

The Richmond and District Angling Society – A History

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Abbreviations used:-

MB – minute books; WMSS – Wenham manuscripts; RAS – Richmond Angling Society papers; BCU – British Canoe Union.

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Introduction

The Richmond and District Angling Society was formed in 1912 with the objective of providing angling facilities to local people at a cost which they could afford. It remains vibrant to this day, adhering to its original purpose. It is organised on a democratic basis with officials and a committee elected by voting members who reside within the town of Richmond or its environs. The Society does not have a profit making objective but maintains assets sufficient to ensure its survival through times of economic constraint.

It would appear that social history research up to the present time has not yet encouraged the study of individual angling clubs, especially those in the north of England. In North Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland only the Richmond Angling Society has, to date, placed its early records in the public domain. In what follows I have tried to provide a thematic history of that society using the minute books from 1912 to 1977, a letter book and accounts for the periods 1913 to 1961 and 1971 to 1973 along with miscellaneous papers compiled by Mr P.C. Wenham. Wenham, father of the historian, the late Leslie Peter Wenham, was a founder member and, for a remarkable fifty one years, Secretary to the Society. His papers, which date from the early 1950s, were kindly lent to me by the historian Jane Hatcher. It will be appreciated that whilst the Society's records up to 1977 have generally been well maintained, especially those kept by P.C. Wenham, as often with the records of voluntary organisation many threads are left dangling; limiting verity and entirety. Unfortunately later minutes are incomplete with a gap occurring between 1977 and September 1983, but access to the minute books from that date has been kindly permitted by the Secretary and Committee of the Society. It is a justified criticism of this study that it concentrates on the period before 1977. The origins of this paper are in the preparation of a short article on the Angling Society for publication in the Richmond Review, the journal of the Richmond and District Civic Society, but it seemed a pity to access the early records without preparing a more comprehensive work than originally intended. However, whilst I have used later records to provide some continuity to the present day, much work remains to cover the 'modern' period.

For those having little knowledge of angling, but who are, perhaps, interested in the social aspects of angling societies, it may be useful to attempt to explain the difference between 'fly fishing' and other fishing methods as any demarcation can be sociologically significant. On a personal level preference for a method of angling can simply be a matter of individual temperament but collectively it can elude to social classification and aspiration and this is especially true for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I use the word 'attempt' carefully as this is a thorny subject full of grey areas criss-crossed with personal and local opinion.

As evinced in seventeenth and eighteenth century writings on angling, those with time to indulge in the sport did not scruple to employ all methods of catching all types of fish¹. It is apparent, however, that the method of catching fish, especially those of the trout species, by floating an intricate imitation of a flying insect on, or in, the water demanded more time, and arguably more skill in the preparation of the required equipment, especially the fishing rod and the line. With the advent of the industrial period, as small craft workshops began to manufacture and sell fishing tackle, this difference became manifest in the greater cost of fly fishing tackle and this helped exclude many anglers from the lower socio-economic scale from fly fishing. At the same time fly fishing came to be seen as a more demanding, a more artful branch of angling which 'differs in many respects from all other kinds of sport practiced on the waters with rod and line'². A belief gained currency that catching the trout by means other than fly fishing was 'unsporting' and so easy that fish stocks could be depleted. Such thinking resulted in many riparian owners permitting only fly fishing on their waters, compounding social exclusion. Such tensions can be detected in the history of the Richmond Angling Society.

An explanation of the law relating to the ownership of fishing rights is also appropriate. Property rights in land also relate to the right to fish, but this can be disposed of, or used, as the owner wishes. Ownership of the right to fish, with or without ownership of the land, ie the river bed and its banks, is referred to as riparian ownership. Along with other rights a riparian owner can fish, access the water and can carry out works in order to maintain the fishery. There is also a right to lease riparian property³.

Foundation

Clubs and societies in British towns are a particular social phenomena dating back to the Augustan era when they emerged as an element of urban cultural renaissance. The sport of angling has been organized by informal circles since at least the seventeenth century tending towards a more formal structured approach later during eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries⁴. Notable early local examples of this process are the Penrith Angling Association, established in 1850, and which still exists, and the Wear Fishing Association, a body formed to reduce poaching on the Wear in County Durham. The Wear Association existed from the early 1850s to 1873 and provided fishing for at least two hundred working men throughout that period⁵. The Richmond and District Angling Society came into being much later in 1912 and at the tail end of a blossoming of new hobby and sporting clubs which commenced in the 1890s⁶.

¹ Taverner, Eric, *Trout Fishing from all angles*, (London: Seeley, 1933), pp 17-23.

² Stonehenge, *Manual of British Rural Sports*, (London: Routledge, Warnes & Routledge, 1859), p 268.

³ Millichamp, Ronald, *A Guide to Angling Law* (Crayford: Shaw & Sons, 1990), pp18-19.

⁴ Clark, Peter, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800 – The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p 124.

⁵ Henderson, William, *My Life as an Angler* (Moretonhampstead: The Flyfisher's Classic Library, 2001), pp 254-5.

⁶ Clark, p 175-6.

'The Swale flows placidly by willow holts and water-meadows betwixt terrace banks.'⁷ Notwithstanding Edmund Bogg's florid description of the River Swale it was not one of the north's premier fishing rivers, but it was accessible, and thus held many attractions for the anglers of Richmond. In 1912 fishing rights in the vicinity of the town were mainly in private hands with only relatively short sections of the river accessible to those without connections, or in trade, manual employment or service. Some fishing was to be enjoyed on the north side of the river by paying for a daily permit from the Zetland Estate Office, and the riparian owners of Skeeby Beck also issued permits, but only to a privileged few. River management on these waters was non-existent as it was on the small stretch of water owned by the town corporation where Richmond residents were allowed to fish freely. The attractions of angling together with very restricted access to a nearby, but generous, length of river resulted in a high incidence of poaching in the district⁸. A keen angler, Mr P.C. Wenham, father of the historian Leslie Peter Wenham, moved to Richmond from the south of England in 1911. After settling into the area he identified the need for an organisation which could harness the angling potential of Swale and its tributaries to the benefit both the angling public and riparian owners in the district. Wenham appears to have been the agent provocateur who consulted with others of a like mind, drawing them together at a public meeting at the Buck Inn, Newbiggin, on the 30th September 1912. Eight people attended this meeting which considered the need for an angling club in the town. The attendees were G. Hayward, a shopkeeper and landlord of the Buck Inn, I. Harrison, H. Benson, B. Spenser, H. Hague, J. McKay, and A. Gregory, a reporter of 10 Flints Yard⁹. Wenham himself chaired the meeting but it was Mr Harrison who proposed that an angling club should be formed for the town and the district. This was seconded by Mr Hague and this proposition became the sole resolution of the meeting¹⁰. Three further meetings took place in quick succession during the month of October and the structure, the officials and the rules of the Society were decided upon. From the fifteen people who attended a second meeting on the 4th October, also chaired by P.C. Wenham, and again held at the Buck Inn, a committee of six was chosen to manage the Society and Wenham was elected to be its first Secretary and treasurer. It was also resolved to invite The First Marquis of Zetland to become President of the newly formed Richmond and District Angling Society. Lord Zetland's acceptance of this position is recorded in the minutes of a committee meeting held in the February of the following year and it is notable that the Zetland family have maintained their support for the Society right up to the present day¹¹. Annual membership subscriptions were set at three shillings per year with an option to pay this sum in two instalments, the first by 1st of April and the second by 1st October¹². Mr Harry Hague accepted appointment as chairman and draft rules were submitted, modified and approved at later meetings on 24th and 31st October. In an attempt to get together a fund for the Society a whist-drive was proposed and a fishing competition discussed, although it is not clear from the records

⁷ Bogg, Edmund, *Richmondshire*, (London: Elliot Stock, 1908), p 112.

⁸ WMSS.

⁹ MB 30th Sep 1913 & *Kellys Directory of Yorkshire North and East Ridings with the City of York*, (London: Kellys Directories, 1913).

¹⁰ MB 30th Sep 1913.

¹¹ MB 12th Feb 1913.

¹² MB 4th Oct 1912 & WMSS.

whether these actually took place. Mr George Harrison the Borough Surveyor and Sanitary Inspector, Mr Herbert William Marsden the Water Inspector, Mr H.V.Norton, Henry Benson, Alfred F.Spencer and the Stationer Herbert William Spencer were the six members of the first committee¹³. At this time a gunsmith, Charles Spencer, was trading in Finkle Street and it is interesting that L.P.Wenham identifies this man as a founder member of the Society¹⁴. However, Charles Spencer does not seem to have joined until March 1913 after which date his shop was the place where non-members of the Society could obtain annual, weekly and daily permits allowing them to fish the Society's waters¹⁵. A reference to Charles Spencer's death was recorded in July 1923¹⁶.

