

Lecture Reports

Brian Little

Thursday 8th September 2011

Instruments of Medieval Music: a presentation including live music

Richard York

This was a most entertaining and instructive talk made all the more interesting by our speaker's delving into the 'realms of best guesses'. Few instruments have survived the passage of time and their actual sounds are little understood.

Richard York's chosen instruments were set against pictures of the social environment when they were in regular use. Musicians were usually professional rather than members of the gentry.

One of the most fascinating was his opening choice, a pipe organ dating back at least a thousand years and used for teaching in churches. A demonstration of its potential was followed by a performance on bagpipes, common in most European countries but of either Greek or Arabic origin.

Throughout the evening it was clear that Richard needed all his considerable skill to demonstrate the range of musical instruments and their capabilities. This was especially true of a hard-to-play recorder which needed a reed to produce sound.

The finale was some music played on what were dubbed freehold pipes. This drum and pipe combination made for a memorable end to a remarkable evening.

Thursday 13th October 2011

The Seventeenth Century Village: Who was in charge?

Deborah Hayter

'How did the village work?' Seventeenth century villages lacked an elected local government. In its absence much depended on a chain of command involving crown officials, particularly JPs, the Lord of the Manor, his steward and surveyors and church officials.

From the mid-sixteenth century parishes began to emerge as units of local government and the Poor Law placed duties on parishes to look after the poor. Critical to this were church vestry meetings and the rôle of churchwardens. In addition to their duty to look after the church buildings and land they were guardians of the community's morals. The meetings also guided the work of overseers in respect of the Poor Law and who had the right to relief. Parallel with this was the growing importance of parish constables who acted as intermediaries between the manor and crown officials on the one hand and the village people on the other. They supervised the apportioning of common land and kept an eye on felons, vagabonds and behaviour in ale houses.

[Reports condensed to ensure room for Deborah's regular 'Snippets' feature.]