

# Houghton Hall Park

## April 2022 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.

It has been a very busy few weeks in the park with winter finally leaving us and spring taking hold, with some gorgeous weather there have been many people out



and about enjoying what the park has to offer. We've had our first activities of the year take place including a school visit, Tithe Farm Primary School's reception class came to visit the kitchen garden to learn all about growing, our Activity Officer and volunteers were on hand to explain what was growing in each bed, the children also got the chance to plant a pea to take home and also look at



some wildlife our Community Gardener had taken from the wildlife pond, this included tadpoles and a dragonfly nymph. The children will be making a return visit in a few months to see how much the fruit and vegetables have grown. Our Mother's Day and Easter Floral workshops took place at the end of March and mid-April, under Jenny's expert instruction participants created some fabulous arrangements. The annual Easter Egg Trail had five hundred children attending over two days, the children had to find eggs hidden around the park with clues that spelt out a word, they then returned to the Visitor Centre to collect their prizes which included 'sunflower' seeds which was the word they had to work out. Bubble blowing Mama Chick was a big hit with all the children! Once again a huge thank you to all of our volunteers for helping us, from building the props months in advance, cutting foliage, checking registrations and handing out prizes it would be really hard to run these events without their ongoing help, if you would be interested in volunteering at our events please message:-

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



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

## What's On

# The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Beacon Trail

**When:** Starts Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April until Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> June

**Time:** 10am

**Cost:** Free!

As part of local plans to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, from April 30<sup>th</sup> until June 12<sup>th</sup>, Houghton Hall Park has teamed up with High Street Safari to run a free story-trail. This innovative experience let's family choose what happens in the story and is completely contactless, with anyone with a smartphone being able to take part for free. Players will not only discover cute characters along the route, but they also get to see them burst to life in augmented reality and take selfies and record videos with them!



The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Beacon Trail is located at seven stops around the park. Families will be guided on their trip by Sir Barnaby Beacon as he visits seven memorable and magical friends, like Charlie Crown or Theadora Throne, who have come to life from Buckingham Palace and gone on a trip to see Houghton Hall Park.

The trail takes about forty-five minutes to complete but can be completed in more than one visit. It's completely free for families and groups to take part in and they win a free, digital fun pack at the end.

Not only is the trail an innovative and fun day out but you can also choose to donate to Help for Heroes to support our veterans and their families. Melanie Waters, chief executive of the charity said:

"We're thrilled to be the charity partner for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Beacons Trail and really looking forward to taking part in this innovative, community-based activity, as part of our plans to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee this year."

The trail runs from April 30<sup>th</sup> to June 12<sup>th</sup>. To find out more about the trail, visit the website: [www.jubileebeacontrail.com](http://www.jubileebeacontrail.com)

## Bark Run

**When:** Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May

**Time:** 10am to 3pm

**Cost:** £12 per person

On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May we will be holding our very first Bark Run! This will be a 2km run or walk you can do with your dog, it will take place in our magnificent park which is a firm favourite of our four-legged friends! There will be five different times throughout the day you can take part, the fun course will include a few obstacles for you and your dog to enjoy. When you have finished you will be rewarded with this fantastic medal which also has a special tag you can attach to your dog's collar.

Get your dog walking friends together and enjoy a great day out, all fitness levels welcome!

Spectators are welcome and there will be some doggy and craft stalls for you to enjoy.

Entry costs £12 per person, under 16s must be accompanied by an adult, both adult and child will require a ticket, one dog per entry i.e. one person cannot run with more than one dog. Book on our website <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/bark-run>



## Pop-Up Tasty Creative Stalls



**When:** Every weekend in the Visitors Centre Foyer

**Cost:** £10 per day

We offer the foyer space in the Visitors Centre every weekend to local crafters as an opportunity to showcase their work with a pop-up stall, stalls cost £10 per day and can be booked on our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/pop-up-tasty-creative>

We also have stall pitches available at our upcoming events, these are outside and cost £15, the stall holder is

required to bring their own gazebo, tables & chairs, for more information and to book visit our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/event-stalls>



## Natural Mindfulness Walks



**When:** 6<sup>th</sup> May, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1<sup>st</sup> July

**Time:** 10am to 11.15am

**Cost:** £7

What's a natural mindfulness walk, you ask? (Don't worry, no swim suit required!) The walk is based on shinrin yoku, a practice from Japan that translates as 'forest bathing' - immersing our senses in the atmosphere of the forest. During the walk, your guide Nicola will invite you to slow down and guide you in some simple exercises to help you tune into the surroundings and mindfully connect to nature.

