



On the Foss

The River Foss Society Newsletter

**Winter
2015/16**



And the waters rose ...



*Top left: rescue boats patrol Huntington Road;
Top right: Merchant Adventurers' Hall is
surrounded; Middle: Castle Mills lock covered;
Bottom: The Masons' Arms was badly hit*



Christmas 2015 is one already etched, or should we say 'washed', onto the memories of many York residents. Those living on or near the Foss have not known such severe floods since the eighties. When the Environment Agency (EA) lifted the Foss Barrier on the evening of 26th December water quickly moved into many parts of York. Huntington Road, Foss Islands Road, Fishergate, Piccadilly and so many other areas have been badly hit. Businesses and homes are badly damaged. Eerily, the River Foss became the topic of leading stories on national TV and radio. Watching national reports from the bottom of a river-like Huntington Road was a bit strange.

We are told that the barrier was lifted because water was creeping into the area which houses the electrics that control the system. Most have heard the official EA statement: "Had the barrier remained closed, and without the pumps running, the flooding would have been more widespread and many more homes would have flooded."

Many, local and national, have reacted to this statement with bafflement. How can a flood barrier's electrics be threatened with water? Why did this not happen in 2000 when the Ouse rose to its highest recorded level?

Another issue is how this Barrier, and other flood defences, can be adapted to deal with the reality of climate change and the greater rainfall it appears to bring.

The barrier, constructed in 1986/7, is now some thirty years old. Government money has been promised to upgrade the barrier to cope with the increasing flood levels. Let us hope that these plans will be quickly bought forward.

Angry local meetings have seen the EA confronted by flooded residents and businesses and an independent investigation is promised. We fervently hope that all the issues are addressed, and dealt with, for no city, nor its residents, can be asked to live with the threat of what has happened in the days following Christmas. Finally we wish to pass on our sympathy to our members and all of those people who have had the misfortune to have had their property flooded.

Adrian Lovett shares his notes and photos of the 'Flood Experience'

Flood Memories

On Boxing Day morning, alarm bells rang when we had to rescue our swing seat from rising waters at the bottom of the garden. This was followed later by moving our hens into a temporary indoor home as the water rose towards their house.



Early afternoon, and the water was covering Huntington Road, where we saw many cars stranded in the rising water. Soon afterwards, Huntington Road was closed and the first sandbags were delivered.

Early evening, and water crept across the Haley's Terrace junction. From the elevated cycle track, we saw people trying to move things upstairs quickly. Cars and vans were now

surrounded with water. Later in the evening we were shocked to learn of the Barrier being lifted. That proved an anxious night, serenaded by the hens contentedly singing themselves to sleep in baskets in our kitchen.

We heard later of one man who woke in the middle of the night and put his foot down into 6 inches of cold water which had come up under the door and through the floorboards. Imagine the shock!

On the morning of the 27th we found the Haley's Terrace junction deep in



water and rescue boats patrolling up and down Huntington Road.

The community spirit has been absolutely tremendous; a pop up cafe giving away free (or for donations only) tea, coffee, bacon rolls, etc. was set up by ladies who call themselves 'Fossys Flossys' with a sign on their van to prove it!

Our thanks also go to Radio York who kept us notified and to all the rescue services from many other communities, who rescued people and continued to check that they were safe. And thanks also to those distributing mops at the Guildhall!

Top left: A damp start to Boxing Day; Top right: One car never crossed the junction at Haley's Terrace - Nestle is behind; Middle: Huntington Road after the Barrier was lifted on Boxing Day evening; Bottom: Mops for all!



See the enclosed calendar for forthcoming events!

A much needed clean up of the grounds surrounding Yearsley swimming pool and the nearby Foss walk has taken place – thanks to the support of York's Community Payback team.

Led by community payback supervisors, Chris Long and Peter Hackett, a team of 14 offenders worked hard throughout the day to ensure that the area is now spic and span in time for early spring. The project, nominated by the City of York, involved offenders litter picking, clearing vegetation and cutting back overgrown bushes.

Ed Gray, York and Selby Community Payback Manager, said: "This is another excellent example of a community payback project bringing huge benefits to local people. Not only is community

CLEANED UP!

payback onerous and accountable but - on projects like this - it frees up public money to be spent by the local authority on other, vital services."

Community Payback - also known as unpaid work - is a nationwide project where offenders pay back communities for the crimes they have committed, whilst serving community sentences. In York, Community Payback is managed by the Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire Community Rehabilitation Company – a prime provider of local probation services.

Dave Meigh, City of York Council



Newly cleaned steps from Huntington Road down to the Foss footpath

Don't Forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

Castle Mills lock, the gateway between the Foss and the Ouse and the only still-functioning lock on the River Foss Navigation, is operated chiefly by volunteers from the North Riding branch of the Inland Waterways Association. This spares boaters the hefty lock fees that would otherwise be charged by City of York Council, the navigation authority. Lately the IWA has been looking to recruit new members for the

other on the floor of the lock chamber - not ideal in the event of any mechanical failure. As we quickly learned, it's essential to do everything in the right order; for example, slackening off the chain on one side of the lock before attempting to wind in on the other!

