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**Archaeology, Norwich and medieval North Sea communities:  
exploration of a diverse commonality**

# Archaeology, Norwich and medieval North Sea communities: exploration of a diverse commonality

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## **Abstract**

*This commentary explores the nature and impact of a body of research and publication by the author which examined and contextualised archaeological research, initially in the city of Norwich and later more extensively in northern Europe.*

*The commentary is divided into six sections. **Section 1** outlines the characterisation, assessment, research, synthesis and publication of archaeological data, notably from Norwich, resulting in a range of stand-alone reports as well as scholarly papers. **Section 2** explores the evolution of the research, detailing the development of approach, and publication of a series of academic papers in regional, national and European journals. **Section 3** summarises the wider dissemination of concepts concerning the origins and early development of Norwich, notably through publication of a monograph in 1994. **Section 4** notes the broadening of the scope of archaeological research on a national scale and how this has been supported by the publication of a number of papers, utilising the perspective from Norwich. Recognition that the hinterland of the medieval city was much larger than its immediate territorial surroundings led to investigation of the potential of the network of 'North Sea world' cities and their own hinterlands. This is explored in **Section 5** where research also led to the publication of a monograph in 2016 examining the development of medieval maritime societies and illustrating how the historic environment highlighted their 'diverse commonality'. **Section 6** takes the twin aspects of the research within a single city, Norwich, and contextualisation within its wide transnational hinterland and illustrates how their publication provides greater awareness of the urban process, assisting both future research agenda and present-day education and engagement.*

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This commentary, presented in support of an award of a PhD by Publication, explores a body of work over the last 40 years which had its genesis in archaeological investigation directed by the author in two east coast English cities, Hull and Norwich. This archaeological enquiry grew into a research framework which promoted wider contextualisation of these urban centres and examination of how the results of archaeological investigation could broaden and deepen understanding of the development of communities around the North Sea zone. At the same time it sought to provide new data for academic debate. The research also enabled fostering of awareness of the role of archaeology as a positive force within modern society, helping to develop the concept of the 'diverse-commonality' that underpins communities around the littoral of the North Sea.

The early stages of work entailed the direction of archaeological projects, primarily urban excavations, complex endeavours which produced correspondingly complex data (**section 1**). This data needed to be characterised, assessed, researched, synthesised and published, resulting in a range of stand-alone reports as well as

scholarly papers.<sup>1</sup> The primary focus of activity was Norwich, the largest city of medieval Britain by area, greater than London and Southwark combined, and one with a regional significance beyond London's orbit. Work was initially undertaken adhering to a research framework established in the 1970s by the Norwich Survey, a time-limited organisation that ceased to exist in 1983,<sup>2</sup> but as the research evolved the author published a series of academic papers detailing the development of his approach - in regional, national and European journals (**section 2**).<sup>3</sup> This development fed into a wider consideration of urban studies, taking early form in a consideration of urbanisation in the east of England from a Norwich perspective<sup>4</sup> and culminating in production by the author of a resource assessment, a research agenda and a research strategy for urban archaeology in the region, together comprising a research framework (updated in 2018).<sup>5</sup>

A summation of the data accumulation stage was published as a monograph entitled *Norwich* in 1994 (**section 3**).<sup>6</sup> This sought to provide a new history of the city as told through archaeological evidence, much of it acquired since the 1970s. Publication enabled wider dissemination of concepts concerning the origins and early development of the city, exploring the role of Scandinavian settlement and assessing the consequences of the Norman Conquest, not only in terms of obvious infrastructure such as the castle and cathedral, but also in the development of the economy and society. The book has been revised twice on the basis of new data<sup>7</sup> and supplemented by two substantial papers reviewing the evidence for the origins and early development of Norwich and the post-Conquest medieval growth of the city.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Norwich research indicated that a broader consideration of emerging archaeological data was also necessary in order to assess the role of urban centres in the overall growth of the economy and society during the Middle Ages. At the same time, the scope of archaeological research was expanding considerably on a national scale as new techniques, fostered by technological and methodological developments, provided new and often unexpected information. The author therefore wrote and published a number of papers, utilising the perspective from Norwich, which illustrated the developing potential of the broadening archaeological approach to greater understanding of the historic urban environment (**section 4**).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Key reports include Ayers 1985a, 1987a and 1994a; key papers Atkin, Ayers and Jennings 1983, Ayers, Smith and Tillyard 1988, Ayers 1990 and Ayers 1991b.

<sup>2</sup> An influential paper is that of Carter 1978.

<sup>3</sup> For example Ayers 1991a, 1996a and 1997a.

<sup>4</sup> Ayers 1993a.

<sup>5</sup> Ayers 1997b and 2000a.

<sup>6</sup> Ayers 1994b.

<sup>7</sup> Ayers 2003 ad 2009 - see Ayers 1994b in bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> Ayers 2011 and 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Ayers 2005; Ayers 2014b.

While academic publication and its contribution to the regional framework embedded archaeological research of Norwich within the wider region, it was also clear that the hinterland of the medieval city was much larger than its immediate territorial surroundings (**section 5**). The situation of Norwich close to the North Sea coast, and its relationship to Great Yarmouth, ensured that it was able to take advantage of both a coasting trade and of more extensive contacts across the North Sea and into the Baltic. Awareness of the potential for increasing understanding of how the medieval city fitted into the network of 'North Sea world' cities and their own hinterlands was greatly assisted by a longterm collaboration with colleagues from Flanders, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, the Baltic States and Scandinavia through participation in a series of colloquia held in Lübeck from the mid 1990s until 2014, ten volumes of proceedings being published biennially. The author contributed to nine colloquia, his published papers exploring such topics within medieval Norwich as trade, domestic architecture, infrastructure, craft industry, luxury, and childhood and adolescence.<sup>10</sup>

Significant though the Lübeck colloquia were, they were essentially devoted to towns and cities themselves (as made clear by the title of the meetings, *Stadtarchäologie im Hanseraum*). In seeking the wider hinterland of Norwich, it was clearly necessary to look beyond the evidence of other towns and cities and to explore interdependent relationships between their own rural hinterlands and other urban communities. This inevitably led to a consideration of the role of the sea, estuaries and rivers, the mechanisms of exchange and the evidence of trade itself. It was an approach which was adopted for a plenary paper delivered to a conference at UEA that explored the role of medieval East Anglia in its North Sea world and was published in 2013.<sup>11</sup>

The ideas expressed at the conference were set out more fully in a monograph published in 2016.<sup>12</sup> Its title, *The German Ocean: Medieval Europe around the North Sea*, highlighted the historic region under discussion and sought to demonstrate that the North Sea could be characterised more as a lake than a sea, supporting communities around it which had much in common. Exploration of the medieval period illustrated that, in terms of resource acquisition and exploitation, utilisation and impact upon the environment, and trade contact made possible by the rivers and the sea, maritime societies contain evidence of material cultures that were often more remarkable for their similarity across distance than for their diversity. Some economies developed more rapidly than others and local solutions to problems produced urban and rural environments of different aspect; the growth, and sometimes decline, of towns and ports was often dictated by local as much as by wider factors. The 'diverse commonality' noted above can be identified for such communities through examination of the historic environment of the North Sea region.

The twin aspects of the research outlined above - extensive data collection and analysis from a single city, Norwich, and contextualisation of that data within its

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<sup>10</sup> Publications dating from 1999 to 2016 with examples such as Ayers 1999a (trade), 2004a (infrastructure) and 2008 (luxury and lifestyle).

<sup>11</sup> Ayers 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Ayers 2016a.

wide transnational hinterland - led inevitably to a third potential strand of endeavour. Archaeological work cannot exist within a vacuum; it draws upon a range of other disciplines - arts, sciences and social sciences. Urban archaeology in particular also has to take cognisance of present-day economic conditions and has a responsibility to engage with both local and wider communities and their concerns. There is a necessity for communication of research which illustrates the basis upon which contemporary communities exist and which can assist both wider education and future sustainable development of those communities. This requires a vision both for future research and for engagement, issues also addressed by publications (**section 6**).

The following commentary therefore explores two sets of research - those of Norwich and of its North Sea context - in which the author has made a significant contribution through publication. The commentary assesses the impact of the research, issues raised by the research, and the contribution to north European archaeological studies through its publication. Further, over the period of the research, the discipline of archaeology in general, with its sub-discipline of urban archaeology, developed considerably and changes in both academic approach and methodological practice are also reflected in the publications. The research dealt with locales of significance: Norwich was the second city of England for much of the medieval period and achieved an economic importance and population numbers which eclipsed all other urban settlements in the country save London, together with a rich diversity of secular and ecclesiastical institutions, trades and industries; the medieval North Sea world within which Norwich sat was rapidly developing a status as the most economically-vibrant region of Europe with an equivalent richly diverse culture.

### **1. Archaeological fieldwork background**

The genesis of the research can be traced to the appointment of the author as Deputy Director of the Humberside Archaeology Unit in 1975, responsible for the conduct of excavations on the line of the proposed South Docks Road within the Old Town of Hull, construction of which subsequently destroyed the archaeological deposits of one-sixth of the medieval port. While work included excavation of part of a monastic site and also of major mercantile properties<sup>13</sup>, it also entailed startling discoveries at the medieval commercial waterfront located at Chapel Lane Staith which not only illuminated the early topographic growth of the critical riverine margin of the port but also uncovered a sequence of medieval timber revetments, one of which stood to its full height of 3.47m..<sup>14</sup> Assessment, analysis and synthesis of this site in particular led to consideration of the discoveries within a national context<sup>15</sup> and to early discussion of the discoveries and their implications with colleagues on the continent, followed by publication.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Armstrong and Ayers 1987 and Ayers 1993b.

<sup>14</sup> Ayers 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Ayers 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Ayers 1983a.

The Hull experience was influential in the subsequent appointment of the author as Norwich Field Officer with the Norfolk Archaeological Unit in 1979. While initially required to undertake area excavation within the north-east bailey of Norwich Castle, two further projects were also envisaged at the medieval waterfront of the River Wensum. The first of these, also in 1979, required similar deep-trench expertise to that developed by the author in Hull and resulted in the discovery of a pre-Conquest 'hard' for the berthing of river- and other craft as well as imported material from Scandinavia, Germany and the Low Countries.<sup>17</sup> The more extensive 1981 excavation east of Whitefriars Bridge not only recovered a similar 'hard' but also riverside structures interpreted as early warehousing.<sup>18</sup> These two sites formed the basis for an overarching assessment of the development of the pre-1066 port of Norwich which was presented at an international conference in Bergen, Norway, in 1983. It drew upon antiquarian, archaeological and topographical observations and included comparanda from sites elsewhere, such as Schleswig in northern Germany. The paper was subsequently published in the conference proceedings.<sup>19</sup>

While the discoveries at the waterfront highlighted not only the necessity but the importance of studying the wider North Sea context for a greater understanding of the early development of Norwich, so too did the results of the main excavation of 1979 when, unexpectedly, the vestigial remains of a pre-Conquest timber church were located, one destroyed in the immediate post-conquest period ahead of construction of the north-east bailey of Norwich Castle. The evidence of this 11th-century structure of unknown dedication was not only recognised as being informative with regard to the early development of Norwich,<sup>20</sup> but also for wider studies of north European church building development. In this regard it was fortunate that the discovery was made just in time for a note of the work to appear in the gazetteer of the catalogue of a major international exhibition on early timber churches of northern Europe held at the Helms Museum, Hamburg in 1981-82.<sup>21</sup> Detailed publication of the discovery was too late for consideration within the discursive text but subsequently contributed to an assessment by Claus Ahrens of the 'problem' of early stave churches in which he concluded that the 'Norwich-type' of church was formative in the development of later stave churches in Norway (notably the famous church at Urnes).<sup>22</sup>

Further fieldwork research within Norwich during the 1980s was necessarily determined by developer action but nevertheless enabled increased understanding

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<sup>17</sup> Ayers and Murphy 1983.

