

Timeline for Bestwood Country Park

6000 BC

Local finds of stone axes, flint tools and early earthworks indicate some people lived locally during the Stone, Bronze and Iron ages. These date from 6000 BC onwards.

300 AD

Some years ago, a coin dated from the Late Roman Period of around 300 AD was also found nearby.

870 AD

By 870 AD, invading Danish armies had made this area part of Mercia. (Now the East Midlands) They established a military base in the nearby town of Snotengaham (Nottingham).

1017-35

During the reign of King Canute (1017 -1035) the five areas of Mercia were changed into five territorial divisions called shires. The borders of the 'Shire of Snotengaham' hardly change from then until the present day.

1070

Lying just 6 miles north of the centre of the modern City of Nottingham, not many people realise that Bestwood once formed part of Sherwood Forest, its thousands of acres covering much of the county. After the Norman invasion of 1066, the whole of Sherwood was made a royal forest.

1086

In the Domesday Book, written in 1086, Bescwode Hay (Bestwood) is listed as being 3,711 acres in size. It is thought that the name originally comes from the Danish word 'buskr' meaning wooden thicket, and the Saxon word 'wude' meaning 'where rough grass grows'.

1100

The forest and everything in it belonged to the king. It had its own special laws and these were strictly enforced by the King's Forest Stewards or Wardens. Many kings hunted here; it is thought that the first Bestwood hunting lodge was built for King Henry I in the early 1100's.

1150

The Bestwood area of Sherwood was the widest area of the whole forest. This made a good hiding place for anyone 'outside the protection of the law' (outlaws). In the 1150s, Henry II offered a 10 penny reward for anyone capturing an outlaw.

1178

In 1178, a forest court sat to hear an accusation and pass sentence on a man 'for trespass in Bestwood Park'. By 1205, King John had raised the outlaw reward to 5 shillings.

1330

In 1330, seventeen year-old Edward III was king, but Roger Mortimer & Edward's mother, Queen Isabella, actually ruled England. The young king went hunting in Bestwood Park, and that night a plan was made in Bestwood Lodge by him to regain power. A small party of the king's men used a secret passage to gain access into Nottingham Castle. There they captured Mortimer & the queen. Mortimer was later hung, the queen imprisoned, and Edward regained both his revenge & his kingdom.

1351

In 1351 Henry had the Bestwood area enclosed with a pale. This was a continuous wooden fence built to create a private royal hunting area (a Park), especially for the keeping of deer.

1486

It was here in 1486, that Richard III received the message of Henry Tudor's landing in Wales with his invasion army. Richard left his beloved Bestwood and rode into battle, losing his crown and his life on the battlefield at Bosworth.

1593

In 1593 an order arrived in Nottingham to ready the Castle for a visit by Elizabeth I, who loved to hunt. An order was also sent 'permitting trees to be felled to repair (Bestwood) Lodge' in readiness for her.

1607

By 1607 the Park although still holding '300 fallow deer and 24 red deer', it was reported that the palisades and fences around the Park 'being so rotten and in ill-repair the deer escape from it at will.'

1627

In 1627, under the reign of Charles I, the lodge was again repaired, showing it to still be in use. Bestwood Park was leased out by the king to private ownership, but required the leaseholders to maintain both the Park and Lodge, saving the king having to find the money to do so.

1644

During the English Civil War, in 1644, a force of 60 Parliamentarian dragoons (mounted soldiers) led by a Captain White passed close by. They were carrying stolen goods from Newstead Abbey, and were attacked here by 100 Royalist cavalry. A fierce battle took place, the King's men finally being beaten back, with the loss of 4 of their troopers killed, and their lieutenant captured.

1681-87

Charles II and his mistress Nell Gwynne enjoyed visits together at Bestwood. In 1681, Charles leased Bestwood Lodge and the deer park grounds to Nell. Later in 1687, he arranged for the £3,000 mortgage to be paid off, and bestowed the hereditary title of the Duke of St Albans on their son.

1700

During the 1700s, much of the nearby land was parcelled into farms and cultivated, and only a small portion of Bestwood Park remained forested. The nearby Mill Lakes, take their name from the several water mills which were sited there.

1862-65

Between 1862 to 1865, the 10th Duke of Albans had the earlier lodge house demolished and replaced with a grand, ornate Gothic-style building. This new lodge cost £23,000, an absolute fortune at the time. Royalty, politicians, and many other famous people were guests there.

1872

It was not until John Carpenter, under lease from the 10th Duke, sank a successful coal mine in 1872, that substantial numbers of people finally came to live here.

1876

In 1876, when coal production started, the houses had been built, the colliery offices finished, and work soon started on the Hawthorn Primary village school.

1877

Alexandra lodge was constructed as a gatehouse in the parkland in 1877. It was given this name as Queen Alexandra passed under the building's large archway while it was still under construction.

1880

Many families had allotments on the area near the houses, now called The Square. Later, the village also formed its own football and cricket teams, and a colliery brass band, 'The Black Diamonds' which still performs to this day.

