



## Fishing in and around Weston

*'Picwinner, Picwinner, Give me a good dinner'.*

It is said that fishermen used to sing this as they made their way along the path on top of the hill from Worle and Kewstoke to join their Weston fellows on the shore.



*Fishermen heading out from Billy Board's cottage, 1840s © Weston Museum*

At the same time they would add a stone for luck to the Picwinner Cairn (which can still be seen in the woods to the west of the water tower) to make sure they had a good catch.

**One reason why people chose to settle in the areas around Weston was the chance to supplement their diet with fish caught in the sea.**

In medieval times, people would have a right to fish in return for their allegiance to the Lord of the manor in the same way that they would have a right to farm – as long as the Lord got a share of the catch of course. In medieval times this included the Lord's right to the first salmon of the season which was once recorded as weighing 32 ¼ lbs.



*An Atlantic Salmon like those caught at Weston*

Fish in the sea were far more plentiful and varied than they are today. Salmon was regularly caught along with large quantities of Sprats, Haddock, Whiting, Prawns and other varieties whose name we would not recognise today (Barons and Tubbelyns for example).

Most of the catch wasn't eaten but was sent to market and made a significant contribution to the local economy.

Unusually, most fishing would be done from the beach. Men would wait for the tide to go out then go out to the channels between Weston's two offshore islands, Bearnbeck, (Birnbeck) and Night Stone (Knightstone) and drive stakes into the mud between which nets were strung (as in the painting below). As the tide came in the strong currents swept fish into these channels where they became tangled up in the nets.



*Stakes between the mainland and Birnbeck Island © Weston Museum*

You can still see Weston fishermen using these traditional methods of beach fishing if you go down to Madeira Cove and Birnbeck Island today.

If the fishermen weren't quick off the mark when the tide went out, gulls would swoop down and pinch their catch. This became such a problem that 'gull yellers' were employed to stand on the beach and frighten off the birds. During summer a house or dwelling was even provided for them on Birnbeck Island.

One famous 'yeller' was said to be so loud that he could be heard in Congresbury if the wind was in the right direction!



*A Flatner off Anchor Head, 1923 © Weston Museum*

Some of the better off fishermen also used boats, which had the advantage of allowing them to sail up the River Axe for freshwater prey as well as fishing in the sea.

The boats used had a unique design with a flat curved bottom that allowed the fishermen to free it should it become trapped on a mud bank - by rocking back and forward.

These famous Somerset Flatners were however notoriously difficult to handle unless in experienced hands. For more information see our Somerset Flatner on display in the museum.



Weston-super-Mare  
Town Council