

The Making of St Leonard's Forest: A New Landscape History

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I Introduction

To assume that the history of all forests and woods follows the same manner is a fallacy. As Chatwin and Gardiner asserted in their 2005 article in *Landscape History*, each forest and woodland requires careful, contextual study. Even at the regional and county level, they argued, such differences could be profound. Take the example of the Sussex Wealden ridge. Worth Forest, which included Tilgate Forest, was contiguous with St Leonard's Forest and although the geology was similar, aspects of the social and economic development were different, such as the early establishment of Worth Priory in this Forest, near the Surrey border and village of Crawley. Ashdown Forest is geologically and topographically different in that it is on sand and silt and is the highest part of the weald with higher rainfall and poorer drainage than the other forest ridge forests. Unlike St Leonard's Forest, it was a Royal hunting forest then a free chase, tenants of the manors of Duddleswell and Maresfield on the forest fringe holding commoners' rights therein, which as Brian Short has shown were subject to both attempts to delimit and spirited defence. Understanding the ways in which individual forests emerged and developed is therefore vital not only in better understanding our regional history but also in writing more nuanced forest histories.¹

The particular focus of this paper is the aforementioned St Leonard's Forest, a focus and subject that hitherto has been remarkably little

1 D. Chatwin and M. Gardiner (2005), 'Rethinking the early medieval settlement of woodlands: evidence from the western Sussex Weald', *Landscape History* 27 (2005), 31–49; P. Brandon, *The Kent and Sussex Weald* (Chichester, 2003), pp. 22–3, 203; B. Short (ed.), *The Ashdown Forest Dispute 1876–1882* (Lewes, 1997), p. 80.

studied notwithstanding the proximity of London and the south coast and the relatively high local population density. Indeed, the paucity of research into St Leonard's Forest is surprising since Legge, writing in his chapter on forestry for the Victoria County History in 1907, assessed it one of the most important of Sussex forests.² Such a judgement comes, at least in part, from the fact that due to the forest's natural resources of wood, water and iron ore, it was the site of an important and valuable iron industry in the 16th and early 17th centuries.³

Beyond academic concerns, it is important to note that our lack of knowledge of the history of St Leonard's Forest also has important implications for the wider community, the specificities of the history of the forest easily ignored or at best undervalued. As a greater emphasis is increasingly placed on the need to build resilient, sustainable communities, so place-based knowledge of how things were done in the past, how people earned a living from their local environment and its resources, what worked and the skills associated with their use, is invaluable in informing the present. This knowledge also has important implications for planning policy, especially so given that forests and woodlands are under continuing threat of being mismanaged or developed. For example, with regard to St Leonards Forest, new knowledge of the archaeological remains of pillow mounds – associated with rabbit husbandry – has profound ramifications for how the land should be managed by the Forestry Commission, while a greater knowledge of the history of the important gardens of the forest might also impact upon future planning decisions.

The approach taken is rooted in the landscape history method, using not just the written archive as evidence but the actual material landscape itself. Drawing on geography, geology, archaeology and ecology, as well as economic and social history, the focus allows us to better understand both the influence of human activity on the landscape and the corresponding influence of the landscape, ecology, topography and geology on human activity. It is a holistic approach that illuminates the local history of a community set in its landscape and alert to its sense of place. Arguably one can see the intellectual genesis of the approach first in poet and writer Edward Thomas's *The*

² W. H. Legge, 'Forestry', in W. Page (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of Sussex*, vol. II (London, 1973) [hereafter VCH, vol. II], p. 306.

³ H. Cleere and D. Crossley, *The Iron Industry of the Weald* (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 16–17, 27; J. Hodgkinson, *The Wealden Iron Industry* (Stroud, 2008), pp. 50, 56, 110; M. Zell, *Industry in the Countryside, Wealden Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 126–34.

South Country (1909). Thomas longed for a history of England written from the point of view of one parish, or town, 'to begin with a geological picture... giving life to past times in such matters as the line made by the edge of an old wood with the cultivated land, the shapes of the fields with their borders of streams or hedge or copse or pond or wall or road'.⁴ It was not until the 1950s that W. G. Hoskins popularised this approach in his influential *The Making of the English Landscape*.⁵ Since then, the approach has been widely taken. Mick Aston's *Interpreting the Landscape*, first published in 1985 and republished in 1997, and Richard Muir's 2000 revision of his 1981 book *The New Reading the Landscape* both speak to the persistence and importance of the method. More recent work by Tom Williamson has highlighted the importance of finely grained local landscape studies by way of better understanding regional and national dynamics, while Langton and Jones have shown both the applicability of the approach to forest history as well as the importance of forests as critical historical foci themselves. Further, the recent upsurge in nature writing by those such as Richard Mabey, Roger Deakin and Robert MacFarlane, as well as the 'rediscovery' of earlier writers such as Nan Shepherd, attest to an interest in landscape history beyond the academy.⁶

The main scope of this paper is focused on the 18th and 19th centuries but it also looks further back, by way of context, to understand how the forest appeared in the early 18th century. The paper begins, therefore, with the geological context, approximation of boundaries and early control of the forest as a private chase, given to the Priory at Sele, and later Magdalen College, Oxford, albeit remaining in the ownership of the Dukes of Norfolk. The next section looks at the use and abuse of resources, most importantly the iron industry for which the forest is still remembered, but also timber, a very valuable resource for shipbuilding and hence defence in the late medieval period. Over-exploitation of timber led to a much depleted and barren forest, this analysed in the following in the context of the establishment of rabbit

- 4 E. Thomas, *The South Country* (Wimborne Minster, 2009, 1st published 1909) p. 134.
- 5 W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (Harmondsworth, 1985, 1st published 1955).
- 6 M. Aston, *Interpreting the Landscape: Landscape Archaeology and Local History* (London, 1997); R. Muir, *The New Reading the Landscape: Fieldwork in Landscape History* (Exeter, 2000); T. Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes, Settlement, Society, Environment* (Oxford, 2003); Idem., *Rabbits, Warrens and Archaeology* (Stroud, 2007); J. Langton and G. Jones, *Forests and Chases of England and Wales c. 1500 to c. 1850: Towards a Survey and Analysis* (Oxford, 2005).

warrens on the poor heathland soils. The final substantive section goes on to examine the way in which the forest became a desirable location for the 'picturesque' estates of wealthy merchants with attendant changes in social regulation and structure.

