



## Too much... or...Too Little

River water levels have been as low as anyone can remember during June, algae are growing apace, and duckweed is making its usual appearance. Not only that, but reeds are starting to choke the flow in several places. The Internal Drainage Board have been spraying the reeds with glyphosate – legal if not desirable – but probably inevitable considering the always present fear of extreme weather events leading to massive water flows, and possible flooding. The reeds would probably be pushed aside by any significant increase in flow, but who is going to take the risk, given recent events here and elsewhere?

Quite the opposite to fears of excess water causing problems, the Environment Agency started pumping water from the Ouse up into the Foss on the afternoon/evening of Monday 21 June as the levels in the Foss had dropped so much. They were also starting to monitor the dissolved oxygen levels which, if too low, could lead to significant losses of fish and other aquatic life.

It's worth thinking about what the lack of water could do to the many old buildings along the Foss too – the pressure of water helps hold the foundations (if any!) in place and stops them drying out and shrinking or moving.

*Mike Gray*



*Above: Choked with weeds at Strensall*

*Below: The river seems to be disappearing along Huntington Road*



## On yer bike!

Tim Rane has hauled quite a few bikes out of the river over the last couple of years, most of which were fit for nothing more than recycling. However, sometimes the odd one is still in a recoverable condition, either for use as spares, or for overhaul and selling on for charity.

Changing Lives UK is a charity providing specialist support services for vulnerable people and their families and it is for their benefit that the restored bikes are sold after refurbishment.

York man John Hellier has volunteered to do the work on the bikes. He has set himself a limit of half a day's work per bike, unless it is a really good one. When bikes



have to be scrapped, he strips any useful parts for future use, then sends the frames to a local scrap metal dealer.

He tells us that he started doing this to keep his hands, and brain, busy in retirement. Of course, it also gives him a way to do more for the community.

Bike restoration wasn't planned, but has just evolved after he started doing voluntary work on the gardens at Union Terrace.

A bike which has been restored will be advertised on Facebook or on Gumtree if it is of higher value. This all goes to prove that something which is a public annoyance can end up earning a bit of money for the benefit of a worthwhile charity.





## Looking Forward

### JULY

**Mon 11 July 10.00 am** Meet outside Crown and Cushion, Welburn. Welburn and Bulmer circular, 5 miles. Refreshments at Dogh Cafe, Welburn. Please let Derek know if you are coming. Contact: Derek Chivers

**Sat 30 July 12 noon** The Groves. The Fairy Trail is having an event focussing on the Big Butterfly Count. The RFS will be joining in with some macroinvertebrates (bugs) from the riverbed on show. Contact: Andy Mulholland

### AUGUST

**Thurs 4 Aug 6:00 pm** Kirkham Priory circular 4 miles. Meet in Kirkham Priory car park ready to set off at 6.00 pm. Meal afterwards at The Stone Trough. Please let Anne know if you are coming. Contact: Anne Bednarski

**Fri 12th Aug 10.00 am** Moor Monkton circular walk 5 miles. Meet ready to go by the phone box in Main St, Moor Monkton YO26 8JA. Fish and chips afterwards at the Wetherby Whaler. Please let Anne know if you are coming. Contact: Anne Bednarski

**Sat 13/Sun 14 Aug** Foss islands Road. York Walls Festival 2022. More information later. Contact: Mike Gray

### SEPTEMBER

**Wed 28 Sept 6.30 pm** Another relaxed stroll around York with Toby Kendall. Toby will lead a second

relaxed wander around York, looking at where some of the interesting below ground archaeology has been found, and how this relates to the above ground city you see today. Specific themes and periods will be based on what people suggest that evening. Limited numbers, booking opens 1 July and is essential. Contact: Mike Gray

### OCTOBER

**Sat 15 Oct 9.00 am** Litter pick along the Foss. Meet at footbridge on Foss Islands Road across from Morrisons. Contact Barry in advance if you are coming so he can plan the morning. Contact: Barry Thomas

### DECEMBER

**Sun 4 Dec 11:00 am - 2:30 pm** Novotel York RFS Christmas lunch. Christmas lunch preceded by a talk given by Alastair Fitter "The campaign to save Askham Bog – lessons learned".

