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GO FISHING IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

(Written for "The Listener" by J. D. McDonald, M.A., M.Sc.)



IN 1069 the Abbey of Barton-farne had three fish ponds, but the Abbey of Whitby had twenty. This is strictly true. It is so entered in the Domesday Book, which records, separately and with the greatest care, the hundreds of fish ponds scattered over England. And right solidly were they taxed—for so

valuable a possession was too good an investment to escape the Royal cupidity. The possession of fish ponds definitely indicated liquid assets. The same picture presents itself in China, taxes and all, twenty centuries earlier. And the pattern is repeated in ancient Rome, where the lampreys destined for the royal tables, lolled in alabaster fish ponds—between meals of, no doubt reluctant, slaves.

A properly managed fish pond is an excellent investment as an adjunct to normal farming and it may be that there are possibilities in it for partly disabled servicemen as a means of livelihood or as a supplement to their pensions. At this point it will be objected that the number of ponds in New Zealand is limited. So they are. But what we need to have in mind are artificial fish-ponds which can be constructed by anyone in his spare time without any special machinery.

Granted the possibility, no New Zealander needs to be told of the virtues of fish as a food. The toothsome smell of frying fish much too infrequently salutes the nose in this country. Its food value, too, is exceptionally high, much better than meat, and into the bargain fish normally contains larger quantities of vitamins and trace minerals than does flesh food. Yet it is usually in short supply in New Zealand, expensive and none too fresh when we get it. The fact must be faced that owing to the steep drop of the continental shelf round New Zealand the shallow water round our coastline is limited and therefore New Zealand waters do not teem with fish—quite the contrary in fact. Therefore it seems that we shall have to turn to the fresh water. Apart from whitebait and trout what do we eat from our streams? The best fish we have is the eel. He is, a much better proposition than the trout for whose sake Acclimatisation Societies seek to exterminate him. The Maoris were wiser than we are. Note the number of names of places with "tuna" in them. The muddy taste so often complained of is absent from the "silver belly" living in a good environment. Smoked eel is definitely well worth eating and jellied eels are a cockney luxury, so if *Anguilla vulgaris* is to be despised and rejected in New Zealand why not export him?

First Build Your Pond.

This article does not seek, however, to ram the eel down anyone's throat. The world is full of edible fresh-water fish. The important thing is first to build your pond and then to stock it properly.

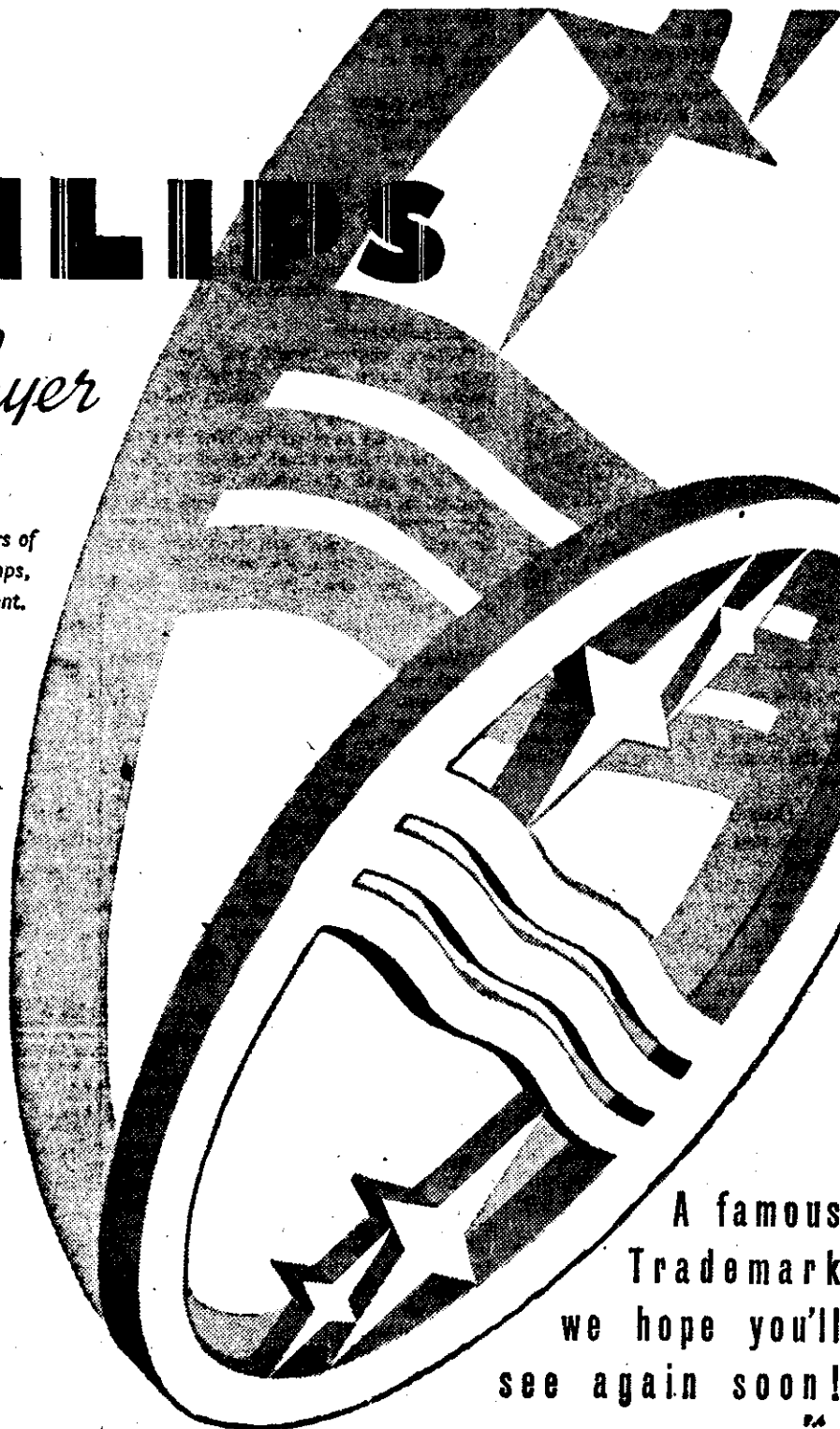
Many farms in New Zealand can show heavily gullied slopes and marshy areas that normally are not much use. These make excellent ponds. An earth dam is erected at the lowest point and consolidated by puddling, the pond bed is treated in the same way and then it is permitted to fill naturally, but ample provision must be made for emptying the ponds in the event of trouble; a pipe in the dam is a good idea. An acre is a convenient pond area for a start. The depth, of course, will be determined by the slope of the land. Some people plant fish food in the pond, others don't bother, but before the fish are introduced it is advisable to "top-dress" with about 4cwt. of a manure containing phosphorus and potash to stimulate the growth of the tiny organisms that feed

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