

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 220

Autumn 2020

Welcome *to our* Newsletter for Autumn 2020

In this edition Friends of the Meadows Chair Julie Savory gives the Annual Report

Dear All,

What a strange year this has been! The AGM which took place last November in the convivial surroundings of the Handbridge community centre at St Mary's without the Walls, with a guest speaker and light refreshments now seems like a long time ago! The restrictions imposed on us by the need to contain the Coronavirus pandemic mean that for the time being we are unable to hold and take part in such sociable gatherings. For this reason, the committee has decided not to hold an AGM as such this year. Instead I will provide a brief summary of our activities over the past year and our future plans and ask for any comments or feedback to be forwarded to us. Hopefully by next November we will be able to meet in person for the 2021 AGM.

An eventful year

As a local resident it feels like it has been quite an eventful year for The Meadows. In February, the extreme weather across the country led to floods in many places and, for Chester, The Meadows played their crucial role as a flood plain helping to reduce the water level of the River Dee. However by early March the 'lake' disappeared almost as quickly as it had appeared but just as we thought we were back to 'business as usual', the Coronavirus pandemic swept across the country! The ensuing 'lockdown' meant that local green spaces became very important for exercise and to provide the health benefits of being close to nature. This was the role envisaged by Harry and Phyllis Brown who purchased The Meadows ninety-one years ago and covenanted them 'in perpetuity' to the people of Chester for their recreation.

In this Issue

- 2-4 Welcome and Annual Report**
FoM Chair Julie Savory presents the Annual Report
- 5 Meadows Management**
An update on Meadows Management matters from Stephanie Hefferan
- 6 Views from The Meadows: Dee Hills House**
FoM Member Margaret Yorke contributes this article
- 7-8 Andy's Meadows Log**
All the sightings in the last few months.

With the long period of sunny Spring weather that accompanied the lockdown period, it was wonderful to see so many people out walking and picnicking on The Meadows. Unfortunately there were also barbeques, large groups gathering and littering.

Thank you to those who you who contacted Friends of the Meadows by email or via the messaging facility on our Facebook page with concerns as we were then able to liaise promptly with our Greenspace officer, Stephanie Hefferan, who steadily dealt with it all.

Thank you also to those who informally helped by picking up litter.

We also heard in May, the sad news that Adele Edwards, who founded Friends of The Meadows (FoM) had passed away at the age of 79. In our summer newsletter, a lovely tribute was included which outlined her huge contribution to restoring The Meadows from a neglected area to one that we can all enjoy.

This edition's cover photo is of a Redwing on Rowan berries taken by Andy Ingham

The pandemic restrictions have meant that we have not been able to hold 'working parties' on The Meadows this year to tackle the Himalayan balsam or the willow brash that is spreading. We receive regular Site Management reports from Stephanie, our Greenspace Officer, and plans are in place for a contractor to be hired to clear the historic ditches and to tackle the willow scrub over the autumn/winter period. Some of the brash will go to Chester Zoo to feed the giraffes, some will be used to provide dead hedging for wildlife and to discourage ASB behind the houses that overlook The Meadows.

Cattle grazing

Due to the Coronavirus crisis, the proposals for cattle grazing were suspended for this year. The FoM Committee hope that 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.

Other Meadows work

We are planning to use some spare metal tree guards to protect some self-seeded saplings, including a couple of oaks and a crabapple.

In early January a few members of the Committee met with Stephanie to have a look at the paths on The Meadows which have deteriorated in places making accessibility more difficult for wheelchair and pushchair users. Following that meeting, repairs have taken place at the Lower Park Road entrance and the need to repair and maintain the remaining paths will be included in future cyclical work programmes.

Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood Plans are a part of the planning process which enables communities, should they decide to establish one, to set out how they want their community to develop.

Following public meetings, Handbridge decided it would want to establish a Plan for



Cattle on the Meadows - once a familiar sight, they have not been grazing here since 2015 (Photo: Steve Howe)

the area bounded by the River Dee and the Wrexham Road within Chester's Handbridge and Park Ward. The Community would then be able to guide development with regard to the green space and heritage of that area, within the context of the Council's approved local plans.

The Friends of the Meadows Committee are keen to be involved in the development of the Plan given the significance of the Meadows to the surrounding area, to Chester, and to the wider natural environment.

In order to establish a Neighbourhood Plan, approval is needed by the Council to both its area and to the constitution of a Forum which must be established to prepare the plan for Community agreement.

The Committee will therefore seek to be represented on the Forum once it is set up.

