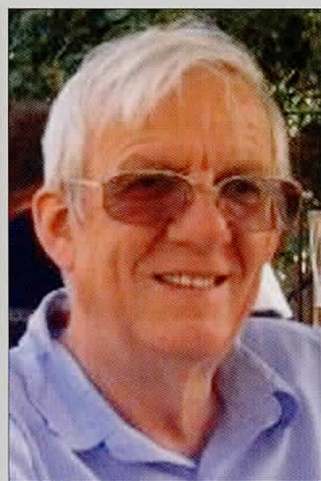


# John Langdon 1944 - 2016

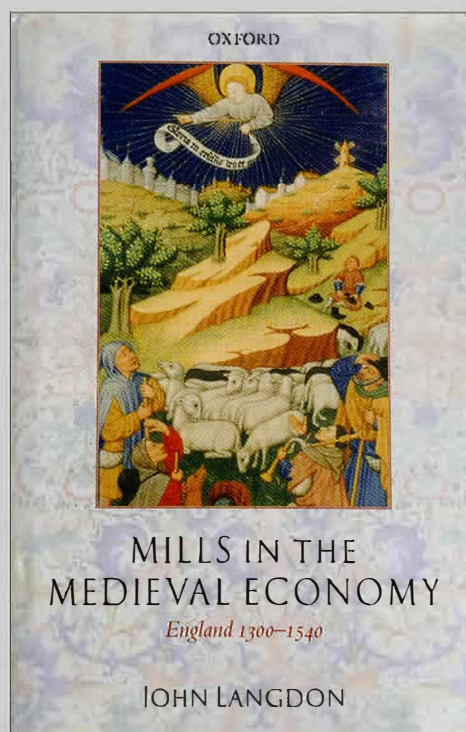
John Langdon, author of *Mills in the Medieval Economy*, died on 31 December 2016 at the age of 72. The son of a Canadian soldier, John was born in Nelson, Lancashire,



and his family emigrated to Canada when he was two. He studied chemical engineering at university in Western Ontario and it was some years later, whilst in England, that he found medieval history and technology to be his true calling. His doctoral research on the use of draught animals in English farming in the Middle Ages was carried out at the University of

Birmingham and he followed on from this by working on a research project on English medieval milling under Dr Christopher Dyer. In 1984 he took up an appointment as assistant professor of English Medieval History at the University of Alberta, and the mills project in Birmingham was taken on by Richard Holt, who published *The Mills of Medieval England* in 1988. John continued with his research into mills, however, as well as other aspects of medieval agriculture and technology, and published a number of original and useful articles. His magnum opus, *Mills in the Medieval Economy, England 1300-1540*, the product of twenty years' research, was published by Oxford University Press in 2004.

I first met John when he attended a Mills Section meeting on medieval mills and milling, held at the Art Workers Guild, London, on a snowy day in the winter of 1990-1. I corresponded with him from time to time after that and he kindly sent me copies of various articles and papers that he had written or found useful for his own research. It was after reading his paper on 'The Birth and Demise of a Medieval Windmill' (published in *History of Technology*, 1992) that I wrote to him, suggesting that the detailed building account inferred this was a tower mill, rather than a post mill as he had concluded. In a generous and open-minded way, which I found to be characteristic of him, John looked again at the original document of 1303 and discovered he had misread a tiny symbol, which translated as 500, rather than 5, cart-loads of stone being brought to build the mill. Keen to put the record straight and promote further discussion, he invited me to co-author a short note with him, which was published in *History of Technology* in 2004. When he was next in England, John and I visited Turweston (Buckinghamshire) and field-walked the areas where we thought it most likely this early tower mill had stood above the village. It was an interesting day, but unfortunately we made no exciting or significant discoveries.



Following up this mutual interest in early tower mills, John and I subsequently put together an article on them for *Technology and Culture* and he returned to the theme of carpenters being the dominant building craftsmen in the later Middle Ages for the eighth Rex Wailes Memorial Lecture, which he presented in 2006. John visited England from time to time in order to work on original documents in both national and county archives and we met up on several occasions. He was always keen to discuss the practical aspects of water-power and milling. Even after his retirement from full-time teaching, he continued to research and write on various aspects of medieval life, in particular technology and labour. When we last corresponded in the autumn of 2016, John had just returned home after a serious operation and a long stay in hospital. He kindly sent me a pre-publication draft of a paper he had recently written on the river Itchen (Hampshire) during the second millennium AD, championing the life and times of a small river 'poorly served in the history of water', to use his own introductory words.

John Langdon was a dedicated researcher with an enquiring mind and an ability to communicate on a practical and approachable level. I admired his depth of knowledge, his enthusiasm for medieval technology and, in particular, his open-mindedness. He was always prepared to question and discuss his own work and conclusions, and was good company. He has left a lasting legacy to molinology through his diligent and painstaking researches, made available in his books and published articles.

Martin Watts

## John Langdon: a select bibliography

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