



Newsletter

Number 1

Autumn 2023

THE VOICE OF HOOTON PARK TRUST • ELLESMERE PORT • CHESHIRE

A regular voice for all who have an interest in this special place

'We drive past here every day of our lives, but never knew of this amazing place hidden behind the trees alongside the M53 near Ellesmere Port.' So say most folk who discover Hooton Park Hangars for the first time on one of the regular Open Sundays, or on the occasional Special Event such as the Bus Running Day.

That, too, was my comment when I first set foot in Hooton Park over ten years or so ago with my then-young grandsons, our first impressions being of a place teeming with interest and character. Back then, though, Hangar 16 was a pile of rubble, but over the past few years we have seen the place revitalised. That hangar, which in those days looked beyond saving, has been rebuilt and now houses the amazing Aeroplane Museum to which visitors come from far and wide.

Other parts of the site are undergoing transformation with the arrival of many special-interest groups who are making their home here – and of which you can read more in the following pages: sincere thanks to all who have contributed in any way to this newsletter.

This Newsletter will primarily be a means of promoting the activities, events and plans for all at Hooton Park, both to those within the site and to the general public. As such, all who have an interest in this fantastic and fascinating place are invited to submit articles for publication.

—Ken Burnley, Editor



A busy and exciting time ahead at Hooton Park

Graham Sparkes, HPT Board Manager, outlines forthcoming plans for the site

'You heard it here first.' Well, that would be a welcome change from the usual Hooton rumour mill! A Hooton newsletter – a great idea, and the board is fully behind what we hope will be the first of many.

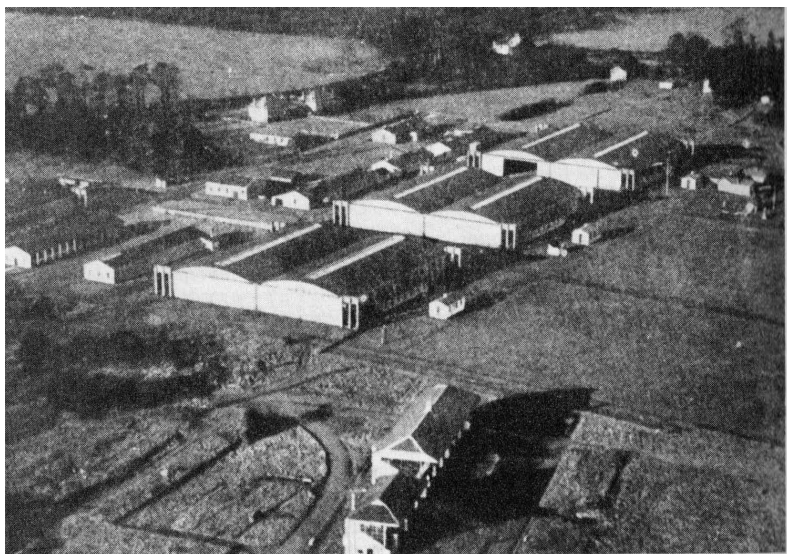
It was decided at our last board meeting that Sunday 29th October will be our final public day for 2023. We will then reopen in April 2024 with the full Hangar 16 in operation. The months from October are likely to be very busy ones with involvement from everyone that has a place in Building 16 with exhibits or displays. The Trust will bear the brunt of the costs as we standardise information boards, but all the groups will have to input information in a suitable format.

The changes will be driven by our 5-year plan as previously presented; we would, however, point out that it is a 'vision' and can and will be adapted as necessary. This is new and exciting territory for everyone and it would be nice to think it will be plain sailing and straightforward; but with a positive cup-half-full attitude and by finding solutions it will happen.

Work has already started on painting the north-bay floor in preparation for the positioning of the Trust's *Meteor*. The high-level windows are a whisker away from completion and may even be completed by the time you read this. The whole building will also be alarmed and have an operational smoke-detection system in place. Just in case anyone harbours any doubts about Hooton Park, we have included this picture of Building 16 (see page 2) taken in May 2015 as a reminder of how much has been achieved.

—Graham Sparkes, on behalf of the Hooton Park Trust Board

What is Hooton Park Hangars?



The aerodrome as built in 1917. The racecourse grandstand, destroyed by fire in 1940, is in the foreground.

