

Fish Pie



verses by

FISHY FOLK

FISH PIE

During 1968 I found that no Fishing Returns were being made for the River Fleet so I wrote to the local ticket holders, choosing a not very tactful moment as there had been a drought, and the immediate result was a most varied bag of replies making the season a memorable one in spite of the drought. I feel the catch is too good not to be shared.

Elizabeth Murray Usher.

Cally Estate Office,
Gatehouse-of-Fleet.

1972

1.

FISHERMEN

Your permit says return your catch
Each week please note, not in a batch:
Even if "nil", make your return
Or will you never, never learn!?

E.M.U.

LAMENT FROM LOCAL TICKET FORTY-FOUR

I'm sad to admit I'd forgotten
To tell what my fishing has been —
And "a condition of issue," is written
On the back of the ticket I've seen:
But, in the light of this morning
Which brought your reminder in rhyme,
I'm prompted to answer your warning
In a way very similar to thine:—

Last week and this, — such endeavour:—
Though I strived with my rod and my reel
To land those beasts of the river,
Not a one went to rest in my creel

J.A.D.

2.

Solar is a noble fish,
And makes a very tasty dish.
But no matter how I try,
The damned thing will not take My fly.
And so, below sad to relate,
Is my total up to date.

P.S. No one likes to make returns,
No wonder 'Rabbie' stuck to Burns.

A.P.

3.

Although the way to fish I ken
I'm not so handy with a pen
So, if indeed I have forgot
To tell how many fish I've caught
My ways from now I'll try to mend
And so, I hope remain your friend

J.S.

4.

I am sitting by the water of the Fleet
Near my favourite pool upon the lower beat
Although the weather's fine I must neither cast a line
Nor even put my waders on my feet.
As to-morrow ends the week, pen and paper I must seek
Ere I tackle up and don the landing net
For I must prepare the tally that is wanted by the Cally
Or another rhyming rocket I will get.
Details of the weekly stint can be found in the small print
And compliance with the task one quickly learns
So to those about to fish I extend a sincere wish
Tight lines and many happy returns!

C.R.

5.

Madam, apologies profuse
But what's the use
No water so no fishing
However much we're wishing
And so forgetting
Each week a *nile return to send*
But always hoping things will mend

S.E.L.

M.L.L.

6.

Our permit says — return our catch —
Each week we note, not in a batch,
Alas, however, to our dismay — Greenwells glory
Can testify to the sad, sad story of DROUGHT.
However, as though to ease our pain,
The heavens have kindly sent us rain,
Our fishing returns will again once flow,
To the office of you know who.
Each week we will without a doubt,
Some with reason to sing and shout,
Speak of the wonders of the lower beat,
Of the lovely little river Fleet.

L.G. with no apologies

7.

To catch "ought, or "nought",
Is sport no doubt,
But fishermen get
No "Trill", if having to
Write out, nil, nil, nil.

C.McK.

8.

With these exceptions*, I've caught nowt,
I'd dearly like to blame the drought
But honestly compells me add,
My tactics also must be bad.

W.H.S. (with apologies to you and Rabbie Burns).

9.

Season of drought & mellow (un) fruitfulness
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun
Conspiring with him how (not) to load & bless
With fruit the lines that round the ripples run.

(With sincere apologies to Mr Keats)

But none-the-less at heavy cost
Two fish I've caught and nothing lost
A sea-trout clean of four pounds two
And one *half* that which was't new!

R.P.R. McG.

10.

One angler sent me the following weekly verses:—

When I recieved verse so free
I thought "this can't apply to me!
But, studing my permit, I
Found I must eat humble pie.
In future, then, I will not fail
To let you have these on the nail.
21/8/68.

11.

My bag, I fear, again is nil, but do not look askance:
I haven't fished at all this week —
I haven't had a chance.
14/9/68.

12.

I haven't fished all this week —
I haven't had the time.
I ought to write "a nil return"
But cannot make it rhyme.
5/10/68.

13.

My catch this week is nil again,
I didn't even go.
Until last night we had that rain
The river's been too low.
21/9/68.

14.

Away from home you cannot fish
However hard you try.
So I must enter nil again —
I cannot tell a lie.
12/9/68

15.

There was an old man who went fishing.
He walked to the river in doubt.
And while he stood hopefully wishing
He suddenly caught a Sea Trout!
(And a herling!)
28/9/68.

