



Angling for the future – the Dorset Arms Angling Club

THE Dorset Arms Angling Club (DAAC) was formed in 1955 and named after its original headquarters the Dorset Arms Hotel, East Sussex, close to the lakes and streams on the Buckhurst Estate which were some of the club's first waters and owned by the 9th Earl De La Warr and his son Lord Buckhurst. Other waters included two stretches of the Upper Medway and two tributaries running through land owned by Lord Gibson and two local farmers.

The club's objective was to offer fishing to local anglers at a time when large clubs were starting to take over fishing rights in the area. Membership was originally drawn from a 4½-mile radius of the Dorset Arms Hotel and limited to 100 seniors and 25 juniors.

An extensive waiting list

However, by the 1960s the club had proved so popular there was an extensive waiting list which included many youngsters so the junior membership limit was raised to 50. Some years later, with financial pressures rising, membership was opened up to accommodate more members and increase revenue.

The mix of waters available allowed members to fish for a wide range of species. The lakes in Buckhurst Park held roach, rudd, carp, tench, pike and perch.

The Upper Medway and its tributaries held wild brown trout, chub, dace, roach, perch, pike and grayling; the latter having been introduced by the Kent River Board. Brown trout were also stocked annually by the board on the two stretches of the Upper Medway.

Over the years other club waters have come and gone, notably among them the Old Mill in Crowborough and Scarlett's Lake in Cowden, Kent.



Eridge Stream chub.

In 2008, the fishing rights to the waters on the Buckhurst Estate were withdrawn and sadly an association of over 50 years ended. Around the same time the club also lost Scarlett's Lake following the death of the owner.

Scarlett's was subsequently purchased by Bromley and District Angling Society. The society approached the DAAC about a possible merger of the two clubs but it was decided the DAAC could best serve its members and the owners of their waters by remaining a small independent club.

The loss of Scarlett's Lake and the waters at Buckhurst Park was undoubtedly a blow to the club, but the DAAC still had access to other waters allowing it to continue in its own right.

By the mid-1980s, two small lakes at Burrswood in Groombridge, near Tunbridge Wells, had been added. More recently two more lakes at Ticehurst House Hospital, Ticehurst, owned by the Priory have come under the club's control.

In 2017, a small lake at Renhurst Farm became available to the club and with the help of the Environment Agency has now been restocked. Previously it had been one of Bromley and District Angling Society's waters.

The club also joined the Rother Fisheries Association (RFA) giving members access to the RFA's waters on the River Rother and Royal Military Canal. Fishing at Weirwood Reservoir was also made available to members wishing to fish a large water.

After the loss of the fishing rights at Buckhurst Park the club continued to use the Dorset Arms Hotel as its headquarters but when it was acquired by the Buckhurst Estate and closed for a short time for refurbishment, the club decided to move its headquarters to the Crown Inn in Groombridge.

The Crown, a 16th Century inn once frequented by the notorious "Groombridge Gang" of smugglers, is only 200 metres from one of the lakes the club fish at Burrswood and therefore ideally located.



Trout from Eridge Stream.

Environmental issues have always been of concern to the club's administration and the rivers are not the same as they were 60 years ago. The arrival of mink wiped out the large population of water voles which inhabited the Upper Medway and its tributaries.

The removal of trees from the banks of the rivers by the authorities over several decades changed their character considerably by letting in invasive Himalayan balsam which prohibited the growth of other waterside plants. This in turn caused erosion of the banks causing narrowing of the water courses with resultant flooding risk.

Pollution from modern farming methods and water treatment works has also had its effect. In the 1970s the fish population of one of the Medway's tributaries fished by the club was decimated by a sewage spill and the river had to be restocked with brown trout.

Where trout were once the predominant species they are now much fewer in number with chub now being predominant. Signal crayfish are now present throughout the whole Upper Medway catchment area including Weirwood Reservoir and the small feeder streams on Ashdown Forest. Native white claw crayfish appear to have been completely wiped out in the area.

Fishing in beautiful surroundings

Today the DAAC remains a small friendly club offering its members fishing in beautiful surroundings. Being a small club our waters are never overcrowded ensuring our members a peaceful angling experience.

The club offers very competitive subscriptions and welcomes new members. Matches are arranged on Sundays throughout the year and Wednesday evening matches are fished during the summer months.

The club considers itself extremely lucky in the support it receives. There is a strong working relationship with local Environment Agency fisheries officers, landowners and the Angling Trust who are doing a great job for anglers' interests nationally.

The DAAC also receives support from politicians. The late Sir Geoffrey Johnson-Smith, MP for Wealden, was an active member and vice president. His successors, Charles Hendry and Nus Ghani, have followed in his footsteps as vice presidents.

Today the club's waters also extend into two other constituencies. Last year Tunbridge Wells MP and Government Minister Greg Clark became a vice president and Huw Merriman MP for Bexhill and Battle has offered support to the club where needed.

As well as welcoming new members, the club is always interested in talking to local landowners looking for a club to manage their waters for them.



Burrswood's first lake.



Environment Agency fish survey at Burrswood.

For more information, you can visit their website www.fishe.net/kent/club/dorset.arms.angling.club.php