



# On the Foss

Autumn  
2013

The River Foss Society Newsletter

## And Now We Are 40...!

*We've reached the age where life begins, so more than 50 of us celebrated this at a festive gathering at the Folk Hall, New Earswick on 23 July ...*

Chairman John Millett started the evening by reminding us of some of the history and achievements of RFS, whose Founder, Bill Sessions, had died so recently.



*John Millett (in the distance) tried to be heard over the sound of rumbling stomachs! No one seemed shy about digging into the buffet.*



*John Hampshire proposed a toast to the Society*

The excellent buffet meal was followed by John Millett and June Card cutting the beautiful anniversary cakes. Long-standing member John Hampshire, Vice Chairman remembered the original founders and proposed a toast to the Society.



*Hilary Kay's beautiful (and delicious) cakes: before, and after June Card and John Millett worked on them!*

This was followed by 'Buzzing by the River' an amazing presentation by York's Anneliese Emmans Dean, a poet, performer, photographer and writer of eco-musicals. Her work brings poetry to life and promotes learning through laughter, rhythm and rhyme. We all left with much warmer feelings towards bluebottles and – yes – greenbottles! Let's hope she'll be available for our 50th!



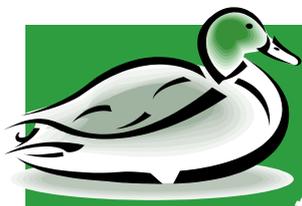
*Anneliese performed as only she can!*

Thanks for a wonderful party go to: June Card for booking the Folk Hall, John Millett for running the evening, Hilary Shepherd for selling tickets and baking cakes, Terry Millett for providing floral decorations, Erica Town for publicity, and Marjorie Burton for liaison with the Folk Hall.

Here's to the next 40!



*John Millett put together an informative display*



## Into Autumn

### OCTOBER

#### Wednesday 16th

Open Meeting at 7 pm at Strensall and Towthorpe Village Hall. Rob Shorland-Ball will speak on the former "Leatham's Flour Mill" that operated on the Lower Foss. By "Open" we mean that Society members and non-members are all welcome. No admission fee: tea and coffee will be available. This is a good chance to book for the Christmas Lunch – see below.

#### Saturday 19th

Last walk of the season, from the crossroads of New Lane and Lilling Low Lane near Sheriff Hutton to Farlington (about 4 ½ miles). Meet at 10 am in the car park of the Blacksmiths Arms at Farlington. Drinks only will be available, but lunch may be arranged elsewhere. Contact Bob Jowett: tel. 01904 764702.

### DECEMBER

#### Sunday 1st

12.30 pm Christmas Lunch in the River Room at the Novotel, Fishergate, preceded at 11.15 am with a talk by RFS Member Michael Sherlock, a volunteer guard on the Wensleydale Railway. The cost for a 3-course lunch plus tea and coffee has again been held at £17.95 and parking at the hotel is free. Payment and menu choices are required by 31st October. Please sign up at the Open Meeting or contact Marjorie Burton: tel. 01904 760871 or e-mail. (See below)

### CONTACTS

June Card: Tel. 01904 766196,  
e-mail: junecard700@gmail.com

Bob Jowett: Tel. 01904 764702,  
e-mail bob.jowett@btopenworld.com

Marjorie Burton: Tel. 01904 760871  
e-mail: marjorie.burton@btinternet.com

## Remembering Peter Walls



Peter was very much a New Earswick person, being born on what is now known as Yorkshire Day, 1 August 1932, and spending almost all his life being involved in the village and living in seven different houses there.

Peter attended New Earswick Primary School and the then recently opened Joseph Rowntree Secondary School – New Earswick being a Rowntree village and the schools then being supported by the Quaker founded Rowntree Company. After school, he did National Service in the Royal Army Medical Corps and then enrolled for specialist nurse training, hoping to work abroad. After his first clash with cancer he decided on mental nursing, gaining many prizes, but then became attracted to teaching science in schools. During teacher training for science, he also enjoyed music, arts, drama and English.

