



There have been numerous sightings of otters on the Foss at Strensall, but we were thrilled that a couple of recent sightings have been backed up with a photograph. The fact we are seeing more otters would seem to indicate that the river is healthy and producing a good supply of fish. It's also good to see otters away from the roads where several have been killed by traffic.

The Otters Are Here!



Dave Russell saw this otter a couple of times

This otter was photographed about half a mile north of the Sherriff Hutton road bridge and taken by Strensall man Dave Russell. Dave was walking his dog early one morning when he spotted the otter, but unfortunately he did not have his camera handy.

at roughly the same spot, the otter was still to be seen. This time Dave had his camera ready and took the shot. Many thanks to Dave for passing on the photo.

However the following morning at a similar time, and

John Millett

Working for flood control: the way forward

The report of the inquiry into the York Boxing Day 2015 floods was published in January 2017 and can be accessed at https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/12456/york_flood_inquiry_main_report

This report reviews critically the response of statutory agencies to the flooding, after it happened. But improving future flood protection is the Environment Agency's job. The EA is working at three levels:

- A £17m upgrade of the Foss Barrier – due for completion later this year;
- A £45m five-year plan for other flood defences in the city;
- An uncosted long term plan to tackle causes of flooding upstream on a whole-catchment scale.

Work on the Barrier will:

- increase pumping capacity from 30 cubic metres per second (cumecs) to 50 cumecs;
- rebuild the pumphouse to raise electrical equipment above flood level; and
- install a failsafe power supply system. As part of the five-year plan, the height of the Barrier gate and flood walls will be raised to allow for higher levels in the Ouse.

The five-year plan is a consultation, not an action plan. It divides York into ten areas. For the Foss, it envisages a storage lagoon near the junction of Haxby Road and the Outer Ring Road; dredging at six spots between Huntington and Monk Bridge; and several embankments and flood walls, the most prominent being a flood wall

from Monk Bridge to Yearsley Bridge. Replacing fixed weirs with tilting weirs has also been suggested.

The long-term plan is even more speculative. Ideas include: changing the planning system to require greater flood resilience in new developments; improving flood forecasting and warnings; and "slowing the flow" through upstream storage and natural flood management techniques such as washland creation, tree planting, changes to land drainage and re-creation of meanders.



Something must be done now to prevent scenes like this

Some proposed actions, especially dredging, could, if badly handled, put wildlife at risk, and the River Foss Society will need to be vigilant as plans develop. Equally, some aspects of "slowing the flow" are likely to be controversial with landowners and farmers, and it will be interesting

to see which ideas survive the political process.

Please visit our River Foss Society website to read an extended version of this article. All the plans are described in an EA booklet, *How we're reducing the risk of flooding for York: Our 5-year plan*. This can be downloaded free from their website at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/568910/EA_York_Flood_Action_Plan_FINAL.pdf

Comments on the plan are invited at yorkfloodplan@environment-agency.gov.uk, and we hope that many members of the River Foss Society will take this opportunity.

Mark Gladwin



A new year ...

MARCH

Tuesday 7 Walk 1: Foss Blue Bridge to Huntington or Haxby 4 or 5½ miles linear. Return by public transport. Pub meal afterwards. Meet at 9.30 am at the Blue Bridge – Foss/Ouse junction, York. Contact Bob Jowett.

APRIL

Friday 7 Walk 2: Coxwold to Easingwold 6 miles linear. 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. Meet at Easingwold free car park. Start: 9.30 am. Contact Bob Jowett.

Friday 21 Spring walk and talk (optional) and Lunch at the Mason's Arms. Meet 11.45 am at Skeldergate Bridge, east. Lunch at 12.30 at Masons' Arms. Contact Peter Hopwood. Limited to 20 people.

Thursday 27 AGM Anne Heathcote, Project Officer, will speak on The Work of the Freshwater Habitat Trust. Meet at 7.00 pm at Strensall Village Hall.

Saturday 29 Litter Pick. Meet at the Round Bridge on Foss Islands Road at 9.30. Wear protective clothing including gloves. Contact Barry Thomas, who will give information about parking.

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You'll find a full list of events on the sheet enclosed with this issue, and of course, in the Events calendar on our website

The Rivers Trust, backed by a number of organisations such as the Environment Agency, has set up a project encouraging communities to become involved in monitoring and protecting their local rivers.

Help us learn more about the River Foss

Community Water Management provides support and training to help community groups set up a monitoring scheme which allows the health of a river to be assessed over a period of time.

Once the environmental conditions around and about a river are understood, a programme of conservation or improvement can be devised.

