This workshop was intended to bring together early career medieval economic historians in order to explore our subject and its future. By ‘early career scholars’ we mean those who are less than ten years into a permanent academic post, those with PhDs undertaking postdoctoral studies or still active in research, and those nearing the end of a PhD. During the workshop sessions, participants will discuss the current state of their discipline and try to identify key questions for the future, as well as the best sources and methods for tackling them.

No formal papers were be given, but sessions were chaired and focused around particular themes. As a basis for discussion, workshop materials (articles and topics for consideration) were also pre-circulated to all participants. The general theme chosen for this first workshop was 'The Medieval Peasantry', but this was intended merely as a starting point for the discussion of a broader range of topics. The aim of the venture was to co-ordinate the activities of researchers in an effort to maximize collective achievements in the field of medieval economic history.
Workshop Programme

Music Room, Downing College, Cambridge

10.15-10.45  Registration and Coffee
10.45-11.00  Introduction to Workshop
11.00-11.45  Keynote Speaker: Professor Bas van Bavel (University of Utrecht)
11.45-12.45  The Medieval Peasantry 1 – ‘Peasants and the Land’
             Chair: Dr Ben Dodds (University of Durham)
12.45-14.00  Lunch
14.00-15.00  The Medieval Peasantry 2 – ‘Peasants and the Market’
             Chair: Dr Chris Briggs (University of Cambridge)
15.15-16.00  The Future of Medieval Economic History in Universities
             Chair: Dr James Davis (Queen’s University Belfast)
16.00-16.30  Setting up a Network for Medieval Economic Historians
16.30-17.00  Tea Break
17.00-18.00  The Medieval Peasantry 3 – ‘Peasants and Lordship’
             Chair: Dr Miriam Müller (University of Birmingham)
18.00-18.30  Summing Up – The Future of Medieval Peasant Studies
Workshop Participants

Martin Allen
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
Dr Martin Allen is a Senior Assistant Keeper in the Department of Coins and Medals at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. His main area of research is English medieval monetary history, with a particular emphasis upon money supply, mint organization and ecclesiastical mints.

Bas van Bavel
University of Utrecht
Bas van Bavel is Professor of Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages at Utrecht University. He has written numerous articles on the economic history of medieval Europe, examining land and lease markets, rural wage labour, proto-industrialization, and the economy of the Low Countries. He is currently working on several research projects: ‘Landed property and property rights’; ‘The rise, organization and institutional framework of markets in Holland, 11th - 16th centuries’; and ‘Economic growth and stagnation in the pre-industrial era: Iraq, Italy and the Low Countries, 600-1700’.

Adrian Bell
University of Reading
Adrian is Senior Lecturer in the History of Finance at the ICMA Centre, Henley Business School, University of Reading. He is the joint author of the book, The English Wool Market c. 1230-1327, published by CUP in 2007. He is currently working on a ESRC project with Professor Chris Brooks and Dr Tony Moore investigating the credit relationships of English monarchs and Italian merchant societies between 1272 - 1340 (www.icmacentre.ac.uk/medievalcredit). Adrian is also interested in the Hundred Years War and he is completing a AHRC project with Professor Anne Curry on 'The Soldier in later medieval England' (www.medievalsoldier.org).

Elma Brenner
University of Cambridge
Elma is interested in leprosy and charity in the Middle Ages; medieval cities and their rural hinterlands; monastic administration of rural estates; the importance of economic concepts and practicalities in medieval religious life. Her current research (Wellcome Trust post-doc) is titled 'Leprosy and society in Rouen, c.1100-c.1500'. It examines institutional and non-institutional provision for lepers in the area around Rouen, aiming to contribute to the social, religious, economic and medical history of the city. One chapter of her proposed book will address the rural estates and commercial activities of Rouen's leper houses.

Chris Briggs
University of Cambridge
Chris’s main research interests are credit in the countryside, landholding structure and subtenancy, peasants' use of law courts, and all aspects of the nature and use of legal institutions in the medieval countryside. He is currently employed on the AHRC-funded project 'Private law and medieval village society: personal actions in manor courts, 1250-1350'.

Catherine Casson
University of York
The economy and governance of medieval English towns is Catherine’s main research interest. In particular, she is interested in how the crown, civic authorities and guilds regulated trade, to what extent they communicated and cooperated with each other, and what their regulatory priorities were. To what extent the regulation of trade varied between towns, and over time, and
why, is a further research interest. Currently Catherine is in the final year of a PhD at the University of York, studying prosecutions for forgery in trade and manufacturing in six English towns during the period 1250 to 1400.

James Davis
Queen’s University Belfast
James Davis’s main research interests focus upon medieval English towns, markets and trade. He has been examining the market culture of medieval England through a variety of literary and legal sources and is presently completing a book on this subject entitled *Medieval market morality*.

Ben Dodds
University of Durham
Ben Dodds research interests focus on medieval peasant agriculture. His research involves the interpretation of tithe receipt data as a source for agricultural history. This has included the development of series of indicators of aggregate arable production and an attempt to understand more about peasant production by comparison with that on manorial demesnes. Did peasants grow the same crops as their seigneurial counterparts? What were the priorities of peasant producers? Following a project on northeast England, Ben is now working on data from parishes in southern and western England.

