Kings Clipstone
A royal residence for the Plantagenet Kings

King John’s Palace
or the
The King’s Houses

cost £2.00

www.HeartOfAncientSherwood.co.uk
The ruins known as King John’s Palace are only a small part of this important royal residence. The part of the site that has been investigated has yielded a wealth of information that confirms there was a complex of high status buildings on this site. Royal records show that this was the favoured residence for the Plantagenet Kings when in the area. It was only during the 20th century that the ruins became known as a hunting lodge.

The early History of the site

The earliest archaeological remains on the site date from 2nd century AD. The proximity to the river Maun and the Ramper brook make this one of the few sites suitable for settlement within the ancient forest of Sherwood. Field walking has yielded shards of Roman pottery. Also the excavation by Rahtz in 1956 and the geophysics survey in 2004 both identify the line of a typical J shaped Roman defensive ditch, probably excavated to protect a Roman villa.
The Domesday survey of 1185 shows a Saxon Manor in the village held before the conquest by Osbern and Ulsi. The Manor of Clipstone was granted by William the Conqueror to Roger de Busli, just one of 107 he held. The amount of land reclaimed from the forest and under cultivation was considerably more than in surrounding villages. This probably reflects the poor quality of the land. Roger had one and half caracutes of arable land and a mill. His bondsmen, 12 vill eins and 3 bordars had a total of three caracutes. A caracute was the amount of land that could be ploughed by a team of oxen in one year. The villeins were free tenants allowed land to farm in exchange for labour on their lord’s land during busy time such as harvest. The bordars (or cottars –later cottagers) were allowed a cottage and small amount of land in return for year round labour. Clipstone Wood was recorded as being pasturable in places and was valued at 40 shillings (as against 60 shillings in the time of Edward the Confessor).

William I died in 1087 and was succeeded by his second son, William Rufus. In the second year of his reign the Manor of Clipstone was still in the hands of Roger de Busli and his wife Muriel. Roger died around 1098 leaving the manor to his son. At some stage shortly after this the Manor reverted to William II.

It is in the reign of Henry II, the first Plantagenet King, that Clipstone first appears regularly in royal records. For the next 200 years the manor was the main royal residence in the area, the Plantagenet Kings having transformed the building into a royal palace.

Records from 1164 – 65, during the reign of Henry II, first mention the Kings’s House at Clipstone, when £20 from the ‘honour of Tickhill’ was spent on the property. The ruins we see today probably date from about 1180.

In an age when the court had to travel to spread the burden on local food and forage supplies, Henry II, Richard I, John, Henry III, Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, and Richard II all stayed for weeks or even months at a time in Clipstone.

Ideally situated at the heart of ancient Sherwood, and only a day’s ride from Nottingham, they could enjoy the pleasures of the beautiful countryside and rich hunting away from the main palaces. Situated on the high ground above the River Maun with the Great Pond of Clipstone to the east, the site would have been fairly secure and very pleasant. The deer park, over seven miles in circumference was enclosed in 1178/79 with a wooden pale of sharpened wooden stakes. This enclosed 1,500 acres of woodland and cost £119.
The importance of the Great Pond should not be underestimated. Not only did it provide water to power the mill, the fish it contained were an essential source of protein, especially as only fish could be eaten on a Friday.

The village and Great Pond in 1630, the palace site is marked in pink.

Archaeologists think this may be part of the deer leap ditch near Warsop Windmill.
The fact that Richard the Lionheart chose the palace for the start of a state visit by the King of Scots confirms that the buildings were of high status. Richard I was only in England for a total of eight months having spent nearly all his time in France, Palestine or held hostage by Henry VI\textsuperscript{th}, the Holy Roman Emperor, yet he visited the Palace three times. The palace, in the Early English Romanesque style, must have been an impressive building. He returned to England in March 1194 after the payment of a ransom of 150,000 silver Marks, a vast sum. In April of that year, after taking Nottingham Castle back from his brother John who had seized it whilst Richard was imprisoned in Germany, he came here to meet William the Lion, King of Scotland at the start of a State visit.

The palace ruins – an illustration published by S.Hooper in 1784. Note the ‘Romanesque curved doorway’ which dates this part of the building to before 1200.

The palace, built of stone was gradually extended by successive generations. Some of these additions were large and expensive. In 1279 Edward I added two chambers with chapels costing £435 12s 6d, a huge amount. Two years later he built stables for 200 horses at a cost of £104 8s 5d. In 1348/49 money was spent on the rebuilding of the knights’ chamber and the repair of the great hall, the Queen’s hall, the King’s kitchen, the Queen’s kitchen, great chamber, Rosamund’s chamber, Robert de Mauley’s chamber, the treasurer’s chamber, the chamber of Lionel, the King’s son, the great chapel, the chapel next to the King’s chamber, the King’s long stable, and the great gateway.
The results of the 2004 geophysics survey of parts of the site immediately around the ruins. It did not cover the section towards the Great Gate where further remains are known to exist below ground level.
Remains of the wall at the Great Gate are incorporated in Maun Cottage, Brammer Farm and Arundale. This wall appears on the 1630 map of the village. The village was laid out either side of the Great Gate.

