

The History of 'The British Aquarist Festival'

The British Aquarist Festival – BAF – was organised by the Federation of Northern Aquarium Societies as its annual fishkeepers' event for members. Starting in 1951 it was sponsored by The Aquarist & Pondkeeper magazine. For over 40 years it attracted up to 17,000 people over a week or weekend at Belle Vue Park, Manchester.



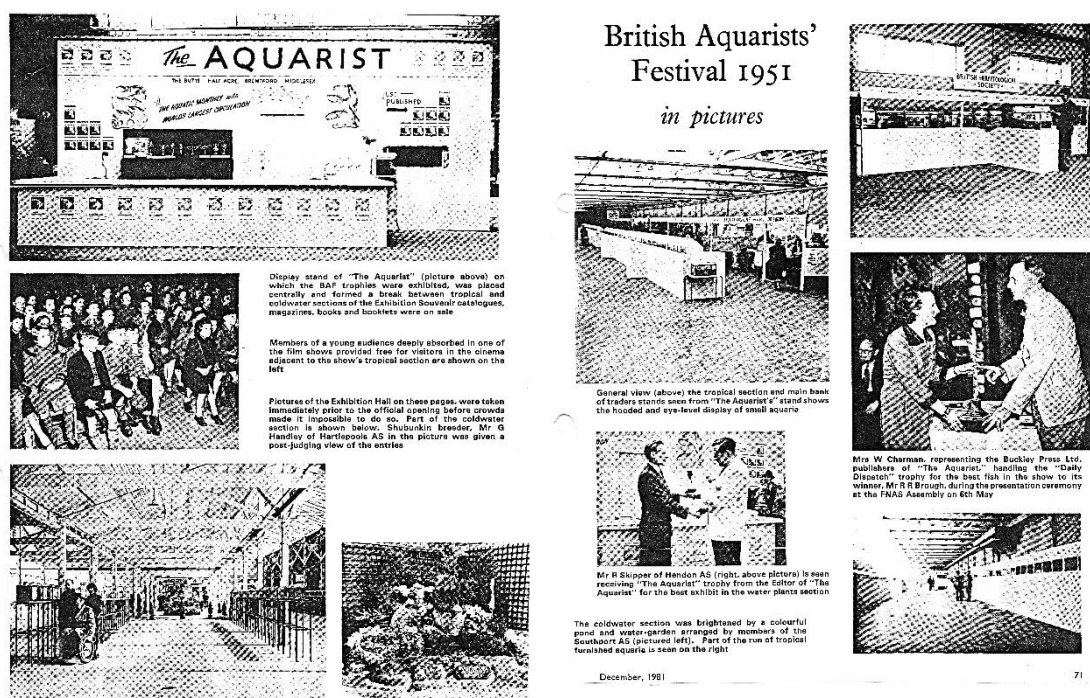
FNAS members met twice a year at the Belle Vue Zoo & Gardens (which itself started in 1836) and at the 1950 meeting (with 1,000 attending) it was decided that the Federation should have its own annual Open Show.

The only other National Fishkeeping Show was by the FBAS (they started in 1938 and now hold their 'Fishkeeping Festival'). Hence it was billed as the "British Aquarists Festival" – BAF. Within a few years, the Yorkshire Federation of Aquarist Societies started their own 'YAF' and the Scottish Aquarists launched 'SAF'.

The same Belle Vue venue was chosen and to help with costs, the magazine *Aquarist & Pondkeeper* was made a partner. They funded cash prizes for the Best in Classes – the FNAS remain the only Federation who do this, all others offer only certificates and trophies.

FBAS standards were initially used and FBAS Judges attended too. FNAS now have all their own standards for showing and judging petfish.

The Show was over 4 days, May 2nd – 5th 1951 and attracted 17,000 visitors with over 1,000 entries in the 86 Classes. Entry tickets were 2/- (10p) for adults, children half price. This allowed visitors to attend the Belle Vue Aquarium, Belle Vue Zoo and Amusement Park too – which helped its popularity. Despite this, the president of the FNAS, Dr J.F. Wilkinson, reported an overall loss of more than £1,000.



Hence the following year the Open Show was made a week long (October 12th – 18th 1952) and cash prizes limited to specials with more trophies and

certificates per Classes. It made a profit of £350. Repeated in 1953.

Political problems within the committee restricted the 1954 show to a one-day affair on the 3rd October. But by 1955 BAF became a 5-day Show. This continued to 1959 when the FNAS found that steward and building support could only cope with a 2-day Show. This became the norm for the Show, then and forever.

The 1967 Show saw the introduction of Champion of Champions where only fish that had won a 1st that year could compete. This remains a popular award – emulated by YAF with their Fish of Fishes and FBAS with their Supreme Championship.

By 1976 BAF celebrated its Silver Jubilee. In the 1980s the Belle Vue complex declined, the Zoo closed and the amusement park was sold for housing development. BAF had to find a new venue...this was chosen to be the prestigious GMex in Manchester. This move was organised by the new FNAS president Arnold Chadwick (Arnie).

The 1987 BAF was held in the huge Convention Hall where it looked rather lost – and cost far too much rent. The 1988 BAF used only half the hall, but the high rent meant the show again lost money.

Hence the 1989 BAF moved to the cheaper Bowlers Exhibition Hall in Trafford Park. Initially this solved the cash flow problem, but by 1996 rising rentals (and reducing visitor numbers) made the Show start to make a loss. Several thousand pounds too, although a dedicated FNAS member bailed them out – temporarily.

Therefore, in 1997 Arnie moved BAF to the smaller Hall of the George Carnell Leisure Centre in Urmston, Manchester. Over the 1990s many traders stopped attending, due to increasing costs with fewer spending visitors.

Only the manufacturers who still saw BAF as an advertising showcase remained, such as Tetra, King British and Aquarian. Aquarian continued to support BAF with their Advisory Service and used the Show each year to stage their Aquachamp competition.