Before the first annual general meeting, held at the end of January 1913, the members of the committee worked hard to lay the foundations of a successful society. To quote the Secretary, at the end of October 1912 the Richmond and District Angling Society was 'without water in which to wet a line', however, by the close of 1912 significant progress had been made¹⁷. Three major owners of riparian rights on the River Swale, Lord Zetland, H.A.S Prior and R.H.Prior-Wandesforde were approached, initially by letter and then through meetings¹⁸. The Marquis of Zetland agreed that the Society could lease his stretch of water on the Swale at an annual rent of five pounds, a sum which he then returned to the Society as a donation, an arrangement which perpetuated for many years¹⁹. A legal agreement, also for a yearly rent of five pounds, was obtained to fish the waters of H.A.S Prior who, along with R.H.Prior-Wandesforde, became a vice-president of the Society with Mr Prior also serving as an ex-officio member²⁰. Protracted negotiations for the waters of the Wandesforde Estate continued until they were eventually leased to the Society in 1915²¹. It would appear, however, that an interim arrangement was made with the Estate as records show rent being paid and Society notice boards being placed on the riverside in 1913²². With the same generous spirit as Lord Zetland the Wandesford Estate paid back the rent for the fishing rights as a donation and there is little doubt that such support helped to ensure initial viability and continuity²³. The Yorkshire Fishery Board, at the time the arm of government responsible for stewardship of the rivers, was also supportive of the new Society and by December 1912 had pledged five hundred yearling trout for release in 1913. The Society had to find funds to transport these fish to the River Swale²⁴.

Thirty four members attended the first annual general meeting of the Society which was held at the Zetland Club, Newbiggin, on 31st January 1913. At this meeting Lord

¹³ MB 4th Oct; 24th Oct; 31st Oct 1912 & Kellys Directory.

¹⁴ Wenham, Leslie P, *Around Richmond in Old Photographs*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989), p 30.

¹⁵ Account book.

¹⁶ MB 22nd Jul 1923.

¹⁷ WMSS.

¹⁸ WMSS.

¹⁹ MB 25th Jan 1913 & WMSS.

²⁰ MB 25th Jan 1913 & 20th Feb 1913.

²¹ WMSS.

²² MB 16th Mar & 18th Sep 1913 & Account book.

²³ Account book.

²⁴ MB 20th Dec 1912.

Zetland's Agent, Mr F.W.Hall, was elected chairman and the enthusiasm generated by the new Society gave rise to a successful vote to increase the committee from six to eleven members. More Richmond anglers wanted to make an active contribution and those elected to form the full committee were A.Suggitt, W.Harrison, H.J.Fraquet, F.Wood and W.Metcalf. A sign of confidence in the success of the new venture can be detected in the adoption, by a majority of 16 votes, of a motion to raise the annual membership subscription, originally set at three shillings per year, to five shillings plus a one shilling joining fee. Youths under sixteen years of age, and apprentices bound under indenture, which at the time would have covered young men up to the age of twenty one, were to pay half the annual subscription. The meeting also agreed to place an advertisement to employ a water bailiff who would be selected by the committee²⁵. Ten applications were received and a meeting of the committee took place on 20th February to interview three candidates selected from the applicants. At that meeting Charles Musgrave was appointed as the first full time bailiff to watch over the waters of the Society²⁶. At a general meeting in March 1913 the issue of annual, weekly and daily permits which would allow non-members, those who lived outside of the town and close its environs, to fish the Society's waters was agreed. This was an important way of funding the Society the membership of which was restricted to those living within Richmond and nearby (in 1942 a five mile radius from the town defined the 'district' for membership, a rule which has continued to the present day. This may have been an affirmation of an earlier rule²⁷). These permits, purchased in the town, initially at the gunsmiths in Finkle Street, allowed many anglers living some distance from Richmond to visit the river and to pay to fish. The price of the annual fishing permit for non-members was set at fifteen shillings, which when compared with the five shillings paid each year by a member, and the bailiffs weekly wage of twelve shillings and six pence, demonstrates the ethos of the Society which was to provide fishing at a reasonable cost for the residents of Richmond and its close environs. Outsiders had to pay significantly more! This meeting also agreed the wording for notice boards to be erected at salient points along the leased waters to warn off poachers and those who fished with scant regard for the law. The notices clearly showed that the Society's waters were 'Preserved Waters - Richmond & District Angling Society'²⁸. However, the culminating event of the foundation of the Richmond and District Angling Society took place by the side of the Swale on 26th March 1913 when the first stocking of the river took place and five hundred yearling trout were released into the water²⁹. P.C.Wenham's vision had become reality. The Society he envisaged now had members, an income, waters to fish and had taken the first important steps in managing its fishery. Wenham was to remain dedicated to the Society; serving as its Secretary until his death fifty one years after its foundation.

²⁵ MB 31st Jan 1913.

²⁶ MB 31st Jan; 12th Feb & 20th Feb 1913.

²⁷ MB 2nd Apr 1942.

²⁸ MB 20th Feb 1913.

²⁹ MB 6th Mar 1913.

Fishing rights

The minute book shows that by early 1922 the Richmond Angling Society leased rights to fish over some twelve miles of river and a total rent of fifteen pounds was paid in the year, ten pounds of which was received back as donations from Zetland and Wandesford estates³⁰. Providing the Society with such extensive fishing had taken much negotiation; some of which was delicate but necessary to overcome preferences held by the gentry yet not easily adaptable to anglers from the working population. Some river-owners frowned on fishing on the Lord's Day and wanted leases drawn up to prohibit the practice. They had to be convinced that many people only had Sunday on which to enjoy their sport³¹. Other owners did not want fishing methods other than fly fishing used on their waters. Whilst this was a problem in an organisation having an egalitarian nature, in that it was trying to cater for most anglers, the restriction often had to be accepted in order to obtain a lease³². Even when leases which did permit all methods of fishing were obtained, owners could remain uneasy. As late as 1951 Mr D'Arcy Hildyard complained that the use of maggot and bottom fishing was spoiling his waters at Colburn and demanded that the Society change its rules to allow fly fishing only³³. Holding rights to fish rivers also brought with it a responsibility to ensure that maintenance work was carried out to keep access paths, riverside fences, gates and stys in good order as well as other works to ensure the viability of the fishery. Then, as today, the committee members took the lead and the first recorded working party visited the riverside on Sunday 16th February 1913³⁴. By the time of the annual general meeting in 1914 the Society fished on waters belonging to Mr H.A.S Prior, the Zetland Estate, the Wandesford Estate, Major Smithwards, Messrs T.B & W Shaw and also the waters held by the Wardens of the Kirby Hill Dakyns Trust³⁵. Whilst most of these waters were on the river Swale it is thought that members also fished Arkle Beck as some of them raised concern that a fish ladder should be incorporated into the wear being built on the beck in order to supply hydro-electricity to Reeth³⁶. Lack of such a facility would have been detrimental to both the fishing in Arkle Beck and to the spawning of Swale trout in its upper reaches.

The year 1914 also saw the first attempt by the Society to own, rather than to rent, fishing rights. The D'Arcy Hildyard family was approached to see if they were willing to sell their riparian rights on the Swale at Colburn³⁷. This approach was unsuccessful but by 1919 these waters were being rented on an annual basis for five pounds³⁸. The next major expansion in the river fishing available to the Society came during the Second World

³⁰ MB 16th Feb 1922 & Account Book.

³¹ MB 25th Mar 1913.

³² WMSS.

³³ MB 4th Apr 1951.

³⁴ MB 12th Feb 1913.

³⁵ MB 24th Feb 1914.

³⁶ MB 24th Feb 1914.

³⁷ MB 9th Aug 1914.

³⁸ WMSS.

War. In 1941 a three year lease was agreed, at a rental of twenty pounds per year, for the Swale fishing rights of the Marske Estate, owned by Mr D'Arcy Hutton³⁹. D'Arcy Hutton stipulated that only fly fishing should be practiced on these waters, and this was non-negotiable⁴⁰. From the 1930s fishing rights were rented from a number of smaller land-owners on waters just outside of Richmond but the fishing on the Swale as it flowed through the town was not controlled in any way by the riparian owner, the Town Council. This became a source of trouble to adjacent preserved waters as unauthorised anglers had a tendency to stray up and down the river. In 1945, in an attempt to improve this situation, the committee proposed to Richmond Town Council that the Society should take over the stewardship this water⁴¹. Meetings took place between the Society and the Lands Committee of the Town Council to work out the rules for such an arrangement putting in place measures such as a daily catch limit of twenty trout per fisherman and prohibiting the use of spinning reels⁴². It was not, however, until 1947 that an agreement was finally reached and Richmond Angling Society became authorised to supervise these waters on behalf of Richmond Town Council⁴³.

