

**“YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE
YESTERDAY”**

Dr. Phill Williams

**A Taste of the Sea Angling History around the British
Isles During the Twentieth Century**

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FOREWORD

by **Keith Armishaw, Angling Heritage**

I first encountered Phill Williams by email as he had come across the Angling Heritage Organisation website, a charitable trust where I am the archivist. It quickly became evident that we both have a passionate interest in the history of the sport and were alarmed at how so much was being lost, even that of just a couple of decades ago.

As time passed, Phill became an integral part of the organisation adding hundreds of audio and video recordings which are preserved for all to see and hear on the cloud-based website, greatly adding to the existing archive, material that would most likely have been lost otherwise.

We all have heard our elders say “it was better in my day” but sadly, fishing is an area where it is absolutely true from overfishing and pollution. These recordings tell of days before this. It is important that we can see what we have done to the planet to highlight what is needed in our efforts to put things right.

A further aspect of where Phill has been a major contributor to the Angling Heritage archive, which has reaped rich rewards, is the Angling Heritage magazine collection, one of the largest in the World. These magazines provide a wealth of history, many of which have proved essential to this book, as well as to organisations around the globe.

This has formed the foundations of this informative book, chronologically collating historically valuable information from a broad spectrum of sources, documenting the progress of sea angling from the close of the nineteenth century through to the start of the 21st century.

As an archive reference project, I am sure many will find it highly informative. Anglers are at the forefront of the early warning systems for this environment, and the history held within these archives will be invaluable for future generations – but let’s hope that it is not just curiosity about the days these species existed. Those of my elder generation will still enjoy reading about the development of tackle and techniques and thinking “I remember that” or even laughing at “I did that”.

It is well worth taking the time and see just how much things have changed.

Keith Armishaw, Angling Heritage: August 2018.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Where to start? History is generated by people, and in the context of contributors to my quest here there have been so many. Far too many to highlight every last one of them across the length and breadth of the entire British Isles. Some from as far afield away even as Australia.

For starters, there are the two hundred plus audio interviews mentioned in the appendix at the close, many of which I have well and truly picked the bones out of. Lots of recorded telephone conversations too, plus countless hours of chatting with anyone and everyone with even the merest fragment of angling historical input to offer.

Not only people. Faceless and voiceless contributions too, some no doubt unwittingly, such as Wikipedia and other large scale users of the Internet, without which I would not even have attempted a project of this magnitude. It would, quite literally, have been impossible.

Then there are the historical heavyweights I have met, spoken to, and occasionally even fished with. People like Clive Gammon, Trevor Housby, Brian Harris and Kevin Linnane to name but a few. Mike Millman in particular has been a font of both historical information and support photographs. Dave Lewis, Mike Thrussell, John Holden, Graeme Pullen, Andrew Alsop....how lucky am I?

The final list is potentially vast. Way too long to include as a roll call of targeted individual gratitude, for which reason, the vast majority are included in situ. That however should not diminish their value, nor the gratitude each deserves. Similarly, so many magazines, websites, forums and threads. Sea Angler Magazine in particular. All providers of priceless historical information, some containing absolute gems and others crumbs; the aggregate upon which the foundations here have been laid.

Dozens of anglers giving their time; their information, their illustrations freely. And now it's my turn to return those favours by making this collection of all their contributions equally free to download, lift information from, quote, or use in any other reputable manner people see fit, bearing in mind that any inaccuracies found, and hopefully there won't be any or many, are always unintended, and in all cases, the blame for these sits with me.

A couple of specific well deserved special mentions now to Bob Fitchie Philip Gill. Within hours of Bob handing back the proof read version for final checks and passing on to the printers in early February I was rushed to hospital where I ended up spending months in isolation being treated for sepsis and MRSA eating away at my lower spine following surgery, which up to the time of writing here has left me unable to walk, stand or sit even in front of my laptop for more than a few minutes at a stretch. Thankfully Bob and Phil stepped up to the breach taking charge of all the final presentation and liaison with the printers, effectively saving the book from being consigned to the dust bin.

Phill Williams, May 2019.

ELECTRONIC AVAILABILITY

Because it is intended as being a historical archive document, I have assembled and released the project in a series of formats which between them will hopefully stand the test of time. It's one thing making a copy available for research at the British Library, quite another expecting all but the most dedicated sea angling historians to actually discover this without first being guided to its presence.

Similarly problematic is putting it out in electronic format as a free download ebook, which I have also done. A fully illustrated version is available on my website www.fishingfilmsandfacts.co.uk. Unfortunately, this will be time restricted by how long I remain alive paying the sites hosting fee's, for which reason I have placed fully illustrated bound printed and electronic copies with Angling Heritage and the Angling Trust, with non illustrated electronic versions available on both Kindle and Smashwords.

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INTRODUCTION

Recreational fishing, or angling, is more than 500 years old. We know this from English prioress Dame Juliana Berners through her instructional writing entitled 'A Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle' published in 1496, more than 150 years before Izaak Walton's better known volume 'The Compleat Angler' which dates to 1653. Magazines, firstly in the form of newspapers, and later in the format we would be more familiar with today are a much more recent addition to angling literature. Surprisingly, my research turned up seven titles in the run up to the start of the twentieth century, some of which would carry at least some sea angling content.....

The Field – launched 1853 and still currently published.

The Fisherman's Magazine and Review – launched 1864, closed 1865.

The Fishing Gazette – launched 1877, closed 1966.

The Anglers Journal – launched 1880's (current status unknown).

Fishing – launched 1886, closed 1890.

Angling & Club Gossip – launched 1892, closed 1893.

Northern Angler – launched 1892, closed 1893.

It might also surprise a lot of people to learn that much of what we would recognise today in terms of fishing tackle has also been around since the mid 1800's, and how technologically advanced, particularly in terms of innovation and precision engineering some of these items had become by the start of the twentieth century.

Obviously, due to the materials available, rods for casting and lines linking the angler to his bait were less well developed. On the other hand, hook quality was good, and those wonderful Victorian engineers with their equally wonderful sounding names were putting up cast iron piers providing better access to the fish and developing the railway network, giving better access to the coast. So not everything we have today has come about within our lifetime. Far from it in fact. Much of it has history

Every port, every stretch of the shoreline where anglers fish, and every individual angler also has history. My dilemma here has been where do I draw the line. Ideally, there would be no line to be drawn and every bit of it would be included. Unfortunately, logistically speaking, that simply isn't possible. Inevitably, and for a number of valid reasons, some potentially suitable inclusions have to be left out.

So rather than attempt to compile a complete history of sea angling in the twentieth century, what I am offering is a flavour of it. That way, overlooked people, forgotten events, historical inaccuracies and hazy dates picked up on by the few and not the many are not punishable by stinging criticism. The book is simply my take on what has been and will doubtless continue to be seen as the most important, formative, and rewarding period in British and Irish Sea Angling History.

Each decade has been allocated its own chapter heading. But you can't just come into or step out of something like this totally stone cold. Fishing tackle for example doesn't suddenly appear out of the ether in 1901. Nor does it stop developing at the close of the twentieth century.

To fully understand the situation from the start demands at least an overview of how we got to where we start from. A 'warm up' period if you like, which is Chapter 1, entitled 'Inheritance'. And so as not to simply leave things hanging in mid-air at the end of the century, there needs to be a 'cooling down' period too, which is Chapter 12, entitled 'Legacy', in addition to which, inclusions extending across

chapter boundaries are dealt with in full at the most appropriate date for that particular episode. Similarly, episodes crossing the final cut off threshold will also be seen through to completion in whatever chapter they begin.

As indicated in the acknowledgements list, I have consulted widely. Not only with 'A-listers', both alive and now no longer with us, but with anyone and everyone who might have any recollection worthy of note. The problem has been that little realising they were going to be quizzed over some event that may have seemed trivial fifty years ago, injecting accuracy, particularly with dates, has been the bane of this whole project.

You can't expect total recall, yet without it you don't have a history book, for which reason I pulled back from labelling it as such, preferring the term 'flavour', which in turn gives me the freedom both to be vague where I need to be, and to inject non-historical recollections of my own into the mix to give the flavour a little more richness, all of which, coupled to the Internet, and an extensive collection of angling memorabilia at Angling Heritage, has allowed the project to progress.

What should also become apparent is the feeling of building momentum over the century as indicated by how much bigger and better informed each chapter is than the last. A number of factors are responsible to varying degrees here. Lack of suitable tackle, particularly rods and fishing lines probably tops the list. Another is the combination of disposable income and the ability to use it on sea fishing, which unless you lived at the coast, meant waiting for the railway network to develop sufficiently.

And let's also not forget that the first half of the century suffered two World Wars, the first taking out a complete generation, and the second, while it was less destructive in that regard, hampering any sort of boat fishing aspirations, be they leisure or commercial, with the knock-on effect this would have on fish stocks as discussed in Chapter 6.

Sea angling as a leisure time pursuit sees its biggest boost from around the start of the 1960's. The interest is there, half decent tackle is available, and most important of all, there are plenty of fish, all of which combine to trigger what can only be described as the Golden Era of sea angling, the likes of which, irrespective of developments in tackle or boat electronics, will surely never be seen again.

Those fortunate to have been fishing between the 1960's and the 1990's, myself included here, were truly blessed. Not only were we born into a period of relative peace and growing prosperity, we also had access to those fish stocks. When I started small boat fishing in the 1970's, the best you could hope for was a small open displacement boat standing on a rusting home made trailer with a 4 hp Seagull engine providing the 'power'.

Fishing a mile or two off would be the norm. Anything more was considered an adventure. On the other hand, look at some of the fish that we brought ashore and caught from the shore, and that is within my lifetime. To quote Mike Millman, "we had the best of it".

I should also point out that the book may also contain contradictions. Clashing accounts from different sources of the same event. Some repetition too, particularly where a fact is required at two different locations to allow readers to dip in and out of things wherever their interest might take them, instead of reading the whole text from cover to cover. Some accounts are also going to be richer or 'thinner' than others.

You can only work with the information available, and I have to say that not all people and organisations have been as forthcoming or as helpful as they might have been, which of course is their prerogative, for which reason, if they don't like the inclusions given to them, they have only themselves to blame.

Judging by some of the photographs taken over the years, it has been a century of contrasts, starting as a trail of death and destruction, often with no logical reason for killing fish other than because you can instead of taking them to eat, through to the exact opposite by the time Chapter 12 comes around. A

time when fish generally are treated with respect, in some cases as though they were the last of their species which must be carefully put back. From the dark ages to enlightenment.

The big question is, in terms of rescuing the fishing, has it all been left too late? A question I put to Duncan Swinbank on the Isle of Mull whose reply was “Now I look at the sea with sadness because I remember the way it was. In a hundred years’ time, people will look back and simply won’t believe what we had and what we did to it. How could we let that happen?” How indeed. See Chapter 12 entitled ‘Legacy’.

CHAPTER ONE - INHERITANCE

Sea angling was already established, popular, and becoming progressively more organised by the turn of the century following the publication of The Fishing Gazette in 1877, and the founding of The British Sea Anglers' Society (BSAS) in 1893. Unfortunately, in the main due to travel and access problems, the overall number of regularly active participants was still relatively low, though progressively increasing, as the railway extended its network to the point of offering angling away-days, angling week-ends, and full blown angling holidays.

GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY.
ANGLERS SHOULD VISIT
THE NOTED SEA FISHERIES OF

WEYMOUTH, EXETER, DAWLISH, DARTMOUTH,	SLAPTON LAKE, PLYMOUTH, LOOE, POLPERRO,	FOWEY, MEVAGISBEY, FALMOUTH, PENZANCE.
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ALSO the NUMEROUS FISHING STATIONS on the
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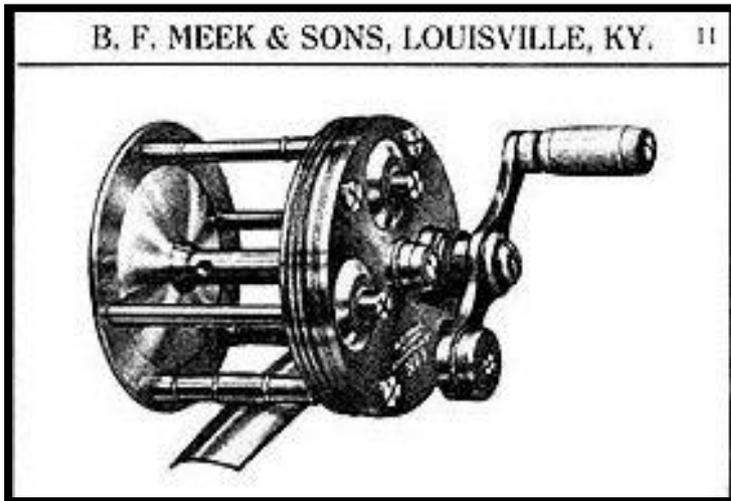
**DIRECT ROUTE to
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JAMES C. INGLIS, General Manager.

The tackle sea anglers had available to them was on the one hand surprisingly archaic considering the numbers and quality of fish being caught, while on the other, surprisingly sophisticated, particularly with regard to reels, which collectively shared gearing, star drags, and level winds. In fact, gear-retrieve reels were actually being advertised in London tackle shops as early as the 1790's. So, to fully appreciate where anglers were at on January 1st 1901, some appreciation of the inheritance they brought with them into the new century is necessary, rather than simply coming in 'cold' from day one.

Although arguably invented in Britain, the first mass market multiplier reel named the Kentucky Reel after the location of its manufacture in Paris, Kentucky, was developed by watchmaker George Snyder as early as 1810. Used mainly by American anglers for casting small lightweight lures and baits to freshwater Bass, these reels needed to be, and were, very well engineered.

Even so, they didn't really catch on this side of the Atlantic until well in to the twentieth century, with British anglers preferring the Nottingham style reel which was a large deep spooled centre pin design that would pay line out readily. These were machined from a single piece of wood and based on the wooden bobbins devised for lace making in Nottingham, hence the name.



The main purpose of a reel for many early anglers was simply that of a line holder and nothing more. Casting as we know it today didn't really catch on until much later, and the correlation between long distance casting and increased fish catches didn't come about until the 1960's, when for the first time, and using a multiplier reel, Les Moncrieff demonstrated the link through his huge Cod catches from the beach at Dungeness (see Chapter 8). That said, it was (and still is) possible to achieve respectable casting distances

with large drum reels, which casters as recently as the 1950's would regularly demonstrate using the Scarborough casting style while fishing for Cod along the north east coast.

Reel manufacturers such as Meek, Milan, Sage, Hardman, and Gayle, many of whom were started and staffed by trained jewellers with experience of cutting gears and producing precision lathe work, were, in the middle to late nineteenth century, producing reels similar in appearance and quality to those many anglers would recognise today. And as was ever the case, cheaper, poorer quality mass market versions very quickly followed. So too did the early versions of the fixed spool reel which was developed from studying the mechanisms used in the textile industry to control and deliver cotton thread.

Thomas Winans and Thomas D. Whistler of Baltimore registered the first patent that specifically described casting from a fixed spool reel in March 1875. However, it was textile magnate Albert Illingworth, the 1st Baron Illingworth, who filed the first patent for the fixed spool reel in its modern format in 1905, which is discussed more fully in Chapter 1. In a nutshell, this allowed line to be drawn off the leading edge of a stationary spool, after which it was restrained and rewound by a line pick up device rotating around the spool which we now know as the bale arm.

Andrew B. Hendryx was another fishing reel innovator worthy of historical note. A fisherman as well as an engineer who started manufacturing reels in 1875. Hendryx initially started off making 'birds cage' reels resembling a very basic multiplier reel which he patented in 1879, of which over the following 12 years he would allegedly manufacture a staggering 244 different versions, 211 of which he displayed at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. He also invented a methodology for constructing reel spools, spool bearings, gear supports, and other fastening devices, along with the first commercially available automatic clutch for freeing the reel spool.

Fishing lines to allow these reels to function at their peak were becoming ever more sophisticated too. By around 1880, horse hair lines, which were braided by hand using a tool specifically designed for the job, were still in regular use. The use of horse hair dates back to around the fifteenth century. Each hair had to be of good quality, without weak spots, and preferably from stallions, as mares tend to get urine on their tails which was said to weaken the hairs, and still it would wear out in use becoming weakened by the breaking of individual strands.

These eventually gave way to silk which was braided, and cotton and linen which were twisted on textile spinning machines then soaked in oxidised linseed oil. Many of these lines were hard because the fibres were twisted or braided very tightly, unlike soft laid braids which were less tight such as in string. These fibres were often dyed, the favoured colours being black and dark green, though in the case of cotton and linen, natural colours were also marketed.

Arguably, one of the greatest advances in the manufacture of multi-fibre fishing lines was the ability to waterproof them. Not only would this aid their longevity, it also made them far less heavy and easier to use than lines that had absorbed water, plus it negated the need for wrapping the line around a wooden frame for drying and rewinding back on to the reel after washing when used in the sea.

Unfortunately, the earliest versions of waterproofing tended to wash off quite quickly and had to be repeated. Lines could be bought either pre-waterproofed or natural for waterproofing at home. Of the various options of the times, the most expensive would be waterproofed hard laid silk, and the cheapest, soft laid cotton. The most popular was a hard-laid twisted linen generally referred to as Cuttyhunk.

The strength of natural fibre fishing lines depended on the strength of the threads, which in turn depended on the length of the individual fibres making up the thread and the plant it was derived from. The flax plant from Ireland gave very long fibres that were turned into high quality linen thread with a breaking strength of about three pounds.

Long staple cotton from the Carolinas made fibres that were longer than regular cotton, but shorter than flax fibres. This had a breaking strength of about two pounds. So, a nine thread Cuttyhunk line would have a breaking strength of about 27 pounds (9 threads @ 3 lbs). A 36 thread Cuttyhunk line had a breaking strength approaching 108 pounds. However, it should be noted that the conversion from thread count to breaking strength became less reliable as line size increased.



Horse hairs replacement lines had their problems too, not the least of which was uneven stacking leading to birds' nests. This problem was overcome by William Shakespeare Jr. of Kalamazoo, Michigan who invented the level wind in 1896. This problem however, and that of casting generally, had already been tackled in a different way by Malloch's of Scotland who introduced the first turntable reel in 1880. A concept not unlike that of the modern day Alvey Side Caster allowing the spool to be turned through 90 degrees for line to pour off the sloped face of the spool like a typical fixed spool reel, after which it was

turned back to resume a centre pin orientation. The increase in casting range made by this design filled a very important void between its introduction and the 1905 introduction of the fixed spool reel.

Rods throughout the nineteenth century were often short by modern day standards, a fact governed by the length to weight ratio of the materials available, plus subsequent handling and balance problems brought about by the woods used to produce them. Shore fishing rods were rarely 10 feet in length, and more often closer to 9 feet.

In the main, British rods tended to be solid wooden poles made from heavy native woods such as oak, until around the early nineteenth century when lighter more 'elastic' woods were brought in from various corners of The Empire. South America and the West Indies in particular provided varieties such as Tonkin, Ash Wood, Hickory, Lancewood, Greenheart, Maple, Ironwood, Malacca Cane, and Bamboo. The mid-part of the nineteenth century also saw the first jointed rods as opposed to a single long pole.

Bamboo in particular was very fashionable, as not only was it light, hollow, and strong, but could also be cut or 'split' into strips which are then shaped like a pyramid and glued back together to form a much

stronger ‘split’ or built cane rod. This revolutionised rod building in 1846 after American Samuel Philippe had imported a split cane rod made in Bavaria, Germany, which he tried to pass off as his own work. The idea was subsequently widely copied by companies such as Orvis and Hardy during the 1870’s, making split cane rods widely available (at a price) to the mass market.

Bamboo, and various combinations of the other woods were also used in the construction of hybrid rods, where for example the butt section might be Maple; the mid-section perhaps Ironwood, and the final section made from Bamboo, either as split cane throughout, or with a split cane piece spliced in to the tip section, offering not only strength and elasticity to help throw a bait further with more accurately, but variations in the rods overall action to suit a specific purpose for which it was being used.

Meanwhile, down at the business end, hooks had been available to buy in Britain since the seventeenth century, with the best of their day being made by Charles Kirby of London in 1650. So, you can probably imagine the advances by our launch date here of January 1901. By the eighteenth century, Kirby hooks were widely available throughout Britain as well as being exported across the World. One hundred years on into the nineteenth century, hook manufacturing had relocated from London to Redditch, with moves towards standardisation of hook sizes, plus the introduction of the eye instead of the spade end for line attachment.

By 1823, Redditch had 17 firms making fishing hooks, working against rivalry from Limerick, Aberdeen, Dublin and Kendal. All names which remain synonymous with hook patterns today, along with Sneck, O’Shaughnessy, Kinsey, needle point, and round bend. Coming into the twentieth century, hook making was in a very good place, with Norwegian firm Mustad poised to pave the way towards modern hook manufacturing expertise in 1876.

In a poll of readers, editors, and a panel of experts for American business magazine Forbes, the fishing hook was voted the 19th most important tool of all time in terms of its impact on the human race. Less effective however were some of the other items of Victorian terminal tackle items such as grip leads for holding baits in position. These only arrived on the scene in the 1960’s, though many of today’s fishing rigs and traces are built around ideas thought through in Victorian times.

Sticking with the theme of engineering marvels, sea anglers should also pay homage to the cast iron Victorian Pier. Constructed for ‘gentle folk’ to promenade and take in the benefits of the sea air which they often did in vast numbers, their value was very quickly realised by would-be sea anglers, leading to large participation pier competitions both for men and for women taking place before we even set foot into the twentieth century. England, Wales, and Scotland collectively had exactly 100 piers according to the National Piers Society, many of which are or were part of our wonderful Victorian heritage. For some reason they were far less popular around the Irish Coast.

According to the website www.piers.org.uk the list of inherited Victorian Piers is as follows.....

PIER NAME	LENGTH	OPENED	LOST
Aberavon	900	1898	1962
Aberystwyth Royal	700 (now 300)	1865	
Aldeburgh	250	1878	1880’s
Alum Bay	370	1869	1927
Bangor Garth	1550 (now 1500)	1896	
Beaumaris	570	1846	
Blackpool Central	1518 (now 1118)	1868	

Blackpool North	1414 (now 1318)	1863	
Blackpool South	492	1893	
Bognor Regis	1000 (now 350)	1865	
Boscombe	600 (now 750)	1889	
Bournemouth	1000 (now 750)	1856	
Brighton Chain	1134	1823	1896
Brighton Palace	1760	1899	
Brighton West	1115 (most gone)	1866	
Clacton	450 (now 1180)	1871	
Cleethorpes	1200 (now 102)	1873	
Clevedon	842	1869	
Coatham	1800	1875	1899
Colwyn Bay Victoria	750	1900	
Cowes Royal	250	1867	1882
Cromer	500	1901	
Deal	1026	1838	
Douglas, IOM	***	1869	1894
Dover Promenade	900	1893	1927
Dunoon	400	1835	
Eastbourne	1000	1870	
Folkestone Victoria	683	1888	1954
Gravesend Town	260	1834	
Great Yarmouth Britannia	700	1858	650
Great Yarmouth Wellington	700	1853	
Harwich Ha'penny	***	1853	
Hastings	910	1872	
Herne Bay Deal	3787	1899	
Hornsea	1072	1880	1897
Hunstanton	830	1870	1978
Hythe	2100	1881	
Lee-on-Solent	750	1888	1958
Leith Trinity Chain	627	1821	1898



Llandudno	1234 (now 2295)	1877	
Lowestoft South	1320	1846	
Lytham	914	1865	1960
Margate Jetty	***	1855	1978
Morecambe Central	912	1869	1992
Morecambe West End	initial 1800 final 900	1896	1978
Mumbles	835	1898	
New Brighton	550	1867	1972
Paignton	780 (now 740)	1879	
Pegwell Bay	300	1879	1885
Penarth	658	1895	
Plymouth Promenade	480	1884	1953
Portobello	1250	1871	1917
Ramsey Queen's Pier	2244	1886	
Ramsey Marina	550	1881	1930
Redcar	1300	1873	1981
Rhos-on-Sea	1300	1895	1954

Rhyl	2355	1867	1973
Rothesay	600	***	
Ryde	1740 (now 2305)	1814	
Ryde Victoria	970	1864	1924
Saltburn	1500 (now 681)	1869	
Sandown Culver	360	1879	
Scarborough North	1000	1869	1914
Seaview Chain Pier	1050	1881	1952
Shanklin	1200	1890	1993
Sheerness	1450	1835	
Shotley	600	1894	
Skegness	1817 (now 387)	1881	
Southampton Royal	900	1833	
Southbourne	300	1888	1909
Southend-on-Sea	7080	1890	
Southport	3600 (now 3633)	1860	
Southsea Clarence	132	1861	
Southsea South Parade	1000 (now 600)	1879	
Southwold	810 (now 623)	1900	
St. Leonards	960	1891	1951
St. Anne's	914 (now 600)	1885	
Swanage	642	1896	
Teignmouth Grand Pier	700 (now 625)	1867	
Tenby Royal Victoria	230 (100 ext later)	1899	1953
Torquay Princess Pier	780	1894	
Totland Bay	450	1880	
Ventnor Royal Victoria	478 (ext to 683)	1873	1993
Walton-on-the-Naze Lost Pier	330 (ext to 800)	1830	1880
Weston-s-Mare Birnbeck	1200 (now 1040)	1867	
Weston-s-Mare Grand	1080 (now 1200)	1904	
Westward Ho	600	1871	1880
Withernsea	1196	1877	1903

Worthing	960 (now 984)	1862
Yarmouth, IOW	685 (now 609)	1876

Of that original 100 piers, during the twentieth century we have unfortunately lost 41 of them, often to fire, a problem with a history of affecting many of the piers that are still standing, and often on more than one occasion each. In addition to fire, storms and collision damage have also been the scourge of many British piers, which if not completely lost, were certainly disabled.

On my local patch, Blackpool North Pier lost its jetty in 1997. On top of this, of those piers where angling is still allowed, sadly, but increasingly, fishing rights are being sold off to angling clubs which rules out so many others wanting to fish them. In particular, youngsters who are the life blood of fishing for the future.

In brief, other inherited items of potential interest include the first modern lifejacket credited to RNLI Inspector Captain Ward in 1854; the ancestor of today's flotation suit by Clark S. Merriman in 1872 as an aid to rescue steamship passengers; galvanising for boat trailers patented by Frenchman Stanilas Sorel in 1836; the first electric outboard motor by Gustav Troure patented in 1880; the first petrol powered outboard motor by the American Motors Co. in 1896; the fishing swivel by Llewellyn Day Lothrop in 1867, and tournament casting in America during the 1860's.



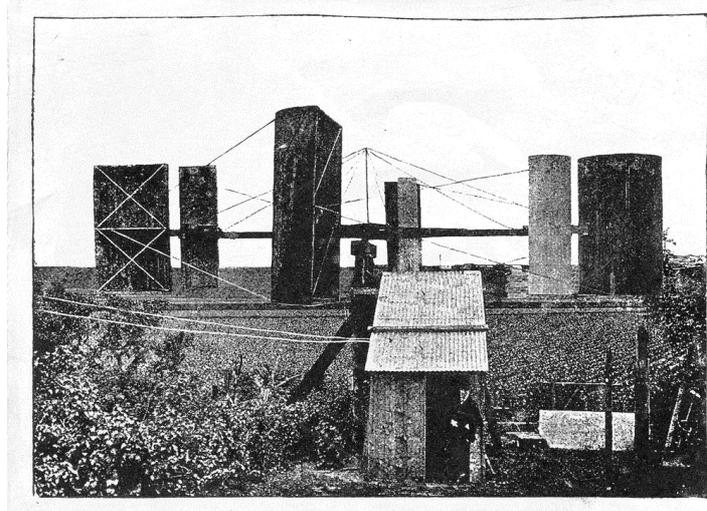
Innovation and engineering aren't the only inherited carry overs from the nineteenth century. As far back as 1896, governments were hearing the first warnings regarding the consequences of human induced climate change, particularly as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius (pictured here) calculated that a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide would increase the surface temperature of the earth by 5 to 6 degrees Celsius. His study entitled 'On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air Upon the Temperature on The Ground' was arguably the first to quantify how CO₂ affects global temperatures, and as we are now seeing, also the distribution of marine fish.

As far back as the late eighteenth century, geologists were finding, though not necessarily fully understanding, evidence of a succession of geological ages in which the climate had clearly changed along with the mix and balance of plants and animals around at that time. Instrumental in delivering the message of climate change to the Victorians were people like Thomas Chrowder Chamberlin, who in 1899 preached the idea that changes in climate could result from changes in the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Again, sounds familiar.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, scientists were already proposing that emissions of greenhouse gasses could significantly change the global climate. Of course, there were other proposed theories too such as forces from volcanism and solar variation. And while it would take several decades for the evidence to catch up with the theory, the Victorians were already on the case in appreciating many scientific discoveries, including the threat of over fishing along with its implications for angling, commercial fishing, and the provision of food for millions of people in what would become known as the third World.

Geological time is vast. Thousands of years are little more than a blip when talk is in millions and billions of years. Actually, witnessing the effects of climate change within a single lifetime should theoretically be unthinkable. Yet that is what sea anglers are now seeing, with so many new species such as breams, wrasses and jacks pushing up from the south, while traditional 'cold water' species

such as Cod and Haddock, particularly in the North Sea, are being slowly inched away from us to the point that if sea temperatures continue to rise, we could very well lose them altogether. So, in that regard, the Victorians were very prophetic in their appreciation of the topic.



Another issue currently affecting sea angling with its roots in our Victorian past is wind farming. The first known electricity producing wind turbine was built by Prof James Blyth of Anderson's College, Glasgow, in 1887, installed in the garden of his holiday cottage at Marykirk in Kincardineshire which was used to charge accumulators developed by the Frenchman Camille Alphonse Faure to power the lighting in the cottage. Blyth offered any surplus electricity to the people of Marykirk for lighting the main street, an offer they turned down, declaring electricity to be 'the

work of the devil.' And so far as offshore boat angling goes, wind farming still is, a topic discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

One theme which should come across from the various quotes and reports in the coming chapters, particularly in the early decades, is the quality of the fishing available back then, despite anglers having the odds stacked against them in terms of ability to get a bait in front of many of these fish, and to land them if or when they did, be that by hiring in the services of a commercial boatman, or more commonly, lobbing baits in from the shore. That said, commercial over fishing hitting coastal fish stocks was a hot topic of complaint, even in those early days, backed by demands that government legislation be brought in to control it, the history of commercial fishing being looked at in more detail in Chapter 2.

From the 1860's onwards, population increase, plus the development of steam power, added an extra measure of pressure to fish stocks. With a rapidly expanding rail network to quickly distribute catches inland (and bring anglers to the coast), fish was seen as protein for the masses, causing trawling to spread rapidly all around the coast to satisfy the demand. In addition, fishing gear becoming more efficient and steam power was allowing boats to work ever further from base exploiting new grounds.

By the 1880's, even the trawler companies were complaining about declining catch levels, asking the government for a statutory 3 mile limit to allow fish to spawn. Unfortunately, they were unable to substantiate their demands with hard data. It was at this point that catch statistics started to be collected.

ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have some particular vested interest, some will also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at the appropriate time slot. NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

BOOKS

A Treatyse of Fisshynge with an Angle (1496) by Dame Juiana Barnes.

The Art of Angling Rock, and Sea Angling (1740) by Richard Brookes.
Sea Fish & How to Catch Them (1862) by William Barry Lloyd.
Sea Fishing as a Sport (1865) by Lambton, J.H. Younge.
Angling in Salt Water (1887) by John Bickerdyke.
The Book of the all-round Angler (1888) by John Bickerdyke.
The Sea and the Rod (1892) by Deputy Surgeon-General Charles Thomas Paske & Frederick George Aflalo.
Hints and Wrinkles on Sea Fishing 1(894) by A. Baines & Frederick George Aflalo.
Sea Fishing for Amateurs by Frank Hudson (1887 to 1904??).
Sea Fishing on the English Coast (1891) by Frederick George Aflalo.
Sea Fish (1898) by Frederick George Aflalo.
Practical Letters to Young Sea Fishers (1898) by John Bickerdyke.
Dover as a Sea Angling Centre (1900) by Deputy Surgeon-General Charles Thomas Paske.

MAGAZINES & PAPERS

The Field – launched 1853 and still currently published.
The Fisherman’s Magazine and Review – launched 1864, closed 1865.
The Fishing Gazette – launched 1877, closed 1966.
The Anglers Journal – launched 1880’s (current status unknown).
Fishing – launched 1886, closed 1890.
Angling & Club Gossip – launched 1892, closed 1893.
Northern Angler – launched 1892, closed 1893.
The Fishing Gazette

CHAPER TWO – 1901 TO 1910

The dictionary definition of the twentieth century is January 1st 1901 to December 31st 2000. Using this as my template, we start with Queen Victoria still on the throne with the last few weeks of her reign ebbing away. Sounds historically ancient, I know. That's a mark of how far back in terms of 'feel' the twentieth century stretches.

Yet more than a hundred years on we continue to reap the rewards of her long reign in terms of its science and innovation through the ongoing development of Victorian led precision engineering, and with the many wonderful cast iron fishing platforms those talented Victorian engineers with wonderful sounding names built for us.

Admittedly, they were not initially put up with fishing in mind. But even back then, anglers were quick to appreciate and exploit a good opportunity, helped to no small degree by the constant expansion of the railway network, allowing people everywhere access to both freshwater locations and to the coast, plus they had the fruits of the empire throwing so many new and interesting imports into the mix such as tropical woods from which to make better and lighter fishing rods.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY



The first thing we need to know coming in to the new century is the state of play in terms of fish stocks. A legacy created not only by the last century, but in fishing terms, all that has gone before. During the time period between 1870 and 1910, a variety of new chemicals including fertilisers were introduced. Electricity generated by fossil fuel burning also began to become more widely available, leading to improved health and longevity, while accelerating pressure on resources and the environment through commercial over fishing, rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification. Very clearly then, the Victorians understood the scientific implications of what was happening, and that so far as fish stocks were concerned, were also well aware that the writing was already on the wall.

A recorded interview I did with Dr. Ruth Thurstan who has published a number of papers on historical commercial fishing pressure, points to the use of otter trawls to satisfy increases in demand as having started to catch on in Britain around the 1820's, at which time they were towed under sail. Unfortunately, accurate records were not kept until 1886, so a range of face to face interviews leading to witness statements done at that time for the intervening period is all she had to go on, an extracted example of which, for the north east of England, points to a perceived 64% decrease in white fish stocks within the interviewee's fishing career.

Accurate records kept between 1867 and 1892 show this trend continuing, with a statistically supported decline measured at 66%. Based on this, plus of course, actual observations, by the 1880's, even trawler owners were openly calling for area closures, plus protected nursery and spawning grounds. Again, sounds familiar. Unfortunately, these did not come about.

So now, more than a century later at a time when despite diesel power and advances in electronic technology make commercial fishing potentially more efficient than ever, after correcting for inefficiencies, it takes a demonstrated 17 times more effort to match the same level of catch produced by late Victorian commercial fishermen, and still we are doing no more than talking about getting to grips with problems identified by our ancestors.

By the early twentieth century, commercial fleets had both the ability and the markets to make visiting the Arctic viable, their boats coming back with huge catches, which as later history shows would lead to a series of skirmishes that would become known as the Cod wars. These would drive the pressure back to our coastal and territorial waters leading to quota's, which along with other measures, were something people had been calling for pre-1900. In fact, bottom trawling actually dates back to the 14th century, at which time people would complain to the king about the destruction of the sea bed.

Once the market for fish was opened up by the expansion of the railway network, trawling spread quickly around the country, reaching Scotland by around the 1860's, driving a wedge between those who would drag the bottom for fish, and those commercials who caught fish, lobsters and crabs with lines and pots, leading the government to intervene with assurances that the bounty of the sea was endless and that fish would always be there for the taking, which obviously as we now know (and no doubt also knew then), simply isn't the case.

Reading some of the angling reports I have included in my early chapters, today's sea anglers can only dream of the opportunities available in the late Victorian and Edwardian era, despite anglers of the period being shackled by what must look like antiquated inefficient equipment, in particular their rods and lines.

That is a mark of how good our fisheries were and could be again if managed properly. And yet the far sighted Victorians thought them to be in crisis back then and were already pointing out what history now knows to be correct, that mismanagement of fish stocks, polluting of the marine environment, and warming of the atmosphere and oceans at an alarming rate through fossil fuel burning can only have one outcome. An outcome that perhaps in another hundred years will have become total reality, making these words appear as prophetic as those earlier predicted outcomes I refer to above.

THE FISHING GAZETTE 1877 – 1966

One of Britain's least know angling publications, but in historical terms, and for the part it played in putting angling generally, and sea angling in particular out there to an ever widening audience, it is without doubt or equal the most important angling publication ever, with the specialist title *Sea Angler Magazine* which began publication almost one hundred years later in 1972, running it a distant second.



Edited by R. B. Marston between the years 1878 and 1927, and looking more like a thin tabloid newspaper than a magazine as we would recognise it today, at times it appeared to carry as many advertisements as it did features, presenting as a mix of game, coarse, and sea fishing in that order of importance, featuring tackle reviews, bait features, and fishing

reports, in much the same way that magazines still do to this day. A case of déjà vu then, with only the paper quality and its dark inky illustrations making it stand out as being that much different from what we see today.

OLYMPIC FISHING

As well as fully recognised events, the Olympic Games regularly stages demonstration events for sports it may well include at some later date, depending on the level of participation and interest each generates.

One such a demonstration sport at the 1900 Olympics staged in Paris was fishing (presumably coarse fishing) which was contested by 600 competitors from 5 countries, plus the host nation, participating in 4 separate events. According to Wikipedia, no results have ever been discovered for these 'unofficial' events.

TWENTIETH CENTURY SEA FISHING RODS

As far back as 1770, fishing rods as we might recognise them today with line guides along their length were being used. Reels of similar advancement unfortunately were still some way off. And while reels in a modern format were slow to develop, when they did, they very quickly left the world of rod building stuck in the dark ages until the development of fibreglass during the 1940's.

Prior to that particular 'giant step' forward, rods were made from heavy native woods, with new stronger, more supple and lighter varieties such as Lancewood and Greenheart from South America and the West Indies being sought and found throughout the empire. Also, Bamboo, which besides being used in its 'tubular' form, both in its own right and as a hybrid with other woods, would go on to produce some of the finest wooden rods ever built when the art of split cane rod building was discovered.

Up to around the mid-nineteenth century, fishing rods tended pretty much always to be made in England. They were also made from solid woods until Bamboo came onto the scene, all of which would be reliant to no small degree on the pieces of wood chosen for their taper, balance, straightness, and the like. With the introduction of split cane, all of that would change. Shaped triangular pieces of perfect symmetry could be hand worked, glued together, and over whipped to give the perfect action.

However, the story behind split cane has a rather dubious seedy element to it. In 1846, American Samuel Phillippe started importing hexagonal cross-section split cane rods from Bavaria which he tried to pass off as his own work. He later received his just desserts when companies including Orvis and Hardy copied them and set about mass producing their own, making them much more accessible to the rod buying public.



Early wooden rods tended to be a solid single length, though coarse fishermen had been experimenting with hybrids to improve their action, length, and balance for quite some time. It was realised and appreciated quite early on that hollow woods offered certain advantages, not the least of which was less weight, particularly in terms of weight to length ratio, to help counter balance hybrid builds.

Invariably this would be achieved through the use of Bamboo as a tubular

hollow lower section, and if you had the money, a split cane tip section, or one of the other solid woods such as Ash Wood, Hickory (1920's onwards), Iron Wood, Maple, or Tonkin if money was tight, the resulting finished item for shore fishing typically measuring between 9 and 10 feet in length. Boat rods obviously could be cut shorter, reducing at a stroke concerns about length to weight ratio balance and action. Other woods available included Calcutta Reed and Malacca Cane.

MINEHEAD PIER

George Luttrell was given the first official sanction to construct Minehead Pier in 1895. Unfortunately, a dispute delayed work starting until 1900, with the 700 foot structure finally being opened to the public in 1901 at a cost of £12,000.

With the advent of WWII, in 1940, the pier became the only one in the entire country to be demolished by government order to give clear line of sight to gun batteries protecting the town. Despite compensation of £90,000 being paid to the owners Campbells, nothing was invested in a replacement after the war.

LOWESTOFT CLAREMONT PIER

Constructed in 1902 to a design by D. Fox, the 600 foot Lowestoft Claremont Pier was extended to its current 720 feet in 1912 and the original wooden piles renewed with Greenheart. Initially, Belle Steamers would call. That service came to an end in 1939 with the advent of war, the structure being quite literally sectioned by the MoD in 1940 for defence purposes. Once the threat of invasion was lifted, the gap was closed by way of a Bailey Bridge.

After the war, the pier fell into disrepair, to the point where in 1948 it was abandoned and left derelict, with Lowestoft Town Council declining an offer to purchase it for the sum of £4,000. In the end, actor George Studd took it over, going on to construct a new pavilion and reinforced concrete platform by 1950. Unfortunately, the pier head and some of the main structure was destroyed by storms in 1962. In 1988 plans were made for major reconstruction and renovation work, but sadly only the shoreward end was actually worked on, leading to the closure of the seaward section.

THE BRITISH SEA ANGLERS' SOCIETY

The prestigious and seemingly rather exclusive British Sea Anglers' Society (BSAS) was founded in 1893, and is therefore another carry over from the preceding century. Said to be an organisation with the aim of promoting the interests of all sea anglers and all that concerns them, in reality it was more of a rich gentleman's club, because the ordinary man on the street probably couldn't even afford the subscription, let alone hope to keep up with the more well-heeled in terms of exploration and regular boat trips.



The first prototype petrol powered automobile was only 8 years old when the BSAS came into being, and the railway network had nothing like the coverage we see today. It follows then that travel was a restrictive and expensive luxury, which meant that unless a person actually lived by the sea, most working folk would rarely if ever get to see it, let alone fish in it.

None the less, the society was resourceful, influential, and successful in the work it carried out at both a practical as well as a scientific level as will become clear as we go along, with many refer-

ences to its work and to its members, some of whom were or would become World renowned anglers and scientists, including its one time Secretary F. D. Holcombe who published books on sea angling including the much quoted classic 'Modern Sea Angling' in 1921.

He would also no doubt have worked on the Societies journal 'The British Sea Anglers' Society Quarterly', a publication containing a wealth of information said to be advantageous to all, extracts of which regarding Dover as a sea angling destination in 1900 by Deputy Surgeon-General Charles Thomas Paske are given below.....

"Individual efforts, backed by the "British Sea Anglers' Society" established a few years ago and now numbering nearly one thousand members, did their level best to tempt anglers to this seaside resort. Single fares for the return journey; a reduction of from 5 to 10 per cent arranged for at a large number of hotels and boarding houses of this port both on its eastern and western aspects; boatmen interviewed and a decrease promised in the hire of craft - these and other measures were brought to the fore but without avail.

All fell flat, mainly due to an indifference displayed by those whose position would have enabled them to lend a helping hand with considerable advantage. Benefit would have accrued to the town, to the boatmen, the Promenade Pier; and the "B.S.A.S." might have been tempted to hold some of its annual competition matches in our waters had Dover been fully alive to its own interests.

Having such a formidable competitor as Deal, this made the matter still more urgent, for there we find a developed organisation. Instead of sneering at anglers and treating them as if belonging to a misguided set of individuals, they lay themselves open to encouragement of every sort - bait obtainable on its pier, reliable gillies to be had when wanted, advice and assistance to those new to the place, as well as great courtesy all round. These are the lines on which to make a place popular, and bring anglers to the front, not the noli me tangere, keep your distance, sort of air so conspicuous in this place. Moreover, Dover

can boast of certain other attractions when, in bad weather, the angler can amuse himself without feeling oppressed with the cheerless aspect of things outside and within.

From first to last my contention has been to form a Society in order to raise the place above its present level, which might be affiliated to the "B.S.A.S." or act independently. This would tend more than anything else to give the necessary stimulus towards the first requirement - organisation. There would be plenty of interesting work for it to accomplish. Periodical meetings to discuss matters piscatorial generally as well as locally, such as the habits, migrations, food and peculiarities of the finny tribe; measures taken to secure any rare specimens which might fall victim to the Varne trawlers and have such preserved; a scheme devised for a more convenient and regular supply of bait of all kinds without the necessity which now exists of having to dive into places afar off and difficult to find; the current literature of the day in the shape of magazines ease of access; boatmen negotiated with and a variety of other matters, all calculated to attract and enhance the value of the place. Nature having provided the fish with no niggardly hand, it remains for the angler to utilise the opportunity offered, not in wholesale, indiscriminate destruction, but with regard to those amenities which regulate the minds of men who view the matter of sport as a trial of skill wherein the former are very heavily handicapped.

The writer has laboured in this direction for some time, but at the period in question the disciples of Walton being few, no headway could be made ... Since then matters have improved in this respect ...

One of the first, and probably most important as well as difficult matters to arrange will be that regarding a regular supply of bait. To overcome the ultra-conservative ideas and habits of certain people being much on a par with the utility of biting against a file; here will the main obstacle be encountered. An argument with such implies waste of breath and energy; persuasion is delusive and the fortiter in re not to be thought of for a moment, the only remaining weapon is bribery, or let us call it by its popular name - competition. The aim should be to make it worth a man's while to devote himself thoroughly to the business, not by fits and starts as heretofore, but under a contract to do so and so. In justice it must be acknowledged that the supply last year was good and fairly regular.

Few could cavil at it, all things considered; and also, one had not to hunt it up first in this street then in that, till the temper showed symptoms of giving way. Than this, nothing could be more unfortunate at the start from being apt to throw a cloud over the whole day's proceedings. A very little of the gall of bitterness is prone to go a long way in most things, angling not excepted. There should be two reliable places where it can be procured, one as central as possible on the east side and one on the west, and the World of trouble such an arrangement would save can only be appreciated by those who have experienced the trial of having had to hunt it out in all manner of places, some not over pleasant to a sensitive organ of smell. Of course, such a condition of things should not exist in these enlightened days, nevertheless it does.

Once the bond of union between members of the craft has been drawn tighter, and a "Dover Sea Angling Club" a fact instead of a dream, it would be very desirable that the matter of specially constructed boats should engage attention. Almost without exception those at present in use have been constructed mainly for the purpose of taking parties out for a row, and are in consequence not so well adapted for angling purposes as they might be ... As compared with the ordinary ones seen on our beach, the main consideration would be - increased strength, more beam, and as much stability as can be imparted, in addition to fenders. A few hours in a boat scarcely able to move or manipulate a rod becomes very irksome and it is often a relief to be able to change one's position without that extreme care now rendered necessary in most cases."

And from the Daily Express, Monday 15 February 1904

The Duke of Marlborough has consented to preside in March at the annual dinner of the British Sea Anglers' Society. On Saturday the annual report was issued, and shows that during the past year the society has made considerable advance, the members now exceeding 1,000. Arrangements have been

made for members to fish at 160 stations round the coast, and during the past season two influential local sea angling associations (Weymouth and Folkestone) have become affiliated to the society.

The club gold medal for the heaviest catch of fish in competition has been won by Mr. B. F Stratton with a catch weighing 81 lbs 1 oz. This specimen fish cup is held by Sir. C. W. Croft-Handley, and the pier cup has been secured by Mr. G. E. Beasley.

NOTE: The Societies Headquarters containing the BSAS museum in Fetter Lane, London, was bombed and completely destroyed during WWII with the Society itself going out of existence once the war was over.

HERNE BAY ANGLING ASSOCIATION



It is not my intention to look specifically at fishing clubs in isolation due to the vast numbers involved. That said, there are a handful of exceptions deserving of mention, and taking account of its longevity, The Herne Bay Angling Association is one of them, having got started on the evening of October 1st 1903 by a group of local residents lead by the towns Mayor.

The group met at the Connaught Hotel to discuss the formation of the club. Local councillor John Mackett was duly elected its first chairman, and estate agent Joseph Gripper its first secretary, making Herne Bay only the second town in Kent to have its own sea angling club, Folkestone having been the first in 1902.

Despite some setbacks during the two sets of war years, plus occasional shortages of fish (yes, even back then), the Association flourished and continues to flourish to this day, from the onset making full use of the towns Victorian pier, plus a fleet of around 50 rowing boats operated by local boatmen whose duties included digging the bait, putting it on the hooks, and disgorging any fish caught, paving the way for today's thriving small boat section of the club.

Reporting on the new club at the time, the People Newspaper commented that Herne Bay was the latest resort to get an angling club, adding that it seemed likely that every coastal town would follow suit sooner or later, bearing in mind the vast quantities of edible fish which could be caught all around our shores. And catch them in vast quantities its member did, eventually producing some of the best competition anglers in the country, a fact reflected in the number of its members that would represent England on International duty right up to the present day. People such as Rod Edwards, Jim Pressley and Paul Cartwright, whose names will crop up again towards the end of the century.

FLAX FISHING LINES

Flax *Linum usitatissimum*, the scientific name of which translates as the most useful linum, is a food and fibre crop grown in the cooler parts of the World. Irish linen is a particularly well known product woven from spun flax fibres, which were also used around the turn of the century to make fishing lines, the breaking strain of each being given a number according to the thickness of the thread produced.

On fishing reels, it went on to be used for many years, particularly for those only able to spend at the 'budget end' of the market. Its big drawback was that it needed to be washed in fresh water to remove all traces of salt after each sea fishing trip, then dried by wrapping it around a large open frame before

it could be wound back onto the reel. But it worked, and it caught many good fish, such as the Cod haul shown in the following advertisement from the Fishing Gazette.

THE LATEST THING IN LINES!!!

THE "PATAR" NON-KINK PIKE & SEA LINE.

Cable Laid Linen. Guaranteed Flax.

Why waste your time and throw away your leads and traces in struggling with the ordinary kinked line when you might be catching fish?

We take out the kinks, dress the line, and let you have it **READY FOR USE.**

All the advantages of an expensive line at a low cost.

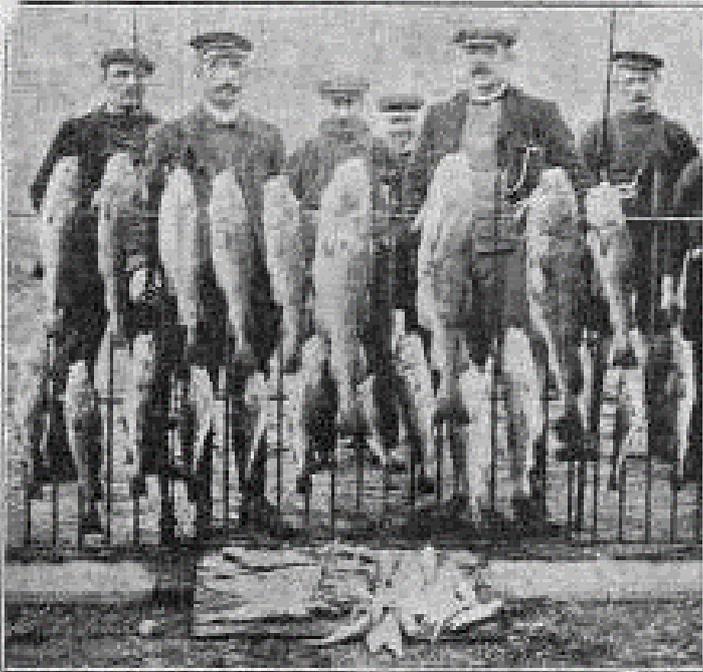
Unrivalled for strength and durability.

Write for samples and complete Dressed Lines.

100 yds. ..	4/-
75 " ..	3/-
50 " ..	2/-

Undressed.

100 yds. ..	3/-
75 " ..	2/3
50 yds. ..	1/6



Use the **"PATAR" REEL** (PATENT) and catch 25% more fish.

With this reel there is no need to put the round handle of reel. You can strike and wind in, or if heavy fish give line instantly and easily. Gives stop, free reel, or optional check, right or left hand, all by one small lever.

PRICE:

4 in. ..	9/6
4 1/2 in. ..	10/-
5 in. ..	10/6

Postage, 2d.

A Specimen catch on THE "PATAR" LINE, 114 1/2 lb, in 4 hours.

Cheques and P.O.O. to be made payable to

Messrs. "PATAR," Oulton Broad, LOWESTOFT.

NOTE: It was later used for Tunny fishing off Scarborough and you can still buy it today.

BOAT FISHING 1904

Piers, obviously, were the favoured Victorian and Edwardian fishing platforms, followed closely by rock fishing, both of which were either free or accessed at a nominal charge. The majority of boat fishing would be done aboard craft owned and skippered by someone other than the angler(s) concerned, a fact more important in the early 1900's than it is today.

One reason for this is that invariably, boats used as fishing platforms would have other forms of primary purpose including inshore commercial fishing. Another reason, and probably the most important single factor here, is that often these boats would be small and powered in the main either by sail or by oars, or as in the case of the report below taken from the Fishing Gazette, by a mix of both according to how much wind there was, its direction, and the distance back to port.



Charles S. Patterson reports: "The British Sea Anglers held their competition late in the month at Deal, and I had the pleasure of fishing on one of the days with a gentleman who was judging. After the last of the competitors had gone off we decided that, as nothing more remained to be done till the return of the boats, we might as well go and do a little fishing ourselves. So, hailing our boatman and getting our things together, we launched about ten o'clock and hoisted sail.

The nice northerly breeze quickly took us to our ground north of the Brake Buoy, and, dropping anchor, we presented our baits to the fishes; sprat on the upper and lug on the lower hook. The tide was nearly slack, and rapidly falling; nevertheless, the Whiting bit freely, and we quickly commenced to fill our fish tub. As is usual at Deal, each fisherman had a large hook near his lead baited with lug, on the look out for Cod, and as the ebb set in my boat companion hooked a fine fellow. Time and again did our angler wind up his fish, to be obliged to let him run ten or fifteen yards off the reel with a rush during his downward plunges. Five minutes brought our fish within reach of Bob's gaff, and a dexterous move tumbled him into the boat, where immediately the hook came away. He was in good condition, and weighed about 15 lbs.

After this our other fish, which were small, appeared smaller, and but little enthusiasm was shown when, on pulling up, an extra tug was felt and a fish of about 1½ ft. in length was drawn close up to the boat and lost: there is little doubt, from the play and also from the brief glance one got of him, that he was a "Fordwich Trout", as a Sea Trout, bearing all the characters of these fish, was taken the week previously by one of the Deal amateurs, boat fishing with sprat bait. (This fish is now in the special department of the Natural History Museum at South Kensington). The tide becoming stronger, the fish turned shy, while the breeze that brought us out was conspicuous by its absence; so getting to our oars we started for home, there to await the returning competitors. Our little take, in four hours, was eleven score of Whiting, a few Pout, seven Dabs, and one Cod of 15lbs.

Of the competitors' takes that day the following may be noted: One Cod 18½ lbs. (on sprat bait), one Cod 18 lbs. (on soft crab bait), one Cod 17 lbs., and one Conger 15 lbs. Such sport may be enjoyed by any fair angler during the months of November and December, if the sprats are in and the weather is favourable. It may be said here that during the last few years magnificent sport has been had at Deal during the month of November with Conger. The large Congers seem to follow the Whiting inshore, and specimens of from 14 lbs. to 20 lbs. are frequently taken.

THE HOLIDAY WHERE TO FISH GUIDE 1904

Extract from the Daily Express, Monday 8 August 1904

It is a happy coincidence that the height of the holiday season should also be the heyday of sea fishing for the amateur. For sea fishing, with rod and running line, is one of the finest sports in the whole wide World.

Whether you fish for Tarpon in the Gulf of Mexico, or for Tuna off the Californian coast, or for Bonito in equatorial waters, or for Bass in the English Channel - and I have fished for them all - there is this delight common to them - the sense you imbibe into the very bones of you of absolute healthfulness, of

physical exultation, of bodily vigour, and, in addition to all this, the assurance of sport both good and free.

As a consequence, perhaps, in the last half a dozen years, English sea anglers have increased and multiplied to an extraordinary degree. It seems but the other day when it was only a rare visitor who wandered out to the pier-head or was rowed a mile or so out to sea, there to work in see-saw fashion the coarse, hard lines of the professional fisherman.

But now, how great a change! At a hundred points round the coasts of Great Britain you behold eager contingents of sea anglers. Nor is there anything primitive about their tackle.

Go to places like Dover or Deal, Weymouth or Plymouth, the Isle of Wight or the Isle of Man, and be convinced and converted by the companies of anglers you will see there, glorying in their sport and hilarious with their success.

Or start from London and work your way round the coast. Off Westgate, Margate and Ramsgate, if you care to go out in a boat, you can make a good bag of Cod, Pollack, Whiting and, with fair luck, of the sporting Bass. If you fish from the pier, you must be content with humbler spoil - Whiting, Trout, and Dabs though, perhaps, an occasional Grey Mullet.

Then, as you go along the coast, you reach Deal - which is perhaps the best sea fishing station within a hundred miles of London. Off the pier you can make good bags of Cod and Whiting, and those who go seaward in boats return at night with rejoicing and bringing their spoils with them. These may include the powerful Conger Eel, whose entrance into the boat often prompts in the amateur angler a desire to get out of it.

Passing Dover, where excellent Pollack fishing from the Admiralty Pier and the jetties is now in full swing, the sea angler has the choice of Folkestone, Hastings (good for Conger, and even Bass, if you fish from the east breakwater), Bexhill, Shoreham, Littlehampton (where I have caught Bass and Grey Mullet both in the harbour and off the long wooden pier), Chichester Harbour, and Hayling Island - also good for Bass and Mullet. Then at Weymouth you can get good sport with most summer fish, as well as in the little-known but lovely bay of Charmouth, and off the rocks of Lyme Regis. And from here, all along the coasts of Devon and Cornwall, the fishing gets better and better, and the fish larger and more full of "play." The same holds good of the north coasts of those counties, of north Wales, and especially of Barmonth, where fish run large, of the Isle of Man, and, of course, of the greater part of Scotland, where in the deep fiords of the coast that splendid fish, the Sea Trout, makes his appearance.

Off the east coast of England, Yorkshire offers the best fishing - Scarborough, Whitby, and Filey being famous for their Whiting, Haddock, and Coalfish. At Mablethorpe, in Lincolnshire, some fair sport may be had, and towards the end of the summer holidays you can make heavy bags off Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

The best known stations - i.e., where boats and fishermen are most easily procured and the wants of the sea angler are perhaps most studied - are Deal, Dover, Hastings, Littlehampton, Weymouth, Devonport, Plymouth, and Mevagissey, Barmouth (in Wales), and Port Erin and Ramsey (the Isle of Man). But I would strongly recommend, for the beauty of their natural surroundings as well as for the sport they offer, the seaside village of Charmouth (which lies like a sleeping beauty on the bosom of a great green hill), the quaint little town of Lyme, perched as it is on the edge of a blue lias cliff, the red coast of South Devon, especially about Brixham, the old-World town of Looe, and the lovely coast between the bay of Bideford and the wooded glens of Lynmouth. Of all sea fish in British waters the Bass, the Pollack, the Mackerel, and the Grey Mullet afford the best sport with rod and line, and are the most satisfactory to catch.

The three first fish may be caught nearly anywhere just now in the English Channel, but Margate, Dover, Shoreham, Littlehampton, Hayling, Chichester Harbour, Devonport, and Plymouth are almost the only places where you may rely on finding Grey Mullet.

ANGLING OPENED UP TO THE MASSES BY THE RAILWAYS

If you read the opening paragraphs of Chapter 1 entitled 'Inheritance', as hard as it may be to imagine in the modern era, arguably the biggest step forward for sea angling generally had nothing to do with advances in tackle technology or innovation. It had everything to do with the expansion of the country's rail network, without which, regardless of tackle, ability, or bait, the vast majority would be sea anglers who would not have been able to get themselves within sniffing distance of the sea.

Unfortunately, however, there is another side to this particular story. For without the speed of the railways, it would have been impossible to get regular supplies of fresh commercially caught cheap fish inland where food would be expensive and quality protein hard to come by. A gap in the market which encouraged the expansion of the nation's fishing fleets with all the knock-on pressures that would bring.

HASTINGS & ST. LEONARDS
SIXTH ANNUAL

Sea Angling Festival

October 26, 27,  and 28, 1907.

PRIZES Value
£150,
INCLUDING
THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND
SEA ANGLING
CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY.

COME WHERE
THE FISH ARE.

Mr. Gair and Son, members of the Hastings Angling Association, fishing on the 8th of October—9 Fish weighing 42½ lbs., including COD, 13½ lbs., PLAICE, 6 lbs. 6 ozs.

COMPETITOR'S HANDBOOKS NOW READY.
Apply to the Hon. Secs., A. A. BARTRAM
and H. DOWSETT, 10, York Buildings,
Hastings.

With regard to the rod and line fishing, it has to be said that both established as well as would-be sea anglers were very responsive to the idea of extracting a combination of recreation and food from the sea. Boats were an expensive luxury, so it was mainly to piers, and to a lesser extent rock marks, that the working classes would be looking.

Tackle that could throw baits any sort of meaningful distance to feeding fish from a beach, or indeed the association between distance and potentially more fish was still more than half a century away, awaiting the appearance of Les Moncrieff. Festivals and competitions introducing some element of pre-organisation were the big draw, as demonstrated by the advertisement shown here.

THE LOSS OF WITHERNSEA PIER

Withernsea Pier was built on behalf of the Withernsea Pier, Promenade, Gas & General Improvement Company to a design by Thomas Cargill. Construction began in 1875 on the 1,196 foot structure, with the pier opening in 1877 at a cost of £12,000.

It was first damaged in 1880 when two vessels collided with it in storms, one of which, the coal barge 'Saffron', destroyed a 200 foot central section which was rebuilt using timber instead of iron. Then in October 1889 the Grimsby fishing boat 'Genesta' struck the pier destroying more than half of the remaining structure with no more than 300 feet left intact, which in 1892 was hit by the 'Henry Parr' leaving a mere 50 feet remaining which was finally removed during sea wall construction work in 1903.

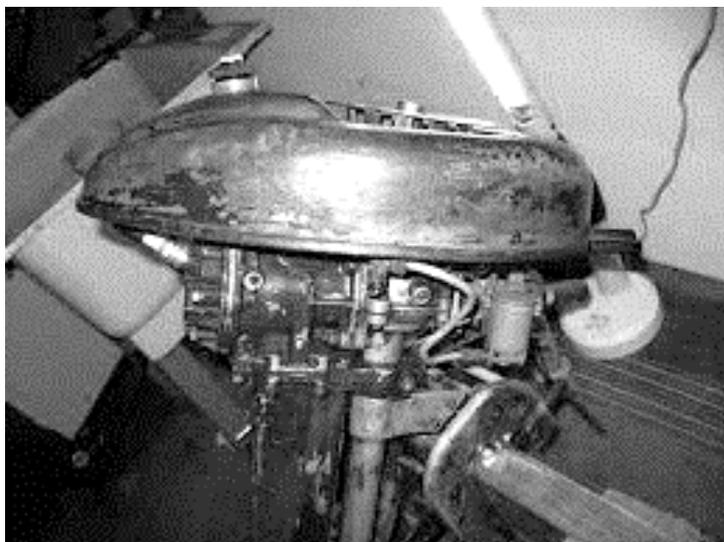
BRITISH SEA ANGLERS' SOCIETY COMPETITION

Extract from the East Kent Mercury, Saturday, 21 November 1903

British Sea Anglers' Society Annual Competition

The annual competition took place on the 14th, 15th and 16th inst., at Deal. On Saturday the weather was rough, but the other two days were fine. The results were generally satisfactory, but there was a great scarcity of Cod. The total weight of sizeable fish (no under half-pound Whiting being weighed in) was upwards of half a ton. The weighing in took place at the Provident Factory (kindly lent by Messrs. West, Usher and Co.), lighted by incandescent lights by Mr. Frost. The whole competition passed off without any untoward event.

THE FIRST OUTBOARD MOTOR



The first petrol powered outboard engine offered for sale was developed by Cameron Waterman, an engineering student at Yale University in America. Waterman initially developed it in 1903 and patented in 1905.

From 1906 his company went on to produce literally thousands of his "Porto-Motor" units, achieving sales of 25,000 by 1914. That said, the most successful outboard motor ever designed and built, by Ole Evinrude, is discussed a little later in this Chapter dated at 1907.

THE IRISH POLLACK RECORD

While Ireland has long demonstrated its ability to produce Pollack in far greater numbers than England and Wales just across the way, for some reason it has never been able to match the English Channel with its far fewer Pollack for maximum size.

Granted, most big English Pollack come from deep water mid-channel wrecks. But Ireland too has wrecks. It just doesn't have whatever that added missing ingredient is to encourage its fish to pile on the pounds, as demonstrated by the taking of the Irish Pollack record weighing 19.3.0 by J. N. Hearne fishing out from Ballycotton in 1904. That record still stands at the time of writing here, despite numerous English Pollack topping 20 pounds having been caught over the same period, maxing out at just short of 30 pounds. Even the 1986 British shore Pollack record comes within a pound of Ireland's 1904 fish.

THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF SEA ANGLERS



With a century and more of angling history to its credit, the NFSA is one of those inclusions that could quite easily have been justifiably discussed at any point throughout the twentieth century. Having done so much influential work on behalf of sea anglers for so long, it has been difficult to single out a specific defining moment.

Where better then to start than with the birth of the organisation in 1904, accepting that this single NFSA inclusion will also be the focal point for a whole century of work, rather than breaking it up into small decade specific chunks, which would then need to be cross referenced and sought out to get the full picture.

Angling in Britain began to get organised around the start of the twentieth century, with many of the older angling clubs in the south east of England able to trace their origins to around that time, with the NFSA forming almost immediately to link them all altogether, allowing them to speak with one voice through a national executive and regional divisions loosely based on the English counties, not all of which saw eye to eye with the national organisers.

Yorkshire for example decided to drop out. Despite this, at its height, the NFSA had in excess of 570 affiliated clubs. Individual membership was also available, though most anglers were affiliated through the clubs they belonged to, which from around 1990 provided insurance cover for all affiliated clubs and their members.

England International Alan Yates, a long time member of the NFSA and Secretary of the south east division has been one of my major sources of historical NFSA information. For an organisation of such longevity and prestige, information regarding its history has been alarmingly difficult to find. It's as though when along with coarse and game fishing's governing bodies, the NFSA agreed to being 'absorbed' into the Angling Trust, all aspects of its previous existence were systematically and permanently erased from history.

Internet searches bring up nothing. Yet for all those years it was involved in everything from organising open competitions and running England's International squads, to record keeping and financing loans to affiliated clubs for the construction of their facilities.

Obviously, Wales, Scotland and Ireland have their own national federations which carry the identity of each of those countries in their names – WFSA, SFSA and IFSA. Why then you might ask was the National Federation not called the English Federation, as it played no direct part in governing the other home nation countries?

I don't know what it is about us English people. It's as if we see ourselves as better than having our own national identity, which I know only too well that most English people are passionate about. The

British Record Fish Committee is another example. Not that it matters now with the passing of the NFSA and the formation of the Angling Trust in 2009.

Each month two officers from each division would meet with the standing committee in London. But it was the divisions that handled much of the day to day stuff at grass roots level, particularly competitions, which could not include cash prizes, and would during the 1980's lead to a major revolt and the formation of the Sea Anglers Match Federation. SAMF drew up its own set of rules permitting cash prizes which all organisations including the NFSA would eventually come to adopt (see Chapter 9). This did not however affect the England squads and International matches, which initially were home nations events. The World championships began in 1991 in Holland where England took top honours.

The NFSA was also one of the founder members of the National Anglers Council (NAC), combining with the national bodies in Ireland, Scotland and Wales under the Sea Angling Liaison Committee of Great Britain and Ireland (SALC).

For a while, the NAC operated the keeping of all British saltwater fish national records in the days before the British Record Fish Committee as we now know it was set up. A medals and awards system was put in place with special awards being presented to members breaking an existing British rod caught record. Changes were also made to the way the country was divided up for administrative purposes, moving from counties to seven regions.

REPORT OF HUGE CONGER

In 1904 the Illustrated London News carried a report of a Conger Eel reputedly weighing 160 pounds, presumably taken commercially. No further details given.

DAILY EXPRESS DECEMBER 1905

Some of the Attractions of Winter Sport

The many angling competitions which are being held now in sea angling, in which both men and women take part, shows the sport to be a growing attraction.

The time was, not so many years ago, when the freshwater angler, proud with memories of fighting Trout or plunging Pike, affected to think that neither skill nor art need be exercised in saltwater fishing.

But his opinion, like all opinions founded on insufficient knowledge of the subject, has undergone change - a change which is as revolutionary in its character as it is enthusiastic in its nature.

The freshwater angler can, it is true, look back to a holiday spent on the banks of some quiet stream and view his "takes" of Roach or Dace, Chub or Barbel, as red letter days.

The sea angler can do more than this. He can fish in the happy knowledge that all is food that comes to his creel; that the "bag" is invariably measured not by ounces, but by pounds, and that all the time he is pursuing his sport he is breathing ozone.

We take so many holidays in the summer that we are apt to forget that it is in winter that we need them most!

There can be no more health giving holiday than a few days' sea angling; and there can be no more delightful centre from which to fish than Deal.

Fish of all sorts, Cod, Whiting, Soles, Plaice and other flat fish, Congers, Skate, Pollack, Mullet (when in season), with an occasional Bass or Turbot, are caught from the pier and from boats in quantities that no other place on the coast can rival.

Those who form their opinion of sea angling from the small catches of the "cold-blue" anglers usually to be seen in winter on the piers round our coasts (and who generally fish with hand lines) may envy the patience which rises superior to results, but must form a very poor idea of the quality and quantity of fish to be taken by rod and line.

For disillusionment they should visit Deal, and have a day (say) off the south-west Goodwin, by the Brake Buoy, or in Sandown Bay - to say nothing of the pier, and they would quickly alter their mind.

What do such casual observers know of the splendid exhilaration of a battle with a sixteen pound Cod?

Or again, take a day's Whiting. Arrived at the ground, the lines are baited with Herring or Sprat or lug, as the case may be, and are no sooner stopped over the side than two and sometimes three fish eagerly seize the morsels. Only the other day two visitors to Deal took in two or three days fifty nine score of Whiting and seven Cod and Codling scaling 45 lbs., besides several Pouting, Eel, and Dogfish.

On another day recently all the boats that went out came back averaging six to eight score of Whiting per boat, besides Codling, Eel, Pouting, and other fish.

And here, as a general note, let me give a hint to intending anglers where to fish. If you are after big Cod or Conger or Dogfish, go to the Brake Buoy, south-west of the Goodwin's, near the Patria wreck. For Whiting, either the old wreck at Sandown or (at low water) 150 yards in a beeline from Deal Castle, or three-quarters of a mile west of Walmer Castle, taking it, as a rule, when the north-east wind blows, and make all speed to the Goodwin's.

Nor is the pier fishing to be despised, and will be found a capital hunting ground indeed.

This pier fishing deserves a word to itself, for it offers scarcely less attraction than boat fishing, and nearly as heavy fish are often caught; from it.

A light, stiff rod, not too long, about seven feet is sufficient; a four-inch winch and 100 yards of good line, not too thick, with two or three leads - or weights - of four, eight, and ten ounces respectively; two or three yards of good gut, some hooks of various sizes, and, save for bait, the pier fisherman's "tools" are complete.

For Cod the best bait is generally considered "hermit crabs", commonly called "soldier crabs", a soft crab inhabiting whelk shells, from which it drives the unfortunate owner, but which are not always easy to procure; and then lug worms (red worms dug from the sand at low water), which indeed is the universal bait, are used.

Of these there are two kinds - "yellow tails" and "reds" - sold by the local boatmen. Failing a supply of "lug", Herring or Sprat answers the need. I have seen over thirty large Codling taken by one angler in a day, and sometimes as many as five score of Whiting fall to a single rod in a few hours' fishing, not to mention Dabs, or Pouts innumerable.

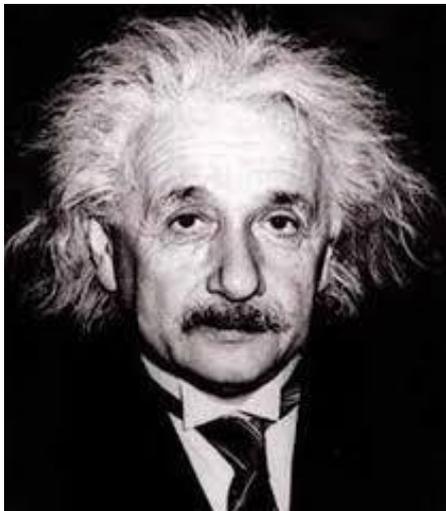
Spinning for Pollack is another capital method of angling from the pier, and many fine fish are captured.

Since the formation of the Deal and District Angling Association a great impetus has been given to the fishing, and much has been done to bring the merits of Deal as a fishing station before the public. Taking it all in all, Deal may be pronounced the ideal fishing ground of England.

EINSTEIN DELIVERS HIS THEORY OF GENERAL RELATIVITY

You don't have to be Albert Einstein to catch fish, but we do need to have had the internationally acclaimed mathematical genius of Albert Einstein to realise the benefits of the advanced navigation which goes hand in glove with the level of offshore boat fishing and maritime safety we currently enjoy today. For without his 1905 theory of Special Relativity where energy equals mass times the speed of light squared ($E = mc^2$), and more importantly for offshore sea anglers, his subsequent linked theory of General Relativity 10 years later in 1915, we wouldn't enjoy the repeat accuracy of electronic navigation we see today.

The Global Positioning System (GPS) we now rely on for so many things including finding fishing marks and the repeatability to return to them at will, simply could not operate. Without Einstein's equations, GPS would literally be obsolete within days. Okay, so we would still have other less accurate forms of electronic navigation. But surely nobody who has ever used and relied on Decca or similar land-based systems would want to go back to the days of unreliability caused by atmospheric variables, signal station failures, or close downs for essential maintenance and repairs.



For GPS to maintain the level of precision we currently enjoy, the 'ticks' from GPS satellite atomic clocks must be known to an accuracy of 20 - 30 nanoseconds, a nanosecond being one billionth of a second. Because the satellites are constantly moving relative to observers on the Earth, effects predicted by Einstein's theory of General Relativity must be taken into account to achieve this required 20 - 30 nanosecond accuracy.

It all boils down to how an observer on the ground sees the satellites in motion relative to themselves. Special Relativity predicts that we should see these clocks ticking more slowly causing the onboard atomic clocks to fall behind identical clocks on the ground by about 7 microseconds (7 one millionths of a second) per day because of the slower ticking rate due to the time dilation effect of their relative motion.

Here's an extract from Astronomycast Podcast Episode 44 by Fraser Caine and Prof. Pamela Gay looking at General Relativity.....

"Pamela: We also have gravitational time delays. This actually means that time slows down the closer you get to the surface of a high-mass object. Here, the Earth actually counts. So, the GPS satellites up in outer-space are constantly pinging us with data, "here's where you are, here's the time you're at." Except the time is passing at a different rate up in orbit, so the information they're sending us if they didn't account for general relativity would be wrong. They have to make corrections with how far you are from the centre of mass of an object, what the mass of that object is, and all of the corrections that they have to make to keep all of these different clocks running in sync with one another match perfectly with Einstein's theories.

Fraser: So, the satellites are actually changing their clocks based on their position around the Earth, the speed they're going, just because of relativity. That's amazing.

Pamela: They actually don't change their clocks, because atomic clocks are just beats of atomic decays. But what they do is before they send us the timestamp information, they say, "here's what my clock thinks the time is, here's the equation that tells me what the time is on Earth relative to me." They constantly have to run all these equations.

Fraser: I wonder what the shift is. It would have to be in nanoseconds, right?

Pamela: It's very, very small. What's neat though, is they're able to make different corrections depending on who they're sending information to. When the GPS information gets sent to another satellite that doesn't have the same offset, that other satellite knows how to take that data and say, "okay, I'm not at the surface of the Earth, so I need to have this different correction put into place." So, in order to keep all of our satellites and all of the people talking in terms of the same standard time, we have to do all sorts of gravitational corrections for these different time dilations that are going on at different altitudes.

Fraser: That is very cool. So, many of Einstein's predictions we use on a daily basis. It's amazing.

Pamela: People who try to say, "I've never seen this," or, "Einstein must have been wrong," aren't paying attention to the different kinds of technology that are used to make different types of correction all the time for what Einstein came up with." Ends.

GPS satellites are positioned in orbits 20,000 Km above the Earth where, due to the Earth's mass, the curvature of spacetime due to gravity is less than it is at the Earth's surface. General Relativity predicts that the clocks onboard satellites close to a massive object like the Earth will seem to tick more slowly than those located further away. As such, when viewed from the surface of the Earth, the clocks on these satellites appear to be ticking faster than identical clocks on the ground.

Calculations using General Relativity predict that the clocks in our GPS satellites will get ahead of ground-based clocks by 45 microseconds per day, and that the combination of these two effects means that GPS satellite clocks should tick faster than identical clocks on the ground by about 38 microseconds per day ($45 - 7 = 38$), which while it might sound insignificant, bearing in mind the level of precision required here, in terms of inaccuracy, 38 microseconds equates to 10 kilometres a day, which is why engineers who design these satellite systems programme in Einstein's predictions before deployment.

LADY ANGLERS EXCEL AT BOAT FISHING

Extract from The Daily Mirror, Tuesday 4 August 1908.



In the realm of sport woman have made vast strides of late years, but in no branch more so than in the difficult art of angling.

An auspicious reason for the patronage angling has enjoyed of late years amongst women is to be found in the fact that many members of our Royal Family, headed by the Queen, who throws her artificial bait with the aid of a light rod inlaid with gold, follow it.

Princess Louise (Duchess of Argyll), who caught Salmon with rare skill in

Canada; the Duchess of Fife, who teaches the young idea to fish at Mar Lodge, on the Dee, and who took a Salmon weighing 16 lb. a few years ago; and Princess Victoria are all keen fisherwomen, and their example has been widely followed notably by Princess Victoria Louise, the German Emperor's only daughter, who, when only ten years of age participated in a fishing holiday at Codinem.

It is not given to everyone to enjoy opportunities such as those which enabled the Duchess of Roxburgh last year to secure the finest Salmon a monster scaling 37 lb. on the Floors Castle stretch of the Tweed;

but as year succeeds year more women mark down the finny quarry as their prey, and the list of feminine competitors at the annual angling competitions at the seaside grows longer.

Early last year, when two fair anglers were fishing at Port Phillip, Victoria, with rod and line they landed within an hour seventy small sharks, ranging from 18 in to 2 ft. in length. In the waters round our shores the shark, fortunately, is not a frequent visitor, and, indeed, this Australian experience differs considerably from that obtaining at the average English angling competition in the amount of excitement engendered per hour.

Thus, at Clacton last year, where a most successful contest was held, Miss A. Hawkes, with 18 lb. 3 oz., was easily first, beating Miss Dyer's record by over 3 lb., though the last mentioned angler won the second prize, and the total catch of all the competitors did not exceed two and a quarter hundredweight.

Another competition held at Clacton, which extended over three days, resulted in Mrs. J. W. Nunn winning a gold medal for the best three catches from the pier, a noteworthy feat recalling Mrs. Gilbert's achievement of landing a Cod of 17½ lb, at the Folkestone festival whereby she won a prize for landing the heaviest fish in the competition.

That a ladies' sea angling competition, when properly managed, is a very popular seaside event was clearly indicated last season at Deal, where Lady George Hamilton distributed the prizes, clad, some in fishing garb and some in motor costume, fifty ladies lined up on Deal Pier and fished as hard as they could from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., regardless of the salvos of applause that greeted each catch and the fusillade of snapshots that battalions of camera owners fired at them. The first prize was awarded to Miss Edith Turner with a catch of 4 lb. 8 oz.

In 1906, when a two days' fishing competition was held at the Cinque Port under the auspices of the British Sea Anglers' Society, much better sport was enjoyed, and the winner obtained 64 lb. 4½ oz. of fish, as compared to 51 lb. 7 oz. by the best lady angler who, with the said catch, won the second prize.

When we read of Miss J. Kerr, another expert fisherwoman, landing 13 lb. Cod at Deal, and Miss Chambers and Mrs. Rice capturing Clacton's angling prizes with very useful catches, the fact that in angling croquet, the only sport at which woman is believed to compete with man on absolute equality, has a serious rival, will not require insisting on. The woman angler has undoubtedly come to stay, and will be aided in her strife for laurels by her characteristic patience and perseverance.

SOUTHSEA PIER DESTROYED BY FIRE

Built initially as an Isle of Wight steamer jetty to a design by G. Rale between 1875 and 1878, it was damaged so badly by fire in 1904 that it had to undergo a complete rebuild with its 600 foot replacement, this time designed by local architect G. E. Smith reopening in 1908 at a cost of £85,000.

FALMOUTH PRINCE OF WALES PIER

Designed by W. H. Tressider, Falmouth Prince of Wales was named in honour of HRH Prince of Wales (later King George V), who in July 1903 laid the foundation stone for the 510 foot long structure. Two years later in 1905, it was opened by the Earl of Kimberly for pleasure use until WWII came along and it was taken over by American forces, opening again to the public in 1951, with two main restorations having taken place since in 1951 and 1987.

FELIXSTOWE PIER

Built by the Coast Development Company Ltd. which was formed by a merger between Belle Steamers and other local business concerns, the 2,640 foot long pier was formally opened in 1905. In the same year, the Coast Development Company became a corporation, which in 1915 went into liquidation before being finally wound up in 1922, with East Coast Piers Ltd. who had been in charge of the summer running of the pier's electric tramway, acquiring the structure and continued operating the trams until the outbreak of WWII, after which it never resumed.

In 1996 plans for a £2.5 million rebuild to save the structure from collapse were drawn up with £700,000 required immediately for repairs. Unfortunately, nothing ever came of the grand plan to resurrect the piers flagging fortunes, and in 1999 a charitable trust was formed to try to save the pier, which again came to nothing, other than an application for a demolition order being made in 2004.

IRISH HALIBUT 95 POUNDS



THE LATE MR. S. BULLOCK AND HALIBUT OF 95 LB. CAUGHT BY HIM AT BALLYCOTTON IN 1905: THE FIRST LARGE ONE TAKEN ON ROD AND LINE.

The book 'Modern Sea Angling' by F. D. Holcombe (Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd, 1931 edition) carries this photograph of Mr. S. Bullock with what Holcombe describes as the first large Halibut taken on rod and line, it being a specimen of 95 pounds caught off Ballycotton in 1905.

Along with Valentia, Ballycotton was fast becoming the Mecca to which members of the British Sea Anglers' Society were regularly journeying on account of their potential for Halibut, large Skate, and a whole string of lesser species, clearly demonstrating that Halibut fishing around the British Isles was not first

put on the map in the 1960's from the north east coast of Scotland (see Chapter 8).

THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF SEA ANGLING

A Report by Frederick George Aflalo of the British Sea Anglers' Society in 1905

“At the dinner recently held by the British Sea Anglers' Society, with the Duke of Marlborough in the chair, it was made known that the membership exceeded a thousand. This remarkable success of an angling club founded only in 1893 invites a brief investigation of the conditions under which the sport of fishing in the sea with fine tackle has come so rapidly to the front as to occupy an increasing share of attention on the part of yachting men and all classes of anglers, besides newspaper editors (who, ten years ago, would hardly look at an article on the subject, and nowadays rarely return one), and the manufacturers and vendors of fishing tackle.

The ancient Greeks held that it was a kinder fate to be poor on land than rich at sea, and there is some evidence that their contemporaries, wisely distrusting their fragile barks to the varying humours of the

treacherous Mediterranean, did most of their fishing with long rods from the rocks that gird their beautiful native coast.

Between those remote ages, however, and the modern period of sea angling lies a gap of centuries. Sea fishing, like golf, holds out attractions to both young and old, offering moderate exercise in the fresh air to those who have reached years of discretion that wince from the violent activities of wading for salmon or stalking trout. The late Mr. Wilcocks, regarded as the father of modern writers on the subject, sent me an enthusiastic letter within a few weeks of his death at an advanced age. The sport keeps such men young. The Latin line "Non omnis ætas, Lyde, ludo convenit" which an aspiring army candidate once rendered "You don't want to go on rotting all your life, Daisy!" holds no threat for them. Whom the Gods love die young; whom they love still better never grow old.

Like many other developments of today, the most complete and rapid advance in sea angling for sport has been consummated in North America, where sea anglers organise costly campaigns against the big game of the ocean jungle with the lightest of implements, battling, till daylight fails, with silver Tarpon or leaping Tuna, killing fishes the length of their own boat on a little rod that looks more suited to the despatch of Norfolk Pike. One man handing the rod to the other and back again until the fish is finally overpowered. Less strenuous is the mood of the British sea angler when he goes in quest of Bass or Lythe, yet even here the familiarity thus engendered with the sea which surrounds his island home is in itself a strong argument in favour of this healthy pastime. It is a familiarity which never breeds contempt, but rather an appreciation of the dangers and difficulties of navigation and a keenness to master them.



What has, without doubt, proved a strong incentive in the growing popularity of sea fishing is the heavier expense of first class sport in fresh water, particularly within reach of London and other great centres. Those with plenty of time and no occupation on their hands can contrive, with a little discrimination, to find excellent free Salmon fishing in Lapland and abundance of free Trout fishing as near as Scotland or Norway. But, for the busy professional man who resides in the metropolis, Trout fishing is either very remote or very expensive: an annual subscription of fifty guineas, by no means excessive, for the

advantages offered by a new Trout fishing club recently started in Surrey, may be regarded as a fair case in point. For the enthusiastic London angler, then, who has no soul for fishless hours passed on the lower reaches of the Thames, and no pocket for the artificial abundance of a newly stocked Surrey lake, there is the sea, free to all, teeming with fish for those who know how and where to seek it, health giving, inviting, irresistible.

The increasing obstacles in the way of good Trout or coarse fishing have proved a serious encouragement to sea fishing only during the past quarter of a century, if as long. The ancient Briton, the Englishman of the Middle Ages, of the Tudor, Stuart and early Hanoverian periods caught their fish in rivers and ponds. Fishing in the sea was confined to the fisherfolk who lived on the seashore, and it is impossible to trace the ancestry of our modern sea angling back to a period anterior to the second decade of the nineteenth century.

There may be several ways of following the development of the sport from its crude beginnings about the period of Waterloo, but the library furnishes the simplest, and the naïvely self satisfied prefaces of half a dozen early works on the subject will tell us all that we want to know.

The excellent T. F. Salter, gentleman, who lived in the once fashionable suburb of Stoke Newington, after his retirement from retail trade, regarded sea fishing only as a *pis aller* for idlers or convalescents stranded by the sea. It is, however, difficult to realise, in these days of radium and motor cars, the disabilities which must at that time have attended a journey to the seaside, though readers of Thackeray will be able to appreciate the drawbacks. Mr. Salter, gentleman (I hesitate to omit the specific name claimed by himself), offered his hints on sea fishing, in his own words "to lovers of angling who may reside on the sea coast, or those whose business, pleasure, ill health or any other cause, may occasion a visit, voyage or residence on the shores of the sea". Nor was the sport in much more general favour when, nearly a half century later, Mr. Lord wrote a handbook on the sport, addressing his remarks to those who, driven by a variety of circumstances to the seashore, might there welcome a new pastime to relieve the boredom of such an existence. That was an age when the royal and ancient game of golf kept its place north of the border, and every wild green within sound of the waves was not dotted with restless specks of red. Even Captain Lambton Young, who wrote in the early eighteen-seventies, merely ventured to express a faint hope that those who go to the sea each summer may "make sea fishing in all its branches a distinct pursuit quite as much as Salmon fishing, Grouse shooting, or any other of the many sports which have become necessary to the existence of the wealthier classes".

Captain Young wrote of halcyon days, when sea fish were more plentiful in our bays and inshore waters than they are today. It is only fair to remember this, else one would blame the author for dismissing all the arts of Pollack fishing in twenty lines.

The next work of importance was by the late Mr. J. C. Wilcocks, whose manual, particularly as it relates to fishing with the handline, is still the standard work on the subject.

To that skilful fisherman and engaging writer who is known to his many readers as "John Bickerdyke", perhaps belongs the title of pioneer in the literature of sea angling as we understand it today. His many works on the subject mark a new era in the applied theory of the sport. He was, moreover, at the time of the first jubilee, singularly favoured by circumstances. Not only was the way for a wider popularity of sea fishing paved by the increasing depletion of our rivers, but the cheaper fares and quicker journeys, instituted by the enterprise of many railway companies whose systems link London with the sea, yearly brought sea fishing more and more within reach of London's millions.

The increasing scarcity of good fishing in fresh water is perhaps among the chief reasons of the growing favour which sea angling has of late found with London anglers. The society aforementioned, though its membership is drawn from almost every seaside county in the island, consists largely of London members, and by far the greater proportion of these have at one time or other enjoyed good sport with Trout or Pike or other inland fish; yet even coarse fishing is becoming a pastime for those only who can

afford to pay. Most of the best Pike caught in Norfolk come from private Broads, and, for all that has been said, or that can be said, against private ownership in such tidal stretches, we know perfectly well that if the whole system of the Broads were thrown open in the summer for free fishing, next year, or perhaps the year after, the fishing would be too poor to attract anyone but those who reside in the neighbourhood.

What may, however, be regretted in parenthesis is that, whenever it is found necessary to clear a lake of its Pike and other coarse fish in order to introduce Trout, why the banished fish could not be carted alive to some neighbouring public water instead of being left to die on the banks. Mr. Halford, in his interesting autobiography, relates the eviction of upwards of three thousand Pike from the Kennet, and why these could not have been turned into the Lea or Thames I am sure I do not know.

The modern purist insists that sea angling must be done with a rod, else it is not sea angling at all. "Capianter arundine pisces" is the badge of the Society, and the majority of its members look askance at a hand line, much as a Pike fishing enthusiast might look at a ligger. Now, I have always, personally, taken a middle course between those who prefer the handline and those who will have nothing but the rod. When and where the rod can be used with advantage, then I admit that it gives the finest sport. Yet I have memories of night fights with Conger and day fights with Sharks in which most rods would have cut a very poor figure.

Let me, however, put in one claim to respectability. When I do fish with a rod, as for big Bass, it is generally with a much lighter weapon than that used by the majority of rod-fishers in the sea - a Trout rod, in fact.



The actual use of the rod in sea fishing is mentioned in a work as old as 1764, in which the ill fated George Glas, who was afterwards murdered at sea by mutineers, describes the rod fishing of Spaniards on the Moroccan coast. Again, in a quaint work, a kind of ancestor of the "Encyclopædia of Sport", entitled "The Sportsman's Dictionary, or the Gentleman's Companion for Town and Country", published in the year 1778, there is an article on "Rock Fishing". This treats of fishing with the hand-line only, but it contains one amazing piece of information to the effect that Mackerel can be taken only when the boat is anchored. As the modern practice is to catch the Mackerel under sail, or, at any rate, rowing among the shoals, it would look as if it were not so old as is commonly claimed for it; and the manner in which I have seen Mackerel caught from anchored boats only in the Straits of Gibraltar and in several spots in the Mediterranean lends colour to this view.

I do not feel much attracted by this quibble over rod or hand-line. An angler is surely any man who fishes with a fish-hook and not with a net. Let me in support of this contention quote the respectable Comenius (1658), who puts it thus: "An angler fisheth with a hook, whereon having put a bait, whatsoever fish being allured, biteth at it, he is taken."

This claim, therefore, to superiority by use of the rod in sea fishing, even where the handline is the more proper method, savours somewhat of the hauteur of "Non Angli sed angeli".

There are some who affect to despise sea angling as coarse sport, lower even than bobbing for Eels or tickling Tench. The strongest argument against so ill mannered an aspersion seems to me to lie in the fact that many distinguished anglers have owned at one time or another to a passing fondness for a day with the Mackerel or Bass. Mr. Halford, high priest of the chalk stream, confesses to many a delightful

day on the dancing waves off Scarborough, Eastbourne and Ilfracombe and calls the Mackerel the gamest fish for its size that swims. Mr. Senior, the friend of the Grayling, whose angling career has been equally distinguished by the waterside and in the editorial chair, has taken his readers after the Queensland Palmer and Schnapper. A distinguished member of the Consular service, with opportunities of every kind of fishing, sets a high value on his long and varied sea angling experience off Mogador, Genoa and Calais. "John Bickerdyke" himself writes with equal facility of the capture of Bass or Barbel, Shark or Salmon, Grayling or Gurnard.

The vast army of enthusiasts who fish from pier, boat or beach no longer confine their activities to the warm summer holiday, when all the family revels at the edge of the sea. The coldest days of winter see the members of the B.S.A.S. fishing in force at Deal, while the sea angling festivals so popular nowadays at many fashionable resorts owe much of their local support to the fact that they attract visitors out of the regular season.

The sport of sea angling, which has made wonderful strides during the past quarter of a century, will, if the signs are not misleading, go still further during the next quarter. It has everything in its favour, though the more extended restocking of inland waters may from time to time create a reversion of public favour to the Roach and Carp. Yet such revival can be transient only, and the vast, illimitable sea will always be there as the stand by of the angler, free to all, ever ready with fresh surprises, less peaceful, perhaps, than the river or Broad, but also more invigorating, more inexpensive, yielding fish that are a delight to the cook, as well as to the sportsman. Sea angling has come to stay. So has the motor car, yet neither will ever be at a standstill".

INTRODUCTION OF THE FIXED SPOOL FISHING REEL

As with some of the other major early items of fishing tackle, the story behind the invention and development of the fixed spool reel is a fairly complicated one, with various parties claiming either to have invented it in its entirety, or to have improved upon an existing design significantly enough to be a part of the history of the device. The duo Thomas Winans and Thomas D. Whistler of Baltimore registered the first patent to specifically describe casting from a fixed spool reel in March 1875. Peter Malloch also laid claim to having created it after watching spinning spindles used for wool manufacturing in 1884.



A similar story, this time involving machinery for the textile industry is said to be behind work done on the fixed spool reel by textile magnate Albert Illingworth, 1st Baron Illingworth, who actually filed the first patent for the fixed spool reel known originally as a 'thread-line' reel in its modern format in 1905. A design which allowed line to be drawn off the leading edge of a stationary spool, after which it was restrained and rewound by a line pick-up device rotating around the spool, a device which we now know as the bale arm. That said, both Hardy Brothers in England and Pezon-Michel in France are credited with making most of the design improvements to the fully finished item.

One of the earliest problems in need of solving was line distribution and backlash. Line backing up on the spool would finally be overcome by the spool itself moving back and forth to spread the loading, without which in the early days, the job needed to be done by hand as is the case with multiplier reels without a level wind. Cranking the handle, holding the rod, and spreading the line uptake was something of a three-handed job, made all the more troublesome by the use of wet silk lines in the days before monofilament nylon. One

of the first reels to have the ‘full complement’ of modern design features was the Illingworth No.3 which also had an adjustable front drag as shown in the accompanying illustration.

FEMALE PARTICIPATION

Extract from the Daily Express 1906: Nothing is more striking than the way ladies generally have taken to the sport of sea angling. Only a few years ago one rarely saw a man - and never a woman - fishing with rod and line on our piers, and now at nearly every seaside resort on our coast ladies are to be seen fishing side by side with the men – aye, and frequently beating them at their own sport!

At Deal, so enthusiastic are the sportswomen that the formulation of a lady’s sea fishing club is discussed in connection with the Deal and District Anglers Association.

Should such a branch association of lady anglers be formed, it will follow the example set by Great Yarmouth, where a ladies' sea angling club has already been formed, and is the only one of its kind yet in existence.

HARDY BROTHERS FISHING TACKLE



The story of Hardy’s could be slotted in pretty much anywhere along the twentieth century time line. It starts in 1872 and continues on until this day. My reason for choosing this particular time slot is that 1907 was the year that the Hardy Brothers partnership was forged, having started with William Hardy the gunsmith based at Alnwick in Northumberland who was subsequently ‘persuaded’ by Lord Armstrong to take his brother John James (JJ) Hardy into the business, advertising themselves as Gunsmiths, Whitesmiths, and Cutlers.

In 1874 William had begun advertising the sale of ‘superior river and sea fishing tackle’, a broadening of the business plan that really began to take off and pay dividends, though at this early stage they were still buying in items for sale as opposed to producing them in house, which eventually put them in the position of being competitors to companies such as Malloch who were supplying them, prompting them to go it alone in 1891 – the year they produced and launched what would become their most famous product ever, the Hardy ‘Perfect’ reel.

Moving forward into the time frame of this book, and finally into the World of sea angling, with products such as the Hardy Fortuna (made For Tuna) which was marketed between 1921 and 1966 taking in the whole of the North Sea Tunny fishing era; the Cascapedia, marketed between 1932 and 1939; a multiplier branded as the Alma available from 1925 to 1937; the Jock Scott multiplier marketed from 1938 to 1952, and perhaps the best known and certainly most collectible reel they ever produced, the Zane Grey multiplier, from 1928 to 1957. There were of course other models, all of which were the result of very careful precision engineering, placing Hardy the quality tackle manufacturer very firmly on the World stage.

Hardy’s developed and produced high quality fixed spool reels too, the Altex being a prime example. They were also the first reel manufacturer to go with the now familiar full bale arm instead of the short partial bale which I can just about remember seeing on old reels myself. And throughout, the words

Hardy and quality were synonymous. So much so that their market was truly global with the company holding no less than 10 royal warrants, and their tackle catalogues were much anticipated reading events.

Their premises too were given a 'make-over' in so far as after starting trading at Alnwick and expanding into Broadgate, by the turn of the century, which is our pick up point here, they were residing in Pall Mall, London. They had evolved into a truly global tackle empire, more of which at appropriate time slots as we go along.

WALTER MARHOFF FISHING REELS



MARHOFF REEL FROM KALAMAZOO
THE REEL FOR YOU

5 New Improvements

Investigate this New Reel for Yourself

It is a beauty in design and finish, light in weight, has a fine **GRADUATED CLICK**, and holds 100 yards of line which is properly wound on the spool

every time, **without the slightest attention from the fisherman.** Our simple and well protected **AUTOMATIC WINDING DEVICE** is what does it.

You will thoroughly enjoy casting and landing fish with this excellent Reel. Write for circular and send your Dealer's name and address to **Dep't. D**

MARHOFF REEL CO. KALAMAZOO, MICH.

The perennial problem of bird nests when casting multiplier reels caused by uneven line stacking was finally overcome by William Shakespeare Jr. of Kalamazoo, Michigan, with his invention of the level wind in 1896. But despite having made the break-through, for whatever reason, the Shakespeare Tackle Company failed to press it into production, preferring to acquire the patent for a simpler design by Walter Marhoff in 1907 which would be the foundation of level wind reels for many years to come.

An invention which actually came about shortly after Marhoff had left his

position at Shakespeare, which spread the line evenly on the spool by way of an endless single thread or cross threaded carriage, for which he was issued a patent in October 1906.

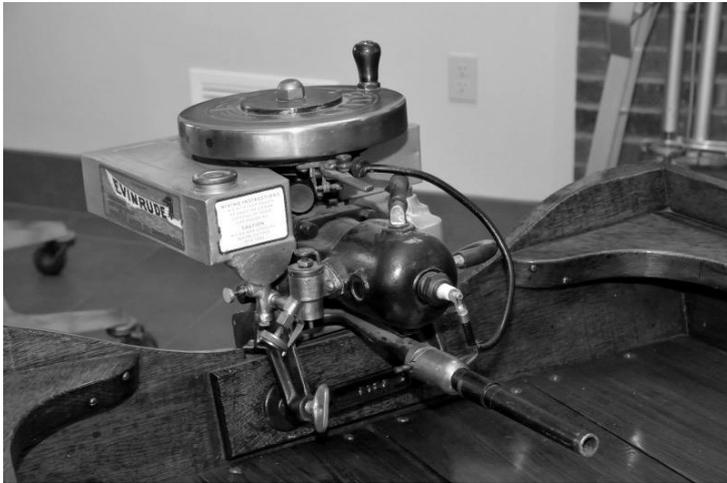
Marhoff would go on to patent a non level wind version with improved braking; a quick take apart reel frame, and end cap thrust bearings. But still he worked on his level wind concept which he again improved in 1907 and for which another patent was issued, this time with the line guide having a slotted guide bar above it.

Ironically, the Marhoff reels were made in the Shakespeare factory under special arrangements, with Shakespeare acquiring the patent for the Marhoff level winding reel in 1908. Speculation suggests Marhoff was either in financial difficulty or suffering ill health. Research has not clearly shown which. Either way, Walter Marhoff died at the age of 39 in October 1908 after long suffering from Tuberculosis.

EVINRUDE OUTBOARD MOTOR

Born in Norway before emigrating to the United States 1882, Ole Evinrude is widely credited as being the inventor of the modern day outboard engine for boats. Except he wasn't. Certainly, he was right up there in early outboard development and production, but actually it was another American, Cameron Waterman, who has that particular accolade (earlier in the Chapter) for a unit he invented in 1903 and patented in 1905.

Two years later, in 1907, Ole Evinrude invented the first practical and reliable outboard motor which had a crank on the flywheel to fire up the two-stroke petrol engine, leading to the founding of the Evinrude Motor Company in Milwaukee in 1909.



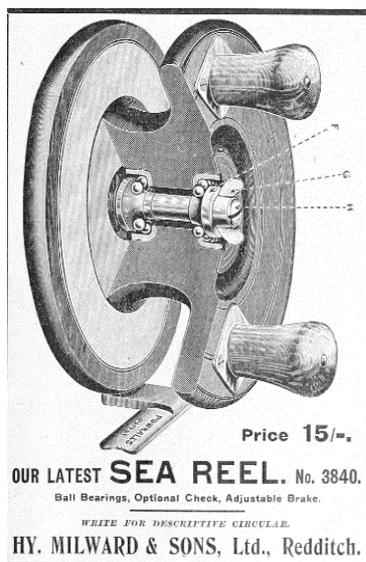
The drive behind him building his first prototype outboard engine reputedly was a day spent laboriously rowing across Okauchee Lake near Milwaukee to impress some girl he was with by bringing back an ice cream for her. Not wanting any more of that (the rowing, not the girl friend), he began exploring ways of powering the boat instead, and that reputedly was the start of great things, including providing employment for around 300 people in the area, one of whom happened to be Arthur Davidson, who

his spare time liked to tinker with motor cycles in the workshop, and look where that got him – the Harley Davidson motor cycle company.

Sadly, Ole Evinrude's part in this chapter of the outboard motor story was short lived as he sold the company in 1913 to look after his sick wife. That however was not the end of Ole Evinrude and the outboard motor business full stop.

In 1919 he invented a much lighter and more efficient alternative version of his original design which he went on to produce through a new company known as the ELTO Outboard Motor Company, ELTO being an acronym of Evinrude Light Twin Outboard motor. Later, along with other well know American outboard engine manufacturers such as Johnson and Evinrude, ELTO was absorbed into the outboard manufacturing giant Outboard Marine Corporation (OMC).

CENTRE PIN REELS



Despite multiplier reels having been available since before the twentieth century, and the modern fixed spool reel reaching the tackle shops in 1905, centre pins reels were, and would for a long time, continue to be right up there for ordinary working people who wanted to fish, primarily because they were simple, and by comparison to the alternatives, affordable too.

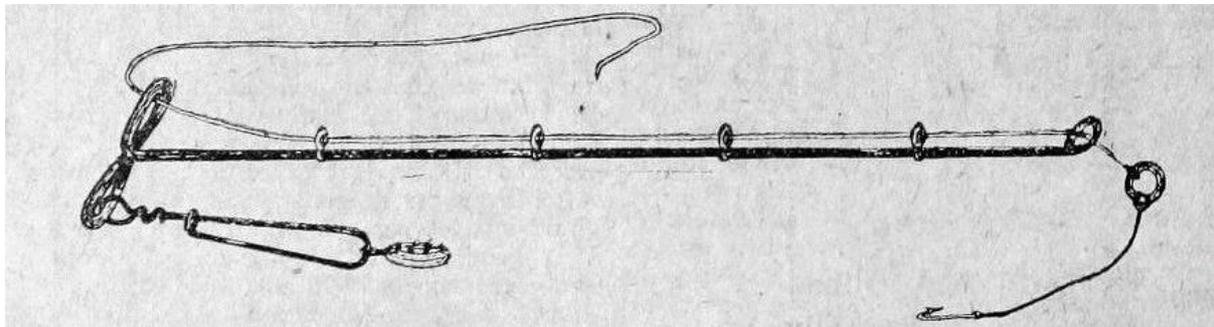
Some, obviously, were very simply put together as a machined wooden spool with cranking handles, riding on a metal shaft and frame with a fitting to attach it to the rod. From personal memory, I know this type of reel continued in popularity right through to 1970's, particularly along the Yorkshire Coast where I often came across it as a one to one ratio no nonsense Scarborough reel.

But that isn't the whole story, because shore anglers fishing the kelpy snaggy rock ledges all along the east coast were very proficient at casting wooden drum reels, which were perfect for bullying both fish and terminal tackle back through unforgiving terrain close in the angler's feet.

So popular did centre pin reels become that companies such as Reuben Heaton, Hardy's, and Slaters, began introducing innovation into their design with high precision engineering, and all metal components. Also J. W. Young who manufactured quality reels that were then badged by other well-known companies, and who only started putting them out with their own logo showing after WWII. Granted, the high precision end of the market was in the main aimed at the freshwater scene where ease of drum rotation was important for trotting floats on rivers. But the saltwater scene also saw a few, particularly for heavy duty big game fishing.

PW Comment: My introduction to 'Big Game Fishing' was using a centre pin reel. At the age of 16 I persuaded my dad to take me Blue Shark fishing out from Looe near to where we were holidaying in 1964. All the boats back then appeared to be using them. I even saved up and bought myself one – the Alcock's Leviathan, which I used for wreck fishing during the 1970's.

THE 'TONY' BOOM



The July 1907 edition of The Fishing Gazette carried a review of what was called the 'Tony' boom, but what anglers of my generation would instantly recognise as being the Clements Boom shown below in the Dexter Products advertisement. A terminal tackle item designed for carrying the lead on a running leger rig so as not to have it twist and tangle either the running line or the trace.

As with some early fishing rods, and like the Clements Boom and the shorter Kilmore Boom of my early fishing days, the 'eyes' were lined with porcelain, which, if it didn't drop out, would often crack at the first hard impact then fall out, or worse still crack and remain in place chafing the line.

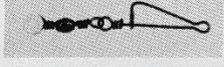


DEXTER PRODUCTS COMPANY
LLANERCH ROAD, LLANFAIRFECHAN, GWYNEDD,
NORTH WALES LL33 0EB

NEW!
POLO DEXTERS MACKEREL SPINNER
has a lot going for it.
It is
• Functional
• Robust
• Reliable
and
• Very effective



PLAIN CLEMENTS BOOM WITHOUT EYELETS



KILMORE BOOM WITH DELRIN EYELET

DEXTER TERMINAL TACKLE, made to the highest standards from the finest quality materials.
THE CLEMENTS AND KILMORE BOOMS shown incorporate a Delrin eyelet which is virtually unbreakable under normal working conditions yet offers a silky smooth action. Both the Clements and Kilmore Booms have a "waisted" link which retains the weight when the clip is secured.



CLEMENTS BOOM WITH DELRIN EYELETS

DISTRIBUTED BY:
East Anglian Rod Co
Henry Aiken Ltd

Peter Lyons Wholesale
Dutton & Co Ltd

Percy Wadhams Ltd
Brent (Hailsham) Ltd

Pegley Davies
Sevenoaks Ang Supp.

DEXTER PRODUCTS
ASK FOR THEM
BY NAME!

The Fishing Gazette reports says . . . "the rings equally distribute any strain to which it may be subjected, thus enabling one to use a boom long enough to prevent the hooks entangling with the line without fear of bending or snapping. It combines with this an absolutely straight pull, the advantage of which cannot be over estimated. They are made of German silver throughout, and are of 3 sizes – 8 inches, 10 inches and 12 inches."

The one big difference between the 'Tony' boom and those that would later replace it here is the larger number of eyes used giving the effect of a short length of fishing rod as opposed to the Clements which had two eyes, and the Kilmore with just one, all to be replaced in the 1970's by plastic booms such as the Zipp Slider and the longer tubi-boom

RECORD CATCH & COMPLAINTS OF COMMERCIAL PRESSURE

Report from The Fishing Gazette November 1907

One of the finest catches of fish ever made off Worthing Pier was taken by a well known Worthing angler recently. In all he took 37, a mixed bag, in which Plaice predominated. On another day he caught 22, including a fine Silver Bellied Eel.

This prompted the following reply.....

Your comment must evidently mean that his record was the number stated, but it is amusing to read, the previous week, 42 were taken in one tide, it was more the rule than the exception to take 60 a tide, and I have known over 100 to be caught on line from the pier. Since there has been so much netting with trammels and seines done, the fishing has, close in, been rather off. Three friends of mine, while fishing from a boat this last summer, caught 181 Bream, Whiting, and Pollack in an hour, and the whole catch that day amounted to 1½ cwt. This year has been exceptionally good for Bass – mostly caught from the beach – an 11 pound Bass being the best that I have noted. There have been numerous catches of smaller fish.

PW Comment: Similar in some aspects and different in others to what we find today. Similar in the sense of commercial pressure, but different in the fact that sustained pressure seemingly dating back to Victorian times and beyond has now finally taken its toll on everything with any value and fins.

THE MALLOCH REEL



Despite Malloch being a company in its own right, the Malloch reel I am discussing here is a concept as much as it is a branded piece of kit. A very similar concept in fact to the Alvey Side Cast reel which is still widely used in Australia to this day, both of which are of the 'turn table' design.

To all intents and purposes, it's a centre pin reel, but with what will be the outer facing edge of the spool machined with a slope, which when the spool is rotated through 90 degrees to be forward facing, allows line to flow freely from the spool during casting, in effect operating like a fixed spool reel. The spool is then rotated back into the centre pin orientation for cranking.

A very effective way of fishing were it not for the fact that as with the traditional fixed spool reel, line leaves the spool in coils which can result in twisting and tangles when the tension is removed leading to slack line bird nesting.

The Malloch reel was developed in Scotland in the 1880's and was subsequently 'copied' by other manufacturers, arguably the best known of which is the Australian Alvey company. For shore anglers it was a revelation allowing them to achieve greater distances with heavy cumbersome terminal tackle and baits. Popular right through the early part of the century, Irish legend Jack Shine even used one for some of his shore Porbeagle fishing in the 1960's (see Chapter 8).

PW Comment: I was given a brand new Alvey Side Cast reel to play with in the 1980's to see if it had any practical value on the modern UK boat fishing scene. So I took it out in my own boat to the north side off Lune Deep at the edge of Morecambe Bay to try for Tope which it handled very well, particularly as the up to date version I had came with a slipping clutch and ratchet. Where I found it to be particularly useful was for uptide fishing casting a large Mackerel bait. In fact, I still have the reel, though if I'm honest, it probably hasn't seen light of day since that trip.

MILWARD FISHING TACKLE



PW Comment: I can well remember using Milward fishing tackle myself in the 1960's and 1970's.

BUMPER BALLYCOTTON BAG

An extract from F. D. Holcombe's book Modern Sea Angling records a catch of 2 Common Skate at 147 and 119 pounds, 5 Cod to 23 pounds, 17 Ling to 26 pounds and 12 Conger to 23 pounds, plus Pollack, Bream, Gurnards and Haddock of unspecified weight, as a single day, single angler 1,000 pounds plus haul fishing with 2 rods from a boat out from Ballycotton in 1907.

PW Comment: Considering the technology of the day in terms of tackle and boats, this rates as a spectacular catch by any standards. Something many of today's anglers can now unrealistically only dream of ever achieving.

STRANGE SHARK CATCH REPORT

A quote from the letters to the editor page published in The Fishing Gazette 1907.....

“On Thursday night (Dec. 12) one of our local boats, whilst fishing about a mile off the Helford River, caught a shark *Echinorhinus spinosus*, 7 feet 6 inches long, of about 4 cwt. I thought it would interest you, as one was caught in exactly the same place by a Mr. Fox, of Falmouth, many years ago. Should also like to say that in reading your paper of the week before last it was suggested that Weymouth was the only place on the south coast that Bass were caught in the winter months. I might say that I, as well as others, have caught 6 of 4½ pounds to 5 pounds each in half an hour a fortnight ago, and another local man caught 11 one evening, and large quantities have been taken all through the summer and autumn”.

NOTE: *Echinorhinus spinosus* is one of the more primitive members of the shark family. Otherwise known as the Bramble Shark, it is normally only found at depths between 200 and 500 fathoms.

Mr. CHRISFIELD’S 200 POUND SKATE

Despite solid wooden rods, centre pin reels, horse hair lines and eventually linen lines being the sea anglers’ weapons of the day, fish which sea anglers 100 years on would be impressed with were being targeted, hooked up, and landed by well heeled pioneers, many of whom were members of the British Sea Anglers’ Society (BSAS).

One member in particular, a Mr. Chrisfield fishing in the company of several other BSAS members at an unspecified location in Ireland (probably Valentia or Ballycotton), brought a skate quoted at 200 pounds to the scales. A fish with quoted dimensions of 84 inches in length and 65 inches across the wing tips. Measurements which when fed into the modern day skate estimation chart used by most sea anglers in the 21st century, and assuming it to be a female on account of its large size, gives it an estimated weight of 186 pounds, which is still an impressive specimen.

BIG DEAL THRESHER

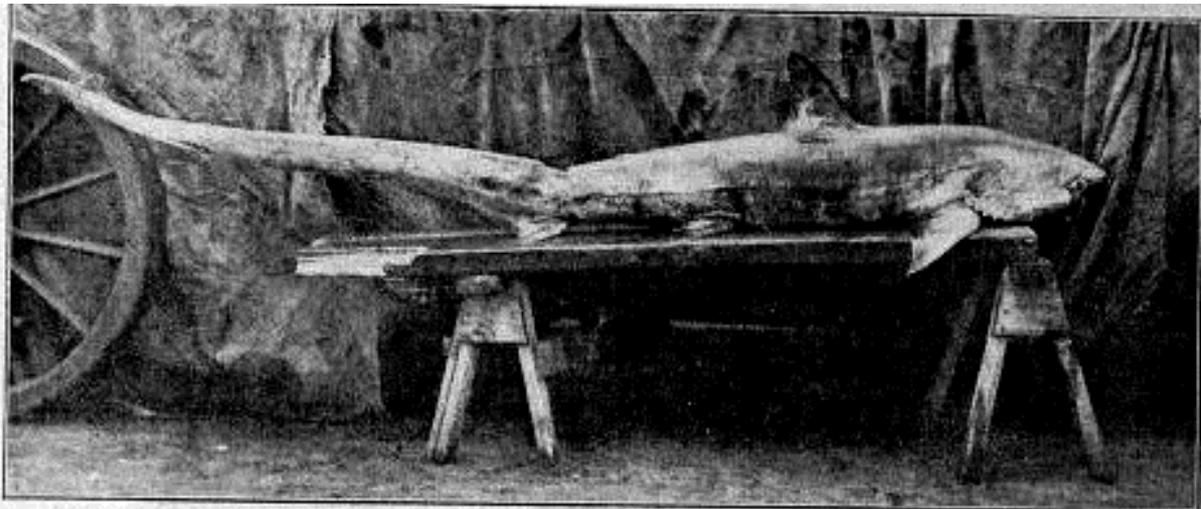


Photo by

[C. Hussey, Deal.

THRASHER SHARK RECENTLY CAUGHT IN THE HERRING NETS AT DEAL.

Length, 11ft.; weight, 3½cwt.

(Published by the courtesy of the Editor of the *East Kent Advertiser*.)

MALLOCH'S CELEBRATED GREENHEART RODS

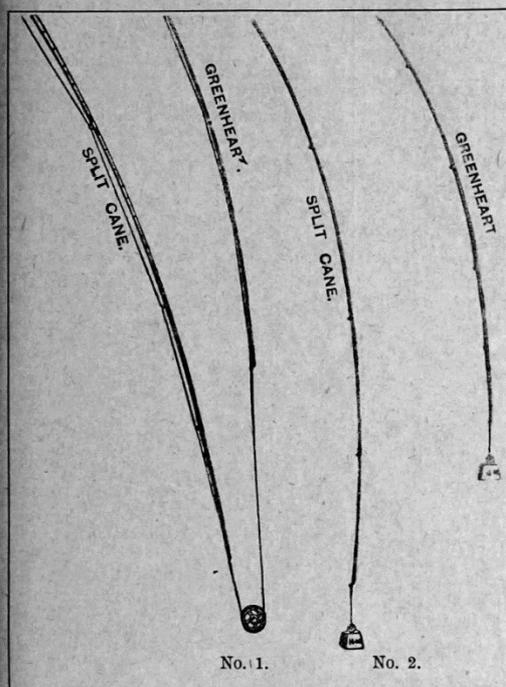
A mix of testimonial, advertisement, and self praise was delivered in this extract from the October 1907 issue of the Fishing Gazette, supposedly weighing up the pros and cons of wood choice for rod building. Malloch's were obviously using Greenheart and were keen to suppress any sort of competition from split cane, supporting their case with a mix of negative advertising and some supposedly 'scientific' artwork based on field trials either made by or on behalf of the company.

OCTOBER 12, 1907

THE FISHING GAZETTE

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MALLOCH'S CELEBRATED GREENHEART RODS.



As many misleading statements have lately been published relative to the difference between Greenheart and Split Cane Rods, I have on many occasions put them to the test, and in no test have I found Split Cane to equal Greenheart. If reference is made to the above illustrations, which are from actual photographs taken by myself, it will be seen how they behave under the tests.

No. 1 Illustration is that of a Split Cane and Greenheart Rod of same length and weight placed in same position with line attached to both rods and then passed over a revolving wheel. As much strain as the rods could stand was now put on, when it was found that the Greenheart had pulled down the point of the Split Cane—the difference amounting to 10½ in.

No. 2 Illustration shows the same Rods with a 14 oz. weight attached to each, the Greenheart in this instance proving 8½ in. the stronger. The above figures are sufficient to show that Greenheart is much superior to Split Cane as a Rod-making material.

The advantages which anyone using Greenheart Rods of my make will find are the following:—

- (a) Greenheart being far more powerful than Split Cane of equal length and weight a longer line can be cast with greater ease.
- (b) Greenheart is more pleasant to fish with; is far quicker in striking; consequently fewer fish are missed.
- (c) Greenheart is more certain in hooking a fish, and when hooked the fish is landed much quicker, thereby saving valuable time when fish are rising.
- (d) Greenheart will cast a neater and lighter line with greater precision.
- (e) Greenheart will stand more wear and tear, is less liable to get out of order, and is very easily repaired.
- (f) Greenheart rods cost less than half the cost of Split Cane Rods.

All my Greenheart Rods are made from the finest selected wood, all balanced by myself. For style and finish I have seen no rods to equal them. During the last few years I have received numerous unsolicited testimonials from well-known and experienced anglers, testifying to the excellence of my Greenheart Rods.

TESTIMONIALS.

P. W., Sunderland.—“The rod fishes splendidly, and is much admired.”

W. W. R., Eastbourne.—“The 16 ft. rod you made for me I consider ‘a perfect rod.’”

T. B., Newcastle-on-Tyne.—“I thought I would like you to know how much I liked the Greenheart rod I lately purchased from you. I may say I never handled a rod with which one could get such good results with so little energy. In fighting fish in the heaviest of waters it was superb, having such backbone and power.”

MALLOCH'S KINGFISHER LINES.

These Lines are admitted by all anglers and the trade to be simply perfection. After being in use for years it is difficult to tell whether they have been used. The dressing is far superior to any other, and the tapers are correct. Testimonials coming in daily from all parts. The lines are sold by all the leading Fishing Tackle Dealers, or can be had direct from the maker.

The most suitable sizes for an

18 ft. Salmon Rod is No. 7 Double Tapered, 42 yds.	price	22/-
17 " " " " 6½ " " 42 " "	" "	22/-
16 " " " " 6 " " 42 " "	" "	20/-
15 " " " " 5 " " 42 " "	" "	18/-
14 " " " " 4 " " 42 " "	" "	16/6
13 " " " " 3 " " 30 yds., price	7/6; 40 yds.	10/-
10 to 12 ft. Trout Rod	2 " 30 " "	6/9; 40 " 9/-
9 to 10½ " " " 1 " 30 " "	" 6/0; 40 " "	8/-

The No. 3 Double Tapered Line is Specially Suitable for Dry Fly Fishing.

There are also 3 Sizes of Single Tapered Trout Lines kept in stock, viz:—

No. 1, 30 yds., price	5/0; 40 yds., price	6/8
No. 2, 30 " " "	5/8; 40 " " "	7/6
No. 3, 30 " " "	6/4; 40 " " "	8/6

MALLOCH'S PATENT BRAKE REEL.

3-inch Aluminium, weight 5½ oz. Price, 22/-

MALLOCH'S BEST No. 1 CHECK REEL.

2½-inch Gunmetal, weight 8½ oz. Price, 11/-

MALLOCH'S PATENT CASTING REEL.

Made in 5 sizes, for Trout, Salmon, Pike, and Mahseer Fishing.

MALLOCH'S PATENT FLY CASE.

For Salmon, Sea Trout, and Trout Flies. None genuine unless Malloch's—several worthless imitations on the market.

P.D.M. having continually during the last thirty years fished all the principal Rivers and Lochs in Scotland for the purpose of finding out the most suitable flies and tackle for the different lochs and streams, and also where the best sport and most comfortable quarters are to be obtained, for the benefit of anglers, they need have no hesitation to write for information for any district they intend to fish or for advice where to go.

PRICE LISTS FREE TO ANY ADDRESS.

P. D. MALLOCH, Fishing Tackle Manufacturer, **PERTH, N.B.**

[2]

PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE STRIPED BASS TO BRITISH WATERS

The Weymouth and Portland Standard, December 1907.....

“A most interesting and at the same time important discussion has taken place at the British Sea Anglers’ Society on the introduction of Striped Bass from America. Mr. R. B. Marston, the editor of the Fishing Gazette, is the advocate for their introduction into our waters as an experiment. Some important letters were published in the Fishing Gazette of Sept. 7 from the Hon. Daniel B. Fearing who is taking a great interest in getting the Bass safely to England, telling Mr. R. B. Marston that Mr. G. Bruce Ismay, of the White Star Line, would be pleased to grant free transportation to both fish and attendant.

Mr. Fearing stated that there may be more difficulty in getting the fish than was at first supposed, one or two authorities doubting whether they can be got except from California. On the other hand, Mr. Fearing has had an informal promise of help from the US Bureau of Fisheries, Washington. Mr. H. M. Smith, the acting commissioner, is hopeful that the waters at the head of Chesapeake Bay, where the Striped Bass is known to spawn, may yield just the kind of fish required. If obtainable at this point the fish could be shipped from New York to Southampton. The fish would come across in tanks in the charge of an experienced attendant. There will be no charge for the services of the bureau’s attendant.

This is certainly very generous on the part of the United States, and one which ought to be gladly accepted. The gentleman named above, and especially Mr. R. B. Marston, should have the thanks of all British Sea Anglers for at any rate trying to introduce another species in home waters. It is very difficult to obtain an account of the discussion from the angling papers, as they give very short account of the subject. The question that may be most important to Weymouth arose whether the temperature of the water on our coasts may be favourable to its breeding. Mr. Pickup, secretary B.S.A.S., and Mr. C. O. Minchin, who presided, from researches made seemed to show that it spawned in water of a higher temperature than it was possible to get on our coasts. The great point is that the subject is to be investigated further, and it is left in the hands of the committee if the scheme shall be supported by the society.



The temperature of the water is the great obstacle that seems to stand in the way on the introduction of the Striped Bass to English waters. This is the one item that should be dealt with in our locality. It is certainly the most likely. And ought at the same time to offer the best place along the whole of the English Channel coast where Striped Bass stand a chance of being successful. The advantages of the place and the temperature of the water should be pointed out both summer and winter. The assumption is the temperature of the water is already known, if not a series should be taken every month of the year for future reference.

The ideal place is probably the Fleet waters, on account of its naturalness and the quietness of its water, with the absence of all shipping. It is also the home par excellence of the English Bass, and if the feeding habits of the Striped Bass is anything similar there is an abundance of food supply. The purity of its water, the physical condition of the bottom, and the connection with the sea as a tidal water could be very well pointed out. There is also enough evidence to prove the Bass are in the locality in winter. A few items on the school Bass were given in the Standard of Nov 5, which may be used.

The taking of large Bass usually begins as early as March in the Fleet waters, and in the notes of last April the taking of them with live prawn was duly published. According to writers on Bass the returns of them is entirely to do with the rise in the temperature of the water. If such is the case, and as the time for their return is given above is much earlier than is recorded on other parts of the coast, it ought to prove the rise in the temperature of the water here is earlier than elsewhere. The theory held by the writer is that the Bass remain all the winter, which the notes of Nov. 5 tried to prove. Of course, we get an exceptionally mild winter compared with some parts of the coast, and this may play a most important part in the habits of a fish like the Bass.

It may be perfectly true the Bass differ somewhat in their winter habits here to other places, and the mildness of the weather may be the reason after all why they are taken right through the winter. That the Bass are taken in the winter here is beyond doubt, and that they are not taken in the winter in other parts of the coast is maintained by the authorities on the subject. Now in dealing with the question of the American Striped Bass in English waters, the difference mentioned about our own Bass in these parts could be very well pointed out as a great and important advantage over other parts of the coast.

Fish, like other animals, can adapt themselves to certain unforeseen circumstances until it becomes a part of their daily life. The writer has caught Bass this side of the dam on the first of the flood, and the fish apparently have been gathered there waiting for the tide to be high enough to carry them over. When the tide has allowed the fish to go over, and one can often watch this take place, they go off biting for a time. Often one has to wait until the very beginning of the ebb before they come on feed again. It may have been when the other kinds of sea fish which used to be caught in the backwater before the dam was placed there could not adapt themselves to going over, and, even if they did, found the water was too brackish to live in. This is only in accordance with the habits of many sea fish which cannot possibly live in or at any rate will not come where the water is too brackish. This is the conclusion arrived at on comparing notes with those who have had great experience with the place for years.

Weymouth Bay is another place where the Striped Bass may be liberated. The advantages could be very well worked out, such as the feeding ground of the English Bass, etc., the purity and temperature of its waters, and the large amount of food supply. If the subject should be entertained, the main thing is to choose the best place in the district where there is the most likely chance for the experiment to meet with success.

The Fleet waters has undoubtedly many natural advantages over the harbour, although many of us wish it was the other way about. In the Fleet waters there is no shipping, no dam, the water is not so brackish, of greater purity, and much larger. In Weymouth Harbour would the young fry get used to the shipping, surmounting the dam, and what is perhaps the most important, be able to survive the brackish water. It is not expected that the local experts will agree with all what is written in the notes, but it is simply done to offer a few suggestions, and perhaps food for thought to help on what to your humble is a most fascinating subject.

The notes have been written for a definite purpose, in order, if possible, to get the angling societies of the town to take up what may turn out ultimately a real bit of work. It appeals to me as most important, and where the three societies could be brought together to discuss the subject fully. His Worship the Mayor and the Angling Committee of the town council should be approached to call a meeting of all anglers. The affair need not be one sided, but all could work together for the good of the town. Why it is so important is that if the Striped Bass could be once successfully introduced into home waters what an inducement to anglers to come, besides the advertisement throughout the whole of the United Kingdom as the place where the Striped Bass was tried, even if a failure took place.

If an invitation was sent to the British Sea Anglers' Society, and also, to Mr. R. B. Marston, pointing out the great advantages as to climate, etc., and the locality where they are most likely to succeed, backed up by his Worship the Mayor and Corporation, and all the angling societies, it is more than

probable this locality may be one of the accepted places. Much has been said about doing good for the town as an angling centre, and this ought surely to be one way of doing a little, if someone will start the ball rolling.

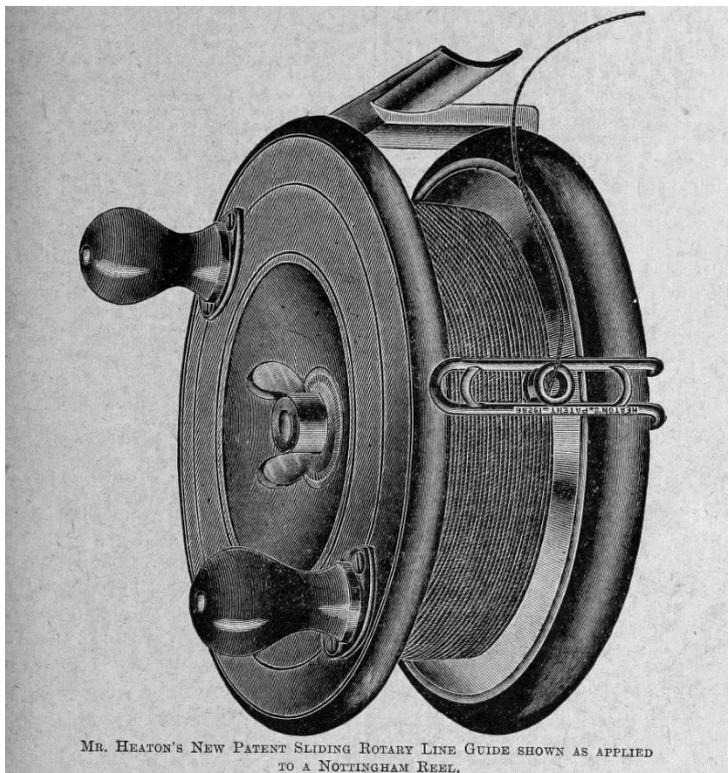
Mr. Pickup, the secretary of the B. S. A. S., has already paid a visit to the town when the first competition of the W. A. A. was held. Mr. A. K. Summers, one of the committee, comes regularly to fish for Bass both in the Fleet waters and at Portland, besides many of their members, so the place is very well known. It would be a great thing if Mr. R. B. Marston, the editor of the Fishing Gazette, could be induced to come here. If the B. S. A. S. should drop the scheme, Mr. R. B. Marston may still go on with it, especially if some such authority came to his aid.”

PW Comment: I can find no reference to this introduction actually having been made, which is perhaps as well in light of how other seemingly innocuous alien species of animals and plants introduced to other parts of the World in situations not adapted to them have turned out to be catastrophic.

Today of course such an introduction would be illegal and would almost certainly never get the right permissions, despite pleas to the contrary by Crispin Rogers and Tony Allen in Sea Angler Magazine in the 1976 (see Chapter 9). That said, if a fish should suddenly ‘introduce itself’ then that would be another matter, and there is evidence in the case of the Striped Bass to demonstrate that this has actually happened at least once.

In 2013 while fishing from Dover Breakwater, Martin White surprised everyone by catching a Striped Bass of 2 pounds 7 ounces which presumably had incredibly for a coastal species, somehow made its way across the Atlantic from the eastern seaboard of the USA to the UK.

THE SLIDING ROTARY LINE GUIDE



A device designed and produced by well known Birmingham based reel manufacturer Reuben Heaton, not dissimilar in operation to a multiplier level wind, but designed for and fitted to centre pin reels such as the example shown here which is a Nottingham Reel.

In operation, the line guide ring revolves as well as having sideways travel when line is either being wound on to or is leaving the drum. But that’s about as near as it gets to the multiplier level wind which travels automatically by way of a thread, so quite what its purpose is remains unclear from the illustration here. Heaton himself is quoted as saying that it “Does away with friction on the bars and sides of the reel and aids in winding in the line evenly”.

BASS FISHING 1907

Lest we forget, an excellent example, if ever it were needed of just how far British, and less so Irish Bass stocks have alarmingly plummeted since the close of the twentieth century is given in the following extract from The Fishing Gazette, August 1907. Quoting Bass catches from the Plymouth area in that year, the publication says.....

“Sport among the fish is good all round. The Bass are still plentiful; in fact, I do not remember any year when they have been feeding so well and been so plentiful as this year. A friend fishing off the rocks at the Rame Head one morning last week, had 26 fine Bass; and after a rest on the rocks for a few hours caught 13 more in the after part of the day. They were all nice big fish”.

PW Comment: One hundred years on and many Bass anglers would be pleased to record those statistics in a year, never mind a day.

WEYMOUTH BASS FISHING

Another Fishing Gazette extract to whet the palates of Bass anglers taken from a letter to the editor regarding Weymouth Harbour published in 1907.....

“Fishing in full swing, and good baskets are the order of the day. A lot of large Bass have been taken lately in the harbour, bottom fishing with squid as bait. Mr. A. Bleathman hooked 9 fish on Aug 30 but got broken up with 5 of them. He landed 4 which turned the scale to 16 pounds.”

STEEL RIBBED FISHING RODS

DECEMBER 28, 1907 THE FISHING GAZETTE i

NOW IS THE TIME
to send your favourite Rods to be Renovated and Strengthened by
“STEEL-RIBBING.”

No Rod is too weak and worthless for “Ribbing” to renovate successfully. It is simply a case of turning old and swoppy Rods into new and up-to-date stiff and strong weapons.

SEND US YOUR ROD AND WE WILL GIVE IT A NEW LEASE OF LIFE!!
We will report on it before we put it in hand.

We have been the recipients of thousands of testimonials from habitual users. The casting and killing powers of every rod can be increased by Steel-Ribbing, which does not add $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of weight to the rod.

HOLIDAY ANGLING REPORT FROM PENZANCE

Reporting in The Fishing Gazette in 1907, BSAS member Mr. H.T. Ashby talks of his exploits...

“I have much pleasure in expressing appreciation of both boat and boatman (W. Taylor). I could not expect to find better anywhere. The holiday, with all its drawbacks caused by the weather has been a most delightful one.....the abstract of the fish taken is as follows: 61 Pollack, 289 Bream, 878 Mackerel,

11 Conger, 45 Dogfish, 4 Ling, 6 John Dory (some very large fish), 5 Gurnards, 1 Hake, 52 Wrasse, 78 Bib, 15 Pouting, 1 Scad 1 Whiting and 1 Garfish”.

PW Comment: The column goes to recount other similar hauls from around the Penzance area. A sad but mouth watering snap shot of how things were within sailing or rowing distance of the coast.

SILK AND LINEN FISHING LINES

As a substitute for horsehair, silk fishing lines were introduced in 1908. Like horse hairs taken from the tail of the animal, silk threads still need to be woven or spun, with the number of threads used determining the finished diameter and breaking strain. The big difference was the length of the threads, which in the case of silk are obviously much longer, far stronger, and could be spun by machine, unlike horsehairs which very often were collected and hand-woven by the angler himself.



There were however still some drawbacks, principle amongst these being the fact that silk needed to be rinsed and dried on open spool after each use, and protected so far as was possible from ultra-violet damage rendered by sunlight. Also, because silk is an animal product, care was needed to protect it from bacteria and mould in the same way that linen lines for big game fishing needed to be cared for following their introduction around the same time.

Besides being more reliable and not having to be produced by hand, what linen and silk fishing lines also did was to improve the average anglers catch potential, because they could be cast up to three times as far as horsehair. But yet again, there was a down side. With

silk lines came the 'birds' nest', as greater distances also introduced the problem of over-runs leading to on spool tangles, lost terminal gear, and in the case of a particularly bad 'bird nest', the costly loss of the line itself.

THE LOSS OF ALDEBURGH PIER

Although the original plan had been to construct Aldeburgh Pier further to the south than actually would be the case, and to a design by Thomas Cargill (despite J. W. Glover also being credited) between 1876 and 1878, the structure was actually built opposite Moot Hall with a proposed length of 567 feet, only half of which was ever built. This was subsequently damaged by a drifting vessel leading to the remainder of the structure being demolished during the 1880's, with the final remnants of the rusting pier head removed in 1908.

THE FIRST EVER STATE PENSION PAID

Not a direct fishing story, but an inclusion that would have had a profound effect on an older angler's ability to fish was the introduction of the state pension in January 1909, which for the first time in the history of the working man linked income to leisure time.

To qualify you had to be 70 years old, which in the early part of the twentieth century was quite some achievement in itself. You also had to have been a British subject for a qualifying period (sounds familiar), which in this case was 20 years. Having achieved all of that, you could expect to receive the sum of 5 shillings per week, which roughly equates to £28.63 in 2018, so the word 'generosity' hardly applies. But a move in the right direction none the less.

EARLY MULTIPLIER

SUZUKI OUTBOARDS

A weaving loom production company operated by Michio Suzuki in the small Japanese coastal village of Hamamatsu is the unlikely setting for the founding of one of the enduring names in outboard motor development and production throughout the twentieth century. That's where the Suzuki outboard engine giant had its beginnings back in 1909, primarily producing equipment for the silk industry, before diversifying into producing small cars.

Then after WWII came motorcycles, starting with small clip on petrol engines to power pedal cycles. Eventually, more than 50 years later, further diversification led to the development of Suzuki outboard engines, starting in 1965 with the D55 which was a 5.5 hp unit, followed by Worldwide exports a year later (see Chapter 10 for modern era update).

THE LOSS OF SOUTHBOURNE PIER

At a cost of £4,000, work on the 300 foot long Southbourne Pier began in 1888 with Mr. A. Smith its designer and Mr. E. Howell the contractor, leading up to an opening date later that same year. The plan was to use it for sailings between Southbourne and Bournemouth. Twelve years on in December 1900 and January 1901, the promenade, sea walls, and the pier were almost completely destroyed by two big storms leading to what remained of the pier being demolished in 1909.

THE VMC HOOK COMPANY

French hook manufacturer VMC can trace its historical association with fishing hooks back to 1796 when the Viellard family appointed Jean-Baptiste Migeon as manager of its steel forge at Grandvillars. In 1835, Migeon's daughter married Juvenal Viellard, whereupon their initials were combined to give the company its globally renowned name of VMC.

For our purposes here, the story really takes off in 1910 with the French becoming increasingly aware of the hook making expertise and market cornering capabilities of British hook makers based in and around Redditch in the Midlands.

To compete, they set about 'poaching' around a dozen families associated with the trade to relocate to France for the business of establishing a new hook making venture which by 1950 was dominant in France, later becoming VMC Peche in 1973, and VMC Europe in 1995, followed by an amalgamation with Finnish lure maker Rapala to form the Rapala-VMC Corporation in 2000.

FLEETWOOD VICTORIA PIER



Initial plans for a pier at Fleetwood proposed in 1892 by Richard Edmunds were rejected and later resubmitted in revised form by G. T. Lumb in 1909, whereupon they were finally accepted, leading to the opening of the 492 foot structure in 1910, followed by the addition of a pavilion in 1911. Further improvements came in 1930 and 1938, and the construction of a decking in 1946.

Unfortunately, the scourge of British piers, fire, badly damaged the structure in 1952, with a major rebuild starting the following year. A further £70,000 was spent on a facelift in 1972. Then in 2000, after going into liquidation, owners Fleetwood Amusements Ltd. closed the pier and in 2003 sold it on to Persian Leisure for redevelopment, after which it reopened the same year, then closed again 4 years later for safety reasons with Persian Leisure selling it on to a local business man who wanted to build flats on it. Unfortunately, in 2008, fire struck again, after which Wyre Borough Council ordered that it be demolished.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Sea & Coast Fishing, with special reference to calm water fishing in inlets and estuaries (1901) by Frederick George Aflalo.

British Salt Water Fisheries (1904) by Frederick George Aflalo and Robert Bright Marston.

Sea Fishing for Amateurs (1904) by Frank Hudson. (PW Comment: Available to read in its entirety free of charge online. <http://archive.org/stream/seafishingforam00hudsgoog#page/n48/mode/2up>)

The Salt of my Life (1905) by Frederick George Aflalo.

Practical Sea Fishing: A handbook for sea anglers (1905) by P.L. Haslope. (PW Comment: Available to read in its entirety free of charge on line.

<http://archive.org/stream/practicalseafis01haslgoog#page/n12/mode/2up>)

Big Game at Sea (1908) by Charles Frederick Holder.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

The Anglers News and Sea Fishers Journal.

The Angler: The Fish.

CHAPTER THREE – 1911 TO 1920

Quite a short chapter in terms of tackle development and angling catches, and no wonder, with almost a half of the decade given over to war with such terrible loss of life on both sides. Understandably, most technical and scientific effort of the day would have been directed towards the ‘machinery’ of that war, and with such a massive chunk of the young male population ‘removed’ from the angling equation by the time the whole sorry affair was over, is it any wonder things stagnated.

The only plus point, and no compensation whatsoever for the carnage throughout Europe, was that fish stocks were given a brief respite to recover through fewer anglers taking fish from the shore, and fewer commercial boats operating offshore, either through government requisitioning, or the fear of German patrol boats and submarines.

THREE FIGURE HALIBUT AND SKATE

The Daily Express, Monday 19th June 1911 reported that a Mr. W. Harrison who is a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society made a remarkable catch of fish with rod and line while on a visit to Valentia Island, County Kerry. His combined one man one day total which weighed in at a staggering 935 lbs included a Halibut of 121 pounds and a Skate of 186 pounds.

RAILWAY FISHING HOLIDAYS 1911

South Eastern and Chatham Railway

**Holidays with the Rod
By River & Sea**

RIVERS: Where to Fish

STOUR
Noted for large roach and bream, and also holding perch, rudd, and pike. Stations: Grove Ferry and Sturry.

MEDWAY
Excellent bream, roach, and chub fishing. Stations: Yalding, Wateringbury, East Farleigh, Tonbridge, &c.
The STOUR is EASILY reached by visitors staying in MARGATE, DEAL, RAMSGATE, &c.
Cheap day tickets from Local Stations to GROVE FERRY and STURRY STATIONS on the river.

BANK and BOAT FISHING

SEA: Where to Fish

DEAL
"The Mecca of Sea Anglers."—(*Angler's News*.) The great autumn resort for anglers from all parts of the country.

DOVER
Good in summer for pollack, pouting, &c., and in autumn for whiting and flat-fish. Excellent pier-fishing.

FOLKESTONE
Capital for pouting, conger, bass, pollack, and flat-fish. Large baskets often to be had.

HERNE BAY
Many bass about in summer. Excellent whiting, pouting, codling, and flat-fish angling. Very large toper sharks in summer.

RAMSGATE
Good summer bass-fishing, and pouting, flat-fish, codling, etc., to be caught. Splendid autumn fishing for cod and whiting.

BROADSTAIRS
Good autumn fishing. Large plaice numerous.

MARGATE
Famous for grey mullet. Good for bass, codling, flat-fish, whiting, etc.

PIER and BOAT FISHING

For full particulars of cheap tickets and train service from London see Holiday Programme. FRANCIS H. DENT, General Manager.

From the latter end of the nineteenth century through into the first few decades of the twentieth, the expansion of the railway network played an absolutely vital role in the ongoing development and popularity of sea angling. It needs to be said that train tickets were an integral part of many sea anglers kit, rated as important as hooks and bait, for without reliable transport to the coast, sea angling would not have been available to working people living as little as a few miles inland.

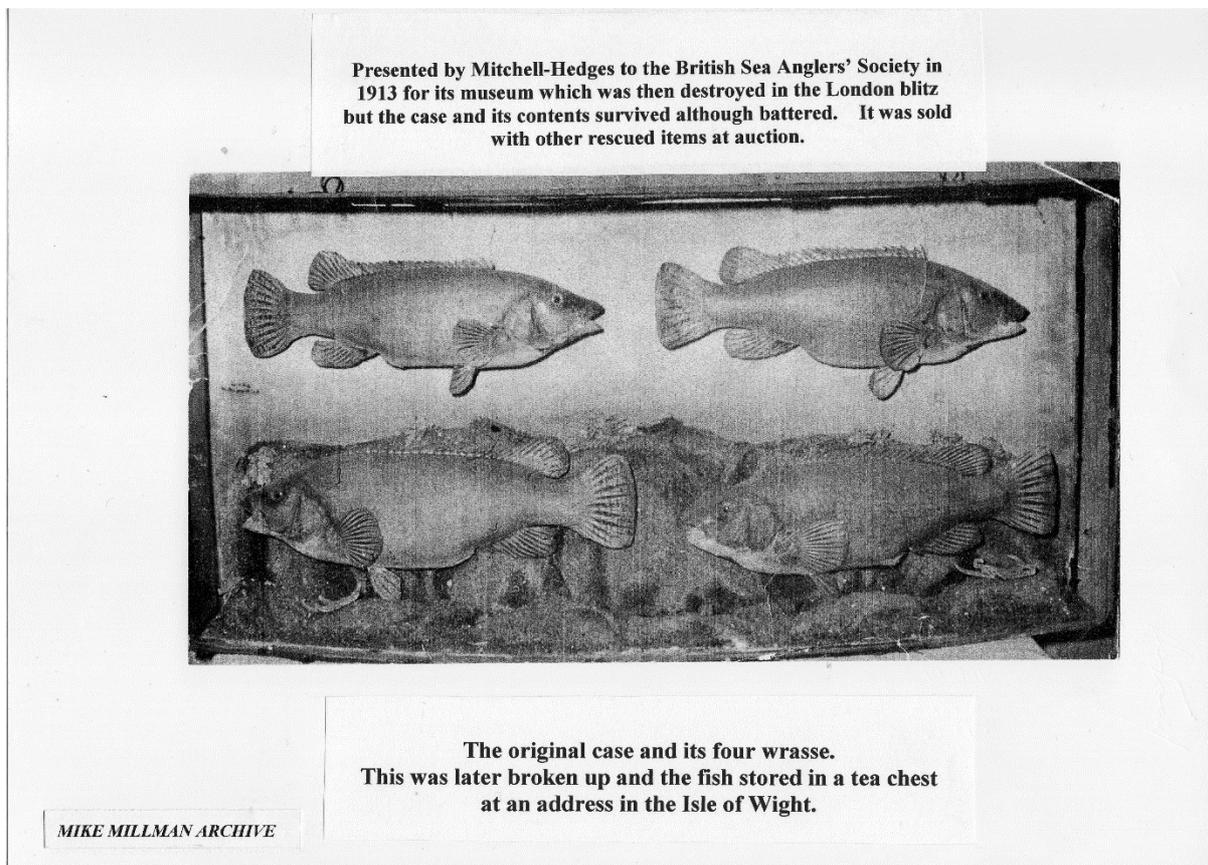
Rail operators were quick to realise this and cash in by offering railway angling holidays from inland destinations to coastal locations where anglers were keen to visit, with the knock-on effect of a boost in earnings to all manner of other people such as guest house owners, boat operators, bait diggers and all the rest. Something authorities today should take heed of today when they close piers and promenades to anglers, overcharge or stop small boat owners using launching slips, then do nothing to conserve fish stocks despite the weight of scientific evidence suggesting otherwise. Authorities should be more aware of what history is telling them and heed the lessons of the past.

MICHELL HEDGES 'RECORD' BALLAN WRASSE

In the first edition of his book 'Modern Sea Angling' in 1921, F. D. Holcombe, Hon. Secretary of the British Sea Anglers' Society (BSAS) gives the first published reference to a remarkable catch of large Ballan Wrasse made by F. A. Mitchell-Hedges some years earlier in 1912. Holcombe writes....

"Formerly it used to be thought by sea anglers that the extreme limit of size which this fish [Ballan Wrasse] attained was about 7 lbs or 8lbs; but we have had to revise our ideas on this point, for a few years ago Mr. F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society, astonished his fellow members by sending to the society's headquarters in Fetter Lane a splendid case of four stuffed Wrasse, all caught by him off Looe, and weighing respectively 12¾ lb., 12 lb., 11½ lb., and 10¾ lb".

Following on from this, in 1957 when earlier piecemeal efforts at record keeping were all brought under one roof, the largest of the Mitchell-Hedges quartet was awarded British record status. However, controversy would dog not only this specific record inclusion, but the claimed weights of all four fish in that glass case.



Frederick Albert Mitchell-Hedges was never far from controversy in all aspects of his life. Thought to have been the real life template for fictionary archaeologist and explorer Indiana Jones, Mitchell-Hedges discovered the 'real' crystal skull around which the 2008 movie Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull is built.

As we already know, he was a keen angler, well impressed by the fighting qualities of the Ballan Wrasse which he singled out for special attention, fishing a heavy ground mark in 18 feet of water about 400 yards to the south-west of Looe Island in 1912, leading up to the cased fish presentation to the BSAS, a piece of history which had been thought lost during the bombing of Fetter Lane by the Germans in WWII.

And that it was thought was the end of that, until Mike Millman and Donovan Kelley separately began researching the subject. Mike Millman's article was subsequently read by Norman Ballard of the Vectis Boating and Fishing Club at Ryde on the Isle of Wight who contacted him saying the case and its contents were intact at the club's headquarters, sparking off yet more controversy in the 1960's (see Chapter 8).

STEEL FISHING RODS



With fibreglass still some 30 years away, and fishing rods made from solid wood unpredictable at times due to the nature of the particular length of wood chosen, in an effort to bring some predictability to the situation, the Horton Manufacturing Company introduced the all steel fishing rod in 1911.

Unfortunately, what they also brought to the proceedings was more than cancelled out by the fact these were heavy and inflexible, much to the dissatisfaction of the angling markets they were aimed out. So much so, that by the 1940's production had ceased altogether

FOOTNOTE: Obsolete maybe, but collectible most certainly.

DEAL & WALMER 7th ANNUAL PIER FESTIVAL

The importance of piers to sea angling has already been flagged up in Chapter 1 entitled 'Inheritance'. With tackle in a fairly poor state of development at a time when every major coastal town it seems felt the need to build an iron pier, the inability to cast distances at that time was compensated for by the reach of the pier, which in the case of Southend at 7,080 feet built in 1890 was well over a mile.

With a more modest length of just over 1,000 feet, Deal & Walmer Pier was never the less an important asset on the sea angling scene. A pier where angling was not only allowed, but encouraged and catered for, as demonstrated by the fishing of 7th annual pier festival organised by Deal and Walmer Angling Association in November 1911 which attracted 258 competitors.

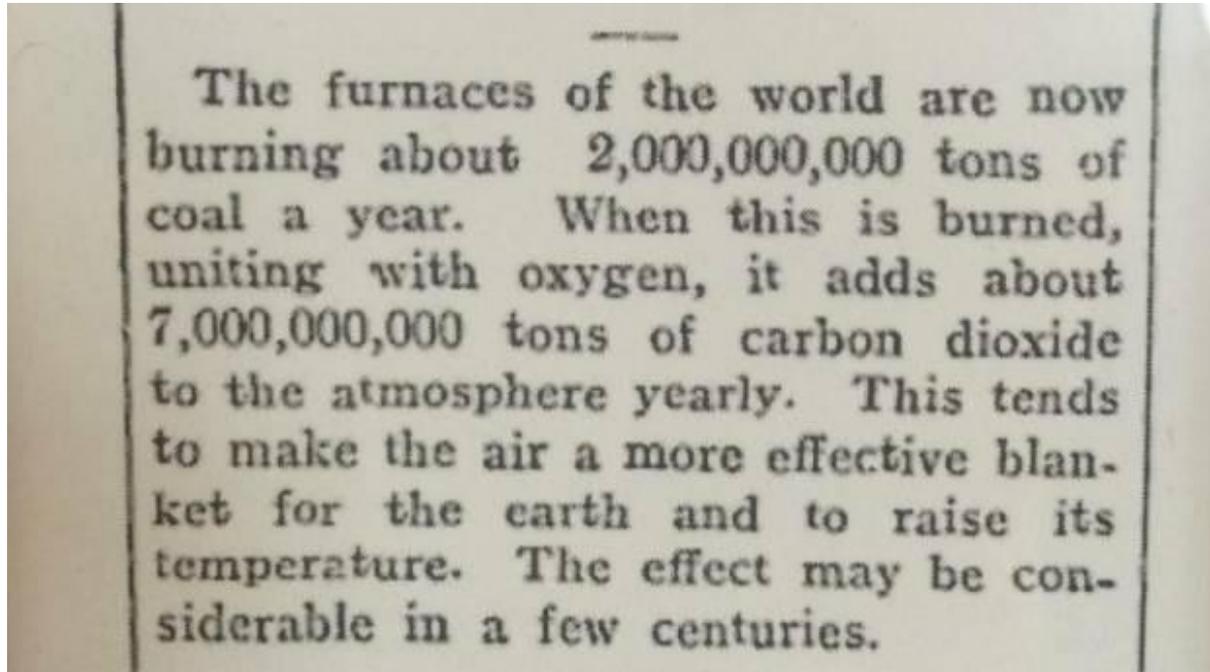
Heavy weather unfortunately put a bit of a dampener on things, with both the organisers as well as those taking part disappointed with the aggregate weight of 'only' 1,102 pounds of sizeable fish brought to the scales, which I have to say, by today's standards, despite the advances in tackle and tactics, would be seen in a very much more positive light.

WARNING OF CATASTROPHE THROUGH FOSSIL FUEL BURNING

Climate change, fossil fuel burning, and their effect on sea angling are going to be a recurring theme throughout the decades of the twentieth century and beyond. For some reason, people think it's an effect

triggered around end of the twentieth on into the twenty first century, primarily because it took until then for the main news agencies to get hold of it.

The truth is that the problems has its origins way back in the early days of the industrial revolution. And while it is a cumulative problem and therefore needs time to manifest itself, as far back as Victorian times, scientists were starting to observe and warn of its potential consequences.



People were equally concerned with acidification caused by the creation of carbonic acid from excess carbon dioxide being absorbed by the sea which has an effect on the food chain. Shellfish in particular which use calcium to form their shells.

Chemical reactions between the acid and calcium is dissolving these shells away. And let's also not forget the planktonic stages of these animals which are crucial in nurturing most species of fish in the early stages of their development. No plankton, no fish.

So, the threat is very real, with scientists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century very well aware of the growing problem of both this and rising sea temperatures, as the 1912 news report above high lighting the catastrophic effect of fossil fuel burning on climate change from New Zealand's Rodney & Otamatea Times and Waitemata & Kaipara Gazette very clearly shows.

This article wasn't the first to suggest that our love of coal and other fossil fuels would have detrimental consequences for the environment that could lead to climate change and the upending of life's balance within our oceans.

Although human beings at that time were not consuming massive amounts of fossil fuel or emitting large volumes of carbon dioxide by today's standards, by the early twentieth century, levels were not negligible either.

For example, between 1900 and 1940, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels had increased from 295 parts per million (ppm) to 310 ppm resulting in an estimated global rise in temperature over the intervening period of between 0.1 and 0.15 degrees centigrade. Insignificant as that might sound, it is still a meaningful measure upon which to build, as is currently the case a century on.

FIRST BLUE FIN TUNA SIGHTING IN NORTH SEA

So far as can be ascertained, the first recorded sighting of a Tunny or Blue Fin Tuna *Thunnus thynnus* in what would very soon become the World's number one BFT Tuna hot spot, the North Sea, was made in 1912. A time when even if they had been caught and brought one ashore, other than visitor 'peep show' curiosity, Tuna had absolutely no monetary value whatsoever.

A change in attitudes was still a couple of decades away, and then only in the fish's value as an angling adversary. Yet by today's standards they were quite literally sitting on a fortune and didn't realise it, which was perhaps as well, as the BFT inclusions coming up in all subsequent Chapters right through until the end of the 1950's almost certainly would have taken a very different course.

HUGE TUNA WASHED ASHORE POOLE HARBOUR

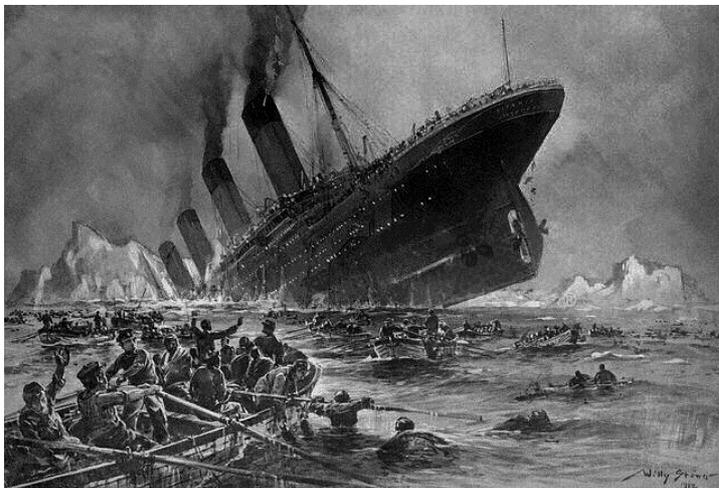
While the North Sea, and in particular that stretch along the Yorkshire Coast was about to become Tuna heaven, from what we know of their instinctive traditional migration patterns today, Blue Fin Tuna were yet to be discovered at many other locations around the British Isles, and along Ireland's west coast in particular.

Back in 1912 that was far from being reflected in the scientific wisdom of the day. Patterns had still to emerge, often based on isolated encounters, one of which was a large Tuna of 728 pounds found washed up on a mud bank inside Poole Harbour in November of 1912.

MARINE RADIO

Radio for use on ships, though not VHF radio which would eventually become the standard, was introduced in the early part of the twentieth century, primarily for passenger telegrams. Nothing about it was standardised, such as watch times, frequencies, or even a requirement to carry it at all. All of that would change following the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912 with the loss of some 1,500 lives.

Things however could have been far worse were it not for the efforts of the ships two radio officers who did eventually manage to summon assistance from some (though not the nearest) other vessels in the area. The radio officer on the closest vessel had just gone off watch after a 12 hour shift. By the time rescue boats arrived on the scene the Titanic was gone, though as a direct result of the radio calls that were picked up, around 700 passengers and crew were saved.



The consequences of the Titanic disaster prompted The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea to be convened, leading to a treaty requiring all shipping companies to follow a prescribed uniform set of rules regarding ships radio. These included strict carrying requirements, and radio-watch keeping hours being standardised.

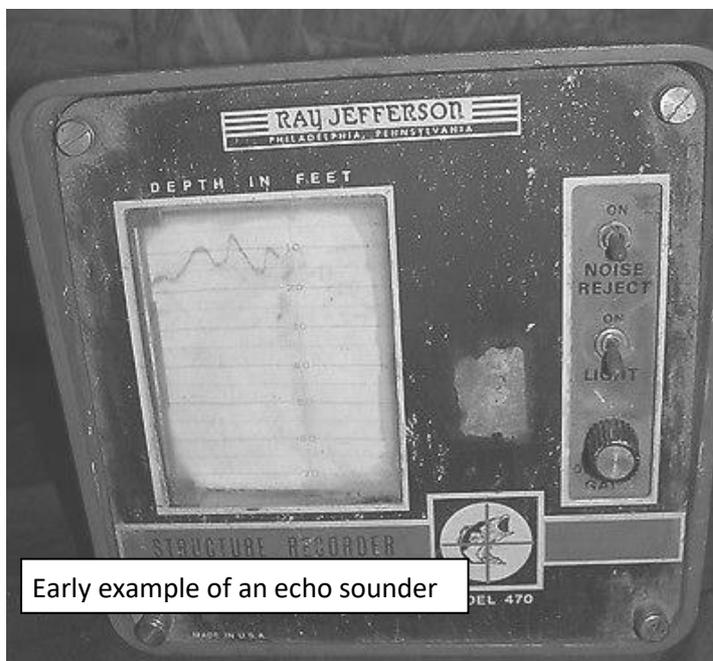
Message priorities and distress frequencies were also standardised, and radio silence periods were introduced providing the foundations upon which the rules and

equipment for modern VHF radio were built, making movement at sea a whole lot safer today, as I know from my 40 years and more as a small boat angler working from the open beach of a west facing piece of the Lancashire Coast.

THE FIRST ELECTRONIC ECHO SOUNDER

The value of echo sounding will not be lost on boat anglers, and small boat anglers in particular, who rely on it both for safe passage and for the pin pointing of subsurface fish holding areas such as gullies, wrecks, reef pinnacles and the like.

Prior to WWI, all depth sounding on ships, including naval vessels, was still being done with a lead weight tied to the end of a line - a much sought after job on board ship if you could blag it because it didn't involve too much hard work, hence the term 'swinging the lead'. Another related naval term in regular 'civi-street' use is unfathomable, relating to depths unable to be reached with the weighted line leading to its use for things about which very little can be said.



Early example of an echo sounder

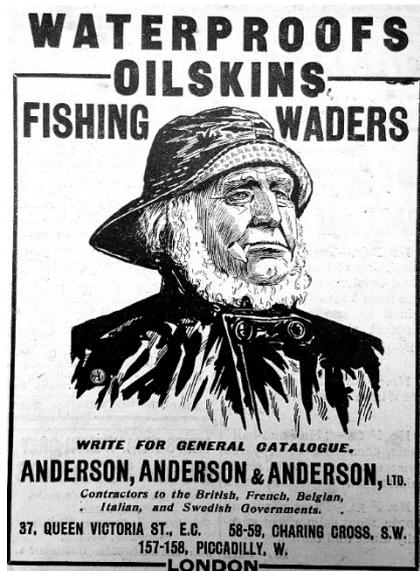
Around that time, experts were seeking improved ways of charting water depth, the finding of submerged objects within the water column, and plotting the sea bed, particularly with the onset of WWI and the threat to shipping posed by German submarines, or visa-versa if you were on the other side.

As a result, a working version of the electronic echo-sounder first became a reality just before the war, when in 1913, German physicist Alexander Behm was granted the first patent for the device, despite the fact that Norwegian inventor Hans Sundt Berggraf had published details of the same invention in 1904, as well as American scientist Reginald Fessenden working on a similar idea as Behm at the same time.

In the wake of the Titanic disaster a year earlier, Behm had also tried to create a device for the forward location of icebergs, but found that unlike the seabed which reflected sound waves well, icebergs did not reflect sound waves nearly as good and the idea was shelved. Behm would later go on to form the Behm Echo Sounding Company in order to commercialise his inventions, driven on to no small degree by the fact that he was also a very keen angler.

RUBBER WADERS AND OILSKINS

While you don't actually catch fish with waders, or for that matter the oilskins in the accompanying advertisement taken from a 1917 edition of the Fishing Gazette, anglers' fishing from the shore and launching small boats would find life very difficult trying to fish without them. A fact realised and acted upon at a very early stage in the history of sea angling, with the first attempt at making waders coming as far back as the 1850's by a company called Hodgman.



The first fully waterproof rubber waders didn't appear until 1912, subsequently getting better year on year with improvements in the quality of rubber production right through until the early 1940's, delivering the standard anglers are used to seeing today.

As for the waterproof clothing, that traditionally was made from heavy duty sail cloth soaked in various mixtures of oil, or waxed with linseed oil similar to a modern Barbour Jacket, to help it repel the water. Another approach devised and patented by Charles Macintosh employed a thin layer of rubber sandwiched between two layers of textured material. Styled into a cape of the type cyclists used to wear, things remained this way until suitable synthetic materials such as PVC and nylon appeared in the 1950's and 1960's.

IRISH COMMON SKATE RECORD

This is another long-standing Irish record, and without wanting to get political here, also one time British record, as the Republic's independence was still 8 years away when it was caught. A record set, in 1913 by T. Tucker while fishing out of Ballycotton, who landed what is listed as a Common Skate *Raja batis* of 221 pounds which still stands as an Irish record at the time of writing here.

Whether that should or will continue to be the case is another matter, as the species *Raja batis* no longer exists, a fact which British, Irish, Scottish and Welsh record fish recorders all continue to dodge (see Chapter 12).

In a nutshell, the species was split into two similar species with new scientific names in the early part of the twenty first century, one of which (the Flapper Skate) is said to be at its most abundant in Scottish and Northern Irish waters, and the other (the Blue Skate) around the Republic's southern and western coasts, with some possibility of geographical overlap between the two.

JOHNSON OUTBOARD MOTORS

Naute, USA, a tornado destroyed the factory, prompting a relocation to South Bend Indiana, and later to Waukegan Illinois, where the real operational history of the company begins.

Having gone the same way as other well known outboard motor manufacturers at various points in their history, the Johnson company was acquired by the Outboard Marine Corporation (OMC) in 1935. In 2000, OMC filed for bankruptcy, allowing Canadian firm Bombardier Recreational Products to take them over the following year, who then stopped selling the units under the Johnson name.

This is really rather sad as Johnson were synonymous with reliability as I can testify to having run the 9.9 version throughout much of the 1970's and 1980's, powering me to many memorable catches during Lancashire's 'Jumbo Cod' era.

THE FIRST DOMESTIC VAPOUR COMPRESSION REFRIGERATOR

A domestic innovation with profound sea angling implications, not the least of which are bait and catch longevity, something anglers and their spouses have often been at loggerheads over for many years. Though refrigeration using non-vapour compression systems had been in use since the mid-1750's, the year 1834 is the one credited with the first working 'modern' vapour compression refrigerator.

This was followed by the first commercial ice making machine in 1854. But we had to wait until 1913 for the first domestic vapour compression refrigeration unit to be produced; a further 3 years for Frigidaire engineers Nathaniel B. Wales and Alfred Mellows to come up with a self contained version, and a further 7 years for mass market availability courtesy of the US company Frigidaire, and the development of Freon as a refrigerant.

THE LOSS OF SCARBOROUGH PIER

Construction work began on the 1,000 foot pier at Scarborough in 1866 to a design by Eugenius Birch, with a delayed opening date of 1869 and a final cost of £12,135. Frequent steamer damage unfortunately brought about a number of financial headaches for the company. But it was the closure of the nearby 'cliff lift' that was the final straw, after which the pier was sold in 1889 to new investors.

Sadly, they too were unable to rescue things, and it was sold again in 1904. The structure was very badly damaged the following year during a severe storm, at which point it was decided not to repair or replace it. The entrance building hung on until 1914, at which point it too was gone.

BURNHAM-ON-SEA PIER

A twentieth century pier built in 1914 just before the start of WWI out of the traditional pier mould, despite being constructed from concrete, making it the first structure of its type throughout Europe. At a length of 117 feet, the intention had been to extend its length which unfortunately didn't happen, giving it another first as the shortest pier in Britain, comprising little more than a pavilion standing on piles.

IRISH CONGER RECORD SET

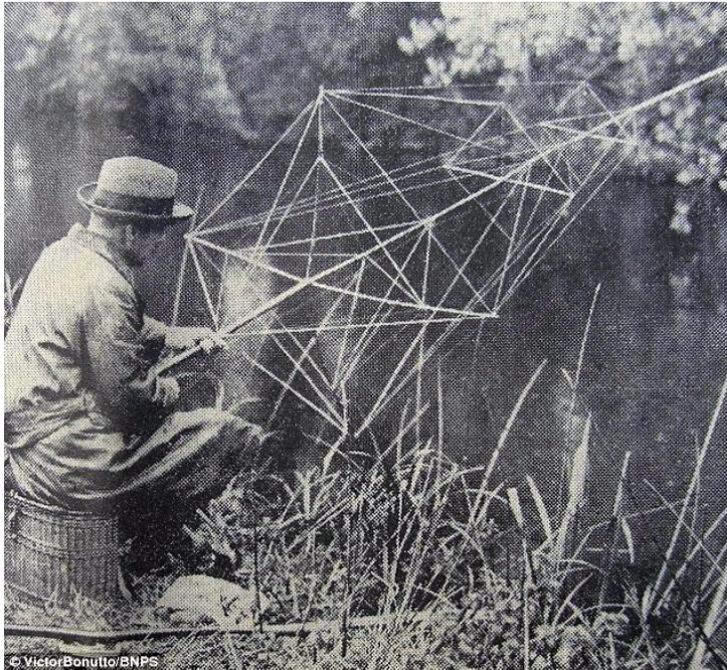
As with the Irish Common Skate record discussed earlier in this Chapter, the Irish Conger record set by J. Green at 72 pounds caught off Valentia in 1914 still stands at the time of writing, adding further fuel to a comment I made in the previous Chapter regarding Irish Pollack, that while the southern half of the Irish coast offers a wealth of opportunities for these and other species, for some inexplicable reason, it is unable to match England's West Country just across the way in terms of specimen sizes.

THE START OF WORLD WAR I

Like most people of my generation born in or just before the 1940's, I have personal recollections of relatives who served in WWI. My grandfather on my mother's side was in the Royal Horse Artillery, and my grandmother's brother, Rifleman Thomas Joseph Kenney of the 5th Kings Liverpool Regiment was killed in action aged 20 in France in 1916. One of millions killed, maimed or injured over the 4

years of hostility. A period in which angling was not only an afterthought, but there were too few people about fit and able to take part in it anyway.

There is however one very notable exception, and while this isn't a sea fishing story, due to the geography of the terrain being contested at the time it is still deserving of mention, as on the one hand it's simply a heart warming story, while on the other, it provided much needed protein at a time when luxuries such as fresh fish to eat were sparse to say the least.



This is a freshwater fishing story from the Mail Online dated June 2017, and one which because of its bravery and ingenuity was just too good to pass on. It tells how Private John Henry Hirst was excused trench duties at the height of hostilities during the terrible battle of Ypres in 1915 to sit out in the open under threat of shelling and sniper fire, fishing for Trout, Carp and Eels in true sea angling style as a food source for his colleagues using an ingenious rod, which when it was produced on the BBC's Antiques Roadshow was valued at a staggering £5,000. In addition, two cased stuffed Carp caught while serving on the western front were valued at a further £5,000.

The innovative rod made from a 17-foot piece of bamboo, relied on a network of cables to support a cross structure in the same way as a modern crane, which in turn supported the extra length of the central pole as a sort of forerunner to modern pole fishing. In 1928, Hirst actually patented the design, and went on to use the rod to win a string of medals as a competitive angler as captain of the famous unbeatable Bradford Team during the 1930's. But nothing ever came of the design, and all relating to it was forgotten until the rod reappeared on the television program.

THE SHAKESPEARE FISHING TACKLE COMPANY

Shakespeare Fishing Tackle was first marketed in the late nineteenth century and has been continuously available throughout the entire twentieth century. As such, an inclusion date chosen at random would at face value be as credible as any other.

With that in mind, I needed something specific to pin the company badge onto, which I found in 1915 when there was a name change from the William Shakespeare Jr. Company, which is not perhaps the smartest name to have in light of the well known literary works of the original and better known bearer of the name, none other than the Bard himself, to the current name, which is The Shakespeare Company.

It all started at Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1896, with avid angler William Shakespeare Jr. looking at ways of improving existing fishing reels for his own personal use, one of which was an innovation known as the level-wind for laying line on the spool evenly during the retrieve.

Shakespeare actually came up with a functional version, but decided to go with another version devised by one of his ex-employee's Walter Marhoff, which in theory they could have had as their own had

they been a bit more business savvy (see Chapter 2). Despite this oversight, a year later he set up the William Shakespeare Jr. Company, which by 1902 had grown to a dozen employees as American anglers began to embrace his considerable engineering and manufacturing skills.



The next memorable date on the time-line is 1908 when the company created the advertising slogan 'Built Like a Watch', which tells its own story. Next, we jump forward to the time slot we are located at here, which is 1915, though during WWI (the bit the Americans were involved in from 1917 to 1918), production was switched from out and out fishing tackle production to the making of fuses for mortar bombs and manufacturing automobile carburetors, both of which would have been precision engineering tasks. War over, and it was back to the core business once again, which by 1920 had expanded to the tune of more than 5,000 tackle outlets specialising in Shakespeare products across the United States.

The next 'landmark' of note was another reversal of manufacturing emphasis brought on by conflict, this time WWII. As with WWI, from a strictly European perspective, America entered the war 'late' coming in during 1941, though in fairness to the American people, good numbers of them enlisted as individuals in the armies of other countries involved in fighting axis forces, such as in Britain.

This is important in the story of Shakespeare in that it allowed the company to continue its work on fishing tackle development and production before being turned over to manufacturing parts for aircraft, jeeps and tanks. During that 2 years they introduced the 'Backlash Brake' and the Wonder Reel (see Chapter 5). Shakespeare engineers also completed design work on a new two gear direct drive reel concept, all of which was shelved until 1946.

Following their 'restart', Shakespeare took some quite major steps forward. Particularly in the field of fishing lines. Line production was moved to Esterville in Iowa and incorporated as the Soo Valley Company. Already involved in the manufacture of braided line and fly lines, the company became an early player on the monofilament nylon line scene after it had been invented and patented by DuPont in the mid 1930's and first made into fishing line by Ashaway (see Chapter 5), who also discovered and marketed the man-made fibre Dacron which superseded the early natural product braids.

On a number of levels, 1947 was a big year for Shakespeare. The Company had been in business for 50 years and had positively thrived. But the past was the past, and yet more innovation was required to secure the future. This came along in the guise of the fibreglass fishing rod.

With fibreglass now declassified and the war over, innovator Dr. Arthur M. Howald approached the Shakespeare Company with the idea of replacing metal and wood as the materials of choice for rod building, with fibreglass. Howald is credited as the developer of modern synthetic rods, a process he patented (see Chapter 6). But it was Shakespeare who were visionary enough to take the concept through to mass production.

The full catalogue of Shakespeare's innovation and introduction from the 1890's through to end of the twentieth century has been nothing short of amazing, and is far too extensive to browse through in its entirety here. More a case now of picking out the remaining bullet points, starting with the death of the

company founder in 1950. Gone but not forgotten as they say through his election to the National Sporting Goods Hall of Fame in 1959. All good stuff. But Shakespeare was still very much a company with an American focus. A fact it decided to do something about in 1965 when Noris Shakespeare Ltd. was established here in the UK.

Corporate stuff aside, the next 'big' thing on the angling agenda was the 1976 introduction of their Ugly Stik hollow glass rod, which using the Howald process, was able to be marketed with a clear tip and ferruleless construction. I've never quite grasped the importance of the clear tip, though from a marketing perspective it certainly helps the rod stand out visually from the rest. But it also needed to stand out in the attributes it could bring to the table, one of which was having that glass to glass joint.

I still have a 15 pound class Ugly Stik on my rod rack which has been and still is one of the better items of Shakespeare tackle so far as I'm concerned. A bit 'tippy' in its action, but great for getting the best out of lively sporting species such as Pollack and Ballan Wrasse.

Much of what else the company was involved in again tended to be either corporate, or American scene orientated. There was (and still is) tackle produced for the European market, which from the involvement I've had both using and field testing some of it, I would have to say puts it around the mid-range in terms of both quality and satisfying the market's needs. Taking account of the Company's early history, you could argue that there has been a degree of 'slippage'.

What you can't argue with is the part Shakespeare played in the innovative design and development of many concepts we take for granted today. That fact will never change. Whether Shakespeare as a company will change from what seems to be a desire to try to satisfy every strand of the fishing tackle market rather than concentrating on fewer 'high end' products with which others might struggle to compete is a decision for them.

HELP FOR HERO'S 1916

As a concept, 'Help for Hero's' which is so active today in supporting military personnel returning from conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq with life changing problems actually goes back over 100 years, a practical example of which was a pier fishing competition in October 1916 organised for 59 wounded WWI servicemen convalescing in the town, with bait and tackle provided free of charge, plus a meal afterwards at the pier pavilion.

THE PFLUEGER FISHING TACKLE COMPANY

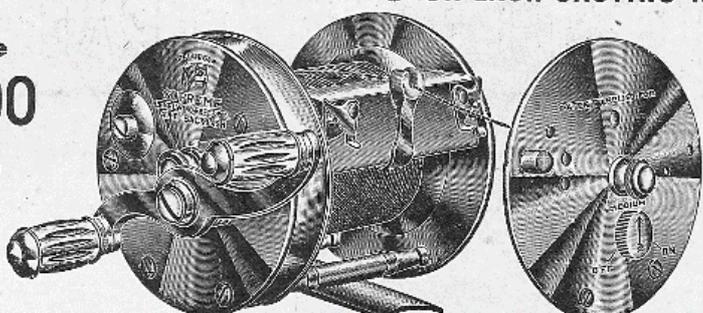
American fishing tackle company Pflueger doesn't have anything like the same standing in the UK as other US companies such as Berkley and Penn. If my recollections are anything to go by, they barely even managed to get a toe hold over here, and certainly not amongst serious anglers, for which reason they will get little more than a cursory looking at. On the other side of the Atlantic however, if the company's hype is to be believed, Pflueger was right up there with the other 'big boys', particularly in the first half of the century, despite its humble beginnings.

This was as the Enterprise Manufacturing Company making fishing hooks in Ohio in 1881 (supposedly established in 1864), which retained that particular focus until Ernest Pflueger Jr. took over from his father, giving the company its current name, and expanding its production into all aspects of fishing tackle, including the strand we on this side of the pond most associate with Pflueger, which is fishing reels dating back to the late 1890's. Well engineered and innovative fishing reels during the early decades of the twentieth century it has to be said.

I suspect the main reason why they didn't catch on and do nearly so well over here is that by the time UK anglers had 'switched on' to the multiplier concept and were prepared to embrace it, competitor companies in Europe were providing models far better suited to the fishing around the British Isles, which isn't casting small lures to surface and mid-water feeding species such as Large Mouthed Bass.

PFLUEGER-SUPREME LEVEL WINDING, FREE SPOOL and ANTI-BACK-LASH CASTING REEL---*Quadruple*

Price
\$25.00
Each



No. 1573 Silverine—1 3/4 Inch Pillar—2 1/4 Inch Disk.
This Reel will hold from 60 to 100 Yards, according to size of Line Used. Packed—One Reel in a Chamois Leather Bag, packed in a chamois lined hinge cover Sole Leather Case with one "Little Giant" Screw Driver.

"Pflueger-Supreme" Casting Reel is the result of many years of persistent experiment and effort on our part to place on the market a Reel which will have all of the essential features of a truly perfect Free Spool, Level Winding, Anti-Back-Lash Casting Reel.

Strong and durable, artistic in design and simple in construction.

LEVEL WINDING DEVICE is incased with a Stationary Housing so as to make it Sand and Water Proof and only works when reeling in the line, remaining stationary when casting, thus avoiding the frictional wear on the line and on the Level Winding Parts of the Reel. The Line Carrier in conjunction with the Trips will automatically pick up the Line at any point and wind it evenly on the Spool.

FREE SPOOL ATTACHMENT—The gears are always in mesh, thus avoiding all possibility of stripping the teeth as is the result of the "Throw In" and "Throw Out" device commonly used for this purpose. The Clutch automatically takes hold when reeling in and likewise automatically throws out when casting.

ANTI-BACK-LASH MECHANISM is contained within the Reel and attached to the Back Plate, automatically thumbs the Spool and stops the same the instant the bait strikes the water, thus preventing all possibilities of back lashing. The Adjusting Screw with Dial Regulator is so constructed that any tension desired can be secured by simply turning the Screw a fraction of a turn either right or left and can be thrown off altogether if preferred, thereby making the Reel an open Free Spool and Level Wind.

NOTICE: 400 Page Illustrated Catalog and Special Net Price List Sent Upon Request

THE ENTERPRISE MFG. CO. Dept. 10 **AKRON, O.**
ESTABLISHED 1864
LARGEST MANUFACTURERS OF FISHING TACKLE IN THE UNITED STATES

PFLUEGER PATENT JAN. 22, 1907.
DOUGLAS PATENT JUNE 16, 1908.
OTHER PATENTS PENDING



In 1916, the first Pflueger 'baitcast' reel made it on to the market, bait-casting being officially defined as the single handed casting of a relatively heavy, and usually artificial bait. In other words, lure fishing. According to Pflueger's own historical pitch, this was a benchmark moment for the fishing reel industry, and looking at photographs of some of their early models, it isn't difficult to see why they would say that.

All their early models look substantial and well put together. But unfortunately, not suited to the market over here other than in the hands of a Salmon angler throwing heavy lures across a river. That said, multipliers weren't the only finger Pflueger would eventually have in the reel manufacturing pie. In 1954 they began producing spinning reels, which in 'proper' English translates to fixed spool reels. Again, very well engineered, and with Saltwater models in their range, which yet again have failed to catch on here which is my cue to wind up this particular inclusion

THE LOSS OF PORTOBELLO PIER

Designed by Thomas Bouch and costing £10,000 to construct, the 1,250-foot Portobello Pier was opened by The Lord Provost of Edinburgh in 1871. Unfortunately, structural alterations, ongoing repairs, and reconstruction of storm damaged sections caused the controlling company to be wound up, following which the pier was sold for £1,500 to a Mr. Galloway. It was finally demolished in 1917.

THE END OF WORLD WAR I

As a historical chronological account of the twentieth century, albeit with a fishing bias, I feel duty bound to mention the end of WWI on the 11th November 1918. My problem is that to look at it from an angling perspective could be seen as diminishing the brutality and colossal loss of life resulting from a conflict numbering 9 million combatants and 7 million civilians, with over 70 million military personnel involved over its 4 year duration.

Pretty much an entire generation on both sides, a good number of which would not return, understandably resulting in virtually no recreational fishing, and very little commercial activity due to most able bodied men following the call.

THE EFFECTS OF THE WAR ON FISH STOCKS

War has a tendency to curtail commercial fishing activity. In WWII it was the threat of being sunk either by U-boats, or along the North Sea Coast, by fast motor torpedo boats operating from captured territory just across the way. WWI also saw its commercial activity reduced because men in their droves were packing up work and enlisting for what in the early days was going to be quite a short-lived skirmish. How wrong were those people pedalling that particular idea? But still men of military age (and often much younger) were signing up to go to the front, many of who as we now know would never make it back.

‘Come backs’ in fish population terms can to an extent be species dependant. Cartilaginous species which invest so much into producing small numbers of well developed offspring don’t bounce back from decline as quickly as broadcast spawners, these being fish which release their eggs, in some cases literally by the million, to be fertilised in the water.

Predation of both the eggs and fry is huge, offset by the large numbers involved. Sharks and Rays with their very small numbers of offspring get around this by giving live births or hatching from tough leathery capsules at a point well beyond all that early stage predation stuff, which is great when everything is in ecological balance, but less good when trawlers, long-liners, and trammel netters have done their worst. So, the quickest come-back is always going to come from external fertilising broadcast spawning species such as Cod, which has been shown to be the case after both World wars.

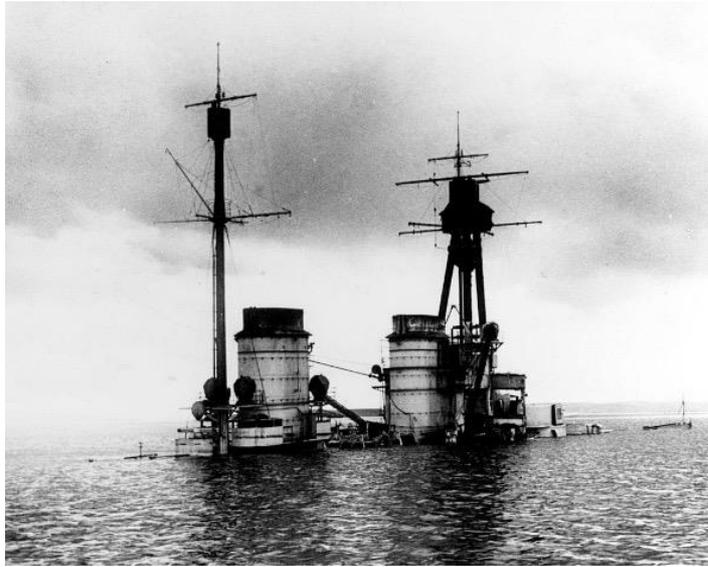
F.D. Holcombe in his 1921 book *Modern Sea Angling* (Frederick Warne, 1921) writes.....

“The diminution of trawling during the years of war, combined with the innumerable wrecks sunk around our coasts, must necessarily have an immensely beneficial effect upon maritime fish life of which the nation in general, and the sea angler in particular, will reap the advantage in the years to come. Our seas had throughout the war, and at a fearful cost in human life, what was almost a close season”. Very Large numbers of Cod in 1919 off the coast of Ballycotton near Cork in Ireland could well have been due to a cessation in commercial activity along the Irish Sea coast, with, in Holcombe’s words, “the bottom of the sea fairly paved with them usually ranging in weight from 2 pounds to 5 pounds or 6 pounds apiece – a state of things the writer believes to be to the great diminution in trawling during the war ”.

THE GERMAN FLEET SCUTTLED IN SCAPA FLOW

Shortly after the end of WWI, it was agreed under the terms of the Armistice that the German high seas fleet would be interned in a neutral port to allow negotiations to take place regarding its final fate. Refusal to accept the fleet by Norway and Spain created a major headache which Admiral Rosslyn

Wemyss suggested might best be solved by internment in the huge natural harbour at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands, using a skeleton crew of German sailors guarded by the Grand Fleet.



At 10.00 am on June 21st 1919, German Admiral Ludwig von Reuter ordered that a flag signal be sent to all ships. This triggered the mass scuttling of the entire 74 interned ships. Initially there was no noticeable effect until around midday when the 'Friedrich der Grosse' started to list heavily, triggering the rest of the fleet to hoist the Imperial German Ensign on their mainmasts, at which point the crews began to abandon ship. British guards were able to intervene aboard some of the ships, but ultimately, 52 of the 74 interned ships would go down.

Some of the wrecks were salvaged for scrap. Others remain to this day where they are a popular site for scuba divers. Some angling has been done around them, which in view of the pristine conditions northern Scotland offers, coupled to a range of species such as Ling, Conger, Coal-fish and Cod which are known to frequent wrecks, you might expect would have been very productive. Elsewhere around the British Isles, particularly in the English Channel, wrecks lying in deep water would very quickly fill up with prime fish. At Scapa Flow, this unfortunately has proved not to be the case. A great opportunity which for whatever reason, Mother Nature has missed out on.

HENDRYX REELS

Andrew B. Hendryx was an angler, who in 1870 decided he could probably make himself a fishing reel that was better than he could buy at the time. With that in mind he set about designing and patenting his creation, followed by the setting up of the Andrew B. Hendryx Company at Newhaven Ct. USA, which rapidly became one of the largest volume producers of fishing reels ever, as well as pioneering innovations and improvements to existing designs, amongst which was the first automatic clutch for a free spooling reel.



Hendryx reels were also the first commercially mass produced stamped brass reels, and were very successful. But as with so many tackle manufacturers of his day, things didn't last, with the company ceasing to trade as an independent after being absorbed by Winchester (the firearms company) in 1919.

PW Comment: While researching this particular inclusion, I came across the included photograph of an early Hendryx reel which I recognised instantly as being an exact likeness of an old reel I had given to me many years ago.

A reel with a spool probably little more than an inch or so in diameter and with no practical purpose that I can think of. I still have it, somewhere. Either way, mystery now solved.

Alvey all of the time, certainly saw the concept as a step forward at some point, and was able to take at least part of his amazing Porbeagle tally with the reel (see Chapter 8).

PW Comment: I was given a brand new Alvey Side Cast reel to play with in the 1980's to see if it had any practical value on the modern boat fishing scene. I took it out in my own boat to the north side of Lune Deep at the edge of Morecambe Bay to try for Tope, which it handled very well, particularly as the up to date versions had a slipping clutch and ratchet. Where I found it to be particularly useful was for uptide fishing casting a large Mackerel bait. In fact, I still have the reel, though if I'm honest, it probably hasn't seen light of day since that trip.

ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Sea Fishing (1911) by Charles Owen Minchin.

PW Comment: Unusually, Minchin's work comes in for scrutiny in F. D. Holcombe's 1921 publication Modern Sea Angling, and not necessarily in a complimentary way. My reading of the situation is that Holcombe either genuinely disagreed with Minchin; Minchin is some years behind Holcombe and therefore considered to be out of touch, or that he sees him as a contemporary rival and wants to depose him. He is certainly quite critical at times, particularly with regard to a report of the fabulous fishing off Ballycotton over which he accuses Minchin of being prone to embroidering the story.

Big Game at Sea (1911) by Charles Owen Minchin.

British Sea Fish: An Illustrated Handbook (1916) by Harold William Swithinbank & George E. Bullen.

Practical Hints on angling in rivers, lakes and sea (1920) by Walter Matthew Gallichan.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

None.

CHAPTER FOUR – 1921 TO 1930

Quite a short Chapter due to the build up to this decade being given over to war, with those who survived striving to regain some measure of normality. A time perhaps to shake off the hangover of those recent and painful dark days, though they did bequeath some benefits to boat anglers through some of the discoveries and development coming out of the conflict.

Things like ship to shore radio, inflatable life jackets, and neoprene. Meanwhile, outside of our war-torn corner of Europe, fishing tackle development and engineering had continued to run at pace, particularly across the Atlantic in America, with Hardy's had continuing their development of precision their top end of the market reels here too.

Also, in America, distance casting was seeing the birth of its first super star, Primo Levenais, a man quite literally decades ahead of his time. At the same time, back in our home waters, World class big game fishing was about to be conceived in the North Sea.

And last but not least, the classic book Modern Sea Angling by F. D. Holcombe was published, providing invaluable information for would be sea anglers of the day, as well as a wonderful historical account of just how advanced on all fronts 1920's sea angling was, with fish that anglers today even would give their right arm to catch.

SURPRISE DEVON SAILFISH

On an undisclosed date during the 1920's, a Sailfish *Istiophorus albicans* of over 100lbs was found alive on a beach in Devon's River Yealm. Unfortunately, it succumbed shortly after it was discovered.

RECORD POLLACK & COALFISH AT SENNEN COVE

Trolling lures from their own boat 2 miles off Sennen Cove near Lands' End in Cornwall on 2 consecutive evenings in 1921, husband and wife team Captain Hugo Millias and Mrs. Millias caught Pollack and Coalfish aggregates of 249 and 416 pounds, including Pollack of 21 pounds, 20½ pounds and 19½ pounds, and Coalfish of 23½ pounds, 20½ pounds, 20 pounds and 19 pounds, with the biggest Pollack and biggest Coalfish which came on separate days both setting new British records.

THE INVENTION OF THE FOUR STROKE OUTBOARD MOTOR

As a small boat angler my entire fishing life, I appreciate the importance of outboard motor technology in terms of reliability, longevity, and economy, which for most of my time was served by having a two-stroke power unit clamped to the back of the boat.

When we did finally replace our two-stroke engine, four-strokes were a revelation, though still they had some disadvantages which the two-stroke was able to overcome. Pollution legislation as well as fuel economy was very probably the main driver behind the rise of the four-stroke outboard motor.

Don't run away with the idea that this a modern innovation, because it's anything but, with the first small ones reaching the consumer market as early as the late 1920's produced mainly by Roness and Sharland, with Homelite introducing the first commercially viable four cycle 55 hp outboard in 1962 based on a four-cylinder Crosley car engine.

Honda produced the first four-stroke outboard powerhead, followed in 1984 by Yamaha. In the early days however, four-strokes tended to be at the smaller end of the range. Then in 1990 Honda, jumped things up to 45 hp, with everyone else, willingly or otherwise, required to follow suit.

SHIP TO SHORE RADIO



Following on from the Titanic disaster of 1912 (see Chapter 2) when the use of radio became an issue in both the loss and the saving of life after the ship struck an iceberg, regulation governing the standardised usage of radio at sea and ongoing technical improvements to radio sets became a very big issue. Work on the radio sets themselves was ongoing with improvements being made right through the 1920's and 1930's, with more impetus than ever during the war years of the 1940's.

Far and away the biggest step forward came with the introduction of High Frequency (HF) messaging allowing communications over ever increasing distance. But still well short of what VHF Maritime Mobile Band would come to offer during the late 1940's, depending of course on the antennae height. As such, VHF being the standard tool for use at sea, including charter boat operators and dinghy anglers.

HARDYS FISHING TACKLE



Globally famous high end tackle manufacturer Hardy Brothers first took to the stage in 1872 when William Hardy set up shop as a gunsmith at Alnwick in Northumberland, and as the Hardy historians say, that might very well have been the end of the story, had the engineering magnate Lord Armstrong not persuaded William to go into partnership with his brother John, also known as 'JJ', to become the World renowned business partnership of Hardy Brothers, initially advertising themselves as Gunsmiths, Whitesmiths and Cutlers, though the guns they sold were actually made for them in Birmingham.

And there things might have stood had it not been for an advertisement in the Alnwick Mercury announcing that they were also to sell superior river and sea fishing tackle, which brought a whole new wave of prosperity to the business.

As with the guns bought in from Birmingham, much of the fishing tackle they sold initially was also made elsewhere. The problem with that was that maintaining your reputation for superior quality products puts you at the mercy of those supplying them. So, in 1891, after 3 years in the development stage, they launched the reel that would go on to symbolise Hardy quality and become their most famous product ever, the 'Hardy Perfect', which save for a few interruptions in continuity, remains in production till this day.

A quick potted history of the company bringing things through to 1921, which was the year Hardy's entered the saltwater tackle market with their famous 'Fortuna' big game reel, the name being a company joke, as it was actually intended 'For Tuna', demonstrates either a brilliant level of far-sightedness,

or an incredible stroke of luck, as anyone who has studied the history of ‘Tunny’ fishing in the North Sea will know only too well that the first Tunny wasn’t caught until the end of this decade, as detailed towards the end of this Chapter.

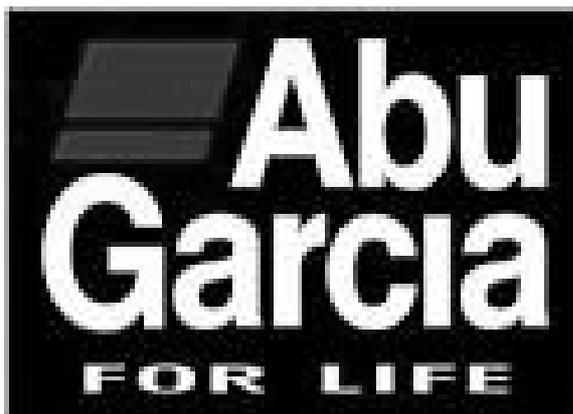
Noted for their precision engineering and superior presentation, Hardy reels of note in the context we are dealing with here include the original Fortuna, made from 1921 through to 1966; the Cascapedia, from 1932 to 1939; the Alma, which was a multiplier on sale from 1925 to 1937; the Jock Scott, which was another multiplier between 1938 to 1952; and perhaps the best known of them all and certainly the most collectible, that being the Zane Grey, which again was a multiplier marketed between 1928 and 1957, which pretty much mirrors the entire period in which Tunny were caught from the North Sea, and I am assured by the current owner of the outfit used by Lorenzo Mitchell-Henry to take his British record Tunny of 851 pounds which still stands at the time of writing (see Chapter 5), was a pairing of this reel and a Zane Grey rod.

You only need look at the current Hardy Catalogue (and some of the prices) to appreciate how they have stuck rigidly with the original company ethos of quality and innovation. For example, in 1932, under one of a growing number of patents, they began marketing fixed spool reels with a full bale arm for the first time.

There were numerous royal warrants too, allowing the company to display the royal coat of arms, indicating that the product in question is also supplied either to the sovereign, or to a member of the royal family, which is some accolade, with Hardy Brothers in possession of at least 10 such warrants. And let’s not forget their much anticipated tackle catalogues regarded by many as the fishing tackle ‘Bible’ of the day. The 1929 edition in particular, which ran to a staggering 374 pages.

PW Comment: I don’t know how true this is, but I am told that at some stage in its history, the Hardy catalogue was printed separately along the lines of game, coarse and sea tackle, allegedly because the company didn’t want highbrow game anglers knowing they also made coarse and sea tackle for the ‘rabble’.

ABU FISHING TACKLE



A World away from becoming the tackle manufacturing giant of today, in 1921, on the banks of the Svängsta river at Mörrum in Sweden, precision engineer and watch maker Carl August Borgström founded and set up AB Uhrfabriken, a company manufacturing pocket watches, telephone timers, and taxi meters. Unfortunately, WWII brought about a downturn in demand for the taxi meters, at which point Borgström’s son Göte, who was a very keen angler, persuaded his father to redirect his considerable skills into the development of precision-made fishing reels with the company name abbreviated to ABU.

With its earliest reels sufficiently well-developed for ABU to begin marketing them, their first reel, known as the ABU Record, went on sale in 1941, followed by the first of their World renowned Ambassador reels in 1952, which Garcia imported and distributed in America. With fishing tackle manufacturing ABU’s primary focus, notable milestones began to line up like a row of dominoes. Far too many of them to deal with individually here, so what I’m going to do is pick out a few along the way which I am familiar with.

ABU reels in particular were taking the angling World by storm long before I started sea fishing in 1970. Particularly the Ambassadeur range with its advanced alloy casing, ball-bearing frictionless interfaces, and precision cut gearing, setting a benchmark across all disciplines of fishing, followed by the fixed spool Cardinal which entered service in 1965.

Towards the end of the 1960's, Peter Bagnall who lives local to me was making 'a bit' of a name for himself on the distance casting scene. So much so that one day ABU came calling, asking him to take a look at a new rod they were about to introduce.

This story in its entirety is covered in Chapter 8. In a nutshell, despite reservations, Peter put it through its paces, then sent it back with a list of required alterations, all of which were enacted, leading to production of the Atlantic 484 rod which dominated the casting scene for several years.

So impressed were ABU that they asked his opinion regarding their reels, resulting in Peter sketching out how he thought the Ambassadeur 6000, 6500 and 7000 might be improved from a European casting and fishing perspective.

Initially, he heard nothing back. Then the following year the Ambassadeur 7000 'appeared', exactly how Peter had drawn it, which added to his 484 design work and breaking records with the Atlantic 484, led to him having a design input right across the ABU range during the 1970's including game and coarse fishing rods, helping ABU establish itself firmly on the British scene, where its sphere of influence had not been quite so great as it was throughout other parts of Europe. Originally, as AB Uhrfabriken, then ABU Svängsta, and now ABU Garcia after the 2 companies merged in 1968.

Heading up ABU-UK was a chap called Tony Perrin. A very good marketing man and sea angler, with a keen eye for new marketing opportunities. It was he who introduced Britain to pirk fishing. Scandinavian anglers had been using pirks for years. The nearest we here in the UK came to them was the commercial ripper, which some argue was the forerunner of the pirk design (see Chapter 10).

Perrin imported what would become an ever-growing range of pirks for people to try, looking for the most effective designs. These 'people' included the legendary 'Trio', knocking out boat loads of big Cod from the Gantocks on the inner Clyde (see Chapter 8). Also, a friend of mine, Tony Bridge from Burnley, who as a teenager along with his brother and his father also fished the Gantocks, and having a much bigger boat than the 'Trio', would occasionally take Tony Perrin along.

I remember buying pirks such as the Egon, Sillen, and Sextet. I also bought myself a Pacific 6 boat rod to use them with, teamed up to what I still consider was one of the best boat reels ever produced, the Ambassadeur 12. I also had a couple of 7000's for light boat work, which were, and still are, excellent pieces of kit, particularly when you throw in their ability to 'cross-over' from the boat to the beach. I even still see shore anglers fishing with the Atlantic 484/Ambassadeur 7000 combination, which like vintage cars, enthusiasts like to take for a run out every now and then.

But I digress. Back to the Ambassadeur 12. This was the smallest model of a trio known as the IGFA range, which also included the 20 and 30 for more serious heavy duty offshore work. If I'm honest, I don't think the 20 and 30 did that well. I don't remember ever seeing them out and about in use. But the Ambassadeur 12 was another matter altogether.

I've read on the Internet that the Ambassadeur 12 was based on the Ambassadeur 8,500 sold in America as the 8,600 Striper. That said, I thought, and am still of the opinion, that it was a 9000 given robust marinised steel side plates. As I understood it, the parts were interchangeable which is a marketing dream in terms of cost cutting. I had a pair of them and have picked up a couple more second hand long after the IGFA range was discontinued.



What I particularly like about this reel is its no nonsense simplicity. Like the Mitchell 624 which was about as simple and as robust as medium size boat reels come, there was nothing to go wrong. They were virtually indestructible. So much so that while fishing aboard 'Jensen II' on the Mersey in December 2004 with the whole top ABU-UK management team having a Christmas 'bonding' trip, I mentioned my Ambassadeur 12's and was told to send them in for a service, which obviously I did.

Peter Bagnall's record breaking Atlantic 484 and its lighter cousin the 464 I have already mentioned. The Pacific 6 which was a 30 pound class boat rod too, of which I used a couple for many years. If you needed to move up a step there was the 50 pound class Pacific 8. For me, with those items available, there was no need to look at anything else until that trip to the Mersey I mentioned in 2004.

Besides a bag of Cod, that day I came away with two uptide rods and a 50 pound class boat rod ringed for braid. The decals said 50 pound class though it looked anything but. It had a very fine tip backed up by a very fast taper to deliver the power. My mate Dave Devine once took a 47 pound Cod using it.

As for the uptiders, the Suveran and the Esprite, these had retractable butts to use as boat rods, though mine are now seized in the uptide position by salt which isn't a problem. These were my first choice of rods for dinghy fishing since 2004, and at my age now, are likely to remain that way.

PW Comment: During the 1970's ABU ran a promotion offering small metal bronze, silver and gold cap badge for fish caught at or above a specified target weight. In addition to these, there was a gold badge with a laurel wreath around it for verified national records, with the option of a beautiful full-size gold braided blazer badge, one of which I had for one of the records I broke which I donated to the Angling Heritage museum at Torrington in Devon along with a number of other items.

IRISH COD RECORD BROKEN

Fishing out from Ballycotton in 1921, Mr. I. L. Stewart set a new Irish Cod record at 42 pounds, a record which still stands almost a century on, and one which looks ever more unlikely to be beaten any time soon, as the boom years for most species around the British Isles are now long since behind us. Fish seem to be getting both smaller and less numerous, so what chance another 40 pound plus Cod, a species which for some reason Ireland has never been overly blessed with.

EARLY INTEREST IN SHARK ANGLING

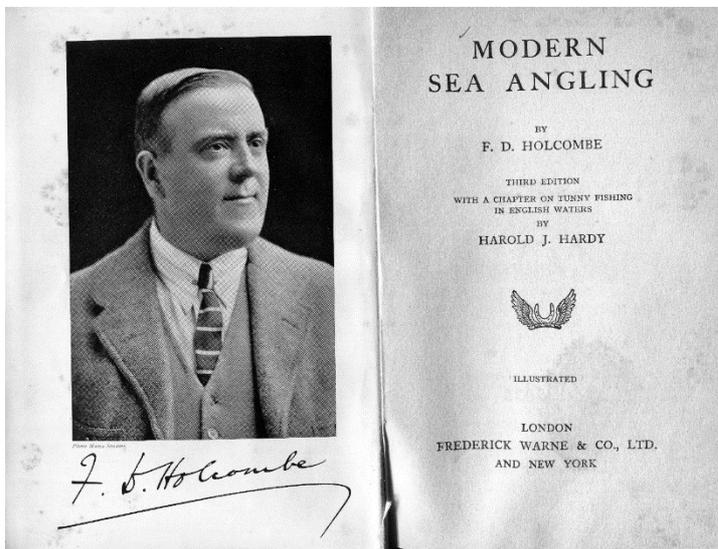
Today, we tend to think of Shark angling as something which began at Looe in Cornwall during the 1950's for Blue Sharks, with Ireland getting in on the act some time later. In truth, the reverse is true, with Ireland appreciating the challenge much earlier than Britain. Sharks, including Tope, were targeted as far back as the 1920's in fact, and not only for Blue Sharks, though these were popular with wealthy English anglers fishing out from Ballycotton where they would also have contact with Common Skate and Halibut.



Porbeagle Sharks were a much more challenging prospect, and one that was not shied away from. In particular this was approached by Lord Sligo and Dr. O'Donnell Brown fishing from small traditional punts around Achill Island, where they would eventually set an Irish record for the species which still stands to this day (see Chapter 5).

FRANCIS DYKE HOLCOMBE – MODERN SEA ANGLING

Francis Dyke Holcombe is probably best known historically for his work as an angling author, and for being the Hon. Secretary of the prestigious British Sea Anglers' Society (BSAS). However, it's as the author of the book 'Modern Sea Angling' (Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd., 1921) that F. D. Holcombe comes up for discussion here. In particular, the 1932 third edition with its Chapter on Tunny fishing by Harold J. Hardy which is the copy I have read avidly from cover to cover after borrowing it from Keith Armishaw while researching at Angling Heritage.



Obviously written in the presentational style of the day, the thing which struck me most was quality of the fishing, coupled to the sophistication and forward thinking of the early twentieth century sea angler, tempered only by some of the tackle at his or her disposal, and access to good fishing, be it due to poor overland transport, or to suitable boat availability.

Yet despite these restrictions, there is no doubt that as a sea angler, the opportunities back then were far superior to those of today, which in part is what makes the reading of old books such as the aptly titled 'Modern Sea Angling' so compelling.

Here are a few extracts from the man himself..... "Of all the sports of which the average Briton is proverbially so fond, probably sea angling has made the biggest strides in popularity and progress during the present century, with the possible exception of golf, although that perhaps can hardly be called a sport, for as someone unconverted to the game has rather unkindly said, it is neither work nor play, but a disease ! For every amateur rod fisherman in salt water when the British Sea Anglers' Society was

founded in 1893 there are probably scores today; and there seems every likelihood that their numbers will be very largely added to in the years to come.

There is one type of sea angler extant - fortunately quite uncommon - who is never so happy as when he can 'wipe the eye' of a brother fisherman by beating his catch. The writer has no use whatever for this gentleman, and he hates, as the devil hates holy water, a selfish, an envious or a jealous fisherman. If the sea angling novice should come across any such he may safely be counselled to give him a wide berth.

There is one other quality which the sea angling novice will do well to cultivate if he can, and that is a certain light-heartedness and buoyancy, even irresponsibility, if you will. The writer finds it just a little difficult to put his exact meaning into words; but he feels that some sea anglers in our waters take themselves and their sport - particularly themselves - much too seriously. This is a mistake. After all, sea angling is a sport, a game, a recreation, or what you will; it is not the serious business that some men make of it. As a sport it is a wonderful thing for keeping a man young; but if it can be taken too seriously it may have an exactly opposite effect."

Having recently re-read the book from cover to cover, what I'd like to do now is include a brief resume based on isolated extracts, in an attempt to give an accurate 'flavour' of the times.....

Many excellent specimen fish are mentioned in the book without specific reference to captor or location. These include numerous Common Skate in excess of 100 pounds, and 2 in excess of 200 pounds, the largest of which at 211 pounds was said to be the British record at the time. Also, a Halibut of 135 pounds; Conger to a record weight of 66 pounds; a Ling of 44 pounds, and Cod to 34 pounds, the vast majority of which, and very likely all of them, being caught out from either Valentia or Ballycotton, which were two of the more favoured haunts for members of the British Sea Anglers' Society.

Holcombe also writes in detail about specific species of fish and how best to catch them, including many of the species sea anglers of the twenty first century continue to invest a lot of time in catching.....

Halibut: As Holcombe likes to put it – blanks are many and the prizes are few. A cold deep-water species found around the Orkneys, Shetland, and throughout the Pentland Firth over the summer months which are collectively an area noted for ferocious tides and frequent bad weather. Halibut are also found in other parts of the Scotland and in Irish waters, in particular Ballycotton and Valentia. The most likely location for Halibut in English he suggests being Cornwall.

The first large Halibut, a fish of 95 pounds, was caught off Ballycotton by Mr. S. Bullock in 1905, and except for the war years (1914 to 1918) rod caught Halibut have been taken there every year, with 1912 being a particularly productive year. The record at the time of Holcombe writing the book stood at 135 pounds, with other recorded specimens coming in at 123, 120 and 102 pounds. One angler even landed two in a day, and BSAS member Mr. E. Graham scored a tally of specimens weighing 100, 93, 91, 77, 72 and 60 pounds, all from Ballycotton.

Sharks: Classed by most anglers of Holcombe's day as being little more than vermin. Fishing for them deliberately was first suggested at the start of the century by Mathias Dunn of Mevagissey. This would mainly be for Blue Sharks, though it was known that there were also Porbeagles in the area.

Holcombe also mentions occasional visits by Hammerheads, plus an incident involving a large grey shark of between 12 and 15 feet in length only 3 feet away from a boat which took a large Pollack and most definitely wasn't either a Porbeagle or a Blue Shark (PW Comment: Possibly a very large Mako, but could even have been a Great White). The record Blue Shark at that time weighed 114 pounds caught by Mr. F. C. Warren. Bigger fish were hooked and lost. Mention is also made of a 10 foot shark jumping clear of the water before snapping the angler's line. Presumably this would have been a Mako.

Tope: Deliberate sport fishing for Tope was first reported in 1907. By 1909 its popularity had grown somewhat, particularly around the Thames Estuary, Herne Bay, and Margate. Large numbers were also found and fished for around the Goodwin Sands. Despite this, opinions were split regarding the Tope's fighting potential.

The biggest recorded specimen weighed in at 61¾ pounds which was a large female fish in pup. More typically they would be smaller male pack fish in the 20 to 40 pound bracket which were often caught fishing on the drift with a float fished bait at or close to the bottom.

Common Skate: Known to achieve weights in excess of 400 pounds, one BSAS member hooked and landed 8 in a single session off the Irish Coast. Very common and widely distributed around the British Isles, the top recommended locations being Irish, Scottish, and Cornish waters, with Ballycotton, Valentia, and Penzance, particularly well recommended.

A 120 pound specimen caught off Ballycotton is thought to be the first very large fish ever landed around the British Coast when it was taken at the start of the twentieth century (Ireland was still governed by Britain at that stage). Eventually, by the time Holcombe's book was on the shelves, specimens to 180 pounds were being caught.

Conger: A fish with a potential of 100 pounds, but rarely taken in excess of half that weight, with the heaviest known specimens at the time being fish of 66 pounds taken off Worthing and 62 pounds from Valentia in 1914. A fish which even back then that was prized by anglers. A nocturnal feeder thought to hibernate over the winter period, and a species very badly affected by severe cold water conditions.

Cod: Holcombe quotes their growth maximum as being up around 70 to 80 pounds. So far as rod and line fishing goes, the best specimen mentioned was a fish of 34 pounds caught by Mr. R. Blair at Ballycotton, though Tobermory in Scotland was said to see Cod between 20 and 40 pounds fairly regularly.

One other comment of note was how many small Cod of between 2 and 6 pounds there were knocking about immediately after WWI, due to the lack of commercial fishing during the war years. This shows what a commercial lay off can achieve.

Ling: According to Holcombe, Ling were excellent fighting fish regularly caught in the south west of Ireland, in Scottish waters, and along the Yorkshire Coast. The record was thought to be 44 pounds for a fish of 5 feet 7½ inches in length taken by Mr. E. Graham at Ballycotton in 1915. Holcombe also mentions a Ling of 124 pounds taken commercially off the Isles of Scilly.

Pollack & Coalfish: Coalfish are at their most common in Scottish waters and rare to the south of Yorkshire, although he acknowledges that good specimens can also be taken in the English Channel along the Cornish Coast where they are (were) known as 'Rauning' or Black Pollack. They are also quite plentiful around the Irish Coast, and at all the above locations they seem to grow bigger than Pollack, a pattern which holds true throughout much of the twentieth century.

Pollack, he goes on to say, rarely grow bigger than 15 pounds, though he makes specific mention of one 20½ pound specimen taken on rod and line at Lochinver in Scotland by Mr. J. H. Layton in September 1920. Fly fishing is promoted as the most sporting technique for the two species, quoting Filey Brigg in Yorkshire as a particular hotspot for Coalfish which rise to a fly more readily than Pollack do.

Bass: As with today, Bass are seen as residing at the top of the list when it comes to British Sporting fish species. He says however that they are not widely distributed, which is a problem that rising sea temperatures currently seems to be sorting out, quoting their favoured haunts as being southern and western coasts. June, July and August represent the peak of the season leading up to the 1920's, with the cream of the fishing usually over with by September.

As for tactics, fly fishing, drift lining, leaded and unleaded float tackle, spinning, whiffing, and bottom fishing tend to bring about the best results. That said, Holcombe is keen to promote the use of the fly as the most sporting approach, conceding that unfortunately, only the smaller fish up to around the 5 pound mark are usually taken by this method.

Black Bream: A very popular species, which unfortunately are not found to be widely distributed. Most Bream at that time were to be found off Sussex, Cornwall and Anglesey, the main areas being the Sovereign Rocks off Eastbourne, Brighton, Shoreham, Worthing, the Kingmere Rocks at Littlehampton, and finally Bognor. A species which typically arrives in April and is gone by June when specimens up to 5 pounds are caught, though 1½ to 2½ pounds would be more typical.

The Kingmere Rocks come in for specific mention, with the caution that there are strong tides to contend with there. With regard to tactics, baits need to be trotted away from the boat with float tackle and drift lining specifically mentioned as productive techniques, adding that it's best to fish the stern of the boat and to employ ground bait made up from smashed up spider crabs thrown over the side allowing the flow of the tide to do the rest of the job.

Red Bream: A rare catch to the east of the Isle of Wight. To catch these fish, you must head west and fish over heavy ground where they can be a particular nuisance when Pollack fishing. Clovelly is specifically named as a hot spot with a good chance of specimens up to 5 pounds. They are also plentiful in Irish waters.

At all locations it is common to locate them in shoals over deep lying reefy ground, particularly as daytime switches to evening, where a 3 hook paternoster rig can be used to catch them more quickly when they are to be used as bait for larger species. In their own right, Holcombe doesn't rate them at all as a sporting species.

Assorted Other Fish of Note: Turbot said to grow to 50 pounds with the biggest on rod and line tipping the scales at 27.14.0 caught by Mr. F. S. Stenning off Salcombe on a Sandeel bait. Brill were said to be reasonably numerous inside Poole Harbour.

Holcombe also goes into quite a bit of detail regard tackle and tactics. For pier and shore fishing he says that rod choice is very important, and that a good general purpose pier rod should be around 8½ feet in length. Reels too should be strongly built, recommending a 6 inch diameter wooden reel fitted with a brass flange and optional check. For bigger heavier fish, see that there is plenty of metal in the brass star drag and reel seat. Also, a Bickerdyke line guard. When fishing lighter, a 5 inch diameter reel is better suited.

For casting, the American's says Holcombe preferred a multiplier reel, adding that this trend has not caught on in the UK. British anglers it seems prefer a spool that is capable of revolving quickly with the potential to do so for at least 3 minutes. He adds that this idea was 'exploded' due to the need to check it heavily to prevent overruns. Nasty knocks to the fingers from the revolving handles were also a problem, as was line breakages.

The ideal reel now is one that will offer no resistance at all at the commencement of the cast, and at the same time will not revolve faster than the rate at which the lead is going out so as not to cause overruns. In Holcombe's view, the best casting reel was a low momentum Nottingham design with front and back plates made from Xylanite, which does not warp in our climate, suggesting that the Washburn Facile is one of the best examples.

Lines to load these reels with must be at least 100 yards in length and will typically be made from either hemp, flax or silk. Hemp, says Holcombe, is stronger than flax, which in turn is stronger than silk. He then goes on to mention another even stronger material called Ramie which was the strongest fibre known at the time of writing, and might become used in the future.

Back in the here and now of the early 1920's, he suggests using twisted hemp for bottom fishing. He also discusses line dressings to improve both durability and strength, writing that C. O. Minchin recommends Mars Oil while he (Holcombe) recommends against, suggesting instead the use of Stockholm tar, which he adds should strictly speaking be applied in a vacuum to ensure tar getting into every single fibre of the line.

Meanwhile, back in the real World, he quotes a recipe of one ounce of tar along with half a pint of methylated spirit or turpentine put in a wide necked jar followed by the dry line in coils for 48 to 60 hours, after which it is dried with a cloth and hung to dry in a warm place so as not to finish up feeling sticky.

Down at the business end, traces are to be constructed using silkworm gut, gut substitute, or wire, with gut substitutes being the material he recommends. He then goes on to say that the best traces are made from Salmon gut, which unfortunately can be very expensive to buy.

Most gut is sold undyed, neutral, or green. For shallow water and near surface fishing, gut is best dyed light green, and for Pollack, dark greeny brown, suggesting that the best people for dyeing gut are the people who dye strings for musicians' instruments, with 3 sizes or diameters recommended for differing jobs.

PW Comment: Holcombe gets quite an extensive inclusion beyond the scope of the books list at the close of this Chapter because his work gives a unique flavour of the fishing, the technology, and the thinking of the time.

Considering the fact that travel, both on the water as well as over land, was much more limited than it is today, and considering the vast differences in the tackle of the time and that of today almost 100 years on, Holcombe and his fellow members of the British Sea Anglers' Society were absolutely spot on with many of their observations regarding the best tactics to catch the different species of fish available, for which we should applaud them.

What's more, they had the numbers of fish, which we certainly don't have today. Yet even they were critical of over fishing, lack of protective legislation, and impending environment calamity, despite the fact that they perhaps didn't always fully appreciate the real reasons why.

NOTE: If you scan through the entire list of books across all the chapters, it quickly becomes apparent that some titles repeat themselves with different authors. In particular the title 'Modern Sea Angling', the first of which appears to be the F. D. Holcombe version detailed above.

THE DISRUPTION OF MARINE LIFE CAUSED BY MELTING ICE

The November 22nd 1922 edition of the Washington Post carried a report warning that climate change was melting Arctic ice and disrupting wildlife as a result. Sounds familiar. So, clearly, alarm bells were starting to ring in the corridors of academia the best part of 100 years ago. But not unfortunately in the corridors of power of today, where climate change deniers, some of which in the United States hold positions of high office, while people in many of the poorest countries of the World, particularly those already suffering the consequences, can go whistle

THE BRITISH CONGER RECORD



In the early part of the twentieth century, record keeping was a much more piecemeal affair than it would eventually become in 1957, when the whole system of was for the first time brought under one roof with one set of rules administered by the National Anglers Council.

Prior to that date, records were regional or kept by associations and clubs such as the British Sea Anglers' Society, some of which were absorbed into the 1957 list, a handful of which stand to this day.

One record which lasted for many years (until 1970) was for a Conger of 84 pounds caught by H. A. Kelly off Dungeness in 1933, a fish which took the record from Miss Bluebell Klean (pictured here) of the Dreadnaught Sea Angling Society, who held it with a fish of 63.3.0 taken off Hastings in 1922

THE OCEAN CITY REEL MANUFACTURING COMPANY

As a historical project with the brief of exploring sea fishing around the British Isles, on more than one occasion I have found myself with the dilemma as to whether or not I should include certain manufacturing companies producing the equipment anglers buy to get a result.

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Quite a few American companies come into that category, because the Americans originally engineered a lot of what we now take for granted, particularly with regard to fishing reels, with some of the 'lesser known' American companies (here in the UK at least) having managed to varying degrees to get a toe hold on the European scene. Obviously, there are some big players too, such as Berkley and Penn. It's the 'big players' of limited UK and Irish interest that are the problem, of which Ocean City is one.

In some ways, it's the engineering reputation of one time Ocean City employee Otto Henze that has persuaded me to press ahead in this case. Ocean City was incorporated in Philadelphia in 1923, establishing itself as a major producer of fishing reels to the US market for the 45 years between 1923 and 1968, absorbing a number of other high quality competitors such as the Montague City Rod and Reel Co, and the Edward vom Hofe Co. along the way. The fact that Ocean City also made rods is incidental to this particular story.

Baitcasting reels were their speciality, these being small multipliers used by American anglers to cast artificial baits and lures. Where Otto Henze comes into the reckoning is that it was Ocean City who set him on the road to engineering stardom by preparing him to set up his own reel manufacturing business in 1932 under the banner of the Penn Fishing Tackle Manufacturing Company, which as we all know, is right up there with the best.

THE LOSS OF RYDE VICTORIA PIER

The first pier bearing the name Ryde Victoria was open in 1854 and destroyed in 1859. This was to have been replaced when the Isle of Wight Ferry Company put forward plans to build a new 2,420-foot pier which included a chain ferry to Stokes Bay to compete with the existing Portsmouth to Ryde service.

Objections from The Admiralty scuppered this, and a revised plan was drawn up for a 970 foot pier which was completed in 1864, after which the Ryde Pier Company took charge in 1865, running a conventional ferry service until 1875. In 1914 Ryde Borough Council bought the pier to acquire right of way on Quay Road, and through an Act of Parliament they proceeded to demolish it, the last remnants of which were washed away in 1924.

SAILFISH SCILLY ISLES

A Sailfish *Istiophorus albicans* was reported found dead in the Scilly Isles in 1926. A find which closely corresponds to a similar incident 2 years later, when in 1928 a specimen was found stranded at the mouth of the River Yealm in Devon. Whether the 2 incidents are linked is pure conjecture. If they are, arguably the main linking factor would very likely be water temperature such as that generated by a particularly warm summer on the back of a mild winter.

In that regard, 1926 enjoyed a late summer heatwave. Conversely, 1928 was nothing special, leading up to the fifth coldest winter of the twentieth century. Otherwise, the species is rare to virtually non-existent at our latitude, and can therefore be best described as an unusual occasional wanderer.

THE LOSS OF ALUM PIER, IOW

Despite two small wooden landing stages having been constructed in 1862, the first pile for the Alum iron pier was driven in during 1869, with the pier opening in 1887, at which time steamers bound for Southampton, Portsmouth, and Bournemouth, would regularly call at the structure which would reduce in frequency just after WWI.

By 1925 the pier was in decline, declared unsafe, and was closed, with part of it actually collapsing into the sea after a severe storm in 1927, never to be repaired or replaced. What remained stayed open until the late 1950's, before 'disappearing' altogether.

THE LOSS OF DOVER PROMENADE PIER

Plans for Promenade Pier at Dover were initially vetoed in 1881, until a company was formed in 1888.

This allowed work on the 900 foot structure to begin in 1892, engineered by JJ Webster, using Alfred Thorne as contractor, at a cost of £24,000.

The official opening was in 1893, the same year that the 'Christine' collided with it, with storm damage the following year destroying 100 feet of it, bringing about temporary closure until repairs were completed in 1895. The Admiralty bought the structure in 1915 for landing purposes, returning it to pleasure use after WWI for a few years, until by 1925 it had become dilapidated and was demolished 2 years later in 1927.

BRITISH PATHE ANGLING NEWS REPORTS

An example of the degree to which sea angling was growing in popularity is illustrated by a number of filmed reports put out by British Pathe News during the 1920's. The quality of this footage is surprisingly good, edited to give a real flavour of the times. Angling Heritage offers one access route to several of these short films, plus others shot in the decades that follow. Alternatively, go to YouTube, or directly to www.britishpathe.com.

SEASIDE HOLIDAY SPORT

An extract from the Daily Express, Saturday 6th August, 1927.

Seaside Holiday Sport by F. D. Holcombe (Hon. Secretary of the British Sea Anglers' Society).



“One of the most sporting fish in the sea is the Mackerel. It is abundant in the summer off the southern and western coasts. Probably most people have caught it in the usual way - by towing a spinner at the end of heavily, leaded line behind a moving boat. But this is murder, not sport. To have real fun with Mackerel you must wait until late summer, when the shoals come close in shore, and fish for them with unleaded tackle.

A drift line is the best. The weather should be calm, and the fish within half a mile of the shore. Sink an old string bag filled with pilchards to act as ground bait. Use a trout fly rod with a fine running line and an eight or nine foot trace of gut. Bait your two hooks with whitebait or sandeel. Go out either before breakfast or after tea.

Bass is another sporting fish. From June to September you may catch him off our southern and western coasts and off the southern coasts of Ireland. A new method of Bass fishing is from a boat, drifting on the tide, with a long rod and a line of pure, undressed silk. A large float is used, and a trace of a stout single gut terminating in a small triangle.

This triangle is lightly attached by one of its barbs to the back of a lively sandeel or prawn. A good deal of skill is required. The boatman must not lag behind or overrun the tide. The angler must not strike a moment too late or the fish will get away. Coalfish and Pollack are both sporting fish if caught in the right way. Scotland is the home of the Coalfish, though he may be taken in Ireland or Cornwall. Pollack may be caught almost anywhere in rocky coastland.

The old method of angling for these fish was with rod and drift line, a stationary bait, and a slipping lead. But a rubber eel with a spinner weighted at the head is more deadly. The line is slowly paid out from a boat and slowly wound in. You may use a gut trace unless sharks or dogfish are about, in which case it is safer to use a trace of wire. Spinning baits seem to have a peculiar fascination for sharks.

You will need a good deal of patience if you are bent on catching Grey Mullet. These fish are common in summer and early autumn on our southern coasts, but they are of all sea fish the most difficult to catch.

They, may be caught from rocks or breakwaters with a roach rod, a fine silk running line, and a fine gut trace. Use a taper float and some large split shot.

As for bait, you may try paste, rag, worms, putrid fish and fat, boiled cabbage stumps, bananas, macaroni, and a great many other things. It depends upon local conditions. In playing mullet remember that its mouth is extremely tender”.

DEATH BY WEEVER STING



A press report published in 1927 makes mention of an un-named angler fishing at Dungeness dying after receiving repeated Weever Stings. Why he should receive multiple stings is something of a mystery. One would presumably have been sufficient to send out warning signals.

The report also doesn't specify the Weever species involved, though very likely it would have been the smaller and more venomous Lesser Weever *Echiichthys vipera*, the name Weever coming from the French word wivre, meaning serpent or dragon. Though painful, on their own Weever stings should not be lethal, so

one can only assume other underlying medical conditions were also involved.

MURDER OF MACKEREL

One of the primary drivers behind catching fish from the sea, certainly amongst working people during the early decades of the twentieth century, would be their value as a source of food. Certainly, this would be the case with Mackerel, which like today would also be seen as an early must catch on many trips for bait, and again towards the close of play to take home and eat. What they are rarely seen as is a source of sport, with most people prepared to do whatever it takes to get what they need.

According to a report from the Daily Express in August 1927, a similar situation was also the case back then, with people setting out to catch Mackerel by trolling, which involved trailing a spinner attached to a heavily weighted line behind a moving boat. Something I remember doing myself during the 1950's when my dad took me on my first fishing trip out from Brixham when I was about 6 years old. But not the way it should be done according to F. D. Holcombe, Hon. Secretary of the British Sea Anglers'

Society, who labelled the technique as murder rather than sport, suggesting people fish for them with unleaded tackle when they move close in to shore.

THE FIRST INFLATABLE LIFE JACKET

A must for small boat anglers, and charter boat operators these days, the first inflatable life preserver was invented by Peter Markus in 1928 and subsequently improved upon during the 1930's, eventually becoming part of the standard issue kit to both US and British flight crews during the WWII where it was nicknamed the 'Mae West' after the rather amply bosomed actress of that era.

Prior to the 1930's, in water assistance had been from various types of buoyancy aid, originally cork, followed by kapok, which I remember wearing myself bought from Army Surplus Stores. The earliest record of the life preserver dates back to 1804.

The name 'Life Jacket' is a more modern and more specific term separating buoyancy vests, which are padded waistcoats enabling the wearer to help themselves, from true life jackets which must support the wearer while unconscious, and have the buoyancy (usually 150 Newtons) distributed in such a way as to turn the wearer face upwards to avoid drowning. Crutch straps are also vital to prevent the wearer slipping out of the jacket, particularly when jumping in to the water.

THE FIRST BIG WINTER FREEZE OF THE CENTURY

The first of 3 twentieth century winters severe enough to cause coastal fish mortalities began with heavy snowfall in late-December 1928. The start of a prolonged cold spell which saw abnormal cooling of coastal waters leading heavy fish losses, though not over as great a geographical area, particularly in the North Sea, as was the case with part 3 of the big freeze trilogy in 1962/63, for which a much more detailed overview is given in Chapter 8.

THE BIRTH OF BRITISH BIG GAME FISHING

Following on from earlier reports of the first Blue Fin Tuna (Tunny) sighting in the North Sea in 1912, and the find of a dead Tuna in Poole Harbour that same year, both of which are covered in Chapter 3, in August of 1929, the Daily Mail reported that members of the British Sea Anglers' Society had received information that a number of Tuna – great sporting fish which run up to hundreds of pounds in weight, had been seen by Herring boat fishermen about 40 miles off Scarborough, and that the news had aroused much interest in angling circles, adding that members of the society in a yacht would endeavour to locate and do battle with these "big game" fish of the sea.

HUGE TUNA WASHED UP AT WALTON-ON-THE-NAZE

Following on from the previous inclusion, a Blue Fin Tuna (Tunny) said to be 1,000 pounds in weight was found washed up on a mud bank at Walton-on-the-Naze in Essex. This incident is similar to a report from Poole where a BFT of 728 pounds was involved (see Chapter 3), but which falls outside what would ultimately become a more predictable distribution pattern for the North Sea, with Walton-on-the-Naze situated at its southern extremity on the Essex Coast.

THE FIRST SUNSCREEN

The use of zinc oxide paste as a source of sunscreen well predates rod and line fishing, and that's as advanced as things were until the first synthetic sunscreen was formulated in 1928. Following this, the first commercially available sunscreens were developed by French chemist Eugène Schueller for cosmetics giant L'Oreal. But don't let that dissuade macho anglers from applying it.

The importance of these 3 pieces of history to sea anglers cannot be overstated, as boat anglers in particular get doses of ultra violet light (UV) potentially affecting parts of the head and face which the ordinary man in the street will not see affected, due to the way harmful sunlight reflects of water, which in some cases, and over time, can lead to skin cancers.

PW Comment: Exposure to UV radiation is a long term cumulative problem which first came to light through veterans of desert warfare in WWII succumbing to higher than average numbers of skin cancers decades after their wartime exposure. As I've said, exposure over water offers an increased risk.

I talk from personal experience here, having had several 'lumps' of my face surgically removed, including having the whole right side of my nose being peeled back to get at one particular cancer which needed two doses of surgery to finally clear out, plus surgery to the underside of my left jaw brought about by reflected UV bouncing up from the water's surface. Now it's factor 50 every trip – doctor's orders.

PRIMO LEVENAIS



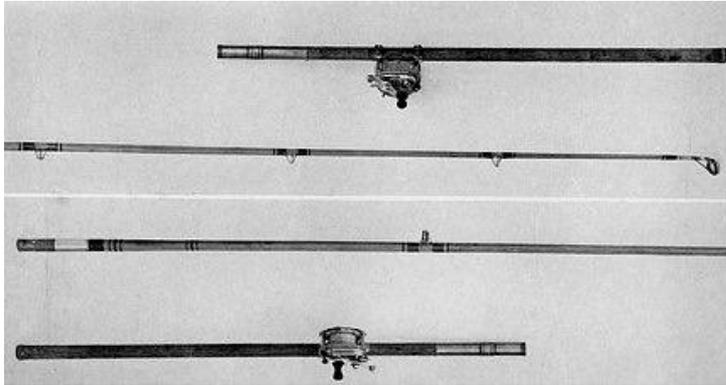
Taking account of the date, the materials used such as hickory and bamboo for rod building, and the cuttyhunk line made from linen, American caster Augustus 'Primo' Levenais arguably was, and in my opinion still is, the greatest distance caster of the twentieth century. British anglers tend to think that we developed all that is good on the casting field, which is probably true during the second half of the twentieth century. But for the first half, America and Levenais most certainly blazed a trail. That said, we can perhaps salvage a bit of national pride here from the fact that

Levenais was born in London in 1906.

Getting as much information as I would want has been one of the major problems with writing a book such as this. Not everything was documented to the degree we would all like to see, and certainly not everything is available on the Internet. From the information I have been able to track down, it seems that Levenais, certainly in the early days, used a rod built from a 44 inch hickory butt with a 9 foot hollow fluted bamboo tip made for him by Lew Stoner (see photograph of Lew Stoner and Primo Levenais in 1936) at the R. L. Winston Rod Co..

This was paired with a duralumin spooled multiplying reel, reputedly in some texts manufactured by his father who was an engineer, and in others by the Dalmo Manufacturing Company after switching from a Pflueger Par, all of which ran on bushes as opposed to ball bearings. The line Levenais used was 6 strand Cuttyhunk, throwing a 4 ounce lead using the 'South African' casting style.

Using the outfit described, casting in Philadelphia in 1929, he was able to throw the lead 506 feet (168.7 yards) which was certainly no mean achievement. And incredibly, over time, as his casting abilities evolved and dramatically improved, he was able to cast much further. Whether or not his outfit evolved to the same extent is a matter for conjecture, but you can be sure that if things improved technologically on the tackle scene, which later on in the 1950's we know they most certainly did, still casting and with his finger on the pulse, he would be equally quick to move with the times.



By 1934 he was putting leads as far as 623 feet 3 inches (207 yards) which he had increased to 660 feet 3 inches (220 yards 3 inches) by 1938. By 1940 the distance had climbed to 705 feet 5 inches (235 yards 5 inches), then to 735 yards 10 inches (255-yard 1 inch) in 1949, and finally in 1955 he set a new World record with a cast of 810 feet 5 inches which is 270 yards 5 inches.

To give the above some sort of context, using the iconic ABU Atlantic 484 & Ambassadeur 6000 combination along with modern monofilament line, Peter Bagnall was the first caster to break through the 200 yard barrier at a demonstration during the 1970's, with John Holden the first to pass that distance at a tournament during the 1980's (see Chapters 8 and 9), all of which begs the question, what might Levenais have achieved using the same outfits and techniques available to Bagnall and Holden.

Off the ground casting was the style embraced by most casters during the 1920's, though it has to be said that while Levenais was still active, other casters were starting to experiment with new innovative styles which included swinging the lead to increase its momentum. As is made clear in Chapter 8, a number of British casters have over the years laid claim to inventing the modern pendulum cast, despite Levenais allegedly experimenting with swinging lead techniques as far back as the 1930's.

In the 1948 edition of Marlon Major's book *Saltwater Fishing Tackle* in which Primo Levenais has contributing chapters, I'm told there is a series of photographs showing what some suggest is an early 'pendulum type' cast, something I put to Colin Howlett of the UKSF, who emphatically dismisses the suggestion altogether, so we'll leave it there.

PW Comment: I see that Zziplex have models named Primo Synchro and Primo Hi Flex, presumably in recognition of what Levenais did on the casting field. The Synchro in particular is written up as being suitable for pendulum and off the ground casting which is particularly relevant, for while Primo began casting off the ground, arguably he may also have contributed to the pendulum casting style.

FIRST ANGLING ENCOUNTER WITH NORTH SEA TUNA

Spurred on by the sightings discussed earlier in this Chapter, Henry Stapleton-Cotton made the first pioneering angling attempt at the Tunny fishing out from Scarborough in 1929, hooking and unfortunately losing 2 fish estimated to be in the region of 600 pounds apiece, very clearly demonstrating that it was possible to target and catch Tunny (Blue Fin Tuna) in British waters, lighting the blue touch paper of what would very soon become one of the most spectacular fireworks British sea angling has, and will ever witness.

FIRST NORTH SEA TUNA LANDED

On Friday 13th September 1929, the first Blue Fin Tuna or Tunny on rod and line from the North Sea weighing in at 308 pounds was caught by British Sea Anglers' Society member F. B. Haanam. Unfortunately, the fish was not taken in British waters, having been caught at Odden over on the Danish Coast of the North Sea.

FIRST BRITISH ROD CAUGHT TUNNY

Following on from British Sea Anglers' Society member F. B. Haanam catching the first ever North Sea Tunny on rod and line from Danish waters (see previous inclusion), plus a couple of lost hook-ups by Henry Stapleton-Cotton in 1929, the first Tunny caught on rod and line brought ashore to a British port was taken on the 27th of August 1930 by Lorenzo Mitchell-Henry. The launching platform for what was to be one of the most illustrious episodes in British sea angling history (see Chapter 5), with Mitchell-Henry at the top of the ratings when it was all over in the mid-1950's, with a Tunny of 851 pounds, a record which still stands to this day.

BULLEN & HERREN

This inclusion comes courtesy of Mike Thrussell. We were chatting one evening about his shark fishing exploits in Cardigan Bay when the names Bullen and Herren slipped into the conversation. I'll be honest, I'd never heard of them.

Whilst researching for his own book *First Run Shark* (Ward Lock, 1990) Mike had come across a brief reference regarding their early shark fishing exploits in Cardigan Bay between the late 1920's and early 1930's, particularly for Porbeagles. Mainly fish up to around 100 pounds or so, but no specific reference to any particular port. And as there was little in the way of commercial interest in Porbeagles at the time, he thought it fair to assume that they were catching them on rod and line for sport.

It's well documented that in the years between the two World wars, prey fish concentrations such as Mackerel and Herring were very much greater than they are today. The Mackerel were on the scene from around April to October, with the Herrings running a little later, and being fished for commercially quite close to the shore, where in scenes reminiscent of the North Sea Tuna fishing which kicked off around the same time, there would be large predatory fish picking off casualties and drop-outs from the nets as they were being hand hauled. This brought the sharks well within sailing range of anyone interested in fishing at a time when boat technology probably wasn't of a standard to allow longer, or otherwise long enough range forays.

Mike thinks it's possible that Bullen and Herren may well have targeted and encountered Blue Sharks too, as there are accounts of the commercial netters and long liners working out from Aberystwyth and Barmouth, catching them as far back as eighteenth and nineteenth century. They were also seen at the surface when the Herring nets were being hauled, but rarely, if ever, again as with the North Sea Tuna, when commercial activity was not taking place.

Mike even recalled a conversation of maybe 30 years ago with an old boy locally who was pushing being a centenarian at the time, who ran a small boat out from Barmouth around the same time Bullen and Herren were on the scene. He also recalled catching lots of Porbeagles and the occasional Blue Shark and had the photographs to back it all up. Nice fish too some of them. But as has always been the case for Cardigan Bay, probably not making it in to three figure weights.

THE LOSS OF RAMSGATE MARINA PIER

Work on the 550 foot Ramsgate Marina Pier began in 1879, opening in 1881, at a cost of £15,000. Unfortunately, within 2 years, the ownership company found itself in financial trouble, and in 1883 it was wound up with the structure itself auctioned off for £250 in 1884.

Later, in 1897, it was severely storm damaged, eventually leading to its closure on safety grounds in 1914. Three years afterwards it suffered fire and collision damage, followed a year later in 1918 by further damage caused by an exploding mine, after which, in 1929, the Ministry of Transport acquired it, demolishing it in 1930.

NEOPRENE

I very much doubt that the warmth and comfort of neoprene waders was enjoyed by sea anglers during the 1930's, or even in the decades immediately following. But as a material, Neoprene was available from 1930 onwards, invented by Du Pont scientist Dr. Elmer Keiser Bolton after attending a lecture given by Fr. Julius Aloysius Nieuwland who was a professor of chemistry at the University of Notre Dame. This led to Bolton developing a synthetic rubber, now known as Neoprene, but formerly known as Duprene, which was first marketed in 1931.

Unfortunately, the manufacturing process gave the product a bad smell, which I'll wager, cannot have been even half as bad as my neoprene waders after a good trip followed by a week lying in the bottom of the boat still covered in fish slime. Even so, the market was put off by this odour. So, a new manufacturing process was sought, and eventually found, which not only solved the odour problem, but also halved the production cost.

Neoprene would eventually find its way on to the SCUBA diving scene, and it was most probably from shops making bespoke wet suits for divers that enterprising sea anglers ordered the earliest pairs of neoprene chest waders, with the mass market following suit probably during the 1970's, which is my earliest recollection of first seeing them.

ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

BOOKS

Modern Sea Angling (1921) by F. D. Holcombe.

Fishing from the Earliest Time (1926) by William Radcliffe.

PW Comment: Available to read in its entirety free of charge online

<https://archive.org/details/fishingfromearli00radc>

Around the coast with Rod and Line (1925) – a Great Western Railway publication.

Sea Fishing Simplified (1929) by F.D. Holcombe and A. Fraser-Brunner.

MAGAZINES & PAPERS

Game, Guns and Anglers Weekly.

CHAPTER FIVE – 1931 TO 1940

A decade dominated by the pursuit of big fish. In the North Sea it was Tunny fever drawing the well-heeled to Scarborough from all corners of the country and beyond. Anybody who was anybody had to be seen to be getting in on the act, though in fairness, there was also a hard core of serious anglers with plenty of money there in the mix too.

Men who were prepared to sleep in a tent on the deck of a boat for weeks on end due to sea-sickness, then think nothing of bobbing about in a tiny rowing boat 100 or so miles offshore to ‘punish’ themselves with perhaps as many as 4 or even 5 huge powerful Tunny in the boat before breakfast. And they were not alone in their heroic angling endeavours.

Over on the other side of the British Isles along the Atlantic Coast of Ireland, huge Porbeagle Sharks were being pursued and beaten in tiny wood and animal hide rowing boats. It was also the decade in which fibreglass was invented then kept under wraps, as another war loomed ominously and was then realised, putting angling on the back foot once again.

THE MITCHELL FISHING TACKLE COMPANY



Louis Carpano was born in 1832, and in 1851, he entered the Clockmakers School in Cluses, Savoy (now Italy). After leaving school, he went to work in France and Switzerland. His first invention dates from 1860 and was an improved milling-machine for the carving of gears. He then moved back to Cluses in 1868 and co-founded a company to produce and sell watch-gears, milling machines, and watchmaker's tools. Louis' nephew, Constant, who was trained by his uncle took over the business in 1902. Louis lived in Turin (Italy) until his death in 1919.

Constants' son-in-law, Charles Pons joined the family business, (now called Carpono & Pons) and became the moving spirit in the company. In the 1930's they worked with two fishing tackle manufacturers to refine their round reel designs. Collectively, they created the first prototype open faced spinning reel in the latter part of the 1930s, and a patent was granted in 1950 for this new reel design.

The true origin of the name Mitchell remains a mystery, although Carpano & Pons had intended to name their first reel “Michel”, until they discovered the name was already used and patented, so they gave the reel an American sounding name that was very in vogue at the time.

Léon Carpano and Charles Pons, astonished as they were by the success of their first models, decided to design and to market more versions of their reel, such as the “Salt Water”, the “Mitchell Cap” (Cap 54), the “Otomatic”, and the “Rapid”. In April 1957 a decision was reached to add a number to the name of each existing model and the first born “Mitchell” became “Mitchell 300”. In 1966, the making of the 10,000,000th reel was celebrated, and production reached an amazing of 12,000 reels per day in 1970. No surprise then that the 20,000,000th reel was celebrated in 1971.

In 1974, Mitchell became partnered with the Garcia Corporation which was a dominant force in the fishing tackle market. But by 1980, these two brands would become independent again and go their separate way. Then in 1990, Johnson Worldwide Associates (JWA) bought the Mitchell Company whose headquarters and R&D were relocated to Marignier, France, where it remains to this day. And

now, since its introduction in the late 1940s, nearly 30 million Mitchell 300 reels have been sold Worldwide.

In 2000, Mitchell was purchased by Pure Fishing as part of the JWA fishing products acquisition. Mitchell continues to sell the Mitchell 300 reel, as well as adding new, innovative products to its successful fishing line up.

Today, Mitchell is one of the proud brands of Pure Fishing, Inc. which is a global family of quality fishing tackle brands, offering a broad range of products that meet or exceed the needs of today's anglers. Pure Fishing claims that it addresses the needs of anglers around the World with a strong portfolio of leading brands, including the Mitchell brand. "We are dedicated to helping you have more fun and catch more fish", they say. Pure Fishing is owned by the Jarden Corporation, headquartered in Rye, N.Y. with in excess of 25,000 employees Worldwide.

THE BRITISH SEAGULL OUTBOARD ENGINE



Anyone who came into small boat fishing around the same time as I did, which was the 1970's, will be familiar with the British Seagull Outboard. It's a generational thing. They were standard issue back then. Probably not because people particularly always wanted to have a Seagull. More a case of there not being much else around to choose from, and with most boats being of a displacement design with their maximum achievable speed governed by their shape and dimensions, there wasn't much point in looking at anything else.

Seagulls were cheap and they were reliable. Very smoky too due to their rich two-stroke mix, and not that economical either, which because they were fitted with short range tanks smack on top of the unit meant lots of messing around pouring in petrol while out in the boat, which these days would be a health and safety concern.

You also had to hand wind the pull cord on every pull which meant you could drop it or lose it altogether, though later versions had optional recoil starts which could be fitted. You could buy longer (not long) range tanks too. But that's how it was back then: cheap and cheerful. Our grandparents and parents had been

brought up on them, saying "If they were good enough for us they'll be good enough for you. Never let you down. Why would you ever want anything else?". Why indeed?

Probably urban myth, but back in the day, there were all sorts of Seagull stories doing the rounds. One of the 'best' was that for some reason small boats with Seagull outboards were involved in either the Dunkirk evacuation or the Normandy landings during WWII. More likely Dunkirk when you think about it, perhaps ferrying troops from the beaches to waiting boats which couldn't get in any closer on account of their draft. But that's speculation.

The story goes that a lot of boats and outboards were either lost or abandoned in all the turmoil, some of which were recovered from either the water or the sand, stripped down, rebuilt, and were made to run again. It would be great advertising if it were true, so make what you will of the story. But they were reliable. Extremely reliable, when you finally got them going due to flooding and oiling up the spark plug with that 10:1 petrol to two-stroke oil ratio.

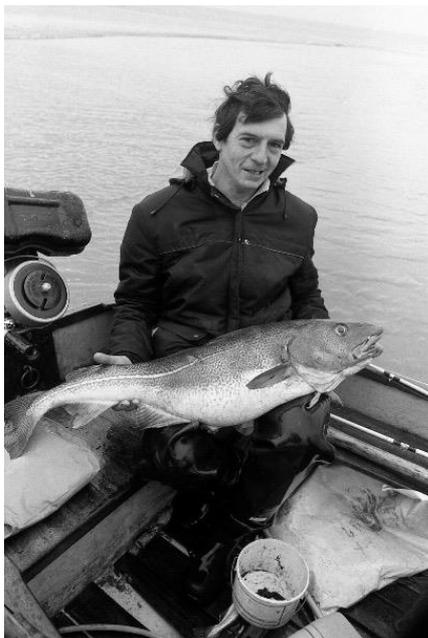
You knew that eventually it would start, for which reason, when larger fully cased in engines such as Johnson and Evinrude began to become popular, a lot of people, myself included, carried a Seagull as a spare, either clamped to the transom, or more usually tucked away up front with a piece of old tarpaulin covering it.

If you read my accounts of Loch Ryan and Arran (both in Chapter 9) you'll see how I was introduced to fishing under Seagull power. At Loch Ryan Davy Agnew operated a 16 foot clinker MacKay Viking powered by a pair of four horse power Seagulls. Later, I started doing self-drives out from Lamlash on the Isle of Arran where Neil McLean had fibreglass versions of the same boat with a single Seagull on the back, the scene of one of my most frightening 'near misses' ever.

We'd fished the previous day for Haddock at the back of Holy Island which we planned to return to for more of the same. On the first day the wind had been coming from the south west. The run up the channel separating the main island from Holy Island is quite sheltered, and that day behind the island it was even more sheltered still. Not so on day two.

The wind direction had shifted ever so slightly to the south which we didn't pick up on running up the channel. As we turned the corner at the top we were met with a barrage of huge breaking swells, so large that we didn't dare try to turn around and run for cover. It was mountainous. But the boat managed to take it, and little Seagull didn't so much as splutter.

We had to run the whole length of Holy Island waiting to be swamped by every following wave until we rounded the other corner into shelter. Based on that episode, my first boat was a MacKay Viking with a 9hp Johnson on the back, plus the obligatory 4hp Seagull held in reserve.



Let's now get down to some of the 'real' history. The earliest engines to carry the Seagull name were the Marston Seagulls produced by the Sunbeam Motorcycle Company at Wolverhampton in 1931, where the design purpose was as an industrial engine.

Not long after, entrepreneur John Way-Hope who had been an Evinrude employee, and Bill Pinniger who was a design engineer, took over the Seagull engine manufacturing rights and patents, and after enlisting the services of Robert Harper who helped with the gearbox design, the British Seagull Outboard was born, which sold in their thousands.

By today's standards, a primitive looking contraption, which as I've already said was smoky, smelly, messy, and often a nuisance to start. But it was reliable, eventually superseded by outboards with fully encased powerheads, lighter two stroke mixes, and recoil start as standard. That said, I bet in some old dockside workshop or boating enthusiasts' garage somewhere there are still Seagull Outboards stood up in a corner, neglected and forgotten,

which I'll wager, with a bit of TLC and encouragement, could still be fired up and would be running in another 60 years, emissions regulations permitting.

THE HARDY ALTEX FIXED SPOOL REEL

The Hardy Altex was as much a concept as a product, which for the first time, and under the protection of a patent, introduced the World to a 'modern' looking fixed spool reel featuring a full bale arm as opposed to the more traditional short bale arm favoured by the fixed spool reel's original inventor Illingworth in 1905.

The short bale arm had long been a troublesome design flaw, improved upon slightly by those sandwiched between Illingworth and the new Hardy concept by extending it to around half length. This however still left scope for tangles, particularly from the braided lines used at the time in the days before monofilament nylon, a problem Hardy's 'technically' solved at a stroke in 1932.

The problem was, and still is, that fixed spool reels put twist in the line, which if the wind gets hold of any 'slack' after a cast when using braid, can lead to self-tangling, which is one of the reasons why so many shore anglers stuck with the Nottingham style centre pin reels for so long, accepting the shorter casting distances in exchange for eliminating line twist problems.

THE IRISH PORBEAGLE SHARK RECORD

Prior to the 1920's, most rod and line Porbeagle Shark encounters, some of which turned out to be successful, tended to be luck based. Suitable tackle, boats, and I suspect a willingness on the part of all but a sport minded few were thin on the ground. That however changed towards the end of the 1930's, when the Marquis of Sligo and Dr. O'Donnell Browne decided to start specifically targeting Porbeagles around Achill Island midway along Ireland's Atlantic Coast.



Not that they were much better equipped than anyone else at the time, still using split cane rods and cuttyhunk lines fishing from of all things a traditional Irish Currach, which is a small light weight boat built using a wooden frame with either animal skins or canvas stretched around it. Doing this, the pair successfully beat Porbeagles weighing up to 365 pounds, the latter still in place in the Irish record fish list caught by Dr. O'Donel Brown out from Keem Bay, Achill, in 1932.

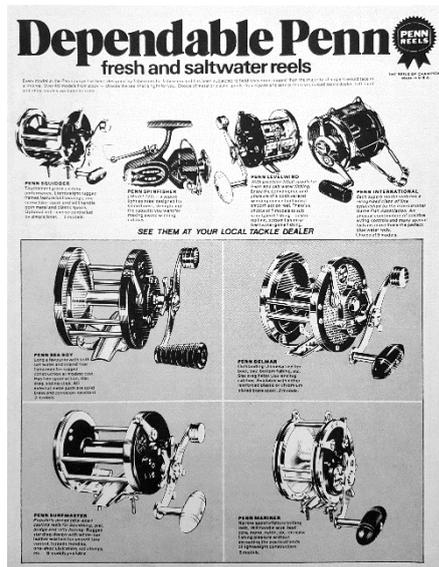
THE PENN FISHING TACKLE COMPANY

While we don't tend to use Penn reels routinely for shore and medium boat fishing in Britain and Ireland, at the bigger end of the range from say 50 pounds class through to 130, or to put it another way, from around 6/0 upwards, everybody knows and respects the American tackle manufacturing giant Penn as producers of solid, reliable, heavy duty fishing reels. In particular their International range of big game reels.

For a while they did also market some very high quality models in much smaller sizes which I got to try for Tope while fishing in Luce Bay, when Penn's UK importers nominated Ian Burrett's boat 'Onyermarks' as an official sponsored boat, equipping it with rods and reels for both the Tope fishing

and the Common Skate fishing further up the west coast which Ian alternated between according the season.

With the Skate I also got to use the latest Penn 50's as well, one of which was put under so much pressure that incredibly I managed to rip the reel drum from its seat launching it into the first eye on the rod, which fortunately for me it didn't smash or I would have been in even bigger trouble.



The story of Penn Fishing Tackle starts with German engineer Otto Henze who emigrated to America in 1922. There he took a job as a machinist with fishing reel manufacturers The Ocean City Manufacturing Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Seeing the potential of the fishing tackle market, and wanting to do his own thing, Henze left Ocean City to set up on his own in a third-floor loft rented from the general machining firm William Schmitz & Company where he produced his first two-reel designs.

These were the F and K models, the first of which in 1933 sold well enough to encourage him to produce 2 further models, which again sold well, in part supposedly due to privations of the great depression forcing families into subsistence fishing simply to feed themselves, which despite all the austerity of the time, actually helped his company to grow.

By 1942, Penn was working out of new premises on West Hunting Park Avenue. There it grew on its regional presence until Otto Henze's death in 1948, at which point his wife Martha assumed control of the company, growing it on still further to become an innovative World leader.

One particular innovation which anglers of my generation will be familiar with is the Bakelite side plate. Less obvious to the eye, was an adjustable bearing which allowed the spool to be tensioned to prevent backlash. Star drags were also offered as optional, all leading up to the production of the renowned Penn Senator, designed to be a match for the most challenging of big game species, offering dependability and quality, plus some extra engineering innovation in the form of high speed stainless pinion gears for faster line uptake. A range of reels followed by the introduction of the Squidder, designed initially for surf casting but highly popular with anglers going afloat, and just one of over 220 different models at the time of researching this inclusion, topped off by their signature model the Senator.

There's not much point in me systematically going through the rest of the Penn range, as much of it was designed for, and aimed at, the US market. But while they weren't specifically designed with the British angler in mind, quite a few Penn models did make it into service over here, particularly in the 1960's on into the 1970's, and were quite popular. I certainly owned a few and have borrowed and used others.

That Squidder I mentioned earlier is a model I am familiar with. In fact, I still have a few Penn reels, though not the Squidder, stashed away in my attic, probably never to see the light of day again. All except one that is. I was given a battered old unloved Penn 180 which I decided to strip down and renovate. A reel so basic there isn't much in engineering terms to go wrong with it. I just cleaned off the salt and green gunge, gave it a service, then immediately pressed it into use fishing with Andy Bradbury aboard his charter boat 'Blue Mink' out from Fleetwood.

Feeling a bit nostalgic, I paired it up to an old boat rod I found lying around, and to complete the picture, I tied a metal 3 boomed paternoster to the end of the line and off I went, prepared to stick to my guns

come what may. Nothing particularly outstanding to report. A typically good mixed day tucked in off Cleveleys with Plaice, Dabs, Smoothhounds and the like in hungry feeding mood.

Rather than struggling, my outfit claimed at least one of every species that came onboard, plus I had the added bonus of the only Thornback Ray, all of which goes to show that while the little Penn and the rest of the outfit might well have appeared antiquated, and despite the paternoster looking like a Christmas tree, you need to look at the 'presents' it had hanging from it. I also took it out several times aboard my own boat and caught well. So sometimes new or modern isn't necessarily better after all.

As previously mentioned, I've used the latest gold Penn reels on many occasions both in Luce Bay and up around the Isle of Mull. I've also used the big Internationals at many destinations dotted around the World, plus, I've had other basic antiquated models given to me by people who probably thought they were doing me a favour.



I once used a 4/0 Senator from the beach in Namibia for sharks which we had to over 200 pounds. I also bought myself a couple of Super Mariners for my every day fishing back in the 1970's which served me very well in a number of situations. These had narrow metal spools which I bought with offshore wreck fishing in mind. Shark and Conger fishing too.

The one thing you had to be mindful of, and this goes for all metal spooled reels at the time of which the Super Mariner was one, was that if the line came back on under extreme pressure, it could end up flexing the edges of the spool slightly. While barely noticeable to the naked eye, this was sometimes enough to touch the side plates resulting in a lock up.

Once the line is removed, either by cutting or by managing to strip it off and rewind it back without the pressure, the spool would re-assume its normal shape and it was business as usual, something thankfully you don't get from modern non-metal spools.

PW Comment: In 1999 I had a beach caught Bronze Whaler Shark of 212 pounds on a standard UK Penn Progression surf rod coupled to a Daiwa multiplier loaded with 70 pounds breaking strain braid.

DABS BY THE THOUSAND

A boat competition held by The Heron Angling Society in Herne Bay, Kent, during 1933, saw 4,982 Dabs brought to the scales for a total weight of 1,995 pounds.

HARDY'S TUNNY TACKLE

When it comes to fishing tackle, particularly during the early to mid-part of the twentieth century, the words Hardy's, quality, and reliability, were synonymous and interchangeable. This was particularly true in the field of fly fishing. But let's not forget that in the Tunny era from the early 1930's through to the mid 1950's, Hardy Brothers also produced quality tackle at the other end of the size spectrum, much of which is highly regarded and collectable today.

The Fortuna reel (For Tuna) is a typical example. Don't let the jokey name make you think otherwise. And don't think that this was just one model of reel. The 'Fortuna' name covers a whole range of top end reels, including saltwater fly reels.



Arguably, the best known of the Hardy big game reels is the Zane Grey, built from saltwater corrosion proof monel with a 2.5 to 1 retrieve ratio, all of which, as the advertising blurb goes, was engineered and built like a Swiss watch. Line drag was primarily controlled by a 6 point capstan star drag, with secondary pressure applied by a leather auxiliary brake pad fitted to the forward facing strengthening bar to help slow the spool by hand without the user suffering burnt fingers.

Hardy's also built Tuna rods. I have the good fortune to know the person who owns the complete outfit used by Lorenzo Mitchell-Henry for some of his Tunny fishing along the Yorkshire coast. Due to the obvious value of this outfit, for security reasons, he wishes to remain anonymous. And to all intents and purposes, the outfit looks like, and supposedly is, just as Mitchell-Henry left it after stepping off the boat.

The line is Irish flax loaded on to a Hardy's Zane Grey reel. But it's the rod that particularly grabbed my attention, made from lancewood fashioned like split cane, put together with the 'inner point' flattened off so it could be laid over a tapered steel inner bar, the wood having been whipped over as opposed to being glued, allowing the Lancewood sections forming the outer hexagonal shape to slide over the steel under load, as glue would not be able to maintain its hold under the level of pressure the rod was put expected to be put under. As for Maintaining the whippings and wood, regular applications of linseed oil were needed to keep the outer 'cladding' in tip-top condition.

TUNNY FISHING AND THE BRITISH TUNNY CLUB

Despite North Sea Herring fishermen being of the opinion that Tunny only appeared off the British coast after World War I, early evidence of Tunny migration through British and Irish waters comes from reports of large 'Blue Mackerel' taken by men in rowing dinghies off the Devon coast during the early 1800's.

These were huge fish taken in Pilchard nets, causing chaos, and threatening loss of life if the boat had capsized. Similar stories off the Irish coast around north Mayo and Donegal (all of which fits today's known Blue Fin Tuna pattern) tell of men hauling 'King Mackerel' in Herring nets. Fish so large they couldn't be weighed. Large 'Mackerel' were also reported as seen off the Scottish coast around the same time, getting as far north as Orkney and Shetland.

So far as rod and line fishing goes, while the 1930's is credited as being the start of the 'Golden Era' of Britain's North Sea Tunny (Blue Fin Tuna) angling, the seeds for that success had been sown towards the close of the preceding decade (see Chapter 4), and in some cases even earlier than that. There had been rumours, supposed sightings, and even dead Tunny washed up along the North Sea shoreline. But the first actual example of 'real' evidence for their existence was a dead 728 pound specimen in Poole Harbour in 1912, quickly followed by reported sightings in the North Sea later the same year.

Another dead specimen said to weigh 1,000 pounds was washed up on a mud bank at Walton-on-the-Naze, added to which, an edition of the Daily Mail in August 1929 carried a story about the British Sea Anglers' Society having received information from North Sea Herring boat crews, of huge fish around their boats 40 miles off Scarborough, with the crew of the steam drifter 'Ascendant' even managing to bring a 560 pound specimen back to port.



Spurred on by all of this, Henry Stapleton-Cotton made the first pioneering attempt to catch a Tunny on rod and line out from Scarborough in 1929. A venture which resulted in the hooking and eventual losing of two Tunny estimated to have been in the region of 600 pounds apiece, very clearly demonstrating that it was possible both to target, and to hook-up, large Tunny in British waters, a suggestion backed up by the first report of a North Sea Tunny on rod and line coming later that same year from British Sea Anglers' Society member F. B. Haanam with a specimen of 308 pounds.

Unfortunately for Mr. Haanam, though fortunately for people like Stapleton-Cotton and Lorenzo (Lawrie) Mitchell-Henry, that first Tunny had been taken while fishing out from Odden in Danish waters, which meant the race for Britain's first was still very much on.

That first fish wasn't long in coming. It was August 27th of the following summer in fact, with Lorenzo Mitchell-Henry on the rod, resulting in a good fish, beaten, boated, and brought ashore, where it weighed in at 591 pounds. Britain's first Tunny record, ironically falling to the man who a couple of years later would weigh in Britain's last Tunny record with a magnificent specimen of 851 pounds taken off Whitby, a record which still stands to this day.

