



Castle Gateway – does opportunity knock at last?



A new riverside path and footbridge would welcome Foss walkers

City of York Council's new plans for the Castle / Piccadilly area, the so-called 'Castle Gateway', offer hope that a long-cherished ambition of the Society – a riverside path from Blue Bridge to Piccadilly – may at last be fulfilled. However, readers with long memories, recalling the history of failed plans for this neighbourhood, will know better than to get their hopes up too soon.

The draft Castle Gateway master plan shows a continuous riverside path from Brownie Dyke underneath Castle Mills Bridge, and crossing the Foss over a new footbridge opposite Clifford's Tower, to link with the existing path behind the Coppergate Centre. So walkers starting the Foss Walk from Blue Bridge, with its finger post indicating 28 miles to Easingwold, would no longer be met, after a few hundred yards, by a long and hard-to-follow diversion away from the Foss.

The Society will do its utmost to ensure that this plan is carried out in a way that does not impede navigation on the Foss. We will also press for a pedestrian link between the Castle Museum riverside and the Eye of York, and for the landscaping of the river banks near Clifford's Tower to be as wildlife-friendly as possible. We also hope to put forward proposals for improving the run-down Foss Basin, though we have no specific ideas on this yet. Would a marina be a good idea? Suggestions welcome!

CYC has commissioned a public consultation exercise, "My Castle Gateway", on the regeneration project. The River Foss Society will contribute actively to this consultation, and we hope that many individual RFS members will do likewise: look out for publicity in the media over the coming months. And please share your ideas with us, so that our response to the consultation reflects members' views as much as possible.

Mark Gladwin



Beat the Balsam!



Top: Just part of the haul!

Below: Pulling the plants is easy and satisfying

On 15 June, 14 members turned out on a warm, sunny morning for our annual Himalayan Balsam pull held again upstream of Haxby Lock House. This invasive plant has spread from gardens, growing in such profusion that it can kill off native species by shading. Without strong roots holding soil, river banks become susceptible to erosion. By pulling as many plants as possible before seeding, we can prevent each plant producing up to 800 seeds, which spread as far as seven miles!

Two committee members recently attended a workshop at which the problem of Himalayan Balsam was one of the topics. They learned that an experiment to deal with this plant by attacking it with Rust – a chemical substance – had been unsuccessful because it had proved effective against only a few of the many different strains of Himalayan Balsam imported. So for now we pull!

The group managed to pull a lot of stalks, but great swathes of the wretched stuff remain. Next year we are considering holding the event on two days, one on a weekday and one during a weekend, in the hope that we can encourage more volunteers to come along. There certainly is a lot to work on. Thanks to all who joined in and helped to reduce the spread of this very invasive plant.

John Millett



Summer Fun!

JULY

Wednesday 26 Crayke guided visit with Dr Michael and Mrs Shirley Haslam. 10.00 start for coffee at the Durham Ox, where lunch is available. Park in their car park. Limited numbers. Contact: Mike Gray.

AUGUST

Wednesday 9 August Walk 5: Sheriff Hutton via Stittenham. Circular 5 miles. Park near the roundabout in Sheriff Hutton on grass verge ready to walk at 9:30. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Monday 14 August Evening walk around Nunnington - 4.5 miles. Meet at the Royal Oak, ready to leave at 6.00 pm. A meal will be available afterwards. Contact: Anne Bednarski.

SEPTEMBER

Friday 8 September Evening walk and talk, Strensall. Meet at The Ship car park ready to walk at 6.00 pm. A meal will be available afterwards. Contact: John Millett.

Thursday 14 September Walk 6: Mill Green via Pond head. Circular 5 miles. Meet at The Dutch House Crayke for 9.30 start. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Monday 18 September Extra event: Boat trip from Goole to Thorne on Yorkshire Waterways Museum's 'Waterstart'. Expressions of interest to Peter Hopwood, who will supply details. Contact: Peter Hopwood.

OCTOBER

Monday 9 October Walk 7: Mill Green via the Durham Ox. Circular 5 miles. Meet in The Durham Ox car park for a 9.30 start. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Wednesday 11 October Open meeting/talk by David Barber and Libby Shakeshaft of the Environment Agency on Invasive Plant Species (Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed etc). Meet: Strensall Village Hall at 7pm.