This continued to the millennium, with Aquarian recruiting the Champion of Champions for advertising via QED...these adverts are published on this



A close contest

'Aquarian' has run its 1998 AquaChamp competition throughout the UK with the grand final taking place at the **British Aquarist Festival in Manchester**. The six finalists competing came from as far afield as Scotland and the Isle of Wight.

The competition was very close but the final score was five each to Colin Tweddle of Cramlington AS and **Keith Mower** of Brith AS. Colin opted to answer a tie-breaker and got it wrong (it turned out later that he did know the answer but forgot it in the heat of the moment) making



Keith the winner. The trophy was presented by Dr David Ford of the 'Aquarian' Advisory Service. He also set the questions using a rather special aquarium book - *1001 Questions Answered about your Aquarium* by Ida Mellen & Robert Lanier, published in America in 1935! Here's just one round of the questions answered in the quiz at BAF '98. How would you have done?

1. In the book, Moonfishes are described as having anal fins that are fan-shaped in females and pointed in males. What do we now call these fishes?
2. Where does the Thick-lipped gourami (*Colisa labiosa*) come from in the wild?
3. The book describes the Ladder fish or Brazilian halfmoon - what do we call this fish nowadays?
4. Breeding goldfish are described as possessing 'Pearl beading in the males' - what do we call this today?
5. How do you sex goldfish outside of the breeding season?
6. Which fish uses 'air and buccal secretion' (as the book puts it)?

ANSWERS

1. Platies; 2. India (or 'British India' as the book puts it); 3. Angelfish (*Pterophyllum scalare*); 4. Tubercles; 5. Males have a slightly depressed anal region; females a slight protrusion; 6. Labyrinth fishes to build a bubble nest (air and spit).

website.

The millennium shows moved yet again. With Arnie becoming ill the organisation of the Shows became the responsibility of Brian Walsh of FNAS. Brian is also a member of Northern Goldfish & Pondkeepers Society, hence, with their Chairman, Sherridan Moores, agreed to combine the NGPS Open Show with BAF at the venue of St. Matthews Hall in Stretford, Manchester. BAF is traditionally held on a Saturday and so BAF was held on the Sunday.

Although the NGPS OS was well attended by the Goldfish people, the BAF entries were poor (less than 100 by 2006) and attendance poor. Brian Walsh therefore moved the 2007 BAF to his home town of Darwen, at the Highfield Working Men's Club, where the Catfish people usually meet.

Held on Sunday 12th August 2007, entry was now free (the 2006 BAF charged £2). Fish entries were much better at 290 with well attended Champion of Champions (Tropical & Coldwater). Repeated in 2009 (25th October) at Darwen, the entries fell to 80, although there was 20 entries to Champion of Champions. There were no trade stands – except the Aquarian Advisory Service with Dr David Ford, as always.

At a meeting of FNAS members it was decided that BAF would hold a final Open Show in 2010. The few remaining members of FNAS (Oldham, Preston, Merseyside, Alden, Darwen, Workington, Solway, NGPS, CSG) were contacted with a plea to attend.

NGPS Newsletter April / May 2010



**BRITISH AQUARIST'S FESTIVAL
FISHKEEPING EXHIBITION
SUNDAY 1st AUGUST 2010**

At Highfield Working Mens Club, Ratcliffe Street, Darwen BB3 2BZ

FESTIVAL FEATURES

F.N.A.S. Open Show

"Champion of Champions Tropical & Coldwater Contests"

Trade Stands include Yorkshire Brine Shrimp, Cichlid Group (sale of books & live cultures), Aquarium Home Services, Dr David Ford, N.G.P.S

REFRESHMENTS and BAR, RAFFLE

AUCTION

To pre book lots telephone 0161 368 4814 or E-Mail Royad@aol.com

ADMISSION: Free OPEN TO PUBLIC 1.00pm

FOR FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT SHOW ORGANISER
Sherridan Moores (0161) 969 7567 Email aufish@tiscali.co.uk or B. Walsh
(01254) 776567 E Mail g.b.w@live.co.uk

**ORGANISED BY THE FEDERATION OF NORTHERN
AQUARIUM SOCIETIES**

....and so the era of British Aquarists' Festivals ended...except when an attempt to renew the Shows was made in 2013. The details of this, now final, Show are on this website. It lasted 62 years – with lots of memories. There now follows some of those...

The first 'History of BAF' article appeared in 'The Aquarium Gazette' (see www.theaquariumgazette.com) in 2017, written by aquarists John Robertson (both son and father) with a foreword by their friend Ron Atherton. Their two-part article can be read in the Aquarium Gazette's digital magazine (Issue 48ff) with photographs from BAF over the years.

Mainly the text is reproduced here from that article and its personal memories of BAF.

Introduction by Ron Atherton

John Robertson of Gateshead was a talented breeder of tropical fish and a respected judge and lecturer, who visited the BAF for over 25 years and competed there many times. This is his tribute to the people who made the show special.

Now a retired senior but still an active golfer, John gave up fishkeeping some years ago but he still gives advice to his son, the younger John Robertson, who remains a keen aquarist and has written several articles for fishkeeping magazines. Here is John Junior's contribution to The Aquarium Gazette about BAF.

John Robertson writes...

I visited the British Aquarists Festival at Belle Vue Park, Manchester on many occasions from the early sixties right through consecutively into the eighties and I always claimed it was the greatest fish show in the world! I competed there many times and judged a few as well, and it was always one of my favourite times of the year. It was always an exciting event with wondrous and exotic treasures to be seen - a fishkeepers Aladdin's Cave! The late great Jack Hems called it 'this stupendous show... the best in Europe'.

