

Kanjers!

Hans van der Pauw



RICHARD WALKER

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DIE OOK U KUNT VANGEN...

The importance of Richard Walker's book Still-Water Angling and its impact on coarse fishing in Britain is widely acknowledged and has often been written about in English angling literature. However, much less is known about its influence abroad.

This article tells of the early reaction to Walker's ideas in the Netherlands.

KANJERS! : Hans Van Der Pauw

Before World War II Britain was far ahead of the Netherlands when it came to angling. Holland was the land of the simple fishing pole, stout tackle and age-old proven tactics. And it was a land of coarse fishing only. Very few people used reels for playing fish so if ever there was some sort of battle with a large fish, this was a matter of bend or break. Quite often it must have been the latter, especially when the stalwart technique was applied by which a fish was hauled out of the water and thrown on the bank in one fierce movement.

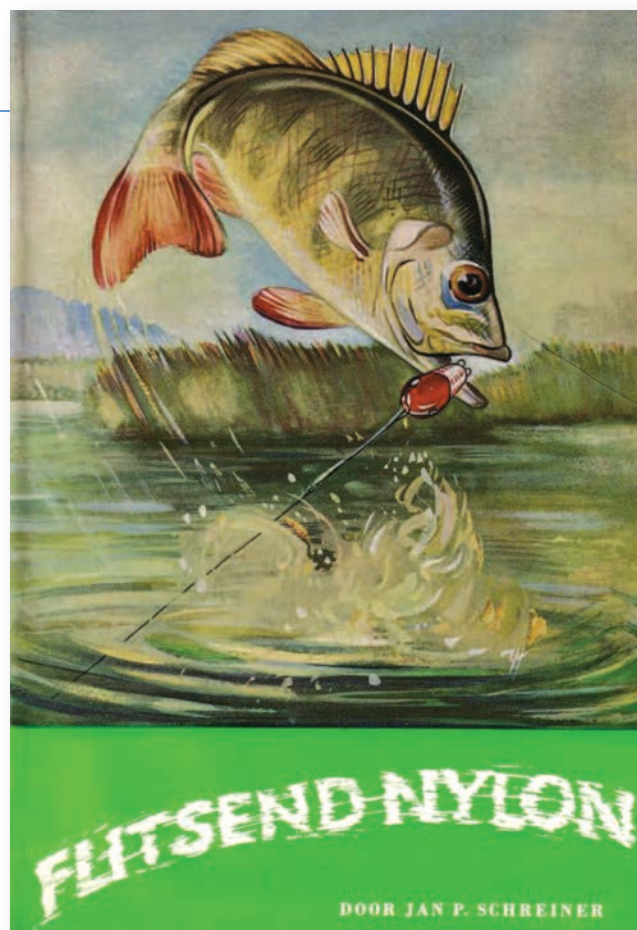
This was coarse fishing in its basic form: very coarse. And although angling for rudd, roach, bream or perch was often done with lighter tackle, the main object of fishing was not to enjoy it, but simply to catch a lot of fish and to do so in a straightforward fashion without sophisticated light tackle or any other frivolous nonsense. Fishing was simply done 'for the pot'.

By the end of the 1930s the first signs of opposition to this crude attitude were beginning to show and it was the Dutch journalist and writer Kick Geudeker who in his 1940 book *Beet!* (meaning bite) tried to convince anglers to improve both their enjoyment of angling and their catch by using finer tackle. 'Give the fish a chance' was his motto, as this would bring more challenge and excitement into the game and thus improve the sport.

After the war the writer and rod builder Jan Schreiner took over the propaganda for light and refined fishing. Schreiner's influence on Dutch angling in the Fifties and Sixties has been tremendous and he may safely be regarded as the father of modern fishing in the Netherlands. His book *Flitsend Nylon* (*Flashing Nylon*), first published in 1950 and reprinted many times after that, educated a whole generation of Dutch anglers in using spinning rods and fixed-spool reels - even though many brethren stuck to the traditional pole for years to come. Most of all, Schreiner was a great fan and passionate advocate of light and ultra light spinning for pike and perch and ultra light flake fishing for rudd. But he also recommended light and refined tackle when it came to fishing for carp and pike, or for sea fishing.