He was appointed Biology teacher at Danesmead Secondary School, York, and was invited to be Recorder of Species for the Joseph Rowntree Nature Reserve at New Earswick which he did for 30 years from 1963. He introduced fieldwork on the Reserve and the nearby River Foss. Now called New Earswick Nature Reserve, it has been visited a number of times by the Society

When Michael Fife approached Sessions Printers with his dissertation on the River Foss, Bill Sessions saw that this would benefit by a section on the Natural History of the Foss and he approached Peter. Thus *The River Foss – Its History and Natural History* was first published in 1972 and is still available.

This book stimulated the setting up of the River Foss Amenity Society in 1973. The inaugural meeting was in New Earswick Folk Hall on 23 July – there was a 40th Celebration this year in the same place on the same date (see the front page). Sadly Michael died in 2011, Bill died earlier this year and Peter died shortly after on 29 April.

Peter was not at the inaugural meeting but was asked to join the Committee, declining because of his very many other interests. However it is known that many Committee Meeting items ended up with "let's ask Peter"! Peter acted as River Warden for the Society on the stretch of the River Foss through New Earswick, diligently noting items of interest and providing an annual report.

It was only at the Memorial Meeting for Peter that many people learned of all his interests – space does not allow more to be included here! Peter had a great love of singing, acting and producing for many local Societies and especially for Tadcaster Operatic Society where he met and subsequently married Veronica in 1988. This brought them both great joy.

Peter was proud of both his New Earswick and Yorkshire connections. A gentleman in all his ways, he fought periods of ill health with success. The River Foss Society's sympathy is extended to Veronica and family and his very many other friends.

*Peter Hopwood*

# A glorious Foss summer

Our wildlife photographer at large, Tony Ellis, has been busy with his camera all summer and has captured some wonderful images. It's been a magical green summer, with butterflies everywhere and birds singing. Tony shares some of his images with us now ...



We've got our own Ratty Junior, part of the water vole colony near New Earswick. He started exploring on his own during the summer.



There's plenty of room on a buddleia for a Peacock Butterfly and a small Tortoiseshell



A woodpecker takes a break for a snack

This thistle is occasionally seen on the Foss



It's wonderful to see a sparrow - a bird now not so common

We've seen a lot of bees on this summer's flowers

## On the Foss

Editor: Beth Shurter  
Tel. 01904 631125  
e-mail: [york.beth2@hotmail.com](mailto:york.beth2@hotmail.com)

Secretary: Marjorie Burton  
Tel. 01904 760871  
e-mail:  
[m.burton599@btinternet.com](mailto:m.burton599@btinternet.com)

## Payment PLEASE!

The Society's financial year is the calendar year and therefore payment of subscriptions is well overdue. Remember, 2012 rates apply:

Family	£12.00
Individual	£ 8.00
Concessions	£ 6.00
Parish/Town Councils	£18.00
Schools and Societies	£18.00
Commercial Organisations	£25.00

Payment please by cheque made out to the "RIVER FOSS SOCIETY" Send to the Membership Secretary, 147 York Road, Haxby, York YO32 3EU. Or, please make payment direct to the Society's bank account: HSBC account no. 51349538, sort code 40-47-31, please put your name in the reference box. Any queries to: Tel. no. 01904 768071, e-mail: [chrisandpete@haxby147.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:chrisandpete@haxby147.fsnet.co.uk). Your Membership Card will be sent as a receipt.

# We went walking

Walks Leader Bob Jowett remembers this summer's walks ...

After a brief visit to the Derwent Tidal Barrage at Barmby on the Marsh last year, RFS members were keen to repeat this interesting event. The Barrage maintains the purity and depth of the River Derwent, a source of drinking water, which could be polluted by flowing into the tidal Ouse.

9 May saw our return for a circular walk including part of 'that other river' - the Ouse. Twelve walkers started at the Barrage and Lock and followed the Ouse south eastwards for about 1.5 miles to a track crossing a dis-used railway. This track leads past the old railway station, now a house, then back into Barmby, where the King's Head provided a delicious lunch.

