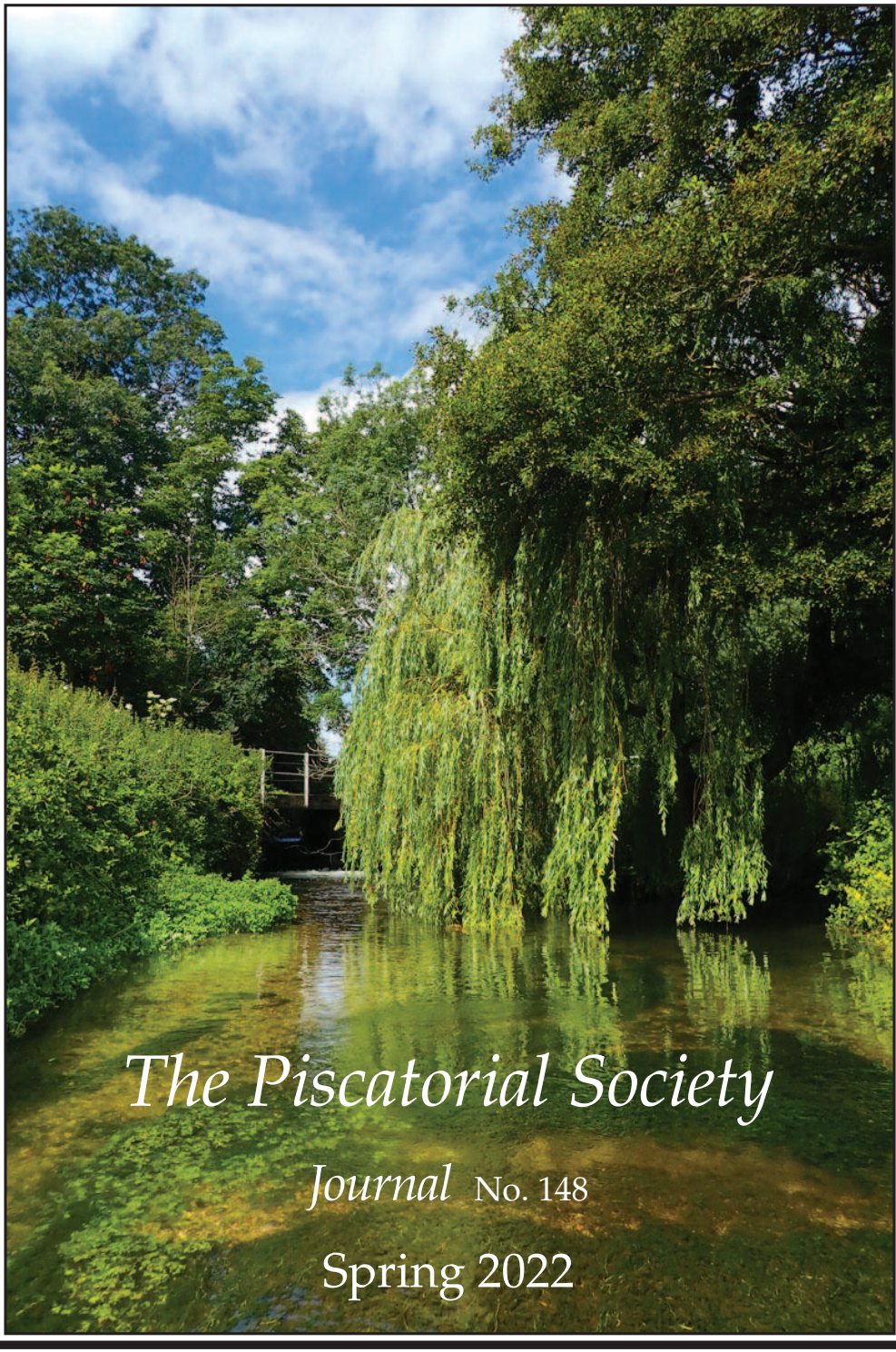

The Piscatorial Society

Journal No. 148

Spring 2022

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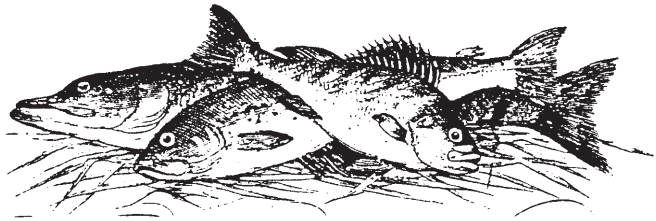

The Journal of the Piscatorial Society No. 148 Spring 2022

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Mr Fish drawings and some others by kind permission of Martin Mayhew

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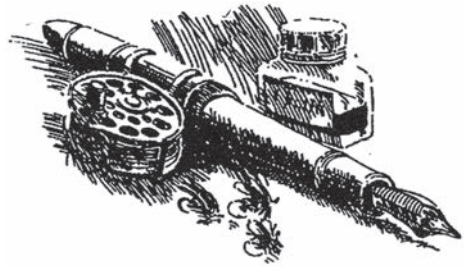


For its protagonists, at its simplest and most enjoyable, fly fishing is a delightful, restful, bucolic activity. Challenging for all of us, meditative for some, requiring all absorbing concentration for others, social or solitary, simple or technical and so often mentally cleansing in troubled times.

Scratch the surface, however, for those who administer it, there's plenty of controversy and disharmony. You may remember, as it has been mentioned a number of times in these pages and at our meetings, a few years ago as a result of a widely circulated Freedom of Information Request, the extent of stocking on chalkstreams permitted by the Environment Agency was exposed. I write 'permitted' but of course there has been an extraordinary demand to increase stocking driven by the over commercialisation of many chalkstream beats for the last 75 years justified by its champions as satisfying demand. Well, we want more people to fly fish, don't we?

Well, yes, but at what cost and what sort of fishing should we be introducing to them? This is almost exclusively a chalkstream issue. Just in case any of our members have only fished the chalkstreams I should let you know that in the West Country, in Wales, in large tracts of the North (I can feel some of our readers squirm at that generalisation, but forgive me), in the Lake District and Scotland people start and finish their fishing careers catching small and big wild brown trout from their broadly unstocked rivers and very happy and proud of it they are. We don't seem to be able to do that on the chalk. One of our members feels pretty strongly about this and responded to a stocking champion's comments by writing an article very recently published in Classic Angling and I'm grateful to them and to Tom Fort for consenting to its publication here. It's personal and pulls no punches and like Tom, I think you ought to have the chance to read it.

As I read through some old journals a couple of months ago and with my thoughts, not unnaturally, on Russia, I found an interesting little read. When I started my salmon fishing, there was much pondering about the piscatorial possibilities temptingly unreachable behind the Iron Curtain. One who pondered and then acted after the razing of the Berlin Wall was Christopher Robinson, then of Bailey Robinson, who pestered the newly accessible Russian establishment and in 1991 with a newly granted visa took an experimental trip to the Kola Peninsula in a very old Russian ex-military helicopter. He later proclaimed that "I cast the first fly ever on a Russian river". It now appears that a Society member was there before him although Christopher may well have caught the first fly caught salmon. That member was Sam Lombard-Hobson who wrote a great little

book *A Sailors War* about his wartime experiences in the Royal Navy. He retired to Sherrington in the Wylye valley, almost opposite our then Head Keeper, George Maich, himself a sub-mariner. I hope you enjoy Sam's story of the first fly cast on the Kola.

Once again, we have a variety of articles including the latest Desert Island Flies by Richard Tomiak and another Six Favourite Angling Related Possessions, this time by Tom Davis. Do let me know if you would like to be next.

As well as the usual long list of winter work, the keepers have had the additional job of getting the Anton ready for its first season and dealing with the after effects of the winter storms, particularly Eunice which landed in mid-February. As I write, the Anton work is going well and although there is much work to do over the coming seasons, the fishery will be ready for the start of the season. As I expected there is much interest in our new water as the on-line bookings demonstrate. As far as Eunice was concerned it was generally the view of the keepers that we came off lightly on most of our waters and as you will read it wasn't all bad news for Craig and the Anton.

It's been a busy winter for the keepers and as ever, we are grateful for all their efforts providing us with such wonderful fisheries.

Have a great season . . . enjoy the Anton.

Graham Waterton
watertongraham@gmail.com

Save the Mahseer

by Barry Hannigan

This article was written soon after the authors visit in 2012

Last March I went out to West Nepal to fish again for mahseer. There still linger in Nepal a few burro sahibs who have stayed on after long careers in the Gurkhas. Their love of the country and the people keeps them there. One of them lives in Pokhara in the middle west and spent his youth in service, but also roaming the hills and mountains and fishing the rivers. I too had youthful years there as an army doctor forty and thirty years ago in East Nepal at the British Military Hospital, Dharan. They were special days as young days were and should be. The medicine was a revelation and professionally outstanding, but it was not too difficult to arrange fishing treks into the foothills of the Himalayas. A request to the Gurkha Major would produce a head boy and porters able to gather the kit and buy supplies in the bazaar.

The Golden Mahseer is a beautiful looking fish, coloured yellow, orange, green and gold, with impressively large scales, and a fine head. It has a soft mouth, but a set of fierce looking dentures deep in the pharynx which are powerful enough to crush a bait. Bill, who knows a great deal more about them than I, wrote from Nepal as follows: "Golden Mahseer are Cyprinidae, Barbus Tor Putitor. The issue of thin and thick lipped species is unresolved but the general opinion seems to be that they are variants of the same species, attributed to various causes. The other species in Nepal is Tor Tor, a much deeper and more powerful fish but getting very uncommon. Spawning is also the subject of controversy" [they run up before and during the monsoon, and go back down in the

autumn] "I suspect they haven't read the books and like most other animals are quite happy to mate when they are ready; certainly I have seen them spawning in one pool three years running in April. The big fish are all hens but I have caught a few cock fish in the mid 30lbs. In general in our rivers I don't think many cocks would run much over 40lbs and the average would be nearer 20lbs." Also on upstream migrations long trails of running baitfish known as Buduna in Nepali are seen, but more correctly Garra Gotyla with some Faketa mixed in and Goonch, a rather ugly Gangetic catfish which grows huge feasting on roast dinners below the burning ghats of the Ganges.

Three old sahibs, two goonch and a mahseer

It seems mahseer are omnivorous. In an article of mine in the Field in 1979, I wrote: "They are harmless bottom feeding fish, only occasionally predatory, but can be tempted with spoons, plugs and spinners, as well as a worm or paste bait much favoured by the old British Indians. I examined the stomachs of 20 odd fresh caught fish and found nothing inside except a variety of silk weed; I could find no evidence of any other article of diet." They will occasionally take a fly in clear water, particularly in shallows, but otherwise usually fished deep on a sinking line where they might be congregated. My attempts with the fly have never met with success, but caused great awe and amusement for the ghillies. More commonly nowadays they are fished for with plugs or spoons like Tobys of various weights from 15 even up to 60gms. Mahseer are at home amongst the big boulders of these fast flowing rivers. They can be found anywhere in the pools, but have a preference for the tails. A ghillie must stay by you at all times since the current is strong, the rocks are slippery, quicksands are treacherous and mahseer take violently and their first run is powerful enough to pull you off your feet.

In the early 70s mahseer were abundant. There were no roads into the hills then, so from Barachattra we would walk for a day to Trebini, the junction of the Sunkosi, Arun and Tamar rivers, which drain the high Eastern Himals. Dawn fishing, breakfast and a

long walk to the next junction for an evening's fishing was the pattern. The fishing was wonderful, but we never realised it was unique. Gangetic dolphins were often seen then playing in the junction. Not so now.

On my return in 1982, things had changed. The medieval society was going. Roads were being driven into the hills, and with them came migrant workers with hunger and dynamite. For my year I caught only six mahseer to 12lbs. The fishing has become poor, I recorded.

The author at the Seti Karnali junction

So an invitation thirty years later to fish for the mighty mahseer was very welcome. There were caveats. Nepal was still suffering from political instability after a vicious civil war, regicide, and civil unrest. There were unpredictable strikes and demonstrations as the various factions tried to influence the communist administration. The old civilities could not be expected. Old Nepal was going.

Western Nepal is remote and grandly attractive. Bill Smith had fished there for decades on the Karnali and its tributaries accompanied by a fine team of boys, accomplished artisans, loyal and industrious. We were to spend three weeks rafting and camping from top to bottom. David Thomas, another ex-ghurka and distinguished educationalist who has established and funded many schools in the mid-west of Nepal through the Cairn Trust, was the delightful third companion. We were warned the mahseer were scarce, but the previous year fish in the 40s had been caught. We were not so lucky.

It was a logistical feat to move twenty five people to Dipayal, necessitating overnight stops in Bhutwal and Tigertops Karnali Lodge in the Bardia National Park. The rafts were four, one for the gear only and three for us with big loads and boatmen. Ahead went a pathfinding canoeist, since some of the rapids were fierce, and could change each year after the monsoon landslides. Camps were chosen carefully by Bill, and set up as instructed while we sat in the shade. We stayed between one and three nights according to the fishing expectations, twelve camps in all. The river was clear and low as is usual at that time of year, unless affected by one of the spectacular thunderstorms that occur when the warm air up from the plains meets the cold air from the high mountains. It was a majestic place to fish and we fished hard but at the end had accounted for only ten mahseer to 25lbs on rod and line.

A Camp by the Khola – complex logistics

So what has happened to these iconic fish, and to the holy Gangetic dolphin and probably to most of the other species that run the rivers of India and Nepal on their annual migrations. The Gangetic dolphin has aroused great interest, especially after the functional extinction of the Yangtze river dolphin. While they once numbered in their tens of thousands, the last survey conducted by the World Wildlife Fund and their partners found less than two thousand remaining in the dolphins' entire habitat range. In Nepal, where the dolphin is considered to be critically endangered, they are thought to be almost extinct with reported numbers of possibly a dozen to a controversial high of a

hundred mainly in the Karnali system, but perhaps also still in the Kosi in the East. The dolphin is a holy animal, a legally protected mammal in Nepal and is the National Aquatic Animal of India, but is heading to extinction. Since the dolphin is at the apex of the aquatic food chain, its fate is an indication of declining biodiversity, including of course the mahseer.

The causes of declining fish stocks are well known. Fishermen get some of the blame but it is difficult to begrudge villagers harvesting such a valuable food source. But commercial fishing with extensive nets, gill nets, snares, poisoning and even bombing of pools are disastrous and worsening as the population rises. This latter increases pollution and adds to the habitat degradation by deforestation and erosion. The many barrages across the larger rivers aid flood control and irrigation, but form barriers to migration especially outside the monsoon season, and in the case of the dolphin segregate populations, reducing the genetic pool.

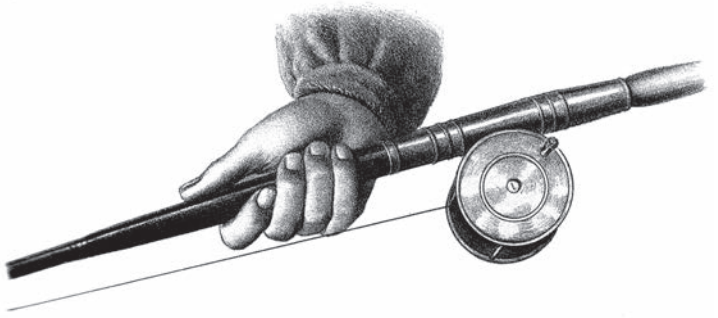
There are research programmes and campaigns both in India and Nepal supported by the WWF to save the Gangetic dolphin and if this holy and unique mammal which is threatened with extinction is truly protected and its habitat preserved, there will be benefits for the fish populations too, particularly the mahseer. This must deserve our support.