The steep bank along this section formed part of the defences. The ditch was part of the early defences but became filled in by spoil from later building phases.

The blue lines show the actual and possible walls – the thicker the line the more certain.

The map shows the possible wall positions including the Great Gate. The layout of the village would have been very similar to the present day village, built either side of the gate following the natural bank.
Some of the entries in court and pipe rolls.
The Royal records provide valuable insight into the development of the Palace into a complex of high status buildings.

1164 £20 spent on repairs to ‘the King’s Houses’.

1165 Robert Fitz Ralph, the sheriff of Nottingham, rendered an account for restocking the manor
‘For six oxen 18s, ten cows 20s, ten sows 6s 8d, ten beehives 6s 8d, twelve sheep 4s’

1170 46s 8d on repairs – a cow cost 2s at the time.

1180 Over the previous four years £500 spent on the King’s Houses, including enclosing the deer park and the vivarium (fishpond). The ruin probably dates from this time.

1183 36s 6d spent on utensils for the King’s Houses.

1184 Enclosure of the courtyard cost 60s. Vivarium broken up and the fish and timber moved to another pond cost 50s.

1194 Richard I (the Lionheart) visited - much pleased – he returns on the 2nd April to meet William the Lion, King of Scotland. Pond repaired at a cost £12 10s 0d.

1209 £40 spent on the palace and fishpond.

1220 Repairs to the great dam and the pale about the King’s Houses cost £70 0s 8d.

1223 The King’s chamber burned down. Cost of repairs 15 marks.

1233 The King’s chamber rebuilt at a cost of £130.

1238 The undercroft below the King’s Chamber converted to a wardrobe.

1245 ‘Large and Handsome’ timber hall built, also a kitchen and wardrobe out of wood for the Queen.
A new chapel cost £26 13s 4d.

The new chapel and the Queen’s chapel glazed with plain glass and wainscoted. Passageways added to link the King’s chamber, the great hall and chapel.

Edward I adds new King’s and Queen’s chambers - cost of £435 12s 6d. The very high cost indicates that they were built with stone.

A stable for 200 horses added at a cost of £104 8s 5d

Parliament held at the palace on the 14th November, first record of ‘Clipiston Regis’.

Repairs were carried out to the Knights’ chamber (wood on stone foundation), the great hall, the Queen’s chamber, Rosamund’s chamber, Robert de Manley’s chamber, the Treasurer’s chamber, the chamber of Lionel the King’s son, the King’s long stable, the great gateway, the great chapel, the chapel next the King’s Chamber.

£140 had been spent on repairs in the previous three years.

Further repairs recorded.

£200 spent on repairs by Henry IV.

Over the previous 11 years £600 spent on repairs and a new tower.

The ‘King’s Houses’ was very much a Plantagenet palace. When the first Lancastrian king, Henry IV, deposed Richard II in 1399, he sowed the seeds of the unrest that plagued England for the next 86 years as Yorkist and Lancastrians battled for supremacy. Henry IV, Henry V & Henry VI continued to maintain the building and made some additions. The palace, never a castle but a fortified house, would have been secure enough in times of relative peace but the turbulence of the 15th century would have made it very insecure. It was not until the accession of Henry VII, after the battle of Bosworth in 1485, that peace returned. No monarch is ever again recorded as using the palace so it is not surprising that it fell into a state of disrepair.
A 1525 survey of ‘the dekayes of the maner of Clippeston’ showed that the buildings were fast becoming a ruin. ‘First the sothest end of the hie Chamber ther is in great dekay & ruyne in stonework tymber lede and plaster 7 the gavel ende of the same is flede outwards so that a part of the rove(roof) and the flour of the said Chamber is fallen doune.’ New work, like building chimneys, had been started but not finished and much of the building had no roof.

By 1568 the palace is being described as ‘site of the late castle’

Thoroton, in his 1677 *History of Nottinghamshire*, records ‘There is scarcely any ruins left at all of the king’s old house, except a piece of thick stone wall and the Park is also cleared of the Gallant Oaks wherewith it was furnished before the late Rebellion’.

The palace would have been treated as a quarry. A new manor house was built on Squires Lane, almost certainly with stone taken from the Palace, probably between 1525 and 1568. It is likely that most of the pre 1630 village was also built from stone robbed from the palace. The amazing thing is the way the sections of wall composed of rubble infill have survived a further 440 years.

**What type of Building was the Palace**
The carved stones found on the site date to about 1180, the end of the Early English Period. From about 1200 the Gothic style took over with its pointed door arches.

