

# RICHARD OF CORNWALL AND MARLOW'S MEDIEVAL DEER PARK

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*While there is documentary evidence to support the existence of a medieval deer park in Marlow, to date neither historians nor archaeologists have been able to identify its location. Close scrutiny of the available documentation from the period suggests that the deer park was more likely to be located in Little Marlow as part of the estates there of Richard, Earl of Cornwall. Recent archaeological excavations, with supporting place name evidence, suggest that Warren Wood, Little Marlow may have formed part of the medieval deer park.*

## INTRODUCTION

The growth of the royal bureaucracy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has left behind a wealth of documentation which can provide a rich source of information for local historians. As an example, there is the following intriguing entry in the Close Roll for 14 April 1233:

‘Peter de Rivall is ordered to give eighteen fallow deer from the royal forest of Windsor as a gift from the king to Richard, Earl of Cornwall for the establishment of his park in Marlow’.<sup>1</sup>

Historians have noted the existence of the deer park in Marlow<sup>2</sup> but have not been able to identify any further records relating to it and consequently its location has remained a mystery. However, by combining analysis of the available documentation from the period with recent archaeological evidence from investigations at Warren Wood<sup>3</sup>, Little Marlow, it is possible to build a thesis relating to the location of the park, and also to reconstruct the complex relationship that Richard of Cornwall had with Marlow and the surrounding area.

## RICHARD, EARL OF CORNWALL

Richard was born in Winchester in January 1209 and was the second son of King John. He was only six years old when his father died and his elder brother Henry succeeded to the throne. While Richard was drawn into a number of conspiracies against Henry III during the earlier part of his reign and briefly led a revolt against him in 1238, he was

thereafter a loyal and valuable ally to the king in his frequent baronial disputes, and was noted for his abilities as a politician and negotiator.

Richard became reputedly the wealthiest man in England and one of the richest in Europe. He acquired much of that wealth through land granted to him by Henry III, including the Earldom of Cornwall in 1231. Many of the subsequent grants were made after the brothers had quarrelled and were often, in effect, bribes to keep Richard from siding with the barons. As his primary biographer has noted, ‘Richard never quarrelled with Henry without coming away a richer man’.<sup>4</sup>

Richard effectively exploited the lands that he acquired and built an impressive administrative machinery of his own, largely based at Wallingford Castle. He also enjoyed considerable wealth from the stannaries in Cornwall, and made a notable profit from leading the recoinage of 1247–48. He even enjoyed a period as regent of England between 1252 and 1254.

Once he had secured his position both financially and politically at home, Richard became increasingly active overseas, for example joining the Sixth Crusade between 1240 and 1242. He courted Europe’s major ruling families and became embroiled in European politics showing, as Pope Innocent IV commented, ‘an unquenchable thirst for power and worldly dignity’. This culminated in his being elected King of the Romans in 1256, although in truth this meant that he became effectively not much more than overlord to a number of German states concentrated around the Rhine.

Richard’s focus on his overseas ambitions coincided with increasing unrest at home. Marginalised

barons, frustrated by Henry III's increasingly autocratic and aloof kingship, finally found an effective champion in the form of Simon de Montfort, who led them in open revolt in 1263. In May of the following year, his army comprehensively defeated the royal forces at the Battle of Lewes. Both Henry III and Richard were taken prisoner. The situation was reversed in August 1265 when royalist forces under Henry III's son Edward defeated Simon's army at Evesham and killed the leader of the revolt.

Richard was held in captivity between the two battles and, while he was personally well-treated, his lands and property suffered significantly. There was clearly an undercurrent of popular resentment against him that found violent expression during this period. While there is no evidence of any damage to his estate in Marlow, his park at Beckley (Oxfordshire) was broken into and his deer driven away, while his men at Woodstock were plundered of their cattle. Oakham Hall in Rutland was burnt down and Richard lost all his goods in Goswold, and his stock and valuables at his castle of Eye in Suffolk. The greatest damage was to his estates at Twickenham/Isleworth and Westminster. In addition, he suffered the ignominy of being ridiculed and abused in the *Song of Lewes*, which celebrated the triumph of Simon de Montfort and is one of the first recorded political songs in the English language.



