

# SOMETHING CLOSE TO NOTHING

A **BRICKS** podcast episode about the  
fishermen of the Feeder Road by Tim Ryan.

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ANNE'S  
HOUSE**



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

**NARRATOR:** Its early Monday morning, mid-November, in South Bristol, on the Cattle Market Road, approaching the long tunnel that runs beneath Temple Meads Train Station. Up on platform 12, the great western main line screeches and grumbles, tannoys blurting timetable alterations to puddles of grey faced commuters. But that's not for us, we're not working today. In fact we're doing quite the opposite. We're going underground, and down here, in the subterranean dinge, other currents flow.

*\*Trumpet plays in the tunnel*

The other side of this tunnel opens out onto the Feeder. Just over a mile long, its one of Bristols main artery's. On its right side, industrial estates, on its left, a dilapidated canal. And running between the two like a hot knife - The Feeder Road. A relentless tsunami of heavy metal - Articulated lorries, container drivers, screaming sirens, coffee fuelled commuters and the occasional petrified cyclist.

Halfway down the feeder road, the great western railway bridge cuts horizontally above the traffic, the St Philips causeway rides along side, and its at this cluttered intersection that we are offered the most visceral snapshot of the canals historic demise, cast deep into shadow by rail and road. And its on the canal, tucked away in the shadows, between a rock and a hard place, that we'll find our quarry.

We are in search of fishermen.

*\*Sound of hurtling lorry breaks the serenity...*

**ALAN:** My father taught me when I was 4. The first fish I ever caught was a little Roach, he took it off the hook and threw it back in and I cried all afternoon. I want to take it home. And I've been fishing ever since really.

I could sit here all day - I never get sick of it.

**NARRATOR:** Alan is 82 years old - and he's been fishing the feeder for over 70 years.

**ALAN:** My uncle used to work for Rimmy Lysop, they used to make oil drums and stuff like that - he used to live up Glendare street, and he used to come down here and watch me fish to keep his eye on me when I was about 8 or 9, but he said to our dad, cos I used to catch a few down here even when I was a little kid y'know and he said 'I wouldn't ever go down there fishing' because it used to smell this water. It used to stink!

# Chapter 2: The Feeders Industrial Past

**NARRATOR:** Im not an historian but context is essential here so bear with me...

The feeder canal opened in 1809, with the purpose of bringing water from the tidal Avon into Bristols Floating Harbour. This created a direct link to the Port of Bristol which encouraged new industries along the feeder. Industrial plants quickly started to clutter its banks, belching out huge amounts of smoke, grime and stench.

Accounts from the time describe that of all the noxious emissions - the chemical plant, the tar factory, gas works, paint works, foundries and the cattle market, the one smell that stood out head and shoulders above the rest was Coles Boneyard, specializing in the jovial alchemy of converting dead animals into farm feed. With the canal on their doorstep, its not difficult to imagine where the industries by-products and effluents ended up.

By 1850, manufacturing had decreased and the shift in power from water to rail & road was complete. By the 1960's the industries along the feeder had fallen into deep decline and by the time the 80s swung around most of the business had completely collapsed, leaving an industrial wasteland. The meat and bones section of Coles Boneyard was one of the last to close its doors in 1981...but the canal remained. Abandoned. Putrid and bubbling with neglect.

**TERRY:** My names Terry and ive been fishing since I was about 7. Im now 64 years old. It would have been about 5 or 6 years ago I got back onto the feeder. It was never really that clean, you was always a bit worried you might get something cos of the rats and things. When it was down by the end near avon street, you had the big commerical areas there and you had stuff coming into the waters from there so y'know obviously the fishing was a bit different then if you like. Now, most of those industries have gone and the fish seems to be coming back - so yeah im quite happy to be able to come out on a sunday its only 10 mins from where I lives and you can have a good days fishing.

**NARRATOR:** For free?

**TERRY:** It is for free - at the moment...til someone decides different.

# Chapter 3: An Introduction to Coarse Fishing...

**NARRATOR:** From our most primitive days, we have caught fish, motivated originally by hunger. And maybe its the primitive in all of us that encourages us to recognise the mystery and magic of fish filled waters.

