



# 48th Thames Fishery Research Experiment 2020

*17 October 2020*



## History

The Thames Fishery Research Experiment is an annual angling event held along the foreshore of the River Thames, one and a half miles downriver from the Port Health River Division Office in Denton, Gravesend.

The experiment takes the form of a competition, in which more than 70 anglers from eight adult teams and two school teams, compete for several team and individual prizes.

The first experiment took place in February 1967 when it was organised by the Thames Angling Preservation Society. There were over 500 participants and 578 fish were caught. The experiment was repeated in 1970 and 1971.

In 1972, the City of London agreed to fund the experiment and organise it in conjunction with the Thames Angling Preservation Society. It became an annual event and is now in its 48th year.

Also in 1972, the then Lord Mayor, Sir Edward Howard, donated the main prize – “The Lady Howard” trophy. The Howard family continue to support the event and Sir David, also a former Lord Mayor, and Lady Howard attend each year.

Nowadays, we work in partnership with several other organisations too, including the Environment Agency; the Port of London Authority; the Fishmongers’ and Water Conservators’ Companies; the Thames Estuary Partnership; Thames21; and the Institute of Fisheries Management. Thames Water and DP World have also supported the event.

## Objective and benefits

The objective of the experiment is to establish the environmental condition of the Thames through the variety, number and size of fish species caught. The scoring system rates the catch according to scarcity and significance in the context of a cleaner river and, of course, the majority of fish caught during the event are returned to the river. Over the years, the experiment has proven that the Thames remains the cleanest river in Northern Europe.

The Experiment encourages sustainability and conservation. The competition rules comply with advice and guidance issued by the Angling Trust and stewards oversee the anglers to make sure the rules are followed. Participants are advised about the proper handling of fish to minimise mortality and all young and undersize fish are returned to the river immediately once they have been recorded.

The results provide valuable data and information to organisations such as the Environment Agency, the Thames Angling Preservation Society and members of the river community.

The event has the unique advantage of linking the river’s recreational angling community with sustainability and conservation. It is also an opportunity for the younger participants of the school teams to learn from experienced anglers and hopefully be encouraged to develop a long-term interest in fishing.

The Experiment brings together a diverse range of individuals and organisations who all have one thing in common: a passion for the conservation of the River Thames and the sustainability of the species which live in it.

**Reg Butcher (pictured) of the Thames Angling Preservation Society has played a key role in organising the Experiment since its inception and is a well known and respected figure amongst all who take part. Speaking about the 2020 Experiment, Reg said:**



*“This is the 48th time of running the Thames Fishing Experiment. At the first one in 1972, there were 12 anglers and each was given two cans of beer, and a packet of sandwiches. Two years later, we began to have a marquee and lunch at the end of the angling competition. We can't do that this year because of COVID, but the City has still managed to run the Experiment so there is no break, and I find that is a wonderful achievement.*

*The City's staff have done a wonderful job, and have worked very hard to keep people safe. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman attended today too which I thought was a magnificent thing to do.*

*Although this Experiment is less than half the size of normal years, it's good to see that the River is still very healthy and there's plenty of life going on. I've had a look at the water myself and find it's still as clean as ever.”*

## COVID-19 and the 2020 Experiment

The Experiment, i.e. the angling competition is usually followed by a formal, three course meal and presentation ceremony in a marquee for approximately 150 people. Attendees include anglers, Committee Members and other CoL dignitaries, plus representatives from partner organisations and livery companies.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we were unable to go ahead with the event in its usual format this year. However, in view of the scientific importance of the experiment, it was pleasing that we were able to hold the angling and data collection element of the day, albeit in a reduced-scale format.