<sup>18</sup> Ayers 1987a.

<sup>19</sup> Ayers 1985b. The excavation noted parallels between the technological approach to boat-building adopted in both Norwich and Schleswig.

<sup>20</sup> The excavation was filmed and subsequently broadcast by Anglia TV. The programme included an interview with Alan Carter, then Director of the Norwich Survey at UEA, who summarised the significance of the discovery for urban studies in the city.

<sup>21</sup> Ahrens 1981, 565. Correspondence between Claus Ahrens and Brian Ayers, October and November 1979.

<sup>22</sup> Ahrens 1994, 41-43.

of development of the early city. Notable amongst excavations was that undertaken at Fishergate in 1985 and which resulted in significant discoveries of Middle Saxon as well as Anglo-Scandinavian deposits.<sup>23</sup> Later levels were also informative and the results of the excavation, together with that of previous work and the author's growing interest in riverside activity, all contributed to a paper given at a further conference on waterfront archaeology at Bristol in 1988 and subsequently published.<sup>24</sup>

Direct data accumulation from fieldwork by the author ceased at the end of the 1980s when the scale of the Castle Mall project necessitated a more 'political and administrative' role of supervision, a development enhanced from 1991 with the author taking on responsibility for fieldwork across Norfolk and subsequently for policy and strategic development as County Archaeologist. Indirect data accumulation obviously continued, derived from the monitoring of excavations undertaken by others but under the author's overall direction. The change in responsibility, however, also led to the ability to broaden the scope of research, adopting a more thematic approach which, through application of emerging ideas concerning the development of the city, also assisted prioritisation of the fieldwork itself.

## **2. Development of analytical approaches to the growth of the medieval city**

Prior to 1979 approaches to investigation of the historic city of Norwich had been established by the Norwich Survey under Alan Carter. The Survey, undertaking fieldwork between 1971 and 1978, identified the origins and early development of the city as a key area for research and its approach was laid out by Carter in an influential publication of 1978.<sup>25</sup> This continued to inform fieldwork choices in the immediate years after 1979, the first three sites excavated between 1979 and 1981 having been chosen before the author's appointment by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit in consultation with the Survey. Similarly the decision to excavate at Fishergate on the north bank of the River Wensum (*Ultra Aquam*) in 1985 was determined by the author with consideration of how best to locate evidence for the pre-Danish town. The Norwich Survey had characterised *Ultra Aquam* in 1974 as 'an archaeological wasteland' albeit with the qualification that there was 'no reason why its archaeology should not be as rich and varied as that S of the river, but to date there is very little evidence of this'.<sup>26</sup> Notwithstanding, the location of Fishergate was highlighted at a conference in Bergen 1983 by this author as 'clearly an archaeological priority .. the entire question of the importance of the north bank of the river at the beginning of the 10th century remains open ...'<sup>27</sup>. Satisfyingly, the results of the 1985 excavation were striking; the excavation 'produced the largest single assemblage of Ipswich-type ware from the city, imported pottery of Middle

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<sup>23</sup> Ayers 1994a.

<sup>24</sup> Ayers 1991b.

<sup>25</sup> Carter 1978, 175-204.

<sup>26</sup> Carter *et al* 1974, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Ayers 1985b, 46.

Saxon and Saxo-Norman date [and] a range of eighth-century finds including a sceatta and two brooches ...<sup>28</sup>.

Concentration upon the earliest urban deposits not only ensured that archaeological endeavour was focussed on a key aspect of the city's growth but also maximised potential material evidence as, with exceptions such as the remarkable discovery of well-preserved middle-range housing of the late 15th century at Pottergate in 1973,<sup>29</sup> the medieval deposits at Norwich were often less rich than at other comparable English towns. However, this observation only applied with regard to the physical aspect of the city itself, the *product* of urbanisation, not the *process* of urbanisation and its attendant implications for wider understanding. The discovery of features and artefacts with a significance beyond Norwich at both waterfront sites and the church site beneath the castle, together with other observations such as those concerning continental influence upon early artillery practice evident following a survey of the Cow Tower in 1985,<sup>30</sup> meant that links with influential communities and cultures outwith the city required investigation.

This increased awareness of the urban process by the author had implications in two interesting directions. Initially, it proved very useful in the determination of where, and particularly how, to undertake major excavation projects at Castle Mall and the Franciscan Friary site in the city. The castle site especially brought serious logistical challenges but overcoming these within a framework which focussed upon core delivery objectives - such as increasing understanding of the development of the pre-Conquest town, the physical and social impact of the imposition of the castle, and the subsequent relationship of the castle and its attendant fee to the surrounding city - meant that difficult excavation decisions could be made within a critical awareness of increasing understanding of the city as a whole, not just a castle location.

The other impact of this awareness of urban process was consideration of the influence of wider factors. It was noted above that a relationship between 11th-century English and Scandinavian culture was identified through studying the results of the excavations within the north-east bailey of Norwich Castle in 1979. The importance of the vestigial remains of the small timber church located there illustrated the interplay of cultural influences across the North Sea, notably in the building culture that developed in Norway from around 1000. This was not something that had been identified previously nor had the Anglo-Scandinavian nature of Norwich in the pre-conquest and immediately post-conquest decades

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<sup>28</sup> Ayers 1994a, ix

<sup>29</sup> Evans and Carter 1985.

<sup>30</sup> Ayers, Smith and Tillyard 1988.



been highlighted.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the pre-conquest period was referred to as 'Late Saxon' in the Norwich Survey's published texts and continued to be so in subsequent publications until the late 1990s. It was felt necessary by the author to continue this terminology in the first edition of *Norwich* in 1994 (Chapter 2 is entitled 'The Late Saxon Town') but, by the time of the first revised edition in 2003, the phrase Anglo-Scandinavian was in use. It was an important shift as it immediately conveyed a more open understanding of the broader north European context within which Norwich was developing.

The rationale for the use of the term was laid out in the *Early Medieval Europe paper* in 2011:

The term 'Anglo-Scandinavian' ... is used advisedly because ... the material evidence from excavation indicates that Scandinavian culture was ... strong ... Indeed, it has been observed that ... diagnostically Scandinavian material [has been] recovered from sites in Norwich (Borre-style brooches, a Mammen-style cross shaft, a Ringerike mount and an Urnes-style capital) ... The chronological range of these finds (the Urnes-style capital probably dates to the early twelfth century and formed part of the Romanesque cathedral) implies a depth of northern culture which can ... also be seen in the excavation of an eleventh-century timber church beneath the north-east bailey of the castle ... [while] DNA analysis of burials recovered at Castle Mall tends to support the hypothesis of a strong Scandinavian element within the growing urban population. Four haplotypes suggested individuals of 'Viking' stock ... [one] closely related to an haplotype only observed in Orkney... the other two haplotypes ... observed in Norway and the Western Islands.<sup>32</sup>

However, a shift to this more culturally-inclusive term from that of 'Late Saxon' proved difficult to implement. The Historic Environment Record, for instance, the county-based record of archaeological sites and material, had been developed using a nationally-agreed terminology. The entire period between 410AD and 1065 is denoted as 'Saxon' with 'Late Saxon' being used for the sub-period of 851 to 1065.<sup>33</sup> As a result significant publications, such as those for the Norwich Greyfriars excavation or the major works undertaken at Castle Mall, have continued to use this

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<sup>31</sup> Carter's 1978 paper is notably reticent when discussing possible Scandinavian influence. The closest that he ventures concerns the potential of identifying trade links: 'it is surely by the eleventh century at the latest that we should look for the intensification of the east coast trade with Scandinavian and North Sea ports which was to become so marked a feature of the twelfth century. It seems that it is here, rather than exclusively in the archaeological material of the period, that we may find the effects of Scandinavian influence on Norwich' (p.203). It is worth reiterating that, prior to the research outlined in this commentary, the idea that Norwich was culturally an Anglo-Danish settlement was almost non-existent.

<sup>32</sup> Ayers 2011, 81-82.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/advanced-search> notwithstanding that Norfolk lies within East *Anglia*.

terminology.<sup>34</sup> This is in contrast to more discursive works such as that of Everson and Stocker concerning discoveries at the church of St Martin-at-Palace where the use of 'Anglo-Scandinavian' is both adopted and used quite specifically to emphasise cultural links between Norwich, an Anglo-Scandinavian urban entity, and activity in other such entities (notably Lincoln but also York),<sup>35</sup> or that of Loveluck who clearly discusses Norwich within a framework of other Anglo-Scandinavian settlements.<sup>36</sup> Adoption of the usage by such scholars in the wider academic community is significant as it is important for future research; the terminology necessarily enforces consideration of influences external to England in general, and East Anglia in particular, when considering the social and economic development of towns and other communities. It also has wider implications; the particular topographic singularity of medieval Great Yarmouth within an English context, for instance, might well benefit from more extensive study of coastal settlements in northern Europe.

The emerging analytical approach was not confined to consideration of the early medieval city. Awareness of the importance of the hinterland, whether defined locally, regionally, nationally or even internationally, obviously extended to later periods as well. An example was recognition that provisioning of the city required a greater understanding of consumption within Norwich, one which considered that provisioning went beyond food resources; an early appraisal of the supply of medieval building materials to the city was presented at a conference in Loughborough in 1988 and published in 1990.<sup>37</sup> Nor was the post-medieval period ignored. Aware that much of the work of the Norwich Survey had been directed towards the documents and buildings surviving from the 16th century and later,<sup>38</sup> a review of the post-medieval city was undertaken, providing a summary of the period, a history of archaeological endeavour and, finally, a sampling strategy for future archaeological work. Perhaps presciently, its publication in *Post-Medieval Archaeology* noted that 'Archaeologists ... are accustomed to using archaeological evidence in an attempt to understand the causes and effects of rapid economic development in the 11th century; it follows that the application of similar methodology to post-medieval material would be apposite'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Emery 2007; Shepherd Popescu 2009 - here the text varies between 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Viking and Late Saxon'.

<sup>35</sup> Everson and Stocker 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Loveluck 2013, 342-350.

<sup>37</sup> Ayers 1990.

<sup>38</sup> Notable publications included Atkin and Evans 1984 and Priestley and Corfield 1982.

<sup>39</sup> Ayers 1991a, 14-15. The sampling strategy encompassed topography and land-use, housing and extramural settlement, public works, defences, and communications as 'particularly pertinent' topics but also stressed the importance of exploring Norwich as a regional capital, opportunities for examination of the agrarian revolution, the social hierarchy of the city, and its role in the regional and wider economy.

An opportunity to promote such new archaeological strategies beyond Norwich was afforded by a regional conference in 1989 to mark some 20 years of archaeological research in the East Anglian region.<sup>40</sup> Here, a paper by the author (subsequently published) was entitled 'The Urbanisation of East Anglia: the Norwich perspective' and, while addressing Norwich in particular, also illustrated relevance to other urban centres in the region. It explored new methodologies of analysis and understanding, including those appreciative of historical context and the potential of archaeology to examine systemic change. In the light of work on the post-medieval city, the publication defended 'trowelling the 16th century' on the grounds that 'we must remember that the 16th century in Norwich was a period of profound change for the city, one when it suddenly jumped from being an important regional centre to an economic prominence that, for a while, was eclipsed only by London. A similar jump seems to have occurred in the 11th century.'<sup>41</sup>

The theoretical approach to the city continued to evolve during the 1990s. The author published a paper in 1995 which explored the image of the city as presented through antiquarian depictions.<sup>42</sup> It was followed by a further contribution at UEA in the Helen Sutermeister lecture series in 2002 entitled 'The Longevity of a City – Medieval Norwich in the 21st Century'. This latter paper was devoted to an understanding of the sense of place concerning the medieval city in the modern world. It sought effective historic urban environment management but, in order to do this, needed to determine how the medieval city could be appreciated within its modern context. In so doing, it tried to 'utilise documents, buildings and topography as well as excavated evidence in order to characterise and track urban identities'.<sup>43</sup> The approach considered such attributes and qualities of urban character as diversity, compactness, dynamism, creativity and sustainability to define ideas of urban settlement. These qualities had been set out in a short jointly-authored paper, published by the Polish Academy of Sciences in a special volume themed to explore archaeological heritage management, in 2000.<sup>44</sup>

The 2002 Sutermeister lecture at UEA expanded on each 'attribute', emphasising the archaeological approach as in 'diversity' which could not only be characterised through surviving monuments (castle, cathedral and churches as examples) or excavated evidence but also more tangentially through property boundaries, open spaces and street-names. It was pointed out that the character of the city evolved in part from being a

resource-poor environment ... which encourage[d] a *sustainable* approach, not least in the re-use of materials. Medieval freestone, brick, flint and timber can be found throughout the city, often adorning later buildings but once again imparting character. More fundamentally, however, urban living before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, dictated a sustainable approach to the environment as a whole. Property boundaries could not be removed without social chaos;

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<sup>40</sup> Gardiner 1993, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ayers 1993a, 117- 126.