Also, a record that was not without its controversy. Not regarding Mitchell-Henry's fish. But the fact that it was bettered by a fish of 852 pounds caught by Lincolnshire farmer John Hedley-Lewis which was unfortunately disqualified as a record, arguably on the grounds of sour grapes as detailed in the next inclusion. Other fish caught later in that inaugural year included specimens of 392, 630, and 735 pounds, the latter falling just 23 pounds short of Zane Greys then World record.

The following year, 1931, by all accounts resulted in a rather a poor Tunny season, though some excellent fish were still brought ashore. Colonel E. T. Peel for example, had a brace weighing in at 700 and 798 pounds, while Mrs. Sparrow beat a specimen of 469 pounds, in both cases fishing well off around the Dogger Bank.

The following season saw the fish come in very much closer to shore, at times as close as 4 miles off. A season in which Harold Hardy hooked a massive fish estimated at around 16 feet in length. A monster which was on the line for several hours before it finally broke free. And so the seasons went on, with Tunny topping 700 pounds being brought ashore in each subsequent year right through to the beginning of WWII in 1939, at which point it was unsafe to be out on the sea, particularly the North Sea, as the Germans had fast motor-torpedo boats operating in the area from bases in Dutch, German and Danish waters.

I think it's fair to say that Tunny fishing was regarded as the 'property' of the well to do. You need only look at the number of double barrel names and military or bestowed titles to appreciate just exactly who was out there taking part. On top of this, it took money, real money, to charter a commercial boat and crew from Whitby or Scarborough for days on end. Weeks on end in some cases, only returning to port when the weather forced the boats back in.

But while it may well have been the 'in thing' to be seen to be Tunny fishing at the time, it was most certainly far from glamorous living rough aboard a smelly commercial fishing boat, or being towed around the North Sea in a tiny rowing boat for hours on end by a giant example of the most powerful fish in the sea, which, as I know from personal experience with Yellow Fin Tuna in the tropics, is trying its level best to rip your arms out of their sockets.

The best example of the hardship aspect of Tunny fishing was given to me by the late Bill Pashby, who I visited at his home in Scarborough in 2010. Bill would have been in his teens at the time, working aboard his father's boat 'Courage', which as one of its regular customers had a hydraulics engineering company director from Teddington named Harry Weatherly. Still full of respect, throughout the recorded interview Bill always referred to him as Mr. Weatherly, explaining how, because he wasn't the best of sailors, he would erect a small tent to sleep in on the deck just in front of the wheelhouse for the duration of the trip. And as a further example of the physical endurance required, Bill recalled a trip made by Cyril Hubert-Frisby VC, who over a 5-day period boated 12 big Tunny, with 5 of them weighing between 461 and 658 pounds coming in the same day.

To facilitate a potentially long Tunny trip, it wasn't simply a case of loading the fishing gear and some food on board, then heading out to the Herring grounds. For starters, the main Herring shoals could be anywhere, and towards the final days of the Tunny angling era when the Herring population was on the verge of collapse, they could be particularly difficult to locate in good enough numbers to have the Tunny appear when the nets were being hauled. Ships radio, and plenty of 'hand-outs' in the form of crates of beer or bottles of whiskey, were as vital to success as any piece of fishing tackle, the idea being to head off to where the Herring drifters were working and wait for 'the call'.



As the long sheet of net was being hand hauled, Herrings that were only lightly tangled in the mesh would drop back into the water, inadvertently setting up an area of chum which would sometimes bring pods of large Tunny to the surface to mop them up. It didn't happen every time, and there was no saying where, when, or even if at all. But when it did happen, enterprising Herring boat skippers would get on the radio in the hope that an angling party would be in the vicinity, which if they were, would be guided in by flashing the boats mast light.

The angling boat would approach the Herring netter to give them their 'reward', then back off a little way, lowering the rowing boat, which would then be sculled over to the Herring netter by Bill on the oars, perhaps with Harry Weatherly aboard getting the gear ready, until the dinghy was positioned right in amongst the action.

Why you might ask would anyone want to fish possibly 50 miles out in the North Sea from a rowing boat for one of the largest, and certainly most powerful fish, found anywhere in the World? Well, the simple answer is that the British Tunny Club rules said that's how it had to be done, and to do otherwise meant not only disqualification of any weights recorded, but incurring the wrath of its other members, who clearly felt that certain standards needed to be maintained. So over Bill would row, then a whole Herring bait would be free lined in amongst the Tunny as they weaved and darted about mopping up every free meal they could find, hopefully including the one with the hook set into it.

So far as the tackle goes, the rods needed to be well constructed, as were the reels. Not everyone would have the same taste in hand tackle, but generally speaking, rods would be triangular strips of Lancewood cut in the way of a split cane rod, mounted over a steel inner bar and whipped in place. No glue was used as none would be strong enough, besides which, the wood needed to be able to 'slide' over the steel inner when a good bend was put in the rod.

As for reels, these would be a mix of large centre pins and low geared multipliers such as the Hardy Zane Grey, the latter constructed from monel to make it saltwater proof, usually spooled up with line spun from Irish flax. In addition, a leather pad would be fitted to the reels forward facing spacer bar to allow extra pressure to be applied by hand without the risk of having the fingers burned by friction. Down at the business end, a 6 foot length of piano wire terminating in a very large, strong, sharp hook, would complete the outfit.

The dinghy would be rowed over while Herrings were being tossed in to keep the Tunny's interest up. The hook would be baited, and from that point on, nobody other than the angler was allowed to touch the rod. A hooked fish would then take flight pulling against, and usually dragging, the small boat, often stern first, with Bill Pashby or one of his compatriots rowing like mad in an attempt to maintain position and add extra drag to the proceedings. Then when beaten, the Tunny would be gaffed in the bottom lip, at which point the mother ship would steam over, rope the fish, and lift it onboard, and the whole operation would start over again. The Club also organised a women's Tunny challenge cup. Tunny Club member Dr. Bidi Evans still holds the ladies record with a fish of 714 pounds taken in 1947.

Of course, not everyone was interested in being a member of the British Tunny Club, nor did they all charter commercial fishing vessels and dinghies with crew members working the oars. Reports of all sorts of attempts and encounters are scattered about the Internet, of which I've included a selection here.

Special trains were even reputedly put on to transport members 'Up North'. Colonel Sir Edward Peel for example sailed his large Sudanese-crewed steam yacht 'St. George' up to the Yorkshire Tunny grounds. Similarly, Baron Henri de Rothschild aboard his 1,000 ton yacht 'Eros'. And let's not forget Lady Yule with her daughter Gladys, said to be the richest heiress in the empire, aboard their 1,574-ton yacht 'Nahlin'. Also finding their way 'up north' were newspaper proprietor Lord Astor, actor Charles Laughton, Conservative party chairman Lord Crathorne, and Guinness family member Lord Moyne, who was later assassinated in Egypt.

The Pashby's took their bookings in the main from Harry Weatherly, though they did on occasion take out other people, one of which was Lady Broughton. She was quite a character according to Bill. Throughout the encounter, which because of her strength would generally take longer than the men, she would swear and shout obscenities at the fish.

On odd occasions when the need took her, she would also 'wet' herself without batting an eye lid. But mainly it was Harry Weatherly, who on one memorable occasion caught 4 fish before breakfast, the 3 best going 545, 589, and 743 pounds. And that's how it went when it picked up again after the war years, right through into the 1950's, by which time catches were slowing off due to the scarcity of the Herrings.

Unfortunately, some of the several Herring populations in the North Sea were on the verge of total collapse. But it wasn't only the bait shoals that were being hit. The Tunny themselves were also taking a bit of a battering.

It's strange really, because Tunny brought ashore at places such as Scarborough were put on ice and turned into peep shows. When one deteriorated to the point of putting visitors off, they would simply wheel in another one. They had no commercial value. Leastways, not on the British side of the North Sea. Over in Scandinavia however it was a very different story.

A report from the Scarborough News (2016) suggests that by 1960, Tunny numbers had collapsed to the point where they were too low to support recreational fishing, suggesting that it was commercial pressure that brought about the situation. In 1949 the Norwegian commercial fleet numbered 49 boats. A year later it had rocketed to more than 200 boats, landing in excess of 10,000 tonnes.

This, coupled to a Herring scarcity for finding feeding Tunny, meant that the writing was well and truly on the wall. As a result, the last Tunny caught on rod and line was by Harry Weatherly in 1954, with Bill Pashby again on the oars.



The British Tunny Club was founded in 1933 with its headquarters at Scarborough, its first president being Colonel (later, Sir) Edward Peel. The original HQ building is still there to this day. In fact, Bill Pashby took me to have a look at the place, which at that time was a fish and chip shop with Tunny photographs adorning its walls, and still with the Tunny Club name on the wall outside. Very much a gentleman's club with clearly considered rules, to which all who fished for Tunny in British waters were expected to adhere.

PW Comment: In 1977, a moratorium on Herring fishing was agreed, after which, the long slow climb back from the brink for the species was allowed to get underway. Whether Tunny numbers followed suit is a matter for conjecture, though there are still occasional reports of sightings, and with things the way they are over in the west off Cornwall, the Atlantic Coast of Ireland, and the west coast of Scotland right up to Orkney and even Shetland, there is every reason to at least hope that Tunny fishing in the North Sea is not lost forever.

MIKE MILLMAN TUNNY FISHING HISTORY

Despite the fact that I risk repeating some aspects of the fascinating history of the Yorkshire Tunny fishing scene, rather than try to integrate snippets in to my own work on the topic, I have decided to reproduce here an information email sent to me by angling journalist and historian Mike Millman as a complete and separate offering.....

“The Golden Age of British Sea Angling began in the 1920’s when it became known that Bluefin tuna averaging 500 lbs in weight were to be found in the vicinity of the English and Dutch North Sea herring drifters. It drew participants to a game that was truly for men of steel, as the fishing was from small boats called ‘cobbles’ that were set adrift with a rower from a ‘mother ship’ quite often more than sixty miles offshore.

Only the very wealthy could participate as the hire of the drifter and its crew cost at least £100, an immense amount of money for the time. Col. R. F. Stapleton-Cotton was the man who began it all. He hooked two bluefins in the 600 lb class but both broke up his tackle. The first capture was made in 1930 by Irishman Mitchell-Henry who fought a Bluefin of 560 lbs for three hours during which his boat was towed several miles by the huge fish. Two years later the World Record came to Britain when Sir Edward Peel caught a fish of 798 lbs, taking it away from the famous American author of western books and big game angler, Zane Gray.

In 1933 Mitchell Henry, who by then had over twenty 500 lbs plus North Sea tunny to his credit, became the British Record holder with a fish of 851 lbs – still standing today but he was denied the British

Tunny Club Record for a slight infringement of its rules. Tunny fishing was stopped by the onset of war but began again at the end of hostilities with 1949 considered the best year of all with forty-nine tunny recorded.

John Hedley Lewis battled a fish of 852 lbs eight miles North East of the Whitby Light. Hooked at 3.30 a.m. it was alongside his rowing boat by 5.05 a.m. but an hour passed before the 'mother ship' caught up and the prize was secured. Controversy that had surrounded the Mitchell-Henry capture surfaced again. Lewis was awarded the Tunny Club record but not the British because the fish had been secured to the scales with a 'wet' rope judged to weigh about one pound.

During the morning of the Lewis success Rod Taylor another dedicated Tunny fisherman with many big fish to his credit had Bluefin of 740 and 647 lbs. The feats of angling in the annals of the Tunny Club are amazing. Major C.H. Frisby who won the Victoria Cross during the first World War was, in a single day, credited with five Tunny that together weighed almost 3,000 lbs. He went on to become a member of the British Empire Team who contested the annual International Tuna Cup Match in the 1960's at Wedgeport in Nova Scotia.

In the post war years, the leading Tunny hunter was H. E. Wetherley who between 1949 and 1954 caught thirty-two fish that had an average weight of 600 lbs. North Sea Tunny fishing was always a very expensive pastime and post war the cost became too great for even the pockets of the very well to do. The demise of the North Sea herring shoals on which the Tunny preyed was also a factor in the sport coming to an end, and the last two Bluefins, both fish of 600 lbs were taken by Wetherley on August 17th 1954. A year later the Tunny Club was disbanded and its memorabilia donated to the Scarborough Museum, who now have plans to mount a spectacular display in an updated building".

HAROLD J. HARDY – TUNNY FISHING



Within the pages of 'Modern Sea Angling' by F. D. Holcombe Third Edition (Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd., 1932) lies a Chapter on Tunny Fishing by Harold J. Hardy, shown in the photograph opposite. Much of the history of Tunny fishing is covered in the previous inclusion. That said, Hardy does offer up some interesting additional historical snippets, as well as going into useful detail regarding his take on Tunny tackle which hasn't been covered, and is therefore worthy of mention here.

Starting with the historical snippets, it is said that the first ever record of a Tunny from British waters is by Pennant for a specimen killed off Inveraray in 1796. No method of killing is given, but almost certainly it would not have been with a rod and line. Jenkins also records the Tunny in his book 'The Vertebrate Fauna of Yorkshire', published in 1853, based on specimens taken off Bridlington and Teesmouth. Again, sadly, no additional information is provided. So very clearly, they were known to visit British and Irish waters for many years before Michell-Henry finally succeeded in getting one into a boat and back to

shore for weighing in 1930.

Hardy describes the best Tunny rods as being made from Bamboo, with or without a steel inner core. Good rods could also be made from Hickory-Bamboo hybrids, with the Hickory over the Bamboo. As for reels, he recommends a drum of at least 9 inches in diameter to facilitate a speedier retrieve, with a

line capacity of 500 yards. Smaller diameter reels with gears to help keep up with a fast swimming fish were also used at the time, and in all cases with a brake, and of a design where the handles didn't rotate with the spool to save damaging your hand while trying to take back some measure of control.

Working parts should be encased to protect them from sea water. As for loading the reel, the British Sea Anglers' Society had set a capacity limit of 500 yards, though did not stipulate its strength. Typically, this would be 200 yards of 100 pounds bs then 300 yards of 70 pounds bs made from the finest Irish Flax. And down at the business end he recommended the use of a twisted steel trace longer than the length of the fish, suggesting between 14 and 20 feet bearing a 4 to 6 inch Limerick hook float fished under a balloon bought from Woolworths.

THE BRITISH TUNNY RECORD GOES

The British Tunny record caught off Whitby in 1933 by Lorenzo Mitchell-Henry still stands to this day. I use the term 'controversial' on account of the fact that many believe, and there is evidence to support this, that the Mitchell-Henry fish was beaten fair and square, and should at the very least have been an equal British record shared with a fish caught by John Hedley-Lewis.

Tunny fishing back then was a well-heeled gentleman's (and ladies') pursuit. So, when rough and ready Lincolnshire farmer Hedley-Lewis came on the scene, he probably wasn't as well received as he perhaps might otherwise have been. Certainly not when he came ashore with a Tunny of 852 pounds which beat Mitchell-Hedges record by a pound.

This obviously ruffled feathers, and very soon there were murmurings of foul play. Somebody had spotted that the fish was strung up from the scales by length of wet rope, which it was suggested at the time, 'must' have weighed more than a pound, and as this was not deducted from the 852-pound quoted weight, the record claim was eventually disqualified.

So how I wonder did Mitchell-Hedges hang his fish from the scales, and was the rope, if one was used there, also then deducted from his quoted weight. All of which led to claims and counter claims, which if the truth be known, was probably a mix of sour grapes and not having your face fit.

PW Comment: While to an extent the episode regarding Hedley-Lewis is a matter of recorded fact, I got the story from an interview I did with Scarborough Tunny guide, the late Bill Pashby, who told me many other stories of what went on aboard his father's boat at the time, on which he worked as oarsman in the rowing boat actually used to beat these huge fish, and in particular, those caught by Harry Weatherly. Clearly, he felt that Hedley-Lewis had been badly treated.

THE INVENTION OF FIBREGLASS

Work on producing fibreglass has been a long and slowly evolving process. This, dates back to work initially done by American Herman Hammesfahr in 1880, who applied for, and was granted, a patent for fibreglass cloth that same year. However, it would take more than 50 years of continuing research and development to come up with the product we would recognise today, when in 1932, Corning Glass research worker Dale Kleist accidentally allowed a jet of compressed air to touch a stream of molten glass during a glass welding operation. This resulted in a spray of glass fibres, which just happened to be the very thing researchers had been attempting and failing to produce for so many years.

Looking to find marketing opportunities, and wanting to develop their fibreglass still further, 3 years later in 1935, Corning Glass began joint operations with Owens-Illinois who had also previously been experimenting with fibreglass, and in 1936 the invention was patented. Following this, in 1938, the two

company's merged to become Owens-Corning, leading to further research and development, which clearly demonstrated just how strong and light fibreglass would be, with a strand of fibreglass being stronger than a strand of steel of the same weight

In 1936, spurred on to some extent by shortages of some natural materials, and with another World war looming, research into plastics and resins led Carlton Ellis of DuPont to be awarded a patent for polyester resin, which the Germans quickly improved upon by refining the curing process. Fortunately for the allies, British Intelligence managed to steal the secret of the process from the German's which they immediately turned over to the Americans, who in 1942, went on to develop the forerunner of today's polyester resin. Light strong structural components for aircraft quickly followed, as did the first ever fibreglass boat known as the 'Daysailer' made by Ray Green, and the rest as they say quite literally is history.

WEYMOUTH PLEASURE PIER

The planning of Weymouth Commercial & Pleasure Pier dates back to 1812, after which in 1840, as an extension of the Esplanade, a piled structure was built at the north side of the harbour which was subsequently rebuilt and extended in 1859.

A passenger landing stage for the Great Western Railway was added in 1888, and a pavilion theatre in 1908. In the 1930's, harbour work resulted in this being replaced by a brand new 1300 foot concrete pier which was opened by the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) in 1933. Forty years on in 1973, work began on constructing a roll-on/roll-off ferry terminal serving the Channel Islands and France. Despite all this, sea angling from the structure has always been allowed.

CONGER & THRESHER SHARK RECORDS

In the World of Conger fishing, the name H. A. Kelly is etched into the species history. Kelly beat Miss Bluebell Klean's 1922 record weight of 63.3.0 (see Chapter 4) with a fish of 84 pounds taken in 1933 over the wreck of the 'Tokufuko Maru' lying 5 miles off the coast of Dungeness in Kent. A record that would last until 1970, and even then, only beaten by one pound. A fish Kelly caught in the company of other large Conger Eels weighing 75, 66, 60 and 55 pounds. And as if to clinch his position in sea angling history, later that same year, Kelly added the Thresher Shark record to his CV with a specimen of 280 pounds.

MORE CLIMATE CHANGE WARNINGS

As you might expect, as science advances and the techniques it relies upon improve, so the power of its arguments are enhanced, as slowly but surely the evidence behind a particular theory starts to pile up. Never was this more true than with climate change, which we tend to think of as a 'modern' phenomenon (modern in this particular instance meaning today).

What we often forget is that the underlying causes of climate change, and more importantly for our purposes here, rising sea temperatures and their effect on fish stocks and distribution, go right back to the start of the Industrial Revolution. An era when nobody cared what they released into the atmosphere or poured into rivers eventually emptying into the sea.



Climate sceptics, of which unfortunately there are still many, whether that be through genuine belief or through convenience if they happen to be industrialists with dangerously polluting waste products to get rid of, often point to 1934 as the evidence for years of record high temperatures being natural ‘spikes’ surrounded by periods of ‘normality’ and that this is perhaps all part of the natural cycle rather than a progressive build up to impending catastrophe, as evidence gathered in the twenty first century now seems to suggest. The list of record breaking temperature years this decade that have contributed most to climate change we are now seeing it, are 1934, 1937 and 1940.

Of particular importance is the year 1937. The following year, British engineer Guy Stewart Callendar made a point of attempting to revive the greenhouse effect theory warnings put out by the 1903 Swedish Nobel Prize winning scientist Svante Arrhenius, who was the first scientist to use the basic principles of physical chemistry to calculate estimates of the extent to which rises in atmospheric carbon dioxide increase the Earth's surface

temperature.

This came to be known as the Arrhenius effect, which later lead American scientist David Keeling to alert the World of man's contribution to the greenhouse effect and global warming. In 1938, Callendar presented evidence that CO₂ levels in the atmosphere had in fact been rising for half a century, a theory scientific opinion at the time chose either to dispute or ignore, leaving twenty first century anglers (amongst other people) to suffer the consequences.

THE FIRST TRUE MODERN SPINNING REEL



UK anglers tend to use the names ‘fixed spool reel’ and ‘spinning reel’ as interchangeable terms for the same thing. True fixed spool reels have been around for quite some time, with claims regarding their invention made by a number of people between the 1870's and the early twentieth century, when finally, textile magnate, the First Baron Illingworth, patented the idea in 1905 (see Chapter 2), and for many, that is seen as the ‘birth date’ of the fixed spool reel.

Americans on the other hand see things a little differently. In part on account of the species they target and the way in which many of these fish feed, their approach to fishing is somewhat different to ours. This includes a lot of lure fishing which needs to be done at range and which is often best served with a fixed spool reel. They on the other hand refer to them as Spinning Reels.

It may be that I am missing something here, and there is a difference between ‘Spinning’ and ‘Fixed Spool’ reels. I can't see it, but that counts for nothing. And so it was that in 1935, American publication Field & Stream announced the introduction of the first spinning reel known as the ‘Luxor’.

To quote the coverage.... “The dynamics of taking line from a spool saw its best answer in the spinning reel. It was not until after World War II that spinning reels generally were accepted in America. The spinning reel made fishing more accessible and inviting for many people”, unquote.

The key word I feel in all of this is ‘introduced’. They tended to fish with small multipliers, a reel they did in fact invent. So, the fixed spool, spinning reel, call it what you will was an invader, stealing ground from their more traditional approach to fishing. Fortunately for us, that ‘invasion’ worked both ways, and we eventually got to see the Luxor spinning reel over here too, which is perhaps as well, as this was the reel legendary Irish angler Jack Shine used to make some of his earliest Porbeagle catches from the shore (see Chapter 8).

POLARISED SUN-GLASSES FOR FISH SPOTTING

Not such an important piece here of kit on the UK as they are elsewhere, polarised sun-glasses were first made by Ray Ban in 1936 for aviators as an improvement to the first conventional sun-glasses made in the late 1920’s by Sam Foster.

On the angling scene, they are probably most widely associated with trout fishing in home waters, and shallow water fishing in the tropics over shallow flats for Bonefish, Tarpon and Permit. Sea water around much of the British Isles is usually either too murky or too deep to see any appreciable distance through with any sort of visual aid, though there might be a case for wearing polaroid’s under certain conditions when fly fishing for Mullet, and more usually Bass, if only to protect the eyes from a rogue heavy fly when the balance of the outfit all starts to go down the pan.

THE BRITISH CANOE UNION

Formed in 1936, the British Canoe Union might not appear to have much of a sea angling link at this stage, but it most certainly will have in years to come in a manner people at the time could not have predicted, as the growth of sit on offshore kayaks and all that goes with them in terms of ancillary equipment gathers a huge following towards the close of the century and beyond. This resulted in the Canoe Union becoming a canoe/kayak umbrella group for the entire British Isles in 2000.

CONGER RECORD NOT CLAIMED

In 1936, some 3 years after H. A. Kelly set a new British Conger record with a fish of 84 pounds from Dungeness, while fishing out of Looe aboard ‘Chid’ Hoskins boat ‘Heather Glen’, Yanny Jordanopulo boated Conger Eels of 89 pounds, 84 pounds and 70 pounds, plus other unspecified smaller fish. The weighing was witnessed as being accurate and photographs of the biggest fish were taken (which I have seen c/o Mike Millman), but for whatever reason, Mr. Jordanopulo did not make a record claim.

BERKLEY FISHING TACKLE

From a British and Irish perspective, American fishing tackle company Berkley is a bit part player. Anglers over here did have a brief ‘flirtation’ with the company, when in the 1984 they ran a promotion offering \$1,000 for any ratified IGFA record caught using their Trilene line (see Chapter 10). Apart from than that, Fireline Braid, plus a few bits and pieces of terminal tackle such as swivels, I think it’s fair to say that the Berkley fishing tackle pretty much passed us by on this side of the Atlantic. Not so



on the other side however, where Berkley is a big name player with a rather interesting history which I will briefly recount here

What would become modern day Berkley began at Spirit Lake in Iowa in 1937, when 16 year-old Berkley Bedell saved up \$50 from delivering newspapers to set up another pocket money 'business' selling

hand tied fishing flies to local tackle shops. So successful was this that by 1939 he was employing several girls to tie flies for him in their homes, which he would buy from them and sell on along with his own, under the name of the Berkley Fly Company.

The venture quickly grew to the point where he was forced to expand to the upper floor of a local grocery store, interrupted by University and national service with the Army Air Corps, after which he returned to Spirit Lake to resume his interest in fishing tackle, and eventually launch the Berkley Company we know today.

It was while working with his new company that he came across an article about nylon-covered cables for sailing boats. This triggered the idea of nylon coated wire for fishing traces, so he arranged a visit to the company, and shortly afterwards began marketing the 'Steelon' leader, which also sparked a curiosity and interest in the possibilities for extruding nylon to make fishing line. This was something others had also been trying to do since the invention of nylon by DuPont in the 1930's (see next inclusion) but had not had a great deal of success with due to the early chemistry of the nylon, which produced a stiff and difficult to use extruded strand which fisherman very soon turned their backs on.

It wasn't until 1959 and the introduction of Stren fishing line by DuPont that this problem appeared to have been solved, which roughly coincided with the development of Berkley Trilene line, of which the company sent out literally thousands of sample spools to fishing tackle shops to give out to their top customers to try and hopefully later buy. This they did, launching a brand which as I mentioned earlier, had a big (and rather costly) promotion in the UK during the 1980's, and which is arguably one of the top rated monofilament nylon brands in the US to this day.

Here in the UK, importing Berkley tackle was at one stage in the hands of Birmingham tackle dealer and top coarse angler Terry Eustace, who set up a promotional talk which I attended. With the formal presentation out of the way, we were all given goody bags, the bulk of which was stuff I would never use in a million years. So, I had a word with Terry who apologised and invited me to choose a selection of Berkley items which I could use.

This included half a dozen jars of a new synthetic 'wonder bait' developed by Berkley scientists that pretty much guaranteed a result which he insisted I try and report back on. So, as you do, I took it and promised to give it a go, then popped it into my Trout fishing bag and thought no more about it.

Sometime later I was fishing on an any method Trout ticket at Esthwaite Lake in Cumbria, where I very quickly caught my limit on popped up worm and sweet corn. It was then that I remembered the Berkley Power-Bait and decided that with nothing to lose at that stage, I had to give it a go, at which point a blob of the Salmon smelling orange dough was pressed around my hook, and away it went out into the lake.

I gave it a couple of seconds to settle on the bottom then put the rod back on the rests to set up the clip-on line bite indicator, which for some reason, I couldn't get to stay on the line, that reason being that the Power-Bait had been instantly taken by a Rainbow Trout.

As you might expect, this immediately raised my interest level, particularly when the same thing happened again and again. So much so that other anglers were coming over to see what I was doing, each of whom I gave a blob of dough, and each of whom also immediately caught fish. All that is except my game fishing buddy and self confessed 'regular blanker' Bob Fitchie who remained fish less. Needless to say, they all contacted Terry Eustace to get more for themselves. It truly was a 'wonder bait', which by the time I next made it up to Esthwaite typically it had been banned. But not before it had been very clearly demonstrated that synthetic baits and additives can, if formulated properly, be attractive to fish.

That's a Trout fishing story and this is a sea fishing book. But I felt I needed to tell that story to set the scene for the next phase of Berkley Power-Bait saga. This was another synthetic product called 'Gulp', which I was invited to try towards the end of the 1990's. This time it was targeting sea anglers and was presented in a range of flavour based formulations, each moulded to resemble the animal it was supposed to taste like, such as a ragworm or a crab.

The outcome of that trip is discussed in Chapter 11. Briefly, Gulp caught lots of fish, particularly Gurnards and Dabs. It also claimed a Thornback Ray, and on a later outing to River Mersey, the prawn version caught a nice Codling. So, synthetics can work, which I am sure will be of value for the LRF enthusiasts.

SOUTHSEA SEA ANGLING CLUB CHILDREN'S BOAT FESTIVAL



Encouraging children to take up outdoor leisure pursuits has always been difficult. Never more so than at the time of writing, when the X-box is widely preferred to the tackle box. Youngsters coming through the ranks to take-over from the 'old guard' when they retire are essential. Something Southsea Sea Angling club picked up on at a very point in their history, with their annual Children's Boat Festival which they started in 1938. A year later, it had to be suspended due to the war, but it was back on again in

1946 and ran every year thereafter until 2001 when it was ended due to the cost of fuel, bait, insurance, and criminal records bureau requirements (CRB or DRB checks).

Talking with Jon Ayres who helped with the festival for almost 50 years, and who had access to some of the club's historical records, the inaugural year of 1938 saw around 100 children taking part. By 1955 that number had swelled to 655. Come 1959 it was 695, and in 1967 it had grown to 875. From around 1990 onwards it was around the 1,000 mark, giving an overall total from 1938 to 2001 when the running of the festival ceased, of approximately 45,000 participants.

The festival itself, which was free to enter, was split into 3 @ 2 hour long segments, in the morning, afternoon, and evening, with 2 adult members per boat acting as crew; 10 people on the beach getting the boats away and back in safely, and around a dozen ladies providing food and drink for the crews. In terms of administration, the competition was for top senior boy and girl, and junior boy and girl, with the top boy and girl overall receiving a watch, which typically would take a catch of at least 20 pounds even to be in with a chance of winning.

Catches consisted mainly of Pouting, Wrasse, and Pollack, though a Conger of 25 pounds, and a Ray of 40 pounds were also caught, which when you consider that everyone was using hand lines, was some going. It was considered that rods and reels would have presented too many problems including bird nests, tangles, and of course safety issues due to flying hooks. Having got the taste for being out catching fish, the hope was that some of the youngsters would take up rod and line fishing later, in addition to which, the club wanted to show its community spirit.

DUPONT DEVELOP MONOFILAMENT NYLON

As the name suggests, monofilament nylon (the World's first synthetic fibre) as used in fishing line manufacturing, is made from the extrusion of a long, single, cheap to produce strand made by melting and mixing certain polymers, a process devised and developed by DuPont chemist Wallace Hume Carothers in 1935 and made public after patenting the process in 1938, at which point the Ashaway Line and Twine Manufacturing Company put it to good commercial use in 1939 by producing the first monofilament nylon fishing line to reach the angling market.



As with Ashaway, DuPont too also began to explore the fishing line market. That said, one of Ashaway's own products, braided Dacron which was a braided polyester, would later go on to corner the fishing line market due to the early monofilament fishing lines being too stiff, creating casting and handling problems, though as an offset, nylon was noted for its knot strength and low visibility. Later, in 1959, DuPont developed and began marketing Stren which was a much softer, thinner fibre. This quickly caught on, as it all but eliminated the earlier criticisms of the original monofilament lines.

liar criticisms of the original monofilament lines.

PW Comment: Though I only really started fishing seriously in the early to mid-1960's, I can actually recall and relate to some of the early developments and difficulties mentioned above. For although Stren was on the market, not everyone either knew much about it, or could necessarily find or afford to buy it, so for many, monofilament nylon was still quite an unwieldy tool.

I also remember the Dacron era too, first coming into contact with it at Looe in Cornwall where all the shark fishing boats it seemed had decided to spool up with it. Then came more improvements to monofilament, followed by the development of modern braids, though that's another story, more of which later. Still there are pros and cons with each, so best not to completely commit to any one camp and chose the best for each specific application.

FIRST MULTIPLIER MAGNETIC BRAKES

A magnet braking system on a multiplier reel is defined as follows..... "A magnet brake system that utilises the electromagnetic force which occurs between magnets and moving metal close by, in this case the spool wall of the reel. The brake force is almost directly proportional to the spool speed and is inversely proportional to the distance between the magnets and the spool.

The magnet brake system was the first brake system to be able to adjust the force from outside by changing the distance between the magnet and the spool wall by a dial. It may have a wide adjusting range but has a much larger brake at slow speed than centrifugal systems. The brake at high speed is less than a centrifugal system, and the magnet brake allows higher initial speed".

Researching both magnetic and centrifugal brakes for multiplier reels has been a nightmare. What I have found are some of the oldest patents for magnet brakes, which surprisingly (for me at least), precede the centrifugal brake. The earliest of these is US2465932A dated 11th October 1943 citing its inventor as Joseph C. Romine.

A few years later, on the 10th June 1947, patent US2482429A was filed by Albert E. Miller for a fishing reel magnetic brake, an application that was marked 'granted' in 1949. Then we have US4618106A on the 27th April 1983 citing Hideo Noda as the inventor on behalf of Shimano. Follow this with a patent filed on behalf of ABU AD on the 11th June 1986 citing Jarding U. Karlsson and Borje S. Moosberg as the inventors, and you start to see the problem I have here, with the patents mentioned being just a fraction of those filed.

Based on what I've seen, I would suggest that the magnetic brake as we know it was not developed all in one go with the later patents being variations or improvements on the original concept. To complicate matters further, Harlan Major's book 'Saltwater Fishing Tackle' revised 1948 edition has a picture of the World's first magnetically controlled reel made by Ocean City, aptly named the 'Inductor', it being the brainchild of Bob Ransome who worked for General Electric, which at the time was researching eddy current braking, looking at regenerative braking for amongst other things locomotives.



Ransome worked in the GEC metallurgy engineering lab, and it was their engineers who helped him put together the reel using a chrome plated copper disc as the revolving flux path adjacent to the set of Alnico magnets. They also engineered in a mechanism that allowed adjustment of the gap between the plate and the magnets. These reels were produced between 1939 and 1941, after which, GEC went over to war production.

PW Comment: Despite the fact that the principle of magnetic brakes to prevent casting backlash had been practically demonstrated as far back as the late 1930's, in the UK at least, distance casting, and the need to control a revolving spool under extreme casting conditions, didn't start to become important until Les Moncrieff publicised his groundbreaking practical Cod catches at Dungeness, clearly demonstrating that greater distance can equate to more fish.

ABU were advertising centrifugal brakes in their Ambassadeur range as early as 1965, which is very close in timing to the Moncrieff catches previously mentioned. But it wasn't until tournament casting took off during the 1970's that backlash control got a proper looking at, with the first of the 'modern' multipliers with mag-brakes appearing around 1983 to 1984.

THE START OF WORLD WAR II

September 3rd 1939, Prime minister Neville Chamberlain tells the nation it is at war with Germany, at which point pretty much all sea angling in areas under threat of a German invasion is suspended. Anyone wanting to put to sea must have a skipper's ticket.

Piers at many locations are requisitioned by the military, and while beach fishing is still permitted, in the months that follow, beach barricades and other defences put a stop to much of that, at which point many angling clubs were mothballed for temporary closure until the war is over in mid-1945.

THE ASHAWAY LINE & TWINE MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Despite nylon filament having been discovered by American chemist Wallace Hume Carothers in 1935 while working for DuPont as discussed earlier in this Chapter, it took a further 2 years to perfect the process, plus another year to patent it. They then had to look for applications to help recoup their investment, which again took time.

Far quicker out of the starting blocks was another American company known as the Ashaway Line and Twine Manufacturing Company, which very quickly found a use for DuPont's nylon fibres by producing the World's first nylon fishing line in 1939. One of a number of Ashaway fishing lines, both before and after the development of nylon, including in 1952 the introduction of braided Dacron fishing lines (see Chapter 7).

WESTERN FISHING LINES

Western Fishing Lines (WFL) is the company that in 1991 developed and marketed Spectra, which along with Dyneema, took the braided fishing line market by storm. Wind the clock back 52 years to 1939, and WFL is a small family owned business in California producing laces for shoes and corsets until the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese brought America into WWII, bringing with it new opportunities for the company to prosper.

One of those was a contract to use a 'new' product known as nylon developed by DuPont (covered earlier in the Chapter) to make parachute cords which were crucial to the war effort, particularly after the supply of oriental silk for both the chutes and the cords had been cut off by the Japanese. This gave a massive boost to the company. But it could only go on for so long, and with the end of the war, WFL found itself left with huge quantities of nylon yarn and nothing to use it on.

Any and all avenues for use would have been explored, one of which was to braid the surplus nylon they had on their hands into a variety of fishing lines, none of which as it would turn out proved suitable for fishing. But what that exercise did do was highlight the substantial demand for quality fishing line, persuading WFL to invest in monofilament nylon extrusion machinery, putting the company right there in the mix at the birth of monofilament fishing line research and development, a process developed by the Ashaway Line and Twine Manufacturing Company as discussed in the previous inclusion.

Taking one very large step forward through time, WFL continued producing fishing lines, as well as a range of none fishing related threads, ropes, twines and the like, and at one stage in the 1970's, the company decided to drastically reduce its product range, axing quite a number of fishing lines.

They then decided to relocate from California to a new state of the art facility in Colorado, where in 1991, a recreational product division was created in order that WFL could look to recapture the market share it once had in the recreational fishing line sector. A move which prompted them to look hard at one particular high performance ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene fibre which would ultimately result in Spectra braided fishing line.

MERCURY OUTBOARD MOTORS

Unlike most of the other outboard engine manufacturers, who as they say, 'started from scratch' by designing and building their units from the ground up, the Mercury story is somewhat different in that it is based on an existing product that was re-engineered. Similar I suppose to the way Formula One racing teams are taken over by new owners, re-engineered to some extent, then re-branded.



Unfortunately, details of that ‘other’ company are scant. What I have been able to find out is that when engineer Carl Kiekhaefer purchased the ailing Wisconsin based company in 1939, he did so with the intention of manufacturing magnetic separators for the dairy industry. The purchase however also included 300 defective outboard motors, which Kiekhaefer decided to rebuild and sell on to mail order company Montgomery Ward.

The story goes that these outboard engines were so much improved that Montgomery Ward asked for more, persuading Kiekhaefer to invest more design time into the units, eventually coming up with an outboard engine that could withstand the elements better than any of the competition of its day.

Allegedly riding on the back of the popularity of the Mercury Motor Company, Kiekhaefer ‘borrowed’ the Mercury name, covering himself by adding the logo of the Roman God Mercury. And so the Mercury Outboard Motor company was formed, taking

a staggering 16,000 orders the following year at the 1940 New York Boat Show.

Foreseeing that interest in boating would increase after WWII, Kiekhaefer designed a 10 hp alternate firing two-cylinder engine for the 1947 New York Boat Show which actually developed closer to 14 hp than to 10. This was the ‘Super 10,’ which was another big hit. Next came a 25 hp unit that actually put out closer to 28 hp, followed by a 40 hp version.

Come 1957, Mercury was producing 60 hp units with some quite revolutionary engineering in them. Not wanting to get too technical here, having switched to reed valves which also served as intermediate main bearings, instead of increasing the size of the crankcase to accommodate them, Kiekhaefer mini-mised the crankcase volume, resulting in a higher compression ratio and yet more power.

Using two stock Mark 75 Mercury power units refuelled on the go stopping only to swap drivers, Kiekhaefer’s staff set a new World endurance record of 50,000 miles at an average speed 30.3 mph, a record which still stands to this day.

With the record in the bag, Mercury engineers dismantled the 2 engines looking for signs of wear, finding both still to be within factory tolerances. Testament to the engineering skill that propelled Mercury Outboards to the top of the class right through to the time when I started small boat fishing.

During the 1970’s on into the 1980’s, Mercury was still the outboard brand name to be seen with. Strangely enough, whilst I would have liked one, I never actually owned one, though I often fished from boats that were Mercury powered. Then along came the Japanese, and on this side of the Atlantic at least, American made outboard sales began to slip into decline to the point that today they stand out from the crowd on account of their rarity.

THE LOSS OF MINEHEAD PIER

Built in 1895 by George Luttrell at a cost of £12,000, the 700 foot long pier at Minehead was the only pier to be completely demolished in WWII to clear a line of sight for gun batteries.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Sea Fishing (1934) Ed. Eric Cooper, Marquess of Sligo and Eric Parker et al.

Sea Fishing (1935) by Percival Lea Birch.

Flounder Fishing with the Wander Tackle (1935) by Percy Wadham.

Modern Sea Fishing: From Bass to Tunny (1937) by Eric Cooper.

Inshore Sea Fishing (1939) by Williams S. Forsyth.

Sea Fishing: Angling from Beach, Boat or Pier (1940) by Frank Ditchfield.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

Angling – A Country Life Publication by George Newnes Limited which appears to have been in circulation on two separate occasions, from 1936 to 1956, and again between 1959 and 1981.

CHAPTER SIX – 1941 TO 1950

A decade of which almost half was given over to war, during which, had it not been for the fact that we are an island nation, the outcome could have been so very different. A country which, controversially or otherwise, built itself the greatest empire the World has ever seen, based to no small measure on its seafaring skills of navigation and exploration. Attributes with profound benefits to the war effort, prompting the development of VHF radio and Decca navigation, the latter of which was to have such a vital part to play in delivering bumper angling catches, particularly from offshore wrecks, in the decades to come. And to help realise the bounty of those wrecks, fibreglass was finally declassified and pressed into service by rod builders. But in angling terms, we only have half of a decade, and even that was dogged by the 6 war years that had gone before.

THE FIRST DEEP FREEZE

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The value of keeping perishables cool with ice, and whenever possible, frozen for long term storage, has been known about for many years. In the context of sea angling, that would be surplus edible fish caught on bumper trips, and keeping bait at its optimum quality. Initially it would have been done with an ice box, which was literally just that – a purpose built box into which ice and perishables would be put dating to around 1854 when the first ice making machines became available, almost 20 years after the first working vapour compression refrigeration system had been built.

Domestic refrigerators first became available just prior to the onset of WWI, with Frigidaire eventually marketing the first self-contained unit in 1923. Domestic freezers the size of a modern deep freeze became available in 1940. A concept designed with domestic produce in mind, but one which, along with the standard

refrigerator, modern sea angling would struggle now to cope without in terms of keeping live peeler crabs, freezing squid, black lugworm, and the like, and of course keeping fish in tip top condition for eating.

THE FIRST 'ATTRIBUTED' GLOBAL WARNING EVIDENCE

Data which would later prove damning with regard to attributed global warming, were first gathered in during the 1940's from Asia and Africa, though have only become fully recognised as such by climate scientists in more recent times.

The Mail Online reports that scientists can now attribute the early signs of proven climate change to Africa during the 1940's. This is because regions such as Africa generally exhibit a narrow band range of temperatures making it easier to pick out trends straying away from the norm, which as we now know, are having a devastating effect of marine eco-systems such as coral reefs and fish distribution patterns.



Twenty first century Britain is now experiencing whole species shifts such as for example North Sea Cod, which fishery scientists are saying have had their regular southerly limit pushed approximately 70 miles to the north of what it was towards the close of the twentieth century. In addition to this, fish shrinkage is also becoming problem, both for anglers and people in third World countries reliant on fish as a primary source of protein.

Apparently, fish gills don't grow at the same rate as the rest of their body. So as water temperatures rise, again using the Cod as an example, their metabolic rate also increases leaving them unable to extract the level of oxygen they require, on top of which, warm water has less oxygen retention potential than colder water in the first place, making the problem a double whammy.

BRITISH ANZANI OUTBOARD ENGINES



Had it not been for the word 'British' in the name, I probably wouldn't have given Anzani a mention. You have to draw a line somewhere, and I have had to agonise over dubious inclusions, some of which have just scraped through while others haven't.

I did occasionally see Anzani outboards on the back of small displacement boats back during the 1960's and 1970's. Like the similar looking Seagull, that's what people used to boat fish back then. I don't doubt there will still be the odd one lying around in someone's garage or in the 'scarp corner' of an old outboard dealer somewhere.

A company set up in 1907 by Italian Alessandro Anzani while living in France where he switched from cycle racing to the production of motorcycles, later adding a whole range of proprietary engines for aircraft, cars, and boats to the company's product list.

British Anzani was an agency of the parent French company Anzani Moteurs d'Aviation, set up in 1912 to supply aircraft parts to the emerging British aviation market. Their entry into the marine engine market comes on the back of a long and at times troubled story, none of which is relevant to the eventual production of outboard engines, which during the 1950's became the mainstay of the company's focus.

This resulted in numerous models, arguably the best known of which from a sea angling perspective would be the 5 hp Super Single pictured here, produced between 1942 and 1979. The rest of the range spanned a horse power rating of between 0.5 and 18 hp.

Cutting a long story short, there appears to have been a rather chaotic management structure in place at times leading to many changes, not only in personnel, but also of ownership, which in turn resulted in mechanical reliability problems. The British Anzani Group finally went into liquidation in 1980.

‘YUM YUM’ YELLOW

During WWII, the American military thought they might have a problem with aircrew shot down over the Pacific due to man eating sharks. So much so that the term 'yum yum yellow' started doing the rounds, the suggestion being that the yellow colouration favoured for life-jackets and life-rafts was acting like a visual dinner bell.

Similar suggestions were also doing the rounds amongst surfers and scuba divers in the decades after the war, leading up to a great deal of detailed research into visual stimuli and sharks, the upshot of which is that sharks are very probably colour blind. So why the perceived attraction towards yellow?

Using micro-spectrophotometry in an attempt to identify cone visual pigments in shark retinas and measure their spectral absorbance, 17 shark species were studied in the waters off both Queensland and Western Australia, with scientists finding that in 10 of the species, no cone cells were observed at all. In the other 7 species where cone cells were found, only a single type of cone cell was observed, suggesting that sharks are in all likelihood colour blind.

So sharks don't actually see the yellow and other bright or glittery colours they seem to be attracted to. Apparently, it's a contrast thing. Yellow is easier for the sharks to see, particularly in murky conditions, or against a bright water surface and sky, which might explain why they sometimes come up to the surface to attack yellow floats, something I've witnessed myself with Porbeagle Sharks.

SUSTAINABLE FISHING

"The Fish Gate" (1943) Michael Graham.

The 1930s were a difficult time for the fishing industry. Prices dropped as the Great Depression eroded markets. Fishermen in Europe's North Sea had an even more difficult problem—falling catches. There had been more than 44,000 British fishermen in 1914, but by 1940, there were fewer than 32,000. Men could no longer make a living fishing.



The problem, according to Britain's chief fisheries scientist, Michael Graham was that as soon as fishermen began fishing, stocks started to decline. To compensate, fishermen bought bigger nets and engines, but after a certain point, profits would again slide.

Graham thought the solution was to regulate fishing so that only larger, older fish could be caught. In 1943, he drafted what he called the 'Great Law of Fishing', a simple declarative statement that summarised the major prob-

lem of global fishing: "Fisheries that are unlimited become unprofitable." While some thought that

fishermen needed to conserve stocks so their sons could fish, Graham believed fishermen had to change the way they fished so that they themselves could continue to make a living.

While Graham viewed the problem in biological terms, policymakers saw that restricting fishing had the potential to compromise the longstanding territorial claims that fishing represented. With the development of marine refrigeration during the 1930s, boats had begun to fish farther from home and stay longer at sea, drawing a host of complaints. Iceland had long been unhappy about European boats fishing off its shores. Mexico and Peru complained about American Tuna boats. And the Americans complained about Japanese boats entering the international, salmon rich waters off Alaska's Bristol Bay.

Throughout World War II, the Northwest Salmon industry tried to prod the State Department into ensuring that once the war ended, the Japanese boats would not return to North American waters. The Truman fisheries proclamation of September 1945 declared that the United States had the right to establish conservation zones in the ocean in order to protect fish stocks that were fully developed. But the proclamation did not go far enough for the Salmon industry which wanted Japanese boats explicitly banned from American waters, though it did go far enough to cause enormous problems for the Tuna industry.

Throughout the 1930s, American Tuna boats had ranged south from San Diego, looking for small bait-fish like anchovies, which they would use to attract high seas Tuna. A month after the Truman proclamation, Mexico adopted a 200 mile territorial zone. Argentina, Chile, and Peru followed. Iceland acted in 1948, Costa Rica in 1949. The Soviet Union claimed a 12 mile limit and began seizing boats that violated it. Such territorial claims turned fishing into a thorny foreign policy issue for many countries.

Increasing Cold War tension also caused considerable trouble for the American fishing industry. If countries could restrict fishing, they would set a precedent for other restrictions, perhaps on military vessels. The US State Department opposed tariffs on fish imported from its allies, making the fishing industry one of the first to have jobs sacrificed for foreign policy concerns. Canadian fishermen, for example, were paid less for the fish they shipped into New England ports. The United States also imported fish from Iceland and Norway as part of its Cold War strategy.

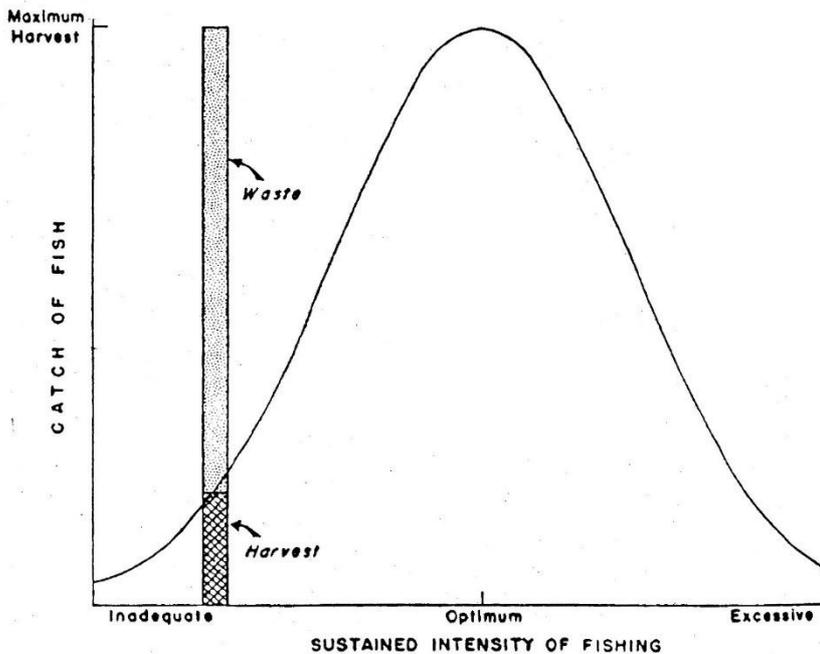
The State Department wanted to maintain a wartime air base in Iceland and to provide a market for Norwegian fish so they would not be sold to the Soviet Union. They also wanted to re-establish the Japanese fishing industry and end the American occupation. But the Northwest Salmon industry didn't want Japanese fishing boats back in North American waters. The Southern California industry was equally worried that cheap Japanese Tuna would replace American canned Tuna on supermarket shelves. When Mexico began seizing American shrimp boats in the Gulf of Mexico, the industry united in demanding that the State Department represent its interests.

By the mid-twentieth century, the World's fisheries had become contested territories, a trend that was clearly going to continue as improved technology and consumer demand drove fishermen further from their home waters.

It became clear to both the industry and the foreign policy experts that the US government would need to play a greater role in protecting the interests of American fishermen. Secretary of State George C. Marshall agreed, and in 1948 created an undersecretary position for fishing. The industry pushed for it to be filled by a University of Washington ichthyologist, Wilbert McLeod Chapman.

Chapman had spent 18 months during the war stationed in the Pacific, scouting for fish stocks to feed American troops. He returned to the U.S. with a desire to expand American fishing into parts of the Pacific pioneered by Japanese fishermen. Post-war military strategy called for a network of bases throughout the Pacific, and Chapman felt that an American fishing fleet would complement the military's plans.

Within months of arriving in Washington, DC, Chapman crafted the US Policy on High Seas Fisheries. The policy acknowledged that fishing should be regulated in the North Atlantic and affirmed the American right to fish without restrictions off Latin America for baitfish and Tuna. It also justified the exclusion of Japanese fishermen from Bristol Bay. The policy was based on a philosophical idea known as Maximum Sustained Yield (MSY). Chapman noted it would “make possible the maximum production of food from the sea on a sustained basis year after year”.



The Maximum Sustained Yield curve above was published in the Bulletin of the US State Department in 1949. Although the concept drove fisheries management for decades, it was a theoretical construction with no experimental or observational backing.

A month after announcing the MSY policy, the United States signed a fisheries treaty with Mexico. Eleven European countries and Canada agreed on January 25, 1949, to regulate fishing in the North Atlantic through the International Commission for North Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF). On May 31, 1949, the United States and Costa Rica established the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission. All of the new treaties and the 2 commissions they created were based on the idea that fisheries would be managed to produce Maximum Sustained Yield.

Although Chapman’s high seas policy appeared to conform to the standards of peer reviewed science, the critical document was not actually published in a refereed scientific journal. Rather, it appeared in the Bulletin of the US State Department and contained no formal references.

The graph that supported the MSY theory has no numerical scale on the axes and was therefore a theoretical construction with no quantitative dimensions. It provides no quantitative evidence either - indeed, there is no evidence at all - to demonstrate or otherwise justify that the logistics curve bears any relationship to nature and how populations grow and decline. As Chapman presented it, MSY was just an idea, a concept with limited theoretical basis and no experimental or observational backing. The mathematical formulas to establish MSY levels would not be published until 1954.

At the heart of fishery science is the idea that removing some mature fish frees up food and other resources for faster growing small fish. In dense populations, fish were old and slow growing, resulting

in a small annual “crop.” Thinning out the old population through intense fishing replaced the old, slow growing fish with younger, fast growing individuals, increasing the weight of the crop, just as thinning trees increased the yield in a forest. Fishing produced the conditions that allowed the population to respond; scientists could predict the maximum number of fish that could be taken on a sustained basis, year after year. Or so they thought. But in fact, predicting the catch has turned out to be considerably more difficult than mid-twentieth-century fisheries scientists ever imagined.



The High Seas Policy briefly quelled various territorial problems related to fishing. However, in 1951 the International Court of Justice at the Hague upheld a Norwegian decision to extend Norway’s waters to 4 miles offshore. This ruling allowed Norway to nationalise a large area that was formerly regarded as part of the high seas and that constituted an important British fishing area. The Norwegian decision was followed by a 1952 report from the International Law Commission (ILC) recommending the creation of an international framework under the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United

Nations.

The report also recommended that territorial limits be extended from 3 to 6 miles. That same year, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru asserted wider territorial limits and their right to manage their own waters. Two years later, Aristotle Onassis challenged this declaration by sending his whaling fleet into Peruvian waters, where the Peruvian Navy promptly seized it. A Peruvian court found the fleet had been whaling illegally and issued a \$3 million fine, paid by Onassis’s insurer, Lloyds of London, which drew Britain into the territorial dispute.

As the tensions over international fishing escalated, the United States organised a conference in Rome in April of 1955. The conference was designed to head off the Latin American attempt to create international law on a regional basis. It was also an attempt to ensure that restrictions on fishing boats would not set a precedent that would allow nation states to restrict other activities in their waters. The United States portrayed the meeting as an effort to provide scientific and technical advice to the ILC. In reality, it was a political meeting orchestrated by the US State Department. Despite objections, especially from Britain’s Michael Graham, the meeting voted to adopt MSY as the goal of international fisheries management.

MSY enabled fishing to continue apace until scientists could prove that overfishing had occurred. Only at that point could restrictions such as mesh sizes, area closures, and time closures be introduced to slow the catch. Policymakers in Rome saw fish stocks as essentially resilient, stable populations that had “surplus” individuals that could safely be harvested. There would be little harm if a few too many fish were occasionally taken. Fish bounced back. In fact, according to the proponents of MSY, fishing created the conditions that allowed the stocks to respond. When fishing became unprofitable, fishing would stop, an assumption that did not take into account the increasing subsidies that governments were pumping into their fishing industries.

The State Department and its scientists presented MSY as a policy to conserve stocks, but it allowed the long-range fleets of developed countries to continue to fish where they pleased in the high seas for another 2 decades. It shaped the fisheries management process by privileging the American preference

for bilateral or multilateral agreements, usually with limited jurisdiction and enforcement. It thwarted the creation of an international fisheries agency with broad regulatory authority and enforcement powers. MSY also confined fisheries science to a narrow approach that focused on estimating harvest points in fish populations.

The ILC adopted the technical recommendations from the Rome meeting in 1956. Two years later, at the start of the Law of the Sea process, MSY was formally adopted as a legal principle. MSY is reflected in most of the post war fisheries and whaling agreements. As global fish catches steadily increased during the 1950s and 1960s, fishermen and policymakers believed they had adopted a conservative and sustainable fishing regime.

But governments were pouring money into fisheries, enabling the technologies developed during the war, such as sonar and radar, to be applied to commercial fishing. The first factory processing ship appeared in 1954. It was capable of fishing and freezing the catch, turning the waste into meal, and staying at sea for weeks at a time.

Ironically, when Garrett Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons" paper appeared in 1968, it had the effect of sanctioning still more growth, despite mounting evidence of trouble. The "tragedy" thesis implied that it was impossible to control the "commons." By persuading scientists and the public that overuse of resources was virtually a law of nature, Hardin's analysis drew attention away from the deliberate government policies that had helped to produce the prevailing situation. Fishing steadily expanded into a powerful global enterprise, operating on the high seas, essentially out of sight, and, for most people, definitely out of mind.

It is generally argued that MSY was a step forward in recognising that the great sea fishes were exhaustible. However, Michael Graham would argue the opposite. MSY, as it came to be implemented, created a false sense of security in the minds of the public and politicians. There have been various modifications of MSY, replacing the word maximum with other words, such as optimum, or economic, but the modifications have not been substantial enough to prevent fish populations from being overly exploited.

The existence of MSY in its multiple realms—politically, scientifically, and legally—has reinforced the perception that it is based in science, rather than in policy. Its legal constraints have limited the ability of scientists to translate the growing body of ecological knowledge into effective action to conserve stocks.

The focus of MSY is on estimating harvest, not on maintaining the population structure of stocks so they can withstand the constant and dynamic changes in the World's most volatile realm, the great World ocean. The controversial history of the adoption of MSY has been largely forgotten, and so has any understanding of the context in which the decisions were made at the Rome conference.

Despite multiple studies recommending that fishing fleets be downsized, it is very difficult to actually do it. Scientists have to prove that stocks are overfished before regulations can be implemented. And there is fierce resistance when biological models indicate declines. In 1996, scientists working for the Pacific Fishery Management Council, which sets seasons off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California, completed new assessments on 6 commercially important rockfish species. All were showing signs of decline: 2 were at less than 10 percent of virgin biomass, triggering provisions of the Sustained Fisheries Act, which had just been passed by Congress. The Department of Commerce declared the fishery a disaster in 2000.

Since then, the council has been engaged in the intensive process of restructuring not only its largest fishery, but smaller sport and commercial fisheries that take a few of the overfished stocks, a problem called bycatch. Environmental groups have also weighed in: Ecotrust authored a groundfish restructuring report in 2003.

Also, in 2003, the trawling industry agreed to participate in an innovative program whereby the federal government contributed approximately \$10 million in federal funds and a \$36 million loan to help fund a buyback program. Ninety-one vessels and their licenses were retired from the industry. Taxes on the catches of the remaining vessels will repay the buyback costs.



A vessel monitoring system was implemented in 2007 to ensure that boats were not fishing in closed areas. Fishermen also pay for onboard observers to monitor the catch composition. Six committees were created and have been holding a long series of meetings to determine how the industry could be restructured so the remaining boats could fish profitably.

The idea is to make the industry more efficient, but also more flexible, perhaps through the use of individual quotas to

fishermen and fisheries cooperatives. Implementation is scheduled for next year. But several of the 8 stocks currently overfished are long lived deep water fish that only reproduce under certain ocean conditions. The rebuilding schedule calls for Widow Rockfish to recover by 2015; for Yellowtail Rockfish, the estimate is 2084. Nevertheless, even if they are not perfect, such schemes represent the most realistic solution to fishing problems in the Pacific and other fisheries.

Managers are groping to cope with the realisation that MSY has tended to lead to the over harvest of stocks. In New Zealand, managers calculate MSY, then set harvest levels at two-thirds of those values. The European Union is currently looking at its fisheries policies with an eye to reducing their catch. These are all positive steps. The key, as Michael Graham argued back in 1943, will be to regulate the number of boats on the ocean. Fewer boats would mean that fishermen could retain much of the fish they catch, reducing the number of dead fish that are thrown overboard because of catch restrictions.

Such programs will be expensive and will sometimes encounter strong opposition from fishermen who are reluctant to comply. Nevertheless, governments and the industry must take firm steps to reduce the number of fishermen. This is the only way to ensure that the remaining fishermen can make a decent living from their profession without further decimating the World's stocks.

PW Comment: A study done by the American's, essentially looking at Pacific fisheries, but with some overlap to what is happening in the Atlantic. A very sobering briefing from which fishery ministers in Britain and Ireland could learn much.

HOPKINS & HOLLOWAY

During the 1940's, S. F. Holloway was a rod manufacturer for a company known as Ridges, an employment which ceased in 1944 to enter into a business partnership with Mr. E. Hopkins under the trading name of Hopkins & Holloway, serving the fishing tackle manufacturing industry. In the main, this was the stocking and sale of rod building components, including when fibreglass and later graphite became available, rod blanks.

By that stage Holloway's son was in control, who in the 1960's, moved the company to Studley in Warwickshire where they started manufacturing rod guides made from bent coiled wire for wholesale

distribution. This practise later switched to one piece guides, which the company launched in 1979 under the name of Seymo, selling to rod manufacturers all over the World.

Later the company expanded its range to bring in similar products from other manufacturers. In 1995 this included the Fuji brand, for which the company became an approved distributor, leading to them being appointed the European distributor of Fuji tackle items in 2003, a range that has expanded still further to include all the top brands in fishing rod construction components.

THE INTRODUCTION OF VHF RADIO



Communication by radio between vessels at sea first came to prominence following the 1912 'Titanic' disaster, when the radio officer aboard the 'Californian', the closest ship to the 'Titanic' when it struck the iceberg, had just gone off watch, therefore failing to pick up the distress call. This triggered fundamental changes in the use of ships radio as discussed in Chapter 3.

These changes deal with High Frequency (HF) radio signals, which greatly increased the distances over which such radio communications could be made. Very High Frequency (VHF) of the type now regularly used by charter fishing boats and small boat anglers, came into being during WWII when it was known as TBS (talk between ships), This began to become more widely available

to the fishing fraternity in the years that followed the conflict.

Very high frequency (VHF), which is a line of sight transmission, is the radio frequency range between 156.0 and 174 MHz, officially designated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as being the VHF Maritime Mobile Band. This is carried by all large ships, as well as by boats fishing commercially and for leisure.

Interestingly, boats operating on freshwater, even if they are fishing, are regulated slightly differently than at sea. In all cases, line of sight for radio efficiency obviously varies according to the height at which the aerial is fixed, which for angling boats have limitations, as opposed to say a yacht with a tall mast. Elevated aerials can potentially transmit for up to 60 nautical miles. For trailed fishing boats it's more like 5 miles, with charter boats slotted somewhere between the two.

In the main, marine VHF operates the 'simplex' transmission system in which communication can only take place in one direction at a time. 'Duplex' is a transmission system which allows unbroken conversation between two parties, as would be the case when making a telephone call. This is something I have yet to come across personally while fishing offshore.

The key message here is that important messages can be 'got out'. Particularly when assistance of one sort or another is required, and for the receiving of information broadcasts by the Coastguard, such as imminent bad weather events, shipping dangers, and of course, the need to have listeners join in any required searches when someone is in distress, which is why dual watch sets, or leaving the radio switched to channel 16 is important, as that is where such information will be transmitted.

PW Comment: When I first started fishing during the 1960's, VHF was something you only encountered occasionally, usually on boats that worked primarily in the commercial sector, with some recreational 'bonus' fishing at weekends. Even when I switched from charter fishing to small boats it was something you only came across occasionally, usually owned by people who had money.

It wasn't until around the late 1970's when I bought my MacKay Viking, and later had a cuddy fitted, that I decided to explore the VHF possibilities for myself, becoming if not the first, then certainly one of the first small boat anglers fishing the Fylde Coast to have VHF. I know that because the only other person I ever got to talk to over the airwaves was Liverpool Coastguard at the beginning and end of every trip.

That was a small hand held set with a short dumpy rubber aerial. It had an output of either 1 watt for local boat to boat chatter, or 5 watts for more distant transmissions. Fortunately (so I'm led to believe), there is a radio wave transfer aerial on top of Blackpool Tower, which if true, is presumably why I was able to contact Liverpool Coastguard who were out of direct line of sight to me fishing off Rossall.

Later, I fitted a tall fibreglass aerial to my cuddy top. This greatly increased my transmission range at sea level which was important, as more and more local small boaters were by then buying VHF sets. Particularly small fixed sets which were starting to become both available and affordable, with a lot more power than my little hand-held set, some of which boasted as much as 25 watts.

THE END OF WORLD WAR II



The 7th of May 1945 (my birthday), and the 14th of August 1945, saw the end of WWII hostilities in Europe and the Far East respectively. Both sets of adversaries officially surrendered on those dates, allowing the MoD to start repatriating what was left of its armed forces to a Britain that was, in its industrial heartlands and naval areas, physically devastated, its people facing further years of rationing and long-term austerity.

Suddenly, thousands of men started flooding back looking for work, putting additional pressure on the countries already meagre resources, including food. Pretty much every food source was in short supply, except for one, which was fish. A 6 year break in commercial fishing, in part due to the fear of being attacked and sunk by German motor torpedo boats (MTB's), aircraft, or mines, had given fish stocks a much needed boost, allowing them to recover in a way that no fishery policy ever has nor ever will.

In his study of twentieth century environmental impact, J. R. McNeill briefly notes that WW II "swept fishing fleets from the sea and allowed stocks to recover where they had formerly been reduced, notably in the North Atlantic". As a result, immediately after the war, fishermen experienced bonanza catches, encouraging fisheries to develop rapidly over the following 20 years. European fish landings in 1938 had been measured at 4.3 million tons.

Some fishing in areas presumed 'safe' from MTB's, mines and even submarines did continue, with fish landings reported to be around 2.5 million tons, or 60% of the pre-war catch. This quickly increased as soon as hostilities were over, well surpassing the pre-war level by as early as 1947, taking full advantage of the replenishment of species such as Cod, Haddock and Plaice, though doubtless most other species taken would also have restored their numbers during the break, which with fast growing broadcast spawning species such as Cod, can see a vast improvement over a relatively short time period.

Haddock and Whiting stocks had increased 'enormously', as Doug Beare et. al. reported, with North Sea populations in particular, which had previously been under pressure, quick to recover over the 6-year break. Fishing effort dropped between 1938 and 1941 by 97%, with the war creating an 'accidental' marine reserve of around 575,000 square kilometres which was fully protected for 6 years, in which fish were able to live longer and spawn more effectively. This however didn't translate into an immediate increase in stock density and of younger fish. Rather, it was the start of a ripple effect going well beyond the war years, proving that closed areas, and reduced pressure, both can and will eventually equate to be better fish stocks.

Commercial fishing pressure, with its knock-on effect to angling, accelerated in the immediate post war years, aided by new technologies developed for military purposes which made commercial fishing disproportionately more effective. So much so that landings from the North Sea were such that fish prices slumped to the point that the commercial fishermen themselves introduced a reduction in fishing, whilst the politicians pressed for exclusive economic zones which had started in some of the Pacific fisheries immediately after the war.

Eventually, that principle crept into European politics, but not quickly enough. By the mid-1950's, the North Sea Herring fishery had crashed, which was the primary reason why rod and line for Tunny fishing ceased: no Herring boats, no Tunny feeding around them for anglers to target. Two decades later it was Cod stocks that were in trouble, leading to the Icelandic Cod wars and shrinkage of the UK commercial fishing industry. But no relaxation of pressure on UK fish stocks, as the EEC (which later became the European Union) started to look enviously at what the waters around the British Isles still had left, and yet again, the rest as they say is history.

SAM HOOK COD RECORD

Suffolk tackle dealer Sam Hook landed a superb Cod of 32 pounds from his local Lowestoft Pier in 1945, a fish which was awarded British record status. Amazingly, he also had a second good Cod hooked up at the same time on the same trace and found himself having to weave his way through and around 290 or so other anglers to get to his fish. That second fish unfortunately managed to break free, but Sam wouldn't have been too concerned about that, as in instances such as this, it's usually the better fish that manages to get away and this time it didn't.

Unfortunately, national record keeping in Britain from the start of the twentieth century right through until 1957 was a bit of a piecemeal affair, with local and club records that had been awarded under different governing rules being used to assemble the first list of the nation's best saltwater catches. Also, it was a time when you only got one shot at a species record, with no separate list for boat and shore caught fish.

So to hold a British record for one of anglings most prestigious species with a shore caught fish would have been an extra feather in any angler's cap, though Sam was no slouch when it came to taking high honours, winning in excess of 300 open competitions in his time, his last award being at the Dover Festival at 74 years of age.

BEAUFORTS DYKE

The end of WWII saw stock piles of captured enemy munitions in need of rapid disposal. The way the British government decided in part to do this was to dump one million tons of it in Beauforts Dyke, a deep 30-mile-long by 2 miles wide trench situated between the Mull of Galloway in south west Scotland and the Northern Irish Coast. Depths there go down to around 150 fathoms (300 metres) making it the deepest spot around our coast, from which it has been a fairly regular occurrence to have discarded ordnance washed up on adjacent stretches of coastline in a dangerously unstable condition.

Commercial fishing will obviously find this a hindrance too. More so than rod and line fishing, as the location of the trench being slap in the middle of the extremely tidal, exposed, and unpredictable North Channel, hardly endears it to pleasure fishing visits, which is a pity, because the area holds out the promise of species rarely caught in other parts of the county.

Fish like huge Skate, which have recently started repopulating the area. Also, Hake, which if you look at the geographical spread of rod and line catches for the British Isles are actually dotted around the periphery of Beauforts Dyke. And let's not also forget the fact that Six Gilled Sharks, which are now being caught in both British and Irish waters, also frequent very deep water.

SELVA OUTBOARD MOTORS



As with some of the other outboard engine manufacturers of European origin, Selva Marine is not exactly a household name, despite being a highly successful company on the European marine outboard scene outside of the UK. They are certainly better known here than companies such as Anzani and Tohatsu, though not nearly so widely purchased as the American and Japanese brands.

Selva is an Italian company founded by Lorenzo Selva Sr. in 1945 who while working in the field of engines more generally, in 1959 had part of the company moved from Milan to Valtellina to expand its growing involvement with outboard motor production, earning Selva a whole string of awards for excellence on the World, European, and their home market stage.

The Selva marketing people list the following 6 criteria as their outboard engine's main strengths.....

Simplicity of construction

Easy maintenance and assistance

Extreme unification of the components

Low fuel consumption

High performance

Italian style

I have occasionally seen Selva outboards doing the rounds over the years, though admittedly not for a long time, and not in the size range required to lift and power a planning hulled fishing dinghy. Like

Anzani and Seagull, in my experience they were always used in the smaller sizes clamped to the back of small displacement boats, though unlike Anzani and Seagull, they looked far more modern with their fully encased powerhead.

The smaller units were, and still are, quite modern looking in their styling, with some of the larger four stroke models looking very plush and modern indeed. All of that said, despite supposedly being popular and award winning throughout mainland Europe, they never quite caught on here in a market dominated initially by American manufacturers, and now very much so by the Japanese.

THE INTRODUCTION OF FIBREGLASS FISHING RODS

Fibreglass, glass-fibre, glass reinforced plastic (GRP), call it what you will, was invented and developed during the early to mid-1940's, but only became generally available after government declassification towards the end of the decade. Soon after, the first 'practical' angling application was put into practise by Dr. Arthur Howald, a name that will become more familiar later in the story.

It started in 1946 when Howald reputedly broke his split cane fishing rod and decided to repair it with some early days fibreglass he was working on as Director of the Plaskan Company. The repair as it turned out was unsuccessful. None-the-less, this was the first true angling application of fibreglass.



It also has to be said that there are reports on the grapevine that the first complete glassfibre fishing rod was actually put together before WWII. This was done by fly fishermen E. R. Hewitt who was trying to imitate bamboo by embedding nylon fibres in a plastic resin, using a length of dowel as a mandril. Not unexpectedly as it turned out, it wasn't strong enough. It couldn't withstand the flexing a rod undergoes when a fish is hooked up.

Fibreglass in a rod making context was experimented with as soon as it became declassified by the US government, with Missouri enthusiasts Gayle and McGuire said to have produced the first

solid glassfibre rod known as 'The Phantom'. Unfortunately, it was way too heavy, and not really a suitable replacement for wood.

Eventually, Phantom and Shakespeare would become the first companies to produce mass-market glass-fibre rods. It's worth noting that a Dr. Haven of the National Research and Manufacturing Company (NARMCO) is also credited with the first fibreglass rod. Complicated, but there you go.

Prior to any suitable alternative, fishing rods were made from various imported woods, the 2 most prominent of which being cane and greenheart. Glassfibre in rod form was first used to produce radio aerials, with its earliest 'authenticated' fishing use attributed to Dr. Arthur M. Howald, who I mentioned earlier, the man who developed the Howald process.

This was a hollow glass process. Not the first, but certainly the most successful. Howald approached Shakespeare who would go on to market the first fibreglass fishing rod in 1947. But the story of how things got to that point involves an accident; the German war effort, counter intelligence by MI6, and the involvement of covert activities on the other side of the Atlantic in America.

The process of actually stretching out fibres of glass had been known for a good hundred years before Shakespeare first used it to make a fishing rod. The problem had been how to make them thin enough

to be completely flexible. Also, how to mass produce them to supply demand, both of which problems were solved during the 1930's after researchers at the Owens-Illinois Glass Company in the US made an accidental discovery. Engineer R. James Slayter was attempting to fuse a coloured trademark into a bottle. He fed powdered glass into a flame and ended up with an unintended pile of cotton-like fibres, which in 1932 were first used in the manufacture of filters.

Later that year, both the product and the process were improved by part-time graduate student Dale Kleist, who was looking at ways of fusing fibreglass insulation blocks together to avoid the ingress of dampness. Kleist decided to fill a metal spraying gun with molten glass and discovered it produced thousands of ultra-fine fibreglass threads which were initially used as another way of making glass wool for insulation purposes. Four years down the line, Slayter and his R&D staff were able to produce strands, both long enough, and flexible enough, to weave into a cloth, which was strong enough to be cut and folded as with any other fabric.

By the onset of World War II, the US navy was using fibreglass as insulation aboard its warships, and so started the military involvement and secrecy with the product. Particularly when Slayter discovered that embedding the cloth in a hardening resin resulted in a lightweight, rigid, easily moulded material that could be used to replace wood and metal in aircraft and ships.

The material was known then as Fibreglass Reinforced Plastic (FRP, and today as GRP), which by 1941 was being applied as a coating to plywood for use in ships and aircraft, and in its own right to mass produce cheap complex structural shapes, helped to no small degree when British Intelligence managed to intercept information regarding advanced resin curing techniques from the Germans. This was passed on to the Americans, who in turn classified all work and research involving fibreglass.

The next big step so far as angling is concerned was the development of the fibreglass rod by Gayle and McGuire, again in the 1940's, though it wasn't properly taken up by the fishing tackle industry at the time who preferred to use fibreglass to impregnate bamboo rods, despite the fact that fibreglass in its own right was strong. In the words of angling writer Joe Brooks at the time, "These are the first rods to stand up to a beating". And so the days of wooden rods became numbered.

Those too of glass impregnated bamboo, as the 'secrets' of fibreglass were declassified and mass production methods could be developed to drive prices down, with, as I said earlier, Shakespeare introducing the first mass-market solid fibreglass fishing rod in 1947, though Howald is officially credited as the developer of modern synthetic rods, which as director of the Libby-Owens-Ford Glass Company, he patented.

While solid glass rods were both a revolutionary as well as an evolutionary innovation that would massively jump the development of fishing tackle forward, they didn't offer any weight advantage over cane and greenheart rods, and their appeal would be short, though I have to say that I was still both seeing and using them myself right up to the late 1960's, prior to ABU 'bursting' onto the UK scene with their Atlantic and Pacific range of hollow glass rods.

That said, despite their proven expertise, ABU were not the first company to produce hollow tubes for fishing rod manufacture. Dr. Glenn C. Havens of NARMCO had developed the process of wrapping fibreglass around tapered mandrils as early as the late 1940's when he started making Conolon rod blanks, which were later absorbed by Garcia.

Like solid glass rods before them, hollow glass rods too quite quickly became relicts of the past, as new fibres and resins began to be developed where they could successfully be used in fishing rod manufacturing during the 1970's (see Chapter 8), both in their own right, and as composites with fibreglass, it being a more flexible and softer actioned material, which when blended with other fibres, is still used to give rods the required action for the job at hand.

NOTE: The Howald process involved a spiral fibreglass core and parallel fibreglass, impregnated with a polyester resin which was then cured in several wraps of tape to keep the components together until the curing oven had done its job. The tape would then be removed with high a pressure water jet. In more recent times, some of the fibres and resins have been upgraded.

METAL FISHING RODS

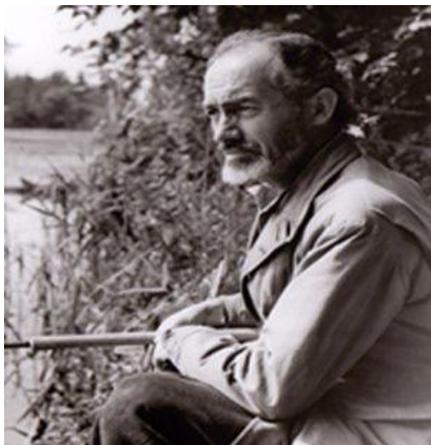
Metal fishing rods made from hollow steel and aluminium by Apple & Pollack made a brief appearance (again) between the introduction of solid and later hollow fibreglass. These however were very quickly seen off by the hollow fibreglass revolution, and had proved equally unpopular when first introduced by the Horton Manufacturing Company, which made fishing rods from steel back in 1913 (Chapter 2).

WINTER FREEZE AFFECTS FISH STOCKS

This is the second of 3 winters in the twentieth century severe enough to result in coastal fish mortalities, the other 2 being 1928/29 (Chapter 4) and 1962/63 (Chapter 8). This time things kicked off on the 21st January, with snow drifts blocking roads and railways, leading to disruption of coal supplies to power stations resulting in domestic power restrictions. As time marched on, food shortages also became a reality, the freeze lasting through to around mid-March when thawing snow brought the threat of flooding.

As regards fish stocks, coastal species, and in particular those at the northerly limit of their range, were first in the firing line, with mortalities suggested in some accounts as being greater than the third big freeze in this trilogy in 1962/63, and probably on a similar level to 1928/29, though mortalities were nowhere near as geographically widespread, particularly in the North Sea, as in the case in 1962/63.

BERNARD VENABLES



Despite his links to sea angling, Bernard Venables will probably be best known to coarse anglers of a certain age through his creation of the strip cartoon Mr. Crabtree Goes Fishing which ran in the Daily Mirror, later published in book form during the late 1940's and 1950's which sold in excess of 2 million copies and probably many more.

Because of the way it was published and marketed, the final figure may never be known. A cartoon character that started life as a gardener dispensing seasonal horticultural tips, which over the winter months left him with very little to be said. So, as a keen angler himself as well as a very good artist, in 1947 Venables suggested to the Mirror's editor that the character should shift his attention to the river bank, and so was born the angling icon of Mr.

Crabtree, the instructional fisherman.

Following the popularity of Mr. Crabtree, Venables decided to devote himself to writing full time, which led to him co-founding and editing the Angling Times in 1953. After a fall out in 1961, he left Angling Times to edit another icon of the mid-twentieth century which was Creel Magazine, where he stayed until its closure in 1967.

Something of a step away from the pure coarse fishing of Mr. Crabtree, Creel published articles from the World of game, coarse, and sea, aimed at the 'top end' of the market, including anglers with an adventurous spirit who were prepared to travel, coinciding with air travel becoming more available and affordable. This not only took the magazine's readers to what might today seem routinely tame destinations, it also took Venables himself, where he would try his hand at whatever type of fishing was presented by the opportunity.

When Creel went to the wall, the travel and fishing bug Venables had contracted was satisfied by a new job working the airlines BEA (British European Airways) and BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation). There his brief was to investigate opportunities for angling tourism, as demonstrated by the many articles he wrote, plus books. Nice work if you can get it.

He even spent 2 years living with the Fayal Islanders of the Azores hunting whales from small open boats with hand harpoons which became the subject of another book. But it was the rod and line fishing which most fascinated him, whenever and wherever the opportunity presented itself, one of which delivered the largest fish ever taken at that time in the northern hemisphere. A huge Six Gilled Shark of 1,540 pounds taken off Madeira in 1959.

Bernard Venables also made films for television and wrote a total of 18 books. For his services to angling he was awarded an MBE. But as the vast majority of his books deal with topics other than sea angling they will not be listed here.

Of these, Mr. Crabtree Goes Fishing is most decidedly the pick of the bunch. As was said earlier, with its final sales figures unknown, but well topping 2 million, it is arguably the best selling angling book of all time, for which, other than his regular salary from the Daily Mirror, he did not receive a single penny piece in royalties as the Mirror held the copyright, leaving him to die at the age of 94 in relative poverty, living in a tiny semi-detached house on a housing estate in Wiltshire.

PW Comment: In 2013, coarse angler John Bailey recreated Mr. Crabtree for a 6-part TV series entitled 'In the Footsteps of Mr. Crabtree' aired by Quest. In the series, Bailey's pupil was 13 year-old James Buckley, who fished a range of freshwater situations filmed in the instructional style of Mr. Crabtree himself.

The following obituary for Bernard Venables appeared in the Telegraph in 2001.....

“BERNARD VENABLES, who has died aged 94, was the author of one of the most successful books ever written about sport, Mr Crabtree Goes Fishing; presented in the form of a cartoon strip, it sold more than two million copies in the 1940s and 1950s, but since Venables was employed as the angling correspondent of the Daily Mirror he received not a penny in royalties, all of which went to the newspaper.

Venables had trained as an artist, and in the years after the Second World War started to draw a series on gardening for the Mirror in which the pipe-loving Crabtree dispensed seasonal horticultural tips. Come winter, however, there was less for Crabtree to do, and Venables, a keen fisherman, accordingly suggested to the newspaper's editor that the character shift his attention to the riverbank.

Crabtree was provided with a son eager to learn the habits of tench and rudd, and along with the readers, young Peter was soon initiated into the piscatorial arts. Venables laid out and drew all the pictures himself, but the key to the Mr Crabtree's appeal was the skill with which he explained a largely intuitive sport to others. The Mirror was quick to see its success, and in 1949 a compilation of the strips, together with some new stories and watercolours, was issued in book form. Priced at five shillings, it proved to be a best seller.

Fifty years on, the characters possess a quaint but alluring charm: Peter Crabtree wears shorts in all weathers, while his father never sheds his tie. But the advice on fishing remains just as sound and pragmatic as it ever was, while the note of concern for the value of the countryside has become still more topical. For his part, although he saw no financial return from his success, Venables took great pleasure, and no little pride, in having introduced so many people to an idyllic and compelling pastime.

Bernard Percival Venables was born on February 14th 1907, the son of a clerk. As a boy of five, growing up near Romney Marsh, he became fascinated by a local pond, imagining the fish swimming below its surface. He soon taught himself to fish with a piece of string and a bent pin. In later years he scorned

anglers who relied on technology to make their catch; for him, fishing had to be a contest of skill and wits alone.

The family later moved to south London, but his father died when Bernard was 15 and he left school young. He then had a series of menial jobs before entering art school (his grandfather had been a painter). Venables joined the Daily Express as a cartoonist and illustrator in the 1920s, later moving to the Mirror. When war came, and many of the journalists were called up, he was encouraged to turn his hand to reporting and discovered for the first time his ability to write clear and attractive prose.

Following the success of Mr Crabtree, Venables began to devote himself to writing about fishing full-time. In 1953, he co-founded the weekly Angling Times. He then became editor of Creel, a magazine aimed at the top end of the market, including those anglers who, with the growth of air travel, were starting to take fishing holidays in more exotic locations.

The magazine folded, however, when it failed to attract sufficient advertising revenue, and Venables then worked principally for the airlines BEA and BOAC, investigating opportunities for fishing tourism, particularly in Africa. His interest in angling of every kind took Venables all over the World in these years. In 1968, he published *Baleia!*, an account of the two seasons he spent with the Fayal islanders of the Azores, hunting whales in small open boats with hand-held harpoons.

Venables also travelled to Gibraltar to fish for shark, and hooked a 24-footer which he managed to bring on deck. The creature, he later recalled, then became very active. "The back end hit one of my friends on the leg, so that he had to go to hospital. The front end gave me a wallop on the head and knocked my pipe out of my mouth." When Venables retrieved his briar, he found that he had also lost a front tooth.

Another of his books, *Coming Down the Zambezi* (1975), grew from Venables's fascination with the newly independent Africa, and also from his interest in David Livingstone's explorations of the continent. Venables, by now almost in his seventies, travelled more than 1,200 miles down the river from its source in the forests of the Congo to the point where it enters Mozambique.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Venables gave much of his energy to the Anglers' Co-operative Association (ACA), which helped to clean up some of Britain's more polluted waterways. He was a dedicated conservationist, and came to see fishing as a sort of mystical act, a participation in a natural order of things greater than man.

"I make a very close link between our belonging here and the will to fish," he said. "There is no natural medium in which the sense of life on earth is more evident than in water . . . Most of the things which are least pleasant about life now are the things which are most antithetical to fishing."

He was the author of 18 books, including *Fishing* (1953), *The Angler's Companion* (1958), *A Rise to the Fly* (1999) and *The Illustrated Memoirs of a Fisherman* (1993). *Mr Crabtree Goes Fishing* was republished by Map Marketing last year. Venables had a lively, inquiring, analytical mind, but he also enjoyed the more reflective aspects of fishing, particularly the birdsong and the play of light on water.

He himself lived near the Wiltshire Avon, and even in his nineties worked seven days a week. Away from fishing, he enjoyed sculpting and especially painting, which he thought his true vocation. He married, in 1958, Eileen Willmore. They had two sons and a daughter".

BRITAINS FIRST RECORDED MAKO SHARK ENCOUNTER

The Mako Shark *Isurus oxyrinchus* was not thought to occur in British waters prior to 1955 when Hetty Eathorne submitted a World record claim for a Porbeagle Shark, which the IGFA went on to

identify as being a Mako Shark. With hindsight, something which perhaps should have been picked up on sooner, as in all likelihood, this specimen wasn't the first taken on rod and line.

This incident prompted people to look more closely at other supposed large Porbeagle catches made out from Looe in Cornwall, including a 300-pound fish caught by Hetty's husband John Eathorne in 1951, which is now presumed to have been a Mako. Murray Mexan also had one before Hetty Eathorne, tipping the scales at 238 pounds in 1954. But even they were eclipsed in their historical timing by a very large fish, almost certainly a Mako hooked off Looe in 1948, which jumped clear of the water several times before finally throwing the hook.

THE DISCOVERY OF AN EARLY COMPASS

Despite whatever else history tells us the Vikings did, they were excellent mariners and navigators, and reputedly it was they who brought us the compass, which in an angling context has proved vital over the years in locating fishing marks and getting back from them.

So it's perhaps worth mentioning here that in 1948 the remains of an early example of a Viking sun compass known as the Uunartoq Disc was discovered in an eleventh century convent on Greenland. Despite popular belief however, the Vikings were not the first navigators to use a magnetic compass. That honour falls to the Chinese in the early twelfth century, through a compass dating back to the Qin Dynasty in AD221 made from lodestone and used by Chinese fortune tellers.

DECCA NAVIGATION AND FISH LOCATION

With regard to rod and line fishing, particularly during the 1960's and 1970's for those incredible wreck fishing catches from Plymouth and Brixham, Decca was one piece of electronics you couldn't afford to be without. On the other hand, for a lot of angling boats, and in particular small private boats, Decca was a piece of kit many couldn't afford to be with either. It wasn't cheap.

Looking back now with modern GPS so available and so reliable, Decca wasn't always that accurate either, which had much to do with it being a land based system open to the vagaries of atmospheric and weather conditions. Despite all this, the contribution it made both to our national security and to offshore sea angling cannot be over stated.

This is the point at which I hand over control of the wording to people in the know who say that Decca was a hyperbolic radio navigation system, allowing ships and aircraft to determine their position by receiving radio signals from fixed land based navigation beacons. A system based on phase comparison of low frequencies of between 70 and 129kHz. Its competitor systems, such as Loran and Gee, operated with pulse timing. Phase comparison made it much easier to implement the receivers using 1940's electronics.

Decca (previously known as QM), was conceived in the United States by Bill O'Brien as a method for measuring the ground speed of aircraft, but was developed as a navigation tool by Decca Radio and Television Ltd. in London for use in Europe. And what an introduction it was given, being switched on just hours ahead of the D-Day invasion by allied forces in WWII, following fears that the existing Gee System could be jammed by the Germans which could have caused havoc for the invasion.

NEW COMPUTERISED **DECCA** NAVIGATORS
FOR **WRECK ANGLERS** AND ACCURATE
LOCATION OF FISHING GROUNDS OUT OF SIGHT OF LAND



KINGFISHER WRECK CHARTS £11 EACH

**REDCAR FISH Co.,
4 DENE GROVE,
REDCAR
TS10 3JH**

PHONE ANY NIGHT BETWEEN 7-9 REDCAR 477510

The UK government ordered Decca to produce 27 receivers, plus the driver and phase control units needed for the transmitters for the Royal Navy to trial. In January 1944, a test was carried out in the Irish Sea comparing it to the RAF Gee system for accuracy, and again, the rest is history.

Although Gee and Decca were in many ways similar, Decca was more accurate and user friendly, presenting its 'read out' on clock dials called 'decometers', as opposed to a cathode ray tube as with the Gee system. One disadvantage of the early Decca sets however was the need for the decometers to be initially set up using an accurately known position, which meant that if there was a break in reception for any reason, the decometers had to be re-calibrated, which thankfully proved not to be a problem for operation 'Overlord'.

On the 6th June 1944 when the D-Day invasion began, the Decca master station known as 'A' was based near Chichester; the western 'B' (Red) station near Swanage in Dorset, and 'C' (the Green slave) about a mile inland from Beachy Head. After the war, it became usual to establish a fourth (Purple) transmitter for additional accuracy.

In 1974, Loran C, which was a more accurate system, was opened up to civilian use, giving Decca some stiff opposition. Decca however was well established by that time, and the cost of switching by an operator from one system to the other would have had huge cost implications, for which reason Decca continued to hold its ground on into the 1990's.

I have to confess that I never fully managed to grasp the Decca concept. Perhaps it was laziness on my part knowing I would never be able to buy a set, then later having access to the Navstar 2000D unit (see Chapter 10), which while it operated using Decca signals, converted the incoming information into a much more user friendly latitude-longitude presentation, all of which was superseded when the Americans removed some GPS signal quality restrictions following the shooting down by the Russians of a Korean airliner in 1984 (see Chapter 10). Decca itself was shut down in Europe in early 2000.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Sea Fishing from the Shore (1949) by A. R. Harris Cass.

Calling All Sea Fishers (1950) by Alan D'Egville.

Approach to Angling in Fresh and Sea Water (1950) by E. Marshall-Hardy and Lieut. N. Vaughan Oliver.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

The Anglers Exchange & Sportsman's Mart.

The Midland Angler.

The Angler – a magazine for freshwater and sea anglers.

CHAPTER SEVEN – 1951 TO 1960

In terms of angling development and the realisation of just exactly what was out there to be caught, this decade probably more than any other was pivotal. Good quality tackle was becoming increasingly available along with sea anglers starting to get themselves organised, as evidenced by the birth of the SACGB, TACGB, IFSA, and WFSA. We even got our own angling specific broadsheet with features and catch reports in the shape of the Angling Times.

On the downside, we saw the demise of Tunny fishing in the North Sea, offset by the discovery that we had Mako Sharks out there within angling range. And for the first time in angling history, fish recording was all brought under one roof. We also got nuclear power generation at Windscale, promising us all a new future with ‘clean’ electricity that would not be adding to the increasing concern with regard to climate change, quickly followed by the World’s worst nuclear accident as Windscale then went into meltdown, threatening marine as well as terrestrial environments, along with the lives of those living and fishing along the Cumbrian Coast.

Time also to introduce some colour illustrations to go with the existing black and white stuff.

INCREASING CONCERN WITH REGARD TO THE CLIMATE



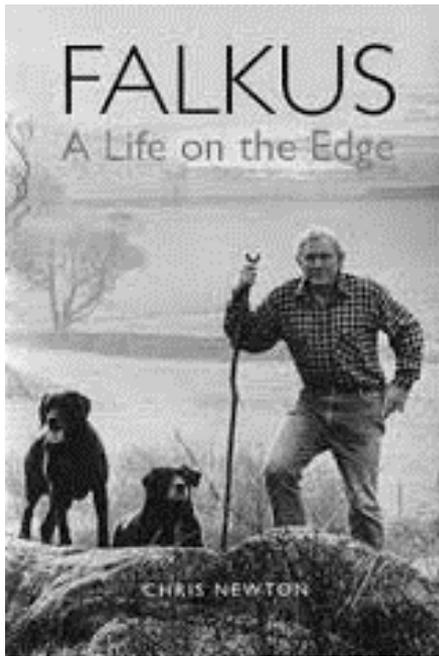
Increasing concern began to surface during the 1950’s with regard to carbon dioxide emissions. In earlier decades, severe weather events were often viewed simply as ‘bad weather’. By this stage they were starting to be identified as the results of climate change, with the potential knock-on effects to terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems which can’t adapt quickly enough to cope we are currently witnessing, not to mention the consequences for Third World human populations, and some in the west. Even the UK where low lying land is in danger, quite literally, of going under due to ice melt leading to rising sea levels

In 1955, Hans Suess used carbon 14 isotope analysis to demonstrate that the CO₂ released from fossil fuel burning was not, as previously thought, immediately absorbed by the oceans. Later, in 1957, better understanding of ocean chemistry led Roger Revelle to the realisation that the ocean surface layer had only a limited ability to absorb carbon dioxide.

This led Revelle to predict the rise in levels of CO₂ we are now seeing and suffering today. A decade in which ever more scientists were arguing that carbon dioxide emissions could be a building problem, with some projecting in 1959 that CO₂ would rise 25% by the year 2000 with potentially ‘radical’ effects on climate. This culminated in 1960 with David Keeling clearly demonstrating, that as predicted, the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere was worryingly proven to be rising.

HUGH FALKUS BASKING SHARK DISASTER

In the World of rod and line fishing, some names transcend divisions such as sea, coarse, and game fishing, and are widely known pretty much across the whole spectrum, with of course the caveat of being of a certain generation to remember them. One such a name is that of Hugh Falkus, the revered Sea Trout authority, whom I had the good fortune to spend an evening with in the late 1980's at an event organised by the Bowland Game Fish Association where he gave a talk, took a few questions, then showed one of his video's which had previously been aired on TV to an adoring audience of specialist game anglers, most of whom would be oblivious to the fact that Falkus had also taken his film making skills onto saltwater too, losing his wife, and almost losing his own life as a result.



The incident in question was brought to my attention by Keith Armishaw, who along with his wife Sandy, is the brains and muscle behind Angling Heritage, one of the repositories for the historical archive work I am involved with, and will no doubt in due course be home to one of just a handful of bound hard copies of this book too. The following synopsis of the tragic 'incident' entitled "Shark Island" which took place on the 12th May 1951 comes from the Angling Heritage website, the full account of which is told in Chris Newton's book "Hugh Falkus; A Life on The Edge" (Medlar Press, 2007).

"It all started when Hugh Falkus heard a programme on the BBC in 1950 by Charles Osborne about marine life. It concerned the fishing for Basking Sharks off the west coast of Ireland, the 'hot spot' being Achill Island, where the sharks are harvested, or butchered, dependent upon your perspective. The fish are caught for the oil from their liver, "squalene", of which each fish can produce up to 100 gallons, a subject Hugh felt would make a good Anglo-Amalgamated Film Co. travelogue.

Whilst the fish were then caught in nets, the traditional method was for a man to harpoon them from a small boat. Hugh quickly realised that this would be a much more dramatic visualisation of the process and make better footage. So, he approached Sam Lee who became Director, with the filming done by Bill Brendan from Bude, accompanied by Hugh who starred in the film, his wife of 4 weeks, and Charles Osborne using his boat 'Pride of Cratlagh' to film from.

Hugh chose the right year as over 1630 sharks were taken that season. The tragic accident started as the boat was out, and at around 3pm as the tide turned the wind picked up. Shortly afterwards, as the fishermen were finishing their days work, they heard a faint shout and saw an unclothed man clinging to one of their boats. They rowed out in a small boat and tied a rope around the man taking him to shore, by which time he was unconscious; it was Hugh. Help was sent to find a doctor, but upon his arrival, Hugh was regaining consciousness and told of the boat being damaged and his party needed rescuing. The 'Price of Cratlagh' had gone down on Daisy Rock (Dysahgy, in Gealic)".

As the locals arrived, they found Diana and Sam Lee both dead, but no trace of Charles or Bill Brendon was ever found. They had tried to swim to other rocks 250 yards away, but Hugh thought nobody from shore would see them, so stripped off and swam over 1.25 miles in water of only 10 degrees, a super-human effort for which he was long admired by the locals, though reports in the papers talked of him grabbing petrol cans, oars, and rubber tubes to create a make-shift raft. Hugh said they had been caught by an outside freak wave.

Miss Claire Mullen was also supposed to have been on the boat, but fortunately for her she needed to visit the local chemist for some provisions only to find that the boat had put to sea without her. The Coroner gave a verdict of accidental drowning”.

LAMIGLAS

Despite being discovered and developed during WWII, due to the process having been classified and kept under government ‘wraps’ for much of the 1940’s, it took until 1947 for the first fibreglass rods to reach the angling market, put there by Shakespeare (see Chapter 6). Initially these would be built on solid glass blanks, which is something I remember very well from my early fishing days. Yet even then, they were not that common, and had to earn their place in the sea angling publics’ affections via their feel and pricing.

When eventually they did start to take off, in 1951, Lamiglas became a major player in the mass production of the blanks, both solid and later hollow, for other custom rod builders to finish off and market under their own brand name, progressing on to graphite and composite blanks when these started to supersede the ‘pure’ fibreglass versions.

THE FIRST EVER GREATER AMBERJACK REPORTED

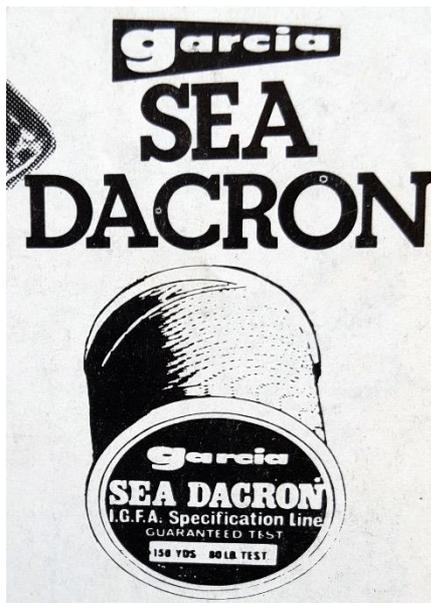
In light of rising sea temperatures and global warming being a hot topic (no pun intended) since the 1990’s, there is a growing tendency to think of visiting warm water species as something new, and a phenomenon that will continue to build in intensity until action is taken to reverse the current trend. To some extent this is true. But not entirely so, as the earliest report of a Great Amberjack *Seriola dumerili* which was commercially caught off Salcombe dates to 1951.

THE LOSS OF St. LEONARDS PIER

Designed by R. St. George-Moore, work started on the 960 foot pier at St. Leonards in 1888, and was completed 1891, at a cost of £30,000. When new, it had a landing stage for steamer traffic at its end, which due to a decline in business was not replaced after being destroyed in rough seas. It was also closed and sectioned for defence purposes during WWII, and suffered bomb damage in 1940. The pier remained closed after the war, until finally it was so badly storm damaged in 1951 that Hastings Council demolished what remained of it a year later.

DACRON FISHING LINE

After the invention of nylon by DuPont in 1935 and its eventual arrival in the tackle shops as monofilament fishing line in 1939 (see Chapter 5), despite still being in much need of improvement and development, the writing was on the wall for woven fibre fishing lines of the day, including linen, cotton, and silk. Or so everybody thought. A new era had dawned. But in the cold light of day, monofilament was found wanting on a number of fronts, and a new ‘hollow’ braided replacement in the form of Dacron was introduced in 1952, ironically by The Ashaway Line and Twine Manufacturing Company, the very same people that had introduced the angling World to monofilament nylon 13 years earlier.



Patented in 1941 by John Rex Whinfield, technically speaking, Dacron is polyethylene terephthalate, which is a man-made fibre with a range of market options of which being spun into Dacron fishing line is just one. When not being used as fishing line, here in the UK it is probably best known as Terylene, and when used by the textile trade it's called Polyester. Known to be reliably strong and with good knot strength, to a degree, Dacron became the fishing line of choice for some, because it could be manufactured with consistency of diameter and breaking strain, which, for IGFA line class record purposes, was difficult to match during the middle part of the twentieth century, hence its popularity.

Dacron however had problems of its own, not the least of which where its propensity to 'catch' the tide on account of its proportionately larger diameter. It also retained water, leading to potential reel spool corrosion. But when drifting float fished baits for sharks, which is where I first came across it, or trolling lures for Marlin and the like, tide catching properties don't come into

play.

Only when you are fishing bait at the bottom does line diameter and its ability (or otherwise) to cut the tide come into the reckoning, which is the ace that modern braided lines have up their sleeve. Dacron unfortunately hasn't. And while it is still available as a fishing line, for the reasons already given, it is very much a niche market, with monofilament nylon well able to hold its own for the type of fishing we do around the British Isles until something better came along, which towards the end of the century, it did.

MAXIMA FISHING LINES

The early part of the twentieth century was an era of angling enterprise. A time of great leaps forward, particularly with regard to the engineering of fishing reels, the performance of which was unfortunately constrained by the fact that fishing line development was trapped in a time warp, with no conceivable way out until 1939. It was then that the Ashaway Line and Twine Manufacturing Company decided it had found a use for the nylon invented by DuPont 4 years earlier, which DuPont themselves had yet to find a purpose, allowing Ashaway to turn it into monofilament fishing line (see Chapter 5). Up to that point, 'modern' fishing lines were braided from cotton, flax, or silk, which restricted their performance in all sorts of ways, particularly when being used from the shore.

Unfortunately, the early monofilament fishing lines turned out not to be the ground-breaking step forwards anglers had hoped for. Handling issues caused by line stiffness was a particular problem that was not resolved until the end of the 1950's when DuPont developed Stren. Something Maxima apparently had anticipated would happen, either through their own research and development, or from information coming from outside, persuading them to invest in a new purpose built monofilament production facility at Geretsried, Germany, in the early 1950's, some years before Stren was developed.

Work practise there was in line with that of company founder Max Gottlieb Meinel's ethic of craftsmanship and quality. So much so that Maxima is now a market leader in over 70 countries, establishing the brand name as one that anglers specifically ask for on account of its long established reliability pedigree.

THE ROYAL YACHTING ASSOCIATION

At face value, the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) and sea angling have little in common. But as small boat angling has grown in popularity from the 1980's through to present times, and with accidents and incidents at sea for small boaters 'almost bound to happen', local authorities providing facilities such as launching slips, and small boat angling clubs needing to convince those authorities of their safety credentials have long needed that all important piece of paper to wave about, stating that those who use the facilities are shown to be competent to do so.

In short, in these days of constant litigation threat, everyone is looking to cover their backs, with the RYA, which was launched in 1952, the organisation everyone would ultimately turn to provide that necessary paperwork in the form of their Power Boat Level II competency certificate.



The RYA is now regarded as being the national body for all forms of boating, including dinghy and yacht racing, motor and sail boat cruising, RIBs and sports boats, powerboat racing, windsurfing, inland cruising and narrow boats, and personal watercraft. Its history goes back to 1875 when it was founded as the Yacht Racing Association, morphing into the Royal Yachting Association in 1952 with a Council of elected volunteers as its supreme policy making body, and a full time day to day management team in excess of 100 professional staff, the majority of whom are based at the RYA HQ in Hamble

professional staff, the majority of whom are based at the RYA HQ in Hamble

The RYA's income derives mainly from membership subscriptions, club affiliation fees, RYA publications, and training activities, including those required by small boat anglers, to the point that it is difficult these days to put a small boat in anywhere around the country other than from some piece of unsupervised beach without the necessary 'qualifications', which, also includes insurance, an RNLI SeaCheck sticker in addition to a wide range of demonstrated classroom based abilities as well as proven practical on the water boat handling and rescue skills.

THE LOSS OF SEAVIEW CHAIN PIER, RYDE, IOW

Formed in 1877, and using a design by Frank Caws, The Seaview Pier Company began work at Ryde in 1879, with the unfinished pier opening for business 1881. That business however was slow, prompting a 50 foot extension in 1889, and a new pier head in 1901, after which passenger services were halted for the duration of WWI. Later, in WWII, the MOD took control of the pier for use by the navy.

By the time it was handed back it was in poor condition and was sold in 1947. Unfortunately, its restoration plans turned into demolition plans due to the envisaged cost. But that was not the end for the pier. In 1948 it sold to the Horwich brothers, after which it became the first pier to be 'listed' under The Town & Countryside Planning Act. But even that unfortunately couldn't save it, as a series of storms in 1950 and 1951 all but wrecked the structure, after which it was demolished in 1952.

THE FENWICK FISHING TACKLE COMPANY

Fenwick are essentially an American company targeting an American market, which for the most part has little if any carry over to the European scene. That in itself should perhaps have invalidated it for inclusion here. Then I started to come across the occasional rod advertised as being available here in the UK, which may or may not have been designed with the European market in mind, but which could very easily be slotted into it, for which reason Fenwick get their inclusion, albeit a rather fleeting one.



According to Fenwick's recording of their own history, the company came into being around 1952 when a group of 5 Seattle businessmen, each with a fondness for fly fishing, got together to exploit the rod building opportunities that a 'new' material called fibreglass presented once it had been declassified after WWII. Work started in a double garage on the shore of Lake Fenwick, hence the company name. At the time, competitive freshwater Bass fishing

was growing in popularity to the point that tournaments were being fished, opening up a niche market for the fledgling company to exploit.

In the main, stuff specific to the US scene happened over the years that followed, the gist of which being that Fenwick developed substantial rod building expertise to the point of placing them right up there with the 'high end' manufacturers such as Orvis and Sage. Then, in 1973, again seizing on an opportunity made available through military declassification, they broke into and mastered the graphite scene, producing the World's first all graphite rod, the HMG (High Modulus Graphite). All good stuff. But all of this is a World away from either beach casting or drop down boat fishing over here.

It was quality that elevated Fenwick on the US scene. As they themselves put it... "Every rod we build represents a lifelong contract between us and its owner to deliver a lifetime of satisfying fishing experiences wherever and whenever they fish". Also, an appreciation that over more recent times, anglers have turned their attention away from being generalists to becoming specialists with specific goals in mind, requiring bespoke tackle to help make those goals achievable, something large European conglomerates producing amorphous tackle ranges offering little if any scope for real choice ought to be taking on board. Thank goodness then there are still a few quality specialists out there, particularly on the rod building scene to help cater for that demand. But I digress.

I must confess to not having put a great deal of effort into researching Fenwick. As I've said, they have over the years been innovative, and they do I am told produce quality high end rods. They also dabble in the design and manufacture of fishing reels, though nothing of any real value to saltwater fishermen over here, unless fly fishing takes your fancy. In short, a company which, were it to cease trading in Britain and Ireland would undoubtedly not be missed, or dare I say even noticed as no longer being there.

DAVENPORT AND FORDHAM RODS

Davenport and Fordham rods are far better known in coarse fishing circles than they are amongst specialist sea anglers. During the 1950's and 1960's, using blanks made by Sportex in Germany, they produced a wide selection of specialist coarse fishing rods which are still highly sought after and used

to this day. They also made cane rods. Their venture into the sea angling market was very limited. That said, they did produce the 11½ foot Clive Gammon Faststrike Bass rod. The company went out of business in 1972.

THE LOSS OF TENBY PIER.

Officially named The Royal Victoria Pier on account of its being opened by the Duchess of York in 1899, work had begun on its construction in 1897, giving it a 200 foot long landing stage accessible to steamers at all states of the tide. Unfortunately, it was allowed to slip into a poor state of repair. So much so that between 1946 and 1953 it was demolished, with angling much the poorer for it. Tenby life-boat station is now located where the pier once stood.

THE LOSS OF PLYMOUTH PROMENADE PIER

This was the final pier to be designed by renowned Victorian engineer Eugenius Birch, who put his plans to paper in 1875. Construction work however was delayed until 1883, completed a year later at a cost of £45,000, and opened after the death of Birch. In 1891, a 2,000 seat pavilion was added, but the writing was already on the wall, and money problems were looming. Steamers stopped calling in 1922, and by 1934 the pier was posting financial losses, to the point that in 1938 the receiver had to be called in. Adding injury to insult, in 1941 the pier was bombed, leading up to its demolition in 1953.

DAMART

When I first started dinghy fishing from my open displacement boat on every available big tide between late October and the last set mid-February, as crazy as it might sound, winters were a totally different season to those of more recent times. Freezing fog was a regular occurrence, occasionally with ice on the beach as the tide was pulling away. We even had fish freeze to the deck, particularly during still, freezing cold after dark evening trips. So it goes without saying that it was tough. Absolutely grim on some occasions. It also goes without saying that getting the clothing right was an absolute must.

At the forefront of keeping warm on the clothing scene was thermal clothing manufacturer Damart, which was founded in France in 1953 by the Despature Brothers using thermolactyl fibres. Gloves, balaclava's, vests, long-john's, and a long sleeved one piece with a button down flap in the seat in case the wearer was caught short so they wouldn't have to strip everything off to sit down on the bucket. Very thoughtful. Excellent thermal quality too. Sometimes worn two layers thick, without which I know I wouldn't have been able to stick it out to the close of play some nights, or end up with as many Cod as we did.

THE IRISH FEDERATION OF SEA ANGLERS

Founded in 1953, the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers (IFSA) is the governing body for sea angling across the whole island of Ireland, despite Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic having separate political identities. Unlike the other two federations of the British Isles, these being the Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers (SFSA) and the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers (WFSA), the IFSA does not have charge of its national record fish list. That is overseen separately by the Irish Specimen Fish Committee.

As a point of interest, England has no national federation, and nor does it have a regionalised record fish committee, preferring instead to contribute to the overall British record fish list only. It did have a federation, the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) handling its business, which in 2009 was consumed into the umbrella organisation the Angling Trust. Complicated, but useful to know when it comes to the angling politics of the British Isles.



Like the SFSA, WFSA, and the now defunct NFSA, the IFSA is a voluntary organisation representing sea anglers in a wide range of capacities. As a member of the Angling Council of Ireland, it is the National Governing Body for sea angling recognised by Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, providing support for affiliated clubs and members. It also runs national competitions and presents International teams for boat and shore, seniors, ladies, and juniors on the World sea angling stage, its objectives being.....

To develop, foster and regulate the sport of sea angling in Ireland.

To act and speak on behalf of sea angling in Ireland and where such interests are involved with similar organisations in other

countries.

To make rules governing the sport of sea angling, particularly in festivals and competitions of all kinds.

The Federation consists of.....

A President

Four Provincial Councils, one in each of the Provinces of Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connaught.

Sea angling clubs, associations or societies in Ireland are affiliated through their Provincial Councils to the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers. To affiliate a club there must be a minimum of 12 senior members. To re-affiliate a minimum of 8 senior members are required.

Associate members at the discretion of Central Council. Every such sea angling club, association, society (hereinafter called club) shall, subject to the approval of the Central Council be eligible to become a member of the Federation.

A Central Council by which the Federation shall be governed.

The Irish Federation of Sea Anglers is affiliated to the following International Organisations:

The Confederation Internationale de le Peche Sportive – CIPS, responsible for the Worldwide organisation of all angling disciplines.

The Federation Internationale de la Peche Sportive en Mer - FIPS-M, responsible within the CIPS for Sea Angling and the organising of World Championships.

The Sea Angling Liaison Committee of Great Britain and Ireland – SALC, a watchdog committee for sea angling in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, organises the Home International Boat and Shore Championships.

The European Anglers' Alliance – EAA, a body formed in 1994 of European nations to oversee EU decisions which may affect angling of any discipline, and to influence decisions for the protection of

angling. Ireland is affiliated through EAA-Ireland formed in 1994 by the Federation of Pike Anglers of Ireland, Federation of Salmon and Sea Trout Anglers, Irish Federation of Sea Anglers, National Anglers Representative Association, National Course Fishing Federation of Ireland and Trout Anglers Federation of Ireland.

International Game Fish Association – USA, responsible for International Game Fish Records.

The IFSA shall affiliate to the Federation Internationale de Peche Sportiva en Mer, the Section for Sea Angling as part of the World Body for all angling disciplines. The Confederation Internationale de Peche Sportiva, the former referred to as FIPS-Mer and the latter as CIPS. The IFSA shall affiliate to the Sea Angling Liaison Committee of Great Britain and Ireland and in circumstances as directed by the AGM take part in all of the following international events.

World Boat Angling Championships (senior) from anchored boats.

World Boat Angling Championships (youth) 17 to 21 years of age.

World Shore Angling Championships (senior).

World Shore Angling Championships (youth) 17 to 21 years of age.

World Shore Angling Championship (youth) 13 to 16 years of age.

Home International Boat Championship (senior).

Home International Boat Championship (youth) 17 to 21 years of age.

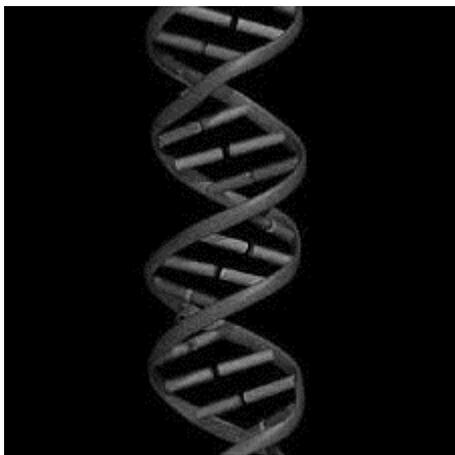
Home International Shore Championship (senior).

Home International Shore Championship (youth) 17 to 21 years of age.

Home International Shore Championship (youth) 13 to 16 years of age.

NOTE: The Irish Specimen Fish Committee, which oversees specimen awards and national records for both saltwater and freshwater fish species throughout the island of Ireland, has its own separate inclusion a little later in this Chapter.

DEOXYRIBOSE NUCLEIC ACID



The structure of Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid, better known as DNA, was discovered here in the UK by researchers Francis Crick and James Watson in 1953, though it should be remembered that the general concept had been around since Friedrich Miescher first proposed it in 1869, and that without the work done by Rosalind Franklin, Crick and Watson may not have got the credit they did.

DNA is now seen a vital tool for speciation and conservation work, and is widely used by fishery scientists here in the UK and Ireland. Irish research scientist Dr. Ed Farrell for example used mitochondrial DNA in the early twenty first century in his work to show that all Smoothhounds found around our islands are *Mustelus asterias*, the Starry Smoothhound, and that no

Common Smoothhound *Mustellus*, has ever been found in our waters, spots or no spots.

Another speciation example is the Common Skate, which again in the early twenty first century was found not only to be in the wrong classification genus, but was in fact not one, but two very similar closely related species. A further important application is demonstrating that fish in some discrete locations are in fact localised, or even refuge populations, such as the Spurdog populations in Lochs Sunart and Etive which act as nursery pools, and therefore must be protected. A vitally important proven fishery management tool then, which will grow in its use no doubt long after this book goes to print.

TATLER FISHING REELS

THIS 367 lb WORLD RECORD SIZE PORBEAGLE



was caught off Jersey
by Bryan Phillips
using
TATLER EQUIPMENT
made with perfect precision by
Grice & Young Ltd
Christchurch, Hants

Grice and Young of Christchurch, Hampshire, was the manufacturing base of that great British piece of sea angling kit, the Tatler multiplier reel. But sadly, as with so many home grown items, out competed by foreign imports able to match, and in many cases, better it, in terms of performance and price.

Also, because it was targeting the smaller volume end of the market by producing heavy duty, I suppose you could call them, 'big game' reels, which only those interested in sharks, skate and wreck fishing likely to want to use one in our corner of north west Europe. That said, they did sell quite well in other countries, particularly commonwealth countries such as Australia, where they see more in the way of fish likely to warrant that sort of multiplier reel.

I personally have never used one. In fact, I don't think I've even seen one. But I did see plenty of Tatler advertising during the 1970's and 1980's, though they were being made long before then. Probably as far back as the 1940's. I have tried contacting representatives of what is now called Eddystone Tatler in Plymouth, but sadly got nothing back from them.

Their current advertising references the company's golden years running between 1953 and 1989 during which time 5 British and 2 World records were taken using Tatler multipliers, plus scores of other specimens and record near misses. The headline catches are a British Mako Shark record of 476 pounds; a British & World Porbeagle Shark record of 540 pounds; A British & World Halibut record of 234 pounds; A British Common Skate record (weight unspecified), and a British Conger Eel record of 102 pounds.

THE ANGLING TIMES

First published in 1953, Angling Times was the breath of 'fresh air' angling very much needed in the austerity years following the 1940's. There was no Internet or social media back then relaying instant news Worldwide and fulfilling every requirement you can think of in terms of information availability. Word of mouth, and what few books there were available, were the only sources of angling information in the early 1950's. Then suddenly, 'wallop', with none other than Mr. Crabtree himself, otherwise known as the legendary Bernard Venables at the helm, at a cost of 4 pence, angling news and features were available weekly.



PW Comment: Angling Times was an institution. An over used term, but entirely applicable in this instance. I remember picking it up every Thursday morning on my way into work if my memory serves me well, more for the news stories it carried than the features, as this was the only means of finding out what was going on and interpreting developing patterns of where to fish for what and when. I even got to contribute to it with angling features on a number of occasions. Now unfortunately,

though the publishers would say otherwise, pretty much all of that universal informative coverage is now long gone, with the paper having been almost exclusively handed over to coarse fishing, and Carp fishing in particular.

THE SHARK ANGLING CLUB OF GREAT BRITAIN

The story of Brig. John Alan Lyde Caunter and the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain (SACGB) are so inexorably intertwined, that having them as separate inclusions was not only impractical, but would be nigh on impossible.

Born in 1889, and living an amazingly long and adventurous life, Caunter, whose nick name in the army was 'blood', commanded the fourth armoured brigade with distinction during WWII, after which he retired, bought himself a boat, employed a skipper, and did a lot of fishing out from Looe in Cornwall. I'm sure there's much more to the story than that on a number of levels, but as our primary remit here is the fishing, and in this particular instance, Shark fishing, that is where we pick the story up and start to develop it further.



Caunter had developed a particular interest in catching sharks. It's said by some that he began shark fishing in response to problems encountered by Looe's commercial Pilchard fishermen. They would regularly have their nets damaged at night by encounters with sharks which would follow the shoals inshore, at times to within a few miles of the coast. In the main these were Blue Sharks, though reports are not specific enough to rule out Mako's and Porbeagles, which could occasionally be encountered over the same ground.

In truth though, Caunter's interest in catching sharks goes much further back in time, with reports of him catching Blue Sharks and at least one Thresher Shark in the 1930's before the onset of WWII. But it was at Looe in the post war period that both he and the SACGB would be launched into the public arena, creating a demand which went far beyond any other branch of sea angling interest could take things.

Towards the end of the 1940's, on in to the early 1950's, Pilchard numbers were slipping in to decline. Local fishermen's incomes were being hit leaving them in need of some sort of fishing work

related boost, which Caunter thought could be helped by using the same sharks that had earlier created so many problems to perhaps provide a new source of income.

At the time he was already thinking about and trialling improved techniques for catching sharks, including long unbroken drifts with baits set at various levels in a lane of rubby dubby, encouraging them to swim towards the source at the boat and hopefully intercepting the baits along the way. He was also keen to persuade others to try the same by chartering some of the local Pilchard boats. And so Looe slowly but surely began to put itself on the national sea angling map, the next logical step being to develop and promote the interest Caunter had worked so hard to ignite.

Cutting to the chase, this culminated in the setting up of what I am confident in saying is Britain's first and possibly best known single species organisation, the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain. At that stage, Mako Sharks were not on the agenda. That would come via Hetty Eathorne later in this Chapter. But Porbeagles were always a slight possibility, which is what would eventually 'spawn' the Mako Shark fishing. Threshers were never really on the cards. So, to all intents and purposes, while the club could justifiably argue otherwise, the SACGB when it came into existence in early January 1953, was at that point in time very much a single species club, that species being the Blue Shark.

Shortly after its inception, it held its first general meeting, which was at the Hannafore Point Hotel in Looe on the 25th January 1953, with who else but Brig. Caunter in the chair, at which it was reported that angler and explorer F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, who at that time was still credited as the captor of Britain's best ever Ballan Wrasse haul out from Looe in 1912 (see Chapter 3), presented a trophy and a special award to the club which has never been claimed in the 65 years both it and the club have been in existence at the time of writing in 2018, more of which later. Like the Tunny Club before it, initially it was something of a gentleman's club. Its aims were.....



To promote the sport of shark angling in Great Britain and to provide the Members with an organisation which is regarded as a central authority for the sport.

To adhere to a strict policy of catch and release and adopt best practise in the handling, and conservation of all sharks.

To maintain and publish records and other relevant data for sharks caught and released which are known to the club.

To provide and administer challenge trophies and other awards.

To promote social contacts between members, and to provide events and social occasions where appropriate

To get a better feel for the fishing at the time, I have enlisted the help of two people who in their own different ways have played a very large part in the history of Looe and the SACGB. One is Martin Bray, son of Jack Bray, who ran the bookings for the boats through his tackle shop on the quay in the hey-day of the shark fishing era, the other being Mike Millman, who has held the post of chairman of the club. Two prominent sources of accurate reliable information, starting with Martin Bray, who was present on a day to day basis for much of the time.

Martin recalls Brig. Caunter's 'learning on the hoof' approach. Obviously, with no previous British shark fishing knowledge to tap into, ideas would be evolved, then taken offshore to be put to the test, with those showing any promise developed through to modern day perfection.

Rubby dubby was certainly the most important of these, with between 2 and 3 stone of pilchards carried on board to be mashed and pulped, then put into mesh bags hanging just in the water for the purpose of creating a trail of attraction into which the baits would be placed.

He also recalled the quality and over-gunning size of the tackle used in the early days, including Hardy split cane rods and Fortuna reels. The word shark evokes thoughts of bruising encounters with huge potentially dangerous predators. The truth of the matter was (and still is), that Blue Sharks are anything but. At the time however, this helped the cause of the commercial boat owners, who for the most part relied on holiday makers wanting to do battle with these fearsome fish. So, the ultra-heavy gear served two purposes.

On the one hand it helped perpetuate the myth, while on the other, it would bring far more certainty to the outcome when placed in the hands of some fumbling novice that had never set foot in an angling boat before, and very likely would never do so again, and to some extent I recall my first sharking encounter in part reflecting some of this. Lured in by the whole mystique surrounding the adventure, in 1964, I was one of those fumbling novices, given a vaulting pole of a rod with a huge Alcock's Leviathan centre pin reel loaded with heavy Dacron to winch in a Blue Shark that would have struggled to make 50 pounds.



I wasn't actually staying at Looe at the time. As a 'practising' angler that had mainly done coarse fishing with a bit of holiday sea angling, I got my information by reading the angling press. The majority of non-angling 'enthusiasts' however would have been prompted to give it a go in a very different way. Early days shark angling became highly organised, and for its time, quite professionally presented too.

Boats that had fish on board would fly a blue pennant for each shark caught which would draw in the holiday crowds waiting on the quay for their return, with the skippers hoping they might remember the boat's name. Pretty much all the sharks caught were killed and brought ashore.

The SACGB had a membership qualifying weight of 75 pounds, which although not large, was restrictive enough, as the vast majority of Blue Sharks caught at the time fell well below that figure. Every afternoon the boats would come in and go through the landing and weighing spectacle at the SACGB HQ close to

the Bray's shop, after which, the corpses of the fish would be discarded at sea.

On the one hand, this promoted the fishing, particularly amongst holiday makers wanting to take back stories and photographs of their 'epic' encounter, while on the other, it slowly but meticulously brought about the decline of the shark fishing it was supposed to be there to promote. If I'm honest, I think that the public eventually lost interest. The growth in package holidays abroad meant less visitors to UK destinations, and less holiday novices booking their trip of a lifetime.

Serious anglers too were also losing interest. Certainly at ports away from Looe where serious angling was the primary concern. Shark numbers and average sizes also began to suffer. Literally thousands of Blue Sharks were needlessly killed. Mike Millman's recollection was of around 6,000 fish killed in one year alone, which in hindsight was a pretty bad decision on all counts.

Quite simply put, it was unsustainable, not to mention unnecessary, resulting in numbers caught and typical sizes spiralling into decline, all of which both could and should have been picked up and acted upon much earlier. Something the SACGB has now addressed in line with angling expectation.

What follows is a list of the trophies SACGB members would fish for annually, plus a detailed explanation of the prize put up by F. A. Michell-Hedges and the controversy surrounding it.

NAME OF TROPHY	AWARDED FOR
Mitchell-Hedges	Best Shark of the season
Mickey Wonnal	Runner up to Mitchell-Hedges
Norman Lorraine	Best Blue Shark of the season
Sammy Porbeagle	Best Porbeagle Shark of the season
Sercombe Oliver	Best Mako Shark of the season
Martini Rossi	Best Thresher Shark of the season
Alan Caunter	Seasons best shark by a lady
Phil Heathman	First Blue Shark of the year exceeding 213 cm, or 137 cm for Porbeagle, Mako or Thresher
Auger	First shark of 120 pounds or more in the season
Venning	Most outstanding or unusual capture of the season
Barbican	Heaviest shark caught single handed in the season
SACGB	Member catching most sharks exceeding 100 lbs in the season
Leslie Andrews	Best shark of the season on 24 Kg (50 lbs) breaking strain line
European Trophy	Best shark exceeding 110 pounds by a member residing in Europe, excluding Great Britain
T. N. Foster	Heaviest shark of the season outside British coastal waters
Marsden Sutcliffe	Best shark of the season by a junior (age 12 to 16 years)

In addition to the above list there is another trophy, as yet unclaimed, put up for the first Blue Shark from British waters to exceed 250 pounds in weight, along with a cheque for £25 to be awarded to the captor's boatman. These were given to the club back in 1955 by F. A. Mitchell-Hedges at a time when £25 was worth a great deal more than it is today.

Never having been claimed, the trophy was handed over to Mitchell-Hedges adopted daughter Anne Marie Le Guillon for safe keeping and has not been seen nor heard of since. She also had possession of the notorious crystal skull supposedly discovered by Mitchell-Hedges, which became the storyline in Steven Spielberg's film 'Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull'.

That long awaited first British Blue Shark in excess of 250 pounds finally came along in 2017 when John Dines caught and released a fish measured and estimated at 256.5 pounds aboard Robin Chapman's Penzance based boat 'Bite Adventures'.



Whether an estimated weight as opposed to a fish actually put on a set of land based scales could lift the trophy remains to be seen, though it would be academic if the trophy, supposedly in safe keeping, cannot be now be accessed. If that is anyone was bothered enough to claim the thing when doing so means the killing of such a magnificent fish.

NOTE: There are other trophies available only to anglers with specific residency, such as Yorkshire, Hampshire

etc., which are not available to the rank and file, and therefore are not included in my list.

Today's SACGB is but a shadow of its former self. From the prestigious HQ on the quay that I remember so vividly in 1964 and on so many occasions during the 1970's to where it is today, there is no comparison.

My last trip to Looe to interview Martin Bay was as much a trip down memory lane as it was a research exercise. The town itself looked pretty much as I had expected it to look from the picture I still had in my mind's eye. The SACGB HQ on the other hand, was a sad reflection of its former glory. Part of the building looked to be have been given over to other purposes. Sat outside were a few typical beer drinkers swilling down pints in the sunshine at the side of a chalk board advertising Mackerel fishing trips.

The image was completely shattered. Chatting to both Martin, and later to Mike, it quickly became apparent that the club was having a pretty lean time of things. Looe was no longer the centre of Britain's shark angling 'universe', and Blue Shark fishing was no longer something most anglers now have any interest in outside of Milford Haven, where Andrew Alsop has recently given it a whole new lease of life (see Chapter 11). All of that said, membership does look to have turned a corner, and is actually starting to grow again.

Over the years, I have witnessed a number of angling decline-recovery scenario's, in which when the fish do come back, it isn't simply a case of restoring the status quo. A good example of this is the Thornback Ray which through conservation and a totally different outlook now by anglers to what was the case last time around, has astonishingly fully restored itself in terms of numbers. But not in terms of typical sizes, and certainly not by re-frequenting all of its old traditional haunts, and the same appears to be true on the shark fishing scene.

The SACGB membership qualifying weight of 75 pounds, which was reasonably regularly bettered, saw way more fish weights falling below that figure than going above. That's how it is with most species of fish. The bigger they get, the harder they are to find. That said, on a number of occasions beyond our year 2000 upper time limit here, Sutcliffe's Blue Shark record of 218 pounds taken in 1959 has not only been beaten, but in one case well beaten, the latter being the first instance of a Blue Shark from British waters of sufficient size to lay claim to Mitchell-Hedges hitherto unclaimed trophy. For while the south west of England and south and west coasts of Ireland often attract good numbers of Blue Sharks, the bigger fish, for whatever reason, have seemed to prefer the other side of the Atlantic.

That, in recent years, appears to have changed somewhat. And it's not as if the result can be put down to less smaller fish about now giving the larger specimens a better shot at finding the baits, because daily catch totals at places like Milford Haven have way surpassed all previous records, with yet more bigger fish topping 100 pounds in the mix. Occasionally even, fish in excess of 200 pounds, all of which have been carefully measured for weight estimation before being released. This was the case with that specimen mentioned earlier. A fish which has been accepted by the SACGB as a measured and released British record. But not by the British Record Fish Committee, which is one more thing they urgently need to take onboard in the hope of regaining some of their lost credibility.

Back at the start of this inclusion, I described the SACGB as a single species club, which when you look at some of its record listings, it obviously most certainly isn't. Had it not been for the chance of a Mako Shark, then much of the more serious angling contingent may well have given shark fishing a wider berth. I tried to explain the SACGB single species tag away on account of the majority of its dealings being with Blue Sharks, the fishing for which was most definitely the main focus in the early day out from Looe. But Looe wasn't, and still isn't, the only venue around Britain and Ireland with a degree of reliance on sharks to attract angling related income.

Blue Shark fishing was practised at a number of ports stretching from all the way from Plymouth in the east to Lands' End in the west, as well as around the corner along Cornwall's and Devon's north coast, not all of which developed into being so reliant on the one species. Falmouth for example had a well-earned reputation for providing Mako Sharks, despite the fact that Looe saw 37 Mako's in the twentieth century compared to Falmouth's 22. Then there was the north coast Porbeagle fishing, primarily from Padstow, superseded by Scrabster on Scotland's Pentland Firth, plus the Thresher Shark fishing by Ted Legge to the east of the Isle of Wight.

In terms of the Cornish ports and Marko Sharks, in almost every case, their lucky captors were fishing in the time honoured way of taking long continuous drifts out over the 40 fathom line with lots of rubby dubby, and occasionally, the odd Mako would come along. Then for some reason during the late 1970's, they simply stopped coming altogether, or more accurately, they stopped being caught.

Shark fishing by that time was itself in decline, so with less rubby dubby and fewer baits going into the water on a daily basis, to some extent, the Mako decline was to be expected. On the other hand, Mako being a warm water species at the northern extremity of its range in British waters, and with global sea temperatures on the rise, perhaps we might have expected more, which clearly didn't happen.

The Porbeagle and Thresher Shark decline was different. This had more to do with commercial over-exploitation depleting population numbers, and in turn angler interest. The north Cornish and Devon Porbeagle fishing failed spectacularly though it has since come back, as I know from personal experience through dinghy fishing for them out from Boscastle with Graeme Pullen.

Elsewhere, the decline in Porbeagle numbers also had a direct effect on the decline in catches of Thresher Sharks, particularly to the east of the Isle of Wight. That was (and still is) the country's main hot spot for finding them. Yet even there they were far from common. As such, people would go out fishing for Porbeagles when they were abundant, coming in with the odd Thresher here and there. So obviously, when the potential for the Porbeagle slipped into decline, people simply stopped going, and

as a result, they stopped catching Threshers, the numbers of which, as low as they always had been, very probably remained unchanged.

What follows are the SACGB line class records accurate at the close of the year 2000.....

SACGB MENS LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR BLUE SHARK *Prionace glauca*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
8 lb (4 Kg)	Male	117	J. Griss	Looe	2001
12 lb (6 Kg)	Male	108	S. James	Mevagissey	1972
16 lb (8 Kg)	Male	109.5	J. Griss	Looe	1996
20 lb (10 Kg)	Male	154	S. Chivers	Looe	2010
30 lb (15 Kg)	Male	134.5	K. Horsfield	Looe	1989
50 lb (24 Kg)	Male	135	J. Dove	Mevagissey	1977
80 lb (37 Kg)	Male	184	K. Parkin	Mevagissey	1976
130 lb (60 Kg)	Male	218	N. Sutcliffe	Looe	1959

SACGB LADIES LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR BLUE SHARK *Prionace glauca*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
8 lb (4 Kg)	Female	75.5	M. Stalder-Griss	Looe	2000
12 lb (6 Kg)	Female	111	M. Stalder-Griss	Looe	1998
16 lb (8 Kg)	Female	90	M. Stalder-Griss	Looe	1996
20 lb (10 Kg)	Female	90	J. Connell	Looe	1975
30 lb (15 Kg)	Female	91	J. Fox	Looe	1991
50 lb (24 Kg)	Female	119	F. Tyler	Looe	1992
80 lb (37 Kg)	Female	144	P. McKim	Looe	1959
130 lb (60 Kg)	Female	134	D. Case	Looe	1959

The Blue Shark all Tackle Record stands at 218 lbs caught by N. Sutcliffe out from Looe in 1959.

SACGB MENS LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR THRESHER SHARK *Alopias vulpinus*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
8 lb (4 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
12 lb (6 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
16 lb (8 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
20 lb (10 Kg)	Male	127.75	D. Froud	Isle of Wight	1986
30 lb (15 Kg)	Male	281	W. Schmidt	Isle of Wight	1983
50 lb (24 Kg)	Male	323	S. Mills	Gosport	1982
80 lb (37 Kg)	Male	257	C. Stubbing	Isle of Wight	1976
130 lb (60 Kg)	Male	295	J. Aris	Isle of Wight	1978

SACGB LADIES LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR THRESHER SHARK *Alopias vulpinus*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
8 lb (4 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
12 lb (6 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
16 lb (8 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
20 lb (10 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
30 lb (15 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
50 lb (24 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
80 lb (37 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
130 lb (60 Kg)	Female	Vacant			

The Thresher all Tackle Record stands at 323 lbs caught by Steve Mills out from Gosport in 1982.

SACGB MENS LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR PORBEAGLE SHARK *Lamna nasus*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
4 lb (2 Kg)	Male	107 lbs 7 oz	D. Froud	Gosport	1984
8 lb (4 Kg)	Male	217	Ian Bunney	Padstow	1984
12 lb (6 Kg)	Male	246	Ian Bunney	Padstow	1983
16 lb (8 Kg)	Male	382	B. Taylor	Hartland Point	1982
20 lb (10 Kg)	Male	336	Ian Bunney	Padstow	1982
30 lb (15 Kg)	Male	416	Ian Bunney	Padstow	1986
50 lb (24 Kg)	Male	414 lbs 7 oz	R. Richardson	Pentland Firth	1992
80 lb (37 Kg)	Male	507	C. Bennet	Pentland Firth	1993
130 lb (60 Kg)	Male	465	J. Potier	Padstow	1976

SACGB LADIES LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR PORBEAGLE SHARK *Lamna nasus*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
8 lb (4 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
12 lb (6 Kg)	Female	87	P. Bunney	Padstow	1984
16 lb (8 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
20 lb (10 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
30 lb (15 Kg)	Female	222.5	P. Everington	Isle of Wight	1969
50 lb (24 Kg)	Female	228	D. Parker	Appledore	1975
80 lb (37 Kg)	Female	236	M. Potier	Padstow	1981
130 lb (60 Kg)	Female	369	P. Smith	Looe	1970

The Porbeagle all Tackle Record stands at 507 lbs caught by C. Bennet out from Pentland Firth in 1993.

SACGB MENS LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR MAKO SHARK *Isurus oxyrinchus*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
8 lb (4 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
12 lb (6 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
16 lb (8 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
20 lb (10 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
30 lb (15 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
50 lb (24 Kg)	Male	Vacant			
80 lb (37 Kg)	Male	370	P. Taylor	Falmouth	1970
130 lb (60 Kg)	Male	498.5	K. Burgess	Looe	1966

SACGB LADIES LINE CLASS RECORDS FOR MAKO SHARK *Isurus oxyrinchus*

Line Class	Angler	Weight lbs	Name	Location	Date
8 lb (4 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
12 lb (6 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
16 lb (8 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
20 lb (10 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
30 lb (15 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
50 lb (24 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
80 lb (37 Kg)	Female	Vacant			
130 lb (60 Kg)	Female				

The Mako Tackle Record stands at 500 lbs caught by J. Yallop out from Looe in 1971.

As I mentioned earlier, the SACGB also now records fish as measured and released, and has done since 1994. However, as the records accepted all date from 2017 at the earliest, putting them well outside the time constraints of this book, I have not included them here. These can be accessed on the club's official website, or by any of the normal means of making direct contact. In addition to this, the club also works with the NMFS Cooperative Shark Tagging Programme based in America

PW Comment: I'm being told that for some bizarre reason, the SACGB appears to have disposed of all its other historical shark records. Without them, Mako enthusiast and author of the book 'The Shark Fisherman', David Turner (Little Egret Press, 2012), had the painstaking task of re-tracing and sorting out the integrity of all the Mako Sharks caught from around the British Isles. A job that would not have needed to be done had the SACGB been less hasty in disposing of the information it held.

THE LOSS OF FOLKESTONE VICTORIA PIER

Folkestone Victoria Pier company was the concept of local estate agent G. B. Trent, who in the early 1880's, had planned to construct an 800 foot pier for completion in 1887 to honour Queen Victoria's golden jubilee.

In terms of size, the reality was unfortunately somewhat less at 683 feet, with a floating landing stage added in 1890, none of which turned out to be profitable. As such, it was leased to Keith Prowse & Co. Ltd. in 1903, which was transferred to a pair of local businessmen in 1907 who switched the emphasis from music hall to wrestling and beauty contests. As was often the case at the time, during WWII, the pier was sectioned for defence purposes. A fire would eventually wreck the pavilion and much of the seaward end, the remains of which were demolished in 1954.

THE ICONIC ABU AMBASSADEUR REEL

Never has a single range of reels from any manufacturer anywhere had such an impact on sea angling, not only here in the UK and Europe, but throughout the entire angling World. Other companies such as Penn with their International range may like to contest that claim, but for sheer number of units sold across all aspects of fishing, both boat and shore, the ABU Ambassadeur range is in every sense of the word, iconic.

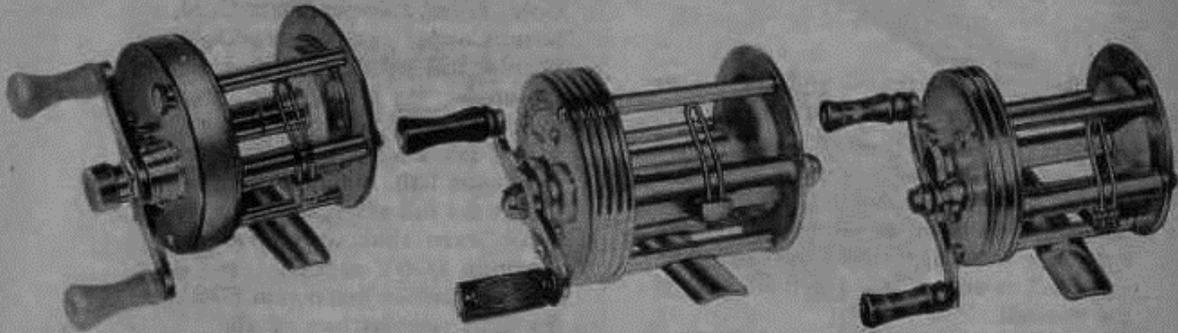
A reel that was light years ahead of its time, introduced to the market in the guise of the Ambassadeur 5000 at the New York World's Fair in 1954. Who at the time could have envisaged that it would go on to become the most famous and longest running series of reels ever produced?

I've already explored the history of ABU as a company in Chapter 4, so there's nothing needs to be added here on that score. It's more of a celebration if you like of quality and excellence over half a century and more. I'm sure if I were to ask people what they think was the most outstanding model in the range I'd be inundated with different answers.

My personal favourite, and what I consider to be probably the best light boat reel ever produced, would be the Ambassadeur 12. I have a couple still which I give a run out to when I'm feeling nostalgic. I don't know why ABU discontinued making them. I guess the answer is linked to turnover. It always is. It's a pity more people didn't get to try them. Maybe then they'd still be on the shelves.

Taking account of what I read and see, coupled to information coming in from people I speak to, if the question of 'best Ambassadeur model ever' was put to a public vote, I'm certain there would be a

THE AMBASSADEUR STORY



Producing the world's finest spinning reel

The brief for the Ambassadeur was simple and straightforward. "Make the perfect reel." Just that. But what *was* the perfect reel? What features must it combine? Behind the answer to these questions lay many years of ABU research and development.

Early Days. It all began in 1940 when the ABU designers produced the Record 1500 reel which was comparatively simple by today's standards. It had a level wind and click adjustment and was later improved by the addition of an adjustable spool cap, which could be used as a brake against backlash or as a drag.

Years passed, and then tournament casters acclaimed a further development in the Record Sport 2100, with its adjustable mechanical brake, free spool that automatically engaged at retrieve, and centrifugal brake which prevented backlash on long casts.

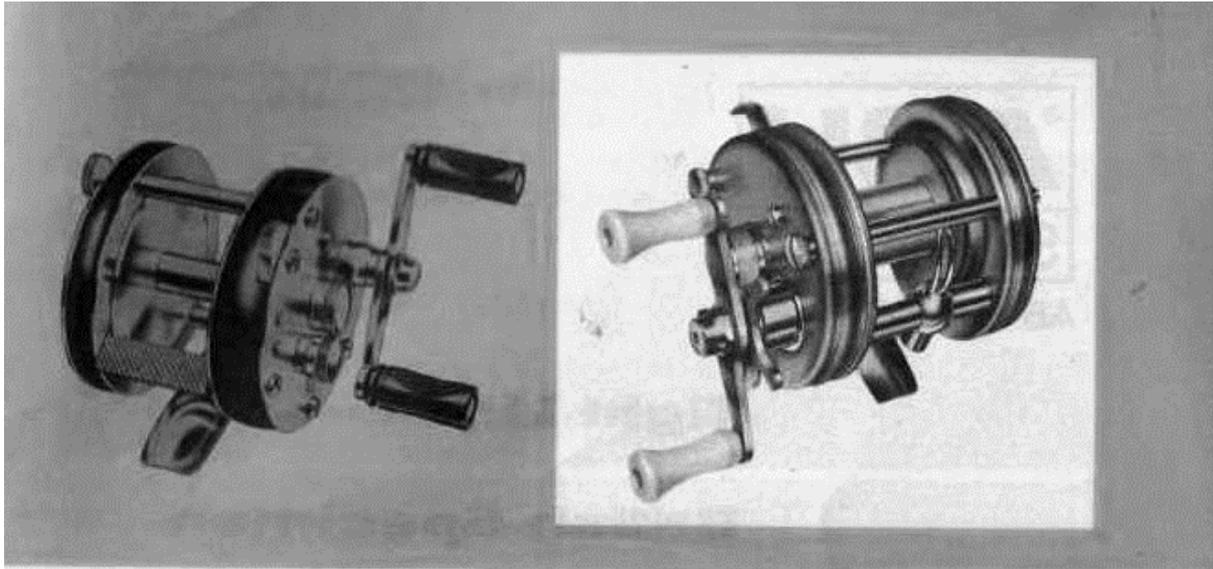
At this time it was not considered feasible to combine a level wind with all these features. A later development, the Record 2500 Super, for example, featured level wind, but without a free-running spool.

Target. Now the ABU designers were

ready to define the perfect reel. It must have a free-running spool to give the angler complete ease in distance casting without backlash. So it must incorporate the centrifugal brake. It must also have a mechanical brake capable of fine adjustment for casting baits of different weights. The angler must be able to start retrieving the moment the bait enters the water, so automatic re-engagement of the spool was a necessity. An automatic anti-reverse device must be incorporated to prevent the handle from revolving when a fish was taking line; also variable tension that could be adjusted easily whilst playing a fish.

Problem. So far the designers agreed that there were no insuperable difficulties. But now came the major problem — how to combine a free-running spool with a level wind that would operate when casting without hindering the length of the cast.

Technically this was very difficult and demanded the full resources of ABU precision engineering. Without going into technicalities, the problem was how to give the disengaged spool complete freedom and yet still retain some form of mechanical transmission that would operate the level wind.



ABU engineers had to design a highly sensitive device which would enable the level wind to synchronise perfectly and run with the natural flow of the line as it came off the spool during the cast.

Experiment. Now that the requirements had been defined from the angler's point of view and translated into engineering terms, the technologists took over. They discussed, argued, experimented. They made drawings and threw them away and made other drawings. Then they made the first prototype.

At this point the anglers took over again. They came back with a few kind words and a number of criticisms.

So it was back to the drawing-boards and the machine shops. More drawings. More prototypes. More tests. And at last the great day came when the anglers said succinctly: "That's it. You've done it."

Achievement. The excitement was now intense. The long period of trial and error was over. The efforts of designers and engineers had paid off. The perfect reel was a practical proposition.

Now it only remained to prove the achievement to the world. A number of reels were made and distributed to leading anglers. Of course they were sceptical. They'd heard it all before. They'd believe it when they saw it.

Recognition. They saw it — and believed it. They used it and applauded it in the

most glowing superlatives; and of course, anglers *never* exaggerate — about tackle. The new reel was now put on the market, and all over the world anglers echoed the compliments already heaped on the ABU designers. For the first time the angler could concentrate on casting and fishing and feel confident that the reel would take care of itself. And because the new reel carried with it such international goodwill, it seemed somehow appropriate to name it... the *Ambassadeur*.

Last Thoughts. After 12 years, nobody has yet come up with a reel to match the Ambassador. But the ABU designers themselves are still carrying on the search for ultimate perfection... and anglers will always be finding new joy in ABU tackle.

A Word to the Fly Fisherman. Just think of those days when the water runs high and coloured and conditions just aren't right for fly. That's the time to go spinning with the Ambassador. You'll soon agree that here is a complementary style of angling well worth acquiring for its own sake and for the extra enjoyment it brings you. When the fish don't take to fly... take to your Ambassador... take fish!

For full details on the Ambassador please turn to page 44—47.

landslide in favour of the 6500. Almost a range within a range, offering a number of options within the one single model, as indeed do some of the other Ambassador's such as the 7000.

The 6500 range had/has everything, from the option of bronze bushes for the spool to run on or bearings, and in the case of the 6500CT, an open top cage to improve thumb control during casting. The most popular casting reel of its era. I regularly used one myself for quite a number of years for fishing from my own trailed boat when smaller species were being targeted. But in truth, it wasn't perhaps best suited to going afloat. What I didn't like about it was the tiny handles which are way too small for boat work, so I bought and fitted a power handle which made an absolute world of difference.

Where the 6500 really made its name was on the beach and the tournament casting field. Put in the hands of a reel technician for tuning and balance, then handed over to the power casters, it really set the records tumbling. Initially, this would be Peter Bagnall (see Chapter 8) who redesigned its early casting partner the Atlantic 484 rod, a combination which quite literally revolutionised distance casting, and put lots of fish on to the beach.

Peter Bagnall also designed the Ambassadeur 7000, which away from the Ambassadeur 12 was may favoured reel, both for the shore and the boat. I had plenty of good fish across a very wide range of species using it, including good Pollack and Coalfish out over the mid-channel wrecks in the 1970's from Plymouth. Another excellent model. But in truth, for the tasks each was designed for, they all were, and still are, trendsetters, flattered by the copies other companies made of them to grab a share of the market.

HARDY'S PATENT EXPIRY

As discussed in Chapter 5 with the Hardy Altex fixed spool reel which was protected by a patent in 1932, because monofilament nylon lines were not available until the end of the 1930's, having a full bale arm on your fixed spool reel only partly solved the issue of line twist and its associated problems, slightly undermining the fact that the full bale arm truly was a landmark improvement, which, had monofilament been available at the reels launch date, would have given Hardy's a huge commercial advantage.

Instead, they lost several years of that, and arguably more as the first monofilament lines were too brittle and performed rather badly, in effect 'postponing' the value of the Altex by a few more years until they got the monofilament problem sorted out.

Hardy's did however get a good decade or more of exclusive full bale arm use before their patent expired in 1954, allowing in their competitors to market cheaper versions of the same. Amongst those beneficiaries were Charles Pons and Leon Carpano who ran a tackle manufacturing business in France. They had been marketing an inexpensive half bale arm reel until the Hardy patent ran out, at which point they switched to a full bale arm version waiting in the wings which reputedly sold in excess of 25 million units under the company name of Mitchell.

HUGE CONGER AT LOOE

It's spooky how record breakers seem to have the knack of catching other huge fish, and breaking other records. H. A. Kelly broke the British Conger record with a fish of 84 pounds in 1933. That same year he also broke the Thresher Shark record. Few other Conger came anywhere near Kelly's fish for size until the 1960's. One that did was a fish of 74 pounds caught by Hetty Eathorne fishing out from Looe in 1954. The same woman, who when fishing from the same port, would go on to catch the first Mako Shark recorded in British waters a year later in 1955.

HERRINGS AND TUNNY

The link between angling for Tunny (Blue Fin Tuna), and commercial Herring fishing cannot be overstressed. Between the early 1930's and the 1950's, the two would work hand in glove. Loose the commercial fishermen, as would be the case in the mid-1950's when North Sea Herring populations began to collapse, and you automatically lost the ability to locate and present baits to the Tunny, which were still there to be caught long after the Herring fishing came to an end.

Fishery ministers of the 'North Sea Countries' finally agreed a moratorium or temporary prohibition on exploiting the so-called Norwegian Herring fishery in 1977 as a last ditch attempt to pull the population back from the brink of extinction caused by commercial fishing excesses.

The word Herring is derived from an old German word for 'multitude' on account of their one time abundance. Long before Queen Victoria came to the throne, Herrings, known by those who relied upon them as 'Silver Darlings', were one of the country's major sources of protein, supporting a thriving labour intensive industry along North Sea coast, providing food and employment on a politically massive scale.

The fact that they could be 'preserved' by methods other than freezing or refrigeration made them all the more important. Salting, pickling, and smoking were the most widely used techniques, with Britain exporting up to a quarter of a million tonnes a year after home requirements had been satisfied, caught by an estimated 10,000 boats from all over Europe during 1913.

For the poorer people of Britain during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, the continued abundance of the Herring was absolutely crucial. Literally tens of thousands of jobs, along with the nutritional needs of millions were dependent upon them. Generations of young women known as the 'Herring Lasses' would travel from port to port as the shoals migrated over the season, cleaning and packing the fish, in cold, wet, stinking conditions, working in teams of 3 or 4, salting the fish into barrels for as long as it took to lay down the entire catch.

To some, it was a means of escaping the grinding poverty of home. For others, families depended on the work. So much so that folk songs about the life and recipes for the Herring's use were widespread. A way of life, which despite some measure of decline, would ultimately come to a grinding halt, along with whatever extra income commercial boat owners based at Scarborough and Whitby could derive from taking well heeled paying passengers heading out to where the drift netters were hauling their nets, which occasionally brought the spectacle of locating Tunny at the surface, and chance of rowing a dinghy over to throw a free lined Herring bait to them.

THE LAST NORTH SEA TUNNY

As outlined in the previous inclusion, to find North Sea Tunny (Blue Fin Tuna), you first had to locate the Herring fishing fleet when they were hauling their drift nets, from which dead and injured Herrings fell into the water attracting pods of large Tunny which would come up to the surface and pick them off. No Herrings; no Tunny. It was as simple as that.

Herrings were definitely in short supply and populations were collapsing, saved only by a moratorium on fishing for them. So, when Tunny fishing finally did come to a halt off the Yorkshire Coast in the mid 1950's, it wasn't due to any lack of big fish. But if you can't concentrate and locate the Tunny in some way, then from an angling perspective, there aren't any to target. So Tunny fishing didn't of itself come to an end. It was over exploitation of the Herring shoals that brought the whole thing to its knees.

From conversations I had with Bill Pashby who was the oarsman in the small rowing boat used to catch many of Scarborough's biggest Tunny, their regular client Harry Weatherly, fishing from the Pashby's boat 'Courage', was reputedly the last man to bring a Tunny back into Scarborough in 1954, around the time at least one of the major North Sea Herring populations finally collapsed leading up to the later 1977 moratorium on Herring fishing, agreed to try to rescue the other North Sea Herring populations from the brink of collapse.

THE LOSS OF RHOS-ON-SEA PIER

It was thought at one stage that Rhos-on-Sea Pier had been built at Douglas on the Isle of Man, bought for £1,300, then dismantled and shipped across. That has since been shown not to have been the case, as the Douglas pier was closed in 1891 and sold for scrap.

So, Rhos Pier was a new build, which saw the servicing of pleasure boats on the Liverpool, Rhyl, Conwy route curtailed so that the structure could be sectioned for defence purposes in WWII. Back in commercial hands after the war it suffered fire damage, and was eventually demolished in 1954.

THE INTERNATIONAL CASTING SPORT FEDERATION

The International Casting Sport Federation (ICSF), which covers all aspects of competitive casting including what for want of a better term I will describe as 'surf casting', was founded in 1955. An organisation responsible for sponsoring tournaments and recognising World records for accuracy and distance.

Contained within it are competitive divisions for almost all types of fly, fixed spool, and revolving spool reel casting, plus competitor classes, with casting said to be set to become an official event at the World Games scheduled for Birmingham in 2021. There is also talk of inclusion in some future Olympics, as it already has a greater participation level and following than a number of other sports already competed at Olympic level.

THE WELSH FEDERATION OF SEA ANGLERS



Like the Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers (SFSA), the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers (WFSA) founded in 1955 and is charged with the duty of the day to day running of the Welsh saltwater record fish list, plus the selecting of the country's senior men's boat and shore teams, along with the ladies, youth, and junior shore teams chosen to represent Wales on the International angling stage.

Eligibility to represent Wales is as follows: A Welsh parent or Welsh born; 3 years residency in Wales, and affiliated to a club which has been affiliated to the WFSA for 3 consecutive years. Personal members are classed as a club for these purposes.

DES BRENNAN AND THE CENTRAL FISHERIES BOARD

Though I met most of the main players on the Irish fisheries team, I was never fortunate enough to cross paths with their leader Des Brennan, who was perhaps just a little bit before my time. So I'm reliant here on people like Clive Gammon, Brian Harris, and Mike Thrussell to fill in some of the blanks. But no matter who it is you speak to, one word always comes to the surface regardless of where else the conversation might be headed, that word being, gentleman.

A very knowledgeable, very proficient, gentleman. A man right at the heart of all the good things that would make Ireland a World leader when it came to investigating, promoting, and protecting its coastal fisheries for anglers, who in return would flock across the Irish Sea in their droves to sample a quality of fishing that Britain had also once enjoyed, but was by comparison now on the slide.



Des Brennan was the organiser and controller of Ireland's original Inland Fisheries Trust, working very closely with fish biologist Michael Kennedy, and Peter O'Reilly. During the very early 1960's, he was asked to survey, assess, and publicise Ireland's sea angling potential available to anglers. Now if ever there was an angler's number one job, then that was it. This entailed visiting all the most likely angling spots and fishing them, not just once, but on a number of occasions, and under different conditions, tide sizes, and times of the year. The team also explored them physically and mapped them in order that their findings could be given to anglers.

A massive undertaking, eventually requiring reinforcements. Initially, these came from just across the way in the UK. Britain was potentially Ireland's biggest angling tourism market, and Ireland's political leaders knew it. So over came the likes of Clive Gammon, Brian Harris, John Darling, Anthony Pearson and the rest, to help with the actual angling side of the surveys at locations deemed most likely by Des Brennan to be of greatest angling interest. Then, as importantly, go back on the ferry and write about them, which they all did on many occasions, particularly the surf Bass beaches (see Chapter 8).

Completing the initial brief of the project was never going to be possible for just one man with a few British visitors thrown into the mix here and there. If they wanted it done properly, they were going to need more staff. At the same time, the Irish government was looking to tie up a few loose ends on the rural and agricultural scene, and rather like the UK would do some time later, they decided to lump them all, including the Inland Fisheries Trust, into one single organisation, with fisheries coming under the sub-heading of Central Fisheries Board (CFB) with those much needed extra staff.

Initially that was Kevin Linnane, whose name will pop up elsewhere in this volume, not the least of which concerns his ground breaking experimental work trolling for Porbeagle Sharks (see Chapter 8). As well as being involved with the practical side of things, Kevin was also a film maker who I worked with at Fenit, plus he collated and produced many of the stats. Paddy Fitzmaurice was similarly involved, handling all the survey results and big fish catches.

Later still, Norman Dunlop and Peter Green would join the team, taking on much of the field work, including meeting anglers both over to fish and at the ever-popular angling road show taken over to the UK along with Irish charter skippers. Ireland was very good at angling self-promotion, and for many years, reaped the rewards from across Europe.

Looking back to my many Irish visits, and to the way UK anglers were treated, or rather neglected back home, it's clear to see that the Irish were light years ahead of anyone else in terms of utilising, while at the same time protecting their coastal fishing, and in particular their Bass. And while the Irish Bass

fishing is clearly not of the same standard it was in the 1960's and 70's (where is these days), it remains head and shoulders above that which you can regularly find around the rest of the British Isles.

Des Brennan was instrumental in this by calling for Bass conservation long before it ever became fashionable. Also, because Irish anglers, through the CFB, have pushed for larger minimum size limits in excess of the size at which Bass spawn, to give them all at least one spawning season, unlike the rest of Europe where they are cropped before they get a chance to breed.

Taking things one step further, Ireland has a statutory Bass take limit and closed periods. Here in the UK we are told that fishery ministers hands are tied by the European Union; the same EU that Ireland is a member of, yet they have the protective legislation, all care-of Des Brennan, who initiated Bass tagging in Ireland, and worked tirelessly to give Bass every chance to remain a species which visiting anglers could expect to catch and enjoy.



Des Brennan died in the final year of this historic project, which is 2000. Following his death, Clive Gammon published this tribute to him through BASS, the Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society magazine.....

“Des Brennan, who died early this week at age 73, was my oldest and closest fishing friend, as well as the best bass angler I ever met.

The first time we met, more than 40 years ago, was when I'd been commissioned to write a book on Irish Sea Angling and the Inland Fisheries Trust had sent him to brief me. He picked me up off the ferry at Rosslare and less than an hour later I was casting to big shoals of bass working over the Splaugh reef.

We did a six-week stint together and became fast friends. And the following October we met again for what I still have to call the finest week's surf fishing I ever had, even though the first day we'd been blown off by a big sou'westerly.

Next day, as the sea eased down, we fished the Black Strand in Co Kerry where the surf proved full of bass and we hammered them. We didn't linger though. That night we drove east, to Rosscarbery in Co Cork, and repeated the performance on Ownahincha, then the Long Strand. So it went on. Next stop was Courtmacsherry – more bass – then Garretstown near Kinsale, then Dungarvan, Co Waterford. And, as a grand finale, just before he put me back on the Fishguard ferry, we socked it to the Barrow Shore, Co Wexford. All week long we'd hit bass after bass after bass.

Oddly, on that trip, we didn't fish Brandon Bay or Inch, beaches which have since become surfcasters' Meccas. But the following year we made up for it. At Inch, people told us we were crazy to try catching fish in them big waves. That day, we caught 34 bass, nothing under 4lbs, best just under 10. When we showed locals the fish in the pub, they didn't know what they were.

We were the first to surf cast Brandon Bay, as well. But it was there – this would have been in the early '60s – that one day, loading the catch into the back of Des's old Hillman, we looked at each other. Why the hell were we killing these fish?

It was the start of something big. Soon we'd be joined by Kevin Linnane of the IFT which now – this was the early '60s – instituted a bass tagging programme which would end in the current Irish bass regulations – bag limit, close season etc – which puts ours to shame.

If Des needs a memorial, it's that programme and its effect”.

Clive Gammon also wrote the following obituary to Kevin Linnane in 2002, again in BASS.....

“Kevin Linnane. one of my oldest friends, a great angler and a great fighter in the cause of bass conservation, died, just before Christmas, of a heart attack. The expression, ‘a happy release’ is an overworked one, but in Kevin’s case it’s fully justified. Two years ago, he was diagnosed with MND, motor neurone disease, an incurable and progressively fatal illness which had left him unable to breathe or feed without the aid of machines. He was only 59.

The first indication had come almost exactly two years earlier, when the two of us were bass fishing in the surf at Inchadoney in County Cork. Kevin complained that his grip on his beachcaster didn’t feel right. Maybe it was the cold, he said. He pulled on mittens but they didn’t do the trick. After he’d got home he went to his doctor, was sent for tests and received what was, in truth, a death sentence.

I first met Kevin back in the ’60s when he was appointed by Ireland’s Inland Fisheries Trust (now the Central Fisheries Board) as an assistant to the late Des Brennan, and from then on we formed a threesome that fished all over Ireland together on angling surveys which have since stood British anglers in good stead from the Kerry beaches to the reefs off Belmullet and Achill Island in Co Mayo.

He was always the strong lad of our party (hey, he was just a kid to us) – who uncomplainingly humped the outboard on his shoulders and dug bait. And how he worked. One unforgettable memory I have is of Kevin, heading home aboard Tommy Welsh’s boat from the Stags of Broadhaven off Mayo one wild evening through big seas. We’d been fishing out with Tommy almost every day for six solid weeks and we were tired to the bone. And there was Kevin, stretched out on deck with the rain lashing down on him. Fast asleep?

He was indefatigable also in the bass – and later shark and ray – tagging programmes which led to the degree of protection – much more effective than our own – that bass now enjoy in Ireland. Later he’d take up the cause of the Atlantic salmon, travelling the northern seas from Canada to the Faroes for what was by then the Central Fisheries Board. And it was he who began the work on bluefin tuna that culminated in the latter part of 2000 in the first capture of the giants off Co. Donegal.

Tuna fishing off Donegal just over a year ago, in fact, was the last fishing trip Kevin and I went on together, and it was Kevin’s last trip of all. By then, the progressive nature of MND meant that his hands were useless so that I had to do the driving up to Donegal. By then, of course, he couldn’t actually fish. Nevertheless, it was a fitting climax to a great angling life that he was there off Downings, Donegal, aboard Michael McVeigh’s Rosguill for that first, wonderful week of bluefin tuna captures.

A great angler and a great friend. I will miss him for the rest of my life.”

PW Comment: A man ahead of his time.

THE IRISH SPECIMEN FISH COMMITTEE

Founded in 1955, the Irish Specimen Fish Committee (ISFC) is an independent voluntary body representing angling interests throughout the island of Ireland. The committee’s principal function is to verify, record, and publicise the capture of specimen fish caught on rod and line by anglers in Ireland, both in freshwater, and saltwater. The Committee also ratifies Irish national record rod caught fish.

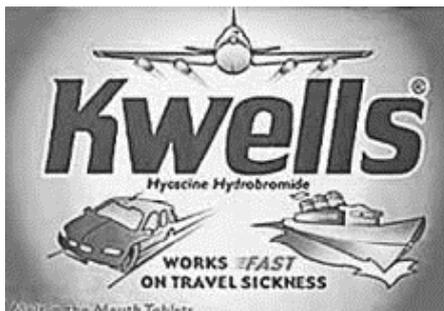
The ISFC coordinates and administers a unique specimen awards scheme designed to recognise any angler who catches a specimen fish in Irish waters, and to publicise the angling venue. Successful anglers are awarded a certificate and a commemorative badge. Specially commissioned silver medals are also presented to the captors of record fish, and special awards are made to captors of multiple specimen fish (on a cumulative basis).



Anglers are awarded a certificate and a commemorative badge. Specially commissioned silver medals are also presented to the captors of record fish, and special awards are made to captors of multiple specimen fish (on a cumulative basis).

In the 59 years leading up to 2014, in excess of 28,000 claims were received by the ISFC, adding to a dataset that is one of the most valuable and long running time-series of its type. It has been used extensively to provide documented proof of the angling value of different waters. In addition to their value for promotion of angling tourism, the ISFC annual report provides invaluable information for anglers when planning trips, particularly those seeking to target a specimen fish.

CINNARIZINE



Cinnarizine was synthesised by Janssen Pharmaceutica in 1955, the importance of which for sea anglers wanting to go fishing from boats rather than being restricted to the shore all the time, cannot be overstated. Finally, the nausea brought about through a mismatch in the brain between visual information and that coming from the balances situated in the ears leading to sea sickness could finally be overcome.

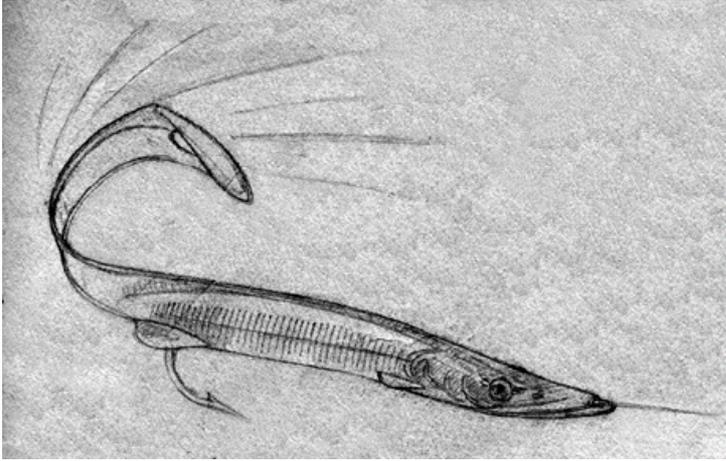
For most anglers and other boat users, this would be through the taking of Stugeron tablets or Kwells, though experts in the field say it is more effective to take Cinnarizine with one of the other sea sickness formulations. You should also try so far as is possible to steer well clear of diesel and exhaust fumes, neither of which would have been a problem during the early part of the twentieth century.

Back then, as in the years leading up to it, sailors were told to stay on deck and focus on the horizon, in an attempt to reduce the eye/balance information mis-match. They would also be recommended to eat foods containing ginger, with Royal Navy sailors told to eat the onboard rations known as 'hard tack' and get over it, which I'm assured, after a number of weeks most sailors did.

ALEX INGRAM & THE REDGILL LURE

While the first commercially produced Redgill lure, also known as the Mevagissey Eel, came along in 1955, the story actually starts more than a decade earlier in the height of a battle during the WWII. Alex Ingram, who originates from Liverpool and is the lures inventor, was a tank commander who was badly injured during a battle with German forces.

The story relayed to me by Mike Millman is that he was taken to a makeshift hospital in a church. When he eventually regained consciousness, he looked up and saw an angel looking down on him, which led him to believe he was dead. What in fact he was looking up at was an angel depicted in a stained glass



window, and he wasn't dead after all. He was however badly injured, particularly in his shoulder, which was his trigger to take up fishing, and spinning in particular as a source of physiotherapy and rehabilitation, a hand written account of which by Alex Ingram himself is reproduced here shortly.

One other little known fact, and relevant to this story, is Alex Ingram's artistic abilities. Several of his paintings are on display in the imperial war museum. And linked to this was his ability

to sketch out design ideas, one of which is shown in the illustration above for the final Redgill rubber lure.

ALEX. J. INGRAM, STUDIED 4 YEARS A LIVERPOOL SCHOOL OF ART. BEFORE THE WAR. AT OUT BREAK OF WAR. VOLUNTEERED FOR TRAINING IN HEAVY TANKS. JOINED THE 3RD ROYAL TANK REGIMENT WITH YOUNGER BROTHER IN NORTH AFRICA. FIGHT FROM EL ALAMAIN TO ~~EL ALAMAIN~~ ACROSS N. AFRICA TO COMIS. YOUNGER BROTHER KILLED IN LAST FEW DAYS OF FIGHTING, ~~MET ALEX~~ WAS MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES. * RETURNED TO THE UK WITH THE REGIMENT AND IN JUNE 44 LANDED ON THE BEACH AT ARDENNES IN FRANCE, FIGHT THROUGH FRANCE BELGIUM & HOLLAND, FINALLY SLOWLY ADVANCED TO CAPTURE A PLACE CALLED LITTLE AMERICA ~~IN FRANCE~~ (LET'S HOPE RED GILLS WILL CAPTURE BILL AMERICA). FLOWN HOME TO UK AND SPENT SOME YEARS BEING REPAIRED. * ONE OF MY WAR PAINTINGS, SHOWING Sherman TANKS PROGRESS THROUGH THE MINIFIELDS AT EL ALAMAIN, N. AFRICA IS NOW IN THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM, IT WAS PUBLISHED IN TIME LIFE ^{ASSISTING AMERICAN ENGINEERS} (SEE LISTING) I BELIEVE IN APRIL 1946 OR 1949 IN THE ARTICLE ON WINSTON CHURCHILL'S WAR MEMOIRS. * ANOTHER OF MY PAINTINGS WAS PRESENTED BY T + L, TO THE CHICAGO SOLVING COMPLEX CENTRE, U.S.A. THIS WAS A PAINTING OF A MITCHELL BOMBER BEING SERVICED ON A NORTH AFRICAN AIRFIELD. ALL THESE PAINTINGS WERE QUITE SMALL WATER COLOURS AS I HAD TO KEEP THEM ABOARD MY TANK IN A SPACE MAP CASE. I HAD MORE RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE FIGHTING IN EUROPE AND WAS TOO BUSY AND USUALLY TOO TIRED TO DO ANY PAINTINGS IN THE LATTER STAGES OF THE WAR. IN 1946 I LEFT LIVERPOOL WITH MY WIFE AND BABY SON AND MOVED TO MERRISLEY CORNWALL ^{MY WIFE'S HOME} A QUIET LITTLE OLD FISHING VILLAGE. MY FATHER IN LAW WAS A FISHERMAN AND I BECAME INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING BETTER FISHING LURES THAN THOSE THAT WERE AVAILABLE AT THAT TIME, STARTING WITH WHAT I BELIEVE WAS THE FIRST EVER CURLY TAILED SAND EEL. THIS PROVED SUCCESSFUL BUT ^{WAS} INCLINED TO TWIST UP THE LINE, I THEN DEVELOPED ONE, 172 mm - SAND EEL USING A PLATE END TAIL, THIS HAS NOW BEEN SUPERSEDED BY ONE NOW 172 mm / 115 mm ^{RAVOR} SCOOT TAILED SAND EELS USING MY PATENTED HOOK LOCK SYSTEM, NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TROLL OR CAST OUT THE HOOK STAYS IN POSITION IN THESE SOFT FLEXIBLE LURES YET THEY CAN EASILY BE REMOVED FREQUENTLY ON THE LINE. ~~AT~~ APPROXIMATING 65 YEARS OF AGE I AM TRYING TO DEVOTE MORE TIME TO LURE DEVELOPMENT LEAVING MY SONS TO SORT OUT THE PRODUCTION SIDE OF THE BUSINESS, WE HAVE A NUMBER OF NEW LURES DESIGNED WHICH WE HAVE TO PRODUCE IN YEARS TO COME, WITH A FULL ORDER BOOK THINGS ARE LOOKING GOOD FOR RED GILLS

According to other sketches I have seen, there were several earlier prototypes which either didn't go into production, or if they did, were superseded by the design shown in the sketch, which would eventually go on to be responsible for many of the huge wreck hauls of Pollack, Coalfish and Cod, including several national records dealt with in Chapter 9, 'The Golden Era of Wreck Fishing'. Also, some memorable hauls of Bass, not to mention other specimen and record fish across a wide range of species.

The Redgill was manufactured in a range of sizes and colours, of which the 172 mm version was far and away the most popular, though on occasions not always the best producer of fish. Sometimes even large fish are more inclined to take the smaller version. Similarly, no one colour could be guaranteed to do the business on any given day either.

Water depth, ambient light, and water clarity would all play their part. One of my favourites for Bass in moderately deep water is the wine-red coloured 172 mm version. Out over the wrecks, which might typically lie in over 200 feet of water, it was a case of different people trying different colours until a pattern for the day was established, which if it wasn't red, a colour that actually appears black beyond 10 metres due to the way wavelengths of light are filtered out with increasing depth, then black itself might very well be the colour preference.

Worked slowly through the water column on a long flying collar rig, or trolled around offshore reef marks, both in its day and even now some 60 years later, the Redgill had, and has, few equals, though later on into the 1970's, Dave Beer's Eddystone Eel also took its share of the fish (see Chapter 9).

All of that said, it wouldn't be unreasonable then to picture in your mind's eye Ingram's production facility as being a small high-tech factory, perhaps on an industrial estate. The truth is that it was far from that. Being kind, you could describe it as a cottage industry. Being accurate, it was a shed industry, quite literally in every sense of the word.

The moulding had started in a garden shed which looked as though it might fall down at any moment and never really progressed much beyond that, other than to expand into a second shed and a stone outhouse. Even after he died and his sons took the business over, it stayed pretty much as it always had, still firmly rooted in the 1950's, despite the fact that both Alex Ingram and his Redgill lures were legendary.

Taking the story through to conclusion, the Redgill brand, the moulds, and all the remaining stock was bought out by Sakuma Tackle around 2006 who also inherited all the files, drawings, and patents. Alex McDonald of Sakuma describes what he saw when he went down to remove their acquisition as being a step back in time and history. Interesting, but sad.

They had an old woman packing the lures, plus a chap named Chas who operated the process. There was stuff lying around everywhere, and to get to the shed you had to beat a path through a sea of nettles. A crane was required to remove the machinery for transportation to Exeter with Chas hired short term to make sure the new staff knew how to operate it properly, the idea being to re-elevate the brand to the level it deserved to be at as an integral part of the ongoing Sakuma range.

FOOTNOTE: Plymouth veteran Mike Millman provides a lot of additional information of the general history of lure making in his inclusion in Chapter 6.

HETTY EATHORNE

Few women have, or will ever hope to match the big fish catches of the diminutive Hetty Eathorne from Brixham. A true angling superstar as the record books can testify. Also, one time owner of the tackle store on East Quay in Looe. The angler who would introduce the UK to the Mako Shark on the 25th August 1955 with a specimen of 352 pounds caught while fishing out from Looe in Cornwall.



Luck would also play its part here, in so far as Hetty thought she'd boated a new ladies IGFA Porbeagle Shark record which turned out to be Britain's first Mako, identified on the basis of not having cusps at the base of its teeth, these being a key identifying feature between it and the Porbeagle Shark. But the story didn't end there. People then started to wonder if other large 'Porbeagles' caught previously might also have been Mako's, in particular those that had been seen jumping clear of the water.

The truthful answer is that we will never really know for certain. That said, 3 big Sharks caught prior to the one we are talking about here can make a very strong case for having been Mako's, one of which weighing exactly 300 pounds was been taken by Hetty's husband John in 1951. The other 2 are a fish of 238 pounds caught by Murray Mexan in 1954, and a 230 pounder by A. Miles, again in 1954, with all 3 fish having been taken out from Looe.

There could well have been others, but these particular 3 have been investigated both by Mike Millman and by David Turner, and on the basis of photographic evidence, look strong candidates to be to have also been Mako's. Either way, Hetty still officially had Britain's first Mako record, plus a ladies IGFA record to boot to go with a ladies IGFA Porbeagle Shark record of 271 pounds she also caught fishing out from Looe aboard her own boat, appropriately named 'Little One', skippered by Bill Butters.

Hetty Eathorne's big fish conquests were just not confined to Sharks. Conger were another species she did well with, taking a specimen of 72 pounds from 'Little One' while fishing a rough ground mark, at a time when the British record still stood at 84 pounds by H. A. Kelly. A fish which would still be considered huge even by today's standards taken from open ground. A fact marked by an invitation by the fledgling British Conger Club (BCC) at its first AGM to become its first president, a position she would hold for many years.

It was at a BCC AGM that she said her goodbyes to some of those she'd worked with and known. Amongst them was Mike Millman. Hetty went over to Mike and said how much she had enjoyed his company, and that they wouldn't meet again. "Give over. Don't go talking like that" he told her. But, he said, "She was right. We didn't meet again", and shortly after that meeting she died. Gone, but not forgotten, with some of her exploits written into angling history.

THE MAKO MASTERS

If you look at the catch list of Mako Sharks from UK and Irish waters during the twentieth century, it quickly becomes apparent that a very small number of people have made the biggest contributions. I'm not talking here of successful anglers, the majority of whom have only ever caught one. It's the skippers who shine through. Three in particular, and not necessarily those responsible for the biggest fish.

Consistency here is the yardstick. Anyone can get lucky once. Twice in Mako terms is a bit more than just luck. Then you have Ray Pengelly, skipper of the Looe based boat 'Irene' with 4: Jack Butters, skipper of another Looe boat 'Paula' with 6, and streaking away in the lead is Falmouth's Robin Vinnicombe with 16, taken while skippering two different boats, starting with 'Inter Nos' then later 'Huntress'.

VENUE	DATE	ANGLER	SKIPPER	BOAT	WEIGHT
Looe	1951	John Eathorne	Bill Butters	Little One	300 pounds

Looe	1954	Mr. Miles	Jack Butters	Paula	230 pounds
Looe	1955	Hetty Eathorne	Bill Butters	Little One	352 pounds
Looe	1956	A. Simpson	Jack Butters	Paula	355.5 lbs
Looe	1956	E. Dawson			129 pounds
Looe	1959	G. Bowler	Jack Butters	Paula	250.5 lbs
Looe	1959	W. Buttle	Jack Symons	Blossom	343 pounds
Looe	1959	A. Melhuish	Bert Dingle	Nautilus	372 pounds
Looe	Late 50's	A. Simpson	Jack Butters	Paula	324 pounds
Falmouth	1960	Murray Mexon	Clinton Powell	Moss Rose	238 pounds
Falmouth	1960	D. Buckland	Clinton Powell	Moss Rose	385 pounds
Falmouth	1960	Veryan Gray	Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	246 pounds
Fowey	1960		Mike Digby	Blue Phantom	160 pounds
Looe	1961	B. Chad-Quick	Ivan Chaston	Tethera	275 pounds
Looe	1961	D. Hartas	Frank Pryn	Golden Spray	342 pounds
Fowey	1961	Dr. Walter Blow	Mike Digby	Blue Phantom	376 pounds
Looe	1961	Mr. Wilson	Johnny Kitto	May Queen	311 pounds
Looe	1961	Jack Sefton	Ray Pengelly	Irene	428.5 lbs
Looe	1962	J. Ellison			345 pounds
Looe	1962	John Hanson	Jack Butters	Paula	427.5 lbs
Falmouth	1962		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	140 pounds
Looe	1963	Jock McDonald			334 pounds
Looe	1963	T. Sheen	Bert Dingle	Nautilus	352 pounds
Looe	1963	Mr. Van Houft			281 pounds
Looe	1963	M. Walne	Edgar Williams	Silver Spray	313 pounds
Looe	1963	C. Watts	Jack Soady	Valhalla	291 pounds
Looe	1963	B. Stevens	Ray Pengelly	Irene	385 pounds
Looe			Jack Butters	Paula	355 pounds
Falmouth	1963		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	160 pounds
Falmouth	1963		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	437 pounds
Shanklin, IOW	1963	D. Fenton			71 pounds
Falmouth	1964		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	240 pounds
Looe	1964	S. Miller	Johnny Kitto	May Queen	435 pounds

Falmouth	1964	F. Cook	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	449 pounds
Falmouth	1964	W. Rogers	Clinton Powell	Swordfish	476 pounds
Mevagissey	1964		Eddie Lakeman	Penare	370 pounds
Looe	1965	A. Hill	L. Butters	Sea Bird	296 pounds
Falmouth	1965	Ted Belston	Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	260 pounds
Falmouth	1965	5th Earl Kimberley	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	390 pounds
Falmouth	1965		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	306 pounds
Salcombe	1965	B. Heath	D. Crews	Chasseur	350 pounds
Falmouth	1966		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	380 pounds
Falmouth	1966	P. Steynor			396 pounds
Falmouth	1966	Bill Bowden	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	336 pounds
Looe	1966	Ken Burgess	Ray Pengelly	Irene	498.5 lbs
Looe	1967	W. Weeles	Frank Pryn	Polaris	263 pounds
Mevagissey	1967	J. Hocking			250 pounds
Looe	1967	K. Cheetham	L. Butters	Sea Bird	400 pounds
Falmouth	1967	Ted Belston	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	410 pounds
Falmouth	1967		Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	214 pounds
Looe	1968	R. Calver			214 pounds
Looe	1968	D. Griffiths	Ray Pengelly	Irene	367 pounds
Falmouth	1968		Guy Crossley-Meats	Fathomer	300+ lbs
Falmouth	1968	T. Watkins	'Tatty Joe' Seyfert	Try Again	312 pounds
Falmouth	1969	Jock McDonald	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	408 pounds
Mevagissey	1969	Brian Lewis	Bernard Hunkin	Westward	325.5 lbs
Penzance	196??	Claude Farmer		Dolphin	222 pounds
Looe	1970	R. Wood	P. Greenwood	Guiding Star	326 pounds
Falmouth	1970	Phil Taylor	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	370 pounds
Looe	1971				167 pounds
Looe	1971	Joyce Yallop	Alan Dingle	Lady Betty	500 pounds
Falmouth	1971	David Turner	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	355 pounds
Mevagissey	1972	A. Williams			128 pounds
Looe	1972				78 pounds
Looe	1977	Anthony Redknap	R. Butters	Lisanne	132 pounds

NOTE: List compiled from data supplied by David Turner & Ian Harbage.

They say you can make statistics support virtually any hypothesis, but these figures stand up to scrutiny whichever way they are interpreted. The total Mako list for the twentieth century is 67, taken during a brief 25 year window of opportunity. Of that total, 35 were taken by boats working out from Looe and 22 from Falmouth.

This could be interpreted as making Looe the number one venue, which in pure numerical terms it is. But when you throw in other factors such as Looe's much earlier start as a shark fishing venue, and its much larger fleet out there on most fishable days pumping in vast amounts of rubby dubby, is it any wonder that collectively, it finishes up with a higher proportion of what is at best a species offering occasional chance encounters to those lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time – well almost.



I say almost, because it isn't all down to chance. Perhaps so with anglers who can do no more than put in the requisite number of trips at the optimum times and hope the weather is kind to them. Less so with the skippers, who are out there doing this all the time, and professionals that they are, picking up on patterns, however small, if or when they appear.

Who better then to talk to than the man heading the list by a clear mile, Robin Vinnicombe, who I met up with at his home in Mylor to record quite a lengthy interview with in 2012. On a separate occasion I also interviewed his 'estranged' brother Frank, who is also said in some circles to have top Mako Shark credentials, though in this case he had Clinton Powell skipper his boat 'Moss Rose' which saw 2 Mako Shark's brought aboard, plus a third by Powell as skipper of 'Swordfish'.

To help further with the story, and the history surrounding it, I also enlisted the help of David Turner, one of the last anglers to catch a Mako Shark with Robin Vinnicombe in 1971, and author of the book 'The Shark Fisherman' (Little Egret Press, 2012), who while researching his book, put together the definitive list of all the known Mako Shark catches from British waters shown above.

The wider story however starts in August 1955 when Hetty Eathorne submitted a record claim to the IGFA for a 352 pound Porbeagle Shark caught out from Looe. A claim which was eventually rejected on the grounds that the shark was in fact a Mako, a species previously unrecorded from British waters, though it's now accepted from photographic and other evidence that at least 3 other large 'Porbeagles' caught off Looe preceding hers, including one of 300 pounds by her husband John, were almost certainly Mako Sharks. So, had there been others, and if so how many, which is a question that will now never be answered.

From Robin Vinnicombe's perspective, the whole episode started by chance in 1959 when he was booked for a wreck fishing trip on a day when conditions were too bad to push off to the wrecks. Not wanting to abandon things altogether, his client suggested they try a spot of shark fishing instead, something Robin had not done before but was willing to be instructed on, resulting in 7 Blue Sharks to 115 pounds.

That was it. Robin Vinnicombe had been smitten by the shark fishing bug, and soon after he would have his first Mako encounter, a fish hooked up very close to the boat which jumped and was eventually lost due to putting too much pressure on it through wanting to rush things to get back to port in deteriorating weather.

Despite being responsible for over 70% of Falmouth's Mako catches, Robin always saw the Mako as a bonus. Having said that, he also recognised that there are things that can be done to increase the chances of an encounter, though still, there was always that element of right place - right time luck. One observation made over time suggests that phases of the moon can be a major influence. When analysed carefully, his catch data shows that a couple of days either side of a full moon can make quite a profound difference when fishing within that small window of opportunity.

As Richard Pierce of the Shark Trust puts it, Mako Sharks are rare fish at our latitude, putting them right at the edge of their lower temperature tolerance limit. This however raises the question of why then they suddenly stopped coming after the mid-1970's, when in fact, water temperatures have been steadily on the rise.

Going back to David Turners statistics, for reasons in part already explained, Looe saw more Mako Sharks than did Falmouth because they had more boats out on more days over more years playing the odds. How then do you explain away the comparative catch ratio's which very clearly point to Falmouth having the superior strike rate, a question I put to Robin? His take on it is that Falmouth has a much more rugged coastline, with plenty of heavy ground such as the Manacles close inshore.

In his experience, Mako like to hang around wrecks and reefs, and at both locations, they love eating Conger and other bottom species, with one Mako coming onboard full of Bass. The closest to shore Robin ever hooked a Mako was less than a mile off at the Manacles, while the furthest off was around 10 miles, with his first successful encounter coming in 1960 in the shape of a 246 pounder caught by Veryan Gray, a fish which turned so hard on the gaff that it almost took Robin over the side, cracking one of his ribs in the process.

In the early days, Robin fished from a 52 foot ex Newlyn long liner named 'Inter Nos,' which in his opinion was a bit too big for the job at hand. Unlike chief Brody's famous line "We're going to need a bigger boat" in the film Jaws, Robin quickly recognised the practicalities of using a smaller boat to be able to deal with sharks more effectively, which came along in the shape of a 34 foot wooden boat called 'Huntress', a name that would become synonymous with Mako Sharks, by producing more of them than any other boat in British angling history.

But still, as the stats bare out, they would always be a rare fish and a chance encounter, though he did manage at least one Mako in most seasons between 1960 and 1971. Sometimes 2, and in 1965 he had 3, which could have been 4 had the 5th Earl of Kimberly, who had just beaten a 390 pounder, not refused the opportunity of another large fish drawn in by the slick, saying that he couldn't go through that twice in the same day.

Sticking with the stats for a moment, they show that the longest duration fight with a big Mako lasted around 6 hours. That was Jock McDonald, who along with Ted Belston and A. Simpson, are the only anglers ever to catch 2 Mako Sharks each in UK waters, with McDonalds 2 fish coming from different ports. Everybody else had to settle for just the one, which of itself was still a major angling achievement.

Looe is the only port to see two caught in the same day on the 31st of July 1963, a date which fits in perfectly with the regular pattern of June and July being the key months, probably due to the time required for these fish to push up to the approaches to the English Channel, and also because of high summer having suitable water temperatures to attract them. Flying in the face of this is Joyce Yallop's record 500 pound fish caught aboard Alan Dingle's 'Lady Betty' out from Looe.

That fish was spotted at the surface during a reef fishing session out towards the Eddystone in May 1971. A fish about which there has been some 'controversy' over the years. I have no opinions either way on this one. I'm just the commentator. But it has been said that Alan Dingle had to virtually bully Joyce into seeing the encounter through to conclusion when she felt unable to go any further. 'Healthy encouragement' is only to be expected. And the controversy doesn't end there.

It has also been said that the weight margin between this fish and the standing record of 498½ pounds caught by Ken Burgess, again out from Looe 5 years earlier, was too close to call, and that the 2 fish should have shared the record. In addition to that, going back to Robin Vinnicombe's comments about Mako's liking to eat Conger, the rumour mill was suggesting that Joyce Yallop's fish showed visible signs of its last meal being in danger of falling out and undermining the record, for which reason it was weighed hanging by its jaws. But I have to say that having looked at other photographs of dead sharks hanging from scales, that was quite a common practise in its day.



There is one other fish worthy of looking at here in a bit more detail. David Turner's definitive list has in it one very obvious outlier in the form of a 71 pound specimen taken by D. Fenton out from Shanklin on the Isle of Wight. The furthest east a Mako Shark had been previously been taken either was Salcombe in Devon, a distance of around 170 miles away, which in Mako migration terms is a very long haul, though not impossible.

It's small size also makes it stand out from the rest, though in fairness, a 78 pound Mako was taken out from Looe in 1972. Bearing in mind the identification mistake made in respect of Hetty Eathorne's 'IGFA record' and the proximity of Shanklin to the Nab Tower area which produced a lot of Porbeagle Sharks before the commercials got to them long after this particular event, it prompts the question (though not an accusation) that this too could have been a genuinely misidentified fish, in this case a Porbeagle Shark.

The Mako Shark does not appear in the Irish record fish list, which surprises me on two counts. Ireland's southern tip is so often the recipient of open oceanic fish wandering up around the edge of their range, which in light of the number of Blue Sharks caught around Ireland, plus the amount of rubby dubby and shark baits going into the water over the years, should have brought about a result.

Even more surprising is the fact that I'm sure I can recall a news item regarding at least one small Mako having been taken in the Kinsale area which looks out onto the same area fished by Andrew Alsop, the skipper who guided Andy Griffith to his 197 pound Welsh Mako out from Milford Haven in 2013. That fish marked the end of a 37 year drought, and maybe the start of another, perhaps in part due to the decline in Blue Shark fishing from Looe, Falmouth and the rest. That however can't be the full story. Let's see what the next chapter in the Mako Shark's history brings.

TOHATSU OUTBOARD MOTORS

Tohatsu is another of those 'lesser known' foreign companies included here by angling implication along with the more established household name manufactures rather than in their own right, in this case through the production of outboard engines, where they also compete with the other companies they manufacture and provide components for.



In 1922, the Takata Motor Research Institute was established in Japan to manufacture railcars, and undertake research into portable generators. By 1950 it had diversified into the production of motorcycles, and by 1955, the development of small outboard engines, marketing a 1.5 hp air cooled unit in 1956, which persuaded the company to invest further into outboard research and development. This which would eventually lead to the production of a complete outboard engine range.

engine range.

Despite the 'lesser known' tag used earlier, at the time of writing, Tohatsu is the second largest producer of outboard engines in the World. You do occasionally see them in use here in the UK. I have clocked up a lot of sea miles thanks to Tohatsu power, resulting in the catching of many big fish, including Common Skate and Tope, all thanks to Scottish charter skipper Ian Burrett, who fishes from a 19-foot Orkney Fastliner reliably powered by Tohatsu engines.

This is some recommendation given the amount of work a charter skipper puts his power unit to. Something other outboard manufacturers, including Mercury, acknowledge through the fact that all their engines under 30 hp in size are re-badged Tohatsu units, as are all Nissan outboard engines sold in the US and Canada. In addition to this, to varying degrees, other well known outboard engine companies incorporate Tohatsu parts.

HUGH STOKER



Despite the fact that I never met the man due to the fact that I was way too young, Hugh Stoker still had a profound influence on my future fishing, particularly in respect of me becoming a small boat enthusiast. I have this abiding memory (possibly not even accurate) of a photograph of him sat in a wooden clinker-built dinghy powered by a Seagull outboard holding up a Thornback Ray. I don't recall which publication I saw it in, as Stoker was very active right across the press during the 1950's and 60's. As such, he is probably the first of the true angling writers as we would know them today.

What I didn't appreciate at the time was the man's sheer pioneering spirit. An avid writer, and equally a very good angler, with a spirit of adventure by all accounts from people I have spoken to. But a difficult, frosty man too. Mike Millman for example, who had met Stoker a couple of times, decided to call in on him one day unannounced, only to have the door slammed in his face. Russ Symons also talks of anglers renting half of the converted windmill he lived in hoping to meet up with the man, only for him to deliberately avoid them for the duration of their stay.

Hugh Stoker was from the age group that saw WWII military service. An RAF veteran in fact, which surely contributed to his self discipline and pioneering spirit. A man whose family would trail his small

boat from his home in Dorset, to say Coverack in Cornwall, then ‘dump’ him there, leaving him to sail back (no outboard motor), stopping off to camp and fish along the way, gathering a wealth of county by county firsthand information for a series of books based on fishing many of the south coast counties published by Angling Times in the mid to late-1960’s. This ‘Sea Fishing In...’ series covered North Devon and Somerset, South Devon, Cornwall, Hampshire & the IOW, Dorset, Sussex, and Kent.

NUCLEAR POWER

Nuclear power generation, and its potential implications in terms of pollution and reducing the effect of rising sea temperatures is not confined to any one single decade. For the UK however, the story starts in the 1950’s with the construction of the Windscale (now Sellafield) site on the Cumbrian Coast. As such I think it’s only fitting that all the information appertaining to nuclear power and the processing of nuclear waste be examined collectively here.

Constructed in 1956, the Windscale site contains the oldest industrial scale nuclear power station in the World. Britain’s other twentieth century nuclear power stations are as follows...

Bradwell (partly decommissioned) built in 1962

Oldbury built in 1967

Wylfa built in 1971

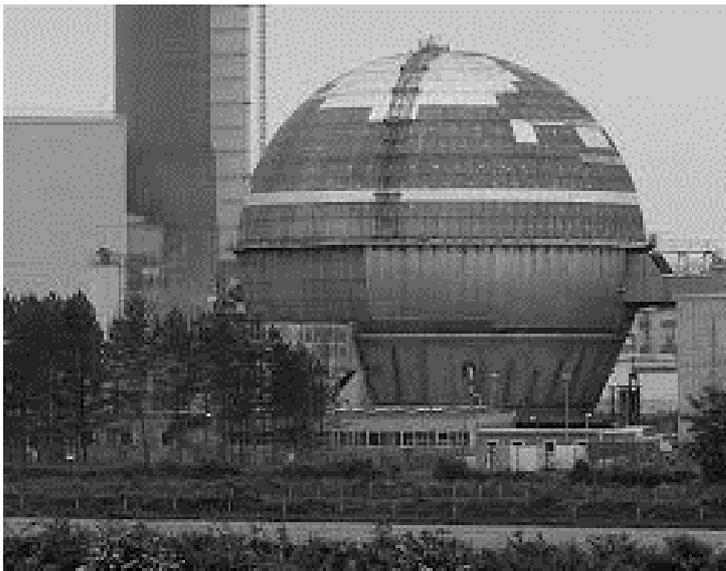
Hinkley Point A built in 1976 & B in 1976 (C comes after 2000)

Hartlepool built in 1983

Heysham No.1 built in 1983 & No.2 in 1988

Sizewell A built in 1996 & B in 1995

NOTE: Nuclear power is not produced on the island of Ireland.



One of the reasons why sea temperatures are rising is climate change. Global temperatures have been progressively rising ever since the Industrial Revolution in Victorian times, with the most alarming rises coming since the start of the 1990’s, the primary cause of which are so called greenhouse gases being released into the atmosphere.

A number of different gases are implicated here, including methane from various sources including ruminant animals such as cattle, and carbon dioxide released through the burning of fossil fuels including coal, natural gas,

and oil based products. In other words, gasses with the ability to trap long wave radiation coming in from the sun by preventing it escaping back into space in the same way that a garden greenhouse traps in heat using panes of glass.

Make no mistake about it, nuclear power is not without its threats and problems, as demonstrated by the Windscale disaster discussed later in this chapter, plus the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Waste processing and explosions aside, in terms of helping check global warming, it has to be the way forward by at least not adding further to the atmospheric CO₂ blanket, with electric cars likely to take out even more in the future. That said, the effects of nuclear power on angling are not all about pollution potential and a chance to cut back on greenhouse emissions. Fish stocks are also affected, as anyone with even a fleeting interest in Bass fishing will know only too well.

There have been, and still are, a number of unintended consequences of nuclear power to fish populations. It's common knowledge that small Bass congregate in their thousands at suitably comfortable points along the temperature gradient created by warm water outfalls serving to cool nuclear reactors.

Obviously, this is helpful in growing these small fish on, as food to growth conversions are always faster at higher temperatures. On the downside, these fish are 'available' for over cropping, be that by aquatic and winged predators, or more usually, by so-called anglers, deliberately catching them to keep at sizes below the legal limit.

The damage done by anglers has long been known, and is now slowly being legislated against. The problem is that words written on paper alone won't stop the slaughter. They are tools to be used by fishery officers, who unfortunately, are far too thin on the ground to be effective.

When approached, suspects are often able to see them coming at distance and dispose of the evidence, with some even willing to resort to violence. But let's not run away with the thought that problems to fish stocks only occur around the warm water outfalls. The abstraction points at which the water is drawn in to cool the reactors also have a part to play.

Power station operators clearly don't want fish, weed, or any other solid material drawn in to their cooling system, and are both keen as well as required by law to ensure the uptake of fish doesn't happen. Based on two personal bouts of experience, I can categorically state that bubble screens which supposedly deter fish from being sucked up at nuclear power stations simply do not work.

The first involves an invite to see fish sucked into the system at Heysham, where I witnessed dozens of Triggerfish and other species being removed from a large rotating debris drum. Then later, as an angling representative for the Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (IFCA), we were barred on security grounds from entry to Heysham power station to investigate reports of literally skip loads of mixed fish being taken from the intake to landfill.

THE WINDSCALE DISASTER

History was made at Windscale in 1956 when the World's first industrial scale nuclear power station began generating electricity, and again in 1957, with Britain's worst nuclear accident of the entire century, when fire broke out in Unit 1 at the facility. This burned for 3 days before it was brought under control, resulting in a ranking score of 5 out of a possible 7 in terms of severity on the International Nuclear Incident Scale.

We will never fully know what effect this actually had on either people or the environment, but it is known that the radioactive isotope Iodine 131, which has been strongly linked to thyroid cancer, may well have been responsible for an estimated additional 240 cases of the disease. Yet despite this, no one was evacuated from the immediate vicinity, though milk from an area of approximately 500 square kilometres surrounding the site was diluted and destroyed for around a month after the fire.



No regard was given to the marine environment either. Windscale (now Sellafield) is located on the coast adjacent to the Cumbrian village of Seascale. The site has a discharge pipe, presumably carrying surface water directly into the sea, around which I have fished from my own small boat for Cod and Plaice. Yet nothing was done to safeguard people from contaminated fish stocks, be they taken by anglers, or commercially or caught.

PW Comment: Fossil fuel burning is warming our planet at a rate too rapid for plants and animals to adapt to in evolutionary terms. Marine fish have a

slight advantage in that they can migrate northwards to maintain their preferred temperature band, which has already been shown to be the case with North Sea Cod.

This highlights the dilemma of how best to generate the power we all rely on. Green energy cannot totally satisfy this demand, besides which, in terms of marine life, it isn't always as green as it's painted. The obvious answer, despite the problem of waste storage and disposal, is nuclear power. But after the fiasco detailed above, can we trust it? Not so much in terms of the science, but the openness (or lack of) of those charged with delivering the electricity it provides.

THE FLOUNDER BOAT RECORD

Inherited as a British record in 1957 by the National Anglers Council (NAC) when British fish recording was all placed under the same roof, the largest Flounder *Pleuronectes flesus* of the twentieth century taken anywhere around the British Isles at 5.11.8 was caught by A. G. L. Cobbledick while boat fishing in the Golant area of Fowey estuary, upstream of the China Clay loading jetties in 1956, the same area from which a specimen in excess of 8 pounds was commercially caught.

COMMERCIALY CAUGHT HALIBUT TOPS 500 POUNDS

Grimsby 1957 saw a Halibut said to weigh in excess of 500 pounds put on to the fish quay, well beating the ports previous best of 456 pounds trawled prior to WWII. Granted, neither were taken by rod and line, and probably never could have been so even if hooked on account of their sheer size and power. If nothing else, the report shows just what might be lurking out there, and what sizes fish can grow to given the chance.

ABERAVON PIER

Aberavon North Pier was built in 1893 by the Port Talbot Railway & Docks Company to act as a breakwater. In 1902, Aberavon District Council added railings to it turning it into a pleasure pier, but unfortunately, a series of powerful gales necessitated the whole length to be strengthened, and in some areas, even rebuilt.

After WWII it was closed to the public and allowed to become derelict, to the point when in 1957, the then owners, The British Transport Commission, began work on re-decking its entire 900 foot length. In 1962, £250,000 worth of concrete block work began to be used to replace any rotted timbers, by which stage the pier was again considered no more than a breakwater, which in a poor state of repair, remains the case to this day.

FORMALISED BRITISH RECORD FISH LIST

You would think something as structured and supposedly well documented as national record keeping would be an easy topic to deal with in historical terms. Despite constant liaising with the current committee's chairman, Mike Heylin, who I know has done all within his power to help me, this has not been an easy nut to crack, if indeed my inclusion here cracks it at all. But here we go.

Prior to 1957, angling records were not kept to a fixed set of rules on a national basis. Sea angling records were fragmented. There was no distinction made between boat and shore. That would come later in 1976 (see Chapter 9). The largest example of each species was awarded record status, regardless of whether it was taken from a boat or from the shore, so long as it was caught in British waters, which are England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with the latter 3, unlike the English, also enjoying the 'luxury' of their own national record lists to which they may also contribute, operated by the Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers (SFSA), the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers (WFSA) and the Irish Specimen Fish Committee which covers the entire Island of Ireland.

Because of the way records had been awarded prior to 1957, things were in a bit of a mess. We now know that some fish hadn't been identified properly (Thornback and Spotted Ray) while others hadn't been weighed accurately (Ballan Wrasse). Also, that different rules had been applied by organisations, angling clubs, angling bodies, and even the angling press, who had all been taking it upon themselves to award record status. The Fishing Gazette for example, at the start of the century, publicised national records, as did the British Sea Anglers' Society in 'reports' over a similar time period.

There is no doubt all were doing so in good faith, and to the best of their ability, but it wasn't working. It needed to function on a truly national scale operated to a fixed set of rules so that it could be seen to be transparent and fair for everyone. Who better then to take on such a task than the body that has throughout its existence denied English anglers the same national identity opportunities afforded to the Scots, Welsh, and Irish, none other than the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA), who gathered in all the 'old' records they could find from a wide range of sources to start the painstaking job of reviewing them all to compile as accurate a list as it was possible under the circumstances?

From research done by Mike Millman for Saltwater Boat Angling Magazine in 2017, the following inherited records were installed by the NFSA in 1957....

Bass – 18.2.0 Felixstowe Beach, 1943.

Black Bream – 6.5.0 Menai Strait, 1935.

Bull Huss – 21.3.0 Looe, 1955.

Coalfish – 23.8.0 Sennen Cove, 1921.

Cod – 32.0.0 Lowestoft Beach, 1945.

Conger – 84.0.0 off Dungeness, 1933.

Dab – 2.9.8 Morpha Beach, 1936.

Flounder – 5.11.8 River Fowey, 1956.
Garfish – 2.9.0 Coverack, 1935.
Tub Gurnard – 11.7.4 Wallasey, 1952.
Hake – 17.8.0 off Lands End, 1911.
John Dory – 8.8.0 off Mevagissey, 1922.
Ling – 45.0.0 Wolf Rock, 1912.
Monkfish 62.0.0 Littlehampton, 1919.
Thick Lip Grey Mullet – 10.1.0 Portland, 1952.
Plaice – 7.5.0 Teign Estuary, 1949.
Porbeagle Shark – 300.0.0 Looe, 1951.
Pouting – 4.10.0 off Coverack, 1935.
Red Bream – 7.8.0 Hatt Rocks off Fowey, 1925.
Scad – 3.3.0 off Deal, 1934.
Blue Shark – 180.0.0 Looe, 1955.
Thresher Shark – off Dungeness, 1933.
Sole – 4.0.0 Clevedon Pier, 1943.
Stingray – 59.0.0 off Clacton, 1952.
Thornback Ray – 38.0.0 Rustington 1935, (later purged).
Tope – 65.0.0 Studland, 1956.
Tunny (Bluefin Tuna) – 851.0.0 off Whitby, 1933.
Turbot – 27.14.0 Salcombe, 1907.
Whiting – 6.0.0 Loch Shildaig, 1940.
Ballan Wrasse – 121.12.0 off Looe, 1912 (later purged).

Two of the above inclusions were later removed in the ‘records purge’ of the 1960’s. Of the remainder, most have since been replaced by bigger fish. Still standing at the time of writing (2018) are the Dab, which now occupies the shore record slot; the Flounder, in the boat record slot; the Tub Gurnard, in the boat record slot; the Thick Lipped Grey Mullet, in the boat record slot, and the Tunny (Blue Fin Tuna), also in the boat record slot.

PW Comment: Despite the best efforts of the NFSA, and subsequently by both the National Anglers Council and the British Record Fish Committee, things have not always gone overly well, a topic I will endeavour to develop a little further in Chapter 8, and will explore in forensic detail in the final Chapter looking at the legacy of the twentieth century.

One other comment I would make here concerns the Black Bream, recorded at 6.5.0 from the Menai Strait in 1935. It originates from a comment published in the 1970’s by renowned Welsh shore angler Bruce McMillen. His point was that in his experience of fishing from the 1920’s on into the 1960’s,

Black Bream were rare to non-existent there, leading to a suggestion that the fish was very probably a mistakenly identified Ballan Wrasse.

I wouldn't care to comment either way. What I will say is that I have caught reasonable numbers of Black Bream both inside and just outside the Menai Strait. Small fish granted, but Black Bream none the less. So, an interesting point to ponder.

FOOTNOTE: Angling journalist and historian Mike Millman has additional points to raise regarding potentially controversial aspects of the British Record Fish Committee in his inclusion in Chapter 8.

YAMAHA OUTBOARD MOTORS

As a manufacturing entity, Yamaha can trace its history back to 1887 Japan, when under the name of the Nippon Gakki Co. Ltd. they produced musical instruments. Keen to make use of machinery that



was standing idle after wartime manufacturing had come to an end, in 1953, Yamaha took its first steps towards becoming an engine producing company. Initially this was with motorcycle engines.

In 1958, this diversified to include outboard motors, which it has to be said were initially not that well received. The first model to go on sale was the P-7 which was criticised for being so noisy that even one of its engineers allegedly commented that it was 'particularly loud and had high levels of vibration'. The standing joke at the time was that you could tell it had been built by musical instrument makers because of the sound it put out.

The big break through for the Yamaha outboard engine division came in 1967, when following a meeting with the Ambassador of Pakistan, the company offered to provide outboard motors to help with flood relief during the rainy season. A time when traditional wheeled vehicles were severely restricted in their rescue operations, and where out in rural environments, few of the boats they had were motorised. Unfortunately, the P-3 motor on offer wasn't best suited in terms of mounting it to the boats the Pakistani authorities were using, so a significant design modification was required and carried out to get the job done.

The next problem the company was faced with was a combination of extreme working conditions and workloads. The engines were in almost constant use and needed to be reliable due to the consequences of breaking down. The ultimate engineering test bed. The eyes of the World were watching. So, Yamaha needed to come good, which they did, with both a quality product, and outstanding after sales service, earning themselves widespread recognition leading to positive word of mouth advertising, bringing with it a significant boost to the developing outboard motor divisions reputation.

Pakistan was their launch pad for Worldwide growth, with the US market coming on stream in 1970. Africa, Latin America, Asia, and most importantly here for us, Europe, quickly followed. The work with flood victims and village fishermen reliant on outboard motors was starting to pay off in terms of unit sales. But it also paid off in terms of quality, and in understanding the competition, because besides repairing their own units in rural Pakistan, Yamaha engineers would also strip down and repair engines made by other manufacturers rather than seeing poor rural folk left to suffer, which was a massive engineering lesson leading to increased Yamaha quality and sales figures.



PW Comment: As anyone who uses an outboard engine will know only too well, Yamaha has been a World leader on the marine engine scene for many years, and is still up there with the best. A good example of this is their 85A model launched in the late 1970's, which is still available unchanged in its original design. Its popularity and reliability were such that a new generation replacement was deemed unnecessary.

As for myself, I fished for years using a 75 hp Yamaha two stroke outboard, reluctantly replacing it with a Honda when four stroke engines were first intro-

duced, and a long-term loan deal was put in place by Warrior boats with Honda. We still kept the Yamaha in my shed for such time as when the loan deal ran out, only to have the Honda replaced with Suzuki, at which point it was decided to sell the Yamaha after leaving it standing idle for all those years. The chap who bought it required a demonstration, so we set it up on a stand borrowed from Warrior Boats, and to our amazement even, we had it running again in no time at all, leading up to one very satisfied customer.

THE DAIWA FISHING TACKLE COMPANY



Japanese fishing tackle manufacturer Daiwa is a relatively new name on the scene, both nationally and internationally, having the same launch date of 1958 as Yamaha outboard motors discussed above. I can think of many occasions when I have used both brands together, with my Yamaha 75 powering us out offshore and my Daiwa Interline rod producing the fish.

However, the story goes back a little further than that with Japanese angling entrepreneur Yoshio Matsui deciding he wanted make better fishing tackle a reality with Daiwa Reels, which first went into production 3 years earlier in 1955. But Daiwa and the angling World would have to wait until 1968 to see the company really make its mark, with the development and subsequent release of the open face fixed spool reel we are now so familiar with.

Though it seems obvious now, the advantage of having a spool that was not encased was ground breaking. Particularly for sea anglers, fishing in extreme locations, where line inspection for scuffing and chafing is vital. Now all of a sudden line could easily be checked, and if necessary, replaced, in addition to which, and of vital importance where casting distance is crucial, more line with a higher stack could be put on to these reels.

Not only that, Daiwa was the first tackle manufacturer ever to incorporate carbon fibres into both its reel bodies and rotors. Obviously into its fishing rods too, and on all fronts, it has continued to develop and innovate to a very high level, not only following trends, but more importantly at times by setting them, putting Daiwa tackle right up there with the best of the best.

Here in Britain, Daiwa tackle is provided by Daiwa Sports UK Ltd. which was established at Wishaw in Lanarkshire, Scotland, in 1977. UK specific rods are manufactured at the site. It also imports a whole range of other UK appropriate tackle, with feedback on pre-production prototype rods and reels based on prolonged heavy usage prior to them entering the company's sea angling range, for a long time being provided by Scottish International sea angler Steve Souter, who I know is one of the most objective and reliable people you could ever wish to hand a pre-production item to with the intention of getting a genuine appraisal.

PW Comment: The idea here when discussing tackle companies is not to provide an advertising show case of all their wares. Their catalogues do that perfectly well, with constant reviews and tackle tests done by experts in their particular field reporting their findings in fishing magazines helping keep everyone up to date with feedback to help us choose tackle suited to our needs and pocket. My mission here is to provide a brief potted history of angling allied manufacturing companies. What I also like to do is add in a few appropriate comments from my own personal experience.

Over the years I have both bought and been handed Daiwa products for review, and as such, when field testing an item, there is then an obligation to comment on what you find. Usually this is positive, though it doesn't have to be so if criticised objectively. Where an item is particularly bad, I would hand it back with no review written, though I stress this has never happened with any Daiwa product. That said, you expect brand new tackle to perform well. The real test is in the longer term. It's when you see well known anglers using tackle which outwardly appears to have been 'around the block' a few times that you should sit up and take note.

I mentioned earlier the Interline rod which has the reel line threaded up the inside rather than being constrained by external line guides (see Chapter 11). Though it can be a pig to thread the line through, particularly on the cold wet deck of a boat, it is still a regular choice for me, and one which always draws a lot of interest, both for its appearance, and for its action. I must have been using it now for over 20 years. I have also had very good service out my Daiwa LD50H reel which I took over to Namibia in 1999, and which when paired to a UK Penn surf rod, beat a Bronze Whaler Shark of 212 pounds from the beach.

THE ANGLO-ICELANDIC COD WARS

As anyone who has ever visited Iceland will be only too well aware, other than fish, the country is pretty much devoid of natural resources other than grass for sheep. Is it any wonder then that they have fought so hard over the years to keep their territorial fish stocks for themselves?

I say fought, but sabre rattling, skirmishes, and a bit of very clever blackmail in a 3 round bout, known over here as The Cod Wars, and to Britain's 'opponents' as Þorskastríðin, is perhaps nearer the mark, with the Navy's of 2 NATO countries 'squaring up' to each other, resulting in one Icelandic Naval engineer accidentally killed in a collision between two armed vessels wasn't a storm in a tea cup either.

Round 1 took place between the 1st September 1958 and 11th March 1962, when Iceland extended its territorial waters from 4 to 12 miles. To be honest, nobody much bothered in the commercial fishing industry, because trawlers doing the Icelandic run as it was known, typically didn't work that close to shore anyway. So while it was technically seen as a political violation, nobody much pushed the issue. Beyond 12 miles however was another matter, with UK trawlers more than willing to ignore Icelandic instructions to stay away or face the consequences.

Round 2 began in 1972 and ended in 1973 through jumping the gun rather than waiting for the signing of a temporary agreement after Icelandic authorities extended their territorial waters from 12 to 50 miles. This was followed by round 3 in November 1975 with a unilateral extension of the 50 miles limit out to 200 miles, ending once and for all in June 1976, with the UK government conceding under pressure from America who feared the loss of a crucially important NATO base, thereby threatening the security of the North Atlantic.

Icelandic gunboats including Odin and Thor were regularly on patrol, cutting the warps of any 'foreign' fishing boat found to be trawling inside the new 200 mile limit, with 'encounters' between fishermen, the Royal Navy, and the Icelandic Coastguard vessels both frequent and inevitable. They were also extremely dangerous. Not so much from a military perspective, though collisions and threats to open fire were ever present. The greatest risk was for those out on deck on the trawlers when the taught warps parted and recoiled. However, feelings were running high, and nobody it seems was willing to be the first to blink.



It's surprising how simple, yet ruthlessly efficient the Icelandic cutting gear was. A bit like a traditional Fisherman pattern anchor with cutting blades along the inner edge of a tightly 'closing V' dragged at right angles across the trawl warps until they parted. The cutters were actually made in the small fishing town of Akranes where I was able to track one of them down and grab the photograph included here. The local Icelanders were proud of them. UK commercial fishermen hated them. Me, I'm a neutral. I would add that having spoken to com-

mercial fishermen at Fleetwood who were on the Icelandic run, many now see the Icelanders as forward looking, wishing we here had done the same.

What, you might ask, has any of this got to do with angling. Well for starters, the Cod Wars after the Americans had stepped in meant that our home waters would start to come under much more intense commercial pressure, which for angling, is never good. That however didn't last too long. For a whole variety of political reasons, Britain's commercial fishing industry contracted; some say laid down and died. So what, you might say. Well unfortunately, vessels from elsewhere in the EU were ready and only too willing to take up the spare capacity, making Iceland's 'illegal' unilateral declaration look even more like a position the UK government should have emulated.

THE LOSS OF LEE-ON-SOLENT PIER

Designed by Galbraith Church, the foundation stone for the 750 foot-long Lee-on-Solent iron pier was laid in 1885 and it was opened in 1888, facilitating a ferry service between it and Clarence Pier at

Southsea. As is so often the case with Victorian piers, in 1932 it was fire damaged, then in 1940 it was sectioned for defence purposes.

Ownership later passed to Gosport Council who were awarded compensation for damage to the structure during the war years but who then spent the money on other things, leading to the structure being demolished in 1958.

THE 'FIRST' ANGLING REPORT OF SMOOTHHOUNDS



No one can state with any measure of certainty when a new species of fish first arrives in coastal waters. The best that can be recorded is the first time a species is reported, either commercially or on rod and line, and in that regard, 1958 may well be the first time Smoothhounds were recorded (or reported) in British waters. A piece of information which came to light during an extensive interview with angler, tackle shop owner, and angling broadcaster Ted Tuckerman from Torquay, who up until 1960 lived in Lymington, Hampshire, close to where this particular incident took place.

Out with his boat partner Gerald Aston Smith aboard their own boat 'Allis Shad' fishing off Thorns Beach for rays and Tope, the pair started noticing large numbers of small white spotted Tope coming to the boat on soft crab baits, which back then they thought could well be juvenile Tope, which they weighed-in at the Lymington and District SFC as Tope.

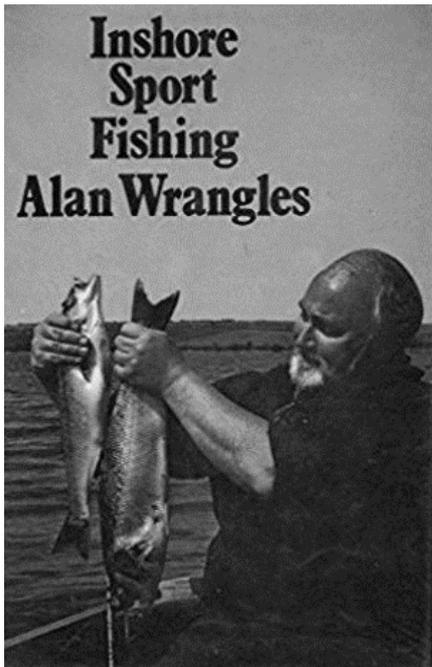
In the main, these would be between maybe 10 and 20 pounds, with the odd 25 pounder thrown in for good measure. What puzzled Ted and Gerald was the fact that even as they got bigger, they still lacked sharp teeth, instead having a mouth with grinding teeth more reminiscent of a ray, which we now know is typical for a Smoothhound, but was not widely appreciated

back then.

Curious as to whether they actually were Tope, their true identity was eventually uncovered by an angler with a similar experience fishing at Brighton, a report of which subsequently appeared in Angling Times actually naming the culprits as Smoothhounds, suggesting that these were probably amongst the first ever recorded in British Waters, and certainly the first recognised as such. All of which comfortably fits with the way in which the species (or is it two species) has continuously been expanding its range by way of sudden appearances miles away from other known populations as discussed in Chapter 9. Controversial, maybe so. Interesting, very much so.

FOOTNOTE: A conversation with Jon Ayes of Southsea Sea Angling Club in Hampshire places the first time he became aware of Smoothhounds at a similar point in time.

ALAN WRANGLES



Alan Wrangles is a name I remember from my early days in the 1960's possibly on into the 1970's, and probably like a lot of people, that's about as much I can say. Fortunately, I know people a little older than myself who both met and dealt with Alan, from which conversations I have to conclude that he was more of an angling journalist than an active angler, though to some extent the two must work hand in glove.

He was arguably, the first 'proper' angling journalist on the scene post WWII, whose writing started during the 1950's, with the 1960's producing his richest vein, though his book 'Inshore Sport Fishing' was published in 1972, followed by his Complete Guide to Sea Angling in 1973, plus books on freshwater fishing topics.

He also attended the inaugural meeting of the British Conger Club at Littlehampton in 1962, a meeting attended by Mike Millman, at which I'm told Wrangles didn't offer anything by way of contribution. Come the following year, the BCC AGM had moved west to Newton Ferrers, with Alan Wrangles once again present, as was Russ Symons, who also recalled that he didn't appear to have any sort of influence. Otherwise described as arrogant and at times difficult, he seemed to be on the periphery of things, possibly explained by his leaning more towards the writing and reporting than actually catching fish, after which he moved to Tavistock, where little if anything was heard of him again.

LARGEST FISH EVER CAUGHT IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE

A Six Gilled Shark *Hexanchus griseus* weighing a staggering 1,540 pounds taken off Madeira in 1959 became the largest fish ever officially caught in the northern hemisphere up to that date. Its captor was none other than the legendary Bernard Venables, co-founder and first editor of Angling Times, future editor of the iconic magazine Creel, and the famous Mr. Crabtree of 'Goes Fishing' fame, who did so much to seed angling as a reputable pastime in the minds of generations of youngsters.

THE BLUE SHARK RECORD

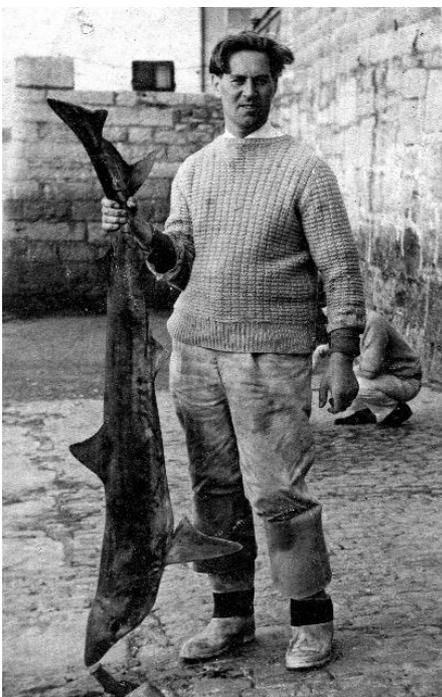
The British Blue Shark, which still stands at the time of writing, was set by N. Sutcliffe with a specimen of 218 pounds taken off Looe in 1959. A weight which has been bettered on at least 2 occasions I am aware of by fish caught in recent more 'enlightened' times in which anglers and charter boat skippers are simply no longer willing to kill fish in order to hang them from a land based scale as per the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC) rules.

These state that ALL records must be weighed on firm solid ground, despite the fact that records for Common Skate and Stingray have been accepted by the BRFC for fish weighed on boats then released. Where then is the consistency? As such, or until the BRFC are dragged screaming and kicking into the 21st century, Sutcliffe's record will remain in place, even though everyone knows bigger fish have been authenticated though a combination of measurements, photographs, and weight estimation formula.

THE TOPE ANGLING CLUB OF GREAT BRITAIN

This inclusion is prompting me to apologise to all those people I have grilled for historical information and have become frustrated with for not having total recall in terms of what exactly happened, where it happened, and when. Now the boot is on the other foot with me struggling to make a meaningful contribution to a historical event I was in part instrumental in, the Tope Angling Club of Great Britain (TACGB), particularly in the dying moments of its life. But first things first, the birth of the TACGB in 1959.

With the exception of BASS, which seemingly goes from strength to strength through its conservation and political work, single species clubs such as the SACGB, BCC and the TACGB were popular from around the mid-part of the twentieth century through to around the end of the 1980's, when there seems to have been quite a major shift in anglers' attitudes to large organisations. This includes the various national federations, and British Record Fish Committee. The SACGB and the BCC, albeit at a reduced level, still exist. The TACGB does not. And I was instrumental in its winding up.



The club was founded in 1959 by Denis J. Williams and 'others', quickly building for itself a wide national and international membership. Its headquarters was at the George and Dragon public house in Conwy, then later at Denton House, Church Walks, Llandudno. Committee members included Vic Noakes, Harold Griffith, and Edgar Griffith. Festivals were hosted, as well as having a big annual dinner and dance which the Mayor and Mayoress of Llandudno always attended. Unfortunately, the death of Vic Noakes in 1977, and Denis Williams in 1982, for whatever reason, signalled a decline in membership, coinciding with a decline in the popularity of sea angling generally.

This sort of coincides with my involvement in the club. I saw an advertisement in the angling press for an any method Trout fishing competition at Ffestiniog in Wales, and along with a couple of mates, I decided to give it a try. Ffestiniog was a large lake into which water was allowed to flow by gravity from a 'header' lake further un in the hills to drive a hydro-electric turbine.

The cost effectiveness of getting the water back up for another drop is questionable, but that's another matter. Part of the company's remit was to provide public leisure time activities wherever possible, one of which was the stocking of Rainbow Trout in the main lake for anglers. This was overseen by a chap called Dick Elliot, who as a very keen sea angler, was known to me at the time through his work in magazines, though I had no idea I was about to bump into him at the lake.

This must have been during the early 1970's. Frustratingly, I can't be more precise than that. I was in the very early stages of getting into angling journalism myself, so I was flattered to discover Dick Elliot knew of me, and a loose sort of long range friendship developed. Dick was big into his Tope fishing and was instrumental in the running of the TACGB, which at the time was still quite strongly supported. In that role, he invited me to be a guest at a TACGB AGM. Not so much for any sort of contribution I might be able to make as to meet some of my angling heroes who he would introduce me too, one of whom was the legendary shore Tope angler Bruce McMillen.

It can't have been long after that event that the club started to 'stumble' a little. A few AGM's came and went, then out of the blue, Dick asked me if I would like to help out by organising a Tope competition on my local patch in an attempt to drum up small boat membership interest, which I agreed to do. Though I was into small boat fishing myself at the time (this was the famed Lancashire Jumbo Cod era), I was still hand-balling across the beach in the company of a few other boats. Knowing this would not be suitable for a well run competition, I approached the Fylde Boat Angling Club which had tractors for launch and retrieve to be co-hosts and they agreed.

This was a time when the piling up and dumping of dead Tope after competitions didn't so much as raise an eyebrow. I told Dick that if we were to progress this match, then killing would have to be kept to a minimum. Fortunately, VHF radio was growing in popularity amongst small boaters by that time, so it was decided that when a Tope was caught, its weight would be reported over the radio so that all fish smaller than it could be returned.

This still meant that dead Tope would be brought ashore, but hopefully, in far smaller numbers. Still not ideal I know. But back then it was a huge step forward, and as a result, somewhere in the region of 200 small Tope got to swim away unweighed, with the eventual winner being somewhere in the region of 35 pounds. Conger and Huss were also taken. Interestingly, LSD's were quite rare back then.

I have to say that the TACGB committee were impressed, both with how well the organisation went, plus the number of Tope caught. I don't think they were aware of how well the Fylde Coast could fish for the species. As a result, I was invited to take up a post on the TACGB committee. Unfortunately, this is where recollections start to get a bit vague in terms of timing. I would say it would have been perhaps at the start of the 1980's or possibly a little later. The club was really starting to struggle in terms of membership. As a new committee member, I attended my first meeting at Colwyn Bay which was reasonably well supported, though not so well as to readily fill all of the official committee posts, with some people having to 'double up'.

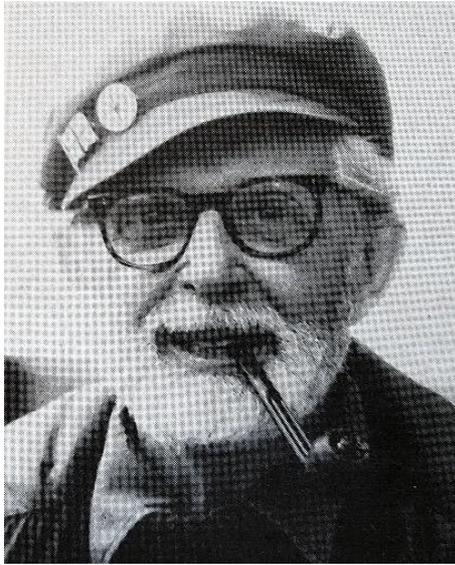


Again, embarrassingly, my recollection is vague as to what post I was invited to take on. I think it was as Vice Chairman, but I could be wrong. I know I didn't have much in the way of 'proper' work to do as a result, so it must have been some nominal post or other. Then it came time for another AGM. I think it was in a hotel or a pub this time with just a handful of people in attendance. So poor was the level of support that we all ended up multi-tasking by slotting into two and in some cases more posts to make sure all of them were filled. Again,

the resulting workload was light to none existent for the year as there was absolutely nothing going on. Then it was time for the next AGM.

This time sadly, there was just four of us in attendance. The chap whose house it was in, some bloke from Birmingham who seemed more interested in CB radio than he was in fishing, Dick Elliot, and myself. It was immediately obvious that it couldn't go on. With that point reluctantly conceded, the decision was taken to wind it up. I think I might have been President and a few other things at that point. Either way, it was dead in the water. Dick must have been the Treasurer and possibly the Secretary too, as he took it upon himself to ensure the winding up was legal, with no potential financial comebacks on any individual, either present on the day, or named in any of the paperwork. And that as they say was the end of that. TACGB RIP.

THE BIRTH OF TV ANGLING PROGRAMMES



The first television programme I can find evidence of with any sort of angling content was on the ITV regional channel Southern Television featuring the legendary Jack Hargreaves. Billed as something of a speciality series broadcast with the imaginative title 'Gone Fishing', it looked at fly fishing in the chalk streams around the New Forrest, which, being a rich man's pursuit back then, the company expected would bring in some good advertising revenue. A series I personally don't recall seeing. But I remember well the series it morphed into a year or so later called 'Out of Town' which was a mix of all sorts of country pursuits from fishing, to farming, to country produce, plus at long last, some saltwater fishing trips, both boat and shore.

If I'm honest, that wasn't my first thought as to what I presumed had been the earliest broadcasting of fishing on the small screen. I had it in my head that an earlier fishing programme was aired on BBC2, a channel my parents couldn't get back then as not everybody had it. My recollection is that it was perhaps called 'Hooked'. This was in the good old days of 'mods and rockers,' and I remember motoring miles on my scooter to some country pub with a BBC2 TV, excited at the prospect of actually seeing fishing on television. But unfortunately, the way I remember things doesn't seem to tie in with the facts.

So it looks like it probably was 'Gone Fishing' in 1959, followed almost immediately by 'Out of Town' starting in 1960. Both fronted by Jack Hargreaves, who everyone thought was the master of all things aquatic and countrified, yet when I speak to people who knew and fished with him, in reality he was the master of none of those topics.

It was actually all a bit of con. Jack would appear dressed in tweeds and wearing a cap full of fishing flies on a made up studio set resembling the interior of an old shed, where without introduction, he would remove his old briar pipe and start talking about old country skills such as cider making or onion stringing, often leading in to a piece of film on fishing for coarse species such as Roach, and finally one day even putting to sea to explore what that might produce.

Talking to veteran west country angler and journalist Ted Tuckerman about the early TV screenings of angling shows (see Chapter 8), just after he had started submitting club reports to the Southampton Echo and Southern Television, the company responsible for producing 'Out of Town' one day contacted him with an invite to take Jack Hargreaves out for a day's fishing and filming for use on the program, which Ted tells me was Jack's first fishing trip ever out in a boat.

They spent a few hours fishing out in Alum Bay over at the Isle of Wight where they managed a few Wrasse, Dogfish, and unspecified other bits and pieces which the programme producers were happy enough with, all of which helped launch Ted on an illustrious TV career of his own....small acorns, big Oaks, and all that.

'Out of Town' fronted by Jack Hargreaves went on to be screened across most of the ITV network. He also presented three series of 'Country Boy', one of which was co-hosted by the renowned fly fisherman Ollie Kite. This time, a programme based on the premise of a boy from the city being introduced to country ways and pursuits, which along with Jack Hargreaves' previous programmes, I gorged on at every opportunity. I believe there were also other less angling inclusive productions. 'Gone Fishing' was directed by George Egan, who along with cameraman Stan Bréhaut, made up arguably the most creative outdoor TV production trio television had ever produced up to that time.

PW Comment: I understand that a DVD box set of 'Out of Town' had now been released. Jack Hargreaves also published a number of books containing a similar range of content to his TV programmes, of which only the one was completely dedicated to angling.

THE LOSS OF LYTHAM St. ANNES PIER

Designed by the famous Victorian engineer Eugenius Birch and constructed by the Lytham Pier Company Ltd., work on the 914 foot structure began in 1864, and was completed for opening in 1865 at a cost of £5,890, with a further bill of £12,000 having to be paid for reconstruction work in 1892.

Later, in 1903, two drifting barges sliced the structure in two adding a further £1,400 to the running total. The pavilion was eventually converted into a cinema which was destroyed by fire in 1927 and was not replaced, part of a pattern of neglect leading up to its closure to all but anglers in 1938. It was eventually demolished in 1960.

THE LOSS OF COWES VICTORIA PIER

Plans to build a pier at Cowes to a design by R. E. Cooper date back to 1893, but were only adopted in 1899, with work being completed in 1902 at a length of 170 feet and a cost of £12,000 borne by Cowes Council, with an intended use of catering for steamers a ferry service, and usage by local sailing clubs, particularly in regatta week.

In WWI it was used for troop movements, and again in WWII the MoD pressed it in to service handing it back in a poor state of repair in part caused by fire damage. But no funds were made available, so the pavilion was demolished in 1951, after which in 1960 it was sold to a private buyer who set about dismantling it between 1961 and 1965.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Sea Angling Modern Methods and Tackle (1952) by Alan Young.

The Techniques of Sea Fishing (1953) by William Ernest Davies.

The Sea Anglers Fishes (1954) by Michael Kennedy.

Bass: How to catch them (1955) by Alan Young.

The Seaside Pocket Companion (1956) by Hugh Stoker.

Sea Fishing with the Experts (1956) by Jack Thorndike.

Salt Water Angling (1956) by Michael Kennedy.

The Complete Sea Angler (1957) by Richard Arnold.

Flatfish: How to Catch Them (1957) by John P. Garrad.

Sea Fishing Baits: How to find and use them (1957) by Alan Young.

The Modern Sea Angler (1958) by High Stoker.

Pollack and Coalfish: How to catch them (1960) by Ken Nicholas.

Sea Angling with the Baited Spoon (1960) by John P Garrad.

Sea Fishing: How and where to catch sea fish (1960) by Arthur Sharp.

Sea Angling: Modern Methods, Baits and Tackle (1960) by Alan Young.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

Angling Times – A weekly broadsheet aimed at all aspects of angling containing features as well as news stories and updates. A trail blazer from East Midlands Allied Press (EMAP) later taken on head to head in the 1960's by the IPC publication Anglers Mail.

PW Comment: I occasionally contributed to Angling Times over the years.

Angling – Appears to have been in circulation on two separate occasions 1936 to 1956 and again between 1959 and 1981.

CHAPTER EIGHT – 1961 TO 1970

By any measure, along with the 1970's, this is without doubt the premier sea angling period of the twentieth century. Never had we had it so good, and never will we see the likes of it again. Another period of increasing organisation, with the BCC, EFSA, and the NFSA. The time when ABU began developing rods capable of hitherto unthinkable casting distances, and Peter Bagnall showed us how it should be done.

This is also the decade of the angling superstar, with names like Clive Gammon, John Darling and Brian Harris amongst others coming into the frame, and the incomparable Jack Shine with his never before or since seen Porbeagle Shark catches from the shore in Ireland, matching blow for blow the stupendous catches of Bass from Co. Kerry's surf beaches, clearly making it the decade when Ireland truly took centre stage.

CLIMATE CHANGE



The 1960's delivered yet more clues to the nature of climate change in the form of analysis data from deep sea cores taken by Cesare Emiliani, and of ancient corals by Wallace Broecker. Rather than the 4 ice ages that had previously been thought to have taken place, it was found that a large number of smaller events had occurred in a regular sequence, all caused by small orbital shifts of the Earth, which are now known as

the Milankovitch cycles. Discovering this led scientists to believe that the climate is sensitive even to small changes, which can quickly (in geological terms) move it away from stability. One such a game switcher is 'man induced climate change'.

The 1960's also saw scientists making more regular and better use of computers to develop sophisticated versions of Arrhenius's calculations first proposed in 1889. Also, during the 1960's, aerosol pollution, better known as smog, became a serious problem in many cities. Unfortunately, scientists were unsure as to whether the cooling effects of particulate pollution, or the warming effect of greenhouse gas emissions would win out. Despite this, they still began to suspect that human emissions would be disruptive to the climate in the twenty first century, though they were unable at that time to predict what the overall climate change result would be.

The first organisation to take on tackling the problem of global climate change was NATO, which in 1969 planned to establish a hub of research and initiatives dealing with environmental topics in the civilian sector. These included acid rain and the greenhouse effect, which the Germans in particular were keen to get involved in and eventually start to apply, under the leadership of Chancellor Willy Brandt.

THE EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF SEA ANGLERS

The European Federation of Sea Anglers was formed in 1961 by a group of International anglers who were taking part in a fishing festival being held out of Looe in England. Many of them had fished together for a number of years, with England, Belgium, France, Holland, Denmark, Norway and Scotland represented in the formative group.

Within six months of its formation, no less than 16 countries were represented in the Federation, either by formation of member sections, or affiliation of existing clubs.



The objectives of the Federation, as laid down at the time of its formation and still in force today, are to promote the sport of sea angling; maintain a list of European Sea Fish Records, and to keep a watching brief on all commercial fishing activities in European waters.

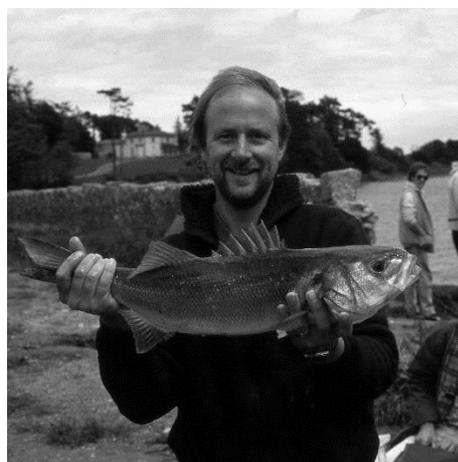
One rule which they were particularly proud of and which they still enforce, is that the Federation shall have no restrictions or limitations based on race, colour or creed. A rule seen by EFSA as being way ahead of its time.

One of the functions of the Federation was to stage the European Sea Angling Championships. These have been staged annually since 1962, and are held in a different country each year. Host countries have included Gibraltar, Scotland, Iceland, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, England, Holland and Wales. In addition to the European Championships, European Line Class, Tope, and Cod events are also held each year, with the more recent addition of Game and Shore Championships.

The Federation is governed by a Standing Committee which consists of the office bearers of the main body, together with two delegates from each of the member countries. Meetings are held three times a year in various centres in Europe.

There are at present 23 countries in membership of the Federation, and the membership of both individual members and affiliated club members, now totals many thousands and is still expanding.

CHRIS STRINGER



With more than 300 open shore match wins including all the 'biggies' spanning a career in excess of 55 years, and still going strong in 2017, you can see my dilemma in finding exactly the right time slot for the Chris Stringer inclusion. Arguably the best match angler in Britain never to have represented his country, England, something I will look at more closely in due course. So, grasping the nettle, as I must, I've decided that the best starting point is probably where it all started for Chris in 1962.

Starting as a junior angler by joining Whitley Bay Angling Club at the age of ten, Chris Stringer showed his early promise by winning the Whitley Bay Open Angling Festival at the age of 15, competing not only against his own club seniors, but also

top visiting match anglers from around the country, all of whom would have been regarded as having far more experience.

This was in the pre-SAMF days, when under NFSA rules, money prizes other than pools were not allowed, for which reason Chris won a refrigerator which travelled to his home in a Mercedes owned by a local news reporter who followed him as he rode his bike in order to get the story

You might argue that his win could just be down to luck, something many top competition anglers do recognise as being a factor at times, both for themselves, and for their competitors, and maybe there was an element of that in this story. But luck is a transient factor, rarely visiting the same person on a regular basis, and certainly not in excess of 300 times.

The final grand total may be even much higher than that. Chris tends not to keep tabs on that sort of thing. When I spoke with him, he honestly had absolutely no idea of how many open competition wins he'd taken, or even which ones, just that it was a lot, based on the fact that he once counted well over 300 replica trophies lying around in bin bags in his garage, plus a few of his favourites kept inside the house.

Off the top of his head, these include....

The Scarborough All England.

The Bridlington Open (Paul Roggeman).

The Irish Winter Beach Comp.

The Daiwa Pairs.

The Wexford Two Day Open.

The White Horse Whiskey.

The Angling Times League.

The Masters.

Others too, such as at Hook in Ireland, the Mersey, Silloth and the Menai Strait. Not so many along the south coast though due to the travelling distances involved. There was even one success at Hartlepool which came as a result of him catching the only sizeable fish of the whole event.

With so much proven ability to pull off the big wins against the fiercest competition the rest of country could put up against him, it seems a travesty, not to mention a lost opportunity to the country, that Chris Stringer never represented England on the shore fishing International scene. A decision he admits that was down to him, and not to 'them', as he was approached to submit a CV as part of the selection process many years ago.

The problem was that he was going through a difficult divorce at the time, and with support funding not available, regardless of who you were or whatever the circumstances, he felt forced to decline. In the end then it was all down to money, which for the reason given, he didn't have but would have needed to have. So he flushed that idea right out of his head for good and continued to show the selectors what a great opportunity they had missed out on by constantly increasing his tally of open successes and list of big scalps.

Like any top competitor, you have to practise to maintain that winning edge. It doesn't necessarily have to be at a competitive level though. Many shore match anglers also pleasure fish. In Chris Stringer's case, during the 1980's on into the early 1990's, this included fishing for the huge Cod that would move

in off the rock ledges around Balcary in South West Scotland. A case of being competitive with individual fish, always looking to catch the biggest and the best, sometimes in the company of Ken Robinson who took the Scottish shore record there (see Chapter 10).

One particular December day in 1986 is etched on Chris's mind, it being a run over to Balcary with north east tackle dealer John Bohill. John had hooked a decent fish off the flat rocks at Rascarel which Chris was climbing down to gaff. Then he says, he momentarily took his eye off the sea which was running big, suddenly finding himself washed over by a wave taking him right into the water on the edge of darkness dressed in all his winter fishing gear, including chest waders and miners' lamp.

It's said that your life flashes before you in sudden potential death situations such as this. Chris says he vividly remembers two things when he came to the surface. The first was shouting "John, I think I've had it", and the second, with reference to his ongoing divorce was thinking "Oh Shit, she's going to get everything now". Fortunately for him as it turned out, neither was true.

Somehow, he was able to get all his protective gear off. There was a big sea running, so every time he managed to swim to the edge of the rocks he found himself snatched away by the backwash. In total he reckons he was in the rough freezing cold water for a good 10 minutes. Then he felt himself touch something which turned out to be the line from John Bohill's second rod.

Earlier in the day John had had to switch reels, and fortunately for Chris, this one had 30 pounds breaking strain line on it. He shouted to John that he had the line, and coupled with some swimming, John carefully eased him into the rocks where he was able to grab and pull him clear.

Chris Stringer managed to catch himself 22 Cod in excess of 20 pounds at Balcary, the biggest going 30.4.0, but concedes he will never be as lucky in his life as he was that cold December day. And there were other very big fish lost, some of which we know from Ken Robinson's exploits there possibly went to over 40 pounds.

Some years earlier at the other end of the Solway and just around the corner is Loch Ryan, Chris broke the Scottish shore Tope record with a fish of 42.8.0 caught during a match in the late 1970's. So, while Scotland almost saw the end of him, it has been kind in other ways, particularly for big open successes such as the South West Scotland Open and the Eyemouth Festival, along with wins on the Clyde and Loch Goil, including some Conger matches

PW Comment: One final mention which falls outside the time restriction of the book is for a win for Chris in the 2013 Amble Open against top opposition, showing he still had the energy, enthusiasm, and talent to pull off a 'biggie', even as an old age pensioner.

THE IRISH THORNBACK RAY RECORD

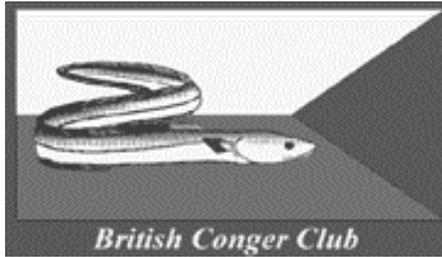
Fishing out from Kinsale at a mark known as Ling Rocks in 1961, M. J. Fitzgerald set an Irish record for the Thornback Ray *Raja clavata*, with a magnificent fish of 37 pounds, a record which remains in place at the time of writing. Also, a fish which draws into question some of the decisions regarding this species made by the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC), who in a much needed purge of dubious record inclusions in 1968, rejected a British Thornback Ray of 38 pounds caught by a Mr. Patterson off Rustington in 1935 which they inherited when fish recording in the UK was all brought under the one roof in 1957.

I recall the late Dr. Dietrich Burkel telling me that the 38 pound fish lost its place due to doubt over its identity, to some extent based on its size, adding that it was thought that only Blonde Rays were capable of achieving that sort of weight, and so, in the company of a few other doubtful inclusions, it was

evicted. Yet here we have the Irish Record Fish Committee faced with an almost identical situation coming to a totally different conclusion.

Then in 1980, a Thornback Ray identified by the BRFC scientific advisor at a weight of 31.7.0 caught by J. Wright fishing in Liverpool Bay was ratified as the new British boat record for the species, despite doubt having earlier been cast on a specimen of 31.5.0 caught by Frank Bee at Fleetwood due to its size. All of which goes to show that in the fish identification World too, again, size matters.

THE BRITISH CONGER CLUB



At its peak, the British Conger Club (BCC) was the largest and most successful single species angling club in Britain; possibly even the World. By comparison to organisations such as the Shark Angling Club and the Mullet Club as examples, BCC membership is still large. That said, annual income, which is the life blood of any club, does not reflect that membership, because many of its current members bought cheap life membership many years ago when the club was awash with income and anglers were queueing at the door to get in.

Initially it had been decided to peg membership at a ceiling of 500. When that figure was reached, the upper limit was reset at 1,000, which again was swept aside as demand continued to soar, hitting a peak at 2,123, a figure which, with the decline in wreck fishing interest, has now dropped. When I spoke with long time BCC member Mike Millman, holder of most of the clubs committee posts at one time or another, annual membership was down to around 120, whereas life members numbered around 850. And therein lies the problem. The club has become a victim of its own earlier success.

The BCC can trace its origins back to the very early 1960's, before the boom in offshore wreck fishing which came a few years later and would prove so instrumental to the club's future success. According to big game angler Mike Connell, it was the brainchild of Michael Lerner during a conversation between him, IGFA president Bill Carpenter, and Connell himself in 1961, with the inaugural meeting taking place at Littlehampton in January 1962.

Amongst those present were Mike Connell and his wife Daphne, angling writer Alan Wrangles, Henry Sutton, and Dutton Everington with his wife Paula, supported later in terms of membership by anglers mainly from the Littlehampton area, leading up to the clubs first AGM held at the Arun Hotel in the town in April 1963 with Mrs. Hetty Eathorne, the Mako Shark record holder (see Chapter 7) duly elected as the BCC's first President. Sadly, many of those present during those very early days are no longer with us.

British Conger Club Annual Trophies.....

NAME OF TROPHY	AWARDED FOR
Angling Magazine Trophy	Heaviest Conger by a member
Bill Shapland Trophy	Heaviest Conger by a lady
Our Unity Trophy	Best achievement by a lady

Solitaire Trophy	Heaviest Conger single handed
Scampi Cup	Heaviest Conger from a reef
Shore Trophy	Heaviest Conger from the shore
Fuller Cup	Heaviest Conger from captors' own boat
Saltwind Cup	Heaviest Conger by a life member
Moore Rosebowl	Heaviest Conger by a junior
Associates Cup	Heaviest Conger by an associate member
Ben Neville Cup	Heaviest Conger on 50 lb test line
Clive Stone Trophy	Heaviest Conger on 30 lb test line
Bob Bates Trophy	Heaviest Conger on 20 lb test line
Eileen Hunkin Memorial Cup	Heaviest qualifying Conger – boat
Ray Rush Memorial Cup	Heaviest qualifying Conger – shore
Sea Angler Trophy	Heaviest Conger by an affiliated member
Top Boat Trophy	Heaviest Conger by a boat member
Skippers Wheel	Most qualifying Congers
Electric Blue Trophy	Heaviest Conger weighed at sea
Nikaria Trophy	Most returned Congers by a skipper
Geoff Flores Trophy	Most returned Congers by a member
KD Trophy	Best junior catching most species
Millman Trophy	Best qualifier by a junior
Maureen Trophy	Heaviest Conger weighed at sea by a junior

As I said earlier, the BCC and mid-channel wreck fishing are inexorably intertwined. There were, and still are, members who specialise in reef and shore fishing for big Eels. The bulk of BCC members however hit the clubs qualifying target (shore 25 lbs, boat - open ground 30 lbs, and boat - wreck 40 lbs) fishing out over wrecks, some of which can be surprisingly close in to the shore. That said, deep and well off traditionally provides many of the biggest Conger hauls, though not always the biggest individual fish.

Initially, catches topping 2,000 pounds were not uncommon once the Ling had been 'thinned out', with Brixham based skipper Dudley Stone the man credited with kick starting West Country wreck fishing, and the winner of the clubs first ever boatman's plaque, with a single season total of 7¾ tons of Conger, surpassed later by 'Our Unity' skippers Ernie Passmore and John Trust, who brought in 27 tons over 3 seasons, each of which saw them take the top boat award.

A number of awards were set up for individuals, the most prestigious of which being British Conger Club Championship introduced in 1963, won in its inaugural year by E. Zimmerman, at which stage it was open to all comers. This however was later changed to BCC members only on account of the number of people wanting to fish. Heats were also introduced at different ports culminating in a single day grand final fish off.

Other individual trophies included the Solitaire Cup awarded to the best Eel hooked, played, and brought aboard the boat without any assistance, the best of which so far as the twentieth century is concerned was a fish of 107 pounds caught by Graham Tibbs fishing from his own boat 'Way Point' in 1996. There are gold, silver and bronze specimen medals too, the first ever awarded being a bronze to Roger Dadds for a 60 pounder taken in shallow water just beyond Plymouth breakwater, with the first gold going to Douglas McRae for an 80 pound Eel back in the 1960's.

The Conger record at the time the club came into being stood at 84 pounds for an Eel taken fishing over the wreck of the Japanese steamer 'Tokufuka' off Dungeness by H. A. Kelly in 1933. The same trip also saw Kelly catch Eels of 75, 66, 60 and 55 pounds. His 84 fish remained the one to beat until 1970, when Colin Chapman bettered it by a pound fishing aboard 'Our Unity'. That was it. It was like waiting for a bus. You spend ages standing around waiting for one, then suddenly two come along in the form of a 92.3.0 specimen 17 days later caught by Peter Ascott aboard 'Girl Alison' out in Lyme Bay.

The flood gates had well and truly opened, the next milestone being a Conger weighing in three figures. After another double figure record of 95.11.0, again from Lyme Bay aboard 'Our Unity', the hundred pound barrier was finally cleared by Ron Thompson fishing aboard Colin Williams 'Karen Jane' out from Falmouth in 1974, with quite a few more, including several more records to follow, all the way up to the World all tackle record of 133.4.0 by Vic Evans aboard his own boat 'Sea Spray', again out in Lyme Bay.

THE PROGRESSION OF OFFICIAL BRITISH CONGER RECORDS

1922 Miss Bluebell Klean	63 lbs 3 oz, off Hastings.
1933 H. A. Kelly	84 lbs, off Dungeness.
1970 Colin Chapman	85 lbs, 'Our Unity', Lyme Bay.
1970 Peter Arcscott	92 lbs 13oz, 'Girl Alison', Lyme Bay.
1973 Billy Oaten	95 lbs 11oz, 'Our Unity', Lyme Bay.
1974 Ron Thompson	102 lbs 8 oz, 'Karen Jane', off Falmouth.
1976 Robin Potter	109 lbs 6 oz, 'Boa Pescador', off Plymouth.
1991 Hans Clausen	110 lbs 5 oz, 'The Mistress', off Plymouth.

1992 Trevor Kerrison	111 lbs 4 oz, 'Electric Blue', off Plymouth.
1992 Nial Ball	112 lbs 8 oz, 'Saltwind of Dart', Lyme Bay.
1992 Derek Mash	112 lbs 8 oz, 'Electric Blue', off Plymouth.
1995 Vic Evans	133 lbs 4 oz, 'Sea Spray', Lyme Bay.

In more recent times, the club has struggled to give away medals and awards. Not through any lack of fish. Conger fishing is one of those branches of sea angling not affected to the same degree as everything else by commercial fishing. If anything, clearing out the Ling and smaller Eels on a wreck often improves the chances of tempting one of the bigger fish, which are much more cautious and slower off the mark. Wrecks that have been 'hammered', including those very close to the shore, are just the places to be trying for 'ton-up' and record Conger Eels. And yes, big fish are still being caught.

The reason why medals and other awards are left gathering dust is the way conservation has taken off, as Conger are well able to get back down after being dragged up through a deep water column, on top of which, they are a finite resource, which when they find themselves a good home stay put until they get that once in their lifetime call to spawn. As such, Conger are no longer being weighed ashore with the degree of accuracy required, many being released in situ by anglers willing to forgo tangible rewards in the form of a piece of metal or a sheet of paper, preferring an estimated weight and photographs to all the medals and certificates the club might wish to hand out.

There is however another side to all of this. Big fish released instead of being brought ashore, weighed, and photographed, no longer make the pages of the angling press in the way they once did, the negative side of which for the BCC being a slump in interest in both the species and the club. The club is more than happy to embrace conservation. What it also needs to do is find other ways to plug the resulting membership shortfall, which with all of today's social media outlets, should not be that big a problem to surmount.

That unfortunately is not the current membership slump explained in its entirety. While there has been a good deal of interest and some truly mind blowing results amongst specialist shore anglers, for most people, big Conger and offshore wrecks go hand in glove. They also go hand in pocket, with a requirement for some pretty deep pockets to buy a place on a wrecking trip these days. It's expensive. For many who would love to do it regularly, perhaps a bit too expensive, with club membership again suffering as a result.

PW Comment: I once had the pleasure of fishing with BCC secretary Reg Quest on a trip aboard Dave Ellworthy's 'Anjonika' out from Plymouth in the early 1970's. A man who did so much dedicated hard work for the Conger Club. Also a man dedicated to good fishing, be it Conger or other species. On the day in question he stuck at light tackle fishing with Redgill lures for Pollack, despite the fact that the boat had a spell at anchor with Conger fishing in mind.

THE LOSS OF COWES VICTORIA PIER

Despite Cowes Victoria Pier being planned in 1893, the plans were not formally adopted until 1899, after which the contractor, Alfred Thorne, working to a design by R. E. Cooper, set about the construction phase, which was completed in 1902 at a cost of £12,800 with a structural length of 170 feet. Its main early usage was passenger steamers and sailing regatta's, in particular Cowes Week.

In WWI it was used for troop movement, attracting MoD interest again in WWII for the Royal Navy, after which it fell into disrepair for which restoration funds were not made available, ultimately leading

to the pavilion being demolished in 1951. What was left was sold in 1960, shortly after which it was for the most part dismantled, with the final remnants disappearing in 1965.

TED TUCKERMAN

Picking an appropriate time slot for a man with such a long and distinguished angling career is never easy, particularly when in Ted Tuckerman's case it starts during WWII, and is still going strong at the time of writing in 2018. So I've gone for 1961, the year he started his Torquay tackle shop.



Having fished his native Hampshire coast in the preceding years, particularly in the second half of the 1940's once obstacles such as the war time boom defences had all been removed, in partnership with a friend Gerald Aston Smith around 1957, he bought an unused 32 foot ex-divers-ex-navy hull which they fitted out for mid-week fishing in and around the Solent, alternating the end to be fished to get the best tides. They also fished club shore matches on Sundays, including coach trips mostly to Dorset as far west as Chesil Beach, as few people owned a car back then.

Their boat trips produced lots of Tope and Thornback Rays off Thorns Beach, plus potentially the first recorded instance of a Smoothhound from UK waters as reported in Chapter 7. Fishing the Solent however wasn't the only angling draw. After winning the Torquay Festival (now the Torbay Festival) as a visitor in 1959 with a Turbot of 23.7.8, Ted decided to up sticks and move to the town looking to set up a fishing tackle business which came to fruition in 1961. In some ways a move back to his family roots, as his father and grandparents were all originally Devon folk.

The building he finally settled for was a run down old marine chandlers' shop which also sold holiday fishing tackle on Torquay harbour side, which over the years was transformed not only into a thriving business, but also a hub from which to branch out along a number of other high profile angling related pathways, including a larger shop premises during the 1970's. Right up there at the top of his achievements list was a second win in the Torquay festival, this time as a 'local' with a 66 pound Conger, the only time it had ever been won by the same competitor from both sides of the town boundary, though repeat wins have been achieved by locals on 3 occasions.

Ted also followed up on an existing friendship forged back in his visiting days with Fred Parker, Chairman of the Torbay Association of Sea Anglers, who he'd previously fished with out from Dartmouth over the Skerries aboard an old plodding open potting boat skippered by Dolf Rundle in the days when Turbot were the big draw, taking dozens of the things to 23½ pounds. But it would be writing and broadcasting, all of which was about to kick off, that would establish him as a big angling name.

Ted had had his first dabble into journalism some years earlier in Lymington, submitting club reports to the Southampton Echo and to Southern Television, the latter never doing anything with them, until one day, out of the blue, the makers of Jack Hargreaves 'Out Of Town' TV program got in touch, inviting him to take Jack afloat for his first ever sea fishing film off Alum Bay on the Isle of Wight, where they caught an inauspicious mix of Ballan Wrasse, Lesser Spotted Dogfish, and assorted other bits and pieces.

Not the best of trips fish-wise on a bad tide, but enough to launch a career which would eventually encompass magazines, book publishing, radio, and of course more broadcasting work. Much more

broadcasting work in fact, starting with BBC Plymouth on the radio, progressing on to the then regional ITV company Westward Television, which would later become Television South West.

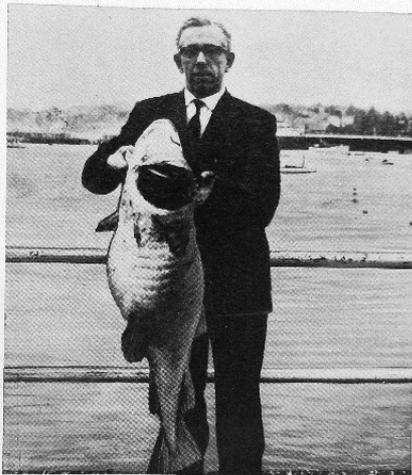
The radio work started when BBC Plymouth sports reporter Ross Salmon wanted to incorporate some fishing into his weekly radio sports program. Ted was invited on an ad hoc basis to make a few contributions. This quickly grew into a weekly slot talking through regional fishing reports, eventually morphing into going in to the studio to present the fishing reports independent of Ross Salmon.

Spurred on by this, Ted suggested they take things one stage further and have a regular stand alone TV program, which unfortunately drew a lukewarm response. Terry Fleet on the other hand, the Westward TV programme controller, was much more receptive to the idea of having fishing on the TV. He contacted Ted with a view to putting together a weekly report to be read out by the weatherman, who on more than an odd occasion messed things up through his lack of understanding of the topic resulting in an invite for Ted himself to attend the studio and present it live, which he did from 1971 to 1989, when unfortunately, TVSW lost their franchise.

In addition to the regular weekly TV work there were two 6-part network angling presentations entitled Catch 76 and Catch 78, radio broadcasting, other non-angling related TV programmes, and articles in pretty much every sea angling magazine and paper that ever existed throughout the Ted Tuckerman era. And as if all that, plus running the shop was not enough, England International duties on two levels would also come calling.

Firstly, as a competitor in 1994 and 1995 at the World Boat Championships, resulting in a team bronze medal in Italy in 1994, fished against a total of 18 other countries from as far afield as South Africa,

and of course the Italians, beaten on their own patch out of Livorno. The following year fishing off Majorca, the team landed just outside the medals. Later, as manager/coach for the England team at 6 home internationals during the late 1990's, the team picked up more team gold medals, but the sixth occasion could 'only' manage a silver.



TORQUAY TACKLE DEALER BREAKS 2 RECORDS!

With this magnificent 39 lb. 6¼ oz. cod, Ted Tuckerman, a well known Torquay tackle dealer, broke both the N.F.S.A. Wyvern Division and the Torbay A.S.A records. Ted was legering in his favourite spot ten miles off Torbay, from the Torquay deep-sea angling boat 'Girl Alison' in 30 fathoms of water.

Other notable 'moments' include 4 years as Chairman of the NFSA, the governing body for sea anglers since 1905 until it was absorbed into the Angling Trust; being appointed a delegate for Wyvern Division on the NFSA committee for almost 30 years; being a member of the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC), and working on the NFSA Conservation Committee dealing with endangered species including Bass, as well as being a representative for EFSA and the IGFA.

