

THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

RESEARCH AGENDA

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Introduction

The image of the North West as an area where few investigations have been carried out is not helped by its perceived lack of material culture. It was generally a region of sparse population, dispersed across the countryside in isolated farms and small hamlets, and was dominated by poor quality agricultural land. The towns were consequently smaller than average, and there is likely to have been less incentive to establish the kinds of manufacturing, businesses and trade that brought in goods which provide the evidence for material culture on most excavations of medieval settlements. This does not mean, however, that the population of the North West was impoverished materially. Leather, horn and wood probably took the place of pottery and perhaps metal vessels, for example. Unfortunately, such objects do not often survive. Though towns were small, there is no evidence to suggest that there were notably fewer towns in the region than elsewhere.

The nature, size and fluctuations of the region's medieval population are still a matter of debate. The character of the landscape and its exploitation indicates that much of the region could not have supported a dense population (Newman 1996), but we cannot be certain that a lack of evidence for material culture, especially at the beginning of the period, is indicative of this. Equally, an apparent lack of material culture from the late fourteenth century cannot be linked to known national trends in population decline, resulting from the disasters of that century. The region appears to lack the settlement desertions noted in other areas in the late medieval period, and this begs the question as to whether or not it responded in the same way as other regions to pressures for demographic change. Much of the medieval North West would be considered to be on the margins, politically and economically, but marginal lands have now been shown to have distinctive economies that responded more robustly to the later medieval crisis than did other areas (Astill 1998, 171; Dyer 1989; Winchester 2000).

Chronologies and Dating

A lack of published finds assemblages, outside the major urban centres of Chester and Carlisle, has hampered the development of precise chronologies for material culture, and therefore dating by association of many medieval sites in the North-West. Even in Chester, however, the identification and dating of local pottery is still heavily dependent on dated assemblages from castles in North Wales (Davey 1983; Edwards 2000, 42). There are problems of identification of material remains, especially at the beginning and end of the period. In addition, the recorded distribution of medieval artefacts is uneven across the region. For example, two thirds of medieval metal finds recorded under the Portable Antiquities Scheme are derived from Cheshire.

Some mid- to late-twelfth century pottery has been recognised in Cheshire and Carlisle, but throughout most of the region, there are no published assemblages of this date. In Lancashire most of the medieval pottery assemblages retrieved have been small and poorly stratified. This situation is of long standing and was commented on in 1975 (Hurst 1977, 123). Excavations in 1994 and 1995 produced the first sizeable stratified assemblages in Merseyside. Fazakerley is one of the few rural sites to be excavated there (Wright 1996),

although features which could be dated by radiocarbon analysis could not be related in any meaningful way to the pottery assemblages. In Greater Manchester the small quantities of material, poor stratification and an absence of any long occupation sequences containing pottery are a barrier in developing a ceramic sequence. In general the national observation made in 1994 that 'most counties need more ceramic evidence from the smaller market towns and rural areas' (Mellor, 7) still applies throughout the region.

The most widely used and most useful form of absolute dating in the medieval period is dendrochronology, although archaeo-magnetic dating is becoming more widespread. Dendrochronology in Carlisle has enabled a sequence of fabrics and forms to be suggested for the city from the twelfth through to the sixteenth centuries (McCarthy and Brooks 1992, 221-2). Elsewhere, apart from a few sites in Cheshire and Merseyside, there are few assemblages of identifiably fifteenth century pottery, although these are nationally rare. Indeed, even in Chester late imported pottery, such as Continental wares appear to be absent from assemblages until the late fifteenth century.

Regional Distinctiveness

The region has a number of distinctive features which mark it as having considerable potential to inform a national agenda. The historically wetter climate, and appropriate preservation conditions in locations such as the Cheshire salt towns and Carlisle, make the region especially important for the recovery of medieval organic artefacts and environmental remains. Consequently, the North West has good potential for the recovery of everyday items which are not usually preserved on most archaeological sites, and provide evidence, not only for daily life, but also for coppice management and woodland crafts. It may also provide the opportunity to examine the development of vernacular traditions on single building plots. Unfortunately, the dendrochronology curve is less well established in the region for the medieval period, than it is for the Roman. Important assemblages of organic artefacts, such as worked leather from Carlisle, await publication. The potential of the region's wetlands for palaeoenvironmental analysis has been recognised, but pollen has been little studied. The investigation of the environment through micro-animal remains, sediment analysis, peat metal contents and plant macrofossils also remains in its infancy.

Much of the region, though not all, is very different from the lowland, arable and village dominated Midlands and South. It is an important area for testing hypotheses concerning the colonisation of marginal lands, the impetus behind village nucleation, and also the resistance to that process. It is also important for the study of proto-urbanism, as it has a plethora of market villages, some of which, by the later medieval period, were exhibiting urban characteristics. Much of the region is dominated by extensively exploited lands, leading to large areas of forest and chase incorporated into major feudal honours, as well as numerous monastic estates. The impact of monasteries on the landscape has been little studied within the region, but areas such as Cumbria provide many opportunities for such studies. Other hypotheses which can be tested include the industrialisation of pastoral areas, rational exploitation of resources under feudalism in a varied landscape, and the imposition of aristocratic power on upland peoples. Some, though not all, of these opportunities are beginning to be exploited. The region offers one unique opportunity within England; to compare and contrast the cultural impact of its two frontier zones. As late as the twelfth century, the region was still being influenced by distinct cultural identities: Welsh, Strathclyde British/Scottish, Scandinavian and English. Yet this aspect of regional cultural origins has not been studied archaeologically.

Initiatives

- There are a number of initiatives which should be undertaken, that are required to establish a context for all the medieval research themes.

- Establish closely dated artefact sequences across the region, linked to absolute dating
- improve the dendrochronology sequence for the region, with more samples taken from standing buildings as well as excavated preserved wooden objects
- site-based palaeoenvironmental sampling should be supplemented by geoarchaeological investigations for micro-organisms, as well as mineral and chemical analysis of sediments
- carry out wider landscape studies based upon individual estates, to investigate the impact of particular forms of landholding and lordship
- focused research on issues of borders and cultural identity, including cross-border research initiatives with Wales and Scotland

Rural Settlement and Landuse

Settlement type, pattern and organisation

The Archaeology of Lancashire (Newman 1996) identified a number of research questions, including issues around the origins of nucleation and site continuity from earlier periods, especially in relation to rural settlements and ecclesiastical sites. These questions are applicable to the entire region not just Lancashire. With the exception of the work at Tatton (Ch), there have been few large-scale excavation projects linked in to wider landscape analyses. Hence, planned nucleated settlements in the region, especially in the north, are considered on plan form to have originated in the later twelfth century, yet there is little confirmatory excavated data. For most rural settlements of all types, there is a lack of excavated data, so that we know very little about food production and consumption, living conditions, or health and hygiene. The opportunity to link below ground evidence with above ground standing buildings is seldom available, though the work at the moated site at Old Abbey Farm, Risley (Ch) sets a regional benchmark in this type of integrated study (Heawood *et al* 2004).

