

# FROM THE FISHING LODGE

‘Thank goodness we’re past the shortest day’.

How often we hear that just before Christmas. I suppose it gives some sort of comfort to think that the days have started to lengthen, bringing with them sunnier and warmer times. Not so! It is only the daylight hours that are shorter now - the days are actually longer, and the coldest weather is yet to come - until February 4th or thereabouts. But there - you knew that anyway.

Last time I wrote I mentioned about the coots, and how they were working tirelessly to keep their island above the rising water level. So you will be pleased to learn that despite the best efforts of the River God to wash their island away, now it even boasts a real live willow tree, and is daily shared by ducks, gulls, and even swans. However, this rota system seems only to apply to the inhabiting of the island and not to the general maintenance of it. It is still the coots that work themselves demented in their effort to keep themselves and their squatters dry.

So few people living hereabouts make any real use of the grounds these days, apart that is from using them to leave their bicycles propped at dangerous angles against the seats, or to leave their chairs scattered about in gay abandon (even on the pathways), and to find the shrubs a convenient hiding place for their discarded plants and plastic bags. So therefore it is somewhat of a refreshing change to discover that we have a fisherman or two in our midst, who make use of the grounds by virtue of their fishing rights. Quite recently one of our fisher folk showed me a 4lb brown trout he had just pulled out, using a barbless hook, so that he could put the fish back without much harm being done. So that’s nice to know. He tells me that we have a ‘lively’ stretch of river.

Have you noticed that we have not seen cows in our meadow for some time - but sheep, yes. In my day we always kept the sheep up in the hills in the winter, and brought them down on the fresh green grass in the spring - but then, I am probably out of date (as I am about most things, as I am continually being told!)

On the subject of cows, do you remember the stampede of cows across the river and up onto the St Michael green? In retrospect one can hardly believe it ever happened - but it did. What on earth was it that started those cows on their headlong flight to pastures new? The water frothed and boiled, the cows jostled each other to get a foothold on our bank - the front ones were pushed up by the ones behind (I don’t necessarily mean the behinds of those behind), and all of a sudden there they were! St Michael was full of

cows all shoving and ‘mooing’ and barging into everything. I really expected my fence to be laid flat. But fear not, I needn’t have worried - salvation was at hand, in the portly shape of Col. Blimp.

As soon as he saw the invasion from his window, he had the situation under control.

‘Let ‘em know who’s in charge - that’s the secret’ he bellowed. ‘Only bally cows, what!’

Whereupon he snatched off his bush hat and proceeded to wave it about in the most extraordinary way as he stomped into the fray, the gleam of battle in his eye.

‘Whoa there - back, back there I say - move damn you’.

The results were not exactly momentous. The cows didn’t seem to understand him - and he most definitely did not understand *them*!

Nevertheless, enthusiasm being the better part of valour, he waded in, showing all the residents - who by now were all framed in their windows - just how to handle the situation. Until, that is, he came face to face with a particularly belligerent beast, who fixed him with a piercing eye, and lowered her head in a menacing way. There was an earth-shattering ‘Mooooo’ accompanied by much hot air from two dilated nostrils, as the two protagonists ‘squared up’.

It was at this point that Col. Blimp remembered that he had left a cup of tea on the table, and that perhaps it was getting cold. He therefore started to slowly back away from his adversary, and when he had gained sufficient distance, turned and marched back to his flat, shouting to all who might be listening- ‘All you’ve got to do is let ‘em know who’s master - eh, what!’

It was only a few minutes later when the farmer arrived on the scene, and had no trouble at all in herding them back across the river. Just as the last of the cows were jumping down into the river, Col. Blimp appeared again, striding over to the farmer.

‘You needn’t have worried old chap, I had ‘em eating out of the palm of my hand’.

The farmer didn’t seem to hear him, and leapt in the river after his cows. Incidentally, one shudders to think what state our bank would be in today if the same sort of thing would happen again. For sure the netting we have now would never stand up to such an onslaught.

What a shame that we don’t have any exciting episodes like that these days, or even the colourful characters to take part in them. For instance - do you

remember Cedric? He was the Close Gentleman of the Road, all through one summer. He took up residence on the seat over the wall opposite the North Canonry. He hung up various bags, boxes, coats etc. anywhere that was handy - he even had a clothes line!

But he became well-known after he purchased a painting from the Military Museum Tea Room. He paid £60 cash for it and hung it from the tree over his seat. But two or three days later he took the painting back saying that it didn't blend with his other

furnishings! I think they gave him his money back, which I presume he invested elsewhere.

Having said that we don't have any exciting episodes these days - one could of course, cast one's eye in the direction of the Hungerford Chantry door.

*Brian Foster*