



JOHN HURST

John Gilbert Hurst

1927–2003

JOHN HURST MADE AN IMPORTANT pioneering contribution in three separate but interrelated fields: medieval archaeology, post-medieval archaeology and ceramic studies. Before his lifetime's devotion to these three disciplines they had not been taken seriously in Britain or Europe either academically or professionally. Medieval archaeology was still the study of major buildings seen through the records of historians and antiquarians, and of portable antiquities divorced from their context. Post-medieval archaeology was principally the study of industrial relics. Ceramic studies in the post-Roman period was the preserve of art collectors, anxious to understand the output of major factories and firms, though a few people collected medieval pottery as examples of folk art. It is a measure of Hurst's perceptiveness and persistence that all these three fields are now studied more widely and practised seriously.¹

¹ There have been a number of obituary notices and a limited biography:

P. Addyman, 'John Gilbert Hurst', *Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (2003), 195–7.

[M. Biddle], 'John Hurst: developing the new discipline of medieval archaeology, and supervising the investigation of 3,000 deserted villages', *The Times*, 15 May 2003.

H. Blake and L. Butler, 'John Gilbert Hurst', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 38/2 (2004), 211–13.

C. Dyer, 'John Hurst: a founding father of British medieval archaeology, he realised the potential of deserted villages', *The Guardian*, 13 May 2003.

C. Dyer, 'Obituary—John Hurst', *Medieval Settlement Research Group: Annual Report*, 17 (2002) [2003], 5–6.

J. Le Patourel, 'John G. Hurst—a potted biography' in D. Gaimster and M. Redknap (eds.), *Everyday and Exotic Pottery from Europe c.650–1900: Studies in Honour of John Hurst* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 1–15.

P. Rahtz, 'John Hurst', *The Antiquary*, 8 (Autumn 2003), 1.

A. Saunders, 'John Hurst: medieval archaeologist and inspector of ancient monuments', *The Independent*, 9 May 2003.

From Cambridge to Cambridge

John was born in Cambridge on 15 August 1927 to parents with academic scientific training. His father, Charles Chamberlain Hurst, was a noted geneticist and his mother Rona (née Hurst) was a botanist specialising in plant genetics. His mother, who was Charles's cousin, was a teacher at Christ's Hospital in Horsham for over twenty years. Both parents valued the habit of keeping meticulous records based on accurate and sustained field and laboratory observations. These practices they encouraged in John when, early in his childhood, he declared that he intended to be an archaeologist. His imagination had been fired by the discoveries in Mesopotamia and Egypt, both much in the news during the interwar period. His interests were regarded seriously enough for him to be taken to visit ancient monuments in Leicestershire, around Burbage near Hinckley, to which his parents had moved after leaving Cambridge, and then to the many archaeological sites around Horsham in Sussex when his family lived there.

After local schooling he entered the upper school at Harrow (1943–5) but found little encouragement there for archaeology and, during wartime, little opportunity to make many local site visits. Two years of National Service were spent in the Army Intelligence Corps, reaching the rank of sergeant, during which time he was posted to the eastern Mediterranean, initially in Iraq, mainly in Palestine during the troubled period of the British Mandate, and finally in Greece. This enabled him to fulfil some of his early hopes and, in off-duty leave, to visit sites of all periods, thereby stimulating and satisfying his existing interest in antiquities.

John entered Trinity College, Cambridge (his father's old college), to study archaeology. If he had hopes of studying Egypt and Mesopotamia, he would have been sadly disappointed. If he had wished to become better acquainted with the classical civilisations, he would have had to transfer into the Classical tripos where archaeology, encompassing the study of ancient sites, sculpture and pottery, was a significant option. By pursuing archaeology he was committing himself to the prehistory of Britain and Europe with a minor excursion into the archaeology of Roman Britain. Furthermore, the academic content was factual and theoretical with no formal excavation requirement within the course. However, a number of the teaching staff conducted excavations during the summer and John chose to work for three seasons with Dr Grahame Clark at the water-logged mesolithic site of Star Carr near Pickering in north-east Yorkshire.

The year group was small: four graduated in archaeology, whilst another fourteen of his year took the anthropology option. John attained a II,1 in each year, graduating in 1951. Life at Cambridge had many compensations. Most of the leading prehistorians in the British Isles were invited to give occasional lectures. The Archaeology Museum was in the same courtyard as the teaching rooms. The student archaeology society had its own programme of talks and excavations, which included work on Roman and later sites within the county.

Medieval excavations

During the summer vacation of 1950 John and a fellow student Harry Norris started the excavation of a medieval manor house at Northolt 'to teach ourselves medieval archaeology'. This project continued with volunteer labour at weekends until 1970. The range of pottery from this site was considerable and John consulted the leading expert on excavated medieval pottery, Gerald Dunning, an inspector at the Ministry of Works. This contact had two unforeseen consequences of great significance for John's later career. The first was that he decided to undertake postgraduate study of the later Anglo-Saxon pottery of East Anglia, much of which was in the archaeological museum at Cambridge. The second was that, with his fellow graduate Jack Golson, he was invited by the Ministry of Works to direct a rescue excavation in Norwich. At St Benedict's Gates in advance of the city's inner ring road they excavated in 1951 and 1953 using the then approved method of a grid of box trenches supplemented by a few longer trenches (the Wheeler system). Although this approach was successful within the deep stratification in Norwich, it was proving to be less satisfactory at Northolt. Both Golson and Hurst wished to explore new techniques and at the Edinburgh meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in autumn 1951 Professor Grahame Clark introduced them to Axel Steensberg of Copenhagen. Golson arranged to join Professor Steensberg for six months starting in May 1952 at Store Valby in Jutland where open area excavation on a village site was proving far more successful in retrieving transient features in soils of shallow depth.

