



The Friends of

# Putnoe Wood & Mowsbury Hillfort



## Newsletter

Winter 2013



*A Merry Christmas  
and a Happy New Year*

*From  
The Friends of Putnoe Wood  
and  
Mowsbury Hillfort*



[www.putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk](http://www.putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk)



This Newsletter is independently published on behalf of The Friends of Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort but does not necessary reflect the views of all members or of Bedford Borough Council







### Reasons To Be Cheerful: Year Three.

Approaching the third anniversary since the formation of the Friends group, we thought it would be a good time to review progress over the last three years.

#### Mowsbury Hillfort.

Over the last three years the Friends have made a particular effort at Mowsbury Hillfort, in order to reclaim this scheduled ancient monument and stem the tide of neglect and decline. As one would expect, within the group each member has their own particular interest whether it is the wildlife, the flora and fauna, the archaeology, the local history or raising a wider awareness of the site. This is a strength and is beneficial, because it allows us to stand back and assess whether we are heading in the right direction to ensure a long term and sustainable project.

The outer meadow, although not within the ancient monument site, is an integral part of the biodiversity for the hillfort. During the time the meadow was left unattended the coarse grass and brambles grew unchecked and suppressed the wild flowers. Now that the meadow grass is being cut annually and the cuttings removed, to prevent nutrients leaching back into the soil, the native wild flowers have flourished again. The same regime has been carried out in the courtyard meadow, this has been equally successful and resulted in a vibrant display of orchids and other wild flowers. An additional benefit is that the ancient ant hills are on view again.

The medieval ponds are important archaeological features, the area around the ponds has been cleared of blackthorn, elder and scrub and the ponds cleared of loose debris. This was carried out to benefit the biodiversity of the area, improve the flow and standing quality of the water and preserve any archaeological remnants in the bottom of the ponds. Future re-growth of the blackthorn and elder together with the nettles will be an ongoing issue.

The inner island, thought to be the site of iron age huts and the mediaeval manor house of Morinsbury, had become badly overgrown with yet more blackthorn and elder. The density of the scrub growth was so suffocating that only moss was able to grow. The clearance of the island is underway and we have already seen new plants such as cyclamen, violets and St John's Wort taking up residence. An L shaped trench has been discovered on the island, one idea is this was where a mediaeval wall has been 'robbed out' or removed to salvage the masonry. Eventually, when the clearance has been completed, we hope to carry out an archaeological survey of the area. We could accelerate the increase of new species by seeding from the wild flowers growing in the courtyard meadow.

The orchard, which was planted in the early 1920's, is another area where the grass is being cut and raked on a yearly basis. This year saw even more wild flowers growing in this area. The fruit trees were gently pruned and guards fitted to prevent damage from rabbits and deer, there was an abundance of fruit to be harvested. To the south of this orchard there is a second and perhaps older orchard. This was hidden from view because once again the blackthorn, elder and scrub had taken over the area, as a result the fruit trees had been forgotten and neglected. Partial clearance of the old orchard has been completed, restorative pruning of these trees will be a challenging task for the future.

Future challenges are the gradual clearance of brambles from the outer defensive mound to the hillfort and the clearance of debris and scrub from the inner mounds and ditches. Although we have carried out a lot of work in many areas of the hillfort, a significant percentage is to remain left untouched to support and sustain the wildlife, flora and fauna present on the site. There was disappointment because the wassail at the beginning of 2013 had to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. Other events were more successful and were well attended. There was an excellent botanical and biodiversity walk with the Wild Life Trust, albeit in the rain and an equally enjoyable and informative archaeological walk with Albion Archaeology. We have undertaken lichen and moss surveys with the University of Hertfordshire and of course contributed to the national butterfly survey, which ran from April to September. The flora, fauna, Wildlife and trees are continually monitored.

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





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### Putnoe Wood

The Park Rangers have managed the wood for the last ten years or longer, it is a well used recreational area with an abundance of wildlife, flora and fauna. Compared to the hillfort, the wood presents the Friends with quite different challenges and ongoing tasks. The main paths are inspected regularly and cleared from encroaching vegetation. Three overgrown cross paths have been cleared and opened up for public use again. We are assisting the Park Rangers to replace missing and broken fences and gates, this work progresses as time and funding permits. We have also assisted the Park Rangers to install three new benches using salvaged oak timber. Management of the small balsam is an ongoing task for every June. Coppicing of the hazel recommenced in October, this is carried out on a 7 to 10 year plot rotation as required by the management plan. A second dog poop bin has been provided at the main entrance, we continue with our efforts to educate dog walkers to dispose of their poop bags and litter responsibly.

