

A Brief History of the Association

The Association was formed at a meeting convened by Sir William Portal of Laverstoke House on Saturday 6th April 1907, who was elected as its first Chairman. Initially it was called the Test and Itchen Trout Fishing Association and its object was to promote the interests of fly fishing on both rivers. A committee of owners on both rivers was appointed to run the Association and the annual subscription was fixed at ten shillings.

The first year was one of great activity with 97 members enrolled. Much effort was focused on a Bill going through the Upper House, proposed by Lord Carrington, which eventually became the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Act. Noble members of the Association had considerable influence in shaping it. The subject of weed cutting was also discussed and rules and dates for this were introduced for the first time.



River work - Mottisfont 1910

A Time for Litigation

The Association soon became involved in litigation and a Guarantee fund was established in 1913. Over the subsequent years many calls were made to the Guarantors, for what were then quite sizeable sums. Two issues in particular occupied the minds of the committee. Run-off from tar spraying of roads had resulted in fish kills and legal actions were initiated against the County Council, the Corporation of the City of Winchester and the Borough of Andover. The other was the requirement to install salmon passes in the mills around Romsey. Test proprietors feared the effects of an influx of salmon on the trout fisheries. After the failure of a High Court Appeal and "in consequence of the war" further action was dropped in 1915.

After the First World War, discharge of raw sewage into the rivers became a big issue and more legal action was initiated against the local authorities.

In 1926, a committee appointed to deal with pollution at Whitchurch became frustrated with the lack of headway and threatened legal action. A meeting of the District Council was quickly arranged and a resolution passed to install a drainage scheme without delay.

In 1934, over £500 (probably over £20,000 in today's money) was paid to one riparian owner to help fund action against Andover Council for pollution of the Anton with sewage and oil. The case was settled with the Council agreeing to install a new treatment system.

The Association was also represented at a number of public enquiries concerned with abstraction for public water supply.

If it appears that our forebears were inclined to litigation, it has to be remembered that protection of the river by regulation was almost non-existent and resort to civil proceedings was the only course of action open to them. It is greatly to their credit and their successors' advantage that they were willing to find such sums of money, time and time again.

The inter-war years were not exclusively concerned with litigation. The Association sponsored fishery research at University College of Southampton, discussed the problem of grayling on the Test and sent its heartiest congratulations to the Houghton Club on its centenary in 1922. In 1929 The Secretary was instructed to get a typewriter.

Incorporation

The Association had not been constituted as a legal entity and so could not initiate legal proceedings in its own name and could only support members in their actions.

At a meeting of the Association on 26th July 1946 it was resolved to transfer all its assets to a new company "The Test and Itchen Fishing Association Ltd." The first General Meeting of the new company was chaired by Sir Francis O Lindley PC KCMG of Weir House Alresford, a retired diplomat and incidentally the grandfather of one our recently retired Chairman, Sir Chips Keswick. Apart from the formal resolutions, the members discussed forthcoming sewage disposal and water boring schemes.

There was much discussion through the forties and fifties on how the Association's activities could be financed. Money was obviously tight and the cost and scope of the Association's activities was increasing. In addition to retaining analysts for work on pollution cases, the Association had its own laboratory equipment and in the late 50's and 60's had its own electrofishing equipment together with a Land Rover. In 1961 the Chairman expressed the view that the advent of River Boards had quadrupled the work of the Association and that the Secretary was overworked – a rare insight. However one way or another, usually by generous donations from individual members, the Association managed to balance its books and continue to finance actions to protect the rivers.

Internal Dissension

Electrofishing was the cause of a dispute within the Association, which very nearly destroyed in the early 1950s it. Opinion was divided between those who were suspicious of it and the damage it might do to fish stocks, fly life and wild life generally and those who were enthusiastic about its potential to control pike and grayling. There was considerable disagreement over its use and solicitors' letters sent back and forth between members over it.

In 1955 the AGM had to be adjourned because of it. At the reconvened meeting, one faction

successfully objected to the re-election of the directors en bloc and then opposed the re-election of one retiring director, which resulted in half the Board and the Secretary resigning. Voices were raised, urging that the continuance of the Association was more important than this single issue. Not even the offer of an inquiry under Lord Simonds, or the news that the Association had successfully opposed a plan to build a tobacco factory at Nursling, were enough to bring harmony to the proceedings.

