

The Middle Ages Revisited

**Studies in the Archaeology and History of
Medieval Southern England Presented to
Professor David A. Hinton**

edited by

Ben Jervis



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David Hinton and Medieval Archaeology: A Personal Appreciation

Ben Jervis

'An archaeologist interested in the Middle Ages has to have a grasp both of the range of contemporary documents and of the work of modern commentators' (Hinton 1977: 211).

It would be an understatement to say that David Hinton is one person with such a grasp, and who has also helped countless students to develop a similar appreciation for the wealth and diversity of evidence, both archaeological and historical, for the medieval period. What follows is a personal reflection on David's contribution to medieval archaeology, a contribution which resonates in all of the papers which follow.

When I made the decision to pursue postgraduate study at The University of Southampton in 2006, a key factor in my decision was the presence of the '3 Davids' (Hinton, Peacock and Williams) in the department. I had become familiar with the work of David Hinton principally through reading his *Archaeology, Economy and Society: England from the fifth to fifteenth century* as a part of my undergraduate module in Anglo-Saxon archaeology. As it turned out David was one of the first members of staff whom I met, taking my fellow fresh-faced MA student colleagues and me on a tour of the Highfield campus. Immediately I was struck by his dry sense of humour, for which I have developed a fond appreciation over the years.

I was fortunate enough to be able to sit in on David's MA module on early medieval archaeology (for the last time, I think, taught with colour slides rather than Powerpoint!), and also to benefit from his mentoring as I prepared my MA dissertation on the Anglo-Saxon pottery from Chichester. Like many other former students and colleagues of David's to whom I have spoken over the years, my over-riding memory of these interactions was of generosity, both of time and of knowledge. As I moved on to my doctoral research I would often appear at David's door with a simple question and end up staying for much longer, as he recommended reading and challenged me to think about the evidence differently. David was not a part of my viva panel, but was among the first to congratulate me as, ever the pragmatist, he tried to deal with a minor flood caused by dead pigeons in the guttering, with his jacket.

For many of us working on the archaeology and history of the Wessex region, David has been an ever present at local and national conferences, often as a speaker but equally as an audience member, supporting local research whilst taking every opportunity to expand his ever growing knowledge of the medieval period. On a personal note, I am grateful for David advancing a number of opportunities to me to speak at some of these conferences. David is a core member of the Oxford Medieval Diet Group and has often regaled us with entertaining summaries of food related topics, typically with matter of fact titles such as 'Offal'; his ability to synthesise evidence, sometimes drawn from the most obscure of sources coming across with every talk. David's interest in food is represented by two papers in this volume, those by Serjeantson *et al.* on monastic diet and by Robinson on wheat in medieval England.

David's work, as reflected in the contributions to this volume, has focussed principally on the archaeology of southern England, primarily Oxfordshire (whilst working at the Ashmolean Museum; see James this volume Mellor this volume; Serjeantson *et al.* this volume), Dorset, Hampshire (Biddle this volume; Brown this volume; Weikert this volume; Yorke this volume; Brisbane and Hodges this volume) and Wiltshire. As acting editor of *Oxoniensia* and honorary treasurer of the M40 Archaeology steering group, he took a leading role, along with Trevor Rowley, in the publication of the archaeological work undertaken in advance of the M40 motorway. This work represented a rare foray into pottery studies for David, with his definition of a type of pottery that he would term 'M40 Ware' so as not to imply a production centre for the ware.

By the time that the M40 archaeology was published, David had already joined the Department of Archaeology at Southampton University, where he would play an instrumental part in the development of archaeology in the city. With students from the University, David undertook the excavation of the house at 58 French Street and he was also an important member of the Southampton Archaeological Research Committee (see Brisbane and Hodges, this volume), which he joined in a personal capacity in 1973. He would go on to become a member of the Executive Committee and, in this role, would also edit the first of the volumes on archaeological work in *Hamwic*, that on the excavations at Melbourne Street, as well as The Committee's booklet on Saxon Southampton (1975). With members of the Southampton University archaeology department, David also undertook small excavations elsewhere in Hampshire, at Beaulieu Abbey, St Peter's Church Yateley and Otterbourne Old Church.

It was though, in Dorset, where David has undertaken his most extensive fieldwork projects. In 1974–1975 he, along with Richard Hodges, undertook a number of excavations within the late Saxon and medieval town of Wareham. This work revealed the first evidence of late Saxon buildings in the town, as well as locating the castle ditch, whilst the failure to locate the quay supports the suggestion of this feature being located further north, the area excavated in anticipation of locating it being the result of later land reclamation. In collaboration with David Peacock, David also established a research project on the Isle of Purbeck, which has both a distinctive topography and range of natural resources (chiefly Purbeck 'Marble') which offered opportunities to explore changes in land use as well as industrial development. The fieldwork and documentary research, undertaken with the support of English Heritage, were published as *Purbeck Papers*, a collaboration edited by David and including work undertaken by him and a number of colleagues from Southampton and English Heritage.

Between 2001 and 2006 David co-directed (with Chris Loveluck) excavations at the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Breamore on the Hampshire/Dorset border. In typical fashion, the report (co-authored with Sally Worrell) combines a comprehensive understanding of the local historical and archaeological context to underpin and weigh a number of possible interpretations of this important site, including assessing the prospect of its unusual character being the result of its location at the frontier between the West Saxons and the Solent 'Jutes' (see Yorke this volume). Other recent fieldwork has included supporting excavations at Tidgrove Warren (Hampshire) and work at Bodiam (East Sussex) and Scotney (Kent) Castles (see Johnson this volume).