Postscript

My original article appeared in the Flyfishers Journal in 2012 and I was curious to find out what has happened over the last decade to help save the mahseer. This lead me to the Mahseer Trust, a UK registered charity dedicated to preserving the mahseer and associated river habitat. The Mahseer Trust has considerable expertise amongst the trustees and officers both at home and abroad, on the Indian subcontinent and across the distribution range in other Asian countries. They are engaged in scientific research and conservation as well as education and community outreach.

Another active charity is Shoal whose priority is to identify and preserve freshwater species worldwide. They have a Project Mahseer running in which the Mahseer Trust is involved.

I have the feeling now that the situation remains pretty dire, with habitat threats increasing. Luckily there is a growing determination and energy to save these beautiful fish and we must hope that fresh funding can be found to save the mahseer.



A Brief History of Grayling Conservation in the Piscatorial Society

by Robin Mulholland

Sometimes by chance and sometimes by intent The Society has been a leading player in the conservation of grayling not only on the chalk streams of southern England but also elsewhere. When I joined The Society in 1979 the instruction was very clear, all grayling were to be killed as they were seen as competitors to trout. In addition they were removed by electro fishing on the Avon along with pike. However the "winds of change" were beginning to blow. A postgraduate student by the name of Bryant carried out a study on The Society's Lambourn fishery in the 70s which looked at the relationship between trout and grayling. He found that the overlap was very limited and we had the first indication that the two species lived in different niches in the ecosystem. John Woolland, who is known to some of us, did similar work on the Welsh Dee in the early 70s. Bryant subsequently did not go into fisheries work and disappeared from our view. Dr Eileen Buttle presented his findings to The Society at an EGM (now the Hordern) in the early 80s and I presented the same information to The Grayling Society in their symposium in Amesbury in 1987.

The results caused no great stir within our Society but there were still members who were keen to see the grayling removed.

In 1981 the first Grayling Match was held. It began as a challenge from Mike Mee, a committee member of the Yorkshire branch of the Salmon and Trout Association, to the Wiltshire branch and was seen as a logical way to remove grayling as well as to raise money for the S&TA. Ken Bramer was the Wiltshire organiser and as the S&TA was fairly moribund in Wiltshire at that time it soon became a Yorkshire versus Piscatorial Society event. The Yorkshire team was made up largely by Oliver Edward's fly dressing class and so began some friendships which have been of great value to the members involved and to The Society. In that first match, 137 grayling were caught by the 20 contestants.

In 1984 Hal Thirlaway, the water warden at the time, carried out the first Wylye electro fishing survey. Hal was frustrated by members complaining that there were too many grayling in the Wylye and that there were more grayling than trout. The survey demonstrated that there were more trout than grayling and again there was an indication that the two populations could live side by side as they occupied different niches. Hal's original thinking was that the survey would be carried out every four years but the information it was providing was so useful that the interval was reduced to every two years and then it became an annual event.

The Grayling Event was evolving. Mike Mee's son, David, graduated in fisheries science and became a fisheries officer with the National Rivers Authority, now the Environment Agency. He was also the coach to the England Youth Fly Fishing team and so the Yorkshire team became a mix of senior EA scientists and members of the England Fly Fishing Team (Rivers and World). This was beneficial to The Society in that we built up some very good contacts in the EA. It was also of great benefit to those of our members who fished in the match in that it lifted their skills to a whole new level. The international team members were always very free with their information and their fly

patterns. The match also demonstrated the futility of the electro fishing which missed the 0+ fish and removed all others meaning that they had much reduced competition. As a result the following October the river had a huge population of 1+ fish. The biomass of grayling remained roughly the same but the structure of the population had been lost. In 1990 therefore the electro fishing ceased and members were encouraged to treat grayling as they would trout, fish barbless and return the majority. Following the introduction of the EA's Trout and Grayling Strategy in 2003 it became mandatory of course to observe the bag limit and the slot size limit. I believe that we were the first substantial body on the chalk streams to stop killing grayling by means other than rod and line. This cessation of killing resulted in the number of fish being caught in the match to rise dramatically and it was clear that many fish were being caught more than once in the day. This theory is supported by the number of times I have caught the same fish twice in my normal grayling fishing and on one occasion my late wife caught a tagged fish on the Wylye, D11. She cast again into the same area with the same fly and caught D11! Some members I know are concerned about the welfare of the fish when, as in the match, large numbers are caught. I cannot say that no fish die after being caught because I do not have that information. I do know however, that the fish are handled both with great care and respect and have never seen dead fish after the event. I do know that if the same stretches are fished the following day similar numbers of grayling are caught.

In 1993 Dr. Anton Ibbotson of what was then the chalk stream group of the Freshwater Biological Association at East Stoke (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology) on the Frome and is now the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, asked if he could become involved in the Wylye survey and of course he was welcomed. He was joined by Richard Cove, then the Environment Agency's lead on grayling and now an employee of Natural Resources Wales. They began by tagging and measuring the grayling and the study was entitled *Year Class Strengths and Recruitment in a Grayling Population*. The study demonstrated that the population fluctuated as we expected with low flow years being better for grayling recruitment. The grayling did not move very far with tagged fish being caught in the same place year after year. This was encouraging as it suggested that the river was providing both feeding stations and spawning areas in close proximity. Scale reading was accurate in identifying age in young, fast growing fish but was much less accurate for older fish and consistently underestimated age. Tag recapture gives a much more accurate determination of age. This was confirmed by a study entitled *Validation of scale-age determination in European grayling using tag recapture analysis* by Kuliskova, Ibbotson, Jones, Cove and Scott. The majority of fish die at four to five years of age but some live much longer even to eight and older. Growth slows in older fish and can actually cease in some individuals. Support for this study was provided by The Society in the form of staff time and equipment, by GWCT and the EA (later Natural Resources Wales). Where money was required for consumables such as tags, the Grayling Research Trust which was set up in 1994, provided small sums in the early years. As time went on and data accumulated it became apparent that money needed to be found to pay for a scientist or scientists to examine the data in greater detail. By this time Stephen Gregory, a modeller and statistician from the GWCT, had become involved and he identified Vanessa Huml, a graduate with a master's degree in Biology from the Ludwig Maximillian University of Munich as someone suitable to undertake the further research. Vanessa undertook a PhD thesis jointly funded by the GRT and Manchester Metropolitan University entitled *Assessing adaptive genetic variation for conservation and management of European grayling*. Her thesis was published in "Molecular Ecology" in 2018. Using the

Wylye data and data from a study by Bangor University, co-funded by the GRT, the results emphasised the need to maintain genetic diversity in the face of the increasing threats posed by climate change. It is also clear from this study that all grayling populations together with trout and salmon in England and Wales are threatened by climate change, with the chalk streams being particularly vulnerable as they are on the southern edge of the graylings' distribution zone.

Following this the GRT funded Tea Basic, a statistician, to spend 4 months analysing the Wylye data. Put very simply the problem for the grayling was high temperature and low flows. Post incubation temperatures above 13.5°C had a negative effect on 0+ grayling survival and increasing numbers of days with low discharge post incubation also had a negative effect on 0+ grayling survival. There was no evidence of any effect of elevated discharge following spawning on the Wylye. The study emphasised the need to maintain natural discharge regimes in salmonid rivers. Tea's paper was published in "Ecology of Freshwater Fish" in 2018.

Both Vanessa and Tea presented their findings to the European Society of Ichthyology at their conference in Lausanne in 2019. Their attendance was funded by the GRT. The most recent study was Jessica Marsh's "How a changing environment affects grayling at different life stages". The results of this study were written up by John Dart in the Autumn Journal of 2021 and the original paper is available on our website Library. Jessica's work was funded by The Society, the GRT and Wessex Water. A second paper has been submitted for publication, written during Jess's spare time from her day job at CEFAS. For me the most important management point to come out of this study so far is the need to maintain areas of clean gravel for both feeding and spawning. Areas of clean gravel often, even usually, go hand in hand with shading so to make best use of existing trees is important. Whether time will allow any new plantings to make a contribution must be doubtful. The creation of a mosaic of habitats is necessary.

Collection of data for the Wylye Grayling and Trout Study is currently problematical due to changes at GWCT and Richard Cove's duties but hopefully this will be resolved and the long term survey will continue. This is the only long term population study in the UK. The value of long term monitoring records such as these should never be undervalued. They are essential if we are to understand the changes in environmental conditions, fish populations and the impacts of climate change. What we have learnt from the Wylye data set will clearly have application to trout if global warming and climate change continue.

The Grayling Event has continued up to its 40th year and has continued to provide a very useful measure of the Avon's grayling population. It has also illustrated how rare large grayling are in a prolific grayling river like the Avon because the most serious competitor for a grayling is another grayling. In 40 years and many thousands of grayling only 5 genuine 2 pounders have been recorded. A grayling must be 46cms to be accepted as 2lbs, 3 have been measured as such and two weighed. After this its 40th year the format of the event is to change and the competitive element will disappear.

Desert Island Flies – 3

by Richard Tomiak

So, storms abound and yet another unfortunate member of the Society lands on the shores of the lost island of Piscatoria. This is becoming a bit of an unfortunate habit but no wonder if one is sailing in the Bermuda Triangle.

Clem Booth originally comes from South Africa and learnt to fish on the freestone rivers around Cape Town, home of many a fine angler with, in addition, a vibrant and creative fly-tying community. Since then, he has travelled with work and has extensive experience in fishing the Alpine waters of Middle Europe. He joined the Society in 2009 and is a keen split cane and silk line fisherman. He uses these almost extensively when fishing the Society's waters and finds their accuracy and delicacy of presentation superior to carbon fibre rods. He thinks that whilst he may catch fewer fish with the cane but the ones he does are bigger! He also likes the fact that he gets to know the rod maker personally and chooses Barder of Newbury by preference. He has set up a split cane group, so take a look on the Society's web page for details – he is planning a split cane day for those who have a rod or are interested in finding out more about them and how they can complement more modern technologies. I will be there to gain tips on keeping my silk line floating more than half an hour!

Whilst preparing this article with Clem we talked about the various styles of fishing that different fishing environments adopt. In middle Europe they put great store by the upstream/downstream dry fly. Their method is to cast upstream and gently lift the rod as the fly floats towards one then let it come down as the fly heads downstream. Their logic is that it covers a lot of water with one cast. I have fished the Traun (South-East of Salzburg) and had success with this method using a dry sedge pattern. We also agreed that the grayling enjoys a high status in Middle Europe with some excellent specimens to be found. I personally hooked and lost a fish of some 50cms or so on the Traun (with a good old Sawyer Killer Bug much to the amazement of my guide – I said the fish must be fed up with endless Austrian food and would appreciate some fine English cuisine! It was very successful that day with the Killer Bug).

Talking of success and Killer Bugs, we also considered flies that are just too successful to the point that they can almost take the fun and interest out of fishing. We have all had days when one fly attracts almost a fish almost every cast so go home early but some flies do this more than most. For Clem these are the G&H sedge and the Killer Bug, so they tend to be set aside and have not been included in his selection. One wants flies that are successful but not too successful – curious isn't it!

So, as his yacht goes down Clem gamely dashes into the swell to rescue what he can of his fishing kit, his eight favourite flies, a book and a luxury item. Let's see what he has rescued.

1: French Partridge Mayfly
This fly is something of a Society favourite. Clem ties it pretty traditionally and thinks it is excellent when the trout are obsessed with shucks as well as of course duns; indeed, he finds that the bigger trout often eschew the duns and instead filter feed like whales on the shucks!

Hook size: 12
Thread: 12/0 or 14/0 green
Tail: cock pheasant tail
Body: dubbed Semperfli Kapok Olive
Body hackle: olive cock tied in with fine gold ribbing
Head hackle: Green French partridge

2: Clem's Emerger
This is one of Clem's creations taking the best of other designs and coming up with his own; it is a design rather than pattern. The key is using a Klinkhamer hook but with a conventional hackle so that the tail and thorax trail inside the surface film. (He also ties a similar pattern with an olive quill body but we have to make choices as the ship goes down, so it is this one, a Danica.)

Hook size: 12 Klinkhamer (but smaller sizes for other Ephemeroptera)
Thread: black
Tail: cock pheasant tail or can use antron
Body: Semperfli Kapok cream with fine silver wire
Thorax: brown cock hackle
Wing: pale brown CDC

3: Stimulator
This is great hairy beast of a fly which the fish cannot but fail to notice it and it is a great all-rounder especially when sedges are around. It is an effective searching pattern too.

Hook size: 12 or 14
Thread: 12/0 or 14/0 olive
Tail: bunch of deer or elk hair
Body: light brown antron with palmered light cock hackle and gold ribbing to tie down
Hackle: brown cock
Wing: deer or elk hair to match tail

4: Griffith's Gnat
Another great favourite with Society members, especially effective when midges are around. They often drift downstream in clusters and this is a great way to imitate them. The tying is pretty traditional though he does use a rusty dubbing for the body. In larger sizes it can double up as Hawthorn.

Hook size: 16–20
Thread: 14/0 black
Tail: wisps of black hackle
Body: rusty orange dubbing
Hackle: black for body and head

5: The Tactical Wonderbug

This was also a favourite of Don Hutton who is also stranded on the island, so no shortage of these flies then! Clem likes a slightly larger fly than Don as well as a different coloured shuck. Not available in the UK so you need a friend to tie some up for you if you don't tie your own.
Clem notes that with a pronounced trailing shuck with colouration either olive or rust it's a brilliant first half of season fly. Irrespective of what's hatching the trout fancy these! He thinks it is a cripple/failed hatch fly pattern that makes it so attractive to fish.

Hook size: Czech nymph hook – 12 or 14
Thread: black
Tail: olive or rust Zelon (trailing shuck)
Body: dark brown dubbing
Underwing wing: loop of the same Zelon and a little CDC
Wing: fine deer hair

6: F-Fly

Clem likes these pretty small in sizes 20–22. They are a classic and popular fly that sits low in the water so very visible to trout as they enter their field of surface vision. The simplicity of the design belies their effectiveness. Clem commented that some people don't even bother with a body – a bit like an Oliver Kite bare hook nymph – just a simple bit of CDC wing, remarkable. Clem likes these flies for when trout have a dimpling rise and is the smallest that he uses. It is an excellent impressionistic imitation of anything from small BWOs, pale wateries or the like.

Hook size: 20–22
Thread: 14/0 in olive
Body: superfine antron in olive
Wing: CDC tips

7: Upside Down Dun

There was a fad sometime back, for upside down hooks on the premise that the hook put off the fish, so an upside-down hook ought to work better was the theory. This myth has been debunked by careful underwater observation and they have fallen out of fashion somewhat. They are also much trickier to tie adding to their lack of popularity. However, another way to look at the hook is a keel, as noted by Gary LaFontaine leading to his Dancing Caddis. This pattern is the same in that the absence of a hook allows the fly to freely skitter across the surface as well as not so easily getting caught up in weed. Clem commented that he likes to use this fly on the Wylye in summer where there is weed about and fish are hiding in the holes in the weed.