II St Leonard's Forest: Context

St Leonard's Forest lies to the east of Horsham town and south west of Crawley, being the most western forest on the Wealden Forest Ridge which includes the forests of Worth and Ashdown, and which at one time may have been contiguous forest. Horsham is situated on the western edge of the High Weald and so the forest falls completely within this region, with the underlying geology of St Leonard's Forest being mainly Upper Tunbridge Wells Sand with ironstone and clay outcrops. The forest is a watershed not only for the Arun and the Mole to the north, but for the headwaters of the Adur and Ouse to the south. The sands and clays give rise to a very distinctive forest landscape of high flat forest ridges with heathland and sparse woodland, cut through by the headwaters forming deep wooded ravines or 'ghylls'.

Wooldridge and Goldring describe the High Weald as a country of ridges rather than valleys, with roads and settlements being confined to the forest ridges due to the geology of steeply cut ghylls though the sandstone, which formed wet wooded valley floors which were difficult to navigate or settle. In St Leonards Forest there are also areas of flat ground, plains of sandstone, for example the extensive Shelley Plain to the south east, and smaller areas such as around Stonelodge Plain, Colgate and Forest Grange. It was these areas that were more suited to agricultural purposes, the higher ridges being heathland and poorer soil.⁷

An initial difficulty in researching the landscape history of St Leonard's Forest was in identifying a boundary to the Forest. There was no ancient pale, and the modern Forest has been much reduced. However, in their research into the forests of England and Wales, Langton and Jones had delineated an approximated inner core of St Leonard's Forest (see Figure 1).⁸ In its greatest extent it would have included the parks of Knepp, Sedgwick, Chesworth, Shelley and Beaubush, all disparked at the beginning of the 17th century. The

7 S.W. Wooldridge and F. Goldring, *The Weald* (London, 1960), pp. 88–9.

8 St John's College, Oxford website, *Forests and Chases of England and Wales c. 1000 to c. 1550*, <http://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/forests> (accessed 1 September 2016).

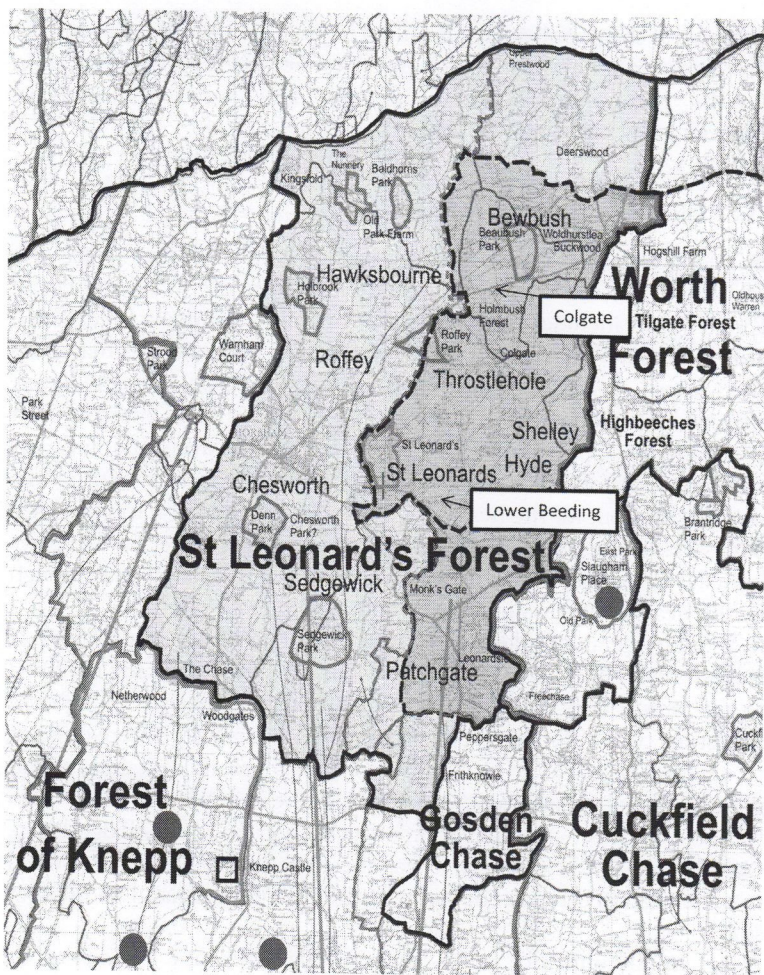


Figure 1: Map created from two OS tiles 182 and 170 by Langton and Jones at <http://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/forests/ForestMapTileSheet170/182.html> and adjusted by author with the assistance of Dr Steve Morris to indicate the boundary, the core of the Forest (darker shading), and likely greatest extent of the Forest (lighter shading)

smaller, darker shaded area shows the core forest which was the focus of this study, which today is about a quarter of that size again. This inner core boundary could therefore be used to research the three main estates in the forest which became five in the 19th century, plus the two main villages of Colgate and Lower Beeding. In addition to difficulties with