Whilst much work has been undertaken on moated sites in the south of the region, those less common sites in the north are little studied. In particular, there are a number of upland moated sites, on the Pennine edge and in the Lake District, for which we have no knowledge of their purpose or date, and which certainly do not seem to fit into the same tenurial and landuse pattern suggested in the south of the region. The majority of the region's moated sites still require a detailed survey.

One of the region's distinct upland settlement forms is the vaccary, and later the bercary. Virtually no archaeological work has been undertaken on these sites. There is little knowledge of how these sites evolved, in particular, how they developed following the change from direct manorially controlled ranches to copyhold farms in the sixteenth century. Neither is anything known about the material culture associated with them. Similarly, their relationship, in terms of date, location and landholding, to shielings is little understood. Our knowledge of all types of medieval upland settlement is dominated by historical and topographical studies, and thus lacks insight on form, function and the lifestyles of their inhabitants.

Vaccaries sometimes formed parts of monastic estates. The influence of monastic estates on landuse patterns in the North West is under-appreciated. There is evidence from other parts of England that monastic estates sometimes developed new types of land management,

agricultural practices, technology and types of livestock and crops (Aston 2000, 125-44). The project undertaken at Royston Grange in the Derbyshire uplands (Wildgoose 1991), is of particular interest in a North West context, and there are opportunities for a similar project in the region. Were the monastic properties in the North West managed in a similar entrepreneurial way? Monastic estates may also contain some of the best evidence for surviving medieval fabric within agricultural buildings, as has been demonstrated in the North East.

Roberts and Wrathmell's study of English settlement has established a national framework against which to reference local studies (2002, 192). The pattern recognised in the North-West is a largely dispersed one with discrete areas of nucleation. Much of the cultivated landscape is formed of various types of enclosures linked to specific types of dispersed settlement, but intermixed with townfields (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 163). These landscape attributes are being mapped in greater detail by the county-based HLC projects and the challenge is to test the assumptions put forward by these projects. They, like Roberts and Wrathmell's approach, are based on evidence garnered from post-medieval maps with all the biases and interpretative traps that entails when used for past landscape reconstruction. They require testing through multi-disciplinary approaches involving documentary research, fieldwalking and topographical analysis at the township level. HLC can be used as the basis for further research into the origins and development of the medieval landscape, such as in Somerset where the origins of villages and field systems have been explored (Rippon 2004, 115-16). Another national programme, the EUS, in Lancashire especially, has provided a clearer picture of the structure of medieval settlement in areas later urbanised. Research in Tameside (GM) has also elucidated these hidden patterns (Nevell 1991). In many still rural areas, however, particularly in the Pennine fringe, the structure of medieval settlement and its relationship to its environs is still not well understood.

Recent projects such as the HLCs have begun to address one of the great gaps in medieval settlement research, the development and evolution of the exploitation of marginal land in the north of England (Harbottle 2002, 163). Of interest in this respect will be Durham University's project on settlement and waste in the Palatinate. Historians have begun to tackle this topic in the North West (Winchester 2000ⁱ) and Fleming's multi-period approach to Swaledale in Yorkshire offers an exemplary approach through landscape archaeology (1998). Again studies based on estates would be useful in this respect, similar in scope to Winchester's examination of the Barony of Copeland (C) (1978, 1987) or Nevell's more archaeological approach to the Ashton and Longdendale lordships (GM). Estate-based landscape archaeology projects will also enable the investigation of the use by estate centres of near and distant resources, an important topic in areas of dispersed landholdings and in a region where transhumance was practised. Such survey should wherever possible be linked to palaeoenvironmental sampling (Bell and Dark 1998, 188).

With very few exceptions, the work so far undertaken on upland landscapes in the region has not attempted any comparisons with the adjacent upland landscapes of southern Scotland, nor has it connected with the flourishing Scottish school of research on medieval or later rural settlement (see Atkinson *et al* 2000). Their assumptions behind the concept of the non-visibility of later medieval rural settlement in the landscape, are very different to those of most northern English workers. It is important to test whether this reflects a genuine difference in the nature of the archaeological record, or merely a difference in research cultures. Similarities and differences between lowland rural settlement in the region, especially in Cumbria, and in southern Scotland have also not been investigated.

Landuse and Resource Exploitation

There has been little use made of palaeoenvironmental analyses to evaluate developments in landuse and resource exploitation. In particular, environmental data have been little used to

examine the distinctive economies of marginal lands (Astill 1998, 171). The lack of pollen data for the medieval period is, in part, a result of poor preservation in the upper levels of peat deposits. Nevertheless, the North West has widespread lowland and upland peat bogs. In the case of the lowland mosses the medieval period was the last phase in which they were exploited as natural wetlands, before major programmes of drainage and reclamation. Pollen needs to be studied for variations in climate and, hence, constraints upon natural and managed vegetation, as well as human landuse changes, which may be responses to climatic developments. Plant macrofossils require studying to establish whether the North West responded in a similar manner to more arable dominated areas where in the medieval period there was an increase in grain pests and crop weeds, with implications for farming practices and trade.

Little work has been undertaken in the region on climate change, though the medieval period witnessed a dramatic change during its course with the beginning of the Little Ice Age. As in the uplands elsewhere in the north, there is no evidence that this event may have led to settlement desertions in the early fourteenth century (Frodsham 2004, 94). In the North East and Yorkshire, however, there is evidence that rye became more commonly grown during the medieval period than it had been before. Rye can tolerate cold winters, but needs dry warm summers. People clearly realised that rye could be grown more successfully and, presumably, had the desire to grow it when they could. When climate began to deteriorate at the start of the Little Ice Age, is there evidence of a mismatch between the climatic indicators and human responses? The North West, especially Cheshire, is at the northernmost limits of tolerance for many taxa of insects and plants. As a consequence the region may be particularly appropriate for tracing climatic changes through the distribution of these sensitive taxa.

