

Navvies

Words and Music: Nigel Harbron

INTRO. VERSE 1

When the land has been surveyed, and the
grand designs all made, it's over to us Navvies with our spades. We
soon shift stone and trees, so we can swing our picks with ease, we work from dawn until the last light
fades.

CHORUS

Now, Patrick is the name, from Ireland I came, to build old England's waterways,
I'm ready to work hard, and earn high regard, and
I know everything about clays.

When the land has been surveyed, and the grand designs all made,
It's over to us Navvies with our spades.
We soon shift stone and trees, so we can swing our picks with ease,
We work from dawn until the last light fades.

*Ch: Now, Patrick is the name, from Ireland I came,
To build old England's waterways,
I'm ready to work hard, and earn high regard,
And I know everything about clays.*

Level-markers show the way, and from them we do not stray,
As we first dig holes, then trenches straight and deep.
Then if all goes to plan, we shift twenty tons a man
With lower-side earth left neatly in a heap.

When the channel is dug out, we start praying for a draught,
As we start to build up layers of puddle clay.
It's up to three foot deep, through it water cannot seep,
The punner is the tool that wins the day.

When we build the coping wall, it's the trickiest job of all,
Before we move along a length or two.
Then the masons bring their stone (by Jesus, how they moan!),
As locks and bridges then come into view.

If we're given a month of pay, then we take off for the day,
And head straight for an ale-house near the camp.
There we smoke and drink strong ale, trying not to end in jail,
Before back to our cabins we all tramp.

If we get two bob a day, that's a decent rate of pay,
With fourpence earmarked for bed and board.
And if a life is lost, the Company bears the cost,
But five pounds is the most it can afford.



Rob lived in a narrow-boat on the Kennet and Avon Canal for several years, and here I am sitting on it keeping a close eye on the cocktail cabinet. In Summer, the narrow-boat lifestyle is almost idyllic; in Winter it isn't, particularly when coming back from a gig at 2am. At one time, there was a real floating, folkling commune on the Kennet, with Rob, Miranda Rutter, James Fagan and Nancy Kerr, and Tin van Eyken sometimes managing to moor their respective boats in a row!