

# FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 198

Winter 2014

## Lesser Celandine

*Ranunculus ficaria*

Lesser Celandine traditionally flowers on or about the 21st February, so even though we are in the grip of Winter, one of the first signs of Spring may soon be seen. Its pretty, star-like flowers create a wonderful blanket of yellow upon the ground.

Lesser celandine is a member of the buttercup family and isn't as closely related to the Greater Celandine (a member of the poppy family) as its name might suggest.

The Welsh call the flower Llygad Ebrill ('April's Eye') and its Gaelic name is Grian ("Sun") because its petals close up before rain. The name Celandine comes from the Latin *chelidonia*, meaning swallow - it was said that the flowers bloomed when the swallows returned



You might think the favourite flower of William Wordsworth would have been the famous daffodil. However it was actually the Lesser Celandine. He wrote no less than three poems about this bright and beautiful flower and even had them carved on his tomb.

"There is a Flower, the Lesser Celandine,  
That shrinks, like many more, from cold and rain;  
And, at the first moment that the sun may shine,  
Bright as the sun itself, 'tis out again!"

Lesser celandine has a long-established use as a remedy for haemorrhoids because of the knobby-shaped tubers attached to the roots, and was known as 'pilewort'. It has astringent qualities which contract the tissues, reducing secretions and discharges. Its leaves are high in vitamin C and were used to prevent scurvy.

Despite its sunny disposition, the Lesser Celandine will fade at the first intimations of summer and, by the end of May, the lengthening days and warmer weather will have drained this little moisture-loving plant of its vitality.

Rachel Cross

## Notes from the Chair



May I wish everyone a Happy New Year! We approach 2015 with some challenges ahead: while we continue to work closely with the Greenspace Ranger to ensure proper management of the Meadows, we are very aware of the financial constraints under which the Greenspace Team operates. However, recently we have been grateful to have received funding from the Handbridge Park Councillors to plant new trees replacing the old willows and hope that they will grow for the enjoyment of people for the rest of this century!

We also face a challenge from encroachment upon the Meadows by redevelopment of the Boathouse on Lower Park Road. No formal proposals have been made yet and consequently no consultations have been formally offered. However, we are aware that plans include a new two-storey building and car park extending into the Barnfield Meadow. The matter was raised at the AGM in November and it was evident that there was little knowledge of what is being planned. The Committee is keeping a very watchful eye on this issue as are local residents' groups.

The Management Plan for the Meadows is ongoing and Julie Rose is keeping herself busy writing it up! In scouring through old documents and maps we discovered that the old earthworks in the North-west corner are in fact (ironically) the remains of foundations for a former boathouse and not the remnants of the Civil War fortification that used to be there. This was the "Lower Fort" constructed by the besieging Parliamentary forces at the end of 1645 to guard the Bridge of Boats that ran over to Dee Lane. Maybe this could make an interesting article for a future newsletter?

With this Newsletter, we are also asking for Membership Renewals and you will find the Subscription Form enclosed – we look forward to your continued support. We are also attempting a recruitment drive for new members and will be targeting homes close to the Meadows. But please also ask any of your friends and neighbours who may not be Members to join for only £5 subscription a household! There is a spare subscription tear-off slip to pass on.

Finally, our website will be undergoing something of an overhaul and we hope to have this up and running soon. Apart from the Newsletter, we will use the website to archive old newsletters, present articles about the Meadows and its history, post items of current interest and to inform of the social events taking place this year. Keep a look out at <http://www.friendsofthemeadows.org.uk> We are also looking at the possibility of having a Facebook Page as many people these days prefer to engage through social media. More on this when it happens!

But we will of course keep putting together our printed newsletters and posting them to you with our teams of volunteers.

Thank you all again and best wishes for the year to come.

**Rachel Cross**

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### Your Newsletter

A number of members of Friends of the Meadows have asked if they can receive their newsletter in electronic format - if you would like to receive your newsletter by email rather than being delivered as a paper newsletter please contact the Newsletter Editor

Peter Hadfield [peter.j.hadfield@gmail.com](mailto:peter.j.hadfield@gmail.com)

## Report on the Annual General Meeting and Talk

Our 2014 AGM took place on 20<sup>th</sup> November at St Mary's Without-the-Walls in Handbridge. Twenty three members attended to hear our Chair, Rachel Cross, give a report on the year's activities and present the accounts. There was some consternation at the news that plans were well in hand for the construction of a water sports centre on the boat house site of Queen's Park High School, with a car park adjoining. You will be kept updated on developments through the Newsletter.