This was more or less the Dutch angling culture in the 1950s when Richard Walker's ideas were first introduced there. Walker's influence in Holland started with the publication of a translation of his book *Still-Water Angling* in 1954.

The first edition in English of *Still-Water Angling* came out in June 1953. This edition sold about 2000 copies and it seems



Jan Schreiner's famous book *Flitsend Nylon* (1950).

its influence was not exactly instantaneous. Anglers are often somewhat conservative, being attached to their proven methods and sceptical of change. I once came across a typical example of this scepticism in a review of Walker's book in *The Singapore Free Press* of 25th June 1953 - yes, we are getting exotic now. Here a Mr C.P. wrote on night-fishing for carp, as advocated by Walker:

With his well-told tales of battles with mighty fish he makes it all sound exciting. But as an angler who has fished through a cold night in heavy rain, I doubt whether any fish is worth so much trouble and discomfort.

Among the earliest group of anglers who did embrace Dick Walker's ideas was a Dutch friend of his, Frans Domhof from

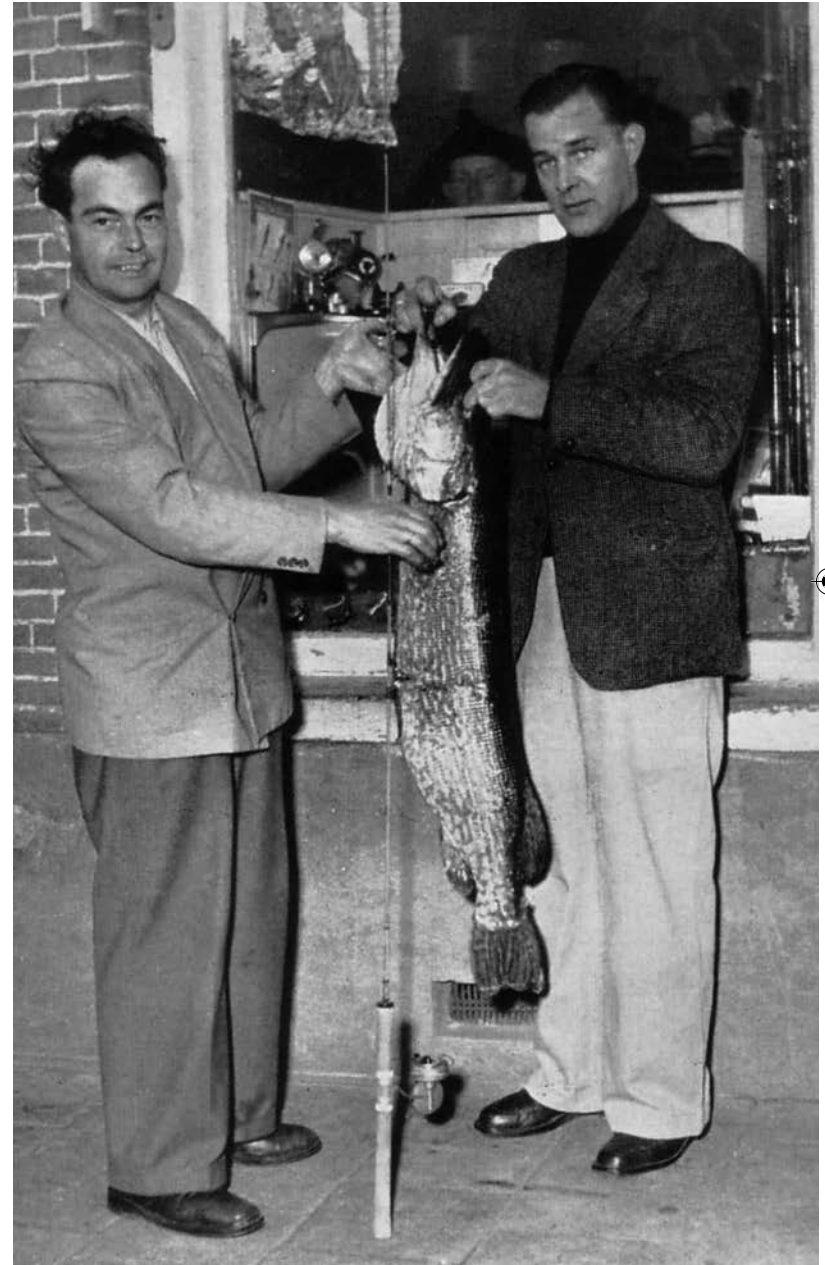
Groningen, a town in the north-east of the Netherlands. Domhof was a fishing tackle dealer, rod builder and publicist. And he was also exquisitely Anglophile. In the Fifties he had many contacts with British anglers and angling writers. He wrote for the *Angling Times* and in Britain his names lives on in the 'Domhof knot' for attaching spade end hooks. Apart from knowing Walker personally, Domhof had also fished with him and he was a great advocate and admirer of Walker, both of his personality and his ideas, calling him 'one of the best anglers I know (and they are not few), if not the best'.

