



On the Foss

The River Foss Society Newsletter

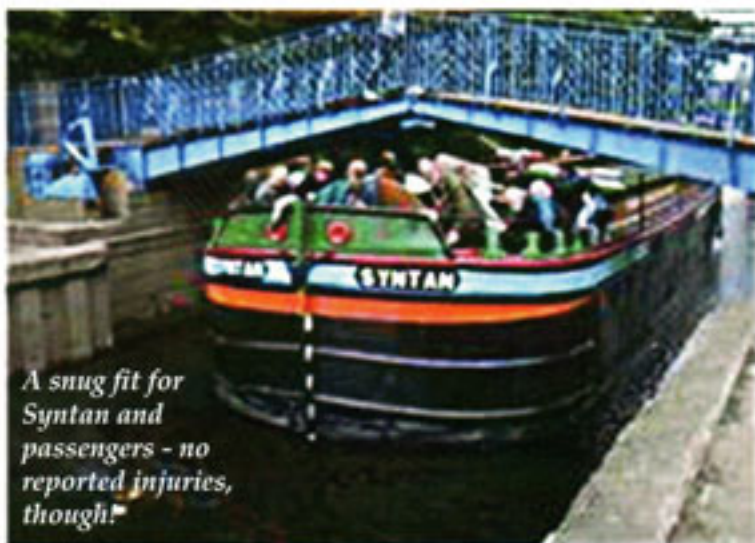
Autumn
2010

Messing About in Boats

On 1 May the Society supported the Open Day organised by the Inland Waterways Association. A number of local politicians attended along with interested visitors. Boat trips going upstream from the Lock were available on the cruiser 'Samantha' provided and crewed by Adrian Lovett, a Society member, and on the broadbeam 'Moonriver'. These were much appreciated by those who took part.

After last year's interest, visits to the barge 'Syntan' on 14 and 22 July during this year's Festival of the Rivers proved to be just as popular and happy occasions. After leaving King's Staith and travelling down the River Ouse, Barge 'Syntan' turned into the River Foss, passed under the Foss Barrier, through the Foss Basin and Castle Mills Lock (operated by trained Inland Waterways Association volunteers – thank you!), past the Merchant Adventurers Hall, turning at Rowntree Wharf and mooring behind the Telephone Exchange.

Whilst moored, Skipper Tony, aided by his crew,



A snug fit for Syntan and passengers - no reported injuries, though!

gave a very interesting talk about the restoration of 'Syntan'. The reverse trip then followed. The variable weather caused some concern for the first date about insufficient water in the River Foss to operate the Lock, and for the second date about too much water in the River Ouse to get under Blue Bridge!

After the deduction of expenses, two much appreciated donations were made to the Beverley Barge Preservation Society which is responsible for the restoration and operation of 'Syntan' and which is now working on another Barge, 'Sun'.

Peter Hoptwood

A Day at the Races ...



Once again we worked with the local branch of the Inland Waterways Association to set up a riverside stall on 11th July, Dragon Boat Race Day. This yearly race is another part of the Festival of Rivers.

Unfortunately, during the day our gazebo on the Ouse bank was in danger of being blown over by very high gusting winds, which restricted what we could display. The Lord Mayor and Sheriff of York were amongst the visitors interested in the Society's activities, and overall it was an enjoyable day.

*Left to right: Coun. Sue Galloway (Lord Mayor),
Coun. Carol Runciman (Sheriff's Lady),
Coun. Richard Watson (Sheriff), John Millett*

What's happening this autumn



Wednesday 22 September, 10.00 am

FOSS WALK 5: Coxwold to Easingwold

Meet at 10.00 am at Easingwold in the Galtres car park. From the south, from Stillington or the Easingwold by-pass, turn right towards the Market Square and then right at the signpost to the free car park, behind the tennis courts (GR695521). The walk of about 6 miles will be at an easy pace and will finish at about 1.30 pm, so bring a picnic lunch. Please phone Bob Jowett in advance – 01904 764702 – if you are coming so he can arrange for you to be taken to the start.

Saturday 9 October, 10.00 am

FOSS WALK 6: Towthorpe to Sheriff Hutton

Meet at 10.00 am in the layby on the Stillington road just off the Strensall to Sheriff Hutton Road near the bridge and cricket club (GR631646). This walk of about 5.5 miles will be at an easy pace and should finish soon after 1.30 pm. Bring a picnic lunch and phone Bob Jowett as above.

Wednesday 20 October, 7.00 pm

OPEN MEETING at Strensall and Towthorpe Village Hall

Our open meeting will feature 'Enhancing Wildlife along the Foss Corridor', a talk by Claire Jackson, Wetlands Officer of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. This will be followed by refreshments. As always, all are welcome.