The Baring Years

Fortunately a new Board was convened the following year under the Chairmanship of John Charles which appointed Raymond Baring as Secretary. Baring sadly died in 1967 but was succeeded by his widow Peggy Baring, who remained as Secretary until 1991. The Association went from strength to strength in this time. Membership, passed 200 in 1964 and 300 in the 70's. Abstraction became an even more important issue than pollution, with the Association being involved in public inquiries for major water supply projects for Southampton, Portsmouth, Winchester and Andover.



Peggy Baring - Secretary 1967-1991

Serious flooding in 1960, particularly at Stockbridge, gave rise to fears that there would be a renewed demand for a lowering of the water table. As a result of recommendations from Mr A W Lunn, the River Board decided to protect against future problems by raising the bridges through Stockbridge. The question of where the sewage effluent from Andover was to be discharged, occupied the Association for seven years, until the Minister finally decided it should go into the Test.

In 1964 a widespread decline in fly life was reported and keepers were instructed to maintain daily records of their observations.

In 1965, it was reported that mink, which are not native to this country, were becoming established and five had been caught by the Leckford keepers.

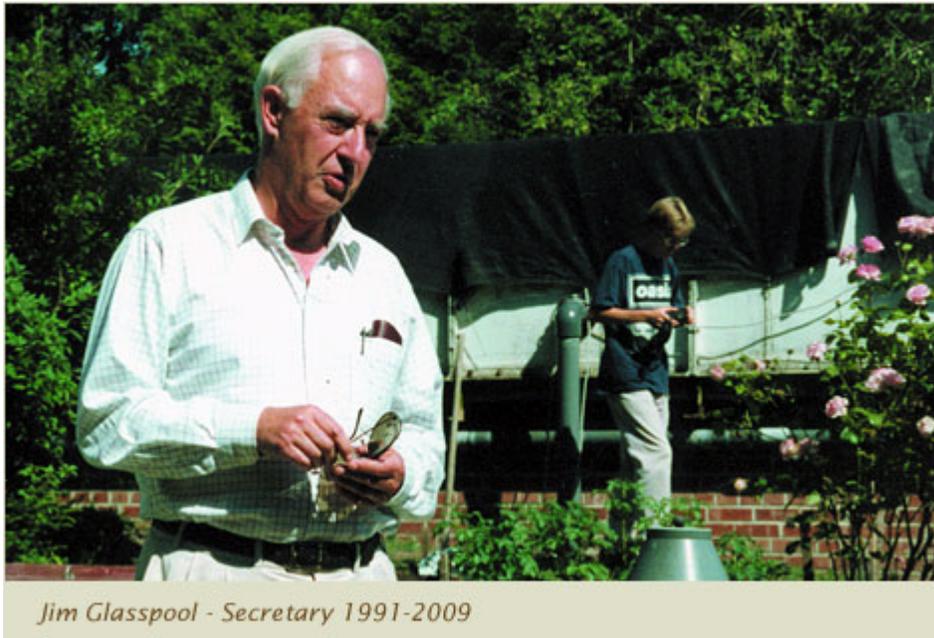
At a Board meeting on 30th March 1969, Sir Thomas Sopwith complained that the Test had been coloured since the beginning of the season. At the same meeting it was also agreed that the River Authority should be asked to appoint a fisheries officer. The River Authority subsequently agreed, providing the riparian owners found the money by means of a 250% increase in licence fees. (Plus ca change).

In 1974, the Secretary reported “unrest in the Keepers Association”. It was agreed that the Secretary could accept an invitation to attend the keepers meeting, but that the Chairman should accompany her. For whose protection this provision was made is not recorded.

In 1976 the rainfall was reported as being the lowest for 90 years, with river flows 40% below average. A pilot pumping scheme on the Candover Brook was initiated. An ecological survey of the whole of the Itchen Valley, was undertaken by the Nature Conservancy.

It was reported in 1977, that there were 88 Honorary Bailiffs on the Test and Itchen. Through Dermot Wilson’s efforts, 52 Americans had joined the Association. There was also a request to stock American Brook trout on the Test but it was not suggested that there was any connection.

