

195

# Canal Songs



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Published by Broadside Records, Studley House, 68 Limes Road,  
Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, England.

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\* Composed by Jon Raven

## Foreword

Some of the songs in this collection were used in the stage musical documentary 'Canal Folk', first performed at Birmingham Repertory Theatre's Studio Theatre in May 1974. The songs were written or selected by me, the prose written by Michael Jackson and the stage presentation produced by Christopher Honer. The written pieces were specially composed to fit particular scenes and may not be suitable songs for ordinary performance. The documentary drew on a large number of contemporary documents and described the canal age with particular reference to the life of the canal builders (the navvies) and the canal boatmen, who plied their trade on them. The remaining songs in this collection have been gleaned from various sources (see source list) by myself and other researchers. As far as we are aware, this is the first collection of canal songs to be published.

The music, song words, contemporary accounts and other notes were set out for printing by off-set litho by Kate Raven, my wife. The cover illustration is the work of my thirteen year old son, Paul. The photographs are by Leonard Raven, my father.

Jon Raven. May 1974.

## Sources of Songs

- The Navigation or Canal Fever - from the collection of Roy Palmer  
 Come Now Begin Delving - Aris's 'Birmingham Gazette'  
 Inland Navigation - Gentleman's Magazine, March 1766  
 The Manchester Ship Canal - Notes & Queries, March 12, 1881.  
 Manchester Reference Library
- On Leeds Becoming a Seaport Town - Broadside Collection. Leeds Reference  
 Library
- Paddy Upon the Canal - Box No.3, Broadside Collection, Univer-  
 sity Library, Newcastle upon Tyne
- The Bold Navigators - Broadside, Manchester Reference  
 Library. Tune - Jon Raven
- The Navvy Boy - Sam Henry Collection, No.760, From  
 Robert Lyons, Greenhill, Blackhill,  
 Coleraine. Researched - Roy Palmer
- The Birmingham Lads - Composed by John Freeth, to mark the  
 opening of the Birmingham Canal in 1769.  
 Researched by Roy Palmer, Birmingham.  
 Tune - Dibdin, "Warwickshire Lads".
- All Hail this Grand Day - Composed by a 'gentleman' to mark the  
 opening of the Croydon Canal in October  
 1809. It was sung by Mr.J.Walsh, one of  
 the canal company proprietors. Times,  
 27 October, 1809.
- Poor Old Horse - Narrow Boats, LP.Reccrd, B.B.C.  
 Publications.
- Keep Your Hands Off - As above
- The Tommy Note - from 'Ballads and Broad sides', by  
 Theo Vasmer. B'ham.Ref.Lib. Tune,  
 Jon Raven, structured from traditional  
 sources.
- The Canal Boat Song - from the singing of Bill Murphy, a  
 London dock hand. Collected by Peter  
 Kennedy, copyright 1965 E.F.D.S.  
 Publications
- The Cruise of the Calibar - from the singing of Emma Vicars.  
 Collected by Fred Hamer. Copyright  
 E.F.D.S.Publications
- The Mary: A Yarn - from F. Hirds, 'Lancashire Stories'  
 1912 - Vol.11. Researched, Mary Prior,  
 Oxford
- The Rosemary  
 Push Boys Push - Written by Pete Dodds of Birmingham  
 - Composed by members of the Dudley  
 Tunnel Trust and others

Unless otherwise stated, all material is researched by Jon Raven.

### Useful Information Sources

- Books - A General History of Inland Navigation, J. Phillips, 1795.  
Canal Adventures by Moonlight, George Smith, 1881.  
The Canal Age, Charles Hadfield. David & Charles, 1968.  
Pan Books, 1971.  
The Canal Builders, Anthony Burton. Eyre & Methuen, 1972.  
George Smith of Coalville, Edwin Hodder. Houghton & Co. 1896.  
Government White Paper on Canals, 1967.  
Government Reports - Additional information may be found in such reports as those relating to Truck Acts, Immigration, Wages, Child Labour, etc.  
Historical Account of the Navigable Rivers, Canals and Railways of Great Britain. Priestly, 1831.  
The History of the Railways connecting London and Birmingham, Peter Lecount, 1839.  
Inland Waterways of Britain, L.T.C. Rolt. Allen & Unwin, 1950.  
Lives of the Engineers, S. Smiles, various volumes, 1862 etc.  
Royal Commission on Canals and Inland Waterways, 7 volumes, 1906-1911, Copies at Birmingham University Library.  
National Biography, for background data on Smith, Telford, Bridgwater, etc.  
Our Canal Population, George Smith, 1875.  
Rob Kat, Pearce. Copy British Museum.  
Navigable Waterways, L.T.C. Rolt, Longmans, 1969.  
Select Committee on Canals, 1878 and 1883.  
Staffordshire Waterways, Local History Source Book No.6, W'ton. Lib.  
Use of Urban Canals, Lewis Braithwaite, B'ham. University, 1970.
- Places - British Transport Historical Records (Canal Company Records etc.) 60 Porchester Road, London W.2.  
British Waterways Canal Museum, Stoke Bruerne, Northants.
- Records - Narrow Boats, LP. Record, B.B.C. Publications. Excellent conversations between boatmen plus some songs - mainly composed in recent years.
- Organisations - British Waterways Board, Canal Shop and Information Centre, 2 Kingston Row, Birmingham  
Inland Waterways Association, Midlands Branch, 71 Masters Lane, Halescwen, Worcestershire.

An LP. recording of some of the songs from this book, featuring Jon Raven and other performers, will be available from 68 Limes Road, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, by Spring 1975.

Jon Raven's published works include the following:-

- Kate of Coalbrookdale, LP. Record, ZFB 29, Argo Records (Division of Decca Records).
- Songs of a Changing World, LP. Record, LER 2083, Leader Records.
- The Nailmakers, LP. Record, Mono. Broadside Records, Sponsored by Radio Birmingham Enterprises.
- Kate of Coalbrookdale, book, songs from the LP. above. Robbins Music Corporation.
- Songs of a Changing World, book, thirty urban/industrial songs. Ginn and Company.
- Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain, entry on Staffordshire. Readers Digest Association.
- Turpin Hero, book, folk songs and other songs, Oxford University Press. To be published late 1974/75.
- The Nailmakers, musical documentary play by the late Malcolm Totten and Jon Raven. Script of the documentary first performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's Studio Theatre in May 1973. Black Country Society. To be published late 1974/75.

At the present time, May 1974, Jon is working on several interesting projects.

Staffordshire Folklore. Batsford's are hoping to publish a new series of regional folklore books and he has been invited to submit a synopsis and chapter on Staffordshire. This is a major project that should be complete by 1976.

Markets, fairs and sports. A collection of contemporary documents, songs and poems illustrating various social gatherings and pastimes in 19th century England. The book will be produced in collaboration with Roy Palmer of Birmingham and will probably be published by Cambridge University Press in 1975.

Black Country Song. A definitive work with commentary in which the rich variety of Black Country lore and song is fully illustrated. The songs are set in their historical context.

A collection of British industrial/urban ballads and songs. Five sections with lengthy introductions to each section. The songs are gleaned from all parts of the country from the researches of the author and other collectors. David & Charles, to be published 1975/76.

Broadside songs of the North East. A collection of broadsides from Country Durham and Northumberland produced in facsimile, illustrating industrial and social aspects of life.

Some of the above projects will be accompanied by LP. records.

#### Acknowledgments

The authors and publishers wish to thank those who have given permission to include the following songs in this book: The Canal Boat Song, copyright 1965 by E.F.D.S. Publications Limited and the Cruise of the Calibar, copyright 1967 by E.F.D.S. Publications Limited - used by permission. The Rosemary, composed by Peter Dodds.

