

Fish from the deep

Brill, or *barbue* as it is known in France, tends to be rather overshadowed by the more lordly turbot, sole and halibut, although it can be used in any recipe calling for any of these three fish.

Brill are only about 18 inches (46cm) long, compared with the turbot which measures up to 3 feet (90cm) long, but both are similar in texture and flavour.

In appearance brill is a fawnish brown, flat fish with a white underside and, like other flat fish, spends its time lying on the bottom of the sea bed.

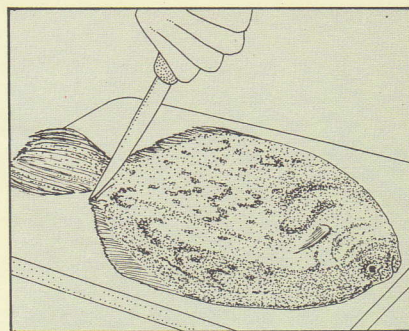
There are two kinds of flat fish – those that are flattened vertically, like skate or ray, and the true flat fish which are flattened laterally, like brill and plaice. A characteristic of flat fish is that both their eyes are on the same side – those with eyes on their right side, like plaice, flounder or sole, are classified as dextral, while those with eyes on the left, like brill and turbot, are sinistral species.

Brill are found in all the waters surrounding the British Isles and Europe, but those from the Atlantic

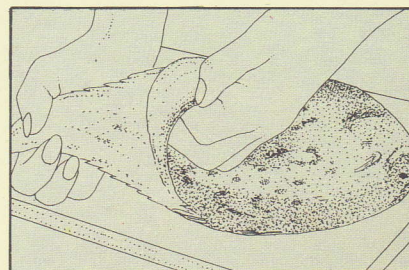
have very much the best flavour. When buying fresh fish, choose only those with bright, clear eyes, red gills and firm flesh. Avoid any with a bluish tinge and a strong smell. Because of their broad shape, flat fish, particularly if they are on the large side, can present problems when it comes to cooking. While it is possible to grill small brill whole, many people find it easier either to fillet or divide brill into halves or slices, rather than cope with the whole fish. Because of its firm texture, the flesh doesn't fall apart (flake) like that of cod or haddock. Allow 4–6 minutes each side when grilling fresh brill fillets, or poach for 7–8 minutes. When cooked, the flesh should be opaque and part easily from the bone.

Brill has a fine, delicate flavour, and is perfect when grilled, lightly seasoned and buttered. For a more special occasion, lightly poach in a court bouillon and serve with *Beurre blanc*, one of the great sauces from Brittany (see under Butter, page 319). Try it too, poached in dry white wine or vermouth, as this enhances brill's subtle flavour.

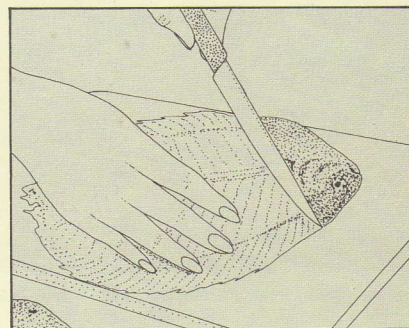
filleting a flat fish



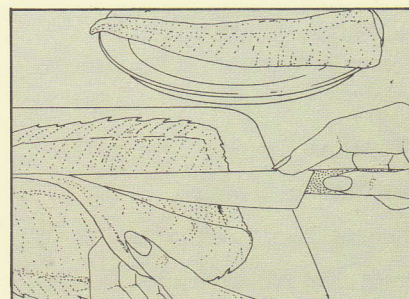
1 Place brill on board, dark side up. Make small cut at tail to loosen skin



2 Hold tail, grip skin and pull off in one. Leave white skin other side



3 Cut off head close to gills. Cut each side of backbone to loosen flesh



4 From back-bone cuts, slide knife under fillets. Detach fillets other side



Left: brill is a flat fish characterized by having both eyes on the same side – the left