

Had someone told me a couple of years ago that I would be penning an article for the Barbel Society's magazine, I would have looked at them as if they were crazy. So I suppose I should fill you in on how I came to be here.



Life changing experiences

I was in the RAF as an airframe engineer and had been for ten years working on Jaguar, Tornado and eventually Typhoon (Eurofighter).

During this time I was a match angler, at first it was just a day off work to go fishing, but being the competitive sort I eventually got into it, and even if I say so myself, I was pretty good at it, even representing the RAF which is a top ten division 1 team.

Anyway, before I get all nostalgic I'll get to the point, in June 2009 I was posted onto Typhoon in Lincolnshire and met a girl straight away and I was smitten, my fishing had even been affected by her arrival, she had a 3 year old daughter and I was more than happy with the situation.

In the November I had taken a week off work to move in with her, on the second day of my week off we needed a lift into Lincoln, her friend was to give us a lift (I didn't drive at this point, just my motorcycle), but at the last minute there was a change of drivers and another friend was to take us.

That decision changed my life. He overtook going into a bend, my girlfriend Jodi and her daughter Ella both lost their lives, as did a driver of one of the cars we hit.

Our driver eventually received a custodial sentence having been charged with death by dangerous driving.

I was left with pretty bad injuries myself, eventually slipping into a coma from fracturing my skull and receiving a severe brain injury.

After a couple of weeks I returned to Chester to stay with my parents. During this time, I thought I was okay, typical post brain injury behaviour.

I ended up going

into Headley Court Rehabilitation Centre (the military rehab unit off the television).

During my stay there (which would fill a book in itself) I was to come to terms with the injuries I had, and would have for life, mainly fatigued easily, poor memory, poor balance and dexterity problems.

When I left there I remember having my first day fishing on the local canal (on the pole) with my old man. I was concerned that baiting up/tying hooks etc would be a problem, because of the dexterity issues (I was still struggling with my laces at this point).

Bizarrely enough it all came completely natural, and I hand tied a 22 (yes they really make hooks that small) at my first attempt. The feeling I got from looking at my handy work will go down as my most memorable moment in fishing, until I eventually break the UK barbel record that is.

I returned to work in mid June, but it wasn't to be, my memory was a real issue and I couldn't be trusted to work on the aircraft, I was eventually medically discharged.

After a fair few attempts on the canal, I noticed that staring intensely at a float whilst holding 13m of pole was giving me some issues, mainly concentration and fatigue. With this, my dreams of being the next Bob Nudd died too.

I could still tie hooks though, so I just had to find a new discipline of our sport. As I had always planned on being a "Specimen Hunter" "at some point, I would just have to bring my plans forward a few years.

First it was perch on the upper Thames around Lechlade, lovely sport but it didn't quite tick all the boxes. Then it was pike, but covering miles of my local canal, fatigue played a

huge part. It wasn't going to happen.

During this time, trying to find a new direction, the barbel had always been in the back of my mind, after having some great sport after them as a child when my parents would drop me off around Shrewsbury, and pick me up several days later.

I had managed barbel to 8lb 6oz on these visits, and never forgot the violent take and tremendous scrap.

Very recently, my parents invited me on a camping trip with them. I wasn't taken with the idea of camping with my parents at 32 years old, that is, until they mentioned there was a river on the campsite, my ears pricked up, where I asked?

"Little Hereford on the River Teme" they replied, so I did some digging on Google, and the barbel was to be my quarry.

I bought myself a cheap barbel rod and reel and off I went aided by the Barbel Society page on Facebook, and the endless gems of advice I had received on there.

As the river was so low I decided to just do short sessions in the evening.

The first night I caught a small 4/5lb barbel which did wonders for my confidence in my baits and rigs.

The second night I managed another small barbel of around 6/7lb.

On the third night I gave my dad a crack, unfortunately he never caught one, but we had a memorable father/son moment, when a large dog otter popped up on the bank opposite. A first for both of us, was his presence the reason for our lack of action that evening?

I had fallen in love with this river during the short space of time I'd graced its banks, so I prepped a new swim all day with various offerings, and decided as it was my last day, to do a full

all night session.

First cast, all was quiet, I had hoped to end the trip on a high, but time wasn't on my side, and it seemed I wasn't to succeed.

But, at around 3am my rod tip flew round, and after a short but spirited fight, I landed my last barbel of the visit. On weighing the fish, the needle of my scales flew round and settled on 8lb 10oz, a personal best. My trip was complete.

I returned to Chester with a love of all things barbel and the River Teme. So much so in fact, I've decided that when my compensation finally arrives, I'll be settling somewhere in Herefordshire, so I can be closer to this stunning raw little river.

The barbel bug is now total, and every spare hour and pound goes into catching the next one.

Having since passed my car test (about time) I can often be found on the banks of the Upper Severn.

I have even travelled down to the Warkwickshire Avon for the Society's fish-in, an excellent trip although the barbel didn't play the game.

I'll be a Society member for life, as I've had nothing but support from members and I feel fortunate to be a part of it.

I'm not sure what the reader is meant to get from this article, but I hope it's an understanding of just how powerful a tool "the love of fishing" can be. It has helped me greatly during my rehabilitation, and in more ways than one. I used to tell people that I went fishing to sit and think, but looking back, I know it was the opposite; I went to forget, as all I could think about was how I was going to catch my next fish.

Baz "future Barbel Society Chairman" Fisher