Meanwhile in June that year John Hurst visited Wharram Percy amid the chalk wolds of east Yorkshire where the economic historian Maurice Beresford of Leeds University was exploring a deserted medieval village. Again Grahame Clark was the intermediary. He and Michael Postan,

both fellows of Peterhouse, had convened a meeting in Cambridge in 1948 attended, among others, by A. Steensberg, W. G. Hoskins and M. W. Beresford to discuss the phenomenon of deserted medieval villages and to visit Leicestershire sites under the guidance of Hoskins. Beresford was then simultaneously recording and publishing Warwickshire village sites. At Wharram Percy, working from 1950 onwards, Beresford was hoping to establish the date of the village's desertion from the pottery and coin evidence. John immediately realised that trial holes and wall-hunting were unlikely to produce reliable results and he offered to direct the archaeological work, thereby allowing Maurice to concentrate on the social welfare of the digging team. With characteristic generosity of spirit, Maurice accepted this offer and there then began a most fruitful partnership of great significance for medieval village studies. As with Northolt, Wharram Percy was an excavation of long duration (1950–90) conducted in July each year with volunteer labour; the attendance of boys from Wetherby Approved School was not quite so voluntary. In the first season (1953) that Hurst directed, Jack Golson joined him and together they employed Steensberg's method of open area excavation, accompanied by the meticulous recording of every single find in three dimensions. From this work grew a research project that is still in progress. The initial meeting of Beresford and Hurst also led to the formation of the multidisciplinary Deserted Medieval Village Research Group in November 1952, opening the study to a wider range of participants than the private research interest of a few economic historians and historical geographers. These two initiatives launched Hurst firmly upon the archaeological path of medieval rural settlement studies.

The Ancient Monuments Inspectorate

After one year's postgraduate research at Cambridge supervised by Geoffrey Bushnell, the keeper of the archaeological museum, but with Dunning as his mentor, John joined the Ministry of Works as Gerald Dunning's research assistant, initially helping him to prepare reports on pottery submitted from soil clearance by workmen at historic monuments, mainly castles and abbeys, in Ministry guardianship. However John was soon in a position to influence the expansion of post-Roman archaeology at many types of site. In 1952 he gained a permanent appointment as an Assistant Inspector and was put in charge of all 'emergency', salvage or rescue excavation on medieval sites. This meant that he

could formulate policy by adopting the practice of commissioning a large number of modest excavations (up to fifty per annum) rather than spend the budget allocation on a few big excavations led by senior academics, as his colleagues in charge of the prehistoric and Roman periods preferred to do. However, this strategy created the need for capable directors. John steadily assembled a cohort of excavation supervisors: some were amateurs wishing to undertake more paid work, others were university lecturers and students wishing to expand their field experience. The adult education tutors running their own field schools were another valuable recruiting ground, recommending promising students to him, whatever their age or youthfulness. Ex-servicemen were another reliable group with experience of field discipline, forward planning and adherence to strict timetables.

Conducting excavations in advance of destructive road or housing schemes was only part of John's remit. The other aspect was encouraging the excavators to write their full reports in their own time in the winter months whilst back in university or engaged in other employment; some permanent excavators were urged to complete their reports in the evening after a full day's work at a different site. This problem of unpaid post-excavation work was not solved for many years. The question of where to publish these reports also needed to be faced, especially when the discipline of medieval archaeology was still emerging and did not have a distinct learned society nor its own journal as the Prehistoric Society and the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies provided. Furthermore, local county archaeological societies were often reluctant to accept lengthy and detailed excavation reports which might swamp the contributions of their own amateur members. The solution was to found a dedicated period society. From this dilemma arose the Society for Medieval Archaeology, though other factors and other scholars contributed to its foundation, as is detailed below.

John's success in formulating strategy and organising site excavation within the medieval period was recognised by the recently appointed Chief Inspector, Arnold Taylor, who promoted him to be Inspector in 1964. More significantly in 1973 Hurst was put in charge of all salvage work with the rank of Principal Inspector. Throughout the next seven years he ensured that there was a fair balance between the needs of the three main archaeological period divisions, and he also encouraged the examination of industrial and pottery-production sites of the post-medieval centuries. His ability to foster specific research programmes, as at medieval settlement sites, or to pioneer new lines of study, as at

glass-making complexes, helped to create an awareness of the potential of such sites and to emphasise the need to consult the relevant documents as well as to appreciate the landscape setting through many centuries. On Taylor's retirement in 1972 John continued in a coordinating role in the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate in London although the parent ministry underwent a number of name changes signifying different political imperatives. Its latest version was, and still is, English Heritage in which John was appointed Assistant Chief Inspector in 1980—a post which he held until his own retirement seven years later. He took on new responsibility for the preservation of ancient monuments in direct care of English Heritage and for giving archaeological advice about their presentation to the public. The final phase was marked by a dispiriting downgrading in the value of scholarship and an undercurrent of hostility to the concept of protected ancient monuments, except as a medium for popularisation and as a source for raising revenue. This was a considerable disappointment to John, whose early career had flourished in an environment which had encouraged scholarship and scientific enquiry.