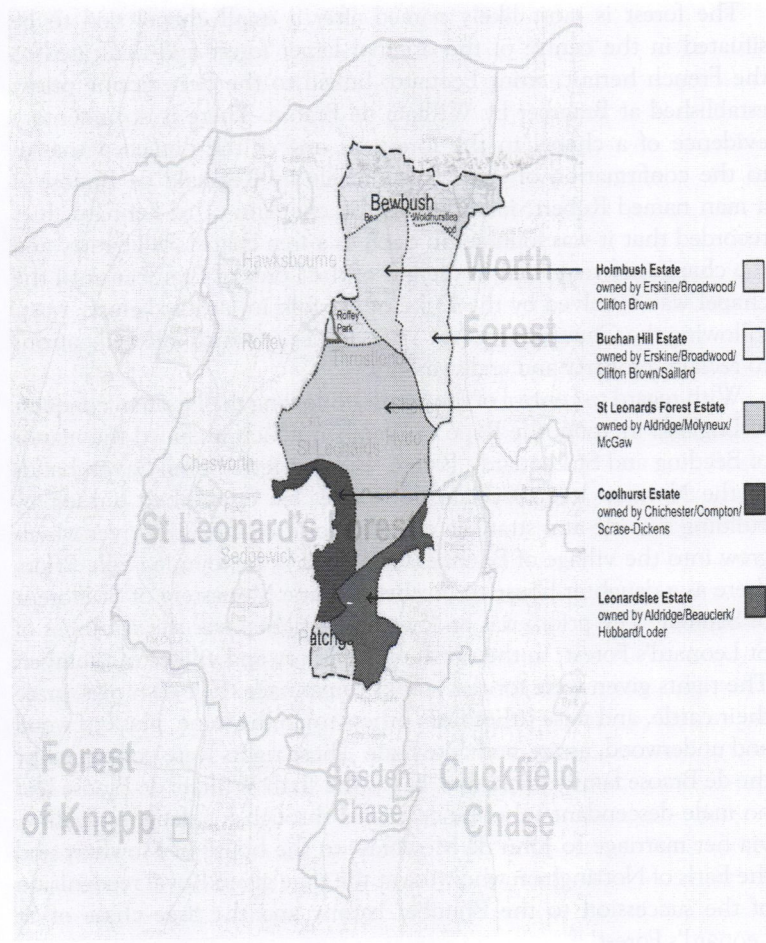


Figure 2: Approximate position of the five estates within the core of St Leonard's Forest. Boundaries changed over time and with ownership, so this is indicative rather than actual. The areas to the north, west and south (marked Bewbush, Roffey Park and Patchgate) probably fell outside these particular estates

the boundaries of the forest, the exact boundaries of the estates have also been hard to pin down without estate maps; only the later maps attached to sales particulars and the 1910–15 Land Valuation Survey maps have been useful in this. Hence the map at Figure 2 is very much indicative only of the estate boundaries and not exact, with small areas north, west and south probably falling outside these particular estates.

The forest is most likely named after a small chapel said to be situated in the centre of the original larger forest and dedicated to the French hermit, Saint Leonard, linked to the Benedictine priory established at Bramber by William de Braose. There is documentary evidence of a chapel in the forest, as one of the named witnesses to the confirmation of the Priory of Sele by Reginald de Braiose is a man named Robert, identified as the chaplain of St Leonard. It is recorded that it was founded in 1208 as a free chapel, or chantry and the chaplaincy remained in the gift of the Lords of Bramber until the chapel was dissolved by the Duke of Norfolk in, or just before, 1547, following the Chantries Acts of 1545 and 1547 which allowed patrons to reclaim property and endowments.⁹

With regard to control of the Forest, following the Norman conquest of England in 1066, the Rape of Bramber, which included the manor of Beeding and St Leonard's Forest, was transferred from Saxon hands to the Norman lord, William de Braose. He established himself by building a castle at a strategic crossing point of the Adur river which grew into the village of Bramber, and in 1075 he founded Sele Priory there as a daughter house to the Benedictine Monastery of St Florent of Saumur. The priory was endowed with rights over the resources of St Leonard's Forest, to the north of the priory and village of Bramber. The rights given were for the monks to pannage their own pigs, graze their cattle, and raise tithes from others to do the same, plus cut wood and underwood, assart, and take foals. These rights were continued by the de Braose family successors, but as the sixth William de Braose had no male descendant inheritance passed through his daughter, Aline, via her marriage to John de Mowbray, to the house of Mowbray and the Earls of Nottingham who were at the time given Royal recognition of the succession to the Bramber barony and the 'free chase of St Leonard's Forest'.¹⁰

Links with the monastery in France were severed in 1396 by Richard II and although independent, the priory was poor and declining, so, in 1459, John, 1st Duke of Norfolk, a descendant of the Mowbrays and their estates, gave leave for it to be made over to the Bishop of Winchester and his newly founded college at Oxford, Magdalen. Tithes from the forest were now paid to Magdalen College, whilst they

9 T. P. Hudson, 'Bramber Rape: Burbeach Hundred, Lower Beeding', in T. P. Hudson (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of Sussex*, vol. VI, pt. 3 (Oxford, 1987), p. 26. Hereafter, VCH, vol. VI.3. Also see: J. Thirsk, *The Rural Economy of England: Collected Essays* (London, 1984), p. 20.

10 VCH, vol. II, pp. 306-7.

took on the responsibility of upkeep, appointment and wages of the clergy. Ownership of the estate remained with the Dukes of Norfolk until the accession of Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch in 1485. The King gave the Lordship and Rape of Bramber, including the Forest, to Thomas, Lord De la Warr, who ten years later sold it back to Thomas, Earl of Surrey and 2nd Duke of Norfolk. However, his son, Thomas the 3rd Duke of Norfolk became the subject of a Bill of Attainder, cancelling all his rights to his property, and so the Rape, Manor and the Forest was granted instead to Thomas Seymour, a political rival with whom he had been keen to form an alliance by offering him his daughter in marriage, an offer refused.¹¹

Thomas Seymour, Baron Seymour of Sudeley and Lord High Admiral, of Wolf Hall in Wiltshire, was a man whose ambitions rose with that of his family. One of his four sisters was Jane Seymour, Henry VIII's third wife, and his elder brother, Edward, became Duke of Somerset, Lord Protector and Governor of the young King Edward VI. However he plotted and schemed for more power, eventually he was attained, examined and executed for treason on 20 March 1549. Following Seymour's execution the Crown granted the Forest in 1553 to Sir Thomas Wrothe although by 1561 it was back with Thomas, 4th Duke of Norfolk, but as he was in debt to the Crown he offered to mortgage to the Queen the manors of Sedgwick, Chesworth, Beaubush and Shelley, with St Leonard's Forest and the ironworks. This was agreed but 11 years later in 1572 the 4th Duke himself was attained and executed, and so his manors and Forest were forfeited and came fully into the possession of the Crown. At this time, in the mid-16th century, control and use of the Forest becomes much more complex as the Crown issued numerous leases that were then sublet.¹²

III Resources: Iron and Timber

In 1631 the Crown granted the reversion of the Forest in trust to Sir William Russell who three years later conveyed his interest to Sir Richard Weston, and his sons John and George. Sir Richard Weston was an advocate of agricultural improvement bringing back to England techniques he had seen on the Continent, the family were still in

¹¹ Ibid., p. 308; and G.W. Bernard, 'Seymour, Thomas, Baron Seymour of Sudeley (b. in or before 1509, d. 1549)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25181> (accessed 1 September 2016).