To some it is the bustling masses they remember buzzing in anticipation like a football crowd and quite unlike the normally peaceful calm of most fish shows. There were usually 10,000 visitors and the opportunity to meet and continue relationships with folk who had journeyed from all around the UK made it a special social event. To others the imaginative and superbly crafted society tableaux are recalled, each ornamented with at least one beautiful furnished aquaria. For many it was the dozens of trade stands offering fish and goods from around the globe that drew them to this fishkeepers Mecca. For me though, the trade stands and the tableaux were mere trimmings, peripheral niceties. Indeed, for me the BAF was all about the fish. In 1967 - a typical year - there were 1,388 competitive entries. As a regular and avid attendee at fish shows the excellence of the fish on display was the highlight of each year.

Champion of Champions

There were numerous annual trophies to be won but class winners were also given a distinctive silver lapel badge. I still treasure mine. A special gold badge and a cheque for £50 (about 2 weeks' wages for me in the seventies) was presented to the winner of the Blue Ribbon event, Champion of Champions. This contest was reserved for those special fish which had already won Best in Shows at the year's open shows. In those days each region would have a show almost every Sunday between March and October and therefore this competition easily attracted 40 top quality fish.

Lemon Fin Barbs

One of the greatest fish I ever saw was a Lemon Fin Barb (*Hypsibarbus* species) owned by Mr and Mrs Bird of the South Park Study Society which won Champion of Champions in 1972. I judged at BAF that year and was delighted to be presented with such a beauty. With the small head, deep, deep body and enormous gleaming scales typical of adults of this species, it truly deserved the 90 points it was awarded and at 18 inches long it held its huge curvy fins with a calm majesty as if it had been crowned king. Lemon fin barbs are naturally impressive and often did well at BAF. A few years earlier, before judges knew how spectacular a fish they could be, an immature specimen became the first Champion of Champions. Then in 1975 my close friend and travelling companion, Vic Davison, won the title

with another fine Lemon Fin. Vic, who raised many superb big Barbs, was a quiet, gentle man, and one-time England international sea-angler. He never bragged but he could be coaxed into talking enthusiastically about his Barbs, his facial expressions comically depicting their exuberance after water changes and the alertness with which they could pounce upon mealworms or earthworms. Just as easily he would recount the proverbial fisherman's tales of catching great Sharks off the Isle of Arran and of monstrous record breaking Conger Eels.

Velifera Mollies

At an earlier event a giant Velifera Molly, stretching its enormous sail to the limit was the best Livebearer I ever knew by a country mile! I kept going back to look at it over and over again. It was truly an honour to see such a fish even though the judges disagreed - it was only placed third! Another lovely Velifera, exuberantly displaying its dorsal to a rival in the next tank won Best in Show for John and Stuart Hall, show stalwarts from the progressive Aireborough club, in 1974. John went on to become BAF show manager in subsequent years.

That Molly narrowly pipped one of the best fish I have ever owned. In a tank flooded by sunlight nothing can match the beauty of Congo Tetras (*Phenacogrammus interruptus*) and this individual, the first I had ever seen, grew to over 4.5 inches. I had shown it on numerous occasions but as the first of its kind in our area, it suffered from the ignorance of judges. 'Ragged fins' they would say, time and again, but eventually I passed the fish onto a friend, Bob Shanks, who entered two males in the BAF pairs class. This time the ignorance of the judges worked in its favour - the pair won their class and with sunlight streaming upon him the now old male was chosen as runner up to the Molly and declared Best Egglayer in Show. I will always wonder if the judges would have been confident to deem the pair as two males had Bob not filled his furnished aquaria entry, sitting barely two feet away, with a dozen baby Congos he had purchased just a week earlier!

Other Species

There were the Checker Barbs of Oldham's Mr Gregory, as big and deep bodied as Tiger Barbs, and the huge glowing Harlequins of Lincoln's Hans Kuhn. I remember a wonderful Powder Blue *Labeotropheus fuelleborni* that

won prizes over several years, its size and strength increasing as its gleaming colours diminished with age. It was owned by Mr Ormesher of the great Southport club, Sandgrounders, but the first time it appeared it was beaten in its class by a large Red Oscar of such fiery hues that it truly merited the name.

A shining Pumpkinseed Sunfish (*Lepomis gibbosus*) was the best coldwater fish I can remember when it took the title in 1971.

I can still picture all these fine fishes but one looms larger in my imagination than any other, recalled from the mists of my memory. I was a young man when Ron Atherton was showing his Tiger Scat (*Scatophagus argus*) and my memory of it is no doubt enhanced by the impact it made on experienced fishkeepers at the time and the almost mythological reverence it commanded, far and wide, long after its demise. It was beautifully marked and exhibited the rudest of health and confidence on the show bench but in its strength of body it surpassed everything else I have ever seen. It was ten inches long, almost as deep and a full one inch between the eyes. Ron tells of the fish's enormous appetite. It consumed a jam jar full of earthworms every day.



Ron's Tiger Scat. This photo was taken by BAF Judge Barry Pengilley and used to illustrate the fish in the book *Complete Guide to Tropical Freshwater Fish* from Ward Lock 1970. A famous fish indeed.

However, Ron Atherton's *Distichodus sexfasciatus* (C of C Winner 1979), in my opinion, will never be matched....



A huge Black shark (*Morulius chrysophekadion*) appeared on one occasion but it was outshone by a smaller specimen (some 14 inches, tip to tip) which seemed just about perfect to me. Every scale bore a golden dot and the fish literally danced in its show tank, spreading its fins, performing rolls, and entertaining all admiring onlookers

.... but I must cover other aspects of the wonderful show so I will end this fishy hall of fame with other aquatic legends

Mr Walker & Mr Cooke

Cliff Walker showed us the first large Silver Shark ever seen and it was splendid. It was so strong in the body that some people actually doubted it was the same species as the skinny silvery fish that were just then becoming so popular. Cliff's Silver Shark was Best in Show at two consecutive BAF's (1962/1963). Although a quiet character, Cliff was a very knowledgeable aquarist, a most respected judge and as show manager for

many years few people ever worked as hard to make the BAF such a huge success.

