



Pulling Together



What a whopper!

Each year, as Midsummer approaches, it's time again for members of RFS to tackle the invasive Himalayan Balsam growing along so much of the Foss. Imported for gardens over a century ago, this plant is a big problem for rivers as it loves damp, grows tall in low light and can kill off native species by shading. This can cause river bank erosion.

Worse still, the seed pods explode on touch, releasing up to 800 seeds into the air as far as 7m away. Viable for two years, the seeds can be transported downstream. Flowers and seeds form around midsummer so the plants must be removed before.



The culprit

A hard-working team pulled hundreds of plants

Until other control methods are developed, the only way to try to control the plant along the Foss is to pull as much as possible before seeding. Luckily, the shallow roots make it easy to remove. We cannot remove or burn pulled plants, but doing as much pulling as we can is very important. By pulling **one** plant we can prevent up to another 800 new plants forming.

This year's campaign saw 12 members working in perfect weather near Earswick. Despite the fact that Himalayan Balsam grows amongst nettles, a lot was achieved.

both on the banks and footpaths.

Telling it all

A new Interpretation Panel has been installed beside the footbridge over the Foss at Strensall Tannery. The panel is similar in design to the panel installed on Earswick Chase. (See *On the Foss* Summer 2014). It describes the varied wildlife of the Foss, especially the water voles, as well as giving an overview of the river and River Foss Society.

Our thanks go to Strensall Ward Committee for sanctioning a grant for the panel, to Strensall Parish Council for their assistance and also to Mrs Bartle of The Allerton Property Management for allowing the panel to be installed on the Tannery site.

John Millett



Installing the board



Looking Ahead ...

JULY

Wednesday 13th Evening Walk C, Crayke. Meet at the Durham Ox pub at 6 pm for a walk of about 5 m followed by optional meal. Contact Anne Bednarski.

Tuesday 19th Day trip. Mid-morning cruise on Ripon Scenic Cruise's boat[s] from Ripon Basin along the Ripon Canal and River Ure to Westwick Lock. Number required and limited to 12 members (or now probably 24). Followed by 4.25 mile walk back. There will be a chance to cruise back, or part of the way, for a small extra charge. For details and to reserve a place contact Peter Hopwood.

Saturday 23rd Litter pick by boat and on foot from Blue Bridge to Yearsley Baths for approximately 2 hours. Meet at 9.30 am at the footbridge opposite Morrisons on Foss Islands Road wearing protective clothing. It would be helpful to know in advance if you intend to come. Contact Barry Thomas.

AUGUST

Tuesday 2nd Evening visit from 7 – 9 pm to the Bell Tower of York Minster, £10 including a drink, for which we need a group of between 20 and 25. Booking essential, please, by Sunday July 17th. Contact June Card.

Saturday 13th Additional event. 4 – 5 hour Humber Sail, starting at lunchtime, on the Humber Keel & Sloop Preservation Society's "Comrade" from Hull Marina upstream, hopefully as far as the Humber Bridge. Please see 14th August.

Sunday 14th Additional event. As the Sail on the 13th is fully booked and most have already paid, the trip will be repeated but 45 minutes later due to tidal conditions. For details and to reserve a place contact Peter Hopwood.

Sunday 14th Huntington Parish Council Gala at the Huntington Sports Club. If you are able to lend a hand with the River Foss Society's stand, please contact June Card.

Wednesday 17th Day Walk 5, Circular (flat) Walk of about 5 m to Derwent Barrier. Take A19 towards Selby then A63 eastwards. Turn right, drive through Barmby-in-the-Marsh and park in the Barrier car park for a 9.30 am start. Contact Bob Jowett.

Tuesday 23rd Evening Walk D at Castle Howard. Meet at the Crown and Cushion pub in Welburn at 6 pm for a walk of not more than 5 m. Contact Anne Bednarski.

Thursday 25th Changed event. Unfortunately, Neil Moran's History Walk has had to be cancelled. The good news is that Will Durrant has kindly stepped into the breach with the offer of an evening Nature Walk of about 2 hours. Meet at 6 pm in the car park at Lock Cottage on the Haxby Road, on the right hand side coming from York just before New Earswick. Contact June Card.

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 1st Evening Walk E, Strensall. Meet at the Ship Inn car park at 6 pm. If you require supper choose from the pub menu and order before we start the walk. Return for supper at 8 pm. If you wish to take part, please notify John Millett.

