



On the Foss

**Winter
2019/2020**

News from The River Foss Society



First prize: 'In the Foss' by Andy Mulholland, who wins a £20 book token



Second Prize: 'Banksy on the Foss' by Tom Fothergill, who wins a copy of *The River Foss* by Fife & Walls

What a picture!

The Society's first photo competition was a success, attracting 31 entries from eight members. Judged by eminent ecologist Alistair Fitter, our President, the photos covered many aspects of the Foss and its immediate environs.

The details of this year's competition will be announced in the Spring.

The two runners up were: 'Foss Soup' (left) by Mike Gray and 'The Foss Reflects' (right) by Beth Shurter



On 26 October eight walkers met at the Dutch House Crayke to start the last walk of the RFS season. Setting out in mild cloudy weather, our route took us towards Mill Farm, Woodfield Farm and Beckfield House. Although a lone bull occupied the field just before Beckfield House, we were fortunate that he ignored us! After Beckfield House we followed the right of way across a field with no path. After crossing the Foss on stepping

Last 2019 Walk

stones, we battled through wet and muddy surfaces to approach the Dam and Oulston Reservoir where we had a morning break. Following our break we headed to Pond Head Farm, then up the road. After walking west we turned off the road through Black Fir Plantation. The path then took us south to Yearsley Road and a short distance into the fields and past Close House.

Dutch House is then an easy walk. After arriving in light rain, the group enjoyed a lovely meal, some the excellent pancake special. Once again the Dutch house had made us very welcome and reserved a table for us. This made for a lovely end to a good season.

Bob Jowett



A new year

A list of all 2020 events is enclosed with this issue and of course, the full calendar of events is on our website

MARCH

Tues 3 March 10.00 am Landing Lane, Haxby. The year's first walk, from Haxby to Blue Bridge. About 5.5 miles. There is a possibility of starting from All Saints, Huntington for a walk of about 3 miles. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Late March 'Pick for York'. Waiting for CYC to make a decision on the date of this York litter pick. Various locations. Contact: Barry Thomas.

March Date to be announced. Castle Mills lock operation training. Contact: Peter Hopwood.

Thurs 19 March 7.30 pm Huntington Community Centre, YO32 9RG. New members' meeting - "A gathering for new members; to make them welcome, to meet committee members, and to find out about the Society's activities. There will be refreshments too." Parking at the rear. New members will be contacted by post or email. Contact: Alison or Marjorie.

APRIL

Wed 8 April 10.00 am Beside Sheriff Hutton church. Sheriff Hutton circular walk, about 5.5 miles. Possibility of a meal afterwards to be discussed on the day. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Wed 8 April 7.00 pm Strensall Village Hall. "Changing the Face of the City; Heritage & Engineering" by Nick Beilby of the York Civic Trust - followed by the AGM. Contact: John Millett.

April - May Dates to be announced. At various locations. Waymarking workgroups from Walbutt's to Easingwold. Please let Bob know if you can help. Contact: Bob Jowett.

Wed 22 April 6:00 pm Crown and Cushion, Welburn. Castle Howard circular walk - followed by a pub meal - 5 miles. Contact: Anne Bednarski.

Sat 25th April 9.00 am Footbridge opposite Morrisons. Litter Pick. Please make sure you let Barry know you are coming. Contact: Barry Thomas.

Wed 29 April Pocklington Canal boat trip. Details from Peter. Contact: Peter Hopwood.

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The way ahead

The society has for many years traversed the Foss Walk, both in sections and in its entirety over a couple of days. Two facets have become ever more apparent recently: the lack of clear signage and poor maintenance, both leading to the walk becoming less and less used, particularly above Strensall.

North Yorkshire County Council have been very helpful indeed, and the Society has signed an agreement with them giving us the go-ahead to start waymarking, and providing us with the necessary insurance. They have also given us permission to clear overgrown paths.

They have supplied us with a fair number of waymarkers which incorporate a window via which we can display the name "Foss Walk" together with our Frog.

They visited us in York to discuss our role, to give us advice, and have provided the necessary instructions on how and where the waymarkers can be put up.

Bob Jowett is concocting a plan that will see us covering the path from Walbutt's upstream as far as Easingwold, allowing work to start on fixing the waymarkers in early spring, before the vegetation grows up and obstructs our passage.

In addition, Bill Twist will be organising workgroups which will be going out from time to time, later on in the year, to clear the vegetation away and keep as much as possible of the path open for easy use.