THE FAMOUS DUKE

FREELY

Come gath - er round me, bon - ny lads, a stor - y I will tell Of  
Bridg - wat - er that great Duke, whose name you know right well.  
In Lanc - a - shire he long did dwell, to Lon - don town he came  
To play the young and sport - ing blade, and be a man of fame.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'The Famous Duke'. It consists of four staves of music in a 2/4 time signature, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written on a treble clef. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across multiple notes. The word 'FREELY' is written above the first staff. The lyrics are: 'Come gath - er round me, bon - ny lads, a stor - y I will tell Of Bridg - wat - er that great Duke, whose name you know right well. In Lanc - a - shire he long did dwell, to Lon - don town he came To play the young and sport - ing blade, and be a man of fame.'

Come gather round me, bonny lads, a story I will tell,  
Of Bridgwater that great Duke, whose name you know right well.  
In Lancashire he long did dwell, to London town he came  
To play the young and sporting blade, and be a man of fame.

'Twas there he took to courting - a girl both bright and fair,  
And soon he fell in love with her, how they made a comely pair.  
But fortune, being cruel to him, it did her love destroy,  
For she turned to another blade and left him without joy.

And then the Duke, in spirits low came home to Worsley town,  
Where soon through work and industry his name was quite renown.  
'Twas there he met with Brindley, the millwright engineer,  
And from there they built their grand canal right into Manchester.

Their names spread wide and many came to view their famous scheme,  
And talk was rife in Midland towns of what it soon could mean,  
If the Brummagem financiers built a cut to carry coal,  
From Hampton and the Black Country - it would surely serve us all.

Well gather round me close, my friends, for a secret I've been told  
That this very day in Brummagem, such a scheme may well unfold.  
For in this pub, some men will meet, who have it in their minds,  
To start this navigation should they the money find.

## BRINDLEY, THE ENGINEER

This 'song' is meant as a dramatic chant and is essentially a conversation between a group of navvies. It does not 'sit right' out of context.

They say Brindley's one of us, lads, But he's had some lucky breaks  
They say his dad's a boczer, I bet his mother's on the make.

He's a funny bloke I'm told. They say an early grave's 'is fate,  
And 'e prefers an 'orses ccompany, to the company of 'is mates.

Ah! Black Jack, the Paddy ganger, ses 'e cor read ner write,  
But they pays 'im by the barrer load, now that ain't bleedin' right!

Yo may be right in that Ben, but they say 'es got it 'ere (taps head)  
That 'es learned 'is trade the 'ard way, to become an engineer.

'E builds cuts without locks, y'know; An' works it out on site,  
What's more 'e lives like we do, And yo cor say that ain't right.

Well, if 'e comes 'ere givin' orders, we'll show 'im 'is bloody place.  
I'll stuff a shovel up 'is arse, and smash 'is bleedin' face.

Yoh shut your bleedin' mouth Ben, cos if 'e's 'arf the mon they say.  
Then I'll tek 'is bloody orders and see yoh on your way.

*Sept. 8, 1767.*

### EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM BURSLEM.

Gentlemen come to view our eighth wonder of the world, the subterraneous navigation, which is cutting by the great Mr. Brindley, who handles rocks as easily as you would plumb-pies, and makes the four elements subservient to his will. He is as plain a looking man as one of the boors of the Peake, or one of his own carters; but when he speaks, all ears listen, and every mind is filled with wonder, at the things he pronounces to be practicable. He has cut a mile through bogs, which he binds up, embanking them with stones which he gets out of other parts of the navigation, besides about a quarter of a mile into the hill Yelden; on the side of which he has a pump, which is worked by water, and a stove, the fire of which sucks through a pipe the damp that would annoy the men, who are cutting towards the centre of the hill. The clay he cuts out serves for brick, to arch the subterraneous part, which we heartily wish to see finished to Wilden Ferry, when we shall be able to send coals and pots to London, and to different parts of the globe. Yours, &c.



To Mr Thomas Bentley, Merchant in Liverpool.

Burslem 2nd March 1767

Dear Sir,

We have several Navigation schemes in Embryo. One from the *Grand Trunk* to Coventry, Banbury and I don't know where. The money was subscribed for surveying &c and Mr Brindley applied to, but he told them they were too precipitate (for they would have been in Parliament this Session) he would look over the Country in a year or two if he could. Another from Birmingham to join the Wolverhampton Canal I dare say you have heard of, and the Loughborough scheme I think is in the House. Mr Brindley has been with them lately, and he is going to Scotland and Ireland in a few weeks. I am afraid he will do too much, and leave us before his vast designs are executed; he is so incessantly harrassed on every side, that he hath no rest, either for his mind, or Body, and will not be prevailed upon to take proper care of his health.

I most cordially join in your benevolent sentiments respecting Projectors, but do not allow either of your exceptions, for I think Mr Brindley—*The Great, the fortunate, money-getting* Brindley, an object of Pity! and a real sufferer for the good of the Public. He may get a few thousands, but what does he give in exchange? His *Health*, and I fear his *Life* too, unless he grows wiser, and takes the advice of his friends before it is too late.

Y[ou]rs affectionately  
J Wedgwood

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To Mr Thos Bentley, Little China Row, Chelsea, near London.

Etruria 28th September 1772

My Dear Friend

I told you in my last that Mr Brindley was extremely ill, and I have the grief to tell you he is now no more. He died the 27th Inst. about 12 at Noon, and died in a sound sleep, for about 9 O Clock in the morning, after giving him something to wet his mouth, he said 'tis enough—I shall need no more, and shut his Eyes, never more to open; he continued to the time of his death (about 9 hours) seemingly in a fine sleep, and yielded up his breath at last without a single groan.

He has left two young Children behind him, and poor Mrs Brindley, inconsolable for the loss of a sensible friend and affectionate Husband. What the public has lost can only be conceived by those who best knew his Character and Talents, Talents to which this Age and Country are indebted for works that will be the most lasting Monuments to his Fame, and shew to future Ages how much good may be done by one single Genius, when happily employed upon works beneficial to Mankind.

Mr Brindley had an excellent constitution, but his mind, too ardently intent upon the execution of the works it had planned, wore down a body at the age of 55 which originally promised to have lasted a Century, and might give him the pleasing expectation of living to see those great works completed for which Millions yet unborn will revere and bless his memory.

Do I need to tell you that he bore his last illness with that fortitude and strength of mind which characterised all his actions.

Wedgwood Letters E18139-25 and E18409-25

## NAVIGATION; OR, THE CANAL FEVER

Navigation's become such a trade,  
That thousands who ne'er saw the ocean,  
When projects are artfully laid,  
Trip away at each favourite motion;  
In person to fondly attend,  
What jockey should not mount his poney,  
And ride to the very Land's end,  
When the object is making of money?

Some people cried up Hampton Gay,  
As prospects the greatest possessing,  
The Grand Junction, 'tis clear, bears the sway,  
And the mania still is increasing;  
At Ell'smere, don't think I'm in jest,  
Regardless of lodging or weather,  
Of Land navigators at least,  
Full a thousand assembled together.

To mortals who share common sense,  
'Tis clear from this strong Canal Fever,  
Whatever divines may advance,  
Mankind are as sordid as ever;  
Content e'en with those can't be had,  
Who riches immense have been savin',  
For spite of philosophy's aid,  
The mind is continually craving.