Menu available and booking opens at the meeting on 19 October. Contact: Mike Gray

### CONTACTS:

Anne Bednarski [annebednarski@hotmail.com](mailto:annebednarski@hotmail.com)  
01904 764086

Derek Chivers [derek@chivers.plus.com](mailto:derek@chivers.plus.com)

Mike Gray [events@riverfossociety.co.uk](mailto:events@riverfossociety.co.uk)  
(preferred) 07596 366342

Andy Mulholland [andyclapa@aol.com](mailto:andyclapa@aol.com)

Tim Rane [timothy.rane@gmail.com](mailto:timothy.rane@gmail.com)

Barry Thomas [barry1thomas@googlemail.com](mailto:barry1thomas@googlemail.com)  
01904 490081

On Saturday 18th June, we held our latest RFS litter pick, meeting at the usual starting point on Foss Islands Road. Surprisingly, only seven members attended; this however enabled us to have three people working on the boat (Foxy), with the other four staying as one group, and heading downstream to Castle Mills Lock. Despite this low turnout, the day overall was very successful.



*Working on Foxy, the council boat*

Along the bankside, we collected litter at three 'hot-spots': the end of Wormalds Cut, behind the Telephone Exchange and Castle Mills Car Park, behind the rail-

## A Clean Sweep

ings adjacent to the river Foss. We collected in total some eight full bin liners of litter/rubbish.

Regarding the activity on the boat, as well as clearing the litter on the surface of the water, we removed from the river bed three supermarket trollies and three bicycles, one a modern Tier battery operated cycle. This has been sent to an engineer who works with these bikes, which are used for hire around the city.

The public witnessing the recovery of these larger items and moving everything from the boat to the Council vehicle, were aghast and made very complimentary remarks about what the RFS had achieved.

*Barry Thomas*



*The rescued electric bike*

**Don't forget our website:**

**[www.riverfossociety.co.uk](http://www.riverfossociety.co.uk)**





## York Walls Festival

The River Foss Society took part in the Spring weekend of the annual York Walls Festival on 30 April to 1 May, showing visitors about the history of the Foss as well as its natural history. As always, our display of trays of macroinvertebrates ('creepy crawlies') proved popular with many visitors.

*Above: Andy Mulholland dips some local residents of the Foss to show visitors the large variety of life in the river*

*Right: Paddleboarders from Bluelogix, a training facility, arriving en masse made a wonderful sight*



## West Beck and Skerne Wetlands – a Watery Haven

On May 5 and June 15 several RFS members visited two parts of a lesser known Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve. We were led by YWT's Jon Traill whose extensive knowledge of the flora and fauna of the area made these visits both fascinating and informative.



*Jon Traill of YWT led the group around*

The River Hull Headwaters nature reserve was purchased by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust in 2008 as two grass fields – Snakeholm Pastures, adjacent to Wansford Bridge, some four miles southeast of Driffield. Then, in 2011 they added what at the time was a commercial fish farm covering 33 hectares, along with around a mile of the SSSI West Beck chalk stream.

The Skerne Wetlands reserve now includes wet grassland, over a mile of chalk stream, and more than 90 former commercial fish farm ponds which have been re-worked into a mosaic of wet woodland, reedbed, fen and open water. "Skerne Wetlands include the UK's most northerly chalk streams, which are a nationally important habitat in the headwaters of the River Hull. The West Beck, with its crystal clear waters, lush bankside plants and stunning beds of water crowfoot, is not to be missed in early summer." (Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.)

