

## Chapter 16

# The Later Medieval Period: Research Agenda

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### 16.1 Introduction

The major geographical divisions of the region have been well described, and necessarily include a varied cross-section of southern English geology, soils and land forms:

- Downland scarp fronts/wooded backs
- Clay vales/gravelled river valleys: champion land
- Forested areas on clays/sands
- Sandy/clay heaths and wastes.

- 16.1.1 Environmental determinism is unfashionable but at some level is foolish to ignore where so often land-use reflects the soils, topography and situation. These factors need to be considered more explicitly in future research. Political and economic factors of land-ownership also have an important role in this period, and there is often historical evidence allowing them to be better understood.
- 16.1.2 From large-scale regional considerations there is also a need for better understanding and definition of the local *pays* – eg Banburyshire, Otmoor, the Forest of Bere, the east Berkshire or Whittlewood, and of the extent to which human land-use and zones of activity occupy or traverse the margins of topographic divisions such as scarp slopes and the boundaries of forests and wastes. Even such a relatively compact area as the Isle of Wight has great variety of landscape types.
- 16.1.3 The historic landscape character of these *pays* needs to be studied, but in greater depth than the contemporary HLC mapping, and with inputs from archaeology and landscape history, and the large quantity of post-medieval data for the early modern landscape. From this can arise an understanding of whether there were in reality typical settlement/landuse types for these areas, or if they were just as often variable and changing over time.

### 16.2 The nature of the evidence

Within the setting provided by geography, soils and vegetation, the material culture of the medieval period is represented by extant, ruined, and buried remains; by visual representations in art (glass, painting, sculpture); and by description or indication in written sources (charters, surveys, accounts, narratives). Environmental and scientific studies add another dimension.

None of these uniquely explains what happened, but while a combination of evidence may make a rounded story, it is still the case that any one type of evidence may provide a unique witness of an event. It would seem unwise to promote an ‘archaeological’ research programme based solely on buried evidence for material culture, without considering the desirability of documentary and archaeological/art-historical/architectural studies.

There is an abundance of documentary sources, as there are buildings and art-works, waiting the attention of those who take the trouble to find them. For all future research projects in this period,

- 16.2.1 Evidence from documentary sources needs to be integrated with the physical evidence, and each allowed to challenge the other.
- 16.2.2 Consideration of art and art-historical studies should be included.

### 16.3 Chronology

The political and social shock of the Norman Conquest provides a firm enough date for the commencement of the later medieval period in England, if a slightly fuzzy one for significant change in material culture. Likewise for the end in the mid-16th century, the political and social shock of the ‘age of plunder’ (Hoskins) was accompanied by a profound economic reorganisation of land and resources, which approximates to changes in housing (the end of the hall house).

In the bigger picture, however, and disregarding the rise and fall of feudalism, and the elimination of the small landowner, the cultural milieu of the English countryside (manor and church, beast-drawn ploughs and manual haymaking) may be seen as a continuum,

established before and after the Norman Conquest, but broken only by the First World War. To aid the chronological definition of research in the late medieval period, therefore,

- 16.3.1 Milestones for the region within the continuum of economic and social development need to be identified.

#### 16.4 Landscape and land use

Field survey, excavation and collection of environmental data remain the most obvious approaches, though making use of the wealth of documentary sources is a necessary adjunct. For river valleys, a prerequisite of effective research may be to define the precise nature of groundwater conditions and flooding. This will make it possible to define areas that were suitable for permanent settlement, for seasonal settlement or for grazing, or areas where evidence of medieval archaeology is sealed below alluvium, making it invisible by normal archaeological reconnaissance methods. It will also allow us to chart the changing extent of land of these different types across time within this period. The following require further investigation:

- 16.4.1 The chronology of development and character of field systems and their relationship to settlement across the region needs to be further explored.
- 16.4.2 The character and organisation of ridge and furrow; field drainage.
- 16.4.3 The relation of surviving ridge and furrow to early field maps.
- 16.4.4 Identification of 'lost' ridge and furrow from old APs and LIDAR survey.
- 16.4.5 Evidence needs to be gathered for the extension of arable into forests and onto downland; assarts and early enclosure; hedge dates and types.
- 16.4.6 The management of water resources: water meadows and leats for mills.
- 16.4.7 The location of fishponds and fisheries; their relation to weirs and mills/ bridges.
- 16.4.8 Canals and artificial water bodies.
- 16.4.9 Sea fishing and coastal fish weirs/traps.
- 16.4.10 Deer farming and parks; deer leaps and traps; stud farms; rabbit warrens.
- 16.4.11 Forests and chases; the bounds of the true (as

well as the legal) forests; their topography and service buildings.

