

# EMASS

Review of the Early Medieval Archaeology  
Student Symposium, held at Cardiff  
University May 2007



Edited By  
Andy Seaman

CARDIFF STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY



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Cover Illustration: the bird motif is based upon an example identified on a uniquely preserved late-ninth century textile discovered in water-logged deposits during excavations (1989-1994) of the Llangorse crannog (Powys). The image was kindly drawn by Ian Dennis of the School of History and Archaeology, Cardiff University.



## **Preface**

The idea for post-graduate conference on early medieval archaeology came about for two principal reasons; firstly it can be argued that although TAG (Theoretical Archaeology Group Conference) and TRAC (Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference) are excellent conferences and forums of debate, they do not provide a consistent voice for early medievalists; nor do I believe that the explicitly 'theoretical' theme of these conferences is always constructive. Similarly conferences organised by the Society for Medieval Archaeology are not aimed explicitly at research students, and are often structured around focused themes. Presenting ongoing research is an integral element of carrying out a research project however; it allows ideas and theories to be discussed, criticised and developed through interaction with other students and academics. As such I felt that it would be beneficial to provide a forum in which research students could get together to present, discuss and debate their research in front of an academic audience. The second principal reason for organising a student symposium was my interest in, and concerns with, the application of archaeological theory within early medieval archaeology. I wanted to hear what other students made of recent theoretical advances, and how they were applying them to their research.

Although the chronological focus of EMASS was on the early medieval period this was not intended to be exclusive; speakers whose interests overlapped with the Roman and Post-Conquest periods were also invited, and indeed the breaking down of traditional period divides became major focus of the symposium. I also felt that there should not be strict session themes, rather students were invited to present on anything that they were interested in. The focus of EMASS was therefore on *discussion* and not dissemination. This broad-based focus produced an interactive and informal atmosphere, which contributed greatly to the nature and quality of the debates (and pub discussions). I felt strongly that there should not be an immediate pressure to fully publish the material from the symposium; there is little point in presenting work at a symposium which is already complete for publication, as this defeats the object of discussion. I was also aware that the pressure to publish may have put-off researchers from presenting work which is still in its early stages, but which they would like to air in front of an academic audience. Having said this, I do think that some sort of dissemination to a wider audience is very important, and as such it was decided to publish an online review which was to include the authors' abstracts and a general discussion. This volume is therefore intended to provide an impression of the topics covered and the debates that arose. All the paper abstracts bar those given by Bradley Hull and Sue Content, who were unable to contribute to this publication, have been included. Where the speakers are publishing fuller versions of their work they have indicated this in their abstracts. This review was prepared for online publication by Joseph Reeves of Oxford Archaeology, and I am extremely grateful to him for his valuable contribution.

## **Acknowledgements**

A large number of individuals and institutions helped to make the symposium such a success. Special thanks must go to the Society for Medieval Archaeology, the Cambrian Archaeological Association, and Maney Publishing for providing very generous sponsorship which kept the cost of the symposium within the grasp of the intended audience. Thanks must also go to (in no particular order) Joe Reeves, Dr Alan Lane, Penny Bickle, Dr Jacqui Mulville, Dr Steve Mills, Ian Dennis, Bob Jones, Dr Howard Williams, Dr Ewan Campbell, Jill Campbell, Dr Peter Guest, Paul Tasker, Karolina Ploska, Rose Hedley, and Paul and Peter Seaman, all of whom in various ways helped with the smooth running of the symposium. Special thanks must also go to all the speakers and session chairs, without whom the symposium would never have taken off. Finally I am extremely grateful to Professor John Hines, who was not only willing to support my original idea for a student symposium, but who also offered constant help and support throughout months of organisation.

Andy Seaman, Cardiff University, August 2007.

## Introduction

### Howard Williams, University of Exeter

The Early Medieval Student Symposium held at Cardiff in May 2007 marks a watershed for early medieval archaeology. As the organiser Andy Seaman outlined in the introduction, TAG and TRAC have become important venues where students of early medieval archaeology can present and discuss themes relevant to their work. However, it remains the case that a venue dedicated to early medieval archaeology has been lacking. The success of EMASS is therefore twofold. First, it was a stimulating event in its own right, perhaps the first of its kind. Seventeen papers addressed a range of important themes for the study of the early Middle Ages based on new and ongoing research. Second, Andy's conference has set up what is hoped will be an enduring precedent of Early Medieval Student Symposia, to be held at different venues each year.

In this brief introduction, I aim to set out what I perceived was important about the papers at the Cardiff conference by firstly outlining the main themes addressed by the speakers and then suggesting some broader issues and concerns for the future of early medieval archaeological student research. This is therefore very much a personal response to the event and should not in any way detract from the overall message: EMASS was a success!

### A Brief Synopsis of the Cardiff Symposium

There were seven research themes that I identified in the Cardiff papers:

1. Following the lead of an introduction by the organiser, Andy Seaman, who expressed the desire for a forum for debate but also an explicitly theorised early medieval archaeology, the first two papers critically appraised the theoretical structure of early medieval archaeology in very different ways. Sue Content considered the importance of studying the history of early medieval archaeology, identifying the impact of the Grimm's mythology and philology in inspiring the ideas and approaches of John Kemble to early Anglo-Saxon graves. In so doing her paper emphasised the essential need to investigate the concepts and traditions in our academic discourse to further future study. Focusing on the present, Herdis Hølleland and Joseph Reeves considered new methodologies for integrating students into the interpretative process, showing how new technologies can democratise interpretation during medieval fieldwork.

2. The remaining themes share a focus on understanding change and considering the relationship between the early medieval material world and the constitution and reproduction of identities in the past. Three papers addressed, again in contrasting ways, the transition from the Roman world and the birth of the Middle Ages. Rob Collins considered the utility of the term 'Late Antiquity' when applied to the British Isles and found the term inherently problematic despite its recent popularity and application to overcome the false-divide of Roman vs. Anglo-Saxon/Medieval. This paper (despite the author's absence) sparked one of the longest debates of the conference! Nick Wells and James Gerrard addressed what coins and pottery respectively can tell us about the ending of Roman Britain, suggesting in different ways how it is possible to re-align current perspectives through detailed analyses of archaeological assemblages.

