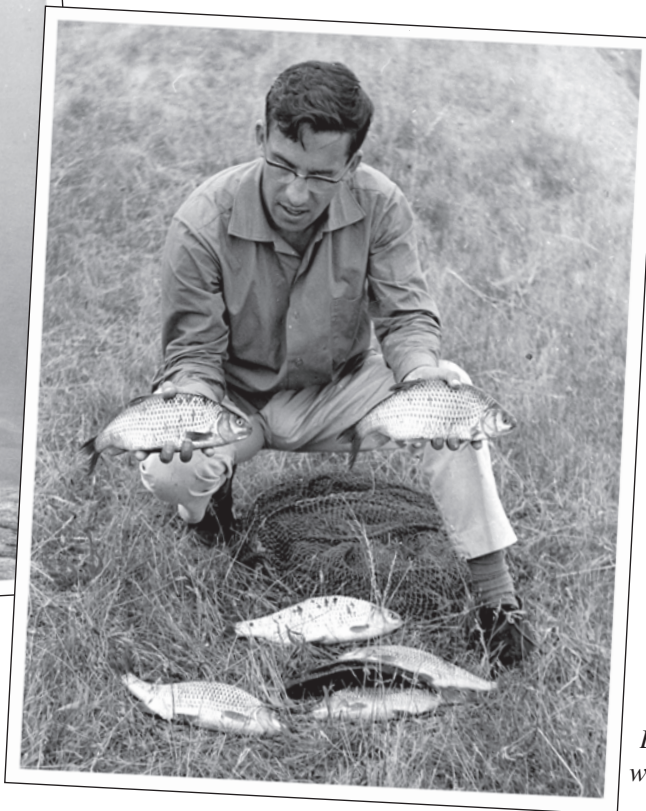
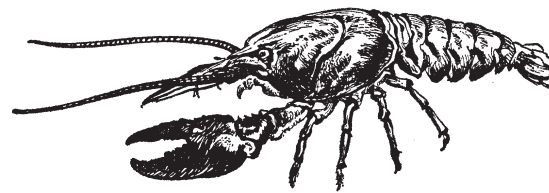


Reunion On The River Kennet



*Frank Parish
also used to
catch big
bream*



*Bill Paxman
was also a big
roach man.*

The Barbel Society can take the credit, or the responsibility, for three angling friends who had lost contact with each other for many years, getting together again for a day's barbel fishing on the River Kennet.

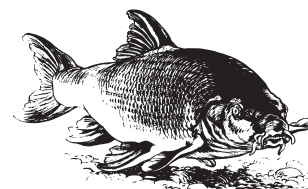
Due to the Editor of "The Barbel Fisher" considering that it was worth reproducing, in issue No. 14, an article that I had written many years before, "Barbel. The New Thinking," a friend of past years, Bill Paxman, was induced to write a letter relating to a couple of barbel rods that I had built for him in 1968. (I'll bet that many of the Society's members weren't even a glint in their mother's eye back then). Reading Bill's letter rekindled

memories and a wish to chat about old times, so my committee member friend John Found, gave me Bill's address and telephone number, and the subsequent long conversation over the wire resulted in Bill asking me to accompany him and another mutual friend, Bill's lifelong angling companion Frank Parish, for a day together on the River Kennet.

How do fishing friends lose touch with each other? When one is young many things happen. Girlfriends and

wives come on the scene along with children, work may cause one to move to a new area or give one a very little time for angling owing to fishing often being a time consuming sport, one may become more interested in other pastimes, (sacrilege) golf for example, or one may become more involved with a different branch of the sport. I was heavily into salmon fishing for a long time, which is a very boring branch of the sport according to some of my fishing friends, and during those days some of them did not fish with us so much. But I think it was the loss of a mutual friend, Ron Osborne that caused Bill, Frank, and I, to fish less together. Ron was a very fine angler, as too are Bill and Frank, and all three used to make catches of large

roach and bream together many years ago when it was very difficult to do so and also many good catches of barbel and chub from venues like Throop and the Royalty. Ron and I fished together a lot, and he fished with Bill and Frank a lot more than I did. We were friends socially too. At one time he was the resident photographer for Angling Times, mad keen, and taught me much about developing, printing, enlarging, and much more. It was all black and white then, and one had to know the rudiments at least to produce a result.



