My River Dearne

An Anthology

The Dearne Valley Writing Group
MY RIVER DEARNE

An Anthology of Writing from the Dearne Valley Writing Group

Edited by

Clare Morgan
Workshop Leader
Writing About Rivers:

Effective Participation through Imaginative Engagement

Workshop Participants

Rowena Bailey
Sarah Brook
Cory Garner
Audrey Barber-Hart
Elsie Hutchinson
Stuart Jenkinson
Tony Wright

Researchers

Claudia Carter – Forest Research
Anna Lawrence – Forest Research
Clare Morgan – Oxford University
Paul Selman – Sheffield University

October 2008

The research project "Engaging with Rivers in a Period of Uncertainty" has been funded through a targeted initiative of the Economic and Social Research Council and the Academy of Sustainable Communities RES-182-25-0006
Foreword

Clare Morgan

*My River Dearne* is an anthology that celebrates the voices of the Dearne Valley Writing Group. The group came together as part of a research project into how working with and through the imagination might help raise awareness of environmental issues, in particular, issues to do with river basins.

Writing creatively demands a great investment of imaginative energy on the part of the writer. A writer has to 'live' in the world he or she is creating through the words on the page. It has been a very great pleasure for me, as workshop facilitator, to explore the world of the Dearne Valley in the company of such a varied and talented group.

The very first thing needed for a writing group to be successful is for there to be a universal readiness to give generously of honest and constructive feedback on other people's work. Then there is the ability to listen, as well as to speak. Through that listening, ideas about how to develop each individual's writing will emerge. Thinking about how other people's writing may develop will inevitably help in the development of one's own.

For most of the group, writing is not something they have engaged in regularly. So courage in an exploration of unfamiliar territory was needed. The Dearne Valley Writing Group has courage in abundance, and also has another quality vital to the success of the endeavour – commitment. Every member of the group worked wholeheartedly at the tasks set. Whether creating a world from photographic images, or discovering new things about the river and its catchment area – strong commitment has characterized everyone's approach.

But what about that 'success' that I've just mentioned? There must, inevitably, be many different definitions of 'success' when engaging with an exploration of this kind. My hope was that the workshops (we undertook six) would be interesting, exciting and fun to participate in. Nothing sounds the knell of
doom to a writing group more than an over-earnest or programmatic approach. The focus has been on engaging each person’s interest, and through that, on developing each unique and individual writerly 'voice'.

This anthology amply demonstrates the range of voices within the group, and the diversity of possibilities for connecting – or re-connecting - to 'My River Dearne'. If peace, tranquillity and a balm for the spirit are vital elements the river provides, the river is also, it becomes clear through the writing, a site of political oppositions. As the economic role of the river has declined, it has often become by-passed by daily life: its importance, except as a threat to be contained and mastered, has been diminished.

The Dearne is not a mighty river. Its position as the heart of a community, and how this has changed through time and is still changing, has been a subject of these writers. Depictions of the beauty and variety of the landscape are matched by a concentration on the people of the catchment area, their relationships, hopes and fears, and how the river and its diverse communities may appear to an outsider.

Those who may know the river well may also, nevertheless, know only their own specific part of the river. In order to write, you have to observe and become more fully acquainted with your subject than you ever thought possible. Re-imagining what you believe you know well, and wrestling with all the complexity and nuance of language in exploring that acutely remade world, is a challenge. These writers have risen to the challenge and introduce us here to 'their river'.

The writing in this anthology, which is only a selection of the body of work produced, points not only to the deep attachment of these writers to the river, but also indicates some of the ways in which it is possible, in engaging imaginatively and expressing that engagement through words, to make the river more wholly and fully one’s own.
Explorations
A River Walk at Darfield

Cory Garner

Darfield is an ancient village mentioned in the Doomsday Book. It is bisected from the north by the river Dearne and bounded by the River Dove to the south. Both the rivers lend their name to the Dearne and Dove canal, which for many years was the artery along which coal was hauled to their industrial customers, from the pits along its banks.

Approaching the River Dearne from the church we travel down a steep incline (a real lung burner on the way back) called Vicar Road. We pass from the old village to the new with bungalows on the left, one complete with a dovecote and doves, and new houses on the right.

The first stile is crossed catching my trailing foot on the top step. We are now in a narrow lane with overhanging trees which rustle in the breeze, and waist high stinging nettles, hemlock and docks, which come in handy for those who are unlucky to be stung by the nettles.

A small field is crossed to a kissing gated bridge over the River Dove, in fact two kissing gates, one at either end of the bridge. A two kisses for the price of one bridge. The babbling narrow stream is very clear, with the bottom covered with gravel which shines through the bright clear water. A clump of the infamous Japanese Knotweed grows from one abutment of the bridge. At our front is a high flood defence bank which runs the length of the river Dove and stretches eastwards into the far distance along the bank of the River Dearne.

Clearing the flood bank the Wombwell flash stretches before us, a large sky above and in the distance a gipsy encampment can be seen with many ponies and horses grazing in the flat, green fields, surrounding the water. Further on, the chimney of the now derelict Wombwell brickworks rises up out of the greenery and haze. This is the home of bats, a protected species.
As we walk along the embankment, we reach the confluence of the Dove with the more languid river Dearne at a point where the Dearne sharply bends to the right, as we view it arriving south from Darfield village. A passing angler says ‘How Do’ as he wends his way home complete with landing net and fishing basket. Obviously fishing is allowed on this stretch of the river.

Away over the skyline to the left the Darfield church peeps through the tree tops. To the right, we see in the far distance Quarry Hills, high above the river and covered with trees. A swan swims idly up river under a rusted, once white painted, bridge. This is a bridge to nowhere, on one side the sewage works and on the other side a field of unripe corn, green and waiting for the sun to shine.