Sunday 5 December, 11.15 am

CHRISTMAS LUNCH at the Novotel, Fishergate, York

Lunch will be served at 12.30 pm in the River Room at £15.95 per head, including 3 courses, mince pies and coffee. It will be preceded at 11.15 am by a talk on the Foss Islands Nature Reserve. Orders and payment are required before the end of October. Menus will be available at the Open Meeting or from June Card.

Doing Our Bit



As part of the 'Mid Summer Clean Up', a City of York Council (CYC) initiative, the Society worked with York Viking Rotary Club to put together a team of 17 volunteers to pick litter on 8 July.

We covered footpaths on both sides of the river from Monk Bridge to Yearsley Bridge as well as the footpath from Foss Islands Road to the Castle car park via Rowntree's Wharf. We also worked on the CYC pontoon to scoop litter from the river. In all, we collected fifteen sacks of litter. Many thanks to Ian Dunn, York's Street Environmental Officer for supplying the black bags and litter pickers and for arranging collection afterwards.

Explosive moments

One of the results of low rainfall this summer was that during July, a bomb was found on 9 July in the Foss near Towthorpe. The York Press reported that a member of the public saw the bomb's fins sticking out of the low waters whilst walking on Towthorpe Road. Police arrived quickly and they in turn requested help from bomb disposal experts from Catterick Garrison.

Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal told us that the bomb was an unexploded WWII British aircraft practice bomb. Weighing 14kg, these shells were filled with sand and produced only smoke and flame on landing. This one was likely used in exercises on or near Strensall Common Army firing ranges. Sometimes, devices like this were simply dumped when no longer needed. Early fly tipping?

After identification and the usual safety precautions being put in place the device was destroyed at about 9.30 am by the unit. There appears to be no damage to the river or the banks. With the very low level of water at the time of the incident, fish stocks were low.

Many thanks to Inspector Vicky Taylor of North Yorkshire Police and Penny Veale, North of England Army Press Officer for the information supplied.

Hidden Habitats

One of York's hidden gems, the Foss Islands Nature Reserve, was established in the 1970s by our Society working with the City of York. Thirty three people, including 6 non-members, visited the Reserve on 18 August, led by David Houldershaw, Environmental Consultant for the Hungate project. David began by explaining the programme of environmental work and creation of new wildlife habitats in protected areas.

Just inside the Reserve is an area once paved, but now uncovered and allowed to seed naturally. Wildflower seed from Strensall Common will be scattered on this area next spring. An otter holt – giving the animals complete darkness and a birthing area – has been built here. Holts help to ensure that otters can move around their large territories safely. David gave us a smell of otter spraint (poo to you and me) collected the night before on the River Nidd. Surprisingly for a carnivorous animal, this smelt more of fresh cut hay. Spraint can persuade otters to use the holt, as they want to establish territories if they smell evidence of 'foreign' otters.

BBC Radio York's Dougie Weake interviewed David and then asked June Card about the River Foss Society's involvement with the Nature Reserve. He was treated to a whiff of otter spraint whilst on air!



Peaceful King's Pool

We moved to the banks of the Kings Pool, the remaining part of a large lake, once part of York's medieval defences. The Pool almost disappeared after the Foss was canalised, and once drained in 1854, this became an industrial area, with the York Gas Light Company and York Corporation's Power station and refuse destructor served by a railway branch line. The Pool is now screened by trees.

Ongoing work includes judicious pruning of trees and shrubs to let more daylight into the area, the prunings neatly stacked to provide wild life habitats, and the ingenious dredging of the Pool. A family of swans, including a large juvenile (still in grey feathers) nested this year in the middle of the pool.

Many bat and bird boxes have been provided. It's hoped that the large population of Canada Geese, often aggressive, could be controlled by oiling some of the eggs to prevent development by blocking air. The geese do not lay new ones as the eggs do not appear damaged or broken. Strong wire fencing, planted with a thorn hedge, was also now in situ to protect the Reserve from vandalism.

The public viewing platform, outside but looking into the Reserve, is at the end of a path also leading to the site of a future footbridge connecting Hungate to the opposite side of the Foss.

This was the first visit to the Reserve for most of us and it was fascinating. It is wonderful to know that just a few feet from busy Foss Islands Road, so much natural life is sustained and should continue to develop with a little help from us.

Out and About

Wednesday 23rd June: Foss Walk from Oulston to Newburgh Priory.