CONTACTS

Anne Bednarski 01904 764086

John Millett 01904 491290

Barry Thomas 01904 490081

barry1thomas@googlemail.com

Bob Jowett 0904 764702

bob.jowett1@btopenworld.com

Mike Gray 01904 758510

sdmike.gray@btinternet.com

Peter Hopwood 01904 768071

peter147haxby@gmail.com



Down on the farm

On 1 June, a beautiful, warm sunny morning, ten members met over a cup of coffee at the Dutch House café in Crayke. We were joined by Peter Cliff, who described the workings of the Crayke Estate, the highs and lows of the farming business and agriculture in general. After a 20 minute walk through woodland and the footpath along the Foss to Launds Farm, Peter introduced us to our hosts, farmers

Mike Dawson and his sons Andrew and Graham. The farm once grew potatoes and sugar beet but now concentrates on wheat and barley with oilseed rape as a rotational crop. The farm meadows are occupied by sheep and lambs.

Our tour of the farm included examining various pieces of machinery such as one of the latest combine harvesters, a huge monster; our member Janet had the opportunity to climb into the cab some 12 feet above the ground and see firsthand the controls for the latest harvesting technology. Mike and Andrew explained the importance of assessing the moisture content of the crop before harvesting commences – all calculated by the machine's computer.

Mike described the operation of the drying machinery to achieve the standard required before the grain is delivered to customers.

Peter, Mike and his sons were very genial hosts, answering a barrage of farming related questions, and we thanked them warmly before returning to the Dutch House for an excellent lunch.

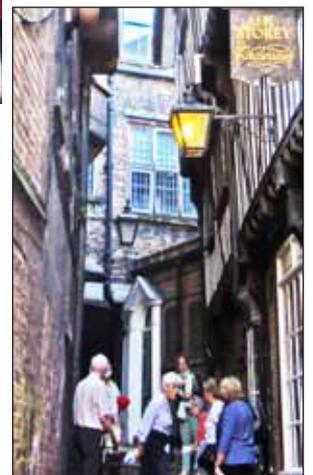
John Millett



Sweet success

Fifteen members enjoyed an interesting city walk on 24 May, a perfect evening, when they were led around part of the city Rowntree walk. This series of five walks visit places in York associated with the Rowntree family and explains their tremendous influence on the city.

Our walk started in Fossgate, visited the sites of the family's grocery business and property holdings and finished in Friargate at the Friends Meeting House, where the family worshipped. The walk was led by Bridget Morris of the Rowntree Society whose knowledge of the Rowntree family is encyclopaedic. After our walk, most of the group enjoyed a meal at the Masons' Arms.



*Top: Lots of walkers
Below: The Rowntrees had properties in and around Lady Peckitt's Yard*

Exploring with a Lady

For 22 RFS members and friends, 8 June had extra significance. Not only was it Election Day, but we enjoyed a boat trip in territories new. At Sprotbrough, near Doncaster, we boarded 'Wyre Lady', whose varied career included service as a railway passenger ferry in Scotland. Once a ferry across Lancashire's River Wyre - thus the name - she eventually came to Doncaster. After refitting, she started work in 1978 at Sprotbrough and is now recognised on the UK National Historic Ships' Register.

We started our trip along the River Don, travelling south west and then west, passing Conisbrough Castle on the River. 'Wyre Lady' locked on to the Mexborough New Cut passing Denaby, then Mexborough and turned south at Swinton Bridge.

Arriving at Waddington Lock, named after the last substantial carrier on the River, a problem had arisen with the Lock, so a C&RT lockkeeper was in attendance. He allowed "Wyre Lady" and a narrowboat to pass through the Lock, then to turn (short of the original objective) and come back through whilst he was in at-

tendance. Coming back we passed Sprotbrough Flash again and went through the Lock towards Doncaster. Time constraints meant turning again, by Hexthorpe, back to Sprotbrough.

It was good to see many young people being taught canoeing at activity centres, as well as narrowboats, swans

with cygnets, herons and the flash of kingfishers. Surprisingly, much green countryside with landscaping and tree planting exists thanks to EU land reclamation grants.

Enjoying knowledgeable commentary, we also saw the dismantling of the wheelhouse and lowering of the boat roof to pass under some of the bridges. All this, plus a buffet lunch and bar service. Skipper Tom and his crew received warm thanks for their navigation skills and patient explanations.

Disembarking, we were met by Sheila Bury, a local artist, nature lover and expert on the area. She took us along the towpath to Sprotbrough Flash SSSI, where we visited two hides, by now in sunshine. After Sheila also answered many questions, we were invited to see some of her paintings, many of the area and much admired. A real and unexpected treat - thanks again to Sheila.

Peter Hopwood



Top: Wyre Lady makes a stately progress

Below: Sheila Bury (right) told us about the Sprotbrough Flash SSSI



Walkers met outside Beningbrough gates

On 2 May, a mild spring evening, 24 people gathered at the gates to Beningbrough Park for the first of this year's evening walks. In sunny pleasant weather, we set off through a small gate beside the main gates into the park and headed to the riverside path. Going along this for about a mile and a half, we came to woodland

Evening walking at Beningbrough

where we were met by the sight of a carpet of bluebells and lush green leaves on the trees.

