

**EARLY MEDIEVAL MONASTICISM IN THE NORTH SEA ZONE**  
***A conference examining new research and fresh perspectives***

25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> April 2015, University of Kent

**ABSTRACTS**

**SESSION 1: Power and Place: the Politics of Monastic Foundation**

**Ian Wood**

**Merovingian monasticism and England**

The earliest monastic foundation in England was that of SS Peter and Paul at Canterbury, which obviously followed the traditions of Gregory the Great. In the North Irish traditions have attracted more attention, because of the significance of Iona for Lindisfarne and its dependencies, and because of the evidence provided by Bede, and by the anonymous Life of Cuthbert. In contrast to these two traditions, the influence of Merovingian monasticism has been rather less considered, and yet the Gallo-Roman and Merovingian monastic tradition was much more substantial than that of either Rome or Ireland, at least in terms of the number of early foundations, the wealth which they gained, and the surviving documentation, in terms of charters, rules and hagiography. Not surprisingly, the influence of Merovingian monasticism in England was considerable, reaching to Hexham, Ripon, Wearmouth and Jarrow. It is also well attested for more southern centres such as Bath and Barking, and it can be easily inferred for the Kentish houses, including Lyminge. This contribution will examine the evidence for Merovingian influence on the monastic houses of southern England, and will stress the extent to which the foundations of the South need to be seen alongside the religious history of Francia.

**Barbara Yorke**

**Queen Balthild's 'monastic policy' and the origins of female religious houses in southern England**

The career of Balthild, an Anglo-Saxon who married King Clovis II of Neustria/Burgundy (639-57) has been much discussed as has the *Klosterpolitik* she pursued during her regency (657-65) for her son Clothar III (657-73). What has not been so fully considered is an Anglo-Saxon dimension to her activities which will form the subject of this paper. It will argue for her influence, both direct and indirect, on the development of royal double houses in southern England, and provide an opportunity to discuss the origins of such houses in Kent. Although connections between Balthild and the East Anglian royal house are acknowledged, the paper critiques some recent assumptions about them, and suggests an alternative area for her own Anglo-Saxon origins. Frankish family nunneries have been accepted as an important influence on the development of comparable Anglo-Saxon communities, but it has to be recognised that they had to be fitted into a rather different type of political landscape within the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The family houses of Francia, and the interaction of rulers with them, provide an opportunity to explore similarities and differences in the way that elites of Neustria and southern England sought to use aspects of Christian practice to bolster their positions.

**Dries Tys**

**Monastic houses in the Frankish lowlands and Northern France between the 8th and the 10th centuries: their setting and relation to aristocratic power strategies.**

The earliest monasteries in the Frankish lowlands (we focus on the valleys of the rivers Schelde and Meuse) are related to aristocratic power strategies. We will present the archaeological information we have for these abbeys, placed in a critical historical context. The information on lay-out is rather

limited on the contrary to historical information. The written sources, mostly hagiographic, leave us an image of royal missionaries, like Saint-Amand and faithful aristocrats (often related to the Peppinids), founding abbeys in their estates in the valleys of both rivers. In this paper we will discuss the pattern that can be derived from these sources related to a broader perspective on those abbeys. The abbeys discussed here include Hamage, Thier d'Olne, Saint-amand, the abbeys in Ghent, Sint-Truiden, Aldeneik and others.

## **John-Henry Clay**

### **Saint Boniface's Pastoral Strategy in Central Germany, 721-751**

Eighth-century Anglo-Saxon missionaries had a fundamental impact on the development of the church in what is now central Germany. They did not enter a pristine 'pagan' landscape, however; there is ample evidence of earlier Christian influence, and by the time of their arrival central Germany contained a complex mixture of cultural and religious traditions. Drawing on contemporary letters, charters, archaeology, and toponymics, this paper will attempt to reconstruct the networks of Boniface's early church foundations in Hessa and Thuringia, and compare these to the church networks of his native Wessex. How far was Boniface innovating in his pastoral strategy, and how far was he adapting to circumstances on the ground? Was he attempting to 'transplant' a pastoral system from his homeland to central Germany? Finally, the paper will move from the practical to the conceptual, considering how Boniface's foundations reflected his ideology of conversion.