Charlotte Harrison
University of Liverpool
Charlotte Harrison is in the second year of doctoral research into the role and effect of the written record in late medieval English rural society, examining evidence for peasant participation in the growing written culture. Her aim is to build a picture of the circumstances in which peasants came into contact with documents (both actively, in having documents such as charters created, and passively in the manor or other courts), the means by which they could do so, and the social and economic status of those who did. Charlotte also hopes to investigate the extent to which the functional needs of peasants, particularly relating to the security of their land transactions, may have shaped the form and use of records at a local level.

Cory Hazlehurst
University of Birmingham
Cory’s doctorate focuses on the history of emotions in the Middle Ages, specifically medieval peasant emotions.

Peter Kitson
University of Cambridge
Peter’s interests in the medieval period are mainly those of an early modernist peering backwards in time. He has strong interests in late medieval demographic behaviour, as well as labour markets in agriculture. He is also working as a research associate on a project that will be exploiting the late fourteenth-century Poll Tax returns to explore the occupational structure and population geography of England at this time.

Mark Koyama
University of Oxford
Mark’s background and training is in economics rather than history and consequently he is interested in the Middle Ages as a means to tracing the origins of the rise of sustained economic growth in Europe. In particular, he is interested in two aspects of the late medieval economy; firstly, the emergence of credit markets and the transition from personal to impersonal forms of credit; secondly, the rise of long distance trade and the formal and informal institutions that
supported this trade in the Middle Ages. As part of a D.Phil. in Economics at the University of Oxford, Mark has completed a paper on the effects of the usury prohibition in the Middle Ages. This paper focuses on access to mercantile capital rather than on rural credit; it examines the tightening of the ban on interest during a period of falling interest rates and widening participation in capital markets is difficult to reconcile with both the traditional historical interpretation of the usury prohibition and with recent economic reinterpretations of the ban. This paper argues that one reason for the persistence of the ban was that it created a barrier to entry that enabled a small number of merchant bankers to earn monopoly rents. He is interested in extending this research by looking at the role of Jewish money lending in medieval Europe.

**Peter Larson**  
University of Central Florida  
Peter Larson’s research interests focus on lord-peasant relations, village / parish institutions, and local law and administration. His current project is entitled: ‘From Reformation to Restoration in Northern England: Three Villages in Durham, 1399-1660’. This project examines three neighboring villages in Country Durham to ascertain the ways in which the transformation from medieval to early modern played out on the local level, in particular the changes in village society and politics and the relationship of village to parish. He is approaching the question through a reconstruction of village society (based on court books, parish registers, and other local records).

**John Lee**  
University of York  
John Lee works in local government and is also a Research Associate at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of York. He has published *Cambridge and its economic region, 1450-1560* (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2005) and related articles in *Economic History Review* and *Local Population Studies*. He is currently completing an article on the descriptions of small towns in John Leland’s *Itinerary*, preparing a paper on the role of fairs in the later middle ages, and editing a collection of sources relating to Stourbridge Fair, Cambridge.

**Tony Moore**  
University of Reading  
Tony research focuses on the relationship between centre and locality in medieval England, especially the development of royal government and law in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He is also interested in local history, especially of Essex, Hertfordshire and London, and the use of ICT in historical research. He is currently working on a ESRC project with Professor Chris Brooks and Dr Adrian Bell investigating the credit relationships of English monarchs and Italian merchant societies between 1272 - 1340.

**Miriam Müller**  
University of Birmingham  
Miriam’s research focuses on peasant communities, including lord-peasant relationships, peasant land markets, peasant material culture, representations of peasants, gender relationships, and kinship ties in peasant villages in the later middle ages. She is currently working on a book about social order and methods of enforcing social controls in peasant communities in later medieval England. In particular, she is exploring gender patterns of offending behaviour, and the relationships between different types of peasant communities to informal and formal forms of the enforcement of order. She is very interested in the relationship of the peasant community with the manorial court and the way the court was used both by the community and against the peasant community by lords.

**Rafael Oliva**  
University of Seville
Mark Page
Victoria County History (Oxfordshire)
Dr Mark Page currently works for the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire, researching parish histories in the Chilterns and Cotswolds areas of the county. Previous projects include work on the tenants of the bishopric of Winchester before the Black Death, focussing on issues relating to inheritance and the land market. Ongoing research includes an examination of retirement, subleasing, tenant mills, and commercial property on the bishopric estate.

Alex Sapoznik
University of Cambridge
Alex Sapoznik is in the third year of her PhD. Her research project is on peasant cropping strategies and the productivity of peasant land at Oakington, Cambridgeshire. Alex’s research interests are peasant market participation, land transactions, and patterns of production.

Matt Tompkins
University of Leicester
Matt completed a PhD in medieval economic history in 2007, entitled: ‘Peasant society in a Midlands manor, 1400–1600’.

