

REMARKS UPON THE FORMER ABUNDANCE, AND
THE PRESENT NON-EXISTENCE OF SALMON
IN THE RIVER THAMES.

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(Continued from Vol. I, page 276.)

An elaborate Act upon fish and fisheries marks the first year of George the First.

Its chief object is to hinder fresh fish taken by foreigners from being brought to England—it gives leave for the importation of lobsters and turbot in “Foreign Bottoms.” But at the 14th section complaint is made that the several Acts of Parliament have proved ineffectual in respect to the rivers Severn, Dee, Wye, Teame, Weere, Teas, Ribble, Mersey, Dun, Air, Ouze, Swaile, Calder, Wharf, Eure, Darwent, and Trent, and charges that the laws shall be obeyed.

I think this is the first time in which the Severn and the Wye are mentioned. We may presume, I suppose, that the law was better obeyed in other localities; and in the Thames we can quite understand that the law would be much more easily enforced, under the authority of the Lord Mayor and Fishmongers’ Company, so far as their jurisdiction extended.

I have met but with one more Act of any interest to the fisherman, and that is certainly a very singular one, from the medley of matters to which it refers. It was made in the 23rd year of George II. (cap. xxvi.) It regulates pilots, permits rum from British plantations to be landed free, prevents frauds in the measurement of coals, continues sundry laws against the exactions of occupiers of locks and weirs upon the river Thames westward, makes a proviso for the river Ribble, by which it is again made lawful to take salmon there between 1st January and 15th September, as it is found that this is the proper season for that river, the permission having been repealed, (I suppose by an oversight) in an Act of George I. already

spoken of. This 26th George II., concludes with an enactment for preventing the destruction of turnips, and the better regulation of attorneys and solicitors! And this completes, so far as I know, any important legislation about Fisheries, but I have no means at hand for examining the decrees of the present century.

I trust this little digest, which is however, far longer than I anticipated, may not prove useless. It is surely well to trace up, through succeeding ages, the interest shown even in a fishery, while the information obtained by inference from such documents as I have quoted, of the manners and customs of the people, and of the care with which natural productions were regarded, is pleasing to the antiquarian, and perhaps, profitable to all.

An editor of Walton, records in a note, a copy from a London newspaper, for 18th April, 1789, which informs us that "*the largest salmon ever caught was brought to London yesterday; 4 feet long, 3 feet round the thickest part of the body; its weight 70lbs. within a few ounces.*"

No salmon were allowed to be bought (by 1 George I., sect. 18), under six pounds in weight.

I find elsewhere, a memorandum of a salmon caught in the river Usk, weighing 68½lbs., four feet nine inches in length, and sixteen inches in breadth. Mr. Pennant mentions 74lbs. as the greatest weight of one salmon he had ever heard of. It is said by some that the larger the fish, the better the quality, but the fish mentioned as brought to London in 1789, was sold at one shilling per pound.

The capture of a salmon in the river Tyne, which was four feet one inch and three quarters long, and weighed fifty-four pounds, is recorded in the Annual Register for 1760, as a remarkable circumstance.

Nor less singular is an account in the Annual Register for 1764, when a Mr. Gleditch presented to the Royal Academy his observations on the method of increasing the fecundity of salmon and trout invented by Mr. Jacobi. From what is there stated it appears that the scheme of Mr. Jacobi was almost, if not quite, the same with that now being tried in Scotland.

The remainder of this treatise will be devoted to salmon in the Thames, and especially in one of the most lovely parts of that beautiful river.

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Berkshire, a highly respectable man, whose daily duties led him to the perhaps most ancient pursuit in the way of trade which exists in England, namely, that of fishing, and cultivating and cropping the numerous osier beds, which form many of the pretty islets in the Thames. In after years he removed three or four miles lower down the river, where he ended his days at an advanced age, being I believe, over 80 at the time of his death. His son succeeded him, and carried on the same trade very successfully and honourably, and died a few years since in a good old age, deservedly respected, and esteemed for his upright walk and conversation.

The father and son, were men of much observation, and their pursuits would naturally give them many opportunities of exercising that faculty, which they seem never to have neglected.

The patriarch appears to have handed down by oral tradition whatever he knew concerning the fishery, and his son has left few records behind him, but they are very interesting and instructive in reference to salmon in the Thames. His son, (the grandson of the person first mentioned) now occupies the home, the osiers, and the fishery, which his two ancestors possessed, and has most kindly lent me the memoranda written by his father, adding thereto much valuable information of his own. He is, I am persuaded, able to throw much light upon the subject of salmon in the Thames.

