

archaeological digs were possible but some 400 test pits one metre square were dug and in one of these the remains of a skinned dog with its claws removed was found. This important discovery is the first archaeological evidence of disablement of dogs as required by forest law. Documentary evidence such as manorial accounts, manorial courts, rolls, terriers and surveys has yielded sufficient evidence to reconstruct the village landscapes around 1500.

The second half of the lecture focussed on a chronological analysis starting in pre-history and continuing through to the sixteenth century and beyond. Palaeoecological analysis showed that as early as 7500 B.C. woodland was giving way to grassland as Mesolithic nomadic groups cleared patches of woodland to make hunting more efficient. By 2500 B.C. there was more grassland than wood. Archaeological evidence from the Iron Age pointed to small groups of two or three round houses in enclosures, probably housing extended family units, and a previously unrecorded hill fort was identified at Whittlebury. Abandoned grain storage pits provided the first evidence of cereal production.

The Romans built their villas mainly on either side of the two Roman roads that cross the area. Examples were found in the modern parishes of Deanshanger, Whittlebury and Wicken but much more common were the farmsteads scattered throughout the area. They were set in an open landscape with linked arable fields and only a few trees to provide fuel. After the Romans the population declined and the woodland regenerated. The lack of pottery densities in the period up to 850 A.D. suggest that nuclear forces in rural settlement did not assert themselves until the later Saxon period.

Domesday Britain in the area studied was characterised by a lot of woodland and the evolution of farmstead villages whose open fields could extend for as far as a mile. To solve the distance problem hamlets grew up away from the main village with their own blocks of land such as those around Silverstone. The establishment of a royal forest stopped expansion in some areas.

The Lillingstones have been the subject of a micro-study backed up by historical evidence that reveal a growing population until the end of the thirteenth century followed by shrinkage during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries partly due to migration, open fields enclosed for sheep or, in the case of Stowe a little later, removal to make way for a deer park. Although those engaged on the study may have revealed a chronology right through to conclusion in some villages, it was not all bad news. Open field declined in the fifteenth century but did not disappear until the Parliamentary enclosures. Moreover the woodlands provided some job opportunities such as charcoal burning, bird catching, carpentry and fuel for potteries.

Mid-summer 2005 is the current time for concluding this project but those involved in this multi-disciplinary way of looking at the landscape hope for a second period of investigation. Only in this way can some of the remaining questions be answered.