It is though, for his work on medieval metalwork that David is perhaps best known. His publication list is littered with reports on finds of Anglo-Saxon metalwork and he has been a substantial contributor to excavation reports from the region, including the landmark report *Objects and Economy in Medieval Winchester*. His works on Anglo-Saxon smithing, including the analyses of the smith's grave from Tattershall Thorpe and the non-ferrous metalwork from *Hamwic* remain significant contributions to the study of early medieval material culture.

Yet, whilst David's associations with *Hamwic* and objects such as the Alfred Jewel may immediately make one think of the early medieval period, David has made equally important contributions to later medieval archaeology. Particularly towards the latter part of his career, David has engaged fruitfully with theoretical ideas including the application of 'closure theory' and its implications for understanding values and identities in the 15th century, medieval identity issues more widely and, more recently, the relationship between material culture and power. There is perhaps, a common perception that medieval archaeologists are 'anti-theory' and, indeed, David has himself been critical of interpretive excesses in the past (Richard Hodges recalls affectionately how David referred to his doctoral work as 'faction'), but these works show that David is much more than a top class synthesiser and writer of archaeological narratives, but is also equally happy to engage with difficult theoretical ideas, provided they can be substantiated by the archaeological and historical evidence. Indeed, I was once given the advice by a journal editor to write for somebody like David Hinton, who is open to ideas but needs to be convinced;

this is perhaps reflective of many of our experiences of David as the most (constructively) critical of critical friends.

In 2005 David produced his *magnum opus*; *Gold and Gilt: Pots and Pins*, a masterful work of synthesis and analysis of the possessions of the people of medieval England from the end of Rome to the Reformation. The book was rightly highly commended at the 2006 Archaeological Book Awards and is equally of use to undergraduate students encountering medieval artefacts for the first time and seasoned researchers needing a point of reference. A joy of this book, recognised by several reviewers, are the candid, often witty, endnotes in which David was not shy about highlighting his past errors and providing critical insights into the arguments of others. This book is important not only for its breadth but the ways in which David was able to explore the wider significance of individual artefacts, touching on issues of identity and belief, as well as economy, laying in place themes and ideas which have been picked up on and developed by other researchers as, over the last decade, a plethora of new approaches to medieval objects has emerged.

In 1979 David became the editor for the Society of Medieval Archaeology, overseeing not only the production of volumes of *Medieval Archaeology*, but also the volume produced to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Society (Hinton 1983), a work which remains a rich source of information for understanding the theoretical development of our discipline and its often problematic relationship with history. In 1987, as editor, David also oversaw the production of the society's recommendations to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, published in the pages of *Medieval Archaeology*. This document represents what today we would refer to as a research framework, highlighting both general and specific research priorities and research practices for work on urban, rural, religious, industrial and manorial sites, as well as making recommendations for the preservation of surviving medieval monuments. David has continued to shape agendas for the societies with which he has been involved, most recently as president of the Royal Archaeological Institute between 2012–2015.

The volume offers a retrospective and review of medieval archaeology in southern England, with papers discussing the history of archaeology, revisiting old archives and addressing long established research questions, all inspired by the research and teaching of David Hinton. The first two papers focus on the history of archaeology. Tom Beaumont James presents a lively account of the life and work of the antiquary Richard James, a scholar whose life can be linked to that of David Hinton in a number of ways. In the second chapter two of David Hinton's former students, Mark Brisbane and Richard Hodges, discuss the development of archaeology and *Hamwic* and the changing ways that archaeologists have interpreted this site, emphasising, in particular, David Hinton's role in championing Southampton's archaeology. Staying with the topic of *Hamwic*, Barbara Yorke discusses the wider political context of the Solent region. The next five papers revisit sites and material with which David Hinton has some personal collection. Martin Biddle discusses Winchester Old Minster (as discussed above, David Hinton was a major contributor to the volume on finds from the medieval city), Katherine Weikert explores the household of Faccombe Netherton (the original report on the site being supervised by David Hinton), Duncan Brown revisits Cuckoo Lane (an important site from medieval Southampton) and Maureen Mellor discusses the distribution of later medieval tiles in Oxfordshire (a subject with which David Hinton concerned himself at the very beginning of his career). The following two papers, both by long standing colleagues of David Hinton, relate to his interest in medieval diet. Mark Robinson discusses the cultivation of wheat in medieval England and Dale Serjeantson *et al.*, contrast the faunal remains from two early medieval monasteries, St Albans and Eynsham. The final chapter by Matthew Johnson discusses work that David Hinton supported following his retirement, examining the landscapes of Bodiam and Scotney castles.

These papers follow are testament to David's influence and impact both on the development of medieval archaeology but also on his colleagues and students. We hope that he will find these reflections on the medieval archaeology of southern England stimulating and that his modesty will not prevent him from enjoying the appreciation that all involved in its production have for his insights, guidance and friendship.

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Author Biography: Ben Jervis is Lecturer in Archaeology at Cardiff University, where he specialises in the medieval archaeology of southern Britain. He undertook his doctoral research at the University of Southampton and his current research is concerned with the material culture of English rural households, medieval pottery and the study of urbanism in Wessex.