

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 230

Spring 2023

Welcome to our Newsletter for Spring 2023

In this newsletter, we focus on the centenary of the Queen's Park Bridge, known to many just as the "Suspension Bridge" which was officially opened on 18th April 1923. We're grateful to local historian Peter Elliott for his contribution of the article. You can read more on his website at chester.shoutwiki.com.

Thanks also to Pearl Evans, who wrote to me about the inclusion of Hardy's poem in the last newsletter and suggested The Robin's Song for this edition which is in the panel opposite.

Looking back over our previous Spring newsletters I noted that ten years ago we experienced a rather cold and wet April for the second time - much like what we're having as I write this! I hope by the time this newsletter reaches you, the weather will have started to warm up and we can enjoy getting out to look for those signs of Spring on the Meadows. Andy's Meadows Log may not yet have caught up in this issue, but look out for returning House Martins, the pale yellow of a brimstone butterfly, or maybe you'll hear the song of the first Sedge Warbler, with its distinctive cream eyestripe, returning from its winter sojourn in Africa.

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
Email: rachelcross789@gmail.com

This edition's cover photo of the Queen's Park Suspension Bridge was taken by Rachel Cross earlier this year.

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The Robin's Song

by Rodney Bennett

Robins sang in England,
 Frost or rain or snow,
 All the long December days
 Endless years ago.



Robins sang in England
 Before the Legions came,
 Before our English fields were tilled
 Or England was a name.

Robins sang in England
 When forests dark and wild
 Stretched across from sea to sea
 And Jesus was a child.

Listen! in the frosty dawn
 From his leafless bough
 The same brave song he ever sang
 A robin's singing now.

Meadows Management

Severn Trent Works - Eel Screens

This project is to install eel screens at the Boughton river intake to upgrade the existing screening at the site as part of The Eels Regulations 2009.

Works involve installation of the new screens and the associated MEICA* equipment, as well as the removal of the existing bandscreen.

A pre-condition survey will be carried out and the grounds and paths will be fully reinstated to existing condition following the works. Vehicles expected to be on the meadows during the survey works are: several large vans and up to 3 cars.

**MEICA = Mechanical, Electrical, Instrumentation, Control and Automation*

Expected path closure April to May 2023

During the above works, there will be a requirement for the **closure of the riverside Public Right of Way (PRoW)** from the gates to the intake at 'The Water Mound'. This is essential for contractor and public safety. The Meadows will still remain accessible from the riverside entrance

The dates of closure will be from Monday 10th April to the end of May. All other paths will be open; the Events Area and remainder of the site etc. will remain accessible. There will be no impact on any of the events.

There may be a requirement for further follow up work in September when a further closure may be required, however, it is hoped all the works can be completed within the initial timeframe.

Closure notices will be posted on site in accordance with legal requirements.

Bottoms Lane grey water/smell - January 2023

Welsh Water attended the site on the morning of 24th January following concerns reported of grey water and smells along Bottoms Lane. They believe that due to the recent prolonged wet weather, there had been emergency overflow pumped from the temporary works they have for mains pipe repair. Note: These works are significant and will be ongoing for a prolonged period.

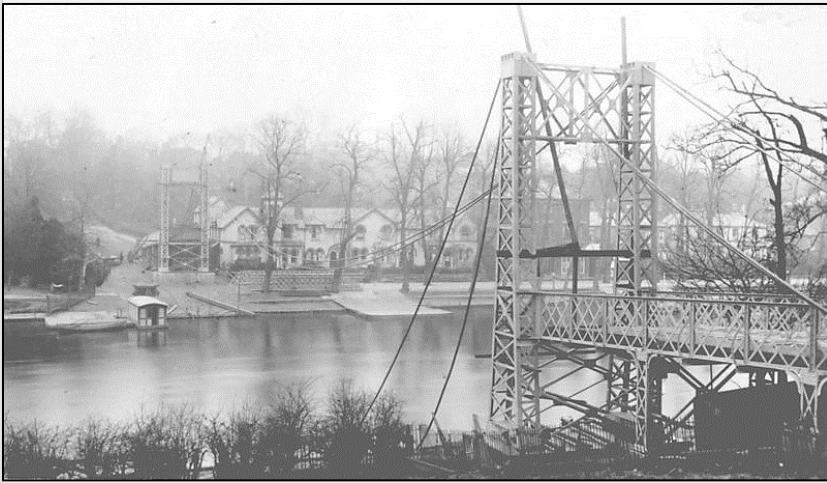
In response to the issue and as a temporary measure, they put more hay bales in the affected ditches. The Environment Agency was notified.