From projects, no doubt, some there are  
Who get themselves into a hobble;  
The Glo'ster at present bids fair,  
But the Bristol turned out a mere bubble;  
The winners much artifice use,  
The losers without affectation,  
Say Christians can outdo the Jews  
In matters of deep speculation.

So fast - for the rage what can stop -  
This keen influenza is growing,  
When piece-meal the earth is cut up,  
To keep speculation a-going;  
Their plans will extend, I'll be bound  
(Whoe'er the assertion may rail at),  
To the moon, soon as Herschel has found  
A half-way house just to regale at.

Whilst schemers their wishes to crown,  
For shares take a rapid excursion,  
Our plan, when the sun has gone down,  
Is to share in the evening's diversion;  
Their nests, by the cast of a die,  
However so well some may feather,  
True friendship of life to enjoy  
Is to meet and be happy together.

## COME NOW BEGIN DELVING

"Come now begin delving, the Bill is obtain'd  
The contest was hard, but a conquest is gain'd;  
Let no time be lost, and to get business done  
Set thousands to work, that work down the sun.

With speed the desirable work to compleat,  
The hope how alluring - the spirit how great?  
By Severn we soon, I've no doubt in my mind  
With old father Thames shall an intercourse find.

By int'rested motives tho' people are led,  
With many the ground who from fancy may tread;  
'Twill prejudice stifle, and malice strike dumb  
When the seat of the Arts shall a sea port become.

Reddich, where sons of the Needle reside,  
Who commerce revere, and make friendship their pride  
The prospect enraptures - and Bromsgrove no less,  
Has cause at the victory joy to express.

In Europe's grand Toy-Shop, how pleasing 'twill be,  
Well freighted the trows, and barges to see,  
The country 'twill charm, and new life give to trade,  
When the seat of the Arts shall a seaport be made.

With permains and pippins 'twill gladden the throng,  
Full loaded the boats to see floating along;  
And fruit that is fine, and good hope for our ale,  
Like Wednesbury pit-coal, will always find sale.

So does the age for Canals seem to grow,  
That vessels accustom'd to Bristol to go,  
Will soon be deserting Sabrina's fair tide,  
For shallows and shoals sailors wish to avoid.

As freedom I prize, and my Country respect,  
I trust not a soul to my toast will object;  
"Success to the Plough, not forgetting the Spade,  
Health, plenty, and peace, Navigation and Trade."

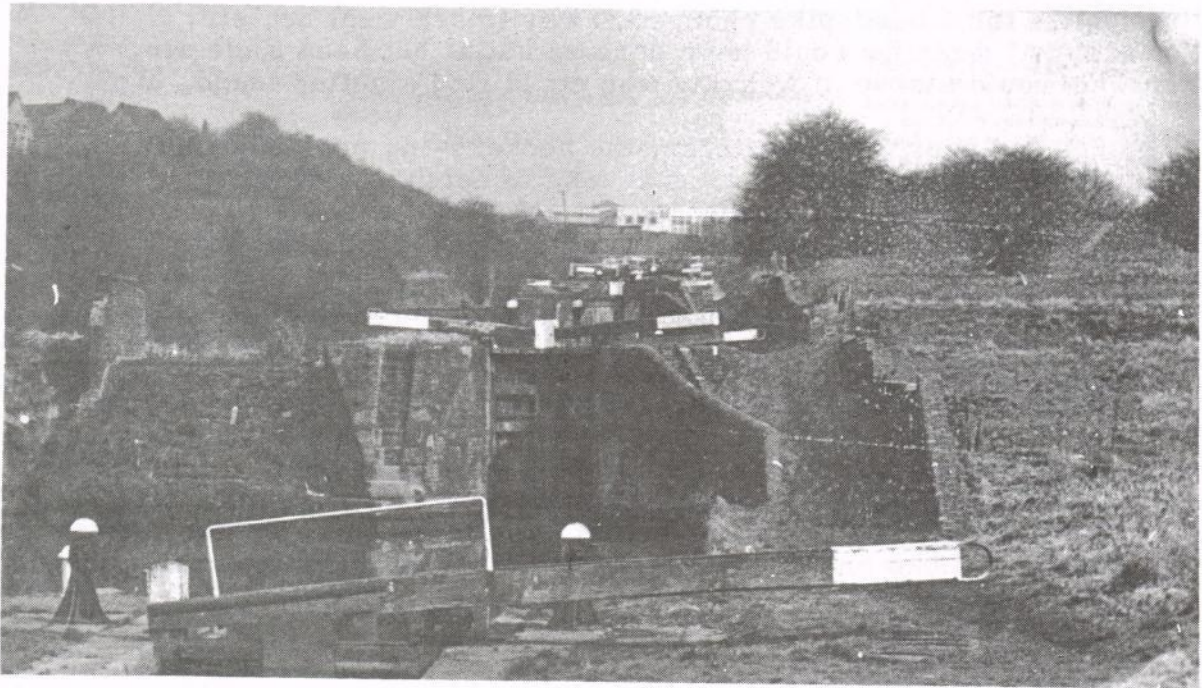
## INLAND NAVIGATION

'Twas just at the time when in sorrowful strain,  
Old England was grievously groaning,  
Her natives in sadness, to add to the scene,  
the loss of their trade was bemoaning;  
To give some redress, in this age of distress,  
Some worthies (tho' few in the nation)  
As a scheme that might tend, to some favourable end,  
Were resolved to promote navigation.

In Lancashire view what a laudable plan,  
And brought into fine execution  
By Bridgewater's duke; let us copy the man,  
And stand to a good resolution;  
If the waters of Trent with the Mersey have vent,  
What mortal can have an objection!  
So they do not proceed, to cut into the Tweed,  
With the Scots so have greater connection.

A free intercourse with our principal port,  
For trade must be certainly better;  
When traffic's extended, and goods easy vended,  
In consequence things will be cheaper:  
Our commerce must thrive, and the arts will revive,  
Which are now in a sad situation;  
If we follow this notion, from ocean to ocean,  
To have a compleat navigation.

To the land what advantages soon must proceed,  
When once we have opened our sluices?  
Our cattle, and even the land where they feed,  
Will be turn'd into far better uses:  
'Tis this will enable our merchants abroad  
To vie with each neighbouring nation:  
Who now, as they tell us, in fact undersell us  
For want of this free navigation.



The spectacular nine locks rise at Delph, Brierley Hill, Staffordshire.  
Photograph: Leonard Raven (1974).

## THE MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL

Unlike Birmingham, which never became a seaport, Manchester was eventually linked with the sea in January, 1894; nearly seventy years after Mr. Hammond first sang his 'Manchester Ship Canal' song at the Theatre Royal, Manchester.

I sing a theme deserving praise, a theme of great renown, sir;  
The Ship Canal in Manchester, that rich and trading town, sir;  
I mean to say it once was rich, e'er these bad times came on, sir;  
But good times will come back, you know, when these bad times are gone, sir.

In eighteen twenty five, when we were speculating all, sir,  
We wise folk clubbed together, and we made this Ship Canal, sir;  
I should have said we meant to do, for we'd the scheme laid down, sir;  
That would have made this Manchester a first-rate sea-port town, sir.

Near Oxford Road the dry dock is, to cork and to careen, sir;  
Our chief West India Dock is where the pond was at Ardwick Green, sir;  
That is to say they might have been there, had these plans been done, sir,  
And vessels might have anchored there of full five hundred tons, sir.