3. The relationship between texts and material remains came to the fore in three papers. Two of these, in different ways, considered landscapes and boundaries in perception and reality: Timothy Jones questioned the use of post-Conquest texts for reconstructing the early medieval landscape, while Andrew Ferrero argued that the Norman invasion brought with it novel understandings of borders. Oliver Reuss' appraisal of the *Hisperica Famina* also considered texts, but this time in relation to the interpretation of church architecture. He demonstrated the difficulty of using a text for inferring the character of an early medieval building without a full awareness of why the text was produced and for what audience.

4. Settlement archaeology was considered on a number of scales. Rebecca Boyd considered how we interrogate the social significance of the 'Norse' house as an arena for the expression of identities in Western Britain and Ireland, using access analyses of house architecture as utilised for later Prehistory and the later Middle Ages. On a landscape-scale, Gill Boazman considered the importance of combining the study of ecclesiastical and secular site-types in early medieval Ireland. She showed the value of looking at detailed regions and how different site-types were embedded within an evolving early medieval landscape.

5. Meanwhile, the study of burial data continues to hold interest, and five papers considered different aspects of early medieval mortuary practices. Adrian Maldonado presented a discussion of the landscape situation of Pictish burial sites. Kirsten Jarrett's paper embraced the study of both burial rites and their landscape situation in discussing their use in expressing concepts of social and ethnic identity in the south-west of Britain in the fifth to seventh centuries. More scientific applications were presented by Lizzy Craig in her presentation of a 'biocultural' perspective on middle Anglo-Saxon cemeteries integrating bone with artefactual and contextual data. David Klinge presented a comparison of late Romano-British and early Anglo-Saxon burial and the important information that the bone data can reveal. Finally, Bradley Hull presented the results of an extensive stable isotope analysis of human and animal remains from early Anglo-Saxon England where the correlation with mortuary variability has begun to reveal some interesting patterns.

6. Finally, two papers considered in an explicitly theorised way how portable artefacts mediated and constituted identities. Ben Jervis addressed later Anglo-Saxon pottery from Sussex, considering how the use and consumption of pottery may have been a defining feature of later Anglo-Saxon local and regional identities constituted through *habitus*. Meanwhile Letty Ten Harkel considered the overt political discourses embedded in the minting, distribution and designs of coinage. She presented the argument that changing messages of regional identity were being expressed through the tenth-century coinage of Lincoln.

7. Cross-cutting these six themes, the seventh and final theme addressed was that of early medieval landscape. This theme was implicit or explicit in many papers. For example, it was manifest in the discussion of the distribution of ecclesiastical sites and settlements in early medieval Ireland (Boazman), considering the urban identity of Lincoln (Harkel), the significance of burial location (Maldonado & Jarrett) and the structure of estates and boundaries (Jones & Ferrero).

## **Issues for the Future of Early Medieval Archaeology**

I want to split this section in two: what was presented and how it was presented.

### ***What was said***

While a surprisingly high number of the papers at Cardiff were of good quality, it seems fair to say that there seems to be no single 'big theory' being employed, although a focus on identity-construction and display seems common to many papers. The only traditional 'big question' addressed was the ending of Roman Britain; other traditional big questions such as early medieval migrations, ethno-genesis, the process of conversion to Christianity and kingdom formation didn't get a look-in! Other absent 'big themes' in both prehistoric and historical archaeologies include the nature of personhood, social memory and the nature of materiality in the early Middle Ages.

Many papers presented the rationale of their research as self-evident or as modifications and extensions of existing work. Only a few papers explicitly suggested challenging existing perspectives and critically adopting new theories and methods or applying them to new data-sets. To be deliberately argumentative, there was very little that was new here although much that was good.

Of particular concern, no recent books or articles by early medieval archaeologists were frequently highlighted by presenters as an inspiration for the archaeological theories being used. This is a concern, because if postgraduates are not identifying them and using the most recent theories in early medieval archaeology and associated areas, then the question remains: whose failing is this? The lack of a single theory or early medieval guru is a good thing I feel. However, it is worrying that there are no recent publications causing debate, dissent or academic conflict that students are picking up on! What is going on here? I suspect they are out there, but students aren't picking up on them! Surely we can do better than stating a desire to 'get away from culture-history'!

Another area of concern is the application of the theories adopted. Papers were varied in their ability to take a theoretical question and apply it with a clear and coherent methodology to a given data-set. Or at least, some papers were very good at hiding this! Understandably, many of the papers are by those in early stages of their research, and these papers were often honest about this fact. This is fine. Yet the balance between theories, methods and data is a strength of the best research. Data without theory and method are meaningless, but so is theory without method and data. Method on its own is simply dull!

The issue of terminology is always at the fore in early medieval archaeology. For a period in which there are more names *for* the period than any other (Late Antiquity, early medieval, early historic, early Christian, etc etc) it often gets confusing. But also embedded within it are ethnic and cultural labels as well as regional and religious ones. It is a minefield for students to pick their way through what can be said and about what. I remain bewildered and I wish students all the success in navigating through it! What shouldn't be forgotten though is how much this really does matter; the very words we employ have a profound effect on how we configure our work and define our research questions. The best research will make clear use of terminology, and if new terms are adopted, explain their use.

In conclusion, I would argue that while there was much good research presented at Cardiff, new theoretical approaches are desperately needed, sensitively applied to the data-sets available using explicit methodologies. Generic discussions of identity will simply not do! Similarly, presenting the rationale for research as self-evident because someone has done something like it before is also concerning. Let's see if the next student symposium can respond to this, because despite some superb papers presented at Cardiff, Andy Seaman's dream of a theorised early medieval archaeology has yet to be fully realised!

### ***How it was said***

The second area concerns the 'lot' of postgraduate researchers and my concerns about how students present themselves and situate themselves within academic discourse. The blessing of student symposia is a relatively stress-free environment in which to present new ideas. The down-side is the fear of ghettoising postgraduates and isolating them within separate conference-events. Many of the better presentations were clearly aware of this dilemma and were using the symposia as one venue among many to try-out their ideas. In conversation it is clear that students were also presenting at TAG, others at TRAC, some to the Leeds International Medieval Congress. This balance of integration and a separate symposium seems to me to be the best way forward for postgraduate students.