Another area in his professional life which brought both anxiety and challenge was the rise of the Rescue Movement in the early 1970s, whose members aimed to obtain from the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate in England and its parallel bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland a far greater financial commitment to archaeological spending on excavation and survey ahead of massive capital expenditure on motorways, airports, industrial estates, urban renewal and new town development. Whatever his private sympathies may have been, and John was too consummate a civil servant to voice an opinion, when the political decision to increase government funding had been made, he and his fellow inspectors, especially Andrew Saunders as Chief Inspector, tried their best to create the most effective framework throughout the country with an archaeological presence in every local authority district. It was a period when long-standing friendships were under strain and when decisions on whether to support a city unit or a regional team could have long-term repercussions. It was also a period of uncertainty amid the 1974 local government and county reorganisation. Whatever the setbacks John never lost his sense of proportion and purpose; occasionally he would express himself to be 'very disturbed' at some outcome but this was the strongest expression of concern that he made. In the event the regional framework which the Inspectorate preferred was only adopted in Wales and environmental laboratories were only established in some major universities. Elsewhere local government units, whether city, county or

metropolitan district, were the major employers as well as being the principal planning authorities. As a result of this devolution to local political units, John attempted to ensure that national research priorities, and not narrowly based political expediency, activated archaeological responses and that government money was well spent on archaeological reports and survey volumes of high academic quality. This policy was to be managed by a national Advisory Committee to decide on general principles and by Area Advisory Committees to assess local priorities for rescue archaeology. Although the broad principle was eroded by universities being unable to offer space to regional units and by most local authorities being too restricted to offer financial support to any staff other than those whom they were legally obliged to employ, the whole enterprise made archaeology of all periods more professional in its outlook, though with many unforeseen consequences.

Medieval archaeology

Although Rupert Bruce-Mitford had declared in 1948 that ‘medieval and post-medieval archaeology may be said to have arrived’ as a discipline, this was a rather over-optimistic assessment.² It needed John Hurst, David Wilson, then an assistant keeper at The British Museum, and Donald Harden, the Director of The London Museum, to harness the latent interest in medieval archaeology and found a society devoted to its study. This they did in a meeting at the Society of Antiquaries in April 1957, launching both a dedicated society and an annual journal of high quality. Bruce-Mitford was the first president, Wilson the secretary (1957–76), Hurst the treasurer (1957–76) and Harden the editor (1957–74). This long period in office by the founding trio ensured that the initial momentum and vision was sustained, although the president and the council members changed in triennial rotation. John’s practice of conscientiously visiting every excavation that he had commissioned meant that he had direct contact with all the leading field archaeologists and was well able to recommend suitable members to serve on the Society’s council. In similar fashion (Sir) David Wilson had close contact with the museum world. Together they ensured a well-balanced range of interests and periods. This variety and balance was also evident in the choice of locations for the annual

² R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, ‘Medieval archaeology’, *The Archaeological News Letter*, 6 (1948), 1–4.

conference alternately in Britain and abroad and in the choice of subject matter in the valuable monograph series. Hurst subsequently served as vice-president (1977–9) and as president (1980–2). It was as president that he gave the final overview at the 1981 conference in Cambridge to celebrate the society's twenty-five years of development.³ He then enjoyed the senior statesman role of honorary vice-president for the next twenty years.

This pattern of identifying an academic need for a society or a research group, of gathering a nucleus of committed individuals and then of founding a society with clearly defined research aims and a wide popular appeal was to be repeated a number of times in John's career. Two of the societies were broad period-based ones (medieval archaeology, post-medieval archaeology) and two were topic-based research groups (settlement, pottery). John's skill and originality lay in perceiving a need or an archaeological potential well in advance; he then created the necessary mechanism to achieve a satisfactory solution.

The study of pottery

The excavations at Northolt had produced a large and varied amount of well-stratified pottery, especially from the kitchen areas. The excavations at Wharram Percy were to produce far less pottery and to reveal a more localised supply chain. Both sites stimulated John in his ceramic studies and in Gerald Dunning he was able to share a common interest and to have as a colleague the one man who had specialised in medieval pottery for the previous twenty years and was ever generous with his time and knowledge. In many ways Gerald was omnivorous in medieval artefacts and would hoard information until an appropriate opportunity came to produce a national survey (e.g. of stone mortars, of wooden buckets or of ceramic chimney pots) stimulated by some find of exceptional interest. By contrast John was dedicated to pottery in all its post-Roman manifestations and ensured its prompt publication to help others working in the same field. Gerald had been his inspiration in the field of Saxo-Norman pottery in East Anglia, published in three linked articles (1955–7) and together they published symposium papers on Anglo-

³ Hurst, 'Medieval archaeology twenty-five years on: summing up', in D. A. Hinton (ed.), *25 Years of Medieval Archaeology* (Sheffield, 1983), pp. 132–5.

