

Friends of the Meadows

Water-dropworts

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Welcome *to our Newsletter for Autumn 2017*

Another year passes and we are once again looking forward to our next Annual General Meeting which will take place on Thursday 16th November. This time we've had to move our venue from St Mary's Without to St Mary's Within the Walls – now called St Mary's Creative Space. The Community Hall at St Mary's Handbridge has been demolished to make way for the building of the new Centre, which is due to open in June next year. It will be approximately twice the size of the old hall and will provide a hub for many Handbridge community activities. We look forward to returning for our AGM next year!



Demolition of St Mary's Centre underway
Photo: /www.stmaryschester.co.uk/

Since our last newsletter 3 months ago, there has been little progress on getting a new Countryside Officer in place and for now we are maintaining contact with Stephanie Hefferan who works out of Winsford. She is responsible for the general management of the Meadows and last month it had its scheduled rotational cut, employing the same contractor as last year. Other work planned includes replacing dead trees within the wooden guards, but she has no tree at the moment. The FOM Committee discussed the possibility of buying tree stock – probably order

black poplars, a native tree currently in decline – but because they grow up to 80', they would not be suitable for the riverside and may instead be planted elsewhere. Another option to replace the dead riverside tress could be Aspen. Planting would take place during the Winter.

We have had little further information about the proposed Watersports Centre although we understand that funding, from Sport England has been withdrawn due to cut-backs. The Queen's Park High School has had 40 pupils sign up for rowing this year and it is good to see the existing facility continuing to be used by young people.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at our AGM – we should like your views on issues including tree planting and dealing with dog mess (see Ruth's article in the is newsletter). We also want to re-visit the original Aims and Objectives of the Group which were established when it was set up in Adele's time. Are they still relevant? Are they in need of updating, and how?

Next year, 2018, marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Phyllis Brown who, together with her husband Harry Faulkner Brown, was so instrumental in making the Meadows available to us all. Her's is a remarkable story and I hope to do her justice with a special commemorative issue.

In the meantime, see you at the AGM!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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Cover image: Gulls on boats, River Dee (James Holroyd)

What about Water-dropworts?

Julie Rose takes us on a closer look at the genus Oenanthe

You may know we have seen a UK BAP species down on the Meadows first seen in 2016 and re-recorded in 2017: Tubular Water-Dropwort, *Oenanthe fistulosa*. This is our rarest plant on the Meadows and has been declining in the UK because it needs wet unimproved meadow. It was, and possibly still is present in the Handbridge marsh area of the Earl's Eye.

The Water-dropworts are umbellifers like lady's lace and hogweed. Most of them have balls of white or yellow flowers. At first sight they all look the same, but the leaves, stem shape, and seed shape are good clues to identification. Their nectar is very attractive to insects such as bees and hoverflies. Tubular Water-dropwort is a delicate bluey-green plant with narrow leaves and a hollow stem. It struggles to stay upright in competition with more robust plants hence its habitat requires careful management for it to thrive. We are very grateful to our previous ranger Amanda for organising the mowing and baling over the last 2 years, which may be why it has appeared here. It may also be relishing the extra wet summer we've had.

Oenanthe is also the name for the bird genus of wheatears. The plants in the genus *Oenanthe* are all poisonous. We have two other water-dropworts on the Meadows. Hemlock Water-dropwort is, as you can imagine from the name, deadly and common, especially down Bottoms Lane. The other is Fine-leaved Water-dropwort, which is rare on the Meadows: not recommended eating either. Cattle eat the leaves, but avoid eating the roots unless exposed by dredging. Poisoning isn't common, despite its abundance, possibly it doesn't taste good. However there have



Photo: John Somerville, British Wildflowers

been several human cases where people have thought the roots were parsnips, and made into curry. The toxin, oenanthetoxin is a neurotoxin that wears off and people can survive if given sufficient and rapid supportive treatment, but please don't put it to the test.

It is thought that the water-dropworts were given to people about to be executed or euthanased - it paralysed them and made them grin: the so-called "sardonic grin".

To the South Wind's breath
Lean the deadly stalks and umbrels
Rooted with death

Water-hemlock: Clark Ashton Smith

On patrol with PCSO Davies

twitter

Sept 1

I have been on patrol with PC Hazlewood on the meadows this evening. This is due to reports of people sleeping rough here

Sept 18

On foot patrol at the meadows with [@ChePolDenby](#) due to residents raising concerns of anti-social behaviour.