Student symposia are important events for the development of student research skills and presentation skills. Some individuals and (I must say this correlated a little with particular institutions) showed themselves very successful at this. Communicating research is a skill in itself and many are to be congratulated for their clear presentations. Yet in the world of Powerpoint, we are configured to a particular media for communicating research. What about innovation? What about new ways of presenting? What about round-tables as ways of generating more debate to break down the audience vs. presenter divide? What about utilising different media to communicate ideas and concepts? What about using early medieval landscapes and artefacts themselves as a means of communicating this research? Students need to think of different ways to move beyond the standard 20-minute presentation to develop alternate ways of teaching and research-presentation. As they stand, the better early medieval research students are looking innovative behind the podium, but a little staid in the media they are employing!

The event was also important for creating dialogue, and again, from observation, I could see some students availing themselves of this opportunity and others clearly unaware that the event was about more than giving a 20-minute paper! The trip to Cosmeston medieval village and the pub afterwards were as important for this discussion as the papers themselves.

Yet a more pressing concern was the rarity of overt disagreement! Now being nice to each other is essential and the Cardiff symposium created a positive climate for the exchange of ideas. But this doesn't mean that we all have to agree with each other! In the 'friendly' environment of a student symposia, there should be room for arguments (friendly ones), criticisms of existing work and positive and constructive assessments of where things should be going. We are all passionate about this, that is why we are spending our time studying early medieval archaeology. Let's not forget that we are entitled to apply that passion to disagreeing with each other!

Linked to this is that way too many students 'played safe'. This is completely understandable in the careful balance students are obliged to adopt in academic discourse between 'looking original' and 'respecting their elders', between fulfilling the expectations of the funding bodies and following one's own research ideas and directions. Now poor research and unfounded and spurious arguments are to be expected in all conferences and ideally should be kept to a minimum. However, I found myself asking: Where were the outrageous papers? Where were the mad ideas? Where were the papers that set out to deliberately challenge existing paradigms, to be controversial and to encourage a debate? At the next symposium I will expect the same high standard of student research and presentations. But I also want to see more open debate and far less deference for the agendas of students' supervisors! Surely it is only in a climate of experimentation and heated and passionate debate that we can move our ideas and approaches forward as well as having fun disagreeing with each other! On a more positive note, there was certainly plenty of humour (intended and unintentional) in the papers that I found most encouraging.



**Conclusion**

The 'buzz' of the Cardiff event was difficult to deny. It appears that the ground-swell of opinion among the postgraduate delegates was that this initiative will be continued. A second meeting is planned for Exeter in 2008. Finally, congratulations to all who took part and may there be further EMASS events in the near future!

## **A few things I want to say about Early Medieval Archaeology**

**Andrew Seaman, Cardiff University**

As means of an introduction to the symposium in this paper I briefly reflected upon my comparatively short personal experiences of researching the late antique/early medieval period in Britain; by doing this I attempted to reveal my main inspirations for organising the symposium. I highlighted and explored some of the strengths and weaknesses which I feel early medieval research currently possesses. Strengths include a largely jargon free discourse, and dynamic and expanding research culture, whereas a major weakness is the failure of early medieval researchers to engage fully with recent theoretical advances within the wider social sciences.

I then went on to consider the position of early medieval archaeology within the wider context of British archaeology, and questioned the position of 'archaeological theory' within our discourses in more detail. I propose that we should embrace archaeological theory to a greater extent, however this does not have to mean that we must abandon all of our traditional research questions, or accept all new theories uncritically; after all we are archaeologists, not theoreticians. I do believe that it is time to critically reconsider some aspects of our traditional discourse however, such as the strong research emphasis on 'economy' and 'social structure', the relationships between individuals and their 'natural' environment, and our use of textual evidence. Early medieval archaeology needs a strong and self-aware theoretical basis from which to approach interpretation. We must therefore embrace and contribute to developments within archaeological theory; however we must do this as part of the wider social sciences, and not as the 'hand maiden of history'.

## **Digging Perspectives at Medieval Wicken**

**Herdis Hølleland, University College London, and Joseph Reeves, Oxford Archaeology**

Our paper was an introduction to fieldwork we conducted during July 2006 at the Medieval site of Wicken, Northamptonshire. We created an online wiki ([www.wicken-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.wicken-archaeology.org.uk)) and provided students and staff with access to it from the trench edge. The project was conducted under the moniker of Digging Perspective; a nod to Ingold's (2000) Dwelling Perspective. The paper presented has previously been published elsewhere (Reeves & Hølleland 2007) and the authors are grateful to Andrew Seaman for his invitation to share this work with a wider audience. The authors will be the first to admit that they are not students of Medieval Archaeology, not least *Early Medieval Archaeology*, but through favourable circumstances they have hopefully demonstrated some potentials in future fieldwork.

The Digging Perspective came into being as a result of the desire to undertake an anthropological investigation of the archaeological process. By doing so we aimed to provide a multi-vocal account of a modern excavation under which the concept of 'interpretation at the trowel's edge' (Andrews *et al.* 2000) can be examined first hand. Extending this methodology beyond the limits of the excavator's trowel, we examined interpretation at both the excavation's and community's edges. In this way, an anthropology of archaeology was recorded; we aimed to not only 'document the documentation' (Hodder in Bailey 2005) but also document the entire process of archaeological interpretation and dissemination into the wider community. A simple paradox drove our work; no single person can completely understand the workings of an archaeological excavation, yet a single person is required to assume final responsibility.

The paper concerned itself with the archaeological theory associated with Web 2.0 content generation and wikis in particular. Our wiki was completely unmoderated; much of the resulting content was superficially unrelated to archaeology and often potentially damaging to the project as a whole. 'Andy wears bras' was a comment accidentally unleashed onto the symposium as an example of user-generated content. The creation and dissemination of archaeological knowledge in this style was described at the time of excavation as 'anarchic'; we used our time within the conference to explain the theory behind this anarchy and demonstrate the true worth and potentials of such an approach. The authors did not present the wiki as a digital panacea for the modern excavation, instead we tried to test the software within an archaeological environment and were reporting on some of our findings.

A fellow conference delegate remarked to Reeves afterwards that he did not like our 'post-modern' approach, largely because he preferred the 'professional' attitude. 'Professionalism' seemed to be the upholding of traditional knowledge

creation and dissemination techniques with no consideration of alternatives. However, we hope that our paper shed light upon new methods of recording that may be beneficial to the archaeological process.

