

**Making Something Happen:  
Ted Hughes, Wild Fish and Chalk  
Streams**

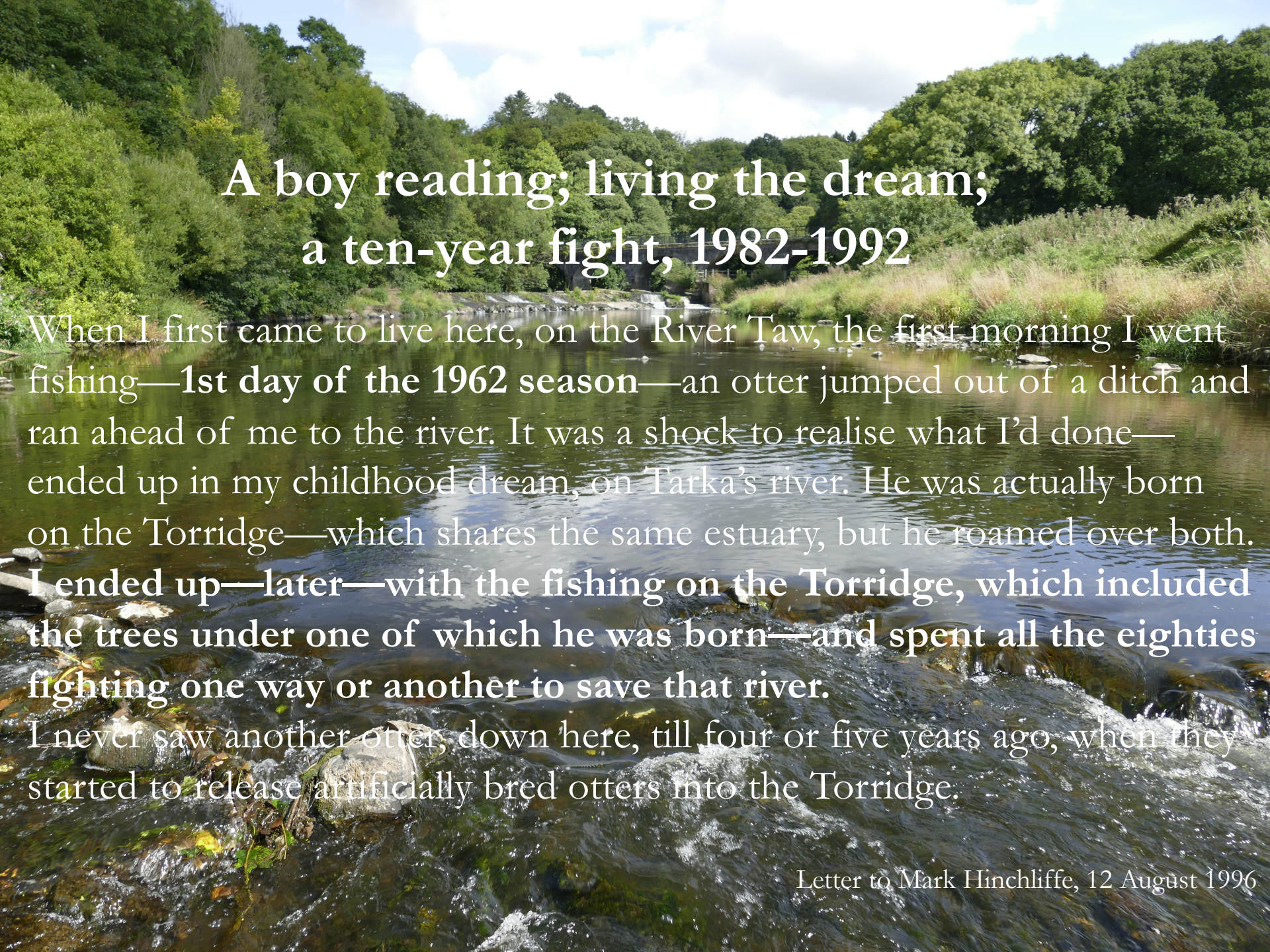
Mark Wormald

# Happy Valley?

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:  
The parish of rich women, physical decay,  
Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.  
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,  
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
In the valley of its making where executives  
Would never want to tamper, flows on south  
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,  
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,  
A way of happening, a mouth.

W.H.Auden, from 'In Memory of W.B.Yeats' (February 1939)





## A boy reading; living the dream; a ten-year fight, 1982-1992

When I first came to live here, on the River Taw, the first morning I went fishing—1st day of the 1962 season—an otter jumped out of a ditch and ran ahead of me to the river. It was a shock to realise what I'd done—ended up in my childhood dream, on Tarka's river. He was actually born on the Torridge—which shares the same estuary, but he roamed over both. I ended up—later—with the fishing on the Torridge, which included the trees under one of which he was born—and spent all the eighties fighting one way or another to save that river.

I never saw another otter, down here, till four or five years ago, when they started to release artificially bred otters into the Torridge.

Letter to Mark Hinchliffe, 12 August 1996



Weir Pool, Beam, near Great Torrington





# Pipe dreams and dated realities

September 1961: Ted, Sylvia and Frieda Hughes move to North Tawton

Autumn 1966: Ted dreams of salmon leaping writhing from a high waterfall on the high Taw, showering him with eggs and milt: fertility.

Impossible, in reality: North Tawton engineer Young's North Devon Water Board pipes had been draining and depleting Taw Marsh for Exeter's drinking water since 1962.

1963: R.C.Walters: 'the chalk aquifers surrounding London have been pumped almost to extinction'

- Quoted by Feargal Sharkey, Planet Pod, March 2023

1982 —  
a draft  
held  
back

The Torridge's difficulties — apart from the lowering effects of water abstraction which makes every other sickness worse — stem mainly from the particular kind of agriculture that dominates the river's catchment. Because of the extreme poorness of the land (a good deal poorer than what flanks much of the Taw), the farms have to concentrate on livestock, which means grass, which means not only a yearly and often twice yearly dressing of Nitrates, but an increasing dependence on silage, which means slurry as well as milking parlours (detergent) and beef (abattoirs). The growth of intensive farming, of this type, has been startling to watch. On these lonely, hard farms, the farmer is not easily persuaded that his old-style drainage is wrong for his new-style farming. The five hundred or more farms of the area are the five hundred sources of the Torridge: eighty gallons of detergent a day, from each hundred cow parlour, lubricating the system. As if this were not enough, oozing into every brooklet of fry, the end product, the cattle and the sheep, are drained of their fluids and refuse at Hatherleigh abattoir on the Lew (one of the Torridge's spawning tributaries) and the giant abattoir at Torrington — one of the biggest in Europe. Both these places present their owners with chronic sewage problems. The worst indignity of all, however, for the smolts going down and the fish coming up, is the untreated sewage of Bideford that rides up and down the long estuary as one of the greatest / tourist deterrents of the North coast. But here, at least, there are signs that the recently-discovered not to say revolutionary truth — what you pour down the drain reappears in your cup — is beginning to filter through.

