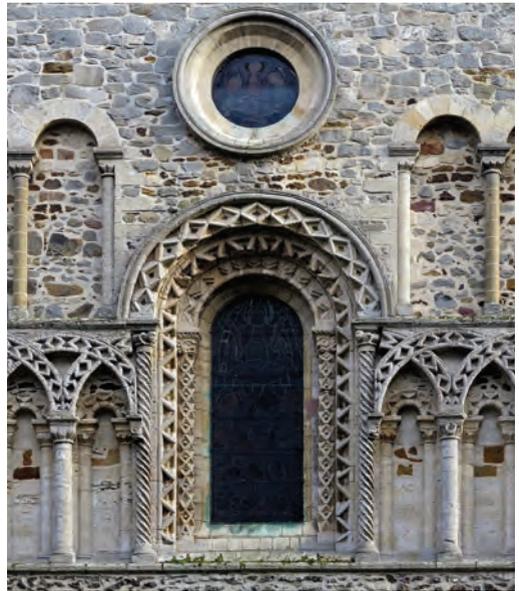


## Archaeology of the Norman Conquest: new directions in material culture research in the 11th and 12th centuries

Alexsanda McClain, Senior Lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at the University of York, was our speaker for this year's Sue Margeson Memorial Lecture. The lecture summarized the genesis and progress of the current AHRC-funded research network *Archaeologies of the Norman Conquest*, focusing on material culture in the 11th and 12th centuries. It looked at the current state of research, with examples from workshops and case studies, which is moving methodologies and interpretative agendas in this period forward.

There has been a truism in archaeology that the Norman Conquest is somewhat 'invisible' materially, apart from new castles and rebuilt churches — that we can't see this momentous cultural and political change in the stuff of everyday life. Dr McClain used a number of Yorkshire case studies partly to describe continuity and change in styles of church architecture but also to illustrate new methodological approaches, particularly involving the scientific side of archaeology. These have allowed archaeologists to use human and animal remains and the residues of foodstuffs inside pottery remnants to probe differences in diet, health, cuisine, and consumption practices on either side of the Conquest. They highlight that even when things like pottery did not apparently change at 1066, the way pots were used and the things cooked inside them, sometimes altered substantially.

Other materials, like coinage and the moneyers who produced them, tell stories of both sharp change and disruption (coin hoarding around the time of 1066 and the Harrying of the North) as well as strategic continuity. Moneyers and tax collectors from the pre-Conquest period not only maintained their positions, but thrived and advanced in



*Restored Norman west front of Castle Rising church © D. Leak*

the new Anglo-Norman world.

Certain practices, such as fallow deer emparkment and hunting and the rising consumption of fish and chicken, were not introduced by the Normans or due to the Conquest, as once thought. They were already extant behaviours in elite Anglo-Saxon society which were adopted by the Normans and rapidly accelerated to meet their own social goals.

This project is encouraging archaeology of the period to move beyond simplistic dichotomies of continuity and change, to develop new techniques and methods of analysis, asking not just what particular things changed and what stayed the same, but who was making those choices, and most importantly why they were, given the complex sociocultural process that was happening around them.

You can find out more about the project, and follow along with future work, at <http://www.normanarchaeology.org> and on Twitter and Facebook on @archaeNC

*Edmund Perry, Hon. Secretary*