

Railways to Greenways performance – “A journey through Space and Time”

A promenade play along the York Greenway Cycle Track from Brunswick Organic Nursery in Bishopthorpe to Naburn Station

Characters:

The Host/John - professional performer 1

2nd Performer to play:

Construction Manager

Ranger

Watchman

Union Man

BR engineer

School/volunteer groups plus audience to play:

Volunteers/Railway children

Train

Miners

The Host meets the audience at Brunswick Organic Nursery

Host: Welcome one and all to this journey through Space and Time. Allow me to introduce myself; I am John; I may take on many different forms, different roles, different ages. But as we will be travelling through Time and Space you could just call me a Time Lord. Or perhaps a Space Cadet, I'll let you decide.

In exploring themes as wide as Space and Time, scale is important. For the purpose of this journey then we will need to scale down. Those of you who have joined us on your pedal-powered time machines from the Sun, the very centre of our universe, may have spotted that it has been scaled down for the purpose of our voyage, roughly 575,872,239 times (in fact precisely 575,872,239 times). You may also have noticed that we scaled down the heat of the Sun especially for you today! Keeping to that same scale you will already have passed four planets on your way here, travelling as you were at roughly 10 times the speed of light (you didn't think you could pedal that fast did you!). We're going to slow ourselves down on foot now, to a mere three times the speed of light. At this speed we should allow ourselves the opportunity to capture some moments in time, glimpses of the past, from this the most green of planets, Earth. On our journey we may even marvel at the range of biodiversity this planet has to offer, whilst also having the opportunity to take in the bigger picture by rocketing past Jupiter and Saturn. Who knows, we may even see a satellite! As we travel though do please be aware of other users of this superhighway and allow space for them to fly past should they need to. Are we ready? Space goggles on (*puts on sun glasses*). Time capsules at the ready – here you are, I have a few capsules left (*hands out sweets – tictacs?*). And off we go!

Sustrans Construction Manager's House - 1980's

Host: We haven't got far and already we can catch a glimpse of a moment in time to help better explain this particular space through which we are travelling. Let's have a listen shall we.

Construction Manager (Tom) enters singing

CM: (*Singing*) Bicycle! Bicycle! Bicycle! I want to ride my.....oh there you are. Finished your tea break have you? 'Bout time. Honestly John we're hoping to be finished in two years not twenty two. Right? 1987, not two thousand and something! So, here's your tools. I know it's heavy going ripping out the old track and shovelling the ballast but we can make some money off that and let's keep the end result in mind shall we? ("One Vision" yeah?!) We have the power to transform people's lives with a whole new purpose for this dead space. Folk will be able to walk, cycle, even run (if that ever takes off) along this track. All the way from York to Selby. We'll be able to create a little area of ecological beauty through the countryside, how about that? A place for everybody to escape the phone forever ringing at home and to be completely, blissfully uncontactable. Imagine that! (*John's mobile goes off. What's that? Nothing!*) And one day this path of ours will be just a tiny fragment of thousands of miles of a Sustainable Transport National Cycle Network across this green and pleasant land. Yeah you might scoff at that John but it's worth a dream isn't it? And it all starts here. Rome wasn't built in a day and all that.

So, this is your team is it John? Got some new recruits I see. Some look a little scrawny to me. (*picking out a child*) Are you good with a shovel? I'll give you this then. It's solid work for us for a good couple of years, then when we're done we'll have to find a willing band of volunteers to hand this cycle path over to. Maybe those of us who still need to work can get a job down the new pit, but let's enjoy the fresh air for now eh! See John, there's life after the railways after all! Now here you are, grab these and get to work. If you need me, I'll be in my house. (*leaves singing a hit from 1985, possibly I'm Walking on Sunshine?*)

CM leaves – Actor 2 to cycle to next position

Host: You have my permission to down tools for we are now going to continue; to propel ourselves through space onto other snapshots in time. Onwards.

Trees on right hand side

Some children in the trees recreating The Railway Children waving at imaginary trains;

Host: As we journey we may see some brief snapshots, visions, vignettes of the past. Ghosts if you like (we are on the outskirts of the most haunted City in the world after all). Here it appears we have some Railway Children waiting to wave to a passing train. Not simply, then, just a work of fiction.

Jupiter

Host: Here we fly past Jupiter, the largest planet known to us, though it looks rather small from where I'm standing! They do say that this particular planet, in this particular universe, was first discovered (or rather unveiled) as recently as 1999! But then they also said it would never last; that it would be destroyed by local vandals. They, like this planet, may just be full of gas. Onwards.

Raised path on left hand side – 2010's/present day

Host: It seems our snapshots in time may not be in order as this appears to bring us to the present day. The maintenance and upkeep of the Greenway. Careful not to stand still for too long as you may find yourselves volunteering.