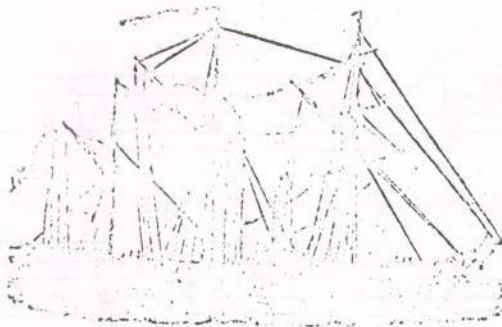
Instead of lazy Old Quay flats, that crawl three miles an hour, sir,  
We'd fine three masted steam ships, some of ninety horses power, sir;  
That is, had it been made we should; and Lord! how fine t'would be, sir,  
When all beyond St. Peter's Church was open to the sea, sir.

At Stretford, Prestwich, Eccles too, no weaver could you see, sir,  
His shuttle for a handspike changed, away to sea went he, sir;  
I'm wrong, I mean he would have done so had it but been made sir,  
For who would starve at weaving who could find a better trade, sir?

Alas then for poor Cannon-street, the hookers-in, poor odd fish!  
Instead of catching customers, must take to catching cod fish;  
That is, supposing it was made, may it ne'er be I wish, sir,  
These cotton baits for customers, would never do for fish, sir.

Alas! too, for poor Liverpool, she'd surely go to pot, sir,  
For want of trade her folks would starve, her custom-house would rot, sir,  
I'm wrong they'd not exactly starve or want, for it is true, sir,  
They might come down to Manchester; we'd find them work to do, sir.

Success then unto Manchester, and joking all aside, sir,  
Her trade will flourish as before, and be her country's pride, sir;  
That is to say if speculation can be but kept down, sir,  
And sure we've had enough of that, at least within this town, sir.



ON  
Leeds Becoming A  
SEA-PORT TOWN.

Copyright.

Oh dear! oh dear! this a curious age  
is,  
Alteration all the rage is—  
Young and old in the stream are mov-  
ing

All in the general cry improving,  
From the Exhibition I've brought  
news down, sirs,  
They're going to make it a sea-port  
town sirs.

Then instead of Factories and cheap  
tailors,  
Nothing you'll see but ships & sailors

CHORUS.

This 'twill be I'll bet you a crown sirs,  
When Leeds it is a sea-port town sirs.

When the first ship appears in sight,  
The town will all be joy & delight;  
Eating, drinking, dancing, singing,  
The old church spire will shake with  
ringing

Then we shall meet with touts and  
prigs, sirs,  
Aldermen too in their gowns & wigs  
sirs,

The heads of the town with all their  
forces,  
And the new Mayor they'll  
draw with Horses.

Thus 'twill be, &c.

All over the town there'll be boats  
and barges,  
Man-o-war ships that never so large  
is;

Steamers backwards and forwards  
towing,

You'll ride for nothing, and they'll  
pay you for going,

Sailors sweating, spurs a battering,  
Heave-ye-heing hand-spikes clatter-  
ing,

Strange sails crowding every day, sirs,  
Sailing & Anchoring in Leeds bay sirs

Thus 'twill be, &c.

The Liverpool Gent's they'll all be  
undone,

Here there will be nought but fun  
done,

Pats half wild, running there rigs sirs  
Landing their butter, their bullocks,  
and pigs, sirs,

Then to make us merry and frisky—  
Meaty potatoes & barrels of Whiskey  
New-laid eggs a twelve-month taken,  
And old maids with money as rusty  
as bacon.

Thus 'twill be, &c.

Such lots of goods the boats will bring  
up,

Store-rooms will like mushrooms  
spring up;

To hold the wares of all nations  
The town must have a transformation  
They'll make the town-hall into a  
store-house,

News rooms they'll make out of the  
workhouse,

At Dock street, grocers will put their  
sigs by,

And Vicars croft they'll make into  
a pigsty

Thus 'twill be, &c.

In a short time you'll have trade e-  
nough, sirs,

All over the world you'll send your  
stuff, sirs,

Goods of every clime and nation,  
Will all come here for embarkation,

Machinery & Cloth, Coals & Carrots,  
In return they'll get Pott Parrots,

Baboons Racoons & Spanish Donkeys  
Jay's Cockatoos & ring-tail'd Monkeys

Thus 'twill be, &c.

In a few years, say perhaps twenty,  
Man-o-war ships will arrive in plenty,

Then as the tide of time encroaches,  
They'll run 'em about the street like  
coaches,

Over the Marshes, stones & Crosses,  
Tats for Jarvis, Whales for Horses;

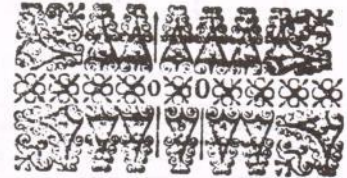
But I'll be off, first I'll make my bow  
sirs,

For, good, I believe there's a ship  
coming now, sirs,

Thus 'twill be, &c.



Darr, Printer, 58 Meadow Lane, Leeds.



PADDY

UPON THE  
Canal.

When I came to sweet Newcastle,  
It happened to be in the fall  
Never gave way to my rigging,  
Until I landed on the Canal,  
To look at such terrible romour,  
It filled my heart with surprise,  
To see such great undertakings—  
The like I never saw with my eyes

So farewell father and mother,  
And fare ye well Ireland too,  
So fare you well sister and brother  
So kindly I bid you adieu.  
I being a poor Irish stranger,  
And knowing not what for to say,  
When the ganger came up in a hurry  
Saying boys its a gay time of day,  
They all stood up in good order,  
You'd thought him father of all,  
I was wishing that very same moment  
I was dying upon the Canal.

I fell in love with a farmers daughter  
And she was right proud do you see  
I caught her right round by the middle  
And set her right down on my knee  
The old woman got up in a hurry  
And loudly began for to bawl;  
Saying get out you saucy big jade.

For Paddy will prove your downfall  
The girls they do all love me here,  
Or where ever that I do go,  
There's Sarah and Betsy and Polly,  
They all do call me their beau,  
The old woman got up in a hurry,  
And loudly began for to bawl.  
Saying we never got good of our  
daughter,

Since Paddy came on the Canal  
I learnt the art of Navigation,  
I think it a very fine trade,  
I can handle the pick and the shovel,  
Likewise the wheelbarrow and spade  
I learned to be very handy,

Although I am not very tall,  
I could handle the sprig of shielagh  
With ever a boy on the Canal,  
So now to conclude and to finish,  
And publish in every degree,  
I'm just as true hearted an Irishman,  
As ever your country did see,  
So fill up a glass and be hearty,  
And drink a good health to us all,  
And to every true hearted Irishman,  
That's digging upon the Canal.

Bought Newcastle Press week 1847

THE BOLD NAVIGATORS

On Mon - day morn - ing we make it a rule, for ever - y - man to choose  
 his own tool, for he that comes first may choose of the best, and he  
 who comes last may take all the rest. For that's the rule of the  
 bold na - vi - ga - tor For we are jovial banks - men all.

On Monday morning we make it a rule,  
 For every man to choose his own tool,  
 For he that comes first, may choose the best,  
 And he who comes last may take all the rest.

Chorus: For that's the rule of the bold navigator,  
 For we are jovial banksmen all.

On Tuesday morning when we go to work,  
 We strip off our jackets, and tighten up our shirts,  
 We strip off our jackets, and let them out free,  
 We drive our poles by one, two, or three.

It's when that we come to the bottom run  
 We fill our barrows to our chin,  
 We fill our barrows breast high,  
 If you don't wheel it another will try.

Tunes - Cecil Sharp collected two tunes for a navigation song (but only one verse) from two Bridgwater, Somerset singers. See Folk Song Journal number thirty-one, pages 35/6.

