

# Friends of the Meadows



**Newsletter 237**

**Winter 2025**

# Welcome

to our Newsletter for  
Winter 2025

A Happy New Year to all our supporters! As I write this, we're just coming out of the very cold weather in early January and while we still have some weeks of Winter to go, already, thoughts are turning to Spring.

Of course, the beginning of the year is when we make our annual call to **renew your Friends of the Meadows subscription!**

Thank you to all those who are renewing 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 Home Page: [friendsofthemeadows.org](http://friendsofthemeadows.org)

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This edition's cover photo is of a barn owl, taken with kind permission from the website of the Broxton Barn Owl Group who recently erected a barn owl box on The Meadows (see page 6)

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## Shakespeare's Sonnet 97

How like a winter hath my absence been  
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting  
year!  
What freezings have I felt, what dark days  
seen!  
What old December's bareness  
everywhere!  
And yet this time remov'd was summer's  
time,  
The teeming autumn, big with rich  
increase,  
Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,  
Like widow'd wombs after their lords'  
decease:  
Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me  
But hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;  
For summer and his pleasures wait on  
thee,  
And thou away, the very birds are mute;  
Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer  
That leaves look pale, dreading the  
winter's near.

This sonnet is a member of the Fair Youth sequence, in which the poet expresses his love towards a young man. It is the first of three sonnets describing a separation between the speaker and the beloved.

# Meadows Management

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

## Severn Trent

Following a meeting just before Christmas, below is the anticipated schedule for the removal of works and reinstatement for the Severn Trent works (timings are weather and tide dependent):

### Mid Feb to end of March

Will start to remove pads from the compound etc. This will take approximately six weeks (up until end March). The size of the compound will be reduced (see below).

Reinstatement of the compound area will reuse topsoil from the site.

Seeding of reinstated areas will take place at this time.

### End of March....

The reduced size compound will remain for a further 4-6weeks from the end of March to allow for seeding establishment;

these will be away from path, just around the reinstated areas. The fencing can be removed/remain a bit longer depending on satisfactory level of seed establishment.

Towards the end of the six weeks pathwork repairs will be done – this may run into April/May. The contractor may close the path whilst reinstating for public and contractor safety but only as they work. Access will still be available evenings and weekends.

## Elizabeth Crescent/Terraces

The work for the terraces was the restructuring of the scrub, which has been completed. Restructuring is to vary the structure of the habitat to create different opportunities for breeding, nesting and foraging to a wider range of species.

*Steph Hefferan*

When cows grazed peacefully on the Meadows.

This photo was taken in June 2012 and published on TripAdvisor by Jon from Greenwich who noted the "abundance of wildlife" and that it was "good for walking, dog walking, running, bird watching"



# Report to the Annual General Meeting

*The Friends of the Meadows AGM took place on 6th November 2024. This the report that our Chair, Julie Savory gave to the meeting.*

We were very pleased to welcome 41 people to our 2023/24 AGM at St Marys Handbridge Centre. A highlight of the evening was a talk by our guest speaker, Jim Holmes (see panel below)

## Looking after The Meadows

During 2024 we removed and re-sited and reused some metal and wooden tree guards that were no longer required and planted native saplings suitable for the ground conditions (rowan, hawthorn, hazel and a hornbeam).

In June, a large patch of Himalayan Balsam from the ditch on the south side of The Meadows was removed. However as seed flows down the river from Himalayan balsam plants up stream, it remains very difficult to prevent its spread.

In March, as part of Keep Britain Tidy fortnight, we took part in a **litter pick** with the Angling Trust and the Welsh Dee Trust.

We have been supported by a great group of volunteers with working parties taking place on the second Saturday morning of the month. We very much appreciate their input.

**Future Plans** include planting native wildflower seeds and plugs in the Spring. Species being considered include purple loosestrife, marsh marigold, cuckoo flower, red campion, mallow, cowslip, common knapweed and oxeye daisy.

We **liaise with Stephanie Hefferan**, the Council's Greenspace officer who organises contractors for scrub control,

grass cutting and restructuring the brambles to help maintain the biodiversity.

As a committee we remain concerned about the impact of the loss of grazing in 2015. The willow scrub is continuing to spread and if not addressed the area could become more of a willow fen than a water meadow.

## Other activities

Two **owl boxes**, supplied by the Broxton Barn Owl Trust have now been installed.

Five **botany** walks were held between May and September led by Martyn Stead a very experienced local botanist.

Andy Ingham **monitors the comings and goings of the wildlife**, especially the birds, that spend time of the Meadows and reports back in each quarterly newsletter which is produced by Rachel Cross with delivery co-ordinated by Ruth Davidson.

We are represented on **the Summit of the Dee** set up by MP for Chester, Samantha Dixon, which brings together interested parties to discuss problems about water quality and its impact and we continue to nurture links with **Chester Zoo** who are doing a lot to support and encourage local efforts in our area to support wildlife through their Networks for Nature Project.

## Bequest

In the summer we received some unexpected news. Dr Allan Pullin, a former chairman of Chester Civic Trust and a Director of the Cheshire Historic

Buildings Trust, left a bequest of £10K in his will for Friends of the Meadows. This is such a generous gift and we will ensure it is used to help preserve and enhance the Meadows.