Saxon pottery (1960).⁴ However, a foretaste of John's later interests had been the publication, with Geoffrey Bushnell, of late medieval sgraffito ware from Cambridge (1953), his first significant article among more than 150 publications on ceramics.⁵

Pottery became Hurst's major research interest, perhaps even ahead of medieval settlement. He was aided by an encyclopaedic memory, powers of instant recall and a methodical approach to recording on large index cards in spiky handwriting, so compressed that only he could read it. At all the excavations that he visited, the pottery would be laid out for him to discuss and pronounce upon (never 'pontificate'); at museums he would ask to see recent acquisitions and problem pieces. On the Continent he was anxious to understand and unfold the backcloth of the locally produced wares against which to highlight the imports, initially those from Britain. However, as his confidence grew and his knowledge increased, he was examining all the pottery traded around the North Sea and then extended his range to the material imported from North Africa and the Levant. Although he was well aware that glass and metalwork provided other comparable containers moving along similar trade routes, he left their study to other specialists, such as Donald Harden on glass. Pottery was never for him an art object, but an entrée into the life of the potters, their methods of manufacture and production, their sources of ingredients and of artistic inspiration. It was a means of tracing trade routes and markets, of assessing its use in homes and craft workshops, and of understanding the mechanisms of its disposal. His early scientific parental influences meant that he was always willing to discuss pottery dating and characterisation with successive Ancient Monuments Laboratory directors, Leo Biek and John Musty. The possibility of dating kilns by archaeomagnetic variation and of distinguishing pottery by neutron activation or by heavy mineral analysis were stressed in John's writings and lectures. As early as 1958 he was participating in and promoting conferences on medieval pottery at such centres as Attingham Park, Preston Montford and Knuston Hall. A series of adult education evening classes

⁴ Hurst, 'Saxo-Norman Pottery in East Anglia', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 49 (1955), 43–70; *ibid.*, 50 (1956), 29–60; *ibid.*, 51 (1957), 37–65; G. C. Dunning, J. G. Hurst, J. N. L. Myres and F. Tischler, 'Anglo-Saxon Pottery: a symposium', *Medieval Archaeology*, 3 (1959), 1–78.

⁵ G. H. S. Bushnell and J. G. Hurst, 'Some further examples of Sgraffito ware from Cambridge', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 46 (1952), 21–6. For Hurst's later articles on ceramics up to 1992, see Le Patourel in note 1. More reports and articles will be brought posthumously to publication by his literary executor R. A. Croft.

at Goldsmiths College on the pottery of London and the south-east started in 1964 and attracted a large number of practising archaeologists, eager to widen their experience and contribute their own knowledge through pottery-handling sessions. John was initially a reluctant lecturer; he had developed a bad stammer as a child, caused when a naturally left-handed boy was forced to write with his right hand. He tried hard to overcome this defect whilst at Cambridge. Only with his wife Gill's help was he able to master this condition when speaking in public and gain the fluency which he later possessed. He proved to be a natural and sympathetic teacher, able to tailor his material to the skills and knowledge of his audiences.

All this time Hurst was widening his experience of pottery both in time span and in geographical range. This is marked by papers on stoneware jugs and Hispano-Moresque wares in Professor Barry Cunliffe's *Winchester Excavations 1949–60* (1965).⁶ In the next decade he published on an extensive range of Continental wares: German stonewares, French maiolica, Spanish lustrewares, and Low Countries slipwares. Not content merely to give identifications, he increasingly stressed the trade patterns, as in papers on 'Near Eastern and Mediterranean Pottery in North-West Europe' (1968) and 'Trade in Pottery around the North Sea' (1983).⁷ Often these papers were written in collaboration with Continental scholars who shared his enthusiasm and pooled their knowledge to promote research. The culmination of this study and fruitful partnership was his exemplary volume in the Rotterdam Papers series *Pottery produced and traded in North-West Europe 1350–1650* (1986) under a joint authorship with H. J. E. van Beuningen and D. S. Neal. This attractive volume did not mark the end of his interest in imported pottery, for John continued to write major articles, supply specialist reports, scour journals and visit sites and museums during his retirement. He was always aware of how the discipline was developing and in 2002 remarked slightly ruefully that the recent scientific evidence was 'playing havoc with many earlier identifications, so that the whole study is now in flux'.

⁶ Hurst, 'Late Saxon and Early Medieval Coarse Wares from Winchester', in B. Cunliffe (ed.), *Winchester Excavations 1949–60*, I (1964) [1965], 123; 'Winchester Ware', *ibid.*, 124–5; 'Firecovers (Curfews)', *ibid.*, 126; 'Tudor-Green Ware', *ibid.*, 140–2; 'Stoneware Jugs', *ibid.*, 142–3; 'Hispano-Moresque Pottery', *ibid.*, 144.

⁷ Hurst, 'Near Eastern and Mediterranean Pottery in North-West Europe', *Archaeologia Lundensia*, 3 (1968), 195–204; Hurst, 'Trade in Pottery around the North Sea', in P. Davey and R. Hodges (eds.), *Ceramics and Trade. The Production and Distribution of Later Medieval Pottery in North-West Europe* (Sheffield, 1983), pp. 257–60.