There were however other strong characters involved in putting on such a grand event. Most notable was George Cooke who had been a steward at the very first BAF in 1951 and was then show secretary and principal organiser during the 25 halcyon years that followed. George was a gentleman who kept a strict reign on the finances of the Federation of Northern Aquarist Societies and by doing so he ensured the viability of the British Aquarists Festival for many years, even despite the rampant inflation of the 70's. This was not Mr Cooke's only significant claim to fame in the hobby. By corresponding with a lady in Sweden, Mrs. Moreton Grindal, he was largely responsible for introducing to the hobby, the worm which bears her name and has since proven to be one of the very best foods for tropical fish.

Here is Mr George Cooke presenting John Robertson (Snr) with his Best in Show award at SAF - the Scottish equivalent to BAF - in 1977



The Tableaux

In format the BAF was original. Aquarists could only enter their fish as part of a club effort with each societies' fish gathered together on a club stand. There were often 25 societies exhibiting, representing some 200 competitors and well over 1000 show entries. Although copied successfully in later years by the Scottish Aquarists Festival and the Yorkshire Aquarist

Festival, a clubs' collective spirit was demonstrated better at BAF by the wonderful tableaux which decorated many of these stands. There was great imagination, colour and craftsmanship in the best of them. In 1970 Oldham's Wells Fargo Stagecoach, complete with leather harness, shotgun, and cacti appeared so authentic that apparently the judges debated whether it had actually been borrowed from a museum. It was my personal favourite. Arthur Boarder, the great goldfish expert however described Northwich's excellent Challenger Army Tank as the finest stand he had ever seen. A model of Edinburgh Castle was judged best tableaux in 1973 followed by Castleford's reproduction of Stephenson's Rocket in 1974 and their Hovercraft in 1976. In 1977 York presented a magnificent model of their Minster. They were all worthy winners.

Few of the show visitors could appreciate how much planning and work went into constructing such elaborate life size models, not just painstaking in detail but with all the facilities of heating, air pumps and lighting incorporated to display the integral show tanks to great effect. Sadly, the effort of staging these displays was not sustained in later years and by 1980 one commentator observed that the artistic tableaux seemed a thing of the past.

Setting-up

The BAF was open to the public Saturdays and Sundays, and the exhibits were judged on Fridays, so Thursday was setting up day. As much as possible would be prepared the weekend before - tanks and gravel cleaned, lead weights cut, electrics checked. As soon as I finished work on Wednesday evening we would carefully pack the van with the stands and equipment and water containers ready for an early start the following morning and then I would start dismantling the living room tank and this would take hours, usually to midnight. The plants were teased out gently to prevent damage to the delicate fronds and so the disturbed sediment didn't soil them. Any old, damaged or algaed leaves were precisely trimmed away and the plants were weighted into buckets of water to prevent them twisting.

Early on Thursday we would fill containers full of our own water, catch our numerous fish (many of whom refused to go quietly), and load the buckets and boxes into the van, before picking up fish from club members who

couldn't get the time off work or who weren't quite as fanatical as the rest of us! If all went to plan, we would set off from Newcastle at 9-ish and arrive at Belle Vue by about lunch time; but we never had lunch. There was always too much to do.

Erecting a stand, even one designed to be simple, took several hours by the time electrics were connected, tanks filled, and facades attached. Only then would the painstaking artistry of the furnished aquaria begin and usually the tank wouldn't be complete until the early hours of Friday morning. By then hours of concentration would see me exhausted but I always insisted on wandering around the huge hall to see the other exhibits, plastic coffee cup in hand, before returning to my intended masterpiece and adding the finishing touches and then finally adding the fish.

I couldn't afford to buy plants for the competition but grew them all in my living room tank which was forever a jungle of numerous rare and common varieties. This tank was adjacent to a window and received considerable sunlight. Growing plants was easier anyway in those days when little box filters in the corner caused insufficient turbulence to facilitate the escape of carbon dioxide, and hoods were fitted for clear tungsten bulbs which were more expensive to run than modern fluorescent tubes but provided a more powerful and suitable light for the plants.

It was all about People

In fact, a small group of fish fanatics then formed Northumbrian Aquarists, with the express aim of showing fish at the highest level. In other words, a club established to compete at the British Aquarist Festival and other similar events. The membership of Northumbrian Aquarists was strictly limited to the best fishkeepers in our region and besides my son and I, it included Ron Atherton and Vic Davison, already mentioned as two who would go on to win Champions of Champions; Tony Bebington, a dentist and Cichlid fan; Len McCourt, an abrasive Mancunian who ran an excellent tropical fish store in Newcastle for many years and was particularly fond of Catfish (he was also a founder member of Catfish International, one of the first specialist societies); and Dick Nessworthy, an all-round aquarist with a lively sense of humour. One of the quieter members was Ernie Snaith, a former beatnik turned Kung Fu expert who was my father's disciple in the art of furnished aquaria. Ernie craftily demonstrated that one of the advantages of showing

your fish at the BAF was that you could place your entry next to any other on your club's stand. Ernie had an outstanding Black Ruby Barb (*Barbus nigrofasciatus*) that displayed constantly in its home tank to a large Kissing Gourami, but normally the Barb faded badly on the show bench. At Belle Vue Ernie was able to place the Barb and Gourami in adjacent tanks within clear view of each other. The Barb then stood out blood-red, like a jewel.

That was in 1974 and there were record crowds of over 17,000 that year and the queue to enter the hall was a hundred yards long on the Sunday afternoon. Although we didn't win Best in Show that year (Brian Cooper of Hartlepool won with a lovely *Heros severum*), Northumbrian Aquarists did particularly well. Indeed, the veteran Jack Hems wrote in his show report that our stand 'was emblazoned with first prize stickers'. It was the oddballs in our tanks that took his eye and he particularly mentioned a Spotted Sleeper (*Domitator maculatus*), a Snakehead (*Channa lucius*) and a swift swimming Characin, *Brycon falcatus* - all large predators. Jack was my favourite author and his book 'The Goldfish', co-written with George Hervey during the dark days of war and published in 1948, remains one of the hobbies greatest works. It was always a treat to meet him at the show.

