

Houghton Hall Park

December 2023 Newsletter

The Houghton Hall Park Renaissance and Renewal Project is being managed by Central Bedfordshire Council in partnership with Houghton Regis Town Council and is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund.



There has been a flurry of activity in Houghton Hall Park over the last few weeks in preparation for our Christmas events and activities. Our popular wreath making workshops sold out very quickly along with 96 make at home wreath kits, this meant collecting a huge amount of foliage! With the help of our trusty volunteers many hours were spent in the park collecting holly, ivy, box, yew, rosemary and conifer, we were lacking in conifer so our friends at Silsoe Horticultural Centre helped us out along with a local tree surgeon, the team were also given permission to go into the grounds

of Houghton Hall to collect from their numerous trees. Once the foliage was collected it then had to be batched up for each wreath kit, another enjoyable day was spent doing this. The first workshop took place at the end of November and the kits were collected on the 1st and 2nd of December, we are delighted with the photos and comments we have received back from some very happy customers!



'I just wanted to send a message to say thank you so much for our wreath at home kits that we collected on Friday. They were beautiful and were lovely packages with lots of beautiful decorations. I have attached photos of mine and my mums which we had a lovely afternoon creating. Thank you again.'



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Friends of Houghton Hall Park Christmas Craft Stall

When: Thursday 21st and Friday 22nd December
Time: 10am onwards

Our volunteers will be having a pop-up Christmas craft stall in the foyer of the visitor's centre. They have been hard at work creating many wonderful crafted items which will make perfect Christmas gifts, please pop in and have a look if you happen to be in the park, all funds raised go to the Friends of Houghton Hall Park.

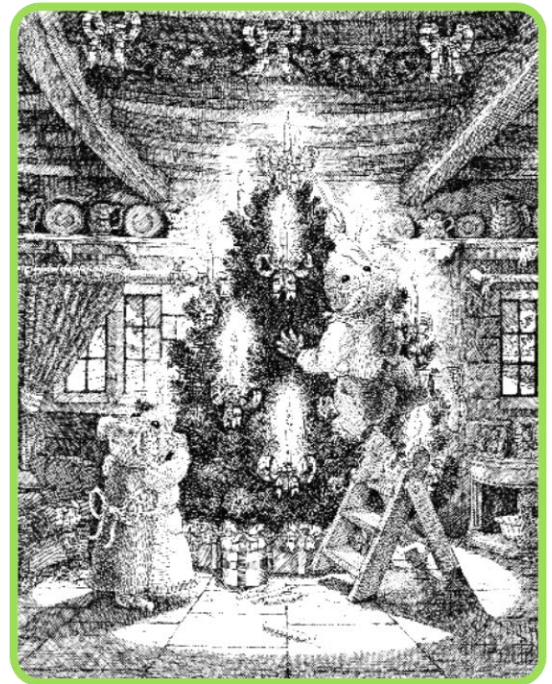


Christmas at Crumble Cottage

When: Thursday 21st and Friday 22nd December
Time: 10am to 3pm
Cost: FREE storytelling and trail, £5 for the Christmas Pudding Bauble workshop

Join Tiny T's Theatre at the Visitors Centre for some festive cheer on the 21st & 22nd December with storytelling, crafts and games based on the book 'Christmas at Crumble Cottage' written and illustrated by Stephen Yorke. There will be FREE storytelling of extracts from the book at 10am and 12noon in the café followed by a Christmas pudding bauble workshop plus Christmas games at 10.30am and 12.30pm costing £5 per child.

You can also take part in our FREE Christmas pudding trail around the park, maps can be collected from the Visitors Centre foyer 10am to 2pm. Enter our FREE colouring competition to be in with a chance of winning a ticket to one of our children's events in 2024!



For more information and to book the workshop please click the link below:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/christmas-at-crumble-cottage>

Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme.

