

Robert Kirk: Angler, rod designer and Norfolk author aged 87

Eastern Daily Press, 20 April 2012

A fishing rod specialist, who represented his country in the world casting championships, Robert Kirk, has died aged 87.

Just three years ago, the Norwich man published his autobiography, "A Fishy Tale," which described his career spanning 80 years in angling.

Mr Kirk, who inspired generations of anglers, had been a pioneer in the development of fishing rods. He had taken up fishing at an early age and was on the River Thames in his native Surrey on his 15th birthday, September 3, 1939, when the prime minister Neville Chamberlin announced that Britain was at war.

He joined the RAF and became a rear gunner with 218 Squadron, flying Lancasters, and also served in Egypt and South Africa. After he was demobbed, he returned to London and was working in an office where he met and later married Edna on March 11, 1950.

Then he went to work for a leading fishing rod maker. He worked for the East Anglia Rod Company, then based in Newmarket, before moving to Wicklewood, near Wymondham, in the mid 1960s.

With 20 years' experience in manufacturing, wholesaling and retailing, he turned a chicken shed at the bottom of the garden into a factory. Having evicted the occupants, he was soon making the 200 glass-fibre fishing rods a week in a range of 50 designs, then with a business partner, Trevor Lee, of Costessey, near Norwich, employing staff from the local villages.

He had represented England in the world casting championships in Holland and also inspired others to take up fishing when he was a night-school teacher. As new light-weight materials for rod, line and spools became available, he was again a pioneer.

When he moved to County Cork in the Irish Republic in the early 1970s, he was again designing and making rods before returning to Norfolk in about 1988.

After working in a tackle shop in Norwich, although past retirement age, he decided to write his life story. After his grandson, Marc Ramsbotham, was killed in an accident during the final race of Isle of Man TT in 2007, he determined to complete the book, which was dedicated in his memory.

He died a fortnight after his 62nd wedding anniversary and greatly appreciated the Queen's message of congratulation on their diamond jubilee in 2010.

He leaves a widow, Edna, and daughters, Gillian and Susan, and is survived by a granddaughter and two great granddaughters.

Michael Pollitt