¹² VCH, vol. II, pp. 308–9.

control of the forest in 1659. In the north and east of the forest the Middleton family were in possession of Shelley and Bewbush, having had a lease granted from Sir Thomas Sherley of Wiston. During the Commonwealth, Thomas Middleton was MP for Horsham but was suspected of being involved in the Royalist uprising at Horsham in 1648. Duly his estates were sequestered, and along with all other iron workings belonging to the crown and royalists, the St Leonard's Forest iron forges were destroyed by Parliamentary forces under Sir William Waller.¹³ On the Restoration, Middleton's estates were granted to Edward Montagu, 1st Earl of Sandwich, while Charles II conferred the Forest of St Leonard itself on his physician, Sir Edward Greaves. On Greaves' death in 1680, the forest descended via his daughter, Mary Calfe, to her nephew, Captain William Powlett, and hence to his cousin John Aldridge of St Martins in the Field, London, and then to his brother, Abel Aldridge in 1746. The central portion of the forest remained with that family until the last decade of the 19th century.¹⁴

Considering the natural resources of St Leonard's Forest and how their use shaped the landscape of the forest, one has to begin with iron. There is archival evidence from the 13th and 14th century for bloomery furnaces at Roffey,¹⁵ in the north of the Forest, and archaeological excavation confirms that there was a large site making arrows (both heads and shafts) and horseshoes.¹⁶ As Cleere and Crossley note, in the western Weald iron ore was dug out of mine pits by digging a shaft of about 1.8–2.4 metres diameter down from the surface ground into the iron bearing rock, up to a depth of 12 metres, and then widening out along the seam of ore. This must have been a dangerous business with the likelihood of dug out shafts collapsing, but a series of pits were dug, with the new pit filled with the spoil from the previous one. Horsham Parish burials for 10 July 1613 relate that mine digger William Atkins was killed in a mine pit which gives credence to the

13 E. Straker, *Wealden Iron* (Newton Abbot, 1969, 1st published 1931), p. 459; M.A. Lower, 'Historical and archaeological notices of the iron works of the County of Sussex', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 2 (1849), 169–220.

14 VCH, vol. VI.3, p. 17; J. Comber, *Sussex Genealogies*, Horsham Centre (Cambridge, 1931), pp. 8–12.

15 Bloomery furnaces were the precursors of blast furnaces, reaching lower temperatures and producing smaller quantities of iron at the base of each furnace. The 'bloom' of iron produced was hammered to remove the slag, or impurities, and so the presence of slag in an archaeological dig indicates iron workings. From the 14th century water power was introduced to drive the bellows and hammers.

16 J. Hodgkinson, *The Wealden Iron Industry* (Stroud, 2008), p. 110.

undergo another treatment: fining. This required the slabs of raw cast iron, called pigs or sows, to be melted and hammered, thus reducing the amount of carbon in the iron. The wrought iron was then transferred to another hearth, a chafery, where it was hammered using a heavy water powered hammer into a bar ready for sale.

Most damaging for the survival of St Leonard's Forest as a woodland landscape with valuable timber was the ownership of the Forest passing from the 4th Duke of Norfolk to the Crown. In 1561 the Duke offered the Forest and parks to the Crown in exchange for his debts and stated that there were 'plenty of woods for fortifications or ships'. Once the Crown had full control it was then leased and sublet, Sir John Caryll obtaining the greater part including Sedgwick and Chesworth, and then sublet further, although Caryll retained his right to hawk, hunt, fish and obtain deer. Sir William Ford was a lessee who reserved for himself the 'great timber' but sublet further to John Gratwick. The effect of this on the forest was the over exploitation of resources through a lack of clear governance and regulation. Legge gives an example of the enormous destruction of the forest by stating the fact that in 1578 one lessee, Sir Thomas Sherley of Wiston, obtained a warrant to take 2,000 cords of beech, birch and oak a year, but by 1597 he had taken 75,016 and a half cords, or 180,000 tons of wood (a cord being 128 cubic feet or 2.4 tons) – twice the amount he was authorised to take. Another lessee, Edward Caryll, had taken 8,580 cords over this time, making the total loss from these two lessees of over 10,000,000 cubic feet of wood, or over 2,000,000 tons in this period alone.¹⁹

Jack suggests that after the Duke of Norfolk's demise there is no clear evidence of the forest courts meeting in order to oversee the granting of warrants and prosecution of transgressors. Thus it appears that Royal Court warrants were issued without any reference to the resources available or good management of the forest environment. Protests were raised by the keepers and rangers particularly with regard to the effect this deforestation was having on the game and their ability to preserve it. The Deputy Surveyor of Wood, Roger Taverner, surveyed St Leonard's Forest sometime between 1566 and 1572, around the time of the Duke's attainder, and Jack quotes him as assessing the forest to be well supplied with desirable timber, oak and beech of great age. However, he warned against the taking of timber from the 'plumps' or clumps of trees, which grew on the exposed slopes, as this would allow

19 VCH, vol. II, p. 309. Legge does in fact say a loss of over a million cubic feet of wood but the figures he provides gives a total of over ten million rather than a million.

the wind to blow through and thus damage the trees and erode the soil. He also warned against the taking of the undergrowth, advising that this be properly managed, and made other sensible suggestions so as a ready supply of wood to the navy could be sustained.²⁰

Taverner's good advice was not heeded for long, warrants continued to be granted, the large timber trees felled, and wood taken for the charcoal burners and the iron forges, as well as for dwellings and fuel by those settled in and near the forest. In the 1630s, Sir Henry Compton had brought the matter of the forest's mismanagement to the Exchequer Court, he complained of the decay of the park palings, deer and cattle coming onto his land and the burning of heath in 'new and unusual places'. Jack noted that Sir John Caryll had allowed the grazing of larger quantities of sheep and cattle in the forest, and also sublet to farmers with permission to plough and improve the forest land. So that by Charles I's reign (1625–49) a survey found no great trees or valuable timber save one old tree worth £1 and other young timber worth only £30.²¹

Both the St Leonard's Forest forges, Upper Forge on Hammer Pond and Lower Forge on Hawkins Pond, were out of use by 1664 and derelict by 1667. As the iron industry moved north, the controlled coppicing ceased. As Rackham has noted, this was the time when the woodlands were at their most vulnerable to destruction: industry having moved on and close management and regulation of the woodland no longer undertaken. The iron industry had used quantities of wood in the furnaces and dug ore from the forest but resources were finite and had begun to run out, thus the industry shifted to exploit the larger deposits of coal and iron ore in the Midlands. It was, however, the felling of large timber trees for wood sales that caused more damage to the existing woodland cover, and the opportunities this provided for over grazing, which effectively changed the landscape of the forest at this time.²²

IV Rabbit Husbandry

How could the forest land now be best used? Thomas Seymour had wanted to build a town in the forest. Turner cites a memorandum attached to Sele Priory records, and endorsed by Magdalen College,

20 S. M. Jack, 'Ecological destruction in the 16th century, the case of St Leonard's Forest, in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 135 (1997), 241–7.