It's when that we come to the main plank wheel,  
We lower our hands and hold fast on our heels,  
For if the plank does bend or go,  
Our ganger on the top cries 'lock out below.'

When we are struck by heavy frost or snow  
We'll blow up our mess and off we'll go;  
We'll call to our time-keeper, without any damp,  
To let us have our time before we go on tramp.

When that it does begin for to rain,  
We'll (gath)er up our barrows and all gang in,  
For it's into a whiskey shop we go,  
We don't give a d--n whether we work or no.

We'll tell our landlady without any damp,  
We'll ( )er up her tommy shop before we go on tramp:  
For that's the rule of the bold navigator,  
For we are jovial banksmen all.

We'll tell our gaffer before we do go,  
That it's not our rule to pay what we owe;  
For that's the rule of the bold navigators,  
For we are jovial banksmen all.

#### GOOD OLD GEORGE

Sing to a sentimental, even maudlin, tune of music hall type.

Aye Georgie's the lad that'll show 'em  
He'll teach 'em their p's and their q's  
When he goes down from Coalville to London  
They'll see a man what don't know how to lose.

He's give of his best for the brickies  
For once he was a brickyard child himself  
But now he has fought all their battles  
And used up all his hard earned wealth.

He rose from a child in the brickyards  
To manage a firm on his own  
But he lost all his money and then lost his job  
When he fought the children's cause all alone.

Well he's won an act of Parliament for the brickies  
Though he's got no job, three children and a wife  
Now he's fighting for the navigation children  
And living on handouts everyday of his life.

You'll see him by day at the outside  
As he talks with the boatees and their wives  
By night he writes his letters to the papers  
To tell the world about the boatmens' lives.

Now some say he's a stubborn do-gooder  
Who'd do best to look unto himself  
But some of us believe that he's a hero  
And we'll follow him in poverty and wealth.





The Lock Keepers Cottage, near Cardiff Castle, on the Glamorgan Canal.  
Photograph: Leonard Raven (1939).

### THE NAVVY BOY

When I was young and tender I left my native home,  
And often to cld Scotland I started out to roam;  
As I walked down through Bishoptown a-seeking for employ,  
The ganger he knew by me I was a Navvy Boy.

As soon as I did get employ, for lodgings I did seek;  
It happened to be that very night with the ganger I did sleep;  
He had one only daughter and I became her joy,  
For she longed to go and tramp with her own dear Navvy Boy.

Says the mother to her daughter, 'I think it very strange,  
That you would wed a Navvy Boy this wide world for to range;  
For navvies they are rambling boys and have but little pay;  
How could a man maintain a wife with fourteenpence a day?'

Says the daughter to the mother, 'You need not run them down;  
My father was a Navvy Boy when he came to this town;  
He roamed about from town to town just seeking for employ;  
Go where he will, he's my love still; he's my own dear Navvy Boy.'

Now just a short time after this her father died I'm told,  
And left unto his daughter five hundred pcunds in gold;  
And when she got the money, soon I became her joy,  
For she longed to go and tramp it with her own dear Navvy Boy.

# BIRMINGHAM LADS

This day for our new na - vi - ga - tion, we banish all cares and  
 vex - ation, The sight of the bar - ges each hon - est heart glads  
 And the merri - est of mort - als are Birm - ing - ham lads,  
 Birm - ing - ham lads, jo - vi - al blades, and the merri - est of mort - als  
 are Birm - ing - ham lads.

This day, for our new navigation,  
 We banish all cares and vexation,  
 The sight of the barges each honest heart glads  
 And the merriest of mortals are Birmingham lads,  
 Birmingham lads, jovial blades,  
 And the merriest of mortals are Birmingham lads.

With pride every heart must be glowing  
 Stamps, presses and lathes shall be going  
 The lads to the wharf with their lasses repair  
 And smile at the streamers that play in the air,  
 Play in the air, free and fair,  
 And smile at the streamers that play in the air.

Let Stratford sons boast out of measure  
 The fruits of their mulberry treasure  
 Such treasure for once may cause jubilee joys  
 But riches spring daily from Birmingham toys,  
 Birmingham toys, all men praise  
 But riches spring daily from Birmingham toys.

The Thames, Severn, Trent and the Avon  
Our countrymen frequently rave on  
But none of their neighbours are happier than they  
Who peaceably dwell on the banks of the Rea  
Banks of the Rea, ever gay,  
Who peaceably dwell on the banks of the Rea.

Not Europe can match us for traffic  
America, Asia and Afric  
Of what we invent each partakes of a share  
For the best of wrought metals is Birmingham ware  
Birmingham ware, none so rare  
For the best of wrought metals is Birmingham ware.

Commission Report. Parliamentary Papers 1883. Commons Vol. 13.  
Report from Committees (3) Canals, Etc., Session 15 February -  
25 August, 1883. Appendix 25.

Remarks relating to the carrying out of the Canal Boats Act 1877 by  
George Smith of Coalville.

The following particulars I handed to Mr. Broadhurst, M.P., one of  
the Honourable Members whose name is upon the back of the Bill, -

"(1) There are about 4,800 miles of river and canals in this country.  
(2). There are between 20,000 and 25,000 boats, barges, and flats,  
at work on our rivers and canals. (3). There are between 80,000  
and 100,000 men, women, and children, living and working upon canal  
boats, or in relation to canal traffic. (4). Connected with canal  
boats there are between 30,000 and 40,000 children of school age,  
actually going without any education whatever other than that supplied  
by canal associations. (5). Judging from my long experience among  
them, not 10 per cent. of our boating population can read and write.  
(6). Not 5 per cent. of the children are attending any Sunday School.  
(7). Notwithstanding the passing of the Act of 1877, overcrowding  
continues in the cabins, in four-fifths of the registration districts, as  
bad as it was previous to the passing of the Act. (8). I have seen  
myself during the last few weeks, in fact, for a long time, over and over  
again scores of times, six or seven men, women, and children huddling  
together in cabins containing not more than 220 cubic feet of air space,  
and regardless of either sex or age; although many of the boats have been  
registered prohibiting overcrowding.

## CAPTAINS OF THE WATERWAYS

A variant of the tune Hostess's Daughter, see 'Wanton Seed', E.F.D.S. Publications Ltd.

Now we are young and in our prime, we sail the cut like captains on an  
ocean line  
With the first mate at the horses head and the crew to steer the ship -  
that's how we earn our bread.

And most of us when the frost does fall can moor our boats and sit snug  
in some wayside pub  
Whilst our wives and children in some cottage play with a roaring fire  
to keep the night (and cold) at bay.

A bob or two in hand we always have, to buy the vittles and to pay the  
club  
And even then some left to buy tobacco and a pint of best down at the pub.

Wherein such jovial company you'll find, the nailers, colliers and other  
of their kind  
Gathered there to chance an arm at dice, the cocking or some other  
sport that brings no harm

So you that till the soil or dig for coal, and you that in some burning  
forge must toil  
Must envy us our better days for we're the captains of the waterways.

## ALL HAIL THIS GRAND DAY

A typical 'canal'celebration' song composed by a 'gentleman' to mark the  
opening of the Croydon Canal in October 1809. It was sung by  
Mr. J. Walsh, one of the canal company proprietors.

All hail this grand day when with gay colours flying,  
The barges are seen on the current to glide,  
When with fond emulation all parties are vying,  
To make our Canal of Old England the pride.

Chorus: Long down its fair stream may the rich vessel glide,  
And the Croydon Canal be of England the pride.

And may it long flourish, while commerce caressing,  
Adorns its gay banks with her wealth-bringing stores;  
To Croydon, and all round the country a blessing,  
May industry's sons ever thrive on its shores!

