

INTRODUCTION



SYLVA:
'TO
SLOWLY
TRACE THE
FOREST'S
SHADY SCENE'

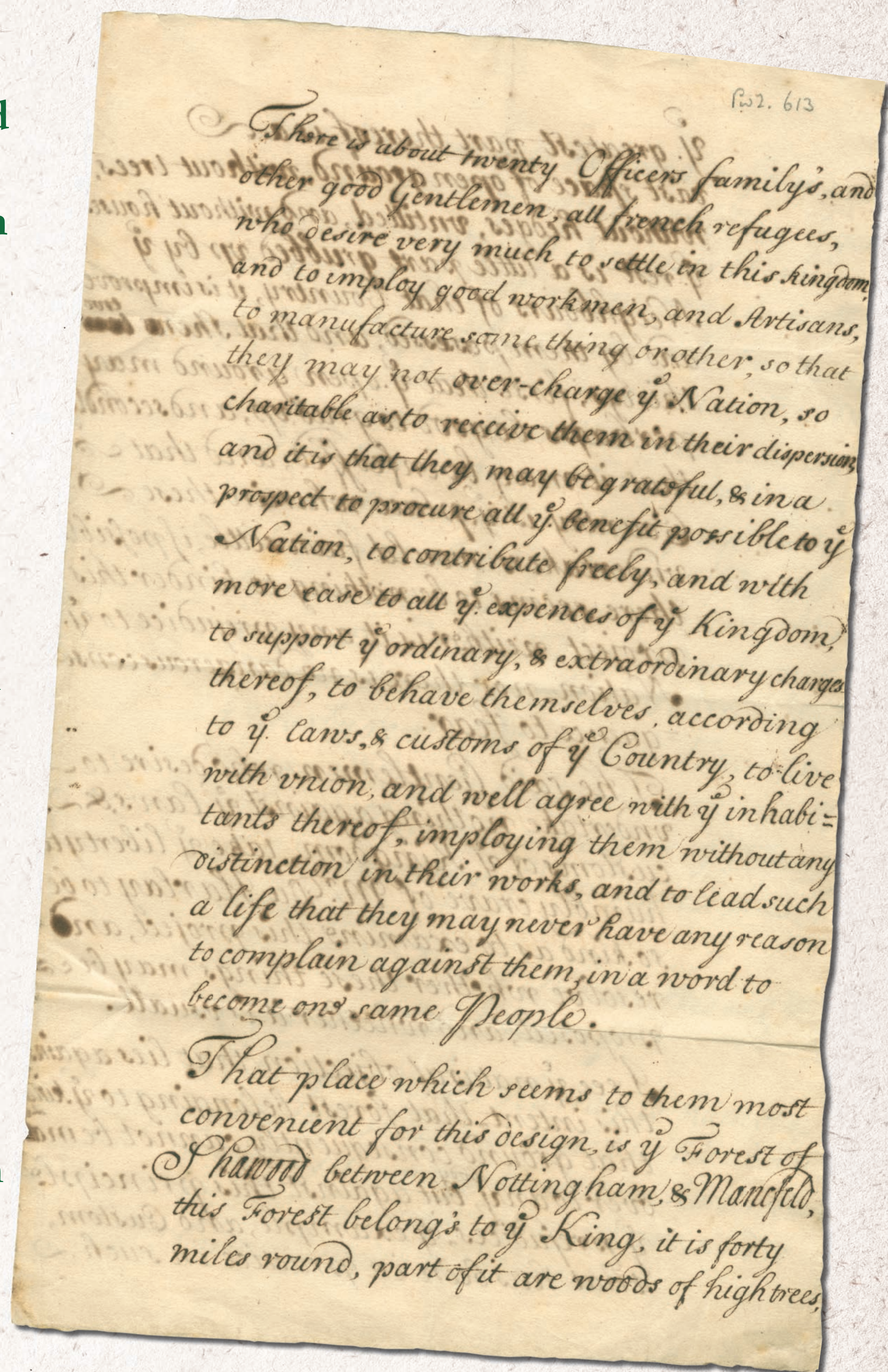
The ways that people interact with trees and woods have varied dramatically through time and from place to place. Today many are concerned about the loss of woodland and might agree with Lord Byron's *Childe Harold* in relishing the forest where 'mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been' and oppose this to the solitude to be found in 'the crowd, the hurry, the shock' of society.

Others find forests threatening and troubling: indeed woodland clearance has often been celebrated as a sign of increasing population and a surrogate for civilisation.

