



The Friends of

# Putnoe Wood & Mowsbury Hillfort Newsletter

Summer 2013

## A Lot Of Dosh

Following further cuts in government funding, Bedford Borough Council will need to make cost savings of £37 million pounds over the next few years. The proposed savings were put out for public consultation last year and if implemented will mean reductions in staffing, services and resources. The Friends work closely with the Parks Department and the Country Park Rangers, the proposals will result in staff reductions and reorganisation of their workload. Other implications are reduced maintenance work for the Parks and Green spaces. We can only wait with some anxiety to see what impact the reductions will have on the Parks Department, the Country Park Rangers and perhaps for the Friends.

Further information can be found at the Boroughs web site under Public Consultations.

## Common Ragwort



Common Ragwort is a poisonous biennial that grows in grasslands and grazed areas. Although animals avoid eating the living plant they can unwittingly digest the plant if it is mixed with cut hay. We are currently removing as much of the Ragwort on the outer meadow as possible to try and prevent the plant from multiplying. Ragwort in bygone days was worn as a protection against evil influences and used as a ward against spells and charms.

### Next Friends Meeting

Mowsbury Golf Club, Trophy Room.  
Tuesday, September 3rd. 19.00

## Archaeology Walk



In May there was a well attended archaeology walk around the Hillfort. This popular tour was led by Jeremy Oetgen from Albion Archaeology and those present enjoyed learning more about the history of the Hillfort. Last year we cleared part of the medieval moated island and Jeremy was delighted to visit it for the first time.

## The Hills are alive with the smells of success.



The outer meadow came alive with an abundance of spring wild flowers including Spotted orchids, Bee orchids and a multitude of different grasses. The effort of annually cutting and raking has been worthwhile. It is essential to limit the amount of nutrients leaching back into the soil for a wild meadow to flourish.

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



## New Gates and Fences at Putnoe Wood



The Country Park Rangers have started work in Putnoe Wood to replace missing and fallen gates and fences. It is an ongoing process and it is reliant on adequate funding and the Rangers having time allocated to complete the work.

## The Opal Tree Health Survey.



The group have been carrying out tree health surveys on the local population of oaks, ash and chestnuts as part of the Opal Tree Health survey. Unlike the oaks in Putnoe Wood, the trees in Mowsbury Park appear un-effected by Acute Oak Disease and the majority given a clean bill of health.

## Going Wild In Mowsbury Park



The wild flower beds in Mowsbury Park have been delighting everyone over the summer months.

## Unwelcome Visitors



Sometime ago a camera was installed at the Hillfort to monitor the wildlife and this proved to be a great success. Sadly in May, following an attempt by two yobs to steal the camera, it was removed. Amazingly one of them can be heard on camera saying ...“what a nice place”... and the next moment they were trying to steal or destroy the camera and cause damage to the surrounding area.

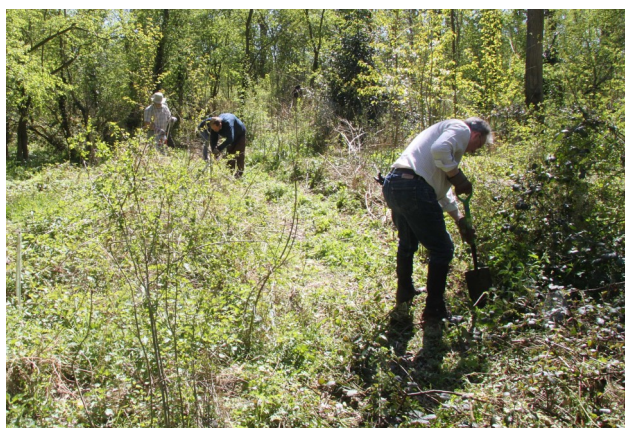
Do not let similar antisocial behaviour spoil your enjoyment of our parks and green spaces. If you witness antisocial behaviour or any suspicious acts on Bedford Borough property or land, please do report it to one of the following:

Police - telephone 101.

Priory Park Rangers – telephone 01234 4211182

Borough’s Parks Department – telephone 01234 718060.

## Putnoe Wood Path Clearance



We are in the process of opening up and clearing three link paths in the wood, these are the ones that run between the southern perimeter path and the central ride. One was cleared earlier this year and recently we completed a second one. It is planned to tackle the third one later in the year.

**Let Us Know Your Views and News.**  
Contribute to the next issue of the newsletter.



## Boards and Names for Putnoe Wood

Ward funding for new interpretation boards in Putnoe Wood has been generously provided by Councillors Michael Headley and Sallyanne Smith. Good progress is being made with the design and layout for four interpretation boards and a pre-production meeting with the Borough's designers is the next stage. Subject to what we learn from that meeting, we are hopeful the interpretation boards will be installed by the end of the year. The plan is to incorporate QR scanner codes for smart phones so visitors can listen to the songs of birds resident in the wood.