Hook size: Klinkhamer, 12 and smaller
Thread: 12/0 to 14/0 black
Tail: partridge
Body: Adams grey dubbing
Hackle: dark brown cock
Wing: light brown CDC

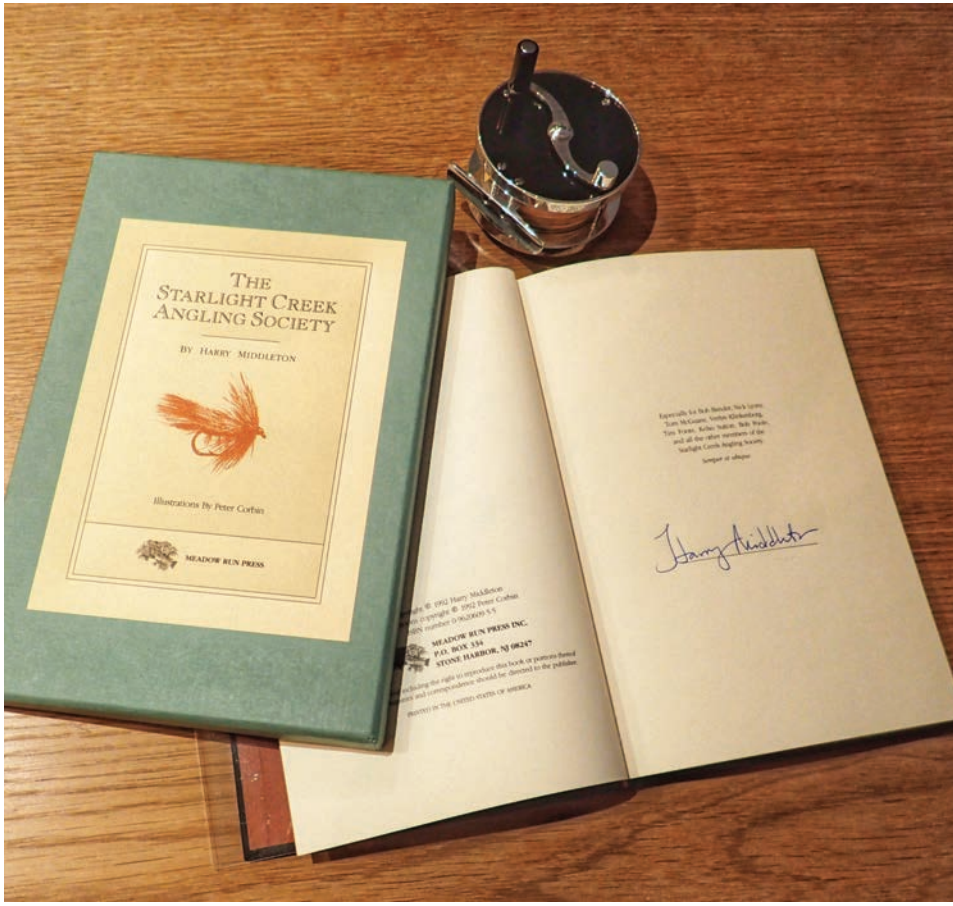
8: Gold ribbed Hare's Ear (Unweighted)

And so to the final fly which just had to be a GRHE. Tie as untidily as possible with hair sticking out all over the place. To be fished low in the surface film or just below.

Hook size: Kamasan B 175, 14 and smaller
Thread: light brown
Tail: guard hairs
Body and thorax: hair mask, with gold ribbing

As ever, there are the also rans – ones which almost made it. We missed out on a heavy nymph with none in the eight but Clem's Rusty Orange would be his choice. Initially tied for grayling with rusty dirty bug yarn it is also very effective for trout (tying: size 14 or less, black tungsten bead head and rusty yarn). Also missing out is the Daddy (trailing legs of course, peacock herl body, fluro-red butt, no wings but dark brown cock hackle), Kite's Imperial, Black Foam beetle and The Parachute Adams (tied with a tail of golden pheasant tippets). It is always tough trying to get a selection down to eight but time is precious with a sinking ship!

Finally, a book in addition to The Complete Angler. Clem's choice, a very rare book but with exquisite writing, *The Starlight Creek Angling Society* by Harry Middleton, who he regards as the greatest fishing and outdoor writer. And his luxury item? A wonderful, century old wicker and leather creel by Joseph Schnell, an American craftsman of outstanding talent.



The Book

The Luxury

Banned on the 1st July 1921

by John McGill

The Importation of Plumage (Prohibition) Act – The Plumage Act

The Summer of 2021, marked the centenary of an event that had a significant effect on the art and craft of fly tying and as such, should not pass unnoticed.

Victorian fly tying in general and the tying of classic, fully dressed, salmon flies in particular, required the use of often brightly coloured feathers culled from a wide range of birds, including Egret, Scarlet Ibis, Indian Crow, Blue Chatterer, Tragopan, Bustard, Jungle Fowl, Ostrich, Flamingo, and various Cranes, Herons, Storks, Hummingbirds, Birds of Paradise, Pheasants and Waterfowl etc. It's a long list. Many of them were rare species even then.

But sombre dry flies could also require the use of unusual feathers. For example, F.M. Halford was always promoting Condor herl, taken from the huge primary feathers, as the perfect dry fly body material. This had always been difficult to obtain, but it is thought that he had a home source all of his own. Halford was 'best mates' with H.S. Hall (of eyed hook fame). Hall taught Mathematics at Clifton College in Bristol. The public school is located directly opposite the rear entrance to Bristol Zoo. Around 1900, Bristol Zoo had one of the very few Condor held in captivity. It's postulated that Hall was also 'best mates' with the Head Keeper in the aviary? So, it's not what you know, it's who you know, etc.

The availability of all of these materials was an offshoot of the Victorian millinery trade, more especially the fashion for large and extravagant ladies' hats. Many of these were adorned with vast amounts of plumage sourced from across The Empire and beyond. The introduction of The Plumage Act put a stop to all that.

The Plumage Act was the result of a determined campaign by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds when it was founded in 1889. The RSPB was founded by a group of women in order to campaign against what was referred to as 'murderous millinery'. They felt forced to unite because the all-male British Ornithologists' Union was not acting on the issue. The Bill was first presented to Parliament in 1908 but its passage was interrupted for a variety of reasons, including trade interests, and not least the outbreak of WW1. Thus the continued momentum in pursuit of the Act over this protracted period was largely female in origin and ran in parallel with the growing suffragette movement.

The Plumage Act was eventually passed on 1st July 1921 and forbade the importation of plumage. However, it did not prohibit the continuing sale or wearing of it. The Plumage Act was superseded by The Importation of Goods (Control) Act 1954. It was repealed by Section 13 of The Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976. This followed the UK signing up to the CITES convention in 1973 and which became active in 1975. It continues to prohibit the trade of plants and animals and their by-products that might threaten the survival of a species.

Despite CITES, some rare old feathers still crop-up from time to time at the vintage tackle auctions. These are either in the form of ageing taxidermy mounts, preserved whole bird skins or small packets of feathers. They often attract fevered bidding and sell for large amounts of money. However, to be legally traded the seller has to be licensed

(for example, professional taxidermists are licensed) and the specimen/s have to carry individual documentation. If there is proof that the feathers are sufficiently old, then permission may (or may not) be granted for sale. Nevertheless, if you scan eBay, you may see rare feathers for sale. We should always be suspicious of the legality of these offers and we should check before we buy. Caveat emptor!

In the context of tying classic, fully dressed, salmon flies. If anyone would like to read a modern day 'ripping yarn' about the theft, in 2009, of a large number of rare bird skins from The Natural History Museum's property at Tring, then you should get hold of a copy of 'The Feather Thief' by Kirk Wallace Johnson (2018).

The Opportunity of a Lifetime

by JSD

On the wall of the Chief Inspector of Police at Wood Street police station Wakefield there was a sign "An opportunity of a lifetime must be seized within the lifetime of the opportunity."

Such an opportunity came my way 1989 when Lars Olson, who was then Secretary of the Swedish branch of the Grayling Society, came to the Annual General Meeting at Ripon.

He showed some spectacular photos and invited Grayling Society members to join him on a trip the next summer to fish in Sweden including Lapland north of the Arctic Circle. That proved irresistible to me as I'd always longed to fish in a true wilderness and here was my chance.

In the summer of 1990 six members of the Grayling Society including myself took him up on his offer of a trip. The plan was to fish in central Sweden on the Gim River which he owned, and to have an opportunity to travel up to the Arctic Circle to fish the River Kaitum staying at the lodge on the river.

It was a party of six of us that set out on that Saturday from Manchester Airport: we flew via Stockholm to Ostersund in central Sweden.

There we were met by Lars and taken to the village of Gimdalen about one hour's drive from the airport. Our "hotel" in Gimdalen was a converted school house, "The Jumping Grayling Inn" as Lars named it as Swedish grayling are renowned jumpers unlike English grayling. The hospitality was excellent and after a welcoming glass of wine and a meal of smoked reindeer and smoked trout we were presented with instant cameras to record our stay including the history of the village and the River Gim.

Over the space of very many years, the river had been used for logging. It had been straightened and all the large stones which would have obstructed the passage of logs had been taken out.

Lars and his friends had actually purchased the rights to fish the river and had spent a considerable amount of time, money and effort using machinery to replace large stones to make the river more suitable for fishing. Part of the river was designated as a spawning area and nobody was allowed to fish in that length. He was intent on restoring the river to its former glory and planned to have numerous guests on Sweden's only catch and release river at that time. One of the problems at that time was that most Swedes had a tradition of "fishing for the pot" and there were no limits. Many rivers had been "cleaned out" of sizeable fish. With proper management here was the way forward.

After a good breakfast on the Sunday we went to the River Gim which was a short distance away. We fished in some deep pots immediately below the road bridge and I caught a small grayling almost immediately on the grayling bug. The fishing was not easy as there was a strong downstream wind and no-fly hatch, The river was deep in places and the wading was not easy, breast high waders and a staff were essential.

I was then introduced to what was to me a new method of fishing, the dry fly namely the downstream method. The trick is the fly is simply cast downstream and the rod stopped high to create slack line. The rod is kept high and then the point is allowed to drop as the fly is taken further downstream by the current. Done correctly a fly can be presented on a perfect drag-free drift in the fastest of fast water. All members of the party caught fish that day, the best being a grayling that was one and a half pounds. We fished until about 7.00pm having taken a pleasant lunch by the campfire.

The author with his first Kaitum grayling

I also found out about something of myself. Our accommodation was in a converted schoolhouse which could be used as accommodation for the Lapp people and their reindeer in very harsh winters.

The bedrooms had only very thin flimsy curtains and the room was very very bright as the sun gave 24 hour daylight. The net result was that first night I had virtually no sleep and I was very, very tired.

After lunch I laid down on a bench and closed my eyes, Lars then put my hat over my face so it was dark and I was out cold for five hours! He later told me unless you can block out the light with blackout curtains, or in my case, a hat over my eyes, sleep is hard to come by. I missed the afternoon's fishing only being wakened about half an hour before going back for dinner.

That evening was a meal with salmon and dill sauce, followed by pork in mushroom sauce, and ice cream: followed by a fly-tying session which in fact went onto 3.00am.

It was significant that when two members of our party went down to the river in the evening at 9.00pm they reported a huge rise of fish all over the river to a hatch of sedge fly.

A late start the next day found us fishing for about an hour and having an early lunch. Again the wind kept down the fly hatch and we decided to take some time to look round the village and visit Ronnie Ericsson one of Sweden's top fly dressers. We then went to Lars summer house in the forest for an evening meal. It was about 9.00pm that evening before we got down to the river, again the wind had dropped and the fish were well on feed and we all had some good sport. One of the members of the Swedish Grayling Society hooked a huge fish which took him right down to the backing before cutting his leader on a rock. I've seldom seen anyone so disappointed.

In northern Sweden you can fish 24 hours a day and it was 4.00am before we were finally persuaded to leave the river as we had a long trip the next day flying to Kirina and then on to the Kaitum River 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

I will never forget my first ride in the helicopter out of the treeless tundra towards the snow-capped mountains and the views as we flew down the mountain into the valley of the Kaitum. The river is huge, about as wide as Lake Windermere in places and narrowing down to rapids some 300 yards wide. The fishing camp situated on the north bank of the Kaitum and run by Ingomar Crystal and his wife, Karena.

The camp consisted of a comfortable communal lodge which serves the dining room and includes a shop, office and kitchen. The log fire burns all day and the comfortable armchairs provide a welcome respite after a day's fishing. Sleeping accommodation was in stoutly built cabins which I found very comfortable with good blackout shutters! I found it hard to believe I was in such a place until I saw some reindeer in an enclosure; I had indeed arrived in Lapland.

Wednesday being the first day of fishing we set out in boats to go and fish the Kuokkak rapids which are about a 20 minute boat ride down the river. The power of the river at this point is tremendous with a good 6 to 7 knot current in the middle and it seems amazing that the fish could rise and take small flies in such a current, but rise they did.

We landed and elected to fish from the bank. My first Kaitum fish came to a well leaded nymph rolled down near the bottom. I saw the line move and struck, my 10 foot Bruce and Walker light line rod was hooped double as a fish about 1½lbs put up a tremendous fight in the fast water on occasion stripping line from the reel. Its fight was like that of a 2½lbs Rutland rainbow trout back home.

All members of the party took good fish until about 2.00pm when the hatch finished

and the fish went off to come on again about 6.00pm which gave us 1½ hours fishing before dinner at the lodge.

Thursday dawned, cold, wet and windy and we stayed in coming out 1.00pm. We again went out to the rapids where we had enjoyed some excellent fishing to the downstream dry fly. Wading was very difficult in the fast water on large stones that rocked!

It was not always easy to get at the fish but one method of overcoming this was to go out in the boats and anchor in midstream with a heavy anchor fishing the downstream dry fly or a nymph cast upstream, or down and across dead drift in classic Yorkshire style.

Members of the Swedish and English grayling party

Boat fishing brought me my best fish of the week, a female grayling of 1lb 14oz although other members of the party took fish of over 2lbs and the best fish of the week caught by one of the guides was over 3lbs.

My best dry fly was far and away the Klinkhammer special which rose fish after fish, the green Caddis worm was my best wet fly.

Friday and Saturday brought us something special, a camping trip to fish for Arctic Char at a place far up the valley. All the camping equipment and tents for an overnight stay were loaded into the boats and we set off for the first stop the Tgirtjam Falls, an hour's boat ride away.

On arrival we found it was a huge series of rapids about 1¾ miles long and it was necessary to leave the boats and walk around on the shore. The boats now without passengers were strung together and the most experienced guide towed the boats

through the rapids using a rubber water jet powered boat which could negotiate the shallow water without problems.

As we were walking up the bank, to our surprise an elderly Lapp man and his sister came down the dangerous rapids in a canoe. They found a place to pull in and the man got out of the boat and spoke to the guides who clearly knew him, a local "character". His problem, an excess of alcohol became apparent as he suddenly fell on the floor laughing. He then staggered to his canoe and resumed the journey down river. "One of these days," said the guide, "he is not going to make it."

Having negotiated the rapids and taking some time for fishing with moderate success we took lunch and posed for photos. It was a perfect day, the air temperature registered 80°F, the river was 53°F. We spent most the afternoon travelling up the river which at this point opened into a huge lake on which at one point a sea plane landed on the water and taxied to the far shore.

We arrived at the top of the lake, the spot which was said to hold char and whilst the guides made camp, we went fishing. Having caught char in Lake Windermere at home I decided over the front short line loch style was the method most likely to produce fish.

Various drifts were tried until suddenly I felt a tremendous pull and the rod bent double. A few heart stopping minutes later and I netted my first Arctic char and nice fish around 1¼lbs which was duly returned. We drifted back again over the same water and the next few drifts produced another fish that broke the line and another fish came off the hook. No more offers were made and it was time for a delicious meal cooked over the campfire. Fishing continued after dinner and as the wind dropped we saw the tiny ripples made by rising fish but despite fishing to midnight I caught no more, but one of the members of the party however got a char on a small dry fly that evening.

The night was so warm I was able to sleep out in the sleeping bag laid on reindeer skins as insulation. Lying under the stars with the sound of rushing waters from the melting snow was magical and I felt a great sense of contentment as I fell asleep. The next day after a good sleep and breakfast we started off back down the river; it was at this point that the land showed its negative side.

The depression rolled up the valley the thunder cracked around the mountains and down came the rain like stair rods, the temperature fell dramatically and those members of the party who did not have first class warm protective clothing, got really cold. It was a long run back to the camp and our boat ran out of fuel. Fortunately we were able to radio the camp and the rubber jet boat came out from the camp, collected us and our boat and took us back to camp.

