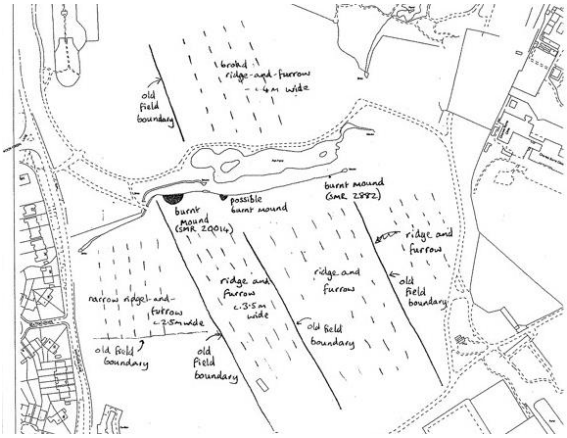
HIGHBURY PARK Friends

# Spring Bulletin April 2023

**Welcome to our Spring bulletin**. Walking through the park during April can be like a visual exploration of the colour green; from the lightest buttery greens of the *Cappadocian Maple* canopy, the ochre-greens of unfurling *Common Oak* leaves, to the dark blue-green needles of the *Blue Atlas Cedar*, it is a diverse palette of many shades and hues. And should the sun ever peep through the clouds, the saturated yellow of celandines, dandelions and narcissi seem to glow and shine against this verdant backdrop. So much to soak up, experience and enjoy as we all make the transition from Winter to Spring.

## Spring Events




## Exploring Archaeology at Highbury event
## March 5th 2023

Our group of 40 set off enthusiastically from the car park on a grey March morning. Our guide, Mike Hodder, ex city of Birmingham archaeologist, explained that archaeology is the physical remains of the past that endure. Some of our ever-changing landscape remains on the surface and may be visible with no need to dig. Birmingham's parks, including Highbury, are rich in archaeological features. We quickly learned that signs of the past are all around us, once we were alerted to them.

Ancient field boundaries are still visible, marked by the oak trees that are planted in straight lines, showing how Highbury was previously farm land. At an earlier time under the Enclosure Act the gaps would have been inter-planted with shrubs to make hedges. Coppicing of hazel trees is an ancient practice that we continue at the present time in the Nature Recovery Network woods in the park. This involves cutting the trees at the base to encourage new growth. The stems that are cut can then be used for weaving fencing as well as used for building wattle and daub timber frame buildings.

We have 9 or 10 patches of mediaeval ridge and furrow at Highbury, clear signs of agricultural past usage of the land. The ridges were used for planting crops. Ridges tend to face downhill to help with drainage, via the furrows. In Highbury there is little from which to accurately date them, but the ridge and furrow areas are likely to originate from mediaeval times or later. Narrow ridges tend to be more recent (perhaps two hundred years) and wider ones are older (possibly three hundred years or more). On the above map you can see some of the areas with differing width ridges in the park. The difference in height of some of the downhill field boundaries are called lynchets, caused by the action of ploughing, when soil would have been moved to the field edges by the propulsion of the plough.

Down by the Shuttock stream there are burnt mounds from the Bronze Age, approximately 1500 – 1000 B.C. If you stand by the bridge with your back to the stream you can see the mounds slightly raised along the bank. Burnt mounds are found all over the country and have been dated by radio-carbon analysis. We have known for some time that there were two or three of them in the park. We were delighted to discover that following the very dry conditions last summer, Mike has discovered another one at Highbury. We hope to measure and officially record this later in the year.

Originally it was thought that the mounds were something to do with cooking, but they are always found by streams. They contain shattered burnt rocks that derive from the stream and the belief now is that they were the equivalent of a modern-day sauna where the wet rocks were heated to make steam for the people who lived along the stream which would have been a heavily wooded area. The shattered stones are easy to identify, as rocks from glacial deposits tend to be much smoother.

It is incredible to think that we have such a rich heritage on our doorstep, much of it hidden from those not in the know. We feel strongly about the importance of preserving the landscape and educating people about the archaeological value of Highbury Park.

