



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Faculty of History

Medieval Economic and Social History Seminar, Easter Term 2017

The seminar will meet in the Walters Room, Selwyn College, at 5 p.m. on the following Wednesdays. All welcome.

10 May 2017

Judith Spicksley (University of York)

Revisiting Vinogradoff's interpretation of Bracton: why was a servus not a slave?

Historians interested in mapping the decline of slavery in England have suggested that the institution had disappeared by the twelfth century. It is possible to detect the beginnings of a decline in the late Anglo-Saxon period, but most academics are agreed that the number of the enslaved fell after the Conquest in 1066, when slavery as a system of labour extraction through personal servitude gave way to serfdom, a system of servile labour organised around landholding in which individuals were bound by virtue of their tenure rather than their status. This alternative form of unfreedom expanded during the twelfth century under the pressure of population growth and land shortage but then declined as a result of the Black Death, which undermined the tenurial restrictions that bound peasants to the land; serfdom as a form of unfreedom withered away. As a result the vocabulary of slavery is absent from the history of late medieval England, where the unfree are usually described as serfs or villeins, following Paul Vinogradoff's interpretation of the legal treatise known as *Bracton*.

This paper draws on a range of published primary materials including the legal treatises of the late medieval and early modern periods, published records of the royal and manorial courts, and medieval and early modern labour statutes. It suggests that the emergence of villeinage and the powerful notion of what Orlando Patterson defined as 'intrusive' enslavement have problematized what it meant to be unfree in the late Middle Ages. The number of those enslaved did decline as a result of economic and institutional change, but slavery as a legal status remained visible in law and practice well into the early modern period.

24 May 2017

Marta Gravela (University of Turin)

The value of goods and value of people. Assessing urban fiscal policies in late medieval Italy

The financial needs of late medieval Italian cities prompted their governments to impose, alongside indirect charges, direct taxes upon property. Proportional division of tax burdens thus required the registration and evaluation of the citizens' possessions in appropriate books called 'estimi'. To what extent did this estimation match actual wealth? By comparing various fiscal systems, I will argue that the evaluation of goods was the result of a complex assessment of the social value of citizens rather than a merely economic appraisal of property.

Convener: Chris Briggs (cdb23@cam.ac.uk).

The support of the Trevelyan Fund (Faculty of History) is gratefully acknowledged.

West Road
Cambridge CB3 9EF

Tel: +44 (0) 1223 335340
Email: mjw205@cam.ac.uk
www.hist.cam.ac.uk