<sup>42</sup> Ayers 1995a.

<sup>43</sup> Ayers 2002a (unpublished).

<sup>44</sup> Ayers, Durham and McNeil 2000, 239-242.

use of buildings intensified with additions and sub-divisions, seldom with complete removal and rebuilding. Access to local materials and use of buildings and space for traditional functions led to sustained provision of traditional building types, usually deployed in the townscape in traditional ways. The people of the medieval city, responding socially and economically to their needs in relation to their geography, created an urban pattern of streets and spaces, tenements and buildings which largely survived, in mutated form, until after the First World War. This self-perpetuating environment only started to break down when sustainable use ceased, people being re-housed in the suburbs and the city centre being converted to monolithic commercial cultures.<sup>45</sup>

The paper was articulating an archaeology of place, the role of archaeologists in the concept and practice of place-making which thereafter became more visible towards the end of the first two decades of the 21st century.<sup>46</sup> The author contributed to the 'spirit of place' principles adopted by ICOMOS in 2009 and designated as the 'Norwich Accord'<sup>47</sup> and explored how these principles could work at the ancient and medieval urban site of Butrint in Albania where 'Place-making integrates an understanding of cultural heritage into future planning, connecting people and places, working with existing communities and promoting change through a context which is already appreciated'.<sup>48</sup>

Unless the above be thought too 'managerial', the definition of such attributes assisted academic theoretical understanding of urban settlements such as Norwich. The concept of dynamism was clearly a characteristic of the city in the Middle Ages. Norwich was a city which, in historic terms, arrived late, grew rapidly, attained regional dominance and then sustained its large developed state and influence for an extraordinarily long period. Asa Briggs writes of shock cities, those where urban problems and issues exemplify their times.<sup>49</sup> He cites Manchester in the 1840s or Chicago in the 1890s. It is not too fanciful to look at Norwich as a shock city in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. A century earlier it was a settlement of middling rank, beginning to assert itself as a shire town. By 1150 it was the centre of secular and ecclesiastical administration for the most densely populated and affluent part of the country.<sup>50</sup> It was graced by major new institutions built with expensive imported stone, it was developing a broad and diverse economic base, and it had contact with other cities and regions from the Baltic to the Bay of Biscay. It clearly also had issues of ethnicity with both Norman French and Jewish immigrants, problems of poverty and

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<sup>45</sup> Ayers 2002a as in fn 43.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Hodges 2017.

<sup>47</sup> <http://icomos-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ICOMOS-UK-The-Norwich-Accord-in-Context-2009.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Ayers 2014c, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Briggs 1968, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Norwich was the urban capital of Norfolk and Suffolk which between them held about a quarter of the entire population of England - Miller and Hatcher 1978, 5. As an example of its size, the city had at least 59 parish churches, more than any other English city save London.

disease, and only a primitive form of self-government - but it dominated its region. It can be argued that the scattered physical remnants of the medieval city perpetuate a sense of the dynamism which led to this dominance. How else to explain the sheer size of the medieval core, the wealth of the excavated evidence, the quality of the surviving buildings, and the range of activity hinted at in the documentation?

Addressing the perceived dynamism of Norwich and the significance of the city regionally, nationally and internationally, entailed the development of analytical approaches to its study with consideration of different questions to be posed and different mechanisms for extracting usable data. An example of the posed question was that set out by the author in 1991 concerning archaeological responses towards a greater understanding of the agrarian revolution, a particularly pertinent question for the resourcing of the largest urban complex within the richest agricultural area of England.<sup>51</sup> Soon after publication of this paper, assessment and analysis of the faunal assemblage from the Castle Mall excavations, largely recovered between 1989 and 1991 but with some excavation only being completed in 1998, provided good comparative data for the use of animals in the medieval period and changes observed in post-medieval material. A section on 'animal economy and the industrial revolution: the Castle Mall contribution' discusses a range of livestock types and is able to tabulate changes between the medieval and post-medieval periods, noting an increased emphasis on meat production. Kill-off patterns changed as did the selection of beasts for instance. It was also noted that 'the Low Countries, from where so many technological and economic innovations originated, have always had close contacts with the Norfolk area. If improvements in either the animals or husbandry occurred, it is to be expected that they began earlier in Norfolk ...'<sup>52</sup>. In this one specialist report by Albarella *et al* therefore, the synthesised analysis was able to address two key aspects of the evolving urban archaeological analytical approach: relationship of Norwich with its immediate agricultural hinterland; and relationship too with the wider transnational hinterland to which it was connected by geography and linked by long-standing cultural interaction.

The evolution of archaeological practice within Norwich thus continued the investigative trajectory established by the Norwich Survey in the 1970s but also sought to identify and fill gaps in both the archaeological record and the approaches to the archaeological resource. Prioritisation of a range of development opportunities was undertaken by the author. Middle Anglo-Saxon origins were first explored in 1985;<sup>53</sup> greater definition of the Anglo-Scandinavian town was a priority from 1979 with particular emphasis on the waterfront; the early Norman town, not previously prioritised, was targeted with excavations at St Martin-at-Palace Plain in 1981, at Castle Mall, and within the French borough in 1999; and mercantile activity in the medieval city was explored through excavation and survey both small (the Great Hall, Oak Street 1987<sup>54</sup>) and large (Dragon Hall, King Street<sup>55</sup>). 'Keyhole'

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<sup>51</sup> Ayers 1991a, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Albarella *et al* 2009, 1006-1007 and tables 13.6 and 13.7.

<sup>53</sup> Ayers 1994a.

<sup>54</sup> Ayers 1987b, 28-30.

<sup>55</sup> Shelley 2005.

opportunities were exploited where available, such as at St George's Street in 1986 where a small excavation seems to have identified an inlet utilised in the Anglo-Scandinavian borough.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the greatest contribution, however, was in developing new conceptual approaches to the investigation and understanding of the city. An awareness of the development of early Norwich within a wider north European framework was supplemented by greater inter-disciplinary questioning of data. The potential results of archaeological enquiry in its broadest sense were extended to address such emerging research areas as those of urban sustainability, resource acquisition and its exploitation, social and economic development, and environmental change.

### **3. Norwich - creating and disseminating archaeological history**

Formative work in both Hull and Norwich by the author was especially fortuitous for developing an historiographical approach to the archaeology of each city. In Hull, a settlement acquired by Edward I in 1293 and subsequently known as Kingston-upon-Hull, a series of rentals and other documents survive for the medieval town which provide an unusual, and unusually accurate, insight into the late 13th- to 16th-century urban topography. Starting with a return of the 1290s compiled for the king, the rentals in particular enable a basic tenemental framework of the town to be constructed. The 1347 fee farm rental is of exceptional use in this regard, having been assembled geographically with street frontage measurements being provided. In consequence, it was often possible to use this rental as a base map for property reconstructions and, with excavation, to work closely within this documentary framework in order to explore urban development.<sup>57</sup> Such work was assisted by publication of the 1347 rental and subsequently by transcription of other documents.<sup>58</sup> Working within this historical framework for Hull was an important early influence on the author, illustrating how approaches to the discipline of urban archaeology were changing and how the adoption of a variety of methodologies could enhance contextual understanding of an urban settlement.

The geographical precision provided by medieval documents in Hull was not available in similar form in Norwich but a framework had, nevertheless, been created through pioneering work of the Norwich Survey. It was recognised that abuttals were frequently recorded on the medieval enrolled deeds of the city and thus enabled the compilation of approximate tenemental maps. Work in the 1970s (largely by volunteer documentary researchers under the guidance of Helen Sutermeister) concentrated on those surviving deeds enrolled between 1285 and 1311 in order to construct tenemental maps across the city. These maps, reflecting a nationally-developing interest in urban morphology, not only helped to inform, and

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<sup>56</sup> Ayers 1987b, 10-11.

<sup>57</sup> An example of the correlation that was possible between documentary and archaeological material was provided by the author's excavation at Blackfriargate in 1976-1977 where it was possible to determine a physical division of a property that could be dated between the rental of 1347 (when it was owned by one Robert de Swanland) and sale of the property (by Swanland to John de Upsale) in two parts in 1352, an extraordinarily close dating for physical evidence - Armstrong and Ayers 1987, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Horrox 1978 and 1983.

indeed target, excavations, but could also reveal evidence of urban property transactions and changes in the urban landscape.<sup>59</sup>

Other innovative work by the Norwich Survey was also instructive. Drawing upon research by Helen Cam<sup>60</sup>, Alan Carter explored the potential of *landgable*<sup>61</sup> records to enable reconstruction of the probable extent of pre-Conquest settlement. Carter and his colleagues also reassessed antiquarian observations and finds. A critique of the work of such influential local urban historians as William Hudson was provided. All of this helped to establish a framework within which to position and assess archaeological projects as well as to shape the potential for an urban history narrative.

The work of the Survey was informed in part by a pioneering exhibition produced by Norwich Castle Museum in 1963 and supported by a short publication.<sup>62</sup> This book of the well-received exhibition<sup>63</sup> drew upon archaeological as well as historical information and was re-issued with updated material in 1981 including illustrations of archaeological material. Formation of the Norwich Survey, with its concentration upon the three strands of archaeological excavation, survey of standing buildings, and documentary research, clearly fostered interdisciplinary working as was made manifest in 1975 when James Campbell's magisterial essay on Norwich was produced for the Historic Towns Atlas series, incorporating numerous observations drawn from Alan Carter's archaeological and documentary research.<sup>64</sup>

Campbell's work, supplemented by comprehensive footnotes and mapping, remains perhaps the best short introduction to the history of the city. It is, however, an academic work and, until digitised recently, not readily available to a wide audience. The reissue of the 1963 booklet of Green and Young, in contrast, stimulated greater public awareness of archaeological work, being illustrated with archaeological discoveries. Soon after the author produced the first in a series of well-illustrated summaries of archaeological work, each seeking to place archaeological projects into a broad historical context.<sup>65</sup> The academic benefit of these 'popular'

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<sup>59</sup> A good example in Norwich of such process and change is that concerning acquisition of the site of the Dominican Friary south of the river in the early 14th century by the Dominicans - Tillyard 1983, 5-11 and especially fig. 2).

<sup>60</sup> Cam 1944, 14-15.

<sup>61</sup> A pre-conquest tax on land, seemingly ceasing to be levied upon newly-developed land after c.1100 - Carter 1978, 185-186 and fig.4.

<sup>62</sup> Green and Young 1963.

<sup>63</sup> The individuals behind the exhibition 'are certainly to be congratulated on the splendid result, and it is only to be hoped that other provincial cities will try to emulate this achievement' - Thompson 1964, 218.

<sup>64</sup> Campbell 1975.