December's theme is: 'A Touch of Frost at Houghton Hall Park', we can't wait to see what you capture for this one, please send your submissions to:- hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

The images must be taken between 1st – 31st December 2023 and each person can submit up to 5 entries. We will not accept any overly photoshopped images that do not represent the reality of the subject in the photo. Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter.

Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work: www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography

Thank you for the amazing response to last month's theme of 'Little Details', we love the way that everyone has looked at the theme differently.

Art & Culture
Event

Central Bedfordshire
great
lifestyles

December's Photography
Theme

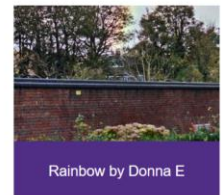
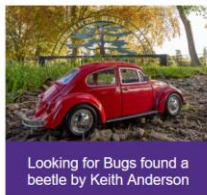
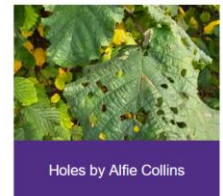
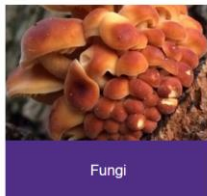
'A Touch of Frost' in Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in December
- Some images will be shown on our website, social media platforms and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 31st December
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED



Nature Notes

Mark Bolan Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens

According to the Met office the 3-month winter period started on 1st December, which seems appropriate considering the hard frosts and low day-time temperatures of late. Although the astrological beginning of the winter solstice is the date of the shortest period of daylight and longest period of darkness. This year the winter solstice begins at 3.27am Friday 22nd December. If you are wondering why this exact time, it is when the north pole is at its maximum tilt away from the sun. On this day we get about 7hrs 50 minutes of daylight, which is an incredible 8hrs 50mins shorter than the summer solstice. I mention this because it matters a great deal to daytime feeding wildlife. At a time when they need more sustenance, they have the least amount of time to forage for it.

The robin for instance, which is often associated with this time of year and frequently depicted on Christmas cards, can lose up to 10% of its body weight each night just keeping warm. This is why if you can, feeding wildlife is so important at this time of year. This said, I would urge you to put out appropriate foods, rather than your leftover bread. The problem with bread is that it fills them up with starch but doesn't give the high level of fat and protein they need to survive the cold nights. Many leftovers are OK though, scraps of meat, cheese or fruit are fine, especially if chopped up into manageable size pieces for the birds you are feeding.

One way you can use bread and great fun to do with children is by making Festive food for birds. Grate your bread into crumbs, add to this mixed bird seeds. To this mix you can then add a variety of food stuffs. To mine I've added flaked coconut and peanuts, both of which I put through a blender first to produce a crumb similar in size to the bird seed. The quantities of each aren't important, just what you have to hand, you could include cheese or chopped dried fruit. To bind your dry mix together, warm some lard, just enough until its melted, you don't need it hot. Gradually pour this into your dry ingredients ensuring every bit is coated in the fat. It won't bind fully until the lard has cooled. Make a hole in the centre of some fairy cake cases and push a loop of string through the hole from the inside. To secure the string put a cocktail stick (trim off the points) through the loop on underside of the case and tie a knot on the inside. Supporting the cases, (I used the packaging from shop bought cakes) spoon in your mixture pushing down as you go, keeping the string in the centre. Then hang them in your garden and wait for the birds to find them. Rather than put them all out at once, keep some in the freezer and put a couple out each day. Because of the fat content they don't fully freeze so come up to match the outside temperature quite quickly.

The other feeder I made from a piece of untreated wood, (you could use small logs) in which I drilled two 32mm holes and some smaller ones to take pieces of pea canes for perches and one for the string to hang it. I pushed the mixture into the large holes and hung it with the others. Have fun and don't forget to make sure to put some fresh water out for them as well.



This is my mixture ready to use.



Fatty cupcakes ready for the birds.



The homemade block ready for filling.



Filled and ready to hang in the garden.