And now my good fellows sure nothing is wanting  
To heighten our mirth and our blessings to crown,  
But with the gay belles on its banks to be flaunting  
When spring smiles again on this high-favoured town.

## POOR OLD HORSE

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and common time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of lyrics, starting with a fermata over the first note. The lyrics are: 'A number one came a backering by, and they say so, and they hope so' and '(And) we said Oh Mam that horse will die, oh poor old horse.'

At Lixhall wharf they go to load, and they say so, and they hope so  
 And then he comes out on the London road, oh poor old horse.

Oh he'll work all night and he'll work all day, and they say so, and they  
 hope so,  
 Put him on the inside and he'll back her away, oh poor old horse.

From Atherstone to the Heart's Hill length, and they say so, and they hope so  
 'Twas there that poor beast broke his strength oh poor old horse.

And after years of such abuse and they say so and they hope so  
 Your salted down for sailors use, oh poor old horse.

As sung by David Blagrove on B.B.C. LP. recording 'Narrowboats'.

The Heart's Hill length is a stretch of canal where granite chipping deposits  
 on the canal bed cause the canal boats to scrape the bottom, making the  
 towing hard work for the horses.

Lixhall, near Coventry.

### KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF

Keep your hands off that's mine  
 Keep your hands off that's mine,  
 You just be careful what you do  
 That little bit of fancy work she doesn't belong to you.  
 She's a nice girl I know and she squeezes absolutely so  
 You can do just what you want with any other fellers wife,  
 But keep your hands off that's mine.

Percy fell in love and married Mabel  
 He took a trip to the dear old Isle of Wight,  
 Spooning anywhere, couples over there,  
 Going through a tunnel late at night.  
 Mabel started giggling in the moonlight  
 Oh Percy do stop kissing me said she  
 Percy shouted out will someone strike a light,  
 There's somebody kissing the wife instead of me.

This song fragment, part of a song that originated in the music halls,  
 was sung on record to the accompaniment of a concertina. It would  
 appear to have been a popular pub song with the boatmen.

PREFACE FROM "GEORGE SMITH OF COALVILLE" BY  
EDWIN HODDER, 1896, NISBET & CO.

GEORGE SMITH was a remarkable man who did a remarkable work in a remarkable manner. For over a quarter of a century his name was daily before the public. When Parliament was in session he was to be found in the forepart of the day in Paternoster Row and Fleet Street, among publishers and press men; and in the evening he was almost as regularly in the lobby as the Speaker was in the chair, of the House of Commons. He lived and moved and had his being in his work. "Love me, love my work" was his unwritten motto. For weary years he fought a hand-to-hand fight with hunger, poverty, persecution, and distress, while at the same time he was known, respected, and on good terms with the highest in the land. He was praised in the press, on the platform, and in the pulpit more than any man of his day; he was hunted down, persecuted, and maligned to a degree that often involved personal violence. By many he was misunderstood, by some he was overrated, by the majority the man and his mission commanded a just appreciation.

It is difficult to define his character. It was nurtured under the sweet uses of adversity; it was strengthened under influences that made Clarkson, Howard, Shaftesbury the men they were; it was weakened by success and praise.

I have before me everything that he wrote or spoke in public - the whole of his diaries, in which he tells the innermost thoughts of his heart; volumes of "material" in which the Church, society, the world, the Legislature express their opinions of him; and with this in view I have endeavoured, with the permission of his family, to give the story of his life, his character, and his motives, as I interpret them from this evidence, and from the testimony of those who knew him best.

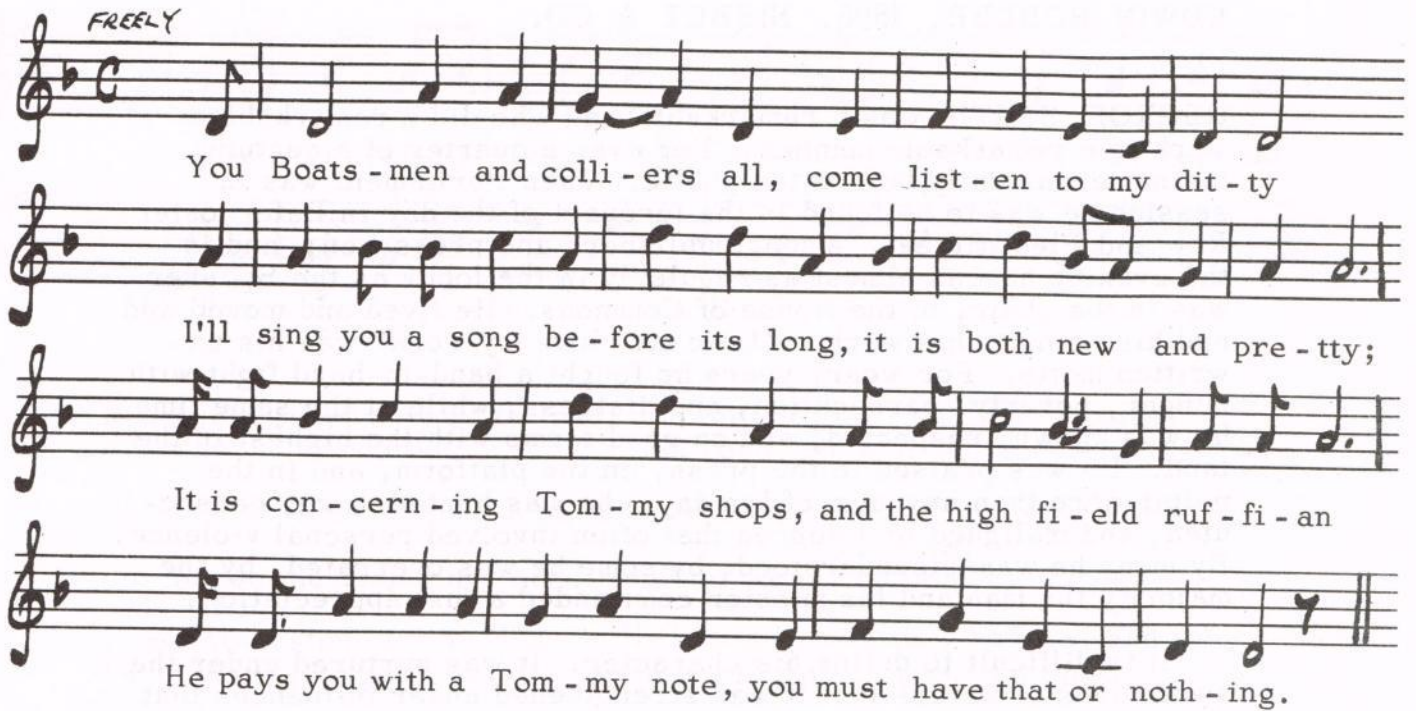
The lesson of his life is, a high ambition and a noble persistence. He was one of those rare philanthropists who gave "himself" to his work, which he set high above personal comfort, even though he knew his task would be of life-long duration. And he differed from the majority of well-known philanthropists in this respect, that he sprang from the poor, laboured all through life for the poor, and made his grave with the poor.

E.H.

St. Aubyns, Shortlands, Kent.

## TOMMY NOTE

*FREELY*



You Boats-men and colli-ers all, come list-en to my dit-ty  
 I'll sing you a song be-fore its long, it is both new and pre-tty;  
 It is con-cern-ing Tom-my shops, and the high fi-eld ruf-fi-an  
 He pays you with a Tom-my note, you must have that or noth-ing.