Ted was also both present for, and participated in, the birth of West Country wreck fishing. Initially with Dudley Stone, the man credited with starting it all, then later with Ernie Passmore and John Trust aboard their Brixham based boat 'Our Unity'. Ted also fished aboard 'Girl Alison' owned by Bob Ould and skippered by Eric Endacott, who in 1970 had gone into Ted's shop as a commercial fisherman seeking advice on how to set up for angling, which Ted was only too happy to give. So much so that he arranged for his Torbay club to go out on the boat to give Eric Endacott a feel for how things might go, resulting in a good haul of middle range Conger out on the wrecks. This led to Ted being

appointed the boat's booking agent with responsibility for the boat's publicity material and photographs.

When Colin Chapman finally broke the long standing 84 pound Conger record with a fish of 85 pounds aboard 'Our Unity', on the very next set of anchoring tides, Ted was out aboard 'Girl Alison', when the only other angler onboard, Pete Ascot, brought up another record Conger of 92.13.0, one of only 3 Eels caught that day, the other two going 81.5.0, and a smaller fish of around 60 pounds adding another strand to an angling career already interspersed with lots of very good fish personally, because there were lots of good fish around to be caught in the post war years right through to the 1990's.

Lots of NFSA medals won too. But never a British record, though on one occasion he did come tantalisingly close with the Cod of 39.6.4 shown here taken on the same day Brandon Jones caught his still standing British shore record Cod of 44½ pounds in 1966.

CLIVE GAMMON

Speak to anyone who fished during the 1960's on into the 1970's about inspirational anglers, and a pound to a penny, most will come back with the name Clive Gammon. Conversely, when you mention the name Clive Gammon to anglers coming on to the scene a little later than that, most will shake their heads saying they have never even heard of the man.

Yet arguably, more so than anyone else ever has, Clive Gammon was responsible for inspiring sea anglers for a generation and beyond, particularly those fishing from the shore, and especially those visiting Ireland, where in the company of Angling Magazine editor Brian Harris and Irish Sea Fisheries Management team members Des Brennan and Kevin Linnane, they explored, uncovered, and publicised the whole Irish surf Bass fishing scene.

So there is a lot to be thankful for in terms of opening up new areas, both in home waters, and abroad. But if I'm honest, that isn't what I personally remember Clive Gammon for. As a 'wannabe' sea angler living 30 miles inland without any reasonable means of getting to the coast in my teenage years, the closest I ever got to sea fishing, quality or otherwise, was when he 'brought' the sea to me in a way that nobody else ever has and probably never will do in the future through the quality of his writing.

When I was a young kid I did painting by numbers. Later, in my teens, when I discovered Clive Gammon's writing in Angling Times and Creel, he introduced me to painting by words. Read a piece by Gammon and you could almost taste the salt spray on your lips. A wordsmith whose craft was to paint a picture so vivid and realistic in your mind that it would transport you to the location in question for the length of time it took to read the article carefully from end to end.

And it didn't only entertain. It was instructional, though not in the way magazines instruct today, which is to hand feed everything with photographic support to an audience that demands instant success rather than by serving an a proper 'angling apprenticeship'. What Gammon did was teach people to teach themselves, which is a far more gratifying approach when success eventually comes along. It certainly worked for me, plus a whole raft of other sea anglers of my generation who have immortalised the man, almost to the point of sainthood.

I am fortunate in that I met the great man twice. Once to fish with in the late 1970's, and again in October 2011 in a very noisy pub at Mumbles in the company of his son and daughter, close to the care home he was by that stage resident in. We'd arranged to meet up at lunch time to record an audio interview looking back on Gammon's life, which despite him having dementia with short term memory loss, his recall of more distant events was still quite good. Just a pity about the background noise.

But in situations such as those you take what you can get, and I was grateful for it, kicking things off with his very earliest recollections of catching Whiting from Swansea West Pier with his grandfather,



who was also a very capable angler. An era in which he too had to learn on the hoof due to the lack of available written material, and obviously no Internet, TV, or videos to glean information from.

He recalled that later on in his teenage years, a few books did start to appear from the freshwater maestro's such as Dick Walker who Clive had a very great deal of respect for, and deservedly so. But little

or nothing with regard to sea angling, something he promised himself he would rectify, which as we all know, that's exactly what he did.

An educated man, Clive Gammon attended Manchester University, where after getting a Bachelor of Arts degree, he went on to study for his Masters. This involved writing a lengthy thesis, the subject of which for Clive was 'The Literature of Angling, 1496 to 1750', his first ever piece of angling writing, and the launch pad for what would be a highly illustrious career. But we are getting ahead of ourselves a little. He first had to find himself a job, which he did as a school teacher in the Manchester area, way too far away from both the sea and from his beloved Pembrokeshire Coast.

So, a move to Pembrokeshire Grammar School was successfully sought, which he told me had everything to do with the fishing and nothing to do with the appointment itself, though he did make a number of life-long angling friends through the school, some of whom feature in his book 'A Tide of Fish' (Heinemann, 1962). That said, it was as for his regular columns in the Daily Express, Sunday Times, and Spectator, plus his article work for Angling Times and Creel that Clive Gammon will be most fondly and best remembered.

So confident was he in his own ability, both as an angler and a writer, that in order to launch himself into the world of angling journalism, he contacted the editor of the Daily Express telling him that as angling was more popular than football it deserved to be given column space in the paper, to which he agreed, appointing Clive as their angling correspondent. But it has to be said, and probably controversially so given the man's standing in the history of sea angling, that in the eyes of a number of people I have spoken to who also fished with him, that while he was a brilliant writer, his angling abilities were nothing spectacular.

Without wishing to destroy his elevated status, according to some, he wasn't as proficient perhaps as legend makes out. More a case of the proverbial right man in the right place at the right time. A competent angler living in an area renowned for its fishing at a time when there were plenty of fish to be caught. For during the 1960's and 70's there were still lots of good fish around, meaning that decent shore catches and angling ability didn't necessarily always go hand in glove. Unfortunately, I never got to fish with him from the shore so can't comment from personal experience. But I did once get to fish with him in a boat, where I have to say he wiped the floor with the rest of us.

We were out from Tenby on a cold, grey, breezy, so called summers day, where the objective was to catch Tope for an Angling Times feature. Clive was to take on the role of teacher, and the rest of the group his pupils. We all knew he had a lifelong hatred of Lesser Spotted Dogfish, which he despised as worthless bait robbers. But if I'm honest, LSD's were not the main problem on this particular day. Our Mackerel fillet baits were quickly being wolfed down by Thornback Rays. We had dozens of the things, along with some LSD's and a few Bull Huss, but could not find any Tope.

Time then to upsize the baits to a whole Mackerel with the tail removed to stop it spinning, which brought me my first Turbot. But still no Tope. Clive then set about doing some fancy knife work on a whole Mackerel and immediately contacted a decent Tope on the very next drop, something he repeated shortly afterwards, leaving the rest of us scratching our heads. What he'd done was take a chunk out of the Mackerel just behind its head causing it to bleed profusely. He actually said before his first drop that this was a proper Tope bait, which rather begs the question as why he hadn't used it earlier with Tope being the main objective for the day.

I mentioned to Clive in interview that it didn't take an expert angler back in the 1960's to have a shot at enjoying a decent days fishing, to which he replied yes, but while there were more fish about, they still needed to be caught. So tactically, along with a range of other considerations, you still had to get it right. Also at that time, tackle was going through something of a major transformation, particularly the reels. Decent quality saltwater fixed spool reels brought a lot more fish to a lot more people by allowing them to reach them lot more readily.

These were the days of Les Moncrieff, who shocked everybody by casting around 150 yards with bait, which kind-of goes to show how far the rank and file were putting their baits out. Over in Ireland, the Bass catches were nothing short of phenomenal. Each angler could expect 20 fish per tide averaging 4 to 5 pounds with the odd 8 pounder thrown in. Back over this side, they were still worth fishing for,



A leash of beach-caught "Doggies" held by Tom Eaton, Wadhurst, Sussex, Getting nightmares, Clive?

which was one of Clive's great loves. But for all his efforts fishing around the UK, and in particular his beloved south west Wales, he only ever managed one double figure Bass, taking it from a mark along the Gower.

While we were chatting about tackle, tactics, and terminal rigs, he told me they were not that much different to how things are today. Rods, obviously, are better, especially if you needed to cast long distances to catch fish. Multiplier reels were both the same and different. There are some very good high-tech reels about now. But also, the Ambassadeur 7000, which hasn't changed that much over the years and was Clive Gammons reel of choice. Terminal rigs too were very similar to what are used now, and obviously, just as effective if you look at the catches back them compared to now.

One very big difference Clive picked up on was transportation to get to the best fishing spots. He noted that his generation was the first to have reasonably regular access to a car. But it wasn't always like that, even for him. There were many occasions when the tackle had to be humped down to the bus stop, with evening trip duration governed by the last bus home. On one occasion he even used the bus to transport himself and his tackle from Carmarthen to and from Swansea, which takes a level of dedication you almost certainly wouldn't see today.

Eventually, as is so often the case with success, outsiders want a share of the man generating it, and America came calling. Sports Illustrated Magazine made him an offer he couldn't refuse, and over he went to live there for a spell. Sports Illustrated covered a very wide range of competitive pursuits of which fishing was just one. But it wasn't only the fishing he had to cover. He recalled having had a dabble at covering all or most of the rest, including boxing, which was a particular passion, and one which would lead to a lifelong friendship with the great Muhammad Ali.

It doesn't come much better than that. Or does it?. His main brief was to produce 12 major angling features per year, going anywhere he wanted for as long as he wanted, and all on company expenses.

There was however one occasion when the editor said he was calling the shots, ‘ordering’ him to go fishing for Taimen, which is a monster trout species that can exceed 100 pounds in the rivers of Outer Mongolia. Salmon fishing in Arctic Russia was another off the beaten track location, and a particular favourite of Clive. But it could only be done during a very brief window of opportunity when the rivers were ice free over the main summer months.

After all the globetrotting, Clive eventually landed back home in his beloved south west Wales. But it wasn’t all over quite yet. By this stage he wasn’t fishing nearly so much, and when I last spoke with him he wasn’t fishing at all and hadn’t done so for a number of years due to his deteriorating health. But he did manage a trip with Dave Lewis over to Namibia in the late 1990’s following up on some research he had done regarding the catching of Bronze Whaler Sharks from the beach.



To put it bluntly, they struggled. But they could see the potential, which was eventually fully realised on a trip I did with Dave Lewis and a party in 1999 when we caught what is believed to be the largest haul of fish ever taken from a beach. Fishing over 5 days, and not everybody fishing every day, 10 of us, plus Dave Lewis occasionally wetting a line, managed a breathtaking haul in excess of 15,000 pounds from open stretches of steep sandy beach, which had it not been for Clive’s earlier investigative work, almost certainly wouldn’t have taken place at all.

PW Comment: Clive Gammon fished at a time when few if any anglers routinely carried a decent camera. If I’m honest, my investing in 2 Nikon SLR cameras’, one for colour and the other for black and white, went a long way in my early success as an angling journalist. But in Gammon’s day that was not the case. If they wanted photographs, then the magazine would send out a photographer, which in the case of Creel was Michael Pritchard. All of which explains why there are so few photographs of many of the early angling greats, and why those that do exist are often of rather poor quality.

The following obituary for Clive Gammon appeared in BASS Magazine taken from the Telegraph, 2002.....

“It is with sadness that we report that Clive Gammon has passed away at the age of 83. Clive was a founder member of BASS (and its first Chairman).

A highly respected angler and writer Clive was perhaps best known, certainly by anglers, for his books.

Over his writing career he produced work for a multitude of high profile magazines and newspapers, including the Angling Times in its heyday and America’s famous Sports Illustrated”.

I met Clive a number of times, though I never fished with him, he was always a gentleman and had an enormous store of stories and tales of the places he’d been and fished. He also had the most infectious grin. Of all the books in my quite varied collection the ones that are my favourites are those written by Clive. No other angling writer comes close.

Perhaps a reflection of his status is the fact that The Telegraph carried an obituary: Clive Gammon – born March 29 1929, died June 10 2012”.

THE IRISH SURF BASS BEACHES

The 1960s in particular, but also the next couple of decades, were a magical time for shore Bass anglers. Magical in the sense of new opportunities opening up in Ireland, and equally magical if you just liked to read articles about Bass fishing, particularly those written by Clive Gammon who was a word artist, able to combine romance with pioneering spirit to the point of making us, his adoring readers, feel as though we were actually there with him through his descriptive writing.

Less pioneering perhaps in terms of discovering the Irish surf beaches of Co. Kerry, because Irish anglers such as Des Brennan and Kevin Linnane already knew their potential. But Gammon was instrumental in delivering that potential to a wider audience starved of good surf Bass fishing, particularly here in the UK, from a collection of beaches or strands as the Irish like to call them, geographically arranged so that regardless of the weather, at least one of them should always be fishable with the right amount of surf coming onto it, whipped up by winds blowing in off the Atlantic (see Chapter 7).



The term Storm Beach was also widely used at the time, which was apt, as this corner of Ireland can get pretty wild at times, as I know from visits hoping to get out in the boat. But for the shore Bass angler, within reason, wind was what they wanted. So bring it on at venues such as Brandon Bay with Stradbally looking across to Brandon, along with Castlegregory and Fermoy looking across to Fenit, both on the top side of the Dingle Peninsula. These were the main surf Bass beaches which produced most of the Bass reported in the press at the time. The locations where Gammon, Brennan, and the rest made their some of their epic catches, with winds coming

in from the west to north west to put up a decent surf.

Over on the other side of the Dingle Peninsula there was Inch Strand and Rossbeigh, both looking right into the teeth of anything blowing in from the west. A friend of mine, Gordon Thornes, had his only ever double figure Bass from Inch, right at the height of the Gammon & Brennan era, which by all accounts was an exceptional fish for south west Ireland. And tucked away right at the tip of the peninsula at Sleah Head is a tiny beach with only enough room for a couple of rods called Coumeeoole, which could produce in bad weather when other marks might struggle. In addition, there was also Caroo near Ventry, and Ballyheigue, with possibly others to search out and try dotted around the Kerry coastline.

Angling Magazine editor, Brian Harris, who also played an active part in all of this, told me that there were so many Bass at the time that it was almost too easy, with typically around 20 fish in the 4 to 5-pound bracket, plus the occasional 8 pounder per man per tide when conditions were right. I remember my times there, particularly Brandon Bay, catching mainly on lugworm, which along with blacklug was always the top bait, provided in Gammon's day by Paddy Walsh at Cloghane. But few if ever any really big fish. Why that should be is anybody's guess. Weight of numbers perhaps, or possibly slightly lower temperatures than the south coast of England? It's difficult to say. But numerically speaking, Ireland always had the edge.

At the same time, Clive Gammon was always pushing for the Irish to protect what they had, and not let it go the way of England and Wales. Along with Brian Harris and Donovan Kelley, he was instrumental

in setting up the Bass Anglers Sportfish Society (BASS), persuading Des Brennan to instigate conservation measures for Ireland, which as we all know did eventually come into being, far surpassing any legislation put in place to protect UK Bass populations. Gammon was also very keen to get people to stop eating them, not helped by TV chef's urging viewers to do otherwise. Thanks for that one. Allegedly, he even started a rumour that eating Bass can make men impotent.

Unfortunately, it was the French housewife who held the key to the future of Bass as a species by opposing moves to have the minimum size limit upped from 10 to 14 inches, because smaller plate sized fish are what consumers of Bass want. Fortunately, EU member states could if they wanted not adhere to EU minimum landing sizes, providing these are raised and not lowered through the use of local bye-laws, which presumably is how Irish fishery scientists were able to install minimum landing size limits and catch restrictions with meaningful parameters, and why the Irish Bass fishery has always been better than that of the UK.

THE BIG WINTER FREEZE 1962/1963

Anglers from the generation following mine will have few if any personal recollections of times when we had regular a clearly defined demarcation between the seasons of the year, particularly between autumn and winter. These days the two are pretty much merged into one, or at best, true winter, if we get one now, starts after Christmas, with all sorts of knock-on impacts on fish populations, the most notable of which using my own Lancashire patch as an example being that the Dogfish don't seem to completely disappear these days, while the Cod season is now delayed until the end of the year, though as a point of balance, it can now run on into April, whereas in the 'Jumbo Cod' years when we had proper winters, the Dogfish would be gone around October as the Cod moved in, with the last set of big tides in February marking the time to put the Cod tackle away and service the outboard ready for the spring fishing to start.



Meteorological records show that January 1947 (the year before I was born) was a pretty grim period, with the sea even freezing in places. From personal memory, I recall once turning up at Cleveleys for a night Cod session in January 1982 when the temperature dropped to 26 degrees below. The boat trailer was sliding about on the slope of the beach due to it freezing as the tide pulled back, and we actually left a dark line in our wake as we broke a path

through a few hundred yards of sea ice on the way out. A line highlighted by the street lights reflecting on the unbroken ice which was like touching pieces of a jigsaw rising and dipping over the gentle swell. But despite our catch actually freezing to the deck of the boat, it didn't feel that cold because there wasn't a breath of breeze to create any measure of wind chill.

That however pales into insignificance in comparison to the winter of 1962-1963. The coldest period on record since the 'mini ice-age' of 1693. A spell which started on the 29th December 1962 when a blizzard swept in with snow drifts in excess of 20 feet. By January the sea was starting to freeze, with ice for up to a mile out from the shore around parts of the Kent Coast, and as much as 4 miles out off Dunkirk just across the way.

The Royal Navy had to use an ice-breaker to keep Chatham Docks open. For the rest of us, it was power cuts, no refuse collections, water mains freezing, and food shortages. And that's how it remained for weeks, topped up by even more snow delivered on gale force easterly winds in February, with wind gusts of up to 119 mph recorded at the Isle of Man. Yard long icicles hung from gutters and stayed there until the 6th of March which was the first day without frost, after which a fairly rapid thaw set in. Then it was the stench of exposed rotting vegetation filling the air.

Unfortunately, vegetation wasn't the only living thing to suffer. Fish in their thousands also died. Normally in very cold weather, saltwater fish have the luxury of being able to move out into deeper water. There the depth and volume usually see to it that fluctuations are more gradual, bringing some measure of stability to the proceedings. Unfortunately, freshwater fish are not so lucky. Temperature however isn't the only external factor fish have to manage. Water pressure brought about by increased depth is another. And let's not forget that instinct rather than decision making is also a driver here.

Some species, perhaps for a complex variety of reasons, feel they need to stay put and tough things out, which unfortunately in 1963 was the undoing of many thousands of Ballan Wrasse and Conger to name but a couple of affected species.

Scientific reports relating to the cold snap highlight the following facts.....

“Fish began to die towards the end of February with numbers increasing to a maximum by mid-March, after which they gradually decreased until reports ceased by mid-April. The development of mortalities was compared with the sea temperatures at the time.

Analysis of fish blood serum showed abnormally high sodium levels in many fish caught in the colder waters. In some individuals the salt content appeared to approach lethal levels, but it was not known whether salt imbalance was the primary cause of death.

Fish mortalities were frequently reported over much of the North Sea to the south of the Dogger Bank. Sole populations suffered the highest mortalities, but dead Cod, Plaice, Whiting, Dabs, Turbot, Brill and Conger were also reported.

The mortalities were on a large scale, but not as great as previously reported for the cold winter of 1946/47, though they may have been as heavy as those in 1928/29. Their distribution however was more widespread than in either 1929 or 1947.

Flatfish were also attacked by a skin infection which certainly contributed to the deaths of many of these fish during the cold period”.

Another scientific paper ‘The Effects of The Winter Of 1962/63 on British Marine Fauna’, published by Dennis J. Crisp (Helgoland Marine Research, 1964) summarised the event as follows....

“During the exceptionally cold winter of 1962/63 the south-east coasts of Great Britain suffered the coldest conditions, but the coasts of Hampshire and Dorset, the Bristol Channel, and parts of North Wales suffered the greatest negative anomalies. Northern life-forms were not generally seriously affected, but some Celtic and southern life forms suffered very high mortality in the intertidal zone, particularly in embayed situations in the areas mentioned. Southern life forms limited to exposed western promontories did not suffer much damage; marine algae were also little affected.

Death was caused not only as a direct result of exposure of the tissues to extreme cold, but also from the general lowering of the animals' activity; for example, failure to remove silt by ciliary action, to cling to rock surfaces, and to burrow, led to many deaths. Even where high mortality was experienced, a few, perhaps more resistant individuals of the species generally survived in favourable habitats, so that distribution limits were little affected. Adaptive behaviour played an important part in the survival of many littoral forms”.

Talking to Mike Millman who was prominent on the south west sea angling scene from the 1960's through to the present time (2018), Ballan Wrasse were hit particularly hard to the point that it took a good 10 years to see not only numbers, but specimen weights, show any signs of creeping back to where they had been previously. That said, there are suggestions that it wasn't all doom and gloom.

Talking to Folkestone based match angler and England International Alan Yates, who despite being in his teens at the time was very active on the local scene, it seems that decent sized Cod, though not unknown, were a rarity in the winters prior to the big freeze. Understandably, they remained rare in the immediate aftermath too. Then things starting to change, not only down in the south-east, but in other parts of the country too.

Gradually, year on year, not only Cod numbers, but individual sizes were on the increase. By the late 1960's, both Dungeness and Les Moncrieff (with Alan Yates as his 'apprentice') were setting new pinnacles for quality Cod fishing. Elsewhere in the country we had the golden days of the Inner Clyde with those stupendous Cod catches made by 'The Trio' fishing the Gantocks. Hot on its heels came the decade long 'Jumbo Era' along the Lancashire Coast, which pretty much coincided with the bumper Cod years along the Welsh side of the Bristol Channel from Cardiff through to Swansea. And last but by no means least, coming a little later than the rest, or was it at the same time but not reported by people wanting to keep a lid on things, we had the fabulous Cod years from the rocks around Balcary on Scotland's Solway Coast, all of which started at pretty much the same time, had its life-span, then was gone.



As a scientist myself, I like to deal in facts. Give me evidence. But as an angler I often see trends, which while they are scientifically unsubstantiated, never the less are credible, and by being aware of them can lead to enhanced results. In other words, anecdotal evidence has its place too, including this suggestion from Alan Yates, who is of the opinion that the big freeze of 1962/62 played a direct part in the big Cod runs also mentioned above that came shortly afterwards.

That lower than average water temperature following the winter of 1962 into 1963 came at the crucial time when Cod eggs are up near the surface from February to April, followed by the fry also remaining in the upper layers of the water column for a couple of months, before heading down for a life on the sea bed. It's suggested that the cold helped keep surface predators of fish eggs and fry, such as Mackerel, out of the equation, resulting in many more individual Cod making it through, and continuing to do so year on year, a good percentage of which survived to reach specimen proportions, until the effect eventually became neutralised by the passing of time.

MONOFILAMENT GILL NETS

Monofilament for use by anglers as fishing line was developed by DuPont in 1939, but started to be used widely against angling interests due to the manufacturing of commercial gill nets during the 1960's, because it was invisible to fish and could be left to fish for itself, so long as it was tended at regular intervals to remove fish, weed, and anything else the tide pushed into it.

Unfortunately, monofilament nets can also ‘ghost fish’ when they become lost or discarded at sea, exacerbating the problem, not only with fish but also wildlife generally. So it isn’t only anglers that want to see them banned. Bird enthusiasts and Cetacean Groups are also keen to keep the pressure on, to the point that UN General Assembly Resolution 46/215 called for a cessation of all ‘large scale pelagic drift net fishing’ in international waters by 1992, which in reality means nothing on a nation by nation scale, as evidenced by the ongoing battle in the UK and Ireland regarding the decline in the numbers of Bass and rays because of gill netting.

JACK SHINE – PORBEAGLE SHARKS FROM THE SHORE

As much of Jack Shine’s best work was already done long before I even wet a line in saltwater, fellow Irish angler and friend of Jacks, Mick White has provided much of the background for this important inclusion by way of an audio podcast he recorded for my Audio Angling series on www.fishing-filmsandfacts.co.uk (see appendix).

While the Porbeagle Shark fishing done by Jack Shine is an incredible and important piece of history belonging to the 1960’s, the story itself starts in the early 1950’s when Jack and his family uprooted from Co. Cork to take themselves over to the beautiful coastal countryside of Co. Clare. There he took up the appointment of creamery manager at Lahinch, looking out over Liscannor Bay, an area of outstanding beauty, with cliffs, rock ledges, and sea caves carved out by millennia of wild Atlantic storms.



At the time of his appointment, Jack was not an angler. But with time on your hands and fishable rock ledges overlooking heavy ground well stocked with good Pollack and Mackerel all summer long, it was something of a tradition locally to cut down a bamboo pole which the locals called a ‘wattle’ from a nearby wild bamboo grove. They would then fasten a length of fishing line to it armed with homemade

lures made from chicken feathers, or a spinner, and jig for fish for the table, as well as enjoying lots of craic and banter along the way.

There was however a downside to all of this. So much potential prey so close in to the rock ledges had not gone unnoticed by good numbers of Porbeagle sharks. These regularly gave local the pole fishermen a bit of a scare and sometimes even a few moments of a tussle as they grabbed at hooked fish, taking them as well as the feather lures.

Even on occasions the pole too, and in that regard, when fishing the rock ledges of Green Island, Jack was no exception. All who endured Porbeagle encounters cursed and verbally threatened one day to get their own back. The difference with Jack Shine was that when he said it he meant it, and intended to follow the threat through.

To appreciate the true depth of the difficulty here, particularly when hooking up big fish, you have to understand that the quality and scope of the fishing tackle we take so much for granted these days simply wasn't available to everyone back then. Even it had been, we're talking about rural Ireland with no big shops, no mail order, and no Internet, all of which only adds to the level of accomplishment here. On top of this, Jack's shark venue, Green Island, was a grassed over piece of the shoreline which became isolated by the incoming tide twice daily.

On the plus side, in the mid-1950's, the Irish government was becoming increasingly aware of the money spinning potential of its sea angling, particularly for Bass from the beaches, and as such set Des Brennan the task of founding what would become the Central Fisheries Board (CFB) and Bord Fáilte, the Irish Tourist Board, by inviting over the great and good of British sea angling to help develop Ireland's fantastic fishing potential by giving it exposure at the hands of people like Clive Gammon and Brian Harris, who would also bring with them new ideas and innovations from the developing UK tackle scene and beyond.

While all of this was going on, Jack, who still a complete unknown to the angling World, had bought himself a motorbike to go off exploring the Clare coastline, not only for likely general fishing spots, but also suitable vantage points, like Green Island, for a crack at the sharks. Both on location, and back at home, he was constantly thinking about it and working on a suitable outfit both in terms of hand tackle and stuff down at the business end that might give him a reasonable chance.

He also upgraded the motorbike to a Morris Minor, and took along with him his sons Gerrard and Knowle, who themselves were developing into fine shore anglers for Turbot, Tope, and Bass, from the beaches, and Mackerel, Wrasse, and Pollack, over the harder ground.

Having completed his shoreline surveys, Jack decided that the northern end of Green Island with one particular fishing ledge looking out over deep water would offer him the best shot, as Porbeagles were regularly seen there looking for food within 50 or 60 yards of the rocks, regularly coming in even closer when hooked fish were being brought in on the bamboo poles. There his first attempt, while it was deliberate in one sense, was also to some extent one taken on the hoof, as it had started off as a Pollack session which very quickly saw a shark bait going out for the first time, when once again, fish on the feathers were being attacked.

This wasn't shark tackle as such. More a case of cobbling together the best rig available from bits and pieces of Tope terminal tackle in the bottom of his tackle bag. A short wire Tope trace, a float, and the back half of a Mackerel, were thrown out by hand towards the shark which was at the surface where it was immediately taken, resulting in a tussle lasting for around 10 minutes, the outcome of which on 13 pounds breaking strain line was only ever going to go one way. But the ice was broken. Sharks could be hooked up, and presumably on stronger tackle, possibly even landed. From that point there would be no looking back.

Next job on Jack's agenda was tackle modification. This included a trace carrying 7 feet of 90 pounds breaking strain wire, a medium/heavy solid glass rod, and a Luxor fixed spool reel loaded with 400 yards of 19 pounds breaking strain monofilament. With this Jack was able to cast around 60 yards which was plenty far enough. But how would he deal with a shark from such a precarious position if he was fortunate enough to get one within landing range. Well, with a pair of gaff heads jubilee clipped to a set of drain rods to flex over the rocks, the length of which could be adjusted by adding or subtracting an extra rod, as he was about to find out.

On his first visit to Green Island with the new kit, Jack had 2 takes from Porbeagles, both of which were missed through premature striking. And all the time he had the added 'misery' of banter and mickey taking from the bamboo pole fishermen to contend with too. But on the 27th of June 1962, all of that would come to an end, when once again his Mackerel tail bait was taken, and on this occasion, allowing the extra time needed to make sure the hook made contact on the strike, he was into a good fish. For a good 30 minutes the encounter ebbed first one way then the other, avoiding sharp rocks, the reef below, and the fish's rough skin on the reel line until finally he had it on the gaff. At 77 pounds, the first ever European shore caught Porbeagle Shark record.

Buoyed up by his success, more visits were planned, and on August the 5th he would land 2 sharks in the same day weighing in at 75 and 91 pounds, helped by some of the friends who just 6 weeks earlier would have been taking the mickey out of him. But not anymore. Unfortunately, there were no more shark encounters that season either. So the tackle was stowed away for further modification over the winter months until the return of the Mackerel in May of 1963, when the first attack on the feathers was followed up very confidently by the tail end of a Mackerel caught earlier being lobbed in on the heavy gear.

That bait had been in the water barely more than minutes before it was taken, resulting in a powerful run of a good quarter of a mile. Obviously, this was a much heavier fish. After all but emptying the reel, Jack eventually managed to turn it out in open water and guide it on the perilous journey back towards all the obstacles at the base of the rock's feet. Forty five minutes after setting the hook, Jack had the fish almost at his feet. With all the hard work done, the fish was steered carefully around the jagged rocks into the best possible gaffing position, only to have the trace part due to the chaffing of the fish's teeth. Time once again for another tackle re-think.

Top of the agenda was to look for a different reel. With the Luxor almost maxed out, and multipliers at that time designed specifically with boat fishing in mind, Jack turned to Australian reel producer Alvey and bought himself a Side Cast with a spool diameter of 5½ inches. The beauty of the Alvey Side Cast was that the spool could be swivelled through 90 degrees from its operational side position to face forwards with the same orientation as a true fixed spool for casting, after which it would swivel back to operate as a centre pin reel complete with sliding spool and drag. A reel that could take 300 yards of 32 pound breaking strain line, which when coupled to a new trace design with 7 feet of wire swivel linked to a further 7 feet of 250 pounds breaking strain commercial monofilament with a float fixed at the mid-point swivel, Jack was back in business for the remainder of the season.

The 1963 season saw many encounters, but only 5 Sharks taken to the creamery scales, which was the way it was 50 years ago, when the sea was seen as having an endless bounty which could never be exhausted. Of those 5 sharks, 4 topped the 100 pound mark, with the 5 fish spread going between 90 and 138 pounds. A catch helped to no small degree by the addition of smaller floats on the line to keep it up in the water away from sharp snags and rough tail flukes. A great combination, with the luxury of letting the sharks run off hard against the drag to tire themselves out in open water, before running the gauntlet of the inshore obstacle course.

Jack's philosophy now was to play them to an absolute standstill before bringing them in anywhere near the gaffs. And this was starting to pay off big time, with 3 Porbeagles in as many days. Yet just

offshore, boats drifting with the same intention were having a particularly lean time of things because they couldn't get close enough in to where all the bait fish were stacked up. And for those occasions when Jack was having difficulty getting his baits that little bit further off if that was required, on the days when the breeze was either coming from or being deflected from his back, he was able to pay line out and let the forces of nature bridge the gap for him.

The following season of 1964 saw another tackle upgrade. Jack had managed to get hold of a 12 foot hollow glass Auger beach caster with a 6 pound test curve. This he paired up with a new Alvey Side Cast 725 which came with two 6½ inch spools. One for what was becoming the 'run of the mill' Porbeagle fishing loaded with 400 yards of 31 pounds breaking strain line, plus a second 'special occasion' spool loaded with 400 yards of 60 pounds breaking strain line, in case something considerably bigger than the norm was spotted. Also, the extra length of the new rod would help protect the line from snags should a fish decide on a last-ditch dive deep at his feet. But equally important, with this new outfit, he was finally able to cast properly instead of throwing the bait out by hand.



By this stage Jack had discovered more potential hot spots deserving of investigation, and it was while fishing one of these in July 1964 that he spotted a Porbeagle close in, sent a bait out to it, and was forced to both catch and land the fish himself, because it was a spot few other people visited and he was completely on his own. Having done it once, he would go on to take several 'solo' Porbeagles in excess of 100 pounds, the best of which was 115 pounds, adding ever more credibility to the legendary credentials of the man.

Never a man to stand still in thinking terms, Jack was forever looking at ways to improve the efficiency of what he was doing, which again in 1964, saw him move away from his favoured tail end of a fresh Mackerel to fishing what by all accounts appears to have been a Mackerel flapper, bringing yet more success to the point where the outside World was beginning to hear of his ex-

ploits. In Australia they were interested because of his Alvey Side Cast Link. But much closer to home, Bernard Venables, the legendary 'Mr. Crabtree' and editor of the prestigious 'Creel Magazine' in Britain contacted Jack for an article on his exploits. By the end of the 1964 season, Jack's Porbeagle running total was 13 sharks.

While continuing to fish for the sharks, Jack was also interested in other forms of fishing too. In particular this included fishing for Bass, something Des Brennan and the Central Fisheries Board (CFB) had long been promoting through visits by famous English angling writers such Clive Gammon and Brian Harris, all of whom were keen to meet with and talk to Jack. Kevin Linnane was another person who spent time in Jack's company, but this time as much as a friend as an angler in the employ of the CFB. This association is what led to the famous trophy shot taken by Kevin of Jack with Porbeagles of 150 and 145 pounds at Green Island.

Other anglers, both visiting and local, tried to emulate Jack's catches, but to this day, none have ever succeeded. And similarly, Jack himself never succeeded in landing one of the true trophy fish which were both seen and occasionally encountered over his years fishing the Green Island rock ledges. That was why he carried that spare spool loaded with 60 pounds breaking strain line for his Alvey Side Cast. And finally, one day, he felt the need to put it on, immediately making contact with a fish which very quickly had 200 yards of line off the spool against heavy drag, and which eventually broke the line at the reel with Jack holding on to the spool in a vain attempt to keep the last few coils of line from disappearing off it.

Speculation as to the size of that fish put it at 300 pounds plus. But still he wasn't done. Ever keen to progress, he noticed that the best takes in terms of both numbers and positivity came when the baits was being slowly inched back in towards the shore. This prompted an attempt at fishing with artificial lures in 1968, which would later be taken up by his friend Kevin Linnane out in the boat under the nearby Cliffs of Moher. But by this stage, both offshore and on, people were noticing a decline, not only in Porbeagle Shark numbers, but fish numbers generally, and through Kevin, Jack turned to the CFB to see what could be done.

As is so often the case, the commercial lobby was strong, resulting in little if any change. Certainly not in getting lobster pot floats with their attendant ropes moved from the within range of the rock ledges, resulting in the shore fishing for Porbeagles slipping into terminal decline. Some measure of success was eventually managed regarding the Bass, but by this stage Jack's health was starting to decline. Jack Shine died in 1998 aged 75 years. A true recipient of the often over used term 'Angling Legend'. And to this day, not a single other Porbeagle Shark has been landed around the British Isles by anyone else. As for final numbers of sharks caught, that's a little vague. Estimates in the press say as many as 100. In truth, Jack didn't actually know himself, though he estimates the figure at somewhere in the region of 40 fish.

DOUBLE MAKO HIT FOR LOOE

Ever since Hetty Eathorne caught Britain's first official Mako Shark of 325 pounds in 1955, Mako statistics have been sparse and very well distributed, making it extremely difficult for patterns to be teased from them. Obviously, Robin Vinnicombe and Falmouth are two linked stand out trends. Other than that, there is precious little else to get your teeth into.

Out of the 66 recorded UK specimens, only Ted Belston, Jock McDonald, and A. Simpson have ever caught more than one Mako, with two apiece. And only once between Hetty Eathorne's fish in 1955 and the last record catch also made by a woman, Alice Clemson, in 1976, has there ever been two Mako Sharks caught on the same day. That was the 31st of July 1963, when Edgar Williams had a fish of 313 pounds, and C. Watts had a 291 pounder, both fishing out from Looe.

FUJI FISHING ROD GUIDES

As a company, Fuji dates back to 1938, when Rintaro Omura first started producing press buttons. And while they were not producing fishing tackle components at that time, he also worked on a few early fishing reel designs. It was in 1963 that the company first produced the item for which it would become internationally renowned, that being fishing rod guides, or as we like to call them over here, rod rings, quickly setting the standard that others would need to follow. So much so that often anglers would ask if a rod had Fuji rings as standard, and if not, could they be fitted. Some would even buy rods and strip the original rings off for Fuji replacements. That's a measure of how highly rated Fuji rod rings were, and still are.

The Fuji Cera Guide was the first ceramic rod ring the tackle industry and its customers had ever seen. In the company's own words, it was an iconic moment. And not wanting to rest on their laurels, more would follow with SiC guides in 1981. The KR concept and Tortzite guides arrived after the millennium. All developments synonymous with premium quality and top performance resulting from years of creative innovation and research, and always with the underlying aim of striving to produce the very best products, a fact recognised by anglers all over the World. In the words of Senior Managing Director Harry Shin Harakawa, the company's fundamental aim is "to dig out the market needs and develop new and original products to accommodate them."



To be sure components are up to company specification and requirements, rigorous testing is undertaken to evaluate every Fuji product. One example of this is a casting simulator to perfect the smoothness and layout of its guides in a realistic fishing situation, on top of which, they also use specially designed machinery to test specific attributes of their guides. Fuji see themselves not just as suppliers of high end components to the fishing tackle industry to help anglers improve their performance, but also as developers of methods and techniques, striving always to satisfy requests from the tackle industry to further meet the needs of anglers, which isn't easy when you have a product that is so universally acclaimed.

DYNEEMA FISHING LINE

Like a lot of good inventions, Dyneema was discovered by accident, in this case in 1968 by chemist Dr. Albert Pennings, whilst researching into polythene at the coal mining and fertiliser giant DSM. During that research, he suddenly realised he had a thread that couldn't be pulled apart which turned out to be the World's strongest and lightest fibre. History records the reaction of his superiors as 'disinterested'. Statistical analysis however credited the new thread on a weight for strength comparison as being 15 times stronger than steel, and 40% stronger than Aramid which is another exceptionally strong synthetic fibre.

Fortunately, others within DSM recognised the potential of Pennings discovery, allowing research and development to proceed and see where it took things, which was the production of a fibre combining low weight to high strength, made it suitable for a wide range of practical applications from bullet proof vests to medical threads, plus of course the one we are interested in here, high performance fishing line, which from 1987 began going head to head in competition with all the other fishing lines of the day.

In all walks of life, you get technophobes and those who embrace every new idea that comes along. Not all new products have the ability to polarise people around these extremes, but the introduction of low diameter non-stretch fishing line, both was, and still is a particularly polarising subject. The 'embracers' were immediately all spooling up and singing the new lines praises as if it had suddenly dragged angling kicking and screaming out of the dark ages. Conversely, as you might expect, for the technophobes it was the spawn of the devil, deserving of none of the praise that some anglers and seemingly the entire angling press were constantly and perhaps undeservedly heaping onto it.

As ever in these types of situations, the truth lies often somewhere in between. Once the initial polarisation barriers had been dismantled, braided lines began to find their appropriate rightful slot in the great scheme of things, and very quickly, having swung in both directions, the pendulum began to settle out, with anglers finally picking out the wheat from the chaff from both sides of the argument and using it in the most beneficial way, carrying it alongside lines constructed of other materials which also still have areas in which they too excel.

I must confess that while I don't consider myself a technophobe, my flag was placed firmly in the 'braid dislikers' camp. I was going to say braid-haters, but that would be too strong a word. Now the war is over and we've all come to our senses, I too have reels spooled up with braid, just as I have reels spooled up with nylon, selecting the most appropriate one on the day for the job at hand, which for the non-stretch braid is mainly fishing in very strong tides to reduce the amount of lead required to hold bottom; fishing in deep water where the stretch in monofilament would 'cushion' out any hint of a bite; pick fishing such as in Norway, and certain aspects of shore based lure fishing, particularly fishing soft

plastic lures at ultra-slow retrieve rates over snaggy ground where you need to be able to feel what is going on in order to react to it.

Situations where I see no advantage to be gained from fishing braid include uptide fishing where you are not in direct tight line contact with the terminal gear due to needing to have a bow in the line; any shallow water fishing where the stretch of monofilament is not so great as be counter productive for detecting bites and striking fish, and in the hands of the newcomers amongst us who are not experienced in playing good fish, and are therefore likely to rip the hook hold free through a combination of too much pressure and no cushioning stretch of the type that monofilament nylon is able to provide.

All of that said, by the close of the century, the braid market was huge and still growing. Probably more so amongst people who have come into sea angling since the introduction of braid than dyed in the wool old sceptics like me. But that's okay, just so long as we all recognise that there are two valid sides to the debate, and that we do not allow ourselves to become so entrenched or indoctrinated as not to seek out the best tools on any given day from the plethora of weapons presented to us.

NOTE: The terms Dyneema, micro Dyneema, and Spectra (modern day braids) are essentially interchangeable names for very similar braided man-made fibres woven into a strand of line. Names and products specifications depend on where in the World you live and which company you buy from. There are slight differences in terms of molecular structure and breaking strain to diameter ratios at the heavier end of the range, in addition to which in all braided lines, the number of fibres used to make up the line control the characteristics of the final product.

MIKE MILLMAN

A keen angling historian as well as being a very well-respected angling journalist, Mike Millman is one of the few inclusions in the book who was more than happy to pen a few words of his own which are reproduced in their entirety here as a mix of his own personal fishing, with an almost complete history of West Country wreck fishing and lure making which I have kept as part of Mikes inclusion here rather than break it up into dozens of smaller units to be spread across other inclusions in the book.

That however isn't the full story. To get that, I have spent a number of hours audio interviewing him on the subject followed up by several lengthy telephone conversations. The information gleaned from these forms the second part of this inclusion. The following words are penned by Mike himself....

“My passion for boat fishing began in the late 1950's and was mostly from an ex-Admiralty cutter called the 'Carol Ann' after the owner's daughter. Evening trips for Conger were run for the Plymouth Sea Anglers Club to marks usually within touching distance of the shore, one having an unexpected result.

The long held adage 'there are far bigger fish in the sea than ever came out of it' proved true for the group of which I was a member who were fishing the Draystone Reef marking the Western end of Plymouth Sound. The bottom was rugged and covered by an incredibly thick mantel of kelp constantly swaying back and forth with the tide. For many years the area had been a noted Conger mark and the incident I recall took place during a dark October night under a glittering canopy of stars.

It was one those rare occasions when phosphorous turned everything it touched to liquid fire, and lines stretching down through 60 feet of water were shafts of light. As midnight approached the smell of our supper cooking in an overworked iron frying pan on an ancient paraffin stove hung strong in the air. Small and medium weight Conger hooked and played up to the boat and then released to return to the shelter of the kelp lit by luminescence had provided a steady level of sport throughout the 5 hours since the anchor had taken hold.

One of the party members had a 'knock' and with food still in one hand picked up his rod gobbled the hotdog and slowly turned the multiplier's handle. The eel that had taken the bait was drawn up steadily without fuss and then the resistance became greater. His rod tip vibrated and dipped fiercely and it



required full commitment to achieve sink and draw. A half minute later the fish arrived at the surface and there in the pool of light from a pressure lamp fastened to a stand on the cabin roof, was a gigantic Conger that seemed to have two heads one in front of the other.

The phosphorous outlined its body of telegraph pole dimension. For an instant stunned and motionless, those on that side of the boat grabbed gaffs but before they could be used, although of little use they would have been, the serpent came to life. It delivered mighty whacks to the side of the boat and clear on the night air came the sound of flesh and bone being crushed. The eel sank from view, but floating where its 'heads' had been was the head and part body of another eel.

Flesh hung in strips and it looked as if it had been the victim of a maniac meat cleaver. The sea was searched for the remainder of the eel that would have floated, but of it there was no sign, meaning that 4 feet of flesh weighing perhaps 40 lbs had been swallowed. The fish that had been severed was pulled and found to weigh 19 lbs and its girth was 26 inches. Using the length of

the boat as a guide to the giant's length that was all of 10 feet, we estimated its weight to be at least 150 lbs. Years later with experience of 100 lb fish to draw on, half as much again would have been closer to the mark.

1953 was the year the Shark Angling Club opened its books at Looe in Cornwall. It resulted in so many Blue Sharks being caught the small Cornish town was dubbed fancifully 'The Shark Angling Capital of the World'. In 1960 by which time 829 members were active, a total of 6,330 fish mainly blues were brought ashore and weighed, usually before throngs of excited holidaymakers. Conservation ideals were a long way in the future.

The first Mako initially thought to be a Porbeagle was a fish of 352 lbs was caught in 1955 by Hetty Eathorne off Looe from her own boat appropriately named the 'Little One' as Hetty was diminutive in stature. On examination of the fish's teeth by representatives of the International Game Fish Association it was proved beyond doubt it was a Mako and so became the first British Record.

The 1960's was a Mako decade during with at least 5 weighed heavier than 425 lbs. In 1966 Ken Burgess became the British Record holder with a fish of 498 ½ lbs that was brought into Looe. Falmouth was also a leading centre for Mako shark activity and more were registered there than at Looe.

In 1971 the late Joyce Yallop who was fishing close to the Eddystone Reef from Alan Dingle's 'Lady Betty' out of Looe set the British Record with a fish of 500 lbs. Joyce was fishing with her husband Rex. They were drifting near the Eddystone Lighthouse when, what appeared to be a large Basking Shark was spotted on the surface a quarter of a mile away.

Alan slowly motored the boat towards the fish and at a distance of no more than 50 yards he realised it was a very big Mako. A whole Mackerel was baited up and thrown over to be almost instantly taken when it was 15 feet below the surface. So began an arm and stomach wrenching battle that lasted 2 hours and 35 minutes. News of it had been radioed to Looe, and by the time the boat docked a huge crowd had gathered at the Shark Club Headquarters to see the fish weighed at exactly 500 lbs

In 1974 the centre of Porbeagle sharking activity shifted from the waters of the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands to Cornwall's Atlantic and the Bristol Channel. Large numbers in the 200 -300 lb class were caught, many close to shore in less than 100 ft of water. London based Jorge Potier set a World Record in 1976 with a fish of 465 lbs he battled from the Padstow boat 'Lady Jayne' off Crackington Haven. But for a 24 hour delay in weighing, the record would have passed from Potier to Cornish angler Derek Runnals the following year. When eventually weighed it took the scale needle to 456 lbs, but the tarpaulin in which it had been kept held 30 lbs of liquid.

The Shark Angling Club of Great Britain became a shadow of its former self in the 1990's and its premises on the Looe Quay was sold. Its rules have changed and no longer is it necessary for a shark of at least 75 lbs (the minimum for Membership) to be brought ashore for weighing and the club's magnificent trophies are won by fish that are measured on capture, the weight being determined by a formula and then released.

Arising from the formation of the Shark Club was the Looe International Sea Angling Festival which in turn led in 1961 to the founding of the European Federation of Sea Anglers, now an organisation of many counties including South Africa.

The early sixties saw the introduction of wreck angling brought about by the availability of the Decca Navigator and sophisticated echo sounders, and 1962 was the year the British Conger Club was formed at Littlehampton, but its headquarters soon moved to the Dolphin Hotel at Newton Ferrers on the outskirts of Plymouth.

South West charter boats led the way with 'Ko I Nor' and 'Our Unity', both Brixham based, providing bottom fishing at a multitude of Lyme Bay wrecks of a quality formerly undreamed of. Plymouth and Cornish skippers soon joined the fray and delivered amazing hauls of big predators.

Mevagissey had the honour of the first 'ton up' Conger with a fish of 102 ½ lbs in 1974 that was in a catch of 4,598 lbs, the biggest ever recorded in a 24 hour period at the wreck of the SS 'Flying Enterprise' lying on the bottom 40 miles off Falmouth since January 1952.

Wreck angling for Conger reached its zenith in the decades from the 1960's and 90's and the record was improved 10 times during this time. Kelly's record was narrowly beaten in 1970 at a wreck in Lyme Bay by Colin Chapman of Southampton who fished from the Brixham boat 'Our Unity'. From this point the record progression was constant

Vic Evans' World record was an early season success at a wreck lying a shade more than 10 miles from Brixham, where definitive fishing for Conger began in 1960 initiated by commercial fishermen. It was against this legacy that Evans, a hairdresser by trade, bought 'Sea Spray' in the 1980's and began charter fishing with bookings made at a kiosk on the Brixham quay run by his wife Diane. On the day he became famous he had just 2 anglers aboard so had time to fish on his own account, the result being a milestone in UK angling.

Within minutes of the bait being taken he knew it was a fish of considerable size, the suspicion growing by the second as it was giving the heavy tackle and himself such a hard time. Line was gained and lost and it was a good 15 minutes before the shadow of the fish could be seen. The moment of truth came when the thrashing eel arrived at the gunwale. Some gaffing assistance came from the 2 anglers, but it was Evans having thrown down the rod who took control and heaved the fish into the boat.

There was little doubt it would break the Record then jointly held at 112 lbs. The news had been sent back to Brixham where the Club's Mark Criddle, who is now coxswain of the Lifeboat and Pete Blower were on the quay with a trolley. On the fish market scales it weighed 133 lbs 4 oz. A World, European and UK record with over 20 lbs to spare. The eel was mounted and is now displayed at the Brixham

SAC clubhouse. A replica donated by the British Conger Club hangs in the IGFA Hall of Fame in Florida.

Coalfish made an indelible mark on fishing in the lower English Channel and the species has a fascinating record history!

In 1921 a Captain H. Millais who was fishing over rough ground off Lands End took a Coalie of 23 lbs 8 oz. destined to remain the record until 1971 when it fell to a Lyme Bay fish of 26 lbs 2 oz. by John Trust. In the same year it was broken twice off Plymouth by the same angler 'JJ' McVicar who had fish of 26 lbs 12 ½ oz. and 27 lbs 10 ½ oz. on successive days. The record was improved twice more in that year by fish of 28 lbs 2 oz. and 29 lbs 2 oz., both taken at wrecks off Plymouth by Stan Stevens and Ron Phillips.

In 1973 it was lifted to 30 lbs 12 oz. again off Plymouth by Tony Harris. In 1980 a Lyme Bay wreck gave a fish of 33 lbs 7 oz. to Lloyd Saunders and 3 years later his father Bill became the record holder with a fish just 3 ounces heavier – both these were mounted and can be seen at the Paignton Sea Angler's Club headquarters in Cliff Road.

1986 brought a fish of 36 lbs by Gordon Wheeler and in the same year Dave Brown set the current record at 37 lbs 5 oz. both taken at wrecks off Plymouth. What had been a bonanza came to an end in the late 80's and 90's when the Coalfish virtually disappeared from the waters of the South West, a rise in water temperature being the most likely reason. Much more could be written about the fabulous fishing that was so much a feature of Westcountry waters and the many records that were set, but danger threatened.

In 1991 The British Record Rod Caught Fish Committee wanted to allow fish to be claimed as UK records to be 'weighed at sea and returned'. My protest against this raised a huge level of support.

My original letter (abbreviated) to the committee said, " I note with dismay the decision by the Record Fish Committee to allow fish to be weighed at sea to qualify as British Records My interest in saltwater records began over 30 years ago and I have at some stage been involved with more than 60 claims. I am of the firm opinion the decision now taken will, in the fullness of time if 'weighed at sea' is adopted make the boat caught record list a nonsense. In my considerable experience and that of others, and very rarely does the weight of a fish recorded at sea ensure when it is finally weighed ashore, no matter how still the sea was. Human nature being what it is the needle reading is always taken at its most advantageous point. Allowing fish to be weighed and released at sea does away with Rule 10 that deals with disease by which the weight of a fish can be enhanced. It is released who is to know?

A major factor in any record claim is correct identification the examination carried out by a qualified Marine Biologist appointed by the Fish Committee. Having watched more examinations of record fish than anyone other the examining staff at Plymouth's Marine Biological Association Laboratory and at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory, it is clear that if this change to the rule is adopted there will not be the means to determine beyond all doubt that the fish on the table is what it is purported to be.

Here is the danger, it is an undeniable fact that mistakes are made by (some) skippers and anglers as to the species that has come from the depths. All too often a Turbot becomes a Brill and vice versa. Pollack and Coalfish are confused, and when it comes to ray the incident of mistake is very high. A big Thornback can turn out to be a Blonde, Small Eyed's, Spotted's, Cuckoo's and Sandy rays are involved. For this reason, many clubs are insisting that all rays be taken to a qualified person for positive identification before a claim for a club record or award is accepted."

Support for my protest was received from principal organisations and leading charter skippers and this forced the Committee to change its mind. Prominent charter skippers said.....

“I must register concern over the decision to allow a claim for a record fish that was ‘weighed at sea’ and returned to be ratified. Having been a charter skipper for many years I defy anyone to judge within 5 lbs a Conger over 100 lbs, even if the sea is flat calm. Pressure must be put on the record fish committee to rescind this ridiculous alteration in the rules. Vic Evans ‘Sea Spray II’, Brixham.

“There is a lot of prestige in having a record fish and I can see no reason to change the rules that would allow it to be ‘weighed at sea’ Geordie Dickson Artilleryman 11.

“I have been fortunate to have two British Records set from my boat. Had these fish been weighed at sea the weights would have been inflated. One of the pollack showed 28 – 30 lbs in a near perfect sea condition but later weighed on land it was recorded 27 lbs 6 oz. Any fish caught on my boat thought to be a record contender will be weighed ashore on certified scales. Ted Cooke ‘Anglo Dawn’”.

Catch and Release is and will be a growing feature of recreational angling and the returning of a fish that could be a UK record is unnecessary and can have no effect on the wellbeing of whatever the species is. The credibility of the record list is already under severe threat, and over time its very existence as an accurate document is doubtful. The International Game Fish Association insists that only a fish brought to shore and weighed on accredited scales before witnesses, can be acclaimed a ‘World Record’. Britain’s Rod Caught Fish Committee must be in accord with this dictate if it is to remain an organisation of worth.

The rules presently in place governing the claiming of a UK record must never be compromised.

Angling in Britain as an organised recreational pastime has a history stretching back almost 150 years, and spectator sports aside, has a justifiable claim to have had more participants than any other sport activity in this long period of time, upon which has been built a remarkable story. In 1883 J. C. Wilcocks, a Guernsey man who later lived for many years in Plymouth, wrote the first definitive book on the subject ‘The Sea Fisherman’ when rod and reel had largely replaced the hand line.

Ten years on the British Sea Anglers’ Society was formed by persons of note and wealth. A Lord became its President and its list of vice-Presidents were from the aristocracy, Town Mayors, and early sea angling authors, notably F. G. Aflalo who was its instigator. Its headquarters, which included a library and later a museum, was in Fetter Lane off London's Fleet Street.

Agents based in the principle fishing towns provided the society with information on catches, recommended reliable boatmen and hotels that welcomed anglers, and even arranged special fares with railway companies. It produced a comprehensive Year Book (a preparation of great labour and a heavy charge upon the funds of the Society and the time of the committee). A superb quarterly journal was sent free of charge to all members. It contained informative articles, a secretary's Postbag, meeting reports and much more.

In 1935 H.A. Kelly who 2years before, had set a record for Conger with a fish of 84 lbs taken off Dungeness told members about the techniques needed to catch such fish. Other articles published included 'My Days with Cornish Tunny' and 'Sea Fishing in Torbay' of which some of the detail is still relevant.

Such was the stature of the Society its monthly meetings were addressed by World famous figures including F. A. Mitchell-Hedges in association with the presentation of his case of record Wrasse. American author and angler Charles Frederick Holder gave a talk in 1912 on the formation of the Catalina Tuna Club that attracted its first British member, Aflalo, who would later write about his experiences there in his book ‘Sunset Playgrounds’.

The Society was keen to report catches of note and over time a semi-official list was constructed. Among the fish noted was a Ling of 45 lbs caught in 1912 off Penzance that remained the record until

1974, a Pollack of 21 lbs and Coalfish of 23 ½ lbs taken off Lands End in 1921. Both would remain records for more than 3 decades.

Another notable fish was a Red Bream of 7 lbs 8 oz. caught at the Hatt Rock off Fowey in 1925 by Arthur Bell who was secretary of the British Sea Anglers' Society. It would not be beaten until 1974 by a fish taken off the Dodman Point. The Society came to an end in early 1941 when the headquarters and most of its contents that included many fish mounts, was destroyed by enemy action. But for this, it is quite possible it would still be a major player in British sea angling.

Through the decades of the 1920's and 30's sea angling had become so popular the Great Western Railway realising the potential for business published a guide entitled 'Around the Coast with Rod and Line'. Its trains brought enthusiasts to the South West of England and South and West Wales who engaged in fishing from the shore, and at sea. It was in this paperback that a Miss Bluebell Klean was credited with being the Conger record holder with an eel of 63 lbs 3 oz. taken off Hastings in 1922. She, like Kelly, a member of the prominent Dreadnought Sea Angling Club.

Many types of artificial eels have played a role in sea angling and it started with a rubber band. The very first came about by accident when a 'Gentleman angler' whose name has not come down through the mists of time, found himself out of bait. He solved the problem by employing the thick red rubber band that fastened his pocket book, an item a person of quality usually carried. Cutting the band in half he passed the hook through one end cast it out and its wiggling as it was drawn back to the rocks attracted a 3 lb Pollack, and history relates many more were caught in quick succession.

The discovery swiftly led to the first India rubber artificials emulating eels and marine worms. An early model was Captain Tom's Spinning Sandeel manufactured by Hearder & Son who were involved in the development of all manner of fishing tackle for commercial interest and the sporting fisherman from premises at 195 Union Street. Plymouth. The company enjoyed a patronage of numerous worthies including H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh and, as the company's advertising proclaimed, the leading nobility and gentry of the World.

Hearders did not have it all their own way. C.& R Brooks also Plymouth based described themselves as practical fishermen and manufacturers of the most advanced marine tackle in the World. The company had much success with their Brooks Double-twist spinning eel offered in grey and red at 4 shillings and 2 pence a dozen. They could be obtained by post at no extra charge or by calling at their tackle manufacturing premises at Stonehouse, then a town in its own right prior to its amalgamation with Plymouth.

Hearders went a step further by offering an illustrated Guide to Sea and River Fishing that included a comprehensive tackle catalogue – gratis. Now described as 'rare' by antiquarian booksellers, you need a deep pocket to obtain it. Quite recently a copy in good condition was sold for £200. Between the wars there was little development beyond the length of rubber tube slashed from midway down the body on the angle to create a tail and carrying a kinked hook attached to a small swivel – the classic rubber eel – crude but quite effective. The elbow of the hook and the swivel encouraged it to revolve when it was given movement.

Plymouth's connection with artificial eels took a step forward in the late 1940's when the first imitation of a sandeel made its appearance. Peter Distin, a very keen boat angler put his engineering abilities to creating initially for his own use an artificial that would be irresistible to Bass, a species he pursued with dedication. The process involved a small oven and an aluminium bar shaped mould and dipped coating using PVC paste, then a new material manufactured by ICI. Several time consuming and temperature critical stages were necessary to build up the body that was then coated with aluminium powder to give sheen and metallic powder of the desired colour, dipped into clear PVC. A final heating combined all the elements. Initially, his eel was made in 2 pieces then joined together, but this was soon

abandoned for a single unit and so the 'Westender Eel' made its debut. Peter did most of his Bass fishing at the west end of Plymouth Breakwater, so the name came naturally.

The big step forward in artificial eel manufacture was injection moulding. One of the first was the Mevagissey Eel, the creation of Alex Ingram who lived in the Cornish fishing village. As like Distin he began making them by hand using a home-produced mould. This led to the development of the Redgill destined to become one of the most famous artificials in sea angling. Pollack, Coalfish and a host of other national records were set by them.

The factory moulded eels were delivered to Alex in a crude state. Flashing (surplus material) had to be removed by hand and the eels were then sprayed in various colours with acrylic paint, but the red slash at the gill was done by hand with a small paint brush – time consuming. Barry Broadway and George Mitchell who set up as tackle manufacturers in Plymouth in the 1960's made successful eels by dip-coating then injection moulding. Dave Beer of Plymouth produced the Eddystone Eel that like other artificial eels set World and British records.

A devastatingly effective range under the Delta label were developed and manufactured in the city by Henry McConnell, a keen angler and talented engineer. He was the innovator of the very successful Scallywag. The block that produced it was a masterpiece of the engravers art and cost many thousands of pounds. Henry was a man who rarely seemed to count the cost, only considering the high class end product. His enthusiasm was boundless and a visit to his factory intended to be quick would often escalate into many hours during which you would be almost drowned in technical details.

Between the man with the pocket book elastic band, Captain Tom's spinning eel, The Westender, Redgill, Eddystone and the Delta Scallywag, a million or so tides waxed and waned. Many of them were fished with great success by legions of sea anglers who owed much to the pioneers of the distant past and those of more recent times who by their ingenuity made it all possible

The National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) was formed in 1904, and in its pre-war years organised a wide range of competitions that were well supported post-war. It relied heavily on club affiliation and its Specimen Fish Medal Competition for which gold, silver and bronze medals could be won. The heaviest of each species gained its captor a special certificate. Membership was considerable and believed to have topped 30,000.

In the early 1960's regional divisions were introduced, the South West's 'Wyvern' being the first. During 2009 following the requirements of Sport England on funding the NFSA became the Marine arm of the Angling Trust designated as the Governing Body of all Angling in Britain. It has not served sea angling well, being as was expected dominated by freshwater fishing interests resulting in affiliation of sea angling clubs and individual membership being low.

1970 saw the Cornish Federation of Sea Anglers leave the NFSA because of a voting issue and it went on to become a dominant independent force in Cornish sea angling, while the NFSA never had a great presence in the principality. Today the CFSA has around fifty affiliated clubs and is an organisation of standing and as yet has not seen the need to affiliate to the Angling Trust."

This is the point at which I take over. With in excess of 6,500 angling articles, 612 television appearance, and 9 honorary life memberships, Plymouth sea angler Mike Millman is without equal as the most prolific sea angling journalist of the twentieth century in Britain, probably Europe, and possibly even the entire World.

From a start date in 1963 through to present which is early 2018, Mike has been the public face and public servant of West Country sea angling since giving up a lucrative full time job in 1972 aged 40, followed by competitive fishing in 1973, to immerse himself fully into the journalism along with his secretary/office manager and wife Valerie, at a point in his life when he openly admits that his personal

fishing ambitions had finally been overtaken by his journalistic ambitions, which so many anglers over the years have been more that grateful for.



For over 40 years, it has not been an uncommon occurrence at the Millan household to have ‘crusty’ visitors drop in for breakfast, either on their way somewhere to fish, or more usually, on their way back with some huge ‘lump’ in the back of the car deserving of a photograph. Equally regular would be call outs at all hours of the day and night, which could be to anywhere along the coast from North Devon through to the eastern extremities of South Devon, with the whole of Cornwall sandwiched in between. Geographically, one of the most prolific big fish and record fish producing areas of the country, with Mike Millman central to the story throughout what history will record as the never to be repeated ‘golden era’ of the 1960’s and 1970’s.

Those 6,500+ articles speak for themselves, published across the entire sweep of British angling titles gracing the magazine racks, many of which were also translated into French, German, Dutch or Danish for publication there too. Amazingly, some even appeared in Mexico. In addition to this, there were also national newspapers and local columns.

As for the television appearances, in 1971 Mike found himself presenting a range of angling as well as environmental topics for BBC TV South West which ran for around 12 years. Let’s also not forget his work on the administrative side of the British Conger Club and Shark Angling Club of Great Britain. But it’s what he did for angling and anglers on the ground that he deserves the most credit for.

All those news photographs, all those angling features, even some of the television items, each had a story behind it tied into ordinary anglers fishing in extraordinary situations, many of which would never have made it into the public gaze had it not been for the discipline and work ethic of Mike and Valerie. Successful British record claims too. Many names have appeared in the British record fish list simply because Mike took control of the claim, which due to apathy or whatever other reason, may very well never have advanced beyond the talking stage.

Every person presenting an opportunity, particularly in terms of a photo-shoot, would receive a copy of that picture as a memento, and rightly so. According to Andy Warhol’s famous quote “Everyone will get their 15 minutes of fame”, which in most cases is only true when somebody like Mike Millman comes along and helps or even makes it happen.

The same goes for charter skippers. With so many top notch wreck and ground fishing opportunities on offer during the Millman era, backed up by so many good fish, for the men operating the boats, making and keeping their profile in the public eye was vitally important to maintain the momentum, and again, Mike and his camera were on hand from a promotional point of view.

The involvement so far has centred around opportunities of mutual benefit to Mike Millman’s business and those participating in it. What a lot of people fail to appreciate is the part he both has played, and continues to play, in ensuring the wheels keep turning in many of the organisations essential to sea anglers on the ground, by sacrificing his time and abilities.

Everyone wants these organisations to work and work well, but at the same time, everyone wants someone else to put themselves forward to do all the work. To fill positions such as secretary, treasurer and the like, and to keep these organisations and objectives on an even keel, you need willing volunteers, and in that regard, Mike Millman has shouldered way more that his fair share of the load.

Mike's first 'public office' was as fish recorder for Plymouth SAC in 1962. Along with Derek Hayles, he was also instrumental in setting up the Wyvern Division of the NFSA, which was the first division to be formed after the NFSA decided to have divisions. This was closely followed by the launch of the extremely successful Specimen Angling Group of Plymouth, which could only be joined by qualification with 3 different species of fish, each having achieved some pretty difficult qualifying weights.

This attracted many of the top anglers in Europe with Mike taking on the role of chairman for 10 years, a time period he has often said should be the maximum for anyone in public office in order to give new blood with new ideas a chance so as to keep things fresh – if you can get people to step up to the mark, which is the perennial problem.

For a variety of reasons, Mike and others eventually fell out with NFSA, which was nearing the end of its life span anyway. Quite a few prestigious names within the organisation were unhappy and unwilling to go along with proceedings, so collectively they formed the highly successful South West Federation of Sea Anglers, which in the best practical terms possible demonstrated to the NFSA where it continued going wrong, despite warnings of their imminent demise, which drew the often repeated response from large, lost, lumbering organisations, of burying their heads in the sand. Again, Mike Millman took on the role of chairman for 10 years, and while the South West Federation is still in existence, like so many angling organisations today, it is nowhere near as potent as it once was.

At a more practical level, Mike was 'head-hunted' for a number of years by Ken Morrith to act as a consultant for K. P. Morrith, the company responsible for the Intrepid line of fishing tackle, which after quite a period of resistance, he finally gave in to while seated next to Ken at a dinner. Out in the boat he was no slouch either. Ernie Passmore and John Trust who skippered 'Our Unity', despite their repeated success in providing big Conger, never managed to crack the 100 pound barrier, though they almost did when at the gaff and in full view of everyone onboard, a 3 figure Eel managed to slip Mike's hook on a day when, despite the initial disappointment, he still went on to win the British Conger Club championship in 1967.

FOOTNOTE: It's worth recording here that Mike Millman has bequeathed his very extensive collection of historically important photographs and documents to the International Game Fish Association for inclusion in their angling archive.

THE ANGLER'S MAIL

Following in the footsteps of Angling Times (first published in 1953) with its weekly mix of news and features from across the entire range of angling disciplines, Angler's Mail arrived on the magazine racks in 1964, initially printed on green newsprint by Echo Publications, which was a small publishing house in the West End of London. In that format it barely lasted a year. With its circulation having fallen to below 9,000, Echo Publications were ready to close things down, a fact brought to the notice of John Ingham in the autumn of 1965, who at the time was working on the sports desk of The People newspaper owned by Odham Press.

John said: "I spoke to the then editor of The People and suggested it would make a very useful addition because Echo were heavily into angling. He gave it his support and it was bought for £8,000 in January 1966. I recruited new staff for a relaunch on May 6. Unfortunately, the editor of The People went home after a long meeting about the relaunch and dropped dead, but it still went ahead."

John Ingham became founding editor of Anglers Mail in 1966, serving 20 years with the publication, and 40 years in total with Odham Press, which later became IPC Magazines (now IPC Media). Until he retired, not one single computer was allowed inside the IPC offices (then King's Reach Tower) because

ANGLER'S MAIL

VOLUME 1. No. 1

THURSDAY, 11 JUNE, 1964

PRICE SIXPENCE

MELOBAIT
The Supreme
GROUND BAIT

£6,000 B.A.A. BID BEATS ALL

THE B.A.A. continued its policy of purchasing the freehold fishing rights on as much of the Severn as they can when, at an auction in Shrewsbury recently they crushed all opposition with their final bid of £6,000.

The fishery under the hammer was the Underdale Hall Farm stretch, just downstream of the weir at Shrewsbury. The rights were formerly rented by the Severn Board, and include some normally productive salmon pools, although it is understood that only 18 fish have been caught there so far this season.

ASSURANCE

Many non-B.A.A. anglers will regret the passing of this first-class venue to the all-conquering midland association, but the outspoken Albert Harding, (who, as president, made the successful bid) was heard to give local anglers an assurance that a bailiff would be employed to ensure that the association's stringent rules regarding litter, loquacity, and the number of fish which may be retained, are rigidly enforced.

Shrewsbury corporation made a valiant effort to retain the water for local interests, and their final bid was capped by only £50. Also bidding strongly up to the £5,000 mark were the works' clubs of Rolls-Royce (Sennelager) and Rubery Owen.

The 1,200 yards of the fishery will hold at least 50 match pens, and will become available to B.A.A. members on January 1, 1965.

A slightly shorter stretch on the opposite bank was sold for £3,000 only six years ago, and many will feel that nearly £5 per yard is rather expensive, even on today's values for the Severn.

However, the continued improvement of the river (this

SIX POUNDER FROM CHEW

Six rainbow caught in thunderstorm

A WELSH angler fishing through a deluge of rain and gale force winds landed a six-pound rainbow trout from Bristol's Chew Valley Lake last Sunday.

The angler, Brian Gibbons, from Cardiff hooked his fish—two and a half pounds short of the British record—near a thick weed bed and during a powerful run the trout managed to get in, to the cover.

Steady strain on the line got the fish moving again and after a brief but hectic battle it was brought to the net. The rainbow was a female and full of spawn, most of which came away when the fish was gassed. On weighing it was found to be just over five and a half pounds.

Afterwards, Brian told our reporter: "I was prepared to go in up to my neck if need be to land this fish. I had already lost one fish in the same weed bed."

BLACK LURE

The rainbow took a black lure as did other big trout gassed by Brian Gibbons' three companions. The Chew Valley Lake has been giving outstandingly good sport this season with plenty of weighty fish being caught.

Local experts feel certain that before long Chew Valley will yield a record-breaking rainbow trout and from the specimens that have been landed so far, it could well be this season.

LOCAL TOPE

MR. B. F. WEATHERLEY is one of the lucky ones who is the only one of his angling friends in the Northwest.

PRIZE

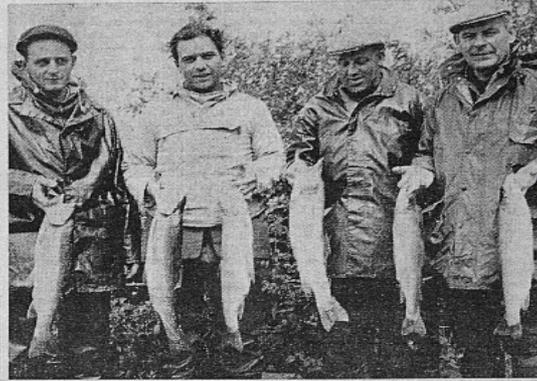
Each week ANGLER'S MAIL will present a prize for what is considered by us to be the fish of the week.

The first weekly winner is Brian Gibbons (see story left) who took another big rainbow trout from Chew Valley Reservoir on Sunday.

Full details of our weekly and monthly awards will be published next week.

1965 SURVEY

AFTER a meeting of the Wear and Tees River Board at Darlington, Co. Durham, it was disclosed that a biological survey of the River Wear would take place next year.



M. Thomas, B. Gibbons, R. Moore and H. James from Cardiff, braved the weather at Chew Valley last weekend.

Combined operations at Ham Lock

IN a combined operation to save many thousands of dying fish trapped between two sets of tide gates at the Ham Lock on the Thames, the London Anglers Association, the Pure Rivers Society and the Thames Angling Preservation Society have been working together for the past fortnight to net as many of the fish as possible.

The L.A.A. said this week that

ROKER PIER FISHING BANNED

ANGLERS in Sunderland, A Co. Durham, which has become one of the biggest sea angling towns in the country, have been forbidden the use of the Roker Pier and access

of the pier did not deter them. When a strict ban began to be enforced recently, many anglers thought it would be a "five-day wonder" but now they have realised that the authorities are adamant they feel very strongly

of the unions until Murdoch's revolution at Wapping. At this point Roy Westwood became editor in 1986, in whose tenure Angler's Mail became the UK's first all colour angling magazine, just in time for the start of the new coarse fishing season in June 1991.

BIG COD BRACE HELP WIN SANDGATE ALL DAY OPEN



As a measure of the way in which not only fishing for Cod, but fishing for big Cod took off during the mid to late-1960's, shore match angler and at that time budding England star Alan Yates took this brace weighing in at just short of 20 pounds and around 10 pounds, along with several other smaller fish, all taken in broad daylight during a Sandgate Angling Society all day competition from Princes Parade, at a time when you could still fish from the promenade, in the days before the beach reinforcements were put in place. Unfortunately, Alan couldn't recall either the exact year or the exact weights, though he says he would have been somewhere in the region of 20 years old at the time, showing he had 'it' from a very early age. Thankfully he still had this old black and white picture as a record of the event.

COD RECORD EQUALLED

Throughout the 1960's, the British Record Fish Committee had yet to separate sea angling records off into boat, shore, and mini-species categories. Split records were still more than a decade away (see Chapter 9), leaving the biggest example of each species, regardless of whether it was caught from the boat or the shore as the record, which for Cod up to 1964 had stood at 32 pounds for a fish caught by

Lowestoft tackle dealer Sam Hook in 1945 from his local pier. A record equalled with another amazing shore caught Cod of 32 pounds caught by Jimmy Trefler fishing from the beach at Dungeness in 1964.

TOPE IN THE WASH

An article by Harry Tallent in a 1964 highlights the now forgotten Tope fishing in and around the shallow sun warmed waters of The Wash, which was (and presumably still is), important as a breeding ground for the North Sea Tope population, with particular attention being paid to the north Norfolk side and adjacent villages which it was argued offered some of the best Tope fishing in Britain, with good catches taken from both the boats working close inshore, and from the shore itself, particularly the pier at Hunstanton, before a severe storm damaged the steps at the end used by Tope anglers to land their fish.

Commercial fisherman had often taken good Tope well within angling range, some going as big as 70 pounds, with names like Hemsby, Titchwell, Eccles, Cromer, and Brancaster regularly in the frame. But it wasn't the locals who discovered and were promoting any of this. Rather, it was locally based American airmen fishing while off duty during the 1950's that set that particular hare running, though it had been known about before the onset of WWII. In fact, USAF Sergeant Tom Thompson took top honours in the 1962 EFSA Tope Championship after a rather poor showing generally, with a fish of 44.7.0 taken off Hunstanton.

Fortunately, the following summer fished much better, with an un-named angler fishing from Cromer Pier taking fish of 34 and 40 pounds, bettered out in the boats by W. F. Wenlock of Wisbech, with a Tope of 55 pounds caught half a mile off Blakeney. So good was it that the Wash Tope Club was formed in 1960, and the Sportsman's Tope Club in 1962, with Dabs and Whiting the top baits during the early part of summer until the Mackerel arrived, switching to Herring towards the close of the season.



PW Comment: I do just about recall The Wash being regarded as a top Tope area. Unfortunately, within my angling life, that seems to have gone by the board. In my experience, little if anything has been written about it since, and that it would seem was the end of that. Except that it wasn't, as Bradwell further round and down in Essex became the countries big Tope hot spot, showing that North Sea Tope were not a thing of the past. Then in 2011, I was asked to drive to Brancaster Laithe to fish aboard 'Katie Louise' at the entrance to The Wash where Mike Ward (pictured) caught himself a magnificent 71-pound Tope.

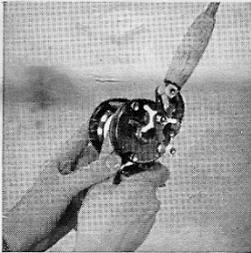
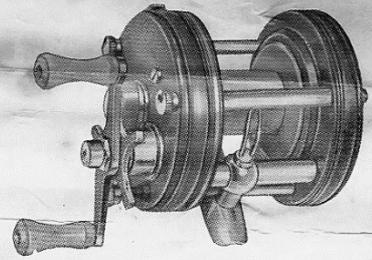
CENTRIFUGAL BRAKES

As with the inclusion for magnetic brakes (see Chapter 5), disentangling all the claims and counter claims regarding the invention and development of the centrifugal brake concept has been tough going. So let's start with a definition..... "A centrifugal system utilises the friction of brake blocks pressed inside of a brake ring. The brake force is proportional to the square of the spool speed. Therefore, when the spool speed is fast, brake force is much larger than when spin speed is slow.

ABU AMBASSADEUR

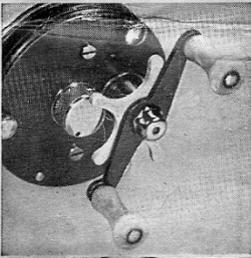
The first and only Reel in the world

with free running spool combined with level wind and centrifugal brake.



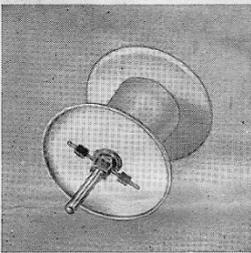
Free running spool — Quick to handle

The spool is conveniently disengaged by pressing a button on the head-plate. Hold your right thumb on the spool and press the button with your left thumb. The spool can be disengaged in whatever position the handle might be. When reeling in the spool is automatically engaged.



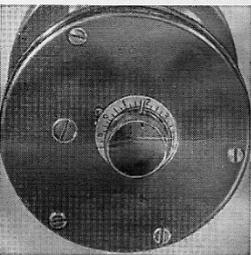
Smooth, powerful star drag and non-reversing crank

The handle is equipped with a smooth and uniform star drag, which conveniently can be adjusted for different resistance — screwing forwards for increasing. The star drag has also anti-reverse click.



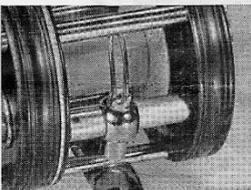
Patented centrifugal brake eliminates over-running

Built into the headplate is a patented centrifugal brake of Urfabriken's world-famous construction. This brake prevents rising of the line under the top-revolutions of the spool, thus eliminating backlashes.



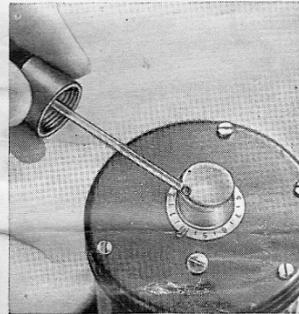
Mechanical brake with adjustable control-scale

The mechanical brake, which is wholly built into the left spool-cup, is equipped with a graduated scale, which makes it easy to adjust the reel for baits of different form and weight.



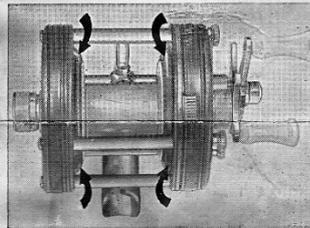
Incapsuled carriage-screw

The level wind system is pliable, elegant and beautifully streamlined. The carriage-screw is covered by a hard chrome plated tube, protecting it against dirt.



Outside oiling

The double-bushed handleshaft with the star drag, both spool cups, the carriage-screw with its bushings and the pawl can all easily be oiled from outside without loosening any screws or nuts.



Sideplates with lineguards

The spool holes in the sideplates have line-guard-edges, preventing the line from penetrating between spool flange and sideplate and being cut off.

Soundless cranking — automatic anti-reverse check

As soon as the fish strikes or runs the automatic check functions immediately, thus preventing backlashes.

Self-centring spool bushings

The spool bushings adjust themselves automatically, thus always assuring the Ambassadeur an extremely light and smooth function. The bushings can be changed without any

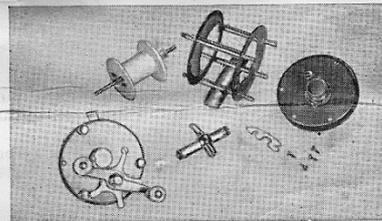
Nylon gears and bushings

The carriage-screw bushings, the handle shaft bushing and the transference-gear between spool and level wind system are all manufactured of the magic nylon material.

Corrosion proof for saltwater use

The exterior of the Ambassadeur is beautifully anodized in maroon. Interior parts are of stainless material.

Built in sections — easy to take apart



Centrifugal reels cast well even with slow casting speed. This is because of the basic exponential shape and ineffective brake range near speed zero. Even when cast harder the casting range doesn't change that because the exponential brake force at higher speed strongly regulates the initial speed", unquote.

I said previously at the time of discussing the magnetic braking system that I was surprised to find that it pre-dated the concept of a centrifugal brake. Looking to the patents once again for inspiration regarding who invented the centrifugal concept and when, it looks very much like ABU are in the driving seat. The earliest patent application I could find is US4390140A dated the 18th March 1980, citing Jarding U. Karlsson and Borje S. Moosberg as the inventors on behalf of ABU which, reads as follows....

“Conventional centrifugal brakes consist of brake weights which are carried on the line spool, in general only at one end of the line spool, and are shiftable, as a result of the centrifugal forces on rotation of the line spool, in a radial outward direction for braking against a circular, and normally cylindrical surface carried on the frame of the fishing reel. In a normal construction, the brake weights are guided on radial guide fingers or pins, but it is also known in the art to guide the brake weights in radial guide grooves.

One disadvantage is that the dimensions and weight of the brake weights, and thereby also their braking effect, are restricted because of the limited space between one end of the line spool and adjacent parts of the fishing reel, and that the brake weights, despite limited radial space, must have radial play between non-braking and braking position. It is also a very great disadvantage that the braking effect cannot be regulated but is determined by the centrifugal force which is dependent upon the speed of the line spool, and upon the weight of the brake weights, which is constant.

The primary object of the present invention is to obviate these disadvantages and, in particular, to realise a simple, functionally reliable centrifugal brake device whose braking effect may be adjusted. Moreover, a further object of the present invention is to realise a centrifugal brake device of the above described type which is particularly easily accessible for adjustment or service.

To this end, the centrifugal brake device according to the present invention is characterised in that the brake weights are in the form of double armed levers and are pivotally mounted in axial planes about pivot shafts which are located a distance from, and are at least substantially at right angles with respect to the axis of rotation of the line spool, and that the braking surface is axially adjustable in relation to the line spool and the brake weights by means of an adjustment apparatus for setting the braking effect on the centrifugal brake”.

The implication of the patent application is that it is a modification to an existing centrifugal braking system and intended to improve it. Cited in the quoted application is US2967676A dated 15th December 1955 by Klingberg Anders Ingemar which is also for a centrifugal brake which fits in well with both what I can find with regard to actual reel models fitted with brake blocks, and my own personal recollections, both of which seem to point the finger in the direction of ABU. In 1965, which predates US4390140A by 15 years, ABU were advertising centrifugal brakes throughout their Ambassadeur range with the later exception of the 8600 which was marketed as a trolling reel and therefore would not be used for casting.

I certainly remember all the advertising hoo-ha and numerous articles at the time telling us all how to get the best from the system. The blocks in my 7000's were removed immediately as I was using them for boat fishing and didn't need the added problem of trying to keep them in place while reassembling the reel after a strip down and service. Whether ABU are the deserved recipients of all the praise circulating around the concept is something I find myself unable to comment on further.

THE COKERS, COD & KENT

The intention here was to write an inclusion looking at the angling history of Varne Bank situated around 9 miles offshore between Dover and France. But when I got into researching the topic, I very quickly discovered that the names Varne Bank, Mick Coker, and the charter boat 'Royal Charlotte' were so closely inter-twined that it was impossible to write about one without including the other, and

so went straight to the man himself for the low down on the famous fishing hot spot, and his award-winning charter skippering career.

For the Cokers, it all began at Folkestone, with a more recent switch of emphasis to Dover. So, despite trying as much as possible to avoid the singling out of individual charter skippers for specific treatment on the basis that if you include one, then in fairness, you really have to include them all which would be an impossible task on a number of levels, Mick Coker and 'Royal Charlotte' more than merit specific mention here.

'The Cokers' are a 3 generational business started just after WWII by Jim Coker, Mick's father, who was a commercial fisherman taking out day trippers and Mackerel trips during the summer months from the beach at Dungeness. One day in 1967, out of the blue, Jim and Mick were asked if they would consider making their boats available for an angling competition offering a guaranteed wage, which is what really marks the start of things, and a progression by increments to a much bigger boat, which in turn meant a mooring in Folkestone harbour from where they had easy access to a variety of marks including the legendary Varne Bank and something like 300 wrecks. On the down side, they also had some pretty formidable tides to deal with, along with commercial competition, stretching right the way across to France.

The Varne Bank was my primary reason for getting in touch with Mick and Matt Coker. The historical exploits of 'Royal Charlotte' were deeply etched on my mind from years of reading press reports of fantastic catches, particularly of Cod, from a boat unfortunately fishing about as far away as it was possible to be from my Lancashire home.

More's the pity I never got to fish from it, and never got to visit the Varne – that 7 miles by a quarter of a mile patch of sand surrounded by stones and broken ground, which at its pinnacle reaches up to with maybe 12 feet of the surface, give or take a bit of variation between tides. An area which Mick



Coker describes as having been like an aquarium in years gone by, both in terms of the fish attracted to it, and the variety of invertebrate life clinging to virtually every stone responsible for attracting all those fish there in the first place.

Sadly, in the years since 'Royal Charlotte' has been fishing the mark, it has been dragged over by trawls so many times that it has been repeatedly destroyed, sometimes to the point where it was left almost completely barren. Then, like Lazarus, it suddenly returns

from the dead. Unfortunately in this case as a short lived resurrection until it attracts sufficient fish to warrant the nets being put across it yet again, after which it lies empty again for a while until the cycle repeats itself, particularly with the Cod, which are always amongst the first fish to return, and equally to attract commercial greed.

The main points I took away from my talk with Mick and Matt in terms of getting the fishing right was the strength of the tide and the colour of the water, which to some extent go hand in hand. Too much tide and Mick would have to take 'Royal Charlotte' elsewhere. Not that that's a problem, as years of scouting around with the thought processes of an angler means that there are dozens of other potentially productive areas of ground to go at, plus of course the wrecks, which between them were pretty much guaranteed to put some decent fish in the box.

Too much colour in the water doesn't make for good Cod prospects on and around The Varne, unless you are fishing with bait. For the lures and feathers, which were always the biggest producers, the water needs to be clear. And if the Cod weren't feeding on the bank in the glare of the day, then they could usually be relied upon to be there and feeding as daytime progressed into evening, which over the winter months happens much earlier in the evening than during the summer.

Despite reports and suggestions to the contrary, fishing out from Folkestone, and from 1996, out from Dover, wasn't all about drifting the Varne or catching Cod. For example, if they did venture over to the Varne and for whatever reason found it not to be fishing, during the late 60's and 70's, it wasn't that difficult under the right conditions to pull up 1,000 pounds of Cod from the rougher stuff scattered around the base of the bank.

What makes a charter skipper worth his money is his day to day knowledge of where to be and when. A time when everything was much more simple than today. But equally, a time when anglers could expect to catch far more fish in turns of numbers, species mix, and specimen weights, at which point in our conversation, Mick pondered what might have been had the parties of yesteryear had the tackle, techniques, and knowledge of today. Particularly braided lines to help them beat the often ferocious tide.

Here are a few of the many Coker accolades and achievements.....

Folkestone 5 hour port record Cod and Pollack haul of 4,462 pounds by Gravesend party 1981.

Cod haul of 3,152 pounds in May 1982.

Several earlier port record hauls.

Sea Angler Magazine Top Skipper Award.

Boat Angler Magazine Super Skipper Award.

In terms of persuading the fish to feed, both on the Varne and the rough surrounding it, lures and natural baits both had their place and their day. Speed of drift, ambient light, and water clarity were all factors affecting choices down at the business end. That said, unless they were targeting flat fish such as Plaice or Turbot, pirks, rubber eels and feathers could be devastating when the Cod were about in numbers and intent on feeding.

Mick however stressed the point that there are times when a mark can be stuffed with fish, yet try as they may, anglers won't get any joy out of them, because like people (most of us anyway) they aren't interested in feeding all of the time. They need to be hungry, and they need to have triggers, which will include availability of the right type of food, in some cases the right water clarity to see it, and as ever, the right amount of water movement courtesy of the tide to stimulate activity without making it too much of a battle to fish in the flow.

Both Mick and Matt, and presumably Jim Coker before them, talk about peaks and troughs. Not in the terrain, but in fish populations, and not always at the same time for all species. Decline in one species can mean an opportunity for others. And at the heart of all this has been the Kent Coasts close proximity to the fish hungry housewives of continental Europe, adding extra commercial pressure on an area already well 'blessed' with home grown commercial fishermen.

Fortunately, there were usually enough Cod about in the 1970's, 1980's, and early-1990's to allow fairly rapid re-stocking once the bank, a patch of rough, or a wreck had been picked clean, which is way more than can be said of today, when despite advances in boat electronics, fishing tackle, and angling ability, fish now have to be worked for, earned, and appreciated. It should also be noted that not all the good fish and best catches were taken over and around the Varne. That 5 hour port record of 4,462 pounds of mainly Cod with some Pollack, was taken fishing over a wreck.



To put things into some sort of perspective, speaking to a Dutch commercial fisherman who occasionally fishes the same wreck Mick took his record haul from, the man said it wasn't worth him wetting his nets for less than 100 kit (1,000 stone or 14,000 pounds) of fish. Taking a shot would be too much trouble without the onboard electronics saying it was worth it, which is both a good thing and a bad thing.

Good in the sense that from an angling perspective wrecks could still be home to a very good head of fish which the commercials wouldn't bother chasing. Bad because if they did shoot their nets they were really going to clean up. So to help redress the political balance, Mick occasionally takes parties to fish rough ground marks close in along the French Coast which can fish particularly well.

The other point to make about the fishing out from Folkestone and Dover in its heyday is that not only did they get the volume and numbers of fish, but also some hefty specimen weights. Catches would very often be mixed in terms of size range, but could regularly include plenty of good fat Cod in the 20 to 30 pound bracket, and sometimes more. The best Cod on the boat tipped the scales at 45 pounds. Now unfortunately, the vast majority don't get the opportunity to grow to any meaningful sort of size, so more thought needs to be put into rotation between marks and species, with Black Bream, Bass, and Turbot at times filling

in for Cod, as well as being first choice targets in their own right

THE MITCHELL-HEDGES WRASSE CONTROVERSY

Following on from investigative work done by Mike Millman and Donovan Kelley, it was discovered that rather than being lost at the British Sea Angers' Society HQ in the blitz of London during the 1940's as was previously thought, the case containing Mitchell-Hedges famous 'record' Ballan Wrasse quartet was in fact safe and well in the possession of the Vectis Boating and Fishing club on the Isle of Wight.

Donovan Kelley subsequently arranged a visit, and later, writing an account of that visit in Creel Magazine in 1964, Kelley went on to voice his scepticism regarding the reported weights, which in his opinion based on personally gathered empirical data leading to a weight estimation graph, appeared to have been somewhat overstated.

Furthermore, despite extensive research, Kelley was unable to find any reporting of the precise weights in the 'Fishing Gazette', which had only briefly reported the 1912 catch a year later in 1913. The 'Anglers News' however, did reference them in a 1913 summary of big fish catches for the previous year, though not at the sizes F. D. Holcombe would later claim in his book 'Modern Sea Angling' (Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd., 1921). The 'Anglers News' summary put them at 12.1.0 (a weight widely quoted thereafter, despite Holcombe's 12.12.0), 10.12.0, and two at 7.12.0, which is a far cry from Holcombe's recording of them.

A keen fishery scientist, Kelley decided he would undertake some additional research of his own to see where that might take things, eventually coming up with estimates based on his own experience, and that of other Ballan Wrasse enthusiasts, that typically 1 in 100 Ballan Wrasse caught would be 5-pounds, and that 1 in every 500 would exceed 6 pounds. In addition to this, post WWII, he had recorded

105 Ballan Wrasse in excess of 6 pounds from which those with length and girth measurements provided accurate data with which to produce a predictive weight estimation graph.

Kelley also had a data from a fish he had taken himself at 6 pounds 13 ounces with a length of 21½ inches and girth of 16¾ inches which is an inch shorter but more than an inch wider than Mitchell-Hedges fish of 10.12.0, with neither of the 12 pound plus fish fitting Kelley's graph based on actual measurements he himself had taken after 're-discovering' the famous case on the Isle of Wight. Just how inaccurate is a matter for conjecture, but evidence enough for the British Record Fish Committee to overturn Mitchell-Hedges claim during a purge of dubious inherited records in 1968.

Table of dimensions taken by Donovan Kelly from Mitchell-Hedges cased fish

WEIGHT (Imperial)	LENGTH (inches)	GIRTH (inches)
12.12.0	24.5	18
12.0.0	23	17
11.5.0	22.75	17
10.12.0	22.5	15.5

Based on these measurements, searches of historical archives including the reference library of the British Museum, plus lengthy correspondence with other people interested in wrasse, Kelley was in no doubt that the 11.8.0 and the 10.12.0 fish claimed by Mitchell-Hedges in fact weighed 7.12.0 and 6.8.0 respectively, concluding that the 2 larger fish would be nearer to 9.12.0 and 8.0.0. Still very big Ballan Wrasse, even by today's standards, with the largest of the 4 still well worthy of record status at the time, but not at either of the reported weights of 12.12.0 or 12.1.0.

Ironically, it would still have been the record today, though one of the Chapel Point lighthouse keepers back in the 1950's caught a Ballan Wrasse of 10.8.0, a claim for which was never even considered at the time as Mitchell-Hedges 'official' standing record was more than 2 pounds heavier.

Mitchell-Hedges was of the opinion that had he persevered fishing out from Looe, he might even have pushed the record up as far as 20 pounds. In support of Ballan Wrasse way bigger than anything anglers have ever caught, divers reckon to have seen specimens that would easily top 15 pounds and more. Then came the very severe winter of 1962/63 which saw off Ballan Wrasse and other susceptible in-shore species in their thousands, sending wrasse numbers in particular into rapid decline, removing at a stroke any chance of angler contact with that odd exceptional monster which might have out grown all the rest.

A few obviously, including some of the larger specimens, did manage to survive and re-seed the population we have today. But still anglers are waiting for that first genuine elusive double figure specimen to one day come along, if such a fish exists.

TREVOR HOUSBY

Physically, Trevor Housby was an imposing man, who liked to catch and to be seen to catch big fish. Also, the man credited by some as being the key early player on the Isle of Wight Shark fishing scene. Not so much in the discovery of it, but certainly in its development and placing of it on the sea angling stage.

TREVOR HOUSBY

THE RUBBY-DUBBY TRAIL

Shark Fishing in British Waters



For the most part this was fishing for Porbeagles to the east of the Island, either from the IOW itself, or from one of the mainland Hampshire ports such as Gosport. Also, for Thresher Sharks, deliberate or otherwise, which are more prolific in the waters to the east of the IOW than anywhere else around Britain, which as a result would from time to time pick up baits intended for Porbeagles.

It was possible to improve your chances of hooking up a Thresher as Ted Legge and Steve Mills showed (Chapters 9 and 10 respectively). But for most people, the Porbeagles were attraction enough, certainly in terms of consistency until they were fished out by the early 1980's, and Trevor most certainly had his part to play on the Hampshire-IOW shark angling scene, one day taking an unusual catch of what appeared to be a Porbeagle Shark with a liberal covering of large dark spots.

The press at the time was buzzing with suggestions of a new species to science, but nothing more so far as I am aware ever became of it, which doesn't surprise me, as I once caught a Tope that was similarly marked.

My earliest recollections of Trevor Housby are from the late 1960's on into the 1970's. A time when I was 'devouring' fishing magazines at any and every opportunity. I don't think the Porbeagle link had been completely forged by that time, which ties in nicely with a conversation I had with angling artist Keith Linsell who worked with many of anglings big names back then, including Trevor, who at that time lived in London and had a mutual friend in Victor Shearman on the tackle and guns counter at the famous department store Gamages at Holborn.

Many of anglings big names of the day were regulars there, including a young Trevor Housby, who at that time was still making his name. Trevor invited Victor Shearman to join a Carp syndicate he was in, and Victor in turn invited Keith Linsell, which is how the Housby-Linsell pairing came into being, with Keith going on to do a lot of illustrative work for Trevor (and many others, at a time when cameras, decent or otherwise, were not a crucial part of an angling journalists' equipment).

In some ways this helps set the scene, and certainly the early scene for Trevor Housby, who obviously came into sea angling from a coarse fishing background and retained his ability to work as an all-rounder throughout his angling life as I can testify myself to some extent, having taken him specifically fishing for Arctic Char at Coniston in the Lake District. A 'guiding' speciality I repeated on a number of occasions for the great and good of the angling World over the years.

Trevor stayed with me for a few days, after which a bouquet of flowers arrived for my wife for putting up with him, which I'm told was typical of his character in some respects. But not always, as I know he also had a temper on him too, particularly if things were not proceeding to plan. I've heard of angler run-in's on more than one occasion, with people who either had, or were perceived to be stealing his thunder, which I suppose is understandable to some extent when you are striving to make a full time living out of the fish you catch and publicity they can generate.

One particular 'ace' he had up his sleeve was marrying into a Portuguese family. This opened up opportunities that would perhaps have proved more difficult for most other people. In particular, the exploration of the Atlantic Islands of Madeira and the Azores which are governed by Portugal. From an angling perspective, some of the potential of these islands, and in particular the Azores, was known, but they had yet to be opened up to regular big game anglers which was something the Portuguese government were keen to do to boost the Islands' economies.

In particular the Marlin fishing, which was World Class back then, and still is pretty damn good even today. Not only in terms of numbers of fish, but sizes as well. A very credible destination for those wanting to catch themselves an elusive ‘grander’. As such, Trevor became the face of the Azores Marlin fishing scene around the mid-1980’s. But he didn’t have it all his own way. Marlin specialist Graeme Pullen was also exploring the potential with his own theories on how best to catch them, which paid off handsomely with the first Azores Marlin falling to one of his rods whilst fishing his lucrative ‘five spot’ lure trolling approach, which I know ruffled feathers in the Housby camp.

I came to know Trevor Housby quite well during the 1980’s through the fishing and his journalism. When Keith Philbin and I discovered the Christchurch Thin Lipped Mullet potential during the early part of the decade (see Chapter 10), and as Trevor lived nearby at Sway, he asked if he could tag along one morning when we quite literally ‘filled our boots’ with the things.

Trevor was in raptures, which surprised me to some extent him living so close by. Later, when I took charge of the features commissioning at Sea Fishing Magazine I had more regular dealings with him, and not always amicable, particularly as I wanted to take the magazine in a different direction to much of what had gone before and away from many of those who had done it, which to some extent probably wouldn’t have bothered him as much as it might other people, as by that stage by the mid-1980’s his attention was already split between fishing in home waters and the Azores, where following all the publicity he generated for the islands, boat prices rocketed beyond the pocket of the ordinary angler as rich Marlin enthusiasts from America and other parts of Europe competed for boat places.

Obviously, I’ve researched many strands looking for whatever I can find on Trevor to go with my own personal recollections. One particular snippet was a short profile for the New Encyclopaedia of Fishing written by Trevor in conjunction with John Bailey, Peter Gathercole and Dennis Moss, published by



Dorling Kindersley in 2002 just before Trevor’s death, which described him as a professional angler for over 30 years who had held records for Blue Marlin, Blue Shark, Whitetip Shark, White Marlin and Wahoo. A man with more than 40 fishing books to his credit across a very wide spectrum, as might be expected from an all rounder.

I don't claim to have read them all, but I've read a few, and for me the one which best sums up my memories of his contribution has to be *The Rubby Dubby Trail* published in 1972, exploring his early pioneering work on the British shark fishing scene. The cover of the book showing a small Thresher Shark with a flying gaff head lethally placed in it is in some ways unfortunate, while at the same time typical, both of the man, and of the times.

In my role as commissioning editor of *Sea Fishing Magazine* I had people voice their concerns about such photographs of huge dead fish not doing the image of sea angling any favours, with Trevor a regular named target for their concern. It's true, he did pose with a lot of large dead fish which would certainly have been better had they been put back, but in hindsight, didn't we all around that time.

All of that said, he was also concerned with what was happening to the Bass, long before Bass conservation became vogue, writing the first Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society newsletter in 1974.....

"Two years ago, commercial fishermen found it difficult to give Bass away, now increased fish prices and a sudden awareness of the Bass as a food fish, has led to a dramatic change in the general situation. In the London fish shops, Bass are retailing at 85p per pound. I know several highly efficient Cornish boatmen, who think nothing of taking eighty to one hundred Bass during a morning's trolling. Many of these fish are on or over the double figure mark, so the damage these men do to existing breeding stock is incalculable".

MASSIVE MONKFISH HAUL



A total of 1,356 pounds of fish comprising 37 Monkfish and 2 Tope was taken in just 3 hours by a 4-man party from England boat fishing out from Fenit in Co. Kerry in 1964. This well beat their previous years haul of just over 1,000 pounds aboard Michael Moriarty's Fenit based charter boat. All the fish were killed and landed for weighing as the old press cutting included here below clearly shows.

PW Comment: Why?? Is it any wonder that the Monkfish is on the critically endangered list, with suggestions and estimates that there are probably no more than a dozen Monkfish or Angel Sharks left around the whole island of Ireland?

BRUCE McMILLEN

Bruce McMillen is one of those angling names that is perhaps a bit 'niche market'. Unless you happened to be around in the 1960's and/or had an interest in catching Tope from the shore, then his name may well have slipped through under the radar. A man who accidentally caught his first Tope from the shore back in the 1920's, who then in 1928 made deliberately targeting them very successfully one of his angling passions.

He quotes his best ever day as being one shared with Jack Harrison while fishing a beach at the entrance to the Menai Strait. There the pair shared a Tope haul of 36 fish for a staggering 1,167 pounds, the accuracy of the quoted weight suggesting the fish were all killed and put on the scales, as in the included photograph here from *Sea Angler Magazine*, March 1976, which was pretty much par for the course

HITTING TOPE PACKS FROM THE SHORE

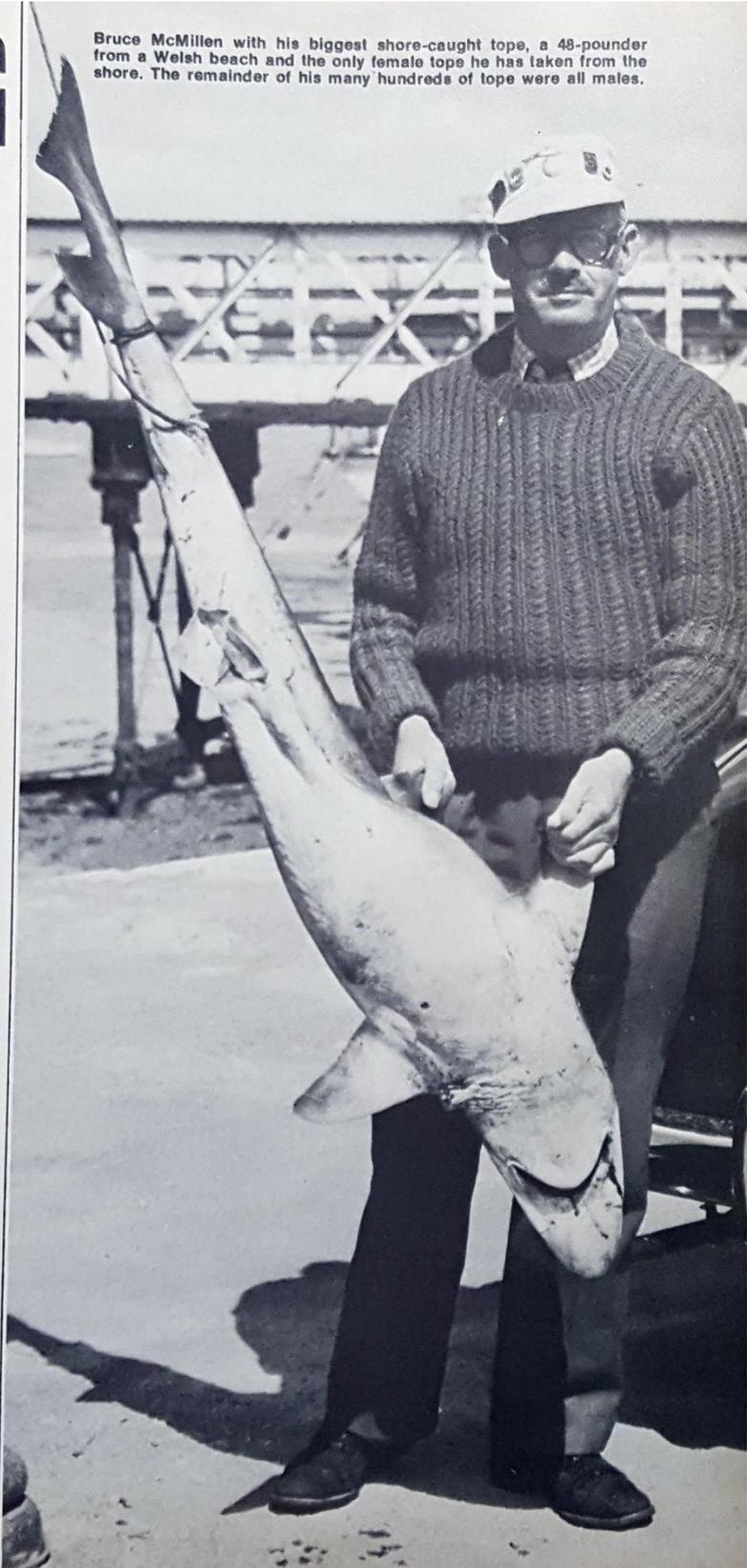
By Bruce McMillen

Bruce McMillen is recognised throughout the North Wales/Cheshire area as one of Britain's most competent shore anglers. Bruce was one of the few pioneers of shore-fishing for tope. He began in the early 1920s and, at 73 years of age, remains dedicated to big fish shore fishing.

Bruce numbers the tope he has caught from the shore in hundreds. He has never kept a tally but his biggest weighed 48 lb and he once shared an epic catch of 1,167 lb of tope made in three sessions.

No-one is more competent to discuss shore fishing for tope — although Bruce is equally able when after bass and flounders. His home is at Deganwy, North Wales.

Bruce McMillen with his biggest shore-caught tope, a 48-pounder from a Welsh beach and the only female tope he has taken from the shore. The remainder of his many hundreds of tope were all males.



right up to the 1980's, when the killing of Tope and other inedible fish species was something the majority of us routinely did, to our shame.

Catches like the ones McMillen and Harrison enjoyed are mind blowing by today's standards, but as Bruce has said, they could have been so much greater still, and done with more frequency in the early days, had it not been for the tackle they were forced to use. It wasn't until the 1940's that fibreglass

replaced wood as the rod building material of choice. Those early days reels were also generally a bit on the crude side too, though there were some reasonably good multipliers out there as well.

For some reason, most UK anglers at that time seemed to prefer centre pin reels, which up until the late 1930's would have been loaded with quite thick Cuttyhunk line tied to a length of Bowden brake wire to beat the Tope's teeth. But it worked, though doubtless, there would have been a few heart stopping moments along the way, such as the day Bruce had one shallow water Tope tear around 220 yards of line from the reel, repeatedly jumping clear of the water as it went. Something I've witnessed myself on occasions while fishing for Tope in shallow water from my own boat.

On calm warm evenings after a few days of settled weather, the Menai Tope would be in water as shallow as maybe 4 feet chasing bait fish, which they would continue to do just as vigorously, if not more so, after dark. That said, night fishing for them was something Bruce McMillen didn't like to do as it meant he would miss seeing them jumping clear of the water.

He would be casting to huge packs of Tope numbering maybe 50 fish at a time, which, when the fresh oily fish baits went in would often go into a feeding frenzy, hence the magnitude of some of Bruce McMillen's catches. These included Tope to 48 pounds, plus a Thornback Ray of 25½ pounds, the main bulk of which came from beaches at or adjacent to the southern entrance to the Menai Strait such as Fort Belan and Llandwyn, though they were not confined just to these. Other McMillen recommended shore Tope hot spots include Poole, Paignton, Chesil, The Solent, Point of Ayre, and Kirk Michael on the Isle of Man, plus a number of Irish beaches.

In a way, slightly contradicting my opening statement with regard to Bruce not being as well known as some of the other people on the scene at the time such as Clive Gammon, he was a regular contributor to Angling Magazine, and later to Sea Angler Magazine, not only writing about Tope, but also his other shore fishing passion which was Bass. As was said earlier, he was a Bass angler before becoming a Tope fanatic until that day back in the 1920's when a Tope picked up one of his Bass baits resulting in both of them becoming hooked, at which point he was on a mission.

It was in connection with Tope fishing that I actually got to meet the man. I was at the last 'proper' Tope Angling Club of Great Britain AGM before the organisation crumbled into oblivion. A meeting held at some fancy hotel in Colwyn Bay as I recall, with the great and good of the Tope fishing World all there, at which point I was introduced to Bruce by Dick Elliot where he was generous enough to chat with me for a quite a while, which is where some of the above information comes from. I think I was a bit star struck if I'm honest. It was the highlight of my evening, making my drive down from Lancashire feel more than worthwhile.

SUZUKI OUTBOARD MOTORS

As a company, Suzuki was originally a manufacturer of weaving looms for the silk industry at Hamamatsu in Japan, starting in 1909 (see Chapter 2). And while it diversified into motorcycles and other petrol engine vehicles after WWII where it honed its engineering skills and building itself a Worldwide reputation for excellence, it took until 1965 for the first Suzuki outboard motor to appear, in the form of D55, which was a small 5.5 hp unit. A popular engine which led the company to enter the export market and the development of a range of outboard engines. To further enhance their product range, in 1980 Suzuki engineers invented oil injection for their outboard engines, followed in 1994 by a range of four stroke units

PW Comment: Suzuki's engineering excellence has never been in doubt. I recall friends having Suzuki outboards in the 1970's and 80's. One of their big selling points at that time was cost, which was considerably less than that of their main competitors. I also recall how the paintwork, particularly on the

part of the leg that was in the water, would often become blistered and crumbling due to electrolysis, though this had no effect on their reliability, which was always very good.

I was running a two stroke Yamaha at the time, then got involved in a sponsorship deal for a Honda four stroke, both of which kept me away from having a Suzuki. But eventually they caught up with me, offering sponsorship to replace the Honda. I remember thinking long and hard before making the move, concerned as to whether they had sorted their bodywork problems out. I need not have worried. I ran their D90 for quite a few years, and have to say it was the best all round outboard engine by a clear mile that I have ever had.

VIC HAIGH'S ENDEAVOR GROUP, ABERYSTWYTH

The Endeavor Group, run by Vic Haigh out of Scooners Landing at Aberystwyth from 1965, was quite an unusual operation in that as well as providing concessionary angling space for its members and running traditional charters, it was also a registered charity involved in research work in and around Cardigan Bay.

Operating from three 36-foot wooden Scoresby Sportfishermen boats conveniently named 'Endeavor I, II and III', the group was engaged in some quite forward-thinking stuff for the times, including catching and tagging Tope. They also caught sharks, with a Mr. E. Knowles catching a 93 pound Blue Shark, and Vic Haigh himself setting a Welsh Porbeagle record at 130 pound in the early 1970's.

In contrast to the quality pioneering work Endeavor did, there were also a few 'less than ideal' activities which got the group a bit of bad press too. In particular, I'm told there was a spot of bother regarding Tope festivals in which dead Tope were brought in for weighing, as was the norm at the time, then later dumped a short distance off, after which their bodies would wash up on the local beaches, much to the disgust of holiday makers.

That wasn't the only Tope related problem. I'm sure I recall reading an item about Vic Haigh's earliest attempt at 'tagging' Tope, which was to cut a 'V' into the fish's nose before releasing it. But on the basis of being unable to find any reference to the written report I'm certain I read, I'm going to say allegedly V-marked the fish, which being hyper-

sensitive in terms of receptors in that area of the head, wouldn't do them a whole lot of good, hence the lack of reported recaptures.

A report on the Internet had Vic Haigh as being about to retire in 2001, having managed to weather whatever criticism had been bandied about, plus some financial problems along the way, and of course declining fish stocks, in particular for a number of the species responsible for putting central Cardigan Bay so prominently on the Welsh sea angling map.

NOTE: See also Aberystwyth Turbot Bonanza further on in this Chapter.

N. J. 'DIGGER' DERRINGTON

When I came to write up Digger Derrington's inclusion, I was reminded of Spike Milligan's book 'Adolf Hitler: My Part in his Downfall', which made me think of Digger Derrington, and my Part in his 'downfall' from the sea angling magazine scene. I had just been given the job of recruiting and commissioning features for Sea Fishing Magazine in the early-1980's and wanted it to reflect the thinking of the day by bringing in new blood with new ideas instead of simply more of the same. Digger had contacted the office and spoken with assistant editor Charmaine Swartz, herself Australian, offering his services, until I reminded her of the game plan of dispensing with the past.



Now, in hindsight, and with probably the same number of miles on my clock that Digger had back then, I see things differently. New ideas are important, but they need to be tempered by experience striking a balance between the two. So to Digger if he was still with us, which unfortunately I know he isn't, I would apologise unreservedly. With that burden now off my shoulders, let's take a look at Digger Derrington the sea angler in a little more detail.

As the nick name 'Digger' suggests, he was Australian. Personally, I had limited dealings with him, but I've spoken to quite a few people who both knew and fished with him. Hopefully then, I've managed to get a fairly accurate flavour of the man, who whilst serving in World War II in the far east was captured by the Japanese and imprisoned in the notorious Changi Camp with all the bad treatment and memories that must have involved, an episode which some say might help explain his sometimes volatile behaviour, particularly towards goods

imported from Japan, and to anyone who looked even remotely Japanese.

A man who didn't suffer fools gladly and wasn't prepared to take any crap from anyone, as evidenced by one story relayed to me of some non-angling passer-by one on a pier having a go at him over the barbarity of angling, then suddenly finding himself pinned to the pier rails by the throat.

My main recollection of Digger is as a shore angler, though like the rest of us, he also did some 'code-crossing' when the opportunity arose. Many of his articles were shore related and tended to be of an instructional nature, which considering the time period, was probably more ahead of the game than perhaps I gave him credit for, as descriptive articles painting the scene generally seemed to be vogue during the 1960's and 1970's.

I'm told he was an enigmatic man, who on the one hand could explode at the drop of a hat, and on the other be one of the most charming and helpful people you could ever wish to meet. The amount of people who recall Digger willingly taking time out to help them bares testament to this. Conversely, angling artist Keith Linsell recalled a different side to Digger, who on one occasion angrily challenged him to a distance casting match with best out of 3, then stormed off when he was beaten, and who on another occasion refused to speak to Keith for months following a comment made on a car journey in which he ordered Keith out of the car.

Digger came to Britain in the late 1950's, setting up home with his wife Pam at Ilford in Essex, from where he travelled extensively fishing all corners of the country, building up an extensive knowledge which he was only too willing to share via 'teach-ins' and 'fish-ins' in his column in Angling Magazine. On his home patch he fished equally extensively both with, and under the guidance of, John Metcalf, who would go on to produce the Metalite series of shore rods.

To complement this, Digger is also credited with boat fishing in the company of Ian Gillespie working on the early days development of what would become known as uptide fishing. Clearly then, a man with a wide ranging angling background which also included fishing for Bass and the conservation of Bass, leading him to become one of the founder members of the Bass Anglers Sportfish Society, better known by the appropriate acronym of BASS.

From my research, Digger seems not to be out of the same mould as other angling journalists of his day, apparently never having published an angling book. Informative instructional magazine articles seemingly were his thing, and despite my actions detailed in the opening paragraph, in the eyes of many, he was often very good at what he did, which now makes me feel even worse.

But he never stopped fishing which is good. On his retirement from British Telecom, I'm told he re-located to Drummore on Luce Bay. Then, as is so often the case in the latter years, the call of 'home' became too much to resist, tempting him to up-sticks one final time with a move back to Yeppoon in Queensland where he fished the mangrove swamps until his death in 2002.

Philip Hyde wrote the following obituary to Digger in BASS Magazine in 2002.....

"One of BASS founder members and early committee member N. J. (Digger) Derrington, died at his home in Yeppoon, near Rockhampton, Northern Queensland, Australia, in the last week of April.

During the war with the Japanese, he was imprisoned in Changi. He came to England in the late 'fifties, and started his sea angling at Walton-on-Naze under the guidance of the late John Metcalfe (later the builder of the Metalite series of fishing rods).



Along with Gillespie and the Clacton dinghy anglers, he was a pioneer of casting away from the boat, now known as uptiding or boatcasting.

He and his wife Pam lived at Ilford, Essex and travelled widely with a small caravan and a small dog called Frankie, fishing from the old man of Hoy down to Sennen cove.

On retirement from his job with B.T., he moved to one of his favourite places in the U.K., Drummore, on the west side of Luce Bay, the home of Scotland's record bass. But the call of his homeland was stronger, and a few years ago he moved 12,000 miles, back to Oz.

He was something of a technophobe, and today's orientated methods would have received some scathing comments from him. His legacy for sea anglers is that he was the originator, via the old Angling magazine, of the 'Teach-in' and 'Fish-in' that we still organise among ourselves today.

Thanks, Digger".

THE BIRTH OF SCOTTISH COMMON SKATE FISHING

Ullapool is said to be the first port in Scotland from which a Common Skate was taken on rod and line, with a 190 pound specimen taken from Loch Broom by Lithuanian angler Joe Kontramas, the first rod caught specimen that is until somebody comes up with evidence to suggest this is not to be the case.

Unfortunately, due to the localised distribution of these fish, along with their slow reproduction and growth rates, plus the early encounter angling boats bringing them ashore dead to weight and hopefully promote more custom from holiday visitors wanting to grapple with one of these 'monsters from the deep', the Common Skate fishing at Ullapool barely lasted to the end of the decade.

THE ICONIC MITCHELL 624

Time and again, simplicity has been shown to be key to sea angling success. Give a piece of kit as few moving parts as are necessary for its effective function, and invariably you are on to a winner. And so it was with the iconic Mitchell 624 reel, originally called the Mitchell Captain. The must have accessory



for offshore boat fishing, probably introduced during the 1960's, and still seen in regular use to this day.

A timeless piece of innovative design and engineering made essentially from robust saltwater proof plastic with protective edgings and a metal spool, with very few actual moving parts. Light weight burst proof spools were still some years in the future when the 624 first came off the production line, added to which, its star drag was perhaps not the best. Nor were the engineering tolerances of the spool and its fit into the side plates, necessitating the use of large diameter heavy line aimed and the pursuit of big fish its main purpose in life.

Very much then a reel of its time. Never the less, a reel with a fantastic track record across a whole wealth of big fish, the best known of which being Vic Evans 133 pound World all tackle record Conger.

LES MONCRIEFF



To those familiar with Les Moncrieff, he is perhaps remembered for a range of contributions. There is however one upon which everyone is agreed. Moncrieff was the first angler to demonstrate the link between increased casting distance and putting more and bigger fish on the beach, something he demonstrated regularly while fishing 'The Dustbin', alternatively known as 'The Boil', at Dungeness power station during the mid-1960's, hence my choice of time slot here, though obviously he contributed either side of that period as well.

A giant of a man physically, drawing this comment from an opponent at a casting demonstration "It's alright for you standing at over six feet....us shorter blokes don't stand a chance", at which point Les went down on his knees and still cast well in excess of 100 yards which became something of a trade mark party trick.

Moncrieff once described Dungeness as "That queer wild finger of shingle that points to France from the Kent Coast". An area where shingle is repeatedly heaped up by south westerly gales along its south west facing flank, and by gales from the east to north east along its east facing section, with the point being the prime spot with very deep water and powerful tides separating Rye Bay from Hythe Bay.

A spot where heavy seas churn out shellfish and worms from the sand further off which are eventually pushed in to the base of the shingle. A strong flood tide hits the west beach and gets deflected seaward. The force of the east tide pushes the flow towards the foreshore where it then turns back on itself to form a slow moving whirl pool. Any food washed out from the sand in rough conditions tends to congregate and circulate there.

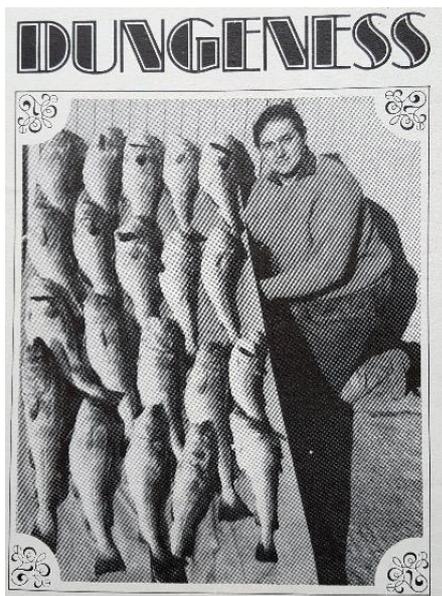
Other anglers reading and hearing about the fabulous catches made by Moncrieff and his young apprentice Alan Yates would obviously scramble to grab the prime mark in front of the power station, throwing their baits out eastwards towards the point. Not that it did many of them very much good. For unless you could put a bait out between 80 and 130 yards, which 99% of anglers at that time (and probably even now) couldn't manage, depending on the stage of the tide, they might just as well have been fishing

anywhere else along the shingle, where they might in fact have had an increased chance to bag up with other species of fish.

Unfortunately, the quality fishing as well as the quality fish dropped away dramatically during the 1970's compared to the previous decade due to commercial over fishing, plus lorries removing shingle from the point to form a protective barrier in front of the power station, with the top year for Cod there being 1961.

I've spent quite a bit of time chatting through the Dungeness-Moncrieff era with England International shore angler Alan Yates, who in his formative years spent a lot of time fishing and travelling around to casting demonstrations with 'Big Les'. Obviously, Cod, and plenty of them were what Dungeness was famous for. But Les and Alan also fished there for Bass, including during the colder months, trying to satisfy the big man's ambition to catch a Bass on Christmas Day, which despite his best efforts, was a feat he never managed to achieve, though he did catch plenty of Bass there at other times of the year, again thanks to his distance casting skills.

It's no mean feat casting a small pout or Mackerel strip the kinds of distances required to be in with a shout at Dungeness, and when successful, he would always put any Bass back weighing less than 8 pounds. Now unfortunately, that opportunity is lost due to the boils being covered over to prevent trawling with the knock-on effect of dispersing the bigger Bass that would gather there. Never mind putting all 'smaller' Bass of under 8 pounds back. Today you would struggle even to see an 8 pounder, and at many locations where Bass can still be caught, you would be hard pressed to catch 8 of the things in a season.



Despite the evidence from old black and white photographs, many of today's anglers don't appreciate the history behind Moncrieff and Dungeness. For those who could reach them, double figure Cod would feature regularly between the start of November and the end of January, and amazingly, Yates and Moncrieff would take 100 and more in excess of 10 pounds each a season, plus some big fish too. That's a measure of how well Dungeness could fish if you could cast far enough. The big question is, how far was far enough.

I've spoken to quite a few people who witnessed firsthand what Big Les could do, both on the beach and at demonstrations, with the general consensus being that casting with just a lead he was probably hitting 160 to 170 yards, and with bait, around 120 to 140 yards. Not huge distances by today's standards, though the bait casting is still impressive. But you have to factor in the tackle available then as compared to now. Nobody is suggesting that Les should go into the casting hall of fame for the distances

he achieved. But as I said earlier, he established the link between distance and more fish in the most practical way possible, and as such paved the way for the casting revolution that followed.

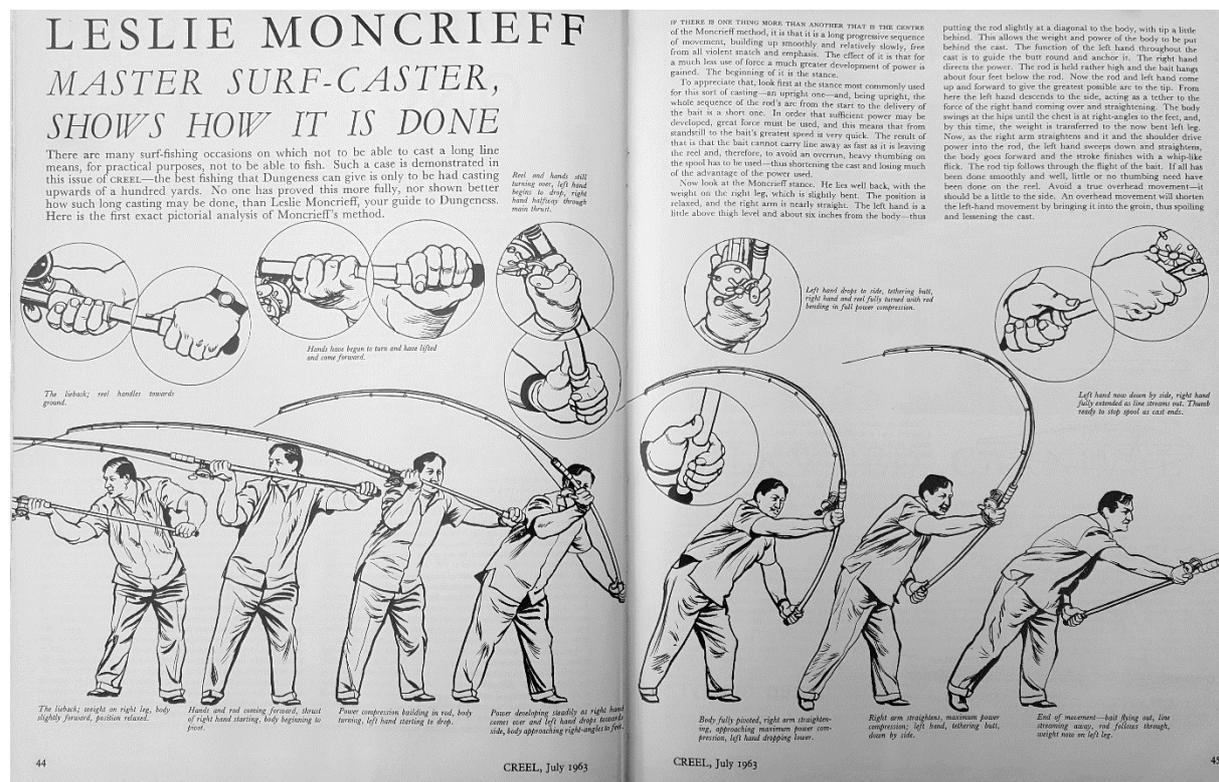
Moncrieff didn't only contribute down on the beach. He also boat fished, and as a trained engineer was involved in tackle development with the Moncrieff Rod Development Company (MRDC) and his association with Martin James Ltd., followed by development work for Hardy. It was while working with Martin James that he produced his famous 'Springheel' rod, and later working with Hardy, the 'Long-bow', which in the run up to the appearance of ABU Atlantic 484 towards the end of the 1960's swept all before them in terms of casting distances when used in conjunction with the casting styles Moncrieff also developed.

It was Peter Bagnall who designed the Atlantic 484 after an invitation by ABU to work with them based on his distance casting CV, all of which was achieved using one of Moncrieff's 'Springheel' rods. A double taper design, which as well as tapering from the top of the butt to the tip in the normal fashion, also tapered from the bottom end of the reel seat to the butt cap, a concept not carried through into modern rod building after Peter Bagnall first replaced his fibreglass butt with duralumin tubing to stiffen it for pendulum casting, quickly seeing Moncrieff's favoured lay-back style, which in truth probably suited Mr. Average better than the pendulum.

Although it was his favoured casting style, Moncrieff didn't only use the lay-back cast, which he popularised by being able to put across the technicalities of getting it right in what to the layman was a non technical way. Who better then to describe the technique than the man himself in an extract from his 'Leslie Moncrieff Column' published in Sea Angler Magazine.....

"A few years ago, anglers with the ability to cast 100 yards were rare, with the introduction of the graceful Lay-Back Style this happy state of affairs has altered considerably. Why are results using this method so superior to the Overhead Style, so widely practiced and accepted as correct?.

Casting a weight long distances requires the angler to execute with rod and body, a series of simple mechanical movements in a set order, the accuracy co-ordination and timing throughout dictating the distance achieved. Any violent action causes inevitable problems of line overrun on the reel.



If we consider field sports, this progressive accumulation of energy, is of prime importance. If you now apply the same principles to casting, a person employing the Overhead Style, with rod held parallel to the ground, and above shoulder height, is using an extremely short stunted action. The violence created within such a limited stroke gives no time to build maximum power progressively, thus causing line over-runs on the reel. In an effort to avoid this trouble the caster has two alternatives - to thumb the spool or reduce power compatible with smoothness. Both will have an adverse effect on distance.

Compare this method with the mechanically sound Lay-Back Style. The Rod is now held parallel to the ground at waist level, thus greatly increasing the arc through which it must pass. The caster lies back, away from the direction of the cast, with right leg bent and arm fully extended – further enlarging the

action, especially as the body follows through in the final stage. The time and movement taken to execute the cast is roughly doubled. This delay period can now be used to achieve power and impetus progressively, accelerating smoothly to the final punch.

So far, I have stressed the need to build power correctly. To interpret and apply requires an explanation. The main essential is to acquire a sensitive appreciation of the weight's behaviour throughout the entire cast, from Stage 1 to 5. The lead could weigh 4 oz and suspended stationary from the rod tip (Stage 1). As soon as the action commences and is progressed, so the rod comes under increased compression, reaching its maximum at (stage 4). At this juncture the lead is applying a compressive force many times in excess of its actual weight, and it is the ability of the caster to understand this power building to its maximum, that allows him to include a whip-like flick (Stage 4) at precisely the right moment".

JOHN SAIT

The photograph included here is of John Sait with a catch made off Holland Haven in 1966 of mostly double figure Cod, the best going 32 pounds, a catch which he says was not exceptional at that time.

For logistical reasons, I tend not to get involved with inclusions for charter boat skippers on the basis that there have been and still are so many of them, which if you include one and not another, suggests some sort of special treatment, which I am keen to avoid. That said, the exploits and catches of some of them were so exceptional that they have to be included, not only for historical reasons, but also to give a true flavour of the times and how these have changed over the years.



One such an inclusion is for Essex charter skipper John Sait, originally fishing aboard 'Endeavour' and later aboard 'Boy Carl', starting in 1970 when he would be booked up for 2 years in advance and for obvious reasons when you look at the photograph featured here, which is what drew me to investigate

further and eventually to this inclusion. Amazing. Both as a measure of the quality of the fishing available back then, and a measure of the angling ability of the man that made the catch.

I came across a question and answer session on the 'Talking Essex' website in which John was outlining amongst other things the quality of the fishing from the mid-1960's on through the 1970's, which like a lot of people, he freely acknowledges as being out of this World, particularly for Cod and Bass.

Also, the development of the best techniques for catching them, including uptide fishing, which despite him knowing Bob Cox and John Rawle very well, he says he first saw on his own boat around 1966. This was when he took out an Irishman named Leheame who would fish up at the bow with a couple of light rods casting away from the boat when the tide was running hard making drop down fishing difficult, where he would average 3 fish to John Sait's one.

John recalls not only the numbers of Cod, but their superb average sizes towards the end of the 1960's through into the 70's, which ties in well from reports elsewhere over the same period. He also notes the poor quality of the Cod fishing during the 1950's, again in line with other reports, particularly from Alan Yates who says it wasn't until after the big freeze of 1962 on into 1963 that Cod numbers and sizes took off due to reduced predation of Cod eggs in the unusually cold water following the freeze event, when such predation would normally be taking place (see inclusion earlier in this Chapter).

HALIBUT FISHING

Halibut are arguably the biggest and hardest pound for pound fighting fish found around the British Isles, and as such are extremely highly prized. Despite this, recent history records the catching of 2 small specimens of 14 and 15 pounds by Commander John Woolcombe off Noss Head near Wick in Caithness in 1966 as being the first time anglers had shown any real interest in the species, though it was thought at the time that other small Halibut had probably also been caught without any reference to where or by who, leaving angling journalists at the time not having much if anything further to add on the subject.

The fact of the matter is that Halibut had indeed been caught earlier – very much earlier, as reported by F. D. Holcombe in his book 'Modern Sea Angling' (third edition) published in 1932. It seems that Holcombe and his contemporaries knew quite a bit about the subject, much of which has been 'rediscovered' experimentally since in the deep tidal waters around Orkney, Shetland, and in the Pentland Firth, locations in fact recommended by Holcombe, despite the degree of difficulty experienced in getting there back then, especially during the early 1920's when the book was first published, and probably even more so prior to that date.

As far back as the turn of the century, Halibut were not only the fish many well financed pioneering sea anglers were attempting to catch, but were actually catching, despite Holcombe's warning in the book that "Halibut fishing is a sport in which the blanks are many and the prizes are but few". No change there then. Writing about the northern extremities of Scotland, he also notes the fact that there are terrible tides, and that very bad weather is frequent, pointing to grounds along the Irish Coast as being much more accessible, palatable, and productive.

Ballycotton and Valentia were the two main latter day Irish Halibut centres Holcombe had in mind, conceding that the productivity of the two venues, in Halibut terms at least, was almost certainly the result of the low number of British Sea anglers visiting and fishing the area. Collectively, the two ports had at that time provided more rod caught Halibut than the rest of the entire United Kingdom, citing just two reports of English Halibut taken off the Cornish coast, though he doesn't say if these were taken commercially or by rod and line.

Holcombe reports the first large Halibut taken from 'our waters' as being a fish of 95 pounds caught by Mr. S. Bullock out from Ballycotton in 1905 pictured here and in Chapter 2, and that since then, with the exception of the WWI period of 1914 to 1918, scarcely a year had gone by without a substantial addition to the rod caught Halibut list, with 1912 being particularly productive. Vague mention is also made of commercially caught fish tipping the scales at between 600 and 700 pounds. In fact, there are records of big Halibut from the Menai Strait; a 320 pound specimen from the Isle of Man; a 456 pounder landed commercially at Grimsby prior to WWII, and again at Grimsby, a 504 pound Halibut in 1957. Yet from the 1930's to Commander Woolcombe's 2 fish in 1966, it appears that little if any angling interest has been shown.

At the time that Holcombe was writing his book (originally released in 1921), the Halibut record was believed to be a fish of 135 pounds. He uses the term 'believed to be' because there was no formal national fish recording system in place at the time. It was often down to clubs and associations to record fish and circulate the results, leaving those interested in record keeping to search out their own statistics.



THE LATE MR. S. BULLOCK AND HALIBUT OF 95 LB. CAUGHT BY HIM AT BALLYCOTTON IN 1905: THE FIRST LARGE ONE TAKEN ON ROD AND LINE.

Formal national records only came into being in 1957. Prior to that time, record keeping had been very much a piecemeal affair. That said, Holcombe quotes 3 other rod caught specimens weighing in at 123, 120 and 102 pounds.

As with today, Holcombe states that it was rare for any angler ever to have caught 2 Halibut, but then goes on to mention one unnamed angler, by that stage having passed away, who some years earlier at Ballycotton had landed 2 Halibut and lost a third all in the same day. According to the same source, the most successful Halibut angler up to that time was said to be Mr E. Graham-Falcon,

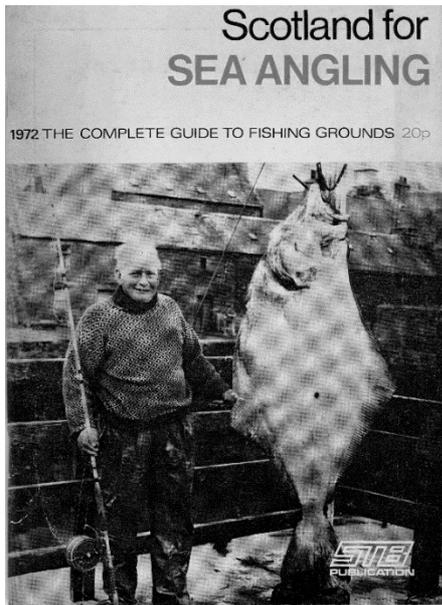
a member of the British Sea Anglers' Society, who had taken a total of 6 Halibut weighing in at 100, 93, 91, 77, 72 and 60 pounds from Ballycotton. He then goes on to say that the best Halibut terrain is where sand meets rock, though concedes that the Ballycotton fish all came from rocky ground.

With regard to tackle and tactics, obviously these were a far cry from what we have available today. His prediction was that 200 pounds was probably the maximum Halibut that most anglers could physically handle. Tackle would struggle with a fish that size too with rods still being made from woods, and centre pin reels loaded with Cuttyhunk line, though tactically speaking, the basic presentational concepts were pretty much the same. Bait was recommended as being a Pollack of around 1½ to 2 pounds. Two strong gaffs were recommended to hold and control the fish putting the first gaff into the head, as not only does this secure the strongest hold, but also allows the head to be held up preventing any last-minute power surges and possible escape.

Jump forward 3 decades, and we see Edward S. Walker writing in Creel magazine in 1963 bemoaning the fact that the Halibut does not appear in the British record fish list, despite specimens having been taken off Valentia in Ireland up to 152 pounds 12 ounces. What Walker unfortunately seemingly fails to grasp is that unless that fish was taken before 1921, which was the year of Irish partition, it would not have been eligible for British record status. More puzzling still is the fact that had a Halibut caught in Scottish waters been properly weighed and recorded prior to the 1950's, it could have been included in the record list when the National Anglers Council (NAC) took control of record keeping in 1957.

Clearly then, Commander John Woolcombe was not the first angler to catch a Halibut in British waters, for while Ballycotton and Valentia are now in the Irish Republic, back in 1905 when Bullock took his 95 pounder, partition from Britain was still some 16 years away. It is true however to say that Woolcombe was the catalyst for the sudden resurgence of interest about to be unleashed, given a massive extra boost by 'Bunt' Knight, the provost of Stromness in the Orkney Islands, who shortly afterwards landed the first of the large Scottish Halibut, with a fish of 161 pounds 12 ounces pictured here off Marwick Head in 1968. That was the fish that really grabbed the attention of would be Halibut anglers, both locally and nationwide

It was suggested by some anglers looking for predictability and patterns, that 'Bunt' Knight's fish had, like many others in that area, moved inshore early season to feed up on Lump-suckers which migrate inshore during the spring to mate and spawn. Whether or not there is any truth in that suggestion is open to debate, as Halibut were subsequently taken in pretty much every month from April through to November,



and maybe even beyond if the weather would abate long enough for interested parties to get afloat, as the Pentland Firth across to the southern waters of Orkney can be unforgiving and treacherous in the extreme.

Hot on the heels of 'Bunt' Knight's fish came a 160 pounder caught by Jim Raeburn, again from Orkney waters, as indeed were all the bigger fish around that time. The Caithness record taken just across the way was held by a Halibut of 60 pounds, with most of Scrabster's fish being closer to the 30 pound mark. That was until John Sinclair brought ashore a fish of 130 pounds, which was quickly followed by other 3 figure specimens. You could say that Jim Raeburn's fish had ignited the blue touch paper in terms of dedicated interest out from Scrabster, prompting renewed dedication, which is perhaps a lesson for the present.

It's fair to say, initially at least, that many of the Halibut either caught or hooked up and subsequently lost, were being encountered by anglers fishing for other species. Don't forget that this was a prime area for mixed catches including many specimens and records back then, a good example being the 1971 EFSA Championship which saw 11½ tons of fish, rightly or wrongly, brought in to the scales. Baited feathers, small bottom baits, and small lures were often responsible for Halibut encounters, not all of which turned out with an unhappy ending. And slowly but surely, patterns began to emerge, one of which was that the best chances appeared to come during April and May, which due to the weather didn't get as much visitor attention as August through to October, which as a result saw more Halibut caught. In short, a statistic that was skewed.

Instrumental in the deliberate pursuit of big Halibut was an angler named Jim Newman, who like many before and since, blanked on his first attempt. But he was no quitter, and on his second visit he caught 2 and lost 1, followed on his third attempt by a new British and European record of 197 pounds in April 1974. And it was Newman, along with other like minded die hard Halibut fanatics, who not only started to discover new marks, but also new tactics in terms of timing, baits, lures, and all the rest, to the point that Sea Angler magazine declared 1975 as being "The Year of the Halibut" after fish of 125, 135 and 140 pounds were caught, none of which came anywhere close to Scrabster charter skipper Jimmy McKay's 198 pound record taken the year before. Later in 1975, Steve Allen had a fish of 127 pounds and Ray James a 114 pounder, all of which were resoundingly out classed by John Hewitt's 210 pounder taken off Dunnett Head.

It's worth noting here that not all the action was taking place around Orkney or off Dunnett Head. Shetland's Viking Festival in the late summer of 1973 produced a Halibut of 148 pounds taken on a

static bait put out for Common Skate, a fish I actually witnessed going on to the scales. And whilst taking part in a competition at Orkney later that year, Shetlander Cavy Johnson, who was instrumental in organising the Viking Festival, became the first person in Britain to catch a Common Skate over 200 pounds and a Halibut over 100 pounds, when he picked up a 148 pound Halibut at Orkney while fishing on the bottom for what he described as 'anything'.

By this stage patterns were really starting to develop and be picked up on. For example, the stats suggested the Brims area and the mouth of Scapa Flow offered good opportunities during April and May, whereas later in the season, say August and September, Dunnet Head and Marwick Head would come into their own. Over at Shetland, April and May were good for Yell Sound, whilst August and September were good for Sumburgh Head and Mousa. Obviously, Halibut could also be caught in other places and at other times, but these were the establishing hot spots. And patterns were also being picked out in terms of tides, with slack water, and especially an ebb slack, frequently featuring.

As F. D. Holcombe had earlier suggested in his book, mixed ground close to the edge of hard ground was proving to be productive. And while Halibut will, and not infrequently do, pick up static baits both large and small, fishing on the drift as opposed to sitting at anchor definitely produces more big fish. Arguably this is due to ground coverage. But equally it could be that movement in the bait offering

MV VIKING QUEEN — SCRABSTER — 1976
All-in Angling Holiday with
JIMMY MACKAY
FISHING THE HALIBUT WATERS OF
THE PENTLAND FIRTH
FULL HOTEL ACCOMMODATION AND SIX DAYS FISHING FOR £70
(All-in)
Jimmy Mackay, 2 Miller Place, Scrabster, Calthness.
Tel: Thurso 2868.

greater stimulation. As for the baits themselves, Mackerel have always proved to be good, though pirks, both baited and un-baited, have also taken their share.

Let's also not forget what Holcombe said regarding serious doubts about the physical capability of the average angler to handle a Halibut much in excess of 200 pounds. Les Moncrieff, the man who forged the link between distance casting and big Cod catches at Dungeness made a similar point, and he was a giant of a man. Two prophetic statements by 2 people who obviously know what they were talking about. Obviously, 200 pounds is not to be taken as an absolute. It's a ball park figure, with the final record of the twentieth century (still in place today) turning out to be 234 pounds by Colin Booth in 1979, which isn't that far above 200 pounds, after which we hear little or nothing on the subject, until perhaps it all gets 'rediscovered' again.

FENIT PIER

Fenit Pier isn't a pier in the sense that most English piers are. It wasn't built from cast iron for Victorian folk to promenade up and down taking the air. It's a working concrete L-shaped structure forming a safe refuge for cargo ships and commercial fishing boats, named after the small isolated village of Fenit in Ireland's Co. Kerry, the name of which is derived from the Irish *An Fhianait*, which translates as

wild place, hence presumably the need for some sheltered protection. As the most westerly commercial port in Ireland, the pier's structure takes up most of Samphire Island located a half a mile or so from the shore, connected to the 'mainland' by a road bridge known locally as the viaduct.



It was built in 1880 to handle freight, for which reason it had a railway connection also using the viaduct, which closed in the 1970's. More recently, the European Union poured money into the village, helping finance a 130 berth marina inside the protection of the pier arm. In summary then, Fenit Pier is a large, concrete, working, structure, which in its day, has produced some of the most spectacular shore fishing probably anywhere in Europe, and to a much lesser extent, is still quite productive for Rays, Huss, and a selection of smaller species to this day.

My personal recollections of Fenit Pier date back to the early 1980's, though both the pier and the village had a fantastic angling reputation long before that date. I was fishing at Fenit on behalf of the Irish Tourist Board 'Bord Fáilte', doing a dinghy survey aboard my own 15 foot Seahog with Brian Douglas (see specific inclusion later in this Chapter). For us, the pier was a welcome piece of shelter while putting the boat in from the slip adjacent to it. It also provided us with some very good fishing. Most of it around the periphery in the boat, but some also in the evenings from the structure itself, where small Undulate and Small Eyed Rays could be taken after dark.

Having seen the Undulate Rays, and desperately wanting to catch one, we positioned the boat close in along the seaward side and had ourselves a couple. This was a time when Fenit from both the boat and the shore was awash with many species of ray, including Stingrays. Also, large skate, not all of which would have been 'Commons' had they been looked at more closely. We had White Skate to 140 pounds from shallow water not too far away from the pier. And to round things off, you could also expect Monkfish, Tope, Huss, and a variety of smaller stuff from the boat, with Bass, Mullet and a variety of flatfish from the concrete arm.

Over the years, I've read a number of reports of the fishing from the pier. When big ships are in, which isn't often, fishing from the end can be off limits. That doesn't matter. The viaduct itself fishes very well, as can a number of other points scattered on and around the huge structure. More than a few big Bass have been taken at various locations, including around the Customs Shed. The fact that there is a variety of substrates within casting range greatly adds to the potential, on top of which, due to its layout, you can always position yourself back to the wind to get some shelter when conditions along the Atlantic Coast of Ireland start to get lively.

The one big drawback has to be access for landing big fish down the steep walls, which can be overcome with a drop net for 'normal' sized species, but which would be of no value whatsoever if you hooked into a big Tope, Monkfish, or Skate. Not that that is likely to happen these days, as the Monkfish and Skate in particular have slipped into serious decline. So much so with the Monkfish, that Kevin Flannery, the director of the nearby Dingle Sea Life Centre, was of the opinion that since the turn of the century there are probably no more than a dozen Monkfish left around the whole island of Ireland. Yet when we dinghy fished there in the mid-1980's you could catch that many in a day.

One particular account of fishing the pier I remember reading was of a party of visiting English anglers looking to catch themselves some Bass. To an extent, the party was fairly open minded about what they caught, with some rather fancying their chances with the big skate. Not so Frank Avery, who scaled down deliberately to avoid them. So you can probably guess what's coming next. Fishing 19 pounds line loaded on to a tiny plastic-spoiled Penn Baymaster reel teamed up with a Les Moncrieff 'Springheel' rod, it took him a full 4½ hours to beat a skate which they weighed on the top at 106 pounds, which Ron Fouracres had to gaff and drag up with one hand as he negotiated a Jacobs ladder down the side of the wall.

The fact that Frank was fishing a 'Springheel' rod dates the event to possibly as early as the 1960's. A time when big fish were prolific in Tralee Bay. Also, a time when they were killed routinely just for the sake of weighing them, which was an endemic problem everywhere around the entire British Isles at the time, as demonstrated by the accompanying photograph taken on Fenit Pier. Then they wonder why there are no big fish left, and yet another remote community location with good visiting angler income potential needlessly suffers.

ANTHONY PEARSON

Anthony Pearson is not a name I was familiar with prior to starting this project, though with the CV he built up, and the circles he moved in, I have to ask myself the question "why not?". It was Mike Thrusell who first alerted me to Pearson while I was researching the incredible shore Tope fishing exploits of Bruce McMillen covered earlier in this Chapter. Anthony Pearson, it transpired, had also been a key player in all of that, along with the opening up of the Irish Bass beaches in the esteemed company of Des Brennan, Clive Gammon, and Brian Harris, earlier in this decade.

Pearson was a very good professional journalist, not only when it came to sea angling, but on the national news reporting scene too. Angling books were another string to his bow, including the classic 'Successful Shore Fishing', published by George Newnes Limited, in 1967. He also wrote a regular Saturday angling column in *The Guardian*, along with articles in *Creel Magazine*, and later *Angling Magazine*, in the main exploring his two pet topics of surf fishing for Cod and Bass at Holderness and around the coast of North Wales respectively. Then suddenly, towards the end of the 1970's, he 'disappears' off the face of the Earth.

I'm informed that he sadly died from a brain tumour after quite a prolonged spell in some sort of nursing home towards the end of the 1990's. It's at this point that I need to start choosing my words carefully. For he also published a book entitled 'Conspiracy of Silence' (1978) about a mistaken identity air and sea attack on the USS *Liberty* by the Israelis during the 1967 Arab/Israeli six day war, killing 34 crew members, wounding a further 171 others, and severely damaging the ship in International waters.

The Israelis quickly apologised for hitting what they claim was thought to be an Egyptian warship, and subsequently paid out \$3.32 million dollars in compensation to the families involved, with a final settlement of a further \$6 million dollars, plus 13 years interest, in 1980. It was later established that the identity of the vessel was clear for all to see when the fighter jets first attacked, a good hour before the

motor torpedo boats arrived on the scene, leading to all sorts of accusations, claims, and counter claims, which Pearson investigated, and clearly had his own views about.

At the time the book was released, Anthony Pearson was already struggling with his brain tumour. Whether that in any way clouded his judgement is a matter for conjecture. It's said however, that as a result of the book, and his ongoing health problems, he became convinced he was being targeted by Mossad, the Israeli National Intelligence Agency, and as a result he was constantly on the move between hotels, B&B's and the like, trying to keep a low profile, which may in part explain the 'sudden disappearance' mentioned earlier.

Having said all that, there are those who feel that 'Conspiracy of Silence' came as much from Pearson's imagination as it did from fact, with some of the events described as being wholly fictional. Conversely, there are also those who agree with him. A good time perhaps at which to throw in suggestions in some quarters that despite his angling writing being of a very high quality, his interpretation of fish weights and events was allegedly less so, commented on by people with first-hand experience of what was reported as fact in some of his books and articles.

THE BRITISH & WELSH SHORE COD RECORD

In 1966, Brandon Jones rocked the shore angling World by beating Sam Hooks British Cod record of 32 pounds taken from the shore at Lowestoft Pier in 1945. Both fish were caught long before the British Record Fish Committee agreed to list separate boat and shore records. On the very same day, Torquay tackle dealer and angling broadcaster Ted Tuckerman also beat Sam Hooks record with a Cod of 39.6.6 from a wreck mark out in Torbay. Another example of the old bus stop cliché, you wait for ages for one then suddenly two come along.

What follows is a tidied-up account copied from a thread on the World Sea Fishing site, dated 2009, and attributed to Brandon Jones himself.....

"I convinced my father to let me go fishing, and we ended up at a place called 'Toms Point' in Barry, Cardiff. The tackle that I was using seems prehistoric compared to today's hi-tech stuff. I was armed with an 8ft solid glass rod and an Intrepid surfcast reel filled with 28 pound mono (I still use it to-day!). The end rig was a simple sliding ledger and 4/0 hook with a sliver of herring.

It was a nice morning, and we started at about 6 o'clock. It was quite quiet, and there were a few anglers around the points. A couple of dogfish were being caught. At about 10.30 am I was thinking about packing up because my father wanted to get back to work. Suddenly, I noticed a small tremor on the tip of the rod. Upon grabbing the rod, I lifted it and everything went solid. Whatever was on the end started to move, slowly, but with a lot of power. Even though I didn't have much experience, I managed to turn the fish and gradually began to bring it to the surface. All I saw was this big swirl, which was frightening in itself. The fish dived twice more, and eventually came up to a sloping rock. I was extremely exhausted. An angler tried to gaff it, but couldn't lift it, and he only managed to lift it up with the help of another angler.

I couldn't see what I had caught for a moment, because there were anglers running from everywhere and crowding around. There was a lot of muttering, "oohing" and "aaahing". I don't think I had realised the true extent of my achievement, but, in the crowd, there was a gentleman who was the Secretary of the WFSA - Major Sid Luen - who said that it was possibly a new British record. My father and I immediately got our gear together and carried the cod to the boot of the car. We then drove down to the railway station, where there was a group of passengers waiting to board. They were all

stunned at this extraordinary sight. We weighed the fish on the scales at the railway station. The reading came back - 44 and a half pounds! This still didn't mean much to me though - the whole experience was still sinking in.

With the fish back in the car, we drove back home, calling in at the pub first to show off our catch! Once we got home, we carefully unloaded the fish into a wheelbarrow, pushing it through the front door. I shouted to my mam "I have sorted out dinner tonight", to which she replied "Poor thing"! The fish was kept cool in the pantry overnight.

The next day, I received hundreds of calls from angling magazines, journalists etc., all wanting to do an article. Over the next day or two, I made it into the local paper, News of the World and Angling Times. I was invited to the Angling Show at Earls Court, at which I was a guest. Unfortunately, I had to give a speech on the previous day's events!!

It became clear that I had smashed the record held by Sam Hook (appropriate name!) of Lowestoft by 12 and a half pounds! I was in various papers and books, and also the Guinness World Book of Records from 1967 to 1972, as after this date they changed the format of the book. It is 40 years next year I have held the record, and I feel like celebrating by organising a charity fishing competition of some sort. For those who want to know technical details of my fish, it was 3ft 7" long, 33" round the girth, 9" tail span, 14" across the shoulders. Inside the fish was 5 pounds of Cod roe."

RYOBI FISHING TACKLE



Ryobi Seisakusho Co., Ltd. was founded in 1943 as a manufacturer of die cast products. Ventures into a wide range of other areas such as power tools eventually followed, with fishing tackle manufacturing not getting underway until 1966. Yet despite this, and the company reportedly becoming one of the biggest fishing tackle manufacturers in Japan, there is very little out there in the way of reported history. I do however have some of my own experiences to draw on, as a friend of mine, Bruce Vaughan, was part of the Ryobi (and later Ryobi-Master-

line) management team based at Tewkesbury, which imported and marketed Ryobi fishing tackle here in the UK.

I can recall once visiting the premises, which to me looked like little more than a large warehouse. I was then given a guided tour by Bruce and 'introduced' to the Ryobi range at that time, which would probably have been around the early 1980's, thereby putting their estimated date of arrival here in the UK as around the late 1970's. Don't however take these dates as gospel. I also have a bit of hands on experience to call on, having used or field tested a quite number of their rods, which were probably best described as 'average' and targeting the mid to bottom half of the tackle market, and some of their reels, which I would best describe as 'interesting'. Particularly the T1 and T2, both of which I still have.

The T2, which is the larger of the pair, was aimed at shore casters and perhaps medium range boat fishing. Both models had an odd shaped flattened down body profile with low line capacity.

More interestingly, the T2 also had a magnetic brake, a thumb operated spool width lever for putting the reel out of gear, and an unusual multi-functional handle which automatically re-engaged the gears when cranked, then in conjunction with a drag shift button it operated the drag, turning it either up or down again by cranking the handle, all of which was a bit too complicated for my liking because you never really knew how much drag you had added or taken away. Least ways, that was how it felt to me, unlike a star or a lever where you have something to visually relate to.

NOTE: Ryobi as an independent manufacturer of fishing tackle ceased trading in 2000 when it was 'absorbed' into Johshuya Co. Ltd, the largest fishing tackle chain group in Japan.

THE IRISH WHITE SKATE RECORD

A White Skate of 165 pounds making it a new Irish record was taken by Jack Stack fishing out in Clew Bay in 1966. Note that some writers also refer to the White Skate as the Bottle Nosed Ray, which can be a little confusing, as both names are interchangeable for the same species of fish *Rostroraja alba*. Anglers tend to think of rays as being the smaller species and skates the larger species, but again, both terms are interchangeable, with White Skate able achieve enormous sizes.

One suggested reason for it also being called a ray is its 'nipple-like' nose. The snout of skates such as the Common Skate are almost a continuation of a line from the tips of the wings to the point of the snout. Rays on the other hand have a rounded snout profile with a small 'nipple' at the end of it. White Skate also have a slight rounding leading up to the snout, but in this case, with a very pronounced long bottle-like 'nipple', hence the alternative name Bottle Nosed Ray.

Quite a rare fish everywhere, including Irish waters, where from an angling perspective it is probably at its most abundant. We had them in my trailed boat at Fenit in Co. Kerry just to south of Clew Bay, and have heard of others taken at various points along this stretch of the Irish Coast, the most recent of which being a specimen of 175 pounds taken by Jonathan Gannon aboard Mary Gavin-Hughes boat 'Shamrock I' in 2015, again in Clew Bay, which was posted on FaceBook as a Common Skate.

From the photographic evidence with the report it was clearly a large White Skate. I immediately contacted Jonathan, and to cut a long story short, after much arguing as to the identification of the fish, the Irish Specimen Fish Committee eventually conceded, though they did not award it record status, probably on the grounds of its estimated weight and return to the water.

There is also a British record for the species for a much smaller fish of 76 pounds taken near The Needles off the Isle of Wight in 1970. Scotland and Wales have no record for the species

PRIZE PORLOCK PORBEAGLE

An unnamed angler fishing a competition out in Porlock Bay on the Bristol Channel reportedly brought in a surprise 55½ pound Porbeagle Shark in 1966.

THE NATIONAL ANGLERS COUNCIL

I'm informed that following on from the establishing of a formal British Record Fish List by the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) in 1957 (see Chapter 7), in 1966, it was decided to put the record fish committee onto a more formal footing, and at the same time, 'divorce' it from the day to

day operations of the NFSA by setting up the National Anglers Council (NAC), which amongst other things would be tasked with taking charge of the British (rod caught) Record Fish List.



The NAC was formed at an inaugural meeting in the Connaught Rooms in London on the 30th April 1966, chaired by Lord Antrim of the Fishmongers' Company, at the suggestion of the Minister for Sport, Denis Howell, and the Sports Council. A later press release described the NAC as the 'think tank' for the other main national angling organisations to act as a link between the government and anglers.

The NFSA, the NFA and the Trout and Salmon Association, together with the Fishmongers Company, were the organisations responsible for establishing the NAC, whose aim was to protect the interests, and especially the future of angling on every occasion, whether that be simply protecting existing fishing, or opening up more water to anglers. An early success was the NAC's finding through a national survey that in 1970, with 2,790,00 adherents, angling was Britain's biggest participant sport.

PURGE OF NATIONAL SEA ANGLING RECORDS

One of the early tasks, and certainly one of the most important taken on by the National Anglers Council (NAC), was to look again with greater scrutiny at dubious inclusions to the British record fish list they inherited from the NFSA. In that regard, from information I have been able to get my hands on by researching old sea angling magazines at Angling Heritage, and through my friendship with ex-Scottish fish recorder the late Dr. Dietrich Burkel, it seems that towards the end of the 1960's (probably 1968), a decision to dig a little more deeply into some of the older inherited records was initiated, based to a large extent on the reliability of fish identification viewed in conjunction with background biological information, which with the passage of time appear less relevant today than they were when the 'purge' was instigated.

A fact equally true of the freshwater scene. The records for the Barbel, Chub, Silver Bream, and most controversial of all, T. Morgan's 1945 Loch Lomond Pike of 47.11.0 were all swept aside. Evictions from the saltwater list are a little less clear due to the fact that angling press wasn't as scathing about the losses there as it was about the freshwater species, plus, requested access to the saltwater records for the period in question from the current British Record Fish Committee (BRFC) has not come about, despite my repeatedly requesting and reminding them.

What I can say is that the Thornback Ray *Raja clavata* was one casualty. This was a specimen taken by a Mr. Patterson off Rustington, which at 38 pounds was thought to be outside the potential maximum growth potential for the species, and was therefore deemed to be a case of mistaken identity. Thornback Rays are notorious in their ability to mimic colouration and patterning of other species. They do however also have features specific to them, which if checked properly, should show up any 'deceit'. You then have to ask what exactly did they think it might have been, which if you don't want to stretch the growth potential of most of the other ray species even more than that of the Thornback Ray, at 38 pounds leaves only the Blonde Ray *Raja brachyura*, which has very specific identifying features of its own.

In short, 38 pounds was thought to be beyond the growth potential of the Thornback Ray and the record was thrown open to claims, which a friend of mine, the late Frank Bee from Fleetwood, could have taken with a fish of 31.5.0, but was for some reason 'put-off' doing so, despite the fact that Bob Gledhill was also involved. Shortly afterwards, a second specimen local to me, this time weighing in at 31.7.0



was caught by J. Wright fishing in Liverpool Bay in 1981, again demonstrating that Thornback Rays can achieve weights in excess of 30 pounds, a record this time which was accepted, and which still stands at the time of writing, suggesting that maybe the eviction had perhaps been a little hasty.

Not in doubt was the eviction of the Mitchell-Hedges Ballan Wrasse of 12.12.0 caught off Looe in 1912 shown in the photograph with Mike Millman here. A fish taken in the company of 3 other monster Ballan's on the day weighing in at 12.0.0, 11.8.0 and 10.12.0, which were stuffed, cased, and presented to the

British Sea Anglers' Society, then thought lost when BSAS headquarters was bombed by the Germans during the blitz. Vindication for that eviction came in the 1960's, when research done by Donovan Kelly and Mike Millman eventually located the case which had not been destroyed after all, allowing them to clearly demonstrate using comparative measurements that the weights had indeed been exaggerated (see Chapters 3 and 8).

The committee was also correct in evicting the record for the Spotted Ray *Raja montagui*, which if my memory serves me well, stood at something like 16 pounds, a weight we now know to be far in excess of that which anyone could realistically expect to catch, be it on rod and line or commercially. Again, a mis-identified Blonde Ray was thought to be the culprit. Shortly afterwards, the Scots also evicted their Spotted Ray record in a purge of their own instigated by Dietrich Burkel in the early 1970's, a vacated slot I would eventually fill, with the knock-on effect of me also taking the vacated British and European records into the bargain. So no complaints there from me on that one.

PW Comment: On the basis of what I can ascertain, that pretty much takes care of the 1968 purge, but not the wider subject of remaining dubious records which clearly need to be looked at again more closely. For example, it has been known for some time that there are two species of Angler Fish in British waters, so which one holds the record?. Then we have the species referred to throughout this book as the Common Skate *Raja batis* now no longer exists having recently been shown to be two similar species. So again, which one holds the record? And I could go on. In fact, I do go on in much more detail, both in the appropriate Chapters for these inclusions, and at a forensic level in Chapter 12. So why aren't species such as the Angler Fish and Common Skate being purged from the list followed by invitations for new claims? A question I am still waiting for answers to.

THE SCOTTISH SHORE CONGER RECORD

At 45 pounds taken by P.G. Bell in 1966, the value of this inclusion comes not from its size, which in Conger terms isn't huge, but from the fact that it was taken from Scrabster Pier on Scotland's Pentland Firth, just a stone's throw from Dunnet Head, the most northerly point on the mainland of Britain. A good practical demonstration of just how widespread the species is with a distribution taking in the 4 corners of the land and not just a lone 'straggler'. Other good shore caught Conger were also taken from the same location weighing up to 35 pounds prior to this record.

BRIAN HARRIS

To purists and nostalgic anglers of a certain age, Brian Harris has a very special and well deserved place in angling history. As editor of the iconic Angling Magazine, he had a direct connection to many of the angling greats at a time when they were still forging that greatness. People such as Clive Gammon, Des Brennan, Les Moncrieff, and later John Darling, all sadly no longer with us, but all still very much alive in the wonderful books, articles, and trail blazing practical work each in his own separate way did for sea angling, particularly in the opening up of the fabulous Irish surf Bass beaches.

Brian Harris both recruited and fished extensively with all these people, plus of course, a wealth of other historically important names. Lucky man. A fact which puts him in the unique position of being able to talk with firsthand experience about the era and its anglers, many of whom would go on to have such a big and long lasting impact on what was to come.



The first time I ever spoke with Brian Harris was on a plane flying from Orkney to Wick. He was going on through to London. Unfortunately, I had to get off at Wick and make the rest of the journey by train because I didn't have the money to stay onboard to Manchester. It was a brief flight, and consequently an all too brief chat. But I found him to be amiable and interested in other people's points of view, particularly as the fishing hadn't gone that well for either of us due to a combination of

weather and tides.

At that stage, as editor of Angling Magazine, he was visiting Orkney to produce a feature. Some 50 years later in 2014, there we were chatting once again, this time with my voice recorder running, getting a fuller insight not only into his life, but the lives of some of the other angling greats along the way, which has helped me in so many different ways in completing this particular project.

In 1967, while working as a journalist for the Kent and Sussex Courier, one of Brian's tasks was to write a regular fishing column under the name of Tom Hook. Presumably based on that, he received a telephone call from Alf Botman, managing editor at City Magazines, which as part of its portfolio published the magazine title Angling covering all aspects of game, coarse and sea fishing.

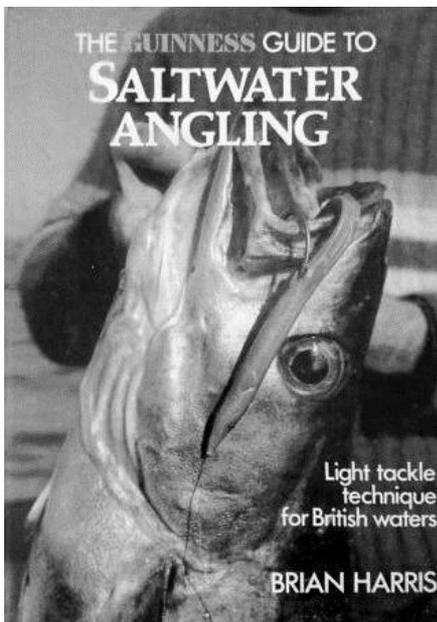
The editor at the time, Ken Mansfield, had decided to retire, and Brian was offered his job, which despite being in his late twenties with the 'low' level of experience that implies, he saw it as far too good an opportunity to pass up. Ken Mansfield agreed to stay on for a month showing him the ropes, after which he recalled making a few bits of mistakes including having his second edition ready late for which he received a bit of a hand slapping. Otherwise, nothing earth shattering, eventually guiding Angling Magazine to its long held iconic status.

City Magazines was an ambitious company with a strong desire to develop 'Angling Magazine' still further. So when that other iconic title, Creel, edited by the equally iconic Bernard Venables came on the market because it hadn't managed to get its editorial content and advertising in balance, City Magazines snapped it up. Another contributing factor was that Creel was the first fishing magazine in the UK to be printed with some very costly colour content.

I came to journalism a good 10 years after Brian Harris took the reins at Angling Magazine, and did all the photographic illustration accompanying my articles in black and white for quite some years myself. That's a measure of how forward looking Creel was, and how forward looking Angling Magazine was about to become by buying and merging the two publications together, keeping the same editorial staff and writers, plus the renowned angling artist Keith Linsell to fill in where the photography so often had glaring gaps.

Without saying so directly, it was clear from our conversation that Brian was very fussy with regard to who he commissioned his articles from. In his words, there were many big names out there at the time who in reality couldn't cut it. As such, the magazine went from strength to strength; it positively flourished. And Brian made a point of meeting, and where ever possible, fishing with all his contributors to check their competency, innovation, and credentials.

They certainly don't make editors like that anymore. In addition, there would be regular meetings to talk through and plan for future editions, such as making the sea angling content come across as more sporting. He also invited readers to invent a lead for surf fishing that could hold the baits in situ without relying simply on sheer weight so that the rest of the tackle could be scaled down accordingly, and could also be wound in easily. A task that would ultimately lead to the invention of the breakaway lead.



One solution offered by Denis Darkin was a bomb lead with a hole in the nose for a tube and fixed anchor wires which worked okay, but was difficult to wind in. Sounds similar to the nose wired grips we use for uptide fishing today. Next on the scene was Ian Gillespie and Nigel Forrest, whose initial idea of a breakaway lead with its wires held in position by elastic bands evolved into the full beaded breakaway's we see today (full story Chapter 9).

This proved to be a revelation in allowing sea angling to scale down massively in terms of tackle, enhancing the pleasure of bringing in small to medium sized fish, previously cancelled out by the size of the lead. So, while Ian Gillespie, Nigel Forrest and Norman Bickers are directly credited with the invention leading them to form Breakaway Tackle, Brian Harris and Angling Magazine also had a hand in things by encouraging people to try to solve the problem in the first place.

Recognising and encouraging innovation led Brian Harris to John Rawle and Bob Cox (full story Chapter 9), recruiting them to write about the early development of uptide fishing as it actually evolved, again getting out there fishing with them and fishing from both the boat and the shore. Brian recalled how much less PC things were back then in the 1960's and 70's in terms of keeping and posing with the massive bags of Cod taken all along the shoreline of Essex, Kent and Sussex.

On one tide they had so many Cod between 6 and 20 pounds plus at Denge that they quite literally couldn't carry them all back to the car, which contrasts poorly with today, when the same marks now produce virtually nothing. Similarly, while out boat fishing with Les Moncrieff, they would catch mountains of Cod to 40 pounds, along with Turbot on small live baits. Now with visiting EU trawlers and take everything EU migrants, the area is like a desert by comparison.

One question I like to ask everyone I interview is "What do you see as your contribution to the sea angling scene?" I know how I'd feel being put on the spot like that, so I have some sympathy for those I ask, though never enough to avoid asking the question altogether. In Brian Harris's case, had it not been for the multi-disciplinary nature of Angling Magazine, his meaningful association with the sea

may well have been negligible. As it is, the reverse is now true. But initially, and again in later life, the sea was not his calling.

After the usual early days playing at catching whatever small fish are locally available, his pre-magazine angling life was dedicated to reservoir fishing for trout at venues such as Rutland, Grafham, and Draycote, the latter being one of my favourite boat trout venues too. This later gravitated towards the big fish clear water stalking scene at places like Avington. Then suddenly, Dave Stewart got Brian interested in Salmon fishing on the River Test.

Dave Stewart, who I've also interviewed at length thanks to Brian putting in a word, taught him a great deal. Particularly with regard to fly fishing for Salmon all the way from Thurso at the top of Scotland, down through England and Wales and across into Ireland. Angling Magazine contributor Reg Righini added Sea Trout fishing in Lancashire and Cumbria to Brian's CV. But initially, as well as vocationally, the sea fishing would also hold at least some of his attention span.

Then along came the infamous Rupert Murdoch wanting to take apart and reassemble periodical publishing with his News of the World Group. A very unpleasant character by all accounts, who many editors at a whole variety of publications felt forced to turn their backs on. So Warner's took over the magazine, followed by David Kay who gave Brian free rein, by which stage specialist magazines were coming along splitting the loyalties of those who had previously bought multi-disciplinary titles such as Angling. Time then to call it a day and get back to the Salmon, trout and Sea Trout he confided.

ABERYSTWYTH TURBOT BONANZA



In 1967, while fishing an open rather uninteresting area of flat gravel, Aberystwyth charter boat skipper Vic Haigh (pictured here), had his first Cardigan Bay Turbot on the boat. Actually, it was his wife Barbara that did the reeling in, but you get the picture. Quite a rare catch locally, the importance of which nobody realised at the time until a few more started to show from the same area, prompting a more detailed investigation. How many there might be down there if fished for specifically was a question nobody was in any position to answer. Unfortunately, the way to catch these Turbot was equally effective with Thornback Rays, Bull Huss and Tope, of which there were a great many more knocking about.

Wanting to get some sort of definitive answer, Vic took the unprecedented step of attempting to 'thin out the other bait robbers'. In particular the Thornback Rays, which were around in the kinds of numbers anglers today might find hard to appreciate. One particular day a party of 4 from Trafford Park, Manchester, took away 188 rays weighing a total of 2,260 pounds, averaging around 12 pounds apiece.

A haul thought to be the biggest Thornback Ray catch ever made at the time, and killing them all didn't raise so much as an eye brow. Sea Angler Magazine who ran an article on the topic in December 1976 under the leadership of Peter Collins, thought nothing of reporting this, and in all likelihood, neither did the magazine's readers. It was a very different era with different standards applying, whereas today it would almost be a 'capital' offence

Whether it worked or not is difficult to say as natural fluctuations in fish populations aren't always easy to pick out. The fact that the Endeavour boats did start getting big enough numbers of Turbot to make sea anglers nationally sit up and take note suggests that something happened to tip the balance in favour of the Turbot getting a look in at the baits first. One reason suggested was the use of rubby dubby in the form of chopped up Mackerel pieces dropped to the bottom when the tide allowed. But surely the faster

predators would have got to the source first. And while they may have caught more Turbot as a result, the ratio of these compared to the rays, Huss, and Tope, probably wouldn't have altered much.

Whatever the change was, the Endeavour boats certainly began to catch Turbot with consistency, and to good size. In 1973 they recorded 120 Turbot. The following summer, this inexplicably dropped to 54, but then climbed right up to 153 in 1975, with the rest single day catch across the seasons coming in at 7 big flatties to 15½ pounds. Good Turbot fishing by any standards, which while it might not have been in terms of individual size compared to say the Skerries, Shambles, or Varne Banks, because this was a large open area not bothered with by commercial fishermen, there was much more of a chance of it continuing to on produce at the same level in the longer term.

PW Comment: With hindsight I can report that this didn't happen, and neither were the Thornback Rays an inexhaustible commodity. In 2011 I had a run out with long time Aberystwyth charter skipper Dave Taylor in the weeks leading up to his retirement. I was down there to record an audio interview with him looking at the fishing way back when through to modern times, in which he remarked that he hadn't seen a Thornback Ray there for quite a number of years.

MYSTERIOUS WITCH

To fully appreciate the story here, this inclusion requires a bit of context regarding the biology, feeding habits, and distribution, of this unique (certainly in angling terms) species of flatfish. In the British record list, the Witch *Glyptocephalus cynoglossus* appears in the shore category at a weight of 1.2.13 caught in 1967 by T. J. Barathy from the beach at Colwyn Bay, a shallow sandy area of the North Wales coast.

This contrasts sharply with its supposed offshore deep water life style, the species being said to prefer depths down of 800 fathoms, having a tiny mouth evolved for specialised feeding on small polychaete worms which are either sucked from their burrows, or nipped off part way down if they it can't be fully dislodged.

A very unlikely record to say the least, and one which in all probability will never be broken. Yet ironically, the British Record Fish Committee, bound by their ridiculous rigid archaic rules, in their 'wisdom' have felt obliged to set a 12 ounce minimum qualifying weight for the vacant boat record slot, when surely, a repeat at any size would be worthy of the record slot, particularly as anglers fishing well offshore rarely if ever use hooks small enough to even be in with a sniff.

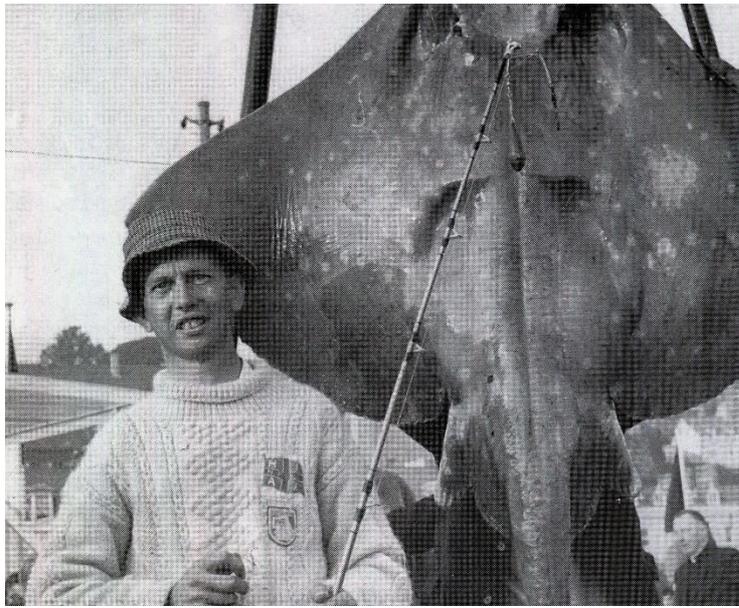
RON EDWARDS

Football players receive many accolades, but none more widely respected than that which they bestow upon one of the own, the players footballer of the year. And so it is with anglers. They too know who amongst us is the most consistently deserving, and from the many conversations I've had regarding exactly that, the one name which repeatedly crops up, probably more so than the rest combined, is Herne Bay tackle dealer and England International Ron Edwards.

Not only is he regarded by many as the best of his generation, but the best of any generation. A man with a finger in the many different organisational pies that keep sea angling going. But unfortunately, a man about which I personally know very little about. I knew the name, but never actually met the chap. So I'm taking my lead here from some of the many that knew and fished with him, and who feel all the better for having done so.

So prolific was he as a major competition winner, including when representing his country on International duty, that he could quite easily have been slotted into any one of the 3 decades covered by Chapters 8, 9 and 10, such was the extent of his ongoing success. A 'truly formidable competitor' is the way England International and top match angler Jim Pressley described him to me, having served his angling apprenticeship with the great man.

After much thought and listening to what others have had to say about Ron's legendary status on the boat match angling scene, I finally decided that the late 1960's would be the most appropriate time slot, as he won the 1967 European Sea Angling Festival at Cobh with a staggering 301 pounds including a



skate of 140 lbs which was weighed then returned to the water, in addition which he also won the 1969 Westport Festival fished against 200 anglers from 12 countries weighing in with 320 pounds, a competition he won 3 times in 5 years.

As well as being a top class angler and Herne Bay fishing tackle dealer, as I hinted earlier, Ron Edwards was also instrumental in the governance and general running of sea angling at all tiers of the sport. In particular, the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA), both at divisional and national level, before it was 'absorbed' along with so many other once famous and

influential angling organisations across the spectrum into the Angling Trust. I just wish I had more to say about the man. For despite his undoubted angling ability as recognised by so many of his peers, information regarding any aspect of his life is sparse to non-existent on the Internet, which is sad, and not a true reflection of the contribution he undoubtedly made.

DRENNAN FISHING TACKLE

Drennan International began life with the now MD of the company, Peter Drennan, producing a small range of balsa wood floats for coarse anglers working from his mother's garage in 1967. Coarse angling was his passion, and he was fortunate to rub shoulders with the likes of Dick Walker, Peter Stone, and Billy Lane, from whom he learned his trade. A quick learner with undoubted skills, both with the rod, and creating the tackle to be used with it, he stood at the helm of a company which grew steadily to the point where it had in excess of 350 employee's producing around 2,500 different products marketed through retail outlets all over Europe.

I probably first came into contact with Pete Drennan around the 1980's. I was given some samples of the monofilament line he was marketing for sea anglers, and was impressed to the point that I used nothing else for many years for my traces. But for some reason that escapes me now, I never put it on to any of my reels.

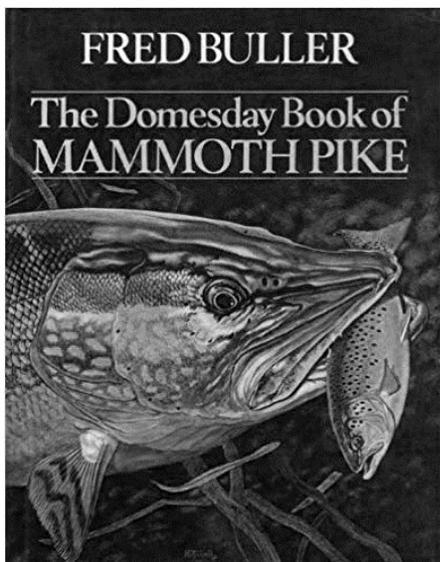
I also had a full set of Drennan boat rods, a couple of which I still have. No fancy whippings or eye-catching colours. A simple straight forward presentation given extra 'class' through the quality Fuji fittings used to complement what at the time looked like a rather long blank by comparison to the

competition, which for me was a plus for getting maximum enjoyment from average sized fish. However, all of that said, I think it's fair to say that Drennan International has retained its strong coarse fishing bias.

KEITH LINSELL

Keith Linsell: the 'human camera'. A man with a wonderful talent who was about on the scene, which unlike today with high resolution pocket cameras and mobile phones, saw few if any of the big name sea angling journalists bothering to carry a camera. Nor were they 'pushed' sufficiently hard enough by their editors to do so to suitably illustrate the written work they did.

Buying a Nikon SLR camera was what gave me an edge when I seriously got into journalism in the mid-1970's. Prior to that time, other than publishing text only which a lot of angling journalists did, there were only two options open. You either had a staff photographer tag along, which for a whole host of reasons was fraught with problems, or the magazine employed an angling artist, of which Keith Linsell was arguably the best.



Some of the angling greats like Clive Gammon could 'illustrate' an article perfectly well with just words. Others required the services of Keith, which was good news for me in researching what these people were actually like in real life. Over the years he was commissioned to work with quite a number of them and was happy to talk about those liaisons, chatting extensively on the subject.

It was through Trevor Housby that Keith Linsell got a foot on the angling illustration ladder. A friend of Keith's, Victor Shearman, worked on the fishing tackle counter at Gamages of Holborne during the 1960's and would sell to many of these people, one of whom was Trevor, who was himself just getting into the angling journalism at the time. Trevor invited Victor to join a Carp syndicate, and with his approval, Victor in turn invited Keith Linsell, which in time led to the pair collaborating.

Initially, the requests for artwork and illustration were sporadic. Not sufficient to make it a full time occupation. That all changed, when after doing work for Brian Harris at Angling Magazine, he was invited to do the artwork for both the Hamlyn Guide to Sea Fishes, and the Guinness book on Sea Angling, the latter written by Brian Harris in 1968. This gave him both the confidence and the resources to go fully freelance. And to do the work, he needed to meet the people he would be working for, and as importantly, hanging out with them, including plenty of fishing with the likes of Clive Gammon, Les Moncrieff, Digger Derrington, Ian Gillespie..... the list goes on. Nice work if you can get it.

Obviously, there was also some freshwater fishing illustration in the mix there too, which isn't really what this book is about. However, rubbing shoulders with the likes of Dick Walker and Fred Buller earns respect regardless of the angling genera. Indeed, it was a collaboration with Fred Buller that produced what for many is Keith Linsell's best ever and certainly best remembered piece of work, the wrap around jacket for the 'Doomsday Book of Mammoth Pike'.

INTREPID & K. P. MORRITT

There isn't a lot of historical information doing the rounds for either Intrepid or K. P. Morrith. Even the tackle collectors were complaining that they couldn't find anything, and that when they compared what bits they could rake up, it was often conflicting. What I can say is that we are talking of a British manufacturer here starting just after WWII, originally based at Cheam in Surrey catering for the coarse and game fishing market with die-cast fixed spool reels and fly reels, before moving to Falmouth in Cornwall in 1968 and widening their range to include sea gear. But it wasn't a clean one factory to the other type of move. Production was going on at both, until eventually, Falmouth took control of everything.



As this is primarily a sea angling book, then that's where the emphasis must lie. Not that there is a lot to tell. I think it's fair to say that Intrepid reels were at the bottom to mid point of the market, and not the type of stuff serious sea anglers would typically be interested in. That said, illustrating this inclusion is an advertisement taken from Sea Angler Magazine August 1975 issue for a new British record Ling taken on an Intrepid Buccaneer multiplier loaded with 30 pounds breaking strain Intrepid line. A Cornish company with a Cornish angler taking a national record in Cornish waters. It doesn't get more patriotic than that.

I'm told that Angling times used to give out an Intrepid multiplier as prize for the best fish of the week. That way at least, good numbers of them would get into circulation around the four corners of the land. I never actually owned one myself. Not even in my formative years. But I do remember seeing them occasionally in use on the boat, where their distinctive red bodied wide spool layout made them stand out, particularly the Sea Streak,

which from memory was the model most widely seen. Shore anglers also used them, though serious distance casting shore anglers probably gave them a bit of a wide berth.

Those shore anglers who did use the Sea Streak often referred to it as the 'Sea Squeak' on account of the noise it made during casting. So Intrepid decided they would give it a makeover and relaunched it around 1977, with Sea Angler Magazine putting one through its paces for review in October of that year.

Boasting a carbon fibre cage to eliminate the previous model's predisposition towards corrosion, it turned out to be 5 ounces lighter in weight. The review concluded that it was able to perform the casting much better. Criticism however was levelled at the wide spool design, which when you ask around boat and shore anglers, didn't exactly do a lot for either camp, with the review concluding that it was not destined to take the casting World by storm.

From what I can gather, Intrepid as a company ceased operations in 1979. Some reels were however made after that period, one being the Rimfly, which was badged up as being made by British Fly Reels (BFR), possibly for Leeda, which continued for several years until operations were finally wound up.

SUSSEX BLACK BREAM

It's funny how things without any tangible connection can sometimes grab your attention to the point where they become an obsession. I suppose it's like when you are young getting a crush on some girl you hardly know and have never spoken to. For me that's the Black Bream *Spondyliosoma cantharus*.

A fish I would read about in magazines like Creel and Angling during the 1960's being reliably caught in vast numbers on light tackle in the spring and early summer from marks such as the Kingmere Rocks and 'The Ledge' off the Sussex Coast. A subject so far removed from my grasp as a Lancashire school-boy that there was absolutely no possibility in my immediate future of ever getting down that way to fish for them myself.

This was the first time I had come across the use of freshwater tackle in the sea. Line class fishing hadn't really made its mark at that stage. Yet here were anglers using light spinning rods and fixed spool reels loaded with 6 pounds bs lines bagging up and having the time of their lives. And while it's true that fishing light will slow the catch rate down, Black Bream were so numerous back then that you could still be assured of plenty in the bag for eating. So much so, it wasn't long afterwards that I first started reading about catch restrictions imposed by some charter boat skippers as an early attempt at conserving local stocks.

In Chapter 12, I describe the Black Bream as being one of the success stories of recent times. A species which has spread, and continues to spread northwards away from its original south coast strongholds, where ironically it is now in trouble. Over the years, and across a wide range of species, anglers have been persuaded away from over cropping the fish they catch. If only the same was true of the commercial sector. But these are not the only threats to the bream over marks like the Kingmere Rocks, a topic I discussed at great length with campaigner, Black Bream fanatic, and Angling Trust volunteer Tim MacPherson.

The July 1974 issue of Sea Angler Magazine carried the following article written by Ian Beacham.

End of Bream Bashing?

BY IAN BEACHAM

A STORM brews on the skyline as Rob Whitehill of Sidlesham, Sussex, gets maximum enjoyment from a bream gives the chance to show its fighting ability on light tackle.

HELLO sailor! A 2½ lb black bream comes face to face with skipper Taff Roberts, a retired Royal Navy Lieutenant.

ROB WHITEHILL knows how to use lightweight tackle and small lures to good effect. This pair came from the Ledge, six miles off from Littlehampton.

FEW species have aroused as much public controversy in recent years as the black bream. Photographs of pseudo anglers ankle deep in dead bream after a trip out to the popular southern marks would immediately set the fires of protest burning.

Happily, slaughter has generally given way to sport in most areas where these game, dazzling fighters abound. Conservation of the stocks is now regarded of primary importance, even though the bream population in the more prolific waters of England in summer number countless millions.

One of the charter boat centres determined to keep the bream beaters at bay is Littlehampton in Sussex, quite often regarded as the first place to go for a louse with the Old wife... or *gibbon-dybboma contraria* to the Latin scholars.

Said Taff Roberts, the secretary of the newly-formed Littlehampton Professional Skippers: "A recent party were determined to keep all they caught. Apparently, they said the bream in London to the Cypriot colony at 50p for small ones and £1 for the bigger fish. They were making £20 a day each and it obviously was worth their while taking a day off work each week to come bream bashing."

"But what niggled me was that they kept breaking the underlined bream into no longer allowed on any of the LPI's boats. So they keep on changing the name of their club when they ring up to make a booking."

"We have been catching an awful lot of bream from the well-known marks such as the Kingmere rocks and the Ledge off Littlehampton but we only see anglers take away enough fish for their immediate needs."

Even though Taff insists on throwing all bream less than 1½ lb back, the ex-Navy Lieutenant can tell you for a fact that the bream shoals that come to breed over the bank of chalk off the Sussex coast for three months of the year are amazingly huge.

He's a trained diver and in the right weather, he dons his cylinders and goes down to the sea bed while the anglers on his boat 'Lady Jane' are fahing over the mark.

"The bream are nose to tail as far as you can see. They're not frightened by your presence because they get to be said Taff. They're constantly on the hunt for food as they hoop around the rocks."

"When the water's been clear, I've sat on the sea-bed, attached by a lead to the anchor rope when there's a strong tide running, and observed anglers' tackle. You can tell what kind of anglers some of them are. There won't be a fish in sight but the bait will be jerked sharply as an angler strikes into an imaginary fish."

"But once I saw a skink caught as I crouched down there and I watched the fight from underwater as the fish picked the bait up, was hooked and then fought all the way to the surface."

A bream's approach to the bait is well worth knowing. First it will just pull the piece of squid — or whatever the bait is — on the first run in; the hook will rarely go into its mouth. The second time he'll whip the bait — and that's the time to strike."

Like the other Littlehampton boatmen, Taff's bream catches this year have shown no decline on last year. He cannot speak for previous seasons as 1973 was his first year in operation as a charter skipper.

After retiring from the Navy after 23 years service, he wanted to combine his hobby of fishing with work. So with his grandy, he managed to buy the 26-foot six-eye stern trawler. Yet it was hard graft making a living, and, like many other skippers, has to spend the un-booked days trawling.

Last year, even with commercial catches aboard, his average wage was £28. Yet even when a day's trawling can bring in £70 compared to £20 with an angling party aboard, he still prefers to go hooking.

He was instrumental in forming the body of full-time licensed and insured skippers in Littlehampton, an extremely popular port with boat anglers from South London and the Home Counties.

The organization ensures that the anglers have a fair deal with either a six or eight hour fishing day — dependent on the times of crossing the notorious sand bar at the mouth of the Arun, second only to the Tawes as Britain's fastest ebbing river. They all charge £3 a head a day and anglers can certainly take home more than two fish.

The head of the angling party is given a questionnaire to complete in which they can express opinions on the service, facilities and enjoyment offered during a day's fishing on a particular boat. Skippers can also put forward their views on the parties they take out with recommendations such as "Should use lighter tackle next time."

It all adds up to an amicable relationship between the two sides and helps Littlehampton live up to its title of being one of the South's premier ports.

24 SEA ANGLER July, 1974

25 SEA ANGLER July, 1974

Despite their long, slow, agonising demise, the Kingmere Rocks remain the country's most iconic Black Bream mark, and as such, the area is deserving of special attention as this is one of the main spawning areas in the country. Habitat destruction is a major factor in this decline. Unfortunately, the main damage to the bream stocks is most likely done away from the Sussex Coast as the mature fish gather up for their spawning run, possibly in the south west approaches to the English Channel and around deep-

water wrecks. What attracts the Bream to areas like the Kingmere is the way the chalk crumbles, particularly around the edges, allowing breeding pairs to excavate nests with their tails, after which the male fish guard the eggs until they hatch.

Bream are interesting fish in that they all start life as females, changing sex to male when they reach 35 cms in length, with aggregations of smaller fish up to around a couple of pounds being the ones that tend to linger on once the main bulk of the years spawning is complete. This means that the bigger fish anglers seek, and are more likely to keep, are mature breeding fish, the maximum size of which has been observed to have to be progressively reducing dating back to the golden days of the 1960's, to a point where today big bream topping 3 pounds are exceedingly rare fish, whereas around the millennium, fish between 5 and 6 pounds could still be caught.

All those years ago I dreamt of nothing better than a trip down to Sussex, where I would board a boat and fulfil my ambition of spending a day on the Black Bream. Over the years I have had my fair share of bream from places like Aberystwyth, Pwllheli and Caernarfon. I've even heard of the odd one or two being caught by anglers out from Fleetwood on my local patch, having steamed over to the southern tip of Walney Island in Cumbria to fish the bouldery ground there. But I never gave up hope of catching a Sussex Black Bream, something I eventually managed to do with Graeme Pullen aboard his dinghy out from Chichester fishing a mark close in off Bracklesham.

KEVIN LINNANE TROLLING FOR PORBEAGLE SHARKS

This inclusion and the story behind it, is down to three men – Jack Shine, Kevin Linnane, and Clive Gammon. Earlier in this decade Jack Shine had stunned the angling World, and shore angling in particular, by catching somewhere in the region of 40 Porbeagle Sharks from the shore on Ireland's Atlantic Coast.

In his role with the Inland Fisheries Trust and later the Central Fisheries Board, Kevin Linnane's job description included investigating wherever possible events such as these, which when fishing with Jack Shine obviously would be the ultimate example of mixing work and pleasure. But it went further than that. Realising just how close to shore some of these sharks were prepared to hunt, and their willingness to pursue and steal fish from anglers' hooks, which was what had prompted Jack Shine to fish for them in the first place, in the late-1960's (thought to be 1968), Kevin had the idea that it should be possible to catch Porbeagle Sharks close in to shore on trolled baits.

Having an idea is one thing. Seeing it through to successful fruition is very often another. Undeterred, Kevin continued experimenting with methods of trolling dead baits in a way that would look natural to either a fish stealing Porbeagle, or to one hunting free-swimming prey. Presumably, and I'm surmising to some extent here based on conversations with people who have trolled dead baits for sharks, he would have been moving at a speed of between 3 and 4 knots, with the baits in around the top 15 feet of water, very likely, though not necessarily, using a flapper bait with a small bullet lead wired into the notch just under its chin to orientate it into a natural 'upright' position.

This he would then troll fairly close into the shore though still in deep water under the Cliffs of Moher close to his home town of Lahinch in Co. Clare. A very forward thinking sea angler who also predicted that anglers would one day target and catch Blue Fin Tuna along Ireland's west coast, which in the late-1990's they did, and after a brief rather fish less lull, are doing so again as I write.

Though I fished with Kevin and chatted about these topics briefly with him in the mid-1980's, not for one moment did I envisage ever writing a history project such as this. It was just idle chit-chat, small-talk, but could have been so much more. Another missed opportunity. For that reason, amongst others,

information unfortunately is somewhat limited. Exhaustive searches on YouTube and across the Internet have added little either.

Eventually, obviously, the correct trolling technique was found and mastered, because Kevin's trolling exploits were ultimately rewarded, not only in the early exploratory days, but also fishing in the company of Clive Gammon, with the pair of them trolling successfully on camera for the film 'Porgie and Blue', shot on 8 mm film in the days before video, with some underwater footage in there too.

GREYS FISHING TACKLE COMPANY

Founded as Greys of Alnwick by Malcolm Grey, the company quickly established its rod building credentials (and other tackle items), particularly in the World of game and coarse fishing, building a strong reputation for high performance mid-market fly rods.

If I'm honest, I think it would be fair to say that the sea angling market, if not an afterthought, is secondary to the other markets the company prefers to identify itself with. As such, its product range is limited to a very small handful of surf rods. That said, these come with quite a healthy reputation. All of which is now academic, as the company was taken over by Hardy's in 1999.

PETER BAGNALL & THE ABU ATLANTIC 484

With my evolutionary scientist head on, a useful way of looking at the development of distance casting is that of a slow progression of techniques and tackle improvements, each of which has contributed something to what is a long, continuous, evolving process of small steps, along with some evolutionary blind alleys and the occasional larger leap forward along the way. That said, as with Darwin's application of the process to the living World, every so often something comes along which shakes things up in such a way that a very much bigger step than usual catapults things forward, and on the casting scene, that evolutionary giant step was Morecambe fishing tackle dealer Peter Bagnall.

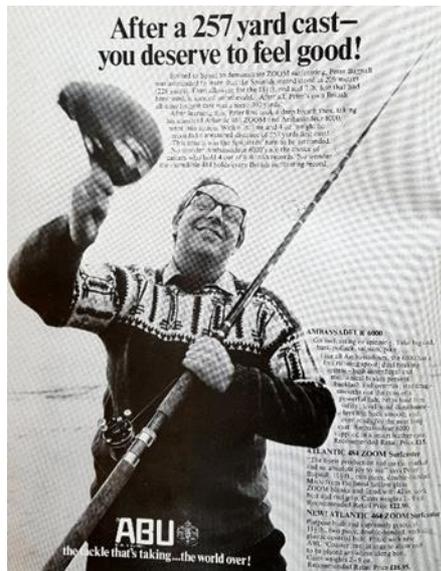
In 2017 I drove over to Heysham in Lancashire, where Peter, now around 80 years old lives with his wife Rosalind, to record a full and frank audio interview with him regarding his life, his casting, and of course, how he saw his own contribution, particularly with regard to pendulum casting and the development of the iconic ABU Atlantic 484 rod. And as is my usual way, not wanting to put people on the back foot or have them thinking of things they wish they'd said long after I've switched the recorder off, I carefully prepared a list of questions for advance disclosure, which in light of his fading memory, Peter decided he would write some carefully crafted responses to in order that the interview went as planned.

We actually sat chatting for half an hour or so before the interview proper got underway. Thankfully, I had the foresight to turn the recorder on at the onset, allowing me to catch him in a much more relaxed reflective mood than when we came to the formal questions and his 'script', a copy of which I also came away with. So rather than re-visit the interview and try to paraphrase the important comments as I see them, I'm going to use selected extracts from Peter's prepared notes to tell the full story of the man himself, the ABU Atlantic 484, the 'Zoom' cast, and how not only the casting World, but also the fishing World took several very big steps forward all those years ago.....

"I started when I was 8 years old with my father's old boat rod, a 6 foot 2 piece made from an Ash stave with sliding reel fittings. A 4" wood centrepin Nottingham type reel, hemp line, nylon snoods for the hooks, and lead weights cast in match boxes. Then, when I was about 13 years old, I worked weekends

at one of the local fishing tackle/photography shops serving customers on a Saturday all day and Sunday mornings.

I was there when a Milbro Fishing Tackle order came in which contained 2 of the 'new' 'unbreakable' solid glass sea fishing rods. There were two models, a 9 foot 2 piece with the butt section ground to a taper and a full cork handle, plus an 8 foot 2 piece with a parallel glass butt section. I thought that the shorter one was the best for me and persuaded the boss to keep it for me and I would work the weekends until I had paid it off. After a couple of weeks, he let me take it home to use, but I carried on working it off.



This was much different to anything that I had used before, and I was using a Penn Beachmaster 160 multiplying reel by then. Being a parallel butt, it was softer and slower in action, but I got used to it and found that I was casting further. Consequently, catches improved, but the main thing was I enjoyed using it, and I still have it. I used it for quite a number of years before plumping for longer rods.”

I then asked Peter if, like me, Les Moncrieff and those now famous catches of big Dungeness Cod had asserted any influence on him, and in particular his interest in casting, as this is seen by many as the pivotal moment when for the first time, shore anglers linked distance with improved fish catches and stoked the interest in the rapidly growing casting scene.....

“I first met Leslie Moncrieff at the British Casting Association championships in 1967 when he brought his casting protégé,

Gordon Moody, to show us how it was done. He appeared to me to be a rather aloof but gentle giant who seemed shy of putting his own casting skills to the test on the tournament field. I had purchased one of his 'Springheel' rods made by Martin James Ltd. before the 1966 competitions and did very well with it. At the time I thought that it was the best rod on the market and found it very easy to use being a soft action throughout.”

And by that stage you'd progressed from working part time in the tackle shop to actually owning it.....

“When I left school, I became an apprentice joiner in the building trade until 1964 when the proprietor of our newest tackle shop suddenly passed away due to a heart attack. A mutual friend asked if I was interested in buying the business and after taking advice I said yes, but only for the cost of the stock. The shop was evidently on the rocks. It was a gamble, and only achievable by the fact that I lived with my parents and they took a minimal weekly amount from me for food etc.

It was in a small lock-up shop behind the Alhambra Theatre in the West End of Morecambe and only about 16 feet by 12 feet, but, it had a cellar which I used as a workshop. I purchased an old 6 foot lathe bed with a hollow chuck which could be hand driven for rod whipping or motor driven for turning handles etc. I used my handicraft skills to make rods and undertook rod and reel repairs giving a quick turn round to keep my customers fishing and gradually built up the trade

Tackle at the time was going through big changes. When I took the shop on the best sea rod available was the Modern Arms Fishing Tackle's steel centred double split cane 10ft beachcaster. A real beauty of a rod, and a good seller. Things were moving on and hollow fibreglass was making its mark. Like all new things there were good and bad models, and I only stocked the former although the price was usually a bit dearer. Even monofilament lines were improving and were getting stronger for less diameter which helped.”

Then one day back in 1964 a leaflet turns up at the shop advertising the British Surfcasting Championships to be held at Wallsend and you decide to give it a try.....

“I talked to members of the angling society about the competition and asked them about going to learn about the different styles used for competition casting and to see if we could see anything that would help us with our own style. Several wanted to go, so the trip was arranged with the cars going together. I got a list of the winning distances at the 1963 championships and we did some measuring of our own casts and found that we could compete without disgracing ourselves, so we decided to enter 2 teams of 3 casters into the team event. Others, including myself, also decided to try the individual events as well.

We arrived with about a dozen entrants for the competitions. On the day we rather exceeded our expectations with the ‘A’ team winning the main event with a total distance of 1003yds. (3 x 3casts each), and the ‘B’ team came fourth. In the individual events I won the 4 ounce weight multiplier level line with a record 156 + yards, and the 6 ounce multiplier event with a record 160+ yards. I was also a member of the winning team. My rod for the 4 and 6 ounce events was my ‘Springheel’ and the reel was a Penn Surfmaster 100P.”

It sounds more like them learning improved techniques from you rather than the other way around.....

“After the prize presentation while we were putting our things in the car we were approached by Dick Swift from Redcar, and Eric Horsfall-Turner who was the Scarborough Town Clerk and also the Secretary of the British Casting Association. Dick was an all round tournament caster competing in the freshwater events as well as in the lighter sea events, and a technician to be admired.

They congratulated me on winning at the first attempt, then the conversation got around to tackle and styles. They were obviously in agreement with the way that I cast, but were not very complimentary about the rod I was using. We got into a deeper discussion and they were firmly of the opinion that if I changed my rod to a more recognisable competition rod I would increase my distances greatly after getting used to the different feel.

Dick talked to us about the South Africans rods, described them, saying that the blanks were not available in the UK. I asked if he had any contacts in South Africa who might be able to send a few over. I asked if he could get them to order 5 for me and my casters, and eventually we got them. They were 12 feet one piece hollow fibreglass with a much faster taper than anything we had here. They were made by the Sportex Company.

My choice after trying the blank a few times with rings taped on was to go the whole hog and make the butt part even more rigid. I cut about 3 feet off the butt end and fitted a brass ferrule, then added a 4 foot 6 inch length of aircraft quality duralumin, extending the outfit to 13 feet 6 inches, adding rings to suit the loaded curve of the rod with a pipe clamp as a reel fitting. Lots of casters did the same afterwards. That was my 4 ounce and 6 ounce event rod for Wallsend 1967. Suffice to say that I won the 4 main events breaking two records, putting the 6 ounce up to 175yards 2 feet. and the 4 ounce level line event to 162yards 1 foot 9 inches.”

This I take it was using the now famous ‘Zoom’ casting style. Rumour has it that despite claims elsewhere from casters who came after your era, you also invented the pendulum cast.....

“The name Pendulum Cast was dreamed up by the angling press because that was part of my description of the ‘Advanced’ Zoom Casting style that I used with the 484 for fishing and for tournament casting further along the line.

Casters these days using much lighter, longer, and stronger carbon fibre rods tend to use a much longer ‘drop’. That’s the length of line from the rod tip to the weight when performing the cast. My drop with the 484 was less than half the rod length, whereas the modern casters have drops of more than their rods length.

Does it matter? Well in conversations with Eric Horsfall Turner, and there were many after our first meeting, the length of drop came up. He told me that a friend of his was a ballistics expert and he had said that the nearer to the rod tip the weight was, the faster it would travel. When all's said and done, it's the speed of the rod tip that gives the cast its distance.

ABU

ZOOM 4
The Beachcaster that holds every British distance record!...

It takes an ABU ZOOM 4 to break records, both in performance and on the beach here's a standard production rod that can outperform or outfish the incredibly versatile ZOOM 4. It will cast all weights up to 9oz, over record breaking distances.

From the experts have not yet reached its full potential. Nevertheless, casts of over 184 yards complete this terminal tackle and over 238 yards with lead line on far have achieved. It is secret is in the 'superforce' ZOOM 4 cast taper. Made from special fibre glass these blanks are exclusive to ABU. The only handle on which they are used is the standard Olympic 84" - the rod you can buy in the shops. Look for ZOOM 4 on the label and you'll be sure of getting the very same labile power. Remember, when beach fishing, the further you can cast the better your chances of really good sport with light line game! And look! that what makes it all about!

Seven record distances	Weight	Length	Distance
In one afternoon	2 oz	12ft	172 yd
The only one to do this	2 oz	12ft	182 yd
Recorded in the Guinness Book of Records	4 oz	16ft	194 yd
By the Guinness Book of Records	6 oz	18ft	194 yd
By the Guinness Book of Records	8 oz	21ft	172 yd
By the Guinness Book of Records	8 oz	21ft	172 yd
By the Guinness Book of Records	8 oz	21ft	151 yd

ZOOM4+AMBASSADEUR
the tackle that's taking over on the beach!

I am of the opinion that if the weight is not following the tip but swinging on a wider arc then it is not being released at the maximum speed it could have been. Having said that, I found that the drop I was using was the shortest that I could control the weight direction with as the power was applied. This locked the rod action and maximum tip speed was relative to the speed at which I could physically perform the cast."

Then ABU came knocking on your door.....

"I was pleasantly surprised and a little flattered when I was approached by ABU GB Ltd to give my opinion of a new beachcaster that they were hoping to bring to the UK market. I agreed to have a look at it and put it through its paces. My very good friend Eric Moore, who later also became a British Surfcasting Champion, said he would come with me to do the tests.

The 10 foot 2 piece rod duly arrived and I was a bit taken aback by it. I took the tip out of the rod bag first and my first thought was that they had sent me a spinning rod by mistake. The very thinnest bit was about one eighth of an inch in diameter with a very fast taper down to the heavy chromed screw-lock ferrule. If this is to cast an eight ounce weight then they must be joking. Out came the butt section and my first impression was how heavy it felt for a slim rod blank. The taper had lessened, it had a nice full cork handle with an anodised aluminium screw reel and the large heavily chromed rings. I could not fault the finish, but would it stand the test?

Eric and I were convinced that the box it went back to ABU in would be a lot shorter than the one it came in. We had weights of 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8 ounces to do the first tests and decided we would go lowest to highest, if it got there. I cast first, not so hard as it was entirely different to anything I had handled before and I was pleasantly surprised, as was Eric when he tried it. After a few casts with the 4 ounce weight we were beginning to get the hang of the action and started to put the power on getting more and more taken with the rod. It was performing much better than we expected.

The following day I was out on my own with the rod, and after a while I started to lay into it with the biggest weight, and I am delighted to say that it laughed at all I gave it and came back for more. Having said that, there were quite a few things that would not help it to sell, the main one being the short length. So I reported my results to ABU and said that although it had done everything we had asked of it, it would be difficult to sell for several reasons but I didn't say what they were.

Knowing that I had a seaside fishing tackle shop must have had them thinking, and they came back asking me to redesign it, and if it was acceptable to them, would I demonstrate it round the country. We came to an amicable arrangement and I set about it. I tried to persuade them to use different rod rings but they were fairly adamant that they were part of the ABU concept at the time so I had to use them. On the plus side these were cradled so the line passing through them did not drag in the glass blank and they were suited to the fixed spool reel. It became the best selling rod for the next 5 years in the UK."

So how did the prototype eventually differ from your redesigned version.....

"There was nothing very wrong, but it was not for the UK market. I suspect it was a spin off from the USA. It cast well after some practise, but it did not match everything already here. The rings were not

spaced correctly for the blanks curve. The reel fitting was not suitable and in the wrong place. The rod was not long enough. So I changed it and then I had to go out and prove it was right. A group of independent witnesses attended the first trials of the rod and most were astonished at the results. The longest cast recorded was 195 yards. Nothing had been seen like it before in the UK. Point proved I think. The rest is history so they say.”

A rod well ahead of its time. But it was fibreglass, soon to be displaced by supposedly newer and better laminating materials.....

“The operational life of a hollow fibreglass rod depends on many things. The quality of the actual fibres, the adhesive used to bond them together, and the care taken in the rolling of the tube and the operation of the ovens for drying it. ABU rods were to the highest spec and up to now I have never heard of an Atlantic 484 breaking. I was going to Scotland fishing and a bundle of 4 fell off my car into the A74 carriageway just above the border. By the time I had stopped and got out, the car behind me ran over the bundle. Apart from 2 or 3 bent rings, they continued to be used in demonstrations for years afterwards.

Carbon fibre had been on the horizon for some time. The first issue was that you could not make it longer than a metre in length. That was sorted, and then came the adhesives problem where they could not find one that flexed at the same rate as the carbon, so the sheets broke up. Like everything else that is important commercially, they sorted it out and virtually ended the fibreglass rod production. I felt sorry for many anglers who were buying so called carbon fibre rods with as little as 5% carbon and 95 % glass. Some just had a few strands of carbon fibre spiralling round the length of the rod.”

I was down on the beach recently and saw a chap still using a 484/Ambassadeur 7000 combination. It's a bit like classic car enthusiasts giving them the occasional run out. But he insisted it was still very much up to the job.....

“Yes, I agree, and still occasionally get correspondence about it. It is humbling to find that anglers still enjoy fishing with them. After all it was designed for fishing, not tournament casting. I enjoyed demonstrating the rod and what it was capable of to groups of anglers who either wanted to learn or did not believe the hype about it. Regardless of the weather it never failed to produce a cast of 190 yards at a demo, and even did 202 yards at Chelmsford on a freezing wet day. That was the first 200-yard cast at any tackle demo in the UK.

I used it at many competitions around the UK. I can't recall just how many British and UK records I held, but it was quite a number. On a personal note, I wanted to have a crack at the International Casting Federation's World championships and was delighted when the British Casting Association were awarded the running of it at Scarborough in 1973. So, as it was a chance to win the top titles, I decided to modify one of my Atlantic 484's to cast a specific weight of 4 ounces rather than the full range. I cut the tip section a bit shorter by about 3 inches and fitted a longer duralumin butt section taking the rod up to about 13ft.

The event was a level line event. That is no shock leaders, so technique was all important. In practise I was regularly reaching 190 yards. But on the day conditions were bad with a very strong left to right cross wind. There was not room to turn the casting court so we were stuck with it. With my Ambassadeur 6000 loaded with 18 lbs bs Maxima line I managed to cast a miserable 150 metres (164yards), but I had emptied the spool because of the cross wind.

Every other caster had the same conditions to cast in and my cast was the longest in the professional class, so I was delighted in that. The following day in much better conditions, for the 2oz multiplier level line event I used a 12 foot fast tapered Japanese made rod which was more suitable to casting the smaller weights. My longest effort was a World Record breaking 132.82 metres (145+yds). “

Then, like a footballer who has just had a World cup medal hung around his neck then retires, you turned your back on it while you were still at the top.....

“I would have liked to have continued with the World Championship casting, but the next venue was South Africa and I couldn’t afford to go. I also was a one-man business which presented lots of problems, so I decided that I had achieved what I wanted, a World Distance Casting Record, so there was not much point in carrying on. But I didn’t mention it to anyone except my closest friend Eric Moore.

You mentioned the Ambassadeur 7000 reel earlier which also has an interesting tale attached to it. I was asked by ABU GB if I would like to accompany a group of fishing tackle dealers to the ABU factory in Sweden and I was delighted to accept the offer. The trip was scheduled for September 1968, and prior to the trip I had been talking to Alf Walker, the London area ABU rep, about the Ambassadeur 6000 reel being unsuitable for general beach fishing and hopeless for rock fishing.

There were all sorts of things against it, except its casting ability. He suggested that I put on paper my thoughts and take it with me to Sweden where he would try to get a few minutes with one of the directors. It was still a family firm in those days, unlike today where it’s a small part of a huge firm.



I not only wrote about the reel I would like to see, but I also did a drawing of it and put on the measurements. With Alf, I got to talk to the then vice-president Len Borgstrum about my ideas, but he did not seem very interested. The following year the Ambassadeur 7000 appeared, and guess what. It was exactly as I had drawn it. The disappointing thing was that I never got even a thank you letter or acknowledgement from ABU. It has since sold thousands all around the World and is recognised as one of the best reels on the market today.”

I hear you later came out of retirement for an ABU demo over in Spain.....

“I wasn’t in retirement as you suggest. It was just the tournament side that I had given up. The Spanish ABU agent was trying to get the local anglers interested in using the 484, but he was coming up against the belief that you couldn’t cast as far as they could with their equipment if you were using a short rod and a

multiplying reel. He asked if I would go and demonstrate it to the Spanish Casting Club. I suppose the thinking was that if they could be persuaded then it would take off in sales.

I was a bit dubious at first as it was a couple of months since I had been anywhere to use the outfit, and I was not going to go into a competition. I was assured that it would not be a competition and my expenses would be paid. I did some research and discovered the locals used 18 to 20 foot bamboo rods, large Mitchell fixed spool reels with specially chromed spools, and very fine, light breaking strain lines with a shock leader. I decided to have a try before making my mind up to go and loaded my reel with 300 yards of 8 lbs bs line and a 45 lbs bs shock leader and went away to practise.

I had 3 casts and comfortably managed between 205 yards and 215 yards, so I was happy with that. Evidently the Spanish record was 213 metres. So I was in the ball park and agreed to go and flew to Barcelona where the demo was to take place, meeting up with the rep and a local dealer and the following day and went to the field where we arrived to find it was laid out as a tournament court. There were about a dozen people in a huddle with their tackle made up. I asked the rep what was going on as I was not entering into a competition and was assured that the casting club were going to have a competition later amongst themselves, so I agreed to carry on.

None of the casters spoke a word to me, and I am not sure how many understood what I was saying. Conditions for casting were perfect. The field was about 6 feet higher than the tide with a slight breeze coming off the sea over my right shoulder on a slight cross wind over the court. I said to the rep that I was just going to do a cast so that I could rewind the line tighter onto my reel. I cast, concentrating on the technique more than power, and when the weight dropped into the field, I realised that it had gone a long way.

I could see the knot that joined the line to the backing line was visible on the reel. I couldn't stop them measuring the cast, even though it was not a competition, but the rep walked out to check that all was right, and 232.6 metres (254 yards 1foot) was the result. A good 19 metres past the Spanish all time casting record, and without trying hard. All were silent, nobody except the rep and the dealer spoke to me. I did 2 more casts of around 220 metres, asked if anybody had any questions or would like to have a cast with my outfit. No takers, so I packed up and came home."

And that occasion actually was the last time you stepped out to cast.....

"Yes, that was my last cast on a casting field, although I have recently watched a couple of competitions not far from where I live and it was nice to be recognised, after all this time. They tried to persuade me to have a try, offering me the use of their gear, but I declined. I had just seen a huge cast of 301 yards and I think I would struggle to do half that these days, although they were not convinced. The late Terry Carroll even sent me a 13 foot rod he built on the 484 principle to try to get me back into it. But no, that was it".

PW Comment: A lesser known fact here is that following on from his involvement with the Atlantic 484 and Ambassadeur 7000, Peter Bagnall went on to redesign all the rods in the ABU range right across the spectrum including game, coarse and sea.

LONG-RANGE CASTING

The story of long-range casting, not to be confused with long-range fishing, spans pretty much the entire twentieth century, which again makes finding a single representative time slot in which to locate it very difficult.

I must admit to being torn as to whether casting and casters should be fragmented into isolated shorter chronological events which anyone interested in the subject would then have had to search out and piece together for themselves. In the end I chose not to go down that route, the reason being that up to say the 1950's, most anglers saw distance casting for its own sake as having no place in or even link to sea angling, and with history again repeating itself, since the late-1980's to present, it has once again regressed along that same path. But not so during the intervening years from the Les Moncrieff era through to John Holden, and it's this period that is important from an angling perspective.

The reason why the 1970's and 80's is the appropriate time slot, is that after seeing very clearly the relationship between distance and improved catches through the legendary Dungeness exploits of Les Moncrieff using the 'Springheel Rod' and his layback casting style, it took a while for a replacement rod to come along which people not quite as big and powerful in stature as Moncrieff could, with the right technique, achieve the sorts of additional distances they had been dreaming of. That rod was the ABU Atlantic 484 which was discussed at length under the previous sub heading.

Long range casting is not the same as tournament casting, though in many ways the two are inexorably linked. What I'm writing about here is the history of angling, not distance casting for its own sake, or for competitive purposes, so in theory at least, the tournament aspect could either be glossed over or omitted altogether. That said, as much of what was done on the field has had a direct link in terms of



outcomes on the beach through product development and the perfecting of techniques, some degree of historical overlap is allowed.

What also needs to be said is that despite what many people think, and what the British press have promoted by pushing tackle development and distance casting styles as something which we developed here in the UK midway through the twentieth century, this is little more than urban myth. The truth is that it belongs to no single decade.

That said, it is very much a topic of the twentieth century, having been spawned and perfected there, and from a tournament perspective, it also died there in the late 1990's, when the man on the beach could no longer relate to huge powerful giants throwing leads maybe 300 yards with rods that 'Mr. Average' could never hope even to bend, only without bait, and as such, what had previously been a popular spectator and participant sport quite literally died on its feet.

It's fortunate for me writing the history of sea angling in the twentieth century to have what is in terms of timing is a topic which fits so perfectly within the parameters I have set myself. It does however owe a little bit to both the late-nineteenth century, and to the expansion of the British Empire. Striving to maximise distance to catch fish also owes much to the development of the railway network, which for the first time allowed ordinary people living away from the coast to travel to the coast to fish, while The Empire took beach casting to other parts of the World. At that time, tackle was to say the least 'basic' and casting styles primitive, and contrary to what we might think in terms of bigger numbers of fish around back them, if you couldn't reach them with a bait, then in reality, they might as well have not been there.

Rods were often basic cane poles, with fibreglass not coming onto the scene until after World War II. The fixed spool reel appeared a little earlier in 1907, and the modern multiplier in the late 1930's, giving a flavour of the difficulties would-be distance casting anglers faced, though multiplier reels in quite a sophisticated form date back to the nineteenth century, as indeed do side cast reels like the modern day Alvey.

Initially, anglers would throw baits out with a simple overhead lob. The swinging lead style which would eventually evolve into modern pendulum casting probably has its origins in the 1920's on the other side of the Atlantic in the USA (see Chapter 3, Primo Levenais). People this side weren't interested in anything that wouldn't catch them fish, and as such shunned any attempt at tournament casting.

Crossing the Atlantic back to the UK, distance casting with bait was gaining in interest, in particular along the north east coast, where large drum reels were being used with what is known as the Scarborough casting style, which as amazing as it might sound, could achieve distances of around 100 yards with bait, which if people are honest with themselves, is probably more than many of today's anglers can achieve using modern high-tech gear.

This was probably the first time in Britain when the link between distance and increased catches was made. Elsewhere in the country, anglers weren't bothered, in part because they had no access to decent tackle, and equally, particularly along the south coast, because nobody realised there were fish there for the taking, if only they could get a bait to them.

The man who would eventually switch people on to the idea that more and better fish could be reached with a bait was, as I've already said, Les Moncrieff. Big Les, the gentle giant of the early 1960's with his huge catches of Dungeness Cod. The whole concept of what he was doing was all about catching fish which drew him plenty of attention, including from Hardly tackle who he eventually collaborated with to produce mass market rods capable of being used for increased distance by the average angler, which was a huge step forward.

Moncrieff also demonstrated and was proficient in a number of casting styles, but is best remembered for his layback style of having the lead dangling from a long rod resulting in a cast which he was able to put across as a non-technical cast which anglers were invited to try and could relate to.

During the early 1960's, Moncrieff eventually came up with a reverse taper handle rod called the 'Springheel', which tapered away in both directions from a beefed-up area around the reel seat. Unfortunately, this started to creep away from the concept of providing for the everyday angler. The thing was, that at around 6 feet 4 inches tall and weighing in at maybe 20 stone, Moncrieff was able to extract the maximum any rod had to give through his sheer power, in a way most anglers were never going to be able to emulate, a problem that has contributed much to the current marginalisation of tournament casting here in the UK today. Would-be casters of more average build would watch then walk away shaking their heads thinking, "How can I expect to do that?"

Distances on the field during the Moncrieff era were up around the 170 yards mark, with a more typical expectation of between 100 and 120 yards by a good angler on a good day casting with bait. And so it remained until the late 1960's until Morecambe, Lancashire, tackle dealer Peter Bagnall, who lives just up the road from me, took to the tournament casting field, which I've covered in detail in the previous inclusion.

An approach by growing Swedish tackle giant ABU to field test a prototype 10 foot ultra-fast taper rod with an 'alarmingly' thin tip which Peter completely redesigned delivered the Atlantic 484 rod, which, when he partnered it with the Ambassadeur 6000 multiplier, allowed him to take distance casting to a whole new level. ABU at the time ran an advertisement saying that it was now possible to cast a bait 190 yards, though they never qualified the statement by giving any further detail as to what that bait was or the circumstances surrounding it.

Importantly, once again, this turned out to be a rod and reel pairing that the average angler on the beach, with some practise, could relate to and get added success from. And so the mass market Atlantic 484 was released as a fairly stiffish fast taper rod of 11 feet 6 inches in length with some hidden internal blank tapering, which could, in the right hands, be used with any casting style, which obviously helped in promoting the link between distance, fish, and Mr. average, to the point that casting both on the field and the beach saw a boost in areas where it had previously made a poor showing, such as along the south coast, particularly after Peter made the first 200 yard plus cast at a UK demonstration with it when he threw a 5 ounce lead 202 yards.

The next big step in the development of distance casting came in the 1970's as a direct follow on from the Peter Bagnall 'northern power house' era of casting, when people like John Holden, Terry Carroll, and Nigel Forrest arrived on the scene. Names which would dominate the casting and long-range fishing scene for quite some time to come, with the first casts to cross the magical 200 yard barrier.

In conversation with John, he tells me that he and other big casters of that era were simply lucky in their timing, giving them the opportunity to grab a disproportionate amount of publicity right across the media spectrum, including TV, radio and the national press, in addition to the angling press. But what the press failed to make themselves aware of, or perhaps they simply ignored, was the fact that such distances had already been achieved decades earlier on the other side of The Atlantic.

Like ABU, Holden and Carroll brought both distance casting and the tackle to achieve it to the masses, with quite literally thousands turning up for the demonstrations they put on. Today, with casts in excess of 300 yards, you would be lucky to see 10 people watching, because anglers simply can't relate to it any more. And there were plenty of other good casters about during the 1970's who were also highly competent. The thing is, only a few ever actually influence the development side of things taking it on to the next level.



Dennis Darkin for example, who many think was the 'inventor' of the pendulum. Darkin was a highly knowledgeable and formidable caster, but the evidence suggests that he did not invent the pendulum cast. It had already been going for many years and was in fact the 'Zoom' style used earlier by Peter Bagnall, though like a lot of people, Dennis may well have been using his own variation on the technique. That suggestion that Denis Darkin was the father of pendulum casting came from a thread on the forum www.anglersnet.co.uk in the form of a reply to a question posed by another contributor regarding the origins of the pendulum cast. Darkin's verbatim reply was as follows.....

"Not sure if I (me and a couple of mates) invented the full pendulum cast but I certainly was the first to fully describe it with words and pictures. We had been practising and using long casting techniques for several years and really got the casting bug after I put a lead across the bows of a ship coming up the Medway at Garrison point. We discussed this at length and came to the conclusion that my casting action had "lengthened".

We took this on to the field and refined it until we developed the full 360deg action. There may be some dispute as to whether I invented this action but there is no doubt that I did not read a description of it anywhere else nor did I see it performed by anyone prior to refining and eventually publicising it in Angling Magazine. It was described as "The definitive article on long distance casting". Sorry if this sounds like blowing my own trumpet but it just happens to be true!. By the way I also invented a breakaway lead that established the principle of using the springiness of stainless wire, this was also published in Angling."

Terry Carroll will forever be remembered and associated with Mike McManus and later Zziplex rods. As a superb practitioner, he teamed up with the equally impressive engineer Mike McManus who was an exceptional rod designer, between them embracing all the most up to date materials and blank design factors, but as ever, and of the utmost importance, in a way that the average angler could then go on to use to catch fish.

This was a time when, with the exception of Hardy, for the most part at least, the UK's home-produced rod scene was dominated by poor quality fibreglass and built cane rods. Rods of a better pedigree were invariably built on blanks manufactured by Sportex in Germany. Then along came Conoflex and Zziplex, and the rest as they say is history.

This wonderful combination of top-flight caster and equally proficient engineer took distance casting and long-range fishing to a whole new level. The secret, if you can call it that, was building stiffness into the butt of a rod that will bend, particularly with the materials available to them at the time. This was where aluminium began to play an ever more prominent role in allowing the butt to be stiffened, and, with the right technique, deliver more power. And while it lasted, the partnership truly dominated. But as so often is the way with these things, by the early 1980's it began to fall apart, which as it would turn out from an angling point of view was no bad thing, leading to Mike McMannus to start up Zziplex while Terry stayed with Conoflex, giving the angling market a wider range of quality to choose from.

The next person to advance long range fishing, and in a number of ways, was Suffolk based Nigel Forrest, who along with Ian Gillespie and Norman Bickers would go to form Breakaway Tackle. Using the ABU Atlantic 464 which Nigel had developed, it was he who went on to develop, or 'invent' if you prefer, the classic modern-day pendulum cast. And while he was an angler as opposed to a tournament caster, he could regularly put a lead out 215 to 220 yards, which he did purely to improve the lot of the beach angler, as a result cementing his place in the roll call of standout names on the casting scene who were able to grab the attention of the beach angling public.

Next up were people such as Andy Rackham, and more especially Paul Kerry, during the mid to late-1980's. For the first time, angling had an athlete join its ranks. A man who enjoyed many forms of sport and trained hard accordingly. Also, a man who when he first picked up a beach casting outfit proved to be a natural from day one, eventually teaming up with Daiwa to pick up where Nigel Forrest had left off, evolving the angling casting scene to a whole new level again where he dominated, until, like many of the other angling casters who had gone before, he decided to back off and eventually pack the whole casting thing in, preferring to put his talents to better use on the beach.

Casting was by now moving into the 1990's, with tournament casting, which had long since divorced itself from long-range fishing, heading further into decline bordering on extinction. Nigel Forrest and Paul Kerry had advanced the angling cause by leaps and bounds. And while there were still a few Norfolk back casters such as Dave Docwra plying their 'trade', again in part because anglers couldn't relate to it, but also because by now pendulum casting was king, the distance angling scene was waiting for its next rising star, who came along in the massive powerful form of Neil MacKellow. A man who stood out in part because he preferred a much longer rod with the reel seated at the bottom, which he used to push the distance limits up around the 280 yard mark.

This was the point at which those in the know on the casting scene say that a line was drawn under the tackle and techniques the average angler on the beach could relate to, and as such, took things into the purist World of casting on a field simply for its own sake.

Though he worked with Penn to produce tackle which the angler could relate to and successfully use, the tackle he used to set his distance records was suited to nothing else other than that, providing you had the muscle, strength, and technique to access and unleash it, as in the case of Belgian caster Danny Moeskops, who finally signed the divorce papers between the field and the beach when he put the distance record beyond 300 yards, with a USKF sanctioned cast of 915.22 feet (305.07 yards) in 2004.

PW Comment: In the 1945 edition of his book 'Salt Water Fishing', Harlan Major features a chapter by American caster Primo Levenais containing a series of photographs seemingly depicting what some see as a pendulum cast, though it wasn't known as such at the time. Previously, Levenais had done his casting from the ground, then this comes along. Whether he was the first person to use a pendulum cast or some early version of it, who knows for sure? Very likely it has been a long, evolving, improving process attributable to no single person. Either way, Primo Levenais was apparently there in the mix.

BRITAIN'S FIRST 200 YARD CAST

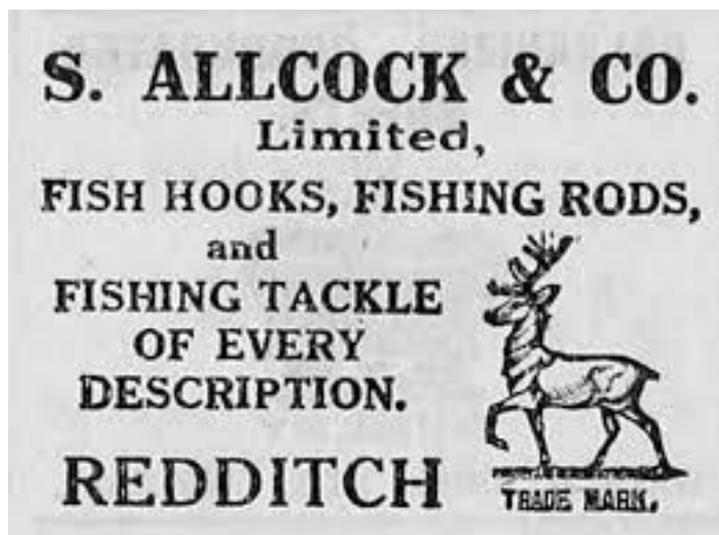
This is a story with two versions, both valid, depending on your views with regard to the rules governing distance casting records. Those who insist that all distances be officially ratified according to UKSF rules creating a level playing field will doubtless go with John Holden, who when I asked him about it couldn't recall the exact date, but thought it to be around 1969 to 1970. His was the first person to 'officially' break through the 200 yard barrier at a tournament. The other option is to go with Peter Bagnall, who cast a distance of 202 yards at a wet and windy casting demonstration at Chelmsford some years earlier.

Both casts were properly measured and witnessed, with the added complication of the weather for the Bagnall cast. In 1983, John Holden also did another 'biggie' at a casting demonstration by achieving 252 yards at Cape Hatteras in the USA, showing the Americans how it should be done.

Ironically however, it was the American's who had been showing us and the rest of the World how to do it in the 1930's and 40's, back in the days of wooden rods matched to reels lacking much of the engineering that makes them handle so well today. The legendary Primo Levenais broke first through the 200 yard barrier at a tournament in 1934, followed by yet more records, culminating in a cast of 270 yards in 1949 (see Chapter 4).

THE DEMISE OF THE ALLCOCK'S FISHING TACKLE COMPANY

For anglers of a certain age, Allcock's is the quintessential English fishing tackle manufacturing company. At a time when foreign imports, albeit of arguably better quality and offering better suited tackle was strangling the final few breaths out of the home grown mass market manufacturers, Allcock's managed to hold on in there as an independent company until the 1960's. They then amalgamated with J. W. Young and M. Lee & Son in 1963 under the joint banner of Top Tackle, which eventually came into the ownership of Shakespeare who closed them down in 1969.



The company's origins go back to around 1800 and Polycarp Allcock, who was a hook maker taught by Charles Tolly in the village of Sambourne, at a time when Redditch was at the centre of the hook making universe. At the age of 13, Polycarp travelled the country with his father using a horse and gig selling hooks and other items of fishing tackle wherever they could. He would eventually marry the daughter of Redditch based James Bayliss, who also worked in the fishing tackle industry. It was at this point that he became apprenticed to a float maker, and later in 1856, he would purchase a small hook making

company. But it was rod making that would eventually establish the Allcock name.

As the rod making took off, work space began to grow ever more 'cramped', to the point that a number of cottages and a shop were taken over and fitted out with a treadle lathe. This was the era of Ash, Lancewood, and Hickory rods, planks of which were hand sawn then worked with a hand plane to prepare them for turning on the lathe, and they sold well. So well that space again became a problem, to the point that in 1866 the company had to move to larger premises, boasting a workforce of around 30 people in 3 separate departments dedicated to rod, float, and hook making. Business was booming, and very quickly the work force had doubled again, including 4 specialist rod makers from London, 3 of whom quickly left, leaving just the one, who happened to be a specialist in split cane

From such humble beginnings, Allcock's became specialist rod makers, primarily, and perhaps even exclusively, for the freshwater scene. But we know they also made wooden reels, because a fire at the site in 1891 saw the company lose its rod and reel wood stockpile, which included woods that had been specially seasoned for as long as 12 years, resulting in damage put at around £2,000 which was a hefty sum at that time.

Fortunately, wood was not the only raw material used to make Allcock's reels. In 1873 they had employed the service of a Mr. Hughes who was a Birmingham trained brass worker employed in the production of brass reels. So despite the fire, business continued on the up, exporting to all corners of the Empire and beyond. So much so, that in 1879, a review in the magazine *Land & Water* declared them the largest fishing tackle manufacturer in the World at the time, with a workforce in excess of 400.

PW Comment: I recall seeing Allcock's tackle. It was widely advertised during my early fishing years, which as I've already mentioned, was primarily targeting the freshwater fishing scene, which is why I've tended to gloss over the company's history. But not entirely so.

When I was 16 my dad took me out shark fishing from Looe where I fished with a stainless steel Allcock's Leviathan reel. A huge centre pin with a star drag and a brake lever which looked like a mini version of a car gear stick. So impressed was I with this reel, and so determined was I that I would become a 'pursuer' of big fish, that I saved every spare penny I could muster, including not buying any lunch with the money my mother had given me for work, until I was eventually able to buy a Leviathan for myself at a cost of £1 12 shillings and 6 pence.

SCOTTISH RED BREAM

Because of the global interconnection of the World's seas, saltwater species, in theory at least, can turn up anywhere. That said, there are rules and patterns which for the most part govern their distribution. But try telling that to the fish, as every so often you get one which out of the blue comes along to completely buck the trend. One such a fish was a Red Bream *Pagellus bogaraveo* of 4.14.0 caught by R. Steel boat fishing out of Tobermory on the Isle of Mull off Ardnamurchan in 1969, which is way too far north of their normal distribution.

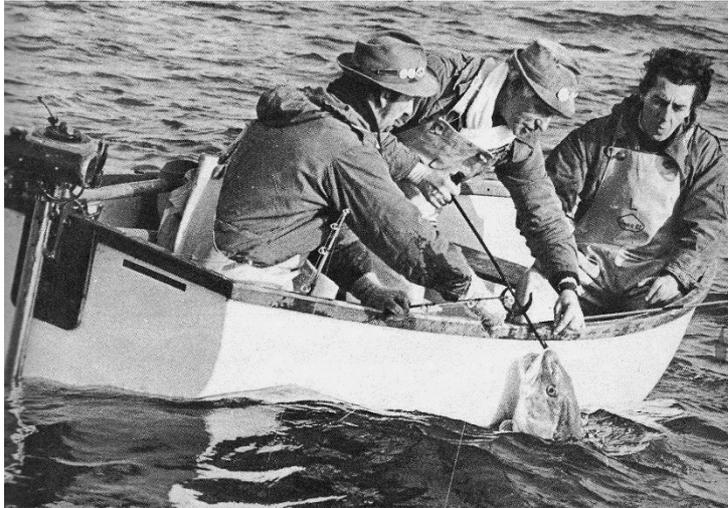
A fish way ahead of its time if rising sea temperatures are to be considered a contributing factor. Then, not another example of the species in Scottish waters since, which in light of the almost total disappearance of the species generally, even from its strongholds, should perhaps come as no great surprise.

THE TRIO

The 'Trio,' comprising of Edinburgh anglers Dough Dinnie, Bill Freshwater and George Mann, completely revolutionised Cod fishing from the late-1960's through into the 1970's, leaving a legacy that reaches forward to today. These were the men who introduced Britain to Scandinavian style pirk fishing, while at the same time, showcasing the World class Cod fishing the inner Clyde and its sea lochs could deliver at that time.

Incredibly, they did this from a tiny open fibreglass dinghy with a Seagull outboard on the back which was launched from the beach at Cloch Point, the nearest entry point for fishing the famous Gantocks, a mark which they immortalised. A mark which anglers from all over England and the rest of Scotland also wanted to fish, and in many cases thought they were fishing. But it wasn't quite as simple as that.

With limited access to marine electronics, particularly for small boats, the Gantocks wreck would take some finding back in those days. In addition, and what a lot of people failed to appreciate was that it wasn't the wreck the 'Trio' were fishing. The actual Gantocks mark was a few hundred yards away. The 'Trio' knew this, and had the finding of it off to a tee, hence the spectacular hauls of Cod the likes of which anglers today can only dream about (see the next inclusion).



Forty pounds was the magic target figure back in those heady days. The Trio would put a small fish shaped sticker on the bow of the boat each time they caught one of that size in much the same way that fighter pilots used to notch up their successes in WWII, and they had a few, plus plenty of 'smaller' specimens. But fantastic fish that they are, Cod in the twenties and thirties didn't really count other than for 'bulking up' the catch. It could however have been so very different had ABU supremo Tony Perrin not also been based in Scotland.

Keen to see the company diversify and grow beyond its famous Ambassadeur reels, ABU began importing and experimenting with a range of Norwegian style pirks, prototypes and working models of which were given to the 'Trio' to put through their paces. What better field testing opportunity could there be, eventually leading to the marketing of lures such as the Egon, Sillen, and Lucas, which would eventually find themselves being tested on new battle fields along the Yorkshire Coast, off Kent, and over the West Country mid-channel wrecks.

At a glance, pirk fishing is a very simple and basic technique. But if that was actually the case, why is it that two anglers fishing side by side in the same boat using the same technique can have such a disparity of results, as has been shown to happen on numerous occasions? This has nothing to do with fish size. For while pirk fishing will usually sort out the better fish, it can't discriminate when they get up into the 20 to 30 pound bracket and beyond. What I'm talking here is disparity in numbers of fish each angler catches.

What could be more simple than lifting a pirk up and down off the sea bed? But in truth, the execution of the actual rhythm of the lift and drop back can be crucial, and the 'Trio' knew this, much to the frustration of the many 'hangers on' who would follow them about, steal their drifts, and copy their lures. Yet at the end of the day, would often have little to show for their efforts by comparison to Dinnie, Freshwater, and Mann, who at the time had reputedly caught more Cod over 30 pounds than any other group of anglers in Europe, plus of course those crucial 40 pounders, simply because they fully understood the pirk fishing technique.

Sadly, it wasn't to last. Their fame, plus that of the fantastic Cod run pushing up the Clyde to the lochs to spawn every winter was always bound to catch the attention of the 'live for today sod tomorrow' element of the commercial fish sector, which when it did, quite literally spelled the beginning of the end. The wipeout was both rapid, and absolute. Hardly a single living thing was left. Businesses that had been built on visiting anglers hiring boats and staying in guest houses were killed stone dead virtually at a stroke, and the whole Clyde system has never recovered.

Today it remains a barren wilderness where you rarely if ever see anyone bothering to fish. Gone too are Doug Dinnie, Bill Freshwater, and George Mann, one of them tragically at the hands of a burglar with a gun. And now, other than a few old black and white photographs, plus some wonderful memories, the only 'living' record of this incredible era is a film entitled 'Run of the Wild Fish' recording some of their exploits, which people at the time genuinely thought would last for ever. But it didn't, though had it been managed properly, it both could and should have done.

THE RISE & DEMISE OF THE CLYDE

No single time slot belongs to the meteoric rise and catastrophic demise of sea angling in Scotland's Clyde estuary and sea lochs. Taking the rise first, when an angling mark is discovered, it's not usually because it suddenly becomes good. In all likelihood it will have held that potential to produce perhaps for years, even decades, before someone cottons on to it and makes its value known, and the Clyde most surely fits this definition to a tee.

However, for history recording purposes, it needs to be time slotted to keep the chronology of this record of the twentieth century on track. So looking at the evidence of how and when the main events regarding the Clyde came to public notice and unfolded, 1969 seems to be the most appropriate point to kick things off, running on through to the mid-1970's and its demise.

It was local angler Joe Curry writing in *Angling* magazine who suggested the time slot with his prediction that the winter of 1969 – 1970 would go down in history as Scotland's winter of big Cod. The moment, if you can call it that, when the now historically important Gantocks really grabbed the entire nation's sea angler's attention with the catching of yet another huge Cod by the acclaimed 'Trio' of Doug Dinnie, George Man and Bill Freshwater, this time with Doug Dinnie grabbing the headlines for a Cod reported as weighing in at 47 pounds. The previous best Cod for the Clyde had been a specimen of 28 pounds. To the rest of the UK the Gantocks had arrived.

These Cod were all Atlantic fish, running the Clyde to enter its various sea lochs to spawn then head off back to sea. Of that there can be no doubt, though some decent fish undoubtedly did stick around, particularly in Gareloch, over the summer months too. My boat partner Dave Devine recalls one particular summer's day fishing the Rhu Narrows on Gareloch, taking plenty of Cod to 15 pounds. According to then EFSA General Secretary and ABU supremo Tony Perrin writing in *Sea Angler Magazine* in 1976, the Cod would enter the Clyde between the Mull of Kintyre and southern end of the Isle of Arran, running up the west channel into the Firth passing Garroch Head up along the west side of Skelmorlie Bank, then along the coast to the famous Gantocks mark.

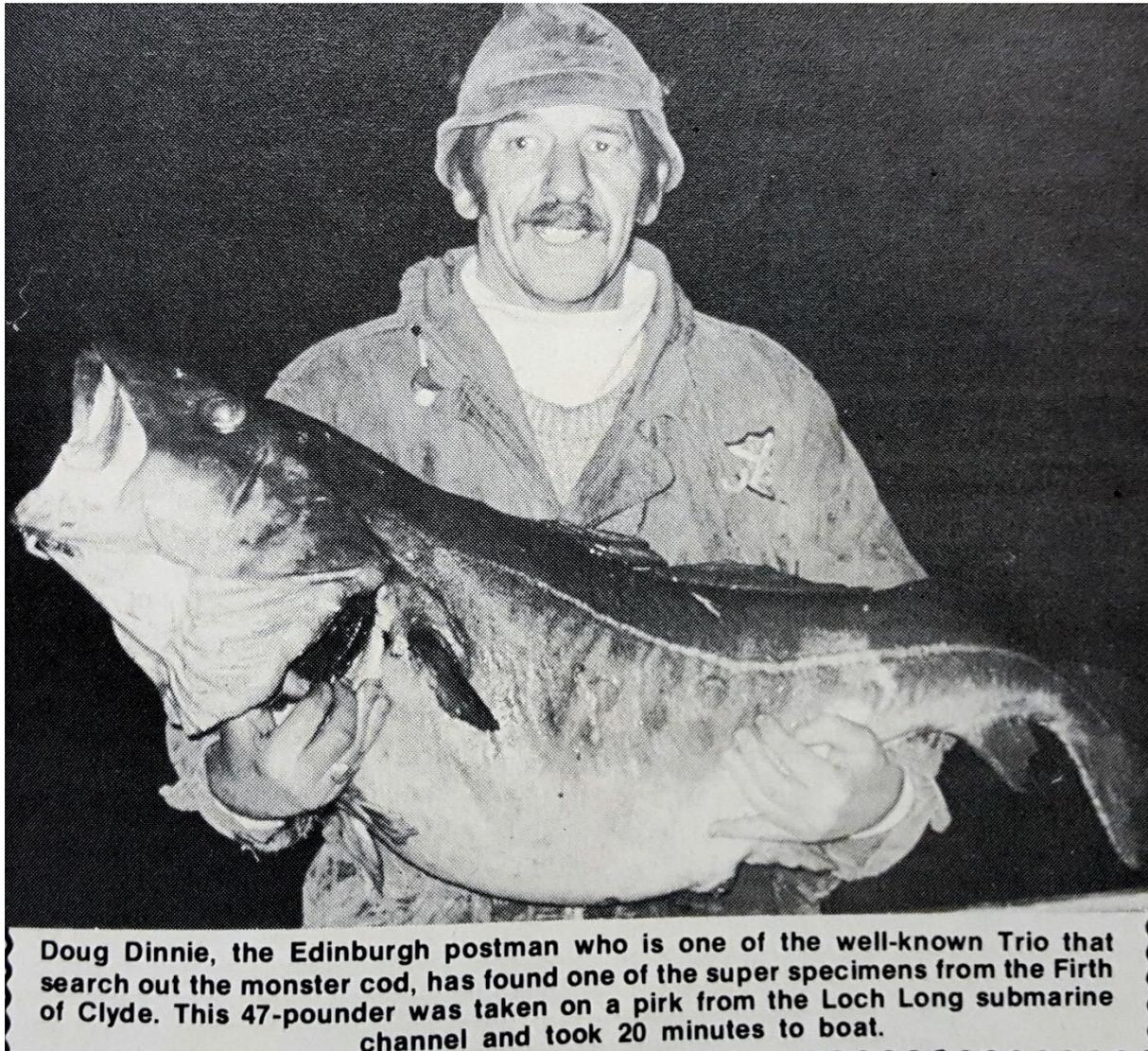
It might be helpful at this point to try to describe the Gantocks itself. Much has been said and written about the famous mark, which if you read it all, may perhaps leave things no clearer than if you know little or nothing about it to start with. Confusion reigns about its precise location and the nature of the mark itself. Perrin describes it as being a deep water mark 450 yards south of Dunoon Bank, adding, that despite what others have said, there are no rocks or kelp down there. In fact, nothing much other than mud, suggesting that any tackle hang-ups were due to scattered debris from the remains of the Powder Boy wreck, which by that time had completely broken up. Yet Joe Curry on the other hand, suggested the ground was rough.

Tony Perrin goes on to describe the mark as not being appreciably deeper than the ground around it, adding that a study of the Admiralty Chart for the area shows a couple of small deeper 'pots' as he calls them, both to the south and to the north east of the Gantocks, suggesting that possibly it was these that enticed the migrating Cod to pause for a while. Other suggestions include the fish using the Gantocks as a way-point where they would pause to orientate themselves before pressing on to their various destinations.

One further suggestion is that perhaps there might be a favourable bit of tide gathering up food in the same sort of way that the equally famous Dungeness 'Dustbin' used to. For me, it's one of those mysteries that perhaps will never be satisfactorily answered, and we should just be grateful for it.

There seems little doubt that the Gantocks was a major staging point of some sort used by many, if not all the mature Atlantic Cod entering the Clyde sea lochs to spawn. Again, quoting Tony Perrin, this was the point at which having lingered for whatever reason, the shoals, groups, aggregations, call them what you will, would then decide on a final destination route, with those fish headed for Loch

Goil and Loch Long taking the channel to the left, leaving the Gareloch fish to veer to the right towards Kilcreggan around in to the Rhu Narrows.



That said, he goes on to say that it may well be that the Gareloch fish don't pass through the Gantocks at all, preferring to cut to the east side a little earlier, taking a route from Innellan diagonally up to the Cloch lighthouse before crossing in to the Rhu Narrows. Again, as with suggestions regarding the makeup of the Gantocks, opinions seem to be divided.

As exceptional as the fishing undoubtedly was, not all the big Cod nor big catches of Cod taken from the Clyde were made over the Gantocks. Marks like the Rhu Narrows on Gareloch, Holy Loch Entrance, Loch Goil, Loch Long and Skelmorlie Bank all played their part. Frank Travis for example, took a magnificent Cod of 46 pounds from the entrance to Holy Loch, a mere half an ounce under the then and still current Scottish record. Also, be in no doubt that the Gantocks offered no guarantee of success either.

What history doesn't record are the failures and many fruitless hours spent flogging away with pirks for absolutely no reward. What it does record is that the then Scottish Cod record of 32 pounds 8 ounces was exceeded on numerous occasions, the biggest of which being taken by B. Baird at 46 pounds and 8 drams in 1970 which still stands to this day.

Many anglers, and many visiting English anglers in particular (myself included), did not fully understand the fishing on offer throughout the Clyde, often thinking that all they needed do was send down a bait or a pirk and it would come back attached to a big Cod. Not so. Many variables needed to come together to assure, if that be the right word, any real chance of success, amongst these being fishing it as the tide was ebbing off through low water on into the early flood.

The Gantocks itself was a tiny mark, reputedly no more than 10 yards by 25 yards covered by between 29 and 30 fathoms of often murky water, certainly at the bottom due to the mud. When the Cod ran, they invariably passed over in small shoals of approximately similar sized fish, with the smaller fish showing first around late November into December, increasing in individual size, though in smaller group sizes until they'd entered the lochs, spawned, and were ready to head back out to sea around March.

Other than the option of take it or leave it, sea and weather conditions, tides, and timing, are all variables outside of angling control. However, the way people choose to fish is was entirely within that individuals' control, and it seems that one fundamental mistake contributing both to blanks and to pirking fatigue, was the way in which people often fished their lures.

Instead of working them quickly and allowing them to free fall on the drop, the more successful anglers lifted them more slowly, often pausing as they touched bottom. The thing is that big Cod are not sprinters as are the smaller fish, and it was reckoned by some experienced successful pirk anglers that excessive , which means re-dropping to find it again on a fairly regular basis.

Another factor within angling control, particularly applicable to the Gantocks due to the size of the target, was boat size. Save for the odd big fish, large charter boats could not match the small boats used by people such as 'The Trio'. For all their phenomenal success, it's said, and from photographs I've seen, it certainly looks like the threesome fished from an open boat of around 14 feet in length, powered by a small Seagull outboard. For unless there's a brisk northerly or southerly wind blowing, the Gantocks is quite a safe sheltered mark. But 'The Trio' and the other small boats didn't have it all their own way, as Derek, Nick and Tony Bridge from Burnley in Lancashire very clearly showed, aboard the own 30-foot boat 'Visa' moored at Kitt Marina.

These days, Tony regularly fishes aboard 'Blue Mink' out from Fleetwood where I've bumped into him on a number of occasions. I've chatted with him at length, and also audio recorded him regarding his recollections as a teenager fishing the Gantocks in its hey-day, starting in the late-1960's on into the mid-1970's, which understandably, he recalls with great fondness.

The family started fishing Warden Bank until they encountered 'The Trio' and moved to the Gantocks, which Tony describes as lying in 32 fathoms of water with not much tide over it on the Dunoon Bank, contrary to what many people believed. A very precise mark over which you could fill the boat while dinghies as little as 20 yards blanked. Nothing it seems came up on the echo sounder, though there was talk of a wreck. A staging point for Cod moving into the lochs, with the best fish between November and January.

All the Bridge family's fishing was done using pirks, which due to the tides not having too much pull would usually be in the 7 to 8 ounce bracket made by ABU, and eventually supplied by ABU, as Tony Perrin used their trips to test a range of new designs, as well as fishing with them on the boat. Tony Bridge recalls the ABU 'Sillen' as being his particular favourite on account of its fast drop rate. His brother Nick preferred the 'Egon', while his father Derek liked the 'Lucas', all of which had their good days and less good days. Everyone fishing the Gantocks used pirks, though not everyone bought them, with all sorts of home made designs being pressed into service, often made from pram handles and other sources of chromed tube, and reputedly even car door handles.

Obviously, success levels would fluctuate, though Tony did recall one instance where the 3 of them had well in excess of 1,000 pounds of Cod, mainly in the 20's, but with a half dozen or so 30's also in the mix. The majority of the 20 pound fish went back, with a good example of some of the better fish posed by Nick Bridge below which appeared in Sea Angler Magazine.



Other days would be far less productive. Some even frustrating, with hours of arm aching work. Then suddenly the fish might switch on and could just as suddenly switch off again, eventually, sadly for good, after the commercial boats were given the green light to start working inside the entrance to the Clyde between Great Cumbrae and Bute, intercepting the fish en route to the Gantocks, eventually creating a virtual desert, wrecking the lives and business interests of so many people from the furthestmost tip of Loch Long right through to the seaward end, in Tony's opinion, never to return again.

Understandably, the Gantocks was regularly crowded out by small boats once its big Cod credentials became widely recognised. However, a fact many had either failed or chosen not to appreciate, was that the Gantocks was only one of many marks, including many excellent shore marks, both capable of producing fish regularly, and of producing some very big fish too, the nearest of which in terms of proximity being the entrance to Holy Loch, which as I mentioned earlier, produced that near record 46 pounder to Frank Travis.

Next up is Loch Long which I have fished myself on a number of occasions, unfortunately, just as the quality fishing period was coming to an end. I boat fished both in the self-drives from Arrochar right down to Loch Goil, and on bigger boats at the other end. The one outstanding memory I have of the place is the sheer number of orange and yellow dots lining its shoreline, which of course were anglers standing shoulder to shoulder wearing waterproofs, fishing from the side.

Gareloch, and in particular the Rhu Narrows, was as much if not more of a shore angling destination, though obviously small boats did fish it drifting through on the strong run and getting moved on by the police. Particularly if they tied up to any of the buoys, as this was a busy military area, with submarines and supply boats heading in and out all the time. A location with heavy ground with lots of kelp.

Also, an area where tactics other than pinking could bring excellent results, as the Geordies who fished the loch regularly with their cool boxes full of peeler crab frequently showed, wiping the floor with the local opposition who had yet to discover crab, despite the fact that so much of it could be gathered on their door step. And to further highlight the value of bait, ABU supremo Tony Perrin writes about one boat angler taking Cod of 39 and 41 pounds in the same trip fishing baited ABU Rauto Spoons.

The lads from Whitley Bay over in the north east had some amazing catches, both on Gareloch, and nearby Holy Loch, neither of which could be touched commercially due to military security considerations. Sea Angler Magazine carried an article in 1973 in which the Whitley Bay boys took in excess of 900 pounds of Cod from Gareloch during the summer months on crab, which when you consider the fact that none of the fish were monsters, was one hell of a haul.

In the main it was made up of Cod with some Coalfish, though Ken Robinson who was part of the group told me there were also Haddock taken, along with talk of Hake, mainly fishing from Rosneath, with no need for distance casting as fish could be taken as little as 50 yards off, though terminal tackle losses could be high.

In 2013 I recorded an interview with Ken Robinson on the exploits of the Geordie crew fishing the Clyde area. This included some time spent on the Loch Long shoreline fishing half way along the loch over night for the Conger, or at first light for whatever else might be on offer at other marks. One occasion in particular is etched on his memory.

This involved 6 anglers fishing in 2 pairs after dark using Mackerel baits and their normal everyday Cod tackle, which produced a never ending stream of Congers, the biggest of which was probably 25 pounds, and the total figure going to over 40 fish. Next morning, they were out fishing Arrochar pier, where they took 10 species including Thornback Rays, Pollack, Coalfish, Cod, and yet more Conger, while on another day fishing at daybreak they took around 400 pounds of Cod. That's how good it was even up at the furthest inland extremity of the Clyde sea lochs system.

Then, sadly, almost as suddenly as it had appeared on the sea angling map, Scotland's fantastic Cod fishery in the upper Clyde was gone, wiped out virtually overnight. The decline probably started to be noticed around 1974, and by 1976 the Clyde was all but a shadow of its former self. Today, to all intents and purposes it's a barren dessert, wiped clean in much the same way as Canada's Grand Banks, the cause of which is a sad indictment of the live for today mentality of commercial fishermen with little regard for and riding rough shod over the many people along the coastline from Dunoon around to Helensburgh and across the way from Gourock through to maybe Wemyss Bay, who had invested in and relied upon the spending power of visiting anglers, buoyed up by the big thoughts of big Cod, who now no longer visit the area.

Speaking to Duncan Swinbank, famed for his exploits with huge Common Skate out from Tobermory on Mull and who fished the Clyde extensively at the time and is therefore very much in the know with regard to what happened, he tells me, as have many magazine articles before, that this was a major Cod spawning area, which up until anglers highlighted its true potential had been a protected area so far as commercial fishing for other than shellfish and prawns goes.

Anglers it seems had once again become their own worst enemy, and very soon envious trawler owners were chomping at the bit with comments like "If anglers can take them why can't we", leading to pressure on their representatives, who in turn put pressure on weak ill-informed government fisheries ministers to have the ban lifted, which they did. Within 3 years it was gone, and over 40 years later it still shows no sign of even a modest recovery.

It should also be noted that anglers too contributed directly to this demise. Anglers often find it hard to grasp that they too can make a noticeable difference to a fish stock, particularly a spawning population, but you need to take account of angler's ability to very successfully intercept spawning fish in comparatively confined spaces, and the damage that taking vast hauls of fish virtually every day throughout the season can have on the situation.

Duncan Swinbank says that many of the areas such as Dunoon bank with its weed beds were inaccessible to the types of nets available at that time. But with fish being concentrated by the local geography into what was an ever narrowing space, blessed by shelter, and with a very precise measure of timing predictability to it all, is it any wonder the place was stripped bare. And yes, in part by anglers, but for the greater part by commercial greed which wiped out an entire breeding population. So is it any wonder then the place remains empty now?

YANMAR DIESEL OUTBOARDS

Probably of more importance to commercial fishermen looking for daily long running reliability and reduced fire risk than to anglers whose needs are geared more towards performance with intermittent delivery, is the concept of the diesel powered outboard engine. On the downside, a conventional diesel

needs roughly 400cc for 10 hp, which in outboard form means a weight of roughly 60 Kg compared to typically around 40 Kg for an equivalent petrol version, plus more smoke, more noise, and vibration.



In 1969, Japanese company Yanmar Marine International BV produced the World's first diesel power outboard motor, which as I recall at the time, had a covered in power-head which was very obviously physically larger than I had expected it to look.

It was very much costlier too. An outlay that typically would have been difficult to recoup from occasional leisure time usage. But not by commercial users if the company's longevity is anything to go by, with today's Yanmar Dtorque 111 twin cylinder 50 hp model looking every bit as modern as any 4-stroke petrol outboard,

and able to meet EU RDC Stage 2 emissions regulations.

THE HALIBUT CLUB OF GREAT BRITAIN

Probably like most people, I had never heard about this particular single species club until I came across a mention of it in an article entitled 'Halibut That Play Very Hard to Get' by Peter Maskell, published in Sea Angler Magazine in January 1973. In it, Maskell bemoans the fact that if Conger and sharks can have their own national club, then why not Halibut too. And so a small dedicated group of anglers based at Wick on Scotland's north east coast where the modern day Halibut story started with Commander John Woolcombe fishing off Noss Head in 1966, set about rectifying that fact in 1969.

The group was dedicated to gathering in every available snippet of information regarding the species, from scientists, commercial fishermen, and from other anglers. But despite repeated Internet searches using a variety of key words, that is as far as it goes in terms of this particular inclusion, and I suspect that like the fishing that spawned it, it too has now slipped off the radar altogether, as Halibut fishing in Scottish waters is little more than a very proud but distant memory.

MONSTER MACKEREL

Fishing from the family's own boat around the Eddystone Reef in 1969, 9 year old Steven Beasley hooked and landed a huge Mackerel of 5.6.4. A fish of a lifetime, even for a more seasoned angler.

SAM HARRIS MBE

Like many similar situations, Sam Harris getting into angling broadcasting was the result of the right man, in the right place, at the right time. After spending his early years during WWII in the wilds of a Scottish Estate near Perth with his mother who worked there as a cook, fed up with the isolation, there followed a move to Tyneside, giving Sam the chance to switch from chasing Trout and Salmon in the estate's river, to putting baits in front of Cod, flatfish and the like, by crawling under the barbed wire

marking the boundary of a supposed mine field which everyone knew was bluff, to try his hand at fishing from the local beach.

It was there he was treated to another stroke of good fortune by meeting up with the Ledger brothers, one of who was a keen shore angler, and the other, the proud owner of a small wooden clinker boat, giving him the option of covering all bases when the weather and opportunity permitted.



Sam tells me he was fishing one day at Blyth around 50 years ago, which dates it to the late 1960's, (hence the timing of the inclusion here), when he was approached by a chap with a rather expensive looking camera hanging around his neck who asked if he'd mind being the subject of a few angling photographs. That chap turned out to be an employee of Angling Times, and he asked Sam if he ever did any writing, the answer to which was "No, but I'll give it a go", whereupon he was recruited to write a weekly sea fishing report for the north-east coast.

A long-distance lorry driver at the time, Sam had a friend who was a chef at quite a large Newcastle department store which was contemplating starting up an angling section in its sports department. To help smooth things along, it was arranged for Sam to have a chat with MD, who asked him if he could pop in when he had days at home from the long-distance work, to advise on the range of tackle to stock, which he did, resulting in him being invited to work there on a full-time basis, which as he says himself, was a big step up from long haulage lorry driving. One that would eventually lead Sam Harris to opening up a tackle shop of his own in Wallsend.