21 *Ibid.*, 241–7.

22 Cleere and Crossley, *The Iron Industry of the Weald*, p. 345; O. Rackham, *Woodlands* (London, 2006), pp. 124–33.

that noted tithes were due from Thomas, Lord Seymour of Sudeley to the college out of the lands held by him in Bramber, Horsham, Knepp and St Leonard's Forest but instead of receiving the tithes due, they had received letter informing them that:

the lorde admirall aforesaide will buylde a towne within the foreste of St Leonarde, wher increase of p'vie tythes may grow to the college, or els a compostion betwene the said lorde and the college for th tythes; wheras now we have but 3s. for the herbage of the forest (*sic*).

Turner suggested that Seymour had in fact gone far enough with his plans of building a new town to fix on a site in the forest, and produce a plan, but only a mention of this survives, not the plan itself or the location. However, this interpretation is queried by the *Victoria County History*, it suggested that Seymour changed his mind over a nucleated village in the forest and instead divided part of the forest into small farms and dwellings, although again the location of these was not identified.²³

Other attempts at improvement also came to little. Richard Weston had been to the Netherlands and witnessed agricultural improvements there, but the importance of drainage was not yet understood and his efforts at raising fertility through the application of lime and dung did little for St Leonard's poor soils. His successor, Edward Greaves, favoured rabbits as an ideal stock for poor soils, and duly turned the forest into a large rabbit warren.

Apart from the 1614 story of a dragon in the forest preying the conies in a nearby warren, there is more solid archival evidence of the presence of warrens, such as the Deputation of Gamekeepers records in the 1780s. Later evidence also comes from leases and legal documents where property is described. For example, the 1801 Head Lease from John Aldridge to George Railton and William Hulls mentions the Great Warren and Plummers Plain Warren, with rights to kill rabbits and conies.²⁴ A 1799 advertisement in the *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* for this same land itemised warren houses and three extensive warrens in a 30 acre enclosure producing 1,200 dozen conies a year.²⁵ To the north of the forest in the sales particulars of 1787 it was noted that part

23 Revd E. Turner, 'Sele Priory, and some Notice of the Carmelite Friars at New Shoreham, and the Secular Canons at Steyning', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 10 (1858), 127; VCH, vol. VI.3, p. 10.

24 Horsham Museum, Horsham, MS3142, McGaw papers.

25 *Oracle and Daily Advertiser*, 29 June 1799.

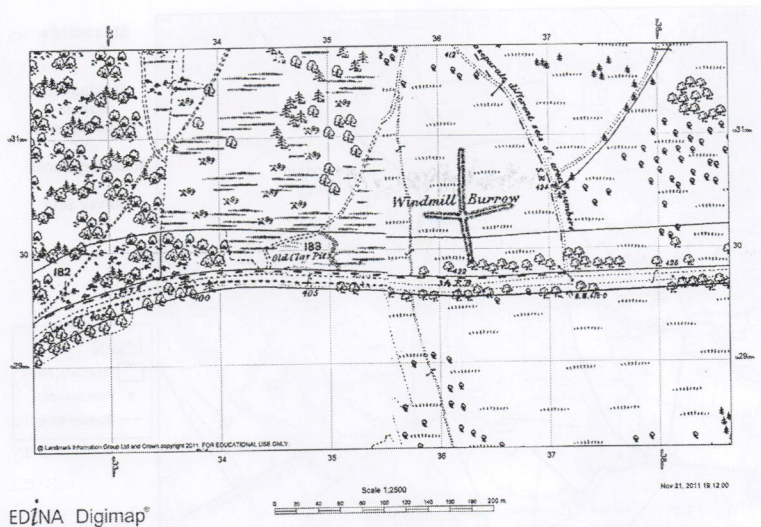


Figure 4: Windmill Burrow, Colgate, OS County Series 1:2500 1st Edition, 1875, reproduced with permission of Edina Historic Digimap

of Little Bewbush and Hopper Farms was a rabbit warren of 1,597 acres with warren houses. When Lord Erskine sold part of Holmbush and Shelley in 1819 to William Sadler, the sitting tenants included: Richard Tester of Lodge House, with lands, grounds and warren; Charles Bartloy in Shelley Farm with warren; and Sibbalds Field Farm and warren, also in the occupation of Richard Tester, totalling 1,460 acres.²⁶

An interesting feature on an early OS map of 1875 clearly shows pillow mounds to the east of Colgate, just north of the Horsham–Pease Pottage road and identified as Windmill Burrow. Four mounds radiate out from a central point, and the whole measures approximately 100 metres by 75 (see Figure 4). Pillow mounds were more common in the south and west of Britain, usually constructed on sloping ground and at right angles to the contours. They could be single or in groups, conjoined or not, some were rectangles and some had flat tops. There were local variations and Sussex appears to have had some very long pillow mounds, Williamson states that these were mostly more than 50 metres in length and in some cases over 200 metres. Rabbits took time to settle into a warren and so warreners assisted them through

²⁶ British Library, London, Add MS 5685, Burrell's Sussex Collections, Bramber Rape, pp. 28–9; West Sussex Records Office, Chichester, Add MS 22,961, Deeds of Charge of the Holmbush Estate.

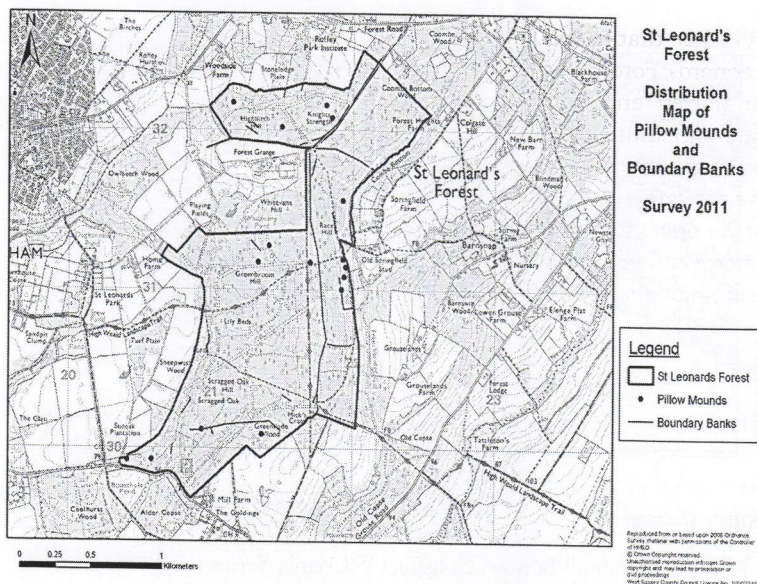


Figure 5: Distribution map of pillow mounds and boundaries from Lidar-enhanced Archaeological Survey of St Leonard's Forest, West Sussex, June 2011, figure 15, p. 49

