



Spring Glories

A brief walk along the Foss over the Easter weekend rewarded me with a true vision of spring. Crossing the iron bridge on the footpath to Sheriff Hutton, I found a small spinney which at this time of year is an absolute gem of well-protected wild flowers, with carpets of early bluebells and large patches of wood anemone.

Close by I found marsh marigolds in full flower. These are in their ideal habitat – a damp, boggy run off from the fields. Though this footpath is just passable when wearing boots, it indeed proves to be a worthwhile expedition.

John Millett



Marsh Marigold (above) and wood anemone (left)

Testing Times



Learning to take samples

River Foss Society committee members Mike Gray and Mark Gladwin attended a workshop over a short period of time. We have agreed to identify five suitable sampling points on the Foss; these could be complemented by one at the lower end of Tang Hall Beck. This is being sampled as part of The Becks project run by St Nicks in York. After we establish the sampling points, Rita Mercer of the DVRN Catchment Partnership Project will run a short training session for our volunteers before sampling begins on a fortnightly or monthly basis starts.

Our data will become part of a national database and will be available to interested parties, allowing comparisons as well as some limited statistical analysis. The Trust has set up a link to their database and devised a reporting sheet for us. We can also contact other organisations such as Freshwater Watch to ensure that our data is added into their database and thus even more useful.

We first need data on turbidity, phosphate and nitrate levels in the Foss. Once we have a reasonable amount of data we can decide if our testing regime is sufficient. The Rivers Trust will provide some funding to pay for the basic kit needed, and for a limited amount of sampling

over a short period of time. We have agreed to identify five suitable sampling points on the Foss; these could be complemented by one at the lower end of Tang Hall Beck. This is being sampled as part of The Becks project run by St Nicks in York. After we establish the sampling points, Rita Mercer of the DVRN Catchment Partnership Project will run a short training session for our volunteers before sampling begins on a fortnightly or monthly basis starts.

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We hope to build a solid team of volunteers not only for sampling but also to help train new volunteers and maybe widen the scope of our tests to include microinvertebrates.

Why not come along to the first training day on 15 May? You can find out just how healthy 'our' river is and learn a lot more about environmental issues. And like all Foss events, it will be fun! Please contact Mike Gray on sdmike05@gmail.com or on 07596 366342.

Mike Gray



Lots to do ...

APRIL

Saturday 29 Litter pick. Meet at 9.30 at the Round Bridge, Foss Islands Road. Contact: Barry Thomas, who will tell you where you can park when you sign up.

MAY

Tuesday 2 Evening circular walk Beningbrough. Three miles followed by a meal at the Blacksmith's Arms. Meet at 6.00pm at Newton-on-Ouse entrance to the hall. Contact: Carol Carr.

Thursday 4 Visit to Pickering Flood Alleviation scheme. Meet at Pickering. More details on booking. Start at 10.30. Please bring a packed lunch. Contact: Mike Gray. Limited to 15 people. We will be travelling by car between sites. Please be prepared to share cars to minimise the convoy.

Tuesday 9 Walk 3: Yearsley Cross Roads to Coxwold 5 miles linear*. Meet at Coxwold car park at 9.30 am. Contact: John Millett.

Tuesday 16 Visit to Tees Barrage plus Transporter Bridge, Middlesbrough. Details from Peter when you sign up. Limited to 20 people. Contact: Peter Hopwood. Please let him know if you can offer or need a lift.

Wednesday 24 Rowntree Walk – a walk and talk around the Rowntree Wharf area concentrating on some of the hidden areas of York where the Rowntree family made an impact. There will be a meal afterwards at the Mason's Arms for those who wish to join in. Meet at 6.00 pm on Foss Bridge by the Blue Bicycle. Guide: Bridget Morris. Duration: about 1 hour. Contact: Mike Gray. Suggested donation to Rowntree Trust £2.50 each. Limited to 15 people.

JUNE

Thursday 1 Visit to Launds Farm near Crayke with Peter Cliff. Leader: June card. Meet at 1030 at the Dutch Barn, Crayke. Limited numbers. Lunch will be available afterwards as required. Contact: Mike Gray.

Thursday 8 Day boat trip along the River Don from Sprotbrough, near Doncaster. Expressions of interest to Peter recommended; he will supply details. Contact: Peter Hopwood.