Sept 25

A joint foot patrol this morning on the meadows and by the river with community safety wardens from [@Go CheshireWest](#). [#partnershipworking](#)

Sept 25

Clear evidence of drug use in Handbridge by the suspension bridge. Reported to street scene for removal. Patrols will be in the area.



During the month of June there were a few changes to the Cheshire Local Police beat team in Chester South. PCSO Chris Fox, who served the Handbridge Park ward for a number of years, moved on to a new role within the constabulary and we welcome PCSO Lauren Davies to the role as the new Handbridge Park PCSO.

Beat Management priorities have included high visibility patrols in public places for public re-assurance and over this coming month especially around Anti-social Behaviour relating to Halloween and Fireworks night.

PCSO Davies is taking part in a new initiative and pilot scheme and along with PCSO Denby (Vicars Cross, Gt Boughton) is trialling the scheme and have their own police Twitter. You can follow all her tweets on [@ChePolDavies](#).



A few of her tweets relating to the area in and around the Meadows during September have been picked out opposite.

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 16th November, 2017 at 7pm

St Mary's Creative Space,
St Mary's Hill, off Castle Street, Chester

This year's AGM talk and presentation will be by Dr. Simon La Frenais on:

The Extraordinary Life of Robert Fitzroy

As a young naval captain, FitzRoy had already taken HMS Beagle to Tierra del Fuego before setting sail once more on his five year epic voyage with Charles Darwin on board. The talk will cover these early adventures and his eventful later years, including his trail-blazing efforts to understand the weather. It was a life of great achievement which ended in tragedy.

Please come along to learn about this great British mariner and scientist. Potential members will be welcome, too.

The Annual General Meeting will commence at 7pm, to be followed by the talk and complimentary drinks and cake!

Note that parking is available at the Castle Car Park – still currently free!



Cattle Grazing and Movement

Why have we not seen cattle on the Meadows? Julie Rose considers the background

Since time immemorial people have stopped disease from moving by stopping the diseased animal from moving. Magistrates shut people up in their houses in London in the plague years; "quarantine" comes from the Italian for forty days, the length of time people from outside had to wait to see if they developed plague before entering a city. Cattle and other stock movements in this country are governed by the same principles.

Movement restrictions are very strict during contagious disease outbreaks such as Foot and Mouth, but even in normal times there are restrictions. Foot and Mouth 2001 was so extensive because stock were moved so many times, and over long distances before the disease was recognised.

All farms have a CPH (County Parish Holding) number that is unique. They may have several CPHs that relate to different parcels of land, and they can, as from 2016, include a piece of rented land in their CPH temporarily. These CPHs are relevant because any cattle movement between CPHs is counted as a movement that needs to be notified to the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS). All bovines have to have a cattle passport and eartags. The eartag numbers are reported to BCMS.

A calf under 12 weeks old must not go to market more than twice in any 28 day period. Before this rule the poor creatures could be hiked around to a different market each day, which was very stressful and resulted in disease and sometimes death.

If cattle are moved between CPHs standstill is triggered. No animal can



Cattle on the Meadows in 2009. Photo by Steve Howe www.chesterwalls.info

move off the holding for 6 days (there are exceptions for example for veterinary treatment or to licensed premises such as shows).

What is the relevance of this to cattle grazing on the Meadows? We haven't had a grazer for 3 years now. Some of this will be the hassle of grazing public access land, danger to stock from dog faeces, possible risk of worrying by dogs, having to gather and corral stock during the raft race and other public events, low productivity grassland (great biodiversity but not productive by modern standards). But another reason will be these movement rules and the risk of having a standstill and not being able to move stock when required without having to apply for a special movement licence

*Want to know more? Go to: 7
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/533856/cattle-sheep-goats-and-pigs-movements-annex-a-to-c-1-July-2016.pdf*

A trip with the Admiral of the Dee

James Holroyd writes about this ancient inspection of the River Dee

On a sunny morning at the end of September Keith Dixon and I on behalf of the Friends of the Meadows Committee took up the kind invitation of The Admiral of the Dee to travel up river on the Princess Diana.

The title Admiral of the Dee dates back to 1354 and was granted to the Lord Mayor of Chester by the Black Prince. It carried with it financial advantages. The charter states that the citizens of Chester and their heirs and successors may *"henceforward, as hitherto they have used without hindrance, make attachments in the water of Dee between Chester and Arnold's Eye (near Hoylake) for toll and other customs belonging to the same citizens and dues on import, and also for offences committed in ships being in the said water as it ebbs and flows between the aforesaid places."*

The symbol of the Mayor's authority as Admiral of the Dee was a small silver oar, which was carried by the Mayor's Water Bailiff in the course of executing his or her duties. The current oar, 14" long, was made by a Chester goldsmith, Richard Richardson, and carries the Chester hallmark of 1719-20.