Our hope is that by making the path easier to find and to get through, its use will increase and much of it will become "self-clearing".

We have many walkers in the society; indeed, our walks are the main reason why lots of our members tell us they joined. So, here is an early 'call-to-arms'! We are going to need help both to mark and to maintain the path in all its 'glory'.

Mike Gray



Some path markers are obscured, others are missing

The new waymarkers show our logo, the walk name and distances



Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

All rivers need a variety of plants to maintain a healthy profile. Trees are essential, for as they grow they take up water, thus slowing the flow of the stream and helping to prevent flooding. They also absorb carbon and help combat air pollution. City of York Council (CYC) supports the Treemendous project, aimed at planting more trees in York to make the city a healthier, greener and more environmentally friendly area.

In late 2019 and early 2020 RFS volunteers took up the Treemendous challenge to help replace and supplement the tree population on the Foss.

In November 2019, five Weeping Willow saplings (each about 6 feet high) were acquired and planted by the River Foss Society with the aid of a grant from the Heworth Ward of the CYC. These replace trees that have fallen (two in recent storms), or been felled for safety due to age or disease. The willows once formed an impressive bank of trees, especially when viewed from the towpath and Huntington Road, and the goal of this project is to restore and maintain this splendour.

The trees were supplied and planted by Sleightholm Landscapes, the contractor which plants trees for the CYC. The trees will fill gaps on the east side of the River Foss north of Monk Bridge and south of the old railway bridge. The new weeping willow saplings (*Salix Babylonica*) are supported by stakes and surrounded by a mesh guard to the Council's specifications.

The CYC provided expertise and arranged the clearance of the planting sites. They provided approval to plant, as did the Foss Internal Drainage Board (FIDB). The FIDB requested ongoing maintenance to ensure the trees do not take root in the river and obstruct navigation. The saplings may need watering in dry summer months, and protective tubes have been built in.

Further north, in the village of Earswick, 50 whips (young saplings 12" – 15" high) of mixed species were planted in December by three RFS members: Michael Reakes, John Millett and Bill Twist. These are on the playing field in Earswick, and fill a gap in an existing treeline. The planting was finished off with the insertion of tree guards, courtesy of Treemendous.

RFS members also helped plant some 350 whips in one January morning at King George's Field, across the Foss from Huntington Road. Michael Reakes had obtained the trees at no cost to the RFS from the Woodland Trust via the Treemendous partnership, and these were planted by volunteer tree wardens, RFS and Treemendous, plus members of the public – nearly 20 people in all. The whips were planted among mature trees and are all native species: hawthorn, crab apple, holly, goat willow, downy birch and hazel. The day started in pouring rain but finished in sunshine. Helpers also collected an enormous amount of litter!

A report last year by the Committee on Climate Change said the UK needs to plant 1.5 billion trees to fight climate change. So a few more to go

Michael Reakes and Alison Scott



Treemendous!

Top: A new sapling stands next to a soon to be removed willow

Right: One of the new saplings

Below: Fifty whips will fill in the treeline at Earswick

Bottom: A team of 20 planted 350 whips along the Foss Bank





Spreading the message

Two committee members manned the RFS stand at the St. Nick's Autumn Fayre on October 5th. Pond-dipping trays meant that interest among children was high, with the star of the show being a huge dragonfly larva.

Meanwhile we informed their parents and other adults about the Foss, voles, mink and our activities generally. An informed public is always a good thing and hopefully will lead to a few more members.



Top: Alison chats to a visitor; above: Pond dipping trays

An enormous dragonfly larva

York resident Lynette Mills knew that the old Foss towpath near the barrier was overgrown and needed clearing. She was introduced to Amy Hunter the Police Community Liaison Officer who told her about the Community Payback Scheme. Through this, workers clear rubbish, cut back branches and clean up weeds and leaves.

After arranging a date for a team to attend, the youngsters worked really hard – even after it started raining.

All hands on deck

Lynette is grateful to the Police who went out of their way to help achieve the result they got. She says 'I want them and the Community Payback Scheme to get the credit they deserve'.



Before (above) ... and after! (below)



Did you know that the River Foss Society is on Facebook too?

On Saturday morning, October 19th, 13 members of the River Foss Society, three guests, and four staff from the Sainsbury's store at Foss Bank, met in Foss Islands road to carry out a litter pick along the River Foss. The latter were joining us as part of the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Sainsbury's starting up in business.

