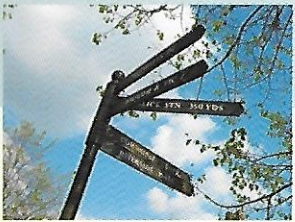


OUR RIVER

The Great Ouse in Buckingham



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^Buckingham finger post
The river bank>



Our River

Ask anyone in the street: "What is the oldest echo of the past in our town?"

Many people will answer: "The Church." Others will say; "Oh, the Old Gaol, I suppose". Still others will suggest St Rumbold's Well.



They would all have been wrong, by many hundreds, even thousands, of years. Since time immemorial, long before men and women settled in the pleasant river valley in which modern Buckingham nestles, the Great Ouse, our river, has snaked its way around and through the low hills which surround the town. Like most rivers, it has attracted human settlement throughout the history of human life in our region. It has been at one and the same time a supplier of the fundamental source of life, water, a means of communication and a bulwark for defending our community.

The course of a river can be likened to the life of a man or a woman, beginning as a frail young child creeping out of a spring or well, swelling and growing in strength as it reaches maturity, only to fade away in the all-enveloping sea. The banks of the river, the whole corridor through which it flows, take on a character which is moulded and patterned by the river itself, its riverside wildlife, its fish, its trees and plants, its fields and pastures, hedgerows and woodlands, its rounded hills and welcoming dales. Our river, the Great Ouse, defines much of our town's character and distinctiveness.

We can think of our river as being in its teenage years; it is not far from its birthplace in springs and wells just north-east of Brackley. Some of us see it as a shy young girl, not wishing to show her face to the world, Maybe that is why the town has, in the past and sometimes still today, seemed to have turned its back on the river, letting it flow unnoticed past backyards and through inaccessible nettle beds, As of today (September 2003) we do not even honour our river by telling visitors her name.

If we look on a map or, better still, follow the course of our river on foot or in a canoe, we can see that it winds back on itself again and again. In Buckingham it meanders around Fishers Field and under Castle (Tingewick Road) Bridge, only to turn again under Lords (Hunter Street) Bridge and over a weir near the Old Town (Tanlaw) Mill and yet again under the London Road Bridge before it flows past the popular Cornwall's Meadow. It goes on winding and turning like this as it flows through the counties of Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire. The reason: there is only a very slight fall in the river corridor as the Great Ouse makes its way to the sea in The Wash. It is some 80 metres (say 250 feet) above sea level in Buckingham and takes all of 240 km (150 miles) to descend to sea level.

This booklet is designed to make you more aware of the jewel in our midst, the river Great Ouse. But more than that, it seeks to remind you of a commodity vital to our lives, but one which we sometimes seem to overlook: water.



The source of the Great Ouse © Barbara Shirley 2003 >

About the Great Ouse



The simplest answer to the question “Where does the Great Ouse rise?” is to answer: “In the south-west corner of Northamptonshire, just north-east of Brackley.”

A member of The Buckingham Society, known for his enthusiasm for maps and for his refusal to accept excessively simple answers, went looking to be certain where our river rises.

He went to Biddlesden on the Bucks/Northants border where a bridge over the Great Ouse marks the county boundary. Thence, he tells us:

“Continue a short way to Syresham, over the new by-pass which must allow the Great Ouse to flow below it. Follow the signs through Syresham to Wappenham. After about a mile, pass Wild House Farm on the left and a quarter of a mile further on there’s a turning to the right clearly marked to Priest Haywood Farm. I parked my car at the turn and walked down this road, which is marked a footpath, almost to the farm.

“After crossing the Great Ouse, here some 4-5 feet wide, the footpath continued to the left and so did I, passing a large pond probably belonging to the farm. Quacking ducks and ducklings on the pond. The Great Ouse reformed itself at the head of this pond but then led to a larger man-made lake. Geese and goslings on this lake. Again the Great Ouse – much smaller now – flowed into the far end and I followed the left bank by the edge of a rough field until after about a quarter of a mile I came to another farm track with a bridge over the stream. The track curved to the left and then led up to yet a third lake, of the three the most natural and attractive.