To recognise the long history of the wood, it is proposed to name the perimeter path and the central ride using names which relate to the past. Putnoe Wood was once part of a much larger wooded landscape owned by a Saxon named Putta. During Putta's ownership of the land it was known as Puttenho or Puttenhoe. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the ownership of the wood was endowed to the Cistercian Abbey of Warden. Later, following the dissolution of the monasteries, the estate was passed to the Gostwick family of Willington who retained it for two hundred years.

We are considering two names for each path and we would like to hear from the Friends as to which two names they would prefer. The names under consideration are as follows:

For the Perimeter path, we offer either **Putta's Path** or **Puttenho(e) Way**.

For the Central ride, we offer either **Gostwick Ride** or **Abbot's Walk**.

The Friends are asked to let Andy Wilkins or John Wallace have their selection of names by Monday 12<sup>th</sup> August. The next stage is to consult the public who use the wood before making a final choice.

## View To A Kill



You do not have to play golf to get a great view of the Hillfort from Putnoe Wood, we are planning to open up more lines of sight from the wood so that everyone can enjoy the vista. It is also hoped that in the near future a path between the Hillfort and Putnoe Wood can be provided so that future walks and activities can combine both areas.

## Small Balsam At Putnoe Wood



The Small Balsam in Putnoe Wood is spreading and we are gradually reducing it in order to stop the spread of this non-native invasive plant. It has some similarities to Himalayan Balsam but the flowers are yellow and much smaller compared to the white, reddish or purplish ones of Himalayan Balsam. Large drifts of Small Balsam are attractive when in flower during June and July. However, this alien species spreads very rapidly and grows up to 1metre tall, gradually it crowds out native woodland species and monopolizes resources. In time the ecological balance of the wood will be altered if it is not managed and controlled. This troublesome plant is a native of central Asia and during the 1820's it was imported into gardens of the grand houses in the UK. Over time it has spread to woodlands and the open countryside.

## More Unwelcome Visitors.



One visitor to Mowsbury Hill was definitely not welcome this year. The Brown-tail Moth larvae ( caterpillars) were discovered in Mowsbury Hillforts outer meadow. This species can be a pest as the hairs on the larvae can cause a rash and acerbate asthma in those susceptible especially children. They were reported, collected (web and larvae) and destroyed by a local lepidopterist. This species was not resident in our part of the UK until a few years ago when they became established in the Sandy / Beeston area.



## Cut Above The Rest

Recently the golf club mowed the lower third of the outer meadow, essential for the golf club to collect wayward golf balls from the driving range. The ideal time for the wildflowers is at the end of the summer and this is when the higher part of the meadow will be cut and raked. We will be able monitor and observe how the two cutting regimes affect the growth and development of the wildflowers over time. Will nature form a hillside tide mark?.



## Butterfly Transect



The Friends are partaking in a national survey as part of the UK Butterfly monitoring scheme. A butterfly transect is a way of measuring the abundance and variety of butterflies at a particular site. The Hillfort is being used for this purpose with a set walking route which is divided into separate sections. This requires a commitment to record a weekly count from the beginning of April until the end of September between the hours of 11am and 4pm, when the weather conditions meet the specified criteria. If the butterfly count is continued over several years, it will enable us to monitor and be aware of any changes in the butterfly population at the Hillfort. This will also reveal any increase in the butterflies due to better site management, hopefully the hard work by the Friends will benefit the butterflies.

The variety and number of butterflies observed has increased dramatically as the weather has improved. In early April our first count resulted in a total of 5 butterflies and only 2 different species, whereas in mid July a single count resulted in a total of 300 butterflies and 13 different species were seen. Wow!

## Dambusters



Only two months ago in Putnoe Wood, there was a good flow of water in the stream and water in the nearby ponds. The recent dry period has meant the stream and ponds have dried-up. Last year Danny, one of the Park Rangers, suggested installing low bund dams in to the stream to help retain some water during dry spells. This suggestion might need to go back to the top of the action list. We have observed that the stream has dried up quicker this year following the establishment of the water holding ponds on the Woodlands estate. Could there be a link?. We think forming bund dams in the stream may be a better solution when compared to calling in the RAF to breach the Woodlands dams.



## Botanical and Biodiversity walk



In late May there was a very interesting Botanical and Biodiversity walk around the Hillfort. This was led by Katharine Banham and Laura Downton from the Wildlife Trust. The weather was extremely wet but the Friends still enjoyed a very informative walk with Katharine and Laura. We gained invaluable information on how to progress our work at the Hillfort, and what we can do to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the site.