There are impressive benefits to our wellbeing from shinrin yoku. These can include reduced stress levels and anxiety, improved creativity and energy levels and even a boost to our immune system.

To book go to: <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/nature-immersion-walks>

## Buggy Exercise

**When:** Every Wednesday during term time

**Time:** 10am outside the Visitors Centre

**Cost:** £2

This is the perfect class if you have a baby, would like to meet other parents and get fit in the process! The park is a great sensory experience for your baby, just getting out in the fresh air and nature is proven to boost your mood and increase energy.

The class starts with a gentle jog/walk/stretch around the park followed by a circuit and sometimes boxing which is a great stress reliever!



To book on visit our website: <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/buggy-exercise>

## Parkrun & Junior Parkrun



**When:** Parkrun every Saturday and Junior Parkrun every Sunday

**Time:** 9am

**Cost:** Free!

A free, weekly, timed 5k/2k walk/jog/run at 9am every Saturday & Sunday. Open to all ages and abilities. Organised entirely by volunteers. Friendly and fun.

If you would like to take part but have not run before you will need to register at [www.parkrun.org.uk](http://www.parkrun.org.uk)

# Monthly Photography Themes

**Art & Culture Event**

**great lifestyles**

**April's Photography Theme**

'Spring Blooms' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in March
- Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)
- Deadline 30th April
- Full terms & conditions at our website

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

LOTTERY FUNDED

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

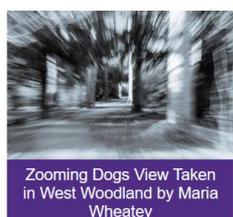
April's theme is: 'Spring Blooms in Houghton Hall Park' we would love to see what you capture, this is completely open to interpretation! Please send your submissions to [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022 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, in our monthly newsletter and our new calendar.

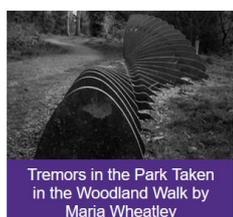
Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work:

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

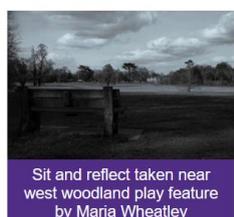
March's theme was 'Black and White' in Houghton Hall Park, thank you to everyone who sent in photos, the park definitely gives off a different aura in black and white!



Zooming Dogs View Taken in West Woodland by Maria Wheatley



Tremors in the Park Taken in the Woodland Walk by Maria Wheatley



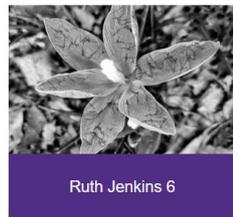
Sit and reflect taken near west woodland play feature by Maria Wheatley