Back at the lodge after a good meal, some members of the party including myself went back to the Kuokkak Rapids for an afternoon's fishing, after all it was the last day!

The wind had dropped despite the downpour and the fly hatch was huge with the insects sticking on the surface and large numbers of rising fish. We all had excellent fishing from the boats until 7.00pm when we went back to the camp.

We had been warned not to be late: the last evening was wonderful. Why is it the last day of the holiday is always the best? The camp cooks had prepared a feast of roast reindeer with cloudberries as dessert: wine was drunk and speeches were made, a great end to a great holiday.

I have not been to the Arctic Circle since that opportunity of a lifetime.

Then and Now

by Martin Orme

Fly fishing has provided me with some of my fondest and dearest memories for well over 40 years. A gentle sporting art I absolutely treasure and I thank my father for getting me transfixed into the sport, enjoyment, challenges and the excitement it has brought. Nothing changes and with the feeling of tight lines, I'm still like a big kid in a candy shop. Loving it!

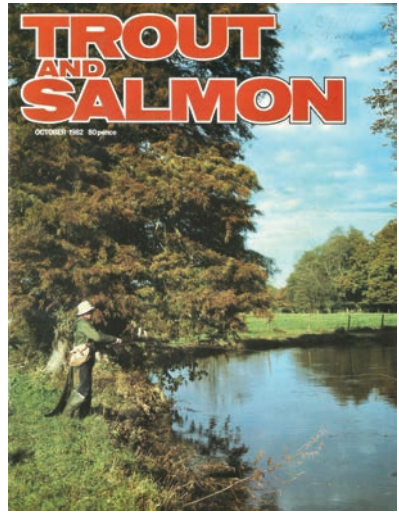
The majority of my earliest memories particularly those when growing up were about those wonderful days casting a fly on the Piscatorial waters in the hope of catching a fish.

One Spring day back in 1982. Yes 40 years ago! Can you believe it, I had a day with my father and brother on the Avon at our Rod Room stretch.

I was always fascinated to see the pike heads looking like trophies nailed to the wall outside the Rod Room. I used to think it was a message 'Pike Beware'.

The weather I recall was almost perfect, still, blue sky with just the right cloud cover and no sign of rain. I was itching with excitement and keen to tackle up and get fishing. My father I remember spoke to a gentleman equipped with a camera and tripod . . . a very impressive setup. The photographer (Eric Chalker) was preparing to take some pictures and why not on such a beautiful spring day and unknown to me at the time, for a well-known fishing magazine.

A favourite stretch of mine was starting downstream opposite the manor, a school in those days. The 'S' bend as my father and I called this stretch. It was always challenging to cast and reach the opposite bank which always had some good rises, quite often grayling among some impressive size trout. As my memory serves, a telegraph cable



The Original 1982 Cover

would run across what is now Sting's field over the river connecting to the school somewhere nearby, I knew this was always a hot spot and popular with members as it was strewn with hanging flies; Grey Wulffs, French Partridges, Greenwells, Tups, all sorts.

Whilst my father was fishing upstream, I noticed the photographer walking gently behind me to the bottom of the 'S' bend eagerly snapping away in my direction. I was thinking I hope my cast is ok and I look the part in case I ever see a picture. Just below the gorgeous sequoia tree, I carried on fishing with my trusted 'Boy Wallop' fibreglass rod recently given as a present from Dermot Wilson's Nether Wallop Mill, I continued focusing on any rising fish oblivious to the photographer's presence. He gently walked past me and upstream towards where my father was fishing, snapping away. I could hear click after click as it was so quiet. Whether I caught any fish on this particular day I have no idea but one thing for certain I was definitely in the frame.

A few months went by and my father mentioned the day when we saw the photographer on the Avon and showed me October's edition of the Trout and Salmon. I looked at it with astonishment and couldn't believe it, that's me! My parents and I were absolutely over the moon. I suppose being in the right spot, at the right time with picture-perfect conditions.

Forwards 40 years and with a friend from the Society we thought it was time to capture the shot once again and with the 'Boy Wallop' we walked to the spot to bring back those great memories four decades ago. We were pleased with the photograph, it came out perfectly, although for the time of year it was a lot greener!

That day in 1982 was a moment in my life and a photograph I will cherish for the rest of my days . . .

One thing I remember my father often said on the banks 'How are you getting on . . . any joy . . . any luck' . . . looking somewhat downbeat . . . 'No trout at all, Dad. All I seem to be catching are grayling, shoal after shoal' How the times change.

'Last cast, Martin. Time to go home'.

The Re-take

Chalkstream Stocking

by Tom Fort

I have no doubt that when it comes to valuing your mint condition original Cascapedia or providing the provenance of Neville Chamberlain's bakelite fly box or telling you which model of the Aerial Rapidex is to be preferred to which, Neil Freeman is the man. But when it comes to river management he reminds me of the bloke at the end of the bar who no one wants to engage in conversation because they know that when he's finished moaning about paying his taxes he will – as surely as night follows day – get on to the need to reintroduce the birch and National Service, give repatriation of unwanted immigrants a trial and do something about the bloody French.

Like many of those charged with running chalkstream fisheries, Freeman bristles mightily at the merest suggestion of the Environment Agency telling him what to do. How dare these whippersnappers just out of agricultural college tell him with his decades of experience what's good for the river!

Let me say at the outset that the move to restrict the size of trout that can be stocked on the Test and Itchen is long overdue and warmly to be welcomed. And if it gives Neil and his fellow 'managers' cause to consider their ways, so much the better. Tipping 5lbs and 6lbs pellet-fed lubbers into chalkstream fisheries and inviting anglers to pull them out again is the game fishing equivalent to the manager of a specialist carp pond buying in grotesquely obese force-fed dustbin-shaped mirrors and spreading the word that there are half a dozen 'forties' cruising around in search of their dinner ready for the man in the bivvy to spod out a halibut-and-fois-gras-flavoured boilie with a hook just next to it.

Thirty years ago I was asked to write a piece about the chalkstreams for the *Daily Telegraph*, and I went to see Mick Lunn, legendary keeper on the Houghton Club waters on the Test upstream from Stockbridge. Mick's stewponds, heaving with enormous browns and rainbows, were the source of many of the outsize specimens regularly dragged to the net by the rods up and down his own river and on the Itchen and elsewhere. I remember asking him what the biggest fish of the season had been and he hesitated, looking a trifle shame-faced, then confessed that it had been a rainbow a shade under 12lbs.

I went away and began to wonder if the twenty or so plutocrats and aristocrats who made up the Houghton Club – which, of course, OWNS its waters and so feels absolutely answerable to no one – were the right people to have anything to do with this beautiful but much abused chalkstream. The Houghton Club waters were certainly stocked in the days of Mick Lunn's grandfather, W.J. Lunn (inventor of the Lunn's Particular and the Houghton Ruby), but according to J.W. Hills in *River Keeper* or *Summer on the Test* (I'm quoting from memory) the average size was 2lbs, and a big fish was 4lbs. I'm sure Mick Lunn would have had his misgivings about tipping his bin-sized rainbows in, but in the end he was a club servant and his tied cottage and salary were dependent on doing the bidding of the toffs.

As it happens, 2lbs is – according to Neil Freeman – the size limit for stocked trout being proposed by the Environment Agency. He also claims that it is the lower limit. I have not checked the fine print, but it seems to me incredibly unlikely that the EA is

actually suggesting that ALL the fish are 2lbs and not an ounce less. Will there really be a ban on fish-farm trout of a 1lb 8oz? And how would it be enforced?

Several times in his somewhat dyspeptic tirade, Freeman appends the adjective 'hallowed' to the water he manages and the Test and Itchen in general. This reminds me of a visit – my only visit – to a well-known tackle shop in Stockbridge to buy a pair of polaroid glasses. While I was browsing, a youngish couple came in to inquire of the proprietor about fishing on the Test. I actually heard him, I kid you not, describe the river as 'the Everest of fly fishing'. The stocked fisheries of the middle and lower Test and Itchen are certainly extremely expensive, but 'hallowed?' They are put-and-take fisheries, managed as they are – according to Freeman – 'because of the sheer number of anglers who are fishing these classic (there you go again) rivers'.

But it must have occurred to Freeman that maybe the 'sheer number' is the problem, (and the fact that many of them know next to nothing about what true fly fishing should be). In fact he comes close to conceding this when he says that at Broadlands the wild trout that have somehow survived the weekly invasion of half-witted and deeply disoriented stockies have, in his words, 'become the prime target for the discerning rods we have ended up with at the fishery'. The sentence is, of course, somewhat ambiguous – he could mean that the discerning rods go after the wildies and the more numerous undiscerning ones hammer the stocked fish with a relentless assault of daddies purchased from the above mentioned Stockbridge tackle shop.

I recall that the same owners and managers put a similar collective howl of outrage some years ago when the EA banned stocking with diploid trout and ordered that from henceforth only triploid (infertile) trout should be stocked. It was claimed – and you still hear it – that for some unfathomable reason triploids are less inclined than diploids to feed at the surface, that they have an incurable genetic predilection for grubbing around on the bottom and ignoring the delicately cast daddy floating above. It should be obvious to anyone who knows anything about chalkstream fishing that the principal reason why rises of trout are so infrequent and short-lived is that the insects are not there, or in nothing approaching the abundance of yesteryear.

Around the same time the wise souls who run my own fishing club – which has some fishing on the upper Test and the upper Itchen, as well as on the Avon and Wylye – decided that stocking was to be very severely limited. In effect the Wylye, Test and Itchen (except for one stretch) became unstocked, catch-and-release; stocking was to continue on a reduced scale on the Avon. Some of the elderly living fossils used to keeping a pile of rigid brownies in their freezers in case somebody someday actually wanted to eat one, croaked their disapproval. Some even resigned. The rest of us held our peace and waited to see how it would work out.

The result has been, I would suggest, wholly beneficial. Where spawning conditions are good the abundance of wild brown trout is abundant. As is the way in a naturally balanced fishery, many are small, fewer are medium-sized, and a few grow big. By big I mean, not the 6-pounders that would hardly raise an eyebrow at many of the put-and-take Test fisheries, but a 2-pounder. Last summer, on a perfect early June evening in a modest fall of mayfly spinner, I got four fish from one of our Itchen stretches: 1lb, 1lb 8oz, 2lbs 4oz and 3lbs 4oz. Wild fish.

I would say that our waters are more consistently fished now than when regular stocking was the norm. The fish are smaller, for sure, or at least the bigger fish are smaller, if you get my meaning. Are they more difficult to catch? They probably are, because a stockie used to regular handfuls of pellets in the stews is likely to find the

Stocked fish or one like this?

larder in the river rather less plentifully supplied, and the titbits on offer tricky to grab – hence the landing of the ubiquitous daddy on its head is highly likely to provoke an eager, not to say famished, response.

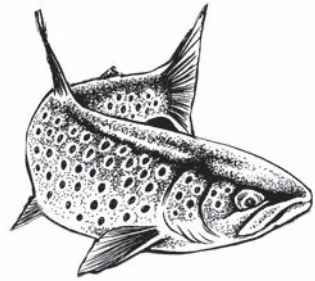
Neil Freeman states as if it were an accepted fact of life: 'If the rivers were not stocked then the wild trout would become uncatchable.' I have heard this assertion many times and I am inclined to regard it as a complete myth. Many of the anglers in my club are very much more accomplished than I am and catch certainly more fish. But it stands to reason that however brilliant they are, they are not going to be able to catch more than a small proportion of an abundant stock. And the fact that I do, on occasions, manage not to disgrace myself, indicates that trout engaged in a daily battle to find enough food to survive cannot afford to become 'uncatchable'. If you present one with something that mimics a familiar food source closely enough in a way that resembles natural behaviour, it will take it. Will it remember the following day how it was deceived, and vow never to let that happen again? I rather doubt it.

It has also been said time and again – J.W. Hills said it – that stocking is necessary because the middle and lower Test does not have enough suitable spawning territory to produce a self-sustaining population of wild fish. I am not sure I buy this either – the fact that Neil Freeman says wild trout are thriving at Broadlands suggests there must be decent spawning. Where else have the fish come from if not close to home?

So I am glad the EA have acted to outlaw the introduction of outsize fatties into river systems that are wholly unsuitable for them. I would like them to ban rainbows altogether. I would like them, or someone else, to conduct a thorough review of the impact of stocking and the viability of self-sustaining catch-and-release. I would like the

Test and Itchen Association to look critically at the way many of its members manage their waters and gently suggest that alternative ways might be tried.

I would like Neil Freeman to talk to his rods and ask them if the landing and beating over the head and dumping in the freezer of alien fish as big as my right thigh is really essential to their pleasure. And I would love him to deploy his considerable intelligence towards working out ways to reduce fishing pressure and enhance the recruitment of wild fish, instead of hurling ill-informed abuse at the Environment Agency.



Red Tags for the Reds

by Sam Le H Lombard-Hobson

First published in Journal 78, March 1987

In my 40 years in the Royal Navy I had made a practice to carry a couple of rods with me wherever I went. There are few places in the world where a keen fisher cannot find some sport; though it may take a bit of research and persuasion and so time, before he can get into the river. At Kola it was simply a horse-drawn cab ride, and again, as in nearly every country, the fishing was free for all and unrestricted.

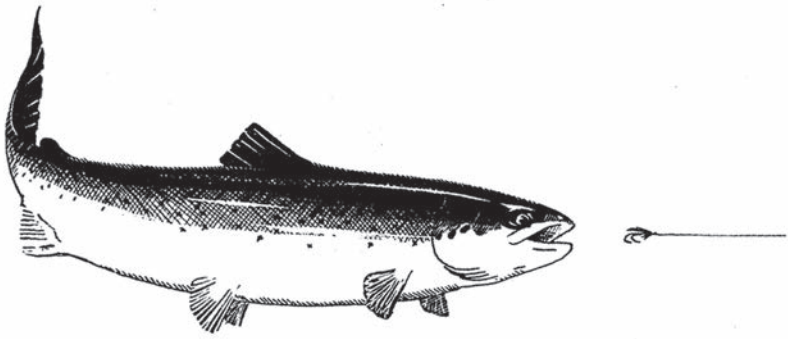
On board ships of the escort force there were usually two other likeminded rods to be found; and Kola certainly provided us with a welcome diversion from the monotony and discomfort of slow convoy work in dreadful weather. It also gave us quite a bit of fun with our two riverside attendants who pose as wardens but, in fact, were watchful agents of the KGB. They never left us and never spoke, clearly having no interest in our piscatorial activities.

With 10ft 6ins Hardy split cane rods we felt certain that we were the first people to introduce such sophisticated weaponry to this remote river at the top of the world. But that evinced no comment from our guards; neither did our method of downstream fishing arouse any suspicion. Having been taught on Test by an uncle that few fish which take a wet will refuse a dry fly, I thought to myself: why not. The following day I came with an 8ft 6ins Walker Bampton greenheart and a box of assorted drys. I selected a back and brown monster that had proved irresistible in the then (1937) little fished Southland of New Zealand, and proceeded to show off to our ever-vigilant onlookers. I cast upstream, thus displaying a mode of fishing that was clearly not acceptable north of

Archangel. The response from the bank was instantaneous. The two Russians set upon me savagely, screaming and gesticulating wildly. It needed no common language to guess what they were saying: "What are you doing? What is that, like a bumble-bee floating on the surface where no fish lie?" My rod was confiscated and I returned to the ship.

Next day the British military liaison officer came on board with my rod and told me that our hosts objected to my bringing illegal capitalistic methods of fishing to Soviet waters, I was warned not to do it again. The MLO thought it more likely that I was suspect of sowing mines in the river!