Wednesday 14 Evening walk around Dunnington - 4 miles. Meet at Cross Keys ready to leave at 6.30 pm. A meal will be available afterwards. Contact: Anne Bednarski.

Thursday 15 Himalayan Balsam Pull. Help us reduce the spread of this invasive plant!! Details from Mike Gray. Meeting point and time will be

announced nearer the time following a survey of known balsam sites. Contact: Mike Gray.

Friday 23 The full Foss Walk - first half. Easingwold to Farlington 15 miles walking in the reverse direction. Meet at Blacksmiths Arms Farlington by 9:30am. Car share to the start in Easingwold. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Saturday 24 The full Foss Walk - second half. Farlington to Blue Bridge, York 14 miles*. Meet at Blacksmiths' Arms Farlington by 9:30am. We finish at Blue Bridge and catch a bus back home and then drive to collect the cars in Farlington. Contact: Bob Jowett.

JULY

Friday 7 Foss walk 4: Coxwold and Husthwaite circular 5 miles. Meet at Coxwold car park for a 9.30 start. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Saturday 15 Boat trip through the Standedge Tunnel on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. Expressions of interest to Peter recommended; he will supply details. Contact: Peter Hopwood.

Thursday 20 Evening walk around Huttons Ambo 4.5 miles. Meet by the village Green ready to walk at 6.30 pm. A meal will be available afterwards at the Crown and Cushion, Welburn. Contact: Anne Bednarski.

Saturday 22 Litter pick. Meet at 9.30 at the footbridge on Foss Islands Road opposite Halfords. Contact: Barry Thomas, who will tell you where you can park when you sign up.

Wednesday 26 Crayke guided visit with Dr Michael and Mrs Shirley Haslam. Meet at 10.30 at the church for coffee - lunch at the Durham Ox. Park in their car park. Limited numbers. Contact: Mike Gray.

CONTACTS

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* Linear walks – please let Bob Jowett know if you are willing to take part in a car share; we will be leaving cars at each end of the walk.

Spring is here and it's time to start our annual series of seven walks. During 2017 we plan to do both linear and circular walks of the usual distance of about 5 miles based on the route of the Foss Walk. This year all walks start at 9.30. This gives us time for a meal at the end.

A new walking season



Dealing with the mud!

For a linear walk, walkers meet at 9:30am at the finishing point. Here volunteer drivers will shuttle all walkers to the start. Then at the end of the walk, we ask those with cars at the finish to give a lift to the drivers whose cars are parked back at the start to collect their cars.

On a circular walk, we meet at 9:30am at the start/finish of the walk.

Foss Walk 1 Tuesday, 7 March A linear walk of about 6 miles, starting at York's Blue Bridge and finishing in Haxby. A group of thirteen walkers met at Blue Bridge at 9:30 in warm, bright and very sunny weather. The weather was perfect for walking and great for views and photography. Unfortunately, recent rain made parts of the walk very muddy – hard work for walkers! Unfortunately, one person did fall in the mud, and that was one too many.



Walkers met at Blue Bridge

We followed the route from Mark Jones' book *The Foss Walk* rather than that on OS maps. This goes along the lock, up over Castle Mills Bridge, under Skeldergate Bridge and past Clifford's Tower to the Foss. Go-

ing through Merchant Adventurers' Hall gardens, we crossed Fossgate, went down Straker's Passage and turned right to the Foss. The path follows the river along Foss Islands Road, past Layerthorpe and up to Monk Bridge.

At Monkbridge we crossed and came onto along the east bank of the Foss, where the mud started! The road Fossway leads the path across Huntington road where a gap in the bridge wall takes the path onto the west bank. We then followed the river to Huntington Church, although some walkers decided to avoid the mud and walk on the road.

The group met at Huntington Church and followed the river, crossing the Foss at the Earswick footbridge and walking along the east bank. At the former lock cottage in Haxby, we crossed the river again and followed the path to Landing lane. At the Haxby roundabout, we went our own ways. We had planned to go for a meal, but decided that our boots were too muddy to go into a pub.

Unfortunately, Walk 2, scheduled for Friday 7 April, did not take place due to a confusion about venues. We offer sincere apologies to anyone who hoped to do this walk.

