

## The History of Ruralia

The genesis of Ruralia lay in the first Medieval Europe conference held in York in 1992. It provided an opportunity for European archaeologists to compare their research and results across national boundaries. The enthusiasm shown at the rural settlement sessions of the conference suggested that it was time to set up a body to facilitate the study of the subject. Two years later the working group of André Bazzana, Alan Aberg, Terry Barry, Jean-Marie Pesez, Jean-Michel Poisson and Haio Zimmermann met in Luxembourg to plan the first conference of Ruralia to be held in Prague in 1995.

The new rural settlement body was set up on the same pattern as Château Gaillard, the organization for those studying castles in western Europe. It was to work under the direction of a president with national representatives who would invite delegates to a biennial conference on a specific theme. The papers would be published in a volume which would appear by the time of the succeeding conference. It is the great merit of Alan Aberg, Terry Barry, André Bazzana, Jan Klápště, Jonny de Meulemeester, Jean-Marie Pesez, Jean-Michel Poisson and Haio Zimmermann that Ruralia has become an established and internationally highly respected organization.

It was of great importance for Ruralia that the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Science in Prague was able to recruit assistance to handle editorial matters. Petr Sommer and Zdeněk Smetánka offered to act as publishers and distributors, and ever since Prague has continued to play an important role. Jan Klápště played a major role and edited the first ten volumes of Ruralia.

The first Ruralia conferences were held in successively in Prague, Luxembourg, Ireland and then Germany. The major role played by French, British and German delegates in the early conferences has gradually been replaced by a more balanced representation from across Europe. The national 'quotas' for delegates, used in the early conferences and aimed at producing a broad coverage of speakers, has been replaced since 2011 by an open call. This has given a wider, more international scope to the conference, and encouraged younger scholars to present papers. A scholarship scheme has been introduced to assist their attendance. Furthermore, presentations are no longer limited to the Middle Ages, but includes more recent aspects of archaeology.

The presentations were published by Brepols until 2015. We changed the publisher in 2017 (Sidestone), and the conference papers and the publications are now underpinned by a peer-review process. The volume is available as book but also as e-book. In this way we meet the current international scientific standards.

Ruralia is no longer an informal organisation, but an association with statutes and a reorganized executive board, registered in the Netherlands. The president is supported by one vice-president, two secretaries, treasurers, and cash auditors. The national representatives are still a very important body; they maintain contact with archaeologists in the different European countries. They spread information regarding the conferences and the proceedings, and they help with the peer-reviewing process. Members have changed and some joined the committee from previously unrepresented countries. Last, but not least, they also reflect the European idea to which we are committed.

Ruralia continues to evolve and tackle new aspects of the subject. And all this sprang from that meeting in York....