

Canal tench love swims like this – but you need strong gear to land them! Here Rob hangs on as a good fish makes for the brambles.

Cut out for tench?

Have you fished a canal lately? Go on, give it a try! You might just catch a tench or two. Midlands maestro Rob Wootton is your guide to tench from the cut...

Did you know that there are tench living in your local canal? Big, beautiful tench that have rarely, if ever, seen an angler's hook? You see, canals are often ignored by the modern angler, who prefers the convenience of a commercial or the somewhat different challenges of a river. That means Britain's extensive canal system remains a largely untouched gold mine for anglers who want to try their hand at these man-made waterways.

Canals in Britain don't come any longer than the Grand Union, whose 137 miles join the cities of London and Birmingham. It also boasts several 'arms', sections of canal that branch away from the 'main line' to link to cities such as Leicester. The result is a huge patchwork of waterways that have been transformed from carriers of industry to a leisure facility enjoyed by those who love the outdoors.

Boaters, walkers, cyclists and, of course, anglers all use canals to their advantage. In match fishing's heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of anglers descended on canals every weekend of the season (there was one then) as they offered reliable sport with small roach, gudgeon and perch. They still do, but the numbers of match anglers visiting canals has

reduced, which is great news for those who would target bigger fish.

With many canal stretches now seeing far fewer anglers than before, the fish in them have been allowed to grow. Carp, bream, chub, perch and even eels of specimen size can all be found by those prepared to put in the time and effort to seek them out. And, of course, tench, which is where Rob Wootton comes in.

Born and bred in the Midlands city of Leicester, the 28-year-old all-round angler loves his local arm of the Grand Union. He's fished it since the age of 10, initially enjoying its vast shoals of roach but now concentrating more on the canal's bigger fish.

Today he's brought us to the canal at South Wigston not far from his home, for a spot of autumn tenching. Given mild weather, these fish will feed all winter long. So dust off your pole and read on...

WHERE TO FISH

All canals hold tench, and you can catch them from just about any swim, but your chances will be so much better if you head for a place that looks 'fishy'. In Rob's case today, this is a great-looking swim that offers plenty of shelter; there's a large overhanging tree slightly to his left, with the added bonus of some far-



ANGLER FACT FILE

Name: Rob Wootton
Hometown: Leicester
Age: 28
Sponsors: Dynamite Baits and Middy Tackle
Occupation: Angling consultant

HOW TO HOOK THREE WORMS



01 Break the first worm and thread it around the hook and up the shank.



02 Break the second and hook it through the broken end.



03 Leave the third whole and hook it through the head like this.



04 The perfect offering for a canal tench.



05 Hook the line above the worms over some elastic tied to the pole.

side reeds where the tree ends.

Even better news is that the canal here is perfectly within pole reach. He can use his pole at just nine metres next to the tree branches, and with a couple of sections added for fishing against the reeds.

Such is the case on many canal swims. You simply don't need a very long and expensive pole. Great swims for tench and other good fish are often where trees overhang the water so you will often find that nine metres is long enough to reach.

The water here is nicely coloured as well, although Rob points out that it never used to be. In fact, for several years the canal was tap-water clear, only becoming coloured over the last few years, presumably the result of increased boat traffic.

Isn't it ironic that while most of Britain's rivers are becoming ridiculously clear, with a consequent deterioration in the fishing, the opposite seems to be the case on canals? It's fair to say, there's never been a better time to fish Britain's canals!

Canals often provide their own little piece of rural tranquillity even in urban locations. Today, Rob is fishing just a few miles from Leicester city centre, but the only clue is the occasional crying baby and the odd glimpse of the houses in the estate through the trees opposite. Some canals, of course, run through heavily industrialised areas, but even these have a certain aura that's hard to describe.

ROB'S BAIT TIP



Pellets and sweetcorn both have their place in the modern canal-angler's bait armoury.

BAIT

You don't need a lot of bait to fish for tench on a canal, but it's a good idea to take several different types.

- Worms. Two or three good handfuls of dendrabaenas for both hook bait and feed.
- Casters. Usually fed along with the worms. Double caster can make a great hook bait as well. You'll only need half a pint.
- Pellets. 3mm pellets are also fed. Most species of fish like pellets and as soon as they are introduced into a water, the fish soon want to eat them. Soft expander pellets are also worth a try as a hook bait.
- Sweetcorn. Possibly the most successful tench bait of modern times. Tench love sweetcorn – fact!
- Hemp. The perfect 'holding' bait, fed to lie on the bottom for the tench to feed over.