Indeed, the annual event was a great place to meet old friends and make new ones. I particularly looked forward to seeing Duncan & Buntie Fotheringham, Stevie Naismith and Billy Goodwin, all stalwarts of the hobby in Scotland; and Melvyn Strange, an expert in rare Livebearers, and Bendix Bissoon, a small guy with a larger than life personality and too many great fish to mention, who both came from Basingstoke at the other end of these islands. Greg Sibson from Nottingham was an experienced judge and a gentleman, and so was Sheffield's gentle giant, Frank Toyne.

Furnished Aquaria

One of the great aspects of BAF was the Furnished Aquaria competitions. There were various classes but the rules stated that each society had to enter at least one planted tank and this created a contest of skill and produced an exhibition of beautiful natural aquaria. Many of them were densely planted in the Dutch style and of a standard that would today impress even Takashi Amano. Barry Pengilley, a successful photographer of fish, was the judge who decided between them. The greatest exponent

was David Shields of Halifax who won many contests in the sixties and seventies. Indeed, his enthusiasm for the BAF was perhaps unparalleled - he had won a first at the inaugural show in 1951 and was still winning in 1980!

Misadventures

Some years we stayed in boarding houses, usually the cheapest and grottiest we could find. One member of Mount Pleasant, a rough diamond called Bob Shanks who had some talent for the furnished aquaria, missed the van at Newcastle and arrived by train much later with his plants in a large plastic bag and not a penny to his name. We therefore enrolled as show stewards, runners for the judges, and we were allowed to sleep three nights on the floor behind the club stand. Bob scrounged a heater, some lead, and a dozen Tiger Barbs from various trade stands and then had the nerve to take one of the major prizes for his planted tank. In later years a Manchester aquarist, Eric Price, offered us his caravan and wouldn't hear of us paying.

I loved the BAF. I judged there on several occasions and I can remember vividly my elation when I was first invited. I still consider it the highpoint of twenty-five years in the hobby. My earliest visits to the BAF were with Johnson Hood, a headmaster and authoritarian individual, and also an outstanding aquarist who had initially introduced me to the furnished aquaria challenge. He had bred Neons before the war when they were still considered rare jewels, but he had achieved a greater fame as a breeder of wonderful Bristol Shubunkins, winning numerous awards at Belle Vue. In 1961 Johnson Hood was the show's best overall competitor and Arthur Boarder, a man who knew, described his fish as 'the best coloured Shubunkins I have ever seen' to the chagrin of the Goldfish Society of Great Britain whom Mr Hood chose not to join. Johnson made a pretty penny selling his young Shubunkins to the BAF's American and Irish visitors.

On another occasion I went to the BAF working on one of the trade stands for Ian Hunt of Sunderland. Ian had as little charm (for those who didn't know him) as Cliff Walker had, but they shared a similar work ethic. Over the three nights his staff also slept behind the fish tanks, but we were well

paid. On the journey back to the North East, Ian treated us to a juicy T-bone steak at one of Lancashire's best restaurants. The head waiter at first suggested that to judge from our work clothes we had better try the burger bar down the road, only to apologise profusely when his mind was changed by an enormous role of fivers that Ian produced from his jacket pocket, the proceeds of a very successful weekend.

I know how much work was involved because I have 'been there'. With Mount Pleasant Society of Gateshead, I was one of a small group of people who built a six-foot-high stand in four parts, arranged to represent the leaves of a book (standing on its end) and illustrated by artistic and gaudy hand drawn maps with lines leading to each of its tanks. So we formed an Atlas depicting accurately the natural home range of our exhibits. The back of the stand was expertly upholstered in leather by one of our members and we were rightly proud of our achievement which had taken several weeks of our spare time to create and more of our pocket money than any of us had planned. Yet still we had to hire a van large enough to transport it and take days off work to travel and erect it and install all the tanks and dozens of fish. Remember this was in the decade of fuel crises, short-time working and winters of discontent. Only a great love of your hobby can lead people to do such things. We won no prizes that year but our appetite was whetted and we returned in subsequent years with better fish.

The Trade Stands

Every year up to 30 trade stands attracted hordes of hobbyists to visit the BAF. There was always something special to be had. There was always something available that we had never seen before, a fish we couldn't name or a new product from Germany, USA or Japan. Indeed, it was generally believed that in the early years the manufacturers and importers timed new introductions to coincide with the show. One year I came home with the first 8-inch Clown Loach ever imported. It gobsmailed all who saw it - for a year - at the following BAF two 12 inch specimens were on offer! Another year a selection of huge, glorious Golden Velifera Mollies, the likes of which I have never seen since, were all sold in minutes while I procrastinated over the price. One year Keith Barraclough of King British imported a number of stupendous Guppies from USA, huge shiny black and red beauties, one of

which won numerous shows and was widely considered in our region as the best Guppy ever seen. There always seemed to be something for everyone.

So for almost half a century the British Aquarists Festival remained the highlight of the fishkeepers calendar. Crowds gathered at Belle Vue for a weekend every autumn for various reasons. It doesn't really matter whether the prime attraction lay in the bargains offered by so many trade stands, or in the novelty of the society tableaux, or the beauty of the furnished aquariums or perhaps the opportunity to renew acquaintances. I will just say thank you to all those people in the Federation of Northern Aquarist Societies and the Aquarist & Pondkeeper magazine who put on such a splendid show and all those fellow competitors who went to such efforts and allowed me to see so many outstanding fishes.

END of John Robertson's article.

