



Nottinghamshire  
County Council

# Sherwood Archaeological Initiative Newsletter

## Winter 2004 - Issue 1

Welcome to the first edition of the Sherwood Archaeological Initiative Newsletter! Here we aim to bring you updates on some of the many projects we are involved in, as well as snippets of local history and information on up-coming events. The Sherwood Initiative's Archaeology team have been busy getting a wide range of projects rolling, and many readers may already be involved in them! If you know people who would be interested in helping out on any of the projects our address is on the back of the newsletter. This issue brings you an update on the volunteer surveying projects, reviews of the archaeology weekends and excavation in Worksop, as well as a brief history of Sherwood Forest and the life of John Leland.

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## The Royal Forest of Sherwood

The Sherwood Initiative's Archaeological Project is actively involved in uncovering forgotten chapters in the history of the Greater Sherwood Forest Area. The Royal Forest of Sherwood at one time covered most of Nottinghamshire north of the River Trent. It is a common misconception that this area was once vast swathes of woodland. The term 'Forest' is in fact a legal one referring to royal parks, and there are Forests in England that have never been wooded. Sherwood Forest, since at least Roman Times and possibly even earlier, has been a landscape of wood pasture; wooded areas surrounded by heathland. In pre-history it would have been a prosperous hunting ground and would likely have supported hunter-gatherer communities along the river valleys of the Maun, Meden, and Poulter.

Though the soils of the Sherwood Forest are generally poor and sandy we know that farming was taking place from at least Roman times, when the area became a margin between the Romans in the west, and the Romano-British traditional communities in the east.

Methods were used, as far back as 200 years ago, to maximise the potential of the area for farming. Fields were farmed for a few years and then moved to a different area. As the vegetation grew back it was grazed by animals. The enormous potential of the woodland was harnessed for the production of timber through managed felling and coppicing.

In Mediaeval times the area was designated a Royal Forest, making it a playground for the wealthy and bringing changes to the lives of all the people who lived and worked in the area. In more recent times the area has hosted intensive forestry plantations, refugee camps, and training zones for the army.

This is but a mere taste of the archaeology that lies hidden beneath the roots of Sherwood Forest.



One of the many veteran oaks in Sherwood Forest Country Park.

## Woodland Survey Update!

The volunteer team have been busy since January prowling around Nottinghamshire's woodlands in search of forgotten archaeology.

So far we have been looking at two main sites; Sherwood Forest and Sherwood Pines Country Parks.

At Inkersall Dam, in Sherwood Pines, the team uncovered a hollow way path around the banks of the now-dry dam, as well as stonework that may well once have been the base of a boat house.



Volunteers Andy Cocker and Michael Harrison examine the stonework at Inkersall Dam.

We have also been very active in Sherwood Forest Country Park, in the area known as Birklands. Among the many army pits and dug-outs, remnants from the days when the whole area was used for tank training activities, the team's volunteers have rediscovered and recorded features ranging from a WWII refugee camp, to old trackways running parallel to modern paths.

One of the most surprising discoveries came when we realised we were walking on ridge and furrow ploughing, on which mature trees were growing! At some time in the past someone was ploughing this land in the middle of the Royal Forest.

The whole of Birklands is scattered with archaeological remains, and criss-crossed with old paths, hollow ways, and boundaries. Although we have looked at a lot of the area there is still more work to be done there!

The volunteer team have recorded everything we have found and a report is being written on the work so far. Ultimately the information will be put onto the Nottinghamshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) so that the sites won't be lost again and can be appropriately protected.



Sherwood Initiative archaeologists and volunteers stand on the ridges and furrows of the ploughing to illustrate its size.

If you know anyone who would like to volunteer to help with the Sherwood Initiative Projects please contact one of the Sherwood Initiative Archaeologists, and we would love to have them along.

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## Surveying Training Day

A training day for the archaeological volunteers is arranged for December 12<sup>th</sup> at the Activity Centre at Sherwood Forest Country Park. It is recommended that volunteers attend a training day, if you haven't already, as it will bring you up to speed with our techniques and all that we have found so far. You are also welcome to come along if you want to refresh your memory! There will be a talk and presentation in the morning, and the opportunity to be taken on a guided ramble of the archaeology of the Sherwood Forest Country Park. Lunch and hot drinks are provided.

If you would like to come along please contact the Sherwood archaeologists ASAP! Guests are welcome.

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## Local Tales

We are hoping to run a regular section of people's memories or local tales. Oral history is a valuable resource of information that is so easily lost. Local legends, traditions, or superstitions can fill in gaps in our knowledge of the past, and bring it to life in a very human way.

**Send us your memories, tales, myths or superstitions and we'll print as many as we can in the next newsletter.**

# The Ramblings of John Leland

One of our projects is to lay old maps of the Sherwood Forest area onto a modern O.S. map, so that we can see how the landscape has changed. We are using maps drawn by a number of people from different periods.

One of the earliest people to make a survey of the archaeology in Nottinghamshire was a chap called John Leland. Leland was on what might today be called an academic "fast-track". In 1530 he was a sub-librarian in one of Henry VIII's royal libraries, yet only three years later he penned a series of poems which were read at Henry and Anne Boleyn's wedding feast. The King was so impressed that later in the year he commissioned Leland "to make a search after England's Antiquities, and peruse the Libraries of all Cathedrals, Abbies, Priors, Colleges, etc. as also all places wherein Records, Writings and secrets of Antiquity were reposed."

