

Gillingham Royal Forest Project



Restoring, recreating and reconnecting a historic landscape



Made possible with

**Heritage
Fund**



Gillingham Royal Forest in a nutshell



Bechstein's bat
© Chris Damant



Great crested newt
© John Bridges



Otter
© Luke Massey



Silver-washed fritillary
© Jim Higham

- ❖ The royal forest in Gillingham was established after the Norman Conquest in 1066.
- ❖ The forest measured 13.7 square miles or 8,000 acres.
- ❖ The three official deer 'walks' were The Lawn Walk, The Clear Walk and the Woods End Walk.
- ❖ The deer park featured a hunting lodge, which was visited by Henry I, Henry II and Henry III. But it was King John who was particularly fond of hunting in the forest and ordered extensive alterations to the lodge, visiting every year from 1203 to 1214.
- ❖ The oaks of the royal forest were used in many local buildings, including Corfe Castle.
- ❖ Edward I is the last known monarch to have visited the forest.

The royal residence, King's Court, was demolished in the 14th century but the site today is an ancient scheduled monument - King's Court Palace moated site.
- ❖ A map was drawn up of the forest in 1624 and forms the basis of the Gillingham Royal Forest project area today.
- ❖ In 1625 the deer were removed and the area was 'disafforested' - meaning it was enclosed for use by private landowners - leading to local riots.
- ❖ Today the area is home to protected species such as Bechstein's and Daubenton's bats, great crested newts, otters, water voles, dormice, barn owls, the silver-washed fritillary and purple hairstreak butterflies.

Setting the scene



The modern-day understanding of the word 'forest' implies a wooded area covered with trees, but its origins lie in the late Latin phrase *forestis silva*.

Forestis meant 'outdoors' or outside, and *silva* 'woodland'. So *forestis silva* meant something beyond the main or central areas of administration, outside common law. Following the Norman Conquest in England, in practice, a royal forest was similar to a kind of 'preserve', taken into Crown ownership with its own far-reaching and strict laws to safeguard the woods and pastures for royal hunting and to afford protection to the beasts of the chase. This was known as Forest Law.

In the case of Gillingham, the forest's purpose was to raise deer for the royal larder. Forests of this kind featured a variable mixture of woodland trees but were part of a mosaic or patchwork of other habitats such as open grassland and farmland and, in some places, though not Gillingham, heath. The legal boundary of royal forests therefore tended to be much larger than that of simply the woodland (however extensive) contained within. Gradually the term forest came to shift from meaning the legal area or boundary to the woodland within the forest, so giving us our modern sense of the word.

The Gillingham Royal Forest Project

Gillingham Royal Forest today



The legacy of Gillingham's Royal Forest is a rich history of people and wildlife, with clues in the landscape as to its past.

Scheduled ancient monuments, ancient hedgerows and small woodlands with veteran trees, ponds and the headlands of chalk streams connect us to Gillingham's past and are there to be discovered and enjoyed.

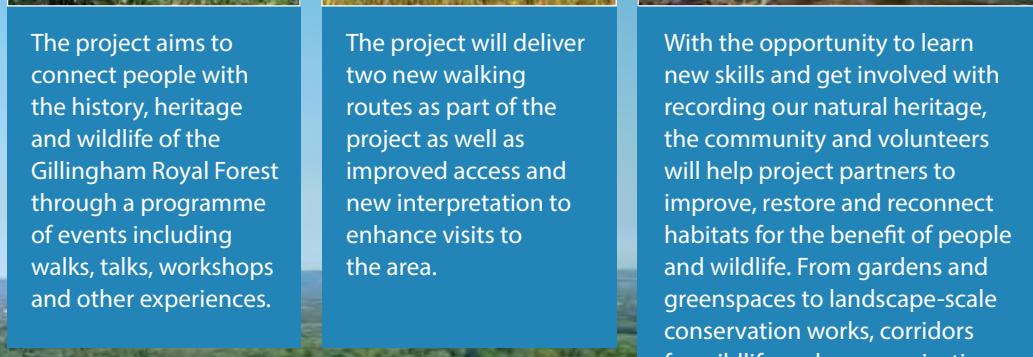
The natural and cultural features of this land form a Living Landscape of great importance and value to the local community, providing opportunities for learning, recreation and participation in conserving its heritage.