My memories of BAF by Dr David Ford, Aquatic Services

When the Aquarian® Fish Food range was launched in 1975, I was given the job of bringing it to the attention of aquarists with the help of our advertising agency QED. By far the most visited petfish show was BAF by the FNAS ... so we built a stand at the Show and I recruited the winners who used Aquarian, for QED to prepare adverts about it and BAF. This continued for many years....

This is just one of many adverts about BAF's winners. More examples can be seen on this website...check the pages.

**"Champion of Champions,
1975 British Aquarist Festival.
Best in Show,
Scottish Aquarist Festival.
Best in Show, Hartlepool Open.
Best in Show, South Shields
Open.
I've won them all-and
many more-with AQUARIAN."**



Vic Davison, of the Northumbrian Aquarists, receives his 1975 Champion of Champions Award at Belle Vue, Manchester. "I have used Aquarian since it was first introduced. Its quality is unimpeachable... my fish accept it with obvious relish," he says. **Aquarian. Because you can't beat fresh food for healthy fish.**



Aquarian is manufactured and distributed by Thomas's, Pelton Lane, Halifax HX1 5QP.

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BRITISH AQUARISTS FESTIVAL

Mr. & Mrs. A. Underwood
1st prizes in: Fancy Goldfish Fantail - Orandas.
Best pair of fish in show, A.V. Coldwater Fair, and Best Coldwater fish in show.
"The fish prefer 'Aquarian' to any other fish food. They thrive on it."

Mr. D. Shields, 1st prizes in: Tropical Furnished Aquaria, and Coldwater furnished Aquaria.
"I've fed the Cardinals since 1981 on 'Aquarian' and they are now first class fish."

Mr. & Mrs. A. Berry
1st prizes in: Best Coldwater Breeders, Best Shubunkin and Best Swordtail.
"We always use 'Aquarian' as it provides a balanced diet and does not cloud the water."

Mr. R. Colley
1st prize Moors and Vellails.
"I use 'Aquarian' because I find it is the best flake on the market."

P. & T. A. Cruickshanks
Champion of Champions
"I've always used 'Aquarian'."

The British Aquarists Festival held at Belle Vue, Manchester on November 6th and 7th, 1982 again proved to be a showpiece for the very best of British aquarists. Once again it was 'Aquarian' fish flakes that stole the show.

When we asked the top winners which food they fed - time and time again the same answer came back - 'Aquarian' flakes.

Why? Some said it was because 'Aquarian' is made from only the finest natural fresh ingredients. Others replied it was because 'Aquarian' is painstakingly prepared under the strictest factory conditions. 'Aquarian' flakes are hermetically

**TOP
WINNERS
RECOMMEND
aquarian**
The fresh approach
to flaked fish food

sealed after manufacture to retain their full, natural and nourishing freshness. Whatever the reasons - there's no doubt that the top aquarists at the British Aquarists Festival had one reason in common - fish fed on 'Aquarian' get results. Ask the winners of the British Aquarist Festival.



'Aquarian' is a registered trade mark and is manufactured in the U.K. by Thomas's, Pelton Lane, Halifax HX1 5QP.

BRITISH AQUARISTS FESTIVAL 1995

Top aquarists at BAF recommend Aquarian® Foods.



"There's never been any doubt in my mind, Aquarian® Foods are by far the best fish foods on the market" says Peter Jones, winner of five classes at BAF – a view reflected by numerous other winners – top aquarists who, over the years, have realised that Aquarian® Foods provide unrivalled quality and nutrition. Take a tip from top aquarists at the 1995 British Aquarists Festival – feed your fish on Aquarian®.



Mr M. Agnew –
'Best in Show'

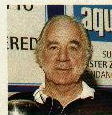
Mr P. Jones –
'Best Marine, Marine Pairs,
Tropical, Tropical Pairs and
Furnished Marine Aquarium'

Mr P. Cank –
'Best Common Goldfish,
Shubunkin, Moors & Veiltails
and Fancy Goldfish'

Mr & Mrs Crew –
'Best Small Arranged Pairs'



Mr & Mrs Robinson –
'Best Goldfish, Loach'



Mr E. Williams –
'Best Goldfish Pairs,
Coldwater Breeders'



Mr B. Drake –
'Best Toothpicks – Top
Spawners, Toothpick Pairs
and Breeders – Egg-layers'



Mr B. Street –
'Best Cuppy, Linebreeder Pairs,
Large Barb Pairs, Large Characins
and Danios & Whynows'



RECOMMENDED BY TOP AQUARISTS

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Special to readers of **Practical Fishkeeping**

100

FREE TICKETS

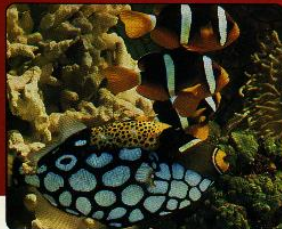
TO THE

British Aquarists Festival

26/27 October 1996

At Bowlers Exhibition & Conference Centre,
Longbridge Road, Trafford Park, Manchester.

with



- All your fishkeeping needs under one roof
- Free lectures from leading fishkeeping experts
- Children's entertainment area
- Free car parking for 500 cars
- Expert help & advice on all aspects of fishkeeping
- Specialist society displays
- AQUARIAN® Aquachamp final
- Live aquarium displays

The British Aquarists Festival is one of the highlights of the fishkeeping year. And now you can get a **FREE TICKET** to this great annual fishkeeping show. All you need to do is put your name and address on a postcard and send it to: "AQUARIAN® BAF Draw", Practical Fishkeeping, EMAP Apex, Apex House, Oundle Road, Peterborough PE2 9NP. All entries will be put together and the first 100 people drawn will receive a free ticket to the British Aquarists Festival, plus a voucher for a free 25g pot of AQUARIAN® Tropical Flakes food to be redeemed on the AQUARIAN® stand during the show.