# March 1984: Executives tampering

**'I've been involved in a local battle, of sorts, over Bideford Sewage System. The Water Authority, mightily urged on by local building interests, are putting in a type of sewage system that merely screens the sewage (takes out 20% solids – which aren't what you think they might be, hyena coprolites, but are mostly cardboard, plastic etc.) The moment the decision for this is lifted, the building embargo on Bideford will be lifted, & 1600 new houses go in immediately followed by whatever developments developers can develop.**

First result, instant increase, of about 30% raw sewage going dump smack flop in the estuary in the middle of the town. The shellfish are already poisonous. **75% surfers & canoists [sic] pick up infections & assorted dysenteries etc. The local hoteliers, & tourist association, see all hear all & say nowt** – fearful of what a public uproar might do to their tourists (population doubles in summer).'

Second result, the death of the rivers' fish.

# Not for public consumption

All our efforts at protest being shoved aside, one of the local lads produced the enclosed. Keep it to yourself, because it might be libellous.'

*From 'The Ballad of the Bideford Browns'*

(O all Torridge beaches are squidgy with faeces  
So come you jolly toddlers and fall on your faces,  
But don't expect us to pay heed to your cries  
For we all sit in excrement up to the eyes.

'One of the local lads'? To the tune of 'The Threshing Machine' (mis?)filed at Emory, Box 170 folder 2



## '1984 on the Tarka Trail'

The river is suddenly green – dense bottle green.  
Hard in the sun, dark as spinach.  
Drought pools bleach their craters.  
The river's floor is a fleece –  
Tresses of some vile stuff  
That disintegrates to a slime as you touch it  
Leaving your fingers fouled with a stink of diesel.

The river's gutted – a boom of plenty for algae....  
Surfactants, ammonia, phosphates – the whole  
banquet

Flushed in by sporadic thunderbursts  
But never a flood enough to scour a sewer,  
Never enough to resurrect a river.



The tale of a dying river

Does not end where you stand with the visitors

At a sickbed, feeling the usual

More than mangled helplessness.

You cannot leave this hospital because

Peter, the good corn farmer, with his three plus

Tons of quality grain to the acre (behind him

The Min. of Ag. and Fish.'s hard guarantee

Which is the hired assurance of hired science)

Heaps the poisons into you too.



# Local lad as Laureate: a Christmas gift, carefully wrapped

‘Rain-Charms for the Duchy’, the first poem published as Poet Laureate, written when the drought burst, now recycled for Prince Harry in the *Daily Mail* 24.12. 1984

– except for these lines

And the Torridge, that hospital sluice of all the doctored and  
scabby farms from Welcombe to Hatherleigh to Torrington  
Poor, bleached leper in her pit, praying that this at last is the kiss  
of the miracle

- TH to Keith Sagar, 21.1.1985 *Poet and Critic* p.142

February 1985

Finding a voice, lending one, raising funds:

## ‘The Best Worker in Europe’

The best worker in Europe

Is only six inch long –

Suddenly all his labours fail.

But still he sings: ‘What’s wrong, my dears?’

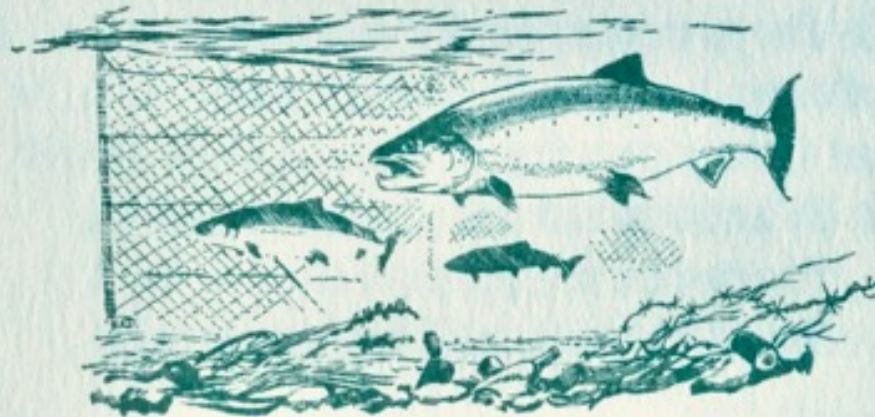
I’ll tell you just what’s wrong.

My respiration, my circulation,

Compulsory-purchased by the Nation,

Are now Sewers of your Civilisation.

God help the slave', sings the Salmon Smolt,  
'Who is owned by everyone.  
The Donkey used, flogged, owned by all  
Is protected by none, my dears,  
He is protected by none -  
    And the wolf takes him easily.  
    O every wave upon the sea  
    Carries a wolf that lives on me.'



From 'The Best Worker in Europe'  
(Cambridge: Rampant Lions Press, 1985)  
Illustration: Charles Jardine

# Dear Dermot: water resources

(5<sup>th</sup> February 85)

Ted to Dermot Wilson, ex Greenjacket, doyen of dry fly fishing on chalk streams, author of *Dry-fly Beginnings Fishing the Dry Fly* (1970), founder of UK's first mail order tackle company at Nether Wallop Mill (1968-1981), fellow contributor to *West Country Fly Fishing* (1983) and most importantly of all **founder of the Water Resources Board for Salmon and Trout Association.**

A thousand thanks for the reading he'd sent, of varying value:

1) a section of Ashley Cooper's book *A Salmon Fisher's Odyssey* (1982). Its common sense chimed with a general opinion emerging: 'martialled properly,' this might stop the SWWA issuing trout-stocking licenses in these rivers until they or somebody else's scientists have done some research.

2) Scientific papers, which kept being on the point of coming up with a crushing piece of evidence – only to turn their attention to something else.

3) Refers, in his turn, to a paragraph in the current (winter 1984-5) issue of *World Wildlife Magazine*, about the Torridge:



fires which affected about 30 acres. The drought was so severe in Norfolk that farmers were forced to irrigate crops five or six weeks earlier than usual.

### **In Devon. . .**

The dry weather produced similar effects, with Dartmoor suffering very badly as did the East Devon Commons. Beaters proved useless in many cases and great reliance was placed on the Fire Brigade who had to turn out in force to deal with a fire on Chudleigh Knighton Heath. However, there were effects of the drought besides fire. The Water Authority abstracted more and more water, for example reducing the flow on the Torridge at Torrington from 15 million gallons per day to a mere two million gallons per day. This is abstracted above a sewage works, a creamery and the North Devon Meat Factory, the effluent from which was far less diluted and will have affected the aquatic life in the river quite dramatically.