His father's little manuscript-book is entitled—

“An account of all the Salmon caught at Boulter's Lock and the Contiguous part of the Thames, from 1794 to 1821, both years included, that is to say, 28 years or seasons.”

“Boulter's Lock” is about a mile above Maidenhead Bridge, opposite to Cliefden Wood, and its cascade is one of the finest on the river.

Each year's memorandum is contained in seven columns giving in succession—“the day of the month, the number of salmon caught, the place where caught, the weight, the age of the moon, remarks.”

It appears from this book, that in 1794, between May 20th and August 23rd, fifteen salmons were caught, whose total weight was 248½lbs., or the average weight, about 16½lbs. The largest weighed 25lbs., caught June 9,

and the smallest, caught August 23, weighed 11½lbs. One fish only was caught in the pool—(I suppose by net) All the others were taken in the Bucks; but this demands a remark.

Many persons would imagine that the salmon caught in the Bucks were taken as they were running *down stream*, just as the eels, for whom the Bucks are set, are caught.

But this is not the case; the salmon, when so caught, are going against the stream, and arriving at one of the Bucks, force themselves by an almost mysterious power through the rushing waters, over, or by the side of the Buck, (Butt?) but before they recover themselves from the extraordinary feat they have performed, are carried back, and falling immediately into the Buck, are caught in it. So at least I am informed by the intelligent son of the writer of the memoranda from which I am copying.

Amongst the "remarks" for the next year (1795), I find, that two salmon weighing twenty-one, and eighteen pounds, were sold May 11, at five shillings per pound, producing £9 15s! Nineteen fish were taken this year, eighteen in the Bucks, and one in the Lock pool. The average weight was little over eight pounds. Two fish weighed four pounds only, and the worthy Observer notes, "the year was remarkable for small fish."

Of the eighteen salmon weighing 328lbs. caught in the succeeding year, (1796) he notices that the largest was caught April 28th, in the sixth Buck (there are nine Bucks) and weighed thirty-seven pounds. The smallest was caught August 11th, twelve pounds weight. "We caught eight in the Lock pool, and ten in the Bucks; not one in the Buck pool, for this year the Buck pool was productive of nothing but great stones and hangings."

"August 4.—We drew the Lock pool with a 6½ inch wide net, but caught nothing. We immediately after this stalled the net, and during the night caught two salmon of twenty, and sixteen pounds. We also on the night of the 11th of August, caught another by stalling in the same place, i. e. between the Lock and Buck pools, by running directly down from Arrow head to the tail of the pool."

1797 was a more abundant year. Thirty-seven salmon weighing 670½ lbs. rewarded the fishers toil. The largest

was caught March 27th, in the second Buck, of thirty-one pounds, but being dead, it sold for no more than 2s. per pound! But one note here is of special interest. We can almost realize the joy with which "April 25. I by myself had six in the first Buck, of 128 pounds, though they were not all perfectly in the Buck, but some in the thorough and head, and three in the tail, and two or three of them dead." "We caught in the same Buck this season twelve salmon that weighed 232lbs."

"The fish in general this year ran very large, (average 19lb., smallest 5½lbs.), but none of them went to a very good market, as many of them were caught in the Bucks, and thereby very much beaten. Only 2s. per pound for such fish!! 1798, sixteen fish, 317 pounds, some sold at 5s. per pound. The largest fish weighed "twenty-eight pounds."

1799.—The century closed with a gift of thirty-six salmon this year to the respected fisherman of Boulter's Lock and Pool. Seven in June, nine in July, fifteen in August, five in September, averaging fourteen pounds. The largest weighing twenty-eight pounds again. The remark here, and elsewhere repeated, is worth consideration, as suggesting the habits of salmon. "Seventeen of the thirty-five salmon caught this year in the Bucks, were caught in one Buck, (*viz.*, the *first* Buck.)

1800.—"It proves in this year that we caught twenty-nine salmons, that weighed 388lbs. One thing we have to notice, that this year we made use of a long purse net to the *first* Buck, fixed so as to admit the fish, after passing through the stopper hole; but we found on trial that this did not answer, as we had several salmons killed in it; therefore we discontinued the practice after this and the following season."

The first Buck, however, again proved most successful, though not so much so as formerly. Seven were caught in it; nine in the other Bucks; ten in the Lock pool, and three in the Bucks pool. Seven in June; fifteen in July; and seven in August.

(To be continued.)