Bob Jowett



Preparing for Spring

On a very wet and misty January day the Community Action for Nature (CAN) group planted over a thousand bluebell bulbs along the Foss at New Earswick. This was achieved with the help of fourteen

adults and nine children. Volunteers include two members of River Foss Society. Spring has already brought the welcome sight of our newly planted bluebells sprouting.

The BIG Spring Clean

organised by Barry Thomas who divided up the river between Monk Bridge and the northern boundary of Strensall into sections and asked John Millett, Peter Hopwood and June Card to arrange for teams of members to cover them. Barry and Sheila Thomas, Jean Nicholson and Mark Gladwin, not available on the chosen weekend, March 2 – 4, did do individual stints at other times.

On Friday 2 March, John and Terry Millett scoured the river banks in Strensall, while Peter and Christine Hopwood, Marjorie Burton and ex-member Roy Atherton covered the area from Haxby Landing to Haxby Weir. Further downstream, Ginny Taylor, Jenny Wilde, Bill Twist and June Card cleared the bank between Huntington Church and the Sleeper Path. As they finished their work, it started to rain, and went on raining, so that when work was resumed on the Saturday morning, the Foss had overflowed its banks in several places.

On 3 March, undaunted by high water, John and Terry Millett, David and Pam Neal and Alison Scott headed for the stretch of the river between Yearsley Bridge

A year after York's "Clean for the Queen" the City of York Council again appealed for volunteers to spruce up the city before the tourist season. The River Foss Society's response was or-

and Monk Bridge. The water was so high that John Cleary and Frank Wilde were unable to get from the pedestrian footbridge at Earswick onto the west bank of the river so they cut through Stablers Walk and the Diamond Jubilee Wood to the Ring Road and worked back upstream. Meanwhile, Mike Gray, Erica Town, Carolyn McQuinn and June Card, with the help of non-member volunteer Sandra, tackled the now very muddy footpaths between Huntington Church and the Ring Road before meeting the other Saturday team for coffee at June's.

Together, armed with litter pickers and plastic bags supplied by the Council, we cleared the river banks from the City boundary at Strensall to Monk Bridge, gathering up nearly 40 sacks of rubbish and taking them to the dump.

It was a good time for a blitz, before the undergrowth had shot up to conceal our harvest of sweet wrappers, cans and plastic bottles. The black spots were along the Towthorpe Road and at Towthorpe Bridge, in the copse at Willow Bank, New Earwick and south of Yearsley Bridge on both sides of the river.

We wished that dog walkers would take their doggy bags home with them instead of leaving them lying around but felt satisfaction in knowing that our efforts had left OUR RIVER in a healthier and more pleasant state for both wildlife and people.

Note: There are further litter picks on 29 April, 22 July and 14 October. Do come and join in the fun! Details will be on the website and in forthcoming Newsletters.

June Card



Working in the wet for a cleaner environment!



Did you know we're on Facebook now?

Readers of the Press will have seen the announcement on 19 January of plans for an eighteen-million-pound redevelopment of York's Castle Museum over the next nine years and for the wider regeneration of the Castle Gateway area around Clifford's Tower, Coppergate and Piccadilly. The controversial scheme for a new visitor centre embedded into the mound supporting Clifford's Tower has received planning permission. Further plans envisage the reduction in size of the Castle car park to create an open public space between Clifford's Tower and the Eye of York and for the construction of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the River Foss linking the Castle car park to Piccadilly, both welcome projects.

Other opportunities currently exist for the improvement of the eastern bank of the River Foss between Castle Mills Bridge and Piccadilly Bridge. The redundant Ryedale Office Block is to be turned into flats. Also available for redevelopment are the Banana Warehouse and the sites of the NCP and Castle Mills car

Development opportunities

parks: a planning application has already been received to build a hotel and riverside apartments on the NCP site.



The River Foss Society supports plans to deal with this rather neglected area, which has the potential to enhance the attractions of the City of York by improving access to the River Foss. Since the Foss Walkway Project, the joint enterprise of the City of York Council and Arup, was launched in 2000, we have been pressing for continuous foot- and cycle- paths along the river banks.

We have suggested to the York Museums Trust that their plans should include a link between the existing riverside walk within the Castle grounds and the intended walkway between the Foss and a new dual-fronted building on part of the existing Castle car park.