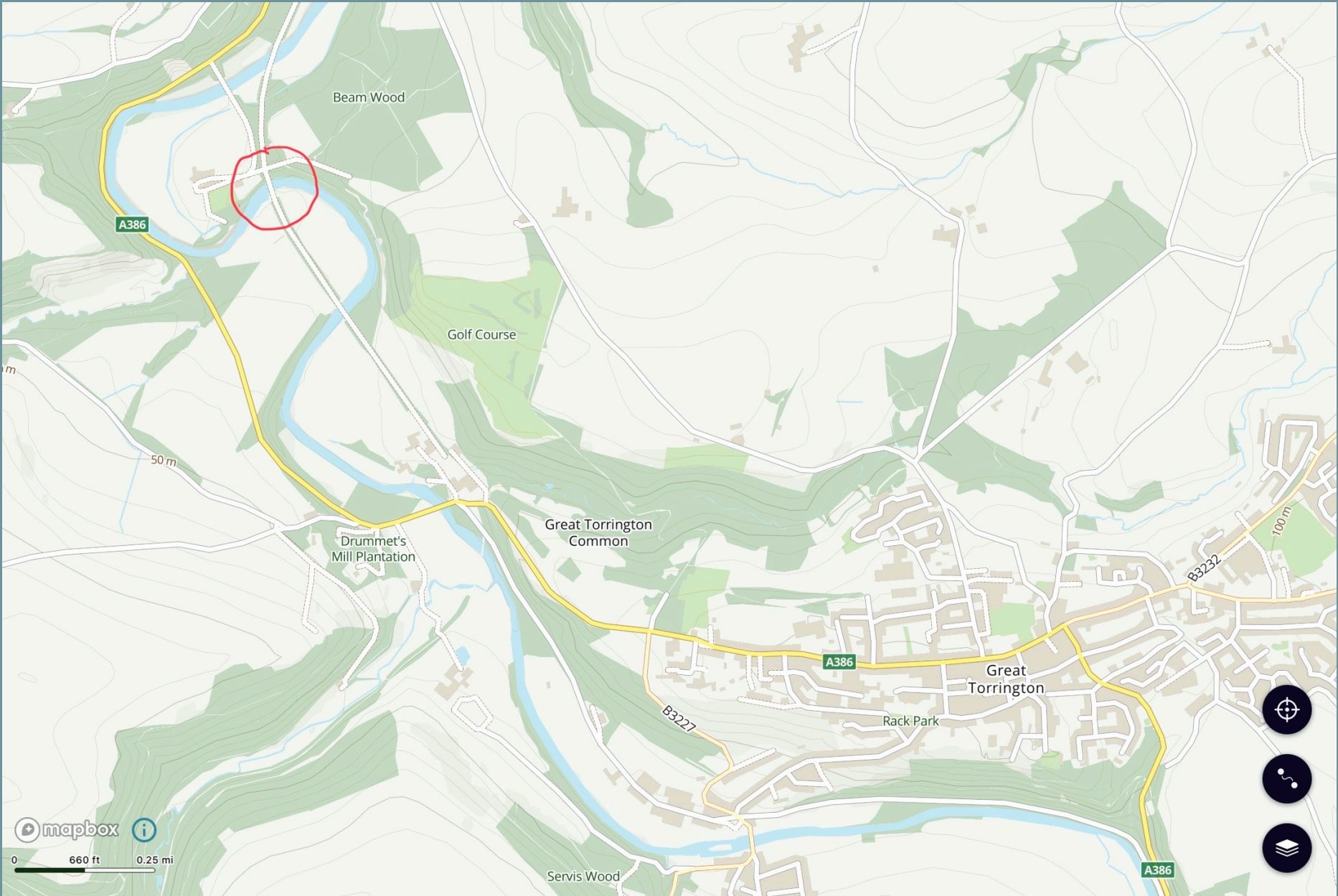
### **In Sussex. . .**

The Trust incurred damage on three of their reserves. The most catastrophic occurred in Ashdown Forest where a small fire initially

# The steaming gun, and the villain

- Sewage pollution and low flows trapping salmon and sea-trout in their mile-long ‘sanctuary pool’, between Beam Weir and Great Torrington
- at 2 million gallons per day, algal bloom phenomenal, the water virtually stagnant;
- a further ‘pollution hotspot’ down in the estuary
- This whole ‘deadly sequence’ set into action by whoever manipulates that water flow
- SWWA responsible, even if they blame ‘freakish drought circumstances, and say that all rivers suffered the same’
- Ted joins the Action Group, and, at Dermot’s suggestion, the Salmon and Trout Association