In the UK, there are, generally speaking, three types of fishing. Sea, Game and Coarse. Sea fishing is self explanatory but the distinction between Game and Coarse fishing is not as defined. In the early 1800's game fishing was known as a pursuit of the upper class, who fly fished exclusively for salmon and trout. The other 95% of fish that populated Britain's Freshwaters didn't make as good eating, and so they were condemned, on no taxonomic basis, as coarse fish. Game fishing required lots of spare time, the equipment was expensive, and the clean rivers and streams that the salmon and trout populated, where mostly owned by the wealthy and made accessible for fishing only through exclusive membership.

This division was re-enforced in the mid 18th century, when the workforce of the Industrial revolution took up coarse fishing on the canals and lakes surrounding industrialised areas as a cheaper, more contemplative alternative to the pub.

To this day, the 'Official fly fishers club' founded by Basil Field in 1884 is so exclusive, you cant even access their website without being an official member. The clubs motto, daubed in Latin across the impenetrable holding page reads...

'Piscator . Non. Solum. Piscatur'

'There is more to fishing, than catching fish'.

And in the case of the feeder canal, thats an understatement.

# Chapter 4: Hunting for Fishermen

**NARRATOR:** Unlike Latin, the feeder canal is for everyone. Its one of a small handful of waters in Bristol that are free to fish. The canal connects to the tidal Avon, so its not stocked like the pay-to-fish lakes on the outskirts of the city. The fish can come and go as they please, and its this element of unpredictability along with its accessibility that attracts all levels of fishermen to the feeder, from the absolute beginner to the militant professional.

**ROBERT:** I'm Robert, I am 20 and this is my first time fishing at the feeder. Since I was little, a child, I always wanted to go fishing. And this past month I got a new job and I was able to afford the equipment.

I work as a go-kart Marshall. Its very hectic and busy so if I can come after work or the day after on my days off it helps me to just kind of chill. And especially I like to look at the colours of the fish. Different greens and blues. Yeah, it helps me quite a bit.

*\*trumpet interlude*

**NARRATOR:** Searching for fishermen to interview is a lot like fishing. You need to be patient and understand your quarry in order to connect with them.

There is always an element of luck involved, and its beneath the humpbacked bridge that connects Marsh Lane to the Feeder Road, that we chance upon Barry, a retired scout leader from South Bristol. Herringbone flat cap, beige gilet and snow white moustache - trimmed to perfection. The hunter has become the hunted.

**BARRY:** Hiya, my names Barry, im seventy next birthday, i've been fishing since I was seven years old but. I've been fishing the feeder for the last ten years though I don't get down here as often as id like.

Yeah my dad he died in 2015 so it will be seven years in November - but he used to come out fishing with me, or I used to go fishing with him - but then when he was older I used to take him out fishing.

When I was a kid I wouldn't have come anywhere near this place. All through here and all through Cruise hole you could you could smell tar and the water was darker and I didn't think anything would live in here when I was a kid, but erm, its certainly cleaned up over the years, as the river has. There's a lot more greenery and it looks a lot nicer than it ever did.

I suppose there is part of a man that is still a hunter and that's the part that likes to fish. I was a scout leader, id take the kids on scout camp and id be up at four in the morning fishing. And a couple of times I caught trout and we knocked em on the head and had em for breakfast. But, game fish, mainly trout and salmon - posher people fish for that really, not ordinary people like me.

Its always been more of a relaxation and a pass time than a competitive sport. My dad was always the same he liked to go out somewhere quite and fish and erm. I'm just happy to be here and catch something or catch nothing and just to be at one. Twenty minutes down here and twenty minutes home - dead easy to get too.

And when your a married man and you've got a wife who likes doing things you've just got to grab a few hours here and there when you can.

**NARRATOR:** Places are like people. They are complicated and don't always say what they mean. Sometimes they are haunted, by a past. A present. Or a future. The feeder is unique in that it fizzes with all three simultaneously.

# Chapter 5: Modern Day Feeder

*\*Approaching police sirens*

**MIKE:** Every time...that's the police! Ambulance and police - up and down. 10, 20 times a day....

**ALAN:** those big container drivers - they don't half make a row when they go over a pothole....

**TERRY:** I blank most of it out - obviously when police cars come out of there they come out with sirens screaming but other than that - I just blank it out.

The main road runs the canals full length, never more than 7 meters away from the water's edge. The derelict warehouses of Silverthorne Lane line the far bank for a quarter of a mile followed by a string of active warehouses that continue all the way to Marsh Lane, where they are replaced by the fauna surrounding Netham Park.