Similarly the symposium on Anglo-Saxon pottery, held at Norwich in 1958, did not mark the end of his research on pre-Conquest pottery but it was followed by many specialist reports on excavated material and a substantial chapter in David Wilson's *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (1976).⁸ He was also in demand to provide overviews of the whole field of medieval (post-Conquest) pottery in England: the best survey was his new edition (1972) of Bernard Rackham's *Medieval English Pottery*.⁹ However as his responsibilities at the Inspectorate grew and his opportunities for site visiting in England diminished, he realised that the informal handling sessions and the occasional adult education conferences on medieval pottery needed to be put on a more organised basis. He therefore galvanised a group of ceramics enthusiasts to establish the Medieval Pottery Research Group in 1975 and John was the obvious choice to be its first president (1977–80). He then served on its council for five years and was vice-president and chairman of its editorial committee from 1989 until his death. This Group has wrestled with problems of nomenclature of forms, descriptions of fabrics and minimum standards of publications. It has held conferences throughout the British Isles and, occasionally, abroad. It has also published in *Medieval Ceramics* other less usual domestic forms such as whistles, chafing dishes and fire-covers. When Michael McCarthy and Catherine Brooks published *Medieval Pottery in Britain and Ireland 900–1600* (1988) they paid a warm tribute to Hurst as one of the founders of their discipline, along with Dunning, Martin Jope and Jean le Patourel. Indeed the crucial role of Dunning in fostering medieval pottery studies had been marked by a festschrift on his retirement, of which Hurst was a joint editor (1974)¹⁰ and by the creation of the Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture, which Hurst inaugurated at Oxford in March 1982.¹¹ Throughout his decades of work on pottery John was always generous in assisting almost all the archaeologists of his generation and of the next in the identification of their excavated medieval pottery, often supplying them with specialist notes on unusual forms and on imported wares. This generosity of his time and the modest

⁸ Hurst, 'The Pottery', in D. M. Wilson (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1976), pp. 283–348.

⁹ Hurst (ed.), B. Rackham, *Medieval English Pottery* (London, 1972).

¹⁰ Hurst, 'Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century imported pottery from the Saintonge' in V. I. Evison, H. Hodges and J. G. Hurst (eds.), *Medieval Pottery from excavations: Studies presented to Gerald Clough Dunning* (London, 1974), pp. 221–62.

¹¹ Hurst, 'Gerald Dunning and his contribution to Medieval Archaeology', *Medieval Ceramics*, 6 (1982) [1983], 3–20.

way in which he offered his knowledge was often a source first of awe and then later of gratitude by the younger generation with whom he dealt on equal terms in the common quest for a greater understanding of their material and its wider significance.

Post-medieval archaeology

John's interest in pottery was not limited to the post-Roman and the medieval centuries. On many sites satisfactory attention was paid to the post-medieval deposits and the material evidence that they contained. It was soon realised that ceramics could become a useful source of information on household composition and food preparation alongside the seemingly closer dating given by clay tobacco pipes and base metal tradesmen's tokens. Hurst provided articles on post-medieval pottery from a bombed site in Exeter (1964) and on early eighteenth-century pottery from Flint Castle (1966).¹² At both sites he was concerned to understand the range of locally available products, which continued medieval potting traditions before the large commercial potteries of London, Bristol and Stoke-on-Trent dominated the market. To facilitate ceramic studies in this period Hurst and Ken Barton, curator of Portsmouth City Museums, brought together museum curators, art collectors and field archaeologists to form a Post-Medieval Ceramic Research Group in autumn 1963. This group held twice yearly meetings in different parts of the country to examine representative museum collections and to discuss new discoveries from excavations. The handling of the pottery was a regular feature and the willingness to share information was essential. After four years as a research group, an appeal was made to a wider audience studying other aspects of the material evidence from the post-medieval centuries before the onset of industrialisation. As with the foundation of the Society for Medieval Archaeology a decade previously, it was envisaged that the new society would be multidisciplinary attracting historians, historical geographers, economic historians, museum curators, art collectors, university archaeologists and field investigators. The Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology was founded in 1967 with Robert Charleston of the Victoria and Albert Museum as president and Ivor Noel Hume of

¹² Hurst, 'Post-medieval pottery', in E. Greenfield, 'Excavation of a bombed site in Chapel Street, Exeter', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 96 (1964), 361–76; 'Early 18th-century pottery from Flint Castle', *Journal of the Flintshire Historical Society*, 22 (1965–6), 73–4.

Colonial Williamsburg as vice-president. This transatlantic link was an important feature of the society's membership growth and has continued to be one of its intellectual strengths. John served on the council or held the office of president (1970–3) or vice-president (1974–8) for most of the first twenty years of its existence. During his presidency he led a very successful conference to Rotterdam and Leeuwarden. He was always ready to give advice to the council, citing analogous situations from other societies on whose council he had served or indicating sources of funding which had been approached successfully in the past by comparable societies. John remained a staunch supporter of this society's research aims throughout his years of retirement.

Wharram Percy

With these two period societies and the Medieval Pottery Research Group, John had set the wheels in motion, had served faithfully for two decades and then bowed out secure in the knowledge that the organisation was strong enough to develop under its own impetus served by the next generation of committed officers. However with Wharram Percy and the research group on medieval villages there was a much closer identification between John and Maurice Beresford on the one hand and between the deserted village site and the national perspective on the other hand. Because these two scholars, once described as the prolix professor and the taciturn Man from the Ministry, had nurtured the discipline from the gamekeepers' cottages at Wharram, it drew them back each July both for the research excavation and for the furtherance of the aims of the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group. Both projects developed over time in directions that their founders certainly did not envisage in June 1952. Initially the question posed was when was the village deserted and what was the form and life span of the peasant house. When a stone-built manor house cellar was found under one flimsily built peasant house, this threw up new questions about village growth, tenurial history, street patterns and settlement blocks. The careful dissection of the roofless village church led to a better understanding of the central role of that structure in the history of the four settlements in the parish and of the diseases and causes of death of the population buried in the churchyard. The examination of the water mill introduced the excavation team to the problems of water supply and of sustaining an arable economy. Indeed as each new aspect of the village's physical evidence was tackled, so the mentality

and the constraints of the inhabitants' lives were better appreciated. All this time the concentration was upon the field remains of a deserted medieval village and Hurst was fully supported by the documentary evidence supplied by Beresford. Articles on the research project and on the micro-topography of Wharram continued to bring the discoveries to a wider audience, as did features in popular magazines and on radio and television.¹³

