Daniel Lysons to Thomas Pennant, 19 September 1767

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From:	Daniel Lysons
To:	Thomas Pennant
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Glocester Sept^{r}. 19.1767

Dear Sir

The Salmon particularly frequents the Severn & in such quantities that a single Draught or Pool in the severn is frequently let for 30 or 40 £ per Ann without any land belonging to it. This Pool is a part of the river perhaps about a quarter of a mile in length, where the bottom of the River being cleard from any inequalities as ^heaps mud ^or sand banks, [...]logs of wood, or stones [...]the nets may be then drawn smoothly down the Stream. The pool being thus made (which is commonly at a considerable expence) four men go with a boat to the top of the pool one of which holds a line in his hand to which the net is fastened. By this line he holds the net close to the shore whilst ^two of the others row the boat over the river with a pair of oars to the opposite shoar. In the mean time the fourth man throws out the net ^gradually from the stern of the boat in order that it may not be entangled. The net being thus let down the men in the boat keep the net as near as they can to the opposite shoar whilst the other continues on that side where the net was first cast out. The net is carried down by the Stream with ^such great force that the man who holds the line has hard work to keep it close to the shoar. As soon as the net has taken its proper sweep the boat is rowed over to the landing place, & the two men who rowed taking a line which was fixed to the end of the net next the boat draw that ^end of the net over as fast as possible. The length of the net & the violence of the stream makes this also very hard work. The business of the fourth man is to row the boat out of the net after having staid at the landing place ^padling & disturbing the water untill the net is drawn close to land, & encloses the boat. Both ends of the net being brought to shoar they draw out the net and land the fish in the same manner as with any other common ~~Draught~~ net. You see that the man who throws out the net at the Stern of the boat, & who takes care of it whilst the net is landing, has very easy work whilst the other three work hard; but they all three take their turns at his post, & he also at theirs, so that upon the whole no one is favoured. In large fisheries there are commonly two boats, the 2^{d}. shooting out their net at the time the first lands, & so they follow one another alternately. When the water is clear they fish chiefly by night, when muddy by Day, & when the fish are plenty in the River they often continue working night & day, with as little intermission as possible.

The Master has half the profits of the fish, the 8 men the other. The master pays the rent & finds nets the men mend them, & perhaps assist in making. You see ~~what~~^how considerable the whole profits must be when the Master pays his rent of 30 or 40 £ per Ann, is maintaind & his family supported from half the profits of a single fishery. Besides Salmon they also take Lampreys & Shad with these long nets, but the principal dependance of the great fisheries is upon Salmon. They begin fishing for Salmon in the beginning of November, & cease the 1st. of august the other three being by act of parliament fence months that the Salmon may go up to spawn. And there is an act that no Salmon big with spawn or that has spawned & not return'd to the Sea shall be taken under a great penalty. These fish are well known to the fishermen, & calld old fish, but they never let them go whenever they can get possession of them. These fish are of a brown colour, & have the under chap much more prominent than the upper, or at least much more so than when it is in its healthy state. Its body is emaciated, & its flesh white & insipid. With these unseasonable fish the London markets are often supply'd to the great discredit of Severn Salmon.

The young Salmon return from the head of the Severn ^to the Sea in the months of ^February & March, & at that time weigh between one & two ounces. These fish return to the Severn again in the months of June & July & then weigh a pound or two, & some larger. The largest sort weighing 3 or 4 pound come up the river as far as Glocester or higher, but the smaller go up the welch Rivers & are taken in great numbers under the name of Sewin.[1]

The above method of taking Salmon with the long net as above, is practiced chiefly in deep water, & where the River is not more than an hundred yards over. The same method is used in shallow water where the water is broader; but there they have also another method of taking them with nets besides the common one of waves. A single man armd with boots which come up to his [...]hips walks into the water when the sands are overflowd ~~with water~~ & the water being shallow he can see where the fish is by the waves it makes in swimming, & as they always swim against the Stream he claps his net in before the fish, & so takes it. The net is in form of a S*t*. Andrews cross, exactly corresponding with our heave nets at oxford.[2] In one of these nets a sturgeon was lately taken weighing above 150 lb. this I assure you is true however impossible it may appear. It will now be too late to add any farther list of the finny inhabitants of the Severn which shall be the subject of my next, which will probably be ^dated from Bath, to which place I shall go in a few days for a slight complaint in my stomach & bowels. It has been on me almost a year, but as I am as certain as can be that Bath is my cure. I can add nomore at present but that I am

Yours sincerely

D. Lysons.

P.S. you shall hear from me again soon

Stamp: (handstamp) GLOUCESTER

To Thomas Pennant Esq^{r} at Downing near Holywell Flintshire Single sheet

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Editorial Notes

[1] The sewin is a fish of the Salmon tribe (*Salmo cambricus* or *eriox*), the bull-trout, found in Welsh rivers. *OED*. An example from *British zoology* (2nd edn., 1768–70), III, iv, 248, is quoted: 'Taken in the river Wye, where it is known by the name of Sewin, or Shewin'. See also *GPC* s.v. sewin, sewyn, siwin[1], siwyn[1] for Cornish and Breton forms of the word and for examples of usage in Welsh.

[2] *OED* doesn't include 'heave net' as a compound, but refers to the use of the noun 'haaf' in Shetland and Orkney, defining it as related to deep-sea fishing and giving examples of various compounds, including haaf-fishing and haaf-boat. For 'Haaf, or heave, netting' as a traditional way of fishing for salmon and sea trout in the rivers of the North West, especially the Lune and Ribble, and on the Solway estuary, see here [accessed 20 February 2018].