Leland travelled the length and breadth of England and was in many cases the first person to give a report on many of the archaeological sites that we now take for granted. In or around the year 1540 Leland passed through the county and had the following to say about the market town of Worksop:

"I cam over a smaull broke with a litle stone bridge over it: and so strait into Werkensop, a praty market of 2 streates and metely welle builded. There is a fair park hard by it: and the beginniges of a fair manor place of squarid stone yn the same. The olde castelle on a hille by the towne is clene downe and scant knowen wher it was. This toune, castelle and large park longgid first to the Lovetotes, then, as sum say, to one of the Nevilles. Then were the Furnivalx of certente owners there: and after the Talbotes. The priorie of the blak cha[nons] the[re] was a thing of [great buildinges, and a place of sepulture to the afore sayde noble men]."

Leland also details Blyth, Nottingham, Welbeck, Newstead, Cuckney, Southwell and Budby amongst many other familiar Nottinghamshire towns and villages.

**Why not create your own short Leland's trail around your local area. Send your trails in to the archaeologists, and we'll print the best in the next newsletter (extra merit for those written in ye Olde Englishe)!**

# Castles Project

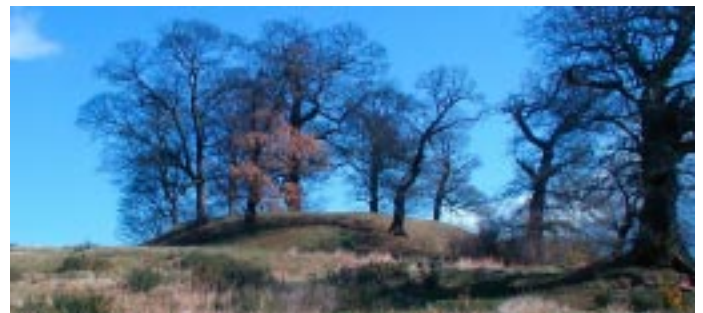


Geophysics taking place on Worksop Castle Mound.

The Sherwood Initiative archaeologists have been turning their attention to the Castle Sites of Nottinghamshire.

Geophysical surveys have been carried out at Worksop, Kings Clipstone and Annesley, with results being promising thus far.

Work has also started on a condition survey of the masonry at King John's Palace. The remains of which have now been classed as at a high level of risk by English Heritage. This photographic survey will then form the basis of a schedule of works for the conservation of the monument.



Bothamsall motte.

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# Castles Conference

Sherwood Initiative archaeologist James Wright will be presenting a paper on the Nottinghamshire Castles Project at a one day conference 'The Medieval Castles of Nottinghamshire' at the University of Nottingham.

The conference is open to all and will be held at the Lecture Theatre 2, The Exchange, Jubilee Campus, on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2005. If you wish to attend the cost will be £20 per person. More information can be found at [www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/centres/clh/](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/centres/clh/) or by calling 01158 466 466.

## Archaeology Days



Activities set up at the Visitor Centre

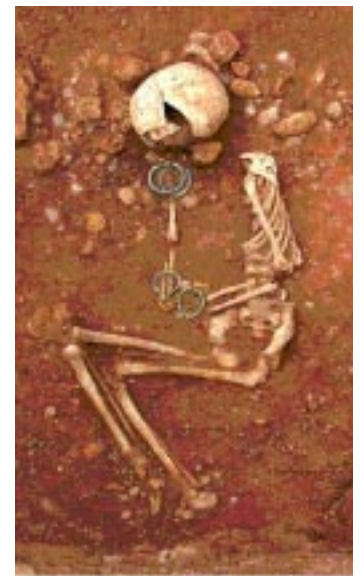
This year we have been involved in both History and Archaeology Weekends at Sherwood Forest Country Park. For these days we had a number of activities set out at the visitor centre in the format of a Tiny Time Team Challenge!

At both weekends Initiative Archaeologists and Alex Morley, Senior Ranger at the Country Park, took groups of people around the woodland to show them archaeological features.

At the Archaeology Weekend we also had Sue Rogers of the Newark and District Young Archaeologists Club, who brought along further activities. We hope to arrange more Archaeology and History days for next year.

## Dug It!

Over the summer some of the Initiative Volunteers had the opportunity to take part in an excavation on the outskirts of Worksop. The site was a 'D' shaped Romano-British enclosure that may have even dated back to the Iron Age. The dig lasted for four weeks and uncovered a large enclosure ditch, copious amounts of pottery, Roman coins, a kiln, and several skeletons, one of which was buried with jet beads and four bronze bracelets.



The skeleton named 'alex' by the diggers.

This was a professional developer-led excavation but Barratt Homes, Pre-Construct Archaeology, and Nottinghamshire County Council came to the agreement that they would allow volunteer members of the public and students onto the excavation.

At the end of the third week there was an open day to which 1000 people came to see the site and finds, and be given guided tours.

### Contacting us

e-mail [heritage@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:heritage@nottsc.gov.uk)  
phone **01623 822 944 (extension 227)**  
post **Sherwood Initiative Archaeologists  
Environment, Trent Bridge House, Fox Road,  
West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire NG2 6BJ**  
internet [www.sherwoodforest.org.uk](http://www.sherwoodforest.org.uk)



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