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## **The Utility of Late Antiquity**

### **Rob Collins, Portable Antiquities Scheme**

The transition from the late Roman Empire to Early Medieval Western Europe has been most successfully encapsulated in the concept of Late Antiquity over the past two decades. Late Antiquity, with its emphasis on transformation and transition between the Roman and Early Medieval periods, has been a welcome change from the ‘decline and fall’ scenarios that have dominated the period since Gibbon’s work in the late eighteenth century. More recently, however, there has been a backlash against this concept.

However, when Late Antiquity is compared to its ‘older sibling’, Classical Antiquity, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, it is a cultural concept rather than a true historical period, and second, the attributes of (Classical or Late) Antiquity flourish under the auspices of a strong state.

Thus, the concept of Late Antiquity holds against the scrutiny of its sharpest critics if Brown’s original thesis is retained – that Late Antiquity is a period reflective of cultural aspects of the late Roman Empire and monotheistic religion. As long as this cultural definition is remembered, we can continue to speak of a Late Antique world. However, Late Antiquity cannot be conflated with basic cultural continuity from the Roman period into the Early Medieval period. The Roman Empire was regionally diverse, and this diversity was further enhanced in the post-Roman centuries with the loss of a geographically vast state superstructure. The retention of Late Antique cultural traits must be contextualised, particularly in reference to processes of transmission. How and why were such cultural aspects transmitted through time? To what extent has the society transformed from its late Roman ancestor? These questions must be born in mind, and further enhance an appreciation of the Diaspora of Early Medieval Europe.

## **Ending with a Bang or a Whimper? Coin use in fifth century Britain.**

### **Nicholas A. Wells, Cardiff University**

In the study of late Roman coinage in Britain it helps to be an optimist. The problem is that, as Richard Reece has remarked with his usual succinctness, ‘facts are thin on the ground; fantasies grow like weeds’ (2002, 63) and this has led to widely differing ideas as to how, why and when the end of Roman Britain came about (for instance Faulkner 2000; Dark 2000 with Esmonde Cleary 1989 in the middle ground) – and, of course, the role (or absence of role) of coinage; that most dateable of objects.

Facts (whatever they are) are indeed thin on the ground: documentary sources do not give any sure indication of how long coin use went on into the fifth century while the coins themselves do not and cannot help us for one simple reason – coinage was never struck and issued in a continuous stream, but rather in bursts as illustrated by Figure 1. The figure shows the peaks and troughs of coin supply to Britain as extrapolated from 140 excavated assemblages.

### British Average Coin Loss (after Reece 1991)

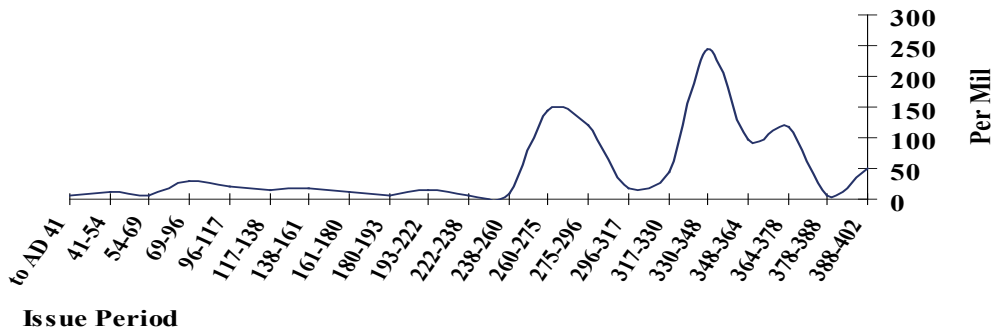


Figure 1: Average Coin Loss in Britain (after Reece 1991).

The graph, though, does not reflect absolute reality; for instance the earlier coin issues will have been extracted from circulation (by hoarding or restriking) thus smoothing out that part of the curve. However it does show very clearly the peaks and troughs of coin supply in the late Roman period. It is apparent, for instance, that coinage of the period AD 296-317 is very rare on sites in Britain while that of 378-88 is almost non-existent. Nevertheless coins were still being used, only they were those of preceding periods.

This has implications for the longevity of coin use in Britain. The last bronze coinage to arrive in bulk were the VICTORIA AVGGG and (to a lesser extent) SALVS REIPVBLICAE issues of AD 388-395. Silver and gold coinage carries on slightly later, mostly struck up to AD 402 but with some struck in the reign of Constantine III (AD 407-411). Here the story of coinage traditionally ends until the mid-seventh century. However it should be clear that the date of these last issues of coinage may bear no relationship to their longevity of circulation.

Analyses of late hoards show that examples with the latest coin dating to 395-402 (Arcadius/Honorius) show a later internal composition pattern than those with later coins (i.e. of Constantine III). Meanwhile, re-evaluation of excavation assemblages and widespread reporting of metal-detecting finds have increased both the frequency and distribution of bronze coins dating from 402. Certainly evidence for post-402 coin supply and use is increasing, though determining exactly the nature of the supply and when coin-use ceased is at present elusive.

The future is bright (which is why it is good to be an optimist!); the Portable Antiquities Scheme is regularly reporting new finds of fifth century coins across Britain while analyses of important hoards such as that from Hoxne (Guest 2005) and general syntheses (for instance the first three papers in Cook & Williams 2006) ask new questions of an expanding dataset. A Bang or a Whimper? The good thing is that there are still grounds for debate.

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## **Taking the Fifth: Methodological approaches and the latest Romano-British pottery**

**Dr James Gerrard, Pre-Construct Archaeology London**

The period from AD 400-450 saw a critical transformation in how life was lived in Britain. The end of Roman authority, the sundering of long-standing links with the Mediterranean and the emergence of new social, economic and political trajectories all occurred within this fifty year span (Esmonde-Cleary 1989). Yet these five decades are among some of the most archaeologically dark to confront the student of Britain's past. For me the gap is illusory (Gerrard 2004), the product of archaeological analysis and this paper attempted to show some approaches that might help to close it.

There are very few archaeologists who would date any Romano-British pottery to after AD 400 (Fulford 1979) and there are just as few specialists who would date Early Anglo-Saxon artefacts to before AD 450 – a date largely derived from Bede's dating of the supposed *adventus Saxonum* (Lucy 2000, 17). The problem is essentially methodological and related to how we date deposits and artefacts. After the importation of the latest Roman coins *c.* AD 388-402 it becomes extremely difficult to date a relative sequence. This problem cannot be easily resolved. Nevertheless some suggestions can be made that might go some way to shedding light on the dark years between AD 400 and AD 450.

