

Introduction

The intention is to follow the courses of the East Norfolk rivers which discharge their contents by way of Breydon Water into the North Sea, while identifying and describing sites near to them of present and especially past, significance and interest. That simple statement hides an aspect which seems to be mildly contentious. Certainly, older maps show the River Yare, having taken in the contents of the River Waveney, continuing through Breydon Water and emerging from the north-east end. It is then joined on the left bank by the River Bure, and swings south between Great Yarmouth on the left bank, and Gorleston on the right bank, before turning east again to enter the North Sea. By this reckoning, the Rivers Waveney and Bure are tributaries of the River Yare, and the town of Great Yarmouth is indeed at the mouth of that river. Modern maps and some descriptive accounts seem to extend Breydon Water to the sea, so treating it as an estuary into which the three rivers flow. Obviously, this does not matter greatly, but as my main purpose is historical, I shall consider the River Yare as flowing all the way to the sea. This short discussion has resulted in my naming 3 of the rivers which will be treated separately, namely the Yare, Waveney and Bure, and a fourth will be dealt with in this way, the River Wensum, because although a tributary of the River Yare by convention, it is actually a much larger river. There are other tributaries, and they will be considered as I travel along the main rivers from source to mouth, at the point where I arrive at the relevant confluences. However, I shall not treat the Broads in detail, limiting myself to brief comments, and to giving an indication of where their meres and other waterways intersect with rivers when I come to such points in my journeys. As with my other accounts of river journeys, I shall break the document into modules which are separately accessible as follows;

1. Introduction (+ Addendum) & References
2. River Yare
3. River Wensum
4. River Waveney
5. River Bure

The journeys have been in an important sense virtual, in that I have not tramped for significant distances along the river banks. There are walkways, like the Wherryman's Way beside the River Yare, which I have utilised for short stretches, but for the most part, I have followed the rivers on maps and satellite views, identified sites of interest, and then worked out ways of getting near enough to see them, and obtain photographs. Time constraints have necessitated such an economical approach as I do not live in the area. However, I have had one great bonus, namely that during visits extending over more than 30 years, my friends in the area, Mr. & Mrs. Andy Moore have taken me to a significant proportion of the most interesting places, and additional visits have rarely been necessary. Sometimes I have found no way of getting a desired view, usually because the site concerned is private, which status has been respected by doing no more than mentioning the building of interest; where access is available occasionally or conditionally, I have sometimes used photographs from the Internet, usually acknowledging their provenance. In rather fewer cases, usually

near sources of rivers, points of interest were beyond my reach physically, and again I have used any photographs I have been able to find. I have referred to many documents, including books, monographs and published learned papers and those which have been helpful are listed in the bibliography which appears after this introduction, but it is right to highlight the relevant Pevsner and Arthur Mee 'King's England' volumes which have been indispensable, and can be used to fill out many of the short accounts presented here. Although it is at least half a century since they were published, this is not of great moment for historical journeys, provided that the continuing existence of any buildings has been confirmed. Maps on the National Library of Scotland website, maps.nls.uk have given a 19th century baseline to my historical enquiries and along with a website to be mentioned later, have been a key tool for identifying the sites of water mills.

The places described are all fairly near to the rivers in question, and although I have allowed myself the occasional detour, especially in riverside towns, I have rarely left the catchment. The aim has been to keep the rivers and their tributaries central to the narrative, rather than using them as a vehicle for a wider study of the lands around them. The city of Norwich presented something of a dilemma, given that I did not want to add another, less comprehensive, guidebook to the many which already exist. So I have kept particularly close to the Rivers Yare and Wensum when tracking them through and around the city. An ever-present temptation, when producing a document of this type, is the inclusion of too much information. I have read a few such narratives and some give details of every settlement, so that no place stands out. Here, I have tried to preserve a sense that anywhere given more than a passing reference has 'earned' it, because of some distinctive or unusual feature(s). I give considerable attention to water mills and old bridges, because in a special sense, they are buildings of the rivers, as opposed to just being near to them, and here stress my debt to the norfolkmills.co.uk website. As regards bridges, I will perhaps be forgiven for steering anyone, who wants more information than I give here, to my own compendium on the website, drtomsbooks.com

This is an appropriate place to acknowledge the help I have received from my brother, Alastair Robertson who has prepared the sketch maps which show the river courses and identify the water mills on them; these items appear at the end of each account of a river. In this regard, only those mills operating in the period from the 17th to the 20th century are included, as only they can be located with confidence. Of course some mills have a longer history than that, and others may have existed in medieval times but be long gone; those known about are mentioned in the text, as indeed are most of the others, but they do not appear in the sketch maps.

