



## Himalayan Balsam!



Himalayan Balsam was introduced to Britain just after Queen Victoria came to the throne, as an ornamental garden plant to rival very expensive greenhouse grown orchids. It soon escaped and began its rampage across our countryside.

Its aggressive seed dispersal, (each pod can project some 800 seeds for up to 7 metres when disturbed, and they remain viable for two years), coupled with a plentiful supply of nectar which attracts more than its share of pollinators, allows Himalayan Balsam to out-compete native plants. To make matters worse, when it dies back in winter, it leaves the river banks bare and vulnerable to erosion by floodwaters.

As an aside, it is said that parts of the plant are edible and can also be used to make jams and parfaits. I don't think I'll be alone in not trying that!

Himalayan Balsam is present along most of the length of the Foss, though we are not sure how prevalent it is in the upper reaches. That is something we hope to establish as part of the Walkover Surveys we are going to be trained to carry out later this year. One of the

first priorities will be to make a map of its presence. Clearly our attempts at removal are not going to be effective if re-infestation occurs from upstream.

We are going to try a two-pronged approach this year: we will be hoeing out the seedlings in a few areas to see what effect that has on its growth later in the year. Then we will be running several pulling sessions in late May and early June, before the seeds set. We hope to send out small parties of volunteers on weekdays, weekends and evenings to tackle the balsam.

It is essential that the stem is cut below the lowest node, whether manually or using a strimmer, it will not then re-grow. As the roots are shallow, pulling it out is not difficult. According to all the advice I can find, it will not re-root itself once it has been pulled, and it can be left to rot as long as there are no seed pods present.

We need all the volunteers we can muster, so please come and join us.

*Mike Gray*

To celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the society your committee decided to re-write the Natural History section of the Fife & Walls book *The River Foss – Its History and its Natural History* first published in 1973 and now needing an update.

During July 2017, starting at Oulston reservoir, we surveyed fifteen miles of the river accessible by public footpaths. To do this a team was assembled, consisting of volunteers from the society with assistance from surveyors from St Nicks Environmental Centre and Community Aid for Nature (CAN). With the aid of a generous grant from the Two Ridings Foundation we were able to hire the

## Surveying the Foss



ecologist Martin Hammond, who as group leader led the survey and whose skills and knowledge helped to identify numerous wild flowers, plants, colonies of water voles, fresh water shrimp and fresh water cray-

fish. Martin also produced extensive lists of invertebrates and mollusc species found in the river and at

Oulston Reservoir. His work has been collated into five volumes:

*The Changing biodiversity of the river Foss.*

*Plant life of the river Foss - Notes from a walk in July 2017.*

*The vertebrates of the river Foss: an historical review.*

*The Historic Flora of the river Foss.*

*Invertebrates of the river Foss.*

We want the results of this survey to be available to members and so we will soon publish this work on our website.

*John Millett*



## A busy Spring & Summer

### MAY

**Tuesday 8th May** Environment Agency river Demonstration: How does a river work and what wildlife can you find? Now fully booked.

**Thursday 10th May** Derwent Tidal Barrage circular walk. Meet at 9.30 at the Barrage Car Park near Barmby. Contact: Bob Jowett.

**Friday 11th May** Bat walk with Will Durrant - Community Action for Nature. Meet at 8.00 pm at New Earswick. More information from Mike Gray. Booking essential! Cost £2 per person.

**Thursday 17th May** Boat trip through Leeds starting at Granary Wharf, River Aire. Expressions of interest ASAP to Peter Hopwood, who will supply details.

**MID-MAY to MID-JUNE** Himalayan Balsam pulls. Volunteers needed for daytime, evening and weekend sessions. Please send names and availability to Mike Gray who will put you in touch with a group leader.

### JUNE

**Friday 8th June** Visit to Rewela Cottage Garden, Skewsby, YO61 4SG at 7pm.

The garden is part of the National Garden Scheme (NGS). Admittance is £7, refreshments included, and all proceeds go to charity. The garden is north of Sheriff Hutton. Take the Terrington Road, and approximately one mile after Sheriff Hutton turn left towards Whenby and Brandsby. Just past Whenby turn right to Skewsby; in Skewsby village turn left. The gardens are 400 yards on your right. If you wish to attend or require a lift contact John Millett.

**Sunday 10th June** Visit and guided tour of Top Hill Low Nature Reserve. Meet at 10.00 at the Visitor Centre, Tophill Low, near Driffield YO25 9RH. Approximately £7.00 for admission and tour. Contact: Mike Gray.

