

The Old River Restoration Project

History

The Old River Irwell (a lake in Princes Park, Irlam) was created in the 1890s when an old meandering loop of the river was cut off by the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal which cut through the area in a straight line.

The lake was originally stocked by Salford Friendly Anglers Society (the worlds oldest angling club, formed in 1817) and the now defunct County Palatine Angling Association in celebration of Queen Victorias Golden Jubilee in 1897 (see photo below). And has proved to be a very popular fishing venue ever since, and became home to the Boathouse Angling Club after the 1st World War.



The lake has played host to many famous fishing competitions, and anglers. With local “World Champion Anglers” Kevin Ashurst and Ian Heaps both being regularly seen on its banks in the 1980s and 90s.

The Old River was regarded as one of the North Of Englands premier venues for fishing during this period, and was renowned for its magnificent shoals of tench and bream.

Pollution in the 2000s Hit The Old River Hard

As the construction of new local housing estates took place, raw sewage began to contaminate the lake, with anglers regularly fishing disgusting things floating on the lake, which people had once flushed down toilets.

This pollution culminated in a catastrophic pollution event, in 2008 when there was a total wipeout of the fish population, and 10s of thousands of dead fish were found floating on the lakes surface, which were removed by the devastated members of the Boathouse Angling Society.

The Old River was the clubs only venue and as a result of the loss of all their fish, the club folded just before its 100 year anniversary.

The pollution event was investigated by both the Environment Agency and United Utilities neither of whom ever came to any official conclusions, or prosecuted anyone for negligence. However, the committee of Salford Friendly Anglers are aware that United Utilities re-built their sewage pumping station situated in Princes Park shortly after this event, and we have been told privately by both EA and UU staff that their investigations resulted in them located 16 misconnected sewers in the area which were discharging directly into the Old River. These misconnections have been remediated, and there has been no evidence of sewage or other pollutants entering the Old River since 2010. (see Manchester Evening News article attached as appendix1)

Salford Friendly Anglers Take On The Lease in 2011

In 2011, Salford Friendly Anglers Society were approached by Bob Morris, an old committee member of the Boathouse Anglers asking us if we could approach Salford Council to take over the lease of the Old River, and to try to restore it to its former glories as a fishery.

Given our historical involvement in the Old River – we were immediately interested in the prospect – however needed to get full agreement from the now defunct Boathouse club to do so, as there is a huge unspoken rule between angling clubs, that clubs don't go prospecting for leases on waters which other clubs have an interest in.

Once this was settled, we approached the council to take on the lease, and to develop an Old River Restoration Plan with the help of fisheries experts from the Environment Agency.

A little bit about Salford Friendly Anglers – what we were, what we do now.

Salford Friendly was formed in 1817 by anglers as a friendly society in the financial sense of the word, to give members savings accounts, and sickness and death benefits to members when at the time life expectancy was only 30 years old in Salford.

The society used to own its own pub, "The Fishermans Hut" on Chapel St, Salford until the 1880s when a reform of the friendly societies act effectively shut the society down as a financial entity, but it carried on as a fishing club. The clubs pub was sold and demolished in the 1890s and the Salford Friendly moved their headquarters to the Kings Arms, Bloom St Salford in 1896, opposite Salford Council Gas Department, - and we still meet there today on the third Wednesday each month.

In the 1910's the Society was chaired by Major William Peer Groves – who was the owner of Groves and Whitnall Brewery in Salford – and he re-jigged the constitution of the club, to turn it into a private members club for merchants and other professionals (he was also the person who founded the Salford Lads Club).

In 2008, our current Chairman Mike Duddy, was approached by an old friend from primary school, and asked to take ownership of the records of the Salford Friendly as the club had ceased to function as an angling club in the late 1990s on the death of 2 out of the three remaining members.

We re-wrote the constitution of the club, brought in a new committee and changed the ethos of the club from strictly private, members only – to a new concept within the angling world, of free to join, free fishing, public ownership of fishing waters/rights. – backed by a committee focussed on the re-generation of inner city water ways, and focussed on encouraging people to take up angling in an area (SALFORD) where according to Environment Agency Rod Licence sales data, less than 40% of the national average of people going fishing.

We had 10 members in 2008 and now have 2300+ members in 2015 – over 600 of whom live in the Caddishead, Irlam, Rixton area.

