



On the Foss

**Winter
2022/2023**

News from The River Foss Society

Let's Celebrate!

As part of the River Foss Society's 50th Anniversary, a morning tour followed by lunch has been arranged for 17 May at the Merchant Adventurers Hall, Fos-



Merchant Adventurer's Hall. Photo: Michael D. Beckwith

sgate, York. We will meet at 11.30 in main reception for a tour around the Hall and exhibits. Lunch will follow at 12.30 and offers three choices for one or two courses:

First Course

Quiche (Vegetarian - served warm), salad, new potatoes and coleslaw

Ploughman's Lunch (pork pie, ham, cheese, celery, apples, chutney and a chunk of bread)

Soup and a sandwich (vegetarian soup with a choice of ham and mustard mayo, cheddar cheese and chutney or tuna and sweetcorn sandwich on white or brown bloomer)

Second Course

Sicilian lemon tart with ice cream

Chocolate Brownie served warm with ice cream

Bakewell slice

Tea or filtered coffee

One course with tea or filtered coffee £10.00

Two courses with tea or filtered coffee £14.00

Please let John Millett know of any dietary requirements. The visit is limited to 25 persons. If you wish to attend please notify John Millett tel. 01904 491290 or johnmillett1@talktalk.net as soon as possible with your luncheon choice. Those attending will individually pay the Hall on the day.

Keeping up with the fairies



The tidied up Fairy Trail

I joined our friends at the Fairy Trail on the footpath of the River Foss, on 21 September 2022 when the Environment Agency (EA) volunteered their help with clearing obstructions and general tidying up. Drain outflow points running into the Foss were cleared of mud and two large (20-30 foot long) fallen trees were removed from the river. It took myself and five strong EA men to do this, using a long rope and a chain saw. This was very satisfying, as the trees had been obstructing the river. The group tidied up along the river and planted lavender in land adjacent to the Foss. There were about 15 workers and we all had a good time.

The other good news for the Fairy Trail is that they have had a grant to help pay for the new pathway which Sustrans have now built to allow people with reduced mobility to access the Fairy Trail and the Foss footpath. Costing around £3,000 of funding money, this starts where the Sustrans bridge cycle track crosses the river. It's a great initiative by the Fairy Trail and Sustrans to make access to this area easier.

Tim Rane

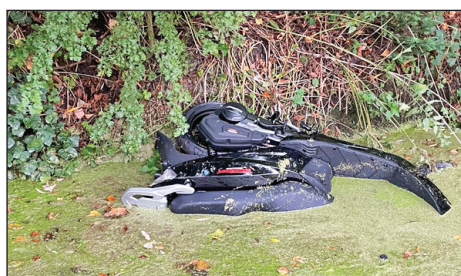
Now and again we run into items of litter in the River Foss which need special attention. In late September we were given use of Foxy, York City Council's rubbish barge to collect a three seater settee which had been thrown into the river at Fossway and had drifted downriver 100 metres only to get stuck in the middle of the Foss. To complicate matters even more, a tree had fallen and was blocking the way so Foxy could not proceed. Once this had been moved, we used the barge to tow the settee to the side and lift onto the bank to allow a few moments of drainage before lifting it onto Foxy. You might not believe how heavy a waterlogged settee is! Overall it was a great success and the two crew from the CYC (who wish not to be named) were super helpful and resourceful alongside myself and Mark.

I was also pleased to have removed the second large motorbike from the Foss since last summer. As its number plate had been removed we assume it was

Dirty Work



The settee and tree branches share a lift on Foxy.



The motorbike peeks out of the Foss

stolen; with luck the police can help us reunite it with its owner.

Last, but certainly not least, was a very large supermarket trolley which I pulled out of the Foss on 21 September. We have not seen one like this before in the river. As it was fresh in, and must have been thrown in from the bridge on Fossway, I returned it to the Spar shop on Huntington Road. It took all my strength to pull out. Let's hope that someday this – and all trolleys – can stay on dry land.

Tim Rane



A monster trolley

In early November we received a project update from Zoe Guilford of the Environment Agency that the Flood Alleviation Scheme at Walbutts Farm, Strensall was making excellent progress. Construction of the control structure which restricts the flow of river water during high flood conditions is well advanced.

The building of the earth embankments which make up the flood water storage area is going well, and according to schedule, although this work will begin slowing down over the winter period and will resume in Spring 2023.

Construction work on the project started in the Spring of 2022 and will bring great benefit for people and

Improving Flood Protection



Work at Walbutts Farm is going well

the environment. The embankment will hold back the flood water in the landscape and so lower the water level in the river Foss during flooding. The Environment Agency states that the new flood storage area will reduce the flood risk for 490 properties in York and Strensall.

The creation of two ponds connected to the River Foss, together with improvements to the

river channel, will result in a new wetlands habitat to support wildlife.

The cost of the project is £17.5 million, funded by Defra. Completion of the project is planned for Autumn 2023.

John Millett

Don't forget our website:

www.riverfossociety.co.uk

Help Needed with Newsletter Distribution (4 times a year!)

Most members receive a copy of the RFS newsletter online, but about 120 members still receive a hard copy through the post.

We need help sending out these copies:

- Printing address labels from a spreadsheet
- Stuffing newsletters into envelopes
- Putting envelopes into the post

This would be suitable for one person or a group of 2/3/4 people to meet up and complete.

Please contact: info@riverfossociety.co.uk

Learning about Dragonflies and Damselflies

*Barbara Hilton
introduces us to
these beautiful river
residents*

flies tend to close theirs in alongside their body.