- 16.4.12 Timber cultivation and transportation; woodland banks and divisions.
- 16.4.13 Provision and marketing of firewood and charcoal.
- 16.4.14 Use of different cereal grains; introduction of rivet wheat; brewing.
- 16.4.15 The production of fodder such as the cultivation of common vetch and the importance of oats require further consideration
- 16.4.16 The growth of horticulture; the development of trade in herbs and spices for both culinary and medicinal use.
- 16.4.17 Rural settlements with anoxic conditions are rare – samples from these should be targeted, and analysed with particular attention to site formation processes.
- 16.4.18 Changes in fauna of major rivers in relation to pollution and habitat loss should be investigated.

#### 16.5 Social organisation

Documentary evidence is the major source of information about social organisation during this period, but it is seldom possible to rely on this to develop a picture of everyday life, particularly for the lower ranks in society. Integration of archaeology and records is essential. Some aspects of life, such as migration patterns and diet, can be informed by modern scientific approaches, which will include the following:

- 16.5.1 Stable isotope analysis of burials to investigate origins and diet may provide information of migration patterns and immigration from overseas.
- 16.5.2 Variations in diet may also reflect differences in social status and location in town/country.
- 16.5.3 The study of faunal remains, both by quantitative analysis and through analyses such as deficiencies evident in teeth or bones, should be routinely pursued for an indication of diet.

#### 16.6 Settlement

##### *Rural settlement*

National and regional studies of settlement types and patterns are beginning to appear, especially valuable

where they cross county boundaries, while it is as well to remember earlier multi-volume syntheses such as the *Domesday Geography* and the *Cambridge Agrarian History of England* which abound with useful information.

Topics and questions remain familiar from those raised long ago by Maitland (1897), Seebohm (1913), Gray (1915) and Hoskins (1955), though the data (on early field systems for example) has greatly increased. These include:

- 16.6.1 The origins and nature of nucleated village settlement.
- 16.6.2 The need to extend village morphology studies from Buckinghamshire to other areas.
- 16.6.3 The origins/continuation of dispersed settlement.
- 16.6.4 Continuity and contrast between Chiltern and Berkshire downs (fringe settlements on scarp edges).
- 16.6.5 Types of settlement on forest edges and commons.
- 16.6.6 The nature of dispersed settlement as farms/granges/moats/hamlets.
- 16.6.7 The character, distribution and chronology of moats.
- 16.6.8 Village shrinkage and abandonment; change from hamlets to farmsteads.
- 16.6.9 Evolution of 'farming counties', possibly origination before the Black Death.

#### *Manorial sites*

Manorial sites have attracted attention because of their prominence, but fundamental questions remain. These comprise:

- 16.6.10 The origins of manorial sites, their chronology and their relation to village formation.
- 16.6.11 Reasons for the abandonment of manorial sites.
- 16.6.12 The character of manorial sites (moated, relation to village plan).
- 16.6.13 Better definition of special types (eg royal manors, castles, ecclesiastical granges etc).
- 16.6.14 The character of peripheral settlements attracted to moated sites, granges, etc.
- 16.6.15 The character and status of manorial/gentry buildings.

#### *Towns*

This region has seen a significant quantity of excavations in large towns, some exemplary but still not all published. Small town surveys in the 1970s promoted agendas for action that have often been disregarded, and the successor surveys are more colourful but perhaps no more informative, while the questions remain. Key among these are the following.

- 16.6.16 What were the reasons for the survival and persistence of urban sites from the early medieval period?
- 16.6.17 What factors influenced the origins and growth of the principal towns?
- 16.6.18 How did the hierarchy of large and small towns, markets and ecclesiastical centres (former Minster towns) develop?
- 16.6.19 What was the distribution of markets and fairs, and why?
- 16.6.20 How does the topography and plan form of towns differ, and what are the key differences between small and large towns?
- 16.6.21 How did tenement patterns develop, and what was their relation to field patterns?
- 16.6.22 Where were the town fields and commons? How did they relate to liberty and parish boundaries?
- 16.6.23 What were the drivers for the formation of new towns, and for town extensions and retractions?
- 16.6.24 How does the survival of deposits vary within and between towns? How did the size of a town affect the management and disposal of waste?
- 16.6.25 Were there differences in the living conditions between small towns and larger conurbations, and if so, in what did these consist?

