

Lecture Reports

Brian Little

Thursday 9th October 2003.

Place Names, Landscape and Settlement in the Banbury Region – Deborah Hayter.

This was the first meeting held at the Museum and some sixty members were richly rewarded with an excellent lecture.

Pioneers in the study of place names were linguists who may well have been attracted by the developments in language over the very long Anglo-Saxon period. Today we need to look to historians like Deborah Hayter who have concentrated on landscape analysis.

Her presentation revolved around a series of well-drawn maps on which were plotted places whose origins can be examined, in relation to important suffixes like 'tun' and 'wic'. She revealed that 'tuns' are abundant in the Banbury region and include a proportion of personal names such as Alkerton.

Cross-sections as well as maps demonstrated that there was great awareness of landscape advantages from very early times. This is manifested in topographical names even if such locations did not have associated settlement. It is also revealed by investigations of Anglo-Saxon responses to river valley areas. Here the attraction was land already cleared for farming.

Woodland areas were highlighted on several of her maps. In some cases these have developed into managed resource sub-regions and overall have persisted in the vicinity of boundaries. Deborah referred to several examples of woodland-related settlements in Northamptonshire. Sulgrave had its specific coppices and Evershaw was linked to woodland inhabited by boars.

Shining through the whole lecture was that familiar Banbury area theme of the marginality of this part of the country. An important consequence is a diversity of place name origins which is a major reason why the study of place names, landscape and settlement is such a compelling one.

Thursday 13th November 2003.

Our Canal in Oxfordshire: its construction, its wealth and its people – Hugh Compton

This lengthy and well-illustrated talk was all about people and places. The former included prime movers such as Brindley, Newdigate and Durell but also lesser known figures such as the wharfingers concerned the commercial contents of boats and the workers who actually dug out the canal in the first place. This involved a wide range of features like bridges and the inter-connecting tramways, which came from ironstone quarrying locations.