Not to be beaten I went back to the same place with the same rod, and was met by the same two KGBs. The night before, I got the interpreter working with us to write on a piece of paper: 'This fly has been specially tied by the famous London firm of Hardy, in honour of our gallant Russian allies.' To this I pinned an aged Red Tag which I had inherited from my uncle, long since dead. Armed with a bottle of duty-free whisky I handed the note to the guard. The result was electric the ploy was swallowed hook, line and Johnnie Walker whisky. We drank the health of Stalin and to all the fish in Russia; and I was positively, though unsteadily, escorted down to the river and given leave by the guards to go on sowing bumble-bee mines with funny red tags on them to my heart's content, and by any means I liked. Unfortunately I was not able to demonstrate the superiority and the validity of our methods of catching fish. For us the war had moved to new theatres, in the Mediterranean and the Far East. We were never to return to the Kola Inlet, thank God – but Rule Britannia!



My Six Favourite Angling Related Possessions

chosen by Tom Davis

Home-built Fibreglass Fly Rod 9ft 5wt, 1980

I was very fortunate that the local tackle shop near where I was brought up was J.B. Walker, the well-known suppliers of blanks and other parts for home rod building. This was a rod I built for myself on a Fibatube blank from Walkers in 1980. Alongside it is the protective tube I carried it in when travelling. It saw much use through the 1980s particularly in Southern Africa where I went to live at the time, and it was only superseded when I acquired my first graphite rod. Although it never gets used these days, it remains something I treasure, getting it out every now and then just to rekindle happy memories of fishing days long past!

Home built 6wt rod

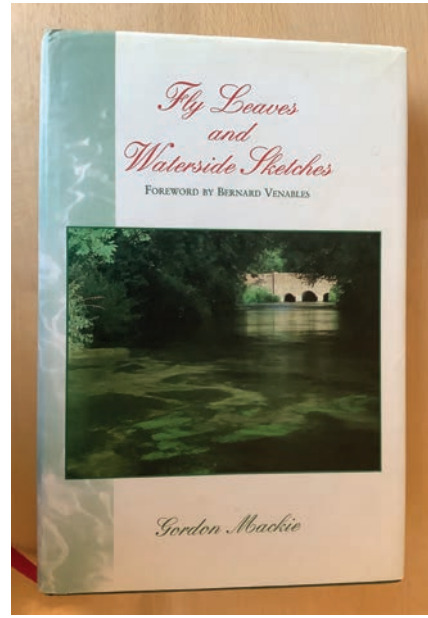
Blue Cotton Bait Bag, c1960s

At some point not long after the turning of the millennium, I was asked by my old friend, Charles Morley, if he and a friend of his (also Charles; both Yorkshiremen) could come for a day's trotting for grayling with me on the Wilton Club Wylye. The other Charles (we'll call him Charles 2) a close friend of his since schooldays, was in a fairly advanced stage of Parkinson's, so we found him a comfortable chair and sat him down in a suitable swim with his centrepin, trotting rod and trusty old bait bag around his neck. Within minutes he was into his first grayling, then another and another, and so the day went on with both Charleses thoroughly enjoying themselves, just as they would have done as schoolboys, despite Charles 2's obvious frailty. At the end of the day as we dismantled and packed away our rods Charles 2 turned to me and lifting his trusty old bait bag over his head presented it to me saying that he didn't think he'd have much more use for it and that he wanted me to have it, and make good use of it. Not many weeks later I heard that the Parkinson's had finally got the better of him. I treasure that bait bag and think of him every time I use it.

Bait bag

Book: Fly Leaves and Waterside Sketches by Gordon Mackie, 1998

Much of my working life in the mining industry involved frequent and sometimes long periods away from home, which cut deeply into the available time for fishing. Indeed, one of the reasons I first joined the Wilton Club was that with grayling and other coarse fishing in winter, it offered the opportunity to fish virtually all the year round: not just the six months of the trout season. Gordon Mackie, the author of this book, was also a long-term Wilton Club member, and former President. Although it very much embraces the Wylye, the book's scope extends widely to other rivers, including several stories of adventures in New Zealand. I frequently carried this book in my briefcase while travelling, dipping in and out of it when jet lagged and unable to sleep, or to while away hours in airport lounges waiting for delayed flights. For me it was always the perfect substitute for actually going fishing. Gordon signed my copy on a day when he, Adrian Simmons (the Wilton Club keeper) and I visited the grave of another Wilton Club stalwart, Nick Roughead, in Great Wishford.



Fly Leaves and Waterside Sketches

Veniard Fly-Tying Vice, c1974

At some time around 1974 Geoffrey Bucknall came to my school and gave us lessons in fly-tying. Inspired by this – he was a gifted teacher – I must have asked for a fly-tying vice for my birthday, or perhaps I saved up my pocket money. I can't remember. Anyway, this Veniard vice was acquired and despite its rather large and clumsy jaws, it was used for many years to form all sorts of feathery creations: some successful; some not, and, just as my flies today, certainly none ever very refined! Despite being superseded more than once with finer and more expensive vices, it remains in my fly-tying room attached to the bench where it is used to hold or grip various things. Here it is with one of my earliest creations: a black and peacock spider in its jaws.

Veniard vice

Young's Rapidex Centrepin Reel, c1959

When my then elderly parents sold the family home in Kent and moved to Sussex, they found in a shed in the garden an old picnic basket with various items of fishing tackle in it. These included some rubber prawn baits with hooks, a box containing salmon flies including Green Machines and Bomber patterns, and a pair of J.W. Young Rapidex centrepin reels. As the only member of the family interested in fishing, the basket found its way to me. The centrepins, both in pretty reasonable condition, were put to immediate use trotting for grayling. I gave one away to the father of my Godson and continue to use the other. Although not as smooth as the more modern ball bearing reels Youngs now produce, it remains serviceable and easy to use. As for the flies: they clearly suggest that the original owner had fished the great Atlantic Salmon rivers of eastern Canada. I'd have loved to talk to him about that, but sadly he'd passed on before they came into my hands.

Young's centrepin reel

Watercolour Painting of the River Irthing, at Gunshall, Cumbria 1990

During my youth I would be periodically despatched up to Cumbria to stay with my father's cousin who lived on a small farm on the north bank of the river Irthing near Brampton. It was complete heaven for me. Just upstream of the farm the river passed through a steep gorge, very close to Hadrian's Wall. I and the neighbouring farmer's son would clamber around the huge boulders worming for trout with little round bob-floats. They used to call them grayling floats, but I never understood why. None of the fish were very large, but they were feisty little things. We never fly-fished it, at least not in a conventional way. I imagine that would have been quite difficult given the terrain, which was bouldery and quite overgrown. As far as we were aware, we were the only people who ever fished it. We never saw anyone else. The painting by Joan Welburn, my father's cousin, was given to us as a wedding present by her. It now hangs in my fly-tying room: a regular reminder of the innocent days of my youth.

River Irthing watercolour painting

Dry Flies & Nymphs: Cricket and Baseball or Bangers and Mash?

by Clem Booth

In 1969, full of excited anticipation after a local newspaper reported there were trout to be had, I made my way on foot to my suburban stream, the Liesbeek River, which flows through the leafy Cape Town suburb of Newlands. Actually, whilst modest in size, the Liesbeek's place in history is not insignificant since along these very river banks the early Dutch settlers – so-called Free Burghers – had been allocated tracts of farming land by the Government of the Cape of Good Hope.

Armed with a solid glass spinning rod that had been repurposed into a makeshift fly rod, an Intrepid RimFly reel, a modest clutch of flies and – it has to be said – a horror of a level fly line, I made my very first venture into the world of fly fishing!

Just 14 years old, I'd been spinning and bait fishing for a good number of years, and was already a 'believer' in the way of life that is angling and, even today, it sometimes seems that the world is divided between us fisherfolk and all the other civilians but that's a subject for another day!

Fly fishing was my next frontier, in my perception back then, perhaps a higher order of things but in the fullness of time and the wisdom of years, I learnt that wielding the long rod was really just another way to spend a day having fun on the water. And, very often, these cherished times aren't so much to do with the method as they are about the people and the places. Fly fishing is undoubtedly graceful and elegant but then, so is trotting a float with centrepin and a cane rod.

I confess to wondering whether I might suddenly be classified as a 'purist', having taken up the gentle art. However, a foray into the Oxford Dictionary quickly and firmly dissuaded me of this misguided notion; a purist was defined as 'someone who insists on absolute adherence to traditional rules, especially in language or style' and this didn't sit at all comfortably with a young lad embracing a fast moving world!

And so, even today, I enjoy the wide variety of opportunities that is angling; whether this be trotting for chub or for that matter casting a crank bait in the hope of a Thames pike. But, all of this said, in the end, the upstream dry fly cast with a split-cane rod remains my favourite way to go about things.

That particular afternoon on the Liesbeek River back in 1969 changed the trajectory of my life when, somehow, no doubt through a mixture of youthful exuberance and pure luck, I landed a beautiful 2¼lbs trout! Did the Gods ordain it so? Or perhaps, did they just turn a blind eye to the shortcomings of a young fella finding his way and, by so doing, usher me into the rich and wonderful world that is fly fishing? I like to think that it was all meant to be. It always feels like it was. And the fly? Well, it was a #12 Coachman, a wet fly as it happens, and a pattern I still carry although I'm yet to catch a second trout on it. But, there's still time!

I wondered why this little white-winged fly was attacked with such alacrity and whether it resembled anything fluttering above, swimming in or burrowing below the bed of the Liesbeek River. Very likely it didn't and was simply a case of this trout doing what trout do most of the time, namely feed opportunistically. I'd unknowingly been

proffered an early insight into the 'attract versus imitate' debate, although the sheer joy of the day eclipsed any and all other considerations, profound or otherwise.

That very season, I started fishing the freestone streams of the mountains near Cape Town; shallow, fast flowing, crystal-clear jewels where dry flies are snaffled irrespective of a hatch. A heavenly prospect, I'm sure you will agree. There are prolific hatches from time to time and action can then be fast and furious but, unburdened by the deliberations or – dare I even mutter it – dogma of a Halford, I started fishing dry flies because, in this environment, it was the easiest and most effective way to catch trout. It was visual, immensely satisfying, a ton of fun, and this is how I still think about it today.

With the passing of those early years into decades, I thought more and more about this passion – some might say obsession – that had engulfed me. I dived into the history, to understand the traditions and – sometimes believable – folklore that surround this most contemplative of ways to spend one's time. I read the books, listened attentively to the views of others and started to formulate some thoughts of my own; thoughts beyond fly fishing being just a way to spend time in nature, important as that was and is to my own sense of well-being.

If there was a risk, it was perhaps looking for meaning where there actually isn't any but, for the most part, knowledge seldom hurts and I like to think that the innocence of my boyhood delights haven't been lost. I enjoy 'fishing in the pages' a great deal, as doyen Dr Tom Sutcliffe put it and it's almost as much as fun as being on the stream. Almost, but not quite!

Along the road, I happened upon the sometimes quite intense debate around exactly what a true 'fly fisher' might be. Was it someone who fly-fished exclusively? Maybe you needed a split-cane rod and silk to classify as a 'true fly fisher'? Or should you only fish dry flies?

Happily, I never found the need to decide on all these matters, which is just as well as, at the end of the day, they are no more than opinions anyway. My only real, rock solid, unshakeable conclusion is that I love to fish and to spend lots of time on the water, often with others of like mind. This hasn't changed a jot in well over half a century and I hope it never does. I don't begrudge anyone who wishes to hold onto this or that dogma but for me, it's the karma I find on the water that's so much more important and keeps me coming back.

There is no need and no intention to repeat all of the arguments for and against dry fly versus the sunk variety; frankly, it's all been said in one or other form. You will have drawn your own conclusions and that's the way it should be. Like in many aspects of life, there aren't really rights or wrongs, only preferences, opinions and decisions.

My long international business career did however teach me to dismantle apparent conundrums and problems, then reassemble the components to see if any enlightenment ensued or, at the very least, understand how it's all put together. It's still something I enjoy doing even though the life of a full time business executive is now well behind me.

And so, I do sometimes ask myself whether the dry versus wet fly schism, to the extent that there is one, is akin to being two different games – let's say baseball or cricket – both very different, yet at the same time with a common denominator of the ball waiting to be thwacked!

Or, could it be that subsurface fishing is just the flip side of the dry fly coin, and in that sense like the yin and yang of bangers and mash? Well, you do need to include gravy, but you know what I mean! I actually do believe that fly fishing represents a kind of ethos.

Definitively not in any shape or form some sort of 'angling class system', but a way of doing things sufficiently differently that such a characterisation is justified.

Hanging a team of flies behind a bubble float and slinging it across the Avon with a spinning rod and fixed spool reel does not by any stretch of the imagination square up with how we 'piscatorials' like to go about our business, even though there are commonalities; trout, flies, fishing line, etc.

So, if fly fishing is an ethos – and yes, it is for me – then where does the spectrum of acceptable interpretations begin and end? Is there value in a traditional approach in an ever-changing world? I find it helpful to think about it from the perspective of the trout. In my experience, trout forage for food in one of two ways; either making the most of a discernible, readily available and frequently recurring food source or feeding opportunistically and having a go at whatever crosses their path. In the latter case, their tastes are clearly catholic yet we also all know how picky they can be.

In point of fact, when it comes to food sources, trout can and often do switch from one mode to the other, maybe even multiple times during the day. Like me, they like to eat and love their food, although don't tell my doctor!

Fundamentally, fish will often opt for the easiest, most readily available source of protein, whether this is a hatch of BWOs, a Peeping Caddis, some or other larvae, fish fry, tadpoles or, for that matter, a spider or beetle. If it's there to be eaten, chances are a fish will oblige.

When a production line of mayflies keep fluttering by, the trout are generally happy to hang around in that particular pantry for the duration. Conversely, if there is no conveyor belt of food, they will often check out what's on the *a la carte* menu.

I've already said that being a 'purist' isn't something I aspire to or, for that matter, even find admirable but if I did, it would be a moot point whether persevering with a dry fly when the trout are clearly to be seen ferreting around in the depths for larvae might actually disqualify such a designation. Food for thought, if you will excuse the pun!

Let's unpack this a bit further. It is for me a given that accurately imitating nature is no easy task. So, when it comes to flies, I'm much more of a Van Gogh than a Rembrandt, an impressionist rather than a student of realism. Creating an expressionistic view of food sufficiently interesting to fool a trout seems to me to be what it's all about. Very often it is much more about movement, drag, size, colour and translucency and not so much whether a perfect imitation is presented. 'An impression of tasty and familiar nosh' is how I think about it.

Mr Halford was a notable exponent of imitation although we have long since realised that a 'top down' view of a fly is sometimes diametrically opposed to what the fish actually sees. This in no way diminishes his herculean contribution to our way of life but is rather just illustrative of how thinking has evolved. When I take newbies to fly fish, I often draw the analogy of a person in a bed staring at a mosquito on the ceiling. That's pretty much what the trout sees depending of course whether the bug is in, or on, the surface film. I borrowed that analogy from a good friend and think it sums it all up perfectly.

A trout doesn't have the luxury of a top-down view of what's on the surface which is, I suppose, why parachute style flies are as effective as they are. The trout sees what's in the surface film even more distinctly than what's on top. They look 'up their noses' as it were, unlike us humans who are sometimes prone to the opposite!

I don't lie awake at night agonising about any of this but I do spend a lot of time – sometimes hours at a time – trying to figure out what a single sighted fish is or – importantly – could be eating. Let me give you one example. A trout hovering in the

current under the branches of an overhanging bush or tree might have a plethora of feeding options. It could be that aphids are on the menu, possibly also ants, beetles or, who knows, maybe a juicy caterpillar. Most likely the trout is holding this position due to the reliability of the food source even though not much might be happening at that moment. In these circumstances, I find that a small foam beetle pattern can and often does make the difference.