The opposite side of the feeder road is home to active industrial estates that run its full length. Scrap metal yards, parcel delivery depots, car sales showrooms, welders, florists, and builders merchants that all contribute to the heavy traffic. The Bristol ambulance service and the Police station ensure a steady stream of sirens throughout the day.

But despite the proximity of the main road, the lure of fish-filled water prevails. And like many of the local fishermen that frequent the feeder, Richard is glass half full - personified...

**RICHARD:** I think you get used to it. It's part of where you're fishing. I don't have to fish here - I choose to fish here. So it's taking the rough with the smooth.

When you're fishing and you're in the moment and you are next to nature even though you've got lorries and cars roaring past, there's an incredible amount of nature and we miss it cos we're all in a mad rush. And that's the great thing about fishing - it's wondrous - it takes you back - relaxes you. And if you catch something that's even better.

I prefer the Autumn, Winter and Spring, certainly on the commercials for the big perch, but down here I'm still learning. Every day's different.

**MIKE:** Life. Cars coming. Your fishing. End of story. This is the peaceful side. You can hear it but you don't have to see it. Look here. On the river. This is all yours.

**NARRATOR:** Compromise is the feeder canals' middle name. But it's not just the traffic on the road that the fishermen have to contend with...

# Chapter 6: Sharing Space

**ALAN:** Bloody hell.....you cant settle here really with other....'water users'.

**NARRATOR:** In the warmer months hired boats & ferries head up the canal and through the Netham Lock towards Conham and Keynsham. 21st birthday parties, Stag Do's, Weddings, Corporate cruises, all pass by the fisherman like potential life style choices for his consideration, accompanied by an unspoken demand for him to remove his rod from the water.

*\*sound of pleasure ferry passing by*

Not the end of the world. Rowers on the other hand are a different species all together.

**ALAN:** Usually about quarter to six in the summer you get the Bristol rowing club and you get around eight or ten boats that go up - then you got a boat with an outboard motor on that follows em to instruct em - and they've got no respect for fishermen whatsoever. And if you have a go - you get a load of mouth...'

Competitive boat racing couldn't be further removed from Coarse Fishing, and its on the feeder that this conflict of interest takes place dozens of times a day.

Speed, momentum, competition. Next to the fisherman its fleeting, comical juxtaposition that leaves a sloshing slapping canal in its wake.

**JOHN:** Now and again you get the odd one or two that waves at you their ok. You get the odd one or tow who think you shouldn't be here. We had a few rowers this morning and they're the worst because they think they own the river. But, just ask them to keep out a little bit - as long as I treat them with respect I think that's the best thing you can do.

**NARRATOR:** In the past, an unwillingness to compromise has resulted in tangled rowers and broken fishing rods. But for the most part, incidents are averted.

It's beneath the waters surface that the fisherman's likelihood of entanglement triples. Down at the bottom of the canal, concealed by the heavily coloured water lies a multitude of fly tipping sins that collect to form a rusty metal reef for the fish of the feeder and the hooks of the fishermen.

# Chapter 7: Popular Baits

*\*trumpet interlude*

**ALAN:** They dredge it twice a year they get a dredger down here and all the muck and sludge and everything else they get out of the bottom there. There is a lot of stuff in here at the moment whether people have thrown bikes in or whatever. I fished over there near the bridge at Marsh Lane and somebody had chucked a supermarket trolley in there....which was bad news.

Cos I like to fish in the margins you see. Thats where you get all your big fish. All this business of casting out the other side. Its the same fish here as it is casting over to the opposite bank...

**NARRATOR:** I've heard fishermen say 'its not how long your rod is but what's on the end of it that counts'. And its true to an extent. The bait you put on your hook depends on the type of water your fishing and what the fish are accustomed to eating.

**BARRY:** 'I've never really caught much on meat or corn in here - im happy using all sorts of baits don't mind trying em but the most successful was hemp and tairs and bread.

**MIKE:** 'erm i got maggots today I couldn't get any worms, maggots worms sweetcorn or dog food.

**ALAN:** Yeah I brought worms down here the last time I caught a little perch - he was about the same size as the flippin' worm.

