

Throop Fishery A PERSONAL VIEW



Neil Maidment

Throop Mill is a sad shadow of its former impressive stature and is rapidly deteriorating into a derelict shell. The once fine historic building sits astride the trickle that used to be a full-blooded mill stream and alongside the old rusty weir. You can't miss it as it is one of the main access points to the renowned Throop Fishery. So, what of the fishery? Is the fishing on that stunning part of the Dorset Stour similarly fading away?



At this point I should declare my bias and overall affection for the fishery and the Lower Stour in general. As a kid in short trousers through to my early 20's I lived a short walk from Throop. The time spent on the banks of the Stour in those early formative years was hugely influential. Then there were my uncles and aunt, all now sadly passed away. All seven of them were fishermen and the lower stretches of the Stour was their river. Ron is credited with the 3rd heaviest salmon ever caught from the Stour, a huge fish of 40lbs 08oz from Nettlebeds at Throop. His ashes were scattered there several years ago.

I can just about remember Throop in the 1960's before the heavy machinery moved in for many, many months with the resulting construction of the New Weir. The additional "flood prevention measures" changed the river forever particularly on the stretches upstream of Throop at Redhill and Parley where the extensive straightening consigned several miles of stunning riverside to history. However, many

parts of the river remain very familiar to me.

So, my attachment to Throop is more than just somewhere to fish. It stirs more emotions in this old man than I usually care to admit.

I missed most of what can justifiably be described as Throop's most recent prime period. At the time the fishery was producing stunning large chub and barbel, I had a young family and had moved to work in London and abroad chasing a so-called career. I did get back to Throop as often as I could but that involved 150 mile trips and I was often at the mercy of prevailing conditions. I'm indebted to a few very accomplished anglers for their words of wisdom at that time particularly as I hadn't quite accepted how a bucket of red maggots and a little feeder with an insanely short hook length could produce the goods.

I am still somewhat envious of the talented anglers from near and far who used their skills and knowledge to take full advantage of what the river was then producing. Hanging on to their coat tails, I advanced my own chub PB several times and finally landed my first 7lber. That and a few others all fell to the aforementioned feeder tactics. However, my absolute preferred choice is to float fish, preferably a big fat balsa or, where required, a waggler. The numbers of 6lb+ chub and occasional barbel that found my net were, for me, quite remarkable. But a "7" on the float eluded me for years.



No fishery can maintain such a level of quality forever and will always go through cycles. Throw in all the other negatives we create; abstraction, population encroachment and pollutants to name but a few, it is no wonder the rivers and their populations struggle to cope.

Then there are the Otters!



Otters were present at Throop in my childhood; their home was downstream on what was then The Littledown Estate, now Beat 3. Rarely glimpsed except by anglers searching for the even more elusive tidal barbel. Quite why further introductions were authorised within the existing range of those residents is hard to understand. But it seems an introduction took place at Throop as well as others at sites further upstream.

There is no doubt, in my mind at least, parts of the middle Stour, particularly in the Blandford area, have been severely affected if not decimated by those introductions. But on the lower river the current situation appears to be a little different. Maybe there is a sufficient head of fish for the beginnings of some sort of a balance to be glimpsed. My own and other results over the last few seasons potentially add weight to that possibility. Whether that state of affairs can be fully achieved and, more importantly, sustained, remains uncertain at this point.

A major local challenge to maintaining any sort of balance is the establishment of The Stour Valley Nature Reserve less than two miles upstream of Throop. Created several years ago by the Bournemouth Borough Council, supported by the RSPB and local volunteer groups, it has its own pair of Otters. It seems they are almost certainly the offspring of the Throop based Otters. They have become local celebrities and, with the exception of the ones based near Blandford, are probably the most photographed "wild" Otters in the South of England.



So, the question was; "Is Throop Fishery similarly fading away?" My answer is a definite no!

A little over three years ago I retired early and then relocated back to Dorset which has given me the opportunity to fish the Stour and particularly Throop a lot. At the time of writing the end of my third season "back home" is rapidly approaching. In general I have concentrated on the fishery from late autumn through to the end of the season but have not ignored the long summer evening trips.

Other than those summer evening sessions, I have managed, by choice, not to employ any static methods of any kind. As soon as late autumn fades into winter all

my fishing is with a float rod, typically trotting prodigious distances with large balsas or quills. Feeding red maggot allied to double/single maggot on a size 18 or 20 hook is the main attack. However, stepping up the hook size and feeding mash with bread flake or punch has proven to be an excellent alternative. This method has consistently produced some fine fishing dominated by chub and occasional barbel.

Locally there is a tongue in cheek reference to the "one and only Throop barbel". It gets around a bit and has massive weight gains and losses! It has interrupted my chub sessions and graced my net on five occasions this season alone. Weighing anywhere between 4lbs and 11lbs 08oz it's been a welcome diversion and a lot of fun on the float.



The sheer numbers of truly huge chub of the past are not there now but I know the odd one or two are still to be found. I finally had my first 7lb chub on the float in 2012 and have followed that one with a few more at intervals since then. The most recent and heaviest arrived in March 2016 and pushed the scales to 7lbs 11ozs. I know at least one chub of similar proportions is still there having lost it, so close to the net, very recently!

Similarly, chub of 6lbs are far from guaranteed but there's always a good chance of such a fish. I've managed several each winter with the best of 6lbs 10oz in January 2018. There appears to be a very good number of chub in the 4lbs to 5lbs range, many of which appear to be young fish in excellent condition. Every now and then they can provide a superb days fishing with multiple chub finding the net.

I've spotted Otters, sometimes a pair, at least once each season and three times in the winter of 2017/18. That bears no relation to the past; they were a very rare sight back then. The current residents are bolder and seem to almost tolerate anglers. But on several occasions, even with them in the area, I've continued to catch well. The chub in particular seem able to disappear for the short periods when the otters are active but then reappear and continue to feed. In January 2018, I had the chub responding well to my normal method. Things slowed down until I eventually hooked another and was slowly playing it towards the waiting net. An Otter surfaced just opposite and appeared to look me straight in the eye. It appeared again as I netted that chub. I thought

that would be it for a few hours as far as the chub were concerned but then hooked and landed chub on the next two trots. Others followed soon after.

Things rarely remain the same and rivers, in particular, will continue to transition through various states of health and balance. Add in a myriad of man-made influences, particularly those of the very recent past, and Mother Nature has a massive fight on her hands. Health permitting I'm hoping I have a decade or so remaining to enjoy the Stour down at Throop. At some point, I may not be able to stand in the water up to my whatsits in the middle of winter and may even be reduced to getting a feeder rod out. But I hope I can still fish my beloved Throop with a decent chance of a chub or two!