



# On the Foss

The River Foss Society Newsletter

Spring  
2012

## Back to Castle Mills

A wild and windy 8th December made a brisk setting for our third visit to the newly stabilised Castle Mills Lock area on the Foss Basin. Keller Geotechniques have completed stabilisation works and left site, so our old associate Brian Hebditch, City of York Council, met us there. In August 2004, at short notice, he showed us restoration work being done on the Lock and in May 2005 joined us when a narrowboat passed through the restored Lock.

Brian reminded us of how the Foss Navigation Company was formed in the 1790s, using the River upstream to Strensall, making a cut across to Sheriff Hutton Bridge until the money ran out! CYC became the Navigation Authority in 1853 and still holds responsibility from just below Blue Bridge upstream to Yearsley Bridge, although this now provides very little income.

Brian has a wide knowledge of York's drainage and flood engineering and has many years' experience

working with the River Foss and Castle Mills Lock. He was very involved with the recent stabilisation work so he could give interesting explanations and answers to questions. We thank him yet again.

Brian has kindly offered us a future visit to Pond Head reservoir which provides 'compensating' water for the river and for which CYC still has some responsibility. We may also visit the Dam and its 'tunnel'.

After a battering by the weather, the good meals and warm fires at the Masons' Arms were very welcome.

*Peter Hopwood*



*Works during summer 2011*

## A Winter Walk

On a cold February day in brilliant sunshine we walked along the Foss near the old filter beds close to Duncombe Farm. The trees were alive with a mixed flock of 40+ birds: Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Siskin and Redpoll, all busy feeding on seeds from the Alder trees lining that part of the river.

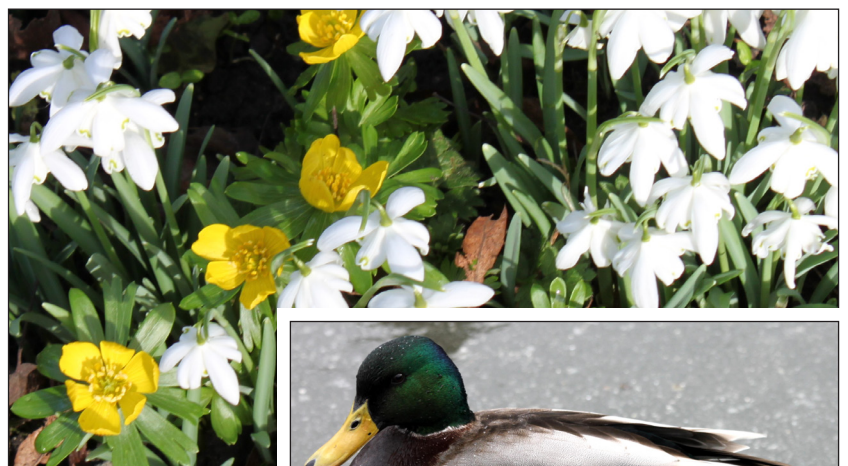
Further downstream near Towthorpe bridge we saw 12 Lapwings overhead and numerous Blue tits, Great tits and Long tailed tits in the trees while a Sparrowhawk flew overhead, scanning the meadow for an early lunch. On the river Mallard were busy pairing up in preparation for the breeding season.

Near Haxby Lock we met a dog walker who had just seen a Kingfisher, so were extra vigilant hoping to see this elusive bird. And we were rewarded, seeing a flash of electric blue as a Kingfisher flew up the river hugging the water surface until settling on an overhanging branch. How good to know that this very attractive bird had survived the recent extremely cold weather.

*John & Terry Millett*

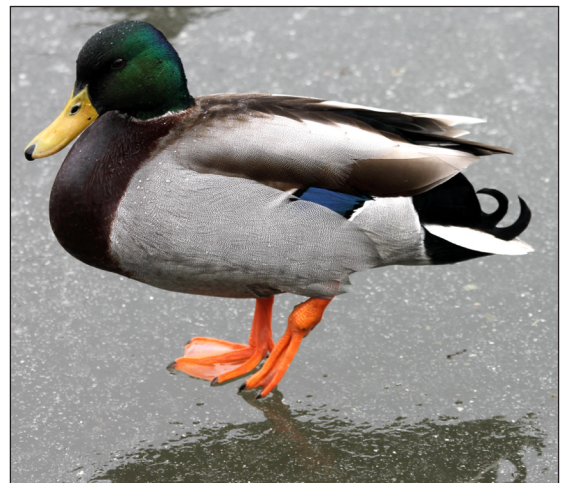
## A Season of Beauty

Tony Ellis has been busy all winter, walking daily along the Foss and observing wildlife in detail. We're pleased to offer his photos for your enjoyment. And there are more inside ...



*Above: These lovely flowers tell us it's nearly Spring.*

*Below: A stunning shot of a mallard making his way across solid ice - perhaps he'd like to appear on Dancing on Ice.*





# What's happening this Spring

**Wednesday 18th April 7.00 pm Towthorpe and Strensall Village Hall** 'The Canalization of the River Foss'. Tony Berry and Christopher Dunn will talk about their archaeological survey of the Foss Navigation. Followed by refreshments and the Annual General Meeting. (See details below)

**Saturday 28th April 10.00 am** Walk from Yearsley Bridge to Huntington to follow up the talk by Tony Berry and Christopher Dunn at the AGM. (See details below)

**Saturday 5th May** Inland Waterways Association Open Day at Castle Mills Lock. Further information may be available at the AGM.

