

# Houghton Hall Park

## May 2024 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.



Our Dog Festival was back on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May and what a woofsome day it was. Having cancelled last September due to a heat wave the weather decided to surprise us again by making it the warmest day we've had in a while! We had a plentiful supply of water for the dogs and our woodland areas offered lots of shade. Many owners chose to come in the morning when it was cooler and many treats were brought from the twenty stalls selling an array of doggy goodies.



Rock Steady Flyball were in attendance showing how much fun dogs can have with flyball, they also let dogs have a go which proved great entertainment!



A massive thank you to Accolade Hounds for running the dog show for us once again, we know that the money raised from that, their stalls and 'doggy dash' will be put to good use.

A HUGE congratulations to The Friends of Houghton Hall Park who won the Pride of Houghton award for Local Group at the awards ceremony last weekend. The Friends work

tirelessly in the whole park, put simply without their support the park wouldn't be what it is today. To give you an idea of how much time they give, in November they worked 487 hours between them!



**A great place to live and work.**

## What's On

### Stick Man Trail

**When:** Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May  
**Time:** 11am to 2.30pm  
**Cost:** Free!

Come down and visit our fun-filled activity trail featuring popular picture book character Stick Man. The self-guided trail is aimed at encouraging children to get outdoors and explore the natural world and find out how things grow. If you want to 'twig' how much fun the trails can be, then visit us 11am to 14.30pm (Last entry 1.30pm).



Pick up your map from the Visitors Centre foyer, there will be a limited amount of free Stick Man stickers and certificates for you to collect once you have completed the trail, there will also be Stick Man Keyrings, books and soft toys for sale.

### Stick Man and The Gruffalo Storytelling

**When:** Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May  
**Time:** 12.30pm to 3pm  
**Cost:** Free!

Join Aaron from 'A Children's Story' in the Kitchen Gardens for FREE storytelling of The Stick Man and The Gruffalo, interactive nature & woodland storytelling, featuring wonderful puppetry, fun for all the family!

Storytelling will take place at 12.30pm, 1.30pm and 2.30pm\*



**When:** Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> May  
**Time:** 10am to 3pm (last entry 2pm)  
**Cost:** Free!

Enjoy a FREE orienteering outdoor adventure at our upcoming Xplorer event - the perfect activity for primary and pre-school children.

Pick up your map from the Visitors Centre foyer.

## Classics in the Park

**When:** Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June

**Time:** 10am to 3pm

**Cost:** £5 to enter vehicle, FREE to the public

Our third Classics in the Park event will take place on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, set in our beautiful park it's a day not to be missed, especially if you love classic cars. In addition to the cars there will be:-

- A selection of craft and produce stalls
- Our popular FREE Stick Man trail
- FREE Wonders of the Woodland Story telling
- Professor Diamond's Punch and Judy Show plus flea circus (weather permitting)
- Swing Dance MK will be showing us their moves
- Singing by Jazz the 2 of Us



If you would like to show your vehicle entry costs £5 per vehicle, there will be trophies for the winners of each category and rosettes for the runners up. More information on how to enter can be found on our website <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/classics-in-the-park-2024>

## Wonders of the Woodland Storytelling

**When:** Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June

**Time:** 12.30pm to 3pm

**Cost:** FREE!

Join Aaron from 'A Children's Story' at our 'Classics in the Park' event for FREE Wonders of the Woodland storytelling, interactive nature & woodland storytelling, featuring wonderful puppetry, fun for all the family!

Storytelling will take place at 12.30pm, 1.30pm and 2.30pm.



Our FREE Stick Man trail will also be taking place around the park.

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/stick-man-trail-classics>

# Monthly Photography Themes

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

May's theme is: 'Dogs in Houghton Hall Park', we hope to see a lot of photos from the Dog Festival! Please send your submissions to:-  
[hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024 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](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography)

April's theme was 'Buds and Blossom', thank you to everyone who submitted photos this month, they really capture all the changes taking place in the park.

Art & Culture  
**Event**

Central Bedfordshire  
**great**  
lifestyles

**May's Photography Theme**

**'Dogs' in Houghton Hall Park**

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in May
- 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 May
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at [www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)



By Myles Pessoa



Buds, Blossom & Snail  
By Carol Butler



By John Pitts



By Lisa Basham

## Café Chat

Hello everyone!

Another month has flown by again! Even though the past month hasn't given us the nicest weather I would just like to say thank you for keeping us busy as usual and to our regulars who continue to come everyday rain or shine.

We have some super exciting things coming up this month we've had the Dog Festival and we will be running another Xplorer trail in May half term too!

This month our special is an Italian Meats and Cheese Roll, our rolls are freshly made every day by our local bakery supplier. The roll is then filled with salami, mozzarella and smoked cheese.