Instead of looking for fifth-century 'Romano-British' or 'sub-Roman' vessel forms, a more profitable approach might be to look changes in the composition of ceramic assemblages. Can a relative sequence of changes in supply be constructed that might take us beyond AD 400? Unpublished work by Scott Martin in Essex suggests that there may be mileage in such an approach and a similar approach to coin hoards has yielded dividends (Guest 1993). Furthermore, the fifth century was a time of social change: can this be seen in compositional changes in the proportions of vessel forms present in the latest 'Roman' groups?

I do not know whether the approaches advocated in this paper will work. I have suspicions that they may and there is an increasing body of late Roman ceramic data generated by developer-funded work that needs to be assessed in these terms. The challenge is to take these ideas forward and demonstrate their validity.

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## **A bio-cultural approach to Middle Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in northern England**

**Lizzy Craig, University of Sheffield**

Traditionally two distinct horizons have been identified in the funerary archaeology of the Middle Anglo-Saxon period (*c.* AD 650-850): the cessation of apparently pagan practices and the beginning of churchyard burial. It is increasingly apparent that churchyard burial did not become the norm until the 10th century and that the most commonly used model for the preceding period - E. T. Leed's "final phase" model - fails to account for the diverse range of Middle Anglo-Saxon funerary practices and burial locations that are little understood. Previous discussion of Middle Anglo-Saxon burial rites has typically focused on southern England, and is usually limited to specific burial types (e.g.

barrow burials) or focussed on a specific issue (e.g. the impact of Christianity). Where synthesis *has* been undertaken (e.g. by Andy Boddington and Helen Geake) the skeletal data have been neglected, while published site reports rarely exceed comparison of grave-goods with age and sex. The funerary archaeology of the Middle Anglo-Saxon period is, thus, in need of an interdisciplinary analysis, integrating a wider range of osteological evidence with study of grave goods, cemetery morphology and landscape setting: the kind of approach which has been successful in earlier and Later Anglo-Saxon research. This will permit new insights into the social strategies of a period characterised by the emergence of more stable social hierarchies and the establishment of the Christian Church.

This presentation focussed on the chronological, geographical and theoretical background to my ongoing PhD project, including the methodological approach I intend to take in addressing these issues through a bio-cultural study of burial archaeology of the Middle Anglo-Saxon cemeteries of the north-east of England.

### **“Pictish” Burials in the Landscape**

**Adrian Maldonado, University of Glasgow**

Cemeteries of long cist and cairn/barrow graves characterise the early medieval archaeology of Scotland. Burials from these sites have been consistently radiocarbon dated to roughly AD 300-800, which corresponds with the “Pictish” period, but long cist cemeteries are part of a wider tradition extending across Western Europe and the Mediterranean in the fifth-seventh centuries (Halsall 1995). Barrows and cairns, especially square ones, are more limited to the Pictish cultural zone, and are often closely associated with Pictish symbol stones.

In the Lowlands (south of the Mounth), these cemeteries are found either at parish boundaries or closely associated with later churches. This may show that parish boundaries were laid out while these early cemeteries were still active or visible. If so, this demonstrates the antiquity of the “multiple estates” or thanages which the parishes eventually replaced (Barrow 2003).

In the Highlands, the cemeteries are not used as territorial markers, but rather occur alongside secular centres such as brochs, souterrains, and later castles. The central location of Highland cemeteries indicates that land was divided into more localized households or estates. Interestingly, in Northern England a similar secularised system (or, one church per village) is commonly associated with the Viking Age (Carver 1998), but in northern Scotland we may thus have evidence for it much earlier.

Cemeteries of both types have much in common in Scotland: the vast majority of burials are flexed, supine, without grave goods, orientated west-east, and use the same form of upright-slab cist. All these aspects are associated with Christianity, but these sites are not churchyards nor are the graves marked with crosses. However, they are all abandoned by c. 800 AD, which fits in with a historical switch to churchyard burial throughout Western Christendom (O’Brien 1999). It is now safe to say that both cairn/barrow and long cist burial rites were contemporary, and are simply two variations within a single Scotland-wide culture of protected inhumation with roots in the late Iron Age. All this should make us question what we think of as “Christian” or “pagan”.

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## Burial, Ritual, Religion and Identity in Early Medieval Southwest Britain

Kirsten Jarrett, University of Sheffield

This paper argues that Anglo-Saxon colonists were categorised as a pagan ‘barbarian other’ by the western British elite; and that *Romanitas* provided a structural opposition upon which the British elite might have based their ethnic identity. Nonetheless, both the textual and material evidence suggest that the *British elite* saw themselves as ethnically distinct from the *Romani*: within the material evidence, the symbols of *Romanitas* are ambiguously combined with those of native ‘tradition’.

A significant example is the association of ‘Romano-Christian’ west-east burials with late La Tène-style enclosure graves and platform cairns (comparable to graves in the north and west of Britain and in Ireland). And in highland zones, ‘prehistoric’ menhirs formed the focus for some elite burials; and prehistoric-style standing stones carried Latin memoria inscriptions containing Roman names and titles commemorating elites. In those parts of the lowland zone in which access to new symbols of *Romanitas* was limited, the Roman past provided a cultural resource: Romano-British ‘antiques’ appear within post-Roman ritual contexts, whilst the native past inspired the imitation of prehistoric barrows.

It is proposed that British identity was restructured after the middle of the sixth century. As the Anglo-Saxon elite increasingly had access to Byzantine culture via the Frankish kingdoms, which devalued the impact of *Romanitas* in distinguishing British identity, it became necessary to reconstruct ‘Britishness’: within this context, ‘tradition’ came to hold a more significant role as the British elite looked back to an idealised pre-Roman native past. The southwest British elite may have emulated burial rites seen as ‘ancestral’ as part of a process of legitimising authority, manipulating ethnic identity to justify ‘rightful’ claims to power over their homeland. Enclosure graves, barrows and cairns became more widespread; tightly contracted burials, comparable with the ‘sacrificial’ deposits of late pre-Roman Wessex, also occurred.