The Hooton Park Hangars site is managed by The Hooton Park Trust (HPT), which was formed in 2000 with the aim of creating a Trust to oversee and manage the restoration of the remaining WWI hangars on the former RAF airfield at Hooton Park, Cheshire. The long-term aim is to provide a multifunctional site, as well as restoring the buildings and the site itself as valuable historic artefacts in their own right. The buildings will then provide the perfect environment for the projects and initiatives that are planned.

Much still remains of the Hooton Park airfield and its buildings. Three original, Belfast-trussed, hangars dominate the landscape, surrounded by the original access roads, taxiways and numerous outbuildings and offices, all steeped in the colourful history of this one-time Royal Air Force airbase.

Some of the runway also exists. All manner of aircraft types have operated from this aerodrome, for example Austers of the Army Air Training Corps, Supermarine Spitfires of 610 Sqn, and, during the postwar years, classic jets such as Gloster Meteors, De Havilland Vampires, Venoms and much more.

Future issues of this newsletter will document the long and rich history of the site – its buildings, its people and its activities – along with photos and other fascinating items from the Trust's extensive archives.



Hangar 16 before restoration.

Fancy joining us as a volunteer?

Our volunteers are quite simply our lifeblood. Without our army of enthusiastic helpers, we certainly would not be able to maintain the site, and our visitors would miss their valuable contribution bringing the visit to life.

In the current age, our hectic lives often mean it is difficult to commit time to a project like ours. We understand that completely – we have the same problem!

However, any time that you can spare will help – even if it is only a couple of hours a month, or even one weekend a year. Every little bit helps.

Why volunteer?

There are so many different reasons to volunteer and everyone has their own reasons. However, here are some of the main benefits:

- Learning new skills
- Good for your CV
- Making new friends
- Knowing you are making a unique contribution to our work.

How you can help

Gardening: Hooton Park is a large site and, with English weather being what it is, needs constant upkeep. If you fancy spending some time helping us keep the grounds tidy, then please get in touch.

Painting: True to the old Armed Forces adage, 'If it doesn't move, paint it!' – we have lots and LOTS of walls, so if you like the idea of popping in for a couple of hours on a nice day and giving us a hand, you will be more than welcome.

General maintenance: As you can imagine, with a site this size there is always something that needs doing – from oiling squeaky hinges to repairing fences.

In return for volunteering, you will be supplied with all the training and equipment you need and, most importantly, endless cups of tea! More importantly, you will be helping to preserve our heritage for future generations.

Chester tram No.4 – restoration progress update



Visitors to Hangar 16 (the Aeroplane Museum) will have noticed, tucked away in a dark corner among the various aircraft bodies, a somewhat out-of-place vehicle in such a setting – a tram; or at least the continuing reconstruction of one!

Manufactured in 1903 by George F. Milnes & Company in 3' 6" gauge and built at the Handley Works, Shropshire, No.4 was one of twelve trams ordered by Chester Corporation and remained in service until 1930.

On retirement, the lower saloon body was sold off as a garden shed to Edward Dibdin in Broughton, Cheshire; and in 1987 the remains were acquired by the Llandudno and Colwyn Bay Tramway Society. In 2004 the Chester Tramway Society and Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society acquired the remains, and in 2020 they were moved to Hooton Park, where much intensive work has been carried out by a team of dedicated enthusiasts.

Recent work has seen the coloured glass advertisements fitted: all the new oak quarterlight window frames are now complete, with their coloured glass advertisements in place. The stairs to the upper deck are now in place, and – stop press! – the glass for the windows has just arrived.

The Chester Tram team would like to acknowledge the continuing support of Hooton Park Trust who allow the restoration to continue in one of their restored hangars; and those whose donations have helped make the project possible. Future progress will continue to be detailed in the HP Newsletter.

—Rob Jones



Home Guard CH21 based at Hooton Park



It is three years since this group first made contact with the management of Hooton Park Trust, and based on the ancient history of the site to the present day, it was an ideal fit for our group, whose forebears had a close relationship with the then RAF Hooton Park.

During these three years we have seen many changes, during which CH 21 have continued to develop and expand, particularly in the local community.

Our proudest achievements include having built up a close relationship with the local community and in particular the Woodcote Hotel and their tribute 610 Sqdn bar and The Ellesmere Port Boat Museum Trust (British Waterways) who have provided us with a wonderful opportunity to engage with the public, by carrying out those educational functions and activities that we were created for and have fun at the same time.