The monsters head found by Rahtz in the 1956 dig is typically Romanesque.
The stone shown below was part of a column.

The photo below shows a ‘Voussoir’, a wedged shaped stone used to form a semicircular arch above a door way. The high quality double chevron is typical of the period. Interestingly, the stone has mortar on its face and fell from the ruin indicating that either the building underwent some remodelling or the stone was rejected and went in with the rubble used to fill the wall.
Romanesque doorways have a semicircular arch and several layers - in the example below the chevrons have been carved in the outer band.

The construction of the Palace.
A variety of materials were used to construct the building. The ruins are constructed of local sandstone and magnesium limestone, probably from Mansfield Woodhouse. Records show that other buildings were constructed of timber on stone foundations or wholly of timber. The later buildings were roofed using sandstone slates from Mansfield.

A layer of dressed stone blocks (ashlar blocks) would have been laid in an inner and outer course using a lime mortar. Stone rubble held together by mortar would then have been packed between the inner and outer face blocks and the wall left for some time whilst the mortar set (unlike modern cement, lime mortar sets very slowly). During the hardening period more ashlar blocks would have been dressed on site to have a smooth face ready for the next course.
The amazing thing is that the ruins we see are almost entirely made up of this rubble infill apart from the four ashlar blocks in the upper storey.

The ground floor walls are thicker than the upper storey, the lower wall rubble being level with the face of the ashlar blocks above.
The photo below shows a row of slots for the joist that supported the upper floor and the courses can be seen in the rubble.
Edward I and Clipstone (1272 –1307)

The two monarchs most closely associated with Clipstone are Edward I, ‘the Hammer of the Scots’ and his son Edward II who was ‘murdered most horribly at Berkeley Castle’.

Edward I spent considerable sums on the Kings Houses. In October and November 1290 one of the most important events in the history of Clipstone took place with the holding of a parliament there. Parliament was summoned to meet on the 27th October and sat until the 13th November. The issue of the Scottish succession had arisen and Edward was determined to shape things to his own benefit. It has been claimed that this took place under the Parliament Oak. However, given Edward’s recent important extensions to the complex of buildings and the possibility of inclement weather it is much more likely that it was held in the Great Hall. As well as considering the question of the Scottish succession, 251 pleas with petitions were presented to the King. The accommodation would have been stretched to the limit, with the nearby abbeys and great houses helping out. Clerks and others were lodged in nearby Warsop. This was the first time the title ‘Kings Clipstone’ was recorded when Thomas de Merk, the Queen’s Remembrancer, wrote ‘Clipiston Regis’.

This was a time of great sadness for Edward. His Queen, Eleanor of Castile, had travelled most of the way to Clipstone with the King in October but was ill and stayed at Harby on the Lincolnshire-Nottinghamshire border to avoid the hustle and bustle of the Parliament. She died there on 26th November 1290. Edward, taken by surprise by her death wrote to his friend, the Abbott of Clugny, ‘I loved her tenderly in her lifetime’. Edward and Eleanor were happily married for 36 years, during which time they had 16 children, 9 of who died in infancy. She travelled constantly with Edward, even on his campaigns in France, Scotland and Wales and is credited with saving his life whilst on crusade. Edward took Eleanor’s body back to London. Later he marked each place the coffin rested with an elaborately carved stone cross.

When Edward I died in 1307 he left huge debts incurred by his many wars and castle building.
Edward II and Clipstone – the Great Famine

Edward II was the monarch who spent most time at Clipstone. He proved a very different kind of King to his father. Described as tall and handsome, he preferred the arts, and pursuits such as building, hedging and rowing to the kingly pursuits of jousting and war.

The Palace’s importance to him can be judged from the fact that he held a great feast here on St Michael’s Day, some ten weeks after his coronation, the Constable of Bordeaux and the Sergeant of Gascony having been asked to supply a 1000 tuns of wine to Clipstone. The Abbeys of Rufford, Welbeck and Newstead were also required to help with supplies.

Defeat by the Scots at Bannockburn in 1314 destroyed his power base and the Earl of Lancaster became the power in the realm.

The Great Plague of 1348 –1375 is the best known catastrophe of the 14th century, less well known is the Great Famine of 1315–1317 which caused millions of deaths across Europe over an extended number of years and marked a clear end to an early period of growth and prosperity during the 11th, 12th & 13th centuries when the climate in Europe was particularly warm. In a wide swathe across Northern Europe, from Russia to Ireland, from Scandinavia to the Alps and the Pyrenees there was universal crop failure.