The Old River Restoration Plan – as written in 2011

When we took over the angling rights on the Old River in 2011, we held a couple of exploratory fishing matches to ascertain what sort of fish stocks were left in the lake after the pollution.

Our members managed to catch small numbers of tiny fish – which gave us great hope than at least some fish had survived – no matter that they were only small roach.

Old River Irwell Irlam Restoration Plan (as written in winter 2012

Back in November 2011 we embarked on our first major restoration project - Drinkwater Park Lake near Agecroft. We set out our objectives and the seven steps we would undertake to achieve them. I'm glad to say that our hard work has made a huge difference, and I will write a full update when the full year is up in November 2012.

12 months after making our first enquiries, we were finally granted the angling rights on the Old River Irwell in Irlam in May 2012. Now we have the task of restoring a water which lost most of its fish to a dreadful pollution incident in 2008 and has struggled to recover. Many of the pegs have fallen into a terrible state of disrepair, and the bankside willow has overgrown to such an extent that many of the pegs are inaccessible.

The stream which runs drains out of the Old River has been allowed to clog up with woody debris resulting a slowly rising water level in the Old River which has started to drown out many of the pegs.



Fish stocks are low, as previously good stocks of carp, tench and bream were wiped out back in 2008 when the over the course of a few months large amounts of sewage entered into the Old River from misconnected sewers, and a large proportion of the fish died. A few roach pike and perch seem to have survived the pollution (which is strange seeing as though perch are normally the first species to belly up when water quality deteriorates) but the fishing is currently very poor.

However - its not all doom and gloom, the water quality in the lake seems to have recovered. The EA tell us that they have sorted out 16 of the 17 sewage misconnections they have found in the local area. There are large amounts of fry in the lake. Its possible to see Kingfishers feeding on the fry every day, so they must be nesting in the area, and I found this lovely little newt in the bankside undergrowth yesterday.



We've also have offers of support, time, materials and fish stocks from the EA and the Salford Council in order to get the place back to some sort of semblance of a fishery again.

You cant tackle a project like this without a starting plan - so here is ours for the Old River

1. Sort out fluctuating water levels.

The existing fishing pegs are regularly being swamped by the fluctuating water levels on the Old River. These fluctuating water levels are being caused by the exit stream being blocked by large and small woody debris, so when it rains, water is being held back in the Old River rather than flowing

away down hill via the exit stream. It should be possible to maintain a reasonably constant water level by clearing the first 100yards of the exit stream from blockages. However we have to be carefull as the exit stream runs through an SSI so anywork we do will have to be minimum impact on the surrounding woodland.

The benefit cleaning out the run off stream will also have the effect of preventing the filth from a combined sewage overflow backing up into the main water body - one of the main causes of the 2008 pollution incident.

2.Repair fishing pegs.

The constant wetting/drying of the fishing platforms has caused many of them to rot beyond repair - there are 36 pegs on the Old River, and the majority of them are in a dangerous state of repair. The EA have generously offered us treated timber to repair the fishing stages.

3. Cut back Willows and bankside vegetation.

The bankside vegetation is seriously overgrown - more than 50% of the pegs are inaccessible - and need a good chainsaw attack to get to them.

4. Restock with fish.

We have held a few matches on the Old River, and held a few pleasure sessions to see whats left after the pollution. Roach seem to be making a comeback with lots of very small fish, perch and pike seem to be thriving - however the once prolific tench and bream seem to have been completely wiped out in 2008.

Salford Friendly Anglers have so far raised over £1000 through our restocking fund matches, a couple of VERY generous donations, and from our collecting tins which are located in various local fishing tackle shops and pubs. We also have the promise of fish 5000 from the EA. We have also put in an application to Salford Council for a grant from the Salford Communities Fund to help with restocking.

Our overall intention is to restore the fishery to being a venue where a family can come for an afternoons fishing and have the reasonable expectation to catch a fish or two of different species. Not stocked to the levels of a commercial fishery - but a venue where an expert can have a good days fishing - and a novice can catch a few.

At present - even the so called experts are struggling to catch anything other than a couple of tiddlers.

It isnt an impossible task to return the Old River to its former glories - however as with most things in life it cant be achieved without a little time and effort.....

So on Saturday the 18th we started off with a little bit of our time and effort ----- well actually alot of time and effort.

