

Friends of the Meadows

A group of four people (three women and one man) are standing on a paved path in a grassy meadow. In the background, there is a town with a church spire and a large rainbow arching across a cloudy sky. An informational sign is visible on the right side of the path.

Newsletter 225

Winter 2022

Welcome to our Newsletter for Winter 2022

In the newsletter two years ago, we were talking about the possibility of having interpretation boards on the Meadows. Now, after a lot of hard work, we have finally realised this ambition and were proud to have two boards placed at the entrances. We hope they will provide a source of interest and information for many years to come.

There was also a lot of talk about remedial work on the path network and finally, last November, the work was completed!



Now, we look forward to 2022 with hope and also to see everyone enjoy The Meadows throughout the year!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's cover photo is of one of the new Interpretation Boards with (L-R) Cllr Razia Daniels, Rachel Cross, Julie Savory and Stephen Savory.

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Membership Renewals 2022

Thanks to all those who are renewing their memberships by Standing Orders – you don't need to take any action for renewal.

However, for those who want to renew by cheque (or even cash), please complete and return the Membership Renewal Form enclosed.

Of course you can also set up a new Standing Order using the enclosed form, or change your existing subscription to add a voluntary donation. You can also find and download the form from our website friendsofthemeadows.org.

Thanks to everyone for your subscriptions – it's your continued interest and generosity that contributes significantly to supporting the various projects and tasks we undertake to look after The Meadows!

Review of 2021

Our Chair, Julie Savory gave this review of the year at our AGM in November

Interpretation Boards

In the summer of 2020 we made a successful bid to the Postcode Lottery Fund for £2k to provide two interpretation boards. We have also been successful in being awarded £300 from Razia Daniel's Councillor's Community Budget to cover the cost of installation.

The Boards have now been designed and made by Shelleys Signs in Shropshire. (See *article on page 5*)

The aim of the Boards is to generate more appreciation of the history of The Meadows, their role in flood prevention and the biodiversity they provide so close to the city centre. They will also include mention of two women who are important in the history of the Meadows:

Phyllis Brown, who along with her husband, Harry F Brown (of "Browns of Chester") purchased the Meadows 92 years ago and covenanted them 'in perpetuity' to the people of Chester for their recreation.

Adele Edwards, who in 1990, concerned that the Meadows had become neglected, established Friends of the Meadows. Sadly Adele passed away in 2020.

Thanks are due to Rachel Cross, James Holroyd and Stephen Savory for all their input into getting planning permission, and refining the design and text.

Management of The Meadows

We continue to work closely with Stephanie Hefferan, the Council's Greenspace officer to preserve and maintain the Meadows for both human recreation and as an area of unspoilt grassland important in terms of the biodiversity it provides so close to the city centre.

Paths

In January 2020 we met with Stephanie on The Meadows to look at the paths which in some places were getting very worn. I am

very pleased to let you know that Stephanie confirmed that her grant application to the capital funding budget has been approved and repair to the path surfaces has now been undertaken.



Waterworks repairs

Thanks to committee member Andy Ingham, a problem with leakage from sewage pipes was speedily identified back in November 2020 and Stephanie quickly organised for the water authority (Severn Trent) to carry out repairs. This work went on for some weeks, as those of you who walk on the Meadows, will have observed. Despite the disruption, a benefit was that a large section of the path near the ferry crossing, was repaired.

(Note that another "sewerage" smell was identified by Andy in early December by Bottoms Lane and is being investigated by the relevant authorities - Ed.)

Grazing

For the time being, a decision regarding reintroducing grazing by cattle has been postponed indefinitely by the Council.

As a committee we were disappointed, as conservational cattle grazing would have had the benefit of enhancing the biodiversity of the Meadows in a way that mechanical mowing cannot. However, we do appreciate that it is necessary to balance

the need to preserve and promote biodiversity with the role of the Meadows as a recreational space for people.

General maintenance

Now that Covid restrictions are eased, working parties are allowed once more and Stephanie has organised volunteers to coppice the willows opposite Deva Terrace. Andy and myself have also carried out some trimming of branches that were overgrowing onto paths.