Wombwell Ings

Sarah Brook

On over the bridge, I climbed a small bund to reveal the marshlands and floodplains that lay before me, their murky dark water reflecting the blue of the sky. In the distance I could see the chimney of an old mill of some type, surrounded by ancient trees, and the faintness of Hoober Stand at Wentworth, built as a lookout tower in the Jacobite Rebellion. Maybe Bonnie Prince Charlie had looked out from there and seen the floodplains and Darfield as a far different place to what it is now.

From the waters rose dark humps, equally spaced and equally sinister looking in appearance. With a quick glance from the corner of my eye, they could be easily mistaken as some ruthless bog monster, sliding through the murk with its serpent like body, waiting to devour the next unsuspecting victim. But fortunately for me they were just the rotting remnants of an old jetty or fence, placed there for eternity, no purpose now except a
marker for flood watchers to see if the waters would once again rise above them and engulf their neat, new homes.

As I walked along the top of the bund, the floodplains on my right and the river on my left, I could now see the newness and clarity of the concrete sewage works, like a volcano it seemed to erupt from the heavy greenery of the trees and shrubbery. Its tunnels, like tentacles spreading out of the river, splurging the effluence that it had purified into the clean river with such force that it took on the appearance of a white tipped waterfall. Gushing and pushing over the rocks, the tremendous sound drowning out our voices. A man made cascade of left overs creating a fleeting moment of beauty and voice.

Four words from our River Walk

Tony Wright

**Catchment** – as we came out onto the path and I walked up to the brow of the small hill, I was mindful of the massive catchment area of the Dearne and the Dearne valley here.

**Tranquil** – peaceful riverside aura, birdsong.

**Scummy** – edge of river scummy, reminds me where we are, what is near and what ends up in the river.

**Slipping** – As I walked back up toward the village, I had the feeling that the old village houses were rock solid perched on the top of the hill, and the new and newer and newer than that houses were metaphorically slipping in towards the water in the valley as time went by and space becomes rarer.
River People
The Wind in the Willows – Kenneth Grahame

Chosen by Elsie Hutchinson

`I beg your pardon,' said the Mole. `You must think me very rude; but all this is so new to me. So--this--is--a--River!' `THE River,' corrected the Rat.

`And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!' `By it and with it and on it and in it,' said the Rat. `It's brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing. Lord! the times we've had together! Whether in winter or summer, spring or autumn, it's always got its fun and its excitements.'

Playing Truant

Audrey Barber-Hart

One day when I was about eight years old I decided that I wasn’t going to school that day. I had had a beating from Sister Josephina the day before because I couldn’t recite my catechism in class at the local Catholic school in Wath. I walked along the river bank dodging out of sight if an adult approached in the distance, kicking stones, wishing that I had eaten more breakfast, knowing there was no school dinner for me today. I would be starving hungry by tea-time.

Then I caught up with another lad on the river bank. Ken was his name, he was also playing truant but from the ‘proddy’ school just down the road. So we knew each other but had never spoken before because of different schools, different faiths.

“What’s that in thi pocket” I asked. “It’s mi catapult” said Ken.
Oh let’s have a go with it.
“Ok” he said, “We’ll have a game to see who’ll be the first to hit a fish in the water”
“Don’t be daft there aren’t any fish in this river it’s too mucky.”
“Well” said Ken “back there I saw on old chair somebody has thrown in’t river we’ll try to hit that.”
We took it in turns with the catapult trying to hit the thick material covering the chair that was moving gently down stream pulled along slowly by the current, we weren’t very good at aiming and I soon became bored so picking up a large stone from the ground I lobbed it out over the water towards the chair hitting it squarely in the middle. We both screamed out in delight, but our delight soon turned to horror as what we thought was a ‘chair’ turned slowly, so slowly, over in the water to reveal the stark white staring face of a drowned man.
We ran, oh how we ran through fields, over fences, thorns and wires snatching at our legs, terror giving us the speed. We never told anyone about this day, we were too upset about what we had seen but we did hear later that a coal miner on his way home from the colliery had found the body, the poor drowned man had been in the water for many hours and was quite dead.
Ken and I became great friends after this incident on the banks of the river Dearne, we later joined the army together and travelled the world and even acted as ‘best man’ at each others wedding.
We are still friends sixty years later but we never talk about the old chair in the water of the river Dearne.
Making News
(an extract)

Stuart Jenkinson

The waiting room had seen better days. The tangerine metal and plastic chairs did nothing to brighten the mood of the witnesses waiting to give evidence to the council planning committee. The new marina development had aroused a lot of interest locally and my Editor had asked me to sit in and get some good copy. There was a whiff of back-handers being offered to the members on the planning committee and I guess that was the story that the Ed really wanted.

The local worthies had already heard representations either pro or con (mostly con) from most of the groups who bothered to turn up. Friends of the Toad, the Pink Alliance against Capitalism and Mothers Against Development were some of the more screwball pressure groups who had already given evidence.

Jeeze have these people nothing better to do? Apparently a yacht marina and blocks of yuppie flats were not everybody's choice for the regeneration of the old canal basin.

There were just three of them left now. And funnily enough they were an Englishman, a Scotsman and an Irishman. No really.

Representing the fishy community was Jeff Greenwood. Wearing the very waxed jacket that he went fishing in if I’m not mistaken; he clutched a bundle of dog-eared letters, plans and press clippings that had become decidedly limp as result of his frequent forays to the drizzle-soaked car park for a fag.

“What's the view of the angling community on the proposals by Gemstar PLC?” I asked, trying to sound interested.

“A disaster. A bloody disaster. I’ve fished that dock for over forty years man and boy, rain and shine. The club has just paid to have it stocked. Roach, Chub, Dace. They don’t come cheap you know. Sullivan and his cronies are just after a quick buck. Throw up some rabbit hatches. Sell them to some out-of-
towners for megabucks and then piss off back to the Emerald Isle laughing all the way to the bank. Where do local people fit in their plans? There’s a lot of retired folk around here and fishing and the odd pint is the only pleasure we have. There’s going to be no room for us to fish between the bloody boats is there!”