<sup>65</sup> Ayers 1983b; Ayers 1987b; Ayers, Bown and Reeve 1992. It was noted in Ayers 1983b that the 'publication is not intended as a history of Norwich [but] it is necessary to place [the] excavations within a context ... [a] historical and topographic outline ...' - p.5.

publications, while not wide-ranging, was nevertheless useful. As an example, promotion in one of these publications of the Fishergate discoveries ahead of final publication<sup>66</sup> led to awareness of the shift of understanding concerning early urban development in Norwich, notably by Ottaway in his survey of the archaeology of British towns. He observed that 'Carter ... believed that the principal tenth-century settlement nucleus of Northwic lay in an area now largely occupied by the cathedral close. Recent work by Brian Ayers ... has, however, indicated that the original Northwick may be north of the River Wensum, its name distinguishing it from Westwick.' Ottaway also highlighted the change of focus to the south bank by the 11th century, as well as the probability of a distinct industrial zone west of settlement here as suggested in publication by the author and others in 1983.<sup>67</sup>

Such observations, however, were not being drawn from either a framework for future archaeological work in the city as a whole or from an archaeological narrative of the city's development. The latter needed to wait while the issue of synthetic frameworks was initially addressed piecemeal through the publication of detailed and referenced assessments of the data emerging from archaeological projects. Increasingly, these projects were not only integrating documentary evidence with excavated features and artefacts but were also providing insights into such topics as changes to the local environment wrought by urbanisation, agricultural produce, marine foodstuffs recovered from ecofacts and soil samples, and the evidence for craft and industrial activity.<sup>68</sup>

Such summaries, while valuable on a site-by-site basis, needed to be supplemented by more comprehensive assessments. Within a Norwich context, integration of sources of information had been stimulated by Carter's 1978 paper for the pre-Conquest period and also by that of Priestley and Corfield for the early post-medieval period. As early post-Norwich Survey archaeological work in Norwich followed the initiatives of the Survey (above) it was only natural therefore that the first attempt at providing discursive integrated assessments of aspects of the city's development should reflect this. Thus, a summary paper on the Thetford-Type pottery industry was published with Norwich Survey colleagues;<sup>69</sup> and the author, invited to speak at a conference in Bergen, delivered a paper (subsequently published) which also concentrated upon the pre-Conquest city.<sup>70</sup> However, future papers would broaden the picture, with presentations concerning medieval building material supplies, riverside industries (both published), and the influence of minor streams upon the medieval topography.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ayers 1987b.

<sup>67</sup> Ottaway 1992, 157-159; Atkin, Ayers and Jennings 1983, 65.

<sup>68</sup> A good example of an excavation which produced evidence for all of these is that undertaken at St Martin-at-Palace Plain in 1981; the environmental data is summarised by Murphy 1987, 131-133.

<sup>69</sup> Atkin, Ayers and Jennings 1983.

<sup>70</sup> Ayers 1985b.

<sup>71</sup> Ayers 1990; Ayers 1991b.



It was evident by the early 1990s that the two strands of dissemination - popularisation in the form of an accessible, referenced narrative history informed by archaeological research, and detailed academic assessment of the insights gained from this research - needed to coalesce into texts which reached wider audiences than local history enthusiasts and those who consult the minutiae of archaeological reports or conference proceedings. Accordingly, stimulated by 15 years' of research in Norwich and the emerging results of major projects such as the excavations at Castle Mall and the Franciscan Friary, an archaeological narrative history of the city was produced by the author in 1994. This monograph took its place within a national series exploring the contribution of archaeology to the history of urban centres. Its preface summed up its distinctive approach:

The archaeology of Norwich is taken to mean an all-embracing discipline, one which examines material evidence but puts it in a context provided by other forms of historical research, such as the study of topography, cartography, documents, place-names and numismatics. The book explores, therefore, how archaeological observation informs and supplements existing models of urban history.<sup>72</sup>

The monograph was designed 'to give an overview of the growth of the city as seen by one who is interested in both the processes of urban development and the effects of that development ... [it] sought to draw on a wide variety of sources and disciplines in order to convey an impression of both the city at various periods and the different ways in which information is being gleaned'. Richard Holt, reviewing the monograph in *Urban History*, clearly appreciated this methodology: 'Norwich was a large medieval city with a complex history, and under Brian Ayers and his predecessors has seen some of the very best in urban archaeology. Ayers' skilful and sensitive blend of archaeological, historical and architectural evidence advances our understanding of the factors contributing to a major city's growth.'<sup>73</sup>

Such 'blending' of evidence from different disciplines would not have been possible 20 years earlier. The range of research within the city in the 1970s and 1980s, nearly all of it (somewhat unusually in a national context) published by 1994<sup>74</sup>, enabled the production of an 'archaeological history' of Norwich. While the monograph maintained a chronological approach to enable ease-of-access for a wide audience, it also provided integration of data in a form which broadened understanding of the development of the city. As an example, the use of environmental evidence not only illustrated the diversity of resources available to the city but also highlighted the extensive trading network of Norwich that provided such items as the earliest examples of pot marigold and hops imported into England.<sup>75</sup> The monograph was therefore an urban history 'designed to have a wide appeal [with] deep knowledge [written in an] 'authoritative way' ...to ensure

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<sup>72</sup> Ayers 1994b, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Holt 1996, 128.

<sup>74</sup> All of the author's major projects were published, summaries of excavation such as that at Castle Mall were also available, and only the third volume of the Norwich Survey's excavations had yet to emerge.

<sup>75</sup> Ayers 1994b, 52-53.

[its] use by academics interested in the archaeology and development of [the city] up to the present day'.<sup>76</sup> Its core argument, as noted above, was for the adoption of an integrated approach to examine a great medieval and post-medieval city. However, this argument developed between the first and third editions of the book so that, by 2009, as well as exploring the city itself, the book also emphasised the contribution of Norwich and its archaeology to a greater understanding of the urban process: '... archaeology ... encourages perception of the city as ... one changing continuously but with a present integrated with the past'.<sup>77</sup>

The impact of the monograph can perhaps be measured in two ways. The first is straightforward; the volume has been revised and re-issued twice (in 2003 and 2009) and remains in print and as an e-book. More significantly is how the monograph has been used by others within archaeological and other disciplines. All three editions have been referenced by numerous academic works for ease-of-access to information. Examples range from Loveluck concerning the pre-Conquest city,<sup>78</sup> through King for the medieval city,<sup>79</sup> Fay for background within a work on health and the city<sup>80</sup>, and to Schofield and Vince in their general survey of towns.<sup>81</sup> Campbell cited numerous references in the monograph for areas where future archaeological research could be directed.<sup>82</sup> The book has perhaps been most consulted with regard to the early growth of the town; Hinton found it a 'useful summary' for the 10th-century settlement and must have been referring to it when, in the same paper but un-cited, he discussed pre-Conquest waterfront areas, finding post-Conquest decline in locations close to cathedral precincts including Norwich.<sup>83</sup> Quiney's work on town-houses used the monograph for his overview of the city in both the pre- and post-Conquest periods.<sup>84</sup>

Referencing to the work has been varied, often within the same field of interest. This is shown clearly by Creighton and Higham's book concerning urban defences where they used it in discussions of 12th-century obsolescence of the pre-Conquest defences of Norwich, drew upon it for a section on the free-standing artillery fortification known as the Cow Tower, referenced gun loops in the city wall, and detailed wall construction.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Holt 1996, 128.

<sup>77</sup> Ayers 2009, 182.

<sup>78</sup> Loveluck 2013.

<sup>79</sup> King forthcoming, 36 - 'Brian Ayers, the county archaeologist of Norfolk up to 2008, has provided wide-ranging and up-to-date surveys of city's archaeology and buildings' [this includes reference to specific papers as well, such as Ayers 2001].

<sup>80</sup> Fay 2015 *passim*.

<sup>81</sup> Schofield and Vince 2003.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell 2004, 47 and endnote 141.

<sup>83</sup> Hinton 2000, 222n and 234.

<sup>84</sup> Quiney 2003, 23 and 29.

<sup>85</sup> Creighton and Higham 2005.

The ongoing impact of the monograph as a readily-accessible source of information continues, both nationally and within an international context. The latter can be seen in the work of Hodges who used the text when exploring perceived 11th-century settlement shift in early medieval Norwich, within a wider assessment of urban development towards the end of the first millennium.<sup>86</sup> Most recently, the chapter on towns in the new *Oxford Handbook of Later Medieval Archaeology* cites Norwich in a discussion both of continuity of urban features and market differentiation observed in the city.<sup>87</sup> Locally, promotion of this ‘excellent introduction to the archaeology of the city, and very good indeed on the origins of the city, the Saxon [sic] town and the medieval period’, by the School of History at UEA, clearly shows the volume’s contemporary usefulness.<sup>88</sup>

All of this is positive impact but use of the monograph can contain cautionary instruction as well. Creighton and Higham’s discussion of the Cow Tower cited the 1994 book as noted above. However, they did not go on to use the detailed *Medieval Archaeology* paper on the Cow Tower, published by the author with two others in 1988,<sup>89</sup> but curiously *did* use Saunders’ earlier paper of 1985 in the same journal,<sup>90</sup> despite the 1988 work providing a much more detailed assessment and survey (and a full transcription of the documentary evidence which was only partially quoted by Saunders). This may not matter because their overview did not lead to any startlingly controversial conclusions but elsewhere Astill’s reference to the book was a little puzzling; discussing the imposition of post-Conquest cathedrals on settlements such as Lincoln and Norwich, he went on to suggest that planting of the cathedral ‘stimulated extensive suburban settlement along major access routes ...’. This is to confuse cause and effect: Astill referenced the chapter on the pre-Conquest town which obviously does not mention such later settlement; the plantation of the cathedral is discussed in a separate chapter, also without reference to urban growth; and the expansion along access routes is dealt with in a third chapter, without reference to the cathedral.<sup>91</sup>

The potential for such paraphrasing is clearly great with an archaeological narrative which sought to cover the length of the city’s history. The volume needed

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<sup>86</sup> Hodges 2000, 106.

<sup>87</sup> Lilley 2018, 282 and 290.

<sup>88</sup> <https://rl.talis.com/3/uea/lists/0632C145-E9F8-E507-E5E9-16D605975E13.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Ayers, B. *et al* 1988, 184-207.

<sup>90</sup> Saunders, A. D. 1985. ‘The Cow Tower, Norwich: An East Anglian bastille?’. *Medieval Archaeology* 29, 109-119.

<sup>91</sup> Astill 2000, 44. Interestingly, he was one of the few to reference either the Norwich monograph or indeed archaeological research in general within the later medieval sections volume of the Cambridge Urban History (Palliser 2000). Overviews by Kermodé (‘The Greater Towns’) and Brodt (‘East Anglia’) focussed primarily upon historical sources.

supplementing with more academically-detailed assessments.<sup>92</sup> Work to produce more focussed studies therefore followed on from publication of the *Norwich* synthesis. The most immediate was a chapter exploring the landscape of the Cathedral Close prior to 1096, written for the major volume marking the 900th anniversary of the cathedral institution.<sup>93</sup> At the same time urban landscape change in Norwich was explored in a paper to the 'Medieval Europe' conference in Bruges while archaeological approaches to urban archaeology in Norfolk towns in general were also published.<sup>94</sup> An overall assessment of the urban landscape was provided in 2004 when it formed the opening chapter of the seminal academic work *Medieval Norwich*.<sup>95</sup> This chapter sought to provide an understanding of the growth of the topographical framework which underpinned the medieval city and has found relevance outside Norwich. Rees Jones draws upon it when discussing tenements in early Norman York<sup>96</sup> and the text is also referenced by Clarke exploring division of parishes in Sandwich.<sup>97</sup>

All of these published texts were particular in their focus, examining the physical landscape of the town. Academic assessments providing well-referenced archaeological narratives of the urban development of Norwich in general followed in 2011 and 2015. The first of these was initially presented as a paper at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds in 2007. Subsequently worked up for publication in *Early Medieval Europe* it explored the pre-Conquest town and its purpose was set out as follows:

In 1977, Alan Carter published an appraisal of the early development of Norwich in which he not only reviewed previous assessments of the city's growth but also set out models for testing by a range of archaeological and historical methodologies. Thirty years later, considerable research in Norwich has deepened understanding of pre-Conquest occupation, identifying more closely the probable development pattern and enabling a re-assessment and expansion of Carter's ideas. This paper reviews that research, seeking to determine both the character of the urban landscape by 1066 and its likely economic and social diversity, while proposing future research areas.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> This is not to criticise the value of the monograph nor of other archaeological work being produced. Discussing the work of the Norwich Survey and of the author's own Norfolk Archaeological Unit, the Introduction to the important multi-authored volume *Medieval Norwich* (2004) states: 'It is a tribute to the achievements of both the Survey and the Unit that so many contributors to this volume have drawn upon their work, and that the study of medieval Norwich is now well on its way to becoming the inter-disciplinary enterprise envisaged three decades ago' - Rawcliffe 2004, xxxiii.