Part of the river next to the Council water, and just below the castle, was owned by Mr R. Willis of Earls Orchard. In 1935 Mr Willis offered these waters to the Angling Society. The reasons why are not known, but this offer was rejected and the waters passed into the ownership of Richmond Amateur Football Club. An agreement was reached with the Football Club to rent these fishing rights for two pounds each year⁴⁴. In 1964, however, the Football Club informed the Angling Society that it wished to dispose of its rights and subsequently accepted the Society's purchase price of forty pounds⁴⁵. It was much earlier, in 1955, when the Angling Society made its first successful purchase of riparian rights when the Trustees of the Dakyns Trust agreed to sell their waters on the Swale⁴⁶. The Trust had been approached in 1952 and as the Society was financially stable, holding reserves amounting to four hundred and thirty five pounds, at the same time a further offer was made to buy the more extensive waters belonging to the Kirkhall Estate⁴⁷. Kirkhall were successors to the Wandesford family and these waters had been fished under lease by the Society since 1915. During 1940 the fishing near Billy Banks was constantly interrupted by soldiers from Catterick bathing in the river. Even though representation was made to the War Department to put a stop to the practice, Kirkhall agreed to reduce the annual rent from twenty five pounds to fifteen pounds to compensate for the ongoing disturbance⁴⁸. When Kirkhall took over from the Wandesford Estate they continued the practice of donating the rent for the fishing back to the Society, but as they increased the rent throughout the years the donation remained at the five pounds as paid to Wandesford in 1915. In 1952, whilst retaining ownership of riparian rights on the

³⁹ MB 18th Dec 1941.

⁴⁰ WMSS.

⁴¹ MB 4th Jan 1945.

⁴² MB 6th Mar 1945.

⁴³ MB 5th Mar 1947.

⁴⁴ WMSS & MB 2nd Nov 1949.

⁴⁵ MB 1st Apr 1964.

⁴⁶ MB 11th Jan 1956.

⁴⁷ MB 16th Jan & 1st Oct 1952.

⁴⁸ WMSS.

Swale, Kirkhall Estates bequeathed its lands at Billy Banks, Round Howe, Calfhall, Hudswell, Redhow and Hag Woods to the National Trust. This presented an opportunity for ownership of the fishing rights to change hands but the negotiations took a similar time to those with the Dakyns Trust and it was not until late 1954 that the purchase was successfully finalised. The Society paid three hundred pounds for ownership of the fishing rights on this most beautiful stretch of the Swale⁴⁹.

In 1966 The Second Marquis of Zetland presented the Richmond Angling Society with his fishing rights on the Swale under Whitcliffe Scar. A deed of gift was drawn up shortly after the Society lost the north bank fishing at Lowenthwaite farm due to the its sale by Zetland Estate, along with its fishing rights for which the Society was tenant on an annual lease. The Secretary attempted to have the sale rearranged so that the fishing was sold separately from the land but arrangements were too far advanced when the Society became aware of the intention to sell. Once sold, the new owner quickly invoked a clause in the lease giving the Society three months notice⁵⁰. It would appear that Zetland Estate did not intend that the Society should loose its fishing and the gift seems to have been, in part, restitution.

The 1970s saw further rights at Catterick Bridge leased from Richmond Town Council along with part of Skeeby Beck and a significant acquisition of riparian assets at Easby where both the major riparian owners agreed to sell their rights to the Society, Mr C.A. Goldingham in 1977, followed by Lady Serena James in 1978⁵¹. With car ownership becoming widespread many more anglers were able to travel to more distant waters to fish and this increase in personal mobility resulted in the Society widening its horizons and seeking out and obtaining fishing rights throughout the 1980s. With the addition of Semer Water and the Rivers Bain and Ure in Wensleydale, and also the River Tees, the range of angling venues for the members and permit holders was becoming much wider; marking a change to the previous local nature of angling activity for the Society⁵². Changes in the sport of angling also gained momentum in this period with still-water angling, for both game and course fish, growing in popularity and, as a consequence, fly fishing on rivers going into comparative decline. The reasons for this are manifold but growth in personal transport was significant along with the greater possibility, and the excitement and kudos, of catching much larger specimen fish in stocked lakes and ponds. In the early 1970s the Society entered into a lease for the ponds at Great Langton belonging to Major Fife of Langton Hall, and also for another pond at Green Lane Farm near Scorton⁵³. The management of still-water fisheries placed new demands on the committee. Different rules to cover fishing practice on ponds had to be drawn up in agreement with the owners and the cost of stocking the new ponds with course fish, such as Carp and Tench, appears to have caused some concern, especially to the Treasurer, as these fish were three times the cost of the trout used for socking the Swale⁵⁴. Different

⁴⁹ WMSS & MB 7th Jan 1957.

⁵⁰ MB 21st Sept, 5th Nov & 30th Nov 1966.

⁵¹ MB 7th May 1975 & RAS Papers 24th May 1977 & 14th Sep 1978.

⁵² MB 5th Sep 1990 & RAS Papers 13th Aug 1981.

⁵³ MB 1st Apr 1970 & 2nd May 1973.

⁵⁴ MB 2nd May 1973.

maintenance tasks were needed on these waters, especially weed clearance and control and the clearing of litter, but the ponds attracted growing numbers of still-water anglers who brought revenue to the Society. Numerous, but less successful attempts were made to obtain further leases on still-water fisheries including ponds and lakes at Dalton, Forcett, Aske and Langthorne Farm near Bedale. But competition from other angling clubs was keen and the next major successful addition, apart from a short term holding of what turned out to be an unsuitable pond at Hornby Castle, did not take place until 1996 when Thorpe Perrow Quarry, near Bedale, was leased. This water, and the ponds at Great Langton, remain important Society fisheries⁵⁵.

The Richmond and District Angling Society has been successful over the years in both obtaining its own riparian assets and maintaining sound relationships with the fishery owners with whom lease agreements were made. Since the early twentieth century a significant and varied selection of waters have been fished by its members and permit holders. Continuity in leasing the same waters over long periods of time is testimony to the dedication and good management of the many officials and committee members who have served the Society. The reputation of the Society was doubly recognised in 1994 when Major Fife showed preference to Richmond Anglers by turning down a higher rental offer from another club for the Great Langton ponds. Mr G. Fothergill also made a generous gesture in leasing his section of the Swale at Red House Farm to the Society, rejecting more money as he believed that the local angling society should benefit from his stretch of this beautiful river⁵⁶.

Membership

At its formation the Society was divided into firstly, members, qualified by residence in Richmond or within a five mile radius of the town, and holding voting rights and eligibility to serve on the committee, and, secondly, those who paid for permits allowing them to fish the waters of the Society⁵⁷. Throughout the years there have been a number of variations on this basic theme. Associate or non-resident membership, without voting rights, was introduced in the late 1970s, probably encouraged by the trend towards greater car ownership and, thereby, greater personal mobility, and in the mid 1990s a category of membership for those who fished only for course fish was introduced for a number of years⁵⁸. However, apart from the demarcation between resident and non-resident, which persists to the present day, the Society from its outset possessed an egalitarian quality based upon the fellowship of angling. Whilst many of the original members were business people and officials of the town a wide social mix was not inhibited. Apprentices, who paid half the full membership fee, and other youths were welcome and some idea of the social mix can be seen in the vote of condolence for two members killed at the start of the Great War in 1915, one a ranker, Private Harry Benson,

⁵⁵ MB 10th Mar 1970, 3rd Nov 1992, 2nd Apr 1996.

⁵⁶ MB 7th Jun & 6th Dec 1994.

⁵⁷ MB 31st Jan & 12th Feb 1913.

⁵⁸ MB 5th Dec 1995.

and the other a general officer, Colonel Leatham⁵⁹. Equality also held good across the sexes, at least in the early days. In 1914 a Miss Walton held junior membership and Miss Olive Leather, of the prominent Leather family who lived at Bolton Crofts in Quaker Lane, was a member of the Society for a number of years⁶⁰. This did not last however, and at the 1932 annual general meeting it was necessary to propose that ladies should be admitted to membership. This proposal was defeated by the members, even though finances demanded more membership revenue at that time, and evidence of a more enlightened attitude only occurs in 1965 when the Society once again accepted a female junior member⁶¹. By 1977 there were three lady members⁶².

Whilst Society membership appears to have transcended class barriers, distinction can be seen in its attitudes to anglers who were serving in the military stationed at nearby Catterick Camp. However, this shows an empathy with the stratified nature of military organisation and does not suggest any general exclusivity within the Society. The first officers' mess to come to an arrangement with the Society was that of the West Riding Regiment in 1913⁶³. It was agreed that mess members could fish Society waters for an annual fee of two guineas, at this time the cost of an annual permit for a non-member was fifteen shillings! Other messes came to similar arrangements which acted as a differential to permit sales made to NCOs and private soldiers stationed at Catterick. A comment made at the annual general meeting in 1917 tells of a considerable increase in receipts due to the growth of Catterick Camp as both NCOs and soldiers had been allowed to fish for an annual fee of five shillings⁶⁴. However, the preference given to messes continues but in 1934 it was decided that only NCOs temporarily based at Catterick Camp should be allowed to fish by special arrangement for five shillings a year, non-resident private soldiers had to buy a permit⁶⁵. Even as late as 1953 a special annual membership category, with a fee of two guineas existed for commissioned officers, all other 'visiting' members, including non-commissioned ranks, had to pay an additional pound for annual membership⁶⁶.