Extremely cold and wet weather began in the spring of 1315. Crops failed, livestock sickened and died or were eaten, wheat sold at 90 shillings a quarter. In 1900 wheat was 26s a quarter. The bad weather lasted until the summer of 1317, by then not only were the people weakened by starvation and disease but much of the seed stock and many of the draft animals needed for ploughing had been eaten. Food supplies did not return to relatively normal levels until 1325. It was a period marked by rampant criminal activity, disease and mass death, infanticide, and cannibalism. Between 10% and 25% of the population died. For the peasants who represented 95% of the population there was usually not enough to eat. Life was a short and brutal struggle to survive. The best off section of society, the Royal family, had an average life expectancy in 1276 of just 35.28 years. Between 1301 and 1325 during the Great Famine it fell to 29.84 years. The extent of the famine can be judged from the fact that when Edward II stopped at Saint Albans on August 10, 1315, no bread could be found for him or his entourage.

Edward’s response to all these troubles was to construct a new farm with defensive walls and a strong tower, which acted as the gatehouse. Peles of this type were becoming common in the border region between England and
Scotland where livestock had to be protected from cross border raiders. Peafield Lane from Mansfield Woodhouse to Edwinstowe takes its name from the pele field created at this time.

In 1315 he held court and spent Christmas here, he was here again in March 1316. The pele was completed late that year. Edward came back in December, then spent Christmas at Nottingham Castle and returned to the Palace in January. During this visit 1200 roach and 100 pike were taken from the pond and wagons were being sent into Lincolnshire in search of forage.

The fortification also served a second purpose. Edward had to guard against being seized by his enemies. The pele provided a very useful strong point that he could bolt to if he was threatened whilst out hunting in Clipstone Park.

The pele stood on a high sandstone hill overlooking the Maun valley and the hunting park and must have been an impressive site. It would have served as a look out point over most of the park. Built of local stone with walls three feet thick it contained a small stock of armour and a siege engine. A large ditch with a wooden paling was constructed to protect the site.

The site of the pele above the Spar Ponds and the Maun.

An enclosure took Mansfield Woodhouse common land for new pastures. Woodhouse wood was partially cleared to create arable fields. The Maun meandering in the valley below was diverted to create a new pond and there is evidence that the Spa Ponds were created at this time. Timber from the forest was used to construct the other buildings including a hall, royal chamber, chapel, bakehouse, kitchen, grange and sheds for the livestock.
The pele gatehouse was later known as Beeston Lodge. The photo above shows the remains of the walls in the 1950s. Sadly, it suffered further decay and vandalism as can be seen below. Now just a pile of stones under a hawthorn bush and bracken.
Building and running the fortification and farm would have required considerable labour. The overseer, Peter le Pavour, was given £98 to purchase seed corn and rye together with the livestock.

Most of the stock at the farm died in plagues during the first two years. In all 159 goats and 135 sheep died. Whilst the weather improved in the summer of 1317 giving a better hay crop, the harvest was still poor.

Following four good harvests and a more settled country, Edward III, on his accession in 1327 gave orders to Roger de Clipstone to move the timber buildings to the Palace site leaving just the stone gatehouse on the site. The location of the pele is shown on a fourteenth century map held in Belvoir Castle.

During this period royal records give an insight into how difficult travelling was. In 1308 it took one messenger 16 days to journey from Clipstone to York and back to collect saddles and clothes for the Kings use.

Nicholas of Clipstone, described in the records as a groom and a ‘curser’ or foot messenger was in the employ of Edward II in 1313-14. Foot messengers such as Nicholas managed 30 to 35 miles per day. Mounted messengers were not appreciably quicker because of the need to rest or change their mounts. Medieval kings relied on these messengers to take written instructions to each sheriff. Once received, the Sheriff had three weeks before he had to return the writ or meeagem, explaining what action had been taken. William Warsop in 1328-29 was paid £18 8s 0d for shoe money over several years. He is mentioned until 1339 when he was owed money for shoes and clothes.

On another occasion the royal records were being moved by cart. The horse pulling the cart died at nearby Cuckney. The villagers and parson objected violently when a village horse was requisitioned to replace it. Pipe rolls still exist containing holes where they were struck by arrows loosed off by the irate villagers.
The Palace Condition Survey – it was a shocker

Nottinghamshire County Council completed the ‘condition survey’ of the Palace in 2007. The conclusion to the report was that the Palace was in a dreadful state. At ground level there had been serious erosion caused by chemicals in the ground and air reacting with the stone. The resulting overhangs have dangerously destabilised the walls. Higher up various overhangs and cavities have developed as the mortar has crumbled.

The photo on the above shows one of the overhangs. The walls are in danger of toppling over as a solid lump of masonry.

The block of masonry in the photo on the left fell from the wall in the 1970s.

In 2009 English Heritage (80%) and Nottinghamshire County Council (20%) provided £106,000 of grant aid for vital stabilisation and consolidation work.
Do you have old photos of Kings Clipstone (Old Clipstone)? Then we would like to hear from you so we can copy them to our database. Contact details

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