



Extract from the account of William Wenman for Sherwood Forest for the year ending Ladyday 1708. Papers of the Holles Family in the Portland (Welbeck) Collection, Pw 2/616

Left: engraving of a deer hunter by CR Ryley, after a painting by Byng; 1782. Forest Books relating to Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire,

## DER HUNTING

The spectacle of hunting and its association with military prowess and horsemanship were key to the establishment of power by Norman kings in England. A medieval Royal Forest was a tract of land subject to the Forest Law which was designed to protect the interests of the King especially relating to hunting, timber trees and other rights.

No one was allowed to hunt protected wild animals unless they had express permission from the King. The four beasts of the forest protected were red, roe and fallow deer and the wild boar.

Royal Forests were often very extensive and about a quarter of the whole of England was under forest law in the early 12th century. The increase in the area of forests was the cause of deep disputes with landowners, which came to a head in the reign of King John, and which brought about the Forest Charter of 1217. This reduced the power of the King but the struggle between royal power, landowners and local people continued for many centuries.

In practice, the main animals hunted from the 13th century onwards were the red deer, native to Britain, and the fallow deer, probably introduced by the Normans via Italy. The larger red deer were chased across open country and were ideal for the scale and terrain of Royal Forests. The smaller fallow deer

were often kept as herds within deer parks owned and managed by the gentry.

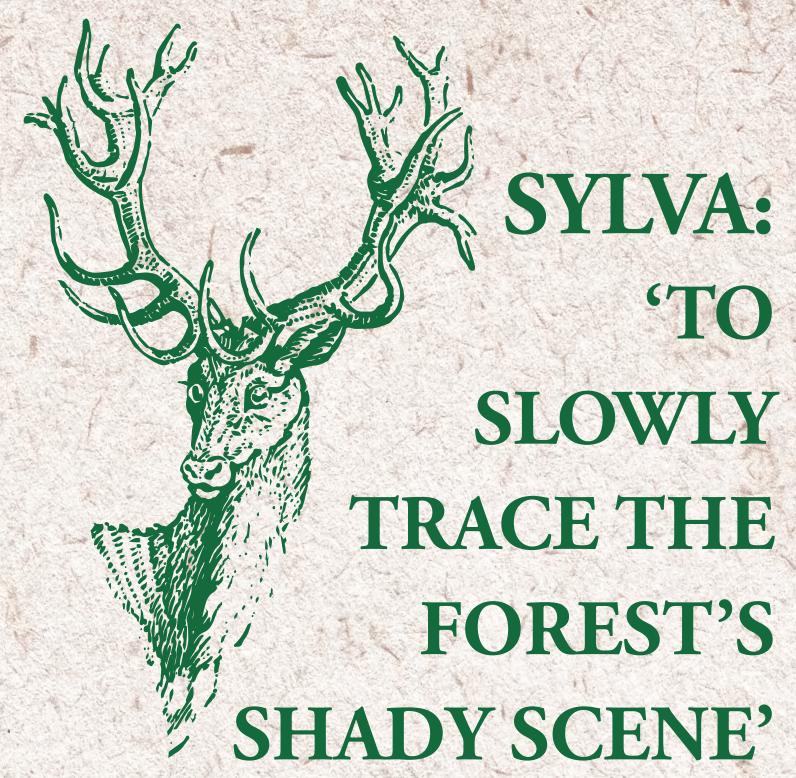
The 'vert' of the forest, including trees, shrubs and grassland forming the woodland pastures, was protected by law.

