

# Friends of the Meadows

A photograph of a woman with short, curly, light brown hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved sweatshirt with a white collar and black pants. She is sitting on a wooden fence with wire mesh, looking slightly to the left. The background shows a grassy field, some trees, and a tall, thin structure with a blue sign that says "Dunfermline".

FRIENDS OF THE  
MEADOWS

**Newsletter 219**

**Summer 2020**

## Welcome *to our* Newsletter for Summer 2020

I hope this Newsletter sees you all safe and keeping well. As you will all know, we did not publish a Spring Newsletter because the Lockdown had begun in mid-March and we rely on teams of hand deliverers who would not have been able to safely fulfil the task of delivering. However, now that restrictions have been relaxed, we hope that this bumper 12-page issue makes up for it!

Since our Winter Newsletter came out in January, there have been some extremes of weather - flooding in February throughout the country and The Meadows did its job in keeping the overall river levels in Chester down. Of course, by May, we all experienced the very warm and sunny weather which I hope you were able to enjoy safely. It did attract many visitors to The Meadows while travel further afield was not possible. And of course we experienced quite a bit of anti-social behaviour including open barbeques, large groups gathering and littering. We received a number of emails and passed them on to Steph Hefferan our Greenspace Officer who steadily dealt with it all, referring on to the appropriate bodies. Steph has again provided an update of Meadows Management Issues and further advice - read more on pages 3-4.

We are extremely fortunate to have this large natural space in our city and often there is a delicate balance to be struck between maintaining a natural habitat and the recreation of people. Adele Edwards set up the Meadows Users Association 40 years ago at a time when the Meadows had become neglected. Now it is a Special Area of Conservation and an important area for nature conservation, being much appreciated by visitors. Adele sadly passed in early May and in this edition we pay tribute to her and the work she did on behalf of us all.

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Our Winter Newsletter, which came out in January, did not include a Membership Renewal Form for those who still pay annually. Of course, many have now set up Standing Orders and we are very thankful for your continued support. Please consider this method of support, or otherwise you can still send a cheque! A Renewal Form is enclosed or can be downloaded from our website (see p.12)

**Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor**  
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This edition's cover photo is of Adele Edwards on The Meadows. Adele sadly passed away in early May and we pay tribute to her in this edition. See pages 6-7. (Photo with kind permission of the Chester Chronicle)

# Meadows Site Management

*An update from Greenspace Officer Stephanie Hefferan*

I hope this finds you all safe and well during these difficult times; it's good to be able to start getting out and about a bit more and hopefully slowly and safely start to get back to some normality.

During the lockdown I have been drafted to cover the Winsford area to support a colleague in long-term isolation, but as the situation is now relaxing, it'll be good to get back in the swing of things in Chester.

I would like to express my thanks to the Friends of the Meadows and also my Chester based colleagues who have been my eyes and ears on the site during lockdown. Additionally, it was particularly noticeable that we have some wonderful 'Wombles' picking up site litter - a big thank you; your community spirit is much appreciated by all.

## Path surfacing and access

In early January, I met with a small group from the Friends of the Meadows Committee to survey the state of the path network across the Meadows and consider what may be done to sensitively improve access.

It was apparent that some maintenance was required. Examples were areas of the path network wearing through, exposing the sub-base and potholes noted here and there. A number of priority areas were identified for work with appropriate surfacing materials in keeping with those areas.

We are hopeful that some money will be found to make necessary repairs and this is an ongoing issue for us, but more extensive work would be outside of budgets and grant funding would need to be sought.

## Meadows cut



During lockdown, disappointment was expressed about the mowing of the 'events' area whilst the buttercups were in flower. It was unfortunate timing, however the contractors were carrying out their scheduled mowing contract. The mowing in this area is done for the purpose of the annual events and they are contracted to do this three times a year - once for each event.

During this time, this decision was made to leave the contract unaltered as we had no idea at what stage any events could go ahead so we needed to ensure that if/when things changed that the area would be in reasonable condition if given the 'green light'. Once it became clear that events would not be going ahead this year, the schedule was altered (for this year only) to spread the cut across the summer season to keep it maintained and manageable for subsequent years. This also has had the added benefit of giving a little extra space for people to relax whilst maintaining distancing during the Covid crisis.

