



The National Anguilla Club

BULLETIN

VOLUME 13

ISSUE No 1.

N.A.C. BULLETIN. VOLUME 13 ISSUE No I.

LIST OF CONTENTS.

EDITORIAL - - - - - DAVE SMITH Page I
THE ANGUILLA CLUB BULLETIN CHRISTMAS POEM COMPETITION. Page 2
THE DAY - NIGHT - TWILIGHT CONTROVERSY - - - - KEVIN RICHMOND Page 5
THE GRAND UNION CANAL - - - - - TONY HOLLERBACH Page 8
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR - - - - - -Page 9
THE RIVER LEA and TRIBUTARIES - - - - - Arthur J.Sutton. Page II

EDITORIAL

A very happy new year to one and all. I trust that the Christmas break was extremely relaxing and that, unlike me, you remained reasonably sober. Now, like me, your thoughts are being directed towards the coming season. The change of year acts a little like a watershed. Up until Christmas I think back to the season complete: reflect on the successes and failures, browse through photos as they come back from the printers and relive the capture of a few of those fish. But with the advent of the new year, my thoughts turn to the coming season: I now think of the specimens I'm going to catch, try to decide which waters to fish and, most important of all, how to fish them.

It is also the time for self analysis. Should I dispense with tactics that have yielded fish in the past - though not as many as I would have liked - in favour of a completely new tactic that may, or may not succeed. Certainly, I feel that there is plenty of room for experimentation. Let us face the fact that plenty of good eels are taken by non-eel fishermen who were not after eels. What makes life so frustrating is that when an eel fisherman fishes these self same waters using eel tactics, they tend to blank. So, what's wrong? Is our tackle too crude?

I vowed that 1975 would be a "social" year for me. It certainly was and on that score I have no complaints. My resolution for 1976 is to be a little more experimental.

I see Eric Birch has been at it again. His latest attack on the eel and also conservation minded eel fishermen, is spawned through ignorance. For those of you who are wise enough to hang on to your 12p and not purchase Anglers Mail, dear, sweet Mr. Birch has resurrected the hypothesis that the European eel does not spawn in the Sargasso sea, but in the deep water of the Atlantic off the European continental shelf. Incredible though it may be, all the evidence points to the European eel coming from the Sargasso seas. If Mr. Birch can present a case in favour of the European eel breeding off the continental shelf, I'm sure there are a large number of scientists who would be only too willing to listen. But before Mr. Birch can do that, he has got to explain away some facts.

Firstly, the beast known as the Leptocephalus larvae undergoes a series of changes and becomes an eel. Secondly, the leptocephalus is a pelagic animal, ie it relies on oceanic currents to take it from A to B. Thirdly, the further west one goes across the Atlantic, the smaller the leptocephali become, being smallest in that area known as the sargasso sea.

Mr. Birch is vehemently against the idea that our eels come from the Sargasso at all. He says:

"Think of the hazards these little fish will have had to overcome during their journey from the Gulf of Mexico. And when one considers that whales, swordfish, sea birds, cod and other lowly fish will have taken their toll of the tiny eels, logic dictates that there cannot be so many survivors by the time they reach the estuaries of European rivers."

Fair comment, Mr. Birch. So, natural selection has dictated that for the eel to survive, the female eel has to produce millions of eggs in the hope that a few may survive. For the eel to breed off the coast of Europe, to comply with the facts above, the eggs must travel across the ocean floor in a westerly direction, surface in the Sargasso, and drift back. Really, Mr. Birch, which is more incredible?

DAVID SMITH.

THE ANGUILLA CLUB BULLETIN XMAS POEM COMPETITION

By Arthur Sutton & David Smith.

Response to this, one of our rare competitions, was, we regret to say, was pretty poor. No doubt, however, this was entirely due to the lack of planning and publicity, for which we apologise.

The scheme was hatched by us the evening before the AGM whilst having a quiet eve of meeting pint or five.

"Let's have a Christmas poem competition," slurred Arthur.

"Great idea," replied Dave.