Please contact us if you have memories or information of any kind on Putnoe Wood or Mowsbury Hillfort. We are always trying to expand our knowledge and understanding of these two sites.



## Mowsbury Orchard



Work continues in the east orchard at the Hillfort. The fruit trees have been pruned and the majority have been fitted with tree guards and palings to deter deer and rabbit damage. There has been a wider variety of wild flowers in bloom in the orchard this year. Katharine and Laura from the Wildlife Trust suggested the grass in the orchard is cut and raked more frequently to encourage a greater diversity of species.

We are hoping for a good harvest of fruit and we ask that you do not pick the fruit until they have properly matured and that you only pick enough to sample the different varieties.

### Tasks to keep us fit and never dull



As summer fades into autumn our busiest time of the year will begin when our maintenance and project tasks get into full swing. The clearance of the inner island at the Hillfort will be resumed, it is planned to open up the area where it is believed Morinsbury Manor stood. The medieval ponds and Iron age ditches and mounds require gentle clearance of surface debris and the summer growth removed to prevent further damage. At the end of the summer the outer meadow will need cutting and raking. In Putnoe Wood there is the regular cycle of coppicing, path clearing and other work to be programmed into the diary. We need to keep up our fitness levels ready for the winter tasks. Well as someone once said ...never a dull moment!.



## Bee orchid



There has been a resurgence of the Bee Orchid at the Hillfort, this is the flower emblem of Bedford. Smaller than the spotted Orchid it can be difficult to recognise especially in long grass.

## White Bluebell.



This year, two white bluebells were found in Mowsbury Hillforts orchard, they are not as common as the regular bluebells. Very good news for the Friends group because it is our emblem.





Not All Paths Lead To Rome



As one more path is cleared another overgrown and forgotten path is soon discovered and we start all over again. Thank goodness there are plenty of chocolate biscuits to keep up our energy levels.

The Opal Air Survey



The Friends Group joined Dr Agnetta Burton and her two colleagues from the University of Hertfordshire to carry-out a lichen survey at Mowsbury Hillforts orchard. Lichens are sensitive indicators of air quality and the survey will help to determine how lichens are being influenced by current atmospheric conditions. Four types of lichens were most prevalent in the orchard, Parmelia which is an intermediate nitrogen tolerant lichen, Leafy Xanthoria, and Physcia which are nitrogen loving and *Evernia* a nitrogen sensitive lichen.

Update on Friends Activities

Rights Of Way surveys.  
A number of the group have been assisting the Boroughs Rights of Way team with inspecting and surveying local footpaths and bridleways.

The Opal Tree Health Survey.  
The group have been carrying out tree health surveys on the local population of oaks, ash and chestnuts as part of the Opal Tree Health survey. Unlike the oak trees in Putnoe Wood, those in Mowsbury Park seem to be unaffected by Acute Oak Decline. The survey is intended to establish more about the general health of our trees and provide vital information on some of the pests and diseases that can affect these trees.

Hillfort Survey  
A national project is in progress to gather information for The Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland. We intend to survey Mowsbury Hillfort very soon. Further information can be found at: [www.arch.ox.ac.uk](http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk)

Did You Know

The Friends of Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort were formed in 2011 and became a constituted group in 2012. We assist and work with the Country Park Rangers and the Bedford Borough Parks Department at Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort. In addition, advice and guidance is sought from the Wild Life Trust, Albion Archaeology, Opal, English Heritage and other relevant bodies. Although we all come from different walks of life with varied hobbies and interests, the one thing we all share is our enthusiasm and dedication to both Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort. As our name suggests we are a Friends Group so irrespective of the type of task or activity we are involved in there is always time for a chat, a joke and of course the compulsory tea and biscuits. In addition to the manual tasks we are actively trying to involve local residents by organising and promoting nature and wildlife walks, foraging, archaeological and history events. If you have a little spare time with an enthusiastic interest in the environment, wildlife, history, archaeology, walks, talks, practical tasks or learning new skills and would like to meet like minded volunteers please come and join us. Many thanks for your support.





# Mowsbury Hillfort

Iron Age Hillfort, Medieval Site and Nature Reserve.



- 1. Main Entrance.
- 2. Western rampart of Iron Age Hillfort
- 3. Leat from Cleat Hill.
- 4. Iron age ditch/ First Medieval pond.
- 5. Courtyard Meadow.
- 6. Second Medieval pond.
- 7. Inner Island of medieval moat.

- 8. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ponds.
- 9. Old orchard east.
- 10. Historic Parish boundary and hedgerow.
- 11. Medieval ditch and mound.
- 12. Old orchard, south.
- 13. Entrance and Iron Age rampart.
- 14. Wild Flower Meadow.