Around that time, Metro Radio was in the process of being set up at Newcastle, with interested parties invited to a presentation and chat which Sam along with a few friends decided to attend. The sports Editor, Charles Harrison, stood up and announced that the program would be covering ALL aspects of sport. Presentation over, Sam went over to Charles Harrison to ask if that would include angling, which judging by the reply, it clearly didn't, followed by the question "Why, is angling big in the north east?".

You can imagine the response to that one. So once again Sam was 'recruited' to participate by taking all his gear down to the beach in a howling gale, then eventually recording a short piece in the shelter of Charles Harrison's car. This went down so well that he was asked to contribute on a regular basis, which evolved into 3 angling broadcasts on different programs every week.

Having got the taste for providing angling information, Sam also began to expand the written journalistic side of things, which would over time, take in just about every angling publication ever produced. But it the radio and TV work where his main journalistic passions lay, and in particular BBC Radio Newcastle who he worked with for the best part of 40 years, interviewing a very wide range of people including a whole list of top names from all branches of life, demonstrating very clearly the extent to which angling participation branches throughout all aspects of life in this country. Unfortunately, however, changes in personnel at Radio Newcastle brought about a change in direction for the radio station, and sadly angling was one of the casualties.

Not wanting to have all of his eggs in one basket, Sam embraced other ways of getting information out to the angling public. Television presenting was one of them, working for both Finnish and Swedish TV presenting in English. And it was on an assignment for television that he landed a 75-pound Sailfish on a Salmon fly rod with a 20 pound breaking strain tippet. A fish which, had he killed it and brought it ashore, would have been a new Kenyan record.

But no, the welfare of the fish came first, which after careful disgorging was allowed to swim away, and all on camera, setting a good example to anglers everywhere, and young anglers in particular, for

whom Sam would organise shore fishing competitions. Large multi-port senior boat angling competitions too, with all the proceeds going to worthwhile charities such as the RNLI, Marie Curie, and the British Heart Foundation to name but three.

Back with the radio work, the change in direction brought about by Radio Newcastle marked the start of a new concept in angling radio broadcasting. In 2009, Community Voice FM (CVFM) Middlesbrough was given the green light, which while it falls outside the time framework of this book, as I said in my 'Inheritance' Chapter, where a project or a story starts within the twentieth century frame work it will be seen through to completion, of which Sam Harris's angling radio broadcasting is a prime example.

So CVFM took up the reins, extending the time frame too from the 1 hour it had enjoyed with the BBC, to 2 hours going out live on a Saturday morning, then Worldwide via the Internet on Mixcloud a few days later, attracting listeners and regular guests quite literally from all corners of the globe.

PW Comment: I would also add that in 2017, Sam's laid-back persuasive approach was responsible for recruiting me to do regular weekly slot on the program. Something I kind-of fancied doing but lacked the confidence to try. Thankfully, with a little practise, it becomes just 'another chat' with a fishing mate over the phone, with coincidentally, thousands of angler's eaves dropping on the conversation. So if ever you get approached for this or any similar radio project, embrace it, and it will embrace you.

RECORD PORBEAGLE SHARK TAKEN OFF JERSEY



The new British record Porbeagle Shark of 430 pounds caught by Desmond Bougourd aboard Graham Cowley's boat 'Stormdrift', on the 20th June 1969, shown here on the front cover of Angling Magazine. A further black and white photo was also produced inside the magazine showing the fish's dorsal fin. This had clearly been bitten through to the point of almost being perforated by what can surely only have been another shark of considerable size.

THE ATLANTIC BONITO RECORD

The Atlantic Bonito is a potentially confusing inclusion if you study the British record fish list. A species which clearly highlights the need always to include the scientific names of fish, which in this case is *Sarda sarda*. For while local names can vary, this is the one constant that will positively distinguish one fish from another. Unfortunately, and confusingly, in this case, *Sarda sarda* is assigned to two separate British record list inclusions, which to complicate things still further have the same captor and weight in the boat category. In other words, the BRFC have listed the same fish twice using the two different local names of Pelamid and Bonito.

The British records for *Sarda sarda* are as follows....

Bonito Boat - 8.13.4 caught by J. Parnell at Torbay in 1969.

Bonito Shore – 3.0.8 caught by J. MacGregor at Hartlepool in 2015.

Pelamid Boat – 8.13.4 caught by J. Parnell at Torbay in 1969.

Pelamid Shore – 2.10.5 caught by P. Blanning at St. Brides, Pembrokeshire in 1996.

This has been pointed out by me to the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC) on a number of occasions. A piece of confusion they seem either unable or unwilling to grasp. As J. Parnell holds both boat records then that is easily remedied. In the case of the shore record, the specimen weighing 2.10.5 by P. Blanning needs to be removed, with J. MacGregor's Hartlepool fish only being displayed in the record list. That said, the St. Brides fish would retain its Welsh record status.

Both Scotland Ireland failed to record the species during the twentieth century, which for Ireland is perhaps a little surprising considering the life style of this fish, which in favourable summers can see them push up well beyond their normal limit of the Bay of Biscay where they are said to be the most abundant small tuna species to be found in northern European waters.

THE EARLY DAYS OF FLEETWOOD

For many years the words Fleetwood and fish were synonymous, though more so on the commercial scene than by angling, as for decades, Fleetwood was the main deep-water fishing port on the western side of Britain, with boats literally queueing up on the tide in the River Wyre Channel on a daily basis to get into the fish quay from the Arctic trawling grounds.

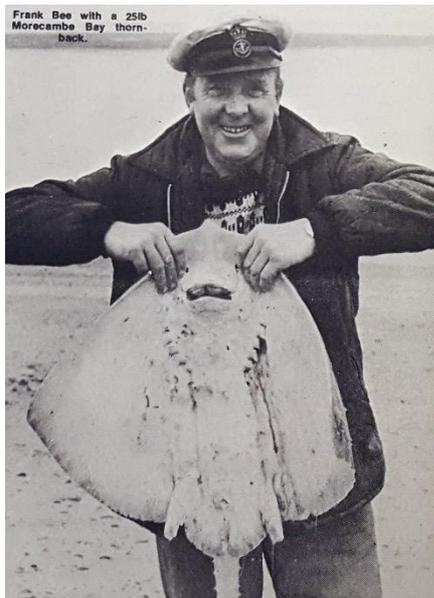
Angling unfortunately was poorly developed level during the 1960's. No boat booking was required back then. Operators such as Baird's Sea Fishing and Ledbetter would pull in, pile 'em on, and motor off down the channel possibly as far as Dumper Buoy, where on a busy day, you could quite literally end up stood behind someone who got to the wooden gunnel before you did, leaving you to fish over their shoulder.

Health and safety in terms of overloading, sea worthiness, and safety equipment were not part of either the boat owners or the local council's vocabulary back then. Despite this, from what I can remember, everyone still seemed to catch plenty of fish, and business was regularly brisk. The days of catch and kill anything for the pot.

An era when Dabs and Whiting would seasonally dominate on most days, with a few Flounders and other bits and pieces mixed in, including plenty of Weevers. But very few Lesser Spotted Dogfish, which while they were undoubtedly there, were scarce. It would take the demise of Baird's and Ledbetter, plus the forward thinking of a new generation of charter skippers to show anglers what Fleetwood and Morecambe Bay was really capable of producing.

That new generation started with a friend of mine, Frank Bee. An ex-commercial fisherman from a well known Fleetwood fishing family, who after a stint living and working in London at Billingsgate as a fishmonger, returned to his home port and decided to buy himself a charter angling boat with a plan to share his enthusiasm and local knowledge with a new breed of Lancashire sea angler.

No more heading out like an overloaded refugee boat. It would be parties of 12, and when the tides allowed due to the amount of run you get in Morecambe Bay on spring tides, new species would be sought, with the Thornback Ray heading up the list, bringing about in a new synonymous name pairing of Fleetwood and ray fishing.



Frank was already privy to many of the rays regular haunts from his commercial fishing days, though doubtless would have discovered new ones too aboard his boat 'Viking' when booked by parties hungry for a better stamp of fishing on the smaller tides. Encouraged by this, Frank started to explore the whole of Morecambe Bay, from the inner marks right out to edges of the roughs, as demonstrated in the accompanying photograph of him with a 25 pound Thornback featured in the March 1976 issue of Sea Angler Magazine.

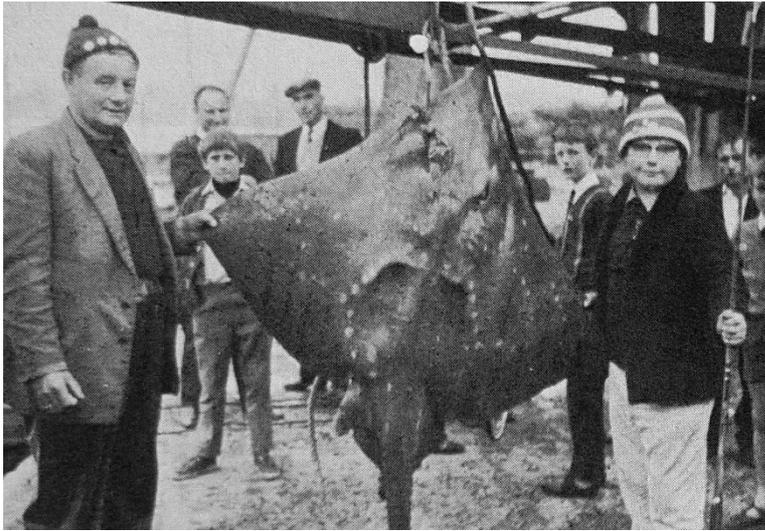
This produced some truly tremendous Thornback hauls including one individual of 31.5.0 caught by Frank himself which should have been the British record (see Chapter 10). Unfortunately, as was the norm back then, they (we) also kept many of the fish for eating. Not that this affected general ray numbers much, though taking out the bigger fish is bound to reduce the chance of quality of fish as has been demonstrated time and again with other species over the years.

Bairds and Ledbetter were still running trips when Frank Bee came on the scene, catering for a sector of the market that wasn't interested in taking that next step up. Cod off the Lancashire coast were still mainly small at that time. The 'Jumbo' years lay in the future, so there was nothing much else other than some good Plaice fishing to distract people away from the rays.

There would also be the occasional Turbot, though that's another story covered in Chapter 9. Marks such as Lightening Knoll and the northern edge of Lune, which had previously been considered distant adventures, suddenly became the norm. As such, Frank had them pretty much all to himself, and would continue to do so for quite a few years, until Fleetwood attracted sufficient patronage to warrant the gradual expansion of a weekend charter fleet, which would peak in boat numbers and hold steady throughout the 1980's, before quite rapidly, rather like the commercial fishing fleet and the town more generally, slipping into decline.

CAUSEWAY COMMON SKATE

This Common Skate of 103½ pounds was caught during the fishing of the fifth Causeway Coast Sea Angling Festival out from Portrush in 1969. It was part of a total catch of 5,878 pounds of fish in which specimen Haddock, rather surprisingly for the organisers, were conspicuous by their absence.



During the previous years running of the event when the specimen weight for Haddock was set at 5 pounds, no fewer than 225 were brought to the scales. For the 1969 event the specimen weight had been upped to 7 pounds, which is one very big Haddock. Hardly surprising then that the festival stats are as they are. Away from the festival, only 10 Haddock in excess of 7 pounds had been registered for the Irish Specimen Fish Competition

SCAPA SKATE RECORD



In the days before Common Skate conservation was kick started by Dr. Dietrich Burkel, fishing for huge skate was a bit of a transient affair, which on the Scottish scene started at Ullapool until that was fished out. Next came Orkney, then Shetland, and finally a situation in which we see the species struggling to repopulate much of the west coast of Scotland from a small refuge population in the Sound of Mull and Firth of Lorne.

Orkney went much the same way as Ullapool, with what is essentially a slow growing population of not that many fish unable to withstand the pressure put on it even by angling. Tag and release was first trialled at Shetland, though its greatest success has without doubt been around the Oban-Mull area. But not before some very big Orkney and Shetland Skate had been put on

the scales, such as this British record of 214 pounds caught by Jan Olsson, reported in the September 1969 issue of Angling Magazine, from where this picture was taken.

THE SEA OF TRANQUILITY

I've included the first Apollo Moon landing in the Sea of Tranquility on July 20th 1969, not so much because of the suggested association with the sea, though that of course was also a consideration, but more to convey a bit of historical context with regard to some of the fishing taking place on that eventful day. I would be 21 at the time, holidaying in a caravan with my girlfriend and her parents at Benllech Bay on Anglesey, and on the day in question I was sat in a small rowing boat anchored up maybe half a mile off catching Whiting, Dabs, Gurnards and Dogfish while listening to the radio as the historical episode of the day unfold.

There was this old chap at Benllech who rented rowing boats out by the hour from a small rocky creek just below the low cliffs at the edge of the caravan site. No engine, no life jackets, no anything other than a small anchor on a short rope and a set of oars. Imagine the health and safety implications of even attempting to set up a business such as that today. Imagine also the recklessness of people like myself putting to sea in such a boat. I wouldn't do it today, and shudder now thinking of how we 'got away'

with it, though in the old man's defence, he wouldn't let us go out if he could see 'white horses' on the water.

SHIMANO FISHING TACKLE LAUNCHED

Despite its place as a high flier at the quality and innovation end of the global fishing tackle market, as a manufacturer of fishing tackle, Shimano can only trace its history back to 1970. Prior to that their focus had been on engineering and manufacturing quality parts for bicycles as a company set up in 1921 by Shozaburo Shimano in Sakai, Japan, on the site of a demolished celluloid factory which he rented, using a single lathe borrowed from the Sano Iron Works, the owner of which was a personal friend of Mr. Shimano.

Bicycle engineering remained Shimano's focus until 1970, at which point the company launched its fishing division, followed by the DUX series of fixed spool fishing reels in 1971. The following year, Shimano Europe GmbH was established in Dusseldorf as a platform for launching into the lucrative European market. Actually, there is some inconsistency here with regard to Shimano's history at this point. For while some sources quote 1971 and the DUX reel series as the start of Shimano's venture



into fishing tackle manufacturing, others quote 1978 and the launch of the Bantam bait casting reel as being the start of it all. The fact that Shimano exhibited fishing tackle in Europe in 1974 suggests that the 1971 date is correct.

Riding on the success of the Bantam, the company began making fishing rods, the first of which was the X-rod. By 1977, and for the first time in rod manufacturing anywhere, Kevlar was introduced to some of the blanks, a material which later fell out of favour with rod manufacturers, primarily, though not exclusively, on the grounds of cost. Meanwhile, reel research and development continued at pace with a prototype Aero reel setting a new Japanese casting record just prior to the model's general release in 1980, with

Shimano's R&D being closely linked to superior quality material choice, as well as precision engineering, this being the foundation stone upon which Shimano Incorporated as it became known in 1991 has been built on.

PW Comment: I have to say that despite the company getting a lot of very good press over the years, particularly for their iconic TLD reel range (see Chapter 10), I was a late convert to the Shimano brand. That came about through my friendship with Dave Lewis who was and still is a sea angling consultant for the company getting them to send me a couple of Tekota 600's, which have been my first-choice reel for my regular boat fishing from that day to this. I also use some of their rods too. In particular the Exage 30 pound class travel rod for fishing in Norway, as well as for shark fishing in home waters.

SCOTTISH RECORD COD CONFUSION

Yet another example of record list confusion, this time concerning the location of a catch. Record claims don't necessarily have to be made separately when a fish qualifies for British and either Welsh or Scottish record status. If a claim is submitted to the federation of one of the countries making up the UK, providing it satisfies the requirements of the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC), which isn't always the case, that record should be 'slotted' in automatically without the cumbersome burden of a separate full written second claim being filed.

That being the case, you would expect both lists to record the same details. Unfortunately, that isn't always the case, as evidenced by a record Cod of 46.0.8 taken by B. Baird in 1970 recorded by the Scot's as having come from the Gantocks, and by the BRFC as having been caught at the entrance to Holy Loch.

SCOTLAND'S FIRST PORBEAGLE SHARK

The first Porbeagle Shark taken on rod and line in Scotland weighting in at 173 pounds 10 ounces was caught by Dr. Dietrich Burkel on the 1st of August 1970 from the tide race off the tip of Mull of Galloway. But not according to everyone when one small technicality is brought into play. A problem which didn't seem to be that much of an issue at the time then became one some 40 years later having gnarled and festered, finally coming to a head on the 40th anniversary of the catch in 2010.

According to the International Game Fish Association, if after a fish has been fairly played to the boat the trace is then touched while the fish is still in the water, then the catch is valid. Primarily, this is to facilitate in-water releases, but is also valid in all other trace touch scenarios. In the case of Dietrich Burkel's Porbeagle Shark that is not in doubt. In fact, it is the primary issue in a story that has been chewed over off and on for 4 decades and more.

During the late 1960's, local lobster fisherman Bob Hogg who worked around the Mull of Galloway out from East Tarbert Bay spoke of seeing, and having encounters with sharks in the course of his day to day work, recounts of which the locals would laugh at and shake their heads. There was a lot of scepticism and ridicule, some of which reached the ears of Dietrich Burkel while visiting the area to collect fish specimens for Glasgow Museum. Snippets of information he filed away in his brain for possible future reference.

At that time, Dietrich's fishing obsessions were Carp and Pike. So much so, that in the company of a few likeminded friends, he helped set up the West of Scotland Coarse Fishing Association. One of those friends was a chap named Bryan Hewitt who had a habit of suddenly disappearing over the summer months, which when queried by Dietrich, turned out to be to fish for Tope in and around Luce Bay.

It was at that point that Dietrich recalled the alleged shark encounters there, which in a nutshell spawned the idea of setting up a group headed up Bryan Hewitt and himself to take a closer look at the area in 1968, as a prelude to a full blown shark fishing attempt. The rest of that group comprised Bob Reynolds and Joe Kontramas, all fishing with Bob Hogg primarily for Tope, but always with shark baits set 10 to 15 feet down the water column suspended by a balloon.

This was a time when all fish were typically brought ashore regardless of their eating qualities. Dead Tope left on the shore at the end of the day were a common sight throughout the UK, something which appalled not only Dietrich, but also Bob Hogg who relied on the Tope fishing as an important supplement to his lobster fishing income. And so the scene was set. The 4 anglers already mentioned along with Bob Hogg and his 2 sons Jimmy and Harry, spread across two 15 foot open clinker boats.

Weather permitting, because this is a particularly dangerous tidal area if you don't have good local knowledge, this was repeated over many weekends, as was the drawing of a complete blank on the shark baits. Bryan and Bob Reynolds however were also keen match anglers as well as Tope fanatics, so when these 2 aspects combined at Port William on the other side of Luce Bay on the weekend of August 1st 1970, they decided to enter the competition, leaving Dietrich, Bob Hogg, and one of his sons in one boat, with Joe Kontramas along with Bob's second son in the other.

By all accounts, it wasn't a day to remember. Come late afternoon with the tide and weather just right, they took the boats into the tide race directly under the lighthouse for a few drifts, and just before calling it a day at around 6 pm, Dietrich recalled seeing a good sized Porbeagle swim past the boat followed

closely by his red balloon. At last it was game on, and a good hour or so later, fully played out, the exhausted shark lay motionless at the side of the boat. It's at this point that the 'supposed' controversy all begins.

The fish was completely beaten. The trace had been handled, which under IGFA rules makes it an authentic catch. Then Bob Hogg's son wades in with the gaff which somehow managed to touch and cut the trace and the fish starts to drift out of reach. A few pulls on oars soon had it back within range, at which point it was brought into the boat and quickly taken ashore for photographs, witnessing, weighing, and the rest as they say should have been history, with Bob Hogg's previously ridiculed reputation now very much back on track, and Glasgow museum about to become the recipient of a new example of fauna from Scottish waters. Happy days.

As you might expect, the angling jungle telegraph soon picked the story up, though it should be pointed out that the Internet, social media, and mobile phones were still a generation and more away, which is crucial to what happened next. It had been agreed right at the onset of the venture that success, no matter who it fell to, should it come along, was to be shared right across the group. So the following morning when Dietrich received a telephone call from Border Television in Carlisle wanting to do an interview, he immediately phoned Bob Hogg, who having been forewarned that this would make the headlines, had none the less still put to sea to check his lobster pots. With no mobile phone, and VHF rare to non-existent in small boats, Dietrich's wife could only manage to contact Reynolds and Hewitt

Having promised shared glory, and wanting Bob to be present, Dietrich suggested putting the TV interview off for a day, but the TV peopled refused, as by then it would be 'old news'. A take it or leave it scenario which he understandably took, being extremely careful to ensure that the 'glory' was shared as they had agreed, particularly Bob Hoggs part in it, as the archive records can support. That said, on his next visit to Drummore he was met with a particularly colourful blast of abuse, and so far as his own involvement with Bob Hogg went, that was the end of it. Dietrich then bought a boat of his own, plus a caravan at nearby Sandhead, both of which he kept up until 1979 when he received a job offer he couldn't refuse to set up a new museum in Hamburg, and back to Germany he went.

That however is not the end of the story. I knew Dietrich Burkel back when all of this was going on. I even collected a dozen or so Mediterranean species of fish for his artwork illustrations in an angling encyclopaedia. We then had no contact at all once he'd gone back to his native Germany, until he and Ian Burrett invited me to fish with them for 4 days looking for Common Skate at Crinan in 2013 where we would film a series of short catching and handling videos for the SSACN website. A visit that I will fondly remember on a number of fronts, including Dietrich catching and tagging a 100 pounds plus Skate, him having been the instigator of the Scottish Skate tagging program back in the early 1970's. Also for the opportunity to talk through the whole story of the Porbeagle catch and subsequent controversy with the audio recorder switched on.

Jump forward 40 years, the 40th anniversary of the catch in fact, and Dietrich was surfing the Internet for shark pictures when he came across a photograph from East Tarbert in the 1970 which he immediately recognised, with the request "Can anyone say anything about the included picture?". Dietrich tells me that a thread had been started with people throwing in what details they had, including Bryan Hewitt, at which point the tone started to become hostile, ultimately resulting in a story featured on the front page of the Galloway Gazette entitled "Hook, Line and a Real Stinker" by columnist Peter Foster, based on conversations he had with the remaining Hogg family members.

I've seen a copy of the story, plus a raft of correspondence and photographs sent to me by Dietrich wanting to put his side of the debate, the gist of the 'Gazette' story being that it had been Reynolds and Hewitt who had originally come up with the shark fishing idea, and were now trying to distance themselves from Dietrich and his catch. Nobody was contesting the chronological account already given. Bob Hogg was not that much of an angler himself, so the whole attempt, despite a good injection of

local knowledge and some scientific input, had been very much helped along by pure luck, which despite the fall out between Dietrich and Bob Hogg, had been favourable to all concerned, resulting in the forming of the Mull of Galloway Big Game Fishing Club in 1971.

According to the 'Gazette', the remaining Hogg family member Jimmy, who was present on the day and from a family moulded by truth and integrity, along with Bryan Hewitt, was now some 40 years on giving a very different version of the outcome of day, suggesting the trace parting invalidated the catch, all of which Dietrich puts down to a mix of envy at him having caught the fish, a distortion of what had happened with the TV interview, and his subsequent appointment to the post of fish recorder for both the SFSA and EFSA, despite being a geologist-palaeontologist by training. The article then said that as a result, Bob Hogg turned his back on angling out of disgust, all of which left Dietrich saddened and disappointed.

Despite repeated attempts over the years, Dietrich Burkel's Porbeagle turned out to be the only one the group ever encountered, though there were reports of one or two by other people, including one over on the other side of Luce Bay at Burrow Head, plus a 102 pounder off Port Logan in 1989. In part the problem was the distraction of the sheer quality of the other fishing available, particularly the Tope.

Coming right back up to date, things remain the same. Sadly, Dietrich Burkel died of cancer back home in Germany several weeks after our Crinan reunion. This however is not the end of Scottish Porbeagle fishing. Far from it in fact, as Scotland now holds the World all tackle record for the species. But we must move further north and a decade or so forward into the future for that instalment (see Chapter 9).

TOO MANY BASS

So prolific were Bass around the North Kent Coast that in 1970 a scheme was brought in by boat operators in Herne Bay to ration the numbers being brought ashore by anglers, who it was said at the time to be fed up with catching them. At the same time, a request for volunteers was made by the National Federation of Sea Anglers to tag and release, as many Bass as possible in order that more could be learned about their habits, as the NFSA was starting to get concerned that some of the catches referred to earlier might lead to a depletion in their numbers.

ANDE FISHING LINE

From my own personal recollection, Ande fishing lines came to prominence here in the UK when people like Graeme Pullen started organising groups to some of the more far flung corners of the World searching for Marlin, Sailfish and the like in the 1980's, though I would add that ANDE was catching big fish in its home country of the US and at other line-class orientated fishing venues well before then. I can picture us all now wetting huge jumbo spools of the stuff and helping each other load up with 50 pound class Ande Premium in anticipation of what was to come, in the knowledge that well over 2,000 IGFA records had been taken using Ande monofilament.

Monofilament has had, and will continue to have, a bit of an up and down history in terms of popularity, particularly when modern braids took the British fishing line scene by storm in the 1990's, with everyone initially jumping on the band wagon until people sorted out what it was they really needed. In some cases that would remain braid. But in all honestly, monofilament is going nowhere, particularly for



shallow water fishing and in the hands of beginners. And let's not also forget that monofilament, including Ande, has been responsible for some of the biggest fish ever caught.

Adding to the flexibility of their monofilament, Ande market their product under the 7 sub-headings of Tournament, Premium, Monster, Back Country, Ghost, and Fluorocarbon, plus there is a variety of leader materials, with Ande Premium, which is a medium soft high tensile strength mono with good knot strength and abrasion resistance, arguably the best general purpose version, offering quality and uniformity, which is exactly what is needed when submitting a line sample for testing as required by the IGFA for line class record claims.

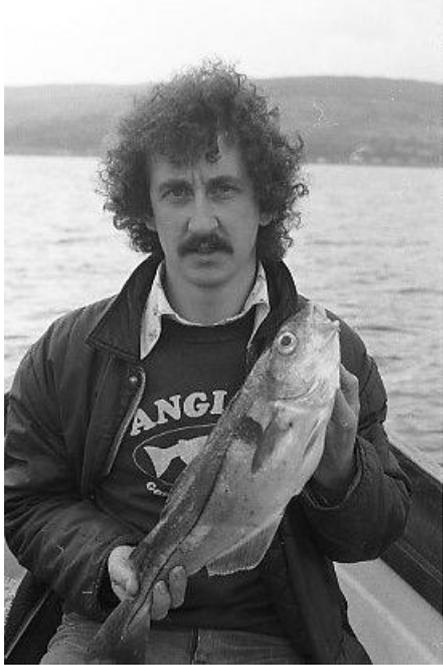
PHILL WILLIAMS

I've decided to slot my own inclusion in at 1970. That was the year when my fishing first became organised and moved up another level. It was also the year I got married. I was out in the back garden looking to sort things out there when I got chatting to my new neighbour Freddie Bell. He also happened to be interested in sea fishing and was a member of the Leyland & Farington Boat Angling Club. Thankfully, the new wife was stood there with me when Fred suggested I go with him to the next meeting. That put her in the tricky position of pretty much having to say yes, you go and have a look dear, which was exactly what I did.

Previously, I'd been doing a mix of coarse and sea fishing. Living inland doesn't exactly help when your main interest lies with fishing in the sea. Over the years I'd done quite a bit of chartering when the opportunity had presented itself, plus a lot of holiday angling from both the boat and the shore. But this was my golden opportunity to meet with like minded people wanting to fish on an regular organised basis, and I grabbed it with both hands.

At this point let me mention my earliest recollection of fishing from a small boat, which is what I would ultimately end up doing for most of my adult life. Both with my parents, and later with my girlfriend soon to become wife's parents, I would spend a couple of weeks each summer either camping or in a caravan at Benllech Bay on Anglesey. Below the site was a path down to a small rocky creek with a tiny shingle beach. There an old by the name of Bob Williams (I think) had half a dozen 12 foot rowing boats which he would hire out by the hour.

They were little more than empty wooden shells containing nothing but an anchor and a pair of oars. I shudder now at the thought of rowing out at maybe 12 years of age with absolutely no concept of what might happen. So long as in old Bob's words there were no 'white horses' on the water then it was okay to go out. Mainly we caught Mackerel, Whiting and Dabs. Also a few dogfish, the odd Gurnard, and



occasionally even a Thornback Ray. But it didn't matter. I was doing my own thing, catching stuff entirely by my own efforts, and have continued to do so ever since.

Bringing the story back to 1970, my first trip with the Leyland & Farington Boat Angling Club was to Morecambe, which is the next inclusion after this. In a nutshell, which is what the tender used to ferry us to and from a moored shrimping boat looked like, in horrible cold, wet, and choppy conditions, we sank on the way back in, and were all very lucky to live to tell the tale.

Definitely a pivotal moment which could have gone either way in terms of me carrying on boat fishing. As a none swimmer, it scared the life out of me. It's funny though how things sometimes work out, because the next trip I was already committed to at that stage was to fish with another old boy called Davy Agnew up at Scotland's Loch Ryan. The problem was that Davy chartered out of a 16-foot clinker MacKay Viking powered by twin Seagull outboards, and every time I looked at the bulge of water coming up from the boats wake I could visualise it swamping in over the

back and taking us out, as had happened some weeks earlier at Morecambe.

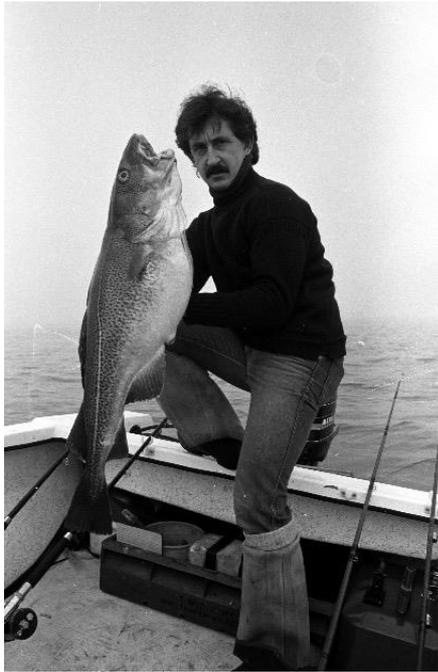
Davy could see I wasn't comfortable, so I told him all about what had happened. That was the beginning of a lifelong friendship, with him encouraging and teaching me everything he knew about small boats, locating fish, and how to catch them. Coaxed out of my fear of being in a small boat, Davy Agnew single handedly set me up for what would be my entire angling life's passion, with 2 Scottish, 1 British, and 1 European record along the way from his boat.

With another dose of irony, after becoming smitten with catching Haddock at Loch Ryan then discovering it was possible to catch even more of them at Lamplash on the Isle of Arran, after initially charter fishing there with Scottish International Neil McLean, I was introduced to a new self-drive fleet he'd just bought. All of them MacKay Vikings with Seagull outboards, only this time, instead of wood, they were made from fibreglass. And again, without wanting to repeat what has already been written in Chapter 9 regarding the wonderful Haddock fishing at Arran, I found myself in a situation one wild January morning at the back of Holy Island, where again in a small boat, I thought my number was up. Thankfully it wasn't. So unhesitatingly when it came time for me to buy my own boat later on in the 1970's, there could only be one choice.

Prior to buying my first boat, I had just completed a couple of seasons dinghy fishing with Keith Philbin right at the start of the Fylde Coast Jumbo Cod era. Some big Cod were just starting to come out, but people hadn't properly got it all sussed by that stage. Keith had built himself 16 foot dinghy with a cuddy literally from scratch. He had bought in rolls of fibreglass matting, drums of resin, and borrowed a mould from their supplier, Glass-Plies at Southport. That's what people often did back then. They made their own trailers too, which Keith would later also do for me.

I then had to drag it over to Blackburn to have it galvanised, as I'd seen far too many rotting painted trailers break apart under the pressure of winching back on. That trailer allowed me to turn up at Cleveleys with my brand new 16 foot MacKay Viking, putting me right at the top of the pile, which for an open boat powered by a 9.9 hp Johnson which my boat partner Steve Lill provided, says much about the state that small boat fishing was in during the mid-1970's, though unbeknown to me at the time, this would be the foundation upon which I would build my angling journalistic career.

As the 1970's progressed on into the 1980's, and with massively increased numbers of small boat anglers both nationally as well as locally all wanting a slice of what at the time was without doubt some



of the best winter Cod fishing anywhere in the country, there was a golden opportunity there to promote, to educate, and to advise on all aspects of boats, engines, safety, handling, and all the rest, which for someone like me wanting to get into angling journalism with magazines such as *Sea Angler*, *Sea Fishing*, and *Boat Fishing Monthly*, meant that the World was very much my oyster.

So much so that my fishing mate Brian Douglas and I published the first ever book looking at all aspects of small boat fishing entitled 'Dinghy Fishing at Sea', published by Beekay in 1984, which quickly sold out and went into subsequent additional print runs. Now when I flick through its pages, it reminds me of how far small boat fishing has come.

For example, we were using nothing more than a Seafarer 'spot the ball' flashing light echo sounder and a compass. Initially, that was it. Electronic navigation, VHF radio, and all the stuff we take for granted now, wasn't even a dream back then. But we had the fish. And while we struggled in some ways and perhaps took a few too many risks, offered the choice between then and now, I

would choose then every time.

As time went on and faster outfits came on the scene, we needed to get better organised. With speed and increased size comes increased weight, which on an exposed west facing soft muddy beach with loose shingle stacked up along the base of the sea walls, and precious few access slips, meant the time had come for tractors, which in turn meant club membership, giving us 'the ear' of the local council to push for improved facilities.

The Fylde coast had (still has at the time of writing) 3 small boat clubs with around 70 member boats in each, with other similar clubs around the periphery (see Chapter 9). That's a mark of how popular dinghy angling quickly became in Lancashire, though unfortunately, it isn't like that today. On a flat calm day with a big tide in January you would struggle to find a 'parking place' off Rossall. Now that the big Cod are but a distant memory, things have changed. Some days you now struggle even to see another boat. And as time goes on I predict it's going to get even worse.

Currently, those who can afford to buy into dinghy fishing tend mainly to be middle aged men with disposable income to spend on 'boy's toys' such as boats and motorcycles. But eventually, these people slip off the radar, and with nobody coming through the ranks to replace them, it can only end one way. Even if youngsters have the money, most prefer to spend it on X-Boxes rather than tackle boxes. We are becoming a nation of hermits, fast losing the ability to communicate face to face, in a World governed by parents literally terrified of letting their kids leave the house on their own.

In addition to promoting small boat fishing and all the peripheral stuff that goes with it, I was also keen to explore and to reduce the gap between what had previously been seen as the 'property' of charter boats, by showcasing what small boat anglers can achieve. Examples here are offshore wreck fishing, exploring the big fish potential over in Ireland, and seeing just how big of a fish it is possible to catch from a trailed boat, inspired to no small degree by the Marquis of Sligo and Dr. O'Donnell-Brown back in the 1930's.

They would row out around Achill Island in a traditional hide covered Irish Curragh and catch Porbeagle Sharks, some in excess of 300 pounds. Now that's what you call pioneering. No way could we, or would we, even try to match that. But pushing the boundaries mattered, with big Tope, big Monkfish, White Skate to 140 pounds, Porbeagle Sharks inside the boat to 170 pounds, and Common Skate to over 200 pounds all helped.

Sadly, in my opinion, the quality of the fishing these days hardly warrants the massive investment small boat fishing now requires. At the time of writing (2018), a fully equipped Warrior 175 which is the outfit Dave Devine, Charlie Pitchers and myself had, costs around £25,000. Even if we do one day finally ‘take back our own seas’ from the EU as the politicians keep promising, which quite frankly doesn’t look to be a certainty, with rising sea temperatures and what we’ve done to the place already, I don’t hold out much hope.

My other big passion was for species hunting. At a very early stage in my fishing I decided I wanted to catch every species in the 4 combined record lists of the British Isles. Finally appreciating that some of them were rare never to be repeated one-off’s, a quick re-think brought some measure of realism to the project, setting the new target at 100 species from UK waters. Bear in mind that LRF didn’t exist back then, so the opportunity to ‘bulk up’ with otherwise rarely seen mini-species was not appreciated. So, for the most part, it had to be done with ‘proper’ fish.

I later added in an extra level of difficulty with a World-wide target of 300 species, and as time went on threw in a few other objectives for good measure, giving me a final bucket list of 100 species from home waters; 300 species Worldwide; a British, a European and a World record; a double figure Trout; a double figure Bass; a fish in excess of 200 pounds from my own boat; a fish in excess of 200 pounds from the shore; a fish in excess of 100 pounds in freshwater; a fish in excess of 1,000 pounds; to write features for all the UK based sea angling magazines; to record 200 archive audio interviews with the great and good of angling, and to complete a fishery based Ph. D research project (see Chapter 11).



One other element was to produce a book based on my exploits when the fishing was all over. Knowing when to call time on the fishing and start writing is never an easy thing to do, though in my case it was made somewhat easier by being diagnosed with rapid onset Rheumatoid Arthritis, plus some ‘spinal difficulties’ which particularly affected my upper body, and therefore my ability to fish.

Even so, it was hard to walk away from the boat fishing, though I still do some shore fishing whenever I can. Thankfully, everything on the list was achieved by that stage with the exception of the 1000-pound fish. I had previously caught fish to 900 pounds, but that wasn’t enough. So, I discussed things with my Rheumatologist who agreed to help prepare me for one last hurrah with a powerful, carefully timed steroid injection. That it was hoped would see me through an attempt at catching a ‘Grander’ Six Gilled Shark at Ascension Island.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t to be, though I did get a consolation 90-pound Wahoo plus loads of Yellow Fin Tuna, Jacks, and some enormous Oilfish. Anyway, putting a tick against everything might have looked too neat; too contrived. So maybe missing out on one of them looks a bit better. I don’t know. But I produced the book anyway entitled ‘The Ultimate Angling Bucket List’ which I have made available as a free download in .pdf format, and as an un-illustrated volume on Kindle. Hard copies went to my immediate family; to Angling Heritage, and to the British Library for archive and research, a process which will be repeated when this volume is complete.

MORECAMBE

Despite living 30 miles inland from the coast, I have been drawn to fishing in the sea whenever and wherever opportunities presented themselves for as far back as I can remember. Some of it as far back in time as the 1950's and early 1960's. Then, when I got married in 1970 and set up home on my own, one of my new neighbours just happened to also be a sea angler and persuaded me (or more to the point, my new wife) that I should join the club of which he was a member, the Leyland and Farington Boat Angling Club, which I did, and promptly booked myself on to the first available trip, which as I touched upon in the previous inclusion happened to be to nearby Morecambe.

It was still very early in the year. The wind was fresh, and the day itself was miserable and freezing cold. The man who would be taking us out was one of the local shrimpers who had his boat moored up in the channel opposite the concrete slip close to the yacht club at the northern end of the town. Bear in mind, Morecambe back then was a very different place to the Morecambe of today. There was no rock armour for starters. Huge shore matches would be held from the promenade over high-water, and the mussel beds were far more extensive than they are today.

Getting to this boat meant splitting us into 2 groups and ferrying us out using the boat's small tender. It wasn't rough, but it wasn't calm either, though there was no way he was going to be taking the boat too far down the channel out of the shelter of the land. I don't recall much about the day itself, though I do have one stand-out memory which I'll come to in a moment. I know we had flaties – presumably Plaice and Flounders. Also a few Eels, and absolutely dozens of Sea Scorpions. Not sure which of the 2 species, other than to say they were all quite small and you couldn't get away from the things. A fish you rarely if ever see now at Morecambe today.

Trip over, it was time to head back to the mooring and be ferried back to the slip. I was in the second group numbering probably half a dozen of us, plus the boatman working the oars in the small overcrowded space. I remember us taking a few bits of water in over the stern and everyone laughing at those who got wet. Next thing, one big wave rolled in over the back and the boat was gone. I can still picture it now. All of us stood up and boat slowly sinking deeper and deeper until 'bump', it settled on the bottom. No life jackets; no anything.

Fortunately, it was probably only around shoulder deep. Everyone grabbed hold of the person next to them, and slowly we inched our way in while trying to stay upright in the tide. Not the most auspicious of starts, particularly for someone destined to become a small boat angler. An incident that remained stuck in my mind for quite some time after, particularly on the next club trip which was a small boat trip fishing with Davy Agnew on Loch Ryan. I kept imagining the wake from the outboard washing in over the transom and swamping us again. A thought which took quite a bit of time to erase from my head.

Obviously, that wasn't the last time I fished at Morecambe, either from the boat or the shore. Morecambe was and still is an excellent venue for Plaice, supported to no small degree by extensive mussel beds back then. There were Bass too at a whole host of locations from Heysham north past the Battery through to the very top end of the town which is also where some of the best Plaice fishing is now. Every year there were and still are big Bass caught, occasionally going into double figures, though as with most venues, more modest fish are always the order of the day.

There was also some very good dinghy Bass fishing using trolled lures and peeler crab over Grosvenor Skeer, which back then was a patch of boulders in an oasis of fine sand. That has since changed dramatically in more recent times coinciding with the installation of the towns rock armour sea defences. A piece of 'engineering' responsible for altering the whole dynamic of the area due to the deposition and transportation of particulates in the area, all but stripping the sand away from the Heysham end of town exposing a field of boulders previously not seen, presumably connected to what was Grosvenor

Skeer, dumping the particulates at locations it never was before, and in many cases not wanted. Grosvenor Skeer was also quite a useful winter Cod and mark too.

THE RECORD BALLAN WRASSE

When Barrie Lawrence from Penrhyn in Cornwall set a new British record for the Ballan Wrasse at 7 pounds 10 ounces 15 drams at Trevose Head in 1970, not only was it a news story in its own right, but also one which reaches both forward into the future and back into the past, with links to the Mitchell-Hedges wrasse controversy story from Chapter 3 regarding a long-standing record that was evicted from the list after having kept who knows how many genuine records from being claimed.

Freed of that burden, and with the species showing real signs of a comeback after the calamitous 1962/63 winter freeze, Ballan Wrasse enthusiasts throughout the south west were, and still are, showing the species a new measure of interest, with Barrie Lawrence taking up the challenge pretty much as soon as the record slot was vacated, predicting in the June 1973 edition of Sea Angler Magazine that it could eventually climb up into double figures, a claim that would later receive some measure of credibility when the Mitchell-Hedges case of 4 large wrasse, including his ill-fated 'record', was rediscovered intact at the Vectis Boating and Fishing Club on the Isle of Wight (inclusion earlier in this Chapter).

Judged against today's Ballan Wrasse records, both of which fall just short of 10 pounds, to me that opening paragraph says two things. On the one hand, at just over 7½ pounds, and with few others caught during the 1960's in the 5 to 6 pound bracket, it shows the size of the 'hit' the species took as a result of the catastrophically bad winter of 1962/63 which took out most of our shore loving Ballan Wrasse population, plus a lot of their food. On the other hand, despite the predictions of both Barrie Lawrence at the time, and Mitchell-Hedges almost 50 years earlier, double figure weights it would appear are right up at the upper growth limit for this species. If not, despite what divers claim to have seen, then surely we would have seen one brought to the scales by now.

BIG WRASSE CAUGHT POST 62/63 WINTER FREEZE

1964: S. Turville, Guernsey at 7.8.0.

1966: J. Baker, Plymouth at 7.2.0.

1969: P. R. F Collins, River Yealm at 7.2.0.

1970: B. Lawrence, Trevose Head at 7.10.15.

1971: B. Hartley, Guernsey at 7.2.8.

1972: N. Childs, Looe at 7.4.0.

1972: R. Hockey, Channel Islands at 7.2.0.

FOOTNOTE: Both the boat and shore records of all 4 nations of the British Isles have yet to exceed 10 pounds at the time of writing (2018).

DON'S ANTILASH

Don Neish was the owner-proprietor of the well-known fishing tackle shop 'Dons of Edmondton'. Primarily a fly fisherman, he loved tinkering and trying to solve problems through innovation, which led

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246 FORE STREET, LONDON, N18.
Tel: 01-807 5219.

to him putting a number of his ideas out there in the public domain through his shop, such as the Hammerhead Bass rod which featured a slug of mercury running free inside the blank to improve the rods strike force by weighting the tip, which apparently stirred no health and safety concerns back in its day.

His most important, and certainly best known piece of innovation however, was his 'Antilash'. A spring-loaded wire contraption, which when fitted to the rear facing side plate spacing bar of a multiplier reel would bounce up and down controlling the line loop at the spool with a braking system. This was aimed at keeping the line tension just right in order to avoid overruns caused by a snatched cast. It was marketed by Lew Childe towards the end of 1960's.

Not being involved in shore angling at the time the gadget was in vogue, I find it a difficult concept to picture in my mind's eye, despite seeing a short video presentation on YouTube, which if I'm honest I'm still not that much wiser. So I enlisted the expert help of master caster John Holden, whose email I will quote verbatim here to avoid any ambiguity.....,

"The Antilash was an attempt at a mechanical thumb for controlling the spool. It comprised a wire arm with a line loop on one end and a brake block at the other. The middle of the wire was coiled into a tube so that the device would sit and turn on one of the reel's rear crossbars. The device was spring loaded at the centre in such a way that in its resting position the brake block was held against the line, and consequently the line loop was held high.

The idea was that when line was running smoothly from the spool in a controlled cast, there would be enough line tension to pull the line loop downward against spring pressure and thus lift the brake block from the spool. The prelude to a backlash is usually too much line flowing from the spool. This would reduce the line tension, and therefore the device's spring would pull the brake block down to the spool, thus acting as a mechanical thumb.

Great in theory, but not so good in practice. Very popular though, and many anglers swore by it."

JOHN DARLING

Genius and enigmatic. Two of many words used to describe John Darling. Others include impatient, fanatical, forward thinking, and new age, the latter in both the modern and the hippy interpretation of the words. But when you ask the people making those comments who were not only around in the John Darling era, some even fishing the same patch at the same time, though people knew of him, few it seems knew that much about him.

JD was a loner with his own take on things; a man obsessed with catching Bass. And while he didn't mind people knowing about his successes, they would know precious little of the locational fine detail other than that which he was careful to dish out in magazine articles, some going right back to the days of Creel, and later Angling Magazine with Brian Harris, and of course, through his books.

At best then, I can offer a few lightly informative crumbs, painstaking gleaned from a wide range of people. These include him being well educated, deep thinking, reclusive, impulsive, adaptable, versatile, and observant. A very good angler who would target specific marks in the Sussex area for very short periods, when through intuition, knowledge, or suspicion, he thought Bass would be there for the catching.



Initially, this was fishing for them from the shore. But when he reasoned that bigger Bass would be more readily available by going afloat he bought himself a small boat, allowing him to regularly access optimum spots at the right times and on the right tides which he did to great effect, to the point that in some angler's eyes he assumed legendary status.

Other peripheral stuff includes him originally living in London and travelling regularly to Sussex, to the point of him upping sticks and moving down there, where he would regularly camp out on the beach in the Beachy Head area. He was also reputedly a designer of fishing tackle, and as much a Cod angler at Dungeness over the winter months as he was a Bass man during the summer and autumn. A man with a totally different attitude and aptitude to most who had gone before, living at a time when social change was also well underway, allowing more of a liberal life style. So on that basis, where do I slot this inclusion chronologically?

Writing in Creel dates his success in part at least to the 1960's. An avid user of crab baits, particularly Velvet Swimmers along the stony beaches also dates him around the same period. His book work however sees him still active throughout the 1980's and 1990's. John Darling died suddenly in 2004 prompting the following obituary published in BASS Magazine by Phil Hyde.....

"John Darling was a native of east Sussex, and apart from a short time as a student in Oxford, and some time in "the smoke", working as a Night Security Guard (to give him more time during the day for fishing, he explained), spent all his life in the general area around Seaford.

He enjoyed "Huntin', Shootin', and Fishin'" and was remarkably good at it. Converting our interests into a career must be an unfulfilled dream for most of us at some time. John did this seemingly effortlessly, writing his first article before the age of eighteen, and getting it published in probably the most influential angling magazine of the 20th century, "Creel", in May 1964!

At this period, John probably felt that certain age creeping up on him, and he disappeared from the angling stage for a while, reappearing around the time when "Creel" and "Angling" magazines merged under the editorship of Brian Harris. As anglers do, John found a mentor in the form of Budge Booker, a well-known south coast angler of the time, and the learning curve steepened. John began writing and taking photos for Brian Harris, and produced some excellent and at times controversial writing, inducing some at times heated correspondence!

In 1973, the inaugural meeting of the Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society was held at Weymouth, and John was there, John's own story of what happened is in the 30th Anniversary issue of BASS.

Around 1979, Ian Gillespie was preparing a book describing the coastal fishing. John was asked to take over the project on Ian's sudden death, and the result was John's first book, the Sea Angler's Guide to Britain and Ireland, published in 1982. Also in 1982, his next book, Shore Fishing, was something of a sea angling Readers Digest, with contributions from Ronnie Preddy, Keith Roberts and Alan Yates covering subjects John felt himself not qualified to write on, like match fishing! John was an airgun enthusiast, and in 1988 Air Rifle Hunting was published.

In the eighties, John took up serious small boat Bassing, and being a thinking angler soon sorted out the most effective method: harnessed live Mackerel. In his most successful season, JD told me he had taken

143 doubles before he lost count, before you ask, most returned. His last book, Bass Fishing on Shore and Sea, published 1996, became one of his best-selling books.

Sadly, his last article is almost certainly the piece he wrote by request for our magazine. He referred to many of his friends as stars; he didn't realise he was one himself. He will be missed".

GILFIN FISHING REELS

Gilfin International (Fishing Tackle) Ltd. produced some of the first Japanese multiplier reels to make it onto the UK tackle shop shelves. Unfortunately, there is very little information out there to say what happened to the company, but it can't have fared too well over here, because other than the Gilfin 500 I had and used quite regularly, I don't recall anything much else either seen, written, or said, about any of these reels.

A superb surf-caster — at a sensible price!

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15 SEA ANGLER July 1972

I believe they also made rods, though I can't comment further on that one. But their reels, while they were typical of the day, actually weren't half bad, and could probably stand up well against many more modern moderately priced boat multipliers even today, and would I'm sure be a very good addition to the gear provided on charter boats for hire.

I say this, because the Gilfin I had was a very well-constructed, robust, yet a basic multiplier with a metal spool that could have handled pretty much anything in the way of bread and butter boat fishing.

NOTE: Even the 'tackle tarts' who collect this sort of thing and have fingers in all sorts of pies when it comes to fishing tackle would struggle to add anything much more.

IRISH PORBEAGLE SHARK SURVEY

During the 1960's, Irish anglers along the Atlantic side of the country were regularly complaining about having fish like Mackerel and Pollack bitten off by large unseen fish. So much so, that the Inland Fisheries Trust recruited a team of well known English anglers headed up by Les Moncrieff to come across to try to determine what the culprits might be. They must have had their suspicions, because the team very successfully targeted Porbeagle Sharks around Galway and Clare, no doubt confirming what people like Des Brennan had long suspected, giving the Inland Fisheries Trust a lot to think about.

From an angling perspective, Irish Porbeagle Shark populations first seriously went under the microscope in the 1970's, when Des Brennan of the Inland Fisheries Trust realised that without protection, and with the support of anglers who, in the main were visitors from the UK, the Irish Porbeagle Shark population could collapse over a very short time period, taking with it a vital lucrative injection to the economy of some west coast rural communities.

Of course, local anglers would also have a huge part to play too, as evidenced by the fact that during one of the 1970's Galway Festivals, a staggering 74 Porbeagle Sharks were brought to the scales, with

twice as many again lost due to poor quality traces. Even worse, wagons were waiting onshore to ship the fish over to Europe for eating.

Brennan also recognised the fact that other shark species, rays, Common Skate, Tope, Monkfish and Bass, all of which were important to angling, also needed specific studies, and where necessary, additional protection. But it was the plight of the Porbeagle which was the first to sound the alarm bell in the early 1970's, as it was relatively common around the Irish Coast, was slow to reproduce, and had a commercial price tag on its head.



Unfortunately, very little biological information was available at that time. It was known that the Norwegians, Dutch, and Spanish were using floating long lines, sometimes of between 15 and 20 miles in length offshore, looking for and catching fish which could be considered to be within range of some charter angling boats, putting the practise at odds with the interests of the Inland Fisheries Trust.

Porbeagle Sharks were found to be present all around the Irish Coast, including to the east in the Irish Sea. Concentrations obviously varied. What was interesting from the commercial data available to Brennan was that contrary to what was previously thought about Porbeagle Sharks being a shallow reef dwelling inshore species, they were being long lined in very deep water over a wide range of bottom substrates.

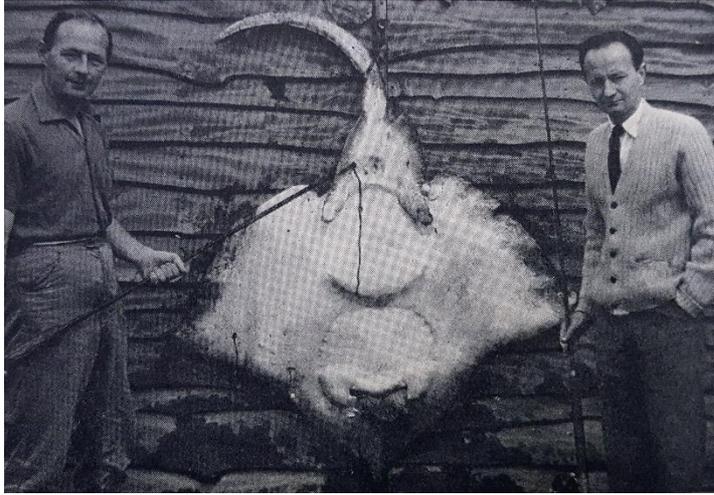
Inshore, when making short targeted angling drifts, rubby dubby is less effective than it is offshore in open water say for Blue Sharks. So, might the same be true of Porbeagles out deep? There was also some evidence to suggest that the larger growing female fish lead separate lives from the males after mating. Did the juveniles also lead separate lives, were any of them local populations, or were some or even all of them migratory?

So many questions, and so many implications for angling, both positive and negative. With all of this in mind, Des Brennan's team at the Inland Fisheries Trust (later the Central Fisheries Board) seriously set about looking for answers, developing techniques for appropriate safe handling (for the fish), tagging, and best practise angling techniques while there was still a sizeable population for anglers to responsibly target.

SIDMOUTH SKATE

Whilst researching at Angling Heritage, I came across this old photograph reportedly showing Dave Trim reputedly with a Common Skate taken off Sidmouth in South Devon. Annoyingly, there was no issue date at the bottom of the page when I got home of what I am convinced is Angling Magazine, probably published during the 1960's, or perhaps early 1970's.

If you look closely at what is admittedly not a clear photograph, you can see that the underside of the fish is white with a dusky edge to its wings. Common Skate are covered in clouds of fine black spots



marking their pores which gives them a grey appearance, and they do not have that dusky edge to the wings.

The snout of this fish is unusual too. Instead of almost coming to a point as a continuation from the tip of the wing, it has a sizeable pronounced snout. All features found in the White Skate or Bottle Nosed Ray, which at that time had the scientific name *Raja alba*, and is now called *Rostroraja alba*, so in all likelihood a case of mistaken identity.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have some particular vested interest, some will also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at the appropriate time slot. NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Tope: How to Catch Them (1961) by Bruce McMillen.

The Fisherman's Fireside Guide (1961) by Clive Gammon.

A Complete Guide to Sea Fishing (1961) by Hugh Stoker.

Grey Mullet: How to catch them (1961) by Alan Mitchell.

Tope: How to catch them (1961) by Alan Mitchell.

A tide of fish (1962) by Clive Gammon.

Shore Fishing (1962) by Clive Gammon.

Sea Fish How to Catch Them (1962) by William Barry Lord.

Angles on Angling (1963) by Capt. S. Norton-Bracy.

The Sea Anglers Pocket Book (1963) by Capt. S. Norton-Bracy.

Mackerel: How to catch them (1963) by John R. Fethney.

Sea Fishing (1964) by Harvey Torbett.

The Art of Sea Fishing (1964) by Laurie Robinson.

Tackle Sea Angling This Way (1964) by John Michaelson.

Saltwater Angling (1965) by Michael Kennedy.

Sea Angling (1965) by Derek Fletcher.

Sea Fishing (1965) by Gordon Turnill.

The Sea Angler Afloat and Ashore (1965) by Des Brennan.

Sea Fishing Tackle – How to Choose it (1965) by Bruce McMillen.

Sea Fishing for Pleasure and Profit (1965) by Rowan Cunningham O’Farrell.

Sea Angling for Beginners: Theory and Practice (1965) by Alan Young.

Newnes Complete Guide to Sea Angling (1965) by Alan Wrangles.

The Art of Sea Angling (1965) by Trevor Housby.

Salt Water Fishing in Ireland (1966) by Clive Gammon.

Feathering for Sea Fish (1966) by Frederick William Holiday.

Sea Angling (1967) by Alan Wrangles.

Successful Shore Fishing (1967) by Anthony Pearson.

Fishing: A Pictorial Guide (1967) by Clive Gammon.

Sea Fishing (Collins Nutshell Books) (1967) by Clive Gammon.

Sea Fishing: North Wales & Anglesey (1968) by Anthony Pearson.

Popular Sea Fishing (1968) by Peter Wheat.

Complete Guide to Sea Angling (1968) by Hugh Stoker.

Sea Fishing: The Wash to the Thames Estuary (1969) by Ian Gillespie.

Rock Fishing (1969) by Trevor Housby.

Sea Fishing (1969) by Clive Gammon.

Pelham Manual for Sea Anglers (1969) by Derek Fletcher.

Cod: How to Catch Them (1969) by Winston Hall.

Sea Fishing in Scotland (1970) by Laurie Robinson.

Sea Baits (1970) by Jack P. Tupper.

The Practical Guide to Sea Angling (1970) by Martin Ford.

Modern Sea Angling (1970) by Richard Arnold.

Competition Sea Angling (1970) by Bruce McMillen.

Sea Fishing for Beginners (1970) by Maurice Wiggin.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

Anglers World.

Sheffield Angling Telegraph

PW Comment: The first publication I ever contributed to.

Creel - Edited by Bernard Venables and still talked about favourably fifty years later.

Fishing – coarse and sea angling edited by Roy Eaton.

Angling Magazine – Edited by Brian Harris, who also gets an inclusion of his own in this Chapter. Arguably the most fondly remembered iconic angling publication of the twentieth century.

Anglers Mail – an International Publishing Corporation (IPC) production

PW Comment: A direct competitor to Angling Times carrying a mix of features and news across the whole angling spectrum, unlike today, when it's main focus is coarse fishing. Also, a publication I occasionally contributed to.

Rod & Line - Distributed through angling shops as a 'freebie' by David Hall Publishing. Based its revenue stream completely on advertising.

PW Comment: I did a lot of work for this magazine. Eventually it went to the wall.

CHAPTER NINE – 1971 TO 1980

The 1970's is very much a follow on from the decade that went before, collectively becoming the 'golden era' of British sea angling, the likes of which in all likelihood will never be seen again. To be born in the late 1940's into a period of relative peace with lots of good fish, and as importantly, access to them, is perhaps the biggest blessing in my angling life. A period when west country wreck fishing was producing catches and records beyond our wildest dreams, for Conger, Pollack, Coalfish, and the country's first 50 pound plus Cod. It was also the decade of the Thresher Shark.

Around the same time, Scotland produced Britain's first and only double figure Plaice of the century, taking Ireland's crown from the previous decade as the most progressive and reliable big fish producing area in the British Isles, with huge Halibut and Skate. This led to a pioneering project of Skate tagging and conservation, which after an earlier bout of killing everything coming into the boats, helped pave the way for the current expansion of the Common Skate from the tiny refuge populations Scotland was fortunate enough still to have left.

CLIMATE CHANGE

While the public at large can readily understand scientific concepts when explained properly, following on from work in the previous decade, during the 1970's, people were receiving confused mixed messages not helpful in getting the global warming/rising sea temperatures message across. With scientists increasingly warning of the consequences of global warming, talk of aerosols (smog) leading to global cooling was not only clouding the atmosphere, but also the issue in the public's mind.

Predictable Earth orbital changes known as the Milankovitch cycles said to be gradually cooling the planet over thousands of years didn't help either. So, a survey of the scientific literature was undertaken looking at articles written between 1965 and 1979, coming out at 44 to 7 in favour global temperatures rising. As a result, a number of scientific panels concluded that (as ever) more research was required to get complete consensus to be able to go forward.

One of the 'loudest' global warming voices during the 1970's was John Sawyer, who published a study entitled 'Man-Made Carbon Dioxide and the "Greenhouse" Effect', in 1972. Summarising the knowledge at the time regarding the contribution of the human derived greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, he predicted an increase of 25% by the close of the twentieth century, corresponding to a global increase in temperature of 0.6 degrees C, which with the beauty of hindsight, has been shown to be accurate.

As usual, the national press preferred to put out exaggerated warnings of global cooling. In 1975, 'Newsweek' stated that the evidence for global cooling was so strong that meteorologists were having a hard time keeping up with it, a position they would go on to back-pedal on in 2006, admitting that they had got it spectacularly wrong.

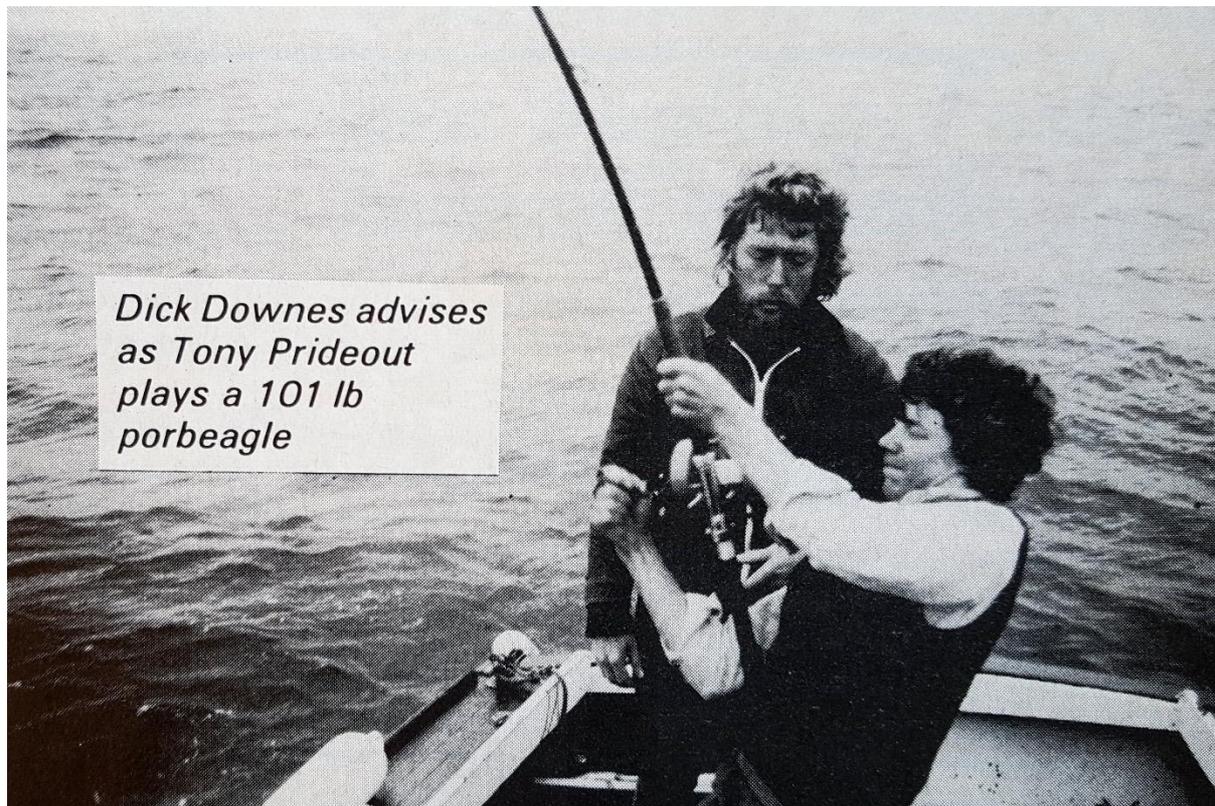
In 1979, the World Climate Conference concluded "it appears plausible that an increased amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can contribute to a gradual warming of the lower atmosphere, especially at higher latitudes..... It is possible that some effects on a regional and global scale may be detectable before the end of this century and become significant before the middle of the next century".

And in the same year, the United States National Research Council published a report concluding that if the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere was doubled, modelling predicts a global surface warming of between 2 and 3.5 degrees C, with greater increases at higher latitudes, adding that despite trying, they had been unable to find any overlooked or underestimated physical effects that could reduce currently estimated global warming resulting from a doubling of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

THE BIRTH OF EAST CHANNEL SHARK FISHING

Sometimes, it's difficult to accurately attribute moments in angling history to one specific person and/or time slot. One particular instance of this has been the shark fishing found to the east of the Isle of Wight. Trevor Housby, who has his inclusion in the previous Chapter, is one name linked with opening up and promoting this. Not specifically during the 1960's, as Trevor's career started around then, spanning the whole final third of the twentieth century. None the less, his was a name associated with this particular piece of history.

However, talking with Jon Ayres, long time committee member of Southsea Sea Angling Club, it would appear that the true honour might actually belong to SSAC member Dick Downes pictured here handing out some 'encouragement'. Initially fishing from his own 25 foot clinker boat operating out from Southsea, he later switched to full time charter skippering with much more room and horsepower at his disposal.



Unfortunately, Jon didn't have an exact date, though I did read in an article by Don Metcalf in Angling Magazine saying that it was 1968, and that a 325 pound British record Porbeagle Shark had also been caught the same year by Tony Prince. Jon recalled seeing Dick Downes come in with between 15 and 20 Sharks hanging by their tails from the bow of his boat. Porbeagles predominantly, but he thinks maybe with some Blues too, something local Thresher Shark expert Danny Vokins doubts, as amongst around 500 sharks he has caught in the area there has only ever been one Blue Shark, which tend to come into the reckoning more towards the Channel Islands.

This catch, understandably, would have caused quite a stir, prompting other anglers to give it a try, 2 of which were Terry Sears and Richard Swaggs who over a concentrated period of around 5 years brought back many Porbeagle Sharks, one of which weighed 347 pounds. It was later that Trevor Housby would have become involved. Also, Ted Legge, whose speciality was Thresher Sharks which the others also occasionally captured (included later in this Chapter), and current Thresher record holder Steve Mills (see Chapter 10).

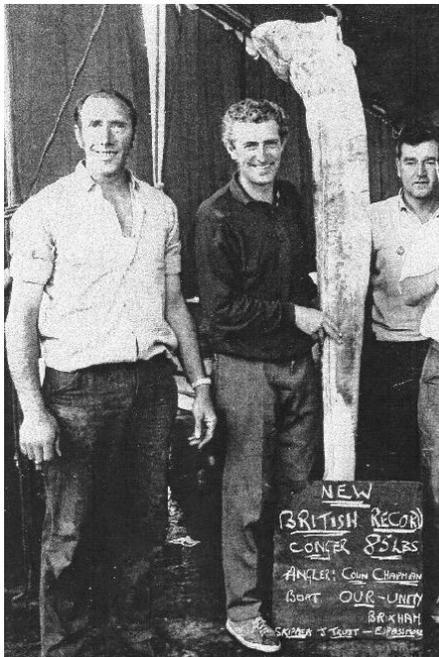
By all accounts, so far as shark fishing goes, Dick Downes was an infectious enthusiast who first became interested in sharks in his twenties whilst fishing for them at Looe and Kinsale. A man who reported seeing Porbeagles to around 500 pounds on his own patch, and was well aware of the fact that home waters Threshers could exceed 1000 pounds, having seen a photograph of one taken in a seine net off the east coast in 1952.

Fishing to the traditional drifting with suspended bait and lots of rubby dubby technique, in 1970, his two boats, 'Zane Grey' which he skippered, and 'Kane Mano' skippered by John Dudley, collectively had 70 sharks of which 7 topped 200 pounds, one being a Thresher, with the average Porbeagle probably for the area being in the region of 140 pounds.

Jon Ayres recalled once seeing 3 large Thresher Sharks swimming within around 50 yards of the shore. It was the day of the Southsea SAC children's festival and Jon was on shore duty. The 3 fish had to swim that close in to get around submarine defences put there in WWII. Large Sharks were also reportedly seen from Yarmouth pier. Dick Downes reputedly knew of several established feeding areas between the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands, with the fish tending to feed deep early season then moving up in the water column as the summer progressed, sometimes to just under the surface.

FOOTNOTE: Despite reports that the Porbeagles to the east of the Isle of Wight were hit heavily by French commercial long liners, Jon Ayes disputes the fact that this was what brought about the end of shark fishing in the area. More likely he suggests, people just stopped going. In his experience, there have always been and still are plenty of Porbeagle Sharks around, particularly further offshore and over the wrecks.

CONGER RECORD BROKEN TWICE



When H. A. Kelly broke Dreadnaught Sea Angling Society member Miss Bluebell Klean's 1922 Conger record of 63.3.0 with a fish of 84 pounds in 1933, few people expected that 37 years would go by taking angling into the 'golden era' of mid-channel wreck fishing before it would be broken again.

Fishing aboard the legendary Brixham based 'Our Unity', Colin Chapman beat Kelly's record by just one pound. Then, as with buses, after waiting ages for one to come along two turn up at once, when 17 days later the record was toppled again with a fish of 92.13.0 caught by Peter Arscott aboard 'Girl Alison', after which the flood gates burst open.

With many of the bait grabbing Ling starting to be cleared from some of the more regularly fished wrecks, increasingly, big Conger were at long last getting the chance to take the baits, with the record falling a number of times all the way through to the 'daddy' of the all, Vic Evans World record of 133.4.0 taken off Berry Head in 1995.

GRAEME PULLEN

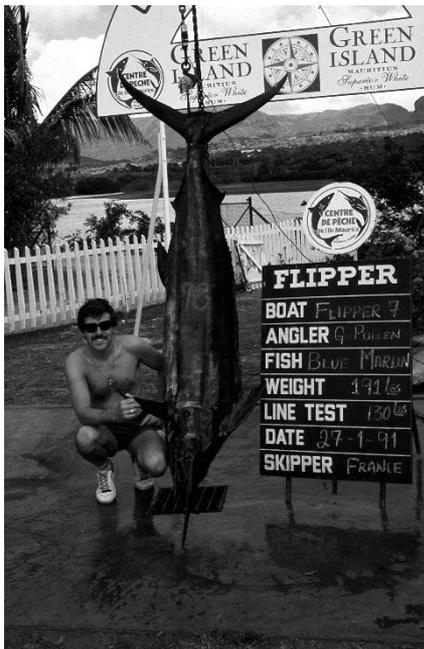
Give or take a couple of years, and with me being slightly older, Graeme Pullen and myself are pretty much the same age, though we hail from different ends of the country. Independently, we were both at

Looe during the late-1960's and early-1970's driven on by the challenge of SACGB membership, which for Graeme was the embryonic start to a lifelong interest in catching and tagging sharks, with him achieving his membership in August 1971 with a fish of 76 pounds verified by weighmaster Mr. A. B. Tudor. And while his wider fishing interests might differ from mine, there is quite a considerable measure of overlap there too. So having crossed paths on a number of occasions over the years, it was almost inevitable that we would become good friends, fishing together in a whole range of situations, both at home and around the World.

A truly international angler, Graeme has an impressive wealth of experience of fishing in warmer climates, particularly for Marlin of all 4 species, which he stopped counting when his tally got to 250. Also big Sharks, neither of which unfortunately fit well with the brief here. Thank goodness then his home water fishing has been equally impressive, particularly on the shark fishing scene, and also just about everything else that swims, be it in the sea or in freshwater. A genuine all rounder in every sense of the term. Without hesitation, in my opinion, the best all round angler I have ever come across.

We first crossed paths at Liverpool whilst waiting to board a ferry for a week away fishing at Clifden in Galway on one of the 'infamous' Irish Sea Safaris (see Chapter 9), under the 'leadership' of Paul Harris, with additional input from the Central Fisheries Board once we were over there.

I was surprised actually that Graeme opted to remain on shore to fish from the rocks at the White Lady when most of the rest of us went offshore to try for Pollack and shark. A bit of a shrewd move on his part as it turned out, as the lads who did stay behind were rewarded with a good catch of Thornback Rays, with shore fishing becoming a bit of a recurring theme on all subsequent Sea Safari's.



Personally, I wasn't too bothered about doing evening shore sessions, particularly if I'd just had a full day out in the boat. But Graeme would insist we all used every available fishing minute to the maximum, which as time has gone on and I've got to know him better away from the Irish scene, sums his level of commitment and enthusiasm up very nicely.

It's not there for show or reputation building. That's just how he is – a complete angling addict, which sometimes can get him into a spot of bother, a very good example of which was when we were over at Islamorada in Florida stopping at Bud 'n' Mary's, where the owner Richard Stanczyk is a long time friend of Graeme.

We'd been out in the daytime fishing for something or other and had enjoyed a good session. But for Graeme that wasn't enough. On the previous evening he'd had a walk around the dock after dark where the boats tie up and fillet their catch, then drop the carcasses into the water.

Bear in mind, this is a rustic wooden build marina with planked walkways held in place by wooden poles piled into the seabed. In amongst all this, Graeme had spotted some huge stingrays and some very large sharks chomping away at all the offal and decided he was going to have a go at catching them, despite the myriad of obstacles such as posts, ropes, buoys and the like. So off he went with his 50 pound class outfit, and in no time at all, he's hooked up a rather large Lemon Shark.

So large in fact that he could do very little with it. Eventually however, he managed to regain enough line to reach the trace, which for some reason he wrapped around one of the wooden posts. It was at this point the big shark went literally berserk. In fact, it looked as though it might even start dismantling

parts of the boardwalk. Unable to free the tightly embedded wire, Graeme cut the mono and bolted back to his room dreading the outcome the following morning. Fortunately for him, the huge shark had managed to tear itself free and was gone, with the walkway still intact.

I think it's fair to say that for a good 30 years or more, Marlin were Graeme's biggest obsession, which counts for nothing on the home waters scene. One aspect of this might however be of value, particularly with Blue Fin Tuna showing again all along the west coast of Ireland and into the Celtic Sea where the Welsh boats can now get at a shot at them too.

I wouldn't be surprised if they also came within range of the Atlantic Coast of Scotland, and I know they are being seen in the western English Channel too. It just needs someone to get out there set up for trolling lures, which is something Graeme is an acclaimed expert at doing. So much so, that by studying the way Marlin are raised and enticed into taking a trolled lure, he devised a trolling technique that is now widely adopted on the bill fish scene.

Traditional trolling was always done with 2 lures well back off the stern skipping on the surface from the outriggers, with a further pair closer in 'smoking' bubbles slightly subsurface on the flat lines. A large hook-free teaser is also used by some boat skippers, which when a Marlin is raised, having done its job, is quickly brought back into the boat. Up comes the Marlin attracted by the commotion of a lure on one of outriggers, and when it does, it also should see the flatline lure ahead of it, and if you get lucky, it will take one or the other of the pair.

Graeme reasoned that a fifth lure fished in the middle of the spread of 4 rather like the 5 spots on a dice would induce more takes, something he observed, tried, and found to be the case. The reason being, that wherever the fish comes up it has an extra lure in its line of sight, and if it moves in on the centre lure, it also sees the other 2 pairs out on the periphery which excite it even more, making a strike far more likely. Would it work with Blue Fin Tuna too? Who knows? One thing's for sure, if it doesn't do any good, then equally it won't do any harm, so on that basis alone it's worth a try.



Getting back to the UK scene, Graeme has and does fish for everything; boat, shore, game and coarse, and as such has written extensively on all topics across a spread of magazines and in his many books. He was also a founder member of the British Light Tackle Club, though he doesn't condone that sort of thing these days as he says it can do more damage than good.

More recently, his emphasis has switched to video making for his YouTube Channel 'The Totally Awesome Fishing Show' which has more views at times than some TV shows. This started with me on the camera and Graeme in front of it, as he can without doubt not only talk for England, but for the rest of the EU too. Often when we've watched footage back he laugh's, asking me why I didn't shut him up. But it's better than him standing there with nothing to say, which is how I would be.

We made a good team in the early days until he really got the bug and kitted himself out for the job, which I suppose was always going to be on the cards due to the geographical distance between us. Three films in particular come to mind here, which as they were shot a good decade or so into the twenty first century kind-of fall outside the historical scope of the book. But not outside the final Chapter, which plugs the gap between 2000 and publication date by exploring some of the legacy many of those people towards the end of the twentieth century left for those who are to follow, and in that regard, Graeme's filmed home grown exploits with Blue Sharks, monster Porbeagle Sharks, and huge Threshers, are more than worthy of inclusion.

FOOTNOTE: I regularly get accused of having ‘stolen’ some of our earliest films from ‘The Totally Awesome Fishing Show’ for my own website. For those in the future likely to repeat that accusation, let me state categorically once and for all that I filmed them with Graeme, where he is best placed fronting the content.

JOHN HOLDEN

No one is born into long-distance casting. Unlike fishing, casting demands a level of dedication, understanding of mechanics, and athleticism. In short, to do it well you really have to want to succeed, and in that regard, John Holden probably comes as close as anyone to being ‘born into it’. Drawn in at an early age, he recalls things starting to get serious at around the age of 14 after watching a good caster down on the beach catch considerably more fish than everyone else, an observation which despite success on the tournament field, has always been the primary objective, subscribing to the Les Moncrieff philosophy of distance plus depth often equates to more fish, and accordingly, a good shore angler needs to have distance capabilities in his armoury. That doesn’t mean hitting big distances for their own sake every time out, but being able to hit them when the need arises.

The serious casting started on a field armed with some old gear and a copy of a casting article written by Les Moncrieff. Initially John was casting across the width of the field trying to reach the far hedge which was around 75 yards away, which equates to a typical distance on the beach for a lot of anglers, though they might argue otherwise.

When this was achieved, he switched to casting along the field’s length which was around the 100-yard mark, all done whilst saving up every penny he could to buy some decent gear, which turned out to be an ABU Atlantic 484 rod designed and used by Peter Bagnall a few years earlier to set the tournament World alight, but not unfortunately Peter Bagnall’s other key tackle item, an Ambassadeur 6000 reel. The money unfortunately wouldn’t run to that. Instead, he had to settle for a Mitchell 602.

Spurred on by Moncrieff’s writing and achievements, he adopted the ‘ground casting technique’, which by his own admission, he initially struggled with. Then, as is so often the case, and for no apparent reason sometimes, one day it all suddenly came together, producing a cast of 140 yards. Within months that had increased to between 180 and 190 yards, and he had switched from ground casting to the pendulum style.

Despite always subscribing to the Moncrieff philosophy of more distance being the gateway to more fish, this inevitably led him to the tournament casting field, where in 1968, he became British amateur champion in the 6 ounce weight category. Then work, (the bane of all anglers’ lives) stepped in. Working for the NHS in bio-medical sciences saw the casting challenged by educational demands, and by 1973, the tournament casting was done with altogether. The proverbial life trajectory cross-roads had been reached. A straight choice between a career with the NHS and one as a freelance journalist.

We all know which way that decision went. And so started a long-term relationship with Sea Angler Magazine, which at the time of talking to John had been going for around 40 years. That however wasn’t his only iron in the fire. There was also a column in Anglers Mail, plus a great deal of tackle development work in America with Fenwick, DuPont, and Penn, necessitating quite a large time input over on the other side of the Atlantic. TV and radio work, plus regular inclusions in Saltwater Sportsman also quickly followed.

Meanwhile, back over here, he published the all time best selling single run angling book of all time entitled ‘Long Distance Casting’, along with a video on the same topic, which topped the 100,000 mark before going out on YouTube. Throw in some demo’s and teaching, plus the longest official cast made at a public demonstration of 252 yards at Cape Hatteras in 1983 using a Fenwick Surfstick and Penn 970

loaded with 0.40 mm line and a 6 ounce lead, as well as putting baits out to around 160 yards, and you could say that John Holden made the right decision when that career cross-roads came into view.

Working tirelessly to help bring no nonsense, no fuss, casting and tackle to the masses in a way which directly linked practical usage on the beach to distance on the tournament field, teaching became a very important part of the Holden repertoire, because as he sees it, achieving good distance is something anyone can do given the right instruction and will to put in the required practise hours.



“There is something magical about seeing a lead fly” he says. “Unfortunately, you can’t always find a suitable flat piece of beach to practise on. It works far better on a field, particularly as you can also move your casting position to suit the wind direction, allowing you to work towards achieving perfection, but always with tackle improvement in mind, or keeping the distance skills honed for the fishing”.

There are of course those who obsess over their casting. There are also casters who never bother to fish. John

Holden doesn’t see himself as belonging to either of those two camps, and now after a brief dabble with tournament casting, he sees self testing and PB’s as being far more important, particularly when they are put to more practical use down on the shore.

Regarding his success in the World of journalism, he puts that down to luck. It could have been anyone he says, until that is you factor in the first cast to break through the 200 yard barrier at a UK tournament, though it had been achieved much earlier and little reported over in America by Primo Levenais, explored here in Chapter 4.

When asked what he thought his personal contribution to twentieth century sea angling history was, he unhesitatingly pointed to his ability to get information across in a none technical manner to Mr. Average wanting to up his casting and fishing range. That he insisted, was far more of an achievement than anything that could be measured in terms of distance between a caster and his lead on the field. The focus has always been, and continues to be, using the tackle and techniques he has helped develop to catch more fish, and few could argue that he hasn’t achieved that and more.

LOCH RYAN

Situated just to the north of Luce Bay, Loch Ryan is the most southerly sea loch in Scotland, and has probably been responsible for more Scottish and British sea angling records than any other Scottish sea loch. Even more remarkable was its big reputation compared to its small size, which is around 8 miles in length, the bottom two thirds of which weren’t noted for producing much in the way of fish. The top small boat venue with access for trailed boats was Lady Bay close to the village of Kirkcolm, which is where I cut my trailed boat fishing teeth.

It all started shortly after that disastrous trip to Morecambe detailed earlier in this Chapter when the boat I was in sank, leaving me traumatised to the point where I wasn’t sure if I would ever set foot in a boat again. Ironically, the very next trip which I was already committed to fish was to Loch Ryan with

a chap called Dave Agnew who lived at Kirkcolm. Davy chartered from an open 16 foot wooden clinker MacKay Viking powered by twin 4 hp Seagull outboards.

I can remember the day vividly. Having been swamped over the transom at Morecambe, I couldn't take my eyes off the following wake kicked up by the outboards. Not the best of days then. But when I explained to Davy what had happened previously, he took me under his wing, and from that day onwards we formed a very special bond, leading to him mentoring me to some of the most memorable fishing of my life, preparing me for what would become my obsession for many years, fishing from small boats.

This was 1970, and Davy looked to be in his late 60's or more even then. A quietly spoken man, never flustered by anything, with arms like tree trunks which he'd put to good use at the end of each trip when he would march those who were fishing again the next day down to the spit opposite Cairnryan to dig lugworms for the trip.



You could of course take bait up with you, and feathered Mackerel always had a role to play. But for the best results with the Cod, Haddock and Plaice, of which there were plenty at that time and probably had been for years before my visits, it had to be fresh lug and shellfish, with the fish baits adding rays, Tope and Conger to the mix. I can picture it now armed with my ABU Pacific 6 rod and Penn Super Mariner reel which I used for everything and everywhere at a time when balanced tackle and fishing light were concepts still some years away into the future.

Like all locations, the venue had its slow times as well as its days of plenty. Though we saw decent Cod into double figures and Haddock up around 5 pounds, more run of the mill sizes were the norm, and plenty of them. Lots of Dabs and some very nice Plaice too. Fishing there from a larger charter boat, my future small boat partner Dave Devine who I didn't know at that time, took a Plaice of 7.9.0 from inside the loch.

I personally never saw a Plaice come anywhere near those sorts of proportions. But I did see the unflappable Davy Agnew flip into panic mode one afternoon when he brought a 14 pound Turbot to the surface which he twice missed with the gaff, snapping his own line in the process. Had it not been for the fact that the fish was momentarily stunned, Davy would not have got that all important successful third attempt.

That same day I broke the Scottish Tub Gurnard record, which I was over the moon about. But a fish which nobody other than myself seemed interested in once Davy's Turbot was popped on to the scales at Don McDiarmids tackle shop in Stranraer. And I was back here again one year on when I broke the Scottish Spotted Ray record, a fish which went on also to occupy the British and European slots.

The Scottish shore Tope record was another accolade belonging to the loch, as was the potential to go shore wreck fishing for Conger which I've covered in more detail a little further on in this Chapter. Then came its popularity as a shore match venue fishing in the vicinity of Cairnryan. Unfortunately, these days, you hear little or nothing about the venue. Certainly its specimen producing pedigree. It's almost as if it had never existed.

THE ISLE OF ARRAN

Having been introduced to the fine fighting and eating qualities of the Haddock by Davy Agnew at Loch Ryan (see previous inclusion), I began looking at the prospects of finding them in even greater numbers elsewhere. I once wrote an article entitled 'Haddiction', which is exactly how it was for me back then. I couldn't get enough of the things, and eventually found myself another 'dealer' in the form of Scottish International Neil McLean on the Isle of Arran, who could pretty much provide 'fixes' to order over the colder winter months.

Haddock trips with Neil were hard days. Leaving Lancashire at around 4 am, we would catch the first ferry across from Ardrossan to Brodick where Neil would be waiting to whisk us down to Lamlash by car. There his 23 foot boat 'Katrina' would be ready to take us up one side or other of Holy Island according to the wind direction and previous recent catches, to fish a series of deep water muddy ground marks from which our Razorfish baits, if they weren't taken by Haddock, would often come back covered in Brittle Stars.



Neil also had a couple of self-drive open 16 foot MacKay Vikings powered by 4 hp Seagull outboards which we would occasionally take out. The same boat, but in GRP, as that used by Davy Agnew at Loch Ryan. A boat which impressed me so much that I would go on to buy one myself to kick off my dinghy fishing career. Meanwhile, back at Arran, after an early afternoon finish, Neil would then race us back to Brodick to catch the last ferry back, which on the winter schedule was around 4 O'clock in the afternoon. Long, tough days, but always worth it.

While Haddock were always our primary objective, we also caught some nice Cod, more than enough Spurdogs, plus the occasional ray and a few other bits and pieces. At that time, Neil held the Scottish and British records for the Cuckoo Ray. A deep-water species occasionally also caught in and around the Clyde. With this in mind, I would sometimes put a bait down on a flowing trace in the hope that I too might see one.

One afternoon doing this I brought up a rare Sandy Ray *Raja circularis*, the full story of which is discussed a little further on in this Chapter. Such distractions however were always short lived. Haddock were what we were there for, and plenty of good specimens to over 6 pounds is what we caught using frozen Razorfish speared by Neil McLean on the big spring times over at Pirnmill. And now it seems those Haddock are all but a distant memory.

Before leaving the Isle of Arran, let me also mention Pladda Island located off Arran's southern tip. Spanning the gap out to Pladda, and as I understand it in that area generally, there is quite a bit of kelpy reefy ground which holds the promise of some excellent Pollack fishing. Though it was talked about with Neil McLean, the Haddock fishing back then was far too good to steal time away from.

However, some years on, long after we had stopped ferrying across to fish with Neil, I fished a trip out of Girvan with Tony Wass aboard his boat 'Rachel Clare' for a magazine article exploring the shallow reefs around Arran's southern tip, and what a fabulous day we had. Nothing huge, but plenty of hard fighting Pollack on light Pike tackle using self weighted soft rubber lures and ragworm, something I believe they still do to this day.

THE ORIGINS OF ORGANISED SMALL BOAT ANGLING

With its seven dinghy dedicated sea angling clubs dating back to the start of the 1970's, the North West of England spear-headed much of the organised side small boat angling in this country as we now know it today. Having an exposed west facing piece shoreline with absolutely nothing in the way of facilities, a huge tidal range, and shallow soft beaches, Lancashire anglers were really up against it. Hardly the best set of ingredients for regularly getting afloat, and more to the point, getting back in without incident. Muddy sand with soft gullies that could change position with every good westerly blow, steep soft shingle along the high water line, and virtually nowhere to run for safety at high water due to walled sea defences all added to the problem.

For all these reasons and more, the Fylde Coast in particular has evolved a certain type of self reliant resilient breed of small boat angler, requiring the mastery of good sea handling skills, and an appreciation of seamanship generally. And that's without the fishing. To get a result here you need to be able to read the sub-surface geography and relate it to finding the fish you are interested in catching, starting at a time when the Seafarer 'spot the ball' echo sounder was as good as it got. VHF was still some way down the line, and navigation all had to be done by rack of eye, land-marks, and a compass. All of which meant that anglers needed to get organised, even if it was just a group of like minded friends getting together to collectively hand-ball their boats down the beach and back. I know, because I've done it.

I've done my share of meeting up with several other boats on the top for a joint effort down to the water,



and more importantly on the way back again. Days requiring stripping the boat out and lifting the engine off to get the trailer back through the shingle. Obviously, as boats and engines got bigger and heavier, this became increasingly more difficult, to the point where more formalised organisation and tractors to work on the beach became inevitable, prompting the forming of the Fylde Boat Angling Club, Wyre Boat Angling Club, Blackpool Boat Angling Club, Morecambe Dinghy Angling Club, and Southport Boat Angling Club, all of which use club owned tractors.

I'm well aware that there were other pockets of small boat organisation around the country at the start of the 1970's such as the famous Hearne Bay Club. But they didn't only cater for small boat anglers wanting to do their own thing. These were multi-faceted clubs. The North West clubs were there with one objective only, and as such were instrumental in writing the rules, constitutions, and risk assessments at the heart of small boat angling clubs elsewhere today. RNLI SeaCheck was also pushed for up here, as were other codes of practise. In addition to this, we also had two of the country's main small boat manufacturers in our midst, firstly with Sea Hog Boats, then later Warrior Boats, where anglers could drop in for a chat and offer their input into what a good angling boat should be like.

The trail blazer in all of this was the Fylde Boat Angling Club situated at Little Bispham close to the Norbreck Hotel on the promenade, which like the rest of the Fylde Coast, offers poor launching facilities and little if any chance of getting in at high water in anything other than mirror calm conditions. So much so that in 1971, local angler Barry Cartlige had a letter published in the Blackpool Gazette looking for like-minded people to get together for the summer Tope fishing, with the paper suggesting a meeting

of like-minded boat owners in a local pub at which 26 people were present, collectively agreeing to extend the help to all year round and form the Fylde Boat Angling Club.

One of the new FBAC members had a Landrover which was immediately put to good use. A match was arranged to be fished every weekend, and despite the club having no other suitable on-beach vehicle, no premises, and no money, it flourished none the less. Membership increased very rapidly until it reached around 180, all with the mutual interest of helping themselves whilst helping each other. One of the members who dealt with the farming community even managed to borrow a tractor which they arranged to keep at a hotel just off the promenade. An asset which very quickly triggered the buying of another. A watershed moment.

Following this it was agreed they should become even more organised by finding themselves a premises to keep the tractors in and persuading the council to alter the launching slip, which even when they did was never very good as it was far too steep. Tractor premises came in the form of a derelict store owned by Fylde Borough Council under the promenade adjacent to the launching slip at Little Bispham which was up for rent.

This unfortunately was in dire need of much in the way of preparatory work before they could even think of using it. Because it was below the level of the prom, it flooded on every set of big tides if there was any sort of weather pushing in from the west. It also had two entrances, one of which needed to be concreted up to keep the sea out. In addition, electricity and a fresh water supply needed to be installed.

On the plus side, it would double up as a tractor store come work shop, plus a store area for a small number of trailed boats, which was fine so long as the sea way kept at bay, which wasn't always the case. One day in particular towards the end of the 1970's the glass roof caved in and the whole unit was flooded, drowning the tractors, and wrecking all the boats inside. I was actually there that day. It was heart-breaking seeing what was left of everything being dragged out once the water had been pumped clear.

By the late 1970's, with money in the bank, and some of the biggest Cod in the country on the door step, it was suggested at one of the meetings that the time was right to expand by setting up a second branch of the club. But emphatically, the committee said no to this. A decision which kick started the other two Fylde based clubs – the Wyre Boat Angling Club and Blackpool Boat Angling Club, working to the same blue-print as the FBAC, which had proved to be far more successful than anyone could ever have envisaged.



A friend of mine, George Hemsworth, who was a founding member of FBAC and had championed the request for that second branch, got together with local angling journalist Bob Gledhill to see if they could get the expansion off the ground, despite the FBAC decision. This was to be the beginning of the Wyre Boat Angling Club just across the 'border' to the north in the council area of Wyre, and of Blackpool Boat Angling at the Squires Gate down at the southern end of town.

To get the expansion project up and running, George and Bob began negotiations with both councils, looking for whatever support they could get, and whatever premises for the proposed tractors might be available. To operate a club of this type efficiently and without debt, they

knew they needed at least 70 boat members to buy the tractors. For this, the Sports Council agreed a loan with the new committee to stand as guarantors. And so began the Wyre Boat Angling Club.

But there was also still the small matter of those negotiations that had been taking place with Blackpool Council before Wyre BC came in with their proposals. A premises at Harrowside just behind the promenade at south shore had been offered to George and the others before the WBC offer was accepted, which George agreed to sign over to yet another group looking to do the same. This was the birth Blackpool Boat Angling Club, with George Hemsworth then instrumental in the setting up of all three Fylde based small boat angling clubs.

The Wyre Boat Angling Club, of which I was an original committee member, bought itself two tractors which were left on the car park of the now non-existent Durban Hotel. One looming problem was that alterations to the sea wall meant they were about to lose access to the beach. In the spirit of Magna Carta they eventually persuaded the council to build a purpose made slip with an off-loading layby in front of the Royal Hotel.

Like the FBAC before them, they also needed a secure tractor store, and again like the FBAC, they found this in the form of an old disused council unit, this time a bathing station set into the promenade at beach level just to the north of Victoria Road, Cleveleys. Again, a lot of structural work needed to be done to make it 'habitable'. The problem was, being at beach level, on a big tide it both flooded and ended up with mounds of shingle stacked against the sliding door. On the plus side, unlike the FBAC unit, this one was also self-emptying once the tide pulled back.

However, to get in once the shingle had been heaped up in front of the door, one of the tractors had to kept outside on the Durban car park with a bucket fitted to dig the other tractors out. In addition to this, the tractors could only drive on the beach between the store and the launching slip when the tide was down. These then had to be made fully road worthy and legally compliant, which they still are to this day, now operating from a converted toilet block adjacent to both the Royal Hotel and the slipway, providing a secure compound, tractor store, and workshop.

While I have been a member of all three clubs at one time or another, having spent only the one season with Blackpool Boat Angling Club, I arranged to meet up with club Secretary Grant Duckworth for a low-down on that club's history. Founded in 1982 as explained earlier, it initially began with just four members putting money into a pot to buy two old tractors which they kept at Harrowside, launching from a nice safe expanse of open sandy beach at the bottom of Squires Gate Lane.

Initially however, the council was being obstructive, something the club took to the appropriate Secretary of State representative who ruled in favour of the club. Initially, boats from Harrowside would be trailed down the busy main road to the slip for launching, a problem rectified by the building of a brand new compound adjacent to the slip, providing secure tractor storage and workshop, plus enough space for maybe 15 trailers while the boats are at sea.

PW Comment: Having been a member of all three clubs, in addition to which I was one of those handballing boats across the beach in the pre-club days, as well as having a spell Landrover launching between my WBAC and FBAC membership, I am probably one of the few people in the position of being able to talk objectively about all three clubs. Run along similar lines, at face value, there isn't that much to choose between them.

Due to the WBAC's location which is closest to the winter Cod grounds, plus a tiny strip of shingle on which to beach in an emergency on most tides, my vote would have to go to them. BBAC with its vast expanse of sand just beyond the southern end of the sea wall might on paper seem like the safest option. But as has been shown in Chapter 9 with loss of life by BBAC club members running almost the whole length of the sea wall in bad weather at high water, having a safe beach to come in on is only of value if you can make it back to use it. On top of this, in the summer time, south shore beach is often crowded

with nose holiday makers which doesn't exactly help. That said, each has played its part in establishing small boat fishing, both in the local area, and nationwide, and are still thriving to this day.

EXPANSION OF THE SMOOTHHOUND'S RANGE

Speaking to Ted Tuckerman about his early life in Hampshire before 'flitting' and establishing his tackle shop in Torquay, he is of the opinion that Smoothhounds are quite a recent addition to the marine fauna of the British Isles.



Whether there is any substance to the claim is difficult to say, though what he gives as his version of events kind-of ties in with their progressive expansion and migration northwards, which could very well have started with a single central pool, arguably making the Smoothhound the biggest angling success story of recent times.

Ted talked of a day back in 1958 when he and Gerald Aston were out fishing from their boat at the western end of the Solent around Hurst Castle. There they started catching small to medium sized

'sharks' covered in white spots. I say small, but some were estimated as getting up around 30 pounds. Not having caught nor seen these before, they assumed them to be juvenile Tope. But there was something about the fish that persuaded Ted to dig a little deeper, which to cut a long story short, saw them eventually identified as being Smoothhounds. Not only that, but so far as could be ascertained, the first ever Smoothhounds caught on rod and line in British waters, though they had been previously landed and identified commercially at Brighton around 90 miles to the east.

My first encounter with Smoothhounds came while fishing with John Rawle out from Bradwell in Essex in the early 1970's. Writing about them in one of the magazines at the time, John's business partner Bob Cox posed the question of why a fish which feeds on slow moving prey such as crabs needs such a powerful set of fins and burst of speed, adding that in his opinion, they must be God's gift to sea angling.

With that fixed firmly in my mind, I was determined to put some of these 'wonder-fish' through their paces, and sure enough he was absolutely right. So impressed was I that I remember thinking "if only there was some way of transporting a shipment up here to Lancashire for release", though obviously that was never a viable option. In the final analysis, I needn't have worried, as within 10 years they had arrived along the Fylde Coast of their own accord. That however is to jump the story a little too far ahead.

After Ted Tuckerman's encounter, they started to become popular throughout the mid to eastern-sector of the English Channel, and to the north side of the Dover Strait into the southern North Sea, in particular around the Thames Estuary. Somebody will no doubt correct me (or more to the point, Ted) if this sudden appearance hypothesis can be shown to be wrong. Either way, it doesn't affect the rest of the story, for while Smoothhounds had never been much of a player beyond the eastern extremity of the Solent, they next start to become popular between Cardiff and Swansea in South Wales. Whether that

was by them suddenly appearing, or as in Ted Tuckerman's example, people not realising initially what they were, again it is difficult to say.

Before we started seeing the odd one come to the dinghies around Cleveleys just to the north of Blackpool in the 1980's, I remember having a day dinghy fishing for them out from Trefor in Caernarfon Bay, then shortly afterwards reading about shore anglers targeting them along the Anglesey side of Caernarfon Bay, in particular from Newburgh beach and Llandwyn Island. And there it seems they stayed for quite a few years, until more recent times when they seem to have become harder to find there, despite the fact that Church Bay at nearby Holyhead not only holds the Welsh record at the time of writing, but continues to produce some of the biggest specimens taken anywhere in the UK.

Now we come to Lancashire. As I say, it was the early 1980's when I first heard of them through my self-appointed job as keeper of the North West record list. Again, as in the Ted Tuckerman example, they could have around before that time and been labelled as small Tope. We will never know the answer to that one, but I suspect not. For once I was aware of them, I started to keep an eye out, and only rarely did an odd one pop up. Granted, we weren't fishing crab baits as were after Tope and rays. But we were fishing squid early season before the Mackerel arrive, and late spring is a very good time for Lancashire Smoothhounds, with squid one of the top baits, so I can only assume there were very few about, unlike now when they are one of the top inshore boat and beach mainstays.

That's it for the twentieth century regarding the Smoothhound expansion. However, as I said in my introduction, where a story begins in the twentieth century and continues on beyond the cut-off point, I reserve the right to see it through to completion, as is the case here. Along the Fylde Coast the Smoothhound fishing has just got better and better year on year. But more than that, since the Millennium, they've also been doing a bit of 'back filling' too, the first inkling of which was a call from 'Jensen II' skipper Tony Parry at Rhyl in 2005. Apparently, one of the local Salmon netters working close to the river mouth had found several Smoothhounds tangled up in his net. Armed with this information and a bucket full of peeler crab, Tony went out to investigate, and sure enough, for the first time in all the years he had been living and chartering out of Rhyl, he started catching Smoothhounds.

On the back of that he had me down there with the camera gear in the company of Mick Duff, Bob Jones and a few others, and we had an excellent day. Nothing big. Sticking to the sudden appearance formula, most of the fish were under 7 pounds, but as with Lancashire, that would change, just as it has at Liverpool which was the next example of back filling. A call from Mickey Duff and John Greenfield for a run out along the Mersey revetment wall aboard his Warrior 175 looking for Bass saw Smoothhounds galore on peeler crab all along the wall edges. And again, this has expanded and improved, with smoothies now a regular feature for both boat and shore anglers fishing the Rock Channel, with fish well into double figures now a fairly regular occurrence.



The most recent expansion example came on the back of another charter skipper phone call. This time it was Ian Burrett who operates 'Onyermarks' based up in Luce Bay, who like the others, had been alerted to a sudden influx of Smoothhounds in the Ardwell to Sandhead area and invited me up to record the event.

Again, lots of fish up to maybe 7 pounds which have since improved in size, extending their range across the bay around

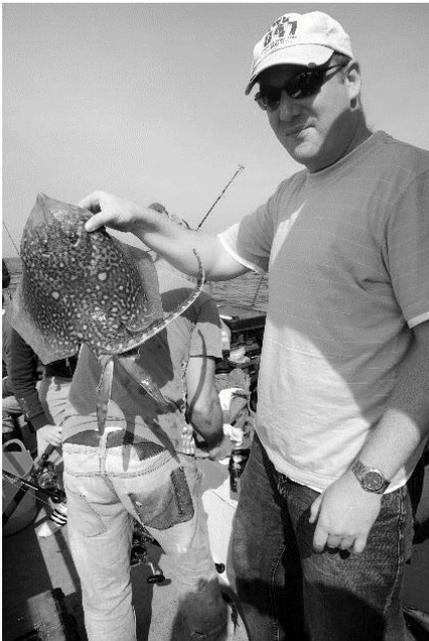
Burrow Head into neighbouring Wigtown Bay, and possibly even further east along the Solway. Also perhaps in the other direction too. There is some fishing activity above Luce Bay which should pick up on any extension in range northwards. But as you get beyond The Clyde that activity becomes sparse, which means that the extent of any further migration could well slip by unnoticed.

That however is not the end of the story. Since the Luce Bay migration there has been a bit more back filling between Morecambe and Heysham in Lancashire. There has also been a bit of controversy too. You may have noticed that I have stuck to the basic term 'smoothhound'. No mention of there being a Starry or a Common version. That is because in 2009, Irish fishery researcher Ed Farrell took on Smoothhound speciation as his Ph. D research project, which after scouring the museums of Europe, and collecting DNA samples from fish both with and without spots all around Britain and Ireland, turned up not a single example of the Common Smoothhound *Mustelus mustelus* from northern European waters.

There is what we call a Common Smoothhound *Mustelus mustelus* found to the south of the British Isles from Southern Europe down along the African coast. But not it seems at our latitude, a finding which Irish fish recorders have embraced by listing just *Mustelus asterias*. The Welsh are still thinking about it and the British Record Fish Committee has chosen to dismiss the research findings. Fortunately for the Scots they have only had the Starry, so far. What happens next in terms of migration and speciation will be future history.

RHYL

Like a lot of places within my angling life-time, Rhyl today is a very different place to the Rhyl I fished out from during the early 1970's. Back then, trips aboard the 18 or so charter boats based at the port were controlled by either Marina Garage, or Blue Shark, who operated out of a caravan which had been an old RNLI exhibition trailer, each controlling roughly half of the fishing fleet.



I remember Blue Shark very well. All the trips I ever did in the early days were booked through them. They had some weird sailing times though. Rhyl is a drying harbour, so boats have to work with the tide, picking up inside when they can, and at the river entrance when the tide is down.

For whatever reason, fishing with Blue Shark often meant sailing in the very early hours of the morning instead of them arranging things at a more sociable time. But never having caught a ray at the time of my first visit, I was prepared to do whatever it took to put that right. So, Rhyl it was, on a beautiful mid-summer day with barely a breath of wind, and assurances by all on board that I would be putting a tick against Thornback Ray on my species list.

The fishing out from Rhyl in the 1970's through into the 1980's was excellent. It was typically Welsh in terms of species mix, but with lots of each, plus lots of Tope, which was something none of the boats seemed to want to tap into for some strange reason at that time. We're talking good Tope here running to 60 pounds and more, with plenty in the 30 to 40 pound bracket. The boats however preferred to concentrate on the prolific Thornback Rays, with lots of Spurdogs, LSD's of course, a few Bull Huss, plenty of Whiting and Dabs, and some of the very best Gurnard fishing to be found literally anywhere in the country.

Again, we're talking big gurnards here. Mainly Tubs, but with a few Reds further off, and always a scattering of the smaller Greys. The British Tub Gurnard record of 11.7.4 caught by C.W. King in 1952 was taken from the shore just across the way from Rhyl on the other side of the nearby River Dee Estuary. That's a measure of how good the Tub Gurnard fishing was, with fish in the 3 to 5 pound bracket taken regularly.

Since those early trips of the 1970's and 80's, the bulk of the fishing I have done out from Rhyl has been with Tony Parry aboard his boat 'Jensen II', all of it after the Millennium cut off point, including exploratory trips for Smoothhounds when they first appeared, which unfortunately places those events outside the scope of what I'm recording here. That said, Tony Parry and the early development of the offshore fishing at Rhyl are very closely inter-twined, some of which does fall within the books time parameters, including the Tope, which were always a potential proposition, though not one you could readily tap into with the situation as it was at that time.

The skippers back then were 'company employed' and tended only to know or could be bothered with the one approach. Tony Parry was also working for Blue Shark, until he decided enough was enough and he would go self employed, allowing him to start exploring more and to target the Tope, either on specialist trips, or for a few hours mixed in amongst the more general fishing, which one day resulted in 32 Tope typically going between 30 and 40 pounds apiece. There was always the chance of bigger fish too during the early part of the summer, with one huge fish going 70 pounds plus. Tony also opened up the prospects of wreck fishing out in Liverpool Bay.

Rhyl can also be a reasonably good shore fishing venue too, with two very different strands to what it can offer. From the beaches, the Bass fishing can be good, with lugworm often the best bait. Then you have the River Clwyd estuary with the 'harbour' and moorings located within it on the downstream side of the railway bridge. An excellent Flounder fishery, particularly on peeler crab when the main early moult is underway. But I must be honest here and say that during all the visits I've made to Rhyl, I've yet to see anyone fishing in the river or around the harbour.

That said, I am aware of a few very good specimen Flounders taken there from chatting to Tony, one of which at 4.1.0 he caught himself. Another good specimen was taken by Welsh International angler Rod Adamson from the quay wall close to the slip. That one tipped the scales at 1.96 Kg before being released, which in imperial measurement is as near as damn it 4.4.0, a fish that even now is bigger than the current Welsh record for the species.

As I said in my opening paragraph, in fish and fishing terms, the Rhyl of today is a far cry from the Rhyl I first fished all those years ago. You only need look out to the horizon to see part of the reason for that statement. Wind turbines to the left and to the right with more to come. The piling in the construction phase of wind farms temporarily drives fish away. Then when the turbines start generating, electro magnet fields (EMF's) from the cables carrying the electricity back to shore can have a detrimental effect on some fish species, especially Tope, which like all sharks are able to detect the small electrical impulses from the heart beats of its prey, an ability that is interfered with by EMF's.

Tony tells me that the Tope are now all but gone. Certainly, from their traditional haunts. Whether EMF's are implicated is a study the turbine owners ought to be undertaking, particularly in light of the claims that wind power is green energy, which if it is having a detrimental effect on animals, even if they aren't regularly seen by the general public, is straying way outside their supposed brief.

I have however spoken at length with Tony in this regard, and while the Tope fishing isn't what it was, with cables pretty much 'boxing' the entire inshore fishing ground off Rhyl, and still good numbers of some species to catch, the part played by EMF's isn't entirely clear.



Another species in decline towards the Millennium is the Spurdog, which was commercially fished to the very brink of extinction everywhere, and that's no exaggeration. Gone too for quite a quite few years were those rays. All species of ray took a particularly severe hammering at the hands of long liners and tangle netters around the close of the twentieth century, with Rhyl suffering as much as everywhere else.

Thankfully, they are now starting to show some signs of recovery. Whether things will ever get back to previous levels

remains to be seen, all of which begs the question, "What was the Thornback Ray fishing like in the 1970's, and how did my attempt at ticking the species off my list go?". Well, excellent is the answer on both counts. I finished up catching several on the day, and collectively there must have been between 30 and 40 on the boat.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE GILTHEAD BREAM

Fishery scientists, and to a lesser extent anglers, often talk about marine species of fish in terms of winners and losers. Those that are gaining by expanding their distribution and population density, and those which are losing out under the same terms. One very obvious 'winner' for south west England, and more recently south west Ireland and Wales is the Gilthead Bream *Sparus aurata*, which according to Mike Millman, is first thought to have appeared in the western English Channel in the form of a few early small stragglers during the 1970's.

It's hard to be too precise due to the way some anglers and commercial fishermen see something unusual then think nothing of it and fail to report it. So on that basis, precise records for all new visiting species are very likely flawed, with the Gilthead Bream being no exception. However, due to the steady increase in size enjoyed by the species, combined to the growing regularity of catches to the point almost of predictability, not to mention their fighting, eating, and visual qualities, the Gilthead Bream was identified and targeted quite early on, and is now an established part of the fauna at a growing number of locations.



What is most striking about the story of the Gilthead is its lifestyle. I've caught small specimens by the bucket full from the open beaches along the north African coast of the Mediterranean. But that lifestyle does not hold true for the bulk of the British Isles. I don't know if it's as they get bigger, or purely a British Isles phenomenon, but our fish are virtually never caught from the open sea. Usually not even from the open shore, though the Welsh record of 1.417 Kg (3.4.0 pounds) was taken from the beach at Llandwyn Island by D. G.

Roberts in 1997. Otherwise, almost to a man, they are found inside estuaries throughout the warmer months.

They appear, then they go, and were it not for those estuary catches, nobody would be any the wiser. They seem to be getting more numerous and bigger in size year on year as well, and are slowly expanding their range, probably due to increasing water temperatures, from one initial hub, which is still reckoned by anglers who now specifically target them to be the best Gilthead fishery in the land.

Those who specialise in fishing for Gilthead Bream describe them as increasingly common, but not too common. One particular Gilthead addict is Alex MacDonald at Sakuma Fishing Tackle. Alex first became interested after seeing photographs of some of the earliest specimens in the fishing magazines, thinking to himself 'I have to have some of that', then deciding to do whatever was necessary to become proficient at both finding and catching them.

Unfortunately, during those early days, not that much was known about them, and what little that was, tended to be kept under wraps for fear of starting a Gilthead stampede. They were talked about in hushed tones, making it was difficult to get onto the Gilthead ladder, even for people with a finger of sorts on the pulse and living in the area. Fortunately, Alex had a starting point – the Salcombe Estuary, scene of more than its fair share in volume terms, and home to a number of records both past and present, including the boat record on account of the thriving small boat fishery within its sheltered waters, though primarily the species is looked at as being a shore anglers' fish.

Through trial and error linked to a growing degree of openness regarding fishing for the species, he was slowly able to piece together the jigsaw that would eventually bring some predictability to his efforts. That said, he blanked during his first season, though he has made up for it since. A season which starts in the spring around the same time as the first crabs start to peel. It's then that the Giltheads start re-entering the estuaries, after which they appear to be constantly on the move.

A case of finding a likely looking interception point, giving it a shot, then jumping ahead of the fish in an attempt to intercept them at the next suitable vantage point. An activity prone to providing short bouts of arm wrenching action based on a lot of hard work, early mornings and evenings. The kind of thing that can be fitted in around work, tides allowing, to maximise the opportunity for a large powerful fish caught well away from the open sea, in some of the most beautiful countryside in the land. Can't be bad.

Jumping back a few years, as a budding 'ichthyologist' in my teens, I bought myself a copy of Alwyne Wheelers book 'The Fishes of the British Isles and North West Europe' (Macmillan, 1969), in which he describes the Gilthead Bream as exceptionally rare, with all catches to be regarded as noteworthy. A statement which just goes to show how quickly things can change, and why some plants and animals can struggle to adapt due to the rapidity of climate change, eventually finding themselves threatened.

Fortunately, not in this particular case, though there will be fish species we are currently familiar with that could be headed in that direction, and as yet we haven't realised it. Wheeler also mentions their attraction to estuaries and beaches, a statement that has only proved to be half right. As I said earlier, I used to catch them for fun from the beach in Tunisia. Wouldn't you have thought then that if they did frequent beaches at our latitude, with the level of angling interest these marks receive, then surely more than an odd one would have turned up by now?

In terms of tackle and tactics, because they have the potential to hit double figures and are immensely powerful fish at any size, Alex fishes for them with a Conoflex Assassin rod paired up to a quality fixed spool reel with a good reliable drag, strong sharp hooks, braided reel line, and a monofilament leader. Simple traces with a pear-shaped lead hammered flat to lie on the bottom in the current and peeler crab baits when the main moults are underway, switching to lugworms during the mid-summer months



seems to be the best approach. Also, throw in a good measure of patience, both in the locating of the fish and also while the bite develops, starting with a gentle plucking before eventually powering off.

As for placing the baits, Giltheads generally move up and down the estuary with the tide following the main channels, hence the need to travel light and be prepared to move with them. Be prepared also to explore, including an ever-widening range of venues as potential interception points as they con-

tinue to establish themselves at a growing number of new locations. These currently include all of Devon and Cornwall, both north and south, the Channel Islands, South Wales, and the southern end of Ireland.

I've even heard unconfirmed reports of Gilthead Bream from the Menai Strait, though that might have been the nearby Llandwyn record mentioned earlier. The current Irish record is for a 3.24 Kg (7 pounds plus) specimen taken by Robert McClean fishing inside Cork Harbour. The species even appears on the Scottish record list, with a fish of 2.6.4 caught by C. Toplis in 1992 from of all places Dunnet Head, which is about as far north as you can fish on the Scottish mainland.

SCARBOROUGH & BRIDLINGTON

Scarborough, more so than Bridlington, is steeped in angling history by virtue of it being the base from which the British Tunny Club operated from the 1930's through to the 1950's. But when I got to know the area in the 1960's and 1970's, in practical angling terms, all of that was long gone. It was back to the more traditional inshore hard ground fishing from open cobbles in big lumpy seas with sacks of mussels for bait, which the skipper would spend pretty much the entire day shelling to keep the bait pot full, for while mussel was (and still is) an excellent bait, it's also a soft bait, and as we hadn't discovered bait elastic and novel ways of containing the mussels for wrapping such as with a gadget rather like a Trout spoon back then, if you didn't hook up the instant a fish touched the bait, you could be fairly certain the hook would be empty and in need of loading up again.

Two particular recollections help paint the picture in a little more detail. The first is walking through the towns in the harbour area and having charter boat owners touting in the street for holiday trade to go and have a few hours fishing. Like everywhere else in the country, you could still book boats in advance, and we often did. Otherwise it was pile 'em on and hire 'em rods, which with the numbers of Cod, and to a lesser extend Haddock about at the time, was usually enough to send most people home happy.

The second 'incident' is the culmination of a number of trips. For while the area with its hard ground inshore was noted for Cod typically in the 3 to maybe 10 pound range, these were not the only fish on the scene. Nor were they necessarily the biggest prize either. Back then, Haddock were far more numerous than in subsequent years. But the biggest prize of all was the chance of picking up a truly enormous Plaice, which while they were never numerous, were about in such numbers as to see them popping up in the angling press with reasonable regularity at weights of 6 pounds and more, presumably eeking out a good living on small clean patches of ground mixed in amongst the heavier stuff.

THE IRISH BASS RECORD GOES

The Irish Bass record (precise date unknown) was comprehensively beaten when Jim McClelland added 6 ounces to the top weight with this magnificent fish of 16.6.0 taken from Castlerock Strand on the Causeway Coast. Jim was fishing with a clam bait offered on a 12 pound breaking strain line, well beating the previous record which had been taken at Waterville in Co. Kerry.

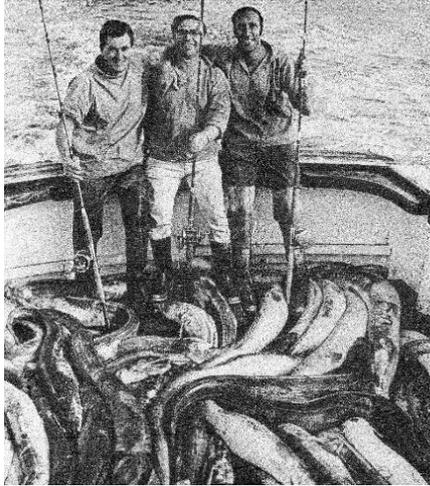


THE GOLDEN ERA OF BRITISH WRECK FISHING

It's often said that John Trust and Ernie Passmore with their Brixham based boat 'Out Unity' on which Mike Millman's Conger photograph included here was taken were the architects of the 'Golden Era' of British wreck fishing. They were most certainly there or thereabouts. But the man who actually started it all was another Brixham skipper named Dudley Stone aboard his boat 'Koh I Noor' in 1966, a few weeks before Passmore and Trust threw their hats into the ring.

None the less, 'Our Unity' is the boat most wreck fishing aficionados relate to, despite Plymouth eventually coming to the fore as the Mecca of west country wreck fishing. It has to be said though that the western end of the English Channel was not the only place to go to for wrecking as the craze caught on. Whitby would also come on strong, making a good case for the North Sea being the top-spot, with Guernsey, Kent, the Llyn Peninsula, Liverpool Bay, and the Kinsale-Courtmacsherry area of Ireland all making contributions.

As well as actually being down in the south west fishing myself at the time, I have invested a lot of time into talking to veteran Plymouth angler Mike Millman exploring the wider West Country wreck fishing scene, and I have to agree with Mike, that what went on from the late 1960's through to the end of the



1970's truly was a golden era, the likes of which, for a whole variety of reasons, will never be repeated, either in my lifetime, or any other.

To quote Mike, "We had the best of it. A best that was so eye wateringly good that in hindsight it's hard to imagine just how good it was, and being so prolific, how it could ever end". West Country wreck fishing did continue on towards the end of the century; just not as good nor as productive as it had been in the earlier years.

So Trust and Passmore made all the early running at Brixham. Like most wrecking skippers, to start with they were commercial fishermen, who having seen what Dudley Stone had brought ashore decided they would give it a go too. This was the mid

1960's when wrecks were seen as 'fasteners' on the sea bed which commercial fishermen knew to avoid. At the time, Lyme Bay had around 400 known deep water wrecks, of which 'Our Unity' fished around 200 on a rotation basis.

To an extent, what set Lyme Bay, Brixham, and 'Our Unity' apart from the rest was the quality of the Conger fishing, and they became the undisputed masters of it. Once H. A. Kelly's 1933 record of 84 pounds was finally broken by Colin Chapman aboard 'Our Unity' with a fish of 85 pounds, the record began to climb on a fairly regular basis, quickly reaching three figures with a fish of 109.6.0 by Robin Potter in 1976 aboard 'Boa Pescador'. Ironically, 'Our Unity' contributed nothing to the British Conger Club 100 pound Conger list, though one particular day they probably should have done.

Getting a good Conger trip in the early days depended on a number of factors all coming together. The right set of tides, the right level and direction of breeze, and having the right set of hands at the helm to shoot the anchor accurately, of which Passmore and Trust were proven grand masters. It often also required that the Ling be thinned out to give the slower feeding Conger a chance on the baits. As much as 15,000 pounds of Ling typically needed to be removed over a number of visits to 'prepare' a good virgin Conger wreck.

One such an ideal Conger trip took place in 1967 when Mike Millman hooked up what was obviously a very good Eel aboard 'Our Unity'. During a fight lasting around 40 minutes, it dived back down 11 times. When eventually they started to see some colour in the water, with everyone else already having wound in, the deck was cleared ready to receive the big fish. Mike eased the huge Conger to within a foot of the gaff, at which point the hook pulled, allowing it to slowly sink back down out of sight. According to all who saw it, that fish would have weighed in at 100 pounds plus. What had happened was that all the heaving, pulling, and diving had worn quite a sizeable hole in the fish's jaw surrounding the hook, which with a shake of its head at the surface had thrown it clear.

Ernie Passmore flung the gaff at the wheelhouse door then went inside and said nothing. Obviously upset, Mike put down his rod and stopped fishing. A while later, Ernie came striding out of the wheelhouse shouting "What you doing. Get fishing again", which Mike did, and the big Eel's just kept on coming, to the point that Mike ended up winning the British Conger Club championship that day. What's more, 'Our Unity' won the BCC top boat trophy on 11 separate occasions. They also had the British Cod record of 53 pounds in 1972 caught by George Martin (see Chapter 9). But when it came to other species, boats at other West Country ports regularly eclipsed them.

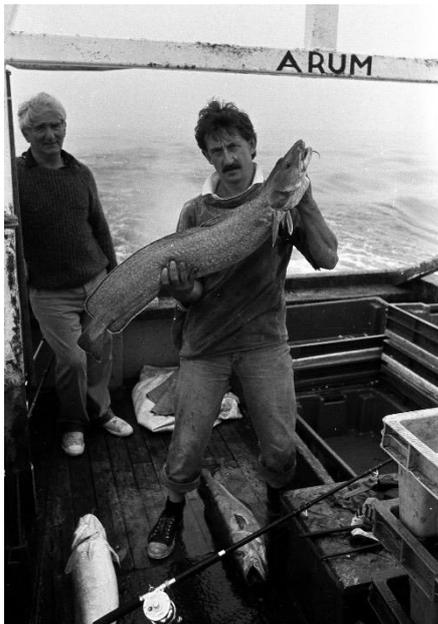
Plymouth quickly became the wrecking capital of the south west, even though it didn't have the country's best Conger boat. Much of my own channel wrecking was done out from Plymouth, in the main aboard Dave Ellworthy's 'Anjonika', because like Passmore and Trust, Dave also liked to do a spell at

anchor when he could for a shot at the Conger. I did also go afloat with Geordie Dickson aboard 'Artilleryman' and had a January big Pollack and Coalfish hunt weathered off with JJ McVicar on 'June Lipet', all of which in the early days were amongst the port's top boats. But as time marched on, others would challenge for JJ's crown, in some cases having previously been his crewmen learning the ropes.

The last time I was down in Plymouth, Mike Millman took to me to meet up with JJ at his home down near the water front. What 'Our Unity' could do in terms of finding fish at anchor, JJ could match with 'June Lipet' for big and record sized Pollack and Coalfish on the drift. He was the master of finding wrecks stuffed with big fish, breaking both the Pollack and Coalfish records on a number of occasions, including catching 2 record Coalfish of 26.12.0 and 27.10.0 in consecutive days on his own rod. As a point of interest, the Coalfish record went a further 3 times during that same month, with fish of 28.4.0 by Stan Stevens, 29.2.0 by Ron Phillips, and 30.12.0 by Tony Harris.

JJ really did take the angling World by storm. So much so that other boats would follow him and were hard to shake off with the sorts of slow plodding speeds even the top boats were limited to back then. There were no fancy electronics either. They had Decca Navigators and echo sounders, but nothing like what's available currently. With today's set ups, the mind can only boggle at what they might have been able to achieve, because back then there were plenty of fish to be had.

As JJ put it, you could have as many fish as you could ever want. And while it was seasonal, quality fishing could reasonably be expected in any month of the year, with everything on the go during the summer and autumn months, and the prospects of those huge Pollack and Coalfish in the last months of the winter, weather of course permitting.



The target weight for a decent wrecking trip in the 1970's was to bring 1,000 pounds of fish brought ashore. Some brought in more. Much much more. But I sense that if anglers didn't hit the 1,000 pounds figure they felt that they'd somehow missed out, and 'June Lipet' was one of the boats that was regularly in the Angling Times and Angler's Mail with those 1,000 pound and multi thousand pound hauls made up of large quality fish, though in fairness, all the top boats were doing the same.

That's a lot of fish. On the other hand, if you're catching 20 pound plus Ling every time you can get a bait down, or Pollack well into double figures on the redgills, between 10 anglers, that sort of aggregate weight can soon be racked up. The reason why catches weren't even bigger was more to do with the slow steaming time to some of the mid channel wrecks, plus the time it takes to motor up and reposition the boat for each new drift.

And let's not forget that it wasn't only Conger, Ling, Pollack and Coalfish these wrecks attracted. George Martin's 53 pound Record Cod aboard 'Our Unity' was far from the only one of its species over taken over these marks. Bream too liked to hang around some wrecks, especially big Reds, with the current record of 9.8.12 having been taken over a wreck by B. Reynolds out from Mevagissey in 1974.

There were also species people might not automatically think of as wreck-lovers taken around them from time to time. Shortly after catching his 2 record Coalfish, JJ McVicar hauled up the Angler Fish record while taking a quick drop down at the end of a competition to catch something to take home for the pot. Huge Turbot feeding up on the sand accumulations created by the tide around wrecks lying on clean ground were also a feature. Some of the biggest Turbot ever taken have fallen to Conger baits landing on the sand as the new tide started to push the boat off its line on the anchor rope.

I also fished the wrecks out from Mevagissey aboard Bernard Hunkin's boat 'Eileen', a boat which had both the Ling (50.8.0) and Angler Fish (82.12.0) records. But I didn't spend a lot of time that far west. That had nothing to do with the fishing. It's just that Plymouth was handier for me to drive down to. Generally, the fishing there was potentially every bit as good. Why would it not be?

Colin Williams who ran the 'Cecille Laura' was also based at Mevagissey. The man with the 'magic eyes' as Mike Millman dubbed him. He actually started out as a school teacher dabbling at the charter angling, which he did without any navigation electronics. Amazingly, he could find wrecks through a combination of timing on the compass and surface water disturbance, hence the 'magic eyes' tag. A boat which provided a lot of good fish and some very big catches, eventually superseded by 'Karen Jane', which once brought ashore a mixed haul of 4,598 pounds of fish. A skipper said to push weather, who would strictly enforce the 2 fish take off rule, both of which diminished his popularity.

Another skipper known for pushing weather was Geordie Dickson. Fishing trips of 2 or maybe 3 days duration, particularly to Guernsey to fish the banks there for a Bass and Turbot, have a stopover, and fish the mid channel wrecks on both legs of the journey across, he notched up some pretty impressive catches, including some huge Coalfish, one of which being the current record of 37.5.0 caught in 1986.

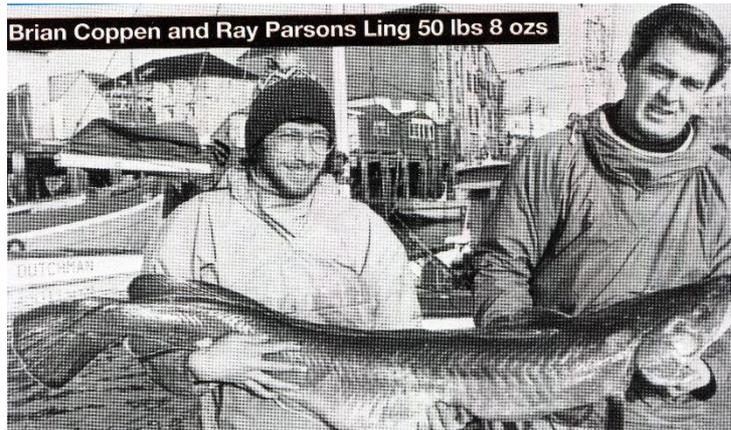
Mike Millman fished with him on one of his Channel Island stopover trips when the weather was so bad that for the return leg to Plymouth, he and a couple of the others decided to fly back, leaving Geordie and the remainder of the crew to cross back to Plymouth with the boat. Back at the quay after an 'interesting' 19 hour crossing battling a storm, the boat had had all its roof gear including its life raft swept away, after which Mike's wife Valerie banned him from setting foot on 'Artilleryman' ever again.

My own experience of Geordie was that of an abrupt hard taskmaster. An ex-army man from the Royal Artillery, hence the name of the boat, who treated everyone onboard like a group of raw 'squaddies'. After a lot of moaning from him before we'd even left port as we loaded our gear onboard for a 24 hour trip, one of the lad's, Ray Catoor, passed Geordie a box of pirks for him to put on the deck. "Don't bring these next time", he barked. "I'll tell you what", Ray replied, "Next time I won't bother bringing myself", which kind-of set the tone for the trip. We had plenty of fish. Mostly Ling as I recall. Then on the way back into Plymouth Sound he suddenly stopped the boat and switched off the engine. Someone it seems had left a dirty pan on the stove, and the boat was going nowhere until it had been washed.

So far as I am aware, Geordie is the only skipper ever to lose an angling boat with a party on board while fishing out from Plymouth. Two boats in fact (see Chapter 10). I'm not sure of the exact circumstances, and wouldn't dare to even think of contacting him for more information. As has been said, he did push weather. But also, I believe, 'Artilleryman' (or should I say 'Artillerymen' as there was more than one with the same name distinguished by a number such as I or II) was prone to letting in a bit of water around the prop shaft.

Whatever the reason, in the first incident his crew were helicoptered off, with him playing the captains role of being the last man to leave before it sank. The second incident is a little less clear. I did contact the RNLI to check their logs but got nothing much back worth adding. As you might imagine, there was a lot of talk surrounding both losses at the time, none of which I intend to get into here for fear of litigation. When asked, Mike Millman was unwilling to speculate either.

I would occasionally see 'Artilleryman' tied up in St. Peterport harbour mid point on one of Geordies multi-day benders while I was holidaying over there. I could never see the attraction in anglers exposing themselves to potentially changing sea conditions and sleep deprivation in that way, when they could actually fish all the same marks on a daily basis from Guernsey with the man I personally rate as the best wrecking skipper I've ever fished with, Dougal Lane. I've probably fished on every boat Dougal ever had over the mid-channel wrecks, the reefs, and the many banks in the area which back then were loaded with good Bass, Turbot and Brill. It was with Dougal Lane that I caught my personal best Bass of 13.2.0. But that's an aside to the wreck fishing being discussed here.



Ling were so numerous back then that if you were quick and the drift was slow you could get 2 fish every pass. Good big fish too averaging in the 20's and occasionally topping 30 pounds, plus the odd record like the 50½ pounder shown here by Brian Copen aboard Ray Parsons boat 'Sunlit Waters'. Also, lots of medium sized Conger at anchor, plus on one trip, several quite large Tope.

Like most of the top skippers, Dougal would and could fish any way, anywhere, for anything and make a top-notch job of it. The best man at anchoring I've ever come across, though I believe Passmore and Trust took some beating. A man who could visualise things in Decca. He would go blasting up to a wreck, and without running over it to see the lie of the land, would throw the anchor over, motor off in a big arc at speed suddenly bringing the boat to a halt, and always land it smack over the wreck. It was amazing to watch. And the fishing, well, at times that was as good as it gets.

I've no intention of going through every single West Country boat and skipper here in turn. But I am happy to flag up snippets relating to each now that the main characters have had their 'moment in the spotlight'. Steve Barrett for example, a one time crewman with JJ McVicar, went on to provide many good Pollack for his clients aboard 'Boa Pescador'. He also had Turbot of 31.4.0 and 32.3.0 from wrecks on different trips.

Lloyd Saunders out of Dartmouth is another top angling skipper who could turn his hand to pretty much any type of fishing including mid-channel wrecking, with Conger topping 100 pounds, and the British Coalfish record. He operated 'Saltwind of Dart'. A man I fished with for early season Plaice out over the Skerries Bank. Another regular producer of good fish was Ray Parsons aboard 'Sunlit Waters'. Fishing out from Plymouth, Ray's customers had Ling to 50.8.0, and for a bit of extra variety once got into a shoal of Wreck Fish *Polyprion americanus* with specimens into double figures, plus an Electric Ray of 80 pounds in 1974.

When it comes to Conger fishing, one particular day in 1992 saw 'Mistress' skipper Bill Warner stick the gaff into 2 huge Eels topping 100 pounds. The first time not only 2 ton-up Conger had been taken on one boat in the same day, but also by the same angler, Jim Calvert, his fish going 103 and 105 pounds.

Another big Conger Boat was Tony Allen's Plymouth based 'Electric Blue'. This was the boat on which Sea Angler Magazine editor Mel Russ had a Conger of 101.8.0 while out with Tony for a magazine feature. Other big Eels aboard the same boat, though not taken on the same trip, tipped the scales at 111 pounds and 112.8.0. But the 'daddy' of them all, the World all tackle record of 133.4.0 was caught by Vic Evans fishing from his own boat 'Sea Spray' out from Brixham in 1995.

We should also pay homage here to some of the people who helped make British wreck fishing what it was, not only in the 1970's, but continuing on to the present day. In particular, I'm thinking here of Alex Ingram who has a detailed inclusion of his own in Chapter 7, but is worthy of specific mention again here for his development of the redgill lure. Were it not for Ingram's Mevagissey eel's, those targeted 1,000-pound hauls, and most certainly many of those big and record Pollack and Coalfish might not have been so regularly encountered. An idea that has gone on to spawn a whole range of spin off designs by other companies including Sidwinders and Savage, fished slowly through the water column on long flying collar rigs for all sorts of fish, including these days, Bass.



West Country wreck fishing trips always could, and probably always will attract fare paying anglers. But no longer in the same numbers, nor with the catch expectation they had during the 1970', when so many virgin wrecks were out there waiting to be found, loaded to the hilt with big fish. No wonder then that the commercials soon cottoned on and took to gill netting them, not only clearing them of fish, but denying angling boats having made the long haul out there the opportunity to even try to fish.

With wrecks hammered and wrecking charter prices having become discouragingly high, is it any wonder that wreck fishing interest has plummeted in the western English Channel? Even the migratory species able to swim from wreck to wreck are not there in the numbers and sizes they once were. The days of heading off in January and February with the objective of expecting to find huge mature spawn bound Pollack and Coalfish are now long gone. But still, all is not lost.

Earlier I mentioned having to clear out maybe 15,000 pounds of Ling from a new wreck to be in with any sort of reasonable shot at the slower feeding big Conger. With Ling and other species a lot thinner on the ground now, and with commercial fishing 'helping' keep their numbers down, there has probably never been a better time for a realistic shot at a 100 pound Conger. Maybe even of beating Vic Evans 133.4.0 World all tackle record. And it doesn't have to involve heading many dozens of miles out from port.

All West Country wrecks will still have a good head of Conger on them, quietly going about their business of waxing fat on the shoals of Pouting these marks also attract. With less competition for a bait dropped in just the right spot, and enough strength and angling guile to get the fish into open water quickly once hooked, the Conger record is still up for grabs, with more giant Eels out there than most anglers probably realise.

THE CONTROVERSIAL TWO FISH RULE

During the 1970's, wreck fishing boats operating out of Plymouth and Brixham could have filled up with customers any and every day of the week. The best tides in the best months could be pre booked years in advance. They were in big demand, and their owners knew it. So much so, that within reason, they could have pretty much asked whatever price they wanted and would still have been busy. But as with everything, ultimately a ceiling price will be found, so rather than working on the corner shop principle of charging top whack and just selling small amounts of product, they opted for the supermarket model of keeping prices within budget and maximising profits through volume selling. That said, they also started exploring other innovative ways of getting their income up.

One way in which they did this was to impose a two fish take-off rule. In other words, every angler was allowed to choose two fish to take home, with the remainder going on to the fish market for the boat. Those doing this would argue, and frequently did so in the press at the time, that it was a means of keeping running costs down which would otherwise have to be passed on to the customer. All highly controversial and frequently argued over, with the words 'greedy' and 'money grabbing' often being bandied about. On the other side of the debate however, some anglers were happy to run with it, because in their view it encouraged the skipper to work harder and ultimately end up with more fish for himself.

Talking to the legendary JJ McVicar who skippered 'June Lipet' out of Plymouth, he confided that he had been the one that had inadvertently started the whole thing as a means of dealing with one selfish

customer who wouldn't share out the Mackerel he caught for bait, but then wanted to walk off with a greater share of the catch than he was due afterwards. JJ told his crewman to see that the angler in question went off with no more than a couple of fish, and that as they say was the start of things. Word got around and others decided to jump on the band wagon, claiming it was keeping cost down.

As always, some skippers were keener to enforce things than other. Obviously, there was a lot of money to be made. But it also entailed a lot of extra work at the end of a long day, with some skippers not bothering unless the catch was big enough to warrant the extra effort, while others would cash in every single last fish.

I'm not going to name names here. Anglers who fished the west country wrecking ports at the time will know who they were. So bad did things become that on one occasion recalled to me by Mike Millman, an angler who had caught what would have been a club record Conger decided he wanted to take it to the scales. But with Conger not the best of eating fish, he also took his two edible fish allowance, at which point the 'un-named' skipper in question said no. If he wanted the Conger too he would have to pay the market rate for it.

RITA BARRETT

Plymouth based Rita Barrett was the mother of Steve Barrett, one-time crewman for the legendary wreck fishing skipper JJ McVicar, and later a top drawer wreck fishing skipper in his own right. But we're not here to sing his praises, much that they are, for his mother Rita could more than hold her own when it came to catching fish. Big fish too. Obviously with friends like JJ and a son with his own boat 'Boa Pescador' she had ample opportunity, setting a number of IGFA ladies World records for Pollack,



plus the British boat caught Whiting record with a fish of 6.3.0 in 1971, taken over the famous Whiting grounds off Rame Head.

I remember JJ telling me that back in the glory days of 'June Lipet', the old plodder had been a commercial boat, and as such wasn't kitted out with modern day luxuries such as an onboard toilet. It was a toss up between peeing over the downwind side or using a bucket in the wheelhouse. Obviously, when Rita was onboard, she would use the bucket. So

JJ would give her just about enough time to get down and at it, then he'd kick the wheelhouse door causing her to panic and try to drag her pants up ASAP. He said she fell for it every time.

THE INVADERS DEEP SEA GROUP

With so many huge and potentially record breaking fish of several species out over the hundreds of mid channel wrecks to be accessed from a variety of ports all the way from Lyme Bay to Lands End, the Invaders Deep Sea Group was set up with the sole focus of targeting the very best specimen fish available from them.

To be in with the best shot of hitting the jackpot, a number of variables all had to come together at the same time. One of those, obviously, was the weather. A major limiting factor which nobody could

predict in advance or control on the day. The others, such as tides, time of year, wreck choice, and perhaps most important of all, booking with the right skipper for each specific job, could be controlled by having a keen like minded group of individual fanatics from all around the country, willing to get in early to mop up all the dates which best fitted their criteria, which is what the Invaders Group did, with some quite outstanding results.

WOOLWORTH'S 'WINFIELD' FISHING TACKLE

**International Class Fishing
...with Winfield**

A series of I.G.F.A. class boat rods matched to new balanced-system multipliers for the international angler exclusive to Woolworth.

Winfield 'International' Series I.G.F.A. class line boat rods are made in finest hollow coloured in the mass glass with compound taper tip sections. The strength at the power section above the handle and winch fitting is further aided by incorporation of a Cooper Progressive Compound Spigot (British Patent).

'International 20'
Stainless tip roller and hard-chrome intermediate rings. Composite handles £16.99

'International 30'
Stainless tip and butt roller guides with hard-chrome intermediate rings £18.59

'International 50'
Stainless roller tip and all intermediate guides £19.95

The 'International' Series of boat fishing multipliers with anodised alloy spools double-bound end plates and improved bearings. All reels are supplied with saddles, spanner and oil. The '40' and '50' reels have fold-away harness lugs.

Winfield 'International 20' multiplier.
Capacity - 300 yards of 20lb B.S. Class braided Dacron.
Gear ratio 3-1. £6.29

Winfield 'International 30' multiplier.
Capacity - 300 yards of 30lb B.S. Class braided line.
Gear ratio 3-1. £6.59

Winfield 'International 40' narrow drum multiplier, for the wire line fisherman.
Capacity - 300 yards of 46lb B.S. Nylon. Gear ratio 3-1. £7.69

Winfield 'International 50' multiplier.
Capacity - 500 yards of 50lb B.S. Class braided line.
Gear ratio 3-1. £7.69

For the shore angler -
Winfield N.E.S.A. Shore Fishing Championship of Great Britain 1974. Twelve Festivals (heats) around the shores of the country with a final in the Winter. Details from the tackle counter at Woolworth Stores.

WOOLWORTH
Where fine fishing tackle costs less than you think

For people of my age, unless you've been in solitary fishing away on some isolated Hebridean Island, then you surely must have been inside a Woolworths store. If not, you will at least know the company name of F. W. Woolworth & Co. to give it its full title, or 'Woolies' to the rank and file. A cheap and cheerful we sell everything high street store very similar to today's B&M Bargains, but with proper counters 'manned' by shop assistants at 807 branches throughout the length and breadth of the UK at the time it went to the wall in 2008. And yes, they even sold fishing tackle.

Initially it was cheap, tacky, wholly inappropriate stuff shipped in from Japan, that was neither use nor ornament to man nor beast. Until that is, they signed up Michael Pritchard to tell them what UK anglers wanted, in a seemingly genuine attempt to get a half decent Winfield branded version of it out there to them. During the 1960's and 1970's, Pritchard was a very well respected angler, illustrator, and journalist. So he was very much laying his own credibility on the line here too.

He had been art editor of much celebrated Creel Magazine in the days

when Bernard Venables was at the helm, and had some carry over I believe to the Brian Harris era and its merger with Angling Magazine. So quite a coup for 'Woolies' to enlist guidance of that calibre to advise on designing and developing a whole range of IGFA rated sea rods and reels which they launched in 1971, and which I'm told, for the money, were actually half decent.

FLY FISHING FOR ESTUARY BASS



The other side of Michael Pritchard (see Woolworth's tackle above) was, amongst other things, a photographic illustrator with *Angling Magazine* under the editorship of Brian Harris, plus some pretty serious, often pioneering fishing work too. For while fly fishing at sea in UK waters is now quite widely practised in the second decade of the twenty first century, 40 to 50 years ago, you would have been looked at as some sort of basket-case for harbouring such thoughts, even though they would prove to have a very solid foundation with fish like Bass, Pollack, and Mackerel, to name 3 regular fly caught species.

At the sharp end of this was indeed Mike Pritchard, who, when conditions were right, would undertake serious Bass fishing sessions from his double ended 14 foot dory anchored up alongside the various sand bars that formed in his local estuaries. A practise which, by his own admission, was a combination of targeted and random.

Targeted in respect of anchoring upstream of these bars and paying back on the rope to get within casting range, but random by virtue of casting to get maximum ground coverage along the bar edges with a weighted sinking sandeel imitation lure. No 'match-

ing the hatch' or individual fish spotting and casting in the Trout fishing sense. But as the photograph here of Mike Pritchard published in *Angling Magazine* shows, it could be highly rewarding on its day.

UPTIDE FISHING

Just prior to the Millennium, I was asked by the editor of one of the fishing magazines to write a few words about what I saw as being the most important contribution to sea angling in the twentieth century. I was unequivocal in my response. It was a toss up between Alex Ingram's redgill lures and uptide fishing, with my vote finally going to the development of the uptide fishing by John Rawle and Bob Cox.

But let us also not forget the part played by Essex charter skipper Arthur Weitzel who provided the platform on which all the early pioneering work took place. For unlike the 'black & white' way in which a lot of people tend to think, uptiding wasn't an idea that was suddenly dreamt up and put into full working practise. It was a process of evolution, which like all examples of Darwin's great work, was driven by the need to change rather than simply by change for its own sake.

The period of that evolution stretches from the late-1960's through into the early-1970's. A time when anglers who went out on boats would often be looking for the deepest water they could find, dropping baits down to the bottom straight over the side using clumsy heavy gear of a type that would look like museum pieces today.

That's how it was when I first came into sea angling. Great if you were fishing an area where that sort of approach could deliver a result. Less good if you fished in an area where the water is so shallow that half a dozen cranks of the reel handle would see the trace swivel breaking surface, which sort of describes much of the outer Thames Estuary, particularly off the Essex coast.

Around that time, journalist Bob Cox, and bait digger John Rawle became fishing mates. Both shared a passion for catching all manner of fish from the boat and from the shore. When they fished from the shore it was mainly for rays, Bass, and Cod. Obviously getting afloat added a few extra species into the mix, for which reason John bought himself an 18 foot boat to potter about the Southend area.

Around the same time, Bob had met and was regularly fishing with Bradwell charter skipper Arthur Weitzel, and invited John to join him to fish aboard Arthur's boat 'Providence'. Sometimes it was just the 3 of them, while on other occasions it would be with paying clients on board, all looking to see what they could catch in the typically 20 to 30 feet of water Arthur's marks often tended to be in, along with some much shallower fishing for Bass and rays around the banks.



Because they were 'crew', and because the boat also had a big fore-deck, John and Bob would climb up front out of the way of the paying customers where they started using longer rods with 'adapted' beach fishing gear and tactics in an effort to keep clear of everybody else. These included casting away from the boat and trying to hold the baits where they landed. This, combined to the fact that John and Bob were often more skilful anglers than the party Arthur had with him, plus they had access to loads of quality fresh bait, saw them catching up to 4 and 5 times as many fish as anyone else on board, something John Rawle says they didn't really pay that much attention to at the time. They were just happy to be out and fishing regularly.

It was also around this time that John was offered the chance to become a charter skipper himself. A chap called Vince Ferguson had bought a 32 foot Aquastar and needed someone to take it out. For John it was like a dream come true. And as when fishing with Arthur Weitzel, when he or Bob wanted to fish with clients on board, it was back up to the bow again casting the baits away, which produced some pretty phenomenal Cod catches.

Again, John put it down to being a more capable angler with better bait. But even when there were more proficient anglers were aboard, he and Bob continued to wipe the floor with them, and still the penny didn't drop. Only when other people started coming out copying their way of doing things and getting the same sort of result did they really start to take casting away from the boat more seriously and look to start developing it.

The day that sealed it for John was a magazine article trip with a party of top notch angling journalists on board. A day when they had maybe 17 double figure Cod on board of which John recalls himself taking all but a small handful of them. Following that trip, 1972 to 1975 was the period in which he and Bob seriously set about working out just what exactly was going on, while looking at other ways to improve on what they already had and bring it into the public domain.

This was the time when the 'scare area' theory was first postulated. Fish moving along with the tide in shallow water suddenly being confronted by a large lump of boat slamming and gurgling on the anchor rope with a party of noisy anglers talking and banging about. The obvious reaction would be for them to swim around the boat, the distance at which they did so correlating to the depth of water underneath the boat's hull.

It wasn't too bad for drop down anglers fishing off the stern. Raising the rod tip regularly with the right size of lead meant they could trot their baits well beyond the scare area if they put their mind to it, and as such, they were still able to catch some fish. It was the poor souls further up the boat who were left to struggle, and the shallower the water, potentially the greater the problem, though it has to be said that to some extent this is species dependant.

In addition to this, drop down fishing only covers an area of something like 40 square yards, whereas uptiding offers the opportunity to massively increase this. Even more importantly, if you cast a grip lead out across the tide and after allowing a suitable line belly to form you finish up with an angle in your line away from the boat, however slight, then that lead has to be holding bottom. Something drop down fishing in a strong tide run can't always be relied upon to do.

I very clearly remember when uptide fishing first started making the angling press. Obviously, there were no purpose made uptide rods marketed back then. You either used your beach rod, a Carp rod, or you modified something to get it down to a more manageable size, which for me is between 9 and 10 feet. People were also using boat rod blanks before they had been trimmed to size. That way you got a more suitable length, a lighter tip action, and additional length at the bottom end to give the extra butt length required for casting.

If my memory serves me well, that's how the early Cox & Rawle uptide rods were made. Then as it caught on, companies began jumping on the band wagon and producing purpose built versions of their own, some of which were up around 10 feet in length. Personally, I prefer uptide rods around 9 feet, particularly for dinghy fishing where you don't have the same level of elbow room. Nor do you need to cast as far due to the reduced scare area disturbance.

I asked John how he saw the development and changing face of uptide fishing since he and Bob first unearthed it back around 1970. Immediately he put me right on the name of the technique. It's not uptide fishing; it's boat casting. The chap nearest the wheelhouse might cast uptide. But the rest of the baits should be spread around the boat, so where the term uptide fishing came from is anybody's guess. Perhaps the need to cast 'uptide' of your chosen position so that when the lead reaches the bottom the tide won't have pushed it beyond where you wanted it to be.

He then went on to explain how much they had fine tuned the process over time through further experimentation and new tackle coming on the market, which while it might not always have been initially designed with uptide fishing specifically in mind, some of it most certainly helped.

As you would expect, with more people casting away from the boat more of the time at all stations around the boat, patterns eventually start to develop. People often ask where the best place is on a boat to fish. The answer to that one depends on the type of fishing you are doing, whether it be at anchor or on the drift, drop down fishing or uptiding. Even within uptiding there are variables which John identified as being down to the size and stage of the tide.



When the tide runs hard, the front half of the boat fishes best. That's because a greater number of fish moving down with the flow find those baits first. Conversely, when the tides are small, or as the run eases, the emphasis switches to the back half. But not all the back half. With less run to battle, fish are more willing to hunt into the flow, particularly when they get the scent of the baits. But as they approach the stern, they start to enter the 'scare area' again, so they deviate around it, which concentrates them up off the two back corners. Anyone fishing at short range directly over the stern is going to miss all this. So its 45 degree's out from the two corners on slack tides, and 45 degree's uptide from the cabin bulkhead when the tide is running hard.

John reckons uptide fishing is do-able at depths down to around 90 feet. That may well be so. Personally, I would be looking to drop down fish at those sorts of depths, preferring to keep uptiding for situations of around 40 feet or less. But that's just my opinion. As water depth increases, the concentrating effect of fish within casting range around the boat decreases. Generally, casting and holding out with a good grip lead at distances of up to 50 yards is the maximum required, which is well within most angler's casting capability.

Some boat skippers say (or used to say) that casting from a boat was dangerous and wouldn't allow it. But if you hang the bait on one of the grip wires so that hooks are not flying around, and give adequate warning of your casting intention, other anglers with any sense will soon take it upon themselves to avoid you. Alternatively, it may even be possible to cast with the terminal gear hanging outside the boat.

Make the cast, feel the lead hit the bottom, then keep on paying out line in the tide creating a bow coming away from the rod tip at an angle of around 45 degrees down tide. This is necessary if the roll of the boat and the force of the tide is not to break the grip of the lead. Having a soft tipped rod with fibreglass spliced into it if the rod is made from carbon fibre also helps. No need for braided lines either. They may well cut the tide a little better, but you get exactly the same level of contact to the terminal gear as you do with nylon when there's a bow in the line.

There is no need to strike at bites either. Bites will show in the conventional way. But if you strike, all you end up doing is taking a bit of the bow out of the line. The idea is to wind line back on the reel quickly until you feel the weight of the fish, by which time it is often already hooked due to it pulling against the grip of the lead. It acts a bit like a bolt rig. Particularly with fixed nose wire grips of the type Gemini now market.

For me, the best terminal rig is a simple flowing trace. Actual trace components obviously are chosen according to the target fish present. The best line so far as I am concerned is monofilament. John Rawle is of the same opinion, suggesting around 300 yards of 15 to 20 pounds breaking strain mono, with 40

to 50 pounds clear mono for the trace. As for the reel it's loaded on to, that's down to personal preference.

Back in the 1970's and 80's, a lot of people only boat fished because they couldn't cast with a multiplier from the shore, so uptide fishing to them was something of a challenge. Few anglers used fixed spools in those days. Possibly because they weren't macho enough, though more probably because they weren't of the quality we see today. Nowadays there are some truly excellent fixed spool reels on the market. So if that makes your life easier, then why not?

The two main things to come out of uptide fishing are more fish in shallow water situations which previously had been difficult to get a good result from, and the opportunity to fish very much lighter resulting in enhanced enjoyment from small to moderate sized fish. What's more, the technique is international too in the sense that the same rules regarding scare areas hold true wherever it is you fish around the World.

Uptiding brings enhanced result everywhere as I have demonstrated to my own satisfaction on numerous occasions fishing in far flung places. So important has the technique now become that no tackle company with any sort of reputation doesn't have specific uptide rods (or are they boat casting rods) as a major constituent of their range.

PW Comment: The information given in this account comes from a combination of over 40 years of uptide fishing which was initially taught to me by John Rawle himself back in the early 1970's, and more recently, a drive down to Bradwell to John's home where we recorded an audio interview regarding the topic.

THE SCOTTISH FEDERATION OF SEA ANGLERS



The Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers mirrors the Welsh and Irish Federations. Also, the National Federation of Sea Anglers, which despite the name, actually only represented the interests of English anglers. The Welsh and Scottish federations also administer national saltwater records within their geographical jurisdiction. Records in Ireland are presided over by the Irish Specimen Fish Committee, and for records caught in English waters it's the British Record Fish Committee.

As of 2009, the NFSA, plus a number of other organisations, was absorbed into the Angling Trust. The other 3 'national' federations however are still operational. Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts to get some sort of a potted history from the SFSA, nothing has been forthcoming. That being the case, all I can do is reproduce the following lines from their website, which I have to say is less than ideal.

What is the Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers (SFSA)?

It is the governing body for the sport of sea angling in Scotland accepted as the advisory body on sea angling by Sport Scotland, the Scottish Tourist Board and the Highlands and Islands Development Board.

The federation is formed by affiliated clubs, individual members, life members and supplier members. A club can also become a member of one of the seven regions covering the geographical area of Scotland and the Isles.

What does the federation offer to member clubs?

All club members may attend annual and general meetings where two delegates from each club will have full voting powers to elect office - bearers' affiliation to local region

Voting rights in the election of 2 regional representatives to the SFSA

Executive Committee

Regional and inter regional competitions

International teams may be financially assisted

The right to apply to run major/minor competitions under the auspices of the SFSA

Special rates for competition insurance cover

Advance tide table information for forward planning of competitions

What does the federation offer to individual members?

All individual members may attend the annual general meeting and other general meetings

At such meetings, all senior members have a vote through their elected representatives on the Executive Committee. The representatives cast votes on behalf of the members in accordance with the Constitution of the federation

The right to elect their own representatives to the Executive Committee

The right to apply for national and international teams

Members may compete in the Annual Boat, National Boat and Shore Championships and Boat and Shore Leagues. These events are organised specifically for them.

A copy of their own newsletter which is issued at regular intervals

What does the federation offer to 'supplier members'?

Classified advertising in the federation's newsletters

Classified advertising in the handbook

Encouragement of anglers to take advantage of their goods and services

What does the federation offer to members?

The strength of the federation to safeguard the sport of sea angling in Scotland and to fight for and protect their interests

A copy of the annual handbook

Information on federation matters, competition details and results via the newsletters

Information on amendments in legislation and matters of conservation

The right to apply for record and specimen fish awards

Coaching and assistance from the federation's qualified instructors

The right to apply for a place on coaching courses

An open line of communication at all times to make recommendations on any topic governed by the federation.

DAVID CARL FORBES

David Carl Forbes was a true angling all rounder, who in fairness, probably had a greater leaning towards coarse fishing than he did to the sea, though he did write books on sea fishing, and one in particular on big game fishing in British waters. In addition to this he was an acclaimed illustrator, both for himself, and for other writers.

A man with a rather interesting life outside of fishing, who, after his time in the Royal Navy where he was their welter weight boxing champion, he became a prize fighter on the fairground scene, where the owner would challenge the crowd by offering a prize to anyone who could either knock DCF out or go the distance with him, something few ever got to collect.

Sadly, he was killed on the hard shoulder of the motorway in 1975 after pulling over with car problems on his way home from a game fair, when tragically, he was struck by another vehicle.

JOYCE YALLOP'S 'CONTROVERSIAL' MAKO SHARK RECORD



In May 1971, Joyce Yallop was Conger fishing with her husband over the Eddystone Reef aboard Alan Dingles Looe based boat 'Lady Betty' when a large Mako Shark was spotted swimming at the surface. Falmouth Mako skipper Robin Vinnicombe once told me that when you see a Mako in this sort of situation, it's usually nigh on impossible to persuade it to feed.

Despite this, Alan and Joyce decided to give it a shot, which on this occasion paid off and the rod was handed to Joyce for an encounter that would provide her with 2 hours and 27 minutes of sheer hell, in which on more than one occasion she told Dingle she'd had enough, followed by a forceful bout of 'encouragement' insisting that she carry on.

What happened next was the first instalment of an episode that would provide a number of talking points over the years, some of which will not be repeated here even as hearsay for fear of litigation. What I can say is that I am reliably informed that when it was finally beaten, the huge fish was tied to the side of the boat

and taken back to port with its head facing the bow, drawing the suggestion from some quarters that this would cause it to ingest some measure of water en route.

Further controversy surrounds an allegation that it had a recently eaten 54 pound Conger inside it, for which reason it was weighed hanging by its jaws. Having looked at other pictures of large sharks on the scales, I have to say that this was not an uncommon practise at the time. On the other hand, the fish's quoted length of 8 feet 9 inches is said to be small for a fish of 500 pounds, being more suggestive of a fish somewhere in the region of 350 pounds, on top of which, it only bettered Ken Burgess 1966 standing record of 498½ pounds by a margin suggested as being too close to call, and therefore at best should have been declared a joint record with the Burgess fish. History however records things differently. A record which still stands at the time of writing.

PAUL HUTCHINS TURBOT

While wreck fishing aboard Ray Parsons Plymouth based boat 'Sunlit Waters' in 1972, 14-year-old Paul Hutchins caught a magnificent Turbot of 31.4.0. A catch which at face value appears to fly in the face of how these large flatfish feed. But not for the first time, large examples of so-called 'clean ground' species have been taken by angler's wreck fishing at anchor for Conger.

The reason why this happens is that Conger are generally fished for during the slacker periods of the tide. The boats position over the wreck is very carefully calculated by the skipper to take account of all available variables, including wind direction and any remaining tide. Then, as the new tide kicks in, or if the breeze either picks up or changes direction, the boat can swing slightly off line, taking the baits onto potential sand build ups around the wreck where fish like Turbot and Angler fish find both rich pickings and relative safety from commercial fishing, thereby allowing them the opportunity to grow big and to occasionally be caught on rod and line.

THE LOSS OF NEW BRIGHTON PIER

In the very early days, New Brighton at the entrance to the River Mersey had a wooden pier. This was replaced in 1867 by a 600 foot iron pier designed by Eugenius Birch which was used mainly by the Victorians for viewing shipping, though there was also a refreshment bar and an orchestra. The structure was later bought by Wallasey Corporation in 1928 at a cost of £13,000, who then spent in excess of £30,000 replacing many of its features. It closed in 1965 and was later leased to a subsidiary of Fortes who reopened it in 1968. But despite spending £200,000 on improvements, it was finally closed in 1972, and after being declared unsafe, was demolished in 1977.

FLOOKBURGH FLOUNDER WAGON



A totally unsubstantiated inclusion this one. Something I recall being told about when I was staying up at Flookburgh in Cumbria where my parents had a static caravan. They spent quite a lot of time in the village, including time in the company of Albert Benson who was a shrimp fisherman, known locally as shankers. A very popular sideline for farmers and market gardeners in the area who would catch shrimps in small beam trawls towed from bars fitted either side of a trailer, plus a third net dragged directly over the back.

In years gone by, the cart would have been dragged by a cart-horse wading in up to its shanks, hence the term 'shanking'. At Southport and Ainsdale this is now done using a wagon chassis with the engine raised above the frame to keep it out of the water. A wooden cabin is also erected at the front for shelter and for the shrimp boiler, with the rear end kept as a working platform.

At Flookburgh they also use a wooden trailer with a wagon steering box fitted so that when the trailer is towed by a tractor on the shore using a long rope with the steering suitably locked in place, it would drive itself out into the water without any risk to the tractor of getting bogged in. Then apparently, some

enterprising shrimper, either using this method or a shanking wagon, started taking anglers out into water around wheel depth where they would have a great time casting for Flounders, all bait included, with no prizes for guessing what that might be.

CONOFLEX

In 1972, Mike McManus, who by that stage had acquired a high level of fibreglass skills though his work on RAF planes during WWII, set about putting these skills to use in the construction of high-quality fishing and casting rod blanks. Prior to that, whatever 'decent' rods there were on the market were built by the various tackle companies on blanks manufactured by Sportex in Germany. This very quickly led to arguably the most important partnership ever in rod blank innovation and construction, when McManus teamed up with Terry Carroll, a very able record breaking caster, to form 'Carroll McManus Ltd.' operating out of a factory unit in Hailsham, East Sussex, wrapping fibreglass around American made stainless steel mandrills they had had made.



Prior to teaming up with Mike McManus, Terry Carroll had worked as a consultant and demonstrator for rod makers Davenport & Fordham, and in 1970, the 'Terry Carroll SurfLite' was being advertised as the rod that broke the record in the 6 ounce weight category, something ABU were also claiming for their Atlantic 484.

The reality was that the rod used comprised of a trimmed Atlantic 484 tip stuffed into a duralumin tube, and even then, it only equalled the Davenport & Fordham cast, after which Terry embarked on a short term alliance with Nigel Forrest of Breakaway Tackle fame, working on a selection of ultrafast blanks of which 6 prototypes were produced under the banner of CFD (Carroll & Forrest Developments), 3 each being produced in green and brown. John Holden tells me that he still has one of the green versions, comprising an 8 foot 4 inch main section with a 4 foot glass butt, which he replaced with a suitable length of alloy.

The CFD blanks were rolled by Mike McManus, with the production rods marketed by Milbro who insisted the rods were of 2 equal sections, selling them as the Terry Carroll CFD 675, which was the first production rod in the UK to be fitted with the then new Fuji BSHG rings and matching tip. The same rod that John Holden fitted with his alloy butt, which when you add in the record breaking trimmed ABU Atlantic 484 with its duralumin butt, says something about the piece meal way in which surf and tournament rods were being put together by anglers themselves striving for extra distance.

It's totally understandable then that the Carroll-McManus partnership when it came along was hailed as a 'marriage' made in heaven, combining the skills of a top flight caster with those of an equally top class engineer, who between them would take distance casting and long range fishing to a whole new level, culminating in a portfolio of benchmark World beating models.

Sadly, as is often the case with marriages, divorce is sometimes a consequence, and for Carroll McManus Ltd., this came about amicably in 1980, freeing up Terry Carroll to start his own rod building company under the Zziplex banner producing a very impressive range of rod blanks, while Mike McManus would eventually move to a new purpose built factory at Crowborough in Sussex in 1986 as Conoflex, from which blanks could also be offered as finished rods with top class reliable fittings such as those produced by Fuji.

As such, both together and later separately, the pair did, and still do, dominate the quality end of the rod and blank market. Unfortunately however, despite some very informed assistance, it has at times proved problematic at times for me to separate these two innovative rod designers and their respective companies. But I will try, and in that regard, I have enlisted the help of a number of people who worked with and knew both men, not the least of which as I hinted earlier being John Holden.

This particular inclusion is a report on Mike McManus and Conoflex. Zziplex and Terry Carroll have a separate inclusion in Chapter 10. Collectively, and later separately, both men set themselves the challenge of producing powerful, yet light, thin walled, fast taper blanks, eventually incorporating carbon technology when the time was right, which during the 1970's was at a very early stage in its development.

As with all the other rod blank manufacturers at the time, fibreglass was initially their material of preference, simply because suitable grades of carbon fibre cloth and adhesives were not available to them at the performance levels they required, these being restricted for use in the aerospace industry only. Like everyone else, they had to sit back and wait for the government to de-restrict them, which it finally did, with American company Fenwick the first to have a carbon fibre rod on the market, variously quoted as being in 1973 and 1976.

In the case of Terry Carroll and Mike McManus, their fibreglass work and earlier expertise with the material helped prepare them for what was to come. Other than Carroll-McManus Ltd. and Hardy's, few established British tackle manufacturers had invested properly even in fibreglass, so when carbon did finally come along, their ability to produce blanks weighing in at under a pound was a revelation, and something their competitors would be very hard pressed to match.

Obviously, these other companies hadn't had the visionary foresight to appreciate the impact carbon would have. And it wasn't just restricted to tournament casting and long-range beach fishing. Boat, coarse, and spinning rod blanks were also given a good hard looking at, with some of the earliest green and brown Conoflex blanks still in regular use to this day. That's a mark of how good these early rods were, with much more to come, as the Conoflex label became internationally synonymous with quality and reliability.

CONOFLEX SEMI CARBONS

— the best of both worlds

FLICK TIP FACTS

When you first pick up a Flick Tip blank you will find it hard to believe that a rod made from such a light slim blank with its fine sensitive tip has already cast a 5oz lead over 200 yards. However, when you flex the blank you will find that like all high carbon blanks it appears to be stiff, and, in fact, you may doubt your ability to compress the blank in use. Don't be deterred, as it is from this stiffness that the casting power of the blank is generated and also the rapid recovering essential to good casting. Fully ringed and under power it makes what it was designed to be — A SUPERB FISHING ROD.

Carroll McManus Ltd

Sybron Way, Millbrook Industrial Estate,
Jarvis Brook, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 3DZ

Carbon fibre was discovered at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough during the 1960's, and as mentioned previously, had for some years been subject to government restrictions. Initially it had been quite a problematic material to work with, particularly for an application such as a casting rod with all the flexing pressure that would exert on such a 'fragile' tube, which in the early history of carbon rods often resulted in the blanks shattering.

This was where Mike McManus's fibreglass skills would really come to the fore, allowing him to blend the two materials in such a way as to improve the hoop strength, ultimately leading to the flick-tip design that would 'spin up' the multiplier reels that were becoming ever more popular on the tournament casting scene, quickly establishing a number of USKF records, including John Holden's first ever official cast in excess of 200 yards on British soil. Greater distances would eventually follow, culminating in the first ever cast in excess of 300 yards by Neil Kelland in a non USKF event using a 13-foot Conoflex Tournament 'Extreme'.

The 'secret' in the early days of carbon fibre, if you can call it that, was getting stiffness into the butt of a rod that will bend, particularly with the blank building materials available to manufacturers at the time. The biggest problems were delamination and shattering, which were only cured when suitable phenolic and epoxy resins became available, allowing tubes to be produced that could bend without snapping. Aluminium tubing also began to play a growing role in allowing the butt section to be stiffened up, which with the right casting technique, would allow the delivery of even more power.

Let's not however run away with the idea that fibreglass as a rod building material had had its day. In its own right, perhaps. But as a contributor to composites along with other materials including Kevlar, which eventually priced itself out of contention, it had a vital role to play. 'S-glass' is superior to carbon in some specific and important respects, including softening up the action when and where needed, a good example of which is boat fishing with braid, which like carbon fibre, has no give in it, and could easily result in a pulled hook hold.

Like ABU had in the late 1960's with Peter Bagnall and the Atlantic 484 Zoom rod (see Chapter 8), McManus, Holden, and Carroll, brought both distance casting and the tackle to achieve with it to the masses, who quite literally were queueing up to improve both their tournament distances and their catch rates, on the back of a period of exceptional Cod fishing at venues such as Dungeness, Eastbourne and Deal. Anglers would turn up quite literally in their thousands for the casting demonstrations the 'big guns' would put on. Yet today, with casts in excess of 300 yards, you would be lucky to see 10 spectators, because anglers wanting to cast to catch fish simply can't relate to it anymore. But that's an aside.

Throughout the 1970's there were plenty of other good casters too. Yet only a few ever actually influence the development side of things by helping everyone else take their casting to the next level. Dennis Darkin for example, who many think of as the man responsible for the pendulum cast, was a highly knowledgeable and formidable caster, but he did not invent the pendulum cast. It had been around in perhaps less 'polished' forms for many years, and was in fact the style used by Peter Bagnall from which ABU took the term 'Zoom' for the naming of their Atlantic 484 rod.

Going still further back, American caster Primo Levenais allegedly progressed from using the South African off the ground casting technique to a 'pendulum style' cast in the 1930's and 40's, using it to produce casts up to 235 yards in the days of wooden rods and 6 strand Cuttyhunk line (see Chapter 4). But in the final analysis, few would or could argue with the contributions made by Carroll and McManus, Conoflex and Zziplex, in getting us to where we are at the close of the twentieth century.

JIM INGLEDEW

Jim Ingledeew was one of a number of early days 'organised' tournament casters, along with the likes of Colin Howlett, Frank Minster, Tony Gittins, Andy Rackham, Terry Housego, Nigel Forrest, Dave Turner and Bimbo Perrin to name but a few, all of whom were early pendulum casters deserving of mention here lest they should be lost to angling history altogether.

All had involvement with the setting up and running of the fledgling United Kingdom Surfcasting Federation (UKSF). An angler as well as a caster who did a lot of writing in the angling press linking the

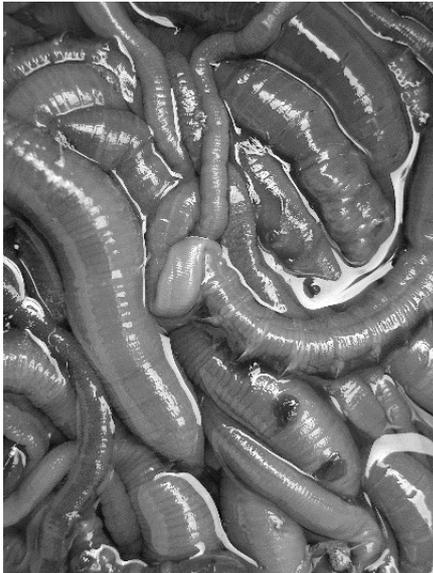
two topics, and who, according to one thread I picked up on the Internet, was the one time holder of the 150g casting record.

SHORE WRECK FISHING

As bizarre as this sounds, in Scotland, shore wreck fishing was a very real possibility. Conger were the primary target, and the location in question was the breakers yard at Cairn Ryan on Loch Ryan, where primarily military vessels were broken up for scrap resulting in debris falling into the water around where they were berthed.

I'm not sure to what extent fishing there was permitted or done by sneaking in after the work force had knocked off for the day. My own experience is one of crossing the Loch by small boat from Lady Bay and simply sailing in. But it was done, and some reasonable shore wreck fishing for Conger could be had as a result.

LIVE BAIT ON DEMAND



It's difficult to know with any real certainty when exactly anglers first experimented with keeping sea-baits alive in tanks in their garages. Initially it would have been something a few people just did without looking to gain any sort of recognition for perfecting the necessary techniques. Judging by what I've managed to find in old angling magazines, coupled to my own personal experiences, I would put my money on it becoming quite widespread from around the start of the 1980's. Certainly in terms of it taking off in any sort of meaningful way, which for quite a few years it did. Nowadays you don't hear much about it, though I'm assured that some of the country's best shore match anglers still do it with at least some baits some of the time.

Though there is probably no limit on what could potentially be kept alive, on the home waters scene, live bait keeping falls into two categories – worms kept in sea water tanks, and crabs held back then brought on to peel to order. I suppose you could also include ragworms wrapped in newspaper kept in a fridge for a few days and gutted black lugworm kept the same way, even though effectively the latter would technically be dead. The real gist of worm keeping however is blowlug, which doesn't expel its guts when removed from the sand; red and king ragworm, and most highly prized of all if you can find it in meaningful numbers, white ragworm.

The first big must in all of this is to sort through the worms as soon as they have been dug, keeping only quality undamaged specimens for the live bait tanks. Even some of these will very likely die through unseen injuries in due course, souring the water, and risking sending the rest of them off. So why tempt fate by adding in worms you know won't last the course?

Next comes setting up the tanks, ensuring a backup supply of fresh sea water, and regulating the temperature. This is best done by buying in old refrigerators to stack up in the garage and drilling holes through their doors to feed in plastic tubes from an aeration pump. I have read accounts of keeping good numbers of worms in large plastic bins without cooling. Smaller plastic boxes with a handful in worms kept in a fridge slows down their metabolism, and more importantly, limits losses if the bait in one tub does go off.

There are people who prefer do their worm keeping without aeration. It depends on the set up, and to an extent, the type of worms being kept. White ragworms for example are far easier to keep without aeration than are red ragworm and lugworm. Shallow plastic trays with sand in the bottom and a shallow covering of water can allegedly see them last for up to 12 months. The same set up will also do for lugworms, but don't expect the same sort of life expectancy. Red ragworm seem to do better with more water and aeration, and all 3 will last longer in the cool stable environment best provided by an old fridge.

Cool and constant are the two key words then. Large sandwich boxes with a couple of inches of water and an aeration stone kept in a fridge with the temperature not turned too far down should outperform larger tubs without cooling, particularly during the warmer summer months.

Regular daily checks are also important looking for casualties which might turn the water off, plus instances of the water already having become discoloured. When this happens, a complete change of water followed by an inspection of the worms to find the culprit is called for. But not just any sea water. It must be at the same temperature as the water being changed, preferably from a bottle in the same fridge, if the worms are not to be sent into shock.

My earlier comment regarding putting a handful of worms into each tub isn't accurate enough to work with. To give some sort of indication of numbers per cubic unit, a 2 foot square tank will safely accommodate between 150 and 200 worms, be they lug or rag, so you can scale things up or down from there. Probably just enough for a single trip, which is great to have 'banked' in case an opportunity suddenly comes along. Great too for the long term keeping of surplus bait, or for when you've gone to all the trouble of digging then a boat trip is cancelled due to the weather. Also very handy for inland sea anglers like myself, who don't have the same sort of daily access to bait beds as people actually living on the coast.

It all sounds like the perfect solution. But is it? The thing is that many one time enthusiasts began to become sceptical about their baits ability to provide comparable results to fresh on the day supplies. With nothing to feed on, the worms condition must obviously start to deteriorate. Ragworms will on occasion start eating each other, particularly any that are showing signs of weakness. Lugworms on the other hand empty their guts which needs to be removed from the water. And for all worms, in fact all living organisms including anglers, when you are starved of food, the body eventually starts to use what reserves it has to make essential repairs first.

In short, some body functions start to lose out and deteriorate, which could explain why experiments have shown less interest in and attraction to tanked baits by fish, to the point that some shore match anglers use them only for practise or for pleasure, insisting on freshly sourced bait for match day.

Anglers have also perfected ways of controlling crab peeling in order that they can have a conveyor belt supply right throughout the spring, summer and autumn months. Even throughout the winter if they select out those individuals which can't be held back any longer and start to peel regardless, or crabs taken out for use which are surplus to requirements and brought back. In both cases, if the gills are removed to help minimise bacterial damage, providing they are wrapped tightly in cling film, these can be frozen for winter use.

The first piece in this particular jigsaw is supply. Rock turning and weed searching may well provide enough for a day's fishing. To have them available on an almost industrial level requires a bit more forward planning, such as that done by a friend of mine Mickey Duff from the Wirrall. Mick and his fishing partner John Greenfield use old car tyres roped together to form long chains which they leave set in certain muddy constant water depressions around the outer edges of the Mersey estuary. Between them they tend the tyres daily, feeling inside for crabs which have entered for security and shelter in order to peel.

As a crab grows, its fixed size exterior casing becomes too small for what's inside, and because the shell doesn't grow with the crab, it has to be cast off in the spring and autumn to allow the growing crab to physically become larger. It's a process known as ecdysis. Calcium ions are removed from the old shell which is what makes it 'crispy' when you peel it off. These are then 'stored' by the crab. Meanwhile, it is growing a new soft leathery shell underneath the old one. Then, when the time comes, it takes on water to expand its inner body to the point where the old upper part of the shell known as the carapace splits across the back and hinges up like a lid, allowing the crab within to slowly drag itself out.

As soon as the crab has freed itself of the old shell it takes on more water to expand and straighten out the soft wrinkled new shell, which over a period of around a week will progressively re-harden as those calcium ions are returned to it. By doing this, a crab can increase its size by up to 30 percent. The problem is, as anglers know only too well, they are vulnerable, with just about every species of fish in the sea more than happy to eat them, hence the hiding inside the types, under rocks, and under weed fronds. Those about to break out of the old shell are peeler crabs, while those that are in the process of re-hardening are softies. This is also the time when they mate. So if you find a crab cradling another smaller crab between its legs, the cradled crab will be a female that has already peeled.



All crabs removed from the traps are checked to see if they are peelers. If you break off the end of a leg and a soft brown leg appears, it's a peeler. Those showing white sinew are rejected and put back. However, a seasoned 'crabber' such as Mickey Duff can usually tell simply by looking at them, with the peeler crabs going into a bucket for transportation back home where the technical stuff begins.

There they are put into shallow plastic trays with maybe half a dozen sheets of newspaper soaked in sea water placed over them. This has the dual role of stopping them escaping, but more importantly, helping keep their gills damp, otherwise they would die. These trays are then placed inside the fridge until a trip or competition comes along and they are needed.

I said earlier that peeling crabs need to take on water to expand and crack the seams of their old shell. Starved of water, and kept cool in this way, they go into a sort of suspended animation. Take them out of the fridge and give them access to an inch or so of seawater and higher temperatures and the peeling process with resume. Water any deeper runs the risk of them drowning through weakness and oxygen depletion. Normally they need to be taken out 2 or 3 days before they are required. That's all it takes to have peeler crabs on demand, avoiding the hit and miss aspect of searching for them in the final days leading up to the competition.

LIVERPOOL BAY WRECK FISHING

I have 2 inclusions for Liverpool Bay wreck fishing, separated in time by several years. Here we are going to look at the earlier attempt of the two undertaken from the charter boats 'Thor I' and 'Thor II,' which if my memory serves me right, were based at Barrow-in-Furness. The second inclusion, covered in Chapter 9, is the development of the Liverpool Bay small boat wreck fishing scene by Dave Devine and Ken Michell, which unlike the charter fishing offered by Dave Edge, really grabbed the north-west angling scene by the scruff of the neck and shook it up.

Why it didn't stir the same level of enthusiasm on charter fishing scene is difficult to quantify. Likely explanations include cost, sailing times, catches in the north-west compared to what could be achieved

fishing wrecks in other parts of the country, and the general mood at the time, which in the early 1970's wasn't nearly so adventurous nor as demanding as it is today.

As you might expect for a large seaport with centuries of history, Liverpool has seen its fair share of maritime casualties. I first became aware of the availability of the offshore wreck fishing potential around 1972, when as a member of the Leyland & Farington Boat Angling Club, we were given a presentation by 'Thor' skipper Dave Edge, who was doing a tour of the regions fishing clubs promoting what he had to offer and looking to drum up customers.

As I recall the evening, while people were obviously impressed and interested, nobody actually followed it up, which to a large extent mirrors the reaction the venture apparently received elsewhere, as within quite a short period of time, nothing more was heard of either the 'Thor' boats or the wrecks until the Rhyl boats, plus dinghies launching from the tricky beach at Southport put it back on the agenda at a time when anglers were seemingly more receptive.

STRANGFORD LOUGH



Strangford Lough just to the south-east of Belfast, connecting to the Irish Sea at Strangford and Portaferry, was featured in the April 1972 issue of Sea Angler Magazine, heralding it as Northern Ireland's best bet for big fish action. In truth, the big fish pedigree of this near 20 mile long 'semi-enclosed' piece of saltwater had been known about for quite some time before that. In particular its large Common Skate, the best of which tipped the scales at 189 pounds. Also, the then Irish records for Tope at 60.12.0 and Spurdog at 15.4.0.

Three figure Skate were, it seems, a fairly regular occurrence when specifically fished for with squid or Mackerel out from Portaferry dropped into around 150 feet of water in Ringhaddy Sound, such as the 145-pound specimen by Ken Johnson shown here. Other species regularly caught included Haddock, Whiting, rays and wrasse. In addition, there are a few small wrecks to drift over.

Big fish hunter Trevor Housby did some 'investigative' work in and around Strangford Lough in the late 1960's and 1970's, taking a skate of 182 pounds, regarded as being one of the best specimens for several years. The same trip also produced Trevor's best ever Tope, which after being mis-gaffed and initially 'escaping' was finally brought back to the boat, where after losing a substantial amount of blood, still turned the scales to 64 pounds, prompting the comment from Trevor that "Strangford Lough is a fabulous place to fish. A place where you sit and wait for hours, nothing happens, then you get the big bite".

The same article also took a fleeting look at Carlingford Lough further to the south straddling the Ulster-Eire border at Warrenpoint. The boat fishing there was centred around Greencastle at the mouth on the Ulster side. More of a mixed fishery this one, with less in the way of huge fish. The Tope tended to be much smaller and there were no reports of Common Skate. Still plenty of Thornback Rays, Spurdog, Haddock, Cod and Conger though to keep anglers busy. Also Bass occasionally at the entrance.

PRIZE WINNING PORBEAGLE

To emphasise the shark fishing credentials of the inshore waters to the east of the Isle of Wight during the 1970's, in August 1972, a Porbeagle of 296 pounds measuring more than 7½ feet in length was brought ashore by Portchester angler Don Cowan fishing out from Langstone. A fish which would go on to be the August winner of that years Bacardi Rum shark fishing competition, putting Cowan in the mix for the overall prize of a bottle of Bacardi rum, plus £1 for ever pound weight of his winning catch.

PW Comment: The waters to the east of the Isle of Wight were Britain's Porbeagle Shark hotspot in the days before North Cornwall, Shetland, and eventually Scrabster burst onto the scene. In the end, perhaps after taking note of angling reports even, French long liners moved in and pretty much cleared out the lot, which is a great pity on two counts.

First and foremost, for the Porbeagles that were removed. But secondly, for the hitting the country's Thresher Shark potential. Most of the UK's Threshers came from the same area, usually as accidents while fishing for the more numerous Porbeagles. Once the Porbeagles were gone, from an angling perspective due to declining interest, the prospect of a Thresher went with them. Some would undoubtedly have fallen victim to the long lines too. But they are still there, as has been shown by Wayne Comben, Danny Vokins and Andy Griffith since the turn of the century.

BRITAIN'S FIRST ROD CAUGHT 50 POUND PLUS COD

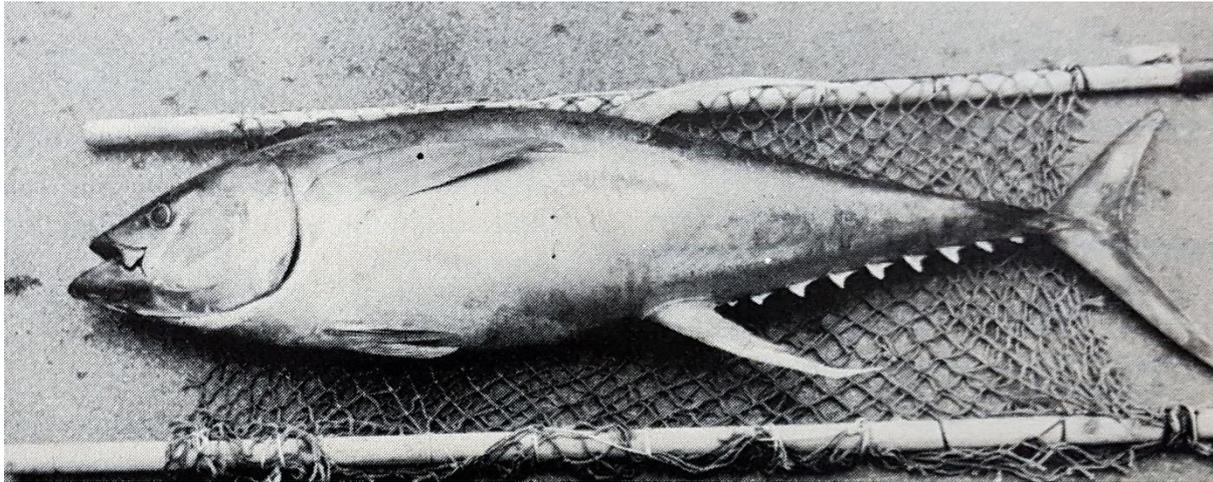


Arguably the biggest prize in British sea angling history, Britain's first rod caught 50 pound plus Cod, is taken under the most unlikely of circumstances, from a port hardly at the top of the list when it comes to top Cod venues, and by a first time angler who didn't really want to be out there fishing in the first place.

In June 1972, top wrecking boat 'Our Unity' set sail from Brixham with a party on board which included retired Northwood, Middlesex book-maker George Martin, who reluctantly, and under supervision using borrowed tackle, dropped a redgill lure down to the bottom while drifting over a mid-channel wreck and was told to crank the handle until hopefully a fish attached itself to the hook, which it did in the form of a Cod of 53 pounds, and another British record was notched up for the John Trust & Ernie Passmore partnership aboard the famous boat.

THE FIRST EVER YELLOW FIN TUNA FROM UK WATERS

Unlike Blue Fin Tuna, or Tunny as they were known in the golden years of the 1930's through to the 1950's (see Chapter 5) which can generate internal body heat and therefore tolerate the 'cooler' temperate waters of the North Atlantic and North Sea, Yellow Fin Tuna *Thunnus albacares* prefer a sub-tropical to tropical climate, which unfortunately falls some way short of what the British Isles can

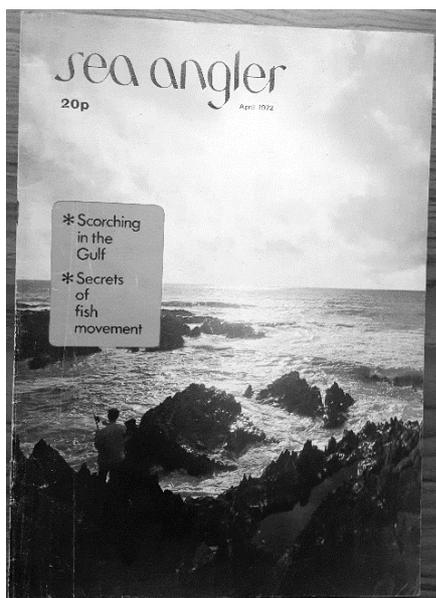


provide (for the moment at least). But migration accidents can happen causing lone stragglers to wander sometimes a very long way off course which proved to be the case for a Yellow Fin Tuna estimated at around 300 pounds found stranded on the beach at Port Meirion in Wales, photographed by Tom Evans and reported to Sea Angler Magazine as a story of interest in December 1972.

SEA ANGLER MAGAZINE

Sea Angler magazine was launched in 1972 with Jim Beattie in charge of advertising and promotion, and Bob Page, the then Secretary of the NFSA as its technical adviser. A time when paper quality was low, photographic reproduction was poor and sparse, and the magazine generally was wafer thin in terms of editorial and advertising content compared to today. Its launch editor was 28 year-old Ted Lamb.

It wasn't long before the magazine became an integral part of the EMAP (East Midlands Allied Press) portfolio, with a switch to Peter Collins at the helm in February 1973, whereupon he doubled the readership in just 7 months before side stepping into the assistant editors post at Angling Times, handing over the reins to Ian Beacham who pushed the circulation figure up to 49,000 before being 'farmed out' to Motor Cycle News, with Peter Collins 'reinstated' in August 1974, the apparent moral of the story being that when working for EMAP it doesn't pay to do a good job



An abrupt and self-opinionated man, Collins was both passionate and confident in what he was doing, boosted no doubt by the magazine buying publics ever growing support helping him set it on the road to becoming the market leader, a lofty position Sea Angler has managed to hold on to ever since, gathering together a formidable writing team including many of the big names of the day such as John Rawle, Terry Carroll and Bod Gledhill, all of whom were at the top of their game at that time.

But time marches on, and come 1985 it was time for Peter Collins to retire and hand over the reins to Mel Russ (separate inclusion Chapter 10), a man very much in certain respects out of the Peter Collins mould, drafted in to bring continuity, while at the same time taking the magazine forward at every level through into the twenty first century, variously seeing off a whole raft of would be competitors in the process, which he did with ruthless consummate efficiency.

EDDYSTONE BASS FISHING

Many names are linked with the incredibly productive early Bass fishing days of the Eddystone Reef. People such as Spencer Vibart and Roy Slater. Also, Vissik the Pole, all of whom trolled the reef with rod and line tactics, and all of whom also regularly put large quantities of Bass onto the fish quay, because for a lot of anglers, that's the way it was back then.

A totally different era, and a totally different mentality. Roy Slater even held the British Bass record with one of his 'commercially caught' fish, but only after being summoned by the British Record Fish Committee to make a deposition due to his commercial history. However, it was two foreign nationals, who for different reasons, would play the biggest part in the demise of the Eddystone Bass fishing, which in all likelihood will never recover.

The first of the pair was an American named Frank Manchester who was working in Plymouth during the very early 1970's. On his native patch, Frank was an avid lure angler who owned his own boat, which when he was shown the potential of the Eddystone Bass fishing had his boat shipped over to Southampton Docks as deck cargo, which he then collected and trailed across to Plymouth.



This was a twin outboard open sport fishing boat of around 28-feet in length from which he would cast large surface lures, stripping them back across the surface where they would get hammered by the Bass. If not the first demonstration that lures and Bass were an irresistible combination, then certainly one of the first. A technique that would eventually lead to Bass trolling.

Bass trolling became a very popular and highly lucrative technique during the Frank Manchester era. A time Russ Symons recalls when the red glue from bicycle puncture repair outfits was being mixed with other 'unspecified ingredients' which caused it to set but remain pliable so that it could be put into homemade lure moulds. It was around this time that Alex Ingram was developing and marketing his revolutionary redgill lure, also known as the Mevagissey Eel (see Chapter 7).

However, many of the early pioneers of the Eddystone Bass fishing however preferred their own concoctions. These were trolled using what was known as the 20/50 approach of trailing the lure out for 20 yards then tying an elastic band to the line to stop the lead, followed by a further 50 yards of line, typically fished from 2 short rods over the stern and 2 longer ones from the cabin roof.

The second 'foreigner' in this story is the infamous 'Spaniard'. A name you would often hear angrily bandied about by Bass anglers of the period. The man's actual name was Poi, who like Roy Slater, Spencer Vibart, and the rest, was trolling lures to great effect on every fishable day until Steve Barrett who skippered the highly successful Plymouth based angling charter boat 'Boa Pescador', allegedly put some gill nets out over the reef and one day hit the jackpot.

Poi learned of this, and from that point there was no turning back with regard to tactics. He became a brilliantly efficient gill netter, if that be the right phrase to use in this context here. The place was all but cleaned out of Bass as he very skilfully, it has to be said, went about his sinister business, at which point he reputedly retired back to Spain.

It doesn't matter where or how you plunder a mark, you can never actually take out every single fish, though at the time it might appear that way. The 'Spaniard' unfortunately came as close as anyone

possibly could do, and even now, more than 40 years on, this once renowned Bass fishery is showing little if any signs of recovery. And that as they say was the end of that.

WHOPPING SCAPA SKATE



Weighing in at 205 pounds, this Common Skate caught by Roger Clarke while fishing aboard 'Pentland Wave' south of the island of Graemsay in Scapa Flow, Orkney, became the third biggest ever Skate in the autumn of 1973 as reported in the November edition of Sea Angler Magazine that same year

THE LOSS OF RHYL PIER

At a cost of £15,000, Rhyl's 2,355 foot Pier was opened in 1867 based on a design by James Brunlees which included a pier railway, though its main income was tied to steamer excursions to adjacent Welsh ports and to Liverpool. Unfortunately, in 1833, the schooner 'Lady Stuart' caused extensive damage to the pier leading to the eventual loss of 180 feet of its length. This was followed in 1891 by the steamer 'Fawn' hitting it, with more damage suffered in 1901 through a fire in the pavilion leading to a temporary closure.

A series of storms in 1909 added further to the pier's woes, to the point where in 1913 it had become unsafe. It remained derelict until Rhyl Council acquired it in the 1920's allowing them to demolish the shoreward end. None the less, it was re-opened between 1930 and 1966, after which at a length of 330 feet it was declared unsafe and closed. Demolition followed in 1973.

THE EDDYSTONE EEL

When you come up with a ground breaking idea there will always be those that 'flatter' it by trying to get as close as possible to copying it without infringing the patent, at times even improving it. Some would say that is what happened in 1973 when Dave Beer's Eddystone Eel went head to head with Alex Ingram's original Mevagsissey Eel out over the mid channel wrecks and around the Eddystone for Bass (see Chapter 7). Both lures had their loyal followers who were convinced that each could out fish the other. Arguably, this wasn't so much down to the general design or colour range available, as the materials used and the design of the paddle on the tail.



The redgill had a pear shaped paddle at the end of its tail, the widest part of which was down facing. In contrast, the original Eddystone Eel had a split paddle comprising 2 semi-circles, one above the other either side of the mid-point placed on opposing sides of a deeper profiled tail as shown in the accompanying photograph.

In both cases this would give the lure the characteristic swimming action that was so appealing to Pollack, Coalfish and Bass which obviously was a major point of difference between the two brands. In addition to this, the Eddystone Eel had a far softer, thinner tail leading up to the paddles, which it was argued gave it a far more irresistible swimming action, particularly when trolling for Bass.

THE UNITED KINGDOM SURFCASTING FEDERATION

There is often a perception that distance casting is a modern pursuit. The story goes that Les Moncrieff was the first person to make the link between increased distance and increased catches with his incredible hauls of Cod from Dungeness in the early 1960's (see Chapter 8), an association I have made myself in this book. The truth however is somewhat different.

Yes, Les Moncrieff did establish and publicise that link, and rightly so. But casting, both for better catches, and as a tournament event goes way back to the start of the twentieth century, with one of the greatest casters that ever lived having hung up his rods long before 'big Les' and the rest were putting baits on to throw to those Dungeness Cod.



Primo Levenais was a casting superstar. Born in 1906 in London, he emigrated with his parents to the USA at a very early age. The UKSF ran a centenary event in his honour in 2006. Getting back to the origins of tournament casting, it pretty much coincides with the birth of Primo Levenais around the start of the twentieth century. In fact, I hear on the grapevine that distance casting in some guise may even have been a full event or an exhibition event at either the 1904 or the 1908 Olympics, though I can find no hard evidence in support of that. In a nutshell then, distance casting for its own sake spans the entire twentieth century, which very conveniently fits the remit of this book.

Having said all of that, we must return to the 1960's and that man Les Moncrieff again for the start of tournament casting here in the UK. To the south Kent area, where the South East Casting Association, which would evolve into the UKSF, first started staging events. However, it wasn't just what we would term 'surfcasting' at that stage. Large events, including the World Championships held at Scarborough in 1973, included every conceivable casting discipline from propelling large leads through to casting a fly. And it was from this that the UKSF grew and flourished, both here in the UK and around the World, with cross interest attraction bringing together the tournament purists and those anglers wanting perhaps to reach a few extra fish.

Much of the information and guidance provided to me here comes from Colin Howlett who was secretary of the UKSF. I have also corresponded with John Holden on the subject, and taking information from both parties, I think it would be fair to say that distance casting throughout the 1970's on into the 1980's was very much angler driven. Demonstration events, and perhaps to a lesser extent casting tournaments, would draw the kinds of crowd lower division football clubs dream about having. It was that popular. And it stayed that way for as long as the 'ordinary' angler could relate to it in terms of being able to both afford, and equally importantly, to 'handle', the types of rods those hitting the greatest distances were using.

What appears to have happened is that as the rods became ever more fine-tuned to add that extra few inches to a cast; as the casting skills needed to make these rods perform to their maximum capability, and as the physical presence of those demonstrating with them passed a point that the man on the beach wanting a few extra fish could identify with, so the angling component of demonstration attendances dropped away to that which the smallest non league football clubs might expect.

When you have very capable casters standing at over 6 feet tall and built like a brick shipyard turning up, understandably, people are going to say, and were saying "How can I expect to compete with that?". As such, the true anglers weren't learning anything, and the everyday casters would always be 'also rans', the combined result being that interest and attendances in demonstrations and tournaments across the board dropped right off.

The area of interest served by the UKSF is now completely divorced from distance casting to catch fish. Some of those competing will no doubt also be anglers. Others may well never have set foot on a beach. The era of 'pure-casting' was upon us, with the UKSF now the global authority on the subject, to the point that its rules have become adopted Worldwide. The South African's, who once dominated with their long one-piece rods and off the ground casting style were constantly being thrashed by the pendulum casters using much shorter stiffer rods from the likes of Conoflex and Zziplex. The casting World had moved on, and the South African's had obviously failed to move with it.

Come the 1990's, the divorce between the anglers and tournament purists was pretty much complete. Tournament casting had by this time gone metric, with regular internationals taking place, along with club competitions and coaching for youngsters right down to grass roots level. Observer attendances may well have been down, but competitor interest was still there, particularly as there were so many different categories, not all of which required the physical prowess of a giant like 'Big Les'. And while the split between the casters and the anglers was there for all to see, rod and reel development didn't recognise any such division and continued apace, providing equipment that the casters could hit new records with, while at the same time helping the anglers to come up with the goods on the beach, leaving everyone happy with the result.



That's the UKSF in a nutshell. I have to say though that I debated long and hard as to whether I should include it at all, concluding that the overlap was too great to do anything other than give it a quick once over, and thanks to Colin Howlett for helping me out with that. That however wasn't the sum total of what we chatted about. A lot of useful information came out of our conversation on rods, reels, and other contributors to the evolution of distance casting, which began around the mid-1960's and flourished on into the 1970's when all the work was still being done with the objective of reaching more fish.

Colin rhymed off a whole list of contributing names, including his own, as he was no slouch when it came to hitting the big distances and records in his day, all of which has been extremely helpful. Then I dropped this 'big question' into the mix – "Who actually invented the pendulum cast?". My understanding prior to our chat was that there were 3 potential names in the hat, the first being Peter Bagnall with his 'Zoom' casting using the Atlantic 484 which he'd developed for ABU in the late 1960's (see Chapter 8). Peter was the first UK caster on home soil to put a lead out over 200 yards.

As John Holden pointed out to me, this was at a demonstration and was therefore 'unofficial', with John himself the first to crack 200 yards in an official tournament. Primo Levenais was the second name, having reached distances in excess of 270 yards as far back as the mid-1950's. Primo was an off the ground caster who some people believe may also have done a swinging lead cast for a series of photographs for a book called 'Saltwater Fishing Tackle', by Marlon Major in the 1940's. However, Colin dismisses that idea out of hand, which leaves me with Denis Darkin.

I've read Internet forum threads, both by and about Denis Darkin, placing the invention of the pendulum casting squarely with him. Colin agrees he would have been instrumental in its development. But so

too were a number of others, all of whom would have been experimenting with variations on the swinging lead style around the same time. People like Denis Gander, Terry Carroll, and Bill Roberts, to name just three. That said, Colin reckons it's between Denis Darkin and Denis Gander.

For me, the Jury's still out, and may well never be in a position to offer a unanimous verdict. In all likelihood the honour is shared across several people, Peter Bagnall included, which is probably the best way to leave things. The pendulum cast is here, and that's all that matters.

PW Comment: I'm no caster, which is why I needed to speak at length Colin who was able to put me right on all things appertaining to casting and casters, including going to great lengths to stress the value of the part played by a small number of people, not only in getting UKSF up and running, but also keeping it running. In particular Roger Mortimer who was primarily a Bass angler looking to improve his casting.

A great Ambassador is how Colin described him. A man who put in a lot of time and effort, particularly when abroad, ensuring that 'British' casting and its implementation was the approved model on which to base other casting organisations. Terry Housego was another, as indeed was Colin's late wife Anne, who despite not being a caster, was very enthusiastic about the club and its members. So much that she was secretary of the organisation for many years, without whose contribution, things might not have run nearly so well.

SUFIX FISHING LINES



A company established in 1973, originally offering ODM services (Original Design Manufacturer), which in this case means providing nylon based products for other companies to brand and market as their own, Yao I Fabric Co. Ltd. of Taiwan, is one of the biggest manufacturers of monofilament nylon fishing line in the World, one or other of whose products many anglers will almost certainly have bought and used at some point or other without ever realising it, as the company was producing in excess of 2,000 tons of monofilament nylon, and 400 million metres of braided line at the time of researching this inclusion.

Many of us will also have specifically bought and used Sufix monofilament line of one type or other too, Sufix being the company's own brand name, or should I say, ever evolving range of monofilament lines designed to be top end products covering just about every conceivable demand sea anglers around the World can possibly make.

DOUBLE 'TON' SHETLAND SKATE

An end of season reflection on the Shetland Common Skate fishing for 1973 by Cavy Johnson highlighted Shetland's second best ever skate weighing in at 210 pounds caught by local angler Billy Coutts. Otherwise, a poor year in skate terms by Shetland standards, despite the tag and release conservation project set up by Dr. Dietrich Burkel having been running since 1971. A total of 31 skate in excess of 100 pounds were tagged and released in 1973, along with 3 smaller specimens. Four skate with tags in were also recaptured and released again.

CAVY JOHNSON

In 1973, Shetlander Cavy Johnson became the first angler in Britain, probably in Europe, and possibly even the World, to catch a Common Skate in excess of 200 pounds and a Halibut in excess of 100 pounds. The skate was taken from his home waters, which at that time was being heralded as the skate capital of the UK. Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the Halibut. For that fish Johnson had to travel 'abroad' to Orkney, which was forging its own UK capital status for giant flatfish. A member of a squad visiting their island neighbours to represent Shetland in an inter-island contest between the two island groups.

This was on day 3 of the 'bout' fishing out around Marwick Head, the same area where 'Bunt' Knight had taken his Halibut record 5 years earlier. Fishing aboard 'Kytra' skippered by Hamish Flett, conditions were perfect. But as Cavy tells it in the January 1974 edition of Sea Angler Magazine, for him at



least, the fish were refusing to cooperate. Haddock, Spurdog's and Ling were all putting in a good show – just not on his baits. Then, after pulling free of a snag and initially thinking his gear had immediately gone to ground again, at last he was in to a fish, which he thought would turn out to be a decent Ling.

There was little or no fight from the fish at first. Just dead weight. Until that is he stopped around halfway up to clear another line, at which point the fish took off. Fearing for his trace after previously having had it 'scrubbed' by Spurdog's, like history repeating itself, when he again had to stop to clear another anglers line, away it went again, powerfully crash diving towards the bottom. Then it turned and started running up towards the boat, giving the impression that it had slipped the hook.

Thankfully it hadn't, and after a few more power demonstrations and heart in mouth moments it was finally at the surface, where Hamish Flett and Harry McKay put the gaffs into it, then found they couldn't manage to lift it on board. Fearing the worst, Cavy threw his rod down, grabbed a gaff handle, and between the 3 of them they finally had it on the deck. At 148 pounds it was the third best Halibut caught in British waters at that time. A fish taken not on a whole dead-bait or a large pirk, but on a small sliver of Mackerel fished on a dropper intended for Haddock.

APOTHOGEL LUGWORM

How many times I wonder has sea angling been subjected to some new wonder bait or other, heralded in a blaze of glory, only to bow out shortly afterwards with barely a whimper. Mainly these come in the guise of scientific formulations, which when applied to a bait as an additive, reputedly should see fish literally queueing up to get on the hook. Let's be honest here, there have been quite a few, some of which are featured elsewhere in this volume. For now, let's stick with the job at hand, Apothogel Lugworm.

What makes this particular product stand out from the rest is that instead of being the more typical applied liquid formulation, Apothogel is by definition a moulded gel deliberately designed to give it a superficial lugworm shape. Marketed in batches of six, it was presented in a stout plastic presentation pack of the type you see these days for supermarket food.

Another way in which Apothogel stood out from the rest was in the sheer depth and breadth of the publicity surrounding it. I remember it being featured on the BBC's weekly scientific program 'Tomorrow's World' where it was claimed that if it didn't produce a fish it could be eaten instead, as it complied with the then rules governing human consumption.

'REVIEWS HAVE BEEN FAVOURABLE'

DURING our tests over the last 18 months, we ourselves have fished two rods in a boat and, over a period, found that one day the best catches were on Apothogel and on another on fresh lug. There were days when there was no bite at all, which of course can happen, bearing in mind that it was a small boat and the bait in the water was only two to three yards apart.

We feel that rather than express our own opinion of Apothogel, we would prefer to quote what other people say.

Apart from two national newspapers giving Apothogel favourable criticism, it is no secret that a BBC television team successfully tested it out and, at a later date, used it on one of their broadcasts on a nationally-known scientific programme — and they would not stick their neck out for something which was not true!

Quote . . . 'No-one's saying that the fish actually leap out of the sea into your pocket, but the smelly worm is already hauling them in. One amazed angler caught six fish with the same worm' — Colin Dunne, Daily Mirror.

Quote . . . 'But does it work? I tried the stuff with, it must be said, some scepticism — which lasted only as long as it took to catch a satisfactory number of whiting. An even more sceptical tackle dealer friend has done well with it for both shore and boat cod fishing' — Ian Cummins, Sunday Telegraph.

Furthermore, since Apothogel has been on the market, in the last few weeks, specimen catches have been recorded, with one of which Mr Tony Barratt of South Benfleet won an NFSA silver medal.

Bob Page, secretary of the NFSA, has already published the results of his initial tests in this magazine. He said: "I have never been a great believer in this type of bait and I said so to the gentleman who asked me to try it . . . I must confess that I did catch fish on the man-made lugworm . . . I caught wrasse, ling and

pollack with the bait".

I would also like to quote one of S.E. England's largest tackle and bait retailers, Greenfields of Canterbury, who state: "This bait is exceptional and we are guaranteeing to our customers that it will work, as we are having reports all the time of our customers catching fish with it".

Peter Brown of A. C. Brown of Norwich states: "One customer did better with Apothogel than fresh bait, using two rods." Ron Edwards of Herne Bay, well-known prize-winning sea angler, said: "Although I have not personally used Apothogel, my customers are catching fish with it and with the bait shortage as it is, I am very happy indeed".

In France, La Soie, France's biggest wholesalers of "Tortue" fame, gave samples of Apothogel to a Professor of the Louis Pasteur Institute. He used the worms in small pieces on small hooks and having caught many fish, gave 'thumbs up' to the test as positive. Consequently, the French company has placed substantial orders for '74.

In Belgium, Seeger of Ostend, who take people out on fishing trips every day during the holiday season, have made tests in the Channel, as a result of which the Managing Director came to London to negotiate orders for '74 and he said — "We caught plenty of fish, including cod."

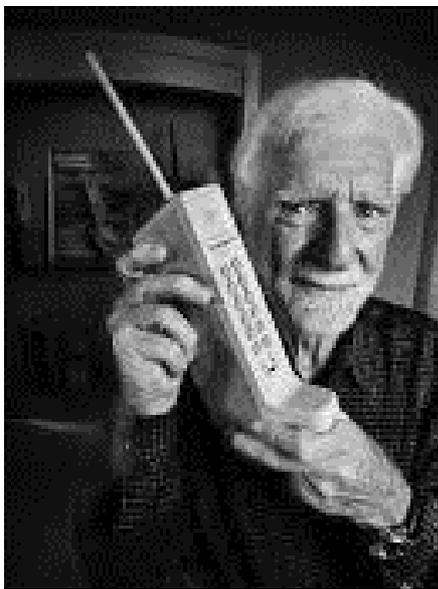
All these quoted reports are completely independent and unsolicited.

We quote Ian Gillespie as follows: Since the arrival of these test samples I have given Apothogel a thorough trial and I am sorry to say that in my opinion it is of almost no use at all. The fish that I have caught when using Apothogel were taken in the summer months in Ireland". This quotation is extremely contradictory though we cannot but agree with his remark . . . "Under normal field conditions I would be very happy indeed to see that happen and perhaps in the face of such evidence conclude that my own tests were inadequate." — Bob Haswell, Chairman of Gilfin International Tackle Ltd.

Like many people I don't doubt, I just had to get hold of a pack to see if all the hype lived up to even a fraction of the reality, which for me, hand on heart, it most certainly did not, which judging by the way it unceremoniously 'disappeared', was presumably the same outcome for everyone else. Well I say same outcome, but clearly this was not the case, as purportedly evidenced by the above testament clip produced by Apothogel themselves which appeared in Sea Angler Magazine.

It appeared as part of a two page spread in the February 1974 edition of the magazine, with the article which stood alongside it having been written by the late great Ian Gillespie, who like the vast majority of trial users, could not produce any corroborative evidence to back up any the manufacturers claims after being provided with samples in August 1973. To quote directly from Gillespie's article... "I have given Apothogel a thorough trial, and I am sorry to say that in my opinion it is of almost no use at all".

THE MOBILE PHONE ERA BEGINS



Weighing in at a staggering 4.4 pounds, the first truly mobile hand-held telephone was produced by Motorola in April 1973, since which time they have become an integral part of seemingly everybody's lives, not the least of which and for a whole variety of reasons both good and bad, are sea anglers.

On the plus side, boat anglers can now chat about things with a measure of privacy not available when using VHF radio. Shore anglers, who unless they carried a hand held VHF, would previously have had no long-range person to person contact on the shore, now have the security, that at times of crisis allows them to summon help.

Unfortunately, the same opportunity fishing out in the boat is frowned upon by the rescue services on the grounds that if anglers rely solely on their mobile phone at the expense of VHF, if there is no signal; nobody at the other end of a call, or if they don't have an appropriate number to call, could unbeknown to

anyone else, find themselves in a life threatening situation.

Looking at a few more of the many benefits of having a modern smart-phone, there are now navigation apps, downloads on fish identification, GPS tracking, and high-quality cameras (both still and video), so that no opportunity need ever be missed. Conservation also benefits with quick PB photographs allowing the return of a fish. And it all started back in 1973 with Motorola's infamous 'brick'.

THE BASS ANGLERS SPORTFISHING SOCIETY (B.A.S.S.)

BASS is the highly appropriate acronym for the Bass Angling Sportfishing Association, an organisation dedicated to Bass angling as a leisure activity, as well as active campaigning with regard to *Dicentrarchus labrax* all the way through to government level. Some would say these objectives are mutually dependant. Either way, without the campaigning arm of BASS, Bass fishing in the UK, as poor as it is these days would be all the poorer, quickly degenerating into a total free-for-all.

Irish fishery ministers on the other hand have taken a totally different view to their UK counterparts, installing the kind of meaningful protection we on this side of the Irish Sea can only dream about, and all credit to them for doing that. So the fight in UK waters continues, with BASS very much carrying the flag on behalf of all of us, members and non members alike.



Myself having been an angling representative of the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA), I regularly came into contact with conservation minded anglers sitting in on meetings at Morecambe Town Hall in the hope that something useful might come up on the agenda. Sadly, with one exception regarding the Heysham nursery area, on my patch this did not happen, and was never likely to either due to the way the IFCA's operate.

I tried repeatedly to get Bass conservation onto the agenda, and at every attempt I was thwarted. In my experience, IFCA was very much a commercial fishing talking shop, for which reason, when my first 4 year stint was up, I decided not to put myself forward for a second term, a decision also prompted

by rheumatoid arthritis and a growing inability to drive.

Sitting in as an 'interested observer' at some of those meetings was Michael Salmon, who I later discovered to be the secretary of BASS, and who I was able to sit down with and interview at length with regard to Bass conservation topics and the organisation behind promoting them. A very enlightening interview backed up by conversations and emails from a number of other BASS members and interested parties, some of who have their say elsewhere in this volume, one being Malcolm Gilbert, who lays down a few words of wisdom in the final Chapter looking at the Bass angling legacy the twentieth century has passed forward to those who are to follow.

Bass are reputedly the single most important angling species around the British Isles. That's the line put out by BASS supporters and sections of the angling press, and while I agree without reservation with all the aims of the organisation, I dispute the 'most important' angling species tag. More anglers fish for Cod, though I don't doubt most would like to catch a Bass. But we're splitting hairs here.

In my opinion, Bass are less important to anglers today simply because there are less of them to target. Some might argue that is why they are more important. As a result, less anglers catch them, and far less anglers specialise in trying to catch them. It's a supply and demand thing which BASS are looking to rectify with more and bigger Bass availability, through conservation work and having the species installed as Britain's first recreational species of saltwater fish.

BASS the organisation was set up in 1973 at Weymouth with an operational structure much the same as any other angling club, but with additional campaigning posts. And while other single species organisations over the years have unfortunately slipped down in the angling public's esteem, BASS has shown itself to be a true and resilient champion.

In 1974, the very first edition of BASS Magazine carried a comment from none other than Clive Gammon, remarking that BASS had been heartened to hear from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) that they were willing to meet a delegation from BASS to discuss the question of minimum size limits for the species, which was being proposed at 14 inches. This equates to 35.5 cms, which subsequent studies have shown to be way too small, but a starting point at least.

The big thing for Bass; the top issue if you like, is, and for a long time has been, the size at which they could legally be killed, either by anglers or commercials.

One snippet of information I was once given regarding Bass sizes, and I stress this did not come from anyone associated with BASS, was that the reason why size limits were being kept low was pressure from other EU states to pacify French housewives who demand a plate sized fish.

Obviously, there are counter arguments to this. So in truth, I don't know why after listening to all the scientific evidence over the years, any government would want to press on with cropping fish before they have had time to reproduce. That's a one-way ticket to extinction. If French housewives do indeed demand immature plate sized fish, why not get them legally from fish farms, of which there are currently many.



BASS initially 'presided' over an unprotected species with no quota restriction and a species threatening minimum landing size. At that time, not the enormous issue it would eventually develop into, as the pressure on Bass stocks was far less in 1973 than today. In the UK and Ireland, only anglers and a few select restaurants would ever get to put Bass on a plate. That all changed when commercial pressure on popular eating species other than Bass began to be picked up on by TV chefs, who in turn began promoting the eating of other lesser known (to the public) species, of which unfortunately Bass was one.

Gourmet interest in Bass was hotly followed by commercial interest. We have a demand and supply situation here. A high value species which restaurants were falling over themselves to serve up. Is it any wonder then that at the time of writing here, anglers are no longer allowed to catch Bass due to their scarcity? Yet ironically, and not unexpectedly I suppose, commercial fishermen who are responsible for the problem, can still land Bass pretty much at will. Explain that one away.

'More and bigger fish' is a phrase lifted from the results of the Sea Angling 2012 survey discussed in the final Chapter 'Legacy'. That's what anglers want, and that's what the restoration team at BASS have as a core objective. That minimum landing size of 36 cms was known and shown to be unsustainable.

You can never put an accurate measure on the length at which any fish might be mature enough to breed. In the south where warmer water facilitates faster growth than in the north, it doesn't take as long to reach sexual maturity. Let's also not forget that Bass are very slowly growing fish too and are subject to regular poor recruitment years. For obvious reasons, allowing fish to be taken at a certain age as opposed to size isn't practical. Sexual maturity therefore had to be related to size, with researchers announcing that 'typically', a Bass of 42 cms in length 'should' have spawned at least once. To be certain, and better still give them at least 2 shots at breeding, 48 cms would be a far more sustainable size.

A lot of commercial Bass fishing is carried out using legitimate angling tactics. Not only does this tend to pick out the marketable fish, it also allows undersized fish to be returned alive. Line caught Bass also enjoy a higher premium than netted fish. As such, a lot of commercial rod and line fishing has gone on over the years, and sometimes controversially so.

Plymouth Bass man Roy Slater was hauled before the British Record Fish Committee with regard to a record claim for a Bass of 18.6.0 in 1975, which as with the rest of the Bass he regularly caught, ended up on the fish quay. Plymouth SAC Bass champion Spencer Vibart was another. Sometimes there's a fine line to be drawn between angling and commercial fishing. Yes, commercial angling is selective and theoretically more sustainable. But it's also unpalatable. The only way of halting, then reversing

the dramatic decline in Bass numbers is to make the species recreational only, with all Bass for restaurants coming from Bass farms.

As if commercial rod and line fishing was not enough of a problem for the Bass, unregulated, unenforced, illegal gill netting is also a big issue. Some people can't catch enough of the things, particularly the unlicensed unemployed who see it as a cash in hand benefits supplement. What they fail to appreciate is that when they 'swamp' the market with their cash today sod tomorrow bumper hauls, besides killing the goose that lays the golden egg for future generations of 'benefits frauds', illegal Bass landing brings the price down for licensed commercial Bass fishermen who should also be getting on their case. The same is true of the growing practise of pair trawlers hammering mature winter aggregations found to be holed up in international waters, with the double whammy of lower prices and a rapidly diminishing resource.

Clearly, that sort of clamping down isn't going to happen any time soon. The need then to push on with other controls is imperative, and in that regard a 48 cm minimum landing size not only helps the Bass, but other species too if mesh sizes and shapes are brought into the equation, allowing more undersized fish of all species to avoid the crush.

In a nutshell, the final decades of the twentieth century saw too many commercial fishermen chasing too few fish including Bass. This triggered the trialling of other restrictions such as limiting anglers to how many Bass they could catch. Suggestions of 2 fish per man per day and a maximum of 10 per year were bandied about, though how the latter would be enforced in anybody's guess, when nobody with an obligation to enforce seems bothered even to enforce the minimum landing size.

With undersized fish, for once, registered commercial fishermen are probably less to blame than 'so called' anglers. Out of work people claiming benefits, cropping huge hauls of undersized Bass in nursery areas known to be immature Bass gathering points such as the warm water outfalls from power stations had to be stopped.

I can only talk from my own experience here, but I witnessed it happening at Heysham in Lancashire. An exposed spot where anyone walking towards the outfall would be seen long before they arrived, allowing catches to be dumped. It's a problem. But intercepting them walking off shouldn't be. Yet as an IFCA appointee myself, to my knowledge this never happened. In the end, the whole nursery area was closed off thanks to pressure from groups like BASS. But it should never have been allowed to happen in the first place.



The BASS restoration project of 1997 started as a conservation project aimed at giving sea anglers more and bigger Bass, with a good spread of sizes across the range. Eventually, and this is going beyond the year 2000 cut-off point here, BASS was asked by the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to respond to proposed EU emergency measures for Bass, which did eventually go through.

They also submitted Bass management plans to DEFRA at the suggestion of

government, setting out long term aims for the effective management of Bass stocks, which as ever, would be considered along with the interests of other 'hostile' lobbying groups. A log book scheme in which BASS members recorded all fishing trips, their duration, and their results including blanks (of

which there were many) was also undertaken, emphasising the fact that there were too few mature Bass around for the species even to hold its own.

In that first edition of BASS Magazine in 1974, mention was made of a factor outside the terms of reference of that MAFF meeting which was more properly the concern of the Department of Trade and Industry, that being the actual value of the Bass catch to the country in economic terms. In Ireland this was a vital factor in persuading the Minister there to introduce legislation. There they very quickly discovered that a Bass alive in the surf – viewed in terms of angling tourism that is – was worth approximately 25 times as much as a dead Bass in a fish box. This has led to Irish Bass being given far greater protection, including catch limits of 2 in any 24 hours, close seasons, and recreational status. Something successive UK governments have repeatedly failed to engage in, at times quoting EU legislation for their inactivity. The same EU that Ireland is also a member of.

PW Comment: Much of what needs to be said regarding Bass conservation in the twentieth century has already been said. Unfortunately, very little of it has been heeded, particularly for UK waters, where the problem has now reached crisis status. Anglers can no longer catch Bass, and if they do so accidentally, which given the current situation is most unlikely, these must be returned to the water immediately, while commercial boats continue to land their catches, prompting emotive words like extinction to be used. And while it isn't quite that bad by 2018, I have to say that it's getting there, for which reason long time Bass campaigner Malcolm Gilbert will be having his say in Chapter 12 entitled 'Legacy'.

THE OPAH RECORD



cess.

To understand the significance of this inclusion, it first pays to understand a little bit about the fish itself. The Opa *Lampris guttatus* (the word Lampris coming from the Greek word Lamprid meaning brilliant, which a very good description of the amazing colouration and markings of this spectacular looking fish) are open oceanic wanderers. They are more usually found in the mid to upper layers over very deep water, from where they very occasionally stray within reach of long range angling boats fishing from ports with open Atlantic ac-

Ireland, northern Scotland, and the south west of England all fit these criteria perfectly. But during the twentieth century it has only been the western approaches to the English Channel that has ever come up with the goods on rod and line, and then on only 2 occasions. Both as it happens while shark fishing with baits suspended beneath floats close to the surface over deep water with plenty of rubby dubby going in to attract predators up the long lane this creates back to the baits, as the boat drifts with the wind and the tide.

The record, which stands at 128 pounds by Tony Blewitt fishing out of Penzance, was taken in 1973. One year on, this time out from Mevagissey a little further to the east, a specimen of 82 pounds was caught, and completing the picture, a specimen was washed ashore dead on the island of Ronaldsay in the Orkneys in 1995, suggesting that proximity to deep open water perhaps has more of a role to play in determining distribution than warm open water. A statement given further credence by the fact that

I saw a couple on the fish dock at Fleetwood way back in the days when the port had a deep water fleet operating around Iceland and along Norway's arctic coast.

HUGE SHETLAND HALIBUT

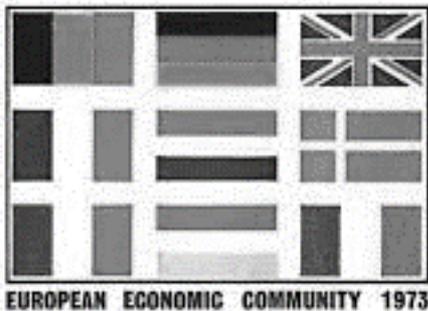


As Halibut fanatics will doubtless know only too well, these are large active predators more usually caught on whole fish baits, large cut baits worked in conjunction with flashing spoons, and large pirks, either baited and as they come. Occasionally, one would 'scavenge' and pick up a static bait which more often than not has been put out for Common Skate. One such a 'scavenging' incident took place in the 1973 Viking Festival based at Lerwick on Shetland.

I was at that festival and had been fishing for skate myself up at Dury Voe when we heard on the radio that somebody had caught a big Halibut. It was the last day of fishing and I had to be away to the airport supposedly as soon as I stepped off the boat. But how can you pass up the chance of seeing a fish such as that, so I didn't. Clock watching, I stood around waiting for the boat to get back in and start the weighing formalities. Just time for a quick 'snap' and to hear the weight announced, then I really did have to be away.

As you can imagine, everyone wanted the same photograph and the 'poor unfortunate' captor was run ragged, which explains why I never got the chance to ask for his name to caption the shot, never expecting that 45 years later I would need it here. And now that I do, I can't seem to track it down, which is a shame. A great fish though, and far too important not to include on such a small technicality.

BRITAIN JOINS THE EEC



On January 1st 1973, the United Kingdom became a member of the European Economic Community (EEC), an organisation which would eventually evolve into the monster that is the European Union (EU) from which, through a referendum on June 23rd 2016, the UK committed itself to withdraw. Something I never thought I would see in my lifetime, and something which, on a number of levels, I whole heartedly endorse.

Not the least of these is the desire for the UK to take its territorial waters back from the totally unfair fish plundering attentions of the other 27-member states who many feel that having emptied their own coastal waters, (those that have them) were intent on doing the same to ours, aided to no small degree by the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Now, on paper at least, we should become 'guardians of seas', which everyone with any interest in fish, be it commercial or recreational, hopes and expects will be a positive.

Footnote: Unfortunately, at the 25th November 2018 signing of the withdrawal agreement with the EU, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that in the trade agreement negotiations to follow, he would be exercising his country's veto if French boats were not allowed to continue fishing within UK territorial waters. Some deal.

NEWHAVEN HADDOCK SPREE

From late 1972 on into early 1973, Haddock suddenly put in a surprise appearance off Newhaven. They are occasionally caught at the other end of the English Channel in Cornish waters, and more regularly around the corner in the North Sea off the Yorkshire Coast. But rarely along the Sussex Coast. And not just 'any old Haddock' either.

Fishing 2 miles off the port, Dr. James Russell amazed everyone while fishing for Whiting by bringing ashore a specimen of 10.0.8, a mere 11½ ounces under the then British record. A catch which follows on from Haddock of 8.4.8, 8.2.0 and 7.4.0 caught aboard 3 different boats the previous week, again drifting within a few miles of the port.

PW Comment: I've made something of a speciality of fishing for Haddock at many of the top Haddock hotspots around the country, and never have I seen a Haddock comparable to even the smallest of those fish. Why they should suddenly turn up off Newhaven is one question. Why so many of such large proportions has to be another. One more example of nature's mysteries.

BOB GLEDHILL

Having the Fylde Coast as my regular haunt, I knew Bob Gledhill well. Least ways, I thought I did. We would often bump into each on the promenade at Little Bispham after coming in with our boats following a day fishing off his home town of Cleveleys. I also worked with him on a number of angling publications, and I don't just mean that we happened to contribute to the same magazine. Bob had an advisory and editing role on a couple of magazines based at Warrington where I had been recruited as the main contributor, so we'd meet up in a pub close to the end of the M55 every month to look at what we'd got and how best to present it.

Bob and I also did some preliminary work on setting up a separate boat and shore record lists too, which under pressure from many sources, the British Record Fish Committee took on themselves to do before we got chance to produce our first list. So yes, I thought I knew Bob Gledhill quite well. That was until I came to write this inclusion for him and started chatting to other people such as Alan Yates and Fleetwood's Ken Forrest, both of whom fished with him. Then suddenly a whole different side of Bob's past fishing life from his pre-dinghy fishing days came to light. It was eye opening to say the least.

It didn't matter who he was talking to, Bob could be very forthright in his opinions and manner. This often came across as abrasive, and certainly rubbed some people up the wrong way. You had to learn not to take it personally as he was the same with everyone. None the less, he was very highly thought of in shore match fishing circles, particularly on the north west scene where he won a number of big matches, including Silloth on more than one occasion. A topic about which he wrote the book 'Match Shore Fishing', published by A & C Black Ltd., 1972.

When it came to the fishing, there too he had a 'split' personality, and on two levels. I don't intend that in any sort of derogatory way. What I mean is that he could switch between being an out and out angler to an out and out journalist when the situation required, and he could also switch comfortably between boat and shore. Good angling journalists tend to work that way. They become focussed on the needs of the magazine on the day to the extent of not fishing in case it might compromise the quality of the final product, and I think that in some ways, Bob Gledhill fell into that category.

I've spoken with people he accompanied on trips specifically geared up to producing a feature for say Sea Angler Magazine, and they tell me he kept his focus until the feature was in the bag. But he was just as capable of delivering with the rod, boat or shore, as with the pen, as evidenced by becoming

EFSA European Cod Champion up in Scotland back in 1979 (pictured above with part of his medal winning catch) to go with his shore open match wins.



Bob got into journalism during the 1970's while employed as a compositor at the Blackpool Gazette, coincidentally working with Andy Bradbury who was involved in the final page production, and would go on to become Fleetwood's only charter boat skipper after a glittering career of his own as a small boat competition angler. The paper needed an angling correspondent, and Bob was the perfect in-house fit for the job which made him a magnet for local anglers wanting their 'fifteen minutes' of fame, launching him and his writing onto the national stage. When 'The Gazette' went computerised and Bob's job went to the wall, he vacated the fishing column to concentrate on his national work. Also forging a new career for himself with his other passion of cooking which he wrote about.

It wasn't only other people's angling experiences and successes that fed into Bob's writing. Yes, he had an eye for a good story. But he could also create a good story too through his own efforts, though in my

opinion he seemed to prefer to write in such a way as not to place himself centre stage, despite the fact that very likely could have out-fished most of those he was reporting on. So much so, that while reading his obituary in the Blackpool Gazette after his death in 2008 from complications following a stroke, for the first time I became aware that he had also captained the England team during an EFSA boat match, probably in the year following him being crowned EFSA Cod champion.

That EFSA Cod championship was a charter boat competition, and one in which Bob being Bob, as ever let his opinions land him in hot water. First off, he wouldn't dress the part with the blazer and the rest of the uniform which earned him a bit of a ticking off. Then he failed to turn up for the team get together the night before the match, preferring instead to 'invest' the time more wisely digging rag-worms with some of the Scottish locals. But all was forgiven the following day when that tub of bait brought him and the team the top prize. A maverick then who had his own ideas on pretty much everything, and would invariably stick to his guns come what may.

My 'day to day' encounters with him always involved boat fishing. That said, I don't recall him playing much of a participational role in the Fylde Coast Jumbo Cod era, despite the fact that it was right there on his door step. He did however venture out on occasion with ex-Fleetwood charter skipper and long time pal Frank Bee when Frank was a member of the Fylde Boat Angling Club, which Bob had helped to set up.

I remember reading the odd local dinghy article or two by Bob. One in particular on float fishing for Whiting at slack water. But that was pretty much it. As I know from personal experience, you can only write so much about one topic at one location, so he would be off somewhere else looking for new material, which Peter Collins who was Editing Sea Angler Magazine at that time regularly gobbled up. They were great friends, and from talking to Mel Russ who superseded Peter Collins, Bob remained a crucial part of the team for some years after Peter Collins had departed.

Bob also did some quite early investigative work with Frank Bee on opening up the potential of Morecambe Bay, particularly for Thornback Rays. From seeing him launching and retrieving his own boat 'Orion', I would say his own dinghy fishing days probably started around the end of the 1980's going on into the early 90's, in effect just missing out on, or possibly even in Bob's case, ignoring the Fylde Coast Jumbo Cod run.

He also used his considerable organisational skills on trips to Ireland and working with Dave Hoghton at Leisure Angling. Alan Yates recalled fishing beach matches with Bob and stopping over with him when they were taking place up here in the north west. But the hospitality never got the chance of being returned as Bob preferred to fish on home territory, often in the company of Johnny Fielden, who was the undisputed master of the shore match angling scene during the 1970's, included a few pages on from here. A persona Bob helped create by ghost writing his 'Fielden File' column in Sea Angler Magazine.

Despite being a very competent all rounder and a nationally acclaimed angling journalist, for some reason, Bob began to fall out with the fishing, eventually turning his back on it altogether. As ever with these things, I remember talking with him at the time and him drifting away. But like many of the people and situations included in this book, I didn't for one moment think I would ever be called upon to provide precise dates. It was probably around the end of the century, which is a lucky let off, as it falls outside my remit here. Cooking the fish rather than catching them became a bigger priority, as did writing about his cheffing exploits, and he just drifted off the scene, forgotten about until the word of his untimely death began to circulate in 2008.

THE DUSKY PERCH RECORD

As I've mentioned elsewhere, one of the angling objectives I set myself during the early 1970's was the catching of every species of fish listed in the combined record lists of Britain and Ireland. A rather short lived objective, which for a number of reasons I quickly realised was never going to be possible, one being that there are a handful of species in there which have only been recorded on rod and line on a single occasion.

One of those inclusions is a Dusky Perch *Epinephelus marginatus* of 28 pounds caught by D. Cope off Durlston Head in Dorset in 1973. A heavily built 'grouper-like' relative of the Bass, and a fish more normally found living a rather solitary territorial lifestyle in the warmer waters from Biscay southwards into the Mediterranean and around the Canary Islands. A record that has stood the test of time, with, so far as I am aware, no smaller specimens reported in the interim, making it a complete one-off.

DOUBLE MONSTER COD HIT



The winter of 1972-1973 provided some of the best big Cod in many a long while at the eastern end of the English Channel. Highlighting the 'dangers' of smoking, when Godfrey Reed decided he needed to roll himself a cigarette while fishing aboard the Deal based boat 'Meranda', he handed his rod to skipper Brian Maidment to hold, just to be on the safe side. The very same moment that the rod registered a slight tap, which Brian obviously struck at and connected with a fish. Initially it was thought to be a Conger. That prediction very quickly changed when a Cod of 50.14.0 broke surface at the side of the boat, caught in the same week that 2 other Cod topping 40 pounds were caught at nearby ports.

The first of these was a fish of 42 pounds caught by Chichester angler Bob Buck aboard Charlie Fox's Littlehampton based boat 'Pauline' taken on double squid, and the second, a fish of precisely 40 pounds caught by Boreham Wood angler John Lewis aboard the Newhaven based boat 'Golden Lily', skippered by

Frank Rigg. Add to this a Cod of 26.15.0 by Jim Keenan from the beach at Whitley Bay up in the north east, and it turned out to be quite a week for big Cod.

SYLCAST & JUMBO SPOOL MONOFILAMENT

During the 1970's and 1980's, bulk spools became the 'in way' to buy monofilament fishing line. For boat anglers these were a Godsend for wreck and rough ground fishing where abrasion and tackle hang-ups were expected to be high. Casting over abrasive ground made them appealing to the shore anglers too, and even more so to distance and tournament casters where overruns and crack-offs are an unfortunate fact of life. A one kilo spool fits nicely into a tackle box or fishing bag, and could be taken to the beach or on the boat with ease.

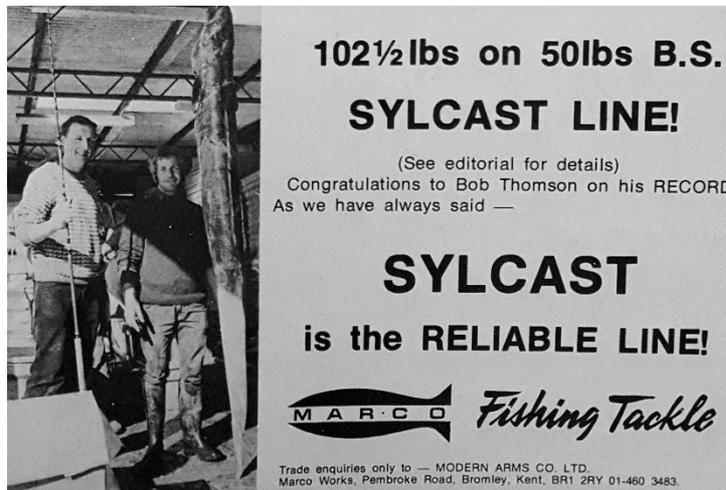
Some said they were cheap and cheerful and couldn't match the 'quality' brands on a number of fronts. That of course depended on the brands you bought and how you looked after it. Leaving monofilament nylon in bright sunlight speeds up its expiry, causing it to become brittle and unreliable. You can usually

tell this is happening when you pull a knot tight and the line parts under the pressure. But far better it happens then than under the weight of a decent fish. Kept it in a cool dark place on the other hand it can last for years. I still have some remnants of Sylcast on bulk spools which have been in my attic for maybe 30 years which still feel okay, though I wouldn't trust it on a reel after all that time.

Monofilament nylon isn't a single product. It's a range of products made from the same base material manufactured to different specifications, each specific qualities the manufacture feels will best suit specific angling applications. Horses for courses. So, to put down for example Sylcast because it comes in bulk at a good price is to do it (and other brands) a huge disservice, because I have used Sylcast many times for boat fishing over the years, and I know that if there had been any sort of problem, like most people I would have noticed it and switched immediately to something else. A fact supported in a Sylcast advertisement with Bob Thompson's 102½ pound record Conger.

In support of the bulk spool, and of Sylcast in particular, what follows is an item copied from the Internet.....

"Sylcast was popular with the tournament casters in the 1980's as it was available on an economical Kilo spool, and it's diameter was consistent and very near to its claimed thickness. When you're going for records, these things matter!



102½lbs on 50lbs B.S.
SYLCAST LINE!
(See editorial for details)
Congratulations to Bob Thomson on his RECORD
As we have always said —
SYLCAST
is the **RELIABLE LINE!**
MARCO Fishing Tackle
Trade enquiries only to — MODERN ARMS CO. LTD.
Marco Works, Pembroke Road, Bromley, Kent, BR1 2RY 01-460 3483.

When a record was broken at a UKSF event the line was checked at certain intervals (every 10 metres?) with a micrometer to check that nothing of the line was below the minimum diameter; when Sea Angler Magazine ran events nationwide their minimum line diameter was 0.35mm, however the UKSF was 0.40mm.

I seem to remember that the UKSF dropped the minimum line diameter ensuring uniformity across the UKSF and Sea Angler casting competitions. This was simultaneous with Sylcast dropping

the line diameter of their 15lb bs from 0.40mm to 0.35mm or just re-rating their line.

Sylcast had the advantage in that their line diameter was consistent. Nice restrained easy on the eyes blue colour too : Sylcast was known affectionately as "Silly" once. I am pleased to see that Gantel is still about; it used to be "de rigueur" for shock leaders at the time. In 1980, Paul Kerry had the official UKSF record at 241 yds with 150g and 0.40mm line.

The following year saw Neil Mackellow put some better distances in the Sea Angler Casting Club events where the 0.35mm line was used with any lead. Mackellow was still experimenting with the long rod/reel down format to compete with Kerry, and I remember the Kerry supporters dismissing Neil's efforts, (and the longer rods) because of the different line regulations.

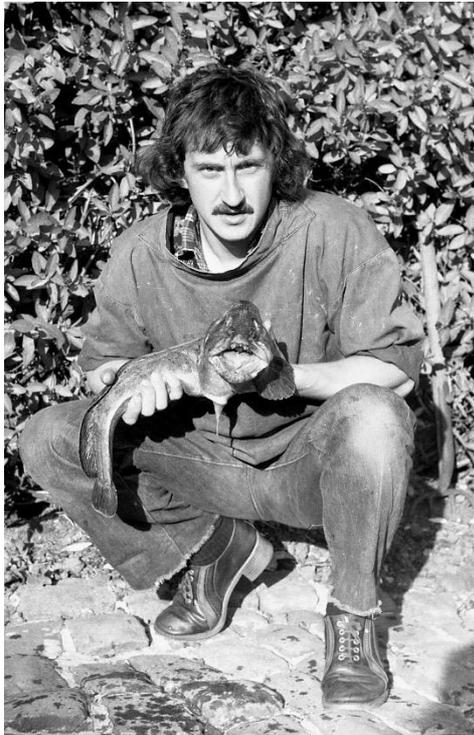
As a buyer of Sylcast at the time, I recall this was the period when they "upgraded" their 0.35mm line from 12 to 15lb, and the 0.40 to 18lb."

FOOTNOTE: Paul McEwens British boat record Bass of 19.9.2 from Reculvers, Herne Bay, was taken on 18 pounds breaking strain Sylcast line.

HARTLEPOOL

Starting in 1973 and running on for much of the 1970's, in the regular company of a group of like-minded friends, I recall many enjoyable days afloat drift fishing the hard ground marks out from Hartlepool. Not the Hartlepool of today though with its modern marina and regimented parking areas. The Hartlepool of the 1970's was an unrecognisably different place. Quite a sizeable ramshackle commercial port with areas of derelict ground to park the mini-bus on, and old wooden jetties with vertical ladders to climb down to the boat after lowering your tackle down on a rope. Not the modern boats either that you will see today. Ex-commercial boats on which health and safety regulations imposed by local authorities for taking fare paying passengers were still some years away. The fishing too was also very different.

One constant in all of this is the boat name 'Famous'. When I re-started fishing Hartlepool in 2012, I was surprised to find that 'Famous', albeit in a different guise as a modern Blythe Cat skippered by Dave Lumley, was still operating out of the port. Back in the 1970's, 'Famous' was a 48 foot ex-commercial boat with an aft wheelhouse skippered by Tom Williams, who also owned her sister boat 'Tracy Jane' which was of similar size and layout. No safety rails back then. The only thing keeping you inside these boats was a shin high timber gunwale which you could put your foot on to help wedge yourself against the wheelhouse in a big rolling North Sea swell.



Muppets, pirks, shads and wreck fishing were still some years away in the future. It was all ground fishing on the drift with bait, which comprised a mix of lugworm, squid, and fish, plus anything else suitable you could lay your hands on, all of which you had to provide for yourself. Tom Williams provided the boats and skippered 'Famous', which after a few visits fished across both boats became the one we would specify at the time of booking. Not that there was anything wrong with fishing aboard the other boat which was called 'Tracy Jane'. More an unquantifiable feeling of potential for success, despite the fact that 'Tracy Jane' would sometimes turn out to be top boat on the day.

Fishing on the drift meant getting the baits as close to the bottom as possible without trailing hooks that were likely to go to ground. My choice was always to have 3 droppers spread out above the lead, the top 2 of which would be around a foot long spaced so as not to tangle each other, with the bottom snood between 18 inches and a couple of feet in length in the hope that it would bounce along the snaggy bottom without blatantly dragging, which for the most part would keep it out

of trouble. Inevitably, you would lose some gear. But make it too safe and the catch rate would go down.

Species mix back then compared to now is also very interesting. When I returned to the port, in 2012 it was mainly Ling, with some Cod and a few Whiting on a mix of shads, Hokkai's and Fat Boys, both with and without bait to give your arms a rest. Thinking back in the 1970's, I don't remember catching any or many Ling, though I'm sure we must have. Cod and Haddock were the main target species, though the Haddock were already starting to get quite sparse by that time. Pouting, Whiting and Spurdog were the other regular customers there in the mix. And it was there aboard 'Famous' that I caught my first Catfish, another species you hear very little about right along the North Sea coast these days.

ESSEX STINGRAYS

For whatever reason, Stingrays in UK waters are largely confined to the south east of the country, from the Isle of Wight to the Thames Estuary. There have been, and always will be exceptions, such as a couple of dozen showing up out of the blue along the Lancashire coast during the early 1980's (see Chapter 9). Otherwise it's the south east, and Essex in particular for the UK, and they are even more restricted still in Irish waters.



The only place I have ever come across them in Ireland was at Fenit in Co. Kerry, where on a good day, you might see half a dozen. What Fenit in the south west of Ireland and the south east of England have in common is plenty of sheltered shallow water in the arguably warmest locations of both countries for the Stingrays to migrate in to early summer to drop their live young, after which some seem to stick around, feeding up until dropping temperatures force them away.

If you get the right weather and find the right spot, Stingrays are one of those species where the prospects are often better from the shore than from a boat, with fish in the 30 to 40 pound bracket a realistic possibility, particularly at St. Osyth on the northern side of the Blackwater Estuary, which during the 1970's made quite a name for itself as a Stingray venue.

But the whole area had potential, and if you wanted boat action, Bradwell deeper into the Blackwater was the place to head for, where I remember John Rawle would target them specifically in

and around the warm water coming out of Bradwell power station. Otherwise from the boats, they were a welcome hard fighting bonus picked up in shallow water on ragworm or crab when fishing for Bass or Smoothhounds.

Sticking with the shore fishing, providing the winter and spring had not had any wild cold fluctuations from the norm, Stingrays were fairly predictable in both their timing and their regularity of appearance. Invariably they would come inshore almost en-masse during a narrow two week window to drop their young, with anglers eagerly anticipating their arrival, and commercial fishermen finding them a nuisance in their nets where they would cut off their tails to reduce dangerous contact and difficult tangles.

An article in Sea Angler Magazine dated July 1977 quoted the then British record as being 59 pounds taken by J. M. Buckley at Clacton, which is a little to the seaward side of St. Osyth. The article also made mention of fish to 80 pounds and more being taken in the area by commercial boats.

From personal experience I know that Stingrays are a handful on rod and line. In an area where light tackle up tide fishing from the boats was the norm, and with little in the way of natural hang-ups allowing equally light tackle from the shore, the scales were always going to be tipped in the favour of the fish when it came to really big Stingrays.

The angling press carried a number of recorded incidences where this proved to be the case. One such an incident was reported by local angling journalist Bob Cox, who tells of charter skipper Arthur Weitzel having his boat towed for over an hour by what could only have been a huge Stingray, before his reel eventually 'burst' under the pressure.

Another report was of a hooked Stingray of around 30 to 40 pounds caught from a boat being 'shadowed' by a second fish that was well over 100 pounds. And of course, there were numerous reports of anglers being smashed up by heavy slow-moving fish (by comparison to Tope), which considering the

location could only have been large Stingrays, which were also hooked up from the shore on occasion and with similar outcomes, particularly around the entrance to the Blackwater.

There are reliable reports to show that the Stingray as a species was known about as far back as the 1920's, and probably even beyond then. It's worth noting here that the British boat record for the Stingray at the time of writing, and therefore the last Stingray *Dasyatis pastinaca* record of the twentieth century, is a Blackwater Estuary fish of 72.2.0 taken by P. Burgess in 1996.

JOHNNY FIELDEN



Never was the statement 'the right man in the right place at the right time' more applicable than for Fleetwood's Johnny Fielden. Britain's first sea match angling super star. A man whose unrivalled angling success was inextricably linked to the life cycle of the humble shore crab *Carcinus maenas*.

Arguably the best shore match angler of his day, yet also argued in some quarters that he maintained that success level only by targeting specific areas of the country and those competitions where fishing with peeler crab could be relied upon to bring the required result, making him the first high profile match angler to appreciate the value of peeler crab, and to have access to a regular maintained supply through buying them in from the south west of the country when they weren't available in his native north west, of which many of his rivals were seemingly oblivious.

There was also one further advantage, if you can call it that. Fielden worked as a 'lumper' on Fleetwood fish quay unloading trawlers. This involved ridiculously early morning starts, finishing around what the rest of us would see as being breakfast time, leaving himself and his brother-in-law Johnny Hammill the rest of the day to dig bait, both for his own use and to sell, go crabbing, and of course go fishing, getting in all the necessary practise and fact finding required to go with his 'magic' bait and be in with a very good shot of a win.

This also included fishing The Clyde, an area where shore matches produced some very good catches in the early 1970's, and where the match scene was hotly contested. Equally, a very good area both for using and collecting crab, so another situation in which he had a distinct advantage, as the value of the peeler crab was very poorly understood, particular north of the border.

Bob Gledhill ghost wrote his 'Fielden File – how to be a match superstar' column in Sea Angler Magazine in which he did talk about the use of crab which is where the accompanying photograph was taken from. Sadly, Bob is no longer with us at the time of writing to get more information. Someone else who also knew Fielden well enough is Fleetwood and District Angling Club member Ken Forrest, who remembers him as a very good and enthusiastic member of the club who rose rapidly through the ranks for the reasons already given, though Fielden himself puts his early success down to membership of Blackpool Central Angling Club.

'Unique timing' is how Ken described the Fielden era. He either won or was well placed in pretty much every match he elected to fish. Then suddenly he seemed to get 'bored' with it all. Either that, or the fact that his competitors had cottoned on to his 'secret weapon' and were starting to use peeler crab themselves, making it harder for him to get a result.

Johnny Fielden remains one of the highest profile shore match anglers this country has ever produced. And if his success was down to a combination of angling skill and initially, exclusive access to a ‘wonder bait’, it takes nothing away from his reputation. If anything, it adds to it. He did his homework, where others perhaps hadn’t, and he reaped the rewards. So if him turning his back on the shore match scene was linked to being rumbled, it doesn’t matter a damn. He made a lot from his expertise and would have won so much more had either he come onto the scene a little later in the SAMF era, or they had revolutionised the way in which cash prizes were introduced a few years sooner than 1980, with most of Fielden’s success coming throughout the 1970’s.

When he did eventually turn his back on the beach it was in favour of Carp fishing. This became his new passion; a pursuit he would stick with until the day he died, quite literally. Johnny Fielden passed away actually at his peg on a local Carp water, which is probably how the majority of anglers would like to end their days. Like a Viking warrior, to die with a metaphorical ‘sword’ in his hand.

RECORD ANGLER FISH FROM PLYMOUTH WRECK



That man JJ McVicar does it again. Not content with finding record Pollack and Coalfish for both his clients and to his own rod aboard his Plymouth based boat ‘June Lipet’, he next added the British Angler Fish record to his personal tally on a trip with legendary sea angler Clive Gammon and TV personality Bernard Cribbins, while attempting to bring a target weight of 3,000 pounds of fish to the scales.

This was a day on which JJ was not allowed to put a line in the water until the allotted fishing time interval was over. Speaking with him about the trip, he told me that he had just enough time for a couple of drops before heading back to port, one of which bagged him the huge Angler Fish *Lophius piscatorius* weighing in a 74.4.0. A fish which put up an epic struggle, fighting the whole way up with its huge mouth wide open creating an unbelievable amount of drag.

NOTE: See inclusion regarding the discovery of a second species of Angler Fish *Lophius budegassa* later in this Chapter.

‘IMPOSSIBLE’ TURBOT

As the Sea Angler Magazine editorial team put it in their June 1973 edition, “Just once in a while someone does the ‘impossible’, catches an outstanding fish in an out of the way spot and knocks theory for six”. That’s exactly what happened when Suffolk angler Derrick Dorling decided to try a spot of shore fishing with lugworm for bait at Dunwich.

While we can all dream, nobody under any circumstances fishing anywhere expects to catch a turbot of 28.8.0 from the shore. You’d be doing handstands even if you caught it fishing say the Channel Islands aboard a boat. A Turbot which ranks at equal third in the all time rankings that is both the biggest ever to be taken from the shore, and the first topping 20 pounds taken on rod and line from the North Sea. No wonder they tag lined it as ‘Impossible’.

THE SWINBANK BROTHERS

Brian and Duncan Swinbank were born and raised on the Isle of Mull at Tobermory. The obvious thing for young boys with access to a rowing boat at a location surrounded by fish rich water is to go out and learn how to catch them. So while this story has its roots very firmly in the early 1970's, it does actually start during the 1960's fishing for Pollack, Coalfish, Mackerel, Thornback Rays, and Tope, and the almost inevitable hooking up of a Common Skate.

It was Brian that hooked the first one which he played out and had at the side of the boat, where it was obviously way too big to bring aboard in the conventional manner. Instead, they had to improvise, which they did by rolling the boat from side to side until the edge where the Skate was became low enough to slide the thing in, presumably along with a lot of unwanted sea water.

To the best of everyone's knowledge Duncan tells me, that his was the first ever rod caught Skate from the whole area. A fish which when landed and displayed on the quay, not only stirred up a great deal of interest locally, but was also key to two as yet unrealised projects. One was the tackle and charter fishing business Brian and Duncan were about to set up. The other being the Scottish Skate tagging project which has done not just in terms of research and conservation into the species as to help make the term Common Skate eventually become a more relevant name than at times it had previously been.



Huge Skate were not a new phenomenon for anglers fishing Scottish waters at that time. Ullapool higher up on the west coast had discovered its population during the early 1960's, and was attracting sufficient anglers to warrant 3 or 4 charter boats to take them out.

Unfortunately, as with the shark fishing out from Looe in Cornwall over the same period, the fish were all brought back for display in order to encourage more tourists and would be anglers to book trips for an encounter with these 'Monsters from the deep'. Needless to say, both the skate population and the angling businesses reliant on them very quickly crashed.

After Ullapool, but before the Swinbank's chartering business, came the exploitation of the Orkney skate population. As with Ullapool before, those fish were again brought back to the quay, though fortunately, with so much other good fishing for edible species also on the cards, they were not the only angling target locally, and as such managed to last quite a bit longer than might

otherwise have been the case.

Coinciding pretty much with Shetland's dabble at Common Skate fishing, Tobermory on Mull was the next venue capable of offering fishing for the species, which Brian and Duncan amongst other things decided they would offer, but with a different take on what had gone before. This time the fish would all be going back, and thus the era of Scottish skate tagging had begun.

Duncan, who was a school teacher, decided he would run the shop and paperwork side of the business. Brian on the other hand was a mechanical industrial designer and would run the boat, a vessel fitted out to his specification. A 32 foot Aquastar named 'Laurenca' was purchased from the Channel Islands and taken up to Crinan to be initially completed, after which it was taken to Tobermory for its final jobs list, where Brian had designed and fitted a purpose built swinging gantry which would enable skate to be gaffed using a detachable flying gaff head, the rope from which could be attached to the gantry to hoist and weigh the fish over the sea, swing it into the boat from photographs, then back out over the water for release.

This actually was much more fish friendly than it might sound, and it was mutually discussed with Dr. Dietrich Burkel of the Glasgow Museum where and how to gaff the fish so as not to cause them any lasting damage, adding that they might be kept out of the water no more than a couple of minutes or so before becoming stressed.

Controversially, this was the method used to weigh the current British record of 227 pounds aboard 'Laurenca', despite the British Record Fish Committee having a rule stating that ALL fish must be weighed on the shore, which in this instance they knew was not the case. Duncan and Brian had given them a fait accompli, take it or leave, but no dead fish. The BRFC decided they would take it, accepting the lowest of 3 weight recordings ranging between 227 and 236 pounds.

Tobermory and Common Skate fishing in the 1970's and 80's became synonymous. The port however wasn't just a one trick pony. It had so much more to offer, particularly when the weather was such as to allow them outside the Sound of Mull which was little more than their poor weather backup.

Fishing up off Ardnamurchan Point and further to the west around the top end of Mull, angling parties could expect quite a wide range of fish species, which beside the staples of Pollack, Coalfish, assorted rays and Tope, over the years also included Turbot, Anglerfish, Sunfish, Red Bream, Gurnards, Conger, Ling and Plaice, plus a lone Halibut and Porbeagle Shark. Lots of line class records too for edible species which could be weighed ashore. But other than the World record for the Common Skate which the IGFA insisted had to be killed, no other skate was ever taken ashore.

Brian, Duncan, and Dietrich Burkel would go to develop and carry through one on the biggest and most successful fish tagging projects in British sea angling history, though that's a story in itself to be told in the next inclusion. Brian and Duncan would also go on to produce award winning innovative fishing tackle through their manufacturing and marketing business 'Knotless Tackle'.

The clue is in the name. This included a range of items including booms and paternosters which could be clipped on or off the line without having to cut or unfasten it as these could be locked in place. Brian designed the tooling and the paternoster, while Duncan devised the booms and took control of the marketing.

Advertising small, low cost tackle items without the benefit of today's social media, back then proved to be something of a handicap. The pricing of the items didn't warrant the weight of advertising spend needed to do it successfully. Being tucked away on a small Scottish Island wouldn't help matters either. None the less, Knotless Tackle went on to win a British design award presented by the Duke of Edinburgh in London, making it only the second item of fishing tackle ever to do so, the other being a fly-fishing reel.

And still some 40 plus years later the business is in existence. The tackle business and shop that is, the boat having been sold on to Andrew Jackson at nearby Loch Sunart, leaving Brian and Duncan to once again enjoy fishing for pleasure, though the vibrant mixed fishery they once had at their disposal has now been commercially decimated.

THE SCOTTISH SKATE TAGGING PROGRAM

As a species, the fish formerly known as the Common Skate *Raja batis* lost that particular identity in the very early years of the twenty first century when it was re-classified and renamed. Throughout the twentieth century however, this was the name it was known by, so Common Skate it is here. The largest skate species found anywhere in the World, and in light of the way fishermen have treated it by pushing it to the very edge of extinction, the most inappropriately named species as well. Yet history shows it to have been one of the most abundant skate species in the north east Atlantic.

Though I wasn't trying for them at the time, Common Skate were still reasonably abundant when I first started sea fishing. I vividly remember looking with envy at magazine pictures of huge specimens hanging from weighing gantries on harbour sides, and therein lies at least part of the problem that was to come. For while commercial fishermen, deliberately or otherwise, were still catching some Common Skate, anglers don't exactly have an unblemished record in all of this.

The earliest modern day rod caught records I can find come from Ullapool. When that venue was 'cleared out' by anglers, attention shifted to Orkney, then later to Shetland, which in addition to angling, the species also lost a good portion of its population to a local fish meal factory, leaving in their combined wake a trail of decline and totally unjustifiable destruction.



I could try to excuse things by saying that anglers didn't know any better back then, which in the early days probably was true. I know I sometimes overcropped and kept inedible fish just for the sake of weighing them, which was the norm in the 1960's and 70's. But it's not about blame. It's about acknowledging what went on, learning from it, and taking things forward. And in that regard, there probably isn't a better example of what can be achieved than the Scottish Skate Tagging Programme spear-headed not by a Scottish angler, but by a German scientist living in Glasgow going by the name of Dr. Dietrich Burkel, who I fished with and was able to talk to and audio-record at length over a 4 day period at Crinan aboard Ian Burrett's boat 'Onyermarks' in 2013, just weeks before he sadly passed away.

It was not without a certain degree of irony then that the last fish Dietrich caught on our trip was a skate of just over the 100 pound mark, which he and Ian tagged and released almost a full 40 years after he had first seen the writing on the wall for the species and had decided to lead by practical example, openly arguing the case for the need for Common Skate conservation by kick starting the Scottish Skate tagging programme. A program so successful, that the species is now slowly re-establishing itself right along Scotland's west coast from one small refuge population that had managed to hang on around the Isle of Mull.

By training, Dr. Dietrich Burkel was a geologist and palaeontologist educated in Britain when his father came to Scotland from Germany to work after WWII. When I first met him in the 1970's he was working at Glasgow Museum, and had just been appointed fish recorder for the Scottish Federation of Sea

Anglers (SFSA). According to the official Scottish skate tagging website, the Glasgow Museum based tagging program was originally set up by Dietrich Burkel in 1974 as a result of concerns being expressed regarding the long term viability of Common Skate stocks all around Scotland, a statement which is slightly at odds with information provided to me verbally by Duncan Swinbank on the Isle of Mull.

Duncan told me that starting in the early 1970's he and his brother Brian set up and operated their very successful angling business at Tobermory, where following a few early angling encounters with large skate, a tagging program was set up on an unspecified date during the early 1970's at their request, having decided they did not want the Mull skate population to go the way of the earlier Ullapool population, a line of action reinforced shortly afterwards with angling initiated declines at both Orkney and Shetland.

Either way, whoever's idea the project was, it very quickly evolved into the biggest and most successful fish tagging project ever undertaken in British waters. Initially, the Swinbank Brothers contacted Dietrich Burkel at the museum for advice on handling and tagging techniques, as he was already involved in tagging Tope using cattle ear tags which was suggested might be the way forward for the skate.

Dietrich also gave advice on safe gaffing and handling procedures, plus a time maximum for fish to be out of the water before showing signs of stress. So cattle tags were duly bought and used until recaptures started to occur during the second season, with fish showing horrendous injuries caused by the tags having been inserted through the flesh of the wing with a fixed clip on the underside.

Unlike Tope fins and cow's ears, both of which don't grow very much in terms of thickness, skate can pile a lot of weight on quickly, and as such, the tags were being pulled into their flesh leading to lesions, areas of overgrowth, and heavy accumulations of barnacles, none of which was acceptable, at which point the project was stopped. Dietrich was informed, and whilst in agreement with the decision, he was also obviously disappointed.

Meanwhile, Duncan had set about searching for an alternative, which with no Internet back then meant using 'snail mail', including one letter to the IGFA headquarters in Florida. They suggested the use of Floy Tags which are the small numbered dart tags commonly used today. These were duly ordered and used for the first time in a British study.

Another take on the Scottish Skate tagging project is one I read by Cavy Johnson regarding the fishing and tagging at Shetland. Common Skate were first discovered there in late 1969. The following year, fishing at Dury Voe they boated 75 big skate in around 6 weeks. It was then according to that article that Dietrich Burkel came calling with regard to conservation, only to find he was preaching to the converted.

Despite not having any hard evidence, the Shetlanders had already realised that they couldn't go on killing skate at the rate they were, on top of which, they wanted to know things like how many individuals they had, how fast they bred, and whether or not they were residents. All stuff Dietrich Burkel also wanted to know. So, Cavy Johnson contacted Dr. Bennet Rae at the Torry fishery lab at Aberdeen suggesting a joint cooperation tagging project which began at the end of 1972, resulting in 60 skate tagged being but with no recorded recaptures.

The initial worry was that the trauma of being caught, tagged, and released, was too much for the fish, and that the project was flawed, until somebody caught a skate with healed gaff scars, but without a tag. It was at that point that the penny dropped. The tags they had been 'stitching' into the fish were obviously coming free for one reason or another. Time then for a rethink, and eventually a switch to the cattle ear tags clipped to the small dorsal fin on the Skate's tail.

The first recapture with a cattle tag came on the 1st of July 1973, after which they only ever had tagged recaptures with cattle tags, proving that the earlier tags had all broken free and that the whole early

section of the project needed to be abandoned and started over again, which it was. Out of 82 skate tagged they had 8 recaptures, from which they were able to come up with some interesting, if a little speculative statistical analysis, predicting that there were around 800 skate in the area, which were resident fish with small migrations to various parts of their territory.

Tagging fish and recording weight and measurement data is a very useful way of understanding fish population structure, migration patterns, and the like. With just a few minutes of 'training', armed with the right tools, which basically means a tape measure, a canula and some dart tags, it can be done by virtually anyone. Huge skate however present problems which in British waters are peculiar to them, the most obvious of which being their size and shape.

Skate are not the most difficult fish to handle in terms of them thrashing or rolling about at the surface. Once the gaffs have been carefully inserted into the fleshy leading edge of each wing to facilitate a vertical lift, that tends to be the easy part of the operation out of the way. I know from personal experience through dealing with fish topping 200 pounds in my own 16 foot Warrior, plus fishing with Ian Burrett in his 19 foot Orkney Fastliner, that in some ways, dealing with them both from and in a small boat is probably easier than a big boat in terms of placing the gaffs and the actual lift.

