**Harlaxton Symposium 2017: Church and City in the Middle Ages**

**Dobson Scholar Report – Claire Kennan**

I was lucky enough to be awarded a Dobson Scholarship which allowed me to attend the 2017 Harlaxton Symposium in honour of Clive Burgess. Dr Burgess and his work have had a significant influence on my own PhD research in which I examine the role of parish guilds in Louth, Lincolnshire. The Symposium offered a broad insight into the themes of church and city, discussing provision for the poor in parishes, monastic foundations, expressions of piety, music and liturgy, commemoration, ceremony, parish administration and the urban environments of late medieval Bristol and London. The interdisciplinary nature of the Symposium also meant that I was also able to attend papers in disciplines outside of History. For example, Magnus Williamson’s paper ‘From Map to App – Revisiting the Soundscape of the Medieval Parish’provided a musically-focused insight into singing and music and its importance in the parish. On the first evening of the Symposium, we were also offered the opportunity to experience the sophistication of parish church music by attending compline at St Mary and St Peter’s church in Harlaxton village. This was performed according to the use of the Sarum Calendar, which Nigel Morgan had discussed earlier in the day.

The Symposium offered a range of papers which were closely linked to themes in my PhD and this meant I could better situate my own work in the broader discussions which are currently taking place in medieval studies. Justin Colson’s paper on parish and civic authority gave a re-assessment of the *Cursus Honorum* and looked at the continuity between the parish institutions of the medieval and early modern periods. In my PhD I examine the close relationship between parish guilds and parish and town administration and this paper encouraged me to draw some broader comparisons with my own work. James Lee’s paper entitled ‘“To have the keepyng of the keyes”: Power and Authority in Late Medieval Bristol’, further highlighted the intricacies of pre-Reformation parish administration and the importance of the ‘common chest’ to these administrative processes. Again, this made me reflect on my own research where a similar common chest, used by churchwardens and guild alderman, survives in the town of Louth and how this enhanced the already complex systems of administration and local power that were in place. Anna Eavis gave a paper on the Holy Trinity Church in Long Melford, which underwent significant refurbishment between 1460 and 1507. The church was heavily patronized by members of the local gentry, with a particular focus on glazing work. This is somewhat comparable to Louth where members of the mercantile elite were significantly involved in the rebuilding of the parish church in the early sixteenth century.

There were also opportunities for me to listen to papers which offered a re-assessment of my area of research. For example, Martin Heale’s paper sought to establish a closer sense of interconnectedness between urban fraternities and monastic houses, emphasising the interlinked nature of lay and monastic run associations. His paper showed that guilds and urban monasteries were not opposed to working together, particularly as the services offered by religious houses would have appealed to guild members, and monks and nuns would have been able to make use of extra intercessory prayers offered by the guilds. This paper made me reconsider lines of enquiry in my own research, which thus far has focused on the parish guilds’ relationship with the town and parish, and not so much the nearby abbey of Louth Park.

The Symposium’s excursion to the Bishop’s Palace at Lincoln was another opportunity to see some of the themes discussed at the conference in situ. Rosemary Hayes gave delegates an introduction to the palace and Bishop William Alnwick before our visit, which gave us some background information on the palace and the work that Bishop Alnwick had carried out there. Upon arrival at the palace, delegates were also given an architectural introduction by David Stocker, putting the building in its medieval context. Despite the palace being largely in ruins, Alnwick’s Tower, which acts as the gatehouse to the palace, survives and has several examples of the bishop’s coat of arms which Rosemary encouraged delegates to spot. Whilst on our visit to the palace we were also able to look around Lincoln Cathedral, situated directly opposite, and explore the historic Cathedral Quarter.

I am very grateful to the committee of the Harlaxton Symposium for giving me the opportunity to attend such a relevant and intellectually stimulating conference. The Dobson Scholarship allowed me to meet respected academics, early career researchers, and other PhD students at various stages of their studies. A number of academics whose work is central to my thesis were also at the symposium, giving me the invaluable chance to discuss my PhD research, along with potential future projects. Harlaxton offered a warm and welcoming environment where I could to listen to a range of papers, be involved with current academic debates and engage in informal discussions during the breaks and at the conference dinner. During the symposium I was also able to present a poster on my research. This gave me the opportunity to receive valuable feedback and discuss my findings thus far, further helping me to shape my thesis. The Harlaxton Symposium has been of immense value to my research and post-PhD plans and I very much look forward to attending again in the future.