Autumn Bulletin November 2024

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter.

The seasons they are a-changing. What a great month to be visiting the park, with the autumn colours, early morning mists and those beautiful sunsets; keep your eyes peeled for all the fungi that are on display. Pictured above are highlights from the last month. Enjoy the park!

Fungus Foray - 19 October 2024

We've run fungi events at Highbury for a number of years, led by the knowledgeable Lukas Large, Curator of Natural Science at Birmingham Museums Service. They have become increasingly popular resulting in up to 50 people attending each event in the last few years. In such a large group it became difficult for participants to hear and see what was happening and this year we opted for a booking system. We gave priority to you, our members, and the few remaining places were then offered up via social media. This plan proved very successful and resulted in a much more enjoyable experience for our 20 attendees. On arrival Lukas showed us some specimens he had collected. Perhaps one of the most exciting for us was Marasmius Hudsonii, a really rare fungus Lukas found at Highbury that grows on Holly leaves. It is so small that it is most easily observed through a magnifying glass. We were blessed with a glorious autumnal day as we walked a circuit of the Park We quickly learned how different fungi thrive in different habitats; Yellow field caps and Parrot wax caps in the meadow, Beech milk caps with the Beech trees

Fungus Foray continued

and Silverleaf on our dead timbers.

Whilst many of the fungi were shades of brown or beige, the closer we looked the wider the range of colourings we spotted. The young Parrot wax cap was a delightful bright green, whilst the names of others Yellow field cap, Lilac fibre cap, Silverleaf, Silky pink gill all gave an accurate indication of what colours to expect.There were huge variations in size, too. We learned a number of interesting facts: Some fungi have a very distinctive smell e. g. Oak bug milk cap smells of bed bugs; the appearance of Butter caps is a sign that Winter is imminent; even fungi that would be deadly for us humans can be eaten by squirrels and slugs; fungi reproduce by forming and releasing vast quantities of spores.

What a great morning! More than 40 species of fungi recorded. Thanks to Lukas and all who attended.

AGM Held at Highbury Hall

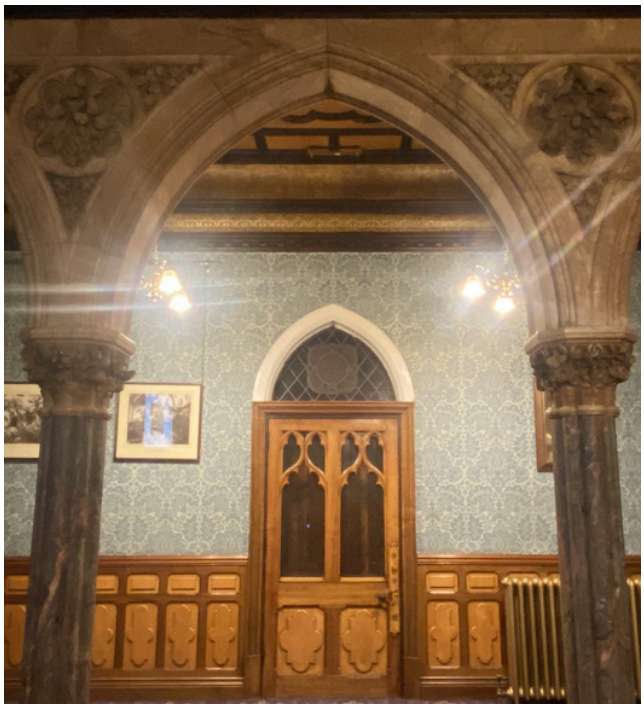
Our AGM was held at the end of September at Highbury Hall. We reported on our activities and finances. All the committee were re-elected: Charles Barnwell, Angela Crawhaw, Sam Gamblin, Anne Gilbert, John Grayland, Sarah Hill-Daniel, Sarah Tomlinson. It was great to meet members in person, with an indoor venue making a change to our usual outdoor events. After tucking into homemade cakes (thank you to our bakers), we enjoyed a fascinating talk by Chris Sherlock of BrumBats.

Thank you Chris, it was very inspiring. We especially enjoyed video clips of BrumBats releasing bats they have rescued back into the wild.

AGM at Highbury Hall continued

We've had a busy and eventful year: our free events programme included archaeology, tree ID and wildlife walks, and we've also managed to progress a number of initiatives in the Park. Take a look at everything we have achieved by scanning the QR code below. Our thanks to everyone who gave their time and their support to Highbury Park Friends for enabling such a productive year.