To ensure compliance with government COVID-secure guidance, and the COVID-safe practices recommended by the Angling Trust, this year's Experiment entailed:

- The participation of six adult angling teams with 4 competitors each.
- Each angler was pre-allocated a marked fishing area sufficiently distanced from neighbouring anglers.
- Anglers recorded details of their own catch.
- A one-way system was put in place around the main site, with staggered entry and socially distanced queuing to and from the car park, registration desk and facilities, all of which were outdoors.
- Simple takeaway catering (breakfast rolls and hot drinks) from an outdoor service kiosk was provided for the anglers upon arrival.
- Anglers and stewards were asked to leave at the end of the angling period.
- There was no judging, prize-giving or meal this year. Instead, results were determined during the week following the competition and the winners notified.
- Both the Fishmongers' Company and the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators assisted with judging the winners of their awards remotely (via email).
- In addition to the anglers and four stewards, the only other attendees were the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the City of London's Port Health & Environmental Services Committee, Reg Butcher, and a small number of City of London staff.



**Keith Bottomley**

**Chairman of the Port Health & Environmental Services Committee**

*"Delighted that the 48th Thames Fishery Research Experiment was able to go ahead this year and equally delighted to be there on the day, which saw near perfect conditions.*

*I was very keen that the event did go ahead. Not least to ensure continuity of the research into the health of the river but also because the event is so loved and valued by the anglers.*

*The event was superbly organised as ever but this year with much greater challenges and restrictions. Well done and thank you to the organising team especially to Joanne Hill.*

*See you in 2021!"*

**Jeremy Simons**  
**Deputy Chairman of the Port Health & Environmental Services Committee**

*"It was great to see the enthusiasm of all the anglers this year – they had an excellent catch (and return), with five species present.*

*The healthiness and biodiversity of the River continues to improve year by year, with greater opportunities to enjoy the outdoors at a time when so many other activities are curtailed.*

*We are all very grateful it was possible for the event to be held this year and thank Jo and her colleagues for all they did to make it happen."*



# Results and Winners 2020

**TOTAL CATCH: 561 fish consisting of 5 species.**

Species	Total caught	Largest specimen
Bass	4	27cm
Flounder	8	31cm
Plaice	1	33cm
Pouting	14	18cm
Whiting	534	35cm

**THE LADY HOWARD TROPHY** is awarded to the team which gained the highest number of points in the Adult Competition.

In 3rd place with 510 points and a catch of 102 fish, was the Charles Stanley Angling Team.

In 2nd place with 575 points and a catch of 113 fish, was the Essex Angling Team.

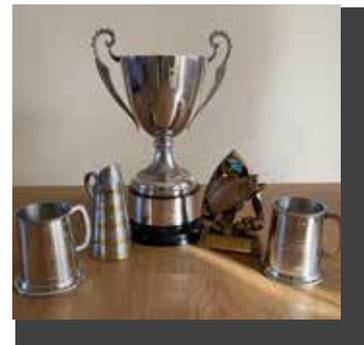
In 1st place with 750 points and a catch of 142 fish, consisting of 133 Whiting, 4 Pouting, 3 Bass, 1 Flounder and 1 Plaice, was the Kent Angling Team.



The trophies and prizes including the Lady Howard Trophy (above)

The award for **BEST INDIVIDUAL CATCH** goes to the angler with the highest individual score. The winner was Ben Cloke of the Kent Angling Team with 250 points.

**THE BIODIVERSITY AWARD** is supported by the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators for the catch which most demonstrates the continuing healthiness and improvement of the River Thames. This year's winning catch (22 Whiting, 3 Bass, 1 Plaice and 1 Flounder) was that of Jason Mann of the Kent Angling Team.



**THE FISHMONGERS' CUP** is awarded to the angler judged to have caught the largest or best single fish. The best single fish was judged to have been a 33cm Plaice caught by Jason Mann of the Kent Angling Team.