the construction of pillow mounds within the warren, which were low mounds of soft earth. These were mainly post medieval and some had specific uses such as maternity units, but most simply encouraged the rabbits in their initial burrowing while protecting the animals from wind and rain. They also made it easier to harvest the rabbits, as deep burrows could be a problem for warreners and ferrets or dogs, and 'purse' nets could easily be put over the burrow entrance, or long nets put the whole length of the pillow mound, between the mound and the warren wall.²⁷

The 2011 Lidar-enhanced archaeological survey of St Leonard's Forest confirmed that there is substantial evidence of the Great Warren in the central part of the forest. Despite past and more recent destruction by heavy forestry machinery, 15 pillow mounds and associated warren enclosures were identified (see Figure 5).²⁸ Although in contrast to the landscape of today, this does confirm the archival

27 T. Williamson, *Rabbits, Warrens and Archaeology* (Stroud, 2007), pp. 18–19; J. Sheail, *Rabbits and their History* (London, 1971), pp. 17–71.

28 Lidar Survey, p. 49.

evidence that in the late 17th and 18th century the central part of St Leonards Forest was open heathland managed for rabbit production in warren enclosures by skilled warreners. At this time, although new agricultural techniques and crops were being introduced to raise productivity, rabbit farming remained a viable option on poor soils. By the late 18th century warrens were being taken out of use due to lower prices for rabbit meat and fur, the availability of wild rabbits, and improved agricultural and silviculture practices which allowed more marginal land to become competitively economic.²⁹

V Parks, Gardens and Towers

The early 19th century saw changing perceptions of the forest, from a wasted heath to that of a picturesque, valuable landscape that could be improved with the right plants and garden designs. The coming of the railways mid-century opened up good access to London thereby encouraging wealthy manufacturers and merchants to begin buying into the forest for their own private country retreats. Figure 2 gives an approximation of the estates in the core of the forest as they changed hands through the 19th and early-20th century. As indicated on the diagram at Figure 2, the northern area is the Holmbush estate which was bought by Thomas Broadwood in 1824, sold to James Clifton Brown in 1868 who sold the Buchan Hill part of the estate in 1882 to Philip Sailliard, born in France and amongst other things a merchant in Ostrich feathers. The large, central area is the older Aldridge estate, inherited in 1760 and slowly sold off, the lower part, eastern area bought in 1803 by Charles George Beauclerk an independently wealthy man and sold after his death by his son to William Egerton Hubbard, a merchant trading in St Petersburg, who bought the entire estate in 1852. Finally the smaller estate to the west was Coolhurst, sold in 1830 to the Dowager Marchioness of Northampton, her daughter marrying a Scrase-Dickins and remains in that family to the present.³⁰

Thomas Broadwood, who bought Holmbush in 1824-5 was a third generation piano manufacturer based in London. It was a very successful company run with his stepbrother, James Shudi Broadwood; both men having houses in London and a country house in Sussex.

29 Williamson, *Rabbits, Warrens and Archaeology*, pp. 18-19; Sheail, *Rabbits and their History*, pp. 74-100; J. Sheail, 'Rabbits and agriculture in post-medieval England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 4 (1978), 343-55.

30 W.T. Pike (ed.), *Sussex in the Twentieth Century, Contemporary Biographies* (Brighton, 1910), p. 294; J. Lowerson, *A Short History of Sussex* (Folkestone, 1980), p. 167.

Thomas Broadwood had originally bought Juniper Hall in Dorking, and perhaps inspired by the tower on Leith Hill, he built his own flint tower on top of Box Hill. When he came to Holmbush, a much larger estate, he employed the architect Francis Edwards to design his new mansion. Holmbush was a two storey castellated mansion with octagonal turrets, which stood high on the forest ridge and to the north the mansion looked over a rich valley towards Rusper where his brother had his country retreat, and in the distance Box Hill in the Surrey Hills. To the south was the back of the house, and with perhaps less of a prospect, the garden and the forest. In addition to improving the mansion, he set about designing straight avenues, gates, statues, a clock tower and the inevitable tall tower in the parkland.

To further improve the estate Thomas Broadwood employed Macadam to move the main turnpike road away from his mansion. Horsfield, writing in the 1830s, confirmed that the turnpike road from Horsham to Crawley, which had been of concern to possible purchasers of the estate due to its proximity to the old house, was moved further from the mansion to the bottom of the hill, having been funded and completed by Thomas Broadwood. The estate, Horsfield wrote, was '3033 acres ringed by a fence; fir trees grow well and contrast with the glittering sheet of water that is the lake.' He praised Broadwood for the greatly improved landscape scenery and commented that 'the garden and pleasure grounds are judiciously laid out, and the various productions raised in the garden have gained notoriety at the different horticultural shows of the county. Dahlias of every variety are raised.'³¹

Burke, writing later in 1852 also appeared impressed with the pleasure grounds. He suggested that the soil was particularly suited to growing American trees and plants. He cited the avenues of spruce firs and rhododendron that were growing to an enormous size, and one particular rhododendron he noted had reached a spread of 120 feet (36.5 m).³² Quest-Ritson noted that the rhododendron became so fashionable towards the end of the 19th century that they became a mark of social respectability, and in fact the new wealth looking for a country residence would first check that the soil was suitable for the growing of rhododendrons before purchasing an estate.³³ Burke wrote

31 T.W. Horsfield, *The History, Antiquities and Topography of the County of Sussex*, vol. 2 (Lewes, 1835), p. 222.

32 It should be noted that the genus rhododendron is a large one, and although most come from China and the Himalayan region, some azalea types come from the eastern and southern United States.