On the deck, they tend to just lay there waiting for you to make the next move. Holding the snout to raise the head and expose the mouth gives easy access for disgorging. That done, take a quick set of measurements, pop in a tag, and the fish is ready to go back. It's important however to run this operation like a well oiled machine taking no more than a few minutes. When the white of the underside starts to show signs of turning pink or red, it's past time to be getting the fish back in the water.

That is when the real fun starts. Hand-lifting 200 pounds of flat slimy fish is no joke. What's needed is a piece of trawl netting or tarpaulin to work underneath the fish which can be lifted at each corner to get it up onto the side of the boat ready to be slid back into the water and away. Then the attention turns to estimating the weight, which these days everybody does. But that hasn't always been the case. It took a lot of hard work by dedicated conservations such as Bill Little and Davy Holt to make that possible, by producing their Common Skate weight estimation charts.

Estimation charts are just that. They predict rather than give an accurate weight. The question is, are they accurate enough, and even if they aren't, providing everyone uses the same chart to read the weight from in much the same way that everyone reads the dial of a scale, then it's the same for everyone. As such, most anglers would be extremely happy to see the various record committee's using estimation instead of insisting on a body being brought ashore to be weighed on firm ground.

In the case of the British Record Fish Committee, and therefore because the fish in question was caught in Scottish waters then the Scottish Record Fish Committee too, despite their seemingly rigid stance regarding weighing fish on firm ground, these rules are sometimes not quite as rigid as they make out when it suits them, as evidenced by the current Common Skate record of 227 pounds discussed in the previous inclusion.

If they can do it once, then why not again, by moving to estimated weights for all scarce slowing growing species, some of which by law now have to be returned immediately at the point of capture, making weighed records for Common Skate, Tope, and a few of the smaller cartilaginous species a thing of the past, and therefore by implication in record keeping terms a complete mockery, when everyone knows that fish bigger than some of the standing records have been caught by anglers not willing to kill them simply to see their name on a piece of paper.



Despite the 227 pound Common Skate *Raja batis* record contradiction which we are now told is not one but two species of fish, the SFSA does allow Common Skate weight estimation for their specimen fish awards at least. With a demonstrable accuracy of around 5 percent, why wouldn't they? The thing is, I don't think people appreciate just how much work has gone into getting weight estimation charts to the accuracy we currently enjoy courtesy of Bill Little and Davy Holt, who should be applauded.

It's not as if they just measured a few examples scattered across the size range then computed a best line of fit to a graph. Lots of fish have been caught and measured, mainly by Davy Holt working out of Lochaline aboard his own boat 'Catchalot', to arrive at the two estimation spreadsheets which can be downloaded from The Scottish Angling Homepage, accessed by going to www.catchalot.co.uk, with one chart each for male and female fish, as the females have the potential to at least double and possibly treble the maximum size of even the biggest male fish.

The Common Skate population in the Sound of Mull and Firth of Lorne is described as relatively small and localised, comprising mainly resident fish, which should over time allow a large proportion of the population to eventually be tagged. I know this to be the case from my own experience of seeing tagged recaptures on a fairly regular basis, along with ever increasing numbers of new tags being put in at every opportunity to what are long lived fish.

In 1994 the recapture rate around the Isle of Mull was said to be around 33 percent, a figure slightly higher than the recapture rate for the skate tagging programme as a whole. Some fish have been recaptured two or three times, and one fish four times. There are even stories of a recapture within an hour or so of tagging. So, the experience certainly isn't doing them any harm.

Tagging also helps scientists get a better picture regarding population structure. It shows that large female fish outnumber the smaller males by approximately three to two. This however may have some seasonal basis to it, with fairly equal numbers of both sexes in the springtime and autumn, following which the males become thinner on the ground, possibly due to migration over the summer and winter months.

taken aboard the Swinbank brothers boat 'Laurenca' off the Isle of Mull in 1986, which controversially was not weighed ashore in accordance with BRFC rules. There is now no such fish as the Common Skate *Raja batis*. The BRFC therefore needs to invite claims for the 2 new species, hopefully based on length/width measurements fed into the weight estimation chart.

IRISH SKATE CONSERVATION

If you read the first 3 Chapters of this book, not only will you see how far early sea angling had come in terms of tackle and tactics, but also how accomplished those early big fish pioneers were at finding large Common Skate and Halibut. And if those two species managed to grab your attention, then the names Valentia in Kerry, and Ballycotton in Cork, may well have stuck in your mind.

Both excellent big fish centres in their day, regularly frequented by well heeled members of the British Sea Anglers' Society. Men, who in the 1920's were prepared to charter a 30 foot 'Whaler' complete with oarsmen at a cost of £4 and 10 shillings for a week, to fish a 1½ mile wide patch of rough ground lying in 21 to 24 fathoms of water 4 miles to the south of Ballycotton, or the mixed ground lying in 35 fathoms of water out from Valentia. Truly pioneering anglers who notched up some tremendous catches of both Halibut and skate.

The current Irish record for the Common Skate of 221 pounds caught by T. Tucker in 1913 was a Ballycotton fish. But as with Ullapool, Orkney, Shetland, and to a lesser extent the area around the Isle of Mull in Scotland, fish were killed needlessly with no thought of conservation nor realisation that eventually, particularly with large slow growing slow breeding fish such as Common Skate, all good things will come to an end, unless people are prepared to do something about it.

Dietrich Burkel realised this and started to apply pressure on the Shetlanders to put their skate back. He carried the same message to the Isle of Mull where it was received with open arms by Brian and Duncan Swinbank, with all fish going back after measuring for weight estimation coupled to tagging to help understand the population structure. Moves which have paid off handsomely.

Sadly for once, Irish anglers and fishery scientists appear to have been slower to heed the warnings, which surprises me in light of their trail blazing conservation efforts with other species. A problem that was highlighted by Sea Angler Magazine editor Peter Collins in February 1976 with regard to Ballycotton, and in the case of Valentia by Paul Keen for which unfortunately the date isn't shown on the copy of the article I have.

In the 1920's, Ballycotton had a fleet of 8 of the oar powered 'Whalers' I mentioned earlier which were booked up solid throughout the entire season. Such was the quality of the fishing, plus the importance of visiting anglers to the local economy. Yet still it went down the pan. Some also blame the burning down of Fawcett's Hotel in 1963, which was a favourite accommodation for English anglers and was never re-built after the fire. But it wasn't that alone.

More probably it was a combination of factors leading to progressive slippage, with the fire perhaps being the final straw. In his article, Collins describes a slip from prominence that had been taking place over a period of 12 years, which dates the start of the decline to around 1964. In 1962, twelve skate over 120 pounds were caught. The following year that number was down to 5, and by 1971, the most notable skate landed weighed just 87 pounds. Around the time the article appeared in Sea Angler they were still showing no signs of resurgence.

At one stage in its history, Valentia had produced more big Common Skate than anywhere else in Ireland. Paul Keen's article was entitled 'Safe from The Slaughter', with Valentia a venue where big skate were being put back alive. In the article, Keen was bemoaning the fact that the Irish Specimen Award

qualifying weight of 130 pounds was not set high enough. Not because it wasn't a realistic specimen weight. More because in order to make a claim the fish had to be brought ashore and weighed.

Keen's argument was that a higher qualifying weight would mean far more fish going back, and rightly so. He also heaped praise on catch and release by highlighting how many fish were being caught at Valentia with healed over gaff scars. Clear evidence that when done carefully in the fleshy leading edge of the wings, gaffing causes no lasting damage.

Later articles, including one by Des Brennan talking about tagged recaptures, made the point that from the evidence gathered in even at that early stage, skate populations appear to be rather localised, with some recaptures taking place years later at almost exactly the same spot, something the Scottish Skate Tagging Program has also found.

So yes, it is important with skate to return them in good condition if it is not to take many years, if ever at all, before numbers start to climb again at a specific location. But in the case of Ballycotton and Valentia, the question has to be asked, has it been too little too late, with both venues' now no more than shadows of their former selves?

LUCE BAY

The Mull of Galloway marking the western flank of Luce Bay is Scotland's most southerly point. No wonder then that its fishing can be more representative of England to the south than the rest of Scotland



to the north. A venue with a rich angling history. Once the most northerly limit of the Bass before rising sea temperatures started extending the regular range of it and other southerly species. Also, the scene of Scotland's first ever Porbeagle Shark encounter (see Chapter 8), and eventually one of the best known Tope venues in the whole UK. But times have changed, particularly since the turn of the century with winners and losers, some of which are dealt with elsewhere.

I was aware of the Luce Bay Bass during the 1970's, but only as fleeting mentions in publications such as *Angling Magazine*, which treated the topic as something really rather special. A fish pursued by enthusiasts willing to put in whatever time it would take to have a Bass encounter so far north. As I say, how times have changed, with areas such as Sandhead and the upper reaches of the bay supporting a thriving Bass fishery by the close of the century. Bass however, were not on my radar back then. Being a boat fisherman with bigger fish in mind, it was always the area around Drummore and the outer reaches of the bay that most interested me.

Ever since the potential of Luce Bay, the main man on the charter boat fishing scene there has been Englishman Ian Burrett. Initially he visited the area as a holiday maker and fell in love with the place, eventually setting up his charter fishing business from a trailed 19 foot Orkney Strikeliner targeting mainly Tope. But it wasn't the Tope that were the initial attraction. The big draw for him believe it or not was the quality of the Cod fishing around the Mull. When the decision was finally made to try for Tope, it took him literally years to catch his first one. Again, how times have changed.

I can't remember the man's name, but I do remember fishing out of Drummore and from East Tarbet around the Mull on a number of occasions with one of Ian Burrett's chartering predecessors. From Drummore it was aboard a boat of maybe 20 feet in length with a Z-drive power unit, which when it worked could crank up a fair rate of knots, and when it didn't, was very contrastingly substituted by a 4 hp Seagull to struggle back in on.

We did see a few small Tope when they could get a look in at the baits. However, other species, in some cases individually and certainly collectively dominated. Bull Huss and LSD's obviously. Lot's of rays too. These were mainly Thornbacks, some topping 20 pounds, plus a few Spotted Rays, most of which, as was the case back then were unfortunately kept. Spurdogs too. With the exception of the dogfish, all species you would be hard pressed to find if at all after the close of the twentieth century.

The other trips I did were from East Tarbet, a launch site I have come to know very well over more recent years. A private launch site, if you can call it that. It's actually a farmer's field running onto a small beach which Ian and his predecessor negotiated permission to use. The Mull headland with its dangerous tide race stretches out to the right as you look seaward. In the pre-Burrett days we charter fished from a trailered 16 foot Pebble dinghy fishing along the edge of the rocks and a short way seaward, always mindful of the tide race. There we caught yet more rays, Huss, and bigger numbers of Tope, which were also of better quality.

As time progressed from the 1970's on through the 1980's, the mix of fish species changes dramatically. In line with the rest of the country, commercial pressure, both from long-liners and tangle netters, brought about a massive decline in ray numbers, and almost the total extinction of the Spurdog. Around the other side of the Mull of Galloway headland is the coastal village of Portlogan, and a little further north Port Patrick. Port Patrick in particular is a venue I fished both from Bryn Watson's concrete charter boat and from my own trailered dinghy, where inshore you could catch as many Plaice as you could ever wish for, and further off, where the tide can really pick up, the same was true of Spurdogs. All of which would quite rapidly would go to the wall.



When Ian Burrett began honing his skills at locating and conserving Tope, he almost single handedly put Luce Bay on the national UK fishing map as a top Tope venue worth putting in the driving time for English anglers to visit. Depending on the size and state of the tide, he had well and truly sussed out the when and where to be for the Tope.

In the main these were male pack fish. If you wanted a shot at the bigger females but with less in the way of numbers, then Portlogan just around the corner in the autumn was the venue of choice. To give an example of the fishing out towards The Scares which are two large lumps of rock way out between Drummore and Port William over on the other side, fishing with Ian, Paul Maris, and Dave Hawkeswood, one day we tagged and released 48 fish to 48 pounds.

Unfortunately, much of the modern day story of Luce Bay takes place between around 2005 and the time of writing, some of which, for various reasons, is touched upon elsewhere. The Tope fishing, or perhaps it was Ian's ability to locate them, just got better and better, helped in no small way by the fact that all fish other than Mackerel, even if they beat existing national records, were returned.

If you didn't agree with Ian's returns policy then don't book the boat. But he always had plenty of customers, which says a lot about the changing attitude of anglers 'educated' by the Burrett philosophy. More recently the Rays, particularly Spotted Rays have started to return, as have a few Spurdogs from

refuge populations further up the west coast. Black Bream and Smoothhounds have also been added to the Luce Bay fauna. Unfortunately, however, the Tope fishing started to go in the other direction.

As Projects Director of the Scottish Sea Angling Network (SSACN), along with colleagues in the organisation, Ian Burrett has contributed much to establishing legal protection for threatened species such as Common Skate and Spurdog. Also Tope, which now have to be returned immediately at the point of capture, triggered by concerns that commercial long-liners were looking to cash in on the lucrative Asian shark's fin soup market.

Ironically, despite legislation being put in place to protect the Tope, and despite all the conservation work done in Luce Bay with the species, being a seasonal migrating fish, you can only do your bit when the fish are within your 'jurisdiction'. Sadly, it now appears they are being intercepted before they get back to the safety of Luce Bay. Either that, or some population fluctuation which scientists are not yet aware of has taken place, because around 2010, Luce Bay Tope numbers took a very noticeable dip.

HUGE ORFORD ISLAND BEACH COD



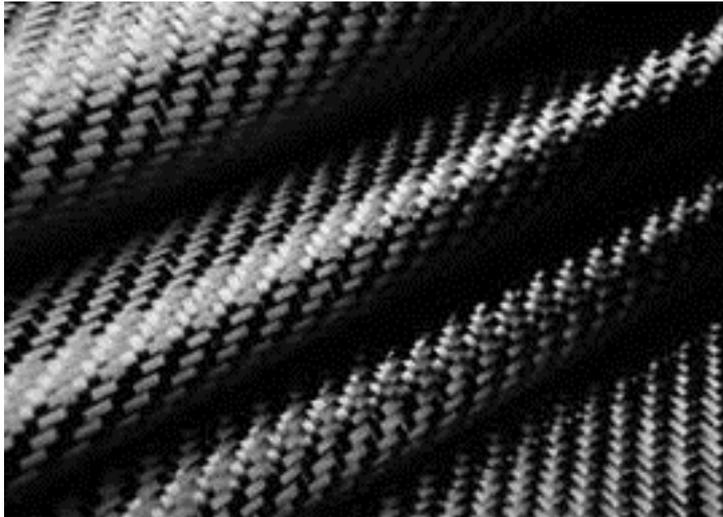
Winter 1973 saw this huge Cod of 35 pounds taken by Maurice Stopher fishing a Herring-lug cocktail from the beach at Orford Island. The picture appeared as a news item in Sea Angler Magazine in December 1973.

THE INTRODUCTION OF CARBON FIBRE FISHING RODS

Prior to its use in fishing rods, carbon fibre had been on the horizon for some time. Initially, the main restrictive issue with it was that you could not make it longer than a metre or so in length. That sorted, then came the adhesives problem where they could not find one that flexed at the same rate as the carbon, so the sheets broke up. But, like everything else that is commercially important, they eventually sorted that out too, which when it was, virtually ended the short reign of fibreglass rod production.

Fibreglass, which was initially used to make solid glass rods then later hollow glass blanks, without doubt revolutionised rod manufacturing back in the late 1940's on into the 1950's, condemning wood, and in some cases steel, to angling history. The better length to weight ratio with hollow glass also allowed longer, better actioned rods to be produced, themselves to be replaced though the development of other fibres and resins.

I was tempted there to say new fibres and resins, but that would not be accurate. Some of these, particularly carbon fibre, had been known about for quite a few years. The problem was that, as with fibreglass during the 1940's, information surrounding it was subject to government secrecy. Restrictions apart, the development of suitable resins that would allow these fibres to be used in fishing rods was a further exacerbating factor. Eventually, in the early 1970's, these were to some extent resolved.



History now shows that the ascendancy of fibreglass was relatively brief due to the discovery in the late 1960's of carbon fibre at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, which as I've already said, was initially subject to government restrictions. Prior to that, Shakespeare had been the first company off the mark with fibreglass. This time it was Hardy's who were quick to take note of the new compound, working on rods containing carbon fibres, which were up to 6 times lighter than their fibreglass counterparts, enlisting the help of coarse fishing legend and qualified

engineer, the late great Richard Walker.

Unfortunately, however, and perhaps unexpectedly, this turned out to be a bigger job than had initially been envisaged, taking an extraordinarily amount of time to satisfactorily complete, with the first production rod only being available in 1976, a full 3 years after the American company Fenwick had put the first ever carbon fibre rod which they called HMG (High Modulus Graphite) onto the US market.

Carbon fibres are for the most part made by what is called the polyacrylonitrile process, otherwise known as PAN, producing fibres of between 5 and 10 microns thick, which on a direct size for size comparison are arguably the strongest material known to science. They are also typically twice as stiff and 5 times as strong as steel, which after being drawn to form the fibres, need to be treated chemically to stabilise the bonds, then heated to a very high temperature to form tightly bonded carbon crystals.

This done, the fibres are then coated and wound onto bobbins which are loaded on to spinning machines to twist them into the required diameter of yarn, which if it is to become a composite with another material, needs to be heat, pressure, or vacuum treated to bind the different fibres together using a plastic polymer. The threads can then be woven into fabric, in this case for resin treatment for wrapping around a fishing rod blank mandril.

Talking to John Holden who is far better informed than I will ever be when it comes to rod building, in particular with regard to the various available qualities that can be built into rods to enhance their casting and shore fishing capabilities, I understand that better quality carbon materials and composites such as boron and kevlar, when government defence restrictions were lifted, besides being difficult to source, also lacked a suitable matrix, or for want of a better word, glue, which meant that in the early days they were either too stiff, would delaminate, and would shatter.

Only when suitable phenolic and epoxy resins arrived on the scene allowing the blanks to bend without snapping did these materials become usable as fishing rods, by which stage, carbon had become the fibre of choice by the tackle companies, if for no other reason than it was cheaper to source than kevlar and boron.

Other than Hardy, few established UK tackle manufacturing companies had previously invested even in high quality fibreglass, let alone carbon when it arrived. This would prove to be a major factor in their demise, to be replaced by dedicated forward looking rod designers and builders such as Mike McManus at Conoflex, Terry Carrol at Zziplex, and Simon Chilcott at Century, all of whom are looked at elsewhere at their applicable time locations.

That said, though the age of fibreglass rods was pretty much over, some companies continued to produce them, both for anglers who preferred them, and initially to undercut the new composites, thereby

making them attractive purely on the basis of cost. Furthermore, fibreglass was, and still is used in combination with carbon fibre to give rods the desired handling characteristics which carbon alone cannot give. An example of this is the predominance of fibreglass in last foot or so of uptide rods to soften their action, thereby making them less likely to jump the grip of the lead when fishing in a swell.

While rods may differ in such things as length, taper, wall thickness, fibre hybridisation and the rest, the general process of making a carbon fibre blank is standard across the industry. The carbon fibre arrives as a flat sheet pre-impregnated with a resin to make it sticky to the touch. This is then wrapped the required number of times around a carefully designed metal template or mandril which will give the rod its required handling characteristics. The embryonic rod blank is then placed into an oven offering temperatures of up to 200 degrees Celsius for around an hour, during which time, the fibre and resin mix dries and hardens ready for the mandril to be hydraulically removed. The cellophane tape is next removed ready for the quality control checks, sanding, and application of the blank's final finish.

By the late 1970's, the rod building market had become dominated by carbon fibre, though other fibres such as kevlar, and less so boron had not been completely ostracised, though appearing mainly as bit part players at the higher end of the market with manufacturers in the search for the perfect rod. This unfortunately, like designing the perfect trailed fishing boat, will never happen due to the potential range of characteristics available and their suitability to the specific task they are being expected to perform, though companies such as Zziplex, Conoflex, and Century still see it as their mandate to unerringly try.

IAN GILLESPIE



Talking to those in the know, and to those who actually knew Ian Gillespie such as Brian Harris and Keith Linsell, as soon as you mention his name, one fact repeatedly comes to the fore and dictates the conversation – the Breakaway Lead, designed to grip by wires rather than by sheer weight then release its grip without picking up weed or snags on the retrieve.

Ian worked with Norman Bickers and Nigel Forrest on the creation and development of a lot of sound fishing tackle ideas through the Breakaway Tackle Company (see next inclusion), many of which are still with us and taken for granted today. But it's Ian Gillespie the top-notch thinking sea angler and journalist I am writing about here, away from what has been said in the inclusion headed 'The Breakaway Fishing Tackle Company' below, which gives a very good insight into the innovative side of Gillespie's character.

In his day to day life, Gillespie was a teacher of English language based in East Anglia. If his fishing articles in Sea Angler and Angling Magazine are anything to go, how blessed were those kids to be taught by him. By all accounts he was a very pleasant man; an impressive angler and innovator, and always good company with his passion for fishing mixed with a spark of good humour. A man who unfortunately left us way too early in life in 1980.

A forward thinker too on the topics such as light tackle fishing and distance casting using his own rod design, the 'Cod Pole', which was aided by and to an extent contributed to the development of the Breakaway Lead.

Ian Gillespie was also, a man with a high regard for the environment and fishery stock management. Other than that, and the very kindly way Norman Bickers, his 'partner in crime' at Breakaway remembers him below, I'm afraid that's pretty much it.

THE BREAKAWAY FISHING TACKLE COMPANY



From humble beginnings, Breakaway Tackle has become one of the most revered and innovative fishing tackle companies here in the UK and beyond when it comes to producing ancillary tackle items. A company perhaps best described as a progressive alliance between Norman Bickers, Nigel Forrest, and Ian Gillespie with its embryonic beginnings dating back to the late 1960's, developing its current identity in 1974. Here, with the kind permission of Norman Bickers and in his own words is a

lightly tidied up version of the Breakaway Tackle.....

"I was 23 when I opened my little tackle shop on 1st January 1968 on the corner of Bramford Road and Chevalier Street in Ipswich. Actually, to call it a tackle shop is a bit of an exaggeration, because I purchased the whole contents of my opening stock with the £50 I had left over from my wedding to Sandie. A local wholesaler did give me £50 worth of credit, but even in those days £100 worth of fishing tackle didn't look much in a shop. I am not good with dates, but for the past 45 years Sandie has reminded me that Xmas and our honeymoon were spent pricing up fishing tackle - we were married on the 23rd December 1967.

In those days the range of available tackle was very small. Bait was the most important item that brought people into the shop. I had started as a bait digger, and before I was married my long-suffering parents and sister sold the lugworm from home. After I married and opened the shop, I thought my wife could work there and I would continue to dig bait every day. But all good business plans can easily be derailed with the birth of your first child. Sandie didn't have an easy pregnancy and didn't really fancy sticking her hands in tins of maggots to get the neat ones at the bottom of the tin, as she was often requested to do.

Nigel Forrest Nigel at this time was a factory foreman at Manganese Bronze in Ipswich which was a major employer in the town and held fishing matches. Nigel thought he would go fishing with the boys. At this time a quality rod was made from solid glass fibre. Only a few hollow glass rods were available to those who could afford them. Most anglers still used Burma poles and centre pin reels. Intrepid reels had just been launched, including the mighty Seastreak multiplier and a chunky fixed spool reel for sea anglers. My first contact with Nigel was through his friend Albert who came into my shop and asked if I had in stock an ABU 484 beach rod. I was dumbstruck. This rod retailed at about £60, and considering I was selling lugworm at 45 pence a hundred, this was unheard of.

To make matters worse they wanted two of them. Like the good businessman I am, I tried to put them off. Why on earth do you want to waste your money on such expensive, newly launched rods that have not really been tested? Really, I didn't want to tell them that I couldn't afford to purchase two 484s, especially as when the rods arrived they might not even like them. This could be two weeks' takings down the drain - and most of my stock would have been converted into two fishing rods. "Don't worry,"

Albert said. "We will pay up front." The rods were ordered and duly arrived. They were nothing like any fishing rod I had seen. The tip was fine even by today's standards. The two sections were joined by a screw down metal ferrule. The whippings were black and gold with gold metallic tape. The aluminium butt was nigh impossible to flex, and the whole rod weighed more than 4lb. But in our eyes, it looked like a Rolls Royce.

Albert often popped into the shop, but at this point I don't think I had met Nigel. In those days he was a very shy and quiet person who would never engage in conversation unless extremely important. Albert was amazed at what Nigel had done with this rod. I remember him telling me that he had invented a whole new casting technique. The distances he was achieving were impossible to believe. The average fisherman would cast about 70 yards, and here was Albert telling me that Nigel would soon be the first angler to break the 200yd barrier. And this with a rod that he had purchased from my humble fishing tackle shop.

Nigel had permission to use his old school playing field to practise on, and the cast he invented was the pendulum cast now used by anglers around the World. The mechanics of the cast are still the same today, and necessary to compress this brute of a rod to get the maximum distance from it. Most anglers use rods that are far too powerful for their ability, and this was certainly the case with the 484. Any angler could bend the tip of the rod, but true distance came from feeling the aluminium butt flexing between your hands. Early photographs show Nigel bending this unyielding butt like a banana at the point of release. The build up was slow. The power came from using the right hand as a boxer does, by punching from the shoulder (you would never knock anyone out with a sideways slap) and at the same time pulling down hard with the left hand.

As expected, Nigel took the casting scene by storm. Not only was he the first person to cast over 200 yards in a tournament. He was also the first person to cast over 250 yards in a tournament. He held many records, some of which he still holds today. In those days' competitors had three casts using 2oz leads, a further three using 4oz, and three with 6oz. Then there would be a level line event (no shock leader). Just as you mastered one event, it was all change. The courts would be set up the night before and it wouldn't matter if you had a gale in your face on tournament day - it would be the same for everyone. Tournaments were held all over the country. Nigel made many friends on the casting field. He was always determined to be the best, and this determination stayed with him throughout his life.

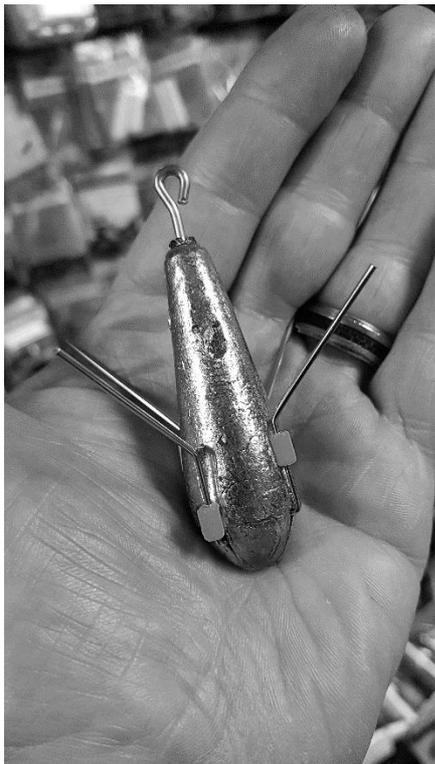
It was at this time that we met Ian Gillespie who was a local school teacher. Many people tell me to this day that he was a passionate teacher who made learning fun. They still talk about his fishing club where his favourite trick was to get a lad to hold a fishing line while he ran 100 yards down a field holding a hook in his hand. "When I shout, strike as if I am a fish and drive this hook into my hand." These kids couldn't believe their luck. They might even inflict some pain into their teacher. But try as they might, because of the stretch in monofilament line over 100 yards, the hook would not move. This is why I seldom strike to this day except in a moment of panic.

Ian was a regular contributor to the angling press, and many of his articles are still available today. His main passion was to make angling an enjoyable sport, not just a means to put food on the table. He wrote an article that highlighted the problems of lead weights. At this time, the spikes on the lead were of heavy brass wire, or welding rod in some cases. To get a lead back to the beach needed a lot of effort and heavy line. No 12-15lb line would be any good. And because of the lead's dragging on the seabed, you would not know if you had caught anything until the rig came out of the water. So sporting fishing was not an option, and very seldom did you feel the pull of a fish.

Ian also campaigned to produce a rod that weighed less than a pound which he called the Bare Bones. He was critical of the 484 which had become very popular on the back of Nigel's exploits. But as today, most anglers thought that by buying the most expensive rod available they would all be casting 200

yards without putting in the days and weeks of practice that Nigel had. As a result, the 484 was the most exchanged rod ever produced.

Following Ian's article, a few ideas were sent in including one where the wires were detached from the lead on the strike and trailed behind on a length of nylon. The wires then plugged back into a hole in the nose of the lead for the next cast. This was the best idea, until Nigel came into my shop asking how to get in touch with Ian. Nigel had come up with something better. Ian's uncle worked at a garage near my shop and they often popped in to buy bait or just to talk fishing. To me, Ian was a celebrity and an author who had written books and articles about fishing. He wrote in the local paper and later did television and local radio. Who can remember the Golden Maggot, a race to catch as many species of fish as possible in 24 hours? Not a television programme for the purist angler, but great entertainment for the masses.



A meeting was arranged, and Nigel produced this lead with revolving wires held onto the body with protrusions that were grooved to keep the wires in place. It was obvious from the outset that this would work, and off to the beach they went to test it. This was a Eureka moment. The lead held in the tide, but on the strike the wires collapsed. Ian said. "It's like pulling in a line with no weight - you can even feel a whiting on the other end." The original Breakaway Lead problem was that the protrusions would wear off after a few retrieves, so that idea was dropped and another meeting was soon arranged after Nigel had made some modifications. Instead of lumps sticking out from the lead's body, holes were introduced so that beads on the grip wires could locate into the sides of the lead. Tension and grip could be increased by nipping the wires together. This was a major breakthrough and remains the principle of Breakaway leads produced to this day.

Nobody realised what impact this invention would have on the World of angling. Nobody foresaw that these leads would end up in anglers' tackle boxes around the World. As with any good invention, the first thing you must do is to apply for a patent. Until your priority date is accepted by the Patent Office, everything has to be kept secret. It's not easy to keep such an important invention to yourselves, but we had to. Once we had received confirmation we could then let everyone know. Ian's writing skills and his association with magazines were very important. Nigel's contacts at work were also invaluable - most of the night shift were engaged in making moulds. First one at a time, and eventually ten at once. It's all very well having good inventions, but it's just as important to manufacture at a cost that the market will accept and to keep up with demand.

The lead was offered to some tackle companies but none would take it up. The excuse given was that most tackle dealers made their own leads and wouldn't stock ours. Besides, the cost of sending lead weights around would also make them more expensive than those produced in a back shed in the winter by tackle dealers. So no one foresaw the major steps forward that angling in general would experience in the next few years. In my tackle shop back then I would have a few brass paternosters, some nice brass bells, and Kilmore and Clements booms with porcelain eyes that would soon break and fall out. The most popular hook was the beak hook which Ian despised. Any poor unsuspecting angler buying these would get his lecture. Ian would take a hook from the packet of ten and just snap it in his fingers, so most fishermen would end up with nine hooks if they insisted on buying them.

Match fishing, sea and coarse, was beginning to take off big time. Ardleigh reservoir was opening as a trout fishery. Fishing was on the move, and I felt the time had come to leave my small rented corner

shop and purchase my own much larger shop at 376 Bramford Road in Ipswich where we remain to this day. For a self-employed bait digger and tackle shop owner, obtaining a mortgage for £4,300 to buy the Doggie in the Window pet shop was as impossible then as it is to borrow £200,000 these days. The bank didn't want to know. No mortgage company would lend the money because this was a business venture, not purely a home. Eventually, some unheard of London mortgage broker lent me the money and the move took place, much to the wife's joy. The living premises were twice as big with a good size garden. The shop was also much bigger with many out buildings that were put to good use making the first Breakaway leads over a small gas ring.

Those first leads were moulded by anyone with a bit of time after work. Nigel would come in, or one of the many bait diggers who worked for me at that time would mould a few. These would then be taken home and the wires put in one at a time. Demand soon began to increase. My job was to take orders then pack and despatch them. All orders were payment up front, so as we sold some Breakaways we would get more lead and mould some more. Demand kept growing to the point that we needed someone to pour lead all the time. Nigel, who wasn't really enjoying life at work, took the decision to give up the security of his job and pension to work full time making leads. I think at that stage it was a risk. For although we had a patent, we didn't know if the lead would stand the test of time.

Now we could increase production and satisfy the increasing demand. But as demand and production increased, the shop trade also grew and before long my bait digging days were all but over. We purchased bait from anyone who wanted to dig. Some digger worked full time others at weekends. A normal Saturday saw us counting and selling over 20,000 worms. When times were bad and we couldn't get enough diggers, I would go with them to get the numbers. On a good day I could dig 1500-2000 worms on a tide, and no one could dig more than I could. Even today at 68 there is nothing I enjoy more than a day's bait digging. So we now had two successful businesses: the Breakaway lead and the tackle shop. Nigel would make leads and I ran the shop. But at times one would be very busy whilst the other had nothing to do, so it made sense to combine the two. In 1974, The Breakaway Tackle Development Company was formed with Nigel, Ian and myself as equal partners.

One of the first products after the Breakaway lead was a device called a Thumbbutton, a simple type of casting trigger that held the line from a fixed spool reel so that the caster would not cut his finger on the power stroke. A similar design is still available today, but the early models were made with our own plastic injection moulding machine. Ian would melt plastic granules and any other bits of plastic and produce Thumbbutton's in my kitchen. Nobody knew what colour the next one would be. Lead sales were still increasing, and Nigel's heart wasn't really in the lead production side. He felt that he would be more useful helping in the shop and developing new items of tackle, so we gave his job of making leads to John who quickly increased production by working longer hours on a piecework basis. He would also take the leads out to people who finished them at home. Production then was about 5,000 per week, but soon this wasn't enough.

Using his engineering skills, Nigel and some of his mates from Manganese look at ways to increase production. Out went the four-at-a-time moulds and in came the ten-at-time versions. Lead was melted in larger quantities and production increased to 2,000 per day, sometimes for six days a week. But the leads still had to go to outworkers for finishing. The first leads had an oversized wire moulded in, which was pulled out to leave holes through the lead. Half-formed grip wires with a bead on one side were passed through the hole. Another bead was put on the other side, then the wire was bent with pliers to complete the lead. As each lead needed two wires this was a time consuming job which made your fingers sore, so Nigel then designed a lead with open ends so the wire could be machine-formed complete. With the wires in place, the open ends were sealed by air pressure. The novel design for which enabled we got another patent. This new process was much quicker and enabled us to keep up with the demand once again.

Match fishing was growing more and more popular. The next invention had a great deal to do with this side of angling. The Felixstowe Festival was the largest match on our part of the coast. In those days the event was pegged for 400 fishermen, and some would not get a ticket. Ian had convinced Nigel that he was going to win this year as he had an ace up his sleeve. All was secretive beforehand, then on the day of the match Ian unleashed his secret weapon.

In a tobacco tin he had some clear plastic that would dissolve in water. We looked at it with incredulity. We all knew plastic didn't dissolve in water, but this was a special type. Ian's idea was to wrap his bait and hook in plastic, and tie it all down to make it streamlined. He realised that locking his bait down would make it more streamlined and so cast farther, and the bait would end up in a better condition on the sea bed. How could he fail to win?. After the match we went straight up to Ian. Had he won? "Well," he said, "all was good on the first cast. It went out like a dream. Next cast, all I had left was a sticky mess in the bottom of my tin." Nobody had told him it was raining.

This was the start of the next chapter in the development of streamlined beach fishing rigs that Nigel designed, based on the simple idea that if the bait did not cartwheel around and tangle in flight, we would cast farther and catch more fish. Thus, the cascade rig and bait clips were invented. At this time we employed Sandie and Linda in the workshop behind the shop to finish the leads. Doug Titshall, a former bait digger, was helping me out in the retail shop, and John Holden (not the famous caster and writer) was pouring the leads. George worked part time packing and sending out the leads and Neville was running a van service to retail shops around the coast. We had included a few other items of tackle that we had swapped with wholesalers who then sold our leads in other parts of the country.



Added to our range were plain leads, egg leads, extra leads, plastic adaptors, and the Thumbrake, a spool locking device for multiplier reels. The device worked very well until manufacturers changed to solid reel cages instead of crossbars. The van service was good for delivering new items into shops quickly. Most tackle shop owners were very keen to stock the latest Breakaway products. At that time most seaside towns had at least one tackle shop, often several. But as with most trades and industries, times were changing. Fish were becoming harder to find due to overfishing and bad breeding years.

Then there were all the household products that are poured into our seas every day of the week. Chemicals that kill all household germs cannot do fish fry or eggs any good. Bait prices were rising alarmingly and match attendances were falling. Add in the odd recession, and it was obvious that the UK sea tackle trade was in decline.

We have been very lucky over the years because as our own market shrank, more and more other countries around the World needed our products. Shipping was never a major problem. Other changes were taking place within the trade. Specimen lakes with large Carp were becoming a major market. "Paint it camouflage and double the price," was the new motto. The number of gizmos and products that hit the tackle shops was unprecedented. Fortunately, to this day, the average Carp is two steps ahead of the angler. Some are never fooled, even if you fish over a silt lake bottom with silt coloured line, silt coloured hooks and silt coloured rigs. Surround your rig with a hundred boilies, and next day the only one left is the one with your hook in it.

With the lead production sorted, Nigel turned his attention to his rig technology. As fishing became harder, the need to cast farther with better bait presentation became more important. Matches were being won with single fish, which often fell to the angler who put his bait out the farthest, and so the Relay Clip was born, a clip that slid onto the rig body with a small piece of rubber. It acted as a bait clip and also as a relay system which Nigel invented and is now universally used and accepted. By adding a swivel to the relay clip it was possible to have three baited hooks clipped down for casting. When the rig hit the water, the clips slid up the rig and released the baited hooks. It was quickly accepted and used in many rig designs. Even today it still sells in thousands.

Once we had the relay clip we produced pivot booms, beads, and a simple clip that would lock down and be released with the relay clip. All this time Nigel was searching for the perfect master release. Rigs had become much more streamlined, miles away from the old running ledger rigs, but Nigel was never content. "That will do" or "that is good enough" were never in his vocabulary. A Breakaway product may have started life on the back of a fag packet, but many, many drawings would be done, and prototypes would be lovingly made from aluminium or plastic. Some would take weeks. Some even took months. And sometimes after months of work, another thought or a way to improve the product, would cross Nigel's mind and the process would start over again.

Over all the years we produced tackle, one company made every item and helped us all the way: Mike and Colin from Mumford Engineering in Clacton, Essex. They have worked tirelessly and often under extreme pressure to help make Breakaway what it is today. Without them it would not have worked. Yes, if we had had engineering drawings we could have gone to China. But Nigel would change his design many times before completion. Every item had to meet his precise demands. As I said, that will do or that is good enough were not words he knew.

At about this time, 1980, we learned of the sudden death of Ian Gillespie. Ian was an amazing person who was passionate about angling in any form and a very forward thinking angler. True, he was extremely disorganised, and if anyone would miss the boat over to Orford it would be him. My lasting impression of Ian was on a boat to Orford. His friend Bill Roberts from Southend had just sent him a new rod blank to try out for his Bare Bones project. Ian arrived on the quay in his slippers, rod blank in hand, and proceeded to put the rings on as we crossed the river. By the time we landed he had a fishing rod. This was typical Ian.

My wife still has her memories of her first meeting with Ian. I told her that I had invited an important journalist round to the house. The doorbell rang and there stood Ian with his baggy jumper down to his knees. It had odd designer holes all over the place. Could have been moths, but as I have said, Ian was way ahead of his time, so it could have been a fashion statement. We as a company missed Ian because he was our mouthpiece. He could stand in front of a hundred people and grab their attention. He was a passionate speaker and could talk forever - something Nigel and I have never been able to do. Nigel was very proud to win the EMAP invention of the century with the Breakaway lead, but if this was the Number One invention, the next product to hit the World of angling would run it a close second: enter the Impact Shield, or as some called them, magic mushrooms.

These were indeed magic to most anglers. At last, a master release you could rely on to work one hundred per cent of the time. No more pulling in your rig to discover that the hook was still clipped up. As with most good inventions the Impact Shield was a simple device held on to the rig body with a small piece of rubber to stop movement through the cast. On contact with the water, the Shield would tip and release the baited hook. As with most new items, you can't wait to get to the beach to try them out. On this occasion we wondered if the shield would move enough to eject the bait. On the first cast we just put the shield onto the leader behind the lead without a stop and cast out to sea. When the lead was retrieved we found the shield had gone right up the shock leader and over the knot; we hadn't realised how much movement there would be. This simple test made us realise the power of impact.

We use this principle on many of our products. Some items we didn't have to go to the beach to test. Nigel would drop prototype products into his water butt. If it released after a fall of two feet, it passed the test. With the master release sorted and UK patents obtained, Nigel wanted to make the rest of the rig more streamlined without compromising safety, an aspect overlooked by some rig makers from across the seas. Along came the cascade swivel: neat and small but strong enough to land any fish. As we were not in the swivel market, we asked Dexter Products to make them for us and this they have done ever since.



Whilst working on the rig side of things, we started to produce other rig-making products such as beads and hooks. Hooks in the early days were pretty basic and normally hand-me-downs from the commercial fishing sector. If you are using 15-30lb main line you don't need a hook that wouldn't break with a 500lb load. We needed hooks that would take little effort to penetrate 100 yards away, with a small barb and small eye that you could push bait over. The first hooks we had made came from Partridge of Redditch and were the Spear-spade with an offset sharp spade that kept the worm up the hook shank, but these were not popular because few anglers had mastered tying spade end knots.

So we introduced an eyed version which we called the Spearpoint hook. Straight away these became very popular and are still sought after today. Many anglers couldn't understand why we stopped making them. Partridge were one of the oldest hook makers in Redditch. Most of their hooks were handmade and finished.

But this type of firm was unable to compete with automated hooks from China. When Partridge were taken over by Mustad and production moved to China we dropped these hooks as we knew it wouldn't be long before identical hooks would be available under another brand name.

Over the years we have had a great deal of success producing and marketing our own products. Some of our biggest disappointments have come from items that Nigel developed, which for whatever reason, we thought another company could do a better job of making for us. Sometimes costs were the problem; other times we did not have the right contacts to get to the people that mattered. Too often the big tackle companies treat you like idiots and pass you around the Indians without ever meeting the Big White Chief.

Without doubt the biggest disappointment, and most probably one of the worst management decisions ever taken in the angling trade was Nigel's fixed spool reel. During Nigel's casting days he quickly saw the shortcomings of the fixed spool reel. The spools were narrow and deep, and the line was laid on haphazardly. Beyond a hundred yards, spool lip friction imposed a lot of line drag. Casting was hard work and you could watch your lead die in the air. The answer was a long, shallow spool coupled with a superior, more criss-crossed line-lay so that the coils would not dig into themselves even under pressure.

The best reel makers at that time were Mitchell, a French company with a good reputation among British anglers. Barrie Welham, the UK managing director, had watched Nigel's casting career blossom, and very much wanted him onboard with Mitchell. In return Nigel was given any item of tackle he needed. He even went on an angling holiday to Mozambique - and not many anglers have been there. I think that in one week Nigel broke six rods. That's most probably why he was never asked again. Using the basic Mitchell 386, Nigel welded the level-wind system of an ABU multiplier reel onto the shaft that held the spool of a fixed spool reel. He made the body longer, and in the casing, he used the level-wind pick-up. He made the spool six inches long.

The line-lay pattern covered the length of the spool. Even today, some spools are longer than the spool can travel back and forth, which leaves holes in the line pattern. Nigel's fixed spool even had a star drag. What a bonus that would be for today's Carp anglers. One of the first people to use this reel was my son Steven, whose distances immediately increased dramatically. We were so sure this would be a winner and the making of our company that we filed for a provisional patent of the line-lay system.

The first people to see the reel were Mitchell as it had been constructed using Mitchell parts. Nigel took the reel down to Southampton to show Barrie Welham, who was impressed. He was a distributor not a manufacturer, but he would take it to France and show it to head office. All good news so far. Surely there would be no way that Mitchell would reject Nigel's design? They were losing out to the big companies such as Daiwa and Shimano, so this reel could put Mitchell back on the map big time. And with the patent they could have the whole reel market Worldwide. This was what we expected. But we were wrong. Mitchell decided that the sea reel market was too small to invest in a new reel. To say we were gobsmacked was an understatement. Perhaps we had picked the wrong company.

Mitchell were losing their market share, so we thought we would go to Daiwa, a company that was on the up and producing more and more quality tackle for the British market. The man in charge of Daiwa at that time was John Loftus who seemed very interested in seeing the reel. Daiwa UK didn't make reels, but he would send it to China for their appraisal. As is normal with these things, a few months passed and no decision had been reached. Filing a patent gives you a year to get your product sorted. After the year is up, you have to pay for a full patent through a patent attorney. We didn't want to do this until we had a manufacturer on board, because they would want their own people involved to protect their investment.

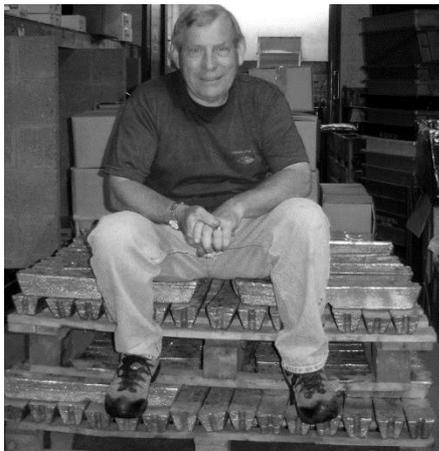
By now the year was up and Mr Loftus told us that Daiwa were not interested; this is after much pushing on our part because we didn't want the patent process to lapse. When we eventually got the reel back we sent photos and articles to Sea Angler and many other publications. Nearly all of them ran full page spreads about the reel and sang its virtues loud and clear. We hoped someone would contact us and offer to produce the reel. All we wanted was a small royalty per reel and we would have been happy. John Loftus then left Daiwa and went to Shimano, and after they soon brought out the first reel using what appeared to us to be a very similar principle to Nigel's.

The majority of reels produced in the World now use this system of line lay. With patent protection, any company could have had the reel market in their hands. But nobody was able to get a patent, and as a result everyone can use the system. So perhaps Nigel did get the last laugh. Some people would say that it was tough luck. Those who knew Nigel would appreciate that it was much worse. Whatever Nigel did, he did to the best of his ability which was pretty substantial. He would leave no stone unturned in the pursuit of excellence. It wasn't just a case of making a reel that worked. Development might involve ten different drive shafts, each one turned on a lathe and hardened. Each would have a different level-wind spiral. On some the spool would go forward quickly and come back slowly. Others would have the spiral in the middle, some in the end. A different spool would be designed and machined for each shaft. In all, I reckon two years of work was just tossed away.

Inventions often start with a problem that needs solving. Next came one of the best products that we make to this day. Walking back across Orford Island one day after fishing a little longer than he should, and scared of missing the boat, Nigel suddenly blacked out for a short time. He put this down to his heavy tackle box with a single strap around his neck. He thought the strap had cut off or restricted the airflow thus causing him to black out. Why do we have a single strap when a harness type system would enable us to carry tackle boxes more comfortably? Thus the Breakaway Backrest was born. It wasn't a simple, cheap job. The backrest needs lots of moulds to produce, making it a major investment at the time, but one of the best items we produce now.

After the backrest, along came the tripod. With these larger products, the time had come to move out of the buildings behind the shop and into a warehouse at Gt. Blakenham just outside Ipswich. Lead production and other larger items like tripods and backrests could be done there. We could also keep a better stock to cover fluctuations in trade. One of the best bonuses from the move was not having two tonnes of lead dumped on the shop forecourt each week. We had to barrow it through the shop to the workshop at the bottom of the garden, which meant the door being open and closed for some time - not good in the middle of the winter. Most of the small plastic items we produce are packed at home by outworkers, mainly my daughter Hayley who started packing hooks at home when she was old enough to count to ten because I wouldn't give her any pocket money. She got one penny per packet. She's now 42 and still getting a penny a packet. Neville's wife Jane packs many products, a boring job but one they both enjoy. It would take a braver man than I to tell either of them that there's no work today.

Neville gave up the van service when trade from around Europe started to increase. We were sending leads out by the pallet load. It's very strange that the lead side of the business has remained constant over the 35 year period, despite recessions and shortages of fish. Yes, we now produce a bigger range. But there is more competition now and fewer anglers. Even so, to this day we still produce 10-12,000 leads per week, 51½ weeks per year (we let them have two days off at Xmas). The standard Breakaway lead had been a brilliant success but even that was beginning to date. Few products stand the test of time like this lead has, but times move on and technology improves. So along came the Impact Lead which incorporates the advantages of the Impact Shield into the lead. Originally, we had planned to drop the Breakaway lead and just make the Impact Lead as we felt most anglers would switch. But as the standard lead was just starting to sell in the USA we continued to produce it, and today we sell nearly as many Breakaways as Impact Leads.



Can you imagine the impact on this company if the European idiots had banned lead weights for use in the sea? At one time this was a real possibility and remains a threat today. Only this week, I had a phone call from a Dutch distributor about the subject. I wrote an article about lead usage entitled: "The first cup of tea on a Monday morning tastes horrible because our water at the shop is delivered in lead pipes." And I thought, if it's good enough for me to drink, I don't think the fish should be given the choice, especially as it's okay to wrap nuclear waste in lead and drop it into the World's oceans. So to us the proposed lead ban was a major shock. I likened it to Ford being told that as from next week we are banning the sale of petrol.

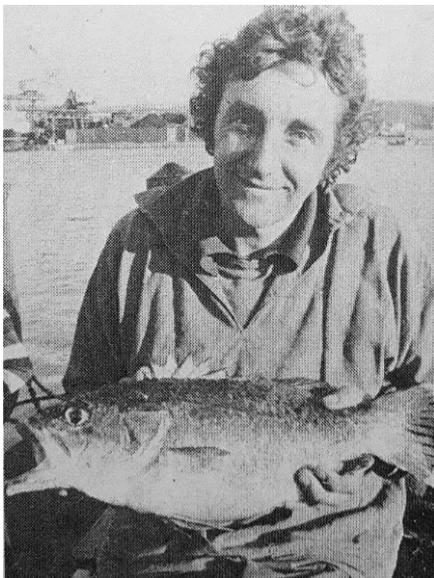
This however didn't deter Nigel. It gave him the impetus he needed to create the World's first non-toxic wired sea weight (hard not to call it a lead). We had to design and produce a weight that could be injection moulded to make a zinc body with no moving parts. The wires and clips would have to be added later. This little enterprise cost us nearly £30,000. On completion, we found out that the European Union had decided not to impose a lead ban yet, though it remains a possibility. But when they do we will be ready. We would almost certainly go to the Ultra System and make a simple zinc body. Something else may materialise in the future.

I hope this story gives some insight into our company and its workings. Forty years have flown by and I have enjoyed every minute of it. As the last man standing, I needed to get as much on paper as I could so all will not be forgotten. So next time you pick up a Breakaway lead, think of Nigel Forrest."

STONE BASS

In my experience, the Wreckfish *Polyprion americanus*, or Stone Bass or as it is also called, is one of those species which seemed to suddenly explode on to the UK and Irish offshore boat angling scene then 'disappear' again for years. In all probability they have always been out there. A case of angling boats now becoming more adventurous, combined with a good helping of luck, and having people onboard with the right gear and attitude to give them a go should you stumble into a shoal. Certainly not something you could pre-plan. Boats heading off into the western English Channel and off the southern coast of Ireland were always the ones most likely to make these rare chance encounters. And when they have, it can be absolute carnage.

Stone Bass are a warm water relative of the Bass, but with the potential to grow really big, which can be anything from mid-double figures up to a 100 pounds and more. So potentially a very interesting prospect. On the down side, the bigger fish tend to feed at depths between 50 and 100 fathoms well out of harm's way. Not so the smaller fish, huge shoals of which are occasionally found straying within angling range, where on some days they can be spotted at or close to the surface, particularly if there is some sort of floating object in the water which seems to attract them.



Then it's every egg a bird, with anglers pretty much catching as many as they might want, though the one in the photograph show here from a news report in Sea Angler October 1974 was caught by Richard Blunt aboard the Plymouth boat 'Sweet Home' after seeing it nosing around close to the boats rubby dubby bags.

If angling press reports are anything to go by, I would say that the 1970's and 80's were the key period in UK waters. In southern Irish waters however, they have proved to be more numerous, with reports still filtering through right up to press. Kinsale skipper Mick Dennehy reports seeing them around floating debris well offshore over very deep water while out looking for Albacore and Bluefin Tuna. He has also occasionally seen Oarfish. It's a different World out over very deep water, which anglers will in the future I'm sure start to explore. For the moment, Stone Bass remain unpredictable chance encounters, with the bulk of the British reports now 20 and more years old.

HUGE DEVON STINGRAY

Never a common fish along the English Channel Coast in west country waters, the autumn of 1974 saw Dawlish prison officer Ken Wright take a Stingray of 56 pounds whilst out on a boat trip from Torquay. A specimen a mere 3 pounds below the standing record of the day. Ironically, the fish was beaten on a rod made by one of the Ken's 'charges' in the Exeter prison workshop.

MONKNASH MONKFISH

This inclusion is a sign of the times, that being the 1970's. A pivotal period in the sad story of the Monkfish. The fish in question is a large 50 pound specimen taken by Cardiff angler Richard Brown, reported by Sea Angler Magazine as being the heaviest taken from the shore during 1974 caught from Monknash Beach, a mark noted for its association with the species.



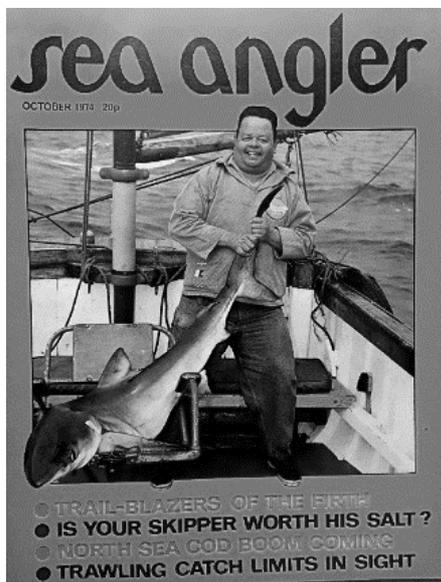
The previous summer, the same angler had one of 40 pounds, while a colleague had another of 48 pounds, in all cases fishing at distance in around 12 feet of water with Mackerel for bait. Unfortunately, however, and this is the downside I alluded to earlier, the fish was cut up into 35 pounds of steaks for the freezer, which cookery experts were saying tastes just like scampi.

PW Comment: There's a general misunderstanding amongst commercial fishermen and anglers when talking about Monkfish because unfortunately they are not talking about the same thing.

When they catch and land 'Monks' to be passed off as scampi, the commercials are actually talking about Angler Fish tails *Lophius piscatorius* and not the Monkfish or Angel Shark as we are now being persuaded to call it which are *Squatina squatina*, a species that is very slow to reproduce, makes poor eating, and is now on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) red list of critically endangered species.

In all probability this is where the recommendation to eat Monkfish comes from. But it is the Anglerfish which in reality commercial fishermen, and by implication culinary experts, are referring to.

RAY WESTERLING



Never a prolific writer, to the best of my knowledge, Ray Westerling was always very much a single species angler with whatever fishing and journalism he was involved in invariably being focused on sharks, and in particular the catching of Blue Sharks out from Looe, with more of a passing interest in Porbeagle and Mako Sharks, which if he was successful with those also never came across in his writing.

I'm not saying he didn't fish for or write about other stuff, but certainly I don't recall ever coming across it. Nothing came up when researching this project either. Therefore, I can only conclude his contribution to be as previously described.

He did however make the front cover of Sea Angler Magazine's October 1974 issue, which I've included it here.

WIRE FISHING LINES

For a few years during the 1970's, sandwiched between the advent of none stretch Dacron fishing line which was first marketed in 1950's (see Chapter 7) and the appearance of modern braids such as

Dyneema in the 1990's (see Chapter 11), if you wanted to fish deep water where line stretch and diameter would be an issue, and/or in areas of fierce tides, then the best way to do it was to spool up with wire fishing line.

This was available in two options, these being single strand, the best of which was 'Tidecutter', and multi-strand such as 'MarlinSteel'. I can well remember fishing with both, each with its own specific metaphorical strengths and weaknesses, depending on your point of view. Both were perfectly capable of doing the job at hand. Both also made similar demands with regard to the 'other' tackle choices necessary to facilitate their use. Where they differed was in the handling, and in the potential damage they could do to the user.

If I'm honest, I'm not really sure why I bought them other than getting caught up in all the hype at the time and feeling I needed to give them a go. Everyone seemed to be raving about wire, particularly Trevor Housby who was pushing it for winter Cod fishing around the Isle of Wight as in the photograph included here.

In reality however, here in the UK, the situations where it was actually out performed monofilament were limited. Promoting other reasons to spool up with the stuff, while in some instances possibly justified, was probably just one more strand of the sales pitch surrounding the product(s) aimed at getting anglers to try the stuff. I can't remember which of the two I tried first, but as I have to start somewhere, it's going to be with the single stranded version known as Monel.



Monel is quite a soft corrosion resistant nickel-copper alloy, or family of similar alloys, which at one time was also used in the manufacture of reels, including some of those involved in Tunny fishing from the 1930's through to the halfway point in the century. A line that never seemed to lie neatly on the spool and would 'chang' loudly as it came off it, particularly from the metal spooled Penn Super-Mariner I was fishing it on. Aluminium spools are best avoided in case of electrolysis.

No knots to worry about either. Thread it through the swivel then simply twist it several times. But be sure never kink to it, or under pressure it would almost certainly part. After use I would always rinse it under the tap then give it a good blast of WD40, though I'm not sure how necessary that was.

The other option was the multi-stranded version. A bit like the stuff we make traces from, but in a very long length, and like trace wire, it needed to be crimped to attach swivels and the rest.

It didn't have quite the same measure of problems, certainly in my experience, with regard to it kinking. Where it could present problems however was with abrasion damage to anything it came into contact with, particularly if it developed a broken strand.

Not only was strand damage a threat to the overall integrity of the line, it was a very real problem for the users thumb when controlling the spool on the drop down. Potentially very painful and invariably involving some blood. This was also the option most likely to cut grooves in the end eye of the rod, hence the need for a roller tip, and would readily cut grooves in soft wet careless fingers given the chance. But of the two, it probably was the more reliable, though I would add that I've used single strand wire for trolling traces, particularly off the coast of Florida.

I have to say, that despite having fished braid on many occasions which in what it delivers isn't really that much different to wire, for some reason wire has a more 'direct' feel to it. Maybe its psychological

because it's metal rather than fibre based. It also shares the same range of negative traits as braid in that it will readily pull a light hook hold on account of there being no stretch cushion.

You could of course use a 'rubber swivel'. A gadget developed in Japan to add cushion to the line and something which could still prove useful today when fishing braid. This comprised two swivels connected by a 6 inch length of industrial grade rubber. But with practise you would get used to the feel and would instinctively know when to slacken the drag to avoid the loss of a decent fish.

THE RISE, FALL & REBIRTH OF WHITBY

Like Scarborough and Bridlington to the south and Hartlepool to the north, Whitby had a reputation for



reliable hard ground fishing from within a stone's throw of the shore seaward as far as its plodding cobles were prepared to sail with anglers on board throughout the 1960's and 1970's. There was also the small matter of some Tunny fishing from the early-1930's through to the late-1950's. Whitby both produced and still holds the British Tunny record at 851 pounds. But Scarborough was the Mecca to

which the well-heeled would flock looking to catch these huge fish.

Scarborough was also the base for the now defunct Tunny Club HQ. However, biding its time, Whitby would eventually have its 'day' in the sun, and what a 'day' it would turn out to be. With its angling fortunes fluctuating first up, then down, and back up again, that 'day' in reality is one continuing story spread over 3 separate decades, any one of which could justifiably act as host.

For me, the important thing is to keep and to treat all of this as one inclusion. Because of the way the different threads are so intertwined, it needs to be kept as one continuous flow rather than broken up and spread about over the latter decades of the century. As this dates back to the mid-1970's, what better place to slot it in and start.

So, we have parties of anglers going out aboard cobles fishing mussel baits by the sack full for Cod which were numerous, Haddock which were still about in good numbers, and Ling when fish baits were put down as an alternative. I remember reading a piece by Yorkshire reporter Harry Brough about a record 9 pound Haddock being brought ashore in 1975, with fish in the 5 pound bracket being fairly common place. Other species included Whiting, various flatfish, Angler Fish and the odd Catfish. Then the port underwent quite a major angling shake up in terms of new forward looking skippers with more modern, comfortable, faster boats, and most important of all, the will to go out further and explore.

I recall getting an invite to go over and take a look at the emerging wreck fishing scene just as it was all about to kick off. For the life of me I can't remember the exact date, though I'm fairly confident it would be towards the end of the 1970's. The owner of a prospective wrecking boat whose name I can't remember either handed out the invite. But I can remember the name of the skipper, which was Stu Johnson, and the boat which was 'Sea Trek', a combination that was about to eclipse the likes of JJ McVicar at Plymouth and the Passmore & Trust partnership at Brixham on the big fish, big catch scene, establishing Whitby as the top port in the country, arguably even in Europe, in a way that few offshore boat anglers previously could ever have dreamt was even remotely possible. That's a measure of how great Whitby was about to become.

This whole area of the North Sea is littered with wrecks. Since the start of the sixteenth century it's reckoned that around 15,000 boats have been lost within range of the Yorkshire coast, with details of around 1,500 lying in between 200 and 300 feet of water thought to have been documented.

Big seas and some pretty wild conditions, especially with a good northerly blow putting up a big swell would have seen to that. But as with the mid channel wrecks off Devon and Cornwall prior to what was about to happen, wrecks were seen as being no more than 'fasteners' on the bottom which commercial fishermen would do their utmost to avoid. The fact that the sea bed is so heavy along the Yorkshire coast helped preserve both the wrecks and the surrounding ground as 'fish sanctuaries', which during the 1970's on through the 1980's were quite literally bursting with fish. It was a match made in heaven.

As the port's reputation grew, obviously there was a pro-rata increase in demand for angling boat space, which eventually increased the size of the angling fleet to around 60 boats, both full time and part time. Unfortunately, while the town's reputation was being built on spectacular hauls and specimen fish, as ever, only a handful of boats, particularly when the initial explosion happened, were equipped to provide what everyone was presumably booking up to catch.

At its peak there were probably no more than 20 boats equipped electronically and manned with the right calibre of skippering skills to offer any real chance of serious wreck fishing success, and as with all ports, this list would have a pecking order, with the best at one end and the rest down at the other.

'Sea Trek' I've already mentioned. Stu Johnson was the man making most, though not all of the headlines, with big Cod catches at times topping 3,000 pounds. Dennis Winspeare with 'The Boys' was another. Other boats with a big following recording good results included 'Dark Island' and 'Shy Torque'. Whitby had arrived.



As with all ports, there are ways to fish and be in the best position of getting a good result, and there are other ways to fish, which while they can still be productive, are maybe less consistent. In that regard, Whitby, and let's not forget its neighbouring ports with a similar potential, became synonymous with rough tough fishing of a kind that certainly wasn't for the feint-hearted. Jigging heavy chrome pirks backed up by feathers or muppets on short droppers all day, even without any fish on the end, is body creasing stuff.

Heavy rods and reels loaded with 50 pounds bs line were called for to give anglers a fighting chance, both of pulling free from the numerous tackle hang-ups, and pulling up strings of big heavy fish when they attacked in force, as they so easily could. It's a good job that Yorkshire and its adjacent catchments had a wealth of miners used to hard physical work to help fill these boat space. Not exactly my favourite type of fishing. But mind blowingly effective when good concentrations of fish are located.

In the main, these would be Cod. The press was regularly littered with reports and pictures of huge hauls and monster individual fish from the Whitby wrecks. The Cod record went on a number of occasions. Added to this was also the Ling. Coalfish were another species on the wrecks, and while they weren't exactly numerous, like the Cod and Ling, they could certainly pile on the pounds.

Ironically, the biggest Cod Whitby ever produced, and the standing record at the close of the century at 58.6.0 caught by Noel Cook in 1992, came from open ground within a few miles of the shore. But if you wanted big fish and big hauls with no two fish take home limit like at Plymouth, Brixham and the rest, it had to be the Yorkshire wrecks. But as they commercials began to latch on and start netting these hot spots, it would become increasingly more difficult and more time consuming in terms of sailing distances to find wrecks available for anglers to fish.

Any removal of fish from a small holding target such as a wreck is bound to make a dent in the population. Yes, fish like Cod, Ling and Coalfish are mobile and can naturally 'restock' a wreck quite quickly from the hundreds of square miles of adjacent heavy ground after the netters have gone, and not even the netters can get every fish. So it wasn't angling, and it wasn't entirely wreck netting that brought Whitby's World class wreck fishing to its knees towards the end of the 1980's on into the 1990's, though both undoubtedly would have played their part.

More likely it was a combination of things, potentially including commercial over fishing; not giving fish time to grow to maturity; new methods of commercial fishing; not enough control over EU registered boats; and finally, poor spawning years and subsequent recruitment, all conspiring together in some combination or other to send North Sea fish stocks plummeting, the consequences of which for angling were dire, especially coming at a time of austerity in the Thatcher years when would-be participants also needed to prioritise their spending.

Though I did some charter wreck fishing out of Whitby and Bridlington during both the boom and the leaner years, my top priority was always fishing from my own trailed boat with Dave Devine. An earlier fishing partner of mine, Steve Lill, who I had shared the ownership of my first small boat outfit with, bought himself a boat or around 25 feet which he decided to moor up at Whitby.

Other than a VHF radio, there wasn't much in the way of electronics aboard Steve's boat. But we did okay drifting ground marks, sometimes with pirks and muppets, other times giving our arms a rest fishing with bait. Pirking is good when there are lots of Cod about. It can be soul destroying when fish are thin on the ground. I remember one day when from the very first drop we were into decent Cod as fast as we could get the lures back down in front of them. I don't know if we'd inadvertently found a wreck of just a huge shoal. We got just 3 good long drifts in before we lost touch. But what a day. So many fish we had to leave our tackle on the boat to fit it all into the car.

We also enjoyed some great catches from the dinghy too right through the 1980's. Nothing individually huge, but plenty of them. Booby beads on droppers with the hooks loaded up with black lug usually did the business. We also experimented using home made chrome lures with a line attachment loop set into the side and short dropper from it filled with beads and coloured pieces of electrical insulation. Baited, these gave the option of jigging and having a rest, and they caught us plenty of fish.

Some days we would also use a surface drogue to slow the drift down when the breeze was 'brisk'. One day, the blue GPO cord attached to the drogue came back in chafed and apparently bitten through which was a bit of a mystery as we never saw anything swimming near to it. A period of fishing which continued on into the 1990's, until the catch rates both for us and everyone else began slipping into decline for the reasons already outlined, at which point we gave over making the long trailing trek across the Pennines.

During the lean years either side of the Millennium, metaphorically speaking, some of the angling boats went under. Both the fleet and angling client availability shrank. A lean time in which any boat angling businesses that did manage to stay afloat could only do so through diversification.

One such a man was Paul Kilpatrick who skippers 'Sea Otter 2'. I first fished with Paul in 2014 when I was able to quiz him on the history of the Whitby story and his part in it, plus of course, catch myself a few nice Cod from a mix of inshore wrecks and open ground fairly close in to the south of the town.



Back at the harbour we also recorded a short audio interview on the same topic, and very enlightening it was too, particularly with regard to commercial pressure in the area now having been relaxed, with the exception of scallop dredging boats from all over the place devastating the sea bed after first cleaning out and destroying their own home grounds.

During the lean years, drifting both the ground and the inshore wrecks, Paul experimented fishing with shads. Not on long flying collar rigs slowly brought up through the water column as would be the case for Pollack or Coalfish, but on a monofilament link of around 4 feet in length from a 3 way swivel, the top eye of which was connected to the reel line and the bottom to a couple of feet of mono with a lead weight. And instead of fishing them on a slow retrieve, the lead was bounced up and down rather like jigging, to give the lures a nice swimming action.

The Cod loved them. Other species too, including the occasional Halibut as evidenced by a specimen of 53 pounds caught by Barry Kemper a couple of weeks before I first fished aboard 'Sea Otter 2'. Paul also discovered that uptide fishing close in to the shore with worm and squid worked well over the winter months, producing the same stamp of fish of between maybe 5 pounds and mid-double figures that the shadding was producing during the summer and autumn.

Like a phoenix then, Whitby has risen from the ashes. The fish are back, though not in the same numbers, size range, or mix as the during the 1970's and 80's, but none the less, of a quality and quantity to put the town right back up on there on the must visit list once again, this time producing the goods within easy steaming distance of the port. And still the fishing continues to improve.

Halibut are now more regularly caught along the Yorkshire coast than they are up in Scotland. Granted, not to the same sort of size that venues like Scrabster and Orkney used to enjoy. But they don't see them at all these days. Porbeagle Sharks too. There have always been incidents of Porbeagles occasionally snatching fish from anglers' hooks. Now they are starting to be deliberately targeted with some measure of success. Again, not to the extent of other ports, yet, all contributing to Whitby's horizons being widened. But for now, the extraordinary glory days of the past are but a fond memory.

THE ABU AMBASSADEUR 12 BOAT REEL

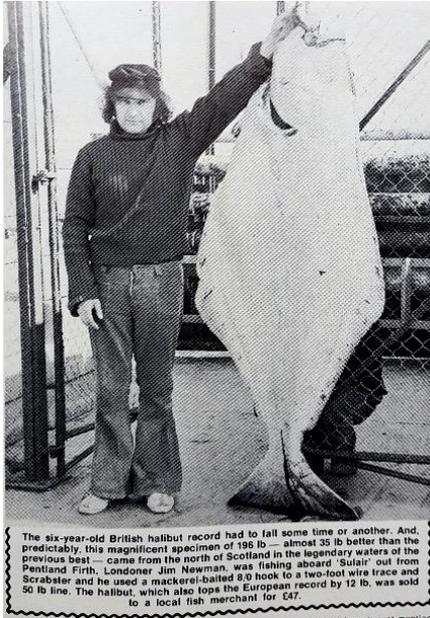
Swedish tackle manufacturing giant ABU have produced more than a few iconic rods and reels over the years, including their Ambassadeur 600, 6500 and 7000 reels and the Atlantic 484 surf and tournament casting rod. Historically classic pieces of kit all of them which will be forever remembered, and in the case of the reels, still in production.

Less well known amongst ABU's reels is the Ambassadeur 12 introduced in 1975. A silver-grey steel cased reel, built in part with components borrowed from elsewhere in the popular Ambassadeur range, reconstituted into a simple, robust, no nonsense boat reel, which as the smallest sibling in a three-model family including the 20 and the 30 for increasingly heavier fish and deep water work, for some reason never really caught on with the boat angling public.

To me, this was a great shame, as in my eyes the Ambassadeur 12 was arguably the best 9000 sized boat reel on the market at the time. As such, I owned three, one of which was used to haul up skate to 140 pounds, as well as sharks, Tope, Conger and all the rest. In fact, I still have two of them which I

had serviced and replacement anti-backwinds fitted after an invite to join the ABU management Christmas Cod bash on the Mersey several years ago thanks to 'Jensen II' skipper Tony Parry, where I was able to give the top brass some grief over dropping the model from their range in 1984.

HALIBUT 197 POUNDS



The six-year-old British halibut record had to fall some time or another. And, predictably, this magnificent specimen of 196 lb — almost 35 lb better than the previous best — came from the north of Scotland in the legendary waters of the Pentland Firth, Lothian. Jim Newman, was fishing aboard 'Sulair' out from Scrabster and he used a mackerel-baited 8 0 hook to a two-foot wire trace and 50 lb line. The halibut, which also tops the European record by 12 lb, was sold to a local fish merchant for £47.

Instrumental in promoting the deliberate pursuit of big Halibut was Jim Newman, a dedicated Halibut enthusiast, who like many before and since drew a blank on his first attempt. But made of firmer stuff, he was no quitter, and on his second visit he caught two and lost another, followed on his third attempt by a new British and European record of 197 pounds taken in April 1974 from the Pentland Firth.

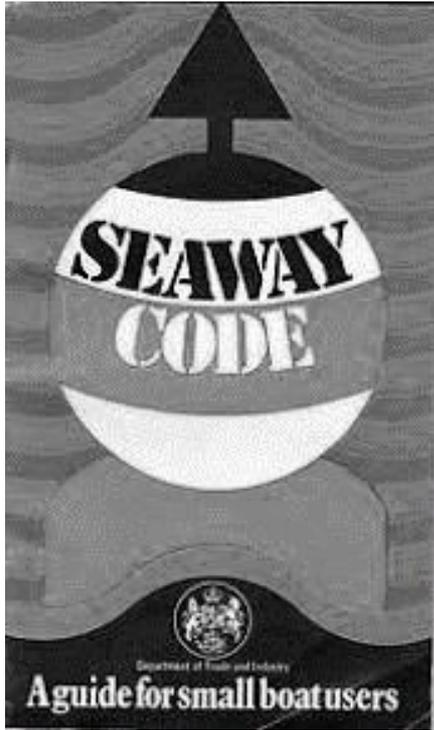
Jim Newman was a man who, along with other like minded die hard Halibut fanatics, not only started to discover new marks, but also new tactics in terms of timing, baits, lures and all the rest, to the point that Sea Angler magazine declared 1975 as being 'The Year of the Halibut'. A story whose modern history starts in 1966 (Chapter 8) with earlier successes dating as far back as the start of the twentieth century extracted from 'Modern Sea Angling', written by F.D. Holcombe (Frederick Warne, 1932).

THE SEAWAY CODE

The launch of the booklet 'The Seaway Code' was publicised in the Daily Express on the 26th of April 1974 by no less a person than Clive Gammon, under the tag 'Small Boat Fishing – is it Britain's Most Dangerous Sport?'. The report goes on to say.....

"Putting to sea in a boat that's too small - the most basic danger for anglers – is highlighted in a newly published book, 'The Seaway Code.' And rightly so. Not a year goes by without a frightening number of drowning tragedies involving rod fishermen who have gone to sea in small boats. I strongly suspect that if precise numbers were known - the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents doesn't differentiate in its statistics between angling fatalities and other drowning accidents – then sea angling might prove to be the most dangerous sport practised in Britain. Frankly it terrifies me to see, as I often do, anglers trying to fish from tiny pram dinghies that can be unstable even in an open harbour on a windy day.

Published by the Department of Trade and Industry, the Code, in a special section for sea anglers, recommends 12ft. as a minimum length for a sea boat - and that no more than two persons should fish from it. Another two feet of length should be allowed for each extra person. And the design of the boat should be beamy, with width about one third of the length so that it provides a stable platform and room



to move about. Inflatable craft are not recommended for sea angling. Sharp gaffs and big hooks can damage them too easily. You'll often see anglers clambering aboard boats in thigh waders - which can be a death trap, quickly filling with water and dragging down anyone unlucky enough to go overboard. All normal safety equipment should be carried - the Code lists items from flares to an adequate anchor, chain and warp. Anglers, it points out, venture further out to sea and stay out longer than most other leisure-time boat users.

There's another special hazard the code lists, which ironically enough is most acute when you are enjoying first class sport. It's easy then to dump fish on the bottom boards as they are swung inboard, promising yourself that you'll tidy up later. But fish are slimy.

Moving about to rebait or to reach for some piece of equipment makes it so easy for the angler to slip on them and go overboard. So box your fish as you catch them. Sensible boat handling is part of good angling technique. And that's what you need to put you in the running for a prize in the Daily Express Angling Feat of the Month competition for April."

BRITAIN'S FIRST TON-UP CONGER

At 102½ pounds, Britain's first rod caught 100 lb plus Conger was taken from the wreck of the 'Flying Enterprise' in the western approaches to the English Channel by Ron Thompson fishing from Colin Williams boat 'Karen Jane' in 1974. Amazingly, the huge Eel took a big pirk. Ron was a member of a 10 strong party of London Britannia SAC members.

The Enterprise was a freighter that made headline news around the World after her cargo shifted in a gale causing it to take on an impossible list. For more than a week it was towed towards Falmouth, but finally sank just 24 hours away from port. The total catch on that day was 4,598 lbs, the biggest in the history of wreck angling at the time in one 24 hour period.

Ron Thompson's fish would be the first of many 100 pound-plus Congers caught during the twentieth century. The rest of those recorded by the British Conger Club are shown in the table below.....

WEIGHT	ANGLER	YEAR	BOAT	SKIPPER	PORT
133.4.0	Vic Evans	1995	Sea Spray	Vic Evans	Brixham
115.0.0	Shaun Tromans	1999	Scorpion	Dave Brett	Plymouth
112.8.0	Niall Ball	1992	Saltwind of Dart	Lloyd Saunders	Dartmouth
112.8.0	Derek Marsh	1992	Electric Blue	Tony Allen	Plymouth
111.4.0	T. Kerrison	1992	Electric Blue	Tony Allen	Plymouth

110.11.0	H C Clausen	1991	The Mistress	Bill Wraner	Plymouth
109.6.0	R Potter	1976	Boa Pescador	Steve Barrett	Plymouth
108.9.0	L Coffill	1993	Helen Louise	Brian Joslin	Rye
108.0.0	V Kroon	1991	Midnight Express	Dougal Lane	Guernsey
107.12.0	P Legien	1998	Smuggler	Colin Dukes	Exmouth
107.0.0	Graham Tibbs	1996	Waypoint	Graham Tibbs	Dungeness
106.0.0	S Hetherington	1997	Smuggler	Colin Dukes	Exmouth
105.8.0	S Norris	1995	Smuggler	Colin Dukes	Exmouth
105.0.0	N Best	1998	Gemini	Dave Harrison	Brixham
105.0.0	Jim Calvert	1992	The Mistress	Bill Warner	Plymouth
104.12.0	R Braddock	1995	Tiburon	Graham Hannaford	Plymouth
104.8.0	C Homden	1996	Waypoint	Graham Tibbs	Dungeness
103.8.0	A Paddon	1998	Gemini	Dave Harrison	Brixham
103.0.0	M Salem	1998	Peace & Plenty	Chris Tett	Weymouth
103.0.0	Jim Calvert	1992	The Mistress	Bill Warner	Plymouth
102.8.0	John Marchant	1978	Norvic	Tony Allen	Plymouth
102.8.0	Ray Street	1981	Gay Girl II	Bob Williamson	Plymouth
102.8.0	Ron Thompson	1974	Karen Jane	Colin Williams	Mevagissey
102.6.0	D Platt	1995	Smuggler	Colin Dukes	Exmouth
102.0.0	Dave Kyte	1994	Carrick	Bill Dow	Eastbourne
101.8.0	Wally Ellis	1978	Norvik	Tony Allen	Plymouth
101.8.0	Mel Russ	1991	Electric Blue	Tony Allen	Plymouth
101.8.0	Graham Tibbs	1996	Waypoint	Graham Tibbs	Dungeness

101.0.0	Michael Pass	1990	Helen Louise	Brian Joslin	Rye
100.8.0	Dave Somers	1994	Nikaria	Chris Martin	Newhaven
100.2.0	Tony Welch	1990	Sea Spray	Vic Evans	Brixham
100.0.0	Dave Higgins	1999	Sundance II	Roger Bayzand	Lymington
100.0.0	Bill Wright	1990	Helen Louise	Brian Joslin	Rye

THE NATIONAL MULLET CLUB

Unlike some of the better known national ‘single species organisations’ such as the Tope Club (TACGB) and Shark Angling Club (SACGB) which have flashed in and out of the angling spotlight over the years, the National Mullet Club (NMC) has quietly gone about its business for the most part keeping out of the limelight.



As with the SACGB, this is not actually a single species club, in this case being ‘obsessed’ with the family Mugilidae, the Grey Mulletts, of which 3 are recognised as being native to the British Isles. Of course, with sea temperatures rising as they are, that could well change. But so far as the twentieth century is concerned, from its launch date in 1975, NMC members have had their interest focused on the Thick Lipped Grey Mullet *Chelon labrosus*, Thin Lipped Grey Mullet *Liza ramada*, and Golden Grey Mullet *Liza aurata*.

From the onset, the aims of the club have been, and continue to be the practical angling, with sharing of information, gaining a greater understanding of the various Mullet species, and conservation at its core. All members are encouraged to re-

turn all Mullet at all times, with the club preferring to accept catch records on the basis of trust rather than dead bodies.

Developing suitable fishery management policies that will allow the stock to grow through sustainable commercial fishing is a key objective, until such time as the Mulletts become a recreational only fishery, which as with the Bass, is something club members and the angling World generally would dearly like to see. To those ends, the NMC have the following specified aims.....

To promote interest and help those wishing to recreationally fish for Grey Mullet of all species.

To campaign for and support any measures to prevent illegal, unreported and unlicensed fishing.

To assist authorities with data collection to help manage the mullet fishery.

To have the Grey Mullet fishery managed in a sustainable manner reflecting environmental, social and economic benefits of recreational angling.

To make all forms of commercial fishing licensed and all landings reportable.

To advocate the practice of catch and release, but to respect the rights of anglers to retain fish whilst acting responsibly with regard to both the number of fish retained and their size.

To seek legislation banning the netting of aggregations.

To campaign for a MCRS of 47cm, the size at which 50% of mullet will be mature and can breed.

To campaign for and support legislative measures to exclude nets from estuaries and other areas considered nursery areas for mullet and other species.

Unlike the SACGB, TACGB and BCC, the NMC has no target qualifying weight for membership. Anyone can join and everyone is welcome, with regular organised 'fish-ins' around the country at which guidance and help can be sought and is given by more experienced mullet fishing practitioners.

There is also a journal entitled 'Grey Ghost' published in the spring and autumn of each year, in addition to which there are newsletters over the summer months, and of course, the incentive of bronze, silver, gold and platinum award certificates for outstanding examples of each of the 3 target species, topped off by trophies for the best Mullet caught regionally, and for the best Mullet landed at an organised 'fish-in' event.

NOTE: The scientific names shown on the club badge featured alongside the opening paragraph have since been updated to those quoted in the accompanying paragraph.

RUSS SYMONS



Like a number of anglers of this period including legendary coarse angler Richard Walker and shore caster Les Moncrieff, Russ Symons' roots were very firmly anchored in engineering, in this case at the naval dockyards of Plymouth, training a mix of new engineers and naval personnel. From a general angling perspective, perhaps not that important. But at a time, when to put it bluntly, angling tackle was crude in the extreme, the ability to seek out or innovate ways of improving matters and deliver engineering solutions for yourself with a knock-on effect for others is what has brought angling on in leaps and bounds.

In particular, light tackle sport fishing, which for Russ would become a passion throughout the 1970's and early-1980's, when any potential weakness not only could but often would result in lost fish when line breaking strains were being pushed to their absolute limits; sometimes even beyond.

The ability to seek out scientific or engineering solutions and place them into angling scenario's eventually led Russ into the World of 'sport fishing' and line class records. A bit of a controversial subject since the turn of the century at a time when for many anglers records now count for little more than nothing, and fish are to be stressed as little as possible to facilitate their safe release.

Back in the 1970's and early-80's, light tackle fishing was something quite a lot of anglers aspired to participate in, and which along with uptide fishing, played a very important role in developing the quality of fishing and tackle we enjoy today, where balanced outfits allow people to maximise the enjoyment they derive from individual fish as opposed to fishing simply to fill the deepfreeze, which with declining fish stocks is no bad thing at all.

This resulted in Russ breaking 2 IGFA World and 7 European line class records, including a Pollack of just over 18 pounds taken on 6 pounds breaking strain line, which when the records later went metric, he did all over again in the new 4 Kg category with a Pollack of 21 pounds 6 ounces.

Both fish, along with his other records, were facilitated to no small extent through collaboration with Terry Carroll at Conoflex, who made him rods with the correct test curve leading on to the development of better engineered reels as part of an attempt to identify as many potential tackle weak spots as possible before the fish could find and exploit them. However, in a recent conversation on the topic, Russ concedes that the interest in light line fishing and lines class records has now all but gone, both on a personal as well as a general level.

Taking a step further back in time, Russ Symons was present at the inaugural meeting of the British Conger Club in 1962 (see Chapter 8), arguably the greatest single species angling organisation of all time. As a BCC member, he is credited with having caught the first 80 pound plus Conger of the 'modern' era, and was the first BCC member to win a gold medal with a fish of 83 pounds, bettered a week later by a fish taken aboard 'Our Unity' which broke the standing British record.

A time when there were still good numbers of virgin wrecks to be found piled high with big fish; ground breaking skippers willing and able to search them out, and pioneering anglers full of adventurous spirit, spurred on by improvements on all fronts in terms of the technical know how necessary to exploit these amazing, often once in a lifetime situations.

Thankfully, Russ was never a man to keep his discoveries and passion to himself taking him into sea angling journalism. But as more than a mere reporter of the facts, he was, and still is, an angling writer who likes to incorporate a degree of thought provoking questioning into his work to encourage others to explore and innovate for themselves, initially through the pages Creel under the editorship of the great Brian Harris, later turning his attention to Angling Times, then over to Anglers Mail working with its then features Editor Mel Russ who would go on to take the helm of magazine market leader, Sea Angler, until his retirement in 2014.

In more reflective mood, as has been said before by a number of anglers of the same era, Russ Symons views the 1970's through into the 1980's as anglings 'Golden Era', to which unfortunately, it appears there is no going back, which for those lucky enough to have been a part of it is perhaps one small consolation for have piled on the years, myself included.

Also, the golden era of creative angling journalism based on thoughtful, adventurous, often ground-breaking work done by people as adept with the pen as they were with the rod, whereas today Russ suggests that what you invariably get is 'tripe' spoon fed to people in such a way that they don't need to serve an apprenticeship. The demand now is for instant success in the same way that television offers instant stardom to people who have done nothing to earn the right to be where they are.

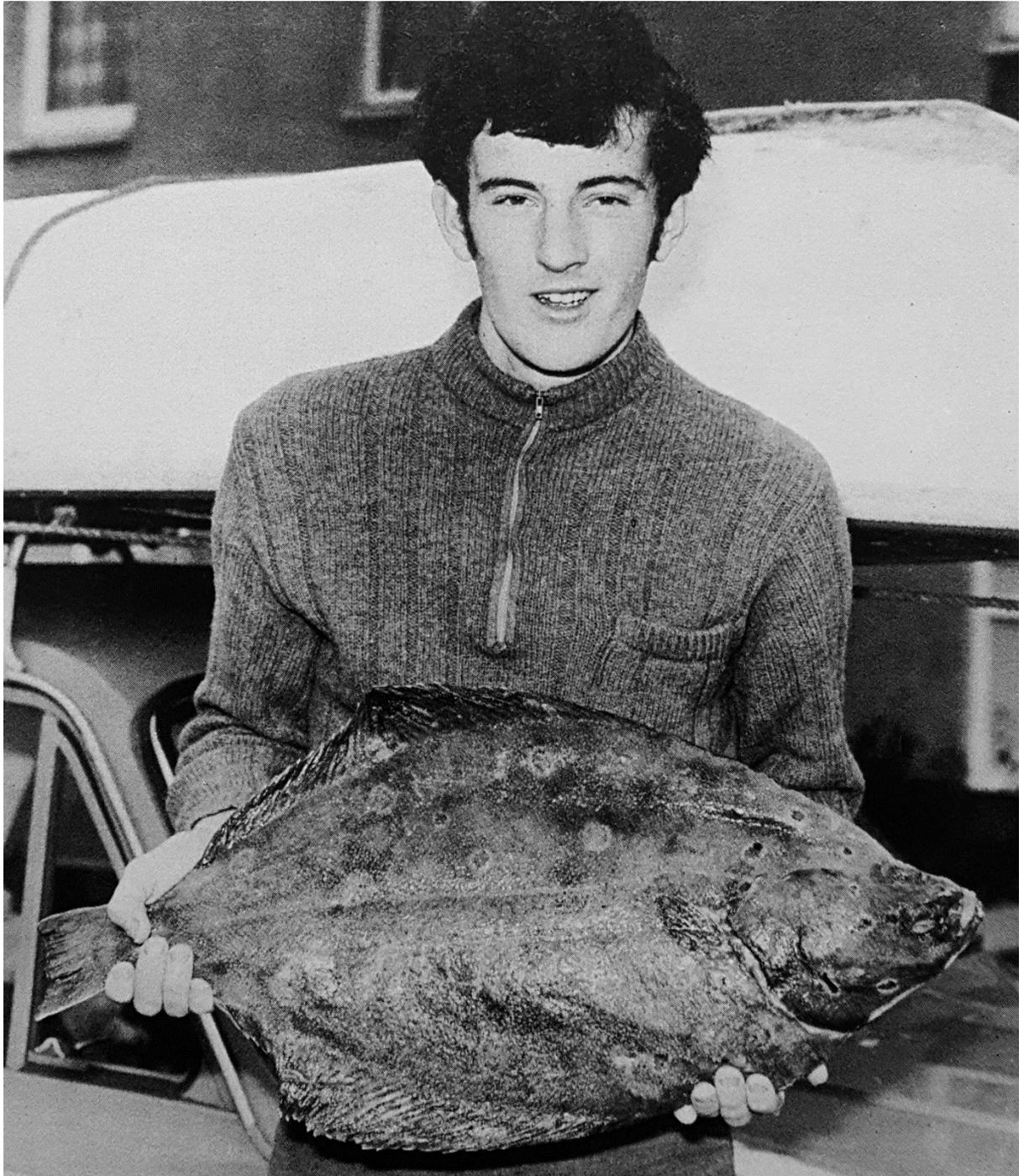
RETURN OF THE NORTH SEA TUNNY

Despite North Sea Tunny fishing free falling into terminal decline during the mid-1950's, occasional reported sightings continued to filter through over the following decades. Bearing in mind that it wasn't the Tunny themselves which suddenly became scarce so much as the Herrings they preyed upon, which made locating them difficult, if not impossible. So, it shouldn't come as any great surprise to hear that some Tunny (BFT) are still knocking about, evidenced by a 9 foot 6 inch specimen washed up on the shore at Hunstanton, Norfolk, in the autumn of 1974.

BRITAIN'S FIRST DOUBLE FIGURE PLAICE

Sixteen year old Harry Gardiner took the British and Scottish Plaice record into double figures with this

beauty of 10.3.8 while dinghy fishing in Longa Sound, Gairloch, in Wester Ross in 1974. The only double figure rod caught Plaice in either UK or Irish sea angling history.



TENBY

Tenby during the late-1970's was a very popular boat fishing venue. My first visit to the place in 1978 was to fish a trip organised by Angling Times with no less a person on board than the legend that is Clive Gammon. Without naming names, and without wishing to defame anybody, I've heard it said on more than one occasion that Gammon was more of a writer than he was an angler. A man who could paint a picture so well with words that you could almost taste the salt in the air as you read his articles.

Also a man in the right place at the right time, which was South Wales when there were sufficient fish still knocking about that it wasn't difficult to come away with a flattering result.

Note: for those taking exception to what has just been said, I merely report what I've heard said. These are other peoples' words, not mine.

That corner of south west Wales was a big producer of good Tope back then, which was to be the main focus of our day. I remember it was blowing quite a bit, but not so bad as to stop us getting out to where we needed to be. One quick stop en route to feather up half a box of Mackerel and we were in business. The anchor was down, the boat was nicely settled in the tide, and an assortment of Mackerel baits were very quickly in position where within minutes they were being eaten. Unfortunately for the focus of the trip, not by Tope; leastways not initially.

This was my first personal taste of Gammon's legendary hatred of Lesser Spotted Dogfish. If he thought we he was being plagued by them back then, it's a good job he isn't around to wet a line today. Outside of the LSD's and a few nice Huss, the bulk of the action came from some quite sizeable Thornback Rays. I also had my first Turbot that a day. A small fish of around 3 pounds which had somehow managed to wolf down a whole Mackerel with its tail removed to prevent it spinning in the tide.

Unfortunately, by that stage, still not even a sniff of a Tope, at which point Clive decided to put out a 'proper' Tope bait. A whole Mackerel with the tail removed and a small chunk cut out of its back just behind the head from which it oozed plenty of blood, differing markedly from our mix of fillet baits, head and shoulder cuts, and flappers which had seen not so much as a hint of a Tope. Gammon then puts out his 'proper' Tope bait and hooks up one within minutes, quickly followed by another, and another.

At face value, I can't see that much difference between some of what we'd already tried and the new set up, but the Tope most certainly could. As a result, we were treated to an object lesson in how it's done by the master. Clive Gammon 3, the rest of us zero. So much then for him not being the greatest when it comes to actually catching fish. What must that say about the rest of us?

THE FYLDE COAST JUMBO COD ERA

When I first started small boat fishing along Lancashire's Fylde Coast at the start of the 1970's, two things were conspicuous by their sparsity. One was other small boats, and the other, large Cod. Two factors which for this story work hand in glove. Trailed boat fishing really was in its infancy at the time. What boats there were tended to be small displacement hulls with Seagull outboards and were barely seaworthy. My boat partner at the time Steve Lill and I had a 16 foot Mackay Viking powered by a 9.9 hp Johnson outboard which was about as big and as seaworthy as outfits came at that time. The age of the faster planning hull was still a few years away.

The relevance of this information is to set a bit of context. The fishing was done mainly within a mile or two of the coast over heavy ground in between 30 and 40 feet of water, which as it would turn out, was perfect for the big Cod era waiting in the wings. But we didn't know that at the time. Cod were caught, but they were mainly small, and mixed in amongst large hauls of good sized Whiting.

There's no way of positively knowing when, how, and by whom the big Cod were discovered. Eventual encounters were bound to happen at some point, which when they did, word spread rapidly on the jungle telegraph. Big fish taken on night lines set on the beach would be another contributing factor. But odd big fish can turn up anywhere. It isn't until they start showing at more than an occasional rate that people start to take note and investigate, which is exactly what happened here.



As a consequence, more people would then start buying boats, so even more encounters would take place, one facilitating the other, until finally a point is reached where every man and his dog is looking to buy a boat and get a slice of the action, including visitors from afar, once Lancashire's 'Jumbo Cod' credentials started to make the pages of the national angling press.

The Fylde Coast is an exposed west facing peninsula with sea walls protecting much of its length. Up against these, the tide has pushed mounds of steep soft shingle shelving down to the muddy sandy beach which is often criss-crossed with gullies and banks, certainly from Cleveleys northwards. It can also be soft in places. Never an easy place to get a boat in and out from with very few permitted launching slips. In short, an area fraught with difficulties. Certainly not the kind of place you can regularly get away with fishing entirely on your own.

Once launched there were also dangers afloat too. Being so exposed, and having sea walls, makes for dangerous times over the high water period, with only limited potential 'escape' routes. Consequently, there were accidents, including fatalities, all of which prompted the need for organisation offering mutual assistance, which would eventually lead to the formation of 3 tractor launching small boat clubs (see Chapter 9).

That then, hopefully, sets the scene. Small boat fishing was in its infancy at an exposed uncompromising location where for some inexplicable reason, some of the biggest Cod in the country decided to put in a decade long appearance within range of even the smallest slowest boats. Whether they had been there prior to their discovery is something we will never know. I would guess they probably had, for a few years at least.

I base this on something Folkestone match angler Alan Yates told me, coupled to what happened in other parts of the country. Both Cod numbers and big individual Cod were absent around much of the country prior to the late-1960's. Then we had the extremely bad winter of 1962/63, when in many places even the sea froze. This pushed potential predators likely to eat the eggs of spawning Cod well away to where it wasn't so cold. Consequently, and this is only the theory, many more tiny Cod than usual made

it through, increasing stock numbers for years to come, with larger numbers than usual making it through to jumbo proportions.

You only have to look at the Cod fishing in the Clyde around the same time. For Dungeness and the south east it was a boom time. The Isle of Wight and South Wales got in on the action too, followed a few years later by the shore lads at Balcary on the Scottish Solway Coast. It's thought the Balcary fish might have been present earlier too, with the locals managing to keep a lid on it in for a while.

Collectively, this suggests that the Fylde Coast was part of a national trend, and that those first few dinghies out there making those earliest encounters were in all probability actually seeing the start of things. Unfortunately, and at all these locations, within a decade or so it was pretty much over, as the initial excess of fish facilitating the bigger fish began to peter out, through a combination of stock-rebalancing and commercial attention, particularly in the case of the Clyde, which lost its Cod virtually overnight.



It's easy to look back with rose tinted glasses and see the Fylde Jumbo Era as an exciting time of plenty. I get that feeling myself sometimes when I look back through the photographs. But if I'm honest with myself, it was tough going at times. Apart from all the launching and weather related hardships I've already touched upon, for much of the time there weren't a lot of fish about either.

For the numbers of boats about over the peak decade from the mid-1970's through to the mid-80's, there were

never massive amounts of Cod caught. On any weekend day with a big tide and flat calm sea from December through to the last big tides in February, it could be like a small boat car park. You would literally struggle to find an anchoring spot for a mile of so out anywhere between Cleveleys and Rossall School. Better then to fish mid week, either in the day time, or after dark, both of which we did quite regularly.

Though others may claim to remember things differently, while fishing big blacklug baits on a 4 foot-long flowing trace, bites were often few and far between. Easy then to lose your concentration and risk missing an opportunity. You couldn't miss the bites though. These were often extremely violent, with the rod being pulled so far over by a big fish making off down the tide that the rod butt would be up clear of the deck, and if you didn't react quickly, the lot would be gone over the back. All adrenalin pumping stuff.

It was the same again when the ghostly shape of a monster Cod suddenly appeared out of the murky water and wouldn't fit inside the landing net. On a couple of occasions I had to lift very big fish into the boat by their gills for Steve Lill. We're talking here of fish topping 30 pounds. Eventually I had a super-sized landing net made, which was just as well, as it was quickly pressed into service by a fish of 38 pounds, second only to the 42 pound north west Cod record taken by Mark Millar aboard Frank Bee's dinghy 'Viking II' in 1985.

Every time we went out, we genuinely expected to catch big Cod. We didn't always get them, but the expectation was there, helped along in part by the fact that there weren't always lots of smaller fish interfering with the baits, particularly late in the season. That 38 pound fish however caught by Garth Haslam was a very early fish taken in the first couple of days of December. Garth was actually into a

different big Cod on his other rod at the time when the 38 pounder took, so I picked up the rod and struck. Then Garth lost his fish, so I passed him the rod. We also had a 19 pounder that day, plus maybe half a dozen other lesser doubles. That was about as good as it gets.

Other days you might only see a couple of fish. The best day numerically I can remember for decent fish was a trip with Mick Mairs when we had 12 doubles, the biggest going maybe 15 pounds or so. And one of the best collective catches was a small group of us coming in at the same time at Rossall School one New Year's Day (see the first photograph). Otherwise, it was isolated big fish, maybe a few smaller fish if you were lucky, plus a few blanks thrown in the mix for good measure.

After a good blow and with plenty of colour in the water, the Cod would come right in on to the beaches after dark, as evidenced by the successes of the overnight beach night liners. We put in a fair few dinghy trips after dark hoping to tap into this. But for whatever reason, they were never as successful as the daytime fishing. Probably because we headed out too far.



It's hard to bring yourself to potter out a few hundred yards and put the anchor down on the low water mark, particularly later on when we had bigger more powerful engines. I remember launching one evening with another small boat that was looking to stick with us for safety reasons. It couldn't have been more than 12 feet long. We blasted maybe a mile or so off. Too frightened to venture off that far, they anchored right on the low water line. I had a Cod of maybe 18 pounds, plus a few other bits and pieces. They had at least 2 fish up around the 30 pound mark, which kind-of proves the point.

Two other night trips are also etched onto my mind. The first was with Brian Douglas in his open 13 foot Rana. We had 2 Tilley lamps glowing away as we went down the beach. We couldn't see the sea state in the dark, but you could hear the roar and see a bit of surf here and there, which in hindsight should have sent alarm bells ringing. Slowly, we eased the boat through the breakers ready to jump in as soon as we had enough water to fire up the engine.

Almost immediately, one of the Tillies was taken out by a roller breaking right through the boat. There was no flame, but still the paraffin kept blasting out. You could taste it in the air. But there wasn't time to do anything about it except keep on going. It was way too dangerous to even think of turning back. So off we motored dipping down swells behind which the street lights would momentarily disappear from view. Thankfully, it flattened off in time for a high water exit. We had a few fish. But in truth, I think we were both just relieved to be back on dry land.

The second night trip was a winters evening in the early-1980's. We were going through a particularly cold snap at the time. The previous weekend had seen the trailer sliding down the sandbank slopes due to the beach freezing as the tide was pulling back. This particular night it got down to a record breaking minus 26 degrees Celsius. I'd even had to pour boiling water into the drain plug hole to melt the icicles to get the plug in which tells its own story.

I particularly remember motoring out from the water's edge. The sea was flat calm and frozen for about 500 yards out. It was like a jigsaw puzzle of pieces of broken ice all touching each other flexing over the gentle incoming swell. As we motored off, the boat cut a black path through the ice which you could clearly see when looking back towards the shore with the street lights reflecting on it. But as cold as it was, it didn't feel cold because there was no breeze to make it cut through you. I can't remember the

exact details of the catch. But I can remember having to get a shovel out of my garage when we got back home to try to prise the fish free, which by that stage had become frozen to the deck.

We rarely if ever see weather like that anymore, and that must be having some say in the way the fishing now fluctuates, with smaller Cod arriving later and stopping on until maybe April, while the dogfish never seem to fully disappear at all.

We also regularly had freezing fog to contend with back then. With no GPS, we would be forced to guess where the trailer might be, then send somebody up the beach to take a look, and if need be motor a bit further down for another shot until we got it right. I also recall how the 'dew' from the fog would freeze on the line making it look like 200 pounds of monofilament. This repeatedly needed to be removed from the line between the rod eyes in order to be able to reel in.



So yes, there were some very good fish out there to be caught on the bigger tides when the water was coloured up over the winter months, particularly during the decade between the mid-70's and mid-80's. Before that time we were all learning, and after it the decline was beginning to set in, until eventually all we had was small Codling and the thought that by next winter they would all be 5 to 7 pounds. Sadly, that never happened. Just more of the same. And now it's just a distant memory backed up by a few old black and white photographs such the one here of Mark Millar with his record 42

pound Cod.

HALIBUT RECORD BROKEN

The following by-line with photograph extracted from the 'Skippers Slant' Column of Sea Angler Magazine published in December 1974 says it all. Glaswegian Jimmy McKay takes the British and Scottish Halibut record with a fish of 197 pounds from his own boat 'Viking Queen'.

Jim McKay is a Glaswegian who moved north in 1960 to work on the experimental nuclear power station at Dounreay . . . and stayed. Jim bought his own boat in 1969 and has operated out of the Caithness port of Scrabster for five years. His boat 'Viking Queen' was formerly based on Shetland where the Manson brothers took fantastic catches of big common skate from her.

Jim McKay (34) has one driving ambition . . . for an angler fishing from his boat to crack the 197 lb halibut record set up this year.



CONTROVERSIAL BASS RECORD

The Eddystone Reef has a long history of producing not only spectacular Bass specimens, but equally spectacular Bass hauls, to the point that it has attracted more than its fair share of commercial attention over recent years. Much of this has been done by people catching Bass using angling techniques such



Roy Slater with Britain's biggest ever rod caught Bass of 18 lbs 6 ozs from the famed Eddystone Reef. The fish was hooked on a Red Gill artificial lure, trolled close to the lighthouse.

as trolling lures for fish to put on the table.

One such a person was Roy Slater, who in 1975 landed a Bass of 18.6.0, which despite being destined for the fish market, because it was taken on rod and line by deep slow trolling a redgill lure in around 25 feet of water, he felt he could legitimately put it forward as a British record. Roy Slater also took a 13 pounder during the same week.

First stop with the huge fish was Mike Millman's house in Plymouth to have it photographed and the news story put out. Then, whether you agree or disagree, he had Mike help him with the process of making a record claim, which for the first time in the history of the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC) saw a saltwater claimant with a potentially contentious record claim, summoned to a meeting of the committee to explain the circumstances surrounding the catch and why it should be accepted, given his obvious commercial fishing interests. This Roy Slater was satisfactorily able to do, allowing his fish to take its place in the British record list.

THE HALIBUT RECORD GOES AGAIN



In 1975, Beverley, Yorkshire angler John Hewitt shown in the photograph opposite finally took the British, Scottish and European Halibut record through the 200 pound barrier with a magnificent fish of 210 pounds, taken from the boat 'Viking Queen' skippered by the then standing Halibut record holder Jimmy McKay drifting a mark close to Dunnet Head.

The day also produced a second 3 figure Halibut at 127 pounds for Steve Allen from Norwich fishing aboard Mick O'Donnell's boat 'Clett Rock', both contributing to what Sea Angler Magazine declared was the year of the Halibut, which in hindsight was a prediction that turned out to be absolutely spot on (see Chapter 8).

A lot of very big fish came out in 1975 from around Orkney and Scrabster (Thurso) fishing the Dunnet Head area of the Pentland Firth, often very close in over rough ground, with the fish falling to a variety of approaches including large pirks, Pollack, and Mackerel fished on the drift.

TONY KIRRAGE



Anyone who ever spent time looking through fishing magazines for mail order tackle during the late twentieth century, cannot fail to have come across 'Tony's Tackle' at Eastbourne, owned by Tony Kirrage. An astute businessman, though not always so, more of which later. Of greater importance here has been his ability to catch fish at a competitive level. An ability that would take him right to the top

of the big open shore match angling scene culminating in an England cap, plus, when partnered with Carp angler Mick Hinson in 2004, the top step of the podium in the Rod Hutchinson World Carp Classic at LacAmance in France, beating off all comers from across Europe with a winning weight of 85.35 Kg. Not many people can boast of making the grade in both codes. A versatile and very capable all-round angler

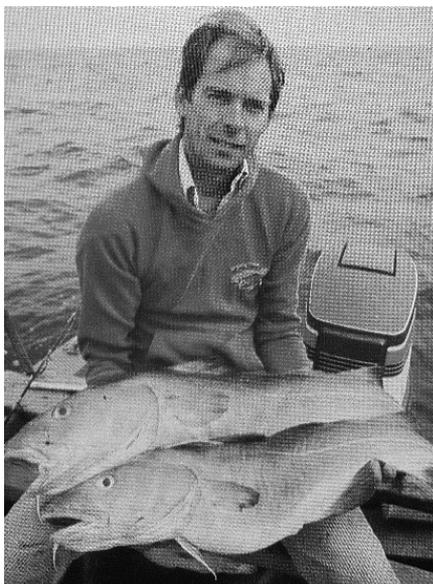
At the peak of his open shore match angling success during the 1970's and 1980's, Tony was winning and being well placed in shore competitions all around Britain and Ireland. Even Gambia and South Africa. In addition, there were also some tremendous dinghy catches of Cod and Bass with his brother-in-law Norman Message (pictured below with brace of Cod) who was also a very good shore match angler, and who coincidentally was capped for England at the same time as Tony fishing in the same team. Then, sadly, in 1994, Tony's first wife Trina suddenly died. A body blow that hit him personally, his fishing, and his business, to a degree from which at one point it looked likely that all 3 might never recover.

'Tony's Tackle' began life in 1975 as your typical coastal town fishing shop, relying heavily on over the counter sales of bait, coinciding with the time that Tony was starting to do really well on the shore match scene. Keen to do even better, he began to design hooks which he felt would give him an advantage, one of which was the sea-match blue produced for him by Mustad of which Tony ordered 500,000, which he began selling through a small advert in the angling press.

This proved to be so popular that he started adding a few extra items of tackle to the advertisement, and before he knew it, his mail order sales were exceeding those of the shop. At one point he was affectionately known as Mr. Zziplex because he was turning over so many Zziplex rods. And because what he was selling was all specialist gear, the sales exploded, with customers literally coming from all over the World.

Buoyed up by his mail order success he began to diversify, which he freely admits was his big mistake. The beginning of his undoing in fact. To sell non specialist items in a market full of competition, you not only have match, but in many cases better the prices being asked elsewhere, as savvy anglers were starting to shop around.

This meant getting the right deals off the manufacturers and turning stuff over for very little, sometimes even zero profit. Add into the mix advertising in all the magazines to the tune of between 4 and 5 thousand pounds per month, plus the sudden death of his wife, and there were days when he wouldn't even bother going into the shop. Is it isn't any wonder that problems began to loom on the horizon.



Things got so bad that the Angling Trade Association (ATA) were reporting that 'Tony's Tackle' was bankrupt and in the hands of the receiver, something they later had to retract as that was not the case. But it didn't help. Creditors did need to be paid, and the business was in very real danger of going under.

One evening, and in desperate need of around £3,000 to keep afloat, Tony went for a drink at his local angling club where they were running one of those ongoing things where you could buy a key and try to open a box containing the money that had accrued so far. He decided to have a go, opened the box, and there inside of it was £3,600. You couldn't write it. The next morning, he cleared his final debt and was able start all over again. But this time with over the counter sales only.

The big thing keeping local walk in tackle shops open these days is most definitely bait. Often an on the day decision transaction

which mail order and the Internet cannot compete with. Getting people into the shop for essentials like bait and the smaller terminal tackle items means they might see and buy something else. Quality big name second-hand tackle is another big draw.

Even then Tony remarked, it seems to get tougher year on year as fewer new recruits come in to pick-up the reins when the older boys like him and myself decide to call it a day. The only thing that might possibly save the situation would be more and bigger fish, particularly amongst the top drawer species such as Cod and Bass. Anything less will in all likelihood see angling become an ever decreasing minority sport, until eventually it no longer happens at all.

LOOE



In British sea angling history, the words Looe and shark fishing are almost interchangeable, and have been since the early days of the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain which set up its headquarters in the town after the pioneering work done there by Brig. J. A. L. Caunter in the early 1950's (see Chapter 7). Blue Sharks were and still are its mainstay, and despite Falmouth's undoubted ability to produce a disproportionately 'larger' ratio of Mako Sharks to Blues, with its own excellent track record in UK terms, Looe was certainly up there still on the Mako hunters venues to visit list. But it has to be said that shark fishing wasn't the only show in town.

I shark fished there on quite a number of occasions. But I also drove down to Looe from Lancashire with the sole purpose of fishing for anything other than sharks on many occasions, and as such, enjoyed some of my best west country reef fishing memories from anywhere along that whole section of the English Channel coast.

We still fished 4 people to the same boats with the same skippers that took out the sharking parties, so there was plenty of room to fish. We also saw a huge variety of reef species, some going to good sizes for what they were. So besides being high seas drifters for the sharks, these skippers also had a very intimate knowledge of the reef systems between Banjo Pier and the Eddystone Light.

It wasn't simply a case of "We have some rock under us so let's try here" attitudes. Some of the anchoring over rock pinnacles had to be very precise taking account of wind and tide, and this was reflected in the results, especially for big Ling. One trip in particular sticks in my mind. We were fishing aboard 'Valhalla' which we always requested. The skipper was slowly circling some pinnacles to get his position right. One of the lads however couldn't wait and dropped a set of baited feathers down. As soon as he saw this, the skipper ordered him to come back until he'd set the anchor. But it was too late, he was struggling. Minutes later he had a Pollack and a Ling, both in double figures up at the boat.

Always at the back of my mind was the targeting of Red Bream. Apart from a few at Newquay, and one at Guernsey, Looe was the only place I ever got the chance to catch them, and always I was determined to grab myself half a dozen on the last day to take home. The problem was that to a degree you had to be selective in how you fished for them, which to some extent ruled other fish you might want out of the equation, while at the same time allowing in some that you didn't want such as Pouting. A bit of a balancing act, which we solved by going for a one trace fits all species solution.

Tied up from 60 pounds monofilament, the lead was attached to the trace using a weak link, above which was a dropper of around 18 inches terminating in a 4/0 to 6/0 hook for the Conger and Ling. Above that and out of self tangling range was a shorter 12 inch dropper with a 2/0 hook for bream and similar sized fish, and further up still, again out of self tangling range, was a 6 inch dropper of lighter mono with a size 1 hook looking to pick up anything small and interesting such as visiting bream and wrasse species. On a couple of occasions, it also came up with brightly coloured Comber.

Sometimes the skipper would break out his own rod and have a go himself. Not to put too fine a point on things, his bottom fishing outfits were absolute garbage. A battered old rusting set of feathers, some of which were missing completely probably bitten off, while others had broken hooks dangling from a battered rod that had only one more eye than me. This was paired up with a semi-seized up reel covered in Mackerel scales and other undetermined debris of biological origin.

Huge slices of Mackerel would then be carved from a fillet and sent down to see what they could find, which as it happens was pretty much everything down there with fins, and particularly Conger. He absolutely wiped the floor with us and was keen to let us know about it with our expensive outfits and carefully crafted rigs. It makes a mockery of some of the some of the stuff you read in magazines about finesse and innovative thinking (some of it probably even written by me).

I always found that the best of the Conger fishing was to be found closer to port over areas of very heavy ground. A so called nocturnal feeder in shallower water, on dull grey lumpy days, you could knock open ground Conger out virtually a fish a drop. I remember my wife getting one of 48 pounds, which away from all the glitz and glamour of deep water wrecking hauls is a very good open ground Eel in anybody's book. But if you specifically wanted a few hours on the Conger, there were 4 hour evening trips aboard smaller open boats fishing just at the back to Looe Island, which is the area Mitchell-Hedges caught his now discredited case of 4 monster Ballan Wrasse back in 1912.

The Eels there usually weren't very big, but there would be plenty of them. Often there would be a plastic dustbin with a lid on it sitting in the centre of the boat to put the fish in with the hook and trace still in place to be retrieved later. The only problem was that as the bin started to fill up, each time you opened it to drop in another, it turned in to a good likeness of a medusa's head as the rest of the captives made a sudden bid for freedom.



Fishing aboard both types of boat in the early 1970's, for me provided some of the most enjoyable trips I ever fished anywhere. The Red Bream, sadly, are now gone (see Chapter 10), and no doubt the quality of everything will not be a patch on what it was back then. Yet certainly in the years I was reef fishing there well offshore, I neither saw nor heard of any other anglers else doing the same.

The nearest most people would come to exploring the potential for fish other than sharks might be to drop a set of baited- feathers down to the bottom in a quiet period while the shark baits were waiting to do their bit. Then, depending of course on the nature of the ground the drift took the boat over, you could be fishing clean ground, or you could be fishing rough. I've been told of odd instances where the boat by chance drifted the odd wreck while the baits were down, coming back with huge Ling and Pollock.

Unfortunately, incidents such as that would be few and far between. Over the rough it would be the usual suspects including Pouting, Ling and maybe Red Bream. I also saw the odd Black Bream, but not in the sorts of numbers

where you could deliberately target them. And over the sand it would generally be very big Whiting. I had them well over 4 pounds, and I know there were bigger specimens. I did also hear of large Haddock and occasional Megrims coming up too. So it was always worth a try when the sharks were playing hard to get.

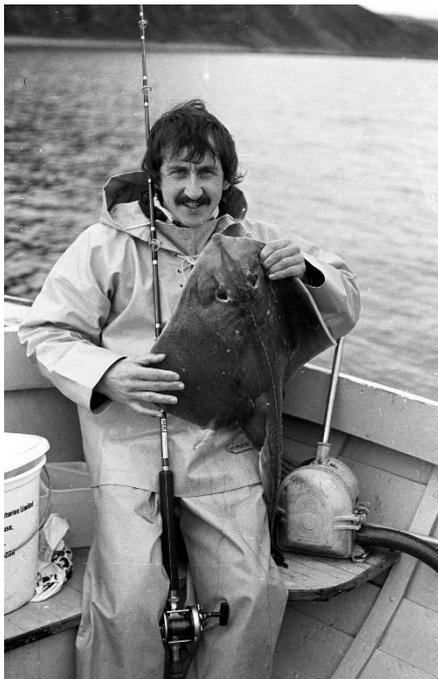
SANDY RAY RECORD CONFUSION

To appreciate this next inclusion, you first of all need to have some grasp of a rather confusing period between the late-1960's and mid-1970's, when the various national record fish committees decided that for a range of reasons they would have a good clear out. Having inherited some rather dubious records from previous 'regimes', a number of those were given the chop, and controlling this to some extent was the British Record Fish Committee which accepts British records from the Welsh, Scottish and Irish lists, as well as from English waters, though for some bizarre reason England doesn't have its own record list, which is another matter for discussion elsewhere.

In the mix along with a number of evicted records were those for the Thornback, Spotted, and Sandy Rays. Misidentification was cited as the main reason for their removal, and new claims were invited to fill the vacant slots, a state of affairs I would ultimately have mixed fortunes with.

In September 1974 I caught a Spotted Ray in Loch Ryan which because it was a first for the club I was with, and therefore a club record, was weighed properly, photographed, and witnessed. Shortly afterwards I was chatting with Dietrich Burkel, who by that stage was the SFSA fish recorder. I mentioned my ray, at which point he told me about the records purge and encouraged me to make a claim, which I did. Some weeks later I was informed that it had been approved, and that it had also been put forward for British and European status, which again, eventually, was approved.

Around the same time, and I have to honest and say I can't be certain of the exact date, I was fishing the deep waters of the Isle of Arran with Scottish international angler Neil McLean who ran the islands creamery. Neil as it happened held the Cuckoo Ray record from the same area we were fishing. So, needing to put a tick against the Cuckoo Ray on my species list, I decided to put a bait out on a flowing



trace to increase my chances of a repeat and came up with as ray. Unfortunately, not a Cuckoo Ray. Instead I had caught a Sandy Ray, which if my memory serves me right was just a few ounces short of 10 pounds. A fish which was photographed and immediately released as it fell some way short of the then Sandy record as we understood things at that time.

This is where the story starts to get a little hazy unfortunately. I've tried to research things more fully but can find nothing. Nor have I been able to elicit much in the way of help from the British and Scottish record fish committees. What I do know is that there was, or had been, an incumbent Sandy record *Raja circularis* with a weight in the teens of pounds, A fish which for whatever reason was evicted, either in the 1968 purge, or at some stage shortly afterwards.

Because this purge hadn't taken place at the time I caught my specimen, as I've said, it went back. Later I find out, again from Dietrich Burkel, that the Sandy Ray record has also been evicted, only this time my fish wasn't weighed on certified scales, nor was its body kept for formal identification, which unlike the

Spotted Ray is a much more difficult fish to accurately identify from photographic evidence alone. So this time no record success.

What makes this story even more interesting, and in some ways bizarre, is what the British Record Fish Committee did next. When a new species enters the record list, the corresponding vacant slot, either boat or shore, is then thrown open to claims, usually with a minimum qualifying weight, which if you read this book in its entirety you will see I have argued both long and hard against for years. But again, that's another story.

For some reason with the Sandy Ray slot, which after the purge suddenly found itself with no incumbent record when split boat and shore records were introduced in 1976, its place in the record list was retained with both the boat and the shore slots vacant and open to claims. In other words, a species as yet to be recorded on rod and line. Why not then list every other species that hasn't been caught on rod and line too, or take the minor administrative option of removing the species altogether? A situation which again, despite me pointing it out to the BRFC, persists to this day.

SOUTHEND NORWAY HADDOCK

Contrary to the inference drawn from the name, the Norway Haddock *Sebastes viviparus* is a small bright red coloured Perch-like fish with a preference for cooler northerly latitudes right up into arctic waters. Scotland should represent the best opportunity of seeing one around the British Isles, though I personally have only ever caught and seen them up in Shetland waters.



That said, at one time they were not unheard of further down into the North Sea to the English border, though I've no doubt that rising sea temperatures will have put paid to that quite some time ago. So why on earth they should start turning up in record proportions as far south as Southend-on-Sea at the northern entrance to the Thames Estuary is anybody's guess. Not just one record, but two. The boat record of

1.13.8 caught by T. Barrett in 1975, and the shore record of 1.3.0 from Southend Pier by F. P. Fawke in 1973, which with 2 years between them can't even be put down as a one off migrational blip.

HUGE SCOTTISH BLUE SHARK

The February 1975 issue of Sea Angler Magazine carried a very enlightening article entitled 'Caithness For Quality' written by Welsh angler Ted Symons, who had moved up to the very top of Scotland to have access to the amazing, and at that time, not fully appreciated offshore boat fishing for assorted round fish species, Halibut, and eventually if you read on, World class Porbeagle Sharks. According to the article, no shark had been taken from the Pentland Firth up to that point, though they were known about in commercial fishing circles through encounters with large fish taking hooked fish from set lines and tangled in their nets.

The article was centred on a party fishing in Brough Bay, which the previous day had produced Common Skate, something London policeman Mike Mansfield was targeting on the morning of the featured trip. The boat was fishing in around 20 fathoms of water quite close in to the cliffs. Within 5 minutes

of the baits touching bottom, Mike Mansfield's offering had been taken, but from the way it was acting, obviously not by a skate.

The general consensus was that it was a Halibut, particularly as it was showing no desire to hug the bottom. Just a heavy strain on the rod without any great attempts to peel off line. Then after maybe 20 minutes or so, the party started to see 'colour' in the water. The fish was on its way to the surface.

Two of the other angling boats also came over to watch, and all were surprised not only that it was a shark, but a huge Blue Shark, a species normally found no further north than the north coast of Cornwall and south west of Ireland. Yet there it was at the surface tightly circling the boat. At one point, so close to one of the other boats that they even had to gun the engine to get out of its way.

Despite constant pressure from the rod it continued to circle, until in Ted Symon's words 'it felt that things had gone on long enough', at which point it surfaced about 20 feet from their boat, then lifted its tail out of the water bringing it down hard on the line, and that as they say was the end of that.

PW Comment: No mention of Porbeagle fishing by this stage, despite local hand line fishermen being 'pestered' by sharks in the area stealing hooked fish from their lines. Shetland would set that particular hare running later in this decade, with the attention eventually shifting south to the Pentland Firth, and ultimately, the World all tackle Porbeagle Shark record of 507 pounds set in 1993.

THE ULTIMATE SHOCKER

In 1975, N. J. Cowley 'shocked' himself and the sea angling World by bringing a huge Electric Ray *Torpedo nobiliana* to the side of the boat while fishing off Cornwall's Dodman Point. It could quite easily have become Deadman Point had it not been handled appropriately, as Electric Rays are one of just a handful of fish which are the only vertebrates able to accumulate and deliver a charge of electricity powerful enough to cause serious damage or even death.

Normally this is used for stunning prey, though can also be defensive should the need arise. The electricity generating organs are situated in each wing, constructed from striated muscle fibres stacked against each other connected together in parallel, which in a particularly large specimen such as the one we are talking about here, may contain as many as 500,000 plates, the upper surface being positive and the lower surface negative. These typically produce discharges in the region of 60 volts, but they can be as much as 220 volts with a current of 8 amps in the largest fish.

PW Comment: The shore record for this species also hails from Cornwall with a weight of 52.11.0 caught by M. A. Wills at Porthallow in 1980. There is a second smaller rarer species recorded from British waters known as the Marbled Electric Ray *Torpedo marmorata*, both records of which come from the waters of the Channel Islands. The boat record stands at 10.14.11 caught by Gary Crane off Sark in 2000, and the shore at 13.15.11 caught by M. E. Porter off Jersey in 1990.

The Irish record of 40 Kg (88 pounds) was set in 2002 at Achill caught by Shay Boylan, and the Welsh boat record of 15.422 Kg (34 pounds) by M. Mathews off Anglesey in 1986. There is no Welsh shore record. Scotland doesn't record the species at all, and I could find no records for the Marbled Electric Ray on rod and line outside the Channel Islands.

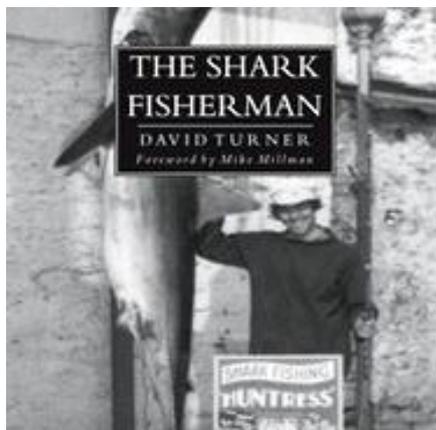
IRELANDS TOPE OF THE YEAR

Strangford Lough produced the best Tope caught anywhere in Ireland in 1975 with this specimen of 56 pounds taken by Wiltshire angler Richard Mann, reported in Sea Angler Magazine in 1976.



THE ENIGMATIC MAKO SHARK – END OF AN ERA

There aren't many species of fish about which you can quote accurate definitive statistics regarding every specimen caught. I stand to be corrected, but outside of one-off wanderers such as say the Dusky



Perch *Epinephelus marginatus*, I would say that the Mako Shark *Isurus oxyrinchus* is arguably the only UK species of fish about which that can be said.

Mako fanatic and author of the book 'The Shark Fisherman (Little Egret Press, 2012), David Turner painstakingly collected together all British Mako Shark catches into a single list (see below), with his own fish of 355 pounds taken aboard Robin Vinnicombe's boat 'Huntress' in 1971 once thought to have been the last Mako to have been caught in British waters. But not so it turns out. Further investigative work by David then led him to Ian Harbage who was able to add a further 4 catches to the list since 1971, unusually, all for small fish of around 130 pounds or less,

the last of which caught by Alice Clemson in 1976 completes the twentieth century list, though you can never say never, with further updates always welcome.

So we have 1976 as the definitive end to the British Mako Shark era. Some were also caught in Irish waters, though not many, and for some reason, usually at the smaller end of the size range, about which I have no further information.

Why an episode spanning 21 years since Hetty Eathorne first brought the species to UK anglers attention (24 years if you count the start date as Hetty's husband John's 300 pounder in 1951, one of two fish given retrospective recognition after the IGFA's contribution to the story, should so abruptly come to a close for what is considered to be a warm water species at a time when rising sea temperatures are now accepted as fact, is a complete mystery. It flies in the face of all the scientific wisdom relating to the species. And having spoken to a wide range of acknowledged Mako authorities, including David Turner, Robin and Frank Vinnicombe, Andrew Alsop, and Richard Pierce of the Shark Trust, I am still no nearer to offering a solution to the dilemma.

THE DEFINITIVE ROD AND LINE UK MAKO SHARK LIST

VENUE	DATE	ANGLER	SKIPPER	BOAT	WEIGHT
Looe	1951	John Eathorne	Bill Butters	Little One	300 pounds
Looe	1954	Mr. Miles	Jack Butters	Paula	230 pounds
Looe	1955	Hetty Eathorne	Bill Butters	Little One	352 pounds
Looe	1956	A. Simpson	Jack Butters	Paula	355.5 lbs
Looe	1956	E. Dawson			129 pounds
Looe	1959	G. Bowler	Jack Butters	Paula	250.5 lbs
Looe	1959	W. Buttle	Jack Symons	Blossom	343 pounds
Looe	1959	A. Melhuish	Bert Dingle	Nautilus	372 pounds
Looe	Late 50's	A. Simpson	Jack Butters	Paula	324 pounds

Falmouth	1960	Murray Mexon	Clinton Powell	Moss Rose	238 pounds
Falmouth	1960	D. Buckland	Clinton Powell	Moss Rose	385 pounds
Falmouth	1960	Veryan Gray	Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	246 pounds
Fowey	1960		Mike Digby	Blue Phantom	160 pounds
Looe	1961	B. Chad-Quick	Ivan Chaston	Tethera	275 pounds
Looe	1961	D. Hartas	Frank Pryn	Golden Spray	342 pounds
Fowey	1961	Dr. Walter Blow	Mike Digby	Blue Phantom	376 pounds
Looe	1961	Mr. Wilson	Johnny Kitto	May Queen	311 pounds
Looe	1961	Jack Sefton	Ray Pengelly	Irene	428.5 lbs
Looe	1962	J. Ellison			345 pounds
Looe	1962	John Hanson	Jack Butters	Paula	427.5 lbs
Falmouth	1962		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	140 pounds
Looe	1963	Jock McDonald			334 pounds
Looe	1963	T. Sheen	Bert Dingle	Nautilus	352 pounds
Looe	1963	Mr. Van Houft			281 pounds
Looe	1963	M. Walne	Edgar Williams	Silver Spray	313 pounds
Looe	1963	C. Watts	Jack Soady	Valhalla	291 pounds
Looe	1963	B. Stevens	Ray Pengelly	Irene	385 pounds
Looe			Jack Butters	Paula	355 pounds
Falmouth	1963		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	160 pounds
Falmouth	1963		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	437 pounds
Shanklin, IOW	1963	D. Fenton			71 pounds
Falmouth	1964		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	240 pounds
Looe	1964	S. Miller	Johnny Kitto	May Queen	435 pounds
Falmouth	1964	F. Cook	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	449 pounds
Falmouth	1964	W. Rogers	Clinton Powell	Swordfish	476 pounds
Mevagissey	1964		Eddie Lakeman	Penare	370 pounds
Looe	1965	A. Hill	L. Butters	Sea Bird	296 pounds
Falmouth	1965	Ted Belston	Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	260 pounds
Falmouth	1965	5th Earl Kimberley	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	390 pounds
Falmouth	1965		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	306 pounds
Salcombe	1965	B. Heath	D. Crews	Chasseur	350 pounds

Falmouth	1966		Robin Vinnicombe	Inter Nos	380 pounds
Falmouth	1966	P. Steynor			396 pounds
Falmouth	1966	Bill Bowden	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	336 pounds
Looe	1966	Ken Burgess	Ray Pengelly	Irene	498.5 lbs
Looe	1967	W. Weeles	Frank Pryn	Polaris	263 pounds
Mevagissey	1967	J. Hocking			250 pounds
Looe	1967	K. Cheetham	L. Butters	Sea Bird	400 pounds
Falmouth	1967	Ted Belston	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	410 pounds
Falmouth	1967		Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	214 pounds
Looe	1968	R. Calver			214 pounds
Looe	1968	D. Griffiths	Ray Pengelly	Irene	367 pounds
Falmouth	1968		Guy Crossley-Meats	Fathomer	300+ lbs
Falmouth	1968	T. Watkins	'Tatty Joe' Seyfert	Try Again	312 pounds
Falmouth	1969	Jock McDonald	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	408 pounds
Mevagissey	1969	Brian Lewis	Bernard Hunkin	Westward	325.5 lbs
Penzance	196??	Claude Farmer		Dolphin	222 pounds
Looe	1970	R. Wood	P. Greenwood	Guiding Star	326 pounds
Falmouth	1970	Phil Taylor	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	370 pounds
Looe	1971				167 pounds
Looe	1971	Joyce Yallop	Alan Dingle	Lady Betty	500 pounds
Falmouth	1971	David Turner	Robin Vinnicombe	Huntress	355 pounds
Mevagissey	1972	A. Williams			128 pounds
Looe	1972				78 pounds
Looe	1977	Anthony Redknap	R. Butters	Lisanne	132 pounds
Mevagissey	1976	Alice Clemson			130 pounds

NOTE: David Turner tells me that while Bill Bowden's Mako of 336 pounds was caught from 'Huntress' in 1966, Robin Vinnicombe didn't take charge of the boat until 1967 so the date could very well be wrong and in need of future correction.

With regards to the Mako's disappearance, you couldn't even argue that the catch drop off was gradual. If you look at the Turner & Harbage list above copied again here from Chapter 7, the trend of a few isolated encounters in each of the years from 1959 forward offers no crumbs of comfort. If anything, the reverse is true.

There were more Mako's caught in some of the earlier years between 1960 and 1966 when sea temperatures theoretically should have been lower than from the mid-1970's onwards, followed by absolutely nothing between 1976 and the end of the century.

Even beyond this book's cut off, with just the one Mako caught by Andy Griffith aboard Andrew Alsop's boat 'White Water II' fishing out of Milford Haven in 2013, the reasons for the long gap have prompted a number of theories to be put forward.

For me, in part at least, it's the lack of interest generally in shark fishing. We're talking here of occasional chance encounters at best. It goes without saying that dozens of boats pumping mountains of rubby dubby into west country waters day in and day out will have had the odds stacked more firmly in their favour than in the period that followed, when interest in Blue Shark fishing slipped into almost terminal decline.

THE SCOTTISH SHORE RECORD TOPE

Loch Ryan in south west Scotland was the 1975 location for part one of a two part Scottish Tope record double with a fish of 54.4.0 was taken by D. Hastings from the Cairnryan area. Some 14 years on, despite the dominance of nearby Luce Bay with the species, the loch would also produce P. Marsland's boat caught Tope record at 74.11.0, both of which were still in top slots at the turn of the century.

FLOTATION & SURVIVAL SUITS

Since probably the mid-1970's, there can hardly be a sea angler in the UK or Ireland, boat or shore, who does not own or has not worn a wet weather one piece or two piece flotation suit during the winter, and sometimes even the summer for fishing. For most sea anglers they are the standard uniform under one branding or other, and yes, they are warm, they are totally weather proof, and they can help you to help yourself if you end up in the water. Unfortunately, perhaps too much reliance is put on them to the point of complacency, which could see the wearer, particularly when fishing from a small boat where no other flotation back up is available, come very seriously unstuck.

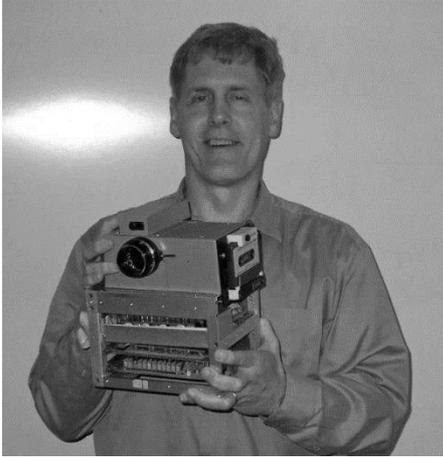
The first record of a commercially available survival suit dates back to 1930, when the New York firm American Life Suit Corporation offered merchant fishermen what they called a safety suit. However, the ancestor of today's flotation dates back much further to 1872 devised by Clark S. Merriman as an aid to rescue steamship passengers. A suit made from rubber sheeting, comprising rubber pants and a rubber shirt cinched tight at the waist, within which were air pockets that were to be orally inflated.

Similar to modern suits, which as already mentioned are waterproof with neoprene panels within the garment, the idea was to help the wearer stay afloat, while at the same time preventing or slowing down the transfer of body heat to the surrounding cold sea water. Up to the 1960's, drowning had been seen as the primary cause of death amongst people finding themselves in the sea. By the 1970's it was realised that hypothermia, either directly in its own right, or indirectly leading to drowning was the biggest cause of cold water death, something the angling clothing market was quick to take on board, and has been providing for ever since.

NOTE: Should always be worn in conjunction with a true life jacket of 150 Newtons fitted with crutch straps to ensure the suit stays on and that the wearer floats face upwards even if unconscious.

DIGITAL CAMERA INVENTED

A piece of history not directly linked to fishing, but an invention which has gone on to revolutionise angling across the board in ways people could not have envisaged when digital photography first became a reality, all thanks to an engineer named Steve Sasson.



Things like the ease with which angling features can be covered by pre checking the photographs before leaving the scene; support evidence for species hunts, and the feed into social media that is so important in today's World of instant news and bragging rights, particularly as the cameras have become ever smaller and better to the point where pretty much everyone has one with them at all times in the smart phones that have become a physical extension of some peoples arms.

Steve Sasson was an engineer working for Eastman Kodak at the time who produced an invention that would eventually turn and bite the hand that fed him, as Kodak were primarily roll film manufacturers which digital photography would go on to make obsolete.

Invented in 1975, it was patented in 1978 as the Electronic Still Camera weighing in at a staggering 8 pounds with an equally mind blowing 0.01 megapixel capability, employing an imaging chip to receive light via a lens which it converted into numbers. This in turn led to the first mass market digital camera being offered for sale in 1994. By 2008, films cameras were declared officially dead. Kodak declared bankruptcy in 2012.

THE LONG FINNED TUNA or ALBACORE

The Long Finned Tuna or Albacore *Thunnus alalunga* is the smallest, most numerous, yet least known of the Tuna (Tunny) species regularly visiting our corner of northern Europe. The British record standing at 4.12.0 caught by B. Carter boat fishing in the Salcombe Estuary in 1990 is far from reflective of what offshore angling for them off open Atlantic facing coasts around the British Isles is capable of producing.

Other than the odd small 'off course wanderer' such as the Salcombe specimen mentioned, this is very much one of those species that isn't going to come to you. To deliberately catch one you will need to go to it, and the best way of looking to do that is by trolling lures high up in the water column well offshore adjacent to the open Atlantic when the sea is at its warmest late summer, which when the weather allows, lies just about within charter boat range around the southern coast of Ireland.

The presence of Albacore off the south coast of Ireland has been known for some time by commercial fishermen who deliberately target them, also bringing ashore the occasional Bluefin Tuna and Swordfish. However, charter rod and line fishing is a more recent activity, put on the map by Derek Noble fishing out of Caherciveen, and later Nick Dent at Baltimore.

Their angling availability was first predicted by the late great Kevin Linnane of the Irish Central Fisheries Board (CFB), who retired CFB employee Norman Dunlop tells me, went over to Vigo in Northern Spain around 1976 to talk to Spanish fishermen who would catch them commercially off the coast of Cork and Kerry between July and October each year when water temperatures and sea conditions were right, and as importantly, when a reliable supply of Mackerel and scad is available for them to predate.

Albacore in Irish waters have it seems been exploited by the Spaniards since before WWII, all of which prompted Kevin to get out and talk with local charter skippers working out from Kinsale, Courtmacsherry, Baltimore, Dingle, and Schull about the rod and line possibilities. And while deteriorating health prevented him actively taking part, he did live long enough to see the first ones brought ashore. Also, the first Bluefin Tuna, though not as yet a Broadbill Swordfish, one of which Norman Dunlop is certain



he hooked up while fishing after dark over the Porcupine Bank to the west of Galway. Given a dedicated attempt, Norman feels certain it's only a matter of time for that fish too.

Bringing the story more up to date, following on from Kevin Linnane's early exploratory work, Alan Glanville, who also incidentally caught the first ever Bluefin Tuna in Irish waters (see Chapter 11), set a new Irish record for the Albacore around the same time that Derek Noble working out of Caherciveen, and Nick Dent at Baltimore started targeting them when all the aforementioned conditions were right.

Nick Dent tells me that the actual timing of that first success probably falls just outside the limits of this book, letting within the very early part of the twenty first century, with a personal best haul on his boat 'Rooster' of 21 fish in September of 2004. He doubts they would have started much earlier than that as he and Derek Noble rely on the Automatic Identification System (AIS) carried by the commercial Albacore boats to find them, something which only came into use after the turn of the century.

NOTE: The Irish record at the time of writing stands at 29.96 Kg (approx. 66 pounds)) caught by Henry McAuley in 2007 out of Caherciveen.

AMERICAN STRIPED BASS FOR BRITAIN

The February 1976 edition of Sea Angler Magazine carried an article by Crispin Rogers detailing an offer of half a million Striped Bass fry for release in British coastal waters. Putting aside any legal, moral, and biological issues associated with the introduction of a predatory alien fish species, plus all the irreversible implications that could present, not only to Britain, but also through inevitable migration to the rest of Europe and possibly beyond, questions have to be asked regarding the potential viability of such a project, which history now tells us did not take place



A similar proposed introduction of Striped Bass *Morone saxatilis* to Britain from America also failed to materialise in 1907, with both the Fishing Gazette and the Weymouth and Portland Standard carrying a story discussing an almost identical offer and subsequent discussion, supported by an offer from the White Star Line to ship both the fish and an attendant across free of charge to the UK to facilitate a release into The Fleet which runs along the back of Chesil Beach.

This proposal got as far as winning the backing of both the Mayor of Weymouth and the Corporation, along with an informal promise of help from the US Bureau of Fisheries in Washington, the full story of which appears in Chapter 1.

Crispin Rogers article subsequently prompted a further airing of the topic in the form of a plea by Tony Allen in the April 1976 edition of the magazine, and between the pair, the whole subject of Striped Bass biology, angling attraction, and survival potential were explored in some detail, the main points of which I'll summarise here, starting with the initial report by Rogers of the offer by Jack Bayliss, Director of the South Carolina state hatchery of the 500,000 Striped Bass fry, subject of course to the approval of the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries who were already on the back foot following to the

introduction of Zander to the Great Ouse Relief Channel by Norman McKenzie of the Great Ouse River Board.

Rogers states that the Striped Bass, which can achieve weights in excess of 100 pounds, can under optimum conditions grow at perhaps 3 times the rate of our native Bass, which approximates to around 2½ pounds per year. He goes on to say how obliging the species is across a wide range of angling tactics, in particular lure fishing, which is something I can testify to myself having fished for them with quite a lot of success in the Cape Cod area.

Both advocates then go on to detail biology and natural distribution of the species, which ranges from the sub-tropical Mississippi delta to the much more temperate Gulf of St. Lawrence area, which ‘enjoys’ sea temperatures probably similar to the south coast of Britain.

Though highly predatory, Striped Bass feed on a much wider range of animals than do European Bass, which to me at least would sound warning bells regarding pressure on other species and food sources, not the least of which would be Salmonid parr and smolts, as Striped Bass spawn as much as 80 miles up rivers, something they obviously would not be able to do due to obstructions, and in most cases, river length here in the UK. Not that this would prevent them spawning. They could, and very likely would, adapt, already having a proven track record of successful translocation to California by rail in 1879 which lies on America’s west coast, as well as more recent investigations done in Russia, South Africa, and Japan.

As Rogers points out, Striped Bass have not evolved in association with our indigenous species and their prey, and that a ‘trial introduction’, for obvious containment reasons, would be impossible. You either introduce them and face any subsequent consequences or you decline the American offer. It’s as simple as that. There is no half-way house. Not even a trial introduction to The Fleet as per the 1907 proposal, unless in some way they could be contained, which knowing anglers, would not be for long.

So, it would be unlikely in the extreme for the then Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, or today’s DEFRA to even contemplate such an introduction, which suggests that Tony Allen’s subsequent plea represents little more than an opinion based magazine page filler.

As an angler myself, I can see how emotion makes it easy to be drawn in by Allen’s comment regarding the need to “pull the fat of empty seas out of the fire”, with a fast growing, good eating, hard fighting species that would benefit everyone. Well, in theory at least. Until that is some unforeseen problem rears its head. Then we would have a situation such as with rabbits in Australia, rats on Pacific islands, and grey squirrels here in the UK. Allen also suggests that to his knowledge there has never been any sort of formal investigation into the possibilities of introducing foreign marine species to our seas. In that regard I would draw his attention to the proposed 1907 introduction reported by the Fishing Gazette.

The prospects of catching very big Bass, both from boats and from the beach, is appetising to the point where it would be easy to let the heart overrule the head. On the other hand, aren’t things bad enough with coastal fish stocks in our corner of north west Europe, without taking the risk of potentially making them even worse through the irreversible introduction of an alien predator, however attractive the prospects of encountering it on rod and line might be?

We know it could survive here because at least one has already made its own way here and done so, despite fishery scientists saying it’s a coastal species and would be contained and therefore deterred from spreading by deeper water. In 2013 Martin White caught a 2 pound 7 ounce Striped Bass while fishing from Dover Breakwater, though just what it was doing there having been faced with the depths and expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, or why it has not achieved British record status, is another matter.

SURFACE SWIMMING LUMPSUCKER

The Lumpsucker *Cyclopterus lumpus* is traditionally a bottom dwelling fish found out in very deep water other than in the spring when they move into shallow water, sometimes so shallow as to strand themselves, as part of their annual breeding cycle. It's usually only then that anglers come into contact with the species.

That's the text book version. The spring of 1976 produced a 10.1.8 specimen that seemingly hadn't read the script. It was spotted offshore swimming just under the surface by anglers aboard Bob Williamson's 'Gay Girl II' out from Plymouth. When it was beneath the boat, the party started dropping baits down to it which for the most part it ignored. That was until Terry Thompson of Bovey Tracey had a go, and his bait was immediately taken.

SIX GILLED SHARKS FROM WESTERN APPROACHES

The Six Gilled Shark *Hexanchus griseus* has the potential to be one of the biggest fish on the planet. A fish commonly found both in, and adjacent to very deep open oceanic water, as evidenced by an amazing run of monster catches made by the clients of Irish charter Luke Aston fishing the outer Shannon region on Irelands west coast, where fish in excess of 1,400 pounds have been caught.



Unfortunately, they were caught whilst I was researching this project, which means they fall outside of my year 2000 'cut-off'. The British record which has triggered this inclusion is a fish of 9.5.0 caught by F. E. Beeton off Penlee Point near Plymouth in 1976. Very obviously and quite literally a pup which has since been bettered by a slightly bigger 'pup' of 28 pounds taken from The Spoils to the south of the Nab Tower off the Hampshire Coast by Chris Rogers in 2012.

My reason for including this information here, some of which I could and perhaps should have left out, is to highlight the potential for catching these huge fish from a British or Scottish port. A fact made all the more real in 1997 by Dr. Philip Vas, who while under-taking research work, removed two small Six Gilled Sharks from a Hake net off the Cornish Coast.

In addition to this, and in the same year, between 60 and 70 specimens ranging from 85 to 220 cms were removed from a longline set in around 100 metres of water off Long Rock in the Western Approaches to the English Channel by a commercial fisherman who was quoted as saying he finds them on his lines quite regularly.

Time then perhaps to be thinking about a concerted deliberate attempt, which from personal experience in other parts of the World, I can say would not be that difficult if the water is deep enough, particularly after dark. For their size they are not that much of a handful either when you do hook one, even a very large specimen. I am confident therefore that it is just a matter of time.

FOOTNOTE: Within days of me writing the above inclusion, that suggested attempt has been successfully carried out. A topic I will look at in more detail in the final Chapter entitled Legacy.

THE INTRODUCTION OF SPLIT BOAT AND SHORE RECORD LISTS

Anyone reading these last few Chapters of this book will appreciate that I have long been a campaigner to have fish recording in Britain run in a way that is fair, accurate, and inclusive. I could go on ad infinitum, but I won't, as the topic gets a full airing towards the close of Chapter 11. One topic however which does need to be aired here due to its chronological timing is the subject of 'split' boat and shore record listing.

I personally would like to see an additional record column for fish caught aboard small trailed boats, where the captor has been totally reliant on his or her own abilities. Also, the inclusion, where applicable, of charter boat skippers' names alongside that of the angler in the boat record category. That said, I am thankful for small mercies with the British, Scottish, and Welsh Record Fish Committee's now having separate categories for boat and shore caught fish. Only the Irish still lump them all together in one list with the best specimen of each species as the record, regardless of whether it was from the boat or the shore. But you only need go back to the 1970's to see Britain as a whole, plus Scotland and Wales, also doing the same.

The perennial problem of getting accurate information regarding dates rears its head again here. When I asked Mike Heylin, Chairman of the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC), if he could do a bit of digging around for me, the best he could come up with was that the 1975 record list was still combined, and in 1976 it wasn't. So somewhere during those 2 years is the point when the actual 'divorce' took place, though it would no doubt have been getting a good airing (and probably lots of resistance) in the run up to that launch date, which while this is helpful, doesn't answer the question of when exactly Bob Gledhill and I started actively campaigning for that split, both at a grass roots level, and in the angling press.

Bob and I also looked at the subject of line class records which were all the rage at the time, but decided we had enough on our plate pursuing our original boat and shore records split goal, which I'm kind-of glad about now with hindsight looking back at the ridiculous lengths some anglers were prepared to go to claim line class records, leaving who knows how many big sharks swimming around trailing hundreds of yards of cracked off line in their wake.

Campaigning of this type with a large, semi-secretive, change resistant organisation such as the BRFC during the 1970's was very difficult. A body that was reluctant to tell anybody anything, so we had nothing to get our teeth into to gauge if they were even listening, let alone whether or not we were making progress of any sorts. A long frustrating period as I remember it, with Bob and I arguing our corner at every opportunity with a 'secret society' which with hindsight was so resistance to change that they would simply try to wear you down in the expectation that eventually you would give in.

Not us. Bob and I went the other way. With no apparent resolution in sight, we decided enough was enough. Armed with a copy of the current record list and a pile of writing material, we met up at a pub mid-way along the M55 midway near Greenhalgh. There we started putting together a split record list of our own displaying one or other 'vacant' slot for each species, claims for which would be considered following existing BRFC rules in the hope that they might eventually take it over, but no qualifying weights. A record is a record no matter how much or how little it weighs.

I'm guessing this would have been towards the end of 1975 on into early 1976. I say this, because in seemingly no time at all after our meet up, the official announcement of a new split boat and shore record list reached the news columns of the angling press. Unfortunately, the BRFC version did (and still does) have minimum qualifying weights for vacant slots.

As an example of the stupidity of this, in 2013, Andy Griffith caught the first Mako Shark in British waters since 1976. That's how rare the species is, even from a boat. What then are the chances of someone landing a Mako of any size from the shore?

But it would have to weigh at least 40 pounds to satisfy some arbitrary BRFC qualifying weight. Porbeagle, Blue and Thresher Sharks have the same qualifying restrictions, as has the Blue Fin Tuna. Removing minimum qualifying weights is hardly going to open some flood gate which suddenly inundates the committee with work, so why have them?

What they also did was separate off those records weighing less than a pound into a second tier mini-species record list without boat and shore slots. The Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers did the same. Scotland also split its records to boat and shore, but left the mini species in the main list. So while it was a victory of sorts, there is still progress to be made, but for Bob and I it was job done.

NOTE: Bob Gledhill sadly died from complications following a stroke in 2008.

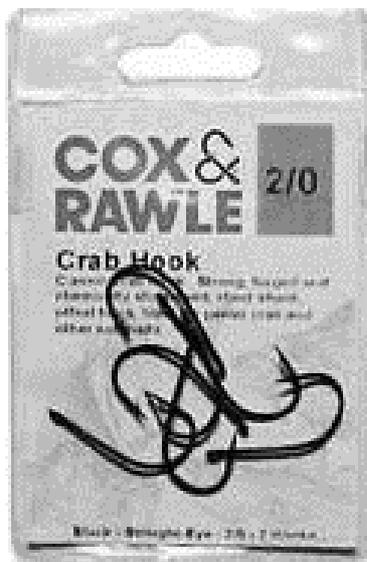
LINE CLASS RECORDS

Line class records per se are not available for all species of fish at a strictly British level, though most can be put forward where applicable for inclusion in the World record list operated by the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) based in Florida, and in the European Federation of Sea Anglers (EFSA) list which include most if not all of the species British and Irish anglers are familiar with. The EFSA list is maintained with the cooperation of the Light Tackle Club.

What is available on a strictly UK basis is a British line class record list for shark species only, operated by the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain (SACGB), which is was for the Blue, Mako, Porbeagle, and Thresher Shark only. So, I contacted John McMaster of the SACGB who informed me that they had approached the British Record Fish Committee with a view to it running a line class record list, which unsurprisingly, the BRFC declined to do.

John also informed me that the 4 Shark species already mentioned is currently the limit of the SACGB's line class interest, adding that he wasn't certain what sort of response an enquiry regarding a line class record for say Tope, Six Gilled Shark, or any other shark species turning up in British waters might stimulate.

COX AND RAWLE SEA FISHING TACKLE



Following the ground breaking success of uptide fishing devised and developed by Bob Cox and John Rawle during the late-1960's on into the early-1970's as detailed earlier in this Chapter, also recognising that there were glaring gaps in the tackle market both for suitable uptide fishing tackle and for quality sea tackle more generally, Cod & Rawle Tackle was set up in 1974.

Both Bob and John had already been exploring suitable rods for their new technique. Initially they had used their beach gear to cast out and hold out from the bow of Arthur Weitzel's boat 'Providence' so as not to get 'involved' with the fare paying customers who were drop down fishing from the well of the boat.

Carp rods were also pressed into service. But as with the beach casters, while these were able to cope with the evolving technique, they weren't absolutely suitable, particularly in terms of length, highlighting the need for purpose built rods at between 9 and 10 feet in overall length,

having a long butt below the reel seat to allow a suitable casting stance in order to fire the lead out to where it needed to be.

I was fortunate to fish with John Rawle at a very early stage in the development of uptide fishing. A time when he was buying in un-trimmed 20 and 30-pound class boat rod blanks to make up into 4 and 6 ounce uptide rods. Because they hadn't been cut to length, these were suitable for having the reel seat further up, and still having sufficient untrimmed length, they were helpful for casting the 30 to 50 yards required to reach fish scattered wide of the boat by the scare area.

Later, as uptiding really began to catch on, tackle manufacturers started to jump on the band wagon turning out their versions of fully finished purpose built uptide rods, many of which in the early days left much to be desired, though that's another story, prompting John to work in partnership with North Western Blanks at Middleton, Manchester, putting together a whole range of boat rods, including as you might expect, an uptide rod, though again, that's another story covered elsewhere.

By that stage, uptide fishing had become an accepted technique, growing in popularity all around the country, promoting the scaling down of all the tackle items used to the point that not only did it result in anglers fishing in shallow water catching more fish, but also enjoying their fishing more as a result, as the previous routinely accepted 30 and 50 pound class outfits used for everything approach was finally laid to rest.

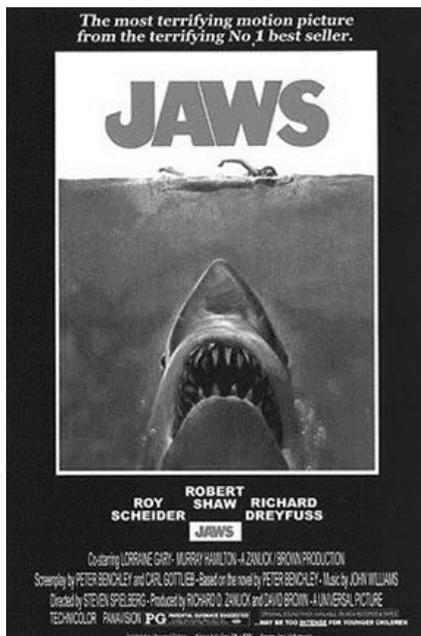
Bob and John also got themselves involved in developing and improving terminal tackle items too. However, the one that sticks in my mind here is their range of uptide hooks, manufactured by master hook makers Partridge of Redditch, starting in 1983. I still have packets of standard black uptide hooks and the heavier gauge uptide extra's in my 'tackle store' which I bought when they first came out. I also have a few packs of their crab hooks, designed with a slightly wider gape to help ensure that the point doesn't become buried and lost inside the bait.

These are exceptionally sharp and strong hook patterns. Far sharper than many of the other hooks on the market at the time, which included some that were either tinned or made from stainless steel, the former being prone to breaking at the tip or corroding, while the latter would always struggle to hold a good point. With Cox and Rawle hooks, sharpness was never an issue, which for a technique where fish would invariably hook themselves by pulling against the anchored lead during the delay between seeing the bite and retrieving the line belly to tighten into a fish, was critically important.

Further concentrating their efforts and proven expertise on terminal tackle, production diversified into a number of other small 'business end' tackle items, including the injection moulding of lightweight booms made from super strong thermo plastics. Swivels and a range of ancillary tackle items was also added to their portfolio. However, I still think it's fair to say that it was for their quality hooks that Cox and Rawle should best be remembered, development work on which continues to this day by introducing micro barbs, even sharper points, and a range of different finishes, many of which also now feature in their range of species specific readymade rigs, based on years of experience of producing truly monumental catches of some of Britain's most popular saltwater species, at the forefront of which are Bass and Cod.

And all because they wanted to fish from the fore-deck of Arthur Weitzel's boat in a way which wouldn't interfere with his paying customers. As they say, from little acorns great oaks grow, and in this case continue to grow. Bob Cox retired from the business in 2011, but for John Rawle the story goes on, and will continue to go on for a man who is an angler first and businessman second, always looking for ways to improve the lot of sea anglers everywhere.

JAWS THE MOVIE



Inspired by reports of a 4,550 pound Great White Shark *Carcharodon Carcharias* caught off Montauk on Long Island in 1964, author Peter Benchley wrote his best selling book *Jaws*, which if you read it, doesn't accurately mirror the storyline of the blockbuster Steven Spielberg movie it subsequently generated in 1975.

The book would obviously have prompted a range of opinions regarding sharks, but not to the extent that the visual depiction, however poorly animated by today's standards, so disastrously did. Shark conservation wasn't exactly a hot topic back in the 1970's. Nobody it seems cared, and even less so after the movie's release. For as hard as it might be to believe now, people were quite literally terrified of going into the water, with all the financial leisure based financial ramifications that would bring. So much so that sharks were killed in their millions at any and every opportunity.

It's claimed by conservation groups and shark enthusiasts that typically between 20 and 100 million sharks are killed for a wide range of reasons every year. The main fear based targets are said

to be Bull Sharks, Tiger Sharks, and Great Whites, the top 3 species implicated in attacks on humans, with the Bull Shark far and away the most deadly of trio. Finning and accidental catching in nets or on long lines are 2 of the main sources of commercially related deaths, to the point that a growing number of sharks World-wide are being pushed at an alarming rate to the brink of viability, and ultimately to extinction.

Don't think it's somebody else's problem either. British waters saw the near extinction of the Spurdog until was it 'rescued' by way of hard hitting legislation around the turn of the century. Angel Sharks, or Monkfish as they were previously known, are to all extents and purposes also now gone. A species I could almost catch to order in Irish waters as recently as the 1980's. And let's not forget the Tope. Only pressure brought to bear by the Scottish Sea Anglers Conservation Network (SSACN) leading to protective legislation prevented the commercial catching and finning of Tope in UK waters from taking place saved that one. As for the Great White at the heart of this inclusion, it is now illegal to fish for or harm the species in any way, anywhere on the planet.

Spielberg and Benchley have a lot to answer for with this story. Yet 'Jaws' is now considered to be one of the greatest movies ever made. So much so that in 2001 it was elected for preservation in the US Film Registry, being deemed "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant". It's just a pity that the species it so demonised wasn't similarly singled out for preservation, though it has to be said that Peter Benchley did eventually try to make amends, saying in an updated version that the shark could not be the villain, adding that if he were to do it all over again, the shark would have to be written as the victim, as Worldwide, sharks are much more the oppressed rather than oppressors, prompting the question, is this too little too late?

INVASION & EXPANSION OF THE SEA BREEM SPECIES

Worldwide there are around 100 sea bream species found primarily in warm temperate to sub-tropical waters. Warm temperate is a bit of a vague wishy-washy term, which for our purposes means the warmer south coast of England, though in bream terms that isn't strictly true, and nor is it likely to

remain even vaguely accurate, as rising sea temperatures continue to open up new territory for existing bream species, while at the same time making our more southerly outposts such as the Channel Islands look ever more inviting to new invading species, of which there are quite a few just to the south of the English Channel, as anyone who has ever looked into harbours and marina's while on Mediterranean holidays will know only too well.

When I first started sea fishing seriously at the start of the 1970's, we only really had 2 species of sea bream regularly available to us, and even then, other than the odd occasional wanderer turning up somewhere it 'shouldn't' have been, these tended to be confined to the English Channel and north coast of Devon and Cornwall, plus a few isolated Black Bream pockets up into West Wales.

What we've since discovered is that those Welsh Black Bream may not have been so pioneering after all. Black Bream need broken substrate to build their nests in, which is why crumbling chalk reefs such as the Kingmere Rocks are so favoured. The reefs of Cardigan Bay are glacial moraines comprising stones and other loose substrate left behind by melting glaciers. Ideal nesting habitat. So water temperature isn't the only consideration here, which helps explain why the Black Bream 'by-passed' Devon and Cornwall's north coast, plus a lot of South Wales, before settling for Cardigan Bay.

We also used to have a healthy population of Red Bream along both sides of the Cornish Coast and across the way in the south and west of Ireland until they completely disappeared overnight, and are only now (2018) showing even the slightest hints of a comeback, with a few 'Chads' (small Red Bream) turning up around the Channel Islands.

The full account of this is given in Chapter 10, the gist of which is that a Scottish trawler scooped up 6,000 stone of 'unknown' red coloured fish around the Runnel Stone which it landed it at Newlyn fish quay around 1980. These 'unknown' red fish turned out to be Red Bream, and nobody has seen hide nor hair of them since, which rather suggests that this was pretty much the entire breeding population lost at a stroke.



Going back to the Black Bream, while the species is currently suffering all sorts of problems related to size limits, overcropping, and habitat destruction at some of its most famous haunts along the Sussex Coast, it seems its fortunes are optimistically brighter elsewhere to the north, where small pioneering populations are prepared to expand the species range, and wherever possible, allow the species to establish breeding populations, which for the moment at least, are not coming under the same level of pressure as they are in the south.

Cardigan Bay is a prime example here. But it isn't the only one, as a full read of my book will show. I remember catching them deliberately in the Menai Strait during the 1980's, and I know for a fact that a few turn up over reef marks throughout Caernarfon Bay every year. In fact, I've enjoyed some pretty good dinghy Bream action over the reefs out around Dinas on a number of occasions. There are also sporadic catches made over one particular mark out from Rhyl, with odd ones even caught along the Lancashire Coast.

Around the end of the twentieth century, Black Bream started showing in Scotland's Luce Bay. Probably a few early pioneers, though with most people up there fishing for things other than Black Bream,

it's difficult to know how many, and when. But eventually they were discovered. And when investigated further by people like Ian Burrett who charter fishes the area from his Orkney Fastliner 'Onyermarks', they were found to be there more regularly and in far greater numbers than people initially supposed, which is a similar situation to the time when Gilthead Bream started turning up along the coast of the West Country in the mid-1970's on into the 1980's.

Likewise, when anglers started to understand the Gilthead's habits and seriously begin targeting them, they found them in many of Devon and Cornwall's estuaries where they now take them up to double figures. And with more people starting to explore, it seems they are not just confined to the English Channel Coast. Specimens have since been found along Devon and Cornwall's north coast, South Wales, and over in Ireland (see Chapter 9). All of which begs the question, what else might we expect?

Around the same time as the Red Bream disappeared, other 'Red Bream' species started to get reported in the angling press. Whether it was anglers taking more notice of what they were catching in light of the wholesale disappearance of the true Red Bream is hard to know. But look more closely they did, and as a result they very soon realised they were in fact catching Pandora Bream *Pagellus erythrinus* and Couches Bream *Pagrus pagrus*, 2 species which are reasonably common to the south of the Bay of Biscay.

Whether these truly were the first examples, particularly around the Channel Islands which so often sees invading species first, is difficult to be sure, though I very much doubt it. To the trained eye, it is relatively easy to pick out the Pandora on account of the shape of the head and face, and Couches Bream if they have darker patterning on them, which they often have. Alternatively, check to see if there is a dark blotch on the lateral line immediately above the pectoral fin which only the true Red Bream has. But when you are unaware of the possibility of other red coloured bream species, why would you look? So very likely, these other two 'red' species were caught previously and had slipped through unnoticed.

When they were finally recognised, from memory, the Pandora appeared to be more regularly caught than the Couches Bream. That situation is now reversed, with Couches Bream featuring quite regularly along the Cornish coast, particularly over the Pell's Reef off Newquay, and as ever, around the Channel Islands. Currently, more Couches are caught in UK waters than true Red Bream, though hopefully the balance will re-establish itself when those 'chads' mentioned earlier grow on to maturity and re-seed the ailing true Red Bream population.

At the same time, there would also be occasional reports of anglers catching Bogue *Boops boops* out over the reefs off south Devon and Cornwall. Typically, these would be either over or close to British record size. As Bogue are not big fish to start with, it would need a good sized specimen to be able to



take a typical UK anglers bait, so those few reported again might not be an accurate reflection of Bogue numbers present in British waters. That said, with the popularity of LRF (Light Rock Fishing) where small previously not bothered with species are now targeted, if there were more Bogue about, you would expect this approach to find them, and on a few occasions that has been the case.

With the bigger bream species we are likely to see at our latitude now pretty much all discovered, it's time to take a look at the other end of the size range,

where once again, LRF might be expected to deliver the goods where conventional shore fishing cannot, due mainly to the terminal tackle involved.

Already we have the Saddled Bream *Oblada melanura* and the Axillary Bream *Pagellus acarne* in the mini species record list, and the White Bream *Diplodus sargus* from St. Catherine's Breakwater on Jersey in the main boat and shore record list, all species I have caught in other parts of Europe. Mainly as small specimens. But the White Bream (pictured here) can achieve sizeable proportions and will give a very good account of itself, so hopefully we will see more of that species soon. And there will be others. Which ones is difficult to say. But if you do fish LRF tactics along the coasts of the West Country and around the Channel Islands, expect there to be more. This invasion isn't over yet by a long way.

THE SCOTTISH & BRITISH BLUEMOUTH RECORD

The Bluemouth *Helicolenus dactylopterus* is one of those species of fish which, when you find them over their preferred habitat, can be abundant in the extreme. This means fishing small baits at depths on the fringe of 'normal' angling range in areas with very much deeper water close by. Otherwise, Bluemouth are a rare fish around the British Isles on rod and line, confined mainly to the north west of Scotland and western fringes of Ireland, for no other reason than access to suitable terrain, despite the species having a wide distribution range.

I recall catching them 2 at a time in deep water off Gibraltar some years ago. As for the UK, all rod caught specimens I am aware of have come from deep water around Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, including the British and Scottish record of 3.2.0 caught by Anne Lyngholm fishing in Loch Shell in 1976. More recently, Ireland has recorded the Bluemouth, caught by another lady angler Sue Tait with a fish of 1.32 Kg (2.91 pounds) in 2008 fishing out of Caherciveen. Wales and England have yet to record the species, though interestingly, Chapter 11 has an inclusion for a Bluemouth found in the intake screens at Tilbury power station on the Thames.

THE BATHING WATERS DIRECTIVE

The 1976 Bathing Waters Directive was introduced by the UK government on behalf of the European Economic Community (which became the EU in 1993), to protect and improve bathing water, and by implication, sea water quality generally, with the aim of protecting human health. The idea I suppose was to embarrass and pressure local authorities and water companies to do something about the state of the nation's waste water and sewage treatment facilities by awarding and refusing blue flag status to specific holiday beaches, with all the financial implications that might bring.

I personally was involved in carrying out beach and bathing water surveys during my time with the National Rivers Authority and later the Environment Agency, during which time huge improvements had undoubtedly been made. However, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that from an angling perspective, in particular shore angling, that some of this may actually have been detrimental to catch results.

We all want clean coastal waters and shorelines. It would be difficult to argue against that general premise. Before people started dumping waste into rivers which would eventually find its way to the coast, or actually piping raw sewage directly into the sea, the fish anglers pursue had evolved to live in clean seas, and were presumably happy to do so.

That however does not mean that some species of fish, and more importantly, the invertebrates many feed on, might not be prepared to exploit a new feeding opportunity where it is presented to them, such

as organic waste stimulating a population explosion at some point along the food chain, which might have a knock-on effect right through to the very top – the fish we catch.

Talking to anglers, and more especially shrimp fishermen familiar with my local patch along Lancashire's Fylde Coast, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that big changes in the quality of shore fishing in the area correlate to improvements in bathing water quality, and not necessarily always for the better.

In the autumn I would carry a push net in the boat. At low water I would come back in, push some shrimps, then head back off to use them as bait to catch Whiting. Push netters were a common sight in the 1980's through into the 1990's. Yet nowadays you rarely if ever see them at all, because shrimps in viable numbers are a thing of the past, and the finger of blame is being pointed very firmly at the lack of organic waste being pumped into the first couple of hundred yards of our coastal waters.

Shrimps and their eggs are predated on by small inter-tidal fish species. These in turn draw in their predators all the way along the food chain to large Whiting and Cod. Similar examples from other parts of the country include Mullet, Mackerel, Dabs, and at times Bass. Switch off the 'food' supply and these fish will hunt elsewhere.

Nowadays, the beaches along the Fylde Coast are far less productive than they were before the awarding of blue flag status. On the other hand, the River Mersey has benefited from its clean up to the point that it has become arguably the best sheltered water Cod fishery in the country. Whether it's coincidental that The Fylde has suffered, or there is some actual basis to what anglers are saying, is for fishery scientists to sort out. I merely present the information as given.

NOTE: The original Bathing Waters Directive was replaced by an updated version in 2006.

NORTH CORNISH PORBEAGLES

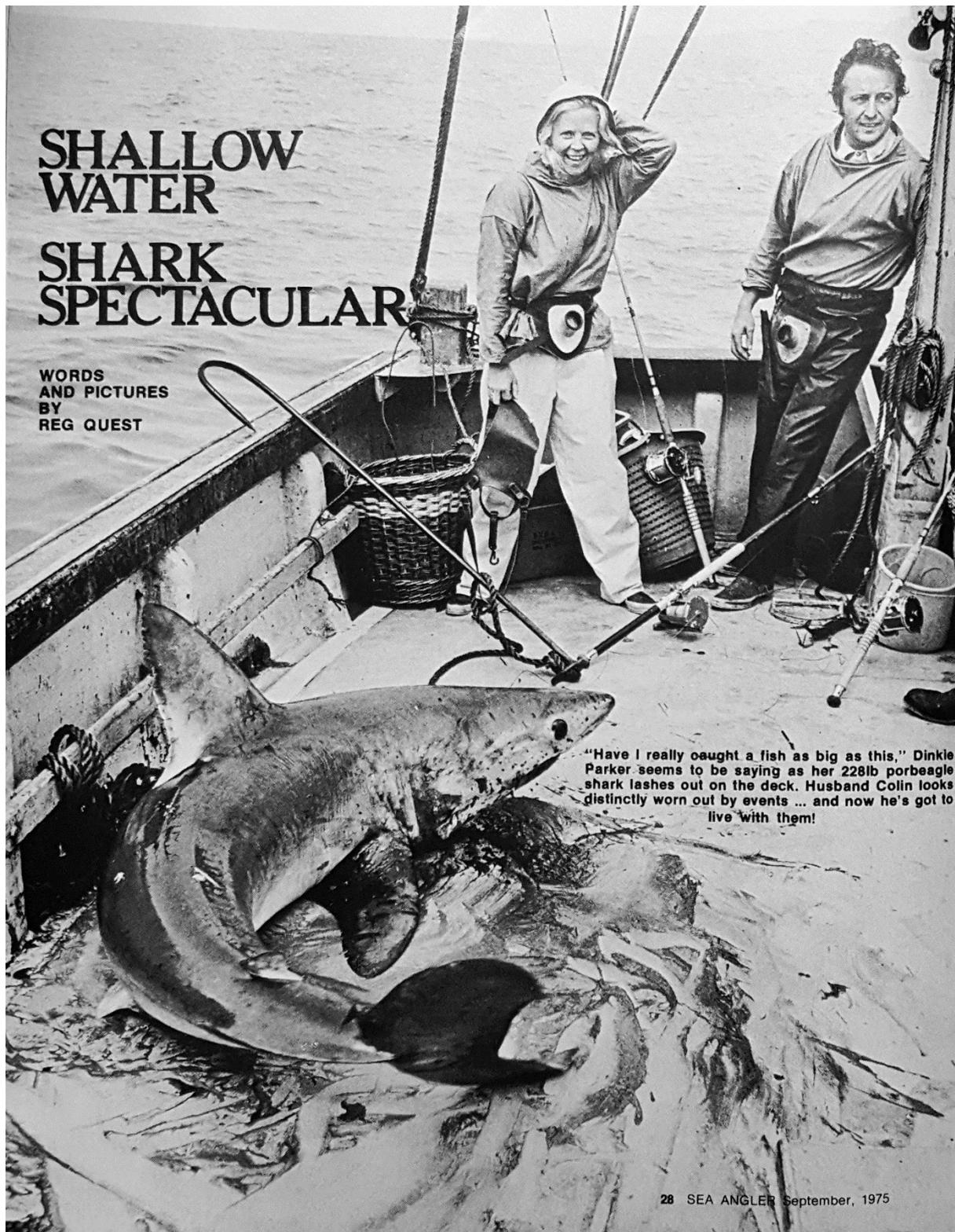
As far back as the 1950's, Cornwall had built itself a reputation across a number of shark species as the shark fishing county of the UK. For the most part this had been with Blue Sharks, plus a sprinkling of visiting Mako's. Porbeagles have always been on the cards too, mainly along the south coast of the county, and almost without exception, like the Mako, they would come along as bonus fish out over deep water or around offshore reefs whilst drifting for the bread and butter stuff along the county's English Channel coast.

Then one day, allegedly on account of damage to lobster pots, some angry commercial fisherman decided to set shark lines out along Cornwall's north coast to see what the culprit might be. Not only that, but so close in to the shore that where holiday makers were able to get down the cliffs to some of the smaller secluded beaches, you could actually hear them shouting and playing whilst out fishing in the boat.

Whoever that person was, most likely during the very early 1970's, it was certainly a bit of 'inspired' experimentation, leading to the discovery of one of the finest Porbeagle Shark fisheries in the World in its day. A fishery that would go on to produce a string of British and World records at a level the American shark fishing centres couldn't come anywhere near.

Only Scotland has managed to produce bigger (see Chapter 11). And evolving from that initial discovery, it quickly became apparent that huge Porbeagle Sharks were to be found patrolling off certain headlands along the North Cornish Coast from Padstow to the Devon border at Hartland Point. Not all of the headlands though. Ideally, they would need to look out over fairly deep water with a mix of ground including some rough to tempt in and hold prey fish such as Pollack and Mackerel.

It has long been known that Porbeagles are attracted to areas of tidal disturbance such as around certain headlands and islands, so presumably that was a factor too. But not every headland along the north coast, of which there are many, and not on every visit either would they consistently produce, despite a mark having been productive as little as a week or so earlier.



Timing too has its part to play, though from the evidence I've dug up from press reports in magazines like Sea Angler, the timing quoted back then doesn't tie in well with my own experience of the timing

now, when, after a spell in the doldrums, the Porbeagles returned towards the close of the century and beyond, showing a very definite division in terms of timing between the big fish and the smaller ones in terms of where to find them and when.

The bulk of the action back in the early 1970's was out from Padstow, though boats did come down in the other direction from Appledore up on the Devon side. The distance difference between these 2 base ports wouldn't be that great to some of the headlands, though from the Devon side you had the Hartland Race to contend with, which while I've never had the misfortune to sail through it myself, listening to those that have under tricky conditions is not something I feel I've missed out on.

Interestingly, nothing is ever said or written about the heads to the south of Padstow. At face value there seems to be no reason why some of these should not offer the same level of attraction as those to the north. Whether anybody has ever tried there is a question I can't answer. So Padstow it was, with one boat in particular named 'Lady Jayne' which was moored at Rock opposite Padstow itself on the Camel Inlet.

John Watts owned the boat and Ray Provis skippered her. This combination has probably accounted for more big Porbeagle Sharks than any other boat in the country, for which reason it was always difficult to get a day out on it, something I managed on a couple of occasions right at the peak of the action, sadly only seeing as opposed to catching Porbeagles around Cambeak, being 'pestered' by Tope getting to the baits first.

Tactically speaking, Porbeagle fishing doesn't quite fit the 'regular' shark fishing mould. It's similar, in that baits are suspended beneath floats on the drift in a rubby dubby slick fishing on the drift. Where it differs is that rather than taking one long continuous drift setting up a rubby dubby trail that can be miles long as would be the case for Blues, Mako's and Threshers, with Porbeagles favouring certain heads at certain times, the drifts had to be short and repeated. So the chum trail is constantly being broken, which must be confusing to an interested fish. On the other hand, with so much chum in the water in one small area, even while it might lead nowhere in particular, sharks can still be switched on into wanting to feed and therefore in theory at least, searching for the source and finding those big double Mackerel baits.

Otherwise, the principles are pretty much the same. Enough 400 pounds breaking strain wire to beat the teeth backed up by enough commercial monofilament to beat touching the rough skin, fished from a 50 pound class outfit with plenty of decent line on the reel. And of course, a float. I can't remember what Ray Provis used to suspend the baits. Probably a balloon. What I can say from experience is that these should only be inflated sufficiently to suspend the bait and no more. Despite being apex predators, Porbeagle Sharks can be very skittish. If they feel any resistance they can play with a bait for ages, and may even reject it altogether.

I read with interest one write up in Sea Angler by British Conger Club Secretary Reg Quest relating to a trip out from Padstow with Ray Provis in 1975. The beginning of June was given as the time when the big Porbeagles arrive, which I have to say ties in with many other summer months reports over that and subsequent seasons. But not with the reality of how things went in the 'second wave' of Porbeagle fishing, when having fallen off the radar, after some years the fish slowly and quietly started to return, long after the charter fishing interest in them had ceased.

I'm not saying that some fish weren't returned by anglers during the 1970's, but the evidence from many articles right across the magazines certainly doesn't point to that routinely being the case. A time when angling's image was less important than it is today. An era when sharks were unceremoniously hauled aboard boats using huge gaffs. A time when a bit of blood splattered about the place was no deterrent to photographs being published, as evidenced by the shot used here from Sea Angler Magazine in 1975, entitled 'Shallow Water Shark Spectacular'.

No disrespect to Sea Angler Magazine is intended here. Everyone did it. That's how it was back then. Now of course even a spec of blood would rule out the use of a photograph, and rightly so. And people wondered why the 'first wave' petered out towards the end of the decade. The answer being that pretty much all of the mature breeding stock had been taken out by a mix of angling and commercial fishermen, the latter having read the angling reports at a time when it was open season on killing sharks, with Porbeagle Sharks in particular bringing in good money on continental fish markets.

The season of 1976 was particularly good for Padstow. Jorge Potier had his record of 465 pounds on a July day which produced another fish of 310 pounds, plus the hooking up of 2 other big fish, which for various reasons didn't end up in the boat (see the following inclusion). Potier's fish provided a lot of speculation on account of its size. "Would this record ever be broken?" and "How close was this fish to the maximum size for the species?". Some were saying that a 600 pounder was very likely out there. Others, including fishery scientists at Plymouth were of the opinion that fish in excess of 450 pounds were rare in the extreme. The truth is that nobody will ever know for certain.

What we do know is that the current World all tackle record weight of 507 pounds achieved out from Scrabster on Scotland's north coast almost 2 decades after Padstow hit its peak has not been approached officially in the additional couple of decades since it was caught. In part, because shark fishing has slipped in popularity. But also, because there are fewer Porbeagles about close in along both the Cornish and the Scottish Coasts. And for good measure, you can also throw in a huge change in angler attitudes.

Not only would it be illegal today to kill and weigh a large Porbeagle Shark, most anglers would refuse to do so anyway, preferring to estimate its weight from measurements, grab a quick photo, then release the fish in the water, and long may that continue to be the case.

RECORD PORBEAGLE GETS CAR RIDE



Unlike today, when due to the inflexibility of the British Record Fish Committee with regard to weighing potential record fish, specimens bigger than the standing records are often photographed and returned without claim, there was a time when to hold a national angling record was not only an achievement, but also an honour. And to do so with a prestigious species which everyone else would be proud to catch was the pinnacle. So you can understand the lengths some people might be prepared to go to see those ambitions realised. That said, there are limits??.

While fishing aboard 'Lady Jayne' skippered by Ray Provis off Tintagel Head in July 1976, Jorge Potier boated a Porbeagle Shark that would eventually pull the needle on the scales round to 465 pounds. A good 35 pounds more than the standing record at the time. A fish so big that it couldn't be accurately weighed with anything they had available at Padstow.

Mike Millman was on hand to record the event, and recalled that having bottomed out the scale, and knowing it would beat the standing British record, but not by how much, Potier bundled the fish onto the back seat of his brand new estate car and drove it over to the Shark Angling Club HQ at Looe, where after going through the necessary record claim formalities, they set about

trying to hose all the blood and other body fluids out of the car, which must by that stage have smelled gut wrenchingly bad.

ANOTHER GIANT PORBEAGLE FROM PADSTOW

As with Jorge Potier's 465 pound Porbeagle Shark record in the previous inclusion, later in that same summer of 1976, Derrick Runnall's also brought a Porbeagle back into Padstow which was way too big for the scales. This time, instead of bundling the fish into his car and taking it over to Looe where the SACGB had scales that could cope as Jorge Potier had done, Runnall's was persuaded to wrap the fish in tarpaulin to protect it overnight until Mike Millman was able to pick the scales up from Looe the following morning and drive them over to Padstow, by which time the huge shark had lost around 30 pounds of body fluids which were still contained by the tarpaulin. On the scales, it fish pulled the needle round to 458 pounds. Had it still contained those lost body fluids, it would have well beaten Potier's record fish.

BIG PORBEAGLE SHARKS OF 1976

ANGLER	WEIGHT	ANGLER	WEIGHT	ANGLER	WEIGHT
J. Potier	465	R. Poweisland	184	W. Beasant	124
P. J. White	404	P. Duboux	182	A.W. Parry	120
J. Harris	335	C. Williams	178	Dr. G. Hamza	120
Dr. G. Hamza	325	A. Paddon	176	Dr. G. Hamza	120
A. Jiovvanny	325	C. Martin	176	Dr. G. Hamza	120
P. Bayntun	306	B. Caton	174	J. Bailey	118
J. P. Price	290	G. Evans	170	R. Giles	118
H. C. Winter-Taylor	280	B. Bates	172	C. C. S. Morgan	117
C. Thorn	277	R. Desouter	164	A. Jiovvanny	115
M. Millman	250	Dr. G. Hamza	162	A. Jiovvanny	110
B. Hancock	250	N. Kelly	156	J. Dungworth	110
A. Paddon	238	C. Williams	152	S. Coley	110
T. Davis	234	M. Millman	150	J. T. Morgan	108

Dr. G. Hamza	220	R. C. P. Cryer	146	A Paddon	108
C. Williams	212	Dr. G. Hamza	143	A. R. Rodrigues	106
A. Jiovvanny	205	P. J. Nadin	140	G. P. Dale	104
G. Flores	204	W. Beasant	138	J. Barnett	102
R. J. Payne	204	D. Chandler	138	G. Evans	102
G. Evans	202	M. Freeman	130		
C. Williams	188	A. Paddon	124		

After the 'first wave' Porbeagle stocks had been depleted towards the end of the 1970's forcing anglers to start turning their attentions to other things, what Porbeagles there were left along the north coast of Cornwall and Devon began quietly going about their business of very slowly replenishing their numbers as best they could, and to re-establishing themselves as apex predators around the headlands between Padstow and Hartland Point. The start of a couple of decades in which very few people bothered looking for them anymore.

Angling had messed up. The sharks were gone, and that it would seem was the end of that. Except that it wasn't. For always the pioneer and a big shark expert to boot, Graeme Pullen teamed up with Pete 'Padstow' Scott to go off exploring the old traditional shark grounds in Pete's 15 foot dinghy which they launched from the beach at Bude, with all the swamping surf problems that can involve. In the summer this resulted in reasonable numbers of smaller fish in the 50 to 80 pound bracket while drifting in around 80 feet of water close to the radar dishes. Then in the spring (March through to early May), fishing very close in to the heads, they also encountered a number of very large female fish of frightening proportions, several of which they had to the side of the boat on the trace then cut free.

Bude was and still is a dangerous place for a trailed boat. With that in mind, Graeme decided to switch operations to Boscastle, which having fished there with him myself, I have to say in other ways probably isn't that much better. A drying harbour with a concealed entrance through the cliffs which is difficult to find the way back in to. Once the tide has gone, that's it for 10 hours. If bad weather comes in you have absolutely nowhere to go for many miles in both directions. A case then of sitting it out and hoping for the best.

For obvious reasons, conditions need to be as good as guaranteed, which of course on an open Atlantic Coast they never are. But we fished it anyway, taking sharks to around 170 pounds over the summer months. Good numbers of Tope too. Sometimes these would swim up to take baits suspended 20 and more feet off the bottom, and on other occasions, Porbeagles would pick up bottom baits intended for the Tope. So plenty of cross over between them. Plenty of action too, with the whole place to ourselves. And like the Porbeagles re-establishing their presence, we too 'quietly' went about our business until one particular springtime weekend.

I'd had a call from Graeme to team up with him at Boscastle but couldn't make it, so he drafted in a reserve in the shape of his fishing buddy Wayne Comben. Essentially, a gloomy, fairly fish less couple of days by all accounts. Graeme always takes mega amounts of rubby dubby made up from Rainbow Trout carcasses which are collected and saved for him in the gutting room at Avington Trout Fishery. The amount of oil from the pellets these fish are fed on has to be seen to be believed. But it wasn't helping much on this particular occasion, until right at the death a large shark suddenly started going

nuts in the slick. A fish which eventually took a bait, with Wayne on the rod and Graeme on the video camera looking to get a film for his 'Totally Awesome Fishing' website.

That was a fish I probably would have ended up playing had I gone. A fish so big it made the national headlines everywhere. The daily newspapers all carried the story. He even had the TV people turn up at his home for a lengthy interview which they screened in conjunction with footage of the fish he had shot. It was a monster, and being very familiar with large sharks, one which he estimated from measurements at between 500 and 550 pounds, though it has to be said that not everybody agreed with that estimate.

In fact, he took a lot of flack over it. But it goes to show that when conserved or left to recover, even large slow growing species will eventually come back. Not necessarily following the patterns of old though in terms of timing. The question this raises is, because of rising sea temperatures, are they now coming in earlier to get the environmental conditions they require, or were they always there early doors? Another question that will never now be answered. The important thing is that they are back.

SHETLAND SHOWS ITS PORBEAGLE SHARK CREDENTIALS

After a mammoth summer long effort fishing in and around the tide race below at the Mull of Galloway, in 1970, Dr. Dietrich Burkel was finally rewarded with Scotland's first ever Porbeagle Shark of 173.10.0 (see Chapter 8). There would be a couple of other smaller ones over on the far side of Luce Bay around Burrow Head, plus one caught on Mackerel feathers aboard the Tobermory based boat 'Laurenca' which Duncan Swinbank described as looking like it had only just been pupped. Other than that, there was nothing for a while, despite commercial fishermen in the 2 main areas about to explode onto the Porbeagle Shark fishing map having known about their presence for many years.

Scotland was about to take Porbeagle Shark fishing to another level. This time however, it wouldn't be from the country's most southerly tip. The attention was about to shift quite literally to the other extreme; the very far north. Initially to Shetland, which is about as far north as you can get, then later to Scrabster on the Pentland Firth, which is mainland Britain's most northerly outpost.

To an extent, the development of Shetland's Porbeagle potential runs hand in glove with the development of the offshore oil industry. Men away from home with time on their hands and money to spend wanting to explore what Shetland had to offer in terms of fishing. I fished Shetland myself in the early 1970's when Common Skate and Halibut were the 2 main players on the big fish scene. From what I saw, the problem was getting boats to take anglers on exploratory trips, because most of those used in the Viking Festival I fished were commercial vessels taking a week out.

As the crow flies, the distance from Lerwick to Sumburgh is about 25 miles. More by boat, because it isn't a straight line sail, and not through the friendliest waters either. Porbeagle Sharks are thought to have some degree of body thermoregulation, hence their tolerance of the lower water temperatures this far north.

In and around the Sumburgh tide race, a small autumn breeding aggregation of huge fish had been discovered. But if you think this corner of the North Sea generally can throw up some weather, wait till you get to the Sumburgh shark fishing grounds. Dietrich Burkel told about a day he got a boat to take him down to fish the tide race. He literally could not stand up in the boat and ended up lying down, while the man in charge just stood there 'tutting', complaining about soft southerners, and Dietrich was from Glasgow. But there would be good days too, and boats willing to take pioneering sea anglers to try for whatever it was they wanted.

In 1976, oil engineer Peter White took his own boat down to Sumburgh where he annihilated Dietrich Burkel's 1970 Porbeagle Shark record with a monster of 404 pounds. I remember it well. The angling

magazines were positively buzzing with both the story and the expectation of what more there was still to come, the zenith of which came 2 years later in August 1978. A day when Eric Manson took his boat 'Sulla' down to Sumburgh and came back with 4 huge Porbeagles, one of which, at 404 pounds again by Peter White matched his previous best, plus an even bigger fish or 450 pounds caught by Lee Phillips, which unfortunately was foul hooked, and therefore in record terms didn't count.

Even if it had, its days of heading up the record lists would have been quite short lived, with Shetland going uncharacteristically quiet as a new player came to the table. Again, with a similar background lead up story of commercial fishermen having had their lines robbed for years by sharks while anglers seemingly paid little or no attention in a fiercely tidal potentially wild stretch of water. The emphasis had switched to Scrabster on the Pentland Firth, where in 1993, the World all tackle record would be brought to the scales (see Chapter 11).

INTRODUCTION OF THE SHAKESPEARE UGLY STIK ROD

Shakespeare introduced their Ugly Stik series of rods in 1976, added to in 1996 when they produced



the Ugly Stik light, which was widely reported in the angling press and through the company's own advertising as being virtually indestructible.

I don't know about that, but the concept certainly seems to have stood the test of time. On a personal level, I have a 15 pound class Ugly Stik which I've used off and on for many years. The kind of rod you turn to when tides are light and you can get away with minimal lead so as to enjoy the full feel of the fish.

Great for light tackle work, though perhaps a little 'tippy' in its action. A range of rods built using what Shakespeare describe as the Howald Process first devised in 1947 for the Shakespeare 'Wonder Rod', based on the visionary work done by Dr. Arthur M. Howald, who is credited as the developer

of modern synthetic rods which Shakespeare developed and patented.

The Ugly Stik concept began as a ferrule-less blank of exceptional strength with a clear tip. The function of the clear tip is one that has escaped me, while the ferrule-less one piece construction has since given way to versions with ferrules for ease of transportation. As for the construction, the tip is solid rather than a hollow tube like the rest of the rod, again for 'advantageous' reasons I have yet to grasp, though it probably offers more in the way of 'top-end' flexibility.

The remainder of the blank has an internal graphite core with an overlay of fibreglass, finished off with an epoxy coating that is said to minimise the effects of UV rays, as well as excessive use and rough treatment wear and tear. When the first blanks were produced, Joe Kuti who was a product manager with the company, took one look at blanks and declared them to be the ugliest blanks he had ever seen. This was very likely due to the fact that they had no pigment, allowing the natural graphite colour to show through, as did the wraps of the cloths used.

Keen to be more cosmetic at the mass production level, Shakespeare added its signature red and yellow basket weave whippings, presenting the rod as a lightly buffed smooth blank of black pigmented fibre-glass, and so the Ugly Stik was born. A rod that supposedly can be bent into a complete circle without breaking it (something I won't be trying with mine), making it the company's best selling rod ever.

ROCKLING RECORDS

To quote Sea Angler Magazine's January 1977 edition which carried this story, "Rockling don't normally send anglers into raptures". Usually they are seen as little more than a nuisance. Bait robbers that interfere with the intention to bag something better. But Mick Docksey of Osmington, Weymouth, certainly didn't see it that way after landing a Three Bearded Rockling *Gaidropsarus vulgaris* of 3.2.0, a specimen 3¼ oz better than the existing British record.

The record breaker was caught during a Weymouth AA shore contest, with Mick getting his record off Portland Breakwater, having picked up of all things a small Pouting offered for Conger, standing as the official British record until 2001 when it was beaten by a specimen of 3.12.14 caught by Michael Negus off the Lizard in Cornwall. At the close of the century, the boat record stood at 3.4.4 caught by C. Hurst fishing off the Isle of Wight.

THE LARGEST THRESHER SHARK FOR 17 YEARS

Fishing aboard Dave Spellor's boat 'Shark Hunter V' out of Fareham in Hampshire in 1976, Peter Huggins beat a Thresher Shark *Alopias vulpinus* of 262 pounds, a catch ranked at fourth in the all-time British Thresher Shark list at the time.

THE BRITISH COMBER RECORD

The current British record for the Comber *Serranus cabrilla* of 1.13.0 caught by 10 year old B. Phillips off Mounts Bay, Cornwall, was set in 1977. An interesting inclusion here on 2 fronts. This is the fish which most represents the ridiculous way in which the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC) have for many years, and continue to do so, operate their remit to the detriment of those they supposedly serve.

As if it were not bad enough that vacant boat and shore record slots are given demeaning and unnecessary minimum qualifying weights, and that species failing to achieve one pound in weight are relegated to a second tier labelled 'mini species', the Committee once again has fallen foul of its own rules.

Because Master Phillips boat record weighed in at more than one pound, it automatically generated a vacant shore record slot. Let's face it, any shore caught Comber in British waters would be a worthy catch. But no, it has been given an arbitrary minimum qualifying weight of 12 ounces, which according to the rules should relegate it to the mini species list which hasn't happened. So why not have just the one list with the best boat and shore example of each species occupying the relevant record slot?

The other point of interest here has to do with the distribution of the species. As anyone who has ever packed a telescopic rod and selection of small hooks into their suitcase for a Mediterranean holiday probably knows, Comber are prolific in those parts. Related to the Bass, they are also widespread along Spain and Portugal's Atlantic coast, slowly becoming less numerous up through Biscay into the western approaches to the English Channel.

I recall a number of occasions in the 1970's and early-1980's catching and seeing good sized Comber while Red Bream fishing over the reefs out from Looe in Cornwall. Reports in the press of others would also appear from time to time. Then, suddenly, this all seemed to stop.

Perhaps reporting of what is after all quite a small fish lost its appeal. Or perhaps they just stopped coming, which would be surprising for what is essentially a warm water species at a time of rising sea temperatures. I don't know the answer. A similar situation has arisen with the Mako Shark, catches of which would have generated much more news interest than the Comber. Another 'mystery' for the fishery scientists to unravel.

WHITEHAVEN PIER JUMBO COD



The late-1970's through to around the mid-1990's saw some seasonal pockets of very large Cod occurring at a number of locations dotted around the country. It has been suggested that the particularly grim winter of 1962/63 when the sea froze for weeks on end in some parts of the country (see Chapter 8) played a part in all of this by keeping the usual predators of the Cod's eggs at bay during the crucial pre-hatching period.

That being the case, the knock on effect would be more Cod making it through to boost stocks, from which potentially a larger number would grow on through to specimen proportions. True or not, the fact remains that in the crucial years following the big freeze, large Cod repeatedly turned up in the Thames Estuary, along the Kent Coast, the Isle of Wight, the Bristol Channel, the Lancashire Coast, Balcary on the Scottish Solway Coast, the Clyde, and off Whitehaven in Cumbria.

Not always at exactly the same time, though for the most part there were overlaps, and now these fish are gone. At Balcary for example, just across the way from Whitehaven, they could have been there earlier than in the famous 'boom' years, but were either not known about, or initially kept quiet.

Though it's a major venue on the Cumbrian Coast, Whitehaven is none the less quite a small town and port. The harbour has 2 components to it, with the outer section protected by 2 solid arms known as the east and west piers, and it is from these arms that some amazing and largely forgotten monster Cod were caught during the 1970's and 1980's.

These include the north-west shore record standing at 40.8.0 caught by Paul Simpkins. The best of a crop of very big Cod, many in the twenties, taken mainly on large black lugworm baits fished after dark, including the specimen shown here published in Sea Angler magazine with a weight of 25.11.0 caught by Paul Wright in 1977, a fish which presumably, like the rest, had to be manoeuvred around the wall to a point where it could be taken from the water.

Nine years on in 1986, Ian Lowrey had one of 25.3.0 from the west pier, with a sprinkling of other good fish reported in the years between. Other Cumbrian Cod hot spots at the time included Siddick beach early season at low water, and Drigg Scar, also at low water, fished from November through to February.

PLATFORM TO BIG FISH

There's a certain romance about the deepest, coldest, most inaccessible areas of the wild North Sea potentially being home to Cod, Ling, and a raft of other species at sizes beyond our wildest dreams. Few if any rod and line fishermen will ever get access to such places thereby keeping the dream alive. But not everybody is denied that access. One particular small group of people have access to it 365 days a year. The oil rig workers of the North Sea.

In May 1977, Sea Angler Magazine published an article written by oil rig worker Brian Draycott. In it, Brian talks of 12 to 20 hours shifts in an area bedevilled by huge winter storms, the likes of which nightmares are made. Recreational facilities on the rig were described as good, as was the food, much of which comes from the canteen's deep freezers, and therein lies a problem. For obvious reasons, fresh food is non-existent. Unless that is you are prepared to catch it for yourself, which is what Brian Draycott and like minded workers on other rigs have set about doing.



In the same way that a wreck attracts good numbers of resident fish, oil rigs have a similar attraction, drawing in a similar range of species. Some of the rig workers began fishing with hand lines. Down at the business end it was pinks and rubber eels which accounted mainly for Pollack and Coalfish. Brian however preferred to use a rod, but noted that it needed to be kept short to avoid getting trimmed down to size by the helicopter blades. And not keen on lure fishing for just Coalfish and Pollack, he turned to the chefs on board to see if they could come up with anything he might use as bait, which they did in the form of squid, prawns,

Mackerel, and herrings.

The main problem with fishing aboard a high standing oil or gas rig is the distance from the platform to the sea below. Typically, this would be around 80 feet, which when you add in around 300 feet of water can be tough going, particularly when you then factor in monofilament stretch.

Modern braided lines were still some years away into the future, so Brian was forced to use braided Dacron which has a greater diameter than modern braids and therefore catches a lot more run. But it did give better bottom contact, which for bait fishing is essential, resulting in Cod to 10 pounds and Haddock to six.

Unfortunately, none of the monster fish we all dream about, which is perhaps as well considering having to lift them 80 feet up through the air to the platform. But they are down there. The divers report huge fish of various species on a fairly regular basis, and therein lies another problem. Divers working around the submerged base of the platform were becoming entangled in lost fishing line. So much so that very shortly after Sea Angler ran the article, fishing from the rigs was banned.

THE BLACK BREAM RECORD

On account of their ongoing progression northwards facilitated by rising sea temperatures, Black Bream

Spondyllosoma cantharus have become one of the success stories the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. However, in terms of numbers and sustainability on some of their more traditional south coast haunts it's a very different story altogether, with constant commercial pressure and spawning habitat disruption driving both sizes and numbers of fish down. So much so that bream in the 3 to 4 pound bracket are now rare in the extreme, with the current record of 6.14.4 taken by J. A. Garlick over a wreck out from Torquay in 1977 still in place at the close of the century, and likely to stand for some time yet, having already kept its place up to the time of writing.

COHO SALMON

Another of those fish for which no positive plausible explanation can be offered. The Coho Salmon *Oncorhynchus kisutch* is a Pacific species normally found from California to Alaska, and the former Soviet Union to Japan. The fact that Coho Salmon eggs were imported to Scotland in 1977 by Unilever Research Ltd. to evaluate the species for farm rearing probably has little direct bearing on the fish suddenly appearing in the sea section of the British record list, though coincidentally, the fish occupying top slot may or may not have some bearing on the bigger picture here.

The 'may not' is due to the geographical distance between Scotland and Petit Port on Guernsey in the Channel Islands where R. J. McCracken took his 1.8.1 record. The 'maybe' part of the mystery stems from reports of similar imports to other parts of Europe around the same period, suggesting perhaps either a mass, or at least partial escape from somewhere close to the Channel Islands, as the McCracken fish wasn't the only one caught in the area at the time, all of which were of similar size.

THE BLACK MOUTH DOGFISH RECORD

Scotland's Loch Fyne was the location at which J. H. Anderson took the British and Scottish record Black Mouthed Dogfish *Galeus melastomus* weighing in at 2.13.8 in 1977. A record which now no longer stands. But an interesting fish none the less in so far as it was seen as rare in the extreme both prior to and immediately after that date. Quite a small species by Dogfish standards, but not one likely to be overlooked on account of its body layout and beautiful markings, even if its true identity wasn't known.



In more recent times, particularly in the Sound of Mull, Firth of Lorne, and at Crinan on the Sound of Jura, all of which are now noted large skate venues, anglers dropping down baited feathers either for something to do while waiting for a run, or as an extra source of bait, have started taking BMD on a fairly regular basis. Everyone that is except me. Try as I may, all I ever come up with are Lesser Spotted Dogs, while those in the boat with me not interested in species hunting seem able to catch BMD almost to order.

WALNEY ISLAND

Walney Island is a narrow 11 mile long strip of land off the Cumbrian coast connected to the town of Barrow-in-Furness by a short road bridge spanning the narrow Walney Channel. A shallow lying lightly populated island dominated by the nearly BAe submarine building yard, with much of the island being given over to uninhabited shoreline and nature reserves.

An area where facilities are sparse, which includes boat launching. Yet during the 1970's on into the early-1980's it was an area I would trail my boat nearly 90 miles to get to every fishable weekend, on account of the quality of the fishing to be had along its west facing open water shoreline.

We were fishing from displacement boats powered by small outboards back then, which is perhaps as well in light of the difficulties faced getting afloat. A tiny ramshackle concrete slip leading on to a soft precarious beach at Earnse Bay was our regular gateway to the marks.



The boats were much lighter back then and the engines could easily be removed if the trailer wheels bogged in. We quickly learned however to continue driving the car slowly while unhitching the trailer, and to have wooden boards ready to put under the wheels if a stop was necessary. Otherwise, the car would be taken back up the beach until the boat was off the trailer, then brought back down again to pick it up, all of which had to be repeated at the close of play.

Our arrival was always timed for low water. With the car and boat parked up top, we would head off to dig a minimum of 300 blow-lug to bolster any frozen blacklug we had with us, which ate into the amount of time left to fish. Launching ate even further into the fishing time. So too did motoring out on a small outboard, and always we would call it a day either at high water, or when the bait ran out, whichever came first.

Not a lot of time was spent actually spent fishing. Even so, the catches were spectacular, because launching at Earnse meant that we pretty much had the place to ourselves. It was too far around to motor for boats launching by the bridge into the channel, and way too far to be reached by anyone adventurous enough to sail across Morecambe Bay to the islands southern tip with the engine sizes we had at the time.

Earnse Bay marked the boundary between the heavy broken ground to the south of the coastguard station and the shallow sandy banks northwards then eastwards into the Duddon estuary. Motoring south-west took you into Cod country. During the summer months these fish could be taken in good numbers on both pirks and crab baits. There were always lots of Tope there too, plus quite a mixed selection of other species.

We did fish for Cod occasionally, but invariably the big draw for us was the fantastic Plaice fishing on and around the banks stretching up to the northern tip of the island. Bass were on the menu too on large blacklug or crab baits, and always there was the chance of an odd Tope that wouldn't stay attached for long if you had a small flattie take a bait and hadn't noticed the bite.

It was here that I learned just how inquisitive Plaice can be. Invariably the fishing would start off slowly. Fish plucking at the first baits down would start to draw in more fish around the boat, the whole thing building to a crescendo towards high water, by which time we would be scratching around on the deck for any bits of worm we could find, which is one of the reasons we started bringing along extra frozen

blacklug, which actually proved to be a turning point. Blacklug for some reason was very good at sorting out the bigger fish. Better still, twice frozen blacklug, which the smaller Plaice and Dabs seemed less interested in taking.

To give a flavour of just how good it was; how fast the action was, and the need to get a fish up, off the hook, and the next bait down quickly, during one 3 hour session we boated 530 flatfish between 3 of us, the vast majority of which were Plaice, many of which would be over 2 pounds, which despite much bigger weights being bandied about in the press is still a very impressive looking fish. But not as impressive as the 4.1.0 beauty which was my personal best, a fish dwarfed by a 5.5.0 specimen which I personally weighed for a friend.

Across the way on the north side of the Duddon Estuary stands the small town of Haverigg. I recall one occasion when I drove around to fish there from an old wooden charter boat called 'White Heather' which would sit on the beach until the tide lifted it, and later would be dropped back at the same spot as the water ebbed away.

The visit was for a planned magazine article. Expecting to see a similar stamp of fish to what I was used to from my own boat, I have to say that I was disappointed. We did catch Plaice. But being influenced more by the estuary than our marks to the south, Flounders made up the bulk of the catch with far fewer Dabs in the mix as well. And then it was all gone. I can't put a date on it. But certainly by the mid-1980's we had been forced to turn our attentions elsewhere.

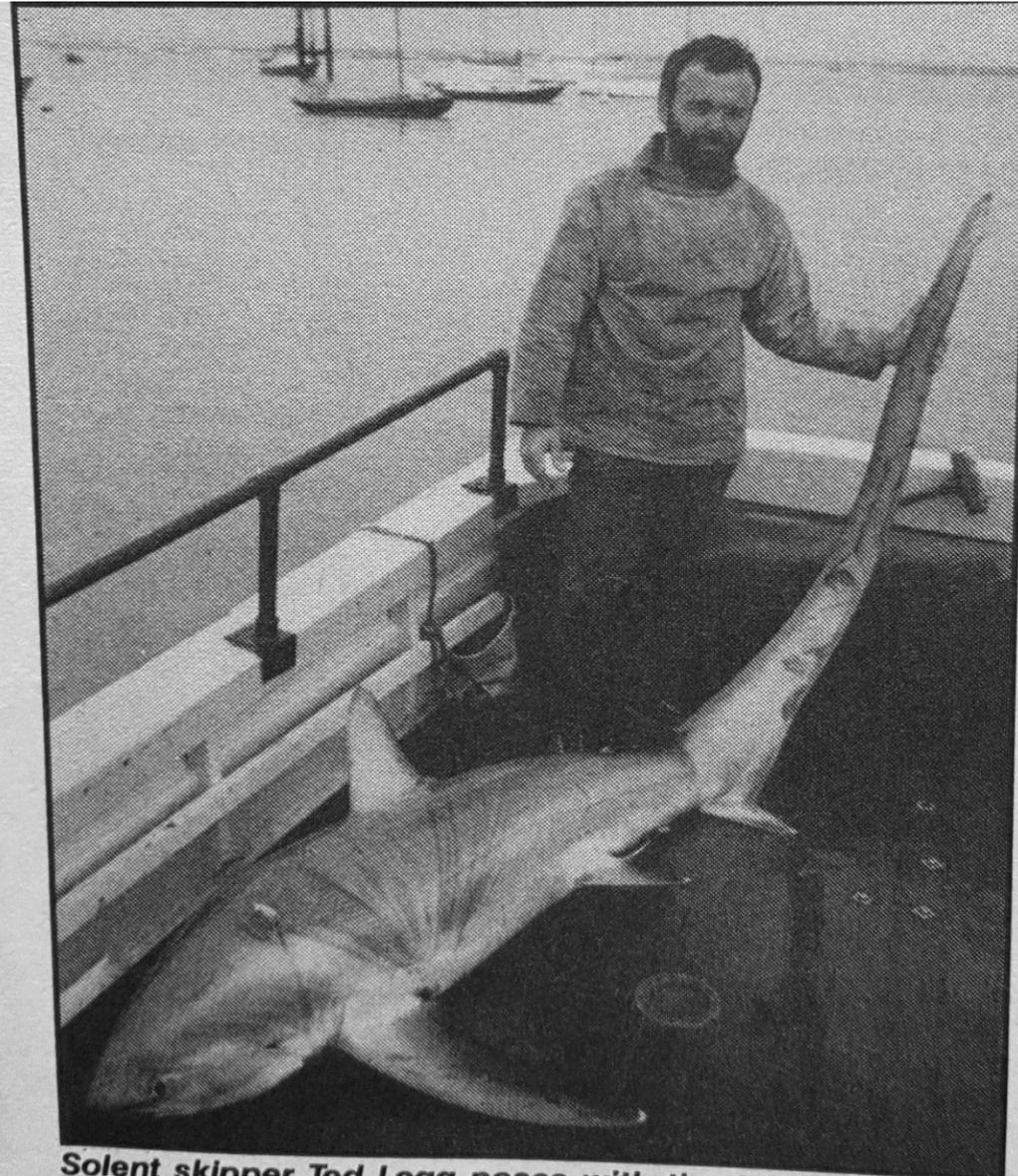
HUGE MEVAGISSEY ANGLERFISH

Charter skipper 'JJ' McVicar's 74.4.0 Angler Fish record taken from a wreck aboard his Plymouth based 'June Lipet' in 1972 was broken by K. Ponsford with a fish of 82.12.0 caught out from Mevagissey in April 1977. Since the advent of mid-channel wreck fishing, large Angler Fish taking lures worked over the sand build-ups created by the tide around some wrecks became something a regular occurrence, just as large Turbot have been taken on Conger baits fished over the same wrecks at anchor when the boat starts to swing out of position on its anchor as the tide or the breeze starts to pick up.

TED LEGGE & THE THRESHER SHARK ERA

Compared to Blue and Porbeagle Sharks, there aren't that many historical reports of Thresher Sharks *Alopias vulpinus* taken on rod and line, though it has to be said that catch numbers are nothing like as scarce as the Mako Shark. What we seem to have is two identifiable clusters, the first around the mid-1970's on into the 1980's when Ted Legge and Steve Mills were active on the shark scene, and the second from around 2005 to present fishing the same sort of area to the immediate east of the Isle of Wight, both linked by a shared thread in the form of Bembridge shark enthusiast Danny Vokins who gets his own Inclusion towards the close of this Chapter, and crops up again in the final Chapter entitled 'Legacy'.

The first official Thresher Shark national record I can find is that taken by the legendary H. A. Kelly at 280 pounds in 1933, the same year he also took the British Conger record with a fish of 84 pounds. Some years later (date unspecified) Brig. J. A. L. Caunter who is credited as being the foundation stone upon which the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain was built also had one, a photograph of which appears on the cover of his book 'Shark Angling in Great Britain', published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd. (1961). We then jump forward to Jim Aris who took the record with a fish of 295 pounds in 1978, fishing out from Gosport and the first real bout of targeted Thresher Shark interest.



Solent skipper Ted Legg poses with the 213 lb thresher shark caught aboard his boat.

Ted locates big shark

SOLENT skipper Ted Legg poses with a 213 lb thresher shark caught from his boat by Paul Bird of Tolcester, Northants. It took the 21-year-old angler an incredible 2 hours, 50 minutes to land on 30 lb gear. It's the fifth thresher this

season to come to Ted's boat, bringing the skipper's tally to 24. With 50-plus porbeagles also accounted for this year — most returned alive — Ted is far and away the most successful sharking skipper along the South Coast.

Other than those few meagre crumbs, there has been precious little else in terms of historical records doing the rounds to pick over. Fortunately, it often doesn't take much in the way of hard evidence to kindle some anglers enthusiasm, which if it produces an early tangible result, even if that only turns out to a clearly identified lost fish at the boat adds a few more crumbs to the pile, which is precisely what

did happen with a small number of dedicated deliberate Thresher Shark enthusiasts, each making contributions which on their own might not have meant much, but when viewed in their strong suggestion that the waters to the east of the Isle of Wight might hold more than a passing attraction to the species.

A much fuller version of this attraction based on homework painstakingly done by current Thresher Shark record holder Steve Mills is given in Chapter 10, outlining the research and practical work he did leading up to him beating Jim Aris's record from his own trailed boat with a fish of 323 pounds in 1982 taken out from Gosport, a record still in place both at the close of the twentieth century and at the time of writing here, which is 2018, though without doubt had there been a different way of 'acceptably' coming up with the accurate weight of fish at sea thereby not necessitating having to bring them ashore to be weighed on solid ground then Steve's record would have tumbled years ago, with probable recipient of the title 'British Record Holder' having gone to that man Danny Vokins.

Steve Mills was fanatical in his pursuit of Thresher Sharks. Arguably no less obsessed with top man with the species was charter skipper Ted Legge, a very difficult man to pin down with a view to doing a historical interview, so we will never really know for sure. What we can say for certain is that he was 'interested' in the species, and being a full time fisherman as opposed to his arch-rival at the time, Steve Mills, was in the fortunate position of being able to put in many more sea days with shark baits in the water than was most other people. Initially, this would be looking to catch Porbeagles for his clients at which he was also very good, a situation which owes much to the pioneering exploits of Dick Downes, and in some people's eyes, local angling journalist Trevor Housby.

Porbeagles were reasonably abundant in the waters to the east of the Island up to around the mid to late-1980's when according to Steve Mills, French long liners progressively saw them off, an action that is disputed by John Ayes of the Southsea SAC but supported by Danny Vokins. Wherever the truth lies, Porbeagle Shark fishing from both charter boats and dinghies had been very popular, both from the IOW, and particularly Steve's home port of Gosport where there is a thriving small boat angling community, resulting in a sparse and for the most part 'accidental bonus' Thresher Shark fishery in which occasional encounters were inevitable, persuading some participants to take things far more seriously than others.

Like the legendary Robin Vinnicombe who became synonymous with catching Mako Sharks out from Falmouth, Ted Legge slowly but surely built himself a reputation for being the man to book your trips with if you wanted to be in with a chance of ticking the Thresher Shark off your must catch list. There's no doubt about it, he was the right man in the right place at the right time; one of them at least. A man who still fishes to this day, preferring commercial fishing for Bass that taking anglers out looking for sharks, who despite my best efforts with Steve Mills remains an elusive character to get into conversation with, more the pity. In the absence of 'total accuracy' I would be guessing based on hearsay. That being the case, from the conflicting information I have which ranges between around 10 fish and possibly as many as 30, I'm not going to speculate. But if the caption to the press cutting included here from towards the end of the Thresher era is accurate, 30 Threshers sounds to be not too far from the mark.

Talking at length to both Steve Mills and Danny Vokins, deliberately targeting is probably more akin to Blue Shark fishing from a tactical perspective based on a single long drift with an unbroken rubby dubby slick than it is to Porbeagle fishing, which depending on where you fish, can involve short repeat drifts through known holding area with rubby dubby ending up all over the show. This is facilitated by the fact that the regular Thresher feeding zone comprises a corridor of around 3 miles wide and possibly as much as 20 miles long, though obviously, Porbeagles would still be candidates for putting in a show.

Ted Legge was collectively targeting the catching of sharks for his clients, of which at that time the Porbeagle was far and away the most abundant. That said, based on observations, he had a trick or two

up his sleeve which he felt would tip the balance a little more in his favour. For starters, as sharks go, Threshers have quite a small mouth best approached with at the most a single Mackerel. Their mode of hunting is to go charging through a bait ball scything away with the tail to kill or injure fish which could be picked off more easily later. Obviously these would start to sink. So while the hunting might take place high up in the water column, the actual feeding might well be somewhat deeper. Something Ted tackled by fishing a Mackerel straight down deep 'on the drop' from the bow of the boat. A tactic shown by him and by others since to be statistically productive.

PW Comment: Over his seasons of fishing for Threshers, Steve Mills had a total of 3 specimens from his own 17 foot boat. Ted Legge obviously had more, but in relation to the rods hours required his catch rate was still wasn't huge, which in part is what has fuelled some of the mystique around the Then they were gone. Least ways the Porbeagles were gone, with the knock-on effect of very few if any shark baits or rubby dubby going in for a long time starting during the mid to late-1980's. So sparse were the results that Steve Mills called it a day and Ted Legge went commercial fishing. Only one man continued on through the lean years, that man being Danny Vokins who I've already mentioned began fishing for Threshers in 1978 and was still fishing for them when I caught up with him in 2018.

UPPER CARDIGAN BAY

Cardigan Bay was full of fish during the 1970's when I began fishing there, and for a long time either side of that, with Aberystwyth, Aberdyfi, and Pwllheli providing charter boat access throughout the entire time. So as with other inclusions, this one could again have been slotted in earlier, and would have been just as valid later, as the area's reputation became very firmly established from the mid-70's right through to the end of the century.

The reason why I elected to slot it here is down to a long and very informative recorded interview I did with Aberystwyth charter skipper Dave Taylor aboard his boat 'Aldebaran' in 2011. Except from one trip with Charlie Bartlett out from Aberdyfi, all my fishing in the mid bay area from the late 1970's to the 1990's was with Dave Taylor, and as he was about to retire, one last trip with the voice recorder running seemed like an appropriate way of getting a first hand slant on the angling history of the area.

During the late-1970's through into the mid-80's, Aberystwyth, and to a lesser extent on account of charter boat availability, Aberdyfi, were high on many peoples list of venues to fish. The fishing was that good. It was also very varied, and I think it's fair to say had still to realise its full potential such as with the Porbeagle Sharks.

Mid-west Wales is ideally placed to tap into quite large angler catchment, regularly drawing in bookings from all around Wales, the north-west of England, and in particular the Midlands, providing excellent fishing for Tope, Thornback Rays, Bull Huss, Black Bream, and to a lesser degree, a whole host of other species.

It also offered choices in terms of bottom terrain, which comprises large areas of clean to mixed stony ground dissected by 3 long discreet fingers of quite shallow lying boulders. These start up in the north west corner of the bay and run for around 12 miles down past Aberystwyth. They are actually glacial moraines, which are cobbles and debris picked up and carried along by glaciers, eventually to be deposited in long piles when they melt.

Dave Taylor was there from the very beginning during the 1970's. I remember going out with him and catching lots of Thornback Rays. The species was particularly numerous back then, yet on today's evidence, you wouldn't know they had ever been present. That's a mark of how that particular species has fared in upper Cardigan Bay. While splitting his time over the many options available back then,

what limited attention Dave paid to the species would turn over between 600 and 700 rays per season with as many as 70 in a day.

Then, as with many venues around the country, ray numbers started to dip towards the late-1990's, having been virtually netted out in 2 to 3 years, with barely half a dozen in the entire season of 2005, and none at all in Dave's final season of 2011. But for some reason, unlike other areas of the UK which suffered a similar decline then saw numbers climb back after the turn of the century, Aberystwyth and



Aberdyfi remained at rock bottom, a phenomenon I have seen at other ports such as Rhyl and Fleetwood, while marks either side of them have an abundance of the species. Very odd, and very difficult to explain.

Another big draw was always the Tope, a fish that was quite prolific on the more mixed ground over the years. We would also pick up both big numbers and big specimens along the edges of the boulder piles, and sometimes even over their tops grabbing at hooked Black Bream, particularly at the northern end of the bay out from Pwllheli. Lots of big Bull Huss there too. As with the ray fishing in the early years, parties would generally spend a few hours fishing for them on bigger baits out over the cleaner and mixed ground, then round off the day fishing for the Black Bream.

Both ports were lucky in that it wasn't necessarily an either/or decision. You could mix and match according to what a particular party wanted to do, which if it did include Tope, produced lots of pack fish around the 30 pound mark with a few very much bigger fish here and there from time to time. Dave recalled one particular day when having been asked to stick with the Tope, his party finished up with 69 fish boated and released.

Black Bream have always been a very big draw in the upper half of Cardigan Bay. During the 1970's and 80's, The Patches was about as far north as good numbers of Black Bream regularly and reliably migrated. For many years, small numbers would occasionally show inside the Menai Strait, but upper Cardigan Bay was most certainly the Welsh Black Bream mecca. Not only in terms of numbers, but also size.

Typically, they would be most numerous between 1 and 2 pounds. But I can remember seeing fish well over 4 pounds taken aboard 'Aldebaran', one in particular missing out on the then Welsh record by a mere ounce. And while bream have had their ups and downs, population numbers appear to be holding fairly steady, though average sizes do seem to have dropped, with the bigger fish these days being particularly thin on the ground.



Porbeagle Shark fishing, for which Aberystwyth in particular became renowned, was quite a short-lived affair. Getting underway properly in the late-1980's, it would be all but gone by the mid-1990's. Sharks had been known about in the area for years but never seriously fished for. As far back as the 1930's, Bullen and Herrin first brought their potential to light, and in the 1960's, Vic Haigh's Endeavour Group had a bit of a play at catching them, but nothing too serious.

This continued on through the 1970's until John Mitchell aboard 'Anne J' fishing well offshore out of Aberaeron starting catching them between 75 and 150 pounds. Never any suggestion of Blue Sharks though. Then local angling journalist Mike Thrussell got involved working with Charlie Bartlett aboard his Aberdyfi based 'Ceffyl Mor', looking to get a better understanding of what was on offer. As a result, on the 4th July 1989, Mike caught the first ever Welsh shark to crack the 200 pound barrier with a new Welsh record Porbeagle of 205 pounds.

More Porbeagle fishing quickly led to a better understanding of the when, where, and how, to the point that collectively, as many as 4 per day in the 60 to 120 pound bracket were coming ashore. They also discovered that the ultra-long distances offshore of the past weren't necessary either. On occasion, sharks were being encountered as little as a couple of miles off picking up baits put out for rays or Tope. Generally though, it was the 6 to 7 mile mark where the largest concentrations of Mackerel were to be found that produced the most. Then sadly, as I hinted earlier, 'live for today sod tomorrow' commercial greed came along and wiped the whole thing out virtually at a stroke around the end of the 80's, in part due to anglers themselves becoming their own worst enemy.

Beside anglers taking Porbeagles for eating, there were way too many catch reports which were bound to attract the attention of the commercials, who when they got wind of the fact that small to average Porbeagles pupped along the north Cornish Coast were using Lundy Island as staging post as they pushed north into South Wales and eventually round into Cardigan Bay for the summer, started long lining and netting in the Lundy area, and by the mid-1990's, Cardigan Bay Porbeagle Shark fishing was little more than a memory.

Tying up a few loose ends, it's also worth mentioning some of the other species that were regularly taken around the middle part of the bay over the years. One which particularly interested me as a species hunter was the Greater Weever *Trachinus draco*. I was desperate to tick it off my list. One of those fish you long to catch just once, then can't get away from afterwards. Every time either small baits or strings of feathers made it down to the bottom over the cleaner ground they stood a better than even chance of coming back full of huge Greater Weevers.

Some I'm told were approaching 2 pounds in weight, though generally they would weigh in at under a pound. Beautiful fish to look at, but a nuisance to clear from the hooks. Equally beautiful were the

gurnards. Mainly Tub Gurnards, some going as big as 5 pounds. And let's not forget the chance of picking up a Monkfish (now called Angel Sharks). Never prolific, but always a possibility. A fish so rare these days that it now on the critically endangered list.

To get the best out of what was on offer inside the bay you needed a bit of tide running. Mid-bay venues such as Aberystwyth and Aberdyfi had little choice other than stick with what they had. Not so further up at Pwllheli. The boats there would fish for the Black Bream and Tope on the bigger tides, but weather permitting, had other options for the neap tide period.

There are quite a few closely packed deep water wrecks out off the Llyn Peninsula. Often lying in more than 300 feet of water, over the years, these have produced lots of good Pollack and Coalfish and were the location that produced the first ever sea angling magazine article fully illustrated with digital photographs which I produced aboard Dave Carey's boat 'Judy B'.

I've even fished these wrecks from my own dinghy, and around Bardsea Island, plus its surrounding banks. A scary place to fish in anything other than perfect conditions, as I know to my cost from a day spent anchored up over the Devils Ridge. It was okay at the start of the tide, turning into a boiling cauldron when the run got underway, which was too then fierce even to get the anchor up and leave. Every fish we hooked (presumably rays and huss) ended up parting the lines due to the sheer force of the tide.

LEVER DRAG REELS



Lever drag reels were developed for the specific purpose of being able to apply a predetermined measure of pressure to a large fish such as Marlin or Tuna without the fish ever putting the breaking strain of the line jeopardy. You might get spooled out, but in theory you should never get broken off.

Unlike a star drag which can be tightened to lock up point, lever drags are protected by a pre-set button beyond which you have to take deliberate action to override, ensuring no accidental over application of the drag in the heat of the

moment. Pushing the lever up against the pre-set button is known as the 'strike' position, which typically should be around 33% of the breaking strain of the line. This is measured by pulling against a spring balance and tweaking the adjustment control until the right level of drag is achieved.

The actual drag itself is applied by means of fibre washers, with the larger diameter spools obviously having the potential to take a much bigger washer, which is why large reels have the potential to apply more drag, and why smaller versions are more easily spooled out by big fish.

It isn't only about the capacity of the line. It wouldn't matter how much line a spool could hold if sufficient drag to tire and turn a big fish cannot be applied. Obviously, you can also achieve the same result with a star drag. The problem there would be in knowing where the 'strike' point is, plus the speed at which you can ease it back to a safe level. But the early lever drags too had had their problems, one of which was achieving 'free spool', something modern versions have now sorted out.

So far as the British market goes, Policansky was the first reel manufacturer to offer the lever drag at affordable 'high street' prices during the 1970's. I well remember all the banter in the angling press at the time. People singing the praises of the concept as though it was something we all long needed and had suddenly found.

Without doubt there are home water situations in which a lever drag can offer some advantage, such fishing for hard diving Pollack and Coalfish over wrecks, or big Porbeagle Sharks and the like. On the other hand, we'd managed quite well without them for years, and for the rest of the species UK and Irish anglers routinely fish for, I'm sure we could have managed for many years more on into the future. Initially it was probably a combination of the novelty factor coupled to converts trying to justify an absolute need to the rest of us.

From what I can remember of the 'big debate' at the time, as well as polarisation for and against with regard to the concept, there was also some controversy regarding its delivery by the manufacturers, Policansky. These related to reliability and quality issues, though in fairness, not only did some anglers sing the reels praises long and hard, to an extent the Policansky project has demonstrated longevity to the point that if you shop around online you can still find and buy them today, with, Sundridge Tackle the appointed agents for Policansky here in the UK as recently as 1989.

However, it wasn't until the Shimano TLD range arrived towards the end of the 1980's following the same remit as Policansky a decade or more earlier, of delivering lever drag reels at affordable prices, and with reliability, that the concept really caught on, with all the other major tackle manufacturers quickly following Policansky and Shimano's lead.

IRISH SEA SAFARIS



One day during the late 1970's I received a surprise invite to join a mixed party of anglers and angling journalists for a week fishing at Clifden in Connemara on the west coast of Ireland, courtesy of the Irish Tourist Board (ITB). It was a roughly 50/50 split between those that had qualified through a mix of competitive wins and catching specimen fish, and invited guests such as to myself and Graeme Pullen. Also with us was ITB representative Paul Harris making

sure everything ran smoothly, including plenty of alcohol in the evenings.

Arrangements had also been made for people like Peter Green and Norman Dunlop to put in a show, both of whom worked for the Central Fisheries Board (CFB), whose primary role it was to explore angling prospects all around the Irish Coast, in part by their own efforts, and in this case by advising on and recording the outcome of what would be quite a long run of annual Sea Safari events, many of which both Graeme and I attended at a range of locations including Fethard and Courtmacsherry.

England International Mick Toomer, and veteran west country angling journalist Mike Millman were also present on some, plus a whole list of other people whose names have long since slipped from my memory. That said, the enjoyment of the fishing, plus the camaraderie and exploits of many of those who also fished these trips is very clearly etched onto my memory.

Picture a dozen or so 20 to 30 year old anglers suddenly released from the 'shackles' of domesticity for a week, with nothing but fishing, drinking, and pranking to keep themselves occupied. It was tough going, honestly. On that first trip somebody broke into my room, then after piling my clean tee-shirts up with a handful of lugworms between each layer they then hammered down hard on them leaving me with a pile of stinking identical 'tie dyed' tee-shirts for the week.

On another occasion, I was awoken by scratching noises at the side of my head and went on to find the wooden bedside cabinet draws all full of crabs. Cling film over the toilet seat, Mackerel dropped into rod tubes then pulped, Mackerel wired to the exhaust of the mini-bus, and a giant Spider Crab trying to claw its way out of a communal toilet used by other none angling guests. The list goes on and on. All good fun, unless you happened to be on the receiving end. But they were fair. Everybody got their share, so no need ever to feel singled out.

The general format was to select a venue with charter boats and decent shore fishing about which the CFB lads knew a bit, but generally speaking, the venue wouldn't be known to the wider outside World. That was where the journalists came in. All the venues chosen got their essential measure of coverage, though it has to be said that the fishing at some went better than it did at others. Often the weather was at least partly to blame, though species mix and availability within realistic reach also had their part to play.

Clifden for example produced some very good Pollack to the redgills fished on flying collar rigs in decidedly 'lumpy' conditions. We had initially been trying to catch sharks which didn't go too well, so the Pollack drifting was a bit of a last minute fallback, which in hindsight deserved to have been given more time in its own right. Meanwhile, the lads that had stayed on the shore headed up by Graeme had a burster on Thornback Rays plus other fish at the White Lady Rocks, holding up part of their catch to show us as we sailed by on the way back in.



The Sea Safari that most sticks in my mind was to Courtmacsherry on the opposite side of Old Head from the far better known port of Kinsale, which by that stage had made quite a name for itself as a shark fishing venue. The weather as ever could have been better, but for the most part it was fishable. Mark Gannon had just set himself up for charter fishing and accommodation, which I know from Graeme has subsequently flourished in all directions. But it was still early days when we first visited.

It was here that I first met shore match man Ken Robinson from Whitley Bay, who would go on to break the Scottish shore Cod record from Balcary Point (see Chapter 10). Ken was very keen to catch a Blue Shark which Graeme and I set about helping him achieve. Our skipper was a local old boy who

was rather more fond of the Guinness than was perhaps good for him. So we pledged a pint of Guinness for every shark caught that first day, which turned out to be 15. And yes, he sank every last glass full and was still fit enough to be back at the helm the following morning.

One evening, Mark decided to take us out for an after dark session close in over some reefy ground around Old Head. An eerie experience. There wasn't a breath of wind, and the sea was like glass. One of those occasions where, whilst it wasn't really misty or foggy, it was hard both to see land and where the fading sky merged into the water. Even more eerie was the phosphorescence of the water. Faint luminous green lines angled out in the wake created by the bow. But more noticeable was the outline of fish just under the water's surface, some of which looked very much like Garfish swimming in the same direction as the boat several yards out from either side.

We had hoped to make out the same eerie outline with a big Common Skate, but that was not to be. We did however get a few smaller Thornback Rays, plus Conger, Huss, and a large Three Bearded Rockling which are spectacular fish when you actually see them in the flesh. I also remember wondering (more like hoping) how Mark would find his way back to base, which obviously he did.

Speaking of Conger, it was there that I got my introduction to shore fishing for them. I'm strictly a boat angler. Shore fishing back then didn't feature on my angling CV. Graeme on the other hand, in part not being a drinker, wanted to fish every waking moment (he's still the same today). As such, he arranged for us to fish a small informal competition from the quay wall after dark. Fortunately, there was a little pub known as the Harbour Bar within sight of where we would be fishing.

It was a strange pub run by an even stranger old woman with a horse whip who would take no crap from anyone. The bar had a tubular brass grab rail on top of it at exactly the right height for sliding a loaded Guinness glass underneath. Needless to say, we took it in turns to go to the bar for yet another tray of the 'black stuff', with one of the lads tripping over a rope and disappearing over the quayside, landing flat on his back on the deck of a boat. After dusting himself down he was straight back to the fishing and drinking, such is the anaesthetic quality of draught Guinness.

Though we caught nothing of any real size, dropping Mackerel fillet baits down between the moored trawlers saw a steady stream of Eels coming in, the best probably just failing to make 20 pounds or so. During my visit to the bar I left my rod fishing with the other lads supposedly keeping an eye on it. Needless to say, when I got back it was gone, which if I'm honest, wasn't totally unexpected given the track record of pranks on these types of trip.

I supposed they had hidden it somewhere, despite them telling me it had been dragged into the water. I looked everywhere, but to no avail, so as you do, I just played along with things. That was until Graeme brought a Conger of about 15 pounds up the wall only to find a second hook in its mouth, the line from which vanished off into the water. So we hand lined in, and there it was, my rod and reel at the other end of it, so it had been dragged in after all.

I lost touch with the Sea Safaris around 1984, when, after a lot of ear bending to Paul Harris and the CFB lads I finally persuaded them that small boat fishing was the future. Dave Houghton at Leisure Angling in Liverpool was similarly persuaded in 1985 of the pending explosion in popularity of small boat fishing which he catered for with his Rosslare Small Boats Festival. Fine if you like competitions and want to be based in one area. Less so if you like to explore for individual big fish and want to up sticks and move to somewhere sheltered should the need arise.

The message finally got through in 1984 (see Chapter 10) with a dinghy exploration of Tralee Bay based at Fenit. As such, I'm not sure how much longer the Sea Safari's continued after the mid-1980's before they were finally axed as a cost saving measure. But at least the Irish had had the foresight to invest in the asset they had by getting English anglers to publicise it in the English angling press, not to mention the CFB producing county by county sea angling guides, putting up road signs to the top fishing

spots, and to their credit, looking to conserve their fish stocks for the benefit of anglers, and not commercial fishing. A lesson there for all of us.

THE LOSS OF MORECAMBE WEST END PIER



Engineered by J. Harker, construction work began on Morecambe West End Pier in 1893, with its formal opening in 1896 at a length of 1,800 feet which was later extended in 1898. There then followed a catalogue of disasters beginning in 1903 when it was breached in two places by a storm, followed by further storm damage in 1907 which took away 180 feet of its extension.

Next on the list was extensive fire damage to the pavilion in 1917, with another big storm in 1927 reducing its length by half to around 900 feet. Yet despite all of this, it remained open until 1977 when another storm struck, this time wrecking around a third of what had remained, leading up to it finally being demolished in 1978.

KEY DEVELOPMENT IN OFFSHORE WIND FARMING



The prospect of commercial wind farming as a producer of so-called ‘green’ electricity took a big step forward in 1978 with the construction of the World’s first Multi-Megawatt Wind Turbine. Pioneering a number of new technologies, at 54 metres in height it was the shape of things to come, and while this was a land based turbine, the implications were there for all to see and continue seeing all around our coast as more and more wind farms come on stream, blighting the seascape and affecting wildlife both above and below the water’s surface.

Interestingly, both the concept and the engineering came from a group of amateurs in the form of the teachers and pupils at schools in Tvind in Denmark, concepts which at the time were widely ridiculed. But, he who laughs last and all that, as it looked and worked eerily like modern day wind turbines with its 3 bladed horizontal axis, putting Denmark right at the forefront of the wind power industry.

PW Comment: When the first offshore wind farms started going up around the UK they were greeted by a wide range of resistance, covering everything from aesthetics to cost effectiveness. With subsidies however, plus a wish to appease climate scientists and the green lobby, offshore wind farms have continued to be built.

Unfortunately, these are often sited in areas where anglers would find good fishing. And while it's a myth to suggest anglers cannot enter a wind farm area, the myth continues to be pedalled in the hope of keeping people away. Particularly those wanting to put anchors down to fish.

Another myth doing the rounds is that wind farms become conservation areas in which fish thrive. That is nonsense, and for a number of reasons, including the vibration and noise they put out, plus electromagnetic forces (EMF's) emanating from the cables carrying the generated power back to land, which has been shown to affect some fish species.

Offshore wind turbines are a coastal eyesore, a threat to wildlife including birds and fish (despite their so-called green 'credentials'), and an obstruction to fishing, and possibly even commercial shipping.

THE LOSS OF MARGATE JETTY

Designed by the famous Victorian Engineer Eugenius Birch, Margate was the first ever iron pier. It was commissioned in 1853 by The Margate Pier Harbour Company as a replacement for an 1,100-foot wooden jetty known as 'Jarvis Landing Stage' which had been breached in two places by a storm, besides which, it could only be accessed on low tides, and was in constant need of repairs.

The new pier opened in 1855, though it wasn't finally completed until 1857. Twenty years later in 1877 it was hit by a drifting vessel causing around £4,000 worth of damage, with further monies invested in the structure 1893, and again in 1900.

As with many piers, it was eventually used as part of the war effort in WWII, with steamer services resuming when the war was over lasting until 1966. Ten years, later in 1976, it was closed on safety grounds, after which it was virtually destroyed by a big storm in 1978. Attempts to demolish what remained were initially unsuccessful, with the final remnants not dismantled until 1998.

NEWQUAY

Despite having many enjoyable fishing trips out from Newquay in Cornwall, the venue really took itself seriously as a sea angling venture during the 1970's, which for a number of years was my annual summer holiday destination with the wife, caravan, and young kids.

The plus side of that statement is that you could always be sure to get on a boat with as little as a day or so's notice, because despite having some potentially half decent mixed reef fishing within a stone's throw of harbour, the whole setup was geared up to half-day, tackle provided holiday trips, for people who in many instances had never fished before, and judging from some of the goings on, would probably never fish ever again.

There was a little wooden kiosk on the harbour back then where you booked and paid for your trip. Several boats were involved, and the lady in the kiosk was tasked in filling them all for either morning or afternoon trips, for which you would be given a ticket. Then, at the allotted time on the allotted day, you would turn up at the harbour, where somebody in authority who I assumed to be the harbour master, would line everyone up according to which boat they were on, then usher them to the steps in turn for boarding. It reminded me of being back at school. We were literally treated like children. But there was another side to it which I was very keen to exploit.



I wasn't in a position to fish full trips anyway. My children were only just starting to walk and were a handful in a small caravan. I found morning trips from 9 am until 1 pm the easiest. The kids weren't up and wanting to be out and about, and most of the other holiday makers weren't that keen on the early starts, so sometimes the boat wouldn't be full.

Not that it mattered. Most had never fished before either, were ill equipped for conditions, and had probably been drinking the night before, because vomiting, shivering people huddled up against the wheelhouse bulkhead brought a whole new meaning to the term 'wreck fishing'. In short, I pretty much had all the bait and the unhindered run of the entire boat as the pleas for an early exit were ignored, the skipper having been paid to see it through right to the bitter end.

I don't recall ever seeing anything particularly big come aboard. The catches suggested reefy or patchy scrubby mixed ground, chosen to produce whatever was possible in the shortest sailing time possible for a group of people, who by and large, would not

care one way or the other, if indeed they even bothered to fish at all. What I do recall however is catching some beautiful Red Bream. The last venue I saw them at in fact towards the end of the 1970's, after which they suddenly vanished from around the entire British Coast and remained that way for many years (see Chapter 10).

On most days you would see Pollack, Pouting, bream, wrasse species, small Ling and small Conger. Occasionally something bigger or more interesting might come along in the form of a large Three Bearded Rockling. I remember seeing a few rays too, one of which was a Cuckoo Ray, while on another day a small Sunfish was brought ashore. Otherwise, it was smaller end reef species and lots of them, which is what occasional punters want. Those that could keep their breakfast down for long enough that was and stand up instead of being hunched over the side staring into the water, wishing they could be anywhere else on the planet other than fishing out from Newquay.

GERRY'S OF MORECAMBE

There are fishing tackle outlets by the hundred dotted all around the country. What makes Gerry's of Morecambe and a few other major tackle retailers such as Tony's Tackle and Gerry's of Wimbledon worthy of historical interest is the role each has played in shaping the way fishing tackle is priced and made available. These men were pioneers, providing the tackle that anglers wanted at prices they could afford to pay.

They were, and still are, important barometers of angling trends for tackle manufacturers and fishing publications, generating the kind of statistics that can only be gauged from what anglers want to do the jobs they have in mind. Interest in conservation for example can be gauged from the sale of say circle or semi-barbed hooks and weighing slings.

The 're-invention' of the fixed spool reel for shore fishing is another sales based trend, as are continental surf rods, braided lines, and a whole raft of other tackle innovations, all of which no single angler could accurately pick up on were it not for the way large scale mail order, and now Internet sales outlets, are able to see by what is being moved.

Gerry Foote was one of the pioneers of all this. But he certainly wasn't the first to get into angling tackle volume selling. Like Tony Kirrage and Dave Docwra to name but two from the 1970's on into the 1980's, Gerry was there or thereabouts in terms of expanding the boundaries, much to the dismay of smaller local shops which by and large can't compete, and are therefore used for bits and pieces of urgently required terminal tackle, and most import of all, access to bait.

Were it not for bait sales and the occasional purchases of last minute tackle items made by bait buyers once they enter the premises, most small shops would go under, which is one area the Internet and mail order boys struggle to compete in, and for the most part leave well alone.



The first thing you notice when you speak to Gerry Foote in his Morecambe based shop is the accent. He's obviously not a Lancashire lad. Hailing from London, he met his girl-friend Barbara (now wife) in. Her mother and step-father had first decided to move to Morecambe, with Gerry following suit. Initially he set up a haulage business which wasn't particularly successful, in addition to which he damaged his spine man-handling some furniture, which for obvious reasons, also didn't help.

Pondering his next step, his mother-in-law who had a sports shop in the town, asked him what he intended to do next, followed up with the suggestion that if he liked fishing so much, why not open a fishing tackle shop. She then talked to a company that sold fishing tackle and arranged a credit line of £1,000 to stock a small premises she helped him find.

He recalls expecting the £1,000 to fill the place with a selection of stock he thought would arrive on several large lorries. The reality was that it arrived in several boxes, all from the same company, which was very sparsely displayed around the shelves. That was during the late-1970's. It was then that he discovered he had the ability to sell, and slowly but surely, things started to blossom.

Talking all this over with Gerry, one of the key moments he recalls came to him while doing the daily early morning chore of sorting through the lugworms in the fridge. All this work for a steady modest wage, he thought. A lot of people in similar situations don't even take a wage, preferring or being required to plough everything back into the business in the hope of growing it, something Gerry himself had done for the first couple of years while living off his wife's earnings.

"Is this it", he thought. "How can I expand?". Morecambe is quite a small town with a limited potential for turnover. He describes his 'eureka' moment as coming from a chat with the advertising sales people at Sea Angler Magazine who persuaded him to take out a half page ad. "You need to be the first ad. in the magazine to have any real impact", they told him. But when he picked up the magazine, because he's right handed, as most people are, when he started flicking through it with his left hand, he began at the back working his way forward. The advertising girls had told him the back was the worst place in the magazine, so they negotiated a price, and it all grew out of that.

That half page ad grew to become a full page, and the black & white evolved into colour. Now, with an ever widening audience, volume buying was on the cards, followed by volume sales at increasingly competitive prices. The obvious knock on from this was more staff and storage space, and all the time the competition is hounding the same manufacturers for volume driven deals to help them undercut everyone else's deals, knowing they constantly need to be at least as cheap as the nearest competition.

Some would put themselves at risk of going under trying to outcompete the competition, so you needed to be vigilant and careful. It was a very difficult tight rope to walk. Fortunately, Gerry says, the relative cost of fishing tackle is well down on what it used to be, which also helps. It allows you to buy in more and do so more regularly, particularly as manufacturing is increasingly being farmed out to China then rebadged when it reaches the UK. Everyone is pushing, asking “How cheap can you make things?”. But, if stuff drops to bits, then ‘cheap’ can prove to be more costly in the longer term.

Through mergers, and by killing off some of the smaller opposition, tackle companies are becoming increasingly bigger and more multi-national all the time. Quite often as a result they are not run nearly so well as in the pre-merger days. Choice and quality can also start to suffer, as can the potential to barter down prices and arrange the kind of deals tackle dealers and anglers want. Now big monopolies can turn around and say “take it or leave it”. So the power has now shifted back to them.

Large conglomerates also tend to result in reduced ranges. It’s no good competing with other arms of your own company, so they can save yourself both R & D as well as production costs by both narrowing cross brand choice and rationalising production, which is good for them, and less good for everyone else.

The tackle scene is changing; has changed, and very likely will continue to change. It may even go full circle with well known names within a larger portfolio once again allowed to go their own way and compete as they did in the past. Angling had better hope so, and sooner rather than later.

RAYS BREAM MIGRATION

This is a story that spans pretty much all of the 1960’s through into the 1980’s with its roots very much further back in time. Certainly hundreds, and possibly even thousands of years. My decision to have 1967 as the inclusion date here is entirely down to the fact that this was the year in which the largest rod caught specimen recorded around the British Isles was taken. A shore caught fish of 7.15.12 by G. Walker at Crimdon Beach, Hartlepool. A location which fits this particular story very well.

Rays Bream *Brama brama* are a deep open water species, sometimes encountered by anglers fishing well offshore, often high up in the water column. Around the British Isles they follow, or did follow, a well trodden annual migration route. This would take them up the west coast of Ireland and north west part of Scotland, around Orkney and Shetland, then down into the North Sea as late summer began to turn into Autumn. Past and present Irish, Scottish, and British records confirm this route and its approximate timing. Then as the fish pressed on southwards deeper into the North Sea, things would suddenly start to go wrong for them.

It’s hard to say with complete certainty what goes through a fish’s mind. Driven on by instinct, and in the late summer months unrestricted by unsuitable water temperature they would continue to push on southwards through the Scottish borders to England’s north-east coast, by which time temperatures were starting to tumble as autumn turned to early winter, bearing in mind that sea temperatures often lag behind changes in land and air temperatures by up to several weeks.

It was during that period in the run up to Christmas that anglers would see the biggest numbers, though still never a lot. Some would be caught out in the boats, though most would come from and even on to the beaches. Invariably there would be good numbers washed ashore in the weeks following Christmas with a big sea running, initially comatose due to the cold, where most would eventually die.

This went on for many years. A friend of mine Ken Robinson from Whitley Bay would collect them for me for photographic purposes, such was the regularity and reliability of finding them. Then suddenly



it all seemed to stop. I've no doubt there will still be a few following this path even today, but you never get to hear about them much anymore, suggesting that this once annual event started to peter out in terms of intensity probably during the 1980's.

The last time any of the national records were broken was 1978. It could be that the maximum weight had been achieved by that stage, but I very much doubt it. More probably it is down to climate change. Winters starting to get milder, and average annual temperatures started to break all records year on year during the 1990's, in all likelihood allowing the fish to successfully reverse their migration route out in deep water where conditions are more stable, resulting in no more comatose specimens being washed ashore.

PW Comment: Reports again started circulating in the press about Rays Bream turning up in the same locations at more or less the same times around 2008 to 2010 and possibly beyond. People were quite literally picking them up off the beaches and

from the surf still alive then taking them home to eat, as evidenced by the photograph accompanying this inclusion of a fish picked up at Filey in January 2010.

THE LOSS OF HUNSTANTON PIER

Designed by J. W. Wilson, the 830 foot long Hunstanton Pier opened in 1870 with a paddle steamer service to Skegness Pier commencing in 1882, after which, as piers go, it led a fairly uneventful life until fire destroyed the pavilion in 1939. Various non-angling related alterations and investments followed leading up to the seaward end falling into disuse. Then in 1978 a storm destroyed much of the pier leading to a small section at the end being completely removed, after which it survived for another reasonable run of time until 2002, when fire again (a regular scourge of Victorian Piers) destroyed much of what had been left. Despite some rebuilding having taken place at the shoreward end, virtually nothing remains which could now be described as a pier.

DANNY VOKINS, THE THRESHER MAN

Bembridge, Isle of Wight angler Danny Vokins is the undisputed master when it comes to Thresher Shark fishing. The waters to the east of the Island have long been known to offer up the best possible chance of a Thresher encounter in British waters. Don't however confuse the term 'best chance' with 'good chance', as Threshers are rare fish, with few anglers ever having caught one, and considerably less than that able to say that they did so fishing for them deliberately.

Charter Skipper Ted Legge who is included earlier in this Chapter earned himself something of a reputation for the species in the 1970's and 1980's by picking a few up both accidentally while fishing for Porbeagles, and occasionally deliberately on a whole Mackerel bait fished deep on the hang from the bow of his boat. Steve Mills (Chapter 10) also put in a lot of time and effort which was rewarded with the current 323 pound record. However, both Steve and Ted Legge hung up their Thresher rods towards the end of the 1980's. Only Danny Vokins continued in the quest through the lean seasons and more recently the good.



When I spoke with him in late 2018, his running total across Threshers, Porbeagles and Blue Sharks was just short of 500, of which his Thresher total was a staggering 48 leaving him waiting for the 2019 season to hopefully finally crack his target of 50 fish. When you consider that Steve Mills and Dave Timms fishing together had just 3 fish to the boat followed by a couple of blank seasons, and Ted Legge's running total is variously estimated to be between as few as 10 fish and as many as 30 depending on who you ask, taken during a period when as a charter skipper he would be out at every opportunity, then Danny Vokins 48 fish is outstanding. Granted, he has consistently put in the time dating back to 1978 looking for results which typically in the early years might be just 1 or 2 in a season.

More recently that figure has started to climb to 3 or 4 in a year with a seasons best of 8 as Thresher Shark numbers have started to pick up this last several years. Whether this has anything to do with rising sea temperatures would be pure speculation. In turn, more fish about tempts more boats to go out looking for them which in turn pushes the catch returns still higher. So the fish are there. It isn't just Danny who is finding them. In 2018 Stewart Newell provided the platform for Andy Griffith to catch and release 5 Threshers over 3 consecutive days.

From what Danny tells me he isn't doing that much different to what Steve Mills and Ted Legge found to be their successful approach. He drift fishes the same 3 miles wide by 30 miles long corridor Steve Mills described to me as stretching from the Nab Tower area eastwards towards Sussex. Whereas Ted Legge liked to fish at least one bait on the hang and Steve Mills favoured having his baits quite shallow, Danny prefers setting them at around three-quarter depth, sometimes with a 'bonus' bait on the hang. Three slightly differing approaches all of which brought results.

Where Danny Vokins seems to have racked up the numbers is through sheer perseverance over the lean years through to the good, in which time virtually every fish he has had to the boat has been tagged and disgorged in the water then released. This includes a fish reliably estimated to be in excess of 500 pounds, a Thresher Shark way in excess of the current official record, which to have been recognised as such would have needed to be killed and brought ashore, something which was never going to happen, particularly having gone to great efforts to persuade the Bembridge Shark Fishing Club to change their rules, insisting that all sharks now be returned unharmed.

JIM PRESSLEY

Jim Pressley was destined for angling greatness from an early age through being tutored by the man many top sea match anglers see as the best of the best, Ron Edwards of Herne Bay (see Chapter 8). Apprenticeships don't come much better than that. But you still have to work at things. Success is not inevitable. It takes hours upon hours with the baits in the water learning all those little nuances which collectively lead to the top step of the podium, and in that regard, Jim Pressley was no slouch.

While he was still at school, he set himself the target of catching 1,000 Bass before he left at the age of 16, which he managed to achieve with time to spare. An excellent example of his competitiveness and winning mentality, even at such an early age.

Born in 1947, his earliest recollection of having any interest in fish was around the age of 5 when he would sit and watch Flounders swimming along the base of Herne Bay breakwater, then try to catch

them with a piece of mussel tied to a length of string. He tells me that he wasn't a big fan of going to school. "What a waste of time that was", he commented. Increasingly, the only thing that mattered in his life was fishing, and obviously, school got in the way of that, which is exactly what many thousands of anglers regularly say about going to work.



The opportunity to boat fish also came at quite an early age. Herne Bay had a number of pleasure boats anchored up maybe 100 yards offshore waiting for holiday makers to hire them. 'Trippers' would be rowed out to them in a 7 foot dinghy. The local council who licensed the operation had a rule that at all times there should be 2 people in charge. What this didn't stipulate was the minimum age of that 'second man', who regularly would be a very young Jim Pressley. So young he was still at junior school. And for doing this he was rewarded by being allowed to sit and wait in the dinghy fishing with a hand line, and a later a home made rod.

At the age of 12 Jim asked his dad to buy him a boat. This drew the response that if he could save up half of the £25 required, then his dad would put the other half to it. What followed was a whole summer of money making pursuits including selling winkles and shrimps, plus of course saving his pocket money.

And true to his word, Jim and his dad financed his first venture into boat fishing under his own steam, which as a lifelong small boat angler myself, I know only too well is a massive learning curve. Suddenly it isn't all just about catching fishing. Knowing their haunts, boat handling, navigation - so many other things to learn that are not actual angling suddenly get thrown into the mix.

The competition side of Jim Pressley's angling life came from a need to find stimulation to continue fishing when he got bored with going out and catching huge numbers of Cod, Bass, and everything else Herne Bay has to offer. Also in the mix, there was the one 1,000 Bass before leaving school I mentioned earlier. It was all becoming too easy without any real purpose to it. That new purpose came in the form of competition angling. Suddenly the focus was shifted from big fish, which he was never interested in anyway, to numbers of fish, and consistency regardless of the odds. This was when he first came into contact with Ron Edwards – a partnership made in heaven.

Outside of the competition days, Jim tells me that Ron Edwards would fish with 4 rods, observing that on some days one would catch more than the others. Puzzled by this, he would then swap them around to see if positioning of the baits might be a factor, and over a period, he was able to work out the reason why. Eventually, this led to the pair putting together a series of methods that would work for all the fish species available to them. This was the key to Ron Edwards success, and later to that of Jim himself. A piece of information he has no intention of passing on, and who like Ron Edwards before him, sadly, he intends to take it to the grave.

One statement Jim made in interview which immediately stood out was that he had no interest in actually catching fish. The thrill and the skill is in getting them to take your bait and hooking them. The winding in part of it was a bind, and of little or no interest to him, particularly as I mentioned earlier when it came to big fish.

But that's not how competitive fishing works, which was the big draw that kept him in sea angling, and he was good at it. Very good in fact, to the point when in 1989 he got his first England International call up to fish the World championships in Belgium, which in organisational terms had been a very last minute affair. With hardly a weeks' notice, the NFSA was asked to send a team over to Belgium, with

Jim Pressley in turn asked to be part of it, going over there with no idea of what it was all about, which he recalls reflected in his contribution.

One day he was listening to a local radio program in which future England International team manager Paul Cartwright was talking about how many matches he had won at the top level, which Jim says had a significant effect on his thinking. Consistent and confident in his own ability, as well as loving having the bragging rights, that broadcast came as the main spur to him to show the rest of the sea angling World what he could do, and in that regard, he would always strive for 100% success, which inevitably doesn't come along, as demonstrated by his results on International duty once again in Portugal in 1990 where he found himself way down the list. Another very steep learning curve.

It's very clear when you talk to Jim Pressley how seriously he takes competitive fishing. So much so that he can rattle off the results of matches almost 30 years in the past, such as being on England duty in 1991 fishing at Westport in Ireland where he had his first big win. The following year at Ostend he had the heaviest bag on day one followed by a very poor day two, which saw him finish up in 14 place.

Following a few more perhaps best forgotten results, 1996 in Belgium again saw him come away with a win, the buzz from which put the World championships very much at the top of his thinking. Anything less such as the Home Internationals required a lot more self motivation, all of which delivered two individual gold medals, one individual silver medal, and three team medals.

Pleasure fishing simply doesn't come into Jim Pressley's thinking, and hasn't done since those early competition entries dating back in the 1960's, when he and Ron Edwards would hand-ball the boat into the water, something which restricted them in terms of operating range. Shortly afterwards, Ron bought a trailer to put under the boat, which understandably, suddenly opened up new venues for them to learn at. But did the student go on to achieve the level of the master? Jim thinks not, and neither does anyone else. For him, Ron Edwards was far and away the best of the best, despite Jim himself winning in excess of 450 sea angling competitions, which says a lot about the ability Ron Edwards must have had.

LANCASHIRE STINGRAYS

Sometimes, inexplicably, fish which you wouldn't expect to see as individuals let alone in numbers, suddenly turn up in places they shouldn't be, stick around for a few weeks, then they are gone, never to be seen or heard of again.

This is exactly what happened with Stingrays along Lancashire's Fylde Coast in the early-1980's. I don't recall the exact date, but I most certainly recall reports of these fish made by Bob Gledhill in his column in the Blackpool Gazette. They appeared suddenly, several were caught from both the boat and from the shore in the Cleveleys area over a very short time, and to my knowledge, none have been caught nor heard of since. Ian Alder took the best boat caught specimen at 27 pounds, with the best shore caught specimen going to Phil Lamb at 24.8.0.

IRISH LADY INTERNATIONALS

For some people this is going to be a disappointing inclusion. For instead of celebrating the international angling skills of a small group of Irish lady anglers, it only hints at their achievement, despite the fact that there are people out there who could have provided the necessary information to place the credit very firmly where it belongs, yet for whatever reason, have chosen not to do so.

This is something I have come across on a couple of other occasions with other inclusions, and I can do very little about it. Fortunately here, not everything is lost, as there are hints at the achievements of these very skilful ladies scattered about the Internet.

This all started when I came across a website run by Newport Sea Angling Club on Ireland's west coast which traces its history back to 1966. Included was the photograph shown here, with Bella Moran standing last but one on the right.

One paragraph in particular caught my attention which reads "From its humble beginnings and on a shoestring budget the club grew both in size and stature throughout the seventies. The clubs current Treasurer, Bella Moran, helped to put the club on the map by becoming the first female angler to captain the Irish Sea Angling Team in 1979 having become the clubs Master Angler the previous year. The competition itself was fished in Youghal, Co Cork".

I did try to contact the club on two separate occasions but got nothing back. Maybe the contact details on the website were out of date. I then decided to take another route which was to contact Norman Dunlop who for many years had worked for Ireland's Central Fisheries Board advising sea anglers, and as such, knew anyone and everyone worth knowing on the Irish sea angling scene.



Unfortunately, I caught Norman at a very bad time in his life with regard to his health, and as much as he would have liked to help he was unable to do so, pointing me in the direction of Clew Bay charter boat skipper Mary Gavin-Hughes who was another of Ireland's elite international female anglers, and who would be able to fill in the missing detail regarding herself, Bella Moran, and a couple of others.

Norman Dunlop's email reply was as follows.... "I met Bella a few times Phil, she was one of a group of excep-

tional female tournament Angler's from the Westport/Newport area of Co. Mayo, which included Hilda Clinton, Maureen Lambert, Margaret Joyce and Mary Gavin (Hughes) etc. I seem to remember that she won a tournament on Clew Bay with a large Common Skate in her catch but I'm not sure exactly when that was. Possibly early 80's. She was a full Irish International like her sister anglers mentioned above. She also represented her home province, Connaught on numerous occasions at IFSA meetings and in inter-provincial tournaments. Don't know if this is of any use? Mary Gavin would certainly be able to fill in dates etc.

Mary Gavin-Hughes is said to be Europe's only female charter skipper. She reputedly started her career by taking people out fishing from the age of 14 and has been doing so ever since. In 2010 she captained the Irish team in the Home Internationals fished out of Belmullet, the captaincy being awarded on the strength of her winning the All-Ireland Open Boat Championship the previous year, beating all comers. A sea angling star in her own right, and one who hopefully would be able to shed some light on Irelands other top ladies. So I contacted her with this email and received the response shown beneath it.....

Hi Mary. I am coming up to the final stage of a project recording the angling history of Britain and Ireland throughout the twentieth century. When complete this will be archived at the British Library for researchers in the future to look back at what twentieth century anglers had, what they did with it, and the legacy they passed forward. If I could find a similar archive in Ireland they could have it too, but as yet no joy on that one.

I was speaking to Norman Dunlop about women on the Irish angling scene and both your name and that of Bella Moran came up. Unfortunately, Norman is quite ill at the moment, on top of which he didn't have that much information anyway. So he suggested I contact you to hopefully fill in some of the gaps.

I already have some material to work with and will run with that if I have to. However, it would be a shame and a loss to those future researchers not to flesh things out a little more. With that in mind is there any chance of a chat or other type of exchange of information at some stage.

Kind regards

Phill

Mary Gavin-Hughes reply – NOT INTERESTED.

But at least she had the courtesy to reply that time. Previous attempts were ignored completely.

PW Comment: For me personally, it doesn't matter if Mary is 'not interested'. It's not about ego's, either hers or mine. The country she represents and the hard working officials of the organisation that put her there should be the main concern, and not to give those their rightful place in recorded history going to archive comes across as disrespectful and arrogant to say the least.

That said, I might actually have been the architect of my own failure here. In 2015 I was looking at Mary Gavin-Hughes FaceBook page when I spotted a photograph of her and Jonathan Gannon with what was reported as being a Common Skate of 175 pounds. Except that it wasn't.

The fish was very clearly a White Skate or Bottle Nosed Ray *Rostroraja alba*, which at 175 pounds was 10 pounds heavier than the standing Irish record caught by Jack Stack from Clew Bay in 1966. I contacted Jonathan to put him in the picture in the almost certain knowledge that so far as any record claims go, with the fish returned to the water, it would probably be too late to stake a claim.

This raised the unspoken question as to why Mary Gavin-Hughes with her undoubted expertise with large skate had not picked up on the fact, and at least tried to initiate a record claim with Jonathan, who I have to say was like a dog with a bone, pursuing the claim regardless of the odds right through to the bitter end.

My identification from afar was opposed initially, but later confirmed, with Jonathan being included in the 2016 edition of the Annual Report of the Irish Specimen Fish Committee. But it both could have and should have been so much more had the fish been correctly identified at the time, and everyone knows it. So perhaps inadvertently I might have ruffled a few feathers and am now getting my 'just deserts'.

HALIBUT RECORD BROKEN YET AGAIN

The end of an era. One of the last big Halibut caught on rod and line from the Pentland Firth, and a new British, Scottish and European best into the bargain, in 1979, Colin Booth took the record up to a staggering 234 pounds, quite a way past the 200 pound figure that people such as F. D. Holcombe of the British Sea Anglers' Society, and big Les Moncrieff predicted would be the cut off point in terms of physical ability for the average angler. The last time the record would change hands in the twentieth century, and a record still in place unchallenged at the time of writing which is 2018.