FIGURE 1 Medieval roof boss in Beaulieu Parish Church, believed to depict Richard of Cornwall

Despite these reversals of fortune, Richard was a significant actor in the negotiations for a settlement following the fighting that culminated in the Dictum of Kenilworth in 1267. He further continued to play a key role as his brother's advisor in the final years of the reign.

In the spring of 1271, Richard's own son Henry was murdered in Italy by relatives of Simon de Montfort. The news of the murder was a shock to Richard and his health deteriorated, culminating in a stroke in December 1271. He never recovered and died in April of the following year. He was buried in Hailes Abbey (Gloucestershire), which he had founded after surviving a shipwreck in 1243. His brother Henry III, who had dominated so much of his life, outlived him by only a few months, dying in November 1272.

#### RICHARD'S LINKS WITH GREAT MARLOW

There is no evidence of Richard having any association with Marlow until 1231, when two separate events established firm links with the town and the area. The first was his marriage at Fawley in March 1231 to Isabel Marshal. Isabel had been widowed in October of the preceding year following the death of her husband Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester. The Marshals were one of the leading baronial families of the period, and marriage into them would strengthen Richard's position at a time when he still had limited wealth and influence.

He therefore moved swiftly to secure the marriage, much to the annoyance – albeit brief – of Henry III, who saw it as his own prerogative to determine the marital fortunes of his younger brother. As well as bringing him greater access to power and influence, the marriage also brought Richard a number of estates in the form of a dowry, namely Hambleden, Henley, Sundon (Bedfordshire) and Thornbury (Gloucestershire).

Richard may also have sensed that there was a greater prize awaiting him through his marriage. The heir to Gilbert de Clare's extensive estates as Earl of Gloucester, including those in Marlow, was his son Richard. However, as he was only eight years old at the time, he became a ward of the crown. As the new stepfather of the heir to the lands of the Earl of Gloucester, Richard may have hoped to have gained the custody of the child and the estates. If so he was to be disappointed, for on

this occasion Henry III quickly granted the wardship of Richard de Clare and custody of the lands in November 1230 to his favourite, Hubert de Burgh<sup>5</sup>. When the latter fell from power in 1232, the king transferred the privileges to two other favourites, Peter de Rivall and Peter des Roches<sup>6</sup>. They in turn fell out of favour in 1234, when custody of the de Clare lands was passed to Richard de la Lade<sup>7</sup>. Documents from the period continue to refer to the latter holding the position as “keeper of the honour of Gloucester” until at least March 1239<sup>8</sup>.

After that, the position becomes more confused. An entry in the Liberate Rolls for March 1241 makes an interesting reference to ‘keepers of the lands late of Gilbert Earl of Gloucester’, implying that responsibility for the custody of the estates had by then been divided between a number of individuals<sup>9</sup>. This is then repeated in another entry in the Liberate Rolls in December 1241<sup>10</sup>. The Close Rolls for the same year indicate that, by now, some of the de Clare estate was in the hands of Richard of Cornwall<sup>11</sup>. More specifically, the Book of Fees in 1242 explicitly states that Marlow was in Richard’s hands<sup>12</sup>.

It seems that Richard of Cornwall did indeed eventually gain Marlow, but it is highly unlikely that it was before 1239. It was in any case to be a short-lived prize, because in August 1243 Richard de Clare reached adulthood and inherited the title and estates of the Earl of Gloucester<sup>13</sup>. One intriguing possibility – although not supported by any documentary evidence – is that Henry may have granted Richard part of the wardship in recognition for his abandoning an attempted baronial revolt in 1238, in which the younger brother had been deeply implicated.

Although it is highly unlikely that Richard gained custody of Marlow until 1239 at the earliest, it seems that his new family spent some time in the town during the preceding years. For example, his first son John died in Marlow in September 1233 and may have been born in the town in the preceding year<sup>14</sup>.

#### RICHARD’S LINKS WITH LITTLE MARLOW

There was another event in 1231 that firmly established Richard’s links with the Marlow area. Specifically in August, one of a series of royal

charters granted him the honour of Wallingford that brought with it an estate in Little Marlow that he held until his death in 1272<sup>15</sup>. At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086, eight and a half hides and half a virgate in the village were among the lands of Miles Crispin and afterwards formed part of the honour of Wallingford, to which this portion of Marlow remained attached as late as the 16th century<sup>16</sup>.