<sup>93</sup> Ayers 1996b.

<sup>94</sup> Ayers 1997a; Ayers 1996a.

<sup>95</sup> Ayers 2004b in Rawcliffe and Wilson, 1-28.

<sup>96</sup> Rees Jones 2013, 72.

<sup>97</sup> Clarke 2010, 32.

<sup>98</sup> Ayers 2011, 62.

The text was therefore in two broad parts, reviewing and updating Carter's own assessment and proposing research areas and methodologies for future work. Consciously written in the hope of producing a similar impact to that of Carter's seminal work, the paper seems to be having this desired effect. The text provides the bulk of the information for the discussion of early Norwich in Crabtree's recent book on the rebirth of towns in the post-Roman west<sup>99</sup> while John Blair, also in 2018, notes that 'Ayers 2011 is an excellent survey of the evidence [of 8th- and 9th-century activity]'.<sup>100</sup> A shorter, slightly updated, review of the evidence was also presented to a colloquium in Lübeck in 2014 and subsequently published.<sup>101</sup>

A second paper was then written to cover the post-Conquest period. This did not have a precursor upon which to build although Campbell's 1975 essay was informative. However it did utilise the endeavours of Carter and others, as well as the author's own work, and also sought to provide both an overarching academic review as well as proposing future research ideas. Accordingly its preamble stated the following:

This paper presents a review of recent progress in the study of medieval Norwich, a city of European importance, examining its urban landscape, buildings, institutions, and commerce and industry. Evidence is drawn from survey, excavation, building recording and analysis, artefact studies and palaeo-environmental data. Much of the information is derived from work of the last forty years, starting with the ground-breaking initiatives of the Norwich Survey in the 1970s, continuing through large-scale excavations conducted by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit — notably at the Magistrates' Courts, Castle Mall and the Franciscan friary, all now published — and from research undertaken by other scholars at the cathedral, on the elite houses of the city, and in the surviving parish churches (thirty of these still stand out of a medieval total of over sixty). The paper concludes with an assessment of potential for future research.<sup>102</sup>

It is perhaps either too soon or indicative of a greater interest in the potential of archaeology to address early medieval as opposed to later medieval urban issues that there is as yet little indication of impact upon urban studies despite publication in a major national series. An exception to this is a review which, unusually, was located in an assessment of recent publications by the Castles Studies Group. Here it was noted that '... the paper summarises the results of many small and large-scale excavations, investigations and building recordings within the town in order to present the current state of knowledge regarding its medieval development. It is an authoritative piece that brings together evidence from a wide range of sources, including developer-funded archaeology, showcasing the value and range of

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<sup>99</sup> Crabtree 2018, 169-171.

<sup>100</sup> Blair 2018, 260 fn 130.

<sup>101</sup> Ayers 2016b.

<sup>102</sup> Ayers 2015, 1.

knowledge that can be extracted from these more mundane investigations in terms of developing an in-depth understanding of a place ...'.<sup>103</sup>

The response to another paper published around the same time is, interestingly, supportive of the idea that earlier material is more readily consulted than that relating to the later medieval period. This paper concerned the pre-urban landscape of Norwich<sup>104</sup> with references to it already appearing, as in the recent work by Rippon on the development of territorial identity.<sup>105</sup> Such interest in early landscape is also to be seen in responses to the 1996 paper on the cathedral site. Texts such as Pestell's paper on monastic foundation strategies,<sup>106</sup> Finch's assessment of the city's churches<sup>107</sup> and Gilchrist's book on the Cathedral Close<sup>108</sup> all refer to this publication.

The archaeological publication of later material seems to have had greater impact with historians and art historians than with archaeologists. The author's publications have clearly provided foundation background upon which other studies have been built. Rawcliffe, discussing both the specifics of the Great Hospital in Norwich and urban health in general, notably references archaeological material from the late medieval city<sup>109</sup> as too does Rutledge in her work on the urban environment of Norwich in the 15th century.<sup>110</sup> Both Fay and Williamson use the *Norwich* monograph for background information.<sup>111</sup> However, more specific use of various texts can be found in works which concentrate on aspects of the medieval city, rather than assessing its development overall. Thus archaeological work on buildings in particular is utilised, ranging from Schofield<sup>112</sup>, to Grenville<sup>113</sup> and Quiney.<sup>114</sup> Some buildings, notably those of 12th- and 13th century date, are referenced fairly frequently: thus the excavated building at St Martin-at-Palace Plain, as well as being in the above texts, is used as a three-quarter page plate in

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<sup>103</sup> Scott and Kenyon 2016, 20-21.

<sup>104</sup> Ayers 2014a.

<sup>105</sup> Rippon 2018, 313.

<sup>106</sup> Pestell 2001, 210.

<sup>107</sup> Finch 2004, 50.

<sup>108</sup> Gilchrist 2005, 23

<sup>109</sup> Rawcliffe 1999 and 2013 *passim*.

<sup>110</sup> Rutledge 2013.

<sup>111</sup> Fay 2015; Williamson 2014 *passim*.

<sup>112</sup> Schofield 1995, 32.

<sup>113</sup> Grenville 1997, 175 and 177.

<sup>114</sup> Quiney 2003, *passim*.

the introduction to Clarke's appraisal of the archaeology of medieval England<sup>115</sup> and on the cover of a volume devoted to houses of this period.<sup>116</sup>

Research and publication on Norwich continues, most recently with an assessment of the area of Coslany on the north bank of the river Wensum<sup>117</sup> and, with three UEA colleagues, on the parish churches of the city. This latter project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, is exploring the archaeology, architecture and art history of the nearly 60 parish churches known from the medieval city and is working towards final publication in two volumes, the first providing summaries of the dedications, earliest references, location and topography, parish boundaries, archaeology, architecture, furnishings and antiquarian illustrations, and the second a series of thematic essays. A paper exploring the churches of the north bank area of *Ultra Aquam* in the city has already been published.<sup>118</sup>

In summary, publication of research by the author over the last 35 years developed initially within a framework established in the 1960s and 1970s, notably as evidenced by the work of Campbell and Carter.<sup>119</sup> Together with relatively prompt publication of excavation projects within Norwich, the author produced a series of papers which explored aspects of the city, such as the development of the early commercial waterfront, resource acquisition and riverside industries, before the publication of a monograph which provided a narrative history of the city informed by an integrated approach to the physical evidence. Thereafter the exploration of Norwich and its archaeological resource broadened, with academic papers which not only assessed developing understanding of the growth of the city and its significance within national and international contexts but also flagged potential for future research. It was recognised that, given that Norwich has a

rich archaeological environment, previous examination of which is well published in comparison to many towns, a diverse tradition of exploration, and hinterlands with much untapped information ... Study of the city continues to reveal much that is new and which contributes to a wider appreciation of the complexity of medieval society.<sup>120</sup>

#### **4. Norwich - broadening the potential of its archaeological study**

The publication devoted to 12th- and 13th-century houses (fn116) was the result of a pair of Anglo-French seminars in 1998 (Rouen) and 1999 (Norwich) initiated and organised by the author and Dominique Pitte of the Rouen Archaeological Service. Speakers were invited from both the UK and France and papers, in English and French, covered a range of themes (such as the state of research questions in northern France, the English medieval townhouse as evidence for the property

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<sup>115</sup> Clarke 1984, 11.

<sup>116</sup> Pitte and Ayers 2002.

<sup>117</sup> Ayers 2017a.

<sup>118</sup> Ayers *et al* 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Campbell 1975; Carter 1978.

<sup>120</sup> Ayers 2015, 18.

market, recent discoveries of civil buildings in Rouen and Evreux, and reinterpretation of Little Denham Hall in Suffolk). Papers on Norwich included a review of the documentary evidence for stone-built houses in the city<sup>121</sup> as well as an assessment of the archaeological and architectural evidence by the author which included other examples from Norfolk.<sup>122</sup> The volume was well-received, particularly in France. A review by Pierre Garrigou Grandchamp, the doyen of French Romanesque building studies, found the volume 'stimulating' in that it 'opens up many new avenues'. He observed in particular that France had things to learn from Britain, notably the need for 'systematic surveys which allow typologies to be based on national series'. He also found the author's 'insights into the establishment in the middle of the 12th century of a 20x20m plot [system] in Norwich and on the [parallels to] the process of colonisation ... at King's Lynn ... most interesting'.<sup>123</sup>

The contribution to the Anglo-French seminars was succeeded by other conference papers, all subsequently published, which took the Norwich experience and applied it to exploration of wider issues. An invitation to Siena in 2001 sought a contribution on archaeological approaches to urban change. This built upon ideas that were germinating from work in Norwich but also sought to position consideration of change *to* the historic environment within consideration *of* that environment. The 'potential contribution of archaeological philosophies and methodologies to managing change' was linked to the need for the archaeological process to be embedded within modern societal thinking:

Archaeological enquiry must ask (and answer) the questions of why? and how? as well as what? and when?. Society as a whole asks all four questions of the architect and the engineer; it only asks the second two of the archaeologist ... The urban archaeologist is the equivalent of a social engineer working in the physical environment. She or he can investigate and explain the context of the urban historic environment, providing an informed framework ...<sup>124</sup>

This interest in the historic urban environment was developed further in a paper for a conference held at UEA in 2003. Entitled 'Understanding the Urban Environment' it sought to explore and expand the range of archaeological approaches to the study of Norwich, reflecting developments in theoretical practice at the time.<sup>125</sup> It examined such topics as the use of space, symbolism in the physical environment, evidence for social control and status and, once again, urban change.<sup>126</sup> Much of the stimulus for the paper came from the author's developing interest in the work of Giles on urban guildhalls and from Schofield's analysis of houses in London.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Rutledge 2002.

<sup>122</sup> Ayers 2002b.

<sup>123</sup> Garrigou Grandchamp 2003, 266-267.

<sup>124</sup> Ayers 2002c, 195-196.

<sup>125</sup> Gerrard 2003, 217ff summarises the context.

<sup>126</sup> Ayers 2005.

<sup>127</sup> Giles 2000; Schofield 2003.