With such an array of baits, you can enjoy the benefits of feeding several different areas of your swim with different offerings. On

some days the fish will want the more traditional worm-and-caster combination, while on others, a pellet approach can pay dividends. On others, sweetcorn over hemp and corn loose feed can be best. You'll only discover which they want if you try them all!

ACCURACY AND FINESSE

Get your pole out if you want catch tench on your canal! That's the simple message from Rob Wootton who says there's no substitute when it comes to pinpoint presentation and accuracy.

With a pole, you can present your bait in the tiniest of gaps between branches or reeds, you can drop your bait inches from the far bank and you can fish with a degree of accuracy that would be impossible with rod-and-reel tackle. In the type of swims Rob is suggesting you fish for tench on canal, a pole is a must.

Clearly, catching tench from what might be snaggy swims does put

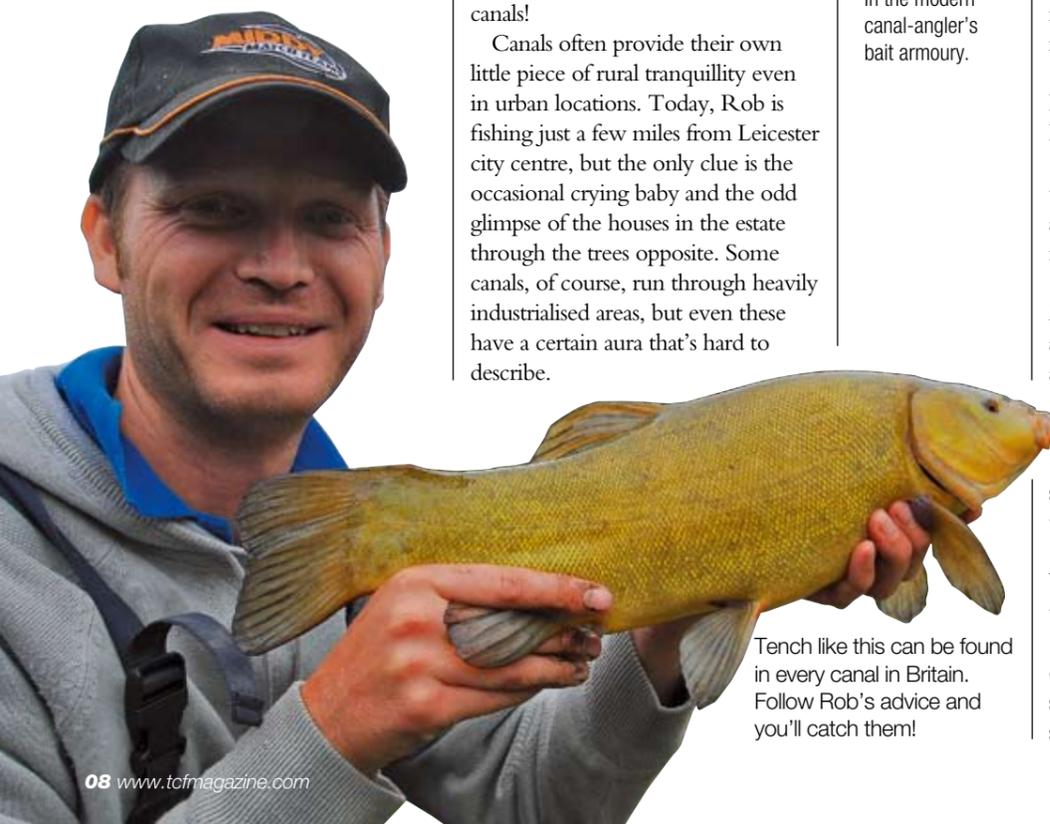
certain demands on your tackle, so you need to make sure your pole is fitted with strong elastic.

Rob uses Middy Shock Core elastic, in 18–22 size. This is a hollow elastic, meaning it is not too 'harsh' on the strike. However, because it also stretches a long way if it needs to, he has fitted only 12 inches or so of this elastic, which fits neatly into the top section of his pole, which he has cut back to take a large internal

bush. This short length of elastic will exert considerable pressure on a hooked fish if Rob wants it to. An angry 3lb tench will soon make for the sanctuary of underwater branches and you need some power if you're to draw it away.

