

Winter Evening Report

Charles Jardine – 08/12/16

Fishing for Schools.

The fishing exploits of Charles Jardine needs no introduction except that I for one was totally unaware of his involvement in initiating the Fishing for Schools scheme in conjunction with the Countryside Alliance Foundation. F4S was set up 10 years ago and now involves 60 schools. Initially devised for children with special educational needs, but I do believe it is now open to all school pupils.

Charles looked at the audience and concluded that the average age was at least 60. Indeed, the feedback from instructors is that the starting age of clients is often now in their 50's. How did we get into angling as children? Rarely was it anything to do with parental participation in the sport. Sometimes a relative was responsible but come what may the availability of a knowledgeable mentor would (at least in my case) have been invaluable.

Whilst the Government recognises the value of outdoor pursuits, we are told that many children seem to prefer computer related games. Fishing is claimed to be expensive, requires independent transport, is mainly made up of male participants, and, let's face it, is regarded as cruel by prominent national organisations. I was interested to learn that Charles has promoted coarse fishing as a low cost introduction to angling although, as someone in the audience pointed out, it was quite possible to spend

£2000+ on a pole. I believe that Oscar Boatfield honed his casting skills on the Cam. I suspect that the vast majority of anglers who started trout fishing on the Midland reservoirs was via the coarse fishing route.

When I started fishing in the 1950's I was fortunate enough to live in an area where there were lots of ponds and lakes within cycling distance. I made my first rod from a garden cane. I then stepped up to an ex-army tank aerial (6/9d in old money) and eventually made up a couple of split cane blanks to make Mk 4 Avon and Carp rods. The £11 cost of each of these finished rods was far beyond my personal means at the time. I doubt if many anglers make their own tackle these days.



Charles passing on his skills to the next generation.

If schools are going to take on fishing as part of their academic course they must be able to recognise the skills involved apart

from merely catching fish. A teacher interested in angling is good starting point. I had no access to machine tools. Thus ferrules had to be fitted by diligent sandpapering of the rod blank. The legs of rod rings had to be carefully and symmetrically tapered using a needle file. Making decent cork handles was a real challenge. The selection of the most appropriate parts was also a key part of the process.

A trip to the local river in urban areas may reveal debris such as shopping trolleys. I visited a river in a remote part of Colorado only to find that the river was used as a car dump! However, with a bit of luck, no end of life forms exist in the river. The life cycles of these creatures is quite incredible be they fish (eels, migratory trout) or bugs. There may even be traces of weed. The restoration of streams around London and Sheffield is well documented. My local stream was Pymmes Brook. It was totally barren thanks, I think, to pollution from the local gas works. Nevertheless I could relate the meandering features of the stream to the scenarios displayed in the Mr Crabtree sketches. So here we have watercraft, pollution and a desire to read and write about ones observations. Line drawings have, to all intents and purposes, been replaced by top quality digital photography not only of catches but also insects (and artificial flies) at high magnification, and even underwater shots.

The scope for drawing up modules is enormous. The idea is to award successful participants a Certificate of Personal Effectiveness by assessment without the use of

written examinations. Even so the programs have been shown to improve skills in more academic subjects such as English and mathematics. I can understand that. F4S is a charitable organisation and needs more instructors and, of course, cash. I read that half a dozen people are running in the London Marathon in an attempt to boost funds. Sponsorship through the tackle industry has not been encouraging with notable exceptions. Wychwood and Greys support the England Junior Fly fishing squad (which also received tackle in a bequest following the passing of Henry Lowe). Orvis have a program supporting F4S. Some fisheries, notably Meon Springs, run fishing days. AW offer free permits to junior anglers accompanying an adult angler. My apologies for my failure to credit other contributors.

In conclusion, Charles reckoned that the F4S program has reinvigorated his personal fishing habits. If anyone wishes to contribute to this worthwhile endeavour, contact can be made through <http://www.countryside-alliance.org/the-foundation/fishing-for-schools/>

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