If you have concerns about this matter (or future similar incidents), please contact Welsh Water on **0800 052 0130** or via [their website](#)

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

Queen's Park Bridge Centenary

Local historian Peter Elliott charts the 100 year history of this iconic bridge



In 1852 a new pedestrian Suspension Bridge with an innovative design was completed in Chester to provide a link between a speculative up-market housing development and the city. This was the Queen's Park suspension bridge. A few years earlier, in 1849, another suspension bridge of "novel design" had been built to cross "The Dingle" between Grosvenor Bridge and Curzon Park and this may well have prompted the Queen's Park bridge, albeit being of a more standard design.

However, within twenty years, this first bridge attracted a number of concerns, particularly after a catastrophic collapse of a bridge in Bath. A number of proposals to replace the bridge followed until in the early 1920s Chester Corporation accepted the responsibility for the bridge and decided to demolish it. This took place

in August 1922, and a new bridge took its place.

The 1923 bridge bears a strong resemblance to the Porthill Bridge in Shrewsbury which was built earlier in the same year by the same firm: David Rowell & Co, a company based in Westminster, London. They were well-known for their ready-made steel bridges which were exported in kit form all over the world. Many of their bridges have a characteristic design with a strong resemblance to the Queen's Park bridge.

The designer was William T. E. Barker, an engineer who frequently worked with Rowell & Co., (not Charles Greenwood, the City Engineer and Surveyor as is often repeated, although he was possibly involved with the decorative details). The contractor for the foundations and masonry work was W. H. Brocklesby of Birkenhead. The new bridge cost £5,650. It spans 277 feet (84 m), and is supported on vertical hangers from two 2.75-inch (70 mm) diameter locked-coil steel cables, each capable of carrying up to 340 tons. It is founded on the north side on a 230-ton concrete block, and on the south side by anchoring into the sandstone bedrock.

The opening ceremony, conducted with great pomp by the Mayor of Chester, Councillor S.R. Wall, took place on 18 April 1923, with many notable civic dignitaries present.

From its opening the 1923 bridge was decorated with large and bold representations of the supposed shields of the Norman Earls of Chester. In fact during the time of the first few Earls, heraldry was not particularly developed and the "earlier" shields most probably were retrospectively assigned. There is general agreement about the specific symbols associated with the various Earls but some of the ones on the bridge appear to be wrong: the arms of Ranulf de Meschines and Ranulf de Gernons have



Like the former bridge in 1902, the new bridge was illuminated in 1938 and was quite a spectacle!

been switched around, and one is the wrong colour.

Some older readers may remember that the planking had small gaps with views down to the river, often to the dismay of dogs crossing over! In 1998 the bridge underwent a restoration and again in 2012 when the planks were replaced.

The impressive restoration of the shields in 2012/13 was undertaken by David Kynaston. They had become rather weather-beaten over the years. Cast out of lead, broken and missing parts were repaired. The shields were fully repainted and finished in 23½ carat gold leaf. The "silver" wolves heads were finished in palladium leaf. Palladium is a rare metal and the major sources include the impact sites of meteorites.

The incorrect order and tinctures remained and the restorer was somewhat dumb-founded when the error was pointed out, but it was hardly his fault given that he had been given detailed instructions. Elsewhere in Chester, in Grosvenor Park and in the Town Hall the arms of the Earls are correctly displayed. In many ways the swap-around is quite apt as Earl Ranulph de Gernons (1129-1153) was notorious during his lifetime for changing sides during the civil war known as "The Anarchy", and does not seem to have given-up!

Spring and Summer Botany Walks 2023

- ✿ Wednesday May 10th
- ✿ Wednesday June 14th
- ✿ Wednesday July 19th
- ✿ Wednesday August 9th
- ✿ Wednesday September 13th

All walks will be led by local botanist Martyn Stead.

The walk will be a gentle stroll with frequent stops to identify plants and lasts approximately 90 minutes.