Our presence at Hooton Park events, too, is always welcomed by visitors and those taking part.

We now, thanks to HPT, have a facility from where we can administer the group in a professional and organised manner, in return for which we are pleased to contribute to the site's monthly and special events when possible.

—John McKenzie



John Karlberg

20th July 1943–18th May 2023

A well-known and much-loved figure around Hooton Park, John Karlberg, owner of 'Little Doris' and 'Gertie' – two buses that he had kept at Hooton Park for some time – sadly died in May this year.

John was born and raised in New Ferry and lived there all his life. Known locally as 'John the Bus' he could often be found in one of his favourite local pubs enjoying a pint or two of real ale.

As a young man in the 1960s John worked on the tugboats on the Mersey for the Rea Towing Company and had an incredible knowledge of shipping, especially that associated with the Mersey. He was especially interested in the war at sea, one of his favourite topics being submarine warfare. Very often conversations would get round to this subject, and it was amazing to hear John recall U-boat numbers along with the names of their captains and go into great detail about related exploits.

John worked at BNFL Capenhurst for many years, and after retirement he worked part-time at the Queen Elizabeth Oil Dock at Eastham, where his ship-handling skills were put to good use in docking and securing vessels. His maritime interests also led him to become an active volunteer with the *Daniel Adamson* Preservation Society and Merseyside Maritime Museum's *Brocklebank* preservation.

John was an avid bus enthusiast, having owned many over the years, including Wallasey Corporation Leyland PD2 No. 53 (AHF 849) and Birkenhead Transport Leyland PD2 No. 67 (MCM 967). 'Gertie' and 'Doris', seemingly permanent fixtures at Hooton, were towed away for auction in August – a sad event for all who had come to know with affection both John and his beloved buses.

(With thanks to Stewart Finch)

Hooton Park grounds – a haven for wildlife



The grounds at Hooton Park are a rare and valuable mix of grassland, woodland, and wild and 'neglected' rarely-visited corners; and though the place can often be fairly busy during the day, from late-afternoon onwards it quiets down considerably except for the security patrols keeping an eye on the site.

This makes Hooton Park a haven for wildlife, with many kinds of plants and flowers taking advantage of the various habitats, and birds and mammals making the most of the place (unfortunately, also including the ever-intrusive pigeons which invade the hangars and leave their deposits everywhere!).

Foxes are, of course, regularly seen even at mid-day; and weasels, moles, hedgehogs, jays, kestrels and buzzards put in an appearance from time to time. A pair of barn owls has successfully raised a family of two chicks recently. Butterflies make the most of the long midsummer grasses and plants of the small meadow areas around the site.

This rich biodiversity is a great asset to the Park, and is already being recognised and made the most of as the site develops.

'...the wilderness blooms into a garden'

'Seven miles from Birkenhead landing stage stand the hangars and subsidiary buildings of a wartime aerodrome. Given over to solitude, its landing-ground overgrown, its hangars empty, it seemed doomed to decay, its facilities and advantages forgotten or ignored. But a few enthusiasts realised its possibilities, realised too that flying as a hobby was exercising an increasing fascination for the youth of today and of the future. Soon the small band found others who thought as they did. The Liverpool & District Aero Club was formed. The hangars were put in order; a small but attractive clubhouse was built; the landing-ground cleared; planes were given by well-known public men, others were bought; the club entered on its life ... where enthusiasm is the driving force, the wilderness blooms into a garden.'

—Source unknown, circa 1929

A full list of contacts for the Trust and for the specialist groups operating within the site can be found on the back page.

Then and now at Hooton

The first in a series by Neil Hutchinson of 'Then and Now' photos of life at Hooton Hangars

