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Citation for final published version:

Jervis, Ben 2017. Consumption and the 'social self' in Medieval Southern England. Norwegian Archaeological Review 50 (1) , pp. 1-29.  
10.1080/00293652.2017.1326978

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00293652.2017.1326978>

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# Consumption and the ‘Social Self’ in Medieval (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century) Southern England

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## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mark Hall for comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to Bronach Kane and the anonymous reviewers for additional references. Jennifer Evans at the National Museum of Wales library kindly provided access to some references and I am grateful to Luke Barber and Fiona Griffin for their assistance for providing access to images.

**Abstract:** Over the last 30 years we have become increasingly aware of the commercializing nature of the Medieval English economy. However, these insights have had little impact on narratives of consumption, which persist in seeing it as a characteristic of modernity. Here it is argued that we must move away from seeing an early modern consumer revolution and instead think about consumption in Medieval society, particularly to examine the implications of commercialization for identity and selfhood. A framework is developed, building upon David G. Shaw’s use of the ‘social self’ and the writing of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, to explore how the increasing variability of a wider range of objects impacted upon the negotiation of selfhood in the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Key Words:** Medieval, Consumption, Pottery, Dress, Assemblage

## Introduction

Debates over the commercialization of the Medieval economy have cast Medieval society in a new light (Britnell 1996, Dyer 2005). They challenge the concept of an early modern ‘consumer revolution’, showing the important role of consumer choice and the marketing of commodities within Medieval life (Kowaleski 2006). Whilst scholars have recognized the commercial elements of Medieval society, it has also been acknowledged that pushing a revolution backwards into the Middle Ages is problematic, as it imposes a modern concept of consumption onto the Medieval past (Styles 1993, Pennell 2012). As Martha Howell (2010) demonstrates, we should seek to examine Medieval commerce on its own terms, and understand its implications for social relations, rather than seeking the roots of its modern iteration in the Middle Ages. Visa Immonen (2012, p. 18) highlights a tendency within Medieval studies to trace “modernity at the expense of the premodern and Medieval”, that is to seek the origins of modernity in the Medieval past. Approaches might be characterized as seeing the Medieval as the root of the modern, or as its counterpoint. My aim here is not to advocate for a single Middle Ages, nor for an evolutionary narrative. Rather, I seek to consider how particular local interactions combined to create specific, affective, commercial relations which can be related to a patchwork of other such interactions which

we identify as the Medieval commercial system. Following Manuel DeLanda (2016, p. 14) we might see the terms 'Medieval' and 'modern' as reified generalities, terms which are essentialist in character and imply an existence prior to action. We can see the Medieval as constructed through engagements with the remains of the past in the present, it comes into being through our mediations with archaeological material culture (Olsen 2010, 145). Therefore, I seek to use the terms Medieval and Middle Ages in as neutral a way as possible, to define a period of time, in this case the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The concept of an early modern (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century) consumer revolution rests on the assumption that people increasingly acquired, and could choose to acquire, non-essential goods, resulting in a greater proportion of national income being generated through commerce (Pennell 2010, p. 29). In the early 1990s scholarship argued that this modern version of consumption emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (see McKendrick *et al.* 1982, Bocoock 1993, p. 11-27, Agnew 1993 for overviews). The factors underlying it were debated, focusing on demand led stimuli, principally greater levels of personal wealth and elite social competition. Whilst it is undeniable that the early modern period sees an acceleration in the range of goods available, and technical developments certainly contributed to the greater number of objects and higher levels of standardization, it is clear from the archaeological evidence for the circulation of objects that 'modern' non-utilitarian (comparatively) mass consumption can exist without modern capitalism (Mukerji 1983, Miller 1997, Mullins 2004, p. 197-9).

Archaeological studies demonstrate the wide array of goods available to Medieval people and show that choices were made over which goods to acquire (Hinton 2005, Egan 2005, Jervis *et al.* 2015, Lewis 2016). Medieval archaeologists have not, on the whole, made commercialization and consumption a principal focus of study when considering artefacts, despite archaeology, as a 'discipline of things' (Olsen *et al.* 2012), being in the best position to understand the relationship between people and objects (the core question of consumption studies being why did different people acquire different things in the past?) (Carrier and Hayman 1997, Courtney 1997, Mullins 2004, 2011; although see Dietler 2010). However, a concern with consumption is implicit in studies focused on how people interacted with objects in the projection, establishment or negotiation of social identities associated with, for example, gender, religion, status or community (Willemsen 2012, Gilchrist 2012, Standley 2013, Jervis 2014). For example, Sally Smith's (2009) examination of the Medieval peasantry's use of objects to resist the imposition of subordinate identities questions the assumption that those lower in the social order had neither the means nor ability to express themselves, and that such expression is a characteristic of the consumer revolution (see also Mullins 2004, p. 204-6).

Such work has further implications, forcing us to critique the divide between the Middle Ages and modernity (see also Immonen 2012). Modernity can be used in two ways, firstly as a period of time defined in opposition to the Medieval and secondly as an ontological state. Just as the Medieval is defined through mediations with the past, so the modern period is similarly constituted. Here my issue is less with the temporal division between Medieval and modern, which is inherently relational, but with the application of a modernist ontology to Medieval material; to make *a priori* distinctions between material and culture or society and nature, which may make little sense in this context (Robertson 2008). Perhaps, as Bruno Latour (1993) asserts, 'we have never been modern', as societies are fundamentally formed in the same way, through social interactions between people, materials and things. We can use this as a starting point to reveal relations between people and things, rather than beginning from a modernist perspective.

If, as Howell (2010) urges us to do, we are to understand Medieval commerce and its implications then we need to move away from the view of a linear development towards modernity, to focusing on the entanglement of people and materials in the Medieval period. This has the dual effect of removing the assumptions brought about by undertaking analysis from a modernist ontological position but also of creating an artificial divide between Medieval and modern, to understand how any period is made up of multi-scalar interactions which resonate across multiple space-times (DeLanda 1997; Olsen 2010, 119-20). In doing so, we will be able to see ideas surrounding possessions and selfhood, as well as linkages with contemporary society, as emerging through these interactions. This paper has two aims. The first is to draw upon social theory to develop a framework to examine Medieval consumption and the second is to use archaeological evidence to consider the implications of commercialization for the negotiation of the self. This will be achieved through the study of 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century material culture in the counties of East and West Sussex (hereafter Sussex) in southern England.

### **Consumption and Commercialization: The Case of Sussex**

Recent literature (e.g. Dyer 2005; Howell 2010) has sought to overcome the simplistic divide between a 'feudal' Middle Ages and a commercialized and industrialized modernity, which is derived from Marx's association of the alienation of consumption from the manufacture of commodities to industrialization. Sussex, a county in southern England (Fig. 1) provides an excellent example of why such a distinction is not tenable, and, therefore, why the question of Medieval consumption is worthy of re-examination. The county has a diverse environment, meaning that there are variations in agricultural and tenorial practice. Furthermore, between the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a proliferation of markets in both the countryside and small towns, suggesting an increase in commercial activity (Masschaele 1997).

