

The King's Park: A Norman Game Reserve

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The area now known as Great Park is a former deer park described in Domesday Book as *the King's Park*. The deer park boundary, marked by banks, ditches and hedgerows, remains almost intact and is a remarkable survival. Only a small number of surviving parks can be dated to pre-1100 so *King's Park* is of great significance. It is recorded in the Isle of Wight Historic Environment Record and discussed in *Historic Parks and Gardens of the Isle of Wight*ⁱ, *the Isle of Wight Historic Environment Plan*ⁱⁱ and *Isle of Wight Parks, Gardens and other Designed Landscapes*ⁱⁱⁱ. The area enclosed by the park boundary comprises 334 acres centred at SZ 4544 8832 and can be traced on Lidar imagery, Google Earth and Ordnance Survey maps. It is located to the north of the Carisbrooke-Calbourne Road and to the west of Betty Haunt Lane, approximately 3 km west of Carisbrooke. Great Park farmhouse lies within the park enclosure.

The history of Great Park can be traced back to AD 1086 when Domesday Book records:

Wilton Abbey holds WATCHINGWELL [WATINGEWELLE]. It was always in the (lands of the) Monastery. Before 1066 it answered for 3 hides, now for 2½ hides, because ½ [hide] is in the King's park ...the meadow is in the park... .

This Domesday entry describes the creation of a new deer park by William the Conqueror after the Norman Conquest. The new park encroached both on Parkhurst Forest and on the estate of Watchingwell, held by the Nuns of Wilton Abbey from before AD 968. The earliest depiction of the park is on a map of the Isle of Wight dating from 1570 in the British Library. This shows 'the kyngs parke' surrounded by a park pale. However, it is more clearly depicted on John Speed's map of 1611 where it is called 'Waching Park'.

Thirty-seven deer parks are listed in Domesday Book although it thought that this figure greatly under-records the number of parks in existence at that time. Nine of the parks were in the hands of the king and three, including the one on the Isle of Wight, are specifically referred to as the 'king's park'. Great Park is therefore of special interest in that its creation is mentioned in Domesday Book and can be associated with the activities of William the Conqueror.

Writing in the 16th century, William Camden records that the Island had 'one little forrest ... and two parkes replenished with deere, for game and hunting pleasure'. The two parks mentioned by Camden were the King's park at Watchingwell and a 15th century park at Wootton marked on John Speed's map. Speed's map also shows the whole of the Undercliff as 'St Laurence Park', suggesting an area of rough, uncultivated land with the appearance of a 'chase' or unenclosed hunting ground although 'Old Park' in Whitwell Parish actually occupied only a small part of the Undercliff. Other deer parks existed on the Isle of Wight in the medieval and post-medieval periods, the most notable being at Swainston and Appuldurcombe.

The King's Park abutted the south-west edge of Parkhurst Forest, then much larger than today. Parkhurst was not recorded in Domesday Book but may have been regarded as a royal forest

by 1086. The King's Park and Parkhurst Forest must be considered in relation to Carisbrooke Castle and all three may be considered components of an 'elite landscape'. Royal castles were important military and administrative centres, Carisbrooke Castle being the centre of power on the Isle of Wight. The castle is mentioned briefly in Domesday Book so we know that it was in use by 1086. William the Conqueror had appointed William Fitz Osborne hereditary ruler of the Isle of Wight in 1066. Fitz Osborne only survived the Conquest for five years and was succeeded by his son who revolted against the Conqueror and lost his lands in 1075. The Island was then kept in Crown hands until 1100 when it passed to the de Redvers family who ruled as hereditary lords until 1293 with Carisbrooke Castle as their local headquarters.

Royal castles nearly always had a park attached to them but parks were frequently situated some distance from the palace, castle or manor house to which they belonged. The King's Park at Watchingwell abutted the Crown demesne lands at Bowcombe and Alvington and was an easy ride from Carisbrooke Castle. The functions of the King's Park and Parkhurst Forest were probably interconnected. The King's Park could possibly have been used for the breeding of deer which were then released into the forest for hunting. However, when first established, the King's Park may have been concerned more with the display of fallow deer, which had recently been introduced, rather than with hunting or the farming of deer for venison. Recent research places considerable emphasis on early fallow deer herds throughout England being kept for display purposes and as a sign of elite status - rare exotica to be maintained in life rather than consumed in death. Early medieval parks of the 11th and 12th centuries may have been viewed more as menageries than hunting or game reserves.

The King's Park formed one of 13 portions of land constituting the parish of St Nicholas which provided tithes to endow the chapel of St Nicholas in Carisbrooke Castle. The deer park boundary corresponded with the parish boundary. Typically, early parks had the shape of a rectangle with rounded corners and the King's Park conformed to this pattern except at the south-east corner where a rectangle of land lay outside the park and the parish of St Nicholas. This land may originally have belonged to the King's Park but have been granted away from the park before the parish boundary assumed its final form. It became the estate later known as Park Place which by about 1250 been divided into the holdings of Park Place and Little Park.

