

Friends of the Meadows

A photograph of a meadow filled with numerous yellow buttercup flowers scattered among tall green grass. In the background, a line of trees and several houses are visible under a bright sky. The overall scene is a lush, natural landscape.

Newsletter 236

Autumn 2024

Welcome

to our Newsletter for
Autumn 2024

Well, it was not the sunniest nor warmest summer, but I hope you all enjoyed the sunny and dry days that we did have!

As we move into autumn, the next big event for us is our Annual General Meeting on 6th November. As is the tradition at these meetings, the necessary business of the AGM will be followed by a talk and this year our thanks go to James Holroyd for securing the service of Jim Holmes who will give a presentation of the River Dee from Source to Sea. Jim's talks are passionate, professional and thought provoking. I'm sure you'll find this talk of great interest, especially if you are a photographer, geographer, humanitarian, traveller or part of the scientific community! All details are on the page opposite, and we look forward to welcoming you.

Finally we have some good news to share! Friends of the Meadows has been bequeathed £10,000 in the will of Dr Allan Pullin. This was a most unexpected and generous gift. We'll discuss how we might use this at the AGM. Please see the panel on page 6 for more details.

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

This edition's cover photo is of Buttercups in Chester Meadows, taken in May 2016.
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To Autumn by John Keats

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—

While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

Among the river sallows, borne aloft

*Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;*

Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

We may all know the opening line of this poem: "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness", but here we present the third stanza. Keats wrote this after a walk in Winchester one autumnal evening. It was published in "1819 Odes", a work that marked the end of his poetic career. A little over a year later he died in Rome.

Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting will take place on **Wednesday 6th November 2024** at **St Mary's Handbridge Community Centre, starting at 7pm.**

We look forward to seeing as many of our Friends as possible. After the short business of presenting a report of the year, the state of the accounts and formally electing the committee, we will be treated to a talk by documentary photographer Jim Holmes on **"The River Dee from Source to Sea"**

High above Lake Bala in the stunning mountains of Snowdonia a small rivulet starts its journey towards the sea.

Exploring valleys, lakes, villages, and crossing borders, accompany Jim as this growing watercourse travels through a landscape rich with life and history, crossed by Thomas Telford's magnificent aqueduct and on to the Roman city of Chester.



Meet the river's custodians and dependents as we travel through time and geography before finally flowing into the Irish Sea through an estuary rich with industrial revolution importance and now a green energy wind farm.



Jim Holmes is a British/Australian freelance documentary photographer now living in Chester.

He has spent 30 years specialising in documenting humanitarian work worldwide, and especially the issues, needs, solutions and outcomes of the development process.

Meadows Management

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer, gives a round up of works on the Meadows

Severn Trent

The weather has affected the scheduling of works and the land re-profiling and reinstatement has been put back to November. If it proves too wet, these elements will be rescheduled for spring which may be better all round.

The compound will remain on site until the re-profiling and ground reinstatement is done plus a short period allowed for it to stabilise and establish; the paths will remain open during this time. However, just a reminder that for public and contractor safety, due to the presence of heavy machinery when the path repairs are being made, the central path will be temporarily closed– the riverside path will remain open for access. Severn Trent Comms team will provide signage on site and on their website when the work schedule is confirmed.

Welsh Water (Dŵr Cymru)

Welsh Water have been on site to start their repairs following the leak in April. They made as start in September by removing the fencing (from previous leaks) and properly repair the path surrounding the manhole. They were also on site to grade out some deep ruts around the levée (ditches).

I still have watching brief on Appleyards until Welsh Water are fully completed and the site reinstated. Some reinstatement work has been done already and the fencing still remains to allow the seeding to establish.

Scrub Management

We are in the final year of the Stewardship agreement. This work has been booked so should be completed over the winter months. I am in discussions with Defra regarding new applications. Due to changes in criteria, they have rejected my request for a continuance (it's like an automatic rollover), so I will most likely have to do a new application which must be submitted by May 2025 so we have time to consider options.

Willow harvest

Similar to the Friends of Westminster Park harvesting the coppiced willow for their pond work, a group from the Narrows Park in Hoole may want to take some from the Meadows for revetement work on their site. It has to be assessed if the Meadows has the right size of stock for what they need but it would be a great use of the resource.

Steph Hefferan



The Narrows Wildlife Connections Group was formed in 2019 to work with Cheshire West and Chester Council to improve the biodiversity of the Narrows Park in Hoole and to improve the area through planting, pruning and basic maintenance. (Photo: Transition Chester)

Managing meadows – unimproved grassland

Between late August and October, meadows will be cut with the cuttings left on the surface for around seven to ten days. This is deliberate as it allows the seeds to disperse into the soil surface, regenerating the meadow for next year. The cuttings will then be collected up.

The cutting is part of our annual cut and collect programme which we have implemented over the past 10 years in the absence of cattle grazing. This is a standard method of managing conservation grassland.

On the site, each area of the meadow is cut over a 5-year rotation so that disturbance to wildlife is kept to a minimum and the remaining areas offer refuge whilst the cutting is taking place. Without this method of management, the area would become scrub land and consequently, there would be no hunting ground for raptors such as Peregrine or other raptors such as Barn owls.

Meadows are a significantly threatened habitat across the UK, with areas such as that of The Meadows (Earls Eye) offering a substantial contribution to wildlife. Ideally, we would favour a lower impact form of management such as cattle grazing to manage the

scrub, but in the absence of that, the next best alternative is cut and collect ie mowing and removal of the cut grass.

