

Patrick Chalmers, Thames Angling Writer

Patrick Reginald Chalmers is one of the best loved sporting writers of the early 20th century. His most well-known works were *The Frequent Gun*, *A Fisherman's Angles*, *At the Sign of the Dog and Gun*, *Where the Spring Salmon Run* and his most popular, *At the Tail of the Weir* (1932) which in its entirety was about Thames angling.

Eskmount today, now named Little Thorpe
(Mike Hurst)

Chalmers was born in 1872 in Devon. His father was of an ancient landed Scottish family and Patrick spent his boyhood at Aldbar Castle, Brechin in Forfarshire where he learned to fish and shoot. His education took him to Rugby School, after which a move to London saw him spend his working life at a merchant bank.



When he retired in 1922 he lived for the rest of his days at the house on the corner of Cleeve Road and Elmhurst Road in Goring. The house was at one time called Eskmount, now it has been rechristened Little Thorpe. Chalmers purchased the house in 1917 on his marriage and lived there until his death in 1942. It was at this property he wrote most, if not all, his best loved books.

Chalmers was passionate about the Thames and its valley, also the freedom and openness of Thames fishing to all. Despite being a man of some obvious wealth and standing, he championed the sport of the ordinary 'coarse' angler, of which he was proud to be one himself. He was no 'salmon snob' despite producing a book about the species. In fact in his Thames books he states any successful reintroduction of the salmon would see the Thames becoming a closed shop, warning that the ordinary angler would lose much access to its banks.

He was also good friends with many very eminent pre-war anglers, the most distinguished of whom was Mr A.E. Hobbs. Hobbs was the chief architect for the Brakespear brewing company and designed most of their early 20th century public houses. He was also the greatest ever exponent of Thames trout fishing and in 1947 had his very famous book published: *Trout of the Thames*.

In *At the Tail of the Weir* Chalmers recalls he and Hobbs retiring to the Pike and Perch at South Stoke for light refreshments after a day out on the river.

A note on Chalmers' writings

Sometimes when you are reading Patrick Chalmers' prose you almost forget you are reading books about angling or shooting (not that I am that keen on the latter), you are beguiled by the effortless beauty of his words. As an example, here is an extract from his introduction to *At the Tail of the Weir*:

'And, a Thames fishing book should be a companion to its fisherman rather than a treatise on how to catch its fish. In fact the book could have no fishing within it. It would be a book of the poetry of green places, old elms and Elizabethan manors. It would have the 'clank,

clank' of Downs sheepbells to hear and the song of larks at Moulsoford. It would have the dip and drip of the paddles of mills which have turned slowly splashing since the days of Domesday. It would have the songs of broken water at the weir's sill, and the voices of rooks high in a spangled December twilight. Age would be in it along with Youth, and the pretty girl with the rose in her bonnet from the Twickenham Ferry. No one man could write it and no one man would want to, but all men would carry it in their pockets and hearts when they went riverwards with a fishing rod.

And, within the book, a singer would sing 'Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song', and softly may Thames run, say I, until the songs of all men are ended.'

Robert Harrington

Chalmers the poet

As well as writing on game sports, Patrick Chalmers was a poet, novelist and humorist who had work published in *Punch*. The following poem shows his affection for the area to which he retired. The date it appeared in *Punch* is not known but it may refer to the time when the name of the station had Streatley added to the Goring. [Ed.]

GORING AND STREATLEY

The Great Western Railway runs down to the West,
Conveyance, like 'Young Lochinvar's' of the best;
And into the sunset it carries me fleetly,
But I never go further than Goring-and-Streatley.

You may look to fair counties that cluster and cling
round the permanent way like the pearls on a string;
But I always alight, when the dusk falls discreetly,
'neath the star-jewelled hill-top at Goring-and-Streatley.

Though if I sat on, with my book on my knee,
I should come in due course to the silvery sea,
I can never do that; Thames contents me completely
as he silvers the valley of Goring-and-Streatley.

Did an 'and' ever link a more delectable pair
than the twain of my ditty? It didn't I'll swear;
Even strawberries-and-cream do not sound half so sweetly
to the ear of the bard as do Goring-and-Streatley.

Be December her darkest, or May at full flood,
With bluebells and fox-cubs in Elvendon Wood,
Be the fogs thick as thieves or the sun shining featly,
How dear's the down platform at Goring-and-Streatley.

The brown-and-white coaches from Paddington run
to the ultimate sea, to the set of the sun;
But I never go further than fancy goes fleetly –
I never go further than Goring-and-Streatley;
Would one EVER go further than Goring-and-Streatley?

Patrick R. Chalmers