

Rebecca Oakes "New perspectives on mortality in medieval England: a comparison of Winchester and New Colleges (c.1390-1540) with Benedictine monasteries at Canterbury, Westminster and Durham"

The population history of the late medieval period has been notoriously difficult to examine and interpret due to the absence of census data or parish records. Some of the best data has been obtained through analysis of monastic communities, where detailed surviving records provide a means of examining life expectancy and mortality within small population groups. However, the experiences of these monastic groups may not be wholly representative of the wider population. Alternative case studies have long been needed in order to provide a comparison and determine the degree to which these monastic samples might be considered representative. One such sample is the subject of this paper. Winchester College and New College, Oxford were founded in the late fourteenth century to educate boys to become members of the clergy. The excellent surviving records of these two colleges have enabled the scholars to be followed through their education from the age of eleven. Their post-Oxford careers have also been identified, and for the first time individuals have been traced beyond the walls of a single institution into a range of different life experiences. This paper will present mortality data and life expectancy levels for those 2,692 individuals enrolled as scholars at these two colleges in the period 1393 – 1540, the largest such sample to date. These findings will be compared with the data obtained for the monastic communities. The paper will examine the experiences of the individuals within these different sample groups, and the impact of these different experiences on interpretations of life expectancy in the late medieval period.