



IT'S A GALLANT FISHER'S LIFE

by Paul Brett

Simon Peter said "I go a fishing" and they said "We also will go with thee" - John xxi,3.

Defra - the Department for Environment, Food and Rural affairs state on their website "Angling is a very popular pastime in the UK with more people going fishing than participating in any other sport. It goes from strength to strength in England and Wales, despite the recession. The tackle trade is reporting a good spring and licence sales are soaring. Sales of rod licences increased steadily after 2000 to record levels last year and 2009 looks like another record breaker. Sales to the end of May are up by 19 percent compared with the same period last year.

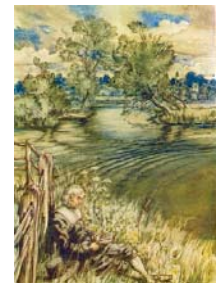
"This is really good news for angling", said Head of Fisheries, Mat Crocker. "Some anglers bought their licences early but others are new or returning to the sport. The late Easter and better weather in April have encouraged people to go fishing. We've helped them by a huge distribution of local angling guides to licence holders, through tackle shops, and on the internet." Firstly, it would not be such a popular pastime if you don't get a Rod Licence as prosecutions would follow if you are caught fishing without one. They are available to buy from Post Offices and are categorised in two sections for Freshwater and Game angling. Rod licences for Non-migratory trout, char, freshwater fish

(coarse fish) and eels cost £26 per season from 1st April to 31st March the following year. There are various concessions for the young, seniors and disabled. A Salmon and migratory trout (sea trout), non-migratory trout, char, freshwater fish (coarse fish) and eels costs £70 per season, again with various concessions. Sea Angling does not currently qualify for a licence, so it's free to all. For more information visit <http://environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/recreation/fishing/31497.aspx>

So what is it about the "Angle" that drives millions of us to the waterside on a daily basis? Is it just to catch fish? Or is it a more of an all encompassing urge to be at one with the elements and enjoy the many beautiful things that mother nature has to offer?

If we go back to 1653, many of these answers are written in "The Compleat Angler" sub titled (The Contemplative Man's Recreation). This is a seminal work of legendary proportions written by Izaak Walton (1593 -1683). In the main, it depicts a fishing trip over a four day period between two friends. Along the way, they discuss the art of angling, relax in good company, get away from hectic city life, enjoy their catch prepared as food washed down with good ale and songs, marvel at the ever changing countryside and weather etc.etc. The book is also embellished with many timeless poems that were written by the doyens of the art of poetry from a bygone age.

If you can imagine that Walton was born on the end of the Elizabethan era and died during the reign of James 11, you will begin to realise that during his 90 years, he lived through some of the most troubled times in our history, including The English Civil War, the Great Plague and The Fire of London. Despite all this



Illustrations from the 1930 edition of *The Compleat Angler* and by Arthur Rackham.

upheaval, he still found the time to go fishing!

John Chalkhill's poem in the book highlights the popularity of angling at the time :
 "O the Gallant Fisher's Life, is the best of any!
 'Tis full of pleasure, void of strife
 And 'tis beloved by so many".

Even back in the post Jacobean era it would seem that fishing was an important part of British life as it is today, despite all the troubles that occur daily around us, the art of the angle carries on unfettered by such events. It's not just the realm of the male that stamps an exclusive right over this domain as was the case in Walton's day, but there are many female angler's who have taken the 'bait' too. Unlike anglers back then who caught fish not just for sport, but also for consumption, people today in all freshwater rivers and lakes, carefully return their catch from whence it came. Sea fishing is a different matter and could be viewed as another method entirely, as in fact is game fishing. In Walton's day, there were no Supermarkets where convenience food littered the shelves in an almost insulting way to the millions of starving people in the Third World. Back then, our ancestors ate Carp, Pike, Perch and even the tiny Gudgeon and all were prepared with various long forgotten recipes to enhance the taste of the dish. Everything was cooked by fire as opposed to electricity and gas and therefore many of us would find the whole culinary art of the 1600's completely alien by comparison to today's menus. You caught it, prepared it, cooked it and ate it as no fridges or freezers existed as is now the norm. What on earth would we do without our 'mod cons'? Could we ever, if



Match Fishing



Sid & Family



forced to, recreate the past if our very existence depended upon it? For many, I very much doubt they would know where to start. Such is the dependence upon convenience in our daily lives that people wouldn't have a clue how to feed themselves. I heard a child ask his mother in a Supermarket recently where the meat she was buying in a frozen package came from. She said it was from the company, rather than saying from a cow!
I have fished since the age of six and the ability to do that as well as play guitar has kept me

following year. Sid and his mate have proudly raised five young ones this year and his whole organised demeanour should win him 'father of the year' award!
Walton's fishing buddy Sir Henry Wotton's poem Spring is a joyous celebration of renewal that many these days would do well to read:
"This day Dame Nature seemed in love
The lusty sap began to move
Fresh juice did stir the embracing vines
And birds have drawn their Valentines"

sane over many years. Both to me are totally relaxing and if I get to stressed out, I either pick up my guitar and knock out a tune or get my rods and head off to the nearest lake or river. It's not just about the 'Big Carp' or the heaviest catch of the day, it's about seeing the seasons change and watching the amazing wildlife that abounds all around. Experiencing first hand, the incredible skies and sunsets, ever changing throughout the year. Welcoming Sid the Canada Goose, who arrives each Spring with his mate and raises another brood of young, only to migrate in Autumn and return to complete the whole process the fol-

Walton's book is described by artist / writer James Prosek as 'the book everyone knows, but not many have read.' This was highlighted the other day by an angler whom in conversation said to me that he had a copy of the book but couldn't understand what it said as it was written in 'Old English'. To be honest, it's not that difficult a read but of course you have to actually find the time to 'read' it. It's certainly not your average, 'bog standard', instantly disposable reality read. It's a very descriptive and well versed piece of English literature that is the third most re-published book in British History, next to The Bible and The Common Prayer book.

Everything these days has to be 'instant', even in angling. I have seen people grow exceptionally impatient if they do not catch fish with minutes of casting their bait. I have also seen anglers with thousands of pounds worth of tackle and endless selections of bait surrounding their almost fortress like set ups. I think the ones that annoy me the most are two fold. Firstly, those who constantly talk to their associates, either verbally or on mobile phones during the course of the session and secondly, those who litter the banks with their rubbish and discarded tackle. The former would do well to adhere to Walton's comment "Study to be Quiet", whilst the later would be better off pursuing sex and travel!

In conclusion, Britain is blessed with many lakes and rivers for all of us to enjoy in whatever capacity we choose and by doing so, let us remember to respect the Countryside and all of the beautiful things it has to offer us and our children because one day, it may not be there.
www.thecompleteanglersongsandmusic.com

Photographs by Michele Breeze



Paul Brett with carp