

## THE BANK BREAKS by BERNARD GILBERT

*Yis, sir we had a fearful time, twos thotty year to –daay  
Sin our owd river burst ‘er banks and carried all away  
I never shall forget it no, when my hair turns grey.*

*The month it was December, ‘twas on a Sunday too,  
An’ all the week it ‘ad been raining fit to soak us through  
Our drains wor all all bung –full, and we was bothered what to do.*

*The parson offered up a prayer for them in storms at sea,  
But it o’most looked as if the foak to be afraid was we,  
Wi’ watter, watter, everywheer, as far as you could see.*

*Just as owd John, the clerk, was reading’ out hymn forty – one,  
Our policeman looked inside and sez, “Excuse me, John,  
A – stopping o’ your service, but they say the bank ez gone.”*

*Wi’ that the congregation all roaz up to their feet,  
An down the aisle went pourin’ fast to get into the street.  
The parson an owd John was first together, a dead heat.*

*‘Twas blowing’ wild and dreadful, the rain beat in your faace’  
We took no heed to that at all, but run on like a raace,  
Rate past the school, along the bank until we found the plaace.*

*We found it plenty soon enough, a great owdacious gap,  
The watter pourin’ through it as ‘ard as it could lap’  
Getting’ worsen every minnit, enough to scare a chap.*

*It wor a gashly, sight’ an’ all, the watter black and strong  
Noah light exceptin’ weer a man ad’brought a torch along,  
An’ us all clustered round ‘im scared, as cloas as we could throng.*

*The wind were tearing' awful overhead, and worse'en it,  
The roarin of the current as the bank went by bit by bit,  
Whilst people shouted in the dark like lost men in a pit.*

*Then lanterns drawed up one by one, a moast amaazin sight,  
Like fireflies aflittin' in the middle of the night;  
It looked just like a nightmare by the flicker of the light.*

*Theer wasn't nowt as could be 'elped until the day 'ad come,  
But when it did, Lor what a sight! Far as the eye could roam  
Was one great waste of watter, just like a sea at hoame.*

*All in the fen was houses like ships upon the seas'  
Wi' foaks at bedroom winders in watter to their knees,  
An 'ere an there was sticking' out the tops o' stacks an' trees.*

*Me an my cousin Arthur we set off in a boat,  
It was a rum experience to find oursens afloat,  
Where crops an 'edges orter stan', and couldn't yet see nowt.*

*'Osses come swimmin' past us, then cows an' bullocks too,  
An when we got to shaller ground the foaks wor waading' through'  
A- carrying their cloas an goods; it wor a strange to-do.*

*One woman wor a-paggin; three childer by 'ersen,  
Then puoyin' in a salting tub come two poor drowned-out men  
Who'd brought a cargo load o' pigs from out the bottom fen.*

*We 'elped foaks outer windows, we 'elped 'em outer trees,  
They stepped off roofs and chimney stacks as ready as you please,  
Which wa'dnt to be wondered at, for it was fit to freeze.*

*Well sir, we got 'em all away up safely past the Mill,  
On to the village, high an' dry – we stands upon a hill'  
Like all Fen villages must do unless they wanter fill.*

*In time we got the hole blocked up wi' barges full o'sand  
Packed tight in bags and floated round an sunk rate on the land  
Or in the water; anyhow, we got the bank to stand.*

*We didn't do it all at once; the watter slived soa mean;  
Three times it rose an brok our works wi'scourin' undernean,  
But we dogged at 'er and stuck to'er, an last we did it clean.*

*O'course, sir, once upon a time we wor an island 'ere,  
Wi' marsh, an fen, an salt sea-water, round us everywhere,  
Yes, just a fishin' village, this, in ancient times I hear.*

*It's bad enuf when one bank breaks an only floods one fen,  
But if yon owd original sea bank should bust 'ersen,  
Or if the Boston Sluice should goa then it would be Amen.*

*'Coz all on us would waaken up I'm thinking by the sea,  
As quick an chep as theer would ever like to be;  
'Twould mean us steppin' back a thousand year quite easily.*

*The bank is heightened everywhere, and yet, I can't explain,  
But when it comes to Christmas time an starts to pour wi' rain,  
We all expects to 'ear as 'ow the bank has brok again.*