

REPORT ON 'MEDIEVAL ANCHORITES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES'

GREGYNOG HALL APRIL 22-24 2014

'Medieval Anchorites in their Communities', an international conference hosted by MEMO at Swansea University and the International Anchoritic Society (IAS), constituted the Society's fifth biennial conference and was organized by Dr Liz Herbert McAvoy between April 22th and 24th 2014. The three-day conference was initiated by a manuscripts workshop for postgraduate and early-career scholars run by Professor Bella Millett (Southampton) and Dr Eddie Jones (Exeter), the two of the most acclaimed anchoritic scholars in the international arena. This was kindly sponsored by the journal *Medium Aevum*, and provided an ideal forum for the interaction of junior scholars with two very senior and experienced academics. Indeed, everybody agreed that this was an excellent way of setting the academic tone for the entire conference. The workshop was followed by a session for promising postgraduate students, also sponsored by the journal *Medium Aevum*, and a wine-reception and book-launch for Dr Jones' new parallel-text edition of the anchoritic guidance text, *Speculum Inclusorum*, published by the University of Liverpool Press. In the evening of April 22, teacher, playwright, actor and anchorite enthusiast, Sue Bevan, performed her award-winning one-person show, *An Audience with Shurl*, in the cellar bar – and to much acclaim.

Over the course of the three days, there were 35 people in attendance, many of whom are primary researchers in the field, with 23 papers delivered, including one plenary (Professor Eddie Jones [Exeter], Professor Diane Watt [Surrey] and Dr Tom Licence [UEA]). It was wholeheartedly agreed that the standard of papers was very high, and that the discussions they generated were both interesting and fruitful. Most importantly, being the only group in Gregynog for the duration of the conference, there was ample room and opportunity for the interaction between postgraduates new to the field and many of the most senior anchoritic scholars from around the world. Indeed, the 35 people in attendance came from 10 different countries. The generous RIF grant of £500 awarded for this conference allowed for postgraduate subsidy, allowing those students who attended to be able to do so for minimal expenditure.

The general editors of UWP's Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages series (Professor Denis Renevey [Lausanne] and Professor Diane Watt [Surrey]) were amongst the delegates. At least five books on anchoritic topics have been published in this series (2 edited by McAvoy) and both editors were so impressed by the standard of papers that they are keen to publish an edited collection based on conference papers. McAvoy is currently working with Dr Cate Gunn on the initial stages of a book proposal, therefore. Meanwhile, Dr Michelle Sauer (University of North Dakota) is also preparing two special journal editions, based on those papers not able to be included in the conference volume.

Additionally, initial discussions have taken place amongst a group of scholars in attendance (led by McAvoy) to reinvigorate and rework a previously unsuccessful grant application to look at anchoritic sites in and around the Welsh

Marches – from a multi-disciplinary perspective. McAvoy has recently been in discussion with St Mary's church, Shrewsbury, with a view to centring such a project on this documented anchoritic site, and aims to develop a new grant application with this in mind in the autumn.

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