



*(Drawing by John Beams)*

**Mr. Harrison as most of us knew him.**

**The drawing by the late Wren Sargeant on the cover shows Mr. Harrison fishing for pike in the winter of 1916 during his convalescence in England after Delville Wood.**

## ARTHUR CECIL HARRISON

By FRANK R. BRADLOW

SO A.C. has gone! To those of us who knew him, he seemed indestructible. Even as he grew frailer physically with years, his spirit seemed to become more indestructible. It was hard to believe he would not be with us always. Now that he has gone it is hard to believe he is not with us still. His legacy to us and to all freshwater angling is represented by the Cape Piscatorial Society to which he devoted his many talents, and to which he dedicated all his enthusiasm and efforts. He impressed his own character and personality on the Society, and saying this is in no way to detract from the conscientious and skilled committees, and particularly the executive officers who have guided the Society's activities. They always leaned heavily on A.C.'s advice, and we have all benefited from it.

In August 1977 when I was on holiday in Germany I wrote a tribute to A.C. on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Society's journal PISCATOR, which he edited for 48 years. Even so far away from Cape Town, A.C.'s personality was felt so strongly by me that I experienced no difficulty in paying him a sincere and deserved tribute.

In that tribute (PISCATOR No. 100 Dec. 1977) I wrote that, "There can be few people who have met A.C. whose lives have not been enriched; his direct but courteous manner, his dry sense of humour, his encyclopaedic knowledge of nature and fishing, and his urbane and humane wisdom are but a few of the qualities which make those who know him realise they have been in the company of a very unusual individual; one of those rare human beings whose personality makes an indelible impression on one's memory. Long may he prosper and long may we enjoy his advice and his company."

All our lives are richer in every way for having known him. Even those who did not know him well could say the same, for he was a totally unjealous man, forever promoting the cause of angling and helping other people. From the first time we met I enjoyed his company and his complete honesty. There was never anything devious or shabby in his attitudes to other people and his extraordinary enthusiasm and unceasing work for the Society never clouded his judgement.

The details of his life are not without interest. A.C. was born in Crouch End in London in 1890. He told me once that he started fishing "as soon as they would let me", which was at the age of about eight. Like John Ridd in *Lorna Doone*, his first fish were roach and later bream, caught in ponds at Highgate and Hampstead, and the Welsh Harp Reservoir near Hendon. As a small boy too he did some sea fishing from boats and piers. As a boy too, he spent some time on an uncle's farm when he was recuperating from a bout of ill health. Ross, who knew him very well, believes this farm was in Dorset, and that it was there "that his love of the countryside and all it contains was born; and it was there that he first became really interested in fish and fishing".

I rather like a story he told Ross about himself at this time (before coming to South Africa). The office where he worked in London was near the Monument (Wren's 200 ft, column commemorating The Great Fire of 1666), and during his lunch-hours he used to climb it to the top and survey London from this lofty perch.

In 1907 he followed his father to the Cape as a youth of 17 years of age; a fortunate event for all South African freshwater anglers. His father, who had been a teacher in England, had started a typewriter business in Cape Town. In August 1915, when he applied for a commission in the South African Overseas Contingent, he mentioned in his application that he "was educated for a commercial career at the Statoners Company School, London, leaving at the age of 16, and for the past eight years have been in commercial life in Cape Town".

In World War I, A.C. attested for service on 9 October 1914 and served in the "Dukes" (Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles) in the South West Africa campaign as "lance-corporal of scouts"—to use his own term—during 1914-15; and later in Potchefstroom, where he was promoted to sergeant, until the 31st July 1915. On 17 September 1915 he was commissioned in the Cape of Good Hope Regiment (1st S.A. Infantry) at Potchefstroom. He served as platoon commander of the 19th platoon in England, Egypt and France until 1916, when he was severely wounded and shell-shocked at Dellville Wood. He was one of the few officers to survive that battle, now one of the shining pages in South African military history.

Sent to the U.K. for hospitalisation and convalescence, he was eventually boarded for light duty, and seconded to the Military Advisers' Staff. His duties involved him in the inspection of government factories (explosives and gas warfare). While on visits of inspection he travelled extensively in the United Kingdom and his daughter remembers him "talking about fishing in Cheshire and Wales and in Scotland". Ross says he "also fished waters which belonged to, or were made available to the country house which had been given over for a convalescent depot, where A.C.H. was for some time after hospitalisation". (The Society has a drawing of A.C. by Wren Sargent fishing for pike from this depot.) During that period on the Military Advisers' Staff he also inspected coastal defences, and no doubt indulged in both seafishing and freshwater fishing in the course of his travels.

According to his discharge certificate he was released from the service at the Maitland Dispersal Camp on 8 May 1919, after he returned to the Cape as Officer-in-Charge of a draft of the 1st South African Infantry on the *S.S. Intaba*. His permanent address at that time was given simply as Markhams Building, Cape Town. After demobilisation A.C. joined his father's typewriter business, and later became an agent for Smith Premier Typewriters.

On 17 December 1920 he married Gabrielle Charlotte Dubois, who was born in Cape Town after her parents had emigrated from France, in Holy Trinity Church, Kalk Bay.