“This final lake or pond seemed to be the prime source of the Great Ouse. It was actually an idyllic scene – quiet except for birdsong; many wild flowers, dragon-flies and chalk-blue butterflies, and great clumps of yellow-flowering iris along the lake-side. This I easily circumnavigated without finding any further outflow. However in wet weather there might be other rivulets from adjacent fields.”

A number of smaller tributary streams join this main stream as it flows between Brackley and Evenley.



^ Yellow Flag Iris at the source © Barbara Shirley 2003
< The Great Ouse enters Fishers Field

How did the Great Ouse get its name?



The word *Ouse* comes from an Ancient British or Celtic word *uisage*, meaning simply *water*. Other rivers with names evolved from this word include the Usk and the Esk and the French river Oise.

The Ancient British word *usquebaugh* has the same root and means “the water of life”, otherwise whisky.

Our river is called the Great Ouse because it is the longest of three English rivers bearing the same name. The others are the Yorkshire Ouse which joins the Trent to become the Humber, and the Sussex Ouse. There is also the Little Ouse, which wanders along the Suffolk and Norfolk borders before flowing into its big sister, the Great Ouse, near Kings Lynn.

The Ouzel, the small river flowing through Milton Keynes to join the Great Ouse, gets its name from a diminutive of the name “Ouse”.

BRITAIN'S LONGEST RIVERS

Severn	219 miles (350km)
Thames	216 miles (346km)
Trent	169 miles (270km)
Great Ouse	163 miles (260km)

^ A glimpse of Bostock Court
> The Old Iron Bridge at Castle Mills >



Fords, Water Meadows, Mills and Holy Wells



In ancient times, natural places for the easy crossing of rivers were obviously important. Thus Buckingham's Old Ford is almost certainly as old as the river itself.

Water meadows, sometimes natural, sometimes created by primitive engineering, are small areas of land along the banks of rivers where flooding ensured the growth of early grasses and fodder to feed hungry animals at the end of a long and lean winter. Some of Buckingham's ancient water meadows, Fishers Field for example, have been built over.

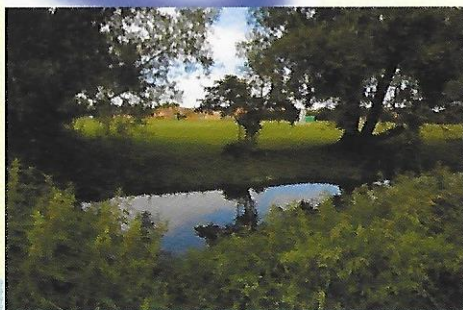
The idea of harnessing flowing water to provide power came from Ancient Greece over two thousand years ago. Water mills were a feature of pre-Norman England; the Domesday book records no fewer than 5,000. Mills had to be solidly built to stand the strain of frequent working; their foundations were generally of stone, even though upper structures might be the ancient wattle-and-daub or, later, wood.

4

Buckingham has echoes of three water mills, one upstream from Castle Bridge, a second is the Old Town Mill (the Tanlaw Mill) and the third the Bourton Mill.

Water is *the* prime essential for life and it is natural that wells and springs in ancient times were often venerated. James Rattue, of the Wycombe Museum, tells us:

"All across the world, and in all period of history, different cultures have revered water and its mysterious qualities. Wells, ponds, springs and lakes were places where hidden worlds could be reached, and offerings thrown into them went straight to the gods. Of course, every community needs a source of fresh water also, and for both these reasons, sacred wells were at the heart of ancient settlements everywhere."



^ The Tanlaw Mill (Old Town Mill)
Stratford Fields >

St Rumbold

Ancient Buckingham as a Centre of Pilgrimage: The Legend of St. Rumbold

Not far from the Great Ouse, just south-west of the town, is the site of St Rumbold's Well. There is a path leading to it from Berties' Walk, which skirts the bank of the river, via the Railway Walk.

The life of the legendary Saint Rumbold, was strange and short, lasting only three days. He was born of royal parents near King's Sutton, some 12 miles west of Buckingham, in about 650 AD. When he was born the infant Rumbold said three times in a loud voice "I am a Christian" and called for Christian baptism. He was then baptised using a stone font which was found miraculously easily nearby. On the second day he preached a sermon on Christian values and the Trinity, and on the third day foretold his immediate death, saying that he wanted to be buried first at King's Sutton, then at Brackley and finally at Buckingham.