During the first twenty years of the excavation Wharram Percy was a privately funded research project and no government resources were spent on Wharram. Only when it was given to the nation by Lord Middleton and became a Department of the Environment (later English Heritage) guardianship site in 1974 did the financial situation improve and the hand-to-mouth existence cease. In 1979 there began a formal partnership with Professor Philip Rahtz of York University. This made it possible to excavate at six different sites in each season, partly to assist in a more lucid presentation of the site to the public, but mainly to understand the village over a longer time span. Not only was the medieval village studied in greater depth, but also various strands of enquiry teased out the Saxon, Roman and Iron Age patterns of settlement and land use. As well as going further back in time, the project also went forward to the twentieth century by examining the more recent building and farming practices in the two settlements of Wharram Percy and Wharram-le-Street and their various dependent townships. At each new discovery or expansion of research, John reacted in mock horror at the increased complexity of the situation or at its implications for his previously published model. However he was too deeply committed a scholar to ignore such work; he made great efforts to assimilate the new research material though remaining sceptical of purely theoretical constructs. His paper 'The Wharram Research Project: Problem Orientation and Strategy 1950–1990' (1985)¹⁴ showed how thoroughly he had absorbed the new thinking. This continuing expansion of horizons has been well recorded

¹³ Hurst, 'Wharram Percy: a case study in microtopography', in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement* (Leeds, 1976), pp. 117–44; Hurst 'The Topography of Wharram Percy Village' in B. K. Roberts and R. E. Glasscock (eds.), *Villages, Fields and Frontiers: Studies in European Rural Settlement in the Medieval and early Modern Periods*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series, 185 (1983), pp. 3–20.

¹⁴ Hurst, 'The Wharram Research Project: Problem Orientation and Strategy 1950–1990', in Della Hooke (ed.), *Medieval Villages*, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology Monograph 5 (1985), pp. 200–4.

in Beresford and Hurst's popular book *Wharram Percy* (1990).¹⁵ Meanwhile the scholarly reports on the various excavations have been prepared under Hurst's general editorship and six major monographs have already been published; four others are still in preparation.

The study of medieval settlements

Initially the focus within settlement studies targeted the anatomy of the deserted medieval village, its manor house, its church, the pattern of peasant houses, the green, the windmill mound or the water-mill pond with dam, surrounded by the patchwork of ridge and furrow arable cultivation, perhaps with quarries, woodland and permanent grazing. Articles and monographs described their appearance and distribution, their regional variation and historical evidence for patterns of desertion. Although the two most substantial works have been by Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England* (1954; 1983) and *Medieval England: an aerial survey* (1958; 1979) with J. K. S. St Joseph, John Hurst contributed to monographs on deserted villages in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire.¹⁶ Sometimes John would identify new phenomena or float fresh hypotheses, but he was always willing to modify his interpretations when faced with more convincing soundly based evidence. The work of collecting data was aided by a number of scholars in related fields, but the main task of recording and assimilating the data fell upon John Hurst and Maurice Beresford, aided at Wharram by members of a voluntary secretarial team. They were at the centre of the network, leading the research and coordinating information in the annual reports of the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group for thirty-four years. Additionally John was in a position to determine which threatened sites should be excavated and which surveyed. With the help of Professor St Joseph, air photographs were taken both as a record and as a means of interpreting the evidence in the field. John was also able to urge that a representative sample of fifty sites

¹⁵ Maurice Beresford and John Hurst, *English Heritage Book of Wharram Percy Deserted Medieval Village* (London, 1990), 144 pp. The latest re-appraisal was Hurst, 'The Wharram Research Project', *Medieval Settlement Research Group, Annual Report*, 17 (2002), 8–10.

¹⁶ K. J. Allison, M. W. Beresford and J. G. Hurst, *The Deserted Villages of Oxfordshire*, Leicester University Press: Department of English Local History, Occasional Papers, 17 (1965), 48 pp.; Allison, Beresford and Hurst, *The Deserted Villages of Northamptonshire*, Leicester ... Occasional Papers, 18 (1966), 48 pp.