‘Heroic’ mythologies now provided models for national identity, with the evocation of ‘shared’ memories acting as a binding mechanism to unite the fragmenting elite. Language remained important in the definition of British identity; in this context *cives* became *Combrogēs* (‘fellow countrymen’), united in their opposition to the Anglo-Saxon *hostes*. Brittonic titles and names linguistically and epigraphically datable to or after the middle of the sixth century demonstrate the increasing appeal of ‘traditional’ forms of power. However, these mechanisms ultimately failed, as the Anglo-Saxon elite, partly in order to de-construct their former efficacy, assimilated many of these practices.

The question was raised as to what extent these processes parallel developments outside the southwest. In reply, it was argued that, although regional variations are evident, these practices nonetheless are part of a more widespread development, and as such may reflect a common response to use burial to assert a pan-Brittonic identity.

## Can We Really Use The *Liber Landavensis* To Reconstruct pre-Norman Estate Boundaries?

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Several features in the boundary clauses within the Llandaff Charters indicate that these had at least been rewritten in the post-conquest period rather than copying from pre-existing charters. The evidence comprises three categories: the dating of Latin forms; reference to post-conquest features; and correspondence with other late boundaries. From this it can be concluded that it is unsafe to regard these boundaries as pre-conquest, regardless of whether the rest of the charter is genuine.

Charter 140 uses *oculam* (Evans 1893: 140) in its thirteenth or fourteenth century usage as a ‘hole’. Charter 223 seems to use *erigo* (Evans 1893: 224) in its twelfth century meaning of disturbed ground. Charter 233 seems to use *custodia* (Evans 1893: 234) in its thirteenth century meaning of a division of church property. Charter 240 has translated the *Historia Britonum*’s *puteus* with the Welsh *bet* (grave). Since *puteus* does not acquire the meaning of grave until the eleventh century, this is a late, albeit possibly immediately pre-conquest, usage. The most certain physical feature that must be post-conquest is charter 165’s *mainaur tnomur* (Evans 1893: 166) which must be Chepstow Castle constructed in the late eleventh century.

The most striking feature of the correspondence with later boundaries is that in Gwent Iscoed the charters, as opposed to the churches, only seem to claim lands occupied by the Bigod and De Clare families, with whom the see was in dispute at the end of the thirteenth century (Howell 1975). It is noteworthy that since, contra previous studies, the boundaries of Charter 235b, Castell Conscuit, place it east of the Nedern and those of the Charter 244, Lann Mihacgel Lichrit, place it west of the Nedern, no de Bohun lands are claimed in the Llandaff Charters despite their Churches being part of the diocese. This includes land at Dewstow known to have been held by the see, it seems to be linked to Humphery de Bohun having already come to terms with the bishopric (Howell 1975: 272).

This pattern continues with the monastic lands, charters 75, 165, 180b, 218 and 223 all seem to respect the monastic estate boundaries mapped by Williams (1979: vi-vii plan 1; 1990: 99, fig 17; 2001: 210 fig 102). In the case of charters 180b and 218 the boundaries forego the obvious geomorphological ones in favour of the monastic ones and a similar case can be made for the northern boundary of the charter 244. Therefore, since the terms of charter 218 explicitly grant the whole estate, it seems likely that portions have been removed in order to endow monasteries and it is these truncated estates that are being claimed. Therefore charter 244 provides a *terminus post quem* of 1302 when Plataland was exchanged by the Cistercians for other Bigod land (Courtney 1983: 221), while the Latin charters 140 and 233 indicate they are no earlier than the thirteenth century.

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## Never trust a text: Rediscovering “De oratorio” in *Hisperica Famina*

### Oliver Reuss, University College Dublin

The long description of an early Irish timber church in the seventh century text *Hisperica Famina* offers an opportunity to understand the nature of wooden churches in early medieval Ireland. Historians and archaeologists have tried to reconstruct this particular church examining and interpreting the textual description. Herren (1974) and Harbison (1982) both dreamed up church buildings that make limited structural/visual sense, while Brady (1997) cannot make up his mind whether to read this text in a figurative or literal way. This paper will attempt to answer Brady’s dilemma.

The text itself describes an actual church and not an oratory as previously argued. The outside is constructed out of beams similar to those used in the Pre-Conquest church in Greenstead Essex. The interpretation of the word *oratorium* as being used to describe a building made out of wood prior to 789 AD in the Irish Annals can no longer be maintained. The fact that the word *oratorium* is used for the first time in the *Hisperica Famina* with the adjective *lapideum* added might suggest that the word meant a wooden church before this time. On the other hand the *Hisperica Famina* made a special reference to a wooden *oratorium* and so the argument can be put vice versa as well.

The roof is constructed as a common rafter roof because of the absence of the description of any internal roof support. The interior is not described in great detail, but it can be argued that the word *porticus* is not used in its meaning as an archway or an entrance but as an equivalent for sanctum or chancel. This sanctum is separated from the nave by choir-screens with superstructures such as arches.



Unfortunately this text cannot be used as an architectural drawing or description of a seventh-century Irish church because of the absence of any archaeological evidence from Ireland and due to the context of the text itself, namely as a poem. Furthermore, comparing the archaeological evidence and the description of the church it becomes obvious that the building involved is 'a' church and consequently not necessarily the church of the monk in Ireland who wrote the text. Therefore *de oratorio* in the *Hisperica Famina* is an insight into the knowledge of architecture, in particular church architecture of the western world.

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### **About the House, a Social and Spatial Archaeology of Norse Houses in Ireland and Western Britain, A.D. 800 – 1100**

**Rebecca Boyd, University College Dublin**

Houses are vitally important sources of evidence for the reconstruction of past societies and culture. Domestic spaces are, both consciously and sub-consciously, used and manipulated to project the social and cultural identities and values of their occupants (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, Kent 1993). The Norse houses of Ireland and Western Britain provide an ideal opportunity to explore this concept. These houses are culturally distinctive, displaying a set of common physical characteristics which contrast greatly with both earlier and contemporary native houses. These similarities suggest a dominant regional Norse culture, where architectural traditions were maintained to actively preserve or even create a "Viking" cultural identity (Larsen and Stummann Hansen 2001). This paper introduces new research which is investigating how spatial analysis can help us understand these characteristically Norse houses and the people who lived in them.

