



50 years on the Foss

Venturing into the Past

On Wednesday 17th May as part of the 50th Anniversary of the Society, 23 members visited the Merchant Adventurers' Hall and were given a tour of the building by Lauren Marshal, the Director of the Museum.

The hall, built beside the river Foss, has frequently suffered from flooding. Lauren vividly described the flooding of 2015 pointing out the marks on the structure where the flood water reached, some three feet above the floor level in the hall. Fortunately, the water drained away without causing main structural damage but left a massive cleanup operation to remove the silt and debris. The main artifacts had been removed to a higher level by the museum staff but there was damage to the electrical circuit. This has now been relocated.

The company of the Merchant Adventurers of the City of York is a guild formed in 1347 when a number of important men and women came together to form a religious fraternity and to build their Hall. By 1430 most members were mercers dealing in textiles and alongside the fraternity they set up a trading association or guild. They used the hall to transact their business affairs, to meet together socially, to look after the poor and hold religious services.

It has a long and prestigious history in promoting enterprise and commercial "venturing" – business risk tak-



Lauren Marshal tells us about the Merchant Adventurers



Flood records - note 2015 at the top

ing. A Tudor Merchant Adventurer was quite simply one who risked his or her own capital in pursuit of trade.

Today, the company, as well as maintaining and improving its Hall for education, enjoyment of the public and as an important place for business, is an active force in the economic development of the City of York and surrounds. It seeks to identify, encourage and inspire young entrepreneurs as well as fulfilling its charitable objectives. The Company was incorporated by Queen Elizabeth I in 1581.

Our visit ended with an excellent lunch served in the committee room. Our thanks go to the management and the catering staff.

John Millett

On Saturday morning 20th May a small group of members gathered at Christine and Alistair Gray's house to see what the moth trap I had left out in the garden the evening before had caught.

Unfortunately it had been a very cold, clear night and there was only a handful of moths in the trap, but Alastair had kept some moths trapped in his garden the night before – which had been much warmer (12° rather than 7° C). Among the spring moths that members saw was a Buff-tip,

A morning of moths



The Buff-tip moth, wings spread, and the same moth in amazing camouflage (right)

which is one of the most startling pieces of camouflage in the animal kingdom: it looks astonishingly like a broken birch twig.

Another striking moth was a Poplar hawkmoth; people are often surprised by how big some moths are, perhaps their image having been formed by those tiny clothes moths that are now actually quite uncommon. The morning was enlivened by coffee and bacon

(both meat and vegan) butties kindly supplied by our hosts.

Alastair Fitter





Riverside action

Wed 12th July 10.00 am 50th Anniversary social. Re-run of 1975 walk - Yearsley Baths to Folk Hall, Earswick. Park at Folk Hall. Meet at footpath behind Yearsley baths. This may change due to the weather, so please register your interest. All members are welcome to come along – if you'd like to have a cuppa in the Folk Hall afterwards, please let Mike Gray know as space is limited.

Thurs 13th July 6.00 pm Walk Farlington circular – 5 miles. Meet at Blacksmith's Arms Car park. Please let Anne Bednarski know if you are coming

Wed 19th July 6.30 pm Walk Oulston to Pond Head circular – 3 miles. Meet at Oulston Village Green. Please let Derek Chivers know if you are coming

Fri/Sat 21st & 22nd July Full 28 mile Foss Walk in two walks over two days. Details from Anne Bednarski.

Thur 3rd Aug 6.00 pm Walk Mill Green to Pond Head circular – 7.5 miles. Meet at Durham Ox pub in Crayke. Please let Anne Bednarski know if you are coming.

Sat 19th Aug 9.00 am Riverside Litter pick. Meet at footbridge on Foss Islands Road. Please let Barry Thomas know if you are coming.

Wed 23rd Aug 10.00 am Walk Coxwold via Husthwaite circular – 5 miles. Meet outside the Fauconberg Arms, Coxwold. Please let Derek Chivers know if you are coming

Sat 14th Oct 9.00 am Riverside Litter pick. Meet at Footbridge on Foss Islands Road. Please let Barry Thomas know if you are coming.

Wed 18th Oct 7.00 pm October Open meeting. Talk: Update on York Flood Alleviation Scheme by Marilyn Sanderson, Environment Agency. All welcome. Contact: John Millett.

