

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

BY GEORGE VENABLES, *Incumbent of Christ Church,
Friezeland, Manchester.*

(Continued from page 45, Vol. II.)

In 1801 we arrive at the culminating point. After this the fishery begins to lessen in value, and in twenty years is extinct. What can happen during that period to drive all the salmon out of the Thames in which they have sported for centuries?

We find from the MSS., that just over half a ton weight of salmon was caught at this one fishery this year! Sixty-six salmon; total weight 1124 lbs.!! averaging 17 lbs. each. The largest, caught May 26th, weighed 37lbs.; the smallest weighed 6lbs.

“ In April 2, in May 21, in June 15, in July 21, and in August 7, forty-seven were caught in Bucks; 11 in the pools; four in Buck net.” (No. 1 was not so successful this year, perhaps the *net* would restrain the fish from leaping up that Buck.)

“ Three in the Lock-head, and one *athwart a rack.*”

Some special memoranda must be added here—

“ May 14, 1801.—We caught one salmon in the second Buck at the Lock, 26lbs.; one in the Lock pool, 29lbs.; and three at the Lock-head the same day, 70lbs.; in all 125lbs.”

He adds—“ Friday morning, May 15, 1801—we had nine salmon in the Well Boat, that weighed 209lbs., sold for 2s. 6d. per lb.”

No exact memorandum appears to be kept of the price which all the salmon fetched; but a significant note intimates that “Thames Salmon” was in favour; for he remarks—“ 1,124lbs. at 2s. 6d. per lb., *to say the least,* comes to £140 10s.”

Has any one gained by the loss of such fisheries? Be it remembered, this is but one out of many on the Thames.

1802.—Eighteen fish, 297lbs., realizing 5s., 6s., 2s., and 1s. 6d. per lb. Two were caught “*athwart a rack*,” and one of these was dead.

1803.—Twenty fish, 374lbs. But then—“Although there have been but few fish this year, most of them have gone to a very good market; upwards of 240lbs. sold at 5s. per lb.”

Here are *sixty pounds* then, and 137lbs. of fish to sell at a lower figure—perhaps *only* 2s. 6d. per lb.!

1804.—“This year stands next in rank to 1801; in April 3, May 5, June 11, July 29, August 12, Sept. 2, —62. In the deep 1; in pools 17; in Bucks 44=62.” Largest 32lbs.; smallest 3½lbs. Price from 2s. 6d. to 5s. per lb.

1805.—“The only thing we can say is, that this was the worst season we ever knew; but very few fish, and none went to a very good market, viz.—seven fish, weighing 116lbs., 16½lbs. each.”

1806.—“Twelve fish, 245lbs.; 20½lbs. each. The largest weighed 33lbs., and fetched though caught in a Buck, £9 18s.”

One fish, weighing 22lbs., “was caught just at the top of the cut, in a cod-net, by my father and myself, and brother. For several days prior to this there had been some very heavy gales of wind from SW. and NE.”

Another salmon, weighing 32lbs., “was spoiled by going to London by a slow coach; instead of fetching 6s., it fetched only 2s. per lb.”

“This is one of the most extraordinary seasons we ever knew, for not a fish was caught from 16th June till 8th September, an interval which in general proves the most abundant part of the season.”

Only one fish was taken after June 16th, *i. e.* on Sept. 8th.

1807.—Although only 16 fish were taken, there was a return of £51 8s. 9d. for them; the highest price being 7s. 6d., and the lowest 2s. per lb.

The average weight—16 fish, 253lbs.; nearly 16lbs. each.

REMARKS.—“We may observe, from the catching of this fish, (which fetched 7s. 6d. per lb., and weighed 23lbs.) what an influence the weather has; for this was the only warm night we have had for near six weeks, and the water moderately low during the whole time.”

“It is very extraordinary in this year that not one fish

“ was caught in the month of May.” (Surely disturbing influences are already shown to be working in the Thames?)

1808.—“ Five salmon, 88lbs.”

The only remark here is—

“ Monday, May 23; caught one in the second Buck at the Lock; weight 18lbs.; sold at 8s. per lb.”=£7 4s.
“ This was the highest price we ever got for salmon.”

1809.—“ Eight fish; 116lbs.”

“ But very few fish this season, and those few went to a very bad market.”

June 21.—“ We may observe that the Lock was shut in, only the very day previous to the catching this fish (the first this season). From this we may infer that while the Lock remains open, there is very little chance with the Bucks.”

N. B. Doubtless he argues correctly. As long as the Lock was open there was a fair space for the fish to ascend: when this was shut in, the only way for the fish was to ascend by the Bucks, into which they often fell.

He adds, of the second salmon—“ This fish was caught athwart a rack, and, when we found him, he was quite dead, but not so far gone, but what he crimped very well by doing it immediately.”

1810.—“ Four fish, 70lbs.; at 2s. 6d. and 3s. per lb. All that is left to be said about this salmon season is, that it is a considerable deal worse than any former ones.”