CLOSING DATE 18TH AUGUST 1996

RULES

- Closing Date for entries 18th August 1996.
- Open to UK residents aged 18 or over only except employees of EMAP UK Limited, their agents or anyone connected with the promotion or their families.
- Only one entry per household. Prize taken valid for one person for one day only. Travel not included.
- No responsibility will be accepted for entries lost, damaged or delayed in the post. Proof of posting is not proof of receipt.
- The first 100 entries drawn will win a ticket for the British Aquarists Festival to be held on 26/27 October 1996 and a voucher redeemable against a 25g pot of Aquarian Tropical Flakes food at the Aquarian stand at the show. No cash alternative. No correspondence will be entered into.
- No purchase necessary. Entries can be made by writing your name and address on a blank piece of paper, marking it "Aquarian BAF Draw" and send it to the address shown above.
- Draw will take place on 15th September 1996 and entries will be sealed within 28 days of draw. Winner names available from the promoter after 15th September 1996. Please include an SAE marked "Aquarian BAF competition Winner".
- Promoter Pedigree Petfoods, a division of EMAP UK Ltd, Apex House, Oundle, LE13 1EB.

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Year after year the Aquarian stand was set-up in the BAF exhibition from Belle Vue to Manchester Exhibition Centres to Variety Clubs to Darwen, with every style from a Product-selling one to the free Aquarian Advisory Service...



Recruiting the Champion of Champion winners meant I was able to chat to, and become friends of, all the top aquarists over some 50 years of competitions. Many of these aquarists are listed in the above article by John Robertson. Everyone was special in so many ways and to give my personal opinions on each would need a very large book, not just a website. One, however, was extra special – Arnold Chadwick. He was the Champion of Champions for BAF. The Show never really recovered from his loss. This FNAS website is his memorial. Browse its other pages.

A Pictorial History of BAF

There are many articles written by aquarists over the years about BAF – here is just one, which is typical of the show's success (two pager)

BAF '93 OUT &

The Wood Man Wins Again

by Dr David Ford — Aquarian Advisory Service

Photographs by Jon Montgomery

Things are really hotting up on the *Aquarist & Pondkeeper* sponsored **Champion of Champions** competition front. Even as this year's top award was being named, the buzz going around was that some very special fish are being prepared for the next show season to join battle with this year's double-winning entry.

Bearing in mind the outstanding quality of our current champion, the new crop being groomed for stardom in 1994 is going to have to be REALLY special. What a mouthwatering prospect! And, by all accounts, some of these newcomers on the show scene promise to be giants of their kind.

Not that this is going to put off **Andy Duck** of the **Northern Area Catfish Group** who won the **Champion of Champions** at the British Aquarist Festival for the second year running with his magnificent Suckermouth Catfish, *Pseudacanthicus leopardus*. The only other aquarist to achieve this distinction was **Ted Derrick** of **Alton AS**, who gave Andy lots of competition this year with no less than six entries for the **Champion of Champions** final.

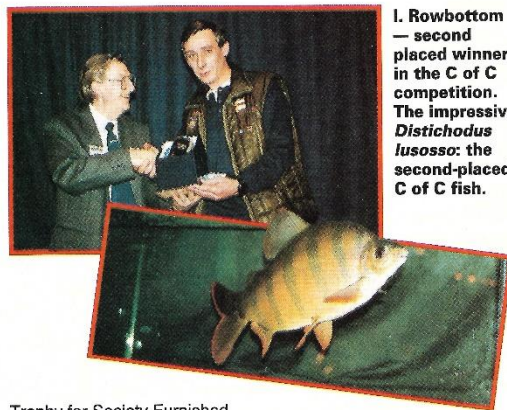
Another competitor for the title was **Alex Torbet** of **Edinburgh AS**, who was featured in the November issue of *Aquarist & Pondkeeper*. He won the Best in Show at the Scottish Aquarist Festival with a Green Swordtail, *Xiphophorus helleri*, raised in his Fish House in Edinburgh Prison.

The same fish was sent by rail to the British Aquarist Festival venue of Bowler's Leisure Centre, Manchester. Alex then followed to collect his fish on prize-giving day. He also entered a large *Tilapia* from his work with the Institute of Aquaculture at the prison. This was a *Tilapia rendalli* which is not known in the hobby. The fish did not reach the final four, but if it would have scored better under the *T. rendalli* standards, rather than those for *T. mariae* under which it was judged, Alex will never know.

The Show was held on 30 and 31 October for the 42nd time, and for 40 of those years **David Shields** of **Halifax AS** has been showing his fish! At BAF '93 his club won the beautiful Cussons



General view of the packed hall on the Sunday.



I. Rowbottom — second placed winner in the C of C competition. The impressive *Distichodus lusosso*: the second-placed C of C fish.



Fergie Brown, deserved third placed winner in the C of C.

Trophy for Society Furnished Aquaria for the 18th consecutive time! To celebrate this event, David was given a special diploma, along with the trophy. As presenter of the prizes, I was also very pleased to award him an Aquarian sweatshirt.

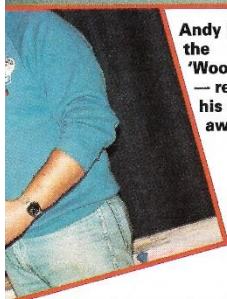
Best in Show was another Catfish (always popular with the judges) *Ancistrus dolichopterus* owned by **Trevor Morris**, another member of Andy's Club, the **NACG**. The Gold, Silver and Bronze *Aquarist & Pondkeeper* pins were awarded to Andy, to **I. Rowbottom** of **Tameside AS**, and **F. Brown** of the **West of Scotland Goldfish Society**. As



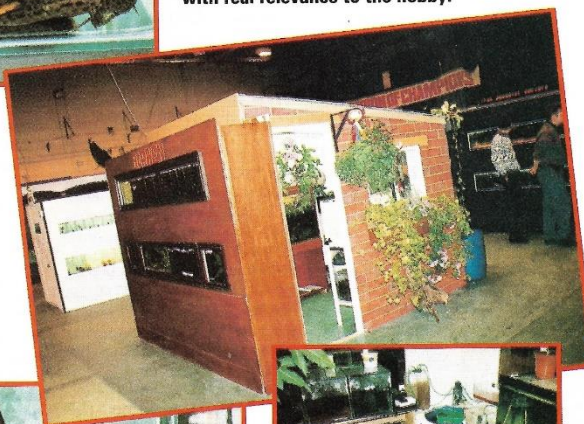
ABOUT



The top C of C fish, *Pseudacanthicus leopardus*, is likely to come up against stiff competition next season.



