

enhanced its appeal beyond the Conservative ranks. Partly this was due to the payment of allowances for out-of-pocket expenses and televised sessions giving opportunity of wider exposure. The House became more and more the only opposition to the Thatcher government as lobby groups, especially Trade Unions, started using the Lords.

During the supremacy of Tony Blair, Labour representation grew and the era of the hereditary peers waned. The House of Lords Act 1999 removed the automatic right of most hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House. By an amendment however 92 such peers were allowed to remain until complete reformation of the Lords. Further legislation in the form of the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005 deprived the Second Chamber of its judicial function and set up a new, independent supreme court to come into being in October 2009.

In conclusion Paul Hayter indicated that further reform can be expected, but by this stage there was already a host of issues on which questions could be framed. I doubt if he was disappointed by the lively session that ended the evening.

Thursday 13th November 2008

English Sporting Landscapes – Dr Trevor Rowley

There is no doubting the fact that here is a topic that has attracted the attention of people with a wide range of interests from the strictly academic to the level of general appeal. The work of W.G. Hoskins and responses by English Heritage reflect something of this trend, which was clear from the breadth of images used to illustrate the lecture. These reminded us that hunting was evident in the Roman world and highlighted in the Bayeux Tapestry. Amongst the animals involved were deer for the larder associated with parks and often linked to castles. The heyday for this type of park was the 12th and 13th centuries but less so in North Oxfordshire and more readily in the uplands such as the Chilterns. There was even deer coursing in some areas, most notably Windsor Park. By contrast fox hunting was late in developing, as was Point-to-Point, which itself preceded the activities of most racecourses.

Somewhat to the surprise of some members of his audience Trevor Rowley diversified his lecture to include cricket and football and focussed on how these had evolved in different locations. Cricket was viewed within the context of country house life whereas football emerged from a less sedate background, namely Shrove Tuesday tussles between sides prepared to fight. A classic example was the Shrovetide Heroes of 1910 at Chester le Street. The subsequent illustrations traced the evolution of Football League teams and culminated in the most recent phase in their histories, namely relocation. Housing landscapes were shown to be strongly linked to several sports and not merely football.

Overall this was a lecture that revealed an astounding range of sporting landscapes. However it lost something of its appeal because of the minimal application to North Oxfordshire and adjacent parts of neighbouring counties.