In 1528 it was further confirmed that the lands, possessions and harbours within the liberties of Chester from Arnold's Eye to Eaton Wear, were exempt from the jurisdiction of the Admiral of England.

However, this favourable arrangement was not to last! The Admiralty rights of



Chester and other seaport towns were abolished in 1835, only honorary titles remaining. Following local government reorganisation in 1974 it was confirmed that the Lord Mayor of Chester had the right *"to exercise the customary prerogative... to enjoy the title of Admiral of the Dee."*

So it was that the present Lord Mayor of Chester, Councillor Razia Daniels, was accompanied by two attendants, one carrying the silver oar on a cushion, as we travelled up the Dee on that sunny morning.

For your two Committee members not only was it a convivial occasion, attended by a small assortment of clerics, councillors, local government officers, an officer of the Marines and a Friend of Edgar's Field but, most importantly, it also provided an excellent opportunity to network over issues relating to the Meadows.

Climate Change and the Meadows

Julie Savory takes a closer look at the **potentail impact on the Meadows habitat**

The Cheshire Wildlife Trust works with Friends of the Meadows and the local authority Countryside Ranger to look after and protect the wildlife and natural habitat of the Meadows.



The Wildlife Trusts work continuously to mitigate and adapt to the changing climate around us. The majority of scientists agree that we are in a period of accelerated climate change where natural earth warming cycles are being magnified by human activity. On the 24th of September Chester Cathedral held a public workshop to discuss climate change and the challenges and opportunities it brings. An aim was to start developing ideas on actions which could be taken at a local level in Chester.

Katie Greenwood, Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Volunteering and Training Manager, spoke on behalf of the Wildlife Trust at the event. She highlighted that climate change is a threat to the UK's wildlife and that the Trust is keen to ensure that our habitats are managed beneficially to reduce these impacts. Flood prevention, crop pollination, carbon absorption, clean and healthy water sources – these benefits of our natural environment must all be

considered and maximised as we prepare for the effects of climate change.

Climate change impacts that will have an effect on species and habitats include rising sea levels, heavier rainfall, droughts, warmer summers and flooding. There is strong evidence that climate change is already affecting our UK biodiversity with many species occurring further north and at higher altitudes (e.g. the Adonis blue butterfly) than in previous decades. Although a warmer climate will benefit some species, this is likely to be countered by extreme weather events and negative impacts on others.

Migrant species can be especially vulnerable to changes in the timings of natural events. Migrations are carefully synchronised with food availability to give species the maximum chance of survival and as such the earlier peaks in availability of insects before species arrive can have a serious negative impact, whilst other species are arriving too early.

"Climate change is a threat to the UK's wildlife"

High spring rainfall can negatively impact on birds, causing reproductive failures and poor chick condition. In west Scotland, Golden Eagle populations declined by 25% when there was a significant increase in May rainfall. Droughts can limit the growth rate of many trees, with beech and silver birch being particularly vulnerable. Bird populations can be affected too such as thrushes and golden plover, as well as

Cheshire Wildlife Trust is working to:

- Restore damaged and fragmented areas of habitat;
- Recreate habitats and natural corridors stones in the landscape; and
- Reconnect these habitats, including linking them to the green spaces in our cities, towns and villages.

Friends of the Meadows supports these aims by:

- Restoring hedgerows using traditional methods which ensure hedgerows remain suitable for nesting birds and as a food source for other species.
- Planting trees to replace trees that have got damaged in storms.
- Providing nesting boxes for birds.
- Liaising with neighbouring landowners, United Utilities and the Grosvenor Estate and the local authority on issues such as clearing ditches, mowing the meadows and cattle grazing.
- Exploring the potential for creating a pond area to encourage invertebrates and other wildlife.
- Trying to tackle invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam, encouraging native plant species to thrive.
- Educating the community through providing guided walks and a variety of wildlife training sessions, increasing local awareness of the wonderful nature reserve on our doorstep.
- Continually completing species surveying and monitoring of species present on the Meadows. Promoting the importance of the Meadows as a flood plain and how careful management of the Meadows and the River Dee can contribute to natural flood management.

mammals like badgers, moles and hedgehogs all of which eat invertebrates which favour wetter weather. Reductions in frog and toad populations are consistent with low summer rainfall, alongside loss of suitable habitats.