## Highbury's History: Highbury's Neighbours – Part 2

*Postcard from private collection of HPF member Gail Pittaway*

**Charles McCallon Alexander** (1867 - 1920) a native of East Tennessee, U.S.A. was a popular nineteenth-century gospel singer and song leader, who worked the evangelistic circuit around the world for many years from 1895 – 1918. In 1904 he married Helen Cadbury, daughter of Richard Cadbury and owner of Uffculme.

She and Alexander toured the evangelistic circuit along with other contemporary and notable Evangelists of the day to spread the gospel. After the conclusion of many years of crusading, Alexander retired to England in 1918, where he lived out the remaining two years of his life at 'Tennessee' on Moor Green Lane. The property was located on what became the grounds of Britannic Assurance. He died in 1920 aged 52 and is interred in Lodge Hill Cemetery, Selly Oak. He was later entered into the Gospel Hall of Fame in 1991.

# Nature Notes by E.M.P

**Coltsfoot** *(Tussilago farfara)*
In flower before the leaves emerge.

**Wildflower leaflet**
available on our website.

The Highbury Park Friends wildflower leaflet gives a guided tour to different parts of the park to spot flowers on the ground blooming in Spring and Summer. *Here's a challenge for you – to find a plant not mentioned in the leaflet – there are two areas in the park where Coltsfoot can be found with their scale-like stems and beautiful compact golden flowers. The leaves appear after the flowers and are downy underneath.* My mother always made us coltsfoot tea if we had a cough.

Photograph: Brian Ecott

**Hornbeam** *(Carpinus betulus)*
Wind-pollinated

Photograph: Brian Ecott

**Norway Maple** *(Acer platanoides)*
Insect-pollinated

But trees also flower. Looking up into their branches will reveal the hanging catkins of those that are pollinated by the wind e.g. birch and hornbeam. These tend to flower early in the year so that the pollen can travel further before the leaves appear. Other trees are pollinated by insects. One of the first to flower is the pussy willow (there's one by the play area), providing much needed pollen for insects after the winter. Then look up at the profusion of greenish-yellow clusters of flowers on the acers - Norway Maple, Field Maple and Sycamore trees.

## Blooming Lovely!

**Blossom Together - our new trees**

Despite the cold start to April our new blossom trees near the Henbury's Wall, which were donated by the National Trust, (Birmingham) as part of their *Blossom Together* project, are now beginning to flower. There are plenty of tiny pink buds on our Crab Apple 'Evereste', so it should make a lovely show as the month progresses. Don't forget to also have a look at our 3 new heritage varieties in the Fruit Forest above the old bowling green!

**Can you help?**

**Saturday 29th April 9:30am - 10:30am**

A few hardy volunteers plan to meet by the Henbury's Wall and clear some of the foliage so our new blossom trees are shown off to full advantage. We would be delighted if any of you can join us. It's a great opportunity to meet other members of Highbury Park Friends and chat whilst helping the park for an hour. Please bring secateurs or loppers and gardening gloves if you have them.

## Volunteer with us

Would you like to join the Highbury Park Friends team? Are you social media savvy or just curious to learn more? If so, we would love to hear from you! We are currently in the throes of re-designing our website and are looking for a volunteer who will be able to help with its general upkeep. Training will be provided in *Wordpress* so no previous knowledge with websites is needed.

**To find out more email us at: info@highburyparkfriends.org.uk**

# Highbury Community News

**All a buzz in the Orchard**

Another part of the park in which to enjoy blossom time is in the orchard, where you can find a wide range of fruit trees, soft fruit, herbs and wild flowers growing including heritage apples, pears and figs. The orchard is cared for by Highbury Orchard Community CIC.

This Spring will see a packed calendar of events and activities happening, including *Spring Showers, as* part of the annual global Earth Day event on 22nd April.

To find out more and get involved go to: **www.facebook.com/HighburyOrchard**

**Highbury Hall Open Days**

The regular monthly Monday Open Days at Highbury, organised by *Chamberlain Highbury Trust* are continuing throughout 2023. Open on the first Monday of the month from 10:00am - 3:00pm it is a great opportunity to explore the former home of Joseph Chamberlain and to find out more about the Trust's work and plans; both for the building and the former estate. **Please note, due to two Bank Holidays in May, they will be open on Monday 15th May.** Find out more at **www.chamberlainhighburytrust.co.uk**

TWITTER: @HighburyPark FACEBOOK: Highbury Park Friends

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