## Cattle Grazing

Given the current crisis, the proposals for cattle grazing were suspended for this year. Therefore, the meadow will be cut as per usual later in the year until such time as a conservation grazing regime can be re-



instated. The introduction of such a regime will enable the Meadows to play a crucial role in helping to address the significant threats facing our bio-diversity on both a local and national scale.

### **Other Meadows Management Issues**

The surfacing under the 'Friends' bench needs re-dressing.

Dog fouling was noted as an issue and during the sunny days of Lockdown some incidents of littering and anti-social behaviour took

place. These can all be reported using the Council's website:

[Residents > Streets and Open Space > Report it](#)

Note: If you need to report a crime or anti-social behaviour that requires an immediate response and is something that is happening at the time then you should contact Cheshire Police on 101 or if it's an emergency use 999

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



Above: A swan glides across the flooded Meadows in February, when river levels were very high and many places across the country were flooded

# Views from The Meadows: Walmoor Hill



Walmoor Hill is the house that renowned Chester architect, John Douglas, completed for his own use in 1896. It is listed Grade II\* and has been described as “a house of considerable size and panache”. Douglas was responsible for the design of hundreds of buildings in Chester, Cheshire and further afield, including many churches, and estate buildings for the Grosvenor family. His best known works in Chester are probably the Eastgate Clock and the terrace of shops on St. Werburgh Street near the Cathedral. Douglas also designed the church where he worshipped, St Pauls Church Broughton, which is also visible from the meadows.

After the death of John Douglas in 1911, Walmoor Hill later became a girls’ school and the headquarters of the Cheshire Fire Brigade. It is now converted into apartments.

*Sketch by Stephen Savory*



# Adèle Edwards, Guardian of Chester Meadows dies aged 79

**Adèle was a grandmother, mother, former teacher and nature lover who founded Friends of the Meadows**



One of the founding members of Friends of the Meadows has sadly died.

Adèle Edwards, from Queen's Park, set up the Meadows Users' Association back in 1980 which later became Friends of the Meadows.

Adele passed away from cancer in early May, aged 79, in a hospice in Wiltshire where her daughter lives.

Friends of the Meadows extended its condolences to all Adèle's family and friends.

Adèle, who was both chairman of Friends of the Meadows and editor of the newsletter for many years, was fortunate to have a garden that backed on to the Meadows where she used to take her dogs and those she minded for other people.

In 2015 she was interviewed for the 200<sup>th</sup> edition of the Newsletter when she lived on Elizabeth Crescent overlooking the Meadows: "I have no need of a television", she had said, "Why would you want one when you have this to look at?"

Adèle's commitment to the Meadows was unquestionable whether through conservation work or fund-raising. And she was proud to have received two Queen Mother's Birthday Awards for her contribution to Environmental Improvement.

Many of her adventures were reported in the local press. One such occasion was when she and a fellow member Richard Lydon, an experienced cow hand, rescued a man driven into the River Dee by aggressive cattle. Another episode that impressed her grandchildren was when she helped Hollyoaks to film on the Meadows and a cast member even used her shower.

In recent times Adèle had been concerned about council plans to extend the Queen's Park High School rowing club into Barnfield to create a larger water sports centre. The scheme now appears to have been placed on the back-burner due to lack of funding and after a judge quashed the 2017 planning consent. Adèle said: "The field was added to the Meadows ten years after the original gift but it has a rather special place. It was secured and given to us by Harry Brown's widow, Phyllis Brown, in 1939 -- the year she was the first woman to become Chester's Mayor."

A former teacher, Adèle had taught in a couple of Chester schools including Queen's Park High School but left the profession in about 1984. She was extremely knowledgeable about flowers, plants and trees.

Adèle was also a woman of faith who had links with the cathedral, St John's Church, St Mary's in Handbridge and St Mary's Church at Eccleston, appearing on Songs of Praise when the BBC came to visit. She supported various good causes, was passionate about the pleasure boats on the Dee and had been one of the judges for the annual charity raft race.

Adèle, who was brought up near Frodsham, attended the Queen's School as a girl. She later married Harry Swithinbank and they had a daughter and son, Louisa and Nick, who have two and three children respectively. Sadly Harry, a surgeon, died aged just 66 in 1987.

Daughter Louisa Thomas said: "For me it's all about her abiding love of nature which she always had. She had very happy memories of staying with her paternal grandparents in their cottage in North Wales from an early age and I think her own parents were very

interested in nature. And she had a science background as well. She was teaching religious education and science when she qualified as a teacher.