Unfortunately I never had the flair or ability with photography that Ron had. God! It's so easy today. All one has to do is point the thing and press and the automatic, computerised machine, takes fantastic pictures which are speedily processed in almost any format at most photographic outlets. By the time Ron died, Kay and I were into the salmon thing, which I guess held little interest for Bill and Frank and so we did not fish together again – until now!

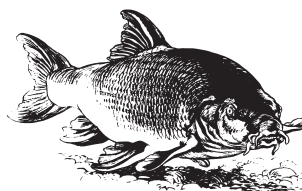
I have added to the original of this article here, to mention how I believe that in one's life there are many coincidences, some seemingly insignificant, but others that are truly remarkable. A small coincidence happened the very next day after I had written this piece. John Found was visiting me so I asked him to read it for an opinion as to its value, and while he was doing so the postman arrived and "The Barbel Fisher" dropped through the door and by coincidence, in the first few pages Steve Pope's contribution was also about friendship and its importance, and he mentioned the friendship that has formed between John Found and myself. That is a fairly recent friendship, but I have several angling friends with whom I have fished for over 50 years and some for almost as long. I thoroughly agree with Steve that angling friendships and other friendships, are very important through one's life. Long friendships can influence one's attitude to life, let alone fishing. Others opinions are often a reason for changing a view about something, and also help one to learn, by discussion and argument, providing one is not of an obstinate character. Obstinance is not an asset towards a long friendship.

Over the years I have certainly had to change some

of my angling assertions through friendships, and I am still on a learning curve. That is one of the joys of angling – you will never know it all!

The Kennet held very little interest to me for years after the Water Authorities of the time raped and ravaged that once beautiful river. When Kay and I fished it regularly it was a gin-clear stream, thick with ranunculus, clean gravel runs and exciting pools and although Kay used to leger, I nearly always fished the float. We nearly always caught barbel, often in goodly numbers and I have had some excellent days on the float, up to 25 fish in an afternoon and evening session, whilst Kay often had a dozen or more on the lead or feeder. As the late President, and my good friend Peter Stone said at one of the Conferences, Kennet barbel were not generally large, averaging (I think he said) from 3 to 6lb. But they fed well, and in good numbers

they hardly ever removed or damaged the bait. Small fry were more of a nuisance especially gudgeon, but only for a little while, usually until the barbel moved in. What a difference now. The water is filthy by comparison, the flows are far less, even when rainfall is normal, weed growth is minimal and not always the best sort, and there are those bloody crayfish! Okay, I know that some anglers are of the opinion that



the crayfish are contributing to the size of Kennet barbel now, the monster fish, but I am firmly of the opinion that due to their presence, barbel and other species are less numerous than they used to be or should be.

The other problem for the

Kennet was the revival of the Kennet and Avon Canal, wonderful for the boating fraternity but also one of the reasons for the filthy condition of the river. There is no way that the continual opening and closing of lock gates will not increase the turbidity of the river by introducing water from the muddy bottoms of the canal stretches.

In spite of all these things, many of my friends have given me days on the Kennet over the last three or four seasons which I have thoroughly enjoyed and I have even caught a few barbel, so I was really looking forward to meeting up with Bill and Frank again, mainly to renew our old friendship, but also with the hope of a fish or two.

I met Bill outside a farm gate. Although I had not seen him for thirty years I would have known him anywhere as his face was much the same, apart from the grey hair – but

“Bloody crayfish . . . I am firmly of the opinion that due to their presence, barbel and other species are less numerous than they used to be or should be”

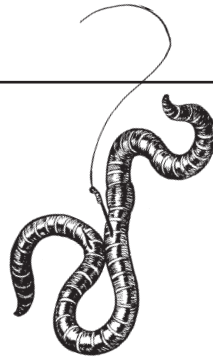
they were excellent fun, especially on the float and pin. In those days I float fished for barbel on most rivers where I fished for the species, as Frank Parish was to remind me when I met him again. Kay always fished the float and pin too when we fished the famous Parlour on the Royalty, but that was mostly for sea trout. As far as I know they had never seen a hook, but they were no pushover for all that.