16.

The weather's cold. The trout are stale,
And I shall fish no more.
So put me down this week as nil
And keep on doing so until
Next season then, if spared, I will
Again become a bore.
This rhyming's been the greatest fun:
Its kept the office on the run;
But really rather takes the bun
For idle chatter!
However, now the season's o'er
You need not fear — you'll get no more.
So let us, shall we?, close the door
On the whole matter.
19/10/68.

D.A.

And from the same angler, thanks for having replaced a faulty stile on the River:—

17.

Thank you, Ma'am, for the lovely new stile —
The best one for many a mile.
While the previous wreck
Nearly cost me my neck
I hop over this one with a smile.
22/9/68.

At this point in proceedings I send another "Round Robin":—

The verses that I have received
Have to be seen to be believed
And so a prize I will present
For the best poem I am sent.

E.M.U.

Which produced another mementous run, the following four from the Junior Ticket Holders:—

18.

Rain is here I'm glad to say,
And to the river I make my way,
With rod and line and big meat hook,
And take my catch back to the cook.
Waiting for fish they must be starving!
The bottom of the dish they must be carving.
The cook must now be getting tired
I know that some day I'll be fired.

D.V.

19.

A poem you ask for, so I will try
To do my best and satisfy.
"Have ye only worms?" is often the cry.
"Ay, but there's no damn fish",
Is the usual reply.
"Where have they been all this season?"
The answer, alas, is beyond my reason.
I've tried, I've tried, God knows I've tried
I've spun, I've wormed and even flied,
But the result of all my toil and wrack,
Are a dozen Herling I've had to throw back
So small indeed I've thought "aw to heck",
"I'd be better off Fishing at — — —".

D.P.

20.

By the banks of Fleet
I fish at night tae I near fall asleep
Sometimes I catch a trout
That is a treat tae eat
Other times I just get wet feet.

I.McM.

21.

Sometimes ower early,
Sometimes ower late
Sometimes nae watter,
Sometimes nae spate
Sometimes ower dirty
Sometimes ower clear,
There's aye something wrong,
When I'm fishing here.

D.D.

And from the Senior Anglers:—

22.

Gatehouse is a fair wee town and sits astride the Fleet,
With all its shops and houses looking very neat,
It has its own wee Provost and a Council as well,
On top of that there is a beadle to ring the old kirk bell.
There is a grand broad street running up its middle,
And in this street there lives a man who can fairly play the
fiddle,

In days gone by it made its name as history will agree,
But now alas all that is gone like the felling of a well loved
tree.

Gatehouse now is a tourist's haven,
And seems to set them all fair raving,
They tell each other of wonderous finds,
Who said something about "small minds".

The Fleet is now a rare attraction, lined six deep with men of
action,

And many a fisherman must wonder, what can they do with
all the plunder,

However, fair Nature at her best, warns the fish of this trying
test,

And gently as shadows at dawning they slip by and head up
river for spawning.

Gatehouse now sits fair and proud drawing its share of the
wandering crowd,

Its Inns and Pubs do of their best to provide the traveller with
comfort and rest,

No longer is it a struggling flower — it has emerged — long
live its power.

L.G. with no apologies.

A fishy poem
You wish me to write
Take care of Gordon,
Heron can bite!

The season starts
On the first of June,
For some it cannot
Come too soon.

Me, myself
I'd rather wait,
Until the rain,
And then the spate.

At last it comes
On a Friday night,
It's digging worms,
By candlelight.

To the river,
In the morn,
Coat and waders
I will adorn.

Henderson and Livingston
Are not there,
Will I try a worm,
Perhaps a snare

Another tug,
Another fight,
Two dead salmon,
What a sight

Now to the office,
I must go.

Because my catch
They'll want to know.

Past the manse,
And past the farm,
In the Murray Bar
I'll spin my yarn.

The score boards in
 The Office stand,
 You must report,
 The ones you land.
 Six weeks later,
 Will not do
 Or another reminder
 Will be sent by you.
 My poem is closed,
 I hope you agree
 It's worth the free ticket
 That you sent to me.
 P.S. If my name,
 You can't assume,
 Here's a clue,
 My Nom-de-Plume.—MMIJY IGRNAG.

24.