The 20 participants were supported by the use of the York City Council boat/pontoon, skippered by Mark.



Breaking into four groups, we picked up litter from the water and the river banks from Foss Islands Road downstream to the junction with the River Ouse at Blue Bridge.

A clean prospect

The group collected some 25 bin liners full of waste, several larger items including a bicycle; along with two full builders' bags that were positioned on the boat/pontoon. Much of this can be seen in the above photograph. My thanks go to all those who took part.

Barry Thomas

Saving our canal heritage

The society has campaigned for some time to have the trees damaging the Strensall lock walls – situated beside the "Old Humpy" bridge – cut down. It is pleasing to report that this work has now been completed.

There is evidence that these trees have been weakening the lock walls which are over 200 years old. If ignored, this could cause collapse of the walls, blocking the river and creating a flooding hazard. It would also destroy a part of our heritage.

However, thanks to the efforts of the Strensall Parish Council and the contractors of the Foss Internal Drainage Board (FIDB) this threat has now been removed. All that remains now is to prevent the inevitable tree growth by treating the exposed tree stubs, some fifty in number. The method of this treatment is still under discussion.

John Millett



Top: The trees had rooted deeply in the stonework of the lock

Middle: hard work to remove so many trees

Bottom the damage from trees was extensive



Because the RFS had many queries about the duckweed that was covering much of the river during last summer and early autumn, particularly in its lower reaches, the Environment Agency was asked for its advice. The following is the statement they kindly provided; we hope it will answer most people's questions.

"Many people think that duckweed is unsightly, which is a matter of opinion, and a sign of pollution, which is

Misunderstood

untrue. It is a sign of low river flows, partly due to lack of

rain, and of a river that is enriched by nutrients. All of these are issues that people should be aware of as part of public environmental awareness – the situation is there for all to see.

Duckweed, which is not algae, but a flowering plant, is usually found in ponds and still water sites. It can grow in rivers when flows are very low and the river begins to behave like a pond and water temperature rises (at least at the surface). This summer has been hot and rainfall has been low, conditions that suit duckweed growth. The River Foss is also slow flowing at its junction with the River Ouse because the lock gates at the Foss Basin act as a barrier and because the Ouse has a larger volume of water and faster flows, causing the smaller river to 'back-up'.

Duckweed is not the result of pollution, although it thrives in water that is enriched, and it is not seen as a major problem that needs action to be taken to remove it. It should die back in autumn and be flushed away when river flows improve. If it is treated with a chemical herbicide it will die and decompose but this will use up much of the oxygen in the water and cause fish and other aquatic species to die."

Mike Gray

On the Foss

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Our annual Autumn meeting on 16 October featured Professor Alistair Boxall speaking on 'the Global Problem of Pharmaceutical Pollution in Rivers'.

His research team from the University of York has investigated the levels of 41 different pharmaceuticals

A bitter pill



every month over a year at many different points on both York's rivers – Ouse and Foss. These include medications used for treating pain, diabetes, depression and microbial infections. The

study revealed that even after sewage processing 22 of these pharmaceuticals were found in the Foss and 18 in the Ouse.

It was discovered that the levels of individual medications found in both rivers related not only to the number of prescriptions of the medicines issued in the city for that month but also to the flow of the water at the time of sampling. Comparing the levels found for the drugs with information from laboratory studies into the effects of these compounds on aquatic organisms, it was shown that levels of some compounds in both rivers were high enough to affect plants, invertebrates and fish.

However, the levels of pharmaceuticals seen in York were very much lower than those in rivers in Africa and Asia, where many of these medications are actually manufactured.

Alistair's talk highlighted just one way that the Foss, like most rivers, is being affected by an ever-changing and growing human population. It seems this is an even bigger problem than most of us had imagined, and one which we need to start thinking about now.

The River Foss has been added this year to the IWA's Silver Propeller Challenge – locations that are infrequently visited by boats and other craft. We would like more visitors to enjoy the City of York from both the Ouse and the Foss. The lower section of the River Foss, the responsibility of City of York Council (CYC) as Navigation Authority, requires passage through Castle Mills Lock.

Inland Waterways Association (IWA) trained volunteers have operated the lock for over 10 years by agreement with CYC but new arrangements through the IWA are in hand for 2020. Two training sessions are planned for March, so we hope that more requests for passage through the lock can be dealt with.

Unlocking the Foss



Syntan visited the Foss several times

Peter Hopwood