On the other side of the Foss there is a once-in-a-hundred-years opportunity to turn the amenity that has featured in all of the recent "visions" for a better York into a reality by creating a continuous walkway that is linked by an underpass under Castle Mills Bridge to Brownie Dyke and thence to New Walk and Fulford. We have objected to the proposal for the hotel on the NCP site precisely because it makes no allowance for such a walkway. If you agree that this is an opportunity that should be seized, please contact your City of York Councillor and make your views known. At the time of writing (April 20th), no date has been set for consideration by the Planning Committee but the deadline for a decision is 30th May – so hurry!

June Card

On a draughty 21 April morning, 11 members met at Skeldergate Bridge, the third bridge built over the River Ouse in York. Once a toll bridge, it was built to replace an earlier ferry. The toll's removal was celebrated in 1914 when Mr Rhodes Brown was Lord Mayor and Mr Newbald Kay was Sheriff. These two well known families are still prominent as Browns Department store in Davygate and Ware and Kay Solicitors in Peasholme Green.

Strolling out ...

The toll house still exists but the bridge lifting section next to the east bank can no longer be operated. Moving downstream we saw two narrowboats as well as the discharge points for the three emergency pumps at the Foss Barrier. These were installed after the December 2015 Boxing Day flooding. We presumed that the 21 gun salute heard was for the Queen's birthday and not for us!

At Blue Bridge there is a detailed Interpretation Board and the Finger Post indicating the start (or finish ?) of the Foss Walk. A memorial plaque to the late Pat Rattenbury, an energetic past RFS Walks Organiser and Footpaths Officer, is displayed on the Finger Post. We moved on, passing The Novotel (a member) and the room where the RFS Christmas Lunch has been successfully held for some years. There were many interesting comments about the Foss Barrier from its installation 30 years ago

to the present, particularly the last 16 months, and the work still being carried out.



The weir at Castle Mills shows the eel pass on the right

Our last stop was at Castle Mills Lock. Here, a chat about its operation was followed by a look at the water by-passing the Lock with the swivelling/tilting weir controlling the upstream water level. An eel pass has been fitted relatively recently – it isn't known whether it has been used yet! Thanks go to many members for their contributions during the 45 minute walk. The walking group then joined three other members at the Masons Arms to enjoy hearty meals and pleasant socialising. Thanks again there to Scott, Mike and colleagues.

Peter Hopwood

Protecting Fresh Water Life

Our Spring meeting and AGM on 27 April featured a fascinating talk by Anne Heathcote of the Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT), which works nationwide to help restore healthy environments to bodies of fresh water. 'People, Ponds and Water' was launched in 2015 and aims to engage 10,000 people across the UK in activities to protect our wildlife heritage.

The Trust manages ponds as well as collecting information about rare freshwater plants and animals. The basis of these environments **must** be clean water. Without that, freshwater plants and animals disappear and life becomes irrevocably poorer - for everyone. Three quarters of rivers and nine out of ten ponds in the UK are damaged by pollution; this makes freshwater wildlife one of the most threatened areas of the natural world. So an essential part of the work in these environments is collection of water pollution data.

In Yorkshire, several projects are underway, amongst them two 'Flagship' ponds on Strensall Common, identified as a Flagship Pond site due to its exceptional importance for freshwater biodiversity. Although this Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is one of only two extensive areas of open heathland in the Vale of York, it supports a rich mosaic of habitats including mire, ponds, woodland and acid grassland. Like us in RFS, Freshwater Habitats Trust wants a future where all threatened freshwater plants and animals have recovered and developed sustainable populations. It is essential that the UK has a functioning network of freshwater habitats: a 'Freshwater Network'. We all want people to value freshwater habitats and their wildlife as an essential part of the environment.

Two successful work days at Strensall Common united



The team at Strensall Common



World's End Pond on Strensall Common has been cleared of damaging scrub

the FHT and eight other conservation groups including River Foss Society. The team worked to remove encroaching scrub around ponds, opening the water so that a diverse marginal flora for healthy habitats can be reestablished and maintained.

We thank Anne again for telling us more about their important work and wish the Freshwater Habitats trust all the best with their projects.

On the Foss

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