TO THE ORGAN GRINDERS

The wind of change has blown
 Frae Craig Ronald to the sea
 And the fishers on The Fleet noo
 Ain't what they used to be.
 The characters o' bygone days
 Were kindly folk to meet,
 But God help the loon wha' tried to steal
 Their stance upon the Fleet.
 Auld Gib, he fancied the Craig,
 Big Sam was at the Stile
 Their language when they missed a fish
 Would carry for a mile.
 Auld Pym's stance was the Standing Stane,
 Ye kenned when he was there,
 For lang before ye reached the pool
 His pipe smoke filled the air.
 While Charlie at the Battery,
 Gie often went hame blank,
 Ye can'na mix ye'er fishing lads
 Wi' courtin' on the bank.

An' what aboot auld Jimmy,
The man frae Rowantree,
Wha's breath, when wind blew frae the North
Drew fish up frae the sea.

An din'na think his record catch
Twix dusk and dawn was bunk,
Auld Jimmy never fished his best
Till he was rollin' drunk.

Noo let us come to Georgie
A man o' stature sma',
Nae doot for him it could be claimed,
The dandy o' them a'.

His better ane could never find,
His equal hard to meet,
This man could land oer twuntty troot
Of tail-less dour Loch Fleet.

We can'na leave the Allans oot,
They fished the Fleet wi' skill,
And Campbell very seldom failed
His fishing bag to fill.

McLellan too could catch his share
But soon forgot the troot,
If someone made a splash and said,
"An otter is about.

The anglers o' they bygone days
Were in a class supreme,
They did not scrounge through Steptoe's yard
To realise their dream.

So keep your records up to scratch,
An' before ye spin ye're tales
For God's sake gang and buy yer'sels
An accurate set o' scales.

ANON.

PRAYER AND MALEDICTION BY THE SALMON

To Thee, great E.M.U. lady of Carstramon
 Superior in law, of us the lordly salmon
 And of all the lesser allied fishes
 Served up by Murray Arms in tasty dishes,
 Grilse, Sea-Trout, Herling and Par,
 Migrating to river Fleet from seas afar,
 And to all ye lesser breeds of man
 Who ply the fishing rod, and do all ye can
 With cruel fly and spinner, spoon and bait,
 In the low waters or in roaring spate,
 To lure us to a ghastly fate,
 Pray, listen to our humble petition
 Or be consigned to endless perdition.

Anglers, we beg ye earnestly to stop for ever,
 That foul practice of casting hooks in river.
 That tear our throats and split our liver,
 Break our nerves and make us quiver,
 All to satisfy a gourmets pleasure.

We humbly ask that we will be given
 Free passage to our spawning heaven
 At Upper Rusko and Barlay,
 There to perform in the natural way
 The task of propagating our ancient race
 According to usage and in the best of taste.

But ye fishers, who in name of sport
 Are not prepared to forego your 'noble' art,
 We ask you—please remove the barb, or better still,
 Fish only a rubber hook that will not kill
 And we will all co-operate with right good will.

But take warning, all ye bold piscators,
Not even the Archbishop in his breeks and gaiters,
Will save ye from righteous wrath
Should you deviate from the narrow path,
And continue to fish with uninhabited vigour
From banks of Fleet our well loved river.

Ye powers who made the anglers your care
And dish them out their bill o' fare
If ye would wish our grateful prayer,
Restrict their diet to the skinking Ware
That japs in luggies, and
Good Lord torment them with monstrous haggis.

Therefore beware, ye anglers, ere we place upon you
The fishes curse with witchcraft and hoo-doo
And when ye are fishing late one night
We'll bribe the Devil to grip ye tight,
And push you headlong in the river
(It will then be too late to call for Mother)
And you will drift down the stream
Until you reach the sea serene,
When every eel and man-eating fish
Will feed upon you with great relish.

Amen.

Lines written in dejection on the Fleet in a very low
water on Saturday evening 31st August, 1968.

R.K.

(Reply)

Great poet of the legal race
Your name shall find a worthy place
Amongst the list of famous men
Whose weapon was the mighty pen.

E.M.U.

26.

Two from the prize winners (they didn't all answer in verse!!)

Thank you for
The box and hooks,
I'll try them in
The streams and brooks,
And if with them
I have success,
I'll spin and worm
A wee bit less.

J.G.

27.