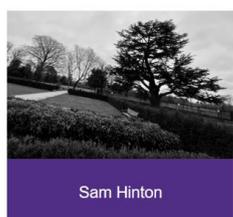
Ruth Jenkins 4



Ruth Jenkins 5



Ruth Jenkins 6



Sam Hinton



Sam Hinton 2



Ruth Jenkins 3



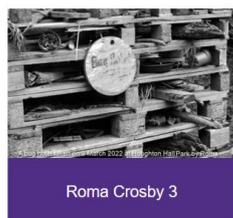
Ruth Jenkins 1



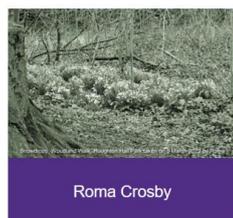
Ruth Jenkins 2



Roma Crosby 2



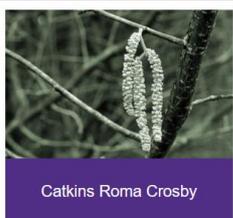
Roma Crosby 3



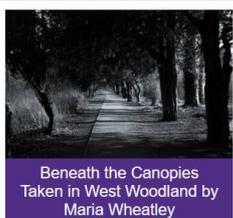
Roma Crosby



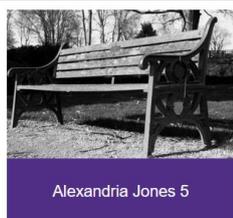
Marie Brewis 3



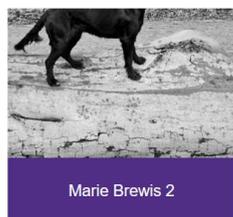
Catkins Roma Crosby



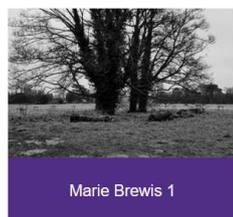
Beneath the Canopies Taken in West Woodland by Maria Wheatley



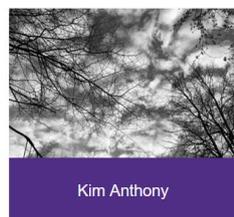
Alexandria Jones 5



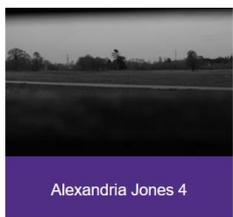
Marie Brewis 2



Marie Brewis 1



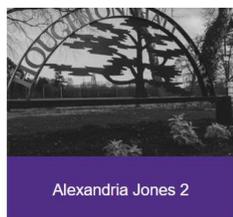
Kim Anthony



Alexandria Jones 4



Alexandria Jones 3



Alexandria Jones 2

## Community Park Ranger Update

*Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.*

Well March has come and gone and what an odd month it has been! We've had glorious sunshine, wind, rain, hail and even snow, one week I got sun burnt and the next I was putting thermals on!

To start the month off there was a plaque unveiling for the Brandreth Tree. The Oak tree was planted in February 2021 in memory of Robert Brandreth who was a direct descendent of the Brandreth family who originally lived in Houghton Hall and owned the majority of Houghton Regis.



At the start of the month the volunteers finished off the clearance of the East woodland. The piles were then removed by Allan a contractor meaning we could start tree planting. The project in the East woodland has been a long project of several months and lots of hours of work and the volunteers have done an amazing job.



In the cleared area of the East woodland we have been able to plant a variety of different species so that in the future a healthy multi level woodland grows. We have planted: Holly, Hazel, Dogwood, Hornbeam, Spindle, Privet, Hawthorn, Guelder Rose, field maple, Sweet Chestnut and Silver Birch. This variety of trees will give us a shrub layer, understory and canopy trees which will cater for all the wildlife in the woodland. Hopefully next year we will be able to add some other species such as yew along the road edge and a couple of other species as well. All the different groups of volunteers have worked so hard for this project from my Thursday



volunteer groups, to the monthly Sunday group as well as a group from Chiltern School who have worked very hard. This project couldn't have been done without the hard work of the volunteers.

After the tree planting on the Sunday volunteer session the volunteers had a well deserved break and some scones!





This month we held Mother's Day flower arranging workshops which meant collecting foliage from around the park. We collected many different foliage from box, to yew, and ivy.

At the end of the month I did some pond dipping for a school that were visiting the gardens and found a dragonfly nymph. Dragonfly's lay eggs next to water, the eggs hatch and a dragonfly nymph is born. They live in the water and eat other pondlife even sometimes tadpoles!



When they get big enough they then moult and a dragonfly emerges.

There were also tadpoles in the water along with phantom midge larvae's (which are hard to take photos of as the name suggests they're see through and are like ghosts), bloodworms and beetle larvae to name a few! It is a very healthy pond considering it's only a year old!

The Cowslips have also come up! For me this is the first sign of spring and is very exciting! It means nicer weather is on the way and everything will start to grow again!