For the Foss, the Environment Agency carries out a minimal number of tests which show that it is in a reasonable condition, but due to funding cuts these tests have become fewer and fewer. However, climate change is certain to challenge the Foss over the coming years.

We would like to assess the river's health at several points along its course, over a couple of years, to establish a baseline for future comparison. We will also map all the various infalls that bring water in so that we can learn where it is fed from.

Via the Communities scheme we can learn how to carry out various simple tests and so find out, for instance, how quickly the river recovers when its flow rate is hugely increased due to heavy rain like we had last December, or dramatically reduced if we have a drought.

Do you have some time and energy going spare??

Would you like to join in and help us learn more about this unique asset on our doorstep?

If you would like to get involved, please get in touch with Mike Gray – if you want some more details and links to the organisations involved try looking on our website. www.riverfossociety.co.uk.

Mike Gray (sdmike.gray@btinternet.com or 07596 366342)

It's great news that the installation of the footbridge over Black Dike, near Walbutt's Farm, Strensall has now been completed, the original bridge having been irreparably damaged during the Boxing Day (2015) flooding. The new, all-timber bridge, is approximately nine metres long and 1.22 metres wide. Its walkway decking rests on two long beams supported and secured to concrete foundations. Access problems meant the beams, each weighing

The Bridge is Back!



Conservation Volunteers at work on the footbridge

550 kg, had to be manually hauled into place by a team of fourteen volunteers. Full credit must go to Bobbie Arnold's team of Conservation Volunteers (CV) who installed the bridge. This was a difficult project in a fairly wet, damp and remote location.

The footbridge, adjacent to Walbutt's farm, can be reached by walking along Breck's Lane, about one mile from Thompson Drive, Strensall. This is a good route for birdwatching as it passes beside the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust section of Strensall common. Apart from

the usual birds, it's a good area for Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Bullfinches, Jays and Tree-creepers.

John Millett

Just over a year ago, the River Foss Society handed its archive record of 43 years of existence for safekeeping to the City of York Archives, now rehomed at York Explore. A group of 17 members met there on Monday

Visiting the Archives

17 October to be given a behind-the-scenes view of these new state-of-the-art archives which contain thousands of unique documents, plans and photographs telling the story of 800 years of York's history. The oldest document dates from 1155, the most recent from 2012. We were shown the secure storage areas, all properly controlled for temperature and humidity and built very strongly to deal with the tons of documents on the shelves. The amount of paper in the archives is equivalent to a five-storey building or 150 filing cabinets!

In the nearby Archive Reading Room the Archivist had prepared a special exhibition for us. Items from the River Foss Society archive were laid out shoulder to shoulder with

ancient documents, maps and plans from York's past. One table held our own records, whilst others displayed

12th century charters, 17th century maps and many other fascinating items.

The archives are complemented by the Local History Collection, housed next door in the former Reference Library. Here are thousands of books, historic newspapers and maps relevant to York and the surrounding area. At its far end we were shown the brand new family history room,



A wonderful display

which offers computer access and excellent research facilities with access to most records held in the UK. This is a wonderful amenity for those researching their genealogy.

We were reminded that if anyone would like to come and see the River Foss Society archive they can access it on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, 9.30am-5pm or on Saturdays between 9.30am and 4.30pm. You can book in advance by email to archives@exploreyork.org.uk or on 01904 552800. You can search the archives and local history catalogues via www.exploreyork.org.uk.



Studying historic documents

Another successful boat trip!

Our last boating trip of the year, an additional event on 19 September, was again on Yorkshire Waterways Museum's "Waterstart" and was well supported. We travelled from Selby along the Canal, upstream on the River Aire, stopping as before for an excellent buffet lunch at The Kings Arms at Beal.

After lunch we went further along the River Aire and then west along the Aire & Calder Navigation to Ferrybridge (actually the only new section to RFS members!) before being bussed back to Selby.

After early morning rain cleared, it remained dry with the odd burst of sun. Thanks again to YWM and The Kings Arms.

Peter Hopwood



Jolly sailors!



Entering Bank Dole Lock from the River Aire

Cleaning it up

The last litter pick of 2016 was on Saturday 15th October, and had a good turnout of 12 members. We had access to the CYC boat and pontoon for the first time for over 15 months; with this boat, we always collect much more rubbish. This time, whilst we got lots of litter from the river itself, less bankside litter was evident, even at Castle car park and Castle Mills lock.

Our new RFS tabards drew attention to litter pickers as we worked along the city centre banks. One member of the public asked if he could take a small group photograph!

Low water caused the boat to bottom on the river bed behind Rowntree's Wharfe, but with the help of two members on the bank and those on the boat, it was quickly re-floated.

