



The Friends of

Putnoe Wood & Mowsbury Hillfort Newsletter

Autumn 2013

Went To Mow A Meadow

Late September saw the cutting and collecting of the tall grass on the outer meadow at the Hillfort, the cut grass was left in mounds around the perimeter of the field. The following day the Friends group set about moving the large quantity of cuttings and spreading it under the trees. We hope the regime of mechanically cutting and collecting the grass continues, even better would be to have it gathered, bailed and removed from site. If you know of anyone who would be prepared to cut, collect, bail the hay and take it away then please let us know.



Well Deserved Cuppa



We tried to calculate the weight of the hay that we moved, but it weighed too heavily on our minds, so we had a cuppa instead. Join us the same time next year.



Ash to Ashes



Ash dieback is spreading across Britain and has been found at over 570 sites so far. Infected trees are no longer being felled in the hope of discovering mature trees that are resistant to the fungal disease. Infected trees can easily be recognised in the autumn because their leaves turn black and remain on the tree. The ash trees at both our sites are regularly monitored and we are glad to report so far there is no sign of infection, only time will tell.

Further information at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara>

The only water was the sweat on our brows.



The loose debris from the lower leat and medieval pond was removed during August. This work was carried out to improve the flow and standing quality of the water. Hopefully this will help to preserve any archaeological remains and improve the biodiversity of the area.

Chairman: *Andy Wilkins* Secretary: *Chris Wedge* Treasurer: *John Wilkie* Events and Tasks Coordinator: *John Wallace*

No butterflies were harmed

Marion sporting Edwardian style attire demonstrated how a butterfly Transect was carried out in bygone days. Some of us had to pull nettles on the day and the stings kept us warm for days.



Bedtime



The Courtyard meadow was cut and raked in September and put to bed for the winter, the old ant hills can now be clearly seen. A small area to the eastern edge was left uncut for the time being because the Grapholita Pallifrontana moth was still feeding on the wild liquorice plant growing in this area.

Wood Path Clearance



Another cross link path in Putnoe Wood was cleared at the end of August, it was hard work and the relief can be seen in this photograph. All three paths have now been cleared and opened up again.

We do not only clear Ragwort



During the ragwort clearance in the outer meadow, any Cinnabar moth caterpillars we found were moved to a safe place at the edge of the field. Common ragwort is a poisonous biennial that grows on grasslands and grazed areas. Animals usually avoid eating the living plant but they can unwittingly digest the plant if it is mixed with the grass when it is cut. The Cinnabar moth larvae feed on ragwort and the moth has been introduced into some countries to help control the poisonous ragwort. In bygone days ragwort was used as a herb worn as a protection against evil influences, spells and charms.



Pheasant Eggs.



This pheasant's nest was discovered in October while tidying up the outer meadow after the grass cutting. The nest and eggs were abandoned earlier in the year and the tall grass had kept it hidden from view and predators.

Tooled Up

Following our application to the Borough Council for funds for essential tools, we have been advised they will be providing volunteer groups with hand tools. No specific delivery date yet but we remain positive. Sadly, no chain saws, brush cutters, chippers or fire stands. We are told using hand tools is good exercise and better for our health. Pass round the spinach.



Bumper Crop



The wet spring, the long warm summer and limited pruning has produced a bumper crop of fruit in the orchard at the Hillfort. Some thinning of the fruit was needed earlier in the year to prevent branches from becoming overloaded. The meddler did particularly well but these fruit will need to be left until they have blotted before harvesting for jam or jelly.

Food For Free



Although we have cut back and coppiced a large quantity of blackthorn and elder at the Hillfort over the past two years, there are still plenty of sloes and elderberries to be found. Gathering sloes after the first frost is recommended, alternatively place them in the freezer overnight, thaw and use as normal. Do not forget the other hedgerow fruits such as hawthorn, rosehips, rowan and wild cherry but be especially careful in mixed hedgerows. Ripe and attractive does not always mean it is safe to eat. Berries from yew, ivy and even un-ripened elderberries are toxic. As everyone knows there is good and bad fungi, it is safe to eat fairy-ring champignons, honey fungus, velvet shank and morel. However, similar looking fungi such as the clitocybe species and woolly milk cap are poisonous. Best advice is to go out with an experienced forager to collect the less well known berries and fungi.