**Wednesday 16th May 10.00 am** Circular walk of about 5 miles from Mill Green, starting from the car park at the Dutch House, where lunch will be available at about 1.00 pm for both walkers and any other members who would like to join them. Please let Bob Jowett (Tel. 01904 764702) know if

you are coming (Please note that the visit to the Pond Head Reservoir has had to be postponed.)

**Tuesday 22nd May 6.15 pm** Visit to Sessions Nature Reserve. Meet in the car park next to Lock Cottage on the Haxby Road. Supper afterwards at the Flag & Whistle. Please phone June (01904 766196) the previous weekend if you are coming.

**Thursday 14th June 10.00 am** Circular walk of about 5 miles starting from the car park at the Blacksmith's Arms, Farlington, which will provide lunch for walkers and other members from 1.00 pm. Please let Bob Jowett (Tel. 01904 764702) know if you are coming

**Friday June 29th 5.30 pm for 6.00 pm** Family or Team Treasure Hunt on foot, about 1½ hours around Strensall - with Prizes! Entry fee £1 per adult. Meet in the car park of the Ship Inn in good time to place your order if you would like supper afterwards, and to be ready for a 6.00 pm start. Names to June (Tel. 01904 766196) in advance, please, by June 22nd.

## It's Your AGM!

Our Annual General Meeting takes place on Wednesday 18 April at The Towthorpe and Strensall Village Hall. This is a great chance for all members to participate in the running of the Society. We look forward to seeing you there.

The meeting is preceded at 7.00 pm by Tony Berry and Christopher Dunn speaking on 'The Canalization of the River Foss'. They will tell us about the progress of their archaeological survey of the Foss Navigation since their talk in October 2008.



On Saturday 28 April a *Ground paddle, Yearsley Lock* gentle two mile historic walk will be led by Tony and Chris to follow up their earlier talk about the survey. Meet at 10.00 am at the Fish and Chip shop in Haley's Terrace. (We suggest parking at the Flag and Whistle pub - near the junction of Huntington Road and the Link Road - and either walking or catching the bus to the start.)

Please let Bob Jowett (Tel. 01904 764702) know if you are coming and want to have lunch after the walk at the Flag and Whistle.

## 2012 Yearly Subscription

The Society's financial year is the calendar year and therefore payment of subscriptions will be appreciated as early as possible in the year and accepted up to and including the Annual General Meeting at the current 2011 rates :

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

Please make payment by cheque made out to the 'RIVER FOSS SOCIETY' and send to the Membership Secretary, 147 York Road, Haxby, York YO32 3EU. Alternatively, please make payment direct to the Society's bank account: HSBC account no. 51349538, sort code 40-47-31. If you use the BACs system, please put your name in the reference box.

Any queries to 01904 768071 or e-mail: [chrisandpete@haxby147.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:chrisandpete@haxby147.fsnet.co.uk). Your Membership Card will be sent as a receipt.

*Peter Hopwood*



Our final walk of 2011 - Foss Walk 6 – took place on Tuesday 4 October, a dry, mild day. Seventeen walkers met at Huntington Church to start the walk along the river. RFS member Tony Berry, one of the team doing an archaeological survey of the Foss Navigation, joined us as we walked to explain many of the remaining canal features, such as foundations for an 18th century bridge. Some walkers, though native to York, had never been on some parts of this walk.

At Lock Cottage, New Earswick, we saw the last “Foss Walk” signpost before Blue Bridge. After Monk Bridge the route follows roadways and footpaths before rejoining the river bank tow-path at Foss Islands Road. This leads to the new footbridge crossing the river to Hungate, where some of walkers left us, using this new bridge into town.

We continued past Rowntree’s Wharf to Fossgate and through the Merchant Adventurers’ Hall garden. Crossing Piccadilly, we rejoined the Foss to Clifford’s Tower, then followed the River Ouse footpath to Blue Bridge. Crossing the Bridge, we passed the Foss barrier and basin and finished at the Mason’s Arms, where two non-walking members joined us for lunch. This was a wonderful way to finish a good year of exploring on foot.

