



The Friends Of

Putnoe Wood & Mowsbury Hillfort



Newsletter

Christmas/Winter 2014



Consolidation

This year has been basically a year of consolidation, it was always planned in the early years to forge ahead with the larger more complex tasks and then concentrate on being able, to be in a position to maintain the specific areas. Initially, tasks started last year by the Friends group in Putnoe Wood with the Green Space Rangers such as pushing through two new green paths, opening up overgrown paths, clearing scrub from along Renhold Brook, the installation of the information and notice boards were completed which left the rest of the year free to plant new trees and shrubs and general maintenance. We also spent a considerable amount of time communicating the virtues of the wood and our efforts to the general public and agreed an annual task list.



Mowsbury Hillfort again gave us different challenges. Ongoing work clearing the scrub on the ramparts, Mowsbury Hill Meadow, Courtyard Meadow the Inner Island, perimeter rights of way paths and the area around the ponds kept us busy during the early part of the year and after bird nesting. A new project of clearing the Leat from the ponds out towards Cleat Hill was started in the Autumn and the paling, guarding of the orchard fruit trees was completed. Delays with cutting, collecting the grass and scrub in the meadows, ramparts and orchard meant we were raking and collecting a lot later than was desirable. The Ash trees on site were tagged, the orchard trees were surveyed and semi-pruned the butterfly transect and several other wild life surveys were carried out by ourselves or other local groups. *Continued on page 6.*

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

Vote For Bob



In October a furtastic autumn day saw us squirreling around clearing the leat at the Hillfort. We demonstrated our support for Bob. A campaign instigated by the RSPB. Since 1977 house sparrow populations have declined by 64%, 60% of the plants and animals surveyed in the UK are in decline. Hedgehog numbers have halved in the past 25 years, all of our flower-rich meadows have vanished and our bumblebees, butterflies and other vital insects are disappearing with them. Bob ventured down to Westminster to hand in more than 100,000 votes for nature to the three main political parties. Unfortunately during the task we were continually attacked by the grey squirrels which we could not see with the infernal masks on. At least the rabbits had a laugh while digging their man traps. All in a days volunteering.

Confrontational, No not Us



We try not to be a confrontational group and would rather point people in the direction of the light which in this case would be towards the dog poop bins just beyond the perimeter of the wood but it would appear our pleas are not being listened too. We would like to see all dog owners clearing up after their pets but it amazes us that a minority of dog owners go to the trouble of collecting, bagging in non biodegradable plastic bags and then decorating the wood with them. We are actively negotiating with the Borough Council to get an additional Dog Poop Bin installed at the northern end of Putnoe Wood. In the mean time if you cannot be bothered to walk the extra mile (no of course not), 20 metres, to place it in a bin or take your dogs poop bag home you deserve to be hammered with a £1000 fine by the Borough Council.

Gonzalo



Not of our doing! The fate of this tree in Putnoe Wood was the casualty of disease and tight isobars from the remnants of hurricane Gonzalo. An information sheet from the Green Space Rangers explaining the problems with some of the trees and further work which is to be carried out has been put up at the entrances to the wood.

Move over Starsky Our Very Own Huggy Bear



Is this Care Bear or Huggy Bear. Thankfully Ranger Danny does not go around hugging all of the trees in Putnoe Wood otherwise the ongoing maintenance programme would stall. No plashy pools (puddles) to negotiate on this early November day as the rain held off enabling us to progress with this years coppicing .



Hay Today Gone Tomorrow.



Perhaps we proved on a cold November day that you do not need sunshine to make hay, OK perhaps the grass and scrub was a little damp but the ramparts are now looking pretty good. You would have been proud of our spontaneous math calculations, it was calculated that the distance travelled by the group manually moving the hay from one side of Mowsbury Hill Meadow to the other was over seven miles and we still had time for tea to recuperate..



Building a Home for Nature



Talk about "building a home for nature" there was enough concrete holding the old notice board in position, to build a block of flats, after two hours of blood sweat and tears we were forced to cut the legs off below ground level. The smart new information board was installed the following week which was a lot easier to install than the removal of the old one. The new board will allow us to keep users of the wood up to date with what is going on.



Letter From A Friend.

The Friends group are always keen and enthusiastic to hear from people with memories or information on either of our sites so it was great to hear from Robert Bright recently.