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Finally, a quick update on the Asian hornet (*Vespa Velutina*) situation from the October newsletter. I mentioned there had been 49 sightings, that number has risen to over 80 reported sightings. Not all have been destroyed, so it is now presumed there will be overwintering queens which will give them an early foothold in the country next year. The biodiversity in some areas of France has been totally altered since the hornet arrived there. So, it is even more important that any sightings here should be reported as soon as possible and there is a free app called Asian Hornet Watch, available for iPhone and android devices. You can also send any pictures through the app to the National Bee Unit.



Any images will help identify the species, so inspectors aren't sent out, only to discover it's a European hornet. The authorities are so concerned, don't not report a hornet sighting because you're unsure. It's better to be safe than sorry.

Wishing you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Peaceful New Year

Until next time.

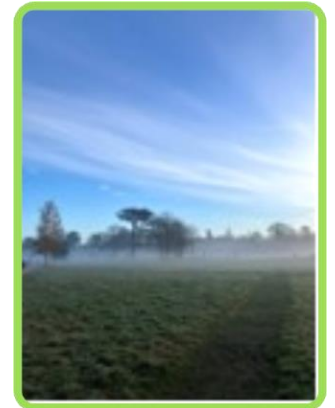
Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens.

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Community Park Ranger Update

Greetings from the park in the month of December, as you would expect for the time of the year it is getting colder, some days are a bit dreary and dull but some days start off foggy then the sun shines through and it turns into a bright crisp day. At the beginning of the month when walking into the park early one morning I was welcomed by a beautiful low fog but the sky above showed the sun shining and a wispy high cirrus cloud formation which is made up of ice crystals as you can see from the picture I felt obliged to take.



Being the start of winter, December is a month in which many mammals venture out less, with some choosing not to for the next couple of months altogether. Bats, Dormice and Hedgehogs are the only British mammals that truly hibernate. What makes hibernation “true” is to do with lowering body temperature and reducing biochemical processes. Hedgehogs build thick-walled nests called hibernacula to spend the winter in. Hibernation is not, however, a constant state with Hedgehogs, they will wake up periodically, although in most cases it’ll wake up, move around in the hibernaculum for a while, and then resettle. It has been known for hedgehogs to venture out, though, particularly if it gets very cold, or even for them to move to a new hibernaculum for the rest of the winter. While in the park last week a regular dog walker said to me that the Squirrels have been more busy than usual lately gathering food which is the sign of a very cold winter to come. Hopefully next year the Microhabitats that I, with the help of the dedicated volunteers, have built will house some Hedgehogs. I have been in contact with a local Hedgehog sanctuary to arrange an introduction for next year so very soon we should have little Hoglets running around in our park during the night.

Tree surveying and plans for what to plant have been going ahead, there are a number of dead, dying and dangerous trees that need attention, where they are in the midst of the woodland they will be left alone to do their thing but trees that are near the public footpaths or close to Park Road North may need to be cut down where dead or cut back in some cases when dead branches are visible. Some wider dead trees can be “monolithed” this is where they will be cut to a height that would be unlikely to fall but slowly decay, standing dead wood attracts a lot of different bugs, butterflies and birds that fallen or felled logs won’t, increasing biodiversity. Whatever action is taken is to protect the public without damaging the woodland at all. Some trees as they get old need to be cut back and although it may appear a bit brutal at times and may not look as it used to it will in fact prolong its life. People may have noticed what is called reactionary growth on some of the trees, water sprouts, which are new shoots coming out of the trunks of the trees and suckers coming up from the roots of the tree close to the base. This reactionary growth can be for a variety of reasons, an extremely hot previous summer making the tree feel the need to start again and in doing so use less water or it could be caused by disease, lost limbs or damage.