33 C. Quest-Ritson, *The English Garden; a Social History* (London, 2003), p. 207.



Figure 6: Postcard in author's collection dated 21 December 1906 showing the Holmbush Tower on the Holmbush estate, taken from Faygate Road

of the Holmbush estate that the combination of natural advantages and money meant the pleasure gardens were exceedingly beautiful. Gardens and pleasure grounds at this time offered the chance for new money to enter society, to demonstrate taste and gardening skills, and not least the size of the owners' bank balance.³⁴

Situated in the south of the Holmbush estate was the tower (see Figure 6) which Hurst records was erected in the summer months of 1855–7 by a man named Sumner, his son and another man called Cox. She wrote that the stone was dug on the estate, prepared during the winter and laid by Sumner in the summer. It was 106 foot high (32.3 m) and built on the old site of the Napoleonic beacon, and when Hurst

34 B. Burke, *A Visitation of the Seats and arms of the Noblemen and Gentlemen of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 1 (London, 1852), p. 24.

was writing about ten years later the tower was open to the public, for a fee, with a woman living at the bottom.³⁵

Later in the early 20th century the tower was lived in by the estate gardener and his family. The recollections of the gardener's son were of nine floors, from the top of which it was possible to see Crystal Palace on Sydenham Hill, London, and the south coast through the Shoreham Gap of the Adur valley.³⁶ The Ordnance Survey map 1874 clearly shows the position of the tower at the end of one of the main rides through the forest labelled Beacon Hill and Holmbush Tower. Thomas Broadwood clearly enjoyed towers and the views they provided. His first flint tower at Box Hill is still standing today, alas Holmbush Tower was dismantled in 1943 after it became unsafe following the bombing of Colgate during the Second World War.

The St Leonards estate and the mansion of New Lodge, remained in the Aldridge family from 1760 to 1906, but was gradually broken up as large parts were leased and then sold off from the turn of the 19th century. The estate was considered of poor quality soil, not fit for agricultural use, and the policy of the family, set out in a trust, was to sell or lease land in order to provide annuities for the family. The first major sale, of approximately 1,000 acres to the south of the estate, was to Charles George Beauclerk in 1803. Previously in 1801 the lease of 3,000 acres to Railton and Hulls had been completed which opened the central area to subletting. For example, in June 1837 the *Brighton Patriot* advertised for sale a 'valuable leasehold estate' of 68 acres in St Leonard's Forest. This was described as '13 acres of meadow and pasture, the remainder woodland principally Birch and Alder, well adapted as a game preserve.'³⁷

Gardner and Gream's Sussex map of 1795 shows the site of New Lodge as a rectangular enclosure with paths radiating out over the Forest. This is still clear in the OS Old Series 1813 map although the main southern drive takes precedence and four meadows or fields to the south west have appeared. The OS 1st edition 1875 map shows a modest footprint of the house, some large stables or barns to the north and between them the divided square of what looks like a walled garden or kitchen garden. The original rectangular enclosure is no longer delineated, but the house appears set in a lawn of mixed deciduous and conifer trees with a drive to the easterly front of the

35 D. E. Hurst, *The History and Antiquities of Horsham* (Lewes, 1889, 1st published 1868), p. 164.

36 Pers. Comm., Gordon Isted of Ifield, Crawley, 19 April 2009.

37 *Brighton Patriot and South of England Free Press*, 6 June 1837.

house, and a long avenue lined with trees running down to the south to meet Hammerpond Road. Hurst noted that the house was approached by an 'avenue of ancient Spanish Chestnuts and in the garden is one of the largest rhododendron plants known.' She also commented that the park, which surrounded the house, was noted for fine old birch trees. Other features that can be seen on the 1875 map are two ponds immediately to the south of the mansion, to the south east an orchard and a laurel walk.³⁸

To the south of the forest was the Coolhurst estate, stretching from Doomsday Green south to Mannings Heath. The estate was owned by the Scrase-Dickins family who married into the Aldridge family, their nearby neighbours in the centre of the forest on the St Leonards Forest estate. Charles Robert Scrase-Dickins who died at 90 (1857–1947) was noted in *The Times* obituary 'as the creator of what is probably the most perfect, as it is certainly the most natural, of wood gardens in a county where such places abound'. He specialised in growing spring bulbs, lilies (of which there was a Coolhurst hybrid) water lilies and most particularly, single camellias, all of which were planted in the woodland garden along with giant redwood, oak and beech. He contributed his expertise to William Robinson's journal *The Garden*, and in the 1930s received the RHS medal for Horticulture. Sadly the woodland garden suffered during World War II as it had first an army camp and then a prisoner of war camp within it, and then the 1987 storm finished off the larger trees, so the landscape changed yet again.³⁹

Leonardslee is the best-known surviving garden in the forest. As noted, it was originally Aldridge land and 1,000 acres were sold in 1803 to Charles George Beauclerk, who built a house, with a walled garden and an ornamental garden. It was he who set out the walks, and made an American garden with magnolias, rhododendron, and azaleas and probably planted the giant redwoods.⁴⁰

38 Hurst, *The History and Antiquities of Horsham*, pp. 148–9.

39 R. Desmond, *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists* (London, 1994), passim; C.R. Scrase-Dickins, 'Garden Flora, Plate 506, Single Camellias', *The Garden* 28 (1885), 202–3; *The Times*, 6 September 1947; Pers. comm., with Major Mark Scrase-Dickins, great nephew of Charles Robert Scrase-Dickins, at Coolhurst, 6 March 2012.

40 Horsham Museum, Horsham, MSS 3269.1 and 3269.2, McGaw Archive; An Act for the Enabling the Trustees of the settled Estates late of John Aldridge, Esq, deceased, to carry into execution a contract entered into with Charles Beauclerk for the sale of part, 1802, Private Bills 1727–1814, Vol. 2, pp. 1–18. <http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk> (accessed 1 September 2016); Hurst, *The History and Antiquities of Horsham*, p. 167.