In a region with an important pastoral economy, the study of animal bone assemblages, from both urban and rural deposits, is limited, at least partly as a result of poor bone preservation. In consequence, nothing is known about possible regional breeds of livestock in the medieval period. From outside the region, however, there are suggestions that stock was being selectively bred (Astill 1998, 172; Dobney *et al* 1996). Studies of livestock assemblages may assist also in examining the impact of long distance droving, for example from Wales through Chester and from Scotland through Carlisle.

The exploitation of non-agricultural resources, such as mosslands, coastal margins and the sea, would have been an important aspect of medieval life in the North West, but little archaeological evidence has been recovered for these activities. Nationally, evidence demonstrates a massive increase in the importance of deep sea fishing, an increase in the exploitation of shellfish, and the increasing importance of both domestic and wild fowl in people's diets during the medieval period. Despite the particularly rich marine and coastal resources of the North West, these developments have yet to be demonstrated in the North West. There has been little study of the remains of fishing in estuaries, for example, yet historical evidence of later exploitation suggests that this would have been extensive in the medieval period. Without examination of fishbone and shell assemblages, we do not know how far such resources were traded.

Initiatives

- Systematic coastal survey, including former coastal/intertidal areas now beyond the high water mark, and comparison with south-west Scotland and north Wales. Attention should be paid especially to evidence relating to fishing.
- Maritime surveys of the intertidal zone, and the collation of finds from dredging and boreholes should be undertaken.

- Study of how dispersed settlement evolved across a township/manor, related to other settlements and accessed the exploitable resources of their environs. A range of techniques, particularly palaeoenvironmental sampling of landscapes and selective excavation, should be encouraged.
- Examination of individual dispersed settlements, especially those with hey, ridding, stubbing, thwaite, or other names possibly associated with medieval settlement expansion. Excavation will be necessary in order to explore the possibility of settlement continuity from the early medieval period.
- Local studies based on the HLC should be undertaken to attempt to recreate the medieval landuse pattern within townships.
- Landscape-based surveys should be undertaken at various levels of historic land holdings and divisions such as the honour, manor and township, to test the underlying hypothesis of both county based HLCs and Roberts and Wrathmell's (2002) national analysis of settlement patterns.
- Studies of the relationships between rural settlement and landscape in the region and in southern Scotland, either by cross-border projects or by testing the applicability of Scottish research concepts within the region, and vice versa.
- Climatic changes in the medieval period (plus human use of landscape/vegetation) should be studied through geoarchaeological analyses of hillslope, valley floor and river/lake/coastal sediments.

Urban Settlement

Existing data

The majority of published work on medieval towns is concentrated in Cheshire. Work has been undertaken elsewhere, but little has been published, most notably in Carlisle, though the partially published excavation at The Lanes, represents the most significant urban project in the north of England (McCarthy 2000; Graves 2002, 179). Important urban investigations also await publication from Cockermouth (C), Kendal (C) and Lancaster. In general, there has been little work on the smaller towns, or on any towns in Lancashire outside of Lancaster. In the majority of cases excavation has been restricted to back plots rather than street frontages. This is partly a consequence of available development opportunities, but also a result of later town development, with post-medieval cellarge being especially damaging to earlier deposits. The lack of analysis undertaken on the majority of the vast quantity of data from Carlisle, much of it excavated in the 1980s or early 1990s, is also an issue, plant remains and geoarchaeological samples, for instance, do not improve with age. Even so, this material has high potential to answer many questions including those concerning health and hygiene, especially in respect of the suitability of the urban environment for the spread of epidemics.

Origins, growth and development

From documentary evidence it is clear that some towns in the south of the region, like Chester, developed from early medieval roots, though the archaeological evidence is scanty, but in Lancashire and Cumbria the picture is opaque. There are elusive hints of early medieval urban origins at Carlisle and possibly Lancaster, but much work remains to be done. With regard to the new boroughs throughout the region it is unclear whether or not they were newly founded plantations or developments from pre-existing non-urban settlements (White 1996, 136).

Market places are a key element in the townscape (White 1996, 136) but there has been little work to trace their origins and development in the region. We need to know whether or not market places were the main element in laying out towns, did they move, grow, contract and how altered were they by the time they were mapped? There are questions to be answered concerning the differences between market arrangements in the towns and the numerous market villages throughout the region. In addition, where possible, the impact of market centres on the exchange of local products needs to be examined as well as their relationship with high-status sites (Condrón *et al* 2002, 32).

Few of the towns in the North West appear to have had defences, but in the two best known, Chester and Carlisle, much work remains to be done to understand the sequence of development. In Chester the towers especially require further study. Many of the towns of the North West, whether major administrative centres or seigniorial boroughs were associated with castles. Defences, castles and market places all had an impact on the layout of the major centres which show a far more complex topographical structure than the later boroughs, with some like Lancaster perhaps being influenced by earlier Roman layouts (White 2000). In contrast many of the boroughs seem to have had a simple two row plan as identified by Daniels (2002) and typical of many planned villages. Topographical studies have been successful in Lancashire in identifying early plan forms, as in the Lancashire EUS, and this type of analysis needs to be applied throughout the region especially in Merseyside and Greater Manchester. Excavations are needed to test the findings of such research and to attribute dates to the earliest plan form as well as to later developments.

There are other gaps in our knowledge of town development. This is generally a result of a lack of large scale excavation targeted at medieval deposits. As Andrew White stated in 1996, 'we have not defined a single burgage plot or a medieval house site in any Lancashire town' (125). The situation is little better in Merseyside or Greater Manchester, though more relevant work has been undertaken in Cheshire and to a lesser extent Cumbria. Aside from very recent work at Caldewgate, Carlisle (F. Giecco pers. comm.) there has been little investigation of medieval suburbs anywhere in the region.

Like the North East our region has much potential for studying the economic development of boroughs in more marginal areas and as in the North East no substantive excavation has been carried out in any small town in the region (Daniels 2002, 191). In some areas like west Lancashire and Merseyside borough foundation appears to have been relatively prolific yet there were numerous failures. Towns here seem to have been planted wherever the landscape would sustain one within a countryside dominated by moss and liable to flooding (a feature noted outside the region, see Lynch 1999, 210). Every opportunity needs to be taken to investigate such places as Newburgh (L) and Croston (L) to examine how and when they operated as towns and why they failed before the end of the medieval period.

The smaller towns in the North West were not always that distinct from planned villages in either their morphology or their economy, with substantial agricultural economic activity supporting the survival of the town (Daniels 2002, 196). Archaeology can contribute to questions relating to their transition from a primarily agrarian to a fully urban economy, and the identification of those boroughs which never fully achieved this transition. It can examine the differences between towns and market villages. Some settlements retained both urban and rural characteristics with one part of the settlement forming the borough and another part being held by non-burghal forms of tenure and as at Warton (L) being physically distinct in terms of the size and layout of crofts. Archaeological investigation can look for differences in material culture between these different holdings within the same settlement and explore questions about the development of urban identities and perceptions of urban life.