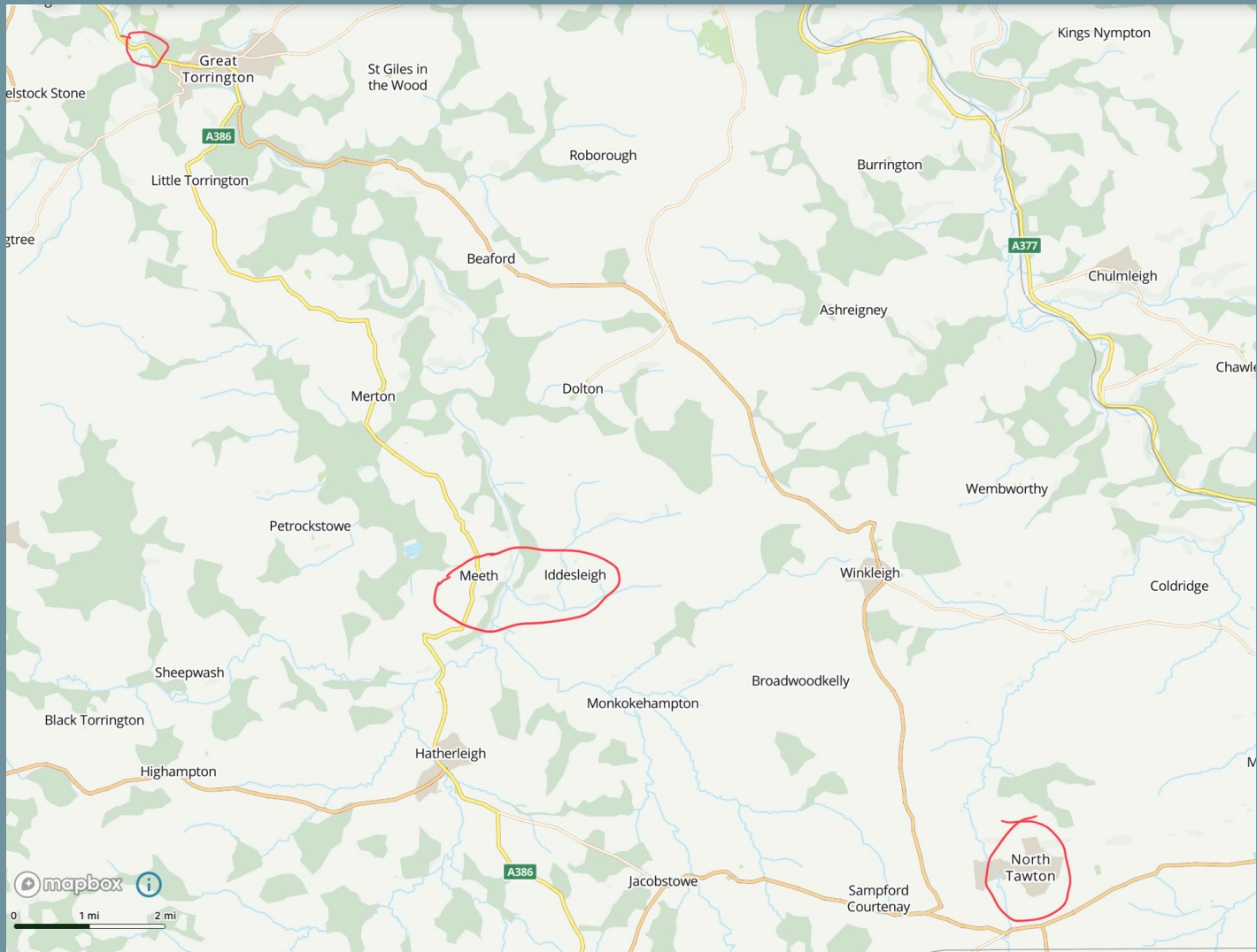


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# Hughes Country: Taw and Torridge





# And is initiated... an English jewel

- Three days at the height of the mayfly fortnight on Dermot's choice of the great chalk streams:
- The Itchen, the Avon and the Test
- Ted drives straight down from salmon fishing on the Spey, salmon still on his mind, and with thoughts of Irish spent gnat fishing too.
- 'What a jewel of a three days it was, for me. With that kind of weather, my Irish fishing companions would have despaired – they need a cloud, before they will tie on a fly.'

# Delights and dynamite, Hughes and the Houghton: Performing in an old English mystery play....

I've been trying to work out whether you 'structured' the fishing, or whether it just fell out that way. That first day on the Itchen was "difficult", in the way I'd been led to expect. My Beacon Beige felt like a W.D. helicopter, my casting like a lion-tamer breaking in a new whip, and me like a water-buffalo dragging a rice-plough. (I expect that's what it looks like on the photographs.) Then on the Avon, I only gradually got the hang of it. But the number of walloping rises there, at least, gave me a vivid sense of the possibilities. And on the second day, as I got the wavelength, & began to focus, and it began to dawn on me that I was, after all, in Hampshire/Wilts, the real delight of it began to settle on my head. The notion of performing in an old English Mystery Play—as performed historically in the Houghton Club & the Piscatorial Society—began to make me realise how ill-dressed I was for the part. A lot of the pleasure after all is in taking on the traditional robes etc. I didn't even have a fishing rod! Or maybe I can say I had a wand—something not unlike a composite angle-rod, part hickory, part willow, part whalebone—and was more authentically equipped, in that detail, than most. But my Gye net! I feel it wasn't far off a bound pack of dynamite.

# Photo opportunity



Photograph:  
Dermot Wilson



# Good company: sharing a picnic...



Photograph:  
Dermot Wilson

... in 1986, a platform, a pattern...

1986

**To Dermot Wilson**

5 January 1986

Ms Renée Wilson

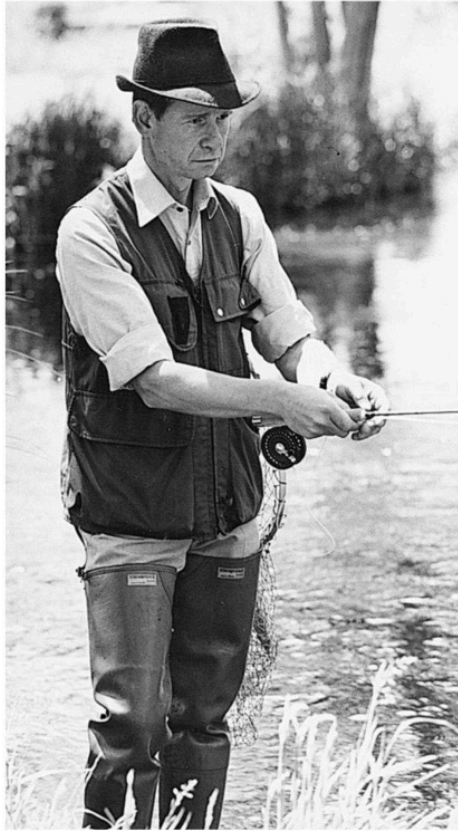
I should have written back to you pronto, because my 'yes' was instantaneous. It's an opportunity for me to do some small pleasing thing for yourself and Renee. Also,—the heady achievement of sharing a platform with Sir Michael! I shall try to get him to deliver some speeches from Troilus & Cressida. He's the best speaker of Shakespeare—the very best—I've ever heard. Makes it sound like his own natural speech—but full of everything, with power, & a whole world behind it. I get chills remembering it.

[...]

Thank you for the irresistible invitation to cast a fly, over those bewitched waters, with a real rod. This time, I'll bring some of my Irish Friend's Copydex spents—really phenomenal tying, and very pretty. By phenomenal tying, I don't mean artistically superb—though his are nice—so much as deadly-looking, & in effect deadly, & curious.

[...]

# If never quite the same style



13b Dermot Wilson fishing for trout on one of the southern English chalk-streams, 1980s



13a TH and Barrie Cooke on the River Dart, South Devon



# The Morning after the Night Before

## 1.3.86, Little Warham, Torridge, frozen stiff



Michael Hordern, Ted Hughes, Nick Grant, James Ferguson: members of the Salmon and Trout Association on the morning after the North Devon branch AGM, and the scenes that inspired 'The Torridge Tragedy'.

Photographs by Terry Norton-Smith



...and contact details: 1988  
Irish friend beside the Bourne





# From the Poet Laureate:

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Write to the Editor, Trout and Salmon, Bretton Court,  
Bretton, Peterborough PE3 8DZ

### No chance for fishery interests

From the Poet Laureate

DAVID SHAW'S REMARKS under "Triumph For The Torridge" (May) slightly misrepresent the true state of affairs, and could lead to a misleading impression of what is needed to help a river effectively.

In the two campaigns recently fought for the Torridge, the argument of the rod fishery was ineffective.

In the freshwater campaign Mr. Chappell, as riparian chairman, worked extremely hard, extracting from South West Water information about the river's collapse, and trying to force them to act on it.

As it turned out, SWWA couldn't be forced. At many meetings their only response was to bewail the utter lack of power of their fishery dept (every other department takes precedence), and the utter lack of cash of the whole SWWA organisation. They also reminded us of their huge empire of crumbling sewage works, other polluted rivers and fouled beaches. The Torridge grew worse, odd sections of it reached a quality grade "fit for industrial use only and lethal to fish" and the future seemed hopeless.

