

Historical Ecology

The Blyth Valley and Southwold SWT Wildlife group began the autumn programme with a talk on Historical Ecology from Adrian Knowles, who has worked in this field for many years.

The subject looks at the many ways that humankind has altered the landscape over hundreds and thousands of years. We looked at how records of land management inform what we see today, from the extraordinary Domesday Book, through to Tithe records, and the Ordnance Survey maps, originally recorded by the military in case of a Napoleonic attack.

The ancient names of fields, woods and buildings frequently give clues about their surroundings and use. Parish boundaries are often irregular, following hedges and woods. Planned, straight line fields are usually more recent than older, irregular boundaries – and yet Iron Age field systems reveal straight lined edges, so caution is always needed in assessment. Ancient woods will often be carpeted in bluebells, primroses and other flora, and have a range of particularly interesting slugs. A system of ditches and banks might be used, perhaps with hawthorn hedges on banks to keep animals out of coppicing woods, or ditches to keep animals, such as pigs, inside.

It was a fascinating view of land use and change over time., and an incentive to research our local area.

Our next meeting is on Thursday, October 13th at 7.30pm, Southwold Arts Centre, IP18 6JP, when Liz Cutting will be speaking about Arctic and Sub-Arctic Wildlife. Tickets cost £3 (rising to £4 in January) to include refreshment. Under25's are free, and all are welcome.

Penny Mansfield

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