“Thank you for your views Mr Greenwood. I’m sure our readers will sympathise with the concerns of the local fishermen”. Christ - what had I done to deserve reporting on this lot. I guess trying to pull the Ed’s bird at the Christmas party might have had something to do with it. Good job I didn’t cop off with her or I’d taking photos of clapped out Fiestas for the classified ads.

There was no mistaking Sean Sullivan. For one thing he was the only person in the town with a suntan in January. His shoes probably cost more than my last car and had definitely seen more polish. He kept fiddling with his palm top. Probably cooking up deals about God knows what. Even if the council threw Gemstar’s application out, Sean Sullivan wouldn’t be going short. He had his chubby fingers in too many pies for that.

“You seem to have stirred up a bit of hornet’s nest with your proposals for redeveloping the old canal basin Mr Sullivan. What assurances can you give The Clarion’s readers that you have the best interest of the town at heart?”

“Progress sonny. Progress. If these cloth-caps are happy to be living in the freaking Stone Age let ‘em. But there’s a lot people out there looking for modern, affordable apartments with all the amenities of the 21st century. I’ve already got Starbucks and Carphone Warehouse signed up for the mini-mall and once these head in sands protesters shut up there’ll be more retailers queuing up for one of the units. Now the council have cleared the shtie from the river there will be plenty of punters willing to stump up the mooring fees too. Jobs they say. Jobs? I’ll tell you what sonny that coffee doesn’t freaking pour itself you know. And if they don’t want Gemstar’s money here there plenty of towns in the north of England who are gagging for it”. 
“Sound like you’ve got a watertight case there Mr Sullivan” I replied, which will more than the flats are if Gemstar’s previous form is anything to go by I thought.

Glenn Chandler was the bearded lock keeper employed by the Waterways to help the weekend sailors steer their tubs through locks just downstream of the proposed marina. Some thirty years in Yorkshire had done nothing to dilute his Scottish accent. So that made him one of the Scottish Glens - ha, ha ha! I’ll have to remember that one. Bad puns are journos stock in trade.

“Looks like you’ll be helping luxury yachts through the locks instead of smoky old narrow boats Mr Chandler” I quipped. He said nothing but thrust his hand deeper in to his coat pocket.

“You must have seen a lot of changes over your time working the locks Mr Chandler. This has got to be a good thing for the waterways hasn’t it Mr Chandler?” I tried again. No reply.

“Cat got your tongue Mr Chandler? Don’t you want to share your views with The Clarion’s readers? Eh? Eh?”

Jesus! 20 questions with Harpo bloody Marx.

“Aye The Clarion” he said. His eyes reddened and he pulled out a yellowed news cutting. He unfolded the fragile paper like a butterfly opening its wings for the first time. He handed it to me. “The Clarion”.

“
Dear Sir Michael... (Diary of a Dearne Flood Victim)

Sarah Brook

(After reading the Pitt Report and a consultation leaflet from the Environment Agency, we were asked to write a small piece about something relating to both the documents. I chose to write a diary entry in the form of a flood victim.)

Diary: 23rd June 2008

Today I read the Pitt Report. He seems compassionate to my needs and what’s required to be done. That’s all well and good, I’m sure he read my letter from the top to the bottom. Not.

He wants to try living in this hell of a space for twelve months, well not quite, eleven months, twenty three days and seven hours, not that I’m counting. I haven’t had a bath in over twelve months and the shower only two foot by two foot, I stink. How bad is that? I know what it feels like to be a nomad now, but I’m static. Everything’s static, the builders, my life, my career, the insurance company and my husband. Static in the pub all the bloody time.

Will Mr Pitt come and look at my house I wonder. Of course he will, hand in hand with Gordon Brown and the rest of the bureaucracy. I haven’t even managed to get Barnsley Council out, never mind Downing Street.

My own picturesque home, next to the lovely river. Not now though. Behold, a dirty, damp despairing shell, that’s not even half habitable. God, life’s so shit and it’s getting me down. I received a letter from the insurance company today, letting me know that the workmen will ‘Recommence work on Thursday 26th June’. Yeh, whatever. I won’t hold my breath. Off to my pokey, uncomfy bed now to cry into my pillow and wait for that drunken husband to get in. Tomorrow just another day.
Wartime 1943

Cory Garner

Walking to Broomhill with my father from Bolton-upon-Dearne along Ingsfield Lane, we have an uninterrupted view south from the high ground down to the wetlands through which the River Deane meanders. The pits of Wath Main and Manvers Main loom beyond. From Bolton-upon-Dearne, the high land stretches eastwards towards Harlington with the river and wetlands running parallel through to Mexborough pastures and on to the confluence of the Dearne and River Don at Denaby.

Each winter the wetlands are washed with floods and during cold specks the frozen lakes are used by ice skaters.

Arriving at Broomhill, standing on Marles Bridge is an old gentleman welcome of a conversation. The old man said ‘aye lad’ (I am 11 years old), ‘when I was a boy, 80 years ago, the river was full of fish’. The river by now has become a lifeless open sewer contaminated by the pits and untreated domestic effluent. (Marles Bridge at Broomhill is the first of three old stone arched bridges which straddle this stretch of the River Dearne. They were built in the early 18th or late 17th century. The next one is at Bolton-upon-Dearne and the last one, Adwick Bridge, between Adwick-upon-Dearne and Harlington.)

It is ‘Wings for Victory’ week in Bolton-upon-Dearne 22nd May – 29th May 1943, with events to raise money for the war effort taking place. I am off Dearne Road beyond Parson’s Mill watching the peewits circle over the open swampy fields abounding the River Dearne. One lands, and after watching it for a few minutes I find its next on the ground. Four beige eggs with dark brown spots, beautiful.