DRAMATIC SEA RESCUE AT BLACKPOOL

I was sat in the house one evening in late December 1987 when I heard a knock at the door. Standing there was Leyland, Lancashire, small boat angler Mick Riley. "Do you want a picture of a decent Cod?", he asked. So off he trots and comes back with a 27 pounder he'd caught on an evening trip out off Cleveleys right at the height of the Fylde Coast jumbo Cod era. The problem was that it was pitch dark and there was nowhere decent to stand him up for the shot, so we climbed into my boat and took it there to give some atmosphere, and that was the end of that.

A short time later on the 6th January 1988, Mick is all over our local Granada TV early evening news following a dramatic rescue which had cost two lives, with Mick getting it in the neck from all sides regarding the 'stupidity' of the decision to go out on a day when reportedly, all the potential rescue services including the Coastguard and RNLI had advised against the trip, which I know for a fact wasn't the case, because I would have put to sea myself that morning too had I not received a last minute call to a meeting in Southport with a magazine publisher which I had to attend.

The evening before the alleged bad weather, the forecast had been perfect. Light winds, cloudless skies, and a good tide right in the middle of the Cod season. On the morning of the day itself it was just as forecast. Nothing had changed in what they were predicting, both on the TV, and by phoning the Coastguard. There wasn't a breath of wind. I can't tell you how much I didn't want to go to Southport that morning.

I was absolutely chomping at the bit, expecting to hear all about what I'd missed that evening when I got back. So off I went to the meeting. Two hours later when it was over, you quite literally couldn't stand up straight outside in the wind. It was howling. Debris and litter was swirling down the road, while trees were being pushed over like those shown in hurricanes on the TV. So as you do, I thought perhaps I hadn't missed anything after all and headed for home, oblivious of what was about to be the big story on the early evening news.

At the time, Mick Riley was a member of Blackpool Boat Angling Club, a dinghy club based at Squires Gate down at the southern end of Blackpool. In the winter, this would mean several miles of motoring to the northern end of the Fylde Coast where the main Cod grounds are between Cleveleys and Rossall, a journey Mick had undertaken in the company of a second boat with Eddie Newman and Doug Arkwright on board.

For some reason the other boat decided to fish off Blackpool. Preferring to fish the best ground up off Cleveleys, Mick pushed on for a few more miles. It didn't matter, conditions were fine, which saw him catch a few decent Cod in the run up to high water which was around midday. Then a bit of a breeze started to pick up. The distant horizon also started to darken. By the time Mick had the anchor up he could hardly stand up in the boat. That's how quickly it came in, and it kept on coming, getting up to between force 9 and force 10 from the west in no time at all

This all happened in less than half an hour, with no warning or even prediction by the weather forecasters. The Coastguard did amend their forecast mid morning saying it might start to freshen a bit towards late afternoon, but by that stage the boats were already out. So regardless of what the press and authorities said after the event, wind of that severity was not expected by anyone.

Boats from the Wyre and Fylde Boat Angling Clubs based at Cleveleys were able to scurry quickly back to their trailers. Mick unfortunately had a more difficult decision to make. On the one hand he could run for the one tiny piece of available beach and be stranded with no trailer, the alternative being to chance it and head back to his own base at South Shore.

Mick and the other boat that had stopped off Blackpool took the second option, which in hindsight would prove to be fatal, the problem being that pretty much the entire Fylde Coast has a sea wall for

flood protection, which at high water when this storm blew up, leaves very few places to get in once you've headed south from Rossall. Committed, they had no other option but to keep on going.

In twenty foot seas, Mick tells me he started taking on water badly, which in a 14 foot Dejon battling a force 9 storm is only to be expected. People on the promenade could see him struggling. In the end, close to North Pier, he had no option but to start letting off flares, which people on the promenade saw and notified the Coastguard and the RNLI who came out to him aboard their small RIB.



Having risked a capsizing themselves in the backwash from the walls, they bravely battled huge seas to where Mick was, only to find that they couldn't take him off due to the conditions, which would have seen the two boats coming together dangerously. He would have to jump, which he did, ending up grabbing the RIB while still partly immersed in the water, allowing him to be hauled to safety. But it wasn't over yet. The RIB then started to have engine problems.

Unbeknown to those onboard, Mick was kneeling on the fuel line starving the outboard of petrol. Once that was sorted, they whisked him back to shore, passing the other boat which by that stage was upturned close to a second RIB dealing with Eddie Newman who had been rescued but sadly died shortly afterwards. Douglas Arkwright's body was washed ashore 5 weeks later. The Coroners verdict was that both had died from hypothermia.

Being the sole survivor, it was Mick Riley that took all the flack, with plenty of it coming from all quarters. The headlines in the papers read "Suicide Sailors; The Man Who Cheated Death; and Anglers Caught in a Sea of Death". There was also talk of them having been warned not to put to sea and sitting on their life jackets instead of wearing them, which wasn't true in Mick's case, as he'd put his on when it first cut up rough. It's true that the Coastguard had revised their forecast mid-morning, but they never got the message out because VHF wasn't routinely carried by small fishing boats back then.

One question that needs to be asked, but never was at the time, was how could a storm of that magnitude manage to ‘sneak’ in without those charged with forecasting the weather noticing it, which it did, causing two anglers to pay with their lives. Then in the aftermath, as it always the case with events such as this, blame then starts to be apportioned, which like most unpleasant things in this life, always seems to cascade downwards from above with some poor soul at the bottom of the pile left to carry the can for events often way outside of their control.

THE SPORTFISHING CLUB OF THE BRITISH ISLES

The Sportfishing Club of the British Isles (SCBI) was formed in 1979 in a sports hall near Farnborough. A meeting of like minds following a conversation between Peter Peck, who at the time was chairman of EFSA, John Holmes who owned a boat in the Canary Islands and had caught lots of Marlin and Tuna, and Graeme Pullen, who at the time was in the early stages of what would be become a ‘glittering career’ in big game fishing.



John Holmes wanted to be part of a sport fishing club in order to compete in international events, and was probably key to the meeting taking place. In total, 6 people attended, including the 2018 SCBI Chairman Dave West who I chatted with to get a flavour of the history of the club which on the one hand offered the chance for like minded people with suitable disposable incomes to get together and fish exotic venues, while on the other, promoting sport fishing in home waters, including for freshwater species, for members either with that inclination or more limited incomes, preferring to confine themselves to the UK and Ireland.

At the time of writing, the club was still going strong with between 90 and 100 members, who collectively hold or have held in excess of 70 World records, both all tackle and line class, including a number of fly fishing tippet records, some of which were made in freshwater. They also are interested in European line class records, British records, and British line class records for sharks currently kept by the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain, but do not operate any sort of record keeping system themselves such as British line class records.

Dave West points to the fact that line class fishing earned itself a lot of bad press in the 1970's and 1980's through anglers going record hunting with tackle out of all proportion to the fish they were seeking. Fishing light balanced tackle is one thing, and a very good way of getting the maximum out of the fishing as opposed to ‘meat hunting’. But going after sharks with lines as light as 4 pounds breaking strain with which you can't strike a fish for fear of snapping off, so you leave it to swallow, then run the risk of it trailing huge lengths of line in its wake if the line does eventually part, does angling no favours at all. Nor does having refrigerated lorries waiting to pick up Porbeagle catches on the quay at Padstow, both of which the SCBI has strived to distance itself from.

AMMO BAITTS

During the mid-1970's, Malcolm Gilbert returned to his native Cornwall from a career in Birmingham, which for me at least, was a most unlikely situation for any keen sea angler to initially land himself in when you consider the cities central location, miles away from the sea in all directions. He returned to enter the families retail business in sports and leisure equipment, and understandably was drawn to the

fishing tackle section where he very quickly realised that a ready supply of fresh bait was an absolute business necessity.

Not so much for the local anglers, as there was an abundance of sandeels to be sourced all around St. Ives, which understandably was the main bait for virtually everything worth catching in the area. The big problem lay with tourists and other visitors who had little alternative but to use frozen bait.

Another problem was poor supply availability, which was haphazard, out-matched by even poorer quality. Obviously, some of the locals were catching their own sandeels with small seine nets worked from the shore, but this brought the problem of boom or bust. Either you couldn't get enough to freeze down or you would get too many, which when using a domestic deep freezer to lay them down and keep them in couldn't freeze the bait quickly enough to handle the volume when the boom times came around.

Excess would result in eels that were too soft and discoloured, as opposed to these occasions when the net didn't bring in enough, and the freezing process wasn't being overloaded. Problems which led to Malcolm deciding to start sourcing his own for the shop with the aid of a friend who smoked Mackerel and had a large walk in freezer, though not a blast freezer, which none the less made a far better job than a domestic chest freezer ever could.

The catalyst for AMMO baits as a commercial operation came in 1977 when a lady who ran a tackle shop in Ramsgate walked into Malcolm's shop and asked if there was any possibility of him supplying her with frozen sandeels, despite the obvious drive time from St. Ives, not to mention delivery costs, logistics, and all the rest, for what might not amount to more than a couple of hundred packs at a time.

That was until she added that she was also the agent for some 30 or so charter boats, and would be looking for at least 1000 packs to start off with. So, with a product and delivery price worked out and agreed it was then a case of filling the order, which within a few days of delivery had risen to a further 2000 packs, on top of which, local Cornish tackle shops were also starting to ask to be supplied.

It was at that point that Malcolm needed to take a step back to consider that while the potential might be enormous, so too was the door to door supply chain from catching, to packing, then freezing them, plus of course providing suitable transportation. In addition, a small fast boat would also be needed for anchor seining the sandbanks which couldn't be reached from the shore.

Fortunately, with long lining using sandeels for bait being the main commercial activity out from St. Ives, he was able to purchase a specialist net from a local sandeel fisherman who was about to retire. In addition, a friend offered to rent out his garage for the packing and agreed to build a small shed in his garden so as to operate a modest blast freezer. This was followed by the construction of a heavily insulated road trailer able to take blocks of dry-ice (carbon dioxide) to guarantee security of deliveries.

Next up was finding a name to establish the brand, and since the scientific name for the five-member sandeel family is *Ammodytes*, the first two syllables were hived off that and the AMMO brand was born. However, at the time there was some controversy regarding over exploitation of one particular sandeel species known as *Ammodytes marinus*. This was being netted on an industrial basis in the North Sea to the point that in some areas, sea birds were actually starving. Fortunately, AMMO would be targeting a different species, *Ammodytes tobianus*, besides which, it would take AMMO 10 years to catch what a commercial operation can harvest in a single day.

Within a year, it was obvious that the operation as it stood could in no way keep pace with the ever-increasing demand, prompting a business plan to be drawn up and taken to the bank for expansion funding to buy a small unit on a local industrial estate. The boat was also upgraded to a purpose built dory, on top of which, a couple of days were set aside to be spent in Aberdeen learning the ins and outs of blast freezing, after which a blast freezer and a small walk in freezer storage room was installed, along with half a dozen stainless steel grading and packing benches.

Friends, family, and local school children were then 'drafted' in to help, with boat landings being timed to suit holidays, after school, and other considerations. Stockpiles of sandeels were also held alive in a holding enclosure out in St. Ives Bay waiting to be processed.

By this stage supply was able to exceed demand. Time then to seek out new markets, resulting in approaches being made to tackle shops all around the UK and Ireland which met with some initial scepticism in areas such as Birkenhead, Tenby, Eastbourne and Stranraer with regard to their bait value locally, scepticism which was ill-founded as more and more took supplies and repeat orders were placed.



AMMO

'AMMO' SANDEELS SORT OUT THE BIG ONES

Congratulations to Andrew Hornby, Ian Tyldesley and Saul Astrinsky. On a recent winter trip to Ireland, against all the odds, they took 9 Bass over 8lbs, the best being this fine fish of 12lbs 12oz. All were caught on 'Ammo' Sandeel.

"I find that if the Bass are present and feeding, they'll take an 'Ammo' Sandeel. It's the only bait I use for Bass and Ray in the surf" - Andrew Hornby.

- ★ WE SUPPLY THE BEST BLAST FROZEN SANDEELS, MACKEREL, SQUID, RAZORFISH ETC YOU CAN BUY
- ★ TRADE ENQUIRIES WELCOME
- ★ WE SUPPLY THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND
- ★ IF THERE IS NO 'AMMO' STOCKIST NEAR YOU, PLEASE PHONE FOR DETAILS OF DIRECT SUPPLY

Ammodytes Co. Ltd
 Penbeagle Ind. Est, St. Ives, Cornwall TR26 2JH
 TEL 0736 797086 FAX 0736 793636

This, understandably, saw Malcolm run ragged making deliveries all around the coast, who in addition to the marketing, was also selling the concept of quality frozen bait to more shops and anglers, some of whom had initially been dismissive, labelling frozen bait as a poor last option, based on previous poor bait experience in the days before AMMO. So much so, that the only frozen stock these shops were carrying was Mackerel they'd laid down themselves, often days old and unwrapped in solid blocks. That however was about to change, with a regular monthly advertising campaign across the

angling press listing shops and towns where AMMO sandeels could be purchased.

During the late-1970's and early-1980's, lugworm and ragworm sales had always dominated the angling bait trade. But with unpredictable weather often leading to mounds of unsold bait, worms were potentially a significant problem for coastal fishing tackle shops. Unpredictable supplies due to weather and tides further compounded the problem. Both anglers and tackle shop owners really did need AMMO, not so much as a backup, though that would be a bonus, but more as an alternative bait in its own right which a great many species of fish are only too willing to eat, if, as it undoubtedly was when the quality was right, which saw AMMO sales again rise steadily.

As well as selling bait, AMMO as a company also sought to advise on its keeping and use, producing a number of instructional publications, something which for a bait supplier had never been seen before, again leading to the company out growing the unit it had, prompting further investment in the purchase of a bigger factory next door and the installation of some serious blast freezing equipment, as significant tonnages of Mackerel, squid, and other baits had by this time been added to the AMMO portfolio.

A re-think on the packaging was also undertaken, seeing a shift from small self-sealing bags to vacuum packaging. A new 3.5 tonne freezer truck plus two 7.5 tonne sleeper cab trucks also helped put the company onto an even better footing, which by the 1990's was employing 14 full time staff, in addition to a further half dozen part time seasonal packers.

The range of products was eventually expanded to take in razorfish, cuttlefish, and black lugworm, plus a range of Pike baits, my favourite of which was most definitely Garfish on account of the oil and blood it oozed out which the Pike most certainly were fond of. I also caught them on large portions of AMMO lance. But if I'm honest, having probably tried every bait and more that AMMO has had to offer over the years, without doubt the best bait of theirs I ever used was one not imported for angling use.

This was a box small blast frozen jack's of around a pound apiece intended as a food source for fish in aquaria and sea life centres. I took a dozen or so up to the Firth of Lorne in Scotland to use for Common

Skate baits where they proved lethal. Not only that, with their tough skin, they could also better withstand the attention of marauding Spurdogs, and did on occasions account for more than one big skate on the same whole bait.

Many specimen fish and more than a few national records including the Irish Bass record and British Sea Trout record have fallen victim to an AMMO bait. As for Malcolm Gilbert, he sold the company in 2007 to take up fighting the corner of recreational sea angling as a tireless campaigner, particularly with regard to protective legislation for Bass, before taking a backseat to spend more of his retirement years with his wife, children, and particularly his grandchildren.

THE TURBOT RECORD

Lannacombe Bay 1980 saw Salcombe angler Roger Simcox break the British boat caught record Turbot *Scophthalmus maximus* for the final time during the twentieth century with a magnificent specimen of 33.12.0, a weight which was not seriously approached over the 20 years leading up to the millennium.

NOTE: As a point of additional interest, though falling well outside the limits of this project, in 2015 Roger Simcox also took the boat caught Gilthead Bream record with a fish of 10.2.0 beating the previous record by 2½ ounces.

MORECAMBE BAY TURBOT

The flat, gently shelving, fairly featureless clean ground along much of the Lancashire Coast, doesn't exactly jump out as a Turbot or Brill haven. And while it has strong tides and a number of minor banks towards its northern edge, Morecambe Bay doesn't exactly fit the bill either. But don't be deceived. Unlikely venues can sometimes turn up unexpected bonus fish, and in that regard, the Lancashire coast is no exception.

Morecambe Bay in particular, which at the height of its reputation as one of the top Thornback Ray venues in the country during the 1970's and 1980's, would every now and again produce the odd Turbot to a static ray bait, particularly in the area around Lightening Knoll Buoy, the best of which tipped the scales at 15.2.8 caught by Ramon Tomlinson fishing out from Barrow.

As an added point of interest, during 1986 and 1987, I did several trips aboard the Fleetwood based inshore trawler 'Biddy' skippered by Ben Bee, brother of Frank Bee, who did so much to open up Fleetwood as a premier sea angling venue. I'd just started studying at Liverpool John Moore's University and was collecting diseased flatfish, of which there were many, for photographic and research purposes.

To keep himself busy in the spring, Ben would trawl the edges of Lune Deep for Flounders which he sold as pot bait. Barely worth the effort, it was enough to keep him at sea rather than stuck in the house until more profitable species returned. Then one day, with 'other species' in mind, he decided to try a tow from Lune to the southern tip of Walney, which amazingly produced around 20 very big Brill and one good sized Turbot. Just exactly where during the 4 hour tow he scooped then up is anybody's guess. But it goes to show what can be out there without anglers ever knowing it was there.

The best shore caught Lancashire Turbot reported was a fish of 13.8.0 taken by Peter Lowton from of all places, the now no longer standing Blackpool North Pier jetty.

THE HELWICK BANK

Towards the end of the 1970's, the Small Eyed Ray became a personal point of focus in my quest to catch 100 species of fish from British and Irish waters. Conversations with Swansea charter boat skipper Paul Radford suggested that South Wales could well be the area to visit, so with Paul's encouragement, myself, Pete Sharples, and one of his angling friends whose name unfortunately now escapes me, decided to trail Pete's boat 'Kirsty Too' down to The Gower for a fishing weekend.

But first things first. We had arranged to meet up with Paul at his mooring early on the Saturday morning where he had an Admiralty Chart of the area ready for us with a few suggested marks highlighted on it, from which we could read off the lat-long coordinates to feed into the Navstar and be on our way.

We'd driven down to arrive at the marina at around 8 am. Next job was to find a B&B in Swansea with safe overnight parking for the boat, then head off over to Oxwich Bay which was the closest launch site we could find to the prime mark Paul had given us, that being the Helwick Bank. All that took us through to around mid morning, the relevance of which is to give the fishing period some sort of time duration context.

The launch went without hitch and the weather was perfect – flat calm with the sun beating down which turned into quite a sizeable 'lazy' ground swell as we moved up the slope of the bank to its peak where we set the anchor down. Not being at the helm, I decided to tackle up ready en route. The bait, which was frozen calamari and Ammo sandeels, was sufficiently well thawed on arrival. All I had to do was bait up the hooks and I was in before either of the other two were even tackled up.

That advance preparation led to 2 Turbot and one Small Eyed Ray seeing the inside of the boat before either of the other 2 had even wet a line, which kind-of set the tone for the rest of the weekend. The bank top was literally paved with fish. Paul had given us reserve marks to fall back on, but we didn't need to move from the bank top all day. There we caught just the 2 species of fish, but it was manic.

As fast as the baits went down they were taken. Total head count for the first day was 64 Small Eyed Ray's and 26 Turbot, which considering the time we got afloat, then had to re-trailer the boat to get back to Swansea, was by any standards amazing fishing. A similar 'bruising' also awaited us the following day. Granted, we had an earlier start, but then had to finish earlier to be back on the road home by mid-afternoon.

Though we caught the fish, the real credit and much appreciation has to go to Paul Radford. And now Dave Lewis tells me that like so many once prolific banks along the Bristol Channel coast, by comparison to our visit, the Helwick Bank is all but devoid of fish.

ALAN YATES

Having achieved so much, including fishing at Dungeness for big Cod with Les Moncrieff, representing England on the International scene, and being the inspiration behind the Sea Anglers Match Federation (SAMF) discussed next of which he was a founder member, Folkestone's Alan Yates could justifiably have been slotted at any one of a number of time points. During the 1960's for example, he would regularly catch over 100 Cod topping 10 pounds per season. Conversely, by 2018, he could fish 10 times and never even see a Cod. Add to this list the post of Sea Angler Magazine contributing editor, video maker, and tackle consultant, and you start to get a flavour of what Alan Yates is all about.

So why choose 1980, and why immediately ahead of the SAMF inclusion which I've separated off due to the historical importance of that whole episode? The answer to that question is because Alan had just won a staggering 13 open shore matches of 200 or more competitors on the trot, which considered along

with his already impressive CV, should have seen his application to join the England squad as being little more than a formality. But it wasn't.



The full account of that rejection and what happened as a result are to be found in the next inclusion, the Sea Anglers Match Federation. In a nutshell, the Southend Open, which was one of the 13 event winning runs, offered a cash prize, which they were not supposed to do as a recognised National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) competition. Those rules do not however prevent the winner from receiving the money. Therefore, it was the organisers and not the angler who was at fault.

Unfortunately, this coincided with the NFSA putting together their first England team for the start of the home Internationals, and that infamous cash prize had put a blot on Alan's England squad application. Angered by this, along with Clive Richards and a number of other top match anglers critical of the way the NFSA were running things anyway, he decided it was time for a change, resulting in SAMF.

My reason for giving a very brief potted history of the NFSA/SAMF clash of opinions here is to highlight Alan Yates' incredible run of 13 big open wins, which kind-of sums up the

competent and competitive calibre of the man. But it wasn't always like that. In the early days, Alan had little or no interest in competition fishing at all.

Alan Yates' sea angling life began as a school kid fishing his local beaches and other shore marks for Bass in the Folkestone area of Kent. Match fishing was something he slowly drifted into before leaving school, at a time when competitions were frequent and well supported, but as I say, could only offer material prizes, with the value of the pool money probably being the main attraction.

He cut his match angling teeth fishing club leagues with the Sandgate Club, who at the time were a dominant force, in the main because they had all the area's best anglers grouped together in the same team. Great for those in that team; not so good for the runners up, which eventually led to the league falling apart due to the predictability of the outcome.

At the time of the SAMF 'rebellion' inaugural meeting, Ron Edwards was present representing the NFSA in an attempt to dissuade the rebellion from going ahead. But it did, though most of the 'rebels' continued with their membership of the NFSA and fishing its matches. And not too long afterwards, the NFSA was itself also fishing to SAMF rules as Alan Yates predicted it eventually would, opening the door for him to submit a new CV application, which within a year saw him picking up his first gold medal.

Interestingly, when first selected in 1980, for a man of his ability and established track record, there was also surprisingly a great deal of self-doubt as to whether both he and they had made the right choice. "Will I be good enough.... can I handle the pressure?" Fortunately, his first call of duty was a home International match fishing with people he already knew, which helped settle the nerves and quell the doubts. In it he was paired with Tony Burnham from Humberside, which then saw them in first place at the close of day one fishing as a pair.

Day two was an individual event which Alan again won. So all that worrying for nothing. He recalls that when you step onto the beach all of that gets pushed to the back of your mind. From the moment the 'all in' sounds out, there is only one objective, that being to rack up points. Failure to weigh in is a disaster. Consistency is the key, and who better to deliver on that one with the CV he has than Alan

Yates, after which the results continued to stack up as the medals came in. Also, more big open wins. So many that he can't even remember them all. But he did give me a quick resume....

He recalled winning £8,500 in a big open at the Isle of Man, but unfortunately, that came after the millennium. The previous year, Tony Anderson had taken top honours there winning a guaranteed £1,000 a year for life which he eventually sold back for a cool £75,000. There was also the Rock Championship in Co. Clare; plenty of wins over on the east coast; Pontins; Readers at the Isle of Wight (4 times), and Thorpe Bay. No win though in the European & All England. The best he could manage there was second place. He also enjoyed open wins in France and Holland.

So far as International medals go, at both the Worlds and the Home Internationals, Alan's tally is up into double figures. In the 'Homes' there are those 4 team golds back to back I mentioned earlier to go with a mix of team silvers and bronzes. Not quite so good in the 'Worlds' with 2 team golds, assorted silver and bronze, and a best placing in the individual running of fourth.



His best International memory he says was fishing in Namibia where in the last hour he landed 2 sharks for 440 pounds, the second one hooked with just 5 minutes of the match to go which needed to be bullied in within the 20 minutes 'extra' allowance time, which it was, and still he only came fourth. But his best overall International achievement was for a second place in South Africa fishing for EFSA England over a series of 4 three day test matches against some very good European opposition, plus of course, the South Africans fishing on their home patch.

Angling politics have also had a big part to play in Alan Yates fishing career. SAMF and the NFSA is perhaps the best example of that. But he was also critical of the way England teams were being selected. In the early days, selection was made by committee. That has since switched to getting selected on the basis of effort and achievement, and rightly so.

This however has not quelled the growing feeling amongst would-be England Internationals that there is something of a north-south divide when it comes to getting selected. This he puts down to the fact that continental competitors 'just across the way' fish light for small fish in gin clear water, something southern anglers are more able to acquaint themselves with than anglers in the north, who don't have the opportunity to practise under those types of conditions on their local patch.

Fishing 5 pounds breaking strain line from a fixed spool reel on a long rod with tiny hooks is a very specialist approach, something UK based teams have had to be conversant with if the continentals are to be beaten on their own patch, which home based anglers are going to need to do if England (and the other 3 home nations) are ever to be considered as the best in Europe or the World.

PW COMMENT: Alan was also keen that I mention the Irish Winter Beach Championships which he won a total of 8 times, including the first running of the event, plus back to back wins. What made this so special for him is that his son Richard also won the 30th running of the competition in 2018.

THE SEA ANGLERS MATCH FEDERATION (SAMF)

The Sea Anglers Match Federation (SAMF) is an organisation born in 1980 out of the increasing frustration felt by shore match anglers with the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA), who ran many of the large shore competitions they fished at the time.

Many of the UK's top shore match anglers were involved to varying degrees. Amongst those stepping up to the plate to help convert that discontent into more positive action, and a founding member of SAMF, was England International Alan Yates, who I have spent time with talking through and recording an audio history of the organisation, both over the telephone, and at his home in Folkestone in 2012, exploring what would become the biggest shake up the UK shore match angling scene has ever undergone.



During one period running from 1978 on into 1979, Alan Yates recorded 13 consecutive victories in open shore competitions fished by 200 or more competitors, one of which at Southend paid out a cash prize in contravention of NFSA rules. This was around the same time that Alan had put himself forward for selection in the England squad to fish a series of Home Internationals.

He personally hadn't broken any NFSA rule by accepting a cash prize. The blame had been squarely laid on the shoulders of the competition organisers. That said, there was a degree of guilt by implication here, and as such, there was a blot on his application which wasn't allowed to go through, despite him being in the form of his life, which should be the main criteria for selection. A 'situation' which coincided with a lot of bad feeling on the match scene generally with regard to the way clubs organising matches were taking far too much money out of the match funds before sorting out the prize table.

Add to this the fact that roving matches were not being pegged or stewarded effectively leading to cheating going undetected, is it any wonder then that frustrations started to boil over to the point that Clive Richards suggested a meeting to set up a new organisation to reflect the concerns that many match anglers had been expressing over many years, but were being ignored. Initially the 'conspirators' met up at Clive Richards house, with Steve Gillett, John Ryder, John Browning, Alan Yates, and Peter Yates present. Clive Richards was elected chairman, Alan Yates secretary, and Peter Yates treasurer.

Following on from this, the first official SAMF meeting was held in London where the remainder of the committee was elected, comprising Stan Gowan, John Arnold, Dave Burrus, Barry Cowell, Gary Dunk and Keith Jarvis. Ron Edwards was sent by the NFSA to try to dissuade those present from their course of action, urging the organisation not to proceed, but to no avail. Instead, the meeting triggered

a flood of affiliated clubs organising and running their competitions under SAMF rules, the first of which being the Angling Times Sea League Stewards Match at Sandwich, followed by the first major open to be fished under SAMF rules held by the Thames Estuary Match Group at Southend

SAMF's first, and arguably most important undertaking, was the introduction of cash prizes. Next came stewarding, with fish booked in and measured as they were caught to prevent cheating, and as importantly, to facilitate catch and release. Pegging and security were also powerful considerations, with anyone found to be flouting the rules ejected from the event. It was also suggested that organising clubs should not be allowed to keep more than 30% of the takings. A collective wish list which led to the following set of rules being agreed based on rules already being used on the East Anglian match scene.....

At least 90% of entry fees to be returned to the competitors and 100% of the pools

All matches were to be pegged or zoned

Fishing positions will be drawn by the anglers

All matches to be stewarded

Duplicate baited traces to be allowed

Matches to be fished to Ministry size limits with allowances for different areas to raise size limits for species of fish in need of protection

A balance sheet to be produced by organisers

No bait bans

Clubs were allowed dispensation to vary the rules due to local area differences, as long as they complied with the basic structure of the new rules.

So successful was the SAMF vision of how shore angling matches ought to be run, that eventually the NFSA would concede defeat and fall in line themselves, followed by the European Federation of Sea Anglers (EFSA) and SIPS. Eventually, the NFSA, along with other representative bodies for game and coarse fishing was absorbed under the umbrella organisation The Angling Trust in 2009 which continues to operate matches according to requirements first laid down by SAMP.

Within a year of the SAMF rebellion, Alan Yates finally fished for his country, leading to a whole string of gold, silver and bronze medals (see Alan Yates inclusion above) before stepping down from his role as SAMF secretary in 1993, with SAMF the organisation slowly slipping into decline, its job done, leaving it to operate more like a small club rather than the powerful political force it had initially been, representing a wave of unrest with the establishment of the time.

FORWARD CHEMICALS WORLD SEA ANGLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In 1980, the Forward Chemicals World Sea Angling Championship fished at Fleetwood in Lancashire was the biggest shore angling competition in history. An event that came into being through a chance telephone conversation between the Widnes based chemical giant and Cleveleys based sea angling journalist Bob Gledhill, sounding him out with a view to sponsoring some sort of angling event, though not necessarily involving sea angling.

It was Bob's quick thinking 'rubbishing' the idea of putting money into a locally based freshwater event that persuaded the company to pump some money into the sea angling economy. When asked what sort of money it would take to put on a good show, Bob 'optimistically' suggested 4 to 5, meaning 400

to 500 pounds. Imagine then his shock when they said 4 to 5 wouldn't be a problem and that they could probably stretch that to maybe 8, with the addition of the word 'grand' to the end of the sentence instead of hundred.

The competition, with the grand title of 'The Forward Chemicals World Sea Angling Championship', was held at Fleetwood on the 15th and 16th November 1980. The biggest UK sea angling match to date, contested by 1,750 anglers for a total pay out in excess of £12,000.



On the Saturday, 17 year old Fleetwood angler Michael Hadgraft won the heaviest Cod prize with a fish of 8½ pounds which also took the heaviest fish prize too, scooping a total of £2,185. The following day, top honours went to Sea Angling Match Federation (SAMF) chairman Clive Richards from Basildon with a Cod of 8 lbs 6 ounces, earning him £2,350, which was one of the largest prizes ever won by a sea angler. In addition, lesser prizes were spread across a large number of competitors via a whole array of winning permutations in an attempt to make the competitions appeal as wide as possible, re-

moving any air of 'inevitability' about the result, giving everyone the feeling that they could compete at some level or other.

Having secured the finances for the running of the competition, Bob handed the logistics of staging the event over to Fleetwood and District Angling Club, who it was agreed by all concerned made a very good job of things. The stretch of shore from Fleetwood around Rossall Point down to Gynn Square was designated and divided up into 4 zones, 3 of which were pegged, the idea being, so Ken Forrest informs me, was that anglers unhappy with their draw in the pegged zones could switch to the free zone closest to Fleetwood.

They also incorporated an International element to the event, and the sponsors provided a computer to take control of the result. Unfortunately, back then, computers were a lot less sophisticated and reliable (or should that read user friendly) than they are today, and it actually took longer with the thing than sorting it out manually, though they did get it to work a bit better on the second day.

This coincided with the formation of SAMF (go back a couple of inclusions), who somehow managed to wrestle the competition from Fleetwood and District Anglers the following year, running it at Pakefield as the Forward Chemicals Masters.

Unfortunately, this changed the complexion of the event from one open to everyone, to what can best be described as a 'qualifying' event for the UK masters, attracting mainly out and out matchmen, which for obvious reasons saw attendances fall for this and the following years event, which for advertising purposes didn't suit Forward Chemicals, who in 1983 handed it back to Fleetwood and District before terminating sponsorship altogether the following year.

NOTE: The UK Masters has been held every year since SAMF set it up to run on a rotation basis around the various regions of the country, with regional qualifying heats leading up to a grand final.

THE IRISH PAIRS COMPETITION

The Irish Pairs, which eventually becomes the Daiwa Irish Pairs fished around the Dingle Peninsula of south west Ireland is a date on the shore match angling calendar dating back to 1980. But rather than risk having me explain its history, what follows is a sanctioned straight copy and paste from the history section of the competition's own website <http://www.irishpairs.co.uk>.

"In the beginning"

The Irish Pairs Sea Angling Competition was originated by Gerry Flynn of the Irish Tourist Board (ITB) in 1980, when Gerry promoted a UK competition, which saw one pair out of every 30 who competed around the UK qualifying for an expenses paid trip to the Dingle Peninsula in South West Ireland. The first final was based at the Skelligs Hotel in Dingle and saw some 18 pairs of anglers competing. The event took place over a long weekend. First winners of the championship were Harry Gill and Gerry Horsefield from the Hartlepool area.

The concept of the competition coincided with the emergence of the Sea Anglers Match Federation (SAMF) and many members of this new organisation were keen to qualify for the event. Clive Richards, new chairman of SAMF, saw potential to help build up SAMF's reputation by becoming involved with the running of the event. The first final was run by the ITB with input from the Irish Sea Fisheries who allowed Norman Dunlop and Peter Green to attend and do the pegging and results.

"Welcome to Daiwa"

SAMF had discussions with the ITB and outlined plans to make the event an open one, lasting a week, with competitors paying their own way instead of winning a place in the final. It was thought that this would help the ITB, as instead of just some 40/50 anglers competing there would be many more UK anglers who would like to attend, thus boosting tourism figures etc.

ITB encouraged the idea, and at the same time SAMF approached Daiwa Sports with a view to obtaining sponsorship for the event. Sales Director of Daiwa, John Middleton attended the second final and agreed to future sponsorship. This sponsorship is still in place and is the longest running sponsorship that the sport has ever had. Daiwa's contribution is exceptional, not only do they contribute tackle, but they also allow us to purchase other items at very preferential rates. This explains why the event consistently boasts a prize table of cash and tackle worth more than £7,500 each year.

"Joined by the Irish"

Coming up to the 3rd year of the event, John Amery had been added to the organising committee, and at Easter time Clive Richards and John took their families over to look at beaches that could be fished with an entry of 150 anglers. It was during a session on Inch Strand that they met up with a group of Dublin anglers and got into conversation. This led to an entry from an Irish contingent which continues to this day, and even led to the formation of the Irish Match and Surfcasting Association (IMASA) which was to play an important part in the development of the Irish surfcasting competition scene.

"The Dun an Oir"

That trip also dramatically changed the course of the event because when Clive and John visited the Skelligs to confirm the booking for September they were told that the new management had not confirmed the booking and had in fact booked 3 coaches of French tourists for that date !! PANIC..... entries were flooding in but we had nowhere to accommodate them. Fortunately, a knight in shining armour arrived in the shape of Matt Britton who ran the Dun an Oir (gaelic for 'fort of gold) complex out at Ballyferriter to the west of Dingle. The complex consisted of an Hotel with rooms, restaurant and bar, together with some 20 self catering cottages in its grounds. We were able to do a deal with Matt and in reality, this was the start of the Daiwa Irish Pairs (as it had now become known) saga. The Dun

an Oir became legendary, this was in the days of “ when does the bar close ?when the last man leaves” scenario, and with all the competitors based in one central location it became a very social occasion. Most opted for the self catering cottages and as all were no more than 100 yards from the hotel no one needed a car to get to the bar....many took advantage of this.

"New venues"

On the fishing scene it had been necessary to expand the venues to cope with the greater numbers, and in many cases two beaches were used, with one from each team fishing separate beaches. Venues used were Ventry Harbour, Ballyrannig, Beal Bawn, all local to the headquarters, and Inch and Brandon Strands which were about 30 miles away. Inch and Brandon could accommodate all the competitors. First names on the Pairs Shield which SAMF provided were Noddy Farrell and Barry Graves from Southend.

"Catch & return introduced"

By the 4th year we were getting concerned at having fish killed by weighing in at the end of the match and we therefore resolved to instigate a “catch and return” policy into the competition. Weight was to be the deciding factor, so what happened was that we encouraged wives, girlfriends, family members etc to attend the event, then sat them under a brolly on the beach with a set of scales, and when an angler caught a fish he went to them, they weighed and recorded the fish, and then immediately returned the fish to the water.

"The Pairs format evolves"

The initial format of the competition was to have 2 days of pegged competition and the rest of the week given over to a specimen fish competition, where the biggest fish of 10 nominated species would pick up a Daiwa reel as a prize. This was to encourage anglers to travel around and enjoy the excellent rock fishing which is available but which cannot be pegged for a match. We had to see and weigh these fish, but anglers were only allowed to return their biggest fish of a particular species, and a board in the headquarters listed the current biggest fish so that people knew what they had to beat.

Initially some of the Irish contingent only came down for the weekend, so a competition was arranged on the Sunday to be based on teams of 4 to be pegged on either Inch or Brandon so that all competitors were on the same beach. The Irish also obtained sponsorship from Semperit Tyres who provided a trophy and a cash input to the event. This sponsorship ran for some 6 years. By this time the Irish competitors were joining for the week, so in the early 90's it was decided to make the pegged matches over 3 days and they have continued as such since then.

Despite a general conception that Ireland was an angling mecca, we found that like the UK if you put 150 anglers on a beach they are not all going to catch 20lbs of fish each. In an effort to get better results we consulted with the Irish Sea Fisheries who agreed that as we were returning all fish caught then we did not have to fish to their size limits (limits which had been instigated for boat angling, as shore fishing at that time was not very prominent). Suddenly beaches like Brandon and Inch, famed Bass beaches, were turned into flounder venues as the anglers learned to target them in order to do well.

"Mr Amery the politician"

By the late 80's the input from Central Fisheries was withdrawn, as they quite rightly stated that the event was a success and the SAMF committee were quite capable of running it.

By the mid-80's John Amery, who had become SAMF secretary, had been organising the event and in those days SAMF booked Ferries, accommodation etc. as well as running the competitions. The event had continued to receive some financial support from the ITB, but in the late 80's they wrote to say that they were going to cease this support. John took it upon himself to write to the then Irish Prime Minister,

Charlie Haughey who had close ties with Dingle (he actually owned one of the Blasket Isles) and point out the input that the event made to the Irish economy at no cost to the ITB, and at Charlie's instigation support continued, and that year he sent his Minister of Tourism to present the prizes!

Support continued in a limited way right into the early 2000's.

"Move to measure and return"

Catch and release remained our mantra, but one problem we had was that it needed woman/man power to attend the 8 sets of scales on the beaches and the number of assistants available gradually declined. So we took our next major step and introduced "measure and return". Each competitor had to have an official SAMF measure and had to act as steward to the adjacent angler. The fish was measured, recorded, returned. Strange at first, but it quickly became accepted. To stop anglers targeting small fish a block minimum size of 18cms and smallest hook size of No 4 was introduced.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Modern Sea Angling (1971) by Alan Young.

Successful Sea Angling (1971) by David Carl Forbes.

Big Game Fishing in British Waters (1972) by David Carl Forbes.

Inshore Sport Fishing (1972) by Alan Wrangles.

Boat Fishing (1973) by Trevor Housby.

Big Fish (1973) by Trevor Housby.

Rubby Dubby Trail: Shark Fishing in British Waters (1973) by Trevor Housby..

Angling in the West Country (1973) by Ted Tuckerman

The Observers Book of Sea Fishes (1972) by T. B. Bagenal.

Match Shore Fishing (1972) by Bob Gledhill.

Sea Fishing in the North West (1973) by Bob Gledhill.

Sea Fishing in Kent (1973) by Hugh Stoker.

Sea Fishing (Learn Through Strips) (1973) by John Michell

Sea Angling Hotspots (1974) by Hugh Stoker.

Estuary Fishing (1974) by Frank Holiday.

Bass (1974) by Des Brennan.

Sharks (1974) by Kevin Linnane.

Cod (1974) by Ian Gillespie.

Skates & Rays (1974) by Des Brennan.

Mullet (1975) by Des Brennan.

Tope (1975) by Clive Gammon.

Wreck Fishing (1975) by Clive Gammon.

Your Book of Sea Fishing (1975) by Richard Arnold.

The Long Book of Sea Fishing in Pictures (1975) by Dick Murray.

The Sea Anglers Guide to Britain: Where to Go (1975) by Jonathan Webb.

Sea Anglers First Handbook (1975) by Alan Vare & Arthur E. Hardy.

Shark Hunter (1976) by Trevor Housby.

A Guide to Shore and Harbour Fishing (1976) by Francis H. Burgess.

Make Your Own Sea Angling Tackle (1976) by Leonard F. G. Burrell.

Catch More Bass (1976) by Keith Elliot.

Catch More Cod (1976) by Paul Cartwright.

Angling in Colour: Sea, Coarse & Game (1977) by Alan Wrangles.

The Guinness Guide to Saltwater Angling (1977) by Brian Harris.

Sea Angling Around Britain: A Fisherman's Regional Guide (1977) by Trevor Housby.

Sea Fishing for Fun (1977) by Alan Wrangles & Jack P Tupper.

Sea Angling with The Specimen Hunters (1977) by High Stoker.

Big Fish from Saltwater (1977) by John Goddard.

Tightlines South West: Angling Guide to the West Country (1978) by Ted Tuckerman.

A History of the Fish Hook (1978) by Hans JØRGEN Hurum.

How to Improve Your Sea Fishing (1978) by Melvyn Bagnall.

A Manual of Sea Fishing Baits (1978) by Hugh Stoker.

Cod Fishing (1978) by Bob Gledhill.

Wales: Angling Guide (1979) by Clive Gammon.

The Fisherman's Guide to Sea Fishing (1979) by Eric Shults.

Sea Angling Supreme (1979) by Mike Millman.

The Bait Book (1979) by Ted Lamb.

The Modern Sea Angler (1979) by Hugh Stoker (6th Edition).

Shore Fishing (1979) by John Holden.

The Observers Book of Sea Fishing (1980) by Peter Wheat & Ray Forsberg.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

Fisherman.

Sea Angler Magazine – an East Midlands Allied Press (EMAP) publication initially edited by Ted Lamb who was quickly replaced by Peter Collins who had two spells as editor. On his retirement, Collins was replaced by Mel Russ who remained in post up to and beyond the end of the twentieth century.

PW Comment: Sea Angler was the first exclusively saltwater magazine on the market. After some early editorial changes, it was soon the market leader, and has maintained that position ever since. A magazine I have had spells working for on a number of occasions, including one looking at the maiden voyage of 'Blue Mink II' out from Fleetwood in 2018 as I was right in the thick of writing this book.

CHAPTER TEN – 1981 TO 1990

As a dedicated small boat angler, for me, this was the decade when small boat fishing really came of age. Boat construction and outboard engines were constantly improving and evolving. But without any shadow of a doubt it was the development and availability, firstly of the Navstar 2000D navigator, and later the release of GPS, which took small boat fishing to the level that charter boat fishing was at. Suddenly wreck fishing and repeatability in returning to open grounds marks was available to small boats. What's more, it coincided with the big Cod bonanza enjoyed along both the Lancashire and South Wales Coast.

But it wasn't all about small boats. Shore anglers too were cashing in on the big Cod bonanza, with hitherto unheard of specimen sized Cod coming from the rocks at Balcary in south west Scotland. Elsewhere too, records were tumbling. On the down side, west country wreck fishing wasn't what it had been, and riding on a sustained period of top drawer North Sea wreck fishing, particularly out from Whitby, suddenly the scales tipped in the other direction, plummeting the east coast Cod fishing into decline. A seismic year for Bass fishermen too, as this was arguably the last good spawning year of the century for the species, the results of which would be enjoyed right up until the centuries close.

CLIMATE CHANGE



In previous decades, all the climate change talk was centred around the science. Will it or won't it warm up, with very little hard evidence regarding the actual day to day consequences for the man on the street, and even less for the sea angler on the beach or out in the boat. In the 1980's, that began to change, typified by a warning that some of the UK's (and by implication Ireland too) most popular fish species may be driven from the North Sea and other areas, and therefore from peoples dinner plates, due to rising sea temperatures driven by the greenhouse effect of certain gasses such as carbon dioxide trapping the incoming Sun's rays in the way that the glass of a greenhouse does, hence the use of the term.

The North Sea example is quoted elsewhere in this book with regard to fish species under threat from rising sea temperatures. The reason why the North Sea in particular has been studied is because it saw

a temperature rise of 1.3 degrees C in the 30 years leading up to the 1980's which is 4 times greater than the global average, resulting in a serious knock on effect to cold water adapted species of which the North Sea has a predominance.

As a result, these species are being pushed further to the north, which for some is a separate problem. Flatfish, which have evolved to live on soft substrates, are finding it particularly tough going as those areas to the north are predominantly made up of hard ground and rocks. Fishery scientists say this will bring about a collapse in commercial fishing terms of many flatfish species in the North Sea.

One of the problems of previous decades was that of scientists pedalling two contradictory scenarios'. Though most were in the global warming/rising sea temperatures camp, a small number were of the belief that aerosols in the atmosphere leading to smog was driving global cooling. By the 1980's the slight cooling trend that had led to all the confusion, particularly amongst the general public, had greatly decreased due to a combination of environmental legislation and changes in fuel use, leaving the greenhouse effect as the only 'argument' in town.

Of more concern was a Greenland ice core study which clearly demonstrated that in the past, dramatic climate oscillations had occurred over time periods brief enough to have been observable within a single human lifetime, making the future consequences of current global warming suddenly feel that much more immediate and real.

A browse through the weight of evidence tells its own story. However, this is a history of sea angling, not a forum for climate change arguments. On the other hand, we have to be interested and concerned regarding issues shown to be having a very real, current, and dramatic effect on the interest we pursue.

I've seen change in my angling lifetime, and it looks set not only to continue, but to accelerate not only in the south of this country, but all northern hemisphere countries. So much so that a 'World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security' concluded that changes due to human pollution not only represent a security threat, but are already having harmful consequences over many parts of the planet, declaring that by 2005 emissions should be 20% lower than in 1988, and still we are waiting.

HISTORICAL FACILITIES DENIED

PW Comment: Normally I would add my thoughts in at the end of an inclusion. My reason for putting them at the start here is to help set the scene and give some sort of chronological reasoning behind the 1980's time slot. Small boat fishing began to become popular around the start of the 1970's, but not so popular as to grab the attention of those in control of launching facilities.

That crept in later, and will have come at different times for different parts of the country. With that in mind I could have slotted the inclusion in any of the final 3 decades of the century. I chose to do so here because by the 1980's, small boat fishing was really starting to forge its own identity, and as such, local authorities were starting to become aware of its money generating potential for them: Ends.

I'd first like to take a quick look at a piece of history dating back to 1215 known as Magna Carta. Signed by King John, it limited the powers of the Monarch and led to many of the laws we take for granted today, one of which is the right of the common man to access certain natural resources, of which fishing and bait digging are two important examples here.

Unfortunately, over the intervening 800 years, much of this has been tweaked and 'updated', and not always beneficially so if you are an angler. For while it's true that we do have unlicensed access to those stretches of the coast that are not privately owned, the bit that connects the road to the beach is not classed as part of the foreshore, and therefore can be operated in any way those that own it see fit.



Britain and Ireland have for many years had thousands of slipways potentially allowing access for wheeled vehicles to get onto the shore. Many of the slipways we currently see were there before I ever thought of using them. They were built way back when and paid for out of budgets long since forgotten, all of which raises two burning questions. Why are small boat anglers being denied access to already constructed facilities, and when or if access is granted, why are exorbitant charges now being levied? It's not as if councils need to recoup the outlay. It's like situations in town where parking payment machines suddenly appear on car parks that had been free to use for years. They do it because they can.

I'm going to use my local patch of North West England as my working example here for no other reason than I know the area and can speak from experience. I'm sure, in fact I know, that the problems here are mirrored all around the country, with local authorities either refusing the use of historical facilities, or charging the earth if they do open them up, then introducing 'safe guarding' rules in the form of required paper work, which to a degree is understandable, but is it really aimed at protecting the public from small boat owners and small boat owners from themselves, or just another level of deterrent to keep the shore free from wheeled vehicles.

The Fylde Coast, of which Blackpool occupies a good chunk, is for the most part protected by sea walls to keep people and their properties safe from flooding and worse. That we accept. Much of the central Fylde Coast is also a magnet to holiday makers. Least-ways it was in the days before cheap foreign charter holidays stole Blackpool's thunder in the 1970's. So protection of whatever portion of the shore the visiting public still uses recreationally is understandable. There has to be rules. But at the same time, they need to accommodate all stakeholders here, including those that want to trail boats down to the water's edge and back.

When I first started dinghy fishing in the early 1970's it was a free for all in some places. You could launch at any of the slips from Little Bispham through to Rossall without anyone bothering you. Where

the Fylde Boat Angling Club launch at Little Bispham, they would even leave their trailers and tractors on the concrete walk way of the lower promenade adjacent to the slip without any fuss.

In the Main, this slipway, and the one in front of the Royal Hotel used by Wyre Boat Angling club which was specifically built for them (see Chapter 9) are used by members of those clubs. The beaches there can be difficult to negotiate to put it mildly, and while some ‘privateers’ did use the slip at Little Bispham and at the Bull Nose right up to the end of the century and beyond, these slips were predominantly used by the clubs concerned. And that’s the way all councils seem to prefer things.

They don’t want uncontrolled trailed boat trailers on their beaches, ‘threatening’ as they see it, the wellbeing of other beach users. That would be too difficult to police. What councils prefer is for all boat owners to have the necessary paperwork, and for the clubs themselves to be responsible for over-seeing this. Besides insurance for the club and for its vehicles, they require things like risk-assessments, VHF radio for all, individual boat and car insurance, RYA Power Boat Level 2 certification, RNLI Sea Check for boats and safety gear....the list goes on and on.

These councils are not openly saying that individuals cannot launch, providing they satisfy the council in advance that all the criteria are met, but in effect that is more or less what it means. The big problem, and this applies to the clubs also, is that the various local authorities concerned set different criteria to each other, so that the travelling small boat anglers must have the complete set, whatever that turns out to be.

All councils use the same general ‘a la carte menu’. It’s just that they each select different requirements from it. Not so much of a problem for club members who are covered by a block application. But a nightmare for individuals who may have everything they need for one slip, yet get turned away at another.

I’ve tested this out so I know. I approached the 3 different governing authorities around the Fylde, plus Sefton who have responsibility for Southport and Ainsdale where I used to just drive onto the beach and launch, and there wasn’t one matching pair of requirements amongst them. God only knows then what the rest of the country must be like. In short, most councils don’t want small boat owners on their stretch of the shore but concede they must provide some access, and as such, seemingly go out of their way to make it as difficult and ‘back covering’ as they possibly can.



This brings me to my second point – historical facilities. Again, I’m going to use my own area of knowledge to help illustrate a point which I’m sure people in other parts of the country will identify with. Other than using Liverpool Marina which locks in and out, it isn’t possible to put a small boat in along the Liverpool side of the Mersey. The only River Mersey launch available is New Brighton on the Wirral side, which is a beach launch with all the potential problems that can bring. Again, all the paper work must be in place to get a launch permit, which includes showing valid car insurance.

The slip itself is fine, and you can park on the beach if you are fishing the tide down and back up to half flood. For a full flood tide you need to make other arrangements, on top of which, you can’t get back in over high water due to the sea walls. Coming in early can take a serious chunk out of the best of the fishing if you are not prepared to sit out

the slack which, on a small tide, are the only tides that can be fished due to ferocity of the run, can be a long barren wait.

You just have to learn to deal with it. What is more difficult to deal with is the fact that New Brighton is right at the exposed seaward end of the river. Any wind from west around to north is a nightmare, plus you have the wash from big ships coming in and out over the top of the tide.

There are many times when it will be either too dangerous or impossible to put a small boat in. Yet a short way up river where all the fish are over the backend and winter months it can be like a sheet of glass. Even more aggravating is the fact that the charter boats, which can take much more weather than a small boat, come out of the marina and are straight on to the fish in flat calm conditions, while the small boats are prevented from launching up river. I fished a session with Tony Parry aboard 'Jensen II' without any problem whatsoever tucked in over near Birkenhead Town Hall on a day when the Coastguard came on the radio saying the wind was blowing 57 knots, which the Beaufort scale classes as a 'violent storm'.

I don't think I would have wanted to be out fishing from my own boat, but it would have been possible. Especially if Wirral council opened up the slipways that are already built, some with adjacent car parking, and all far enough up river to be out of the worst of the weather.

These people demand all the necessary paper work on the premise of making it safe for small boaters, yet deny them the use of safer historical facilities, instead pushing them down to the most difficult and dangerous slipway along the whole Wirral side. The fact that the majority of those fishing belong to the Wirral Boat Club and are local rate payers counts for nothing. Councils would rather 'moth ball' perfectly safe already constructed facilities that have cost them nothing. They say they want to see young people off the streets, then make life difficult and costly for those that try.

ZZIPILEX RODS



The story of Zziplex is the second instalment of a two part inclusion which begins in the 1972, when skilled fibreglass engineer Mike McManus teamed up with equally skilled distance caster and several times record holder Terry Carroll,

which for shore anglers everywhere has been hailed as a marriage made in heaven, initially operating under the company name of Carroll McManus Ltd. (see Chapter 9).

When eventually the 'marriage' was over culminating in an amicable divorce and the two parties going their separate ways in 1980, Terry Carroll went on to start Zziplex and Mike McManus set up Conoflex. Two absolute top of the range fishing rod blank manufacturers, not so much in competition with each other as doing the job they both loved, while at the same time pushing the boundaries ever forward, leaving all who came after them in their wake.

Mike McManus honed his fibreglass skills working on RAF planes during and after WWII. Once fibreglass had been declassified and was available to all who could find a use for it, the German company Sportex set the bar with fishing rod blanks which they made to a high quality for finishing and badging up by other tackle companies. Now of course, Sportex make completed fishing rods of a very high quality in their own right.

Back in the late 1940's through into the 1950's, rod building was undergoing a period of transition from materials of the past, such as various woods, to those of the present starting with fibreglass, initially

producing solid glass rods, quickly followed by hollow glass tubes, which is where Mike McManus begins his story.



By the time Carroll McManus Ltd. had split into Conoflex and Zziplex, the pair had well and truly mastered the art of wrapping various types of resin impregnated matting around purpose designed stainless steel mandrills made up for them in America.

I was very careful there not to be too specific in terms of matting and resins. Carbon fibre had been around for some time while fibreglass was still ruling the roost. If you research carbon fibres on the Internet you will see that they have been around for a very long time.

Joseph Swan first produced them in 1860, though carbon fibre as we now know it was supposedly 'invented' in the USA in 1958. Either way, it wasn't until we Brit's started playing around with it that the techniques required to use it as we are now able to do were developed in 1963, whereupon its use was restricted to the aerospace industry.

Eventually, obviously, this became de-restricted. But that didn't mean it suddenly superseded fibreglass. A lot of development work was still required in terms of manufacturing suitable grades of cloth and adhesives. These needed to be capable of producing a lightweight thin walled tube that could be relied upon not to delaminate or 'explode' under the sorts of sudden extreme pressures distance casting can load into a rod blank. So, in the early days, fibreglass continued to rule the roost. It took the ingenuity and forward thinking of Mike McManus to blend some of the old with some of the new, a process which continues to this day.

On its own, carbon fibre, or graphite as the Americans like to call it, is not suited to making fishing rods. Neither is Kevlar, which has priced itself out of the market now anyway. Blended with fibreglass to provide some 'elasticity', both produce excellent fishing rods, which is where the skill of the rod blank maker comes to the fore.

As was said in Chapter 9, the secret in the early days of carbon fibre, if you can call it that, was getting stiffness into the butt of a rod that will bend, particularly with the blank building materials available to rod blank manufacturers at the time. The big problems with carbon was delamination and shattering, which was eventually cured when suitable phenolic and epoxy resins became available, allowing tubes to be produced that could bend without snapping. Plus of course, aluminium tubing to allow the butt section to be stiffened up, which with the right casting technique would allow the delivery of even more power.

Let's not however run away with the idea that fibreglass as a rod building material had had its day. 'S-glass' is superior to carbon in some specific and important respects, not the least of which is softening up the action when and where needed, a good example of which is for boat fishing with braid, which like carbon fibre has no give in it. Without something to soften the action, that combination could very easily result in a pulled hook hold.

GUERNSEY

On a number of occasions throughout the 1980's and 1990's, and at a number of levels, the Channel Islands of Guernsey and its near neighbour Herm have been particularly fruitful fishing grounds for me. It all started with a family camping holiday along with Fleetwood charter skipper Keith Philbin and his clan. We had intended to fish, but had absolutely no idea where or for what, so as you do, being primarily boat anglers, we went down to St. Peterport harbour for a quick reccie and discovered that some bloke named Dougal Lane would take out trips either to the mid-channel wrecks, the various reefs, or the offshore banks, if he could get a big enough party together. We also discovered another boat doing more regular bank fishing which had a local group trip planned with enough space for Keith and myself, so we decided to kick things off with that.



What a day that turned out to be. Dozens of Turbot, Brill and Bass while drift fishing long flowing traces with live Sandeel. But more importantly, talking to the locals, new friendships were forged and new opportunities opened up which would straddle almost two decades. On board fishing that day was a chap named Peter Frise (pictured here) who quite literally lived to fish.

Along with his fishing partner Joe Gomez, whose father had been handed over to the Germans by General Franco to work as a slave labourer in the concentration camp on nearby Alderney during WWII and later given asylum, they would fish for anything and everything. In particular they were keen shore competition fanatics as well as boat anglers, with a list of big fish and trophy wins that would be the envy of anyone.

As the years went by, Peter and Joe would take me shore fishing all over both islands for Conger, Mullet, Plaice, Garfish, and just about anything else they could rack up a good score in the local ongoing club competitions. I also had my 100th species of fish with them in the form of a Red Mullet while fishing from the rocks

one evening at Bec Du Nez.

On another occasion I had flow down specifically to cover a shore fishing competition for one of the magazines one cold grey miserable late autumn weekend. The story and the photographs were my priority. But that didn't mean I couldn't also fish. While they were float fishing for Garfish, I dropped a worm bait straight down the rock face at my feet which came up with amongst other things a Ballan Wrasse of 6½ pounds.

That was at Herm. Very often we would take the first early morning ferry across, known jokingly as the 'milk run'. The Wrasse fishing was excellent around the Rosaire steps close to where the ferry dropped off. Lots of Black Bream there too. But for the competitions, Garfish were the main target due to their sheer numbers. Spoonfuls of a bread, fish oil and boiled sandeel chum known locally as 'Shirvey' would be fed in from favoured rock marks to gather the Garfish up within casting range.

This could also bring in Mullet, so a second rod ready rigged up with float tackle would always be at hand in case the 'Grey Ghosts' appeared. Otherwise it would be slider float tactics for the Gars, known locally as 'Long Nose', which barring the odd Pollack, Wrasse, and Bream, pretty much ruled out anything else.

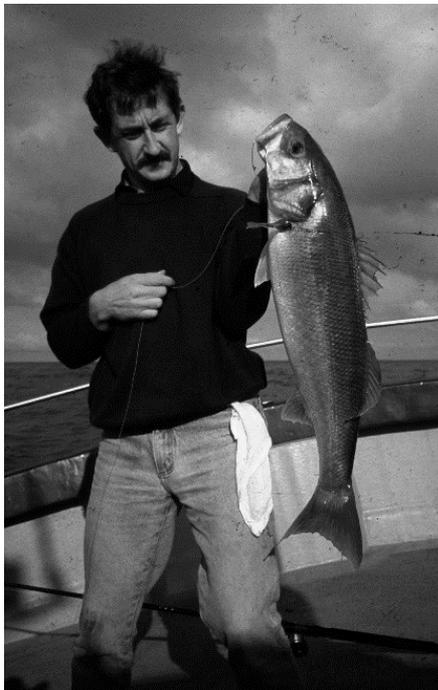
Back to that first visit now with Keith Philbin. Besides fishing the banks, we also decided to take a trip with Dougal Lane who at the time was running a 30 foot wooden boat called 'Arum'. While the likes of 'JJ' McVicar, Passmore & Trust, and Geordie Dickson who we'd regularly see tied up in the harbour

doing 4 and 5 day trips were making all the headlines from the mainland ports, visiting exactly the same wrecks but from the opposite direction, Dougal Lane was a match for any of them.

Never have I met a more accomplished man with the anchor. He said he could think and even dream in Decca. But ironically, certainly in the early years, all the fishing we did with Dougal both over the wrecks, and on the banks where there were plenty of Blonde Rays, was done on the drift.

The wrecks back then were bursting at the seams with big Ling. Obviously there were other species too such as Pollack, Coalfish, and Conger, if you fished for them. We also had a few nice Cod to 27 pounds. But it was Ling city. On a slow drift with not much wind or tide, if you were quick enough, you could get 2 drops to the wreck on the same pass, which meant 2 Ling running between 20 and 30 pounds, for as many times as you could keep it up.

After 'Arun', Dougal fished from 'Midnight Moon' and later 'Midnight Express'. We did a lot of drifting with live sandeel over the banks aboard 'Midnight Moon'. By then the Turbot and Brill had been well and truly thinned out. But the Bass were still about in good numbers, and we'd rarely come back with less than 40 to show for our efforts, which being on holiday, we would leave on board for Dougal to market as a bonus.



We were drifting the banks off Alderney one particular day with Bass coming up here there and everywhere. Dougal was being run ragged with the landing net, and typically the fish were running between 7 and 9 pounds, which was a very good average size. On the final drift when we got to the end of the swirls and eddies marking the bank, Dougal shouted 'lines up' ready for home.

Everyone was winding furiously, and I remember thinking one of them had perhaps fouled my line with a hook which was sliding up it. But when I looked around, everyone else was in. The next thing I remember was Dougal looking into the water and dashing off to get the net, and with one quick swipe, dropping a Bass of 13.2.0 on the deck. A PB for me (see photo here), and a fish I didn't even know was on until it was laid there in the net in front of me.

We also fished from 'Midnight Moon' at anchor over the wrecks, but nothing spectacular to report. The usual never ending train of big Ling and plenty of strap Conger. There would have been bigger Conger down there I'm sure, but the Ling and 'straps' were too quick on the baits to give any of these a look in.

Interestingly that day, we also boated around half a dozen big Tope which raised a query from me about the shark potential. Blue Sharks would be all over the place out there beyond the 40 fathom line. Porbeagles too around some of the wrecks, and more specifically closer to shore in areas with plenty of tide. A previous British record Porbeagle of 435 pounds was a Channel Island fish. Unfortunately however, we never got to fish for them, though they were most certainly around.

The last trip I fished with Dougal was when a group of us flew down from Lancashire for a 5-day session. That was aboard 'Midnight Express', and was the visit that produced that PB Bass. Unfortunately, the weather was a bit on the marginal side. One day we fished a species hunt close inshore which turned up all manner of stuff including some very good Black Bream. Come the final day it was still blowing quite a bit. Dougal said it was up to us whether we stayed inshore or went off to the wrecks. The boat could handle it; the question was, could we.

Only one way to find out, so out we chugged taking quite a battering. Sadly, by this stage, which would have been the mid-1990's, the mid channel wrecks were nothing like as productive as in years gone by. It was this day that Dougal gave us a master class in precision anchoring. But a few small Conger and a dozen or so half decent Ling were scant reward for all work put in.

Two other standout boat trips worthy of mention are one with Maurice Down, and another towards the end of our visits aboard a boat I had never seen before. Live sandeel bait is king in these parts. Anglers and commercials alike demand them for everything, a demand met by a local inshore trawler operated by Maurice Down. Peter Frise arranged for me to meet Maurice and eventually have a run out with him.

Each morning, Maurice and his crew would motor down to the Great Bank just out from St. Peterport and do a couple of tows with a fine mesh otter trawl which would come up bursting with live sandeels. These immediately went into giant couges (oval wicker baskets with a lid) for transportation back to harbour, where Maurice would then run around all the fishing boats filling their smaller couges ready for the off.



The other trip was a chance encounter on the quay. We were without a boat trip that morning wondering whether to go shore fishing, when we heard that a mainland university had funded a student to tag Bass for some project or other. The skipper of the boat he'd chartered had gathered together a crew of local Bass anglers, but there were still a few places going begging which we somehow managed to blag.

As for the fishing itself, this was done way off within distant sight of the power station at Flamanville over on the French

Coast. And what a day it was. So good they had to have 2 landing nets on the go. I remember seeing 2 double figure Bass in one of the nets at the same time. Big Bass were everywhere, all of which with the exception of a few 'casualties' were tagged and released. The photograph here is of four of those casualties, all going into double figures.

SOUTH WALES COD BONANZA

If you read my other accounts of big Cod eras from around the 1970's to the end of the 1990's, although none of them appear to be directly connected, there are definitely similarities between some aspects and some locations. Not between all of them at the same time or in the same way, but enough to feel they are some how linked, however that may turn out to be, if indeed we ever find out.

Three in particular stand out, these being South Wales, Lancashire's Fylde Coast, and Balcary on the Solway Firth, and I'll explain why those three in particular as opposed to say the Isle of Wight grounds and the Firth of Clyde in a moment. I've discounted ports in the Whitby area on account of them having Cod all year round, particularly during the summer months where they fish for them in deep water typically with lures.

There is however a case for considering the Humber on the grounds that the fishing there is similar to what I'm going to describe for South Wales, but I suspect that's just an accident of geography throwing up coincidental similarities and that the fishing there really is still linked to the rest of the North Sea.

The Cod fishing in the Thames estuary is also similar in its execution to South Wales, Lancashire and Balcary, but again I see no other link. Similarly, the Kent and Sussex Coast through to the Isle of Wight grounds which at one time produced not only big fish, but staggeringly huge hauls of Cod, particularly for Mick Coker fishing out of Folkestone and Dover (see Chapter 8), and from the beach at Dungeness.

Forgive me if this seems like a long rambling introduction in which South Wales has barely had a mention yet. What I'm trying to do is establish a pattern, and a reason, firstly for the appearance of all those big Cod from Cardiff through to Swansea during the 1990's, and as importantly their subsequent disappearance not long afterwards in much the same way that they disappeared from Lancashire and Balcary, both of which, like Wales, are on the west coast of the country physically well isolated from what was happening in the south east corner from the IOW round to the Thames Estuary. The firth of Clyde (Chapter 8) was a totally different situation where huge fish were entering the sea lochs to spawn, presenting themselves as an easy target for the commercials.

Where the fishing at all these locations very likely is linked is the bitterly cold winter of 1962 on into 1963. An icy blast so cold for such a long period that the sea actually froze in a lot of places causing some inshore fish populations to suffer huge losses. It's said, and this is a theory not an explanation, that the water was so cold it pushed the predators of Cod eggs right out of the equation, resulting in abnormally big numbers of Cod recruitment for years to come.

If only a small percentage of those then make it through to monster proportions, with the starting figure so massive, then that small percentage growing on to specimen size can also be huge, with the knock on effect again of large numbers of eggs from those large individual fish keeping the ball rolling. Well for a while at least. It's a bit like pyramid selling. Eventually it must peter out leaving somebody somewhere bemoaning their luck. But providing you are somewhere in the middle of the pyramid, be thankful for what you've got.

What is a little more difficult to explain is the fact that while South Wales, Lancashire and Balcary are loosely linked by geography and there was most certainly a good measure of timing overlap between the three, it isn't a perfect match. But it's not that far off in terms of its big fish more so than numbers of fish from memory, and from talking extensively to Dave Lewis who was in the thick of it all back then.

South Wales produced a little later than Lancashire, as did Balcary in south west Scotland. I have nothing to throw in the mix on that one, though there is a certain amount of suspicion amongst those who fished Balcary regularly, such as Ken Robinson, that the big Cod had been there and were known about by local anglers much earlier who had managed to keep under wraps, for a while at least, so the overlap fit might be better than the stats appear to show. But it isn't only west coast geography that links these three big Cod events. It has as much to do with where, when, and how they fed, and the way in which anglers fished for them to be in with the best shot of success.

It's taken me a full nine paragraphs to get to this point, but finally we've made it. Time now to look specifically at South Wales. The geographical area in question runs from the narrow part of the Bristol Channel just to the west of Swansea, with some decent fishing on the corresponding English side too. In terms of general overview, scanning back through some of the angling magazines of the day, a lot of emphasis was put on fishing from Mumbles Head east to Cardiff, which ties in well with what Dave Lewis tells me and the limited amount of Cod fishing I did with him down there at the time.

That was all boat fishing. But boat anglers weren't the only people cashing in. The shore lads were getting their share too, though rarely in the size range the dinghies and charter boats were seeing. Top shore venues undoubtedly were Mumbles foreshore, Swansea East Pier and breakwater, Sker Point, Porthcawl, and Ogmore from the beaches and rock marks.

The Deeps at Ogmore produced Cod of 37lbs and 38.12.0 from the shore in the mid-1980's. Sully Island, and Lavernock Point were also in the frame. And for completeness, over on the English side, it was Minehead, Porlock, Burnham, Bridgewater Bay, Weston Bay, Hinkley, Dunster, Brean Down, and Portishead, fished both from small boats and from the shore.



Attempting to link patterns has been a key objective here so far, so let's take a closer look at some of those. I use the word 'those', but in essence it pretty much boils down to just one, which is the similarity of the tactics and timing required to get a result, particularly out in the boats.

Shallow, coloured water, particularly after a good stir up on a big tide were the optimum conditions for all three venues. The tides are much fiercer in the Bristol Channel than they are along the Fylde Coast making uptiding the top technique, both to beat the boats scare area, and to be certain you were holding bottom. Balcary being a shore mark fished from the rocks meant you had to take what you could get in terms of water depth.

Much of the Welsh boat fishing was done fairly close in at depths of around 50 to 80 feet, with blacklug loaded onto a flowing trace pinned to the bottom where the fish would be hunting by scent and vibration, as opposed to sight. Unlike Balcary and Lancashire, ragworm was also a reasonably reliable plan B if blacklug or blowlug was hard to come by. Squid too was another alternative, which up here in Lancashire has since become a regular winter Cod cocktail partner for blacklug, though we never thought to use it in the day.

Size progression and seasonal timing are another pattern linking the three west coast venues. Things would start with the smaller fish from around September through to Christmas, increasing incrementally in size and numbers over time, with the very biggest fish coming around the turn of the year until they headed off to spawn towards the end of February, maybe on into March. Someone will always have some example or other that doesn't quite fit that time scale. These are wild animals, and fishing can be like that sometimes.

That then was the regular pattern, with plenty of Cod between maybe 3 and 8 pounds to the east of Swansea before Christmas, with the expectation of the bigger lumps out from Swansea itself in the new year, which as a point of balance, in terms of sheer Cod numbers, was less well blessed. Paul Radford, it has to be said, was the key player on the charter fishing scene at Swansea.

Both from Swansea, and certainly further to the east, as with my own Lancashire Coast, small boats fishing quite close into the shore took the lion's share of the Cod, both numerically, and in terms of size. Sully in particular, which is time restricted by the tide and therefore not the best of launching sites for small boats fishing between 800 yards and a mile or so off, and the area around the SWIG Buoy at Mumbles were the top spots capable of producing lots of doubles, and of course the bigger fish, which could go anywhere from 20 to 40 pounds.

Lancashire started around the mid-1970's and petered out around 1990. As I said earlier, Balcary probably started early than we think, say in the early to mid-1980's going on into the 1990's, 'kind-of' mirroring the South Wales run which really got going in the second half of the 1980's, peaking through into the 1990's, then slipping into decline around the turn of the century with an end date somewhere around 2005.

As with the others, while it lasted, it was fantastic, and always with the tantalizing prospect of cracking the 40 pound barrier, which while it wasn't done that often, was always on the cards as long as you had a big bait out on a bigish tide after a big blow had put plenty of colour in the water, as demonstrated by the accompanying photograph of Paul Radford stood in front of his Swansea based charter boat 'Radfords Lady'.

'RIPPING' GOOD COD TRIP



From the turn of the century right on into the 1950's, Scottish inshore commercial fishermen relied on a gadget they called the Cod Ripper. Obviously, there would be local and individual variations on the basic design, which usually consisted of a suitable lead weight with hooks either dangling from or attached to it, the idea being that it would foul hook Cod, which for commercial purposes didn't matter. Except that some designs and hook configurations also attracted Cod which would either strike at the ripper, or investigate it and become impaled. Either

way, as a source of meagre income or food for the family, it was still job done.

There has been speculation over the years as to whether rippers were the inspiration for modern day pirks, introduced to the UK from the Scandinavia by ABU in the 1970's. By making them reflective with angled shapes they would reflect glints of light more efficiently, and would set up vibration or disturbance patterns in the water which fish like Cod would home it on. But let's not forget the basic premise of lead and hooks, which if done properly, can catch as opposed to foul hooking fish every bit as efficiently as a much costlier over the counter pirks.

I'd like now to recount a trip out of Hartlepool with a party from Preston Sea Anglers probably during the 1980's. Club members had previously been shown a ripper and had gone into 'mass production' prior to this trip. It consisted of a straight length of lead of probably an inch in diameter and 6 inches in

length. This had a hole through the side towards the top for a loop of corlene to be tied through with a swivel to attach the reel line. It also had 2 holes at the bottom, one slightly above the other, going through at right angles to each other for 12-inch lengths of corlene to be passed through and given 'stopper' knots tied as close to the lead as possible to fix the corlene in place.

The 4 ends of the fixed corlene strands were then each given a 10/0 tin plated hook tied in such a way that they all hung down together in a cluster in approximately the same position a couple of inches below the bottom of the lead. It was as simple and as basic as that. This was then dropped down and worked sink and draw like a pirk, the reflective tinned hooks supposedly looking like a burst of small sandeels scattering. Whatever the visual effect it most certainly worked, with us catching in excess of 800 pounds of Cod to double figures over heavy ground, very few of which were foul hooked.

CONWAY



North Wales between the 1960's and 1980's was a very different sea angling proposition to the one we see today. When south westerlies made it impossible to fish on my local Lancashire patch, throughout the 1990's, Dave Devine and I would trail our boat down into North Wales looking for a bit of calm water where we could drop a few baits down, and would often end up in the shelter of the Great Orme, or the estuary at Conway fishing for Flounders.

The open sea wasn't much better than the estuary, offering small Whiting, Dabs, and a seemingly endless stream of Lesser Spotted Dogfish. So much so that Colwyn Bay in particular became known as 'Doggie Bay', and the greeting on the Welcome to Wales sign passed at the border which reads 'Croeso y Cymru was translated as 'Welcome, have a dogfish'. That's a mark of how poor the small boat fishing could be in the Conway, Llandudno, Rhos-on-Sea, Colwyn Bay area, for us at least. But it wasn't always like that. Far from it I believe.

I've charter boat fished all along that stretch of the North Wales coast over the years, and at times didn't do much better than Dave and I did in the dinghy. We would pick up the odd Huss and Thornback Ray, but throughout, the North Wales grand slam of a Dog, a Dab and a Whiting dominated. That said, in 1980 I wanted to arrange a last minute trip for myself, my boat partner Steve Lill, and my young son Ian who had just come out of hospital and wanted to go fishing. So I rang around and managed to get hold of the owner of a battered old wooden charter boat at Conway, which from memory anchored up just out in the bay in the lee of the Great Orme, only this time we were fishing on the opposite side to that which we were familiar with at Colwyn Bay.

I can't say that the trip is etched on my mind as a day to remember, but we must have enjoyed it for me to be recalling it here. From beginning to end it was regular nicely paced action. A few Tope might have made Steve and I sit up and take a bit more notice. But for Ian, it was perfect. Lots of double figure Spurdog, Huss of similar size, and quite a few Thornback Rays mixed in amongst the 'usual culprits', plus a sprinkling of Gurnards for good measure. And that's how much of North Wales fished from the 1960's to around the end of the 1980's.

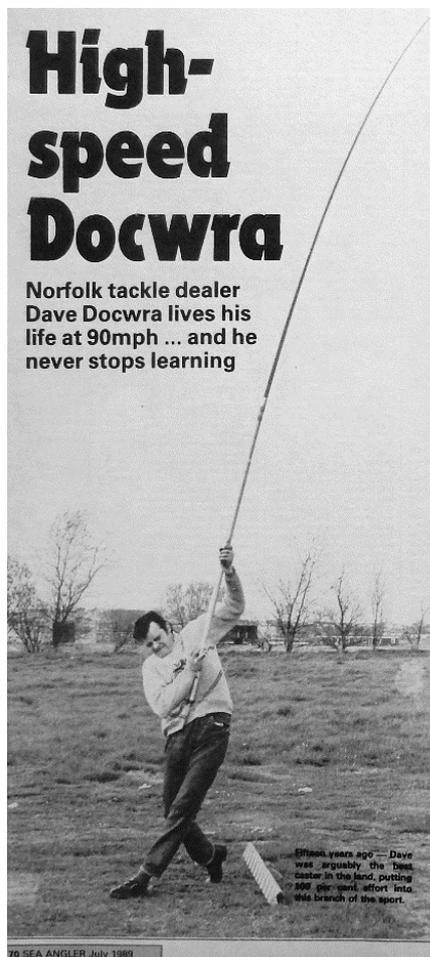
Busy, bread and butter fishing. Then the commercials started long-lining the spurs, tangle netting the rays, and scooping up pretty much anything else they could get their nets around, creating the situation presenting at the close of the 1990's and beyond. But it also has to be said that anglers must share some

of the blame too by not always practising what they preached as the photograph shown here of Spurdog caught off Conway from Angling Magazine clearly shows.

Shore fishing in the area was also pretty reliable over the same period. I remember fishing the Colwyn Bay Victoria roving Bass competition on a few occasions, and while most people struggled to get a result, I did see some very nice Bass brought to the scales. But by the close of the century, that too had changed.

The last time I fished there, barely a handful of fish were caught, though thousands of lead weights simultaneously crashing into the water probably wouldn't have helped. Things were similarly bleak on the few occasions I fished or took a walk on Llandudno pier. Thankfully, the venues at the extremities of the stretch I've mentioned, which are Rhyl and Holyhead, were able to perform to a much higher standard from both the boat and the shore and have continued to do so through to more recent times.

DAVE DOCWRA



When it comes to fishing, Dave Docwra, or the 'Doc' as he is more affectionately known, is a bit of an enigma. Is there nothing in angling and related terms this man can't do, and more to the point do well? Initially he was a coarse angler, and a very good coarse angler. So good in fact that he represented England in the 1972 World Championships in Italy. Then he switched his attention to sea fishing. At first this included boat fishing, until one day he was forced at the last minute by other commitments to miss out on a trip out from Southend with his friend Barry Lowe, plus another angler and his son. Tragically, the boat somehow turned over and those onboard were drowned, understandably removing any future interest in going offshore looking for fish.

Instead, he turned his attention to shore fishing, also adding distance casting to his armoury, both on the beach and on the tournament field, at various times holding 14 USKF casting records, which to some extent tapped into the excellent problem solving skills of the man in terms of tackle development, particularly with surf rods, which he built to order for sale through his tackle business.

Instructing others in getting more from their casting was another strand, while at the same time getting involved at a very early stage in mail order selling in the pre-Internet era as an 'expansion' to his Great Yarmouth tackle shop. A perfectionist who always put maximum commitment into everything he did.

During the 1980's and 1990's, when he wasn't instructing face to face, manning the shop counter, or actually out on the beach fishing, he got involved in instructional video making, some of which have recently been digitised and are just as relevant now as they were when they were first filmed.

Yet for all his achievements actually fishing and helping others to do better, he was a very modest man who once said that successful sea angling was 10% acquired technique and tackle, and 90% being in the right place at the right time with the right bait, which as we all know comes down to understanding exactly what you are doing with little if any reliance on luck. If it were otherwise, how come he just

kept on catching fish, topped off by Cod of 24.14.0, 23.8.0 and 22.8.0, adding more weight to the old cliché of ‘the harder you work the luckier you get’.

EAGLE RAY ENCOUNTER

The Eagle Ray *Myliobatis aquila* tends to be a rare unscheduled visitor at our latitude, though that may well change as sea temperatures continue to rise. Where they are common, such as around the Canary Islands, they can be particularly abundant. A fish a drop on some days. But so far as we are concerned around the British Isles, it’s a handful of specimens at best, typically from the mid channel area around the Isle of Wight. That’s where the first recorded specimen I am aware of was taken, establishing the species on the British record fish list.

At the time of writing, the record stands at 101.14.6 for a boat caught fish taken by R. Lewis off St. Catherine’s Bay on the Isle of Wight in 2004. I haven’t come across any other specimens to report, though I don’t doubt there will have been others. Having an almost separate forward protruding head with the eyes set into the sides, the Eagle Ray isn’t a fish you are likely to mistake for anything other than what it is, or at least immediately recognise it as being something different and worthy of note. So expect more.

BOOBY BEADS & STAY FRESH KEEP NETS

Booby Beads are the ‘Marmite’ of sea fishing tackle. You either love them or you hate them. For a lot of people there is no in between. Personally, I can take them or leave them. Their inventor and manufacturer John Wilding is a personal friend of mine who came up with the idea around the start of the 1980’s. With enthusiasm bubbling out of every orifice, he turned up at my place one evening with a box full from the first production run for me to put through their paces.



For those who don’t know what Booby Beads are, they come as a flat pack of plastic mouldings ready for assembly. The main body comprises of two halves of a hollow ‘ball’ moulded side by side rather like the cups of a woman’s bra, hence the name.

One of the pair has a recess around its rim and the other a raised ‘collar’ for clipping them together, either as a double by using two mouldings, or as a single by turning one over on itself. But before doing that a small metal bead is placed inside each ‘cup’. Then as the bead rotates in the tide on the trace, the

tiny metal ball inside rattles, adding audio to the visual aspect of the rotation. These come in a selection of colours which can be mixed together as required.

The first time I took them to sea was at Amble fishing from my own boat for Codling around Coquet Island. To counter the heavy tackle hungry terrain there, I like to use dropper rings. In this case 3 droppers spaced out above the lead. Mid-point on each dropper I trapped a Booby Bead. Dave Devine and

Paul Bennett who were fishing with me stuck to plain traces of similar construction, and all 3 of us baited up with the same blacklug.

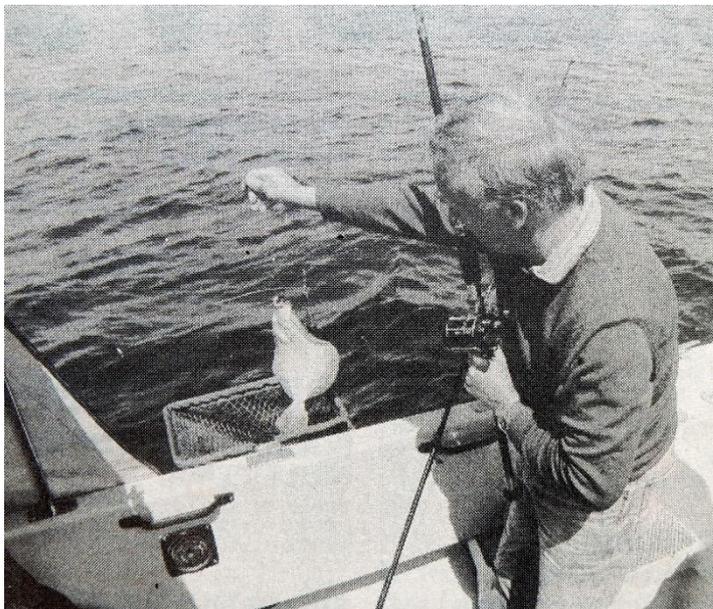
It immediately became apparent that having the Booby's incorporated in the rig was an advantage. So much so that Dave and Paul stripped down their traces and did the same. My initial thought when I first put them on, was that being in perfect symmetrical balance due to having no 'offset' to catch the tide like the blades on a propeller, they wouldn't rotate. Well they did rotate, though I still think that putting a slight 'twist' in them to encourage more rotation would not have gone amiss.

I wasn't too keen on the single bead idea though. I couldn't see the point. That said, some people swear by them, including amazingly some shore anglers which I find surprising. Scottish International Steve Souter was a big fan, so when he couldn't get any for a Home International competition (England included) I sent him a load up which I suppose by definition makes me a traitor.

Different anglers have different takes on colours and combinations. I personally like to go with just plain silver. Really though, you should experiment, as the attraction of colours can change from day to day according to water clarity and ambient light. But I'm told they also attract well even in low light and dirty water conditions, though obviously that has to be down to the rattle they give out.

For me, it's the same argument as when loading coloured plastic beads onto a snood. Some say one colour or combination is best, while others might prefer something else. Once again, I'm in the 'either way' camp, though if I do use them for Plaice or other flatfish I go for an alternating black and green sequence. I would add though that if I didn't have any I wouldn't lose too much sleep. Some days they appear to boost catches, while on others they are matched by bait alone. The one thing I have noticed is that having beads on the trace never seems to detract, so that basis I am happy to use them just in case it turns to be a 'beads on' day, and I view Booby Beads in much the same way.

After enjoying a considerable amount of success with his Booby Beads, John next turned his attention to the Stayfresh Keepnet. A robust, quality constructed, square framed net, which fitted into a mounting fixed to the gunnel of the boat, which he personally came around and fitted for me. This involved cutting



a sizeable oblong hole in the fibreglass which I wasn't too keen about, but I let him do it anyway, the premise being that fish could be kept fresh in the net while hanging in the water, and that Mackerel could be also kept alive, either to be cut up later, or for use as live baits for Tote and Bass.

I was charged with the task of reviewing it for Sea Angler Magazine in August 1989. The theory was great. The application, particularly for live-bait keeping was unfortunately considerably less so. Using it while fishing on the drift was better than when at anchor, because the contents of the net were never, nor could ever, be perfectly distributed due to the tide catching the free hanging frameless

mesh, causing it to spin and pretty much 'strangle' the contents.

This wouldn't matter with dead fish being kept cool for eating, or washing after gutting and filleting. But for keeping live baits it was hopeless. For that it would have needed a fixed box frame holding the net in place with the water free to pass through it.

NOTE: John told me that an American film company placed a very large order for Booby Beads which they used as a lining for a space vehicle in some sci-fi film to help make it look more futuristic.

CHRISTCHURCH THIN LIPPED MULLET

The Thin Lipped Grey Mullet *Liza ramada* (also listed as *Chelon ramada*) is a paradoxical fish in that around the British Isles it's a rare, or should I say a localised species, yet at the same time, where it is found it can also be extremely abundant. Find one Thin Lipped Grey Mullet and you invariably find lots of them, which is exactly what myself and Keith Philbin did at Christchurch in Hampshire while on a caravanning holiday there with our families over a period spanning 4 summers running from the late-1970's through into the early-1980's.

Being unable to trail both a boat and a caravan down from Lancashire, my boat partner Steve Lill trailed the boat down, staying over to fish on the first weekend, and again on the last weekend to trail it back. The difference he observed in terms of the fishing over that two week period was staggering to say the least



Initially, we had no real idea of where or for what we should use the boat for. On one of the first weekend days we put it in at Lymington on a bight but blustery day, where amongst a few other bits and pieces, my son Ian who was maybe 5 at the time, boated a 22 pound Stingray. Other than that, there was not much else doing.

Throughout our stay the weather remained poor in terms of wind, so one morning after Steve had gone back up north, Keith and I decided to put the boat in at Pontins on the River Stour,

working our way down stream with a tub of ragworms and a few spinners to see what we could find, targeting Bass, Flounder, but having no idea really in terms of local geography or how to go about extracting the best from the situation.

We chose an early start for no other reason than wanting to avoid the mayhem created by holiday-makers chugging up and down the place in self-drive boats from around late breakfast time onwards. On top of that, we also fancied giving the Mullet fishing a bit of a try, which again is often dogged by noise and disturbance throughout the bulk of the day.

I had actually already had a crack at them from accessible parts of the river bank on a previous visit, when all I could manage was a surprise freshwater Bream on float fished bread flake. There was however talk of Thin Lipped Grey Mullet in the area, and of catching them occasionally on ragworm. So, in the knowledge that these were a possibility, and knowing there might be Bass and certainly Flounders about, at around 5 am on a miserable grey July morning, we found ourselves exploring the Stour/Avon all the way down to the upper outskirts of Christchurch harbour.

Much of the lower Stour, certainly when travelling down it by boat, looks to be inaccessible to anglers on foot, which meant we pretty much had the entire place to ourselves. Not that it made a lot of difference in terms of fish. No Bass fell to our spinners. Similarly, no Flounders seemed to fancy our ragworm baits. And all the time the tide was dropping leaving us confined to a narrow muddy channel just above

the confluence of where the Stour and Avon meet where we pulled in to the reed fringed bank and physically placed the anchor amongst vegetation for one last ditch effort, this time combining the bait with the lure. That was the secret. We had stumbled across the right combination of tactics, positioning, and timing within the tide, suddenly finding ourselves repeatedly hooking up Mullet after Mullet.

With the timing of the low water period jumping forward each morning, ideal conditions obviously would not stay perfect for long, so we decided to make the best of it, getting up early every morning until we were eventually overtaken by the hustle and bustle of the place. Yet during that short period we learned so much in terms of amount of bait to apply to the hooks, retrieve rates, and lure type.

The lighter the lure, the better chance of keeping it high up in the water column at a slow retrieve rate, and in that regard, we found that Jenspinn lures beat everything else hands down. With a tiny portion of bait applied to each of the 3 hooks of the treble so as not to have to wait for the worm to be nibbled down to size, we seemingly just couldn't go wrong.

When Steve arrived back to pick up the boat a fortnight later he couldn't believe what we presented him with. By that stage we were taking up to 40 mullet a session over a couple hours. It was quite literally end to end manic action, and what good fighting fish they were on the ultra-light spinning outfits we had with us.

What we didn't appreciate at that time was that few, if any other anglers knew about it, and were enjoying the same. Furthermore, when we got back home and started reading up on Thin Lipped Mullet, we discovered that the boat caught British record for the species was vacant with a minimum qualifying weight of 2 pounds, which pretty much every fish we caught had well bettered, and in several cases by quite some margin. The problem was that not being armed with this information at the onset, those fish we had kept had long since seen the inside of a frying pan, so the evidence was gone.

In terms of Christchurch as a holiday destination and Steve trailing the boat down again, the following summer saw a repeat of the same, only this time in the knowledge of what we needed to do in terms of weighing, witnessing, and keeping hold of the evidence. In the run up to our stay I'd also spoken to Trevor Housby about our findings and he asked if he could tag along on one of the days. Living nearby at Sway, you'd have thought he might already have been aware of the situation. But little did we know at that time that we'd stumbled across something that seemingly nobody else had discovered.



So along Trevor came to share in a haul well in excess of 40 fish, the best specimens of which we kept back as 'evidence'. To say he was amazed would be an understatement, and in due course he produced a feature on the trip for one or other of the magazines. As for Keith and I, we were just happy to have access to a deep freeze in which to keep the best of the fish, which this time would be traveling back with us immersed in formaldehyde.

Back home I informed the British Record Fish Committee who instructed me to send the fish to Plymouth for formal identification, which I did. I then had to wait for confirmation. In fact, I waited and I waited, but heard nothing back. In the end I rang the lab enquiring as to the identification, to which they replied, "what mullet". They claimed not to have received the package. So that as they say, was the end of that.

For weeks we'd been enthusing and telling people about our record fish, then all of a sudden it wasn't to be, followed no doubt by a large dollop of scepticism from all concerned. It was already our second season on the fish, and despite all of us well topping

the record qualifying weight on many dozens of occasions, we were still unable to back up all the talk with solid evidence. That however would not be the case at the third attempt.

By this time my son Ian was about 7 years old and was having regular trips out with us, as was my daughter Dawn who is 18 months younger, both of whom wanted to get up early and fish for the mullet. Thankfully, from our very first run down the river it was still business as usual. Lots of fish, though not unfortunately this time around as big as some had been in previous years.

All of us, Ian and Dawn included, topped the qualifying weight literally every session, but the best specimen, which was initially caught by Dawn and later bettered by Ian, could only pull the needle around to 2 pounds 7 ounces, well short of our previous best specimens of over 3 pounds, with Ian's fish this time around finally becoming the record, though we also took a couple of other 'near misses' back home with us as reserves, just in case that one also went missing in transit leaving us on the back foot once again.

BALCARY COD

Around the same time that South Wales, Lancashire's Fylde Coast, and Cumbria's Whitehaven Pier were making the news on the big Cod scene, Balcary Point just across the Solway from Whitehaven was lighting up the Scottish Cod scene with a seemingly endless stream of huge fish, all taken from the shore.

Whether it had just started producing these huge fish or had been previously with the locals having kept things under wraps is always difficult to know. Either way, for much of the 1980's on into the 1990's, what was actually a collection of specific different rock marks close to Kippford attracted a lot of angling attention, both local and visiting, in particular by Ken Robinson, Chris Stringer, and their friends from Whitley Bay near Newcastle (see Chapter 6).

Ken Robinson caught his Scottish shore record Cod there in 1988, by which time quite a number of other big fish were regularly being caught there. That said, I'm going to start the inclusion in 1981 when the World first got to hear about Balcary.

In front of these rock marks was a series of sandbanks with very good worm beds on them. Around and between the banks there was a network of deep-water gullies within casting range of a number of specific rocky fishing 'platforms' running between Colvend and Rascarel, into which, a dropping tide would concentrate big fish between Christmas and the end of February, right through until the mid to late-1990's. Then seemingly overnight, they were gone.

This pattern loosely fits in quite well with the other big Cod producing areas dotted around the country at the time, some of which in the north west may have been sharing a single population of fish both sides of the narrow Solway. Fish said to reproduce out off St. Bee's Head in Cumbria which is a short hop from Balcary.

St. Bee's itself produced some very big fish at the time, as did Whitehaven Pier, plus Lancashire's Fylde Coast a little further to the south which more than likely came from the same 'parent' population, unlike South Wales, the extremities of the Solent, and the Sussex Coast, which in all likelihood would be a separate population

Speaking to Alan Yates and reported in full in Chapter 8, it's a fact that Cod numbers, and over time, Cod sizes on his patch underwent a sudden rapid increase, which he puts down to the record breaking freezing winter of 1962/63.

His suspicion is that predators of Cod eggs and hatched fry spawned over that winter would have been sent scurrying by the cold, leading to a population explosion from which, inevitably, good numbers of fish would get the chance to grow on, keeping the momentum going until eventually it started to peter out. If correct, this might explain a lot of things with regard to the sudden increase followed by decline in big Cod numbers at several locations, including Balcary.

The reason why the name Balcary keeps cropping up, despite being just one of several fishing platforms available, is that the Saddle and Flat Rocks at Balcary far and away produced the best of the fishing, though by no means all the best fish.

Fished immediately after a good blow to colour the water and churn out plenty of food, which, like the fish on a dropping tide would find itself in the deeper gullies and channels in the company of big black lugworm baits, this was where the main action would take place until it became too calm and settled, at which point anglers would have to wait for another good onshore wind to stir things up again.

When you arrived in situ, the fishing was fairly easy and reasonably predictable on the bigger tides. What was definitely not easy was the journey between the car and the rocks with all your gear. This typically would involve trekking across fields and negotiating fences, then the rocks themselves, often in icy conditions.

Hard going, but with the promise of super sized Cod to spur you on, which if you did hook one created a whole new set of problems in avoiding the sharp rocks with the line, climbing down to get the fish out of the water using an extension gaff, sometimes in the dark with a good sea running, and finally carrying it back.

The next question I suppose is, "What is a big Cod?". Besides taking the Scottish shore record with a fish of 40 pounds 11½ ounces in 1988 (reported in full further on in this Chapter), and catching many fish in the 10 to 20 pound bracket and bigger, in one session Ken Robinson once had fish of 32 and 25 pounds. During another at Colvend he took 9 fish to 25 pounds. Obviously, those were some of the better fish. On other occasions, large Flounders would be a nuisance taking and sitting on the baits. Loose weed washing about would also necessitate continually winding in to clear it. So it wasn't a fish a chuck, or a big Cod every session, by any means.

Ken suggests that 2 good Cod in a day was typically as much as you could hope for, good being fish topping 20 pounds apiece, and over the years several topping 30 pounds. The other side of the coin was that a lot of people, particularly first timers who had not done their homework also blanked. A case then of spotting small windows of opportunity to find big fish within casting range in very localised areas, and making the most of whatever opportunities came along.

Then, around 1996, very few fish were reported, and sadly by the following winter, to all intents and purposes they were completely gone, and unless people are keeping any sort of resurgence under wraps, that's it, they haven't been back since.

THE LOSS OF REDCAR PIER

Despite the Redcar Pier Company having formed in 1866 with a design by J. E. & A. Dowson, construction work did not begin on Redcar Pier until 1871, with the 1,300 foot structure with its separate landing stage finally opening in 1873. Twelve years on in December 1885 a ship demolished the landing stage, followed by a further collision incident by the 'Amarant' in 1897 causing a 60 foot breach.

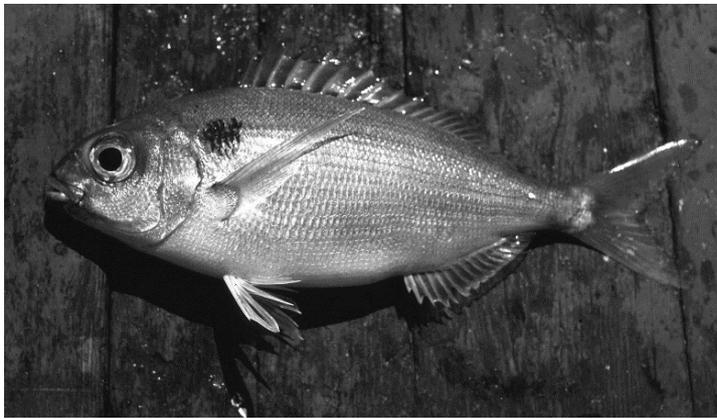
Adding further woe was the burning down of the pier head in 1898, and after considerable investment and repair spending, plus a spell in the hands of the MoD for defence purposes, a combination of mine and storm damage reduced its length to a mere 45 feet beyond the pavilion. This led to Redcar Borough

Council buying it at a cost of £4,500 in 1946. Several years later flooding caused further damage, and eventually in 1980 it was declared unsafe and closed, after which the site was cleared in 1981.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE RED BREAM

While everyone else was fishing for Blue Sharks out of Looe during the 1970's, myself and a small group of friends would be out from the port anchoring the various reefs within striking range fishing small baits on dropper rigs for Red Bream. The attraction wasn't only the Red Bream. The same rigs would bring up all manner of other stuff too, but the bream were very much our primary target, and we'd regularly have good catches of them between 2 and 4 pounds.

I also fished for them out from Newquay, though less successfully so due to the nature of the trips being primarily aimed at holiday makers. And I know for a fact that other like minded anglers all along coast from Plymouth around to Newquay, plus the Channel Islands too would indulge themselves in a spot of Red Bream fishing, even over the mid channel wrecks where the bigger fish tended to hang out. Then all of a sudden, they were gone.



The mystery of how and why they suddenly disappeared has been one I have tried to find a solution to for many years. I can't recall the exact date because at the time I never envisaged getting involved in a project like this, but it must have been somewhere around the start of the 1980's or maybe a touch later.

Usually when a species disappears, it starts with a progressive decline which tends not to get noticed at first, but not so here. This was sudden, and it was dramatic. What's more, its effect was widely felt too, even across to the Channel Islands, though Mike Millman tells me that French stocks down around Biscay, though they suffered some degree of decline, were not hit nearly so badly as those around the west country.

In 2012, I arranged to meet up with Mounts Bay Sea Angling Society and local area expert Sid Pender to record an audio interview for my Audio Angling archive at the British Library. These things tend to follow a basic introductory format before getting stuck into any issues relevant to the person being interviewed and the area concerned, and without any real expectancy of solving this mystery, I happened to mention the sudden decline in Red Bream numbers, to which Sid offered a well considered and perfectly plausible explanation. Almost the entire local breeding stock had been wiped out in a single documented incident.

Handline fishermen in the Penzance area around the time in question would spend their summer and autumn sustainably line fishing for Mackerel, then with the season over, they would cut their feathering rigs down by half to bait fish for Red Bream around the Runnell Stone to boost their income prior to the onset of winter.

In time-honoured fashion, this continued until around the start of the 1980's, when two Scottish boats pair-trawling close in around the Runnell Stone landed 6,000 stone of what they termed 'un-identified' red fish at Newlyn, which turned out to be mature Red Bream *Pagellus bogaraveo*, after which time, anglers and hand lining commercial fishermen couldn't so much as buy a bite.

It appears that the entire breeding stock for the area had been scooped up in one ‘live for today, sod tomorrow’ episode, from which it has taken decades to detect even the merest hint of recovery, which at the time of writing is just starting to come with a few ‘Chads’ (small specimens) being be caught here and there on rod and line.

In support of the Red Bream disappearance to some extent is the clustering of national records.....

Record List	Boat Record	Year	Shore Record	Year
British	9.8.12	1974	4.7.0	1979
Scottish	4.10.0	1969	Vacant	
Welsh	0,567	1981	Vacant	
Irish	9.6.0	1963		

NOTE: Irish fish recorders make no distinction between boat and shore, hence the single inclusion. The shore record for Wales and Scotland is currently vacant, open to claims.

THE THORNBACK RAY RECORD

When fish recording in the UK was formalised in 1957, a thornback Ray *Raja clavata* of 38 pounds caught by a Mr. Patterson off Rustington in 1935 was included in the new record list, compiled from a variety of regional and club fishing records, which presumably, would previously have been operating to a wide disparity of rules and required measures of evidence.

Later, in 1968, these records were scrutinised in more detail in an effort to weed out ‘dubious’ inclusions, of which Mr. Patterson’s Thornback Ray was one, a fish which Dr. Dietrich Burkel of the Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers told me was removed because the British committee considered it unlikely that the Thornback Ray could achieve those proportions, and therefore it must have been a case of mis-identification.

Along with the other casualties, the Thornback Ray record slot was then declared vacant and new claims invited, shortly after which, Lancashire charter boat skipper Frank Bee, who specialised in finding Thornback Rays for his clients out from Fleetwood, caught a specimen of 31.5.0, which was witnessed and subsequently photographed by local journalist and England International angler Bob Gledhill.

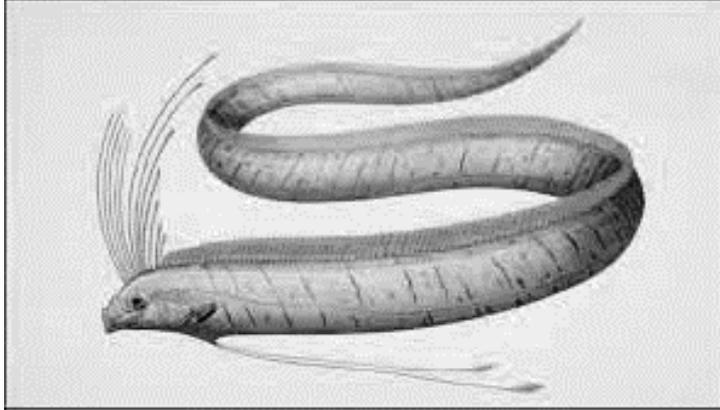
Unfortunately, with all the participants in the saga now gone, it’s at this point that the story starts to get a little hazy I did however spend a lot of time with Frank Bee in 2008 and 2009 talking to him about his career, and recorded some of our conversations for posterity. And as you might expect, the big Thornback Ray he caught formed part of that conversation.

Clearly, Frank’s fish should have been the new British record. Well into his 80’s when we discussed what had happened, his recollection, such as it was by then, was that Bob had handled things on his behalf, and in his opinion, because of its size and the fact that he had caught the fish some years earlier before all of this kicked off and had therefore not needed to keep the body, despite everything else being in place, the record fish committee were not convinced as to its true identity.

Some time later another huge specimen was caught, this time by J. Wright weighing in at 31.7.0 from nearby Liverpool Bay, which not only proved the point with regard to the growth potential of the species, but this time also satisfied the record fish committee with regard to accurate identification and

weight, all of which poses the question, might they not have been a little too hasty in evicting Mr. Patterson's 38 pound fish in the first place. We will never know.

WHITBY OARFISH



Making the news in 1981 was the finding of an Oarfish *Regalecus glesne* washed up on the shore at Whitby. Apparently not the first time this amazing looking open water offshore wanderer had found itself along the shoreline of the North Sea coast's border region.

A spectacular, bizarre looking fish, certain to grab the attention of anyone finding it, and the fish thought most likely to be the source of sailor's stories of sea serpents on account of its potential size,

shape, and preference for the upper layers of the oceans deep water column.

As an added point of interest here, though unfortunately just straying outside the time constraints of this project is another Oarfish measuring 11 feet 7 inches in length on the beach at nearby Skinningrove, this time caught on rod and line by Val Fletcher fishing a night session with her partner in 2003.

Realising they had something out of the ordinary, though not appreciating the rarity or the scientific value of what had just happened, they nailed the fish to a plank to show people, then chopped it and put it in the freezer, at which point a potential British record as well as a highly valuable scientific opportunity was lost.

CHEMICALLY SHARPENED HOOKS

As any angler worth his salt knows only too well, blunt hooks result in missed bites. A hook tip should feel 'sticky' when you draw it along your finger nail. Not penetrating, but not wanting to move either as the sharpness of the tip beds in. Prior to chemical sharpening, hooks would need to be mechanically ground. Then chemical sharpening arrived on the scene, though it's difficult to ascertain exactly when, where, and by whom the process was devised, though with some degree of certainty, it appears that it was not devised with fishing hooks in mind.

I say this because the US Patents office cite the origin of the invention as work done under a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) contract, and is therefore subject to the provisions of Section 305 of the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958.

Confusingly, there is a second reference to chemical sharpening in the US patents, again referencing NASA, this time dated 1981, describing the process of forming sharp tips on thin wires, in particular phosphor-bronze wires of diameters such as one thousandth of an inch used to contact micro-size Schottky barrier diodes.....and so the technical blurb goes on. In a nutshell then it appears that NASA was responsible for inventing the process, with everyone else, hook manufacturers included, unintended beneficiaries.

The process of chemically sharpening a hook point removes whatever protective coating the hook might have, and by necessity also weakens the area being treated, which is something no doubt hook manufacturers calculate into a hooks design dimensions. It also takes longer to produce chemically sharpened hooks.

First, obviously, the hook is made, after which it goes through a series of chemical ‘attacks’, which because the point of the hook is the thinnest part, it is most heavily affected, thereby thinning and sharpening it by eating away the metal. But if overdone, this can actually blunt the point, as well as weakening the barb and eventually the hook shank. So, it’s critical that it is done right, which by implication suggests that care should be taken when selecting chemically sharpened hook brands.

THE TOXTETH RIOTS - MERSEY CLEAN UP



Angling has a lot to be grateful for with regard to the Toxteth riots which took place in Liverpool in 1981. Of themselves, they had nothing to do with angling or wider environmental issues. They followed on from the Brixton riots of the previous year, in the main built around long standing tensions between the local police and the black community, though in closer analysis, those taking part probably had a range of agenda’s, and in many cases, maybe even no agenda at all. More a desire to jump on the band wagon as is so often

the case in situations such as this, sometimes to the cost of the issue people feel a need to be so vocal about.

The difference with Toxteth was that it was a watershed moment. With Margaret Thatcher in power, Britain was in a deep recession. Unemployment was at a 50 year high, and people were no longer willing to sit back and take a wide range of things, including squalid environmental conditions, resulting in the government appointing Michael Heseltine as its Minister for Merseyside, with promises that everything would change.

“Well, they would say that wouldn’t they?”, is the political phrase which readily comes to mind here. Except that in this particular instance, Heseltine really took his brief onboard by championing Liverpool with a range of promises, one of which he most certainly did deliver on, it being to clean up the social deprivation and poverty of Liverpool’s riverside and dockland areas, the success of which is there for all to see. This is now the cities ‘in place’ to live. But it’s the clean up of the Mersey itself which has to be Heseltine’s greatest legacy through his Mersey Basin Campaign.

Promising to confront the polluters head on, in 1989, backed up by huge swaths of government money for implementation and investment, and with the public water companies privatised and their environmental units hived off and lumped together, he formed the National Rivers Authority (NRA) which he tasked with the job of restoring the countries freshwater and aquatic environments.

It’s hard to imagine a tory government making good on promises to Liverpool. They’ll be promising Salmon running up the river next. And receiving my first post university wage during week one of the fledgling National Rivers Authority was yours truly, with the Mersey clean up the number one priority on the agenda.

From my own experience, Liverpool and the industrial areas on its periphery feeding into the Mersey such as around Runcorn and Warrington were key target areas. Much work was done on ‘persuading’ industry to clean up its act. It was very much a carrot and stick approach, with so many potential starting points, that when I look back, it’s hard to appreciate the amount of work we all got through to get things to where they are today.

It was like peeling your way through a giant onion, with multiple layers of Victorian as well as modern day pollution going in to the river, plus a century and more of unregulated toxic neglect lying there in the bottom sediments. No sooner had we peeled away one layer than another and another would come to light. And at the same time, we were also ‘leaning’ on the regions newly privatised water company United Utilities (UU), who right from the earliest advances was persuaded to build a new ring sewer to intercept all the previously unregulated raw sewage inputs to the river and eventually collect them together at a new treatment facility at Sandon Dock.

To help put things in context, a quick explanation of sewage treatment might not go amiss. Today’s discharges have to meet very high environmental impact standards which are rigidly enforced. On behalf of the NRA, which later became part of the Environment Agency (EA), I have taken enforcement action against United Utilities on a number of occasions. Back in the early days, I feel that initially we (the NRA) were happy to see any improvements, looking to get to the final goal in incremental steps if necessary. And so it was at Sandon Dock, which merely collected up all the effluent and allowed it to settle, discharging the still highly polluting liquid phase, then dispensing with the sludge by ‘other’ means.

I actually took the first enforcement sample at Sandon after it officially opened in 1991, though the aim always was to push UU towards secondary treatment, whereby the liquid is passed through a second line of treatment, which back then would have been filter beds where bacteria would ‘consume’ the strength out of it, preparing it to meet a higher quality standard of discharge.

So initially, the Sandon Dock treatment facility didn’t do that much. It was a small part of the persuading of UU that it would be one of a number of steps, both for that facility, and the many others dotted along the Mersey on both banks, and collectively with the industrial targeting, the clean up of the Mersey got underway.

The rocks put in to construct the Seaforth Terminal during the 1970’s was arguably the earliest focal point put on the sea angling map by local angler Johnny Fawcett, leading to an on-off relationship with regard to permission to fish. I can remember large Cod being caught around Seaforth rocks both from small boats and from the shore before the clean up effectively got underway. But it was sporadic, for there were most definitely times when the Mersey in the areas we as sea anglers are interested in today was a biological desert. Times when it was totally unsupportive of life. Arguably, the worst polluted waterway in Europe.

I haven’t lived in Liverpool where I was born since I was 4 years old, but people who knew I was a ‘Scouser’ loved to remind me that “The River Mersey is the asshole of Britain with Liverpool stuck three miles up it”. What can you say? It was true. But it isn’t anymore, and that’s the important thing thanks to Michael Heseltine.

Fish began pushing back up the estuary as soon as conditions allowed. I can recall NRA and EA survey results and the excitement these generated when the species count went up. Then, in 2002 we had the big one. The headline generator. Traps set by fisheries staff at Howley Weir on the Mersey close the EA HQ in Warrington came up containing Salmon. There had been reports of Salmon trying to jump the weir there as early as 1999. Now they had the evidence, prompting a line from me in an article I wrote on the subject at the time which read “From a running sewer to running Salmon in just 13 years”.

Considering where we started, I have to say that I am staggered by the rapidity of the progress. From that worst case scenario imaginable to a situation where trout and coarse fish species were pushing downstream, and saltwater species pushing upstream in such a brief time, is nothing short of mind blowing. And now the river is full of saltwater fish species for many miles inland.



I've both charter and dinghy fished it for years, and in my considered opinion, the River Mersey is arguably now the best sheltered winter Cod fishery in the country. There are usually plenty of Cod in the river pretty much all year round, but November through to February marks the main run. Lots of Thornback Rays too, plus all the unusual culprits such as Whiting and Dabs.

Liverpool Marina at Coburg Dock fringing the city centre is so sheltered, that only on rare occasions such as a howling north westerly or south easterly storm do trips get weathered off. I remember fishing a Cod Match aboard Tony Parry's boat 'Jensen II' tucked in over on the Birkenhead side when the Coastguard gave out a recorded wind speed of 57 knots, which is a full storm. Yet there we were happily catching Cod and rays.

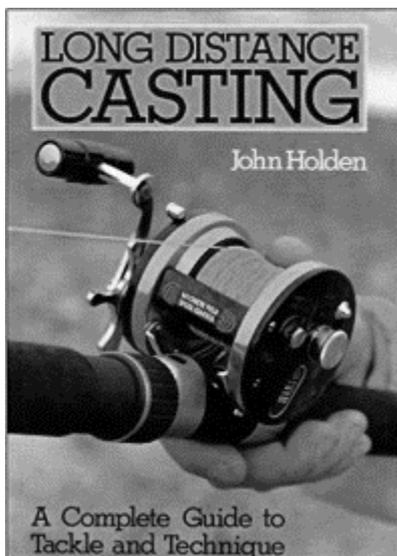
Fishing from the shore, I've had Cod to 7 pounds from the car park of the Britannia Pub next to the Festival Gardens, which has to be a good 8 miles inland. But my main fishing in the river was from my own boat which we would launch from the beach at New Brighton, slap bang in the teeth of any breeze or swell pushing in at the estuary mouth. A very frustrating situation, as the winter fishing is done inland from New Brighton where it was invariably always sheltered and flat. Yet we couldn't always get the boat in to sail to it. The charter boats on the other hand, which can take more weather than us, had the luxury of the marina looking out onto sheltered water. Small boats didn't use the marina because you had to lock in and out, which meant committing yourself to a fixed period, which isn't perhaps the safest approach.

I also regularly charter fished the Mersey too in each of the main winter season months as a 'banker' in case we couldn't get the dinghy in. Then, as I've mention elsewhere, I got a rapid onset Rheumatoid Arthritis, plus other 'stuff', and had to stop doing the types of fishing I found physically difficult, which sadly meant the small boat.



Thankfully I was still able to charter fish, or if needs be ‘spectate’ soaking up the atmosphere until well into the writing of this book, then unfortunately, that too had to stop. So wanting to finish on a high with a decent fish from my favourite winter venue, I last actually fished the Mersey aboard ‘Jensen II’ with Tony Parry in 2017, where after taking a 7 pound Cod towards the close of play, I put my rod down and said “that’s it, me done”.

THE BIGGEST SELLING SEA ANGLING BOOK OF ALL TIME



With over 300,000 copies sold, John Holden’s ‘Long Distance Casting’ published by Crowood Press in 1982 is the biggest selling single run sea angling book of the twentieth century, probably even of all time, eclipsed as an angling book per se only by Bernard Venables ‘Mr. Crabtree Goes Fishing’ about which the actual sales figures are unknown, though by the mid-1950’s these had already topped 2 million and were continuing to rise, outselling by a wide margin Izaak Walton’s legendary ‘The Complete Angler’ published in 1653.

NOTE: Like Walton’s Complete Angler, Mr Crabtree is a freshwater fishing book.

THE SCOTTISH TURBOT RECORD

A new Scottish Turbot record of 25.4.0 was established in 1982 by I. Jenkins fishing off the Isle of Mull, a record which was still in place at the close of the century right up to the time of writing.

THE ISLES OF SCILLY

The Isles of Scilly are a collection of around 140 islands, islets, and exposed rocks, clumped together in the western approaches to the English Channel some 28 miles off the south west tip of Cornwall. Of these, only the 5 largest islands are inhabited, the main base being St. Marys with its population centred around Hugh Town, the ‘import – export’ hub of the islands through which all freight and passengers aboard the ferry ‘Scillonian’ must pass. A location which from a sea angling perspective has promised much over the years in the angling press. Promises which for a whole range of reasons have not always been kept.



I’ve stayed on and fished around the Scilly Isles since the early 1980’s where I have explored the onshore, inshore, and offshore fishing so far as was possible due either to local geography or charter boat restrictions. Boats in these parts have to multi-task, fitting in fishing around ferrying holiday makers and freight between the islands, and taking out bird or seal watching trips. Fishing trips therefore are whatever can be arranged in terms of timing, duration, and of course numbers of people actually wanting to go fishing, which depending on who is visiting the islands may be nobody at all.

Fortunately, during a two week stay, Alec Hicks, who for years has been at the heart of sea angling locally, would usually be able to raise a party or two for some sort of fishing or other. In all those visits I only once got to fish with him for Blue Sharks, though a friend of mine Graeme Pullen put in a few more attempts. For me it was always bottom fishing. I did however manage to get on a trip aboard ‘White Hope’ in 1982 when a shark fishing party had been assembled to get out into open water and set up a rubby dubby trail. I can’t remember the final tally that day, but guess it was somewhere in the region of around 20 fish, typically between 30 and maybe 60 pounds apiece.

During my earliest visits I fished in the company of the local police force – both of them. They were on assignment from mainland Cornwall. This would be mainly for Pollack. When Alec had parties of holiday makers wanting to fish it would be with feathers drifting close in to exposed lumps of rock. With the local constabulary on board, both of whom were very experienced anglers, we went to a place known as the Spanish Ledges, drifting with redgills in deep water where we took a much better stamp of Pollack. We must also have been fishing either for Mackerel or with baited feathers down deep, as one day we suddenly got into a shoal of Blue Whiting, the one and only time I’ve ever encountered the species.

Blue Whiting are an abundant fish out in very deep water, something the Scillies is surrounded by. As such, unusual deep water species are not that unusual there, often well within angling range. I know this because I spent a day at sea aboard the local trawler ‘Swan Dancer’ which scooped up loads of Megrims, John Dory, Hake and Boar Fish to go with even bigger numbers of Turbot, Brill and assorted Rays.

So impressed was I with what I saw that I got Alec to go out to the same area and anchor so we could fish the bottom. But other than masses of LSD’s, we saw just the one Spotted Ray caught by my son Ian. So angling doesn’t necessarily always tell the full story. Far from it in fact.

Based on written accounts by shore anglers who probably had never actually fished the place, the Scillies was going to be the big Ballan Wrasse capital of the British Isles. On the ground however, it was a different matter. Access to many promising looking marks was poor to none existent, and where I did

manage to get down such as around Peninnis Head, the water was a bit on the deep side for a fish that typically prefers depths down to around 40 feet.

But we fished it anyway, and where the water depth was okay we caught some nice Ballan Wrasse to a touch over 4 pounds. Never a lot though, and nothing big enough to fulfil the predicted promise. So, when I got the chance to fish with Alec at anchor close in over heavy ground inaccessible from the shore, naturally I jumped at it. This would be the moment of truth.

As a boat angling species, Ballan Wrasse are often rarely looked upon as a worthy target. I don't know why, because on tackle suited to their size they are a very powerful handful, and as such, one of my personal favourite species. And so it was tucked in off Peninnis Head. Lots of arm wrenching fun amongst the rocks and kelp.

This was to be the session certain to deliver on the unfulfilled promise from the shore. But that wasn't to be. For while we had lots of fish, again nothing topping 4 pounds, which makes me wonder where some of these predictions come from. It was the same when I fished Lundy Island (see Chapter 11). People imagine these venues should be hotspots on account of their isolation, but so far, this has not proved to be the case.

At the time, my children Ian and Dawn were both very young. Ian came out on the sharking trip and caught himself a small Blue. Dawn on the other hand was less interested, though she was quite happy to sit on the harbour wall dropping tiny baits down the stonework and hauling up lots of Dragonets, Sea Scorpions and Smelt. It was an LRF fanatics paradise.

Ian and myself had our baits further out catching Plaice and Wrasse depending on whether they landed on sand or rough. Strangely enough given its location, no one up to that time had ever caught a Bass there. Then suddenly I could hear Dawn shouting help, so I dashed over to see what was going on. By the time I got there she had a 3¼ pound Plaice splashing around on the surface which we gingerly hand lined up the wall. Ian wasn't happy to put it mildly.

KINGFISHER
SHARK FISHING & PELAGIC TRIPS
SKIPPER/OWNER ALEC HICKS 20 YEARS EXPERIENCE

The Kingfisher

BIRDS SEEN ON PELAGICS
FEA'S PETREL (FIVE SIGHTINGS), WILSON'S STORM PETREL (FIRST DISCOVERED FROM KINGFISHER, ANNUAL REGULARLY SEEN IN JULY AND AUGUST) MANX SHEARWATER (SEEN EVERY TRIP IN THE SUMMER MONTHS) COOK'S SHEARWATER (ANNUAL) MEDITERRANEAN SHEARWATER (ANNUAL) EUROPEAN STORM PETREL (SEEN EVERY TRIP IN THE SUMMER MONTHS) POMARINE SKUA (ANNUAL) ARCTIC SKUA (ANNUAL) GREAT SKUA (OFTEN SEEN) SABINE'S GULL (ANNUAL, ESPECIALLY LATE AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER) PUFFIN (FREQUENTLY SEEN IN THE SUMMER MONTHS) GREY PHALAROPE (ANNUAL, ESPECIALLY SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER)

BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (SCARCE BUT ANNUAL) RISSO'S DOLPHIN (SCARCE BUT ANNUAL) COMMON DOLPHIN (FAIRLY COMMON) PILOT WHALE (ANNUAL) SEI WHALE (RARE) MINKE WHALE (RARE) & LEATHERBACKED TURTLE

REEF & WRECK FISHING also AVAILABLE
BIGGEST FISH SO FAR: COD 17 LB, LING 35 LB, POLLACK 16 LB, BLUE SHARK 120 LB, PORBEAGLE SHARK 30 LB
I run these trips during the evenings between 5 Pm-10 Pm June, July, August & September

NEXT TRIP SUNDAY 4.15pm 10pm SHARK FISHING
ROD HIRE AVAILABLE

PRICES: PELAGIC TRIPS £ / PERSON: SHARK & WRECK FISHING £50/ PERSON
TO BOOK: MOB.07768 662229 - ALEC HICKS

PW Comment: In 2006 I went back to the Scillies, and who should be standing on the harbour when I walked off the ferry but Alec Hicks. Needless to say, some fishing very quickly followed. But how things had changed. The bulk of the offshore fishing was by then centred on Blue Sharks, though not primarily with anglers in mind.

When I first visited the Scillies, the odd bird watcher would jump in with the shark anglers wanting to see what birds would work their way up the rubby dubby lane. We had one on the catamaran trip I mentioned earlier. In a reversal of roles, by 2006 it was the 'twitchers'

who were booking the boat with the odd angler tagging along, which this time was me.

So effective was the stinking smashed up carcasses of old Mackerel and the rest at drawing in birds that these trips had become highly popular. So popular in fact that the 'twitchers' were bringing along their own rubby dubby formulations, in addition to that which Alec was putting out.

This brought in (so I'm informed) Wilson's Petrel and Fork Tailed Skua's to name but two that I can remember seeing. Everyone on board was wetting themselves with excitement. Everyone except Alec and me that is. The problem was that it can take time to attract Blue Sharks up a slick when they are scattered far and wide out in open water.

Unfortunately, by the time sharks were starting to appear, it was time to be heading back as these were 4 hour evening trips out in some pretty 'lumpy' conditions, which with all the rubby dubby swilling about the place as well, calls for a strong constitution to keep your last meal from mixing in with it.

WHITE MARLIN, SCILLY ISLES

A White Marlin *Kajikia albidus* was found dead in the Scilly Isles in 1982, the second report of a billfish from the island group, as a Sailfish *Istiophorus platypterus* was reported there under similar circumstances in 1926. In terms of its being way off course, the Sailfish is unusual as it prefers waters far warmer than the British Isles can offer, and for that matter, much of mainland Europe too.

White Marlin on the other hand are much more tolerant of the types of temperature our corner of the World has to offer, particularly as in more recent times sea temperatures continue to climb, a fact backed up by an unnamed boat setting sail from a UK port to head well offshore in search of Albacore *Thunnus alalunga* claiming to have raised a White Marlin to one of its trolled lures.

STEVE MILLS

England International gold medal winner; Wexford small boats champion; British Thresher Shark record holder; Sea Angler Magazine columnist; Chairman of Gosport Sea Angling Club.....Steve Mills list of achievements just goes on and on, and always at the very highest level. A very active, competitive, deep thinking sea angler with the drive and enthusiasm to do whatever is required in terms of research and advance preparation to come up with the very best results possible.

You could almost say he was groomed for boat angling success by his father, who after moving to Hampshire from Kenya in east Africa where Steve was born, had him fishing generally from around the age of 5, and boat fishing by the age of 6 when he was home from boarding school, where while he couldn't fish there, he would read and study to better understand fish biology, distribution, and how their lives are affected by variables such as seasonality and tides so as to be best prepared for when he could get out in the boat, and of course for later life too with all the success that would bring.

This philosophy has been the corner stone of Steve Mills very impressive competitive years. When I asked him if he had any preferences for competitions such as total bags, catch and release, or species hunts, he said he wasn't bothered. "Put together whatever set of rules you like and I'll happily fish to them and do my utmost to win", was his reply. "All take strategy, effort, and forward planning. There are no easy fixes". And who could argue with that in light of the CV sticking with those principles has generated

Take the Leisure Angling 'Wexford Small Boats Festival' which I myself have fished while Steve was present. How many other people would head over to Ireland on their own a week in advance simply to practise and suss out where to find whatever species were available that particular year. Similar levels of required investment were also undertaken done for all other competitions, plus going out the evening before feathering Mackerel so as to ensure a good early bait supply. Success breeds success, and for as long as this particular strategy continues to reap dividends, he says he just keeps on doing it.

I did ponder over placing this inclusion in Chapter 11, as 1991 was the year he added an England team gold medal at the World championships to his tally, and in some ways slotting him there might have made more sense. That was the event in which Jim Pressley won individual gold. But in the end I decided to stick with the early-1980's so as not to spatially separate his personal inclusion from that of the very detailed account of his Thresher Shark record, which is the next inclusion after this. A fish which oddly enough he doesn't nominate as his most impressive catch.

That honour goes to a couple of days spent fishing off Brandon Head in Co. Kerry in the company of his boat partner Dave Timms and Sea Angler Magazine Editor Mel Russ. His research suggested they should take a look at a small deep water depression which on day one in the company of Mel produced 4 large Common Skate. Unfortunately, the following day Mel couldn't make it, so Steve and Dave returned to take 12 large Common Skate, one very large White Skate *Rostroraja alba*, and a Six Gilled Shark of 120 pounds. Fourteen fish topping 100 pounds apiece across 3 species in a single sitting from a trailed boat. Amazing.

STEVE MILLS AND THE BRITISH THRESHER SHARK RECORD



As was said in the Ted Legge inclusion in Chapter 9, the Thresher Shark *Alopias vulpinus* is not common fish in British waters, for which reason they are rarely deliberately targeted by anglers. Over the years there have been no more than a handful of people who have purposely fished for them with any reported measure of success. On the regular charter fishing scene it was Gosport charter skipper Ted Legge. But there have been and still are both large private boat and trailed dinghy angling devotee's too, the list of which not surprisingly includes Steve Mills, along with Stuart Newell, Wayne Comben, and the most successful Thresher specialist of them all by a clear mile, Danny Vokins who gets two inclusions, the first towards the close of the 1970's and an update in the final Chapter 'Legacy'.

That's a quick scene setting potted history of the UK Thresher Shark scene. I say UK, but examining the catch returns, it's a little more localised than that. The stats suggest a total of 3 Threshers from Welsh waters, all taken very close to the time of writing here, the best of the bunch coming out of the weight estimation formula at 293 pounds caught by George Simmonds fishing off Dale in Pembrokeshire, who after a couple of photographs, being a responsible angler, then released the fish. Unfortunately, Ireland and Scotland have yet to record the species on rod and line from their waters, which doesn't surprise me for Scotland due to the low intensity of shark fishing interest there, but does for Ireland, which you would have thought might be in with a good shot.

Top of the list so far as actually weighed specimens go is the current British Thresher Shark record of 323 pounds caught by Steve Mills. A specimen not only taken from, but also brought into Steve's 17 foot Shetland boat, at a time when attitudes towards killing fish and record keeping were very different to the way we see things today. Bringing fish ashore and putting them onto the scales was still the norm towards the latter part of the twentieth century. Having spoken to Steve regarding the scenario, like the rest of us, I know he would now do things differently given the chance again, but also like the rest of us at that time, did what he felt was both acceptable and necessary by killing the fish. A record which in all likelihood under the current circumstances will never now be broken, despite bigger fish being

caught by both Wayne Comben and Danny Vokins which were released. Unless or until the British Record Fish Committee have another look at their archaic rules.

Steve Mills took his 323 pound record from what has deservedly become the number one Thresher Shark hot spot just to the east of the Isle of Wight in 1982. The best of 3 specimens he and his boat partner Dave Timms caught over quite a prolonged period of deliberate intensive fishing for them based on a lot of research hours put in by Steve, which in part has been contributory to the success rates enjoyed by other Thresher Shark enthusiasts today. A fish which also holds the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain (SACGB) 50 pound line class record, a further 3 of which at the lower end breaking strains are still vacant, along with all the categories for ladies, and interestingly, all the categories for Thresher Sharks in the new SACGB measured and released category, which is something I thought would have caught on more than it has in light of the current strong feelings regarding catch and release.

I've spoken with Steve Mills at length on a couple of occasions regarding his angling life (see previous inclusion), and in particular his record Thresher, one of the conversations being recorded as a formal audio interview for archive. As such, I feel able to talk with some authority on the topic, about which I'm sure Steve won't mind me repeating some of the specific catch detail here. In particular that appertaining to location, which as I've already said is to the east of the Isle of Wight. But there's a bit more to it than that in terms of precise drift positioning, timing and tactics, though I'm sure that Ted Legge, Danny Vokins and Stuart Newell each have their own take on how that particular strand of things should go.

When it comes to his angling, Steve Mills is meticulous to the point of being obsessive in terms of preparation and detail. Nothing is knowingly left to chance. Charts, tides, water temperature, fish biology.... all get the same deep study treatment. It's no coincidence therefore that he has achieved the levels of success he has in all his angling endeavours, and it is this level of commitment in terms of research, patience, and input of time, despite the set backs and blanks endeavours of this type are always going to be dogged by, that his efforts have borne fruit, while others embarked on the same journey might easily have fallen by the wayside a lot earlier in the quest.

Steve Mills first became interested in the prospects of catching sharks generally on his local Gosport patch in 1979. Initially it was with the packs of Porbeagles which roamed in good numbers to the east of the Isle of Wight at that time, a pursuit embarked upon by a number of other shark scene 'household' names including Dick Downes, Trevor Housby, and that man Danny Vokins again, which collectively would also turn up the occasional 'bonus' Thresher encounter here and there. Through his research efforts, Steve concluded that the small numbers of Threshers frequenting the area did so as part of a regular annual migration known to stretch between Poole and West Sussex, with his own local patch smack in the middle of it

Early summer mainly mature female fish start pushing eastwards from Dorset, skirting around the Isle of Wight, to turn up off the Hampshire coast around the end of June on into early July. From there they appear to continue on into Sussex waters, arriving late July through into August where they pup, as evidenced by anglers occasionally catching very small Threshers off the Sussex Coast which had obviously very recently been born. Having passed on their genes, the adults then turn around and reverse the journey, a suggestion supported by occasional Thresher encounters as far west as Poole later in the year, on paper at least, confirming Steve Mills hypothesised Thresher Shark migration route.

Looking to fine tune his proposed theory still further, Steve was of the opinion that when they made their run west to east, for the most part they would be confined within an approximately 3 mile wide corridor in which pretty much all the Thresher encounters and sightings reported at that time to the east of the Isle of Wight had taken place. Porbeagle Sharks also used to be quite plentiful in the same area, which for some people presented something of a distraction, thereby keeping the more serious though less productive Thresher attempts to a minimum, until it's suggested that French long-liners virtually

wiped the Porbeagles out during the late-1980's, probably taking some Thresher Sharks into the bargain.



While the Porbeagles were still on the scene, Steve and Dave Timms had found it was possible to some extent to limit their unwanted attention by positioning the baits higher up in the water column, say between 20 and 40 feet down as opposed to fishing them deeper which the Porbeagles apparently preferred and the Threshers it seems didn't, though 'interference' from other species could never be completely ruled out. On one occasion this turned out to be Tope when the rubby dubby slick dropped deeper through the water column as the tide

died away. On another, a similar problem brought scores of Spurdogs up to the surface. But as a rule of thumb, the chances of contact with a Thresher appeared to be greatly increased by doing this.

That sets the scene for the where and the when. The 'how' also needed to be just right, again in an attempt to keep Porbeagle interference rates down, while at the same time maximising the chance of a hook-up with a Thresher. Setting the bait depth accurately was one answer. Another was so set the boat up to make one long continuous drift along the approximately 30 miles of Thresher 'corridor' with plenty of rubby dubby creating an unbroken scent trail back to the baits. Steve's approach here was for 2 rubby dubby bags filled with smashed up Mackerel at each end of the boat, one of which was set deeper than the other. That way the lane would be deeper. It also meant that when one bag was brought in for a top up, the slick wasn't confusingly being broken.

Mackerel was also used as the hook bait as Thresher Sharks feed by herding small pelagic bait fish together then go crashing through the bait ball lashing at them with their huge scythe like tail to stun or kill as many as they can before returning to pick them off. So with Threshers seemingly favouring Mackerel, and have relatively small mouths, a single Mackerel on a 12/0 forged hook to 4 feet of heavy bite proof wire backed up by 11 feet of lighter wire to comply with SACGB rules was used. These rules also include the sending in of samples of the terminal tackle used with the written claim for verification, as well as additional levels of proof above and beyond that required by the BRFC.

Tackle selection is also important for successful Thresher Shark outcomes. Unlike Porbeagles which tend to make short powerful runs and fight deep, Threshers run and run, then run some more, a trait I've had confirmed to me by a number of people. Steve's record breaker took over 200 yards of line in its first sprint, then had another go immediately after a short pause, extending the distance between it and the boat to around a quarter of a mile. Strong heavy tackle with plenty of line is an absolute must if encounters are not to be squandered with a trace made up to suit the length of the fish, which in the case of the Steve's record measured 13 feet 9 inches of which the tail would account for near enough half which also needs to be factored in when preparing the end gear. One touch to the reel line from that long rough skinned 'blade' while the fish is powering away could very well prove to be game over.

Eventually, after one and a half hours of standing and fighting the shark with only a butt pad for comfort, the huge Thresher was finally beaten and lying there at the side of the boat, which amazingly had drifted a full 6 miles from the original hook up point somewhere close to the overfalls. That however wasn't the end of it. Far from it in fact. Dealing with a powerful fish of that size with a dangerous tail like that is also likely to present potential problems. I remember Graeme Pullen telling me that when the monster

he and Wayne had at their boat started waving its tail about, it could actually reach right across the beam of their 17 foot 'Wilson Flier', presenting a very real injury hazard.

Fortunately, Steve and Dave had had an earlier practise attempt with a 261 pounder the previous year, so knew to secure the fish in the water with ropes and a flying gaff with its tail alongside the front deck area well out of harm's way. Only then did they allow themselves time to take a breather. That done, they then somehow managed to lift the huge fish into the well of the boat and headed in to Southsea where the incumbent 295 pound Thresher Shark record had also been weighed. Fortunately, Steve was able to make prior contact with friends within the club to come down to weigh and witness the fish. Unfortunately, the steelyard they had available was only calibrated to 300 pounds, which while that read out was going to be greater than the standing 295 pound record which this fish well beat, wasn't accurate enough for record claiming purposes.

So, it was back into the boat with the fish which was then taken to Steve's home where it was left in the boat covered in wet sacks overnight for another weighing attempt the following morning. The estimate at Southsea was somewhere in the region of 360 pounds. The actual weight when they finally found a suitable scale at the fish market in Portsmouth almost 24 hours after capture came in at 323 pounds. Ample reward for all those invested hours, and sufficient encouragement to spur them on for a further couple of seasons, which other than a few Porbeagles brought no further Thresher Shark success, until eventually even the Porbeagle interest such as it was dried up.

In the end, towards the close of the 1980's the law of diminishing returns brought their shark fishing exploits to a complete halt. It was all over. That said, Steve believes that the Thresher potential is probably still as good as it ever was, a prediction supported and in more recent times and well surpassed by the exploits of Danny Vokins and Stuart Newell fishing the same area, with Andy Griffith fishing aboard Stuarts boat catching as many Threshers in a single day as Steve and Dave Timms had taken in total. So with no plan B in the shape of the Porbeagles any more to provide some level of distraction, and Threshers at that time always unpredictably scarce encounters in general angling terms, he hasn't been out there since in any sort of serious capacity looking for more of the same.

THE BRITISH & SCOTTISH TORSK RECORD



Torsk *Brosme brosme* are primarily a northern latitudes member of the Cod family found to be most numerous in sub-Arctic and Arctic waters, where in Norway for instance they can become something of a pest taking anything and everything resembling food if it touches the bottom. Less so in Scottish waters where they occasionally put in a show.

The only places around the British Isles where I personally have seen them caught are Shetland and out from Kylescu on Scotland's north west coast.

A Scottish and British record for the species was set in 1982 by D. J. MacKay fishing in the Pentland Firth. Ireland also records the species taken off the Donegal coast. Wales has yet to see one and is now probably unlikely to do so if sea temperatures continue their upward progression. All British record inclusions to date have been for Scottish fish.

EPIRB – EMERGENCY POSITION INDICATING RADIO BEACON

Hardly a regular piece of angling kit, none the less, the Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon or EPIRB as it's more commonly referred to, is a very important development in maritime offshore boating safety equipment, introduced as the International Cospas-Sarsat Programme in 1982 as a treaty based inter-governmental piece of humanitarian cooperation between 43 nations, dedicated to locating radio beacons activated by people in distress when detected by satellites giving it global coverage, resulting in the first rescue making use of the technology in 1982.

Most sea anglers will not come into any sort of direct contact with the device, which actually comes in 2 incarnations, one being the 406 MHz version carried by most large sea-going vessels including some charter fishing boats. This device can either be operated by hand, or more usually by hydrostatic pressure such as when a boat is going down.

There is however a smaller cheaper 121.5 MHz version which is purely hand operated, an example of which I had aboard my trailed fishing dinghy. Not as effective as the 406 MHz version, this one relies on the distress signal being picked up either by land based receivers, or more usually passing aircraft, which then pass the alert and its position on to the emergency rescue services.

THE FIRST MOBILE PHONES AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC

Despite the first hand held none cable connected telephone being made by Motorola as far back as 1973, on the basis of it weighing 4.4 pounds, it could hardly be described as a 'mobile' phone. True mobile phones were eventually introduced in 1983, though by today's standards even they look as big as a brick, and other than used for making and receiving calls, if you could get a signal that is, they were about as much use as a house brick too. A far cry from modern Smart Phones with the capability to perform almost unlimited functions, to the point where many people now rely on them completely to bring order and structure to their lives. And for angling, therein lies a problem.

In the days before mobile phone availability, all person to person long range talk at sea had to be done by VHF radio. It still is; leastways it should be. And while most small boat clubs insist on VHF as a condition of membership, and all charter boat operators are required to carry it for licensing purposes, in truth, the mobile phone has now become the messaging 'vehicle' of choice, particularly where private conversations regarding fishing and marks is concerned, which for those purposes it is a very big plus.

Not however to the point where a mobile phone is carried in preference to VHF, with the obvious exception of shore fishing where a person might become trapped by an incoming tide or lost in fog, both of which have led to angler deaths over the years. As such, HM Coastguard and the RNLI openly discourage the exclusive use of mobile phones in boats. This is not to say they discourage having a mobile and using it for the purpose intended, which could in an emergency, such as a VHF failure, suddenly also become a lifesaver, particularly one of the waterproof versions. If of course you can get a signal.

Getting a reliable signal at sea is the main beef regarding mobile only use for the emergency and rescue services. You can't always get that required signal. Worse still, if you can, there might be nobody at the other end to take the call. Even if there is, you then have to rely on those people going through a chain linked route of message transfer, all of which takes time, and which, like 'Chinese Whispers', tends to lose a little bit in the detail each time it gets passed on.

THE IRISH PAIRS BECOMES THE DAIWA PAIRS



The Irish Pairs competition as it was originally known started life in 1980, a full historical account of which is given at the close of Chapter 9. Following a sponsorship deal with tackle giant Daiwa in 1983, the event changed its name to the Daiwa Irish Pairs. That sponsorship deal was still in place at the year 2000 cut off point for this volume, and continues to be so in place at the time of writing.

WHITE MARLIN IN MORECAMBE BAY

Despite this being the most northerly distributed of the Marlin family with the potential to show over deep-water just within angling range of Britain's south west coast, the reported finding of a specimen of White Marlin *Kajikia albida* washed up along the Lancashire coast dead at Morecambe Bay in 1983 is highly unusual to say the least.

THE INTERNET IS LAUNCHED

The 6th of August 1991 saw the launch of the Worldwide Web to the general public. However, the precursor for the Internet had been developed as far back as 1969 by the US Department for Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, APRANET, where researchers developed tools for the early Internet. In essence, by using packet switching, APRANET was able to allow multiple computers to communicate on a single network.

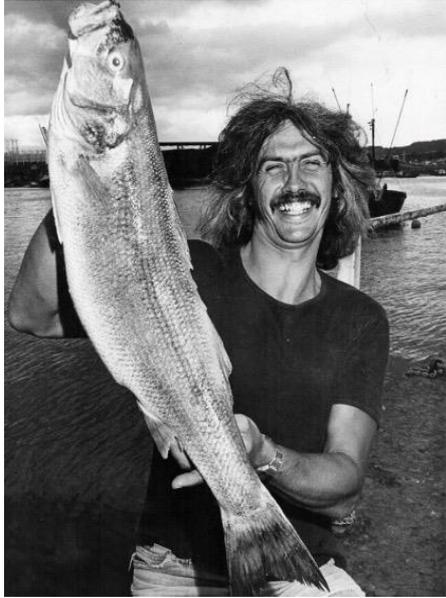
This in turn led to Robert Kahn and Vinton Cerf developing Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) and Internet Protocol (IP), both of which were adopted by APRANET in January 1983, allowing researchers to assemble what they termed the "Network of Networks" leading up to British scientist Sir Tim Berners-Lee creating the modern Internet while working at CERN in 1989, at which stage it was still a vehicle for use by scientists working there to share information with each other.

On a number of levels, without the Internet, this book would almost certainly not have been possible. As a pure research tool it is without equal. Equally, as a publishing tool, allowing me to self-publish a fully illustrated free download version in addition to a small number of bound copies printed for archive and future research purposes placed with Angling Heritage and The British Library.

A further text only version, again thanks to the Internet, is available on Kindle. However, it's as a source of wider angling information, including audio podcasts and YouTube video that the Internet excels, providing a wide range of no cost, comprehensive, instant angling related information, plus armchair tackle buying at the click of a mouse. So much so, that in all likelihood, paper publishing will probably become a thing of the past after I'm gone.

ED SCHLIFFKE

Looking back to the 1983, so far as I can ascertain, Cornish angler Ed Schliffke appears to be if not the first, then one of the first shore angling guides working here in the UK. With a surname like that you are hardly likely to forget him. Equally, with his nickname of 'Rock Hopper' which very much sums



up his sphere of angling interest. Beach and some boat fishing also feature in the mix, both for business and for pleasure in and around the Padstow area.

The guiding was born out of pleasure fishing and writing about it in Sea Angler Magazine during the 1970's. During the decade that followed, he began guiding parties of youngsters from local schools with little or no previous fishing experience down steep rock marks to fish for Mackerel, Garfish and Pollack during their summer break. This eventually evolved into guiding adults, often with pressure jobs such as ex-PM David Cameron and his adversary Nigel Farage, who otherwise wouldn't have the time to invest in sussing things out for themselves.

The loss of the youngsters from his clientele was sad on two fronts. A combination of health and safety coupled to perceived concerns revolving around adults working with children is depriving youngsters of what many would see as a great day out, while at the same time, also cutting off one potential strand of

supply of interested replacements so necessary in keeping sea angling viable for the future, which is a shame.

That's political correctness for you. And it doesn't only apply young people. Ed is also good in front of a video camera as evidenced by the fishing films he has fronted. A fact recognised by the television people who lined him up for some filming, then at the last minute decided it wasn't possible to go ahead because it meant the crew having to walk on rocks which wasn't within their health and safety rules. The clue was in the nick-name 'Rock Hopper'.

The guiding officially started in 1983. As far back as the 1960's, Ed had sold fish to people staying on the Treyarnon caravan site near Padstow, some of whom had asked if he would take them with him. This was also the site where he set up a small business selling tackle and bait out of a shed before moving to a property in Padstow.

Back in those early days there were still plenty of fish, unlike today. Lots of good Small Eyed Rays including the British record at 12.6.0 in 1976, plus a later interim record at 13.10.0, in addition to which there were Tope, Conger to 40 pounds, and 3 double figure Bass. He even accidentally hooked a Porbeagle Shark one day while float fishing half a Pollack for Tope in 1972, the big surprise being only the one such incident with sharks which regularly come in around the heads on his patch at certain times of the year.

THE SPANIARD

If ever there was an emotive name to conjure with it's The Spaniard. A name guaranteed to make west country anglers blood boil, and one destined to carry the sole burden of responsibility for turning a World class Bass fishery into an empty area of reef. Certainly from a Bass angling perspective around the Eddystone area from the early to mid-1980's. Possibly even a bit either side of those dates.

It's difficult to be more precise, because pretty much everyone you speak to who fished that area at the time knows of the man, mainly through hearsay and urban myth. There's no doubting he was a real person and that he was responsible at least for some of the bad stuff he is credited with, all of which has made my job all the more difficult here. But I have managed to tease out a few 'facts' about the man, the reef, and the times.

During the 1970's the Eddystone reef was alive with Bass. I've heard talk of football pitch sized areas suddenly erupting with them at the surface, possibly feeding, but also at times as an escape response from Orca which would occasionally visit the area to feed up on them. Then suddenly another area would erupt, and another. Not the same shoal due to the distances and short time intervals involved, all of which should help give some measure of how many Bass were about at the time.

There were lots of avid Bass anglers too, such as former record holder Roy Slater, ex-policeman Spencer Vibart, and Vissik the Pole, all of whom took their fish trolling soft rubber lures, and equally important, all of whom landed their catch for sale at Plymouth fish market.

Though Alex Ingram's redgill lures were available at the time, a lot of people preferred to make their own lures, and successfully so, which were trolled using the 20 and 50 technique. The lure itself would be paid out 20 yards astern of the boat at which point the lead would be attached, then a further 50 yards of line would follow to get the lure action, trolling depth, and distance from the boats disturbance just right.

That was until American Frank Lancaster who was an engineer working at Plymouth dock yard had his own 28 foot twin engine boat shipped over to go plug fishing for the Eddystone Bass. Using a large fixed spool reel, he was able to cast and rip lures across the surface which the Eddystone Bass went crazy for, until eventually he relocated, boat and all, back to the other side of the Atlantic.

Roy Slater was actually summoned to give testimony before the British Record Fish Committee with regard to his record claim for a Bass of 18 pounds 6 ounces on the grounds of his links to commercial side of things. In the end, his record was accepted. There was little else the BRFC could do really. Using angling techniques to catch fish then selling them on instead of keeping them for home consumption isn't a deciding factor according to the BRFC rules.

Fishing the same areas as Roy Slater, Spencer Vibart and the rest was a man of Spanish origin named Pio (that's all I have) doing exactly the same as the rest of them in terms of technique and catch landings, until one day, 'encouraged' by something he witnessed, he decided to switch from rod and line fishing to gill netting, and the rest as they say is history.

That was the day one of the top Plymouth wrecking boats skippered by a name well known to many (which will not be divulged here), allegedly landed a huge haul of Eddystone Bass he'd taken while gill netting the reef, which it seems Pio was witness to, and about which he thought "I'll have some of that".

As a result, he abandoned the rods and set himself up for gill netting, a 'dark art' he became incredibly well practised at, leading to some colossal catches and mega pay days. So much so that he would eventually retire back to Spain on the proceeds, leaving the Eddystone Reef virtually devoid of Bass, from which it has never recovered.

BURNMOUTH

Whilst Whitby was grabbing all the headlines during the 1980's for the calibre of its offshore wreck fishing, not everybody wanted to spend half their day steaming ever further offshore to lose dozens of pirks and strings of muppets to hang ups, even if it did put them in with a shot of a monster Cod or Ling. Not everybody wanted to abuse their bodies either pumping big heavy pirks up and down when they were over the target, followed by fast arm aching retrieves once they'd drifted off it to get back in position for another pass.

It takes a certain kind of dedication to continuously put yourself through that, and while it's true that the rewards can be greater, under those conditions, fish most certainly have to be earned. So it's nice sometimes just to take a day out. A day spent fishing over much shallower ground with bait, and still to

go home with a good haul of Cod, which is exactly what a group of us decided to do in 1983 with an exploratory trip out from Burnmouth.



If you follow the North Sea coast up to the Scottish border, you will see that Burnmouth is the first town you come to in Scotland. Quite a small port, where back then there was the opportunity to take a run out aboard one of the small inshore commercial boats to fish the heavy kelpy ground close in.

Equally, we could have chosen Eyemouth to the north or Berwick on the English side, which in common with so many of the ports situated to the north of Hartlepool, offered a similar level of inshore fishing over the summer months.

If I'm honest, the only reason why Burnmouth was chosen was to get a magazine feature out of the trip. In hindsight however, it turned out to be one of our more memorable trips from that neck of the woods, due to a mix of perfect summer weather, not being too physically demanding, and a nice catch of the most beautiful red kelp Cod I can ever recall seeing.

Dr. MIKE LADLE

Throughout his entire adult life, Mike Ladle has been involved with fish. Not always fishing for them,



but involved none the less. As a child he began fishing in a pond on the local golf course near his home in Leeds, then later with his grandfather in the local canal. At that time, sea fishing was nowhere on his horizon, with his hero of the day being the late great Richard Walker. So much so that when he wrote his first book he sent a copy to Walker, who confided that had he been 10 years younger he would be giving sea fishing a go himself. But we've jumped on a step here.

Back in his 'pre-book' days, Mike Ladle would holiday with his parents on the Isle of Man, where at Castletown he learned to fish for wrasse, subsequently followed by holidays to Seahouses where Coalfish and Flounders were added to the list. Later still, he made a successful application to study zoology at Newcastle University, for no other reason than to be close to the sea to improve his fishing skills, eventually setting up a university fishing club, all of which developed into him embarking on a research project for his Ph.D, where at Bamburgh he studied the distribution of marine molluscs, worms and amphipods, which meant constantly digging up the beach, providing a never ending source of good fresh bait.

As ever, all good things must come to an end. Research over, it was time to get a job, which when it came was with the Freshwater Biological Association (FBA) in Dorset studying chalk streams. In particular the part played by detritus as a food source, which eventually led to him taking over fish research there, which, with the help of students, included work on counting Salmon and the radio tracking of various fish species, one of which was the Dace *Leuciscus leuciscus*, resulting in some particularly interesting data.

It's not within the brief of what I'm trying to put together here to explore the life history of freshwater species, but I will quote one snippet regarding Dace that Mike told me about. At dusk each day the whole shoal being studied would move around half a mile upstream to feed. That done, it would move back downstream again, not only to its original position, but with each fish within the shoal occupying the exact same spot as before, evidenced by tiny radio tags they had fitted to them. A piece of research which convinced him that science and an enquiring mind are crucial to angling success. And so it has proved.

Mike Ladle describes himself as an all-round sea angler happy to fish for anything. Those who read his books and articles will perhaps have formed a different opinion, with Bass and mullet 2 species in particular about which he often has much to say. This all started in his student years when he saw a chap catch a Bass on sandeel. Having scrounged one off the man, he caught a Bass himself. But there were no Bass up along the north east coast. So becoming a regular enthusiast would have to wait until he relocated to Dorset in 1965 where Bass could be pursued fairly readily. But not so much with the sandeel, or other natural baits initially.

This was the period in which he started to develop his now renowned lure fishing skills, long before it became vogue. In particular, fishing with Rapala's, one of which he was using when he caught his best ever Bass. That said, he's quick to point out that all the other specimens in his best Bass list were taken on a range of baits, including live baits. Also a few good specimens on Conger baits. All of which has led to a wealth of writing on the topic, some of which he admits himself that people find a bit of a stretch to believe as he attempts to connect science to sea angling, with the extra satisfaction that can bring when you use the connection to target something and succeed.

The lure fishing for Bass became prominent after a failed attempt at trolling Rapala's led him to take a look at The Fleet behind Chesil Beach at Weymouth, where, he was informed by the locals, there was way too much current to fish. Despite this he dropped a Rapala in and simply held it there wiggling in the flow which brought him 2 Bass without even trying. A defining moment. Not only in his desire to catch more Bass, but to do so with lures, his growing collection of which included Rebels, ABU Killers, and a variety of Rapala's.

Being the meticulous scientist that he is, he began statistically analysing what was going on in order to improve and pick out trends, one of which was that when fishing with bait, on average he would catch one decent Bass approximately every 40 hours, whereas when lure fishing, the wait time would reduce to one every 4 hours, giving him a 10 fold increase for the same measure of input.

Lure fishing however is not without its problems, one of which is snagging up due to the treble hooks which could result in expensive tackle losses, a problem he solved in 2 ways. Firstly, by the increased usage of soft plastic lures fished weedless with the hook embedded in the body of the lure from which it breaks clear when a fish hits, and secondly, by fishing with surface poppers, which from my own experience of fishing them in the tropics and seeing fish attack them at the surface, has to be one of the most exciting forms of fishing imaginable.

Fishing this way, not only did Mike find he was losing less tackle, but also that it increased his potential as well as his actual catch rate by making it possible to fish shallow snaggy areas, particularly with the soft plastics, which could be retrieved at a barely detectable rate. The drawback, if you can call it that,

was that while the catch rate increased, it comprised mostly of small Bass until he moved into rocky areas, where he noted a direct correlation between the size of the rocks and the size of the fish caught.

Initially this was casting with monofilament of 8 pounds breaking strain. Later, when braid arrived, it was possible to give himself more of a cushion by switching up to 20 pounds breaking strain with the same casting capability, plus the added bonus of being able to feel every little touch, be it from a fish or a snag. This in turn allowed him to act accordingly as opposed to fishing on the surface where fish invariably hook themselves in the violence of the attack when fishing with braid, something which can't be relied upon to happen with a reel spooled up with 'stretchy' monofilament nylon.

Mike Ladle has both said and written much on the catching of big Bass based on science and observation. One of those observations which many anglers find difficult to get their head around is fishing in water on an incoming tide as soon as it is deep enough for fish to swim in. If the feeding attraction is there, they will do this until the tide turns and begins to ebb off.

The evidence Mike gave me to back this up was a day when he flicked out a Mackerel head on a circle hook 2 yards out into 2 feet of water as soon as the tide started to flood. Obviously, it being an incoming tide, the bait would quickly find itself lying in the optimum position. The one remaining ingredient is having the confidence to sit back and wait for a fish to move in and find it, which can happen a lot quicker than many people think.

Depending on your take on using live baits, love 'em or hate them, Mike found these to be very productive, particularly for the very biggest Bass, all of which, coupled to his lure fishing and other bait fishing observations, suggest that if you fish lures you should expect Bass in the 2 to 4 pound bracket, whereas fishing bait has brought him Bass from 4 to 11½ pounds, and while fishing live baits he has taken Bass to 12½ pounds.

There is however one proviso, that being that these statistics are based on generalisations. In the real-World, Bass of any size can on occasion fall to any presentation, which if it's a very big fish on tactics expected to bring only smaller fish only adds to the fun.



Another Mike Ladle observation is that Bass have the cunning to hide themselves in shoals of seemingly inoffensive mullet as a means of getting close to unsuspecting prey. An observation made whilst watching mullet feeding on the maggots of the Seaweed Fly *Coelopa frigida* which lays its eggs in amongst stranded rotting wrack and kelp where the developing larvae feed on decomposition bacteria coating the decaying weed along the high water strand line. On the bigger tides the maggots feeding in this manner often end up in the water at high tide.

Picking out a Bass and targeting it under those circumstances may well not be realistic. But targeting mullet on fly tackle with a maggot pattern of size 10 to 14 fished at the surface on a floating line is another matter, and another area of expertise developed by Mike Ladle who has caught literally thousands of mullet doing this.

A word of caution though. Mike was at pains to emphasise the competence with which mullet are able to pick out a poorly presented maggot representation, and how much it helps to loose feed actual maggots in the area into which the fly is to be placed, all of which require that the conditions be good. A big onshore blow would be out of the question. Then he switches to bait. The best times to be fly fishing are around dawn and dusk, providing the timing of the tide suits. An approach that has produced mullet in excess of 8 pounds. So make sure then that you have plenty of backing line on the reel.

The other area of angling Mike Ladle is especially passionate about is conservation. Particularly in relation to Bass, most of which he returns these days. Statistical observations of fish stocks around the British Isles after the 2 World wars which blighted the first half of the twentieth century, not unexpectedly demonstrate a dramatic increase in stock density due to pressure on that stock being relaxed, in this case out of necessity due to a combination of the number of men away waging those wars, and a fear of putting to sea for those that remained. Coastal defences in some parts would be another factor.

Unfortunately, population increases resulting from the pressure being relaxed can only be exploited for so long until the commercial pressure returns, eventually at an increased level. And while a head count of commercial fisherman comes nowhere near the number of sea anglers there are in in the country, the commercial fishing industry is far better organised and far more vocal in its lobbying than is sea angling, where apathy and disregard for speaking with one voice puts sea anglers at a distinct disadvantage, which is why organisations such as the Bass Anglers Sportfish Society (BASS) are so important, of which Mike Ladle has long been both a member, and an active supporter.

DAVE DEVINE & KEN MITCHELL, LIVERPOOL BAY WRECKING

There is a degree of uncertainty about the precise timing of this particular episode as it falls right on the boundary between the 1970's and 1980's. Unfortunately, in conversations with my boat partner Dave Devine who is the only person I know left with any first hand involvement, quite naturally, more than 40 years on, his recollection of precise dates is a little hazy, and while I also took part myself in a 'tagging along' capacity benefiting from the work done by Dave and Ken Mitchell, my recollections in terms of timing are no better either.

The story begins with 3 independent strands, each with the same aim, but for different reasons. The first is that of SCUBA divers wanting to visit the wrecks out in Liverpool Bay and who are known to have been diving them around that time from encounters with their RIBs over the slack water period. These encounters also provided the occasional bonus set of 'borrowed' coordinates for wrecks he hadn't already found.

I recall a group turning up one particular day when I had just anchored at slack water who 'persuaded' us to move off to another wreck. Except that I couldn't because I'd got my anchor stuck, which despite my muttering curses about the divers, they very kindly went down and freed for me. So they had worked out how to locate and position them too.

Strand number two actually started a decade earlier in the early 1970's by 2 ex-commercial fishermen fronted by Dave Edge who based their boats 'Thor I' and 'Thor II' at Barrow-in-Furness right at the southern tip of the Cumbrian coast. English Channel wreck fishing in the late-1960's and early-70's had taken the sea angling World by storm, to the point that everyone wanted a piece of the action.

The very words 'wreck fishing' drummed up visions of huge piles of fish just waiting to give themselves up. Dave Edge knew this, so he decided to set up a charter fishing business offering that sort of fishing up here in the north west. Next, he went out visiting angling clubs in the area putting on presentations, including at a club I was with which dates this to around 1971 or 1972. But after an initial surge, things seemingly must not have gone too well, as they very soon faded into the annals of angling history.



Liverpool Bay dinghy wreck fishing started in earnest during the early 1980's through a chance encounter between builder Dave Devine, who years later would become my small boat fishing partner, and Ken Mitchell who owned a very successful garage business in St. Helens on Merseyside which specialised in modifications such as sun roofs. Dave was working close to Ken's garage and Ken had fitted sun roofs to some of the site staff's cars, leading to the pair getting into conversation, which inevitably would go on to their shared

passion for small boat fishing.

Ken was already trying his hand at wreck fishing by this time, but only over the El Oso, which was a steam tanker lost in 1940 around 14 miles off Southport clearly marked with a cardinal buoy, and could therefore be found with a compass and an echo sounder. Dave was given an invitation to join Ken for a launch from Ainsdale Beach, which back then anybody could simply turn up and do without all the paperwork everyone seems to need at many launch venues today.

It was immediately realised that Dave's boat was too a bit small to be venturing that far off, so he jumped in with fellow builder Alan Robinson who Ken had already helped build a larger boat in his garage, something Dave would also do shortly afterwards, leading to a partnership that would put Liverpool Bay dinghy wrecking on the map for those with the money to buy in the necessary electronics, which Ken had, linked to the ability to interpret what scant information there was available at the time.

Spurred on by their loose 'partnership' and limited success over the wreck of the El Oso, Ken went out and bought himself a magnetometer, as the approximate position of some wrecks was shown on the Admiralty chart, on top of which, wreck numbers could also be bought in from the Admiralty's wrecks department in Somerset.

One such a wreck, which they presumed to be the Councillor, was targeted using the magnetometer and was found at the first attempt, immediately producing better fishing than earlier visits to the El Oso. The only problem was that they had no means of repeating the find at will, so the next big spend was on a Decca navigator for initial location and repeatability, which at around £700 was a massive investment to make at that time simply for pleasure fishing.

This, linked to the magnetometer, brought a certain amount of additional success. But what you have to appreciate is that the majority of the ships wrecked en route to and from the port of Liverpool ended up over clean ground in between 75 and 100 feet of water. The odd one might have settled out a little deeper, but essentially, they were in shallow(ish) water, prone to becoming silted up, and in some cases had been blown up where they were proving to be a hazard to shipping. On the plus side, with repeatability sorted out and nobody else having the capability to find and fish them, they had the place pretty much to themselves, though they were ever wary of other boats coming anywhere near them cashing in on all their hard work and investment.

The next big game changer was upgrading the quality of the echo sounding equipment to go with the Decca (and around 4 years later the more readily affordable and available Navstar 2000D) in the form of the Lowrance Eagle Mach I paper sounder, which Dave assures me could still hold its own with the digital sounding equipment of today.

They also bought in yet more wreck numbers from the Admiralty, which at the time had to be mathematically adjusted to make them work properly. The coordinates purchased, plus those taken from Admiralty charts were Imperial, whereas the navigator worked in decimal, so they devised a conversion formula for the last 3 digits which were quoted in seconds which they divided by 6 and multiplied by 10 to fine tune the accuracy and reduce the initial visit search time.

Being a land based transmission system, Decca was prone to accuracy loss through poor atmospheric conditions. The Navstar 2000D, though easier to use and potentially more accurate due to having an additional decimal place to the seconds, was similarly conditions affected, as it too relied on the Decca land-based signals which it converted and displayed in latitude-longitude which could be more easily transposed onto or read off a chart. Later when GPS became available, and in particular the much more accurate un-encrypted version, these problems would disappear. But GPS was still some years away into the future.

Decca overlaid Admiralty charts were also particularly helpful, and were used with some success. Wrecks were found by noting the direction of the red and green Decca lanes and taking the Decca position from the wreck register print out then switching the Navstar 2000D to Decca mode. They then had to find the relevant red and green lanes and watch the numbers change, guiding them to the destination, all of which took some getting familiar with, but actually found some of the wrecks at the first time of asking.

Whichever initial location approach was favoured, once the predicted location was reached, a systematic search pattern had to be under taken, and in the case of all visits, knowing how to work with what you had once you located a wreck was also an issue, which only experience through time consuming trial and error could help overcome.

On arrival at a new wreck site, if the target was proving difficult to find with the sounder and magnetometer, a systematic search pattern had to be set up. Typically, this would involve an anchored buoy put down where the navigator said the wreck should be, then working an ever increasingly large spiral pattern around it.

If this produced nothing, a second anchored buoy would go down on the edge of the previous search spiral followed by another spiral search. And if that failed to produce a result, the first buoy would then be lifted and 'leap frogged' over the other, a rotation that had to be repeated continually until either wreck was found, which it usually was, or the search was abandoned, either completely or for another day.

In the early days, it was pretty much all drift fishing for Pollack, which if you were lucky might hit double figures. Rarely very much more. For this, a light weight disposable grapnel anchor, a suitable length of light gauge rope to cut the tide, and a series of dan buoys was required to indicate the drift.

The grapnel would go down over the uptide edge of the wreck to allow for drop time. This would be made up of lengths of metal bar welded to an old window sash weight to act as a grapnel, the bar being thin enough to bend out under outboard motor pressure if it became stuck. At the top end of rope was a large orange buoy with a trailing rope and smaller buoy attached to indicate the direction of the tide. Sometimes on a large wreck, particularly one lying across the tide, two buoys would go over, one at either end. There were no chart plotters back then.

Fishing at anchor was a completely different ball game altogether. Full time wreck fishing skippers even back then had it off to a fine art. People like John Trust & Ernie Passmore aboard 'Our Unity' out from Brixham who specialised in wreck anchoring for big Conger were masters of the art. Back up in Liverpool Bay, waiting for weekends with weather good enough to motor well off to anchor a wreck was a completely different matter, the accuracy of which sometimes had an element of luck about it, but could with a little ingenuity still get the baits going down smack on target.

If for example the boat settled up a little to one side, the outboard motor would be turned and used as a tiller in the tide to push the boat a little bit to one side or the other. The only problem there was lack of tide and strength of breeze possibly counter pushing on the boat. Then the side cleats close to the anchor post could also be used to make the boat move 'off line' a little in the tide, though this was either right or it was wrong, as unlike using the outboard as a tiller, there was no fine adjustment when using the cleats.

One further approach, and arguably the most accurate of all though it involved more work was 2 boat anchoring. The first boat would anchor where the calculations for water depth, wind speed and direction, plus the tide said was the right spot, then the second boat would run the echo sounder around it to get its positioning absolutely bang on. The first boat would then have to lift his anchor and have a more accurate second shot.

When you see the range of fish available in Liverpool Bay, you might wonder if all the effort and expense was worth it. But, everything is relative, and with the nearest deep water wrecks either out towards the Isle of Man or off the Lley Peninsula, it was a case of take it or leave it.

So with Pollack generally between 5 and 8 pounds going up to a maximum of perhaps low double figures, Ling to maybe 15 pounds though usually a lot smaller, and Conger weighed by Dave at 35 pounds, working under their own initiative, Dave Devine and Ken Mitchell, followed by others including myself, took it with open arms, with the same wrecks now still regularly visited by boats working out from Liverpool Marina and nearby Rhyl over the summer and early autumn months, these days catching Cod in the 2 to 5 pound bracket as the dominant species the last time I fished them during in 2015.

GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM (GPS)

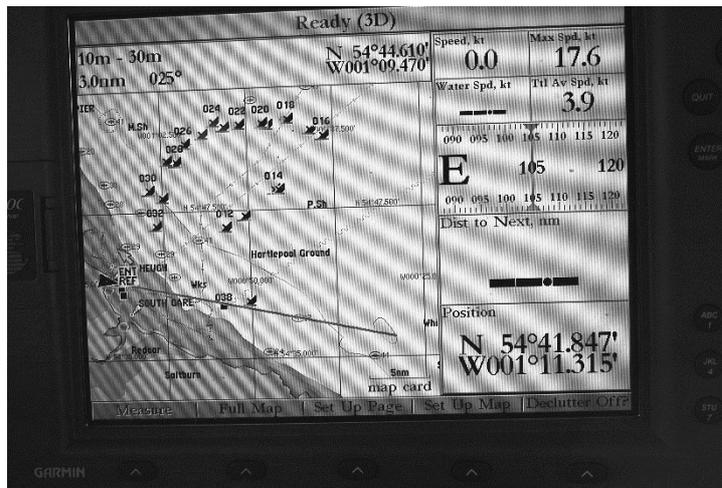
The early days of electronic navigation were reliant on land based signal stations. When wreck fishing began hitting the headlines during the 1960s and early 1970's it was facilitated by Decca, which came in a progression of updated versions over time. Next came the Navstar 2000D, which for a small boat angler like myself was the first time I and many others like me had access to accurate navigation. Phillips also produced a similar instrument, but it was the Navstar that grabbed all the headlines, and presumably the bulk of the sales.

The Navstar and Phillips weren't so much improvements on Decca as a cheaper, easier to use variant of it, converting the Decca signal into latitude and longitude, though the Decca numbers could also be displayed and used from it if preferred. And like Decca, the Navstar and all other incarnations of machines using land based Decca signals, it was prone to inaccuracies caused by climatic conditions, plus potential shut downs for maintenance or repair purposes.

Such inaccuracies and encumbrances could be (had to be) borne by sailors and fisherman. But for military purposes, only the best was good enough. Particularly after the Russians had put Sputnik into orbit in 1957, demonstrating not only a technological superiority over the west at the time, but that if orbiting satellites could be tracked from the ground such as the US military had done with Sputnik, then the reverse was also potentially possible, allowing people or objects on the ground to be tracked by satellites, and with that the race to build a fully functional satellite navigation system was on.

This also triggered the race to provide satellite navigation to non-military users, a race the Magellan Corporation claimed to have won in 1989 with a hand held device called the Magellan NAV 1000. However, fearing GPS might also be used by America's adversaries, the US Defence Department deliberately downgraded the signal accuracy of the system, which while it was both way better and way

more reliable than the alternative land based systems, still fell some way short of the accuracy we all enjoy today.



GPS for 'the masses' became a reality following the shooting down of Korean Airlines Flight 007 by the Russian military in September 1983, killing all 269 passengers and crew on board. The Russians had mistakenly identified the passenger jet as a spy plane after it had strayed off course into Soviet airspace due to the fallibility of the navigation systems used by civilian aircraft during the early 1980's.

At the time, the US had an early version of GPS operating from around a dozen satellites, but fearing it might fall into

the wrong hands and be used against them by adversaries, they had deliberately downgraded the signals for civilian use, including civil air travel. The Korean airliner tragedy triggered a sudden change in this policy. President Ronald Regan ordered the higher signal quality to be made available to everybody when the next overhaul of the system was put in place. The World at large would finally get access to GPS operating at full strength. What's more, it would be available for free.

It took 10 years and more than \$10 billion for the second version of GPS to come online as promised. As you might expect, the US military continued (and continue) to work on improving what everybody now has access to. Finally, in 1995, Roger L. Easton, Ivan A. Getting, and Bradford Parkinson delivered the GPS that offshore sea anglers know and love today, providing the reliable military grade precision requiring a 'constellation' of 27 satellites (24 in use with 3 spares), a figure that has since risen to 31, each orbiting the Earth twice daily forming a network from which any 4 need to be in line of sight of a ground based receiver at any one time to fix a position with the greatest level of accuracy.

This in turn allows receivers carried in vehicles on the ground, in the air, or at sea, to interpret a precise set of location coordinates by measuring the transmission times of radio signals from these satellites, with the built in proviso that Albert Einstein's 1905 calculation for relativity is built into the transmitted result to take account of the fact that time passes at different rates depending on the mass of objects such the Earth being in close proximity to the orbiting atomic clocks (see Chapter 2).

The system obviously is in a constant state of improvement and upgrade. In 1998, Vice President Al Gore announced plans to make the GPS satellites transmit 2 additional signals to be used for civilian applications, aimed in particular at improving aircraft safety. This was implemented in 2000 after Congress had approved the proposal. Also in 2000, just before departing office, President Bill Clinton decided to get rid of selective availability.

The powerful degradation of GPS put in place just before the first Gulf War was removed, making it as much as 10 times more accurate at a stroke. Following this, in 2005, the first 'Block II' satellites were sent up to join the GPS constellation, followed by the 'Block III' satellites for availability in 2014. And throughout, the US Airforce which manages the military GPS system, has endeavoured to keep at least 24 satellites available for at least 95% of the time, which is good news for sea anglers and bad news for the fish the system undoubtedly helps us to locate.

RICHARD STAPLEY



It wasn't until my second research visit to the Angling Heritage fishing magazine archive at Great Torrington in Devon in 2018 that I suddenly realised I had omitted Hampshire angling journalist Richard Stapley. As soon as I started seeing his articles reappearing in Sea Angler Magazine throughout the 1980's and 1990's, I realised I needed to do something about it.

I don't know why I didn't pick up on this earlier, as during that period Richard was prolific in his writing, usually backed up by very good colour illustration. That said, I never actually met him and know very little else about him, other than the fact that he was highly regarded locally, and that he co-wrote the book 'Boat Fishing' with Mike Millman and John Holden, both of whom are sea angling 'A-listers' and must therefore have regarded his input as worthy of their collaboration.

SEABAIT LTD. RAGWORM FARMING

The ability to have fresh bait of the required consistency, quality, and size, regardless of seasonality or prevailing weather conditions, is a massive step forward, both for the suppliers of it, and for the outlets used by sea anglers to get their supplies from. One solution is to 'Factory Farm' the stuff. But that isn't as simple as it might sound as I know only too well from work I was involved in to get coarse fish to breed to order and grow on in crowded farm conditions with the National Rivers Authority when the priority from government was to bring all freshwater bodies up to a certain standard and provide them all with fish.



So I can sympathise with Peter Cowin and Peter Olive, the scientific brains behind Seabait Ltd., which started life as a Ph. D research project that was subsequently shelved mid-term, because writing it up and publishing it in the time honoured fashion would have meant giving away all the intricacies of their hard won findings

Publishing unfortunately would have allowed potential competitors to ride on the back of their research into an activity which they themselves wanted to take forward on a commercial footing.

One of the problems Cowin and Olive faced was that of getting an animal which breeds only once in its lifetime to do so to order, and if possible, more than once, to ensure an ongoing year round supply of offspring to grow on. In other words, manipulating nature.

Normally it takes around 18 months to achieve a suitable bait sized ragworm, something they were aiming to reduce by at least one third, with the ability to grow a 0.5 gram worm on to 4 grams in around

3 weeks, which having perfected the methodology would allow consistency of supply with a commercial target of 30 tons per year at full production., aided by quite a substantial grant of £100,000 to construct the infrastructure.

The Seabait Ltd. ragworm farm was set up in 1985 at Lynemouth Power Station, a site belonging to the Alcan Lynemouth Aluminium Smelting works near Ashington in Northumberland. Water used in the steam cycle of the smelting is taken from the mains supply. Cooling water on the other hand was drawn in from the nearby North Sea and subsequently returned to it at a slightly higher temperature than when it was abstracted, offering Seabait Ltd. a source of artificially warmed seawater which prior to 1985 was being wasted, and one which Cowin and Olive saw as crucial to the day to day operation of their project.

Ken Robinson and I visited the site when it was first up and running in 1985, at which stage it was producing ragworms in the 5 to 7 inch bracket to fulfil orders coming in from all around the country. Gazing into the large circular tanks, it was hard to imagine what lay beneath the shallow sandy substrate. When I threw in a handful of small carefully formulated feed pellets I got the shock of my life. Thousands of 'medusa-like' ragworms reaching up to intercept what they had become conditioned to seeing as their only food source. It was a bit the famous Pavlov's dogs' experiment.

Obviously, there was always going to be detractors who would argue that cultivated bait could never be as good as that sourced from the wild. Having caught lots of good fish on them from the boat as well as the shore, Ken Robinson, who is a highly respected North East shore match angler, very strongly disagrees.

Sea Bait Ltd. ceased production in 2011. Not because it wasn't a success or that its product wasn't good enough. More of a commercial failure based to a large extent on the age old business problems of over stretching and cash flow related to a subsidiary business that had been set up in Maine, USA, to where Peter Cowin had relocated to help move the business on.



The company was also reportedly exploring servicing the Asian culinary shellfish market at the same. This, coupled to earned income not flowing in as promptly as it needed to left the core business of ragworm production overexposed, resulting in reduced output to UK tackle shops, who understandably had to resort back to natural supplies.

This ultimately set in progress an unstoppable domino effect, putting the Seabait Ltd. workforce of around 24 staff in jeopardy from which the project

never really recovered. Peter Cowin now operates a business producing scents and bait enhancing formulations for the US angling market, trading under the name of Bioedge.

MENAI BLACK BREAM

Before delivering this inclusion, it needs to be said here that the Black Bream *Spondyliosoma cantharus* is in some ways one of the big angling success stories of the early part of the twentieth century. For while the species is currently struggling on some of its more traditional haunts such as Kingmere Rocks

off the Sussex coast, from around the turn of the century its range has been slowly expanding northwards to the point where Black Bream can now be caught regularly in Scotland's Luce Bay. But it hasn't always been that way.

When I seriously began sea angling during the mid-1960's, Cardigan Bay in West Wales was seen as the Black Bream's regular northerly limit. That said, when the National Anglers Council (NAC) brought the role of British record keeping under one roof in 1957 by pulling in and considering historical records from a variety of regional sources, the Black Bream record they inherited, and eventually installed, was a fish of 6.5.0 taken from the Menai Strait in 1935.

I remember well dinghy fishing for Black Bream in the Strait during the 1970's and 1980's, particularly to the south of Menai Bridge over a number of small reef marks tucked very close in to the shore. But always there would be just a few small fish, with rarely more than half a dozen at best at a sitting. Even outside the Strait from Caernarfon to the Llyn and over the long fingers of boulders from Pwllheli to Aberystwyth, Bream have always struggled to top 3 pounds. The best I ever saw tipped the scales at 4.5.0 in the early 1980's, which makes that 6.5.0 Menai fish all the more special, and dare I say it 'thought provoking'.

FLEETWOOD THORNBACK RAY CATCH RECORD

Based on work done initially by ex-commercial fisherman turned charter skipper Frank Bee, from the 1970's through to the 1990's, Fleetwood was a very firm contender for Thornback Ray capital of the UK. One of its problems unfortunately was and still is the ferocity of the tide in Morecambe Bay, which means that fishing on the bigger spring tides is completely out of the question.

For Lancashire Thornback Rays, the less run the better, with the best of the fishing often coming over the slacker periods, unless it was a particularly small neap tide. Even towards the edge of the bay from the northern edge of Lune Deep over to Lightning Knoll buoy fishing the edge of the roughs, conditions needed to be right otherwise you could struggle. But when you could get a fresh Mackerel or squid bait down in front of the Thornback Rays, the fishing could get quite busy.

The day of the port record catch was the 1984 Fleetwood Life Boat Competition. A day when the dozen or so charter boats operating out of the port would put on their annual fund raiser for the RNLI with me fishing aboard Keith Philbin's boat 'Happy Hooker'. Keith and I go way back a long way and would holiday together with our families. My job was to make sure both the pre and post-match publicity was all in place, which on the day meant taking a few photographs and fishing as part of the team on board.

It was quite a pleasant summer's day as I remember it. The problem was that with the charter fleet all being part-time, and with there having been big tides the preceding weekend, nobody had any really up to date information as which marks might be fishing best. A case then of going out on the day and quite literally 'testing the water'.

We started the day somewhere just to the north of Lune looking for Plaice, which didn't go too well. Normally the boats would be in touch with each other over the VHF, but not this particular day. In a competition, even if it is for a worthy cause, it's every man for himself. No information sharing, with everyone in it to win it. So, Keith decided we would take a run further up along the edge of the bay as the tide started to slacken, and bingo. It was every egg a bird.



As fast as you could put a bait down, literally, a Thornback Ray would be on to it and hooked up. I've never seen anything like it. Bearing in mind that the steaming time back to port had to be carefully calculated so as not to miss the weigh in, plus the earlier unproductive Plaice attempt, I reckon we had no more than 4 hours actual fishing time on this mark. Four hectic hours which produced a total 97 Thornback Rays.

The previous port record of 45 fish had stood for quite a number of years. We more than doubled that. And we weren't the only ones to beat it. Two of the other boats also well beat the old figure, though neither they nor we knew anything about each other's exploits until we reached the weigh in, our team also having put a good 30 or so rays back as being under size.

As I recall, the organisers had set a minimum 5 pound weight limit for Thornbacks, which meant we still kept more than 60, plus of course what everybody else caught, which is a shame. Onboard stewarding for catch and release would have been far more appropriate. But that's how it was back then. Needless to say, we won the top boat award. In fact, we pretty much swept the prize table clean, taking all but one of them. And now with the Thornback Ray situation in and around Morecambe Bay very different to how it was back then, this in all probability is a record that will stand for a very long time, if indeed it ever gets toppled.

PW Comment: During the 1990's ray numbers all around the country slipped into decline. It took many years for numbers nationwide to slowly creep back to what they were. The strange thing is that when they did, they didn't always return to the same marks that had previously been hot spots, which is perhaps a little odd in areas where the terrain is not likely to have altered dramatically from what it had been before.

Hampering this slightly at Fleetwood is the fact that some of the land marks used in the early days are also now gone. The famous 'Cricket Pitch' for example has lost the 3 land based structures that gave it its name. So for old times' sake, the GPS numbers are 5358.11 North, and 0306.79 West.

THE MACKEREL RECORD

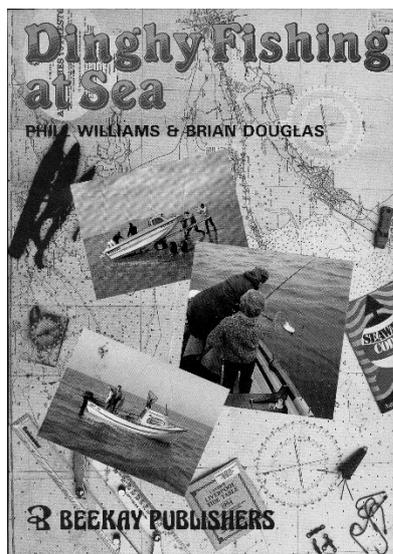
Mackerel are one of those species, which in the company of Herrings and Sandeels, are not really regarded by anglers as being 'proper fish'. They're bait, the catching of which is seen as a chore which has to be undertaken at the start of a trip. That said, the Mackerel is arguably the single most important fish in British waters, for while it isn't regularly predated on by as many of the angling species we as anglers often think, for a great many of them it is still the number one bait.

Regular Mackerel predation probably applies to Bass, Pollack, sharks, and when either they move up off the bottom or the Mackerel shoals are well down in the water column, also Tope given the chance. On top of this, as eating fish go, there is nothing to touch it, and pound for pound, fished for on the right tackle, there is no better fighting fish either, anywhere around the British Isles. An obliging fish too, both in its willingness to take a lure, and in its availability to the widest range of sporting tactics, including fly fishing when they are well up in the water column. Unfortunately, it has to be said, the once vast shoals have become increasingly less reliable over recent times as commercial pressure takes its toll.

Incredibly, and sadly in angling terms, Mackerel generally are an underrated fish to target simply for pleasure. But not so when they reach the sort of proportions W. J. Chapple encountered while fishing out from Penberth Cove in Cornwall in 1984 where he boated a monster Mackerel of 6.2.7, almost matched by another monster at 5.11.14 taken by M. A. Kemp from Berry Head near Brixham a couple of years earlier in 1982, both of which still occupied their respective British boat and shore record slots at the close of the twentieth century right up to the time of writing.

DINGHY FISHING AT SEA – THE BOOK

The first book specifically looking at fishing from small boats written by myself and Brian Douglas was published in 1984 (BeeKay Publishers). A book with 2 distinct separate sections entitled 'Going Afloat', which explored a wide range of essential topics including what to buy, outfit maintenance,



launching, safety at sea and navigation, and 'Practical Fishing', exploring the catching and handling of the 40 most likely species of fish to be encountered from a small boat fishing in UK coastal waters.

With small boat fishing in its infancy at the time, I'm assured by those who 'egged us on' and eventually bought it that made essential reading in its day. Some even went so far as to say ground breaking, earning its place in small boat fishing history, if only to measure how far small boats, trailers, and electronics have come in the intervening 30 plus years.

During the 1990's, Dave Lewis also covered the same topic in book form, putting his own slant on things, and giving the whole subject a much needed update, in particular taking account of the level of change that had taken place with regard to boats, outboards and electronics within little more than a decade.

NOTE: Dave Lewis' book entitled 'Dinghy Fishing' was published in 1996 by the Octopus Publishing Group.

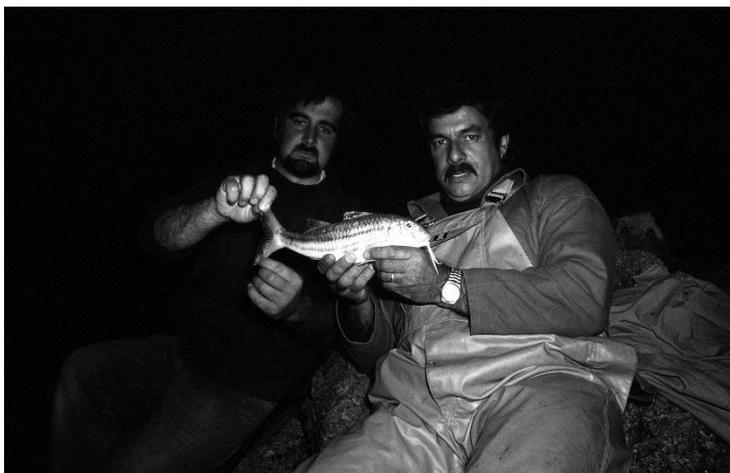
THE 100 SPECIES TARGET IS ACHIEVED

Consciously or otherwise, most anglers set themselves targets. It could be something short lived such as catching more than your mate on the day, or a little more ambitious such as constantly challenging your PB for a particular species. Being the person that I am, I set my targets both higher and wider than a single event. Not because I feel that I'm any better than anybody else. I'm not competitive with other people, but I am with myself. So I decided to set myself longer term targets which I could measure myself against over my entire angling lifetime, and in that regard, totally unrealistically, I set out to try to catch every species of fish listed on rod and line from British waters.

It didn't take me long to realise the impossible enormity of that particular task. With so many rare and unusual species, not to mention one-offs such as the Dusky Perch and Big Eye Tuna, quite obviously it was a step way too far, even for someone so recklessly over ambitious as me. So grudgingly, the target was modified down to 100 species, which with the beauty of hindsight, still takes some doing.

Initially it goes well as you pick off all the regular species on your patch. Willingness to travel and single-mindedly fish for things which are not so regularly caught, or are of no interest to anyone else, starts to put a few more ticks on the list. But even that starts to slow once you get up around the 70 species mark. Today of course, LRF brings lots of small, previously rarely seen but not that uncommon extra species into the mix. Had that been the case in the 1970's and 80's, things would have progressed a lot more quickly for me I'm sure.

As ever, I'm not certain as to the exact date when I caught my one hundredth species, but certain enough to put it at around 1991 or thereabouts. I had flown over to Guernsey to meet up with Peter Frise and Joe Gomez to do some magazine coverage of the back end shore fishing on offer there. Arriving late afternoon, we were fishing well before dark from the rocks at Bec Du Nez, casting ragworm baits out on to clean sandy ground. Knowing the Channel Islands saw a few Red Mullet at that time, and with 99 species already in the bag by that time, I remember talking about the prospects of catching a Red Mullet with Pete and Joe, to which they replied I'd have to be super lucky to complete my target with one of those.



Just into darkness I had my first bite and struck into what felt like a smallish fish. Unable to see the water's edge properly from our high vantage point, Joe climbed down to investigate and bring the fish up. Suddenly he started shouting. "I don't believe it, the lucky @\$% has only gone and hooked a Red Mullet". I thought he was winding me up and would climb back up brandishing a Pouting or something. But no, he was deadly serious. It was almost as if I'd moaned it onto the hook.

The target had been achieved, leaving me both elated and at something of a loose end for the future, a 'problem' I very quickly rectified by adding in a list of new elements, the whole account of which is given in my book "The Ultimate Angling Bucket List" produced as a fully illustrated free download ebook on my own website, plus as a non illustrated ebook on Kindle & Smashwords, and in hard copy fully illustrated for archive at the British Library and Angling Heritage.

PAUL KERRY



Though I never actually met Paul Kerry, I feel a kind-of kinship with him by virtue of the fact that we were both signed up by Kevin Maddocks at Beekay books to write for the company as a joint first venture by BeeKay onto the sea angling scene, which up until that time had specialised in publishing coarse fishing books.

To give this a timeline, the books were both published in 1984, though Paul's rise to 'glory' had begun around the mid-1970's. I remember once chatting the book's prospects over with him on the telephone, then our paths never crossed again due to the geographical as well as angling distance between us, him being a shore angler and distance caster, with me preferring to fish from small boats.

One thing those who know Paul Kerry well all say, and I have spoken to quite a few people while gathering this information, is that he was the first, and with hindsight possibly the only shore and tournament caster to treat the subject in the way a modern day athlete would.

Diet, exercise, and training, were all part of the Kerry routine, and quite obviously it has worked exceptionally well for him. He very quickly rose through the ranks to superstar status, out casting all who put up against him, becoming the first caster to officially break through the 230 yard barrier, taking the World record up to 239 yards 2 feet 11 inches in 1979.

Unlike the man who was to follow Paul to the pinnacle of tournament distance casting, Neil MacKellow, Paul was a 'traditional' caster in terms of having his reel seated up the rod butt, which meant he would cast with a much shorter rod than MacKellow and the rest.

By virtue of the distances he was hitting, he was obviously a pendulum caster. Initially he would have been running a 0.4mm main line with a 0.75 shock leader. The running line diameter rule was changed to 0.35 around 1981, right in the middle of the Paul Kerry reign, allowing us for the most part to be able to make direct comparisons between him and those who would come later. This would have been loaded onto an ABU Ambassadeur 6500, switching to a Daiwa Millionaire and later models with magnetic brakes when Daiwa signed him up as their beach and tournament tackle advisor.

IRISH TARPON

A scientific paper entitled 'A New Record for The Tarpon, *Megalops atlanticus* Valenciennes (Osteichthyes-Elopiformes-Elopidae), in the Eastern North Atlantic by E. Twomey and P. Byrne of the Department of Zoology, University College Cork published in 1984, records the catching of an adult Tarpon by fishermen in the River Lee, Co. Cork, approximately 14 miles from Cork Harbour in 1981. This is the most northerly record for the species, with this particular individual having been observed over a period of around 3 weeks in the vicinity of a warm water discharge from an electricity generating station where it was presumed to be feeding on Grey Mullet which congregate at the location.

BERKLEY \$1,000 HANDOUT

During 1984, the future editor of Total Sea Fishing Magazine and later Boat Fishing Monthly Magazine, Jim Whippy, heard on the grapevine that Paignton angler Brian Taylor had won himself \$1,000 as part of a promotion by American tackle giant Berkley, for catching an officially ratified IGFA World record using Berkley Trilene monofilament.



The winning family Whippy

Eager to know more, Jim then discovered that the promotion was ongoing. Furthermore, armed with a copy of the then IGFA World record list borrowed from Ray Rush, and with many of the record slots for species available in UK waters either achievable or vacant awaiting claims, particularly in the women's category, he quickly armed himself with a suitable selection of Trilene monofilament filled reels, and set about seeing how many line class records he and his wife Pat could get claims in for before the promotion ended.

Fishing from their own small boat off the Sussex Coast, Bass and Conger were two particular target species the couple felt confident at having a good shot at, and quickly set about working their way through the line class lists, followed by a whole stream of formal record claims.

Unfortunately, as is so often the case with organisations such as the IGFA, it takes time to get a decision, one way or the other. It was 3 to 4 months in fact before the first acceptance letter dropped through the letter box, followed by a steady stream of others. A grand total of 16 in fact, 'grand' being the applicable word here, winning Jim and Pat a tax free cheque for \$16,000. And they weren't the only ones submitting claims.

Fingers burnt by the sudden influx of Trilene 'activity', while Berkley continued with the promotion, the following year they limited it to one claim per person per year. In addition, a further \$2,000 was also put up for records set using Trilene line in conjunction with a Berkley rod. So with the requisite rods and Trilene filled reels in the boat, it was all systems go again for the new summer season, this time with daughters Anna, Lisa and Selina on board, collectively adding a further 5 records, and therefore another \$5,000 to the family pot, before finally in 1986, Berkley wound their cash for records promotion up.

DINGHY EXPLORATION, FENIT

Following on from the success of the book 'Dinghy Fishing at Sea' written by myself and Brian Douglas in 1984, and recognising a gap in the leisure fishing market which it was felt Ireland was well suited to fill, the Irish Tourist Board (Bord Fáilte) invited myself and Brian to trail my 15 foot Seahog boat over to Co. Kerry to undertake a small boat potential exploration of the sheltered waters of Tralee Bay based at Godley's Hotel close to the launching slip in the small hamlet of Fenit.

The area was already popular with shore and charter boat anglers. So, Bord Fáilte arranged for us to shadow the local charter boat for a few days for safety reasons and getting to know the area, after which the late great Kevin Linanne from the Central Fisheries Board (CFB) would join us for a couple of days to film a promotional video of what we had managed to turn up.

As arranged, we slipped the boat in early on day one and waited for the charter lads to be ready to head out towards the exposed entrance of the bay to drift for Pollack and Mackerel, followed later by putting

baits down on the bottom at anchor. Fine if you're in a 30 foot charter boat. Less so sat low in the water in a small dinghy with huge Atlantic swells pushing through, not only obscuring the other boat close by, but also the land either side of us momentarily too.



These swells were large and they were deep. So on day 2, as we'd had very little other than dogfish on day 1, and with in all likelihood more of the same on the cards, Brian and I decided enough was enough. Succeed or fail, we would head back into more sheltered waters and have a mooch around doing our own thing, which in reality is what future small boat anglers trailing across would very likely want to do themselves anyway.

Fenit had a reputation for good mixed fishing, which included 2 species we were particularly interested in catching, Undulate Rays and Monkfish. However, the where, when, and how, was something we would have to sort out for ourselves, but knowing that Undulates could be caught from the huge stone jetty after dark, we reasoned that the vicinity of the pier would be as good a place as any to start looking, and anchored up accordingly in around 20 feet of water, maybe half a mile or so to the seaward side and started to fish.

Fortunately, we'd managed to feather up a reasonable box of Mackerel out in open water earlier, something which would become a daily time consuming chore as the week wore on, because try as we may, we simply couldn't find Mackerel anywhere inside the bay. But we did however manage to find plenty of other fish, and suffered far fewer Lesser Spotted Dogs into the bargain which can't be bad.

From the onset we were into Small Eyed and Thornback Rays. Bull Huss and Tope quickly followed. Unfortunately, no Undulate Rays initially. No Monkfish either, though we were beginning to think we'd found the famous 'Monk Hole' when we anchored over a slight depression in the same general area to the seaward side of the pier where we kept hooking up good fish then losing them.

This wasn't through breakages or poor hook holds. One fish took off so powerfully that it actually pulled the boat around off line in the tide on the anchor rope. Then bump, as with the others, everything went solid. We thought the line had maybe become snagged under a rock or something, and eventually decided to pull for a break. But it was happening time and time again. Surely nobody could be so unlucky.

As arranged, 'the legend' that is Kevin Linanne joined us midway through the week. After a quick briefing it was decided that a repeat of what we'd had already done would satisfy his requirements for the video. Then we would be free to explore further over the remaining few days. We also told him about the big fish we'd hooked and parted company with, but he said nothing. That was until it happened again with him in attendance.

Another of our 'mystery guests' had picked up Brian's Mackerel fillet bait, and as had been the case earlier in our stay, after a short slow line ripping run, things suddenly went solid. Again, we thought it was a snag. But Kevin knew exactly what was going on. "It's a big Skate" he said, and suddenly everything started to slot in to place. In just 20 feet of water well inside the bay fishing from a 15 foot platform, large skate were the last thing we had expected to contact.

Having done it and seen it done many times before, Kevin coaxed Brian through the encounter. At one point close to the boat, we could even see the red Zipp Slider and lead mid-water while the fish was

still firmly clamped to the sea bed just a trace length away. Then suddenly, the huge fish's suction was broken and it was on its way up.

Immediately we could see it, and it was massive. Neither of us had experienced this sort of thing before, either from a dinghy or a charter boat. Fortunately, we had a decent gaff onboard which I carefully placed into the leading edge of its wing, at which point Brian put the rod down and grabbed the pole to give me a lift at dragging it in, all the time with the camera running, and all 3 of us on the same side of the boat at the same time, plus the weight of the fish, something we couldn't have even considered further off in amongst those Atlantic swells.



Neither Brian nor I had seen a big skate before, and without so much as a second thought, automatically assumed it was a Common Skate *Raja batis*. Not so said Kevin. It was a Bottle Nosed Ray *Raja alba*, (more recently renamed *Rostroraja alba*), also known as a White Skate, and it was well in excess of 100 pounds. With no suitable scale on boat, we obviously we couldn't weigh it, so using lengths of monofilament from one of the reels, we took its length and width dimensions which Kevin was later able to feed into a weight estimation table, giving the fish an estimated weight of 140 pounds.

Meanwhile, the fish had to go back, which was even more of a challenge than getting it into the boat a few minutes earlier. Kevin then borrowed a tiny rowing boat which we towed back offshore for him to sit while we faked some boat to boat continuity video action with several pounds of lead tied to the end of Brian's line.

Before he left, Kevin also gave us the approximate location of the famous Fenit Monk Hole. Surprisingly, this involved heading even further inland, looking for a particular rusty corrugated farm building roof, in front of which just a few hundred yards off the famous mark.

The echo sounder was reading as little as 4 feet at times on our run in, dropping just a couple of feet more to indicate a shallow lying depression which for some reason was a magnet to all sorts of fish. Not only Monkfish to over 50 pounds, but lots of Small Eyed Rays, Thornbacks, and Stingrays. But still no Undulate Rays unfortunately, though we did get a couple anchored tight in to the pier after seeing them caught from the stone work after dark one evening. And now it's all gone. From a position of being able to catch Monkfish almost to order, the species is now on the critically endangered list, with an estimate by Kevin Flannery, the director of the Dingle OceanWorld Sea Life Centre, of no more than a dozen or so left around the entire Irish Coast.

IOW RECORD THRESHER ON A BROKEN ROD

On a trip that also produced 5 Porbeagle Sharks to 180 pounds, Bembridge AC member Bob Pakes boated a new Isle of Wight Thresher Shark record of 223 pounds after it took a full 300 yards of Dacron from his reel on its first run. After regaining the bulk of the lost line, the butt of his ABU Pacific 8 rod then began to come apart. Determined not to lose the fish, the rest of the party aboard Danny Vokins boat 'Thresher I' quickly came to Bob's rescue, helping him cobble together a fix which involved lashing up the broken butt, allowing the 90 minute battle to continue through to fruition.

FISH SOLD TO AID ORPHANAGE

A 23 strong party from the Altrincham based Packet Sea Angling Club fishing a boat competition out of Westport Co. Mayo put almost 5,500 pounds of fish onto the fish market to be sold in aid of a local orphanage. Comprising a species mix including Cod and Coalfish to double figures, most of the fish fell to pirks and feathers, with competition top honours going to Harry Whiteley.

NORTHERN IRELAND'S CAUSEWAY COAST



The mid-1980's through into the mid-1990's wasn't perhaps the best time to be visiting Northern Ireland sporting an English accent, despite only being there to fish. Even more the case when trailing your own boat using a Landrover with English registration plates, then driving into town in it each evening to get something to eat and drink.

But we did it, and on more than one occasion, to enjoy the fantastic charter boat, small boat, and shore fishing around the north Antrim coast at the invitation of the Northern Irish Tourist Board, who understandably at the time, were desperate to promote visitors for whatever reason, both to bring in income, and to demonstrate to the rest of the UK that it was safe to visit, which while we escaped with just a few small unsavoury moments, it probably wasn't the best time to visiting.

This was also a time when the fishing was still of a very high calibre. Local anglers said it had been even better at some point back in time, which I guess is true of most places. But it was good enough for myself and Sea Fishing Assistant Editor Guy Milham to make a number of visits, initially to fish out from Portrush, and on a subsequent visit also Ballycastle when the weather was settled, switching to the beaches of Magilligan and Benone Strand when it wasn't, where Flounders by the bucket full could be caught pretty much to order in the company of small Turbot, and with decreasing regularity, also the occasional Bass.

Ian Hill from the NITB pictured above made all the early visit arrangements, which included himself, as he was a very keen sea angler too. Joe Mullan would supply us with fresh ragworm from his shop every morning, with the fishing side of things put in the hands of charter skipper John Bradley, who must surely have been the most entertaining man on the whole island of Ireland. Dressed in a suit and wearing a tie, John wasn't exactly the image of how you might expect a charter boat skipper to look.

With few, if any teeth, and a cigarette constantly perched on his lip, his softly spoken broad Ulster accent made it was very difficult at times to catch what he was saying, which was perhaps as well, as he was the master of Anglo Saxon comedy innuendo which kept everyone in stitches the whole trip long with his constant comments.

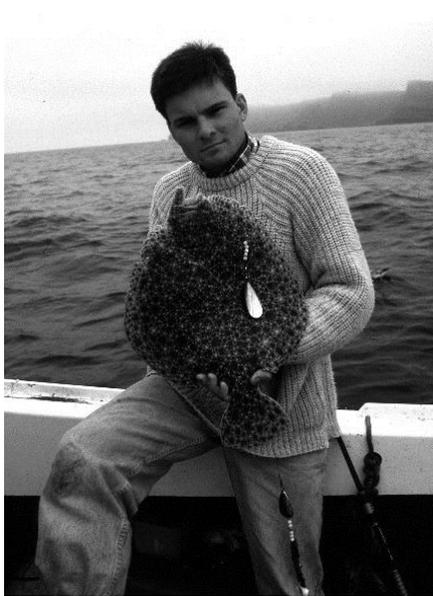
We fished with John many times and heard all sorts of stories about the quality of the fishing both with him, and from him, and of course stories about the man himself, including how on one occasion he somehow managed to get himself washed overboard and had to be rescued by his anglers. But the fishing, which was why we were there, was excellent, and if it had been half as good as the locals said was the case in the past, then it must have been spectacular, particularly for Cod, Haddock and Plaice.

We had lots of other species too, including some very good Conger around the islands just to the north east of the harbour. Also, good Cod to 18 pounds, along with Plaice and Turbot to double figures drifting

the Causeway Bank, and always with a crate of Lucozade bottles on board filled with Poteen brought on and left there by the RUC, who on one of the trips fished a competition with John, Guy and myself.

One day which particularly sticks in my mind was a trip fished out in White Park Bay near Ballintoy. A small harbour between Portrush and Ballycastle fished on a wild old day, with a very brisk southerly wind blowing straight off the land. This made it safe to fish close in, but as we were drift fishing for Plaice, we could only let the boat go so far before we lost the shelter of the land and had to reposition.

Even so, fishing large spoons with a 6-inch hook length loaded with coloured beads and ragworm tipped off with a small strip of silvery Mackerel belly, we caught some excellent Plaice. More there actually than we had on the Causeway Bank, though with less other fish on the scene to step in if the Plaice were playing hard to get.



We also fished a couple of times out from Ballycastle with a chap called Capt. Chris. I can't remember his last name. I do remember though that due to the weather we were pretty much confined to drift fishing with baited spoons between the shelter of Rathlin Island just across the way, which is not a place to be out in a boat with plenty of wind and tide.

The fishing there wasn't as good as at Portrush or Ballintoy, but we had a steady flow coming aboard. These would be mainly Cod in the 2 to 5 pound bracket, though I do recall one half decent specimen caught by Capt. Chris himself which was into low double figures.

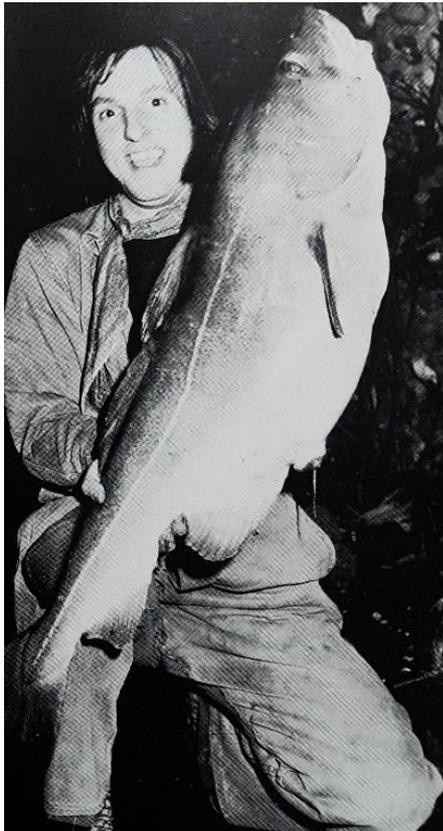
This was a time when the Irish Republic was doing exceptionally well at attracting anglers. Particularly small boat anglers, who as well as doing their own thing and exploring, which is what I used to do there, would also turn up literally by the ferry load to fish the small boat festival at Wexford. Something I think the Ulster tourist people were both aware and envious of. So, we also got the invite to trail over, where we teamed up with local small boat angler Derek Leacock who regularly fished out of Dunseverick and was willing to give us the guided tour.

Dunseverick was a venue with fishing broadly similar to that which we'd enjoyed earlier at Ballintoy, though with some launching and retrieving that was a bit on the tricky side, particularly the journey back in, when we had to race through a tiny gap between 2 pieces of reef visible only by way of the white water rolling and breaking over them, which was 'interesting' to say the least.

I hear that John Bradley is now no longer with us, which is sad. He really was a character, who despite his cutting sense of humour was liked by everybody, myself included. I'd love to be able to relate some of the going's on here, but the age spread of the potential audience here perhaps wouldn't approve. Let's say it was it was verbally entertaining and leave it at that.

I also remember shooting some video of the fishing, and of John on one of the trips which I've recently had converted to digital, allowing me to edit it and put it out on YouTube for anyone either interested in seeing the fishing, or with fond memories of John. Good times spent in good company, and some good fishing into the bargain, but sadly at a time when things were not so good for the rest of the population on all sides north of the border.

HUGE ADMIRALTY PIER COD



The November 1985 issue of Sea Angler Magazine carried this photograph of a Cod weighing 28½ pounds taken by shore angler Allen Brown, fishing from Dover's Admiralty Breakwater.

THE WELSH ELECTRIC RAY RECORD

Always a rare and noteworthy catch in British and Irish waters, the Dark Electric Ray *Torpedo nobiliana* has the most northerly range of any of the Electric Ray species likely to occasionally put in a show in our coastal waters, with this Welsh specimen of a fraction under 40 pounds (15.422 Kg) caught by M. Mathews from a boat fishing off Anglesey in 1986 being pretty much at the northern extremity of this fish's range.

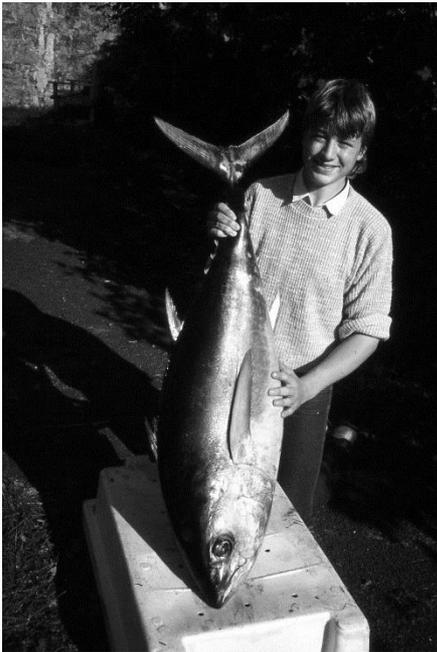
It's interesting to note here that fish are the only vertebrates capable of producing an electrical current, either for offence or defence, and in that regard, Electric Rays have quite a sizeable power generating organ. Constructed from modified striated muscle fibres stacked against each other connected up in parallel and located in each wing, they collectively make up around one sixth of the fish's total body weight.

The organs of a large specimen might contain as many as 500,000 such plates. Discharges of up to 60 volts are the norm, though this can vary with the size and condition of each individual fish. Large specimens have been recorded emitting 220 volts with a current of 8 amps, the upper surface being the positive side, and correspondingly, the lower surface the negative side, making this a species which it would be unwise to mis-identify and attempt to handle.

BIG EYE TUNA FROM NEWLYN HARBOUR

Big Eye Tunny *Thunnus obesus* are tropical to sub-tropical fish usually found well down in the water column over great depth, hence the size of the eye for hunting down their prey in low light conditions.

A location where water temperature can be considerably depleted, something this particular species has evolved to handle through its ability to regulate its body core temperature within certain parameters.



All of that said, a lone specimen was spotted by a number of people over a number of days swimming up and down inside Newlyn Harbour in the summer of 1985, one of whom was 15 year old local angler Alan Pascoe, who, with the odds of a successful outcome well and truly stacked against him, optimistically set out to catch it, and amazingly succeeded.

I use the word optimistic here on 2 counts. First off, because this is an open water species which prefers a deep water column in which to conduct its normal daily feeding regime. With that in mind, it wouldn't be unreasonable then to expect this particular individual to be feeling distressed and therefore be unwilling to feed if it felt 'trapped' inside a warm shallow harbour with unfamiliar 'activities' taking place all around it.

Even if it did have an interest in feeding, which clearly this specimen had, what are the chances of actually landing such a large and extremely powerful fish from the side of a walled harbour with potential snagging obstacles galore.

Having spoken at length with Mike Millman who reported the story at the time, young Alan stalked the fish for hours, eventually persuading it to take his bait and finally getting it in and on to the scales, where it pulled the needle around to 66 pounds 12 ounces. Surely one of the most incredible shore angling feats of modern times, and a species not likely to feature in angling reports in the UK again I'll wager, as rising sea temperatures offer no attraction in this particular instance.

But just in case, the British Record Fish Committee in their usual 'wisdom' have set a 30 pounds minimum qualifying weight for any boat caught record claim, which is ridiculous in the extreme, as any example caught by fair angling means ought to be considered. Is it any wonder then that the BRFC these days are being sidelined to the extent they are?.

NEIL MACKELLOW

In terms of casting supremacy, Neil MacKellow, who I'm told was also affectionately known as 'Black Beard', took over the top UK casting mantle from Paul Kerry who is discussed in Chapter 10. A big, powerful man, MacKellow was also a very precise technical distance caster who knew how to hit the sweet spot with every aspect of his cast. A man who I'm reliably informed started his casting journey as a back-caster in the 1980's before switching to the pendulum, a style he was to absolutely dominate for many years with his trademark seating of the reel low down on the rod butt, necessitating a longer rod than earlier casters such as Paul Kerry and Nigel Forrest, who preferred to seat their reels in a more traditional position

MacKellow wasn't the first to set up his outfit in this way, but he was certainly the best known. Denis Darkin and Denis Gander for example had been doing it long before Neil popularised it, to the point that his set up and rod choice began to be copied far and wide.



Initially this would be with rods made by Conoflex, then Zziplex. But as his dominance grew, other tackle manufacturers inevitably would come knocking, such as Penn, who expected him to help develop their products as well as being seen to be using them as part of any collaboration.

At Penn it would also be development of the reels too, despite which he was often to be seen casting with an ABU Ambassadeur 6500, though regardless of rod and reel combination, he could always be relied upon to produce huge casts. As a party piece he would even cast with a rod rest, and still hit impressive distances.

By the time that Neil MacKellow was at the peak of his career during the mid-1990's, tournament casting had long since divorced itself from long-range fishing. The average angler could no longer relate to the physical prowess of the top pure tournament casters, and as such, could never hope to hit the same distances or even get near to them, even if they practised and perfected their technique.

MacKellow was throwing leads at and beyond the 250 yard mark with 'boring' regularity, his best cast going 281 yards 1 foot 3 inches at a UKSF event in 1985, establishing a new World record which would not be matched or bettered during the twentieth century, and from what I can see looking at the UKSF listings, and talking to Colin Howlet, it hasn't been bettered since the year 2000 either.

Neil MacKellow was given the title of technical editor with Sea Angler Magazine, and at one stage coached the Greek national team based on Cyprus, which is where unfortunately he saw out his days before succumbing to Alzheimer's in 2017.

The following obituary for Neil was published by Planet Sea Fishing in 2017.....

"Sad news yesterday that casting and sea angling legend Neil Mackellow had passed away.

The UK and World casting scene will miss "Black Beard" as he was affectionately known. Neil was a stalwart of the UKSF circuit in the 1990's and later passed on his knowledge abroad.

.He had a hard time of it later in life when he was struck down by Alzheimer's. Even then he was still coaching friends in Cyprus and Greece where he lived latterly.

Neil was a great friend to Planet Sea Fishing with his early contributions from inception in 2008 helping to establish the site. He was always more than happy to pass on valuable advice whether in person, by correspondence, in magazines and video or through the electronic medium.

His insightful and informative tutorials provided for the site, which in particular featured Penn reel tuning and knot tying, are still as valuable a resource today as they ever were.

Neil not only loved his casting but was an excellent angler who enjoyed his shore fishing both at home and abroad.

Rest in peace Black Beard you will be sadly missed by all those who knew you in real life and virtually".

MIKE THRUSSELL

I've known Mike Thrussell for a long time, and we've crossed paths on a number of occasions, but as



yet, we've never fished together, which now that I've made myself aware of the fact is a bit of a shame. Back in 1974 we almost lost him for good from the 'home' sea angling scene when he upped sticks and headed off to Australia. Despite having had a taste of what the West Wales beaches had to offer, the lure of 'the colonies' remained too great for 5 years. Then it was back here to set up camp at Fairbourne, an area he used to holiday at 4 times a year with his parents, where at a very early age he was given a copy of Mr. Crabtree Goes Fishing, an Alvey Side Cast reel, and the freedom to try his hand from the local beach, resulting in one very memorable Flounder, which for a Sheffield lad was enough to make him want to relocate closer to the sea.

A great opportunity to learn independence and how to evaluate situations rather than being told what to do. Also a location where it was not an unreasonable proposition to concentrate on targeting Bass, based on patient trial and error, plus a lot of background reading from Messer's Gillespie, Darling and Harris over the winter months, devouring anything and everything he could lay his hands on about Bass and the art of rod building

One day Mike's dad spotted a request for fishing reports from the area in Sea Fishing Magazine. Eventually he was persuaded to approach the magazine's editor Bob Hawkes to see if he might like him to plug that gap. Obviously, some sort of conversation ensued to the point where Mike tells me that Bob invited him to produce a feature for the magazine, which in timing terms I work out to have been sometime around 1984.

What Mike probably doesn't know until he reads it here is that I had just been appointed Features Consultant for the magazine. Bob Hawkes was an expert magazine producer through and through, but had never wet a fishing line in his entire life, hence my appointment. As such I would feed him leads to follow up, and occasionally, as was the case here, he would find himself in the position of doing a bit of recruiting of his own, about which he would call me up and have a chat when the business was concluded.

The chat with Mike Thrussell was one such a case in question. Ultimately, he was the boss. And after a couple more calls to 'pester' Mike into submission, he finally gave in, coming back (eventually) with his first feature "An Hour at the Bar – Time for a Bass".

With hindsight, I have to say that was a good bit of recruiting. So impressed was Bob that he flexed his muscles further and was straight back on to Mike for a dozen more full features on the bounce, which was both good for the magazine, and equally good for Mike and his budding new career, launching him on a pathway to well deserved greatness to the point of making a full time living out of angling journalism and consultancy work.

The magazine work also helped broaden his horizons, bringing in all aspects of boat and shore fishing, which combined with his love of some of the writers of old such as Gammon, Harris, and good old Digger Derrington, plus the steep learning curve that tackle consultancy can demand, all helped mould him into one of the best all round sea angling journalists of the twentieth century and beyond. Still firing on all fronts at the time of writing here, Australia's loss was the UK's gain, or should I say regain.

The first bout of consultancy work, and the bit we are most interested in here because it took place within the time constraints of this book, was working with Shakespeare. I think Mike will agree with me when I say that during the 1980's and 1990's there was a greater disparity between tackle manufacturing companies than there is today. Nowadays pretty much all the tackle produced is of good enough

quality to confidently fish with. Thirty years ago, that wasn't the case, and Shakespeare tackle wasn't exactly at the top of the pile.

So he would have his work cut out convincing the people there with regard to quality and direction, which looking back, slowly but surely, he was managing to do. A time in which he says he learned an awful lot about fishing tackle in a very short amount of time. Then out of the blue he was asked by Rob Wyatt to transfer his allegiance to Leeda, which he describes as a catalyst point. An equal partnership opportunity in terms of input, which between them led to the development of some very good rods over a period of around 11 years before Max Gottis at Fox Tackle came calling. And now, seemingly these days, everyone works together under the mega-umbrella of Pure Fishing.

Tackle design and development can only go so far in a World where declining fish stocks result in not only fewer fish due to poor size limits and commercial discards, but fewer big fish, which are the ones most anglers desperately want. From a tackle perspective, this has led to a gradual scaling down of rods, reels, and lines. Gone are the one size fits all days of the 30/50 pound class rod and huge reel loaded with 50 pounds breaking strain line for everything. Today the 12/20 pound class outfit is the best seller across most companies, as boat anglers become ever more aware of the need to extract as much as they can from every single fish and enjoy each to the max.

Shore anglers are fishing much lighter too, with continental style rods and LRF outfits to throw out much improved rigs compared to what went in the past. And for catch consistency, it's back to the Les Moncrieff ethos of distance casting due to fish being thinner on the ground, and as a result, more spread out.

While all of this was going on, Mike was also instrumental in developing the Porbeagle Shark fishery West Wales enjoyed during the 1980's. A fishery mainly comprising of 'pups' through to fish of around 100 pounds or so. There was occasionally the odd slightly bigger fish. But realistically speaking, that was about the size of things as they say, with the pups and grown on juveniles probably making their way up from the pupping grounds along the North Cornish and North Devon Coast, travelling past Lundy Island across the Bristol Channel and around St. David's Head to feed up all summer long in Cardigan Bay.

I can say this with some degree of confidence, both from my own experience of fishing off Boscastle, plus the fact that by the early-1990's, the commercials had gotten wind of this and very quickly took them to the cleaners working in and around the Lundy area. Obviously, they didn't get them all. But they got enough to make a dent so big that in angling terms the Cardigan Bay Porbeagle fishing was dead in the water.

Mike Thrussell was on the Porbeagle trail at a very early stage fishing with Aberaron based skipper John Mitchell aboard his boat 'Anne J'. Between them they slowly raised the profile of the Porbeagle potential for other interested anglers and skippers to pick up on. They even unsuccessfully tried trolling for tuna which had been seen and occasionally hooked then lost on shark baits.

Mike also fished for the sharks with Aberdyfi charter skipper Charlie Bartlett in an effort to help them both better understand what was going on, on the one hand for the pleasure of the angling, and on the other to provide Mike with background research for his book 'First Run: Shark', (Ward Lock, 1990). And as with everyone else, they mainly caught sharks of a predictable stamp.

With most Porbeagles coming in just either side of the 100 pound mark, a fish of 200 pounds was something Welsh anglers at that time could only dream about in home waters. But sometimes, dreams do come true. This one most certainly did, when on the 4th July 1989 Mike broke through the 200 barrier with a Welsh record Porbeagle of 204 pounds.



On the subject of books, Mike also put in a lot of time and effort into researching and analysing the local Bass population which has resulted not only in him catching of some very big Bass, but good numbers of them too. Inevitably, a book would come from all his efforts, again published in 1989, entitled 'Bass: Strategy & Confidence', (Blandford Press). He then goes on to assure me there is no money in writing books. You write them because you want to and to pass on information. A fact I'm very well aware of here, which is why I'm putting this project out as a

free download ebook with hard bound copies going to various archives, including the British Library.

The same desire to pass on information also led Mike to Radio 5 live and a fishing programme anchored by Nick Hancock, the knock on from which was some television and video work. In particular with the BBC discussing the possibilities of a Great White Shark in British waters with Steve Leonard, plus occasional appearance on Tight Lines with Keith Arthur on Sky.

My final question to Mike was, wearing any one of your various hats, what for you has been the most important development of the twentieth century? No hesitation about the answer, "It has to be carbon fibre". Modern rods with their faster tapers are very much more responsive, lighter, and able to react more quickly than their fibreglass counterparts. But it was a close call between this and braided lines, which he says have opened up new areas which had previously been either difficult or even impossible to fish with monofilament, such as the ability to fish very deep water on the drift. Also, deep water lure fishing.

Braid won't replace monofilament, he adds, which is still a very important item in the sea angler's tool kit. It complements it, and both, hopefully, will continue to be available and to improve. And in answer to the same question substituting the word person for development with regard to twentieth century contribution, Mike nominates John Darling and his approach to Bass fishing. JD was one of the first truly technical angling writers. A man who understood fish movements and was able to predict their whereabouts to get ahead of the game.

CENTURY RODS

Century are not one of the first pioneers of the UK distance casting scene. That honour goes to ABU, Conoflex and Zziplex in that order. But certainly they were one of the big players both during and since the 'second wave' of quality casting rods began making it on to the shore angling scene.

It's sad then that with such a pedigree, and having played their part in the history of shore and tournament casting rods, nobody at the company could find 10 minutes to talk over their achievements or even answer an email with a few basic questions on it, such as when and how the company started, and which side of the carbon fibre revolution they came in at.



I even got north east shore match angler and Century visitor Chris Stringer to put a word in while he was at the factory, and still nothing. On that basis I can only work with what I have, which in this case is nothing other than a few ‘scraps’ from published tackle tests and a straight lift from the Century website as it was at the time of writing.....

“Century has produced fine rods in England for over 30 years and we are in our fourth decade of manufacturing, development and research.

We are specialists in an era of generalists. Very few have the detailed technical knowledge to produce precision tackle and most contract their product ranges to large mass manufacturers based in the East. Critically – we have access to grades of materials that genuinely make a difference to the action, durability and performance of a rod.

Century’s links with prime suppliers of raw materials are long standing and we have a detailed understanding of the materials we use in our products – from high strength to high modulus carbon fibres supported by complex resin systems that carry the load between the fibres. We understand the interaction between these raw materials and how to bring maximum benefit to the angler.

A passion for fishing is about escape. To change the routines and stresses of everyday life into the thrill of the environment, brimming with anticipation. Becoming one with yourself and your surroundings. Century understands this precious time is supported with tackle that works and performs. Simon Chilcott, who founded the Company, has always focused on the importance of understanding technology and where it meets the water.”

The Century website blurb there touched on the concept of high modulus carbon, which due to the way Century wrap the cloth can result in the production of smaller diameter blanks offering at least the same strength and power with up to 25% reduction in diameter, which in the company’s words delivers better distance potential by producing less drag through the air. The tip in particular is wrapped in high strength 3K carbon to deliver added hoop strength in major areas of compression. A second bonus is less wind resistance when the rod is on the tripod which reputedly translates into a steadier rod tip offering better bite detection.

THE ROSSLARE SMALL BOATS FESTIVAL

The Rosslare Small Boat Festival was initially devised as a way of getting dinghy anglers to trail their boats over to the east coast of Ireland in the hope of boosting angler visitor numbers in addition to those either fishing the shore and from charter boats. From what I can remember of those very early days, Bob Gledhill may well have had some input into the initial planning, a point I put to the current event organiser John Belger who vaguely recalled some mention of Bob, but who unfortunately couldn’t add anything further.

As far as the logistics of putting on an event of this type go requiring accommodation, tractors to put the boats in, plus contingency plans for when the weather doesn’t play ball as is so often the case around

the Irish Coast during the autumn months, that was all down to Liverpool based Leisure Angling owner Dave Hoghton.



I've fished the competition a few times over the years. But I missed out on the inaugural event back in 1985 which I believe just 5 boats took part in, a number which very quickly grew. Dave Hoghton invited me over to cover one of the very early following events. The fishing potential there was fantastic. Amongst many species we had a John Dory that year. And the only way the fishing changed leading up to the millennium was to get better and better year on year, as repeat competitors gained more knowledge regarding what lived where and when.

The event name has also undergone a few changes since its inception, the one constant throughout being Tommy Byrnes caravan park where all the competitors and their boats 'lived' for the duration. In the early days the rules of the event itself would also change year on year, sometimes even with a single staging. To understand this better, you need to understand a bit about the location and the fishing.

In the early years it was split over the two locations of Kilmore Quay and Carne. Not only did this offer more scope in terms of fish species, with the 2 venues facing different directions there would be a better chance of getting some fishing done at one location or other according to the direction of the wind if got above force 3 to 4.

Actually, there was a third venue too, saved as an absolute last resort for really bad weather, that being Wexford Harbour for Flounders, and possibly a few Bass and Eels if you were lucky. And we had some really bad weather to contend there over the years, plus some good weather too, with absolutely no limitations on where we went off looking for different species of fish.

The main competition was the species event. Along with consistency, the ability to understand and catch the largest variety of species is for me the greatest measure of true angling skill. Intensive studying of charts, arranging a variety of baits, and boats whizzing around in all directions looking for different marks is how I remember things. And in the evening in the bar there would be talk about who had caught what, while at the same time jealously guarding the marks that had produced them, forcing everyone who went, particularly the regulars, to get better year on year.



You could see this in the species counts and species mix which peaked at 43 one year. A good example is the Streaked Gurnard. I saw some lying in a trawlers fish box at Kilmore Quay one evening. I dare say that nobody knew how to identify them at that time. Now they are regularly caught, or more to the point, caught and recognised for what they are.

In addition to the overall species count there would also be nominated species for cash prizes every day. Normally you would get the list in advance. But it could change to the point that some days you weren't really sure what you should be looking for and ended up fishing for the wrong thing.

One particularly wild weather year they even organised a shore species hunt. Myself, Dave Devine, Paul Bennett, and Kevin Eardley formed a team which finished up with 13 species. But because there was a minimum landing size for unspecified species which commercial fishermen are not interested in, things like gobies and small wrasse species were excluded for not making

the size, and we ended up missing out.

Another year my car had problems at Fishguard and I missed the ferry. Next morning I managed to make it with the boat to the ferry terminal, but then had to leave the car at a Fishguard garage for repairs. A stacker truck towed the boat onto the ferry and another towed one off at the other side, and there waiting for me was Kevin Eardley with Tommy Byrne's 4WD pickup truck which was loaned to me for the week. That's the kind of spirit the event stoked up, despite the fierce rivalry that also existed. No wonder then it has gone on for so long, and has for many become an eagerly anticipated event on their yearly fishing planner.

A mark of how popular and well respected the event became is demonstrated by the fact that when in 1995 one of the competitions original organisers decided that Rosslare was no longer suitable and moved it to Cork, many of the Rosslare regulars who disagreed with the move decided they would carry on going to Rosslare anyway, which was when the name was changed to the Rosslare Small Boat Competition.

In 2000, the organisers again decided not to run the event, and still it wouldn't lie down and die. Competitors Phil Hallsworth and John Meaning decided to take on the running, persuading Norman Dunlop of the Central Fisheries Board, and Josie Mahon from the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board to assist, leading up to yet another name change to the Annual Rosslare Small Boats Festival.

Since the millennium, the original organiser, Leisure Angling has merged with Anglers World Holidays, an amalgamation which still runs the event to this day, going from strength to strength year on year in terms of competitor numbers and species mix, with as many as 45 boats taking part, including these days a healthy Irish contingent. So much so that big name sponsors such as Garmin, Daiwa, and Sea Angler Magazine were only too willing to come on board, all of which is a far cry from those early pioneering days when everything was new and waiting to be discovered.

BRIDLINGTON CHARTER BOAT DISASTER

Thanks to rigorous rules governing boat licenses, charter boats sinking, losing clients, and getting into serious difficulties more generally are thankfully very rare occurrences around the British Isles. But they do occasionally, as was the case when on the 11th August 1985, the Bridlington based charter boat

'Valhalla' skippered by Ian Taylor got into difficulties just outside the harbour entrance. Ian was returning to port with an angling party in deteriorating weather conditions following a bad weather alert. As the boat was about to make the harbour entrance it lost its rudder and was quickly swept towards the harbour wall.

Coastguards were on the scene within minutes of receiving the boats distress call, dropping ropes and ladders down the face of the wall in a desperate attempt to rescue the skipper and his party. Local fishermen were also quickly on the scene with more ropes and life-belts, which several of the anglers were able to make use of to get themselves to safety. A further 5 were airlifted to the shore by an RAF helicopter from nearby Leconfield. But sadly, 58 year old Kenneth Handly lost his life.

A couple of years after the tragedy I was fishing out from Bridlington with Ian Taylor who with much sadness spoke briefly about what had happened on the day. His abiding memory was of the almost superhuman strength you can find when called upon to use it during emergency situations such as on that day. Having made it off the boat, Ian recalled grabbing one member of the party by the hair and literally dragging him up the last part of the wall, taking his own physical capabilities far and away beyond anything he would previously ever have imagined possible.

BRITAIN'S TOP FLOUNDER FISHERY UNDER THREAT

The August 1986 edition of Sea Angler Magazine carried a disturbing story by Mike Millman, suggesting that Britain's record breaking Flounder fishery, the Teign Estuary from where Bill Stevens had caught his 5.2.0 British shore record of the day, was under threat from 'inappropriate development'.



The Teignmouth Docks Company had plans for a major redevelopment aimed at opening up the lower reaches of the famous estuary to larger ships, the most contentious of which would be to extend the docks up towards Teignmouth bridge, which in turn would require large scale dredging, both to allow the bigger ships in, and to keep the area open to them, added to which were concerns about waste washed from the quays ending up in the water and polluting it.

To extend the docks to almost double their present size, and to permit the handling of larger vessels in the way the proposed plans envisaged would require the removal of 'The Sally', a large natural sandbank which dominates the harbour area below the bridge, around which channels have been cut by the flowing water. These channels are the main arteries of the Teign through which Salmon, Bass and Flounders currently freely pass. In addition, a deep depression, again below the bridge and currently used as a holding area by many of the Teign's famous big Flounders, would also be lost.

Spoil dredged from the harbour, which was already being dumped in the vicinity of Bundle Head, was being linked with a decline in the estuaries Bass catches by way of smothering the area where the harbours prawns breed, resulting in less in the way of natural food. The removal of 'The Sally' would further exacerbate the food availability problem by taking out the local sandeel population upon which so many of the estuaries fish rely. In addition to this, oyster beds would also be under threat, plus the livelihoods of bait providers who farm peeler crabs throughout the estuary, both for local use, and for transportation all over the country.

As you might expect, anglers and environmentalists were up in arms and fighting all of this. In particular, the way the company was riding rough shod over stakeholders by pushing for a private Bill through parliament to get what they wanted. So much so that cooperative partnerships began to spring up to work as a combined unit to fight the proposals tooth and nail.

Representing anglers' interests was the Teignmouth Sea Angling Society. Wider environmental interests were represented by the Teignmouth Harbour Environmental Co-ordinating Committee made up from 5 local organisations with vested interests in the river. Collectively they forced a 3 day public enquiry with the Council still sticking to their guns, saying it was committed to the proposals which were originally presented in 1982.

PW Comment: In 2018 I spoke with Mike Millman whose article it was in Sea Angler Magazine. He told me that the town planners had not allowed any of the proposed problem changes to go ahead. And to seal the areas Flounder fishing credentials, in 1996 the shore record went up to a new high of 5.7.0 for a fish caught by Barry Sokell, a record which still stands at the time of writing (see Chapter 11).

THE HEADINGTON SHARK



Imagine coming home from work and finding a 200 Kg 25 foot fibreglass Shark impaled head first through the roof of your neighbour's house. On the 9th August 1986, neighbours of Bill Heine, an Oxford local radio presenter, were confronted with exactly that.

It was reportedly a protest sculpture designed by John Buckley and constructed by Anton Castiau inserted into Mr. Heine's roof on the 41st anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing, designed to demonstrate a sense of impotency over a range of issues ranging from nuclear power to the Chernobyl disaster.

Thirty one years on and still in place, the sculpture was given a renovation. Then in 2016, Bill's son Magnus bought the property at Headington just outside of Oxford to preserve the piece of work, which the local council had initially tried to find reasons to have removed, then in 2017 relented with a complete U-turn, looking to give the house listed status.

DAVE LEWIS

Back in the early 1980's I was appointed 'Features Consultant' at Sea Fishing Magazine, working alongside Bob Hawkes who was a seasoned magazine journalist, but who knew little if anything about fishing. My job was to recruit writers, commission articles, and help generally Bob with the routine planning and balance of the magazine. I also wrote articles of my own, one of which in 1985 was a report back on a trip which saw Brian Douglas and myself trail my 15 foot Seahog dinghy over to Fenit in Co. Kerry to explore the small boat potential there, then team up with Kevin Linnane to produce a film of our exploits for the Irish Tourist Board.

This trip, amongst other things, produced lots of big Monkfish, assorted rays including Stingrays and Undulates, plus a Bottle Nosed Ray or White Skate of 140 pounds, which was quite a feat considering the size of the boat, plus the fact that we only had one gaff, having never in our wildest dreams expected to see anything that big (inclusion earlier in this Chapter). A time when small boat fishing really was

in its infancy, unlike today when huge Common Skate and Porbeagle Sharks are now considered dinghy and even kayak fodder.



One evening shortly after the feature had been published, I received a telephone call from a reader who had spoken with Bob Hawkes at the office and was given my number to get more information regarding the fishing at Fenit. The name of that caller was Dave Lewis from Malpas in South Wales. Obviously not wanting to have to go over there and waste time sussing the venue out if he didn't need to, he was particularly interested in some of our marks, which I readily gave to him, adding the tag line that if he had a decent trip

and managed to get some good photographs he might get back to me with a view to writing an article, which in due course he did. And so was launched the illustrious career of Dave Lewis.

Following on from Fenit, Dave was ready and willing to write about a whole range of other topics too, including Bass, Smoothhounds, and jumbo Cod from his neck of the woods, all done in the days before computers, when double spaced typed copy was the order of the day patched up with 'gallons' of tippex corrections, leaving enough room between the typed sentences to make editing notes. Also a time of colour transparencies, which you got to see for the first time long after the event when they came back from the developers hoping they would turn out okay. Happy days. Journalists these days don't know they're born.

One problem, if you can call it that, was that both Dave and I being small boat anglers fishing in the main for the same range of species meant there was a degree of overlap. This meant that subject material available to us both was effectively halved. A problem solved in 1992 when Sea Angler Magazine editor Mel Russ came knocking at Dave's door offering him a lucrative contract which it would have been impossible for anyone to have refused. Along with Alan Yates, he was appointed to the post of contributing editor, and I can't think of two more deserving people.

Obviously, Mel Russ had been keeping an eye on what we'd been doing at Sea Fishing, in particular the small boat fishing stuff which was becoming very popular at the time. That post accepted, the flood gates were thrown wide open for Dave. And with him being equally proficient on the technical side of things, Shimano were the next to come calling offering him a consultancy. Why not. Top companies require the top men. And there was also a lady named Annie Ayton looking to expand her range of bespoke holidays to far flung corners of the World to include sea angling. I did a few of those myself including Namibia with Dave in 1999 where we took in excess of 15,000 pounds of fish from the beach after exploratory work by Dave and Clive Gammon, which hadn't gone too well the year before.

Next on the scene was Martin Founds of Anglers World Holidays. Again, with bespoke holidays, but this time with more of a bias towards the quality of the fishing rather than the peripheral creature comforts. In particular, holidays to Norway. It was Martin and Dave, along with exposure in Sea Angler Magazine thanks to Mel Russ, that put Norway on the UK sea angling map.

Dave tells me that things didn't go to well initially. With all its fjords and islands, Norway has one of the longest coastlines of any country, so there was a lot to take in and to explore in the hope of finding

suitable options. Thankfully, Mel Russ kept the faith, and very soon they had it all sorted. Again, I fished it with Dave in 2005, a trip that delivered on its promise in every way possible.



Exploratory trips with Andrew Alsop looking at the Shark potential out from Milford Haven was another string to Dave's bow, and look where that is now. So a very varied and meaningful list of contribution that not only has, but continues to be of great service to anglers from the UK and Ireland. And all thanks to one chance telephone conversation back in 1986. Or is that just me trying to muscle in on Dave's extensive angling and journalistic abilities, which in my heart of hearts I know would have shone through at some

stage, even if that conversation hadn't taken place.

From a personal perspective, though he still routinely tests new boats and outboards for Sea Angler Magazine, the small boat fishing has very much taken a back seat in Dave's busy schedule. Much of his UK fishing is done at a more 'professional' level now. If he's there to produce a feature, that takes priority over him fishing on the day. But it wasn't always like that. Scattered throughout the later Chapters of this book are numerous references to us fishing together for all manner of things.

I remember him once saying that if he wasn't involved with the article production side of fishing, his perfect day would be sat in a 13 foot Orkney displacement boat fishing for Smoothhounds, a species I know he has a great affection for. Instead, he had a 16 foot Orkney which I recall us fishing from for Trigger Fish in Oxwich Bay on a day with an awkward beam on swell. Being a planning boat user, I'm not a big fan of displacement boats, even though I cut my teeth fishing from them.

I can still remember how uncomfortable it was with the boat rolling like a pig beam on to the waves. But what a good days fishing it was. I also had a double figure Cod with him on a charter trip from Penarth when I was field testing the first prototype of my 'Super-Grip' uptiding lead (see Chapter 11). And so the list of fish and trips goes on, all of them successful with good company to boot. But now Dave's emphasis is on exploratory trips light line fishing in exotic locations, something we could all do with a bit more of.

THE CYCLOPS ROD

'Cyclops' was the first production fishing rod marketed with the reel line running up the centre of the tube as opposed to the more traditional approach of having line guides whipped at appropriate spacings along the outside length. If you flick forward to 1997, you will see that Daiwa dabbled with the same design criteria for their Interline range of rods. A novel idea using the entire power curve of the blank as opposed to individual contact points for the line, which according to Terry Housego who marketed the original rods under the name of Cyclops on account of them only having one eye where the line exits the blank, offered frictionless casting and line recovery.

The inclusion here centres around a test and review done for Sea Angler Magazine by Andy Rackham. But as it was Terry Housego who was pushing the concept, through one time UKSF Secretary Colin Howlet, Terry says he also field tested the rod for review publication in another of the EMAP magazines at the time, reporting that while it was fine on the tournament casting field where he achieved distances



up around 240 yard mark using it, actually fishing with it was another matter, with water coming from the wet line wetting the inside of the tube adding drag and acting like a brake.

The idea had originally come from a shore angler named Terry Eccles. Eccles had put together examples for his own use, incorporating an offset butt which dropped the reel seat sufficiently out of line with the main blank for the reel line to feed from a multiplier spool to go directly into the aperture, eliminating line angle, which might otherwise cause frictional drag as it touched the inner wall edge of the tube. The concept of laying the line along the length of the inner blank was said to do away individual points of friction, and therefore drag, in the way it would have had had it passed over points of contact such as external line guides.

This raises an obvious question about suitability of finish along the inner length of the blank, which if it was not perfectly smooth, could of itself lead to friction, or worse still, line damage. So, for the production rods, Housego used a Conoflex semi carbon tip and carbon butt with a precise internal finish.

The rod also had a funnelled trumpet like guide built into the exit point at the tip, again with eliminating line wear in mind, all of which was 'tackle tested' for Sea Angler Magazine in 1986 by Andy Rackham photographed here with the rod, who reported the action to be similar to that of a standard rod, but with a quicker recovery after making a cast due to the absence of rings. Andy also reported that it worked well with both multiplier and fixed spool reels, which is surprising, taking account of line coil compression by the small aperture after leaving a large diameter spool.

ANDY RACKHAM

Andy Rackham from the previous inclusion field testing the revolutionary Cyclops rod was a close friend of 'master caster' Paul Kerry. And while he did throw leads on the tournament field, coming onto the scene when he did with the quality of the 'other' casters doing the rounds at that time, motivation from a strictly competitive perspective would I imagine have been hard to maintain.

Fortunately, being a highly competent and highly motivated shore match angler too, he could at least put his undoubted casting abilities to good practical use by providing instructional material for publication in magazines such as Sea Angler, aimed at helping the magazine's readers put more fish on the beach.

THE LAST COALFISH RECORD OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Weighing in at 37.5.0, the last Coalfish record of the twentieth century was taken over a mid-channel wreck in 1986 by D. Brown fishing aboard Geordie Dixon's Plymouth based boat 'Artilleryman', with very few other specimens coming anywhere near to causing an upset in the 14 years of the century remaining.

This possibly can be explained by rising sea temperatures pushing what is essentially a fish of northern latitudes that little bit further up and out of reach, a suggestion supported by the shore record of 24.11.12 taken from Filey Brigg in Yorkshire by M. Cammish in 1995, and by the vast majority of big boat caught Coalfish since the turn of the century now being caught around the Shetland Isles.



WEYMOUTH PORBEAGLE BRACE



With the Isle of Wight and the grounds to the east of the island regularly grabbed the mid-channel shark fishing publicity during the 1970's and 1980's. So much so that it's easy to forget at times that other ports in the general area were also getting a share of the Porbeagle Shark action, as the picture here shows.

Skipper Sam Fowler and Southampton angler Chris woods pose with Porbeagles of 120 and 112 pounds taken out in Weymouth Bay, reported in the October 1985 issue of Sea Angler Magazine.

THE 'SEAREELS' SCARBOROUGH REEL COMPANY

Centre pin reels have been used throughout the entire history of sea angling, a fact which labels them archaic relicts of the past in some anglers' eyes. That said, even during the multiplier age, many north east coast anglers both fishing from boats and from the shore persisted in fishing with them to great effect.

Throwing leads out into kelp from rock edges for Cod, and dropping strings of muppets weighted by a large chrome pirk into a tackle hungry wreck, makes demands on tackle that can often best be overcome by a large wood centre pin. A Scarborough centre pin to be exact, which in 1986 were being sold as fast as they could be made, as Sea Angler editor Mel Russ reported when he visited 'Seareels' at Ashgarth in Yorkshire to see the manufacturing process for himself.



Amazingly, the Scarborough revival all started with ex-toolmaker Reg Borthwick and his enthusiasm for the trouble free, maintenance free, direct line approach of boat fishing with a big Scarborough, and him being unable to find one to use. So as you do, having all the necessary tools and engineering skills, he set about making one for himself, impressing his fishing pals so much that they 'placed' their orders, followed by a number of east coast charter skippers who saw them as ideal for tackle hire outfits on the basis that

quite literally nothing can go wrong, which eventually led to orders coming in from here, there, and everywhere, including Germany and the USA.

Historically, Scarborough reels were supposed to have been made from Beech wood. Unfortunately, Reg found he couldn't readily work with the stuff. It was the same with Mahogany and Oak, eventually seeing him settling for a wood known as Iroko on account of its very fine grain.

From blocks of Iroko, wooden drums ranging from 7 to 10 inches in diameter were turned down on his wood lathe, with some of the brass fittings similarly worked on a metal lathe, leaving only the reel seat to be cast in brass and hand worked.

Otherwise, all the reels component parts were hand-made by Reg, who also innovatively added a left-hand threaded centre pin lock to stop the drum locking up. The wooden drums were then polished and given two coats of quality marine varnish then sent out to do their stuff.

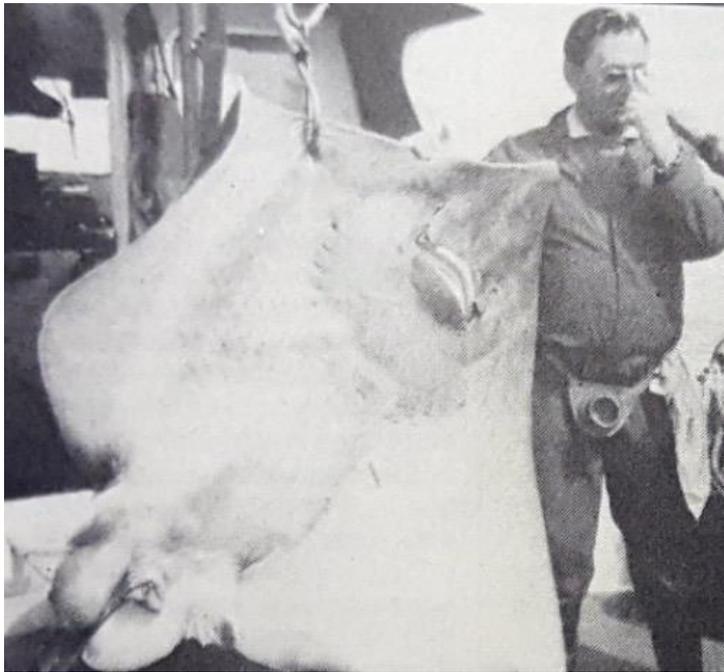
PW Comment: I saw quite a few Scarborough reels used in the pre-wreck fishing days while cobble fishing out from Bridlington and Scarborough. I also saw them used over the wrecks, where a loop of line would be wrapped around the handle to maintain the fishing depth once the jiggers had touched the bottom. I still have a brand new one in my tackle collection which I never got around to using. Perhaps I should give it a go.

COMMON SKATE RECORD DILEMMA

The British Record Fish Committee (BRFC) prides itself on standing firm by its rules, particularly the ones governing the weighing of fish. So much so that more than a few anglers with fish over current record proportions have measured, photographed, then released their fish, preferring to snub the old guard, which is either unable or unwilling to be dragged into the twenty first century.

As such, the British record list is a now something of a farce, listing fish which everyone knows have been beaten, sometimes on multiple occasions. On the other hand, you can't help but respect the com-

mittee for resolutely sticking to that which they believe to be right for angling, even if they are completely misguided in doing so. The problem is that this unfortunately is not the case. Despite protestations to the contrary, they have not been sticking to the letter of their own rules.



It transpires that when it suits their purpose (whatever that might be), rules can be waived or bent without so much as a second thought, as demonstrated by the current British Common Skate record caught off the Isle of Mull by R. Banks in 1986.

During a conversation with Duncan Swinbank whose brother Brian skippers their angling boat 'Laurenca' based at Tobermory, it transpired that the 227 pound record fish was actually weighed on the boat with the full knowledge of the BRFC, despite their insistence that ALL record fish must be weighed on firm solid ground – in other words, on dry land.

Skipper Brian Swinbank, who is also a skilled engineer, designed and built a special gantry with a weighing scale attached. This was then fitted to the side of the boat in order that big skate could be hauled up clear of the water, weighed, then immediately released.

In the case of the record fish in question, the weight was taken a total of 3 times, with the BRFC agreeing to accept the lowest of the 3 readings. A great bit of forward thinking by the Swinbank brothers allowing the record fish to be weighed, claimed, and released. But not exactly in the spirit of the sometimes unattainably high standards the BRFC claim to have set for themselves, and the wider angling public.

NOTE: As a species, the Common Skate *Raja batis* now no longer exists. The perfect opportunity then to put this rule violation right, by inviting claims for the 2 new species – the Flapper Skate *Dipturus intermedia* and the Blue Skate *Dipturus flossada* which *Raja batis* has 'evolved into (see Chapter 12, Decline of Cartilaginous Species).

THE ICONIC SHIMANO TLD RANGE

Sometimes iconic pieces of fishing tackle come along as individual items. On other occasions, they form part of an iconic range. Introduced in 1986, Shimano TLD reels fit into the latter category, the range initially comprising of the TLD 5, TLD 10 and TLD 15, with the TLD 20 and TLD 25 coming a little later, and the twin speed versions yet later still.

A no frills, affordable, nothing much to go wrong piece of kit offering years of reliable service across the entire spectrum, covering everything from flattie bashing inshore through uptide fishing and offshore wrecking to Common Skate. Then unfortunately, the smaller versions were discontinued, which is a pity, as they would have slotted in well with the current climate of maximising the pleasure of individual fish through scaling tackle down, as opposed to the fish mongering ways of old.



For me, personally, 2 recollections of TLD fishing spring to mind. The first was a night spent after Tarpon off Islamorada in the Florida Keys leading to an encounter with 160 pound specimen on a TLD 15 which it handled with ease. I well remember the lever drag feeling exceptionally smooth and always in complete control.

The second occasion was a trip to Norway where I decided I needed something a bit beefier than my Shimano Tekota 600. Dave Lewis, who had organised the trip, had long been singing the praises of the TLD range to me. In fact, he confided that if he had to choose just one reel to fish with for everything for the rest of his life, that reel would be the TLD 15, which as I've said, I was already impressed with. But no, I needed something bigger, so I opted for the TLD 25 which served me well both there, and later back home from my own boat for Common Skate, with specimens topping 200 pounds.

HUGE COD FROM St. BEE'S



During the 1980's, at a time when a number of venues such as Lancashire's Fylde Coast, South Wales, and Scotland's Balcary Point just across the Solway from Cumbria were grabbing all the big Cod headlines, specimen Cod catches made in the far north west of England, by and large were tending to slip in under the radar.

Granted, there was never a lot of them, but there were some quite sizeable fish from time to time, particularly from Whitehaven Pier. Away from Whitehaven, shore based Cumbrian jumbo Cod catches were pretty thin on the ground. One however was this beauty of 35.8.0 taken by Ian Dearden at night from St. Bee's in 1986.

THE BULL HUSS RECORD FROM MINEHEAD

In 1986, Cwmbran angler Mike Hall took the Bull Huss record up to 23 pounds with a superb specimen taken aboard Terry Arnold's Minehead based boat 'Minehead Angler'.

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT JACK REECE

Jack Reece has earned his place both in British sea angling history and in history more generally for a variety of reasons and at a number of time slots from the 1980's through to the turn of the century. My reason for choosing the mid-1980's is for the role he played as Detective Chief Superintendent in charge of solving the IRA bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the 1986 Conservative Party Conference.

Chief Superintendent Reece, who was on the verge of retirement and spending even more time fishing, always said that his ability to fish as well as he did was down to his CID training of thinking things through logically and leaving no stone unturned.



There was, and still is, a certain irony in this link to Margaret Thatcher, with Jack Reece an International level sea angler, and Margaret Thatcher's indirect responsibility for the decline in offshore sea angling, particularly along the Yorkshire Coast after the 1984 miners' strike, and through recession more generally during her 'reign', when money was so tight that for most families, priorities other than fishing came first leading to a slump in charter boat demand from clubs, of which the various miners associations were just one cog in the wheel.

Also, despite her supposed euro-scepticism, for her role in further integrating the UK into the European project with

all the impacts on our fish stocks that would bring through her signing of the Single European Act in 1986.

Jack Reece and his team would eventually solve the Brighton bombing case, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of Patrick Magee. But in reality, Reece had expected to be retired and fishing by that stage, which after the case was put to bed he was able to do, carving out a list of successful angling outcomes to match anything he had achieved with the police.

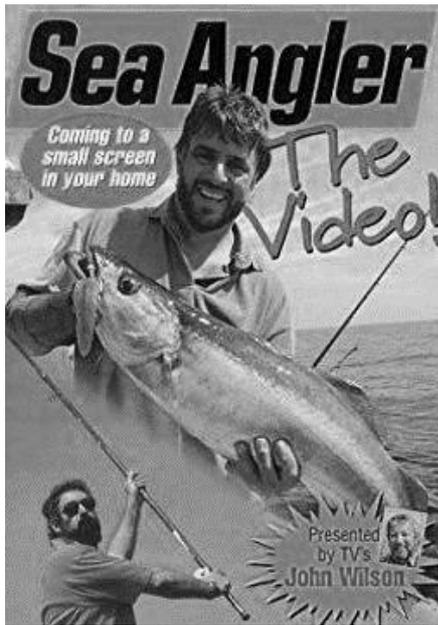
These included representing England at International level in Portugal; climbing through the ranks of the NFSA to become its Chairman, and taking the European Six Gilled Shark record with a fish of 1,069 lbs 3 ounces caught off the Azores in 1990. He also won many competitions fishing with his brother out of Hastings, throughout which time he always had to be vigilant, as he was reportedly on an IRA hit list following the solving of the Brighton bombing case.

MEL RUSS – SEA ANGLER EDITOR

From its launch date in 1972 through to the turn of the century and beyond, Sea Angler Magazine has been, and still is the market leader. Like a premier league football team, long term stability with a knowledgeable steady hand on the tiller, and continuity of approach when the time for change does come around has been shown to be a winning formula, and in that regard, Sea Angler has perfectly reflected that particular model.

First at the helm was Ted Lamb, replaced very quickly by Peter Collins, who on his retirement in 1985 handed over to Mel Russ, at that stage still features Editor at Anglers Mail, which was very much a case of replacing like with like. I personally always found Peter Collins a very hard nut to crack. To say we didn't get on would be no understatement. If he didn't like you or wasn't interested in your material he would say so, and that was that. As a result, the magazine not only flourished, it increased in popularity, so despite my personal disappointment, he couldn't have been doing that much wrong.

Similarly, Mel Russ has proved to be his own man. He too wouldn't suffer fools either, and like Peter Collins he would let you know. Perhaps not quite as abruptly, but you knew where you stood. Fortunately, this time around I was a little more acceptable, as Mel and I got on very well, and at intervals when I was not involved with other magazines, I did work for him right through to until his retirement, then for Cliff Brown in the years beyond that until I too finally had to retire.



Mel Russ took charge of Sea Angler at a time of transition for the magazine industry. To a degree, change was already underway when he was appointed. His arrival however coincided with some major shake ups, as publishing technology increasingly allowed magazine production to become a desktop affair using a Mac computer, digital photography, photoshop, and electronic editing. Also, there was the possibility to check in situ and adjust as required, offering endless possibilities, which in many ways put extra demands on both editorial staff and contributors to produce material of the highest standard, because the finished product could now replicate that.

In 2012 I drove down to the Bauer Publishing HQ at Peterborough to meet up with Mel and record an audio interview with him for archive, the content of which I'm using here as my inclusion notes. A very busy open plan office with Sea Angler occupying just part of one row of desks, which kind-of blew away the picture myself and a lot of other people have, which was of a private

office where the boss sits with his feet on the desk waiting for contributor copy to arrive, which then gets worked on in between freebie fishing trips and trying out loads of freebie tackle.

Mel very quickly put me right on that one. It's a complete misconception he told me. Filling 100 blank pages every month paired up to 40 pages of support advertising doesn't leave much time for anything much else, including getting the issue out on time. You can't sit around waiting for things to happen he insisted. You have to be proactive and make it happen. Editorial pagers don't fill themselves. You are quite literally torn in all directions, and as such need to be well organised with a good loyal team. The buck, if there is any, stops with the editor.

As the market changes, so must the magazine, and to do that you need to be intuitive and stay ahead of the game. Big company's such as Bauer (formerly EMAP) must succeed. At smaller 'competitor' publications with lower overheads and distribution expectations it's a bit more relaxed. In 2012 for example, Kayak fishing and LRF (light rock fishing) were emerging potentials from within the sea angling umbrella, both of which needed to be monitored carefully. Also, the interest being shown by freshwater game anglers looking to use their fly fishing outfits in the sea.

All of this, on top of the more routine day to day stuff had to be watched very carefully, with adjustments in editorial planning made according to need as things develop. In addition, Bauer was also looking to move into digital publication. Perhaps not instead of paper, though that will undoubtedly come in the future. But certainly, complementing paper, with so much more scope such as photo libraries, video demonstrations, and all the rest.

It was while he was at Anglers Mail that Mel Russ developed his interest in practical sea angling. Then one day the editorial secretary pointed out an advertisement to him for the upcoming editors position at Sea Angler, then owned by East Midland Allied Press (EMAP), suggesting it would be right up his street and that he should apply, which he did, and as history shows, he got the job. A position earned on merit. Obviously, there was also a bit of politics mixed in the appointment too, by taking a key player away from one of EMAP's major competitors. But as Mel puts it, Peter Collins was always going to be a tough act to follow.

Initially he kept many of the 'old' writers such as John Rawle, John Holden, and Steve Mills as a foundation to build on. He also put more time into planning issues, and began sending out photographers to make sure the illustrative side of things met his high standards. And amazingly, in light of how we are all used to seeing Sea Angler now, he made a determined push for more colour content to complement the majority black and white features of the day. Fortunately, with technology changing, within 18 months the whole magazine would be published in colour, with Sea Angler's competitors obviously working hard to follow suit.

One thing Mel stressed when I pushed him about his thoughts on the direction sea angling journalism was or should be taking, was how he, and presumably Sea Anglers readers, were bored with the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) and angling politics. There were, and still are, issues which need to be addressed where politics has a very big part to play. However, reporting on in-fighting within large organisations didn't fit that brief.

Instructional, well illustrated content from people at the forefront of angling development was what he perceived the Sea Angler readership as wanting to see, and being the confident (some would say arrogant) leader that he is, that was what they were going to get, by commissioning features from the likes of Terry Carroll, Bob Gledhill, Alan Yates and Dave Lewis to go with, and possibly even replace, some of the writers he had inherited from the Peter Collins era. A list of names that have all been given individual inclusions throughout the various Chapters of this book.



As I said in my introduction, Mel Russ is a very keen sea angler himself, which also helps. And yes, the editor does get to field test equipment and fish in the pursuit of editorial content sometimes, all of which has to be squeezed into a very tough monthly working cycle. As such, fishing trips are always going to be work related. But they can be pleasurable too, and at times satisfying and rewarding, such as one particular day spent wreck fishing out from Plymouth aboard Tony Allen's boat 'Electric Blue'. A day which produced a lot of very good Conger, including one particular specimen to Mel's own rod which took two gaffs to lift into the boat, at which point it went berserk on the deck.

A fish so big that they struggled to carry it to the scales, where when they did finally get it there, pulled the needle around to 100½ pounds, giving him entry to one of the most exclusive angling 'clubs' in the land, the ton-up Conger club. The highlight of his whole angling career. A fish which in hindsight, and in these more enlightened times, perhaps should have gone back, something he tells me is the one regret on what was otherwise a real red letter day.

Adding to the work load, in more recent times, the magazine has gone from its regular monthly slot to a rolling 4 weekly program. As soon as one issue is finished the next is sat there waiting to be started. This obviously requires even more in the way of forward planning, along with a certain amount of

material coming in as it happens, reviving skills learned as a news editor at Anglers Mail. That works out at 5 pages completed each and every day, equating to 25 page a week and 100 pages per month.

In addition, there is also a seasonal element about which editors need to be very careful not to get caught up in a looped repeating trap, all of which needs to be considered at the same time as trying to cater for newcomers, Bass fanatics, angling budgets, age profiles, and much much more. And let's not forget the advertising which readers often complain about as taking up far too much space, little realising that editorial pages are supported at a fixed ratio by advertising pages. This absolutely has to be kept in balance and is therefore complementary to the editorial material, and must be positioned at the correct point to make the most potential advertiser impact.

My brief here is the history of sea angling during the twentieth century. As I've said throughout, where applicable, I will let inclusions run on past the year 2000 cut off point if this completes the story. In that regard, I could have included so much more from the interview with Mel Russ, but on reflection, as interesting as some of this is, his inclusion could just as easily have run with that material left out, which is what I have chosen to do. That said, I think questions about the present and the future for Sea Angler and other competing magazines does help complete the historical over all picture.

The fact that Sea Angler has both ridden and seen off challenges from a number of competitors demonstrates the magazines appeal, and in Mel's opinion, it has never seriously come under threat. When others come in wanting a slice of the revenue cake, the editorial policy is to pull out all the stops by producing bigger and better issues and offering subscription gifts. Loyalty from its talented writing team is another reason for its success. They and the production staff have stuck together like a family, and readers appear to appreciate this.

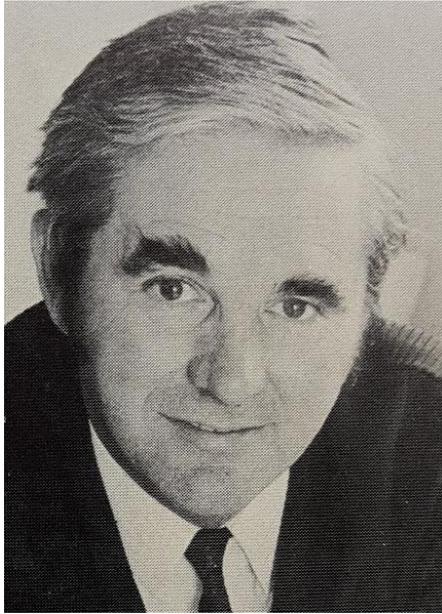
My final question was to ask if printed magazines, and Sea Angler in particular, have now seen the best of it, and is it perhaps now time to call it a day. With so much information freely available almost as it happens on the Internet and from social media, do anglers still need to pay for more of the same every 4 weeks? And with fish stocks in the state they are, does sea angling even have a long term future, particularly with so few young people coming into it (and other outdoor pursuits), preferring instead to sit in front of a computer playing games.