Tuesday 6th Day Walk 6, Allerthorpe. 5 m Circular Walk starting at 9.30 am. From A1079 Hull road turn right towards Sutton-upon-Derwent. After entering Allerthorpe Common, turn left and park in the second car park (GR 752/473). Contact Bob Jowett.

Thursday 15th A day in Stillington. Park at the Village Hall and meet at 10.30 am for coffee at the White Bear, where, after a morning walk around the historic village guided by Grahame Richardson, lunch will be available. There will be a gentle, 3 m afternoon walk in the surrounding countryside. Bookings for lunch essential before Friday September 2nd, please. Contact June Card.

Monday 19th Additional event. Day trip on the Yorkshire Waterways Museum's "Waterstart" from Selby along the Selby Canal, upstream on the River Aire, possibly stopping for a buffet lunch at Beal, then west along the Aire & Calder Navigation to Ferrybridge, from where there will be a bus back to Selby. For details and to reserve a place, contact Peter Hopwood.

OCTOBER

Thursday 6th Day Walk 7. Circular Walk of about 5 m from Farlington via Whenby. Meet at 9.30 am in the car park of the Blacksmith's Arms, Farlington. Contact Bob Jowett.

Wednesday 12th "A Year on the River Foss", a presentation about their special project by a group from the York Photographic Society. Starting at 7 pm at the Strensall & Towthorpe Village Hall, this is an Open Meeting to which non-members are warmly welcome.

Saturday 15th Litter pick of about 2 hours on foot and by boat. Meet at 9.30 am at the footbridge opposite Morrisons on Foss Islands Road wearing protective clothing. Contact Barry Thomas, who would find it very helpful to have names in advance.

Monday 17th 6.15 to 7.45 pm, a visit to the City of York Archives, where our own archives are now stored. There is a charge of £3 each and a group maximum of 16. If oversubscribed, an overflow visit can be arranged for a week later. Please book before October 12th or at the Open Meeting. Contact June Card.

Don't forget! Our Christmas Lunch will be held at the Novotel, Fishergate, on Sunday 4th December at a cost of £20.95 per head. Further details and booking information will be available in the next Newsletter and at the Open Meeting. Contact June Card.

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Spring In Our Steps

On 5 April seven walkers – and a dog – met at the Dutch House, Crayke and headed for Woodfield Farm on the Foss Walk. Passing Burton House, the group reached Oulston Reservoir via the stepping stones and enjoyed a coffee break. The return route used a muddy Brierham Lane



Walkers took a break at Oulston Reservoir

and then negotiated the stepping stones again. Walking via Close House, we returned to the Dutch house and had a lovely lunch there.

It was disappointing to note that the signage on the route is not ideal, and some stiles need attention.

Philip Manders

On 12 May, a hot, sunny day, a group of seven walkers met in Newton upon Derwent near the Half Moon Pub at 9.30am. We headed south down the main street and then south on the main road. Turning towards St Lois Farm, we walked south at Sutton Woods, keep-

ing the woods on our right. At the end of the woods we headed west to the River Derwent.

On the river, we walked north along the river bank. Enjoying the day we car-



Walkers at the Half Moon Pub



Good walking along the Derwent

ried on past our turn at Mask Lane for a bit. Retracing our steps to Mask Lane, we headed back to the cars and drove to the St Vincent Arms, Sutton upon Derwent, where six of us had a lovely lunch following a dry, easy walk.

Bob Jowett

Evening Walking



Prepared to get wet - the hardy walkers are ready



Meeting an obstruction ... so into the oilseed rape!

On 19 May, despite pouring rain, a group of about a dozen walkers enjoyed a circular route on our first Evening Walk, taking in the villages of Firby and Westow. One memorable aspect of the walk was the obstruction of the footpath by a pile of manure which forced a diversion through a field of oilseed rape.

A lovely meal was had at the Stone Trough pub with an open fire to dry out the soggy walkers.

On 6 June, 22 walkers and one dog assembled in the quiet village of Moor Monkton in beautiful early summer weather to enjoy our second evening walk of the season.

We ambled through fields, via Red House School and along the River Ouse, where we passed the Yorkshire



A beautiful evening, celebrated by 22 walkers and a dog

Water pumping station. We then turned left at the confluence of the Ouse and Nidd, and headed back to the village. We were given a warm welcome at the Red Lion pub where we enjoyed a hearty meal.