"I've got a new electric air and water temperature thermometer to offer as the prize," added Arthur.

And that was all the planning involved in the project, other than deciding that neither of us could enter. We are, after all, the best poets in the Club and would win. But if we were judging as well, we may be accused of cheating! The publicity consisted of a brief announcement during "Any other Business" at the AGM.

Despite all these handicaps, poems were received. Our apologies to those that didn't know what was going on and our thanks to those that did and contributed.

Now, on to the poems.

The points we were looking for in these literary masterpieces were as follows:

1. References to Christmas.
2. References to eels.
3. Be poetic
4. Be clean.
5. Capture the "Anguilla Club Feel"

Many entries were able to capture that feel. Bob Pountney certainly recorded our sentiments in his poem entitled "The Session" with the opening stanza.

"Water, water wide and deep,
Have your eels all gone to sleep?
For this is my fiftieth blank session,
No wonder that I've got depression."

Terry Jefferson, ignoring points 1 - 4 above, was also able to capture the spirit of the Club, that camaraderie that exists between one and all, in his epic "The Season Past". Unfortunately, its only saving grace is that it loosely fits in with the tune of "the Twelve Days of Christmas" and thereby staked some claim, however slight, to literary composition. It starts off reasonably politely:

"On the first trip to Bala,
Dave Knee and Jonny Bell
Thought that Ernie Orme
Had caused the rotten smell."

From such a promising beginning, the tone of this entry slides something shocking! Kevin Richmond's entry, "Eel today, Gone tomorrow" captures the feel and improves upon Terry's entry in that there is the inclusion of eels. This epic commences:

"Of all the fishes in the pond
I like to try for eels,
To touch their slimy sensuous skin
Is something that I feel
Won't make me blind or deaf or dumb
Like other things I do.
(But please don't think I'm like That)"

Once again, poor Ernie Orme is the victim of Kev's mirth.

"....Ernie Orme has told me
I'm not like him - he's crude."

But before Ernie rushes off to take legal proceedings, we must hasten to add that he was not alone in being the target for mickey taking: the Editor ran a close second. Terry Jefferson's comments are unprintable, and possibly the cleanest reference to this member came from Bob Pountney in his entry entitled "Freddy Flubb":

"....One night last June he got quite stiff
Drinking meths with David Smith."

Lies, of course; but the Editor will get his revenge! In similar vein, Tony Hollerbach in "The Alphabet According to St. Anguilla" refers to Dave's affinity to beverages:

"G is for Guzzeling - ask Dave Smith what that means."

Bob, infact, seems to be more preoccupied with alcohol than anyone else. In The Session, he says:

"....I feel quite sure no sleep I'll lose
Because I am so full of booze."

And in another piece, "The Eel Man" he says:

"Downing two bottles of stout
He casts his baits out"

and later on he continues:

"... And unloads his gear from the car;
Rods, boxes and bin,
Four bottles of gin
Cos the pub's just a little too far."

Face the truth, Bob. It's not the Editor who's the wino, it's you!

Between them, Bob and Tony amassed a fair number of entries. Tony's "Understanding as with Bob's "1995" fell into the protest song category. Not, we feel, ideal yule-tide poetry.

Dave Holman's "Knock Out Drops" is also a protest poem, but in different vein. This describes the frustration of having a run whilst visiting someone else's pub for a cuppa. He concludes:

"Next time I fish I will not wander
For that is why I'm in this lunber.
The moral of this tale is true
Don't go to Arthur's for a brew."

The cutest entry came from Henry Hansen, who, we are sure, wasn't alone in his wishes.

"All I want from santa is a ten pound eel
One that I can see and touch and feel
That is over four feet long
And that has my name upon."

The entry least likely to win, in that its got nought to do with cels (although there is a vague reference to Christmas) came, naturally enough, from Terry Jefferson. Entitled "Dedicated to Matchmen Everywhere", it is worthy of reproduction (What went wrong, Terry? It's clean!)