It has been so lovely to hear our customers wanting to know where things are around the park like the kitchen gardens and the bluebells, all members of staff in the Café are always more than happy to help navigate you around the park using the maps available in the leaflet holder at the main entrance.

Until next month!

Mia,

Café Manager

Houghton Hall Park Café

## Community Park Ranger Update

Hello once again from the park, May is well and truly upon us and the park is bursting into life all over. While walking around in the park these past few weeks I have been, in my opinion, treated to new sights everywhere. In the woodlands and meadow land wild plants are establishing themselves and displaying their beautiful colours. The swathe of yellow Cowslip has been replaced by more yellow, Buttercups this time. Our park has three types of Buttercups, the low to the ground Creeping Buttercup which can be seen in the event field by the Visitor's Centre and two taller ones in the meadow fields, one called Meadow Buttercup would you believe? And the other is the Bulbous Buttercup. We also have three varieties of Speedwell, Field, Germander and wood Speedwell, you may have seen the small blueish flowers low to the ground near the edges of fields. If you spend a bit of time in the park and walk slowly and keep your nose to the ground, you'll see a lot going on, plant identification books are very informative, some take a while to get used to the terminology but after a while it does sink in. One I would recommend is "The Wild Flower Key" by Francis Rose, it's full of well-drawn illustrations and lots of info. There are some good apps for phones too, one I like in particular is PlantNet, as long as your picture is of reasonable quality it is very accurate in identifying plants. It has pictures that have been submitted by other users so you can compare and some very useful links.

Apart from the plants mentioned above I have seen White Bryony, Bindweed, Hairy Vetchling, Wood Avens to name a few. I'm sure people haven't failed to notice the red flowering Horse-chestnut trees that we have a couple of in the park that flower a little later than the



white ones. These red ones are a hybrid of White horse-chestnuts and Red Buckeye.



One plant in particular deserves a bit more attention in this newsletter as it is very beneficial to a healthy woodland... Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*) also called Ramsons and Bears Garlic amongst other names. We have a couple of small patches of this native plant in the park in the western woodland, people have told me there used to be a lot more but hopefully it can spread, some woodlands have a white carpet of the star shaped flowers. Over winter the bulbs store energy so that when spring arrives it bursts

into life very quickly before the tree canopies can block out some of the light they need. It feeds lots of insects including Hover Flies, Butterflies and of course Bees.

The white Flowers will be setting seeds soon which will fall very close to the plant which ants very kindly transport to other locations. They have quite a strategy for taking over the woodlands, they bunch together closely in early spring so that when it rains the water is prevented from going into the soil quickly, this slowing down of water movement means that more nutrients will go into the soil around the plant. It also produces special compounds Phenolic phytotoxins which accumulates in the soil and inhibits other plants from growing.

After it has died down and the toxins have washed away the rich fertile soil around the plant is ideal for summer plants to grow so it benefits other plants too. The leaves provide food for many animals, including us, and microscopic microorganisms as the leaves break down. The second part of its botanical name *ursinum* shows its connection to Brown bears and explains why one of its names is Bear's Garlic. It is believed that when a bear comes out of hibernation the first thing it eats is Wild Garlic because it has compounds that detoxify and help regain strength after it's long snooze. As I mentioned above it is edible for humans and makes a mean Pesto making it very popular plant with foragers. If you know of other places where it grows in profusion, not in our park, cut a handful or two of the leaves and look up the recipe, you won't be disappointed.

This plant really is a team player benefiting a variety of animals and putting nutrients into the ground to make our park healthier.

While I'm here, just a quick reminder that I have a group of volunteers who go out into the park doing various conservation tasks every other Sunday usually, our next outing will be 2<sup>nd</sup> June. All are welcome, send me an email if you are interested and I'll let you know what we get up to.

Bye for now until the June newsletter.

Neil.

Community Park Ranger.

Neil.Forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

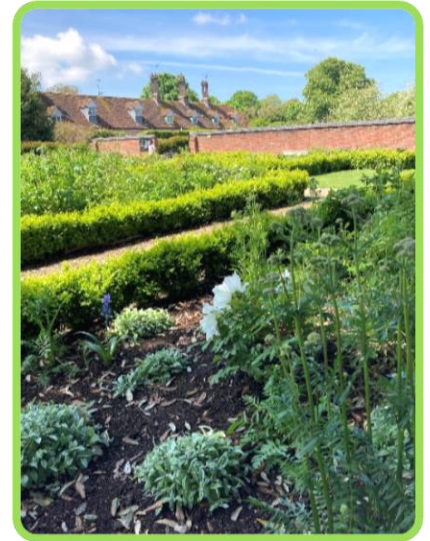
## What's happening in the gardens?

Our mini heatwave was very welcome last week and after days of rain it was great to be gardening in shorts ... for once!

