

THE BANKS OF THE RIVER

The tides of the cold North Sea ebb and flow into and out of the river Humber where the clear blue water suddenly turns into what most locals call, “a mucky chock’let culler”

On the south bank of the Humber River there is a small town called New Holland.

New Holland’s main claim to fame was that it was the jumping off point for many who wished to cross into Yorkshire and because the big city of Kingston-upon-Hull was only about a mile away they could do so by ferry boat.

Leeds and Bradford were also big cities but were too far away to be classed as convenient.

One could nip to Hull and be back the same afternoon for the price of a six penny ticket.

Well---- most days, there was the odd day when the tide was low and if the wind was wrong the Humber Ferry might just dig her nose into a sand bank, then it would be half a days wait until the tide came in again to float her off.

One bloke’s pet party piece when in a crowd discussing the footy match in East Yorkshire was, “ If’n tha’s got “igh blood pressure go rahnd by Goole tu Hull cos ifn ‘t’ ferry gits stuck on t’ mud tha’s goin’ tu be deerd afore any bugger naws tha’s stuck”

People of Barton-on-Humber wishing to go to Hull would take the train from Barton because the railway company had kindly laid a line from Barton to New Holland.

Another line went from New Holland to Grimsby, then from Grimsby to all points South.

To go North and on to Scotland from Barton one had to catch the ferry at new Holland and then on arriving at Hull catch a fast train which called at York, Thirsk, Darlington and so on to Glasgow or Edinbrough

But in the Scunthorpe, Lincoln, Brigg, Gainborough area some bright lads decided to run busses by road.

These likely lads decided to call their company, “Enterprise and Silver Dawn” The busses had a cream and choc brown colour scheme and most were double-deckers. There was another bus company that operated from Lincoln.

Their busses were single-deckers and were painted green and cream and were classed as Express busses.

I don’t know why, because they all had to obey the road speed rules and legal notices.

To go by road to new Holland one could get on the bus in the Market Place and it would travel three miles to Barrow-on-Humber about three miles away.

From Barrow the bus would continue on to new Holland a further three miles.

But Barrow was inland by about one mile, this meant that if one wanted to walk to new Holland one could do so by walking on the river bank and it cut a couple of miles off

People would often walk along the Humber bank on a warm sunny afternoon and visit relatives of friends who lived near the Humber bank at Barrow Haven and indeed New Holland.

The path alongside the Humber was indeed a pleasant place to ramble during the day but at night time it could be a death trap for many.

So it was understood by most over the years that the Humber Bank path was a no no by night.

In olden days it had been frequented by footpads and vagabonds who would way lay any who were traveling alone.

Many young damsels took heed of Mamma when she warned, “if you go that way you could get your purse snatched by some footpad, or Viccy Virca

But today there are deep pits full of water where the clay had been dug out to make bricks and tiles.

Also tides coming in and going out would nibble away at the coast line and some parts of the pathway were rebuilt or rerouted to avoid some of the potholes full of water when the tide came in.

If one went by train there was only one stop between Barton and New Holland and that was called Barrow Haven.

Barrow Haven was an inlet where barges would take shelter and tie up.

So it came to pass that the lads at the footy match one Saturday afternoon in one of the local farmers grass field near New Holland began shouting the odds.

“What???? yuv got best darts team rahnd ‘ere? bollocks!!! New Holland team ul knock yus fer chuffin’ six”

Fred Watson sidled up to one of his cronies and nudged him with his elbow and talking out of the side of his mouth like he was passing secrets to a Russian spy, commented, “‘Ees a proper gobby little runt that wun”

“ Ger ‘im, ah say, ger ‘im tu put ‘is munny weer ‘is gob is an’ weel gi’ ‘im a match tu rember us by, app’n.”

After a lot of verbal weaving and ducking on both sides, a darts match in the Mukky Duck at New Holland was agreed upon.

Mule Skinner, Fifteen Watts, Chalky White, Taffy Evans, and Dicky Twit where good mates who played darts in the Dog and Duck most Saturday nights.

The Dog and Duck was a very old pub and dated back to the sixteen hundreds.

One table had the initials D.T. and a lot of people believed that Dick Turpin had actually carved them one night while carousing with one of the barmaids.

Which to most locals proved that one could do two things at once if one concentrated.

The sign outside the pub was reputed to be originally a gibbet for stringing up any cut-purse or other ne-er do well that was caught cutting the strings that held the blokes money purse or bag to his leather waist belt.

It was said the pub long ago had originally had board with a picture painted on it by a local artist who had a slightly off beat sense of humour, and probably inebriated to boot, he painted a duck laying an egg with a dog trying vainly to push the egg back.

A lot of church goers who never frequented the pub decided to protest the sign and in the end the local magistrate one Mat Bigwig made an order for the sign to be painted over to the chagrin of the inn keeper who had to pay another artist who was a church member and painted a golden retriever with a duck in it’s gob.

The funny thing was, the birth rate dropped when the sign was repainted.

The Game of darts was set up and it was agreed that both teams would meet on Saturday night in the Mucky Duck in New Holland.

The purse was five guineas and was to be held in Big Mal’s safe until the match was over and the winners proclaimed.

