

Clive Branson – Angler. My living Autobiography

I was born in Cardiff, in the country of Wales in the first week of January 1951. My Parents Barbara and Sidney Branson met during the later stages of the Second World War, my mother being in the land army and my father was in the navy. Like most people after the war they had a vision of building a family and I was the first born and the eldest of five children four brothers and one sister.

During my childhood I grew a fascination of water which almost cost me my young life, being pushed from behind by a friend who thought it was fun to see me go into the drink, not realising at that stage in my life I had never learnt to swim. Blacking out under the water I was rescued by other school friends. However it never put me off from my fascination of the local river.

My fishing interest started when I saw other young lads catching eels on hand lines. Catching them on worm and keeping them alive in a small pool by the river. I thought this was fun as another hobby and interest was catching slow worms and grass snakes on the local railway line. However I started to fish seriously at the early age of about 12 years old, enjoying my childhood fishing on the River Taff that runs through the heart of the Principality, it was then full of roach and big chub. It is amazing that the first fish anyone catches are always remembered and my single roach was no exception, all of 4oz, so excited about my catch I took it home and eat it.

Through those early years when ever I got the chance you would find me by that old river that run black with coal dust. Catching roach on silkweed picked from the weir was my favourite bait. During my school days I would dream of catching fish and daydreaming that perhaps one day I could become a champion angler. Another sport I enjoyed was football, and being very good at most sports I became the youngest school team goalkeeper in the schools history and often I would get glowing reports posted in the sport section of the local news paper, of which my mother proudly cut out and kept in a scrap book. Then one day I had a call up to go for a trial with Cardiff City young football team, however it clashed with a local angling club fishing match. And yes I decided to go fishing, I often wondered if I had pursued the football path, yet the money was not in the game at that time in the sixties.

At the age of 16 I won my first big competition with 20lb 8oz of roach, beating senior opposition. My claims to fame also include winning the Junior Welsh National and other domestic competitions. And although I fished many a competition in my younger days and was winning plenty of small competitions, it was not until I represented the National Team of Wales in the World Championship's 1981 at Luddington, England, that I became recognised as a good quality angler, finishing in 3rd place on day one with 6lb 11oz, and second day on a flooded river coming 17th in the World overall with an 11oz eel. Helping the Welsh Team into the Bronze position on their very first attempt and was the start of a very successful chapter in my fishing career.

The Welsh Bronze Medal winners



Top Left to right- Richard Bainton – Ken Hornsea – Keith Bean – Phill Davies – Clive Branson

Bottom – Richard Candy – John Mayers (Captain)

During my late twenties match fishing was at its peak with huge entries to most competitions, our local league was a sell out with over 12 teams of twelve anglers competing every weekend, and in those days the national championships boasted over 1,000 anglers competing. Silver fish such as Bream, Roach, Rudd, chub, Perch and Tench became the sort after species. Carp were very rare then and a big bonus if caught and landed. Team matches was very popular and travelling all over the country was the highlight to most weekends. I was so keen as a youngster I travelled with our local match group Cardiff Nomads to far off places including, Hampshire Avon, Kentish Stour, Bewdley upon River Severn, Oxford Canal, River Trent Nottingham, River Dee North Wales and others too many to mention, often as a runner as well as an angler, learning the sport.

However it was not until The World Championship's in France 1986 that I became a household name, coming second on both days whilst fishing with my favourite method "The Waggler" catching over 6lb of chub.

My Running-up
catch - victory came
the following year...

FLYING HIGH

● *HIGH-flying Welsh wizard Clive Branson grabbed the glory for Britain in the World Championships in Strasbourg, finishing runner-up in the team event and the individual match. Here he shows off his 17 lb 13½ oz which helped Wales to sixth place overall.*



The best was yet to come, in the following year in Portugal 1987, I won a closely fought contest, again with the "Waggler" against some of the best anglers in the world at that time, including Dennis White and Kevin Ashurst (England), who were pegged next to me, I became The World Freshwater Angling Champion with a bag of small Barbel 6lb 1.8oz.