Margaret Yates
University of Reading
Margaret’s research interests focus on the nature of transition - economic, demographic, social - particularly those at the end of the middle ages. She teaches a final year special subject on The English Peasantry 1350-1450. Her current research project is an investigation of the market in freehold land which she plans to expand chronologically to 1195 and into the sixteenth century.
Summary Report

This one-day workshop was attended by twenty-two people, and we wish to thank everyone who participated and helped make the day a success. Nineteen of those who attended are based in the UK, but particularly valuable perspectives were provided by participants from universities in the USA, the Netherlands, and Spain. In addition to the discussion in the sessions, the workshop gave participants extensive opportunities during coffee and lunch breaks to meet new people and discuss research plans. The participants were a diverse mix in terms of experience, ranging from those in the early phases of doctoral research, to individuals now well established in permanent academic posts. It is hoped that everyone got something positive out of the day. The organizers have subsequently received enthusiastic feedback from a number of participants.

The most important outcome of the day was that delegates came away with a greater appreciation of the importance of making their research as relevant and interesting to as broad an audience as possible. All study of the economic and social history of the medieval period should, as far as possible, attempt to draw inspiration from, and make links with, other social science disciplines and periods of historical research. One can make a strong case that medieval social and economic history is particularly well placed to offer relevant and fruitful exchange of ideas with other disciplines. Furthermore, by demonstrating the wider relevance of research on the medieval economy and society, we increase the chances of bringing new people into the field and of retaining those already working in it.

During the day, we heard a great deal about how, in practical terms, we can pursue the task of tapping into wider debates and making fresh comparisons. For example, we can get involved as individuals in international research networks such as the CORN (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area) network; we can design research projects which allow problems in economics and other social sciences to be explored through medieval evidence (as is being done by Adrian Bell and others at the ICMA Centre, University of Reading); and we can endeavour to attend and learn from meetings like the EHS conference and (especially) the International Economic History Association conference. We can also do more to inject a sense of the relevance of the long-term historical perspective on economic change into our teaching, and into our broader engagement with non-specialists. Finally, we must avoid segregating ourselves under the exclusive banner of ‘medieval economic history’. We must forge links with fellow medievalists of all kinds, as well as with economic historians of other periods.

The day also saw participants coming up with interesting suggestions about future directions in particular aspects of our own field of medieval social and economic history. The themes that received closest attention were agricultural productivity, serfdom and freedom, lordship, rent, the state and warfare, short-term fluctuations versus long-term trends, and the impact of mentalities. The workshop did a great deal to clarify the current research agenda, especially as far as rural and agrarian history is concerned.

There was support at the workshop for the idea of establishing an ongoing network of ‘early career scholars’ working on all aspects of the medieval economy and society. The network would be hosted on a website, and there are number of concrete possibilities for this. Potential functions of the network are to circulate news and members’ contact details and interests, and to provide a platform for members to post information about sources they have used and data they wish to make available.
James Davis and Chris Briggs opened the workshop and thanked all those who had helped in organising and funding the day. Particular thanks goes to the Economic History Society, the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), and the Centre for History and Economics, for their generous financial support. The staff of Downing College have also been extremely helpful and accommodating during the organisation of this event.

**Keynote Speaker: Professor Bas van Bavel**

Professor Bas van Bavel opened the workshop with an insightful and thought-provoking assessment of the challenges facing medieval economic historians both now and in the future. The quality of the research and publications is still of a very high level, but there are important issues more generally, not just in the UK but across Europe and the USA.

The topics tackled by UK medieval economic historians tend to be relatively small-scale but well-grounded in the sources and thus of high empirical quality. However, we need to consider more the ‘relevance’ of our work and who would be interested. Medievalists generally have begun to look away from economic and social matters and concentrate more on culture and mentalities through bigger, more elegant narratives. They have moved significantly away from the empirical approach that is still dominant in economic history and it could be argued that we have been left isolated. Have medieval economic historians become too traditional and empirical, and lost the clarity of our message and its broader relevance?

However, we need to recognise that many are still very interested in our research, and not just medievalists but also economists, sociologists, and perhaps even policy-makers. Economic history can be a bridge between the humanities and the theories of social scientists, between history and economics. The bridging of these disciplines is admittedly hard but also valuable, and we should be inspired by the big questions of economics and sociology and also by present-day issues.

Has medieval economic history become closed off to such avenues of inspiration since the heyday of the 1960s and 1970s? There appeared to be a spirit of disappointment and ennui in the 1980s and 1990s, with too much of our discipline linked to discredited ideologies. This disappointment was unjust, because so much of what we do is still relevant and most is not ideology-led. There are many examples of important, present-day issues that are the bread-and-butter of medieval economic historians: concepts of economic growth and success; living standards; property rights to land; the rise of markets; ecological changes and pollution; transitions of the economy and society. We can stand back and give an important, long-term perspective to such changes in our economy and society. It takes the view of centuries to observe fundamental economic change in its true guise. Comparative analysis, both geographically and chronologically, is the main tool we can employ for both description and explanation, and is perhaps the only way. Medievalists know how to use such analytical tools to their maximum potential.