We were then treated to a fascinating talk on The Long Bow and Cheshire Bowmen, by Bernard Dennis, who came amply supported by many types of bow & arrow, and a wide variety of photos. There can be no attempt to do justice to the talk in this small space. Suffice it to say that our interest was held throughout and we finished the evening much more knowledgeable about many aspects of archery than when we began. For example, we learnt much about the design of bows through the ages and the fearsome reputation of Cheshire bowmen, including how the best yew for bow-making came from Italy and Spain; how various types of arrowhead inflicted different sorts of damage and how the longbow, with its incredible rate of fire, had played such an important part in England's supremacy over France in the Middle Ages. A good number of phrases or sayings in modern use come from the ancient world of archery, such as "keep it under your hat", (where the archer kept his second bow string).

For the end of the evening the Committee had prepared a good supply of drinks and nibbles, plus a free raffle for a large basket of wine and fair trade goods.

As they came into the hall, members were encouraged to contribute their thoughts on the value of the Meadows, by writing them on post-its and fixing them to a wall chart.

Various themes emerged. Some emphasized the good fortune for Cestrians of having such an open, natural space so close to the City centre. It was a place to get quickly away from urban life, appreciate nature and enjoy river walks. Although it was seen as convenient for dog walking there was comment about the failure of some dog owners to pick up after them and control their pets. (Are there enough bins for dog mess?) The opportunity to watch bird life was mentioned several times, as was the fact that the Meadows acted as a green lung. Someone had even written a haiku:

*Sunlit, waving grass.  
Mirror shapes under willows.  
White swirl of sea gulls.*

Many people mentioned the space for walks and the views. One lucky person even enjoyed the view from her window!

**James Holroyd**



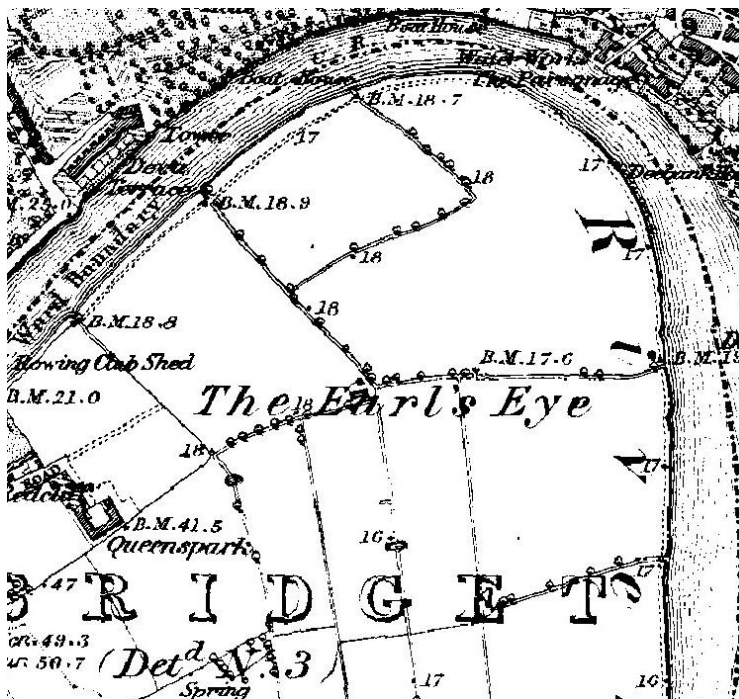
## The Meadows Management Plan – an update

Management Plans: what's the big deal? Management tool, or a lot of hot air and waffle? Why have we waited so long? The 1995 plan was written, but not adopted. Of course, the Rangers who make the day-to-day decisions have this job list without a formal management plan.

The final result should be a job list for the year on one sheet of paper that can be pinned on a notice board (virtual or otherwise) and another with an outline of the job list for the next four.

To get to this one page we first describe, then evaluate, importance and aims; then dream an ideal list of jobs, then appraise what we can realistically do with budget and time constraints. Simple really. It's a tried and tested standard format. In theory nothing can be left out.

What comes first is a detailed description of the site, its physical and human geography, history, sociology, climate, and its biodiversity. It can be difficult to get all this information together, as Google doesn't have just what you need all the time. The Library and Chester Record Office have been useful. From here we must evaluate our site. What use is the Meadows, and to whom? Is it important to more than just we Cestrians? Is its history or biodiversity important at a county level or even country or international level?