Read our activity report on our website. Scan the QR code here:



Interior, Highbury Hall

Bats in Highbury Park

BrumBats have been helping us to monitor our bat population, surveying the bats regularly since 2011. Our records are held at EcoRecord. We have recorded five species of bats: Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule, Brown Long-Eared and Daubenton's. At this year's AGM, we learnt from Chris that the name 'Chiroptera' is a derivation of Greek meaning 'hand wing' (from Chiro plus Ptera) and Chris showed us a picture illustrating how the digits have become lengthened to become wings. You can read more about Highbury's bats here and hear some recordings of them by scanning the QR code below. We hope to be able to resume bat walks in 2024.

Scan the QR code here to learn more about the Bats at Highbury Park and hear a recording of them.

Flood Management Scheme

We all know Highbury is very wet and it seems to get more waterlogged each winter. You may not be aware, though, that some of the neighbouring roads around Shutlock Lane have been regularly flooded because of water running down the slope to the south of the Long Pond and into people's homes.

Flood Management Scheme continued

Finally, some relief is in sight. Birmingham City Council has developed a flood management plan. Hopefully, this will hold back the flood waters whilst dealing with them in a natural way. Work has started on Phase 1. This involves clearing the banks of the Shuttock Stream and then widening the water course as far as the outfall.

We hope it might also make it easier for Severn Trent to address the pollution in the stream that occurs quite regularly. The brick lined outflow has been raised near Shutlock Lane. As can be seen in the picture here.

Phase 2 will create a swale for water storage adjacent to the south side of the brook. A swale is a depression created in marshy or wet ground to act as an overflow that both stores and filters flood water. The Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust have helped by collecting seeds from some of the lovely flowers in our hay meadow, such as purple betony. They will keep the seeds and grow them into

plug plants until they can be planted along the banks of the Shuttock Stream.In 2025, Phase 3 will open up the ditch and bund adjacent to Shutlock Lane. What is a bund? It's an embankment created to act as a barrier to water. The fourth and final phase will create another storage space for excess water to the left of the vehicular entrance to the park.

The Flood Management Project will allow the development of new habitats and we welcome the opportunity for increased bio-diversity. It might look a bit of a mess currently but in a few years the "improved" landscape should both look lovely and provide improved habitats for wildlife.

Leaving the Park Gates Unlocked

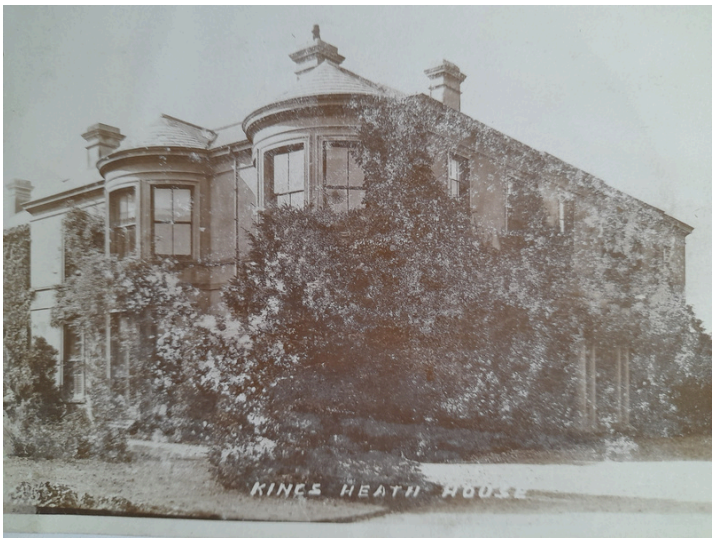
A few months ago we heard that Birmingham City Council was launching a trial over the summer to measure the impact of leaving park gates unlocked overnight. If the experiment was successful then the scheme would be rolled out to other venues. We were not one of the parks selected to take part in the experiment and nor we were informed of the plan directly by the Council. The HPF Committee responded to this proposal with concern. Highbury is a Grade 2 Listed Landscape. In the last few years, we have experienced

Leaving the Park Gates Unlocked continued

three encampments of Travellers who left rubbish and caused damage to the land. We have witnessed frequent fires, graffiti and other acts of vandalism in addition to people camping out in the woodlands at times. We have seen quad bikes driving through the meadows and detectorists digging up the ridge and furrow and it is hard for us to understand how leaving the Park gates open at night is going to help with any of these issues. On the contrary, it seems an open invitation to increase anti-social behaviour.