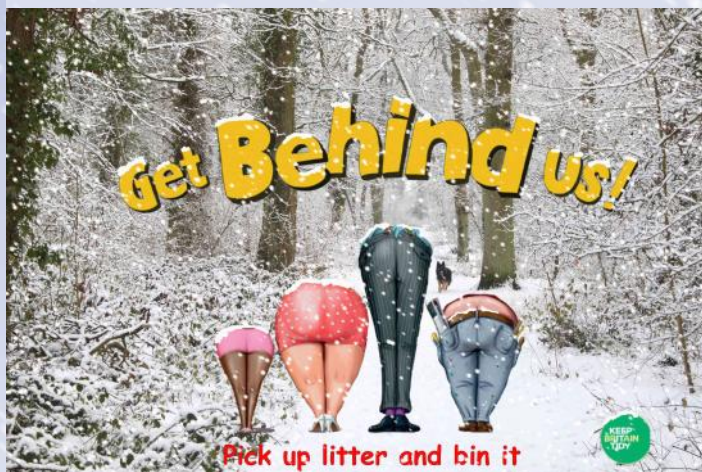
Following the allocation of ward funding by the Putnoe Ward Councillors, we have made good progress with the provision of four new interpretation boards for the wood. After extensive research and preparatory work, some of the Friends met with the ICT Design team at Borough Hall in October. The aim is to have the new boards completed and installed in March 2014. The existing glass fronted board at the main entrance to the wood is to remain, so it can be used as a notice board for public information. In 2013 a tree health survey was undertaken and nature, flora, fauna and bird walks took place during the year.

Do the Friends group have reasons to be cheerful? Oh yes a great deal indeed. We remain very proactive and have lost none of our enthusiasm over the last three years. Our commitment to both sites is as strong as ever and the number of Friends has increased. Volunteering can be fun, so why not come and join us.

We wish you all a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and thank everyone for their support and friendship.



### Keep Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Tidy



Cleaning up the nation's rubbish costs more than a billion pounds a year, a little thoughtfulness costs nothing. Please dispose of your litter responsibly and help keep Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort tidy. Bedford Borough operate a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of environmental crime and have issued 475 Fixed Penalty Notices for littering and other similar crimes since April this year. Watch out for our litter pick blitz days and come and join us.

[www.keepbritaintidy.org](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org)

[www.putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk](http://www.putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk)

### Double Vision



No, you are not seeing double, a second shiny new dog poop bin has been installed at the main entrance to Putnoe Wood. There are 550 individual provided dogs waste bins located across the Borough, that number has now increased by one. We thank the Borough Council. Do not confuse this new addition with a post box as a pensioner in North Yorks recently did, he was posting his mail in a dog bin instead of a nearby post box. Should have gone to Specsavers.

[contact@putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk](mailto:contact@putnoemowsburyfriends.org.uk)



## Badgers and what you may not know

The name badger possibly derives from the French word *bêcheur* meaning digger or from the word *badge* in reference to the white mark on its forehead.

Badgers are related to otters, stoats, weasels, polecats and pine martens.

Badgers are omnivorous and will eat a wide variety of foods, insects, frogs, small reptiles, small mammals, small birds, berries and seeds although their main diet consists of earthworms.

A Badger can eat up to 200 worms per day.

Although females are able to mate at any time, the fertilised egg does not implant in the uterus until December and the cubs are normally born in February.

An adult badger can weigh upwards of 27 lbs or 12Kg

Badger dens are called sets

The collective name for a group is a clan, males are called boars, females sows and the young, cubs.

Badgers have the fiercest bite of any animal of their size.

The main enemy of badgers is mankind.

Badger baiting was outlawed in the United Kingdom as early as 1835, with the Cruelty to Animals Act, but it was not until 1992 with the Protection of Badgers Act that cruelty towards and death of a badger constituted an offence.

Despite having been illegal for over 170 years, badger baiting has continued in a clandestine manner throughout Britain and Ireland until the present day.

Badgers become infected with Bovine TB from cattle dung or saliva. Other mammals such as deer also carry this disease.



## Walk on the Wild Side with Dave Barnes



Copyright 2013 David Barnes

Dave Barnes had to squeeze the October Putnoe Wood bird survey in on Sunday morning 20th October no matter what the weather and unfortunately it wasn't any better than it had been the previous week. Heavy rain and wind was the order of the day and the birds were keeping their heads down. The highlight was the Goldcrest and of note was the absence of Blackbirds for the second month running.

Total Bird Species: 12.

Join Dave at Priory Park for Guided bird walks on the last Sunday of each month starting at 9.00am throughout the winter.

Further information at <http://djbblogging.blogspot.co.uk/> or via the link from the forum page on our website.

