



# On the Foss

Summer  
2013

The River Foss Society Newsletter

## Strensall Exploration



*Welcome to our Summer issue ...*

We are very sad to announce the recent death of our beloved Founder Bill Sessions. Be sure to read our tribute to Bill inside.

Then just a few days after Bill's death we were saddened to learn of the death of Peter Walls, another of the Society's stalwarts from those early days. Deadlines have precluded a proper article about Peter in this edition, but we shall publish a more fitting tribute to him in our next newsletter.

Because we have devoted a full page to Bill, our regular feature of Tony Ellis' photos cannot appear at this time, but we promise that it will be back in our next *On the Foss*.

Let's have a happy and busy summer on the Foss.

*The Editor*

PS Don't forget to book your tickets to our 40th Birthday Celebration!

On 10 April members Chris Dunn and Tony Berry, who are surveying and recording the Foss Navigation, led an historical walk around Strensall, telling us a lot about the village and the Foss Navigation. On a sunny, warmish day Chris started by explaining how Strensall grew over the years. After walking through the village, we arrived at 'Old Humpty', the New Bridge at Moor Lane. Dated 1798, this has two arches: the main bridge used today which spans the remains of the first of Strensall's two locks and a smaller span crossing the bypass channel built with the locks.

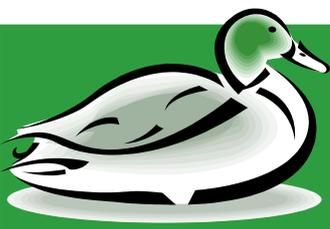
The group walked past the remains of the weir near the Old Tannery towards the 'upper lock' just upstream of Strensall's second road bridge by John Carr. Choking overgrowth has recently been removed, giving many of us our first clear view of this much damaged lock channel. A lot of stone remains, as does some iron machinery.

Although 15 booked for the walk, another 20 or so (local history students) turned up! This is now the largest number of people turning up for any walk. Two new members told us they had enjoyed the event,

*Top left: a lot of the lock channel remains at 'Old Humpty'; top right: this machinery looks ready for work; bottom: Chris stands in the depth of the 'upper' lock, surrounded with some of the remaining stone.*

seeing it as a good start for activities with the society.

After the walk 15 of us enjoyed an excellent – and economic – meal at the Ship Inn. We hope Chris and Tony will lead another walk next year starting at Haxby.



# Summer Fun

## JULY

**Tuesday 2nd** Walk, lunch and visit to Shandy Hall – see details in Spring Newsletter.

**Thursday 4th** Joint Litter Pick with Rotary Club of York Vikings, Yearsley Bridge to Blue Bridge. Meet 2.00 pm on top level of Sainsbury's car park, Foss Bank. Free parking permits available from 1.30 pm at Customer Services. Equipment provided but wear gardening clothes and gloves. Contact June Card (see below).

**Monday 8th** Last opportunity to book for party – see July 23rd below.

**Wednesday 10th** Repeat of the previously enjoyable Boat Trips of almost 3 hours on the Pocklington Amenity Society's narrowboat "New Horizons". Maximum of 12 for a 6.00 pm start. Pre-booking essential. For more details and a booking form contact Peter Hopwood (see below).

**Tuesday 23rd** 40th ANNIVERSARY PARTY AT THE FOLK HALL, NEW EARSWICK,

6.30 - 9.30 pm with buffet supper, bar and entertainment "Buzzing by the River" by Anneliese Emmans Dean. Tickets £10 available in advance only.

Please send cheques, made out to River Foss Society, and s.a.e. to Hilary Shepherd, 7 Mill Hill Drive, Huntington, York YO32 9PU to arrive no later than Tuesday, July 9th.

## AUGUST

**Thursday 8th** Walk 6, Mill Green to Oulston, 4.5 miles. Meet in the car park of the Dutch House on the Crayke to Brandsby road at 10.00 am when you can, if you wish, order lunch. Non-walkers welcome for lunch. Contact Bob Jowett (see below).

**Tuesday 13th** Evening visit to Sheriff Hutton Church and Castles with Church Warden Roy Thompson. Suggested donation to Church funds £3 each payable at start. Meet at Church at 6.00 pm. If you would like a meal afterwards at the Highwayman, please call and order it before the start of the visit. Contact June.

**Wednesday 21st** Possible visit to "Spider T", a restored Humber Sloop based at Keadby Lock. To register an interest, contact Peter.