Big Mal was the landlord of the Pub. He got the nick name in his school days

when someone was overheard to remark, “ That kids built like a brick dunny wi’a hoist on ‘is front lawn”

Saturday came round and Barton Market Place, which normally was empty and silent, was now awash with noise and chatter and a small crowd milling about who were waiting for the bus.

A car pulled up and the darts team got in, then with a lot of cheering and hand waving, and shouts of, “ger em in!” and, “ mine’s a pint” the car roared away up Barrow Road.

Five minutes late the double-decker bus pulled in and people began to fill up the bus.

One youth suddenly erupted from the nearby Butchery where he had been obeying the call of nature and he had to skip over the now meandering stream of water that was creeping to the nearest street drain.

The youth leapt aboard the bus just as it began to move off and found there was no seats left and had to stand in the alleyway between the seats hanging on to a roof strap.

One young lady kept glancing at him grinning, and the youth turned bright red as the thought crossed his mind, “ did I remember to button up?”

When the young lady did glance away he shot his hand down to verify that he had indeed done so, and when the young lady glanced at him again he was more composed and managed a feeble smile in her direction.

He was about to give her a feeble five finger flutter from the wrist but thought, “Don’t push it”.

The people in the bus watched as the familiar sights of the countryside slid by.

Owd Moody’s farm looked black and desolate after the fire that had almost burnt the farm down.

Looking out of the other side one could see the gravestones of the cemetery whizzing by.

Then the bus lurched as it passed over Barrow mere and all the people in the bus rose out of their seats and dropped back into their seats and the bus sank on it’s springs till the fast turning tire kissed the mudguard briefly then the spring pushed the bus body back to it’s normal position.

Barrow Mere was where the tarring of the road by Barrow council came to an end and Barton council road workers overlapped. The resulting hump in the road was the result of years of overlapping of tar and stones.

The bus turned left at the 'T' road and then turned right to go into Barrow-on-Humber.

Stopping in the market place one person got off and the lad standing now got a seat.

Leaving the market place the bus chugged on towards Goxhill but at another road junction took the left fork and made for New Holland.

Arriving at new Holland the people got off the bus and like a swarm of Lemmings going to commit Hari Kiri they surged toward the Mucky Duck pub.

One got the impression on entering this pub that one was a foreigner.

Hands and forearm were suddenly thrust round the glass of liquid on the table as if to protect it from prying eyes, and mouths would twist to talk side ways while staring unblinking eyes watched one's every move.

Bit like watching a rattlesnake about to strike at a rat.

"Oh, this is a friend of mine" could be heard above the clink of glasses and the answer, "Ah doo, ah'm Fred"

And some wit would add, "Yu last name wouldn't be Bear by any chance? Har har har"

Another voice warbled " Sit dahn then, an' ah'l git thee a pint"

Over near the far wall the visiting dart team were warming up.

Then there was a buzz of excitement as the door opened and the local team suddenly appeared.

One bloke was about three foot six high and where most people have a gaze that suggest it is five minutes to one,

This bloke's gaze suggested it was twenty to four, with one eye looking straight at you the other was trying to look out of his left ear.

But, he threw a dart.

He threw a dart and it struck in the dead center of the board at 50 He threw another dart and it stuck in the back end of the first dart. Then he threw a third and it stuck into the end of the second dart and the total weight of all three darts stuck together pulled them out of the board and they fell on the mat in front of the board.

The next bloke was about six foot tall and looked like he'd just stepped off a whaling boat fresh from the Antarctic.

He was attired in a dark blue wool jersey that had a roll top neck.

His unshaven jaw looked like me Mam's old scrubbing brush and I was suddenly reminded of Desperate Dan from the Beano comic book.

Before entering the pub doorway he held open the door then putting one finger to the side of his nose and blocking off one nostril he blew his nose.

What looked like a half grown caterpillar suddenly shot from his nose and skidded across.

the pavement and into the gutter.

"Boody 'ell" someone muttered, "We may as well go 'ome now"

But like any other darts game new friends were made and everyone had a good time.

Except Fred.

The darts game was finished and New Holland team had beaten the Barton team and the Barton people were leaving to catch the last bus home.

But a chance remark by one new Holland lad needled Fred who had had more than his fair share of tonsil varnish.

"Ee that Fred's got t' needle agi'n, appn' e's off tu miss bus? snickered Doris Doolittle.

"Five Bob sez ah can git three in't bull afore thee" snarled Fred.

" Reet lad , tha's on' quaffed the New Holland bloke.

Suddenly a voice from the doorway screeched, “Tha’s goin’ ter miss last bus Fred”

Fred got his last dart in just as he heard the engine rev up.

By the time Fred had got to the door he was in time to see the headlights of the bus scanning the surrounding houses and then illuminated the road ahead and with a growl the engine thrust the crowded bus onto the road and into the darkness.

Fred watched as the glow of the bus inside lights and tail lights became smaller and smaller until they finally disappeared in the distance and dark of the night.