## **SESSION 2: What did Monasteries Look Like? Architecture and layout**

### **Rosemary Cramp**

#### **New perspectives on monastic buildings and their uses.**

For more than forty years there has been discussion on what, if anything, distinguishes a monastic settlement from other ecclesiastical or lay settlements in the period 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. This lecture will review recent evidence for the buildings which have been more recently excavated on such sites and discuss their form and apparent functions, with some reference to documentary sources.

### **Elizabeth Lorans**

#### **Marmoutier (Tours), a late Roman and early medieval monastery in the Loire valley (4th-11th centuries)**

Elected as bishop of Tours in 371, St Martin decided to create an hermitage on the northern bank of the Loire river, near Tours, and spent part of his time there until he died in 397. The description of the place by Sulpicius Severus in the *Vita Sancti Martini* provides the image of a remote spot, of difficult access, between the cliff and the river. Archaeology reveals a different story, showing an early Roman settlement which was reused by the bishop and his companions without any chronological gap.

This paper will present an overview of the morphology and topography of the site using all the evidence provided by recent research undertaken by Tours University. Geophysical and geomorphological surveys allow us to reconstruct the formation, in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, of an island which gradually joined the main land, which made possible the extension of the precinct towards the south.

Various Roman and early medieval buildings as well as funerary areas are known through excavation and texts, which makes it possible to reconstruct the topography of the site during the first millennium, before the major development it underwent between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Comparisons will be made with a number of early monastic sites in Gaul which followed a similar pattern.

### **Tomas Ó Carragáin**

#### **Toureen Peakaun: Insular Monasticism and Royal Patronage in the Glen of Aherlow, Ireland**

Founded by Beccán in the mid- to late seventh century, Toureen Peakaun, Co. Tipperary (Cluain Árd Mobheagóg), seems to have enjoyed the patronage of the kings of Cashel, c.20km to the northeast, as well as contacts with several important churches in Ireland and possibly further afield. There is a substantial collection of sculpture at the site, including a high cross which may be as early as c.700. This paper presents the results of recent survey and excavations there. Among the features uncovered were early medieval burials and possible traces of wooden churches; an ecclesiastical enclosure c.170 in diameter, which seems to be a primary feature; a modest amount of iron-working (primarily blacksmithing); and a small and unusual domestic enclosure surrounded by a water-filled ditch. This evidence is placed in the context of other recent excavations that provide us with important new insights about the layout and character of early Irish monasteries.

### **David Petts**

#### **Places and spaces: some reflections on reconstructing the spatial organisation of Northumbrian monasteries**

Anglo-Saxon monastic sites were complex places combining religious and economic functions. They were locations where many different communities, secular and ecclesiastical, high and low status, confronted and engaged with each other. They were also caught in a web of local and long-distance

religious, political and economic relationships. This paper explores some of the practical and methodological issues involved in identifying how these multi-functional settlement sites were spatially organised. Drawing on a range of monastic sites from Northumbria, including extensively excavated sites such as Whithorn, Hartlepool, Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, and less well-understood sites such as Lindisfarne and Coldingham, the range of ways in which such monastic sites were structured will be examined. In particular, the dynamic and changing nature of these sites will be highlighted, and the danger of imposing simplistic models of what monasticism *should* look like will be addressed

**Tony Wilmott**

### **The Anglian Abbey of Whitby: new perspectives on topography and layout**

Between 1993 and 2014 English Heritage have undertaken several archaeological projects at Whitby Abbey. These have been connected with the provision of new visitor facilities, mitigation of coastal erosion, and a research project. The results of this work are now being assessed in preparation for a full programme of analysis. Although the work has recorded evidence for all periods from the Bronze Age to the post-medieval, some of the most significant results have been to revolutionise understanding of the Anglian monastic landscape.

Following the 1920s excavation of Sir Charles Peers the received view of the Abbey was as a small settlement on the cliff-top comprising a series of small free-standing cells. This view was challenged in the 1970s by Philip Rahtz and Rosemary Cramp, but no new evidence was forthcoming until the recent work.

Anglian archaeology has now been found across a very wide area of the Headland, and it is apparent that much more has been lost to the sea. New findings include a major lay Christian cemetery, extensive 'domestic' settlement, evidence for high-status glass working, and confirmation of the site of the monastic cemetery close in to the site of the later abbey church. Most recently, in 2014, a boundary ditch has been tentatively identified, cutting off the Headland from the River Esk to the North Sea. This contained only Anglian finds, and may be the boundary to the monastic settlement.

The paper will briefly examine the new evidence for the Anglian monastic landscape on the Headland, and will attempt tentatively to interpret the results. It is hoped that it will prompt further discussion during the conference.