Butterfly Survey 2013



The 2013 Butterfly Survey at Mowsbury Hillfort has been completed. This involved a weekly count over the same route between the beginning of April and the end of September. The variety and number of butterflies observed increased dramatically as the weather improved and became warmer. In early April the first count resulted in a total of 5 butterflies from 2 different species, whereas in mid-July a single count resulted in a total of 300 butterflies from 13 different species. The large numbers of common blue in the outer meadow and the peacocks on the knapweed in the courtyard meadow were particularly beautiful. Two of the highlights were when Sue spotted a small copper and Margaret saw a painted lady, it was very exciting. Everyone involved enjoyed participating in the survey. We have learnt a great deal and are much more confident in our ability to identify the different species. Not only that, the camaraderie and fun have made it a totally worthwhile experience which will help us learn more about the site. The survey spreadsheet can be downloaded from the Hillfort Ecology page on our website. Our thanks to Chris Wedge for coordinating the project and to everyone that assisted with the survey.



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Poorly Dog and Nature Reserves

A dog was recently taken seriously ill shortly after visiting Putnoe Wood. A vet advised that the possible cause of the illness could have been slug pellet or bait poisoning. We are very happy to report that the dog made a full but expensive recovery.

To our knowledge no herbicides, pesticides, baits or alike are used in Putnoe Wood or Mowsbury Hillfort but that is not to say they are not used on surrounding land. Naturally occurring plants, fungi, seeds and even the daffodil bulb found at both sites are toxic. Dog owners are asked to supervise and keep your dog under control, be watchful of what they are eating.

Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort are nature reserves so please do not let your dog chase or harm the wildlife.



www.putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk



Additional Dog Poop Bin



The present dog poop bin at the main entrance to Putnoe Wood is frequently overflowing by the time it is emptied. We suggested a larger bin is installed but this was not considered operationally practical and so a second bin is to be provided at the main entrance. Our request to have additional bins positioned at the other exits to the Wood was also not considered feasible as the waste collection vehicle would not be able reach them. We have done our best to make it as easy as possible to dispose of dog poop bags when leaving the Wood. We ask dog owners to remove your poop bags from the Wood and dispose of them in a convenient bin in Mowsbury Park, in Wentworth Drive or take them home.

Double Shift



In mid October, some of the Friends did a double shift in heavy rain. In the morning, three of them assisted with coppicing in Putnoe Wood. Later others joined them on the island at the Hillfort. Such enthusiasm.

Oh No! Not That Tree

The ash tree that stands proudly on the western ramparts of Mowsbury Hillfort, could be felled or reduced, because of the damage the tree roots are thought to be causing to the archaeology of the perimeter mound and ditch.



For the Friends this tree has become an iconic feature of the Hillfort as are the two oaks at the main entrance to Putnoe Wood. There are a large number of forest trees inside the Hillfort that are a greater risk to the archaeology of the site. In view of the dieback disease threatening the ash trees in Britain, we hope this tree is reprieved until a national strategy is developed for the care of ash trees.

Hillfort Island Escape



Before work began in earnest on clearing the remainder of the Island the regenerated scrub from last years clearance had to be cutback. As well as the rampant Dogs Mercury and nettles we discovered a few new plants, Cyclamen, St Johns Wort and Violets that had taken up residence. Its great to see an increase in the biodiversity in such a short space of time.

We may be able to accelerate the increase of new species by seeding from the courtyard meadow when the clearance has been completed.

Full Surgery



Nurse Marion's Hillfort surgery was full at the recent Inner Island clearance. Blackthorn punctures and bramble gashes and a few with breathing difficulties from the previous weeks hay making. Everyone was in fits of laughter, not sure why, but then that's what volunteering is all about. We all survived to task another day.

Interpretation boards for Putnoe Wood.



The Friends working group with their content and layouts for the four new interpretation boards met with the ICT Design team at Borough Hall early in October. The draft designs should be ready by early to mid November. In addition to the Friends and Park Rangers giving their approval to the final designs they will have to be vetted by the Borough. We are looking to complete and obtain approval by Christmas after which the order can be placed with the board manufacturer. The aim is to have the four new boards completed and installed in March 2014. We have agreed the location for each of the boards but the precise placement on site has yet to be agreed. The plan is to retain the existing glass fronted board at the main entrance to the wood so it can be used as a notice board for public information.