You'll also need strong terminal tackle. Too many people think pole fishing is all about tiny hooks and gossamer-thin lines, but that simply isn't the case. The great thing about

Once you've managed to draw a hooked tench away from the branches, the playing process should be relatively painless with the right gear.



Tench like this can be found in every canal in Britain. Follow Rob's advice and you'll catch them!



ROB'S TACKLE TIPS



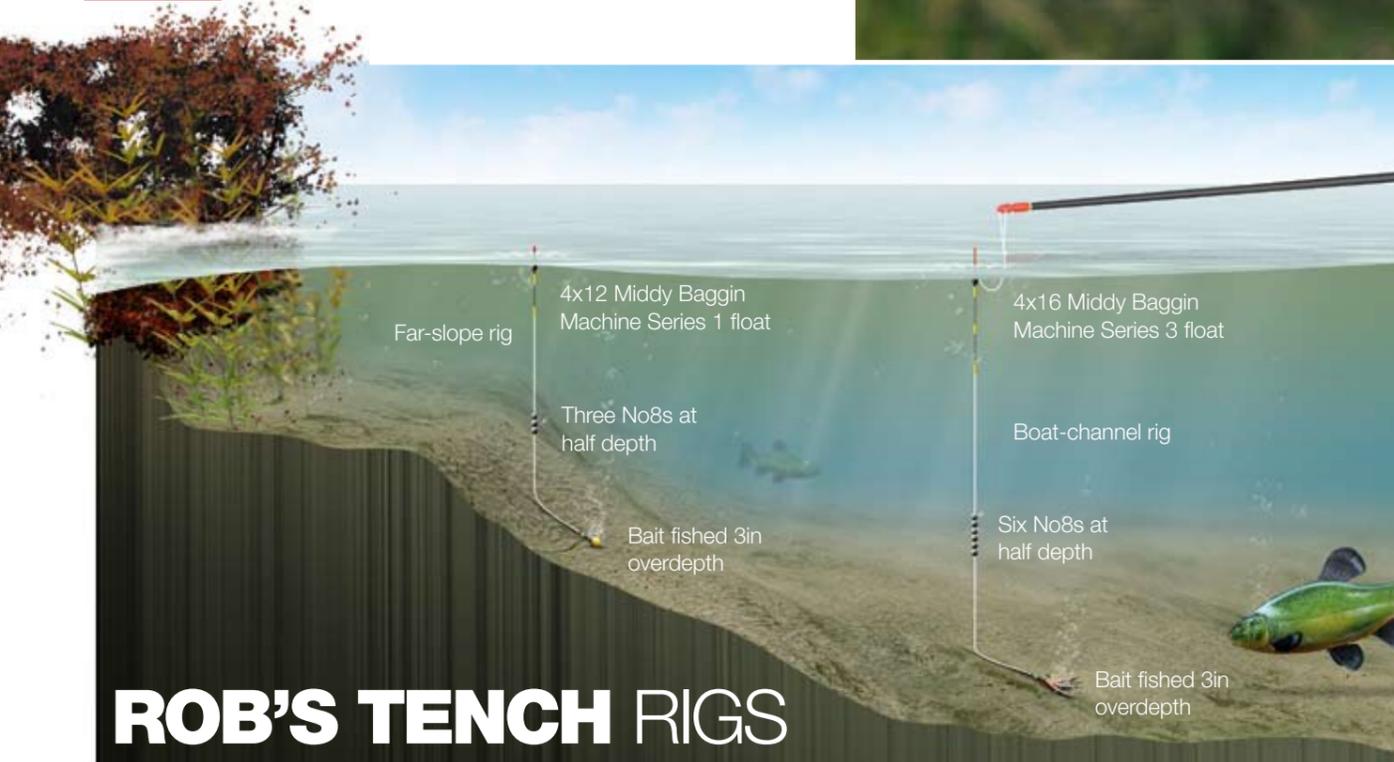
01 Just 12 inches of elastic will allow him to exert force on a hooked tench if he needs to.



02 Middy Baggin Machine floats are perfect for tricky swims as they're so strong.



03 When you're fishing as close to snags as this, your tackle needs to be up to the challenge!



ROB'S TENCH RIGS

a pole, however, is that you can still fish with a degree of finesse, while using relatively strong tackle.

As his main line, for example, Rob uses 0.16mm monofilament. It's from Middy and called Lo-viz Fluorocrystal, with a breaking strain of 5.2lb.

He uses this line all the way through from pole to hook. A hooked tench will find any weak spots caused by knots in your line – the fewer knots the better.