5

In the Middle Ages there was an important shrine and tomb to St. Rumbold in Buckingham Church. Pilgrims came there to pray and to be healed after drinking the curative waters of St. Rumbold's Well. The older inns of Buckingham were said to have been founded on the pilgrim's trade. Unfortunately nothing now remains of the old Buckingham Church which fell down in 1776 and was rebuilt on its present Castle Hill site. However, in 2003 a small memorial to St. Rumbold was erected in the old churchyard, close to where his tomb might have been.

St. Rumbold's Well is marked on John Speed's map of Buckingham dated 1610. A few years later, in 1623, a stone conduit house was built over the well or spring area and lead pipes carried water across the river to Castle House. The stone parts we now see at the well site are the remains of this conduit house which fell into disuse in the 1930s. Below the steps the interior usually appears dry because the water level has fallen. In 2003 the Buckingham Society helped protect and part-restore the site and improve access to it.



St. Rumbold is a curious link with long-distant Anglo-Saxon days — over 1350 years ago. But he has a part to play today in Buckingham's archaeological, historical and tourist scene. The Buckingham Society is keen to see that he is no longer an unknown and forgotten figure from the past.

The Good...

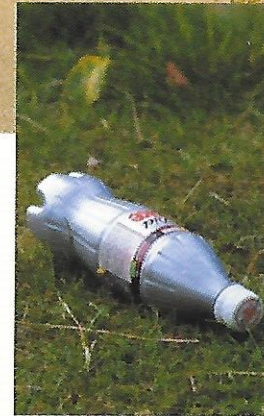


6



^ Feeding the ducks in the sunshine
Clean, clear, safe footway by the riverside^

... the Bad and the Ugly



7



^ Dog bins need to be used sensibly
Sympathetic tree planting could mask industrial units^

Buckingham's River Corridor



9

8



Riverside Wildlife



The River Great Ouse in Buckingham supports a wide range of wildlife from small water beetles and bankside butterflies through to swans and willow trees. As well as providing homes for all this wildlife, the river is an important link or wildlife corridor, connecting the countryside around Buckingham with the parks and gardens within it.

There is not enough room here to talk about all the plants and animals that can be found. However, here is a taster of what you are likely to see. Next time you walk along the river, why not take a moment to sit and let the wildlife come to you?



Small Tortoiseshell butterfly

These are one of our commonest species, often seen flying around parks and gardens in summer and hibernating in garden sheds and cellars in winter. The caterpillars feed on nettles growing in sunny spots.



Banded demoiselle damselfly

Damselflies are similar to dragonflies but are more delicate and hold their wings back along their bodies rather than out to the side. Female banded demoiselles lay their eggs into plant stems beneath the surface. They can trap air under their wings to enable them to breathe underwater as they lay.



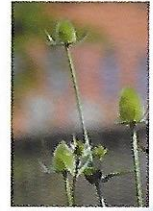
^ Top: Himalayan Balsam. ^ right White-tailed Bumble Bee on Teasel.
^ left: Small Tortoiseshell
< Grey Squirrel, Tanlaw Mill. ^ Long-Podded Poppy

Riverside Wildlife

Water boatman

Water boatmen are often seen at the water surface.

There are several types, some feed on pieces of dead plants and others feed on smaller insects that get trapped in the water. They tend to dive at the first sight of danger.



Chub

One of the larger fish found in Buckingham, reaching up to 2 feet in length. These fish will eat almost anything, animal or vegetable, that comes their way. You can recognise them by their big, silvery scales.



Daubenton's bat

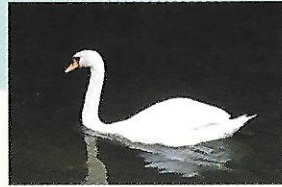
This bat leaves its roost 40 minutes after sunset to feed on insects over slow moving or still water. They take insects from close to the water surface and have been known to fall in occasionally.



^ Top right: Teasel. ^ left: Mallard ^ right: Wildlife Meadow
^ Bat Watch at Chandos Park. Small White on Thistle >



Riverside Wildlife



Mute swan

The emblem of Buckingham, mute swans are the biggest of the British swans, easily recognised by their orange bill. Swans are Royal birds, this dates back to the time when they were an important part of feasts and

banquets and the monarch wanted to claim the birds for themselves.