Giles in particular introduced the author to the work of Hillier and Hanson which, together with publications of Matthew Johnson, facilitated new ways of viewing the historic environment.<sup>128</sup> The response to the paper was encouraging; Rees Jones later observed that 'Brian Ayers deftly combines a survey of theoretical developments in Archaeology, especially in post-processualism, with a survey of the rich archaeology of the city of Norwich. He ends with a call for more interdisciplinary work to understand the processes of urban change, in which archaeology can be used to set the agenda for understanding the past and not used as a mere adornment to the work of history.'<sup>129</sup>

An invitation by the Norfolk Historic Buildings Group for a short paper provided the opportunity to promote such ideas both to a greater extent and to an audience which has the study of buildings as a major focus. The aim was to foster an awareness of the potential of building study to find meaning in the historic landscape, seeking to examine such notions as privacy, access and social hierarchy, and visual social messaging. The paper therefore proposed that

survey is informed by a theoretical framework which seeks to question such matters as structural and spatial organisation with an integrated consideration of likely functions, probable status, control points and permeability .. with such an approach to archaeological observation and assessment of structures, social relationships can be surmised with some confidence ... largely the result of developing theoretical archaeological models. This 'contextual archaeology' is one which sees material culture – in this instance buildings and their surroundings – as one which encodes meaning and which can be decoded to elucidate greater understanding of social influences on urban form, the disposition of buildings themselves, the hierarchical use of buildings, and the relationships of structures to spaces.<sup>130</sup>

The text noted that the approach remains unusual but was in essence a positive response to shifting methodological approaches such as that of Lilley writing on 'urban property and social order' which refers to social hierarchies and the mapping of documentary evidence on to the internal structure of the properties.<sup>131</sup> The paper urged observation of 'messages of distinction', noting how at Dragon Hall on King Street, Norwich, circulation patterns around the building could be determined from fabric details. 'Divisions between public and private space are evidenced not only by decorative detailing but even by the use of materials; doorways in public areas were fashioned in stone whereas in private and working areas these were created in brick.' Fragmentary objects from excavations were also informative; discovery of elements of continental stove tiles in pre-1507 deposits at Pottergate indicated the rare ownership of an enclosed stove in England; it was noted that the social 'message' of the stove 'was perhaps profound – the owner signalling contact with, and appreciation of, mainstream European domestic culture'.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Hillier and Hanson 1984; Johnson 1993.

<sup>129</sup> Rees Jones 2007.

<sup>130</sup> Ayers 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Lilley 2002, 204.

<sup>132</sup> Ayers 2007

A final paper exploring such a 'post-processual' approach to the urban environment was prepared for and published in a German *Festschrift* in 2014. The author had already explored some of the ideas rehearsed in the above earlier works with German and other north European colleagues at conferences in Lübeck. The *Festschrift* was an opportunity to present concepts to a wider community of colleagues working in similar fields.<sup>133</sup> It specifically sought to explore mentalities in the past, examining evidence which can suggest the decision-making processes and outcomes of actions. Art history as well as archaeology was used to examine likely considerations of late medieval people, for instance quoting Sekules on a possible motive for Thomas Erpingham's sponsorship of the early 15th-century gateway at Norwich cathedral that bears his name: it has the 'appearance of a personal memorial [built by] a zealot intent on asserting an orthodoxy'.<sup>134</sup> While the paper concentrated upon Norwich, it also drew evidence from elsewhere in Europe such as Malmö where careful archaeological analysis of buildings was able to suggest social imperatives behind urban change, specifically noting a creeping 'gentrification' in the 16th-century town.<sup>135</sup> The *Festschrift* text, as befitted a paper published in Germany, discussed how the study of social changes seen in the fabric of buildings could be 'characterised as *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, that is moving from a form of coexistence as a domestic community to that of a more structured, rule-bound society'.<sup>136</sup>

### **5. The North Sea World**

Awareness of the need to consider a broader hinterland than simply that of the rural area around Norwich was brought home to the author at his interview for his first post in the city in 1979. He was shown medieval pottery sherds, was asked to differentiate them, and mistook 11th-century Andenne ware (from present-day Belgium) for Stamford ware. As has been seen (above, section 2), excavation in Norwich soon demonstrated that medieval settlement owed much to communities across the North Sea. Attendance at and delivery of papers to meetings (subsequently published) in Lübeck and Bergen<sup>137</sup> emphasised that much was to be gained from study of the contributions of continental European colleagues to an understanding of Norwich's own archaeology. The particular interest of waterfront archaeology as a key aspect of urban archaeology, and east coast urban archaeology especially, was additionally helpful. Early waterfront work was promoted in such locations as London in the UK, Bergen in Norway and Dordrecht in the Netherlands<sup>138</sup> but the author was fortunate to be involved in three excavations of east coast waterfront sites and to have the example nearby of the

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<sup>133</sup> Ayers 2014b.

<sup>134</sup> Sekules 1996, 207.

<sup>135</sup> Thomasson 2004, 187ff.

<sup>136</sup> Ayers 2014b, 224.

<sup>137</sup> Ayers 1983a and 1985b.

<sup>138</sup> The state of European research into waterfront archaeology in the late 1970s was explored in a London conference in 1979 which was subsequently published, with a note by the author on Hull (pp.126-129), as Milne and Hopley 1981.

first such site to be excavated in Britain, at King's Lynn in 1964 (by Helen Clarke, née Parker).<sup>139</sup>

The intellectual context within which sat the author's early interest in a wider European perspective was itself developing at this time. Barley edited a major volume of European towns which appeared in 1977. This was divided into subject areas<sup>140</sup> but, in large part, the various contributions were generally seeking either to fill gaps in historical knowledge or to illustrate aspects of urban history. Good examples are the contributions of Nyberg on Denmark for the former and Lobbedey on northern Germany for the latter.<sup>141</sup> A change in approach could be seen in 1982 with the publication of *Dark Age Economics* by Hodges. Its subtitle, 'The origins of towns and trade' signalled a growing awareness by archaeologists of the potential of the discipline, particularly when questioning and, where necessary, adopting the methodologies and insights of other disciplines.<sup>142</sup> Others developed, and indeed themselves questioned, Hodges' approach, often bringing new theoretical analyses to the growth of urbanism as a phenomenon.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, studies of particular types of north European towns were being produced as seen in the work of Clarke and Ambrosiani.<sup>144</sup>

Study of such works by the author was supplemented by meetings with continental colleagues, examination of both sites and artefacts either with parallels to or provenances of continental locations, and use of excavation reports and other papers from projects across the North Sea, as well as along the English (and Scottish) coasts. These led inevitably to a greater understanding of the interconnectedness of medieval societies using the sea as a means of contact. Being receptive to new ideas within urban and wider archaeology necessitated a responsive approach which sought to explore the archaeology and historiography of Norwich within a broader European framework.

It helped that the author operated within a milieu which worked directly in response to development pressures and could develop linkages with colleagues in kindred organisations, both in Britain and on the continent. The significance of this needs to be stressed. For instance, the importance of Lübeck's archaeological service from

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<sup>139</sup> Parker 1965.

<sup>140</sup> Country Surveys; Origins of Towns; The Town as a Political Centre; and The Town as an Ecclesiastical Centre - Barley 1977, various authors.

<sup>141</sup> Nyberg 1977, 65-81; Lobbedey 1977, 127-157. Lobbedey's work concentrates on the products of urban excavation, rather than questioning the process of urbanisation itself, noting for instance that 'The real importance of the Lübeck excavations lies in the recovery of an enormous number of finds ... Neugebauer hopes that he will ... be able, if he uses the finds in conjunction with documents, to link objects to individual owners' (p.142).

<sup>142</sup> The volume did not discard the relationship with history although its opening chapter 'The shadow of Pirenne' was perhaps titled in a questioning way.

<sup>143</sup> A good example of such a text is that of Carver 1993. A critical view of Hodges was provided in Anderton 1999.

<sup>144</sup> Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991.

about 1980 in promoting Anglo-German archaeological understanding is an early example. Its publications in the *Lübecker Schriften zur Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte* series contained much useful information concerning both sites and approaches. A 1983 volume was devoted to 12th- and 13th-century maritime trade centres with British contributions by Ayers (Hull), Clarke (King's Lynn in particular but also English east coast ports in general) and Keene (London). Helen Clarke's paper drew attention to the increase of topographical understanding that archaeological and documentary research could bring to the study of such ports, noting the Hull evidence for its recognition of early division of properties by principal streets as topographical development changed the physical footprints of harbour-side towns.<sup>145</sup>

The contribution of Lübeck to inter-north European co-operative engagement received a significant boost from the mid-1990s with the establishment of biennial colloquia on urban archaeology in the Hanseatic region. These colloquia, as well as bringing together over 40 colleagues from the Low Countries, Germany, Poland, the Baltic States, Russia, Scandinavia, Ireland and Britain, also produced themed volumes of presentations and discussions every two years. The topics ranged widely - trade, domestic architecture, infrastructure, craft industry, urban defences, luxury, monasteries, and childhood and adolescence - and participants were encouraged to draw upon a variety of sources so as to ensure consideration of such contributions as those of documents, buildings and environmental sciences.

The range of topics often encouraged consideration of how data could be used and its potential for future development of interpretation. An example was the opportunity in 2010 to consider the role of children in the medieval urban environment, as evidenced by the subsequent published paper in 2012.<sup>146</sup> Using Norwich material, it was possible to combine documentary, art-historical and archaeological evidence in order to illustrate the state - and potential peril - of pregnancy and childbirth in the 15th century not only to discuss pregnancy but the likely approach to its joys and dangers by women themselves.<sup>147</sup>

The frequent invisibility of children enforced a consideration of how archaeologists engage with the concept of childhood and the need to consider, as an example, 'biological distinctions of immaturity from cultural meanings placed on individuals' bodies'.<sup>148</sup> It is necessary to note that 'an excavated skeleton may be biologically that of a child but the individual concerned may have performed an economic or social role that, in modern western society, would be regarded as that of an adult.' It

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<sup>145</sup> Clarke 1983, 71, quoting Ayers 1979, 4).

<sup>146</sup> Ayers 2012, 25-38.

<sup>147</sup> The paper drew attention to Margaret Paston's letters when pregnant, the Toppes window glass in the church of St Peter Mancroft depicting pregnancy clothing which could be let out as the baby grew, a study of the veneration given by women to St Anne (associated with conception and pregnancy) and St Margaret (associated with women in labour) in 15th-century Norwich, and the archaeological evidence (ironically from the church dedicated to St Margaret *in combusto* on Magdalen Street) of neo-natal deaths.

<sup>148</sup> Baxter 2008, 159-75.

was argued that 'Archaeologists can, and should, seek data which explores the socialisation of children, their economic role in urban society, the impact of change upon children, the growth of a market for child-centred artefacts, and familial relationships. All this is possible, if difficult, with existing data and methodologies.'<sup>149</sup> It was a point taken up by the published colloquium summary, emphasising that 'children and adolescents were not a separate group of society but rather an integrated and essential part of it. Ayers states that the methodological approach of archaeologists has to be modified ...'<sup>150</sup>

This approach to seeking methodological improvements of the manner in which archaeological data can be used was adopted at other colloquia, such as that on defences or that in 2012 on urban monasteries.<sup>151</sup> At the latter, the author devoted an entire section to 'future work', urging a questioning approach which not only noted that 'the establishment of monasteries in towns and cities were cases of large-scale redevelopment, a phenomenon not unknown to archaeologists' but also, *inter alia*, noting that 'monasticism was an international movement ... frequently importing ideas which, translated into material culture, could have a profound effect ...'. The final publication's summary urged 'Reading of the chapter on future work in the article dealing with Norwich is strongly recommended to all readers'.<sup>152</sup>

The colloquia served a further function in that they highlighted differences in methodologies across northern Europe which, in itself, was instructive. As noted above, Scandinavian colleagues for instance often brought interesting ideas to the meetings: an example - Corelli, in exploring the trade of Lund, sought to interrogate the evidence to determine whether the artefacts discussed were representative of a trading community or merely characterised local consumption within a significant Scanian town.<sup>153</sup> It also led to disputes; the author's paper on urban defences mentioned above, in seeking to discuss the symbolism of defences rather than dwelling solely on their martial and mercantile control capabilities, was considered beyond the remit of archaeology by at least one German colleague.

The meetings in Lübeck therefore fulfilled the three useful purposes of broadening awareness of the range of urban archaeological material being recorded and published in northern Europe, highlighting methodological differences and innovations, and creating a community of scholars with kindred interests. However, the meetings and resulting publications could only go so far in terms of dissemination of information. A recent example of the limitations that still apply can be seen in a work from Schleswig in northern Germany. Here Rösch in re-working data from excavations in the 1970s and 1980s at the town's medieval waterfront, drew upon British examples for discussion, including work undertaken by the author at Hull in 1978 (with regard to details of technological construction)<sup>154</sup>. It is

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<sup>149</sup> Ayers 2012, 35-36.