The quiet is disturbed by a familiar noise, low at first and getting louder, to which my attention is turned. There it is! The four roaring engines of a Halifax bomber accompanied by four escorting fighters approaching from the east, flying low over
Bolton-upon-Dearne as part of the ‘Wings for Victory’ celebrations.

At Bolton-upon-Dearne off Lowfield Road, approximately 300 yards north of the River Dearne, the army have built an ack-ack (anti-aircraft) battery, with four 3.7" guns and a camp adjacent, which is part of the Sheffield air defence system. Two hundred soldiers both men and women are stationed there. They take part in the ‘Wings for Victory’ parade, football matches and social events of the week. Dances in the junior boys school and free and easy evenings in the Collingwood and Angel Hotels.

The weeks and years have passed by and it is now 2008 and I am the old man. The wetlands from Broomhill to Bolton-upon-Dearne once used by ice skaters in the winter are no more. Covered by spoil heaps from the pits after the war, the spoil has been landscaped in recent years. The old man in Broomhill is long since dead but the river is revived, pristine again and full of fish.
Still Life

by Kirsty McColl

Chosen by Stuart Jenkinson

I walked down the river where we used
to go
And underneath the bridge where we first
kissed
The old town that we knew is dead and gone
Gone
The sickly sun shines greyly through the
mist
And like the love we used to know
The poisoned river waters flow
And then they're gone
For some of us still life moves on

Our love is just a relic of the past
You'd never recognize the old town now
Somewhere behind the concrete and the
glass
The monuments of England's sacred cow
Where are all the human beings?
Have they been sent to Milton Keynes?
They used to live round here but now they're
gone
For some of us still life moves on
Discovering the Dearne
Missing You

Tony Wright

Bridge Cottage
26 High Street
Darton
Barnsley
S.Yorks
England
S75 2JX

Friday 29th September, 2008.

Hiya Babe,

I’m missing you so much you wouldn’t believe. Things are made easier when I think of the smile you’ll have on your face when we hold hands and walk beside the river here in 3 months time. I cannot wait for your flight to touch down at Manchester on December 18th, we are going to have such a great time here, and you will love it. I know how much you hate the boring brown of Australia and long for the lush green of England. You won’t be disappointed, I just know it! College is going great, couldn’t be better really. Good group of fellow students and the tutors I’ve met up to now seem pretty cool.

But to be honest, I don’t want to talk about me, I want to tell you how great this place is and build up your excitement even more. I’m living in that little cottage I told you I was going to look at. It’s in a village called Darton. It only takes me about half an hour to walk up to the college in a morning. I walk along a footpath called The Dearne Way, along the banks of the River Dearne, that’s the river that runs at the bottom of the cottage garden. Even though at one point the footpath is only yards from one of the busiest motorways in the UK, the M1, it is still a gorgeous stroll. The trickle and sparkle on the river somehow
blanks out the whiz and droning of the heavy traffic, it’s a weird feeling. You know how I won’t go anywhere without my beloved ipod on, well it’s great walking to the college along the Dearne Way. Trees swaying in the breeze, clouds floating by, and I hardly ever see anyone so I just toddle along singing my head off throwing acorns into the river!!

I’ve only been here two weeks and already I’ve got lots of happy memories in my head. I’ve met a guy called Paul; he’s in my English Lit’ group. He’s a good laugh. He has lived in Barnsley all his life. When I told him how much I like walking along the Dearne Way to Bretton College in the morning, he asked me if I fancied going for a walk down the rest of it. Apparently the whole footpath runs for about 30 miles, all long the side of the river down to where it meets the River Don. He’s kind of taken me under his wing and each weekend we’ve been walking a stretch. It’s a great way to learn about the place you’re living in. He tells me some great stories as we’re walking along. Stories about when he worked at the coal pit and a big strike they had a few years ago. But he also tells me the older history of the place, like canals and what old buildings we see used to be used for. It’s so different to what we’re used to back in Oz.

There seems to be something to look at everywhere, something to ask a question about around every little corner. He’s happy telling me because he’s got pride in his town. He seems really pleased that someone from the other side of the world like me is actually interested in the town and river he knows so well.

Last Saturday morning we walked along the section from Bretton into Barnsley. We had a steady stroll, talked lots, then went for a pint of beer and a chip sandwich (I think he called it!!?) in a pub in Barnsley next to the river, lovely sunny day as well, told you it wasn’t cold all the time!! The way that river tells stories of times gone by is an education in itself. I felt like I wanted to know it all because it is really interesting and inspiring. Another thing I like about it is how everyone says hello as you meet them on the walk. Total strangers chatting about the weather or seeing a rabbit or anything at all really, it’s as though the river makes them
have something in common with each other so they are more likely to chat than they would on the street.

At one point of the walk, just as we were coming over a little hill, I just stood still and took a look all the way around me. I could see a motorway, a massive concrete mast on the horizon, a big distribution centre for lorries, but I could also see an old mill, (Paul said it was 600 years old), two stately homes, and the scar from an opencast coal pit, and the rising hills of the Pennines - old and new side by side. The scenery really does change every time you blink. Paul said that the place where the nice new townhouses had been built was once the site of a pit and a coal washing plant. You wouldn’t know it now and it seems hard to imagine, but Paul said the pit was there, employing over a thousand men right up to about 20 years ago.

The Dearne keeps going towards the town of Barnsley, as did we. As we neared the town centre we passed a number of old canals, or should I say places where canals used to be. The canals are long gone now. One thing I was impressed by was how the local Council, I think it’s the Council who’ve done it, have taken the time and money to make the Dearne Way a defined walk. It is a set-out route with signs to guide, and interesting sites along the way. Paul says there are some leaflets to accompany the walk, I will try to get some to send to you back home, and then I can test you on the history when we go for our walks at Christmas time!