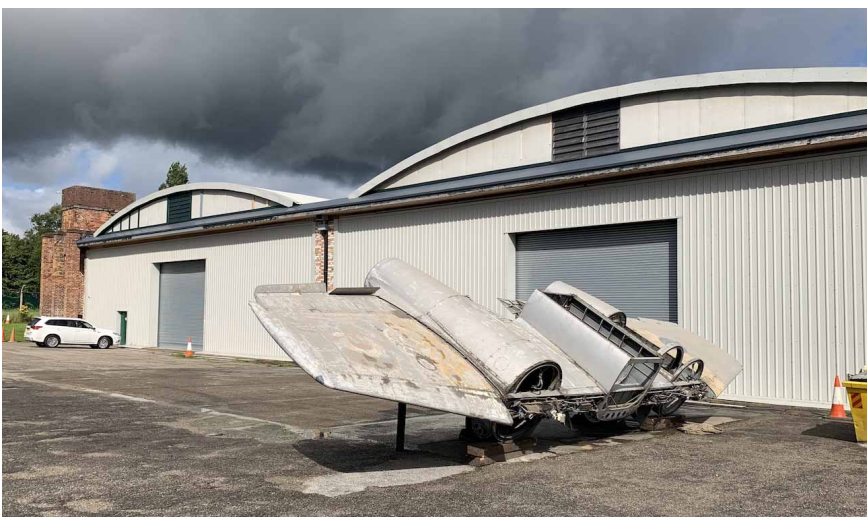


Then ...

In May 1951 611 squadron were equipped with Meteor F4's which resulted in a move from Woodvale near Southport to Hooton to utilise the longer runway. In December 1951 the F4's were replaced with the updated F8's which flew from Hooton until the squadron disbanded in March 1957 and Hooton closed. The photo shows 611 squadron Meteor F8 WH505 outside the hangars in September 1953 with their chequerboard squadron colours on the fuselage. 610 squadron were also equipped with F8's but their squadron colours were a black and white chevron pattern. Both squadrons also use the twin seat trainer type T7.

Now ...

The centre section of Meteor T7 WH132 sits outside the hangar awaiting the media blaster to remove decades of paint. She was built by Glosters at Hucclecote in 1951 and struck off charge at Kemble in 1966 destined to be a gate guardian at RAF Leconfield but never put in place. Hooton Park Trust acquired her in October 2017. The centre section is now primed and back in Hangar 16 along with the tail and cockpit sections for re-assembly and display. The aircraft will be finished in silver with yellow training stripes and maybe have 610 squadron colours one side and 611 the other, watch this space. Re-assembly would not be possible without the sterling work already carried out on the cockpit section and canopy.



Wirral Amateur Radio Society (WARS)



The Wirral Amateur Radio Society is a very active group of folk who meet regularly at Hooton. It is a long-established society that has been in continuous operation since 1936.

We are able to introduce radio theory to beginners in the hobby from all around the world, and run regular training courses and exams at all levels (including the amateur licence), participate in contests, host special event stations as well as practical and on-the-air evenings.

In 2022 we approached Hooton Park Trust as we were looking for a new place for our headquarters, and we felt that we had many talents to offer the Trust in their efforts to expand the offers on the site.

We have been made very welcome, and helped the Trust with many of their plans; and as we go forward together it is our hope to put Hooton Park on the world map by telling all our worldwide contacts the history of the Park from its early days. We have already attended on open days and brought in interested parties though the gates.

At the same time we continue to teach youngsters radio and electronics as both a hobby and a career.

Hopefully, as we get to know the other groups on site we would like to see how we can work together to improve the Park's experience.

If any of the other group members wish to take advantage of our presence we're only too willing to help.

The Aeroplane Collection Ltd



The ever-popular Avro Triplane replica in Hangar 16 at Hooton. This was an early aircraft built by A.V. Roe and was the first British aircraft to fly.

Annual Bus Running Day 2023



The annual Bus Running Day this year took place at Hooton Park on 13th August and was felt by all who participated to have been a great success, with many hundreds of folk coming to admire and enjoy riding on these fabulous old buses.

The bus owners' group at Hooton is made up of vehicle owners who store, refurbish – and of course run their vehicles when the opportunity arises, such as at this annual event.

The owners put an enormous amount of work into events such as this, both in the planning and preparation, and on the day itself, to ensure that all goes safely according to plan and to give enjoyment to the public.

The event also attracted a number of visiting buses from elsewhere in the region, and thanks go to their owners who brought them to Hooton for the day.

Huge thanks go to all who worked so hard to make the event a success, and to everyone who participated in any way. As one visitor said: 'These old buses look fantastic displayed here in the fitting setting of Hooton Park, and are a credit to all who own and look after them for us to enjoy on days such as this.'

