



Following the Boxing Day 2015 floods several schemes were put forward to reduce the chances of such a thing happening again, and some £40m+ was allocated to this. Most of the promised work has been completed, with one of the last being the flood alleviation scheme some 2km upstream of Strensall where the final touches are being applied, readying it in case of need this winter.

I wrote an article which appeared in the newsletter earlier this year, so I won't go into the details again, but this is an area of farmland sur-

What a relief!

rounded by a bund wall which will store water temporarily when the river levels rise significantly.

The course of the river has been modified so that it runs through a large pipe in a concrete dam as can be seen in the photograph. Inside the pipe is an orifice plate which will restrict the flow of water. (The plate can be changed for one of a different size, should it be necessary). As the flow rate increases beyond that which the orifice plate

allows, water will back up behind the dam and eventually overflow into the storage area. When the water level in the river falls again, any water stored will drain back into the river. Should it fill up completely, an overflow will send excess water back into the river lower down, effectively short-circuiting the storage area.



The dam before installation of the orifice plate. The smaller pipe is for emergency use and will normally be closed by a penstock. Photo by John Millett.

The flood area is designed to be used only when the river level is very high, the 1 in 100+ year event we hear so much of, as happened in 2015. If it takes in water other than under these circumstances, there is a risk that it could be full when really needed and so offer no protection to the areas which it has been built to safeguard.

This means that it will not reduce the minor flooding such as we saw last winter – it is there to prevent disastrous events

such as that of 2015. Something we never want to see again.

Mike Gray

For anyone wanting to identify wildlife of almost any sort, the app iNaturalist is a boon. A simple photograph will, in most cases, yield several suggestions as what you have in front of you. If iNaturalist makes no suggestions, or you don't like what it does suggest, you can upload it anyway, and within a short time someone, somewhere, will identify it for you. It's amazing how quickly this can happen with enthusiasts from all over the place stepping in to help, and there are some very knowledgeable people out there.

You may remember that we used iNaturalist for the City Nature Challenge at the end of April – I for one found it fascinating. I'd never had the reason to look so closely at one plant before and record just how many species were on it – 11 on one nettle plant!

Following this, John Terenzini

Help from iNaturalist



created a River Foss Project within the app so that we could record anything living close to the river. To date we have 3,379 observations of 815 species by 250 observers. Two observers have recorded 100+ species and the most observed species are the Asian Lady Beetle (a ladybird), Cow Parsley and Canada Geese.

This could turn out to be a fascinating and valuable record of what lives in and by the river, and I would ask anyone interested in recording or monitoring to use iNaturalist to add to our knowledge. All you need to do is add River Foss to your list of projects and you will then help us add to our records.

Happy hunting!

Mike Gray

Photos (Mike Gray). Top: Common European Ambersnail, below: Chicken of the Woods



Autumn Activities

OCTOBER

Sat 12 October 9.00 am Litter pick. Meet at footbridge on Foss Islands Road. Contact: Barry Thomas. Please let Barry know if you are coming.

Wed 16 October 7.00 pm October Open meeting. Strensall Village Hall. Liam Herringshaw's talk on "York: Two Billion Years of History". Just turn up and listen. Contact: John Millett.

Thurs 24 October 7.00 pm Pint 'n a Chat. Brew York, Walmgate. All welcome, just turn up and look for us downstairs. Contact: Christine Gray.

Sun 1 December 11.30 am Christmas Lunch. Novotel, Fishergate. Speaker Alistair Fitter - "When will it flower - plants and climate change". Contact: Mike Gray.

CONTACTS

Christine Gray 01904 621808 membership@riverfossociety.co.uk

Mike Gray 07596 366342 events@riverfossociety.co.uk (preferred)

John Millett 01904 491290 johnmillett1@talktalk.net

Barry Thomas 01904 490081 barry1thomas@googlemail.com

Litter picking of gargantuan proportions

A few weeks ago, I spotted a large wooden gate in the Foss just downstream of Huntington Road Bridge near Yearsley Baths. After a litter-pick session along the footpath, I decided to attempt to recover this gate as it was blocking the river.