Refreshed, we walked to the Barrage where operator



The Barrage; Inset: waters swirling in as the gates open

Malcolm Taylor gave us a fascinating talk about the theory and set-up of it. We went downstairs – technically 'underwater' – to see the enormous cables and machinery which operate this impressive facility.

Many thanks again to Malcolm for his charming welcome to a fascinating piece of river engineering.



Starting at Yearsley

On 2 July 10 walkers, were transported to Yearsley crossroads to start Walk 5, following Mark Jones' blue Route. Some of our group took the opportunity to visit the source of the Foss as we passed it. The walk then passed High and Low Lion Lodge, then Newburgh Priory, finally coming into Coxwold. After lunch some of the group visited St Michael's Church, and then went on to Shandy Hall, where the Curator of the Hall gave us an entertaining tour around the home of the author of Tristram Shandy, the Rev Laurence Sterne. This gave us a good insight into this important author, who is buried in the church graveyard and whose 300th birthday is celebrated this year.



Laurence Sterne's gravestone

Walk 4 of the season, on 15 June, started at Sheriff Hutton Bridge and followed the River Foss, where the path is very overgrown.

Crossing the Foss, we headed past Foss House, the 18th century Friends' Meeting House. Our walk took us past Cornborough Farm and then up to Cornborough Manor.

Heading west towards Farlington, we came to a rape seed field with a right of way through, but no path!

Thursday 8 August was another perfect day for one of our favourite routes on the Foss Walk. Nine walkers met at the Dutch House and were driven to the start of this walk at Oulston.



Walkers at Oulston

Walking paths through what seemed like miles of cereal crops was very different from the Spring walks of previous years, though we were surprised to find a boggy bit just before our stop at Pond Head. This reservoir was built to serve Foss Navigation; its waters are still regulated to the lower stretches of the river.



Cereal crops everywhere

After our refreshment break, we finished a very pleasant walk to Dutch House, where we enjoyed lunch. All in all, a wonderful day of Foss walking.

John Millett and John Nicholson volunteered the hard work of leading the group, making a path through to follow the right of way. Eventually we arrived at Towthorpe Farm and then stopped at Farlington church for a break.

We then headed into Stillington, where we shared the entry into the village with a large charity cycle ride. Seven walkers stayed after this eventful walk to enjoy a meal at Stillington's White Bear.

One 21 August we returned to the Yorkshire Waterways Museum at Goole where again we were made most welcome. We were pleased to find that this time the two boat trips around Goole Docks were on 'Wheldale', built as a compartment boat tug in 1959. On our previous visit this vessel was away at the 2012 Queen's Diamond Jubilee Pageant on the River Thames.

## Ships Ahoy!



*'Wheldale' took us around the docks*

Some of us were at the front, others at the back of the boat, the excellent commentary had to be repeated and it was sad to learn of the general loss of traffic and see some empty wharves. After the trips finished some were able to climb down into 'Wheldale's' cabin and/or engine room. The second trip was caught by an unexpected shower but oth-



*Mal welcomed us to 'Spider T'*

erwise the weather was kind all day. A brief talk and a buffet lunch in the Museum followed.



*'Spider T' ready for work*

Then on to Keadby, North Lincolnshire, where 'Spider T', one of only two remaining Humber Super Sloops, is moored on the Stainforth & Keadby Canal near its junction with the River Trent. At first glance it appeared that we could walk on water to get to it! We were given a warm, enthusiastic and amusing welcome by Mal Nicholson, owner and skipper, first on the quayside and then below deck in the Edwardian style cabin. What an interesting story he had to tell - rescuing and renovating the boat and trips to the 2012 Queen's Diamond Jubilee and along the East Coast. On one occasion 'Spider T' was filled with dirty fuel, necessitating a lifeboat escort into Whitby Harbour.



*Keadby Lockkeeper's control room*

An additional bonus was being able to visit the Keadby Lockkeeper's control room and the excellent views of the River Trent upstream and downstream and along the S&K Canal.

*Peter Hopwood*

Although a very wet day was forecast for 18 May 2013, the weather soon improved after early rain and the two trips on Pocklington Canal Amenity Society's (PCAS) narrowboat 'New Horizons' went as planned.