**ROBERT:** 'Maggots for me! 100% Maggots...ever since I was little all ive known is maggots.'

**NARRATOR:** Roberts commitment to maggots is unparalleled, and of all the baits used on the feeder, its the red maggot that proves most popular.

When maggots find their way into your home, its supposed to be a sign that your going through a process of spiritual transformation, of positive change and deep awakening - it could also mean you've got a fisherman for a husband who has accidentally left the lid off his bait box.

**MIKE:** My misses wont - no they....wont.....no no no! Leave em down the shed! For some reason she doesn't want em' in the house. She'll go fishing with me but she wont put em on the bleedin hook - I gotta do it!

**NARRATOR:** Fortunately Im here to put mikes bait on his hook for him today. And its by following one of Mikes maggots down into the murky depths, that we are going to try and imagine what life might be like beneath the surface of the canal. So lets have a rummage in the bait box and see if we cant find a juicy one to mic up....



# Chapter 8: Martin the Maggot

**MARTIN THE MAGGOT:** 'Awwww man its so cool being a maggot! I cant believe im 10mm long already! Not one to blow my own trumpet but if i didnt know any better id say I was the juiciest maggot in this box! Only six more days until im tucked up all cosy and warm inside that chrysalis - and then! When I hatch out the other side - Ill be a fully grown blue bottle! Absolutely buzzin!

Oy! ! what the hells goin on ? Whaddaya think your doin? Get them grubby sausage fingers away from me!

**NARRATOR:** And with that ,our intrepid explorer Martin is attached to a hook and plunged head first into the murcurial goop...

\*Underwater sound scape begins as the maggot sinks down to the canal bed.

**MARTIN THE MAGGOT:** ohhhhhh (fear) - scared..... - coooold.....its so....dark down here..... .

**NARRATOR:** As Martins eyes slowly grow accustomed to the gloom, his new surroundings begin to shape and define themselves.

Shopping trolleys, Scooters, cans, bottles and bikes, rusted razor wire, traffic cones, tyres and knives, rotten rope coiled like sleeping serpents and ancient brick work suffocated by luminous green, shag pile algie.

**MARTIN THE MAGGOT:** Trouble with being a maggot....there isnt a fish in this canal that doesnt crave for me... so succulant - so juicy! Damn sometimes I make my own mouth water.....Whuu.....what was that?

**NARRATOR:** A flash of silver flickers in the gloom....

**MARTIN THE MAGGOT:** Erm....Think im just gonna crawl inside this tin can for a bit...

# Chapter 9: Beneath the Surface

The sun momentarily emerges from behind rolling clouds, shafts of muted light penetrate, illuminate and transform. And from the relative safety of his rusty tin can, Martin watches as a secret world, full of life, slowly reveals itself...

A shoal of tiny Minnow, each no longer than a match, dart tentatively from one secluded hiding spot to another, hard-wired paranoia, the predatory appetisers shimmer olive and silver in the sun's muted beams.

Then! A kaffuffle down on the canal floor as a tiny plume of dirt and gravel rises up from the detritus - Gudgeon! bottom feeder extraordinaire, no bigger than a child's thumb, drooping whiskers on either side of a small, thick lipped and snouty mouth, all the better for rummaging, elongated body speckled grey and gold, he takes a breather before burying his head back into the silt.

Then...from above, a larger, sharper, energised flash of silver and red zaps close to the surface. A Roach! Elegant, fast and delicate. Dark bronzed back radiating to a silver flank, fins burning red and orange.

Up against the canal's far side, a gang of long, bronze silhouettes loiter beneath the shadow of some overhanging brambles. 4 thick lipped, large mouthed, blunt nosed, Chubb slurp floating insects off the surface.

Further down, Beneath the shadow of the motorway bridge, an armada of Bream hold the mid water. Sociable, placid, deep bodied with a high back, almost circular, dark brown silhouettes fall into formation, youngsters close by their sides, the purest silver.

Beneath the bream, a solitary Tench - emerald green bodied with ruby red eyes passes through, reserved, stout body lined with elegant spooned fins.

Then, on the canal floor, a zig zag of liquid metal on white belly, through an assault course of detritus. An Eel! Long, thin and snake like, camouflages itself to perfection against some black rubber cables, before slithering on.