throughout England should be scheduled for protection and that the six best preserved be taken into guardianship. In the event only three became monuments in state care. However as the study of villages extended into Wales, Scotland and Ireland, assembled in *Deserted Medieval Villages*, edited by Beresford and Hurst (1971; 1989), the wide variation in the evidence became clear—the product of different geology, climate and soils, the outcome of various social and tenurial patterns and affected by a diversity of pressures to relocate or abandon settlements. Dispersed settlement rather than the nucleated village needed a new range of survey and excavation strategies. Indeed just looking at the failures was bound to examine only a small part of rural agrarian and pastoral life. The canvas broadened and the Research Group dropped the restrictive ‘Deserted’ to encompass all types of settlement, not just the peasant house but all the phenomena pertinent to medieval rural life in Britain. Also site reports and book reviews publicised new research being undertaken in Europe. What had first been approached as a distinct study with a limited set of questions now became open-ended, embracing poly-focal village origins, field systems and soil quality, settlement boundaries, desertion and relocation, transport and land reclamation. A parallel study group, initiated by Alan Aberg and Jean le Patourel, concentrated on moated sites, first in England, then within the British Isles and finally throughout Europe (1971–86). These initiatives widened the orbit of the research group still further and the two parallel groups combined in 1986 to become the Medieval Settlement Research Group. John Hurst provided an assessment of the Medieval Village Research Group’s aims and achievements (1987).¹⁷ He had also contributed valuable survey articles ‘The Changing Medieval Village in England’ to J. Raftis, *Pathways to Medieval Peasants* (Toronto, 1981), ‘The Medieval Countryside’ to I. Longworth and J. Cherry, *Archaeology in Britain since 1945* (London, 1986) and ‘Rural Building in England’ to H. E. Hallam, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales II (1042–1350)* (Cambridge, 1988). These were his last major papers on rural settlement.

Within the new Medieval Settlement Research Group, Hurst and Beresford became the elder statesmen and the baton was passed on to the next generation who formulated new research strategies and tackled new types of terrain, such as Shapwick in the Somerset Levels or Whittlewood

¹⁷ Hurst, ‘The Work of the Medieval Village Research Group 1952–1986’, *Medieval Settlement Research Group, Annual Report*, 1 (1986), 8–14.

in the forests of Northamptonshire. John was always encouraging, sometimes startled by new insights with an amazed 'incredible', but always willing to evaluate them and study their implications. His approach remained alert and well informed, even after fifty years in this particular branch of study.

Learned societies

From the start of his career with the Inspectorate, John Hurst was assiduous in extending his knowledge and his range of personal contacts. He was soon a familiar figure at lectures in London and at conferences throughout Britain. As his reputation grew he would be invited to international conferences on rural settlement, especially the *Ruralia* series started in Prague, and on pottery and related artefacts, notably the gatherings in Rotterdam. In March 1958 he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, attending their Thursday meetings with great regularity as well as working in their unrivalled library throughout his career and his years of retirement. He served on its council and was appointed a vice-president (1969–71) when relatively young. He continued to serve the society on its research committee (1971–7), its executive committee (1979–84) and its finance committee from 1984. His attendance at and contributions to the other senior archaeological societies in London resulted in him being elected to the council of the British Archaeological Association (1960–5) and to that of the Royal Archaeological Institute (1965–70).

The one society in which his membership owed more to parental example than to his official duties was the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Admittedly he also had encouragement from Grahame Clark at Cambridge, where the great majority of archaeology students took the anthropology route to their degree. He lectured on Wharram Percy and became a committee member of Section H: Anthropology at the 1953 meeting and was elected secretary of the section (1954–7), later serving as recorder (1958–62) and as section president in 1974. Additionally he served on the national council of the main Association between 1965 and 1970, an indication that his advocacy of field archaeology of the historic periods had received academic acceptance among scientists. Wherever the Association held its annual meeting John would be in touch with local archaeologists to make sure that they contributed to the meeting handbook, led tours to the most significant

sites and gave lectures to set the local archaeology in a wider context. By their collaboration with the area's geologists, soil scientists, historical geographers, economic historians and museum curators, he hoped that they would enrich their research. This concern for the wider context, both his own and his parents, was also in evidence when John booked to join a university-sponsored tour of the Galapagos Islands. He was bitterly disappointed when illness prevented his participation.

Honours and festschriften

An even more treasured honour was his election as a Fellow of the British Academy in 1987, an election which closely followed that of Maurice Beresford. With characteristic modesty John regarded this not as a personal honour but as a collective recognition of all the team who had worked together at Wharram Percy and in the research group on medieval settlement.

John was also delighted by the bestowal of an honorary degree of Doctor of the University of York in July 1995. The citation praised his dedication to the study of deserted medieval villages and the encouragement of the discipline of medieval archaeology 'influencing an entire generation of medieval archaeologists and inspiring their research directions for more than three decades. This was not a possessive role, because Hurst was always approachable and always willing to share his expertise with others.' It praised his leadership in founding societies and specialist working parties: 'Indeed between 1960 and 1990 it would have been unthinkable to have launched a research group without his wise advice, his ready co-operation and his extensive contacts.' Characteristically, he regarded this honour as one to be shared by all those working with him in medieval archaeology rather than his own personal reward.

A third well-deserved honour was the award of the Medal of the Society of Antiquaries of London, presented to those who have provided outstanding service to the Society or have significantly furthered the aims of the Society. John was pleased to learn that he was to receive the medal on 29 May 2003. Sadly he did not live to attend the ceremony and his family accepted it on his behalf. However, he had privately expressed the view that it was more a recognition of the growth of medieval archaeology and of the teamwork that it had generated in the past fifty years. Professor Rosemary Cramp in her presidential address stressed that John had shown leadership and inspiration at Wharram Percy, in rural settle-

ment studies and in medieval archaeology, and it was those particular personal qualities that were being honoured.¹⁸