There were three children of the marriage. Both sons, Professor A. D. Harrison at a university in Canada and Mr. R. C. Harrison a practising architect in Australia, have been at opposite ends of the earth for some years; but both A.C. and Mrs. Harrison were able to visit them from time to time.

Their daughter, Joan, now Mrs. A. G. Ive, lives in Johannesburg, and it was in her care and that of her family and Mrs. Harrison that A.C. was able to spend his last few months. Happily, Mrs. Harrison is in good health and spirits.

Outside his business, his interests were in fishing, and the study of his natural surroundings. In my previous tribute to A.C. I quoted what Prof. A. V. Cowen said of him when the University of Cape Town conferred an honorary degree of Master of Science on him in June 1960. "Calmly, industriously, unostentatiously, for more than 50 years, Mr. Harrison has enriched the world of learning as a freshwater biologist and piscatorial expert. His list of scholarly publications on trout, bass, eels, the kurper, and many exotic fishes is long and impressive." (PISCATOR No. 49, p. 41.)

As I wrote about A.C.'s fishing activities in the hundredth issue of PISCATOR there is no need to repeat them here. Many of the people who fished with him or accompanied him on his journeys of scientific investigation are no longer with us. Fortunately his voluminous notes, correspondence, and printed articles are still available. When they are finally sorted out, catalogued and indexed, the ichthyological scientists, as well as the ordinary angler, will be astounded by the volume of his researches, and by the breadth and comprehensive understanding displayed in his works.

For more than 20 years A.C. served as the Advisory Officer for Cape Inland Fisheries, and in 1952 he became Secretary of the Advisory Committee for Nature Conservation. Again to quote Prof. Cowen, "such men . . . who seek to keep alive our awareness of nature in an industrialised world are rare". There were very few organisations concerned with nature conservation in any form which did not seek his advice.

It was to be expected that when World War II broke out A.C. would volunteer his services. He joined the 24th Battalion of the S.A. Coastal Defence Corps on 5 November 1940. This battalion was a part-time unit of the N.V.B. (National Volunteer Brigade). It was composed mostly of older men who had served in the first war and who had volunteered to help voluntarily with the coastal defence at a time, as A.C.'s daughter, Mrs. Joan Ive, says, "when attack from the sea was not an impossibility". A.C. was appointed a warrant officer, and Mrs. Ive remembers him "going on manoeuvres along Muizenberg beach and Strandfontein and also at Simonstown". One of his duties was to inspect coastal defences, something he had had experience of in the first war. He was demobilised on 31 December 1946.

All this time he had, of course, been editing *PISCATOR*, running the Society, and acting as Advisory Officer for the Cape Inland Fisheries. He also wrote the little booklets giving information about freshwater fishing which were obtainable from the Cape Peninsula Tourist Bureau. He was much more than a secretary for the Society. He kept fishing records, did thousands of scale-readings, did field inspections of fishing waters, gave advice to non-members and visitors, and edited *PISCATOR* alone for over 47 years.

In later years, as his typewriter business declined, largely because typewriter service was done on contract by the companies which sold them, A.C. became solely immersed in the affairs of the Society. These affairs he watched over with affection, with tremendous diligence and with anxious solicitude.

Thus it was that when he became ill, and was unable to carry out his duties, none of us could really accept that the run had come to an end. At the A.G.M. in 1979 it was decided he should remain nominally as secretary and editor. In our heart of hearts, of course, we knew he would not return, but none of us liked to face the fact.

Mercifully, he did not suffer too much or too long. He died in Johannesburg with most of his family around him. At his funeral were at least three members of the Society, Gerry Levin, H. W. Kinsey and another member whose name was not recorded. There may very well have been others, including Peter Arderne.

What more can one say of a man whose life was as full as A.C.'s? The world is very short of people of such excellence of character. Although it is said no man is indispensable, Cape freshwater fishing will never be the same without A.C.H.

We salute his shade and will remember him!

---

#### **LETTER RECEIVED FROM MRS. G. C. HARRISON**

Johannesburg,  
July, 1980.

The Secretary and Members,  
Cape Piscatorial Society.  
Dear Cdr. Snow and Members,

Your letter of the 22nd July has just reached me, enclosing the Society's cheque for R4 022. I have been much moved by the kindness of the Members of the Society in contributing towards this gift to A.C. and by the consideration of the Committee in deciding unanimously to forward it to me as his widow.

My husband was aware that the collection for this gift was in progress and this evidence of the regard and affection of the Members meant a great deal to him in the closing days of his life. He had given much to the Society in terms of time and dedicated work and it was gratifying to him to know that this was appreciated; but more particularly he valued the personal concern and goodwill of which the intended gift was an expression.

When he became ill and had to go to the care of family far from Cape Town, he was especially glad to have any news from or contact with the Society. The visits of an occasional Member or two who were able to call were very much appreciated. He was particularly anxious that PISCATOR should continue to be published, and was gratified to read the various contributions when they were sent to him for approval. It also meant a lot to him to receive letters from Members expressing their regret at his illness, and telling him of their fishing activities. If replies were not received, please be assured that your letters were read, pondered over and appreciated by him even though he was unable to reply to them personally.