And then. Something bigger, grey and spectral emerges through turgid super-novas of silt cloud, skimming the canal's bottom, rotund. Her huge scales change from grey to deep bronze as she glides closer. Seemingly weightless. She slows and hovers. Searching lips protract and retract in the silt, and once again she is obscured by cloud.

When the silt eventually settles, the Carp is no more than a distant silhouette, returned to ghostly grey, phantasmic, She vanishes back into the shadows.

Suddenly, silver shatters as the minnow shoal explodes in 80 different directions. Spooked! Dark clouds roll back over the sun, its beams retract, and the canal bed is cast back into darkness. There's been a shift. All the fish have vanished. Nothing moves... and Martin begins to get a sinking feeling that he may not be alone inside his trusty tin can.

As he turns slowly, two black beady eyes glisten back at him through the darkness.

**MARTIN THE MAGGOT:** Oh...erm.....Mornin! I ....was just....having a little breather in your tin can pal.....ill be on me way now...all the best!

Martin wiggles his way out of the can as the home owner emerges from his lair, olive green with dark brown tiger stripes. Fluorescent red fins, jagged gills and scales rough as sand paper, a spiked dorsal fin flares out from his humped back, Jurassic and razor sharp to the touch. As the perch moves slowly towards Martin - his bony jaw gapes abnormally wide, almost dislocated by an eagerness beyond appetite to devour. Perch Will eat anything! Minnows, worms, slugs, SPAM!... but of all their carnivorous cravings - there is nothing they love more than a juicy red maggot!

And as Martin's short life flashes before his eyes, he is momentarily distracted by a slender silhouette, well over a meter long, drifting towards them from the shadows, inanimate but with intention as it floats unexplainably against the current...slow and impending, malevolent, like creeping death...

A huge yellow eye blinks open....the silent terror shape shifts in an instant, from drift wood to torpedo as its boney head angles to align with its prey. Ancient grinning mouth studded with razor sharp teeth splays open as the monster bolts. A flash of green leopard pattern across gold thunders past. blood colours the water. And with perch clamped, vice-like, the Pike dissolves back into the shadows with his prize.

# Chapter 10: Memorable Fish

**SHAUN:** You probably not going to believe this cos it sounds like a bit of a fishermens tale but I wasn't fishing for Pike, I was reeling in a dace or something and then there was a massive almighty splash, the pike came up grabbed the Dace I was on about a size 14 hook and it caught the hook in its lip.

It was just a fluke - it grabbed it, the fish went down its gob but the hook got caught in its mouth, the rod just went like that im surprised the line didn't snap but I managed to get him in.

**ALAN:** It was the end of the day, my wife was here with me and the float just went away and never stopped. So I went right down to the traffic lights down there, and a bloke got off his bike and said 'what have you got there mate?' and I said 'I don't know - I haven't seen him yet' and I started tight lining, he come up on the surface, and I couldn't get him out and he said 'haven't you got a landing net?' I said yeah about forty, fifty yards up the river bank. So he come up here - he got it and brought the landing net down and we got the fish out - it was 8 pounds 3 oz Common Carp - frightened me to death.

**RICHARD:** Its funny y'know I ve noticed over the years when you achieve your goals within fishing there is an anticlimax cos you think 'where do you go after this?' You strive - you fish all weathers and you strive...life stops - you commit yourself to this...its like being a sportsman so how can they say its not sport - your focus - it takes over your life - its mad! And then you catch your quarry and there's this emptiness. There is! I've had some huge fish - certainly perch and you go 'that was great to catch - but where do I go from here?' And its weird cos ive now gone back to basics. From having ten thousand pounds of carp gear trolleys alarms blah blah blah to just fishing down here - with basic stuff.

**MIKE:** Two and half pounder Silver Bream. That's the one. I thought what's this - it was like that - nibbling - and I thought here it is - pulled it up and thought this is a bit heavy! Out it come my mate come with the net - two and half pounder! I thought 'Yes!' I got a bream!

I think with fishing its not what you've caught but what you feel when you catch a fish. You can sit there for hours and there's nothing there, I don't mind that- peaceful. I just want a peaceful life. All the ears going on and all the people getting killed in Russia and that...

*\*Trumpet interlude*

**NARRATOR:** The phrase 'Gone Fishin' is often used to suggest someone has tapped out of reality. ...Disconnected. that they are no longer working. If anything, its our day-to-day that can sometimes feel detached. A string of unfocussed, transient moments. But in the mostly untroubled world of fishing, the past and the future have a tendency to melt away, sometimes leaving us in a place of total immediacy. At the very least, fishing is an excuse to break our cyclical routines, and allow ourselves to reconnect with the natural world.