West Beck is a haven for wild brown trout, grayling, brook lamprey, water vole and kingfisher. In spring, beds of water crowfoot flowers provide a carpet of



white among the gravel beds where the fish spawn. The clean, oxygen-rich water is home to a wide range of mayflies, caddis flies, and other aquatic insects, attracting wagtails and other insect-feeding birds. Bitterns have been attracted to the marginal reed beds and otters are found along the chalk stream; their tracks and signs are plentiful. In late summer, muddy edges attract wading birds such as green sandpipers, whilst dragonflies can be seen scattered amongst stands of purple loosestrife.

For us, the highlight was the abundant presence of water voles – we didn't see any on either visit but we were told that they are quite undaunted by the presence of people, and volunteers often watch them swimming about only feet away. We were able to see areas of cut grasses so typical of their browsing, as well as numerous burrows and a goodly selection of latrines!

We saw brown trout and barbel more than two feet in length in the clear cool waters of the beck, with dragonflies and damselflies a-plenty. Reed and Cetti's Warblers, Skylarks and Whitethroats serenaded us, and a pair of Marsh Harriers hunting close by over the reedbeds provided a closing spectacle.

Skerne is free to visit and always open, and is well worth the journey – it has no hides or facilities, being the sort of place to relax and stroll, with time to spare to watch and listen. Our thanks to Jon for his time and expertise.

*Mike Gray*



# Wonderful Walking

On the morning of 22 April a group of thirteen walkers and a dog turned out for our first walk of the year, enjoying the bright spring sunshine. From Huntington Church we worked our way towards York, sometimes by the West bank of the Foss, sometimes not, finally reaching the Monkgate roundabout. From there we crossed the Foss and began to walk back along its East bank.

The initial stages of our return were greatly improved by the recently enlarged and enhanced 'Foss Fairy Trail' – a series of ingenious miniature fairy dwellings which stretch along the Foss nearly as far as the crossing of the cycle track. From here we crossed the playing fields to rejoin the Foss at Yearsley Bridge, before retracing our earlier steps back along the river to Huntington.



Several walkers paused on their return to take welcome refreshment at the Hound Lounge in New Earswick. We had walked a total of 6.25 miles on this enjoyable start to what promises to be a good walking season ahead.

*Derek Chivers*



Thirteen people arrived at Beningbrough Hall main gates on 5 May, a beautiful sunny evening. Our walk started by the Ouse, passing the historic water tower with its adjoining pump house, once used to supply water to Beningbrough Hall.

We passed the confluence of the Ouse and Nidd (sad-

ly no sighting of the tansy beetle) and then walked through the wood where we admired the carpet of bluebells and newly-carved wooden seats.



We headed past Pike Ponds dating back to the medieval period which were used to keep fish to ensure there was a ready supply of food. A tasty meal at the Blacksmith's Arms completed a very pleasant evening stroll.

*Anne Bednarski*

On the morning of 25 May a small group of walkers and a dog gathered at Nunnington village hall. The first part of our walk took us through Nunnington, leaving by a footpath at the western end of the village, just by a bridge over the River Rye. Following the river for a couple of miles, we passed a very 'wonky' footbridge, which was luckily not on our route, before turning away from the river and heading slightly uphill. We then followed field paths south to Stonegrave.

From Stonegrave we climbed again, reaching the ridge leading to Caukley's Bank and great views over the Vale of York. A short walk northwards then took us back to Nunnington and the comforts of the Studio Café, where we enjoyed welcome refreshments.



*Derek Chivers*





*2 spot ladybird*



*Cardinal beetle*



*14 spot ladybird*

Eleven walkers and a dog gathered on 7 June to enjoy a stroll along the Foss from St Andrew's church to Haxby. The wildlife we saw were a two spot ladybird, a 14 spot ladybird and a cardinal beetle. Sarah Watson took these lovely photos.

Our walk was followed by an outdoor coffee at Aroma. Five people caught the bus back and the rest of us walked, taking a slightly different route back to All Saints.