A group of children are carrying out conservation activities along the raised path. Actor 2 playing the role of the Ranger welcomes the audience as a new group of volunteers, identifying John in particular.

Ranger: Welcome everybody. So, as you can see there is plenty of activity from our team of volunteers to maintain the upkeep of this Greenway and to help develop its ecological offering. Here we have.... doing.....meanwhile.....are(*pointing out actual activities that the children are carrying out.*). Obviously, we are always happy to welcome more volunteers to help us out if any of you were interested? Hang on, it's John isn't it? Weren't you involved in the initial creation of this Cycle path?

John: I was indeed, it feels like a surprisingly recent memory!

Ranger: Oh, then you'll know all about the nature itinerary that was carried out back in the 80's. Well, how lovely John that you can come back to help develop the biodiversity of this space and to chart its progress now that you've reached your retirement years.

Host: (*to audience*) I may be slightly older than I look!

Ranger: Now obviously we welcome help of all kinds from our volunteers but it may help to check the knowledge of your little group John so that we can determine what jobs they are best suited to. Who can tell me what plant this is?

Ideas for examples of plant species? Himalayan Balsam? Can we have, say, 3 board with different species to identify that they can then see for real further along the line?

Can you identify this species of beetle? Oh dear, you don't even recognise the rare Tansy beetle that resides along this path? Dearie me!

The children volunteering are able to provide the right answers where the audience struggle.

Well done to our young helpers here. For the rest of you there may be a little more to learn but there are lots of information boards along the route that can help you

improve your knowledge. There are also a whole range of tasks to be done by people of all abilities and levels of knowledge, or in your case, inabilities and lack of knowledge! So long John, good to see you again.

Host: So long, anon, now we must journey on.

Railway Cottages

Actor 2 to cycle to the next position during this section. Children from the previous scene to join the group

Host: On this superhighway we are now some distance from the Sun, a position in space where there is no warmth, no hope of water and little sign of life. Similar then to how this countryside used to be. The only sign of life for miles was in these Railway cottages, standing alone in a deserted space of fields with no running water, no electricity and far from civilisation. The only people to come anywhere near would be hurtling past in a whirl of steam and smoke. A difficult place to grow up for a young lad whose only prospect was to work on the railways, I can tell you. Especially one with dreams of one day becoming an astronaut, or time traveller. But we must venture just a little further to discover more about this time of trains.

Before Naburn bridge

1960's

Actor 2 as Watchman approaches the group.

Watchman: John lad, what are you doing? Standing so close to the line when there's a train due to come through any minute? Honestly, I think listening to them Beatles has made you soft in the head!

Host: I don't think he's referring to the rare Tansy beetle.

Watchman: And who are all these people you've brought with you? I can see you, you know, from my watchtower up there. Seriously you're lucky they didn't leave that machine gun up there after the war or I'd be tempted to use it, put you out of your misery before a train gets you! Seriously John, for a teenager you don't possess much common sense, do you?

Host: *(to audience)* I may be slightly younger than I look! We're just trying to continue our journey so if we could just get across....

Watchman: You're joking, aren't you? Here comes the train now. Stand back everyone.

A school/volunteer group simulates a train crossing the bridge and passing them. Initial ideas to create this with spinning bike wheels, bellows blowing talc through a funnel to create the smoke

and as much noise as they can create – percussion instruments and rhythmically banging sticks onto the metal struts of the bridge.

Watchman: That was a close one! Come on then, if you want to cross now's your chance. There don't appear to be any boats to swing open for just at the moment. You can count yourselves lucky though. If you'd been on the bridge at the time of the train crossing at 125mph you could have been sucked out into the path of the train! Now they've closed that Naburn station the trains hurtle over this bridge.

Now get going John and don't be late for your shift. You never know, if the Coal Board get their wish they'll close this line and then maybe you'll have to work underground instead. Can't see that being better than being positioned up there though. I can see all the way to York Minster from my perch up there, looking over across the river. I'm like the fisher of dreams! Unlike you, you're just a dreamer, John. Face it, it's not rocket science is it! You my lad will never be a space explorer!

Host: Yes Dad. Come, one and all, for we must press on towards Saturn.

Bridge with archway for mining scene c.2004

They stop short of a group of children with placards chanting "Save our pit"

Host: So, we have discovered how this space enjoyed a time of rail travel and how that made way for transport of differing kinds, but what about the reason for that change? I think we may be about to enter a black hole to find out more.

Actor 2 appears as Union Man (from behind the group)

UM: Ah John, there you are mate. You're just in time..

Host: Time? Which time are we in now?