Thanks go to the management of Carpetright in Layerthorpe for allowing us to park for the duration of the litter pick. We thanked them by picking litter in their car park.

Barry Thomas

Traffic control signs and furniture were part of the haul from the boat!



Working from the boat near Castle Mills lock

Investigating Stillington

Thursday 15th September was one of those isolated sizzling summer days. Over a cup of coffee at the White Bear, we met our guide, Grahame Richardson, who explained that Stillington had been a manor. The lord of the manor owned all the land and the villagers who leased their houses and land from him received copies of their leases and were therefore known as copyholders. The leases from the beginning of the 17th century had survived and were preserved at the Borthwick Institute, where Grahame had been studying them.

As we walked around the village, he shared with us his fascinating knowledge of the buildings and the people who had lived in them over a span of four hundred years. Our tour ended at the beautifully-kept St Nicholas Church, where little remains of its 12th century origins but there are fine examples of the Mouseman's modern craftsmanship.

After a good lunch at the White Bear we set off for a rather hot walk in the surrounding countryside, this time under the guidance of RFS member Michael Turvey. He led us across the River Foss at Stillington Mill and along Harryfield Lane which is part of the Foss Walk, so we were



Part of the Foss Walk outside Stillington

delighted to see work in progress to scrape the overgrown vegetation from this Right of Way. We crossed the River Foss, no more than a small stream here, by the 'White Bridge'. From here we could see the raised river banks which had once harnessed the water to serve the Corn Mill, now a stables, a kilometre upstream from Stillington Mill. Crossing a field and another bridge, our path brought us once more to the Foss and to an embankment containing the reservoir for Home Farm before turning back to Stillington.

June Card



This trough is decorated with a dragon (?) spout found in demolition in St Sampson's Square many years ago

Fracking: no threat to the Foss?

As far as the Society can tell at present, shale gas extraction in the Vale of York by means of hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") is unlikely to threaten the environment of the River Foss, despite the fact that the whole of the catchment is included within areas covered by Government-issued Petroleum Exploration and Development licenses (PEDLs). No applications have been received for fracking exploration anywhere near the Foss, and given the safeguards in place, it seems most unlikely that any such application would be approved.

Fracking is probably the most controversial issue covered by the Minerals and Waste Joint Plan, issued in November 2016 by the combined planning authorities of the City of York, North Yorkshire County Council and the North York Moors National Park. No doubt in recognition of widespread public concern, the combined regulatory authorities (Oil and Gas Authority, Environment Agency, Health and Safety Executive, Public Health England) organised an information day in York in November, to coincide with the consultation period for the Minerals and Waste Plan.

Members of the River Foss Society attended the information day, and met afterwards to discuss our approach to the Minerals and Waste Plan. Conflicting arguments exist about the safety of fracking and the climate change impact of burning shale gas, but the River Foss Society has no mandate to take a view on either question. Given that our aim is solely to protect the environment of the Foss corridor, we decided that there were no grounds for us to object to the Plan, because of the strong protection it offers for the river.

Although the Plan's presumption is in favour of sustainable mineral development, it seems highly unlikely that permission would be granted for fracking along the Foss, much of whose whole length is subject to protection, either within the Howardian Hills AONB or as a Green Corridor within the York Local Plan. Besides, planning authorities must consider the impact of development on public rights of way, on biodiversity, on the quality of farmland and on the environs of historic York. Fracking also needs the Environment Agency's consent, which would be refused where there is any risk of flooding or contamination of watercourses or groundwater.

Nevertheless, we should not be complacent. While surface drilling will not be allowed in protected areas, it will still be possible to tunnel underneath them from sites beyond their boundaries, possibly to their visual detriment. The Society will need to remain vigilant!

June Card and Mark Gladwin



Seven walkers enjoyed Walk 7 from Farlington to Whenby

Foss Walking

On a hot and sunny 6 October 2016, seven walkers set out from the Blacksmiths Arms, Farlington, heading east on the Foss Walk path past Black Collar Hall Farm towards Upper Towthorpe. At the track, we turned left up to the Stillington/Sheriff Hutton road. Continuing east we met a gap in the hedge where we headed north passing close to Whenby Lodge Bull Breeding Centre. Entering the road close to Whenby, we went west, then up a steep path to Whenby Church. After a break for refreshments, we headed roughly south past Clifton House farm and Green Land farm. We walked into a field with cattle, but they soon moved and we left and headed back to Farlington.

Bob Jowett

Festive Fun!

Our Christmas lunch, on 4 December, brought 48 members together at Novotel. The day started with drinks and a wonderful talk by member John Shepherd on 'My View - Life after Retirement'. This was illustrated with John's superb photographs.