Before the Black Death the southern part of Sussex was one of the wealthiest areas of England, with there being intensive arable cultivation (Brandon 1971, Gardiner 1995, Campbell 2000, p. 106-20; p. 276-305, Campbell and Bartley 2006, p. 265). This area is largely characterized by traditional bonded tenorial arrangements, but this large-scale cultivation was supported by waged labour (Campbell and Bartley 2006, p. 265). The chalk South Downs, stretching across the middle of the county, are characterized by a mixed husbandry regime specializing in the cultivation of grain and sheep farming, the growth of the cloth industry in the later Middle Ages contributing to its prosperity. Here sheep were both part of demesne and tenant flocks. Coastal ports benefitted from the export of cloth (Pelham 1930, 1934, Mate 1991, p. 85, Campbell 2000, p. 162). A final area is the clay Weald, a mixture of lower value arable land and pasture, principally utilized for cattle. The Weald is an area of abundant natural resources with timber and iron being important exports through Winchelsea and Rye (Gardiner 1996, Campbell 2000, p. 96). Away from the arable heart of the county, tenants were more commonly free or paid rents in cash (Campbell and Bartley 2006, p. 253-4). We see, therefore, associated with differences in agricultural practices, differences in the extent of feudal organization even before the Black Death. After the Black Death processes of engrossment and enclosure changed the organization of agricultural production, with it shifting away from large estates towards smaller units farmed by yeoman farmers (Brandon and Short 1990, p. 104, Mate 2006, p. 169-91).

Therefore, Sussex well demonstrates the increasing importance of waged labour and free tenure to the Medieval agrarian economy, both as a supplement to bonded tenants and as an incentive to expand into marginal areas such as the Weald. As such, a stark contrast between the Medieval and modern economies can be questioned (Hilton 1992, Britnell 1996; see also Trentmann 2004 p. 373-401 on the relationship between consumption and modernity). This is not to say that they are one of the same, or

that the Medieval economy is an embryonic version of modern capitalist production, but that commerce had implications for agrarian production, introducing complexity into socio-economic relations and challenging the feudal order stereotypically associated with Medieval society. The binding of industrialization to capitalism, in contrast to a simpler feudal mode of production seen to be characteristic of Medieval society, obscures the alienation of production seen in Medieval artisans producing goods in bulk for the market (albeit at a lower level of alienation to modern industrial society; see Schweickart 2014). To follow Immonen (2012, 26), we should put “less weight on the question what the theory of capitalism can tell us about the Middle Ages and emphasize more how the ruins of Middle Ages make capitalism inappropriate as an explanation”; in other words rather than seeking capitalist relations in the Middle Ages we should explore how the relations which constitute Medieval societies brought about economic change through creating circumstances in which land could be acquired, merchants could speculate or labour commoditized. This was not a single transition but rather we can work to map the ways in which multiple economies emerged at different scales and in different places, combining and acting upon each other, causing change in unpredictable and multiple ways (DeLanda 1997, p. 14-15). Rather than seeing Medieval society as on a path to a ‘prior’ state of capitalism, we can map relations unfolding in ways which ultimately become capitalist in various forms. Here I follow Lucas (2017, p. 189) in suggesting that it can be productive to retain some naivety about ‘what comes next’ to fully appreciate the immanence of relations. Undoubtedly, bonded labour was important in the Medieval period, however the performance of commerce broke down these relations, particularly after the Black Death (when demographic change stimulated an increase in the importance of waged labour and the farming out of newly enclosed land) (Broadberry *et al.* 2015, p. 83). It is these processes of enclosure, in association with the growth of a commodity market and the development of a bureaucracy of monetizing possessions and inheritance, that Matthew Johnson (1996) highlights as being particularly important in the emergence of capitalism as both an economic system and world view; a difference brought about incrementally through local relations, which, from a modern standpoint, contrasts a different, but no less complex, form of Medieval society. What focussing on relations reveal is that capitalism is not the result of evolutionary economic development, but forms as bricolage, as a patchwork of effective associations which accumulate over the long term (see Crellin 2017)

### *The Circulation of Goods*

This study focusses on the circulation of two types of goods in Medieval Sussex, pottery and metal dress accessories. It should be noted that many metal objects will not have been deposited in archaeological features, but may have been melted down and recycled, limiting the sample available for study. The corpus has been massively increased over the last 20 years by the reporting of finds to the Portable Antiquities scheme, a voluntary scheme for the reporting of finds by members of the public. This is an important resource which is increasingly being used by archaeologists. These data must be used with caution however, as, like excavated finds, various factors influence recovery. These include the fact that finds are reported inconsistently and land use determines where metal detecting takes place (Robbins 2013). For this reason, metal detected finds are considered here as supplementary to those from excavated contexts and their purpose is not to support the empirical comparison of urban and rural areas, but to suggest differences across rural areas within the county and to demonstrate the diversity of objects consumed, some of which are not known from excavated contexts in Sussex.

Sussex was well urbanized compared to other counties by the Norman Conquest, with production moving to towns by the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This allowed goods to circulate more freely than they had when production was focused in rural estate centres and this new world of goods led to the emergence of

distinctly urban identities (Thomas 2011, p. 412-5, Jervis 2014, p. 114-8). Even so, archaeological evidence suggests that it was not until the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> centuries that goods began to circulate at a regional scale, Anglo-Norman pottery, for example, having very localized distributions.

Johnson (1996, p. 102) argues that prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century ceramics did not carry meaning beyond their function, a point disputed by Paul Courtney (1997, p. 103). However, within the framework which will be proposed here, it is right to say that ceramics did not *carry* meaning, but wrong to state that vessels were not capable of *acquiring* it as they were enrolled in social practices through which they *became* meaningful, with this meaning sedimenting within them and having implications for the ways in which they were engaged with in the future (see Joyce and Gillespie 2015). In West Sussex, production was more centralized than in East Sussex, partly due to the settlement geography (Streeten 1981). Pottery was produced on the outskirts of Chichester, Pevensey, Steyning and Hastings (Barton 1979, Gardiner and Greatorex 1997, Lyne 2009). A major industry producing highly decorated glazed wares developed at Rye. In contrast, production in the Weald was rural (Tebbutt 1975, Hadfield 1981).

Three tiers of pottery production can be identified. Coarse utilitarian vessels such as cooking pots were generally produced locally, as demonstrated by the use of local materials. Plain glazed jugs appear to have been produced at fewer centres, typically those associated with towns or markets, and were dispersed over a wider area. Finally, highly decorated wares were produced only at Rye and at least one centre in West Sussex (see Streeten 1981 for an overview of pottery marketing in Sussex). Glazed wares require greater capital investment in terms of lead for glaze, fuel for the kiln and time, both to produce the vessels and to learn the techniques. It is conceivable that such highly decorated wares were in direct competition with metalware, which we might expect to be a feature of a commercialized economy (Verhaege 1991). The presence of multiple pottery types in towns demonstrates competition existed between producers. In Pevensey, for example, glazed wares from Rye, Hastings and local workshops, as well as imported products, were all marketed (Barber 1999). A recent examination of the distribution of imported pottery in Sussex (Jervis 2017) demonstrates that vessels from the near continent (principally France) were mostly used at ports and at higher status (manorial) sites inland. It is proposed, however, that this distribution is not due to these vessels functioning as *a priori* symbols of status, but due to the ways in which large households engaged directly with the markets in the major towns of the region (which, in the case of Sussex, are ports) rather than using local markets (see Dyer 1989). It is also proposed that the use of a wider diversity of products along the lower reaches of rivers and the coast led to the emergence of distinctly coastal identities. We see therefore from the 13<sup>th</sup> century the increased marketing of pottery, as conditions changed, allowing these objects to become commodities. Specialized wares were produced and distributed through regional marketing networks, in contrast to the preceding period where production and marketing was localized.