Neighbours evidently got on well in the forest, as Beauclark's daughter married Robert Aldridge, owner of the St Leonard's estate. Leonardslee was put up for sale in 1852 and was described as having very ornamental gardens, productive arable, meadow and woodlands and 96 acres of valuable orchard. It was bought by the merchant William Egerton Hubbard whose youngest daughter also married a near neighbour, Edmund Loder, son of the Loders at High Beeches, and so they inherited Leonardslee. Edmund Loder developed the garden laid out by Beauclerk. He increased the planting on the slopes and walks of the valley, created an alpine garden and planted 400 hardy palms and bamboo in the dell or American garden. He became increasingly interested in hybridising rhododendron hence the group known as rhododendron loderi which are still available today and are regarded as some of the best hybrids. According to the *Gardeners Chronicle* of 1907, there were five acres of kitchen garden, 500 apple and pear trees of 120 varieties and in the glasshouses were soft fruit and 2000 carnations of 100 different varieties. It is very different today, and after being sold in 2010 now closed to the public, although the Loder nursery is still in existence.⁴¹

Clearly an important impact on the forest landscape was the establishment of the two villages, Colgate and Lower Beeding, both developing in the forest due to the private estates detailed above and the patronage and control they exercised in establishing the three Anglican churches, local schools, the rented and tenanted properties and of course the opportunity for employment. In the 1876 OS map showing the village of Colgate, there were 11 houses, plus the vicarage, church and school within one kilometre of the church, which can be regarded as the village centre. Earlier in the 1841, census there had been only nine households, mainly agricultural labourers. And as with most of rural Sussex at the time, such agricultural workers lived in acute poverty, an 1844 newspaper report noting the wretched state of the poor in the village, the report prompted by a man and his two children having died from eating rotten meat.⁴² By the time of the 1871 census there was more variety in occupations, and 30 years later in 1901, the number of houses had grown to 35 and the households now contained a wine merchant and those living on their own means.⁴³

41 Anon., 'Leonardslee', *The Gardener's Chronicle*, 13 October 1906, pp. 253-4, and continued 20 October 1906, pp. 272-3.

42 *The Morning Post*, 2 July 1844; The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA], HO 107/1095/11, Horsham North 1841 Census.

43 TNA, RG10/1099 and RG13/949, Horsham North Sub Registration District 1871 and 1901 Censuses.



Figure 7: Post card in author's collection showing St John's Church and parishioners, post mark date on reverse is unclear but dress would indicate late 19th century or early 20th century

The first church to be established was St Johns at Coolhurst, often known as the forest church (see Figure 7). As previously noted, Magdalen College, Oxford, owned the tithes and the right to appoint and pay clergy in the forest, however for a long time there was no church in the forest; St Leonard's chapel had been dissolved in 1547 and the family chapel on the Holmbush estate was private although centrally placed in the village of Colgate. The local clergy from Horsham shook up the situation in the 1820s when they wrote to the President and Fellows of Magdalen College insisting something be done regarding the provision of religious guidance as they feared the residents of the forest were suffering 'a daily descent into moral depravity'. The solution was the creation of the parish of Lower Beeding, separate from the old parish of Beeding, and the subsequent building of a parish church, The Holy Trinity, at Lower Beeding.⁴⁴ However, before this was settled the Aldridges and the Scrase-Dickins got together to build a chapel of ease to be called St Johns at Coolhurst under the administration of the proposed new parish church. Charles Scrase-Dickins gave the site on Hammerpond Lane, just west of the entrance to the Aldridge estate, and the church was financed by both families who continued to be

44 Magdalen College, Oxford, MS 741, Bloxham archive: Correspondence and notes; E. Cartwright, *The Parochial Topography in the Western Division of the County of Sussex*, Vol. II (London, 1830), p. 365.

involved as churchwardens and paid for a new chancel in 1889. With regard to Saint Saviours in Colgate, this was not endowed until James Clifton Brown bought the estate from the Broadwood family in 1868 and spent £5,000 on enlarging the church and building a vicarage. It was consecrated in 1871.⁴⁵

The new parish church of Holy Trinity at Lower Beeding was built in 1840 on land gifted by Robert Aldridge. Magdalen College built the vicarage and arranged the clergy until this advowson, or living, was sold by them to William Egerton Hubbard of Leonardslee in 1861. He then set about improving the church at his sole expense and added two side aisles, stained glass, double pillars and decorated wooden beams. Later the Hubbard family paid for a tower with bells, and a barrel organ dedicated to various family members. So the churches and the schools in both villages were heavily endowed by the local landowners and became a focus for the growth of the villages, although the landholdings generally remained in the hands of the few.⁴⁶

Lower Beeding was not a named village in the census of 1841 although there was a cluster of houses around Crabtree, south of Leonardslee. Building the parish church north of Leonardslee on Aldridge land caused the focus of the village to shift and develop around the church, the Plough Inn and a brickyard. By 1871 there were some 34 households within a radius of a kilometre of the church in which resided some 19 agricultural labourers. By 1901 more occupations were supporting the large houses, Leonardslee, Beedinglee and South Lodge, with only nine households now engaged in agriculture.⁴⁷

VI Conclusion

By taking a landscape history approach this paper shows how St Leonard's Forest changed through the centuries due to a complex interplay of geology, topography, economic and social factors. Power and patronage played an important part in how the forest was managed, and mismanaged, in the 16th and 17th century. The forest landscape changed from a productive woodland and iron industry to a barren heathland stripped of its timber trees, suitable only for large rabbit warrens.

45 M. Baldwin (ed.), *The Story of the Forest* (Colgate, 1985), pp. 1–3.

46 S. Lewis (ed.), *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (London, 1848), pp. 148–99; and D. R. Elleray, *The Victorian Churches of Sussex* (Chichester, 1981), pp. 71, 167; and VCH, vol. VI.3, p. 27.

47 See note 43.

By the later 19th century the southern counties had benefited from improved roads and railway building linking the growing wealth of London to the suburbs and beyond. Culturally, the picturesque had taken hold along with the romantic ideation of the possession of a rural estate. This saw St Leonard's Forest reimagined as a desirable site for private parks and gardens, showing off the latest exotic imports from plant hunters. The philanthropy of the wealthy now contributed considerably to the establishment and growth of the forest villages.

Thus through an integrated landscape history approach it is possible to fully grasp the two-way actions of a community in its landscape. This relationship and sense of place lingers into the 21st century, and forests in particular matter to the public. This was made clear by the outcry when in October 2010 the government announced its intention to sell swathes of state owned and Forestry Commission land to the private sector.

Landscape history studies show us that forests have many layers of meaning for the community; from the history of privilege or employed service to the outsider histories of travellers, poachers, smugglers and the dispossessed. There are resonances today of the tensions that arose between public and private spaces, such as the footpaths through St Leonard's Forest, which effected peoples' daily lives. There are feelings of fear and mystery still associated with myths and stories such as the St Leonard's Forest dragon. Finally, there are feelings of appreciation and awe of the trees themselves, and the ecosystem they support. Together these layers of meaning inspire a strong sense of attachment to place, to the forest however little popularly understood it is and however amorphous its bounds, that help to engender a shared desire to understand and protect it for the future.