

## FLOODED FURLOUGH on the NWD Canal by Roy Webster

The Boy Roy, serving his two year National Service at Technical Training Command HQ, RAF Brampton, Hunts, had volunteered for duty during Christmas, 1952.

Fact was, he had little to attract his temporary return to “civvy street during the break for he had received what is commonly known as a “Dear John” letter from long-time girl-friend, Tricia, informing him she was on the point of becoming engaged in wedlock to a local village labourer almost twice her age. So much for the old adage that absence makes the heart grow fonder! He thought.

More importantly was the result of a telephone chat with Toby, his home Dilham village football club chairman, who advised there were no Yuletide match fixtures pending over Xmas, so the usual Saturday morning A11 hitch hike to Norfolk with his soccer boots dangling round his neck was off his personal weekend fixture list.

Thus, while longing to re-cast a line into his favoured swims on the NWD Canal he would cadge a few slices of stale bread for bait from the RAF station cookhouse and be satisfied with a few off duty hours testing his skills among the bream populating the Brampton Angling Club Pit; Or perhaps sitting quietly alongside British top rod, Maurice Kausman of Huntingdon, admiring the star’s centre pin single maggot match magic amongst the Brampton Great Ouse shoals of river roach.

Working alone, fingering the keys of the RAF HQ teleprinter and occupying the special single ground floor bedroom for duty volunteers in the huge three-storey Brampton Grange HQ, was a doddle. This was less than the one mile repeat bike ride back from office to nissen hut camp for food and sleep and, more importantly, a mere 200 yards from the nearest Brampton village drinking establishment. There, a nightly card game with keen and friendly village punters, plus very palatable food available, tended to favour the shortest trip of the night from the work place and back in time for early

morning duty when troubled by grumbling, deeply harassing hangovers, were commonplace but sometimes happily justified by a bulging wallet, although on one occasion RAF police were forced to break down the locked bedroom door to wake him at 3 am to send important top secret coded information to RAF stations nationwide.

Thus, Senior Aircraftsman Boy Roy believed he had demonstrated how to make the best of an RAF special duty roster. Now, he had to negotiate his own reward of a longer new year's leave with the RAF Station duty officer and his own immediate section boss, the veteran Air Ministry Secret Service civilian operative Mr Alan Pruett whose wall message in bold letters above his desk read: "HARDLY ANYBODY KNOWS ANYTHING"

The Boy qualified for ten days New Year leave and this time the RAF financed the rail journey to Norwich where he then boarded the single decker 5a bus to the stop where his own bicycle, after a previous weekend leave, was parked in the special hut kindly provided for travellers by the house property owner.

He had already been informed by Toby, the Dilham village soccer club boss, he was filling centre back berth, a position employed against an Army outfit where he had shown much promise in a RAF squad mostly filled by National Service budding professionals, still listed on FA main league club books.

The station's warrant officer in charge of RAF football was a secret scout for Notts County and offered The Boy a trial which he declined. At that time he considered the game pay structure was utterly inadequate. In any case he had no intension of surrendering his enjoyable NW canal fishing after demob for the sake of a few quid more but with fewer long term prospects than the reserved sedentary fruit farm company secretary and accounting position awaiting his discharge.

Thus he remained loyal to Dilham FC, and raring to go. His next plan was an all Sunday angling outing precluding a fabulous fishing fest on the unrivalled facility of the North Walsham, Dilham Canal where sport had been enhanced by the 1940 deepening by the military tank trap completion

But now, almost home, he had a problem. The rear tyre of his bike was as flat as a pancake. Kick off was in 20 minutes and his hand pump was missing. At that moment the hugely respected local match referee Pinkie Batchelor cycled up. "What's the problem?" he enquired in a less than friendly tone. "I've Just got off the bus, got a flat and kick off is soon" The Boy responded meekly. Pinkie nodded. "Here, you can borrow my pump but I warn you. I am your referee today and if you put yourself about like you did last time out you will be sent off." he growled

"Heaven forbid, Sir. On the game you refer to I was feeling most unwell that Saturday; I had walked miles, my balance was severely affected and that caused me to fall over and swing my feet that were beyond my control. I have done a long journey today and can scarcely place one foot ahead of the other. I am sure you can allow for that if I accidentally trip an opponent!"

"Get to that dressing room and get changed. I shall be watching you." declared the unimpressed Pinkie in threatening tone through gritted teeth.

The result from the local derby was DILHAM 1 EAST RUSTON 1. (No red cards, No injury) and afterwards gallons of Xmas and New Year celebration pints in the nearby Cross Keys pub where opposing players shook hands but warned it would be do or die next time out.

Sunday Morning duly arrived not a moment too soon for The Boy Roy who, despite a violent headache, managed to stoop and fill his bait can with plump garden worms and two slices of newly baked home-made bread in his float box.

Despite a mild grass frost there was no ice and he was soon rowing the family dinghy along Taylors Cut to his favoured spot upstream of the NWDC/River Ant confluence above Wayford Bridge.

Ground bait was gently fed into the selected area where active bream bubbles were visibly rising from the agitation of Hoovering bottom feeders. The bream were there, busily satisfying their usual early morning appetites.

And deciding on a catch and release policy (the ferrets would be disappointed) more than 40 common bream from a hectic morning's angling activity, the

heaviest estimated at around four pounds, were returned to the water none the worse for their visit to dry land.

For the remainder of that week The Boy cast his bait into various promising angling areas below the Tonnage Bridge with stunning success for species including a number of hard hitting pike into low double figures tempted by herring tail baiting a single black size four eel hook and all returned alive to fight another day.

With his old man kindly repairing the puncture the Boy duly turned up for the next Saturday away soccer coach trip to Trunch where the team stole the points with a best of five goals victory.

The Boy had planned a grand stand finish to his leave, hooking record catches of canal bream from his favourite spot. And on the last Thursday of his freedom he was making his early morning stroll to the moorings when he was stunned by sight of the family row boat afloat in the garden and coming up to meet him.

During the Night of Jan 21/22 a fierce spring tide in the North Sea driven by storm force north westerly gales had lifted coastal sea levels by metres. And now, with all his favoured lowland Canal venues connected to tidal influences inundated by flood water he was obliged to transfer his angling activities elsewhere.

Fortunately the memory of his uncle Ben bragging about catching massive roach from the non-tidal stretch of the canal above the Honing road bridge adjacent to the army pill box paid off.

There, unaffected by the overnight weather, he discovered the whole channel, bank to bank, was margined by lily pads and otherwise weed free, flowing over a gravel bed and certainly ideal for roach fishing, running bread flake bait through the swim on a size 14 fine wire hook supported by his home made twin shot stick float.

The tactic could not have worked better. Little free portions of slow sinking bread flake induced the roach to feed avidly and huge silver scale studded specimens that appeared never to have been hooked before, were carefully

netted and immediately released upstream to avoid disturbing the remaining shoal.

And although with gale backing to the east and the relenting mountainous sea tides draining away the worst of the coastal and river marshland floods of the century within two days, Boy Roy spent the remainder of his leave reeling in those pristine perfect, red finned roach from that non tidal, piscatorial paradise. And, what's more he kept secret the news of those wonderful catches to this very day!

Please Note: Legal right of access to fish the south/west bank of NWD Canal above the Dilham/Honing water bridge to Briggate still belongs to one of the local landowners. Permission must be obtained.