### **16.7 The built environment**

#### *Rural building*

The study of vernacular architecture has been a remarkable instance of a popular academic endeavour over the last half century, achieved in the absence of any organised research framework as a self-supporting empirical activity and producing a huge increase in knowledge and understanding. The more recent addition of widespread dendrochronological dating and more systematic research projects on specific topics has sharpened the

edge of our understanding. More research is however needed on the following topics:

- 16.7.1 The quality of buildings, framing/roof types as indications of class/status.
- 16.7.2 Rebuilding as reflecting wealth/agricultural change.
- 16.7.3 Changing building techniques in timber, stone and brick, and the chronology and distribution of use of different materials.
- 16.7.4 Crucks and box frames, and in particular, the chronology and distribution of framing types.
- 16.7.5 The chronology of the end of the construction of open halls, and of the start of the construction of continuous jetties.
- 16.7.6 Chronology and distribution of roof types, and in particular the change from crown-post to queen-post roofs.
- 16.7.7 Dating of buildings in local areas/regions as a guide to the chronology of change (eg recovery from Black Death).
- 16.7.8 Understanding regional differences in survival rates (eg extant stock of early peasant houses in Harwell and the Vale of White Horse, and of hall houses around Winchester).
- 16.7.9 The plan forms of farmsteads and the nature of subsidiary buildings, especially barns associated with monastic/institutional landlords.
- 16.7.10 The identification of 'squatter dwellings' on commons and wastes.
- 16.7.11 Buildings identified in written and pictorial sources.

### *Urban building*

As with rural vernacular, town houses and other buildings have benefited from a generation of close study, and much more is known, but more remains to be found. Topics that need further study include:

- 16.7.12 The origins and development of urban housing types (plan, gables and ridges in relation to streets).
- 16.7.13 Character and ranking of town houses.
- 16.7.14 Warehouses and storage cellars.
- 16.7.15 Origins of inns (wealdens used as); taverns in special cellars.

- 16.7.16 Halls of gilds and buildings of institutions.
- 16.7.17 Hospitals, colleges and almshouses. The association of hospitals with urban settlement in particular is currently insufficiently appreciated.
- 16.7.18 Location and character of parish churches and friaries.
- 16.7.19 Lost buildings identified in written and pictorial sources.
- 16.7.20 The development of specific building types using different materials in particular areas of towns and cities, and their relationship to social identity and status

## **16.10 Ceremony, ritual and religion**

### *Monastic houses*

Like castles, monasteries have attracted much archaeological attention, but continue to produce new aspects for study. Fundamental elements that still require study include:

- 16.10.1 The relation of pre-conquest churches to later churches and claustral buildings.
- 16.10.2 The character and chronology of major buildings.
- 16.10.3 Better understanding of subsidiary buildings, economic activities, water management and gardens.
- 16.10.4 Monastic life, diet, health and death.
- 16.10.5 Minor monastic and related sites (moated monastic sites).
- 16.10.6 Barns and granges.
- 16.10.7 Failed or temporary monastic houses.

### *Parish churches*

The parish church stands at the fountainhead of modern archaeology, and yet even after 150 years of study has much to reveal. Very few aspects of the church as a cultural indicator have been mapped or studied in regional terms, even though church types (such as the 'wool' church, steeples, or the early two-cell parish church) are well known. The study of the spatial distribution of these and other patterns of church types, together with the chronology of church building and rebuilding, the regional patterns of masonry and carpentry, of decoration, tracery and sculpture would be worthwhile.

Aspects that require particular attention include:

- 16.10.8 The chronology of church building/rebuilding and its relationship to the evolving liturgy.
- 16.10.9 Study of patrons and rectorial works to fabric.
- 16.10.10 Regional patterns of church types and chronology.
- 16.10.11 Location of church in village/parish plan.
- 16.10.12 Change from parochia to parish, and the role of chapels.
- 16.10.13 Regional patterns of masonry, decoration, windows, sculpture.
- 16.10.14 Chronology and types of roof, screens and seating.
- 16.10.15 Church monuments, plate, bells and windows.
- 16.10.16 Churchyards and their features; burials.
- 16.10.17 Rectory and Rectory farms; vicarages.

### 16.12 Warfare, defences and military installations

The early defences of the pre-conquest *burhs* were often the origin of later town walls, and though defended towns are few their standing remains have perhaps received less attention than buried sections.

Similarly much remains to be learnt from castles, which range from early earthwork constructions to royal and seigniorial centres such as Windsor. Their level of survival particularly in urban environments is not good. The modern fashion for discounting the defensive aspects of castles is given the lie by the upgrading of coastal defences in the light of invasion threats (eg Southampton, Portchester/Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight). The following measures should be prioritised:

- 16.12.1 Surviving sections of town defences need to be recorded.
- 16.12.2 Reconsideration of castle remains and sites, particularly in towns across the region, is needed.
- 16.12.3 The measures taken to upgrade medieval (and earlier) defensive sites, particularly on the coast, during the later medieval period, should be further studied in relation to contemporary events in political relations with the continent.