"I grew up on Cleat Hill and as a boy and young man I spent a great deal of my spare time with farmer Bill Allen on his smallholding that included Mowsbury Hillfort ('The Goss' as we all called it). As such, I grew to know it like the back of my hand! I still do, and visit it regularly if infrequently now. My legs are not in great condition, but I managed to struggle up there in July and at the beginning of this month. I noticed that the outer enclosure had been cut, and that someone had been doing some hedge laying! Bill Allen did some digging in the 1950s and early 1960s. He had a collection of material, and sketches of his diggings. I fear though that they would all have been destroyed by his sister after his death! I also knew Putnoe Wood of course, when it was a riot of bluebells and other wild flowers and wild life. That was before it was opened up and 'improved' by the Council. Fortunately, 'The Goss' is not so frequently visited and now that it is so overgrown, is showing signs (including a few bluebells) of becoming a real wildlife preserve. Unfortunately, this does not seem to include the characteristic honeysuckle of my child-

-hood, although some still grows around Bill Allen's old farmhouse. I also did some work, with my friend Peter Dudeney, in the later 1960s. (The two of us initiated an Archaeological Society at school). With the help of my late father, a Civil Engineer, we surveyed and mapped the site. I retrieved a certain amount of pottery shards, mainly St. Neots Ware, from the outer enclosure (then cultivated). The spot was marked on our map. These items and the map were handed to the County Archaeologist in the early 1970s". Last year we were contacted by Richard Stoodley now living in Kent who said he was delighted to have come across our website, he was born in Putnoe Lane in 1937 and spent much his boyhood around the wood and "up the Goss" as they called Mowsbury Hillfort. He told us that in the 1940's the farm, now a golf course, was farmed by Bill Allen, who lost a leg in WW1, helped by Ted, who lived in a wooden hut within the medieval moat. He is mentioned in G J Dring's, Iron Age Pottery from the Camp.

You never know perhaps Robert and Richard knew each other during their childhood years.



Food For Free



Wow! we had no idea that all those wild things could feed my family for free and I could have a full head of hair before the month is out, thank you box wood plant, stinging nettle and green friends. Back to earth, we hope everyone enjoyed the foraging walk in September and that the super stores will not be the poorer for our experience. Our thanks to Jon and Ginny who guided us through the Flora and Fauna and for a most enjoyable stroll around the hillfort.

How The West Was Won.



The brush cutter training and qualifications for some of our members definitely came in handy this year. It enabled us to tackle some of the heavy scrub and bramble clearance that up to now only the rangers were authorised to carry out. However, it was all men and women to the pumps with the manual tools on the majority of the other work.

Starlight Hike



Five of the Friends group pussy footed it over to Sue Ryders', St Johns Hospice in Moggerhanger to join in with the Starlight Hike. Us old codgers, 'Made it Through the Night', (a 10K walk starting at 22.00pm and not a pub in site) in just over two hours which was not bad considering the walk was across country and included a stop of remembrance to take stock of why we were joining in. We managed to collect a few groats for our troubles but for some of us it took more than a couple of hours to recover.



With the amount of maintenance and clearance tasks over the year the pressure started to show on some of us. Never fear, our dead hedging elite are good for a few more years yet.



Tasks, Activities and Friends Meetings

www.putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk

Mobile site: www.pwmhfriends.com

www.facebook.com/putnoemowsburyfriends



As an Ook cometh of a litel spyr

Before we receive comments about the spelling of the heading it comes from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, 1374. It appears to be the earliest variant of "Mighty Oaks from little acorns grow". Did you know the word acorn doesn't come from 'oak' and 'corn', as is popularly supposed, but from the Old English 'aecern', meaning berry or fruit.



Back to the matter in hand. Early December found the Friends Group planting some 200 tree saplings and the same amount of shrubs. Unfortunately only 40 of these were oak as the species does not do well when planted below a canopy. With the problems at the moment in the wood with acute oak decline it was considered prudent not to plant too many oaks at this time. The other tree species included: Hornbeam, Large-leaved Lime, Small-leaved Lime Silver Birch, Black Poplar (male & female). The understory shrubs were: Field Maple, Hawthorn, Crab Apple, Spindle, Wayfaring Tree and Guilder Rose.

December Friends Meeting



The final Friends meeting of 2014 was held on December 9th. Our thanks to everyone that braved the elements. Robert "Rocky" Bright talked to us about his younger days squirreling about at the Hillfort, the Wood. Thanks also to Lorenzo Franco, Mowsbury Golf Clubs restaurant gaffer for the Christmas fare and nibbles. The minutes of the meeting will be downloadable from the office page of the website as usual. Our next meeting will be on Tuesday February 10th 2015.

Not For The Faint Hearted.