### Membership

We currently have a membership of approximately 177. Membership costs £5.00 per household and we are very grateful for the additional donations made by Friends which contributes significantly to supporting the various projects and tasks we undertake.

### Join us

Many thanks to all committee members and volunteers for their respective contributions.

In addition to those mentioned above these include: James Holroyd, Secretary, Keith Dixon, Treasurer, Richard Cain, Membership Secretary, and newsletter delivery volunteers.

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 do get in touch. Email us at [fomchester@gmail.com](mailto:fomchester@gmail.com)

## The River Dee: From Source to Sea

*A talk by Jim Holmes*

Carrying camera equipment, at intervals over ten separate days, Jim Holmes has photographed our river, starting at its source above Lake Bala in Snowdonia, where a stream flows out of crags into a steep rocky gully. This stream will develop into a river 113 kilometres long (as far as Chester), with a vast catchment area of 1850 square kilometres.

The undertaking was not without its inconveniences, for on occasions Jim had to negotiate barbed wire fences or take rapid evasive action when faced with the attentions of butting bullocks. But the final result was a magnificent photographic record of the river as it gathered volume on its journey towards the sea.

Many interesting facts emerged, among them: the Dee is the most regulated river in Europe and the Pontcysyllte aqueduct is the highest. Under the auspices of the Welsh Dee Trust, a record is kept of all creatures caught in the water samples regularly taken and tests are made for phosphates resulting from run-off from farm land. Members of the public are encouraged to take part in this exercise, as they are with the weighing and tagging of fish, which takes place over a weekend each year. (Contact *The Welsh Dee Trust* on [www.welshdeetrust.com](http://www.welshdeetrust.com)). The river is judged to be extremely healthy but fish stocks are sadly in decline. One of the causes would appear to be climate change.

Jim had much to say: about the weir in Chester, the hydroelectric station alongside it; the straightening of the river in 1737 below the City and the shipbuilding industry alongside. There were photos of some of the magnificent bridges spanning the river, including the longest single-arched stone bridge in the UK. Unfortunately, there is no space to record details here.

At the end of the talk Jim said he looked forward to joining a Friends of the Meadows working party, as he builds a photographic record of people associated with the river. He also mentioned that he runs photo walks within the City for keen photographers.

His contact: [jim@jhpix.com](mailto:jim@jhpix.com)

*James Holroyd*

# Barn Owl Box

It was good to see the Barn Owl box finally go up on the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> November by members of the Broxton Barn Owl Group.

Jimmi from the group came back the following week to put some stabilising posts at the base to prevent any movement of the pole as the ground is very soft.

It was also interesting to note that one of the guys said he found a bat dropping caught in a web underneath the box that we put up on Bottoms Lane track.



**The Broxton Barn Owl Group** is a group of local volunteers dedicated to the conservation of Barn Owls in West Cheshire. Their aim is to increase and support the number of Barn Owls in West Cheshire and monitor their population.

With a heart-shaped face, beige back and wings and pure white underparts, the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba* is a distinctive and much-loved countryside bird. Its habitat is open country or farmland with rough tussocky grassland, typically along field margins, ditches, woodland edge, young plantations where a high density of small mammals can be supported.

Visit the Broxton Barn Owl Group's website at [www.broxtonbarnowls.org](http://www.broxtonbarnowls.org)

If you know of Barn Owls in your area you can contact them and report sightings, request nest boxes and report any threats to existing nest sites.



## October 2024 to January 2025



*Male Mute swan chasing newcomers away at the Groves (see 5th January 2025)*

### **19<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

Five Goldcrest around the Meadow including four on Bottoms Lane track.

Nearby two Chiffchaff, ten Meadow Pipit and two Stonechat in the centre of the Meadow.

Three Skylark calling as they flew high over the Meadow.

### **26<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

Four Snipe and the first Jack Snipe of the winter flushed from the marshy area of the Meadow.

### **1st November 2024**

Two Cetti's Warbler by the ditch in the centre of the Meadow.

A Snipe was flushed off the bank below Andrew Crecent and nearby a mixed flock of Goldfinch and Siskin feeding in Alder trees.

### **2nd November 2024**

Bat droppings caught in a Spiders web were found by an eagle-eyed member of the Broxton Barn Owl group The web was directly below the Bat box on

Bottoms Lane and indicates the box is in use by the Bats.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024

Five Hawfinch were reported mid-day visiting Overleigh Cemetery. The Cemetery used to be a regular winter Hawfinch site back in the 80s but sightings started to dwindle as part of a nationwide fall in the population. These big finches are often found in graveyards as they like to feed on Yew berries and the seeds of Hornbeam.

### 16th November 2024

A further sighting of a single Hawfinch in trees overlooking the Cemetery

### 5<sup>th</sup> January 2025

The male Mute Swan started 2025 where it left off the previous year by continuing to be aggressive towards any visiting Swan. See picture of the

Swan chasing the newcomer away from the Groves.



*Common gull (January 2025)*

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Friends of the Meadows member Graham Sturley, who volunteers on the Meadows, sent in this photograph showing a view of the Meadows across the river from Grosvenor Park.

The photo is from a Chester Corporation Chester Guidebook dated 1959.

Graham points out the old ferry landing stage on the Meadows side where a ferry used run to the bottom of Dee Lane.

The guide describes "The Meadows, formerly known as the Earl's Eye, are extensive fields to the west of Queen's Park, open to the public as playing fields"