

# Friends of the Meadows



**50 years on:  
Remembering Louisa Phyllis Brown  
1877 - 1968**

**Newsletter 210**

**Winter 2018**

## Welcome to our Newsletter for Winter 2018

Well, here we are in 2018. This 210<sup>th</sup> issue of the Friends of the Meadows Newsletter is dedicated to the life of Phyllis Brown on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1968.

Those of you who have followed or know about the history of the Meadows know how closely she, together with her husband, Harry F Brown were involved in procuring The Meadows for the people of the City of Chester. It was a great gift for which we shall be forever grateful. But as well as this, Phyllis Brown had a remarkable life as one of the leading citizens of our city during the last century. Yet now, many of us may not remember what she did. In researching material on her life for this issue I should like to especially acknowledge *Have Mynde*, the magazine of The Queen's School and the Chester Chronicle in which her obituary appeared in 1968. I hope you enjoy reading about her life and contribution.

In our current lives, the most notable news is that the planning permission for the Watersports Hub was quashed at a Judicial Review in Leeds on 19<sup>th</sup> December. The Review was sought by Queen's Park resident Clive Sykes, whose lawyers successfully argued that planning consent was granted 'illegally'. If the Council want to pursue the plans they will have to do more work and go back to Committee. However, we also understand that funding is also a major ongoing issue. Despite the Council having already committed £0.5M, there is due to be an undisclosed amount coming from the Royals Rowing Club following the sale of its current premises. But a hoped-for substantial grant from Sport England has not been granted. In addition, the projected

costs may include further money for a retaining wall and we understand that the total may be in excess of £3.5M. We await developments this year.

As reported at the AGM, Stephanie Hefferan is continuing to provide the Country Ranger service across sites in Cheshire West including The Meadows, so she has many sites to look after with no more (or even less) resources than Amanda had when she was in post. However, she has been following the Management Plan for the rotational cuts and we hope to continue to have the Zoo Browse team back to remove some of the willow in the centre of the meadow.



Having consulted with Stephanie, we hope to plant some more trees in the Meadows, specifically native black poplars which will be made available from the Black Poplar Project at Chester Zoo. As these trees can grow up to 25M in height, they won't be suitable for a path or riverside position (probably aspen can be planted here). So the site has to be carefully chosen

Finally, it's Membership Renewal time! You should find a renewal form with this Newsletter and we've kept the subscription at a minimum of £5 but of course would welcome whatever you can offer!

**Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor**  
**Email: [rachelcross789@gmail.com](mailto:rachelcross789@gmail.com)**

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#### *Cycling at Seventy*

*Leaning upon my handlebars, uphill  
I struggle and today I wonder that  
A heart, as old as my heart is, can still  
Drum into action, though the lane's not flat,  
Stiff legs, with force which some might say would  
kill.*

*Why all this toil with wheels? Have I a need  
To keep old habit or a kind of pride?  
As if in answer, on the downhill side,  
A young man rushes by me at speed  
Few on this winding country road would dare;  
His cape, blown backward, has the sweep of wings,  
He has the halo of the blackest hair  
And the cold stare that sheer defiance brings;  
All signs affirm him Lucifer, no less,  
Who fell but survived his overthrow.  
Such arrogance infects me and I know  
I must not bow to age and weariness,  
I ride, since an archangel wills it so.*

*Molly Bond*

Illustration: 'On Her Bike' by Stephanie Lambourne. Blank Art Cards By Green Pebble. [www.greenpebble.co.uk](http://www.greenpebble.co.uk)

# Remembering Louisa Phyllis Brown

*On the 50th anniversary of her death, we look back at the life of this remarkable lady*



Born in Hough Green on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1877, the daughter of Charles Humfrey, she attended The Queen's School as a girl from 1890 to 1895 after which she joined the Old Girls' Association, of which she remained an active and most regular member all her life, covering an astonishing span of 77 years. She graduated B.A. in 1896 and six years later, M.A. of London University. After a year of study at Cambridge Training College, where she gained a Teacher's Diploma, she spent over two years at the Girl's Collegiate School, Port Elizabeth in South Africa, whose current motto is "*Facta non Verba*" – "*Deeds not Words*", which reflects upon an important aspect of Phyllis Brown's later life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century!