You Boatsmen and colliers all, come listen to my ditty,  
 I'll sing you a song before its long, it is both new and pretty;  
 It is concerning Tommy shops, and the high field ruffian  
 He pays you with a tommy note, you must have that or nothing.

With the colliers I begin how they pay each other,  
 Nothing have they but a tommy note, from one week to the other,  
 On Saturday when a weeks work is done and to receive their money,  
 The high field devil has learned a trick, to pay them off with tommy.

The boatsmen now I bring in, that sails from high fields to runcan;  
 The boatsmen and their wives, they curse him at the junction.  
 And all belonging to the branch that know the art of boating,  
 Wishing the tiller down his throat, it would be a means to choak him.

When they had done their runcan voyage and go to receive their money,  
 One half stops for hay and corn, the other half for tommy,  
 Then to the tommy shops we go, to fetch our weeks provision,  
 Their oatmeal, sugar, salt and soap, short weight and little measure.

Saying if we had money instead of this, provision we could have plenty,  
 The profit they get out of us, is nine shillings out of twenty,  
 Then we jump on board the boat, and the children look so funny,  
 The voyage we so cheerful go, till we have eat all our tommy.

There is one amongst the rest, that knows the art of boating,  
 He vows and swears a wife he'll have so long he has gone a courting,  
 He vows he will married be, Come listen to my joke sir,  
 And when the parson's done his work, I will pay him with a tommy note  
 sir.

Now we have finished our voyage, the children look so funny,  
For here at runcan we do lie, and have eat all our tommy,  
Come gear the horse and clear the line, and jump on board the boat, sir,  
Both night and day we'll steer our way, for another tommy note sir.

The original broadside indicated a chorus line of "Fal De Riddle Ral".

Tommy Shop - The truck shop owned by the employers where food and other goods were often of inferior quality and superior price to those available on the open market. The canal folk and people in a great many other forms of employment, were often paid in full or part by tommy-notes, that could only be redeemed at the company store.

### THE MARY: A YARN

(Air, The Ram of Derby - a song of the Mersey and Irwell)

The Union Jackie's flying  
By the Company's Wharf, Old Quay,  
And Mary of Dublin lying  
Unloading her Murphies today.

Eighteen hundred and forty,  
October the twentieth day,  
At half-past four in the evening  
She anchors by the quay.

In the Irish Sea I hailed her,  
As I stood in the packet boat,  
With equal pride I never saw,  
A merchant sloop afloat.

It always does my heart good  
To see the Union Jack,  
So here's success to Mary  
And soon may she come back.

"Your name?" "The Mary, Captain Hill."  
"Your cargo?" "Pratis, sir!"  
"Where from?" "Dublin." "Whither bound?"  
"The Port of Manchester."

And soon may scores of others  
Perform the trip with her  
And trade and commerce double  
In noble Manchester.

- Poor Jack.

Printed by Wilmot Henry Jones, Market Street, Manchester.

### REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF THE CANALS

from the Report of the Royal Commission on Canals, 1909.

Few improvements and no large extensions of inland waterways (always excepting the Manchester Ship Canal) have been made since 1830, and, on the other hand, there have been many deteriorations and even disappearances of canals which once existed. On a few waterways or sections of waterways, favoured by special conditions, combined in two or three cases with enterprising management, traffic has been maintained and even increased. On other waterways it has declined, on some it has virtually disappeared. Everywhere the proportion of long-distance traffic to local traffic by water has become small. Considered as a whole, the waterways have had no share in the enormous increase of internal transport business which has taken place between the middle of the nineteenth century and the present time. Their position, so far as regards their total traffic, has been at best one of a stationary character, since the development of steam traction on railroads and on the sea, while the whole transport business of the country, including that taken by railways and that taken by coasting vessels, has multiplied itself several times over.



# THE CANAL BOAT SONG

(A) D (A) D (A) D (Bm) A (D7) G

O take the wax out of your ears and list-en to my song It's a sto-ry  
(Em) D (Bm) E (Chorus echo) (A) D Bm D (F#m)

of the sea I will re-late (will re-late) I'm a sail-or you can tell by my  
(Bm) A7 D (A7) (Bm) (F#m) G A7

fresh salt water smell Man-y a time have I been ship-wrecked for my  
D A (A7) D D (A) D

fate (for my fate). O it's low-er the fun-nel, stop the ship and reef the  
(Bm) A G (Em) D (Bm) E7 A A7

an-chor chain Throw the car-go over-board and haul it back a-gain.  
D (A) D (A) D (Bm) A G

Trice the life-boats up a-loft while the stor-my winds do blow. Cook  
D A (A7) D

o'the watch, ship struck a match, Heave ho, heave ho.

O take the wax out of your ears and listen to my song

It's a story of the sea I will relate (will relate).

I'm a sailor you can tell by my fresh salt water smell

Many a time have I been ship wrecked for my fate (for my fate).

Chorus: O it's lower the funnel, stop the ship and reef the anchor chain

Throw the cargo overboard and haul it back again

Trice the life boats up aloft while the stormy winds do blow

Cock o'the watch, ship struck a match, heave-ho, heave-ho.

She was a four-wheel barque, silver-plated fore and aft

With a cargo of fresh fish we did embark

O we'd not been long at sea, when we struck a Christmas tree

And we all fell down a coal-hole in the dark.

Then a-sailing round the lake, we'd a marvellous escape

The wind blew off the skipper's wooden leg

Down on the deck he fell, and he swore like merry heck

And we had to bathe his foot with ham and eggs.

Then a-sailing round the bay, the crew were making hay  
 And the fireman spread a picnic on the deck  
 The skipper went below to scrape her with a hoe  
 And the bosun hung the windlass round his neck.

Then the anchor sprang a leak and delayed us half a week  
 As all the time the skipper raved and roared  
 So we hit him with a brick and he went so awfully sick  
 That he went and threw his eyebrows overboard.

One day we all got drunk and the poor old ship she sunk  
 We all rushed up on deck to see the fun  
 With the cargo on our backs for the shore we all made tracks  
 And we went and dried our whiskers in the sun.

### THE CRUISE OF THE CALIBAR

When I were young and in my prime as la - zy as could be,  
 I stepped on board a Brad - ford fly, her number were twenty  
 three, As we seet sail fro' Gal - sey Bay we geet lost in a  
 terrible fog, And th' on - ly mate a - booard that flat were

Doo - key's Airre - dale dog. - \_\_\_\_\_

When I were young and in my prime, as lazy as could be;  
 I stepped on board of a Bradford fly, her number were twenty-three,  
 As we seet sail fro' Galsey Bay we geet lost in a terrible fog,  
 And th'only mate aboard that flat were Dookey's Airredale dog.