On the hottest day of the year, a few of us gave up a day to make a start - a proper 9 to 6 day of hard graft.



The EA delivered timber to the Boathouse pub last week, so theres no time like the present to make a start.

And our first task was to drag out woody debris from the exit stream, to release water being held back in the lake.



The amount of junk blocking the stream was incredible - but half an hours work with nothing but a

garden rake taking out 3 blocked pinch points has resulted in the water level now being 6 inches below, rather than level with the top of the wooden pegs.

Our volunteers strimmed back the nettles from the footpaths, and the ten pegs we decided to tackle. Once the vegetation had been cleared back the poor state of repair of most of the pegs became apparent - however, 9 inch tannalised boards supplied by the EA, and lots of 6 inch nails soon made them safe.

Sounds easy when your writing it on a blog - but was real hard graft on the hottest day of the year so far.





We raked out many of the snags/ironmongery/rubbish from these first ten pegs - and had to launch our club boat twice to retrieve the rake from immovable objects. Henley on Irwell - with a plank for an oar.



Before





After



Plenty more work to do over the winter clearing out and repairing the old pegs.



6pm soon came round, and a welcome pint in the pub before we went home..... I cant thank the members who helped out on the day enough - for a real hard days effort.

Bob Morris, Barry Carney, John Polding, Emma Pickergill - thank you, thank you, thank you.

The EA in addition to donating timber towards the reconstruction of the fishing pegs have promised to kick start the restocking of the Old River in October 2012 - with an initial restocking of

200 tench

500 bream

These fish will be little hand size fish. Salford Friendly intend to restock with larger fish in order to create different year classes, however this will be dependant on the success of our bid for grant funding from Salford Council.

If we can have a good turnout for a winter workparty - we should be able to complete most of the work in a day.

I will email all members when we've set the date.

Update March 2013

Fish Refuges For The Old River

Over the last few months, the Old River has been plagued by cormorants munching down on our newly stocked fish.

Outrageous!

So as we were not allowed to shoot them, or trap them, the only thing we can do is create fish refuges - to enable our fish stocks to hide from the black death.

(if your not a fisherman - please don't think us anglers don't like water birds - WE DO ! we love to see the herons, grebes, kingfishers etc which are natural predators on our waterways - we are just the first people who suffer from the new version of the black death - the invasion of sea birds which can eat up to 3lbs of fish per day- and wipe out whole fish populations - which in turn sustain the kingfishers, herons grebes etc. Once the fish have been wiped out from a lake, a lot of water birds also move on).

So - if we allow cormorants free reign on our lakes and rivers - we might as well pack it all in and take up knitting.

The only solution open to us is to construct fish protection refuges - in which our fish stocks can swim into in order to escape the unwelcome attentions of this alien predator.

16 people attended our work party today, and in 2 hours we constructed 5 fish refuges which we hope will help to effectively shelter our silver fish populations from cormorant predation.

With a lot of help from our local environment agency officers - and using sheep/stock fencing and silage netting - we created our refuges and placed them at the Boathouse pub end of the Old River in mid channel between pegs.





We also took the opportunity to put up the first of our new club signs - in addition to this blue sign, we also have put up a new wooden notice board at the Boathouse end of the Old River, so that we can keep people up to date with match dates, work partys and other events.



In the near future (9th April) we are going to hold another work party where we will cover these fish refuges with floating islands - to act as further habitat improvement for our fish stocks and also to act as markers where the cormorant cages are located.

At present, the location of the fish refuges is given away by small red and white marker floats.

The 5 refuges we created this morning - are only the start of the project.

We anticipate creating up to 25 refuges and floating islands along the entire length of the Old River. Which will be a massive habitat improvement - resulting in better fishing over the coming years.

If you can lend a hand - your more than welcome to join us on the 9th April.

Floating Islands For The Old River May 2013

On a wild and windy day - 16 of our members generously gave us their time, to help construct 12 more fish refuge cages and 4 floating islands.

We now have a total of 17 refuge cages in the Old River, each one will be topped with a floating island.

The cages look like this



If you take a walk around the Old River - you can see the location of each of these cages as there is a small bright marker float.

Over the next few weeks - each cage will be marked by a floating island - we made 4 yesterday -

three have been left in the pub beer garden so that the plants can get established without the attention of water birds - we have put one in place so that people can have an idea of what we are trying to achieve.