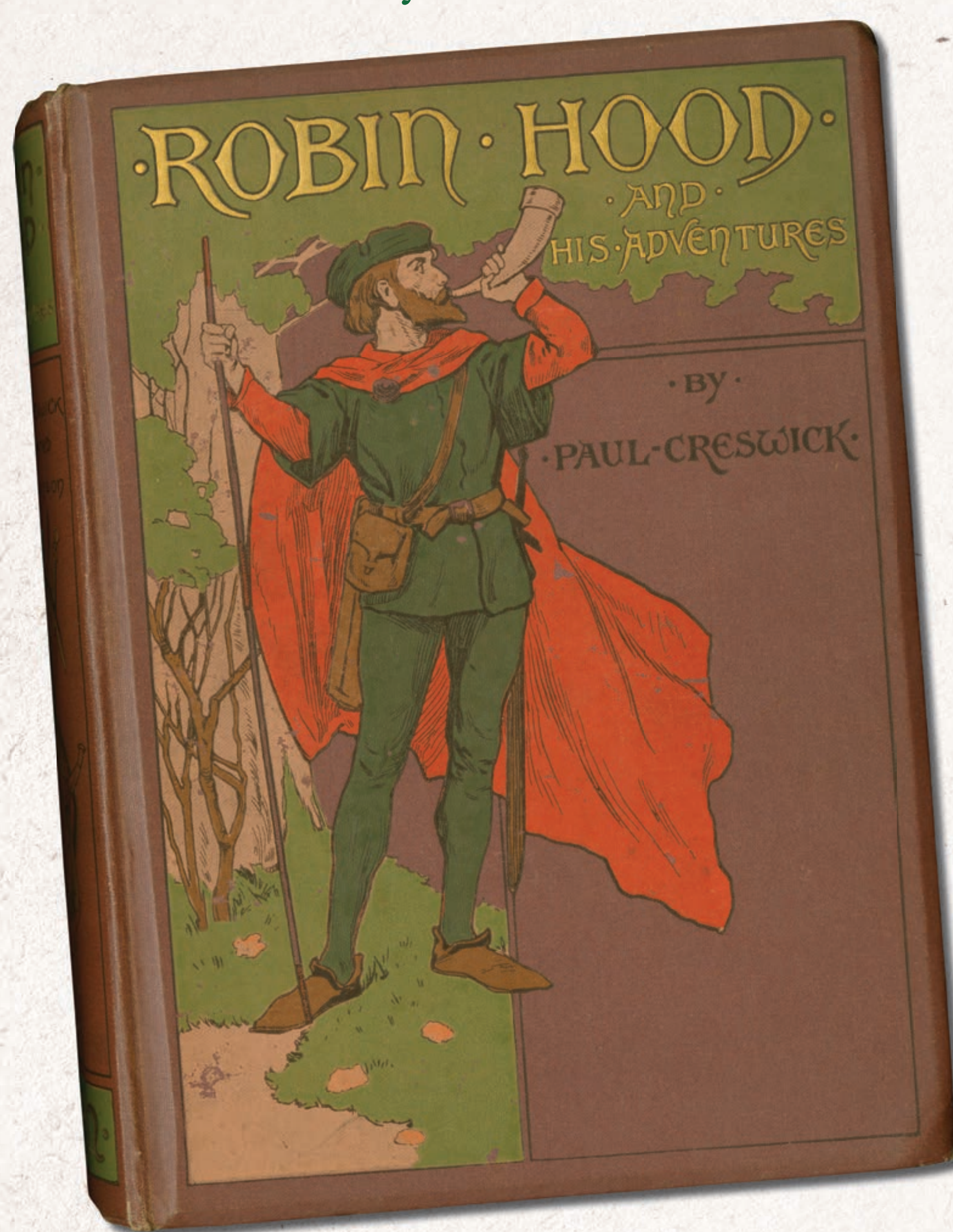
Nottinghamshire has an exceptionally rich heritage of woods and forests. In the east of the county there are many ancient woodlands formerly vital for fuel and timber and now valued and managed for nature conservation. Towards the west, Sherwood, one of the most famous forests in the world, has a dynamic history of monastic and royal power in the medieval period, and later the rise of powerful aristocratic estates and state forestry.

The word forest conjures up images of places dominated by trees and wildness, of sylvan nature untouched by the hands of humans. But the reality of forest history is much more complicated. There was no direct connection between the idea of forest and the concept of woodland: medieval forests were administrative units more akin to a modern national park than extensive areas of planted trees.

Forests are sites where the competing interests and demands of villagers, aristocrats, farmers and kings have been played out over centuries. Rather than natural woodlands, they are places dominated by the management of wild and domesticated animals, and by the commercial control of trees. But they are also places of myth whose landscapes and legends have provided inspiration to poets, novelists and painters.



Above: Plea for 20 French officers and their families and other French refugees (probably Protestant Huguenots) to build a village in Sherwood Forest under the protection of the Duke of Newcastle as Chief Ranger; c1680s. *Papers of the Holles Family in the Portland (Wellbeck) Collection*, Pw 2/613



Right: *Robin Hood and His Adventures* by Paul Creswick, (London, c1903). *East Midlands Special Collection*, Not 1.S16 CRE



Page 1 of *Sissons's Beauties of Sherwood Forest: a guide to the "Dukeries" and Worksop* (Worksop, 1888). *East Midlands Collection* Not 1.D28 SIS



This exhibition has been jointly curated by Professor Charles Watkins, from the School of Geography, and Manuscripts and Special Collections.



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