A trout holding in an indentation in the gravel in a riffle might be waiting for a dislodged, tumbling peeping caddis, a delectable food source of some substance. Watching for a while might not confirm the certainty of this but the whole point is the fun one derives in figuring out what the fish might be doing! Perhaps no peeping caddis has come by for an hour or more but there is enough in the way of 'trout muscle memory' to eat one when it does. A very rewarding way to fish in my view.

I often get a trout to rise to the dry although no hatch is underway and perhaps the trout response is a function of a hatch a few hours before, or maybe it is just opportunistically interested in eating something that looks a bit yummy! I don't really mind one way or the other and my philosophy is a simple one; exact imitation is not my objective and I instead try to create an impression of what the trout either is or would be eating given half a chance.

The use of the term 'attractor' might be a tad off-putting in some august circles but, lest my modest flow of fishing invitations dry up altogether, let me try to elucidate. We have already determined that we very contently fish within an ethos, so an Abu Reflex and spinning outfit is just not cricket nor can it ever be. There is however no thin end of the wedge inherent in involving steadily as long as the original 'North Star' is not thereby diminished let alone extinguished.

That said, much – probably most – of our feathery offerings are in reality quite far removed from the natural, whether by size, movement, translucency or other factors. Creating the impression of a familiar food source is for me what it's about. Sometimes, success is achieved by casting a fly slightly bigger than the prevailing naturals thus attracting the fish to take an interest. And other times, it's the exact opposite!

So a sighted fish not feeding at a particular moment might be persuaded by the deft presentation of a 'searching' pattern; a fly that creates the impression of something the fish often eats whether regularly or opportunistically. I actually love the purity, beauty, simplicity and very often efficiency of an upstream dry fly cast to a feeding trout. It's just a fun way to fish. At the same time, when the fish are focused on a food source on the bottom, I don't hesitate (within the rules of course) to try to emulate that too and, in my opinion, this is a very rewarding way to go about things.

Fly fishers at some point might ask themselves whether and to what extent they wish to offer flies within all parts of the water column (that's just a posh way to say 'depth') or restrict themselves to only one or perhaps two dimensions. For those who choose the latter, all strength to them but for others who rather seek to ply their trade throughout the spectrum, that's great too. It is, after all, just fishing and whatever is permitted within the rules and ethos is fine by me.

I leave it to you to decide whether fishing weighted or unweighted nymphs is the flip side of the dry fly equation or rather a completely different game, one rather not played. Nymphing is actually a tricky old game in that managing current and depth is no easy task at times but of course it's up to each of us to decide whether it's something we want to have a crack at or not. In certain circumstances, it's the way to go although by preference, I do like to fish on top.

Nymphing is attempted in a number of ways, for example free-drifting a nymph upstream is often highly effective. The challenge is sometimes greater than with a dry fly as you need to manage two additional aspects, namely lateral drag and depth.

Sometimes a tuft of wool on the leader can help to manage depth and drag, something I learnt in Alaska and the Alpine streams of Germany and Austria where the shallow, fast-flowing rivers make the method essential.

The frequently maligned term 'strike indicator' is in that sense an anomaly as it is actually about presentation and the 'strike' aspect is neither here nor there. If you find yourself needing a bit of wool on your leader in order to detect a trout taking your subsurface offering, then perhaps that long overdue Specsavers appointment is opportune!

A better name for the tactic might be 'depth and lateral drag management' and is more accurate although perhaps the marketing folks at the fishing tackle firms might have a thing or two to say about that!

Well, which was it, Dry Fly or Nymph?

Other than fishing a nymph that is either sinking slowly or at constant depth, one can plumb the depths or fish a la Skues just below the surface as might take your fancy. For my money, fishing subsurface is a sensible complement to my first love which is fishing the dry but, as I've said, each to their own, always within the rules of course. Perhaps one day, we will be talking about what the really big wild trout eat and will venture into the realm of streamer fishing. In skilled hands, this is a very effective and highly technical way to fish. But, more likely, we won't and that's ok too.

Our chosen fly fishing ethos majors on sighted fish holding upstream of our position and it's fun, relevant and works as well as it always did. And aren't we lucky to be able to enjoy all this on such wonderful rivers? I believe we Piscatorials are truly blessed.

Tight lines to you all. Whether on the dry or the nymph, I wish you much joy and a couple of trout to go with it.

How will 2021 be remembered?

by JSD

Members will be aware that The Piscatorial Society, which was started in 1836, invariably has a rich history. By 1936 100 years after it started, The Society published a book setting out the history of those first hundred years. This set a precedent and in the year 2000 at the start of the 21st century it was decided to publish another book to show how far the club had progressed.

As a new member one of my first tasks was to read both books and later I gave a reading from the first book at one of the mayfly suppers.

Extracts from chapter 4 of the first book show what wonderful fishing members had in those days and it reads as follows:

"In September 1867 a Mr Blainey weighed in 59 fish from the Thames mostly bream of the colossal weight of 132lbs. The whole of the club's room must have been littered with the corpses.

Later in the same year some very large bags of Pike were produced: 117lbs by Mr Rolfe, 154lbs by Jardine and Rolfe together and 106lbs by Jardine alone.

On New Year's Day 1877 there is an entry that the Chairman invited the eight members present to celebrate the event with two bowls of punch supplemented by three bottles of champagne. On this occasion there was a marked deterioration in the beautiful copper-plate handwriting in which the Minutes were kept.

In that year the number of members of the club had increased, and the 40 or so present at meetings were not able to be accommodated in the club room.

It was decided at the start of 1877 that the club room at The Star and Garter was no longer big enough.

A larger room was secured at Ashley's Hotel in Maiden Lane and later, another under the same management at The Mona in Henrietta Street. The move was made in February.

The nine years association with the Star and Garter was celebrated by the Society by the presentation of a silver snuffbox to the landlord, Mr Brackenbury, and by him a donation of £5 to the prize fund of the Society.

At the last meeting in the Star and Garter Mr Jardine produced a magnificent pike of 35lbs, this fish was stuffed and exists to this day.
The higher rent for the new club room necessitated an increase in the subscription to £1 and one shilling and the entrance fee to 10s and 6d. In addition a guarantee fund of £2 and 10s a head was raised."

1877 also saw a remarkable dinner and an account of which was published in The Field.

"The annual dinner of the members of the Society took place at the Ship Hotel Halliford on Wednesday evening last under unusually interesting auspices.
Mr Perelli-Rocco, one of the members (and it was he who was the first to introduce Londoners to the delights of Gorgonzola cheese), invited those who could join in to meet him at Staines Bridge where his splendid houseboat would convey them to the dining quarters, and on board where luncheon was provided.
On the way down river they called in at Chertsey Bridge and by kind permission inspected the young fish belong to Mr James Forbes. On arriving at Halliford a salute was fired and the boat which was covered in bunting was moored opposite the hotel, in front of which a spacious marquee which Mr Stone had put up for the occasion. Mr Leman also had his boat and saluted the visitors as they passed down the river by firing a sundry small cannon.
The anniversary supper in October was a less joyous affair. Of this the minute book records morosely "not satisfactory, attendance being insufficient, also inadequate supply of tripe".

I wonder what the next book published by The Society will say about 2021? Certainly in that year 2021 we had a remarkable lunch and moved fisheries, and no tripe.


A Committee Meeting of the Piscatorial Society

A History of The Society in 100 Objects – 1

by John McGill

A Book from the Rod Room Library

Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries
by Dr. J.C. Mottram (b.1880, d.1945)

In his exploration of over five hundred years of classic fly fishing literature, Arnold Gingrich (1) selects only eighteen authors for inclusion in his main chapter headings. As we might expect, his listing includes the greats such as Walton and Cotton, Venables and Chetham, Bowlker and Ronalds, etc., but one of his authors is Dr. James C. Mottram. Who was he? Sadly, there is not much biographical detail available about him.

What little we do know can be gleaned from his obituary (2), published in the scientific journal 'Nature'. It can be summarised as:

- Born in Holt, Norfolk. Education at The Beacon, Sevenoaks; University College London.
- Graduated in Medicine in 1898. Postgraduate study in Cambridge.
- Joined the Cancer Research Laboratories at the Middlesex Hospital. Appointed Director of The Radium Institute.
- Appointed Senior Pathologist and Director of Pathological Research at Mount Vernon Hospital in 1931, a position he held until his death.

In addition, we know that he was a keen field naturalist and an able water colour artist, a combination of interests and skills which found application during WW1 when he was appointed as Experimental Officer in the Camouflage School of GHQ. Later, he wrote the copy on natural camouflage in the Encyclopaedia Brittanica's 12th Edition, published in 1922 (2).

Andrew Herd (3), refers to the fact that . . . "very few descriptions of Mottram's character have survived, the best being by his niece, Joan Clarkson (4). It is thought that much of (her) book is based on Clarkson's experiences fishing with her 'beloved uncle' . . . and that one particular description is of Mottram himself . . ."

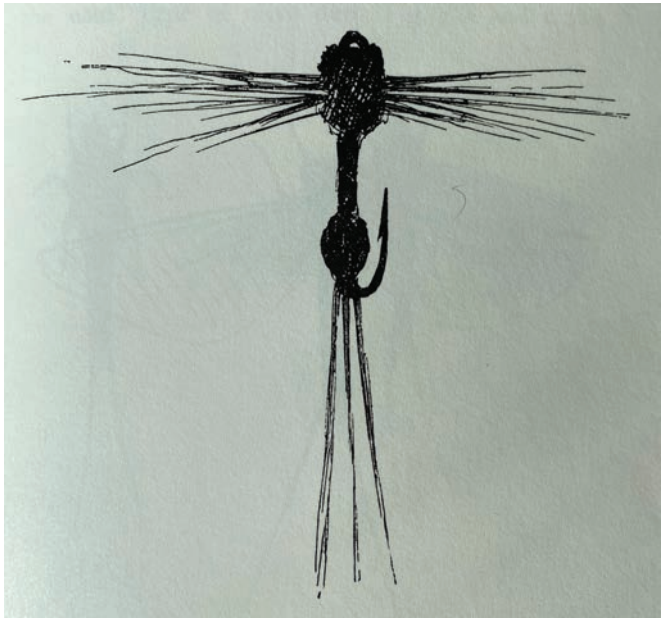
Mottram joined The Fly Fishers' Club in 1909. From 1912, he published articles under the pseudonym 'Jim Jam' in The Field, The Journal of the Fly Fishers' Club, The Fishing Gazette and The Morning Post. In 1915, Hugh Sheringham, Editor of The Field, published twenty four of Mottram's articles in book form, under the title of 'Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries' (5). Within this volume is one particular chapter which Timothy Benn (6) refers to thus . . . "But pride of place must go to one of the greatest articles on fly-dressing ever published: Flies of the Futur . . ."

In the article 'Flies of the Future', Mottram advocated a new method of fly design, focussing more on buoyancy, silhouette and transparency rather than on colour (5). Moreover, he was not afraid to design and fish patterns based on aquatic organisms other

than adult Ephemeroptera and Trichoptera. Indeed, he went so far as to include lead in some of his sub surface patterns and he was even prepared to fish them deep. These would have been regarded as heresies by many.

His innovative flies for river fishing included:

– Three variations of Olive Dun: a Buoyant Olive Dun, a Silhouette Olive Dun and a Colour Olive Dun.
– A spent Jenny Spinner where the material for the abdomen was omitted in order to best mimic the transparency of the natural.
– A Shrimp imitation.
– Different patterns for 'resting' compared to 'swimming' nymphs.
– A series of Reed Smuts.



Mottram's Simple Silhouette Illustration of His Transparent Jenny Spinner.
"To my mind, one of the best ways of indicating transparency is to omit the transparent parts altogether".

From: Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries (5) p. 129

In addition, he was an early advocate of fishing more imitative flies for stillwater trout, rather than the gaudy salmon or sea trout flies which were, for example, being employed at Blagdon when it first opened in 1905. This was way ahead of Blagdon's most famous fly fisherman, Dr. Howard A. Bell of Wrington (b.1888, d.1974), who has been cited as having . . . "the greatest formative influence on the development of reservoir fishing in the first half of the twentieth century . . ." (7). But Mottram got there first.

His equally innovative flies for still water fishing included:

– An Alevin Fly using small glass beads for eyes.
– A Fry Fly using marabou to provide movement.
– Patterns to imitate Corixa spp., Chironomid Pupae and Sedge Pupae.
– Emergent/suspender patterns which hang in the surface film.

In his homage volume to Mottram's ingenuity in fly design, Timothy Benn (6) argues that, when viewed across all of his fly designs . . . "Mottram was so far ahead of his time that he was not sufficiently understood by his peers, and that his flies, which at the time seemed wild and eccentric, prophesied the development of fly fishing . . ." He adds . . . "if you open the fly box of almost any angler today . . . many (of the flies will be) all but identical to those which Mottram devised with such farsightedness over a century ago . . ." (8).

So, Mottram seemed destined for greatness but sadly, he fell victim to the notorious Dry Fly versus Nymph Debate which was held at The Fly Fishers' Club in 1938. He didn't choose the wrong side but he did swop sides for no apparent reason and so damaged his reputation (3).

This is a great pity because, as Timothy Benn states (8) . . . "contemporary patterns owe more to his influence than almost any of those devised by his better-remembered fellow Fly Fishers' Club members . . ."

But 'Flies of the Future' is not the only interesting part of 'Some New Arts and Mysteries'. Right from the start and throughout, the book makes for interesting reading. For example, we are all probably aware of the old adage that an angler goes through three key evolutionary stages during their fishing career. The three stages can be listed as wanting to:

– Stage 1. Catch the most fish.
– Stage 2. Catch the biggest fish.
– Stage 3. Catch the most difficult fish.

I would guess that we would all like to think that we are at Stage 3, with a temporary lapse back to Stage 2, from time to time?

In his introduction to 'Some New Arts and Mysteries' (5), Mottram overlays and expands on this evolution, at least in terms of fly fishermen. The main points of his narrative can be summarised as:

. . . "There are many ways of regarding the sport . . ."

. . . "There is the **scientific angler**. For him fishing is a series of experiments: facts are noted, conclusions drawn, laws made; and because fishing is an eternal enigma, so is he eternally a slave to it" . . .

. . . "Thus he wanders from experiment to experiment. Flies, gut, rods, are all tested in this way, and yet the solution, instead of coming nearer, seems, like the mirage, to keep ever receding before him as time passes by, until at last he must leave the problem unsolved, fortunately for the everlasting pleasure of those who follow" . . .

. . . "The **naturalist-angler** is a common species; he says, 'I never saw a rise the whole morning'. He spent all the time searching for a grey wagtail's nest near the upper fall.

Fishing takes him bird-nesting, insect watching, flower gathering, into places where otherwise he would be a trespasser" . . .

. . . "The **jolly angler** is now sadly rare. When fish require long hours for their capture there is no time for much good fellowship, as there was when a basket could be filled more quickly, as of yore" . . .

. . . "The **poacher** is frequently a fisherman: he is both fearless and adventurous. For him fishing alone is too tame a sport: he must have more excitement . . . Every sense must be on the look-out . . . Whilst others in his place would shake with fear he is full of delight" . . .

. . . "The **poetic angler** is by no means rare. He is a lone man, drawn to the silent places by the water, and he carries a rod that he may linger there with good excuse" . . .

. . . "Fishing has given rise to the **fish-breeder**, a born angler whose enthusiasm has carried him further than mere angling, into being a foster-father of many little fish; he cares for and nurtures them; he tends to their pastures, guards their breeding grounds. He regulates their numbers, mixes their blood, destroys the bad, conserves the good, protects them from enemies, and gives them friends. He, too, carries a rod, but seldom has the heart to slay" . . .

Arnold Gingrich (1) devotes a whole chapter to Mottram in his book and asks his reader . . . "Did you find yourself sharply in focus in one of those six mirrors? I did . . . I'm that last one, the fish-babier. But which ever one you are, that or one of the other five . . . (you'll) find plenty to chew on in 'Some New Arts and Mysteries'" . . .