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Notice Board

Remember – On 12 July at 10.00 am we are recreating our first Foss Footpath walk of 1975 from Yearsley Baths to the Folk Hall, where coffee and cake will be provided. (Please park there too). We hope a few members who took part all those years ago will be with us too!

Don't forget – submit your entries to this year's Photo Competition by 12 August. You can see all about the competition on our website

Clearing Up

Our 'big litter' leader Tim Rane noticed whilst walking along the Foss just south of the footpath bridge over lower Huntington Road that a large clump of shorn tree branches was not only blocking the Foss stream, but also trapping a dead sheep which had drifted downstream.

In late April, Tim and Barry Thomas got use of the council boat Foxy to lift these tree branches which appeared to have been left after cutting at the order of the Council.

Working hard to load these sizeable branches, our chaps cleared the stream and towed the corpse of the sheep down to the nature reserve in Foss Islands Road, where it will break down amongst the cut branches well away from public view or access.



Barry and Tim arrive on Foxy with their haul - including a sorry looking sheep

Walking the Foss

On 3 May, six walkers started this season's walks on a beautiful sunny morning with two more joining us a bit later. Setting off from Hound Lounge, New Earswick, we followed the Foss Walk, walking through sunny fields looking their loveliest in the late Spring sunshine.

After enjoying a welcome cuppa at Aroma in Haxby, several people walked back along the opposite bank of the river.

Anne Bednarski



On Thursday 18 May, a fine evening, nine humans and one dog gathered at Blue Bridge for an evening walk along the first section of the Foss. After passing Castle Mills lock we joined the City walls opposite the Barbican. We enjoyed our stroll along the walls before we descended to Foss Islands Road near the Red Tower.

We rejoined the Foss proper on the the east



bank of the river, admiring the hard work and imagination of the Foss Fairy Trail, a collaborative project that emerged during the lockdowns, and which has enriched that part of the footpath.

We walked past the Sessions nature reserve to the edge of New Earswick. From here we took the riverside path through fields, noticing the foundations of the old Foss Bridge, before

arriving at All Saints Church, Huntington. From here some of the party took a short walk to celebrate a lovely evening at the Blacksmith's Arms.

Derek Chivers

Tony Berry is a retired illustrator and an expert on the archaeology of the Foss Navigation. He has pulled together a vast amount of information on his favourite subject, illustrated to a high standard by diagrams and plans, which should soon be available for all to see on our website.



Tony shows us the chamber

On 19th April, he showed a group of members round the lock at New Earswick, which is hidden away next to Lock-keeper's Cottage. It was so popular that a repeat visit was arranged the next week! Thank you, Tony.

This is the most intact of the locks along the Foss, apart from Castle Mills. This was extended and upgraded several times, and remained in regular use until the 90s.

To put everything in context, Tony showed us a drawing he had made of the lock, its weir, and the surrounding channels as they would have been in the eighteenth century. He then described in detail how the lock worked, and showed us the remains of much of the mechanism. The ducts and the iron components of the paddle mechanisms for letting water in

Locks Remembered

and out are still visible, as are some of the straps that held the gateposts in place.

Equally, the recesses for the gates when open, and for the gate posts to turn can be clearly seen. The weir which controlled the water level above the lock was removed in the 1930s, at the same time as the entrance to the lock was blocked, but some of the weir's stonework is visible next to the main river channel close by. The original course of the river leaves the current one over a small



A lot remains of the chamber

weir by the allotments opposite Huntington school, passes behind the Hound Lounge café, through a separate archway under the Link Road, and re-joins just before it reaches Huntington Road.

It was a fascinating reminder of what the Foss once was and of what can still be seen if you look closely.

Mike Gray

50th

Anniversary!

Golden Gala

A 'Foss frog' decorated the 50th birthday cake for the River Foss Society. A tasty afternoon tea was also served.



It's our 50th anniversary so, of course, we want to celebrate. And that's just what we did on June 10 at Stillington Mill on the River Foss.

Sixty five members and friends gathered in a beautiful garden on a glorious summer afternoon to enjoy lovely food, good chat and a celebration of all the River Foss Society has achieved.