Richard’s estate in Little Marlow formed part of a frequently expanding portfolio of land in the South Buckinghamshire and Thames Valley area that Richard accumulated during his life. In addition to the lands in Marlow, for example, he also held estates in Iver, Beaconsfield, Cippenham and Risborough, as well as establishing an abbey in Burnham and holding extensive lands throughout Berkshire and Oxfordshire<sup>17</sup>.

It would be wrong to overstate the importance of the Marlow estates to Richard, especially given the short duration of his control of the lands in Great Marlow. In addition to his lands in Cornwall, he also owned considerable estates in Suffolk, the East Midlands and Yorkshire. But the concentration of land in the South Buckinghamshire and Thames Valley area is significant and this part of his portfolio was frequented by Richard throughout his life, unlike for example his properties in Yorkshire.

#### RICHARD’S DEER PARKS

It has been estimated that there may have been as many as 3,200 deer parks across England at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when they were seemingly most widespread<sup>18</sup>. More than 50 have been identified to date in Buckinghamshire alone<sup>19</sup>. The thirteenth century in particular witnessed a remarkable proliferation in their establishment across the country. Many, including Richard’s park in Marlow, were first established with grants of deer by Henry III from his own parks in the royal forests.

It is likely that most of the approximately two hundred members of the greater baronage in the thirteenth century had at least one deer park, and it is possible that Richard had as many as twelve or more across his lands at various points during his life, in addition to the one that is recorded for Marlow. Deer parks have been identified on his other Buckinghamshire estates, including those at Burnham, Cippenham and Princes Risborough<sup>20</sup>.

The main purpose of these parks was to provide the lord of the manor with a private hunting ground and a ready source of meat in the form of venison<sup>21</sup>. Fallow deer was the beast of the chase par excellence, and it is worth noting that it was this particular breed that was granted to Richard by his brother for the establishment of his park in Marlow. In addition to hunting, the land in the deer park was occasionally put to other uses, including the pasturing of cattle and the raising of horses. Parks were often also a valuable source of timber, and enabled swine to be fed on the pannage from the trees. In addition to their practical purpose, deer parks were also status symbols, emphasising the wealth and standing of the lord amongst his peers and tenants.

#### THE LOCATION OF RICHARD'S DEER PARK IN MARLOW

There is no documentary evidence that allows us to identify the location of Richard's deer park in Marlow. However, it is possible to narrow the search through re-examining the nature of his relationship with the area during and after 1233, when the deer park was established.

We have already seen that it is highly unlikely that Richard gained custody of the de Clare lands in Great Marlow until at least 1239, six years after the establishment of the deer park. It is also unlikely that he would have sought to create a park on land that was not his own, or that he knew he would be likely to hold for only a limited period of time, until the de Clare heir reached adulthood. For those reasons, it is unlikely that the deer park is to be found within Great Marlow. The more promising location is therefore Little Marlow, which Richard acquired along with the honour of Wallingford in the summer of 1231, and which remained in his possession throughout the rest of his life.

The challenge to this interpretation is that the Close Roll for 14 April 1233 that refers to the original grant of the deer to Richard for the park states specifically that it is in 'Merlawe' as opposed to 'Parva Merlawe', or Little Marlow. However, other medieval documents are guilty of referring to Marlow when it is clear that their intention is more precisely a reference to Little Marlow, and that is the most likely explanation in this case. For example, the later accounts of Richard's son as Earl of Cornwall erroneously refer to Marlow as

opposed to Little Marlow as being part of the estates<sup>22</sup>. In addition, the Book of Fees mistakenly attributes Marlow to the honour of Wallingford in 1220, when it had long since formed part of the honour of Gloucester<sup>23</sup>.

Recent archaeological investigations undertaken by Archaeology in Marlow allow us potentially to locate the site of the deer park with more precision. Specifically, the group has undertaken extensive investigations over the last few years at the site of Warren Wood, located off Winchbottom Lane, towards the north boundary of Little Marlow parish (NGR SU 8715 8972: Fig. 2)<sup>24</sup>.

There are a number of reasons why Warren Wood could be a strong candidate for part of the site of Richard's deer park. Firstly, it shares many of the characteristics of other known deer parks in terms of both location and features. The deer parks of the period were almost invariably well-wooded to provide covert for the deer. They were also normally situated on uncultivated land at the edge of the manor and, as a result, the park boundary often coincided with the manorial and parish boundaries<sup>25</sup>.