Urban Life

Towns were centres of craft industries and potential centres and dispersers of innovation (CBA 1993). Given the role of parts of Lancashire and Greater Manchester in the post-medieval development of industry, researchers should be alert to medieval evidence for technological developments and manufacturing specialisation in the region. In general, however, there is a lack of regional data about urban industrial processes. Documents such as monastic cartularies contain many references to urban industries but to date little archaeological information has been forthcoming about the nature of these industrial activities within the North West's urban environment (White 1996, 136). Recent excavations in Chester, Carlisle and the Cheshire salt towns are beginning to redress this deficit and with their waterlogged deposits in particular, these are likely to remain the main centres to address this issue. These waterlogged deposits also have considerable potential for organic artefact preservation and the information these can provide for everyday life (Watson 1998, 234). Moreover such objects sometimes offer the opportunity for accurate dating through dendrochronology.

In Chester the Rows Research Project remains an exemplar in the archaeological investigation of standing urban buildings. Aside from in Chester, however, there is a general perception that standing medieval houses are absent from within the towns in the rest of the region. Staircase House, Stockport (Ch) has revealed the potential for the survival of such buildings elsewhere in the south of the region and the analysis of the commercial and domestic use of its space provides a template for similar investigations. Only when medieval buildings are identified, however, can one move from empirical observation to a theoretically informed analysis (Grenville 1997, 13). Although Carlisle has to date not shown any evidence that medieval buildings survive under later facades, there are hints that elsewhere in Cumbria, in towns like Cockermouth, Kendal and Penrith there may be some survival of medieval fabric within primarily post-medieval buildings. For the north of the region in particular before the more 'intricate questions' posed by Grenville (1997, 193) and Johnson (1996) can be asked, there is a need to discover to what extent do medieval buildings survive behind later façades? Very little is known about the living conditions of ordinary towns people. Adequate environmental sampling is required to gather data on health and nutrition and to relate it to living conditions (Astill 1998, 172). Awareness of all the social groups present within a town is necessary, including the despised and dispossessed. The legal provisions against the Welsh in Chester and the Scots in Carlisle manifested themselves physically in divisions and use of urban space. In Carlisle Scots and felons for example, established themselves at the ends of backplots (Graves 2002, 183) and the impact of this on town development and the social opportunities of the inhabitants needs to be considered.

Initiatives

- There is a need to examine the street frontages in medieval towns as well as the backplots.
- More work is needed on town defences in the region, especially at Chester where the towers need more study.
- Efforts should be focused on discovering more about the character and function of the region's earliest medieval towns in the immediate post-conquest period. This is particularly relevant for Chester, Lancaster and Carlisle.
- The vast quantity of data recorded for Carlisle needs to be made accessible through publication and the formation of a Carlisle Urban Archaeological Database. Similar projects need to be progressed for Chester and Lancaster.

- The role and nature of small towns should be examined which should include below ground investigations in well preserved small towns such as Hornby and Walton in north Lancashire.
- There is a need to examine proto-urban and urban settlements that are linked to local industrial specialisation such as Alston (C), to identify any differences in structure and material culture from the small market towns, as well as in their role as part of regional trading networks.
- Adequate sampling strategies should be formulated for all medieval urban archaeological projects, and the still unpublished artefact and ecofact assemblages from past major excavations such as The Lanes, Carlisle must be assessed, analysed and published.

Ritual, Religion and Ceremony

The monastic orders

Monasteries are considered one of the most frequently studied of medieval monuments (Gilchrist 1995, ix) and the North West is no exception in this respect. The region has been the focus of some nationally important projects researching monastic remains, most notably the excavations at Norton Priory (Ch) and recent work on other monastic sites in Cheshire has revealed well-preserved remains with substantial research potential. Much earlier work was undertaken that is of variable quality, and often largely unanalysed and unpublished (Wood 1996, 150). Across the region the sites investigated have tended to be those of the principal orders, hence to an extent the Augustinian, Benedictine and Cistercian sites are well understood. Work has concentrated on monasteries with upstanding remains and these are often not the first site upon which a particular house was established. Moreover, work has been concentrated on the claustral buildings with relatively little attention paid to the outer courts and ancillary buildings. Whilst some of the more peripheral structures within the precinct are often associated with economic activity, rather than religious devotion, they still have the potential to shed light on monasticism and formed key components within monastic life. Do these structures have physical evidence for spiritual belief expressed through non-religious activities?

Little is known about any likely continuity between pre and post-Conquest monasteries. The assumption has been that there was very little continuity but is this really the case? Continuity may best be sought in the urban monastic houses as in Chester rather than on the rural sites, but even in the countryside a new building on a new site, only a few miles away from an earlier medieval site, may not be representative of a radical discontinuity. The new post-Conquest houses had initial phases when the sites were occupied by temporary structures, such as the timber buildings at Sawley (L). Some initial sites were quickly abandoned for more suitable locations as at Milton in Cumbria (within Preston Patrick parish and close to the pre-Conquest monastery at Heversham), which moved to Shap. There are also a number of short-lived houses in the region. These abandoned and briefly occupied sites are a priority for investigation as they have the potential to throw light on pre-thirteenth century monasticism. They are sites unaffected by later monastic developments or the Reformation.

Excavation and recording has been concentrated almost entirely on the remains of the larger monasteries of the principal orders. The only smaller house investigated has been the tiny Gilbertine priory of Ravenstonedale, excavated in 1928-9 (Turnbull and Walsh 1992). Apart from the published excavations at the Austin Friars house in Warrington (Heawood *et al* 2003), Chester Greyfriars (Ward 2000) and Carlisle Blackfriars (McCarthy 1990), little work

has been carried out on the lesser monastic sites. The three projects noted largely recorded the remains of the associated cemeteries and little is known about the arrangements and nature of the region's urban friaries. Similarly little or no work of significance has been undertaken on sites of what has been termed 'the other monasticism' (Gilchrist 1995), nunneries, hospitals, preceptories and hermitages. Indeed the extent to which these sites survive, given their frequent incorporation or reuse in post-Reformation structures, is an unanswered question.

