

A Fish Called Hamlet

During the course of our angling lives we suffer many setbacks when things do not go exactly as anticipated. The day is perfect in every way when we arrive at the selected venue, we are full of confidence and expectation, only to have the fickle finger of fate dash our dreams, the end result being another fishless session. Every method known to man fails to tempt even the slightest interest from any fish in the water. We have all been there at some time whether it be watching a motionless float or willing our buzzer to scream, anything to indicate that we are in with a chance. It is enough to drive any self respecting angler into reaching for the mobile and dialling the Samaritans. What we have failed to appreciate is that we are thinking like people and what appears to be perfect to us may be far from ideal for fish despite all of our experience. There are the other days when we get a bite on every cast failing to hook anything at all. Or, when we do eventually hook something, it is brought to the surface ready to be netted and the fish expels the hook with relative ease and disappears back into the depths from whence it came.

This happened to me only last week on a pike fishing trip. I arrived at the river on a cold morning and setting up my usual float tackle, baited the hooks with a frozen rainbow trout. The bait lay undisturbed for about one hour before I brought it back in to check that the crayfish had not eaten it. Sure enough the trout was in pristine condition and so I decided to add a little flavour by injecting some wintered fish oil into the trout, recasting it back to the same spot as before. Coincidence or not, after about ten minutes the float bobbed a couple of times before submerging and sedately moved off across the river. Picking up the rod I felt for the fish and struck but the pike had released the bait and gone about its business. The next cast to a similar position brought another bite within twenty minutes. This time the float bobbed once before taking off at supersonic speed. "At last", I thought, as I struck into something solid. Just how solid I was about to find out as the fish had managed to snag the tackle into an immovable object leaving me no option but to pull for a break. Not to be beaten, and believing in the old adage "third time lucky" the tackle was reassembled and a fresh bait cast slightly away from the hidden snag. Sure enough once the trout had thawed out the float started its familiar dance and when I was sure that the pike had the bait I struck and felt a respectable fish pulling back. Keeping on the pressure I brought the pike to the surface where it did a roll and spat the hooks out, the fish returning once more to its lair leaving me to untangle the trebles from the undergrowth. It was the typical 'Hamlet' moment, all it needed was for a string quartet to start playing 'Air on a G String' to make the scene complete. As it happens I did have a packet of the aforementioned cigars in my pocket and I did light one up!

Those of us over a certain age will remember in the distant days, before colour was brought to the world, a time when adverts on the TV only lasted a few minutes. There were adverts for just about anything including alcohol and – wait for it – cigarettes and cigars. At this point I am sure that any younger readers will be recoiling in disbelief, but can assure you it is true. Each advert extolling the virtues and pleasure of inhaling 5000 toxic chemicals into ones lungs on every breath, to their credit they did withhold this information, replacing it with scenes of people enjoying successful and healthy lives. The series of Hamlet advert always depicted a scene where an unfortunate person would have experienced a disappointment or be in a situation where they were not in control of their fate and that they could console themselves by smoking a cigar. Back in those days I did smoke cigarettes myself. It may come as a surprise to some that it was not the expertise of the advertising

companies that had me reaching for a pack of Embassy, it was the coupons contained within, and a desire to accrue sufficient tokens to exchange for a fishing umbrella. My fingers were stained yellow and my lungs were probably a similar colour but at least I would stay dry in the wettest of weather. If I go back even further in time, in my smoking history, I think that I have to lay the blame firmly at the door of Mr Crabtree. I can honestly say that Mr Crabtree was the single influence that started me smoking a pipe at the age of 14. As I look through my ageing copy of 'Fishing with Mr Crabtree', in every picture he is depicted smoking that pipe and so, naturally, I thought that the secret to being a good angler must be down to a pipe smoking. I still smoke a pipe today, though only when fishing, but I did give up the cigarettes 30+ years ago. It seems strange looking back, that angling is viewed as a relatively healthy pastime, out in the countryside and open air, sometimes a lengthy walk carrying excessive amounts of tackle and yet it the only time that I smoke – or even think about smoking. This weekend I shall be back after that pike again complete with frozen trout and a packet of cigars. I think that I shall have to name that fish 'Hamlet' and look forward to the time when it graces my landing net.