

**'From Ostriches & Buzzards to Royal Woodland Pastures' - (Jason Peters)**  
**(Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2014)**

Jason gave an unusual, fascinating talk on the species and habitats of historic Huntingdonshire as evidenced from the historic documentary and cartographic record.

Jason was brought up locally and his family farmed Sapley Park Farm for several generations. He attended school at Hinchingsbrooke and is now a Landscape Architect. The research presented at this talk has formed the basis of his advanced diploma which took two years of research and one year to draw up the maps. From understanding the origin of place names, he has built up a picture of Huntingdonshire from the Middle Ages.

Huntingdonshire once had a royal forest called The Royal Forest of Sapley, also known as Sapley Park. There were forests of Weybridge, Harthay, Sapley, Spaldwick and Agden and forty to fifty percent of Huntingdonshire was under forest law in 1301. So, what is the definition of a forest? Well, the correct definition is “any area of land under jurisdiction of forest law”. Forest law is a complex and dynamic set of laws which designates who has permission to hunt which type of animals. It also covers licenses for tanners (leather), “pannage” (nuts), “wood bote” (windfall wood), “forage” (rights of way), “common rights” (grazing) and even rights to hunt small birds like larks. Forest law was decided by the monarch, who decided how much of his forest was under forest law. At the top of the list of animals were red deer which could only be hunted by the monarch: they were “the beast of the royal forest”. In non-royal forests (known as the “Chase”), roe deer were “the beast of the forest” and fallow deer were the “beast of the park”. These other types of deer were introduced so that common people could eat venison (not just the monarch).

There are many words which today we are not aware of the origin. For example, ridge meant the boundary of a forest and ridge way later came to mean road and hay originally meant a “game reserve for hunting game”. The origin of the word meadow (“meade”) comes from the fact that a meadow is important for honey. And why are ostriches in the title of the talk? – well, this was the old name for bustards which were hunted by “hawkers” with goshawks.

Having completed his research, Jason proposed the theory that the typical English estate is modelled on the Anglo-Saxon forest as they have the same terms: lodges on the edge of the estate, driveways, chases, a gatehouse and hedging (“hay edge”).

Since completing his diploma, Jason has worked in Poland, on The Lagoons Project in Dubai and is currently restoring Forty Hall Estate in Enfield following a £1.2 million grant. Maps of Huntingdonshire drawn up by Jason at different times since the Middle Ages are available at his website: <http://posthumousplans.co.uk>.