Aided by my trusty grappling hook, I snagged the gate and manoeuvred it into an upright position alongside the path. Unfortunately, it weighed a bloomin' ton and I couldn't get it out of the river. So, aided by my chain saw, I chopped the thing in half!



Sadly, I still couldn't lift the other half *Halved* out of the river,

possibly due to the fact the gate was still attached to a (rotten) 8" x 8" gatepost! So, I dragged the heavy half back upriver to a spot opposite a very much lower bank from where I had thrown a weighted line across the river.



Then, after standing the gate up again, *Repositioned* I lashed the two

bits of gate together and threw it all back in. Now, I

could trot around to the opposite bank and haul the whole lot across, making it a whole lot easier (but still pretty heavy) to slide up the bank where I guess it will stay to dry out and wait until November, when it will be cut up and made into a fine bonfire!



Upright

Incidentally, I later managed to remove the gatepost, which on its own weighed about 15Kg.



The whole lot

Andy Holt

Waiting for the bonfire



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

email: membership@riverfossociety.co.uk

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

Up to mid-August we had taken 37 biological samples at 15 of the 16 sites on the river since April this year.

Four new volunteers have recently signed up to do this work, which is good

How healthy is the Foss?

news. Hopefully, by the time this newsletter is with you, they will have had training in kick-sampling, identification of the animals found and the use of the biotic indices we use to give an indication of the biological health of the river.

There have been no surprises in the results so far this year, compared to last, with the river not being of particularly good quality along much of its length. The three sites in the upper reaches are the cleanest, but could be better; they suffer to some extent from agricultural run-off. Farlington Beck, a tributary upstream of Sheriff Hutton, has improved significantly since last year, although algal mats were present on the bottom of the beck this summer. Good numbers of pollution-sensitive taxa – units



of biological classification, arranged in a hierarchy for plants and animals including family, genus and species – were found within the algae, but as they were this year's young, many were only around 3mm in length so difficult to find.

As the river comes down towards the city, downstream of Sheriff Hutton, its quality tends to deteriorate except where the river is shallow, faster flowing and producing riffles which increase the levels of oxygen present. This allows a wider range of animals to survive. Sewage outfalls, agricultural and urban run-off are all adding to the levels of pollution within the Foss, sadly similar to most of England's rivers these days.

We now have nearly two years' worth of biological results. If we can keep this monitoring going into the future we might, hopefully, begin to see improvements in water quality as work such as controlling sewage discharges and educating farmers into protecting the river is now beginning.

Barbara Hilton

It's the August bank holiday weekend and I'm in York visiting Mum and Dad (Christine and Alistair Gray), and trying to fit in some running.



I've wanted to run the Foss Walk for a while and this seems like a good challenge – can I make it to Stillington in time for lunch with

A run along the Foss

Grandpa?! (That's Mike Turvey). I plot a route in the OS maps app working out at 16 miles. Perfect for the last long run of this training plan.

On Sunday morning after putting off running for as long as I can, I set off from Yearsley Lock at 9:38 am. It's a gloriously sunny day and warmer than I thought. The air smells like mint chocolate and I happily bounce along the first three miles thinking about chocolate and river banks and how two step channels (like those along the section from Yearsley lock to New Earswick) are good for having more space for water when it's very wet, but apparently less good for water voles.

I pass All Saints Church as they're ringing the bells. I listen to birds, wave at dog walkers and admire a butterfly. It's idyllic. Then I get a stitch and hate running for the next four miles.

Just beyond the top of Strensall Common the scenery has changed a little as the footpath is now an access road for the Foss Storage area of the York Flood Alleviation Scheme. It's a bit intimidating to run along an industrial track. It's still the countryside, but it feels uncanny.

By this point my legs are tired. I have a snack, then walk up most of the hill from West Lilling to Sheriff Hutton

- it feels incredibly steep. Reaching Sheriff Hutton feels like I'm on the home stretch, even though I still have 5 miles to go. I follow the grassy path out of the far end of the village and end up in a field of cows which are all looking at me with suspicion. I try not to make eye contact with them as

I cross their field and escape onto the next section of footpath.