In what other ways can medieval economic historians demonstrate their worth in the modern academic world? Measures of economic success in modern society tend to be abstract values such as GDP. However, partly because there are no real sources for GDP in our era, we know that there are many other possible and potentially more valuable indicators for economic success. These include real wages, health, standards of living, security, and leisure time. There are also
other quantitative indicators, such as human stature. Average height is a proxy measure for health, quality of food, living conditions, and the energy needed to work, and figures can be found for all periods and places in order to give us a long-term view of economic change. In this way we can provide a nuanced link to the theories of economists and policy-makers, demonstrating how peasant societies were able to push up welfare standards, perhaps more so than in a market economy. The break-up of modern peasant societies has been applauded as a beneficial process, but medievalists could provide a caveat to such endorsement.

Regarding land, modern thinkers tend to assume that private, absolute and exclusive property rights are the only way forward for economic growth, such as in the policies imposed upon Eastern Europe in recent decades. As medieval economic historians, we can dispute these assumptions. Property rights have not always existed in this absolute form; they were often organised for economic, social and ecological reasons. In certain circumstances, property arrangements helped align peasant goals to their needs. Understanding these motivations and processes might help us formulate modern property rights and resources in a innovative manner.

The rise of markets and market exchange is a vital area of research. We know that markets are not abstract playing fields of supply and demand, as implied by some economists, but rather complex constellations of formal and informal roles. Much can be different when we open up the black box of markets and view in detail the rules and institutions. Any analysis of markets should be embedded in the social and political context. Who is making and using the rules of market exchange and to what aim and effect? These insights link directly to new institutional economics. By looking at market exchange more generally, which we have long been interested in, we are now linking with a main strength of economics. We can provide the social and political context and the long-term perspective for slow and complex institutional change. A very long-term perspective is required to identify the fundamental changes and the reasons behind them, and perhaps why so many institutions are persistent. Rules are created by people who impose institutional frameworks; but these do not always work due to the influences outside abstract theory. History shows that it can be also dangerous, such as for welfare, to change radically institutional rules. Through a broader geographical comparison of formal and informal rules, we can see how organisations and rules develop in some areas and not in others. Why does this divergence exist and what is its effect? Ultimately, the view from history suggests that flexible, mobile, and strong markets are not always beneficial to standards of living compared to markets run on a social basis (that modern economics would regard as backward).

There are other structural problems that UK (and other English-speaking) medieval economic historians might need to consider. For instance, a particular use of language can be exclusive, both for non-medievalists and non-English historians. English medieval historians generally tend to use their own language and stay very close to the sources. Journal reviewers also do not accept other terminology, so European historians are forced to make translations from a different historical context. This does have a beneficial consequence in that they therefore have to explain in more general terms to the outside reader. However, in broader terms, UK medieval economic historians must make an effort to explain in similar general terms, for comparative and accessible reasons. They should also be encouraged to engage in more international networks, such as the CORN network (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area, at: http://www.corn.ugent.be/) and the COST-funded Progessore network (European Union funded). In addition, how do we attract good, young people into the discipline and help them build a career?

Overall, medieval economic historians do need to be inspired more by the big issues and by the state of society today. We should also endeavour to make our work more accessible, clearer and relevant, because the future of the subject is bright and the potential strong. It is important to try
to use concepts outside economic history in order to better our own approach and interpretations, and to inspire us. We need to open dialogue, rather than present a ready-made package, and this will require us working harder to make it more relevant. At Utrecht University, a structure has been put in place to facilitate exchange between disciplines. The university restructured the departments and chose themes instead of traditional disciplines, thus encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Peasants and the Land

Ben Dodds introduced a session to explore some potential new avenues for research concerning peasants and the land. The traditional image of the peasant as a helpless victim of a brutal life has been reassessed dramatically by medieval economic historians. One big question, relating to the apparent failures of agricultural productivity to rise before the Black Death and to feed a growing population, once led to the answer that technology was poor, land quality low, and the peasantry only interested in subsistence and seigneurial burdens, not markets or commodities. Similarly, the question of how agrarian capitalism emerged from the post-Black Death environment had tended to concentrate on the withering away of serfdom as a precursor to the ‘rest of history’. Recent research has demonstrated that the answers are not so clear cut and numerous complexities have been incorporated into the picture. How could some manors achieve yields comparable to the eighteenth century, and therefore why did not all do so? There is increasing evidence for market interaction by peasants and lords, who appear responsive to market incentives. The lords have traditionally been portrayed as exploitative, but now the weaknesses of medieval lordship are often stressed. Villeinage itself becomes only more complicated and varied in its manifestations as historians, like Mark Bailey, look ever more closely at its regional context. The recent work of Langdon and Masschaele, relating to investment and the growth of land/labour productivity, leaves many questions unanswered about factor markets.

Where do we now look for the answers? In the 1980s and 1990s, medieval economic historians turned to new sources, bringing empirical rigour to the court rolls and account rolls and revealing new insights. The sources are not so new, but they can still be manipulated in innovative ways, such as Campbell’s attempt to calculate national aggregate figures for seigneurial agriculture. Can the same be done for peasant farmers? Regional approaches also appear to give us a clear way forward to reflect comparatively on wider developments and relevance.