Ash dieback will virtually wipe out the ash trees in the UK, an estimated 97% dying within 15 years, with this in mind trees will be planted to replace them as they die. Our park has, or had, many Elms but with what is a widely known disease, Dutch Elm disease they need to be replaced, it’s not all bad news though there are varieties of Elm that are 100% resistant to that disease which will be planted. Our park will be here for a long time and will become healthier as we learn how to adapt to climate change, not all changes spell disaster, with dedication and wise choices change can be good, for us, the planet and the generations to come.

Neil Forder

Community Park Ranger, neil.forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk, Mb 07356122621

What's happening in the gardens?

November had lots to keep our volunteers busy as we gathered greenery, continued to mulch the flower beds and generally put the gardens to bed for the winter.

Wreath making has become part of Christmas preparations at the park and we spent a couple of weeks gathering a big selection of yew, ivy, holly, rosemary and some of the wild box growing in the park. It was a good opportunity to trim some of the greenery back and visit quieter parts of the park. Evergreen shrubs prefer to be pruned in the spring when frost can no longer damage them, so we were careful what we took, but luckily, we have plenty of and lots of it!

Our volunteers enjoyed a wreath making session and it was great fun to produce such a lovely Christmas decoration. They have also created a pop-up Christmas shop which launched in the Visitor Centre last Friday. It sells handmade Christmas decorations and gifts. After a successful launch please look out for it again over the next few Thursdays in the Visitor Centre. Takings from the shop will go towards the Friends of Houghton Hall Park Fund, which in turn used to maintain and develop the Kitchen Gardens and park.



I must say thank you to our volunteers for creating such a wonderful Christmas display in the Kitchen Gardens. It is a scene from "Christmas at Crumble Cottage" which tells the story of Rosemary and Sedgewick, who live and work in Upper Crustington, Bedfordshire. Our two enterprising mice and a lot of their friends are now on display in the Kitchen Gardens and are bringing the gardens to life with their antics. We hope you enjoy the display and on the 21st and 22nd December your children can have fun following the Crumble Cottage trail around the park and gardens, please see the 'what's on' pages for more details. I know Carol, our volunteer who organized and led the creation of the display will not thank me for mentioning her here, but I have to say a huge thank you to her for all her hard work, as well as the rest of the team for some show stopping knitting!

In the gardens we are quietly putting the gardens to bed and planning for next Spring. We will have to rotate our beds around next year as despite mulching and good care we have been visited by pests such as the allium leaf miner. So, we will move our onion/leek/spring onion bed and must make sure we cover the crops. Rotating crops round is always a good idea and helps the soil keep healthy and keeps pests at bay.

There are still a few hardy shrubs in flower and it's great to walk past and smell the scent of the yellow flowering Mahonia, and the pink flowering Viburnum. The formal gardens are holding up well to winter and the evergreen shrubs add some cover and colour to the park.

The frosty mornings in the park have been wonderful, especially when the sun comes up and everything starts to sparkle. I promised myself I wouldn't go on too much about the weather but there have been some lovely days in amongst the rain and cold.

Finally, Merry Christmas to all our visitors to the park we enjoy our chats with you and look forward to bringing the Kitchen Gardens to life again next year.

Wrap up warm and see you in the park.

Sue Atherton

Community Gardener, Sue.atherton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk , Mb 07356 122658



Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Sun 9am to 4pm



Become a volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

Thinking of giving something back to your local community? Then get in touch with us to see what you can do to get involved. Here are some ideas below:

- Observational Surveys
- Community engagement
- Weeding and clearing
- Cleaning
- Watering
- Growing food and encourage healthy eating
- Teach younger generations (if you have a skill or qualification, let us know!)
- Become a community leader
- Support other volunteers
- Contribute to the annual park events calendar
- Volunteering assistant at events running at the park
- Curate local history talks at visitor centre
- Habitat enhancement work in the woodland and meadow

There are many opportunities to take part. If you would like to volunteer and join the Volunteers of Houghton Hall Park, please email hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



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Council



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