

OA Research Seminar VI: Medieval urban provisioning c.1066-1485

Provisioning the backlands: recent work on animal bone and plant remains from Carlisle's medieval Lanes

Denise Druce & Ian Smith (OA North)

This talk will present the results of the faunal and plant remains from the northern Lanes, Carlisle. After the Roman site was abandoned, probably by the 5th century, several medieval tenements were created following the 're-establishment' of the city as a major centre from the mid-12th century onwards. The area examined formed the 'backlands' of properties behind the street frontage, initial activity within the five tenements examined was characterised by rubbish pits and wells. The Lanes themselves were established during the second half of the 13th century, providing separate access to these backlands, and activity intensified significantly, including the construction of several timber buildings. A range of industry-related and trade activities seem to have been taking place, including so far unique evidence for medieval cupellation of silver from lead ore, and the finds (including the animal bone and archaeobotanical remains) have provided a wealth of information, and raised many questions, about the provisioning of the everyday lives of the inhabitants.

Provisioning town and gown: the contribution of animal and plant remains from recent excavations in medieval Oxford

Rebecca Nicholson & Steve Teague (OA South)

Oxford was clearly an important place throughout the medieval period, at least in part due to its location at the conjunction of the rivers Thames and Cherwell and on the main north-south road from the south coast to the midlands. The extensive trading network between Oxford and London in the medieval period, based largely on the trade in wool, cloth and grain, was linked to rising prosperity in the 12th and 13th centuries. Rising in tandem, the university developed gradually in the 12th century to emerge in the 13th century as a major factor in the town's economy and this in turn attracted not only merchants and scholars but also groups of friars to settle there.

This talk will present results from several sites excavated by Oxford Archaeology in recent years, some from within the grounds of the present-day University Colleges. These excavations have produced not only the physical remains of earlier college buildings, associated features and artefacts, but also the physical remains of plants and animals which can provide a valuable insight into the foods available and consumed as well as their likely sources. Alongside items that would have been sourced locally are others from much further afield. To what extent do those foodstuffs – and especially fish – reflect the lifestyle and status of the town's inhabitants, and can we see changes in provisioning that may reflect changes in the hinterland?

Iron, charcoal, pottery, salt: urban provisioning from marginal rural landscapes in Eastern England

Graeme Clarke & Paul Spoerry (OA East)

This paper attempts to reveal the 'hard to see' effect on the growth of rural industries in response to the presence of urban places and their markets. Good agricultural land was seldom available for other uses in medieval England, whereas poor soils maintained as

woodland, or other marginal landscapes such as marsh or heath, could be more available for different kinds of economic exploitation. We attempt to see these landscapes, and the industries that developed there, in relation to the needs and opportunities present within major urban places nearby. In some cases the evidence lies entirely in the rural location, the commodities they provided being all but invisible to urban archaeology, whereas other products of marginal rural places are centre stage in the urban archaeological record, but hardly seen so far in their areas of manufacture.