Steph Hefferan

Unimproved grassland is a type of grassland that is not artificially fertilized, ploughed, or reseeded. It is the result of traditional land management practices that have been used for centuries.

Unimproved grasslands are home to a wide variety of species, including orchids, snake's-head fritillary, bird's-foot trefoil, knapweeds, yellow rattle, primroses, white eyebrights, and oxeye daisies. Animal life includes a variety of species of bees, butterflies, birds of prey, adders, yellowhammer, and skylark.

Traditionally, floodplain meadows are 'shut up' in the spring to allow the hay to grow with no grazing animals, followed by a mid-summer hay cut. The subsequent grass growth is grazed by cattle, horses or sheep and is known as 'aftermath grazing'. (www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/)

Chester Meadows is not managed as a "hay meadow", so if grazing was established, the cutting would stop but we would still have a diverse sward structure.

Volunteer works on the Meadows

Wildflower planting

Following discussion with the Greenspace Officer it was agreed to fund planting of wild flowers. It is thought that it would be better to supplement what we would find there naturally like cuckoo flower; then where we can seek opportunities which are more likely to be the fringes of higher ground, add in other species such as marsh marigold. On the Water Mound, the replanting seed mix has already had to be agreed which will be meadow grass without Perennial Ryegrass. When the landscaping is completed wildflower seeds might be added in to their grass mix if it's in time for spring sowing..



Cuckooflower, is a pretty, springtime perennial of damp, grassy places like wet meadows, ditches and riverbanks. (Photo (cropped): Karen Lloyd)

Tree guard removal

Julie Savory and Andy Ingham met with three volunteers on Saturday 14th September and removed two wooden tree guards from trees just off Bottoms Lane which were no longer needed. Our next working parties are Saturday 12th October and Saturday 9th November. We would like to press on with removing two metal tree guards which are no longer needed and are starting to damage the trees they supported (see photo).

They are on the Meadows in the same area where we have planted saplings earlier this year. We wish to re-site these in the same area and plant two more saplings. It is also planned to put some peat-free compost around the seven sapling trees we planted in the spring to suppress the



weeds and give them some extra nutrients, prune back some of the willow bushes around the jetty and try to remove the upstanding posts left from the wooden tree guard dismantled previously.

Some volunteers may undertake some litter picking. Future plans include removing two metal tree guards that are no longer needed, re-siting them and planting two more saplings.

Bequest from Dr Allan Pullin

We have some good news to share. Friends of the Meadows has been left a bequest of £10,000 in the will of Dr Allan Pullin.

Dr Pullin lived in Walmoor Park and was a GP at Tarvin Road Surgery until his retirement in the mid-90s. As well as a Friend of the Meadows, he was a much loved past Chairman of Chester Civic Trust and also a Director of the Cheshire Historic Buildings Trust until his resignation in March 2023. Dr Pullin Passed away peacefully on 29th March 2023 at the Countess of Chester Hospital, aged 85 years.

This is such a generous and unexpected gift and we would like to make good use of it to help preserve and enhance The Meadows.



July to October 2024

xxx 2024

The first Swallow of the spring swooping across the Meadows was a couple of weeks later than usual [Rob].

The first Swift of the spring arrived on time. Subsequent numbers remained low with only three to five birds flying above the Handbridge rooftops.

Two Grasshopper Warbler reeling on



Grasshopper warbler (20th April)

the Meadow (see photo)

27th April 2024

A migrating female Redstart feeding in the field below Andrews Crescent.

Nearby a Lesser Whitethroat singing in the Hedgerow and above the Meadow a pair of displaying Lapwing.

Cetti's Warblers continue to increase in number & appear to be more visible as a consequence (see photo of Cetti's chilling out by the west end river entrance.)



Currant clearwing moth (2nd June)

28th April 2024

On neighbouring water company land two Sand Martin and two Swallow were feeding around the Horses.

1st May 2024

A migrating male Whinchat feeding in the centre of the Meadow. *Mark*

1st June 2024

A Water Rail was heard squealing from the Handbridge marsh.

Yellow-barred long-horned moths appeared to be everywhere with six in display flight by the west end river

entrance and eight along Bottoms Lane track.

2nd June 2024

Two Currant Clearwing moth were attracted to a pheromone lure by the Handbridge allotments. As the name suggests the caterpillars feed within in the stems of currant bushes. (see photo previous page)

4th June 2024



A Lime Hawk moth was attracted to
Lime hawk moth (4th June)

light in Cross Hey. (see photo below)

8th June 2024

A migrant Hummingbird Hawkmoth was observed feeding on Valerian flowers in Andrews Crescent. *Keith*

21st June 2024

A Lunar Hornet moth was attracted to a pheromone lure in a Cross Hey. Rarely seen even though LHMs are day flying moths but with the recent introduction of lures they are more widespread than first thought. The LHM caterpillars hatch from within the tree trunks of Willow. (See photo)

2nd July 2024



Another successful breeding season

Lunar hornet moth (21st June)

One of several similar 'mimic' species, known as Clearwings, this is one of the largest, and presents a fearsome sight to the uninitiated.

for the Sparrowhawk with a brood of four all fledging (see pic of juvenile)

19th July 2024

With a break in the rain a fair amount of Small and Essex Skipper on the wing along with a Southern Hawker dragonfly flying up and down Bottoms Lane track.

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder,
Tel: 01244 677135

Facebook: /friends_of_the_meadows-chester
Website: www.friendsofthemeadows.org
Email us: fomchester@gmail.com