Learning the Lock



Michael Cadoux watches trainee Peter turn the winch

volunteer lock keeper team, and so we three trainees found ourselves on a cold but bright November Sunday, ready to be initiated into the mysteries of the lock by old hands Michael Cadoux (IWA branch chair) and Andy Chase.

The first thing we learnt was that the operating system at Castle Mills lock is highly unusual, perhaps unique on British canals. This is not through any exciting technical innovation, however - rather, it's because York City Council was looking to save money when the present lock gates were installed in the 1930s. The chain-winch system adopted for opening and closing the gates means that they do not need to be delicately balanced, unlike the more familiar type of canal lock gates with their long balance beams, and this apparently led to big savings in construction costs. The penalty is that the gates all have to be laboriously winched open and winched shut, drawn by chains crossing over each



Andy Chase demonstrates for Ron

Fortunately, with the Ouse in flood, the water level in the Foss basin was only a foot or so below that above the lock, so very little Foss water was wasted as we practised opening the gates. Michael and Andy made it all look easy, but we three trainees now await - with a certain amount of trepidation - the moment that we may be called upon to put training into practice. I'm sure that IWA will make sure to pair us novices with old hands when phone calls from boaters, requesting passage through the lock, start coming through. More volunteer lock keepers for Castle Mills are still welcome - contact Peter Hopwood if you are interested.

Mark Gladwin

A Start to the Season

From the windows of the River Room at the Novotel where we ate our Christmas Lunch on 2 December, we could see the lowered Foss Barrier and the swirling waters of the Foss as they were pumped around the Barrier, to emerge downstream where the narrow tongue of land separating the Foss from the Ouse was already nearly submerged. A presage of things to come!

Meanwhile, the atmosphere inside was festive. Mike Gray had already entertained us with a beautifully-illustrated talk on "The Birds in your Garden", showing us how an amazing range of birds could be tempted to our bird tables. An aperitif of mulled wine was followed by a seasonal three-course menu and tea or coffee with mince pies. For the 49 members present it was a cheerful start to the Christmas season.

June Card



On a cold but sunny morning volunteers, Jean Nicolson, John and Terry Millett donned wellies and cleared away an accumulation of debris that the floods had deposited against the Interpretation Panel beside the Foss at Earswick. It was a mucky job but well worth doing.

John Millett

Walking the Walk

Bob Jowett recalls the last walk of 2015...

Six walkers, including two non-members, met for the final walk of 2015 on 8 October at the Dutch Farm near Crayke. The day was excellent, with warm, sunny weather and good visibility.

Our route took us towards Mill farm, Woodfield Farm and Beckfield House. The Foss Walk path after Beckfield House had been ploughed, leaving a slight, incomplete footpath. After recent rain this plough was difficult to walk across, with walkers sinking up to their ankles in the sticky mud. With no alternative route, progress proved to be slow, with everyone getting very muddy!

We headed for the dam at Oulston Reservoir for a break and then walked up to Pond Head Farm. The group then walked up to the road, and then turned off down through Black Fir Plantation. We then headed south to Yearsley road, going a short distance into the fields and past Close House.

After a wrong turn and navigating back to the correct



The walkers (above) and at Oulston dam (below)



path, there was a final easy walk to the Dutch House, where we were welcomed as always, with a great meal.

Litter, litter everywhere ...

The final litter pick of 2015 took place on Saturday 17 October. We decided to search a reduced area and concentrate on the Castle Mills lock area and the section of the river down to Blue Bridge. This was as a direct result of the City Council's boat being out of service having a replacement engine and gearbox fitted. Seven volunteers turned up on the day for us to find a significant level of litter in the water. Using different methods, the litter was attracted to the bank side so that it could be safely retrieved.



The volunteers found a lot of litter in the Foss

Combined with the litter taken from the river banks, we had a successful litter pick and filled ten black bin liners. With no CYC vehicle at our disposal, the waste was then taken to the Council Depot in James Street.

There will be three litter picks in 2016 – in April, July and October. The details will appear in our diary of events.

Barry Thomas

Remember the summer!

Community Action for Nature member Julie Edwards photographed this water vole in the Foss last year



DANGER!

Due to the recent flood damage the timber footbridge crossing Black Dike (Grid ref SE6483 6209) close to Walbutt's Farm, Strensall has been closed. The bridge is unstable and must not be used. The CYC plan to repair or replace the bridge as soon as possible.

For more information, please phone the Council's Rights of Way section on 01904 551550. The River Foss Society will be monitoring the situation and will be pressing for the repair to be completed as soon as possible.

On the Foss

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