The hook, meanwhile, also needs to be very strong and Rob's choice is a size 16 93-13, again from Middy. This is a barbless, spade-end pattern, designed originally for carp but perfect for these tench too because it won't bend under the considerable pull of a pole against a 4lb tench making for the branches!

STRONG FLOATS

Floats for fishing for tench against snags need to be strong and Rob uses two different types today.

For his boat-channel rig he uses a Middy Baggin Machine Series 3, which has an easy-to-see cane tip, side eye to help the float 'sit' properly in the water, and, crucially, a small hole running vertically through the float's oval body. This is to eliminate a common problem with pole floats, when the line cuts into the body under the pressure of several good-

sized fish. Its fibreglass stem also makes the float stable if it's windy.

Rob will use this rig close to the tree, which he knows will be right at the far side of the boat channel in around five feet of water.

A high-visibility float tip is vitally important when fishing in swims like this; the inconsistent reflection of vegetation on the surface can make it difficult to see a fine float tip.

Rob's second rig features another float from the Middy Baggin Machine range, this time the Series 1.

This is a dibber-type float and is ideal for his far-side swim, which is only around 2ft 6in deep.

Both floats are shotted simply with enough No8 shot to cock them so that only the top of the orange tip is visible at the surface. The No8s are fixed together in a bulk at mid-depth, and he plumbs the depth before setting the floats around three inches overdepth.

This three inches is important because it will give the fish time to take the bait right into their mouths before a bite is registered.

Once he has plumbed the depth in both swims, Rob shortens his line so there's only around 12 inches between pole float and pole tip. This short length is important – too much line will easily become caught up in the branches of the trees opposite.

A perfect pair of Grand Union tench.



ROB'S FEEDING TIPS



01 Feed one swim with small regular consignments...



02 ...and 'dump-feed' another swim with larger, but less frequent potfuls.

THE SESSION

With everything set up, Rob can start fishing. He has a game plan which any angler after a catch of canal tench would do well to follow.

It revolves around the two areas of where to fish and what to feed, and it's the result of several years' fishing here and on other canals containing a good head of tench.

The first thing he does is use a pole cup to introduce a cupful of chopped-up worms on his closer swim near the far side of the boat

during the shipping-out process, he explains, so that their fish-attracting juices are released only in his swim and not elsewhere in the canal.

It takes only a few minutes before the float sinks out of sight and a firm lift of the pole sees... a half-ounce perch come cleanly out of the water! Several more follow, plus a couple of small rudd, before things go quiet.

This brings a smile to Rob's face as he knows a tench is likely to have moved into his swim and, sure enough, minutes later another

He pulls like mad while throwing the pole behind like a man possessed.

channel against the overhanging tree. He knows that there will be a tench or two here before boat traffic pushes the fish further across the canal.

If he fed further across at the start of the session, those fish might be tempted to move off to that feed immediately – not a good thing because they'd then have nowhere to go later on in the session if disturbed, except off down the canal!

After feeding, he impales three worms on the hook, hooks them over a tight loop of elastic on his pole, and ships out to drop his rig onto the exact spot he has fed. The worms are kept away from the water

identical bite this time sees elastic stream from his pole tip on the strike.

Now Rob demonstrates superbly how to extract a big canal tench from its lair. Well, actually he pulls like mad while throwing the pole behind him like a man possessed. You can't take any prisoners against a 4lb tench in a swim like this.

The fish, well hooked and up against strong but balanced tackle, is soon drawn to the net.

Only 20 minutes later, another, smaller tench falls to the same bait, but that signals the end of the action from the boat channel. Half an hour passes – as do a few narrow boats – before Rob makes the decision to feed his far line, this time with hemp, sweetcorn and pellets.

Several hook-bait changes follow, before it's sweetcorn that sees the next bite of the short session. It's another good fish, but no match for Rob's stout tackle, and he ends the session with three good tench.

It's not as prolific as some days but tench are always an unpredictable species. Isn't that what makes them so special? **FISHING**

VENUE FILE

GRAND UNION CANAL

Location: Grand Union Canal, Leicester Arm, South Wigston, Leics

Controlling club: Wigston AS

Contact: Adam Nurse, tel: 07860 112000

Day tickets: £3 on the bank, £1.50 concessions

Season permits: £20, £10 concessions

How to get there: Park in the Crow Mills car park which is on Countesthorpe Road to the south of the canal. Rob was fishing to the right, 200 yards before the first lock.