Mottram wrote three other books (9, 10, 11) but none of them are regarded as matching the quality of his thought provoking first volume (12).

Nevertheless, Gingrich (1) concludes his chapter on Mottram with the following . . . "it seems a most suitable leave-taking from a formidable fisherman, in many ways the most extraordinary I ever encountered in print" . . .

Equally, Andrew Herd (3) also cites Mottram as . . . "the forgotten genius of British fly fishing" . . .

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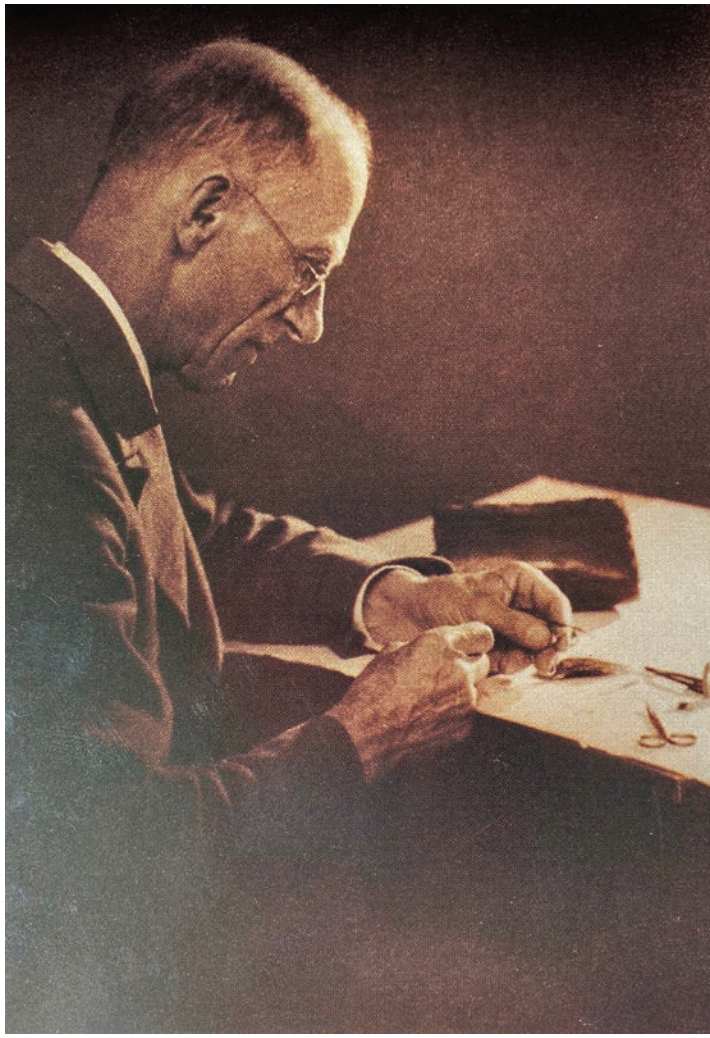
Footnote
From the first edition in 1915 and in subsequent printings, the illustrations in Mottram's book have always been of poor quality. They are mostly just simple silhouettes, but perhaps this is appropriate given his emphasis on silhouette in fly design. Timothy Benn's article (8) provides some excellent photographs of recently tied interpretations of Mottram's designs.



A Study of Mottram At His Fly Tying Desk

Presidential Pontification

by Paddy Douglas-Pennant

I am writing this when there is less than a month to go before the start of the trout season. Of concern at the moment is the very dry spell we are experiencing which, coming on the back of a relatively dry winter, I fear might result in reduced flows this spring and summer. We will see, but at least the weed seems to be growing well with the clear waters and sunshine of March. This will be a big year for us all as we start to fish the Anton for the first time. Please do remember that this four-mile fishery will take time to "bed in" so best to give Bob and the keepers the benefit of the doubt if there are aspects that you would like to see improved, and not resort to the telephone or print too soon. They may well have thought of it already and will be working on it. The time for reflection will be at the Hordern. We have made it clear all along that transitioning this hitherto heavily stocked fishery to a wild state is not a quick fix so bear that in mind.

In my last Report of the Board for the 2022 AGM I referred to the exceptional amount of work done by Board members on your behalf, and never more so than in recent months when under the expert guidance of David Watson we have been considering the future of the Development Fund. It is now abundantly clear to us that we are unlikely to be able to purchase outright first-class chalk stream fisheries capable of supporting a genuinely wild trout population because the competition is just too strong, coming mainly from wealthy individuals and syndicates with far more money than we can muster. The prospect of purchasing new fisheries was one of the reasons why we have husbanded over 20 years or so our spare cash in the Development Fund, but we are constantly mindful of the fact that the buying power of that fund is being eroded by inflation, and never more so than now. So we have been looking into a number of actions that we could take to use some of these reserves to improve on the services that we provide for members. This culminated in an "away day" for all members of the Board in March when a number of possibilities from a long wish list were examined in detail. And at that point I would just like to offer our thanks to our keepers who gave us plenty of ideas for this from their own fisheries.

Although the outright purchase of a new fishery is unlikely for the reasons I have given, we do keep our eye out for possibilities to extend and improve our existing owned fisheries at Freefolk and on the Wylye, which are of course a priority for us. We then have our leased fisheries where improvements are always possible, and in this we tend to prioritise those leaseholds where the term remaining is longer than 10 years. Our Lake

Estate fishery on the Avon is an example, and I reported in February that following our successful negotiation with our waterlord, Ed Bailey, to extend that lease out to 2035 we feel confident about spending money there on improving the Rod Room and Stuart's house. After all we have been in occupation since 1975 so it's time to spend a bit of money on it! Ed and his charming wife, Heiki, were our guests at last summer's lunch party and we enjoy a very cordial relationship with them. So work on the Rod Room has been ongoing over recent months and I hope that you will be pleased when you see it. The room is now much warmer and comfortable, and will become more of a focus for Society activities in future – meetings, courses, presentations at any time of the year, not just in the summer. And there has been a general clear-out of stuff that has hung around there for many years, principally as no-one has hitherto been brave enough to throw things out! We have cleaned and re-framed a number of our pictures which will go back on the walls, but if you find that some of your favourite old photos have disappeared do not worry, they are being transferred to the Society's scrap book which will remain *in situ* there. John McGill, our librarian, will be working on this. And we have not forgotten Stuart's house, but at his request we are delaying work there until the weather warms up. So you will see plenty of changes when you visit and I hope that your reactions will be positive.

I will not go into the detail of other improvements to our fisheries other than to mention that new huts, both large and small, and better-sited benches were high on the list. Our keeper team have been exceptionally busy this spring so it will inevitably take time before we can get these in place, but they are on the list, as are a number of other improvements which I will not list now as I'm sure that in due course David will be putting out a post on it.

As always my thanks go to our very hard-working Board and to Bob and the keeper team, not forgetting the regular self-employed contractors that we use as well. It's a dangerous thing to say – so I am firmly touching wood – but things seem to be going well with the Society at present. Long may that last. I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible during this season.

Director of Fisheries' Report

by Robert Wellard

Changes on the Horizon

In November 2021, after receiving Royal Assent, the Environment Act 2021 came into law. Amongst other things the new act aims to deliver long-term, statutory targets to improve air quality, biodiversity, water and waste reduction, and resource efficiency by the end of 2030. The new act also sets out ambitious new policies such as biodiversity net gain that includes local nature recovery strategies and conservation covenants, all of which will have an impact on how our land, and more importantly, our rivers are managed by farmers, landowners and tenants, which includes The Piscatorial Society.

The act also includes a legally binding target on species abundance for 2030, which seeks to reverse declines of iconic species such as the hedgehog, red squirrel and water vole. Moreover, it also aims to crack down on water companies that discharge wastewater into rivers, with new duties requiring that the government publishes its plans to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows by September 2022.

According to Natural England, the inclusion of five Environmental Principles for integration, prevention-rectification at source, polluter pays and precautionary, and the need for all Government Ministers to consider them when making policy, will help increase the opportunities for Nature recovery, with the EA, Natural England, Defra, local authorities, Wildlife and Rivers Trusts delivering Local Nature Recovery Strategies within a national framework of voluntary agreements where landowners conserve their land's natural or heritage features for the long-term.[1]

There's also a new Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)[2], a public body, created under the act, with its main mission to protect the environment by holding government and other public bodies to account, with a *free-to-use* complaints system for investigations. The OEP draft strategy is currently under public consultation.[3]

Following recent announcements from Defra a clearer picture is now starting to emerge for the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes you will no doubt have heard about. ELMs are effectively covered by two schemes: Local Nature Recovery (LNR) and Landscape Recovery (LR).[4]

Local Nature Recovery
Described by Defra as an evolution of the existing Countryside Stewardship (CS), the new scheme will be available to farmers and landowners from 2024 and is based on land management options found in current CS agreements. Those who subscribe to this scheme will be able to select options best suited to their land or business needs, although some options will directly link to Local Nature Recovery Strategies drawn up by Local Authorities in the area. Options are likely to include creating or restoring wetlands and woodland areas, as is currently being explored on the Anton fishery and by farming groups on the Avon, Test and Itchen catchments.

There are also payments for improving heritage features (water meadows) along with options to improve public access, which we will need to monitor closely.

The new schemes aim to be less bureaucratic than CS in terms of inspections and compliance penalties, which has often been a concern with some of our waterlords. With a 40% increase in CS applications in 2021, there's a clear indication of the level of enthusiasm for 'rewilding' at a scale we've not seen before. Further details of the Local Nature Recovery scheme are due to be published later this year.

Landscape Recovery
As the name suggests this is natural recovery on a landscape scale that will target projects of between 500 to 5,000 hectares that could easily include whole or sub river catchments where owners come together as a single entity. The theme here is twofold: threatened native wildlife species and restoring England's streams and rivers. The LR scheme can be tailored to individual projects but also it includes funding for project development and planning costs, which includes advice on legal, technical and environmental impacts of a project. As already mentioned, Defra is looking to agree terms with a single entity through long term covenants or designations, which I've no doubt will present some interesting challenges where the scheme specifically focuses on improving land bordering rivers owned by multiple landowners. However, the fairly recent formation of the Farming Cluster Groups[5] provides a long overdue focus for engaging in this process. Farming cluster groups describe themselves as independent, member-led, self-funded, not for profit organisations. For example, on the Wylye there's a group of landowners and managers covering over 18,000 acres of land, working collaboratively to deliver large scale environmental improvements. Improving ecological connectivity and safeguarding clean water are key objectives we need to engage, where there's a shared vision for nature through a healthy, and productive farmed landscape that reduces pollutants reaching the river.

So how does this affect us?
Water quality is of significant importance to freshwater fisheries so any pressure the new OEP can bring will be most welcome. In terms of physical improvements of land and rivers, the bits where we have much more control, it's still early days, but likely we will see more government funded schemes coming our way that aim to:

1. Optimise flows and habitat diversity in rivers and carriers.
2. Provide fish passage easement around the mill sluices and historic impoundments.
3. Create and/or optimise wet woodland habitat.
4. Restore landscapes to improve floodplain connectivity.
5. Enhance aquatic and riverine habitats and reinstate 'natural river process'.
6. Improve angler (and in some cases public access) to the watercourses.

What will this look like on the ground? An example of this level of intervention, recently carried out on the River Kennet at Eddington Mill in Hungerford, Berks, by Cain Bio-Engineering Ltd is highlighted below and, subject to funding, committee and landowner approval, in many ways reflects our direction of travel on the river Anton, which we started back in October last year.

Drone image 1 – The river Kennet with a visual key for improvements (see right)

1: Nature-like fish bypass channel – A new off-take channel, showing bank-side revetments, planting and access bridge under construction.

2: Large Woody Debris – LWD tree deflectors, installed on the opposite TLHB bank to re-claim the over-wide channel, acts as a sediment trap which, over time, will redefine the new channel width – identified by post-project riverbed scouring and the exposure of clean gravels.

3: Gravel berms and backwaters – Angler accessible berms with marginal backwater habitat to the rear. The berms were re-planted using site-won provenance.

4: Historic channel fish pass – This historic channel is now an online backwater habitat providing a perfect habitat and refuge for juvenile trout with augmented flows. The new channel was pinched with shallow gravel shoulders to generate fish 'attractor flows' from main river into the bypass channel. The new channel was quickly populated by native trout along with reported spawning activity.

5: Wet woodland – Shows the historic fish pass confluence with one of three wet woodland backwaters. Following plant colonisation this open wetland area will provide valuable habitat for invertebrates, amphibians as well as a number of endangered species.

6: Gravel borrow pit wetland features – Following floodplain gravel extraction for the restoration works, these off-line borrow pits were re-shaped with shallow graded margins to create natural floodplain wetland features that continue to support a wide range of species bit also they help to control sediment and nutrient run-off.

7: Main Channel – Lowering of bunds and regraded riverbanks designed to reinstate floodplain connectivity. Floodplain lowering was applied throughout the entire site.

8: Eddington Lake – Lowered bunds with gently emerging scalloped lake margins. The promontory embayments will in-fill with vegetation to create extensive wetted margins around the entire lake perimeter.

Our work on the Anton

Whilst there's still a lot more we need to do to get to the point of delivering river improvements on this scale, the work the keepers carried out on 900m of Beat 4 at Westover are already reaping rewards.

A key aspiration of the Anton project is to expose areas of gravel for spawning and so it was with the strategic placement of whole trees, in some cases reducing the channel width by 50%, we've seen an immediate effect with improved flows scouring away years of sediments, exposing gravels. In just a few months we've seen a succession of wild trout, grayling and salmon spawning where they haven't spawned in years.

Our plans for the Anton are ongoing but already I'm being asked to look at other waters where landowners are embarking on a similar rewilding journey, where they see the Society as an ideal partner (tenant) for delivering wild fisheries improvements. It will be interesting to see what else comes our way.

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2. https://www.theoep.org.uk/
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4. Land & Business – Country Landowners Association Magazine – Feb 2022 (pp14–15)
5. https://www.farmerclusters.com/profiles/south-west/
6. Eddington Mill River Restoration – By kind permission Cain Bio-Engineering Ltd

Drone Image 2 – Large trees strategically positioned on the Anton (Beat 6), scour the riverbed of silt, exposing clean gravels

Secretary's Soap Box

by Geoff Fleming

Regular fishers on the Wylye are aware of the 'turn up and fish' procedure that operates along the six or so miles of river that we have in the Wylye valley. All our beats, from Parsonage Farm down to the lowest at Glebe Farm, have designated parking spaces for two vehicles. Heytesbury Mill is the one exception – where only one car can get into the space unless two members are fishing and leaving together (as one will need to park behind the other).

Some of the off-road spots are difficult to find and new members are urged to consult their Year Books and use the *what3words* app to get the precise location. One such parking place is at Stockton, a particular favourite of mine. As access to the hut and parking is through two fields (and sometimes three shut gates) a "slider board" has been placed on the road outside Stockton House so that members can tell if both parking spaces have been taken and avoid going through the fields only to find that the beat is fully occupied.

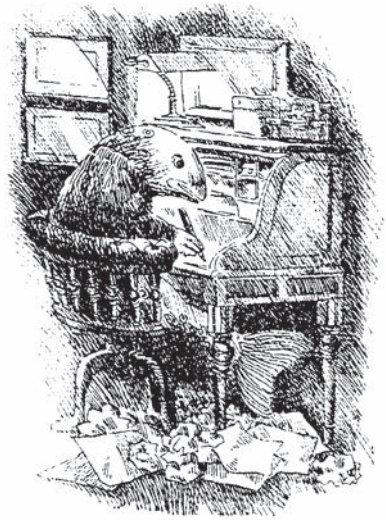
This ought to be foolproof but . . . what happens is that some members fail to use the slider board, so I've driven down to the river, opening and closing gates *en route*, only to find two cars already on site. It suddenly seems a long way back. Similarly, I've arrived to find the board indicating fully occupied parking but because I'm now a cynic, I drive down and find no one there.

