**Harlaxton Medieval Symposium 2018 Dobson Report Taylor Aucoin:**

**Performance, Ceremony and Display in Late Medieval Britain**

The 2018 Harlaxton Medieval Symposium explored the theme of ‘Performance, Ceremony and Display in Late Medieval Britain’ through a wide-ranging series of interdisciplinary sessions, workshops and excursions. I was fortunate enough to receive a Barrie Dobson Scholarship, which enabled me to take part in an intellectually stimulating programme set in the beautiful and unique confines of Harlaxton Manor. As a final-year doctoral student, the symposium was a great opportunity to meet and learn from some of the most respected scholars in my field before embarking on my early career.

The symposium took a broad and inclusive approach to ‘performance’; some papers explored the classical understanding of the concept as drama and theatre, while others covered the performative aspects of architecture, text and faith. As a historian of festive culture in medieval and early modern Britain, all the sessions were relevant and beneficial to my research in some capacity. In my doctoral thesis, I focus on Shrovetide (Carnival) customs of rural feasting, civic sports, courtly revels, and urban rioting, and the way in which these past traditions were constantly reshaped and put to use through performative means. The sessions on civic theatre, tournaments, schools and royal performance were thus of particular interest to me. Diana Wyatt’s paper on the sponsorship of theatre in Hull presented ideas pertinent to my own research on the patronage of football in late medieval towns and cities. Sarah Carpenter’s paper prompted thought on the layers of ceremony which surrounded late medieval tournaments, while Nicholas Orme’s highlighted the importance of seasonal festivals to performance traditions in English schools. Beyond the sessions themselves, the symposium was a warm and welcoming environment for more casual discussions and connections over food and drink.

The theories at play in papers were put into practice in two excursions and a stimulating workshop. On Wednesday, the latter was led by Elisabeth Dutton and Aurelie Blance and saw us working through the practical issues Barking Abbey nuns faced when performing medieval liturgy. Later that evening we experienced how architectural spaces could influence choral song first hand, as Andrew Kirkman led the Binchois Consort in a concert of fifteenth century music at St Wulfram’s Church, Grantham. The performative potential of space and objects was also the theme underlying the symposium excursion on Thursday. After an illuminating introductory talk by Clive Burgess, we travelled to see the monumental brasses of Higham Ferrers and the wall paintings of Raunds.

On Tuesday night I also had the opportunity to present a poster on my research at a session with fellow postgraduates. Showing my work through this visual medium was a valuable experience; it facilitated discussions with many delegates which have already helped improve my thesis. I am sincerely grateful to the committee for the opportunity to attend the symposium; it has been beneficial to both my research and career, and I look forward to returning to Harlaxton in the future.