The Kennet in those days was devoid of signal crayfish but did hold our little native fellow, and it was not unknown to have tiny plucks from some of them when using maggots when feeder fishing. They were not however any nuisance at all as



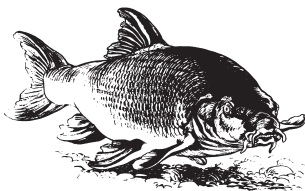
Two old barbel fishers get together with a 7lb 1oz fish

“I still live in the past and although I don’t get anything like the quantity of barbel that I used to, I still love to catch them and any barbel of whatever size is a result”



at least he still had his. He said he would have known me too in spite of the fact that I now wear a beard. That was unnerving. As I told him, I only grew it so that the people I have insulted through life and the people I owe money to, won’t recognise me. It was great to see him I tell you. Thanks, Barbel Society.

We motored along tracks to the river where it was not too far to walk. He said it was for my benefit, but I think it was for his really as I am still as fit and handsome, as I was when I was in my twenties. Alright, so I never was! Bill put me in a swim which he said was probably the best swim along the stretch, from where he had caught many barbel, and big ones. He had taken one the previous week from it which was over 12lb. He apologised for the lack of flow, the low water, and the general condition of the river and the crayfish that would probably annoy us, but in spite of it, he was confident that I would catch. He paid me the great compliment of



fishing with one of the rods that I had made for him all those years ago and said he had caught some great fish on it. I handled it. Compared with modern carbon rods it was quite heavy, although at the time of manufacture it was extremely light in comparison to cane and was still straight. As this model and those beautiful split cane versions that are now manufactured,

along with past split cane Mk. IV’s, Avons and their like, are mostly used for legering, they are simply rested on the knee if one likes to touch leger, or are put in the rest while waiting for the great pull, so it doesn’t matter much if they are heavy, but as I float fished so much, along with rod building, I am sure that the heavy split cane rods (although we thought they were light at the time) were responsible for years of very painful elbows. I float fish a lot less now, but there is much pleasure in handling lightweight carbon, through-action rods when I do. I remember writing of the virtues of through-action rods on many occasions, and often got a lot of stick for it, but I notice that nearly all rods of modern design have that sort of action nowadays.

Fishing was slow, but unbelievably the crayfish did not worry me very much, or Bill either who had settled in a swim just upstream. Then Frank arrived. He too I would have known anywhere and of course the three of us went into long discussions, including many memories, comparisons with the old days, tackle comparisons, what we had been up to all those years and so on. Frank and I were well into it when Bill disappeared. He returned with a carrier bag and I thought he had gone to fetch his sandwiches. But no! From the bag was produced a fine bottle of wine and three glasses and we were toasting each other with enthusiasm. Whichever God was watching this reunion I have no idea, but there could not have been a better time during the day

for my rod to fold in half. Weighing 7lb 1oz., it was a mediocre fish by present day standards, but I think it was far more appropriate to the occasion than some monster, as we all agreed; it was as good as you were likely to get from the River Kennet in the days when we fished together. I still live in the past and although I don’t get anything like the quantity of barbel that I used to, I still love to catch them and any barbel of whatever size is a result. That being so in my book, the day was already a great success.

Unfortunately, that was the only fish, although I did have another pull that was possibly from a barbel. What I would have loved though was for Bill to get a good fish on the old rod that I had built,

and for Frank to have also taken one of the Kennet monsters, although they have had their fair share of them in the past to Bill’s 14lb 11oz whacker. He fished the Kennet the following week and took a fish over 10lb to add to their doubles this season. Great!

It was a great day, and naturally we are going to manage days together in the future. Whether fish are caught or not will not matter that much as we have so much to discuss if the fishing is too good it may well interfere with our day. Whatever, we are all looking forward to it.



By Dave Stuart



Dave drinking his ‘toast’ while playing a barbel