While no attempt has yet been made to date the wood at the site, its existence has been proven in earliest maps dating to the start of the nineteenth century<sup>26</sup>. It has also been recently recorded as ancient woodland<sup>27</sup>. Assuming its existence stretches back to the thirteenth century, its location at the northern end of the parish fits with the common features of other deer parks, as does the sloping and generally steep nature of the site, which in turn would have made it difficult to cultivate. It is further situated some distance from the village of Little Marlow, again consistent with the normal practice for deer parks of the period. Finally, most known Chilterns parks are in excess of 100 acres, and the combined size of the modern day Warren and neighbouring Bloom Woods is over 215 acres.

The site that has been investigated to date by Archaeology in Marlow consists of two linked banked enclosures, in total measuring approximately 100m by 80m. It is likely that the outer enclosure would have provided some security for livestock (probably other than deer), while the inner enclosure would have surrounded a house and maybe a range of outbuildings. Amongst archaeological finds from earlier periods, the investigations have identified substantial quantities of early

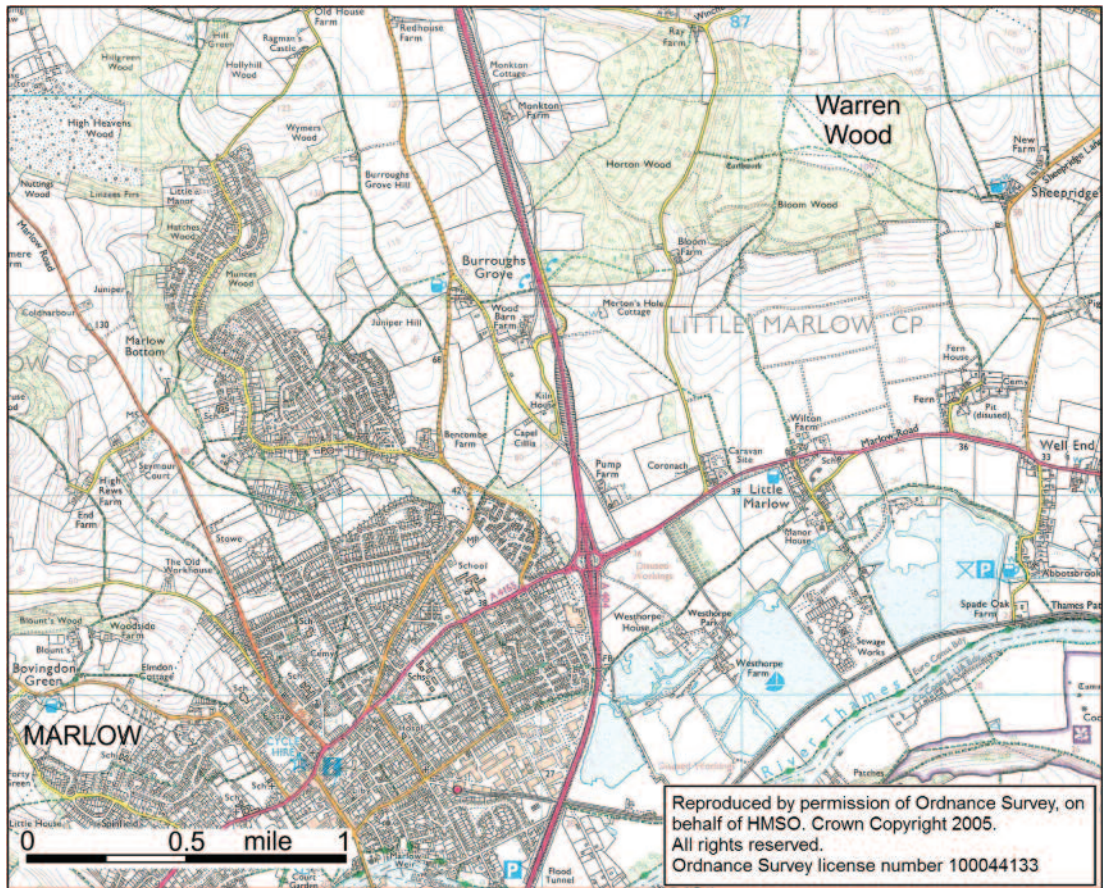


FIGURE 2 Extract from Ordnance Survey Explorer Sheet 172, showing the location of Warren Wood

medieval pottery and roof tiles and large amounts of flint, all within the inner enclosure. The evidence points to a dwelling on the site of relatively high status, dated some time between *c.*AD1050–1400. Dwellings of this type would have been common in deer parks at this time. Maintenance of the park was a significant activity, as was winter-feeding of the deer and some form of onsite human presence was often necessary to deter poachers. The keeper or parker who lived in the dwelling would therefore have been an important manorial official<sup>28</sup>.