Across the main drive we went through another gate into more woodland. Following the path

around we eventually returned to the main gates of the park. We had enjoyed magnificent views of the river, surrounding countryside and the Hall itself.

At the end of the walk 22 walkers had an excellent meal by the roaring open fire at the Blacksmiths Arms. All thoroughly enjoyed both the walk and the meal.

Carol Carr

More pictures on our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

On 9 May, six members started Walk 3 at Yearsley village and walked towards Rutter's Plantation, stopping off to check the spring which is the start of the river Foss. In spite of the very dry weather we had been experiencing, the spring had a reasonable flow.

Spring Walking

Our walk took us via the High Lions Farm and Lodge before descending to the Colley Broach Road where we heard skylarks calling, saw a brown hare, and had good views of Ampleforth, Byland Abbey and the White Horse. We continued on past Newburgh Park and into Coxwold where we enjoyed a warm welcome and a tasty lunch at the Coxwold Tea Rooms.

John Millett



Walkers on Walk 4

Four walkers met on 7 July in warm sunny weather to do Walk 4 – a circular walk starting at Coxwold. Deciding to walk clockwise, we headed over the crossroads and joined a path

after a short distance. This path then crosses and re-crosses Green's Beck. We climbed quite steeply to High Leys, joining the road for a short section, then crossed to Beacon Banks and headed towards Husthwaite.

Passing cows and alpacas in fields, we climbed upwards into Husthwaite and had a break on the green. Leaving the village, we crossed the fields and joined Elphin Bridge Lane. After crossing a road bridge over a dismantled railway, we turned off the road at Angram Hall and through fields passing Coxwold Park House. Horses in these fields noticed us but did not approach.

In another field, a herd of cattle stood in an intimidating line blocking the path. But by walking straight at them, they moved. Down in Coxwold, we enjoyed lunch at the tearooms now with new owners. They made us very welcome as we sat in the warm sun in the garden. We had enjoyed a good walk, dealing with some long grass, many crops near the path and a selection of livestock.

Bob Jowett



A wonderful view

Note: We will report on this year's full two day walk in the next issue

A Good Pick ...

Thirteen committed RFS members met on 29 April on Foss Islands Road and were quickly split into five small groups: three people on the CYC boat and pontoon, and other members allocated to specific areas along the river banks, where litter was in abundance.

As usual, we used the boat/pontoon, heading downstream to Castle Mills lock, as a collection point for all the waste and rubbish. On its return to the mooring point at the footbridge, we were able to witness the significant environmental impact that we had made in just over two hours. We had collected two large builders' bags full of rubbish, including some 20 full bin liners as well as metal baskets and frames, wooden stakes, a road sign and two safety belts. All the rubbish was then taken off the boat/pontoon and loaded onto a flat-back CYC lorry for disposal.



Filling another builder's bag



Gotcha!

The comment was made by two regular attendees that they thought that it had been one of the most successful RFS litter picks ever. But it did not end there!

At the AGM two days earlier, a member had told us about a bicycle being thrown into the river at the bridge along the Sleeper Path in New Earswick. John Millett, Peter Hopwood and myself went to investigate. Sure enough we found a substantial new-looking Raleigh bike with one wheel missing, lying on the river bed some 12

feet below the bridge. We couldn't gain access from the side, so using what gear we had in the car and some ingenuity, we raised the bike and removed yet another eyesore.

Many thanks again to all those present on 29 April and at the bike raising.

Barry Thomas

A small group of members visited the Pickering Flood Alleviation scheme on 4 May. Philip Roe, Area Forester for the Yorkshire Forest District of the Forestry Commission, gave a briefing explaining what the flood alleviation scheme is, how it came about, and how it works. Few of us had appreciated the amount of planning, preparation and work that went on behind the scenes before anything visible happened.

This system works by holding back peak river flows using dozens of small dams made using trees felled within metres of their final situation. Fitting superbly into the landscape, they are in effect a copy of nature's own way of holding back water with fallen trees. Each costs little to construct, and most hold only a small amount of water, but added together the effect is significant.

In addition to the more visible dams, trees were planted, ditches were disconnected from the river, and dozens of heather bales were placed in moorland streams – all aimed at slowing the flow of water.

All of these features are backed up by a bund (an earth wall) close to the town and next to the North Yorkshire Moors Railway. This encloses a section of flood plain creating a small reservoir which temporarily holds back yet more water.