It has been suggested that the King's Park may originally have been stocked with fallow deer although red deer and roe deer were the native species. A parliamentary survey of 'Carisbrooke Park' (as it was then called) dating from 1650 stated that 'there are within the said Park at present nine score deere of several sorts', these 'sorts' presumably being red deer, fallow deer and roe deer. There are few medieval references to the King's Park but a document from the end of the 13th century records that the 'bailiwick' (the area of jurisdiction within Parkhurst Forest) was granted by Edward I to Robert Le Sauser and supported a chief forester with two foresters under him and two park keepers. A gate called 'Wolde Park' to the north of the King's Park between Alvington Manor and Vittlefields is mentioned in a document of 1365 describing the limits of the Forest of Parkhurst. In about 1420 the lordship of the Island was held by Philippa Duchess of York. At that date, the Manor of Bowcombe was leased out 'except the chase of Parkehurst and pasture for her wild beasts in Old Parke'. Accounts for the lordship of the Island in 1513 include expenses of £3 for the 'Keeper of the park' and of £5 for the 'Foresters of Parkhurst'. The Keeper of the King's Park is named as Nicholas Baker in a document of 1541. He is also recorded as keeper and occupier of the park

in the 1560 *Royal Survey of the Isle of Wight: West Medine* which contains the first detailed description of the park boundaries. This refers to the 'Park Gate' located on the east side of the park at the northern end of Betty Haunt Lane.

In 1630/31 the King's Park or Carisbrooke Park was granted by Charles I to Philip Mainwaring, Henry Knollys and Stephen Smith but possession of the park passed swiftly to Sir Thomas Barrington who owned the adjacent Swainston estate. The Barrington papers at the Isle of Wight Record Office include 'A note of our woods and lands in Carisbrooke park, now ours, Isle of Wight April 1631'. This 'note' is a detailed set of recommendations for the future management of the park. It refers specifically to the 'Parke lodge' and to the 'pale' around the park. Trees of various species and in different locations are described, building up a picture of what the park looked like, and there are detailed instructions on trees and underwood that were to be left standing. The park contained cattle in 1631 but there is no mention of deer. They may have been removed when the Crown sold the park in 1630/31 but this seems unlikely because of the later 1650 reference to 'nine score' (180) deer.

The Barrington plans for Carisbrooke Park were thwarted when it was repurchased by the Crown following concerns about loss of timber on the Island. However, after the execution of Charles I in 1649 all Royal holdings became the property of the State. A survey of the park took place in July 1650 and shortly afterwards it was sold to a consortium. The 1650 Survey records nine hundred and twenty 'timber and other trees' as well as 'those which are marked out for the use of the navy'. In the separate sale document, it is stated that three hundred and eighty trees had been reserved for the navy. In total, there were 1300 large trees in Carisbrooke Park, which would have made the park very remarkable in the local landscape. Carisbrooke Park was adjacent to Parkhurst Forest but the part of the forest close to the park was treeless grazing land. However, the surveyors were unimpressed by those timber trees which had not been marked out for Navy use, stating that many of them were *old dotterels and decayed trees good for little save the fire*. Modern ecologists would be much more enthusiastic about these 'old dotterels', regarding them as veteran trees supporting a rich community of lichens, fungi and mosses and abundant insect life.

Carisbrooke Park was returned to Royal ownership after the Restoration in 1660 and remained a Crown possession until 1864. In 1671 Charles II paid a visit to the Governor of the Isle of Wight, Sir Robert Holmes, at Yarmouth. Writing more than a century later in 1781, Sir Richard Worsley reported that:

The King landed at Gurnard-bay and passed through the forest of Parkhurst, to the Park, now the Park-farm, belonging to the Governors of the island, by a road made by Sir Robert, some traces of which still remain.

It is not known when the conversion of the deer park to agricultural use took place but this seems to have occurred by the early 18th century when the present farmhouse was built. This was on the site of the lodge and retained the hall from the lodge which became the farmhouse kitchen.

The earliest map which refers to Great Park by name is Isaac Taylor's one-inch map of Hampshire, 1759 where the farm is shown as 'G. Park'. The park was sold by the

Commissioners of the Queen's Woods on the 16th of March 1864 to Sir John Simeon of Swainston 3rd bart. and added to the Swainston estate. In the late 1880s the Freshwater, Yarmouth and Newport Railway line was built, running through Great Park. In 1932 Sir John Walter Barrington Simeon 6th bart. sold most of the land at Great Park to John Sherring Mullett of Thorley Manor Farm. It has changed hands at least twice since that date, the present owners acquiring Great Park in 2000. The land has been in arable use until now but it is hoped to restore the character of the former deer park with its wood-pasture, associated tree and shrub cover and, where appropriate, recreated woodland.

Great Park is private land. A public footpath starting beside Betty Haunt Lane runs from east to west through the centre of the former park and allows walkers to view the landscape. The photographs featured in this report were taken in locations with no right of access by permission of the landowner.

ⁱ *Historic Parks and Gardens of the Isle of Wight* by Vicky Basford. Published in 1989 by the Isle of Wight County Council. Available from the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust, price £5.

ⁱⁱ *Historic Environment Action Plan Northern Lowlands*. Isle of Wight County Archaeology and Historic Environment Service October 2008. Available from [Archaeology - Service Details \(iow.gov.uk\)](http://www.iow.gov.uk).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Isle of Wight Parks, Gardens & Other Designed Landscapes Historic Environment Action Plan*. Isle of Wight Gardens Trust: March 2015. Available from [Projects \(iowgardenstrust.co.uk\)](http://www.iowgardenstrust.co.uk).