Place name evidence may also offer some insight into the original purpose of the site. For some time it has been assumed that the name of the wood derived from the local Borlase Warren family, who were prominent local landowners during the eighteenth century. However, the first

record of a map for the wood identifies it as “The Warren”. This title gives scope for a different interpretation into the genesis of the name, rooted in its use as a noun rather than as an association with a local family.

“Warren” had a number of different meanings during the medieval period, but all in some way were associated with the hunting or rearing of animals<sup>29</sup>. In one sense, it was the exclusive right granted by the king to a lord enabling them to hunt smaller game over their estates such as hares, pheasant and partridge. The right of free warren therefore meant both the right to hunt particular warrenable animals, and also the place where the right was exercised. Although this suggests something quite distinct from a deer park, in practice the two could often become intertwined. It was quite

common, for example, for deer parks to contain other animals than deer for the lord's hunting, whether that was for food or simply for pleasure. Either way, the possibility that the name of Warren Wood is derived from the medieval use of the term for a hunting area cannot be lightly dismissed.

One of the problems with this interpretation is the lack of supporting boundary evidence. Deer parks were enclosed areas, necessarily so in order to contain the deer. In practice, this normally meant the combination of a substantial earth bank, topped by a palisaded fence, with an inside ditch that together created a formidable barrier.

This boundary, broken by gates for passage in and out of the park and occasionally by a deer leap, would have been maintained at doubtless some considerable effort by the parker<sup>30</sup>. To date, no such banks have been clearly identified at Warren Wood, although the site does contain many features of archaeological interest that have yet to be investigated.

There is one final possible interpretation of the site that is again linked to the name, specifically that it contained a rabbit warren. In the early medieval period, rabbits were extremely rare and highly prized, both for their meat and their fur<sup>31</sup>. Various attempts, initially unsuccessful, were made to import rabbits from France and breed them in England, but they required a good deal of nurturing, protecting and looking after. The first mention of native mainland rabbits dates from 1235 when Henry III made a gift of ten live rabbits from his park in Guildford. The first reference to a coneygarth (farmed rabbit warren) on the English mainland appears in 1241 in the same park<sup>32</sup>.

Richard of Cornwall clearly cultivated rabbit warrens, and their rarity and value can be clearly illustrated by his reaction to his coneygarth at Twickenham being attacked and plundered during the period of the revolt in 1263–64. Even as late as 1268, he was insisting upon an inquisition being undertaken to establish and bring to justice those responsible for the crime<sup>33</sup>.

While it is appealing to attribute a further potential interpretation to the site at Warren Wood, to date no archaeological evidence has been found that would support its purpose as the location of a rabbit warren. It is worth noting, however, that deer parks and rabbit warrens were not mutually exclusive. The latter were sometimes maintained alongside or within the grounds of the former, as was the

case at both Twickenham and Stonor<sup>34</sup>.

There are no further records relating to the deer park in Marlow after Richard's death. By the turn of the fourteenth century the number of parks across the country was at its peak, and for various reasons it declined after that. Due largely to the effects of the Black Death and the subsequent labour shortage, it became more and more difficult to maintain the hunting parks and many gradually fell into disuse and were leased out.

There is no set pattern to the life and eventual fate of the medieval hunting enclosure. Many were short-lived and may not have survived the life of their founders. Interestingly, the archaeological evidence to date from Warren Wood suggests that medieval activity at the site may not have continued much beyond the early thirteenth century, so it may indeed have had a short life as a deer park, potentially reflecting its diminishing significance to Richard following Isabel's death in 1240 and the wider expansion of his estates, both in England and overseas.

It is to be hoped that ongoing archaeological investigations at Warren Wood will help to answer some of these outstanding questions, but for now it is reasonable to conclude that the site is a potential candidate for the location of Richard's deer park in Marlow.

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