"Spare a thought for the Matchmen this Christmas,
With its ever more rapid approach,
They'll be scratching their heads in amazement,
Cos us Pikemen have nicked all their roach.

And if Ivan can make it to Chelsea,
Many people may well be agog,
But poor Ivan won't know what has hit him,
When he finds out his bed's in the bog."

The best two entries are inseperable. It was loosely agreed that, in the event of a tie, the Chairman would decide; but it would be unfair to thrust such a task on to the Chairman. Since the S.G.M is to be held in March (so as not to clash with the NASG Angling Conference) we feel that we could, and should, have a postal ballot. So, next time you write to either of us, include your vote. The two finalist's poems are below in membership number order.

FREDDY FLUBB

By Bob Pountncy.

This is the tale of Freddy Flubb
Who joined the National Anguilla Club.
So, if you want to hear this poem,
Please just stop what you are doing.

Now, Freddy was a friendly lad
And though his habits weren't too bad,
He'd sit, sometimes, and pick his nose,
Quite often chew and suck his toes.

But he had fished for cels for years
And then one sunny day he hears
From a chap called Ernie Orme
About a Club that's above the norm.

In this club he wished to be
So dropped a line to Brian C.
Though Freddy wore both wigs and dresses
With cels he'd had reasonable successes.

Fred then applied to Hansen, Henry.
Sent his subs to our dear Ernie.
Then he had - can you guess? -
A nice long letter from AJS.

So, Fred was in the NAC
And this he was so pleased to be.
Wrote articles for the Bulletin
And hoped the editor would put them in.

Freddy went on all Club trips
Drinking beer and eating chips.
One night last June he got quite stiff
Drinking meths with David Smith.

It's years since the NAC got Fred,
His hair's now white, his eyes are red.
And though his rod is bent and curled
He wouldn't resign for all the world!

CARRY ON PAL

By Tony Hollerbach.

As I look out my window this morning cold and clear,
My heart is full of happiness and full of Christmas cheer.
When along from the river, an eelman comes forlorn
I say to him: "Why fish for eels upon this wintry morn?"
"Do you not know the Anguilla Club," he answers unto me.
"We are dedicated. Fish all year and this you've got to see,
"Why only a couple of years ago I caught not one eel but three."
"Come in, come in," I say to him. "There must be more to this.
"I mean, fishing in winter's quite alright, but I'd hardly call it bliss."
"I'll tell you a little something," he said, "and then you'll understand
"We've session reports and articles, sometimes out of hand.
"In my own case five rods I fish with one aim to achieve:
"To break the rod hours record, and this you must believe.
"That is why I fish all year, and the winter as well
"To beat that Henry Hansen. And with five days left it'll be sheer hell!"

THE "DAY-NIGHT-TWILIGHT" CONTROVERSY

By Kevin Richmond.

During the 1975 AGM a motion to put a "Twilight" period into the day and night period was defeated. I feel that this was incorrect and a step in the wrong direction. My hope is that this article will convert some of those persons who feel that using twilight in our session reports is a waste of time.

First of all, let us define twilight. I feel that half an hour either side of day/night as shown on the session reports is sufficient for this period. For instance, in March, night is defined as 19.35 to 07.00. The twilight period for March would be 19.05 to 20.05 and 06.30 to 07.30 making night one hour shorter, ie 20.05 to 06.30, and day is similarly altered.

Thus, having defined what is meant by twilight, we must now ask the million dollar question. Is this a significant period? This question, of course, can only be answered once we have some facts. Being the reporting officer for the South-West for 1975, I have been able to keep records of all eels taken during that period. As such, I have records of 131 eels being caught. If we group these eels into day and night (Table 1) it will be seen that "night eels" heavily outnumber "day eels" in both numbers and weights.

Table 1.

	DAY	NIGHT
Ecls	16	115
11b - 21b	5	69
2-31b	1	28
31b+	1	13

Table 2.