Andy Duck — the 'Wood Man' — receiving his C of C award.



Inside Darwen's fish house.



Fergie's outstanding Calico Fantail.



There were about forty entries in this year's 'expanded' C of C.



Ferdie-Dee the clown has become a welcome fixture on the show circuit. Children love him . . . and he's a pretty decent fishkeeper, too!

As a result of introducing silver and bronze pins, the number of entries for the Champion of Champions has increased dramatically since 1992, with names already being registered for 1994!

The Show did not attract large numbers of visitors on the Saturday, so it was never too crowded. However, traders reported that those visitors who did attend were buying, not just looking. There were many things for aquarists to buy, too, with no less than six stands selling live fish. These were JMC, BeltonFish Farm, Tropics

MAJOR BAF '93 AWARDS

Champion of Champions:
1, Andy Duck (NACG);
2, I. Rowbottom (Tameside AS); 3, F. Brown (W. Scotland Goldfish); 4, Mr and Mrs P. Dawson (CAST '88).

Highest Pointed Tableaux:
1, Darwen AS; 2, Isle of Wight AS; 3, Scorpion AS; 4, CAST '88; 5, Silktown ST.

Best Fish in Show: T. J. Morris (NACG).

of Stockport, Euro Discus, Peak Aquatics and Bubbles Aquatics.

As usual, plenty of fish food and treatments were on sale at specially reduced prices for the show, including Aquarian, Tetra, OSI, Ruto Frozen Foods, WaterLife and Yorkshire Brine Shrimp Supplies. Aquariums and accessories were available from Merlin, Coral Reef, Global-custom, Rosewood and so on.

Sunday saw many more visitors and the show was much busier, with many charabancs of aquarium clubs from around the country, including Scotland and Wales. The general public, too, arrived in force on Sunday, and to cater for these, 13 societies in the FNAS showed their fish in tableaux.

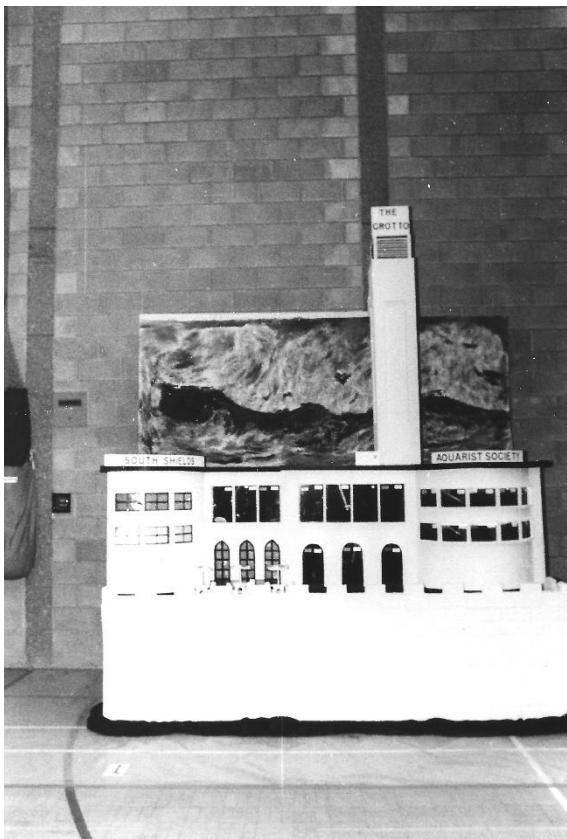
The well deserved winning tableau was a complete, life-size fish house with flowing tap and rain pipe running into a rainwater tub, by Darwen AS. Second was an unusual display by the Isle of Wight AS of antique items for aquarists collected by members over the years. Scorpion's 'Mouse with Cheese' came third, despite their mouse getting jammed!

Several societies opted for the simple box display, a trend that has developed over recent years. However, Cast '88 managed a fourth prize because the box was so well made.

The title of this article: **Wood Man Wins Again** refers to the fact that Andy Duck is called the Wood Man, he is so keen on adding petrified wood to his display tanks. His collection of catfish are kept in ideal conditions with the acid, brown waters created by petrified logs, and Andy believes that catfish such as his winning *P. leopardus* feel more at home in the twisted wood caves of the logs.

Andy forsook all the usual prizes offered to the Championship winner and asked for the pick of the stall of Cornish Bogwood. He chose two interlocking giant pieces of petrified wood, to be installed in his brand new 6-foot aquarium, a suitable new home for the double winner of **Champion of Champions**.

That was in the 1990s, here are photos from the 1980s at Belle Vue ...



In the background is the winning tableau – it is 'The Grotto' which was a famous pub in South Shields. Built by South Shields AS to house their club's fish entries.

The runner-up was a Cottage by Redcar AS. In those days' clubs from the North and South of Great Britain made the journey to Belle Vue.



Back to the 1990s and here is an entry by Halifax AS – a traditional box, which was the simplest way of displaying their fish in each Class....



More elaborate was this box turned into a local bus by the Lakeland AS....



...as always, when opened to the public, after the judging, the crowds entered....



More BAF tableaux over the years...









...and, of course, lots of Trade Stands – here is just one....



... if you have BAF memories to publish, let me know at: -
drdmford@outlook.com.