All these three honours were a worthy acknowledgement of the high esteem in which the wider academic community held his scholarship. Two dedicatory volumes provide a more tangible indication of the warmth and affection with which he was regarded by his fellow workers in the two areas of research he had made particularly his own and in which his scholarship had been accompanied by a long commitment to the organisational needs of the research groups. He received a festschrift in July 1989 to mark his retirement two years previously and to record his outstanding contribution to the Medieval Village Research Group of which he had been the founder in 1952 and its secretary for thirty-four years until its transformation into the Medieval Settlement Research Group. This festschrift was jointly in honour of John Hurst and Maurice Beresford to recognise their exemplary partnership at Wharram Percy and in the study of medieval settlements. Most appropriately the volume was entitled *The Rural Settlements of Medieval England*, edited by M. Aston, D. A. Austin and C. Dyer and was presented to the recipients at Wharram Percy. This contained contributions embracing many different approaches from the younger generation of scholars, all disciples of Beresford and Hurst, and nearly all participants in the Wharram excavations

The second festschrift honoured the pioneering role that John had played in the study of pottery in Britain and Europe. *Everyday and exotic pottery from Europe c. 650–1900*, edited by D. Gaimster and M. Redknapp, was presented at the opening of the Medieval Europe conference at York University in 1992 among a large gathering of British and Continental scholars. All the forty-four contributors felt that they had benefited to a greater or lesser extent from John's scholarship, practical expertise and personal guidance. They hoped that the choice of topics within the book reflected his wide-ranging knowledge and the breadth of his own research. In many cases reference was made to the unobtrusive help, the wide scholarship lightly carried and freely shared, and the inspiration which his research had been to them. Others have commented upon their prior expectations of an aloof omniscient scholar and the reality of an easy manner allied to a genuine interest in pottery studies that both ignored a generation gap and bridged a gulf in status between a high-ranking civil

¹⁸ Rosemary Cramp, 'Anniversary Address 2003', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 83 (2003), 1–8, esp. 6–7.

servant and a junior museum officer. His enthusiasm and the lack of pretension made conversation and the exchange of knowledge fluent and mutually profitable.

What was seldom appreciated by all those whom John assisted in so many ways was that all this research and all these publications were prepared in the evenings and the holidays outside his official working hours. He did not have the luxury of a sabbatical year as university scholars might have. He seldom enjoyed subsidised research travel. Indeed the only help that he received was six weeks paid leave in May–June 1960 to work with Steensberg on the Borup Ris field survey, and a Leverhulme Travelling Grant in 1963–4 to examine post-medieval imported wares in Continental museums. All the published books, articles and reviews, as well as the voluminous correspondence arising from research and society business, were laboriously typed with one finger on an ancient and idiosyncratic machine. Only much later was his burden eased when book publishers gave him some typing help and when he had official access to research assistants and draughts-persons. This makes his achievement all the more remarkable.

Family life

In many ways John kept his private life well separated from his public activities at work and research. It was at Cambridge he met Dorothy Gillian Duckett, an archaeology student at Newnham one academic year his junior. During his research year they collaborated in the Archaeology Society activities and later worked together at Wharram Percy. When he joined the inspectorate and was looking for suitable excavation supervisors, he chose Gill to direct medieval excavations at deserted villages (Hangleton, Wythemail) and later at moated sites (Ashwell, Milton). They married in 1955 and produced two daughters, Francesca and Tamara. The marriage was a successful partnership balancing Gill's extrovert mercurial temperament with John's taciturn and placid nature. When the family visited excavations in progress throughout England during school holidays John took the leading role, both as the commissioning inspector and as the pottery expert. However, on their many visits to the Continent Gill's personality often broke the ice between experts who had communicated by letter but never previously met. The extensive summer tours of European museums and excavations in an old Bedford van enabled John to build up his wide range of contacts and acquire an ency-

clopaedic knowledge of pottery and of excavation practices. Gill also collaborated with John in preparing the Medieval Britain annual survey in *Medieval Archaeology* for fourteen years and its counterpart in *Post-Medieval Archaeology* for four years.¹⁹ Sadly Gill died in 1971, aged 39, leaving him to bring up his daughters with the support of his many friends and to care for a large house in Gloucester Crescent, London, overflowing with books, files of papers and card indices. After university, his daughters embarked on their careers, Francesca as a teacher and Tamara as a scientist. John was devoted to them and to his three grandchildren, Joseph, Charlotte and Megan, the product of Francesca's marriage to Bob Croft, the Somerset county archaeological officer.

He never remarried and never moved house until in his retirement he transferred to a former dairy with extensive outbuildings in a village near Stamford. These housed his library and his research materials (which will be deposited in the British Museum). John had a great interest in classical music, especially opera, and he had a collection of several thousand records amassed over fifty years. It was in the quiet village street that he suffered a vicious and senseless attack, unprovoked by one of the mildest of men and kindest of scholars. He died in hospital in Peterborough seven weeks later on 29 April 2003 from his severe injuries, prematurely ending the highly valued life of a friend still actively engaged in mature scholarship.

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Note. I am grateful to Bob and Francesca Croft for generously assisting me with some personal and family details.

¹⁹ J. G. Hurst, 'Medieval Britain in 1956: Post-Conquest', *Medieval Archaeology*, 1 (1957), 151–71; and in vols. 2–4 (1958–1960); D. G. Hurst, ditto, vols. 5–14 (1961–70); D. G. Hurst, 'Post-Medieval Britain in 1966: excavation and field-work', *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, 1 (1967), 107–21; and in vols 2–4 (1968–70).

