HIGHBURY PARK Friends

NOVEMBER 2011

Park News

Highbury Park and the Kings Heath Floral Trail

The Kings Heath Floral Trail which passes through both Highbury Park and Kings Heath Park has been awarded ***Gold*** in the Urban Community Category. The judges were taken on a whistle-stop tour through the park and as part of the special areas of achievement they pointed out the following:

- Highbury Park's Hay Meadow and Woodland Flower Meadow
- The tree grafting for a new Community Orchard in Highbury Park
- Highbury Park Friends

Sweet Chestnut Foraging

Highbury Park has just a few young sweet chestnut trees near the path. This year the weather conditions were just right to swell the edible nuts (not to be confused with inedible horse chestnuts!). Canny foragers were out in force, competing with the crows and squirrels to extract the glossy brown nuts from their prickly shells. Although not as large as the commercial variety, these chestnuts can be microwaved, boiled or best of all - roasted. We have frozen some to make chestnut and celery stuffing for Christmas dinner. (Ellen Pisolkar)

Farm Bailliff's Cottage

The long-awaited repairs to 92 Queensbridge Road (Farm Bailiff's Cottage) are being carried out, with an expected completion date in November. With a bit of luck, our friends at Four Seasons Garden Project will be moving from their Portakabin to the renovated house. Extensive interior and exterior work includes new plastering, heating, toilet and kitchen facilities, a cleared garden, and a slabbed footpath leading to the greenhouse.

Earlier this year Maureen Perrie wrote to us about her research on the Highbury farm. "I've been looking through the Chamberlain papers at the University for information about the Highbury farm. I've been reading Ethel Chamberlain's letters to Neville in the 1890s, which have a lot of information about the livestock and crops. Ethel's letters provide almost weekly updates to Neville about events on the farm. They confirm in great detail what we already know from Phillada Ballard's work - about the livestock (cows, sheep, pigs) and poultry (hens, ducks, geese, turkeys) - but there is also quite a lot of information about what they grew on the arable land: lucerne, vetches, rye and root crops (mangels, turnips, potatoes, carrots). Presumably these were all grown primarily as fodder for the livestock. There are also references to hay and silage."

(David Papadopoulos)

Art Walk with Catharine Clarke

In mid-September Catharine Clarke led an art walk through Highbury Park. Here two HPF members give their account of the walk.

This was an excellent way to spend a Sunday morning in September. Catharine Clarke led us around Highbury Park on a mission to see all her favourite haunts in early autumn - and what a feast for the eyes it was! In Catherine's own words, we walked...

'"through the swaying meadow, to the Highbury Oak ... across the cloud watching field... around the stream, to the evergreen avenues, and shadows ... past the willow herb island to the beauty of liquid

amber, and into the dancing purple.... along the sheltered path to the towering bullrush"...

These quotes and illustrations are taken from the beautiful hand drawn map we were each given. (Look for a copy of the map on the HPF website soon).

We stopped along the way, while Cathy explained why a particular spot meant so much to her. We were all sad when we came to the end of the walk, We had loved Catherine's thoughts and stories, her reminiscences, and as a memento, the beautiful map.

(Su Richardson)

From the grand and noble English Oak (Quercus robur) to the waving carpet of Autumn Crocus (Crocus nudiflorus), Catharine Clarke, local botanical artist, led an art walk through Highbury Park, as Autumn was beginning. With her practised artist's eye she was able to link the sensorial feast of Highbury Park with her knowledge of botanics and art. As we walked, she related what we saw to artists and art works in public collections, and suggested current exhibitions to help us explore various themes further. We looked at the mundane in a new way and learned how to appreciate all that Highbury has to offer to an artist. A highly enjoyable experience and an enlightening one. (Steve)

Here are details of a forthcoming exhibition and the books that Catharine referred to.
David Hockney: A Bigger Picture.
21 January to 9 April 2012, Royal Academy London.
David Dimbleby, *A Picture of Britain.*
Cyril Hart, *British Trees in Colour*.
Sandra Knapp, *An Artistic Voyage through Plant Exploration.*
Richard Mabey*, Flora Britannica.*
Shirley Sherwood, *A Passion for Plants: Contemporary Botanical Masterworks.*

Archeology Walk with Mike Hodder

On a sunny late October Sunday BIrmingham City Council archeologist, Mike Hodder, led a small group on a voyage of discovery. Little did I know when I began the the walk that I would be taken back two hundred, three hundred years, then further still to the Bronze Age, right here in Highbury Park.

The first part of the walks concentrated on ridge and furrow, a form of ploughing with a long history, used as early as the Iron Age. It recurred throughout the country but remains are constantly under threat and only a few exist in Birmingham. The value of this form of cultivation was to provide greater depths of soil for planting, together with drainage, thus assisting in both dry and wet weather.

What of ridge and furrow remains in Highbury Park? The Henbury playing field was the first area we explored. Here we found narrow ridges, with two and a half to three meters between them, indicating that the last time this piece of land was ploughed would be about two hundred years ago.

When we walked to the other side of the large pond we found broader ridges, about three and a half meters. Broader ridges indicate an earlier period. This was confirmed in this case by the age of the trees. The land would have been cultivated before trees were planted, and some trees in this part of the park are over 300 years old.

Mike referred to the important role of voluntary groups in surveying and documenting remains. In 2009 Highbury Park Friends carried out a survey of ridge and furrow in Highbury Park and recorded it in detail. This information is now kept on the Birmingham City Council data base.