Future projects

Black Poplars Information Board

We are also working to install an information board about the Black Poplars which were planted in 2018. Planning permission has been applied for and approved, the board content has been designed and we are seeking funding from the Councillors' Budget to help with the cost of provision. The Black Poplars were provided by Chester Zoo as part of their project to restore and conserve threatened species.

Other Suggestions

Other suggestions for expenditure include owl boxes, a wildflower strip and possibly new saplings for the empty tree guards.

We would also welcome suggestions from members for next year's expenditure. Please get in touch with members of the committee or email or message us through the FoM website.

Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan

Many of you will be aware that a Neighbourhood Plan is being developed for the Handbridge area. The aim is to ensure that any local issues or concerns are reflected in the planning process. One of the strands is green spaces and Keith Dixon is representing FoM on the Green Spaces and Conservation Group.

Membership

We currently have a membership of approximately 150 households.

Membership costs just £5.00 per household and we are very grateful for the additional donations totalling £879.00 made by Friends which contributes significantly to supporting the various projects and tasks we undertake to look after The Meadows.

Thanks

Thanks go to **James Holroyd** for his patience and sterling work as Secretary, to **Keith Dixon** for his work as Treasurer and to **Richard Cain** for his work as Membership Secretary,

I would also like to record our thanks to **Bill Richardson** who stood down this year after many years' service as our Treasurer.

Our thanks also go to **Rachel Cross** for producing four excellent newsletters during the year, one for each season and to **Ruth Davidson** and our team of volunteers for delivering the newsletters.

We are grateful to **Rachel** for maintaining the website and **Andy Ingham** for managing the Facebook page and continuing to monitor the comings and goings of the wildlife, especially the birds, that spend time of the Meadows.

Friends of the Meadows Committee

At the AGM on 18th November 2021, the following were all voted to serve on the Committee:

Julie Savory (Chair)
James Holroyd (Secretary)
Keith Dixon (Treasurer)
Richard Cain (Membership Secretary)
Rachel Cross (Newsletter and website)
Ruth Davidson (Newsletter distribution)
Andy Ingham (Meadows Log)
Julie Rose

Get involved!

If any members are interested in becoming more actively involved, either as a committee member or by helping out with Meadows maintenance working groups, please get in touch.

Meadows Interpretation Boards

As mentioned in Julie Savory's Review of 2021, the new Interpretation boards with information about The Meadows were finally installed at the end of November and are now in place at the two main entrances.

Friends of the Meadows devised the design and undertook the initiative, with a grant of £2000 from the People's Postcode Lottery and help from the budgets of

Councillors Razia Daniels and Neil Sullivan. Officers of CWaC also gave their support, particularly the Greenspace Officer, Stephanie Hefferan.

The boards highlight the environmental value of the Meadows, their history, the wildlife they contain and the debt owed to the Browns, who purchased the land for public use.

In early December, the boards were inspected and photographs taken to mark the occasion!



*From left to right in the photo:
Stephen Savory,
Julie Savory,
Rachel Cross
(Friends of the
Meadows),
Councillors
Razia Daniels &
Neil Sullivan*

The Beauty of Sundials

James Holroyd reports on the talk given by Mike Shaw at our AGM in November



Despite fears about Covid, it was a well-attended talk, and rightly so, for Mike Shaw brought enormous enthusiasm and energy to this challenging subject. It has been his hobby for over thirty five years, taking him to distant places and bringing him into contact with famous scientists - Patrick Moore, among many others. Facts difficult to absorb for some were delivered with humour, and supported by excellent slides and teaching tools, such as a globe. At various stages throughout the talk, Mike produced different examples of sundials from his large hold-all.

