



BIG PLAYERS

in Milton Keynes: Sports, Arts & Media

Bill Billings MBE 1938 – 2007



The Knowles Hill School Gulliver, created by Bill Billings and pupils of Knowles Hill School. This 42ft Gulliver, leaning on the school, was made in two weeks to clean up the streets. Bill used bits of trees and willow branches with movable joints made out of old bicycles tyres. His head was made of foam, with tape from old OU cassettes to weave his hair.

'The children enjoyed finding rubbish to feed him with. They loved him. It was said that the streets for miles around were never as clean as when Gulliver was there.'

(from www.billbillings.co.uk)

The iconic dinosaur created by Bill with the local community at Pear Tree Bridge, Milton Keynes.

'There are wild ecstasies, in the mansion of the mind.'

(from 'Roads Tell All Souls' by Bill Billings)

Bill Billings was born in London in 1938, left school at 15, served his apprenticeship as a printer, was awarded a scholarship to St Martin's College of Arts, but never enrolled. He did National Service in the Royal Signals, serving with the SAS in Aden in the '60s; he worked as a telephone engineer; and in 1974 he became a lorry driver on the building sites of what was to become Milton Keynes.

He started his career in the arts as a poet under the tutelage of writer Jack Trevor Story, working for television and radio and calling himself 'The Poet Lorryate'. His work covers a huge range of artforms - poetry, sculpture, painting and drawing, comics and art history, music and playwriting - and an equally wide range of fellow workers - from schoolchildren and young people to prison inmates.

Acknowledged for his unique contributions to the new city communities - such as the dinosaur sculpture at InterAction, Pear Tree Bridge - Bill was awarded in 1986 an Honorary Degree from the Open University. In 2000 he received an MBE for his work 'as an inspiring artist working with communities in Milton Keynes'.

'If I have had any enemies it's because I'm crude and scruffy, but I've always stayed true to myself.'