"Capturing and visualising data from medieval charters about people and their lived environment. Introducing a new 'Digging into Data' research project: ChartEx."

ChartEx (Charter Excavator) is a new project funded under the Digging into Data Challenge (2012-13), which will develop new ways of exploring the full text content of digital historical records.

The project will demonstrate its approach using medieval charters which survive in abundance from the 12th to the 16th centuries and are one of the richest sources for studying communities in the past. Charters (title deeds) record legal transactions of property of all kinds: houses, workshops, fields and meadows. Long before records such as censuses or birth registers existed charters were, and still are, the major resource for researching people and their lived environments. Charters provide detailed evidence of how and why towns and villages have developed physically over time. The rich descriptions they contain help us to track the ownership of individual parcels of land over centuries and connect them to the histories of the people who lived there. Charters thus provide the essential data for understanding historic built environments and their historical contexts. They can help us understand how we connect to the places and communities in which we live and how we can conserve or develop them for the future.

The ChartEx consortium is an innovative partnership between historians, archivists, and experts in computer science and artificial intelligence from Canada, the Netherlands, the UK and the US. The new ChartEx tools will be developed from a combination of Natural Language Processing, Data Mining and Instrumental Interaction. The developed service will enable researchers of all kinds to interpret the data they find through rich visualisations using the ChartEx workbench. They will enable users to really dig into the content of these records, in order to capture their rich descriptions of places and people, and to go far beyond current digital catalogues which restrict searches to a few key facts about each document (the 'metadata').

This short presentation will provide an overview of the aims and methods of the project and invite feedback from participants in the conference.

Dr Sarah Rees Jones, Department of History (Centre for Medieval Studies), University of York

Professor Helen Petrie, Human Computer Interaction Research Group, Computer Science, University of York

 Dr Christopher Power, Human Computer Interaction Research Group, Computer Science, University of York