The presence of commodities, most simply defined as objects produced for sale rather than domestic use, might be perceived as bringing about homogeneous experiences of the world due to the standardized nature of production. However, commodification can be usefully perceived of as a phase in an object's life (Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986). Any object has the potential to become a commodity (that is to be enrolled in commerce) and what differs between societies is the extent to which this 'commodity potential' (which, in Deleuzian terms, can be seen as a 'virtual capacity' of an assemblage; see Harris 2017) is actualized. Through the adoption of ideas of artefact biography, in which objects did not carry a pre-determined set of social meanings which led to the homogenization of experience (Miller 1987, p. 196), scholars are now moving towards a subtler and more dynamic understanding of the relationship between Medieval people and Medieval objects (Courtney 1997, p. 102-3, Gerrard 2007, Gilchrist 2012, Standley 2015). Furthermore, these actions can be seen not as

displaying identities or representing culture, but as creating both (Leone 1995, p. 264, Matthews *et al.* 2002, p. 112).

For example, the localized exchange of plainer pottery types might be considered to have articulated the ongoing formation of communal relationships in the market and through shared domestic experience. The wider distribution of these types as marketing networks developed, perhaps expanded these communal relationships. Just as imports used in higher status households need not automatically be status symbols, so these vessels need not relate to regional identity, but acquired this association with the emergence and re-iteration of social relationships, becoming part of a community formed through relations between people and objects (Harris 2014, Jervis 2017). Commercialization expanded the size of these interactions and, through the formalization of markets, gave them a regular rhythm.

Whereas these plain vessels were used in town and country, highly decorated pottery appears to have a different distribution pattern. These vessels were clearly within the means of rural households, who were able to acquire decorative metalwork for example, yet their distribution is focused, as far as it is possible to tell, on the towns, institutions and manor house sites. Their distribution is wider than that of continental imports, suggesting that this is not simply a factor of these goods only being available in the larger markets. These vessels were available at local markets but were apparently not acquired by all households. A range of decorative motifs (e.g. heraldic imagery and abstract designs) are carried on these vessels. Anthropomorphic motifs are common; these bearded faces often being linked to masculine identities (Fig. 2) (Cumberpatch 1999, Green 2015).

Decorative pottery brings to the fore the consideration that objects might be communicative symbols, with people selecting objects to specifically broadcast messages. The presence of this pottery shows that people chose to invest in decorative goods which possess embellishment beyond their immediate function. Much of the literature on consumption is focused on the idea that goods are utilized as a means of communication, particularly inspired by Thorstein Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous consumption (that is of using consumption as a means of displaying wealth and power). More generally, a tension exists between the function of objects, symbolic frameworks and localized systems of meaning (Mullins 2011, 134). Jean Baudrillard (1996, p. 218-9) defined consumption as "the organization of things into a signifying fabric" and a "systematic manipulation of signs". However, the existence of such systems of objects need not imply a consistent understanding of the meaning of things across society, with these meanings emerging from localized interactions, but also being determined, in part, by the life history of an object (Dietler 2010, p. 62-3; Joyce 2015). Once these subtleties and tensions become acknowledged it becomes plausible to view decorated jugs as passing through a process of commodification as they are produced specifically for the market, not being pre-packaged sets of symbols, but objects which find meanings as they become enrolled in social practice.

This relationship between meaning and practice is particularly the focus of Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's (1978) work on consumption, for whom consumption is a ritualized activity through which goods are used to make firm and visible judgements. They acknowledge that meaning is not inherent within things, but is fixed through practice. Therefore, what distinguishes groups is not necessarily what goods they use, but the ways in which they find meaning in relation to them (Douglas and Isherwood 1978, p. 87). A similar theme emerges in Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of consumption as the materialization of social distinction. In this work, we can see how objects come to stand for social groups through the performance of similar social practices, rather than being *a priori* symbols of class or status, a role which is re-enforced through repeated practice. The influences of these perspectives are apparent in archaeological studies of Medieval material culture, in which objects act as symbols which



bind communities (Gilchrist 2012, Willemsen 2012). The representational role of objects is also central to studies of the consumer revolution (e.g. Campbell 1987).

It is clearly over-simplistic both to see consumption as a means of projecting identities, either by using objects as symbols within an over-arching system of meaning or as the result of habitual engagement, and to view objects as passive in this process (Carrier and Heyman 1997, p. 360, Graeber 2011, p. 502). The key points here are that meanings are fluid, that objects may be understood in multiple ways and, whilst always communicative, depending upon the perspective from which consumption is viewed, the message received may vary considerably.

The meanings of objects change as they become enrolled in different sets of social practices through which people are also defined; they *become* representational rather than *carrying* meaning, and objects can be a part of, and act upon, multiple object worlds. Materials and objects have a vibrancy and a capacity to shape contexts (see Bennett 2010), as Robertson (2008, 1070) argues in relation to the use of objects in Medieval literature and documents. consumption, therefore, has implications (Weatherill 1993, p. 206, Miller 1987, p. 163, Buchli and Lucas 2001, Dietler 2006, p. 336-7, Costall and Richards 2013). Consumption might be viewed as the result of a set of social interactions, through which an object becomes commodified. The point of difference between consumption and other interactions with objects is not that objects find meaning; as Latour (2005, p. 9) demonstrates meaning emerges through interactions between people and the material world, but the trajectory that the object has taken which has drawn people and things into effective networks of commerce. The commodity potential of pottery was realized and it developed meaning as it became part of the social contexts of the merchant home or rural manor. Whilst commerce may have homogenized the objects available, they exited the market along different trajectories, with varying implications.

The urban focused distribution of highly decorated ceramics contrasts the general absence of decorative metalwork from towns in Sussex. This absence is not unique to the county. In Winchester (Hampshire) Alex Cassels (2013) has suggested that distinctively decorated dress accessories were worn in suburban areas by an emergent mercantile class. Within the walled city David Hinton (1990) observed a surprising lack of highly decorated accessories, suggesting that within towns lost items might be more conspicuous than in the countryside and, therefore, more likely to be recovered and recycled. A similar absence can be noted in other small towns (e.g. Armstrong and Ayers 1987, Hawkes and Fasham 1997, Vince *et al.* 1997, Draper and Meddens 2009), suggesting taphonomy may not be the only factor at play. This is despite metalworking being associated with towns such as Crawley, Lewes and Winchelsea (Gardiner 1996, Mate 2006). It is unclear where the metalwork worn by people in Sussex was produced. These, principally copper alloy, items may have been produced in the towns but some may have been imported, particularly from London.

