

Water Under the Bridge

Six towns with councils and chains of office
Lurched into nineteen seventies disunity,
Kicking and screaming their resentment at
Unwanted political subjugation.

Years later, through strained democracy,
Townships replicated old districts and boroughs.
Three largest, Rochdale, Heywood, Middleton,
Regained their identities.

Each too small for modern local government,
Proud Milnrow, Wardle and Littleborough
Became united, named after Pennine hills,
Where red turns white past Blackstone Edge.
Those Pennines, drained into brooks and rivers,
Fill Hollingworth, Piethorne and

Watergrove, where sail boards
Fly over high sunken village,
Wind turbines soon to tower above the twain,
Sleepy Wardle village nestles below.

A "Weighvers' Seaport" before
Benidorm enticed workers to sun,
Hollingworth Lake now draws
Tourists to row, sail, walk or fish.

Piethorne lies above Milnrow,
Home of John Collier - Tim Bobbin,
Writer of Dialect,
Sketcher of gargoyles.
Here Beale flows
To join Roch at Belfield.

From a source above Littleborough,
Roch flows through to Rochdale,
Hidden below Europe's longest bridge,
Where Town Hall stands in awesome majesty,
With modern sentinels guarding its tower;

Peregrine falcons above the clock.

Within the hall Protector Cromwell
Shares windows with Kings and Queens;
Stairs boast busts of cotton's
Bright and Cobden.

Blue plaque above outer steps, new
Memorial unveiled this year
To Cyril's larger than life politics.
Blue plaque at Molesworth Street, old
Memorial for Gracie's songs and films,
Which outlived an Italian marriage
Through war time's troubled waters.
Two citizens both firmly stamping
Rochdale on the modern map,
Itself carved earlier by
Birth of Co-operation,
Pioneering spirit, caring, sharing,
Breaking the mould of unfair oppression.

Now new Lancastrians,
From Ukraine to Pakistan,
Co-operate with old;
All faiths for one human race.

River flows tirelessly on, curling
Gently around that Park of Queen's
Which national recognition now enjoys.

Magic Market,
New spirit of co-operation,
Also thrives in Heywood,
Forged by modern pioneers
Daring to defeat visionless bureaucrats.

Phoenix rises from Hind Hill ashes,
Proudly stamped with coat of arms
Of gone but not forgotten borough;
Birth place of Lisa, the other 'Stansfield',
Joined to Gracie by name and song alone.

Here Roch encaptures foaming waters
Pouring down Ashworth valley from
Scout Moor, where turbines light towns;

Carving through water of a different kind,
Keri Anne delights us all with medals.

Having flowed out gently from Manchester basin,
Rochdale Canal, new tourism thoroughfare,
Meanders from its entry at Middleton
To its exit at Littleborough,
Heading for the white rose.

Middleton, where Irk and Wince flow,
Home of fierce Mancunians,
Who wear that post code with pride,
Holds its own places in history.
Queen Elizabeth the First bequeathed
A Grammar School to last forever.
From here Sam Bamford led men,
Starving for justice, to Peter's Field,
Where none was to be found.
Early industrialists repelled Luddites,
Architect Edgar Wood designed uniquely
But drunken men raked moon for cheese,
Giving name to a strange fountain and
Mike Harding's Moonraker studios.

Flow on, water under bridges;
Flow on, waters of history;
But, as they flow, we must never forget,

All truths of history are carved to last;
Present can mean nothing without the past.

Robin Parker, November 2011