

## Lecture Reports

*Brian Little*

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

***The Hunting Transition: from Deer-hunting to Foxhunting***

Mandy de Belin

This was a presentation with a strong regional focus, Northamptonshire and East Leicestershire, appropriately termed the ‘Brush Shires’. The purpose of the talk was to discover the factors governing the popularity of the two forms of hunting as well as the reasons for the transition from the pursuit of deer to that of the fox over the period from 1500 to 1850.

One major supposition has been that landscape changes have been of paramount importance. These have included woodland losses and developments in agriculture that impacted on habitats for deer. By the time of the Civil War there was also a perceived crisis in the size of the deer population.

Part of Mandy de Berlin’s talk was devoted to different styles in deer hunting. These included the use of dogs, the deployment of bows and arrows and the inclusion of sufficient men on foot to drive the deer. In certain instances hunting took the form of coursing with greyhounds.

By the nineteenth century although the fox had largely replaced the deer as the object of each hunt, old allegiances to the pursuit of red deer stags still persisted.

The speaker devoted a major part of her presentation to variations in fox hunting. These embraced control of hounds, horsemanship with an emphasis on galloping as well as a stress on the pursuit aspect.

As in the earlier period of deer hunting dominance, her research focussed on landscape changes especially within the Royal Forests such as Rockingham and Whittlewood. The eighteenth century enclosure movement was also significant in the way it led to the use of fencing and hedges giving the opportunity for an exhilarating ride with jumps. Other agricultural developments resulted in fields with faster surfaces but at the same time a shortage of foxes to chase was a growing concern.

Mandy de Belin’s overall conclusion was that the transition from deer hunting to fox hunting was less to do with numbers and more about horse riding techniques linked particularly to the emergence of a squirearchy.

### **Email List**

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