

Department of History Research Talks

Date: 06 February 2025, Thursday

Time: 16.30

Avenue: A-130 FEASS Seminar Room

Title: Some Local Perspectives on Medieval English Economy: A Comparison of Urbanization in Salford, Steyning, and Agbrigg and Morley, 1086-1348

Speaker: M. Özgür Elmacioğlu, PhD Candidate, Bilkent University, Department of History

Abstract:

The period from late eleventh century to mid-fourteenth century was characterized by an increase in the number and size of the urban settlements as well as the ratio of people that dwelled in urban settings in England. A simultaneous development, increasing commercialization, meaning an increasing dependency on market transactions for a greater part of the population, accompanied urbanization. While this general trend is well known in the literature, how exactly these processes played out in particular localities needs to be scrutinized. This talk deals with a comparative analysis of urbanization in the hundreds of Salford, Lancashire; Steyning, Sussex; and wapentakes of Agbrigg and Morley, West Yorkshire. A complex interplay of different factors impacted urbanization in a given locality. These factors ranged from geographical and topographical ones, such as coastline changes and road networks; to economic and political ones, such as integration into regional markets or initiatives by royal and aristocratic lordship. The comparison shows that being close to a major urban center, London for Steyning, and York for Agbrigg and Morley, positively impacts urbanization as the smaller towns in these regions acted like “satellite cities” to large urban centers, offering a range of goods and services, which was lacking in Salford, Lancashire, a region with lower population density. Being connected to waterways or road networks increased the likelihood of urbanization, by facilitating exchange and connection. For many towns in Steyning, the waterways were crucial not only due to the forested nature of the northern part of the hundred, which made overland travel difficult, but also because of the role of waterways in waterborne trade in southeast England. Wakefield, the biggest town in Agbrigg and Morley, was on a major highway going to York. Although political and economic initiatives such as establishment of new towns or grant of liberties and privileges for the burgesses of already existing towns, either by royal or other aristocratic actors, were driving powers for the establishment of urban centers, it was not a guarantee for future urban development.