



Following the master

You're not a compleat angler until you've fished the Dove, especially if it's from Izaak Walton's Derbyshire fishing temple

Photographs by Jake Eastham

WHEN it first appeared in 1653, as an anonymous little manual bound in sheepskin and designed for bankside consultation, it cost 18d. Today, a first edition of *The Compleat Angler* might set you back £40,000, and it has been translated into everything from Korean to Finnish. Some detractors scoff at its quaintness, but Izaak Walton's classic remains a masterpiece of English pastoral prose—a chronicle of contentment from an era of civil turmoil.

This rambling discourse on friendship and fishing proved such a bestseller that, in 1676, its elderly author invited his young protégé, Charles Cotton (CC), to contribute a second part, to cover trout and grayling methods.

Theirs was an improbable companionship: Walton was a quiet, self-made merchant who had a draper's and ironmongery business off Fleet Street (one wonders if he ever sold hooks), whereas Cotton (36 years his junior) was the colourful squire of Beresford Hall in Staffordshire—adept at billiards and horticulture, perpetually strapped for cash and, as a poet, rather inclined to be scurrilous. Unlike his sober mentor, he confessed to being, 'a toss-pot [drinker] these twenty good years'. One can't help warming to him.

Cotton's addition, which he dashed off in 10 days flat, is our first treatise concentrating on fly fishing, and describes numerous artificial patterns for the green drake (mayfly), white gnat and 'cow-turd fly'. Walton was primarily a bait maestro, and CC hung one of his piscatorial 'father's' London fly dressings in his 'parlour window to laugh at'.

But they both loved the waters of the Peak District, particularly



Gathering inspiration from the shade of Walton in the temple



The Editor and David Profumo rest in piscatorial companionship, like that of Walton and CC



'One of the most enchanting places my rods have taken me'

the River Dove in Beresford Dale. To commemorate their friendship, CC built a stone fishing temple on its banks, their initials carved in cipher above the door, with the superscription *Piscatoribus sacrum*. It stands there still—probably our sport's most hallowed structure. Last month, the Editor and I paid a visit.

Although once devastated by agricultural pollution, over the past few years, the Dove has been gradually restored, and a population of wild brown trout again exists. Access is carefully limited, but some day tickets are

available. The skillful young keeper, Andy Heath, told us the fishery is about to be put on sale and certainly, for now, it's in excellent hands. We could hardly wait to tackle up.

Unlocking a door in the ancient mossy wall, Andy led us through a portal into a parallel world. Great limestone cliffs shaggy with vegetation loomed to our left—it's said the Squire hid in caves there to escape his creditors—and through a leafy tunnel dancing with green sunlight flowed the modest Dove, overhung and clear and punctuated by a few *Danica* duns.

CC coined that great maxim 'fish fine, and far off'—and you

Walton's classic remains a masterpiece of English pastoral prose

could see the need for subtlety. I'd strung up a tiny one-piece cane rod, hoping to pick the pockets of this narrow stream. We followed the stony path and there on a secluded oxbow beneath the trees, we suddenly saw the temple ahead.

This is one of the most enchanting places my rods have

ever taken me—secret, peaceful and deeply historic. Editor Hedges, firing up a potent cigar, announced he would watch as I 'caught the first one'. Unerringly, my cast pitched into some brambles and there came a disapproving cough from my audience. Surely the shade of Father Izaak would help me at this stage of my pilgrimage? Next throw, I entangled my back-cast. The editorial smoke-screen moved incredulously away.

With several miles of the beat to cover, we soon settled down and laid siege to individual rises. My luck turned, and I winkled out a brace of gorgeous brownies—brightly enamelled creatures ➤

Reel Life

that were a challenge and a joy to fish for, obliging enough if only you could insinuate your fly with some accuracy beneath the branches. Once a shower had cleared the air, the mayfly hatch strengthened, but you still had to creep and crawl to address the little pools and runs.

By luncheon—smoked fish and custardy Bakewell pies, courtesy of the excellent Charles Cotton Hotel in nearby Hartington—we'd landed (and released) a dozen wild trout between us, and the Boss and I were both seriously taken with Dovedale. One wouldn't have been too surprised to have glimpsed old Izaak and his raffish collaborator gossiping beneath the ash trees: as they wrote, it is indeed 'a marvellous pretty place'.

One wouldn't be too surprised to glimpse old Izaak and his collaborator

Walton died in his 90th year, a tribute to the healthfulness of his pastime. One item in his will read 'fishing tackle and other lumber—£10'; one can only imagine what that might fetch now. Just four years later (in 1687), Cotton, insolvent and having sold off his family house, perished from fever. But the temple endures as a monument to their fine and far-off friendship—do go there one day, if you can.

For bookings on the Temple beat of the Dove, contact Simon Cooper of Fishing Breaks (www.fishingbreaks.co.uk; 01264 781988). For all other information about the fishery, telephone Andrew Heath (07896 344448)

David Profumo caught his first fish at the age of five, and, off the water, he's a novelist and biographer. He lives up a glen in Perthshire, with a labrador who only understands Gaelic.



Above: Celebrating the catch of the day. Left: Now, which fly would Walton and CC recommend? Below: Originally costing 18d, a copy of *The Compleat Angler* would now set you back £40,000



Left: The two authors, with Walton on the right. Below left: Surely CC would have approved? Below right: The friends' initials entwined