

# Friends of the Meadows



**Newsletter 217**

**Autumn 2019**



# Welcome *to our* **Newsletter for Autumn 2019**

We look forward to our next AGM to be held on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November, again at the St Mary's Handbridge Centre. Three years ago, Jill Burton came and gave us a fascinating talk on the History of Erddig, "The Jewel in the Crown of Welsh Country Houses". This year, she will delve into its history a little deeper and uncover one of its little secrets.

The 2016 AGM also marked the end of my term as Chair after five years in the role. Since then, the Committee has carried on its work without a dedicated Chair (or indeed, Secretary) but the arrangement does seem to work. And of course we are indebted to James Holroyd in preparing all the minutes for our meetings and the reports for the AGM. Unless anyone steps forward to take these Committee roles, we shall carry on in this manner.

For a number of years now, Julie Rose has contributed to the Committee with her invaluable botanical expertise but now finds herself taking work away from Chester so may be unlikely to be able to sit regularly on the Committee. However, we hope to see her at the AGM!

All details of our AGM are on the next page – we look forward to seeing as many of you as possible coming along and supporting us!

Finally, don't forget that you can find more about Friends of the Meadows online at <https://www.friendsofthemeadows.org/>

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

This edition's cover photo of the **Meadows from Grosvenor Park Belvedere** is cropped from a photo posted by Ashley Shaw @GillandShaw on Twitter

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## JOHN CLARE: "AUTUMN"

The thistledown's flying, though  
the winds are all still,  
On the green grass now lying,  
now mounting the hill,  
The spring from the fountain  
now boils like a pot;  
Through stones past the  
counting it bubbles red-hot...

*John Clare (1793-1864) is often overlooked in accounts of Romantic poetry, but he wrote sensitively and originally about the English countryside and his poetry displays a fine eye for local detail.*

# Annual General Meeting

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 at 7pm**

**St Mary's Handbridge Centre,  
St Mary Without-the-Walls, Handbridge, CH4 7HL**

**This year's AGM talk and presentation will be by Jill Burton on:**

## **Erddig's "Thief Cook" – Fact or Fiction?**

Erddig's servants' poems are often quoted as evidence of the Yorke family's generosity to their servants, but also mention how one of their cooks was a thief.

But the poems are written by the employer - not the employees! Jill has researched in to the facts behind one particular story to uncover the truth behind the poem.



Jill Burton last entertained us at our 2016 AGM talk on the history of Erddig.

She retired 8 years ago after working for 21 years as Education Officer for the National Trust with responsibility for Erddig and Chirk Castle. In retirement she volunteers at Erddig and now works on the National Trust 'Collection Management System' and continues to research and add to the properties servants' records.

**Friends of the Meadows members and non-members welcome!**

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

# Meadows Site Management

*An update from Greenspace Officer Stephanie Hefferan*

## Riverside Fencing

The riverside has been completed and gates have been installed in agreement with the annual events organisers, so now it is a question of monitoring re-growth, trimming back in places for views as required and then allowing it to develop over time and take further action as necessary

## Cheshire Railings

The Cheshire railings have now been painted and we have received a lot of comments as to how much better it looks. I'm very pleased with the result and think the volunteers did a good job all round.

## Cut and Collect

This was booked with the contractor and took place in mid-September. Friends of the Meadows did raise an issue with the extent of the "collect" (see Meadows Log) and this is being followed up.

## Hedge Cutting (Bottom's Lane)

At the time of writing, this is due to take place. I will monitor to ensure it has been done.

**Steph Hefferan**  
**Greenspace Officer**

## More Minerva Magic!



A sign in Edgar's Field tells visitors to the park that it is "Home to a Goddess". But which Goddess? The Historic Environment Records also reveal that a remarkable shrine stands here, a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the only *in situ* shrine in Western Europe. From a recent survey by the newly founded Minerva Community Project, it seems that few Handbridgeans or visitors know this.

Minerva was the Roman goddess of wisdom, Trade, the Arts, and strategy in war. Her domains included medicine. She is equated with the Greek goddess Athena, and both have attributes of the owl, olive tree and spear.

It is believed that quarrymen excavating stone to build ancient Deva erected the statue to seek her protection. In medieval times, the story goes she avoided damage by religious zealots who mistook her for a cloaked Virgin Mary.

Minerva was venerated all over the Roman world, celebrating her festival *Quinquatria* from 19th to 23rd March. Today her statuette in Edgar's Cave is badly weathered with traces of her helmet, shield spear and owl just visible; but there is no interpretative information to help visitors understand what they are looking at.

The **Minerva Community Project** is a constituted community group of local Handbridge residents who were initially concerned by the deterioration of the statue. The group wants to put this unique Minerva Shrine back on the tourist map, with new pamphlet information and proper signage from city-side to the monument, and aims to hold community engagement days to celebrate our shared heritage. They are currently seeking National Heritage Lottery Funding, supported by the Council, Museum, Big Heritage, local businesses and community groups, and aim to commission a new professional preservation survey.