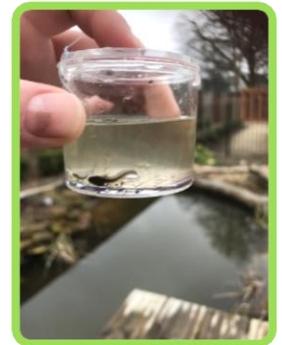
It has been a very few weeks but very productive.

If you would like to get involved and volunteer feel free to email me on: [Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

Have a fantastic month, stay safe and hopefully see you around the park.

Many thanks

Eleanor



## Nature Notes

Words by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.

Spring has sprung with a mixed bag of weather. Snowdrops have come and gone and daffodils have brought a welcome splash of colour to the landscape. Soon it will be the turn of the tulips that bring their vibrancy.

You will notice around the park, when trees have to be cut down they are left to rot down over decades. Apart from adding nutrients to the soil, they become populated with fungi and mosses which in themselves harbour a diversity of life. Likewise areas of the park are left uncut and allowed to grow enabling wild flowers to flourish, adding to the ecological economy of the area. All making a walk around the park a wonderful experience.



*This Great Tit building a nest in the eaves of my house*

I mention this because the birds have been busy in my garden over the last couple of weeks, collecting nest material. From the crows taking twigs and old plant stems high up into the conifer at the bottom of the garden, to the tits pulling bits of moss from around the pond area. This year the great tits have chosen the eaves of my property to build a nest. It's very therapeutic watching them come and go through a small hole cut for cables taking power to my garage. This is why I try not to tidy my garden too much. Whilst it is nice to have a beautiful manicured lawn and neat borders, they can be as barren as a desert as far as wildlife is concerned. Putting food out for birds isn't the only way to encourage birds and other wildlife into your garden. Providing them with the building materials they need, not only makes your space more enticing, it has the added benefit of creating habitats for all sorts of wildlife, bringing the diversity of a more complete eco system.

Wildlife has evolved over centuries and our idea of a beautiful garden isn't necessarily their ideal. Take butterflies for instance, we love to see them flitting amongst the flowers in search of nectar. But have you considered their needs for the other stages of their development? Where is that butterfly going to lay its eggs? What are the caterpillars, important food for birds, going to feed on?



*Bees mating in grass that hasn't been cut too short*

This doesn't mean your garden has to look like an overgrown wilderness. Small changes can make a difference. For instance not cutting your lawn like a bowling green will help. Leaving your lawn slightly longer will increase the number of insects living in it and provide a feast for birds. Even small areas slightly untidy can be beneficial, a small pile of twigs and leaves will create a home for any number of creatures. Just as a small pond in a bucket or barrel can add the

bio diversity and enhance your chances of attracting more wildlife into your garden.



*I leave a small area of grass uncut*



*We love to see butterflies searching for nectar*



*Many bugs will find a home in this untidied alchamilla mollis*

Although they have more food available to them now, I still put a wide range of foodstuff out for them. Apart from the continuity and assurance of a well-stocked larder, birds are very busy at the moment preparing to raise the next generation and using up lots of energy in the process. So by putting out sunflower hearts, kibbled and whole peanuts along with other feeds I'm giving them a helping hand.

If you have children or grandchildren why not give them a small patch of garden and let them grow some seeds such as teasels, excellent for attracting both bees and birds. Perhaps encourage them to do bug hunts around the rest of the garden? My grandchildren still enjoy rooting around in the borders, turning over leaves or stones, in daytime and as it gets dark. Sometimes it's worth leaving a piece of wood or piece of slate on the corner of the lawn overnight, it's surprising what can turn up.

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park



*Just a small patch of nettles will help*

## What's the latest in the Gardens?

*By Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer*

Last month I wrote about the tremendous work Jenny had done during her tenure as Community Gardener. This month I would like to mention the dedicated and brilliant team of volunteers that have achieved so much. There is so much work they do, that goes on in the background, that isn't obvious or seen by the public, but is necessary to help make the park and gardens the beautiful space we all love.