There can be little doubt that Domhof was the one who instigated the publication of a Dutch translation of *Still-Water Angling* in the Netherlands. The preparation for this edition must have followed soon after the publication of the original in 1953. The translation - a very good one - was written by Hans de Vries, a professional translator and perhaps an angler as well, although Domhof claimed he had helped with the translation of various technical terms and aspects.

The title of the Dutch version of *Still-Water Angling* became *Kanjers!*, which is the Dutch word for whoppers. (Whoppers indeed: there are other publications with the title *Kanjers*, at least one of them less decent than an angling book.) *Kanjers!* is the title that appears on the title page, which as a rule is considered the 'official' title of a book. The title on the dust wrapper however is a bit longer, namely *Kanjers! die ook u kunt vangen*, meaning: 'Whoppers you too can catch'. And this longer title is spot on, as this is precisely what the book is all about: that catching big fish is not merely a matter of luck, but that it is possible for anyone to catch whoppers, by applying the right behaviour and the appropriate tactics and by using adequate tackle. This notion of catching big fish by design is the core of the 'Walker revolution' of the 1950s, leading to the phenomenon of specimen hunting that became so widespread from the 1960s onwards.

Kanjers! was published in Holland in the autumn of 1954. It appeared in two almost identical editions. One had the publisher's name on the title page: 'N.V. Leiter-Nypels - Maastricht, MCMLIV'. The other one, by the same publisher, was printed to be distributed by the major Dutch wholesaler of fishing tackle, Albatros, and had that company's name on the title page: 'Albatros, import-export, groothandel in en fabrikant van hengelsportmaterialen, Amsterdam'. Furthermore there was a slight difference in the lettering on the green cloth

Frans Domhof (right) and a friend in front of Domhof's angling shop in Groningen, a picture from *Kanjers!*.





The two simultaneous editions of *Kanjers!* from 1954: the green Leiter-Nypels edition and the blue Albatros edition.

cover and most noticeably a difference in colour on the dust wrapper. The 'Leiter-Nypels' edition had the title against a green background, the Albatros edition had a blue background. The picture used on the dust wrapper was the same as the one on the original English edition, Dick Walker holding his famous 44lb carp 'Clarissa'; only Pete Thomas' old car, vaguely visible in the background on the original photo, was retouched away.