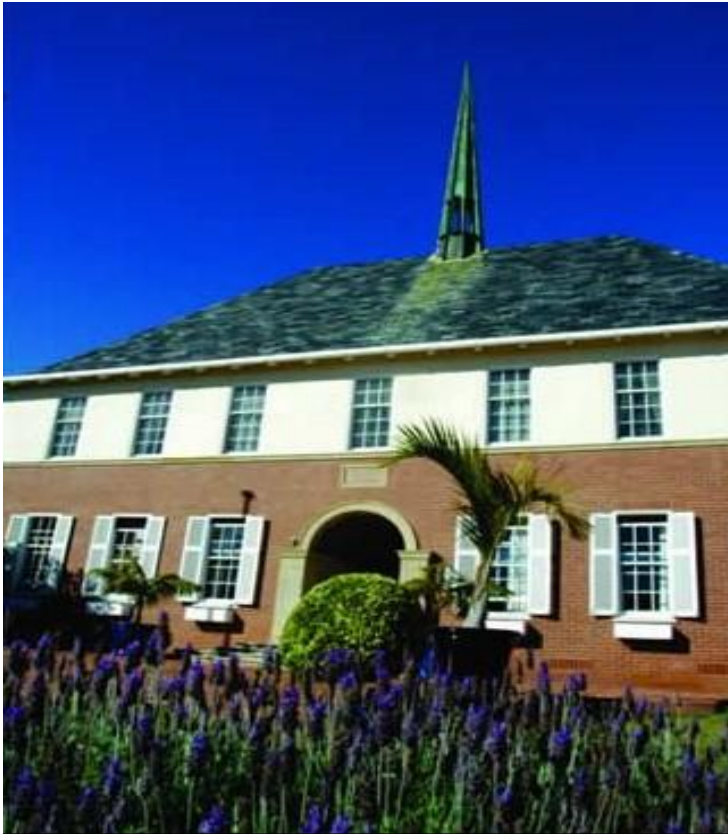
In 1902 she married Harry Faulkner Brown of the famous Browns of Chester family and lived for a short time in Weybridge, Surrey before returning in 1907 to Chester where her husband continued to practice as a solicitor as well as continuing the family association with the department store, now, of course, part of the Debenhams Group.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1968, Alderman Phyllis Brown passed away at her home in Curzon Park. She was 90 years old and a few weeks short of her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. During her life, she contributed greatly to the life and work of the City of Chester, not least when together with her husband Harry Faulkner Brown, The Meadows was procured and granted as a gift to the citizens of Chester in perpetuity. In this issue, we look back at her remarkable life: one of energy, vitality and enthusiasm.

## **Political life**

Phyllis Brown's working life centered on local politics and in this respect she followed in the footsteps of the Brown family as a member of the Liberal Party. Her husband Harry Brown became Mayor in 1919 and she served as Mayoress during this time. A year later in 1920, Phyllis Brown became the first woman to become a member of the Chester City Council, elected as Liberal Councillor for St John's Ward.

During her outstanding Council career she was recognized as an authority on



The Girl's Collegiate School, Port Elizabeth in South Africa, Motto "*Facta non Verba*" – "*Deeds not Words*"

It was founded in 1874 to provide daughters of prominent families in the growing settler town of Port Elizabeth with a quality education. It is one of the oldest girls'-only schools in the country.

education, housing and child welfare and served on many other committees.

She advocated women's suffrage and took a prominent part in the formation of the of the Chester Women Citizen's Association, becoming its first President. This was acknowledged as an arena for the discussion of the "new feminism" of the inter-war years with its emphasis on women's issues and rights. In 1922 she was appointed a City Magistrate and was on the Supplemental list when she died.

When Elsie Welsh joined her on the Council in 1927, Mrs. Brown addressed The Liberal Club and raised the issue of women in politics, commenting that "*it was very sporting of Boughton Ward committee to adopt a woman... because*

*everyone knew the committee ran a certain risk in doing so, and no-one knew better than she did. She thought it a happy fact that the Liberals had taken the lead in putting a woman on the Council. She hoped other parties would do the same because there was work for women on the Council as well as work for men".*

Phyllis Brown was returned to the Council three times before being ousted in 1929 but in 1932 was re-elected in a by-election for St Mary's Ward. In 1933 she was elected as the first female Alderman in Chester. She remained the sole woman in the Liberal ranks in the 1930's.

