

THE NIGHT BARGE

Ian Welland. 22 May 2023.

The mist breathed in and out, heavy, thickening, and then at times shadowy. I could see in the mirk a barge emerging, its skipper standing at the bow holding a lantern, the light from which cast a weird eerie cone in the mist.

'Enter the lock now,' cried Sid the lockkeeper.

The barge pulled into the lock, cut its engine and the far lock gate closed slowly behind the barge's stern. I held a lantern up toward the skipper but suddenly he vanished! No sign of the skipper nor the lantern.

'He's gone, Sid!'

'Gone? Gone where Michael?'

'Vanished I tell you.'

The water in the lock levelled out and the front lock gate opened to allow passage down the canal. The barge creaked and moved forward. And as the barge drifted forward and through the arch of Batchworth bridge, from the stern a lantern flickered, and the skeletal ghostly figure of the skipper reappeared.