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**LAND OF THE FANNS**

# Teacher Briefing

Bedfords Park

*From, Land of the Fanns Online Resource*

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## **Bedfords Park**

Broxhill Road,  
Havering-atte-Bower,  
Essex RM4 1QH

<https://www.essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/bedfords>

## **Summary**

- 97 hectares (215 acres) , one of Havering's largest parks.
- Green Flag status since 2007.
- Historic parkland, trees, lake and walled kitchen garden.
- Designated Local Nature Reserve.
- Home to a herd of captive red deer.
- Variety of habitats, from small blocks of scrub to large areas of woodland.
- Panoramic views over East London.
- Variety of natural habitats where nature can thrive.

## **History**

- The name 'Bedfords' is believed to derive from a John Bedford, or Bedforde, who owned land in the area in 1362.
- In 1771 Bedfords was bought by a lawyer called John Heaton - he had become very wealthy and owning Bedfords cemented his social status among the landed gentry. It was his pride and joy.
- One of John Heaton's first jobs at Bedfords was the rebuilding of the house as a two storey brick mansion with a cement render.
- Heaton made lots of changes to the gardens also, and was interested in running them in a productive way similar to a farm. One of his agents, John Gould, kept a diary and described Bedfords as having "much the appearance of a park and all the uses of a farm".
- The estate was planted with clumps of trees irregularly spaced in the fashionable style, and was sheltered to the north and east by plantations of oak, chestnut and various evergreen firs, laid out with gravel walks winding through them.

- There were many exotic trees in the gardens, such as Cedar of Lebanon, Holm Oak, Monkey-puzzle, Giant Redwood and Yew. Many of these special trees still exist.
- Bedfords had a two-acre kitchen garden for growing fruit and vegetables, enclosed in 12 foot high brick walls.
- Bedfords was included in a book by John Neale called Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland (1818). It was described as having a 'well-stocked garden with green houses, hot houses and a pinery of considerable extent'.
- In the 19th century Bedfords was bought by Charles Barber who enlarged the house in 1865-67 and laid out the surrounding hilltop in gardens with exotic trees, including Monkey-Puzzle, Cedar of Lebanon and Giant Sequoia (some of which remain).
- In 1870 the estate was sold to Henry Stone and after his death his widow, Mrs E.V. Surtees, sold Bedfords to Romford Urban District Council for £9,000 on 31st March 1933.
- Bedfords Park was opened in 1934 with the mansion house used as a museum and art gallery.
- During the Second World War the house was occupied by military forces as a base for the Home Defence.
- The mansion building began to decay and was also damaged by vandals, so was demolished in 1958. The Essex Wildlife Trust Visitor Centre is now on the site of the historic mansion.
- Further details at <https://londongardenstrust.org/conservation/inventory/site-record/?ID=HVG003>

## Landscapes & Habitats

- There is a captive herd of Red Deer, and also wild deer are often seen (Fallow, Roe and Muntjac).
- Birds: woodpecker, nuthatch and hobby. A large corvid roost in winter, with masses of rooks, crows and jackdaws gathering near the deer pen.
- Invertebrates: a wide variety of butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies.

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## **Wildlife & Insects**

- Wildflower meadows with Cuckoo Flower, Pignut and Ragged Robin in the Spring.
- Bluebells
- Many exotic trees originally planted in the historic mansion gardens still survive, such as Cedar of Lebanon, Holm Oak, Monkey-puzzle, Giant Redwood and Yew.