

We had no transport back then, so it was a train journey to Leeds and 2 buses (which took around 3 hours) to get to Topcliffe, this necessitated us staying the weekend.

There was only one bus back all day on Sunday around 4ish, so if you missed that you weren't going home until Monday!

There were a few stretches that could be had for the price of a day ticket, notably the Black Bull and Angel stretches.

We chose the Angel as we were allowed to pitch our tent in the field at the back of the pub for the duration of the weekend.

We had some brilliant times, fishing the piles at the bottom, never catching anything big, usually average sizes chub and smaller fish, but enjoying ourselves none the less.

The kit we used were Abu Mark IV Zooms, paired with Mitchell Match, or 300s loaded with 4-6 lb line.

Steve and I have spoken

Having fished since the early 70s, initially around my home town of Halifax, brother Steve and I eventually got to hear about the fishing on the Ure at Boroughbridge, then the Swale at Topcliffe. We had many a foray into these dark and distant waters.

about this since, but we can't ever remember it raining, the summers were long and hot, perhaps we chose not to remember, or more probable we only picked weekends where the weather was favourable.

We'd nip into one of about four pubs in the evening, the above two mentioned, plus The Swan and The Shoulder of Mutton, which is now that fine eatery "The Crab and Lobster". Later returning to our temporary accommodation in the field, at around 10.30. The only trouble was, at that time it was near impossible to pick your way

back without treading in something nasty and smelly that used to belong to a cow!

Even with a torch, many a time you lost your shoe, and my shoes cost me a fortune (£35 back in 1972).

I well remember getting undressed out of my fishing gear in the Angel car park, not realising that the entire dining area could see me!

I got some funny looks when I eventually went in for a drink, not sure if it was the afore mentioned spectacle, or the fact that I was wearing green velvet flares, and green and silver 2 inch platform shoes.

Oh happy days.

I never ventured back to Topcliffe after 1976, the music of Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, Sabbath, Purple, The Who etc. beckoned, along with night life, and the young women of Halifax.

Fishing took a back seat, then married life, family etc., you know the score, we've all been there.

Then one day, in 1985 Steve got the chance to fish the "Field stretch" and told me how good it looked, so once again my tackle was dusted down and we quickly got tickets through a distant family member who worked for

The Swale, fishing & life in general



Brother Steve at
Topcliffe 1987

The Swale, fishing & life in general By Gordon Helliwell

the Field Printing Company in Bradford.

To say it was brilliant fishing would be a disservice, we were discussing it recently, and both came to the same conclusion it was to us, the best fishing we had ever experienced. Putting a pint of maggots in on the far bank, then leaving it to rest a while.

We would have a coffee, then tackle up and stick float fish it.

The best day we had, was 28 chub each, with Steve eventually banking a 5lb 11oz which got in the angling press. We had good size grayling also, not sure the size of the barbel we caught, but they couldn't have been big, as we would have remembered.

We do remember getting smashed by them, but tackle wasn't the same as now, and most of the time we were stick float fishing.

There were also some huge pike present. My younger brother Adrian once fished there and hooked a massive grayling, estimated at around 2 1/2 lb, as he was about to net it a huge pike bit it in half!!

This brings me full circle, in the intervening years I was content to just fish closer to home. A local club we joined had stretches of the Calder, and a couple of small lakes of around 1 1/2 acres, where we could pop down for a few hours and catch carp to mid teens.

Steve always more intrepid

than me, while I was content to fish my local lake for carp, he would go off looking for other waters to fish, and decided that he wanted to pursue his favourite species, the barbel once more, and try for a double.

And so it was in 2006, he joined the Barbel Society, purchased a ticket for Topcliffe and embarked on his passion for a double figure barbel.

Working for Royal Mail meant he could be at the riverside by 1.00pm.

His first few trips resulted in the odd chub and small barbel. He kept me informed via his mobile, but for the most part it was blank after blank, but he never got

disheartened.

It took him 9 trips before he got a 9lb 7oz, from the "cattle drink", which made all the blanks worth it. A week later, in mid September, he again ventured onto the same swim. Between 6.30 and 7.30 he had 2 barbel both over the ten pounds.

The first 10lb 2oz the second 10lb 6oz. 35 years he had waited for a double, then gets two in an hour.

To say he was elated doesn't do the moment(s) justice. I felt really good for him, he'd deserved it with all the hours put in. The only problem was, when he caught them, it was getting dark so he never got any decent photographs.

No matter, this didn't dilute his achievement, it was still a remarkable session.