As a former chairman of the Public Library Committee, the City Library was one of Phyllis Brown's chief interests. She and her husband provided the property whereby extensions to the Library were carried out and Mrs. Brown also provided the fittings for the children's library.

In 1955 she was the first woman to have the Freedom of the City bestowed upon her.

### **Votes for Women!**

Phyllis Brown was President of the Chester Branch of the Women's Freedom League. Like the Women's Social and Political Union, run by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel Pankhurst, this was a militant organisation, which agitated for women's voting rights and was formed in 1907. Largely due to the efforts of local members, the Chester Branch was set up in 1913.

Although willing to break the law, members of the WFL were committed to non-violence and opposed the WSPU campaign of vandalism against private



The Women's Freedom League (WFL) was a breakaway group from the WSPU established by Charlotte Despard, Edith How-Martyn and Teresa Billington-Grieg in 1907. The WFL was completely non-violent although over 100 of its members went to jail for direct action demonstrations and refusing to pay taxes. The colours of the Women's Freedom League were Green, Gold and White.

and commercial property. The WFL in Chester opened a Suffrage shop at St. Werburgh Street where they sold merchandise such as badges and also set up a war savings scheme. Social events were organised for service personnel which were used as an opportunity to publicize women's suffrage. Although the Chester branch was in the forefront of many distinctly patriotic gestures, and were reported to be working distinctly "under a suffrage banner".

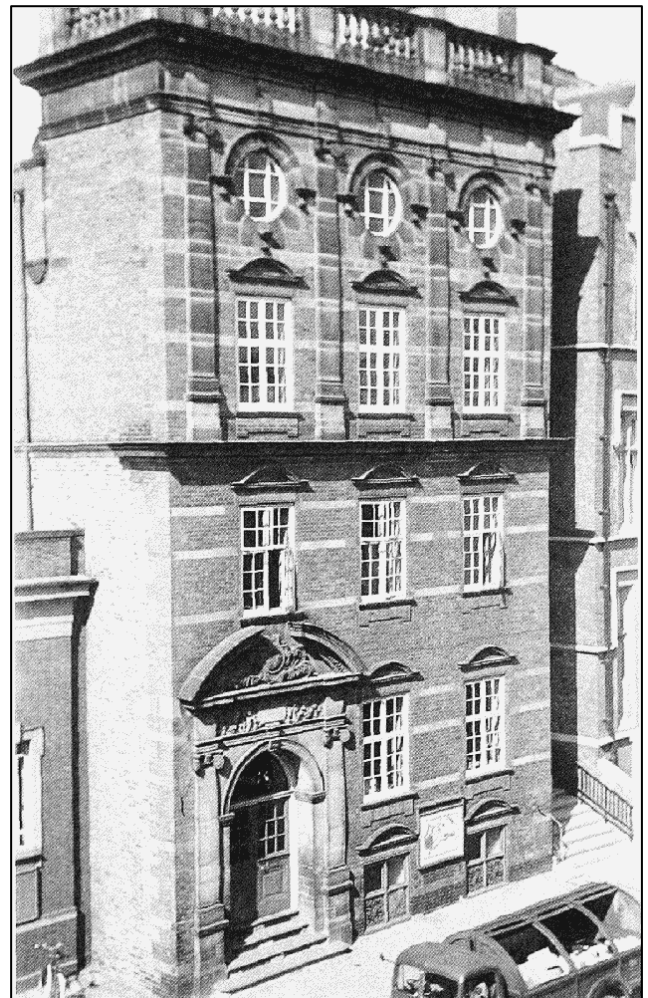
### The Queen's School

Phyllis Brown was both a life-long friend of The Queen's School and its greatest benefactor. She was a member of the Old Girls' Association for over 70 years; she served on the Board of Governors from 1917 to 1950; and from 1933 she was its Chairman.

The magazine of the Queen's School "*Have Mynde*" wrote at the time of her death that she "directed our affairs with vision and foresight both during the difficult days of the war and in the years of expansion that followed. To her generosity we owe our playing-fields,

the rose-garden at the main school, our junior school buildings at Nedham House, and three houses in Stanley Place where our preparatory department is located. Her beneficence and wisdom touched the life of our school in its every aspect, and left it so permanently enriched that the Governors are confident that all our friends will wish to be associated with the Memorial to be raised in her honour."