## **SESSION 3: Production, Consumption and Surplus: Monasteries as Economic Central Places**

**Rosamond Faith**

### **The world of the *Limenwara***

In the hope that a landscape history approach might be a useful supplement to what has established in the archaeological record, my paper raises some possible lines of enquiry about kind of place Lyminge might have been before the period of the timber halls, themselves precursors of the minster. It does this with reference to two other places which seem to have been centres of lay power Lindisfarne and Rendlesham. Essentially this involves looking at social relationships, particularly those engendered by livestock husbandry, as well as at the landscape itself. I revisit the concepts of the 'multiple estate' and Jolliffe's view of early administrative arrangements, both of which used a Kentish estate, Wye, as a model, to see whether either of these now unfashionable concepts could still prove useful. I conclude with a look across the Channel to suggest some approaches which might be relevant when thinking about powers in the land and their relationships with the people who lived on that land.

**Justine Bayley**

### **The production of fine metalwork and glass objects in Middle Saxon England**

A number of technical treatises survive from the early medieval period but the best documentary source for early medieval metal and glass working is Theophilus' *On divers arts*, though the manuscript probably dates to the early 12th century. However craftsmen have always been conservative in the application of techniques, so this work can safely be used to illuminate the practices of a few hundred years earlier. It is appropriate too that the author was a practicing craftsman-monk so his perspective is helpful when looking at monasteries as economic centres.

There is now a considerable body of archaeological evidence for the working of both non-ferrous metals and glass in Middle Saxon England. Although iron working was also widespread at this period as iron objects were an essential part of everyday life, the focus here is on the other metals. The largest assemblages of metalworking finds tend to come from major urban settlements, but there is a growing body of material from known monastic sites as well as from other rural settlements, some of which may have served a monastic function as some period of their existence.

This paper will examine the physical evidence for non-ferrous metal and glass working, using it to reconstruct the processes carried out. This in turn will allow a comparison of the craft activities practiced at settlements of different types so their economic importance can be assessed and set in context. Some comparisons will also be made with contemporary metalworking practices in continental Europe.

**Mark McKerracher**

### **Seeds and status: the archaeobotany of a monastery**

The excavations at Lyminge have produced an archaeobotanical assemblage of exceptional size, scope, and variety among Anglo-Saxon settlement sites, spanning both Early Saxon royal and Mid Saxon monastic phases as well as including prehistoric and medieval material. This paper reviews the potential of this large, well-preserved assemblage to elucidate changes in diet and farming practices at this uniquely important site. In particular, this paper presents the results of a detailed, quantitative analysis of 10 rich archaeobotanical samples from the monastic phase, undertaken by the author as part of a doctoral research project. Various crop and weed species present in the samples are identified, and their relative abundance quantified. The identified taxa include, in small quantities, the hulled wheats spelt and possibly emmer – both highly unusual in samples of Anglo-Saxon date. The results are considered within the immediate context of the site and its landscape, and within the wider context of Mid Saxon England, including comparisons with other high status

and ecclesiastical sites. Nascent patterns suggest that the monastic settlement at Lyminge and other contemporary high status sites may share an 'archaeobotanical signature', chiefly characterised by an unusual diversity and abundance of plant remains.

## **Zoe Knapp**

### **Changing tastes: Investigating feasting and fasting in Anglo-Saxon Lyminge**

The Anglo-Saxon period has been characterised as one of dynamic transition and change, and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity was one of the most significant events during these turbulent times. The social, economic and political impetus behind the re- adoption of Christianity across Anglo-Saxon England has been studied at length, primarily through historical sources, changing settlement patterns and trade and exchange patterns of material culture. Zooarchaeology is now recognised to make an important contribution to site interpretation, and is increasingly being employed to answer questions of changing Anglo-Saxon animal husbandry. Using evidence from the well-dated zooarchaeological assemblage from Anglo-Saxon Lyminge, Kent (c. A.D 5<sup>th</sup>-9thC) I consider changing patterns of animal exploitation between the pre-Christian phase of settlement and the monastic phase of settlement. However, moving beyond patterns of subsistence and drawing on concepts of the agency of animals, I investigate how changing human-animal relationships are reflected in the foodstuffs that are being consumed in Anglo-Saxon Lyminge, and if there is any evidence for the introduction of monastic dietary rules that reflect wider changing world-views.