Although we fish together on most occasions, Steve working for Royal Mail has the added advantage, as explained earlier, that he finishes around dinner time, so he has more available fishing time than me.

When he joined the Barbel Society I wasn't too bothered, as most of the time he was at Topcliffe I'd be working.

We spoke about it at length, and I decided to join the B.S; not to catch a double, just to test the water and see what the Barbel Society was all about.

In general I was not disappointed, save for the forum, but that's another issue.

I bought a Topcliffe ticket and on cold, late October day in 2006, we ventured out to retrace my journey of some



20 odd years earlier.

As we set off, I didn't know what to expect, I felt excited and slightly apprehensive. Would the village be the same? Would I recognise the place after so long away? Although I'd fished the Field stretch in the 80s, I'd never actually

been into the village since the 70s.

As we approached the bend by the Field stretch, and crossed over the small bridge, the church to the left, it was exactly as I remembered it. Through the village, on past the Angel nothing seemed to have changed, we turned into Wynn Lane, I could see that a new estate had been developed, but apart from that, the village was just as I remember.

We parked and walked the river, as we approached the Angel stretch, I looked up the field to see the pub and the field we used to camp in, but something

wasn't right.

Where's the sand bank down to the river, and the piles that we used to fish to?

They were about a third of the way across the river, there used to be a clear view all the way down the river, now it is restricted by hawthorn bushes.

I wasn't disappointed, just slightly confused, after recognising so much of the place, the river course didn't seem to belong in my minds eye.

We returned to the car, collected our gear and tackled up in the cattle drink.

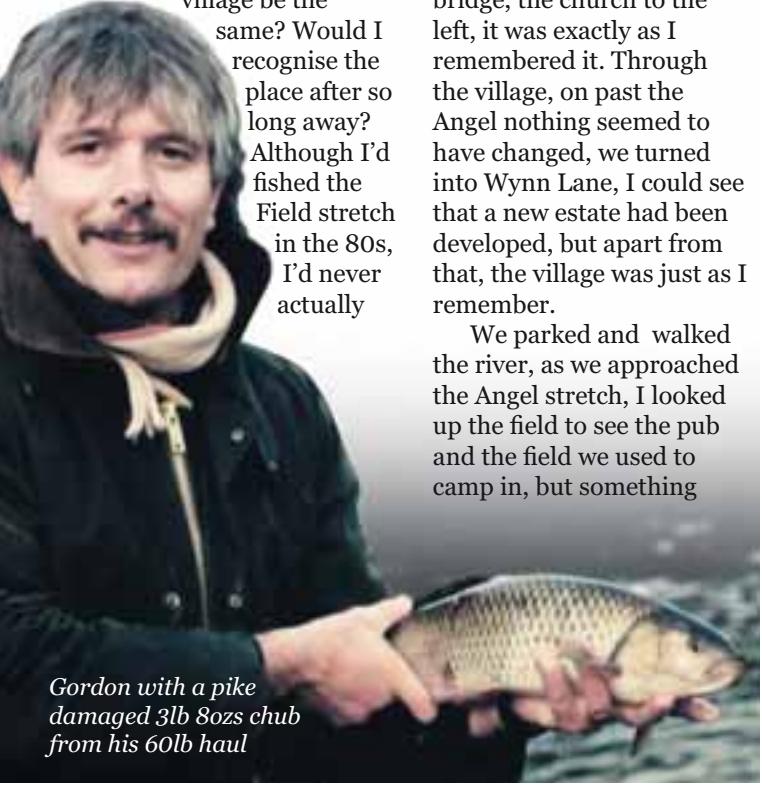
It felt good to be back on the Swale after so long away, just to drink in the atmosphere, I felt at peace just being there. Perhaps this is something only an angler can understand and appreciate.

It would be nice to say we caught, but the Lady Swale doesn't give up her wares that easy. No matter,

I had a wonderful day, and one that will stay with me for a long time to come. You see, fishing to me is more than just about catching, its many things. Being at one with nature, where nothing matters. When you're on the riverbank, the world and all its ills pales into insignificance. It doesn't go away it just rests from your mind for those precious few hours, when we are at one with ourselves and our surroundings. That to me is worth a 100 big fish. It recharges the batteries, and helps me face another stressful week in the modern world.

On the way home, we stopped for a pint and a natter about the day, and to plan our next sojourn to Topcliffe.

To the Barbel Society I give thanks, because without this stretch of river, I would never get the chance to fish the river of my youth.



Gordon with a pike
damaged 3lb 8ozs chub
from his 60lb haul