She retired from the chairmanship of the governing body in 1950 but remained very actively interested in the School and its activities, gifting properties after her retirement.



The former Public Library in St John Street, photographed in 1964.

The library opened a juvenile department in 1923, for which Phyllis Brown provided the fittings. An extension was added in 1931, built with the help of the Carnegie Trust, which insisted on closing the separate ladies' reading room.

As said in the School magazine *Have Mynde*, "Few schools can have had so many magnificent gifts from the hands of a single donor. Few schools can have had so true and generous a friend. We shall not see her like again."

In addition to her involvement with The Queen's School, Phyllis Brown was also a governor of King's School, the City Grammar School, foundation manager of two church schools, Chairman of the Chester Nursery School committee and of the Chester Branch of the League of Nations Union. She was a member of the Council of Social Welfare Executive Committee and of the Unemployment Assistance Board Advisory Committee.

### **The Meadows**

It will of course be remembered that in December, 1928 it was Mr. and Mrs. Brown who provided the purchase price for the Council to buy 64½ acres of land that we know as The Meadows. The sale was completed the following year and ownership was transferred in a formal ceremony at the end of June when Harry and Phyllis Brown presented the Mayor with the title deeds.

In March 1938, when she was Mayor of Chester, Phyllis Brown presented many trees planted along the river banks and was presented with a silver spade by the Improvement Committee.

Later that year she was instrumental in buying two further plots of land on The Meadows and also gifting them to the City. This included the Barnfield on which the Boathouse was built in 1971, used by the Queen's Park High School Rowing Club.



### **Later life**

Her latter years were spent in reading, needlework, listening to music, welcoming her many friends and attending the Parish Church of St Mary-Without-the-Walls in Handbridge.

From May 1967 she suffered a series of illnesses and was looked after at her home in Curzon Park by her dedicated housekeeper of 15 years, Miss Ada Stead. She passed away on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1968 and her funeral took place at St Mary's Church, attended by many people whose lives she touched who came to mourn her, but also celebrate her very full life as one of Chester's best-known and respected citizens.

And fittingly, in remembrance of their great friend and benefactor, a choir, made up of 35 pupils of the Queen's School, sang at her funeral.

### **Rachel Cross**

# Remembering Phyllis Brown – The Queen's School

Phyllis Brown had a very long association with The Queen's School and served on the Board of Governors from 1917 until 1950, being Chairman from 1933. During this time, her never-wavering trust and affection for her old school made her the very cornerstone of the establishment and a tower of strength to two successive Head Mistresses, Miss Maud Nedham and Miss Liz MacLean. Here are their tributes, printed in *Have Mynde* magazine in 1968.



**Miss Maud T. Nedham**, was Headmistress of The Queen's School from 1925 until 1947. She died in 1976. This was her tribute written in 1968 published in *Have Mynde*:

"My first clear memory of Mrs. Brown goes back to the days when I was a new member of the staff and we had an Open Day so that parents could come and see the school at work. Mrs. Brown was something of an alarming personality to me at that time and I remember her coming to a room in which I was just beginning a lesson with a class of middle school girls. She was quickly provided with a chair but it at once collapsed under her! Calmly and with a cheerful smile, Mrs. Brown picked herself up. She then accepted a more reliable chair and we went on with the lesson. That silly little incident formed a good introduction for me to Mrs. Brown and she was no longer an alarming person. I hope that as an Old Girl of The Queen's School she always felt at home in it.