Discussion

Mark Page noted that there is generally more optimism about the medieval peasantry and their ability to produce and manage. Should we begin to look anew and beyond the issues raised in Bailey’s ‘Welfare’ article. Can we be certain that agricultural productivity on peasant land did not rise during the thirteenth century? What can we know about the welfare and standards of living for the peasantry? Chris Briggs suggested that inventories (found in plea rolls and coroners’ rolls) and consumption evidence could be built upon. An initial survey has already revealed supposedly very poor people holding livestock and other goods. This is a topic ripe for further research through a combination of sources, as well as further modelling of peasant household economies. Miriam Muller has also found that smallholders often get involved in a variety of commercial dealings, which raises the issue of how much is hidden from view. Mark Page noted that many paid tax, which suggests that they were not indigent, while Tony Moore reminded us that some of the better-off peasants were paying subsidy levels equivalent to the lesser gentry. We should
perhaps be more optimistic about peasant survival strategies and output per capita in the thirteenth century?

Although the manorial sources are not ideal for such differentiation, we need to be clear about the relative changes in land, labour and factor productivity. When people were actually working, was there very high labour productivity? Or was both land and labour productivity higher than we expect and assume, especially if high yields were not matched until much later. Do the theories of Boserup apply to the medieval context of apparent population pressure and urban demand? Or was maximising yields and profits necessarily that important? Were yields actually at a sustainable level for the circumstances, but peasants were able to work very hard when necessary for specific high yields.

Alex Sapoznik raised another issue related to productivity that requires further research. Particular medieval plants may have had a ceiling of productivity, and plants and crops were difficult to modify selectively. Comparatively, there is evidence of some selective breeding of livestock in medieval Europe, but this does not appear to be happening in England even at a low level.

Miram Müller warned against imposing modern mentalities on pre-modern societies. The medieval peasantry and lords had very different priorities and motivations for their choices. This does not mean that they could not be flexible, but their shifts may have been driven by factors that we need to explore and understand more, as well as local and regional peculiarities. Rafael Oliva also argued that the factor market is influenced by a particular medieval mentality, with a noticeable difference between legal and real holdings (leases, sub-letting, etc), and an uncertainty about who is exploiting whom.

How do we begin to look anew at these problems and develop projects? Peter Larson advocated comparative studies, not only within the medieval world but also with more modern developing countries. The dynamics of 19th and 20th-century Asia have been explored by historians and anthropologists in order to understand how people interact and acquire knowledge. Could this provide inspiration for how we can look again at court rolls, such as the role of the individual within a community and what actions were regarded as acceptable and what was a stigma? Mark Koyama urged us to look again at the developments in economics, noting that the model in the Langdon/Masschaele article was underspecified and underdeveloped. There is much more there to be explored. In addition, economists are looking more at mentalities beyond profit-maximisation and at new models of ‘satisfying income’ and even a new paternalism.

Peter Kitson reminded us that long-term trends may be important to the historian, but annual fluctuations were more vital to the peasant and perhaps therefore their short-term strategies. However, Bas van Bavel countered that this was true only to a certain extent. Peasants often addressed short-term risk through institutional formations that existed for centuries, such as field systems that acted as a type of risk insurance. Similarly, Miram Müller argued that many peasants were working for their family and heirs, and providing for their children constituted a form of long-term thinking. However, as Mark Koyama noted, in other ways peasants were unable to spread risk and had to resort to short-term strategies, such as the sale of land if they could not access the credit market at times of need. Bas van Bavel agreed that accessible capital markets were very important for peasant societies, and that developed factor markets erode the necessity to resort to such strategies.
Peasants and the Market

Chris Briggs introduced the next session on ‘peasants and the market’. There are two basic ways of looking at the market: firstly, the abstract exchange of goods, labour and land – how much do we know about factor markets and the level to which the peasantry engaged in them; secondly, the physical and institutional market – where were markets located, how did they operate and regulated, and what contrasting market structures existed during the medieval period? There is extensive scope for work on issues such as prices and market integration, and much is being done. However, if we want to know how people were actually using markets, we still need more micro-studies, especially in relation to commodity markets. How the peasantry engaged with abstract markets poses different challenges; their opportunities were very dependent upon the size of land, price fluctuations, and social status.

Tithe data (such as that investigated by Ben Dodds) shows market responses, but more is still needed on the pre-1350 period. It would be very valuable if we could marry this with sources for the producers themselves, particularly since small peasants are likely to respond to market conditions in a different manner to large agricultural producers.

The physical market and its institutions leads us to the practicalities of how people actually ‘marketed’. Rural markets only rarely had their own court rolls and are more often incorporated into manorial records. However, where there are separate market rolls perhaps more research could be done. The chronology of market survival, especially for more rural markets, needs more clarification beyond the simple application of Everitt’s sixteenth-century data. A better chronology and geography of market distribution could be allied to settlement patterns. Another topic that deserves more treatment, especially given their apparent importance in early modern England, are the middlemen and merchants and the extent to which they interacted with the peasantry. This is linked to the wool trade, a dominant and important export commodity yet hardly noted in court rolls and debt cases. How much was produced outside ecclesiastical houses and can we get a better picture of the role of the peasantry in wool production and marketing? Lastly, money remains a topic that still generates boundaries between economic historians and numismatists, yet is vital to our understanding of marketing and economic history as a whole. These boundaries need to be broached much more.