What was the Lord Mayor about? Rather, what was doing in London?

An observant man, like the respected writer of these interesting Memoranda, however, could hardly fail of finding something else to say in spite of his foregoing remark—and here follows a curious but not unparalleled anecdote:—

Friday, 29.—“ One salmon, 18lbs.; 2s. 6d. per lb. This fish actually caught himself, which was by leaping into the punt while she was tied to the Campshot, close to the tail of the Lock Bucks in the night, where I found him the next morning dead. The Bucks were laid during the time.”

I may say a little about trout presently; but I will just mention here, as confirmatory of our worthy friend's

anecdote, that about eighteen years ago, a fine trout of four or five pounds weight, leaped into a garden close to the stream, and so was caught, being unable to return. This was at Snakeley Mill, upon the Wycombe stream, which, thirty years ago, abounded with trout.

1811.—“ Sixteen salmon, 181½lbs. ; from 1s. to 3s. per lb. ; the largest 16lbs. ; the smallest 4½lbs.” (The size of the fish decidedly inferior.)

“ It is observed this year that the Lock was shut in only two days previous to the catching of the first fish, a standing proof that there is very little chance *with the Bucks* while any part of the Lock remains open.”

This is important, and shows that if salmon are to propagate, there should be a fair opportunity at every wear to allow them to work upwards.

“ The last eleven fish that were caught were not only late in the season, but to make it still worse, they were very early swam fish, so, upon the whole, we may pronounce them out of season.” (They appear to have been caught in September.)

“ It is very extraordinary, seven were caught at one hawl in the Lock pool, and three in the Buck pool the same day—ten salmon in one day, September 5, 1811.”

Query—Had these poor “ out of season” fish taken their annual trip towards their marine residence; and had they found the waters about London in such a condition as to be afraid to venture through it?

1812.—“ Eighteen salmon, 224lbs. ;” average 12½lbs.

1813.—“ Fourteen salmon, 220lbs. ;” average 15¾lbs. ; “ two of these 22lbs. each.”

1814.—“ Thirteen salmon, 97½lbs. ;” average 7½lbs.

Notice the smallness of the fish. There must be a change in the state of the waters somewhere.

1815.—“ Four salmon, 52lbs. ;” 13lbs. average.

“ It now appears that the Salmon Fishery in the Thames is falling off very fast.”

1816.—“ Fourteen fish, 179lbs. ;” barely 13lbs. average.

1817.—“ Five fish, 76½lbs.” average 15¼lbs.

1818.—“ Four salmon, 48½lbs. ;” average 12lbs.

1819.—“ Five salmon, 84lbs. ;” produced £16 13s. 6d.

1820.—“ In the year 1820 not one salmon was caught by us, nor by any person within several miles of Boulter’s Lock.”

1821.—“ Two salmon are caught, weighing 18lbs. and “ 13lbs.; the former on Tuesday, June 5, and the latter “ July 13.”

Here the record of salmon-taking ends. I think that occasionally within the last twenty years I have heard of a salmon being caught, possibly a fine trout was mistaken for a salmon, though this is not certain; but of late years not one salmon has been seen.

The compendious view which follows is too useful to be omitted :—

“ Number and Weight of Salmon caught from 1794 to 1821, both Years included.”

Year.	No. of Fish.	Weight.	Year.	No. of Fish.	Weight.
1794	15	148	Brought up	376	5966
1795	19	168	1809	8	116
1796	18	328	1810	4	70
1797	37	670	1811	16	181 $\frac{3}{4}$
1798	16	317	1812	18	224 $\frac{1}{2}$
1799	36	507	1813	14	220
1800	29	388	1814	13	97 $\frac{1}{2}$
1801	66	1124	1815	4	52
1802	18	297	1816	14	179
1803	20	374	1817	5	76 $\frac{1}{2}$
1804	62	943	1818	4	48 $\frac{1}{2}$
1805	7	116	1819	5	84 $\frac{1}{2}$
1806	12	245	1820 (not one caught)		
1807	16	253	1821	2	31
1808	5	88			
Carried up	376	5966	Total	483	7346 $\frac{1}{4}$

“ If this Journal had been begun about twenty years “ earlier, say about 1774, our figures would have run much “ higher, both in respect to numbers of fish and likewise “ weight.”

“ I think it must be about the year 1780, that my father “ caught upwards of fifty salmon in that reach opposite “ Clieveden Spring, (about one and a half miles above “ Boulter’s Lock) and the other fishermen caught in equal “ proportion.”

“ I remember” (this was evidently written some years “ afterwards, perhaps under a feeling that such things would “ be doubted in a few years) “ catching a salmon in the “ Buck pool on 26th June, 1793, that weighed 42lbs.; “ length four feet one inch.”

A little bill is stuck in the book, by which it seems, that “ January 27, 1814, one lamprey was charged 7s.”

(To be continued.)