Statistical data on membership is unfortunately rare in the surviving records and extrapolation of patterns of membership from the annual accounts would be difficult and misleading. It is worth, however, including the 'snapshots' of member numbers that do remain as they give some insight into the nature of the Society during its long lifetime. The very early financial accounts list most members by name but within a few years this practice ceased as by 1916 membership had risen, from 59 members in 1915, up to 69⁶⁷. At this time a significant number of these members were in the armed forces with 39 of the 69 members of 1916 serving their country in the Great War. Many years intervene before another comparison can be made and it is not until 1937, during a period of

⁵⁹ MB 31st Jan 1913 & 2nd Feb 1916.

⁶⁰ Account book.

⁶¹ MB 21st Jan 1932 & 3rd Mar 1965.

⁶² MB 26th Jan 1977.

⁶³ MB 3rd Jul 1913.

⁶⁴ WMSS & MB 7th Mar 1917.

⁶⁵ WMSS.

⁶⁶ MB 2nd Dec 1953.

⁶⁷ MB 8th Mar 1915 & 2nd Feb 1916.

declining membership and related financial concerns, that the minute book indicates 99 resident members⁶⁸. By 1957 the records show 225 members, plus 72 junior members. In addition 325 day permits to fish the Society's waters and 44 weekly permits were sold in that year. This was followed, in 1958, by 215 members, 86 juniors and 428 day permits with 55 week permits sold⁶⁹. Just under twenty years later, in 1975, the adult membership is shown to be remarkably similar, standing at 245, but the junior members had increased to 130 with 507 daily and 160 weekly permits issued. Membership numbers went up in 1977 to 303 members with 175 juniors⁷⁰. In this period much was done by committee to encourage the young. In 1974 the Secretary had been approached by a group of parents asking if the Society could instruct youngsters in the skills of angling. A local school, (it is not known which school), also expressed interest in the junior angling section⁷¹. The challenge was taken up and evening classes were held resulting in a buoyant junior membership⁷². By 1993, however, an overall decline in membership was seen as the main reason for a deficit of expenditure against income for the year, but lack of data inhibits any comparison with the membership numbers in the 1970s⁷³.

The membership level for 2002 was 89 members, along with 271 associate members and significant permit sales ensuring the wellbeing of the Society⁷⁴. It is interesting to compare these present day numbers with those in the past and to speculate on the reasons for the marked decline in resident membership to a point where local membership is almost comparable with the early days of the Society. Any hypothesising should consider the wide range of angling venues now available along with the ability to travel to them with great ease.

Water Bailiffs

The Water Bailiff is an official whose main task is to ensure that people fishing preserved waters do so according to both the law and the rules of the Society. Early leases for fishing rights entered into by the Richmond Angling Society stipulated that a water bailiff had to be employed⁷⁵.

Until the 1960s the bailiff was an employee of the Society, insured by the Society and working full-time during the trout fishing season and being retained to patrol the river three times each week for the rest of the year. The first appointment was made in early 1913 after response to an advertisement and selection by the committee⁷⁶. The first

⁶⁸ WMSS & MB 1st Feb 1937.

⁶⁹ MB 1st Oct 1958.

⁷⁰ MB 3rd Dec 1975 & 26th Jan 1977.

⁷¹ MB 9th Oct 1974.

⁷² MB 2nd Apr 1975.

⁷³ MB 7th Dec 1993.

⁷⁴ Account book.

⁷⁵ WMSS

⁷⁶ MB 12th & 20th Feb 1913.

appointee was Mr Charles Musgrave, apparently a skilled angler and fly maker, who served as bailiff until his death in 1923⁷⁷. His initial weekly wage was fourteen shillings during the trout season together with an annual bonus, which may have acted as a retainer for patrolling out of season. A two weeks notice period was incorporated into his contract and, initially he was not permitted to fish the waters in his charge⁷⁸. Charles Musgrave seems to have been diligent and well thought of. In October 1913, only nine months after his appointment, he was thanked by the committee and given special permission to fish the waters⁷⁹. His pay increased to seventeen shillings by 1917, to eighteen shillings in 1918 and by 1920 it had risen to twenty five shillings⁸⁰. Musgrave supplemented this income by providing tuition in fly fishing to Society members and P.C. Wenham records an incident which took place whilst he was teaching a member to cast on the river. The pupil caught his hook in Musgrave's nose and riverside attempts to remove it were painful and unfruitful. Before the hook could be extracted the barb had to be removed by filing and this operation had to be very carefully carried out and this was done in the King's Head Hotel. For some time the unfortunate bailiff's nose was said to be 'a sight to behold'⁸¹.

Full time employment of the bailiff throughout the whole of the year was not introduced until 1946 and at an annual salary of fifty two pounds, paid weekly⁸². This change was brought about by the growth in the importance to the Society of coarse fishing which continues outside of the trout fishing season. During the early period the bailiff can be seen very much as a servant of the Society and it was only in 1949 that ongoing permission was granted for the office holder to enjoy similar benefits to members and to fish the waters, subject, of course, to his duties not being neglected⁸³. By the 1940s the bailiff was not only authorised by the committee but also through a warrant issued by the Fishery Board which considerably extended his powers under the law⁸⁴. The Society appears to have looked after bailiffs in its employ. In 1948 the bailiff, Ernest Robert Horn, became incapacitated through an accident at his home. Horn had initially been employed on a temporary basis in 1929 to cover the incapacity of the post holder Nicholas Roskell who was supported until he relinquished the post in 1930⁸⁵. Because of Horn's good service the Society also agreed to pay him whilst he recovered and this continued until he resigned in 1949 due to his 'advancing years'⁸⁶.

By the 1950s the task of effectively policing the whole of the Society's waters had grown more onerous. In 1941 a lease was obtained for fishing rights on the River Swale owned by Mr D'Arcy Hutton of Marske. As a consequence the bailiff had to be granted additional pay for looking after these waters. Extension of the Society's fishing rights

⁷⁷ MB 22nd July 1923.

⁷⁸ MB 20th Feb 1913.

⁷⁹ MB 2nd Oct 1913.

⁸⁰ WMSS

⁸¹ WMSS

⁸² WMSS

⁸³ WMSS

⁸⁴ MB 14th Feb 1954.

⁸⁵ WMSS & MB 8th Mar 1929.

⁸⁶ MB 12th Jan 1949.

further up the dale required significantly more travelling time and patrolling for the bailiff⁸⁷. Even with the incentive of more pay effective coverage of the full extent of the fishing rights was difficult therefore, in 1958, the Society agreed to pay the Marske Estate an annual fee for the services of estate keepers who helped to keep an eye on these more distant waters⁸⁸. This appears to have been the formalization of an arrangement which had existed since 1941 by which Mr Beattie, an employee of the Marske Estate, assisted the bailiff and was recompensed by 'a Christmas gift' from the Society⁸⁹. In 1968 the last full time bailiff, a Mr Hammond, stood down due to ill health and a period of patchy and irregular patrolling, probably on an informal basis, ensued⁹⁰. By January 1972 a solution was found by engaging two part time bailiffs, one of each to patrol the Swale above and below Richmond and applicants were sought by advertisement to fill the posts. However, many of the nineteen applications received were seemingly on a misunderstanding the positions were full time! Only three applicants pursued the vacancies and two appointments were made at a rate of pay of two pounds per week⁹¹. At this time the Society was leasing still-water fishing rights on ponds and also had an agreement through which its bailiffs were watching over the riparian rights owned by Mr D'Arcy Hillyard, on the south bank of the Swale at Colburn Hall⁹². The Society received a payment of forty pounds per year for this service to the Colburn Estate⁹³. This additional patrolling, especially to ponds at Great Langton and Scorton, added greatly to the workload and in 1974 three part time bailiffs were covering both river and pond fisheries, one bailiff being dedicated to the ponds. The part time nature of the patrols, carried out as and when their full time occupations allowed, caused occasional criticism from some members who fished during the working week and failed to meet a bailiff on his rounds. Comments from the committee, however, reflect a more realistic attitude to the limitations of part-time stewardship of the Society's fisheries⁹⁴. As the full time bailiff had been employed from year to year, with continuation confirmed at the Annual General Meeting, a loose system of annual re-election of part-time bailiffs came into being and in the 1970s with honorariums added as an incentive. Each bailiff received five pounds for 1974⁹⁵.

Over the years the work of the bailiffs contributed to the wellbeing of the Society acting to protect its waters and, thereby its income. Many rule infringements and pollution and poaching incidents were reported and dealt with. Minutes of a committee meeting in June 1913 record what must be the first action taken against an angler for fishing without a permit⁹⁶. Later records show varying periods of litigious fervour in dealing with unauthorised fishing, especially in the 1930s and 1950s. In 1935, a year when legal costs due to lease negotiation were not incurred, payments to solicitors acting to prosecute

⁸⁷ MB 18th Dec 1941.