The people in the pub were really friendly. When they heard my accent they asked me why I wasn’t drinking Fosters - ha ha ha, first time I’ve heard that eh love! We chatted with them a little and I told them I had come to Barnsley from Australia to study at Bretton. I told them how much I had enjoyed walking along the Dearne and how I actually preferred it to Australia. They got a bit funny and thought I was being sarcastic and taking the Mickey out of Barnsley. Paul told them that I really did like it here in Barnsley. He told them he had been giving me a historical tour down The Dearne Way. They seemed to change their tune then, next thing they couldn’t wait to tell me loads of memories of the Dearne and how every single person had a Dearne story to tell.
There were tales of someone falling into the river out of a tree-swing and someone catching a big fish with a stick a bit of string and a bent paper clip! My favourite was the one about some young lads building a raft in the school summer holidays. They challenged themselves to build this raft to cross the river at a place called Hoyle Mill, near where they lived. The story was they pushed themselves off from one banking and got grounded in the middle of the river. The old guy said they were stuck there for hours as they were too scared to either wade across or shout for help!

Each person in the pub had fond memories to tell of the Dearne, it turned out to be a great afternoon. Next weekend me and Paul are going carry on with the walk and do the Barnsley to a place called Darfield bit. I’ll let you know all about it.

I will also try to get those Dearne Way leaflets to you so you too can imagine us walking holding hands along the Dearne. I can’t wait to see you in December, I know you’re going to love it here. It is so different to what we’re used to, this place will give us a new life together and I can see us spending a very long time here together.

Talk to you soon,
Love you and missing you,

Tx
A Letter to Papa (extracts)

Rowena Bailey

Dear Papa,

Hello from sunny Yorkshire!

So far I am really enjoying my stay with Helen, David and little Tom. They have made me very welcome and have spent a lot of time showing me the area. They live in a pretty village near to the River Dearne, and I think that it is a lovely introduction to the English countryside. It was somehow how I imagined it, but the differences from our countryside are what I noticed the most. The main difference is that the horizon is not flat, and that there is somehow less sky.

On the first day we walked through long grassland from the village, and I didn’t see the river until we were close. The river there was about as wide as a large road, and wound around in a slow, almost half-hearted way through the rich earth. It seemed to feed the country around it; green life spilled over all of the surfaces so that everything looked cushioned and comfortable. This was interrupted by a grey metal bridge, which cut into the lazy landscape almost saying ‘wake-up!’

David suggested that I might like to see more of the river, so on Saturday we all went for a drive, following the river upstream. We followed a new road along the valley, which cut through neat countryside, but which was lined by large out-of-scale buildings that I imagined could have been dropped in overnight. ... I turned to look out from the rear of the car at the wide expanse of the Dearne Valley behind us; a bowl of green punctuated by villages, depots, and strung across with telegraph poles.

We rose above the valley and in the distance I could see more individual distinct hills, one topped by a stretched cone, pulled out towards the sky. Beyond these hills a large darker mass loomed across the horizon. As we descended down into the valley
again, it seemed that the valley was tighter, the fields alongside the river shorter. When I caught glimpses of the river it looked about the width of a single-track road, and was crossed by old worn stone bridges.

We reached Denby Dale, a town that seemed to stretch along the valley. Here we stopped to by a pie for tea. David told me about the celebratory pies that Denby Dale was famous for and about the large pie that had to be buried because it went off. This did not improve my appetite! I was more impressed by Denby’s landmark viaduct across the valley, it seemed to emphasise how steep the valley had suddenly become.

Here we left the Dearne, David said that he thought it rose somewhere to our left, and he wanted to show me some real hills, so we carried on, passing through a stone mill town, then up a much steeper rise towards a tall mast on top of a mountain. We parked at the top and I got out of the car. Looking across for miles and miles, I could see cooling towers, the glint of large buildings, tower blocks, all scattered across a patchwork of tiny fields. Somewhere down there, in the hills below, the little Dearne started its journey. The journey took it across much of the scene below me, winding among the lumpy folds, through towns that I could not pick out in the faint haze. Though I could not see it, I imagined the distant North Sea, and beyond it, you all at home.
Dearne, Dove and Don

Cory Garner

Water rushing, dashing, downstream
Meets another from the left
This one babbles, smiles and gushes
As it joins its bigger brother.
Now the two join hands together
Twist and turn, they move relentless
Round the bends and swirls they travel
Fishes gather in the eddies waiting
For the angler’s lure.
Off they go to far off yonder
To join an even bigger brother
The River Don is their repose.
An Afternoon Encounter

Elsie Hutchinson

Sam strolled down the well used track to the river. He loved the river. It seemed to draw him to it. It was his haven. He could not explain the affinity he had with it. In all its moods he felt at one with it. He loved it in the mist when the trees were drip-dripping into the water and the swans glided ghost-like down stream; in the morning with the sun catching the ripples as the water flowed over the stones and the birds were chirping and the ducks quacking; in the heavy rain when it rushed noisily by; in the summer watching the dragon flies hovering over the lazy water and in the evening when the shadows were creeping and the birds settling to rest as the sun set.

Today it was warm but not too hot as he stood on the bank watching the ducks swimming along with their ducklings paddling along behind. Then he spotted old Jack Smith further down the bank sitting on a stool with his fishing tackle round him, shaded by the branch of an overhanging tree.