1 down 16 to go !

Many many thanks to those members who gave their time - very much appreciated.

And we went on to build 16 of these floating Islands – which are now loved by ducks and anglers alike.

In 2013 the anglers were awarded £2,600 by Irlam and Caddishead Community Committee – which we used to add another species of fish to the Old River called Rudd. This took the number of species of fish back up to 5 after our previous small restocking of seed fish (roach, pike, perch bream and tench)

The Last 2 Years

The last 2 years have been a wait and see what affect our previous work and restocking would have, and we have been quite pleased with the growth in numbers and size in the roach and pike population in the lake. However, the tench and bream population seem to be taking much longer to recover, and its these two species of fish which anglers prize above all others.

Our Plans Going Forward to 2017

1. Restock with Crucian Carp – courtesy of Environment Agency
2. Restock 1,000 new 8” tench to boost existing small numbers of this species – (hopefully via a grant from XxXxxxXXX.....)
3. Restock 500 new 8” bream to boost existing small numbers of this species - (hopefully via a grant from XXXxxXXxxXX)
4. Re-lay the footpath behind the Boathouse Pub to complete the circular public walkway around the lake – Courtesy of community work days from the construction company AMEY Ltd (instigated by SFAS members who work for the company)
5. Dismantle wooden fishing pegs – and replace with stone chip pegs, cut into lake banks, and cut access steps into Lake Bank. Work to be started winter 2015/6 and conducted by SFAS members and paid for from club funds.

We have had regular dialogue with the Environment Agency Fisheries experts, and they now think that after 7 years, the Old River is pollution free – as

proved by the survival and re-production of the small numbers of seed / test fish that were introduced in 2012 and 2013.

As there have been no carp re-stocked into the Old River we can apply to the National Crucian Carp Project (via the EA) for a stocking of 1,000 crucian carp – as there are now King Carp in the lake for them to cross breed with.

We have also agreed with the local council not to stock king carp into the lake, to help prevent the problems and other anti social behaviour that night fishing carp anglers can cause.

So as a consequence of this promise not to stock King Carp species into the Old River – the EA have promised us £1,620 worth of Crucian Carp each year for the next 3 years.

Now that the water quality has been proven to be satisfactory over a number of years, we would like to increase the numbers of tench in the Old River – as these are local anglers favourite fish. Unfortunately they are expensive as they are slow growing – but if the XxX XXXxxx xXXX will grant us £4,200 we can buy 1,000 of these fish from the fish farm, and have them delivered in February 2016. Also provide funds to purchase a further 500 bream costing £1140. Making a total grant applied for of £5340

During Autumn 2015 – we have agreed with the construction company Amey Ltd, that they will provide materials, plant and labour to finish the footpath around the lake behind the Boathouse Pub to complement and complete the circular public walk/pathway around the lake. This section of path is currently in a state of disrepair and dangerous due to its proximity to the water, and its narrow constricted pathway. Amey Ltd have agreed to do this work under their scheme of getting employees (our Salford friendly members) to do one day a year community work at the companies expense.

If the council or the anglers had to pay for this work to be done by Amey or another contractor, the bill would be in the region of £20,000 to £30,000.

As the wooden pegs which we repaired when we took over the lease of the lake (and are still repairing as they are constantly being damaged) are reaching the end of their working life span – we will soon be looking to replace these fishing pegs, with fishing platforms that are situated on the banks of the lake.

Making these pegs from stone chippings and stone ballast. We feel as though these pegs will be safer as they won't protrude out over the water and people won't be able to fall off them into the water, they will have greater longevity and be vandal proof. The angling society members will carry out and pay for this work to be done, through club work parties and club funds from our fund raising events and donations.

Sorry for making you read all this – but we think it's important you know about our background, our long history of involvement in the Old River Irwell, and our members' interests in Caddishead, Irlam and Rixton area – where we have over 700 members.

The Old River used to be a real asset to the local community – not just as a nice place to walk round and feed the ducks, but also to a large silent community of anglers. Once the Old River is back up to scratch is a fishery again (a long continuing process) then we are very confident that local anglers will once again take great pleasure in spending time on its banks. And of course attract anglers from far and wide as it used to, most of who will spend money in the local, pubs, shops etc.

Everyone in the area will benefit from a rejuvenated – pollution free Old River.