## SEPTEMBER

**Saturday 7th** Walk 7. Coxwold to Easingwold, about 6 miles. Meet at 10.00 am in the free car park behind the market place at Easingwold. Possibility of pub lunch afterwards. Contact Bob.

**Monday 16th** at 7.30 (Note change of date and time.) A Moth Evening with Dr. David Chesmore in Doug Heald's garden, "Woodlands" 147 Huntington Road adjacent to Yearsley Bridge. Street parking only. Contact June.

## CONTACTS

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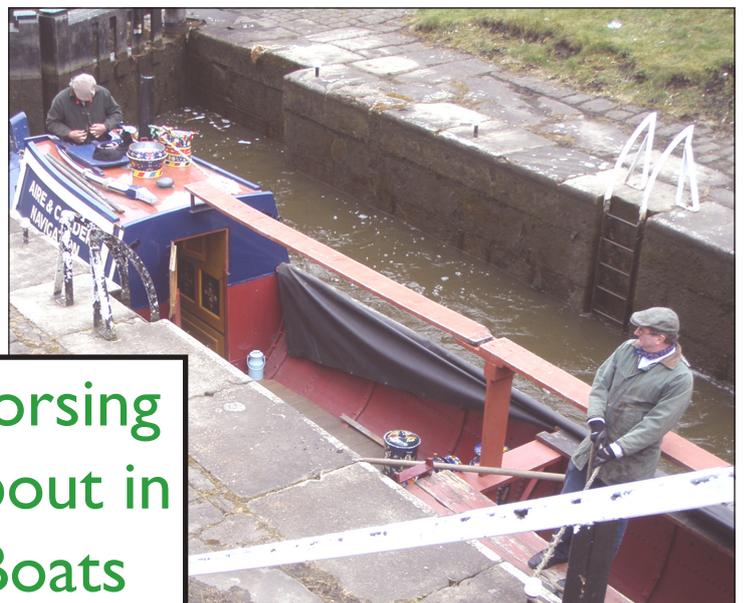
e-mail bob.jowett@bopenworld.com

Responding to a talk that member Adrian Lovett gave to the Society in April 2011, 15 members and friends joined Adrian, Sue Day, the Horseboating Society Chair, horse 'Bilbo Baggins' and horse drawn narrowboat 'Elland' in travelling from the Armley Industrial Museum, Leeds, to Rodley on 11 April. Sue demonstrated the grooming and harnessing of "Bilbo" to us and Museum visitors. We then set off along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, travelling 4.5 miles and going through seven locks (including two three lock staircases) and two swing bridges, to arrive at Rodley. This took longer than planned, so it was then unfortunately too late to visit the Museum after returning by the service bus.

Last year Sue, 'Bilbo' and 'Elland' travelled the 128 miles from Leeds to Liverpool - the first horse drawn boat to do the trip for 60 years.

*Peter Hopwood*

*Narrowboat 'Elland' in a staircase lock with RFS members Adrian Lovett on the tiller and Warwick Burton on the ropes.*



**Horsing  
About in  
Boats**

**Don't Forget our website:**

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

*River Foss Society members and York Citizens alike were saddened to hear of the death of our beloved Founder, Bill Sessions, on 20 May at the age of 97.*

*Two of the Society's earliest members remember Bill ...*

## Bill Sessions – Founder and Friend

The River Foss owes a great deal to Bill Sessions' interest in it. Bill's gentle approach in his relationships with people, and indeed with wildlife, masked a steely determination to achieve anything he undertook. Thus he enthused others to such an extent that they acknowledged the worthiness of his causes so that they too could further them.

His association with the River Foss was almost lifelong, beginning with visits to his grandparents at Duncombe Farm, Strensall. Here he found much to learn about wildlife and in him were planted the seeds of awareness of the need to protect nature from Man. This was particularly so when he witnessed an otter hunt and the cruel aftermath down by the Foss. Later in his life his family moved to Water Meadows, Huntington where he became involved with matters to do with the adjacent river – the Foss. Later he would help to set up both the New Earswick and Sessions Nature Reserves.

It was a natural step to his concept of an organisation devoted to the preservation of the whole of the Foss

As the Society's secretary for a time during the eighties I saw how the Society gradually expanded under Bill's influence. The River Foss was his companion for much of his life, and from his original brilliant idea of publishing the knowledge of Michael Fife and Peter Walls together, he collected people to join him in looking after it. Thus, the River Foss Amenity Society took root.

