the Society of Medieval Archaeology around the same time (Gilchrist and Reynolds 2009).

It is also possible to point to important recent research in a number of specific areas:

- European background: major studies that aid the consideration of the English evidence in the light of the wider European background have been provided by Ayers (2016), Bates and Liddiard (2013), Carver and Klapste (2012), Hoffman (2015), Klapste (2016), Simms and Clarke (2015), and Wilkin *et al.* (2015).
- Landscape classification: English Heritage led the way in this in the 1990s and early 2000s by championing a whole-landscape approach in Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) (Fairclough *et al*. 1999; Clark *et al*. 2004; Rippon 2004) and through the identification and mapping of settlement provinces and local regions (Roberts and Wrathmell 2000 and 2002). The technique has however come in for some criticism for its adequacy in capturing and recording the complexity of landscape character, and its employment as a planning and development tool (Austin 2007; Williamson 2007; Donnelly *et al.* 2014)). An alternative approach, termed Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has been developed alongside HLC (and sometimes incorporating aspects of the HLC work) and offers another way of recording landscape character (Warnock and Griffiths 2015; Fairclough and Herring 2016). A new approach is also being trialled by the English Landscapes and Identities Project (EngLaId) based at the University of Oxford, which seeks to combine computerised data from a variety of sources to investigate the history of the English landscape 'from the middle Bronze Age to the early medieval period' (Donnelly *et al*. 2014). Part of its on-going problems stem from varying definitions used in the original data, not least the use of the term 'early medieval', with its double meaning of the period from the 6th to 10th centuries (following Continenal usage), and its meaning as the earlier part of the period from 1066 to 1500 (in traditional English usage).
- Excavation and survey projects: the importance of the landscape approach is shown in the work at Raunds in Northamptonshire (Parry 2005, Audouy and Chapman 2009, Chapman 2010) and in the Whittlewood project in the East Midlands (Lewis *et al*. 1997; Jones and Page 2006). The use of test pits to examine to examine currently occupied rural settlements (CORS) has also been developed (Lewis 2007, 2015).

- Farming and field systems: techniques of medieval farming on a continental scale is presented by Klapste (2016). The operation and origins of common fields, particularly in the context of the English Midlands, are explored in detail by Hall (2014) and by Liddiard *et al.* (2013). English field systems outside the Midlands are considered in Rippon (2012a).
- Castles and moats: a model synthesis of development of castles in England is provided by Goodall (2011) and recent castle research by Davies *et al*. (2015). The impact of castles on settlements and landscapes is considered by Creighton (2002, 2009a). Differing views as to the motivation behind the construction of homestead moats are presented by Platt (2010) and Johnson (2015).
- Designed landscapes: the growing appreciation of deliberate landscape design and planning is reflected in Creighton (2009b) and Jamieson and Lane (2015).
- Standing buildings: an approach combining the character of the landscape and the farm buildings it contains is championed in Lake and Edwards (2006). Meeson (2012) provides some analysis of the growing data from dendrochronolgy.
- Artefacts: the production of high-quality museum and excavation catalogues (e.g. Egan 1998) is substantially aiding the interpretation of material, especially with regard to the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The overwhelming importance of the East of England for the recovery and recording of medieval artefacts is demonstrated by the maps in Oksanen and Lewis (2015).
- Archaeobotany: the need to set priorities and standards are highlighted in Van de Veen *et al.* (2013).

Key themes for the East of England

The historic landscape

Work over the last few decades has developed a more detailed understanding of the evolution of the complex historic landscapes of the East of England. The late Oliver Rackham, building on earlier maps showing the distribution of Midlands-style common fields, produced a national map (1986) that broadly divided England into a central component with a 'planned' countryside, and eastern and western ones with 'ancient countrysides. The three western counties of this region (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire) largely fell into the 'planned' part, and most of the three more eastern counties (Essex, east Suffolk and east Norfolk) fell into the 'ancient' part. In mapping commissioned by English Heritage, Roberts and Wrathmell (2000 and 2002) similarly divided this region by the boundary between their Central and South Eastern landscape provinces; the former being characterised by common fields and nucleated villages, and the latter by more diverse field systems and dispersed settlement patterns.