When I see fishermen in the city, it strikes me as some sort of protest against the momentum of everyday life, and when I see them on the feeder canal, surrounded by the heavy industry, traffic and train lines that metaphor becomes steroid enhanced.

# Chapter 11: Wildlife

**MATT:** Im matt ive been fishing since i was little really I was about 8 my grandad took me on a canal - not this one. I'm a marine biologist by trade. Im 30 now so i guess ive been fishing 22 years - on and off y'know.

Its like being in on a secret - most people will walk past this or drive past it or whatever and theyll see it and they might have a loose understanding that there is stuff under there but I dont think people comprehend how complex life is under the surface and whenever you go fishing and you pull something out its like your getting a little glimpse into that world that your not a part of...

Even though its got echoes of the industrial past and nowadays it gets the occasional sewage outflow into it its still nice to sit by a watersource and watch the world go by - grey wagtail that kind of thing.

**NARRATOR:** The feeder is much more than a traumatised landscape. Its an ongoing story of damage and repair. A body of water ceaselessly attempting to recover from industrial trauma. And its the local fishermen that have frequented the canal over the past 40 years, their regular cleaning of its banks, reporting of pollution, sewage leaks, fish disease and fly tipping that are partly to thank for its improvement both above and below the surface...

**MATT:** Anyone who buys a rod license is funding the environment agency. Environment Agency will restock rivers - restore rivers back to their natural state a lot fo weir removal and physical barrier removal. Dont get me wrong no organisation sperfect and the Environment Agency has its flaws but the money that you put into fishing will help the conservation of a lot of these habitats. A lot of people say that conservation should happen for its own merrits and fair enough, but I think if youve got people who are willing to put their money and time into conservation of habitats and they gget enjoyment out of this and its good for their mental health then why not.

Theres a lot to be said for people who use an environment versus just observing it. Theres a vested interest and a value thats associated with that environment.

I didnt realise until recently that we are the only country in the world with privatised water. That boggles my mind. I mean I knew we were backwards but I didnt know we were that backwards yknow. The fact that we have reguar instances of raw human shit being pumped into natural waterways is a direct c'onsequence of them selling water off and making it a profit making excercise rather than a service for people and wild life.

I mean sorry to get political but it wasnt theirs to sell at the end of the day. It doesnt belong to them, it belongs to the people. The country. They sell off these things like water and then do nothing to regulate the damage. I dispair really. Britains got some of the worst natural waterways in Europe and yet we have such beautiful wildlife both above and below the surface and it seem slike such a waste not enough is being done to protect it.

**NARRATOR:** Coarse Fishing inevitably encourages a deeper connection to nature and a better understanding of the fish, animals, birds and plants that populate our water sources, and despite the feeder canals compromising location, its no exception to this rule.

Though the spectre of victorian industry still looms over the canal, the multitude of chemicals that once flooded into it are long gone. These days a more ancient and subtle alchemy has picked up some momentum. And its only when you become a part of the feeders furniture, that it fully reveals itself...

Coots, moorhens, kingfishers, swans, cormorants, Herons, vovls and water rats all make regular appearences to the keen eye, particularly near Netham Park where the opposite side of the canal becomes more accesible. Here, a wilder river bank has managed to flourish, overgrown with dogwood, buddleigha, hop and old mans beard. And its tucked a safe distance away from the main road, in this tranquil pocket , that that someone is about to catch their first perch...



# Chapter 11: Teos First Perch

*\*Sound of children on the bank...*

**BEN:** My names Ben im here with my two sons Milo and Teo. I'm 27, these two are five and seven year sold. Milos been doing it all by himself recently and Theo is just getting interested.

We live really close, just the other side of Netham Park, so just making the most of having a spot close by, specially whilst we are just getting into it and learning.

**TEO:** Daddy can you throw some maggots in

**BEN:** This is our usual spot and this time, late afternoon seems to be good. We have just caught Dace, Roach here, some really nice Roach but small size its more just for them getting used to it and getting the hang of it so its great for that. We're not waiting around a long time for the big ones - just whatever we can get.