	DAY	TWILIGHT	NIGHT
Ecls	12	52	67
1-21b	5	27	42
2-31b	1	11	17
31b+	0	5	9

However, if we bring twilight into the frame (Table 2) the one-sided advantage of fishing at night does tend to diminish, and, in fact, as one can see, twilight becomes nearly as favourable as night in terms of numbers of ecls caught.

Unfortunately, I did not keep detailed records on actual rod hours fished by the group in question and, therefore, cannot quote any RH/E figures for any particular time of day. However, I have been able to analyse my previous two season's figures and can present results based upon my own angling performance

The collective data can be broken down into various categories to give rates of catch etc. Thus the total effort by myself for the two years was $1,704\frac{3}{4}$ RH for the capture of 55ecls. In table 3 the results applicable to night and day only are shown. The differences between these two categories are quite marked showing night to have a distinct advantage, in terms of RH/E and if we take these results as sufficient, we would be excused for thinking that fishing at night was 1.53 times faster than fishing during the hours of daylight. However, if the figures are split into the three categories of Day, Night and Twilight some interesting facts emerge. (Table 4.)

For the 1974 data, twilight was 2.2 times faster than night and four times faster than day; 1975 gave twilight an advantage of 1.9 times faster over night and nearly five and a half times faster than day! Combination of the two year's figures gives an overall picture with twilight having an advantage over night of 2.1 and 4.4 over day.

As can be seen, this table does seem to split the taking times into what seems to be a marked advantage for twilight. Henry Hansen has suggested a reason for this. It seems that his waters (Henry's) can generally be divided into two categories - viz clear ponds and muddy ponds. The clear ponds give a faster

Table 3.

	1975		1975		TOTAL	
	DAY	NIGHT	DAY	NIGHT	DAY	NIGHT
RH	398	390	356 $\frac{3}{4}$	560	754 $\frac{3}{4}$	950
E	12	17	7	19	19	36
RH/E	33	23	51	31	40	26

Table 4.

	1974			1975			TOTAL		
	DAY	TWILIGHT	NIGHT	DAY	TWILIGHT	NIGHT	DAY	TWILIGHT	NIGHT
RH	337 $\frac{3}{4}$	109 $\frac{1}{4}$	341	289 $\frac{3}{4}$	147 $\frac{1}{4}$	479 $\frac{3}{4}$	627 $\frac{1}{2}$	256 $\frac{1}{2}$	820 $\frac{3}{4}$
E	7	9	13	3	9	14	10	18	27
RH/E	48	12	26	96	17 $\frac{1}{2}$	34	62	14	30

rate of catch during the twilight hours, whereas the muddy waters give a faster rate of catch at night. As most of my waters are reasonably clear, this theory provides some "food for thought", although, I personally feel that this reason alone cannot be the sole factor for the significant faster rate of catch during the twilight period. Could the reason be dependant upon something else? Cloud cover, temperature or barometric pressure, for instance?

So, let me repeat what I said at the beginning. As the premier specimen group we should make an effort to try to find out more about twilight by having it incorporated into the session reporting scheme. If my results are "normal", it would appear that twilight is a very favourable period and we should endeavour to find out "why". Of course, my figures could just be an isolated freak; but other anglers I have spoken to seem to hold the same opinions - that twilight does produce a faster rate of catch. So, unless we take the plunge, we are not going to find any answers to these highly significant differences.

Comment: First of all, I should like to congratulate Kevin on managing to present his data in such a convincing form. As many of you will know, I do not need convincing and, in fact, Kevin and I have exchanged several letters on the matter.

The most significant thing about this piece is that the gauntlet has well and truly been thrown down: it now needs someone to pick it up. And someone has got to pick it up. At the AGM, as Kevin said, a motion proposing that "Twilight" data be incorporated into the session reporting scheme was defeated. That is

not really true. It was massacred! Something like twenty people voted against it which means that had there been 100% turn out and all those extra people voted for the motion, the motion would still have been defeated. Not only was the majority of the meeting against the idea, but also a majority of the Club.