16.12.4 Given the importance of royalty in the region, castles should be considered in relation to major seigniorial establishments, such as the king's houses and the 'palaces' of bishops and magnates.

16.12.5 More investigation should be made of the relationship of castles and their landscape setting as manors with adjacent villages and fields, parks and forests (eg Portchester).

### 16.13 Material culture

Perhaps the most interesting recent development has been the results of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, and the realisation of the quantity of small metal objects that have been found. Pottery dominates the finds from excavations.

16.13.1 There is still a need for further study of the varieties and quality of pottery usage.

16.13.2 Small finds can be seen as important indicators of consumer activity in rural and urban households, and evidence for the influence of overseas trade and proximity to London may be identifiable. They may also indicate the presence and movement of noblemen and their retinues within and beyond the region. These lines of enquiry should be pursued.

16.13.3 Whether these influences also affected changes in use and status of pottery or whether they were the result of wider economic and social change should be investigated.

### 16.14 Trade and industry

Discoveries suggest that the pottery industry involved both large and small-scale production. There are important early examples of the use of brick (Eton and Windsor; Ewelme) and likewise floor tiles are very prevalent in institutional buildings. Stone quarrying is important in the Jurassic belt for fine limestone and stone slates, as also in chalk areas for chalk rubble and clunch. Stone types have been identified in some areas (eg Berkshire churches).

Cloth production was a major element in town economies and later in rural areas, but its archaeology is hard to identify, whether in relation to dyeing, fulling (mills) or tenter fields. Tanning was another major urban activity and in some places parchment was produced. Milling is widespread, and mills are best known from mill leats and post-medieval windmills.

Other products include coastal salt, iron and woodworking, from small domestic objects to ships. Despite good documentation and a wide assemblage of artefacts, the production sites and technology associated

with these industries are not well understood. The following should be actively sought:

- 16.14.1 Means and location of manufacture of small metal objects.
- 16.14.2 Patterns of marketing of small metal objects.
- 16.14.3 The location of the more persistent and the temporary production sites for pottery.
- 16.14.4 The means and places of production of brick and floor tiles.
- 16.14.5 Distribution of structures using brick and floor tiles should be examined for evidence of the sources of the materials, and the distance that these materials were transported ie the range of each industry.
- 16.14.6 Identification of quarry locations.
- 16.14.7 The means of transport (coastal, river and road) for stone.
- 16.14.8 Urban tanning sites and production of parchment.
- 16.14.9 Origins of fibre production.
- 16.14.10 Evidence for the survival of horizontal mills.
- 16.14.11 Distribution of coastal tidemills.
- 16.14.12 Salt production sites and the technology that they employed.
- 16.14.13 Identification of ironworking sites.
- 16.14.14 Production sites for wooden objects, including ships.
- 16.14.15 Study of the markings on casks as a means to identify their origins, and thus inform patterns of trade.
- 16.14.16 Identification and study of shipwrecks and their cargoes.
- 16.14.17 Mason's marks should be studied, not only to assist in understanding the organisation

of labour on major building projects, but also to investigate the movement of craftsmen and decorative styles.

## 16.15 Transport and communications

Use of the south coast ports for overseas trade is an obvious topic, but the coastal trade may have carried a greater bulk of materials (demonstrated by the distribution of objects such as Purbeck marble mortars). Use of the Thames is harder to demonstrate, and the use of Taynton stone in the White Tower does not prove use of the Thames for stone transport. Weirs and mills were certainly a hazard to navigation (and so mentioned in Magna Carta). The difficulty of navigation between Oxford and Reading is thought to have led to the increased importance of Henley as the transshipment port for the cereal grown in the south midlands and destined for London, just as it was anyway for exporting Chiltern products such as firewood. Although it had wharfage in Reading, and despite documentary information showing the links between Newbury and London for the cloth trade in the later medieval period, the use of the Kennet, and of other smaller rivers within the region, is poorly understood.

Road transport was always more important than is allowed, whether by pedlar, packhorse or two-wheeled cart. The following should be research priorities:

- 16.15.1 Evidence for coastal and overseas trading ports, which will inform patterns of exchange within Britain and with the continent.
- 16.15.2 Wharves and other evidence for river transport should be investigated wherever possible to demonstrate how the major rivers of the region functioned
- 16.15.3 River craft from this period are not well recorded and evidence for Thames barges, 'shouts', punts etc. should be more actively sought.
- 16.15.4 Evidence for the creation, diversion and maintenance of waterways and for industries such as milling and fisheries is needed.
- 16.15.5 The extent of road transport and bridges in the region needs further investigation, including evidence from documentary records.