**TEO:** Ive caught something!

**MILO:** A perch Teo! It's a Perch!

**BEN:** Well done Teo!

**TEO:** I left it in for a very long time!

**BEN:** You did! Well done! very patient! Do you want to hold it?

**MILO:** Let me hold it!

**Ben:** Looks at its fin here - its beautiful

**TEO:** Are the maggots ok?

**MILO:** Owww! its sharp!

**narrator:** they've got a spiky dorsal fin those perch haven't they...

**MILO:** yeah!

**Ben:** Shall we put it back?

**NARRATOR:** you've got to watch your hands with those guys  
- is that the first perch you ever caught?

**MILO:** No!

**TEO:** yeah!

**Ben:** It is for Teo I think!

**TERRY:** Its good for everybody, especially if your learning to come down to places like this. Good learning areas so you can hone your river skills. River fishing is a lot harder than fishing on a pond cos you've just got to work hard for everything you get y'know....

# Chapter 12: Transient Feeder

**NARRATOR:** As late afternoon ebbs into early evening, the temperature drops and the feeder puts on a new face. The space is made up of so many fluctuating elements that a small shift in any of them can have a dramatic effect on the general feeling of the place. The water's expression changes constantly, from a flat mirror of calm to a fast paced swirling current. The repetitious sound of the traffic has an uncanny knack of luring you into a false sense of security before spitting you straight back out with some violent industrial thud. Comforting and volatile in equal measures.

The feeder is transient to the extreme, and some of the people that pass through don't always treat the canal with the respect it deserves. Autumn's rot reveals a plethora of multicoloured doggy bags suspended from tree branches. And the canals banks often bear even stranger fruits...

**TERRY:** the council do put bags up on the railings for people to put their rubbish in but the people who leave the mess aren't normally the fishermen.

**RICHARD:** They floated past me so I netted them out and ill take them home. so there's three bottles that ive just netted out and put up on the bank and ill take me home - even if there's stuff around me ill take it home

**ALAN:** somebody left a load of clothes near that bridge - they're still there now. First of all I thought someone had stripped off and got in the water - I was looking down here to see if anybody was in the water but...

**NARRATOR:** Rotten clothes, abandoned tents, scorched grass, piles of empty cans, bottles and used syringes offer an insight into some of the extra curricular activities that take place down here under the cover of darkness. Most of the locals know better than to night fish the canal. And some have learned the hard way.

**ALAN:** I caught a couple of Roach so I thought Ill go a bit deeper so I put my float up a bit and away it went and I had an Eel on their about three quarters of a pound and he tangled in all the blackberry in the embankment. Well I pulled and pulled and in the end the line snapped. Cos you know what eels are they tangle round everything. And this voice said 'did you take the hook out of that fish? Bit sick isn't it?' he said. I said 'What do you mean sick?'. 'How would you like a hook in your mouth?' I said 'you better go away my ol'son' just like that. And I went to get up the bank and he smacked me straight in the side of the head. So I goes back, my heart was going like hell, im gonna have to do something with him. I put my rod into this bush and went to go up the bank afer him and he smacked me straight in the side of the head with a block of wood. I thought 'this blokes gonna kill me' and he said 'dont think of following me or your dead'. Anyway - I was shaking, and I thought it was the rain coming out of my ear and down my face - it was blood.

# Chapter 12: Changing faces...

**NARRATOR:** Off all the Feeders multiple personalities, few are as dramatic as the days end. The sun dips behind the Marsh Lane tower blocks and as the light fades, the feeder begins to meld into something more abstract. Undefined. Street lamps flicker on as the rush hour traffic gets turned up to an ultra-violent 11.

*\*sound of live doom metal coming from building*

And as the heavy doors of industry close for the day, others open.

The old engineering works half way down the feeder was converted into a rehearsal space for musicians in 2003 and the dirge of doom metal has managed to slither its way into more than one interview. Heavy industry had a profound influence on music in the 70s and 80s. Perhaps some of the bands are hoping a bit of the Feeder will rub off on their music?

**ALAN:** well somewhere round here...oh...its the other side of the garage...they have erm..its like a rave party innit - they got a rave studio or somethin there - ive seen people goin in there - so what it is - obviously they got to pay to go in...

