

# **What about the Haven**

**by Victor Thompson. (aged sixty and a half.)**

Having spent most of my adult years in the RAF I have been gratified at the efforts of the people of Barton, especially newcomers, in their drive to keep the town alive and improve its appearance and facilities. They must face a never ending uphill struggle with the towns vandals who seem intent on destroying anything that looks nice. I have seen the town as a series of snapshots. A weekend here, a weekend there and have probably noticed changes more than if I had been here continually, as such changes would then have been almost imperceptible. However, one part of Barton, the Haven, does need some form of attention.

I was born at 91 Ings Lane on the 17th May 1941, and apart from a few months living as a baby in Barrow I spent my childhood at Barton. From 1942 the family of Freda and Albert Thompson lived at 7 Maltkiln Lane (this was long before the name was hijacked by the residents of Chemical Lane). I grew up on the eastern side of the Haven surrounded by the Maltings, Ropeworks, Farmers' Company Chemical works and Brickyards. On the Waterside side of the Haven was a wharf for unloading barges from Hull, and Clapson's shipyard which made and repaired small vessels. This was a wonderful yet rather dangerous playground for children of families that lived and worked there. Remember names such as Atkinson, Bott, Gadie, Graves, Lees, Milson, Mitchell, Thompson, Warrener, Welsh, Salter.

All the families lived in what would, by modern standards, be considered to be two up two down slums, with outside thunderbox toilets and the dust of Industry all around. Inside, the modest gas lit houses were absolutely spotless. The houses may have been slums, but not the people. The old fire grates were frequently black-leaded and the cobbles on the causeway were swilled down daily. My parents moved into a new council house just before the floods that devastated much of the east coast. Out of curiosity we went to see how our old derelict home had fared only to find a muddy tidemark three feet up the wall. We had a very fortunate escape.

As children we got everywhere inside the brickyards, the maltings and on the Haven. We explored everything and damaged nothing. Much of our insight into adulthood was supplied by the pictures pinned to the brickyard workers crew room. The haven was the natural playground for the Maltkiln Lane boys (we tried to avoid taking our sisters as they slowed things down and told tales), with fishing, sculling up and down in requisitioned coggy boats unhooked from the barges and climbing into the maltings warehouses and on piles of bones inside the Chemical works. I even had the doubtful honour of falling into the Haven which in those days carried the sewage for the whole of Barton. My mothers' joy at my survival was greatly tempered by the stench of my clothing.

In those days it was possible, at high tide, for my sister Pauline and myself to get across the Haven to the Methodist Sunday School (run by Miss Arnold and High Street grocers Mr and Mrs Nicholson) on the other side, by walking across the barges that packed the Haven, rather

than going the long way round via the wooden Ropery bridge. But that was in the days when the Haven was useful, it provided work and pleasure and was cared for by the authorities, who made sure that it was regularly dredged.

Now, although the sewage has long since been diverted to a proper treatment works, the Haven is scruffy dirty and uncared for. The Haven south of the shipyard is slowly being silted up, with just a deep slot left for the water.

The industries have gone, most of my parents generation have moved on and the Haven no longer serves a useful purpose, indeed, with its high earth flood defence banks, grass covered silt banks and deep water channel, it is potentially dangerous, especially to children. Throughout the country disused canals and waterways are being refurbished and brought into service for pleasure, but I don't think this would be of use at Barton. South Ferriby already provides a superb service for weekend sailors.

Perhaps the best thing that can be done with Barton Haven would be to lay a large storm drain down from the railway station water plant to the start of the shipyard. There build a flood defence across the Haven to the end of the old ropewalks, to join the existing flood defence on the old malting side of the Haven. The Haven basin would still be available for commercial activity and the unusable part could be filled in and landscaped. The advantages are that this would provide a play and recreation area for people in the area while reducing the need for a unsightly earthen flood wall and bridge maintenance at Proudfoots. The town would gain a lasting asset and rid its self of an eyesore.

So, having floated my ideas, what other lasting alternatives are there? Some thing must be done eventually, but then there must also be the will and the money. I can but dream.