*Bob Jowett*

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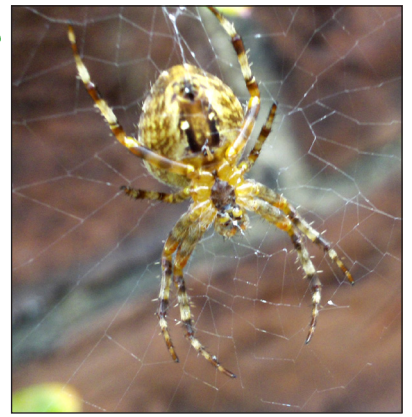
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## Winter Beauties

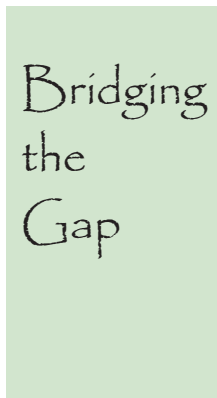
More of sharp-eyed Tony Ellis’s winter photographs of our rich Foss natural life

*Right: This spider continues to weave a web through the winter*

*Below: A chub glides serenely through the cold, clear waters of the Foss.*



*Left: So that’s where ladybirds go during the winter! Above: This jackdaw visits Tony daily and has become very relaxed around him*



On September 23rd 2011, June Card, Bill Sessions and I attended the official opening of the new footbridge over the river Foss at Hungate. The bridge was opened by the Lord Mayor of York, David Horton and Mark Dickinson, Managing Director of Lend Lease, parent company of Hungate Regeneration Ltd, the developers.

The bridge has been named Leetham’s Bridge, in honour of the nearby Leetham’s Mill, now called Rowntree’s Wharf. Joining Hungate Phase 1 with Navigation Road, the bridge is a striking modern stainless steel structure with wooden decking. It has already become a well used footpath and cycle route to the city centre.

*John Millett*

**Don’t Forget our website:**

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

# The Good Old Days?

John Hampshire found this poem amongst the many River Foss Society papers left by Michael Fife, who sadly died in May 2011. Written in the early 19th Century, it was published in the *'Yorkshireman'* on October 31, 1846.

Luckily, things have changed since then ... but perhaps we still have a way to go.

## A Poem on the River Foss

Oh! Poets have sung of the 'Bonny Doon'  
Of Thames, of Tyne, of Tweed,  
But thou, a stream beyond compare!  
Hast never had thy need  
Of song or praise, or that renown,  
Which justly is thy due.  
Are not they waters stagnant slime  
And is not such their hue,  
That if they could but give a gloss,  
A blacking warehouse we'd call Foss.

How gracefully the dead dogs float  
Upon thy snail-paced tide,  
What odours steal from these dung hills,  
That rise on either side;  
How deep, how rich the mud that fills  
Thy channel to its brink,  
And leaves a track of deeper black  
As the old keel boats slink,  
Through filthy weeds, so green and gross  
That mantle o'er the face of Foss.

Limb shaking ague, and fever force,  
That licks the life blood up,  
Consumption! that fell hypocrite,  
All drain thy noxious cup;  
A deadly leaven thy stream has prov'd,  
Mix'd with the city's pride –  
The boat of the 'grim ferryman'  
Oft floats upon they tide.  
Thirsty King Death is ne'er at a loss,  
His 'coal black wine' is sure the Foss.

All that healing art profess,  
Quack, surgeon, or M.D.,  
Your glasses fill with blood red wine,  
And quaff a toast with me.  
The pestle flourish around each head,  
Gleam high the lancet's blade,  
And drink to Foss, pellucid Foss,  
The best friend of your trade.  
To know 'would be a real dead loss,  
Were they to purify the Foss.

# Taking Action for the Foss

Few *York Press* readers could have missed a recent, large, illustrated centrepiece for Letters to the Editor titled 'Why is the Foss Such a Mess?' The writer despairs at litter in the river and the seeming disuse of the council 'litter boat' moored in Foss Islands Road. Spurred by this, discussion in the committee led to organising a meeting with City of York Council about the points raised.

John Millett and Peter Hopwood met with Martin Horner, Head of Civil Engineering at CYC, whose section includes the CYC River Foss cleaning boat. He confirmed that the council 'litter pick' the Foss in the city once monthly from April to September, and work with us on extra litter picks. However, nothing is budgeted for winter to cover this. The majority of litter currently appears to be in the river between the Nature Reserve and Rowntree's Wharf.

Martin will be flexible about the timing of litter picks and promises to take RFS advice. He also agreed to make the cleaning boat immediately available, with a skipper, providing that the RFS provides four volunteers. This will be treated as a trial.

John Millett has also been given a key for the Foss Islands Nature Reserve. A visit has confirmed that this too is badly in need of a litter pick. Obviously we will be asking for volunteers as soon as a date is decided.

We will report on how the trial boat litter pick went later, as it is scheduled for a time after this edition goes to press. Let's hope that it might be the first of many.

## Another Otter Tragedy

Will Durrant, Warden of the New Earswick Nature Reserve, has reported another sad otter death on Haxby Road. On the evening of 20 January a motorist saw an otter twitching on the roadside outside Lock Cottage; by the time she could turn the car around it had died.

Will sent the otter – a male, about one year old, weighing 2 stone - to the Cardiff University Otter Project, which does post mortems on otters dying in the UK; this information contributes to studies about otter populations and pesticides.



In less than six years six otters have been killed in the vicinity of the cottage. "It appears the otters are coming from Sessions Nature Reserve and climbing the bank, running down the side of the cottage and crossing the road at the front of the cottage. This usually happens when the River Foss is in flood or flowing very fast," Will says.

An otter fence was put in three years ago, but Will is concerned – this is the third otter to be killed since the fence went up. He asks: "What else can we do to safeguard them?" Perhaps it's time to see what can be done to protect this part of our wildlife heritage.