© Emma Godden



LEARN

The project aims to connect people with the history, heritage and wildlife of the Gillingham Royal Forest through a programme of events including walks, talks, workshops and other experiences.



ENJOY

The project will deliver two new walking routes as part of the project as well as improved access and new interpretation to enhance visits to the area.



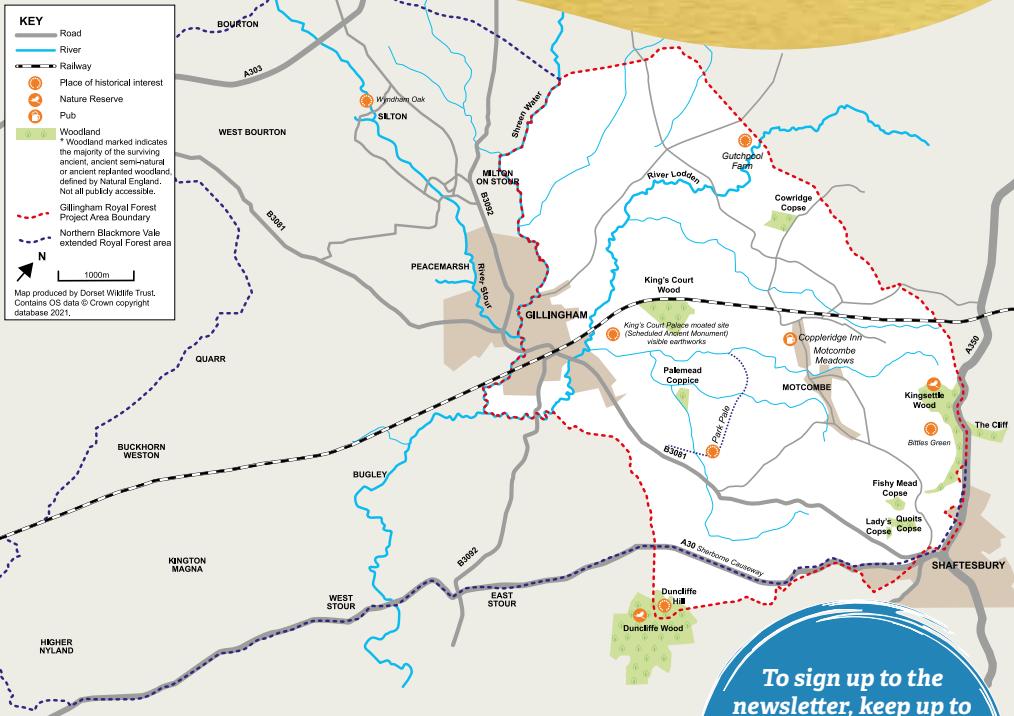
HELP US TO CONSERVE

With the opportunity to learn new skills and get involved with recording our natural heritage, the community and volunteers will help project partners to improve, restore and reconnect habitats for the benefit of people and wildlife. From gardens and greenspaces to landscape-scale conservation works, corridors for wildlife and communicating the heritage of Gillingham Royal Forest will be at the heart of this project.

© Amy Yeats

Gillingham Royal Forest today

With events, training and volunteering opportunities, improved countryside access and new trails, we hope that the growing population of the Gillingham Royal Forest will discover their natural environment, bringing benefits for wellbeing and for wildlife.



This project is made possible thanks to National Lottery players, Southern Co-op and South Western Railway Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF).

To sign up to the newsletter, keep up to date with events and/or volunteer visit
www.wtrust/3ieUDeE

PARTNERS

The Gillingham Royal Forest project is a partnership project led by Dorset Wildlife Trust and includes: Blackmore Vale Line Community Partnership, Dorset Council, Environment Agency, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West, Gillingham Action for Nature Group (GANG), Gillingham Local History Society and Museum, Gillingham Town Council, Gillingham Walkers, Motcombe Parish Council, Natural England, North Dorset Health Walks, NFU, Riverfly Group, Stour Catchment Partnership, The Three Rivers Partnership and U3A.

Ongoing, the partners and community groups that we work with is likely to expand to include others as the project develops.