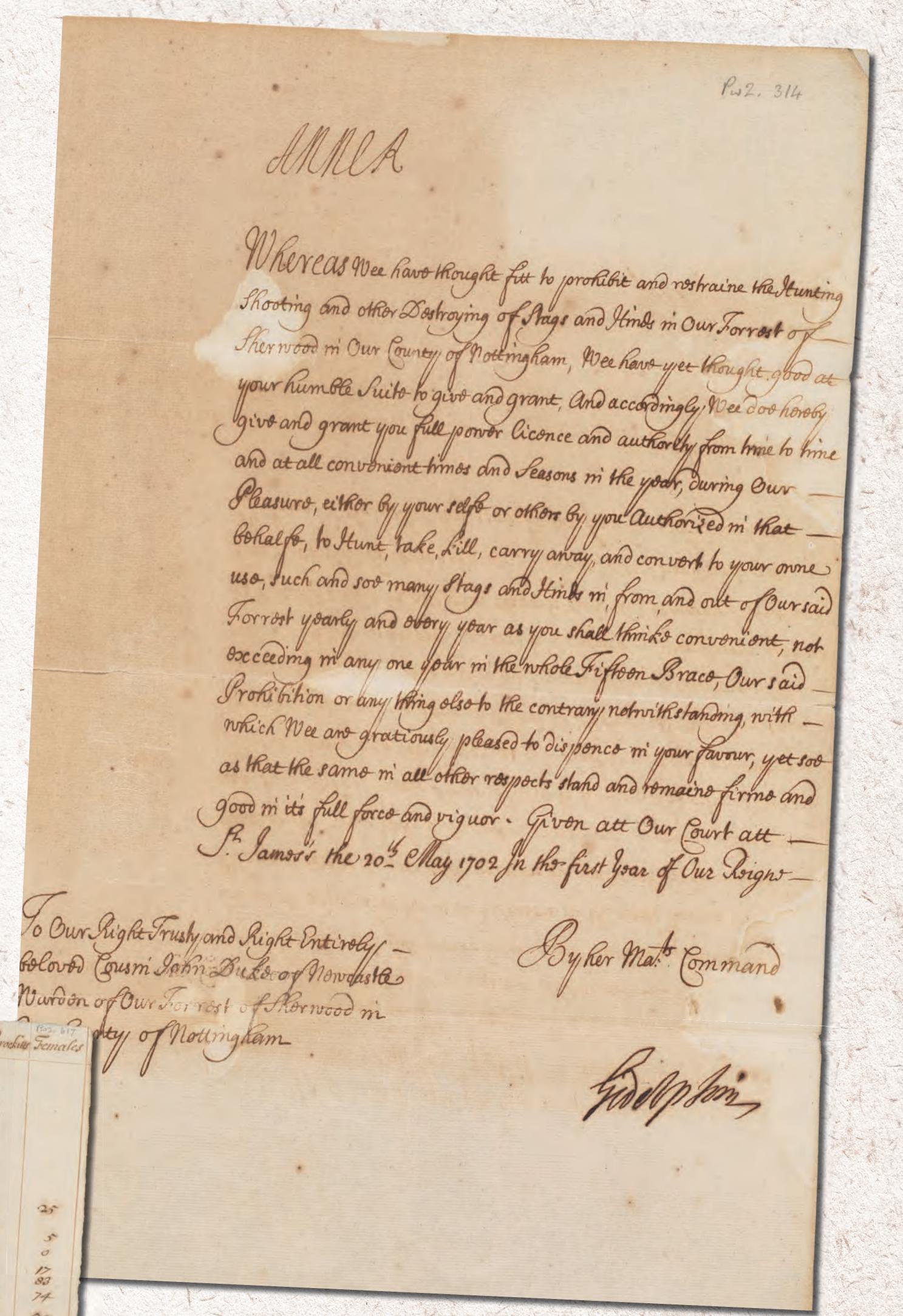
Local people could use these pastures for their livestock but grazing was restricted when the female deer were 'fawning'.

The pastures were closed off during 'fence month' centred on Midsummer

Day to allow the successful establishment of the new generation of deer.

Inventory of deer in Sherwood Forest; 1708. Papers of the Holles Family in the Portland (Welbeck) Collection, Pw 2/617





Above: warrant granted by Queen Anne to the Duke of Newcastle to kill deer in Sherwood Forest; 20 May 1702. Papers of the Holles Family in the Portland (Welbeck) Collection, Pw 2/314