“Hello Mr Smith. Have you caught any yet?”
“No lad. I’ve not been here long. Sit down. Look the water is clear, see over there that shoal”
“There are a lot of them,” said Sam excitedly. “What sort are they? Look their fins are orange. Are you going to catch one?”
“They’re roach but I’m after a bigger fish today. I’ve heard that there’s a carp been seen,” said Jack.
“How big are they?” asked Sam.
“Well they can get to three feet long. They are great fighters. It can be a real tussle to land one,” said Jack.
“What will you do with it if you catch it?” asked Sam.
“Why I’ll put it back. The sport is the catching not killing. I’ll take a photograph of it first though if I do get him else nobody will believe me,” said Jack with a laugh.
“Are there any salmon?” asked Sam.
“No lad not yet but there will be in a few years. They are already at Doncaster. They’ll not get further on than here though” he added.

“Why not?” asked Sam.

“Because when they built the weir they didn’t make a way for the salmon to get over it. They’d have to if they were building one today.”

Sam walked a few yards along to where there was a shallow area near the bank. He took off his trainers and socks and paddled in the water. He turned over a stone with his foot.

“Look Mr Smith!” he said in great excitement. “Look there’s a crayfish! Look how big it is!”

“I love it. Look there are a lot of them,” said Sam.

“The trouble is that they eat the native ones,” said Jack.

“They’re taking over, just like the grey squirrels.”

“But they’re fun” said Sam.

Jack and Sam sat down again sharing the day and the restful river. Waiting for the carp to bite.

The silence was broken by the sound of someone trying to start an engine. Sam jumped up to see what was happening. Further down stream he spotted a young man who had a dinghy in the water and was fitting an out-board motor to it. Sam ran along the bank to have a look.

“Hi kid,” said the man,” how do you like my dinghy?”

Sam recognised that it was Mark Roberts who lived a couple of streets away from him.

“It looks great Mark,' ne said, "but are you going to motor on the river?”

“Of course I am. Why else would I be here? I’m going to take it up stream to see what I can get out of it. You watch it’ll be great”

“But you can’t do that. You mustn’t do that,” said Sam.
“Why not? It’s none of your business kid. You don’t own the river and I’ve just as much right to be here as old Jack over there. The river’s here for us all to enjoy. I’m not doing any harm.”

“But you’ll upset the fish,” said Sam.

“They’ll be alright,” said Mark, “they’ll swim away. They are used to the water being choppy when it’s stormy. I don’t kill them not like old Smithy there.”

“Mr Smith doesn’t kill them!” Exclaimed Sam. “He puts them back.”

“How would you like a hook in your mouth and being swung up in the air? I bet it hurts the fish. I don’t,” said Mark.

“What about the ducks? You’ll frighten them,” argued Sam.

“The ducks can get out of the way. They can fly can’t they?” Said Mark getting angry.

“But you’ll cause big waves and the water will wash away the banks,” Sam persisted. “And what about the oil and stuff that will pollute the river.

“There won’t be any and even if there is it won’t do as much damage as the people who throw litter into it. The fishermen are a menace anyway as they leave lines around which get tangled round ducks legs and what about the lead weights they use even though they are banned?”

Sam started to say something. He opened his mouth and closed it again.

“I’ll do what I want,” said Mark.
He started up the motor and roared away up stream, scattering the ducks and causing a lot of turbulence behind him.

Sam ran back to Jack. “Are you alright?” he panted.

“Aye lad, I’m alright but he broke my line. There’s no point staying now. These dinghies are a menace.”

“What can we do about it?” Asked Sam.

“I don’t know lad. There ought to be a law against it.”

Sam watched Jack pack up his gear and trudge off up the path. He stood watching the water as it gradually settled down.
He could hear the noise of the motor in the distance. He turned and walked slowly back home, thinking.
The Spirit of the River
A River Poem

Sarah Brook

Crystal Clear
Rippling Rapids
Splishing Sploshing
Weaving Waving
Shiny Pebbles
Jagged Rocks

Soothing sounds
Skating Boatmen
Silvery Fishes
Serpenty Plants
Deeper Darker
Living Lots
We laughed and we giggled as we raced onwards through the short vegetation and over the small pieces of flint broken away from the huge rocks and boulders thousands of years ago.

More and more bubbles just like me joined in the grand slalom of joy and excitement of being released from the oppressive darkness and into the world of light, of warmth and of adventure. We screamed with joy as we ran faster and faster over the smooth round comfortable pebbles, we twisted this way and that playing games of ‘catch’ and of ‘hide and seek’ in this wonderful party of life. I wanted it to be like this forever but suddenly the light changed it was as if a curtain had been drawn across the sky to blot out the sun, a strong wind began to blow and we all scurried for shelter underneath the overhanging clumps of grass by the edge of the water, but the winds soon found us and herding us all together it picked us up and threw us back out into the middle of the now fast flowing stream. Some of us bubbles burst open and were swallowed up by the quarrelsome water, I just managed to take a deep breath before an angry lump of water poured over me and dragged me down, down into the darkness, I held my breath for as long as possible and when I felt the strength of the water ebbing away slightly I rose to the surface once again, “phew that was awful” I cried “I nearly drowned”

Just then the rain started, huge drops of icy cold water fell with great force from the heavens some hitting me and some hitting the water so that new bubbles were born, these new bubbles were very confused they didn’t know what was happening, where they were or what they had to do next and for what purpose.

I explained that we were the life of the river, the river being a living thing made up of many parts and that we were one of the
essential parts carrying essential nutrients, food and oxygen to
the water, to the plants and to all creatures that lived in the river.
We had to be active and healthy and race along to all parts of the
family of our mother the river.

_Bubbly and cool, bubbly and cool,_
_By dabbling shallow and dreaming pool,_
_Bubbly and clear, bubbly and clear,_
_By shining pebble and foaming weir,_
_Under the bank where the fishes hide,_
_Fallen blossoms float and ride,_
_Rushes and grasses strong and wild_
_Play by me, stay by me, mother and child._

I wandered along with my new found friends enjoying the ever
changing scenery, we went through man made passageways, over
great falls, almost losing our way in the vast maze of the wetlands
but finding our way eventually to pass by the beautiful stately
pale cream coloured stone castle on the hill, it was then that I
realised strong forces were pulling me inextricably along I could
feel the vibrations of another body of water rushing towards us
from another direction, an immense power, this power was
determined to envelop us and then we would no longer live in the
Dearne River.