She was working as a laboratory technician in one of the hospitals when she met my father, who was a surgeon."

Louisa added: "She enjoyed life and put everything into the things that she loved. There was no half way with mum, it was all or nothing."

In accordance with her wishes, Adèle's ashes will be scattered at St David's, Pembrokeshire, in the presence of immediate family, later in the year. Adèle loved churches and cathedrals and St David's Cathedral was one of her favourites.

*This text has been edited from an article by David Holmes appearing in the Chester Chronicle on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020. Reprinted here with photographs by kind permission.*



*Adèle paid a vet to trim the horns of distressed bull, Blackie, whose horns had started to grow in towards its skull.*

# Swifts - the joyful icon of summertime



Swifts are with us for just 3 months each summer bringing spectacular action and excitement to our skies.

These amazing birds have shared our buildings ever since the Romans came to Britain. They still breed in our eaves and gables, but not for much longer, as modern and renovated buildings exclude them. We have lost over half of our Swifts in just the past 20 years

Unless we help them, Swifts will vanish from the UK. Find out here all about Swifts, why they matter, and how you can help them thrive.

*[Photo by Mandy West on Flickr]*

## Roger Nutter reports from the Chester Swift Conservation Group

Last year wasn't a good one for swifts in the UK. Faced with very bad weather in SW Europe during the spring migration, many birds abandoned their journeys and numbers in the UK were 25% lower than expected. Hopefully, this will turn out to be a one-off blip in the graph; most of the swifts would have made it back to Africa, and many should be able to attempt the journey here again this spring. The average breeding life of a swift is 6 years.

We continued with our efforts to put up more swift boxes around Chester. In 2019, we fitted approximately 35 boxes, about the same total as in 2018. A Chester RSPB Group stand at the Hoole Allotments Open Day in July provided a useful boost to demand, resulting in about 20 houses having new boxes by the year end. Supply and fitting of boxes was paid for thanks to a new grant of £635 from the Naturesave Trust, and a second small grant was secured from CWAC at the end of the season which will enable us to top up

our stock of boxes this spring.

Unfortunately, progress this season is likely to be slowed down by coronavirus, but at least we can keep an eye on boxes already installed to see if any swifts adopt.

The swift conservation message is getting through on other fronts too. The Environment Team at CWAC have started to make developers fit bat and bird boxes to new buildings and renovations, such as the new student accommodation on St Martin's Way, a new block at Upton Primary School, and the housing development at Lache.

If you are planning any roof work this spring/summer, please ensure any existing swift and martin nests are not disturbed or obstructed, and if you don't have a nest site, please consider fitting a nest box. If you need advice on what to fit and how to do it, please e-mail us at:  
[RSPBChester@googlegroups.com](mailto:RSPBChester@googlegroups.com)



## Of all We Looked at in March

onion-dome buds on the sycamore,  
green and fattening,  
mahogany spears of buds on the beech  
spaced so far apart they seemed anti-  
social,  
the dusky blues of the alder catkins,  
and the triple crown of buds  
that mark the finial of ash twigs,  
a trinity St Patrick might have used  
if he had not found the shamrock

it's the space  
between the dark buds of the beech  
that we remember now,  
their perfect skill at social distancing

*Gill McEvoy*



## Rust Fungi



Above:  
*Rust fungus  
on a leaf*

Right:  
*Rust fungus  
spores*



Rust fungi have complex life histories. All live on plants - some are very host specific, others less so; some complete their life history on one species, others have intermediate hosts.

These fungi have co-evolved with their host plants, they have no free-living stage like our familiar cap and stem fungi. On wild plants tiny critters feed on the spores, which feed bigger critters, which feed the birds. When we create monocultures in intensive agriculture we create perfect habitat for rust fungi to decimate crops.

Colourful and tiny, the bright orange smudges on Meadowsweet are *Triphragmidium ulmariae*, a rust fungus.

It's widespread this year on Meadowsweet everywhere. Look for a bent over leaf, or twisted stem, and turn it over. It will deform that particular leaf but does not destroy the whole plant.

*Julie Rose*



## January to May 2020

### 6th January 2020

A return visit to the exact spot as before Christmas, to see probably the same Woodcock taking flight from the copse at the west end entrance of the Meadow.



*Cormorant with a captured lamprey (see 16<sup>th</sup> February)*

### 16th February 2020

A record count of 10 Goosander including 6 males on the river by the Old Dee Bridge. Nearby Cormorant were helping themselves to a plentiful supply of Lamprey (see photo).