What changed this picture was the sudden emergence of the giant Roadford Reservoir scheme. Almost everything now being done for the Torridge is linked to the Roadford plan and budget. When, in 1985, SWWA's own Roger Furness produced his devastating analysis of the river's pollutions and of SWWA's inadequate ("totally useless") sampling techniques used up to that date, and presented his radical plan for putting things right, who could take the credit for it? The riparian owners, the Roadford planners, or Roger Furness himself? He did the same for the Upper Tamar, as polluted at that time as the Torridge, and also part of the new Roadford scheme's priority and prestige.

The promised £20m is something else. It comes as a direct result of the 1985 Bideford public enquiry, which concerned itself exclusively with the effects of estuary sewage on public health and on the local tourist economy. This enquiry was initiated and to a large degree organised and pressed home by a Bideford housewife, Monica Pennington, against an ill-researched sewage-treatment proposal by SWWA which would have sunk the mouth of the Torridge even deeper into the mire. Before she had finished the Torridge even had become the subject of EEC and parliamentary debate.

But in this campaign for the estuary, just as in the campaign for the freshwater, the voice of the rod fishery carried no weight. The Torridge Riparian Owners' Association kept clear. They eventually took the opportunity to present the case against SWWA's mismanagement of the upper river, but Monica Pennington was never able to enlist their support against SWWA's plan for

the estuary. It was left to her own action group to assemble the information about the effect of estuary sewage on smolts, on a salmon's ability (and inclination) to swim against the polluted current (the Torridge tidal gate is a narrow six-mile rib-race), and the option of a sicker river (the Tav).

It all looked like powerful staff to her action group, but SWWA's hired experts dismissed it with a wave of the hand (though I see it has not been dismissed by the experts on the Ness).

Obviously we would like to believe that the voice of the fishery swayed somebody somewhere in the struggle. Various riparian owners tried their leverage on particular ministers and individual salmon fishermen in the government. James Ferguson of the Salmon and Trout Association took the enquiry and indeed the whole Torridge to heart, and worked for it everywhere. And there is no doubt that without the constant encouragement of one old Torridge fisherman, Colonel Geoffrey Graham, Monica Pennington could not have kept going. But at every point the lesson was: unless the voice of the rod fishery can camouflage itself within larger, social — in other words political — issues, it can get nowhere.

It was a double stroke of luck for the Torridge that a new SWWA chairman and chief executive, Keith Court, and a new local Conservative MP, Emma Nicholson, arrived on the scene at just the right time. The Environment Minister's response to the enquiry report had been positive, but vague. It seemed to promise everything, and yet defer action into the uncertain future. The Torridge-siders were unhappy. Keith Court then expressed the will to solve the estuary's problem quickly and completely. Emma Nicholson saw that something more, some more definite reassurance of commitment, was needed. And it was she who persuaded Ridley to authorise Keith Court to make that announcement, promising the £20m.

But as for the voice of the fishery, she put her finger on it. Speaking of her efforts for the river in general she commented: "This has nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that a few rich gentlemen want to catch salmon," and went on to explain that a clean river meant clean drinking water for North Devon, and a clean estuary meant a promising future for the region's tourist industry.

In other words, a river that is nothing but a fishery has a poor prognosis. This is being put to the test at the moment, by a single crucial anomaly.

The Torridge as Roadford plan and public mains goes down only as far as the abstraction point at Torrington. The Torridge as estuary marina comes up only as far as the top of the tide. Between these two limits lie a three-mile piece of Torridge which is in the precarious state of being nothing but a fishery.

On odd occasions during any week this

stretch of water stinks badly. At the upriver end the giant Torrington creamery (about to be enlarged) sits right on the bank, beside the ailing Torrington sewage works, and a abattoir and meat factory in Europe, now owned by the powerful Hillside Holdings, and employing 700 people. Every adult fish coming down, has to run this three-mile gauntlet where Greenpeace, taking a random sampling, found ammonia concentrations exceeding the tolerance of "small fish" by about eight times. Only last week, some of the *avant-garde* of the Torridge's once-famous but now much-depleted May run of big sea-trout came floating back out of it, belly up.

Whoever can divert a fraction of the Roadford budget, or a fraction of the estuary's £20m to rescue this bit of water will deserve our congratulations. Because here is the only voice is that of the fishery.

Ted Hughes, North Tawton, Devon

### Torridge co-operation

IT IS KIND of Mrs Norton-Smith to acknowledge the efforts of so many people and organisations who have worked so hard to ensure that the Torridge does not completely lose its run of salmon, but her letter (June) shows a common misconception.

The improvement in the environmental quality of the river is only half the "triumph". The stock of Torridge salmon is still at risk.

Mrs Norton-Smith, a riparian owner on the Torridge, recognises the efforts of Government and water authority, the help given by the media, associations, action groups, conservationists and individuals, and the efforts of those netsmen who have agreed to give up netting for a while, and she is now placed in the enviable position of being able to make a valuable contribution to the final "triumph" by agreeing to return to the river any salmon she catches this year.

Those of us who have played our part in helping to highlight the water quality problems of the Torridge would welcome her help and her lead in securing more salmon for the reads.

Then our *truly* combined efforts will have an effect.

Joe Chappell, Bideford, North Devon

### UDN on the increase?

FOR THE PAST 15 years I and one or two friends have fished a medium-sized river in the north of Scotland for one or two weeks in late May.

Our bags (it's a two-rod beat) have varied between nil and 30-plus fish. Until recently these variations have been mostly accounted for by the number of fish present and the

water.  
there are a lot  
the water, the  
lactic, a slow  
the number  
the fly on the  
fish

say to snail  
immediately  
ly being  
he fish has  
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# Political will or stroke of luck? pooling resources

‘Unless the voice of the fishery can camouflage itself within larger, social – in other words political – issues, it can get nowhere.

‘It was a double stroke of luck for the Torridge that a new SWWA chairman and chief executive, Keith Court, and a new local Conservative MP, Emma Nicholson, arrived on the scene at just the right time.’

‘The will to solve the estuary’s problem quickly and completely’

A vague Environment Minister overborne by decisive intervention and funding:

£20m for Roadford Lake, completed in 1989 and still England’s newest reservoir

# Fishermen won't

'As for the voice of the fishery, she put her finger on it. Speaking of her efforts for the river in general she commented: "This has nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that a few rich gentlemen want to catch salmon.'

# 1992 'Riverwatcher' recycled from the Dart, for Dermot

## Be a Dry-Fly Purist

Barely prick the meniscus. Lightly caress  
The last gleam on the river. Lift off deftly  
As a sedge-fly. Keep your head clear  
Keep your body keep your soul clear

Of the river-fetch –

(the epileptic's strobe,

The yell of the Muezzin

Or the 'Bismillah!'

That spins the dancer in

Her whole body liquefied

Where a body loves to be

Rapt in the river of its own music) –

Or be lost.