The parish church

The parish church or parochial chantry chapel is the most common extant monument from the medieval period and this alone indicates something of the significance of organised religion in medieval life. Though medieval in origin, continued usage has imposed upon the buildings the functional and symbolic requirements of later generations, so that many have been successively rebuilt and medieval fabric lost or obscured. Surviving medieval fabric seems to be under-recognised in parts of the region, notably in Lancashire, and there is a need for basic structural analysis to rectify this. As elsewhere there has been a relative surfeit of studies of church architectural styles and medieval burial monuments and fittings by architectural and art historians, nevertheless the relevance of this data to wider social issues remains under-appreciated. For example, the region lacks studies relating endowments, building enlargement and the architectural styles of urban churches to the archaeological and historical evidence for urban growth and decay. Antiquarian sources for the region indicate that much of the desire to rebuild in the post-medieval period was a functional consequence of poorly built medieval churches. This also has implications for the nature of local medieval society, its wealth and possibly religiosity. The origins and distribution of churches across the region when analysed in their landscape and organisational context (see Morris 1989), may also shed light on fluctuations in population and the developing settlement pattern. More can also be made of local distinctiveness in styles and building and monument type to illuminate local identities, traditions and customary practices.

Aside from standing and, for the most part, still operational churches there are few known medieval church and chapel sites. Abandoned sites are rare in the region, perhaps because of the relatively low density of medieval church provision. A priority should be the identification of deserted sites where there may be an opportunity to investigate issues of church origins and study palaeo-osteological assemblages.

Vernacular religious and secular customs

There has been no significant archaeological work in the region dealing with vernacular religious practices and other aspects of popular belief. It is an area that has remained the province of the historian and folklorist. There is archaeological potential, however, especially in relation to artefacts, whether deliberately and significantly deposited items or bent coins at shrines. Vernacular beliefs and customs were often manifested physically, 'there was a tendency deeply inherent in medieval popular perception to translate the spiritual into the concretely sensible and the material' (Gurevich 1988, 194). Merrifield (1987) highlighted some of the potential, such as foundation/threshold burials and deposits, but there has been little effort in the North West to engage with what can be seen as a difficult agenda.

Areas of potential can be seen in the distribution and use of preaching crosses and holy wells. Were they used as gathering places, compensating for the lack of churches and chapels? A corpus of artefacts such as pilgrim badges, items that can be classed as foundation or other ritual deposits, and charms, would be a useful beginning in addressing the issue of popular belief. Unless we engage with this agenda we cannot hope to gain a clear insight into the lives of the ordinary person.

Human remains

Medieval death and burial remains an area of little study within the region, beyond the interpretation of high status burial monuments. Few burials have been excavated hence there is very little evidence directly related to the health, age profile and genetic characteristics of medieval people in the region. The few significant skeletal assemblages that have been excavated are largely related to monastic communities. Church burial grounds are likely to have continued in use for centuries after the last medieval burial and thus medieval skeletal remains, outside of high status tombs, are likely to consist of re-interred disarticulated fragments. There are also issues of sensitivity and respect surrounding all burials but these are especially relevant in burial grounds belonging to still active religious communities. With regard to these issues, recent guidance by the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists (ADCA 2004) is particularly helpful.

Groups of articulated skeletal material of identifiably medieval date are likely to derive from monastic cemeteries, which have innate biases within them. They are often largely single sex, may lack children and will contain individuals of non-local derivation. Osteo-archaeological analysis, polymerase chain reaction techniques to study DNA and oxygen isotope analysis will provide information on morbidity, diet, health, hygiene, genetic variation and place of origin (Whyman and Perring 2002, 56-8). Even populations confined to monastic cemeteries are capable of allowing inferences to be made concerning variations between populations, such as between those living in urban and rural environments. Towns for example are likely to attract more non-local people (Mays 1998, 200). Other issues, however, are open to question, such as the impact of urban living on health, as a recent study has shown that it was not urbanism but industrialisation that had the greatest adverse impact on children's health (Lewis 2002, 57).

Initiatives

- Monastic outer courts, ancillary buildings and precinct boundaries should be investigated through topographical and aerial photographic analysis, geophysical survey and selective excavation incorporating palaeo-environmental sampling.
- Extensive and site specific studies of cells, hospitals and other minor sites of the monastic orders are required.
- Opportunities should be taken to investigate through geophysical survey and excavation the sites of early and/or temporary monasteries. This would not only assist in the study of monasticism but may be of considerable significance for the study of twelfth century building techniques (Wood 1996, 151), and as the sites are historically dated would be beneficial in establishing artefact chronologies.
- Investigation of the buildings of urban friaries needs to be a priority.
- Modern buildings analysis is required for churches to identify medieval fabric and to reveal their structural evolution.
- Churches should be assessed in their landscape context as key components and nodal points in the medieval settlement pattern.
- A corpus of artefacts relating to medieval popular belief and spiritual customs should form the basis to a synthetic study.

- Where statistically viable groups of burials are encountered full scientific analysis using all available techniques should be a high priority.

Defence, Warfare and Military Activity

Earth and timber castles

There have been few modern investigations of earth and timber castles, or such phases of later stone castles, within the region. Davidson's (1969) seminal work at Aldingham motte (C) represents the last major excavation on such a site in the north of the region. In the south there have been recent small scale research excavations at Aldford (Ch) and an evaluation at Rochdale (GM). Investigations are needed at some of the earlier stone castles to identify possible earth and timber fortifications which may have been their predecessors (Wood 1996, 145). Without larger-scale and more widespread modern excavation of earth and timber castles it will be impossible to confirm dates of abandonment and possibly origins, or to answer speculation about purpose and nature. Are sites in the south generally earlier than those in the north? Are mottes in the Lune and Ribble valleys representative of fluctuating frontier lines? One innovative line of inquiry with regard to the latter question is Iles' (2003) use of GIS-based viewshed analysis to examine the effectiveness as part of a defensive line of earth and timber castles in the Lune valley. The application of similar techniques elsewhere will provide some insights into the likely purpose of early castles.

The North West offers a unique opportunity to examine contemporary castles in two border areas. How do they compare and if they differ why do they? How much of a response to a frontier location were the castles, or were they simply a product of local feudal society and requirements?

Stone castles

The region has produced some notable published research on stone castles as at Beeston (Ch), Carlisle and Brougham (C) for example, but much work remains accessible only through the 'grey literature'. A number of surveys of standing fabric have been undertaken as responses to conservation initiatives at castles throughout the region, but this work remains unpublished. Sites with potential for the assessment and publication of their results include the Cumbrian castles of Egremont, Kendal and Pendragon as well as most notably Lancaster Castle. Further accurate recording of structures is required but needs to be linked to the type of spatial and functional analysis recently used to study the 'Great Tower' at Carlisle Castle (Goodall 2004). Lancaster Castle, along with Kendal Castle especially, have had some significant unpublished excavation work and the production of this material should be a priority. Without the analysis and publication of existing data it will be difficult to tackle some of the more complex and non-military aspects of castles such as their relationship with their hinterlands, dependant towns and role as consumers of both agricultural and manufactured products.

