

The Perchfisher

DICK WALKER AND ARLESEY LAKE

by Tony Meers

After Dick Walker's capture of a record 4lb 13oz perch in December 1950, and many others around the 4lb mark, the deep waters of Arlessey, became a mecca for those wanting to emulate their hero.

Dick Walker was accompanied by many of the big fish anglers of the day – Bob Rutland, Peter Thomas, Peter Stone, Frank Gutfeld, and also by a young Alan Brown, to name but a few. Many other famous anglers, fished Arlessey after Dick – Derrick Davenport, Frank Murgett, and Gerry Berth-Jones, but there are no records of them being as successful, except for Frank Murgett who had a 4lb 4oz specimen in October 1953.



Perch fishing the Walker way – photo courtesy of Pat Walker.

Whilst Dick Walker is best known for his carp fishing, it was his perch fishing that first captured the imagination of anglers. In fact, Dick's early fame was due to his perch captures. These were, to start with at Arlessey Lake, but later on the middle reaches of the Great Ouse with the Taylor brothers.

It was Frank Belcher, a local fisherman, who informed Dick about the perch at Arlessey. Frank had previously caught a 3lb plus fish from the stumps area of the lake. Good size perch had been caught by accident by other anglers, and Dick decided Arlessey needed a targeted approach. He even went to the trouble of obtaining a contour map of the lake from the London Brick Company.

Arlessey is also of course where Dick, with the help of young Alan Brown perfected the Arlessey bomb, which took the angling world by storm. But the first attempts were not successful. Alan nearly blew up Dick's shed when he made the first batch; there must have been some



A young Alan Brown with an Arlessey perch – photo taken by Dick Walker.

moisture in the moulds Dick had prepared for Alan, because the whole lot exploded. The second attempt was a great success, and the rest is history.

ARLESEY LAKE

Arlessey Lake was dug as a clay pit for the London Brick Company, and the earliest evidence of the lake I have found is in a photograph taken c1927 showing the brick making kilns still in place, and when the lake was around 15 acres in size and between 50 and 60 feet deep.

There seems to be a lot of confusion about the Arlessey Lake that Dick Walker fished. Where it was situated, and even if it still exists – as it was reported that it was purchased and became a landfill site. This is partly true; in 1984 the process of filling in the lake with locally collected waste began. Frank Gutfeld has confirmed this by sending me some photos he took at the time.

In 1986 Penny and David Beatham took over the lake and farm, and also set about building a superb contemporary house widely regarded as an excellent example of modern architecture. At the time Letchworth Fishing club had permission to fish what remained of the original lake. In order to prevent a right of way around the lake being established they had to close off



Dick Walker, Peter Stone and Frank Gutfeld at Arlessey.

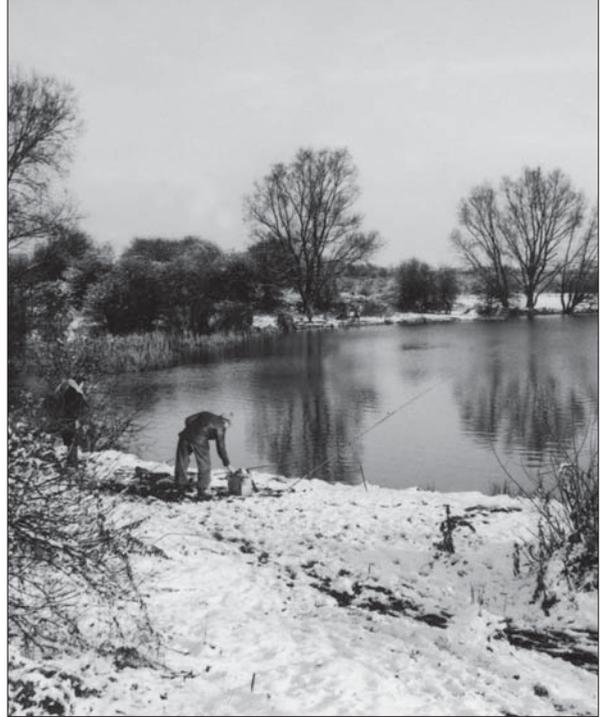
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A landscaped Arlesey Lake c1995 – photo courtesy of Penny Beatham



Penny and David sold Arlesey in December 2009. And as I understand it, the new owners are not permitting fishing any longer, which is a regrettable end to this historic lake as a fishery.

All the best *Tony Meers*



Arlesey Lake in winter – photo courtesy of Frank Gutfield.

the lake. Penny and David let it be known that locals would be able to continue fishing but by permission only directly from them. As you can imagine, this caused some disappointment and resentment for a while but a number of fishermen returned to fish on a regular basis. It was established by a public enquiry that there was no legal right of way around the lake. Things settled down and in the early 1990's they took advice on how to manage the lake, fish, fowl and wildlife, speaking to various bodies including RSPB, MAFF and anyone else who they thought might be able to contribute to the ongoing discussions. It was agreed that the lake should be shallowed to allow natural vegetation and algae to grow for food, and to encourage natural breeding of the fish. Up to this point the fish had been surviving on anything the fishermen chose to throw into the water!

After about 3 years the islands were formed and gradually landscaped. The fish thrived and the wildlife flourished. They continued to allow fishing though they did not advertise it in anyway. Once the works were completed many of the previous fishermen returned to say that they had been very sceptical and were amazed at what Penny and David had done.

There were many rumours of very large perch still being caught, but these have not been confirmed.



Dick with a nice 4lb perch – photo courtesy of Pat Walker