**Wednesday 13th June** Walk through the King's Fishpool: 1067 to 2017 with John Oxley. Meet at 6.30 pm at Blue Bridge, Foss Islands Road. Contact: Mike Gray.

**Friday 22nd June** Two day Foss Walk - Blue Bridge

to Farlington. Meet 9.30 am at the Blue Bridge, York. Contact: Bob Jowett.

**Saturday 23rd June** Two day Foss Walk - Farlington to Easingwold. Meet 9.30 am at Farlington. Contact: Bob Jowett.

**Tuesday, 26th June** Visit to Alistair Fitter's riverside garden, Huntington. Contact: Mike Gray for address and details.

### JULY

**Monday 2nd July** Boat Trip on the Calder and Hebble Canal. Meet at the Shepley Bridge Marina, Mirfield. Expressions of interest ASAP to Peter Hopwood, who will supply details.

**Thursday 5th July** Evening Walk - Stockton on Forest. Meet at 6.00 pm at Fox Inn, Stockton on Forest. Contact: Anne Bednarski.

**Thursday 12th July** Visit to Pond Head Reservoir with Brian Hebditch of CYC. Meet at 10.00 at Pond Head Dam. Park on roadside **not** at the farm and walk about 1 mile to the dam. Contact: Mike Gray.

**Friday 20th July** Bat walk with Will Durrant - Community Action for Nature. Meet at 8.00 pm at New Earswick. More information from Mike Gray. Booking Essential! Cost £2 per person.

**Saturday 21st July** Litter pick along the Foss. Meet at 9.15 at the Blue Bridge opposite Morrisons. Contact: Barry Thomas.

### CONTACTS

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Neil Moran led a group of around 20 members along the city walls from the art gallery to just beyond Monk Bar. Despite a freezing wind, we all enjoyed a most informative and entertaining walk and talk. Neil mixed Vikings,

Romans and medieval times together to make a picture of the changes York has gone through.

We started with an explanation of what Bootham Bar had been and why it is as it is now – not every age has been as considerate of the city's history as ours is! Behind the Minster we learned about the standardised layout of the Romans with lookout towers spaced by the soldiers' ability to shout from one to another.

At the end we passed the icehouse, apparently supplied with straw-wrapped ice from Scandinavia and used for food storage in the summer months: it was a reminder of times past to hear of the variety of meats consumed by the Vikings. No wonder so many bird species struggled to survive!

Mike Gray



# A new walking season

*Walks Leader Bob Jowett tells us about Walks 1 and 2 of the 2018 season ...*

The 2018 walking season will include both linear and circular walks, mostly covering a distance of about five miles. Walks normally start at 9.30am, giving time for a meal at the end. Linear walks meet at the finish of the walk; volunteer drivers then take all walkers to the start. At the end of the walk, those with cars there give a lift back to the start for drivers to collect any cars there. Circular walks meet at the start/finish of the walk.

River Foss Society Walk 1 was on 10 March. Covering a distance of 5¼ miles, this circular walk started at Farlington. Eight walkers were met with low mist and continuous light rain which made the going very wet with large puddles and slippery, sticky mud.

We started 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 to the Stillington/Sheriff Hutton road and continued east. We eventually entered the road close to Whenby, walking along the road, and up a steep path to Whenby Church. Here we had a refreshment break enjoying (!) a misty view. We continued roughly south, passing Clifton House farm and Green Land farm then went back into Farlington.

Despite the weather, and many paths being underwater, the walk was enjoyed by the group and seven walkers enjoyed an excellent meal at The Blacksmiths Arms.



*A good turnout for Walk 2*

April 17 was cloudy and windy for the start of Walk 2 with 13 walkers. Following a circular route and with the Right of Way path temporarily closed, it started on a grass verge on the Sheriff Hutton to Bulmer road. We used the "Ebor Way" and then turned right onto the "Centenary Way". The right of way path was ploughed out and we had to walk further onwards to pick up the path.

After Stittenham Wood we walked a very muddy path into Stittenham, where we had refreshments in the garden of Richard, a keen walker who owns a B&B in the village. He welcomed us into his garden to sit on the



*Above: On Walk 1, using a Right of Way gate fastened with string left us with no option but to climb over*

*Below: The Walk 1 group have a paddle on the footpath*



seats he keeps in there for any walkers passing. We continued on the "Centenary Way" to Low Mowthorpe Farm and up to Mowthorpe Lane where we turned left to Sorwood Thorns and joined the "Ebor Way". We then walked south to return to the start.