It is wise at the outset to consider the hoped-for audience for a piece of work like this. I have visited the area regularly over the past 30 years and viewed most of the towns, villages, mansions, ruins and other artefacts described, but in a largely unstructured way. As a result, I have missed seeing things which would have been of considerable interest (some of these omissions have been repaired as part of the present exercise), and have certainly not followed an optimal path. So, apart from reflecting an abiding interest in rivers, and everything physically associated with them, the document uses the courses of the rivers to provide a logical and coherent way of viewing points of interest near to them. I would hope to assist visitors and local residents, who might like to trace a stretch of river and view features and artefacts there. I suspect that I have less to say to those with real knowledge and expertise about the area, but some may be like me in wishing to read critically anything dealing with a topic of interest. Even though it is a negative note to end on, I should make it clear that there are areas which are hardly touched on in the document. Although I do try to identify nature

reserves and areas of special scientific interest, I have virtually nothing to say about the plant and animal life generally in and around the rivers, nor do I have much to say about fishing. There is nothing in the document to aid the navigation of any canoeist or boating enthusiast, and that includes finding hostelry, though I would hope that my account might enhance the enjoyment of trips they make along the rivers concerned by identifying artefacts they might see in passing and by suggesting stopping-off points.

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Addendum

A1. On returning to this document after completing the accounts of the separate river journeys, I realised that there were a few general points worth making.

As regards the watermills on the rivers, an overview is given by the Table below;

River	No. of Mills	Corn Mills	Paper Mills	Cloth Mills	Other	No. of Waterwheels
R. Yare	17	14	3	2	0	24
R. Wensum	17	16	3	2	1	27
R. Waveney	14	14	0	2	0	19
R. Bure	20	20	1	2	2	23
Totals	68	64	7	8	3	93

Notes;

1. Some mills had more than one function over time, and/or sometimes separate waterwheels carried out separate tasks in the same mill, so numbers do not add simply.
2. 'Corn Mills' is used generically to include all types of grain and flour mills.
3. It is no surprise in a county of much arable farming that there is a predominance of corn mills, but it is surprising that there are so few performing other tasks. In particular, no other specialities grew up along any of the rivers, and there appear to be none that would be classed as industrial in function.
4. Many of the watermills operated in tandem with windmills, and a substantial number were boosted by steam engines from the mid-19th century onwards. Of those which survived to the later 20th century, a few were converted from water power to electric power.
5. On each river, the watermills are confined to the middle stretch. Upstream the flow of water was not large enough to power a mill consistently, while downstream, navigation was a priority in the period of interest, and mills extending across the river were a major obstruction.

A2. It is disappointing that so few old bridges still cross the rivers (my criterion is pre-1700). There are 2 in the River Yare catchment, 1 in the River Wensum catchment, none in the River Waveney catchment, and 3 in the River Bure catchment; 6 in all.

A3. It is worth remembering that Norfolk is a dry county, with the annual rainfall in Norwich 629mm, compared with the English average of 855mm. Given that fact, it is perhaps surprising that there is so much water to be seen around each of the rivers, though much of it can be described as standing in old sand and gravel pits, ponds, and meres, rather than flowing in ditches and drainage channels. Nonetheless, at Yarmouth, the mean discharge rate by the River Yare of 162000 gallons per minute, is substantial.

References

Bibliography

Title	Author (s)	Publisher	Date
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The King's England - Norfolk	Mee A. ed.	Hodder & Stoughton	1951
The King's England – Suffolk	Mee A. ed.	Hodder & Stoughton	1949
The Round Towers to English Parish Churches	Messent C J W	Fletcher & Son Ltd.	1958
The Buildings of England – N-E Norfolk & Norwich	Pevsner N.	Penguin	1962
The Buildings of England – N-W & S Norfolk	Pevsner N.	Penguin	1990
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The Waveney Valley	Reeve C.	Fonthill Media Ltd.	2015
The Castles of the East Anglia	Salter M.	Folly	2001
Rivers of East Anglia	Turner J.	Cassel & Co. Ltd.	1954
Water and Wind Power	Watts M.	Shire	2005

Websites

Site	Comment
britishlistedbuildings.co.uk	
pastscape.org.uk	English historic buildings
maps.nls.uk	Historic maps
gridreferencefinder.com	Convenient access to Google & OS maps
drtomsbooks.files.wordpress.com	My own gazetteer of ancient bridges
en.wikipedia.org	
ceh.ac.uk/index	Hosts the National River Flow archive
norfolk Mills.co.uk	Exceptional source of information

In the course of the project, I have read guidebooks acquired during visits to historic sites, and I have consulted many local websites. Apart from extracting facts, I have not copied text, but would want to thank those responsible, who have made useful information available.