My best wishes for the future prosperity of the Society, and thank you for your generosity to me.

Yours sincerely,  
(Signed) G. C. HARRISON.

---

**A great many members expressed their concern over Mr. Harrison's illness and shock at his death when calling at the Society's offices and by telephone.**

**Below are some extracts from letters received at that time.**

## A.C. A PERSONAL FAREWELL

By JOHN BEAMS

**A** MAN is many things to many people. It is therefore on a purely personal note that I wish to pay my last respects to A. C. Harrison. I met him something over 15 years ago, considerably less time than many others have known and loved A. C. But it is enough to feel a deep personal loss and more than enough to realise that his passing marks the end of an era for the Cape Piscatorial Society.

To me, A. C. was guide, philosopher and friend, a very real gentleman and a man who made my life so much the richer for having known him. From henceforth there will always be the sad reminder of his death whenever I start my latest newsletter, no longer the old familiar "Dear A. C."

*From Mr. Ray Louw of Jonkershoek in a letter to Mr. Harrison:*

It came as a shock to learn, only during the past week, that you were ill. For so many years I have taken you for granted; that you were always there at the Club Room. Now I selfishly feel completely sunk. My oracle on fishery matters has been denied me.

*From W. H. Kinsey:*

The passing of A.C.H. has been very distressing and I do wish to record with you my expression of deep sympathy. I first met him in 1947, since when I have been a member of the C.P.S., and he was very good to me then and since. Fortunately, I was able, together with Jerry Levin and another gentleman, to attend the funeral here in Johannesburg.

*From Mr. A. Clauzel in France:*

The death of Mr. Harrison deeply affected me, and I will always remember his smile when listening to members' tales; he knew so well a fisherman's nature.

*From Mr. John Hewitson in California:*

I have never met A.C. but he made me feel that I was a friend right from the first. Our shared interest in the sea-going habits of rainbow trout got things started, but the friendship has continued for over 14 years and I can tell you that I felt closer to him than to many people that I see every day. I valued this friendship beyond my words to express it. A.C. printed several of my contributions and thus made me feel very much a part of PISCATOR and the Society and its varied projects.

It is clear to me that all anglers in Southern Africa owe A. C. Harrison a great debt and his many contributions will remain a living monument in the streams and lakes of that part of the world. I feel privileged to have had this association.

*From Douglas F. Smith:*

In the Editorial you ask for personal notes and comments on A.C.H. for consideration for an obituary. I regret that I cannot offer anything of interest; I am a comparative newcomer to the Cape. However, I can say that the Fisheries Department in Kenya consulted A.C. on several occasions, and followed his advice.

*From Alan Thompson:*

I wondered what tribute we, as a fishing family, could pay to the memory of A.C. I eventually remembered these lines from Larry Koller's *Complete Book of Freshwater Fishing*, written some 17 years ago; to me the finest words on freshwater fishing that have ever been written. My two sons and I owe much to A.C.'s unfailing courtesy and wise counsel. These words are for him, and I hope to all who were privileged to know him.

"Angling is the art of catching fish with a rod, a line, and a hook. It is an ancient and honourable sport; its roots lie deep in the past, a tradition intangible but persistent governs its conduct. The tradition, which received its form and best expression from Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton, permits the angler to be guileful and deceptive, and to bring to bear on the contest whatever wisdom and experience he has been able to accumulate—for so will the fish. But it urges that the fight be fairly fought, and that the fisherman show a lively curiosity about—and a decent respect for—the natural equilibrium of life in lake and stream. Fishing, of course, may be done by other methods and with other motivations. But it seems to be true that applying the art in terms of the tradition yields the maximum of satisfaction and is most soothing to the spirit.

"I do not consider myself an elite fisherman or a purist, but I am convinced that any fisherman who aspires to be better than he is will do well to follow a traditional course. For a man fishes to catch fish, and a thorough angling education can teach him many things that will serve him in his quest.

"The fisherman who has learned his craft is a many-sided man. He is an ichthyologist of sorts, aware of the life cycle, feeding habits, and temperament of the game fish he seeks. He is an amateur entomologist, a keen and knowledgeable observer of the seasonal insect life of the water he fishes. If he has learned his lessons well he will know something of hydrochemistry and be enough of a meteorologist to have a feeling for weather. He will be a mechanic who knows his tools; he will be able to deliver an intelligently selected fly or lure to a chosen spot, and will know the capacities of rod, line and leader under strain when his manoeuvres have successfully raised a fish.

"Beyond these tactical considerations, however are the sensory perceptions the angler gathers unto himself. He responds to the ever-changing moods of rivers and lakes,

and to the inter-related lives of the creatures that inhabit the environment. His eye detects the microsecond gleam of a trout flashing at his fly in the depth of a turbulent run. His ear is tuned to the faint flip of a rise, even above the tumult of running water. He cannot be indifferent or dispassionate towards his place in this natural world and call himself an angler.

“No one will ever know all there is to know about angling, but the angler’s pleasure will always be in direct proportion to his understanding. Like all worthwhile efforts, angling gives back in the degree to which it is given.”