<sup>150</sup> Falk 2012, 611-14.

<sup>151</sup> Ayers 2010; Ayers 2014d.

<sup>152</sup> Falk 2014, 741-44.

<sup>153</sup> Corelli 1999.

<sup>154</sup> Rösch 2018, 154.

characteristic of the problems of access to literature, particularly between Britain and Germany, that he was only able to refer to a summary published in a generic work rather than the excavation report.<sup>155</sup>

A further constraint was that the colloquia only provided a partial understanding of the diverse nature of the hinterlands that served the urban communities under discussion. The meetings were essentially discussions of activities *within* towns and of parallels and differences between towns, rather than considerations of the complexity of the networks and resources that supported towns. Research elsewhere, particularly with the development of scientific techniques such as dendro-provenancing or isotopic and aDNA analysis, was increasingly providing data which illustrated the movement of peoples and commodities, often with a precision which was lacking from more traditional studies such as pottery analysis. The discovery of 11th-century skeletons in Norwich belonging to individuals from Orkney and the Western Isles or, at a similar date, those from northern Scotland or Norway located in rural Jutland, Denmark demonstrated that the North Sea was a highway facilitating human contact, just as analysis of fishbone assemblages indicated that stocks from the northern North Sea could be tracked to medieval locations in London and Antwerp.<sup>156</sup>

It became clear that a more comprehensive approach was necessary, one in which the towns of the Hanseatic region were viewed within their hinterland context. *Hinterland* is, of course, a German word in origin and one deployed more specifically in German historiography than its use in England. In Germany it describes the broad economic system within which a town existed whereas the immediate area supplying that town with its resources of food and other sustaining supplies such as fuel is called the *Umland* or surrounding countryside.<sup>157</sup> Such division of definition is not available in English which can cause problems: as Giles and Dyer note 'Words have meaning, and the vocabulary of urbanism and rural life represent real divergences'.<sup>158</sup> Exploration of hinterlands through documents alone usually results in an analysis of the *Umland* environment;<sup>159</sup> it can, however, be argued that archaeological data, particularly when examining the evidence from the region around the North Sea, investigates 'settlement hierarchies, rural production and exchange, social contexts and environmental impact';<sup>160</sup> in other words, *hinterland* in the German sense.

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<sup>155</sup> Milne & Hobley 1981 and Ayers 1979 respectively.

<sup>156</sup> Töpf 2009; Price *et al* 2012; Barrett *et al* 2011. The fishbone data is instructive in that its analysis was only possible because of decisions decades earlier to retain such material after study of large-scale excavations, some such decisions having had to be argued due to storage costs.

<sup>157</sup> Perrin 2002, 11.

<sup>158</sup> Giles and Dyer 2005, 2.

<sup>159</sup> Galloway 2005 is full of interest on the rural hinterland of towns but the maps alone in his paper illustrate the essential localness of much of the discussion.

<sup>160</sup> Ayers 2013, 78.

An attempt to outline the archaeological potential for study of this wider North Sea region was undertaken in 2010 with an invited contribution to the 'East Anglia and its North Sea World' conference held at the University of East Anglia. The paper given at this conference and subsequently published sought to examine 'disparate material culture ... be it in the form of topography, buildings, excavated structures and features, artefacts or paleo-environmental data'.<sup>161</sup> Examples ranged from the mechanisms of connectedness in the medieval period, be that of shipping, evidence for commerce, transfer of environmental resources (timber being the most obvious), technological innovation, social identity, or the transmission of ideas. Unknowingly but with hindsight appropriately, it was an approach which Mehler subsequently characterised as 'Hanse archaeology': 'artifacts, biofacts, architectural remains in towns and rural areas, coastlines and their hinterlands, port facilities, ships, and commercial routes'. It is an archaeology differentiated from Hanse history and has 'both a narrow focus, concerned mainly with analysis of the intercultural exchange between the Hanseatic merchants and their agents ... and their customers abroad, and a wider focus, which studies the social, economic, and cultural impact these contacts had for both societies'.<sup>162</sup>

The approach adopted by the 'East Anglia and its North Sea World' paper was developed by the author in the monograph which followed. Entitled *The German Ocean: Medieval Europe around the North Sea*, this work was an archaeologically-driven narrative of the medieval North Sea world. It sought both to review recent developments in knowledge and understanding and to provide an appreciation of the potential of future research.<sup>163</sup> The aim was to show how the North Sea enabled the development of societies, often bound together by common geographical situations and by the trade which access to the sea facilitated. Emphasis was placed upon the developing nature of archaeological research and the monograph investigated processes and trends as well as physical structures, buried features and artefacts, essentially noting that much of the approach could not have been written even ten years earlier. It recognised, however, that notwithstanding a commonality of experience, the pressures of geography, access to raw materials and political expediency could all combine to provide distinctive regional variations. 'Economies developed more rapidly in some areas than others; local solutions to problems produced urban and rural environments of different aspect; the growth, and sometimes decline, of towns and ports was often dictated by local as much as wider factors'.<sup>164</sup>

As a result, the monograph set out to explore the 'diverse commonality' of the medieval North Sea region (which was itself defined as 'south-to-north from Flanders to Norway and from the Thames Estuary to Iceland; and west-to-east from the Moray Firth to Riga' - that is, including the Baltic but excluding the English Channel). It remained conscious of differences as well as similarities, Liddiard

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>162</sup> Mehler 2014, 3209-3210.

<sup>163</sup> Examples of how far archaeological approaches have developed since the late 1970s (see note 141 above) are papers included with Wilkin *et al* 2015, notably that of Müller (pp. 145-187).

<sup>164</sup> Ayers 2016, 2.

helpfully mindful that ‘... part of any North Sea identity was bound up in differences, as well as shared affinities’.<sup>165</sup> However, the linkages between different communities as exposed by archaeological work was one of the key aspects of the text. It drew inspiration from the wealth of data uncovered in some of northern Europe’s most pioneering urban excavations, those of Asbjørn Herteig in Bergen, Norway. These showed the potential complexity of relationships as vividly as an inventory document: ceramics from England, Germany, the Netherlands, Flanders and France; decorated walrus skulls from Iceland and Greenland; grain from eastern Europe; and boxwood combs from the Mediterranean.<sup>166</sup>

The monograph was therefore rooted in archaeological observation. It drew together a digest of the wealth of new data being uncovered around the North Sea and the Baltic. It utilised evidence from recent discoveries at Portmahomack on the north-east coast of Scotland to exploration of the seabed seeking the lost port of Dunwich in Suffolk; it examined Norwegian evidence for charcoal production outside Trondheim which highlighted one form of woodland exploitation; it observed that another form was provided by the link between Scandinavian oak and the roof of the Guthrie collegiate church in Angus; it noted how archaeology, using cloth seals, was able to discriminate between the linen production of the Belgian towns of Leuven and Diest, production which documents appeared to subsume under the larger town of Leuven; and it itemised the varied cargo of a ‘bulk carrier’ dating to the mid-15th century located off Skaftö, on the western (North Sea) coast of Sweden where analysis of the timbers of the ship indicated that she was likely to have been built in Poland while her cargo included copper ingots from central Europe, lime almost certainly from the island of Gotland in the Baltic, and planks, variously from southeastern and northern Poland.<sup>167</sup>

An important aspect of the monograph was its use of new forms of evidence both to illustrate the increasing inter-disciplinarity of data for historical interpretation and also the potential utilisation of such data towards contemporary concerns. A concrete example of the former was provided by scientific studies of plague victims where results isolated the genomic sequence for the *Yersinia pestis* pathogen, a causative agent of the Black Death.<sup>168</sup> The latter was illustrated by aDNA analysis of skeletons seeking to locate the genetic variant CCR5D32 allele, with the potential of assisting gene therapy and the development of drugs to combat AIDS.<sup>169</sup> Both studies were possible because of the results of urban archaeology.

The necessary research for the monograph was not undertaken within an intellectual vacuum. On the contrary, it can be argued that it forms part of a *zeitgeist* that is enhancing recognition of seas and the connections that they provide to enhance understanding of the functioning of societies in the past. Ferdinand Braudel is often cited as an early example of such an approach to understanding the ‘cultural unity’ of an entire maritime area; his classic work on the Mediterranean

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<sup>165</sup> Liddiard 2013, 14.

<sup>166</sup> Herteig 1968, 77.

<sup>167</sup> Ayers 2016, *passim*.

<sup>168</sup> Schuenemann *et al* 2011.

<sup>169</sup> Pringle 2007, 45–49.



in the late 16th century was published in 1949 although it only appeared in English in 1972. His work was tripartite, exploring the environment, social organisation and events.<sup>170</sup> Hugely influential it was nevertheless a work of history, drawing upon traditional historical archive resources rather than wider cultural references nor the results of broad archaeological enquiry.

A conference in Leiden in 1995 sought to explore whether there existed, during the similar early modern period, 'a cultural unity in the North Sea area analogous to the one Ferdinand Braudel defined for the Mediterranean'. It ranged widely, citing 'the spread of protestant religion, migration patterns, the organisation of civil and family life, law, food habits, the spread of northern renaissance art and architecture, child education, literacy ...' and sought a 'North Sea Culture'.<sup>171</sup> It too, however, kept largely to traditional historical resources; the chapter on 'Reading the landscape' for instance clearly emphasises 'reading' rather than landscape survey.<sup>172</sup> The Leiden conference was followed by another meeting, this time in St Andrew's in 1996, concentrating upon the medieval period and exploring historical perspectives, cultural contacts, and hagiographical studies.<sup>173</sup> This too, while embracing art and architectural history, did not address wider archaeological investigation of North Sea cultures.

Two publications in 2011 were catalysts for a greater appreciation of the potential of both historical and archaeological study of seas, exploring the Mediterranean and North Seas respectively. The former was addressed by Abulafia in his volume entitled *The Great Sea*; the latter by van de Noort in *North Sea Archaeologies*. Both authors took a similar basic philosophical approach; they were studying the sea, not the landmasses that surrounded them. Abulafia drew a distinction between his work and that of Braudel as his Mediterranean was 'resolutely the surface of the sea itself, its shores and its islands ...'<sup>174</sup> Van de Noort chose 'a sea over a landmass as ... it provides an alternative place within which to explore the ways that people related with, and connected to, the world around them.' His study was intended as part of the 'nature-society' debate, putting the sea 'centre stage' in contrast to other approaches such as that of Cunliffe, whose work on the Atlantic was characterised by van de Noort as one where 'the predominant perception of the sea remains one as viewed from the land'.<sup>175</sup>

The year 2011 was also that in which the *East Anglia and its North Sea World* conference was held. This 'deliberately inter-disciplinary affair' drew upon research from scholars working on material from Iceland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium as well as the UK and was published in 2013. It contained a very useful overview essay by Liddiard, noted above for his observation on North Sea identities, which not only summarised the development of an historiography of seas

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<sup>170</sup> Braudel 1972, 20-21.

<sup>171</sup> Roding and van Voss 1996, 7.

<sup>172</sup> Lord 1996, 64-77.

<sup>173</sup> Liszka and Walker 2001, 12-13.

<sup>174</sup> Abulafia 2011, xvii.

<sup>175</sup> van de Noort 2011, 1-3; Cunliffe 2001.

as a 'central point of analysis', it also sought to characterise a 'North Sea World' and, in the context of the conference, the role of East Anglia within it. While providing a pointer to the wide range of papers that followed in the volume, it also usefully drew attention to the variety of disciplines which can inform maritime studies.<sup>176</sup>

This rich variety was drawn upon by the author when researching and writing *The German Ocean* monograph. Its philosophical approach can perhaps be characterised as Braudel/Cunliffe rather than Abulafia/van de Noort in that its subtitle was '*Medieval Europe around the North Sea*' thereby focussing on the sea as a connector and enabler for the societies which bordered it. The Introduction stated that the subtitle was 'chosen deliberately to emphasise the littoral' but the themes and discoveries, from across northern Europe and which helped to characterise North Sea societies, were explored through a broad chronological framework. As with the earlier Norwich monograph, this enabled ease-of-access for the general reader while also providing a context for the scientific data. It can be argued in consequence that *The German Ocean* monograph as a whole forms the first archaeologically-driven narrative of the medieval North and Baltic Seas.