Roll on grey skies
Come summer's heat
To cast our flies
Upon the Fleet.
On Skerrow too
Where trout abound
(They say its true
There's *some* around)
And on Bush Moss
Amidst the cows,
A "Peter Ross"
As someone vows
Will hook a rainbow
Big and strong
(Or hook a weed
Some 3 ft. long)
But E.M.U.'s lovely loch and streams
Fill all our hearts with happy dreams
To her warm thanks for lovely flies
To which all *decent* fish must rise.

R.P.R.McG.

28.

Verse written on reverse side of a Nil Loch Skerrow permit.

To you, this will be no surprise
I did not get a single rise
But peace we found, and joy forbye
Treasures that money cannot buy

A.R.

(Reply)

The permit you had of me
To fish Loch Skerrow recently
I must regret to note was blank
You caught no fish from boat or bank
I do appreciate the verse
That you have penned on the reverse!

E.M.U.

And for good measure..

Spoken at a Burn's Supper in reply to the Toast of "The Ladies".

29.

Oh! Rabbie gin' ye micht come doon
An see the sights in oor wee toon
Th ancient tavern still is here!
Dispensin' whisky, milk and beer!
Fowk are a' talking about the freeze
Yet skirts are miles above the knees!

If ye sit boozin' here wi' Dod
Think twice afore ye tak the road
Ye'll hae tae buy some fish and chips
Tae stink the whisky off yer lips
For warlock Barb'ra 'll dae her best
Tae nab ye wi' the breath'liser test
Your loss was juist puir Maggie's tail!
To-day ye'd finish up in jail!

J.K.

30.

A swerving grouse upon the wing
Is certainly a graceful thing,
And tho' I'm nearly anti-blood,
Hate hearing grouse fall with a thud,
With conscience dulled I've made a date
To eat this grouse upon my plate,
And tender tho' its breast may be
I like to see them flying free
Round granite crags, oe'r heather banks
But here and now, to you, our thanks.

P.S. Should I be lucky in the draw,
And I'm given wings to keep,
I'll find myself a heather knowe
Along the shores o' Fleet.

P.P.S. Before mid-day I'll fill my crop
An' hae' a flutter roun'
On policy it's safer then.
I'll hide, in the afternoon.

J.H.

And, in reply to an enquiry as to the health of one of the
literary Anglers:—

31.

Thank you so much for your very nice verse
I was rather ill, but might have been worse:
To be unwell at Christmas *is* rather a curse —
One doesn't feel frightfully hearty.

However, I very soon rose from my bed:
The doctors agreed that I wasn't quite dead:
So I put on my clothes and I hastily fled
To be in at your much talked of party.

And there I imbibed some delicious champagne,
Which coursed through my system and made me regain
My health, so that when I returned home again
I was feeling uncommonly hearty.

Well, I'll wish you God speed and a happy New Year,
Though what it will bring us is not very clear:
But we can at least shout with a mighty loud cheer —
"Thank you — for a jolly good party!"

32.

And in contrast a note of sympathy to me from a friend:—

You poor old Mrs. Muggly Wumps
How did you come to get the mumps —
You must be feeling flat,
Horridly housebound and tied by the leg —
Well, what about laying an Easter egg?
An EMU's egg at that!

K.D.

And to end, a poem written by one of the Anglers' — a
nostalgic epitaph to our lost, but never to be forgotten
Railway.

33.

THE VALE OF FLEET
(Memories of a School Boy)

Smelt as a boy but well remembered still
That carriage whiff of smoke and grime that filled
His nostrils as, with weary breath and pant,
The engine's song of — "Think-I-can" — as chant
To — "thought-I-could, I-thought-I-could" gave way
As summit passed. And in the fading day,
From country train, his grit struck eyes peered out
To get first sight at last on lonely moor
Of heaven's gate — windswept Dromore.

Such simple things: The smell of burning peat,
The black-faced sheep on road: the Vale of Fleet,
The pool of Ness, the pool at Rusko bridge,
Unseen, yet sensed behind its wooded ridge.
The gentle flow of Fleet whose every twist
And every pool was known delight, to list
Among those joys to which no conscious thought
Was given as yet. Only in later years
Would solace come: in times of triumph — or of tears.

Such simple things: yet never in life more
Would this same uplift make his spirits soar.
Nor ever in his travels wide and far,
In tropic sunshine, city's roar, nor yet
In desert's bloody war, would he forget.

ANON.



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