English Heritage also commissioned an East of England Historic Landscape Characterisation Project (1999-2008) and a related Historic Field Systems of East Anglia Project (2000-05). Drawbacks to parts of the HLC project are aired in Gascoyne and Medlycott (2012). The Field Systems study showed the complexity of the agricultural arrangements in Eastern England, with common fields of varying degrees of formality prevailing in the north and west of the region, and ancient 'block holdings' (or land in severalty) dominating in the south (Martin and Satchell 2008). The boundary between the two approximates to the line of the River Gipping in Suffolk and has been shown to be a major cultural and landscape boundary and has been termed 'the Gipping Divide' (Martin 2004, 2012a). The significance of this boundary has also been explored by Williamson (2006) and Rippon (2008, 2012b). Differing views about the nature of the field systems and their distributions are expressed, from a more traditional agricultural history perception, by Bailey (2009). The Fields Systems project also expressed

doubt on the suggested prehistoric dating of co-axial field systems that are a feature of the clay lands of East Anglia (Williamson 1986) and Williamson himself has since (2016) argued that such dating is unreliable and has suggested that 'the roots of the medieval countryside lay in a largely pastoral Anglo-Saxon landscape'. The fields project also highlighted the absence of 'high' ridge-and-furrow (with permanent ridges) in most parts of the region, except the west. Instead 'low' ridge-and-furrow (regularly split and reformed) produced by 'stetch' ploughing was the norm. The distribution of regular and irregular field systems in south Cambridgeshire is explored by Oosthuizen (2010).

The HLC mapping also contributed to a Landscape Character Assessment project in Suffolk (2008; http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk) that was later (2010) extended in a less detailed form to the whole region (http://landscape-east.org.uk/east-england-landscape-typology). Some more detailed LCA work has been carried out under HLF Landscape Projects in the Stour Valley of Suffolk and Essex (http://www.suffolklandscape.org.uk/userfiles/pdfs/DV%20Hist%20landscape%20Study/Core_Document_MaM_LandscapeCharacterStudy.pdf) and in the Brecks of Norfolk and Suffolk (www.breakingnewground.org.uk/assets/LCAP/BrecksLCA2.pdf).

Analysis of fieldwalking results (Medlycott 2005) and of aerial photographs (Ingle and Saunders 2011, Bales *et al*. 2012, Cattermole *et. al*. 2013 and the on-going Breckland National Mapping Programme project – https://historicengland.org.uk/research/research-results/recent-research-results/east-of-england/breckland-nmp/) has helped shed light on the distribution and density of medieval sites over large areas of land. The NMP projects carried out within Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk have significantly enhanced our knowledge of the period, both by identifying new sites and by providing detailed transcription and interpretation for those sites visible on aerial photographs that had previously been recorded. These projects have recorded extensive evidence for settlement, field systems, farming practices (ridge-and-furrow, agricultural enclosures), religious sites, communication networks, land reclamation and drainage and industry. The Portable Antiquities Scheme has extended the recording of metal-detector information, which was previously largely limited to Norfolk and Suffolk, into the rest of the region, although an accompanying degree of analysis is still required.

Computerised mapping by Barlow (2011) of the Domesday data for Suffolk has offered new insights into that county's landscape and economy. Regional landscape surveys have included the Medieval Fenland project, a synthetic assessment of excavated data for the fenland areas of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Peterborough (Spoerry 2005). Two differing interpretations of a fenland landscape at Little Downham, Cambridgeshire, are presented by Taylor and by Clarke (2010). Taylor (2013) also provides a landscape history of another fenland parish at Dodington, Cambridgeshire.

Rapid Coastal Surveys in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex have recorded many medieval and post-medieval features relating to the management and exploitation of the medieval coast, including seawalls, grazing-marshes and salterns. Woodland surveys, undertaken as part of the Forestry Commission's regeneration programmes at Peterborough and elsewhere, have revealed hitherto unrecorded features associated with historic woodland management, and important earlier remains (Hall 2001; Simco 2003). The survey methodologies have been applied to woodland managed by other bodies.

Rural settlement patterns

A review of the settlement evidence in 'Greater East Anglia' (Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk) has highlighted some of its distinctive and significant features (Martin 2012a). These include hall-and-church complexes with a suggested Late Saxon origin; a high incidence of dispersed farmsteads of medieval origin, many of them moated; and settlements arranged around the edges of common pastures called greens or tyes, which are often peripheral to their parishes

and, it is suggested, post-Norman Conquest in origin. Earlier origins for greens are, however, suggested for Cambridgeshire (Oosthuizen 2002, 2003). The development of common-edge settlements in Norfolk is also explored by Williamson (2014). A neglected aspect of common land, common wood pastures, are analysed for Norfolk by Dallas (2010).

