

New discoveries about medieval England presented in innovative conference

May 12 2016, by Cerri Evans

New discoveries uncovered at medieval sites across the East of England have been examined in a new form of conference in which academics, consultants and members of the public presented their data and discussed ideas.

Around 100 people representing universities, community groups from Essex to Yorkshire, and members of the public from as far as Wales and Cornwall attended the Medieval Settlement Research Group's 30th anniversary [conference](#).

Recent archaeological discoveries spanning the sixth to the sixteenth centuries found in rural villages were reviewed to identify common and contrasting patterns.

Delegates discussed how findings from these projects are contributing to a 'bigger picture' about how developments in the [medieval period](#) have influenced the places we live in today.

Themes covered included the importance of the middle Anglo-Saxon period (7th to 9th centuries AD) in understanding how today's settlements came into existence, and the impact of the 14th century Black Death in reversing settlement growth for almost 200 years.

The conference, run by the School of History & Heritage at the University of Lincoln, adopted an innovative format to engage the public, giving members of community groups an opportunity to present

findings on the same terms as academic teams.

As well as expert speakers, the conference included a visit to the deserted medieval village at the University of Lincoln's Riseholme campus, a site iconic as the first deserted medieval village excavation to be published in the journal, *Medieval Archaeology*.

The conference was devised and run by Professor Carenza Lewis, an archaeologist and Professor for the Public Understanding of Research at the University of Lincoln. She said: "The conference was open to anyone with an interest in medieval rural villages, hamlets and farms. It was also very timely; *Historic England* has just published a report into the research value of community archaeology and history showing how pertinent the issue of public engagement with research is in the field of heritage.

"We reviewed recent archaeological investigations in places where people currently live and work in Eastern England, which are often not thought of as historic sites, but where a lot of exciting and innovative work has recently been carried out. There was a special focus on the contribution of community projects to the academic study of rural settlements.

"Around 75 per cent of delegates were members of the public and the format –which enabled professional archaeologists to hear about new discoveries made by community groups, who were in turn able to hear and discuss the latest academic ideas - was very successful, stimulating lively and informed discussion."

Formal feedback confirmed the positive impact the conference had; 83 per cent of delegates gave the conference overall the highest possible rating, 79 per cent felt they had made useful connections, 96 per cent felt they had learned something useful, and 92 per cent said they felt

more inspired and enthused as a result of attending the conference. And 85 per cent said they would attend a similar conference again.

"Community archaeology is increasingly popular across the UK and has made possible [new discoveries](#) in and around many settlements of medieval origin where people live today," added Professor Lewis. "This focus on non-deserted medieval settlements is also reflected in current scholarly research which recognises that most medieval settlements did not become permanently deserted, thus encompassing the non-deserted majority is a priority if understanding of the period is to be advanced. The success of this conference makes me keen to run similar events again in the future."

Speakers included archaeologists and historians from the universities of Lincoln, Cambridge and Leicester; community archaeology groups from Essex, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire; as well as Historic England and the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Provided by University of Lincoln

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