In answer to this, Mel quoted the words of veteran west country angling journalist Mike Millman, who has also said the same to me - "I think we've had the best of it; the best fishing, and the most exciting times. It was a privilege to have been a part of it, and now it's gone". But in Mel's opinion, magazine production will continue. Financially, it's secure. Yes, there are issues which need to be addressed, on top of which you can never hope nor expect to please all of the people all of the time. Sea Angler is quite happy pleasing 90% of them, and if it can continue doing that, then it's a job well done.

PETER COLLINS

If you've read through the previous account, it will be abundantly obvious that Peter Collins and myself did not hit it off. I don't know why that was. We never actually met, and with him at the helm of Sea Angler Magazine having steered it to the number one slot amongst UK sea angling magazines, he held all the cards. A man with total control over my entry at that time into sea angling journalism, so I was never going to antagonise him deliberately, for which reason I can only conclude that what I was producing at the time was 'rubbish'. But he was what he was, and in the context of sea angling magazines, he achieved great things. So, I'm happy to go a little bit off piste here and include an obituary for him published by the Telegraph on November 3rd 2011.

"Peter Collins, who has died aged 86, turned his passions for fishing and shooting into his livelihood when he became founding editor of Sea Angler and Sporting Gun magazines.



Peter Robert Collins was born on October 26 1924 in the Broadland village of Wroxham, Norfolk, and educated at the Paston School (Nelson's alma mater) at North Walsham. He began his working life in the family's boatbuilding and hiring firm Ernest Collins & Sons, but never took to it, much preferring to borrow a dinghy to go off fishing on the Broads for bream, roach and pike.

In 1940, with the Broads closed off and defended against German invasion, he was arrested many times and cautioned for illegal fishing. Eventually he was issued with a unique permit to supply pike for a local fish and chip shop (a venture which often earned him more than his wage at the family boatyard). All went well for 18 months until one day, while pursuing pike, he strayed into a mortar range run by the Commandos and received shrapnel wounds to an arm. After recovering, he joined the Royal Navy as a shipwright and spent three peaceful years in South Africa and Ceylon.

The war over, Collins became fishing correspondent for the Eastern Evening News, writing under the name "Broadland Otter" — a tribute to a persistent and successful thief from his bait traps. This regular column led to Collins's break as a sports journalist: aged 36 (and still unable to type) he joined the Angling Times and moved to Peterborough. He went on to become a forthright and campaigning founding editor in the 1970s of Sea Angler and Sporting Gun magazines. His books included Fishing the Norfolk Broads; Match Fishing (with Benny Ashurst); and Rabbiting (with a Broadland gamekeeper, Bob Smithson).

After retiring in 1986 Collins continued to enjoy coarse and sea fishing throughout the British Isles. He was a life member of the British Conger Club — having gained entry by catching a 40lb conger eel. This demanding sport would provide Collins with his most memorable cover for Sea Angler — a shot of a fisherman caught mid-scream as he reeled in one marine monster while another on deck bit into his boot.

Collins was a scourge of what he saw as "inept" officialdom, and spent much of his time battling with authority. Recent foes included the Broads Authority, Natural England, the RSPB and Delia Smith.

As a shareholder of Norwich City FC, Collins objected to Delia Smith's position as joint majority shareholder (with her husband, Michael Wynn-Jones). "She has made a fortune telling people how to cook eggs," he declared. "How on earth can she run my football club?" For a time he refused to attend matches. But he was somewhat disarmed when, after deciding to end his boycott, he arrived at the club's ground, Carrow Road, to be greeted by Delia with a kiss.

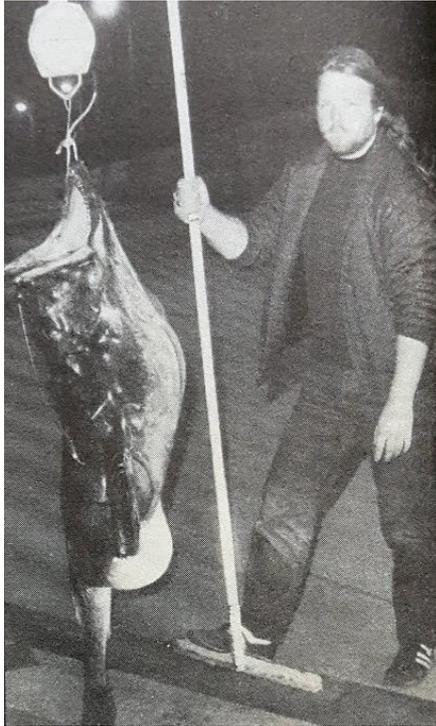
When he was 80, his long campaign against the introduction (for sporting reasons) into East Anglian fenland waters of the predatory Zander (pike-perch) culminated in a formal caution by the Environment Agency after he was found fishing for Zander with illegal set lines. Typically, he had welcomed prosecution — risking a £5,000 fine or a jail term — and claimed the caution as a victory.

After a late fight against the Great Fen Project — which was returning prime farmland (and shooting grounds) to marsh and mere — his final target was the Crown Estate: at the time of his death he was resisting the loss of fishing rights on a lake at Holme Fen, Cambridgeshire, which he had stocked with carp, some now weighing up to 30lb. His ashes will be scattered on the lake."

LEEDA FISHING TACKLE

Leeda is both a brand in its own right and a distributor of other market leading brands, some of which it also owns such as Wychwood and MAP, brand names which will resonate more with the freshwater scene than with sea anglers. Started in the 1980's, Leeda also manufactures its own rods and reels for all corners of the angling market, including sea fishing, which to quote their own advertising labels, their tackle is "the number one choice for millions of anglers starting out in fishing".

THE LAST ANGLER FISH RECORD OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Fishing out from Bangor Co. Down in 1985 aboard 'Bangor Quest', Sean Neill figured it was probably safest in terms of minimising tackle losses over the heavy ground they were drifting to do a spot of pirk fishing. This resulted in him battling an Angler Fish of 94.12.4 which he had to bring up through around 250 feet of water.

Initially all onboard were convinced he'd foul hooked a large Common Skate. But it was a very different shape that eventually broke the surface. Then the realisation hit the party that not having been expecting anything approaching that sort of size, they didn't have a gaff onboard to lift it into the boat.

A case then of 'any port in a storm', with someone finding a large pirk with a 10/0 treble hanging from it which was pressed into service as a make shift mini-gaff. It did the trick, with Sean's fish well beating both the standing Irish record of 71.12.0 and the British record of 82.12.0.

NOTE: The fish was donated to the Ulster Museum for display purposes.

STEVE SOUTER

Steve Souter started his sea angling as many youngsters do fishing for Flounders from his local beaches, progressing to the boat scene when finances and transportation allowed. It was then that he began entering competitions, and more to the point, getting results from some of them.

He stresses that fishing with quality anglers such as Jim Meiklejohn and Adrian Black, who were easy to learn from, would without doubt have been instrumental, and it was that which eventually encouraged him to start entering a few open boat matches where he took a bit of a 'kicking', but quickly learned a whole more.

Undeterred, he continued to stick at it, grinding out good results and learning yet more from the bad ones. It is was most definitely an evolutionary process which takes a certain level of determination and staying power to stick with. But stick he did, eventually winding up representing his country Scotland, more of which later, and as a tackle consultant for Daiwa where he spent 15 rewarding years before being tempted to 'jump ship' and switch his allegiance as their European Consultant across all brands.



The tagline “When he’s around fish are not safe” put out for him by Daiwa during his consultancy years with them is most definitely not the type of thing Steve would have wanted said about himself. He says it embarrasses him. But when you look closely at the stats, Daiwa do have a point. For without doubt, Steve Souter is one of the most accomplished, gifted, and championship ‘decorated’ sea anglers the twentieth century has produced.

Unfortunately, however, by his own admission he hates trophies and medals,

describing them as dust collectors. He doesn’t keep a tally of what he has achieved either, but when pressed, he tells me he can remember winning home international golds, and a whole collection of EFSA gold medals for top International team, two-man teams, and four man teams. Also, 4 (could be 5) EFSA individual gold pins for winning major events, plus lots of silver and bronze pins and medals.

As regards specific competitions, he has won the EFSA Scotland Cod Championship 4 times; the English Boat Championships; the Western Isles Open Boat Championships 4 times; EFSA Scotland Individual 7 times, and what must be getting on for around 100 meaningful opens and other major events, adding that he has no idea if anyone else has ever come even close to those stats, though he reckons that the likes of Neil Bryant, Richard Russel and Ray Barron could be potential candidates, all having won more than their fair share over the years. All of that said, for some strange reason, he has never done well fishing in the World Championships. NOTE: Not all of the above were necessarily won within the time constraints of the twentieth century. But as it started there, for completeness, at the time of writing (2018) that’s Steve Souter’s own best estimate.

A lot of competitive anglers, boat and shore, see getting a place in their respective International squads as probably being beyond them. Perhaps not from an angling perspective. But certainly, with regard to the process of selection, which when you speak to anglers at that level, is similar in structure for each of the four nations, but with each individual having arrived there with a different story.

Underpinning all of this is a string of good match results. That is essential before even thinking of make any sort of formalised approach. In Steve Souter’s case, he applied to the European Federation of Sea Anglers representative for Scotland, which he regards as the ‘real’ Scottish selection. The paper work this then generates includes a form to record the applicant’s results, experience, and other additional information that might help smooth their pathway onto the selectors prospective list.

International level fishing is primarily about the team. Individual success, if it comes, should always be a secondary consideration. Experience of fishing both for and with a team is therefore vital, which perhaps explains why International teams change very little. Breaking in by displacing an established team player is always going to be a tough ask. Conversely, staying there once you get in can also be very difficult, demanding consistency, whilst always fishing for the team, which means there is no place for selfish thoughts or ulterior individual honour motives.

On the other hand, it does demand selfishness with regard to your home life. As Steve put it, so much time ‘wasted’ travelling to competitions, getting bait, then away for blocks of time when the competitions are underway. And when they’re not doing that, free time at home is spent tending to bait and tying rigs and the like.

There is also a lot of time spent researching on the Internet. Anglers don't give up information readily, even to their own team mates, all of which collectively makes it difficult to get to the top, and equally difficult to stay there once you have. None the less, it's also difficult to walk away from. Then when you look back at what you've missed out on at home as a consequence, it can also seem like a waste of a life.



Steve's family life was put on the back burner. A lot of sacrifices were made. Probably more by the other family members than by Steve himself. There is, and has been, a cost to the family. Also, a financial cost with strains put on the household budget, because while you are giving your all for your country, it gives nothing back to you in terms of financial support. Transportation, air travel, hotels all come from your own pocket. On top of this, you miss out on your kids growing up and on other interests.

From May through to October in the Souter household it is generally mayhem for the satisfaction of the honour of wearing that blazer and representing your country, which as well as the competitive fishing, also includes functions and all sorts of other related non-fishing stuff which you probably don't like or even want to do. But it's compulsory. One goes with the other. That's the way it is.

With advances in electronic technology has come a very noticeable and worrying decline in the numbers of people just wanting to go fishing, let alone aspiring to represent their country. On top of this, for many species, and in a lot of areas around Britain and Ireland, fish stocks are in decline, which also doesn't help. Youngsters these days prefer an X-box to a tackle box, and when they do show some interest in club fishing where they can get guidance from older members, there are all sorts of hoops for clubs to jump through to ensure those adults coming into contact with youngsters have been suitably vetted for safeguarding purposes.

Is it any wonder then that club and competition angling is in a state of decline which many see as terminal? Also blamed in part for the current situation is conservation. On the one hand, disregard for conservation of fish and stocks by fishery ministers is what has got us into this mess. Now competition fishing is looking to take a lead, with some of the older hands finding it difficult to turn their backs on the ways of old where it was catch and kill. Not anymore. A case of striking the right balance and sticking with it.

Over the winter months when the competition scene is in recess, Steve tends to concentrate on shore fishing for pleasure, putting his boat gear away for a spell. The pressure of the boat competitions leaves him feeling burnt out and in need of a change. He's had enough. No more distance travelling either. A case of fishing for anything on the local scene for a few months before the merry-go-round starts up again. Flounders and LRF fishing will do nicely thank you. In fact, Steve sees LRF fishing as a means of improving his competition touch, leaving him feeling able to get straight back on it again.

As if all this was not enough, he also has consultancy work, which means getting out there getting the gear dirty and wet and to be able to give objective accurate feedback. It's not about getting loads of free tackle, it's about loyalty to the company by trying the gear in a variety of situations, which can lead to

several incarnations of a rod or a reel before its fit to put it out there in the tackle shops; product development and endorsement. As such, there isn't much substandard tackle about these days across the entire tackle industry.

Finally, there is the media work – magazines, TV and radio. At the time of interview in 2014, Steve had worked for the Sky TV show Tight Lines for around 19 years. He says he loves the studio stuff with all the banter, but again, it's about time constraints, which when you add in the consultancy testing and the other fishing, means there isn't much time left for anything else.

Twenty five years writing for Sea Angler also needs to be factored in. Steve acknowledges getting a lot of help from Sea Angler editor Mel Russ in the early days. So, with hindsight, would he do things differently given a second chance? The answer to that question was an instant and emphatic No. Steve Souter describes himself as impulsive. A man who doesn't like to sit on fences. He won his first International cap aged 19 in 1987, hence the date slotting here, a final figure for which he says his no idea other than to say it's more than 50. How many more will be added to that tally when he finally hangs up his rods remains to be seen. A very impressive CV.

BIG MEVAGISSEY HADDOCK



With so much other boat fishing going on, clean ground bottom fishing isn't often practised off the Cornish Coast. One of the main opportunities is when shark fishing trips are running a bit on the slow side. It's then that anglers try dropping baited Mackerel feathers to the bottom to occupy themselves, a practise that has produced quite a few surprises over the years, sometimes in the form of large Haddock like the one shown here from Sea Angler Magazine dated September 1986, with Bodmin school teacher Fiona James holding up a 10½ pound specimen on what, unusu-

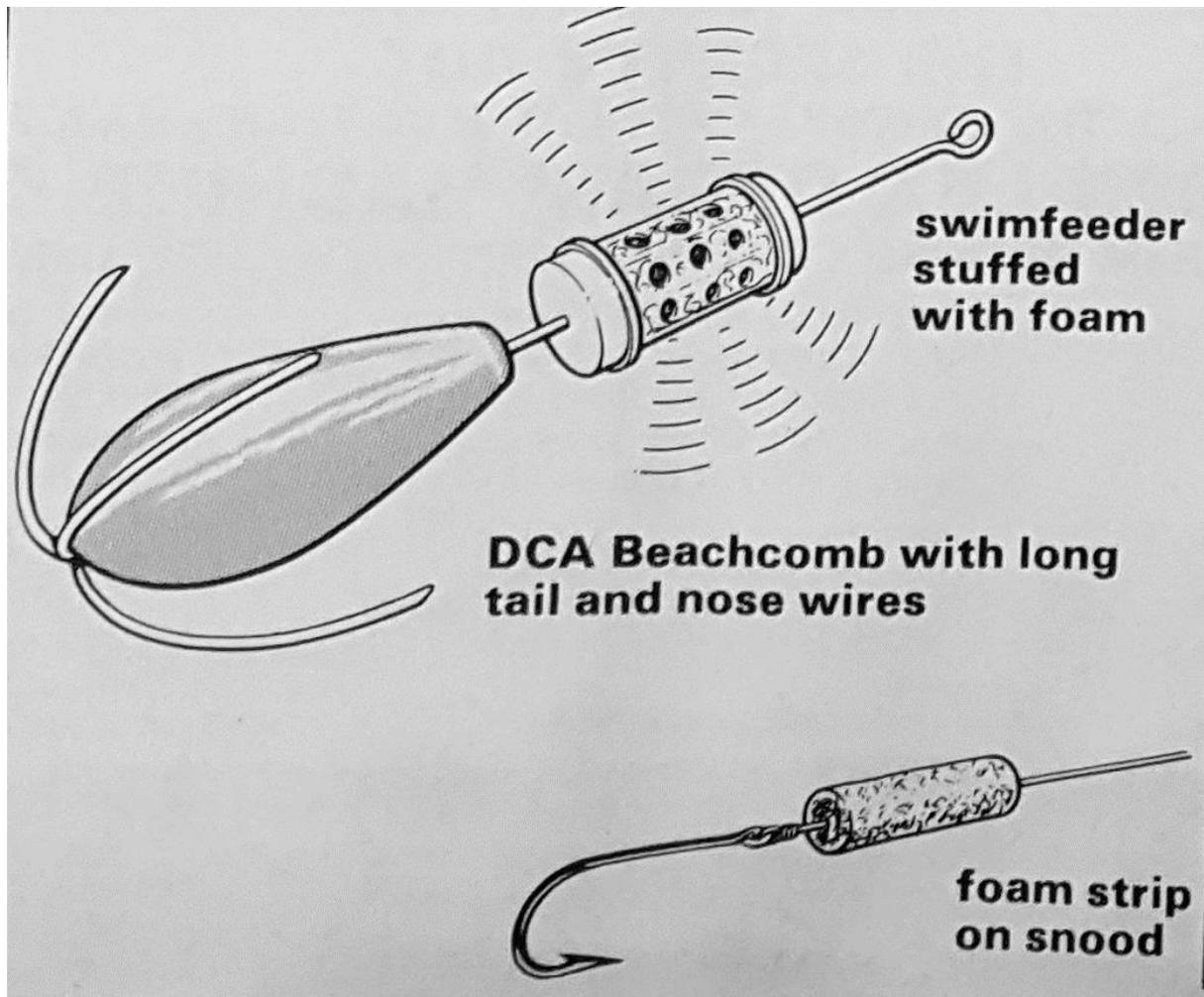
ally, was a dedicated bottom fishing trip. Ironically, Fiona had only gone along to make up numbers and isn't a regular angler at all.

BIOTRAK

Never one for bait additives or synthetic 'wonder baits', I have included Biotrak only on the basis of a very positive write up by John Holden in the Sea Angler Magazine May 1987 edition. As John points out in his opening paragraph, the concept of peppering up natural baits with chemical concoctions has been around for many years. He then goes on to identify 3 specific areas where a successful formulation would be of benefit, these being prolonging the scent trail, raising the baits power of attraction, and increasing its drawing range.

Personally, the only 'additive' I have come across to actually add something to a natural sea-bait is Pilchard Oil, which obviously isn't synthetic, though it is heavily processed and would not be available otherwise. Biotrak, created by British biochemists Martin Johnson and Philip Clarke working in America, is suggested in John Holden's article as having the potential to tick all of those boxes.

For obvious reasons, no specific formulation details are provided other than to say that Biotrak is both an attractor and an enhancer, comprising the attractant itself, a dispersing agent, and a binder. Clarke and Johnson wouldn't even file a patent for fear that their work might be copied. The liquid can either be applied via a nozzle directly to the bait, or the bait can be marinated in the liquid in a small tray or similar. It can also be used independently of the hook bait, one suggestion being a small swimfeeder type device as shown in the illustration here taken directly from the article.



John's findings make interesting reading. As a trained bio-medical scientist he was very careful in conducting a trial that was both meaningful in its duration, and replicable in its outcomes, testing Biotrak regularly over a period of 3 years. Using treated and non-treated baits side by side, sometimes even on the same trace and other times on separate rods fishing side by side, both boat and shore, John noted a 15% increase in catch rate spread across Cod, Whiting, Flatfish, Bass and rays – all common species, which in part or in full reply on scent to find their food.

In that regard, Biotrak is said to maintain its scent trail for up to 20 minutes, suggested as being far longer than many natural baits which might only last half that time. His meticulous monitoring showed that Biotrak treated baits show their advantage over untreated baits progressively in line with the time it takes for the untreated baits to become washed out. And used as shown in the diagram, Biotrak is said to have an even more marked advantage in coloured water.

TOP THAMES TOPE

Since their presence was first discovered during the early-1980's, big Tope have become a regular early summer target in the southern North Sea, with the last big tides of May and first set in June the main window of opportunity. So much so that in 1980, charter skippers John Rawle aboard 'Vicky Emma' and Kevin Benham aboard 'Valkyrie' put a few parties together for a concerted attempt on a new British record Tope fishing around the base of the sand bars that litter the outer Thames Estuary accessed from Bradwell-on-Sea.



Kevin's party was first to see some big Tope action, with Tony Bowman boating an excellent fish of 75 pounds which only narrowly bettered another huge specimen of 73½ pounds taken by England International Mick Toomer who occasionally crews for John Rawle aboard 'Vicky Emma'.

Not to be outdone, John Rawle also got in on the act with a fish of 76 pounds pictured here, caught on an Eel's head bait, which he has long recommended using throughout his time of pioneering the catching of huge Tope in the Thames Estuary, pointing out that Eels will be part of the staple diet of large predators feeding in estuaries.

The session in which John took his record beating fish was 'lumpy' to say the least. Not the best of days by a long chalk for boating and for accurately weighing a huge fish on a spring balance type scale. Mick Toomer even had to have the other anglers hold on to his legs as he reached over the side of the boat to grab the huge female fish, which was immediately put into the weighing sling and onto the scales.

Typically, and repeatedly, the readings ranged between 76 and 78 pounds, so the lowest weight was agreed by all onboard as the one to run with and the Tope was removed from the sling for a quick photograph before its release. However, when it was put back on the deck, several pups suddenly appeared creating additional haste in getting the huge fish back into the water and safely away.

Within days of John Rawle's 'record' fish, Kevin Benham was putting his anglers back on the big fish, this time in near perfect sea conditions, and still it was a struggle getting one particularly big fish caught by Phil Richards into the boat. After several nerve jangling minutes with Kevin trying to lift the huge fish in, one of the other anglers grabbed its dorsal fin with another taking hold of the trace which actually snapped as they attempted a joint lift.

Safely on board and in the weighing sling, it took the needle round to dead on 80 pounds. Another record beating Tope, which as with the others, was quickly photographed and released. And just for good measure, Dave Harris had a 68 pounder aboard Dave Cheeseman's aptly named boat 'Anguilla', that being the scientific name of the Silver Eel which has become the bait of choice for the big Tope fraternity fishing the outer Thames Estuary.

SCOTTISH SHORE RECORD COD AT BALCARY

With conditions looking good for an afternoon and evening session at Balcary Point, in late 1988, Ken Robinson drove over to Scotland's Solway Coast from Whitley Bay where he'd planned to meet up with fishing tackle entrepreneur Ken Grimmer from Wales. Their plan was to rendezvous at the Balcary

Hotel, but when Ken Robinson arrived, Ken Grimmer had already set off, even though he didn't really know where he was going.

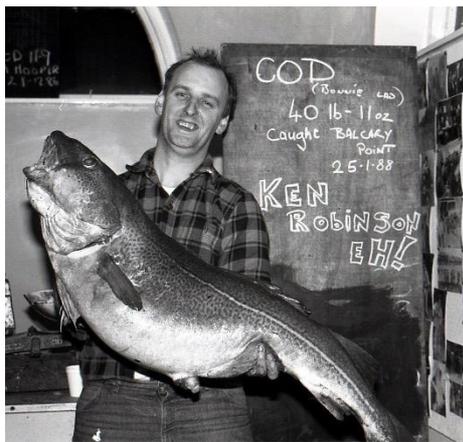
Eventually, Ken Robinson found him at Flat Rock, but with the prime mark of Balcary Point still free, it made no sense not to drag all their gear back over and fish there. Things were looking good. The water had plenty of colour in it, so they hurriedly set up just at the top of the tide. Minute later, their big black lugworm baits were in position, and save for a few bits of tugs and tweaks as the ebb tide started to pick up, that was it for a while.

The first change in fortune came in the shape of a smallish Cod of around 7 pounds, after which they sat back and waited again. Next, Ken Grimmer gets a good bite, hits it, and he's in to a decent fish on gear which to put it politely wasn't really up to the job being asked of it. Nevertheless, he was able to steer it close enough in for the other Ken to climb down and gaff. A fish of around 20 lbs. Ken Grimmer's first ever Cod in fact. What better way to open your account. So out went the baits again.

By this stage the weed problem was starting to ease as Ken Robinson brings in another fish, this one around 10 pounds. Out go the baits once more resulting in a few more tugs and pulls, when suddenly a proper bite starts to develop, which instead of slack lining as is very often the case at Balcary, the fish took off actually pulling line. To do that it's obviously a decent fish. So, being careful not to over-cook things, Ken R tried to ease it in, which it very clearly was not happy about, prompting the fish into making a few dead stops with him gaining only a few turns of line onto the reel here and there.

By this stage the tide was almost gone with the light quickly following it. The fish was now moving towards the Saddle which was a worry as it might drag the line over the sharp rocks leading to a break. This presented the dilemma of whether to climb down or try to guide the line around the rocks. Having gone for option two, and now looking to be getting the better of the fish, Ken then has the further problem of this being Ken Grimmer's first Cod trip, and it was he who would have to make the difficult 20 foot climb down the rocks in the fading light with the gaff.

Hooked up to a very good fish with a novice on the gaff, he then has to start walking backwards to ease the fish back within reach. So now he can't see either Ken Grimmer or the fish and doesn't have a clue about the status of either, until minutes later Ken Grimmer is on his way back up, at which point he throws the rod down and helps get the fish safely up top. Time then to take stock of what just happened.



Without scales they both know it's a very big fish, yet still they both cast back in and continue fishing. Well for around 20 minute or so at least, after which time, without any further bites, curiosity starts to get the better of them. How big is it? They need to get it weighed. But they also face the long difficult walk back in dark with all the gear, only this time they have 4 fish too, which necessitates 2 trips.

What has to be done has to be done. So to carry the fish they decide to hold them over their shoulders hanging down their backs, at which point the big Cod crapped all down Ken Robinsons jacket back. Not a pretty sight as they rush around Dalbeattie trying to find a shop still open with suitable scales on which to put the fish, which inevitably draws a complete blank.

Nothing else for it then, the fish would have to go back to Whitley Bay where it could be weighed properly.

Never having been to this part of Scotland before, Ken Grimmer has no idea how to get back to the M6 and home. Ken Robinson obviously has, so he tells Ken Grimmer to follow him to where the road crosses the motorway at which point they would part company with him heading south back towards

Wales. Well, it sounded like a good plan, and would have been had Ken Grimmer kept close to Ken Robinson as he passed through a set of traffic lights just as they changed to red. Ken G unfortunately wasn't quick enough to make the light, but not wanting to lose his guide goes through anyway, which was the last they saw of each other as a bright blue flashing light put paid to the convoy idea, leaving Ken Robinson to continue on his way back across to Whitley Bay on his own.

It was around 1 am when he finally made it back and let himself into the club house where the fish took the scales down beyond 40 pounds, clearly beating the standing Scottish record. So now he needs a witness. Mobile phones weren't available at that time, so he remembers a van parked up in a dark corner of the car park which is a regular haunt of courting couples. You can imagine the scene. Some lunatic covered in fish crap interrupting your performance babbling about a big Cod. The mind boggles. So off the van shoots. Then he spots a telephone box and decides to phone his mate Arthur to come and witness the fish.

It's around 1.30 am by this time, and having been woken by the call, Arthur's wife picks up the phone only to get a similar outburst to the previous courting couple. Anyway, he eventually makes it down to the club building, and the rest as they say is history – quite literally. A shore caught Cod taking the needle on the scale around to 40.11.8. A record which has not been bettered since, and one which in all likelihood, probably never will.

THE 'MONSTER' OF HERNE BAY



From a story carried by Sea Angler Magazine in 1987 declaring Paul McEwen's Bass of 19.9.2 caught off Reculvers as being the fish that has rewritten the history books; a fish many thought didn't even exist, taken on squid bait fished using 18 pounds breaking strain Sylcast line.

Initially while still out in the boat, Paul and his fishing partner had estimated it might go between 14 and 15 pounds. How wrong were they. A record which still stands at the time of writing which is

2018.

SHORE CAUGHT LESSER SPOTTED DOGFISH RECORD

As a boat angler forced by ill health to 'embrace' shore fishing, one thing I very quickly learned was that everything is relative. The same Lesser Spotted Dogfish *Scyliorhinus canicula* (now promoted to being the Lesser Spotted Cat Shark) so despised as a bait robbing pest when afloat, suddenly becomes a fish worth catching to the point of even deliberately targeting them on occasions when throwing baits in from the shore. Accordingly, being the shore record holder for the species carries no stigma at all in the way that I for one wouldn't be publicising the fact if I was credited with the LSD record from the boat. But that's just me. Other anglers will have different views on the subject.

Ironically, and in some ways deservedly so, the British and Scottish shore record for the species with a fish of 4.15.3 caught by S. Ramsey fishing at Abbey Burnfoot, Kirkcudbright in 1988, is bigger than the boat records in both the British and Scottish record lists, and by default, also beats the best from Welsh list, as Wales also contributes to the British list. Ireland on the other hand makes no distinction between boat and shore, with its list having a specimen of 4.4.0 from Valentia in 1982 in top slot, making S. Ramsey's fish the biggest caught anywhere around the British Isles, and the European all tackle record to boot.

THE UNDULATE RAY RECORD THAT WASN'T

Keith Burgoyne from Blackfield, Southampton, missed out on the British Undulate Ray *Raja undulata* boat record in the autumn of 1988 due to a 9 hour time delay between catching his potential record and actually getting it officially weighed. A time deficit during which it would most certainly have lost weight. How much weight is always difficult to say. But for a fish of that size, 5 ounces would not be an unrealistic estimate, an amount which would have given Keith the record by half of an ounce.

The fish took a side of Mackerel fished from his own 20 foot Hardy boat in 100 feet of water off The Needles. NOTE: It would be illegal to bring an Undulate Ray to the a set of shore based scales these days, with obvious implications for the BRFC.

NEWHAVEN JUMBO COD



Towards the close of the 1980's, the Newhaven based charter boat 'Nikaria' skippered by Chris Martin was making quite a name for himself for the size of Cod it and the anglers fishing from it were regularly bringing back to port, topped off by the 47.3.0 monster posed here by its captor Ted Hoyle, taken over one particular wreck with a growing pedigree for attracting and producing big Cod, including other specimens of 42½ and 44 pounds in preceding seasons.

Reported in the May 1988 issue of Sea Angler Magazine, the trip also produced a number of other Cod topping 20 pounds, plus Ling to 30¼ pounds, putting a grand total of well over 1,000 pounds in the fish hold by early afternoon.

At one stage Don Palmer hit 3 Cod all at the same time, the biggest of which topped 30 pounds, and the other 2 just under. Three hours later and another 1,000 pounds plus of fish had been added to the catch,

including countless double hook-ups of very large fish, 7 of which topped 30 pounds, in addition to that magnificent 47 pounder.

SCAPA SKATE NARROWLY MISSES THE RECORD



Fishing aboard 'Silver Fern' skippered by Pip Stout over the Bring Deeps off Graemsay in Orkney's Scapa Flow, and reported in the November 1988 issue of Sea Angler Magazine, Nottinghamshire angler Michael Fletcher boated a magnificent Common Skate of 217 pounds, a mere 10 pounds short of Britain's best.

Michael was fishing 3 Coalfish on a 12/0 hook and a 250 pounds breaking strain commercial monofilament trace when the huge fish took, which after weighing and the photograph shown

here being taken, was immediately returned to the water. One other Skate of 125 pounds taken by Alan Booth proved to be the only other skate taken over a 6 day trip.

BANNED CORNISH COD LANDED

Despite a Cod ban being in force for parts of the UK, including the south west of the country, Sea Angler Magazine's July 1988 issue reported Dutch angler Kobus Schouten fishing aboard the Penzance boat 'Silver Spray' skippered by Mac Thomas bringing ashore the third largest UK Cod ever, in the shape of a 50 pound fish taken from a wreck on Mackerel bait fishing 7 miles out into Mounts Bay. MAFF officials were said to be looking into the breach.

MARbled ELECTRIC RAY

On account of their southerly geographical position, when it comes to the 2 recorded Electric Ray species, the Channel Islands are often the first location in the UK to intercept what few examples ever make it up to our latitude. Usually it's with the Dark Electric Ray *Torpedo nobiliana*. However, towards the close of 1988, Martin Shales of Grouville on Jersey had a Marbled Electric Ray *Torpedo marmorata* of 5.8.4 from Bonne Nuit Pier, a fish which has been positively identified and put forward as a new British shore caught record. The boat record, also a Jersey fish, stands at 2.8.0.

UNUSUAL OPAH CAUGHT OFF LOOE

Fishing aboard the Looe based boat 'Paula' skippered by Phil Gould, 18 year old Jason Harvey hooked and landed an 80 pound Opa *Lampris guttatus* while feathering for Mackerel to use as bait.

IMPRESSIVE OIL FIELD COD HAUL



Fishing from a ship which normally carries oil in the North Sea, merchant seaman Keith Fairley had Cod to 47 pounds using a large Scarborough style reel fishing from the ship out over the Beryl Oil-field. Report from Sea Angler Magazine November 1988 issue.

SHORE ANGLERS ARRESTED AFTER TRAWLER INCIDENT

Father and son anglers Tom and Ryan Conduit were fishing from Chesil Beach in 1988 when a trawler passed by so close that it ripped their end gear away. Incensed by the incident, the pair began pelting the boat with stones from the beach, causing the boats skipper to contact the police who arrested the pair, taking them to Bridport police station where they were charged with criminal damage.

In an interview with staff at Sea Angler Magazine, Tom Conduit said he was annoyed by the incident. Not only him and son Ryan, but hundreds of other anglers along the famous fishing mark, adding that you could tell how close in they were by the fact that they could be reached by throwing stones. Mr. Conduit said that he had nothing against the police who were very polite and were just doing their job.

At the police station, Mr. Conduit came face to face with the skipper of the boat concerned, who when asked about destroying anglers' gear and interfering with their leisure, said he'd got to earn his living, and that it was just hard luck.

After a spell in the cells, the issue was finally resolved when the police acting as mediators got the charges dropped on condition that Tom and Ryan paid £45 to mend a window broken by one of the stones. A crewman was also hit, though that matter wasn't taken any further.

Responding to questions as to why the incident had gone as far as considering charges of conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace, Bridport police said there had been no other complaints about the conduct of the skippers, and as such, they were pleased that the final outcome was satisfactory to both parties.

WELSH RAGWORM FARM GETS GO AHEAD

The science behind ragworm farming was first explored by Sea Bait Ltd. (see Chapter 10) based up in the north east corner of England. Now a second farm has been given the go ahead by Preseli Council in Pembrokeshire for twins David and Adam Hoyle, along with their father John, to set up the infrastructure to potentially produce 10 million baits a year from a plant based at the Honeyborough Industrial Estate at Neyland on the Milford Haven estuary. The brains behind the venture is David who has a marine biology degree from Bangor University, with Adam, who is a chartered accountant, handling the running of the business side of things.

TRIO OF SHORE CAUGHT TON-UP COMMON SKATE

Pier fishing at an undisclosed location in the Scottish Highlands (presumably Lochaline on the Sound of Mull), over the space of 2 days, 3 anglers landed 3 Common Skate in excess of 100 pounds which were released, one of which could be have been considered for British record status. But not the Scottish record which already stands at 154 pounds for a fish caught in 1971, and which should in theory also be the British record. Yet another reason for a long overdue overhaul of record keeping in the UK.

The 3 anglers concerned, each of whom caught a Skate in the session, are David Neil from Ayr, Stuart Cresswell from Prestwick, and Stuart Morrison, who had the best of the trio at 133½ pounds. The other two weighed 115½ and 128 pounds, all caught in around 300 feet of water, each taking the best part of 2 hours to get in.

The biggest of the 3 fish initially tipped the scales at 132 pounds before being released. However, it was subsequently discovered that the scales were weighing 1½ pounds light with the weight adjusted accordingly to 133½ pounds. The fish had a wingspan of 58½ inches and a length of 78½ inches, which when I put these dimensions into the weight estimation table for female skate as the fish appears not to

have claspers in the accompanying photograph from Sea Angler Magazine's September 1988 issue, suggests a weight of 154 pounds, equal to the standing Scottish record.



British record claims require a body for verification, and this fish was released. Fortunately for Stuart, though less so for the fish, the biggest of the trio died and was found the next day, making a record claim more likely to be accepted.

PW Comment: the discrepancy between the actual weight of Stuart Morrison's Skate at 133½ pounds and the 154 pound estimate is concerning, particularly if the weight and dimensions are

accurate, unfortunately supporting the views of those who are against weight estimation, a camp which does not include myself.

THE PLIGHT OF THE NORTH SEA CATFISH



Never a common fish, but never an unwanted fish either is a good way of describing the Catfish or Wolf Fish *Anarhichas lupus*, which when it is caught by UK anglers, normally comes from the northern half of the North Sea in and around the border's region, with both the British and the Scottish record lists including the species.

Due to the rather complicated way in which fish recording is done in the UK, a problem brought about by England not having its own record list like the other UK nations, instead contributing 'only'

to the British list, at various times in angling's recent history, the British record has switched between being a Scottish and an English fish. For geographical reasons, neither Wales nor Ireland list the species on rod and line, and judging by the dramatic decline in Catfish numbers taken since the millennium, few if any English and Scottish anglers are likely to encounter one in the future either.

The close of the twentieth century saw the following rod caught Catfish records, all of which were still in place at the time of writing.....

The British boat record of 26.4.0 is held by S. P. Ward fishing from Whitby in 1989, paired up with the British shore record of 12.12.0 caught by G. M. Taylor which came from Stonehaven in 1978. The Scottish boat record of 13.12.11 was taken by D. Brown off Burnmouth in 1985, with the 12.12.0 Stonehaven fish holding the British shore record also occupying the Scottish shore record slot.

Always keen on the idea of catching a Catfish, which I did just the once out from Hartlepool in 1974, I would keep tabs on who was catching them and where. I even spent a day out from Hartlepool aboard the commercial fly shooter 'Adaptable' working well within sight of the land, which hauled up literally dozens of the things. That's how numerous, if that be the right word, they were back then.

Speaking to people who boat fish these days in areas where Catfish should occasionally still be showing, all now report a total lack. Even the commercial boats find them hard to come by. But when asked what the reason is, nobody has a definitive answer. Over exploitation commercially or by anglers is unlikely to be the sole reason, though all cropping of a species clearly at the edge of its geographical distribution is bound to have some effect. Catfish produce a natural ‘anti-freeze’ which should immediately hint at where some of the disappearance problem might lie. They do this to help combat extreme cold conditions, suggesting that the cold North Sea lies very much at the southern extremity of their range.

Once a reasonably regular, though always unexpected bonus fish from the big stone piers to the north of Whitby right up into Scottish waters, and a regular(ish) catch on pirks while Cod fishing offshore along the same stretch, you would be hard pressed to see even a single example today. A decline that has its roots in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century, which I am suggesting is linked to rising sea temperatures. So often we talk of decline with some species and increases or even new recordings to the south of our islands for others. To my knowledge, so far, nothing has actually become extinct around the British Isles. A prime candidate for that dubious honour is without doubt *Anarhichas lupus*.

PW Comment: Always a good source of information for both Scottish and North Sea waters is Scotland boat International angler Steve Souter, who I quizzed over the Catfish shortage when I was researching this inclusion. Steve recalled that Berwick and Eyemouth just north of the border always produced a few. In his experience, Stonehaven northwards around into the Pentland Firth also saw its share.

Commercial fishermen and divers also fairly regularly reported seeing huge Cats well in excess of the current records. But he was less sure at pinning the blame entirely on rising sea temperatures, suggesting that commercial activity, and in particular the raking up of the inshore to middle range grounds leading to habitat destruction would have also some part to play. No denying though, that in UK terms, this species started struggling in the closing years of the twentieth century.

THE ICONIC DAIWA SLOSH 30 REEL

Released in 1989, the Slosh, or to give it its proper name, the Sealine SL30SH, is actually the main player in a range of reels from Daiwa bearing the ‘Slosh’ tag, each having a different number to denote its size and position within the range.

Slosh also generated a number of derivative models, differing from the main range by way of features such as gearing configurations, bearings, and arguably, aesthetics.

However, it’s the ‘thoroughbred’ Slosh that we are interested in here, and in particular, the SL30SH, the important question being, what made it iconic; a standout piece of kit worthy of being singled out, the answer to which lies in its across the board popularity. A reel capable of being used for everything, from light to medium boat fishing and open beach fishing to working snaggy rock edges and kelp for Cod. In short, a thoroughbred multi-tasker that was (and still is) the ‘reel’ deal.

With no personal experience of my own regarding the Slosh (I’m an ABU and Shimano user), I again enlisted the guidance of Steve Souter who spent years working on tackle development with Daiwa. When asked what the reels standout features were, he unhesitatingly pointed to its massive 6:1 retrieve ratio, the first of its kind in a mass market reel, plus the fact that unlike some of the other quality reels out there, from a casting perspective, it was good to go straight from the box.



No tuning or tinkering required. A simple, durable, multi-purpose centrifugal braked reel which could be relied upon to give years of un-faltering service. Well, he would say that wouldn't he, except that at the time of our conversation Steve was no longer consulting for Daiwa, having switched allegiance to the empire building Pure Fishing. And still he was full of praise for the thing.

One feature however he wasn't too keen on was the way the reel's gearbox caused it to sit high above the reel seat,

which, if you have small hands, can make it difficult to wrap the thumb around the spool for line control. Otherwise, an uncomplicated, simple to strip down and reassemble star drag reel, which surprisingly, actually went down in price as the years rolled by. A model that is still available for reliable public service at the time of writing, some 28 years on from its launch.

ANOTHER SCAPA SKATE RETURNED



Orkney was once the Mecca for big skate, until unfortunately, their numbers there went into serious decline, forcing visiting big fish addicts to take their business elsewhere. The Island group had taken on the mantle from Ullapool before being 'forced' to then pass the baton on to Shetland, which in turn then passed it forward to the area around the Isle of Mull, where thankfully, a small refuge population was to be found.

In light of what has just been said then, it was good to see a skate of 127 pounds caught by Macclesfield angler Roger Lynch aboard the Stromness based boat 'Triton' skippered by Robert Swanney making in onto the news page of Sea Angler Magazine's October 1989 issue. Even better to read, that unlike many big skate in the past, the fish was returned, though looking at the photograph here, it appears there is still some way to go on the Orkney scene with regard to fish handling and conservation.

THE SCOTTISH BOAT TOPE RECORD

South west Scotland has long been renowned for both the quality and consistency of its Tope fishing. Luce Bay in particular, fishing out towards The Scares during the summer for numbers of pack fish often going up to 50 pounds, and Port Logan on the other side of the Mull of Galloway for fewer numbers of bigger Tope later in the year.

In my experience, Loch Ryan, just a stone's throw away which I fished regularly throughout the 1970's, was never a noted Tope mark. In fact, despite fishing Mackerel baits at a number of locations from the loch entrance to Lady Bay, I never saw a single Tope. Nor did I have any 'lost' encounters with fish which could have been Tope.

Despite all this, the twentieth century came to its close with Loch Ryan Tope occupying the Scottish boat and the shore record slots, both of which still stand at the time of writing, the boat record for a fish of 74.11.0 caught by P. Marsland in 1989, with the shore slot occupied by a fish of 54.4.0 by D. Hastings caught in 1975.

MORECAMBE COASTAL SEA DEFENCES – ROCK ARMOUR

Shore anglers having fished at Morecambe prior to 1989 will no doubt remember a very different venue to the one we are presented with today. In the 1970's on into the 1980's there could be literally hundreds of visiting anglers lined up all along Morecambe promenade fishing competitions over the high-water period.

A much loved opportunity, since made absolutely impossible in 1989 by way of a £12 million project supported by grant aid from the government carried out over 2 phases by Birse Civils under a partnering contract with the National Constructing Excellence Initiative, hyped up by the local council as a comprehensive improvement to the town's coastal protection. A concept based on placing a strip of huge lumps of rock in front of the promenade along the entire length of the town's sea front, the idea being that it will dissipate the energy of incoming waves and stop them over topping the existing defences to minimise flood risk to domestic and commercial properties.



Sea defences are vital, there is no getting away from that fact, and protecting property is an integral part of what coastal local authorities are all about. There are however different ways of achieving the same end, though all will not come in with the same price tag, which is always a major consideration. In this case, a project guaranteed to raise a few hackles, for which reason the powers that be at Morecambe claimed to have invited all potential stakeholders to a meeting to air their various concerns. Yet when you speak

to anglers who regularly fished Morecambe at the time, you will struggle to find a single person who knew anything about any consultation.

The general feeling is that the council had a budget and a plan which they were determined to press ahead with. A plan which destroyed the high water angling prospects of the town at a stroke. As a knock on, it will also have affected some incomes, as anglers when they visit a location spend money in shops, cafés, petrol stations and the like. But these weren't the only considerations.

The town is now stuck with a litter collecting, vermin ridden eye-sore, that has changed the very fabric of the beach many of its cherished visitors were there to enjoy. Sand migration caused by rock groynes hindering the free movement of the tide has created new collection points. One 'casualty' here has been the kiddies paddling pool which has been swamped by sand accretion, while at the other end of town at what was Grosvenor Skeer, the beach resembles a boulder field, having been stripped bare of whatever sand it had.



So bad is the beach around Oakley Road where Morecambe Dinghy Angling Club launch their boats, that getting trailers to the water at low tide is like driving an obstacle course, while at high water, some of the larger boulders when submerged present themselves as genuine collision hazards for incoming small boats.

The fishing itself has also changed, with a redistribution of hard and soft ground species. Worse still, having evaluated Morecambe's rock armour sea defences as something of an experiment, other

local authorities are now looking to follow suit, including nearby Wyre Borough Council, who from a start date of 2012 have effectively killed high water and disabled access angling between Rossall Hospital and Fleetwood golf course at a stroke, with many other authorities around the country 'worryingly' said to be looking to follow suit.

ANGLING BODIES SUPPORT BASS PLAN

The summer of 1989 saw Britain's major sea angling bodies agreeing to support a new size limit for Bass, new net mesh sizes, and proposed nursery areas put forward by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF). The delegation, with stakeholder interests, included representatives from the National Anglers Council (NAC), the Sea Angling Liaison Committee of Great Britain and Ireland, the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA), the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers (WFSA), the Cornish Federation of Sea Anglers, and the Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society (BASS).

Delegates expressed support for the bans on Bass fishing from boats and from the shore in Bass nursery areas, but were concerned with regard to how these bans might affect anglers' ability to fish for other species in those areas, asking MAFF to consider selective bans on Bass fishing only. Clarification was also sought on other points, including fishing by foreign vessels, by-catches of Bass in protected areas, monitoring of activities in these areas, and overall monitoring of the plan.

Protection for young fish at power station intakes was also raised, all leading up to MAFF confirming that as all nursery areas lie within the UK's 6 mile limit, foreign vessels would not be allowed in. There would also be no permitted by-catches within the designated nursery areas. (see further three inclusions below).

WELSH BASS ANGLERS APPROACH THEIR MP's

Bass campaigner Bryan Meade declared the governments proposed conservation strategy as 'watered down' and has approached Welsh MP's in an effort to get MAFF's proposals rejected. Twenty six of the thirty six Welsh MP's agreed to set up a committee to discuss what measures are required to properly protect the species in Welsh waters, with a view to convincing the Secretary of State for Wales that the original proposal of a 100 mm minimum net mesh size and a 36 cm minimum landing size for the species was required, hoping that there would be a knock-on effect for English waters.

MAFF STEP BACK REGARDING NEW BASS LEGISLATION

After all the promises; all the campaigning; all the hope, MAFF have knocked back protective measures for Bass with a minimum landing size of 36 cms (up from 32 cms) not expected until 1990 at the earliest. Gill net mesh size legislation has also been watered down. Instead of the proposed 100 mm mesh size being sought by anglers, the new limit will now be 89 mm, again brought into force in 1990 at the earliest, prompting concern over proposed Bass nursery areas which MAFF said required further consideration.

NO-GO BASS NURSERY AREAS

Following initial discussions involving stakeholders and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries Food (MAFF,) 32 Bass ‘nursery’ areas have been proposed as the latest move by the government to protect Bass stocks, of which 22 are in England, and 10 in Wales (Scotland and Ireland are governed separately in this regard).

Within a designated area, fishing will be prohibited for all or part of the year, and in some, shore fishing would be prohibited altogether. Organisations and members of the public were given until the 8th of September to comment, with full details of the proposal available through MAFF. (see also previous inclusions).

ANGLING COD BAN

During 1988, anglers in some parts of the UK were informed by the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) that the European Economic Community (an early incarnation of the European Union) required a cessation of fishing for Cod. All Cod caught by anglers would have to go back, which as you might expect, incited a huge swathe of incredulity and bad feeling towards both the UK government, and to their political masters over in Brussels, provoked by what angling’s governing bodies termed a bureaucratically contrived piece of legislation carrying a penalty of up to £50,000 for those caught flouting it.

European waters are divided up into what fishery scientists refer to as ‘boxes’, each of which has a quota for commercially valuable species which the member state whose jurisdiction a particular box lies within would be expected to enforce and self monitor.

This however takes no account of the fact that fish are highly mobile and at times inclined to migrate between boxes, leading to quotas for some species suddenly, and without intent, being exceeded. In addition to this, fishery scientists in their wisdom decided that rod and line fishing was responsible for a large portion of the quota take up in some boxes (sounds familiar), and as such needed to be included in any conservation effort identified and subsequently actioned.

Angling’s governing bodies wanted the ban to be on the marketing as opposed to the catching of Cod, which would have exempted angling from the prohibition. But no, MAFF weren’t having any of that and proceeded with a blanket ban in those boxes deemed to be under threat, one of which took in large parts of the southern England.

The fact that anglers, who are after all stakeholders in all of this, had not been consulted was yet another bone of contention. And further adding to the problem was a mix of anger and confusion in what turned out to be an on, then off, then back on again situation reimposed on the 1st November 1989 for vessels of 10 metres and under fishing in the English Channel and south west of the country.

THE RECORD EAGLE RAY



For some inexplicable reason, though there must be one, while the Eagle Ray *Myliobatis aquila* is a reasonably rare fish in British and Irish waters, the handful that are caught by anglers have over the years all been concentrated around the Isle of Wight and the adjacent mainland coastline opposite.

Adding weight to the argument was this record beating specimen of 61½ pounds taken by Mervyn Drew aboard Brian Monk's boat 'Thresher' fishing off the Nab Tower. It was actually caught within a mile or so of where the standing record it was about to displace was also taken. The fish took a whole Whiting offered on a 6/0 hook, and was reported in the November 1989 issue of Sea Angler Magazine.

THE SHORT BEAKED GARFISH

The first record of the Short Beaked Garfish *Belone svetovidovi* as a new addition to the fishes of the British Isles came in 1990, when eagle eyed angler Chris Cass fishing in Mounts Bay, Cornwall, thought that one of the Garfish he'd caught looked 'different' enough from the others to warrant further investigation.

How he defines the phrase 'looks different' is difficult to quantify, as both this species and the regular Garfish *Belone belone* look so strikingly similar that *B. svetovidovi* could quite easily have been knocking around in British and Irish waters for years without anyone ever giving it a second glance. Until Chris Cass came along that is, who sent the specimen to the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth for their thoughts and changed angling history.

The first record for Irish waters came along a few years later in 1994 caught by Eric Leijten at Courtmacsherry. The species had not been officially recorded on rod and line from either Scottish or Welsh waters by close of play.

Identification goes as follows....

Garfish *Belone belone* – vomerine teeth present in large specimens, the vomer being pads on the roof of the mouth. Teeth in the jaws comparatively large and well spaced.

Garfish *Belone svetovidovi* - vomerine teeth absent in large specimens. Teeth in the jaws comparatively small and well packed. Also has a more compressed body.

NOTE: Not to be confused with the similar looking Skipper *Scomberesox saurus* which has a series of small finlets between the rear of the dorsal fin and the tail and the rear of the anal fin and tail which are missing in both *Belone* species.

SCARBOROUGH 51 POUND COD



John Nelson was the proud captor of this massive 51-pound Cod caught on a pirk aboard the Scarborough based boat 'Perception' skippered by Simon Barnigham in 1989 and reported in Sea Angler Magazine.

HUGE SKATE ON THE ISLE OF LEWIS

Local Scottish angler Rick Knight missed out on a British Common Skate record with a fish of 138 pounds taken from the shore at Loch Roag. Unfortunately, the angler failed to realise the angling value of his catch, which well bettered the standing British record of 133½ pounds taken from Lochaline Pier, but not for some reason the Scottish record which stands at 154 pounds, which is possibly where the confusion arose. Scottish records are also eligible for British record status. Perhaps the captor of the 154 pound fish was only interested in the Scottish record scene (see earlier inclusion in the Chapter).

NORTH WESTERN BLANKS

While they made quite a name for themselves as producers of excellent blanks and finished rods for the coarse fishing scene, North Western Blanks based in Manchester, never really broke onto the saltwater scene in any sort of a meaningful way, which is a bit of shame.

I once got an invite to visit the factory at Middleton where I was given the VIP treatment. I remember them bringing out a load of blanks which I can only assume were not destined for finishing, because they then put them on the concrete factory floor and had me walk and jump all over them. Not an easy

thing to bring yourself to do. But they assured me it would be fine, and it was. Apart from a few superficial abrasions, I didn't manage to smash a single tube. Amazing.

The reason for the invite was to look around the factory and take away a range of boats rods produced in collaboration with Essex charter skipper John Rawle which I was to field test, report back on, then publicise. John Rawle, as everyone should know, was instrumental in inventing uptide fishing in conjunction with Bob Cox, so obviously the range included an uptide rod. Possibly even a couple of different casting weights. I can't fully remember.

As for the boat rods, these covered the full range from 12 to 80 pounds class following the recognised IGFA protocol. All excellent rods fully fitted out with quality Fuji fittings, and I caught lots of good fish using them. In fact, I still have some of them on my rod racks. But unfortunately, for whatever reason (possibly marketing), they never really caught on, with barely a handful of sightings by me or other people fishing with them from that day to this.

CHRIS CLARK

While it can be argued that Jim Whippy (Chapter 11) has the best all round CV in British sea angler, there is no escaping the fact that when it comes to shore match angling and representing England both in a practical angling as well as a managerial capacity, there is nobody out there, at home or elsewhere in the World to beat Chris Clark.

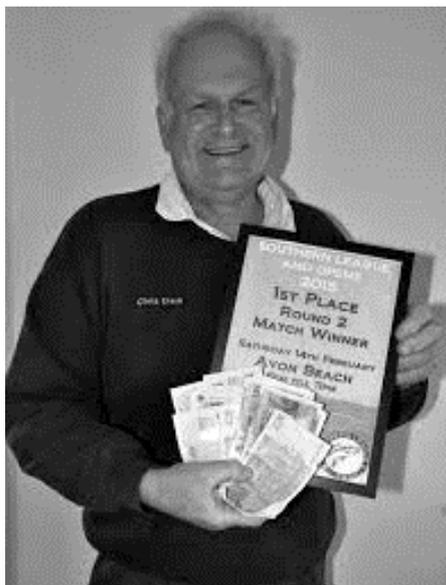
Despite fishing for wild Brown Trout in the streams of his native Hampshire from around the age of 6 and graduating to the saltwater scene at the quite late age of 17, Chris had never even entered a shore competition, let alone done well in one until after he got married, which as he rightly points out could well have something to say about the institution of marriage.

When he did start out on the shore match scene, he very quickly and equally visibly rose to the top, leading to his first England call up at the age of 30 to fish in a Home International, quickly followed by an invitation to represent England on the World match stage.

That was at a time when the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) had previously wanted nothing to do with the World scene, or anybody else for that matter, dictating how they should stage an event. Fortunately, the venue that year was Ireland, and being our closest neighbours and friends, the Irish were especially keen that England should be there. So keen in fact that they made the application and paid the entry on England's behalf just to have the team there.

That was both England and Chris Clark's first venture onto the World stage, and he has attended every staging since up to the time of writing here, either as a competitor, or some other capacity such as managing or coaching, coming away with more than 20 medals, both team and individual of all colours, which is more than anyone in the entire history of the event in which he was ranked number one. A CV entry more than matched by his success on the open match circuit.

Despite all of that phenomenal success, he classes his finest hour as being a bronze medal won in France in the same year that doctors told him he could be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life, and that either way, due to the nature of the numerous breakages and replacement metal work in his right arm, without doubt he would never hold a fishing rod again. Amazingly, the holding of that rod came within 4 weeks of him leaving hospital. His wife took him down to the rocks at Portland with his arm still in a brace.



His selection for the World Championships had already been made prior to his accident with a piece of heavy machinery on his farm, which had it not been for a mobile phone to summon help, could well have killed him. Aware of his prowess within the team, plus his determination to prove the doctors wrong, the England selectors decided to wait and watch, then eventually allowed him to compete, and not only has he been remained not only with the England set up ever since, he is also the sole representative of shore anglers World-wide at the Federation Internationale de la Peche (FIPS), angling's World governing body.

Since his accident, things have changed for him in the way he now has to fish. Ironically, this has actually helped his International career, forcing him to use the type of tackle the continentals are so very adept at using, which is often a far cry from the kind of gear best suited to fishing in the UK and Ireland.

THE BARROW BASS TAGGING PROJECT

Here again, the actual date for this entry is a little vague, though I'm pretty confident in slotting right at the close of the century. I received a call from Barrow-in-Furness Bass angler Mike Turner asking me if I'd like to drive over to cover a CEFAS Bass tagging project being done in conjunction with BASS, in which he and fellow Barrow angler Kenny Bowes were looking to provide data with regard to Bass migration and location return patterns.



Very much a case of poacher turned gamekeeper scenario for both men. Without hesitation I agreed to 'tag' along with them if you'll pardon the pun, after which a suitable(ish) weather slot was found, saw us on our way down the Walney Channel aboard Kenny's boat to a point where he put out a small narrow mesh otter trawl to scoop up a supply of live sandeels for the day.

Mike and Kenny had a whole list of GPS marks dotted around upper Morecambe Bay and the south end of Walney Island which they regularly relied on for results. Unfortunately, at the first couple we fished, Tope were persistently biting the baited hooks off forcing us to move, eventually pushing us out of the bay altogether to a mark along the base of a bank where we anchored in order that the baits could be cast using very light bullet leads to where the fish were feeding.

Unfortunately, by this stage, the weather was starting to deteriorate, giving us no more than an hour or so before conditions pushed us back into the shelter of the channel.

Long enough though to put dart tags into 41 Bass.

DUNBAR

Covering the boat potential at Dunbar for the angling press has seen me fishing out of the port on a couple of occasions. What I like about this venue, along with a number of other Scottish and English east coast ports, is that because much of the fishing takes place close in over heavy ground, and because the prevailing wind tends to come from the south west or west, it's often possible to get afloat there when the rest of the country's boat anglers are confined to barracks.



The downside of that unfortunately is that the fish typically tend to be on the small side, with Cod the dominant species. I personally don't think I've seen a Cod there in excess of around 5 pounds.

Very few Haddock these days too. Plenty of Ballan Wrasse on worm baits fished very close in, plus a good mix of other bits and pieces, including Sea Scorpions. But that's pretty much it, unless you fish for undersized small Bass around the power station outfall.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Sea Angling in Southern England (1981) by Peter Smith.

The Anglers Mail Guide to Basic Sea Fishing (1981) by John Ingham & Roy Westwood.

Sea Angling from the Shore (1982) by Ray Forsberg.

200 Sea Fishing Tips (1982) by Ivan & Ivor Garey.

The Sea Anglers Guide to Britain and Ireland (1982) by John Darling.

Long Distance Casting (1982) by John Holden.

The Beach Fisherman's Tackle Guide (1983) by John Holden.

The Penguin Guide to Sea Fishing in Britain and Ireland for Shore and Boat Anglers (1983) by Ted Lamb.

Sea Fishing (1983) by Trevor Housby.

Sea Fishing (Fishing Skills) (1984) by Tony Whieldon.

Dinghy Fishing at Sea (1984) by Phill Williams and Brian Douglas. Long Distance Casting and

Long Range Casting and Fishing Techniques (1984) by Paul Kerry.

The Anglers Guide to Sea Fishing: A Practical Guide to the Successful Techniques of Catching Fish from Pier, Beach and Boat (1985) by Bill Howes.

Big Game Fishing (1985) by Trevor Housby.

The Sea Anglers Sporting Fish (1985) by Mike Millman.

Beach Fishing (1986) by John Holden.

Dream Fishing (1986) by Trevor Housby.

Operation Sea Angler (1986) by (1983??) Mike Ladle & Terence Gledhill.

Beach Casting (Fishing Skills) (1987) by Tony Whieldon.

Cod Fishing (1987) by John Rawle.

Hooked on Bass (1988) by Mike Ladle.

The Complete Boat Angler (1988) by Bob Gledhill.

Specimen Hunters Handbook (1988) by Trevor Housby.

The Graeme Pullen Guide to Sea Fishing Baits (1988) by Graeme Pullen.

Sea Boat Fishing (1988) by John Burgess.

New "Anglers Mail" Guide to Sea Fishing (1989) by Chris Clark.

The Guinness Book of Sea Fishing: A Guide to Light Tackle Techniques for Shore and Boat Fishing in British Waters (1989) by Brian Harris.

Go Fishing for Cod (1989) by Graeme Pullen.

Bass: Strategy & Confidence (1989) by Mike Thrussell.

Uptide and Boat Casting (1990) by Bob Cox.

First Run Shark (1990) by Mike Thrussell.

Sea Fishing from Kent to Cornwall (1990) by Mel Russ.,

Beach Fisherman's Compendium (1990) by John Holden.

I Know a Good Place (1990) by Clive Gammon.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

Sea Angling Monthly.

PW Comment: I wrote some of my earliest and certainly weakest sea angling articles here. But, you have to cut your teeth somewhere.

Sea Angling Handbook – published by East Midland Allied Press (EMAP).

PW Comment: Quite a difficult publication to research having changed its format and name on a number of occasions. It started life as Sea Angling Handbook in 1986. The summer of 1987 saw the first

name change from Sea Angling Handbook to Sea Angling, which was a Sea Angler quarterly publication published confusingly as a bi-monthly magazine by EMAP Pursuit with Mel Russ in charge. By the summer of 1988 it was all change again as it reverted back to its original title of Sea Angling Quarterly, and as the name suggests, was published every three months instead of two, with Mel Russ still in charge until 1992, when once again it underwent a name change back to Sea Angling and a publishing frequency of two months with Cliff Brown in charge. That lasted until the December 1992 – January 1993 edition which was its last, paving the way for the launch of Improve Your Sea Angling.

Sea Fishing - Marketed as Britain's biggest boat, shore and match fishing magazine

PW Comment: A magazine edited by Bob Hawkes who was not a sea angler. I was appointed Features Consultant tasked with recruiting contributors, suggesting articles, and editing their angling content. Amongst those I introduced to angling journalism are Dave Lewis and Mike Thrussell. I also wrote extensively for the magazine, only leaving my consultancy with them to go to university as a mature student in 1986.

Boat Angler - An East Midlands Allied Press (EMAP) publication launched with a winter issue in 1989/1990 with Mel Russ in charge. Wanting to concentrate on their flagship publication Sea Angler Magazine, in 1999 EMAP closed down Boat Angler and Improve Your Sea Angling, with Boat Angler initially being incorporated in the Sea Angler banner for a time.

Sea Fishing Today

Fisherman's Weekly – A Marshall Cavendish Magazine. Had sea angling content.

PW Comment: I contributed some articles here, and more particularly, photographs.

CHAPTER ELEVEN – 1991 TO 2000

The three stand outs of the final decade of the century have to be braided lines, World records, and Bluefin Tuna. Like them or loath them, and with braided lines I'm kind-of in the latter category, the impact of braid on some aspects of offshore boat fishing has been nothing short of miraculous. Switching to World records, the UK during the 1990's saw two all tackle World beaters with the Porbeagle Shark from Scotland's Pentland Firth, and the Conger from a mid Channel wreck. Speaking of Conger, amongst a wealth of 100 pound plus Eels, for the first and only time ever, this decade saw two caught by the same man on the same day.

With regard to the Irish Blue Fin Tuna fishing, the close of the 1990's running on slightly beyond the millennium saw a very lively short lived spell followed by almost a complete cessation, then a second wave several years later arriving well outside the time frame of this project, though there is some mention of it in the final Chapter entitled 'Legacy'. But while some of the fish in the initial 1990's wave were exceptionally large with charter skipper Adrian Molloy personally just missing out on breaking through the 1,000 pound barrier, the second wave fish were initially well down the size order. That said, they have since been but piling on the pounds year on year.

BRITAIN'S FINAL WEIGHED TOPE RECORD



During the 1980's and 1990's, Thames Estuary anglers, and Bradwell charter skipper John Rawle in particular, began searching out big early season female Tope with some outstanding success.

As with all large specimen fish, these are always going to be thin on the ground and therefore a gamble when you target them. But a gamble many anglers were prepared to take, and which when it paid off, often did so in spectacular style with specimens in the 60 to 80 pound bracket, and on occasions even bigger, including potential record breakers, taken while uptide fishing in shallow water well offshore.

I'm not sure if it was down to a lack of more conventional Tope baits early season such as Mackerel, but John Rawle and his anglers started fishing with Eel portions. Freshwater Eels were caught or bought, cut into suitable sections, then frozen or even taken on board fresh if they were available on the day.

John reasoned that a natural constituent of an apex predators' diet in an estuary would have to be freshwater Eels, a piece of theorising which again, to use the word 'spectacular', brought about spectacular results. The one downside here was the brevity of the targeting period which lasted for just a couple of sets of tides during late spring.

Always a man with forthright, outspoken, and well thought out views, John Rawle was actually one of the forerunners of catch and release, including if necessary British record fish, which were not claimed because of the British Records Fish Committee's inflexibility in not allowing fish which could be readily identified from photographs to be weighed at sea.

There had I believe, been some talk of allowing this in 1991, which was opposed by a campaign headed up by Mike Millman who was adamant that inaccuracies and potential ‘stretching’ of the truth would allow cheating to creep in, a line of argument I personally disagree with as there are always safeguards that can be put, but a line of argument that eventually won the day.

It’s common knowledge that the Tope record prior to the incumbent, also caught off Bradwell in 1991 by R. Chatfield, was bettered by other Bradwell fish on a number of occasions. I believe this was also the case in other parts of the country too. All fish which their captors decided would be returned to the water alive. What makes this whole controversy all the more interesting is that a Stingray weighed aboard John Rawle’s boat and returned was allowed to be claimed as a British record. So too was a Common Skate in Scotland. Where then is the consistency here?

I’ve spoken with Mike Millman at length on this topic and will be discussing it in full in Chapter 12. But there have to be ways of expressing the size of fish other than by weight, which when one is agreed for record purposes, would get around the introduction of inaccuracies brought about by trying to read a scale accurately in a bouncing boat.

We must now also consider the fact that some fish, Tope included, can no longer be brought ashore for weighing, which means that the 82½ pounder occupying the record slot at the close of the twentieth century, and still there at the time of writing, will remain in top spot indefinitely, or until such time as a solution can be found to the problem of record catch and release.

THE NAVSTAR 2000D NAVIGATOR & PHILLIPS AP



Decca as a navigation aid was introduced during the mid-1940’s (see Chapter 6) and was made available to those commercial fishermen and private boat owners who could afford it once it was declassified after WWII.

I first became aware of it when I was shark fishing out from Looe during the 1960’s. The shark boat skippers were commercial Pilchard fishermen who had turned their hand to angling to supplement their incomes when the Pilchards started to become scarce. As

such, they would use Decca to revisit areas where the Pilchard shoals had previously been located. I also remember the Plymouth wrecking boats using it to produce their monster hauls, but again these were often commercial boats turning their hand to rod and line fishing.

Decca did eventually start finding its way on to boats dedicated purely to angling, some of which would be operating as a business and others for pleasure by people with money. Plenty of money. Decca wasn’t a cheap piece of kit to operate, pricing itself well outside the affordability range of small boat fishermen like myself. We were still working with compass bearings, sailing times, and land marks, as indeed were many charter boats still, which were equally prohibited from having electronic navigation on the grounds of cost.

All of that would change suddenly when the Navstar 2000D and Phillips AP appeared on the market. Fixing a precise date for this has not been possible, but the Phillips AP, which was a similar unit available around the same time as the more popular Navstar, appeared around 1992. And when it did, marine

electronic navigation suddenly entered the affordability bracket of pretty much most people. A small, easy to install, easy to operate unit that would transform boat angling, and in particular, small boat angling.

It still had its drawback though. For starters, the set wasn't watertight, which in a small boat prone to taking on water, particularly in a bit of a sea when landing onto an open beach, it needed to be made 'elements proof', which I did by fitting mine into a purpose made fibreglass box with a Perspex front held shut by rubber bands cut from a car inner tube. It did the trick. The exterior mounted Baton like antenna was also a 'dampness' risk. But nothing a good daubing with Vaseline or silicone grease in the appropriate places couldn't cure.

If the truth be known, both the Navstar and the Phillips AP were cheap(ish) 'refined' versions of the original Decca navigator sharing the same operating system. Both relied on the land based Decca signals, and as such, both were subject to the same naturally generated inaccuracies which land based transmitters cannot fail but introduce due to the vagaries of the weather, and rain in particular, plus other atmospheric problems. As such, compared to GPS even in its most encrypted form, it could have its 'off days' to say the least, which for the types of fishing where pin point accuracy is a must, wasn't exactly helpful to put it mildly.

The favoured readout for these units was in longitude and latitude, though this could be switched to Decca if required, which was something I never did. Decca for me was one of life's mysteries which only the cleverest amongst us could even hope to understand, so I gave it a wide berth. None the less, powering the Navstar it was a Godsend, the accuracy of which we initially tested out by going to known points at sea such as buoys, then following the Navstar readings back to them to see how near or how far away we ended up.

That's what it took to give us the confidence to start working way out of sight of land. Of course, you could still get back using the good old compass, which we always carried as a back up. It was more a case of feeling comfortable about fishing far off open ground marks, which unlike a wreck, wouldn't necessarily be obvious from looking at the picture on the echo sounder.

Not the best navigation aids ever marketed then, but a huge jump forward at a time when affordable and accurate angling boat electronics was in their infancy. Also, a short lived system. The Americans had already developed GPS, primarily as a military tool (as ever), which was initially classified then offered up with encryptions built into it just in case it got into the wrong hands.

It took the shooting down of a Korean Airliner by the Russians due to it having strayed off course into Soviet air space on account of the navigation equipment used at that time to 'persuade' Ronald Regan to offer up the full GPS package to all comers in, something sea anglers will be eternally grateful for.

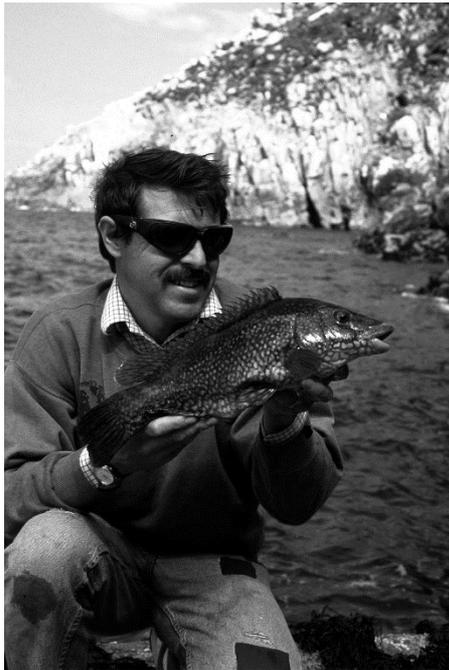
LUNDY ISLAND

Once the hide out of pirates and smugglers, with just a handful of people now living on it, Lundy Island is a peat topped 1,100 acre 400 foot high granite lump situated 12 miles off the Devon Coast about a third of the distance across the Bristol Channel from England to Wales. A venue which over the years has had speculative articles penned about its fishing potential, particularly for big Ballan Wrasse, in all likelihood written by people who had not been based on the island to put such theories to the test.

Day tripping visitors are catered for aboard the MS Oldenburg out from Ilfracombe, on top of which, there are some holiday accommodations to let. An interesting place which precious few people ever get to visit, and even fewer get to fish, exceptions to that last comment being myself and Graeme Pullen who were invited to spend a week there exploring the fishing on behalf of the Landmark Trust in 1991.

Travel on the island is on foot, or in the case of the locals, by quad bike, often following well worn goat tracks through the heather and peat. Access to the water pretty much everywhere involves a difficult and at times hazardous climb down, which for a vertigo sufferer like myself carrying fishing tackle isn't the best. But we managed, obviously finding some spots more accessible than others.

What we didn't find, despite our best efforts, was the supposed quality of Ballan Wrasse fishing that dreams are made of. Don't get me wrong, wrasse of a number of species were plentiful, including Ballan's up to around the 4 pound mark. But no monsters, though in fairness, bait, other than what we managed to take across with us was a bit of an issue. No beaches to dig for worms and no inter-tidal rocks to turn over looking for crab.



We also managed a couple of sessions fishing out aboard the islands 30 foot launch when both it and someone to drive it was available. A boat which when not in use was kept on a trailer in a small shingle cove adjacent to Rat Island. The hope had been to look at the Porbeagle Shark potential around the tide races at either end of the island, but the weather pretty much put paid to that. Lumpy at best, it got pretty wild at times, though we did manage to find some shelter, and some nice sandbanks once we'd negotiated the tide race off the northern tip, where caught a selection of Turbot, Blonde Rays, Small Eyed Rays and Pollock.

Shark fishing unfortunately was out of the question, which is a pity, as Lundy is known to be a hang out for Porbeagle's frequenting the Bristol Channel, plus the north coast of Devon and Cornwall, and is supposedly also a staging point for others en route to Cardigan Bay.

One afternoon while walking back across the top after wrasse fishing, we came across quite a sizeable water filled depression on top of the cliffs. We assumed this was freshwater on account of its pea green discolouration, plus the fact that unseen fish were regularly spotted topping. So we tied a short length of the finest line we had to the tips of our shore rods and lowered in pieces of Mackerel and limpet on the smallest hooks we could find, which resulted in us catching dozens of small Carp.

What they were doing there is anybody's guess, so we reported our findings back at base, at which point we were told of an even bigger pond and given its location, which in due course we fished with the same sea tackle, only this time with bits of bread from the breakfast table, plus a small waste bin lined with a plastic bag as a keep net. And there we caught dozens of Carp to around 5 pounds, a few Golden Orfe, and quite a few small Prussian Carp.

THE DECLINE OF FLEETWOOD AS A CHARTER PORT

As I've said elsewhere in the book, date marking inclusions such as the birth, rise, and decline of ports, fish bonanza's, and even trends is never easy, because invariably they tend to sneak in under the radar then fizzle out towards the end, often with no defining moments to pin an actual date on. To some extent this is true of Fleetwood as a charter fishing port, the rise of which I've covered already in Chapter 8.

In the case of Fleetwood's demise however, there are a couple of date marked moments, which, if they didn't specifically bring about the ports actual demise, certainly contributed to it, these being the peak

of Margaret Thatcher's 'reign' as Prime Minister, and around the same time, new boat licensing regulations brought in at local government level.

Despite becoming a Mecca for boat anglers from a huge potential catchment area from the late-1980's through to the early-1990's, in terms of facilities and boats, the port has never provided well for anglers bringing money into the town. At its height during the 1980's, much of the dozen or so charter boats operating out of the town still had to tie up at the top end of a muddy tidal creek leading up to Jubilee Quay adjacent to where the Freeport and the marina are now.

Boats would have to go out on the tide and tie up in the River Wyre, sometimes for hours starting in the middle of a freezing cold winters night, then wait to pick their anglers up by ladder after nosing in on to the Ferry Beach, risking clients getting wet feet, and the boat becoming grounded for a tide, which despite berthing in the marina is still the case to this day.



I know I'm going to come in for some stick with this next paragraph, but by and large, the charter boats generally weren't up to much either. I fished from them all, so I talk here from experience. What you have to bear in mind is the fact that charter boats reflect the port they are based at. It's not good business to buy a brand new boat capable of 20 knots for weekend fishing only in an area exposed to the prevailing winds where the sailing times to the fishing are generally quite short.

Investment has to be based on potential turnover, which explains why the majority of the boats at Fleetwood were old adapted plodders priced so as not to operate at an annual loss. There were a couple of exceptions to this. My long time friend Keith Philbin hand built his boat 'Happy Hooker' totally brand new. Chris Hurst also invested a lot of money in 'Liquidator'. As for the rest, by and large these can best be described as adequate for purpose.

The first body blow was Margaret Thatcher's recession years. This was a problem affecting many northern coastal towns, some more so than at Fleetwood. The Yorkshire Coast was particularly hit hard when the coal mines went to the wall. Miners clubs making regular bookings were the life-blood of some

ports. But it wasn't only miners who were affected. People working in or reliant on many other industries suddenly had to prioritise their incomes, and understandably, boat angling for pleasure was pushed well down the list, if indeed it managed to scrape onto the list at all.

When this type of thing goes on for long enough, anglers unable to go fishing very quickly become acclimatised to that loss to the extent that a sizeable number may well not return once the recession is over, leading to a knock on reduction in charter boat numbers. On the plus side, this creates an opportunity to jump on boats at short notice as an individual, even on premium tides and at key times, whereas previously it would have been clubs only booking the best tides a year and more in advance.

Blow number two for Fleetwood (and again other ports) was a change in the way 'skippers' tickets' were issued. Prior to 1992 these were administered by the local authority. Come 1995, charter boat operators had to satisfy the Department of Trade (DoT), which involved expensive surveys and lots of new date limited safety equipment, all of which is good for anglers, but costly for operators. Costs which had to be passed on in the form of increased charter fees, which with less potential customers in the first place due to the recession was another reason why some boats went out of business, in Fleetwood's case, adding even more doom and gloom to a town still trying to get over the loss of its distant water fishing fleet as a result of the Cod Wars, when pressure from the Americans forced the UK government to capitulate when the Icelanders threatened to close the crucially strategic NATO base at Keflavik.

There was a period during the 1990's, when so far as I am aware, Fleetwood possibly didn't have even a single charter boat putting to sea. One or two people dabbled here and there, but never really made a proper go of it. Speaking to Fleetwood's only current charter boat skipper Andy Bradbury, it's possible that 'Wyre Princess' skippered by Pete Riley continued operating for a time. Also, a chap named Steve Everdale who may also have dabbled before not seeing eye to eye with the boat's owner, which rapidly brought a halt to that venture. Today of course we have Andy Bradbury with 'Blue Mink', though that falls outside of the time constraints I am working to here. Sad really, because the ports decline wasn't linked to any lack of fish.



PW Comment: Besides being popular with anglers from within its geographical catchment area, Fleetwood would regularly attract big stars from the Word of TV and the stage who were working the summer season at nearby Blackpool. I would sometimes get mid week invites to tag along with those that had booked to fish with charter skipper Ted Peake.

Comedian and East Enders actor Mike Reid pictured here holding a Thornback Ray was a very keen sea angler. He would turn up in a silver Rolls Royce with the registration plate COM1C, which was a bit of a magnet for jealous idiots wanting to drag keys and the like along the paint work.

The famous comedy actor Sid James was another. I got the call to fish with Sid who unfortunately had to pull out at the last minute due to an urgent meeting he had to attend, only to hear on the news that he'd died later that week. Paul Melba was another, and Nat Jackley. Great days, which don't seem to come around anymore.

MORAY EEL ENCOUNTERS

Since 1980, sea temperatures are said to have risen by around 1 degree Celsius. That doesn't sound much, but it is sufficient to further encourage the ongoing push of southern European marine species progressively northwards, with 2 aspects of this push very noticeably coming together during the 1990's in the shape of the Moray Eel *Muraena Helena*, which if it is present, is a highly likely candidate to be encountered by anglers on account of its coastal nature and voracious appetite, with the south west corner of Britain and Ireland collectively the more likely locations to receive southerly species pushing northwards, a fact supported by the British record fish list.

The first recorded Moray in British waters was taken on a line off Polperro in 1834. Three others were subsequently caught in Cornish waters, one from Herm in the Channel Islands, and another off the Irish coast.



More recently, a specimen was reported caught off Lands' End in 1989 and a further 3 landed at Newlyn during the 1990's; one from Guernsey in 1996, and one off Kilmore Quay in southern Ireland in 1997, bringing the estimated total up to around 20 specimens.

But none as yet by an angler on rod and line, though having been plagued by the same species in other parts of Europe, in all likelihood, it's only a matter of time.

FOOTNOTE: To further support the notion that it is only a matter of time before some unsuspecting angler hooks one, a specimen was found underneath

the ferry ramp in St. Peterport harbour on Guernsey in 2011. A fish which so easily could have been that angling first.

MERSEY COD

I can remember a time when there were no fish, let alone Cod, entering the River Mersey Estuary. There were frequent periods when the river was officially classed as being biologically dead. Equally there were times, probably linked to dilution caused by rainfall swelling the river, when toxic chemicals leaching from bottom sediments accumulated through uncontrolled dumping throughout the industrial revolution, and in particular from the chemicals industry around Widnes and Runcorn, when the area around Seaforth and New Brighton could just about support fish, which were often quick to take advantage of the opportunity. Particularly during the late-1970's on into the 1980's, when big Cod were prolific during the winter months inshore along much of the adjacent Lancashire Coast.

I well remember reports of big Cod being taken both from the Seaforth Rocks, and from small boats anchored up just off them. Fish in the 20 to 30 pound bracket. It wasn't a regular occurrence by any stretch, but it did happen occasionally. Then during the second half of the 1980's, Cod of any sort of reasonable size started to become progressively scarcer for Lancashire sea anglers. It was the beginning of the end of the Fylde Coast Jumbo Cod era which these Merseyside fish were very likely linked to. From times of plenty to only small fish which never seemed to be any bigger the following winter due to commercial pressure.

Mersey Cod fishing owes its existence to the Toxteth riots of 1981 which eventually led to the creation of the National Rivers Authority (NRA) and its successor, the Environment Agency (see Chapter 10). Though both organisations had a remit that would allow some jurisdiction over coastal waters, the bulk of the work undertaken by the NRA and EA involved freshwater. The link between this and the Mersey Cod comes via the miraculous clean up of the river, progressively peeling back layers of historical toxic pollution like the layers of an onion, until such time that fish were able to repopulate its waters, which amazingly they have done big style.

I was employed by the NRA from day one of its existence, and spent much of my time working on the Mersey clean up, which gives me an additional boost when I'm out on the river fishing for the winter Cod. Over the years, fish generally, and Cod in particular, have pushed further and further up river past the Liver Buildings, Albert Dock, and all the other famous inner-city land marks, to the point where a decrease in salinity as opposed to an increase in toxicity is now the limiting factor. From running sewer in 1989 when the NRA was set up, to running Salmon in 2002 took just 13 years, turning arguably Europe's most polluted waterway into its finest sheltered water Cod fishery, an achievement which all concerned should be immensely proud of.



As with other parts of the country, Cod numbers and sizes have fluctuated over the intervening years. This has nothing to do with the Mersey's past history. I wouldn't go so far as to say it's a natural cycle, because commercial pressure, successful spawning years, and rising sea temperatures to name but 3 factors will also have had a part to play. Cod numbers and sizes in the Mersey seem to go up and down as they do elsewhere. What I will say is that now the Mersey has established itself as a Cod stronghold, the numbers and sizes inside are far and away better than those outside along the nearby Fylde Coast to the north, which was once Lancashire's major producer of winter Cod.

There have been years when many of the fish would be in the 5 to 8 pound bracket. Also, years when numbers were up and sizes were well down. Always there is the chance of the odd double figure fish, though the really big fish topping 20 pounds have become sparse to non-existent since the clean up years, simply because of the fact that they all but disappeared everywhere else at the same time. So, the

river is more than holding its own, with the added bonus that it can be fished in weather that would be a complete non-starter for boats operating outside.

Anything from southerly around to westerly, which just happens to be the prevailing wind direction for the area is perfectly fishable. I once fished with Tony Parry aboard 'Jensen II' in 57 knots of wind tucked in over on the Birkenhead side, which on the Beaufort Scale comes in as a full storm. However, strong winds from the north west and south east are another matter altogether, and are completely bad news.

Some anglers struggle and don't like fishing the Mersey. In some ways it is easy to fish, while in others it can be extremely difficult. The water flow added to the tide can make it very hard going simply to get a bait down in the feeding zone. Personally, I prefer to fish neap tides of 8 metres or under, though the charter boasts will stretch that to around 8.4 metres, and may even try to grab a few hours towards the end of a tide, slack water, and the restart of the run on the bigger tides..



Uptide fishing is an absolute must. Holding across the tide with a decent grip lead is the only way of being sure your bait is on the bottom, where it absolutely needs to be. Having an angle in the line shows you are holding out. The amount of lead it would take to hit bottom dropping down at peak flow would be enormous, and still you could never be certain that the bait is where it needs to be. With this in mind, for the stronger tides, I have developed a super-grip lead (see Chapter 11).

As I've said, Cod populations fluctuate. But never has there been a particularly bad season, unless some external factor such as melted snow water, or unprecedented volumes of inland rain are having a temporary effect. Every year right up to the time of writing, the Cod have been reliable. I remember taking a 7 pounder back in the 1990's from the car park of the Britannia pub which has to be 8 miles inland. And it isn't just Cod. Environmentalists have recorded somewhere in the region of 35 marine species in

the river, with Thornback Rays particularly prolific in the autumn and early winter, particularly if you mix squid into a cocktail bait with black lugworm when fishing for Cod.

DONOVAN KELLEY MBE

When he got his teeth into a subject, to put it mildly, Donovan Kelley was thorough in the extreme. Like a dog with a bone, there was no letting go until it was buried and finished with, a determination that would see him awarded an MBE by the Queen for his services to sea angling and in particular Bass, though he was no less dogged with his work on the controversy surrounding a case of 4 Ballan Wrasse supposedly weighing up to 12¾ pounds which he eventually unravelled in the mid 1960's (Chapter 8).

I think it's fair to say however that it's for his work on Bass and for BASS (Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society) that Donovan both should and will be best remembered, and rightly so. So what better way to present his inclusion than to invite his fellow BASS campaigner and friend Malcolm Gilbert to say a few words about the man.....

“Donovan was a keen sea angler all his life. Growing up in Plymouth he initially fished the docks for Pollack, Mullet and Mackerel. In his early teens his parents moved to Torbay where his interest in Bass began after meeting the then renowned bass expert Ray West at Dartmouth. Whilst fishing for Mullet

in Teignmouth he caught some baby Bass and they stimulated what became a lifelong curiosity about the life cycle and behaviour of species.

His early investigations into Bass were put on hold during the seven year period of war, but once home he became a member of the Marine Biological Association, and together with the director Sir Frederick Russell, formulated plans for a variety of field work studies.



Photograph: Left to right, Eric Dixon, Dr. Edward Fahy of the Marine Institute of Ireland, Donovan Kelley, and Malcolm Gilbert.

Donovan wrote regularly for the Fishing Gazette. As a Government auditor he retained an amateur status throughout and corresponded with over 400 people – too many to name -who had connections with the fishery. In the early 1970's, with the help of the Natural Environmental Research Council (NERC), fish were tagged over a five year period on Anglesey, followed later with corroborative studies in North Pembrokeshire, North Cornwall, Dorset and offshore in Essex. In 1981 research started focusing on first year Bass (0-group) survival rates up to maturity. Other tagging programmes followed.

It's difficult to over emphasise how important his contribution has been to understanding the biology of Bass, work predated by the Government's Marine Fishery Laboratory (later known as CEFAS), which gradually took off after Bass became recognised as a commercial species. Prior to the early 1970's commercial catches of bass were incidental and opportunistic and the species was widely regarded as an 'angler's fish.

Most of Donovan's research was published in the Journal of the Marine Biological Association and in testament to his work on Bass, when government scientists the late Graham Pickett and Mike Pawson published their book 'Sea Bass, Biology, exploitation and conservation' it was dedicated to Donovan and his wife Betty. In 1991 Donovan was awarded an MBE for his work on Bass".

AMBLE

Fed up with loosing fishing trips to the weather along the exposed open west facing Lancashire Coast, and always looking to find new locations where we could catch more Cod, in the early to mid-1990's, Dave Devine and I started trailing our boat across to Amble in Northumberland. You could launch there quite easily from the north side of the River Coquet back then, and could be virtually guaranteed both shelter and fish after a short blast from the harbour mouth over to the heavy ground to the south and east of Coquet Island.

It was obvious where the 'good' ground was because of all the pot marker flags. Both drifting and at anchor with worm and squid cocktails, we would catch small Cod to maybe 5 pounds all day long, with a few Wrasse, the odd Ling, and the occasional 'Granny Fish' or Sea Scorpion thrown in. And in really settled conditions we would also push well off to places like Craster Skeer, where both the Cod and Ling were often of better size with a few nice Haddock thrown in for good measure.

The last time I fished Amble was in 2011 which falls outside the upper date limit of this book. What I will say is that while the harbour and marina had most definitely changed, the fishing was still pretty much as I remembered it, except this time I was out on the charter boat 'Upholder' skippered by Dave Built, a Londoner who'd moved up to the north east in 1983 to escape the escalating cost of living down there, and to get some fishing done.

Fortunately, this coincided with the decommissioning of good numbers of commercial boats. Initially Dave was fishing from a small boat. He then bought 'Upholder' from ex-Lifeboat Coxswain Rodney Burge who I also spoke with at length on the day, getting a glimpse of what the fishing in this area had historically been like during the late-1960's and early-1970's.



During the 1970's, Rodney was commercial fishing for prawns and whitefish of which there were plenty, recalling the smaller mesh sizes used back then, and how if mesh sizes had been bigger, fish stocks generally might not be in the mess they are today. He would also drift some of the 30 or so wrecks within 10 miles of port, with yet more further offshore.

As this was 'commercial angling', they would be using big feathers and jiggers on heavy gear looking to fill up the fish boxes as fast as possible, which as he recalled wasn't difficult. In fact, you could have filled the boat, a fact not lost on some of the local rod and line anglers who started going out with him as well, eventually leading to parties of 10 taking hauls in excess of 6,000 pounds of fish gutted, adding that these days the fishing is nowhere near as good because all the big fish and big concentrations have long since been caught.

He recalled days when you would be bringing up fish 3 at a time maybe going up to 40 pounds, which in 50 fathoms of water was extremely hard work. It was amazing for as long as it lasted, which was for a few years. Until the other commercials started setting gill nets around the wrecks, which marked the beginning of the end.

Nowadays, when the water is clear, the wrecks don't fish much better than the ground, which to an extent follows the trend all along the east coast from the borders down past Whitby. They had it good with fish everywhere, and huge fish on the wrecks, followed by something of a Cod population crash.

This pushed skippers all along the North Sea coast to find other techniques, which turned out to be uptiding in the winter close inshore, and shads when Cod numbers started to recover over the summer and autumn months. But the Haddock, well they never recovered. In fact, Rodney couldn't recall having seen one since around the mid-1990's, and it saddened him to say that the improvement in Cod numbers when it did come around 2005, coincided with another huge decline in commercial fishing, highlighting exactly where the blame should be laid with regard to declining in fish numbers.

THE GEMINI LEAD

To understand the importance of the Gemini lead, you first need to understand the value and limitations of the Breakaway lead developed back in the early-1970's (see Chapter 9). Having its collapsible wires set into the side of the body of the lead, the Breakaway needs to lie on the sea bed, preferably having been pulled and held in position by a shallow angled length of line under tension.



That is why the Breakaway works so well from the beach, where line angle is always going to be low due to the elevation of the beach in relation to the angler, and length of line from the rod tip to the lead. A brilliant piece of innovation that completely revolutionised beach fishing. Unfortunately, less good when used from a boat.

Uptide fishing makes very different demands to beach fishing. The casting range is much shorter, often not

much more than an overhead lob, and the line angle is always going to be greater, even in very shallow water. As uptiding is effective down to maybe 90 feet and frequently used in depths of between 20 and 50 feet, then line angle is always going to be an issue.

Under those circumstances, a Breakaway lead would very likely 'sit' on the bottom offering little if any grip at all. To have any real chance of holding across the tide, the grip wires need to either come from, or be placed very close to the nose of the lead. In addition, the lead needs to be as evenly elongate as possible to make it want to lie down.

Established in 1991 by Lyn and Tony Caton, as with Breakaway, Gemini is a company built around the design of a fishing lead, in this case one capable of doing for boat anglers what the Breakaway did and still does for beach anglers, one exception here being that with the Gemini there is also the opportunity of overlap with the same leads being able work from both the boat and the shore. They called it the Gemini 100+ Sinker System offering finished leads bought over the counter, or kits with a mould and all the components for home production, which was very handy.

Time now to describe the Gemini lead options. The actual lead as it comes out of the mould has a stainless steel wire running through it from front to back. The backend has a loop on it for attachment and protrudes a short way, while at the front 'blunt' end a small length of stainless steel thread protrudes. This is welded to the end of the tail wire to negate any messing about trying to set the components in place ready to pour the lead.

This thread is important as it is to this that the plastic nose cone with the grip wires is screwed into position. There you get a choice of either a cap with four long centrally placed wires ready for bending

to give a fixed nose wired version, or one with 4 short hinged wires, which when set in position will release under pressure as in the Breakaway lead.

I say a cap with 4 hinged self-releasing wires, but actually it's a choice of 3 caps coloured blue, red, and yellow, with different wire strengths, allowing some flexibility in the hold the lead will give to suit different tide strengths and types of terrain. A very well thought out idea, particularly when you add in plastic screw on extensions to place between the lead and the cap to additionally displace the centre of gravity of the unit when lying on the bottom, ensuring it has an even greater potential for grip.

So successful did the Gemini lead become, and so innovative in his thinking with regard to terminal tackle and ancillary items was Tony Caton, that as the business grew, it spawned a whole range of additional items. Mentioning just a couple, the Genie luminous floating bead is something I invariably have with me, particularly when fishing for Plaice, while the Genie Link Clips are now a standard trace construction item to the point that it's difficult to envisage ever doing without them.

But best of all for me is the Gemini disgorger. I've tried a lot of hook removal gadgets over the years, including some from America, and this one beats them all hands down. It's easy to use, guaranteed in its delivery, and as important when handling fish with teeth, it's highly durable too.

ARTILLERYMAN & ARTILLERYMAN II SINK ON FISHING TRIPS



Those who fished with Plymouth wrecking skipper Geordie Dickson during the golden days of west country mid-channel wreck fishing will know exactly what I mean when I say that he was a hard man to like. You never felt relaxed in his company. A military man through and through, and how it showed, hence the name of his boats 'Artilleryman' and 'Artilleryman II'.

A genuine Geordie who was not afraid to speak his mind, and who, no matter what anyone else had to say, would always do things his way. A 'little bit' of wind wasn't going to stop him getting out there fishing. So much so that veter-

eran Plymouth angling journalist Mike Millman was banned by his wife Valerie from ever setting foot on the boat again.'

Geordie' would go on to lose both 'Artilleryman' and its replacement 'Artilleryman II' at sea, as detailed in an email reply from Mike Millman regarding my trying to fill in a few of the missing details with regard to the incidents.....

"Geordie Dickson did lose 'Artilleryman' and 'Artilleryman II' in the Channel. Neither were particularly good boats (both old) and both took on water that could not be handled. There were no casualties. In the case of 'Artilleryman II' Geordie was the last man to leave by helicopter as the boat went under, the rest of the anglers were picked up by boats. Geordie took up angling on retirement from a full hitch in the army and was a very fine navigator, but he pushed bad weather and had little respect for the sea. On one occasion the weather was so bad I decided with four others to fly back from Guernsey to Exeter rather than risk the trip back on the boat which arrived in Plymouth minus all its top hamper electronics

and a life boat, all swept away by a momentous sea. Things got so bad Valerie banned me from going to sea with him!”

This is one of those inclusions where it has been difficult to get as much accurate reliable information as I would like. I remember reading about the losses in the various angling publications at the time, none of which unfortunately turned up in a trawl through literally hundreds of archived fishing magazines at Angling Heritage, though I know the reports are there somewhere. So I contacted the RNLI HQ at Poole in Dorset to see if they could shed any further light from their archives, which drew the following response.....

4/4/1978 launch at 17:50, Fishing vessel 'Artilleryman' of Plymouth, Landed 1 man.

21/12/1979 launch at 18:10, Fishing vessel 'Artilleryman' of Plymouth, No service.

11/5/1984 launch at 09:25, Motorboat 'Artilleryman II' of Plymouth, Escorted craft.

15/5/1991 launch at 19:28, Fishing vessel 'Artilleryman II' of Plymouth, assisted to rescued 9 and saved vessel.

6/9/1991 launch at 19:25, Fishing vessel 'Artilleryman II' of Plymouth, landed 10 and gave help.

PENSIONER CATCHES DOUBLE FIGURE BASS



Harry Pearce, an 86 year old pensioner from Ramsgate, landed this magnificent 14 pound 2 ounce Bass fishing Herring on a 2/0 hook and 25 pound breaking strain line straight through. He also had a Bass of 7.10.0 during the same session.

Just to show that age is no barrier when it comes to catching big Bass, 75 year old Sam Lebrooke had one of 10.12.0 mentioned in the same report in Sea Angler Magazine January 1991, caught from the beach at Dawlish. Brian Inwood of Birchington in Kent also got in in the act with Bass of 15.4.0 caught on peeler crab.

MEL RUSS TON UP CONGER

Making the news instead of reporting it for once, Sea Angler Magazine editor Mel Russ etched his name into the British Conger Clubs prestigious ‘ton up’ list with a magnificent Conger Eel of 101½ pounds aboard Tony Allen’s boat ‘Electric Blue’ fishing out from Plymouth in 1991.

THE BLUE RUNNER

Increasingly, new species are being added to the various national record fish lists, and even more increasingly, these records are being broken as growing numbers of these new species push up to our latitude as sea temperatures continue to rise.

Amongst those showing ‘quite regularly’ at the time of writing is the Blue Runner *Caranx crysos*, a species I am more used to seeing on the other side of the Atlantic in the chum slick along the Florida coast, where we used to catch dozens of the things on small baits to put in the live wells.

The earliest report of a British or Irish rod caught Blue Runner I can find is of a 37 cm specimen taken off Portland Harbour in September 1992, with a second specimen reported taken on a hand line in St. Ives Bay in 1993. By 2007 the rod caught record had jumped to 2.8.12 taken from the shore by Nick Rogers fishing along Cornwall’s north coast.

Not recorded in Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE TRIGGER FISH



The Grey Triggerfish *Balistes capriscus* which is the species we see quite regularly around parts of the south and west coast of England, Ireland, Wales, and now even Scotland, is essentially a warm water fish at the northern edge of its range. A range which is constantly expanding as water temperatures continue to climb.

There are records, though sporadic, dating back to the 1960’s, when specimens were identified from lobster pots along the Sussex Coast. These precede the earliest reports I can find of anglers encountering them on rod and line. An-

gling catches however are not an accurate barometer by which to judge Trigger Fish distribution. For example, to my knowledge, none have ever been taken by anglers along my native Lancashire Coast. Yet they have been turning up in the intake filters of Heysham Nuclear Power Station for years.

I can’t say how many, nor how far back in time. I first witnessed this during the mid-1990’s. This drew comments along the lines of them being attracted there by the warm water discharge from the power station, which is fair enough. But that doesn’t explain why a warm water species would press on northwards for hundreds of miles through water too cold to suit its life style in the hope of finding the outflows at Heysham. I don’t know the answer either, but there has to be more to this story.

In the very early days during the 1970's, along the south coast, it was just odd ones showing here and there on rod and line, mainly caught by shore anglers fishing worm or crab on small enough hooks, and even on into the early-1980's they were still considered unusual and novel enough to be news-worthy. That slowly but surely has changed, and as more and more Triggers were caught, they began to show some measure of predictability, to the point that shore anglers in particular were able to work out the how, when, and where a little bit better, resulting in successful targeted results.

This was particularly true in summers following an early warm start to the spring on the back of a mild winter in areas where their staple diet of crabs and shellfish was plentiful. This typically means either mixed ground, or locations with shelter such as inshore wrecks, piers, or rock marks close to cleaner substrate where they like to shoal and patrol, a good early example of which is the wreck of the Royal Adelaide at Chesil Beach, though the whole of Chesil now seems to have the potential to produce Trigger Fish these days.

As the years have rolled by; as sea temperatures crept ever higher, and as winters barely get cold enough to freeze anymore, Trigger Fish have not only become more abundant in those areas they had been frequenting since the 1980's, but have expanded their range too, particularly in the south and west, spreading with some measure of catch predictability right up into South Wales.

There had been odd ones reported in lobster pots around The Gower before the first rod and line reports came in, which following the patterns elsewhere, were surprise occasional encounters. These however became ever more frequent, to the point that by the 1990's, if you knew where to fish, to a certain extent Welsh Trigger Fish could actually be targeted, which is what Dave Lewis invited me down to Oxwich Bay to try.

With both of us having an interest in catching different species of fish, we have helped each other over the years to add new species to our respective lists, and this was Dave offering me a chance to tick off the Trigger Fish, which for me never having seen one alive before let alone caught one, was an opportunity way too good to pass up.



I'd dinghy fished both in and around the Oxwich Bay area on my own before, so I was aware of the wreck lying just off the beach which exposes at low water creating a potential collision hazard. But with Turbot and Small Eyed Rays on my mind, it never entered my head to bother to try fishing it.

Dave on the other hand, being a local, was aware that Trigger Fish had started putting in regular appearances around this particular mark and could be successfully targeted using peeler crab baits, which turned out to be the case on

the day of our visit.

I wasn't the only visitor he would take there either. Dave Cooling contacted Dave with a view to writing an article on the Oxwich Triggers for Anglers Mail, a trip they fished on the 26th August 1992. The reason why Dave can be so precise is that mixed in amongst the other Triggers caught on the day was a specimen of 3.11.0 which beat the existing Welsh record. A fish which they kept alive in the boats live-well for official identification at Swansea and later released. A record which has subsequently been beaten, but a big Trigger Fish back then, and a species that it was rare to be able to deliberately target in Welsh waters back in the early-1990's.

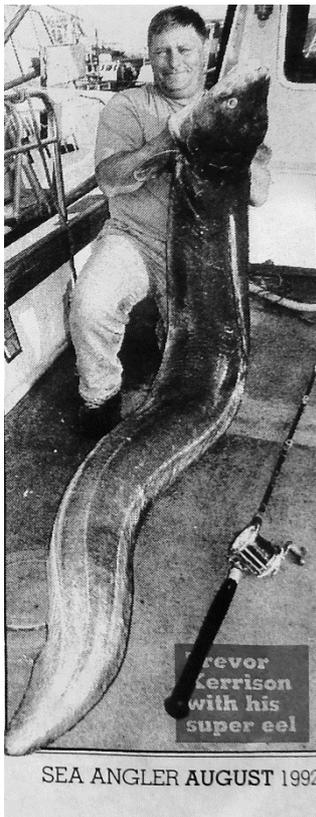
ONE MAN, TWO TON-UP CONGERS



History was made in 1992 by Liverpool angler, the late Jim Calvert, when he became the only person during the twentieth century to catch two 100 pound plus Conger, not only ever, but also on the same day, while fishing a mid-channel wreck out from Plymouth aboard Bill Warner's boat 'Mistress'.

His 'ton-up' brace tipped the scales at 105 and 103 pounds. And as if that was not enough, Jim also had another good Eel of 75 pounds during the same trip.

TWO MEN, TWO TON-UP CONGERS



Two ton-up west country Conger Eel records in the space of a fortnight certainly got the Conger enthusiasts buzzing, both fish being reported together in the August 1992 issue of Sea Angler Magazine, the first being a 111.4.0 specimen taken by Trevor Kerrison and shown here aboard Tony Allen's Plymouth based boat 'Electric Blue', with the second, a 112.8.0 specimen caught by Nial Ball fishing aboard Lloyd Saunders 'Saltwind of Dart'.

In the case of the Dartmouth fish, nobody had anticipated just how big it was going to be until it came into full view, at which point it was double gaffed, drawing comments about its potential record size before it had even been put onto the scales.

With the Plymouth fish, freshwater angler Trevor Kerrison was on only his third ever boat trip. As with Vic Evans 133.4.0 World record caught 3 years later in 1995, the reel used was a Michell 624.

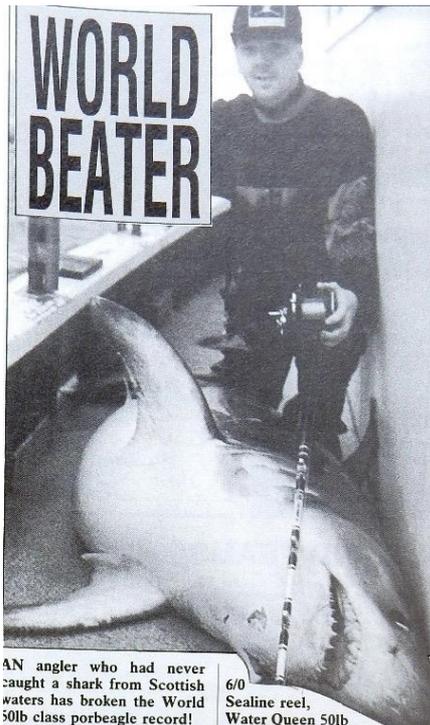
THE LOSS OF MORECAMBE CENTRAL PIER

Proposals for Morecambe's Central Pier were first made public in 1867, with construction beginning the following year, leading to its grand opening at a cost of £5,000 and a length of 912 feet in 1869. Its main purpose initially was one of attracting steamers which ceased coming around 1914. It then suffered its first physical disaster in 1933 when fire destroyed the pavilion, replaced at a cost of £25,000 in 1935/36.

Total closure came about in 1986, followed by another fire, this time in the amusement arcade in 1987, after which the council issued an ultimatum to the owners either to upgrade or to demolish. The pier was sold in 1990, after which some repair work was done. But seemingly not enough, with the council effectively condemning the structure in 1991, followed by another fire, and demolition in 1992.

THE SCOTTISH PORBEAGLE SHARK RECORD

Robert Richardson of West Kilbride, who at the time had yet to catch a shark of any size, became the new Scottish Porbeagle Shark record holder with a huge specimen of 414 pounds taken 300 yards off Dunnett Head aboard the boat 'Karen', as reported in the May 1992 issue of Sea Angler Magazine.



An encounter which lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes, putting the boat 4 miles away from the original hook-up point in a pitching sea, with swells running through at a height of 20 to 25 feet. The fish, which was brought alongside no less than 9 times, beat the previous record by a clear 10 pounds. The British record slot was occupied by a fish of 465 pounds at the time.

PW Comment: I've fished aboard 'Karen' myself under the cliffs at Dunnett Head. Fortunately, the sea was quite flat with an offshore blow. Had it been otherwise we might have been in a spot of trouble as the boat caught fire down in the engine compartment.

There we all were stood out on deck with our life jackets on and smoke billowing out of the wheelhouse door with the alarms going off. A Mayday was put out, and Thurso Life Boat picked us all up. One good reason why boat anglers should unhesitatingly always donate to the RNLI.

THE FINAL COD RECORD OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Since the advent of offshore wreck fishing in the 1970's, the very biggest Cod have mainly tended to come from offshore wrecks fished for out of ports along the Cornish, Devon and Kent coastline, and of course during the 1980's and early-1990's from the North Sea wrecks, primarily those fished out from Whitby.

Despite the fact that there have always been good Cod taken from the hard-

open ground off the Yorkshire Coast, arguably everyone was surprised, when in 1992, the last (and still current) British Cod record of the twentieth century came from an open-ground mark quite close in to the Whitby shoreline.

The fish in question which tipped the scales at 58 pounds 6 ounces was taken by Noel Cook fishing aboard the legendary Whitby wrecking boat 'Sea Trek' skippered by Stu Johnson.

BIG FLOUNDER FACT SHEET

In the early 1990's, Plymouth angling journalist and angling historian Mike Millman painstakingly pieced together a fact sheet listing all the big Flounders caught by anglers over the 50 or so years up to that point.

Starting in the 1920's, the biggest specimen taken by an angler weighed in at a little over 3 pounds. It took until 1928 for the first authenticated 4 pound Flounder to be weighed, with the next example at 4.2.0 by Bruce McMillan fishing from the beach at Wallasey.

By 1937, two huge Flounders of 4.1.0 and 4.5.0 were caught in the Fowey River, the larger of the pair setting a new British record which stood until 1949 when a fish of 4.13.0 was taken from the River Exe estuary, triggering a run of very big Flounders throughout all the estuaries of the west county's channel coast, of which another Fowey specimen in 1956 was the first to break through the 5 pound barrier. A year later in 1957, a specimen of 5.5.0 was taken at Littlesea in Dorset, with the next 5 pound plus specimen being a fish of 5.4.0 from the Fowey in 1965.

During this period, the largest example of any species of fish regardless of it being boat or shore was awarded the British record. That all changed in 1976 with the introduction of split boat and shore records, and as the overall record at the time had been taken from a dinghy by Arthur Cobble Dick at 5.11.8 from the Fowey, the shore record slot was thrown open to claims with a minimum qualifying weight set at 4 pounds which was quickly filled with a fish of 4.7.0, subsequently beaten by a superb Flounder of 5.2.0 by Bill Stevens fishing in the Teign estuary in 1978, itself being displaced in 1987 by a fish of 5.3.10 caught by Malcolm Burgess.

By 1994 the shore record had crept up to 5.7.0 caught by Barry Sokell, again from the Teign Estuary, a fish which along with Arthur Cobble Dick's boat record taken in 1956 still stands at the time of writing.

THE LOSS OF SHANKLIN PIER

Working to plans drawn up by F. C. Dixon and M. N. Ridley, the 1,200 foot Shanklin Pier was opened in 1890 by the Shanklin Esplanade & Pier Company to facilitate steamers between the mainland and the Isle of Wight. That ownership unfortunately lasted a mere 2 years, when in 1892 the receivers were brought in to auction it off, followed in 1899 by ownership passing to Shanklin Council.

As was so often the case during WWII, the pier was temporarily taken over by the MoD for the war effort, suffering some bomb damage in the process. More temporary closure lasting a year between 1975 and 1976 saw it reopen under the ownership of Fred Sage, who in 1986 sold it on to Leading Leisure plc. Shortly afterwards a storm damaged some sections of the neck, after which it went to South Wight Borough Council for £25,000 who then spent a further £189,000 on its demolition which was completed in 1993.

THE LOSS OF VENTNOR VICTORIA PIER

Formed in 1870, the Ventnor Pier & Esplanade Company completed the 478 foot Victoria Pier in 1873, adding a landing stage to the structure in 1881. This was destroyed, along with 40 feet of the pier deck by storms later that same year. As a result, a 650 foot replacement pier was built and opened in 1887 at a cost of £12,000, with a pavilion added in 1901.

The first World war brought a downturn in fortunes, with steamer services put on hold until it was over. On top of this, the whole pier was sectioned in WWII for military purposes. Unfortunately, after handing it back for regular use, the structure was in such a poor state of repair that it was condemned following a survey in 1948.

Down but not out, the pier was rebuilt to a design by Basil Phelps and opened again in 1955. But yet again, fortune was not on its side. In 1981, necessary repairs were costed at £750,000 followed by fire damage 1985 leading to ownership finally being transferred to Ventnor Town Trust in 1988, with £250,000 of the sum needed for restoration promised by South Wight Council not coming through, leaving no other choice than demolition at a cost of £239,500 in 1992/93.

GORE-TEX BREATHABLE CHEST WADERS

Neoprene chest waders, first made to order as bespoke items by SCUBA shops during the early-1970's, revolutionised small boat and beach fishing in terms of warmth and dryness over the winter months. Unfortunately, far less so during the warmer summer months, when if worn for long periods resulted in overheating, sweating, and discomfort. A case of still getting wet on the inside while keeping outside water ingress at bay. A problem finally solved by American's Wilbert and Bob Gore in 1969, who accidentally discovered Gore-Tex when they expanded polytetrafluorethylene (PTFE).

Gore-Tex is Teflon that is stretched into a thread after heating, which under magnification was found to have pores between the strands which were small enough to keep water out, but large enough to allow water vapour (sweat) to pass through. From around 1976 when commercial output first started, a multi-billion dollar market rapidly grew up serving the outdoor clothing industry, including light-weight breathable chest waders for the summer, which if they did eventually start to leak could have the feet removed, creating a pair of breathable rain proof fishing over trousers instead.

STONEHAVEN

Stonehaven was the furthest north over on Scotland's east coast that I ever got to fish, with a one day trip out from the port as part of a venue hopping tour in 1993. Surprisingly, for me at least, it was quite a small port, with just a single charter boat operating as I recall, which took us slightly to the south of the harbour to drift the inshore marks over heavy broken ground with lures and a variety of baits.

Cod were supposedly the main target fish, of which we had a few up into high single figures, but certainly no bigger. Small to medium sized Ling were also about in reasonable numbers, but sadly no Haddock or Catfish, particularly the latter, as the press had carried reports of the odd one or two prior to our visit, including from the stone pier at the harbour mouth from where the Scottish and British shore record was taken with a fish of 12.12.8 by G. M. Taylor in 1978, a record which still stands at the time of writing.

So it was as much for the species we didn't catch as the ones we did that I most remember Stonehaven. That said, there was one catch episode which very clearly sticks in my mind. Thinking back to how things were at Bridlington along the Yorkshire Coast in the 1970's which has similar ground inshore

with a habit of throwing up some pretty impressive Plaice, I asked about the possibility of any small sandy patches mixed in amongst the rough, and about the prospects for flatfish, to which I was given a fairly negative response. Undaunted, I reckoned that if I could get my baits smack on the bottom without losing everything to snags on the drift, then I might be in with a chance.



To do this, I decided to field test a new design of lead I'd thought up designed specifically to hop and bounce over snags without going to ground. To make it I used an ACA mould designed to produce what they call a 'crescent' lead. A shallow D-shaped design with the bulk of the weight dispersed towards the fatter line of curvature.

With a traditional line loop at the top, I had two six inch stainless steel paternoster wires protruding from the bottom which I bent into a curve pointing in the same direction as the curve of the lead body, the idea being for the lead to sledge along the heavy snaggy bottom, and hopefully a few sandy patches too, without getting hung up.

It worked brilliantly well. I only lost one it the time it took the others to lose quite a bit of traditional end gear. What's more, I also had a nice bonus Plaice well in excess of 3 pounds.

ARBROATH

It was in 1993 that I fished out of Arbroath on Scotland's north-east coast. I recall the wonderful smell of the fish smoke houses drifting across the harbour area on the morning air. But I only fished it the one time, drifting quite close in to the shore over very heavy ground in around 35 to 40 feet of water where we saw plenty of small Cod in the 2 to 5 pound bracket, plus quite a few reasonable sized Ballan Wrasse. Not the most memorable of days. But one of those trips from which you unexpectedly come away from armed with a bit of useful new information you hadn't previously been privy to.



All except for one chap, we were fishing lug and shellfish baits on droppers either at or just off the bottom to minimise the risk of snagging. He on the other had brought along a couple of dozen simple home made lures of around 8 ounces apiece which he'd painted red and white. But rather than jigging them, using a fixed spool, he was casting them as far down tide as he could, then cranking the reel handle just sufficiently to gain a bit of line as well as taking up the slack created by the drift of the boat, tweaking and bouncing them along the bottom all the way back to the boat ready for a re-cast.

As you might expect, he parted company with quite a few of these, hence the reason for bringing along so many. Importantly, what his technique did was put his lure amongst the fish long before our baits could drift down to them. Consequently, he had first shot at any fish that might be around, which meant that despite the time lost having to re-tackle after a hang up, he was making the advantage count, ending up with many more fish than the rest of us came back with. Very impressive.

On a slightly different tack, speaking with Scottish International boat angler Steve Souter who has frequently fished Scotland's east coast between his home town of Edinburgh and the Moray Firth, I'm told that the situation along that whole stretch is now pretty dire. A combination of Marine and Coast-guard Agency (MCA) regulations and dwindling angler interest, with few if any youngsters coming through the ranks driving many charter boat businesses to the wall, leaving Arbroath to fly the flag as a thriving port, backed up by occasional forays out of Stonehaven and Dunbar. What regular boat fishing there is done in the area now comes mainly from private trailed boats centred at a few locations along Scotland's west coast.

THE PAUL ROGGEMAN EUROPEAN OPEN BEACH COMPETITION

In 1993, East Riding County Council events manager Paul Roggeman, a keen angler himself, had the idea that an open beach fishing competition might be a way of drawing additional low season visitors to the area. Fished initially as a 2 day event between the pilot jetty at Spurn Point and the northern end of Bridlington's North Marine Promenade, it started life as the Bridlington Open, which as its success grew became the British Open, and finally the European Open, changing its name again slightly on the death of Paul in 2015 to the Paul Roggeman European Open in recognition of his tireless efforts over the years, becoming the biggest open shore angling competition in Europe, and arguably the World, not only in terms of entrants, but cash prize money and ancillary prizes too.



To give an example, the 2018 event is expected to have a prize fund of the order of £35,000, with the winner of each day receiving £2,000, and the overall winner £4,000. As well as cash, there are also tackle prizes awarded to the top 20 anglers each day, with further prizes for ladies, juniors, and overseas competitors, which in the past have included a car.

The success of the event was, and still is, testament to Paul Roggeman's hard work, dedication, and enthusiasm, matched by the level of support from its organisers,

sponsors, and participants attending from more than a dozen countries, the winner of which, besides the obvious tangible rewards, also walks away with the title of European Open Beach Champion for that year.

Directly linked to the event, local businesses are winners too to the tune of up to half a million pounds currently coming into the local economy at a time of year when tourism is otherwise fairly flat.

HUGE HALIBUT FROM LOCHINVER

I was out Haddock fishing in 1997 off the Old Man of Stoer with Peter Rawlinson from Kylescu on Loch a' Chairn Bhain, chatting as you do about what else might be on offer in that fairly wild and remote corner of North West Scotland, when the subject of 'Big Fish' such as skate and Porbeagles came into the conversation, at which point he threw in the capture of a very large Halibut that had been taken close by in a fairly tidal piece of water.

It took me by surprise a little, as I thought that particular episode in Scottish sea angling history was all done and dusted. But evidently not. In fact, that was not the only Halibut to be taken from the area, so I began searching on the Internet for anything I could find to substantiate this or any of the other alleged recent rod and line Halibut catches.

I have to say that I found very little hard evidence. In some respects, that should have been enough to rule this inclusion out. But Peter was pretty insistent. So all I can do is repeat what snippets I was able to find, leaving it to others in the future to follow things up more fully if they should so wish.

The bigger of the reported Halibut it seems was caught by Bob Ramsey in 1993, a fish said to weigh in the region of 200 pounds. It wasn't clear if this was a rod and line catch or by some other means. Either way, still as fish worthy of note, with at least one other smaller Halibut reportedly weighing 42 pounds also caught, by person or persons unknown.

WELSH STINGRAY RECORDS

Stingrays are not a species regularly associated with Wales. What makes this inclusion even more intriguing is the fact that not one, but two national records, both boat and shore, were taken so close to each other both geographically and in time. The Welsh boat record stands at 30.958 Kg (68.3 pounds) taken by K. Rawlinson out from Aberdovey in 1993, with the shore record at 24.7162 Kg (54.5 pounds) by K. B. Wyatt in 1991 from nearby Fairbourne.

THE SCOTTISH PORBEAGLE WORLD ALL TACKLE RECORD

Porbeagle Shark fishing around the Mull of Galloway never really took off after Dietrich Burkel showed it could be done back in 1970 (see Chapter 8). Next came Shetland, where despite some truly huge fish put on the scales, including Peter White's 404 pound record in 1976, that venue never really set the World alight either, probably on account of its relative isolation, boat availability, and small breeding aggregation of mature fish.

It did carry on producing some very large fish though, the last of which I can trace being a 414 pound specimen caught in 1994. By that time however, attention had shifted to the Pentland Firth, fishing a short distance out from Scrabster on the Scottish mainland where angling boats were available. An area I have fished myself and witnessed some excellent bottom fishing before having to be rescued by the RNLI when the boat we on, 'Karen', caught fire. But that's another story.



In its heyday this was the Halibut fishing hub of the British Isles. Why it still isn't is difficult to say. Halibut were never numerous at best. So perhaps the shark fishing has deflected attention away from trying to catch them. Whatever the reason, fishing just up the coast from Scrabster, huge Porbeagle Sharks were present from October through to March, topped off by Chris Bennett's World all tackle record of 507 pounds taken in March 1993 off Dunnet Head.

THE FIRST 300 YARD CAST

Using a 13 foot Conoflex Tournament 'Extreme' rod at a Sea Angler Magazine casting event, on the 13th March 1994, Neil Kelland became the first tournament caster in history to break through the 300 yard barrier, beating it by a mere 1 inch. Unfortunately, despite being measured by United Kingdom Surfcasting Federation England team captain Dennis Retter, Kelland's cast was not awarded record status as the event was not an official USKF event, the reason given being that casts made outside of USKF supervision carry no guarantees with regard to the intricacies which make some tournament casts acceptable while others are not. But a massive milestone none the less.

THE MASS MARKET DIGITAL CAMERA IS LAUNCHED



First unveiled at the Tokyo MacWorld Expo in February 1994, the QuickTake 100 was the first mass market colour digital camera, launched almost 20 years after Steve Sasson had invented digital photography back in 1975.

As it happens, it was also one of the few 'non-computer' products Apple ever produced. A piece of 'wizardry' capable of capturing eight 640 x 480 pixel colour images. Pathetic by to-

day's standards I know, both in quality and capacity terms, but revolutionary in its day, particularly to angling in a number of different ways.

Today, social media is awash with digital images of anglers with fish, often posted within minutes of capture. But spare a thought for people like myself previously going out on angling photo-shoots in all manner of conditions after promising a feature, and having absolutely no idea at all what the photographic outcome might be until the film was developed days after the event. A nerve racking time, with more than the odd complete failure along the way. Whereas now it's, click, scrutinise, and re-shoot if necessary. In that regard, angling has never had it so good.

Both the fishing and the fish have benefited too. There is absolutely no need to kill a fish now to have your '15 minutes of fame', as most of us carry mobile phones with excellent photographic capabilities. PB's are recorded for posterity and the fish gets to swim away. Then there's the species competitions where a fish is placed alongside an angler's personal registration card, photographed, and the result email attached to those in charge of running the show. Easy, or it should and could be, if anglers were a bit more savvy with regard to identification, making a point of picking out any specific key identifying features for the camera to record.

I'd like to add here that I was very quick off the mark with digital photography. I recognised its potential immediately, and bought myself a 3.3 megapixel Casio version in the hope of building up an early digital library to be ahead of the game when the concept really caught on. The problem was that other than the odd news picture which had first to be paper printed then scanned for use, nobody in the World of angling publishing seemed in any great hurry to even consider taking full feature shots on digital.

That was until Jim Whippy started up 'Boat Fishing Monthly Magazine' in 2000, for which I was out on assignment to cover the deep water wreck fishing in St. Georges Channel off the Lleyn Peninsula aboard Dave Carey's 'boat 'Judy B''. Working initially with film, at the same time I also covered it with

digital, both of which I sent to Jim with the question “Why can’t we use the digital pictures instead of the film?”.

His answer was, “I don’t know, let me ask the printer”, which he did, the result being the first full digital angling feature published here in the UK. And again, fishing in Wales some years later aboard Gethyn Owen’s boat ‘My Way’ out over Holyhead Deep, I notched up another first by getting a full feature published shot using a mobile phone, which would be no big deal in light of the quality of today’s smartphone cameras, but was a different matter altogether back then.

THE NORTH EAST COLLIERY BEACHES

Whatever else Margaret Thatcher did in her ‘reign’ as the UK’s first female Prime Minister between 1979 and 1990, her ‘war’ with the miners, led at the time by Arthur Scargill, would go on to have a profound effect on the beach fishing between Seaham and Hartlepool along the Durham Coast. For after taking on the miners and grinding their faces into the pit spoil, the shutdown at Horden Colliery in 1987, Seaham Colliery in 1992, and Easington Colliery in 1993 also marked the beginning of the end for some of the most outstanding and consistent beach Cod fishing in the north east. Blackhall Colliery, which also contributed to this story, closed its doors for the last time in 1981.



For years, spoil from some collieries had been carried away from the pits and dumped by what were known as ‘The Flights’ dating back to when these pits first opened in the previous century. A never ending series of giant buckets carrying countless tons of waste from each of the sites to be dumped over the cliff edges onto the shore, leaving the sea water lapping over it perpetually coloured.

I was tempted there for a moment to say polluted by it, but Wikipedia defines water pollution as being environmental degradation occurring when pollutants are directly or indirectly discharged into water bodies without adequate treatment to remove harmful compounds. Cod frequenting the area certainly didn’t view the colliery spoil in that way.

Ken Robinson who lives at nearby Whitley Bay and knows the area well, reckons the waste was piled up maybe 6 to 8 feet deep with a sheer drop at its seaward edge, spanning a distance of quite literally miles. It could potentially have been much thicker in the immediate vicinity of the dumping sites had longshore drift not dispersed it more evenly. Blast Beach near Seaham, and the aptly named Chemical Beach where tanker loads of liquid waste was added to the mine spoil, were both recommended hot-spots for catching Cod. Particularly around any little rocky outcrops which might form features.

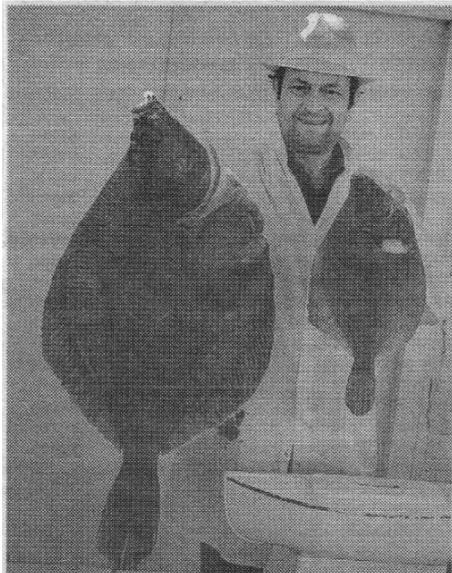
Irrespective of sea conditions, colour in the water there was guaranteed, with the fish responding accordingly. Then, suddenly, the ‘pollution streams’ were switched off. This didn’t affect things immediately. But it did, and adversely so by the end of the 1990’s, when the inshore waters in the area had all but completed their self cleansing.

Now, save for bits of belts and old machinery, any signs of colliery activity have been all but washed away, with craggy rocks, some maybe 10 feet in height reappearing as the beaches revert back to some

semblance of their previous geography. And mirroring this, the Cod fishing has also changed beyond all recognition, which in Ken's estimation was significantly better when the spoil was going in.

A salutary lesson perhaps for the environmentalists, who don't always see things in the same way as the flora and fauna they are supposedly looking to protect. Safety concerns are also an issue now too. Getting cut off by an incoming tide coming in behind you is always a possibility now when fishing kelpy rock ledges, which it wasn't when they were covered by the colliery spoil.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST PLAICE



The biggest plaice known to have been caught in British waters. Peter Ellis, of Network Fisheries, Newhaven, compares it with a 2lb plaice. Picture: Clive Wire.

June 1994 saw the landing of the largest Plaice ever recorded anywhere in the World. Unfortunately, it wasn't taken on rod and line. But it was close enough to the coast to have been a potential target. So despite the undoubted commercial pressure on coastal fish stocks, you have to believe it could have taken a bait, then wonder how many other huge fish are still out there waiting for that one lucky encounter.

The Hastings trawler 'Our Pam and Peter' skippered by Dave Peters netted the monster fish, which tipped the scales 20 pounds 10 ounces, making it almost double the size of the best taken on rod and line weighing in at 10.3.8 by Harry Gardiner in 1974, which itself was the first and only double figure Plaice taken by an angler fishing British or Irish waters.

A cast taken of the fish is displayed in the Hastings Fishermen's Museum. Scottish angler Davy Holt also reports seeing 2 huge Plaice of 14½ and 12 pounds caught in gill nets in Loch Long in the 1980's. Both fish were said to be full of spawn, and both were released alive.

THE FLOUNDER SHORE RECORD

Despite fears of a Flounder population crash in the Teign Estuary resulting from a proposed dock expansion project (see Chapter 10), 1994 saw Barry Sokell come away with a new British record shore caught Flounder of 5.7.0, beating the previous record of 5.2.0 by Bill Stevens taken in 1978 from the same venue. And those are just 2 of many huge Flounders the Teign Estuary has produced over the years, from the boat as well as the shore, making it the Mecca to which countless thousands of autumn and winter Flounder pilgrims have flocked for half a century and more.

UK BROADBILL SWORDFISH ENCOUNTERS

To my almost certain knowledge, no angler has ever hooked and landed a Swordfish *Xiphias gladius* from anywhere around the entire British Isles. If they have, they've certainly kept it quiet. But why would they? It would take the British and Irish big fish scene by storm. So why aren't anglers going out there and trying to catch one yet, because make no mistake about it, they are there, and have been for many years?

For once, this has nothing to do with global warming and rising sea temperatures. Broadbill Swordfish live way down in very deep water, though from personal experience of fishing abroad, I know they will also feed high up in the water column, providing there is still plenty of water depth beneath them, a requirement which at face values doesn't sound as though it can be satisfied around the British Isles. But it most certainly can be.

There is sufficiently deep enough water within fishing range around the south and west of Ireland where commercial long liners have been known to pick Swordfish up. The Scots could probably also find deep enough water, though the more northerly latitude might work against that happening. That said, there are historical records of Swordfish found north of the border. Using the Scilly Isles as a base to explore the wester approaches could be another option. But it's all speculation. What we do know is that they are out there.



To give things a bit of perspective, it might help to understand how the deep water open ocean food chain reacts as daylight turns into darkness. Water is a great medium for filtering out sunlight. The first colour to disappear from the spectrum is red at around 10 metres. The deeper down you go, the more colours you lose, until eventually everything appears to be shades of blue and green before the light is completely 'switched off' at around 600 feet. Beyond this is the sunless zone, a World of animals able to give off signals using bioluminescence, where those creatures that do rely on sight often have very large eyes, of which the Swordfish is one.

At the base of the food chain are phytoplankton. Small vegetative organisms which rely on the sun's rays to drive the energy giving process of photosynthesis. As the sun starts to dip in the sky, its rays start hitting the water's surface at an angle, some of which are deflected. By this stage the phytoplankton will have risen well up in the water column to grab every last bit of sunlight they can find until they find themselves at the surface with the sun completely out of view.

Feeding on these tiny vegetative organisms are zooplankton. These are the larval stage of all sorts of animals including barnacles, crabs and the like. And feeding on these are tiny fish, in turn predated upon by larger fish right through the food chain to the apex predators such as Swordfish, which explains why Swordfish and sharks move up in the water column after dark.

If an angler is going to catch a Swordfish, it's going to take a deliberate and well thought out plan of action. If that person were me, I would be looking very seriously at the south western tip of Ireland, in particular at those ports with a reputation for catching Albacore *Thunnus alalunga* on rod and line such as Caherciveen or Kinsale, where in settled weather, angling boats head well off to mix with the commercial Albacore fishermen who are known to catch Swordfish in the same area.

To help whet angling appetites a bit more, listed below are some recent Swordfish encounters from around the British Isles, none of which unfortunately were taken on rod and line.

July 1994: A commercial boat that had been fishing for Albacore landed its catch at Newlyn fish market. Mixed in amongst quite a varied haul were 2 Mako Sharks, a dozen large Swordfish, and quite a sizeable number of smaller Swordfish.

August 1996: Reputedly the largest Swordfish ever landed at Newlyn was brought into the fish market where it recorded a weight of 1,000 pounds.

September 1996: A report by Andrew Johnson of a live Swordfish jumping clean out of the water in the Firth of Lorne, Scotland.

August 1997: A Broadbill Swordfish estimated at 250 to 300 pounds was found washed up dead on the shore of Loch Long on the Inner Clyde.

August 1999: A Swordfish of 400 pounds caught commercially off the Cornish Coast or more likely further afield then brought in to Newlyn was bought and put on display at Brighton.

PW Comment: These are not the only Swordfish incidents over the past century, though they are the only ones with reasonably well substantiated information backing them up. Less substantiated encounters include a dead specimen supposedly washed up in Morecambe Bay, a sighting off the Isle of Wight, and most intriguing of all, a story from a relative of one of the famous 'Trio' who opened up the fantastic Cod fishing at the Gantock's in the late 1960's and early 70's, claiming that one of the 'Trio' hooked a Swordfish inside the Clyde somewhere, actually seeing it at the surface before it was gone. These reports however should not be taken as fact as the supportive evidence just isn't there.

I know for a fact that there are a couple planned Swordfish deliberate attempts underway as I write. One has already taken to the water, with the other planned for 2019. Using historical information carefully collected and studied, Andrew Alsop who skippers 'White Water' out from Milford Haven at the first attempt after dark in 2018 hooked up a very powerful fast moving fish that was way too powerful and fast against 30 pounds of reel drag to be a shark, but not fast enough to be a BFT. Unfortunately, the hook pulled. It's worth noting here that had that fish been beaten it would have been Andrew's fourth different species that day topping 100 pounds, having already boated two different shark species and a BFT. Kevin McKie I'm told is also planning an attempt from Plymouth by running out to the edge of the continental shelf, which is an awfully long way out in a single engine boat without backup. Fingers crossed for both attempts to be successful.

FLUOROCARBON FISHING LINE



Fluorocarbon is a material used to make high end specialist fishing line. Developed in Japan during the 1970's, initially it didn't have any practical applications, until someone tried extruding it in the same way as when manufacturing monofilament nylon line, finding it to have specific desirable properties suited to angling which monofilament doesn't possess, these being invisibility, strength, and abrasion resistance.

Many people thought that it also lacked the stretch of monofilament nylon, but that isn't the case. It just takes more force to get it to stretch, at which point it can actually stretch more than nylon. It also comes with a higher price mark up than nylon, which is one of the reasons why it tends to be used sparingly as a leader material.

Having a higher density of almost twice that of nylon due to its molecules being more tightly packed means its sinking ability is greatly enhanced, which is good news for subsurface fly fishermen. The fact that it offers much lower visibility than nylon is another plus for fly fishing, or any clear water situation in which fish are skittish and likely to be put off if something isn't quite right, mullet being a good saltwater example.

This is because at 1.41, fluorocarbon has almost the same refractive index as water which is 1.33, as opposed to monofilament nylon at 1.55, which means the fluorocarbon doesn't appreciably distort light

when passing through it. This allows the use of heavier breaking strains of fluorocarbon over nylon without it being seen, on top of which, it is incredibly abrasion resistant, making it a natural choice when fishing heavy snaggy ground.

I personally can't foresee a time when too many British or Irish anglers are going to spool up entirely with fluorocarbon in preference to either monofilament nylon or braid. Where fish are skittish, it does offer advantages, and where the ground is heavy enough to threaten the main line, then a fluorocarbon 'rubbing strip' of a few metres should be more than enough.

The marketing people say that the formulation's tightly packed molecules also transmits information back to the rod tip better than nylon can, though they seem to ignore the fact that this can be achieved to an even greater extent when using braid. So again, a hybrid approach employing a favoured main line with a length of fluorocarbon attached to it makes sense, plus of course, you can also use it for the traces or snoods.

So far, the talk has all been about advantages. Unfortunately, there are disadvantages to be weighed up and thrown into the mix too. Fluorocarbon is stiffer than nylon and has more memory, which for sea fishing with a big lead and a fast tide to stretch the line and droppers, probably doesn't present the same problem as would be the case with say fly fishing.

Shock strength is another consideration, though again, probably not as big a factor at sea where breaking strains tend to be greater to start with. Alternatively, slacken off the drag if you don't want light hook holds to result in lost fish. Care also needs to be taken when tying knots. These must be well lubricated with saliva before pulling them tight. Knot choice too can be important, with the Palomar knot a recommended choice.

The final disadvantage, and arguably the biggest, is cost. When it was first made into fishing line it was prohibitively expensive, and probably would never feature as a complete fill for a reel. Thankfully, improved production processes have made fluorocarbon not only cheaper to produce, but also more flexible and easier to manage, to the point where it won't come 'springing' off when loaded onto a fixed spool reel quite as readily as previously.

It would be futile quoting costs here as these would soon be out of date. What I've done instead is look at the Berkley brand where 660 yards of 0.46 mono is roughly half the cost of 200 yards of similar size fluorocarbon, which I work out to be around 6 times as expensive. A comparative measure which roughly translates across the entire fluorocarbon manufacturing sector.

ROGER BEER - MONSTER CONGER DOUBLE

Essentially a shore fisherman due to regular bouts of both nausea and actual sickness while afloat, Ivybridge angler Roger Beer has been no stranger to specimen fish over the years, including the Small Eyed Ray record. Conger, however, became something of an obsession for him during the early to mid-1990's, fished for after dark from Brixham Breakwater, where he and his angling friends would put in 4 to 5 sessions per week, resulting in lots of big Eels hooked, some landed, and others lost, plus it should also be said their fair share of blanks, because shore Conger fishing it turns out can be like that.

Another drawback comes from the rocky, snaggy nature of the breakwaters base and the size that some of the Conger hooked along its stone and concrete length can get to, making it necessary either to climb down or descend with the aid of a rope to get to the water's edge with the gaff. Bear in mind that towards the breakwaters end you are fishing a good half a mile or so out to sea into quite deep water, with up to 60 feet of stonework above the water, depending of course on the stage of the tide, and along the outer edge, the size of any swells which might also be pushing in.

It was late December 1995 fishing towards the end on the outer side during a cold late evening session that Roger's reel registered a strong run, which he hit hard, and was hooked up. What ensued was a tough encounter, as shore Conger episodes so often are, lasting in total around 20 minutes, by which time the fish was down near the base and needing to be dealt with. Without hesitation, holding the line for guidance, Roger went down on the rope to put a gaff into the fish, followed by the hazardous tricky climb back up, something he and his pals had done many times previously.



Roger Beer
Record Conger
56 lbs 4 ozs
Shore 1975

Near the top, a second gaff was pressed into service, which unfortunately caused tearing of the fish that would ultimately lead to some weight loss. Once over the outer wall, it was put into a dry sack which would have sapped up yet more of its body fluids and weight.

When eventually it was put onto a certified scale it took the needle around to 56¼ pounds, beating the existing British shore record at the time, for which a claim was ultimately registered and eventually ratified. But it could have weighed so much more had it not been gaff damaged, and might not even have been a contender at all had an even bigger Eel estimated at around 80 pounds not broken free at the gaff on an earlier occasion.

The second part of this story takes place aboard Kevin Tate's Torquay based boat 'Anne Clare' in 2008, which while it falls outside the twentieth century when mentioned in its own right, is included here as the continuation of an ongoing story started some 13 years earlier with Rogers shore record Eel.

It was a day when having been tempted back to boat fishing as a one-off due to his previously mentioned pre-disposition towards sea sickness, Roger then had to borrow some tackle for what was a day to be spent fishing a wreck around 25 miles off.

A trip that around midday produced a large Pouting which he put on for bait. and which after it had been at the bottom for a few minutes, was promptly eaten by a large Eel.

After quite a soft take, Roger describes the fight as a tough up and down affair lasting more than half an hour, before finally it was up and ready to be gaffed. He didn't actually get to see the fish in the water as Kevin Tait had him back away into the centre of the boat to allow him to do his bit. But the gasps and comments of the others onboard looking down on the fish told him it was something special.

Just how special only became apparent many hours later. After the fishing was finished, the huge Eel was taken back into Torquay where it bottomed out the scales. It then had to be sailed around to Brixham where it registered 109½ pounds, the first and only time the double of a 50 pound plus Conger from the shore and a 100 pound plus Conger from a boat by the same angler has ever been achieved.

ORKNEY OPAH

An Opa *Lampris guttatus* of around 1.5 metres in length was washed ashore in the Orkney Islands in 1995. A visually striking fish with a dark blue back shading to green on the flanks, silver, gold, and lilac sheens, and scarlet fins, topped off with a covering of round milky white spots. An oceanic wanderer with a preference for mid water feeding over depths of between 100 and 200 fathoms found across the oceans of the World. The twentieth century saw 3 Opa recorded on rod and line, all taken in the south western approaches to the English Channel, 2 of them on float fished shark baits.

THE WORLD ALL TACKLE RECORD CONGER



Fishing a Torbay wreck out from Brixham aboard his own boat 'Sea Spray' in 1995, Vic Evans caught a British, European and World record Conger Eel of 133.4.0 using a Mitchell 624 reel, adding more weight to the reels iconic, tough, no frills, never let you down status.

NOTE: A cast was made of the fish, one replica from which was presented to the IGFA for display in their Hall of Fame in Florida.

SIDEWINDER LURES

As a company, Sidewinder Lures came into being during the mid-1990's as the result of a natural progression made by Devon tackle dealer Dave Kiddy, who at the time was stocking other lure makers products to complement tackle items he was producing on site. As you do, he then began thinking of ways he might be able to improve the best soft lures on the market such as those made by Redgill and American company Felmlee. His 'improved' pattern turned out to be a loose hybrid of the best of the British and American soft lures, produced in a range of sizes, weights, and colours, which experience told him would best suit the UK wreck fishing scene, as well as Bass anglers' fishing both from boats and from the shore.



As ever, price was a key consideration, especially when breaking into a market already provided for with revolutionary ground breaking products. Shore anglers in particular require competitively priced alternatives for use in the snaggy more tackle hungry areas where big Bass feed within easy casting range. This culminated in a Lure with an internally weighted head and fixed hook protruding mid-body through the back.

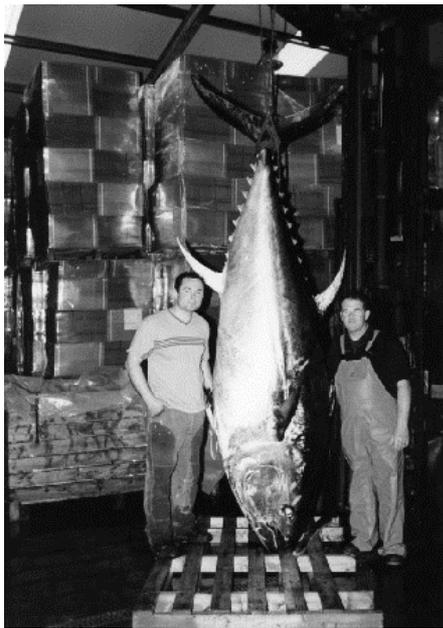
In their now traditional presentation format, and after much research and development work, the Sidewinder that would finally make the company name arrived on the tackle shop shelves around 2005. In 2013, Sidewinder was voted the most popular lure brand in the UK.

PW Comment: Rhubarb & Custard Sidewinders are lethal for Cod at Whitby. Fishing them sink and draw on a 4 foot dropper with a heavy lead doesn't require a self-weighted presentation. But it doesn't inhibit things either. Fantastic for Cod and Bass.

DAIWA PAIRS TRAGEDY

The 1995 running of the Daiwa Irish Pairs competition on Ireland's Dingle Peninsula resulted in tragedy, as competitor Nigel Robinson, an experienced and well equipped rock climber, died as the result of slipping down a cliff face while fishing alone during one of the specimen hunts. In recognition of the accident, the Sea Anglers Match Federation (SAMF) runs an annual Nigel Robinson Memorial Match from which monies raised are put into a special fund, aimed at assisting anglers' families in emergencies.

IRISH BLUE FIN TUNA



This story starts around 7,000 years ago at a time after the ice sheets engulfing much of the northern hemisphere during the last glaciation had retreated sufficiently to expose their 're-sculpting' of the British Isles, allowing the seas surrounding them to start to warm up sufficiently for the species mix we have today to eventually establish itself.

I should add here that while the Tuna's as a family group tend to be seen as fish of warmer climates further to the south of Britain and Ireland, in the case of Blue Fin Tuna *Thunnus thynnus*, that has never been the case. This is a species capable of raising its internal body temperature by as much as 10 to 15 degrees Celsius above ambient, allowing it to thrive in the cooler temperatures of latitudes as high as the northern tip of Scotland, and of course Nova Scotia on the other side of the Atlantic, which has a renowned World class BFT fishery.

This is where the Blue Fin Tuna gets its legendary awesome power from. But to maintain this lifestyle it has to eat up to 25% of its own body weight of small oily fishes daily. This means being constantly on the move, which in turn needs even more food, usually taken in the upper layers of the water, all of which means that unless you know they are there and deliberately gear up and try for them, or you see them 'bursting' well offshore and recognise what you are seeing, then in all likelihood, most anglers would never even know Tuna were about.

This pretty much has been and remained the case until something fundamental happened on the Irish commercial fishing scene in the late-1990's, though the species also has history from the early-1930's to the mid-1950's along Yorkshire's North Sea coast, with presumably the same fish either migrating up the western side of Ireland, around the northern tip of Scotland feeding on Herring along the North Sea coast to the borders as they migrate southwards, or taking the alternative route via the English Channel.

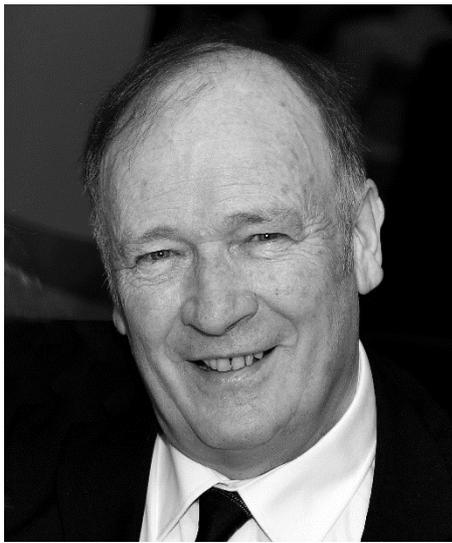
The Irish 'discovery' was initially made by a super trawler fishing out from Killybegs on the north west coast around 25 years ago. One day it landed a dozen or so large Blue Fins. This obviously made the local news at the time, then as these stories do, it slipped off the radar, seen as little more than a blip with nothing more said on the subject.

The super trawlers in the area at that time were fishing for Mackerel between October and April from the northern tip of Scotland down to Biscay, which while it pretty much mirrors the Blue Fin Tuna migration route, rarely if ever puts the boats and the Tuna in the same place at the same time, hence the infrequency of accidental commercial Tuna encounters. That was until an opportunity came up for the

fleet to supply Scad to Japan in the late-1990's, which meant switching their activities to a season spanning August to November, which for the first time did put the boats and the Tuna in the same place at the same time.

Suddenly, Blue Fin Tuna were being brought ashore most nights, which not only a good news story generally, but a big news story in terms of angling, which had not been aware of their presence at a time when finally there were people both willing and able to investigate the situation further.

The trawlers incidentally, did not want the Tuna. They were a nuisance to their operation which was to surround a shoal of Scad with a huge purse seine, then suck the fish onto the boat through a tube once the net had been pulled in more tightly around the shoal, along with any Blue Fin Tuna either passing by or actively feeding on them.



Tuna are way too big for the suction tubes and would in effect block them, wasting time. Anglers on the other hand would give their right arm for even a crack at such magnificent fish, as business-minded charter boat owners were only too well aware. So, the race to catch them was on, which turned into a three legged affair involving ex-pat English pensioner Alan Glanville, local boat owner Adrian Molloy, and Michael McVeigh (pictured here) who had a brand new boat on order to start up a charter fishing business working out from Downings, and a man who I have spoken to extensively on the history of Blue Fin Tuna around the Donegal area of north west Ireland.

Each of the trio it seems was working independently of the other two, with, all three seemingly unaware of the exploits of each other. For Michael's part, he quickly got on to Kevin Linnane at the Central Fisheries Board in Dublin, knowing he had himself tried unsuccessfully to catch Tuna further down the coast a number of years earlier, possibly as a result of either the commercial Tuna encounter mentioned in my opening remarks, or more likely resulting from talk locally by smaller scale commercials about sightings of 'Monster Mackerel' seen occasionally at the surface.

Kevin Linnane put Michael in touch with the legendary Clive Gammon who had extensive contacts in Canada and the USA through his time living and working over there on Sports Illustrated. Gammon in turn put an advertisement for information in a magazine regularly seen by commercial east coast rod and line Tuna fishermen. This was answered by a chap called Dan Shannon living in Boston, who coincidentally, had family roots in Ireland's Co. Clare.

At the same time, Michael was making investigations of his own asking local fishermen in his area if they'd ever seen any Tuna, which again stoked conversations about 'Big Mackerel', which he now knew must be Blue Fin Tuna. Meanwhile, Dan Shannon had been in touch and had arranged to fly over when Michael's new boat was ready, to see if they could win the race to the first rod caught BFT in Irish waters.

Unfortunately, as is often the case, Michael's new boat 'Rosguille' was behind schedule and would be delivered late, arriving towards the end of September 2000, followed by Dan Shannon's promised visit on the 11th of October that year. This would just about give them the chance they needed for a good shot at catching a Tuna. However, at the same time, both Adrian Molloy and Alan Glanville were already well advanced in their preparations, with Molloy having already been out trying with one hook-up and lost fish to his credit.

Alan Glanville on the other hand hired the Killybegs boat 'Suzanne' and was out trying 2 weeks before Dan Shannon arrived. Four days into his angling efforts he brought ashore a fish of 529 pounds, followed by a second BFT in excess of 300 pounds the following day. The race had been won, with Englishman Alan Glanville the victor.

That, obviously, is not the end of the story. Far from it in fact. Dan Shannon arrived and had explained to Michael McVeigh the tactical options available. These were live baiting, or trolling using outriggers with teams of plastic squids on a spreader bar, from which the main lure with the hook in it is set around 3 feet back from the 'teaser team' and would often be a different colour to the rest, the theory being that interested BFT's would home in on the commotion and pick off the straggler.

Two of these rigs were set up using green squids on one side of the boat and orange squids on the other towed at a speed of around 5 knots off Sheephaven Bay, unfortunately, without even a sniff of interest. So, on the second day the plan was changed. They would find the bait fish then drift with a live bait in the vicinity of the shoal and see if that might make a difference.

The day started with a Mackerel and a Coalfish coming to the feathers, which Dan Shannon rigged up using an 11/0 hooks hidden close to the dorsal fin of the bait, with the connecting nylon stitched in at the fish's nose. Using a 130 pounds breaking strain trace and main line, the Mackerel was set at 30 metres down, and the Coalfish 20 metres down, then it was time to put the kettle on for a brew.

Michael recalls having barely set foot in the wheelhouse when one of the reels let out a scream. As he darted back out, Dan was already getting the other line in. At this point line was still pouring from the reel, so the engine had to be fired up for the boat to give chase. On the rod, the fish gave a few more runs then came up to the surface. Dan meanwhile was steering the boat to maintain a safe working angle to the line. Eventually, as Tuna invariably do as they tire, the fish started to circle and go deep requiring an extraordinary amount of pressure to try to prevent it getting too far down.

In total the fight lasted for around an hour and a half. Dan meanwhile had prepared a harpoon he uses commercially back home for when the fish hit the surface again. As Michael was still struggling with the fish, Dan gave him a quick explanation of using the harpoon to complete the job all by himself. Then, finally, the trace came back into view which Dan grabbed, drawing the beaten fish towards the boat, at which point Michael let fly with the harpoon with such force that in Dan's words he 'button-holed' the fish.

The harpoon with its detachable head had gone right through the Tuna, which, with the hook still in its mouth, was never going to get away. After roping it to the stern cleat, they towed it back into Downings where a forklift truck had to be drafted in to get it to the scales. Two sets of scales in fact, each weighing up to 200 pounds, giving it a combined total weight of 344 pounds, and another first.

To finish the story, we have to stray slightly outside the timed parameters of the book which has a cut-off set at the start of the 21st century. Because he'd taken that first fish on a live bait, Michael stuck with the approach for what in his words was longer than he really should have, for meanwhile, Adrian Molloy was perfecting his trolling technique and having much more success as a result, mainly because he was covering more ground and sighting more fish which he would then endeavour to get ahead of and intercept, a tactic Adrian would use when fishing a rod for himself one day, resulting in an Irish record of 440 Kg (almost 1,000 pounds – pictured at the start of this inclusion), a fish way bigger than Mitchell-Henry's 851 pound British record caught back in 1933, and one of many big fish taken by Adrian and his clients.

Sadly, as is often the case, all good things must come to an end, and by around 2005 the BFT had virtually stopped coming. Sightings and hook-ups were rare, and anglers simply stopped making attempts to the point that the outriggers and chairs were removed to fish for other things.

To satisfactorily conclude the story, and this time straying even further beyond the books cut off point, the Blue Fin Turn did eventually return, probably after some intervention and quota setting by European fisheries ministers aimed at allowing the stocks to replenish after some serious overfishing in the Mediterranean. This time however, they were weighing in more usually around the 200 to 300-pound mark and in need of more time to grow on to those earlier proportions.

Besides appearing throughout their previous haunts off Donegal, around 2015 BFT also started to be caught along the south and east coast of Ireland, particularly out from Kinsale, and off Milford Haven in south west Wales, many of which, as was the case with Adrian Molloy during the earlier run, were tagged and released. A few reports and brief encounters were also reported off the Cornish coast. But that as they say is another chapter for another book, and is as much coverage as my own time constraints will allow me here, though there is more in the final Chapter, 'Legacy'.

CIRCLE HOOKS

Despite having their historical origins in Australian commercial fishing during the 1890's, circle hooks only appeared on the recreational sea angling scene around 1996, popularised by their inherent ability to not only increase hook-up rates for some species under certain circumstances, but perhaps more importantly, as an unstoppable wave of conservation mindedness swept across the entirety of sea angling linked to declining fish stocks, because the fish circle hooks are responsible for are invariably hooked in the scissor at the anterior corner of the mouth, and are only rarely hooked more deeply.

The first time I was given a circle hook to use it was attached to an outfit provided by a guide during a trip to the Stick Marsh in Florida to fish for Large Mouth Bass. My first impression was that it had started life as a J-hook before being twisted out of shape in some brutal disgorging exercise, then left for somebody else to sort out. Not so, as our guide Gerry Sloane quickly explained, demonstrating the hooks ability to slide along the palm of his hand without causing so much as a scratch, then take hold as it changed direction when pulled through the gap between his first finger and thumb, simulating a hook being pulled back towards the exit point of the mouth by a running fish before connecting at the scissor on its way out.



Circle hooks are at their most effective when a fish picks up a bait and runs away from the user. The way the point is bent inwards allows the hook to slide along the inside of the mouth rather like the runner on a sledge, then as it changes direction and angle just as it is about to exit the fish's mouth at the scissor, the point becomes exposed and is able to do its job.

The down side of circles is getting baits such as worms onto them; disgorging tough skinned fish such as sharks and rays, and when on the odd occasion one does manage to get a grip deep in the throat after being swallowed which is

very difficult to do, getting it back out without damaging the fish in the process. Yet despite so many more plus points than minuses, circle hooks have never really caught on over here, and in all likelihood, they probably never will.

THE WELSH ATLANTIC BONITO RECORD

A Welsh shore record breaking Atlantic Bonito *Sarda sarda* of 1.077 Kg (2.37 pounds) was caught by P. E. Blanning fishing in St. Brides Bay, Pembrokeshire, in 1996, again providing evidence, if ever it was needed, that our seas are indeed warming up, encouraging ever more new and exotic species to push further north as a result.

THE WELSH PORBEAGLE SHARK RECORD

South Wales has had a bit of an off and on relationship with the Porbeagle Shark over the years. It's Porbeagles are probably the same population as those along the nearby coast of North Devon and North Cornwall, which includes some bigger fish caught closer to the shore in the early part of the year, plus lots small fish over the summer months which began putting on a good showing towards the end of the 1990's after the lull that followed the boom times of the 1970's.

At the time of writing, Milford Haven is now making all the running on the Welsh shark fishing scene, including with the official Welsh record list, as the WFSA have accepted the fact that anglers are going to put sharks back. That said, the last official Welsh record of the twentieth century, and still standing at the time of writing is a fish of 134.265 Kg (296 pounds) caught by D. Rafill off Porthcawl in 1996.

THE MONKFISH – ANGEL SHARK



There is no way of ever being certain exactly when a specific species of fish moves from a position of being thin on the ground to requiring alarm bells to sound. The process usually unfolds slowly, hidden in clear view. I remember catching plenty of Monkfish *Squatina squatina* during the 1980's, and when I stopped fishing for them, I thought no more about them until I heard rumours that my favourite spot in Tralee Bay had been wiped out by commercial fishing.

When I was catching them there, so too were other people around the western side of England and Wales through into the English Channel. Granted, it was never a lot. But that's the way Monkfish, or Angel Sharks as they've more recently been re-branded, were. Occasional bonus fish. Then gradually on into the 1990's press reports really started to dry up, after which, species numbers seemingly went into free fall.

Whatever happened, and there has been much speculation regarding the problem, the final phase of their disappearance in this instance does appear to have been both sudden and spectacular. As you might expect, long lines and tangle nets came in for a lot of scrutiny, and while commercial fishing most certainly will have been a contributing factor, it may not have been the only one. Angling too must shoulder some of the blame. Time and again while searching old magazines and angling newspapers for information I have been confronted by pictures of dead Monkfish, which like Tope and sharks over the same time period, were needlessly killed, weighed, then dumped.

Away from south west Ireland, I have personally only ever seen Monkfish in Cardigan Bay. A quick look at the various national record lists however suggests a much wider picture, with the 66 pound

British boat record coming from Shoreham in Sussex in 1965, and the shore record of 52.14.0 from Llwyngwriil Beach, Gwynedd, in 1984.

As you might expect, being a Welsh fish, that British shore record also occupied the corresponding Welsh shore record lot, paired up with a Monkfish of just over 59 pounds (26.932 Kg) caught off Porthcawl in 1978 in the Welsh Boat record Slot. Ireland, which doesn't distinguish between boat and shore records, boasts a best of 73 pounds from Fenit in 1980 as its all time best.

The thing which immediately springs out from those records for me is their clustering between the mid-1960's and mid-1980's, which is when press reports were at their most active for Monkfish generally, which includes the time frame over which I had my involvement with them at Fenit. There was even a report of one being caught from a small boat on my local patch off the Fylde Coast.

In short, a geographically wide scattering of irregular and at times isolated encounters, since which I can't recall even a single report. The last time I saw a Monkfish was when my wife caught a 55 pound specimen in the Canary Islands, which by all accounts is arguably their last 'stronghold', if that be the right word on the European scene.

Monkfish/Angel Sharks are now on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of threatened species. Fishery scientists report a marked population decrease over the past 50 years, with the species having become locally extinct from large areas of the seas surround Britain and Ireland, something anglers probably aren't particularly aware of due to the infrequency of rod caught specimens.



One of the biggest timed catches made in Ireland in 1964 was this collection of 37 monkfish and 2 tope, which together weighed 1,356 lb. and which were caught in only three hours' fishing. The scene was Fenit, Co. Kerry.

Left to right are Michael Moriarty; his father, Mike Moriarty (skipper); S. Warren (Reading); F. Robbins (Oxsbridge); George Warren (Oxsbridge); and Bill Warren (Reading).

The Warren party caught more than a thousand pounds of fish in their 1963 expedition and hope to do well again this year.

As a result, the species has been assessed as critically endangered, and while angling input can only ever at best be described as anecdotal, the fact that most anglers younger than me won't ever have seen even one let alone caught one in our corner of Northern Europe, tells its own story. A fish now considered to be locally extinct over much of its range within the Irish Sea, which previously had been one of the most productive areas according to angling reports. Add to this no recent reports from Northern Irish waters, and the species being declared extinct in the North Sea in 2006, and you start to get a grasp of the bleakness of the reality now facing the species.

In an interview with the Irish Examiner, Kevin Flannery, Director of Dingle Ocean World, suggested that in 2013 there was possibly as few as a dozen Angel Sharks left in Irish waters, which even if they represented an equal split across the sexes can hardly be expected to find each other, and even if they did, with a gestation period of 8 to 10 months leading to litter sizes of 25 or less, how can a dozen of them be expected to repopulate an entire country. As the saying goes, "Stranger things happen at sea". Let's hope this is one of them.

FOOTNOTE: While chatting with Jon Ayres from Southsea Sea Angling Club in Hampshire, mention was made of him being on a boat dragging a net through Bracklesham Bay many years ago and seeing between 50 and 60 tiny baby Monkfish on the deck, all of which were put back. At the time of writing it's argued there are not that many Monkfish or Angel Sharks left around the entire British Isles.

BLUEMOUTH AT TILBURY POWER STATION



While the Bluemouth *Helicolenus dactylopterus* is not exactly a rare fish, it is one that is rarely caught. The reason for this is its preferred environment is bottom feeding at depths of 200 down to 1000 metres where it can be found in vast numbers, which goes some way towards explaining why most of those caught around the British Isles come from locations like the Loch Shell near Stornoway, and along the Atlantic Coast of Ireland such as out from Dingle. Most certainly not Tilbury tucked away well up inside the Thames estuary. Imagine then the surprise MAFF officer Graham

Picket got when he picked one out the cold water screen at Tilbury power station in 1996.

THE SPIRIT OF EURO '96

Looking to recapture the spirit of Euro '96 football scene, the National Federation of Sea Anglers decided they would put on the greatest 'World Shore Angling Championship' in the history of the sport. An event which would cost more than £100,000 to stage, taking place along the sea walls and shoreline in and around the Dover area from the 11th to the 19th October 1996.

NFSA Chairman Jack Reece said: "Euro '96 was recognised as probably the best organised and friendliest tournament in soccer history. Now we want to capture some of that spirit and make this the best ever World shore championship. However, we intend to go one better than Euro '96 as we are confident that we can produce a home victory in the men's and ladies' competitions. In fact, we could end up with

4 gold medals as we will be favourites to take the individual titles as well. We must not only put on a great show but we must come home as winner.

When we were planning our bid for this event, Chris Clark was on the organising committee and he has sportingly said that he will continue to stay on the committee rather than defend his title. That's a tremendous gesture as he would have almost certainly been selected for the squad and would have a good chance of keeping his title. He's sacrificed his own chance of glory for the sake of helping to make this championship a great success".

Jack Reece, of course, was no stranger to success himself, having won the European Tote championship 3 years in a row, and is Captain of the England team which will compete in the World Big Game championship in Watamu, Kenya, in December (see Chapter 10). Colin Bond, a staff college instructor at RAF Bracknell and manager of the mainstream England squad said: "We will be the favourites and we could complete a clean sweep by winning all four golds. However, the pressure will be on us as the host nation.

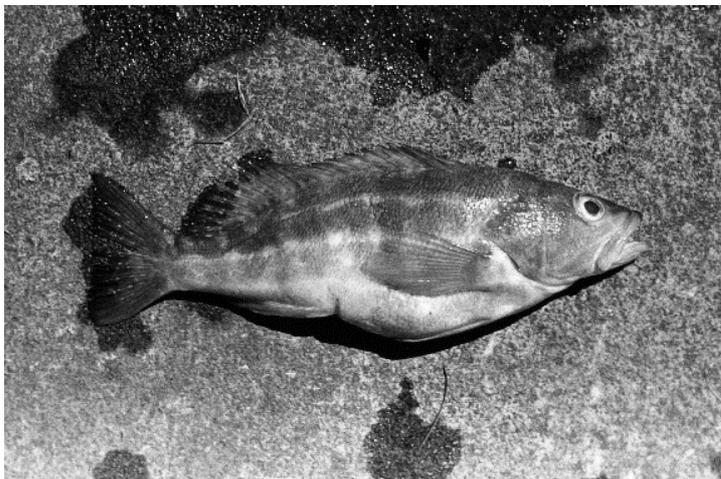
The main challenge to England will come from Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and of course, from countries bordering the English Channel such as France, Belgium and Holland. But, as always, the Italians will be a threat, as fishing is considered a mainstream sport, and with generous sponsorship, their squad will probably arrive in Dover 3 weeks before the event starts. But England, and in particular Dover, are confident that they can repel any 'foreign invasion', with a team from Brazil already booked to take part.

Whiting and Codling will be the main quarry with competitors hoping to catch up to 11lb at each of the 4 matches - 2 during the day and 2 at night. The mile long breakwater in front of Dover's famous White Cliffs will be used as one of the venues with sites at nearby Seabrook, Sandown, Walmer and Deal also included in the tournament line up". The England squads are.....

MEN: Alan Yates (Dover), Peter Owen (Folkestone), Steve Allmark (Dover), Bernard Westgarth (Co. Durham), Ian Golds (Portsmouth). Res: Trevor Rooney (Eastbourne).

LADIES: Emma Davies (Dover), Joanna Hyde (Paignton), Rosemary Browning (Brighton), Pauline Ferry (Newcastle-on-Tyne), Christine Carrington (Eastbourne). Res: Carole Greene (Bexhill-on-Sea).

MEVAGISSEY COMBER



Comber *Serranus cabrilla*, which are small highly colourful relatives of the Bass, were quite regularly reported in the weekly angling press during the 1970's. I caught and witnessed a few myself reef fishing for Red Bream out from Looe in Cornwall. Then suddenly, they appeared to drop off the radar.

Whether this was actually due to them disappearing or just a sudden lack of interest by the angling press in reporting them is difficult to say, as if anything, numbers should perhaps have been on the increase due to rising sea tempera-

tures

Whatever the reason, to all intents and purposes they were a fish of the past. Until one turned up in a lobster pot off Mevagissey in 1996, hopefully triggering a whole new wave of interest, both in looking for, and as importantly, recording specimens if or when they do come along.

MUSTAD TAKE OVER PARTRIDGE OF REDDITCH

To those who know their fishing hooks, Mustad and Partridge have at various times over the course of angling history been two of the very biggest players on the hook manufacturing scene. In turn, Partridge have long had an association with Redditch, which itself has long had a historical association with all aspects of hook manufacturing.



For many years, Redditch was the country's hook manufacturing centre of excellence, having transitioned from hand made hooks to full scale industrial production, and quite literally, World domination. But like so many manufacturing centres and products, time moves on, with high quality Asian imports competing with traditional 'home grown' produce, which if evasive action is not quickly taken can often prove painful, or even lead to complete failure by not adapting or evolving quickly enough to meet new challenges.

The Partridge company took its name from its founder Albert Partridge, in time succeeded by his son Ted who felt obliged to sell out to Alan Bramley in 1970 when none of his own children were prepared to carry the family tradition forward. Bramley in turn decided to expand the company portfolio to include exclusive split-cane rods, which had also been traditionally made in the area before the introduction of fibreglass and carbon fibre pretty much made wood as a rod building material obsolete. Hook making however, and the development of new patterns in particular for a more discerning and demanding market remains the company's core business, with innovation at the heart of its success.

Despite competition from the far east, both in terms of quality, and all too often cost until the home grown talent has been 'seen off', Partridge was obviously well able to hold its own, eventually catching the eye of that other major European hook manufacturer O. Mustad & Son, who in 1996 'engineered' a successful take over of Partridge, leaving the new owners, in their own words, free to "introduce new levels of consistency and industrial production along with a continuation of the innovative developments that had characterised the previous 20 years".

Under the Mustad umbrella, Partridge of Redditch would continue as a separate brand, which I suppose is one small blessing, as opposed to absorption and elimination. That way at least, the historical link back to the past lives on.

DANNY MOESKOPS

At the time of writing, the tournament casting World is dominated by Belgian giant of a man Danny Moeskops. When he competes, it isn't so much a question as to whether he is going to win as by how much. The man is totally dominant. The UFSF all comers record list for men, which has 6 weight

categories for multiplier and fixed spool reels contains only one name repeated throughout. Five out of 8 UKSF recognised World records also belong to him, with 3 of them exceeding 300 yards, all of them coming after the end of the twentieth century.

Fortunately for the time constraints of this history project, Danny began visiting the UK to cast in tournaments in 1996, becoming UKSF Champion the following year with a throw of 253.38 metres (277 yards) using a lead of 175g, which it has to be said was not the longest cast made in the twentieth century. That honour goes to Neil MacKellow in 1985 with a cast of 281 yards 1 foot 3 inches, a record beaten by Jason Willicombe with a distance of 263.74 metres (288.4 yards) in 2002.

LOCH ETIVE HAKE

At the peak of my 100 species chasing obsession during the late-1970's and 1980's, I decided to take a close look at the prospects of deliberately catching a Hake. While there are people who can lay claim to having caught the odd Hake here and there, I'm probably right in saying that precious few people, if indeed any at all, have ever deliberately successfully targeted the species based on the type of research I have been able to do from old magazines, mixed with records I have kept regarding encounters I have picked up on in various other ways over the years, the main reason being the extraordinary lifestyle of the species which is completely at odds with how, when and where the vast majority of 'home waters' anglers choose to go about their day to day fishing.

In a nutshell, Hake are a predatory species with a distinct tendency to keep well out of angler's way. Odd ones are picked up here and there in the normal course of routine bottom fishing. Dave Lewis for example once picked up half a dozen small ones in a single trip, then has never seen one since. And there is very good reason, not only for him, but also for the rest of us rarely if ever seeing one either, which is their habit of hunting and feeding well up in the water column after dark out over deep open water.

This is an indirect response triggered by tiny vegetative phytoplankton at the very base of the marine food chain. Every day, these tiny 'plants' move progressively up in the water column towards dusk in an attempt to grab the last few rays of fading sunlight, which in common with all plants, they require to drive the chemical process of photosynthesis from which their energy is derived.

As the phytoplankton move up towards the surface, they 'drag' the zooplankton with them, these being a wide range of tiny microscopic animals destined to become all sorts of larger marine invertebrates such as crabs and shrimps which feed on the phytoplankton, hence the connection between the two. Next come tiny fish followed by marginally bigger species. And so the feeding attraction goes on right through the food chain all the way to the top predators, which for our purposes here, is the Hake.

During daylight hours, Hake rest at or near the bottom, which is when they occasionally encounter anglers' baits and even more occasionally maybe decide to take one, all of which goes a long way to explaining the degree of difficulty involved in successfully targeting the species. To stand any real chance of targeted success, the attempt would have to be both deliberate, and very carefully thought through.

With this in mind, I spent a long time carefully logging all available reports of rod caught Hake in the hope of eventually pin pointing some sort of pattern. At face value, not an easy thing to do when incoming data is sparse in the extreme. The catches I did manage to record were well scattered, but mainly from the west coast of Scotland to south east Ireland and the western approaches to the English Channel.

What quickly became apparent was that despite not having an open oceanic element to it, the Irish Sea and some of its loosely 'adjacent' Atlantic stretches, was in fact responsible for a very high percentage of all the rod caught Hake catches reported. Locations included the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, the

Sound of Jura, the Firth of Lorne, the firth of Clyde, Islay and Loch Etive. My task then was to try to fathom out why.

The first thing I did was to look at the area on a map, which told me very little. It wasn't until I looked at it using Admiralty charts that I found one potential reason staring me straight in the face - Beauforts Dyke. The deepest stretch of water within angling range in the British Isles. A long narrow finger like trench stretching from south west of the Isle of Man up through the North Channel separating Scotland from Northern Ireland, on past the Firth of Clyde towards Islay.

With depths in excess of 140 fathoms, that had to be it. If for no other reason than the ferocity of the tide and often potentially wild conditions in the North Channel, little if any angling would take place either over or around the trench itself. There were however ports dotted around it with sufficient in the way of reported accidental Hake catches to suggest that Beauforts Dyke may well prove to be the common denominator here.

Lying on the periphery of Beauforts Dyke close to Oban is Loch Etive. Formed by glacial activity during the last ice age, with an opening to the sea, technically speaking, Loch Etive is a 20 mile long fjord, which with depths down to around 500 feet, is by any standards exceptionally deep. That said, as you follow its run first heading east then north towards Gualachulain at its head, its salinity progressively declines.

As with the Baltic Sea, its upper layers can be pure freshwater, which because this is less dense than saline water, floats on top of it, hence the number of Rainbow Trout pens dotted about the place. And when it rains there, which being Scotland it so often does, run-off entering the loch can be substantial forming quite a deep 'floating layer' across much of its surface area, which is almost exclusively fresh water up at the head, making it a most unlikely scenario in which to hunt an open water predator such as the Hake.

As if all of that were not enough, a short distance into the loch at Connel it becomes constricted close to the road bridge to form The Falls of Lora, the only two way fall in the whole of Europe. A point where the run exiting the loch on an ebbing tide can be so great that 'plodding' boats actually stand still at full power trying to battle the flow, having to come back for another go when the tide turns, which of itself is another curiosity with a 2 hour time lag between high tide at the entrance and Bonawe, not to mention a rise and fall difference of 2 metres at the entrance as opposed to around 2 feet at the head. Yet despite all this, some fish species have negotiated the falls, one of which incredibly is the Hake.

During the 1990's on into the early part of the new century, some very big Hake were 'accidentally' taken well inside the loch. These include the current British and Scottish records weighing in at 25.12.14 held with the same fish caught by Mr. R. Roberts in 1997. But rarely, if ever, does it produce any small Hake.

Just why this should be the case is a question I put to Ronnie Campbell, who both lives on and charter fishes in the loch, who when I interviewed him on the topic was of the opinion that the Hake he and his clients caught were probably all female fish. Unfortunately, why they were there was something of a mystery, but there had been quite a few of them, though at the time of interview (2011) he hadn't seen one for perhaps 3 years.

THE SHARK TRUST

Set up by Richard Pierce in 1997 as a charitable organisation dedicated to promoting the study, management, and conservation of sharks, skates and rays (elasmobranchs) both here in the UK and internationally, while not directly allied to sea angling, with certain conservation proviso's, the Shark Trust does support shark angling when conducted responsibly, and is to no small degree supported in return

by shark anglers through their tagging, conservation work, and reporting, after Blue Shark catch numbers plummeted from around 6,000 per season to just 86 in one season. In light of this it became only right and proper that angling should work to put things right, a call which thankfully most sea anglers do now passionately respond to.

The need for an organisation looking out for elasmobranchs started to become clear to Richard Pierce during the mid-1980's when he returned to the UK from the Middle East and discovered that the angling boats at Looe were no longer tagging sharks. As a result, from the early-1990's onwards, he began sponsoring the tagging out of his own pocket, until the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain (SACGB) and Dr. Ken Collins of Southampton University took the project over, leaving him to concentrate his efforts solely on the Shark Trust, with the aim of promoting shark conservation Worldwide.



The way Richard sees it is that no official body was policing the scant legislation there was out there, or the wellbeing of shark populations, and in that regard, anglers and charter skippers both can and do have a huge role to play in terms of providing eyes and ears out in the field.

According to Richard, the non angling public by and large perceive angling as a blood sport, a perception which anglers should be at pains to reverse as they have in Scotland have by speaking with one voice promoting the wellbeing of all fish species via the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network.

Effective PR can work both for you and against you, as some anglers and commercial fishermen displaying pictures of dead sharks on social media have learned to their cost, resulting on occasions in death threats. So we need to learn how to deal with these fish responsibly, either in the water, or if they are to be boated, then with their eyes covered by a wet rag during disgorging, and later cradled properly to support their internal organs when posed for photographs, something SSACN have been at pains to promote through a series of handling videos I shot for them which can be viewed on their official website.

Shark angling and handling has come on in leaps and bounds since the Shark Trust was set up, both with and without their direct involvement. The top shark angling charter skippers now make it their business to see things are done appropriately. It's in their own best interests to do so. Furthermore, some are also involved in scientific programs, as they are far better placed, and certainly better experienced, to carry out this sort of work than even the scientists themselves, who are best left to deal with the data as and when it comes in.

In so far as is possible, sharks should be placed on the deck rather than dropped onto it, with a growing number of dedicated shark angling boats having a door in the stern to draw fish in through. Circle hooks have been another giant leap forward, ensuring most sharks are hooked in the scissor of the mouth from where the hook can most easily and painlessly be removed. Deck hoses are also inserted into sharks' mouths to pump oxygenated water over their gills, and all traces of blood, which can come from even a light hook hold in the scissor, needs to be removed before any photographs are taken so as not to alienate the non angling public.

Despite being apex predators with undeserved, fearsome reputations, sharks are actually quite fragile fish. And while they can appear healthy enough as they instinctively swim away after release, this can

believe the fact that they may go on to suffer serious problems and even death resulting from poor handling, which may take hours or even days to manifest itself.

Add this to the fact that their breeding strategy is one of producing low numbers of well developed offspring, which while it has served them well over millions of years, can just easily work against them at times of over exploitation, and it isn't hard to see why numbers can dip quickly then take decades to recover, if at all, evidenced in the twentieth century by a number of examples, the most poignant of which being what happened with the Spurdog, which went from being the most prolific small shark in northern European waters to the very brink of extinction, from where it is now struggling to climb back.

DECLINE OF THE SILVER EEL

Unlike the Scots and the Welsh, both the British and Irish record fish committees place the Silver Eel *Anguilla anguilla* in their freshwater record lists. This I understand is because the biggest specimen reported to them came from freshwater. So presumably, were that to change, its location in the record list would also change, illustrating the point that this is one of those species that is not exclusive in its habitat preference. In fact, before the species went into critical decline in the latter stages of the twentieth century, Silver Eels, whether sea anglers wanted them or not, played a major part on the shore angling scene, and were particularly important in shore competitions in some parts.



In the main, the Eels caught by sea anglers tend to be male fish known commercially as 'Dog Eels', which choose to remain in or close to estuaries, and in harbours adjacent to them. Obviously, not all of them choose to do this. But a fair percentage do, presenting themselves as potential takers of sea anglers' baits, unlike the Eels which press on up into freshwater having left the sea as tiny glass Eels after arriving around our shores from their Sargasso Sea spawning grounds, which they will eventually return to when they get their one and only call to reproduce.

In preparation for this they will stop feeding. Their gut actually atrophies and ceases to function, which means that by the time inland Eels reach coastal waters again, food is the last thing on their mind, which explains why the records are always most likely to come from freshwater before gut atrophication starts to take place.

In the Sargasso Sea, Eel eggs are shed during the spring and early summer months at depths of around 200 to 300 fathoms, where on hatching, the larvae maintain that level within the water column before undergoing a deep lateral body flattening process after which they are known as Leptocephali.

During this stage they rise closer to the surface, where over the next couple of years, they grow progressively longer as they are slowly carried around by the rotation of the Gulf Stream in an ever-increasing radius from the point where the eggs were initially shed, eventually being picked up by a spin off from this rotation which delivers them to European shores.

My reason for mentioning this here, is that in 1956, the Leptocephali was declared to be a newly discovered species of fish with the scientific names *Leptocephalus brevirostris*. This of course was revised some years later when it was realised that it was in fact a developmental phase of *Anguilla anguilla*, the Silver Eel.

Due to a combination of factors, the number of young Eels arriving around the coast of the British Isles during the 1990's was alarmingly low. So low in fact that the word 'crisis' was being bandied about. In part this was due to serious commercial over cropping of the tiny Eels as they enter the rivers to migrate upstream in the spring of each year. Less small Eels getting through equates to less large Eels going back, with the knock-on effect of reduced spawning potential, adding further to the cycle of decline.

The problem unfortunately hasn't only been one of direct over cropping, which could with legislation have been dealt with. There have been indirect effects too with far greater and more devastating consequences, leading to the species being listed as critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Estimates by the UK Environment Agency put the decline in Silver Eels as being as much as 95% since the early 1990's. Statistics like that stretch the definition of the word decline, which in truth would be better served by the words 'verge of extinction'. This in turn prompted panic measures by the aquaculture industry that had been responsible for seriously over cropping the species in the first place.

In their 'wisdom', the aqua-culture industry shipped in supplementary supplies of the Japanese Eel *Anguilla japonica*, some of which were infected with the parasitic nematode *Anguillicoloides crassus* which infects the fishes swim bladder and can lead to it rupturing and ultimately death. Unfortunately, it is this as much as anything else the aquaculture industry has done that has brought the species to its knees.

As is so often the case with new infections where there is no historical resistance, the parasite quickly spread to indigenous wild populations, and is now a widespread problem in Eels right across Europe, in addition to which, hydro-electricity dams, flood defence systems, and other barriers to upstream migration have exacerbated an already serious decline, not to mention global warming and its potential effect on the direction of the Gulf Stream, which originates in the Sargasso Sea as a slowly rotating slack eddy of the western Atlantic located to the east of Florida and south of Bermuda, which passively delivers the tiny 'Glass Eels' to our shores from their distant breeding grounds.

IAN BURRETT



I first met Ian Burrett in the mid-1990's when I was asked to go up to Drummore on Scotland's Luce Bay to do a feature for Boat Angler Magazine looking at the charter fishing set up he had operating from a pair of trailed 19 foot Orkney Fastliners. Knowing Luce Bay to be one of the top Tope fishing areas in the UK, obviously, I jumped at the chance.

A trip that was to be the foundation stone of a long friendship, some of the best fishing I have ever enjoyed in home waters, plus a working introduc-

tion to no nonsense, no compromise angling conservation from a man who would eventually take Scottish (and by default, the rest of the UK) sea angling's case to the highest offices of both Holyrood and Brussels (see the next inclusion, SSACN), which considering that he is an Englishman, was most definitely Scotland's gain and England's loss.

Ian hails from Hull, and had visited south west Scotland while on holiday as a child. Later, when he was old enough to drive, he continued to visit, particularly to Luce Bay, where he would stop over in a caravan. Visits which over time became more and more regular, to the point that eventually he decided not to bother going back to Hull, persuaded to no small degree by the quality of the fishing, something many anglers who have fished with him over the years will testify too.

Except that it wasn't like that when he first decided to 'up sticks' and move there. Back then the species mix included Cod, Pollack, Turbot and Plaice, plus rays by the boat load. A time when 50 rays in a session was not unusual, comprising a mix of Thornbacks, Blondes, Cuckoo's and Spotties. But oddly enough, he caught no Tope. With so many other distractions, he didn't bother with the Tope until 1992, amazingly spending 3 blank years at it before he caught his fish.

Ian's passion for Tope has many strands to it. Luce Bay turned out to be a World class Tope fishery once he had sussed it all out. Tope are large fish which visiting customers would be willing to travel for from the main centres of population in Scotland and from south of the border. They were also a species which were to a large extent untouched commercially, despite the other species mentioned earlier coming under increasing pressure.

By the time I was fishing with Ian, nobody even spoke of Cod, Turbot or Plaice. The rays had also been decimated by swathes of tangle nets catching them out in deeper water before they could migrate inshore. Only Tope and Pollack remained plentiful, and Ian was determined to do everything within his power to keep it that way, eventually with legislation to protect the Tope, and through a very early commitment that everything brought into the boat other than Mackerel and sandeels for bait would be treated with respect and returned, including several national records. "If the anglers didn't like it they don't need to book with me". But they did, and from spring through to autumn, his charter fishing business positively thrived.

Before pressing on, it might help to take a quick look at the geography of the area. For a number of reasons, Ian keeps his boat 'Onyermarks' on a trailer. The main one is the flexibility to use a number of operational bases both within Luce Bay and beyond it. Inside the bay he tends mainly to operate from East Tarbert tucked into the Mull of Galloway, which is Scotland's most southerly point. He has an arrangement with the local farmer there. He also puts in from the beach at Drummore as the harbour there dries, and occasionally higher up in the bay from Ardwell.

It all depends on which marks he intends to fish, and also if he intends fishing for species other than Tope. The upper bay area around Sandhead has over the years produced exceptional numbers of Bass, including double figure specimens. I think I'm right in saying that when I first started sea fishing back in the 1960's, this was regarded as the most northerly extent to which UK Bass would migrate. Smoothhounds and Black Bream have also found their way into Luce Bay around the Ardwell area since the millennium, and the Spotted Rays have recently started to come back.

Over on the other side of the long finger of land protecting Luce Bay's western flank, there are launch sites at Port Logan, Portpatrick, and a few isolated beach locations. This is the exposed side looking out across the North Channel towards Northern Ireland. A fiercely tidal area with some very deep water prone to cutting up very rough, which under the right conditions also offers some excellent fishing opportunities.

I remember fishing out from Portpatrick with Bryn Watson years before I met Ian, catching Spurdogs almost to order in the deeper water before being forced back inshore by the tide. An area Ian now visits late summer into early autumn, mainly out from Port Logan for the very biggest Tope, some of which have reached record proportions, with one particular fish estimated at over 80 pounds, all of which were returned without claim. You catch fewer Tope over that side, but it provides another option when the wind is in the wrong direction for Luce Bay, hence Ian keeping the boats on trailers.

Luce Bay is essentially a summer venue. It's vast, with lots of good holding areas. It was also species rich around the close of the century, despite the disappearance of some of the more attractive examples mentioned earlier. It can be quite tidal too, something Ian has learned to deal with over the years through experience, by having a number of less tidal 'fall back' marks to be used when needed.

Tope most certainly are the mainstay of what Ian has to offer, with Pollack fishing running it a close second. Interestingly, with conservation as opposed to freezer filling established as the way to fish these days, species hunts are another popular strand to the Burrett business, offering as many as perhaps 30 and more to skilful anglers willing to try for anything and everything over a weekend's fishing.

This option has been helped greatly by the recent appearance of the Black Bream and Smoothhounds mentioned earlier, the reappearance of some lost species, plus good numbers of edible species including Cod and Haddock out from Port Logan. Even Common Skate are starting to put in the occasional appearance thanks to the efforts of the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN) of which Ian Burrett is a very active founding member.

The Pollack are mainly found very close in around the Mull of Galloway right up along the exposed western side. The tide race under the lighthouse can be treacherous and must be treated with respect. So, Pollack trips only start from East Tarbert in settled conditions, progressing around the point on up towards Port Logan. In less reliable conditions it's a Port Logan launch working your way down, in both cases drifting through a number of small indentations into the cliffs over heavy ground in around 30 feet of water.

When I've fished the Pollack with Ian it's been a mix of soft lures and sandeels feathered up around the tide-race. Also, long thin belly cuts of Mackerel, and in all cases, fished on a flying collar type rig slowing cranking the reel and getting the Pollack to give chase. On one occasion, I felt nothing more than a slight pressure on the line, eventually seeing a reddish blur in the water just below the surface which I instinctively thought it was weed. The reality was a huge Ballan Wrasse which we carefully weighed and found to be well over the Scottish record. A fish destined never to make it onto the list for the reasons already given – Ian's policy of returning all fish, of which this is just one example of several returned records I personally have witnessed.



Besides being a champion of fish conservation, Ian Burrett is also a champion of light line fishing and new innovative techniques, used in an attempt to extract maximum pleasure from individual fish, which makes sense if you are not going to be taking them home to eat.

One method he sometimes uses is slider float fishing, both for the Pollack and for the Tope. Pollack have very good eyesight and will readily move up in the water column to intercept a meal passing overhead. Less so with the Tope, which usually want their meals at or close to the bottom.

In this case, Ian lets the line slide through the float until the bait weighted by a couple of one ounce ball leads above the trace swivel touches bottom. When it does, he pulls it back up a couple of feet then stops it with a piece of elastic band or a float stop. A great way of getting a few bonus Tope when the tide stops running and the

fishing normally tails off. It seems that the visual stimulus of a bleeding tail less Mackerel trotting by in what remains of the run is more than some Tope can resist.

On one occasion, I received an invite to fish with him and a party of Scottish Salmon anglers who had perfected the art of catching Pollack on the fly. They'd already taken a number of IGFA World tippet records which were returned unclaimed, and had invited me along for an article and a video. The leader of the group was Allan Everington. Also, with him on one of the trips was renowned Salmon writer and fly tier Ally Gowan's.

Conditions need to be right for casting and getting the large sandeel pattern flies Allan had tied to sink. But they don't need to make it all the way to the bottom for the reasons explained earlier regarding Pollack being happy to swim up to intercept a meal passing over head. Using a fast sinking Orvis 600 grain shooting head, the lures would occasionally come up with weed on them. So, they were managing to get well down. That day Allan and Co. broke 3 IGFA records, which as usual, were returned rather than taking them ashore to be weighed 'properly' on firm ground as per the rules.

On the conservation side, particularly that relating to Tope and other tough skinned difficult to disgorge fish likely to pick up the Mackerel baits, Ian has been particularly active, always looking for ways to minimise the stress to the fish leading to a successful release. Disgorging in the water is one approach, and for fish which anglers require a trophy shot of, careful lifting onboard by the dorsal fin and tail to keep them horizontal was always very important.

Sharks have heavy internal organs which are prone to dramatically shifting inside the body cavity when held up by the tail as many anglers previously did. Sudden shifts in these organs can result in ruptured blood vessels which the angler doesn't see. As such, the angler puts the fish back, it swims away seemingly 'happy', then dies a slow agonising death as a result.

Bringing a Tope into a boat requires horizontal lifting, quickly placing it on to the deck where it needs to be secured, putting a wet rag over its eyes to calm it down, then out with the hook while the angler is getting himself and his camera ready for a quick picture or two. Cradled horizontal handling is equally important for the trophy shot too, then back into water facing into the tide until the fish 'kicks' and swims away.

Some of the disgorging of Tope, sharks and skate over the years has been, to put it bluntly, barbaric. Particularly with fish that have swallowed or taken the hook deep down. Powerful fish that are difficult to control, lots of sharp teeth, and thick leathery skin all combine together to make disgorging difficult, which can put these fish at risk.

To get around the deep hooking, Ian began experimenting with baits and strike timing. In the end he worked out that a Mackerel cut through mid-point to produce 2 equal halves gives the best chance of hooking Tope in the mouth. Smaller baits can be taken in more readily and the fish struck earlier after counting to 6 from when the run gets underway.

In the case of the back half of the Mackerel, the tail needs to be removed to prevent it spinning. Whole Mackerel can take a long time for Tope to get down, while 'flappers' tend to encourage the attention of more pesky dogfish hanging on to the fillets. As such, half baits have proved very effective at getting over deep hooking fish and mis timed strikes.

Hook barbs have been another area for Burrett experimentation. The barbs on standard hooks are often unnecessarily large, even for more readily disgorged fish such as Cod and Pollack. For tough skinned species they are a nightmare, particularly when taken down deep where the disgorger can barely reach, then when it does, can barely manoeuvre in the confined space. But going fully barbless wasn't the answer either. Baits were easily lost, particularly during casting when uptide fishing, which if you didn't see it come off, can mean wasted time with just a bare hook in the water.

The answer there came by squeezing the barb down to just a 'bump' with a pair of pliers. This proved to be sufficient to keep the hook in situ on a tight line, while allowing easy extraction when the fish is in the boat. And to keep the bait in place, he pushes a small square of rubber cut from a car inner tube over the 'bump' once the bait has gone on.

This technique was also applied to fishing for Common Skate. Towards the close of this Chapter I have an inclusion entitled "Self-Drive Common Skate". I was up on Loch Sunart in a hired self-drive dinghy with an 8 hp outboard on the back working on a magazine feature. Coincidentally, Ian turned up at the Salmon farm slip just as we were preparing to go. Having fished there before, he gave us a couple of marks within range of our tiny engine, both of which went on to produce 3 figure fish, then he was off out of the loch to explore the Sound of Mull.

One particular Common Skate he'd taken previously in Loch Sunart came out of the weight estimate formula at 247 pounds, well above the British and Scottish record, which as ever he put straight back. But his fishing up there in the early spring was purely for pleasure before the Luce Bay season got underway again. It had taken him 4 years to finally catch his first Skate in the area. Then a few of his Tope regulars asked if they might tag along, which to cut a long story short, led to him spending 3 to 4 weeks up there each spring with clients, before later switching operations to Crinan on the Sound of Jura in the spring and autumn, with the Luce Bay Tope sandwiched in between.

As you might expect, being a conservationist, and with his SSACN hat on, improving catching, handling, and release techniques for big Common Skate, as well as putting tags into them for the skate tagging program SSACN inherited from Dr. Dietrich Burkel (see Chapter 9) became an important and integral part of the work he ended up doing in the Sound of Mull, Firth of Lorne, and later, Crinan.

Double gaffing in the soft fleshy leading edge of each wing avoiding the body cavity was shown through recaptures not to cause lasting damage to these fish. It also made his skipper's role easier, and was therefore less stressful to the skate. The disgorging we've already looked at. Ian also devised the technique of working either a large square of commercial fishing net or a piece of tarpaulin under the skate while lying on the deck which could be lifted at its 4 corners, first resting it on to the side of the boat, then slipping it back effortlessly into the water.

Things down at the business end were also given a good looking at. Wire traces were replaced by 200 pounds commercial monofilament cut to a length a few inches greater than that of the largest skate on the weight estimation chart, which is approximately 84 inches, to avoid contact between the tail spines and the braided main line. A hook with its barb squashed down and a rubber square holding the bait in place was also used.

Running on the heavy trace is a 6 inch length of half inch diameter plastic hose with the lead weight attached to it, 'stopped' about a foot up from the hook, the idea being that if the main line ever parts, as the fish moves off, it then pulls the trace through the piece of hose, swivels and all, and doesn't therefore have the lead trailing behind it.

Baits too were modified. Originally he would use a whole 5 pound Coalfish. This later gave way to the 'kebab' technique of cutting up 2 or 3 Mackerel into 2 inch sections, inserting the hook through the centre of these, then sliding them up onto the trace. These would slid back down to butt up to the actual bait which was a couple of Mackerel or squid kept together with an elastic band for ease of the fish taking the bait, the idea being that the 'kebab' would set up an in situ rubby dubby trail.

So successful has the skate tagging programme become, worked in conjunction with catch and release and the weight estimate chart which everybody uses, that the Common Skate looks like maybe starting to live up to its name once again. The move by Ian from fishing the Oban area to Crinan shows how far the species has now spread from what was quite a small refuge population during the 1970's and 1980's.



Early on in the twentieth century skate were found along the Scottish side of the North Channel out from Portpatrick. Now it appears they are also making a come back there too. As yet in small numbers, but there none the less, and over on the Irish side too fishing out from Cushendall. Whether this will lead to them repopulating the entire Irish Sea remains to be seen. But for now, it looks like the work started by Dietrich Burkel and picked up by Ian Burrett and SSACN is tentatively paying dividends, and long may that continue to be the case.

PW Comment: Throughout my years of fishing with Ian Burrett I have worked very closely with him in his promotion of his conservation values, not only through articles in fishing magazines, but also by way of a whole series of handling demonstration videos for the SSACN website, also them airing on YouTube.

THE SCOTTISH SEA ANGLING CONSERVATION NETWORK



The Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN) did not exist during the twentieth century, which should make it ineligible for inclusion here. However, an earlier forerunner, Save Our Sharks (SOS) from which it evolved did come into being around the close of the century, which, coupled to SSACN being linked to several other inclusions dating right back to the 1970's such as the tagging of Tope and Common Skate, plus other matters linked to Scottish sea angling and the conservation of fish

stocks for recreational fishing, I felt it only right and proper that I at least fill in some of the detail of an organisation I have mentioned on numerous occasions elsewhere.

Marine fish species have no barriers outside of temperature and water depth. That said, SSACN does have a predominantly Scottish bias, despite having two Englishmen in Ian Burrett and Steve Bastiman at its organisational heart, both of whom reside in Scotland, plus Denis Kelly who is very much a Scot. But don't run away with the idea that this is a purely Scottish story, because it isn't.

It's true that the work SSACN does, and the grant funding it gets, in many ways tie it to the Scottish scene. But ironically, some of the best conservation results SSACN has won, such as legal protection for some shark and ray species through its work at both national and EU governmental level hasn't just benefited Scotland, and at times hasn't benefited Scotland at all, while the rest of the UK reaped the rewards.

To some extent, SSACN's 'roots' stretch right back to the fantastic Cod fishing days of the Clyde and its sea lochs from the mid-1960's through to the early-1970's. Then, over a period of just a couple of years, lack of control with regard to commercial fishing for what was a Cod breeding population entering the Clyde to spawn, saw the entire population crash virtually overnight when trawlers were allowed back into the area after successfully lobbying those in positions of power.

Other species disappeared too. And with them went all the bed & breakfast accommodation, hotel jobs, small boat hire businesses, shops, and an estimated 110 charter angling boats. All because of an ill thought out decision by fisheries ministers, from which the area has not, and probably will not ever recover, resulting in the demise of a World class fishery that brought income and work to a great many people in an area where employment opportunities have always been sparse. All for the sake of a few big pay days for a handful of commercial boats, resulting in hardship and suffering to a whole community. Something SSACN was and is determined should never be allowed to happen again.

In 2012, English & Welsh anglers were surveyed (see Chapter 12) all around the coast in an attempt to determine the true value of sea angling to both the local as well as the national economy, something SSACN had already undertaken some years earlier. From the SSACN survey, the Scots already knew the full value of their sea angling, which at £142 million surprised even them. Compared to the value of Scottish commercial fishing, it begs the question 'Why are things so heavily weighted in favour of a sector that not only contributes so little, but empties our seas and destroys so much marine habitat into the bargain?'

Small immature fish are dumped back into the water dead as collateral damage under the 'dressed up' banner of bycatch. At the same time, commercial dredgers looking to catch say scallops, and prawn dredgers, do untold damage to immature fish, and more especially to the habitat that supports them and everything else. So there isn't a one size fits all answer to the question 'why?'. It's very complex, and yet it's also very simple at the same time. Angling brings in more revenue spread across more people than commercial fishing ever can, plus it doesn't destroy habitat. So why can't governments see this at face value and take decisive action?

Because they either can't, or won't, and because the commercial sector lobbies better than angling ever does and has sympathetic listening ears to whisper into, organisations like SSACN are vital. As has been said, and as the name implies, while SSACN is a Scottish organisation, it has won legislative concessions not only for the rest of Britain, but across the EU too. For some reason the Scots are very supportive of their environment. The Irish are also very conservation minded too. But when you speak to English and Welsh anglers, particularly if you invite them to fight for the kind of stuff SSACN fights for, most simply shrug their shoulders and walk away in a display of indifferent apathy.

	SPECIES:		Sex:	Comme
	Tope <input type="checkbox"/>		Male <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Starry Smooth Hound <input type="checkbox"/>		Female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Common Smooth Hound <input type="checkbox"/>		Unknown <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Thresher Shark <input type="checkbox"/>			
	Porbeagle Shark <input type="checkbox"/>			
	Short Fin Mako Shark <input type="checkbox"/>			
Angel Shark (Monkfish) <input type="checkbox"/>				
Smooth Hammerhead <input type="checkbox"/>				
Blue Shark <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SPURD				
Condition of Fish: Good <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Gravid <input type="checkbox"/>	Non Gravid <input type="checkbox"/>	
Total Length: 125cm	Fork Length: 50cm	Weight: 7		
Locality in Words:			Weather: cold	
Lat/Long: 56° 12' 03" / 5° 03' 47"		Tide: very		
Bottom Structure:	Sandy <input type="checkbox"/>		Rough <input type="checkbox"/>	Reef <input type="checkbox"/>
Date: 15/11/08	Time: 11:45	Depth: 2	Other <input type="checkbox"/>	
Parasites:	Bait Used: mackerel			
Angler/Anglers Name and Address: Ian Burrett				
Boat Name:				

I have spent time at a number of mass tagging events organised by SSACN, including tagging Spurdogs in Loch Etive and Loch Sunart; Tagging Common Skate at Crinan, in Loch Sunart and around the Sound of Mull, and the tagging of any and all cartilaginous species with specific emphasis on Tope in Luce Bay, where it is noted that the level of support these events receives is truly heart warming, which for me being an Englishman is embarrassing to concede.

I don't know what it is, but the Scots are fiercely proud of their heritage in a way the rest of us are not, and as such

they are willing to support this type of charitable work, sometimes at great cost to themselves, which hopefully one day will bring the rewards it deserves, while at the same time, the fishing south of the border continues to slide down the pan.

The SSACN emphasis, it has to be said, has been mainly directed towards the various sharks and rays. Cartilaginous species which produce small numbers of well developed young, either in protective leathery capsules, or as live young, which when they are pushed to the edge of extinction as some have been over recent years, find it very difficult to climb back from, which if they do manage it, can take them very many years, one very good example being the Spurdog, a fish once said to be the most abundant small shark in northern European waters.

I remember days in the 1970's when the Spurdog shoals were so vast you had to sail huge distances just to get away from them. More recently, Ian Burrett spoke of shoals 5 miles across in Luce Bay during the 1990's. Until commercial boats from all over Europe started taking an interest in them, to a point where by the turn of the century you quite literally couldn't find even a single one. They were to all intents and purposes extinct.

Not only from Luce Bay, but all around the entire country, which had it not been for a couple of small refuge populations tucked away in Loch Etive and Loch Sunart, would almost certainly have remained the case. Hence the Tagathon's in both of those lochs organised and overseen by SSACN, to gather in data which the Scottish government had demanded in order to have these 2 refuges even considered as set aside for recreational angling only.

Since it's early humble beginnings, SSACN has managed to acquire funding from public donation, subscription, and from the Scottish government, and as such is now able to employ a fishery science team of its own to handle the type of data that angling is now able to provide.

Dart tags were put into large numbers of Spurdogs, plus acoustic tags in some of the Loch Etive fish, with detection devices fitted to both sides of the narrow entrance to the loch at Connel to see if the population was totally resident, or if some migrational movement, perhaps by larger mature fish takes place, in an effort to fully understand just exactly what it is they were dealing with.

Satellite and data logging tags were also considered which are expensive and restrictive in their availability, and while they can potentially provide a more comprehensive spread of data which 'pinger' and dart tags cannot, this might not always add much extra to strengthen the SSACN argument if used sparingly.

Common Skate have to be the most unfortunately named fish in British waters. These too have been the subject of intense scientific investigation, dating back to work started by the likes of Dr. Dietrich Burkell and the Swinbank Brothers who started the skate tagging programme in the 1970's (see Chapter 9). Also Davy Holt and Bill Little, who did so much work on compiling the weight estimation chart which anglers are not only happy to use, but through legislative conservation measures sought and won by SSACN have to use, with all Common Skate now required to be disgorged and returned at the point of capture, including those scooped up by commercial boats.

This particular piece of legislation backs up a lot of the early days pressure from anglers for commercial fishermen to do the right thing, leading to the species currently expanding out beyond the small refuge population hanging on around the Isle of Mull, with specimens now appearing all along Scotland's west coast in both directions, plus across the way in Northern Irish waters. An expansion which would have made the 'Common' element of the species name once again sound relevant had it not been for the discovery that this is in fact not one, but two similar species, now given the new names of Blue Skate *Dipturus flossada* and Flapper Skate *Dipturus intermedia*.

At the time of writing there are a number of cartilaginous species which have been given protection to varying extents in the seas around Britain and elsewhere in Europe. The Monkfish or Angel Shark *Squatina squatina* is currently the species most at risk. In 2013, Kevin Flannery, Director of Dingle Ocean World, suggested to the Irish Examiner that there could be as few as a dozen Monkfish left in Irish waters. Yet 30 years ago at nearby Fenit, we could catch that many in a day.

Undulate Rays too, which despite a decline, are also now making quite a meaningful comeback along the south coast of Britain. A species which, along with the Monkfish, Common Skate and Tope, plus Porbeagle Sharks within a specified size bracket, must also be returned to the water immediately at the point of capture, all of which is thanks to the relentless science based lobbying work done on all our behalf's by SSACN..



My final question to Ian Burrett was, what is the future for SSACN and its campaigning work? His immediate come back was more and bigger fish. That's what anglers want. Also, more educational outreach work in schools, and a more professional outlook for SSACN, which is a registered charity with its own management team. As an employer, SSACN also needs to be looking for more grants to finance its ongoing work.

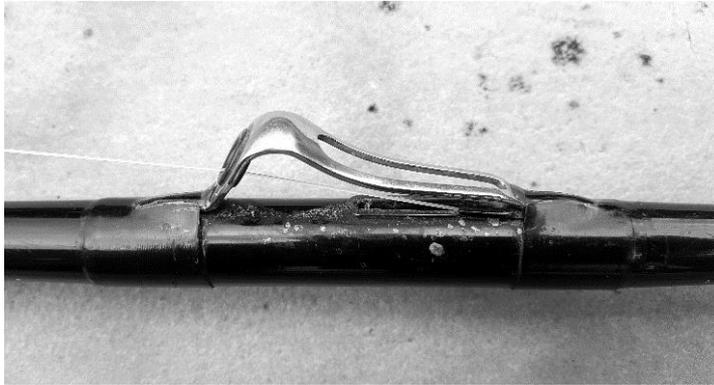
There is also a political dimension to this work, though this isn't party political. Amazingly, fishery scientists are still telling fishery ministers that our

seas are healthy. SSACN was called to Holyrood to present an alternative slant on things to MSP's, where their views are very well respected.

Back in the SOS days, they even went over to Brussels to argue against Article 47 (the part played by angling in fish stock levels) which was eventually overturned. This later became article 55 (with greater clarity than Article 47, and not as anti-angling) which has turned out to be of some help to sea angling, and which, had it not been for SOS and later SSACN, would have seen sea anglers hammered. But far

and away the greatest success has been the economic study, which clearly demonstrates the value of angling to the economy compared to commercial fishing.

INTERLINE FISHING RODS



In 1986, Sea Angler Magazine carried a product review by shore angler and caster Andy Rackham exploring a new concept in rod design known as the Cyclops (see Chapter 10). The name was on account of the fact that the rod only had one eye fixed within the rod tip as a line exit point. This, it was claimed, allowed line to flow from the reel along the inner curve of the blank, thereby eliminating friction points created by having rings or eyes. That said, in 1994,

Daiwa Seiko Inc. filed for, and in 1997 was granted, a patent for the eyeless fishing rod, which they called the Interline. At the time, I was sent the boat fishing version for appraisal.

According to the patent application, “Line is distributed evenly along the entire inner spiral structure, decreasing torque, providing smoother retrieves, friction free casting and ultra smooth even drag pressure. Decreasing line contact and drag thus increasing cast distance and accuracy by drawing water off the line and keeping the line centred in the rod. By increasing the number of spirals and decreasing the spiral peak, interline rods have become inherently more sensitive. These are the coolest, funkiest and sexiest most technically advanced rods available. The line goes inside through the guides located inside the rods. The rod is specially designed with carbon thread inside to make sure the line goes smoothly and will not touch the rods side tightly. It ensures the line will not scratch with the rods. The reel seat is located closer to the bottom; this will make the balance perfect. The angler can feel more relaxed when using the rods”.

My own experiences contradict none of the above. In fact, these days it is often my rod of choice for general fishing, covering everything from inshore flatfish to medium sized offshore Tope. On account of the model I have being 8 to 20 pounds class, obviously there are situations I wouldn't take it into. But the same is true of other rods in the same weight category. That said, I would never put to sea intending to use it without a backup rod to hand either. For while it's true that there are no eyes to break or damage which is often the reason for rod failure, if you suffer a line break which recoils back inside the rod blank, that's it until you get back home and can rethread the running line ready to go again.

Unlike the 1986 Cyclops mentioned earlier, the Interline has an eye just above the handle with a slot for the line to feed into the tube. A 'gadget' is also provided to attach the line to then feed into the slot using gravity to help it on its way along the blank, finally exiting through the funnelled end eye. Reasonably straight forward enough in the warm and dry back home. Less than easy in a wet pitching boat loosing fishing time.

I quickly lost my line threading gadget and now resort to feeding a length of quite heavy diameter mono in through the tip. This more readily resists bending or bunching and should become visible through the slot when eventually it arrives there. I then use a pair of tweezers to lift it clear. That then becomes my 'fish wire'. This in turn is superglued to the end of the reel line to avoid bulky knots, and the line fed back through and out for a swivel to be tied to it. Imagine attempting to do all of that on a boat.

I personally like the action, sensitivity, and feel of the rod. It never fails to attract interest too when I'm in new company, to the point that Daiwa must have sold dozens of the things on the back of the one they gave to me. I did however have reservations about salt build ups inside the tube and the tip eye and what these might do to the line. Also drying algae and other scum over the summer months, though I must be honest and say that in around 20 years of usage, none of these envisaged threats has proved to be a problem, yet.



As an additional point of interest, around 1993, Daiwa set up the Japanese National Casting Competition for rods without external line guides which proved very successful in the braid casting category. Obviously, the rod would be 'difficult' to use with a shock leader; even a tapered leader, due to the narrow exit aperture impeding the knot. Reports tag the Interline as being very good with small diameter braids and long spool reels.

The point I still can't fully get my head around is why line friction and therefore slowing is not increased if the line has more contact area inside the tube than outside with a traditional rod. To help allay that fear, Andy Rackham in the Cyclops test back in 1986 said he could see no difference in casting distances between the Conoflex Cyclops and standard Conoflex rods of similar rating.

Forum threads say much about the rods spiral lining. They also point to Tommy Eccles, a plasterer from the Isle of Man as being the concepts creator. He reputedly had a rod maker knock up the first prototype which allegedly Daiwa bought the patent for. Others suggest Les Moncrieff first came up with the idea, again with the reel offset to allow straight line access into the open end aperture of the blank. The Moncrieff boat version supposedly had two different tips rated 20 and 30 pounds class.

It's also suggested that Ron Thompson makes 'Interline' rods for piking because the line doesn't tangle around the eyes on the drop or down stroke. That unfortunately still leaves problems with hang-ups. When this happens, I suppose you could wrap the line around a lump of wood both to get a direct pull, and to stop it disappearing down the tube.

<https://www.google.com/patents/US5598657>.

THE ESSEX BOYS

Put bluntly, the Essex Boys are a small group of friends who are passionate about fishing at all costs, with enough disposable income to fund their passion properly. At the centre of the 'gang' are Paul Maris and Dave Hawkeswood, a pairing I have had the good fortune to fish with on a number of occasions, and always in Scotland.

The first time was at Lochaline where Luce Bay charter skipper Ian Burrett would rent the entire Ardtornish Estate building for a month each spring, then have small groups up staying with him to fish from his two Orkney 19 Fastliners for huge Common Skate.

This started initially with Ian trailing up there in his Luce Bay chartering 'close season' to fish with a couple of friends launching on Loch Sunart, sometimes venturing out into the Sound of Mull, and later the Firth of Lorne when the weather was right to explore. Ian tells me it took him 3 years to get his first Common Skate. Now of course they expect to catch them every trip. Then a few of his summer regulars asked if they might tag along for the skate, and it all sort-of grew from that.



Amongst those asking to have a try for the skate were the Essex Boys. According to Paul Maris, that would be towards the end of the 1990's. But the Essex Boys story starts a little earlier than that around the early to mid-1990's when Luce Bay was their venue of choice for huge bags of Tope during the summer with Ian, who later in the year would also trail across the peninsula to Port Logan where the Tope were fewer, but the size was way up as the bigger female fish came into the equation.

Fishing out around the Scares approximately midway between the Mull of

Galloway and Burrow Head out on the fringe of Luce Bay, the Tope fishing can only be described as incredible. Obviously, the fish had to be there to catch. But the catches had everything to do with the hard work put in by Ian Burrett in painstakingly working out the where and when according to the size and state of tide. And didn't they just clean up. One day in particular I was there to shoot a couple of videos on Tope handling and float fishing for them at slack water. That day we had 48 fish, ironically to 48 pounds. In the main they were male pack fish in the 30 to 40 pound bracket. But what a day. Beautiful weather, plenty of action, and the Essex Boys for company.

When eventually they got in on the Common Skate fishing in the spring of the year at Lochaline, their catches followed a similar pattern. These were the days when they used a 5 pound Coalfish for bait on a 90 inch long 200 pounds bs mono trace. Days when if an angling feature or a video was on the cards, Ian would wait for Paul and Dave to be there, because whenever they turned up you could always expect great things.

We had some amazingly good fishing on some pretty grim, lumpy, hail and rain lashed days waiting for the tide to ease away. Much of the fishing was done in the Sound of Mull, mainly due to weather restrictions. But if it was achievable, then the Firth of Lorne was the place to go, fishing not that far away from Oban.

It was a long haul down there from Lochaline though, which incidentally is an excellent shore mark for big skate when fishing from the pier. But always it was well worth the run. It was there in fact that I had my best skate in my own boat at 204 pounds. But that's another story. The Essex Boys and big hauls of Common Skate seemingly always went hand in glove, whatever the conditions. So, I've spent quite a bit of time 'confined' with Hawkeswood, Maris and Burrett, and have witnessed some tremendous fishing as a result.

One particular day sticks out above the rest. I'd just headed back home leaving Paul and Dave to have one final go at the skate the following day before they too were away. Unfortunately, due to a family emergency, Dave Hawkeswood had to shoot off home at the very last minute leaving Paul to fish for both of them. The result was what I believe to be the greatest single person single session haul of Common Skate ever made.

Across the rods, without a break, Paul was into big skate for a total 4½ hours solid. During that time he boated 10 big fish averaging 198 pounds apiece, 4 of which were over 200 pounds, the best coming out of the weight estimation formula at a staggering 219 pounds.

I've never come across nor even heard of anything like it before. If somebody out there has done better than I pity the person who was involved, because it all but crippled Paul Maris.

WELSH COD RECORD BROKEN

If you look at the various inclusions regarding big Cod from the 1960's through into the 1990's, a very clear pattern should start to emerge. There was little in the way of decent Cod until the late 1960's, at which point the first hints of what was about to happen start to come through with Scotland's Clyde estuary and sea lochs.

Next up was the south east of England along the channel coast from Kent to the Isle of Wight, followed shortly afterwards by the Lancashire Coast from the late-1970's to maybe the start of the 1990's. Two other participants here are South Wales, and Balcary on Scotland's Solway Coast, both of which came into their prime a little later than the others, and consequently finished a little later too.

Folkestone angler Alan Yates, who was fortunate enough to fish with Les Moncrieff at Dungeness for huge Cod during that period, puts the whole episode down to the big freeze of 1962-1963 when in many places the sea actually froze. This pushed a lot of fish away into more tolerable areas, including the predators of Cod eggs and fry, resulting in a Cod population explosion and higher numbers of big Cod making it through the ranks until such time that the old balance re-established itself.

I know from speaking to Dave Lewis that South Wales and the Bristol Channel area, while it mirrored the fishing along my native Lancashire Coast, did lag behind it by a few years, which might help explain the timing of S. H. Williams Welsh boat record Cod of 20.638 Kg (45.8.0 pounds) caught fishing out from Swansea aboard Paul Radford's boat 'Radfords Lady', coming along as late as 1997.

The Welsh Cod tended to arrive in numbers further east than Swansea around the Cardiff-Penarth area first. I remember Dave telling me about his dinghy catches out from Sully. They were also seeing them over on the English side of the inner Bristol Channel. Then they would start to move west around the Christmas period on into January and February. Not so much as a population, but certainly the bigger fish culminating in that 1997 record, which like a lot of local records set at the time at other locations around Britain, still stands to this day.

BLACKPOOL NORTH PIER JETTY



Opened in 1863, Blackpool's North Pier is one of the better known examples of work done by the of famous Victorian engineer Eugenius Birch. Three years later, a fishing and landing jetty was added, which was further extended in 1869, bringing the total length of the structure to 1,410 feet.

Sandwiched between building and later extending the jetty, Nelson's formed flagship 'Foudroyant' which was moored just off for an exhibition broke free of its mooring and damaged the pier, followed by a further 2 collisions in 1892 and later in 1897 after the deck had been widened.

There then followed 2 fires in 1921 and 1938 leading not only to extensive reconstruction and repairs, but also investment in bars and even a helicopter landing stage which I remember well. I also recall some leisure excursions resuming with the MV 'Balmoral' calling at the jetty in 1992.

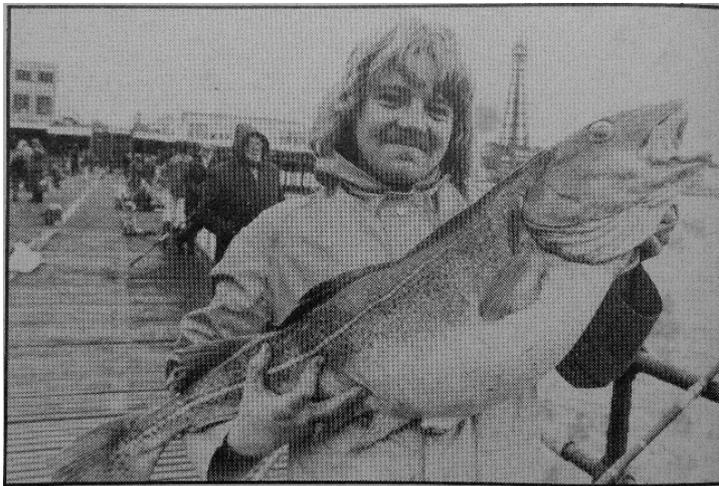
But despite all of this, the lower jetty section with its small tackle and bait shop at the top of the steps was always popular with anglers, myself included.

There is something about being on the jetty after dark on a making tide with the reflections of the street lights and illuminations on the water. And while Dabs and Whiting were the winter mainstays, there

was something magical about getting set up with the wind on your back and the Tilley lamp well pumped up at your side.

More often than not this would be in poor sea conditions, which as incoming waves thundered under the jetty when the tide was up enough, would send spouts of water crashing up through the metal grating soaking some unfortunate soul. And while you might laugh to yourself, it paid not to laugh too loudly, because it was a racing certainty that sooner or later your turn would come.

The North Pier jetty was mainly a small fish venue. The kind of place youngsters serving their angling apprenticeship would go along with occasional anglers lacking the necessary skills for the beach. Being a small boat angler, I probably fell into the latter category. But it didn't matter, because I used to love the whole atmosphere of the place, on top of which, as some anglers occasionally did, you might get lucky and hook into something big, though in all honesty the chances of that being a Cod were slim, as even in the Jumbo Cod era, the bulk of the bigger fish were a few miles to the north from Cleveleys through to Rossall. Even if you did hook one you still had to get it up, which occasionally happened, but not regularly enough I suppose to carry a drop net or extended gaff.



Who says piers don't produce big fish? Not Gary Marriott, of Blackpool, who caught this 27 lb cod from Blackpool North Pier.

The end for the jetty came in 1997 after a big storm severed it from the main pier, with the owners deciding not to repair it, saying they would invest a million pounds into the rest of the structure instead, which like some other Victorian piers around the country is a listed building, and that unfortunately was the end of that.

Fishing is still allowed on the pier through club membership fishing from the remaining upper level. Again, small fish dominate, though the occasional unexpected bonus fish still comes along. But nothing to equal some of the bonus catches of the past, such as a 13½ pound

Turbot caught by Barry Lowton, and a 27 pound Cod caught by Garry Marriot reported in *Sea Angler Magazine* by the late Bob Gledhill.

THE PANDORA BREAM RECORD

When you get used to seeing Pandora Bream *Pagellus erythrinus*, it's fairly easy to pick them out from the other 'red' coloured sea breams visiting our corner of the World, and will increasingly visit us and thrive as sea temperatures climb yet further, extending their regular range ever further northwards.

Conversely, when you are not used to seeing them, and more to the point, you are not expecting to see any 'red' coloured sea breams other than the one which regularly visited our southern and western shores until they suddenly disappeared off the angling radar around the start of the 1980's (see Chapter 10), then you could be forgiven for not recognising either the Pandora, or Couches Bream *Pagrus pagrus*, which throughout the 1990's up to present have seemingly increased in numbers and range.



As you might expect, and is so often the case with new visiting species, the first early encounters of 'other' red sea breams came from around the Channel Islands. Least ways that's what we think. I certainly wasn't looking for new species when I would regularly fish for Red Bream off Looe on the English Channel coast, and out from Newquay along the north coast.

Newquay however is now known to attract good numbers of Pandora Bream, with the current British boat record standing at 3.6.12 caught by C. Stone in 1997 coming from the port. The shore record standing at 1.8.7 caught by Philip Jewell was taken in the Helford River just across the way close to Falmouth. Scotland, Ireland and Wales don't have the species listed - yet.

CORNISH LUVAR

Distantly related to the tuna family, the Luvar *Luvaris imperialis* is a fish of the open ocean which on very rare occasions has turned up along Atlantic Coasts up here in our corner of the World. A fish very much of the upper layers of the deep water column, and a very strikingly obvious, quite deep bodied fish, with a very blunt facial profile, coloured metallic blue on the back, pinkish red on the sides, and silvery underneath, all finished off with scarlet fins.

The few specimens there are that have been reported have tended to be stranded individual juvenile fish. None of the bigger mature specimens which can potentially weigh as much as 300 pounds and more. So, the 34 pound specimen caught in a surface drift net set for Albacore down towards the Bay of Biscay and subsequently landed at Newlyn fish market in 1998 was at the lower end of the size range, adding to the mere handful commercially caught since that date.

This particular specimen was bought by Smarts Fish Merchants and handed over to local self-taught taxidermist Kenny Everett to mount for exhibit in their collection of usual Cornish fish.

ANGLING CHARTER FISHING RIBS

Glass and wooden boats are for anglers. RIBS are for divers. That's how a lot of people over a lot of years have separated these two classes of boat and the people who operate them. Then you start to look at the emergency services who are expected to turn out in some of the worst conditions imaginable to rescue anglers foolish enough to be out there when really they shouldn't be, and you start thinking to yourself, hang on a second.

True, the RNLI have also large self-righting boats for the major, longer range offshore call outs. Most rescues however, by both the RNLI and the Coastguard, are undertaken using small beach launched RIB's, which should tell anglers something about the design and sea handling qualities of these boats. As the advertising blurb put out by the Northern Ireland based RIB manufacturer Stormforce puts it, RIB's are boats chosen by people who have to go out to sea.

There's a long held belief that angling and Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIB's) can't work together on a number of levels. The main concerns seem to revolve around puncturing with hooks, gaffs, and knives. In short, opportunities for the Sponsons (tubes) to deflate, necessitating the RNLI to have to come to



the rescue, which in truth doesn't happen due to the way RIB's are put together and how hard the sponsons are inflated.

If you do manage to puncture the sponson of a RIB, which would be quite difficult due to the amount of protective covering most have, the air inside isn't going to suddenly come whistling out leaving the boat lurching to one side, because the pressure keeping the sponsons inflated is a lot less than people might think.

I'm told that the pressure pumped into the sponsons of a RIB isn't actually that much different from the ambient air pressure outside, on top of which, they have compartments inside each tube, all of which would need to be punctured at the same time on both sides to become genuinely life threatening, which even in a major disaster scenario just isn't going to happen.

So there you have it. RIB's are much more rugged than we anglers give them credit for, and in terms of ride at speed, well, that's why the emergency services choose them instead of other types of boats and construction materials. With its straight through V-hull, in heavy weather, nothing can touch a RIB for comfortably maintained pace, stability, and ride.

The story of Stormforce RIB's and offshore sea angling is straddled either side of the millennium. It starts with GRP hull production under the banner 'Red Bay Boats' which some dabbling diversification during the 1990's turning out the sort of 6 to 7 metre open RIBS we are all familiar with. Then in 1998, history was made with the first of a long line of increasingly bigger models starting at 9.1 metres, designed and fitted out to satisfy a whole range of business and commercial applications, including ferries, offshore engineering, and of course, offshore charter angling.

To find out the truth behind the hype, I went over to Cushendall in Northern Ireland where Stormforce RIB's are produced, which also happens to be the home base of charter fishing skipper Hamish Currie. At the time, Hamish was operating a trailed 9.1 metre (30 foot) RIB named 'Predator II' which he'd been fishing from for a few years.



Hamish arranged for me to visit to the factory and meet up with company director Tommy McGloughlin who would show me the construction process first hand. But it was the fishing from the RIB that I had really gone over to check out, which went ahead in some of the most atrocious conditions I have ever been out in. So bad in fact that even the ferry sailings had to be cancelled. Yet there we were out in Red Bay catching fish, both in the shelter of the land, and right out in the thick of all. It was a revelation. Never will I look at the concept of fishing from a RIB in the same light ever

again.

On one of the days, Tommy let me have a go in his own personal 48 foot RIB. This one wasn't decked out for angling. The whole thing was covered in for pleasure sailing. I remember it had a sticker on the steering console which read 'Drive as if you have stolen it'. In other words, to hell with conditions; give it plenty of throttle, because the boat can take it.

RIB's are the only boats I have been out in which can be opened right up to the max in pretty much anything the sea and the wind can throw at them. Again, the reason why the rescue services see them as their obvious first choice. A fantastic piece of kit which I defy any boat angler not to be impressed with.

As a result, Hamish Currie is not a man to cancel trips. He doesn't need to. And in an area noted for its rough seas, plus it has to be said, some very big fish including Common Skate and Porbeagle Sharks which Hamish is renowned for putting anglers in touch with, a no nonsense any weather boat is an absolute must.

Shortly after my visit I discovered that Blackpool Boat Angling Club member Mike Thornton had bought a 6 metre Stormforce Angling RIB on a trailer fitted out for small boat fish off the Lancashire Coast, and again, a trip out was arranged. This time however, I knew pretty much what to expect, and in that regard, I wasn't disappointed.

Once again, safety was of primary concern in terms of reinforcing and protecting the sponsons. This time I was also able to get a good look at the fibreglass hull supporting the sponsons, and it wasn't difficult to appreciate how and why these boats can maintain the turn of speed they can offer. That through V-hull made it a dead cert to ride well at speed. The fact that the 'V' carried right through to the transom was what allowed the boats pace to me maintained, even in rough weather.



Because of the sponsons, RIB's are far more stable boats than GRP V-hulls. If I have a criticism it would be the sensation of sitting so low in the water. It takes a bit of getting used to, as does any new boat.

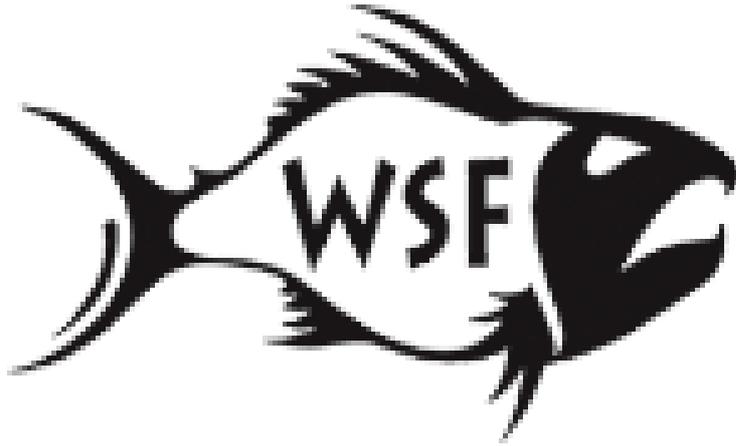
I'm used to a Warrior 175, a boat from which it would be physically very difficult to fall out of. With just the sponsons for freeboard on the RIB it was difficult not to want to keep an eye out for any broadside waves. But I needn't have worried. The boat rode everything with total ease, and even if

it did fill up with water, for obvious reasons, it couldn't sink. All you then do is open up the throttle, lower the 'Elephants Trunk' at the stern, and within minutes all the water is gone. Try doing that trick in a GRP boat.

WORLD SEA FISHING

In an era when angling websites are common place, and when social media can deliver angling updates virtually as they happen, it must be hard to imagine a time when pretty much all angling related content came from the local news agent via the printed word.

An era when information provision could be very long winded, and at times particularly difficult to come by. A situation which inspired 16 year old Mike Thrussell Jr. (son of Mike Thrussell the angling journalist) to look at ways of resolving the problem as a project during in the summer break from school in 1998, about which it would be no exaggeration to say, Mike Sr. was less than enthusiastic.



“It won’t last”, Mike Sr. said. An inspirational talk if ever it was needed. And so it was that Mike Jr. set about the often arduous task of figuring out a presentational format for magazine style fishing articles and reviews, an area of support for which Mike Sr. was eventually ‘commissioned’ to provide material.

The initial idea came about when Chris Pierce from Sea Fishing Magazine was staying over at the Thrussell household.

Lots of different journalists would stay over from time to time, allowing Mike Jr. to engage in regular bouts of brain storming and canvassing points of view. As such, the content side of things wasn’t that difficult to come up with.

This provided plenty of ideas to present to Mike Sr., who despite his initial reservations regarding the project, once the technical side had been built and was operational, was only too willing to help out with on a regular basis.

Inevitably, the high level of traffic generated by WSF eventually led to the establishing of a forum where interested parties could air grievances, tout for information, and generally have their say. An aside which evolved a popularity on an unprecedented scale offering the perfect way to get the regular followers involved. Until that was the nasty and more abusive threads occasionally kicked off, something all forums seem to attract, unfortunately.

Often these are little more than alcohol fuelled rants. Some however do develop into potentially more serious situations, which is where the moderators come in. There’s a fine line at time between freedom of expression (within the rules) and abusive or threatening remarks which fall beyond the pale. Fortunately, Mike Jr. anticipated this and got on top of it at a very early stage.

Catering for healthy moderate ‘debate’, WSF set up a separate angling politics site geared up to take the really heavy stuff. This as it turned out was a smart move, as the number of trolls significantly dropped away, many preferring to practise their ‘dark arts’ on social media platforms such as FaceBook and Twitter.

This makes the job of finding and dealing with the smaller number of remaining WSF trolls all the easier, unless of course they are sending private messages which the rank and file have no access to, leaving the main site and forum to do what it was set up to do, which is inform on angling topics and provide access to information that would, in the late-1990’s, otherwise have been very difficult to get hold of.

JIM WHIPPY

Jim Whippy has arguably one of, if not the best angling CV’s the UK sea angling scene has ever witnessed, and as such, he has to be one of the most experienced competitive international sea anglers in the country. Check this list out.....

World Boat Championships – fished for England 6 times. Won team silver and team bronze.

Gold medals in EFSA Game Championships in Florida 1990 & 1994 with England A team.

Captained EFSA light tackle dinghy team in a 2-test match series in South Africa.

Captained EFSA England boat team for 20 years and won a gold medal in Norway.

Captained the 'Pevensey Pack' to win the national shore league final.

Captained a team to win National shore league at Sandgate.

EFSA European Senior Boat Champion (over the age of 65) twice.

Won the Plymouth 5-day international.

Won the Weymouth YYS 5-day international.

Won the European Cod championships.

Won 2 gold medals in America – Big Game Fishing Championships.

Won the PBAC club boat championships 13 times.

Won the NFSA southern division championship twice.

Won the national boat league final at Guernsey (gave away the £12,500 prize to runner up).

Along with wife Pat, and daughters Lisa, Salina and Anna, broke 31 IGFA line class World records.



Chatting to Jim, you would think that this was a CV born out of humble beginnings which just sort of evolved as opportunities arose. Luck may well be a factor in a lot of anglers' success, but as the saying goes "The harder you work, the luckier you get" always rings true, and will most certainly have played no small part in amassing that particular CV. Consistency of that magnitude is earned through dedication and ability.

Fate has also had a hand in some of it too. He tells me he was always looking to stretch himself, competing from both the boat and shore with separate tackle boxes for each. That was until one particular day he turned up at a match with the wrong box of tackle. Disaster; time then to make a choice, boat or shore', and stick with it. Fortunately for the England boat squad selectors that choice was to go with the boat fishing.

Back in the mid-1990's, Jim was a carpet fitter for his day job, and a very successful sea angler whenever any leisure time opportunity presented itself, which around 1995 was becoming increasingly more regular than was financially comfortable, as recession saw to it that a growing number of people were putting the buying of new carpets ever further down their list of urgent purchasing priorities.

Time then for another dose of good hard thinking, and possibly even a change in career direction. As he'd always fancied adding angling writing to his already impressive CV, supported and encouraged by his wife Pat, he started up the free news print publication 'Sea Angling News', supported solely by advertising, distributed from Orford in Suffolk right around the coast to Weymouth in Dorset, which after producing the paper, was something else Jim had to do for himself from the back of a van.

In his own words, "not exactly being computer literate at the onset", he very quickly had to get himself up to speed in terms of layout, construction, and production, in a bid to cut costs. Fortunately, Sea Angling News became a resounding success. So much so that in 1998 he was able to sell the business on when David Hall Publishing came calling with an interview invitation to head up a new publication

they had planned, entitled Total Sea Fishing. A magazine which was to go head to head as a direct challenge to the established market leader, Sea Angler Magazine, owned at the time by the publishing giant East Midland Allied Press (EMAP).

Testament to the man, Total Sea Fishing and Sea Fishing News were both still in circulation at the close of the century, and then some. Jim however was no longer at the helm of either, having decided in 2001 to go it alone with his own second highly successful publication, this time a full colour magazine entitled Boat Fishing Monthly.

I remember it well. EMAP's magazine Boat Fishing has just been absorbed into Sea Angler, presumably to cut costs. I was actually working for both EMAP titles at the time and was asked by Jim if I fancied making a switch. Coward that I was, I feared finding myself in the journalistic wilderness if BFM failed, while at the same time I also quite fancied the move, and most definitely fancied working for Jim, whose receptive temperament I already knew was ideal for the position he was in.

As a compromise, I initially provided material without it being attributed to me. But increasingly I was being drawn in to the point where I decided to come clean, provoking the comment "So you've decided to take Jim Whippy's shilling then?", from Sea Angler editor Mel Russ when I told him I was planning to jump ship.

What made Boat Fishing Monthly such an attractive proposition was the way in which Jim managed it, always seeming to have his finger very firmly on the sea angling pulse. But he didn't micro-manage it, so there was always plenty of opportunity to express a range of views. And so it went on until 2006, when again Jim's astute business acumen told him it was time to cash in and sell the title on to Warner's Publishing.

It was at that point that Dave Barham took the helm with Jim as consultant for a year, until sadly, and for a number of reasons the magazine market contracted, with BFM eventually going to the wall in 2015. And while strictly speaking it falls outside of the date parameters for inclusion here, it's worth briefly adding that in 2016 Jim Whippy came out of retirement to work with his boat partner Tim McPherson as start up editor of another new magazine title, Saltwater Boat Angling.

Two final points to make from my conversations and recordings with Jim. The first concerns a log book he kept recording catches made aboard his 10 foot dinghy dating back to 1967 which has allowed him to make a direct comparison, albeit localised, between the catches back then, and those of later years. With hindsight, something we all might benefit from doing.

Amazingly, from his notes, not that much seems to have changed in the Pevensy Bay area of east Sussex over that time. Based on 135 trips fished in 1967, the results were no better than they were in 2014 when I interviewed him, with the added comment that they should in fact have been better now on account of the improvements in tackle and tactics, though looked at another way, this could also be masking a slight decline.

The other point is in relation to the Berkley 'Trilene' promotion era of the mid-1980's. American tackle giant Berkley announced that they would pay out \$1,000 for any officially ratified IGFA record taken using their Trilene line. The full story of this appears in Chapter 10, the gist of which here is that Jim cottoned on to this at a very early stage and decided to take a look at the line class opportunities for species swimming off the Sussex coast, picking out a number of very good opportunities which he made the conscious decision to go out after in his boat with his wife Pat and 3 daughters to see just how many records they could break, which after a few subsequent 'tweaks' to the promotion by Berkley, brought in a cool \$31,000.

PW Comment: It was while working for Jim that I produced the first ever fully digitally illustrated fishing article published in the UK. Anticipating that digital photography would take over from film, I

bought myself a Casio 3.3 megapixel digital camera in 2000 which the following summer I took along with me on a wrecking feature trip out of Pwllheli fishing with Dave Carey, where I planned to duplicate everything and start building up a digital library to get ahead of the game.

Updating Jim about the trip, I mentioned the digital pictures and asked could he perhaps use them instead of the transparencies, to which he replied he didn't know, but he would ask the question at the printers, adding that I should send them down on a disc with the rest of the feature, which I did, and the next thing I know they were there in the magazine. I also did a similar thing with mobile phone photography at a time long before the incredible quality of today's smart phones. I don't think I would have got to do either had I offered them to Sea Angler at that stage of the game.

Knowing Jim to have an excellent grasp of all things relating to sea angling through his time as a magazine editor, plus his experience of club, open, and International match fishing, I asked him for his thoughts on how and why sea angling has got to where it is today, and what perhaps the future might hold. He replied as follows.....

“Sea fishing in the UK was at its best during the 40 years running up to the millennium. What made it become such a huge sport was emerging technology. The most exciting fishing up until the 60's was shark fishing which could be undertaken without needing exact marks to fish. Skippers were required to know the tide flow and depth from experience, then use rubby dubby and lots of fresh Mackerel to bring the fish to the baits. Reefs such as round the Eddystone off Plymouth were legendary for their catches of Bass and Pollack. But elsewhere it was mainly anchor down for whatever came along”.

Decca.....

It was the arrival of Decca that sparked off the craze for wreck fishing, as skippers could hire a Decca set and locate wrecks on a fairly regular basis. What they came back with fired off a craze for Conger Eel fishing. As the eels got bigger, more and more anglers booked charter trips and the business flourished. Around the wrecks they also found large Cod, Pollack, Ling and even Turbot, all adding to the excitement.

Decca was not fool proof, was difficult to understand, and was not available to the small boat owner. When the first GPS came on the market things began to change. A GPS unit could be purchased by charter boat skippers, not hired, and soon small boats were affording them and using them to good effect. Conger Eels went out of fashion and the targets became the Pollack, Ling and Cod for the freezer and less anglers wanted to stay at anchor. It also meant commercial boats could lay their nets with absolute accuracy and wipe out a good wreck in a couple of tides.

Downward Spiral.....

Recently, apart from a few years of exceptional catches of Cod, the fishing generally has been on a downward spiral. Huge commercial vessels with the ability to take out whole shoals of fish have made their mark. The harvesting of sandeels in the North Sea to use as fertiliser meant another important food source for many species was drastically reduced. The number of anglers participating has also been dropping year on year. This is mostly because of the technological changes, especially for our youngsters, who have become increasingly addicted to iPads, iPods, laptops, DS games, mobile phones, Snapchat, Minecraft, Twitter, Facebook, etc, etc. Once, children were free to spend their lives outside. They are now very much cocooned indoors and watched over 24/7.

Low Numbers.....

This can be seen clearly at fishing festivals, competitions, and on charter boats generally, with the majority of anglers well over 50, and very few youngsters coming into the sport. Unbelievably bad management of our sea fishing by the EU fishery ministers, ignoring the warnings from scientists and anglers alike about the reduction of fish stocks, has led to a situation that needs drastic measures. Strangely

the only ones to have been banned from catching, for example the Bass, are the sea anglers who catch a tiny fraction of the gross catch and mostly return them alive anyway.

After Brexit.....

We now enter a period of greater concern in 2018 with the coming of Brexit and the possibility of a transition period where the Common Fishery Policy may be left in the hands of the bureaucrats in Brussels and not taken over by our own government.

Small Boats & Kayaks.....



Now for the forecast about where our sport will go in the future. It's much easier to look back on what actually happened than predict an uncertain future. My view is there will always be enough anglers wanting to get out deep to keep charter boats going, but with probably less available space in most ports. Small private boats will still be popular for inshore fishing, but with many more anglers opting for kayaks and small transportable boats that are more economical to run, avoiding expensive marina fees.

These are also more attractive to the younger generation who see them as more cutting edge. The two biggest drawbacks to this are the weather that cannot be relied on, making small boat launches difficult, and the 'green' effect with more young people conscious of not wanting to harm any living creatures. Over the years I have noticed a run of bad weather can mean no boat fishing and anglers turning to trout fishing or even other sports, eventually giving up on boat fishing altogether.

Activate the Young.....

Although shore fishing is not so reliant on the weather and can be taken up for relatively little cost, the numbers of anglers entering competitions have also reduced dramatically. The only increase in shore fishing has been fishing for Mackerel during the summer when the beaches are sometimes lined with anglers looking for an easy catch. What needs to happen to bring sea angling back as a major sport, hobby, or pastime, however you think of it, is firstly for our politicians to make sure there are enough fish to be caught by proper management of the stocks in our inshore waters. We need to fire the enthusiasm of our youngsters to get out and about on the beach and leave the electronic gadgetry behind. One of the best places to start is in our schools if it wasn't for the 'health and safety' culture that would worry about children handling long rods, sharp hooks and heavy leads. All things previous generations grew up with as part of learning life skills.

ANTIFOULING OF BOATS

In November 1999, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) of the United Nations adopted an Assembly resolution calling for the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) to develop an

instrument legally binding throughout the World to address the harmful effects of anti fouling systems used on ships.

The resolution called for a global prohibition on the application of organotin compounds which act as biocides in anti-fouling systems by the 1st of January 2003, and a complete prohibition by the 1st of January 2008, which was later adopted as the International Convention on the Control of Harmful Anti fouling Systems on boats and ships.

While it might not seem to have much of a direct connect to sea angling, the importance of these measures when implemented is vast. All moored boat hulls gather speed sapping growth below the water line. This is mainly barnacles and weed which can result in fuel wasting drag, prevented by the application of organotin based paints.

The problem is (or hopefully, now was) that organotins, which were the chemicals of choice used prior to this piece of legislation, are a group of compounds containing tin bound to organic components (carbon-containing) that are highly toxic to marine algae, molluscs and crustaceans, which by getting into the food chain concentrate up fish and even marine mammals, affecting their endocrine (hormonal) regulation with lethal effect. As if marine resources don't have enough pressure on them already these days without us trying to poison them (and potentially ourselves as consumers) as well.

GREYS FISHING TACKLE TAKE OVER

In 1968, a Hardy's fishing tackle employee named as Mr. Grey decided it was time for him to go his own way in the World, and start up a fishing tackle manufacturing company of his own. Obviously called Greys, the new company specialised in the manufacture of rods, and fly rods in particular to a very high standard, which not only won it a lot of high end business, but then raised the question "why not quality sea fishing too?". Why not indeed. And so the business expanded, producing value for money quality rods for both the boat and the shore.

It may also have ruffled a few feathers too at other companies competing for the same business, not the least of which was Hardy's where the story had all started. So much so, that in 1999 the story went full circle when House of Hardy Ltd. acquired Greys of Alnwick, in their words as "a strategic opportunity to compete in complementary areas of the tackle market". Reflecting the success and importance of the 'merger', in 2004, House of Hardy Ltd. underwent a name change to Hardy & Greys Ltd.

ANDREW ALSOP

Andrew Alsop is the 'new face' of UK shark angling. Gone are the dark days of killing fish, hauling them ashore for weighing, then dumping them. An era that started at Looe then expanded to the Isle of Wight grounds, followed by the north Cornish Coast, Cardigan Bay, and finally Scotland's northernmost tip, with sharks regularly brought ashore and dwindling numbers causing anglers to scratch their heads and wonder why. A question that can be answered in one word, sustainability.

The killing of large slow growing animals with desperately low reproductive rates can only ever have one outcome. So if anglers want sustainable shark fishing with continuity on into the future, they need to do something about it. And while I acknowledge the great leap forward conservation has taken through shark specialists like Andrew Alsop not being prepared to kill fish simply to weigh then dump them, not even for record claims, you can't always rely on all anglers to take that same path, for which reason as the man in charge of the boat, Andrew decided he would take a stand himself, which when you build yourself a reputation for angling excellence in the way that he has, is easier to enforce. "If you want to fish with me, these are the rules. If not, take your business elsewhere".

Unusually, because of the timing of this inclusion and the way in which the Andrew Alsop the charter skipper got into the business, to do the story justice, I need to split the inclusion into 2 parts. The first part is Andrew Alsop the pleasure angler, which takes things through to around 2003 where his pioneering work on the Welsh shark fishing scene then fits very nicely into Chapter 12 entitled 'Legacy'.

Andrew and his dad Derek (AKA Allan or Al) had been quietly going about their business of catching and releasing sharks out from Milford Haven for some time, when he and angling journalist Dave Lewis quite by chance crossed paths at Penearth Marina in 2003. Dave was there to do a boat test for Sea Angler Magazine, and Andrew happened to be moored nearby aboard his 26 foot Osprey. Dave spotted the boat and went over, asking if he might perhaps do another boat test on that model too and was invited aboard, where as you do, you start chatting about the fishing.



There happened to be a photo album lying around with lots of pictures of Andrew aboard the boat with Blue Sharks, prompting Dave to ask if he'd taken it over to Ireland to catch them, to which Andrew said no, he'd caught them out from Milford Haven, leaving Dave a little taken aback. So with the boat test arranged, a still slightly sceptical Dave asked what the chances were of jumping in with him one day over at Milford Haven to take a look at the shark fishing, to which the answer was yes.

That trip produced something like 16 Blue Sharks, quite a few of which were topping 100 pound mark. Still at sea, Dave immediately got on the phone to Sea Angler Magazine editor Mel Russ saying "You're not going to believe this, but I'm fishing out from Milford Haven and we've had over a dozen Blue Sharks", and in due course the article was published.

Meanwhile, a week or so later, Dave was back on the phone to Andrew asking if he could do another trip, only this time bring along Byron Bates, a day on which Dave caught his PB Porbeagle Shark of 164 pounds, one of 4 caught, along with 8 or 9 Blue's, which again was him onto the phone to Mel Russ from the boat with another "You're not going to believe this story....." followed by yet another Sea Angler Magazine feature.

Shortly afterwards the Osprey was sold, a skippers ticket was earned, and with the obligatory financial juggling all complete, an Evolution 38 in kit form was purchased from a chap who had bought it then had run out of money before seeing it on the water, the idea being for Andrew to do a bit of weekend charter fishing while still pinning down a full time job with the NHS, a rapidly revised plan when the angling public cottoned on to the quality of the shark fishing out in the Celtic Sea, which was as good if not better than that which they used to read about along the Cornish Coast before the turn of the century.

That's the story of how Andrew Alsop and 'White Water' shark fishing got started. But not shark fishing as people knew it at the time. Working with a blank canvas he was able to establish the type of shark fishing that might have saved all the venues mentioned previously in the first paragraph from going to the wall had they adopted it all those years ago. In a nutshell. sharks caught at sea would stay at sea, with weights being derived from an estimation formula.

It was a huge learning curve which progressively saw them catching individual Blue Sharks that were larger, and numerical catches that were greater than all that had gone before, every single one of which

was released. Plenty of Porbeagle Sharks too, plus the first Mako Shark in nearly 40 years, and colossal Blue Fin Tuna which would on occasion pick up the shark baits too. But now we're getting into the 'Legacy' period of what Andrew has painstakingly uncovered and conserved for future generations. As I said in my opening paragraph, Andrew Alsop is the new face of UK shark angling. To be continued in Chapter 12.

THE FIRST GPS ENABLED MOBILE PHONE

For many people, the mobile phone has become an extension of their anatomy to the point where surgical removal may well turn out to be the only way some of them will be persuaded to put the damn thing down. There are however important implications of mobile phone use, both good and bad for sea anglers, and you can decide for yourselves which category each fits into. These include additional contact with the rescue services, a camera to record PB's for catch and release, and private boat to boat chatter about catches, marks etc. without the use of public broadcast VHF.

What isn't listed there is GPS. In 1999, mobile phone manufacturer Benefon launched the first commercially available GPS enabled mobile phone called the Benefon Esc!. Now of course, most mobile phones have the facility, allowing the device to be tracked and located with pinpoint accuracy, which privacy arguments aside, can only be a good thing for people who put themselves at risk in pursuit of pleasure.

JERSEY

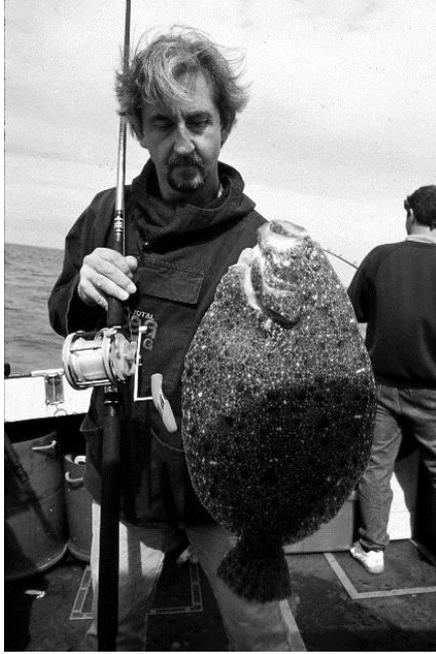
Like Guernsey, Alderney, and the other smaller Channel Islands, Jersey is in the front line when it comes to intercepting southerly fish species either occasionally pushing northwards as visitors, or as climate change allows, appearing on a more regular footing, for which reason the Channel Islands are renowned for having an extensive and interesting species mix.

On the downside, they will be amongst the first places to lose their cold water adapted species such as Cod when these are pushed northwards, which probably won't bother or affect them that much, though I have to say that I've seen some very good Cod caught over the years aboard Guernsey based boats hitting the mid-channel wrecks.

Jersey has a long tradition of good boat and shore fishing. It also offers some tremendous concrete structure fishing such as the breakwater at St. Catherine's, which over the years has produced more than its fair share of decent and interesting fish. A quick glance at the Channel Island record fish list puts Jersey at the top of the pile for a whole host of species, including Blonde, Undulate, Thornback and Electric Rays.

Various wrasse and bream species can also be found all around the island, along with Smoothhound(s) (see Chapter 9), John Dory, Ling and much much more. With good local knowledge, this can be a shore anglers paradise, particularly those interested in species hunting and LRF. My experience however is confined to boat fishing out from St. Helier with Tony Hart at the helm.

I've only visited the place once, but still I managed to get in sessions bottom fishing out over the Corbiere Bank, and a visit to the mid-channel wrecks. Visiting the island in 1999, a decade and more after I'd last fished the mid-channel wrecks, for the wrong reasons unfortunately, the wreck fishing by that stage was something of an eye opener.



Gone was the never ending succession of big Ling. In total we caught just 4. One chap fishing smaller baits brought a big Pouting up, which in theory should have been an excellent Conger bait fished as a flapper, but nothing. The one saving grace was the quality of the Black Bream fishing, one of which was somewhere around the 6 pound mark. But we hadn't punched so far off to go Black Bream fishing, so all in all, very disappointing, and a sign of how much things had changed.

In contrast, the bank fishing at Corbiere was tremendous. I remember there was a good bit of tide to have to contend with. But when the fish came on, they did so in both numbers and quality. From memory it was all Turbot and Brill, though I have a half recollection of seeing at least one Small Eyed Ray too.

Not just any Brill. I had a PB on one of the days (see photograph), with no shortage of 'also rans' there in the mix. Conversely, the Turbot, which were equally numerous, were more 'average' in their size, with the best perhaps pushing into double figures. I suppose that comes from the fact that this is quite a small mark,

which when the weather and tides are right, comes under a fair amount of pressure. But enjoyable inshore fishing none the less.

SAKUMA HOOKS

It may sound like a Japanese company, but actually Sakuma is British through and through, though it does have strong Japanese links. It all started in the 1990's when the late Brian Rowe began importing quality unbranded hooks from Japan and came up with the name Sakuma. The company's website puts the start date as being 1999. Speaking with Alex MacDonald at Sakuma, he puts the start a little earlier in the mid-1990's, so not much more to be said on that one.

The Sakuma hook range initially had 4 components to it, these being the 560 Stinger, the 550 Phantom, the Manta 540, and the Manta Extra 545, the 2 Manta's being particularly popular, and accordingly big sellers. Along with Kamasan, Sakuma were the first hooks sold to UK anglers that were chemically sharpened.

PW Comment: Since the turn of the century, Sakuma has expanded its portfolio to include a wide range of quality items, again mostly imported from Japan. I would also add that having been given a few packets of Sakuma hooks and Sakuma extra's by Tony Parry who skippers 'Jensen II' out of Rhyl and in the Mersey, I was introduced to Alex MacDonald at Sakuma who provided yet more samples, plus information for a couple of other inclusions here, in particular about Gilthead Bream and Redgill lures. From that day through to my final trip, Sakuma have been my hooks of choice, with the thicker gauge wire 'Extras' put by for the heavier duty stuff such as Conger and Tope.

THE IRISH STINGRAY RECORD

I don't know what it is with fish, but occasionally and unexpectedly, a species will set up a small localised stronghold for itself, yet be rare or even absent in the areas immediately adjacent to it, a good example of which is the Stingray *Dasyatis pastinaca*. The only place I've ever come across the species

in Irish waters has been Tralee Bay in Co. Kerry, and even then, always only in one spot, the once famous Monk Hole, though I have heard of specimens taken from and around Fenit Pier in the past.

These fish were never very big, probably maxing out at between 20 and 30 pounds, but they could almost be guaranteed, and good numbers of them. Then, as with everything else in the area, and the Monkfish in particular, something hit them hard and they were all but gone. Since then the area has been made a Conservation Zone with only angling allowed. Thankfully, the Stingrays never lost their connection with the place. As such, it was great news to hear that a new Irish record at 33.2 Kg (73.2 pounds) had been caught in Tralee Bay in 1999 by Michael Wall.

SELF-DRIVE COMMON SKATE



For safety reasons, particularly in terms of proximity to shore, safe handling conditions, and navigation, self-drive fishing tends to be offered in sheltered estuaries and large natural harbour locations such as Carrick Roads; Falmouth; Fowey; the Helford River, Dartmouth and the Teign. The fact of getting afloat under your own steam is seen by many as being as important as the fish themselves, which usually comprises a mix of Flounders, Thornback Rays, possibly Bass, and if you get really lucky, or work at it, maybe even a Gilthead Bream.

Over in Ireland you can get a bit more adventurous fishing the open sea at Courtmacsherry and Cobh. What you wouldn't expect is to put to sea in a 16 foot displacement boat powered by a tiny 8hp outboard to go fishing for huge Common Skate, which is exactly what myself and Dave Devine did in April 1999.

Andy Jackson, who is based at Laga Bay in the sheltered waters of Scotland's Loch Sunart which connects to the seaward end of the Sound of Mull, had invited us up to look at his self-drive boat hire business for a couple of days. Back then he offered a

basic package comprising a couple of Orkney Longliners, with safety gear, an anchor, and a laminated piece of chart showing the seabed within striking range.

Being small boat anglers, Dave and I considered taking up some additional kit of our own including portable electronics, then decided against it on the grounds of wanting to sample the same package the general public would get, the one exception being to take along our own anchor and plenty of rope. The waters of Loch Sunart may well be sheltered, but they are also very deep, and we wanted access to all that was on offer.

By a fortuitous stroke of luck, as we loaded our gear into the boat alongside the wooden jetty at the Salmon Farm, Ian Burrett, who I knew from charter fishing for Tope in Luce Bay, suddenly turned up with his trailed 19 foot Orkney Fastliner 'Onyermarks'. Since then Ian has gone on to add the title of Scotland's premier skate skipper during the spring and autumn to his summertime Luce Bay chartering credentials. Back in 1999 however, he was doing a spot of exploratory pleasure fishing both inside the loch and beyond, gaining invaluable experience to share with his customers in the years to come.

On an earlier visit, he had taken the largest Common Skate ever caught from inside the loch. A monster which came out of the weight estimation table at almost 240 pounds, a fish way bigger than the standing record, which like every other skate he and his clients have taken and will take in the future was returned to the water immediately, hopefully to be caught again.

Knowing we had nothing in the way of electronics, Ian suggested a few marks we might like to try, the number one priority being to find deep water over soft ground. The skate in Loch Sunart can be anywhere, and as subsequent exploration has shown through organised mass tagging events, they can also be everywhere, including much further up inside the loch around Resipole where trailed boats can be launched at the roadside, and where kayaks tied up to some of the buoys out in deep water regularly contact fish in excess of 100 pounds.

I'm told they are even starting to get an odd one from the shore at Salen Pier. But back in the late-1990's, while we knew the big fish were easily accessible to boats such as those for hire by Andy, we were still very much unaware of the extent.

As you can imagine, with a top speed of around 4 knots, progress was slow. But with depths of 200 to 300 feet easy to find, lack of speed wasn't going to prove an obstacle. In fact, I'm tempted to say that in some ways it was a bonus, as there was no temptation to keep upping anchor to try somewhere new, which very much flies in the face of what is needed here for a real shot at success.

Common Skate fishing can be a waiting game. A case then of setting the big baits out and fishing for other things with smaller baits on a second rod while you wait, which brought us plenty of Spurdogs and Lesser Spotted Dogfish, the latter being quite handy as a supplementary bait source, plus the odd Thornback Ray, which of course went back. And surprisingly, as we were to find out, that wasn't all it delivered on each of the 2 days.



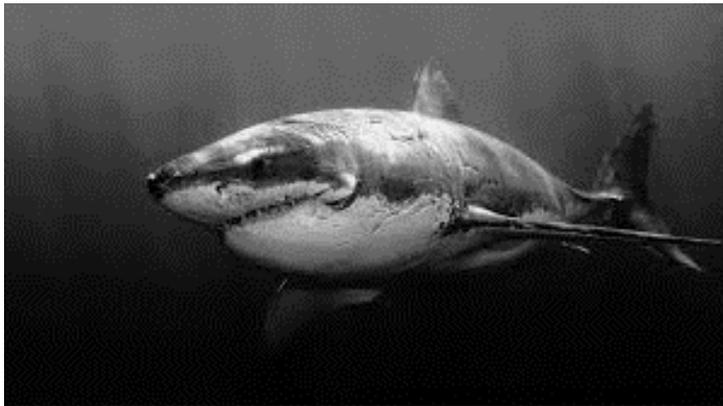
Day one was spent anchored up just to the back of Carna Island. There we were catching Spurdogs and hoping they wouldn't be ripping into our bigger skate baits, when Dave lifted in to what was supposed to be yet another Spur on his light rod. A fish which in fact turned out to be a Common Skate of 105 pounds when its dimensions were fed into the weight estimation chart. And ironically, the very next day, exactly the same thing happened again, only this time the fish had an estimated weight of 145 pounds from a mark in around 250 feet of water

close in to the shore about a mile from the Salmon farm. So close to base in fact that we could clearly hear children playing on the shore at Laga Bay. And again, the fish had somehow missed the larger baits on the heavier gear, preferring to pick up a quarter fillet of Mackerel instead.

I fished Loch Sunart on a few other occasions from around 2008, when the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN), of which Ian Burrett is projects director, started organising Tagathon's there, these being mass tagging events to gather in data in support of a special conservation zone status application for the loch. In the main these were fished from trailed boats and kayaks, resulting in a lot of skate and Spurdogs being tagged and released.

Whilst there, I also took the chance to revisit Andy Jackson, who by that stage had done away with the Orkney Longliners in favour of a small fleet of unsinkable, moulded plastic self-drive Scandinavian 'Pioneer' boats with full safety gear, electronics, and a drop down bow door rather like a landing craft for skate to be brought on board through easily (or for access by wheelchairs), and more to the point, safely and easily released through afterwards.

GREAT WHITE SHARK ENCOUNTER



Talk of Great White Shark encounters around Britain and Ireland needs to be treated with a fair degree of scepticism, as there were no authenticated evidence based occurrences recorded at our latitude during the twentieth century. On the other hand, Great Whites have the ability to generate internal body heat of between 10 and 15 degrees above the ambient water temperature surrounding them, placing them into the category of thermo-regulators.

Thermo-regulators are cool water tolerant because they can generate body heat rather than simply 'taking what they are given' from their surroundings. Theoretically then, they should cope well in the 'cool' waters around the British Isles where water temperature can be very similar to that found off the southern tip of South Africa.

We also have the required source of high energy food in the form of seals. In fact, we have some of the biggest seal colonies in Europe. So, with everything pointing to British waters being perfect Great White Shark habitat, the question has to be asked, why then are we still waiting for that first authenticated visit? Or are we?. Who better then to ask than Richard Pierce of the Shark Trust who has investigated over 100 British Great White reports over the years.

The first point Richard makes is that Great Whites are rare fish these days, even in areas they are known to regularly frequent. This therefore makes 'fringe encounters' such as around the British Isles less likely than ever these days. But not impossible. Shark angler Andrew Alsop who skippers the top shark boat 'White Water' out from Milford Haven told me of an injured seal taken to an animal hospital on his local patch after it had been found with severe lacerations off Freshwater Bay. Staff at the hospital put the injuries down to boat propeller damage, but as Andrew rightly points out, they were also consistent with shark bite marks, which had this taken place in South African waters, would most definitely have been marked down as a Great White attack.

According to Richard Pierce, out of the many dozens of clearly erroneous reports he has seen over the years, a tiny number do actually stand out as potentially credible. Unfortunately, all lack hard evidence in the form of a body or a photograph. What makes them credible is the people reporting them, and the additional circumstantial evidence from other reports in the same area around the same time.

The best documented of these is a report of a sighting on a shark fishing trip off Cambeak in Cornwall in August 1999 aboard Phil Britts Padstow based boat 'Blue Fox'. On board that day was well known angling writer and photographer Henry Gilbey. Also, Britts crewman Mike Turner, an ex-commercial fisherman as it happens from South Africa, who for obvious reasons, knows a thing or two about Great White Sharks.

They had in fact sighted a large unidentified shark in the same area the previous year, but it wasn't seen clearly enough to accurately identify it, and as such, it was thought to have possibly been a Tiger Shark. Nothing however was said for fear of being ridiculed. But this 1999 encounter was different. It also coincided with a half eaten badly mauled seal being washed up locally.