The scheme has prevented quite a few houses in Pick-

Using nature's resources



One of Pickering's 'leaking' dams



Inspecting the system

ering from being flooded during recent heavy rainfalls and can only be called a success. It is alleviation, not a cure, but is a cost-effective way of minimising frequent flooding and the misery it brings.

After the briefing we were taken on a tour of three sites, plus the bund, so that we could see how the different dams work, and appreciate how well they blend in. The combination of forest scenery and sunshine made this a real pleasure as well as an informative occasion. Our thanks go to Philip Roe, Area Forester for the Yorkshire Forest District of the Forestry Commission, for a very informative and enjoyable day.

Could this work on the Foss? Unfortunately, a Pickering-like system is unlikely to help us much. Our catchment is flat, so any rise in water level would cover large areas of land, and whilst the Pickering team had only three landowners to work with, the Foss is surrounded by dozens. Lower down on the Foss we have to contend with the rapid run-off from three major areas of housing in Strensall, Haxby/Wigginton and Huntington.

What is going to be the best way to slow the Foss at peak flow times? There are many ideas being considered, and RFS will continue to look at what is being done around the country to see whether there is anything relevant to us.

Mike Gray

Another fine evening walk



The evening of 14 June was beautiful and sunny when 19 walkers set off from the Cross Keys, Dunnington for a five mile circular walk. We walked through fields, taking care as we crossed the A166 to the picturesque village of Holtby.

Passing Holy Trinity Church, we looked at the plaque in memory of the sculptor, Sally Arnup. Just before arriving back in Dunnington we stopped at the top of the hill to admire the magnificent view. On a busy night at the Cross Keys, we were very well looked after and enjoyed a tasty meal.

Anne Bednarski

Oh I do like to be beside the Tees side!

Travelling to Teesside on 16 May in heavy rain, 16 members' first stop was at the Canal & River Trust's River Tees Barrage. In the Meeting Room, we learned that the Barrage was built in 1987 at a cost of £55m and was one



Tees Barrage helps control the Tees

of the biggest engineering projects at the time. It considerably reduces the length of the tidal river but includes a by-pass with lock for boats and it improves the river's watersports facilities. The C&RT (successors to British Waterways and a charity like the National Trust) is responsible from 200m downstream of the Barrage to 22 km upstream. The C&RT work with Stockton Council to improve the area for the whole Teesside community – environmentalists, naturalists, boaters, watersport participants and anglers (fish pass included). We saw how the Control Room gathers information from two upstream flow monitors, various cameras and other data input to enable continuous adjustment of the Barrage sluice gates. Though someone is on duty 24 hours a day, a surprisingly small number of staff deal with all the varied work being done.

On the north bank, next to the river course, there are short and long white water kayaking courses; the kayaks can be returned to the top by a conveyor belt – once even tried by a seal! Archimedean screw pumps generate electricity. Only one was in use on the day due to a relatively low flow from upstream to tidal water. These pumps can be reversed to top up the vast amount of water needed at times for the kayaking courses.

Thanks go to the Manager, Lee, for the arrangements and to Stuart and Reece for all the information provided. After lunch we moved to the Tees Transporter Bridge

built in 1911 to efficiently transport workers across the River Tees. In 2011 to mark the Bridge's centenary a £2.6m Heritage Lottery Fund award enabled the refurbishment and upgrading of the Bridge – now a leading historic visitor attraction and site for abseiling and bungee jumping (160 ft drop!).

On the day the Bridge was closed to traffic. Usually road traffic and foot passengers cross the River Tees on a gondola suspended from a frame along the main beam of the structure and pulled by cables from the Winding House. After a wonderful introductory talk at the Visitor Centre by maintenance engineer Brian, the closure proved an advantage as we visited the Winding House to see both the massive winding equipment and the original electrical (500 volts DC) control equipment still in place but replaced by low voltage AC computerised control equipment – a failure in this (21st C) had caused



The Transporter Bridge walkway 160 feet above the River

the Bridge (20th C) to be closed on this day!

We then ascended the massive structure in a glass viewing lift to the walkway 160 ft. above. The 570 ft walkway was much wider and safer than most had anticipated from ground level. Unbelievably it seemed to be much less windy than below with fantastic views over the wider Middlesbrough area and as far as Roseberry Topping on the North York Moors.

Thanks this time go to the Bridge Supervisor, John, along with our guides Brian and Michael for their cheerful help and explanations.

Peter Hopwood

On the Foss

Editor: Beth Shurter Tel. 01904 631125
email: york.beth2@gmail.com

Secretary: Alison Scott Tel. 01904 766206
email: alisonscott3029@hotmail.com

Membership: Elaine Mephram Tel. 01904 769168
email: membership@riverfossociety.co.uk

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