

Tetney Lock Bridge

Whiling time, waiting wharfside for tide to force gates at Lock long gone, across from brickworks and claypits become caravans & fisheries, took a beer at the Crown and Anchor or Sloop Inn, a house among houses now like Chapel and Coastguard Station - all cluster along a triangle of lanes & waterways. At the apex Navigation & Mother Drain merge to fall through tilting weir from sluice to outfall sluice - exclude *escluse* salt from fresh - turnstone flies over flood gates, under pipe syphoning sweet oil from sea line, then out & out all gathered rivers, becks & drains under winter-flocking geese, swirling starlings through whimbrel marshes into wide tide mouth.

Fen Bridge

Here bees farm hives: chew, store, seal, comb,
clean, seem safe in still garden space behind
great shuttered warehouse at Austen Fen
Poulton Tunnel & pumping stations east
and west keep draining, syphoning - here's
honey and water, water and honey. Suddenly
certainly on far side of bronze water, a horse
rides along Treasure Lane, precarious in power
pole & cable frame before bucolic backdrop
of hay-rolled gold on green. Hunt value here:
white honey, yellow wagtail on Bridge Farm roof,
finches feeding by Fen Farm Cottages. King Lane
to Fen cuts fast through it all on a blind lateral over
the water past Anka, Amaryllis, Bienvenue.

Amaryllis means refresh, she thought - *that's what you should feel when you get home, refreshed*. The Victorians thought determination, especially in love, from the classic story perhaps, or the determination of a country girl, whose father worked for Claytons Coal Merchants, who married a man whose grandfather used to fetch the coal from the boat, who started in a caravan in a garden across from windswept Austen Fen, who made four children from nothing. Now he's gone from the tumour, she carries on, keeps her hands knitting and her kettles full - *no mains down here - all the water's pumped out - if we've no electric, we've no water*. Or perhaps Amaryllis, from Greek amarussein, sparkling like her mother after dad took all eight of us to chapel so she could take her bath in private in front of the fire, sparkling like the water when we used to pack a picnic on a summer day and take all the children down - and then come home. She knows they won't do anything more with the canal now - *they'll leave it as it is won't they? - after all we've got the reservoir off it now*.

Firebeacon Bridge

Terminus, then coal port. After the Ship Inn fell into the water, new built bungalow & boatyard on Bull Bank leading to reservoir, high walls exclude over farm & marshland. Canal path widens above nettle patches of wrens, badger pathways between shining thistle rosettes, vole burrows into bankside loam, reedbeds below. From far, gaining ground, bright yellow digger on caterpillar tyres black scraping arm thrashing out into water back-draws cracking reeds & plants up onto side a grubbed-out season's growth dumped, scattered with scallops & winkles. Something does happen here: no creatures seen to scuttle but they do: shaved space made, clear flow maintained.

That was how we got into cows. This cow - she'd had a calf too young, it sends 'em a bit loopy - I fetched her out the canal three times for the farmer. In the end, he said, "you can have her". We kept the cattle safe, but we'd no more horses after the neighbour's pony went in and died didn't it. Dad ran across the water pipe with the lad on his shoulders, everyone on the bridge cheering. As boys, they tried to bike it - they fell in. Then they went down on drums fastened together - they all tipped up, tipped right out. We didn't care, used to swim in it anyway, playing down there all the time, with the dogs and everything - wouldn't now, all the chemicals off the fields, more than there used to be. Took all kinds of boats down to the pub at Tetney. If only it could be put back into use - it would be brilliant, anything that would bring activity here - pubs back on the side, rowing. Only folk come here now is when it gets high, people come to gawp at it 'cause they think it's going to come over. Don't write that down.

Church Foot Bridge, Alvingham

Wagtails call on wing low by winter crops
kingfisher darts turquoise upstream. Behind
the farm, cows pasture over earthworks
priory moats & banks, ditches & fishponds

PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD

Let the wealthy give land and alms so *our*
meadow and all the village of Alvingham
next to the dyke in the east are protected
from flooding - till the plague took them

THE ETERNAL GOD IS THY REFUGE

Chasing a trapped wren round St Mary's
damp white spaces, held by anxious corbel
heads, dark green lichen growing over font

Underneath Are The Everlasting Arms

I got married and went to the farm. We found our own recreation really. When you're farming, there's always something going on. We had wheat, barley, oil seed rape - we used to breed Lincoln red cattle and we had sheep as well. They used to come early Summer every year and dredge it out and all the debris they used to put it on the side, and the next year on the other side, for the farmers to deal with. They'd wait well into the Autumn and it dried out in the sun in the summer, then the men would burn it. The water used to run at such a speed when they got it dredged out. My mother-in-law married in 1912 and went to the farm. She remembered those barge boats that used to come up the canal with coal to Louth. They used to have those big round white ships biscuits - just flour, sugar and water really - and the men used to throw them to the kiddies on the bank - they used to line up for 'em, they loved 'em.

Keddington Church Foot Bridge (Eastfield)

What's behind fences, gates creaking open into other sides, properties chosen privacy over view. Just off the towpath, the Raven beerhouse and bit of land out back, long since private: cabin and chair look onto canal's past thirsty workspace, diminutive drink left out. Blackbird goes blithe between gardens gathering, flies over roof to drink at rainwater-filled *Deep Excavations* - diggers on Eastfield Road *WHERE TOWN MEETS COUNTRY* - takes low flight back over frost-laid grass swathes and off down canal kink. Even in December you could never write the ground or the growing growings in it.

Tilting Gate Foot Bridge, Riverhead

From brambled banks of split concrete
gulls call through unseen traffic behind
Woolpack, warehouse, mill. Ducks hold
heads low, face east wind on rippling canal,
outfall pipe spouts in. Stacked breeze blocks
at the builders' yard before sun-streaked
factory facade **U.K.** picked out, light bricks
against dark, where goods were hoisted out
of shuttered doors & windows miniature
over the water. The old geezers head along
the wharf past shades of granaries, kilns &
bone mills into the Gas Lamp. Nettles weaken
on the bank, leaves at every stage from
skeletal to new-fallen. *Are you cold there?*