**NARRATOR:** The old cattle market sits at the base of the feeder road surrounded by the Totterdown basin. Its a matrix of cobbled corridors and open warehouse space once used to gather large groups of bovine animals into one confined area for potential sale. The building now plays host to an ultra-commercial nightclub called motion. The less said about those parallels the better.

*\*sound of nightclub and very bassy music fading in - increasing in volume...*

In the summer months, the party gets taken outside to the walled courtyard. From the outside looking in, a cobblestone cauldron spills over with dry ice, air horns and flickering laser beams. Heavy bass resonates down the feeder and its a surreal sight to watch fishermen perched along the canal of a summers evening as the BPM's build from one adrenalised white knuckle climax to the next.

When Motion first opened as a nightclub in 2006, the land surrounding it was almost all industrial and parties would go on til 5 or 6 am without complaint. But Bristol Council have recently developed a deep concern for the noise pollution produced by the nightclub.

# Chapter 14: Demolition/Council plans

**ALAN:** There was a guy come down here said you wont be fishin here next year - I said whys that then? He said cos all that land is gonna be developed. I havent seen nothin in the paper about it...

**NARRATOR:** In 2018, a 10 acre brownfield site on the Feeder was sold to a company called Square Bay. Redevelopment plans were recently given the green light with hundreds of new homes, offices, shops, a secondary school and a 17-storey block of student flats set to sprout up in the very near future.

“Sensitive redevelopment’ has been assured and benefits for the local community are evident, but in the photoshopped predictions of what the new space will look like, there are no fishermen to be seen. Instead, booji couples line the banks sipping prosecco and the canal itself is swamped with watersports enthusiasts.

For decades, time seems to have stood suspended on the canal. But today, the JCB’s, pile drivers and cranes have finally made their move. Soon the feeders unique character will be irrevocably altered forever. For better or worse depends on who your asking...

**RICHARD:** I mean I was fishing down the bottom there I baited up put the groundbait out and the caterpillar on the building site started vibrating where I was istting i was wobbling like a jelly - then a mini digger started firing out concrete - they had cleary just come back from lunch and i wa slike OH NO! Mate i could feel it under my bum. That was a little bit too much. But there you go.



# Chapter 15 : Shape in the Dark

The temperature continues to drop, close to freezing now as we make our way back towards temple meads station. The occasional car only serves to highlight the eerie serenity that has now enveloped the feeder.

On the opposite side of the canal, A doom scrolling security guards face floats, illuminated in the window of his portacabin, sleeping diggers and JCB's scattered around him like kids toys across the freshly bulldozed brownfield estate.

At this time of night, things are more heard than seen. Up on the railway bridge, a cargo train rattles by. You can hear the distant sweep of traffic on St.Philips Causeway. The River rats shuffling around in the undergrowth. You can see the dew floating in the light from the street lamps and you can feel the canal breathing. The water rushing fast, steam floating spectral above its blackened surface as it ripples and curls in the darkness, full of secrets.

Its 10pm and zero degrees on a Monday night in mid November. And just when you think you have found the line a fisherman wont cross in pursuit of their obsession, a flashlight down on the canal bank flickers back a retort. Through strained eyes, a shape in the dark begins to define itself. A solitary hunched silhouette, rod clenched between gloved hands, leans in towards the rushing water - statuesque.

Watching. Waiting.

**LEN:** 'Your whole being rests lightly on your float, but not drowsily: very alert, so that the least twitch of the float arrives like an electric shock. And you are not only watching the float. You are aware , in a horizonless and slightly mesmerised way, like listening to the double bass in orchestral music, of the fish below in the dark. At every moment your imagination is alarming itself with the size of the thing slowly leaving the weeds and approaching your bait. Or with the world of beauties down there, suspended in total ignorance of you. And the whole purpose of this concentrated excitement, in this arena of apprehension and unforeseeable events, is to bring up some lovely solid thing like living metal from a world where nothing exists but those inevitable facts which raise life out of nothing and return it to nothing'

**NARRATOR:** Lens recital taken from the book 'Winter Pollen, Occasional Prose' by Ted Hughes. Thanks to all the fishermen of the feeder road etc etc...

# Credits:

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**Tim Ryan:** Writer, Interviewer, Recorder and Producer.

**Rowan Bishop:** Technical & Production Assistance.

**Jim Connolly:** Trumpet Player

**Pinky Dale:** Harp music used in underwater segment