



Canal &
River Trust



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



MK Gallery

Title: Gongoozler

By: Jennifer Reid (An artist residency funded by the Canal and River Trust, MK Gallery and other partners)

Intro: As artist in residence on a narrowboat in Campbell Park in August 2017, I came up with the songs in this book. They are for all users of the canal, from lifelong boaters to first day gongoozlers. I have put the songs to tunes that I, as a traditional Lancashire-style singer, know well, but the meters are very simple and a tune you may know better than me could fit. Sing, read aloud, read in your head, shout these lyrics, for they try to represent those present on the canal both then and now.

Ode to the Towpath Cyclist

Sithee Deawn tune

Things on the canal they go slow,
If I have to let your tyres down let it be so,
If you can't share the space,
By lowering your pace,
By the time that you pass me you'll surely know.

It often is the case you scare me stiff,
And when I mention it we're bound to have a tiff,
Save me grey hairs 'til I'm old,
Just do as you're told,
It took me half an hour to style this quiff.

I've been walking here close to five years,
I live in fear of you changing your gears,
To step it up a notch,
Instead of using a stopwatch,
You should respect the towpath and keep it clear.

Boating Folks

Frolicksome Kate tune

Theres a watery road through the heart of MK,
Its been there for years the 'istory books say,
Theres people would use it to carry cargo,
Now they use it for leisure and going wi' flow.

*All on the Grand Union,
You'll want to go through again,
It's gorgeous from Bletchley way up to Cosgrove*

Some people began to work on the cut,
They were very independent they kept their gobs shut,
As the ethnic minority of t'time,
They were stigmatised in some folks minds.

*All on the Grand Union,
You'll want to go through again,
It's gorgeous from Bletchley way up to Cosgrove*

This linear village they call the canal,
The boys and the girls they fell under its spell,
Until recently they come onto dry land,
And settled in Buzzard because of the sand.

*All on the Grand Union,
You'll want to go through again,
It's gorgeous from Bletchley way up to Cosgrove*

These canny boat folk they had no need for pens,
For nothing is clearer than a boatman's lens,
They navigated by telegraph wires,
And could tell you plainly how much was their hire.

*All on the Grand Union,
You'll want to go through again,
It's gorgeous from Bletchley way up to Cosgrove*

On the Grand Union

Owl of Oldham tune

As the sun nods his head to the shimmering drink
A boater sits by the outside to think
A barge passes through under Cosgrove bridge
The canal is my home, she can only go slow,
Whether carryin' family or cargo

The towpath was made for ploddin' wi' horse
The rope burns on bridges, they tell of their course
But now theres no horses or leggers or wings,
The canal is my home, she can only go slow,
Whether carryin' family or cargo

The Grand Union gave us monkey boats,
Perhaps named after Thomas who improved life afloat,
He made the first living quarters for boating folks
The canal is my home, she can only go slow,
Whether carryin' family or cargo

Now the Grand Union, the longest waterway,
Is enjoyed by the inhabitants of MK today,
Through parks and rural scenes, its true enough to say
The canal is my home, she can only go slow,
Whether carryin' family or cargo

The Milton Keynes Hall of Fame (with help from Helen, Fiona and Maja)

No tune as of yet

I passed through Stony Stratford,
Although once elusive,
The sessions can be bad or good,
But oftentimes inclusive.
On coming into Ravenstone,
Stalwart of the party scene,
I was taken in by the ravers,
And left feeling rather green.

*Theres more to us than roundabouts,
And a few concrete cows,
We're ideas men and women,
Working in the here and now,
People just aren't looking,
When they say theres nothing here,
We're a vibrant busy city,
Thats right lads - we're top tier!*

I went into Westonunderwood,
Where Cowper says his prayers,
I pushed open his front door,
Releasing all the hares,
We promptly began chasing them,
Across Stoke Goldington,
After we ended up having many,
When we said we'd stay for one.

*Theres more to us than roundabouts,
And a few concrete cows,
We're ideas men and women,
Working in the here and now,
People just aren't looking,
When they say theres nothing here,
We're a vibrant busy city,
Thats right lads - we're top tier!*

I caught old Nobby Newport,
On the way across to Stony,
I caught a glimpse of Theo Eaton,
Riding on a pony,
I saw all the fellas there,
Meeting in the Bull,
Planning the Grand Junction canal,
To make a pocketful!