In a festive atmosphere, we enjoyed a delicious three course meal followed by tea and coffee with mince pies. A convivial way to start the festive season!

An Autumn Evening Walk

Thirteen members, guests and Bertie, Margaret's dog, turned out on the evening of 1 September for the last of our popular evening walks. On a beautiful late summer evening, our route took us along the Foss to Brecks Lane, returning via a circuit of part of the Strensall Common managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT). At dusk, walking back along the Foss and looking west we were privileged to see beautiful gold lined clouds against the blue of the sky — magical. We later enjoyed supper at Strensall's welcoming Ship Inn.

Another walk west of Strensall via Woodhouse Farm and Pottery Lane was originally intended, but the river footpath was closed owing to repairs to a landslip. I took an alternative public footpath across an open meadow, only to be mobbed and threatened by a herd of young cows. Fortunately there was a timber fence handy which I hurriedly climbed, making my way to the safety of the roadway. With the safety of members at heart I abandoned the idea of that walk and chose the Strensall Common walk instead - a good choice!

John Millett

Don't Forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

For the health of the Foss

Ever wondered who's responsible for maintenance of the Foss like grass cutting, invasive plant control and other issues? Of course, the River Foss Society always keeps an eye on these things, but the work of keeping the Foss well maintained from Yearsley Bridge northwards to the Dutch House Café near Crayke is the day to day task of the Foss Internal Drainage Board (FIDB). Four RFS committee members met recently with the FIDB's Nathan Culpan, Assistant Engineer, and Works Foreman Shaun Kerrison, to discuss several concerns which have been voiced by members.

RFS members have questioned the early and short cutting of grass on the river banks, as this can prevent the growing of wild flowers. A Biodiversity Action Plan, common to all IDB's, has been adjusted to the Foss. Mowing could be left a bit later, but overlong grass hides problems like holes, rubbish and dog runs which cause problems with machinery. Strimming is made difficult by dog dirt which can be flung over the operator by the machine.

Mr Culpan will provide a map of areas where vegetation could be left, though the tributaries of the Foss might be more suited to this than the river itself. Grass cutting for most of the river is done by FIDB, but the flailing of hedges is contracted out.

Many people worry that dredging will be a threat to wildlife, as the spoil is classed as Hazardous Waste. However, FIDB is exempt from the Hazardous Waste Act as long as the waste is left at least 9 metres from the river. Mr Culpan is confident that dredging operations can actually enhance wildlife when properly done. Invasive plants are also a great con-

using punts have been tried. The first was exhausting; and there were too many reeds to use a punt.

All contractors are fully trained to spray with Glyphosate, and spraying is done early morning when the wind speed is lower to minimise drift. A new additive adheres to the leaves better, increasing the spray's effectiveness, thus reducing the amount needed. The FIDB have been using Glyphosate for over twenty years and believe that there is no apparent adverse effect on wildlife.

Many of the Foss river groynes, installed a long time ago to give fish a deeper channel, are now in need of repair. Nathan Culpan said new groynes would not cost very much and he could see no problem in replacing them when the FIDB is working in the relevant areas.

On the subject of long term planning for the river, restoring meanders as a water storage area in times of flooding has been proposed lately. Nathan Culpan agreed that it is a good idea and thought farmers would be in favour of it as long as they got paid. However, he was sceptical about the benefit of slowing the river, for if it got any slower in times of low water, pumping stations could not function properly.

We want our relationship with FIDB to be a positive one, and we look forward to working together for the health of the Foss.

John Millett



The river presents a challenge for good maintenance

cern. Shaun Kerrison said he does control Giant Hogweed when he encounters it, but has given up on Himalayan Balsam. He had controlled Japanese Knotweed at New Earswick voluntarily.

The use of Glyphosate for weed control worries many. Nathan Culpan said that it is the only chemical which is still legal to use for the task of river reed control, essential when reeds are threatening banks. Otherwise, heavy machinery, damaging to river banks, is necessary. Alternative methods, such as spraying with a backpack or

Happy Habitats

On two days – Friday 24th February and Saturday 11th March – River Foss Society will be teaming up with Butterfly Conservation and the Fresh Water Habitat Trust to



Damselflies thrive in a good habitat. Photo Tom Fothergill.

carry out scrub clearance around specified ponds at World's End, Strensall Common. This will benefit the moth, butterfly and dragonfly population.

If you are interested in this kind of activity please come and join us. All tools are supplied and wearing your gardening clothes is advised. Contact John Millett on 01904 491290.

On the Foss

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