Fred looked up at the sky and the big moon and looking at the people who were now leaving the pub some of whom were throwing glances which seem to say, “Silly sod, now you ‘ave to walk ‘ome”

One bloke on passing threw a casual remark, “Go kip dahn in t’ Railway Station waitin’ room mate, app’n there’s a fire in theer?”

Fred took heart and thought, “Well ah can allus catch fust train ‘ome in ‘t mornin’

But there was no fire in the waiting room and it was so cold Fred decided he would walk home along the Humber bank in the moonlight.

Fred was six foot one inch tall and built like a brick dunny, so the thought of anyone robbing him never occurred to him.

But what Fred did not know was what the New Holland people knew but they had not thought to warn him was that at this time of the year there were some extra high tides in the River Humber.

The noise of the pub and the lights of New Holland began to fade as Fred made his way on the footpath that led to the Humber Bank.

It was now well after ten o’ clock and the moon was now and again being dimmed by clouds.

Sometimes Fred could see the grass about a hundred yards away then a cloud would hide the moon and he slowed down his walk because he was not sure of his footing.

“Either ah’ve ‘ed too much tu drink or the ground is givin’ way sometimes,” he mused.

Then it began to rain, just lightly at first but it was still wet and soon Fred was not only wet through but also he was cold and it was getting darker as the moon had disappeared altogether.

Fred thought he had been walking for what seemed a long time when suddenly he thought about the Welshman’s garden full of leaks and decided to take one.

Now usually when Fred is pissed, his aim is off, and he manages to fill his left shoe and he does not notice until he begins to walk again.

Then the sloshing sucking noise wakes his befuddled brain up and it registers that his shoe is indeed full of fouled water.

“Ah well ah weer’t ‘ev tu wesh tha’ foot wen ah gits ‘ome” he mumbles to himself.

But as Fred is relieving his bladder the awful truth suddenly comes crashing down on him.

He is not pissing in his left shoe and the water is not raising any dust off the ground.

He is leaking into watter.

Fred knows he is Fred and not Jesus Christ so how come he is walking on watter?

The awful truth suddenly hits Fred and he is now fully awake.

He remembers vaguely skirting Barrow Haven, so he must be half way between Barrow Haven and Barton.

That meant if he kept the lights of Hestle on the Hull side of the river to his right he would stay on the path that was now being covered by a high tide.

If the tide was just coming in, how high would it get cos Fred could not swim.

Fred was cold and wet.

The tide was coming in and the moon was gone.

Fred was alone and up to his ankles in the North Sea.

On one side there could be brickyard pits flooded, but where? Since everything was under the muddy waters of the tide.

Was it fancy or was the ground being washed away from under his feet, Fred remembered seeing where the sea had sculptured round tufts of grass growing on the bank but the roots had held fast and the sea had washed away all the loose soil round them.

Thinking he was on one of these tufts made Fred reluctant to move and fear began to gnaw at his marrow as he envisaged a muddy corpse being washed up on the mud tomorrow.

Then Fred remembered when he was a lad and he began to pray.

He dare not move his feet and he was so cold and wet but he could move his arms and he thought what the hell and took out his pocket watch and was amazed to see it was past midnight.

“Where the hell am I “ he thought

Then there was a noise above the lapping of the tide.

There it was again, and by gently turning his head he could make out a smudge in the dark and the faint glow of a light a long way off.

Then he heard a gruff voice quiet near, “theer ‘e’ is the silly sod”

It was then Fred realized the light wasn’t far away because it was a cigarette end glowing he could see, and the black smudge in the water was a coggy boat being sculled by a bloke who with a mate were eel fishing in the dark.

“Are you that silly bugger from Barton that missed last bus ”

“Yis” said Fred

“ Well don’t just stand theer like a wet dream, ger inter the bloody boat”

“Ah can’t swim” wailed Fred

“ Can’t yu bluddy walk neither” queried the bloke with the oar out the back of the boat, and giving the oar a couple of swings the boat glided closer and they grabbed Fred and hauled him into the boat.

Shivering with cold the wet Fred tried to get comfortable of the hard ribs of the boat.

The bloke on the oar fished out a metal hip pocket flask and offered it to Fred.

“ Ere yar mate, tek a good swig o’ this, it’ll put ‘air on thee chest”

Fred took the offered flask and took a swig and coughed, “bloody ‘ell, THAT’S raw paint stripper”

“ Well if it stops yu gittin’ new monica mate, be grateful” “ Don’t yu meen Peeronia” “Naw mate that a swear word used by furriners, ah think?” “Well” said Fred, “ how t’ ‘ell did yu naw ah wus in trouble?”

“ Easy mate” we wus busy nickin’ the spare propellor off’n one o’ they barges in t’ ‘avon an’ we eerd some bugger bawlin’ is ‘eerd off about some daft bugger pissed and walkin’ ome on t’ ‘umber bank when it wus high tide time o’ t’ year.

Fred looked a bit sheepish and muttered, “ aye well yu weern’t be rescuin’ me agi’n, bugger the darts.”

“Aye well, be that as mebbe, but afore yu step ashore thee owes me a refill fer me flask” “well” said Fred, “aif a croon ain’t bad tu git ‘ome safe an’ soond and ah thank ‘ee.”

OzTam