Next we must discuss what we want to happen – our aims. On the Meadows from the Chester users' perspective we may want to keep the paths, seats and gates in good shape. From a biodiversity perspective the

internationally threatened Eels and our locally scarce beetles are now our main concern. We have lost our ground-nesting birds such as lark and meadow pipit since the last management plan. Should we aim to get them back? Is there any point? Why did we lose them; was it disturbance from humans and their pets, or too much mowing or grazing? Have our aims changed since the last Management Plan? Do climate change and more severe winter weather mean we must ensure that the Meadows can store as much water as possible when necessary to protect our friends downstream in Deeside from flooding? Or is access to green space all year round more important? What natural and man-made trends do we need to manage? Grassland scrubs over, ponds silt up, trees grow old and die. Do we aim to keep the scrub down, is our grassland most important or is the scrub useful?

What threats are there to the Meadows? There have been many schemes to concrete over part of the Meadows in the past, some more serious than others.. We have to hope that it is accepted accept that greenspace has intrinsic value and building on these natural reservoirs is unacceptable. Will there be funds to manage this semi-natural habitat?

How do we know if our management works? What monitoring should we do? Can we involve local schools and colleges for mutual benefit? And then we must think that this is a semi-natural habitat that has been managed for grassland and some arable production for hundreds of years. Maybe we don't need to do very much at all to keep all the users happy.

And then we can decide what will go on that job list.



## Meadows Log October, November, December 2014

17/10/2014 A Kingfisher was observed zipping low over the Sandy Lane stretch of the river.TD .In fact 2014 has been a very good year for Kingfishers as they appear to be present on any body of water, large or small.

18/10/2014 Butterflies continued to remain on the wing including A Red Admiral taking advantage of autumn sunshine at the Lower Park Road entrance to the Meadows.TD

19/10/2014 Wheatears occasionally pass through during spring migration but not so often in the autumn. It was a surprise to stumble across a juvenile hopping around the Meadow. The Wheatear was very tame and happily feeding on invertebrates, including Beetles (see photographs below).



26/10/2014 Thrushes have been thin on the ground this winter. When they did arrive it was generally in small numbers. This was probably due to warm weather and a dearth of berries on the trees and bushes this year. 2 Redwing and 6 Blackbirds were in the hedgerow along Bottoms Lane track.

2 Goldcrests were in the hedgerow at the lower end of Appleyards Lane. They were also merrily feeding on the plentiful supply of invertebrates, yet to be wiped out by a severe winter frost.

01/11/2014 Both Dragonflies and Butterflies made it into November. A Red Admiral butterfly was basking on an Oak Tree while below a Common Darter dragonfly absorbed the sun rays on a fallen branch.

02/11/2014 Fieldfare finally put in an appearance on the Meadow. 12 Fieldfare briefly paused in a Sycamore Tree before continuing their journey up the river.

26/11/2014 A single Jack Snipe returned to the water logged Meadow. The Jack Snipe is smaller, shorter winged and the bill is half the length of the Common Snipe. To see one you will have to don a pair of wellies and enter the wetter parts of the Meadow. Unlike the easily flushed Common Snipe the Jack Snipe usually sits tight as you approach, and will only fly off at the last moment.



30/11/2014 Mild weather allowed the cattle to remain on the Meadow for longer than in previous winters. They were removed a head of the tree planting which took place the following day. Cattle are partial to a bit of Willow!

27/12/2014 Buzzards have been sighted as one of the possible reasons for the Kestrels decline in lowland areas. They appear to coexist on the Meadow relatively well, even though they share a similar diet and were perched in trees at opposite ends of the Meadow. The Buzzard again, in the canopy of an Oak at the lower end of gardens bordering the Meadow and the Kestrel by the picnic area (See photograph). The Kestrel looked a little worse for wear following the short cold snap. The worn tail feathers possibly explaining the Kestrels reluctance to hover.

**Andy Ingham**

Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135

## Queens Park Bridge



Queen's Park was planned on a greenfield site immediately south of the River Dee in 1851 by Enoch Gerrard. It was developed in the 1850s and 1860s as a middle class residential suburb. The Duke of Westminster originally intended to have the area laid out as a model industrial suburb but Victoria Pathway remains the only part of this vision that was realised.

The original Queen's Park bridge (see opposite) was opened in 1852 to serve Queen's Park, providing a direct link to the city. Chester Corporation took on the responsibility for this bridge in the early 1920s. They demolished it in 1922 and replaced it with a new bridge (above) designed by Charles Greenwood, City Engineer and Surveyor. This is the bridge that stands today.