⁸⁸ MB 5th Nov 1958.

⁸⁹ WMSS

⁹⁰ MB 5th Jun 1968.

⁹¹ MB 19th Jan 1972.

⁹² MB 3rd Mar 1970 & 5th Apr 1972.

⁹³ MB 5th Apr 1972 & 5th Jun 1974.

⁹⁴ MB 6th Feb 1974.

⁹⁵ MB 10th Dec 1974.

⁹⁶ MB 13th Jun 1913.

were the third largest expenditure item⁹⁷. Typically offenders first received written warnings, or were asked to appear before the committee, but cases were also pursued to the magistrates court, as when a Royal Signals sergeant was fined two pounds with three pounds and three shillings costs for fishing without a permit in 1953⁹⁸. In relation to relative monetary values it is interesting that when the Society pursued a similar prosecution in 1975 the magistrates fined the offender one pound and the ten pounds costs awarded only met half of the Society's legal bill!⁹⁹

Throughout the 1980s, the 1990s, and up to the present day, the system of volunteer, part time bailiffs, rewarded by annual honorariums, has continued on the still-water and river fisheries of the Richmond Angling Society. Bailiff reports are an agenda item at each monthly committee meeting with permit transgressions, litter and pollution incidents, interference to fish and fishing, and the odd broken fence or rickety sty being dealt with in time honoured way. The water bailiffs can be seen as the unsung heroes of the angling fraternity!

A list of the full time Water Bailiffs of the Richmond & District Angling Society is given in the appendix

Managing the Fishery

Owning, or holding the tenancy of riparian rights, imposes a responsibility for the management and maintenance of those rights, a constant task for the officials and committee of the an angling society. Over the years management of the waters has presented many different challenges whilst many jobs, waterside maintenance tasks such as planting trees to counter erosion and repairing fences and stys, have continued unabated year after year.

In the early days of the Society the major cause of disturbance to the fish and to the angling on the Swale came from large groups of soldiers from Catterick Camp bathing in the river. Whilst persistence had to be maintained this problem was easily dealt with as the Society had a good relationship with the military authorities with many officers mess members fishing the waters at a special two guinea rate¹⁰⁰. This disturbance fluctuated along with the troop levels at Catterick Camp but as the century progressed, and society became more affluent and mobile, a new problem of disturbance to angling emerged.

In 1957 the Society first became concerned about interruption to angling by groups of canoes using the river after the Town Council permitted Darlington Education Committee to canoe at Earls Orchard¹⁰¹. The River Swale Act, legislation dating from 1770,

⁹⁷ Account book.

⁹⁸ MB 3rd Oct 1953.

⁹⁹ MB 12th Nov 1975.

¹⁰⁰ MB 3rd Jul 1913.

¹⁰¹ MB 4th Dec 1957.

conferred all rights to use boats on the river to its riparian owners. Consequently the river does not possess any right of navigation entitling canoeists use of the water without deferring to the riparian owners¹⁰². Through the 1960s the incidence of canoeing increased but problems remained spasmodic and essentially local. Resolution was sought by granting permission for the canoeists to use the Societies waters at certain times, especially outside of the trout fishing season, or by intervention, as when discussions took place with the headmaster of Richmond Hill Approved School after boys had been taken canoeing on the river without first asking permission from the riparian owners¹⁰³.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 80s the problems brought about by unauthorised canoeing increased and came to occupy a very significant amount of time for the committee. The Swale had become a magnet for canoeing and whilst the Army and many canoe clubs acted within the law and obtained permission from water owners before holding events on the river, increasingly many private individuals and canoeing parties did not. This brought them into open conflict with anglers and riparian owners. The problem became worse as it was no longer simply a local one with canoeists regularly coming to the river from as far away the Midlands and even the south of England¹⁰⁴. Bad feeling grew to such an extent that in 1984, and after taking legal advice, a major legal case with the British Canoe Union over canoe access to the waters of the Society was considered¹⁰⁵. Such an aggressive stance was not easy and proved to be divisive. Resignations from the committee took place and statements were made by some committee members distancing themselves from the stance being taken¹⁰⁶. Finally the Society decided that the risk of incurring overwhelming costs in a major legal case was too great as the BCU was a national body with significant resources. The situation continued to deteriorate and by 1986 a canoeing fringe group, the Campaign for River Access for Canoes and Kayaks, not supported by the BCU, were planning disruptive actions to provoke the angling fraternity and Richmond and the Swale were prime targets¹⁰⁷. Serious confrontation was avoided however but in the autumn 1987 representation had to be made to Richmondshire District Council when the Swaledale Outdoor Club, on behalf of canoeist, applied to the Council to take over the riparian rights, owned by the Council, but which the Angling Society had held since 1947. This proposition was rejected by the Council by a vote of 11 to 2¹⁰⁸. Following these events the Society continued to support the organisers of canoe events who sought their permission, and the permission of the other riparian tenants and owners on the river. By the 1990 annual general meeting of the Society the Secretary reported that a good working relationship had been restored with the Swaledale Outdoor Club¹⁰⁹. However the

¹⁰² MB 3rd Jun 1987, this Act was emphasized in a letter from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust of May 1985 to Richmond Town Council, the subject being the designation of the Swale as being of special scientific interest.

¹⁰³ MB 7th Apr 1965.

¹⁰⁴ MB 7th Mar 1984.

¹⁰⁵ MB 6th Jun 1984.

¹⁰⁶ MB 7th Mar & 3rd Oct 1984.

¹⁰⁷ BCU Press Release 11th Dec 1986.

¹⁰⁸ RAS, 'Presentation regarding Swaledale Outdoor Centres Proposal to take control of the management of Richmond Council water' 19th October 1987, & Northern Echo.

¹⁰⁹ MB 5th Dec 1990.

Society, its bailiffs and committee members, continued to uphold their rights by challenging and reporting unauthorised canoeing, a policy which continues to this day.

In the early twentieth century, replenishing the fish stocks of rivers where frequent angling took place was an established practice encouraged by the Government through the regional fisheries boards. Stocking was carried out on an annual basis and consisted of releasing into a river mainly immature fish, hatched and reared artificially in a fish farm. In December 1912, within a few months of the formation of Richmond Anglers, the Yorkshire Fisheries Board pledged the new Society five hundred yearling trout to place in the Swale. The Society had to cover the cost of transporting the fish to the river and a subscription was opened amongst the members raise the sum required¹¹⁰. On the 26th of March 1913 these fish arrived at the riverside and the first stocking took place¹¹¹. The location of this event is not recorded but the next annual release, also of five hundred yearling trout, took place in February 1914 at various locations along the river including Lowenthwaite¹¹². The account book records a payment to the railway company for carrying these fish¹¹³. Once they had arrived at Richmond Station they were taken to the river side by horse and cart. Initially the Fisheries Board provided free trout from its own hatcheries for stocking, but this practice was replaced by a monetary grant enabling the Society to source its own fish. This system, which gave the Society more latitude in the selection of species, age and size of the fish for stocking, continued until 1951 when the Yorkshire Fisheries Board was replaced by the Yorkshire Ouse River Board under the River Board Act 1948¹¹⁴. Grants ceased for 1951 but were resumed by the new Board in 1952¹¹⁵. Occasionally these grants for stocking were supplemented by individual members and by riparian owners and, as when Sir Henry Lawson made a donation of thirty five pounds to the Society specifically for stocking in 1943¹¹⁶. Donations made restocking with large numbers of fish possible and in 1945 one thousand two hundred trout two year old trout and six hundred and twenty four yearling trout were released followed by one thousand two year old fish in 1947¹¹⁷. At this time Society rules permitted the successful angler to remove twenty fish from the river each day¹¹⁸. In 1954 a daily catch limit of ten fish was imposed by the committee and the annual stocking levels had fallen to around five hundred trout¹¹⁹. Up to this time all the stocking carried out was with indigenous brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) but in 1956 the Society introduced one hundred rainbow trout into the Swale along with four hundred brown trout. The rainbow trout (*Salmo gairdneri*), is a native of North America and is an extremely adaptable fish. It can grow to a very large size and was introduced in response to the trend in angling towards catching larger 'trophy' fish. The practice of releasing rainbow trout into the river continued in the 1950s and towards the close of that decade the

¹¹⁰ MB 20th Dec 1912.

¹¹¹ MB 25th Marc 1913.

¹¹² MB 24th Feb 1914.

¹¹³ Account book.

¹¹⁴ MB 7th Feb 1951.

¹¹⁵ MB 16th Jan 1952.

¹¹⁶ MB Jan 1943.

¹¹⁷ MB 7th Feb 1945 & 5th Nov 1947.

¹¹⁸ MB 6th Mar 1946.