And so it was that I was swallowed up by this force the
two rivers came together under a warm sandbank bordered by
great fronds of Lady Ferns and Bull Rushes where long ago water
nymphs might have sat on rocks cooling themselves in the long
summer evenings, where now a great wall of water rose, quelling,
bubbling and gurgling so to bring terror to my heart, it was so
strong I couldn’t tell where water ended and air began, so there
the Dearne and the Don amalgamated and I was no longer an
innocent bubble I was now rushed along in a determined hasty
and forceful manner just one insignificant bubble among so many
others.
I Always Will Be... (extracts)

Stuart Jenkinson

In my soul I know I have had many existences but now I am a stone.

The people who think they are clever call me a piece of sandstone of the Lower Coal measures. But I care not for the names as they will pass just as the clever ones themselves will pass in time.

Time. To have time is to exist and I have existed for a long, long time. Even the clever ones cannot imagine how old I am.

Most of the people who have seen and felt me measure time by their own lives. The arrogance of it! For me their lives are as brief as a thought. Their worries and vanities have as little effect on me as seas of gas lapping on the shores of a distant star. As much as their lives are of any interest to me it is as a species, not as individuals. People see each heron, a salmon or a butterfly, as a replicant of a single type with the same attributes, skills and weaknesses. So people are, to my kind.

I first felt the warmth of the sun on my face after the ices tore me from my mother and I fell away from the craggy scar. I lay at the foot of the cliff as the world warmed up. There was little life then. Only the elemental forces of hot and cold, light and dark. Dancers in the perpetual waltz of the seasons.

Of course I have no eyes to see these things but I do not need the senses of flesh and blood to appreciate the world around me. Even a blind man can enjoy the warmth of love.

Then one day a spore blown from afar settled on me. Nourished by the rain and the sun it grew and spread over me. The crispy flakes of lichen tentatively and imperceptibly explored my gritty surface. Like a cancer the lichen tried in vain to draw nourishment from me but my structure was strong and didn't give up its life-force easily.

Propelled by the Lord of the weather and the dead hand of gravity I crept down the valley side to a narrow channel that
was forever filled with water. Dark and peaty in the summer, icy and hard in the winter. Pulses of rain nourished the infant stream and propelled me of the first stage of my journey.

I tumbled along the stream bed, rapidly in times of winter flood and resting in times of summer drought. The caddis fly sheltered beneath me and the dipper used me as a stony perch.

One day a group of men met at the water's edge. That they were men was plain to see as people had not yet started to hide their sex beneath clothes. Voices were raised and they started to fight. One of them plucked me from my shallow pool and brought me down hard on the head of another. His skull broke beneath me and for a moment my cold, smooth hardness knew the bloody warmth of his brain. As the man fell so did I, back to my stream, the running water washing the gore from my gritty face like a crimson comet's tail.

The water carried me further and further downstream away from the place where I had first Come to Be. As I collided with my countless brothers and sisters I changed my shape. Coarse, sandy granules were broken from me and started on journeys of their own. My angular corners were transformed to smooth curves as I tumbled in the current.

I rested for a time on the river's edge trapped behind a fence of willow and hazel that people had thrust in to the silt where the water et the land. For a while people resisted the inevitable power of the river and lived their lives in houses built along the stream. Then one day the river rose and swept away the barrier of twigs and stones and washed away their homes. It carried away too some of the people of the village. Young and old drowned in the swirling embrace of the powerful arms of the river. As they perished I felt their life-energy leave them like a ripple of warmth.

...The hand of a child. It draws me from beneath the water clutching me in its small, white fist. For a while the child feels my perfect smoothness andonders at my yellow disc like the eye of a sightless owl. Then the child throws me spinning
through the air and I land skim-skip-a-skipping across the
gossamer membrane of the lazy, summer river. The child is for
the moment satisfied and runs away in search of another game.

The hand of man. The clever ones join their minds to try
and tame Nature, to make the world one that serves their ends.
They blast the earth. They lay dams across the river and venture
below ground to remove the black treasure from my Mother.
The clever ones think they are in control but they are no more
than hanging on to the traces of a chariot as the horses take it
wherever they have a mind to go.

Although we are fellow travellers I am not of carbon and
I do not know its needs and desires. I have seen it in bubbles of
gas and in the fabric of life. I have seen it captured and I have
seen it set free. It too must follow the Nature and the Law and be
bound by the Balance that holds all things. As I near the end of
this journey and prepare to meet the vastness of the sea, I know
that the Balance has been changed. Man is a dancer, and the
dancers and the band are out of tune.
The River

Valerie Bloom

*Chosen and with comments by Sarah Brook*

The River’s a wanderer
A nomad, a tramp.
He doesn’t choose one place
To set up his camp.

The River’s a winder
Through valley and hill.
He twists and he turns,
He just cannot be still.

The River’s a hoarder
And buries down deep
These little treasures
That he wants to keep.

The River’s a baby.
He gurgles and hums
And sounds like he’s happily
Sucking his thumbs.

The River’s a singer
As he dances along.
The countryside echoes
The notes of his song.

The River’s a monster
Hungry and vexed.
He’ll gobble up trees
And he’ll swallow you next.
I love this piece by Valerie Bloom. I love its simplicity and preciseness. It says all that I want to say about my river. Although it doesn’t mention the nature within the river or on it, it makes me feel as if I’m bobbing along on a bank, doing all the things that are described, especially on a warm summer’s evening. She even pursues the anger of the river in the last verse, and how dangerous and unpredictable it can be. I do believe it is aimed at a young age group but I think that’s why I do like it so much, it’s playful and flowing just like the river itself.