It is important to remember that buckles and brooches are only one item of dress. Analysis of their occurrence does, however, lead to some observations to be made about the use of these dress items. Few 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century dress accessories have been excavated from sites in Sussex, with there being a clear increase in the presence of metal dress items from the 13<sup>th</sup> century in places such as Shoreham (Stevens 2011) and Lewes (Swift forthcoming), where there are continual occupation sequences. These objects are typically bulk-produced items exhibiting moulded or punched decoration. Examples from the towns are generally undecorated beyond their moulded shape, which is surprising if one considers towns to be the focus of commerce and wealth (Table 1). For example, excavations in Shoreham recovered six copper alloy buckles of which only two carry decoration, one in the form of lobed knobs and one in the form of incised lines (Fig. 3E-G) (Stevens 2011). These simple buckles are likely to have



been cheap to acquire, having minimal labour investment in their manufacture and being produced from comparatively cheap materials. Similar, plain, items have been recovered from excavations in other parts. There are exceptions; an incised buckle plate from Lewes (Fig. 3C) might be an amulet, treasured for its protective qualities and from excavations in Crawley a gilded annular brooch (Fig. 3A) and a gilded buckle plate featuring a lion passant (Fig. 3B) have been recovered (Stevens 1997, p. 205-6, Swift forthcoming). Aside from taphonomic factors, other causes of this lack of decorated dress items may have been investment by urban people in other elements of dress, such as fabrics, which are not visible archaeologically

13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century dress accessories have also been excavated from rural contexts on the chalk downland (Table 2). These include decorated buckles and strap ends from the village of Hangleton (Holden 1963, Hurst and Hurst 1964) and a 13th century farmstead at Bramble Bottom (Musson 1955). Eighteen buckles, in a variety of forms and including gilded examples, were excavated from another farmstead at Bullock Down and the surrounding landscape (Fig. 4A and Fig. 4B) (Drewett 1982, Rudling 1995). These are significant as gilding and silvering are explicitly forbidden in sumptuary legislation from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that this technique was providing a medium for display which may have come to be perceived as transgressive (see Phillips 2007, p. 27). The decorated nature of these items (requiring investment in both labour and materials) stands in contrast to the urban examples. A range of other items, including mounts and strap ends, all dating from the 13th-15th centuries were also recovered. Noticeably, little or no highly decorated pottery was recovered from these sites.

Within the Weald a picture of variability emerges. Decorated pottery and metalwork are absent from farmsteads at Polegate, Hartfield and Hurtspierpoint (Tebbutt 1981, Butler 1994, Stevens 2007), but were recovered from a rural site at Ashington, where the size of the excavated building is suggestive of some level of elevated status (Priestly-Bell 1994). Wealth can also be seen in the material culture from excavated moated sites in the Weald such as those at Glottenham and Stretham (Martin 1989, Funnell 209). Differences in consumption based on wealth are clear in the archaeological record and it is apparent that wealth could be disposed of by Wealden households on portable goods.

It is here that we can turn to the finds made by metal detectorists, which are very much supplementary to the excavated evidence due to the factors influencing their recovery. Firstly, certain types of objects are more likely to be recovered than others (Cool and Baxter 2016), however we can anticipate that similar items are equally likely to be recovered from across the study area. Secondly, areas are surveyed at different levels of intensity with some areas being inaccessible to detectorists (such as land within built up areas and scheduled monuments). Thirdly, land use may determine accessibility, with detectorists favouring ploughed fields. These issues must be borne in mind when using this data and for this reason detailed analysis cannot be undertaken. We can, however, identify some general patterning in the distribution of detected finds.

Across Sussex, metal detectorists have recovered and reported a range of decorative items, including buckles and brooches, some of which have been gilded and including types not known from excavations (Table 3; Fig. 4C). These items could have been acquired from markets, chapmen or as gifts and need not have been new (see Okansen and Lewis 2015 for a further consideration of metal detected data). The evidence shows that decorated, non-essential, items were available in Medieval Sussex and would appear to have been within the means of many people.

The first observation that can be made is that the number of finds increases dramatically from the early Medieval to Medieval period, demonstrating the increase in the circulation of goods and coinage as well as a rise in population. This reflects the trend seen in the excavated data, with the wider range of finds within the metal detected corpus emphasizing the increasing diversity of goods available. Secondly, the proportion of finds from the Weald, compared to the coastal plain and Downs rises considerably in the Medieval period. This corresponds to the clearance and settlement of the region in this period and is to be expected and has been observed previously (see Richards *et al.* 2009). By comparing the distribution of specific types with the distribution of Medieval artefacts as a whole, we can also make some tentative inferences about consumption practices. The distribution of buckles is approximately consistent with that of all Medieval finds, and in all three zones approximately half are decorated. It is noticeable that most of the gilded buckles (to give the impression of being made of a more valuable metal and which were legislated against from the 15<sup>th</sup> century) and a single silver example are from the Downs, although the quantity is too small to demonstrate any statistical significance. A different pattern is evident among the brooches. None were recovered from the coastal plain, despite other Medieval finds being recovered from this area.

Although built on a limited dataset, these observations are tentatively offered in support of a hypothesis that the most extravagantly decorated objects were used in areas of dispersed rural settlement where bonded tenurial arrangements were weaker. It is not only in metalwork that this pattern can be seen. It is in the Weald that we first see the rural adoption of new forms of domestic architecture in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Alcock 2010) and the area has a high density of moated farmsteads, perhaps suggestive of wealth (either as a medium of display or for the purposes of security; see Platt 2010), showing that dress was one of several media in which investment was made in display.

Across England there was an increase in decorative metal dress accessories from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, relating to changes in fashion in which clothing became more elaborate and fitted, requiring new items such as lace ends and giving belts a new significance in shaping the body (Standley 2013, p. 49). This might be seen as the emergence of a concept of fashion; a concern with clothing beyond the functional, which emerged as a capacity of the ability to choose, in turn emerging from an increase in commerce and disposable wealth. Howell (2010, p. 243) argues that associated with this wider availability of decorative clothing was a change in the role of dress, from displaying rank to being actively employed to project an image. Buckles and brooches are one part of a dress assemblage which also includes fabric and the difference apparent in their distribution may suggest that they accrued different levels of significance in town and country. Although cheap, belts have been suggested to have significance in Medieval society. Discussing examples from the Netherlands, Annemarieke Willemsen (2012, p. 199) argues that these cheap accessories were not a medium for imitating the wealthy but engaging in horizontal competition, emerging as a form of vernacular fashion. She highlights how attention would be drawn to them by their external position and shiny appearance, making them an ideal medium for display, whether of resistance to authority (see also Smith 2009), a common identity or individual wealth. Indeed, except for accessories in gold and silver, or decorated with gilding, silvering or precious stones, these accessories are absent from later Medieval sumptuary legislation. It is likely that other items of jewellery and dress were used alongside belts in a similar way, but the cheapness of metal accessories may have provided a medium for display otherwise not available to rural households who, for reasons of cost or accessibility, may not have acquired colourful or desirable fabrics. The increased availability of dress items clearly caused concern, as it created the potential for the hierarchical organisation of society to be undermined, stimulating the development of sumptuary legislation, considered further below. As will be discussed in the second half of this paper, the use of dress for display was not a simple process of communication. As already discussed, objects mediate social

relations rather than simply communicating an identity, so care had to be taken in employing objects to carefully enrol them into the performance of the self.

In summary, commercialization led to the wider circulation of a greater variety of objects by the 14<sup>th</sup> century, including highly decorated pottery and a diverse range of cheap metal dress accessories. The available data suggests that highly decorated pottery was more commonly used in the towns and a relationship between decorative dress accessories and areas of dispersed settlement has been proposed. This suggests different attitudes developed towards certain objects, which may relate to levels of wealth, accessibility or, as will be argued, the ways in which behaviour was moderated by rules and values.