In 1991 the Board was faced with the problem of finding a successor to Peggy Baring as Secretary, after so many years. Fortunately Jim Glasspool, an executive of Shell and a longstanding member of the Bishopstoke Club, was due to retire fairly shortly and he indicated he would be interested in the post. This was confirmed by a delighted Board forthwith.



The Age of Regulation

After the Second World War the River Boards and later by the Water Act of 1963, the River Authorities, were given increased responsibilities for abstraction management and pollution control. The Water Act of 1973 gave greatly increased responsibilities for both supply of water and regulation, to ten Regional Water Authorities. The Water Act of 1989 handed over the utility functions, to private sector water companies and their regulatory duties were passed to the newly

created National Rivers Authority, through the Environment Act of 1990. Subsequently the Environment Act of 1995, reinforced this separation and established the Environment Agency.

With these changes, the role of the Association, although not its objects, has also changed. There has been a plethora of new legislation, both primary and secondary. The Association has sought to influence its direction at all stages of public consultation and the DETR has listed the Association as an official consultee on abstraction and other issues. Although there are national bodies, which do invaluable work in representing angling interests generally, the case for the fragility and special nature of chalk streams has had to be made by the Association. It is also necessary to keep a close watch in areas such as County and District Plans to ensure that the need to protect the river valleys is properly reflected in any development proposals. Increasingly the decisions are essentially made, when the policy is established, rather than when individual development proposals are made.

Environmental protection legislation has also had a big impact on the management of the rivers. Proposals were first made to notify the Test and Itchen as riverine SSSI's in 1994. The Chairman and Secretary of the Association were able to argue successfully that the list of operations for which prior consultation was required, should be especially tailored to reflect management practices – the first time English Nature had agreed to a non standard list. In spite of some misgivings at the time, the notification of the rivers has not created undue management problems and their status as SSSI's and a candidate SAC, is becoming increasingly important in resisting further abstraction, or securing action to remedy historical damage.

The Association has also sponsored research into a number of topics affecting the rivers. These have included the effect of fish farms, studies of algal growth and studies of macrophyte distribution, particularly Ranunculus and factors which might affect its growth.

In 1993 the name of the organisation was shortened to the Test and Itchen Association Ltd to reflect its broader river conservation focus.

The Association Today

In 2008 with the approaching retirement of the Secretary, Jim Glasspool, a subgroup of the Board was established to look at the future structure and function of the Association. In recognition of the growing workload both administrative and expert, the group recommended the establishment of two separate roles. In April 2009 Tom Davis, formerly an environmental advisor with Rio Tinto, took over from Jim Glasspool as Executive Director, and in at the AGM in May Clay Brendish succeeded Sir Chips Keswick as Chairman. Later that year Jacqui Williams came on board as Administrator of the Association.

Today the Association has some 550 members, is in good financial health, with a guarantee fund of over £50,000 and has good relations both locally and nationally with the various organisations which influence our destiny. The threats to the rivers are many, however, and we shall need all of these strengths if we are to meet them.

Chairmen

- 1907 Sir William Portal Bt
- 1932 Mr A N Gilbey
- 1933 Col. A H French DSO

- 1940 Sir Francis Lindley PC KCVO
- 1950 Major T T Phelps
- 1956 Mr J C S Charles MBE
- 1962 Mr T L Forbes
- 1964 Viscount Knollys
- 1966 Mr John M Williams
- 1973 Mr H J S French
- 1981 Mr J W Potter
- 1992 Mr David Owen
- 2000 Sir Chips Keswick
- 2009 Mr Clay Brendish CBE

Secretaries

- 1907 Mr J Charles Warner
- 1911 Mr C Ernest Pain
- 1934 Captain G G Petherick
- 1947 Mr A Maudsley
- 1948 Major R D Baird
- 1951 The Hon J Ashley-Cooper
- 1956 Mr Raymond Baring
- 1967 Mrs Peggy Baring
(later The Countess of Malmesbury)
- 1991 Mr Jim Glasspool

Executive Directors

- 2009 Mr Tom Davis