

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 241

Winter 2026

Welcome to our Newsletter for **Winter 2026**

A very happy new year to you all!

Subscriptions for this year are now due and a renewal form is included with this newsletter for those of you who have not set up a standing order.

The minimum subscription is still kept at just £5 for the year with an option to add a voluntary donation to that if you wish. We hope that you will renew your membership and that you can persuade your friends and neighbours to join as well – new members are always welcome!

Back in the Autumn of 2016, our then Greenspace Ranger, Amanda Pritchard wrote "The scrub in [the central meadow] will need to be kept in check as it can become predator perches for magpies and crows, which is not good news for other birds. Next up will be to coppice some of the willows in the meadow." Amanda left a few months later and the Council undertook a restructuring of its services. Stephanie Hefferan took on the task as the single Greenspace Officer for all of Cheshire West and Chester, doing the job with even more limited resources. We're very grateful for Stephanie's continued continuing contribution to the management of the Meadows and her collaboration with our group.

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's cover photo is of Bottoms Lane track after snowfall on Monday 5th January,

Photo by Julie Savory

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Spellbound by Emily Brontë

*The night is darkening round me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me
And I cannot, cannot go.*

*The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with
snow.
And the storm is fast descending,
And yet I cannot go.*

*Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below;
But nothing drear can move me;
I will not, cannot go.*

Composed in 1837, it is believed that this poem is set in the imaginary world of 'Gondal', created by Emily and her siblings when in their teens. The seeds of Emily's adult preoccupations are already present here: willpower, destiny and death.

Meadows Management

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

Sailing club

They were working in the autumn to coppice a proportion of trees opposite the club. It was agreed that there will be no power tools (battery or fuel) used – hand tools only.

Disabled access gates

I have chased the relevant officers (responsible for getting costs and contractors and responsible for getting grants). Following a site meeting with the contractor funding should be being pursued, but it will take time. I will ensure that it doesn't get overlooked.

Scrub management

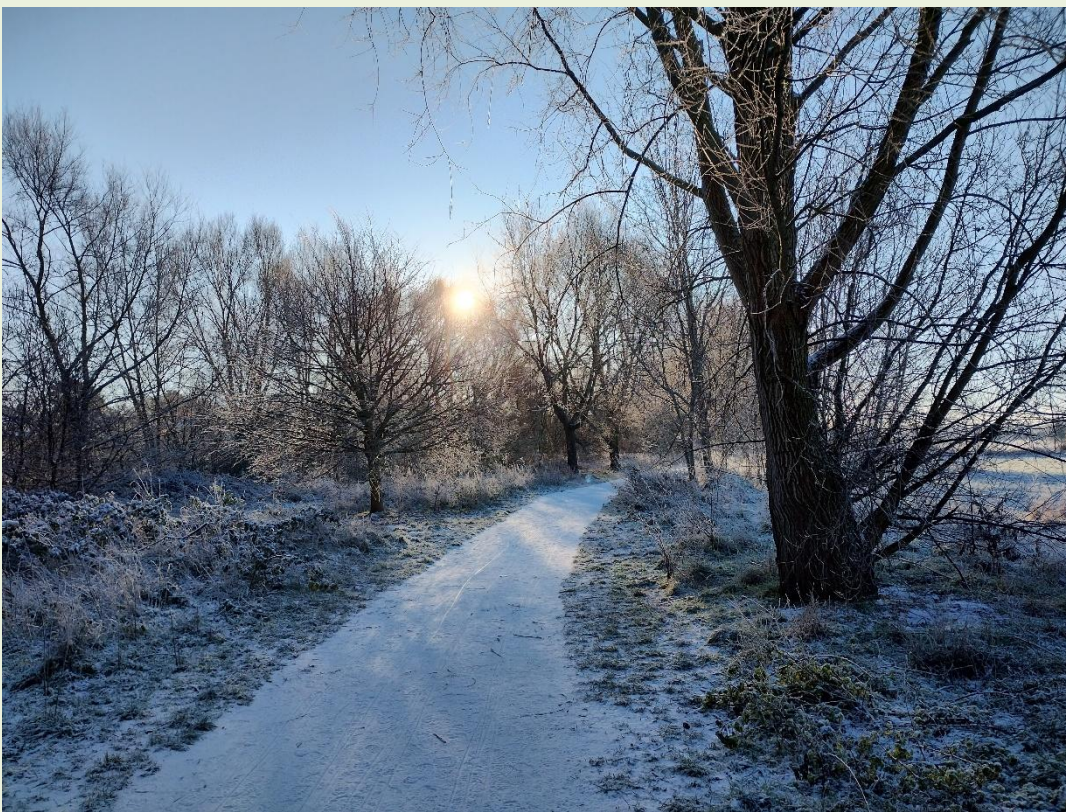
The work was completed on the main meadow in October. Following Chester Zoo rejecting the trees (for use as brash), I will look at various options for next year that will make it easier and more efficient for the contractors to operate and so get more done in the allotted time. One possibility is