Frans Domhof wrote an introduction to the book, dated July 1954. And he started off like this:

It gives me great pleasure to, as it were, introduce the author to the reader. For one, because it is no one less than Richard Walker, but also because his book is to my knowledge the first instructive book on angling from abroad to be translated into the Dutch language. How much this speaks for the quality of the book I need not explain any further. Without the least of doubt KANJERS is by far the best literature on angling hitherto published in our country.

That last sentence was bound to irritate many Dutch angling writers, most certainly Jan Schreiner, who at the time consid-

ered himself to be nothing less than the prophet of modern angling in the Netherlands. But Domhof did not seem to bother about that and modestly sharing in Dick Walker's genius he continued:

Thinking practically and logically, to him (as to myself) folklore and legend have less value than down-to-earth reality . . . He is more progressive than any other angler I know and he fishes for pleasure, for sport and . . . to catch fish. Furthermore he is not easily satisfied and certainly not with half measures or mediocre and inadequate tackle. That is why he makes much of his tackle himself and his fishing methods are modern and highly effective. This is also because he believes little or nothing without first having personally tested its credibility and soundness . . .

Dick is pre-eminently a 'big fish' man and his observations on these big fish are compelling and highly clarifying and I dare say a revelation, not only to the average angler, but probably even more so to the 'expert'. That's the way I know Dick and that's the way his book is. I can only hope that my chapter on zander, written especially for this book and for the Dutch reader, will be like that as well.

According to Frans Domhof, *Kanjers!* was the book Dutch anglers had all been waiting for and would finally guide them towards modern angling. But the reception was not quite as enthusiastic as he had expected. In December 1954 the foremost Dutch angling monthly *De Sportvisser* – a magazine that had also given a vivid account of the capture of Walker's 44lb record carp in its issue of January 1953 – published a review of the book. It was written anonymously, but almost certainly by Jan Schreiner, one of the most important editors and contributors of *De Sportvisser*, who, in addition to having an ongoing feud with Frans Domhof, was not keen on foreign influences.

The review started off kindly enough – very good translation, many fine pictures – but then stated bluntly: 'The value of this book for the Dutch angler however is highly doubtful, to say the least.' To explain this, the reviewer focused mainly on what Walker wrote about carp fishing, clearly Walker's major interest judging by the amount of pages devoted to it. The technical details Walker gave on the rods he used for his fishing were said to be too difficult for most readers to understand. His rods were considered to differ too much from what we were used to in Holland. They might be fine for English

circumstances but, according to the reviewer, in Holland we didn't need such heavy rods and lines - neither for roach and bream, nor for carp. Moreover the reviewer presumed that the big fish Walker aimed at, especially big carp, were very scarce in Holland:

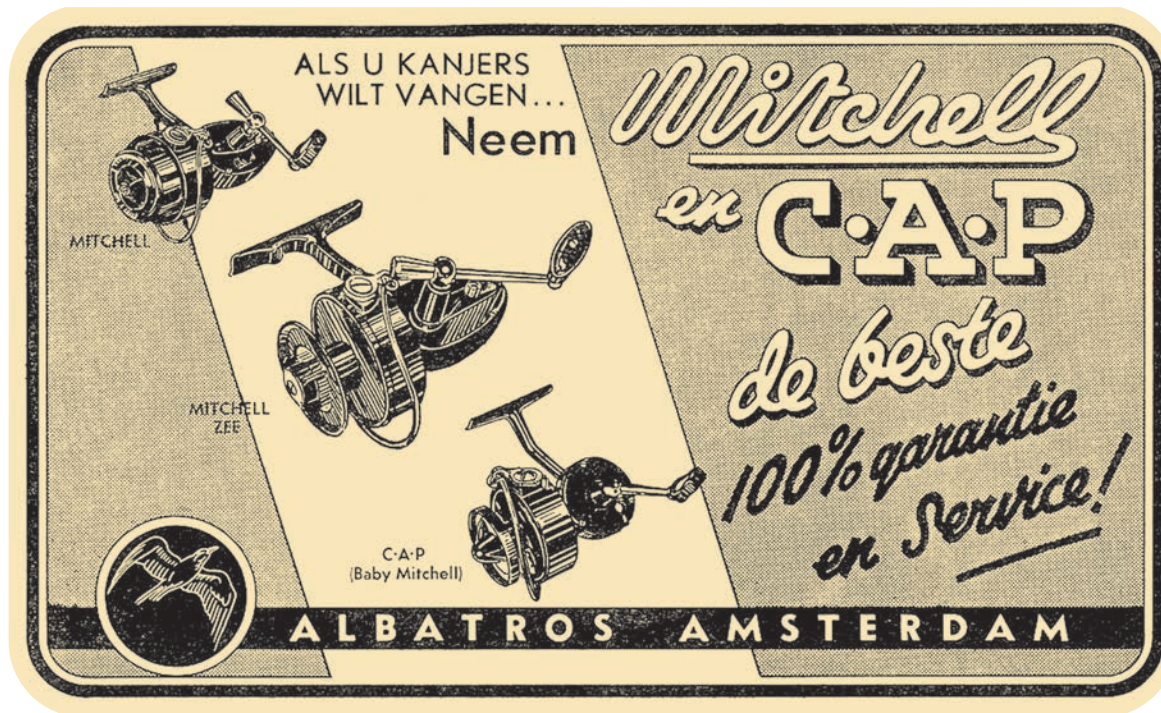
I believe Dutch anglers will already be overjoyed when they get the opportunity to catch several carp a day, apart from the fact that there are very few waters in the Netherlands that hold 30 and 40 pound carp. The kind of carp Walker writes about. That belief comes from the fact that e.g. Dirk de Vries, one of the best carp anglers in the Netherlands, has not been doing anything but carp fishing for almost fifty years, with a frequency of two to three times a week, and that his biggest carp in all those fifty years of fishing weighed less than 12 [metric] pounds. Seen in this light it becomes very dubious whether it's any use at all to inform oneself on the methods of a specialist 'big-fish-catcher'.

The chapters on angling for tench, perch, bream, roach, rudd, chub and pike have nothing to offer to the modern Dutch angler, because we have already advanced much further with our fishing technique, and apart from that they are rather incomplete.