Discussion

Adrian Bell began the discussion by highlighting the lack of information for peasant wool production and trade. Nevertheless, the collecta was an important device for monasteries to fulfill their contracts, and much of the collecta was from peasant families and of a good quality. Martin Allen also noted how the wool trade and money supply were intimately connected, and that deposits of gold coinage could be tracked with the fortunes of the wool trade.

Bas van Bavel raised the possibility of broader European and geographical comparisons. When did divergences in commercial development occur and how can we explain them? He argues that we need to look more at the institutional foundations in order to understand the divergences that appeared to take place in the medieval period. Institutional economics is a useful way forward, since the evidence suggests that even efficient medieval markets were unable to produce higher levels of welfare. This relates to more recent economic developments – markets do not always grow, and more efficient markets do not always lead to general welfare benefits.

Ben Dodds also asked to what extent markets were a help or hindrance to economic growth? Mark Overton has argued that early modern markets had fewer rules and more middlemen compared to the middle ages, when the market structures were holding back development. But,
what was really different? Certainly the size of market activity had increased by the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, partly due to renewed population pressure. However, the basic market organisation had not changed as much as one might assume. Could it be an ideological change in the commercial morality – a type of Protestant work ethic? James Davis argued that the basic market transactions, for grain, bread, ale and meat, were still driven by a similar moral ethos to that operating in late medieval times. If anything, market rules had become more stringent and anxieties more intense in the face of increased population and then harvest failures. There was a tendency to revert to conservative, paternal attitudes at a time of crisis, even if this in itself might be a misinterpretation of the medieval mentality.

Had there been a contraction of the market infrastructure in the wake of the Black Death, and an accompanying rise in informal marketing? How does this equate with the apparent development of a consumer culture, as evidenced by the archaeological records, improving product quality, and sumptuary legislation in the fifteenth century? Catherine Casson also noted that the York Archaeological Finds Database shows increasing numbers of items like buckles and broaches during this period. Was this the beginning of a longer-term ‘consumer revolution’? This can all be linked to questions of industrial and market development, inventories, and rural specialisation. However, another contradiction is apparent in this thesis of a ‘nascent culture of consumerism’, related to the seeming shortage of coin during the fifteenth century. To what extent can market exchange exist and thrive without coin? In a similar way to the lease-market in parts of Europe, should we accept that payment in kind and barter was a viable alternative? Chris Briggs noted that such payments would be easier for regular rents as opposed to more ad hoc commodity purchases, though again we know too little about the ways in which traders offset debts and credits for regular customers.

Margaret Yates asked if we should reconsider the entire concept of the ‘golden age of the fifteenth-century labourer’? In the immediate post-Black Death period, the tumultuous changes were seen as beneficial for many within the peasant ranks. But perhaps it was not such a golden time by the fifteenth century, when immense market changes and fluctuations made them more vulnerable to market forces? Rafael Oliva remained us of the differentiated aspect of the peasantry, who each entered the market on very different terms in their capacity to bargain and set prices. Chris Briggs added that wealthier peasants may have manipulated the market in an effective manner, but sometimes this was to the detriment of other peasants, such as by waiting until later in the year for higher prices. James Davis also asked whether we need to look further at the active role of the peasantry in facilitating and controlling the market for their own ends, particularly in developing institutional frameworks that allowed them greater flexibility. In this vein, Chris Briggs raised the question of the relative importance of state rules for markets and the extent to which a strong state might make stricter, more inflexible institutions. Was this necessarily more beneficial for market development and efficiency than more local, flexible market structures that the users adapted for their own ends?

Peasants and Lordship

Miriam Müller presented this final session, noting that lord-peasant relations has been a cornerstone of medieval peasant studies for many decades but has been subject to notable revision in recent years. There has been some hostility to the models of Marx and a seeming rejection of class relations as a valid basis for study. For instance, the classic class division and traditional model of villeinage was re-examined by John Hatcher in his Past & Present article. More recent examples of a softening approach include Mark Bailey’s discussion of the myriad of villeinage systems in medieval Suffolk and Chris Dyer’s examination of the potential weaknesses of thirteenth-century lordship.
However, is it useful to dismantle completely the ideas of Marxism and to denigrate the notion of sharp divisions in medieval society. After all, it is apparent that the medieval peasantry themselves did still accept class divisions and extreme inequalities, and this is something we need to understand. Cultural history is not divorced from economics. Was villeinage an exploitative and impoverishing institution? What does oppression mean in the context of the medieval peasantry? The mentality of the medieval peasantry needs to be re-examined in a new, imaginative and holistic manner. We also need to understand more how peasants related and viewed each other, but this should not negate the importance of lord-peasant relations as a fundamental lodestone for the medieval mentality.

Discussion

One important stepping-stone for future research is to broaden our comparisons of serfdom across medieval Europe. From an English perspective, this will allow us to ask whether English lordship was stronger or weaker than their European counterparts. However, this also raises the question of how we actually make international comparisons when the foundations, terminology and context are often so different? Nevertheless, such comparisons could be very enlightening. For instance, the great importance attached to the Black Death in England is perhaps coloured by the relatively late dissolution of serfdom. By comparison, across much of Europe serfdom had largely dissipated by the late thirteenth century. We need to understand the effect of such divergences.