Volunteering is not all about sunshine, deck chairs, tea and chocolate biscuits there's always room for a little bonding and military type manoeuvres.

Referendum



August saw us clearing Keepers Path and Ditch in Putnoe Wood at about the same time as the Scottish Referendum was being balloted as you can see our Scottish contingent decided to take the vote a little too literally by taking their tea on the other side of the path.

888,246 We Do Remember.



High Rise Housing.



New bat boxes funded by Brickhill Parish Council have recently been installed along Falcon Avenue, Brickhill by the Bedford Bat Group. Bird boxes on Waveney Green were put up earlier in the year.

Continued from page 1.

No one can actually predict what may occur next year especially politicians, weather men, bankers and sooth sayers but what I can say is this may possibly be the last newsletter that we will be producing. Will we, won't we! Even a relevantly simple newsletter such as ours can be very time consuming to put together even if it mirrors our Facebook postings. So I would like to take this opportunity as I have room here to do so, to thank all of the Friends group for their hard work and efforts and I am sure their enthusiasm will not abate over the coming years. As well as a very successful Wassail in 2014 and the foraging and a nature walks, one of our number was awarded a highly commended certificate from The Winifred Fowler 2014 Community Awards. This reflects on the whole group for all of their endeavours. Two of the group achieved NPTC level 2 in brushcutting with the possibility of places for further NPTC and first aid refreshers training. Our ladies dead hedging has become an art form and is becoming a legend in their own life time and the boys exploits in forestry, notice board, bench and gate erections are well renowned. Last but by no means least John Wallace for his skills with the task and events coordination, John Wilkie as treasurer for looking after our well earned groats and Helen Wilkie and previously Chris Wedge as secretary, not an easy task to interpret our comments into the written minutes and of course not forgetting our Green Space Ranger colleagues from the Borough. A special mention for Martin Fannon whom armed with a brushcutter is an adversary not to be taken lightly and Dave Parrot who is single handily trying to hack through the mosquito invested Leat to the top of Cleat Hill and as for qui, moi:

“Hey Ho it's a Volunteering life for me”.

Role of Honour from the Christmas Card on the front page :
Left to right:

Chris Moss, John Jordan, John Wilkie, Dave Parrot, Andy Wilkins, Chris Wedge, Margret Fisher, Sue Gadsden, John Wallace, Lynn Caudrey, Martin Fannon, Helen Wilkie, Sue Fannon, Diana Readhead, Helen Miller, Jane Warner, Marion Wallace, Allison Wilkins.

Parrot Taken up Residence In Leat



One of the larger long term projects started this year at the Hillfort was to clear the Leat towards Cleat Hill to allow more water to drain into the ponds not only to provide water for the wild life but to help protect any archaeological remnants that maybe buried in the ditches. One of our members Dave Parrot has taken on this task as a personnel challenge and it would appear, plans to complete the clearance before the start of the new year. Well done “Dave of the Leat” we will make sure to pop up to the Hillfort on Christmas day with a mince pie. You can just about see Dave “man of Leat in the photograph at the start of the project heading off like something out of Avatar.



Phew! More Judgment Than Luck



Phew! A very skilfully felled diseased tree otherwise one of our new notice boards would have been a gonner. This is just one of the trees in Putnoe Wood that are having to be removed because of disease or are in an unsafe condition. It was not possible to leave this tree as standing dead wood for the wildlife.

Congratulations, to Margret Carpenter for winning the Winifred Fowler Community Award for her service to the community and her tireless efforts for The Friends of Foster Hill Cemetery.





The Friends of

Putnoe Wood & Mowsbury Hillfort

Invite you to the

WINTER WASSAIL

IN THE ORCHARD AT MOWSBURY HILLFORT

Tuesday 20th JANUARY 2015

Come & join us in the ancient custom of Wassailing...
In the company of the local Hemlock Morris Dancers
we will share a traditional wassail ceremony.
Hot apple juice will be served to keep everyone warm!
Meeting point:
Mowsbury Golf Club Car Park at 7.15pm for 7.30pm start.

Please note this is an outdoor event so wear warm
clothes & sturdy shoes.
Bring a torch to light your way! and something to bash to help make a noise
and awaken the spirits!
Parking available in the golf club car park

Booking essential as places are limited.
Priory Rangers 01234 211182
prioryrangers@bedford.gov.uk
contact@putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk

Everyone welcome - this event is **FREE OF CHARGE**
A donation of £2.00 would be welcome to cover refreshments.

For more information about Morris Dancing, please visit: www.hemlockmorris.com



Bedford Borough Council