The Aeroplane Collection (TAC) began its existence as the Northern Aircraft Preservation Society (NAPS) in October 1962. NAPS was formed by a handful of like-minded aviation enthusiasts and was based in Greater Manchester, initially at Stockport, then Irlam and Peel Green. It was one of the first voluntary aircraft preservation groups in the UK, and set up the British Aircraft Preservation Council in 1967. This is the umbrella organisation for the Aircraft Preservation movement in this country, and also has overseas members. Nowadays known as Aviation Heritage UK, it continues its role in a landscape very different from that of 1967.

NAPS changed its name to The Aeroplane Collection Limited in 1974 and became a company limited by guarantee. This was to protect its members and to further its aim to become a Registered Charity. Charitable status was granted to TAC later in 1974, its *raison d'être* being 'to advance the education of the public in the preservation of aircraft and aeronautical equipment of historical, technical or other interest, and in aviation generally, with specific focus on aviation in the North West of England'.

The first aircraft that NAPS acquired was Avro Avian, G-EBZM, a single-engined, two-seat biplane. This was followed by a couple of Mignet Pou-du-Ciels, better known as the Flying Flea, the de Havilland Dragon Rapide, the Avro Triplane replica, a Bensen Gyrocopter and an Auster Autocrat. These aircraft are now housed at Hooton Park together with a de Havilland Vampire, Miles Messenger, Luton Minor and other aircraft. In total the number of aircraft that NAPS/TAC have been involved in preserving is just under 100 – a remarkable number. There are many aircraft touched by the organisation that are now preserved, which would otherwise have ceased to exist.

The collection is maintained by a very active group of enthusiastic folk at Hooton who are always keen to welcome new members to help with the work.

Museum of Printing given a new home at Hooton



The Museum of Printing at its former home in Amorini Antiques Centre, the 200-year-old Columbian 'Eagle' press taking centre-stage.

The Museum of Printing started life in 2012 as Juniper Press in a small studio in Liverpool Bluecoat, using two Victorian Albion hand-presses on loan from Liverpool Museum.

During the following seven years at the Bluecoat the Press went from strength to strength as both a teaching resource with regular workshops, and as a centre for demonstrating the skills and equipment used in the 500-year-old craft.

In 2019 Juniper Press sought to rescue the 1820s Columbian ('Eagle') hand-press (shown above) which was then held by Liverpool Daily Post & Echo. This was achieved, but locating the press in the Bluecoat studio was out of the question as the press was too large for the room.

I subsequently had an offer from the owners of Amorini Antiques, near Woodside, to relocate the studio to a room within the antiques centre; and so the equipment, along

with the newly-acquired Columbian press, was moved to Amorini's and renamed The Museum of Printing. Here the Museum thrived despite the pandemic and lockdowns.

Sadly, in the summer of 2022 the Museum was asked to vacate the centre due to the site's redevelopment; however, Hooton Park Trust came to the rescue and offered temporary storage, along with the suggestion that Hooton Park would make an ideal permanent home for the Museum.

And so preparations are under way for the equipment to be moved into the present admin room.

Printing has always had strong links with all forms of transport – producing timetables, posters, tickets, advertising, etc., and this exciting venture for both the Museum and HP will offer the opportunity for existing tenants here to take advantage of the Museum for authentic 'period' printing, e.g. posters, handbills, tickets etc. using presses commensurate with the age of many of the exhibits at Hooton Park.

It will also be an extra attraction for the visiting public on open days and other occasions when the site is open to the public.

Grateful thanks go to the HP Board for their very kind offer of this opportunity to bring traditional printing to the Hooton community.

—Ken Burnley

The Griffin Trust at Hooton Park

The Griffin Trust, who run the motor transport sheds to the south of the site, have a long history at Hooton Park. In 1962 the Hooton Park site was bought by Vauxhall Motors to establish a new car factory. The site included the former RAF military airbase with three hangars and associated buildings. In 1990 Vauxhall Motors agreed to lease much of the site to a new charity to be founded and based here – the Griffin Trust. Soon after, the Trust obtained 'listed building status' for the hangars and once the site was cleared they began restoring the buildings, aircraft and vehicles for their collection, while organising a variety of transport-motivated events and open days. In 1999 Vauxhall Motors applied for permission to demolish the site; however, permission was refused after a worldwide campaign spearheaded by the Trust. In 2000 the Hooton Park Trust was formed and later that year the Griffin Trust was asked by the Hooton Park Trust to relocate from the aircraft hangars to two motor transport sheds which were in a state of repair and were renovated by 2007. The Trust maintains a historic collection of vehicles, while also running events celebrating the heritage of one of the world's oldest vehicle manufacturers.