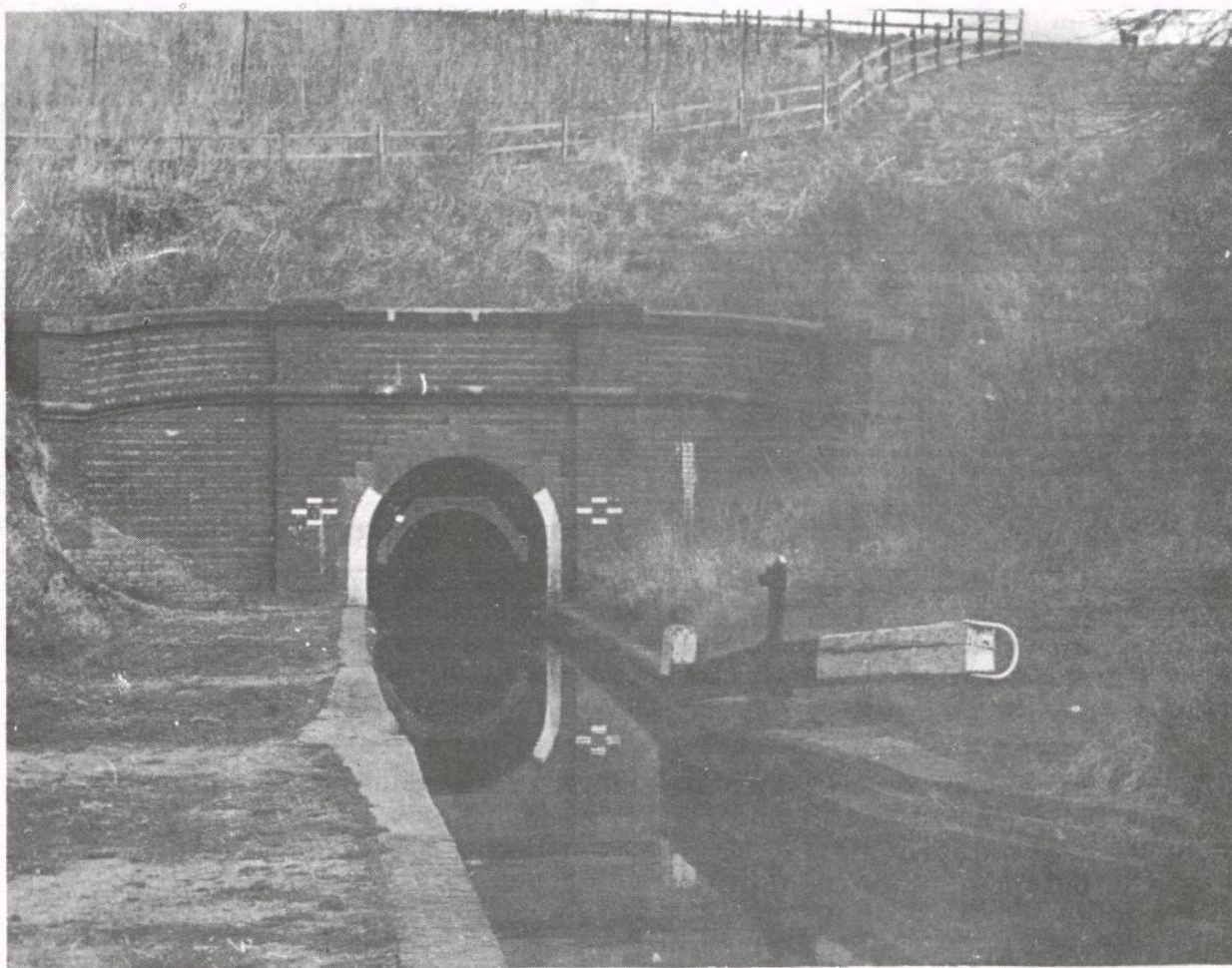
Now when we-geet a bit further on we met owd twenty-one,  
 John Dakin he were steering, he'd a Bradford fly hung on,  
 That Bradford fly were owd Dolly's John, owd Dolly stood on t'bow deck,  
 When t'tow rope broke and caught owd Dolly a belt at t'back o' t' neck. 25

We sailed along quite merrily till we come to Aintree Val,  
And then it started raining, by gum it went dark wi' cloud,  
I caught me foot in t'stern rail and went slurring reight on t'deck,  
And I went heead fost down t'scuttle hole,  
And I nearly broke me neck.

Me Feyther were down in t'cabin, he were hevving his bit o'scoff,  
He said, Now lad be careful, Tha welly knocked t'kettle off,  
Tha'd better frame and start pumping for I think we've sprung a leak,  
And I wished I'd never gone boating for my living for to seek.

Soon after that we'd an awful shock, we met another ship,  
And that were old Tom Rover, he were on a Sunda' Schoo' trip,  
He shouted out, Howd in, you clown, I forgeet and I howded out,  
And we met stem up in t'middle o' t'cut, By gum and I geet a clout.

We ended up w' t' boat i' t' pawnshop and our crew went to Walton Jail,  
And I'm th' only survivor who lived to tell the tale,  
I've 'ed some happy memories, and some bad 'uns too, I vow,  
But I'll never forget when I war t'fost mate, on booard o' the Calibar.



The Dudley Canal Tunnel Entrance from the Park Head end, Dudley.  
26 Photograph: Leonard Raven (1974).

# THE ROSEMARY

'Twas way up in Brummagem so I do hear say, A boat by the  
 name of the Rose-ma-ry lay. She was clothed up and pain-ted  
 in tra - di-tion-al style, But she had-n't car-ried for a ver - y long  
 while. Fol de rol, fol de ri do, sing fol de rol day. It's the song  
 they're all sing-ing down Brumm-a-gem way.

'Twas way up in Brummagem so I do hear say,  
 A boat by the name of the Rosemary lay.  
 She was clothed up and painted in traditional style,  
 But she hadn't carried for a very long while.

Chorus: Fol-de-rol, fol-de-rido, sing fol-de-rol day,  
 It's the song they're all singing down Brummagem way.

Along came a boatman the old boat to see,  
 Says he, 'Here's a craft that is useful to me.  
 I'll load her with coal and to London I'll steer'  
 Said the boatman to the owner, 'if I take her from here.'

The owner said 'yes', the boatman 'okay'  
 And into the cabin he went straight away.  
 He lit up the stove, cleaned cobwebs and mould,  
 And polished the beam till it shone like fine gold.

He sang as he laboured far into the night,  
 Got up in the morning before it was light.  
 He put the rusty blowlamp on the cylinder head,  
 'Tis a fine day for boating' the old boatman said.

He primed up the engine, a prayer in his heart,  
 And kicked on the flywheel to see if she'd start.  
 With a bang like the sound of a ten pounder gun  
 The aged old Bolinder started to run.

He cast off the fore-end at the counter he stood,  
 As the Rosemary shook herself free of the mud,  
 With tears in his eyes says the boatman 'We may  
 Get right down to Coventry for the end of the day.'

On dark stormy nights round the fall of the year,  
 If the beat of a Bolinder distant you hear,  
 It's not Claytons Stour, Youmea or Tay  
 It's the ghost of that boatman and the old Rosemary.

Bolinder - A type of engine  
 Clayton's Stour, Youmea or Tay - Old canal boat lines

PUSH BOYS PUSH

We're go-ing through the tunnel, Push, boys, push, we're sav-ing  
 this old tunnel, Push, boys, push. It's the pride of Dud-ley  
 town, and they're trying to close it down, so Push, boys, push.

We're going through the Tunnel,  
 Push, boys, Push,  
 We're saving this old Tunnel,  
 Push, boys, Push;  
 It's the pride of Dudley Town,  
 And they're trying to close it down,  
 So Push boys, Push.

Don't let your strength to fail,  
 'Cause we're coming to the Jail,  
 We may get stuck inside,  
 If the boat it is too wide.

We'll go through Castle Mill,  
 Cathedral Arch as well,  
 There's no more fresh air smell,  
 When you've passed by the Well.

The tunnel's two miles long,  
 That's why we sing this song,  
 It keeps our spirits high,  
 While we cannot see the sky.

The boats been going through,  
 Since seventeen ninety-two,  
 It's a crime and it's a shame,  
 If we cannot do the same.

And now we're coming nigh,  
 Don't you see the sky,  
 We'll have a celebration  
 Now we've sung it to the nation.

Castle Mill - A roofless basin.  
 Cathedral Arch - The point at which two tunnels join.  
 The Well - An air vent.  
 The Jail - A slight kink in the tunnel.