*Theres more to us than roundabouts,
And a few concrete cows,
We're ideas men and women,
Working in the here and now,
People just aren't looking,
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A Tale of Two Billys: Billy Barker (written by Tony Hill) and Bill Billings
Bouncing Billy Barker tune

In Gorton town in Mancheser that place of high reknown,
You can read it in the history books in the library way down town,
There's a story of a man who brought great local fame,
To the town that had adopted him Bill Barker was his name.

*Lay your money down it can't be done said many's the remarker,
Who now remembers Gorton town and Bouncing Billy Barker*

In streets of Gorton when a lad he played the local games,
Football, kickstone, knock and run and he knew the peoples names,
But he soon found that he could jump where no one else could go,
And he practiced until he could do what others didn't know.

*Lay your money down it can't be done said many's the remarker,
Who now remembers Gorton town and Bouncing Billy Barker*

Bill's secret were a pair of weights he held one in each hand,
He used his arms to swing them up when he jumped off from dry land,
Into the middle of the cut which was so very wide,
He used his arms to swing them up and reach the other side.

*Lay your money down it can't be done said many's the remarker,
Who now remembers Gorton town and Bouncing Billy Barker*

Now every Sunday morning when the day was getting warm,
Along the cut at Edge Lane locks Bill Barker would perform,
He said he'd jump into the water and step right across,
And asked if any betting man would care to chance a loss.

*Lay your money down it can't be done said many's the remarker,
Who now remembers Gorton town and Bouncing Billy Barker*

Folk would stare in deep amaze and mouths would open wide,
To see Bill bounce just like a stone and reach the other side,
But more than this when coming back to make the challenge harder,
Bill did the trick but started out with his back toward the water.

*Lay your money down it can't be done said many's the remarker,
Who now remembers Gorton town and Bouncing Billy Barker*

But sad to say in Gorton town his home since childhood days,
In nineteen hundred and sixty five Bill Barker passed away,
But up til then at 80 years he was still a gradely man,
And people still recall his fame and tell it when they can.

*Lay your money down it can't be done said many's the remarker,
Who now remembers Gorton town and Bouncing Billy Barker*

Now whilst I'm here I'll sing to you about another man,
Who hails from this area and during his lifespan,
He championed t'community and arts for everyone,
If you look around MK today you'll see what he has done.

*He was an arty local lad, for sharing he was willing,
He made MK a better place did our Billy Billings*

Billy was a gentle soul and very modest too,
Theres rumours he was SAS but nobody ever knew,
He said, "If I have had any enemies it's because I'm crude and scruffy,"
But this didn't stop him making waves and landing an MBE.

*He was an arty local lad, for sharing he was willing,
He made MK a better place did our Billy Billings*

Some 500 people came to the church to say goodbye,
To this dynamic local chap who gave everything a try,
Up by Peartree Bridge you can see his dinosaur,
Bill Billing was a gift to us, he opened up the door.

*He was an arty local lad, for sharing he was willing,
He made MK a better place did our Billy Billings*

The row between the Canal and the City

Belly and back tune

Canal: This problem I have with the city,
I no longer can hold up my tongue,
Its with this brand new ditty,
I'll put all my feelings in song.
This city has been growing and crossing,
Truthfully, all over my path,
If you can restrain your growing,
You will be avoiding a bath.

City: The canal is an engineered relic,
He's certainly no match for me,
My improvements have proved psychedelic,
Compared to his blue and his green.
I won't be held back by indifference,
To progress and also to change,
If he has a problem please air it,
I welcome a healthy exchange.

Canal: You have seen the products of your evolution,
Wrapping an oak tree up in a shop,
I agree that this grim contribution,
Was not meant its life for to stop,
I understand your need for improvement,
I have undergone similar schemes,
But you have to think of these movements,
And how they can become extreme.

City: I was the first smart city,
That stands up however you fight,
You may have been built here first,
But you have to declare that I'm right,
Your simple design and construction,
May have been a leap forward at the time,
But I will not accept the admission,
That your skills are better than mine.