How can we tap into the English serf’s perspective? Increasingly, historians have noted that the peasantry viewed the manorial court rolls as a valuable tool for their own transactions and administration. What was being recorded was not always from the lord’s viewpoint alone. Much information was being filtered through the jurors and tenantry, and for many tasks the court served as the effective administrative institution for a village via the auspices of the ordinary jurors. Indeed, Peter Larson noted that rebellions were often sparked by lords trying to assert their authority too forcefully through their courts in reversal of recent trends. Miriam Müller asked if this use of manorial courts by the peasantry was evidence of weak lordship or alternatively a strong peasantry? Or should we be wary of such black and white assumptions?

Rafael Oliva argued that lordship cannot be looked at only in economic terms, such as rent. We need to understand how lordship was actually perceived beyond the figures. Margaret Yates asked if the medieval literature and art might yield insights into this question, though she recognised that many of these cultural products were produced by the elite and would reflect their concerns. Nevertheless, a growing complaint literature of the fourteenth century, and numerous artistic representations of the peasant, do represent a possible avenue for investigation in this respect.

Much of the discussion to this point was related to the villeins – a variegated and complex body of people that defies simple definition. In a similar vein, James Davis asked if the medieval freeholders have been underexplored and whether we need to understand much more about their complex relations with lords and the notion of ‘freedom’. How economically independent were free peasants? Did they use manorial courts regularly and were rent extractions always market-led? Too many historians make assumptions about free peasants that they would no longer make about villeins. Miriam Müller also noted that there is evidence for local variations in the extent to which free peasants were restricted in their actions. Has too much been made of the supposed division between the free and unfree? Bas van Bavel remarked that ‘freeholding’ was not even a term used on the Continent, where most land remained strictly constrained.
Nevertheless, there were communal and public courts in the Netherlands, where peasants had an extensive range of control and free action.

Chris Briggs recited the fundamental and oft-quoted question: is lordship bad for economic growth? Bas van Bavel suggested that this is certainly a conception that we need to move away from. For instance, in lease-farming the extraction of rent is often much higher than in servile operations – this is not necessarily good or bad, but it certainly demonstrates the different effects of these institutions. Miriam Müller remarked that peasants constantly used the manorial court for their own ends, but although they had subverted the court it still remained a seigneurial institution. John Lee highlighted the role of lordship in developing economic activities, such as markets, towns and credit facilities. Although these were sometimes advanced for social and cultural reasons, this does not mitigate their influence.

Adrian Bell raised another issue related to peasants and lords, regarding their military service. Can we identify who they were undertaking military service for, or indeed where the serfs were from? Rentals and tax lists might give some indication, as well as a long search through court records, but there is no easy (nor certain) way to trace names from muster lists to individual villages. Margaret Yates asked if the peasants of the 1381 revolt might have been dominated by those who had recently returned from the Hundred Years War, a potentially aggressive and organised militant group? Could the lists of soldiers and archers be compared to the indictments after the revolt?

In a more general sense, there are still many underexplored records that can reveal much about the medieval peasantry. These include extensive royal records, such as gaol delivery and trailbaston, King’s Bench, and Pardon Rolls, all of which could yield much about social order and royal authority. They are potentially very time-consuming compared to the amount of information attained, but they might represent valuable new routes of investigation.

**The Future of Medieval Economic History**

There has been discussion recently about an apparent shortage of early career scholars in UK universities in the field of medieval social and (especially) economic history. Chris Briggs provided some provisional statistics that suggest a decline in medieval articles published in Economic History Review over the past few decades. This workshop was intended to provide a forum for such scholars to meet and discuss varied aspects of their field, as well as to encourage collaboration on research projects. James Davis presented a session to discuss some of the broader challenges facing medieval economic history, particularly within the universities themselves. How healthy is medieval economic history in the universities, and how can we ensure the future strength of the subject, both in research and higher education teaching? How do we retain good, young scholars? Do we need to be more assertive as a group in order to make medieval economic history attractive to universities, funding bodies and students?

Margaret Yates began by urging delegates to consider medieval sessions at the annual Economic History Society Conference. This should be an ideal forum to try out new ideas and take risks. Yet, every year there is considerable difficulty in ensuring a medieval presence in the conference schedule. Bas van Bavel also noted that English scholars need to engage more in European networks and conferences. From 3-7 August, the International Economic History Association (IEHA) will hold its XVth World Economic History Congress in Utrecht, The Netherlands. We should be seeking to attend such gatherings, both as an important international network but also as a means to be inspired. Miriam Müller also encouraged us to engage in non-economic history
conferences, such as the annual International Medieval Congress at Leeds, or else we might otherwise be seen as just talking to ourselves. Nevertheless, the Anglo-American Seminar is another important triennial occasion, especially for medieval economic historians, to which it is hoped we can all go. Interestingly, Peter Larson noted that many prominent American scholars appear to be drifting away from medieval economic history and into other fields of interest. This could become a significant problem for the through-put of future scholars in the discipline.