¹¹⁹ MB 20th Jan 1954.

numbers of fish release had risen again to a peak of one thousand four hundred and sixty three in 1958¹²⁰. In the late 1960s some members seemed to be worried about the practice of restocking the river and about the numbers of fish being removed from the water by anglers. At the 1967 annual general meeting two motions were proposed, one to stop restocking and another to reduce the daily catch limit significantly, down to three fish each day¹²¹. Both motions were defeated. This was not a particularly bad period for Society finances, so the cost of restocking was not a problem. This idea not to stock along with a proposed reduction in the catch limit, points to the emergence of a change of thinking about management of the wild trout stocks in the Swale and encouraged the undertaking of the particularly difficult task of getting members, and permit holders, to submit a return of all trout caught. In 1969 eighty nine anglers responded to a call for catch returns and this showed that two thousand seven hundred and seventy three trout were caught with nine hundred and eighty five of these were taken home to be eaten!¹²² The validity of such data from an organisation having a large transitory permit holding 'membership' is always suspect, but the very fact that the exercise took place shows a growing concern about trout stocks and the policy of restocking, which some believe to be detrimental to the wild fish stock of the river. However, stocking continued and it was not until the 1975 annual general meeting that the catch limit was reduced to four fish a day¹²³.

When the Society took on the fishing rights on the ponds at Great Langton and Green Lane Farm, Scorton in the early 1970s new demands in sustainable fishery management were placed on the committee. The stocking policy now had to include course fish for the ponds and the cost of carrying out the initial stocking of these waters, due the high cost of course fish in comparison to the cost of reared trout, was a surprise¹²⁴. The whole of the stocking budget for 1973 was taken up in providing two hundred rudd, two hundred carp and twenty kilos of small tench for release in the ponds¹²⁵. In later years surveys of pond species, and the transfer of specific species from one pond to another in conjunction with the Yorkshire River Board, along with weed clearance, the building of footbridges, bank consolidation and the constant clearing of the inevitable litter left by careless anglers, occupied a significant amount the time volunteered by committee members¹²⁶. Not everything went to plan and occasional mishaps occurred. Crisis point was reached in 1998 when the overstocking of the pond at Scorton resulted in dead fish appearing on its surface, including a carp weighting twelve pounds¹²⁷. Whilst the trout stocks in the River Swale were far from neglected due to the new emphasis on still-water angling, the trend towards course fishing focused attention on the river below the water falls at Richmond. This water contains a number of course fish which do not live in the river above the falls. Traditionally only trout had been released into the Swale, usually above Richmond, but in

¹²⁰ MB 23rd Jan 1959.

¹²¹ MB 25th Jan 1967.

¹²² MB 3rd Dec 1969.

¹²³ MB 12th Feb 1975.

¹²⁴ MB 2nd May 1973.

¹²⁵ MB 5th Dec 1973.

¹²⁶ MB 15th Aug 1984.

¹²⁷ MB 6th Dec 1989.

1991 it was decided to release one thousand two hundred barbel into the river below the falls¹²⁸. This release of barbel, plus a further release of roach, was encouraged and funded by the Swale Preservation Society which the Richmond Angling Society had joined in 1989¹²⁹. However, some years later few of the fish had been caught and it was concluded that the policy of stocking the river with species other than trout was not effective. A note in the minutes also expresses the opinion that habitat improvement would prove more beneficial to course fish stocks than placing new fish into the river¹³⁰.

The angler today may only remove two fish from the river in any one day and all fish caught in the Society's still-waters are returned alive to pond. The emphasis is now towards improving the habitat of the fisheries, especially in order to sustain and improve the wild trout and grayling stocks of the rivers. The Society works alongside the Environment Agency and instead of now obtaining grants for restocking, funding assistance is directed towards habitat creation and restoration.

From the earliest days of the Society its bailiffs and its members have been active in the detection of pollution in its rivers. An early cause for concern was the paper mill at Whitcliffe. In the summer of 1915 the bailiff, Charles Musgrave, suspected that fluid being discharged from the mill was causing the demise of fish. The Fisheries Board were informed and carried out an investigation but decided against prosecution of the mill owners¹³¹. The problem continued to recur and in 1918 a quantity of dye was released from the mill into the river¹³². Pollution by dye was still an occasional problem in 1930 as was tar seeping into the river from the town gas works as well as excess waste from sewage system of Catterick Camp¹³³. All these incidents were reported to the Fisheries Board and remedial steps taken but the problems seemed to keep returning. In later years the Town Council also became involved as the gas works continued to pollute the Swale and a further problem of rubbish in the river was caused by construction of the new swimming baths¹³⁴. The bailiffs persisted at the forefront of the battle against pollution but with the change from full time to part time water bailiffs the Society appointed a Pollution Officer to liaise with the authorities and to deal with incidents. The Pollution Officer had a major task in 1970 when new workings to extract gravel near Brompton-on-Swale caused several discharges of grey sludge into the river and again in 1975 when sewage from the town sewage works killed many fish and legal proceedings to obtain compensation for the diminished fish stock, and the cost of restocking, were considered¹³⁵.

Predation of fish by birds and by riverside animals can at times be a fishery management problem and until the recent past solutions were often robust. For many years, and until otter hunting was banned in 1975, the society actively supported the North Yorks Otter

¹²⁸ MB 8th Jan 1992.

¹²⁹ MB 6th Dec 1989.

¹³⁰ MB 3rd Dec 1966.

¹³¹ MB 2nd Sep 1915.

¹³² MB 1st Aug 1918.

¹³³ MB 6th Mar & 3rd Apr 1930.

¹³⁴ MB 2nd Jul 1947 & 2nd Apr 1975.

¹³⁵ MB 10th Jun 1970 & 12th Nov 1975.

Hounds. The otter hounds sought the permission of riparian owners before hunting, or 'drawing', the river banks and permission was readily granted by the Society. Regular annual donations were also made towards the upkeep cost of the pack¹³⁶. In the 1980 predation by mink was becoming a problem on the river but apart from reference to this in the minutes there is no indication of what, if any, solutions were found¹³⁷.

Minutes of committee meetings, and annual general meetings, record many proposals, counter-proposals, votes and resolutions covering the rules applied to the practice of angling on Society waters. It is a task beyond the scope of this work to record this process in detail, but it is important to recognise that management of the waters questioned and, where necessary amended, the ways in which members and permit holders practiced their sport. Whilst fishing for course fish on still waters has always adhered to a system of 'catch and release' the river environment was different and over the years both the number, and the size of the fish which anglers could kill and take home has been carefully regulated. The method of fishing, referred to as spinning, in which a gyrating brightly coloured lure is dragged through the water, has been a constant bone of contention, as has the of restriction of various parts of the river to fly fishing. In considering these and other similar matters the committee of the Society has faced a constant balancing act between the preservation of fish stocks, changes in angling fashions and the need to attract sufficient income from anglers to maintain the objective of the Society, to provide quality angling at a reasonable cost.

The life of the Society

Essential to the life of the Society are the regular committee meetings at which current issues and problems are discussed and decisions made. The annual general meeting, which full members attend if they wish to do so, has traditionally taken place in the first months of each year. The Committee of the Richmond Angling Society now meets in the premises of Richmond Cricket Club on the evening of the first Tuesday of each month, a date set by resolution as far back as 1921¹³⁸. Whilst the first meeting place for the Society at its formation was the Buck Inn in Newbiggin it quickly moved to meet regularly in the Zetland Club, now the Citizens Advice Bureau on the corner of Newbiggin and Bargate. Rent was being paid to the Zetland Club until 1917 but following the Annual General Meeting in 1918, which was held in the Buck Inn, meetings were once again held there, possibly on a no rent basis¹³⁹. The Society became well established in the Buck and in 1930 had its own 'club room' where a number of mounted specimen fish were displayed¹⁴⁰. The Buck Inn was also a place where anglers visiting the area could obtain their weekly or daily fishing permits¹⁴¹. Association with this inn lasted until 1964 when

¹³⁶ MB 1st Feb 1950 & Account book.

¹³⁷ MB 2nd May 1984.

¹³⁸ MB 17th Feb 1921.

¹³⁹ Account book & MB 15th Feb 1918.

¹⁴⁰ MB 1st May 1930.

¹⁴¹ MB 4th May 1933.

committee meetings were moved to the Town Hall Hotel which continued as the home of the society until the mid 1970s when a further move was made to the Fleece Hotel on Reeth Road¹⁴². In October 1984 the Terrace House Hotel became the venue for meetings followed by a move to the Board Inn in early 1990s and, finally, in July 1995, to the Cricket Club¹⁴³.