I only make it a couple of metres further before I realise that the path is almost entirely blocked by brambles. I probably could get through, but I can't see far enough to tell if the path gets any clearer further on so I spend a minute looking at the map to see if there's a practical detour. There isn't, so I hop a fence, skirt round the edge of a field and climb over a gate to find the road.



Bramble blockage

After a few minutes of running along the road it's clear that 1: there are too many cars that I have to jump out of the way of for this to be enjoyable, and 2: I'm going to be late for lunch. I decide to phone Mum and ask to be rescued (which she is more than happy to do), and keep running along the road until I see her car. I've run 13.5 miles when I'm picked up, and (after a quick shower) we go out for lunch with Grandpa at the pop up café in Farlington village hall. A sandwich, a cup of tea and some sticky ginger cake – perfect!

Emmeline Gray

A summer's walking on the Foss

Derek Chivers shares his memories of June and July walks on the Foss

1st June

1st June saw a walk starting and finishing at the village of Coxwold, which is on one of the alternative routes of the Foss Walk. Passing Shandy Hall, we picked up the old Helmsley to Malton railway line, stopping for refreshments at a DIY honesty café at the site of the Husthwaite station.

We walked through fields uphill to the village of Husthwaite, admiring the neat village green. From here we picked up the low ridge ascending towards Beacon



Walkers enjoy an ice cream from the café at Husthwaite

Banks, with views not only across to the White Horse but also of the local alpaca farm.

A walk past the lake at Newburgh Priory led us back to Coxwold for refreshments at the Fauconberg Arms.

21st June and 29th June – Full Foss walk

Day 1: 21st June

As is traditional, the party walking the full Foss Walk met at Blue Bridge on a (for once) sunny day, to begin the walk to Farlington. The first leg took us through York, following the walls and then Foss Islands Road to the Monkgate roundabout. From here the delights of the Foss Fairy Trail accompanied us nearly to



Moving along

Yearsley Bridge. From here we were able to follow the river bank right into Huntington and onto Landing Lane in Haxby. A brief section of road brought us to Towthorpe Bridge, where we rejoined the Foss as far as Strensall, where liquid refreshments and lunch were taken.

The track past the sewage works took us to the area where the Environment Agency is working on a major flood relief project. Some signs informed us this would be completed in 'Autumn 2023', although work was still ongoing. As the route to Sheriff Hutton Bridge is often very overgrown in the summer months we took the alternative tracks through Lilling up to Sheriff Hutton, for a cooling ice cream. Our last leg of the day took us through fields and farms to Farlington, where a much needed drink and a meal were enjoyed by the party at the Blacksmith's Arms.



At Old Humpy, near Strensall

Full Foss walk

Day 2: 29th June

We left Farlington on a fine day, but one without much sunshine. The route took us up to Marton and through fields to the edge of Crayke. From here the path climbed steadily until we reached Pond Head reservoir, the official source of the Foss.

From here we took field paths through to the village of Oulston, before picking up the (small) River Kyle. Field paths led us to Easingwold for a pleasant drink in the Market Place.



Farlington Beck

Gazing over Pond Head Reservoir



23rd July

Blue Bridge to Huntington

On 23 July, an early evening walk led us down Piccadilly and Fossgate, taking some small snickleways to pick up the Foss near the Rowntree Wharf developments. Rejoining Foss Islands road, we followed the Foss along the Fairy trail, past Yearsley Baths and Nestle, joining Haxby Road briefly near Lock House. From here we walked through the edge of New Earswick and through fields to finish at the bridge near All Saints Church, Huntington. A pleasant drink was enjoyed in the Blacksmiths' Arms.



