Godmanchester Garden Club Newsletter
October 2025

News from No. 10

I was reminded by Francis's talk that we visited The Manor at Hemingford Grey in July – friends from the US were staying with us and she is a keen quilt maker. The borders were full of colour with some magnificent Turk's cap lilies (Lilium martagon). I loved the wild carrot umbels too! It had been a while since we had visited and I had forgotten that a selection of unusual plants was for sale! I took the opportunity to buy another splendid aeonium – we lost ours a couple of winters ago. A lovely place to visit on our doorstep!

Happy Gardening, *Sue*

PLFrancis Mizuro: Tales from the Riverbank

https://www.electricriverboat.co.uk/

Francis began by telling us about his background in horticulture as a propagator producing large numbers of plug plants on a commercial site near Wisbech. Before leaving the business Francis introduced an automated robot sticking line that stuck cuttings flown in from warmer countries around the world. Robots were not as efficient as the faster workers; however, they were able to work continuously, without breaks or limited working hours.

He and his wife Sarah then took over the St Ives Electric Riverboat Co. which now offers a variety of trips and events departing from the quay in St Ives, to various destinations along the river Great Oue. https://www.electricriverboat.co.uk/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Great_Ouse

The river Great Ouse is initially fed by chalk streams originating in the Chiltern Hills, with the river itself, rising in Syresham, Northamptonshire and flowing into the North Sea near Kings Lynn, a length of 143 miles, the fourth longest U.K. river.

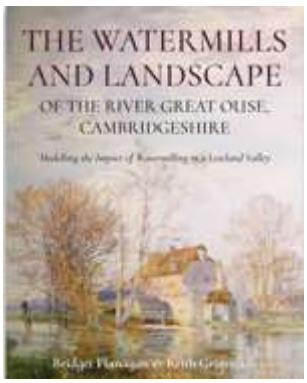
There is increasing concern about chalk streams, which are now drying up, due to over extraction from aquifers, and too much house building. This is having a negative impact on the flora and fauna of the chalk streams. Of the 210 rivers classified as chalk streams globally, 160 are in England.

St Ives Electric Riverboat Co. offers river trips from Easter throughout the summer until the end of October, when the river becomes increasingly volatile or is flooded, as is happening more frequently. In the Great Ouse Valley, we are protected from some flooding thanks to the Lowland Meadows. Port Holme represents 7% of the U.K. Lowland Meadows and is protected by being a Site of Special Scientific Interest and was flooded several times and for long periods last year.

St Ives Electric Riverboat Co. supports endeavours to have the area of the Great Ouse Valley from St Neots, where the river enters Cambridgeshire, to Earith where it leaves it, classified as a "Designated Landscape", https://www.landuse.co.uk/thoughts/landscape-designations with the aim of conserving the area for its remarkable natural beauty and distinctive character. He works with The Great Ouse Valley Trust, https://greatousevalleytrust.org.uk, a charity formed in 2018 to protect, promote and enhance the special landscape in the Great Ouse Valley in Cambridgeshire and whose Chair, Graham Campbell, was with us on Monday evening.

Francis is learning about new research suggesting Lowland Meadows may sequester more carbon than woodland, because the carbon is protected by the anaerobic conditions of the Lowland Meadows.

The rich history of the Great Ouse Valley was illustrated by the many watermills that once used the river, of which Hemingford Grey water mill was one of the wealthiest, but burnt down leaving no trace. Francis was lucky to have attended the book launch of a book written by Bridget Flanagan and Keith Grimwade entitled "The Watermills and Landscape of the River Great Ouse, Cambridgeshire: Modelling the Impact of Water milling in a Lowland Valley" Paperback – 30 Jun. 2025 by Bridget Flanagan (Author), Keith Grimwade (Author) was subsequently published.



One of the trips offered by the St Ives Electric Riverboat Co takes visitors to the Manor, Hemingford Grey, continuously inhabited since Norman times and now visited for the gardens, created by Lucy Boston, and the history of the house. Francis recommends reading Lucy Boston's children's books, set in and around the house, starting with "The Children of Green Knowe" (1954), to appreciate some of the artefacts in the house. Lucy was also a talented patch worker and visitors from around the world come to view her quilts.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_M._Boston

Talking about the flora of the river, Francis recommended an app, **iNaturalist**, that helps to identify plants and animals and shares observations with a community of scientists and naturalists. He showed us native plants that thrive in clean water: Marsh Woundwort (Stachys palustris, below left), Arrowhead plant (Sagittaria sagittifolia, right), yellow water lily (Nymphaea lutes) and water mint (below right), which purifies water. Francis is interested in the way reed beds can purify polluted water.

He went on to talk about the threats to the river and its valley, from invasive plants, such as pennywort and Himalayan Balsam, to the pollution from sewage and agricultural runoff, and housing and other developments.

Some of these have been or are being tackled by local groups, who go out in canoes litter picking and "Balsam bashing". Volunteers also measure water quality in order to lobby for improvement.

Francis spoke of the company's involvement with the Norris Museum's educational programme "River Heroes", and stressed the need for education and understanding of the history. If you are looking for a way to support our river valley, Francis suggested The Great Ouse Valley Trust.

It was an interesting, wide-ranging and informative talk, enjoyed by all there and inspiring us to plan a river trip instead of a garden visit next year and become more involved with this special landscape.

Josephine

NB Photo of Francis and Sarah taken with Ben Obese-Jecty MP, found on Facebook