1875

By early 1875, the first terraced cottages were being built on what became known as Park Road, each with a back yard containing a wash house, boiler and toilet. The houses were of a very high standard, unlike most working class housing of the time. Work had also started on the ornate colliery office buildings with its large clock tower. A complete industrial village community was slowly formed, with eventually over 2,000 people employed here.

1882

The train station on Moor Road was opened in 1882. The railway was the only public transport available to Bestwood residents until a bus service started in the 1920s. Most iron and coal workers would have had to walk to work, even if they lived some miles away.

1900

In the early 1900s the Village Institute was built. It later became the Bestwood Hotel. The 4 storey pit baths were built adjacent to it. St Marks Church was built in 1887; the nearby Emmanuel Church had already existed since 1865 as part of the St Albans estate.

1900s

There was a local pavilion, bowling greens, cricket and football grounds and tennis courts. Family social life played an important part in the community's welfare. It also acted as a balance to the hard and dangerous work of the men.

The Village Hall built in the early 1900s, replaced an earlier 'village hut'. The hall was used for a variety of community uses including a cinema, dance hall, a base for the village Boys Brigade and rehearsal room for the colliery band. The building was later extended and became the Miners Welfare Club.

1914-18

In World War I, 1914 – 1918, sixty four local men volunteered to fight. Many did not return. One night during the war, Bestwood works was nearly bombed by a German Zeppelin airship. The flames of the ironwork furnaces were put out just in time, and the airship could not see its target. A war memorial to the Bestwood volunteers was unveiled in 1918.

1920s

The number of houses remained roughly the same until the 1920s when more housing developments were created. Farmland to the south was bought by Nottingham City Council & various private developers.

1928

Due to a fall in the price and demand of pig iron, the ironworks were mothballed in 1928, and the assets eventually sold off in 1939.

1939-45

During World War II, 1939 to 1945, more men were conscripted here to work, as there was an urgent need for increased wartime coal production. These young, inexperienced miners, were nick named 'The Bevin Boys' after Ernest Bevin, the wartime Minister of Labour. During the World War Two, the Bestwood coal lorries had the name changed to 'Best Coal' to hopefully confuse any enemy invaders.

1940

In 1940, nearby land was used as a temporary tented village for survivors from the Dunkirk evacuation in France. Later, a wartime Army training ground was made here, and an ammunition dump created in the woods.

1950s

Even more extensive building developments took place in the 1950s, this being reflected in the local school population which grew from 67 pupils in 1948 to nearly 300 in 1960.

1965

In 1965, a BBC television play was partly filmed on location here. Written by the highly respected Dennis Potter, 'Stand Up, Nigel Barton' starred Keith Barron. It made a big impression at the time, due to its outspoken social and political content.

Late 1960s

By the late 1960s, the gradual national decline of heavy industry eventually reached Bestwood. But the closing of the colliery in 1967 still came as a great blow, as most of the community were dependent on the pit. Some men were transferred to neighbouring collieries; some left the industry forever, but were never to forget the comradeship and community spirit that was generated by working at such a large colliery.

As the working life of Bestwood changed so did its environment. Some of the land in the area changed ownership. Due to Bestwood being near to Nottingham, even more suburban housing areas were built, including Rise Park and Top Valley. Bestwood Lodge became a privately owned hotel.

1980s

In 1985 Gedling Borough Council and Nottinghamshire County Council pooled the local land under their ownership to make an area of 670 acres. This was designated as Bestwood Country Park, and the site remains under their joint ownership to this day. The Mill Lakes, reed beds and ancient water meadows were sensitively restored and managed, and part of the national cycle route (Sustrans) now runs through them.

From 1985 onwards the former colliery site and pit tip were completely re-landscaped, and these and other important areas within the park are now designated wildlife conservation areas.

1996

May 1996 saw a partnership formed between local ex-colliery workers, who became a volunteer group, and the two councils. The scheme was to carry out ongoing restoration work on the Bestwood Winding Engine and building. This would help preserve it as a working monument to Bestwood's industrial past.

Many park improvements were carried out, such as car parks, toilets, and an on-site Field Studies Centre. An extensive signed footpath and horse trail network was established, as well as a detailed wood and parkland management plan.

2009

In 2009, a Heritage Lottery funded restoration of the winding engine, the engine house and this former electrical sub station was carried out. They are now fully restored and open for visitors to see inside.

Today Bestwood and the park receives over 400,000 visitors a year. Local people and visitors alike can now enjoy the park's wide range of natural features, wildlife habitats and event activities. The park now contains 20 out of 24 key natural habitats, of which 8 are nationally important.

So Bestwood has certainly seen a long and varied history already. But its story continues. Just as the community of Bestwood continues to live, work and adapt towards an unknown but definite future. For those of us today, it is hard to imagine what it used to be like here.

This short history gives just a glimpse into the Bestwood story - past and present.