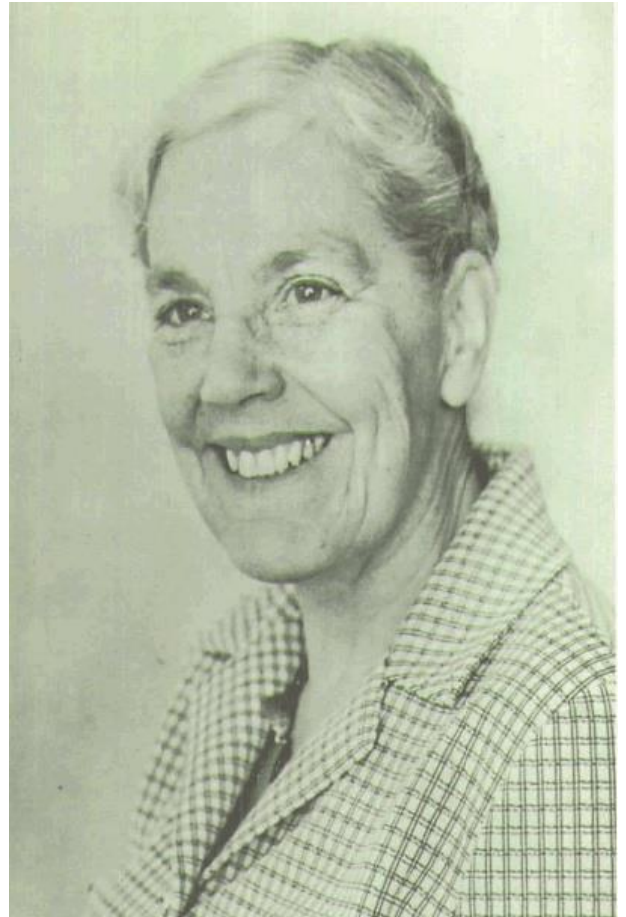
Later when she was Chairman of the Governors and I was Head Mistress, I had many opportunities, both formal and informal, of welcoming her to it. One characteristic of hers that I remember well was that she always had time to listen. In these busy days how often we hear the remark 'I have no time to do this or that'. Mrs. Brown was always ready to discuss any problem that had arisen, or better still to hear of suggestions for improvements or developments. The generosity of the Brown family is well known and my first example of it was the gift which enabled the school to buy the Playing Field below the City Walls and later the building which is now the Pavilion. Generous gifts were always a help to further development but it was often the wise and understanding interest and advice that were most valuable. One vivid example of this came in October, 1946, when the war was only recently over and our buildings were no longer adequate. Tentatively I suggested that we might try to find a new home for the junior school, as we had already done for the kindergarten. I was to retire at the end of the summer term so my suggestion was meant to be for my still unknown successor. However Mrs. Brown's prompt acceptance of the idea, and her generosity, enabled the house to be found, alterations to be undertaken and Nedham House to be opened a year later. I usually spend some time in Chester each year and I am always grateful to Miss MacLean for the welcome she gives me when I visit the school. I am full of admiration for the alterations and additions to the buildings and I am sure they must have given great pleasure to Mrs. Brown. I last saw her in June, 1967 and, in spite of her serious illness, that short visit is a happy memory for me because we were still so much in sympathy and her sense of humour had not failed. She was indeed a wise woman and a true friend."



**Miss Liz N. MacLean** was Headmistress of The Queen's School from 1947, appointed at the age of just 34. She remained in post until 1973 when she retired. She died in 1996 aged 83. This was her tribute published in the 1968 edition of *Have Mynde*:

"Strangers visiting the main school and Nedham House are often struck by the amount of physical space which suggests endowment on a scale that is more often found in old established boys' schools than in girls' foundations of more recent date. Our friends know that many of the facilities which we enjoy were made possible by Mrs. L. P. Brown's gifts of property extending over a period of fifty years. The Queen's School may even yet owe its survival into the twenty-first century to her generosity and foresight.

Although she retired from the chairmanship of the governing body as long ago as 1950 she remained actively interested and indeed her principal gifts, Nedham House and Nos 1, 3, 5, 7, Stanley Place were all made after her retirement. She died in January 1968 a few weeks before her 91st birthday, having displayed to the end the tenacity which had made her so often a pioneer. The school choir was privileged to sing at her funeral service and a few days later, at Prize-giving, our Vice-Chairman, Miss Gladys Phillips, spoke most movingly about her service to us and to the city of Chester. The family's gift to the school of some of her books will enable us to keep a memorial of her in a corner of the library which will be readily accessible to every girl, so that each generation may learn in its turn what it owes to Phyllis Brown."



The Queen's School, Chester, with which Phyllis Brown was associated for most of her life.

The "Chester School for Girls" was founded in 1878, serving young women from Chester and the surrounding area.

The School would change its name within four years, when Queen Victoria issued a royal decree commanding that the School should "henceforth be known as The Queen's School".

# Admiral Robert FitzRoy

*James Holroyd has put together this article on the fascinating talk given by Dr Simon La Fresnais at our AGM last November*

Robert FitzRoy has had mountains, ports, ships, even trees and a dolphin named after him – and most importantly, an area of the BBC shipping forecast. So who was this man? In this short space it will be possible to give no more than the bare outline of Simon La Fresnais' wide ranging talk, which was so ably supported by slides.