Many of the castles in the region underwent significant changes in the later medieval period or owe their origins to that period. It has been noted that in Lancashire there is an unusually large amount of late medieval building (Wood 1996, 142). This makes the region important for the study of the transition from the castle to the great house. Ongoing research at Lathom Castle (L) may be particularly significant in this respect. Elsewhere detailed examination of the fabric of what are now primarily post-medieval great houses may reveal the extent of the incorporated medieval castle remains. Materials analysis including dendrochronology and petrology can provide dating evidence for development and information on material sources (Wood 1996, 155). Dendrochronological studies have recently been undertaken for a number of sites including Carlisle Castle but stone petrological analysis is less common.

Fortified houses

The North West is noted for its fortified houses, especially in the north of the region. Although there have been a number of identification and ground plan surveys, there is a lack of detailed fabric analysis and very little excavation. Radcliffe Tower and Bury Castle, both in Greater Manchester, have been the subject of excavations, but there has been no modern excavations undertaken on these sites further north. Consequently, the origins and evolution of many of the sites are not well understood. Some sites such as Clifton Tower, near Penrith (C) have had their roof timbers sampled for dendrochronology and further opportunities should be undertaken to sample sites especially when combined with structural analysis.

Fortified houses are not only an important material resource in the North West, but an appreciation of their function, especially along the Scottish border, is key to understanding border relationships. Detailed structural analysis, combined where appropriate with investigations of below ground remains, is necessary in order to comprehend these sites. Past confusions over terminologies such as pele (Dixon 1979) and misidentifications as pele towers of surviving solar wings of demolished halls, are in part a consequence of a lack of detailed investigation and in-depth analysis. Only through systematic and targeted investigation can these fortified houses be understood in terms of their hierarchical relationships to each other, their structural relationship to higher status castles and their role as arbiters of local taste, consumers of produce and guarantors of security.

Battlefields and sieges

Given the region's two national boundaries and the roles of both Carlisle and Chester in the respective Scottish and Welsh Wars of Independence, it is surprising that the region is so lacking in identifiable major medieval battle sites. It has only one medieval battlefield contained in English Heritage's Battlefield Register, the site of the Battle of Solway Moss, fought near Longtown in 1542. The only other significant engagement was the defeat of Madog of Powys in 1146 on the Cheshire/Welsh border. Aside from these battles neither the wars with Scotland or the Welsh princes, nor the dynastic disputes of the Wars of the Roses led to major engagements in the region. Even so, there is potential for battlefield archaeological methods to be applied to the site of the Battle of Solway Moss to allow a more precise location of the battle and the disbursement of the troops.

Chester and Carlisle were both used as bases for armed interventions in Wales and Scotland respectively and this must have had some, as yet undefined impact on the development of these cities. Chester served as a base for construction workers recruited from across the country to build the castles in north Wales. The increase in the occurrence of pottery in the mid thirteenth century may be related to the resulting economic benefits associated with the campaigns against the Welsh. Border skirmishing did lead to some notable sieges and sackings that must have exercised at least some influence on urban development in the region. Chester was taken by Owain ap Gruffudd in the 1150s and around the same period Carlisle twice came under siege from William the Lion. Both Chester and Beeston Castle (Ch) were besieged in the de Montfort rebellion of 1265. Further sieges took place at Carlisle in 1296 and 1315, the latter credited with causing the decline of the suburb of Caldewgate. Part of Chester's ditch to the north of Eastgate was excavated in 1991, and there is documentary evidence to suggest that this was originally dug in response to the De Montfort siege. There was no archaeological evidence to confirm this, however. No archaeological evidence has been forthcoming relating to any of the other episodes, nor to events such as the Scots sacking of Penrith (C) in 1316 or Warton (L) in 1322, an event that is reputed to have led to the decline of that borough.

Initiatives

- Further use of IT applications such as computer modelling and viewshed analysis to reinterpret and complement existing records for well known as well as more obscure sites.
- Search of existing archives to produce site specific reports and interpretative compilation studies.
- Large-scale excavations of earth and timber castle sites in the Scottish and Welsh frontier zones.
- Selective excavation and geophysical survey of some stone castle sites with potential for earlier earth and timber antecedents.
- Detailed interpretative fabric surveys of fortified houses, combined where appropriate with geophysical survey, selective excavation and dendrochronological analysis, integrating the below and above ground data within a well dated and contextualised framework.
- Documentary research combined with topographical analysis and gridded metal detector surveys to more accurately locate the Battle of Solway Moss.

Technology and Production

The role of the monasteries

The region had a considerable amount of land under the control of the monastic orders and it is to be expected that they played a significant role in the development of technology and industry within it. This is not a topic that has been explored previously, because of the lack of work on monastic landscapes beyond the confines of the claustral ranges. Elsewhere, the broader assessments of monastic precincts set within a context of the even wider analysis of the whole estate, as at Bordesley Abbey Worcestershire (Astill 1993), have revealed a complex array of industrial activity involving wind and water mills, leat systems and warehousing. The Cistercian Order particularly is considered to have had highly organised industrial capacity and to have facilitated the international diffusion of technology. There are opportunities to examine these assertions within the region at sites like Furness Abbey (C) Sawley (L) and perhaps Vale Royal (Ch).

The monastic orders are nationally known to have been involved in food processing, textiles production, coastal salt production, stone quarrying, mining and iron working (Aston 2000, 144-9), all industries of significance in the region in the post-medieval period. The local role played in their development by the monastic orders is for the most part unknown, as is any variation in activity between the orders or between individual houses. Iron was mined by monks in Furness and coal in West Cumbria by monks from St Bees, and it is likely that monasteries were engaged in coal mining in east and south Lancashire too. Nationally little archaeological work has been done on this aspect of the monastic economy (Aston 2000, 147), but landscape survey within coal measure areas of monastic estates, combined with documentary research, may identify some medieval monastic coal workings. The monks at Furness Abbey (C) are known to have worked iron on their estates in the thirteenth century, though none of the bloomeries within their lands can be definitely attributed to them (Bowden 2000, 39-47).