Kevin has put forward his reasons as to why we should undertake this additional work. It's now up to one of the majority to justify their stand. (Ed)

THE GRAND UNION CANAL

By Tony Hollerbach.

With the approach of spring, my mind is able to turn from thinking of the season past to that one coming. For me, like many others in the Club, the season will start on the Grand Union Canal as it passes through the old Welland and Nene River Board area. With the water Authority intent on stopping close season eel fishing, this may be our last chance to fish that water during the break.

So many big eels have come from the canal - a lot of small ones too! - but, taking an average, much larger eels can be caught, given the rod hours. But what of the water itself? I refer to its history, which is a subject I find interesting, and I hope it proves of interest to you.

The Grand Union Canal was built around 1810 at a time when very little construction was taking place due to the economic hardships of the time caused by the Napoleonic wars. But despite the economic situation, the "industrial revolution" was in full swing and there was a demand for quick and cheap transport. This transport was provided by the network of canals that were built all over the country. Compared with road transport, the canals were quick, for the roads were little more than dirt tracks and the horses could not pull an economic payload on the road, whereas they could pull an economic barge load.

The canals were at their zenith for only a short period - no more than about fifty years - for they were soon overtaken by the new railways and many of the canal owners (especially in the south of the country) realised that they could not compete with the new iron roads, drained their canals of water, and laid railway tracks in their place. Similarly, there was also a vast improvement in the quality of the roads. So, as other forms of transport improved, the canals gradually lost business and many of the smaller canal companies had to close down and their canals fell into disuse.

Although the larger canals could not compete with the railways in terms of speed they were far cheaper for carrying bulk loads, eg coal, where regularity was more essential than speed. Thus the Grand Union survived as the coal route to London.

What a marvel of engineering the canals were, especially when you realise that at the time of their being built there had never been any great engineering schemes of that size in this country other than the building of castles etc. For example, there was the problem of how to get over hills. This was achieved by the use of a system of risers (locks). There's one example of these risers on the Northampton arm of the GU. But there is a much better one at Foxton, near Market Harborough, on the Leicester section of the GU, where a rise of 400ft is accomplished.

Another feat of engineering definitely worth a mention is the tunnels of which there are a great many on our waterways, all of which took a great deal of skill

and a toll of lives which today would be classed as catastrophic in comparison. Perhaps one of the greatest examples of a tunnel is at Blisworth, near Northampton, which is 3,056yds long - one of the longest three in the country. The longest tunnel is Dudley tunnel which is 3,172yds. Just think, though: over 3,000yds; nearly two miles long! What a feat for those days.

Before the Blisworth tunnel was built, and during its construction, all barges had to be unloaded on one side of Blisworth hill and then the load taken to the other side by way of a tramway (built especially for the purpose) where it was reloaded on to another barge.

No towpaths were built in the tunnels and the barges were propelled through the tunnel by foot-power with a system called logging (remember, the only motive power was by means of horses. For logging, a plank was laid across the fore end of the barge and the barger and his wife laid on the plank with their feet against the tunnel wall. They then walked the barge through the length of the tunnel. This was a very dangerous practice indeed; any sudden movement by one person could dislodge the other with the result that they either drowned or were crushed by the barge against the tunnel wall unless they were very, very lucky. There were many such fatalities until special "logging boards" were introduced, which fixed securely to the barge and could be adjusted to suit any width of tunnel.

Eventually, professional logging gangs came into being. At Blisworth tunnel, for example, two gangs were stationed at each end of the tunnel, ie at Blisworth and Stoke Bruerne. They charged about 1/6d per trip. This system continued until the middle of the nineteenth century with the advent of the steam tugs.

I hope this has given a small insight into one of our best known canals. The only other thing worth mentioning is the peace of the canal: the beautiful scenery and wildlife which, in all probability, the eel angler notices more than most.

You may wonder what the history of the canal has to do with us, The only justification I can give is that in the early hours of the day as one is cooking breakfast after an uneventful blank, one could think of the building of the canals: the engineering feat involved, the lives lost and the need for coal which meant that the canal could survive. We have inherited that with all the beautiful and tranquil surroundings. One can be almost pleased that the serenity was not broken by the threshing of an eel!