UM: What? For my speech man! I could do with your support. Oh, and cheers for rallying some more protestors (*indicating audience*). This'll give them a clear message. Come on.

Union Man leads the audience and John down to the archway. Some children/volunteers already there, others from the path join. The Children/volunteers who have already joined the group from previous scenes remain up on the bridge looking down.

UM: Okay settle down settle down. Right, so this is the situation. They're trying to close down the Selby Coalfield.

Reaction from crowd

But we're not going to let them, are we?

Reaction of defiance

Twenty-one years this has been going. Some of us have been here that whole time, haven't we? Not you John, you joined after messing around with that cycle track for a couple of years, but you're still one of us die-hards. In that time we've set, and broken, countless records; we've mined over 121 million tonnes of coal from over 400 hundred faces spread over 460 miles of underground roadways between here and Selby. We survived the Thatcher years by pulling together, showing solidarity. But now, in 2004, it seems the game's up. Well not if I can help it.

Reaction from crowd

We say no to shutting the Selby Coal field. We say no to nearly 2000 job losses. And we say no to walking away from a highly productive pit. Are you with me?

Reaction from crowd

UM: John, are you with me?

Host: Well, the thing is....

UM: What? Are you not backing us John?

Host: I don't have the appetite for the fight. I'm nearing retirement age (I don't look it, I know!), I'm too old for all this.

UM: I can't believe I'm hearing this.

Host: And besides maybe, just maybe, it's time to start looking into more greener fuels going into the future.

UM: We'll still need coal John. We'll still need industry.

Host: That, I suspect, is a debate for another time. But it's worth noting that even Drax Power station, one of our main outlets for the coal produced from here, has already started to look into co-firing biomass.

UM: But.....but....

Host: It may be the end of the line. But it isn't necessarily the end of the line. For now though we must leave this debate and re-join this line for the final leg of our voyage through Time and Space.

Along path - Opportunities to identify plants that the Ranger showed on the boards along here? Opportunity for Actor 2 to overtake the group! Children from mining scene join the group.

Saturn/Naburn station 1970's

Host: And now my friends we arrive beyond Saturn, where exactly what takes place in space is more unknown and where time can be warped. It is then perhaps appropriate to end in this time-warp; Naburn station. A weird and wonderful place where passengers would await their trains, until it's closure in 1958, complete with its very

own first-class ladies waiting room...in case there happened to be any first-class ladies around. A place where, some twenty years after its closure, they may even have discussed the diversion of this East Coast main line;

Actor 2 as BR engineer enters

BR Engineer: So, you see ladies and gentlemen the NCB are offering to fully fund the diversion of the East Coast main line. They are concerned, you see, about the possible subsidence that mining may create and the resultant lower speeds at which our trains would need to travel. Now as you know we at British Rail could pay a sum to reserve this coal and leave it unworked, however this would make us very unpopular with the Coal Board and could frankly be embarrassing as well as costly as there is such an extensive area ripe for mining. Between you and me we already have frustratingly low speeds over Selby bridge and we also believe that we can squeeze a brand-new bridge over the river Aire as part of the diversion that the NCB are promising to fund. I therefore think we need to fully support this proposal. All those in favour....(*spots John*) hang on a second. John lad, I'm sorry, I know how much the railway means to you and your family. But times change. There will be other ways to enjoy this track. The Coal board are going to sell it to some cycle path project; for a pound, they tell me! You never know, in years to come this could be the country path escape you've always dreamed of. Hey, maybe they'll even put a cafe somewhere round her for the dog walkers and cyclists to stop and have a chat! Time's change John, time's change.

Host: I think over the last hour we can certainly agree that times change! We have discovered some moments in time to possibly help better understand the history and differing uses of this, our communal space. If you wish to continue your voyage onto Pluto you will find it a mere 8(?)km from here, scaled down accordingly of course, at Riccall. But whatever you do don't try to voyage on to the nearest star after that. Even on the same scale of 575,872,239 to 1 the model of star Alpha Centauri wouldn't be found for a further 70,000km, or put another way; one and three quarters of the way round the globe. Your time may be better spent visiting one of the pubs at Naburn, Riccall or Bishopthorpe or perhaps just stopping here for refreshments. In fact I believe that if you wave your tickets at the lovely Audrey over there you will receive a complimentary bun and hot drink from the Shed. If you wish to wander further along this route then please do. You can't get lost as it is just a single path but if you do require satellite navigation then the best I can suggest is to look out for our very own satellite, Casini, over there.

However you choose to spend your time do please make the most of this space. Who knows how it will evolve further into the future, but for now allow yourself the time and the space to relax, to reflect and, if you so wish, to discover more. First and foremost please ensure that you enjoy this time, in this space. Thank you.