The crew aboard 'Blue Fox' were in the process of releasing a Tope of around 30 pounds when they became aware of the commotion being 'investigated' by a large shark said to be around 15 feet in length. They describe the shark as passing the stern of the boat and rolling to expose its white underside before

swimming away. Immediately, Mike Turner said what everyone else was thinking, that they'd just had an encounter with a Great White.

Unfortunately, despite having good camera equipment on board, things happened so quickly that there simply wasn't enough time even to grab a quick snap. So once again, do you say anything risking ridicule, or do you keep quiet? A dilemma in part answered the following day when at exactly the same spot, 2 anglers fishing from their own boat 'Blissful' had a shark which they describe as being equal in length to their 17 foot boat, bite off a good two thirds of a Tope they were bringing in. A fish whose appearance and behaviour perfectly matched that witnessed by the party aboard 'Blue Fox' the previous day.

To many, Richard Pierce included, that is the most credible Great White encounter in British waters to date, and on that evidence alone, should be reported as such. But things didn't end there. A couple of weeks later in September 1999, a local lobster fisherman working his pots off nearby Tintagel Head reported a very large dead shark of around 15 feet in length tangled up in one of his ropes. The fisherman described the shark as having a slate grey back, bright white belly, and a crescent shaped mouth with triangular teeth.

Unfortunately, because the carcass had no commercial value to him, it was cut loose without being photographed. According to Pierce, that description makes it hard to believe it could have been anything other than a Great White, the evidence for which was tantalisingly there, then unfortunately discarded. Three sightings of the same fish in the same area around the same time. Very credible.

Adding a Scottish dimension to the Great White encounters, though unfortunately occurring just the wrong side of the twentieth century cut off but included here for completeness is another encounter described by Richard Pierce as being very credible, this time coming from marine biologist Dr. Simon Greenstreet while scuba diving with his wife and 2 friends near Black Rock in the Summer Isles in July of 2003.

The Greenstreets had just finished their dive and were making ready for the other pair to go in, when they spotted a large fin around 40 metres away which they initially thought was that of a Basking Shark. Taking the opportunity to swim with the fish they fired up the engine, at which point it changed course and headed straight for them.

Judged by all on board to be over 16 feet in length and lacking the characteristic huge gill slits of a Basking Shark, their description of the fish very clearly fits that of a Great White. And again in 2003, commercial diver George Brown was approached by a very large shark while inspecting the steel piles holding up the ferry pier at nearby Uig on Skye.

WHITBY TUNA ENCOUNTER

Chapter 7 has an inclusion detailing what is thought to be the last Blue Fin Tuna caught on rod and line from the North Sea. A fish of unspecified weight caught by regular 'Tunny' enthusiast Harry Weatherly in 1954 from the Scarborough based boat 'Courage'.

With the Herring population which was the main food source for North Sea Tuna on the verge of collapse, a moratorium was declared on drift netting for them with the knock on effect that with no injured and escapee Herrings falling from the nets as they were being hauled to attract the BFT and allow anglers to pin point them, which in effect brought the chances of rod and line fishing for them to an end, which is not the same as saying the tuna were all gone, because they weren't. Why anglers didn't switch over to trolling is another matter. Perhaps it wasn't sufficiently well developed at the time, who knows.



This 9ft 6in Atlantic blue fin tuna was washed ashore at Hunstanton, Norfolk.
34 SEA ANGLER November, 1974

Whatever the reason, from there on in, certainly from an angling perspective, the Blue Fin Tuna were left pretty much to themselves, and that as they say was the end of that. Except that it wasn't; well, not quite.

Occasional specimens would be found washed up dead from time like the one pictured here found at Hunstanton in Norfolk. There would occasionally be reported sightings too. Taking things one step further, 2 anglers reported actually hooking a very large powerful fish off Whitby some years after planned deliberate Tunny fishing had come to an end. A fish which hit hard

and stripped the reel in a single power burst, which they say categorically was not a shark.

RNLI SEA CHECK



Recognising the growth in small boat fishing, and the fact that local authorities responsible for providing launching facilities were becoming increasingly concerned about protecting themselves from litigation with regard to boat and beach user safety, the RNLI introduced 'Sea Check'. A free annual voluntary scheme which both individuals and small boat angling clubs could utilise to ensure they had the appropriate allocation of checked in date safety equipment, for which they were handed the necessary evidence.

Small boat clubs in particular often took 'Sea Check' onboard as a mandatory requirement of membership, along with

valid insurance and an RYA Power Boat Level 2 certificate, aimed at satisfying local authority demands placed on them for continued use of facilities, which for the councils involved helped keep 'unwanted' vehicles from operating on the beach. The idea eventually was for the RNLI to train a nominated club member to do the checks annually on their behalf.

SUPER-GRIP LEADS

Since its clean up, over the winter months, the River Mersey can be stuffed with fish. The problem is that despite its level of protective shelter and availability of Cod, Whiting and Thornback Rays, it is still unfortunately one of the more challenging venues on my boat angling calendar, due entirely to the

ferocity of the tide as it squeezes in and out of what is a long and quite narrow connection to the open sea.

The tidal range generally along the Lancashire Coast is quite large, though that has little bearing on holding bottom, with 6 to 8 ounces of lead usually being sufficient for drop down fishing away from the influence of the Mersey estuary.

A large spring tide will top 10 metres, whereas a small neap tide can dip to under 7 metres, and as with most locations along the open stretch of Lancashire coast, it will be the bigger tides that offer the best prospects for catching Cod. That however is most certainly not the case when it comes to the River Mersey. It may well also be the case at other locations where Cod are present, but the run is so hard that getting baits down to them either limits or excludes any attempt to catch them.



When the tide is running particularly hard, even fish like Cod which like a bit of run to get them feeding, will get their heads down, or make use of any bit of shelter or respite from the run they can find until it eases sufficiently to resume more comfortable feeding. And while there is no way of demonstrating this adequately, I'm confident they continue feeding past the point where anglers not only can't get baits down to them, but more importantly, can't keep them there until a feeding fish comes along.

This explains why in the Mersey my preference is to fish tides of under 8 metres in size. They are easier to fish, and you can still get a good result. Charter boat skippers on the other hand with their need to be afloat as often as possible will normally fish tides up to 8.5 metres. Maybe even slightly more than that. Then you reach a point where the fishing ceases to be a pleasure. But fishing only the best tides unfortunately can be very restrictive, which prompted me to explore ways of getting more out of problematic tidal situations.

I'm using the Mersey as an example here because it can be a tough venue to fish unless you know what you are doing. Also a venue I know well. But it could be anywhere around the country. And the solution I eventually came up with could work equally well in all similar situations.

Fortunately, the Mersey is shallow enough to uptide fish, which is very good news. Uptide fishing with a visible angle in your line is the only way of knowing for certain that your bait is on the bottom in situations such as this. Drop down leads are simply washed away and lifted clear of the feeding zone by the tide. So it had to be an uptide fishing solution, which can be achieved in one of two ways. Either you can increase the weight of the lead, or you can improve the level of grip.

Each potentially brings something to the solution. Then I got to thinking, why not go for both. But I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit here. That was the final solution. Before getting to that point, I had a lot of experimentation with grip wires to wade through.

The first thing to say is that grip wires presented in the Breakaway Lead orientation of positioning then protruding from the side of the lead doesn't work well from a boat. At long range from a shallow shelving beach where the line lies virtually flat they are a fantastic idea. At short range in deep water from a pitching rolling boat, the lead tends to sit on rather than lay on the sea bed, offering little or no grip.

This is where the Gemini-lead comes in to its own. Wires from the nose and a long tail for the trace to connect to both help it to orientate itself into the best gripping position, which is lying on the sea bed.

Plastic extensions to the nose can further help the lead to grip, using either the self releasing wires, or longer fixed wire options.

I personally prefer the fixed nose wires. But in the final analysis, like the Breakaway Lead, there can only ever be 2 wires in contact with the sea bed doing the gripping at any one time. The reason why there are 4 wires present is to ensure 2 wire gripping contact whichever way up the lead settles out on the bottom. My plan was to double the grip in terms of wire numbers, and to spread it over a wider gripping area to maximise both hold and stability.

Initially I did this using a long flat oval shaped lead. This unfortunately took a while to get down as it tended to shoot off sideways and flutter on the drop, which meant that by the time it had reached the bottom, the fierce tide it was supposed to be combating had washed it miles away from where it was intended to be. So that idea was scrapped in favour of the most aqua-dynamic shape of them all, a simple elongated bomb.

As with the previous flat version, it had 4 wires to do the gripping protruding from the side. However, because you can never know what orientation your lead will take up after casting, to ensure it had grip wires facing up tide, I had to put a further 4 wires protruding from the other side too, bent over the opposite way to those on the opposing side to cover all eventualities.

Like a lot of people, I feel most comfortable fishing from one particular side of a boat. When I'm charter fishing, I always go the left side as you are looking down the boat towards the stern. But I also do a lot of dinghy fishing from a boat I share with Dave Devine and Charlie Pitchers aboard which we all have our regular jobs to make the operation run smoothly. And because my job of anchoring takes place over the right side of the boat, that's where I end up sitting and fishing, which is the opposite to where I would choose to be on the charter boat.

Bear with me here, as this is important. What I'd done was invent a lead that could only be used from one side of a boat, depending on which way you bent the wires. I obviously didn't realise this initially, and because the first time I took it out I coincidentally happened to be on the side of the charter boat that suited the arrangement of the wires, it took me further outings to realise what I'd done. That was a trip with Dave Lewis and Cliff Brown (now editor of Sea Angler Magazine), and using the lead I had a nice Cod of 13 pounds.

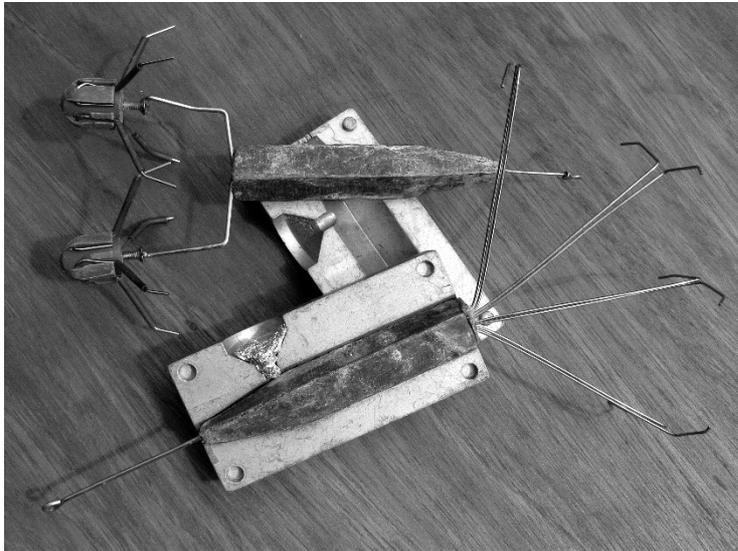
The right side versus left side of the boat scenario only came to light when I took the same lead out in my own boat where I fish the opposite side to when I'm chartering. I just couldn't get it to grip. I finally realised this was because the 4 gripping wires facing downwards looking to make contact with the sea bed were now on the down tide side of the lead which in effect meant they were pushing rather than pulling for hold, which in a strong tide simply doesn't work

That problem was quickly remedied by moulding in an attachment loop at both ends, allowing the connection to the trace to be switched according to the side of the boat it was being used from. But while it worked, I wasn't particularly happy with that situation, which prompted me into having a total rethink and come up with a lead with just the one connecting loop, even greater grip, and the potential to make it in bigger sizes if that was required.

To do this I used an Adjusti-Lead mould I had lying around. This produced a long square bomb, the weight of which could be varied by inserting a plunger into the open end set to the required size marker, then pouring the lead in through a hole in the side. This had the potential to make leads of up to 12 ounces. What I did was block off the side pouring hole, throw away the plunger, and simply pour the lead in through the large square open end to the level of whatever size of lead I required.

Obviously, the closed end had a small hole for a long tail wire. I would then insert 8 stainless steel paternoster wires of 6 to 8 inches in length with their ends bent over so that it couldn't be pulled out of

the lead under pressure, then filled the mould with lead to the required level. This done, I then grouped the wires into 4 pairs which I angled as far apart from each other as I could rather like a garden grass rake, then bent each of the pairs in opposite directions so that it would have 4 wires gripping whichever way up it settled out.



What a superb grip-lead this turned out to be. Using the 12 ounce option with its 4 contacting grip wires spread over a much wider area, I could hold out in virtually anything, and caught a lot of Cod as a result in situations where I would previously either have struggled, or been unable to fish.

There is however one drawback - its propensity to tangle the trace, which when hanging down amongst all those wires is virtually guaranteed to happen. Something I readily got around by attaching the lead to a long tubi-boom.

I even videoed its performance in comparison to other grip leads by dragging them all along in wet sand on the beach. Both the fixed and releasing nose wired Gemini leads held, as did mine, though eventually the Gemini's would pull free under increasing pressure. Not so my super-grip lead. It just dug in, and nothing could shift it. Yet still there is enough flexibility in the wires by way of their length when used over snaggy ground to allow what could potentially be a lost lead situation not to happen.

Alternatively, you can make the super-grip using two Gemini heads. This allows a similar level of 4 wire grip, with the potential for the wires to release if they should become stuck.

DOUGAL LANE RESCUE

Guernsey charter skipper Dougal Lane started his fishing career as a scallop diver. Chartering, when it came along, was always a seasonal and at times intermittent activity, supplemented by different aspects of commercial fishing over the years, all of which added to his skills when it came to finding anglers fish.

In my experience, Dougal Lane is the most skilful person at anchoring wrecks I have ever fished with, and I've fished with a few. He once told me that he could even think and visualise situations in Decca.

Over the years I fished with him on all of his different boats, starting with 'Arum' right through to 'Midnight Express', taking countless numbers of big Ling, Pollack, Cod, Turbot, and my biggest Bass at 13.2.0. He even rescued the butt end of my rod complete with reel from St. Peterport harbour when I dropped it overboard demonstrating his diving skills, a pursuit which would eventually land him in serious trouble, both personally, and later with the Guernsey port authority.

It started innocuously enough off Alderney, when at slack water he left his crewman, who was himself an ex-commercial crab fisherman, in charge of his anglers while he dropped over in the Scuba gear to have a mooch about with a hand spear. Attached to him by a line was a 30 inch float, which should have been sufficient to indicate his position.



Unfortunately, while the tide was showing as the last of the flood at the surface, down at the bottom it was already ebbing, creating a rip around mid water, which he tells me caused the float to disappear. The problem was that Dougal didn't know this, and neither did his crewman, who continued drifting with the tide to the point where inevitably each lost touch with the other, leaving Dougal being carried along towards the coast of France.

With time ticking by, concern began to grow on the boat where they were starting to fear the worst and the rescue service were notified. This included a plane, the RNLI, and other boats all searching an area where the information provided suggested Dougal should be, but nothing. Two and a half hours later he was still drifting at the surface, but in the opposite direction to where the rescue services were looking.

All except one spotter plane that had already flown over him a couple of times, when on each occasion he had tiringly powered himself high up in the water waving one of his fins, all of which was missed. By this stage the search was in the process of being wound down, when fortuitously, the navigator went to the back of the plane looking for a chart and luckily spotted Dougal out of the rear window.

As you can imagine, the angling party left on board the boat was extremely concerned for his well-being. I dare say his crewman and those conducting the search were getting a little bit worried too. But in the end, it all came good.

Later that evening, Dougal was scheduled to go to a jacuzzi party with his wife and friends. Laughing about it afterwards, he recalled that when he got in the jacuzzi they attached a huge float to him. But joking apart, it could so easily have turned out very differently, and the rescue most certainly wasn't the end of the matter either by a long way.

Initially he was given a stern talking to by the harbour authorities for leaving his party in the hands of someone without an angling boat operator's license. Then the local media got hold of the story prompting sterner action which quickly followed.

In the end, a 4 week chartering ban was imposed on him right at the start of the last month of the season which meant employing a replacement skipper. Dougal was still on the boat and still in charge of the decision making. Just not at the helm as the skipper. And now he doesn't charter fish anymore, which is a great loss to angling, and an even greater loss to the local Bass and Bream populations which instead he fishes commercially.

DEATH ON THE JETTIES

Shore fishing has always been very popular on the east coast of England to the north of the River Tyne from the tackle hungry but highly productive rock edges to the colliery beaches, before the mines in the area closed and stopped dumping spoil onto them which in turn coloured up the water as discussed earlier in this Chapter. And for those wanting a slightly easier though at times more perilous alternative, the area is 'blessed' with a number of long, roughly west to east facing stone breakwater jetties, built to protect shipping entering and leaving port when there is a big sea running.

Tynemouth Pier on the north side of the Tyne has no rails, and for safety reasons is closed off in big seas. Despite this, with no regard for either their own safety or those they would expect to help them if they become unstuck, some anglers are prepared to climb over the gate after dark, even when a big northerly swell is pushing in which can wash right over the top, and on occasions crash over the light-house at the end.

This is the longer of the Tyne's 2 harbour arms, the other being South Shields, which like its sister jetty is also closed when there's a big sea running. A jetty with a back wall and railings, neither of which offer any comfort when a big wave washes along it. Another pier where anglers are known to risk everything for the chance of a few fish by climbing over the gates when they have been closed.

Roker Pier is another which runs roughly west to east, but with a curve in it to help protect shipping entering Sunderland Harbour. A jetty with a flat wash deck construction fringed by rails along both sides, and prone to be being completely swept when there's a big northerly sea running, particularly as it's lower in height than some of the other stone jetties in the area, and therefore more risky to fish.

None the less, it remains popular, and has produced a few surprises over the years, such as Turbot in excess of 20 pounds and the odd Brill, unlike Seaham North Pier, which can only be fished by club members, unless there is an open competition underway. Even more restrictive is Seaham South Pier just across the harbour entrance where angling is currently prohibited. A jetty from which anglers have been washed into the sea, while others who were a little more fortunate managed to cling on to be hauled back to safety.

Finally, there's Hartlepool Heugh Pier with a flush deck running north west to south east, though no less likely to be swept when a big sea is running. The setting in fact for a competition which a friend of mine Ken Robinson got the organisers to abandon due to the weather.

Ken had arrived at around low water to be greeted by a massive northerly swell running through which was only going to get more dangerous as the flood tide got underway. In the end he persuaded the hosts to fish from the better protected Middleton Pier tucked more into the lee of the land. Despite this, a few people still ventured out along The Heugh, 2 of whom were washed off. Despite the rapid response of a boat risking all to assist them, both died at the scene.

BOB MOSS, SHORE BASS ANGLING GUIDE



The first angling guide I ever came across this side of the Atlantic was a chance encounter with a chap based near Dingle. I was over there mixing a bit of holiday making with some fishing, and as I'm predominantly a boat fisherman, with the weather the way it was, I was struggling. Everything I had booked went down the pan.

By chance I spotted a flier for a shore angling guide based just outside the town named Bob Moss. That was it. Immediately, the penny dropped. A potential Sea Angler Magazine feature. So I decided to make an approach, and to my surprise, I discovered Bob to be an Englishman who had gone over a good number of years earlier to fish and had somehow never bothered to go back 'home'.

Why would you want to go back with such a wide range of beaches and rock marks facing every conceivable direction, making it possible to get favourable conditions any day of the week, plus offering the possibly to switch from venue to venue within a trip based on Bob's

in depth knowledge of the very best times to be fishing each, and so far as I am aware, always for Bass.

We planned to meet up at his place then motor over to Brandon Bay, where interestingly, the fishing was to be done with lugworm fished from a light Carp rod cast short by wading in. A very enjoyable experience I have to say, particularly as we had Bass actually topping and tailing behind us, which at times saw us casting back towards the beach and parallel to it.

Clive Gammon, Des Brennan, and Kevin Linnane opened up the surf fishing in this area back in the 1960's when it was typically 20 Bass per rod per day. These would mostly be fish in the 3 to 5 pound bracket with the occasional 8 pounder thrown in for good measure. How things had changed by the late-1990's when I was there with Bob.

Thankfully, the numbers of fish seemed either to be holding up well or coming back thanks to the way the Central Fisheries Board (CFB) over there had pressed for, and won, protective legislation for the Bass. That's why Irish Bass fishing, numerically speaking, has always been so much better than in England and Wales. On the other hand, they rarely ever see Bass as big as some of the UK venues have produced over the years, which could I suppose be down to the more favourable climate the south of England enjoys.

SMOOTHHOUND DELEMMA

Collectively, there are 11 national Smoothhound records spread across 2 species (for the moment at least) contained within the record lists of Britain, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but because of the 'dilemma' aspect suggested in the subheading above, rather than position them all in their appropriate year slots and repeat having to explain the 'problem' each time, I have decided to list and discuss the situation surrounding them in this single combined inclusion with the largest amongst them dictating the actual time slot used here of 2000, which seems to me a more appropriate approach.

The following Smoothhound records were caught within the time constraints of the twentieth century.....

STARRY SMOOTHHOUND *Mustelus Asterias*

British boat record – 28.2.0 by A. Bowering off Minehead in 1998.

British shore record – 23.2.0 by D. Carpenter at Bradwell-on-Sea in 1972.

Scottish boat record – 7.1.0 by S. Cresswell off Creetown in 1998.

Scottish shore record - broken beyond the 2000 cut off.

Welsh boat record – broken beyond the 2000 cut off.

Welsh shore record – 21.4.0 by M. Coles at Aberthaw in 1998.

COMMON SMOOTHHOUND *Mustelus mustelus*

British boat record – 28.0.0 by A. T. Chilvers off Heacham in 1969

British shore record – 20.3.0 by P. Orchard from Hillhead Sea Wall in 2000

Scottish boat record – broken beyond the 2000 cut off.

Scottish shore record – open to claims.



There is no Welsh inclusion for the Common Smoothhound, and despite Ireland having a Smoothhound record set by Keith Gray at 16.56 pounds from Carne in 2000, no Irish inclusion in the Common Smoothhound list either.

At first glance this might appear odd, until you appreciate that Wales doesn't list the Common Smoothhound *Mustelus mustelus* as a species, while the Irish don't use either of the two prefix names preferring the simple term Smoothhound for reasons I will come to in a moment. But first let me make the important point that Ireland does not have split boat and shore records either. The largest example of any species, be it boat or shore, is the record, hence the single Irish record being mentioned in this paragraph as opposed to the lists above.

The reason why the Irish don't list 2 Smoothhound species is their preference for the none species specific term of just Smoothhound, though the scientific name they use, which is *Mustelus Asterias*, identifies this as what anglers call the Starry variety. Wales also list just the one species which they refer to as the Starry Smoothhound *Mustelus Asterias*.

In both cases this is based on research work done by Irish fishery scientist Dr. Ed Farrell, who when working on his Ph. D, took DNA samples from hundreds of Smoothhounds caught all around the UK and Ireland, as well as from historical museum specimens from throughout Europe. And spots or no spots, without exception, he found them all to be *Mustelus Asterias*. In other words, the Common Smoothhound *Mustelus mustelus*, while it is a recognised western Atlantic species, does not occur, or rather, has not yet occurred, at our latitude.

The issue created by Ed's DNA survey was raised by me both formally to the British Record Fish Committee and informally via email correspondence to the Committee's chairman Mike Heylin, but as yet the Committee as a collective are sticking with the status quo, as their fishery expert Oliver Crimmen of the British Museum does not agree with Dr. Ed Farrell's findings.

Within the time restrictions of this book, which has its boundaries set at each end of the twentieth century, the Scots were fortunate in not having to decide where they stood, as only the Starry

Smoothhound was reported in their waters. That however changed in 2003 when *Mustelus mustelus* was added to their list, putting them in line with the Brits, and out of step with the Welsh and Irish.

RARE FRILLED SHARK

A commercial boat fishing just off the coast of Co. Donegal landed 3 rare deep water Frilled Sharks at Killybegs within a month of the closure date for inclusion here. At least one of the fish was donated to the Dublin Museum of Natural History. All 3 specimens, along with other unusual species from an angling perspective, were scooped up during a survey run by Board Lasca Mhara (BLM) exploring the possibilities of finding new commercially viable fish species to replace the ones we have become more used to seeing in fishmongers' shops, but are now coming under increasing commercial pressure due to over exploitation.

CEFAS REPORT ON THE OFFSHORE BASS FISHERY



From the late-1980's through into the 1990's there was a steady increase in the commercial (over)exploitation of Bass by pair trawlers operating in the Western English Channel. This fishery was originally discovered by French commercial fishermen, but as the holding area and the techniques to exploit it became more widely known, boats from England and Scotland also joined in to the point that by the mid-1990's, British anglers and inshore commercial fishermen were becoming increasingly concerned about the scale and impact of this fishery, as larger Bass were disappearing from their catches.

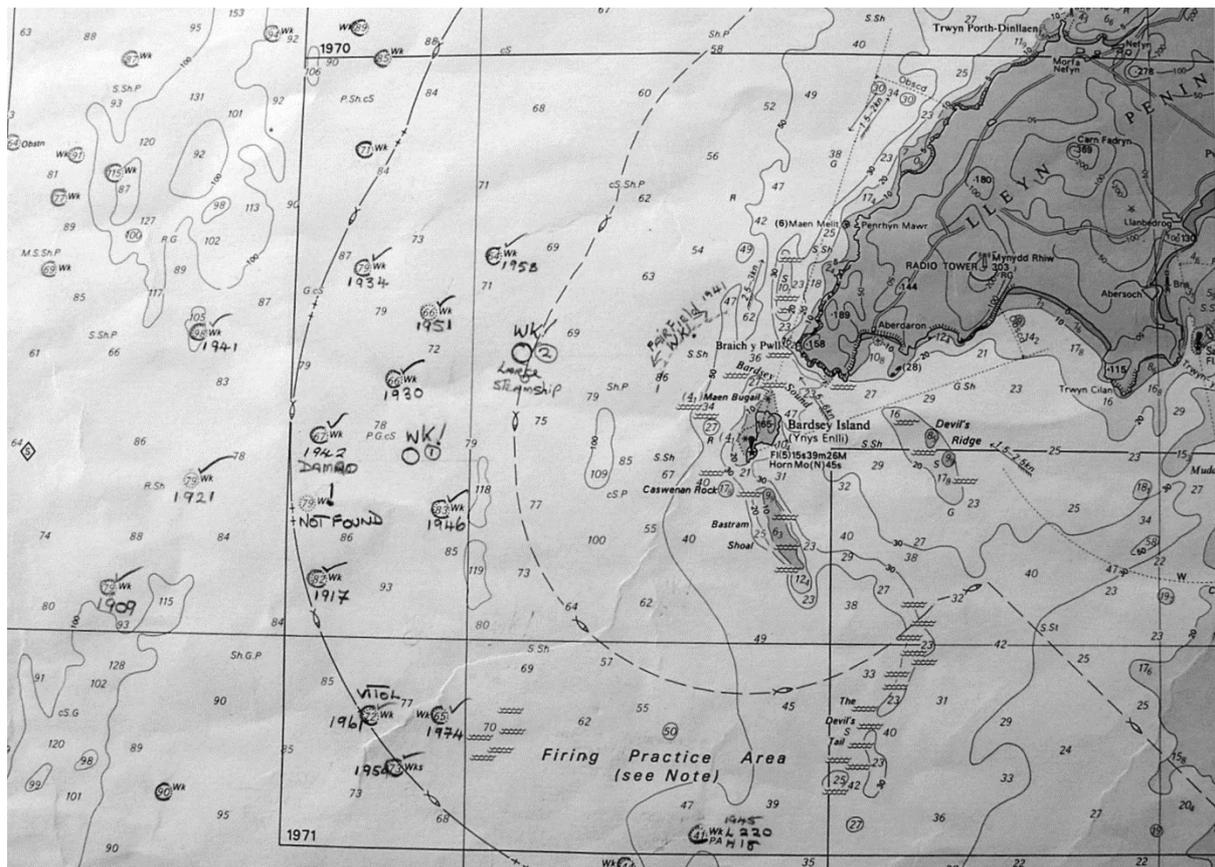
With the publication of the CEFAS (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science) report 'Offshore Bass Fishery, Pilot Study Report: M0802' documenting catches in this fishery between January and March 1999, there now appears to be relatively few large fish left in the spawning stock, which is a cause of serious concern for sea anglers.

So much so that the Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society (BASS), supported by the National Federation of Sea Anglers and the European Anglers' Alliance, mounted a letter writing campaign targeting both MPs and MEPs with their concerns. The aim of this campaign was to focus the attention of both MAFF and the European Union DG14 (Fisheries) on sea anglers' concerns, and to ask for scientific studies covering the whole fishery and its impact.

PW Comment: With hindsight, a campaign that made not one jot of difference. The decline has continued with anglers in the UK at the time of writing prevented from catching Bass altogether. This started with a catch restriction that morphed into a total ban, as anglers were blamed for the loss of 25% of the stock taken, which if my maths is correct, means that commercial fishing must be responsible for the other 75%, begging the question that if commercial fishing takes out 3 times as much as angling (which isn't true anyway as anglers rarely ever see Bass these days, and when they do they rarely kill them), why then are they still legally landing Bass for sale?

WRECK FISHING IN St. GEORGES CHANNEL

St. Georges Channel is a particularly deep water area to the west of the Llyn Peninsula in Wales. For centuries it has been a regular passage route for cargoes of lead, iron, coal, and food stuffs, to and from ports in West Wales and presumably Liverpool, after rounding Anglesey. And where you have regular shipping runs, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when weather forecasting and navigation aids were primitive to none existent, when bad weather came along you were certain to have shipping casualties. Why such a large accumulation in so tight an area I can't really say, nor does it matter for our purposes here. They are there, and now anglers are putting them to good use.



Boat owners with an interest in wreck fishing in these parts often alternate between the wrecks on the smaller tides and the reefs when the run gets harder. You couldn't fish these wrecks on a big tide. It quite literally screams through, which is a good way of resting the two angling alternatives on a fortnightly cycle.

The weather, as ever, can also play its part in the resting process, particularly the wrecks. The waters around the Llyn, and in particular around Bardsey Island can be treacherous, as I know from personal experience. Not only is the area in which many of the wrecks lie very exposed, but to get there you have to negotiate some pieces of water best kept for perfect conditions, on top of which, when you do get there, it's exceptionally deep.

Mid channel wrecking off the south coast of England usually maxes out at around 200 to 250 feet in depth. Off the Llyn you are looking at depths in excess of 300 feet, which with the tides already mentioned, plus the surface conditions, can make it a tough place to regularly get results. But get it right, as I have been fortunate enough to do on a number of occasions after making the long journey from Pwllheli or Caernarfon, and it can be excellent.

The fishing, or should I say the results I have witnessed, have mainly come from Pollack, with some Coalfish and the occasional Cod. However, in some years when Cod numbers are up, the better specimens can move out to these wrecks in good numbers, which is a bonus. As for Ling and Conger, I've not heard of or seen either caught, in the main because the fishing here is done on the drift.

Tactically speaking, this is soft rubber territory. Redgills, jellyworms, and shads in a variety of colours can all do the business on their day. Flying collar rigs were still in vogue when I was last fishing there, with the lead attached using several wraps of an elastic band to act as a weak link. Alternatively, and much straighter forward is a piece of lighter breaking strain line.

Outfit-wise, we were fishing with gear of no more than 30 pounds class. You shouldn't need anything heavier, as the bulk of the fish would be hovering around the double figure mark. There were occasional bigger fish, but not that many of them. And if there proved to be little or nothing on a particular wreck, as Pollack can be transient fish – here today, gone tomorrow, then days later back again, it would take no time at all to motor over to another wreck as they were so tightly packed.



Historically speaking, one trip I did with Dave Carey aboard his Pwllheli based boat 'Judy B' in 2000 proved to be something of a milestone. Not so much for the fishing, which was very good as it would turn out. More so for the coverage of that fishing. I'd been asked by Boat Fishing Monthly editor Jim Whippy to do the trip with Dave for a magazine article. Coincidentally, just prior to that request, I'd decided to buy myself a Casio 3.3 megapixel digital camera to build up a digital library whilst still working with film in an effort to get ahead of the game. This was to be its first outing, so every shot I took on transparency film was duplicated with the Casio. A bit of a laborious operation, but well worth the effort as it would turn out.

On the Monday morning I reported in to Jim to say that we'd had lots of good Pollack, plus a few Coalfish. So good in fact that both Dave and his crewman were each working with different landing nets at the same time, occasionally scooping up 2 Pollack together if anglers next to each other were up at the same time. It was an angling photographer's heaven, with enough time by mid afternoon to share in the action myself from up on the bow knowing the feature was already in the bag.

Then I threw in the 'Oh! by the way' bit to Jim regarding the digital camera, asking if it might be possible to use the results. As no one had attempted a full digital feature before, he said he didn't know but would ask the printers. I sent along both sets of photographs and was rewarded with the first full digitally illustrated fishing article to appear in a British magazine, which is covered in more detail further back in this Chapter looking at the first mass market digital camera which came out in 1994.

CAERNARFON BAY

The first time I fished actually out from Caernarfon was in 1973 aboard some old ramshackle wooden tub with water swilling up onto the boarded deck from the bilges. The weather was fine, as was the journey while we were still inside the Menai Strait. But there must have been either the remnants of bad weather or a good old swell pushing in from somewhere, because the rollers over the bar at the exit point were absolutely mountainous.

I'm not sure how the old tub managed to make it through, but that's how charter fishing was in the early days. Fortunately, out in open water things were much better and improving as the day wore on, turning into one of those days that back then we would remember for all the right reasons, but now with hindsight, stands out for all the wrong reasons based on the way angling attitudes and pressures have changed over the intervening 45 years.

These were the days when catching too many of one particular species of fish could quickly become a bit of a nuisance. The Spurdog packs were so vast, and nationally so widespread, that there would be times when you quite literally would have to motor many miles to get clear of the things. Often these shoals were made up exclusively of female fish as Spurs tend to congregate in same sex shoals, with the pregnant females amongst them about to give live birth to their offspring after a 22 month gestation



period creating the additional problem of the deck being awash with pups, which I'm told if they are 'full term' or thereabouts, despite still having a yolk sac attached, if treated gently and put into the water immediately, they can survive. A theory we certainly put to the test that particular day.

Seemingly every move we made it was yet more Spurs until eventually we got some respite finding a few huss and rays. Fortunately, Lesser Spotted Dogs were nothing like the numerical problem back then that they are today. But

still the Spurs kept on coming, well clearing 1,000 pounds in total had we killed and weighed them all, which brings me back to my earlier comment of remembering the trip for all the wrong reasons.

I have to hold my hand up and say that between us we unnecessarily killed way too many fish for our immediate needs, which was something of a regular occurrence all round Britain and presumably parts of Ireland until the Spurdog population crashed in the late 1990's. A different time with different attitudes and values. To borrow the over used cliché, the bounty of the sea did seem to be endless, and with Spurs pretty good eating, as can happen, regrettably, we kind-of got carried away keeping more than perhaps we should have. How things have changed, on a number of fronts, and for the better.

For our 'sins', we later lost our mini-bus deposit and were barred from ever hiring it again. The sharp spines of a Spurdog can make short work of a plastic carrier bag, allowing blood and other body fluids to leak out all over the floor of the bus. Back home we left the mini-bus on the owner's forecourt and posted the keys through the letter box, where it stood with its windows closed with the early morning sun beating down on it, and a wedding party ready to take it out the following day. Needless to say, both the owner and wedding guests were not best pleased, and we never saw the vehicle again.

I have charter fished out from Caernarfon a few times since on much better boats, and in much better conditions when crossing the bar. One particular trip I recall produced plenty of Black Bream over the many reefs between Trefor and the Lleyn. Caernarfon is also a starting point for the St. Georges Channel wrecks discussed previously. But most of my fishing there has been done there from trailed boats.

On arrival with the boat we would net live sandeels inside the Strait, then head outside to put them to good use drifting over the bar with a long flowing trace. On its day, this could be very good Bass territory, though in the main they would range from schoolies to a few mid-range fish. Some days you would even find them shoaling with the Terns diving in everywhere for the sandeels they were pushing

up. Other days it was chuck in and chance it, and on some occasions, it wasn't worth even doing that. Then the thinking would switch to other things.

Beyond the bar there are Tope, rays and huss, plus of course, Black Bream over the inshore reefs. With Tope in mind, one day Dave Devine and I tried 'bagging' as a means of drawing a few fish in. This involves the use of a plastic carrier bag with a lead weight attached to your line fixed into one corner of the bottom of the bag. You then fill it with chopped up Mackerel and drop it over with the reel in free spool.



Water pressure on the drop keeps the bag wrapped around the loose feed. At the bottom you give then it a couple of quick jigs up and down and the contents empty out to be scattered by the tide, allowing the bag retrieved, hopefully drawing in predators, both visually and by the scent, resulting in amongst other things one afternoon, 2 decent sized Turbot stuffed full of Mackerel chunks.

From a historical perspective I also want to mention the trailed boat launching here. Always we would put the boats in from a small private slip at Ty

Calch owned by the late Ron Edwards, who also had a boat storage compound, and could arrange live sandeels for bait at White Cottage where he lived close to the exit from the Strait on the Caernarfon side.

Ron would put the boats in using an old tractor for a small fee as shown in the accompanying photograph. A really likeable old character who was a font of local knowledge concerning both the fishing, and the area generally.

THE ANGLING CONSEQUENCES OF OFFSHORE WIND FARMING

Every hillside and coastal vista these days is seemingly blighted by wind turbines generating 'so called' green energy in a supposed attempt to reduce our carbon foot print. In other words, reduce the volume of carbon dioxide the burning of fossil fuel in coal, gas, and oil consuming power stations puts into the atmosphere, which along with other man-made greenhouse gases forms a blanket allowing heat in from the sun, but not back out again as in a conventional greenhouse, hence the use of the term. Consequently, the atmosphere starts to heat up at a rate that is too rapid for animals and plants to evolve adaptations to, and in a nutshell, many will die out.

Fish are not immune either. Saltwater species at least have the opportunity to move with their preferred temperature band to maintain temperature equilibrium. But eventually, that too will be gone. At the time of writing, fishery scientists say that North Sea Cod have been pushed northwards by around 70 miles over the past decade or so. South coast charter boat skippers such as Mick Coker at Dover agree with this. Of course, we also gain new species from further south pushing such up as breams and wrasses as offsets. But is that really the way we want things to go?.

We all want green energy. It's just depends on how you interpret the word 'green' in this particular context. We shouldn't forget that renewables such as wind power also come at a price. I've read, though I can't substantiate this, that the cost of building, supplying, then operating wind turbines, is not covered



yet by the value of the electricity they produce. Maybe that is no longer the case, or if it is, then maybe they will become more cost effective over time. That's an issue, but not the only one in terms of cost, for cost doesn't always come down purely to money.

There is a cost to the environment too, and to fishing (both angling and commercial) in having aggregations of offshore wind turbines which so often 'steal' some of the prime locations from us due to the nature of the substrate and the depth of the water required for their construction. Piling

during the construction phase certainly scatters fish. Sound travels 5 times faster and further in water, so is it any wonder it drives fish away?

Noise and disturbance from the blades themselves are another factor. Then there's electromagnetic fields (EMF's) from the cables carrying the electricity back to shore which can act as a barrier to a number of species. On top of all this, the wind farm operators don't like boats fishing near them, let alone between them, perpetuating the rumour that the ground a wind farm occupies is out of bounds, which after the potentially hazardous construction phase, is not the case. Commercial boats, yes; angling boats, no.

The first known wind turbine used to produce electricity was built by Professor James Blyth of Andersons College, Glasgow, which is now a part of Strathclyde University. Blyth built a 10 metre high cloth sailed turbine in the garden of his holiday home at Marykirk in Kincardineshire in 1887. This fed power into large accumulators developed by Frenchman Camille Alphonse Faure which Blyth used to light his cottage, making it the first domestic property in the World to have electricity generated by wind power. He even offered to provide lighting for the towns streets which was rejected as being the work of the devil, which is how a lot of fishermen see wind power today.

Almost a century later, the UK had its first onshore wind farm. An aggregation of 10 turbines in Cornwall, powering around 2,700 domestic properties in 1991. The countries first offshore wind farm was constructed at Blyth in 2000, ironically the same name as that of its inventor, with a further 26 offshore wind farms operational by the time of writing here, several of which are sited in areas I personally fish between Cumbria down and North Wales, on account of the shallow depth and suitability of the substrate, and our west facing geography looking out onto the wind swept Irish Sea.

Two in particular in the north west which are worthy of mention are the North Hoyle wind farm (2003), and Rhyl Flats (2009), both of which I have quite a bit of anecdotal evidence about, and in particular North Hoyle. Green energy and conservation are two entities which are often mentioned together. But it seems that conservation is only applicable to that which the more vocal conservation minded public contingent can actually see with their own eyes.

That which they can't see often counts for little or nothing, such as life hidden beneath the water's surface, which has every bit as much right to carry on unaffected as has bird life, cetaceans, and all the rest. Or so you would think. Yet little if any regard is paid to fish, or to invertebrate life further down the food chain which supports them. Animals which in many cases is not mobile nor able to move to pastures new when life in their corner of the World become intolerable from both the construction and the operating phases of a wind farm.

Noise from the piling operations at sites off Rhyl could be both heard and felt as vibration many miles away from the actual sites themselves. But it's the EMF's that we should be more concerned about. Scientific work supported financially by energy companies suggests there is little or nothing to worry about here. But they would say that wouldn't they. Sharks and rays to varying degrees have the ability to detect minute electrical impulses from the heart beats of their prey animals, and can, depending on species, be affected by anything which might interfere with this ability.

These detectors, known as ampullae of Lorenzini, are tiny pits located mainly on the underside of the fish's head. I remember being in a small boat out off the coast of South Africa when a Great White repeatedly swam up to the outboard motor and started gently mouthing the leg. It seems that the weak acidic effect of the saltwater acting on paint blistered exposed patches on the metal outboard leg was creating a weak electrical current that the sharks were able to detect, hence them 'investigating' it, which was a bit unnerving. Other species may well have been able to detect it too, I don't know. And therein lies the problem.

Work needs to be done to see if EMF's from cables carrying power ashore are acting as a barrier or a deterrent, not only to cartilaginous species, but other species too including Plaice, Cod and Eels. Because if they are, this needs to be factored in. Fish are just as important as birds. The unfortunate thing is that anglers are very poorly organised, and at an individual level are for the most part apathetic, unlike bird watchers, who are very vocal, and through RSPB representation, regularly get things done.



Besides being my charter skipper of choice when fishing The Mersey over the winter months for Cod, and at Rhyl during the summer, 'Jensen II' skipper Tony Parry is also a personal friend. He was in fact one of the earliest people I recorded an audio interview with, a chat which took in a wide spread of subject material, including offshore wind farms.

It was Tony who informed me about the piling vibration felt through the grab rails on the boat. He also told me about what happened to the Tope population locally.

Very few of the Rhyl charter boats would bother fishing for Tope. But for Tony it became something of a speciality, and as such, he would get parties onboard specifically wanting to fish for them in the approaches to the River Dee close to the North Hoyle wind farm.

Over the years, I witnessed some great Tope catches there. Then suddenly, they disappeared from the main area Tony fished which was a gully running between offshore banks regularly used by the Tope as a 'Motorway'. That was until the energy company decided to run its power carrying cables along the same gully, and that as they say was the end of that. Now he has to put in more miles to find less fish, something he obviously wouldn't do if he didn't need to.

Some work has been done on the effects of EMF's on fish. The COWRIE report for example -The Potential Effects of Electromagnetic Fields Generated by Sub-Sea Power Cables Associated with Off-shore Wind Farm Developments on Electrically and Magnetically Sensitive Marine Organisms - two extracts of which are summarised as follows.....

“The results of the COWRIE Phase 1 work demonstrated that the EMF emitted by industry standard AC offshore cables had a magnetic (B) field component and an induced electric (iE) field component. These EMF components were assessed as being within the range of detection by EM-sensitive aquatic species but whether any potential impact would result remained unknown. It was noted however that a number of monitoring studies for existing wind farms were underway and that these may assist in the determination of potential impact in the future. In addition, during 2003 further consents for development were issued for three strategic areas of the English/Welsh/Scottish coastal zone.

A review of material on electrosensitive species showed that there are many fish species within the UK waters which are potentially capable of responding to anthropogenic sources of E field. However, it is not known whether the interaction between the fish and the artificial E field will have any consequences for the fish. The information available on magnetosensitive species is limited, however it does suggest that potential interactions between EM emissions, of the order likely to be associated with wind farm cables, and a number of UK coastal organisms could occur from the cellular through to the behavioural level”.

The report goes on to produce a list of electrosensitive (E field response) species in UK coastal waters. These are the Lesser Spotted Dogfish *Scyliorhinus canicular*, the Blue Shark *Prionace glauca*, the Thornback Ray *Raja clavata*, the Silver Eel *Anguilla anguilla*, the Cod *Gadus morhua*, the Plaice *Pleuronectes platessa*, and the Salmon *Salmo salar*. NOTE: The Environment Agency would not allow the breeding migration of Salmon entering the River Dee to be affected.

Clearly then, more needs to be done, particularly as there are potentially ways of avoiding some of the problems, as I discovered in my time as a serving angling representative of the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) when I was invited to a presentation by National Grid. This concerned the problem of getting electricity from a proposed new nuclear power station at Sellafield in Cumbria to the national grid running along the M6 corridor.

The Lake District National Park, understandably, did not want a series of pylons blighting its landscape. National Grid then proposed running a cable across Morecambe Bay to the Fylde Coast, which immediately raised hackles amongst both the commercial fishing and angling representatives. The commercials were fearful of picking it up with their gear, or if it was covered by boulder cladding, having yet another ‘fastener’ for them to avoid impeding their activities. My concerns, which I voiced at the meeting, were EMF’s acting as a barrier across the bay which fish would be totally unable to navigate either over or around.

Two rather surprising alternatives were put up for discussion. One was to construct a tunnel across the bay to carry the cables with an ‘island’ mid point with an inspection hatch. The other was that if boulder cladding was acceptable they could look at converting the alternating current (AC) to direct current (DC) at say Barrow-in-Furness, then reconverting it back again at the other end of the cable on the Fylde Coast. Obviously, there would be a price to pay in terms of power losses due to the double conversion, but they were prepared to at least look at this if that was the price of getting the power to where it needed to be.

I also raised the question of EMF’s from a tunnel. Would the cables be sufficiently well concealed for this not to have an effect on fish swimming nearby. Again, they agreed to investigate and come back with answers. All of which very clearly demonstrates that EMF’s can be mitigated if sufficient pressure is applied, which in the case of wind farms is not the case. As I said earlier, angling is not sufficiently well organised. We need to be fighting this with a single voice and commissioning our own research to present to both government and to the offshore energy industry. But sadly, I fear this will never happen.

BRITISH CANOEING

Formerly the British Canoe Union which was formed in 1936 (see Chapter 5), British Canoeing has set itself up as the organisation and voice for all paddle sports, which with kayak fishing for everything from inshore flatties to Common Skate currently the big growth area in sea fishing afloat, must by implication also make it the representative body for that aspect of sea angling too.

That said, the freedom to carry or wheel a kayak down to the water's edge without all the palaver small trailed boat anglers have to go through these days is presumably what attracts so many to the sport. An attraction which surely would be undermined if rules, regulations, and membership of a formal body ever became a necessity.

ARRIVAL OF THE AMBERJACKS



Disregarding the Scad, Pilot Fish, and Blue Runner, all of which also belong to the Jack family, 3 Jack species of outwardly similar appearance have now been recorded from the waters surrounding the British Isles during the twentieth century.

One is the Almaco Jack, which from my experience is a shorter fish than the 2 Amberjack species it quite closely resembles. Two species which even the experts struggle to set apart based on external features, these being the Greater Amberjack *Seriola dumerili*, (shown here) which is a fearsome fish in terms of raw power as I have experienced many times while wreck fishing off Key West, and the Guinean Amberjack *Seriola carpenteri* which I have yet to come across, a fish only described as a separate species as recently as 1971.

In September 2000, while fishing for Black Bream around a mile or so out from Belvoir Bay on Herm in the Channel Islands, local angler George Staples caught what at first was identified as being a small specimen of Greater Amberjack weighing 645g (approx. 1½ pounds). This identification was later amended to Guinean Amberjack by fish identification expert Alwyn Wheeler of the British Natural History Museum, a species that had not previously been recorded as far north as the English Channel.

Oddly enough, 4 days later, a second smaller fish of reportedly identical body layout and markings was caught by Bas Gaudian from Lancrese Bay on nearby Guernsey. Yet more evidence, if ever it was needed, of rising sea temperatures affecting fish populations and distribution.

BERKLEY GULP

If you read this volume cover to cover, you will see there have been several attempts at synthetic baits and chemical bait enhancers over the years. The idea of physically making baits and bait enhancers that are reportedly better than the real thing is the Holy Grail of tackle manufacturing.



To be able to have bait which works efficiently and keeps indefinitely at ambient temperatures so that it's always there ready to go is something tackle companies and anglers dream of having. Hence the amount of research and development money thrown at the concept, which judging from the way many of these baits arrive in a blaze of glory before fizzling out with hardly a whimper, usually turns out not to be money well spent. Yet still the scientists keep on going at it. And based on past performances, their target audience grows ever more sceptical.

American tackle giant Berkley have been embarking on this path for many years, and with some measure of genuine success. Jaded by past experiences, I only reluctantly try these products when specifically asked to, and only then when given them as free handouts. Going off topic slightly, Berkley tackle promoter Terry Eustace once gave me a couple of small jars of Berkley Power Bait paste which he insisted I try for trout on any method trout water somewhere if ever I got the chance.

Unconvinced, I put them in my tackle bag and promptly ignored them for months. Then one day, having taken my limit on natural bait and having switched to catch and release, I found the jars and suddenly felt obliged to put a blob on the hook, and to my surprise, I had fish falling over themselves to eat the stuff. So much so, that having told other anglers close by what it was who subsequently went out and bought some for themselves, the next time I visited the fishery I found it was banned because it was so effective. So synthetic baits can work, and the Berkley scientists are well capable of producing them.

A bit of a convoluted story I know, but my way of getting around to discussing the field testing of another Berkley synthetic bait marketed as Gulp. A product developed during the 1990's at the company's Spirit Lake laboratory in Iowa, where the science department spent years testing and perfecting it to a level which Berkley thought necessary to jump some of the hurdles other products over the years had failed to clear.

In short, from the onset, it needed to do what the manufacturers said it could do. In other words, consistently catch fish at least as well as if not better than the natural alternatives. A pretty tall order to meet, but one which Berkley confidently felt they could claim to have met with a water based resin impregnated with chemical scent which is readily released in water as an attractant, unlike soft baits made from oil impregnated PVC where the oils used to soften the material act as a barrier to the water, thereby preventing much of the attractant being dispersed. Gulp, they claimed, was 400 times more efficient at dispersing scent than natural baits.

The upshot of all this was the whole range of Berkley Gulp products landing on the deck of Tony Parry's Rhyl based boat 'Jensen II' with the instruction to go out and catch fish. At the time, 'Jensen II' was an ABU sponsored boat, and with ABU and Berkley part of the same group, in terms of UK trialling, it was the obvious route for them to take.

So off we went out towards the wind farm to conduct the testing, with not very much in the way of confidence I might add, to the point that a supply of natural bait was also at hand in case the Gulp failed miserably so that the day wouldn't be completely wasted. Thankfully, that proved not to be the case. Using small pieces of the lugworm and ragworm presentation, we had fish from the very first drop.



Obviously, you can only catch what's there, which on this particular day was the usual North Wales summer inshore culprits. Mainly, if I'm honest, Gurnards and Dabs. The Gurnards in particular loved it, coming up 3 at a time to form part of our final total of 10 species for the day, including interestingly a Thornback Ray. But no Smoothhounds on the crab version, even when they were shown to be about using natural crab baits.

All in all, then, quite an impressive display, completely backing up the company claims. And by way of a footnote, a few months later I was winter fishing in the River Mersey, again aboard 'Jensen II' as part of the ABU management teams end of year bash, when one of the team had a Cod on a shrimp version of Gulp fished static in very murky conditions, providing yet more evidence in support of Berkley's claims.

ULTRABITE



Hot on the heels of the Berkley Gulp field testing detailed above comes another synthetic fish attractant in the form of a liquid application to apply to natural baits selling under the brand name of Ultrabite. A formulation developed right at the close of the century and actually put on sale in 2001.

Yet another scientific compound which supposedly no fish would be able to resist of which I was given a sample to try comprising 20 separate 50 ml plastic vials, which meant that once a vial had been opened, any liquid left over at the end of a session ended up being wasted.

If you've read any of the previous synthetic bait inclusions you should be in no doubt of my innate scepticism regarding these types of product. On the other hand, as a scientist, I would never dismiss any claim out of hand without first putting it to some sort of a test, which is exactly what I have done here, though not with anything like the same level of vigour used by John Holden when he field tested Biotrak (see Chapter 10), despite it having been meticulously jointly developed at great cost by Kiotech and the Centre for Environmental, Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences (CEFAS) based on a formulation described as 'Factor X' developed by Dr. Andy Moore and his team at CEFAS, and patented by them.

When I received my sample, Ultrabite had already had some 'celebrity' endorsements, which made me marginally keener to put it through its paces where I otherwise might not have been that bothered, something I decided to do following the time honoured protocol of investigating it and presenting the findings as a scientific paper.....

INTRODUCTION: For many years, anglers, tackle companies, and fishery scientists, have strived to discover a formulation which could either be used to enhance the attractiveness of natural hook baits to fish, or as a totally synthetic bait to be used in its own right. In 2001 a fish attractant jointly researched

by Kiotech and CEFAS went on public sale. Listed here is a summary of the claims made for that product, which is sold under the market name of Ultrabite.....

Ultrabite is revolutionary because it combines sex pheromone, food and bite producing aromas.

Ultrabite is the first government approved fish attractant and is endorsed and used by Matt Hayes.

Ultrabite attracts male and female fish and is available in 10 species profiled formulae.

METHODS & MATERIALS: Two identical 4 foot long traces were constructed from 40 pounds breaking strain monofilament with a 3/0 hook at one end and a swivel at the other. At the midpoint, a 12 inch dropper with a second 3/0 hook was attached. On one trace a micro bead was placed just behind the hook on the point. On the other trace an identical bead was placed behind the hook on the dropper. This was done to identify the hook baits treated with the Ultrabite. These rigs were then fished on 2 identical boat fishing outfits. Lugworm bait from the same source was applied to all 4 hooks across the 2 traces, one trace having general formula Ultrabite applied to the bead identified bait on the point, and the other with Ultrabite applied to the bead identified bait on the dropper. This meant that both outfits would be fishing in an identical manner comparing like with like across the 2 traces in the same vicinity, comparing the claims made for Ultrabite by putting the 2 baits on the same trace in direct competition with each other. This was felt necessary to eliminate so far as was possible claims that fish feeding around one trace and not the other might skew the result. Experimentation was carried out over 3 consecutive trips.

RESULTS: A total of 46 fish are recorded in Table 1. comprised of 23 Whiting, 18 Cod, 2 Dabs, 1 Lesser Spotted Dogfish, 1 Pouting, and 1 small Conger Eel. Statistical analysis of these data has not been carried leaving the raw data to speak for itself.

Table 1

Trip No.	Ultrabite on point hook	Ultrabite on drop-per hook	Untreated bait on point hook	Untreated bait on dropper
1	3	0	3	10
2	4	4	4	4
3	5	2	3	4

DISCUSSION: It could be argued that 3 trips and 46 fish hardly constitute exhaustive testing. But at £14.99 for a pack of 20 @ 50 ml vials in the UK which it has to be said was expensive at the time, any reasonable angler would not be seen as being unreasonably optimistic in expecting at least 1 positive result out of the 3. Yet the best Ultrabite could manage was to match the untreated baits, which clearly is not good enough. Statistically, 61% of the total catch was taken on untreated baits and 39% by those treated with Ultrabite.

I suspect that had the trial gone on for longer, chance would see to it that the results would have evened themselves out across both the treated and untreated baits, and between fish on the droppers and those on the point. Whether or not Ultrabite treatments targeting specific species such as Bass and Cod would have given more encouraging results is an area for further research.

Bait additives generally over the years have not given good results. The only 2 attractants I have field tested which have shown any positive correlation between application and increased fish catches have

been WD40 and Pilchard oil, both of which work best with cartilaginous species such as Tope, Thorn-back Rays and Bull Huss which have particularly well developed olfactory senses enabling them to track down highly scented baits more efficiently than other fish.

Pilchard oil with its thick, viscous, sticky nature may well cling to baits longer than less adhesive liquids, giving it a potentially longer period of attraction, which would greatly increase the chance of any bait coated with it being found. WD40 is less viscous, but again lasts well. In addition to this, WD40 can be particularly effective when injected into the body cavity of sandeel baits which are head hooked and lashed to the trace to prevent body cavity rupture with the hook. Ultrabite however is far too expensive to inject, and as most species of fish feed better when the tide is running, could have a tendency to be washed off a bait before it has had time to work effectively.

THE CONOFLEX DOWN BUTT UPTIDER



I'm no shore angler, but the onset of rheumatoid arthritis, particularly in my shoulders and arms in 2014 started to steer me in that direction as a replacement for certain aspects of boat fishing, including the heavier duty stuff, and my lifelong passion of small boat fishing which I could no longer do.

Any shore fishing done previously was for the most part opportunistic, such as covering events for magazines, making the best of holiday opportunities, plus the occasional shore only trip such as one to Namibia in 1999 with Dave Lewis and a party of UK and Irish shore fanatics where we recorded arguably the largest haul of fish in shore angling history, with in excess of 15,000 pounds of fish from the beach over a 6 day period.

The relevance of that trip here is in the tackle we used. Our guide, Johan Burger, provided everything, though we also took our own standard UK beach tackle with us which we also used to good effect. Without going into unnecessary detail, the reels provided were 4/0 Penn Senators with one of the strengthening bars removed for thumb control of the rotating spool during casting.

As for the rods, these were one piece 14 foot Purglas Executives with their reel seats set around 9 inches up from the butt cap, necessitating (for me at least) casting left handed to control the reel, the thinking being that the shortened distance between reel seat and butt cap allowed for the use of a butt pad which was essential for handling sharks averaging around 180 pounds apiece.

So impressed was I with the concept and what it might have to offer back home that I decided I would put together a down butt version of my own for uptide fishing. Though I didn't realise it at the time, I was already showing signs of shoulder and neck joint weakness, none of which was helped by playing fish like Tope with the rod butt tucked uncomfortably under my arm. So I contacted Conoflex with a brief outline of what I was looking for, and they came back with a down butt version of their 10 foot Assassin, which I have to say has proved to be a particularly effective weapon on fronts I hadn't even considered when the concept first came to mind.

Unlike drop down fishing at anchor where the favoured back of the boat not only allows you to trot your gear down tide well clear of everyone else, then cashes in on the scent trail laid down by the other baits which in turn draws fish uptide where the stern baits are in the prime spot to intercept them, uptide fishing can be as effective from any position on the boat.

Fish moving with the tide detect noise and vibration from the boat which they then arc around, with the widest point of that arc being around midway down each side of the boat. Having got past the boat they may start to move back to their original line off the stern, but you can't bank on that. The nearest point they come within casting range is upside of the bow, making the most forward position on each side of the boat a prime spot in terms of reaching the fish and avoiding everyone else, tucking in out of the breeze at the back of the wheelhouse bulkhead.

The downside of this position comes when casting. Your end gear is always going to be hanging in either a dangerous or a precarious position as you make ready to cast. Using the down butt set up, I personally find avoiding casting problems much easier, as I can get sufficient power behind the lead using a 'left handed' cast from a starting position over the water parallel to the side of the boat.

The one obvious problem when doing this is mastering the reel control with the left hand instead of the right, which I found after a few practise throws to be as comfortable as doing things the other way around. From there on, you have the advantage of being able to comfortably use a butt pad if for whatever reason you either want or need to use one.

CLIMATE CHANGE ROUND-UP

The end of this decade closes the twentieth century. What better place then to sum up the worrying climate change situation and its ongoing consequences for sea angling. Yet with all the weight of both scientific as well as practical evidence available for anyone and everyone to clearly see what is going on, still there are climate change deniers right through to the very highest and most influential positions in governments, in many cases because it doesn't suit either them or their business interests to tackle the problem head on.

Heavy industry, and fossil fuel burning in particular, which includes the cars we drive to get to fishing harbours and the boats which take us out to the fish on arrival. All are adding to the problem. So what is the solution. A question which if I could provide a unanimously acceptable answer to I wouldn't be sat here typing this right now. Unfortunately, there is no hard and binding right answer.

It's all about compromises which no side is ever going to feel entirely happy with. But whatever these turn out to be, they need to be thought through and implemented rapidly before the pendulum has swung too far. By the close of the century, the point of no return had probably not been passed. By the time of writing this some 18 years later, and with 17 of those years officially listed globally as the hottest years on record, the swing of that pendulum is starting to look ominously close to its limit.

A lot of people, many of whom will be anglers, may wonder what the climate change fuss is all about. Sometimes to answer complex questions of this nature they need to be explained in simple contextual terms. This should not be taken as a slur on the man in the streets ability to understand and appreciate complex concepts. We all lead busy lives and often don't have sufficient spare time to invest in understanding issues which may not be as immediately important to us as the problems we have in our personal lives. So, let me throw a few angling related examples into the mix.

Plankton sit at the base of the marine food chain, or food web if you prefer. This is a soup of microscopic animals and plants, some of which will progress to become larger more recognisable animals such as crabs, barnacles and other marine invertebrates. Animals with fish larvae need as food, and in turn are predated on by larger fish which are themselves then eaten by even larger examples all the way through to the Apex predators, many of which are angling favourites. Plankton is also a direct staple food for some larger fish species too such as Basking Sharks. In all cases, the eating of plankton is not species specific. Plankton is plankton, which if it's your staple diet, any combination will do.



For other reasons, the constituents of the plankton soup can be important. Vitrally so when you consider that much of the oxygen put back into the atmosphere after animals (including ourselves) have ‘consumed’ it is created by the vegetative component of the plankton soup. Plants including phyto-plankton use incoming sunlight as the energy source to drive a process known as photosynthesis which splits carbon dioxide molecule into carbon, which all plants need, and oxygen, which they release as a bi-product for us to breath. But again, this isn’t

species specific amongst the vegetative component of the plankton. Where species identity is important is demonstrating the validity of the argument that global warming is real through rising sea temperatures.

A study published by William J. Chivers, Anthony W. Walne and Graeme C. Hays in 2017 in Nature Communications 8, article number 14434(2017), clearly demonstrates rising that sea temperature levels, which we are all now seeing, are having a very profound effect on fish stocks.

To summarise, what they found was that planktonic species typically found at more southerly latitudes on account of water temperature were migrating northwards, in some cases at an alarming rate. From 148,000 samples across 35 plankton taxa, they found that different components of the species mix responded to temperature rise at differing rates, with those species with the tightest temperature tolerance bands having moved northwards by as much as 99 Km (61.5 miles) per decade from an often quoted start date of 1970.

You need only look at the national angling record lists and the content of angling articles over the past 30 or so years to see similar changes in some of the fish species we now catch. To use a 21st century example, the British record list now displays the Almaco Jack (2010); the Greater Amberjack (2007) and the Guinean Amberjack (2000).

At the moment, these are little more than ‘pioneering migrants’ pushing the northern boundaries of what they can tolerate. But more will come. A prime example of this being the appearance of the Gilt-head Bream, which similarly started with a few pioneers along the south coast, and has now spread northwards into Ireland and Wales. Couches Bream is another occasional visitor that has turned into a regular customer. All 4 record lists display other examples.

What these lists don’t highlight is the progression northwards of species already with us. Well I say that, but there are a couple of recent examples, plus one that has been around for quite a while. In my angling life, both Black Bream and Smoothhounds were at their regular northerly around mid-Wales. Now they are being caught regularly, and in the case of the Smoothhounds prolifically in south west Scotland, and have in all probability progressed even further north than that into areas where angling of a type likely to catch them is not often practised.

Bass too have pushed their latitude boundaries northwards. They were already occasionally present in Luce Bay when I started fishing. Not long after, fly fishermen looking to catch Sea Trout in the sea-lochs dotted around the Orkney Islands started reporting catching a few.

Putting a positive spin on things, you could say this is good for angling. Exciting new species appearing and existing species expanding their range. But always remember, where there are winners there must

also be losers. Cold water adapted species living at the southern extent of their range are not going to be able to deal with all of this well at all.

Some of those species may well be bit part players on the regular sea angling scene. But not all of them. Cod and Haddock in particular are coming under increasing threat. Anglers in northern England and Scotland won't have noticed the subtle changes yet. As the Cod's southerly limit creeps northwards from the English Channel, for anglers in Lancashire and over in Yorkshire it remains business as usual. Well, for now at least.

One of the interviews I did both for this project and for the audio archive was with Kent charter skippers Mick and Matt Coker. Their reputation for Cod catches over the years has been outstanding, so they know a thing or two about the species from an angling perspective. Yet Mick says he is already seeing changes, particularly in the numbers of Cod caught since the turn of the century not all of which can be put down to over fishing.

Everything may well be fine at the moment further up in the North Sea along the Yorkshire Coast, but give it time. Scientists looking into the forced northerly migration of cold water adapted species are now saying that the regular southerly limit for North Sea Cod is now 73 miles further north than previously due to sea temperature changes, and it doesn't look like slowing down or being reversed any time soon unless or until global government policies are not only put into place, but are given time to reverse these trends, if indeed that is still possible.

All of that said, while global sea temperatures across the board are following a rising trend, scientists are saying that at some point the British Isles might be plunged into a much colder period. It sounds like a contradiction I know, but it has to do with the loss of sea ice in northern polar regions. The British Isles can be up to several degrees warmer than other parts of the European land mass at the same latitude because of the fact that we are buffered by being surrounded by sea water which is being warmed by the effects of the Gulf Stream.

Scientists are suggesting that due to the complex way in which ocean currents work, it is possible that the loss of the sea ice in the Arctic could trigger either a shift in direction, or a slowing down of the Gulf Stream, leaving us surrounded by very much colder water. As a result, while the rest of the World warms up, we could actually see the reverse happening. What effect this might have on marine populations remains to be seen.

OVER EXPLOITATION WARNING

During the early 1990's, research scientist Edward Wilson published a statistically supported extinction rate prediction across all life forms of 3 species lost each and every hour. This equates to a staggering 27,000 species per year. Now, some 30 years later, at the time of writing this book, that figure has been revised up to several hundred per day, with the caveat that the current free for all, particularly in terms of over exploiting coastal seas and increasingly the deeper oceans, must cease immediately to have even the remotest chance of dragging things back from the edge of the abyss.

Another survey done by the World Wildlife Fund states that populations of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles have declined by 49% since 1970, and that species such as Mackerel and tuna's which are relied upon for food have fared even worse with a 74% drop, adding that fish are being caught faster than they can reproduce.

It's a demonstrable fact that industrialised commercial fishing typically reduces biomass by 80% within 15 years of commencement, and that as technology improves, the commercial sector will increasingly

move away from continental shelf exploitation to the open ocean where large species such as marlin and tuna are already in trouble.

NEW ANGLING PUBLICATIONS

What follows is a list of angling publications in the form of books and periodicals. Where applicable, or where I have a particular vested interest, some might also feature as individual inclusions within the Chapter at an appropriate time slot.

NOTE: List may not be definitive as it may not contain every publication for the decade.

NEW BOOKS

Fisherman's Year: When and Where of Britain's Best Fishing (1991) by John Holden.

The Challenge of Shore Angling: A Practical Guide (1991) by Lindsey Green.

The Complete Book of Sea Fishing (1991) by Trevor Housby.

Successful Sea Angling (1991) by Trevor Housby.

Sea Fishing: Expert Advice for Beginners (1991) by Trevor Housby.

The Complete Book of Sea Fishing: Tackle and Techniques (1992) by Alan Yates & Ted Entwistle.

Forty Anglers (1994) by Donovan Kelley.

The Dorling Kindersley Encyclopaedia of Fishing (1994) by Peter Gathercole, Trevor Housby, Dennis Moss, Bruce Vaughan and Phill Williams.

The Challenge of Sea Fishing (1995) by Lindsey Green.

The Challenge of Light Tackle (1995) by Lindsey Green.

Estuary Fishing Afloat & Ashore (1995) by Dave Lewis.

Fishing for a Year (1995) by Jack Hargreaves.

The Illustrated Angler (1996) by Trevor Housby.

Dinghy Fishing (1996) by Dave Lewis.

The Art of Wreck Fishing (1996) by Stu Arnold.

Cod Fishing: The Complete Guide (1997) by John Wilson & Dave Lewis.

The Complete Book of Fly Fishing (1998) by Various contributors Inc. Phill Williams.

Life with Bass (1998) by Donovan Kelley.

The Sea Anglers Step by Step Guide to Bait and Rigs (1998) by Mel Russ.

Sea Fishing Properly Explained (1998) by Ian Ball.

Bass Fishing on Shore and Sea (1998) by John Darling.

Sea Fishing (1999) by Alan Yates.

The Concise Encyclopaedia of Coarse, Sea & Fly Fishing (1999) by Gareth Purnell, Chris Dawn and Alan Yates.

The Practical Guide to Salt-Water Fishing (2000) by Martin Ford and Bruce Vaughan.

NEW MAGAZINES & PAPERS

Boat Fisherman.

Shore Fisherman.

Anglers Review.

Improve Your Sea Fishing – Published by International Publishing Corporation and edited by Roy Westwood.

Lure Angler – published by the Lure Anglers Society of which Dr. Barrie Rickards was president, with Fred Wagstaff and Fred J. Taylor his vice presidents.

Sea Angling News - A free angling paper supported by advertising started and produced by Jim and Pat Whippy.

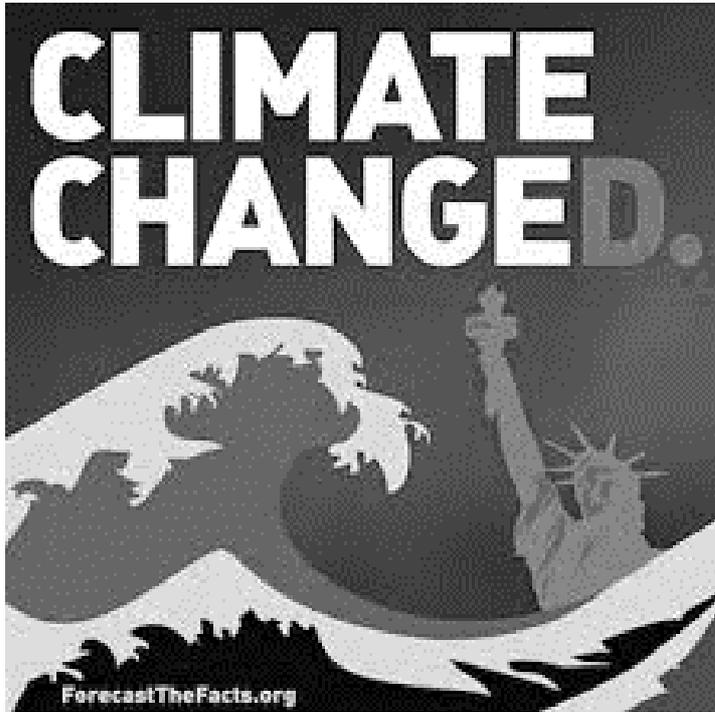
Angling Ireland.

Total Sea Fishing – A David Hall publication aimed at boat, pier, beach, match edited by Jim Whippy after being head hunted from his own weekly free paper, Sea Angling News.

Boat Fishing Monthly – Started by Jim Whippy to go head to head with the EMAP publication Boat Angler.

CHAPTER TWELVE – LEGACY

The legacy twentieth century anglers have left is there to be seen, and more importantly, for us to be judged by for those who come after us. An inescapable fact which I have absolutely no intention of even trying to dodge or justify.



If anything, I will try to address it head on by discussing what we had, what we did with it, and in many cases, what we also did to it, and it won't only be me providing the explanations. I have recruited a few guests with thoughts and comments that won't necessarily always concur with mine. People who like me will attempt to explain some of the mess and arguably unfixable problems being passed forward to the next generation, which when observers look back, will no doubt provoke questions like “Why did they do that, and how could that have been allowed to happen?”

Some of the problems future anglers will inherit were also inherited my generation, either in part or in full, so we too are also passing them forward. Arguably the best example of this is climate

change leading to rising sea temperatures and fish species mix changes, which has its origins in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, despite prophetic warnings from the science community almost from its onset. As for the rest of what can generously be termed 'change', most, if not all of that, is twentieth century generated. We had fishing of a calibre anglers today now can only dream about, which to put it mildly, we didn't manage very well at all.

Mapping the declines of the second half of the century is perhaps best summed up by a chat with Jon Ayres, the long time weigh master for Southsea Sea Angling Club (SSAC). Looking at club records on a decade by decade basis, Jon recalled the club's early attempts at boat fishing. During the 1950's this was being conducted from 14 foot clinker boats, which for a good 80% of the outings recorded were still being rowed out to the fishing grounds. The club did eventually buy a small number of Seagull engines which could be booked on a first come first served basis. In addition, some of the better off members also bought engines of their own. Either way, the bulk of the fishing during the 1950's took place between 1 and 2 miles offshore, accounting mainly for Plaice, Flounder, bream, rays, Tope and Bass.

Come the 1960's, outboard motor availability was more widespread and members were travelling closer to 3 miles off without any measurable improvement in recorded catches. Jump forwards another 10 years to the 1970's and the use of outboard engines was not only more widespread, but typically they were more powerful too. Membership had been swelled by a lot more younger anglers who by this time were venturing off between 5 and 8 miles, again without any appreciable improvement in catches, though Cod, along with more Conger, were featuring, in the main because people were finding more

rocky ground, which when they moved off it was producing up to 20 rays per trip, along with more and better Tope.

The 1980's were similar to the 1970's. By this time however, the boats had become faster still, allowing them to hit more distant marks with ease and with more fishing time available which theoretically should have meant more fish. But the catches they were making were not that much different to the earlier rowing boat days fishing up to a couple of miles off.

There was a spell during 1970's out in the deeper water when the Cod fishing really came good. But it was a similar story in a number of other parts of the country, my own patch up here in Lancashire amongst them. Then like elsewhere, that eventually ran its course and it was back to the status quo of chasing decreasing numbers of shrinking fish, except anglers fishing for sharks or heading out to fish the offshore wrecks, both of which as the angling history of the twentieth century very clearly shows would have a limited 'crest of the wave' duration.

THE PHENOMENON OF SHRINKING FISH

An unexpected consequence of rising sea temperatures proposed by Daniel Pauly and William Cheung in a research paper entitled 'Shrinking of Fishes Exacerbates Impacts of Global Ocean Changes on Marine Ecosystems', published in Nature Climate Change in 2012, is exactly what the title implies – the size of fish is on the decrease. Not at the individual level in fish that have already achieved a certain size. They can't suddenly shrink. More at population level which progressively over time is going to see the maximum achievable size of the individuals it contains coming down.

Here's what Pauly and Cheung had to say in an extract of their research.....

“One of the main expected responses of marine fishes to ocean warming is decrease in body size, as supported by evidence from empirical data and theoretical modelling. The theoretical underpinning for fish shrinking is that the oxygen supply to large fish size cannot be met by their gills, whose surface area cannot keep up with the oxygen demand by their three dimensional bodies. However, Lefevre et al. (Global Change Biology, 2017, 23, 3449-3459) argue against such theory. Here, we re-assert, with the Gill-Oxygen Limitation Theory (GOLT), that gills, which must retain the properties of open surfaces because their growth, even while hyperallometric, cannot keep up with the demand of growing three dimensional bodies. Also, we show that a wide range of biological features of fish and other water breathing organisms can be understood when gill area limitation is used as an explanation. We also note that an alternative to GOLT, offering a more parsimonious explanation for these features of water breathers has not been proposed. Available empirical evidence corroborates predictions of decrease in body sizes under ocean warming based on GOLT, with the magnitude of the predicted change increases when using more species-specific parameter values of metabolic scaling.”

In a nutshell, increased water temperature accelerates the metabolism of water breathing animals, and in particular fish. The problem is that as water increases in temperature it becomes less able to hold the oxygen fish need to extract via their gills, which unfortunately coincides with an increased oxygen requirement to drive their increased metabolic rate. Pauly and Cheung argue that as fish bodies grow faster than their gills, a point is eventually reached where the gills become too small for the job required of them and they are unable to respire sufficiently to promote or sustain normal growth putting limits on the sizes they can attain.

Fish gills are organs evolved to extract dissolved oxygen from the water and release respired carbon dioxide into it. The problem is that the gills' surface area does not increase at a pro-rata rate to the rest of the fish's body. If for example a Cod grows 100 percent larger, it is argued that its gills might only grow by 80 percent or less according to the study. Tuna, which are fast moving fish and need more

oxygen than Cod may shrink by as much as 30 percent researchers said. Conversely, Brown Trout, which are not as active as tuna, might only decrease in body size by about 18 percent with each degree Celsius of warming as the point is reached where the gills cannot supply enough oxygen for a larger body, and so the fish stops growing



Cheung, who is an Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia's 'Changing Ocean Research Unit' said that the research team found that typically the body size of a fish will decrease by between 20 and 30 percent for every one degree of water temperature increase, which will have a profound effect on marine food webs, upsetting predator-prey balance relationships in ways that are currently hard to accurately predict.

Pauly, a Professor and project leader for the UBC 'Sea Around Us Project' added that lab experiments have shown that it is always the large species that become stressed first, with the smaller species having an advantage in terms of respiration. However, while supporters applaud the findings, others are of the opinion that their research does not support their findings.

The headline conclusion of this piece of research is that under current climate change predictions, the body weight of some 600 species of saltwater fish is likely to shrink by between 14 and 24 percent by 2050. "It's a difficult concept for people to imagine because we breathe air," Pauly says. "Our problem is getting enough food—not oxygen. But for fish, it's very different. For humans, it would be like trying to breathe through a straw."

Closer to home, fishery scientists have also linked oxygen to smaller fish sizes in the North Sea, where Haddock, Whiting and Sole are seeing significant size loss in areas of the sea with less oxygen, which kind-of brings it home at an angling level as another limiting factor in addition to what we already know about commercial over exploitation.

WINNERS & LOSERS



Evolutionary science teaches us that disaster for some species means opportunity for others. Whenever and wherever a new niche opens up there will be animals and plants willing to step in to evolve and exploit it. The problem is that the required adaptation takes time; often vast amounts of time, and therein lies a major short term problem. With climate change progressing at the rate it currently is, for most (arguably all) animals and plants caught up in the turnover, the time necessary to adapt and embrace the new reality simply isn't there. Events are moving along way too quickly for that, with realistic predictions of an additional 5 degrees C by 2070 and an extra 70 cms of sea level above what is was at the Millennium if it is not urgently brought back under control.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on how you look at things, while fish also require time to adapt, when temperature changes overtake them, unlike terrestrial animal species geographically constrained by the land mass they find themselves living on, or plants which are quite literally rooted to the spot, marine species of fish along open oceanic coasts such as around the bulk of the UK and Ireland have the option of moving either north or south (with the current climate situation it is northwards) to remain within whichever temperature band they find most comfortable for living in, and more importantly, where they can successfully reproduce.

This however isn't the full story. For while fish are potentially mobile and able to push further north if they require cooler conditions, much of the food some species rely on may well be less mobile, and in some cases, as with plants on land, as individuals ie. barnacles, these prey items can be fixed in a specific location, though their offspring as part of the plankton 'soup' may well fare better. So it's a very complex situation in which everything is interlinked, and to some extent reliant on the other links in the food web for survival. Fortunately, for most angling species at our latitude, dietary requirements are not so specific as to provide a survival threat and they can adapt by prey switching, within reason,

to that which is most readily available. For some species however, there are 'must have' requirements other than the constituents of their diet.

Most fish thrive and breed within specific temperature bands. For some species the upper and lower limits might be such that their band of comfort is extremely wide such as it is for say Cod, which in my lifetime I have caught around the Shetland Islands in the north, the Channel Islands in the south, and along both sides of the country east and west, though that is now starting to change. Other species have much narrower survival bands. Geographically, the British Isles are located at a latitude which at its most southern extremity some sub tropical warm water species can tolerate, while at the northern end, cold water adapted species can thrive, with a very large band of overlap between the two which all but a few peripheral species can happily tolerate.

Unfortunately, the water temperature band I began dropping baits into during my early fishing years is demonstrably and fairly rapidly creeping northwards, allowing more warm water adapted species into the reckoning at southern latitudes, while at the same time pushing a number of traditional cold adapted favourites northwards, until eventually they will be beyond regular angling reach altogether unless the trend is either halted, or better still reversed. Of these, the best known and most cherished is the Cod. A fish which as I've already pointed out in earlier Chapters, Dover charter skipper Mick Coker caught in abundance right up to the end of the century and now concedes is a species he is losing some contact with as the North Sea warms at twice the rate of the rest of the World's oceans.

In 2005, the journal 'Science' announced that scientists at the University of East Anglia had demonstrated that the recognised southerly limit for North Sea Cod distribution was 73 miles further north than it was 28 years earlier in 1977. The 'main message' from an obviously extensive and detailed study was that 21 fish species were shown to have shifted their distribution in line with the rise in sea temperature, 18 of which had moved further to the north, with 3 preferring to search out cooler deeper water. Professor John Reynolds who led the study pointed to the fact that as species such as Cod and Haddock had moved 73 and 65 miles respectively further to the north, management programmes would need to be particularly precautionary if southerly populations were to recover from overfishing.

Lowestoft lies approximately 70 miles to the north of Dover on the North Sea coast. The premier North Sea ports such as Whitby are around 3 times that distance further north again leaving them safe, for the moment at least. So it's coming. Eventually, more and more Cod will be pushed to higher latitudes with catch numbers likely to drop away. But unless you are single mindedly addicted just to catching Cod, it isn't all doom and gloom, for as was said earlier, wherever you find losers there will also be winners which won't necessarily always be looking for vacated niches to fill. Some will be happy to muscle in, out compete, and maybe even displace existing species not under immediate threat from temperature rise. An indirect consequence which must also be factored in to the statistics.

Fish able to take advantage of rising sea temperatures fall into 2 categories; those that have always been found in British waters expanding their range northwards, and those that previously weren't here, or were very rare occasional visitors, and have now become established around southern coastlines. The later are mainly breams and wrasses, with more new species to come as British and Irish waters get ever warmer. But there are other species too, such as the amberjacks, and undoubtedly yet more to come. This then is an ongoing legacy, with the southerly biased species we already have that are expanding their range northwards more of a predictable known quantity, the best examples of which without doubt being the Smoothhound(s) and the Black Bream.

Currently, Irish fish recorders recognise only one species of Smoothhound, identified as being *Mustelus asterias*. The British, Scottish and Welsh record fish committee's list 2 species, despite DNA studies by Irish fisheries researcher Dr. Ed Farrell between 2006 and 2010 showing every Smoothhound he examined caught by anglers throughout the entire British Isles, plus every museum specimen he took DNA samples from in Britain, Ireland, and northern Europe, spots or no spots, was *Mustellus asterias*. The

species anglers commonly call the Starry Smoothhound. Unfortunately, scientific advisors to the British, Welsh and Scottish record fish committees take a different view. Who finally wins the argument remains to be seen.

In a conversation I had with south coast angler Ted Tuckerman, he recalled that in all likelihood he was the first person in Britain, if not to catch a Smoothhound, then to catch one and identify it as such. That was back in 1950's (see Chapter 7). By the time I came to appreciate their fighting qualities in the early 1970's they had already expanded their range (or had become recognised more widely) both east and west, though not always showing up at all locations along the way. From 1958 when Ted first encountered them they initially underwent a pretty uniform spread eastwards, particularly throughout the Thames Estuary, which is where I first fished for them with John Rawle out from Bradwell.

Looking to the west, their expansion was far more selective, with pretty much every location along the Channel Coast to the west of Hampshire by-passed, as was Cornwall and Devon's north coast. So far as I am aware, South Wales was the next recipient. I also remember doing some early days dinghy fishing for them out from Trefor in Caernarfon Bay during the 1980's, which so far as I am aware was their most northerly outpost at that time, and for a while that was about it. Then I began to hear rumours of possible Smoothhounds along the Lancashire Coast where they have steadily built what today is a very good population from around the early to mid-1980's, after which they began back-filling locations previously missed such as Rhyl and later the Mersey Estuary, followed around 2008 by reports of a growing strengthening showing in Scotland's Luce Bay.

Much of this has already been covered in the final two Chapters of the twentieth century. I'm fleetingly repeating things here to illustrate their steady advance northwards, presumably facilitated by documented sea temperature increases, as the sea bed and its food holding potential hasn't changed that much from the days when the species was absent. This however has not been replicated along the east coast in the southern North Sea. Or is it that anglers there are simply not fishing in ways likely to produce Smoothhounds if they were about? A difficult question to answer. How much further north they will progress in the west remains to be seen. With anglers becoming progressively thinner on the ground beyond The Clyde on Scotland's west coast, they could be there already, as yet undetected.



Black Bream have a similar story to tell. The eastern English Channel, particularly to the east of the Isle of Wight was always an important Black Bream stronghold. Less so in more recent times, as commercial pressure, both directly and indirectly in that area has taken its toll. Over-fishing in its many guises is affecting bream stocks in terms of numbers and reduction of average size. Worse still, it is also affecting their spawning grounds which off the Sussex coast is chalk reef such as the Kingmere Rocks, where they build their nests in the

loose chalk substrate. There, habitat destruction is every bit as 'challenging' as over cropping, so it's perhaps just as well that range expansion is now underway.

As with the Smoothhounds, much of this has already been covered in the last couple of Chapters of the twentieth century. Like the Sussex Coast, Cardigan Bay in West Wales has a long established link with the species, providing good nesting substrate due to its reefs being glacial moraines deposited at the end of the last ice age when glaciers carrying assorted pieces of solid material finally melted, leaving long

narrow fingers of stones and other transportable debris. Perfect Black Bream holding and spawning territory, and the ideal base from which to send out pioneering 'scouting parties' looking to set up new forward positions, which as with the Smoothhounds, they have done by leap frogging large sections of the coast which obviously must not have had suitable habitat to attract and hold them.

Back in the 1980's and early-1990's, we used to target and catch a few Black Bream inside the Menai Strait, along with good numbers on the reefs just outside the southern entrance around Dinas. I'm told there is even a spot off Rhyl which in some seasons since the turn of the century throws up a few. Very odd ones are also caught over the mixed bouldery ground along Lancashire's Fylde Coast and the bottom end of Walney Island. Then in 2008 I got a call from Ian Burrett who charter fishes in Luce Bay over the summer months telling me that Black Bream had turned up there in the Ardwell area. So again, with so few people fishing in a way likely to catch small bream, it's difficult to know just exactly when they actually first arrived, and how much further to the north they have or will expand their distribution.

Smoothhounds and Black Bream are both 'winners' in so far as they have gained ground over and above that which they already occupied around our coasts. Another category of winners is those that have used rising sea temperatures to expand their range from waters to the south of the British Isles. Understandably, no 'new species' so far as I am aware have expanded their range down from the north into Scottish waters due to the way current temperature trends are going. Even so, all things considered, in its entirety it is still quite an extensive list, some of which are not established or even fairly regular migrants - yet. Those are candidates for an addendum inclusion by some other researcher on into the future after my ashes have been sprinkled on the beach at Rossall. For now, I intend only to mention those species which can be classed as current inclusions to the fauna of the British Isles.

As anyone who has ever holidayed in mainland Europe to the south of us will know only too well, when you peer into the water around harbours and breakwaters there, the vast majority of the fish you will see are small breams and wrasses, a bias which carries on through in terms of the new species regularly on offer in the south and west of the UK and Ireland. Sea breams in particular. We lost the Red Bream *Pagellus bogaraveo* back in the 1980's (see Chapter 10). But we didn't lose red coloured sea Breams altogether. In fact, from around the same period we gained 2 new species, and may even have had them earlier through incorrectly labelling them as Red Bream, which if you have no reason to be specifically checking to see if there might be different identifying features or a new species is an easy thing to do with both the Pandora *Pagellus erythrinus*, and Couches Sea Bream *Pagrus pagrus*.

Not unexpectedly, these were first picked up around the Channel Islands, which is often a major staging post for species pushing up from the south. From memory, it was the Pandora that appeared to be the more numerous, with the emphasis later switching (and remaining) with the Couches Bream. Initially these would have been chance encounters. Now I believe that Couches Bream can be caught pretty much to order if you go the right place at the right time, such as Newquay in north Cornwall. I'm not sure how future expansion and new species entering the frame might pan out though. Pandora and Couches Bream were not replacements for the 'lost' Red Bream. For while there are feeding and territorial overlaps, each of those 3 species primarily occupies a separate niche. Whether those needs can be satisfied north of the west country is another matter. Red Bream when they were abundant only rarely strayed north of the western approaches. So only time will tell.

It's at this point that sea angling journalist and fishery scientist Dr. Mike Ladle would like to add a few thoughts.....

Sea Angling then, now and coming shortly!

Every sea angler has a different take on what they enjoy catching and how they prefer to do it – each of my close fishing pals has their own unique approach. Originally, perhaps thirty thousand years ago, the main, if not the only objective of using a hook (or gorge pin) and line to catch fish was to obtain food; but I have no doubt that the thrills of sensing a bite, feeling the line tighten and seeing a fine fish

appear from the depths (and of course that terrible empty feeling when the line fell slack) were the same then as they are today.

We can't know how good the fishing was in the stone ages but one thing is certain it would have been vastly more productive than we can even imagine. Added to this most of us just DON'T WANT TO HEAR HOW BAD THINGS ARE NOW!

The quality of angling changes along a sort of shifting baseline with each lifetime that passes and that's a lot of lifetimes. As Callum Roberts states in his excellent book "Ocean of Life" (which should be compulsory reading for every angler and politician) "Younger people generally fail to perceive changes experienced by the elderly ...in favour of things they have experienced themselves." So it's very tricky to get a realistic opinion on the changing state of sea angling even within living memory.

Historic photographs of fish caught by anglers provide the most graphic examples. In Florida in the 1950s huge groupers and sharks dominated boat angler's trophy catches and today, less than seventy years on the pictures are of small snappers and grunts (which in the past would have been mere baits). The proud anglers are still equally smug about their prize fish. They have no idea that anything has changed. Similarly, photographs of trawl catches from North Sea ports in the late 1800s show so many large cod and ling that modern fishermen often don't believe them.

Closer to my south coast haunts the Agricultural Survey of Dorset 1812 states that - "The sea on our coast abounds with sturgeons, turbot, mackerel, plaice, soles, basse, whittings, congers, porpoises, lobsters, red and grey mullet, thornbacks, piper or gurnet, frill or scollop, shrimps, prawns, and oysters." Just a little further afield, in the Channel Islands, The Fishing Gazette of 1877 quotes - "The bass (*Labrax lupus*) also attains in these waters the finest possible development, examples weighing from 14lb to 20lb being a common sight upon the stalls." Such fish are almost beyond the hopes of today's anglers.

On a shorter time scale we've all seen the same sort of changes ourselves. Since I started bass angling in the 1960s the numbers and sizes of bass caught here in Purbeck has dropped dramatically. Of course large ones are still landed but such fish are much less frequent than my diaries recall. Many members of the Bass Angler's Sportfishing Society, disappointed with their U.K. catches of bass, now travel thousands of miles to the USA every year to fish for the related (and much larger) striped bass, even though these fish have themselves seriously declined in size and numbers. In short, we are approaching the bottom of a long, steep, slippery slope of diminishing catches. Scientific analysis of fish stocks proves this but WHY IS IT HAPPENING?

It is clear that in the seas around the UK many types of fish are now much smaller and less numerous than they used to be. Who or what is responsible? There can be no doubt that the results of human activities including climate change, pollution and most obviously overfishing are the major factors. Commercial fishing organisations striving to maximise their catches are keen to avoid being singled out as the villains of the piece; although they are often to blame because they (and their shareholders) understandably crave the best financial returns for their efforts.

High fish prices of course result from popular demand due to eating 'fashions' fostered by TV chefs and foodie magazines. Commercial interests lobby politicians to avoid catch restrictions on valuable species and through the media try to 'rubbish' the irrefutable scientific evidence for decline. Angling magazines, with editors wearing rose coloured contact lenses and trying to make us believe that everything is fine, don't help. From my point of view another tiny problem is the trend of the past few decades to give match results in the form of points based on total lengths of catch. This makes comparisons with catches in past years - which are useful to assess changes in 'angling fish' stocks - impossible. Oh for a return to species, numbers and sizes (individual lengths will do as they can easily be converted to weights).

Inevitably there is a conflict between the ideals of netmen and anglers. Commercial interests try to maximise returns by catching as many 'just marketable size' fish as possible; while anglers prefer populations with a wider range of age and size groups – the urge to catch something bigger and better is a strong one.

Angling is, of course, by far the least damaging method of obtaining fish for food since it can be highly selective. Using rod and line avoids the by-catches of small, immature individuals or unwanted species which are a feature of most commercial methods. Of course anglers are not entirely blameless and there are still lots of stupid rod and line fishers who kill virtually everything that they catch. However, 'catch and release' of even large (valuable) edible fish is common practice here in Dorset. These days this has been made more effective by the increased popularity of lure and fly fishing which often result in mouth hooking and good survival. Similarly, the (slowly) growing trend for bait fishing with circle hooks has made throat and gut hooking less of a problem and live release more effective. If we are seen to be 'doing the right things' it strengthens our case for good management of fisheries in general. However, fish mortality due to angling is a minor aspect of the overfishing problem.

Of course in many parts of the world catches of marine fish are the only way for people to avoid abject poverty or may even be the difference between life and death. So unless the demand for fish is somehow drastically reduced (which isn't going to happen in the foreseeable future) I see no prospect of a return to the thriving fish stocks of years gone by.

THE DECLINE OF THE CARTILAGINOUS SPECIES

Legislation and lobbying, particularly by the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation (SSACN) of the Scottish parliament at Holyrood and later the EU in Brussels, and by the Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society (BASS), have in part helped rescue some of sea angling's all time favourites from the very brink of disaster. BASS, both as an organisation and as a fish species, for reasons outside of the organisations control unfortunately, have not been as successful as they and we all would have liked. SSACN on the other hand, and the fish species they represent, have had and continue to have some pretty amazing success stories.



In all cases this has been with cartilaginous (elasmobranch) species; sharks and rays. I'm not going to go down skate versus ray definition route here. In this context the terms ray covers both groups, which along with the sharks are divorced from the rest of the fish species anglers are interested in by virtue of the fact that they have no skeleton in the conventional definition. What musculature they have is built onto an inner framework of cartilage, with the teeth being hardened by the addition of calcium phosphate. One other point of difference being internal fertilisation and in-

vesting in small numbers of well-developed offspring either born live or deposited in tough protective egg capsules, allowing a far greater survival rate compared to the broadcast shedding of many thousands of externally fertilised eggs. There is though a potential downside in that during periods of over fishing or other population disaster, it can take literally decades to pick up on any early signs of recovery. And only then if there is a sufficiently large enough mature refuge population hidden away somewhere beyond disasters reach.

From the late 1990's through into the early 2000's, sea angling came close to losing some species of shark and ray, the most notable of which being the Monkfish, or to give it its new posh name, the Angel Shark, *Squatina squatina*. Never a common species at the best of times, but one which would regularly pop up in the angling press during my early fishing years. If you systematically read through the entire book here you will notice the Monkfish cropping up fairly regularly in west and south Wales, the central English Channel, and especially around Co. Kerry in the Irish Republic where all of my many encounters were made. And, it has to be said, where it got a pretty raw deal at the hands of anglers who along with commercial fishermen must share responsibility for the fish's current International Union for Conservation of Nature critically endangered status.

Because Monkfish were not as widely sought and caught by anglers as some of the other elasmobranch species, they slipped away under the radar without too much angling generated fuss. Not so the Spurdog *Squalus acanthias* and Common Skate *Raja batis*, which had it not been for hard earned protective legislation engineered by SSACN, linked to the willingness of anglers to perhaps make good the misdeeds of the past through conservation, both species would almost certainly have been lost to those generations coming after mine. In fact, the Common Skate is already lost, though not for reasons of extinction. In name only this time, with the scientific name *Raja batis* now binned and replaced by 2 new names, denoting that what was one originally thought to be the single species known as Common Skate has now become two species (see footnote at the close).

Common Skate (their now defunct twentieth century name) have been the subject of conservation efforts dating back to the 1970's with the far sighted work of people like Dr. Dietrich Burkel, followed later by Bill Little and Davy Holt. Spurdog became a more recent conservation target. This was once the most abundant small shark in European waters. A fish so numerous that I can recall charter fishing days when we would be forced to move literally miles to escape the marauding shoals and stand any chance of catching something else. Abundant and reliable; the answer to a charter skipper's prayer, knowing he would not have to struggle to provide for his clients. The perfect example, or so we thought, of the endless bounty of the sea, and an equally perfect example of just how quickly and spectacularly an abundant species can almost completely collapse over a very short period due to commercial greed with some measure of angling over cropping thrown in for good measure.

Almost to a man, people who came on to sea angling scene from the 1990's through to the first decade of the new century quite literally had never seen let alone caught a Spurdog. They were the fish of photographs only. From the top of Scotland to the English Channel, east and west, the population crash was as complete as it was sudden. Had it not been for a couple of small very localised refuge populations, and perhaps a few stragglers out in deeper water when the cost of commercial diesel out-balanced the fish's market value, then I am certain their demise would have been ruthlessly absolute. We quite literally never saw nor heard even a rumour of a Spurdog catch for many years, and had it not been for the decisive never take no for an answer campaigning by SSACN, it would unfortunately have remained that way.

Having 'discovered' that there were small refuge populations in both Loch Etive and Loch Sunart in the Oban area, SSACN fought to have these declared conservation and nursery areas. To achieve this they were asked to provide irrefutable scientific data to back up their claims in order to get the then Scottish fishery minister onboard, which thankfully they did, the result being a painfully slow limp back out of the abyss to the point where there are catch reports, albeit sparse ones, from all corners of the land once again. Legislation too to prevent it happening again, expanded to include other cartilaginous species such as the Undulate Ray *Raja undulata* and Tope to name but two. Fish which anglers are still free to enjoy, but which must be returned at the point of capture, which in these enlightened times isn't a problem. It is however for the various record fish committees, who while they now don't always require 'a dead body' for identification, still insist that all records must be weighed on firm ground, which legally is quite literally in some cases no longer possible.

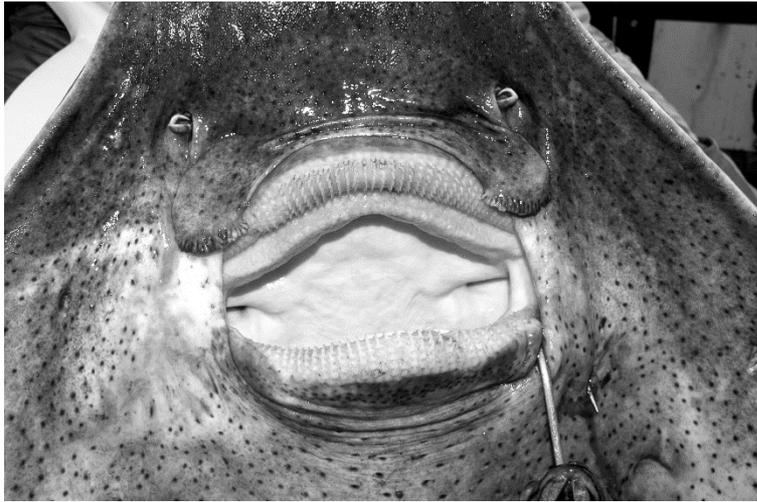
The Thornback Ray was another casualty of commercial excess during the late-1980's through into the new century. Tangle nets and long lines devastated their numbers too. This however is a species that has made quite a spectacular recovery without the help of directly targeted restrictions, assisted instead by restrictions aimed at protecting other vulnerable species. And now they can be caught in greater numbers than for a very long time, though the bigger double figure fish are much more difficult to locate. And the species generally is no longer necessarily always now found in the places where history suggests us we might expect to find them. For some reason, a number of 'hot spots' from the past remain almost devoid of the species. A very good example of this is Aberystwyth. Yet neighbouring venues can be well blessed with the things with even greater numbers than at any time in living memory.

Producing small numbers of well developed offspring is a very good strategy when everything is in balance. But a nightmare when it isn't, skipping whole generations of anglers with their absence. Thankfully, with the right type of help this won't be irretrievable, though the Monkfish situation looks likely to buck that particular trend. Conservation however requires that literally everybody is singing from the same hymn sheet, which in the case of the Common Skate, with the exception of the record fish committees, everyone it seems is happy to do. From a low point of a single refuge population following the angling excesses that had seen off Ullapool, Orkney and Shetland as the premier venues, we now see the species 'overspilling' along the Sound of Jura into Northern Irish waters, even occasionally getting as far south as the Mull of Galloway, fuelled by anglers and commercials returning all specimens in one of the most remarkable fish conservation turn arounds the country has seen.

To illustrate this, a friend of mine Paul Maris made one of the most spectacular skate catches ever recorded. It would probably have been 2008. I'd been up there fishing with him, Dave Hawkeswood and Ian Burrett and was heading back home, when the following day Dave urgently had to return home leaving Paul to fish on his own with Ian then get a lift back with the rest of the 'Essex Boys'. The conditions and the tides were perfect as Ian put the anchor down in over 500 feet of water in the Firth of Lorne. All 3 rods were pressed into service on what would turn out to be not so much a manic session, but a steady relentless period of 4½ back breaking hours in which Paul's rod was arched over constantly as he boated 5 out of the 7 skate which took the baits for a total of 976 pounds, and an average weight of 195.2 pounds apiece.

The breakdown stats come out at 162 pounds, 198 pounds, 199 pounds, 203 pounds, and 214 pounds, all photographed, tagged and released, with weights generated by the weight estimation chart drawn up by Bill Little and Davy Holt. And to top things off, the following day saw Paul boat a new PB of 219 pounds, which when you add in the number of skate he caught over the full 3 days totals 9 fish averaging in excess of 190 pounds apiece. Now if that's not World class skate fishing then I don't know what is, all coming from one initial refuge population teetering on the brink of collapse which anglers fought to save, championed by skipper Ian Burrett and his unpaid conservation obsessed colleagues at the Scottish Sea Anglers Conservation Network.

Sharks are similarly well blessed in having Milford Haven charter skipper Andrew Alsop spear-heading conservation efforts there, helped by the fact that the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers are now accepting national records with estimated weights, providing all the necessary checks and balances are in place. Since the numerical and average size collapse of Blue Sharks along the English Channel coast at ports like Looe and the years of shark angling apathy of the 1990's, the Blue Shark has quietly prospered, leading to times of plenty on all fronts. In addition to this, there are now many more Blue Sharks with 3 figure weights, some well bettering both 200 pounds and the current official British record of 218 pounds; plenty of good sized Porbeagles, plus of course that first Mako Shark since the mid-1970's taken in 2013 out from Milford Haven by Andy Griffith. So the current situation for sharks is looking very good and will hopefully remain that way, with catch and release and estimated weights the way in which angling is going, regardless of any record fish committee rules.



FOOTNOTE: This is regarding the Common Skate speciation changes mentioned earlier. The Common Skate *Raja batis* is no more, which is no bad thing, as it was hardly the most appropriate name for a fish of such localised distribution so in need of legislation to protect it from over-exploitation. A series of changes which began with the fish being taken out of the genus *Raja* and placed into the genus *Dipturus*. It was then discovered that what had been thought of as 1 species with the new scientific name of *Dipturus batis* was in fact 2

very similar but separate species leading to the new name change being binned, and now we have 2 new species - the Flapper Skate *Dipturus intermedia*, and the Blue Skate *Dipturus flossada*, the unfortunate knock on consequence of which being that we've now gone from what was one of the easiest and most straightforward fish naming exercises to one of the hardest, as Flapper Skate and Blue Skate are so much alike, hence the earlier confusion. The big question now is, which one occupies the current record slot still listed as *Raja batis*

THE CHANGING FACE OF SHARK FISHING

A quick résumé of UK shark fishing history indicates boom followed by decline, then for many years virtually nothing at all. For the Blues and Porbeagles, that was without doubt down to population decline, the blame for which is shared across all sectors including angling. Blue Sharks are probably not (or were not) a deliberate target for commercial long lining, though currently they are for finning to satisfy the Asian market. Much of the reduction in both population numbers and average sizes has to be laid at angling's door. Indiscriminate and unnecessary killing by charter boat skippers for display purposes to encourage the next wave of holiday bookings from the 1960's through to the 80's saw Blue Shark statistics nosedive, taking with them any serious angler interest there might have been prior to the decline.

Anglers quite literally turned their backs on the Blue Shark in their droves. Possibly less so in Ireland, but they felt it there too. The charter fishing fleet and its clients had quite literally killed the goose that laid the golden egg. Not only at Looe, but at other ports too which were less reliant on shark fishing, such as Plymouth, Mevagissey and Falmouth, all of which had a knock on negative effect on the chances of catching an elusive Mako Shark. Over a period of maybe 30 years, many thousands of anglers had collectively put in hundreds of thousands of hours drifting along with rubby dubby bags and float fished baits, which between them had accounted for just 67 Mako Sharks. It had been thought that the late David Turner had caught the last Mako of the twentieth century back in 1971. That has recently been revised to read Alice Clemson, with a fish of 130 pounds off Mevagissey in 1976.

While all of this was going on, as discussed in Chapter 9, Porbeagle Sharks were discovered close in along the north Cornish Coast, which was another nail in Blue Shark fishing's coffin. Suddenly people wanted to catch bigger fish closer to base, and who could blame them. And as if we never learn, again the fish were killed, only this time they had commercial value, evidenced by freezer trucks turning up at Padstow supplying markets across mainland European with shark steaks. Understandably, commercial long liners too quickly got in on the act, particularly around Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel.

This not only affected North Cornwall, but Cardigan Bay too. Then they were discovered around Shetland and later in the Pentland Firth, the latter producing the current World all tackle record, where again they were killed and in some cases marketed for profit.



During the 1970's on into the 1980's there was also a lot of interest in catching Porbeagles to the east of the Isle of Wight. Again, anglers would regularly land their fish. So too would French long liners using angling news stories as their targeting triggers, which allegedly, according to which source you use, saw that population off too. But it wasn't only Porbeagles. As with those accidental Mako catches along Cornwall's south coast made by anglers' fishing for Blues Sharks, Porbeagle anglers to the east of the Isle of Wight would also occasionally pick up bonus fish in the form of Thresher Sharks. In fact, most of the Thresher Sharks recorded in British waters have come from this area. So when the Porbeagles went, so too did the chance of an occasional accidental Thresher, which may or may not still have been around when the angler interest generally waned.

By the end of the 1990's, shark fishing was in a pretty bad place, and while anglers were not entirely responsible, either directly in the case of the Blues and Porbeagles, or indirectly as with the Threshers and the Mako, some of the responsibility for the mess was unquestionably down to us. Thankfully, with the new century came new hope from a quartet of sources, each of which had quietly been going about their business of looking for and finding sharks. Only this time around things were going to be different. With possibly just the odd individual exception, it was all going to be catch and release, which history has clearly shown is the best way forward on all fronts, on top of which, for the Porbeagle Shark at least, there were legal protection issues to consider too.

The first of the 4 strands I'd like to deal with is the monster Porbeagle potential along the north Cornish coast. The same area the Padstow boats were taking all their big fish from back in the 1970's before it went to the wall. Fish, thankfully, are creatures of habit driven on by instinctive urges, on top of which,

however efficient anglers or commercial fishermen are, they arguably never get every last one. Invariably (hopefully) there will be a small residual population at least. Not enough to attract any further pressure, but a reservoir population from which, given the appropriate amount of time and left to their own devices, they might one day start to recover. And so it was along the north coast of Cornwall. Some Porbeagle Sharks did make it through; some measure of success was achieved in starting to restore the balance, and some people (two in particular) felt the time was right to take another look and see how things were coming along.



By now the twentieth century had given way to the twenty first, and a most unlikely shark fishing operation was quietly getting underway. Pete Scott had bought himself a trailed 15 foot dinghy with a cuddy. As a dinghy angler myself, and wanting to be polite here, let's just say that the outfit was less than impressive. But it was a platform, and one which he was joined aboard by legendary UK shark angler Graeme Pullen who had fished the area from the Padstow boats first time around. Two anglers brimming with enthusiasm, but not perhaps the most proficient when it comes to

small boat work judging from some of the tales relayed to me by Graeme. Stories of horrendous life threatening swamping's negotiating the surf beach at Bude. Out in weather they shouldn't have been out in along a very unforgiving stretch of rocky coastline, and encounters with sharks out of all proportion to the boat they were fishing from.

The law by this stage was on the side of the sharks, which even if Pete and Graeme had wanted to bring one in, which they didn't, things could have gotten 'interesting' for them. We're talking here of some fish upwards of 400 pounds. So why bother fishing for them? The simple answer was because they were there, and the thrill of having them to the boat on the leader, popping in a tag if and when they could, then cutting them free. A sequence of events that Graeme was beginning to realise was getting dodgy. So he bought himself a brand new 17 foot Wilson Flier and moved the operation to Boscastle with its 'concealed' harbour entrance and a mere 40 minute window of opportunity to get on or off the trailer at high water followed by a complete harbour dry out between tides, and nowhere to run for safety should the weather take a turn for worse along what it an open Atlantic piece of coastline. But it was better than Bude, and it was closer to the March and April big fish marks tight in to certain headlands just to the north of Boscastle.

I met up with Graeme down there for a weekend in the summer of 2009. By that stage the big mature female fishing moving in to pup were seasonally no longer on the cards. Summer time means drifting in around 80 feet of water in front of the Bude radar dishes for smaller Porbeagles in the 60 to 80 pound bracket, though I did manage one of around 170 pounds which was a nice bonus. Lots of Tope too, both on the bottom as well as to the suspended baits. Graeme's rubby dubby made up from pulped pellet fed Rainbow Trout frames left over in the gutting room of Avington trout fishery was switching everything on. But to have a crack at one of the biggies, it would have to be fingers crossed for settled weather on a set of big tides the following spring. Something which rarely drops absolutely right on such an exposed piece of coastline, but which did the following year at short notice, which meant I couldn't make it.

Keen to grab the opportunity, Graeme teamed up with Wayne Comben for what turned out to be a cold grey settled weekend with virtually nothing to show for all their efforts. Until the last hour or so that is,



Porbeagle Shark

Lamna nasus



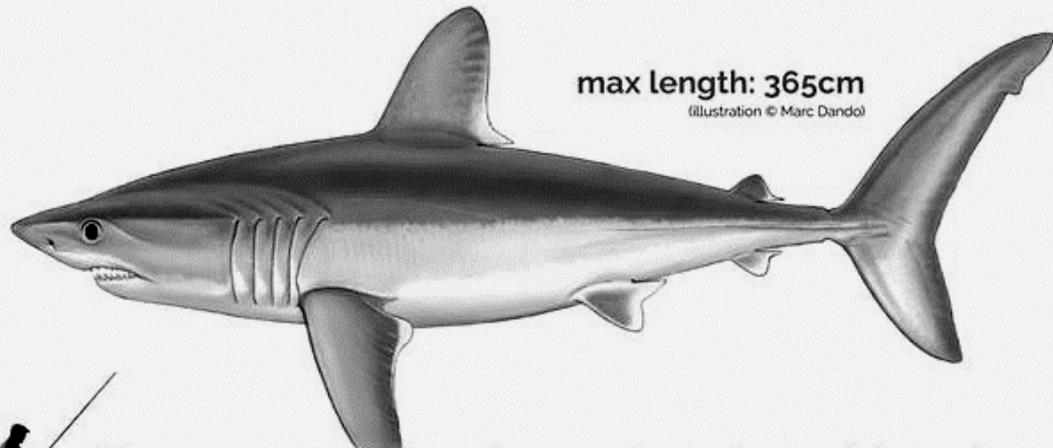


Critically Endangered in the Northeast Atlantic¹

- Avoid targeting Porbeagle Sharks between April-August, as pregnant females are moving through British waters.
- If hooked, seek to release the shark as early as possible.
- Avoid in-boarding the shark unless absolutely necessary.



It is prohibited to land Porbeagle Sharks when caught by rod and line, or handline, from a boat in Scottish waters²



max length: 365cm
(illustration © Marc Dando)



Please ensure Porbeagle are released as safely and rapidly as possible, minimising impact on the shark.

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www.sharktrust.org/anglers
✉ enquiries@sharktrust.org
☎ 01752 672020

supported by:



¹ IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
² Sharks, Skates and Rays (Prohibition of Fishing, Transhipment and Landing) (Scotland) Order 2012.

when a large Porbeagle was spotted charging around in the rubby dubby slick, which shortly afterwards picked up one of the baits and was off. Wanting to film the episode for his 'Totally Awesome Video

Channel', Graeme passed the rod to Wayne, who eventually, after much hard work, had a Porbeagle of between 450 and 550 pounds to the boat. The exact weight will never be known, but the video evidence supports it as being huge. So big in fact that all the national papers and Channel 5 TV news picked up the story. It was very big news at the time, much to the annoyance of the detractors and trolls who never want anybody to do well, but who rarely if ever get out there and try themselves. A fabulous fish, which under different circumstances, perhaps could have been mine, though with their current status maybe they are best now left alone.

Around the same time as Graeme and Pete Scott were risking their all fishing out from Bude, South Wales shark angler and soon to be top shark skipper Andrew Alsop had a 'historically interesting' chance encounter with Dave Lewis that would change not only his life, but the whole future of shark fishing in the UK. The full story is covered towards the end of Chapter 11. In a nutshell, Dave was doing a boat test, spotted Andrew and his dad who chatted to him about the sharks out from Milford Haven, then 'invited' himself along for a Sea Angler Magazine feature. That's how Andrew Alsop got started and how one of the greatest episodes in British and Welsh shark fishing began aboard a series of boats named 'White Water', culminating in a fast outboard driven version capable of hitting the grounds out in the Celtic Sea much more rapidly, with the knock on effect of increased fishing time.

Like many anglers of a certain age, Andrew had enjoyed his first shark fishing experience at Looe, but had learned from the many mistakes made there with regard to conservation. No fish killing aboard 'White Water'. Not even when British record Blue Sharks started coming in through the stern door. All his fish were destined for accurate measurement and weight estimation before being tagged and released. Of course, the British Record Fish Committee (BRFC) weren't having any of it, despite the fact that anglers were equally adamant about not having anything to do with them as a result, making record keeping something of a farce. British record keeping that is. The Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers quickly moved with the times, awarding Andrew's clients Welsh records for the Mako Shark at 194¼ pounds in 2013, and the Blue Shark at 242½ pounds (the British record still 218 pounds). NOTE: That Mako taken aboard 'White Water' by Andy Griffith was the first of its kind since 1976.

Andrew tells me that around 90% of all the Blue Sharks he sees are female fish, which are thought to max out at between 250 and 300 pounds. So there's still a bit of scope for improvement there. The biggest fish are undoubtedly the males which don't follow the same migration patterns as the females, preferring to stay over on the American side of the Atlantic, which means that the British Isles probably won't ever be a World beater like it is on the Porbeagle Shark scene. Speaking of which, Porbeagles have also developed into something of an Alsop speciality too. Unlike the north Cornish fish which include very big females' early season, the Celtic Sea Porbeagles are deep open water fish, mainly of mid range weight, some of which are now taken using perfected trolling techniques. The baits have also brought in Blue Fin Tuna, which ironically Andrew and his clients are keen to avoid due to the low IGFA rating of the tackle used for the sharks, as one BFT can take up much of the day with the rod being passed from person to person looking to clear the hook and get back to the core business of the sharks.

Andy Griffith, Graeme Pullen, and Wayne Comben, are names which crop up time and again when it comes to pioneering shark fishing enthusiasm. After that big Porbeagle at Boscastle, Graeme and Wayne were at it again in the Wilson Flier out from Falmouth, where Mako legend Frank Vinnicombe directed them to some very productive Blue Shark fishing, including taking at least one on a reservoir fly fishing outfit after chumming it in close enough to the boat. That day they also had a Barracuda jump clear of the water in hot pursuit of some Mackerel. Meanwhile, back in Hampshire, Wayne decided he would re-tread the paths of old that had led to so many Thresher Sharks to the east of the Isle of Wight 30 years and more before, this time fishing from his own 17 foot Wilson Flier out on his home patch to the east of the Solent.

Appreciating that his chances of a Thresher encounter at best were very low, yet willing to put in whatever time was necessary to satisfy his curiosity, Wayne strung together 6 consecutive blanks without so much as seeing a hint of a fish. Chatting with Graeme Pullen about the situation, Graeme decided that on the next attempt he would tag along to film the proceedings and talk on camera about the historical side of Thresher Shark fishing for his 'Totally Awesome Fishing Show'. What an inspired decision that turned out to be. A day that would finally see line disappearing from the reel spool with Wayne again on the rod and Graeme on the camera. History repeating itself would be too much to ask for. But sometimes even the wildest of dreams can come true, and this was to be on another one of them, with Wayne finally getting the better of a fish estimated to be in the 500 pound bracket, and again, to the annoyance of the detractors and trolls, all on film, both at the boat and under the water on the GoPro camera.

Thresher Sharks, almost as much as Mako Sharks, are bonus fish with which you can only marginally improve your chances of an encounter. Or so the theory goes. From the late-1970's through to present, Bembridge angler Danny Vokins has made it his life long quest to fish for sharks, and Thresher Sharks in particular, for which he has a set of statistics nobody else can even come close to. From a running total of almost 500 sharks, Danny and those who fish with him have tagged and released 48 Threshers (full story Chapter 9), having witnessed a sudden increase in catches, encounters and sightings in particular over the last few seasons, indicating that for this species at least, the future is looking optimistic, providing people respect the fish in every way possible, including leaving Steve Mills 323 pound British



record intact, resisting any temptation to topple it under the current rules which would involve bringing one ashore. And as it to emphasise all this, late one evening in July 2018 just as I was about to shut the computer down for the night, I received the following email from Andy Griffith.....

“Just wanted you to know that I successfully caught & released THREE Threshers today, yes THREE !!. Back out tomorrow & Sunday so who knows what might happen!! I know you wished me well on this so I'm so pleased to report this amazing news to you”. And to top things off, two

more did come along, one on each of the following days. Three decent specimens estimated at just either side of 200 pounds by Stuart Newell whose boat they were fishing from, plus a couple of small fish, one of which was lifted into the boat due to it being tangled up in the trace, allowing them to grab a couple of quick photographs one of which is included here.

Completing the 4 part inclusion here is the Six Gilled Shark *Hexanchus griseus*, put onto the British record fish list by F. E. Beeton with a 9½ pound specimen taken off Penlee Point near Plymouth in 1976. Obviously, a pup, not long since 'dropped' by the sound of things, as Six Gilled Sharks are amongst the largest growing fish on the planet, regularly exceeding the magical 1,000 pound barrier out in deep water where in all but a few special situations, typically lie beyond regular angling reach. My own first encounter was off El Hierro in the Canary Islands bottom fishing in 1,760 feet of water during the daytime for a fish which prefers a life spent in perpetual darkness, though they will move up to feed, both in water depth and within the water column after dark, occasionally even into water where light can penetrate, as has been the experience of Irish charter boat skipper Luke Aston at Carrigaholt on the Shannon Estuary.

For a long time now I have been predicting the catching of a more representative Six Gilled Shark record from around the British Isles. But it was only ever going to come through deliberate targeting, either in or very close to exceptionally deep water. With that in mind, Luke Aston who has developed something of a deserved reputation with the species, was specifically chartered by Andy Griffith for a deliberate attempt in 2017. A trip that produced 3 specimens ranging between 600 and 1,400 pounds, all of which were measured and released, helping further enhance Luke Astons credentials as the man to fish with if you want a home grown ‘grander’. But last minute ‘news flash’, as I’m putting the finishing touches to things here, I learn that he is not the only man on the case.



Plymouth and Liverpool charter skipper Kevin McKie who had his first Six Gill encounter with an 800 pounder on a trip I organised to Ascension Island in 2015, took his boat ‘Size Matters’ way out past the Scilly Isles into the Western Approaches for a deliberate attempt in the summer of 2018. A trip which would produce several specimens, the best of which was carefully measured and estimated to be 512 pounds, plus others in excess of 200 pounds including the specimen pictured here caught by Dave Lewis, all of which were released. Also brought aboard was the first officially identified Blue Skate

Dipturus flossada taken on rod and line at 35 pounds which had a CEFAS tag in it to authenticate the identification.

BLUE FIN TUNA

Sticking with the Atlantic Coast big fish theme, now might be a good time to look at what has happened, and may in the future happen to the latest appearance of Blue Fin Tuna *Thunnus thynnus* around the British Isles. Britain has a long and well documented historical association with what was in the first half of the twentieth century called the Tunny (same scientific name), detailed inclusions about which are in Chapters 5, 6 and 7), all of which took place in the North Sea, primarily along the Yorkshire Coast.

The first one landed on rod and line was caught by Lorenzo Mitchell-Hedges in 1930, and the last one by Harry Weatherly in the mid-1950's. That was the point at which UK rod and line fishing for BFT/Tunny ground to a halt. Not because of any documented shortage of fish to target, but rather, due to a moratorium on herring netting which is what 'chummed' them up to the surface for the hook baits to be fed to them.

The first ‘new wave’ of Irish Blue Fin Tuna came and went over a handful of years spanning the millennium. No sooner had people like Michael McVeigh and Adrian Molloy got things sorted in terms of how, where and when, than numbers dropped away dramatically to the point that boats dedicated to pursuing large Tuna had once again to turn their attentions to other things (full account in Chapter 11). Then around 2012, rumours and some early positive results tentatively suggested a potential return, this



time as it would transpire in larger numbers than previously, but initially of much smaller size. I remember recording an interview with Alastair Wilson in 2016 who had just successfully been out chasing them in his Warrior 165 close in off Donegal, resulting in sightings, takes, lost fish, and eventually a BFT of around the 300 pound mark to the boat, and he wasn't the only one.

Momentum continued to build during the years that immediately followed. The fish progressively got bigger, with the sightings and encounters increasingly more widespread. In addition to the usual west coast of Ireland run, reported sightings also came in from along Chesil Beach, the south Cornish Coast, Cornwall's north coast, south east Ireland, and most interestingly of all, south west Wales, where not only were they being sighted, they were also being hooked up, and in some cases, boated then released.

At Milford Haven in particular, 'White Water' shark fishing skipper Andrew Alsop was seeing a different side to their feeding strategy, in some ways reminiscent of 70 years earlier along the Yorkshire Coast where chumming and static baits were the favoured approach. Herrings falling from drift nets as they were hauled would bring huge Tunny to the surface where sight casting with live or dead baits was the killing technique.

Andrew and his clients were 'enjoying' unintended, and for the most part unwanted encounters while shark fishing with dead baits drifting under a float in a rubby dubby slick. Sounds exciting until you consider the IGFA rating of the tackle being used for the sharks, which with a catch ratio of 70/30 Blues over Porbeagles, is usually 30 and 50 pound class outfits, offering insufficient drag capability to successfully stop and beat a huge tuna.

In 2017 they hooked up 10 tuna on the shark gear of which 8 were fought to the side of the boat, the best of which was estimated at 650 to 700 pounds. They also had one fish in on the deck estimated at around 500 pounds, hooked up on a full shark trace which they needed to free to release the fish. That fish came in relatively quickly at 2 hours and 15 minutes. Normally it would take a whole lot longer, with the fight being shared across the party on board to clear the hook, otherwise it's a whole shark fishing day lost.

Anglers and fishery scientists are still trying to understand exactly what it is that is happening here, and work out the precise story behind the big come back, prompting talk of two different populations, and potentially different strategies required to manage each properly, with anglers playing a full and active part in gathering in the research data. Catch and release with tagging wherever practicable is now very much the order of the day. What may or may not happen in commercial circles is another matter, with necessary long term strategies still being hotly debated and contested.

Whatever the outcome, hopefully it will be done with sustainability and conservation at the forefront of the thinking, prompting a conference to be held at Falmouth in 2018 attended by Irish BFT enthusiast Michael McVeigh, who provided me with the following report.....

"There were 2 main problems affecting the decline: -

1. Quota stood at 28k tons in the Eastern Atlantic
2. Ranching, also called fish fattening farms, was being carried out by wealthy "fishermen" in the Mediterranean. Purse Seiners would catch the fish and transfer them to cages towed by tugs at sea. The fish were towed to a sealed off bay and fattened for market. This method was wide open to abuse/black fish.

ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) did 2 things to solve the problem - drastically reduce quotas to 12k tons, and place observers on the Purse Seiners. Thence stocks dramatically improved, and when the young fish in the Mediterranean had grown big enough to make the journey to NW Ireland (around 250 pounds minimum) - they came. That happened in 2012 and they have been here ever since.

In response to the growth in stocks, ICCAT increased the quota for Eastern Atlantic BFT - 2018 it is 22k Tons - and they have set a 20% increase in the quota, year on year, over the next 4 years - from memory it will be something like 33k tons in 2022”.

There are some who say that the quota is unsustainable. We'll see.

Electronic Tagging off Donegal started in 2003? at first by Barbara Block from the University of Stanford, California, later being carried out by the Irish Marine Institute. There were also a few tags by skipper Angus Campbell off Lewis.

The tags were originally set for 9 months release, later set to 12 months release. The Irish Marine Institute also carried out in 2017 some "metric"? tags which only recorded for 12 hours and they hoped to show how BFT reacted to being boated, tagged & released.

There is currently underway a 2 year tagging programme in English waters supervised by Exeter University - driven by Tom Horton and will be composed of 15 tags 2018 & 25 tags 2019 off Falmouth. ThunnusUK is, I believe, the name of the programme and is the first electronic tagging programme in English waters of BFT.

The Electronic, Satellite Tags off Donegal & Scotland have shown that the fish feed around the area and then move to various areas including mid Atlantic, Eastern USA, Bay of Biscay and Mediterranean.

Sizes of BFT off Ireland - in 2000 - 2005 period there were some big fish of up to 1000 pounds - Adrian Molloy caught a BFT that size – officially recognised as 968 pounds, but the fish was weighed on a vehicle weigh bridge in kg at 440 kg - 968 pounds. The scales settled at 440 after touching 450kg, but the next increment was 450kg, which would have made the fish 990 pounds - surely well over 1000 pounds when caught much earlier.

I digress - there were numbers of BFT in the 250 to 900 pound range - mostly around 350 - 500 pounds. Since they have returned, there are not so many large fish - in fact in 2014, most of the fish caught were under 300 pounds. By 2017 there are some fish around 500 pounds, but I have not heard of any of a bigger size than that.

Distribution - 2017 and there are now BFT showing almost everywhere on the south, south west & western coasts of the British Isles. Quite a number of fish have shown up and were caught off Wales, southern Ireland, southern England, western Ireland, and north western Ireland. It is probably just a matter of time before they are back in the North Sea off Scarborough and Whitby as in the Thirties.

The following statistics were taken by word of mouth from Irish Charter Skippers who over the period had Angling Clients targeting Bluefin Tuna.

The first BFT taken by rod & line in Irish waters were caught in 2000 – 3 fish in that year.

These statistics, although NOT scientific, do prove anecdotally that the stocks of BFT visiting Irish waters have almost completely collapsed.

Below is the summary table taken from each year's statistics which are in separate files.

When considering the number of days were BFT were sighted the following points should be noted: -

The season is mid-August to mid-November – total of 90 days approx.

Using 35 – 43 foot boats, there will always be a fair proportion of days in the season when north Atlantic weather prevents days at sea.

YEAR	Number hook-ups or strikes	No. BFT Landed or tagged & released	No. days in year of sightings
2001	27	12	30
2002	3	9	39
2003	8	13	31
2004	29	18	29
2005	7	0	24
2006	0	1	17
2007	0	0	4
2008	0	0	5

Following on from the above I spoke further with Milford Haven skipper Andrew Alsop who also attended the Falmouth conference and comments on this to Michael McVeigh who wrote back adding.....

“I was also talking to Andrew at the ThunnusUK conference in Falmouth (Exeter University) a couple weeks ago. It is very interesting about the Falmouth Bay BFT - they are a smaller size than the Irish/West Scotland fish. I believe that the simple answer is that BFT travel according to 2 reasons.

1. Their length, which means that the longer fish have a higher "cruising speed", allowing them to travel further.



2. Bigger fish can retain their high body temperature in lower water temperatures (BFT body temperature is typically 10 - 15 centigrade higher than the water). If my theory is correct, then the Falmouth fish will travel to Ireland etc the following year. We should know this in a couple of years if the 15 satellite tags this season off Falmouth are successful. Adrian Molloy thinks that the Falmouth fish MAY indeed be a separate population - or at least have lost their biological genetic memory.

There is probably no way of knowing until those tagging returns are in. Irish/Scottish tagging returns have shown those BFT travelling across the Atlantic, in mid Atlantic - Bay of Biscay - Celtic Sea - Mediterranean.

I would also posit that the spread of BFT which has already been happening this past several years since quotas were reduced, will continue and we will see BFT returning to the North Sea and further - this may already have happened, it's just that angling boats on the periphery of known areas are not yet up to speed in recognising BFT. The counter to this is that ICCAT have now increased quotas almost to the levels of 2000 & will rise above 2000 level by 2022 & it may happen that a reduced stock will mean a reduced area of travel for BFT.

Underpinning all this is, of course, the fact that the main thrust of their migration patterns is entirely dependent on bait fish - they are with us to eat and for no other reason. BFT in big numbers in any area will consume vast quantities of bait fish and they will be forced to move if there isn't the food to satisfy them. Short answer - we don't know yet."

FOOTNOTE: Literally, as I was doing my last few manuscript checks in readiness for taking it to the printers, I came across this Blue Fin Tuna news story reported by the BBC. In Japan it has become



something of an annual tradition for BFT prices to be over-hiked in the clamour to get fresh sushi on the first market day of the new year, and in that regard, sushi empire owner Kiyoshi Kimura appears to have had the deepest pockets, paying a staggering 333.6 million Yen (\$3.1 million) for a fish of 278 Kg in January 2019.

The fish was a 'locally caught' Pacific BFT, which on a different day should have been more realistically priced at around \$60,000, though prices were very much on the up throughout 2018 reflecting fish scarcity, increasing by over 40% in the latter half of the year alone. A 'vulnerable' species not quite as scarce as its (our) Atlantic counter-

part which is IUCN Red Listed as 'endangered'. Is it any wonder then that commercial fishermen are willing to go to the lengths they do, and in some cases run the risks some undoubtedly take, with potential pay-days of that magnitude. Something which must not be allowed to happen here on the European scene.

BASS FISHING

Without doubt, the most glaring example of greed based fishery mismanagement so far as sea angling is concerned is the European Bass *Dicentrarchus labrax*. At the time of writing (2018) anglers are not allowed to even think of fishing for them. If one is caught by accident, which when you think about how difficult it is to catch one deliberately due to their current scarcity is probably unlikely, it must immediately be returned to the water, something a lot of anglers would do anyway without having to be told. A situation brought about because sea anglers, according to European Fisheries ministers, are almost entirely responsible for the current Bass population slump.

It's true that rod and line fishing is responsible for a large proportion of Bass killed, but not in the hands of recreational anglers. It seems that if you buy a commercial fishing license to market Bass for consumption having caught them using lures and live baits, then magically the damage is somehow suddenly minimised, as commercial rod and line fishermen are not affected by the catch restrictions faced by recreational anglers.

Commercial fishermen will do all within their powers to resist sensible, scientifically demonstrable required minimum size restrictions designed to allow all Bass to spawn at least once before coming to rest on a dinner plate. Yet anglers aren't even allowed the time to take a photograph. Returning Bass immediately means exactly that. Get them back in the water ASAP to ensure their wellbeing at least long enough to give the commercials more of an opportunity to get them onto the fish market.

The Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society (BASS), amongst others, have campaigned long and hard against any and all of the injustices regarding angling and Bass. For me, the main problem is that sea anglers generally don't like to be organised. Perhaps it's the freedom thing of doing whatever they want when they want (most of the time anyway) that deters the vast majority from joining organisations, even when these have anglers' best interests at heart.

As such, we are unlikely ever to get our side of the argument across. Commercial fishermen on the other hand, despite being fewer in number and with a demonstrably smaller financial input to the country's economy than angling, are very well organised indeed; expert at lobbying, and are therefore always more likely to win any dispute at government level in which anglers are also involved.

A lot of anglers have strong opinions on the current plight of the Bass. One of the most vocal has long been Malcolm Gilbert, former MD of Ammo Baits, and a leading campaigner for the Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society (BASS). When asked for a few words to sum up the current worrying yet farcical situation, Malcolm had this to say.....

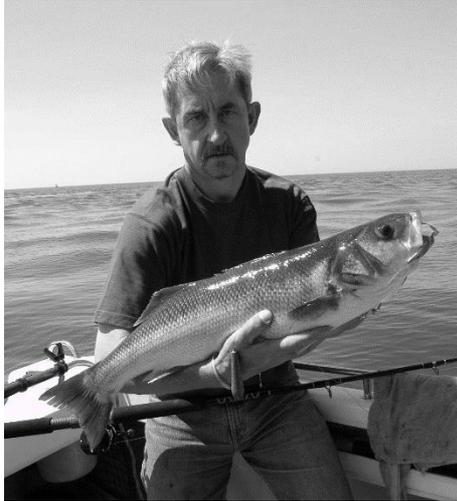
“A skeletal analysis of the Bass fishery as I witnessed it in the early 1970's to where we are now makes depressing reading. When I was a teenager in the 1960's living in Cornwall, I used to read in sea angling magazines and the Angling Times numerous reports of spectacular Cod catches from the east coast and south east. Whilst stocks deteriorated a little through the 1970's Cod could still be predictably targeted at hot spots. It is now but a shadow of what it once was. A superb recreational fishery has been lost with massive negative economic impacts upon tackle shops, bait suppliers, and charter boat operators”. Did the recreational sea angling community learn from this? Apparently not.

Prior to the 1970's and early 1980's Bass was of negligible commercial interest. It was widely regarded as a recreational species. This does not mean that no Bass had ever been sold commercially, but commercial exploitation was localised, minimal, and irregular. Official landings in 1973 for UK were 23 tonnes. In published Government statistics of UK fish landings, Bass was one of many less popular species all lumped together under 'others' until the mid-1990s when its commercial significance resulted in it being listed alongside other main stream species such as Plaice, Cod, Sole and others.

As commercial effort on Bass escalated and commercial landings headed towards an annual figure of 1000 tonnes, great changes amongst recreational Bass anglers were taking place. Long term Bass anglers were witnessing a deterioration in the quality of Bass angling. Fish were becoming less abundant and consisted of younger/smaller individuals.

A tiny minority of Bass anglers supported efforts to lobby the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) which later became the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for a more conservation orientated approach to managing Bass, with an increase in the minimum landing size being one issue. However, no angling organisation ever had sufficient resources to represent recreational sea anglers in a thoroughly effective way because so few sea anglers have ever seen the need to join and support such organisations.

The National Anglers Council (NAC), the Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society (BASS), the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) and more recently the Anglers Trust (AT) need far more resources to effectively deal with all the issues confronting sea anglers than is provided by the relatively small level of support they have had. To just deal with the complex issue of Bass management locally, Nationally and at EU level requires a specialist team with scientific and legislative knowledge, and above all, advocacy skills, plus the financial resources for extensive and expensive travel.



To be fair, angler representation did result in minor incremental successes that saw the minimum landing size (mls) that was a mind numbingly ridiculous 26 cm (less than 250 g or 8 ounces) in the early 1970's increased to an only slightly less ridiculous mls of 32 cm (350g or 12.5 ounces) in the early 1980's. In 1990 it was further increased to 36cm (510g or 11b-2oz) where it remained until scientists warned that stocks were in danger in 2012, when it went up to 42cm (750g or 11b- 11oz).

This process took more than forty years, and the 42cm mls is now proudly justified by Defra as "giving female Bass the chance to spawn" which is precisely what anglers had advocated during all that period! It should never have taken the Government department that has responsibility (or should have!) for looking after public fishery resources that long to do the right

thing.

As commercial effort on Bass increased so of course did landings. And as commercial landings increased and stocks deteriorated, a growing awareness of the need to conserve Bass amongst recreational anglers resulted in the culture of catch and release fishing taking hold. Remember, at one time before commercial interest in Bass took off, most of the fishing mortality on Bass derived from recreational sea angling, but as commercial interest and catches escalated, more and more anglers were returning some or all of their Bass.

The most recent scientific advice suggests that recreational sea angling is now responsible for around 25% of all fishing mortality. This must, by definition, mean that commercial fishing that was originally responsible for negligible levels of fishing mortality of Bass has now reached 75%. But the scientific community avoids stating that commercial landings have now reached 75%. Scientists and other commentators feel much more comfortable pointing out that recreational are responsible for 25%, which is actually a massive reduction from the original position.

In this way, RSA is portrayed as the 'bad' boy and it is now RSA that has been excluded from taking ANY bass for personal consumption, whilst the sector that has entered the Bass fishery more recently and is now responsible for 75% of fishing mortality, are portrayed as the victims and are able to still catch and land Bass!

As controversial as it will undoubtedly be, in my opinion, recreational anglers are now reaping their reward for failing to support and resource effective representation of their corner. And joining an organisation isn't enough. Anglers have to engage with issues affecting angling and individually make representation to politicians and all decision makers. Failure to do so will inevitably result in more unfair decisions.

Responsibility for the Bass situation is not wholly down to anglers. Anglers fish for pleasure, relaxation and a meal of the freshest seafood possible, whereas all the suppliers of the goods and services purchased by anglers do what they do for their livelihoods. And yet, despite the indisputable fact that 'fish' have to be the single most crucially important ingredient for a healthy recreational sea angling sector, the 'trade' has resolutely chosen to remain unengaged with fisheries management policies. Thousands

of individuals and businesses whose prosperity and economic security are directly linked to fish have remained disconnected from the processes by which those fish are managed, or in the case of UK/EU management, mismanaged.

This is bizarre in the extreme. What other sector doesn't invest in its future? Can you imagine suppliers of golfing equipment and golf pros remaining silent and out of sight if 10% of golf courses were ploughed up annually. It is all the more inexplicable because across the Atlantic, the tackle and recreational boating industries have invested in high quality representation and contributed to the required conservation of species upon which their trade is dependent. And it has paid enormous dividends!

I briefly mentioned the value of angling to the UK economy earlier. A number of different parties including SSACN have demonstrated the huge difference in value to the national economy sea angling makes by comparison to the commercial sector. Angling contributes to the incomes of many people at a local level. Commercial fishermen on the other hand with their lesser value to the economy, often don't even have the decency even to land their catch at the location they took it from, doubly depriving local economies by catching fish that would pull in the anglers, then not providing alternative employment to local people at the fish quay by landing their catch elsewhere.

HALIBUT FISHING

Anglers see Halibut as being members of that small elite group to be found swimming in British and Irish waters which they like to class as big game species. A big Halibut is a worthy adversary, and a fish reckoned by none other than Les Moncrieff who was a mountain of a man to be physically unmanageable once they get to around 250 pounds in weight. That subsequently has proved not to be the case as demonstrated by visitors to Norwegian waters. None the less, it is a useful reminder of the fighting prowess of a species that gave up quite a number of three figure specimens from Scottish waters during the 1970's (see Chapter 9) and from Irish waters 50 and more years earlier.

It's been quite a number of years now since serious Halibut hunters regularly made their way northwards to fish the Pentland Firth and the two island groups of Orkney and Shetland beyond. The Halibut fishing just sort of slipped off the radar, with little if any real fuss. Whether that was due to declining interest or lack of fish is difficult to say. Probably the latter triggering the former, because if they were still a real prospect, then be in no doubt that enthusiasts would still be going out looking for them. Either way, very little other than the odd chance encounter has been heard of since via the pages of the angling press, suggesting large Scottish Halibut to be another sporting species that has unfortunately been lost to angling.

For reasons which will become apparent shortly, switching topic briefly for a moment, towards the tail end of the Scottish Halibut era, Whitby was fast becoming the place to fish if you were interested in trying for big Cod and plenty of them. A no fuss, no finesse venue, where physical hard graft was regularly rewarded by jigging strings of muppets weighted by heavy chrome pirk over an assortment of inshore and offshore wrecks. Then, as with the Scottish Halibut fishing, it was gone.

The Whitby Cod phenomenon is explored in detail midway through Chapter 9. My reason for mentioning it here is to focus in on the ports post boom years decline and subsequent rebirth, which during its 'difficult period', saw its die hard regulars and their charter boat skippers experimenting with all manner of approaches looking to get a good result, which included substituting shads for the pirks and fishing them sink and draw at or close to the bottom, which when the Cod finally did eventually start to come return in numbers, delivered the angling rebirth Whitby and its neighbouring ports had been praying for.



What the shad fishing also did was expose another hitherto untapped potential of that area of the North Sea. Previously, the Whitby regulars had been going about their business of targeting and catching Cod and Ling for the most part oblivious to some of the other species sharing the same ground, which when the odd one was caught, was seen as little more than an accidental welcome bonus. Porbeagle Sharks are one species that have been successfully fished for on rod and line over the past few seasons. Obviously, they'd been known about for years as occasional fish robbers over the wrecks. Now they were being sought out as potential targets.

Nobody is under any illusion as to how far there is still to go on that particular score. It's still early days with much more to be learned, particularly in terms of either locating or concentrating them if it is to seriously catch on. But they are there. And so too are Halibut, which while they are small by comparison to those caught previously in northern Scottish waters, are none the less being caught more regularly than many people realise, hinting at another potential for future generations to explore further as part of the 'unfinished business legacy' my generation has left behind.

I first became aware of mid North Sea Halibut aboard the commercial fly-shooter 'Adaptable' working out from Hartlepool during the early-1980's. Nothing I saw that day would have topped 20 pounds. It was the fact that we had maybe half a dozen of them within easy striking range of the shore that grabbed my attention, something the skipper told me was quite a common occurrence at certain times of the year.

Fast forward 30 plus years to 2014 and I'm out fishing for Cod from Whitby aboard 'Sea Otter 2' skippered by Paul Kilpatrick producing a feature for Sea Angler Magazine, flicking through a few potential extra support pictures on Paul's mobile phone, when Barry Kemper posing a 53 pound Halibut taken on a shad just a few weeks earlier suddenly popped up on the screen.

Obviously it stood out as something out of the ordinary, though mainly on account of its size, and the fact that Barry had fortuitously had the clutch on his reel set right before the surprise big flattie took a fancy to his shad. What often happens is that Halibut come along when people are understandably not expecting them and are therefore not prepared for the fierce hit and run take. By the time they have the drag set right, the fish has either pulled the hook or smashed them up. But thankfully, not on every occasion.

Most seasons see a sprinkling of Halibut between 10 and 20 pounds on the deck, with other Whitby boats and other ports even in the vicinity reporting similar rates of success. So if they can be taken that regularly accidentally, the question then has to be asked, how many more and to what size might anglers be able to achieve if they were to target them deliberately. A question I put to Paul Kilpatrick on the day, his recommendation being to fish a shad between April and June before there is an abundance of natural prey such as Herrings about going into direct competition with the lures.

THE SEA ANGLING 2012 SURVEY

It's one thing making sweeping statements about the economic value of sea angling to the national economy compared to that which commercial fishing brings in. Quite another matter backing it up with

hard facts, which in the final analysis, is the only argument governments will listen to, except unfortunately, or so it would seem, when it's delivered via the pages of a survey known as Sea Angling 2012, which ironically was ordered and funded by none other than the British government themselves.

Despite this, and the fact that confidence in this type of report is perhaps not as high as we would like due to the haphazard way in which information feeding into it it was collected; the types of generalised questions asked, and the level of refusal to participate by up to 50% of anglers approached sceptical as to what the data might be used for, it remains our best shot at getting an important message across, and as such, deserves a summarised outline here.

As a recreational fishing representative sitting on the North West region of the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) at the time the 2012 report was released, I was present when its findings were formally delivered, audio-recording it in its entirety for archive purposes, a brief extracted summary of which now follows.....

Sea Angling 2012 was widely acclaimed as being the most comprehensive survey undertaken in terms of its scope and geographical coverage, despite some difficult circumstances surrounding aspects of data gathering. With very little in the way of solid historical data regarding sea angling, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) contracted 'Substance' to deliver the planned survey working in conjunction with University assistance to gather data of a quality good enough for the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to develop a policy for implementation both nationally and internationally.

Additionally, it would also serve to satisfy a European Union directive that member state provides estimates of recreational catches, which in light of what subsequently happened with Bass where anglers can no longer fish for them while commercial fishing continues to be allowed, those anglers that did refuse to participate probably feel totally vindicated.



To get the type of data required for a survey of this type, as many stakeholders as possible need to be encouraged to participate, some of whom were approached while in the act of fishing by IFCA Fishery Officers asking a wide range of questions such how often they fish, how they spend and on what, and most controversial of all, how many fish and what species are caught, killed or released. As you can imagine, it was that last question that most regularly touched a nerve.

Around 50% of anglers refused to participate fearing this was data 'they' could potentially use against them. Estimates of how many fish per day, month, and year, from both boat and shore were required, as well as information regarding 'other' benefits such as health and social welfare, all of which would ride on the back of a National Statistics survey also looking into numbers of sea anglers. So quite a comprehensive information gathering exercise, much of which anglers would be unconcerned about divulging. But not all of it.

In essence, the catch information gathering had three linked but separate strands to it following natural demarcation lines of charter boats, private boats, and shore angling. Of the three, contacting charter boat operators for their input was probably the most straight forward as they can be contacted in a number of ways which wouldn't necessarily involve face to face field work.

To do this the MMO funded approaches to a random selection of charter boat operators for catch information. Private boat and shore angler approaches were handed over to IFCA who reported difficulty in gathering the private boat data, which as a small boat angler myself I find puzzling. With most local councils reluctant to allow uncontrolled vehicle access to the shore, regulated tractor launching clubs willing to enforce all the necessary documentation requirements are often the only way private boats can launch from designated slipways. With an eye on the weather and the tides, it should then be easy to rack up dozens of potential data sources at one go. Yet they say they struggled.

On the basis of information gathered by the Office for National Statistics it was said that at the time of the survey, 2% of households in Britain contained someone who went sea angling at least once per year. Extrapolating this figure to take in the whole population, this they say equates to more than one million people wetting a line in 2012. Of those, 880,000 were reported to be from England. As for expenditure, based on an online survey with 'necessary adjustments' said to reflect how keen people were to actually fish, an estimated total population level spend in excess of £1 billion was arrived at, which after assorted 'taxes' were factored in reduced the £1 billion figure down to around £831 million, generating in excess of 10,000 full time equivalent jobs, which would in turn have a down-streaming effect of allowing additional spending elsewhere by those involved generating additional wealth across the broader community. When all of this is thrown into the equation, the final 2012 value of sea angling comes to around £2 billion.

Of course, statistics are there to be interpreted, with the same set able to be used with different 'spin' applied to them to back pretty much any hypothesis, something no doubt the commercial fishing sector and EU fisheries ministers will be quick to exploit. Anglers therefore should be equally adept at interpreting 'facts' bandied about by those who would try to diminish the economic value angling has to coastal towns, tackle dealers, and tackle manufacturers to name but a few.

What the report delivery also made clear was the uncertain level of confidence in trying to extrapolate a national result from what by their own admission was an unbalanced survey with the additional concern that not everyone approached participated, and that amongst those that did, 'glossing' of the truth to slant the result more favourably could well have been a factor. Fortunately, a similar type of survey carried out in 2004 produced similar predictions which would have been of some comfort and value to those writing the final report, though obviously not to those commissioning it at government level, who continue to offer more of a listening ear to the commercial lobby.



Then there are the social benefits at a time when health and well-being are constantly being touted, while the NHS visibly crumbles around us. With regard to encouraging people to spend time out of doors, for 60% of those taking part in the survey, sea fishing was their only way of getting out into 'wild places'. Knock on activities such as getting involved in things like coastal clean ups were also looked at. When asked what would it take to encourage more people to go fishing more often, not unexpectedly, the overwhelming answer was more fish and more bigger fish, adding that a large proportion of those interviewed said that they had definitely witnessed a conspicuous decline in both fish numbers and sizes within their angling life.

To round things off, the statisticians recorded charter boat anglers on average catching 10 fish per trip with shore anglers reporting an average of 2, giving a total 2012 catch estimate of around 10 million fish. Of these, shore anglers typically released 80% of

what they caught as opposed to boat anglers who released approximately 50%, a figure probably biased by the potentially larger size of fish caught by anglers going afloat, all of which has been 'noted' by the European Union who were said to have looked with interest at the figures, which even when you factor in the suggested levels of error, still equates to quite a considerable level of pressure on coastal fish stocks in addition to that exerted by commercial fishing.

As both sectors provide employment as well as other benefits to the national economy, the big question has to be which is the more beneficial, and as importantly, which group is better at applying spin and lobbying those in positions of power, which if you listen to anglers with a finger on the political pulse most certainly isn't us. According to respected and influential England International Chris Clark, the report was a poor attempt, done on the cheap for the convenience of those charged with carrying it out, and not helped by apathetic angler resistance to it. Having said all of that, Chris conceded that it was still a good result for sea angling, if only the government that commissioned could be persuaded to accept and act on it.

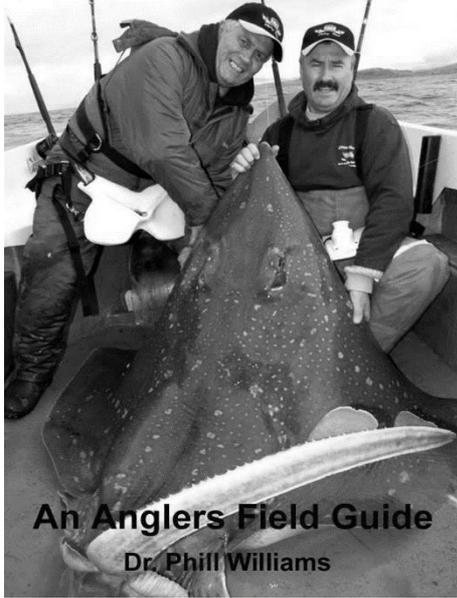
LRF & HRF

Lure fishing enthusiasts, particularly those at the LRF (Light Rock Fishing) end of the spectrum are probably going to hate me for saying this, but in my considered opinion, LRF in particular is symptomatic of the times, and would in all likelihood never have caught on in the way that it has had our coastal fish stocks not been in such a dire state. Current LRF targets such as rocklings, blennies, tiny Pouting and the like, were nuisance bait robbers or live baits when I first started fishing, even for an out and out species hunter like myself.

Never in a million years did I even consider that 'tiddler targeting' would develop into an art form with dedicated tackle and practitioners all of its own. And while I dabble with it sometimes myself, I feel sure that if there was anything better out there to catch, then some at least of the LRF (Little Runt Fishing) brigade wouldn't give it a second thought.

On a more positive note, the fact that being able to target a wider range of species including many a large majority of sea anglers would otherwise know little if anything about, encourages people to have a better understanding of fish biology and ecology, and the interconnectedness of all the animals that call the sea their home.

UK SALTWATER FISHES



Species hunting in particular is one very important offshoot of the LRF scene that has grown in popularity over the last few years. Having an 'official' personal ID card to put in shot when new species are encountered and photographed allowing them to be returned to the water is great for conservation. The fact that photographs sometimes need to be taken in a species-specific manner to pick out key identifying features is forcing today's anglers to get to know their targets more intimately, which again is no bad thing, and the driving force behind a species field guide which I produced to be downloaded onto a mobile phone in 2017.

Because it's important to actually see as well as read about the specific identifying features of fish while attempting to pin a name to them, it was crucial that every species recorded on rod and line from around the British Isles, plus a few that possibly will be in the near future, had good quality illustrations for those using the guide to compare their catch too, which was very much easier said than done.

To achieve this, I had to rely on the generosity of a number of other anglers. Two in particular who contributed a number of the more difficult species were Ross Johnson, who is an out and out species hunter whose ambition is to notch up 1000 species, and Andy Copeland, who is a very successful species shore match angler and champion of LRF generally

So enthusiastic is Andy that I've invited him to say a few words on the technique here, and maybe even have a 'pop' at some of the LRF detractors, myself included.....

"LRF or Light Rock Fishing was born in the Far East by Japanese Anglers wanting to target the abundant number of small fish they had there, yet still retain a sporting challenge. To do this, ultra-light ledger rods rated 0.5g - 5g paired with 1000 sized fixed spools and ultra-fine braid became popular, the end tackle used being mainly small jigs, lures and Isommes (an artificial worm bait). A form of angling that has proved a big hit with seasoned veterans as well new anglers and children coming in to the sport.

It was brought to UK anglers attention by Tronixpro and Majorcraft who had the vision to see how the LRF angling methods could work in UK Waters, and soon after LRF was born here in the UK, the pioneers of it soon finding themselves the brunt of jokes accused of being grown men using kids rods, but as those around fishing heavy tackle struggled the LRF lads caught fish for fun, and slowly attitudes started to change to the point that the heavy tackle lads soon found that an LRF rod had found its way in to their tackle holdall, from where it would appear when the fishing was quiet. So much so that pretty soon the same anglers would arrive with only the LRF kit and another angler was caught by the LRF bug.

LRF is a method of angling that could appeal to all. The tackle can be stored in the boot of a car, and with artificial baits and lures it's available to be used anywhere and everywhere. Species of fish never previously seen in certain areas started showing up on a regular basis. And not only were these NEW species being caught, there were also being correctly identified, giving anglers a greater knowledge of species and how to catch them. So much so that people have started using the methods with standard small sections of bait such as maddie ragworm or squid tentacle, and it has evolved further into LBF (Light Bait Fishing), which is basically coarse fishing in the sea with hook sizes 14 - 20 catching numerous new mini species such as Gobies, Pipefish, Butterfish etc... all good fun on 0.5g light rods".

Heavy Rock Fish (HRF) on the other hand has grabbed my complete attention. The value and regular use of rubber and soft plastic lures first came to prominence through the pioneering work done by Alex

Ingram on his redgill lures in the 1950's (see Charter 7), and those who followed, underlining the often used cliché 'of copying being the sincerest form of flattery'. And while redgills were used from the shore, which was Alex Ingram's original concept, it was out in the boat wreck drifting for big Pollack or Coalfish, and using them for Bass that drew the most attention, and it is to the Bass that I am now going to direct things with regard to the legacy we hand forward, though it must be stressed that not only Bass are involved, with one particular unanticipated bonus also there in the mix.

Speaking with Irish Bass guide John Quinlan in 2015, he was of the strong opinion that the development of soft lure fishing for Bass has been the biggest single step forward in his lifetime. Because they can be fished 'weedless' by inserting the hook deep into the body of the lure; because they can be fished almost imperceptibly slowing better mimicking natural prey, and because they can be fished as described in the most tackle hungry terrain imaginable where Bass will often be probing about at water depths only just able to cover their backs, soft lures have opened up a window to Bass fishing that most people either didn't appreciate was there, or if they did, would not previously have been in a position to exploit it. That's how important these lures are.

Another ardent soft lure fanatic I recorded an interview with was Danny Parkins in 2014. In fact, it was he who first coined the phrase Heavy Rock Fishing (HRF) to me. Like John Quinlan, and also Dr. Mike Ladle who was singing their praises, Danny was using them to catch Bass, only this time not by specifically targeting them. To him they were a bonus catch, as were Pollack and anything else that might take a shine to them while he was fishing them for big Ballan Wrasse.

What Danny was doing from a number of his favoured north coast West Country rock marks where in the past he might have fished crab or worm for the wrasse, was expose and tap into a previously new and aggressively predatory side to a fish most anglers had labelled as a rather sedate inshore species whose powerful body frame had more to do with handling powerful buffeting waves amongst the tangles of rock and kelp as it has chasing down and predated on mobile moving prey.



What Danny found was that big wrasse were more than happy to nail the darker patterns of 'worm-shaped' lures right in the thick of it all in the Ballan Wrasse's typical shallow water haunts at a catch rate that very likely would not have been matched by bait, with the added bonus of the other species mentioned.

I'm not going to delve too deeply into tactics and the like here. That is something for others to cover, and they have covered it thoroughly in magazine articles, web articles, and

in YouTube videos. My job here to provide a bit of the background on what for once is a very good piece of 'legacy' to be handing forward, particularly with Ballan Wrasse now potentially one of the larger growing harder fighting species still regularly available, which has over the years been something of a neglected species, thankfully commercially, and by many shore anglers.

COASTAL SEA DEFENCES & ROCK ARMOUR

Local authorities have a duty to protect property, livelihoods, and people. Even those that have ignored planning recommendations not to put new build properties in vulnerable high flood risk situations,

a problem that aggravated the hell out of me in my employment with the Environment Agency who were statutory consultees on planning applications. With coastal communities, it's a given that protection has priority over access to high water shore fishing. Equally, it's infuriating, when having consulted along with other potential stakeholders on project design and have suggested effective workable alternatives that they cast these aside as if the stakeholder consultations were just a necessary nuisance; a hoop to be seen to jump through before recommending that which they had always intended doing right from the onset.



I have first hand experience of this, at both Morecambe and Fleetwood (see Chapter 10), where rock armour cladding was put along the high water line removing any chance of fishing at a stroke. Rossall in particular has been a disaster. I became very involved in trying to argue anglers' corner on that particular project as I was made aware of its imminent start in plenty of time. Not only did it kill all prospects of high water fishing stone dead, but again, as with Morecambe, it took out a stretch with excellent disabled angling access, in this case at a location where due to the local geography, less restrictive alternatives were a genuine workable alternative.

The specifics of these two cases are not important here as they have already been discussed further back along the books working time line. In a nutshell, huge, uneven lumps of rock so big that only a couple or pieces might fit in the back of a truck are carefully put into place along the high water mark in front of any existing failing sea defences, reaching maybe 20 metres or so seaward, the idea being that the uneven voids between the rocks will dissipate the energy of large incoming waves that might otherwise breach and would result in flooding in a particularly fierce spring tide storm. A very effective but not exclusively effective approach, which in all likelihood will be pressed into widespread service nationally, as sea levels continue to rise, and storms become more energetic and ever more frequent over the coming decades due to global warming.

There are going to be a number of long term pass forward consequences of rising sea temperatures for sea anglers and for coastal communities other than changing species mix. As our climate warms causing sea ice and glaciers to melt, sea levels are set to rise and weather patterns will change. You need only look back to the last glacial period across the northern hemisphere. When the ice finally backed off, sea levels eventually rose by around 80 metres, consuming vast swathes of previously dry land. Nobody is suggesting anything as dramatic as that. Even if it all melted there wouldn't be enough for affects so

catastrophic. But sea levels are set to increase, and as such, low lying areas of land are under threat and must eventually either be consumed or better protected.

Lancashire's Fylde Coast is administered by 3 separate local authorities. The rock armour defences at Rossall installed by Wyre Borough Council were officially completed in 2018 at a cost of £63 million, utilising 241,000 tonnes of rock armour laid over 86,342 tonnes of rock underlayer, along with 10,000 specially manufactured precast concrete units comprising mainly sets of steps, and therein lies a big bone of contention. The adjacent town of Cleveleys uses banks of pre-cast steps to dissipate wave energy. Backed up with a retaining wall with sealed storm doors these steps are more aesthetically pleasing, and more importantly, they don't prevent high water shore angling. Yet Wyre BC dismissed this idea quoting cost, then installed them above the high water line offering no sea defence qualities and no angling opportunities. Then they wonder why stakeholders get upset.

FISHING TACKLE CONGLOMERATES

One of the historical themes I have linked to the passage of time over the twentieth century is the pro-rata improvement in the development and quality of fishing tackle, particularly rods and lines. The two key drivers here being the need to improve, and desire to improve, need being angler driven and the desire to do something about it coming from the manufacturers, especially when you have small specialist companies run by enthusiasts actively competing against each other for market share. A very good example of this is Conoflex and Zziplex driving casting rod development forward because they had the expertise and the motivation to do so, forcing everyone else to up their game or be left in their wake.

Small, family run entrepreneurial businesses are the life-blood of evolving quality. Unfortunately, it seems they are not the way forward so far as the tackle trade looks to be currently headed. For while there still is a handful of independent companies managing to hang on in there as carry overs from the past, rather than spawning more, we are likely to see less as the century progresses, in part because fishing tackle generally is so good and so well developed that the spark is no longer there to develop independently. And while many of the big company names of old are still there, many are clumped together and 'governed' by large single management structures, which when you think about it, while it might appear to offer lots of choice, doesn't want one company within its ranks to prosper at the expense of the others. NOTE: Top end manufacturers Shimano and Daiwa for the moment at least are managing not to get drawn into all of this.

What we now have is a collection of companies producing tackle lines and products, which if the identifying decals were to be removed, other than a small number of readily identifiable inherited 'carry forward' items such as the ABU Ambassador range of reels, could have come from any one of the group with their cheaper outsourced Chinese manufacturers, as all are producing and marketing products so similar in terms of quality, appearance, and price tagging, operating as most now are under one amorphous giant umbrella, that to a large extent it wouldn't matter which of the organisations brands you chose. As such, competition, which in the final analysis is what drives development on, is dead, leaving anglers no longer able to vote with their wallets and take their business elsewhere.

Quite literally as I write, my computer has flagged up the sale of arguably the biggest tackle conglomerate of them all, Pure Fishing (ABU, Penn, Greys, Fenwick, Hardy, Mitchell, Shakespeare, Berkley and others) announcing that it has been sold on by current owners Newell to the New York private equity group Sycamore Partners, an organisation with no known links whatsoever to any outdoor leisure activity related industries, for the mind blowingly staggering sum of £1.3 Billion, sold on the grounds of it being 'surplus' to Newell's requirements, whatever that means. All of this at a time when angler



participation is contracting, in part due to lack of interest at the younger end of the age time line, and even more worrying, a lack of decent sized fish for the rest of us.

Is this the way forward?. Will angling benefit, or at least not suffer as a result?. Who better to ask than angler and tackle consultant Mike Thrussell, a freelance Product Development & Design Consultant for Pure Fishing brand.....

“From the 1960’s, and right through the early 1990’s, the high street tackle shop reigned supreme. Their stock was aimed only at localised fishing opportunities, and unless there were other shops in close proximity, any price comparison of individual items by anglers was very limited. Sales to anglers were com-

monly based on recommendation via the shopkeeper, or via other anglers already using a product, alternatively by reviews or articles in fishing magazines.

Tackle shops bought their stock in two main ways. Either directly through a visiting sales agent or company representative, or by visiting specific annual company trade shows to first view, then buy suitable product to fit their own business frame.

The advent of technology to the masses during the 1990’s triggered a major shift in how the individual angler would initially research and then buy his tackle, but also change forever how the high street tackle shop would trade within the angling framework.

Retailers, with the will to embrace technology, saw an opportunity to reach a far wider audience than the basic high street footfall. By using online web pages, even small tackle shops were able to reach out and advertise to thousands of previously unreachable people eagerly searching for new, more versatile and cheaper products online. This gave the buyer more choice and that opportunity to seek out the cheapest price. Those retailers that didn’t embrace technology were stuck in a world where sales would sadly decline in the majority of cases as footfall inevitably fell as more and more people shopped online. Gradually the smaller shops began to disappear.

At the same time, tackle shops reaching those wider online audiences, began to expand, either by carrying greater stock levels, but also by venturing in to other angling disciplines that previously might have been out of bounds to them due to a limited localised audience. As individual shops expanded, so too did their wholesale buying potential and this in turn allowed cheaper retail pricing to the benefit of the angler.

The angling trade was also changing. Between the 1960’s and early 1990’s the trade was reliant on a mix of smaller companies supplying niche product under individual brand names, but also by much larger national and international companies, such as Shakespeare, Daiwa and Shimano amongst others, who manufactured and bought mass product from their own and freelance overseas factories. It was inevitable that big companies with worldwide interests would also need to expand and grow to survive. This would be by specific “recognised by the angler” brand name acquisition, but also by buying up those smaller companies and incorporating their niche product in to their own range. It was no different to what happened with food retailers and manufacturers buying up household product names and incorporating them within their own portfolios. The more buying power a company has, the cheaper commodities can be. Cheaper prices mean more shoppers, more shoppers sees a greater overall profit margin and this is how the supermarkets expanded to be in every corner of our geographical society.

Although the general public embraced the high street supermarket philosophy when it came to every day shopping, there was a surprising resistance and dislike amongst general anglers that tackle companies expanded in the same way and took on more and more brands under single company umbrellas.

Perversely, it was the angler that benefitted most from this supermarket style shift through manufacturing and supply companies, and some tackle shops, getting bigger and being able to offer better prices and a greater product choice to the angler.

It has to be said that a major moan by anglers was that product was not of the quality it had been before, and that, to some extent, may be true, but it was the anglers themselves that demanded cheaper and cheaper tackle and inevitably quality will suffer within that scenario. In the late 1960's a quality reel, such as the ABU 6000 series, would cost, at shop level, around £14, this when the average wage was probably sub £30 for many UK workers. In 2018 a similar standard ABU 6500 reel would retail in the region of £150 or less, this when the average wage is quoted as being close to £550 to £650 per week. The 1960's reel cost the individual virtually half a week's wage. In 2018 the average wage would buy that reel 4.5 times. You can't expect to have maximum quality and mass produced prices. The majority wanted cheap prices and that's where the angling market concentrated its product ranges. A company has to work to its customers, and the customers, on the whole, want cheap prices, which is why the majority generally shop in major supermarkets.

Looking to the future, it's likely that big named companies will continue to manufacture abroad but then sell direct to the angler from their own websites. This will include rapidly expanding companies using the multiple shop format that themselves will buy direct from overseas manufacturers then sell via their own websites and other general shopping websites direct to the public. Cutting out the middlemen means cheaper consumer prices but a higher overall profit margin for the seller. This is already happening and in all walks of life, and fishing tackle will be no different. If this scenario proves correct, then the smaller localised tackle shop will inevitably struggle to survive in the long term.

There may be room, for a while, for smaller companies still with niche products, to trade independently within the angling trade and to supply retailers but looking forward it seems the conglomerate philosophy of multiple brand ownership backed by direct manufacturing and selling will be the future of the angling trade".

NATIONAL RECORDS



One unfortunate legacy twentieth century sea anglers will be handing forward for the next generation to take on and sort out is the prehistoric way the various national record fish committee's conduct their affairs, supposedly on our behalf. An unmitigated disaster cascading ever further into irrelevance right up to the time of writing here, a situation that presumably will continue for some years to come. Self-appointed organisations supposedly there to serve, but instead, dictate, restrict and are self-serving.

All have their origins in the twentieth century, in which time period, with the notable exception of the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers, they appear to have become frozen in time. Like dinosaurs, which some 66 million years ago were also on their way out, they need a hypothetical meteorite strike to come along and put them out of their misery, allowing evolution to take its course with new better adapted replacements waiting to step in, takeover, and flourish.

Anyone reading this book from cover to cover will be under no illusion with regard to my feelings on the current state of record fish keeping. There are way too many examples of historical 'problems' ignored in the hope that they will somehow go away scattered throughout the second half of the century, which along with more recent examples such as the binning of the Common Skate *Raja batis* as a species and the DNA research undertaken by Dr. Ed Farrell on Smoothhound speciation urgently need to be addressed. With that in mind, one day in 2009 I sat down and systematically went through the four lists noting every problem I came across and presented my findings in the format of a scientific paper which I then copied to each of the committee's in the hope that some action might come from my efforts. What follows here is a copy that document.....

Introduction

Britain, the Irish Republic, Scotland, and Wales, keep national angling record lists of the biggest examples by weight of all the different species of fish caught within geographical territory. Lists which are then used as a benchmark by individuals and organisations for a range of angling related purposes. Recent times however have seen a growing unwillingness on the part of anglers to kill or injure fish to comply with certain claim procedure rules, leading to a stand off between these who record and those who catch.

So much so that increasing numbers of sea anglers, and in particular those fishing for non-edible species such as Tope and skate normally destined for release, have completely turned their back on the whole concept of record fish. And while it is accepted that there are always going to be some who will shun record keeping irrespective of circumstance, a growing majority of those currently doing so find themselves in the anti-record fish camp only because the rules governing claims are so far removed from modern day thinking that the whole subject has become an irrelevance.

For some time, anglers have been in a situation where for certain species of fish, the official record weight is no more than that of the biggest specimen killed and submitted, when everybody knows, in my case from personal experience, that bigger specimens for reasons of conservation, have consciously, deliberately, not been submitted, and instead have been released.

Throughout the history of fish recording, for a whole range of reasons, there have been potential angling records that have not been claimed. In the main this used to be through ignorance. Now however, it is through conscience. For reasons of credibility on the part of those responsible for record lists, this situation must not be allowed to continue. If truly reflective record keeping is the genuine aim, then urgent adaptation and modernisation is crucial. The objective here is to explore options for facilitating modernisation.

Materials & Methods

The four national record lists and their associated claims procedures provide the basis for phase one of this study which is to compare and contrast current best practises. Phase two evaluates work done by myself and other interested parties on weight estimation derived from length, girth, width and actual weight measurement as a potential alternative. Novel approaches are also introduced and discussed.

Results

What is immediately obvious from comparisons of the four national record lists and procedures studied here is the complete lack of consensus shown in both presentation and operating rules. Anomalies found are as follows.

Ireland.....

Unlike the others, does not make any distinction between boat, shore, and mini species records.

Does not regard the Sunfish as legitimately catchable on rod and line.

Does not recognise two species of Smoothhound *Mustelus mustelus* and *Mustelus asterias* as being present around the British Isles.

Displays the weights of its inclusions as a mix of metric and imperial measurement.

Does not automatically allow new species to be included without first going before a committee for permission, which is not always given.

Has vacant qualifying weights for anticipated unrecorded species.

For identification purposes requires the actual body, body scales, or photographs, dependant on the species being claimed.

Requires all potential record fish to be weighed on land.

Does not allow the inclusion of weight estimates from any source.

Wales.....

Displays the weights of record fish in metric units only.

Distinguishes between boat and shore caught record fish.

Displays species with a weight of less than 1 pound (450 grams) in a separate mini-records list without boat & shore separation.

When a new species is included in either the boat or the shore category, a vacant minimum qualifying weight is automatically generated for the other unfilled slot.

Does not require any fish to be killed for identification, instead accepting photographic evidence.

Does not require that all potential record fish be weighed on land, or even weighed at all. Has and will continue to accept weight estimates based on length and girth measurement for certain species where reliable estimation data is available.

Will allow any and every legitimately caught species of fish to be claimed.

Scotland.....

Displays the weights of record fish in imperial units only.

Distinguishes between boat and shore caught fish.

Does not exclude fish with a weight of less than one pound from the main body of its list, thereby generating boat and shore records for what England and Wales regard as mini species.

When a new species is included in either a boat or the shore record slot, the corresponding slot for that species is listed as available for claims.

Does not have minimum qualifying weights for any potential inclusion.

Requires all potential record fish either dead or alive for examination to confirm identity.

Requires all potential record fish to be weighed on land, though it has said that it may consider claims for Tote and Common Skate weighed on board a boat and released.

Does not allow the inclusion of weight estimates from any source.

Will allow any and every species to be claimed.

Britain (The United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland).....

Displays the weights of record fish in separate imperial and metric unit columns.

Distinguishes between boat and shore caught record fish.

Displays species with a weight of less than one pound in a separate mini-records list without boat & shore separation.

When a new species is included in either a boat or a shore record slot, the corresponding slot for that species is made available for claims.

Includes species of fish for which neither the boat or the shore record slot is occupied.

Sets minimum qualifying weights for species in vacant record slots.

Requires some species of fish for examination to confirm identity.

Requires all potential record fish to be weighed on land.

Does not allow the inclusion of weight estimates from any source.

Will allow any and every species to be claimed.

NOTE: Although Scotland and Wales keep their own national records and contribute to the collective British record fish list, England as a separate country only records its fish under the British record banner. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have a single shared all Ireland record list, though fish taken in Northern Irish waters which exceed current British records can also be claimed through the British Record Fish Committee. The Channel Islands, which have their own separate record list, and the Isle of Man also contribute to the British record list. England is the only country not to have a record list of its own.

Approaches Other Than Weight.....

As weight is only one way of describing the size of a fish, the potential validity of other approaches for expressing the size of fish should also be explored. These include a formula for weight estimation of Tope and other sharks based on body measurements; a weight estimation table for Common Skate based on length and width, and size determination based on a length and girth generated 'points system' without a weight estimation element to it. In the main, weight estimation as a substitute for accurate weighing is an idea both initiated by and widely taken up by anglers, particularly those catching fish too big to weight in the confines of a boat, or which would suffer unnecessary stress if a weighing attempt were to be made.

Weight Estimation of Tope Based on Body Length.....

Estimation of the weight of Tope as used by some organisations in the UK comes from the World-wide standard formula used for all sharks of $a \cdot L^b$ where 'a' is a multiplying constant, and 'L' is the length of the fish to the power 'b'. The actual 'L' measurements themselves are species specific. Unfortunately, with no actual self-generated examples to compare the accuracy of random samples against, there is little more to said here.

Weight Estimation of Bass from Body Length.....

Using data generated by me for 112 Bass which were measured for body length, weighed, and aged by scale reading, a regression plot of length against weight was produced. Using this graph to estimate weight from body length puts a 50 cm Bass at 3.5 pounds. Unfortunately, the actual weights of 3 of the 50 cm Bass contributing to the graph ranged between 3.1 and 4.25 pounds. Similarly, the estimated weight of a 58 cm Bass is 5.5 pounds whereas actual weights varied between 4.65 and 5.5 pounds.

Finally, the estimated weight for a 38 cm Bass is 1 pound compared to actual weights of 1.6 and 1.75 pounds.

The scatter of points on the regression plot themselves suggest wide weight to length variation, despite the accuracy of the fit of the line being quoted as 91%. Maximum weight variation between estimated and actual at the 3 quoted lengths ranged between 0.75 and 0.85 pounds, which in the case of the 38 cm example equates to +75%.

Weight Estimation of Cod from Body Length & Girth.....

Weight, length, and girth measurements were collected by myself from Cod caught both here in the UK and in Arctic Norway. By multiplying the length by the girth I arrived at a points score for each individual fish. These were then plotted against the weights of the fish generating these points scores using regression analysis to produce a graph.

Using the graph, point scores (length x girth) can then be used to estimate weight. As a check on the accuracy of the graph, the scores of 2 Cod each weighing 44 pounds were fed into the graph and their weights read from the corresponding axis. Neither fish came out of this estimation process at 44 pounds [see Table]. Both in fact were considerably under the true weight of 44 pounds, with discrepancies of 7 and 15%, despite a predicted graph accuracy of 97.3%.

Actual Weight	Length cms	Girth cms	L x G (Points)	Graph Estimate
44.0	131	69	9039	37.5
44.0	126	76	9576	41

Weight Estimation of Common Skate from Body Length & Width.....

For many years, anglers catching Common Skate in the Oban area of Scotland have been using a weight estimation table painstakingly derived from the collection of actual weight and body dimension data. Initially this work was undertaken by Brian Swinbank. The table with its current accuracy however is the work of Bill Little and Davy Holt, which as part of a biodiversity action plan was revised in 2003 to extend its weight estimates up to 270 pounds, seen as being more than sufficient to accommodate a new record for the species.

This unfortunately gave rise to an error which added up to 10% to the weights of fish upwards of 180 pounds. As a result, Davy Holt has now removed that version of the chart from his website, preferring that people use the original chart which has a proven accuracy variability of less than 5%, though on the down side, it can only provide estimates for fish up to 206 pounds. For specimen hunting this is fine. But for record status, if this chart was ever to become acceptable, it would unfortunately fall a little way short of the mark. Due to the huge potential size discrepancy between the sexes, male and female fish are dealt with as separate entities.

The dimensions taken are from the tip of the nose to tip of the tail (length), and wing tip to wing tip width across the upper back (width). With repeat data also used to give an average weight for a given set of dimensions, and quality assurance spot checks periodically made with actual fish weighing's by Davy Holt, the accuracy of this table is known to be very high, and it is the same for everybody, if, as appears to be the case, everyone takes the charts estimates at face value. Examination of the chart however, particularly towards the lower end of its weight range, shows a lack of subtlety which could be ammunition enough to prevent its use for record fish purposes.

Discussion.....

Before discussing the merits or otherwise of weight estimation in more detail, some more general comments regarding the subject of record keeping first need to be explored from the anomalies highlighted in the results section above. Under the results sub-heading 'Britain', item No.2 reads 'distinguishes between boat and shore caught record fish' and item No.3 reads 'displays species with a weight of less than one pound in a separate mini-records list without boat & shore separation'. This has led to a violation by the BRFC of its own rules demonstrated by the British boat caught record for the Comber *Se-ranus cabrilla* shown as 1.13.0.

The listing of any species in either the boat or the shore record list automatically generates a vacant slot in the corresponding column, which according to item No.6 is then given a minimum qualifying weight. In this case, the minimum qualifying weight for the vacant shore Comber slot has been set at 12 ounces which at less than one pound qualifies it as a mini-species, thereby demoting it to a different record list which does not differentiate between boat and shore caught status.

Items 7, 8 and 9 shown below from the 'Scotland' sub-heading are also at odds with each other.

7. Requires all potential record fish either dead or alive for examination to confirm identity.
8. Requires all potential record fish to be weighed on land.
9. Will consider claims for Tope and Common Skate weighed on board a boat and released.

Weight Estimation.....

Weight estimation based on some version of measured body dimensions is a credible means of ascertaining a reasonably accurate weight of a fish, though for record fish generally, it is perhaps a step too far, particularly with those species that are traditionally kept for eating. But for what anglers refer to as 'sporting species' which are caught and intended for release because they have little or no culinary value, or because of either legal protection or scarcity, weight estimation could prove an invaluable tool, particularly as whatever marginal inaccuracies there are would be the same for everyone.

The Welsh Record Fish Committee (WFSA) have already endorsed the weight estimation/conservation concept by ratifying their current Blue Shark record based on a weight estimate from body dimensions. Just how far that particular record claim might have gone had the same fish also beaten the Blue Shark inclusion in British record list to which Wales contributes would have been interesting to see.

Acknowledgements.....

My interest in fish recording goes back to the 1970's, when in conjunction with the late Bob Gledhill, I was instrumental in the pursuit of separate boat and shore records. However, it wasn't until I started fishing in the company of Ian Burrett in and around Luce Bay that I became aware of, and interested in, the potential for weight estimation and the release of all species of fish, including national and international records, some of which I both caught or witnessed caught aboard Ian's boat 'Onyermarks'. He also introduced me to Davy Holt who I must thank on two fronts. Firstly, for his contribution here with information regarding weight estimation of Common Skate. But also, for the tireless efforts both he and Bill Little have put in to that particular project.

Steve Bastiman of the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN) has made contributions with regard to the weight estimation of shark species, and with comments on the wider aspects of the project. Mike Dixon and Helen Pearce from the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers made contributions too, both on the practical side, and more especially on the motivational side through encouraging comments each made while providing background information. Dr. Ken Collins of the UK Shark Tagging Programme has also provided information on the weight estimation of sharks from body length. Finally, I would like to acknowledge those anglers, many of whose names I don't know, that have stood by their

convictions and kept the faith when potential record fish have come their way, by returning them alive without a second thought.

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Recommendations & Points for Consideration.....

1. A points-based record list should be established based on length multiplied by girth/width at the widest point. This could be presented as a separate entity for selected 'sporting' species only, or for cartilaginous species, legally protected species, or better still for all other recorded species as an additional column running alongside the current weight based records.

What has gone before is gone, and existing weight-based records should not only be retained, but also maintained for those who have no wish to participate in a points-based system, and for those catching edible species which would be retained for the table in any case. It is even conceivable that the same fish if measured as well as weighed could occupy both record slots which would give a much gentler lead in to the points-based system taking centre stage. NOTE: This is not weight estimation, either directly or by any attempted back door route as it takes no account of weight at all.

2. Expand the current record fish lists to reflect the degree of achievement represented by a record catch. This applies only to boat records. Anglers fishing from non-chartered boats such as private dinghies where both the locating as well as the catching is down to personal skill should be given their own separate list in the way that shore anglers already have. In the case of charter boat caught records, the name of the charter skipper should also be included alongside the name of the angler in recognition of the contribution both make to a record catch.

3. Remove minimum qualifying weights from all inclusions. Where a fish is the best example available it should be recorded as such. A record is a record regardless of how well or otherwise it reflects on the size potential for a particular species, a good example being the 1976 Six Gilled Shark record of 9½ pounds caught by F. E. Beeton.

4. Disband the current mini-record list (as is the case in Scotland) and incorporate it into the main boat and shore record list. Not only is the mini-records tag demeaning and suggestive of an inferior second

tier, it also creates a situation in which record keepers are unable to abide by their own rules. Mini-fish records as they stand in Britain as a whole, and in Wales, are currently catered for in a one-inclusion list without boat and shore status for all species whose weight comes in at under one pound. Min-record list inclusions are not intended to have separate boat and shore status. But because of the way record keeping is currently structured, complete separation is not always possible as in the example of the British record for the Comber.

5. At the time of writing, the boat caught record for the Comber is 1.13.0. As things currently stand, when a species enters either the boat or the shore record list for the first time it automatically generates a vacant slot in the corresponding column which is then given a minimum qualifying weight. In this case, the vacant minimum qualifying weight for a shore caught Comber has been set at 12 ounces thereby making it a mini-species which it cannot be listed as because the mini-records list shows no division between boat and shore.

6. Operate boat and shore records independently of each other so that the inclusion of a species in one list does not automatically generate a vacant slot, with or without a qualifying weight, in the other list.

7. Remove fish currently listed with no record weight displayed, either boat or shore. Examples of this are Red Mullet in the Irish record list, Silver Eel in the Welsh record list, and Sandy Ray in the British record list. In the case of the Silver Eel and Sandy Ray there are two vacant slots (boat and shore) with the Sandy Ray also having minimum qualifying weights set for each. This being the case, why not then also list all the other as yet un-caught species of fish which could potentially be found in British waters.

8. In terms of presentation and procedure, the four approaches to national record keeping discussed here differ markedly from each other. It would be helpful to anglers, and for fish recording credibility, if a consensus approach were to be agreed and applied. This should also be extended to settle disagreements over the inclusion of the Sunfish which The Irish Record Fish Committee say cannot legitimately be caught by fair angling methods as it feeds on soft bodied invertebrates (mostly jelly fish medusae, salps and ctenophores [Wheeler, 1969]), and inclusion of the two Smoothhound species *Mustelus mustelus* and *Mustelus asterias*, which again the Irish take exception to on the basis that at our latitude both species are not present, one being a local variation on the other, as evidenced through DNA analysis at the University of Dublin by Dr. Ed Farrell.

9. That the identification of the current Anglerfish record(s) be confirmed as that of *Lophius piscatorius* and not *Lophius budegassa* which has been shown to be present at our latitude. Investigation of museum collections of *Lophius* previously labelled *L. piscatorius* indicate that its presence extends as far north as Scottish waters

Since preparing the above, the need for re-appraisal of species such as the Angler Fish and the Smoothhounds has been given more urgency through a chain of events surrounding the inclusion in both the British and Scottish record lists of the 227 pound Common Skate mentioned earlier, which was weighed at sea then released. That fact alone should have invalidated the record claim. Yet the record remains firmly in place, despite the fact that in more recent times, doubts over its identity could have given both record fish committee's good reason to evict it, and both have chosen not to do so.

That opportunity arose in 2009 when fishery scientists decided that the Common Skate should be moved from the genus *Raja* and placed in the genus *Dipturus*, then immediately discovered that what had been thought of as one species with the new scientific name of *Dipturus batis* was in fact two very similar species, the Flapper Skate *Dipturus intermedia*, and the Blue Skate *Dipturus flossada*, the unfortunate knock on consequence being that we've now gone from what was one of the easiest and most straightforward name pinning exercises to one of the hardest, as Flapper Skate and Blue Skate are so much alike, hence the earlier confusion. The big question is, which one holds the record.

PW Comment: there was talk during the Peter Tombleson era of fish recording of consideration being given to allowing fish caught aboard boats to be weighed at sea, a controversial move, but one which with hindsight would have gotten the BRFC out of the hole it now finds itself in with regard to protected species. Mike Millman who was vehemently opposed to this got into some pretty heated exchanges with Peter Tombleson to the point of canvassing the views of a wide range of organisations, charter boat skippers, and individual anglers for support, which to a large extent he got, and would I suspect campaign against it again if the conversations I've had with him on the subject are anything to go by. Whether or not the wider support would still be there is another matter. Something has to change.

FOOTNOTE: Mike Millman also has a few choice thoughts of his own regarding record keeping on the British scene in his own inclusion in Chapter 8. In addition, the same Chapter looks at the National Anglers Council with regard to record keeping, and the purge of sea angling records from both the British and Scottish record lists during the mid-1960's.

PLASTIC POLLUTION

The United Nations Environment Programme states that if the current rate of plastic pollution entering our oceans is not quickly dealt with, then by the year 2050, there will be more plastic waste accumulated in the sea than there are fish. An issue which scientists at least are keen to get onto the agenda, if not governments and the general public who seem far less concerned about or aware of the problem, despite the enforced ending of free plastic carrier bags by large retailers, followed at the close of 2018 by proposed charge increases to be levied by all retailers in a further (probably vain) attempt to limit the use, disposal, and environmental damage of single use plastics to marine aquatic environments.

The World was introduced to plastic back in the 1950's. Some 50 years later, as a pass-forward to the twenty first century, the problems caused by single use plastic bags and other unnecessary plastic packaging which breaks down into tiny, painfully slow to biodegrade pellets known as microplastics at volumes which look to be on course to smother the entire ocean floor and all that attempts to live on or in it, is arguably going to be the worst environmental legacy we will bestow on those anglers (and everyone else) who come after us. A problem with the potential to send the entire marine food chain all the way through to the apex predators into a spiral of terminal collapse.

Let me try to put some figures on things. Never an easy task as there are so many different estimates out there ranging between complete under-statement to gross exaggeration. I'll try to steer a mid-course here, which is still (or should be) alarming enough. In 2014 it was estimated that there was between 15 and 50 trillion microplastic particles in the Worlds oceans, equating to between 93,000 to 236,000 tonnes of the stuff, which along with as yet larger items of discarded plastic waste, was responsible for the untimely deaths of around 1 million sea birds and 100,000 (some estimate far more) marine mammals. Greenpeace reckon we produce around 260 million tonnes of plastic each year of which at least 10% ends up in our seas and oceans.

As 'eye witnesses', sea anglers tend mainly to see accumulations along the high-water strand line, plus occasional items floating by, often put there by fellow anglers whilst we are out fishing in boats. Unfortunately, as bad and as dangerous as this is, it's not what we can immediately see around us that is the main problem. It's the stuff we can't see and probably will never see that is the big worry, a great deal of which gets caught up in and 'delivered' elsewhere by Gyres, these being large circulating areas of ocean current caused by the Coriolis effect of the Earth's rotation, of which there are said to be five.

Plastic is difficult to break down, looks unsightly, and occasionally gets mistakenly eaten by large marine mammals and some fish such as the Sunfish. So is that it?, and if so why all the fuss, or more to the point, why not more fuss, the answer to which comes from the way plastics are able to bind to other ocean pollutants such as POP's (persistent organic pollutants) including highly dangerous PCB's due



to the plastic's 'characteristic of attraction'. Contaminated microplastic pellets are ingested from which harmful chemicals are absorbed into body tissue thereby putting them into the food chain, the highest levels of which concentrate up at the top, which if you catch and consume fish ultimately means you, potentially resulting in disease and/or the break down of hormonal management systems.

It has to be said that not all plastic comes from inappropriately discarded consumer driven sources.

A substantial amount in the marine environment comes from Ghost Fishing Gear. An estimated 640,000 tonnes of nets of various sorts that are either lost for a variety of reasons annually, or simply dumped when their useful life is up. Being largely made up from various plastics, these too will eventually break up to form yet more of those dreaded microplastic pellets. But not before they have caught and killed huge numbers of marine mammals, birds, and fish. Particularly fish of the upper layers such as marlin and sharks, not too mention all the additional plastic items they can also gather up over time as they go.

THE FINAL WORD

This goes to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme which states that if the current rate of plastic pollution entering our oceans is not dealt with urgently, then by the year 2050 there will be more plastic waste in the sea than fish.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY PHILL WILLIAMS

Dinghy Fishing at Sea (BeeKay Publishing, 1984) by Phill Williams and Brian Douglas.

The Dorling Kindersley Encyclopaedia of Fishing (1994) by Peter Gathercole, Trevor Housby, Dennis Moss, Bruce Vaughan and Phill Williams.

The Complete Book of Fly Fishing (1998) by Various contributors inc. Phill Williams.

Fluctuating Asymmetry as a Measure of Environmental Quality in the Three Spined Stickleback *Gasterosteus aculeatus* (2017). Published on Kindle and Smashwords. Copy also available in the archive of Liverpool University (2004).

The Ultimate Angling Bucket List (2016) by Phill Williams. Self-published as a free download eBook on Kindle and Smashwords with hard bound archive copies held by Angling Heritage and the British Library.

UK Saltwater Fishes: An Anglers Field Guide (2017) by Phill Williams. Self-published as a free download eBook on Kindle and Smashwords.

APPENDIX 1: AUDIO INTERVIEW ARCHIVE

This archive of audio interviews with a wide range of top angling figures is available both on the website Fishing Films and Facts, and as a collection at the National Sound Archive of the British Library under Collection No. C1486 Phill Williams Angling Interviews where it can only be accessed and listened to on site.

The overall collection entry is <http://sami.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgisirsi/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY7528353>

The angling collection entry is <http://sami.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgisirsi/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=C1486{087}>

Copies are also held at the Angling Trust, Angling Heritage, and at a variety of regional and county archives according to the geographical location of either the interviewee or the interview content.

Podcast Interview 1: Ian Burrett, Luce Bay: Recorded in 2009. Humberside sea angler Ian Burrett loved the Luce Bay area so much that he moved home there to set up the highly successful Onyermarks charter business. Ian is also a great advocate of conservation and a founder member of SSACN.

Podcast Interview 2: Mick Riley, Sea Rescue: Recorded in 2009. Mick Riley, sole survivor of a dinghy angling tragedy off Lancashire's Fylde Coast talks about the events leading up to that day, the feeling of isolation and desperation of the situation, and of his eventual rescue. Given a hard time later in the press, unjustifiably as it would turn out, here he puts the record straight and tries to persuade other small boat anglers to be more safety conscious.

Podcast Interview 3: Gethyn Owen, Holyhead: Recorded in 2010. Gethyn Owen is an ex-Welsh International boat angler turned successful charter skipper operating out of Holyhead. A measure of that success is anglers fishing aboard his boat 'My Way' having successfully claimed the Welsh records for Tope, Spurdog and Smoothhound, which in each case was returned to the sea alive.

Podcast Interview 4: Frank Bee, Morecambe Bay: Recorded in 2009. Veteran angler Frank Bee talks about his long commercial and charter fishing career, and how that influenced the charter angling scene both at Fleetwood and in Morecambe Bay. Later, when he retired from chartering, he bought himself a small boat, which amongst many good catches was responsible for the North West Cod record of 42 pounds.

Podcast Interview 5: Phill Williams, Fylde Cod: Recorded in 2010. As a dinghy angler who was present and participated in the famous Flyde coast jumbo cod fishing era between the mid-1970's and mid-1980's, Phill Williams takes a realistic as well as a nostalgic look at this probably never to be repeated event. Many huge Cod were taken very close in to Lancashire's Cleveleys shoreline. But it wasn't a case of success guaranteed, as very often there would days with little or no reward for your efforts, at times in weather and sea conditions at the limit of what the small unsophisticated boats back then could handle.

Podcast Interview 6: Tony Parry, Rhyl: Recorded in 2010. Tony Parry, skipper of 'Jensen II' based at Rhyl in the summer, and Liverpool over the winter months, talks about the history and current status of both fisheries, plus his thoughts on renewable energy in the form of offshore wind farms and their direct and indirect effects on fishing and fish distribution.

Podcast Interview 7: Phill Williams, North Lancashire: Recorded in 2010. The top side of Morecambe Bay on into the Duddon Estuary was once alive with summer Cod, Plaice, Tope and Bass. Vast catches

could be made there on a regular basis. Then it started to slip into decline. Here we look at the area in its 1970's and 80's heyday.

Podcast Interview 8: Graeme Pullen, Billfish: Recorded in 2010. Graeme Pullen has devoted a large portion of his life to the pursuit of huge fish, and in particular Marlin. Here he talks openly about billfish species on a Worldwide as well as a European basis, explaining some of the developments in both techniques and pin pointing new hot spots that he has been responsible for.

Podcast Interview 9: Stuart Barrett, Dever Springs: Recorded in 2011. Dever Springs trout fishery in Hampshire has a well earned reputation for cultivating and producing big and even record sized Brown and Rainbow trout. Its gin clear chalk stream fed lakes also make it one of the country's premier stalking waters. Stuart Barrett from the fishery discusses a range of issues regarding big fish rearing, stocking, and catching.

Podcast Interview 10: Jason Owen, Pwllheli: Recorded in 2010. Pwllheli has long been a very popular summer charter angling venue, but also has a lesser known full year-round potential too where it offers a huge diversity, depending on the size of the tides, which includes reef, wreck, bank and open ground fishing. Charter skipper of 'Haf Aled' Jason Owen explains.

Podcast Interview 11: Graeme Pullen, Sharks: Recorded in 2010. Big fish expert Graeme Pullen talks about all aspects of fishing for big sharks both Worldwide and in UK waters.

Podcast Interview 12: Graeme Pullen, Trout stalking: Recorded in 2010. For some, stalking big trout in the gin clear still waters of Hampshire became not only a pilgrimage, but an art form. Here Graeme Pullen looks at the history as well as the techniques behind the phenomenon.

Podcast Interview 13: Pete Thorman, Gt Whites: Recorded in 2010. Monster fish and Great White shark enthusiast Pete Thorman talks about what it was like to catch huge sharks for a tag and release scientific research program off the coast of South Africa.

Podcast Interview 14: Bill Pashby, Tunny: Recorded in 2010. Between the 1930's and 1950's, Scarborough was the hub of big game fishing in the UK. Here Bill Pashby recalls his time spent taking out wealthy customers fishing for giant Blue Fin Tuna, or as he calls them, Tunny.

Podcast Interview 15: Ron Greer, Ferox Trout: Recorded in 2010. Ferox 85 is a single species research and study group set up in 1985 to look into all matters scientific and angling with regard to wild Ferox brown trout. Much has been learned about this enigmatic fish by the group over that period, not to mention the fact that its members have also taken the British rod caught record to new heights. Now in its silver jubilee year, co-founder Ron Greer talks about a wide range of subjects relating to the group and Ferox fishing in the UK.

Podcast Interview 16: Ian Burret, SSACN: Recorded in 2010. As projects director of the conservation lobby group Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN), Ian Burrett talks about the groups history, achievements, and future aims.

Podcast Interview 17: Andy Bradbury, Fleetwood: Recorded in 2010. As the sole charter boat left operating out of the port of Fleetwood, 'Blue Mink' skipper Andy Bradbury talks about his transition from small boat angler to charter skipper, and the prospects for visiting anglers over the year.

Podcast Interview 18: Zyg Gregorek, Royal and Grand Slams: Recorded in 2010. Graeme Pullen discusses tackle and tactics for the Tarpon, Bonefish and Permit grand slam, then goes on to talk with Zyg Gregorek, the only man in history to achieve three different royal slams by catching every species of billfish, every species of tuna, and the IGFA's nominated list of nine different shark species.

Podcast Interview 19: John McAngus, Zander Introduction: Recorded in 2011. John McAngus is the last surviving member of the team responsible for the controversial introduction of Zander to the Fens

back in 1963. A time when fishery managers could do pretty much what they wanted. Here we get the full story of what he describes as 'that fateful day'.

Podcast Interview 20: Wayne Comben, Langstone: Recorded in 2010. Graeme Pullen joins Solent small boat specialist Wayne Comben for a days mixed fishing and boat talk out from Langstone Harbour aboard his 17-foot Wilson flier.

Podcast Interview 21: Neil French, Littlehampton: Recorded in 2010. Graeme Pullen interviews Littlehampton charter boat skipper Neil French about the prospects for visitors to the Sussex port, and for information on the techniques he uses to get the best out of what is available.

Podcast Interview 22: Mick Duff, River Mersey: Recorded in 2011. Over recent years, the River Mersey, both inside during the winter, and outside over the summer, has earned itself a well deserved reputation for being one of the most consistent sheltered boat fishing venues in the country. Here Wirral small boat club member Mick Duff gives us a guided tour.

Podcast Interview 23: Mick Duff, Peeler Crabs: Recorded in 2011. Arguably, the top bait on the sea angling scene is peeler crab. Unfortunately, it has something of a mystique surrounding it, particularly in terms of long term keeping and having it ready to order. Here small boat expert Mick Duff spells out the whole process of trapping, holding and bringing peeler crabs on.

Podcast Interview 24: John Rawle, Uptide Fishing: Recorded in 2011. As the co-inventor of uptide fishing along with Bob Cox back in the 1970's in and around the Thames Estuary, Essex charter skipper John Rawle explains the history of this highly successful shallow water boat fishing technique, and how to get the best out of it in terms of tackle, terminal rigs, and approach.

Podcast Interview 25: John Rawle, Islamorada: Recorded in 2011. Essex charter boat skipper and co-inventor of the technique of uptide fishing, John Rawle takes a detailed look at both strands of his charter fishing life here at Bradwell in the UK, and Florida the USA, comparing and contrasting his US experiences in terms of fish catching and conservation to our side of the Atlantic.

Podcast Interview 26: Frank Shaw, Newhaven: Recorded in 2010. Graeme Pullen interviews Newhaven charter skipper Frank Shaw on a range of local topics.

Podcast Interview 27: Mick Riley & Phil Denham: Recorded in 2009. Mick Riley, sole survivor of a dinghy angling tragedy off Lancashire's Fylde Coast talks about the events leading up that day, the feeling of isolation and desperation of the situation, and of his ultimate rescue. Given a hard time later in the press, unjustifiably as it would turn out, here he puts the record straight and tries to persuade other small boat anglers to be more safety conscious. His RNLI rescuer Phil Denham also tells the story from his perspective.

Podcast Interview 28: Dick Farrer, Side Winder Trawlers: Recorded in 2011. Veteran Fleetwood trawler skipper Dick Farrer talks about his days on the old side winder trawlers running up to Iceland, both before and during the cod Wars.

Podcast Interview 29: Mike Roden, Game Angling Guide: Recorded in 2011. Full time fly fishing guide and instructor Mike Roden talks about fly fishing and guiding in the north west.

Podcast Interview 30: Chris Roberts, Salcombe: Recorded in 2010. Salcombe charter boat skipper Chris Roberts talks to Graeme Pullen about the inshore, offshore, and estuary prospects from the port.

Podcast Interview 31: Frank Vinnicombe, The Mako Man: Recorded in 2011. In the 1970's and early 80's, Frank Vinnicombe reputedly caught more Mako sharks for his clients than every other boat and angler put together, earning himself the nick name 'the Mako man'.

Podcast Interview 32: Martin Bray, Looe Blue Sharks: Recorded in 2011. Martin Bray, as did his father Jack before him, operates the tackle shop and one time boat booking office on the quay at Looe in Cornwall which was the hub of shark fishing in Britain, adjacent to the headquarters of the Shark Angling Club of Great Britain. Then gradually, things slipped into terminal decline.

Podcast Interview 33: Zyg Gregorek, Anglers Paradise: Recorded in 2011. Zyg Gregorek owns the luxury multi-lake and accommodation complex known as Anglers Paradise at Halwill in Devon. Here he talks about the initial concept through to its completion and its prospects for the future.

Podcast Interview 34: George Wilson, Highfield Lakes Fishery: Recorded in 2011. George Wilson is the manager of the widely acclaimed Highfield Fishery at Hambleton on Lancashire's Fylde Coast. Here he talks about the construction and management of the fishery.

Podcast Interview 35: Dave Builth & Rodney Burge, Amble: Recorded in 2011. Dave Builth skippers the charter boat 'Upholder' out from Amble, while Rodney Burge was her previous owner. Both are members of the Amble lifeboat crew, and in their different ways, both know much regarding the history of sea angling along this part of the Northumbrian coast.

Podcast Interview 36: Andy Owen, Port Dinorwic: Recorded in 2010. Andy Owen operates the angling catamaran 'Morgan James II' out of Port Dinorwic on the Menai Strait where he has two contrasting options to offer his clients. The first of these is deep water wreck fishing out in The St. Georges Channel, the other being inshore reef, bank and open ground fishing for a vast array of popular species including Bream, Bass and Tope.

Podcast Interview 37: Dave Christy, Bait Digger: Recorded in 2011. As a bait digger for many years, Fleetwood based Dave Christy has a vast reservoir of knowledge on the distribution, gathering and keeping of marine worms for angling bait which he shares with us in great detail here.

Podcast Interview 38: Nathan Lumb, Pole fishing: Recorded in 2011. Pole fishing is a very quick and precise approach to catching fish in a freshwater match situation. Here, still water pole match fishing expert Nathan Lumb takes us on a step by step journey through the technique.

Podcast Interview 39: Tammy Fisher, Female Charter Deck Hand: Recorded in 2011. Female sea anglers are quite a rarity, even in today's enlightened times. Women crewing or skippering offshore charter boats in the UK are almost unheard of, making Tammy Fisher, who works aboard 'Katie Louise' fishing for Tope and Cod along the Norfolk and Suffolk coastlines respectively, something of a different find. A short but interesting insight into the work and plans of this 21 year old lady sea angler.

Podcast Interview 40: Dave Taylor, Aberystwyth: Recorded in 2011. Aberystwyth has long been a favourite sea angling destination, particularly back in the 1970's and 80's when porbeagle sharks were present in good numbers. As with the rays, shark numbers unfortunately have gone into decline. But there have been winners too, particularly the Black Bream. And throughout that time, Dave Taylor who skippers 'Aldebaran' has been taking parties out looking for them all.

Podcast Interview 41: Dr. Ed Farrell, Smoothhounds: Recorded in 2011. Dr. Ed Farrell discusses his research work showing conclusively that despite claims to the contrary by anglers and fish recorders, only one Smoothhound species, the Starry variety, is found in northern European waters.

Podcast Interview 42: Rod Taylor, Coarse Fish Farming: Recorded in 2011. Coarse fish farming as a science was introduced to the UK in the wake of the Toxteth riots in the 1980's for river restocking, particularly around the Mersey Basin, wherever and whenever water quality would allow. At the forefront of perfecting these techniques was Rod Taylor, who explains both flow through as well as recirculation fish breeding and keeping.

Podcast Interview 43: Phill Williams & Brian Douglas, Fylde Cod: Recorded in 2011. As dinghy anglers who were present and participated in the famous Flyde coast jumbo Cod fishing era between the mid 1970's and mid 1980's, Brian Douglas and Phill Williams take a realistic as well as a nostalgic look at this probably never to be repeated event.

Podcast Interview 44: Phill Williams & Brian Douglas, Fenit: Recorded in 2011. A story of an exploratory dinghy trip by Brian Douglas and Phill Williams to Tralee Bay in Co. Kerry Ireland which produced a wide variety of ray species including the rare Bottle Nosed Ray with specimens of 140 pounds.

Podcast Interview 45: Mick Duff, Dinghy Six Gilled Sharks: Recorded in 2011. Surprising a lot of people, a six gilled shark in excess of 1000 pounds, the first ever grand plus fish from around the British Isles, was caught off the Irish port of Kilkee in 2009. But years before that, dinghy angler Mick Duff had already found their whereabouts.

Podcast Interview 46: Jeff Carroll & Bill Gibson, Char Trolling: Recorded in 2011. Plumb line trolling a string of lures over deep water for char on Coniston in the Lake District is a tradition that goes back many generations. Here modern day practitioners Jeff Carroll and Bill Gibson explain the process and talk about the life history of the Char.

Podcast Interview 47: Ian Heaps, Ex World Coarse Angling Champion: Recorded in 2011. World and European coarse match angling champion Ian Heaps talks about his glittering career, his angling techniques, and his school of angling at Holgan Farm in West Wales.

Podcast Interview 48: Eric Hope, Lakeland Guide: Recorded in 2011. Cumbrian angling guide Eric Hope from Hemmingway's at Keswick talks about his guiding throughout the Lake District, and the fishing he offers for Pike, Perch, Salmon and wild trout, including some huge Ferox trout.

Podcast Interview 49: Dave Lewis, Namibian Shore Sharks: Recorded in 2011. Dave Lewis and Phill Williams look back at what was arguably the most productive shore angling trip ever made which produced in excess of 15,000 pounds of fish to almost 300 pounds from the steep surf beaches of Namibia's skeleton coast.

Podcast Interview 50: Jamie Soons, Kayak Fishing: Recorded in 2011. Kayak fishing at sea is one of the fastest branches of fishing in the UK. Here kayak regular Jamie Soons talks the subject through thoroughly from buying and kitting out to monster Common Skate.

Podcast Interview 51: Dave Lewis, Guided Sea Angling Trips: Recorded in 2011. Over recent years, fully inclusive organised angling adventures to all corners of the World have become an integral part of the modern sea fishing scene. One such a guide is sea angling journalist Dave Lewis who talks here about the scope, potential, and strong points of the trips he accompanies offered by Anglers World Holidays.

Podcast Interview 52: Mick White & Jack Shine: Recorded in 2011. Jack Shine is an Irish shore fishing legend. Sadly, he died in 1997, but his legacy of over forty Porbeagle Sharks caught from the shore has never been repeated, not even with one fish, and possibly never will be. Towards the end of Jack's life, Mick White spent quite a bit of time in his company documenting his achievements which he details and shares with us here.

Podcast Interview 53: Bob Fitchie & Phill Williams, Salmonid Slam: Recorded in 2012. Back in the 1970's, Phill Williams and Bob Fitchie set out to catch a Salmon, Sea Trout, Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout, Brook Trout, Grayling, Schelly, and Char each all in the same season as a salmonid grand slam. Bob Fitchie actually completed it becoming arguably the first person ever to do so.

Podcast Interview 54: Andrew Alsop, Welsh Sharks: Recorded in 2011. Both Milford Haven charter boat skipper Andrew Alsop and the port itself are fast making their names on the shark fishing scene.

Already the British Blue Shark record has been beaten and released as one of a number of fish topping two hundred pounds, with hundred pounders a regular occurrence, and fifty sharks taken in a single day.

Podcast Interview 55: Dave Beecham, Canaries Carp: Recorded in 2011. Because the Canary Islands have no natural lakes nor indigenous freshwater fish species, local farmers rely on dammed reservoirs for crop irrigation purposes to which they have introduced carp to prevent weed growth. In the high temperatures there, these fish have thrived and grown big. Ex-pat UK carp angler Dave Beecham guides visiting anglers on all inclusive trips to these lakes where fish in excess of thirty pounds are regularly caught.

Podcast Interview 56: Ronnie Campbell, Loch Etive: Recorded in 2011. Much of the development of the common skate fishing in the Firth of Lorne, and of the spurdog fishery in Loch Etive is down to local charter boat skipper Ronnie Campbell, who discusses the fishery, its problems, and his regrets at the way the Loch Etive side of things are going, citing his own responsibility in the way things have turned out.

Podcast Interview 57: Steve Ball, Fylde Coast Shore Fishing: Recorded in 2012. Fylde Boat Angling Club shore section member and local shore match angler Steve Ball takes us on a tour of the Fylde coast, suggesting features, marks and tactics along the way.

Podcast Interview 58: Mick McCallum, England Shore Fishing International: Recorded in 2012. Blackpool shore match angler Mick McCallum charts his progression through the ranks to representing England and winning a gold medal at the home internationals, then on to the World championships, before becoming totally disillusioned with the squad, its south coast bias, and its politics. A no holds barred discussion of the entire topic, plus a wealth of tackle and tactical information used to get him to the top.

Podcast Interview 59: Dougal Lane, Guernsey: Recorded in 2012. The Channel Islands have long been an extended trip stopover for south coast charter boats. Here local commercial skipper/charter boat skipper Dougal Lane looks in detail at the wreck, reef and bank fishing within easy reach of his base on the island of Guernsey. He also gives an insight into finding and positioning over wrecks, plus details of a dramatic rescue.

Podcast Interview 60: Steve Quinn, England International Boat Squad: Recorded in 2012. Ex-England International boat angler Steve Quinn looks at the whole boat match angling scene, as well as providing a wealth of top quality tackle and tactical tips which he used to get into, maintain his squad place within, and ultimately win medals with, including gold, as well as becoming European cod champion.

Podcast Interview 61: Clive Gammon, Reflections: Recorded in 2011. Out of all the sea angling greats who helped shape today's sea angling scene by helping its transition from the old ways of the 1950's and 60's to those of the 21st century, Clive Gammon is the one held in the highest esteem by the vast majority of people.

Podcast Interview 62: North West Boat Club History: Recorded in 2012. Much of what we commonly see in small boat fishing clubs today has its origins in pioneering work done by a handful of Lancashire small boat anglers more than forty years ago. Here we explore the history of the Fylde, Wyre, and Blackpool boat angling clubs, with founder members from each.

Podcast Interview 63: Stuart Cresswell & Willie Kennedy, Tagathons: Recorded in 2011. As a response to the Scottish government demanding hard data demonstrating the need for marine conservation, the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN) organised a Spurdog tagathon on Loch's Sunart and Etive. So popular was this, and so revealing in terms of factual data that it has now become an annual event along with others at Luce Bay for tope, and Crinan for common skate added to the diary. Here event organisers Stuart Cresswell and Willie Kennedy discuss both the concept and the events.

Podcast Interview 64: Steve Quinn, Coarse Fishing Legends: Recorded in 2012. Ex-England International boat angler Steve Quinn actually started his angling career as a coarse match fisherman competing, and doing very well, against some of the all time greats such as the Ashursts, Ian Heaps and Ivan Marks. Here he gives his recollections of what these legends were actually like as people as well as anglers.

Podcast Interview 65: Alan Sharpe, Boat traces: Recorded in 2011. Ex-England international boat squad member Alan Sharpe discusses his trace design and manufacturing business. Terminal tackle items are also discussed at length, along with his time in the England squad.

Podcast Interview 66: Morris Clarkson, Spintec Salmon Lures: Recorded in 2012. Morris Clarkson of the Ribchester based workshop Spintec has been hand making bespoke salmon lures since the 1950s, including the flying C, devon minnow, and blair spoon. Quality not quantity is the company motto. He also regularly fishes with these lures on the River Ribble for Salmon from where he has taken in excess of two hundred fish. Both aspects are discussed here in detail, along with a history of lure making in the UK.

Podcast Interview 67: Les Hall, Cod Wars: Recorded in 2012. The last of the three Cod wars between Britain and Iceland left the UK fishing fleet banned from within Iceland's two hundred mile unilaterally declared territorial limit, and our home ports such as Fleetwood doomed to terminal decline. But before the retreat, there were many skirmishes and incidents, some of which were never reported. Here Fleetwood trawler chief engineer Les Hall recounts some of them.

Podcast Interview 68: Stuart McCoy, Barrow-in-Furness: Recorded in 2011. Renewable energy such as that from offshore wind farms is supposedly green energy, yet here we have the story of Barrow-in-Furness charter boat skipper Stuart McCoy being prevented from picking up customers by energy company DONG, and of problems caused by electromagnetic fields from their power cables affecting fish, in particular Tope.

Podcast Interview 69: George Hemsworth, Fresh v Frozen Bait: Recorded in 2012. Throughout the famed Fylde coast jumbo Cod era, besides going out in his own small boat rod fishing, Blackpool angler George Hemsworth also set lines on the beach on the winter night tides, taking Cod far bigger than anything ever taken on rod and line, and always on fresh bait, to the point that he wouldn't even try if only frozen bait was on offer.

Podcast Interview 70: Dave Roper, World Coarse Fishing Champion: Recorded in 2012. Against the odds, using maggots under a waggler from a conventional rod and reel outfit, Preston pole and bloodworm expert Dave Roper beat the Italians into second place on their own patch fishing the River Arno in Italy to be crowned 1985 World individual coarse fishing champion.

Podcast Interview 71: Dr. Dave Shultz, Weather Forecasting: Recorded in 2012. Understanding and interpreting weather forecasts, while it may well be a science, and an inaccurate science at that, is crucial to all who put to sea in boats, including anglers. Here Dr. Dave Schultz explains in layman's terms how to get the best out of the weather information available.

Podcast Interview 72: JJ McVicar, Plymouth Wrecks: Recorded in 2012. Though not the man who sparked off angler interest in wreck fishing back in the 1970's, Plymouth skipper of the 'June Lipet' JJ McVicar is most certainly the best remembered name from that period, and rightly so, for his exploits with massive catches of record breaking Pollack, Coalfish and Angler Fish

Podcast Interview 73: Justin Anwyl, Bass Fly Fishing Part 1: Recorded in 2012. Though popular in the USA, saltwater fly fishing is still in its infancy in the UK. Here, in a 2 part interview, Chichester bass fly fishing guide Justin Anwyl gives a very detailed and all inclusive insight into the subject from the British perspective.

Podcast Interview 74: Justin Anwyl Bass Fly Fishing Part 2: Recorded in 2012. Though popular in the USA, saltwater fly fishing is still in its infancy in the UK. Here, in a 2 part interview, Chichester bass fly fishing guide Justin Anwyl gives a very detailed and all inclusive insight into the subject from the British perspective.

Podcast Interview 75: Simon Clarke, Wels Catfish: Recorded in 2012. Despite being an alien species, unlike Zander, Wels Catfish have been welcomed by coarse specimen hunters, tempered by the fact that they have not exploded throughout the UK in the same way that the Zander did. Catfish Conservation Group secretary Simon Clarke explores their history, habitat, and feeding requirements, and most important of all, how to catch them successfully on rod and line both in the UK and on the continent.

Podcast Interview 76: Roger Beer, Conger: Recorded in 2012. To catch a Conger in excess of fifty pounds from the shore is incredible. To catch a Conger in excess of one hundred pounds from the boat is equally so. To actually catch both would be amazing. Here Devon angler Roger Beer, the only angler ever to have achieved this feat, talks about all things Conger, particularly catching them from the shore.

Podcast Interview 77: Peter Arlott, Kennet River keeper: Recorded in 2012. The Aldermaston Mill day ticket stretch of the River Kennet has been in the Arlott family for many years. Here river keeper Peter Arlott talks about the many problems the Kennet and other rivers in the vicinity currently face from water shortages, predation, and alien species. He also discusses fishing for quality Barbel.

Podcast Interview 78: Ian Gaskell, Fly Fishing Competitions: Recorded in 2012. Ian Gaskell, winner of the Lexus European fly fishing championship at Chew Valley gives a no holds barred detailed explanation of all aspects of competitive fly fishing using the loch style approach from a drifting boat.

Podcast Interview 79: Chris Ball, Surface Carp Fishing: Recorded in 2012. Carp historian and legendary surface feeding carp stalker Chris Ball discusses his favourite subject covering everything from tackle and tactics through to baits and feeding.

Podcast Interview 80: Kathy Barco, Florida Fisheries Commission: Recorded in 2012. Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission chairman Kathy Barco explains how state funded organisation has restored its coastal fish stocks from a very low ebb some years ago to a level which now supports a multi-billion-dollar sport fishery, allowing it to justifiably call itself the sport fishing capital of the World.

Podcast Interview 81: Wayne Comben, Rays: Recorded in 2012. Langstone small boat angler Wayne Comben talks about the tackle and tactics required to catch his favourite fish, rays, five species of which he has caught on several occasions all in the same day.

Podcast Interview 82: Prof. Gerd Masselink, Coastal Engineering: Recorded in 2012. Quite often, shorelines and their fish holding features, plus water's edge conditions for small boat launching are the result of work done by coastal engineers. Sometimes these can be beneficial, while on other occasions less so. Here Professor Gerd Masselink discusses specific engineering features and their potential effects on sea angling, using examples from Blackpool and Morecambe as specific case studies.

Podcast Interview 83: Margaret Owen, Haaf Netter: Recorded in 2012. As always, there are two sides to every debate, and so far as Salmon and Sea Trout are concerned, anglers think that commercial netmen are responsible for taking far too many fish. Here Salmon Haaf netter Margaret Owen talks about the sustainability of her fishing in the estuary of the River Lune.

Podcast Interview 84: Martin James, Life Story Part 1: Recorded in 2012. While angling journalist and broadcaster Martin James may well have originated in Kent, as the voice behind BBC Radio Lancashire's At the Waters Edge, he is well known to many throughout the North West for his probing interviews. Here, in a reversal of roles, he is on the receiving end of the questions, looking back over his long and varied angling career.

Podcast Interview 85: Martin James, Life Story Part 2: Recorded in 2012. While angling journalist and broadcaster Martin James may well have originated in Kent, as the voice behind BBC Radio Lancashire's *At the Water's Edge*, he is well known to many throughout the North West for his probing interviews. Here, in a reversal of roles, he is on the receiving end of the questions, looking back over his long and varied angling career.

Podcast Interview 86: Mike Millman, *Legendary Journalist Part 1*: Recorded in 2012. Think of the West Country and big fish from those parts, and to some extent, veteran sea angler Mike Millman will have been involved. An angling journalist for over forty years and now into his 80's, Mike looks back on the many highlights from what can only be described as the golden era of sea angling.

Podcast Interview 87: Mike Millman, *Legendary Journalist Part 2*: Recorded in 2012. Think of the West Country and big fish from those parts, and to some extent, veteran sea angler Mike Millman will have been involved. An angling journalist for over forty years and now into his 80's, Mike looks back on the many highlights from what can only be described as the golden era of sea angling.

Podcast Interview 88: Chris Ball, *Reflections*: Recorded in 2012. Carp historian and legendary surface feeding carp stalker Chris Ball discusses his early formative years and his advancement through both the weight ranks and fishery ranks up to the present time.

Podcast Interview 89: Chris Ball, *History of Carp*: Recorded in 2012. Carp historian and legendary surface feeding carp stalker Chris Ball discusses the history of the species introduction to Britain, charting its advance in both size and prowess through to Richard Walkers forty four pound Redmire record Clarissa.

Podcast Interview 90: Graeme Pullen, *North Cornish Porbeagles*: Recorded in 2012. Graeme Pullen lifts the lid on North Cornwall's inshore Porbeagle Sharks, then as an addendum, describes the day he and Wayne Comben caught and filmed the largest shark ever caught in British waters in May 2012.

Podcast Interview 91: Wayne Comben, *Plaice*: Recorded in 2012. Plaice are one of those species which all anglers love to catch. They are also a species which commercial fishermen prize, on top of which, when you do find them, they can be there in big numbers and are therefore vulnerable. Here Wayne Comben tells how best to approach all aspects of their catching, with a few cautionary examples of how best to ensure that they will continue to be there year on year.

Podcast Interview 92: Tony Bridge, *Gantocks Cod*: Recorded in 2012. Back in the late 1960's to mid-70's, the place to be for monster Cod from a small boat was Scotland's inner Clyde, and in particular, a mark known as the Gantocks, immortalised by three Edinburgh anglers known as 'The Trio'. Then almost overnight it was cleaned out never to be re-seeded. Fishing at that time with 'The Trio' was Tony Bridge, who gives us an insight into the fishing over the Gantocks mark, and also offers up some reasons for its rapid decline.

Podcast Interview 93: Bill Briggs, *White Water Worming for Salmon*: Recorded in 2012. While it isn't held in the highest esteem amongst purist Salmon anglers, upstream white water worming is not only a very skilful way of catching Salmon in low water conditions, but if done properly, as Bill Briggs explains in minute detail here, can sometimes be the only way to fish on all rivers some of the time, and on some rivers pretty much all of the time.

Podcast Interview 94: Graeme Pullen, *Carp fallacies*: Recorded in 2012. New comers to carp fishing could be forgiven for thinking that electronic alarms, boilies and bivvies are the key requirements for success. Well it would appear not. Here Graeme Pullen explores an alternative approach to carp which not only catches lots of fish, but often does so when the boilie brigade don't see enough action to get them out of their bed chairs.

Podcast Interview 95: Sven Hille, Baltic Trolling: Recorded in 2012. Due to its brackish nature, the Baltic Sea increases in salinity with depth, and decreases in salinity the further north and east you go. As a result, anglers are able to catch Salmon, Sea Trout, Cod, Pike and Garfish from the same spot, on the same gear, and in the same day. Obviously, these fish also have preferences. Here German angler Sven Hille lays the whole situation on the line.

Podcast Interview 96: Phill Williams BBC radio Lancashire: Recorded in 2012. Interview by Martin James for his BBC Radio Lancashire angling series *At the Water's Edge*.

Podcast Interview 97: Pete Shaw, Exposed Coast Kayak Fishing: Recorded in 2012. Kayak instructor and angler Pete Shaw gives a detailed insight into kitting out, handling, and fishing from a beach launched kayak along an exposed west facing piece of coastline.

Podcast Interview 98: John Horsey, Pike on The Fly: Recorded in 2012. Fly fishing for novel species is angling's big growth area currently, and for the most part in freshwater, that means Pike. In particular, Chew Valley Lake in Somerset is the place to go, preferably with six times World fly fishing champion John Horsey who operates there as a full time guide. Here, for those preferring to do it on their own, John spells out the do's and don'ts that should lead to success.

Podcast Interview 99: James Pinder, Salmon Perceptions: Recorded in 2012. Salmon fishing is seen by many as elitist, expensive, even snobbish, and there are many reasons why this might be so. But is it really any or all of those things. Here Salmon purist James Pinder explores a wide range of perceptions and misconceptions while also delving into the politics of it all to challenge those views.

Podcast Interview 100: Sandy Armishaw, Angling Heritage: Recorded in 2012. Angling Heritage is a bespoke angling history repository with full charitable status, the patrons of which are Fred Buller and Chris Yates. Here its founder Sandy Armishaw explains fully what the organisations remit is, and how anyone and everyone can become involved.

Podcast Interview 101: Mel Russ, Sea Angler Magazine Editor: Recorded in 2012. Sea Angler magazine editor Mel Russ talks through the history of Britain's most successful ever sea angling magazine, from its birth in 1972 to present, and from its early black and white days to going electronic and interactive in 2012.

Podcast Interview 102: John Horsey, International Fly Fishing: Recorded in 2012. John Horsey, England's most successful international fly fisherman ever with six World championship gold medals to his credit, discusses the whole concept of international fly fishing competitions.

Podcast Interview 103: Alan Yates, SAMF: Recorded in 2012. Arguably, one of the most influential England shore anglers of his day and without equal on the open match circuit, Folkestone angler and Sea Angler contributor Alan Yates talks about his match angling career, and how he would ultimately become a founding member of the Sea Anglers Match Federation or SAMF.

Podcast Interview 104: Sid Pender, Mounts Bay: Recorded in 2012. Mounts Bay Sea Angling society is one of the oldest sea angling clubs in the country, and here its elder statesman Sid Pender, who has held most positions of office within the club, takes a detailed look at the organisation, fishing generally in the Penzance area, and how the future of Cornish sea angling looks.

Podcast Interview 105: Mike Weaver MBE, Wild Trout Trust: Recorded in 2012. As a founding member and former chairman of the Wild Trout Trust, Mike Weaver talks us through the formation of the organisation, its aims and its successes, plus reflects back on his trout fishing career with some insight into his thinking, tackle and tactics.

Podcast Interview 106: Charles Inniss, Fishing Inns: Recorded in 2012. Angling Inns were once a common feature in parts of the UK with none more famous than the Half Moon at Sheepwash in Devon run

by Charles Inniss. A lifelong Salmon and Sea Trout angler, Charles Inniss also ran ten miles of the River Torridge, was secretary of the Torridge Angling Association, and knows much regarding the angling history of this classic game fishing river.

Podcast Interview 107: Harry Whiteside, Salmon Netter: Recorded in 2012. Anglers and commercial fishermen will always be on opposite sides of the fence. But to understand any potential threat, anglers need to appreciate the commercial side of things too. This is particularly true of Salmon netting. Here Ribble Salmon netter Harry Whiteside talks the subject through.

Podcast Interview 108: John Holden, Distance Casting: Recorded in 2013. Far and away the most influential shore angler/distance caster of the past forty years has to be Essex based John Holden. A former distance record holder, casting instructor, and current stalwart at Sea Angler Magazine, here is a man who knows everything there is to know on this particular topic, and is willing to share that experience with us all.

Podcast Interview 109: Robin Vinnicombe, Falmouth Mako's: Recorded in 2012. From his first mako encounter in the late 1950's up to the last ever British Mako Shark catch in 1971 which was aboard his Falmouth based boat 'Huntress', Robin Vinnicombe accounted for one in three of all Mako Sharks ever landed from UK waters. Now well into his 70's and wheelchair bound following a stroke, here he guides us through a detailed look at how he achieved what he did with this most enigmatic and highly prized angling shark species.

Podcast Interview 110: Dr. Stephen Atkins, IFCA: Recorded in 2013. In 2011, Sea Fishery Committee's, which were responsible for policing inshore fishing activities, were replaced by Inshore Fishery and Conservation Authorities with seats on those authorities being given to various stakeholder groups including angling. Here North West IFCA Chief Executive Officer Dr. Stephen Atkins explains the working of an IFCA, plus explores measures which could be employed to help boost Bass numbers both regionally and nationally.

Podcast Interview 111: Ken Robinson, Scottish Shore Cod: Recorded in 2013. It's not that long ago that fish which would make the angling press these days, even from a boat, were regularly being caught from the shore in Scotland. Absolute monster Cod in particular. Then suddenly, they were gone. Here Scottish Cod record holder Ken Robinson reflects on the fishing back then at Balcarry, what happened to it, and recounts the day of his record catch.

Podcast Interview 112: David Turner, The Last Mako: Recorded in 2013. As the captor of the last Mako Shark in UK waters back in 1971, and having thoroughly researched the species for his new book The Shark Hunter, David Turner tells us all we need to know on the subject of Mako Shark fishing.

Podcast Interview 113: Mike Winrow, River Ribble Barbel: Recorded in 2013. The River Ribble in Lancashire was illegally stocked with Barbel during the 1970's. By the turn of the century, it was producing some of the biggest specimens in the country. Lancashire Barbel fanatic Mike Winrow explains.

Podcast Interview 114: Dr. Ruth Thurstan, Commercial Fishing Pressure: Recorded in 2013. As anglers, we've all seen change, particularly in the numbers and sizes of our more popular fish species. But this has been going on since the 14th century. Here, Dr. Ruth Thurstan looks at historical catch data and relates this to what we are seeing in terms of fish numbers today, projecting it on to what we can also expect in the future.

Podcast Interview 115: Phill Williams, The Target: Recorded in 2013. Back in the 1980's, Phill Williams set himself a target of 100 UK fish species, 300 Worldwide fish species, a double figure wild trout, a 100-pound fish in freshwater, a 200-pound fish from a trailed boat, a 200-pound fish from the shore, and a 1000-pound fish from anywhere. In addition, there was to be a British, a European and a World record fish, plus a fisheries based Ph.D. This is the story of that quest.

Podcast Interview 116: John Wilkinson, River Lostock: Recorded in 2013. Back in the 1960's, the River Lostock in Lancashire was devoid of fish. Now in 2013 it's full of the things ranging from coarse species to Brown Trout. There's even talk of Salmon. Here John Wilkinson talks about the fish and the fishing, while Phill Williams explains how they came to be there in the first place.

Podcast Interview 117: Mike Winrow, Specimen Perch: Recorded in 2013. Perch were once a prolific fish. Then in the 1960's, shallow ulcer disease all but wiped the species out in the UK. Now nearly fifty years on, from those few resistant survivors, the Perch is back. But in the process, the balance of power in terms of which fisheries have the ability to produce specimen sized Perch has changed radically. Here Mike Winrow explains.

Podcast Interview 118: Ken Robinson, Shore Big Game Fishing: Recorded in 2013. Fishing abroad for hard fighting warm water game fish species can be a costly business if you fish from a boat or with a guide. Here shore angler Ken Robinson gives away a wealth of tips and locations for going it alone in Europe and America, with some quite spectacular results.

Podcast Interview 119: Mike Winrow, Gravel Pits: Recorded in 2013. For still water species of coarse fish, far and away the most productive venues in terms of individual growth, particularly for Bream and Tench, are gravel pits left to fill with water when extraction work is finished. Here coarse specimen hunter Mike Winrow explores their productivity and getting the best from them tactically, with particular emphasis on specimen Bream and Tench.

Podcast Interview 120: Dr. Dietrich Burkel, Scotland's First Porbeagle Shark: Recorded in 2013. Controversy has surrounded the catching of Scotland's first ever Porbeagle Shark by Dr. Dietrich Burkel off the Mull of Galloway back in 1971. Dietrich Burkel gives the definitive version of events which should now lay the issue finally to rest.

Podcast Interview 121: Dr. Dietrich Burkel, Scottish Skate Tagging Program: Recorded in 2013. The Common Skate tagging program that has done so much to bring the Scottish population back from near collapse is taken for granted these days. But back in the early 1970's when the species received no help or protection, even from anglers, it was a very different matter. Here Dr. Dietrich Burkel talks about how he helped set the program up, then reflects on its success over the intervening forty years with SSACN now firmly in control of the project.

Podcast Interview 122: Ken Robinson, North East Shore Fishing: Recorded in 2013. Ken Robinson is one of the best know shore match anglers on his native north east coast. An area of excellent fishing prospects. But equally, an area of extremes with regard to terrain and the tactics, and ability to extract the best from what's on offer. Here he discusses tackle, tactics, bait, venues and species, offering advice on how to be in with the best shot of a result.

Podcast Interview 123: Luke Aston, 1000 Pound Irish Sharks: Recorded in 2013. The largest verified fish caught around Britain and Ireland was a Six Gilled Shark of 1056 pounds taken in 2009 aboard Luke Astons boat 'Clare Dragon' based at Carrigaholt on Irelands River Shannon Estuary. That said, his clients have caught and released at least three bigger fish, plus other Six Gills in smaller weight categories. Here Luke Aston talks about his encounters with these enormous fish.

Podcast Interview 124: Michael McVeigh, Irish Blue Fin Tuna: Recorded in 2013. Though they had probably been there for many hundreds of years, back in 2000, it was suddenly realised that huge Blue Fin Tuna were running up the west coast of Ireland very close in to the shore, and that through a process of trial and error, they could in fact be caught on rod and line there. Adrian Molloy eventually took the record up to 968 pounds. The other key player in all of this was Downings charter skipper Michael McVeigh who charts the rise and fall of Tuna fishing for us here off the Donegal coast.

Podcast Interview 125: Mike Roden, Tenkara Fishing: Recorded in 2013. The ancient art of Tenkara fishing was developed in Japan for purely practical reasons, and again for practical reasons, it has recently been introduced to the UK where it is used to exploit running water wild trout and Grayling situations in a way that conventional fly fishing cannot hope to match. Here Tenkara Centre UK director and game fishing instructor Mike Roden explains.

Podcast Interview 126: Keith Philbin, Fleetwood Charter Boat History: Recorded in 2013. Fleetwood rose to prominence as the North West's premier charter angling port during the 1970's, a position it held until the mid-1980's, when through the recession years of the Thatcher government, and costly fundamental changes to licensing rules, it suddenly nosedived into decline to the point where there were no boats at all. That number has now risen to two. Here Keith Philbin who operated two of the boats in Fleetwood's heyday talks about the rise and fall of the port's fortunes.

Podcast Interview 127: Gerry Foote, Gerry's of Morecambe: Recorded in 2013. If you want to know anything worth knowing about angling trends, or the recent evolution of fishing across each of its disciplines, the best person to ask is one of the big players in the retail fishing tackle trade, and in that regard, few are better placed than Gerry Foote, who for many years has owned and operated the tackle shop, mail order and Worldwide online tackle business Gerry's of Morecambe.

Podcast Interview 128: Andy Steel, England shore manager: Recorded in 2013. Ex-England shore fishing team member, selector, and manager, plus current SAMF secretary, Andy Steele talks over a range of topics regarding international shore fishing qualification, selection and duties.

Podcast Interview 129: Brian Crawford, Freshwater Eels: Recorded in 2013. As well as being a big Eel angler and author of two books on the subject of Eels and Eel fishing, Brian Crawford has also held a number of posts within both the National Anguilla Club and the European Eel Angling Association, and is therefore very well placed to talk on all topics related to the subject.

Podcast Interview 130: Dr. Paul Gaskell, Trout in The Town: Recorded in 2013. Why should urban and city centre streams and rivers be effluent channels or rubbish dumps, and why should potential fish habitat be deprived of that main ingredient in the recipe, the fish themselves? Here Dr. Paul Gaskell looks at an initiative he manages, aimed at bringing fish back to city centre locations through the Trout in The Town Project

Podcast Interview 131: James Thorburn, Tope and Spurdog Study Project: Recorded in 2013. After working as projects officer for the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network gathering in and processing tag recapture data from Luce Bay, Loch Etive and the Firth of Lorne, James Thorburn was offered the chance of turning the project into a full Ph.D. Here he talks about the project and its preliminary findings at the end of a day tagging out in Luce Bay.

Podcast Interview 132: Alex Wilkie, Everything on Fly: Recorded in 2013. If it can possibly be caught on the fly, Alex Wilkie will try for it, both in freshwater and at sea. Even fish which many think are impossible on the technique, Wilkie will still try for them and has had more than his fair share of success. Here he talks through those fly fishing ambitions and successes, with a full run down of the tackle and tactics required.

Podcast Interview 133: Tony Lofthouse, Fisherman's Friend: Recorded in 2013. Fisherman's Friend is a small medicinal lozenge produced in Fleetwood, originally to aid the fishing industry in the 1860's, but more recently as a remedy of global marketing importance in a wide range of flavours and strengths. Here MD Tony Lofthouse talks about the history of the company and its commercial fishing links.

Podcast Interview 134: Mike Heylin, BRFC Part 1: Recorded in 2013. Part 1 of a two part interview. As chairman of the British Record Fish Committee, Mike Heylin knows only too well the depth and

breadth of the job his committee faces to drag itself into the 21st century, a fact highlighted by an array of often awkward questions, all of which he takes here in his stride.

Podcast Interview 135: Mike Heylin, BRFC Part 2: Recorded in 2013. Part 2 of a two part interview. As chairman of the British Record Fish Committee, Mike Heylin knows only too well the depth and breadth of the job his committee faces to drag itself into the 21st century, a fact highlighted by an array of often awkward questions, all of which he takes here in his stride.

Podcast Interview 136: Dave Lumley, Hartlepool: Recorded in 2013. The charter angling boat 'Famous' has operated out from Hartlepool in a number of different guises and with different skippers at her helm. Currently a purpose built Blyth Cat, here her skipper Dave Lumley looks at the fishing in this corner of the North Sea, and reflects back to the boats earliest days in the hands of Tom Williams during the 1970's.

Podcast Interview 137: Andy Griffith, Shark Grand Slam: Recorded in 2013. It's been the best part of forty years since a Mako Shark has been caught in UK waters. Then Andy Griffith comes on the scene fishing with Andrew Alsop out from Milford Haven and takes a World first grand slam of a Blue Shark, Porbeagle, and Mako, all over one hundred pounds and in the same day.

Podcast Interview 138: Allan Everington, Pollack Fly IGFA: Recorded in 2013. Scotland's Mull of Galloway is a World class Pollack fishery where numbers of excellent fish come within range of fly fishing techniques from a small boat close in to shore. Here Allan Everington, who has bettered existing IGFA tippet records for the species on a number of occasions, talks through the tackle and the tactics required.

Podcast Interview 139: John Inman, Canals, Squats & Nationals: Recorded in 2013. Coarse match angling, and in particular club matches on canals seems to have lost its appeal over recent times. Here canal expert John Inman looks back over his very successful time match fishing in canals, and in particular with his key bait, the squat.

Podcast Interview 140: John Inman, Commercial Coarse Fisheries: Recorded in 2013. Small commercial coarse fisheries and smaller numbers of angler's match fishing have led to a real change in match fishing attitudes over recent times. Here Bolton match man John Inman assesses the value of these fisheries, and the best techniques to extract the biggest number and greatest variety of fish from them.

Podcast Interview 141: Wayne Comben, Threshers and Porbeagles: Recorded in 2013. In the course of just over a year, fishing from a trailed boat, Wayne Comben caught a record plus Porbeagle, a record plus Thresher, and along with Graeme Pullen, boated Blue Shark on the fly, and the largest small boat single session haul of Blue Sharks ever in the UK. Here Wayne relives those experiences.

Podcast Interview 142: Michael Salmon, Secretary BASS: Recorded in 2013. Currently in its 40th year, BASS, the Bass Angling Sportfishing Society is an organisation devoted to getting Bass the species firmly re-established in a sustainable way on the UK sea angling scene. Here the organisations secretary Michael Salmon explains.

Podcast Interview 143: Prof. Mark Everard, Roach: Recorded in 2013. With hundreds of two pound plus and many three pound plus Roach to his credit, Mark Everard is the country's foremost expert on the subject of Roach angling and all aspects concerning its biology. Mark is also the author of a number of books on the subject, and joins us here to talk over all aspects of his Roach fishing life.

Podcast Interview 144: Graeme Pullen, Blue Shark on Fly: Recorded in 2013. Two Blue Shark trips producing a fly caught specimen and the biggest ever trailed boat haul squeezed in between catching a monster Porbeagle and a monster Thresher Shark, again both dinghy caught, recalled by Graeme Pullen.

Podcast Interview 145: Roger Beer, Shore Rays: Recorded in 2013. Shore ray expert Roger Beer discusses his tactics and tackle for catching an assortment of big rays from a variety of Devon rock marks, catches that have included shore records for both the Small Eyed and Spotted Ray.

Podcast Interview 146: Dick Clegg OBE, MBE, England manager: Recorded in 2013. Without doubt, Dick Clegg has been not only the most successful national team manager in coarse fishing history, but also most successful manager in any sport engaged in by participants representing this country, resulting in an OBE and an MBE to add to his many trophies and gold medal wins, all of which, along with other aspects of his life, he discusses in candid detail here.

Podcast Interview 147: Richard Peirce, Shark Trust: Recorded in 2013. Shark Trust and Shark Conservation Society Chairman Richard Peirce discusses sharks in UK waters, looking at the role anglers both can and do play in the science behind the trust's work. Suggestions for better handling and conservation generally by anglers is also discussed.

Podcast Interview 148: Alan Scotthorne, the World's Top Coarse Angler: Recorded in 2013. With five World individual titles and numerous team titles, Alan Scotthorne is without equal the greatest coarse angler in the history of international match fishing.

Podcast Interview 149: Sandra Scotthorne, World Champion Female Coarse Angler: Recorded in 2013. Ladies in angling are quite a rare commodity. Ladies in coarse match angling well capable of taking on and beating their male counterparts are almost unheard of. Here five times World team gold medal winner and twice individual World champion Sandra Scotthorne takes an in depth look at the ladies international scene.

Podcast Interview 150: John Bamford, Friends of The River Yarrow: Recorded in 2013. While the group, Friends of the River Yarrow formed primarily to ensure the entire environment on and around the River Yarrow in Lancashire has been restored, there is no denying that fish have probably been the main beneficiaries. It has quite literally gone from running sewer to running Salmon, and stands out as an object lesson to others who may want to restore lost fisheries to their former glory.

Podcast Interview 151: Dave Trafford, Canal Match Fishing: Recorded in 2013. Back in the 1970's, Dave Trafford was a keen and successful coarse match angler who took a time out from angling, twenty five years in fact, before coming back onto the canal match angling scene, by which time so much had changed. Now able to compare and contrast the two era's which are a generation apart, here he takes a look at those changes, plus his current match situation.

Podcast Interview 152: Didier Dellanoy, French coarse angling World champion: Recorded in 2013. French 2013 World coarse fishing individual gold medal winner Didier Dellanoy offers his thoughts on his win, his behind the scenes preparation including practise here in the UK, and the current England set up during a stay with multiple World champions Alan and Sandra Scotthorne.

Podcast Interview 153: Paul Maris, Big Fish UK: Recorded in 2014. Paul Maris, who is one of the Essex Boys, talks here about his big saltwater fish exploits in the UK, including the biggest ever one man one day Common Skate haul which saw him constantly playing big fish for well over four hours.

Podcast Interview 154: Eddie Mounce, MD Fish Thailand: Recorded in 2014. Eddie Mounce set up Fish Thailand as a business while back packing after graduating from university with a degree in fisheries management. Here he talks about the wonderful fishing, the fisheries, and the future of targeting some of the biggest freshwater fish in the World.

Podcast Interview 155: Ally Gowans, Scottish Salmon: Recorded in 2014. Ally Gowans is arguably the most inventive and skilled angler on the current Salmon fishing scene. His fly the Ally Shrimp was voted by Salmon anglers as the fly of the millennium. Here he discusses this and some of his other

patterns, plus the fish weight calculator, conservation, fly fishing history, and of course Salmon fly fishing itself.

Podcast Interview 156: Paul Maris, Marlin World Championships: Recorded in 2014. Part two of a two part interview with Essex Boy Paul Maris. This episode looks at the Essex Boys big fish exploits abroad, and in particular the Marlin World cup and completing the billfish royal slam.

Podcast Interview 157: Leon Roskilly, Mullet: Recorded in 2014. To most sea anglers, Mullet are looked upon as either uncatchable or hardly worth the massive amount of effort required for precious little return. But with the right approach, that need not always be the case. Leon Roskilly explains.

Podcast Interview 158: Leon Roskilly, Angling politics: Recorded in 2014. Most anglers prefer to leave their hobby related politics to a small number of able volunteers who tirelessly work on our behalf. The least we could do then is support them. But to do this, we first need to understand the issues. Here Leon Roskilly explains IFCA's, MCZ's, and the Sea Angling 2012 survey.

Podcast Interview 159: Alex MacDonald, Redgill Lures: Recorded in 2014. The most iconic lure of the twentieth century has to be the Redgill. A small rubber eel devised by Alex Ingram of Mevagissey which revolutionised the World of wreck fishing. Now a part of the Sakuma portfolio and still catching lots of fish, particularly from the shore, here Sakuma MD Alex MacDonald looks at the lure and its history.

Podcast Interview 160: Tommy Flower, Carp: Recorded in 2014. Carp are the 'in' fish currently on the coarse fishing scene, and while it hasn't always been that way, Tommy Flower wasn't around in the pre-boilie commercial fishing era, so who better to ask for a different perspective on the subject.

Podcast Interview 161: Alex MacDonald, Gilthead Bream: Recorded in 2014. Gilthead Bream first appeared on the scene in the 1980's, initially as occasional migrants, but eventually establishing themselves as regular visitors to certain estuaries in the west country where a targeted fishery has sprung up tapping into their hard fighting capabilities. Here Alex MacDonald of Sakuma Tackle sings the praises of the species.

Podcast Interview 162: Tim Macpherson, Kingmere Bream: Recorded in 2014. Black Bream and their habitat along the iconic Kingmere Rocks in Sussex are currently under so much threat that a campaign group has been set up to try to reverse the trend before all is lost. Instrumental within that group is Tim Macpherson who joins us here to explain the problem, and how both it and the potential remedies could have profound knock on consequences for other ailing fisheries around the UK.

Podcast Interview 163: Jim Whippy, Boat Fishing Monthly Editor: Recorded in 2014. Arguably the most widely capped England boat fishing international ever, Jim Whippy talks about his sea fishing and his time at the helm of some of the country's best known sea angling magazines.

Podcast Interview 164: Alex MacDonald, Sakuma: Recorded in 2014. Alex MacDonald, MD of hook designers, manufacturers and importers Sakuma, talks about all aspects of hook design, choice and usage.

Podcast Interview 165: Sarah Collins, GhoF: Recorded in 2014. Get Hooked on Fishing CEO Sarah Collins discusses the aims and successes of a charitable project designed to promote fishing to younger people, and in particular those with social problems.

Podcast Interview 166: Danny Parkins, Nocturnal Pike: Recorded in 2014. When you talk about lure fishing for big Pike, probably the last thing you would expect to hear is a recommendation to do it after dark. Here Pike enthusiast Danny Parkins puts the case for nocturnal lure fishing.

Podcast Interview 167: Danny Parkins, LRF & HRF: Recorded in 2014. Light Rock Fishing (LRF) and Heavy Rock Fishing (HRF) are two lure based techniques which have really grabbed the shore fishing

scene over recent times. HRF in particular for big Ballan Wrasse, which regular practitioner Danny Parkins talks about in great detail here.

Podcast Interview 168: Dave Pakes, Commercial Bass on Rod and Line: Recorded in 2014. Commercial rod and line fishing for Bass is no different to recreational fishing up to the point of selling the fish, which if all the necessary paperwork is in place, is the most sustainable method of commercial fishing out there. One other key difference is that the commercials also catch more fish, something we anglers could perhaps learn of a few lessons from.

Podcast Interview 169: Chris Ogborne, Bass Fly Fishing Guide: Recorded in 2014. Chris Ogborne is one of those rare people to make the grade as multiple World champion fly fisherman, then switch codes to take up guiding fly fishermen at sea. In particular for Bass, though the game fishing side of things for pleasure hasn't been entirely dropped.

Podcast Interview 170: Brian Harris, Angling Magazine & Creel Part 1: Recorded in 2014. Ask anglers of a certain age which was the best fishing magazine ever published and most will say Creel, which later evolved into Angling edited by Brian Harris, a man who along with most of the contributors he recruited, is held in equally high esteem. Here Brian joins us for a two part interview about all things connected with his angling life.

Podcast Interview 171: Brian Harris, Angling Magazine & Creel Part 2: Recorded in 2014. Ask anglers of a certain age which was the best fishing magazine ever published and most will say Creel, which later evolved into Angling edited by Brian Harris, a man who along with most the of contributors he recruited, is held in equally high esteem. Here Brian joins us for a two part interview about all things connected with his angling life.

Podcast Interview 172: Carl McCormack, Coarse Angling Coach: Recorded in 2014. Once seen as something you might consider on say a foreign holiday, these days, more than ever before, the services of coarse angling coaches are being sought by youngsters, beginners, and people returning to fishing after a long break. Satisfying that demand are people like Carl McCormack, who besides helping his customers, has also coached his twelve year old son Callum to gold in the junior national championships.

Podcast Interview 173: Steve Souter, Scottish Boat Match Champion: Recorded in 2014. Steve Souter has had, and continues to have a glittering international career fishing for Scotland, where he has won, often on multiple occasions, all that has been put in front of him. But being so successful is no accident, as he explains, along with his thoughts on a range of other topics.

Podcast Interview 174: Neil Farnworth, CAST: Recorded in 2014. CAST North west is a Lancashire based charitable organisation set up and operated by Neil Farnworth with the aim of bringing dis-affected youngsters into education and training by using angling as a primary tool for grabbing their interest.

Podcast Interview 175: Terry Moseley, Disabled Angling Part 1: Recorded in 2014. Disabled in a sports accident while serving with the parachute regiment, Terry Moseley has almost single handedly dragged the provision of access for disabled anglers kicking and screaming into the 21st century. He's also won his share of national and international medals in the process.

Podcast Interview 176: Terry Moseley, Disabled Angling Part 2: Recorded in 2014. Disabled in a sports accident while serving with the parachute regiment, Terry Moseley has almost single handedly dragged the provision of access for disabled anglers kicking and screaming into the 21st century. He's also won his share of national and international medals in the process.

Podcast Interview 177: Dave Taylor, Off the Shelf: Recorded in 2014. With the writing on the wall for distant water trawling, back in the 1970's, the Whitefish Authority financed a number of experimental

trawling trips along the edge of the continental slope looking for new fish species to eat. The last of those trips was made by the Fleetwood trawler 'Jacinta'. On that trip was Dave Taylor who talks about the experience.

Podcast Interview 178: Mike Thrussell, Angling Journalist: Recorded in 2014. Ever since the 1970's, Mike Thrussell has made a wide range of contributions to sea angling through magazine articles, books, TV, radio, and as an angling tackle consultant, and as such, he has had a say in the success of a lot of other anglers along the way. And being of that generation, he is also fortunate to have mixed with several of the sea angling greats of the past - something he reflects on here.

Podcast Interview 179: Dr. Malcolm Greenhalgh, Life Story: Recorded in 2014. Dr. Malcolm Greenhalgh is one of the most respected names on the game angling circuit, with particular emphasis on wild running water fishing. Here he talks about his early formative years and expresses a wide range of views in a manner best described as a real down to earth no nonsense reality check.

Podcast Interview 180: Dr. Malcolm Greenhalgh, Fly Fishing Characters: Recorded in 2014. Behind the names accompanying books and articles in the World of angling are a range of characters which the reading public by and large get to know very little about. Here Dr. Malcolm Greenhalgh enlightens us on a few of those he has come across on the game angling scene.

Podcast Interview 181: Paul Kilpatrick, Whitby: Recorded in 2014. After a dip in fortunes during the late 1990's, offshore boat angling at Whitby is right up there again with the best. But tactically speaking, it now bears absolutely no resemblance to what went before. Gone are the jiggers and muppets replaced now by shads, bait, and uptide fishing, pioneered for the most part by 'Sea Otter 2' skipper Paul Kilpatrick.

Podcast Interview 182: Tony Kirrage, Tony's Tackle Part 1: Recorded in 2014. Tony Kirrage of Tony's Tackle in Eastbourne has represented England on both the carp and the saltwater shore angling scene. He has also won the Carp World championships. Here he talks openly about all aspects of his angling and business including almost going to the wall with the shop.

Podcast Interview 183: Tony Kirrage, Tony's Tackle Part 2: Recorded in 2014. Tony Kirrage of Tony's Tackle in Eastbourne has represented England on both the carp and the saltwater shore angling scene. He has also won the Carp World championships. Here he talks openly about all aspects of his angling and business including almost going to the wall with the shop.

Podcast Interview 184: David Kent National Federation of Anglers & Angling Trust: Recorded in 2014. The National Federation of Anglers governed coarse angling, and match angling in particular, for just over one hundred years. Here ex-NFA Vice Chairman David Kent looks at the history of the NFA and its new role within the Angling Trust.

Podcast Interview 185: Warren Harrison, World record Carp Haul: Recorded in 2014. In September 2014, a trip by Manchester Carp angler Warren Harrison set the media on fire. Two carp topping ninety pounds apiece, plus others in the seventies and eighties as part of a 2.5-ton haul is the stuff of carp angling dreams, as Warren himself explains here.

Podcast Interview 186: Jason Owen, Charter Boat Outboards: Recorded in 2014. Recent times have seen an increasing degree of interest amongst charter boat operators in switching from inboard diesel power to large petrol driven outboard engines. Here, Jason Owen from Pwllheli discusses the pros and cons of making the switch, and explores some of the new opportunities this should open up for him and his customers.

Podcast Interview 187: Mark Bowler, Fly Fishing & Fly Tying Magazine: Recorded in 2014. Mark Bowler, editor of the prestigious Fly Fishing & Fly Tying, talks about his amazing rise to owner-editor of the magazine after initial rejections and no formal journalistic training.

Podcast Interview 188: Bob Fitchie, Irish Tuna: Recorded in 2014. Around the turn of the century, the west and north coast of Ireland was treated to a short lived run of huge Blue Fin Tuna with fish caught approaching a thousand pounds. Here Bob Fitchie recounts his memories of one such trip.

Podcast Interview 189: Wendy Patchett, England Ladies Fly Fishing Team Captain: Recorded in 2014. Ex-England team captain and multi-medal winning fly angler Wendy Patchett talks about her life in competition fly fishing, offering a range of tips to other up and coming lady anglers.

Podcast Interview 190: Dr. Mike Ladle, Science & Bass: Recorded in 2014. Besides being a zoologist and fishery scientist, Dr. Mike Ladle is an acknowledged expert in the art of lure and fly fishing for Bass and Mullet, though other techniques are also discussed.

Podcast Interview 191: Chris Boagey, FRV Scotia: Recorded in 2014. Chris Boagey is deck boss aboard the Scottish fisheries research vessel Scotia. Here we discuss a range of research topics which will be of interest to sea anglers across the UK.

Podcast Interview 192: Dave Steuart, Coarse Fishing Legend Part 1: Recorded in 2014. Brian Harris, the renowned editor of the still highly regarded but now sadly no longer with us Angling Magazine, has described Hampshire angler Dave Steuart as the best all rounder this country has ever produced. Here in part 1 of a 2-part interview looking at all aspects of his angling life, we explore Dave Steuart's coarse fishing credentials.

Podcast Interview 193: Dave Steuart, Coarse Fishing Legend Part 2: Recorded in 2014. Brian Harris, the renowned editor of the still highly regarded but now sadly no longer with us Angling Magazine, has described Hampshire angler Dave Steuart as the best all rounder this country has ever produced. Here in part 2 of a 2 part interview looking at all aspects of his angling life, we explore Dave Steuart's coarse fishing credentials.

Podcast Interview 194: Dave Steuart, Discusses Kay Steuart: Recorded in 2014. Brian Harris, the renowned editor of the still highly regarded but now sadly no longer with us Angling Magazine, has described Hampshire angler Dave Steuart as the best all rounder this country has ever produced. In addition to that, Dave's late wife Kay who he talks about here was widely regarded as the best female all rounder the UK has ever produced.

Podcast Interview 195: Tim Harrison, Welsh Bass guide: Recorded in 2014. Full time New Quay Bass guide Tim Harrison takes a look at Bass population numbers, Bass tactics, and his own pathway from leaving school without qualifications to heading up the Environment Agency's fishery department in Wales, which he then walked away from to concentrate on fishing for Bass.

Podcast Interview 196: Chris Clark, Top England Shore Angler: Recorded in 2014. Chris Clark is in numerical terms the biggest international medal winner ever representing England on the shore angling scene, but rates his best win as one particular bronze after a farming accident threatened to leave him wheelchair bound.

Podcast Interview 197: Keith Linsell, Angling Encounters: Recorded in 2014. Back in the 1960's and 70's, angling journalists rarely carried cameras, and magazine illustrations were mainly line drawings or artwork. Heavily involved at that time was artist and angler Keith Linsell who as part of his job had to fish with many of the names we now regard as legends today. Here Keith reflects on a few of those big names.

Podcast Interview 198: Keith Linsell, Angling Artist: Recorded in 2014. Back in the 1960's and 70's, angling journalists rarely carried cameras, and magazine illustrations were mainly line drawings or artwork. Heavily involved at that time was artist and angler Keith Linsell who as part of his job had to fish with many of the names we now regard as legends today. Here Keith reflects on his artwork, his fishing, and the future.

Podcast Interview 199: Brian Crawford: Power Generation. Recorded in 2014. As a race of people, we need energy. That can come in many forms including fossil fuel burning, nuclear, and natural green energy. Unfortunately, each is not without its potential problems to aquatic environments. Physics teacher and IFCA member Brian Crawford has studied the implications of each and gives his verdict here.

Podcast Interview 200: John Quinlan: Irish Bass. Recorded in 2015. For years the Irish have lead the way in Bass conservation with bag limits, size limits, and recreational only fishing. Bass guide John Quinlan discusses the politics and its implications on the Irish Bass fishing scene.

Podcast Interview 201: Mike Thrussell Jr.: WSF. Recorded in 2015. The availability of top notch up to the minute angling information has come a long way since the introduction of the Internet. Arguably the biggest player in all of this has been the website World Sea Fishing, or WSF. Here its creator and MD Mike Thrussell Jr. talks about the concept, history and future of WSF.

Podcast Interview 202: Steve Yeomans: Winter Trout. Recorded in 2016. Contrary to widely held opinion, Rainbow Trout are actually a cold water species, seasonally better suited to the spring autumn and winter months. Fly fishing school instructor Steve Yeomans explains.

Podcast Interview 203: Mark Bowler: Sea Trout. Recorded in 2014. Sea Trout numbers in systems draining to Scotland's west coast have slumped dramatically over recent years. Here Fly Fishing and Fly Tying editor Mark Bowler discusses the implications, and arguably the main reason behind the problem.

Podcast Interview 204: Andy Copeland: LRF Matches. Recorded in 2016. Light Rock Fishing or LRF combines species hunting with light tackle fishing. Here LRF match angler Andy Copeland explains the tactics and rewards around his native north east coast.

Podcast Interview 205: Alastair Wilson: Big Fish Small Boat. Recorded in 2016. For most people, big fish in small trailed boats means at best Tope and Conger, and more likely Huss or Rays. Not over on the Irish small boat scene. Here Alastair Wilson discusses encounters with Blue Sharks, Porbeagles, Common Skate and Blue Fin Tuna aboard his Warrior 165.

Podcast Interview 206: Eddie Weitzel: Essex and Lancashire. Recorded in 2016. Now residing and fishing in Lancashire, Eddie Weitzel, son of 1970's Essex charter boat skipper Arthur Weitzel on whose boat John Rawle and Bob Cox devised uptide fishing, talks of his earliest recollections of the boat and shore fishing on his old home patch, and now along his adopted north-west coast.

Podcast Interview 207: Ross Johnson: Species Hunting. Recorded in 2016. With a monster Skate in excess of 170 pounds and Tope topping 50 pounds from the shore, Ross Johnson could be labelled a shore specimen hunter. But that is some way from the truth. In fact, he's just as much at home with his LRF gear chasing mini species in an attempt to catch 100 species in UK waters, and 1000 species Worldwide.

Podcast Interview 208: Stephen Lamont: Lure Fishing. Recorded in 2016. The freedom and drop of a hat potential, not to mention the successes of lure fishing in its various forms has taken sea angling by storm over recent years. So much that some devotees do little else. Lure fishing fanatic Stephen Lamont explains.

Podcast Interview 209: Mike Dennehy: Kinsale. Recorded in 2017. Kinsale charter boat skipper Mike Dennehy discusses the recent explosion in Blue Fin Tuna numbers to add to the Albacore and Sharks he already regularly fishes for. Prospects for Swordfish and a number of lesser known open oceanic species are also explored.

Podcast Interview 210: Wayne Thomas: Mullet. Recorded in 2017. Mullet tend to be regarded by most sea anglers as uncatchable, and while they are the most widely seen fish swimming around in British coastal waters, they are also the most widely ignored. But not by everybody. Wayne Thomas explains the process of fishing for them.

Podcast Interview 211: Steve Mills: Thresher Sharks. Recorded in 2017. Anglers of my generation will be familiar with the name Steve Mills. England international, Sea Angler Magazine columnist, dinghy angler, and holder of the Thresher Shark record. Here he talks about all things Thresher Shark.

Podcast Interview 212: Peter Bagnall: The ABU Atlantic 484 Zoom. Recorded in 2017. It isn't often that one angler makes an advance in technology so great that it quite literally is a game changer. Peter Bagnall is one such a person. The man responsible for the iconic ABU Atlantic 484 which quite literally took the distance casting and beach angling scene by storm during the 1970's.

Podcast Interview 213: Mick & Matt Coker: Dover & Folkestone. Recorded in 2017. Some of the most outstanding Cod catches of the 1980's and 1990's were taken aboard the angling boat 'Royal Charlotte' fishing out of Folkestone and Dover skippered by Mick Coker. With his son Matt now at helm and Mick aboard 'Portia', the pair reflect on the amazing fishing they have provided and shared along their corner of the Kent Coast.

Podcast Interview 214: Magni Blastein: The Faroe Islands. Recorded in 2017. A live recording on the boat with Magni Blastein looking at the fishing the Faroe Islands have to offer, in particular for monster Plaice

Podcast Interview 215: Andy Griffith: Six Gilled Sharks. Recorded in 2018. Having completed a unique IGFA grand slam for Sharks in British waters including taking the Welsh Mako Shark record, it looked unlikely that Andy Griffith would be able to top that achievement on home turf. But top it he has with two Sharks in excess of 1000 pounds both taken on the same day.

Podcast Interview 216: Sam Harris: 'Gone Fishing'. Recorded in 2018. 'Gone Fishing' radio show host Sam Harris is used to being the one dishing out the questions. In a reversal of roles here he is put on the receiving end in an examination of his long and varied angling life.

Podcast Interview 217: Andy Griffith; Thresher Sharks. Recorded in 2018. Completing the shark fishing trilogy, Andy Griffith talks in detail about a three day session which produced a staggering five Thresher Sharks, three of which came on the first day, following up on a promise made by Portsmouth based boat angler Stuart Newell to help Andy tick the final missing UK shark species from his ever growing list of big fish achievements.