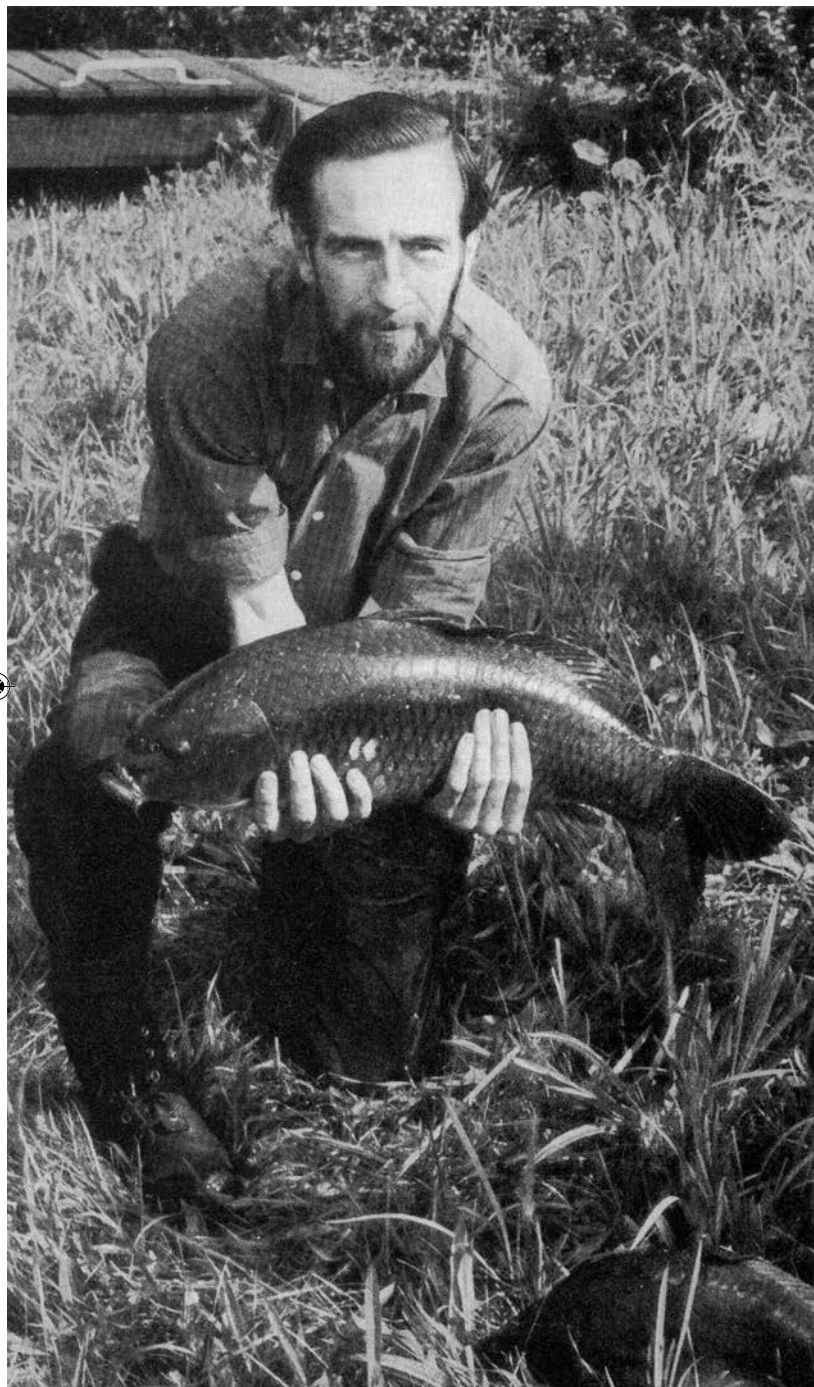
That last sentence wasn't exactly modest, but it should be understood in context. In Holland at that time fishing tackle and technique was generally seen to be moving away from the very stout tackle of the past in favour of fishing lighter, with more subtlety. The lighter and finer, the more advanced.

The review concludes with a sneer at Domhof for assuming *Kanjers!* to be 'by far the best literature on angling hitherto published in our country' - just as Domhof's statement may be considered a sneer at Schreiner's famous book *Flitsend Nylon*.

In short, Walker's ideas did not really catch on in Holland in the 1950s. Nor did they do so in the 1960s. A small but



Albatros Tackle didn't hesitate to put its own advertisement for Mitchell reels in the *Kanjers!* book.



influential book on carp fishing in the 1960s was *Sluimerend Dynamiet (Slumbering Dynamite)* by A. van Onck and C. van Beurden, first published in 1961. Both writers did show due respect for Walker's achievements, and for the design of his Mark IV carp rod, but they believed the circumstances for carp fishing were less favourable in Holland than in Britain. They assumed that the prevailing interest in game fishing in Britain had led to a long time neglect of carp, which had enabled the fish to grow much larger than the carp in Holland. That meant there were more big carp that could be expected in Britain. In addition, night fishing, which was thought to be favourable for catching big carp, was prohibited in Holland.