Central to the discussion at each meeting is the financial state of the Society as its continuity depends on being able to pay the rent for its fishing rights. To ensure that financial commitments can be met in lean years an annual surplus of income is paid into a reserve fund. This reserve has been needed over the years, especially when the Society was buffeted by national events during the 1930s. The first annual loss of £21 8s 10d was incurred in 1920 followed by a further loss of £14 5s 10d in 1921¹⁴⁴. As a consequence of these trading losses, it was decided to increase the price of weekly permits to 7s 6d and by 1923 an annual profit had been restored¹⁴⁵. In 1931 some of the members demanded both an annual dinner as well as a social evening. Some reticence to this can be detected in the committee but these events did go ahead. However, they were blamed for a loss of £5 19s 9d in the year¹⁴⁶. A special general meeting was called in June 1932 by a group of members who were concerned that less sporting fishing methods, bottom fishing and spinning, were depleting fish stocks in the river. At this meeting motions to ban spinning on the river, and only to issue day permits for fly fishing were carried, these decision had a major financial impact¹⁴⁷. By 1933 the annual loss had increased to £9 18s 8d and it was concluded that issuing day tickets only for fly fishing, and the prohibition of spinning, had reduced permit revenue by excluding many anglers. Even though these decisions were reversed the assets, which stood at £101 15s 7d in 1934, had to be called on to pay the rents for the leased waters¹⁴⁸. By 1937 the assets had gone down further to £59 14s 2d¹⁴⁹. As well as decisions taken by members external factors were at work worsening the Society finances, not the least of which was the reduction in troop numbers at Catterick Camp during this period of disarmament¹⁵⁰. The early 1930s also saw an upturn in unemployment and this may have reduced permit sales to people from the nearby industrial centres. 1935 also heralded rent increases on most of the waters leased by the Society and an effort was made to encourage anglers to visit the River Swale by advertising in the *Fishing Gazette* and also in local hotels¹⁵¹.

The Second World War may have saved the Society from financial oblivion and 1942 can be seen as an end to its money problems. Whilst during this period local members of the armed forces were permitted to fish free on the Richmond Anglers waters whilst on leave, the increase in military activity throughout the area saw a vast influx of visiting

¹⁴² MB 5th Feb 1964 & 8th Jan 1975.

¹⁴³ MB 3rd Oct 1984 & 4th Jul 1995.

¹⁴⁴ MB 16th Feb 1922.

¹⁴⁵ WMSS.

¹⁴⁶ WMSS & Account book.

¹⁴⁷ MB 23rd Jun 1932.

¹⁴⁸ WMSS, MB 2nd Mar 1933 & Account book.

¹⁴⁹ Account book.

¹⁵⁰ MB 27th Feb 1936.

¹⁵¹ MB 27th Feb 1936.

anglers and permit sales¹⁵². 1943 saw a surplus of £47 8s 10d generated which, after falling slightly to £42 10s 9d in 1944, amounted to a further contribution of £60 14 10d to the financial assets in 1945. This was sufficient to allow the Society to make a donation of £26 5s 0d to the Richmond Welcome Home Fund for returning service personnel¹⁵³. The end of hostilities reduced profit to £20 11s 0d in 1946 but by 1950 reserves stood at £343 15s 6d¹⁵⁴.

Whilst by no means as threatening than the situation in the 1930s, financial problems occurred once again in 1993 with a deficit of £2485. This was due to rent increases coinciding with a downturn in membership and permit sales. A radical solution was sought and the long standing preferential membership fee for residents of Richmond and its surrounding district was scrapped. This decision recognised the dependence on revenue from anglers living outside of the Richmond Area. Voting rights and committee service became the only advantages available to resident members. This measure, together with a full review of permit pricing and advertising the fishing available, especially still-water fishing, through the tourist information service and local hotels, resulted in gradual permit sale increases and helped to bring the Society back into the black by 1998¹⁵⁵.

Whit Monday 1916 was a day out for some of the members of the Richmond Angling Society. The fishing venue was Marske Beck and as there was no pub in the village of Marske the party cycled over the old road from Richmond to Markse laden with bottles of beer and a bottle of whisky as well as their fishing tackle. At the beck side, however, the angler charged with carrying the precious bottles slipped and fell into the water. Only a single bottle of beer was recovered. The sporting ethos ran high, however, and all agreed to fish only upstream of the accident so as to avoid inebriated trout! On returning to the cycles at dusk it was discovered that the lads of Marske had used the tyres of the cycles as pin cushions and the party had a weary trudge back home!¹⁵⁶

Such informal days out were frequent in the early days of the Society. They re-emerged again in the 1970s when coaches were hired for fishing trips to rivers in Cumberland as well as the River Trent¹⁵⁷. But right back to its foundation organised fishing competitions were considered an important aspect of the life of the Society. Anglers drew for pegged fishing locations along the river side and a prize was won by catching the largest weight of fish within a specific time period. In September 1913 the committee started to look for 'neutral' water, water not fished on a regular basis by the competing anglers, on which to hold the first competition¹⁵⁸. Mr E.H.Courage, who held riparian rights near Kirby Fleetham allowed the Society to hold an annual competition on his waters over many years¹⁵⁹. The first competition was not a success however, and the minute book records

¹⁵² WMSS.

¹⁵³ WMSS & Account book.

¹⁵⁴ Account book

¹⁵⁵ MB 3rd Oct 1995 & 5th Jan 1999.

¹⁵⁶ WMSS.

¹⁵⁷ MB 1st Aug & 10th Oct 1973.

¹⁵⁸ MB 4th Sep 1913.

¹⁵⁹ WMSS.

that it was not supported by many members. To encourage support money prizes, amounting to two pounds and ten shillings, were offered for the second competition which took place during the fateful month of August 1914¹⁶⁰. The second event was a great success and established an annual August bank holiday competition; but in 1915 tragedy nearly struck¹⁶¹. Those taking part in the competition drove to Kirby Fleetham in a two-horse carriage. After fishing for an hour a terrific thunderstorm interrupted the proceedings and all made for the shelter of the local inn. On nearing the inn the carriage was nearly hit by lightning which struck a nearby tree and killed a sow and six piglets. Some members of the fishing party, and the horses, suffered from severe shock¹⁶². The rules for this annual competition, drawn up in 1919, suggest that the event was for fly fishing only. Wading into the river to fish was not allowed and the number of flies to be used was restricted to three¹⁶³. In 1920 it was decided to hold a competition for junior members of the Society but the next reference to such an event is not until the Annual General Meeting of February 1928 when it was noted that the winner of the 1927 junior competition was Leslie Peter Wenham, son of the Secretary P.C. Wenham¹⁶⁴.

In 1929 it was decided that a second competition should be held each year as Captain T.H. Singleton had presented a cup to be awarded annually. It appears that this additional competition was held in June and bottom fishers, as well as those fly fishing, were catered for. The first winner of the Singleton Cup was George Harrison in 1932¹⁶⁵. Further donations of trophies were made in the following years. In 1936 two cups were presented, one by Mr Walter Metcalfe to be used for an annual trout fishing competition and another by Mr F. Cherry¹⁶⁶. In 1938 the Silver Jubilee of the Richmond Angling Society was marked by the purchase of a silver trophy from funds raised by donations from members. This trophy came to be awarded for the biggest weight of fish caught each year in all Society competitions and it came to be known as the Aggregate Cup, it is still awarded. In the 1930s it was customary to invite the Mayor of Richmond to the Society annual dinner and in 1939 the then Mayor, William Robinson, presented a trophy to the Society to be used in an open competition the first of which was held at Catterick Bridge on 16th July 1939¹⁶⁷. Surplus funds remaining from the entrance fees for this completion were handed back to the Mayor each year to be used for charitable purposes and throughout the war years the Red Cross and the Merchant Navy Comforts Fund received significant donations the largest being forty pounds in 1943¹⁶⁸. Not every competitor in these competitions played by the rules however, and the winner of an event held at Morton-on Swale in August 1935 was suspected of cheating, buying his winning fish, which weighed in at 3lbs 7oz, from a member of the Northallerton Angling Club for five shillings. Allegations flew between both Secretaries and investigations were put in

¹⁶⁰ MB 24th Feb & 2nd Jul 1914.

¹⁶¹ MB 8th Mar 1915.

¹⁶² WMSS & MB 2nd Feb 1916.

¹⁶³ MB 13th Mar 1919.

¹⁶⁴ MB 1st Apr 1920 & 21st Feb 1928.

¹⁶⁵ WMSS.

¹⁶⁶ WMSS.

¹⁶⁷ WMSS & MB 21st Jan 1932.

¹⁶⁸ WMSS.

place; but in the end it was a case not proven¹⁶⁹. By 1947 seven competitions were held in the year, these were the Metcalfe Cup in April, the Clarkson Cup (for fly fishing) in May, the Cherry Cup in June, the Singleton Cup in July, the Spenser Cup in August, the Robinson (Mayor's) Cup in October and the Aggregate cup for the heaviest catch weight¹⁷⁰.