I am still uncertain as to whether I would perceive a river as being masculine, I see them much more on the feminine side. When she’s calm she’s elegant and flowing, in a beautiful Chanel or Givenchy evening dress, striding down the red carpet with all eyes upon her. Her curves are smooth and shapely and she has the voice of an angel, she smells clean and fresh and attracts a magnitude of colourful flora and fauna. But don’t be fooled by this elegant side, because once the tide turns and her mood blackens you are best as far away from her as possible. A mid life crisis, the change, time of the month or just a bad hair day. Her waters run deep and dark, getting faster and more harsh, tearing up everything in her path until the order is found. She will take no prisoners and doesn’t care who she hurts along the journey. But once the rage has passed and the anger has subsided, the muddy waters cleared and her accessories returned, she is back to her beautiful, immaculate self. A man wouldn’t show so many emotions or take care of what it has, he also wouldn’t be as forgiving for the ‘inhumanity’ that is thrown its way.

Beautiful and simple, yet meaningful and truthful. She’s captured everything that I like about my River Dearne.
Catchment
Stages

Rowena Bailey

Birth at Dearne Head

I am falling, among many falling
towards the green-brown earth
faster, faster towards the field
which hosts the river’s birth.

My shape changes, divides, flattens,
then for a moment rests,
until I feel the pull again;
downwards, downwards pressed.

Playing and shaping a channel at Birdscrate

We wind together, racing, lacing,
together we have found our strength,
pulling the earth and twisting it
And making the surface dent.

Now we are much bolder
we throw the stones around;
jumping and writhing together
in our wild and merry playground.

But soon we grow weary of this
and fling our playthings down;
slow down, take time, reflect,
and look at all around.
Studying, caring, nurturing, and woeful at Denby Dale

I hold for a moment a tiny shape hard to part from me, 
the motion of its life is open for all to see.

Swirling green strands tied below catch the living sun; 
the force of life, the essence, in turn they pass this on.

And on and on through different forms; insect, fish and bird, 
giving them all the spark of life that carries on undeterred.

But hiding among me, bound with us lurks insidious, creeping danger. 
malevolence moves along the chain of life: an unseen killer, a changer.

It threatens the lives I nurture, yet is a part of me. 
I am a life giver and a taker throughout my whole journey.

A battle against the barriers at Bretton

As our number grows we push, buffet, and shape, but find ourselves rallied and marched, guided and pulled in straight.

Our advance is halted, progress stopped,
we gather; our numbers burgeon.
We rest, collect and wait
behind the wide stone curtain.

I feel the pull, the charge begin,
I hover a moment at the rill,
our surface looks smooth, molten and silk
but underneath we spill.

We speed into the chasm below,
lost in a fury, a rapture.
I spit out, fire, then tumble and wrestle
the air that I capture.

Wise, ample, older at through Darfield, Wath and Bolton

Later on, there is more time
and ease to spread and wander,
more time to look and witness
and study, judge and ponder.

I sense within us a picture of
a landscape that has changed;
memories linger as acid leaks
that join us along this range.

They tell of industry and man,
earth moving, work and toil.
The valley we wind through lazily
was full of waste and spoil.

Now a wide basin holds our route,
open, green and distant;
shaped by many before me
pushing, driving, persistent.
Nearing the end, small among so many in the Don

I near the end, there comes a reach
where we are joined by others.
It leaves me lost, bewildered,
dispersed from comrades and brothers

And I am left with memories
of battles I have won,
Of those I’ve watched and nurtured
along the path I’ve run.

Journey's end and the great unknown

I take them with me, the memories,
*into the wide blue yonder,*
into the great unknown;
the open reach of the Humber.
Spreading the Word

Elsie Hutchinson (from her Journal)

At the museum today, Geoff was copying some photographs from the archives for me. He produced them at lunch time when a group of us were sitting in the café. So of course people were interested to look at them and wanted to know why I needed them.

So I explained. We got talking about rivers. Hilda (82) said that there were many hymns that mention rivers. She started to quote some of them. Rivers are used as metaphors, Geoff reminded us of Enoch Powell ‘Rivers of Blood’. He also reminded me of a book ‘The Green Child’ by Herbert Read its quote ‘a piece of political and philosophical fantasy’. We can’t find the book – must have lent it to somebody. It was weird but we both remembered that the river flowed ‘backwards’.

I told them about some of our homework exercises. Especially the last one. They came up with ideas about what they would be: a fish, a log, a leaf and a stone.

I did point out that a stone would be at the bottom and wouldn’t see very much other than things in the water and that it would take it a long time to be moved down to the Don from Birds edge – years probably.

Hilda said that she would be a ripple – what a good idea. She said that we see them going on and on.

They all said that they don’t think about rivers and their uses etc but when on holiday or out for a day they do when walking by them. Hilda said that I’d made her think. She’d enjoyed the discussion and would go away and carry on thinking. The others nodded. So that is good. It seems as though everyone I know is thinking about rivers now, which is what we want people to do.
Acknowledgements

Foreword; photographs on cover and page 41 © Clare Morgan

A River Walk at Darfield © Cory Garner

Wombwell Ings © Sarah Brook

The Wind in the Willows © Kenneth Grahame

Making News © Stuart Jenkinson

Dear Sir Michael... (Diary of a Dearne Flood Victim) © Sarah Brook

Wartime 1943 © Cory Garner

Still Life © Kirsty McColl

Missing You © Tony Wright

A Letter to Papa © Rowena Bailey

Dearne, Dove and Don © Cory Garner

An Afternoon Encounter © Elsie Hutchinson

A River Poem © Sarah Brook

I Always Will Be... © Stuart Jenkinson

The River © Valerie Bloom

Stages © Rowena Bailey

Spreading the Word © Elsie Hutchinson