**Lisa Rossetti**



# Time to SHINE

## *Greenspace Officer Stephanie Hefferan on the Meadows ditches and the conservation designations*

The Meadows has a long history of agricultural activity with documentary evidence dating back over 1000 years and continuing on through the centuries until the present day.

Some of these clues to its agricultural history can still be seen on site today with a system of earthworks of raised medieval 'ridge and furrow' cultivation and drainage ditches that span the centuries of management. The 'ridge and furrow' and some of the ditches are not easily seen on the ground but take a look at an aerial photo and they can be clearly made out.

In recognition of this long history, the site is recorded as a **SHINE** site – "Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England".

Whilst these sites are not officially designated in the way a listed building would be, they are recognised as being of importance as a historic feature and as such are recommended for management under Natural England's agri-environment schemes. As such we are hoping that the introduction of low-impact conservation management techniques such as selected removal of scrub and light grazing will help preserve these features for future generations.

If you are interested in learning more about the site's history, the Friends of the Meadows website has a fascinating section which provides more back-

ground details from Roman times onwards:

[www.friendsofthemeadows.org/history](http://www.friendsofthemeadows.org/history)

The site is not only important for its historical earthworks but also holds the highest UK and European conservation designations: SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and SAC (Special Area of Conservation). These designations help inform our management decisions and confer on us a legal obligation to protect its features; addressing the erosion of the bankside being the most recent example.

So whatever your interest: historical, conservation or recreation, The Meadows proves to be a very special site indeed!



*Above: Ditches on the Meadows (Image: Beth Alvey courtesy Cheshire Live)*



# The Annual Raft Race



On the 30th June the annual Chester Raft Race, organised by the Rotary Club of Chester, took place. It was a beautiful Summer's day and crowds thronged on The Meadows and The Groves to see the colourful rafts race each other along the River Dee to the finishing post just by the Suspension Bridge. The theme this year was "Chester Transport and Heritage through the Ages".

Julie Savory, on behalf of Friends of the Meadows, was invited to join the judging panel on The Groves bandstand. There were some fantastic entries including Vikings and Romans; however the winning raft, which was felt to be the most original and most fitting with the theme was "The Duke's Coach", which was skippered by Stuart Cossins from 4CAccess.

All the entrants had to try and dodge the spray from the Fly Boarder Jay St John and stay afloat despite the drenching!

This annual event raises thousands of pounds for charity. This year £9,000 was raised which has been distributed in grants to local charities and a charity supporting schools in Cambodia. The principal beneficiary was Claire House, the Children's Hospice on The Wirral who were later presented with a cheque for £5,000 by Brian Westcott, the current Chair of Chester Rotary.





## July to September 2019

### 4<sup>th</sup> July

As stated in the previous log very few Swifts arrived in the spring to nest in Handbridge. A dozen late arrivals appeared at the beginning of July and immediately started prospecting potential nesting sites for next summer. Let us hope they return and find to their liking the 30 nest boxes installed in Handbridge & Queens Park.



*Common Swift in Handbridge*

### 6<sup>th</sup> July

A solitary Common Spotted Orchid was found by the Bottoms Lane track hedgerow- somewhat from their more traditional location on the other side of the Meadow.

Six-spot Burnet were more noticeable than in previous years and may be increasing.

Both Large & Small Skipper along with a few Ringlet Butterflies were also on the wing.

### 13<sup>th</sup> July

Narrow-bordered 5-Spot Burnet moths started to appear and strangely replace



*Six-spot Burnet on the Common Spotted Orchid (see 6<sup>th</sup> July)*

the Six spot variety (see pic of 5 Spot sharing a Knapweed flower head with an unidentified little critter.

It was lovely to see clumps of Tufted Vetch in flower along with the less showy but no less attractive Lesser Skullcap.

### 25<sup>th</sup> July

Four male Banded Demoiselle Damselfly were on riverside vegetation behind the new fencing. Two skittish female Mandarin ducks were on the river opposite Sandy lane.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> August

This summer was certainly a great year for the migratory Painted Lady Butterfly. You only had to step out of the house into your own garden to find one. See photo of a Painted Lady visiting a Buddleia in Cross Hey.

### 4<sup>th</sup> August

Three female Common Darter Dragonfly were found on the Meadow along with a Common Blue Butterfly.



*Banded Demoiselle (see 25th July)*

### **20th September**

At dusk two Southern Hawker Dragonfly were patrolling up and down the

Bottoms Lane track as if guarding the area from any intruders.

### **24th September**

A juvenile Mute Swan was observed by Rachel next to the Weir. It has not been seen since so has presumably been driven off by the resident pair.

#### **Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder**

T: 01244 677135

You can get in touch via our Facebook page:  
[/friends of the meadows-chester](https://www.facebook.com/friends-of-the-meadows-chester)

Or via the Contact page on our website:  
[www.friendsofthemeadows.org](http://www.friendsofthemeadows.org)

Or email us directly at:  
[fomchester@gmail.com](mailto:fomchester@gmail.com)



On 20th September, it was a beautiful morning on the Meadows with the cut done. This photo was taken by Andy Ingham afterwards. He noted that much of the grass and bramble was taken but some grass had been left and felt it needed to be fully cleared. He passed on his concerns, and Stephanie is following it up.