



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**IRONWORK IN MEDIEVAL BRITAIN: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY.** By IAN H. GOODALL. Pp. xv and 397, Illus 175. Society for Medieval Archaeology (Monograph, 31), 2011. Price: £32.00. ISBN 978 1 907975 45 5.

The Society for Medieval Archaeology has rendered the archaeological world a great service with the publication of the late Ian Goodall's doctoral thesis on medieval ironwork, which focuses principally but not exclusively on the post-Conquest period. It is a compendium of those iron objects, excluding weapons and spurs, from archaeological contexts and museum collections which may occur in considerable numbers on medieval sites, but because they are usually unattractive to look at and disagreeable to handle due to corrosion, tend to take a lowly place in priorities for finds research. However, humble though they may be, all those hammers, punches, knives, hooks, locks, buckles, horseshoes etc., have a huge contribution to make to our understanding of medieval economy, technology and society.

The Goodall thesis is catalogue raisonnée of the best sort, drawing on a great tradition begun by Ward Perkins with the *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (1940). It is well organized, meticulously researched and referenced, and the accompanying drawings, although simple outlines, allow for easy comparative study. Fortunately Goodall worked at a time when X-radiography of ironwork was beginning to become an essential component of finds research — which it is not in many European countries even today. This allowed him to see beneath corrosion crusts and identify his objects accurately. The reader should, however, be aware that the thesis was completed in 1980 and it does not take account of Goodall's own subsequent publications of material from Goltho, Thetford and many other sites, all very helpfully listed at the beginning of the volume. To gain a more complete picture of medieval ironwork, one would also need to have a number of other relevant publications to hand, including the Winchester Studies volume *Artefact and Economy* (M. Biddle, 1990), although the revised dating for some of the objects in the thesis has been incorporated here. The 'Norwich Households' in *East Anglian Archaeology* Volume 58 (ed. S. Margeson, 1993) and the (non-Goodall) *Archaeology of York* fascicules AY17 / 6 and 17 / 8 (for the pre-Conquest period) and 17 / 15 (for the post-Conquest period) and are also valuable additions to the original Goodall *oeuvre*.

A feature of the York fascicules is the detailed reporting of research into the metallography of ironwork and the non-ferrous platings found on locks, keys, dress fittings and the like. If the Goodall thesis does show its age, then it is perhaps when we find that metallography is a topic which is largely passed over by Goodall in half a column summarizing work on knives by Ronald Tylecote (p. 111). Metallography is a field which has really started to come into its own since 1980 and become an important

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partner to traditional typology. While thinking about caveats, although nugatory really, one might also be critical of some of Goodall's classificatory schemes (e.g. for knives, pp. 106–08) as being a little impressionistic in an age of computer assisted statistical analyses and rather difficult to apply to new material. Nevertheless, for all you finds researchers out there, worried about that bit of crusty old iron, this volume is your essential starting point.

One feels that in the present era a student wishing to produce a thesis like Goodall's, free of theoretical speculation, would be considered impossibly old fashioned. Yet it is only on the basis of work like this that knowledge of the past can really progress and provide the basis of more ambitious research programmes. I knew Ian Goodall and owe an enormous amount to him in my own research on ironwork. To work alongside a scholar with such finely honed critical faculties and such vast experience of the material was a great privilege. I also remember him saying that he never got bored of ironwork and that every new batch of objects with their X-radiographs was a bit like Christmas!

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