*Anne Bednarski*



June 21 proved to be a very bright morning when seven human - and one canine - walkers met at the edge of Skipwith Common. The walk combined nature with human activity in that the common, now a nature reserve, was the site of RAF Riccall during WWII, and signs of that era are still evident. We began by heading towards the village, past an observation/fire tower before turning west along the northern boundary of the common.

Skipwith's trees are many and varied, but we did spot some lovely old Oaks, as well as many, many Silver Birch. The habitats on the common are varied, with the first part of our walk largely being through mixed woodland, while the later stages gave us glimpses of

some of the more remote wetland areas. We reached another parking area, at King Ridding Lane, where we turned south, picking up part of an old runway from the war to take us into the heart of the common.

We had heard about Highland cows and wild ponies on the common, which we did not spot, but we did see some Hebridean sheep and a glimpse of a heron. A little way along our path we came to the 'Bomb Loop', an elliptical path which led us past the remains of several bomb bays, and also allowed us to see the monument to those who served at RAF Riccall, which is made from an aircraft propeller.



*The monument to those who served at RAF Riccall.*

At the point of the ellipse we took a boardwalk into the edge of the wetland area where we saw a rare King Fern. Returning to the main path we crossed the common back to the car park, at the end of nearly five miles.

*Derek Chivers*





## Into the past

The evening of 22 June saw a group of 15 being led for an informative stroll around town by Toby Kendall, of York Archaeological Trust. In glorious weather, our walk started in the Monk Bar car park where Toby demonstrated how the line of the Roman Via Decumana, starting at the 'back door' of the fortress, still exists in the very straight line of several lanes through the Groves. Many streets in York reflect the lines of original Roman ways – clearly seen by comparing earlier mapping.

On Lord Mayor's Walk we looked at the standing medieval city walls. These have been excavated over the years and it was found that the builders of the middle ages worked straight onto the remains of the Roman fortress walls, not bothering with sizeable foundations – hence the number of later buttresses. Toby also says that when the moat around the walls was filled in, there was a Rope Walk in the area across from York St John's University. This was found during excavation and is shown on the 1852 map. A Rope Walk was made by twisting together fibres and stretching them in a long straight line; difficult to find suitable stretches in York!

Strolling into Gillygate, Toby demonstrated to us how some properties there, like many throughout the city, reflect older times when the width of the plots was dif-

ferent. Brickwork has changed over the years, too, and from his experience of working at The York Handmade Brick Company Toby told us a lot of interesting facts about bricks. When bricks were first used in York they were hand made in moulds and were necessarily narrow. A brick tax had been levied on the number of bricks in a given property so it became an economy to use larger ones.

There is a piece of well trodden paving stone around Bootham Bar, probably due to generations of people, some presumably in hobnail boots, swinging round the corner of the building to get through the pedestrian arch at the side of Bootham Bar. We crossed High Petergate to inspect Precentor's Court, which has a group of lovely early Georgian houses. Again, we carefully looked at bricks in one building and saw that in reconstruction some builders had used modern bricks which they cut; they do look different from the original hand made ones in most of the wall. Rubbed bricks are used to make the wedge shape for use over doors and lintels.

In front of the Minster we 'enjoyed' strong breezes and headed quickly to Duncombe Place, a street widened and developed in the late nineteenth century. Blake Street was superimposed by Vikings on the Roman grid pattern of streets as a 'short cut' between what is now Bootham Bar and the Porta Praetoria located in front of the Mansion House. After discussing the evening's sights, we dispersed, much more knowledgeable about our own city.



## Welcome!

We enjoyed a get together with 22 of our newest members on 30 June. This gave them a chance to meet committee members and to see the variety of work we do on the River Foss.



You can now find us on  
Twitter @riverfossyork.

And, of course, we are still  
on Facebook



### On the Foss

Editor: Beth Shurter Tel. 01904 631125  
email: york.beth2@gmail.com

Secretary: Helen Button Tel. 01904 658228  
email: info@riverfossociety.co.uk

Membership: Christine Gray  
Tel. 01904 621808