Extractive and metal-working industries

The Lake District and North Pennines especially are noted as areas of early developments in minerals extraction and metal working. Geophysical survey has been undertaken to identify and categorise potential medieval iron working sites in the Lake District. This work carried out to date by the National Trust and the Lake District National Park Authority should be extended outside the national park, especially into Furness. A high proportion of the bloomery sites in this area have some surface survival. Another area of potential for investigating medieval ironworking is in Greater Manchester in the Castleshaw Valley and along the upper Irwell (Nevell and Roberts 2003, 5). In the Castleshaw Valley three excavated bloomeries appear to have been worked by itinerant, seasonal smelters (Redhead 1995), but we do not know if this organisation is typical nor are we aware of the range of contemporary site types and sizes within any area, or across the region. There are questions to be answered concerning the relationship of bloomeries to estate ownership and type of tenurial arrangements and about the provenance of materials in bloomeries associated with towns or at distance from the main orefields. To answer these questions will require identification surveys allied to detailed landscape analysis and documentary research, as well as the scientific analysis of slags and other bloomery materials (Finch 2002, 115). Beyond the processing of ores, there is very little evidence from within the North West for the manufacturing of metal goods. In Chester a dump of late medieval copper alloy cauldron and other moulds have been found, but this appears to be the only such deposit found thus far in the North West.

The North West is a key region for studying the early application of water power to iron manufacture (Newman forthcoming), yet not one water powered bloomery of medieval date has been excavated in the region. Without such work we cannot understand their technology, their local economic and social impact, or their potential influence on other forms of water powered smelters. The dialect of non-ferrous mining and smelting in the region appears to have strong Scandinavian influence. The field evidence requires testing to examine any technological connections with Scandinavia such as the introduction of Nordic technology to the region. Recent research on the Continent has indicated that the blast furnace was introduced or developed by the twelfth century in Sweden and central Europe, and its early distribution may be linked with Nordic contact and with haematite/non-phosphoric ores. This raises the possibility of previously unrecognised medieval blast furnaces in the region, especially in the Lake District.

Historical evidence hints at the late-medieval development of copper mining and smelting in the Keswick/Caldbeck area of the Lake District, in advance of the better-known sixteenth century Mines Royal workings, but what is the field evidence for this? If earlier workings can be identified it would be worthwhile comparing them with the Mines Royal ventures in order to note contrasts with the imported German technology and differences or similarities in methods, organisation and investment. The technology and field evidence of medieval lead/silver mining are very poorly understood, despite historical evidence for nationally-important silver extraction in the Alston (C) area in the twelfth century. This appears to be in part a consequence of more recent mineral extraction, especially hushing and open cast, which have removed earlier remains even within the last few decades, though there appears to be better survival in Bowland (L). Work is required to identify areas of potential for surviving medieval remains and to target these for investigation. Identification may be assisted, as it was in Derbyshire, through the use of geochemical sampling of watercourse silts (Crossley 1998, 220). There are archaeological questions that need exploring relating to technological adoption and adaptation, for example the 'bole' smelter is largely understood from sixteenth century documentary evidence in Derbyshire but it is not known whether the technology was widespread, or exhibited technical variety, in earlier centuries and in other orefields.

The medieval exploitation of most other minerals in the region also is not well recorded or understood. Coal mining is recorded in documents but no confirmed medieval remains of the

industry are known in the North West. Similarly, there are twelfth century documentary references to salterns in Cumbria but little recorded physical evidence for the medieval coastal salt industry anywhere in the North West. Consequently the full extent of the industry in the region is not known, nor can technological comparisons be made with saltworking in other regions or evolutionary technological developments traced. Hence the influence of the medieval industry on the post-medieval industry remains unknown. In contrast much is known about the medieval inland salt industry. This was centred in the Cheshire towns of Nantwich, Middlewich and Northwich. Excavations have revealed many waterlogged organic objects including hollowed out logs known as salt 'ships'. Opportunities for further investigations should be taken, however, because the quality of wood preservation allows the potential for close dating through dendrochronology and provides information on carpentry techniques and woodland management.

Woodland industries and management

The timber-based vernacular architecture tradition in the south of the region survived into the seventeenth century and indicates that large quantities of good quality timber were still available by the end of the medieval period. It is assumed that there were sufficient areas of coppice woodland to provide a sustainable supply of fuel for the metalworking industries (Astill 1998, 175), and the needs of woodland craft industries such as the production of pegs, barrel staves, bessoms and wattling. Some of the round wood found on sites such as The Lanes, Carlisle, is indicative of such coppice produced items (Huntley 2000, 78-9). Clearly coppices were not so extensive, however, as to prejudice the supply of timber.

The only archaeological study of woodland industries in the region, undertaken in the Furness area of Cumbria, found that it was difficult to date the remains of woodmen's huts, pitsteads and hearths, but the majority would seem to be post-medieval in date (Bowden 2000, 23-35). Evidence for medieval woodland industries, and their influence on the management of woodlands, is most likely to come from consumption sites in the form of wooden artefacts or from palaeoenvironmental indicators from waterlogged and wetland deposits. In this respect surviving medieval woodwork in buildings and urban waterlogged deposits represent the best resource for examining regional woodland management.

Manufacturing

Archaeologically the industry most visible by its product was pottery manufacture. There are 17 possibly distinct kiln sites within the region recorded on the National Database of Medieval Pottery Production Centres in England, though a number of these are likely to be duplicate or erroneous entries. There are no sites recorded for Greater Manchester and only two in Merseyside and one in Cumbria. Only four sites have been excavated and all are in Cheshire, though a fifth has been identified at Salmesbury (L). Linked with a lack of well-stratified independently dated finds assemblages, it is not surprising then that the production, distribution and consumption of pottery in the region is as a whole poorly understood. There is an urgent need to identify and investigate further pottery production sites and to look at the relationship between identifiable kiln products and product distribution. The use of archaeomagnetic dating of the kilns may assist in more securely dating regional pottery types and these dates can be compared to assemblages of relevant pottery associated with absolute dates from consumer sites. Through this approach refinements can be made to typologies and the dating of technological advances, inter and intra regional differences exposed and analysed, and the nature of regional pottery production placed in a chronological and geographical framework.

One of the greatest archaeological legacies of the post-medieval period in the North West is the number of relict water-powered mills. A sizeable proportion of these are known from documentary sources to be on the sites of medieval soke mills. Nationally, despite work on

some monastic watermills and water management systems as at Bordesley, archaeological research into medieval mill sites is not common and excavations are few. Whilst evidence for water supply and ground plans has been forthcoming there has been relatively little information on mill technology (Holt 1988, 117). In the North West there have been no excavations of medieval mill sites with the recent exception of an evaluation at Harraby Mill, Carlisle. Work is needed on water-management systems in the region to examine whether the major medieval leat systems now being recognised in South West England as associated with industrial activity, are also present in our region.