Access analysis examines the relationships between distinct spatial units as they are expressed in boundaries, access ways and permeability from the view of an outsider. The underlying theory is that private spaces are located deeper within the building and are less accessible to the outsider. By following the access routes from open, public to deeper, private space, levels of movement, control and power within the building can be traced (Foster 1989a, 1989b, Hillier and Hanson 1984). Initial applications of access analysis to Level 8 from Wood Quay Dublin (Wallace 1992a), revealed that distinct patterns of access and movement exist within the buildings. The analysis also showed that access to the rear yards and outbuildings (supposedly private space) varied from plot to plot. Access to rear yards was typically through the main building, but in four plots, access could be gained by circumnavigating this building. This raises the question of whether the yards are truly private spaces, and also raises the issue of who is controlling the distribution of space at household, plot and street level. Future work will investigate if the patterns visible at Level 8 are reproduced at other stratigraphic levels.

Previous work has indicated that Viking houses on South Uist exhibit both Norse and Pictish identities (Sharples and Pearson 1999), and it is possible that other houses may exhibit dual identities. Native Irish and Norse alliances were often sealed by marriage, and if an Irish woman controlled the domestic sphere, could her ethnic origins be visible in the organisation of her house? The Irish houses are well suited to investigate these questions as their limited lifespan (twenty to thirty years) would equate well with the lifespan of the power figures within a household. If a majority of houses indicate strong levels of non-Norse influence in their spatial arrangements, this may undermine the existence of a dominant regional Norse identity.

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## **Across The Great Divide: Inter-connections between Ecclesiastical and Secular Site-types in Early Medieval Ireland**

**Gill Boazman, University College Cork**

There are two problems with previous interpretations of early medieval settlement in Ireland. Firstly they formed part of the foundation myth of Irish nationalism. In this myth ecclesiastical sites represent the Golden Age of saints and scholars and ringforts the homesteads of independent farmers so essential to De Valera's vision of a rural pre-colonial idyll.

The second problem stems from the enormity of material and documentary evidence from the period. Analysis of this abundance was simplified by the division of the period into ecclesiastical and secular. The corollary of this was that the study of the two major site types, ecclesiastical sites and ringforts, was separated.

The result of this was a monolithic view of the period unaware of both the subtleties of inter-site connection and variation in function and meaning within the same site-type. In the late 1990s this generality of approach began to be replaced by smaller regional studies. This tighter focus engendered a concern with connectivity rather than segregation.

The present study is of three parishes in Co. Cork. It examines early medieval site-types in relation to their landscape and to each other.

Boundaries are zonal rather than linear. They are formed by mountains and the marshy surrounds of rivers in the valley bottom. Ringforts extend in lines up the river valley sides. Ecclesiastical sites lie at a slightly lower altitude and acentrically to ringforts. However they are invariably on raised ground.

The bulk of ringforts respect a major ecclesiastical site such as Rosscarbery by about two km. Three large ringforts and a few smaller ones lie close to the site. Documentary evidence indicates considerable ecclesiastical land holding in the parish. Thus it is possible that of the ringforts adjacent to the ecclesiastical site, the larger were the dwelling places of aristocratic penitent land donors and the smaller of ecclesiastical clients.

In both study areas there is a documented major ecclesiastical site but also many minor sites. These minor sites are often on borders. They could be earlier foundations, border markers for the major site or possibly the familial

foundations of local elites. Whatever the explanation ecclesiastical sites occur in far greater density in the Irish study areas than in a comparable study of parishes in Cornwall.

This very small-scale investigation therefore reveals a more complex situation than that envisaged by previous Irish early medieval settlement studies. Firstly ecclesiastical sites do not always occur in poor low-lying land. Secondly it is possible that not all ringforts are secular dwellings: some may be the residences of ecclesiastical clients or land-donors. Thirdly the proliferation of smaller ecclesiastical sites in Ireland may indicate a greater dispersal of resources throughout the society than in the more centralised church organisation of early medieval Cornwall.

Several questions arose: one being the possible excavation of a line of ringforts to determine their use-time. Two adjoining ringforts have been excavated at Lisleagh in Co Cork: one preceded the other, although they were contemporaneous for the remainder of their 200 year occupation. The relationship of Cornish rounds to Irish ringforts was also discussed, and it was noted that the latest radiocarbon dates for Trethurgy were about 600 AD: the beginning of the ringfort period in Ireland. Thus the question of a Dumnonian/Irish connection remains.

## **The City of Lincoln and its ‘Hinterland’ Lindsey in the Tenth Century AD: A Town in its Context**

**Letty Ten Harkel, University of Sheffield**

This paper discussed one aspect of my doctoral research into the social and political role of the city of Lincoln in the late ninth and tenth centuries AD. My research focuses on the relationship between the city of Lincoln and its ‘hinterland’ Lindsey, and places it within the context of other major centres within the Danelaw, in particular York. Special emphasis will be on the concept of identity, on two levels: the regional identities that were formed as a result of the Viking settlement, and the possible emergence of a new ‘urban’ identity. Inspired by theoretical and methodological concerns, my thesis will compare five different types of material culture that have been found in both urban and rural contexts, namely coinage, sculpture, metalwork, pottery, and burial evidence.

This paper focused on the coinage, and placed it within the context of a published volume on the tenth century stone sculpture from Lincolnshire (Everson and Stocker 1999). This volume argued that in the early tenth century, the sculpture from Lincoln and Lindsey displayed very strong affinities with the Hiberno-Norse styles prevalent at York. From the mid tenth century onwards, however, Lindsey was characterised by its own locally produced style, incorporating more southern elements in its decoration.

During my paper, I analysed the late ninth and tenth century numismatic evidence from Lindsey, in order to test the hypothesis brought forward by Everson and Stocker. Although initially the Lincoln mint struck coins based on West Saxon prototypes, it is clear that in the early tenth century a very strong relationship exists between Lincoln and York. This is expressed most clearly in the similarities between the Lincoln-struck St. Martin’s coinage, and the Sword St. Peters coinage from York.

After the conquest of the Danelaw by King Athelstan of Wessex in AD 927, however, Lincoln proceeded to produce only the ‘national’ Anglo-Saxon coinages, suggesting that the shift in allegiance from York to Wessex took place earlier than the sculpture would suggest. However, the refusal of the Lincoln moneyers to strike any coins that emphasised Athelstan’s status as king of all England indicates that the incorporation of Lincoln into the kingdom of Anglo-Saxon England was, at this stage, only superficial. What is more, the single finds from the area show that Lincoln was still firmly embedded within the economic networks of York and the southern Danelaw, a situation that only begins to change after the coin reforms of Edgar in AD 973.