We had a warm sunny day for this event, which 15 members attended. Our walk from Oulston was completed with a picnic on the lawn of Newburgh Priory with a superb view overlooking the lake in the grounds. After lunch we were given a conducted tour of the house, led by the son of the owner. This house stands on the site of an Augustinian Priory founded in 1145 and is steeped in history. It contains a tomb which allegedly contains some of Oliver Cromwell's bones.

The house tour was followed by a walk around the extensive garden. We finished the day in the tea room where we enjoyed afternoon tea and delicious home baked sponge.



Our leader braves the chill winds

We eagerly anticipated a bird watching walk on 25 May at Strensall Common led by keen birder John Millett. Unfortunately, changeable weather brought a cold, chilly wind across the common. As a result the number of birds was saw was limited. At the start of the walk we had good views of a Willow Warbler singing in a nearby tree. Further across the common we saw several Chaffinches and a Mistle Thrush, whilst a Cuckoo was calling in the distance.

We were hoping to see Stonechats but it seemed that the extremely cold winter had forced them to warmer climes. After the walk we met in the warmer clime of Thompson's Fish Restaurant and enjoyed supper.

10th June Walk and Social Evening with The Friends of New Walk

Our evening walk along the Ouse started at St. George's Field, where we formed two groups under the knowledgeable leadership of John and Chris Dowell. They showed us points of interest along New Walk



including Pikeing Well, popular in the 18th century for its healing powers, and the tramway, apparently disappearing into a high brick wall, used to transport supplies shipped from Woolwich Arsenal to the former military base. Crossing the Millenium Bridge we walked back past Rowntree Park with its beautiful World War II memorial gates. The evening ended with a convivial supper at the Lowther on King's Staith and a vote of thanks to Shirley Woolhouse, Secretary of the Friends of New Walk, the organiser.

13th July Foss Walk 3: Blue Bridge to Huntington

As part of York's Festival of the Rivers, the Society volunteered to lead a walk along the Foss from Blue Bridge to Huntington Church. Members were joined by several visitors interested in the history of the urban reaches of the Foss. Alas, we never did reach Huntington Church, as the heavens opened as we reached the Link Road. Peter Hopwood came to our rescue, ferrying us to June's house where we enjoyed the fish and chips we had thoughtfully pre-ordered as we passed Haley's Terrace.

12th August Foss Walk 4: Marton Abbey to Yearsley

The only visible remains of Marton Abbey are the outlines of the fish ponds and a few stones rebuilt into the present farmhouse. From here we had a short morning walk including the Crayke Estate permissive path adorned with mosaic plaques of wildlife to celebrate the Millenium. This took us to Mill Green Farm, run by a young Dutch couple as a Centre for developing the link between art and nature. We explored their impressive ecological garden before eating a delicious Dutch salad in the cafe. Fuelled for the second part of the walk, we crossed the Foss by stepping stones, saw where its flow was controlled at Pond Head and took another opportunity to see its source.

Don't Forget our website:
www.riverfossociety.co.uk

Early on 24 August a sewage spill occurred from the outfall from Strensall's small sewage works 110 metres north of 'Old Humpy' bridge. The spill, described as extremely smelly black liquid and solids flowing down a 20 inch pipe, turned the river water black. Coinciding with a severe thunderstorm and a local power failure which presumably caused the containment tanks to overflow to the river, this was discovered by John Chapman of Strensall Parish Council who, with his Community Payback team, was doing repair work to the footpath nearby. A small amount of sewage was still leaking into the river at 7.30pm. The spillage was reported to the Environmental Agency (Incident no. 816084) and to the Yorkshire Water Authority (Incident no. H774717).

More happily, John Chapman and the Community Payback team have repaired the steps on both sides of 'Old Humpy', as well as the footpath near the small sewage works. This path, once in danger of collapsing into the river, was repaired by pegging and boarding the path banks before bringing in 2 tonnes of broken stone to consolidate the surfaces. Our thanks go to John and his team for this work which has made a vast improvement to the paths in this area.

John Millett

2010 Yearly Subscription

Thanks to the many members who have already paid this year's subscription either before or since the recent first reminder! For those who have not yet paid their subscription, or wishing to join, the subscription rates for 2010 are:

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

Please make payment by cheque made out to the 'RIVER FOSS SOCIETY' and send it 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. Your Membership Card will be sent as a receipt.

Please make any queries to the Membership Officer on (01904 768071) or chrisandpete@haxby147.fsnet.co.uk.

Peter Hopwood

June Card, Secretary Tel 01904 766796
Stable Mews, the Old Village
Huntington, York YO32 9RA
e-mail: junecard@waitrose.com