The Woods of South-east Essex

The Ancient Woodlands of England.

Oliver Rackham. 1986. Rochford District Council, Essex.

Earliest map for woods of all SE Essex – Chapman & Andre. 1772-4.

Ancient Woods defined then = all primary woods and those secondary woods established before 1772. Versus recent woods.

Woodbanks – massive banks and ditches with bank on wood side. Pollards on banks. Short pollards = stubs.

Forests were grubbed out. Ancient woods = wildwoods least worth grubbing out.

Archaeology of different features

Building timbers and the medieval uses of woods.

Main use of wood – renewable source of energy not timber;

Wood used in carpentry – round, minimum size needed; whole tree; rounded;

Almost no relationship between isolation and number of species; no systematic effect on how many species; size makes more difference – 1.8 x species in 40 acre vs 4 acre – not much;

55 ancient forest species in E England

Giant stool of chestnut; stools >300 years; hornbeam to 10 feet or more;

Coppicing plants – species that flourish when wood is cut; not necessarily visible all of the time; broom survives as buried seed; many show up excellently in strips under electricity cables in areas coppied frequently to keep growth low;

Need to restore woodland grasslands; "place for emptying dogs"

Many woods have an understory of brambles

Woods long neglected with too many timber trees, too long between coppices; excessive shade; plants destroyed by horses, cattle; loss of plants due to shade;

Threat of agriculture and housing;

Gradually learning how to manage these – knowledge came slowly; public amenity' avoided the "Curse of Too Much Money" – over restoration and excessive tidiness;

"Woods have a life of their own; men have been given the power to preserve or destroy them, but have little control over how they develop."

Badgers in some.

Some Illustrations

Photos

Maps of same region showing different features on each

Leaf shapes

Ancient maps reproduced

Cartoony maps hand-drawn to show details

Timeline of forest cover showing % with % lost to agriculture, % lost to development; % recently reformed.

Old Air Photos