

A fishy tale...

2 February 2012 — Halton Borough Council

'Salmon returns to the Mersey for the first time in 100 years'

"It was the splashing below the bridge that first drew my attention to it and on looking over the side I was surprised to see a large silver fish swimming close to the bank below me. My curiosity was aroused as in all the years I had been working alongside the River Mersey, fish were definitely not something you would expect to see this far above the tidal limit!"

As Projects and Conservation Officer and founder member of the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group, the route I took on 14th August 1989, was one taken several times a week to carry out some task or survey on the No 3 bed. On crossing the bridge between No2 and No 3 bed, it was my habit to check the river for signs of wildlife which, apart from the movement of an occasional Mink, was often just a blank canvas, but not on this occasion!

As I scrambled down the bank to get a closer look, the fish swam off upstream towards Woolston Weir but after a short distance it stopped swimming and was quickly swept back to where I was standing by the strong current. Over the next 10 minutes it repeatedly tried to swim upriver but each time gave up after a while until finally, it rolled onto its side and gave its last gasp in front of me.

After taking the fish to a local angling shop and getting confirmation from the National Rivers Authority, the news found its way into the Warrington Guardian (photo), Angling Times and some national newspapers who were keen to record this historic and significant piece of local interest

Although the Salmon was an exceptional 'catch' at the time, it was an early indication of the changes occurring in the Mersey as subsequently birds such as Great Crested Grebe and Little Grebe not only began appearing more frequently on the river but increasingly seen diving and surfacing with fish. Within a few years anglers were competing along its banks and Salmon were recorded moving up river beyond the modified Woolston Weir to breed.

At the time it was an interesting experience and a forerunner of an exciting new phase in the history of the once badly polluted River Mersey and I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to record this historical event!

Rob Smith

July 2010



Mr. Rob. Smith with the salmon which he found in the River Mersey on Monday.
Photo No. C78-5.

Salmon found in River Mersey at Woolston

A LARGE salmon, forced off course by record tides and stormy weather, has been swept up the River Mersey to Woolston Eyes for the first time in living memory.

The unusual discovery was made on Monday morning, and weighs more than 8lb.

The fish is the first to be found at this point. Others have reached the river before, but have not been able to pass Woolston weir.

An exceptionally high tide on Sunday may have washed the fish off course. Mr. Rob. Smith, working in the area, and was surprised to see a fish in the river.

He tried to push it back into the water, but it struggled to the bank and gave a last gasp for air.

Mr. Jim Waldron, owner of Anglers' World, Manchester Road, examined the salmon and believes it to be the first fish in more than 100 years to be discovered in the area.

He said: "It is a female salmon, which was returning from the sea. It still bears the marks of the sea lice that have lacerated the scales."

The fish was on a journey from the Irish Sea and was pushed off course from the River Dee.