Finally, in 1967 a potential record eel was landed from the GU. Weighing $9\frac{1}{2}$ lb., it was proposed to the record (rod caught) fish committee: but it was proved to be a Conger by Terry Coulson and the claim rejected. I wonder what's next! Could it be Dave Smith landing a specimen moray eel? (Or any eel?)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I should like to bring to members' notice the following extract from an introductory letter which appears in "Understanding Coarse Fishes" by Tom Ravensdale (Published by John Gifford Ltd.). The letter was written by no less than the Duke of Bedford, a supposed expert on wildlife.

"Wild life and wild places are slowly vanishing from the face of our

planet. Man expands at an astonishing rate and, of course, at the cost of other animals who are desperately trying to survive in a world they surely have the right to live in....."

I fully agree with the Duke in that bit, but further on, he says:

".... Oddly enough, the angler does much to help the wildlife and places of natural interest by his very love of fishing. The coarse fisherman does not keep his bag, indeed he stocks and replenishes barren waters: turns gravel pits and reservoirs into living lakes and ponds, helps to feed the fishes - thus all manner of other riverside wildlife, birds and otters - by groundbaiting,"

Nothing wrong with that, either. But the sentence continues:

"...., removing eels and other predators."

I have sent a letter to the Duke outlining my views and asking him his reasons for saying that the removal of eels is good. As soon as he replies (if he replies), I will send same to you for publication.

Tony Hollerbach,
39, High Street,
Wymington,
Rushden, Northants.

So many of our members repeatedly ask me about the River Lea and other waters in the Lea valley, that I have been prompted to write this article even though I have written on the subject earlier.

Over the last few decades the course of the river has been changed a great deal by the hand of man. I know of no map which accurately shows the present day course faithfully, and because of recent changes I am not now so familiar with the river of my boyhood as I was.

The first change of any consequence came about when the Metropolitan Water Board had the outflow at Hertford altered to cater for London's increased needs where water was concerned. This change took place during the forties and, at first, one could detect little difference. Later, it became clear that the increased abstraction was having an effect - an adverse effect - on the river and on its tributaries. The tributaries Beane, Rib and Mimram became mere shadows of what they were formerly. The herring sized dace which were the pride of the river Beane, although still present, are very largely depleted in number and it can now be said that never again will the Beane be able to boast of such numerous good sized fish. Talk to any angler of the trout in the rivers Mimram and Rib and the only answer you will get is a polite laugh.

Soon after the war ended came the first sad news that an alteration to the course of the river between Kings Weir and Aquaduct Lock was proposed. Local objections were waved asunder and the machines moved in. Great, hungry machines devoured bellyfulls of good earth from some of the richest water meadows in the valley and all we could do was to stand and watch the river as we knew it disappear. The said stretch was once a delightful jungle with almost impassable bankside growth, and the fauna was very notable for a place so near to London. The river twisted this way and that. It almost doubled back on itself in places and in front of you you might see the back of an angler who was, effectively and in actual fact, fishing some $\frac{1}{4}$ mile downstream of you. The little copses and numerous spinneys were a haven to all forms of wild life including some flora which has not been seen since in the area. They are all gone now, and the once twisting river so shallow in places yet so deep in others now runs dead straight, shallow and fast until it meets the original course again just below Aquaduct Lock.

I must not be wholly pessimistic, for the new course has aided the Barbel population no end. Although they were present right through the 'thirties' they are now firmly established in numbers not previously known. They reach a fair size too. We journey a mile or so downstream and come to a delightful spot known as Fishers Green, and the starting point of the most recent change. I will describe how it was then, and now is.