(*And she said:*

*'When I hooked*

*My first salmon, that salmon*

*In the Ferry Pool, it was I never*

*Expected nobody ever told I had never*

*Known anything not*

*Riding over jumps all I could think it*

*Was like having my first baby –')*

# To Christopher Reid

21 June 1992

Ts Faber

Dry Fly Fishing is a psychologically determined activity—making slight understatements at the surface in the hope of interesting the organic mysteries and terrors in the depth: attitude of detachment, actually the concession of a basic reluctance to get involved. The English Art—which explains why it became identified with the class stratification that it did. On the most elite trout streams, in Hampshire etc, fishing with a lure (an imitation nymph or something of the sort) beneath the surface is actually forbidden. It is not done. It corresponds quite closely (culturally) to typical attitudes to poetic form, this regime of the Dry Fly. On the other hand, when it works it can be the most fun. For trout it is definitely more fun.

The opposite approach (poacher's approach) comes up in the next poem: Stealing Trout. There, ideally, you get down into the river bed and grab them with your bare hands.

An all-rounder has to be master of all the methods that produce the goods and the thrill.

TH's lesson to his editor is incidental to a discussion of the revised text of *River*, as it was to appear in *Three Books*, the 1993 volume that also included *Cave Birds* and *Remains of Elmet*. 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning', not in the 1983 edition of *River*, was transplanted from *Recklings*.

1992

## Local victories

Ian Cook's battle with SWWA led them to pledge £5000 to research the foam that had blighted the Creedy.

TH, 15 April 1992: 'It's an important case, it's an absolutely historical case, because it's reactivated the power of common law in this terrific issue of water quality in our rivers.'

- Guardian, 16.4.92, quoted by Yvonne Reddick, 'Hughes's Environmental Campaigns', in Terry Gifford, ed. *Ted Hughes in Context*



# 'Your World'

'all our urgent talk about environmental problems seems to get us nowhere. Many sporadic local recoveries and advances do not reverse the cloudier, global, steady deterioration. Resonant promises from politicians and the glossy environmental policy brochures of industry seem to miss the mark. There is something about debate itself, about the endless demand for further research, that is a substitute for responding truly to the situation. **Nothing about it changes the way we actually live. Verbal argument simply provokes more verbal argument. What is needed is a new kind of language that goes straight to the heart and soul, and changes things there. When we change here, then everything has to change, our whole way of life simply changes, and it can change quickly.'**

- TH: The Observer Colour Supplement, 29 November 1992



1993



Ted Hughes,  
*The Iron Woman*

Illustration:  
Douglas Carrel



Illustration:  
Douglas Carrel



# *The Iron Woman* (1993)

‘Clean me.’ ‘Waste no time.’ ‘Hurry.’ ‘More water.’ ‘The river’.

‘It burns!’

‘Listen.’ ‘The birds?’ ‘No!’

The hand, with that colossal finger and thumb, just as daintily as it had held the snowdrops, took hold of her hand and gripped it, softly but firmly.

Lucy’s fright lasted only for a second. Then she was overwhelmed by what she heard. A weird, horrible sound. A roar of cries. Thousands, millions of cries – wailings, groans, screams.’

‘What you heard is what I am hearing all the time. .. The cry of the marsh. It is the cry of the insects, the leeches, the shrimps, the water skeeters, the beetles, the bream, the perch, the carp, the pike, the eels.’

‘They’re crying,’ whispered Lucy.

‘The cry of the ditches and the ponds,’ the voice went on. “Of the frogs, the toads, the newts. The cry of the rivers and the lakes. Of all the creatures under the water, on top of the water, and all that go between.’

# Touching, Catching 'in the hearing of children'

- 'It's when we touch, don't you see?' he cried. 'It's contagious!' he cried. 'You've caught it off the Iron Woman, Now I've caught it off you. And if I grab someone, they'll hear it too. And then if they grab somebody they'll hear it too. And on and on.'
- In the waste recycling factory, 'whoever touched any of those who had fought with Lucy and Hogarth was hit by the same explosion of screams.'



# And when screams aren't enough

'Listen to me now,' said the Iron Man. But instead of speaking, he took the Iron Woman's hand, and seemed to listen.

'Just as I thought,' he said. 'The scream is terrible. And yet it needs something extra.'

slim secretaries struggled with man-sized barbels, carp, salmon and pike, tripping over the litter of empty shoes and tangling, empty trousers. The seals, giant frogs, colossal water beetles helped themselves, and so did the big eels. The factory's entire office personnel lurched, flopped, thumped and slithered towards the exit. 'To the river! To the river!'