Interpretation boards

Over the summer, we have applied to the Postcode Lottery Fund for a grant to help fund the provision of two interpretation boards which will be placed at the river side entrance and the Lower Park Road entrance. We are still waiting for planning permission to be granted and hope to hear regarding that and whether or not we have been successful in obtaining a grant by the end of the year. The aim of the Boards will be to create more awareness of the history of The Meadows, including the gifting of them to



FoM members planting Black poplars in February 2018

the people of Chester by Harry and Phyllis Brown, the role of The Meadows in flood management and the biodiversity of this special area of water meadows in the heart of the city.

In early September, as lockdown had eased, an evening 'heritage walk' based on the proposed content of the interpretation boards, took place for a small group of women from Chester Grosvenor National Women's Register Group (NWR). A similar walk was to have been provided in June for the Chester Heritage week organised by the Civic Trust, but this was cancelled due to the pandemic.

We are also hoping to obtain funding from Chester Zoo for an interpretation panel to explain more about the Black Poplar trees which were planted in 2018. Black Poplars, once a familiar part of the British landscape, are now the most endangered native tree in Britain. Chester Zoo is seeking to conserve them and provided FoM with four saplings (two male and two female) in the hope that they will cross pollinate and provide new saplings for the Zoo to use in other locations.

Accounts

Bill Richardson has prepared the Annual Accounts and these can be seen by going to our website under "[Events and News](#)".

Newsletters

Unfortunately due to the pandemic, we were unable to produce and deliver a Spring newsletter, but we hope you enjoyed the bumper Summer edition. I am sure you will join with me in giving a big thank you to Rachel Cross who edits the newsletter and also monitors and responds to queries that come in through the website and Facebook page.

Committee

Andy Ingham continues to monitor the comings and goings of the wildlife, especially the birds that spend time on The Meadows. His notes and photos in each of the newsletters give us a great insight into the lives of our feathered friends. Thank you Andy. I would like to thank all members of the committee for their support and contributions to our work in looking after The Meadows. Bill Richardson for the accounts, James Holroyd as Secretary, Richard Cain as membership secretary, Ruth Davidson for hosting meetings, Keith Dixon for representing Friends of the Meadows on the Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan Forum and Clive Gregory who keeps a daily eye on The Meadows whilst walking his dog.

Thanks also go to Stephanie Hefferan, the Council's Greenspace Officer, for all the hard work she puts in to help us maintain and protect The Meadows.

Members

We also appreciate the support of all our members. We currently have 185 members. If you have any neighbours or friends that you think would like to support our work, please do tell them about us. Membership is just £5.00 a year and the funds are used to cover the costs of the various projects we undertake to maintain and protect The Meadows. If anyone is interested in joining the committee to support the work that we do, please get in touch.

Julie Savory, Friends of the Meadows

Meadows Site Management

An update from Greenspace Officer Stephanie Hefferan

Hoping this finds you and your families safe and well during these difficult times. Lockdown has proved challenging for all of us and during the period we have endeavoured to keep the parks open and safe for users and the Friends of the Meadows have been invaluable in keeping a neighbourly eye on the site and reporting issues as they arise.

Anti-social behaviour

This increased over lockdown, however whilst there were several issues reported on site, overall we did seem to suffer less significant issues than other neighbouring areas. All issues were reported promptly to our Community Safety Warden's team and the local PCSO who attended the site frequently to monitor and discourage issues before they arose. We are grateful for their active role in tackling these issues. If you see or wish to report anti-social issues, in the first instance **please contact 101** - this will enable them to keep a log and help them target their limited resources more effectively.

Coppicing of riverside trees

We have gained approval from Natural England for coppicing of some trees along the riverbank; these are restricted to two areas only - opposite the Sailing Club and opposite Deva Terrace. We have to abide by certain restrictions and can coppice no more than 1/3 per in each area per annum; this will continue to maintain the root system to prevent bankside erosion whilst maintaining views to the river in these locations. We will monitor the situation and plan work activities accordingly.

SHINE historic features

Work to maintain the site's historic ditch features are scheduled over the winter period. This will be carried out by contractors and involve removing scrub and clearing vegetation out of the ditches so

that they continue to remain a feature of the site.

This is a 5 year project so areas will be cut on a rotational basis allowing species that rely on these ditches to naturally adapt to the work as it progresses.

SHINE is the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England. It's a joint project between Natural England, the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers and Historic England.

Cut and Collect

The Meadows Cut and Collect has been completed for the year. It is proposed that grazing will be re-instated to maintain the grassland in future years (see below).

Proposals for the return of Cattle Grazing

Proposals are being made for the return of cattle grazing of The Meadows, the aim of which is to support our much threatened biodiversity and be more sustainable in our management. Grazing would be in low numbers and by rare breed cattle to ensure the survival of our national stock.