If we stood on the old bridge at Fishers Green, looking downstream, the river was soon lost from view as it twisted and turned, meandering between lush water meadows on its left hand bank and the Royal Ordnance Gunpowder factory on its right hand bank. The Ordnance factory is not seen, as it lays deeply hidden from view in dense woods and detracts nothing from the wonderful scenery. Here it was that, in 1945, I and two others first cut through the dense and wicked barbed wire, ignoring totally the notice that we were on or near sacred Government property, to become the first anglers to fish that stretch since the commencement of world war II. We took bream the size of small pigs, great chub which looked like sunken logs when in the water, the occasional barbel and many fine roach and dace. I recall how the roach failed to respond to hempseed, never having seen it before.

Stand on the bridge at Fishers Green now, looking downstream, and you see before you a great channel of uniform depth and concrete banks. The scene and the river bear no resemblance to what once existed there. The fishing, I am informed, is still good by match fishing standards, but most anglers fishing there have never even dreamed of fish the like of which were a

regular feature at that venue.

Towards the early fifties I fished a great deal at RYE HOUSE and ST MARGARETS. I can still now, if I try hard, smell the wonderful fragrance of the malt houses. Rye House in particular boasted many oast houses A few still remain, mostly in a state of decay, and I try not to look at them for fear of the tears which I know will fill my eyes. The river at RYE HOUSE ran sweet and clean and during each winter rose to cover many acres of meadow. Fat, prime roach, left the river then to feast on a banquet of drowned worms, and at such times I have taken great bags of roach to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb fishing a small lobworm some distance from the river ! The present population know nothing of the meadows, for the river rarely reaches anything like bank high now. Yes, Rye House was synonymous with big roach in quantity.

At St Margarets, always good for the odd spot of tiddler bashing, I found that I could take splendid Perch by carefully fishing a small dace or a plump minnow. It was on one such perch fishing trip that my small dace was taken, just prior to a thunderstorm, by a huge eel. I lost that eel, possibly the largest I ever encountered on the Lea, but it whetted the appetite I had always had for big eels and I fished there almost exclusively for the next two seasons in search of the big eels. Not that I had to search very hard, for St Margarets was very kind to me. It culminated in myself and one Jack Smith taking thirty eels of four pounds or a little more in just three one night sessions. Others got to know of the eel fishing there and because of this and the ban on night fishing we decided to give it best. Just in time, for the river was to suffer several catastrophic Phenolic pollutions. St Margarets Rye House and other stretches died an unnatural death.

Since that time, when the Brothers Owen used to fish a regular Saturday £5 wager as to who caught the first two pound roach, Rye House has not been the same. Even the River Lea Benevolent match, which was annually fished there, was switched to the river Thames.

The famous Forty Guinea Fishery, so called for that was the subscription prior to the war, and which bypassed the canalised section between WARE and St Margarets, now recruits few new members even though the subs have dropped to five pounds. It is stocked annually with hand fed trout of diminutive proportions but these are easily taken within a few weeks of opening day, and when taken leave the river denuded of fish. A far cry from those days when the Club House for members fishing there was stocked with many fine glass cased specimens, including one enormous eel. I have estimated that eel to weigh ten pounds, but alas, the case is not marked. Indeed, the reason may well be that that eel was not taken on rod and line, but was taken from the weir pool by the keeper in the late 1920s (About the time I was born).

What of the future ?

It is clear that many fine stretches will never again be the same as before inasmuch as the alterations which have taken place mean that different species take up habitat. Without being too optimistic it is fair to say that the whole river, generally, is at last showing signs of good improvement. Certain reaches are fishing rather better now than most anglers can recall. This applies particularly to those stretches of canal below Enfield Lock. The section below Tottenham Lock which, when I was a small lad, was always polluted and evil smelling, is now cleaner and is yielding fair sized dace and roach right down past the Hackney Marshes. Prior to the war, if a body was taken from the water below Tottenham Lock, the ensuing verdict was always ' death by poisoning '. I despaired of ever seeing a live fish in that area.

Many reaches previously devastated have now a good population of fish. With the passage of time it is possible that St Margarets can again boast of many four pound eels. It certainly holds eels again, as I found to my delight in January 1975. Although not legal, I still hope to enjoy the eel fishing which the river once afforded me.