The next discovery, revealed by the lie of the land, was 'burnt mounds'. The grassed over mounds are of shattered stones and charcoal, and radio-carbon dating of the charcoal has revealed that these occurred in the Bronze Age, 1500 - 1000 B.C. They are almost always found next to streams leading to the theory that they derive from a method of heating stones to produce steam. At first it was believed that this was for cooking purposes, however the discovery of a number of sites with a stake lined pit next to the burnt mound suggests, a way of producing steam for sweat baths. Burnt mounds are numerous in the U.K. and help to indicate the density of population at that time. In Birmingham they provide the main evidence of the Bronze age in this city.

Where were burnt mounds found in Highbury Park? As expected, by the stream - near to the bridge at the Holders Lane side of the park. How to spot a burnt mound? Look for raised mounds near a stream or river.

Next search for signs of charcoal or heat-shattered stones in the river bank. Shattered stones have jagged edges whereas glaciation deposits are of rounded pebbles. The shattered stones would have been part of a large rounded pebble, before heating.

There are at least three burnt mounds in the park. If you stand with your back to the bridge, face the park, and look along the stream, you will see the bank rising into mounds. Mike would like to see a detailed survey of the site - a future project for Highbury Park Friends?

At the beginning of the walk Mike Hodder mentioned the importance of open spaces for archeological remains above ground. Their presence in public parks helps to conserve them for the future. By the end of this illuminating walk I understood what he meant, and another layer of meaning was added to a familiar, loved place. (Christine Hardy)

4 November Wild Life Walk with Paul Anthony

It was warm and dry when twelve people and three dogs joined Paul Anthony at the car park. He was keen for us to see bird roosts and to appreciate the autumn migration to this country of birds from Scandinavia and continental Europe which replace the departing swallows and swifts. In addition to this predictable migration which regularly occurs there is localised migration, caused by weather conditions which make the bird's survival in their normal locations untenable through cold, lack of food, or both. Paul reckons that the bird populations in towns are often better numerically and in the number of species than in the countryside. There are more trees in urban areas which often produce sheltered spots with a warmer microclimate and good food supplies such as insects under the tree bark.

Soon after 2 p.m. the birds started to flock and we watched gold and greenfinches gather in the same tree. The chaffinches tend not to mix with the other finches. The tits flock together

and we saw long-tailed tits gathering with blue and great tits. They were in a tree adjacent to the yew where they roost.

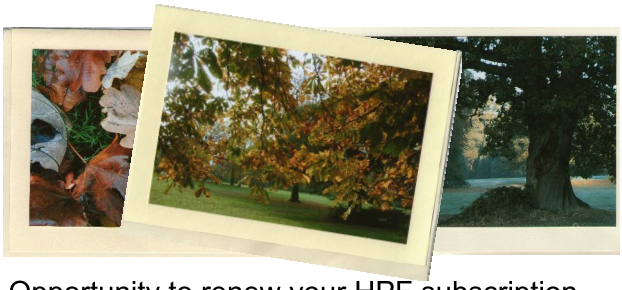
Several birds which we consider British birds also migrate. Wood pigeons, blackbirds and thrushes breed in Scandinavia, but spend the winter here. Robins come here for the winter from continental Europe and they are more timid than the robins that stay with us throughout the year. Redwings and fieldfares are winter migrants to Britain. A small number of parakeets have returned to Highbury Park. A great spotted woodpecker, a nuthatch, magpies, crows, coots, mallards and stock doves were also seen. We dispersed as the rain came, but we had had a cracking bird-spotting walk. (Margaret Tyler)

Future Events

Festive Decorations, Wood-crafting Sessions and more,
the Orchard, Highbury Park,
Sunday 4 December from 12 noon.

Collect leaves, berries and twigs to make beautiful decorations for your home. Find out folklore surrounding Christmas plants. Watch woodcrafting demonstrations, and join us for some festive food and drink.

HPF photo cards of Highbury Park will be on sale (a new batch in production as I write).



Opportunity to renew your HPF subscription.

Look out for our tent near the orchard project.

Please note the December wild life walk has been cancelled due to ill health. Keep and eye on park notice boards for details of walks in 2012.

Subscription Renewals

Our subscription year runs from September-August, so 2012 renewals are best made now. Rates remain £5 or £3, and cheques, made payable to Highbury Park Friends, can be left at York Supply in Kings Heath, or posted to Highbury Park Friends c/o York Supply, 57 Waterloo Road, B14 7SD.

Or why not renew your membership on Sunday 4 December over a hot drink and (we hope) hot chestnuts? See details on this page.

Like to Get Involved?

Would any members and new members of HPF like to get involved in suggesting and organising events, carrying out research, writing and delivering newsletters, contributing to the website, or other committee activities?

If you can contribute an hour or two per month do contact us at
contact@highburyparkfriends.org.uk

We'll be delighted to hear from you.

Useful Contacts

HPF Committee
David Papadopoulos: (0121) 242 1845
E-mail:
contact@highburyparkfriends.org.uk

HPF Membership Secretary and HPF mail:
c/o York Supplies, 55/57 Waterloo Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7SD.

HPF Newsletter Christine Hardy, email
contact@highburyparkfriends.org.uk

HPF web site
http://www.highburyparkfriends.org.uk/

Birmingham & District Beekeepers Association, John Madgwick: 558 8623

Ranger Patrol: 454 7810 - for urgent matters.

Birmingham City Council: 464 8728