
11.1 The active peasant: changing the rural world, 1250-1350 Room 103

Convener: Christopher Dyer

Chair: TBA

Medieval peasants have been reassessed in recent historical writing. We no longer think of them just as victims of an oppressive social structure, or as an inert mass, but as people who constructed their own identities, responded to stimuli around them, took initiatives, and made decisions. They played a part in moulding the rural world and promoting change. This is the first of two linked sessions.

11.11 Christopher Dyer – English peasant agriculture in an age of crisis

This paper will use a variety of sources, including archaeology and landscape, to investigate peasant responses to the changes and problems of the period 1250-1350. This will include examination of their acquisition of land and its management, and a consideration of the techniques employed for cultivation and animal husbandry. Manipulations of land use and rotations, choice of crops and livestock, the application of labour and market contacts will be considered. This will be a contribution to the debate between those who emphasise the immiseration of the peasantry, and those who see peasants as more adaptable than the lords in coping with the crises of the period.

Christopher Dyer has a BA and a PhD from the University of Birmingham. He was Assistant Lecturer, University of Edinburgh (1967-70); Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, and Reader, University of Birmingham (1970-90); Professor of Medieval Social History, University of Birmingham (1990-2001). He is currently Professor of Regional and Local History in the Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester. He has held many offices and was elected FBA in 1994. He is the author of many publications including *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: the Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540* (1980); *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (1989; revised edn. 1998) [translated into Spanish as *Niveles de Vida en la baja edad media* (Barcelona, 1991); *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (1994; new edn. 2000); (with C. Lewis and P. Mitchell-Fox), *Village, Hamlet and Field: Changing Medieval Settlements in Central England* (1997; rev. edn., 2001); *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: the People of Britain, 850-1520* (2002; pbk., 2003); *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in Late Medieval England* (2005). He is also the editor of: (with T. Aston, P. Coss and J. Thirsk), *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honour of R. H. Hilton* (Cambridge, 1983); (with Kate Giles), *Town and Country in the Middle Ages. Contrasts, Contacts and Communications* (2005); *The Self-Contained Village? The Social History of Rural Communities 1250-1900* (2007); (with P. Coss and C. Wickham), *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages* (2007); (with C. Richardson), *William Dugdale, Historian, 1605-1686* (2009).

11.12 Miriam Muller – Communal identity, peasant agency and lordship

This paper will be a comparative exploration of communal structures and identities in three fourteenth century villages, two of them in Wiltshire and one in Norfolk. The paper will consider settlement structures, landscape features, local economies and infrastructure, and examine how these might have impacted on peasant mentalities and community dynamics. Another important aspect will be to consider the role of lordship both in constructing communal identities and creating the image of the outsider. It will be argued that the construction of communal dynamics and identities is of a dialectical nature, fundamentally encompassing the ever changing and locally dominant lord-peasant relationship. The approach will be interdisciplinary, straddling such disciplines as economic history, sociology and landscape history.

Miriam Muller has a BA in History from the School of Cultural and Community Studies, University of Sussex, 1996; an M.Phil from the University of Cambridge, 1997 (thesis on 'Rural politics and peasant ideology in the fourteenth century: the St Alban's manor of Winslow'); and a PhD from the University of Birmingham 2001 (thesis on 'Peasant mentalities and cultures in two contrasting communities in the fourteenth century: Brandon in Suffolk and Badbury in Wiltshire'). She is now Lecturer in Medieval History, University of Birmingham. Recent publications include: 'Social control and the hue and cry in two fourteenth century villages', *J. Medieval History*, 31(2005); 'A divided class?

Peasants and peasant communities in later medieval England', in *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages*, ed. C. Dyer, P. Coss and C. Wickham (Past & Present Supplement, 2, Oxford, 2007); and 'Peasants, lords and developments in leasing in later medieval England', in *Emergence and early development of leasehold in the European countryside during the middle ages* (CORN series, vol. 10, 2009). Her field of interest and research is the comparative social and economic history of later medieval England, especially peasant communities and lord peasant relationships. Within this broad field: gender, conflict, conflict resolution and co-operation between peasants, and between lords and peasants, ca 1250-1500.

11.13 Phillip Schofield – Peasants and litigation in the manor court

In this paper an attempt will be made to consider the ways in which peasants operated within a world of law. Focussing especially upon a wide body of manorial court litigation from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the paper will build upon earlier work on manor court litigation and the peasant's place within law and legal mechanisms; it will also add, through a close consideration of material emerging from an AHRC project on manor court litigation, to the evidential base for both a peasant use of law as well as the context in which law was employed. In this last respect, careful consideration will be given to the development of the manor court, especially in the decades either side of 1300, and the extent to which the peasantry was itself capable of stimulating any such change.

Phillipp Richard Schofield, BA (Lond.); D.Phil. (Oxon.) is Professor of Medieval History and Head of Department at Aberystwyth University. Recent publications of relevance to the proposed paper include: (with Thijs Lambrecht), *Credit and the rural economy in North-western Europe, c. 1200-c.1800* (forthcoming 2009); 'Die Kreditvergabe im englischen *manor court* 1250-1350. Formen und Funktionen' in G. Clemens, ed., *Kreditbeziehungen und Netzerkbildungen. Die soziale Praxis des Kredits* (2009); 'The social economy of the medieval village', *Economic History Review*, 61 S1; 'Peasant debt in English manorial courts: form and nature', in Julie-Mayade Claustre (ed.), *Endettement privé et justice au Moyen Age* (2007); 'Intestat et testaments paysans en Angleterre et Pays de Galles au XIIIe siècle et au début du XIVe siècle', in N. Vivier, ed., *Ruralité française et britannique, xiiiè-xxe siècles. Approches comparées* (2005). Phillip is currently preparing a Selden Society volume on inter-personal pleas in manorial courts with Dr C. D. Briggs, University of Southampton (to be completed in 2010).