There is no attempt here to summarise the session. It was too wide-ranging. We learnt much, such as the straight pointed object on the top of many sundials (the gnomon) should be straight not curved, pointing towards true north and, for this part of the British Isles, set at an angle of 53 degrees from the horizontal base. At night, it would be pointing towards the pole star. Unfortunately some sundials on the market today have been created by people ignorant of these facts. (Sundials in the Southern Hemisphere, have to be oriented towards the Southern Pole and the hours marked in an anticlockwise direction). Most sundials are built so that the shadow cast by the sun on the gnomon falls on a horizontal surface, but it can equally be shown on a vertical surface, often a church wall.

Sundials are naturally only of use when the sun is shining, but provided they are oriented correctly, and the gnomon set at the correct angle, are extremely accurate. In earlier times, church bells could be rung at the appropriate moment, eg. for matins and vespers, according to the shadow the dial cast; and early clocks had to be reset regularly, using sundials as a reference.

Perhaps one of the greatest revelations of the evening was that sundials could take multiple forms, almost cylindrical in some cases. There are large civic examples of sundials, large enough for children to climb over. There is even a sundial on Mars, helping to orient the robot travelling over the surface of that planet! *James Holroyd*

Winter Ride by Gill McEvoy

A struggling sun hauls up
between the ribs of trees,

a pheasant melts its wax
into the hoar-frost of a hedge;

in the field red cows stand
still wrapped in somnolence.

Frost-bitten air is feathered by our
breath,
our skin is dimpled with cold.

The horses, fresh from oats
and warmed-up linseed oil,

their copper flanks alive
with strength and muscle

are up on points,
ears pricked for possibilities -

pounding gallop,
fierce race through snow.

They fling up frozen divots,
deadly as missiles.



October 2021 to January 2022

24th & 24th October 2021

A Ring necked Parakeet visited gardens in Cross Hey on the 24th and 25th October where it dined on apples and crab apples.

28th November 2021

A flock of 18 Teal took flight from the Handbridge marsh.

5th December 2021

A drake Mandarin Duck was loafing on the river beyond the Red House.

26th December 2021

Goosander were present on the river in varying numbers either side of the Old Dee Bridge. A total of seven including four males was the highest count of the winter so far.

4th January 2022

Jackdaws continued to roost in trees bordering the Handbridge marsh. They are gregarious birds constantly chattering & can be heard some distance away. A conservative count of 250 but numbers on other nights may well be a lot higher.

5th January 2022

Another gregarious bird is the Linnet that can gather in huge winter flocks to feed on stubble and set-aside. The Meadow and neighbouring land support no more than a handful during the daytime. It was therefore a surprise to see 150 Linnet gathering in trees at dusk below the Handbridge allotments. After circling



Jackdaw on the Meadows (photo: Andy Ingham)

around they gradually dropped into the bramble to roost.

6th January 2022

A Cattle Egret flew low over the Handbridge Allotments heading in the direction of the grazing Horses. Cattle Egret as the name suggests associate with livestock and will prey on invertebrates disturbed by the animal's hooves. Unfortunately, no further sightings of the Cattle Egret.

12th January 2022

Foxes became noticeable at the beginning of the year possibly due to the improving weather and visibility. At dusk, one was seen bounding across the Meadow and another sneaking along Bottoms Lane track into the hedgerow.

Nearby, a Pipistrelle Bat was also hawking up and down the track.



Linnet on the Meadows (photo: Andy Ingham)

14th January 2022

An unseasonal Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly was observed by the Groves. With the daytime temperature only 3 degrees it had possibly been disturbed from its hibernation. (Joe)

18th January 2022

Linnet (see pic left) continued to roost below the Handbridge allotments. An impressive count of 192! It is possibly one of the largest roosts in the county and significant in that it is now red listed by the RSPB as a species of conservation concern.

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

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Public Events on The Meadows in 2022

The Deva Triathlon

Starting from Grosvenor Park this event has its run routes through the Meadows and will take place on place on **Sunday 12th June 2022**

The Chester Raft Race

This is scheduled to take place on **Sunday 3rd July 2022**

The Deva Divas Triathlon

The Women's Triathlon event will take place on **Sunday 10th July 2022**

The Dee Mile

One of the oldest river races in the UK, this will take place on **Saturday 6th August 2022 at 5:30pm.**