There is no charge for the walk and it is not necessary to book in advance. So please come and join us to find out more about the diverse range of plants which can be found on The Meadows.

Meet at the Bottoms Lane entrance to The Meadows CH4 7AP from 6.00pm, ready to start walking at 6.30pm.

Public Events in 2023

The Deva Triathlon starting from Grosvenor Park has its run routes through the Meadows and will take place on **Sunday 11th June 2023**

The Chester Raft Race will take place on **Sunday 2nd July 2023** (to be confirmed). Events start at 10:00am and the race begins at 10:30am from the Meadows

The Deva Divas Triathlon will take place on **Sunday 16th July 2023**

The Dee Mile, one of the oldest races on the river, takes place on **Saturday 12th August at 5:30pm.**

Membership Subscription Renewal 2023

Just a reminder that the subscription of £5 for 2023 is now due. Many members have already paid, for which I thank you. No action is required if you have paid already for 2023 or if you have a standing order set up to go through sometime in 2023.

Any members who have not yet paid can do so by cash or cheque sent to Richard Cain, 56 Elizabeth Crescent, Chester, CH4 7AZ or alternatively by direct payment to our bank account below.

Account name: Friends of the Meadows

Bank: Barclays | Account Code: 03445895 | Sort Code: 20-20-46

Should you be uncertain if you have paid, wish to pay by standing order or have any other query, please contact me on tel: 07531 629300 or email: richard.cain1@btinternet.com



January to April 2023

5th January 2023

Coot are probably taken for granted on most other bodies of water but up until this summer they were a rare sighting on our stretch of the river. The continued presence of one or two birds over the winter is an interesting development. *Bob*



A Sparrowhawk by Jane Dodd taken on 7th January in her Eccleston Avenue garden

11th January

A Green Woodpecker feeding in the grazed fields on Water Co land. The shorter grass here more to its liking than on the Meadow.

19th January

Three foxes were on the embankment below Andrews Crescent seeking refuge from the floods. *Richard*

21st January

Seventy Teal were on the Handbridge Marsh along with 30-40 Snipe and one Jack Snipe, a Woodcock flushed near Bottoms Lane track and possibly the same bird again flying over houses on Andrew Crescent.

25th January

The Barn Owl again flying towards the Meadow at dusk.

26th January

A flock of thirty Wigeon flying up the river.

31st January

Two Pipistrelle Bats feeding at dusk above Bottoms Lane track.

1st February

A handsome male Stonechat in the centre of the Meadow. *Mark*

8th March

A Great Spotted Woodpecker renovating the entrance hole of the new bird box on Bottoms Lane track. It would be a major surprise if the Woodpecker decided to nest here with the box very close to the path.

10th March

A pair of Mandarin flew from the Handbridge marsh and headed over towards the river.



Cetti's Warbler (see 26th March)



A Mallard over The Meadows on 23rd March

14th and 20th March

Older members may remember with fondness Skylarks singing all through the summer. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to hear one above the Meadow. *Rob*

19th March

47 Snipe on the Handbridge marsh being the highest count of the year.

26th March

While most species of bird seem to be on the decline it's nice to report that the Cetti's Warbler is thriving, A record six were counted on territory ranging from Belgrave Park to the Lower Park Road entrance.

27th March

Two Small Tortoiseshell were observed enjoying a brief spell of sunshine by the avenue of Willows.

30th March

The first Willow Warbler of the spring was heard singing by the Suspension Bridge.

1st April

A Dipper is a rare sight anywhere in lowland Cheshire but to see one fly up the gully by the water wheel and land next to the Weir is even more remarkable.

Two Sand Martin above the Meadow were the first of the spring. *Denzil*

13th April

A lone Swallow darting across the path by the gate at the lower end of Bottoms Lane track the first record of the spring. *Tim*

16th April

A Common Whitethroat singing briefly for the first time this spring on the Handbridge marsh and a flock of 25 Sand Martin ignoring the rain by the Sailing club.

**Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder,
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Facebook: [/friends_of_the_meadows-chester](https://www.facebook.com/friends_of_the_meadows-chester)

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In February, volunteers Andy and Stephen, fitted a bat box and a bird box onto trees on Bottoms Lane. The bat box was provided by Chester Zoo as part of their Wildlife Champions initiative and the bird box by a local supporter of FoM.