Moorhen

Moorhens feed on water plants in ponds and rivers. In spring you may see rival males fight. They grip each other by the feet and try to push the other underwater.



Mallard duck

Mallards outnumber other ducks and water birds on almost every British waterway. One of the reasons for their success is that they are very adaptable. Mallards are known for nesting in unusual places, often near to human habitation.

Mallard nests can be found away from water in trees and buildings.



^ Mute Swan and cygnet. ^right: Moorhen. ^left: Mallard male < Gatekeeper ^

Riverside Wildlife

Yellow Flag Iris

Yellow flag iris was once thought to cure toothache. It grows around the margins of ponds and along the banks of slow-moving sections of the Great Ouse. The striking yellow flowers attract many insects.



Willow

There are many different species of willow and they are frequently found close to water. Willows are excellent for wildlife; they provide a home and food for 266 species of insect. These insects are in turn food for birds and bats, so willow is an important part of the food chain.

Kingfisher

A careful observer may sometimes see the electric blue of of a darting Kingfisher along the quieter stretches of the river.



Crayfish

Crayfish are freshwater relatives of lobsters. There is one British species, the white-clawed crayfish. Unfortunately, non-native American crayfish have been introduced to British rivers, including the river Great Ouse. The American crayfish carry a plague which has seriously affected the white-clawed crayfish population.

A licence is needed to photograph these elegant birds.

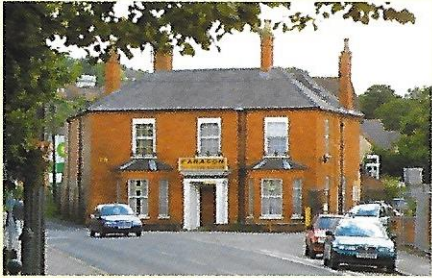
^Top right: Yellow Flag Iris © Barbara Shirley 2003

^Left: Hawthorn growing in Willow

^Right: Yellow Water Lilies. Right: Small White on Thistle >



The Future: Our River, the Canal Basin...



The Canal Basin

4 Wharf House is the only visible memory left of the Buckingham Arm of the Grand Union Canal. Opened in 1801 and following for the most part the river corridor closely, for some fifty years it was a highly profitable operation. The building of the railway in the 1850's started a period of slow decline. The last full barge crept into Buckingham in 1888 and by 1900 all canal traffic to and from our town had ceased.

The canal now is dry to Cosgrove.

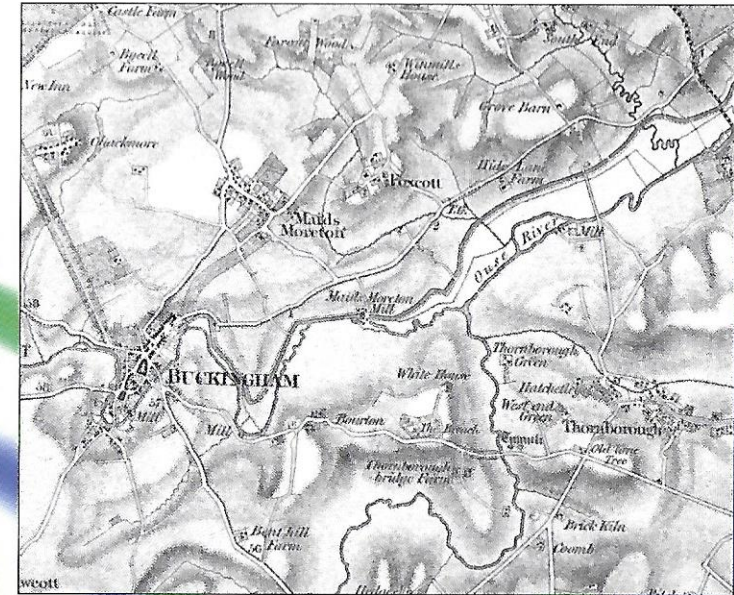
The Buckingham Arm is an undeniable part of our heritage. The Buckingham Canal Society, founded in 1992, aims to be able eventually to ensure the renewal of recreational navigation along the Buckingham Arm. Volunteers from the Canal Society have been working on several sections and hope to have at least one "in water" within the next year or so.

