



## Stratford Revisited

Frederick Bentham

The way may not be straight but it certainly is narrow and the grubby backs of urban sprawl close in as we pick our way through the Forest of Arden. Flotsam abounds, some but the tip of a jetsam-berg for sure: the messy waters allow the look-out no inkling—visibility is nil in the watery shallows. Mercifully no cry of “we split, we split!” follows. Why is it that the solution to that besetting problem of growing children “What to do with the old pram”, is to so many just to chuck it into the canal? The canal towpath is not easy of access and what do all those parents do who have no canal near by?

Two things remind us that we are not cruising on an open sewer, the frequent locks we have to fill and empty and a key we have in our pocket. This tiny key opens the last lock, the padlock on the gateway to the Avon; not just any Avon—not that rival in Ontario for example—but Shakespeare’s own Avon. A lone and tiny splash of colour crawls by; some dear soul has planted with flowers—a blessed plot on a bank where the wild slime grows. We round a sharp bend, one of the quietest and

peacefullest dogs we have ever seen floats serenely and calmly by. Ahead lies a dark, dank tunnel; we brace ourselves sounding a warning sennet, or a tucket, on the siren. Our boat crawls in—we just clear—but the darkness has passed and it’s daylight at last.

There we are in an ornamental basin surrounded by grassy and flower bedecked gardens. Beyond looms the theatre and the object of this article. Surely no theatre has a lovelier setting. We use our key, empty the lock, leave the canal\* and turn into the Avon itself—and can even tie up alongside the theatre—if we don’t mind risking running aground!

The theatre we all know is that built in 1932 to replace the strange edifice of 1879

*\*In fairness to the lovely and interesting Stratford-upon-Avon canal it must be stated that these remarks only apply to the bit in the town! Towns seldom play fair by their canal. Neither does our Government when it proposes to split the priceless network regionally among seven glorified water boards. One wishes our Prime Minister when sailing the silver sea around this scepter’d isle would spare a thought for the happy breed of men who cruise within this other Eden.*