The Welsh Gold Medal Winners



Top – Dick North – Richard Bainton – Colin Cook – Spud Murphy – Clive Branson – Phill Davies
Bottom – Clive Roberts – John Mayers (Captain) Eric Humpries (reserve)

Another highlight in my career was helping Wales win The National Team World Championship in Bulgaria 1989 whilst winning the second-day competition with over 27lb and in fact I have enjoyed winning the second day World Championship competition no fewer than four times, including Hungary 1991.

During those golden years of match fishing come many other wins for example, winning the Boyle Irish Festival, River Erne and Blackwater matches with weights of 142lb & 131lb respectively and winning the Bristol and Avon Pole Championship (16lb). I have also been the Welsh National Native fishing the River Dee and also coming Champion the river Taff feeder record holder (33lb).

Other competitions I have won include the Sundridge Pole Championship winning £2,000 on the Regents Canal, the Nantes International festival Roath Park Cardiff, the Lower Wye Championships and the Wye Championships (with 74lb of chub), plus many more, the list being too numerous to mention!

Enjoying some great success I was privileged to have been invited to A Queens Garden Party meeting Prince Phillip and The Queen. Appearing on BBC Sports personality of the year award and Bruno Brooks Tight Lines Sky Sport were other memorable moments.



The Welsh Team Fishing Switzerland

Clive Branson



Some of my Trophies

As I was being billed as the most successful match angler that Wales has produced thus far, did find opposition within the Welsh team selection when the captaincy was taken over by Eric Humpries of North Wales. Eric who as an angler did not match up to my expectations and was only endorsed by the out going captain Doug Hornblow of South Wales, conspiring between them that would allow Doug to fish in the World Championships. Eric who could not make it into the Welsh team on his own merit was in my opinion a poor choice of captain as been shown over the twenty years in charge. With no team success to boast and only an individual bronze in all his time in charge whereby when I was involved with the team selection and team tactical meetings over a period of eight years we amassed a Team bronze and winning Gold medal combined with two individual bronze Two Silver Medals and my individual Gold medal. Eric and I did not see eye to eye and said I was a bad influence in his team therefore I did not fish for the Welsh team since 1991.

Meanwhile residing in Wales did have its draw backs so with that in mind I decided to move to the heart of Match fishing, the Midlands and moving into a quaint Riverside cottage close to the Warwickshire Avon was my dreams come true. Believing that moving to the area would also help my match fishing skills, whilst setting up a business on Twyford Farm in a pet and aquatic shop to help keep the roof over my head.

Living in the midlands was good for a while, offering tuition to guest staying with me at the cottage and free tuition to local youngsters, fishing on my doorstep and being recognised as a semi professional angler in fact the angling press was giving me great public awareness through fishing columns and articles. I was billed as the first professional angler and various opportunities became available, such as making a string of fishing Videos, another company, adopting my ground-bait secret ingredient's and marketing them, also a French company called Waterqueen asked me to promote their hi-tech fishing lines throughout the UK. Writing a small fishing series within the Angling Times gave me fantastic exposure to the angling public. I was being sponsored by an Oil company taking hospitality weekends of anglers to the River Wye near Ross-on-Wye.

I was and still a great believer in positive mental attitude and wrote on many occasions about the power of mind and thought, whilst in some quarters I was branded a nutcase and some of the angling press ridiculed my teachings. One occasion The Angling Times suggested was Clive Branson Brilliant or Barmy, even some of my inventions such as the adjustable eye glasses were put down as madness, although Milo of Italy thought different and ordered thousands for the Italian fishing market.