Mick Sharp is a long-time member of the Essex Angling Team and helps with the organisation of the angling competition. On behalf of the anglers, Mick has kindly provided some comments on this year's experiment and results:

*"The circumstances building up to this, the 48th Thames Fishery Research Experiment, have been unusual, unique and a huge challenge to organise in a safe and compliant way. The fact that the event was held at all was testament to the excellent planning skills, determination and drive of the organising team. The preparation was well thought out and the delivery on the day faultless.*

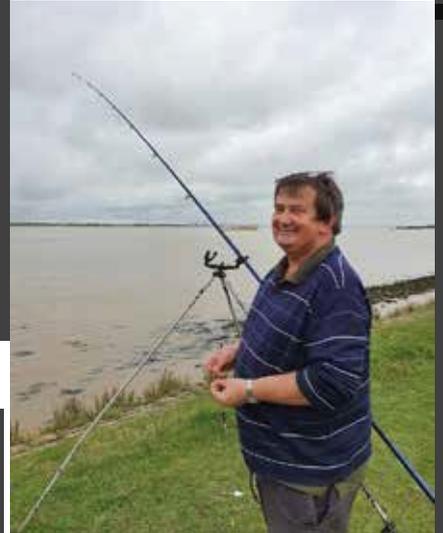
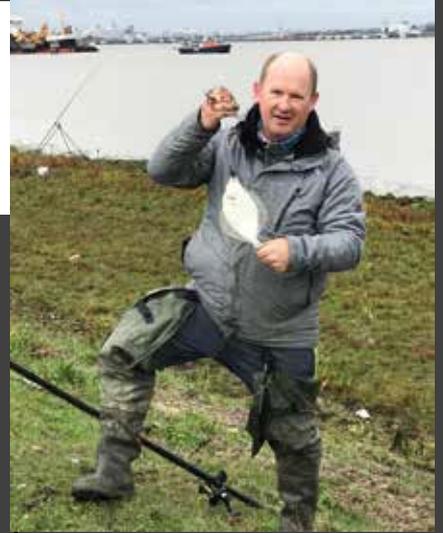
*Feedback from the anglers was extremely positive and full of praise on how smoothly things ran and how safe they felt.*

*Due to the COVID outbreak, only around one third of the usual number of anglers fished. This ensured appropriate social distancing and compliance with the Angling Trust's guidelines for holding fishing matches during the pandemic.*

*However, this unusual arrangement did not stop the fish biting. In fact, although the number of species were down on recent years, we had one of the best returns in the last decade regarding numbers of fish. Individual returns were very high in numbers but dominated by the Whiting species.*

*By supporting the Experiment this year the City has maintained the consistency required to ensure that the results from all 48 years can be properly analysed and reported. Anglers appreciate that the whole purpose of the competition is to help us all better understand the changes that have taken place in the health of this great river and this year's catch returns have been exceptional.*

*So, on behalf of the anglers, I offer a big thank you to all of the sponsors, supporters and organisers for having the faith in putting on the Experiment in difficult times."*





**The City of London Thames Fishery Research Experiment is organised by the City of London in conjunction with the Thames Angling Preservation Society and the Environment Agency.**

### **Contributors to the 2020 Experiment**

**Jon Averbs (Director of Markets and Consumer Protection) and Gavin Stedman (Port Health & Public Protection Director) and their staff from the City of London.**

**Reg Butcher of the Thames Angling Preservation Society; Mick Sharp of the Essex Angling Team, and their colleagues, who contributed their wealth of experience and expertise to the arrangement of the angling competition. Their continued enthusiasm and commitment is vital to the success of this event.**

**Kat Tye, Jeremy Matthews and Vicki Gravestock of the Environment Agency who assisted as stewards.**

**Gavin O'Donnell, Fisheries Programme Manager, of The Fishmongers' Company who judged (remotely) the winner of the Fishmongers' Cup.**

**Rob Casey, Master of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators, who judged (remotely) the winner of the Biodiversity Award.**

**First aid providers, SE Medical, whose attendance to the safety and wellbeing of participants is very much appreciated.**

### **The Angling Teams**

**Charles Stanley Angling Team  
City of London Invitation Angling Team  
Essex Angling Team  
Kent Angling Team  
Port of London Authority Angling Team  
Thamesiders Angling Team**

**For further information, please contact:**

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