### **The Purpose of Consumption**

Consumption is the way in which we use objects to make sense of, and find our place within, the world. It is a means through which social relationships are constructed and maintained (Douglas and Isherwood 1978, p. 57, Miller 1987, p. 165, Carrier and Heyman 1997, p. 362, Agbe-Davies and Bauer 2011, p. 20). Objects are employed to achieve a specific end, but also have a power of their own to bring about unintended consequences, for example if their use is misunderstood by others. It is these unintended consequences which might be seen as the effects of commerce on social relationships discussed by Howell (2010), for example surrounding rights to property, the nature of marriage and the role of gifts within Medieval urban society. From such a perspective, later Medieval sumptuary legislation<sup>1</sup> can be seen as a way of coping with these changes which occurred as greater personal wealth and the wider circulation of goods made decorative dress more accessible and resulted in clothing being used to construct identities (Richardson 2004a, p. 10-11, Phillips 2007, p. 22, Howell 2010, p. 260). This is not to say that commodities were not valued for their function. Meaning and function can conflate, as is the case for objects whose social and monetary value emerge from their employment as stores of wealth, or apparently commonplace objects which might find meaning through being passed as gifts (the meaning of which may have changed as people became increasingly aware of the monetary, rather than associative, worth of things) or as inheritance (see also Cohn 2012). As Howell (2010, p. 260) states, “sumptuary legislation both created new meanings for clothing and helped give birth to the discourse of the modern self”, and a similar point is made by Johnson (1996) in relation to probate inventories. If the key change which is seen to underpin the consumer revolution is a wide cross section of society using a wider range of non-essential goods, then the key indicator of such a change is the establishment of the freedom to make choices (Majewski and Schiffer 2001, p. 32). The variability apparent in the archaeological record suggests that such freedom did exist by the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, implying that rather than seeing a revolution in the early modern period, that we are seeing the re-articulation of an already commercialized society.

Within a framework in which there is a rigid distinction between a feudal and capitalist mode of production such freedom does not exist. The tension between Medieval and modern has inhibited us from fully exploring what consumption means in a Medieval context, as well as creating a situation in which consumption and modernity become related through the limited scope of studies (Trentmann 2004, p. 378). People sit within a hierarchical society in which self-expression is limited both by this social structure but also by the limited range of goods available. Within such a context there is no need for people to use objects to find their place within the world (e.g. Baumeister 1987). Whilst the elite might access prestige goods to create theatres for the performance of hierarchical relationships, such distinction is not necessary for the subordinate masses. Archaeological and historical evidence demonstrates this picture of material homogeneity to be untrue. The varying composition of archaeological assemblages shows that people invested in a variety of goods from decorated dress

accessories to ewers for handwashing and richly decorated pottery, all of which might be considered non-essential items (Jervis *et al* 2015). It is more productive to explore how engagements with objects through commerce and consumption altered social relations than to try to see objects as passively reflecting a perceived social structure.

## **Objects and the Self**

Phrases such as ‘consumer society’ or ‘consumer revolution’ mask the fact that society is not about the relentless production and destruction of things, but about the creation of people; the formation of identities, communities and senses of self (Graeber 2011, p. 502). If we are to understand the implications of commercialization in terms of selfhood and identity, then it is necessary to briefly define a concept of the self.

Literature on the Medieval self has grappled with a tension between the autonomy of the individual to fashion their own destiny and the defined social order (Tonsor 1988, Neale 2008). Roy Baumeister (1987, p. 163) stated that ‘the Medieval lords and serfs did not struggle with self-definition in the way modern persons do’. Such opinion is based on a concept of a feudal order diametrically opposed to modern society, which Sussex demonstrates particularly well, through the diversity in tenurial arrangements, to be overly simplistic. In general, however, scholarly opinion moved towards there being an increasing consciousness of the individual around the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, be that in the contribution of citizens to the making of law and society or the literary concern with singularity (Ullman 1966, Logan 1986, Blamires 2010). Archaeological studies of the appropriation of material culture in identity work also suggest that people were using the material world to forge identities in a variety of ways. It is, therefore, now acknowledged that Medieval people had some autonomy, but that some social constraints over behaviour remained.

### *The ‘Social Self’*

David G. Shaw’s (2009) study of the ‘social self’ in Medieval Wells, Somerset, offers an alternative framework for thinking about Medieval selfhood. Shaw considers the self to be a localized set of awarenesses, or relationships, bound to a body. The self is, therefore, a bundle of perceptions, both our own and of those with whom we interact. This concept is used to explore the extent to which people had the freedom to express themselves and the effect of this expression as they form a ‘social self’, that is the self perceived of by others (Shaw 2009, p. 145).

The ‘social self’ finds parallels in the idea of assemblage as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, p. 2) which offers a useful means of thinking further about Medieval selfhood. Assemblage is a common term within archaeology, typically used to define a collection of objects from an excavation (see Hamilakis and Jones 2017). Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage is more pervasive, assemblages being sites where ideas, perceptions and goods become entangled, forming the self as a more-than-human entity. This is a process which Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 245) term ‘territorialisation’, the creation of a bounded bundle of associated animate, inanimate, material and immaterial components. However, many of these components are also entangled in other assemblages - the production of other selves and of society. Social relations therefore coalesce to form a bounded self but also pull the self into other assemblages. It is because of these connections that the process of forming social relations has consequences, because one person’s actions are experienced by and act upon others. As the self is constituted of these social relationships which form and dissolve as we navigate the world, the process of being social, creating social relationships, sets us off on new paths and entangles us with each other in new ways. Rather than inhabiting a social context, it is this process

of being social which assembles society; people make society as society makes them, with commerce being one set of relations enrolled in this process.

In this study the self, whether Medieval or modern, is conceived of not as a bounded body, but as a bundle of relationships with both the self and society being unfinished products, which change with the social relationships which constitute them; the self is not ontologically prior to consumption but emerges through it (Robertson 2008, p. 1061). The self is representative of the consumer.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally two views of the consumer dominate; either the consumer is a 'hero', who marshals scarce resources to achieve maximum utility, or a 'dupe', who is constrained by market forces (Slater 1997, p. 33). Postmodern scholarship suggested a third type of consumer, who manipulates material meanings to communicate. It is this view of the consumer which has implicitly dominated archaeological studies associated with the relationship between material culture and identity. Colin Campbell (2005, p. 24, p. 28) challenges these ideas of consumers beholden to life needs, social constraints or symbolic frameworks by proposing an alternative type of consumer, the 'craft consumer'. Rather than consuming to express an identity, Campbell sees this consumer as acquiring and using goods in a way determined by their identity, which has emerged through ongoing relations with the world around them. They employ commodities not as pre-packaged sets of symbolic meanings, but as raw materials, manipulated to craft personalized objects, as Olsen et al (2012, p. 193) stress, "what an object *is* depends upon how the connections run through it" and the same might be said of the consumer themselves.