Philip Mander



Passing the pumping station lake

At April's Annual General Meeting three loyal, long serving committee members retired.



Changes Afoot

John Hampshire, our Vice Chairman, who has been a member for many years, took over as Treasurer in 1994 and since that time has served as Chairman, Vice

Chairman or Secretary. John has always believed in the value of the Society, for prior to 2005 we were going through a bad patch with the loss of leaders and members. John, with the help of Peter Hopwood, held the Society together, recruiting new members. They printed and delivered a thousand leaflets titled "Keep the Society Going" and we have not looked back since. John wishes to be a shadow committee member, kept involved with the decision making, but not involved in the day to day running. So we can only say 'Thank you, John' for all the time and effort you have put in to helping to make the Society what it is today.

June Card is also standing down from the committee. Since joining in 2006, June has been the backbone of the Society, initially taking on the work of Secretary; because of June's organisational skills this work soon evolved into looking after Events Planning and Planning Applications. June is a very sociable person, and has a great skill in remembering people's names and faces. This helps members feel welcome. Although leaving the committee, June will continue to look after Planning Applications and report to the committee as necessary. I'm sure that she will retain a keen interest in the Society and help out where necessary.

Tom Claxton is also leaving the committee. Tom joined the Society in 2004 and soon joined the committee where he took on the onerous task of setting up our webpage, a task which he tackled single-handed without assistance from the committee. As a regular member of the walking group, his camera is never far away and his photographs of group events and walks appear in the newsletter and on the web alongside a host of interesting comments recorded on the day. We look forward to meeting up with Tom as he is keen to continue joining in the Foss Walking group.

There have also been other changes in our committee. Alison Scott has joined the committee as our Secretary, and our previous hard working Secretary Marjorie Burton has taken over the distribution of these newsletters from Ann Lang, who did such a wonderful job for several years. Mike Gray is another new committee member who from September will take over as Events Organiser. Mike has also undertaken the role of building up the wildlife section of the new website.

John Millett

Payment, Please!

Many thanks to all members who have paid so far this year – about three quarters of you. You really rallied to the call in the first newsletter of the year. Would any member whose money is still outstanding please remit it as soon as possible. If you have any queries about the amount or how to pay, contact Elaine either by phone (01904 769168) or email: membership@riverfossociety.co.uk. Looking forward to the deluge!

Elaine Mepham

It's a shock to realise that it has been a full six months since York was devastated by the Boxing Day floods which were a result of the Foss Barrier being lifted.

Much has happened since - public meetings have been held, money promised for repair and upgrading of the Barrier and enquiries initiated.

Perhaps one of the most important achievements has been the Environment Agency's commissioning of a report about the incident, its causes and suggestions for remedial action. This

report is available via the Environment Agency's website home page (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency).

All along, the River Foss Society has been involved, with committee members attending some of the public meetings. We are able to contribute to identifying improvements in water management and have now been asked for opinions and ideas about preventative measures. We will be recommending that the Independent Flood Enquiry Group considers the following measures:

- construction of additional flood water retention lagoons at the former Haxby Water Treatment Plant site and at Walbutts Water Treatment Plant at Strensall
- construction of a "leaky dam" at Black Dyke, Strensall to slow the release of water
- raising the weir height at Oulston Reservoir to increase storage capacity
- re-installation of groynes originally constructed to conserve fish stocks at Strensall, Earswick and Haxby, to slow water flow.

Representatives of the Society have also met with the Environment Agency to discuss various issues.

Rest assured that the River Foss Society is working hard to ensure that what happened six months ago will never happen again.





"New Horizons" in the lock at Gardham (left), where some of our members put their backs into winding up the lock gate paddle (above).

Visiting old friends

On 26 May afternoon and evening trips were made on the Pocklington Canal Amenity Society (PCAS) trip boat "New Horizons" from the Melbourne Arm west to Gardham Lock and Swing Bridge and back. The weather was better than forecast, being dry and reasonably warm, although not really suitable for using the picnic tables at Gardham!

Most members managed to see a barn owl and a heron and to hear a cuckoo as well as helping with the swing bridges and lock, and also trying their hand on the tiller. Thanks are due again to our friends at PCAS – Bob for arranging the bookings and the crew for both trips: Alastair, Roger and Ed. The RFS members have met Alastair and Roger on previous successful trips in 2013 and 2014. Roger says that they like to volunteer for crewing when they know the RFS is coming!!!