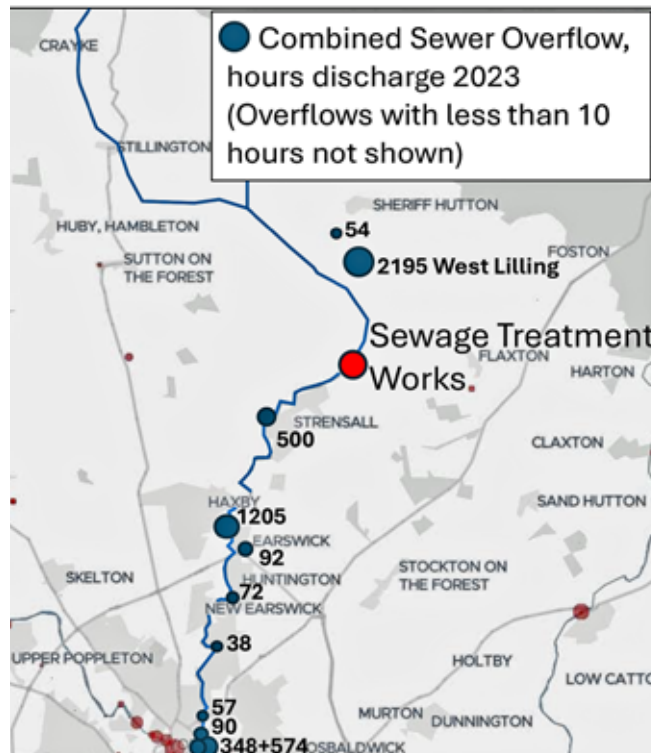
A good crowd enjoyed the evening walk

On 16th July eight RFS members, including four from the committee, met with the newly formed Rivers Health Team from Yorkshire Water to hear about the company's plans for improvements to the sewage treatment works and Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) on the Foss. We shared some data, collected by RFS citizen scientists, including monthly Phosphates and Nitrates concentrations and counts of aquatic invertebrates, to illustrate the decline in water quality and biodiversity from the rural upper Foss to the city centre. This decline is, at least in part, a result of continuous outflows from sewage treatment plants and quite frequent, but discontinuous, outflows from CSOs.

The Yorkshire Water team explained that they have prioritised work through to 2050 to improve the quality of the treated flows discharged into the Foss, including more phosphate removal at the Haxby/Strensall sewage treatment works. The phosphate removal upgrade is due in the 2025-28 timeframe. These phosphate levels reductions are a requirement from the Environment Agency under a Reason For Not Achieving Good (RNAG) notice related to relatively poor aquatic invertebrate diversity seen below Strensall.

Yorkshire Water has phased plans for reducing the frequency and volume of discharges from CSOs. This will include some extra storage tanks to reduce individual CSO spills to no more than 10 per year, down from

Yorkshire Water has plans for the Foss



highs of over 100 seen in some CSOs in the early 2020s. Work has already begun at West Lilling: a new surface water pipe will disconnect surface water runoff from the Combined Sewer, reducing frequency and discharge from the storm overflow. The storm overflow currently spills sewage into Black Beck and onwards into the Foss and, once work is completed, discharges are expected to be reduced by over 60%.

After the meeting we took the YW team for a site visit to Willow Bank, one of our aquatic invertebrate kick-sampling locations. We also discussed the impacts of farming on water quality, and noted the large amounts of Himalayan balsam on the river banks.

The improvement plans are subject to adequate funding (linked to water bills), with a final determination on water bill increases from the government due in December 2024. Given the uncertainty on the funding it is still unclear how many of the proposed improvements will be implemented. The RFS committee has requested an annual meeting with the Rivers Health team to monitor what has been achieved and what changes to the plans have occurred.

Details of all England's water improvement plans can be found here: <https://www.water.org.uk/overflows-plan> and it is possible to download and filter data to look at specific river improvement plans, including the Foss.

Alistair Grey

On Saturday 17 August, the RFS held another litter pick, starting from the Footbridge on Foss Islands Road. Ten people turned up and I was able to allocate two to man the York City boat, Foxy. Their role was to take litter out of the river. The remainder were split into two groups, and they proceeded to collect rubbish along the river banks

Rubbish!

downstream to Blue Bridge at the junction with the River Ouse.

Two hours later, we all met up at Castle Mills lock, where we were able to put all that had been collected onto Foxy. Afterwards, Foxy returned upstream to the start point, stopping and collecting further litter on the way. The final task was to remove all the rubbish collected by lifting it from the boat, over the railings and onto a Council vehicle for disposal. The day went very well, and the weather was ideal.

Barry Thomas