As the biographies of people and things are entangled with each other, it is through this mode of consumption that we can see the meanings of things and senses of self as mutually constituted; our pottery and dress accessories do not project an identity, but are enrolled in the process of crafting it, of finding oneself in relation to a specific context (Kopytoff 1986, p. 80, Carrier and Heyman 1997, p. 369). However, just as there are always constraints imposed by the material and the social context in the production of an object, so constraints remain over the ability of people to be entirely creative in their crafting of personal objects. The dichotomy between the autonomous self and the hierarchical social order becomes false when we think in this way, with the contrast being better characterized as a tension.

Two principals have been established about the self. Firstly, the self is in a constant state of becoming, requiring the ongoing formation of social relationships. As Shaw (2009, p. 162) states, the self was "entirely constructed out of relationships and it was hungry for them".<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the self is more than what is projected, because it is formed of social relationships it overflows its porous boundaries. Therefore, it is overly simplistic to conceive of consumption purely as a means of projecting an identity, we must consider how the self emerges in relation to society and how objects mediate this emergence. The process of commercialization disrupted previous ways of navigating the material world, opening new possibilities and allowing people to be perceived as expressing themselves in potentially subversive ways, or to employ objects to this end, as resistant identities were crafted through consumption (e.g. Smith 2009). The concept of the 'social self' calls on us to examine the implications of such expression. As objects become enrolled in social processes, as they become implicated in assemblages of the self, they become meaningful in new ways as people negotiate the world through them – the biographies of people and things cannot be separated and self-making and consumption become two facets of the same process (Kopytoff 1986, p. 76).

### **Linking Commercialization and the Self: Desire**

We have identified that an increasing range of goods were circulating in Medieval Sussex and that

consumption has implications for selfhood, but what was driving people to consume these goods? Studies of consumption have focused on the concept of desire to explain this behaviour. We tend to think in terms of the desire to acquire things; to address a material lacking (what Georg Simmel (1904, p. 67) views as resistance to immediate consumption). This material desire emerges from social relations which generate a freedom to want and acquire goods. However, rather than being the cause of consumption, this material desire is a consequence of commerce.

Here I wish to focus on a different form of desire, that to be social. If we follow Latour (2005), 'being social' includes entangling ourselves with the material. This is not a desire to communicate, as objects are not signs which we erect to tell people about ourselves (intermediaries), but mediate social experience in a manner analogous to Campbell's consideration of 'craft consumption'. It is through the entanglement of ourselves with things that social relationships are constituted. A good example of this is the acquisition of European pottery by indigenous communities for destruction in potlach ceremonies in North America (Marshall and Maas 1997). Here goods were not obtained due to a perceived lack, but through a desire to be social, and developed distinctive meanings as they became entangled in the re-iteration of social relations.

The concept of social desire employed here is derived from Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of desire as the force which drives us and drives society, which is "a ceaseless, flowing and active force that helps us find new [possibilities] that exceed the bounds of our current cultures and social forms" (Neu *et al.* 2009, p. 32). This might be analogous with Shaw's 'hunger' to form social relations in the production of the self and highlights the productive, rather than representational, nature of the social relations that desire brings about. Social desire therefore provides a concept which links commercialization and the self. If the self is formed of social relationships, then the flow of an increasing variety of goods onto the market creates a greater diversity of opportunities to craft the self. By examining patterns of consumption, we can identify different ways in which this new world of goods was absorbed into processes of self-making in Medieval Sussex and the implications of the formation of these relationships.

### **Consumption and the 'Social Self'**

Did commercialization really lead to a situation where people had infinite possibilities to form social relationships? Although commercialization allowed goods to flow more freely and people to exercise greater choice in the market, elements of society persisted. Although monetized to varying degrees, service remained a structuring concept. Choices, perhaps not made specifically as a means of communication, were seen and evaluated by others. The ability to act upon desire was stifled by the flow of money, as although people had relative freedom in the marketplace, they had to remain within their means (indeed one role of later Medieval sumptuary legislation was to remove the stigma associated with not being able to afford items; see Phillips 2007, 29). Whilst it was possible for merchants to become wealthy, most wealth stayed in societies higher echelons through the payment of rents and taxes. The formalization of markets meant that people could only acquire certain goods at specific times in specific places.

Deleuze and Guattari (1972, p. 166) propose that a key function of social structures is to 'code', or channel, flows of goods and desire. As assemblages are de-territorializing, overflowing their boundaries, the coding of desire is about opening certain possibilities for interaction whilst blocking off others. Therefore, commercialization facilitated the formation of increasing relationships with things,

whilst the feudal structure, or more specifically a culture of deference, can be seen as limiting this potential. Shaw (2009, p. 43-5) argues that Medieval society was structured around three key principles - honour, fidelity and hierarchy, and it was against these principles that the 'social self' was judged. People were, therefore, motivated to communicate adherence to these values and had to take care that their actions were not judged harshly against them. It should be stressed that such ideology does not pre-exist action, but forms and persists through it, with the unfolding of assemblages of the self being contingent upon historical (coding) processes, which limit the potential for alternative trajectories of becoming to emerge. We can, therefore, see this persistent ideology as coding flows of goods and desire, making the acquisition of some goods possible whilst limiting the potential for interaction with others. Over the long term we see both the wider circulation of goods but also the persistence of values and the introduction of new structures to control this circulation. Here then we see, through a commercial lens, the tension between individual autonomy and the established feudal order apparent in discussions of selfhood.

We can evaluate the implications of consumption behaviour in this light. Decorated pottery might be considered a suitable medium through which to display adherence to the values of a culture of deference. Although skeuomorphic vessels do exist which ape other materials, pottery can be considered an honest medium, in that it can't be mistaken for something else. It is a cheap, unpretentious and disposable item. Although cheap, decorated pottery offered a useful medium through which people could put into practice the key values of honour through generosity and respecting hierarchy through the order in which drink was taken, as well as demonstrate elements of their identities, such as masculinity, virility or honour through iconography (Cumberpatch 1999, Jervis 2015, p. 170-85). The distinctive distribution of these vessels in towns and at higher status rural sites such as Glottenham suggest that they are associated with contexts where hierarchical structure was particularly important. Their use in townhouses, particularly in ports, suggests that they were used by merchants in socializing and the conducting of business (see also Green 2015, p. 442-3).

Dress, in contrast, is contentious. It is an important means of objectifying the 'social self', of creating a visual impression which betrays how one wishes to be perceived (Shaw 2009, p. 145). In a consideration of the merchant's hat in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Robertson (2008, p. 1073-5) shows how the self is an assemblage, with items of clothing being components which de-territorialize the self into other relations, causing relationships of effect through which inferences about the self are drawn, in a similar manner to that proposed by Shaw. Therefore, care had to be taken to wear clothing appropriate to one's position within the town and it might be such concerns which underlie the sparsity of highly decorative dress items from urban excavations. Although taphonomic processes have undoubtedly removed some objects from circulation, we would expect the small sample of lost objects to include a higher quantity of decorated items if these accounted for the majority in use. Wearing elaborate clothing, whilst allowing the wearer to present an image of success and affluence, might be interpreted by others as an attempt to subvert the key values of Medieval society.