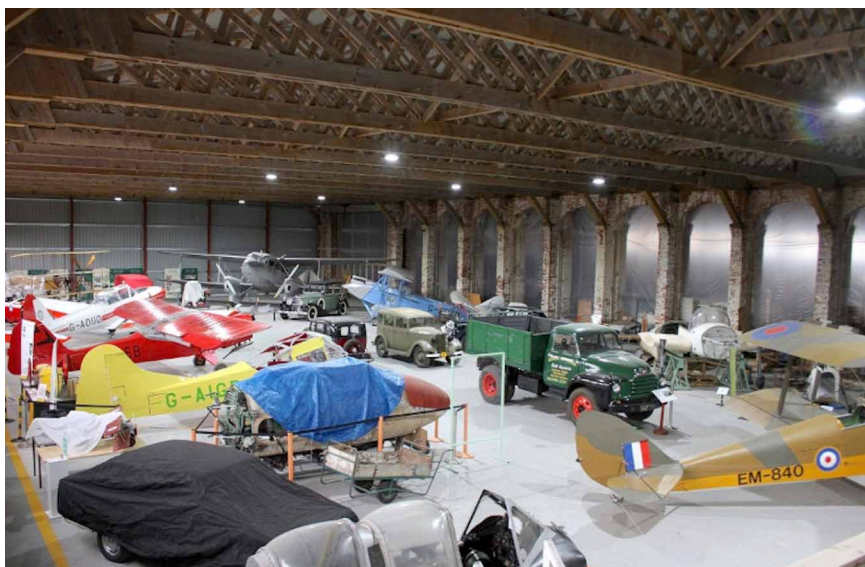


—Christine Thomas

Eastham volunteer group

Here at Hooton Park we are very lucky to have a group of volunteers from Eastham Day Care Centre who join us on Wednesdays. Along with two carers, the group of men and women have now been coming and doing ground-works, gardening and painting for over twelve months. They are a great bunch of people and we all look forward to their arrival – usually arriving in the group transit vehicle, but occasionally Glyn Plevin will collect them in one of the site buses, which is a real treat. They have fitted in with our volunteers and the mess-room is buzzing when their tea and dinner breaks are taken!

New Aeroplane Museum is proving to be a popular attraction



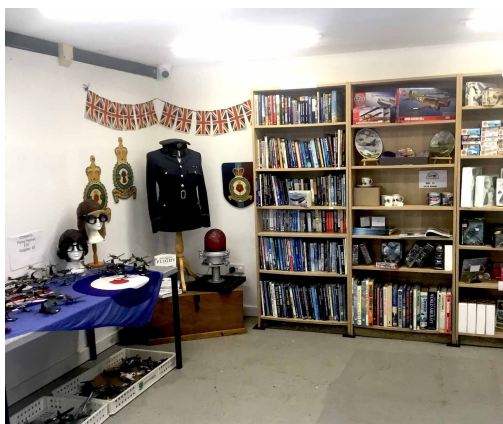
Hooton Park's collection of aeroplanes is now housed in Hangar 16, the west wing of which has been refurbished over the past few years (see photo on page 2 in its dilapidated state) to provide a fitting setting for the planes and associated items such as aero engines.

The Aeroplane Museum has been open to the public on the last Sunday of every month and has attracted many hundreds of visitors, as well as hosting specially booked tours for groups of interested folk, who can not only view the static display, but often watch volunteers at work on restoring the planes.

The Museum's shop has also proved extremely popular with visitors who are able to purchase books, kits, models, clothing and other air-themed goods, the proceeds of which go towards the upkeep of the collection.

Although not open to the public through the winter, intensive work is to be carried out in the east wing of the hangar so that the collection can expand as more planes and other associated exhibits are added.

Grateful thanks go to all the hard-working volunteers and others who have made this amazing space possible, and who continue to maintain it and act as hosts throughout the 'open' season.



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Ellesmere Port Model Boat Club

Entering the security gates at Hooton Park, visitors will immediately notice the large and attractive rectangular 'lake' which has been recently created and filled with water by members of the Ellesmere Port Model Boat Club, who use it as the sailing water for their model boats. The Club's displays have been a great attraction for visitors to the several open days held at Hooton these past few months, the number and variety of vessels and their manoeuvres entertaining old and young alike!