In conclusion, it may be clear that the sculpture was not subject to the same degree of centralised legislation as was the coinage. As a result, it was slower to respond to political change on a ‘national’ level. It is only when we combine the study of these different cultural agents that we can begin to comprehend the complexities of the socio-political relationships that existed at the time.

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## **Borders as Concepts in Early Medieval Britain and France**

**Andrew Ferrero, Exeter College Oxford**

The study of borders and borderlands in early medieval archaeology has been hampered by an absence of conceptual debate and characterised by a lack of theoretical sophistication. Geographers, worried by similar stagnation within their discipline concerning the study of borders, have begun to draw increasingly on anthropology and psychology for inspiration. This paper proposes that such an approach would also benefit the study of borderlands in the past and in turn contribute to debate on the nature of borderlands in the present.

Central to this proposal is the study of the borderlands of the Norman Empire. It is suggested here that the attitude of the Normans towards their borders represents a way of thinking not dissimilar to how we view our borders today. Normandy, being a precariously placed polity, placed significant emphasis on her territorial limits, the formal border was precisely recorded and efficiently guarded, more so than Anglo-Saxon England. If the borders of Normandy failed, it would not take long for the political core to be overrun. Consequently this importance of borders exhibits many signs of what might be style a 'border psyche'. It is proposed that the attitudes of the Normans towards the English-Welsh border during the Conquest were conditioned by such a mentality and that they sought to place more importance than the Anglo-Saxons on the maintenance of that border.

In contrast to traditional core-periphery interpretations, the Norman state represents a political unit where the periphery represents the ideological core with a purposeful attempt to repopulate marginal areas and bring them more into line with the core economy. Thus we see an explosion in castle building along the English-Welsh border combined with the establishment of urban centres and religious houses, a concerted attempt to 'normalise' the landscape and the spread of the Norman ideology to maintain control and security.

Geographers influenced by psychology have been particularly interested in notions of belonging within bounded space. It has been suggested that we all from a very young age have a desire to be within bounded space, both in terms of delimited settlement, but also within large national units. Might this situation also have existed in past societies? Castles, while serving a defensive role, might also be overtly ideological, spreading the belief that dwellers in the borderland are not on the periphery, but are part of one politically homogenous state. The castle in this instance serves as an indicator that the region is under the rule of law, whether or not that was actually the reality. The very physical walls of the castle also represent the invisible borders of the state, thus fulfilling the need of the society to reside within bounded space.

It is also suggested that the Norman attitude towards border areas represents the birth of borders in a modern, territorial sense. Where previously the identification of political borders was vague and largely based on population dynamics, so the new attitude was precise and based on land. Archaeologists and other students of the past have long been wary of reading the present back into the past in their research, but in the concerted attempt to avoid anachronism have we instead missed and ignored evidence of modernity in history.

## **Pottery and Identity in Late Saxon Sussex**

**Ben Jervis, University of Southampton**

Following the innovative work of Paul Blinkhorn and Christopher Cumberpatch (1997) amongst others my research is aimed at creating a social archaeology of the early medieval period primarily using ceramic evidence. Using the study area of Sussex I have illustrated that certain identities can be seen to be produced and reproduced through ceramics, primarily their manufacture and discard. Using analogies drawn from ethnoarchaeology my paper explored some of the social and economic restrictions on resource procurement such as the embedded agricultural cycle. Arguing that resource procurement (primarily the procurement of clay for pottery manufacture) is a social activity I suggested that this activity produces interactions which can be seen to be reproducing perception, and thus identity at a community wide level. As a counter to this I then briefly explored pottery forming techniques, arguing that these are reflective of a different level of identity based in part around learning patterns. I then turned to look at the identity of settlements, arguing that a distinction was being created between urban and rural sites through the more commercial nature of pottery production in settlements such as Chichester. This paper highlighted time and space as being the structuring principles behind the social interactions which make up the practices of pottery manufacture. This work is currently

being developed through a focus on Chichester in West Sussex where I am undertaking a reassessment of the ceramics and investigating the roles of time and space in relation to pottery manufacture. It is intended this will lead to a more informed idea of the notion of a distinct urban identity, if it can be proved such a thing was becoming into existence. It is intended that the work will continue to look at pottery use, and in some cases consumption, through a detailed analysis of residues and use wear as well as the depositional contexts of pottery from a number of sites in Southern England. This will move away from looking at the social dynamics and identities linked to pottery manufacture to looking at how pottery was perceived and acted in social relations between members of the wider human and material populations. It is planned that a version of this paper will soon be published in the journal *Medieval Ceramics*.

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**The Use of Biological and Mortuary Evidence to Understand the Transition from Roman to Anglo-Saxon England in the Cambridgeshire Area**

**David Klingle, Cambridge University**

The transformation from Roman to Anglo-Saxon England (AD 400-600) is one of the most debated issues in early English history: did the invading Germanic Anglo-Saxons destroy and wipe out the previous Romano-British people or was the process more peaceful? Most scholars have focused on the issue of grave goods and other mortuary evidence. The biological aspects and relationships of these burials are only now beginning to be addressed, including the possibility that the incoming Anglo-Saxons were much larger and healthier populations. This paper considers both the mortuary and biological evidence of Roman and early Anglo-Saxon burials and focuses on grave goods, cemetery and body layout, and examines skeletal remains for sex and age demography, nutritional, metabolic, and dietary problems, trauma/fractures; arthritic and/or work related conditions or patterns; and infection. By integrating the biological and archaeological data, I explore how lifestyle, social organization, and ethnic identity changed from the Roman to Saxon periods.

Whilst the groups appear to have clear differences in mortuary practices, it is clear that in the fifth to seventh century, the former Romano-British and Anglo-Saxons were reduced to similar levels of subsistence and organisation. Distinctions in health, wealth, and availability of resources and goods between these populations may have been actually quite fluid and ethnic identity interchangeable. This paper systematically analyses various aspects of Roman and Anglo-Saxon burials in England and helps refine our concepts of analysing social and biological changes from a seemingly “civilised” (Roman) period to a “barbarian” (early Anglo-Saxon) period.