Excavations on medieval rural settlements continue to be carried out across the region, but these are often reported merely as parts of multi-period sites where the identified medieval remains are limited to ditches, pits and occasional post-holes, with few opportunities for meaningful observations about the layout and content of the settlements. Larger-scale and more productive excavations are fewer, but are continuing to produce substantial results. In Bedfordshire, excavations close to a loop of the Great Ouse on the west side of Bedford have produced evidence of settlement from Saxo-Norman times onwards within a series of toft enclosures along a trackway (Luke 2016). In Cambridgeshire, a farmstead has been excavated at Cheveley and a planned settlement at Burwell. In Essex, excavations in connection with the development of Stansted Airport led to the recording of a moated site, farmsteads, cottages, hunting-lodge, a windmill and field systems (Havis and Brooks 2004; Cooke *et al*. 2008).

Significant work has also been recently carried out at Bradwell Airfield. In Norfolk, excavations on the line of a gas pipeline uncovered medieval remains that imply substantial reordering of the landscape in the late medieval period (Wilson *et al*. 2012). Common-edge excavations and surveys have taken place at Lingwood and Mattishall. At Botolph Bridge on the edge of Peterborough, excavations have revealed details of a hall-and-church complex with probable Middle-Late Saxon origins with later tofts along an adjoining street (Spoerry and Atkins 2015). At Stowmarket in Suffolk, excavations have revealed an enclosed farmstead and a series of roadside tofts (Woolhouse 2016). Similar roadside tofts were excavated at Great Blakenham (Wallis and Meredith 2011) and at Brettenham, Darsham and Whatfield (Mustchin *et al.* 2015). At Capel St Mary an enclosed farmstead with evidence of an aisled building has been excavated (Tabor 2016). At Wortham, part of a green-side settlement has been excavated (Atkins 2015).

As a contrast to these large-scale excavations, the most-recent test-pit excavations of the CORS project (Lewis 2015) have produced interesting results in Bedfordshire (Riseley), Cambridgeshire (Rampton, Sawtry, Stapleford), Essex (Daws Heath, Hadleigh, Manuden, Southminster), Norfolk (Blo' Norton, Brundall, Hillington, Hindringham) and Suffolk (Long Melford, Walberswick). The contribution of aerial photography to the analysis of medieval settlement patterns and landscapes in Essex is discussed by Ingle and Saunders (2011), and the on-going Breckland National Mapping Programme is continuing to provide results (Bales *et al*. 2012, Cattermole *et. al*. 2013).

The high status element – castles and moats

New analysis of the Norman motte-and-bailey castle at Eye, Suffolk, indicates that the large 'outer bailey' that defines the current street pattern of the town actually envelopes two mottes, each with its own bailey, making it one of the very few double-motted castles in the country (Martin 2013). Work in 2011 on Haughley Castle, Suffolk, showed that the Norman motte was once crowned by a stone keep (Brown et. *al.* 2012, Martin 2012b). Up-to-date accounts of two of the best Norman stone castles in the region (Colchester Castle and Norwich Castle) are provided by Berridge, Ayers, Heslop and Popescu (all 2015). Geophysical surveys followed by a community excavation in 2016 at the ringwork called Court Knoll at Nayland, Suffolk, revealed that it contained an inner enclosure with a small church, which appears to have been reshaped and reused as a tower. A new analysis of the unusual earthwork castle of the 'Anarchy period' in King Stephen's reign at Burwell, Cambridgeshire, is

provided by Wright *et al*. (2016). Another non-standard castle, at Lidgate in Suffolk, is also probably of that same period or of the time of the Barons Wars in the 13th century (Martin 2016). Work has also been carried out on the site of the castle of Fulk de Breauté, King John's henchman, at Luton, Bedfordshire. The 14th-century 'status castle' of the de la Poles, earl and dukes of Suffolk, at Wingfield, Suffolk, has been studied and digitally reconstructed by Liddiard and its origins analysed by Martin (both 2015).

Homestead moats are one of the characteristic features of the medieval landscape of the clayland parts of the region and Martin (2012) maps the current distribution in Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and parts of Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire – a concentration unmatched elsewhere in England. He also presents the evidence for them being, principally, visible symbols of status. Platt's views (2010) on the largely defensive purpose of homestead moats has been examined by Dean (2014) in relation to moats in the South Elmham area of Suffolk, where he has drawn attention to the existence of numerous small moats.