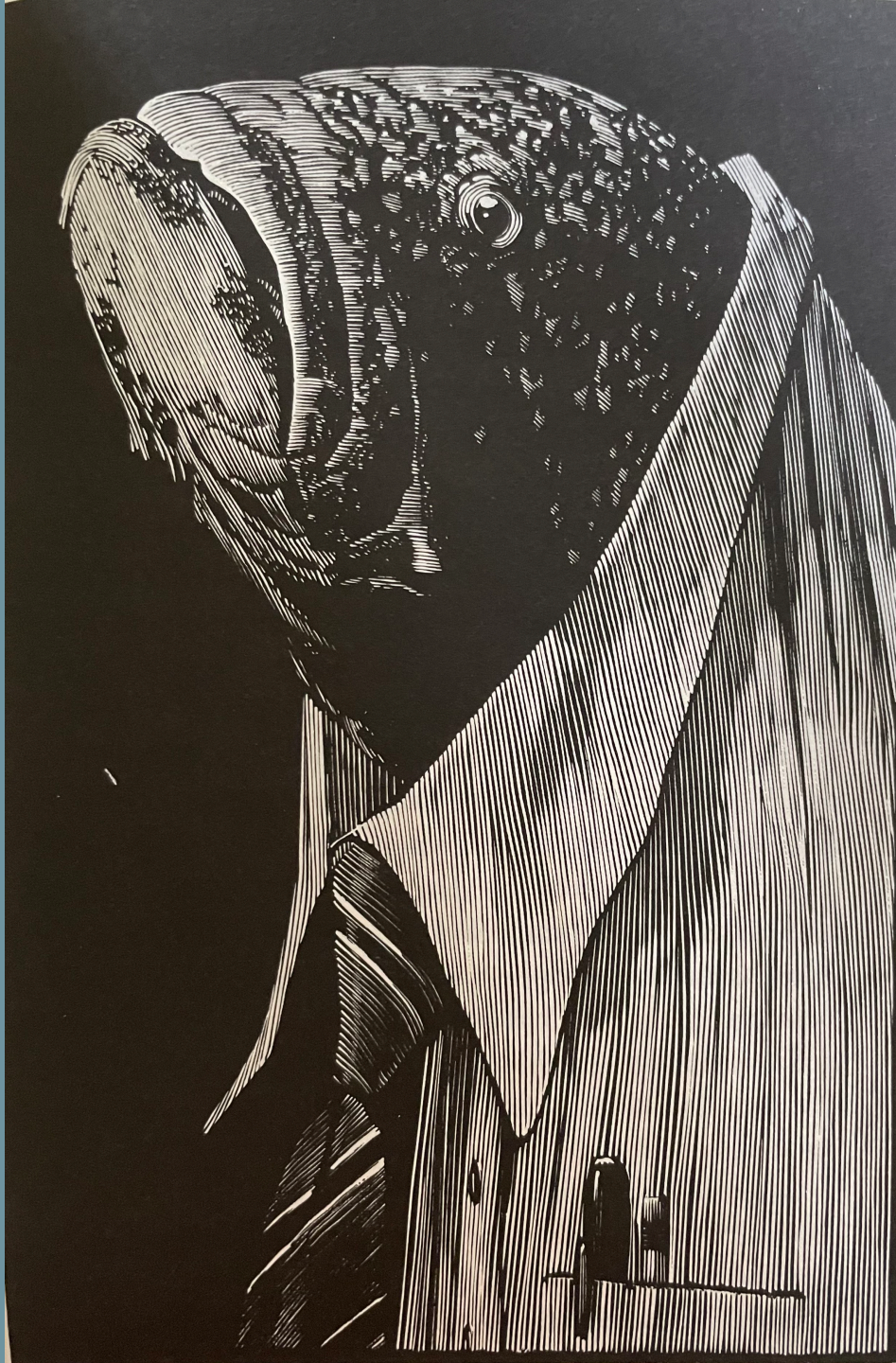


Illustration:  
Douglas Carrel

# Immersive story telling? A national disaster

Was that the end of it? It was not. Not by a long way.

Not just all over the town, but all over the country men had turned into giant fish, giant newts, giant insect larvae, giant water creatures of some kind. Every man over eighteen years old was in water.

Wherever the women could not get their husbands into the rivers or reservoirs or ponds, they got them into baths or swimming pools.

The Prime Minister himself was a six-foot-long dragonfly larva, in the bath at Number Ten. His secretary came in every hour to tell him about the latest phone calls, but all he did was wave his feelers at her and push his strange mechanical jaws in and out...

It was a national disaster, of course. The rest of the world was dumbfounded.

From Ted Hughes, *The Iron Woman* (1993)

# 1997

- In late 1996, Ted prepared evidence to public inquiry against estuary netting in the Torridge. Presented Jan 1997.
- Lessons learned: from the 1980s.
- Professional presentation of evidence: 3800 words
- Over-abstraction
- Industrial and agricultural pollution
- And the economic argument: for tourism, the benefit to the local economy of rod caught salmon, hotels etc, from fishermen



# Coming clean? the voice of the fishery, changed, diversified

What is it that fishermen value so much about catching a Salmon or a Sea-Trout? **It is one of the mysteries of human nature that these two species have established such a powerful grip on the minds of so many people. Among my Salmon and Sea-trout fishing friends are people from every walk of life.** They will make large sacrifices to secure their week's or their odd days Salmon or Sea-trout fishing.

•

**I've been asked to explain why the passion for catching these fish affects such a large number of people.**

Ted Hughes, evidence submitted to public inquiry into drift netting in the Torridge-Taw estuary, 1997.

British Library, Ted Hughes papers, Add MS 88918/121/6

# Physical contact, lasting change, constant postponement

The fisherman has to leave his business and go to a wild beautiful place to **make physical contact with a wild, mysterious, very elusive creature.**

This engages him in a **physical involvement with a wild river**, with the weather, and with all the swarming life of an unspoiled piece of wilderness.

This **changes him**. What comes awake are a thousand feelings and senses that we normally never use. Fishermen will tell you, this is the most exciting and deeply satisfying experience, so intense that for most fishermen **it becomes an addiction, a passion.**

Why can't we experience all that just by walking beside a river. That can be a pleasant experience. But what happens to the fisherman is altogether more intense. The stressful modern world evaporates as prehistoric memory and awareness take over. **But it cannot happen without that possibility of coming to grips with the wild fish.** It is the hunt. The suspense, the ingenuity. The active concentration in a wild lonely place.

The constant possibility of the great explosive thrilling moment and the constant postponement of it. All this, and many other things, are what makes Salmon and Sea-trout fishing one of the ultimate sports.

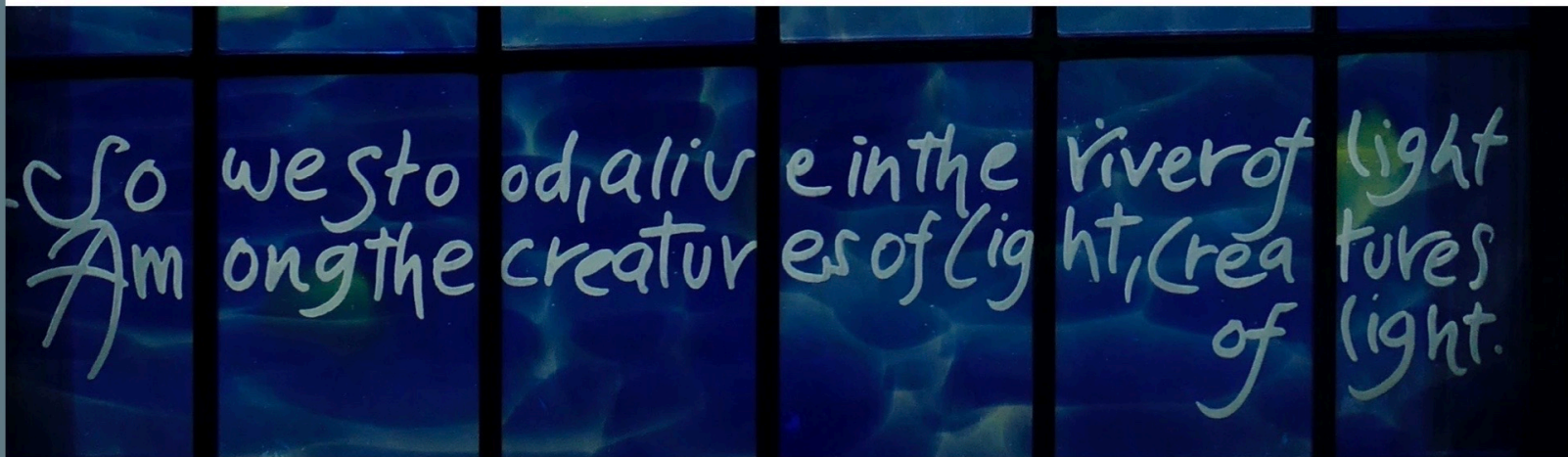
# 2019: a confluence

ownedbyeveryone.org

## 'Owned by everyone': the plight, poetry and science of the salmon

The website of an international conference in Cambridge, 11-12 December 2019

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'Owned by everyone': the plight, poetry and science of the salmon