chipping in the location of the felling so we don't end up with lots of scrub lying about...

On Elizabeth Crescent the works were also completed on restructuring the bramble (which is working really well). They have also taken out a small patch of mature gorse as it was encroaching into the grassed path way. Gorse coppices well but is slow to regenerate. It will be allowed to regenerate but will also allow us to keep a wider path.

Riverside gates – this has been reported and is sitting with the infrastructure officer for action. The erosion to the path (opposite Deva Terrace) has also been noted and flagged for repair.

Steph Hefferan



Left - Another photo from Julie Savory following the snowfall in early January – this time of the riverside path along the eastern side of the Meadows.

Thomas Harrison - Architect

*James Holroyd reports on the talk given
by Mike Graham after our AGM in November*

Whilst volunteering in many different guises, particularly at Chester Castle, Mike came to realise the important contribution, often overlooked, that Thomas Harrison had made to the architecture of Chester.

His early years – and Rome!

Born in 1744 in Richmond, Yorkshire, Harrison was educated at the local grammar school. After he had left and was probably working as a joiner with his father, a local landowner paid for him to attend the Accademia di San Luca in Rome. This proved to be a turning point in Harrison's life.

In the event, he remained in the city for seven years, studying classical architecture, and even submitting several plans to the Pope, including one (unsuccessful) for a new museum in the Vatican.

Return to England – and Lancaster

On his return to England in 1776, he moved to Lancaster, where so much of his early work was to take place. Here he built Skerton Bridge over the River Lune in Lancaster, the first substantial bridge in England with a flat (as opposed to an arched) road surface. He then set about rebuilding Lancaster Castle, which was to include the shire hall, a courtroom and, importantly for his later work, a debtors prison.



Thomas Harrison's portrait, 1820 by Henry Wyatt from the Grosvenor Museum

Moving to Chester

It was at this point, around 1793, that he moved to Chester - although throughout his life he undertook a vast range of projects in the North West - and following the prison reforms then taking place, began work on Chester Castle.

The large edifice was largely in ruins, but still housed the county gaol for Cheshire. The dungeons, dating from the thirteenth century, were a source of gaol fever and tragic cause of death for gaolers and inmates alike. His work on rebuilding the castle continued for the next forty years.



This year marks the bicentennial of the widening of the Old Dee Bridge in 1826. The bridge was widened by 7 ft. on the upstream side by adding an iron-plate footpath and railings, and the road surface was macadamized

Works in Chester

Some of the other important assignments he undertook in Chester were repairs to a much neglected Cathedral, the design of the Northgate and refurbishment of the Old Dee Bridge.

Concerns over increasing traffic were raised - even back in the mid-nineteenth century - and Harrison was able to make more space for pedestrians. Carriages travelling from Shrewsbury to Holyhead on their way to Ireland often bypassed Chester, which was not on a direct route. By an act of parliament it was decreed that a large bridge should be built over the Dee.

Harrison submitted three designs, one in iron, two in stone. The Town Council agreed one in stone – happy not to miss any passing trade.

The result was the Grosvenor Bridge, the longest single-arched stone bridge in the world at the time.

There is no statue to commemorate his contribution to the city, but towards the end of his life, Harrison purchased the site of the Benedictine Nuns' convent and built himself St. Martin's Lodge, where he lived until his death in 1829.