If you would like to support the work of Friends of The Meadows, please get in touch via the link on www.friendsofthemeadows.org.uk or look at our Facebook page.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust also welcomes volunteers to work on their projects throughout Cheshire.

For more information look at www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk



Thoughts on Meadows Walks by Ruth Davidson

Now that the new knee is bedding in, it is time to resume our Meadows walks. Bottoms Lane (or Dogs Bottom Lane as a visitor to Chester remarked) has too much dog muck left uncollected. Now I would love to own a dog but I am too queasy to 'pick up' so that's it – no dog.

Cutting slack for those people who have a much loved pet but can't manage to bend down to clean up, what about all of the other dog owners who take advantage of the beautiful scenery around the meadows? Why do the vast majority of owners pick up and a small minority refuse to do so or pick up only to leave the plastic bag in situ? The reasons why dog muck can be hazardous are well documented - neospora caninum - toxocara. A recent article in The Chester Standard highlighted the problems associated with dog muck left on some footpaths.

As Friends of the Meadows, how should we tackle/manage this problem? The people, the dogs, the natural beauty make walking on the Meadows for me a really heart-warming experience, a joy.

Why is this being spoiled by a minority of users of dog walkers on the Meadows? We need to act.

We could consider the use of “pink poo” - pink highlighting foam, leaving bags at strategic points, using part of our subscriptions to purchase extra bins (although how to empty these would need careful thought), days of action or carrying placards!

It would be good to hear your thoughts at the AGM in November.

The Friends of the Meadows AGM takes place at St Mary's Creative Space (on the city side of the river) on Thursday 16th November at 7pm.



Photo (left) by
TripAdvisor
Reviewer
jonotennis.

“I usually take the ferry across the River Dee from Sandy Lane car park to The Meadows Good for walking, dog walking, running, bird watching Great views of the buildings of Boughton and back towards Chester An abundance of wildlife”

Trip Advisor



July to mid-October 2017

Apologies for a fragmented log, but we do rely on input from those that frequent the Meadows to pass on any interesting, unusual sightings. The Meadows do go through quiet periods and then suddenly burst into life with newsworthy activity.

26th July 2017

Ring Necked Parakeets are abundant in the south east but only small colonies exist in the North West. The nearest to us is possibly Sefton Park in Liverpool. They are not shy, retiring creatures. One raucous bird was seen and heard by Rob Sidwell screeching in the trees at the foot of the terraces (Gorsty bank). It was also heard again by Rob the following day.

12th August 2017

On Julie's "not for the faint hearted" Grasses Identification morning, a few new species were recorded for the first time.

They were Greater Duckweed in one of the ditches, Bottle Sedge nearby and Giant Fescue in the coppiced area by the river.

17th August 2017

The first Kingfisher to be seen on our stretch of the river post breeding season was found by John Wainwright fishing from the motor boats docked by the sailing club.

24th August 2017

A walk through the long grass yielded a good count of 11 2nd generation Common Blue butterflies (see photo), 4 Small Copper and 1 Painted Lady egg laying on Creeping Thistle (see photo)



Common Blue butterfly (24th August)



Painted Lady butterfly (24th August)

30th August 2017

The first Barn Owl of the season was seen hunting over the Meadow by Rob Sidwell on his constitutional evening dog walk. The only other observation was again by Rob on the 8th October

13th October 2017

Continental Goshawks thrive in urban areas but here in the UK are rarely recorded away from forested areas. Trevor Dennis was lucky to have good views of this powerful Buzzard sized raptor as it hunted over the Meadow.

What started off as a quiet uneventful twilight walk changed with a Kingfisher flying by the ferry landing stage.

Nearby a Sawbill swam away from the shore. A closer inspection revealed not

the regular Goosander but its smaller relative the Red Breasted Merganser (*see photo*). The Merganser was still by the Meadow the following day cruising down the river towards the Groves.

14th October 2017

A male Stonechat hovered briefly above the marshy area before alighting on a nearby Hawthorn bush. This is the first sighting of a Stonechat on the Meadow this season. Will it make the Meadow its winter home?

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

01244 677135 or get in touch via our Facebook page:

[/friends of the meadows-chester](https://www.facebook.com/friends-of-the-meadows-chester)



Red-breasted Merganser (13th October)