## On The Brink Of Extinction

Britons rare wild flowers are on the edge of extinction. It has been estimated that over ninety percent of our wild flower meadows have been lost and of those remaining only two percent of ancient wild flower meadows survive. A wild flower meadow can take hundreds of years to evolve, perhaps a good reason why we should accelerate this natural process by seeding the Hillforts outer meadow with plants such as Small Scabious, Rough Hawkbit and especially Yellow Rattle which is a semi parasitic on the roots of grass and inhibits its growth.

Bedford Borough has been experimenting with urban wild flower areas which can be of great benefit to the local populations well being and the localised wildlife although the size of the plantings may not be large enough to make a significant overall impact. Perhaps our efforts at the Hillfort will encourage the restoration of other wild flower meadows in their natural environment on the edges of Bedford which are easily accessible for recreational use and enjoyment.

Another area in which we should all be concerned about is the recently reported decline of certain species of birds such as the cuckoo, starling, willow tit, lapwing, whinchat, wood warbler, turtle dove and grey partridge.

Natural England, have said that more work is needed to go into protecting birds in the wider countryside, rather than those maintained on special sites such as natural reserves. Our efforts at both Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort will hopefully have a beneficial impact on the biodiversity of the two areas.



## QR Bar Codes

QR barcodes, or quick response codes, are a special type of barcode that can be read by mobile phones and contain up to 100 times the amount of information than a regular barcode does. Users can scan the QR barcode and instantly navigate to a relevant website on their smart phone. We hope to incorporate these on the information boards at Putnoe Wood and then possibly roll them out to other areas of the two sites. The QR barcode below is a sample of what the barcode looks like and this one will take you to our website. We can use these QR barcodes to provide selective information on the wildlife, history,



archaeology, or even bird song at any given point. If you do not have a QR barcode app on your phone they are easily available on line. QR Code Reader and QR Reader for Andriod are both free apps.

## Higher Level Stewardship

Fantastic news for the Friends group, the Park Rangers and Bedford Borough Council. We can announce that Natural England has granted Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) status for Mowsbury Hillfort. The primary objectives of HLS are wildlife conservation, natural resource protection, maintenance and enhancement of landscape quality and character, protection of the historic environment, promotion of public access and understanding of the countryside. Congratulations and thank you to Park Ranger Jane and everyone involved in achieving this recognition.





## SCI Seasonal Canine Illness

In recent years, during autumn, dogs walked in woodlands can suddenly become ill. In some cases, dogs do not recover. Cases of this illness, named seasonal canine illness (SCI), are usually seen from August to November. The AHT (Animal Health Trust) are investigating this illness and advises vigilance during this time. Five study areas are currently being investigated, Sandringham Estate, Thetford Forest, Sherwood Forest, Rendlesham Forest and Clumber Park.

Please seek advice from your vet if you are concerned about your dog.

What to look out for:

Vomiting, Diarrhoea, Lethargy.

If you have walked in woodland and notice the following signs in your dog/s within 72 hours, please contact a vet immediately:

The AHT is currently investigating possible links with Harvest mites or distance travelled. There are no known preventive measures, but the following may help:

1. Ask your vet about topical spray treatments for mites to apply to your dog immediately before a walk. These may offer more protection against mites than spot-on treatments.

2. If you are taking your dog on holiday with you and/or travelling long journeys in the lead up to walking in woodland, ensure your dog has lots of breaks and access to fresh water before, during and after your journey.

For the latest information visit:

[www.aht.org.uk/sci](http://www.aht.org.uk/sci),

email [sci@aht.org.uk](mailto:sci@aht.org.uk)

or call 01638 555399



## Open To View



Work at the Hillfort has commenced on clearing debris and scrub from the ditches and banks to the west of the island and south of the courtyard meadow. This is being done to prevent further damage to the archaeological features and to open up vistas inside the Hillfort. On completion this will provide lines of sight from the southern medieval mound across to the courtyard meadow and island. This is a long term project and will have to be factored in with our other seasonal tasks. As we progress we will of course monitor and be guided on the impact of the clearance on the resident flora and fauna. Removing such a large quantity of cut wood and debris from site will be difficult so we will have to continue to dead hedge or create informal stacks to soften the impact on the area.

## Last Tree Standing



The inner island at the Hillfort has been finally cleared of all of the blackthorn and heavy scrub. We now have the opportunity to progress with archaeological surveys and to further our aims of increasing the biodiversity of this area.

## Sunset Over Bedford



After a misty December afternoon working at the Hillfort, the mist cleared as we headed for home and we were treated to a brief glimpse of the sunset over Bedford. What a lovely way to end the day.

## What's on in this neck of the woods

Sunday 29th December 2013

Priory Country Park. Guided Bird Walk

9.00am. Priory Visitors centre.

Wednesday 8th January 2014

Wild Life Trust talk. Caring for Bedfordshire's wild life.