We now know it as **The Architect!**

James Holroyd

Tree management along the riverbank

Over the last few months we've received a number of comments – and suggestions - about how the trees growing along the riverbank of the Meadows may be managed, particularly to reduce their height by pollarding.

Presently, pollarding is not being considered as a viable option for a number of reasons, which are summarised here.

Pollarding is a traditional but ornamental way of managing a tree, so is not necessary for a tree's general management or health. It also needs to be borne in mind that as this is within boundary of the river's SSSI, permission would need to be gained from Natural England on any non-essential tree work. Currently their advice is to only deal with dead, dying or dangerous trees, rather than any form of ornamental management.

Pollarding sits well in formal gardens or street trees if they have been previously managed that way, but does not sit well with the natural, countryside/rural feel of the Meadows site being managed.

Pollarding can be an expensive form of tree management. Once pollarded, the tree then needs to be in a regular regime of re-pollarding. With fast-growing willow this would be



Many of the older willows, including those pictured above in the "Willow Grove" were planted in March 1938, by Phyllis Brown when she was Mayor of Chester. She was presented with a silver spade by the Improvement Committee.

Mrs Brown and her husband Harry F Brown (owner of "Brown's of Chester") purchased 64 acres of the meadows in 1929 and then presented the title deeds to the City, for use as a public park.

frequently: approximately every 3-4 years.

Regrowth from pollarded limbs creates a weakness in the tree structure at the junction of the stem and the pollarded limb. This creates additional hazards if not maintained.

From a conservation standpoint, removal of limbs reduces the availability of mature wood, which in turn decreases the overall biodiversity value of the tree.

Pollarding is not generally appropriate on mature trees. Generally, trees suitable for pollarding have been done so from a young, immature age rather than after the tree reaches maturity. However, willows may be able to tolerate pollarding, depending on the circumstance.



October 2025 to January 2026

11th October 2025

A rare L-album Wainscot moth was attracted to light in Cross Hey with only one previous record in Cheshire in 2023 (see pic). Considered to be both a resident on the south coast and also an immigrant, its favoured habitat is brackish ditches.



L-album Wainscot moth

18th October 2025

A Grey Seal was observed catching fish by the Weir and later at Eccleston. (*Peter*) There is also an unconfirmed sighting of a Grey Seal swimming upstream at Plas Madoc! Plas Madoc is approximately 35 miles from the Dee estuary.

The first Fieldfares of the autumn were recorded above the Meadow. *Denzil*

Twenty Siskin were feeding in Alder Trees off Bottoms Lane track, twelve Meadow Pipit on the Meadow and two Tufted Ducks with the Mallard flock on the Groves.

1st November 2025

A pair of Ravens tumbled acrobatically above the Meadow attracting a pair of Walmoor Park Buzzards and a battle ensued for the air space. The commotion abruptly ended with the appearance of a city Peregrine swooping in and clearing the skies.

6th November 2025

Always an impressive sight by the river is the autumnal display of fruiting Parasol Mushrooms. *Richard*. (see picture)

12th November 2025



Parasol mushroom

A Ring-necked Parakeet visited gardens on Elizabeth Crescent. *Jo* (see picture)

23rd November 2025



Ring-necked parakeet (Library photo)

A Great Crested Grebe was on the river by the Old Dee bridge & single male Tufted Duck by the Suspension bridge.

29th November 2025

A pair of Blackcap were feeding on Hawthorn berries at the lower end of Bottoms Lane track.

16th December 2025

Possibly the same Ring-necked Parakeet was again observed in Andrews Crescent (*Keith*) and then Elizabeth Crescent on the 20th December (*Graham*).

It will be interesting to hear of any reports of Parakeets in January as they will have

paired up and started nesting. As their UK distribution continues to expand it may only be a matter of time before Parakeets are a regular sight in our area.

5th January 2026

Three Teal took flight from the Sandy Lane side of the river.

8th January 2026

A Kingfisher was seen perched and then flying along the ditch on Bottoms Lane track and again on the 9th January. *Richard*



This fox was spotted on the Meadow by the Elizabeth Crescent entrance on 15th January Photo: Rachel Cross

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