So **please** – remember to set the board as you drive down to fish – and on your way back out!

Maybe we should install a camera on the site which could be accessible on our phones.

Another case for the installation of a camera is above the fly boxes in the Rod Room as I am sad to report that the honesty box for members taking flies was *several hundred pounds* down last season. This is such a valuable and useful facility that members and their guests enjoy, but if we abuse it we lose it.

Keepers' Kaleidoscope



Head Keeper's Review
Is Rogan Joshing?

by Stuart McTeare

The last six months had been so far so humdrum: autumn morphed into winter, winter was morphing into spring. We'd had a little rain, a little frost and little or no high wind until the last days of February when storm Eunice breezed into town and changed everything. The world appeared out of control, angry. Carnage awaited.

With the impending threat of war, tanks amassing on the Ukrainian border, doom was in the air. On the eve of the invasion at the behest of an ageing relic in-law I was invited to celebrate a significant birthday at a venue that had just been crowned with a third gold star from a certain pneumatic tyre company. A pure coincidence, the booking had been made months previously, I'm sure in the wake of the latest accolade getting a table in the place will be akin to acquiring an FA cup final ticket in the Royal Box, even Prince Andrew will be struggling with that one these days.

What on earth could go wrong, apart from being overcome with guilt about the extravagance in the face of a war. We arrived in the sleepy south Cumbrian village with little fanfare. There was the feeling of an invasion of another kind as seen in what is now known in Cornwall as Pad-Stein, where a celebrity chef has moved in and rather tank-like rolled out their successful formula, sprinkling their magic ingredients across various premises, including a shop that sells branded *kiss me quick* chef's hats, tea towels and any

other item worthy of branding, in a village that barely sports a post office these days. How times are changing and changing like I've never seen in my life time.

So imagine my horror when we at last spied the menu that had been incarcerated in an imposing austere heavy grey envelope locked with a wax seal. There at the very top of the 17 course tasting menu was the first dish of the evening:

Chalk Stream trout, pine cured,
Gooseberry tart, cherry belle radish, marinated trout roe

So early in the night I was backed into a very tight culinary corner that played hugely with my conscience and messed with my morals. It lead to bigger questions I'm not really able to answer that have played with my mind ever since.

The fancy Dan restaurant manager was a bit evasive about the poor fish's provenance never once uttering the term farmed which of course it had to be unless we were indulging in the nefarious delicacy of out of season fare. It transpired, with a gentle Columbo-esque prod, all the evidence led to the truth that the sad trout was born and spawned in one of the Test & Itchen's biggest table trout pollution producing conglomerates. No artesian producer feeding a tiny pond of trout, all individually named and lovingly cared for, but a huge industrial unit, exposed and being investigated by the RSPCA for crimes against fish. Just like the BBC did recently with the bedraggled dairy cattle that were prodded, kicked and punched for being silly cows, whose offspring are stuck in tiny crates, their fate to be eaten as veal. Now I'm no vegan vegetarian bunny hugging peace & loving Rastafarian but come on I presume we all love fish here within the Society? How do these industrial farms or indeed any fish farm sit with our vision of a chalk stream idyll? Why do we persist in over exploiting our chalk streams with farmed fish, as the custodians we all claim to be, when salmon parr will be munched and phosphate loadings loaded even more in the direction of tipping point?

How did this all sit on my very sensitive taste buds? It didn't. I know farmed trout when I taste it however much it's been messed and miso'd by a chef with a constellation of Michelin stars, my pallet is that tainted and rarified. Thankfully we were involved with an elongated tasting menu so the morsel of trout barely touched the sides but there was no mistaking the tang of farmed trout.

I haven't the financial appetite to return to the scene of the crime against fish cuisine but I do want it noted again, we all need to be as sustainable as possible in our lives and restaurants claiming to be sustainable need to be outed, if the talk is in one direction and the walk is clearly heading down a different path away from enlightenment. At what point do you throw down your fine napery and walk away?

Now with the vicious war raging in the Ukraine, are our thoughts of sustainability mere vacuous whimsy or are they more urgent and relevant than ever if we want to save our chalk stream centric universe? Certainly for me eating at Dan's expensive fancy faux sustainable food outlets, whose grasp of reality has been parked, is a one off and to be approached with extreme caution in the future but then should they have a future? Do we all have a future?

Cluster bombs and chemical weapons perversely with a certain Russian President involved lead me back to crimes against fish, *piscocide* and angling etiquette. Strangely back in January I had been joshing about Putin becoming a PS member with a non-fishing friend, they didn't really fully understand the nuance of the joke but we did enjoy a jocular riff. Months on maybe it's not so funny but a scary possibility of his jackboots

stomping in this direction. Putin's topless grip and grimace trophy shots of large pike are a sight for sore eyes. Fishing without a shirt, let alone a tie, now there is a prospect, the tip of the iceberg?

Is Putin future PS Presidential material? If a PS President can wear shorts and a cravat-less open neck shirt, surely the next stop is taking your top off and cuddling pike, that would be truly embracing the Society's emblematic past? He may even fast track some of his cronies. Roman? Just don't mention the VAR. Nymph fishing with an indicator during the trout season could be the least of our worries?

Shall we all try and be kinder to our chalk stream fish and not exploit them at all costs, show some restraint if we can? For now, to quote a recent rogue entry in the Stockton hut log, 'leaf those fish alone son' . . .

Freefolk, The Grange, Abbotts Worthy and Abbotts Barton

by Craig Dawson

Late March and spring has sprung, almost overnight as it happened. One day thermals and woollens, shirt sleeves the next? The rapid switch has suddenly brought home how near the opening of the new season and how much more there is still to do. It has been a busy autumn/winter beginning with the electro surveys on the Wylye followed by electro surveys on the upper beat (6) on the Anton, ahead of the restoration project. The surveys on the Anton being done to see what/if changes our works have on existing fish populations. What those surveys revealed was contemporary with the state of the river – lots of grayling, some wild trout and an awful lot of stocked fish, a situation that we will hopefully have improved as we return the river to a self-sustaining wild populations. The project carried out in October involved a lot of woody installation, creating a narrowing, re-meandering and substrate resorting of the channel, the fruits of which were made apparent by Christmas with huge numbers of redds being cut on the freshly exposed gravels, pretty much wherever we had installed the woody. Those same gravels are now being exploited by the grayling. Great to see and I'm sure the results of future electro surveys will bear this out.

It has, despite all the wet days, been a dry winter. The aquifers here on the Test and Itchen are far from filled, meaning that we will enter the season with low river levels, something far removed from the previous two. It will be year of judicious weed cutting to keep rivers propped up through the summer and autumn. Perhaps the trout know something – spawning was over quite an extended period, beginning around Christmas and then in spurts of activity right through into mid-March. The Freefolk lakes have proved very popular this winter, seldom a day without a visit and many when the car park has been full. There was some colouration (algal blooms) in late February and March when the sunnier days arrived but this appears to have calmed down now and both lakes are 'fining' up nicely. We had a digger on site recently to repair a leak in the carrier, once done that afforded us an opportunity to patch up some of the fishing areas on the Top Lake. Not sure how long this new material will last though, given the footfall on the lakes.

Much of the winter has been spent pruning, repairing collapsed boggy banks and more lately the debris that Eunice generously provided. Storms such as Eunice and the destruction they wrought are not entirely all bad. Eunice provided some useful material on the Anton, particularly on Beat 6, that made for additional woody structures. She felled some trees on the Candover that have afforded more light on the river and an easier back cast, not bad at all. It is actually in these drier seasons that all that woody structuring comes into its own – pinching the river to maintain flows, extra cover for the fish, habitat for fly, etc. The value of timber in a river can never be overstated.

The sun is shining, the rivers are not full but flowing, there are nice hatches of large dark Olives and others about and the weed is just starting to winkle out of the gravel – the season is almost upon us. I am sure, that this season, without Abbots Worthy but with the Anton, will be an exciting one for the members and for years to come.

The Wylye

by Joe Emmett

The abundance of good weed growth last year certainly played its part in the good fishing of the latter part of the season. After a fairly dry late summer and autumn the river was starting to look a little tired by the time the season came to a close. As a barbel angler I'm forever praying for rain and floods, however it never really seemed to happen during the autumn and therefore the less said about my barbel fishing last season the better. There were a few periods of rain and the river came up and down a couple of times; however on the whole we have had a very dry autumn and winter. You would usually associate a dry winter with a cold winter however this was not the case, it was mainly just grey, cloudy and mild with very little rain or frost. The Christmas period was the mildest I can remember, and I think some places were as warm as 16°C! The trout would have appreciated the relatively settled conditions for their spawning which, with the river being so clear, was evident to see up and down the fishery. I also witnessed what I believe to have been a salmon on a redd at Knook, along the section by the footpath downstream of our car park. It's really great to see salmon spawning this far up the catchment and amazing to think they have travelled what must be 40 miles upstream over countless barriers and obstructions just to spawn on our stretch of the Wylye.

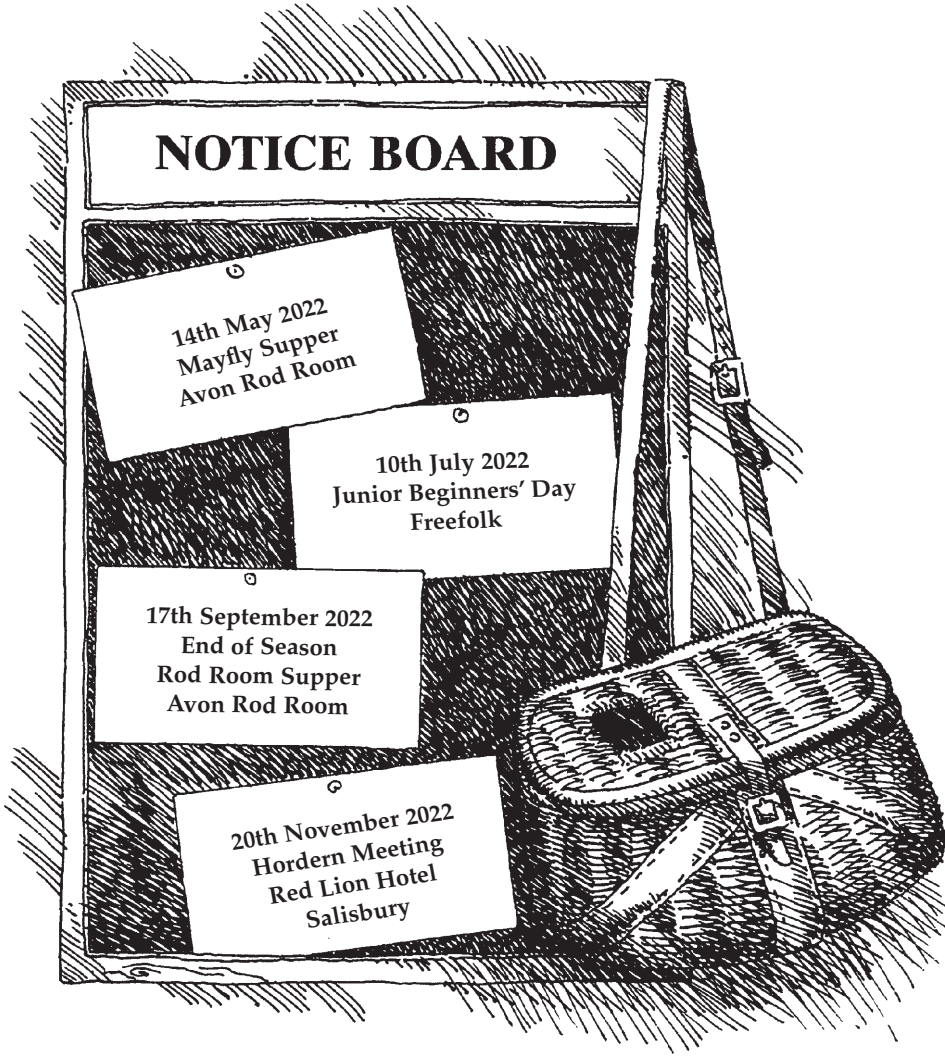
One bonus of a dry winter is the potential reduction in pollution from run off, slurry pipes and overwhelmed sewage works. However, the pressures are still increasing, and I have been keeping an eye on yet another large-scale housing development taking place right on the edge of the Wylye in Warminster. This site has made the local paper on several occasions for its blatant flouting of the rules and its continued impact on the river and local habitat. It's mind boggling to think these developments are permitted to proceed when you consider the hoops, we must jump through in our work to improve the river's habitat. With the outdated local sewage systems and pumping stations struggling to keep up with the current population it makes you wonder how many houses they plan to build and how bad it will have to get before they start to take action.

The uneventful weather was certainly helpful in enabling me to get into the river and get to work on my ever-growing list of jobs. I made a good start on the pruning and habitat improvements throughout the whole fishery and put in a fair bit of extra time at

Knook which was well overdue some attention. The area just below the car park that has become a bit of a public path is now wading only and would discourage members from walking along it. I am allowing the bank there to become overgrown and uninviting in the hope it can reduce bank damage, improve the marginal habitat and give us a little more privacy. I have added new access posts and logs along this section too to help members navigate and reduce bank erosion from dogs.

Things were going well and despite the distractions of taking on a new fishery I was happy with the progress I was making to that jobs list. Then on the 18th February along came storm Eunice to spice things up a bit. The storm hit on the Friday afternoon and by the evening most of the valley was without power. This continued right through the weekend into the Monday and probably wasn't helped by Eunice's brother Franklin who arrived on the Sunday from a slightly different direction to finish off anything that his sister had left. There was plenty of damage throughout the valley and it was sad to see the loss of several very large beech trees at Stockton Park, however on the river we actually got off quite lightly. The wind direction meant that the majority of the trees that did come down fell away from the river on the non-fishing bank. There are a handful of large trees that have fallen into the river and despite the extra work they have given me, it has just added to the ongoing improvements of the fishery. In the long term these gifts from Mother Nature have just speeded up the process and helped me put some trees into the river in places I may not have been able to put them myself. There are now nice new features at Stockton, Middle Boyton, Lower Boyton, Upton Lovell and Suffers Bridge curtesy of Eunice and Franklin. These new additions are currently scouring and sorting the gravels, cutting deep holes and gathering silt and I'm sure by the time you see them they will have settled in perfectly.

The relatively settled conditions and sunny spring weather have led to the river staying clear and given the weed a good head start. I was starting to panic slightly when in the early part of February the river was resembling the often tired, low looking river of September and October, however some good rain did eventually come and although it was the large amounts in a short period type it certainly improved the levels and the condition of the river. It wasn't until early April that the now almost annual sleet, hail and snow started that saw me caught out several times, miles from my truck with no coat. It has been quite common to be in a t-shirt in the morning soaking up some rays and in full waterproofs by lunchtime running for cover from a hailstorm. I am hopeful that this is just a blip, the long-range forecast looks promising and although it's no heatwave it looks as if the wintery conditions shouldn't continue into May like last year. I have heard that the Grannom have started hatching in Dorset and as long as the weather continues to improve, I'm sure it won't be long before I see the first ones on the Wylye. The question is always the same though, will they hang around until the 15th April or will they clear off when they hear the inevitable stampede of eager anglers on opening day.


NOTICE BOARD
14th May 2022
Mayfly Supper
Avon Rod Room
10th July 2022
Junior Beginners' Day
Freefolk
17th September 2022
End of Season
Rod Room Supper
Avon Rod Room
20th November 2022
Hordern Meeting
Red Lion Hotel
Salisbury

The

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