Canal: Now I see fit here to mention,
The case of the tortoise and hare,
And believe it is not my intention,
To label us circle and square,
Whilst we may not be so different,
And we do share some common traits,
I would ask you slow down your ascent,
Before it becomes far too late.

Tommy shops song

Hard Times tune

There is a swell of tommy shops,
From Stoke Bruerne to Gayton,
They lurk beside the waterside,
To curse folks and to bate 'em.
They make our working lives more hard,
By stealing all our wages,
Since the owners put 'em in,
Its doubled both our ages.

Whilst going over the Iron Trunk,
I noticed we were low,

On supplies for us and t'boat,
We all were running slow.
We almost stemmed up by the shop,
Which caused our hearts to grieve,
I, who, stressed and overworked,
Am starved enough to thief.

These tommy shops they are the scourge,
Of a boatpersons life,
To be ripped off for the owner's gain,
To fail my kids and wife.
To go hungry to allow,
The boat to run and work,
Whilst we in't cabin struggle on,
In dirty dress and shirt.

Buckingham Arm bridge song

Wark O Th Weaver's tune

Queen cut the ribbon in 1801,
To open up Buckingham, this right prestigious arm,
A lot of trade was driven, into these parts,
Continuing our noble navigation

*If it wasn't for these people preserving these parts,
You wouldn't have a bridge on the Buckingham Arm,
You wouldn't be able to witness history,
If it wasn't for this noble society.*

Then come the railway, Bletchley to Banbury,
And made our arm feel quite secondary,
And sewage was making us feel like an estuary,
It wasn't looking good for Buckingham

*If it wasn't for these people preserving these parts,
You wouldn't have a bridge on the Buckingham Arm,
You wouldn't be able to witness history,
If it wasn't for this noble society.*

We were slowly being forgotten, it was a crying shame,
For faster transport trade links and neglect was to blame,
Things were looking up by the time the war came,
For they found a use for old Buckingham

*If it wasn't for these people preserving these parts,
You wouldn't have a bridge on the Buckingham Arm,
You wouldn't be able to witness history,
If it wasn't for this noble society.*

They founded a society, to protect what was there,
For this canal society, restoration was their care,
They've been at it a few years now, and I do declare,
Their work is improving old Buckingham

*If it wasn't for these people preserving these parts,
You wouldn't have a bridge on the Buckingham Arm,
You wouldn't be able to witness history,
If it wasn't for this noble society.*

Restoration will bring leisure and wildlife back t'cut,
Stone bridges and the heritage, which for centuries have been shut,
It'd benefit the Ouse as well, so down t'towpath they strut,
The Buckingham Canal Society!

*If it wasn't for these people preserving these parts,
You wouldn't have a bridge on the Buckingham Arm,
You wouldn't be able to witness history,
If it wasn't for this noble society.*

Blisworth tunnel song

The Rosemary tune

Up by Stoke Breurne at the sign of the Boat,
A humble bargee was fumblin' in his coat,
He pulled out the keys and the engine did sound,
On that Sunday morning he was tunnel-bound

He pre-booked with Kathryn so that he could go through,
And she met him out front of her house with a brew,
She boarded the boat and cruised into the mouth,
Of the Blisworth tunnel facing East to the South.

They entered the tunnel, the boat all aglow,
As the headlamp created a dancing shadow,
There was pulling and pushing on the old tiller bar,
Steering through Blisworth was awkward so far.

With a third of the tunnel behind them they saw,
That the steering began to ease up a bit more,
This restored portion was a blessing but still,
I wouldn't fancy leggin' it, that'd be overkill.

The fore end began to drift off again,
The last 500 metres were proving a pain,
He imagined the leggers and their brass arm bands,
Putting their lives in the boats command.

He envisioned them at Candle Bridge, buying tallow,
Lighting them up when they went down below,
To tempt Springheeled Jack to visit them there,
Before he could finish the boat's horn did blare.

"You're all set for Gayton, I presume?" said Kathryn,
And hopped off the boat onto land with a grin,
The boater, readjusting his eyes to the light,
Said "thanks very much I should reach there tonight."