### 29th February 2020

It is always a great sight to see the meadow flooded. Eight cantankerous Coot and two Mute Swans (see photo) joined the hundreds of Gulls.

### 18th March 2020

A Cetti's Warbler was heard calling below the Belgrave Park entrance by Jon Wainwright. It is a couple of years since the last Cetti's visited the Meadows.

### 19th March 2020

Two Jack Snipe were flushed from the centre of the Meadow.

Nearby two Water Rails were calling but remained hidden in the marshy area.

Up river from the Meadow there was plenty of activity on flooded fields below Huntington. Previously, it was not possible to see this area from our side of the river. This winter though, the Duke's team have sensitively created gaps in the riverside vegetation and although strictly not part of the recording area it was possible to see two Shelduck, four Tufted Ducks, one Shoveler and several Teal.

3 Mandarin Duck including 2 stunning males flew out of a ditch on Water Company land. Mandarin were regularly seen on the river during the lockdown, with a peak count of four males opposite the Riverside Court on the 30<sup>th</sup> April.

### 20th March 2020

A return visit to check on the flooded fields below Huntington to find 5 Wigeon and a calling Curlew.

Two Water Rail took flight from underneath a Willow on the Handbridge marsh. I think it is fairly safe to say this was not the same pair heard on the Meadow the previous day.

### 29th March 2020

A Green Woodpecker flew from the Meadow and over Bottom Lane track. Its distinctive "yaffle" was also heard on a number of dates in fields below Belgrave Park.

### 5th April 2020

A stunning male Redstart on the Meadow & another 14<sup>th</sup> April by the Belgrave Park entrance.





*Grasshopper Warbler (see 6<sup>th</sup> April)*

### **6th April 2020**

The first of many reeling Grasshopper Warbler on and around the Meadow, with a peak count of six on **19<sup>th</sup> April** (see photo).

Three Willow Warbler were also singing along the riverbank.

### **7th April 2020**

First Common Sandpiper of spring with a peak count of six on **17<sup>th</sup> April** between the Old Dee Bridge and the Meadows. A pair of Grey Wagtail feeding on the edge of drying muddy pool. (see photo)

### **10th April 2020**

The biggest surprise of the spring and a first for the Meadow was the sight of a Whimbrel flying above the river.

### **11th April 2020**

Sitting high up in a willow a Mink attracted the attention of the local Corvid community.

A pair of Great Crested Grebe were noted by Jon Wainwright on the river below County

Hall & seen on a later date displaying in front of Deva Terrace.

The first Sedge and Reed Warblers were heard in reed either side of Belgrave Park entrance to the river.

Orange Tip and Speckled Wood joined the Small Tortoiseshell & Peacock. It has to be said this spring has been an incredible year for Small Torts, as they seem to be everywhere.

### **13th April 2020**

The first Whitethroat of the spring on the Meadow.

Lovely to see a pair of Lapwing displaying above the river. Although no evidence found of a prolonged stay on their former nesting site on Huntington side of the river.

### **15th April 2020**

The first Lesser Whitethroat of the spring calling beyond the Belgrave Park entrance. A poor year though for Lesser Whitethroat.



*Grey Wagtail (see 7<sup>th</sup> April)*

### **19th April 2020**

The first Swallow of the spring flew over Eccleston Avenue heading towards the Meadow.

### **22nd April 2020**

A Tawny Owl was accidentally flushed from hedgerow bordering the Meadow.

### **25th April 2020**

Six House Martin and the first record of a Swallow over the Meadow. No evidence of any Swallow nesting anywhere along our stretch of the river.



### 29th April 2020

The first Swift to return this year was observed by Trevor Dennis above the Meadow.

### 6th May 2020

A Little Egret flying leisurely up the river was a surprise sighting and even more surprising only the second record for the Meadow.

### 30th May 2020

Good to see a trio of small butterflies: Large Skipper, Common Blue & Small Copper.

Numbers of each species remain low and may well be down to the winter flooding.

A Black Tailed Skimmer dragonfly was basking on the path by the river.

A Pied Hoverfly observed on flowering Red Fescue.

### 31st May 2020

Mute Swan have chosen not to nest anywhere near the Meadows this year. Rose Ely spotted a pair of Swans with their three cygnets up at Eccleston. They have thus far stayed away with only the occasional day trip to The Groves.

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

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