

BOATS I HAVE LOVED

Reginald Wood of Sowerby Bridge
1950

This morning I'll pretend I'm ill,
And sit beside our window sill,
And not look out till after Nine,
But after that Oh! what a time.

This window is my favourite spot,
Of coloured boats there's quite a lot,
And horses too, complete with dray,
Loading goods for Halifax way.

Names so strange to thee not me,
Of boats that never put to sea,
But sail to Liverpool or Hull,
Sometimes empty but often full.

I'm most deceitful I'll admit,
Pretending illness when I'm fit,
But blame you must this busy pool,
That's the reason I'm not at school.

Warehouses number one to four,
Goods in plenty, and rats galore,
Food and clothing know not ration,
Days of Peace and a prosperous nation.

All the boats of colour yellow,
These belong to just one fellow,
And that fellow is my dad,
Now you know why I'm so glad.

Aster, Ivy, Oak and **Bluebell**,
All are owned by the Rochdale Canal,
These I love too, have no fear,
But my dad's I love more dear.

Bessie, there in her coat of blue,
Calder and Hebble's one of few,
Discharging grain, at number four,
Flour Mill waggon at the other door.

On the wharf in the sunlight's bask,
Glucose leaks from many a cask,

Many times here have I been caught,
Licking my fingers, something for naught.

Boatmen swing from fore and aft,
Each with a love for his own craft,
Shouting words so strange to thee,
Of *combings*, *shuts*, whatever they be.

Alongside ***Fraternity***, and ***Ceres*** and ***Nymph***,
Transshipping saltcake, for Barnsley I think,
Loading this stuff is a mucky affair,
Full fifty Tons for glassmaking there.

Any boat of five feet draught,
Calder and Hebble bear this craft,
In Rochdale Canal she would not float,
Four feet the limit for any boat.

The ***Crane Boat*** there she never sails,
She's ***Baden Powell*** transshipping bales,
With swinging jib over ***Neptune***'s hold,
Come cotton goods in colours bold.

She puffs and blows this old crane boat,
She's the hardest worked of all afloat,
As derrick swings and chains hold taut,
Over she rolls from starboard and port.

From the day I first saw light,
This basin's been a busy sight,
In sunlit waters of summers past,
In frozen pond of winters blast.

There's a boat I love to see,
Rochdale Canal's steam packet ***Dee***,
What thrill to hear: her whistle's blast,
As from the ***Thistle*** her moorings cast.

To Aire and Calder I call shame,
To launch your boats without a name,
To number them I don't agree,
You may as well just number me.

Mollie and ***Mercy*** there I see,
Grain and Jute it's sure to be,
Jute for ***Homfrays*** up the hill,

Grain for Sowerby Bridge Flour Mill.

Oh these happy boyhood days,
Scene of boatmen's many ways,
Even in their fight and brawl,
Oh, I think I love them all.

Textile machinery packed in case,
Fine, the work of this proud race,
Shipping to Germany via Hull,
Perseverance takes it till she's full.

Thanks my friend I forgot your name,
But for thee I might be lame,
Snatched from hooves of death maybe,
Of horses chasing homie to tea.

Stacks of salt from many a trip,
Like heaps of snow in winter's grip,
Pig-Iron ingots, heavy and cold,
Come from the **Bedford's** middle hold.

Forgive if with this tale I bore,
Speaking of *Aegre* or *Tidal Bore*,
Of fellows who in **Ouse** do meet,
A tidal wave of many feet.

With youthful eyes I miss not much,
Even my food I gulp and rush,
For Sowerby Wharf has proved to me,
Of far more interest than my tea.

Now with sorrow my head I bow,
To the **Hawthorn** who sank in tow,
As the Mersey on that sad day,
Took another life away.

As the war clouds roll our way,
Some yellow boats are painted grey,
To sail in Flanders cuts and river,
To cross the sea first time ever.

These grey boats I saw no more,
They knew not fame that warships score,
But may their timbers rest in peace,
I thank them for this youthful treat.

Days of Youth why did you end?
To pass to me life's other bend,
Leaving men so dear to me,
And boats that never put to sea.

And as I pass the Wharf to-day,
Empty warehouses seem to say,
Your window's there and here are we,
But have your boats put out to sea?

But in my mind there'll always be,
A picture formed for me to see,
Of boats and men, horses and drays,
Bringing sweet memories of bygone days.