Buildings – excavated and standing

The lack of a good corpus of excavated medieval houses in the region has repeatedly been flagged up (Wade 2000, Martin 2012, Luke 2016) – a lack which is particularly notable with regard to rural settlements. In many cases it is only the absence of other features that suggests the presence of buildings. This suggests that the current corpus may be biased towards buildings with sunken floors and earth-fast structural elements. In contrast, the region has one of the highest concentrations of standing medieval timber-framed buildings in Britain. The study of the standing buildings is, however, largely the preserve of architectural historians and there is still only limited interaction between them and archaeologists dealing with excavated buildings.

New editions of the Pevsner architectural guides, incorporating substantial new research, have been produced for most of the counties of the region: Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough (O'Brien and Pevsner 2014), Cambridgeshire (Bradley and Pevsner 2014), Essex (Bettley and Pevsner 2007, includes a chapter on timber-framed buildings *c.*1200-1700 by D. Andrews), Norfolk (Pevsner and Wilson 1997 and 1999) and Suffolk (Bettley and Pevsner 2015). Hertfordshire is currently being reviewed. Essex has sponsored several important studies that have combined evidence from this region with that from other parts of the country (Stenning and Andrews 1998, Walker 2011, Andrews and Walker 2017). The Norfolk Historic Buildings Group published a research agenda in 2002-3 and has followed this with several major surveys of historic buildings in particular places (Longcroft and Morgan 2002-3, Longcroft 2005, Longcroft *et al*. 2009, Longcroft *et al*. 2015).

Lists of tree-ring dated buildings, arranged by county, have been made available online by the Vernacular Architecture Group – www.vag.org.uk/dendro-tables/.

Industry

Pottery is frequently used as a means of dating sites and there have been very welcome advances in the analytical and synthetic study of the medieval pottery of this region. The Castle Mall site in Norwich (Shepherd Popescu 2009) revealed probable Thetford-type pottery production as well as evidence for numerous other crafts/industries, including a huge 15th-century assemblage from infills of a castle well which comprised a wide range of waste from artisans working around the Castle Fee. A comparative study of the Anglo-Saxon to 17th-century pottery from Colchester, focussing on local wares, has been published (Cotter 2000). A newly recognised pottery type, Ely Ware, dating to the mid 12th to 15th centuries, has been identified and published (Spoerry 2008). Spoerry (2016) has also provided a wider

study of the pottery of Cambridgeshire that includes reviews of pottery sourced from the surrounding counties, points to some newly-identified wares and suggests 'ceramic regions' that 'represent recognisable units in term of topography and settlement, and have some relevance to administrative and tenurial relationships'. Walker (2012) provides a study of Hedingham Ware (12th-14th centuries) from north Essex, including its origins, affinities and distribution. The Harlow pottery industry (13th-18th centuries), also in Essex, is reported by Davey and Walker (2009). Slowikowski (2011) reports on six production sites for Late Medieval Reduced Ware in the south-east Midlands. Recent excavations at the important pottery production site at Grimston, Norfolk, are reported on by Mustchin and Thompson (2014). New kiln sites have been identified at Haughley and Kessingland in Suffolk.

Assessment of progress on research topics

The 2011 revised research framework for the East of England (Medlycott 2011) reported on progress on a number of specific research topics which had been highlighted in the previous research agenda and strategy (Brown and Glazebrook 2000) under the headings of:

- Population studies/demography
- Settlement and social organisation
- Economy
- Land-use changes
- Culture and religion
- Publication of backlog survey and excavation

Future priorities for research

Gascoyne and Medlycott (2012) identified a number of future research priorities for Essex that have a wider relevance:

- The importance of studying the medieval evidence within its wider landscape.
- Palaeoenvironmental sampling and the dating of extant historic landscape features such as field boundaries.
- A multi-disciplinary approach.
- Settlement change, evolution and abandonment, particularly with reference to the evolution of greens and green-side settlements.
- Surveys of coastal grazing marshes and the earthworks within them.
- Similar surveys of ancient woodlands, heaths and valley bottom pastures.

Martin (2012) also proposed a set of questions and research aims:

- 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?
- 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?
- Greens, tyes and commons – research into their origins and development needs to take into 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?