It was not until about 1970 that British fishing tackle and techniques began to spread in the Netherlands, especially – and for some decades almost exclusively – in the field of carp fishing. By that time the Dutch rod builder and knowledgeable angler Jan Roelfs had already had many years of contact with British angling authorities, amongst them Dick Walker, Peter Tombleson and scientist Dr J. Jones, and with British anglers who came over to fish in Holland, like Colin Graham, Joe Waldron, Fred Thorncroft, David Haville and Charly Wishart. The latter three fished for carp in and around Vinkeveen in central Holland on their summer holidays. They had done so from 1960 onwards and Fred Thorncroft had kept diaries of these events. His delightful diary of their trip in the first half of September 1968 was included in translation in a very influential Dutch carp book published in March 1970: *Karpervissen (Carp Fishing)* by the painter-sculptor Jan B. de Winter. (I've long tried to trace Thorncroft's original diaries to try to get them published, but unsuccessfully.)

Jan B. de Winter clearly respected and admired Richard Walker, both for the materials he developed, especially the famous Mark IV carp rod, and for his approach and techniques. De Winter was probably also the first Dutchman to join the British vanguard of carp anglers. He and Fred Thorncroft were among the mere sixteen members of the National Carp Club, formed in 1968, one year before the more famous British Carp Study Group. But soon after, other

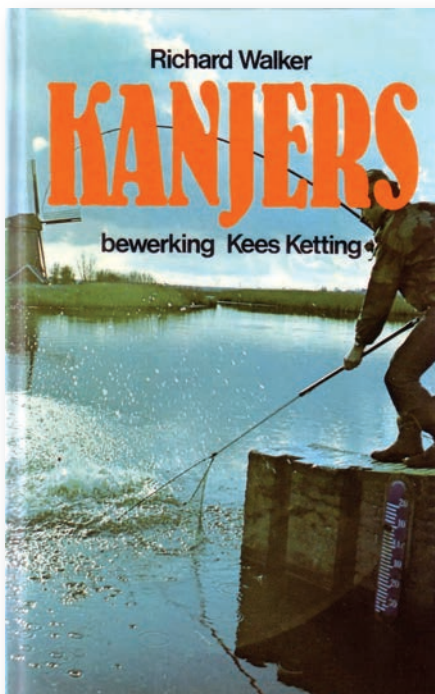
Fred Thorncroft with a nice carp caught in Holland in September 1968, a picture from *Karpervissen*.

Dutch anglers discovered the British carp scene as well. Some of them, like Rini Groothuis, joined the British Carp Study Group and introduced British tactics and tackle to the Netherlands. But by then the developments in carp fishing had gained momentum and new carp authorities and celebrities began to appear, introducing new ideas and ever newer tackle. The British influences on carp fishing in the Netherlands now came primarily from people like Jack Hilton, who published *Quest for Carp* in 1972, and Jim Gibbinson, whose Osprey-book *Carp* (1974) was sold in Holland too.

Richard Walker's book *Kanjers!* was reissued in 1977, now translated from the fourth, revised edition of *Still-Water Angling* (1975) by Kees Ketting and adapted by him to Dutch circumstances, which was of course sacrilege. But by now Walker's influence on carp fishing was already superseded and overshadowed by that of a new generation. In 1981 Kevin Maddocks published his tremendously influential book *Carp Fever* that was very popular in Holland as well; in 1988 a Dutch translation was published under the same title. It's

likely that many more Dutch carp anglers have read *Carp Fever* than *Kanjers!*

By this time Richard Walker had become the grand old man of angling instead of the trend-setting authority. From here on, the British influence on Dutch angling - at first only on carp angling, later also on angling for pike and other species - was to come from the new generation of anglers that had emerged. In retrospect Walker's influence in Holland has remained limited almost exclusively to carp fishing. Even the Arlesey Bomb he invented for perch fishing was used mainly for carp fishing over here. And on the whole the British influence on Dutch angling remained modest in the 1950s and 1960s, when Walker was at his most influential in Britain. Therefore his direct influence in that era in Holland has remained rather limited. Yet there can be little doubt that the generation of British anglers that came after him, that contributed so much to Dutch angling from the 1970s onwards, were much indebted to him. They rose to fame by standing on the shoulders of this influential innovator who had laid the foundations for much of modern coarse angling. ■



The second edition of *Kanjers!* (1977).