

HIDDEN RIVERSIDE NORWICH

How the River Wensum Shaped the City and its Suburbs

Steve Silk

This book celebrates the River Wensum, the meandering waterway to which the historic city of Norwich owes its very existence. It is intended to provide inspiration for the reader to go out and discover the hidden and lesser known parts of the city's riverside. By boat, bike or canoe, the Wensum is there to be discovered. Both for those who know the city well, and for those simply visiting, there will always be some new discoveries to be made.

For many years the delights of the river have been overlooked; hardly surprising given that the Wensum once formed a polluted artery bringing smoke-grimed coasters into the industrial heart of the city. But those days have gone. The river is now cleaner and greener and over the past fifty years wharves and staithe have been replaced by fashionable apartments overlooking tree-lined riverside footpaths.

Many will have their favourite stretches along Wensum's winding route. The river pops up at Hellesdon bridge for example, but then disappears behind Heigham. It sidles furtively into the city centre near the Barn Road roundabout and doesn't really announce itself until at least Duke Street if not the top of Riverside Road. But all the while this beautiful, rare, chalk river is providing habitats for flora and fauna and valuable places of peace and quiet for the rest of us.

This book aims to put all the pieces of the jigsaw together, from rural Ringland, through the suburbs and into the historic city.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

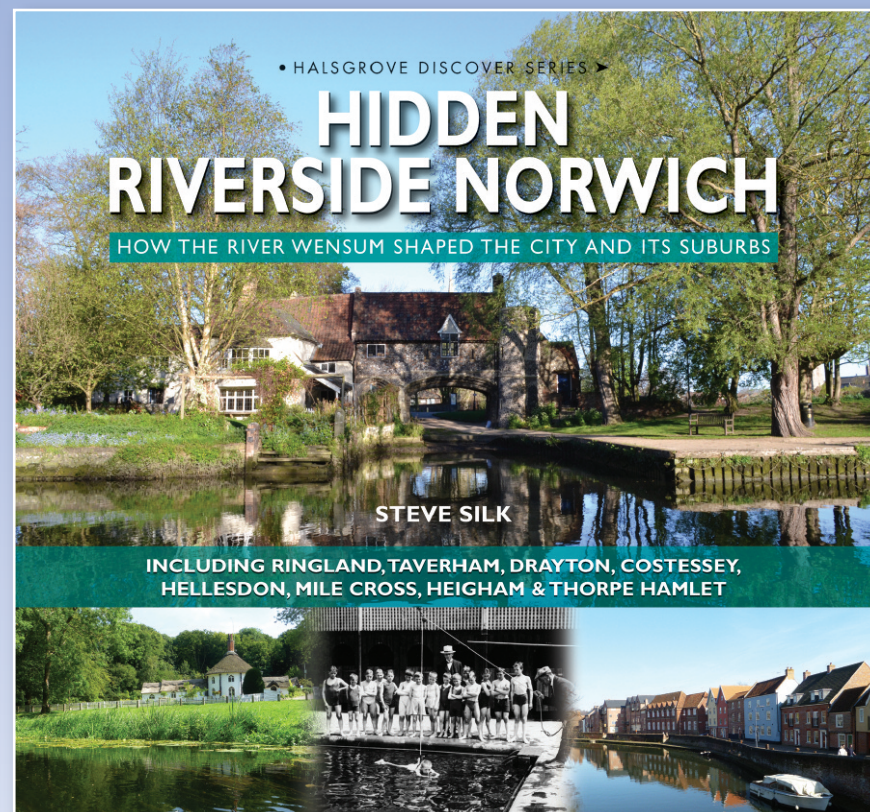
Steve Silk is an assistant editor for the BBC, working on its Look East news programme based in Norwich. He lives in Loddon, half way along the Wherryman's Way, with his wife Debbie and their two daughters Abbie and Maya.

Also by Steve Silk: *The Wherryman's Way – A Guide to Norfolk's Long Distance Footpath*

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Imprints: Halsgrove, Ryelands, Halstar, PIXZ Books & Halswood Journals. Halsgrove® is a registered trademark. Copyright© 2016

HALSGROVE TITLE INFORMATION



Format: *Hardback, 144 pages, 214x230mm, profusely illustrated in colour throughout*

