**A Royal Forest**

A **royal forest**, occasionally "**Kingswood**", is an area of land with different definitions in [England](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England), [Wales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales), and [Scotland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland). The term [*forest*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest) in the ordinary modern understanding refers to an area of wooded land; however, the original medieval sense was closer to the modern idea of a "preserve" – i.e. land legally set aside for specific purposes such as royal hunting – with less emphasis on its composition. There are also differing and contextual interpretations in Continental Europe derived from the [Carolingian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_the_Carolingian_Empire) and [Merovingian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merovingian_dynasty) legal systems.

Royal forests usually included large areas of [heath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heath_%28habitat%29), [grassland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grassland) and [wetland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wetland) – anywhere that supported [deer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deer) and other [game](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game_%28food%29). In addition, when an area was initially designated forest, any villages, towns and fields that lay within it were also subject to forest law. This could foster resentment as the local inhabitants were then restricted in the use of land they had previously relied upon for their livelihoods; however, common rights were not extinguished, but merely curtailed.

The areas that became Royal Forests were already relatively wild and sparsely populated, and can be related to specific geographic features that made them harder to work as farmland. Prosperous, well-farmed areas were not generally chosen to be afforested; if they were, they tended to lose the status fairly rapidly.

Forest of Dean

The Forest of Dean was used as a source of [charcoal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charcoal) for [ironmaking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blast_furnace%22%20%5Co%20%22Blast%20furnace) within the Forest from 1612 until about 1670. It was the subject of a Reafforestation Act in 1667. Courts continued to be held at the [Speech House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speech_House), for example to regulate the activities of the [Freeminers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freeminer%22%20%5Co%20%22). The sale of [cordwood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cordwood) for charcoal continued until at least the late 18th century. Deer were removed in 1850. The forest is today heavily wooded, as is a substantial formerly privately owned area to the west, now treated as part of the forest. It is managed by the Forestry Commission.

Epping Forest

The extent of Epping Forest was greatly reduced by inclosure by landowners. The [Corporation of London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporation_of_London) wished to see it preserved as an [open space](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Open_space_reserved&action=edit&redlink=1) and obtained an [injunction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Injunction) to throw open some 3,000 acres (12 km2) that had been inclosed in the preceding 20 years. In 1875 and 1876, it bought 3,000 acres (12 km2) of open waste land. Under the [Epping Forest Act 1878](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epping_Forest_Act_1878), the forest was disafforested and forest law abolished in respect of it. Instead the corporation was appointed as Conservators of the Forest. The forest is managed through the Epping Forest Committee.

New Forest

An Act was passed to remove the deer in 1851, but abandoned when it was realised that the deer were needed to keep open the unwooded "lawns" of the forest. An attempt was made to develop the forest for growing wood by a rolling programme of inclosures. In 1875, a [Select Committee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Select_Committee_%28Westminster_System%29) of the [House of Commons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Commons_of_the_United_Kingdom) recommended against this, leading to the passage of the [New Forest Act 1877](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_Forest_Act_1877&action=edit&redlink=1), which limited the Crown's right to inclose, regulated common rights, and reconstituted the Court of Verderers. A further [Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_Forest_Act_1964&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "New Forest Act 1964 (page does not exist))was passed in 1964. This forest is also managed by the Forestry Commission.

Sherwood Forest

A forest since the end of the [Ice Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice_Age) (as attested by [pollen sampling cores](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palynology)), Sherwood Forest [National Nature Reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_nature_reserve_%28United_Kingdom%29) today encompasses 423.2 hectares, (1,045 acres) surrounding the village of [Edwinstowe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwinstowe%22%20%5Co%20%22Edwinstowe), the site of [Thoresby Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thoresby_Hall%22%20%5Co%20%22Thoresby%20Hall).

The forest that most people associate with Sherwood Forest is actually named [Birklands and Bilhaugh](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Birklands_and_Bilhaugh&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Birklands and Bilhaugh (page does not exist)). It is a remnant of an older, much larger, royal hunting forest, which derived its name from its status as the [shire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shire) (or sher) wood of Nottinghamshire, which extended into several neighbouring counties (shires), bordered on the west along the [River Erewash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Erewash) and the [Forest of East Derbyshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_of_East_Derbyshire). When the [Domesday Book](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domesday_Book%22%20%5Co%20%22Domesday%20Book) was compiled in 1086, the forest covered perhaps a quarter of Nottinghamshire in woodland and heath subject to the forest laws.