## 'Owned by everyone': the plight, poetry and science of the salmon

### WELCOME

This is the home page of an international conference held on 11-12 December 2019 at the Cambridge Conservation Initiative and Pembroke College, Cambridge, with the support of Pembroke College, the CCI, Salmon & Trout Conservation and Patagonia. At

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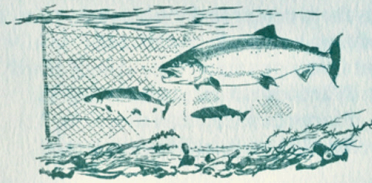




# 'Owned by everyone': the plight, poetry and science of the salmon

**A CONFERENCE AT THE CAMBRIDGE  
CONSERVATION INITIATIVE AND PEMBROKE  
COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE**

God help the slave', sings the Salmon Smolt,  
'Who is owned by everyone.  
The Donkey used, flogged, owned by all  
Is protected by none, my dears,  
He is protected by none -  
And the wolf takes him easily.  
O every wave upon the sea  
Carries a wolf that lives on me.'



CONVENED WITH  
SALMON & TROUT CONSERVATION  
AND WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM PATAGONIA

## 11-12 December 2019



WWW.SALMON-TROUT.ORG

Cambridge  
Conservation  
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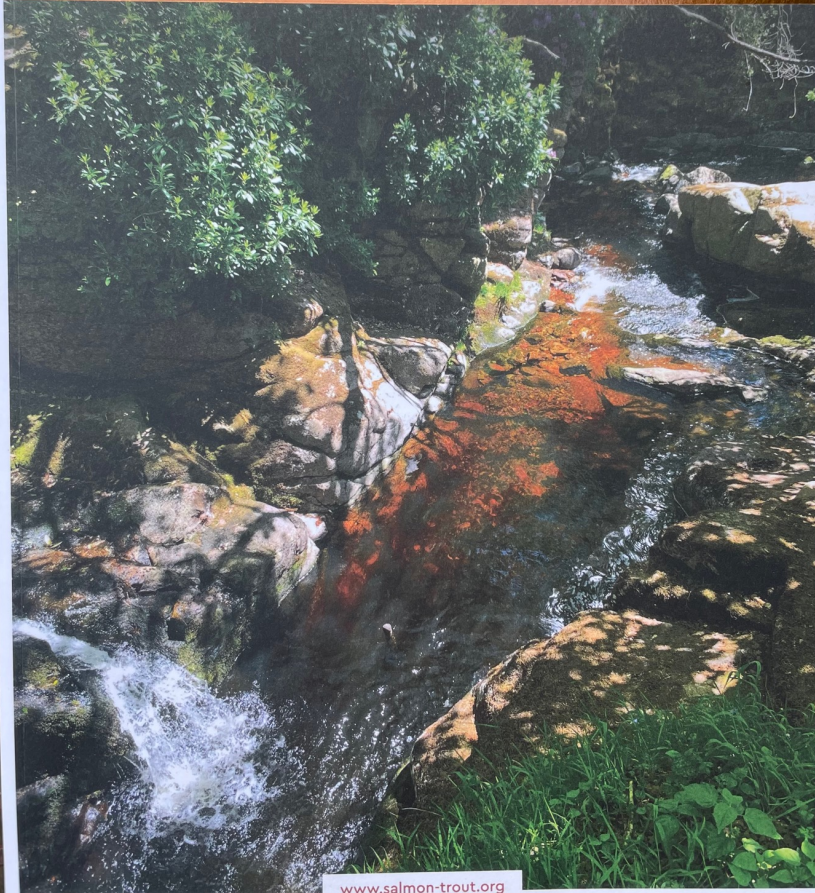
WWW.YEAROFTHEWOLF.ORG



- Programme notes, for delegates only, as now
- In our last session, talk of a conference volume
- Nick Measham, CEO of Salmon and Trout Conservation, which the Salmon and Trout Association had become in 2006, suggested a title :



# WILD FISH



[www.salmon-trout.org](http://www.salmon-trout.org)



You couldn't make it up...  
Martin Rowson, *Guardian* 25 February 2021





# 'Proof it's live'

Proof it's live... → Wild Fish! For Mark



© Martin Ransa 21

26.2.21

Happy Birthday Steve Mx

very best wishes — Martin Ransa — 21 27.2.21



# Camouflage or evolution? July 2022

WildFish.



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populations

WildFish is the only independent charity in the UK campaigning for wild fish and their environment. We receive no government money and rely on the donations of our supporters.



# August 2022

**Liz Truss**

## Liz Truss 'has sewage on her hands' over Environment Agency cuts

Exclusive: Truss oversaw cut in funds to tackle water pollution, since when raw sewage discharge has risen

**Pippa Crerar and Helena Horton**

18:52 Monday, 22 August 2022

The Tory leadership frontrunner, Liz Truss, was responsible for cutting millions of pounds of funding earmarked for tackling water pollution during her time as environment secretary, the Guardian can reveal.

Truss, who was in charge at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) between 2014 and 2016, oversaw “efficiency” plans set out in the 2015 spending review to reduce Environment Agency funding by £235m.

This included a £24m cut from a government grant for environmental protection, including surveillance of water companies to prevent the dumping of raw sewage, between 2014-15 and 2016-17, according to the National Audit Office.

It represents almost a quarter of the funding cut from this area between 2010, when the grant stood at £120m, and 2020, by which time it had fallen to £40m.



# River pollution goes unchecked as testing in England falls to 10-year low

**Experts warn drop from 100,000 samples in 2012 to 41,519 last year means huge risk to water quality**



**Sandra Laville**

Fri 2 Sept 2022 16.11 BST



Follow Sandra Laville

# 'My Irish friend': Living Water, and the hearing of children

Ted Hughes remains an inspiration and a reproach. He's not the only one.

February 2023: footage in the Irish Film Institute of Barrie Cooke, in 2007, on the slow death of Ireland's lakes -- eutrophication, algal blooms, dying mayfly. And on the beauty and horror of painting water, clean or polluted:

'I've always thought that if you're trying to paint accurately what's there in front of you, sometimes it's beautiful. It's also terrible. It is just really the foul effluent of this pipe coming out into the river Nore, and it was really shocking. The River Nore was a clean river at that time. As far as I'm concerned it's a horror. And now, unthinkably, the sea, the sea. The North Sea, the Irish Sea, are just bigger lakes. Phosphates, nitrates, chemical waste, radioactive waste. **It's all so simple: without living water we die.**



# Living Water

- World Rivers Day, Sunday 24 September
- Cambridge Zoology Museum, Bath Festival Orchestra, WildFish Conservation, Pembroke College
- ‘Living Water’: two concerts, for fenland schools and for the local community: music, poetry, film, painting, commentary, ‘within the hearing of children’
- Watch this space, and listen....