7.30pm Priory Visitors centre.

Monday 20th January 2014.

Wassail 2014 with Hemlock Morris dancers

Mowsbury Hillfort. 7.15 for 7.30pm start.

Wednesday 12h February 2014

Wild Life Trust talk The wild life of a Bedfordshire

Village. 7.30pm Priory Visitors centre.

Tuesday 4th February 2014

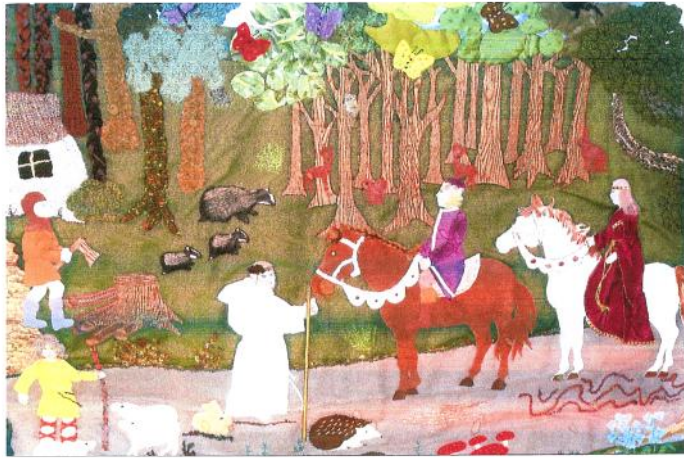
Friends Meeting.

7.00pm Trophy Room. Mowsbury Golf Club.





## Library Walk W. I. Putnoe. Bedford.



### Putnoe Wood

*A* secretive mouse and some tough little pigs  
Lived in a wood amongst brushwood and twigs,  
Some hedgehogs, and badgers that foraged by night,  
And a woodcutter keeping his axe very bright  
In this forested hideout of badger and bird  
An encounter like this may well have occurred:  
One summer day a mysterious priest  
Met the lady and lord on their way to a feast  
Had they met there by chance or by secret design?  
Were there orders to give with a purpose malign?  
Did the woodcutter overhear news that seemed strange  
Of a murder? A birth? A political change?  
The fate of a king or a great treasure found?  
Or the news of a castle razed to the ground?  
Did the lordly ones finish their journey that day  
Or turn back in alarm to make plots or to pray?

*P*utnoe Wood is still here; you may walk in its ways  
And under its leafy boughs spend happy days  
There are snowdrops in February, bluebells in May,  
And it has not much changed since that far distant day  
When the rustling leaves muffled all that was said.  
But the moment was captured by needle and thread  
And everyone there but the secretive mouse  
Can be seen on the wall inside W. I House!



### Useful Telephone Numbers

Larissa Clarke (Parks Officer)	01234 718350
Priory Park Rangers	01234 211182
Bedford Borough Council	01234 267422
Bedford Police ( non emergency )	101
Environmental Services	0800 121 8888
Highways Help Line	01234 718003
Bedford Citizens Advice	0844 245 1290
NHS Direct	111
Anglian Water	0845 714 5145
British Gas	0800 111 999
Brickhill Parish Council	01234 271708

## Day Trip

### Willington Dovecote and Stables

Take a pleasant walk along Bedford's Green Wheel path network from Priory Country Park towards Willington and you will find the 16th-century stone dovecote and stable buildings commissioned by Sir John Gostwick. Completed in around 1541, they were made from the remains of a manorial complex, and include stones most likely taken from local priories, in particular Newnham Priory, after the dissolution of the monasteries. The dovecote is home to over 1,500 resident pigeons, and a nesting site for barn owls and kestrels.



### Anglesey Abbey, Gardens and Lode Mill

A little further away just north of the A14 and Cambridge is Anglesey Abbey, another National Trust property.



At the age of 30, the future Lord Fairhaven began to create his first home. Wanting to inspire and surprise visitors, he created a spectacular garden with planting for all seasons and a cosy house in which to entertain. Life revolved around horse racing and shooting, and guests enjoyed 1930s luxury.

A Jacobean-style house with gardens a working watermill, fine furnishings, books, paintings, silver, rare clocks and 46 hectares (114 acres) of gardens.

Other National Trust properties in the area are Wimpole Hall a large working estate with home farm, large country house, formal and walled kitchen gardens and extensive parkland. Houghton Mill an impressive working 18th century water mill and Wicken Fen, one of Europe's most important wetlands, supporting an abundance of wildlife. plants, birds and dragonflies.







The Friends of

# Putnoe Wood & Mowsbury Hillfort

*Invite you to the*

# WINTER WASSAIL

*IN THE ORCHARD AT MOWSBURY HILLFORT*

**MONDAY 20<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2014**

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](http://www.hemlockmorris.com)