The Ouse Valley Walk is an invitation to explore the natural beauty of the river corridor beyond Buckingham.



^ Wharf House, Lock Cottage ^
© Buckingham Canal Society 2003 >

... and the Growth of Milton Keynes



The Growth of Milton Keynes

15 Although the prospect is doubtless not pleasing to many, the growth of Milton Keynes in a west and south-west direction over the next two years or so is likely. This growth will almost certainly have a major impact on the river corridor.

This probable growth presents a substantial opportunity for our town. The river corridor and the contiguous canal basin could be developed as a significant recreational facility and tourist attraction.

^ Reproduced from the 1980 Ordnance Survey Map

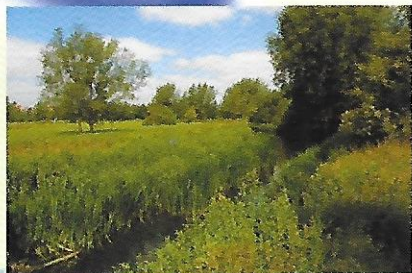
Some ideas for early action



The Buckingham Society strongly recommends that firm and early consideration be given to the following to ensure that the community can make even more effective use of the great asset

represented by the corridor of the Great Ouse in our town:

- Press for early completion of the legal arguments which are holding up the passing to public ownership of the grassy area of the Heartlands development;
- Ensure that this area, together with the adjacent Bourton Meadow Park, becomes fully integrated into the recreational and tourist attractions of Buckingham;
- Ensure that name boards are placed on each side of the three road bridges crossing the Great Ouse in Buckingham and erect notice boards in strategic locations telling about the river (eg: Chandos Park, Cornwall's Meadow and Bourton Mill);
- Set a target date (we suggest five years) for the full completion of the Riverside Walk in Buckingham;
- Introduce an "adopt a stretch of river" scheme (similar to the "adopt a roundabout" project) so that firms, institutions and private groups may play a part in the amelioration of the river corridor in Buckingham;
- Ensure that the ideas and projects suggested by the Buckingham community as a result of the Town Workshop held as part of the Heritage Open Days in mid-September 2003 are implemented.



^ Stratford Fields
Bourton Meadow >

Acknowledgements

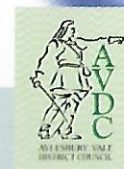


The Buckingham Society wishes to acknowledge with deep gratitude the very great assistance it has had from a number of people and institution in the work of writing, editing and production of this booklet. The booklet is itself part of a much larger enterprise, **The Year of the River**, conceived by and managed by the Society.

This larger enterprise includes the making of a video film entitled **Our River** and a town Workshop held in conjunction with the Heritage Open Days weekend of 13-14 September 2003.

Specifically, the Society wishes to acknowledge the hard work and professionalism of the following:

- John Credland, to whom the Society wishes to express its profound thanks for most of the photographs and for invaluable help in preparing the booklet for publication. His professionalism is stamped across this booklet.
- Glyn Kuhn for computer graphics
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- The Buckingham Town Council
- The Aylesbury Vale District Council, especially Andy Kirkham and Cheryl Scott
- The Buckinghamshire County Council, especially Cllr Ken Liverseidge and Julia Wise



All photographs, unless marked, © John Credland LBIPP 2003 - 01280 813641



The Buckingham Society
Campaigning for a Better Buckingham

Why not join your local Civic Society?

The Buckingham Society welcomes new members

We need **your help** to extend our recent achievements:

- Safeguarding and publicising the site of **St Rumbold's Well**
- Becoming one of the first **Pathfinder Societies** in The Civic Trust's new scheme
- Sustaining *Buckingham's Vision and Design Statement* which is now used as important planning guidance to ensure high standards of design, distinctiveness and sustainability in new buildings across Buckingham
- Starting the debate on what we'd all like to see in the **River Great Ouse corridor** through our town
- Backing the group that has made a significant start to refurbishing our ancient **Old Churchyard**.
- Celebrating our shared heritage, especially through the annual **Heritage Open Days Festival** each September.

FILL IN ONE OF OUR MEMBERSHIP LEAFLETS, TODAY!

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