Writing an article in the Angling press about PMA Positive Mental Attitude which demonstrated me hypnotising a good friend at the time Tony Skinner, who fished for starlets, offering a visualization technique on how to catch more fish was even more ridiculed, however the few occasions I travelled to some angling clubs for fishing demonstrations saw a sell out crowd, and on one occasion in North Wales I attended an evening talk and was gob smacked to see over 400 anglers queuing up to see me. On another occasion in Newport South Wales I gave a talk about PMA and got anglers on stage and hypnotised a few willing suspect only for them to fall off as if being pulled into the water by a huge fish stating it was all in the mind.

Life was good for me at this stage in my career, however little did I realise there were evil forces coming my way, slowly by slowly my world started to crumble, then one weekend before the Warwickshire Avon Bank holiday John Smith festival the Dutch international Fishing Team was staying with me, when the night before the festival thieves broke into the garage where the fishing tackle was stored. Over £40,000 of fishing tackle was stolen. The distressing fact that the Dutch team could not fish that weekend was further saddened by the accusations that I was part of that evil act. A cloud that hung over me for many years during International events, I thought things couldn't get worst.

And then some local people at Evesham started to become jealous with my business success and angling fame and every obstacle was put in my path including a local fishing tackle shop ban saying I was taking his business. Then everything from health and safety inspectors to police and environment agency were sent anonymously to my address. Also Including a plan to close my business at Twyford farm from Mrs May Vince the manageress who sold me down the river so to speak, by letting me invest all my money into the business knowing that the farm was being sold off to a development company. Looking at the additional business that I attracted to the farm the development company valued the extra visitors. By closing the other businesses around the farm less people came to the shop and eventually Mrs May Vince sent in the bailiffs to close me up completely.

Even though all this misfortune was upon me the worst was yet to come when one day whilst conducting business outside the county it started to rain heavily. I heard on the radio whilst driving the car that the river was in imminent flood conditions. Realising I was living close to the Avon I made my way back home, only to discover that the river was flooding into the cottage. The river was rising so fast that the fire brigade were telling people to evacuate their houses. Within a short time the river rose unpredictably high and seven foot of water washed through the cottage. The worst flood in over 150 years was the news bulletin where hundreds of people were affected, stopping in a hostel for the duration of the reversion of the flood until it was possible to go back. When upon entering I was in distress to find the walls of the house collapsing and all my fishing tackle had been

swept away with the river. Years of collecting small irreplaceable tackle items and memorabilia were lost.

To cap this disaster the insurance company wouldn't pay for the content insurance due to the position of the house being on a flood plain; however with the help of the mortgage company I managed them to pay for the rejuvenation of the property. While the house was being dried out by drying machines the worst was yet to happen, with thieves breaking in the vacant house during the night and cleaning me out of valuables that were still present upstairs in the house. Making a claim with the insurance company was a big mistake when the company suggested I was fabricating the amount stolen, I was arrested and kept in jail but with no evidence against me I was released.

After experiencing such an appalling time while living in Evesham I decided to sell up and relocate to mid Wales, a small place called Crew green near Shrewsbury close to the river Severn; there I thought I could restart my career. Taking a mortgage on a country public house and guesthouse I started in full swing a lively public house, taking bookings for anglers and travellers being very busy in the first year. Then the unthinkable happened, a spate of foot and mouth disease spread like wildfire, closing the land and embarking an exclusion zone around the rivers nearby. Not seeing a single customer for 6 months the Brewery consequently foreclosing on the business and was left penniless losing £170k of property. Licking my wounds and cursing my bad luck I hightailed back to my birth place Cardiff in South Wales.

Ten years since have seen me flip from job to job, still enjoying my match fishing, however not to the extent and professionalism that I once endeared but enjoying my couple of days on the river bank that are allowed under my circumstances.

These days I run a successful website called www.angling-news.co.uk and as I am coming up to my 60th birthday I look back at my successes and tribulations and when asked would I have changed anything well I have to answer by saying no, and even now while good friends of mine have passed away and some stopped fishing due to illnesses, I am still fishing with keenest and often I have my little success on the local match scene. Still alive and kicking...Watch this space

My Now these days with a bag of chub