After leaving the Melbourne Arm of the Pocklington Canal, we were limited to cruising west at that time, so everyone was pleasantly surprised to meet a boat travelling towards us.

Members and friends steered the narrowboat, helped with operating the swing bridges and Gardham Lock after which 'New Horizons' turned and made the return journey.

The highlight for the bird watchers was seeing two barn owls. Thanks go to the PCAS narrowboat crew of Alastair Anderson, Roger Bromley and RFS member Adrian Lovett.

*Peter Hopwood*



*Above: Alistair Anderson welcomes us onto 'New Horizons'*



*Below: The second group at Gardham Lock.*

## A Summer Evening's Stroll

Our President Alastair Fitter led this walk round Askham Bog which is a compact nature reserve of 43 hectares, hidden by trees. It lies off the A64 and is owned and managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The bog is rich in flora and fauna, the reserve being a mixture of grassland, woodland, bog and fen with patches of open water and drainage ditches, the result of peat extraction in earlier years.



*This pond, in a quiet corner of the Reserve, is home to several species of dragonflies*

Alastair described the development and evolution of the bog from glacial times; as we moved along he pointed out some of the wide range of plants including Royal Fern, Water Iris, and the delightful Water Violet, which looks white in the sun and only shows its violet hue in the shade.

Several birds were heard including Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Robin but they remained frustratingly hidden from view under thick green foliage.

It was a very interesting tour on a glorious summer's evening and our thanks go to Alastair for sharing his knowledge of the plants and the reserve with us. The evening was complete when we enjoyed a tasty meal at the Quaker Wood in Acomb.

*John Millett*

## Let's keep it clean!

On 4 July, 11 litter pickers – five RFS members, two helpers and four members of the Rotary Club York Vikings met at the 'half moon' bridge on Foss Islands Road to pitch yet another battle against rubbish in and around the Foss.

Teams were formed, one working on York's 'litter boat', and others working along the banks. Litter along the City part seems to be less this year - whether this is because there has been less flooding or people are behaving better will not be known. A lifebuoy had to be left in the river near the waterway entrance to the Foss Islands Nature Reserve because of a temporary tenant – a nesting bird! The area around Castle Mills Lock seemed less littered, possibly thanks to residents of the Shelter next to the lock who are helping to keep the Lock area tidy.

As always, our thanks go to York Council's Julian, his usual helpful self with the boat. Rachel, also from the Council, delivered and, with Iain, collected the grabs. On behalf of the RFS, and this time also the Rotary Club of York, thanks for everybody's help and co-operation.

*Peter Hopwood*

## Problem Solved

We have not intentionally ignored the fact that the Foss was incredibly low at one point in the summer. *On the Foss* will provide full information about the problem and its solution in the Spring issue.

A demonstration of the Environment Agency's new sluice gate at Castle Mills Lock – part of the solution – should be happening in November, probably followed by a lunch break at the 'Masons Arms' and an afternoon visit to the Agency's Foss Barrier. For details contact Peter Hopwood, Tel. 01904 768071, e-mail: [chrisandpete@haxby147.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:chrisandpete@haxby147.fsnet.co.uk).

## Living History

A large group of RFS members were warmly welcomed to Sheriff Hutton's parish church, St Helen and the Holy Cross, on the evening of 13 August. Church Warden Roy Thompson gave us an excellent tour around this historic church, built around 1100 and closely connected to the powerful Neville family. Their chapel dates here to the 15th century. Two medieval stone effigies can also be seen here.

After enjoying tea and coffee at the church, we walked to the Castle ruins and were met by its owner, Dr Richard Howarth. The Castle – built during King Stephen's reign – was the headquarters of the Council of the North for 150 years. It was owned by the Neville family, with strong connections to Richard III, for a long time. Its ruined towers stand tall as a landmark of the area. Dr Howarth showed us the remains of a medieval hall, now normally locked.

Many headed to the Highwayman pub after our tour for a lovely meal to end an illuminating evening of history.



*We started in the churchyard*



*Landmark towers*

**Don't Forget our website:**

**[www.riverfossociety.co.uk](http://www.riverfossociety.co.uk)**