Although the Society was his creation Bill never overrode a committee decision, but would offer help in furthering a suggestion. He seemed to know everybody, and his influence could be called upon to promote the Society's aims in writing, for instance, to members of the County Council whom he knew personally. If he heard of someone showing an interest in the river he would get in touch with them to find out all about them – and then persuade them to join the Society!

Bill's interest wasn't only in the river; he once gave me



*Bill was saddened by the death of this otter killed on the road near New Earswick*

as a corridor which could be devoted to conservation and sensitive recreation. Thus, he set up the meeting resulting in the River Foss Amenity Society in 1973 ('Amenity' was dropped subsequently).

Soon after this in 1975 the Foss Walk was opened by Major Blashford-Snell in the presence of the Lord Mayor of York, the civic party and members of the Society. Bill's vision of a walk from the confluence with the Ouse and Pond Head has proved very popular. In 1976 the cooling tower on Foss Islands Road was demolished; the watery area with its trees was left vacant. This was the opportunity for the creation of a nature reserve which Bill wholeheartedly supported – he arranged for a pair of Mute Swans to be brought from Abbotsbury. The birds stayed for only one winter, much to Bill's disappointment.

Bill never faltered in his monitoring of the Foss and frequently gently nudged the Society's officers into action – he was always ready to use his many connections.

We are indebted to our Founder; he will be sorely missed.

*John Hampshire*

a huge list of all the plants growing in the field next to the New Earswick Nature reserve.

He would give me sheaves of cuttings from the Press, all neatly dated, to put in the History Scrapbook – a lengthy process which was carried out at intervals! He entrusted some early photographs of the Foss to the Society, and would ask if they were safe; they are indeed treasured in our archive.

He sometimes came on Society walks with an assortment of grandchildren. One of my happiest memories is of a walk up the slope approaching Pond Head, Bill gathering flowers on the way. We all stopped for a breath, Bill turned to speak to us, holding his nosegay behind his back, whereupon a goat came up behind him and took a large mouthful of choice blooms! Everyone enjoyed this, as we always did, the company of that kind, clear-sighted gentle man.

*Shirley Jones*

This year's first walk, from Monk Bridge to Haxby, on 5 March started with the leader (standing in for Bob Jowett) waiting at what he **thought** was Monk Bridge – the pedestrian span linking Foss Islands Road to the De-fra site. Luckily the leader's wife mentioned that there was another. Monk Bridge is actually the bridge dated 1794 which crosses the Foss towards Heworth! Fortunately, no time was lost.

The weather was foggy and cold but dry. Seventeen walkers set off and followed the River Foss going up-



## Stretching Our Legs

Ring Road on the approach to Earswick had been washed away but luckily it was dry enough to get by and Haxby was reached at lunchtime. A gentle but good walk for the new year.

*Tom Claxton*



## Cleaning Day

*Crew of the York Council river barge after the litter pick reclaiming, as always, lots of life buoys!*

As we all know, keeping the Foss and its immediate environs clean is a massive and ongoing task. A litter pick planned for 23 March had to be postponed until 20 April due to bad weather. The new date had lovely Spring weather.

We cleared a lot: the actual River Foss from Castle Mills Lock to Monk Bridge, the banks from Blue Bridge to just above Monk Bridge and part of Foss Islands Nature Reserve.

Besides the usual bags, 13 life buoys, one tyre, one six gallon beer barrel (unfortunately empty!) and a shopping trolley were collected. Though the banks were generally well cleared, there was still some rubbish in and at the sides of the river which could not be managed.

We were pleased to learn that Julian and a colleague hoped to take the boat out later to finish the collection which we were not able to complete. Our thanks go to Julian for another great effort skippering the City of York Council boat and dealing with the rubbish later.

*Peter Hopwood*

## Walking Through History

Our member Dr Neil Moran, who leads history walks around York, took a group of members on our own



*Looking at the remains of St Leonard's Hospice*

history trip around the city on 27 April. Unfortunately it was an extremely cold day with some bright sunshine interspersing the freezing showers.

Starting in Museum Gardens and the many points of interest there, we headed across the Ouse, along North Street, across Ouse Bridge and then onto King's Staith down to Blue Bridge. After Castle Mills lock we headed back to Clifford's Tower where Neil completed the walk. From there we rushed to the wonderfully warm Masons' Arms for a hearty lunch!

Neil's sharing of his encyclopaedic knowledge reminded us of so much of the past of our wonderful city.

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