Our President, Professor Alastair Fitter, saluted Bill Sessions and his co-founders for their foresight in recognising that our 'green world' and waterways needed protection, sympathetic management and care. The basic remit of the Society, and the need for it, had not really changed and, was needed now, more than ever.

He praised all the work that the committees and volunteers across 50 years had done, mentioning in particular Peter Hopwood, June Card, John Millet, Tom Claxton and all past chairs for getting the Society into the digital age. He thanked the Mill for a lovely afternoon at a tremendously appropriate venue.

Finally, he asked us to raise our glasses to the River Foss Society and its next fifty years.



Such a beautiful location



The crowd gathers to toast 50 years of the River Foss Society



Relaxing in garden shade



Lots of information at the gazebo



Games and quizzes set challenges in the sun



A wonderful afternoon to catch up

Castle Mills Lock

It is rare to have a passage enquiry more than 60 days ahead requesting a specific day and time – it has sometimes been less than 60 hours! However, on 17 May skipper Mike Wright confirmed his 57 ft long narrowboat, 6 ft 10 ins wide, “Uz Boat” would be arriving at the agreed 11.00 on 18 May. They did and there was adequate water flow in



Looking towards the lock entrance, blocked by a boat and dinghy

the River Foss but an unoccupied cabin cruiser and its dinghy were illegally moored adjacent to, and tied to, the bottom lock gates, thus blocking the lock entrance.

The four Lockkeepers on duty, Roger Button, Paul Wilson, Alistair Gray and Adrian Lovett, managed to move the cabin cruiser and dinghy to one side, enabling “Uz Boat” to pass, necessitating the use of only one gate at each of the Lock. Skipper Mike confirmed they were attempting to complete the Inland Waterways Association’s Silver Propeller Challenge to reach certain defined points on the inland waterways system, Wormalds Cut on the River Foss being one.

“Uz Boat” achieved the objective and Mike took the requested photograph showing the original Leethams Millers Wharf, now offices and residential flats, at the junction with Wormalds Cut. “Uz Boat” was soon back and on its way heading for Ripon. Mike was very grateful for the arrangements made and appreciative of the efforts of the Lockkeepers.



“Uz Boat” at Wormald’s Cut

Peter Hopwood

For hundreds of years York has relied on the River Ouse for drinking water. Lendal Tower was once used as a water tower for water pumped from the adjacent river. When, in 1846, a new pumping station was built at

Understanding Our Water

Landing Lane, Clifton, water from the Ouse started being treated before being sent to our taps! Since then, the amount of water has increased hugely to match the increasing population and use. We had a rare opportunity on April 25 to see how our drinking water is pumped from the river and treated for safety.

Our guide was Steve Halls, *Learning about water treatment* Production Manager Clean Water who we wish to thank for a comprehensive and informative tour.

We started in the control room where an overview of the process is displayed on computer screens. The process is automated, shutting down (with associated alarms sounding to the engineers on duty) if any parameters go out of range.

The plant consists of a series of concrete tanks and filters where water from the Ouse has algae and sediment removed in a process known as flocculation and dis-



Learning about water treatment



Water from the River Ouse takes about four hours before it becomes clear drinking water, meeting all regulations. We ended our tour in the room containing numerous large electric pumps which send the water into Yorkshire Water's grid, and ultimately to our homes.

One of several pumps that send the treated water to houses via the water network. The equipment in the background is the electrical supply and control system for the pumps.

Loads of Litter Lifted

For this year's first litter pick on 1 April, eleven members arrived at the meeting point, the footbridge along Foss Islands Road. Three members were allocated to the boat, and the remainder were split into two groups to search for litter along the river banks downstream to Blue Bridge and the river Ouse.

We encountered the usual heavily polluted areas such as the rear of Rowntree's Wharf; rear of the Telephone Exchange; Castle car park and the Castle Mills bridge and lock areas. On the day, the litter collected filled two very large builder's bags attached to the boat/pontoon, and filled a dozen green bin liners.

All this waste was taken back to the start point, and loaded onto a CYC vehicle for disposal. What was missing on the day was the retrieval of large items such as shopping trolleys and bicycles, which on the day were not visible due to the height of the water. My thanks go out to those members who were present.

Barry Thomas



On the Foss

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