*More mud on Walk 2*

This walk had some problems with walkers maintaining varying paces. At one point the group spread out over almost a mile. Whilst a lamb was returned over a fence to its mother, one group charged ahead, but unfortunately did not know the route and accidentally walked through a farm yard. This caused delays and confusions in meeting up at the end of the walk. Our walks are social and encourage mixing so we do not use a 'backmarker' to bring up the rear but in this instance it might have helped.



## Save Our Swans!



We have a beautiful

bonded pair of mute swans at Foss Islands Nature Reserve. They have both been ringed so we know that they were part of a study done by the Sorby Breck Ringing Group and both were ringed on the Foss.

The cob (male) is called Scar Face – you can see why from the photo – and he is upward of 13 years old. His missus (the pen) is called Bella and she is a young beauty about four years old.

In the last two years they have produced seven cygnets. Unfortunately, last year they all disappeared before reaching adulthood. What happened? We don't know. First four went missing then the final three.

Bella is currently sitting on the nest and being closely guarded by hubby. I do hope this year we have a better outcome. If you see the cygnets please let us know when and how many. Take a picture and send it in!

We would like help in monitoring the progress of this lovely home grown family.

*Elaine Mepham*

The speaker at our Christmas lunch was Graham Smith, a member of the Friends of York Walls, talking about the history of the Fishergate Postern Tower. He told us its story with enthusiasm, and even included a medieval folk song!

It was built around 1505, at a time when the River Foss lapped its foundations; its position created a natural defence for the city.

It has four floors linked by a spiral staircase, with several masons' marks visible. The roof was added in the late 1500's, turning the battlements at the top of the tower into a row of square windows. Today the tower is well worth a visit. Plans are under way to return this currently unused tower to community use. Friends of York City Walls website gives visiting hours for the Postern Tower.

*John Millett*

## Of towering interest

### On the Foss

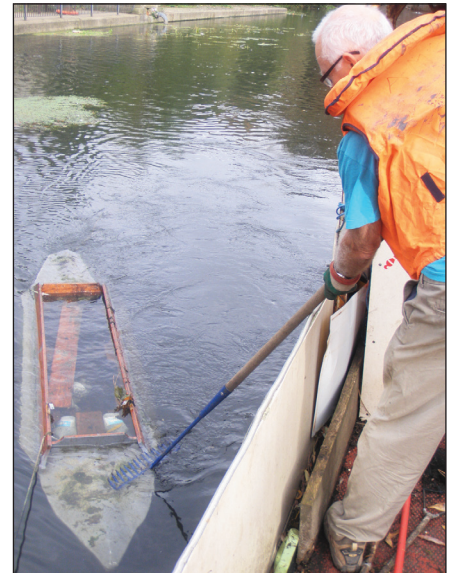
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## Mark Gladwin

Committee members have been shocked and saddened by the death in March after a brief illness of our colleague Mark Gladwin. Sitting on the committee for nearly seven years, he was an integral part of it, latterly serving as our Planning Officer. In this role he carefully read and reported on any planning submissions that could be



*Mark impressed the team by pulling this sizeable piece of litter from the river*

relevant to the Foss basin. This included the Southern Gateway scheme; in support of this Mark led a walk around the area, explaining the proposals to the walkers; he reported that most of this group were very much in favour of a continuous footpath for the Foss.

When the Community Water Project helped us get started as part of the national river testing scheme, Mark was involved and helped train members who provide data on a regular basis. He was also involved in surveying the state of the Foss Walk.

He cared so much about the world we live in and was involved in many activities supporting the environment and our appreciation of it.

As a committee member, he was always there to help and give advice. We will miss him sorely as a friend and a colleague.

## Have you said 'yes'?

Because the law relating to data protection changes in May, we asked all members to confirm that they are happy for us to contact them by post/electronically by ticking the box on this year's membership renewal form.

If you have not done this yet, please do it now. Some members have said that they would prefer an electronic copy of the newsletter. If you are one of these tick that box, otherwise you will receive our beautiful "On the Foss" paper copy as usual.

If we do not hear from you we will not be able to contact you.

Thanks for your cooperation.

*Elaine Mepham*

**Don't forget - River Foss Society is on Facebook too!**