We are grateful to HPF member Councillor Izzy Knowles who has organised representations to the Council on behalf of the parks that fall within Moseley Ward. We have been told that the current arrangements to lock park gates at night will continue for the present time and the arrangements for each park will be individually reviewed. We have made clear our opposition to the Council's plan and will keep you updated about the outcome.

History - Highbury's Neighbours Part IV



Kings Heath House, Kings Heath Park
- From a private postcard collection

Kings Heath House, Kings Heath Park - From a private postcard collection

I'm sure our members will be familiar with Kings Heath House situated in the heart of Kings Heath Park close to Highbury. ThIs postcard was sent in 1928 to a recipient in Northumberland from a woman visiting the area.

Kings Heath house was built in 1832 for the newly elected MP William Conngreve Russell (namesake of Russell Rd, Moseley). In 1880 it was purchased by John Cartland a wealthy brass founder (and ancestor of the novelist Dame Barbara Cartland.) It was later leased to Frederick Everitt, owner of the brewery in Grange Road, which supplied the Cross Guns Pub on Kings Heath High Street (now called the Old Court.) In 1908 the house and grounds were sold to Kings Norton Urban District Council and the house was used as a school for a while. The grounds became a park by popular demand. In 1914 the house and grounds were sold to Birmingham Corporation, which later used the house as their horticultural training centre and continued the use of the grounds as a public park.

Gail Pittaway, HPF member,
October 2024

Testing the Water
Monitoring the Shutlock Stream

We've experienced long standing problems with pollution of the Shuttock Stream that flows through Highbury, down into the River Rea. Discussion with Severn Trent over the years hasn't resolved the problem. Highbury Park Friends has joined Birmingham River Champions in a bid to regularly monitor the water quality. This initiative is organised by Dr James White, Research Fellow in Water Sciences, Birmingham University, to encourage local groups to monitor the quality of local waterways. We are delighted to participate in this very positive citizen science scheme. Several of the Committee attended training in Riverfly monitoring so we can can regularly check invertebrate life in the stream. We held a preliminary monitoring session and will continue to monitor both wildlife and any chemical pollution. We hope eventually it might be helpful in resolving pollution issues with Severn Trent.

Help us to do this by reporting any pollution in the stream, seen (or smelt!) to Severn Trent on **0800 783 4444.** You can include video if using a smartphone). You'll need to detail what you observed, when and the exact location, noting if sewage is entering the stream.

The outfall of the stream at Highbury is at the what3words location: **frame.dose.vocab**. Interestingly if you go a few metres further downstream the what3words location is slime.action.backup.
Please also email us at **contact@highburyparkfriends.org.uk** to let us know what you've reported. This is a great opportunity to help us get to the bottom of this on-going problem. Please get in touch if you need more information.

If you are interested in volunteering with Highbury Park Friends please email: info@highburyparkfriends.org.uk

Contributors to our Contributors to our Autumn Bulletin - Anne Gilbert, Sam Gamblin, Sarah Tomlinson, Gail Pittaway, Ellen Pisolkar and Sarah Hill-Daniel. Our next issue is out : January 2025

Don't forget to follow Highbury Park Friends on Social Media!

@Highburyparkfriendsbrum **@Highbury Park Friends** **@HighburyPark**

Stood on the Edge of Time

We end this newsletter with an atmospheric poem, submitted by HPF member, Ann Flynn.

A Revisit to Highbury Hall

An unknown voice called her back
to an historic house
that stood on the edge of time.
Inside the air seemed lighter
as if forgotten souls lingered
to greet visitors.
Rooms kept secrets from long ago,
the guide spoke of ancestors
that were flesh and blood.
The frail had a haven
beneath high beams,
human strands left prints
as luminous as a full moon,
fixtures as firm as a fist
generated the glow of a forest.
Words flowed unbidden
as if a phantom spirit
whispered in her ear.
From a large window she saw a landscape
created from one man's dream.
Trees heard the chimes of carriage wheels
on winding paths,
tears made trees tremble.

Early 20th Century postcards (from the private collection of Gail Pittaway), the library (left) and the dining room at Highbury Hall.