It is estimated that as many as one in three people in England don't have access to nature near their home. For such a small town, we are so lucky in Houghton Regis, to have such a large park and gardens. Covering forty-two acres, not many areas can boast of such a large accessible space on their doorstep. From the Visitor Centre there is the woodland walk. But if you need something firmer underfoot, the circular walk around the park is a mile long and allows access for all to see and hear nature in all its glory. It leads you through a range of diverse areas from open parkland to the shady Yew Tree Walk. I regularly meet people who tell me they have lived in the area a long time but have just discovered the park and enthuse about how wonderful it is. I would encourage you, not only to make use of the park, but visit at different times of the day especially early in the morning at this time of year to hear the birds marking out their territories.



Since Jenny left as Community Gardener, we have only been able to open the kitchen garden on Mondays and Thursdays. That isn't to say nothing has been happening. To maintain the high standard we set ourselves, both the kitchen and formal gardens need constant attention and the volunteers have been extremely busy preparing for the season ahead. At this time of year there isn't much to see by way of change on the raised beds as most of the work required is behind the scenes, so to speak. We have been busy sowing and nurturing the hundreds of plants needed for this year's produce.

Many of you may be unaware that the park volunteers also get involved in the various activities that take place in the park. This includes making many of the props and items needed for these events. The recent Easter Egg Hunt is a case in point, where a team of volunteer woodworkers and crafters came together to make the Eggs and large chick for children to find. Volunteers also set out the trail, manned the registration table and collected the props each day of the event.

Volunteers recently hosted sixty reception class children from Tithe Farm Primary School. The children were shown around the kitchen garden and finished their visit by potting up pea seeds, which they took away with them. Despite the snow showers the visit was a great success and the children invited to come back later in the season to see how the produce has grown. The teachers were given a few packets of cress seeds to sow at the school.



At the kitchen garden, Bed 7 is always popular with visitors, also known as the pollinator bed it has several themed displays over the year. Each of these is designed, created and set out by an army of talented garden volunteers often working several events ahead. This year we have an additional one to mark the Queens Platinum Jubilee, which will run for a couple of weeks from the last week of May. Following on from this will be our summer display.

One of the questions often asked by visitors to the kitchen garden is how do we keep everything looking so good? Firstly let me say that we face exactly the same challenges that gardeners face in their own gardens. There's the vagaries of the weather, pest and the usual slug issues. We also have problems with pigeons pulling out newly planted onions and leeks and pecking young brassicas and lettuce plants rendering them useless. On top of this the foxes have tended to dig up newly planted potatoes in their search for worms. The answer is, we have both a plan B (usually spare



plants) and the dedicated volunteers who keep up with weeding, watering and generally tending the gardens. We also cover young plants with either fleece or netting until they become established. Whilst on the topic of protecting plants. We have had some lovely warm days recently and no doubt lots of you have been buying bedding plants. It is still too early to plant these out, as there with the danger of frosts. I wouldn't put young plants out until the end of the first week of May.

One thing you may have noticed is the structure by the gates at the back of the kitchen garden. This is a hut, being built by the volunteers, from where we be able to sell the garden produce to the visitors. It will be a great step forward having a dedicated space close to our prep area, rather than setting up an ad-hoc table by the gates.

A longer term project is the painting of the railings. This is a time consuming job and can only be done during warm spells. Fortunately the paint dries very quickly and we don't have to leave barriers up overnight. The volunteers have finished those around the pond and are continuing along the front of the kitchen garden.



Take care

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

## Plant of the Month – Aubretia



You know spring has arrived when you see walls covered in a purple waterfall of Aubretia.

A slowly spreading, mat-forming, low-growing evergreen perennial alpine. Aubretia is member of the Brassica family and originates from Central Asia and Europe where it grows in poor soil on rocky limestone screes and outcrops. It needs full sun and dry conditions so is ideal to plant in the top of a wall cascading down the side. A superb plant that becomes absolutely smothered in small flowers of rich purple, also perfect for rockeries, borders and edging paths. A trim after flowering will tidy the plant and may encourage a further flush of flowers. Being hardy, it is a useful container plant for spring colour

Irene Copperwheat  
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer

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



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