Next Friends Meeting
Mowsbury Golf Club, Trophy Room.
Tuesday, December 3rd. 19.00

And You Thought It Was All Over

You may think that as autumn turns to winter nature turns off the lights and goes into hibernation but there is still plenty of things to see and enjoy at both of the sites. Many of our feathered friends stay with us during the colder months and we have an influx of migrant birds such as Waxwings.



The Fungi compete to see who can grow the biggest and strongest.



If we happen to have frosts or snow the sites turn into winter wonder lands.



Photographs of the changing seasons can be found on our website. The Friends group will not be hibernating over the winter. Come rain, snow or shine we will be carrying on with our tasks as usual. Why not come and join us.

Coming Soon

Coppicing at Putnoe Wood.

Coppicing at Putnoe Wood is carried out on a 7 to 10 year plot rotation as required by the management plan. The hazel poles are cut and used for fencing, stakes and crafts. The off cuts and waste is used for dead hedging within the wood.

The Friends group give demonstrations on how to construct garden obelisks using the hazel poles. Willow is used to tie the poles together and the timing of the demonstrations is dependent on the availability of willow from Priory Park.

Fencing and gates in Putnoe Wood.

Replacement and repair of the gates and fencing at the entrances to the Wood is ongoing and we have been invited to assist the Park Rangers.

Mowsbury Hillfort. Inner Island

The autumn scrub clearance of the inner island has commenced. Last year we piled the cut scrub on the northern perimeter of the island expecting to be able to dispose of it later, sadly due to the restrictions associated with the ancient monument site this was not possible. This year we will dead hedge the cuttings on the island.

Planting of fruit trees in orchard.

English Heritage has given approval to plant new apple trees in the orchard at the Hillfort, these will replace fruit trees that have died. In addition approval was granted to replace the missing nature reserve sign at the northern entrance to the Hillfort. The Borough obtained the replacement trees in the spring and two of the Friends have been giving them shelter until approval for the planting was granted.

Timber post for notices at the Hillfort.

It is planned to install a timber sleeper post near the bottom gate of the outer meadow to display information and notices for the Hillfort.

Wassail 2014.

As you may recall the Wassail organised for the beginning of this year was cancelled twice due to adverse weather conditions. Hemlock Morris have kindly agreed to lead the proceedings for a wassail in January 2014, Again this is subject to the weather and the date to be confirmed.

Day Trip

To the south of Bedford, close to Barton-le-Clay, there is another iron age Hillfort called Sharpenhoe Clappers. This site is not as defined or well preserved as Mowsbury but it provides sweeping panoramic views north towards Bedford. On a very clear day it is said one site can be seen from the other.



Sharpenhoe Clappers, which is owned by the National Trust, is an ancient beech woodland and chalk escarpment with flower meadows and wooded walks.

Further away, but still achievable as a day trip, is Sutton Hoo in the south-east corner of Suffolk.



Sutton Hoo is a group of seventeen known burial mounds from the 6th-7th century and it overlooks the River Deben and the town of Woodbridge. Archaeological excavations revealed a ship-burial, probably dating from the early 7th century. The burial site held a wealth of Anglo-Saxon artefacts of outstanding art-historical and archaeological importance, it is one of the most significant sites for this period in Britain.

Useful Telephone Numbers

Larissa Clarke (Parks Officer)	01234 718350
Priory Park Rangers	01234 211182
Bedford Borough Council	01234 267422
Pride in Bedford	01234 718276
Bedford Police (non emergency)	101
Environmental Services	0800 121 8888
Highways Help Line	01234 718003
Bedford Citizens Advice	0844 245 1290
NHS Direct	08454647
Anglian Water	0845 714 5145

Keep In Touch

www.putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk

Browse and download photographs from the "Album page".

Check for up and coming tasks, events and our Facebook Feed on the "Whats On Page".

Take a stroll around the website if you would like to find out more about the history, archaeology of Putnoe Wood, Mowsbury Hillfort and The Friends Group.