Price: *£16.99*

ISBN: *978 0 85704 282 8*

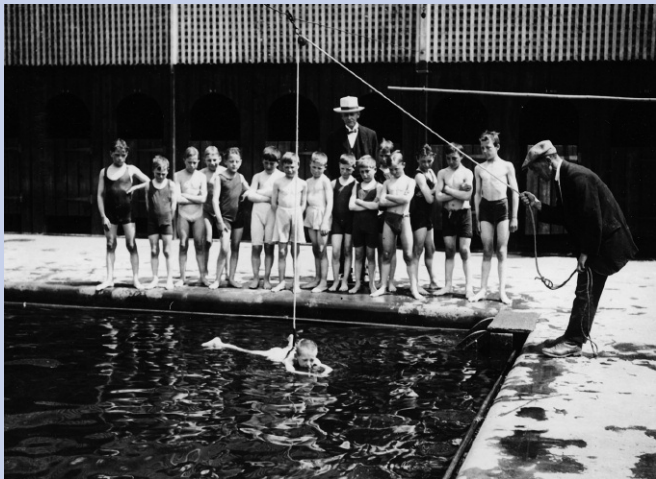
Imprint: *Halsgrove*

Published: *April 2016*



Halsgrove Publishing, Halsgrove House, Ryelands Business Park, Bagley Road,
Wellington, Somerset TA21 9PZ Tel: 01823 653777 Fax: 01823 216796
www.halsgrove.com e-mail: sales@halsgrove.com

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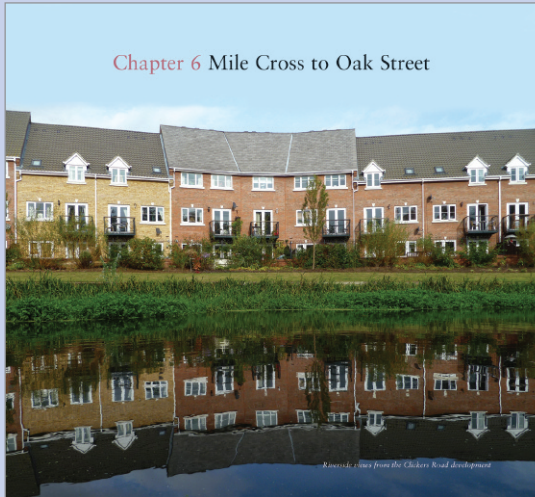


Above: Swimming lessons at one of the baths along the Wensum

Left: Canoe view at Hellesdon



Heading down to Costessey
The final navigable reach of the Wensum



Chapter 6 Mile Cross to Oak Street

This is the transitional chapter, it starts in suburbia and ends in the city. And annoyingly from my point of view, the area to the north of the Museum from Drayton Road to Oak Street doesn't have an overarching name. It's part Mile Cross, part North City and part Costessey.

As ever it's simpler down on the river. The Wensum leaves Hellesdon behind as it flows under the Sweet Briar Bridge on Norwich's outer ring road. On the south bank we're then in Heigham, where the water treatment works dominate the landscape. On the north bank the Sweet Briar Road meadows provide a welcome "green lung" between Marriot's Way and the river.

Mile Cross Bridge is the next landmark. A city council depot and refuse tip share the riverside with a travellers' site. Then we find another well-used green space, Anderson's Meadow. Now the river turns south, soon rubbing up against Wensum Park and then St Martin's Road. Modern flats and houses make the most of the location and it's great to see so many canoes semi-camouflaged within private gardens.

And then to Oak Street. Remember that in the old days, living near the river meant disease and the risk of flooding. Only the poorest dwelt close to the Wensum and they lived cheek by jowl with each other too. The yards and terraces here were among the most god-forsaken slums in all of Norwich. Overlooked and under-appreciated, this part of the city once teemed with life.

Sweet Briar Bridge
This elegant two-span bridge was built in the 1930s as one of the final pieces in the jigsaw of the outer ring road. As a driver you're hard pushed to notice it. As a canoeist heading downstream it's a suitably grand start to the river's city life.

Mile Cross Bridge
Indisputably the ugliest bridge across the Wensum, the Mile Cross Bridge dates back to the early 1920s. It was built as part of an unemployment relief project and helped serve the new council estates which were springing up to the north of the river. Reinforced concrete was then the material of the future. Functional and durable, yes. Pretty, no.

Dolphin Bridge
This one also gets a mention in the Heigham chapter. It was built as a pedestrian bridge in 1809 to replace the Dolphin Ferry. Many at the time felt it should have been built for cars too. Originally it was longer, allowing people to cross the old Midland & Great Northern railway line. Marriot's Way now runs in the railway's place.

From top:
Sweet Briar Bridge
Mile Cross Bridge
Dolphin Bridge

61