Later Medieval sumptuary laws, although transgressed, highlight that this was a real concern (Crawford 2004, Robertson 2008, p. 1070-1; Howell 2010). These laws are not just representations of opinions, but were participants in action. They are a form of bureaucracy, a means of introducing social structure (DeLanda 1997, p. 31). The laws introduced by Edward III in 1336/7, and re-iterated several times over the following 150 years, had a dual purpose, of preventing excessive expenditure on clothing and reinforcing social hierarchy, through the processes of dressing and the passing on of clothing in wills (Burkholder 2005, p. 143; Crawford 2004). These laws fit into a wider concern with morality and excess, encapsulated in the value system described by Shaw (Richardson 2004a, p. 1). The language



surrounding their use reveals a genuine concern with excess and these laws provide a “lens for viewing the porous boundaries between subjects and objects in the Medieval period” (Robertson 2008, p. 1070). The laws formalize restrictions on the ways in which people can dress, serving to make dress contentious in ways which might not emerge if symbolism was not attached to certain fabrics or items through this process of regulation (see Richardson 2004b, p. 215). These laws are most concerned with the upper tiers of society, with comparatively little space being given to those below the rank of gentleman or burgess (Phillips 2007, p. 25). Analysis of textiles left in wills from London and Canterbury suggest that people rarely dressed above their station (Burkholder 2005, 143). These regulations also applied in the countryside, however similar documentary evidence is not available (although ongoing research into Escheator’s and Coroners records may reveal insights in the future; see Jervis *et al* 2015). Someone’s fidelity might be called into question if they were perceived to be presenting an image which did not correspond to their place in urban society, action which might also be perceived as challenging hierarchy and as a dishonourable challenge to the position of others. Legislation therefore sought to code the meanings of dress as commerce opened new possibilities to engage with clothing and accessories, opportunities which could not be entirely realized due to the consequences of inappropriate display. A brooch from Lewes, decorated with set glass (Fig. 3D), presumably intended to imitate gemstones, may have been valued for apotropaic qualities with glass acting as an effective substitute for gemstones (Swift forthcoming, Standley 2013, p. 90). In light of discussions of the ‘social self’ this might be seen as a fraudulent object, in tension with the value of fidelity; using cheaper materials to create an image of greater wealth, the wearing of gemstones being limited to Knights or esquires and gentlemen (and their wives and daughters) with incomes above £100 (Phillips 2007, p. 33).

This reading of the evidence suggests that the increased circulation of goods had social consequences. These objects introduced the potential to challenge the established social order (indeed, Burkholder 2005, p. 144 suggests that sumptuary laws were most explicitly aimed at merchants and those in positions to acquire ‘new’ wealth) but the persistence of structuring values suppressed such a challenge, the consequences were too great. Therefore, people took care to craft social selves which were not distinctive, however as commerce gradually eroded traditional relations with dress so normative dress became more elaborate. Certain objects, such as decorated pottery, found utility in this context as a means of fashioning a ‘social self’ built upon these values. Care had to be taken when using others, such as dress accessories, not to create an image which might be interpreted as subversive. Therefore, the use of these objects was about more than communication, they became meaningful as they were enrolled in a crafting of the self, into which they became absorbed. Whilst in theory, income was the only barrier to the acquisition and display of goods, the evidence from Sussex and elsewhere suggests that in urban contexts people chose not to invest in decorative metalwork for personal display, except in certain circumstances (Hinton 2005, p. 209). To return to the earlier discussion of theories of consumption, we see different systems of objects emerging through localized interactions. Differences between urban and rural life were articulated through interactions with goods as they were pulled along different trajectories after exiting the commoditization phase of their biography.

### *Coding Flows*

It is proposed, therefore, that the values of service culture coded flows of goods and desire, making certain relationships with the material world possible and restricting others. Although the diversity of goods suggests freedom of choice, the different distribution of goods suggests that this was not an absolute freedom, but that the meanings and implications of these goods were related to the wider social contexts which they inhabited. Apparent differences in the distribution of certain items suggests that

the affordances (see Knappett 2005, p. 52), or 'performance characteristics' (Schiffer 1999) of objects vary between contexts; whilst a certain object may find utility in crafting a 'social self' in one context it may not in another. We can, perhaps, see the emergence of fashion in the spaces created by these affordances, as a product of the relationship between regulated behaviour, which created a concept of 'proper' dress and the choices which commercial development created (see also Robertson 2008, p. 1070-1). As such, fashion is not universal across a society but is contingent upon the ways in which flows of goods are manipulated by strong or weak coding structures.

A useful way of conceptualizing the coding of flows is through the metaphor of textured social space. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 5, p. 552-81) perceive of a smooth social plane across which relationships can form as rhizomes, in a promiscuous and unstructured manner. The introduction of coding, the results of the historical processing of flows, striates space, creating boundaries across which flows cannot move. This striation can be equated to the barriers which Igor Kopytoff (1986, p. 75) sees to objects realizing their commodity potential. We can view commercialization as a process of 'over-coding', which smooths some established striations and forms new ones. We might see this, for example, in the wider circulation of goods following the shift of production and marketing from estate centres to towns in the early Medieval period. In commercialization, we see both the de-coding of flows of goods, with an increasing range and quantity in circulation, and a de-coding of desire, the monetization of social relationships making it possible, within financial limits, to form varied social connections. However, certain striations, the values of service culture, reified in some instances through regulatory bureaucracy, persist.

The archaeological evidence suggests that town and country might be differently textured social spaces. In towns, the ideology of deference appears particularly strong; being aware of one's place in society was essential to the portraying of the 'social self', through dress as much as other mediums such as civic ceremonies. Although cheap dress accessories were not legislated against, their absence could be suggestive of a heightened awareness of the dangers associated with display. Dress was less a medium for social competition and more a cautious activity, demonstrating an awareness of the dangers of display, and the effects that incorporating fancy objects into the self might bring - not an inability to consume but of an ideology of exuberant public consumption being incompatible with the structure and values of urban life in this context, as urban communities sought to maintain dress as a means for neatly categorizing people (see also Richardson 2004a, p. 12-14). Regulation was one of the ways in which urban spaces were textured, giving them what DeLanda (1997, 32) terms hierarchical characteristics, in contrast to the freer flowing 'meshwork' or some rural areas. This competition was undertaken through other media, social drinking for example, through which the aim was not to show off wealth but good character.

In contrast, except for higher status households such as those occupying the Wealden moated sites, comparatively isolated rural households were not investing in highly decorated pottery, but some acquired some decorative items of dress, as seen in the excavated evidence from Bullock Down and suggested by the diversity of finds in the metal detected corpus. Phillips (2007, p. 31) draws on several historical studies to suggest that, whilst transgression of sumptuary legislation was rare, it was more common among the gentry, precisely the kinds of people associated with these households. I propose that these isolated rural settlements inhabited smoother social spaces, in which flows of desire and goods were less restricted by service values. Although service still structured social relationships, the dispersed and isolated nature of the settlement perhaps promoted a stronger sense of an autonomous self. Whereas the over-dressing of servants or peasants in a structured hierarchical context might reflect poorly on the master or lord (Crawford 2004, p. 158) this was potentially not the case where these

hierarchical relations were less clearly defined through un-bonded tenancy. Here the 'social self' was not judged as harshly as in the town. There was greater freedom for the fashioning of a sense of self in a less inhibited way. In short, these objects performed differently in the formation of the rural self to in the formation of the urban self. We can perceive of a relationship here between the increasing singularization of wearers and the singularization of objects, with the choices made by wearers serving to create personal objects and distinctive persons in the manner proposed by Campbell (2005; see also Kopytoff 1986, p. 83). Within towns and at rural fairs farmers may have had an ambiguous identity, living as they did outside of the structures of urban life. Their projection of affluence, perhaps acquired from pastoral agriculture, might have been seen as less subversive in the town than that of townspeople because they were situated outside of the urban community. Furthermore, it was in the interest of these farmers to project an image of affluence, honour and good standing, so that they might be able to secure credit. As such, these 'non-essential' goods might be seen as acquiring a function in this context through the specific social interactions in which these rural landowners partook. A parallel can perhaps be drawn with the emergent urban mercantile class in Winchester, who potentially had a greater freedom to express themselves through dress than those more deeply embedded within urban social structures (Cassels 2013).