The formal gardens are stealing the show, and all the rain has meant we have a wonderful, lush display of shrubs and flowers. The alliums are out in the main display bed and look wonderful with the irises.



Our exotic tree peonies were amazing last week, they are short lived but very striking amongst all the greenery. It was fun watching people smell the flowers and enjoy the colours. The trees have come out and the shade from the copper beech tree near Moore Crescent carpark was very welcome in the hot sun.



Our volunteers were proud winners of Pride of Houghton Awards on Saturday night (11<sup>th</sup> May). They are a truly exceptional group of people and continue to take the gardens in all sorts of different directions and involve so many people in what they do. Thank you from the team at Houghton Hall Park, we couldn't do it without you!

This past month our volunteers have begun selling out bedding plants and they have been well received. Look out for sales on a Thursday morning from the kitchen gardens.

We also welcomed Year 3 and 4 from Chantry Primary School on a wet Monday in April. They enjoyed exploring the gardens, finding out how to grow vegetables and sampling spinach in our polytunnel. They also tried some of our mustard green but didn't find them spicy enough, we will try harder! They were wonderful, enthusiastic visitors and we hope other schools will come and visit. Last week we had a visit from Dunstable Methodist Church Squirrels with their helpers. They enjoyed a tour and planted some beans and peas to take home. Thank you again to our volunteers who ran activities and steered groups of excitable 4-year old's round the kitchen gardens!



The next few weeks will be about planting as much as possible as we try to make up for lost time, the cold wet spring put things on hold in the kitchen gardens, so there is lots to do. We are sowing seeds and some rather small vegetable seedlings which will hopefully catch up. Our volunteers have started installing an irrigation system which will make us more resilient to hot weather and droughts. Although who knows what will happen this summer!

In the meantime, enjoy the warmer weather and see you in the park.

Sue

Community Gardener

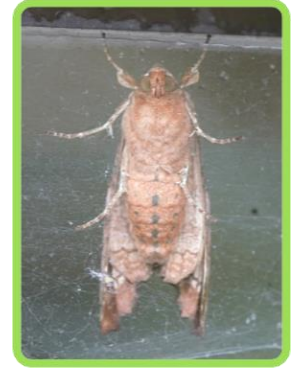
[Sue.atherton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Sue.atherton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## Nature Notes



*A squirrel and starling sharing my homemade bird feeder.*

The recent warm weather has certainly brought all sorts of wildlife out. All sorts of bugs are making the most of the sunshine. I saw a damselfly warming itself on a rhododendron flower a few days ago. Ladybirds and butterflies too have been more abundant. As are box caterpillars an insect which is also a serious pest is the box caterpillar. The moth *Cydalima perspectalis* lays her eggs on the underside of box trees and the emerging caterpillars lay waste to the host plant at an alarming rate. They protect themselves by creating a dense layer of white webbing stretched over their feeding ground. This East Asian native, first arrived in this country in 2007 and has since gained a firm foothold. After a month the caterpillars pupate, and the emerging moth quickly



*Underside view of a moth resting on a window.*

mates and begins to lay eggs. The caterpillars overwinter amongst the foliage of box bushes and emerge in the spring. They can be difficult to spot and the first sign they are around is large gaps in the foliage and browning of any remaining leaves, by which time it may be too late to save the plant.

Another non-native species is the Asian Hornet. So far, most nests have been destroyed, although several have been spotted already this year. The nearest sighting to this area was a couple of weeks ago in Toddington which has yet to be confirmed as an Asian and not the slightly larger European hornet which isn't a problem. The Asian or yellow legged hornet as it is sometimes known is such a potential problem it is a notifiable insect. As I mentioned a few months ago these hornets have completely altered the biodiversity in areas of France where it has taken hold. Defra are determined to stop this happening here and have set up traps over wide areas where there have been sightings, this includes Toddington Services on the motorway. If you see a trap please leave it, they are checked daily and the lure inside is completely harmless to pets and humans.

On a brighter note, I bought some Buckfast bees recently and they have settled into their new hive. The bees are in a box containing five frames on which the bees have been overwintered. Once I got them home, I placed the box on the stand where their hive will be. Then I opened the little entrance flap, so they could come out and orientate themselves in their new surroundings.

After a couple of hours, I put the hive on the stand and transferred the five frames from the box to the hive. The bees that were still flying, happily came back accepting the hive as their new home. I will leave them now for a week to settle before disturbing them anymore.



*The new bees starting to explore.*



*Bees returning to the hive from their first foraging trip.*



*Bees enjoying the early morning sunshine.*

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens



## Keep in touch

### Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

### Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

### Twitter

@BedsCountryside

### Website

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

### Email

[hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## Current Opening Times

Mon – Fri 9am to 4.30pm

Sat – Sun 8am to 5pm



## 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](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)



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