More details will follow in due course.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer



© Andy Ingham

Blackbird on riverside fencing (Andy Ingham)

Views from The Meadows: Dee Hills House



Illustration of Dee Hills House in the Regency period from an original drawing. Colourised by John Murray/Rachel Cross

Dee Hills House was designed and built in 1814 by the well-known Chester architect Thomas Harrison, for Robert Baxter a Chester solicitor. It had extensive grounds of 10 acres, with pleasure gardens above the river extending from part of the present Grosvenor Park along Boughton to Hoole Lane. It had a tree-lined drive from the Bars and was flanked by paddocks to the north and kitchen gardens to the south-east. There were three entrances with lodges to the estate and Dee Hills House had its own gasworks in the grounds.

In the 1850's it was purchased by William Titherington, a Liverpool cotton-broker who had married Eliza Grace Fluitt, the daughter of a wealthy Chester family. Soon after taking residence he built Sandown Terrace, three large Italianate houses, at the eastern end and at the south-west corner Deva Terrace, a prominent group of smaller houses, on the river-bank. From the 1880s to the end of the century the terraces of Beaconsfield Street were built over the northern part of the paddocks, and larger houses lined the drive, now named Dee Hills Park and by 1892, Dee Hills House and the remaining gardens had been sold to the government and the house was being used as the residence of the Army's district commander. It became known as Old Government House. In recent years it became offices until the present apartments were built.

Submitted by Margaret Yorke of Friends of the Meadows

In the next issue: Stephen Savory takes a closer look at a particular folly by the river



June to September 2020

11th July 2020

Common Valerian was flowering below Andrews Crescent and also in the hedgerow off Bottoms lane track.

Great Burnett and Betony were flowering in profusion on the neighbouring Dukes land.

19th July 2020

It is not often you find a new species of Butterfly for the Meadow but that happened with the discovery of Essex Skippers on the embankment below Andrews Crescent. Essex Skipper have spread both North and West in recent years and were only recorded for the first time in Cheshire a couple of years ago.

Essex Skipper are best separated from the similar Small Skipper by looking at the underside of the orange antennae that have a "dipped in black ink" look about them (see pic). A welcome addition to the fauna of the Meadow so do keep a look out for them next year.



Essex Skipper (see 19th July)

2nd August 2020

A flowering Ragged Robin was a good find in the marshy area of the Meadow by Rachel and her colleagues from RECORD and represents the only record of the summer.

Also found were a good selection of Butterflies including Gatekeeper, Comma and Green-veined White along with Cinnabar and Blood Vein Moths.



Comma butterfly (see 2nd August)

12th August 2020

A Short-eared Owl was flushed from the centre of the Meadow by Rob out on his early morning Dog walk. Unlike other Owls, Short-eared roost on the ground. It is possible this Owl was passing through the meadow after the breeding season.



Southern Hawker (see 18th September)

15th September 2020

A pair of Kingfishers flew low and quickly along the river embankment opposite the sailing club.

On the other side of the river a pair of Muscovy Ducks remained in situ by the Sandy Lane slipway.

18th September 2020

A Southern Hawker was flying back and forth under the canopy of Bottoms Lane track. It eventually came down to rest in the hedgerow (see pic) where a Comma was also feeding on a juicy Blackberry.

A Cetti's Warbler was calling from scrub at the foot of the embankment below Andrew Crescent.

26th September 2020

It is always good to welcome back the first flock of Pink Footed Geese from Iceland. Even if their 'wink wink' calls above the Meadow do herald the start of Winter.

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

Tel: 01244 677135

Facebook: /friends of the meadows-chester

Twitter: @earlseye

Website: www.friendsofthemeadows.org

Email us: fomchester@gmail.com

STOP PRESS - Watersports Hub

We have received notification that the Planning Application for the Demolition of the existing boathouse and erection of a Watersports Hub (with associated parking, access, landscaping and plant) was withdrawn on 14 September 2020.

Comments invited!

If you have any observations, comments or queries relating to anything in the Newsletter, especially Julie's Chair's Report (or any other Meadows matter), please get in touch by email at fomchester@gmail.com or use the Contact page on our website:

<https://www.friendsofthemeadows.org/>

Friends of the Meadow Committee:

Chair: Julie Savory
Meeting Secretary: James Holroyd
Treasurer: Bill Richardson
Membership Secretary: Richard Cain
Meadows Log: Andy Ingham

Newsletter Editor/Website: Rachel Cross
Newsletter deliveries: Ruth Davidson
Committee: Keith Dixon
Committee: Clive Gregory