A short essay by the author on material evidence from the Hanseatic world followed publication of *The German Ocean*.<sup>177</sup> This latter publication was itself the result of a conference contribution in 2015 in King's Lynn. Similar contributions were made to a public meeting in Ghent in 2014 and to university students at Leiden in 2017. The essay provided a more accessible - academically and financially - introduction to the contents of *The German Ocean* monograph.

The publication of archaeological material concerning the medieval North Sea in both the UEA conference proceedings and *The German Ocean* is beginning to have an effect upon the historiography of this maritime region. As an example, Steven Rigby's 2017 assessment of Boston, a 'medieval boom town', has been able to compare topographic development there with similar urban growth in Bergen, Norway through reference to the archaeological data made more easily accessible following publication of the UEA North Sea conference in 2013.<sup>178</sup> He also drew on the archaeological contribution to understanding of the technological change in commercial bulk carriers across the North Sea and that the range of 'raw materials, foodstuffs and everyday consumer items, such as wool, grain, wine, cloth, timber and fish, rather than luxuries for a limited elite, came to make up an increasing proportion of commerce', noting that 'much of this everyday trade is absent from our surviving [written] sources'.<sup>179</sup>

A recent publication from London concerning the extensive waterfront excavations undertaken on sites of 11th- to 17th-century date has used *The German Ocean* in its discussions of ships, ports and waterfronts, urban street patterns in the Baltic,

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<sup>176</sup> Liddiard 2013, 1-14.

<sup>177</sup> Ayers 2017b.

<sup>178</sup> Ayers 2013.

<sup>179</sup> Rigby 2017, 17 and 38.

the early adoption of brick, and smokehouses in Sweden.<sup>180</sup> Excavations in Ipswich, exploring trade in the medieval period, reference the work<sup>181</sup> as does a recent online essay concerning literary approaches to wetlands and the waterway access to them.<sup>182</sup> The monograph is now on the recommended reading list for students of medieval archaeology at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands.<sup>183</sup> The influence of the author's research is also reflected in his invitation in 2018 to undertake peer review of a major university project investigating coastal communities and which is now underway in Flanders.

### **Section 6 Wider Impact and Engagement**

Recognition of the educational value of *The German Ocean* by the University of Leiden complements earlier similar recognition of the potential of archaeological processes and discoveries to assist educational understanding and attainment in the UK. In 1989, ahead of the large Castle Mall excavation in Norwich, the author negotiated with the Education Department of Norfolk County Council to secure the secondment for three years of a schoolteacher to the project. The role entailed the development of educational resources by this teacher for the use of fellow teachers in delivery of the (then) new National Curriculum. All aspects of the curriculum were addressed, not just that of history, with opportunities being created for using archaeological approaches and results to assist delivery of learning at various Key Stages and for the attainment of Assessment Targets. 'Twilight' workshops were held for teachers who were also provided with materials which highlighted aspects of archaeological work to enable engagement with subject areas such as mathematics, the sciences, English and geography. Site visits to the Castle Mall project were also a central part of the project.

Encouraged by English Heritage the work was followed up with engagement at a European level in initiatives of ICCROM and the Council of Europe: *Schools Adopt Monuments*, a project designed to assist teachers and students to use the historic environment within the curriculum and to increase awareness of the environment amongst young people, their parents and friends; and *The City beneath the City*, 'a heritage awareness project involving pupils from European cities'. This latter sought to encourage understanding by school students of 'time depth' within cities and to foster debate about balancing urban development with conservation needs and management of cultural heritage. The project included a conference in Rome in 1994 at which the author delivered a paper which was subsequently published.<sup>184</sup>

As well as educational initiatives utilising the archaeological research being undertaken in Norwich, work in the 1990s was also directed towards the production of a research framework for archaeology in the east of England. The framework consisted of three parts: a resource assessment which outlined the current state of knowledge and understanding; a research agenda which highlighted gaps in

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<sup>180</sup> Schofield 2018, *passim*.

<sup>181</sup> Brown *et al* forthcoming.

<sup>182</sup> Pinner 2018.

<sup>183</sup> <https://studiegids.universiteitleiden.nl/courses/67417/medieval-archaeology>.

<sup>184</sup> Ayers 1995b.

knowledge, the potential of the known resource, and research topics; and a research strategy providing a prioritised list of objectives. Each stage was undertaken with consultation across academic bodies, local authorities and field units working in archaeology, drafts of texts of specialised areas being submitted by designated individuals (the author undertook the section concerned with medieval urban archaeology). The resource assessment and research agenda was published in 1997 and was followed by the research strategy in 2000.<sup>185</sup> The research framework was updated in 2018.<sup>186</sup>

Promotion of archaeology and archaeological research as a community activity, which both the educational initiatives and the regional research framework supported, needed to be underpinned with a vision for the future of such research that worked with the community. An attempt to provide this arose through a presidential address given to the Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group in 1999 and subsequently published.<sup>187</sup> This address noted *inter alia* that ‘enthusiasm for discovery amongst non-professionals, for *research*, that elusive chimera which so frequently eludes professional archaeology, increases year by year’ and it sought to encourage such research in a positive manner by asking (and answering) key questions such as what is the value of the archaeological record? It was directed at Norfolk-wide non-professionals, urging engagement with archaeological enquiry, while placing this enquiry within the context of the requirements of contemporary society and economy.

Those requirements were tackled more directly in 2000 with a short jointly-authored piece for the (now Chartered) Institute for Archaeologists exploring mechanisms whereby archaeological practice could utilise government development initiatives, specifically the Single Regeneration Budget (or SRB) to promote archaeological research. The paper pointed out that SRB funding enabled targeted archaeological research ahead of development. This in turn provided information which meant that projects funded by development itself were not only more sharply focussed but could be designed to maximise addressing archaeological research questions.<sup>188</sup>

The necessary linkage between academic archaeological research and the wider needs of society is a requirement which becomes more and more necessary with a modern society which questions the validity of much academic endeavour. It is an issue that has been addressed recently in two papers. The first of these, to the Dutch Urban Archaeology conference held in Amersfoort in 2017,<sup>189</sup> discussed the potential of medieval urban archaeology in Europe, exploring research strands such as those outlined by Astill in his review paper for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations for the Society for Medieval Archaeology in 2009. It suggested that implementation of Astill’s research ideas could have a wider resonance beyond the research community.

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<sup>185</sup> Ayers 1997b and 2000a.

<sup>186</sup> Antrobus and Ayers 2018.

<sup>187</sup> Ayers 1999b.

<sup>188</sup> Ayers and Shelley 2000.

<sup>189</sup> Ayers, B. 2017. ‘The Potential of Medieval Urban Archaeology in Europe: a UK view’. Unpublished.

Astill's paper considered the impact of urban archaeology on identifying and understanding the processes of urbanisation; the potential to appreciate nuances of urban growth, decline and changing distinctive character across and within settlements; the scope for researching social and cultural development of urban societies through considerations of spatial patterns, space, buildings, and material culture (urban mentalities as well as economic development); urban-rural relations; and the still present issue of a lack of archaeological evidence from small towns.<sup>190</sup> The author argued in Amersfoort that Astill advocates an understanding of the urban process as much as its physical structures; that he encourages exploration of distinctiveness; that he recognises a role for archaeology in researching social and cultural developments; and that he is interested in spatial patterning and its uses. These are areas which require archaeologists to think about intangible outcomes, rather than just physically-evident outputs.<sup>191</sup>

Such outcomes have a relevance for the needs of modern society. Urban archaeology can engage with modern populations by increasing understanding of how towns and cities were used, continue to be used and could be used in the future (Astill's requirement that archaeologists explore both urban formation and urban morphology). Developing this concept of spatial usage, it is possible to explore streets within an archaeological framework, not through excavation but via a contextual understanding of the environments that they serve. A recent British Academy project investigated the life of medieval streets, working with modern urban communities to encourage understanding of their development and their use through time (a meeting was held in Norwich and included a paper and public field activity led by the author).<sup>192</sup>

The Amersfoort paper has recently been followed by a keynote paper delivered at a conference in Lübeck on 'Archaeology in the Here and Now' in November 2019. This amplified the potential for positive engagement of urban archaeological research with modern societies. The paper argued that urban archaeologists 'deal with complex societies - towns and cities - and ... generate complex, inter-connected data ... [research archaeologists] have the ability to assess the impact of settlements upon the environment; we can demonstrate how neighbourhoods evolve; we have much evidence of the effective mix of domestic, industrial and craft activity; we can assist good urban planning by our understanding of the grain or form of the townscape; we can characterise the impact of large institutions upon urban space and its use; we have information about zoning of urban activities; and we have evidence for what is culturally local and specific.' The paper will be published in 2021.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Astill 2009.

<sup>191</sup> Ayers 2017, *op. cit.* in note 189.

<sup>192</sup> Davis 2016.

<sup>193</sup> Ayers 2021 forthcoming.

## **Conclusion**

Archaeological research and publication by the author over a period of 40 years, summarised above, has principally been undertaken in, and concerned with, urban centres. A growing emphasis on the interconnectedness of those centres with other urban entities and their hinterlands across northern Europe has resulted in three corpora of publications: the acquisition, assessment, synthesis and publication of data concerning the medieval city of Norwich together with discursive works examining aspects of the city; assimilation of research elsewhere in Britain and in the Low Countries, Germany, Poland, the Baltic States and Scandinavia to provide syntheses exploring the 'diverse commonality' of rural and urban communities around the littoral of the North and Baltic Seas; and the dissemination of both sets of research to communities beyond academia, seeking to ensure that archaeological research provides educational inspiration, and also works to assist the development of modern society.

Research continues. The inter-connectedness of the North Sea world explored to date has very much been a 'helicopter view' and is one currently being adopted on a smaller scale for an assessment of the material culture of Suffolk in its North Sea context. Elsewhere more detailed assessment could begin to correlate data from individual communities around the North Sea, seeking influences both upon and from local centres. The small ports of Wiveton and Cley in north Norfolk have been explored recently in trial work by Lewis<sup>194</sup> and contain the potential for increasing understanding of both their role in the economic network of the North Sea community and of their rural surroundings (as facilitators of pilgrimage for instance). Similarly, archaeology can explore the smaller coastal communities of eastern Scotland, providing ancillary data to that recovered from larger centres such as Aberdeen and Perth. The importance of Portmahomack in north-eastern Scotland has been demonstrated by Carver<sup>195</sup> for the early medieval period. It would be interesting to examine other such locations for the later medieval period as well; the significance of Tain and the pilgrimage route (once again) to the shrine there is but one example of the variety of experience with the potential for wider archaeological enquiry. Developing this enquiry in the post-processual manner outlined above would help to broaden understanding of medieval societies.

The epigram chosen for the opening of *The German Ocean* monograph was written by an English jurist, John Selden, in the 17th century. It reads:

It is said that all isles and continents ... are so seated, that there is non but that, from some shore of it, another may be discovered ... Every one hath so much relation to some other, that it hath not only use often of the aide of what is next to it, but through that, also of what is out of ken to it.

The published research has sought to illustrate the truth of this statement, viewed through the prism of archaeological evidence. Such archaeological evidence needs 'the aide of what is next to it' in order to understand 'what is out of ken to it'. Work, primarily on Norwich and then engaging with work elsewhere, has provided that 'from some shore of it, another may be discovered'.

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<sup>194</sup> Lewis 2016.

<sup>195</sup> Carver *et al* 2016.

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