Robert FitzRoy was a scion of royalty through a mistress of Charles II. At the age of twelve he was sent as a naval cadet to Portsmouth. There he quickly distinguished himself as an outstanding recruit and by the age of twenty two was second in command and later captain on The Beagle, in its task of mapping the southern coastline of Argentina. However, it is on The Beagle's second voyage, this time with Charles Darwin on board, that Robert FitzRoy is often best remembered. The ship spent only five weeks on The Galapagos, a stay that was to change thinking about our origins, but the voyage itself lasted five years.

On his return FitzRoy married and spent two and half years drawing up charts and writing an account of his voyages. He then became an MP in Robert Peel's government, but was soon sent out to New Zealand as Governor. There he sided with the Maoris over the loss of their lands to settlers and was recalled after complaints were sent to the British government. Although subject to severe depression, he went on to further appointments, including command of HMS Arrogant.

In 1854 he was appointed to deal with the collection of weather data, the



*Robert FitzRoy, early-mid 1860s*

development of a weather forecasting system. Indeed, it was he who coined the phrase 'weather forecasting'! Working with a staff of only three and partly using his own funds, he set up 15 weather stations round the British Isles. These sent back reports by telegraph to London on a daily basis to be published in The Times. Greatly saddened that his warnings of gales had been ignored when The Royal Charter sank off Holyhead, with the loss of 450 lives, and deeply in debt, he took his own life at the age of sixty. Queen Victoria and Charles Darwin were among those who contributed to the support of his family.

Further reading:

*FitzRoy* by John & Mary Gribbin.

*This Thing of Darkness* by Harry Thompson – a novel modelled closely on the historical facts.



## Mid-October to December 2017

### 15<sup>th</sup> October

Raven and Buzzard were involved in aerial combat above the Meadow. It was difficult to see who came out on top as they both departed fairly amicably and went their separate ways. A pair of Stonechat were on the Meadow again and remained in residence to the end of the year. Two Red Admiral and a Large White butterfly were enjoying the autumn sunshine on the Meadow.

### 16<sup>th</sup> October

The Red Breasted Merganser observed on the 14<sup>th</sup> October was seen for the final time loafing around on the river at dusk. Presumably it headed back out to the estuary as inland sightings of this species are quite rare.

### 25<sup>th</sup> October

At dawn a Great Crested Grebe fished the river underneath the suspension bridge.

### 27<sup>th</sup> October

Pink footed Geese continued to pass over the Meadow in smaller numbers this year and on a less regular basis. In previous winters you could almost set your watch by their comings & goings. A flock of 300 heading up river was one of the larger movements this winter.

### 15<sup>th</sup> November

On the Handbridge marsh a normally secretive Water Rail probed in leaf litter at the foot of a small Willow. It remained in view for 5 minutes before

melting back into the dense undergrowth.



*Stonechat*

### 18<sup>th</sup> November

Both the Meadow and the Handbridge Marsh started to hold more water, attracting Snipe. A flock of 15 rose from the Handbridge marsh.

Twelve Redwing and one Fieldfare were feeding on an area of Meadow cut in the autumn.

Three Goldcrest flitted through the Willow by the river.

### 18<sup>th</sup> December

Sightings of Kingfisher have been regular this winter. Trevor Dennis recorded a very tame Kingfisher between the Groves & the Meadow. Trevor was able to stand only a few yards from it fishing on the river bank. The Kingfisher was also at ease with walkers passing by on the footpath. Trevor also recorded it on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> January.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> December

Although not on the Meadow but worthy of a mention was the discovery of a Hawfinch by John Wainwright at Eccleston. John describes it as Christmas coming early after decades of searching. Hawfinches used to visit Yews at both Eccleston churchyard and Overleigh Drive prior to a sharp decline in the Seventies.

### 23rd December

Numbers of Snipe on the meadow continued to rise and with this the chances of finding its smaller cousin the Jack Snipe also increase. A single Jack Snipe was duly flushed from the side of the flooded path in the centre of the Meadow.

Two wintering Chiffchaff flitted through grasses by the avenue of Willows. (See photo).



*Chiffchaff*

### 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)

## A Winter Walk on the Meadows

This lovely photo of people walking through the avenue of Willows in the December snow was taken by Julie Savory