Both the afternoon trip (above) and the evening trip (below) were fully booked



2018 marks the bicentenary of the opening of the canal and the PCAS are working hard to reopen navigation east to Bielby by then. The 9.5 mile canal is home to Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the Canal & River Trust has received a grant of almost £500k from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is separate to the PCAS restoration project funded by the PCAS Bicentenary Appeal. The HLF money will be used for improvement of wildlife habitats on the present non-navigable length of canal between Melbourne and Canal Head, visitor and volunteer activities, interpretation signs and leaflets, and work at two bridg-

es. PCAS expect to have considerable input and involvement but none of the money. There is an indirect financial benefit because the dredging for wildlife will mean that PCAS will need to spend less on dredging for navigation.

Peter Hopwood

From 12 July you will see a new

WWW - What a Wonderful Website!

website for River Foss Society. The site includes several new features and will continue to tell you about upcoming events as well as bringing you news and photographs of your activities on the Foss. We'd like to see your pictures of the Foss from present day walks and events as well as any old photos you might have. And we'd like to see wildlife photos you've taken.

We want to thank Tom Claxton, who recently left the committee after being Webmaster for many years. Tom set up the River Foss Society website and put a lot of time and energy into running it single handed. We hope that we can do as well.

It's just possible that during 'switchover' the site may

be down for a small time, but it will be worth waiting. Remember, we'll be using the same address: www.riverfossociety.co.uk

On the Foss

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C18th Folly or C21th Power Station?

Well, both, really. Howsham Mill was recorded in the Domesday book but when its successor needed rebuilding in the late eighteenth century, the owners of Howsham Hall called in York architect John Carr to design a structure that would enhance their view from the Hall down towards the River Derwent. The result was, on three sides, a charming stone-built pavilion in the gothic style, surmounted by a statue of Diana, the goddess of hunting, a reference to the use of the adjoining parkland. Only on the brick-built fourth side facing the river did the building betray its utilitarian function. The mill was abandoned in 1947 and fell into ruinous decay. It was not until 2003 that the Renewable Heritage Trust was founded to rescue and secure the future of Howsham Mill.

A group of members of the River Foss Society visited the Mill on May 8th in idyllic weather. We were shown some of the equipment from the old mill, including two millstones, one of native millstone grit for grinding cattle feed and the other of imported quartz for producing the more refined flour for human consumption. (In



John Shepherd's photo of Howsham mill from the water

electricity. In addition, an Archimedes Screw has been installed to exploit the drop in water levels from above to below the weir. The Archimedes Screw, an invention of ancient times, was used to raise water from lower to higher levels, most famously in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Its descendant at Howsham is the first in England and is used in reverse to power a turbine. Together, the wheel and the screw generate 30W of electricity and this will soon be boosted to 70W by the installation of a second screw. The electricity produced is fed into the National Grid, providing an income for the upkeep of the Mill and its educational and community projects. What a wonderful win-win solution to the problem of preserving a little architectural gem!

June Card

In her talk at the Annual General Meeting, member Dr. Margaret Atherden told us about her research into the plants to be found along the verges of roads in North Yorkshire. Some of the country lanes were formerly drovers' roads used for the movement of farm animals; others arose after the Enclosure Acts. Because of the high cost of laying down a metal surface, only a central strip was treated, leaving the green borders we see today.

These are not uniform: verges have a profile starting with the edge of the road surface and moving through zones back to the hedges, walls or trees that form their boundary. What flourishes on them depends on the soil, aspect and competition among species. Verges also have to fight their enemies. These include garden mowers intent on turning them into lawns, salt deposited for winter road-gritting, heavy-handed flailing of hedges and cutting at the wrong time of year.

The Wild Flowers of the Verges



Nevertheless verges serve a number of purposes. Agriculturally they are used for grazing and hay-making and we all enjoy a picnic on a pleasant green roadside. Today they have an enhanced value for their connectivity. It is not enough to set up small nature reserves dotted around the countryside: to ensure the survival and biodiversity of their animals and plants: these havens must be connected. In the verges of our roads there is a ready-made network along which species can move.

About half of North Yorkshire's plant species have been found on the road verges, including several beautiful orchids. In Dr. Atherden's experience, these crucial life-lines are best protected when groups of willing volunteers work under the guidance of professionals who understand the ecology of the verge.

June Card