They are one of the oldest groups of insects known and are not closely related to any other existing Order. There were dragonflies flying long before the dinosaurs appeared and they were some of the first winged insects to evolve, 300 million years ago. Oxygen levels were up to 15% higher than today and to survive these conditions insects, such as dragonflies, grew increasingly large, the largest fossil insect so far found being a dragonfly with a wingspan of 70cm and a diet consisting of insects, amphibians and other small vertebrates. As oxygen levels decreased, large insects began to reduce in size but, at the same time, they had to deal with competition from the feathered dinosaurs, birds, so they needed to become more agile fliers, smaller in size but extremely manoeuvrable. Adult Odonata are still predators but of smaller prey such as mosquitoes, gnats, other small flying insects, in fact anything small enough for them to seize which they catch in mid-air; they are the most

The taxonomic Order Odonata contains these recognisable, beautiful insects which are usually seen patrolling and aggressively defending their territories over ponds, lakes and slow-flowing rivers. We have 56 resident and migrant species in the UK, composed of 35 large, robust dragonflies and 21 longer, thinner and more delicate damselflies. An easy way to tell the difference is that dragonflies hold their wings open when at rest whilst damselflies

effective predators in the animal kingdom with a 95% success rate. They have many features which help them with this role as super-efficient aerial predators including extremely large compound eyes for acute vision, spiny legs held forward to form a basket shape to catch prey and flight muscles that allow the fore and hind wings to beat independently, so increasing their aerial manoeuvrability.

The aquatic nymphs, or immature stages, that we regularly find in the River Foss, take one to five years to complete their development, depending on species but, unlike the adults, they are not brightly coloured being brown or green for camouflage to help with their role as one of the top invertebrate predators in our freshwaters. They feed on other aquatic insect larvae, aquatic worms, small fish and tadpoles, catching their prey using their hinged jaw and the large, pincer-like extension of their lower lip, known as the mask. The nymphs will shed their skin between 5 and 14 times as they grow before they are ready to leave the water.



Southern Hawker Dragonfly. Photo by Martin Stubbs

When they are ready to emerge as adults, they stop feeding, crawl up a suitable plant stem and settle well above water level. The skin along the back splits and the adult struggles out, usually at night or early morning as they are vulnerable to predation at this stage before their wings expand, dry and harden, which takes about an hour. The beautiful adult colouring usually takes a few days to develop, reaching full colour at sexual maturity.

Unlike the nymph's relatively long life, the adults only live a few weeks between April and November when they can often be seen dipping half their body into water. This is the female laying her eggs, which take about a week to hatch into nymphs, and the cycle begins again.

Keeping Clean

The River Foss Society held its last litter pick of the year on Saturday 15 October. Ten members, including three newcomers, met up at the footbridge on Foss Islands Road. Three were allocated to man the CYC boat/pon-toon ('Foxy'), and the rest split into two groups to cover the river banks downstream to the junction with the River Ouse at Blue Bridge.



At Castle Mills Lock

We found the usual heavily polluted areas – behind the Telephone Exchange, Castle car park and Castle Mills Lock/bridge. The high level of duckweed on the surface of the water prevented those on the boat from finding some large items in the river. It did, however, enable us to explain to several members of the public that this growth was a sign of the water being in good condition. Without exception they thought that it was the opposite.

Overall we had a successful day, and loaded up the CYC vehicle to take the rubbish to the tip. This included a large 3-seater settee, which we had recovered from the river eight days earlier.

As this was the last litter pick of the year, I thought that it would be appropriate to compare it with previous years. There is no comparison at all! First, with the

very dry summer, water levels were noticeably lower. This meant that the outline of larger/heavier items which were on the river bed could be spotted. In particular I am referring to shopping trolleys and bicycles; it also included a motor bike and a brand

new ladies' motorised scooter. Both the latter were returned to their owners via the police.

The tally of shopping trolleys is now around 60 and bicycles about 20. We have also used the boat to remove many heavy branches overhanging the river along the back of Huntington Road. Much of the credit for the aforementioned goes to my fellow RFS committee member – Tim Rane. Tim lives close to the river and takes his dogs on daily walks along the river bank. He also has all the tools at his disposal for dealing with the removal of these heavy items. Needless to say, the RFS has received a significant amount of good publicity, including a full page article in the Yorkshire Evening Press. So many thanks to Tim for his support.

I look forward to litter picking in the future.

Barry Thomas



Toby talks through the showers

An evening walk was led in pouring rain on 28 September by Toby Kendall, who met RFS members in the memorial garden on Leeman Road. Once the end of the railway sidings, used as a dumping ground for waste from railway building, this area has a lot of mixed up history. Confusing in terms

of understanding what was where, but interesting that the area had been in use by various peoples for different functions over the centuries.

At the development area behind the station, Toby talked about the archaeological dig done there. We then walked through the station and across to the 'Hudson Quarter' within the medieval walls on the site of the city's first permanent railway station designed by George Townsend Andrews. Its location inside the old city walls was a deliberate statement of power by George Hudson. By punching through the old city

walls, he made it clear that the railways were to be taken seriously.

Parts of the original railway buildings have been altered but incorporated into the new building which includes York's first station building. This replaced a makeshift wooden building on Queen Street outside the walls of the city.

Opened in 1840 by the railway pioneer, George Hudson, the 'Railway King' and Chairman of York and North Midlands Railway, this was the terminus of the original trunk route for the Y&NMR and trains to London via Derby and Birmingham.

Once again, Toby used his archaeological experience to help open our (damp) walkers' eyes to even more fascinating facts about our city.

Wet Walking!

On the Foss

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