From the 1950s onwards, and encouraged by the growth of motor car ownership, the importance of competitive angling to the life of the Society had grown to the extent that the task of competition organisation demanded the appointment of a Competition Secretary. Trophy donations from past officials of the Society, sometimes in remembrance of deceased members and officials, added to the corpus of events and the present day yearly calendar now comprises of thirty days of competition fishing, both on rivers and still-waters, for at least fifteen trophies. Only one of the trophies presented in 1947 is now not competed for. In the early days of the Society fly fishing competitions were the norm, today the Clarkson Cup, donated for expertise at fly fishing, remains on the shelf.

Over the years the emphasis placed on the social side of running an angling society has ebbed and flowed. The first recorded proposal for Society dinner, to be held at the close of the trout fishing season, was made in February 1921 but it is not clear if this event ever took place¹⁷¹. At the annual general meeting in 1922 the matter of an annual dinner was again raised but, after much discussion, a decision on the issue was deferred¹⁷². A photograph taken in 1927, and shown in L.P. Wenham's book of old Richmond photographs, shows an annual dinner in progress at the Buck Hotel with the Mayor of Richmond, James C. Eyles, in attendance. About fifty people are at this event, less than half the attendees were in evening dress, the rest wore suits and ties with a number of soldiers in service dress¹⁷³. This photo shows that by the late 1920s the annual dinner was an event of some importance, but there appears to have been some initial reticence over it taking place. By the early 1930s there had been a proliferation of social events. As referred to above, the second year of that decade witnessed two events, a dinner and a social evening, and the cost of these, not fully recovered, was thought to have dented the finances of the Society. Notwithstanding this 1932 appears to have been a watershed and it is possible that the committee considered that an active social side would sustain membership numbers which were fragile at that time. As well as the annual dinner, a supper was held by members in a private house, and the cost of this amounted to £6 16s 6d, which included a toast to the Mayor and other guests¹⁷⁴. The dinner was held at the Fleece Hotel and the Mayor, the deputy Mayor plus all the riparian owners were invited as guests. Also, in the November of that year, a less formal 'pie and peas' supper took place in the Working Mens Club¹⁷⁵. Inviting the Mayor of Richmond to the Society annual dinner helped to reinforce connections with the town and this paid dividends with

¹⁶⁹ MB 22nd Aug 1935.

¹⁷⁰ MB 5th Feb 1947.

¹⁷¹ MB 17th Feb 1921.

¹⁷² MB 16th Feb 1922.

¹⁷³ Wenham, Leslie P, *Around Richmond in Old Photographs*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989), p 77.

¹⁷⁴ MB 21st Jan 1932.

¹⁷⁵ MB 7th Jul & 3rd Nov 1932.

the presentation, by the Mayor William Robinson, of the Robinson Cup, first competed for in 1939 and could possibly have helped to pave the way for the Society obtaining stewardship of the Town Councils water in the 1940s.

From the late 1930s there is little further mention of dinners and suppers until 1959 when a proposal for an annual dinner was made at the annual general meeting, suggesting that this event had lapsed¹⁷⁶. It appears that the dinner was reinstated but by 1963 it was not being supported by the membership and an inconclusive discussion took place on the advisability of perpetuating the tradition¹⁷⁷. However, the event was revitalised by the later 1960s and through into the 1970s as membership enthusiasm returned with the members joined at the table by ladies and even by junior members. A further dimension was added by occasionally holding the dinner at out of town venues, Smallways, near Greta Bridge, was used, Catterick Bridge Hotel was considered and photographs show competition trophies being presented after the feast. But again, in 1974, interest hit rock bottom and a dinner at the Fleece Hotel was a failure. Not well supported by members the evening made a loss. Also, few award winners turned up for the trophy presentation¹⁷⁸. Today the Society does not hold an annual dinner. The annual general meeting is followed by pies, peas and beer and competition trophies are presented to the winners by the riverside. This, perhaps, is the heritage from the chequered past of social events in the life of the Society, in itself a product of a temperament possessed by many anglers, preferring riverside solitude to tableside small-talk!

Understandably, for an organisation which aimed to provide angling at a reasonable cost for its members, and which occasionally experienced fluctuations in its income, the Society has never given a high priority to altruism. During the Second World War two funds, the Merchant Navy Comforts Fund and the Richmond Welcome Home Fund, established due to the war effort in the 1940s, received significant donations as did the Red Cross. In the 1950s and 60s regular annual donations made to the Richmond Operatic Society, along with a payment to the Richmond Hill Toppers, and also to a building fund for a new pavilion for the Football Club, show a willingness to help with financial support to other local organisations¹⁷⁹. Annual contributions were also made to organisations which worked towards the interest of field sports at a national and regional level. Donations to The British Field Sports Society have continued since 1947 and at that time the activities of the Pure Rivers Society were also supported as were the North Yorkshire Otter Hounds¹⁸⁰. Two committee members were co-opted as attendees at the meetings, in the Bulls Head Hotel at Darlington, of the North Yorks and South Durham Federation of Anglers. Affiliation to this regional organisation was made in 1931. Formed amongst angling clubs it acted to liaise between the clubs and with fishery boards¹⁸¹. It also organised inter-club fishing competitions. The Richmond Angling Society remains affiliated to what is now the North Yorkshire and South Durham Anglers

¹⁷⁶ MB 23rd Jan 1959.

¹⁷⁷ MB 3rd Jan 1963.

¹⁷⁸ WMSS & MB 10th Oct 1973.

¹⁷⁹ MB 5th Apr 1972, 4th Apr 1973 & Account book.

¹⁸⁰ Account book.

¹⁸¹ MB 11th Feb 1931.

Federation. 1976 saw the start of a scheme through which other angling societies in the region exchanged a small number of annual permits. The purpose of this scheme was to widen the range of fishing venues open to members. Members applied to the Secretary to borrow an exchange ticket before travelling to the waters of a participating club to fish. Once again it is interesting that the start of this scheme can be dated to a period during which personal mobility was increasing significantly. The first club to co-operate was Newcastle University Angling Club closely followed by the Bishop Auckland Angling Club¹⁸². These two clubs continue to exchange annual permits as do the Barnard Castle and Northallerton Angling Clubs and the Wansbeck and District Angling Association.

Conclusion

The immutable viability of the Society, and especially its ability to manage its fisheries, can be seen in the continuity of its fishing rights on the River Swale some of which have been held since inception and have remained substantially unchanged since the 1940s with major sections of water passing into Society ownership. The association with the Zetland family is also a significant aspect of continuity and has contributed status to the Society and a link to the past appropriate to both an ancient sport and a country town. However, much has changed. The ability of such a society to employ a full time water bailiff succumbed to economic and social pressures. These same forces, acting through the sport of angling, have changed the emphasis of the Society away from river angling, mainly for trout, towards mixed sport which includes a focus on still-water course fishing, the income from which is now essential to its wellbeing.

From its early days, and until the mid 1970s, the Richmond and District Angling Society maintained fishing rights primarily for the angling fraternity of Richmond and its surrounding district. In order to sustain the range and quality of those rights visiting anglers were welcome to fish its waters, but at a greater cost than local anglers. Intrinsically, the Society was looking after an angling resource of local importance.

The 1970s saw the start of a transformation. Growing personal mobility gradually released the anglers of Richmond from reliance on local waters, accessible on foot, bicycle or bus. It also meant that more visiting anglers would travel to fish the waters of the Society. A more expansive, wider ranging characteristic is shown by the way that more distant waters were leased, on the Tees and in Wensleydale, and in attempts to obtain still-water fisheries over a fairly wide area. The coach trips organised by the Society in the 1970s, visiting far flung rivers, are also symptomatic of this change. Transformation was complete in 1993 when the preferential membership fee for Richmond locals was abolished. Richmond and District Angling Society emerged as a body managing an angling resource of regional significance.

¹⁸² MB 3rd May & 3rd Nov 1976.

Appendix

Chairmen 1912 to 1977

H.Hague 1912
F.W.Hall 1913 to 1925
Major N.Rooke 1927 to 1928
Alfred Paddison 1929 to 1940
William Stanley Rodber 1940 to 1942
Ernest Thwaites 1942 to 1943
William Stanley Rodber 1943 to 1953
George Harrison 1953 to 1957
A.G. Ayto 1958 to 1962
J.C.Pinning 1964 to 1965
T.N.Kitchin 1966 to 1973
R.L.May 1974 to 1977(?)

Secretaries 1912 to 1977

P.C.Wenham 1912 to 1963
L.K.Bagley 1963 to 1964
J.O.Hawitt 1965 to 1975
J.Legg 1976 to 1977(?)

Bailiffs (full time) 1913 to 1968

Charles Musgrave 1913 to 1923
Frank Tempest 1923 to 1924
Matthew Brown Lambert 1924 to 1927
Nicholas A Roskell 1927 to 1930
Ernest Robert Horn 1930 to 1949
Rex Johnson 1949 to 1954
N.Atkinson 1954 to 1956
George Harrison 1956 to 1959
Mr Legg (of Hipswell) 1960 to 1966
Mr Hammond 1966 to 1968

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