As Astill (1998, 174) pointed out, archaeology has had a negligible impact on the largest medieval manufacturing industry, textiles. The documentary record indicates that in Lancashire and Greater Manchester small family units were purchasing raw materials from local markets and then working it up for resale as cloth at the same markets with fulling carried out at the local manorial fulling mill (Walton 1992, 352). This has considerable implications for the relationship of local markets and their hinterlands. The North West has considerable potential for archaeologically engaging with these issues. In addition to the numerous known woollen and linen cloth processing sites, there are urban waterlogged deposits with the conditions for preserving flax fibres. They can also preserve other organic, animal-derived, manufactured products like leather goods. There are many issues surrounding the processing of animal carcasses and the manufacture of animal derived products such as shoes, bone pins and combs. Was production centralised in towns and the products supplied to the consumer through a distribution network, or was processing and manufacture undertaken within every sizeable rural community, as seems to be the case with textiles? Such considerations have major implications for the way society was organised and the way relationships were structured and discharged between town and countryside and between social groups.

Initiatives

- Identification of likely medieval industrial remains contextualised within estate based surveys of both monastic and secular holdings.
- Investigation of bloomery sites in Furness and other major iron working areas using geophysical techniques.
- Excavation of selected bloomeries, especially where there are signs of water-power usage, to discover their dates and technological development and affiliations.
- Combined documentary and topographical surveys, and where appropriate palaeoenvironmental and geochemical analysis, to identify areas and relicts of medieval mining and non-ferrous metal working.
- Routine analysis of datable building materials to gain information on both building industry technology and the nature of woodland industries and management. The timber-framed halls and churches in the south of the region may be particularly useful in this respect.
- Identification and investigation of archaeomagnetic dated pottery kiln sites to more closely identify sequences and the links between producers and consumers.
- Detailed investigations of mill sites, especially fulling mills.

- Investigations of urban-based industries, using the full panoply of available scientific techniques to provide information on developing technologies but also the role of towns as centres of production.

Trade, Exchange and Interaction

Maritime trade

The multi-period work at Meols (M) has demonstrated the potential that research on medieval harbour sites can have for using artefacts as signifiers of trading links. Some work has also been undertaken on the development of Chester as a port but much more basic research is required into the other medieval ports across the region. Where were they, what were their facilities and trading links? Silting appears to have been a problem for river ports like Chester in the later medieval period. The impact of climate change on river discharge, and thus estuarine silting, needs investigation as does other climate induced changes such as besandment which may have caused difficulties for coastal port sites.

Unlike in some other maritime regions, such as those bounding the Severn estuary, there has been little work on identifying wreck sites and no discovery of medieval boats. Yet the potential of parts of the region appears high. Riverine deposits at Chester, estuarine deposits in the Dee, Mersey and perhaps Ribble, as well as the margins of Morecambe Bay, all seem likely areas for preserved sunken medieval hulks. Intertidal and marine archaeology in the region, however, has been little developed. Consequently, there is much need for the type of maritime and coastal research initiatives undertaken in the North East by Tees Archaeology.

Artefact distributions

There are many pitfalls in constructing trading patterns on the basis of artefact distributions, nevertheless there is much that can be deduced from examining artefact distributions in the context of trade and exchange. The role of the monasteries in trade for example can be archaeologically attested through the remains of their surviving infrastructure of roads and bridges, but also through artefacts recovered from monastery excavations.

Amongst the topics the North West's artefact assemblages can begin to address are issues of cultural identity, geopolitical spheres of influence and chronological discrepancies in data across the region. Questions need to be asked about whether the distribution of pottery across the region reflects national and/or cultural boundaries. The apparent scarcity of pottery from the immediate post-Conquest period should be examined to discover if it reflects a genuine lack or merely an inadequacy in the existing data. If a genuine scarcity, does it reflect a low level of use, either through low demand because of a low population or a preference for another material? If there is a low level of pottery use in the post-Conquest period across much of the region why does this seem not to be the case in parts of Cheshire as at Nantwich and Norton, yet in the principle urban centre, Chester, it seems very scarce? The extent and use of imported pottery from outside the region and abroad is unclear. Other fruitful areas of research include the distribution of Cistercian and other transitional pottery types in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which is trans-regional and appears to be unrelated to earlier pottery distributions.

Initiatives

- A study of medieval ports and their trade contacts via documentary research, sample excavation and the use of artefacts to study trade networks.

- Maritime and coastal studies to identify medieval wreck sites and the opportunistic exploration of intertidal and waterlogged terrestrial remains of medieval ships.
- Regional pottery studies examining distributions from production centres and the apparent biases within the data and the perceptions of the nature of the data.
- Artefacts studies contrasting well dated urban assemblages with those from nearby contemporary rural sites and contrasting high status site assemblages with those from ordinary sites. This should enable insights into different patterns of interaction and breadth of contacts between different social groups.

Future Research Directions

The future directions for research are likely to include the further identification of pottery production sites and the construction of dated pottery sequences across the region. These will be assisted by the enhancement of absolute site dating through dendrochronological and archaeomagnetic techniques. Palaeoenvironmental work should include the sampling of suitable deposits directly associated with known medieval settlements. Excavation and survey work, including geophysics, tied to documentary sources where available, should be undertaken to explore the origins of towns, and the development of industrial practices in particular. Coastal survey is likely to be a developing area of interest in order to engage with developing national agendas and to meet the threats of development and climate change. Research will inevitably focus on some of the distinctive potential of the region such as its waterlogged urban deposits. Issues of regional concern are likely to include ethnicity and identity in borders areas, and the complex exploitation of marginal uplands. Cross-regional comparisons with other distinctive areas elsewhere in Britain, and even Europe, may also offer valuable insights.

Above all future research initiatives will need to be contextualised. We must place our empirical data within historical frameworks of social relationships. Landscape surveys are best undertaken within the confines of real landed entities, an estate or a manor. Castles and monasteries need to be seen in the context of their patrimonies. Towns should be examined in relation to their hinterlands and their competitors. Artefacts should be viewed as items that people used, cherished, sometimes feared, and discarded. The past focus on settlement rather than on land use and issues of production and consumption (Finch 2002, 113), has given a partial view of medieval life dominated by form and function. Finch has proposed instead an archaeology of inhabitation which fully encompasses the social relations that are manifested in the medieval landscape (2002, 113). It is this agenda with which we need to engage in the North West.

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