Two main areas of concern were discussed further:

1) Research grants and collaboration
Adrian Bell and Tony Moore, who are both based in a Business School, noted that the economists are very interested in what they are researching. Mark Koyama suggested that economic history (even medieval) is considered a ‘sexy’ topic for many economists. There are many opportunities to spin our work into different directions and show its relevance and topicality. Indeed, economic history is likely to deemed more relevant and important than ever given the present economic crisis, and we should address this in our research grant applications and other efforts. At the heart of this is the need for collaboration and the ability to gain research funding. The acquiring of large research grants leads to further employment in the field, as well as funded PhD studentships and Research Assistants. Our ability to gain funding through both the AHRC and ESRC is very important and valuable to the discipline. Chris Briggs also noted that there are opportunities for researchers to work in collaboration with the National Archives. By incorporating a plan to work with the TNA into any project, perhaps by providing a catalogue of the material, there are many subsequent benefits in attracting external funding. In a similar manner, we should consider how many of our sources have an application and appeal beyond the academic realm, with a wider audience interested in local history and genealogy. All this is an important part of attracting research grants and demonstrating ‘impact’.

2) Teaching
Margaret Yates noted that the lifeblood of our subject remains how it is taught and the way it inspires the new generation. What opportunities are there for economic history in the university undergraduate system? Many departments consider that the double whammy of ‘medieval’ and ‘economics’ is a curse for student numbers, and they prefer to push cultural, social and political history. Is there an institutional bias against economic history? For instance, there was concern at the lack of tenured medieval economic historians at Oxford, as well the decline of economic history as a distinct discipline. Yet, Catherine Harrison reminded us that medieval economic history contains much that is vital in a modern history degree, particularly its stress on source work, interpretation, and numeracy.

The label of ‘economic history’ is perhaps an obstacle for some, and we need to consider carefully how we package the subject and make it accessible. John Lee noted how local and regional history was considered relevant and accessible, yet much of it is effectively economic history. We should certainly work hard to sell ourselves to history departments, but how we do this does very much depend on the institution and the ethos of the university. Some are looking for medievalists who can tackle a broad range of topics and themes, while others might be interested in an economic historian who can provide a bridge to other departments. Also, just as we discussed whether it is unhelpful to brand ourselves exclusively as ‘economic historians’, so it might not be helpful to confine ourselves by period. In particular, we should take a greater interest in and be inspired by what is happening in the early medieval and post-medieval periods. Through such linkages, collaboration, and co-authorship, a momentum can be established for medieval economic history and its future strengthened. Margaret Yates stated that we should be ‘banging the drum’ more about our subject. There is a lot of good and exciting research and impetus within the subject, and it perhaps just a matter of configuring ourselves in the right way.
A Network for Medieval Economic History

It was proposed that this workshop should lead to the establishment of an ongoing network for all medieval economic scholars, in collaboration with the existing triennial Anglo-American Conference on the Medieval Economy and Society (the next meeting of which is in Durham in 2010). This conference has traditionally brought together a core of medieval economic historians and particularly tried to encourage the attendance of many from American universities. It was proposed that the names and email addresses of those attending the ‘Sowing the Seeds’ workshop should be forwarded to Professor Philipp Schofield, so that he can invite them to the 2010 meeting and make them aware of the financial help available for those attending the Anglo-American conference.

An established network of all medieval economic historians will enable those in the field to debate important issues in medieval economic and social history, as well as the future of the discipline itself and how to increase the chances of keeping good, young scholars in the field. It is hoped that both the workshop and network will aid in continuing to strengthen the community of medieval economic historians. By providing a base for the network in an online forum, it is hoped that this will raise awareness of those working in relevant fields, provide centralised information, and encourage contacts. In its preliminary format, this will include an online discussion forum, working papers, a list of members, seminars and events, and a list of potential materials and resources held by individual researchers.

Many delegates were keen on the idea of data-sharing - a type of ‘Academic Commons’. This does not necessarily mean putting material itself online, but rather making everyone aware what potential materials (transcriptions, databases, figures, etc) you have and can be shared. Economic history is a time-consuming business in terms of data collection, particularly if we want to include a broad range of sources. It makes sense to share basic resources where possible as a community that seeks to support colleagues in developing new avenues of research. However, the proposed list will merely contain a possible list of material and the inclusion of material and whether it is shared will be left to the discretion of individuals. However, it is hoped that most would view this as an encouraging initiative that will generate greater interest in the subject and prevent extensive repetition of effort.

It is hoped that individuals will also place working papers online for a limited period (these may be seminar papers which they are also presenting at various seminars and conferences, or simply a work-in-progress for which they would like comments), which will then generate feedback through the online discussion forum. The working paper will then be removed so that the contributor can revise the paper for publication. Some may be concerned that placing working papers online will mean that their work can be accessed before publication and perhaps even copied. However, the public nature of the online network means that the paper has been openly advertised and any copying could be deemed plagiarism. In effect, posting a working paper would be more likely to protect copyright than not, by raising awareness of your work among a wide range of colleagues.

Overall, a network will provide a centralised source of information, discussion, feedback and collaboration for those interested in medieval economic history. The final form of the network and a possible website is still to be developed. However, it may be possible for the Economic History Society to host such a forum on its website, while the Economic History Society and the Centre for History & Economics (King’s College, Cambridge) both offer the opportunity to apply for further funding to establish such a network.