Dress accessories and pottery did not just communicate identities, they became absorbed into the self through consumption, a process which had social implications. Exuberant dress could be contentious in the town, with the humbler medium of pottery providing a more suitable means for the negotiation of social relations, which could include gifts in the form of hospitality. Indeed, one reason for the decline of highly decorated pottery after the Black Death might be a shift towards the provision of gifts in cash, as commerce monetized the relationships of trust and hierarchy which were previously mediated through hospitality and gift giving (Woolgar 2001, Howell 2010, p. 207). The striated social space of the town can be contrasted with the smoother social space of the countryside in which the de-coding of goods and desire and the greater circulation of money resulting from the process of commercialization, created new possibilities for consumption and the negotiation of selfhood, in relation to a changing material world. This accords with Deleuze and Guattari's (1972, p. 268-70) argument that within a feudal system instruments of suppression become de-coded and subsumed by flows of goods and desire, through which new codes or structures, such as the class system and property ownership emerge. In the countryside the monetization of service relationships freed flows of desire from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, manifest here in the form of dress accessories and personal adornment, but eventually resulting in the enclosure of land and the emergence of the yeoman class (Johnson 1996, Dyer 2005, p. 134). In the towns and nucleated settlements this process was slower, with these structures not changing until after the Black Death, when population decline offered opportunities for new urban elites, keen to show off their newfound wealth and status, to emerge.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to develop a framework for the examination of the implications of commercialization for Medieval selfhood through archaeological evidence. It was proposed that modern scholarship has challenged the existence of a stark dichotomy between the Middle Ages and modernity, as demonstrated by the presence of commercial elements in the Medieval economy and the ability of people to demonstrate autonomy in defining themselves. Rather, the Middle Ages might be characterized by a tension between increasing commercialization, leading to opportunities for wealth creation and social differentiation through consumption, and a persistent ideology of deference. Drawing upon scholarship on consumption it was argued that objects do not have fixed meanings but, that society, people and objects find meaning in relation to each other. Therefore, objects are not used to project an identity, but

rather are absorbed into the self through the enacting of a form of social desire which is restricted through persistent social structures. Within Sussex, a county shown to be increasingly commercialized through the Middle Ages, this is apparent in the different consumption patterns observed between urban and rural communities.

I have not proposed that Medieval consumption was identical to our own, but argue that there are similarities and that we should not neither seek an early modern consumer revolution nor see the modern economy as directly developing from the Medieval one. Instead, we should consider the implications of commercialization for Medieval society and how these implications came to be articulated differently over time and space. The application of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory and concept of desire, in tandem with Shaw's discussion of the 'social self', has created a framework through which we can tackle the tension between feudal order and commercial freedom. It is clear from archaeological evidence that a wide variety of goods circulated and that a cross section of society had access to them, but that the freedom to consume was unevenly distributed. It is only through the study of the distribution of archaeological objects at a regional scale and from a range of site types, supported by historical information, that we can gain an overview of the ways in which different types of goods flowed through Medieval society. Further interdisciplinary study is required to understand the ways in which these objects were valued and the mechanisms through which they were acquired, for example from the market or as gifts. Although we don't see it clearly in this archaeological sample, monetization introduced a means for inequality and oppression to emerge as people did not have the means to engage fully with the material world, even where social structures might be perceived as weaker (perhaps, for example, in the case of poorer farmsteads in the Weald). Over time, however, commercialization degraded the core values of service culture, seen well in the monetization of gift exchange and concerns over dress, potentially leading to a situation in which a more self-centered material desire emerged, one focused on competition, getting on through the creation of a 'social self' founded on new values, the emergence of fashion and the new forms of class structure.

## Endnotes

- 1: See Phillips (2007) for a summary of English sumptuary legislation.
- 2: Here consumer is broadly defined as somebody who acquires and uses goods from the market (commodities) and is a form of identity emerging from engagement with these objects.
- 3: An approach finding parallels in studies of relational personhood (see Fowler 2004).

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## Captions

### Figure Captions

Fig. 1: Map of towns and markets in Medieval Sussex, and the location of sites mentioned in the text. The Weald is marked in grey and the chalk Downs are the stippled area. Drawing: Author.

Towns: 1: Arundel; 2: Battle; 3: Bramber; 4: Chichester; 5: East Grinstead; 6: Hastings; 7: Horsham; 8: Lewes; 9: Midhurst; 10: Pevensey; 11: Rye; 12: Seaford; 13: Shoreham; 14: Steyning; 15: Winchelsea; 16: Withering; 17: Crawley; 18: Mayfield; 19: Petworth; 20: Robertsbridge; 21: Rotherfield.

Other sites mentioned in the text: 22: Bullock Down; 23: Hangleton; 24: Bramble Bottom; 25: Hurstpierpoint; 26: Ashington; 27: Polegate; 28: Hartfield; 29: Salehurst; 30: Glottenham; 31: Stretham/Henfield.

Fig. 2: A) Example of a Medieval face jug from Pulborough (after Barton 1979). B) Chart showing the proportion of sites by type from which decorated pottery has been recovered.

Fig. 3: Examples of dress accessories from urban sites: A: Gilded annular brooch, Crawley. B: Gilded buckle plate featuring lion passant, Crawley. C: Buckle plate with incised lettering, Lewes. D: Annular brooch with set glass 'gems', Lewes. E-G: Copper alloy buckles, Shoreham. ©UCL Archaeology South-East: Reproduced by kind permission.

Fig. 4: A: 1-9 Copper alloy buckles from Bullock Down. 10-15: Copper alloy buckle plates from Bullock Down. Items 7 and 10 have traces of gilding. (©UCL Archaeology South-East: Reproduced by kind permission). B: Copper alloy objects from Bullock Down. 1: Annular brooch or buckle. 2: Buckle. 3: Strap attachment. 4 & 5: Buckle or strap end plates. 6: Lace end. 7: Sheet fragments. 8: Gilt harness pendant. 9: Brooch. 10-11: Buckles. 12: Harness pendant. (© Sussex Archaeological Society: Reproduced by kind permission). C: Gilded items reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme website (reproduced from <http://www.finds.org.uk> under a Creative Commons Share Alike License)

### Table Captions

Table 1: Buckles and brooches recovered from urban excavations in Sussex.

Table 2: Buckles and brooches recovered from rural excavations in Sussex.

Table 3: Distribution of metal detected finds from Sussex reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme. The distribution of Prehistoric, Roman, Early Medieval and Post-Medieval finds are included for comparison. Data downloaded from [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk) on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2016.