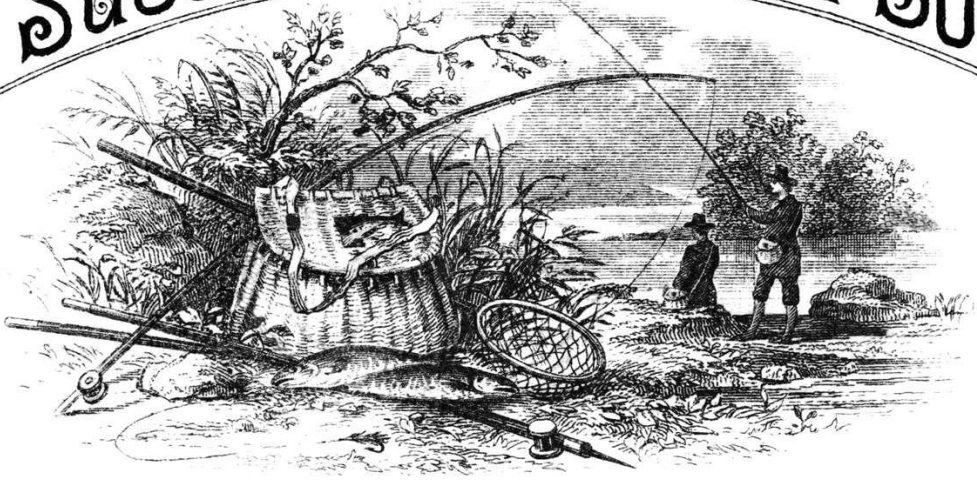


# The Sussex Piscatorial Society.



Founded 1891

# Sussex Piscator

Annual Magazine of  
Sussex Piscatorial Society Ltd.  
Issue 9, Spring 2018



# Contents

Welcome

Jon Stewart

A Year in the Life: Year 2

Chris Mitchell, Water Keeper, Cheriton

Brown at the End of the Rainbow

Colin Duffy

Back to the Future: Coarse Section 2017

Keith Russell

Trout and Grayling Fishing the Test and Itchen

Iain Mortimer

Tales from the Trout Section (Part 3)

John Baker

Pulse Trawling and British Sea Fish Stocks

Chris Middleton, [BritishSeaFishing.co.uk](http://BritishSeaFishing.co.uk)

## Welcome

I hope everyone has had a good 2018 so far... Thank you, as usual, to everyone who's contributed to this year's issue. It would be a much thinner publication without you.

This year we have three excellent accounts of present-day experiences in the SPS Trout Section (still the UK's best fly fishing club!). The first two pieces are from Cheriton Water Keeper Chris Mitchell, and Possingworth enthusiast Colin Duffy, both build on articles you may remember from our previous issue. Thank you, Chris and Colin, I hope you'll put more in next year too.

The third is a superb article from Iain Mortimer explaining tackle and tactics for trout and grayling on the Test and Itchen. Thank you so much Iain, for your outstanding contribution. It's a truly great piece.

Keith Russell has another brilliant account of last year running this SPS Course Section. Thank you, Keith, for all you do. It's a huge amount of work – as is clear from the diary – and I'm sure we would all like to extend our gratitude. The transparency you offer in these accounts is very informative and most welcome, I'm sure all SPS members enjoy reading it.

Finally I'm proud to present the third and final instalment of John Baker's historic series. This concludes his account of life at the helm of SPS Trout Section over the decades. Thank you for this, John, it's been a fantastic to follow your reminiscences here. I guess some things change, some stay the same, as the song goes. Please do consider sending more for next year's magazine as I know this is well received.

One last treat came in, just as I was compiling this issue, when news broke of the European Parliament's vote on the controversial practice of pulse trawling. This is a new method of commercial sea fishing that could do a great deal of damage our inshore stocks. Then again, there are also elements of the practice that could be beneficial. In that respect I suppose it is similar to the fracking controversy that has gained so much publicity of late.

The pulse trawling ban is still very much a live issue at the time of going to print. This vote will take some time to work its way through the complex EU law-making process, so it's far from a done deal. Plus, of course, there is the added complication of a pending Brexit -- which means everything could be up in the air once again two years from now. So, I contacted Chris Middleton from *British Sea Fishing* who wrote an excellent, well balanced and fully referenced piece on the subject, and he kindly agreed to allow me to adapt a version for this year's *Sussex Piscator*. I thoroughly recommend Chris's work and his site is really worth a visit for anyone interested in sea fishing and conservation: [britishseafishing.co.uk](http://britishseafishing.co.uk)

I'm always happy to receive articles so please feel free to send items in. Please email [jonsleeper@btopenworld.com](mailto:jonsleeper@btopenworld.com) Deadline, as usual, is December 31st 2018.

As always, whether it be reflections on fishing trips, a memoir, a discussion of environmental issues, poetry, puzzles, general fishing tips, tackle talk, an opinion piece, a guide to one of our waters, anything you like really -- particularly coarse related articles -- I'll be delighted to include it in next year's *Sussex Piscator*.

Tight lines! Jon Stewart

## ***A Year in the Life: Year 2, Chris Mitchell, Water Keeper, Cheriton***

---

So, another year older, another year wiser!? - some of you may have read my article in last year's Piscator about my first year as water-keeper for the SPS beat on the Cheriton stream (upper Itchen headwater), well the editor thought a follow-up might be interesting -

Late 2016 saw me applying to the Environment Agency for a permit to install a pair of revetments toward the top of the beat in order to narrow the stream and invigorate the flow over a likely trout spawning location.

The trout eggs need to nestle in clean gravel where highly oxygenated water can flow over them. If there is too much silt then this can deprive the eggs of oxygen and they die. So the faster flow helps to keep any silt in suspension. Having received the all clear from the EA, landlord and farmer we went ahead with the works as in the photo and it works!



The gravel cleaning in October 2016 also bore fruit as we counted seven obvious redds in the beat in early 2017. So, we have repeated the exercise in October 2017 with assistance from a willing junior helper!



We have suffered with comparatively low flows for much of year. We have tried to compensate for this with more restricted weed cutting to help hold the water back. In addition, we have installed some more groynes to energize flows as well as create more structure and pools in the river for the more mature fish.

The regular work parties have continued throughout the year. Even with a year's weed cutting experience it doesn't seem to get any easier!

Earlier in the year and more recently bankside tree pollarding has been going on to try and achieve the right level of shade and open banks with (relative) ease of casting, whilst ensuring enough cover for the trout. In addition some limited planting of saplings has taken place on the more exposed sections of the beat to add

some shade in years to come. Grateful thanks go to the hardy souls who turn out, you know who you are! - work parties really are a good way to get to meet fellow club members and get to know the water, if you have not fished it.

The beat has been lightly fished again this year, with some 26 visits (including 2 guest visits) and 19 wild trout brought to hand and all returned. The beat is a wild trout only water (all catch and release) and indeed designated as a wild Fishery Protection Zone by the Environment Agency so we are not allowed to stock.

As in some previous years the Society donated a day's fishing to their 2017 auction. The winner fished for a day in May and was delighted to catch 6 trout! – so proving the fish are there if you can stalk them effectively.

I attended the Test & Itchen Members Day in November to hear of some of their work on behalf of riparian owners in seeking to reduce water abstraction levels and undertake other lobbying activities to our benefit e.g. to seek controls of numbers of swans in the Test & Itchen catchments to limit damage to riparian weed.

There are continuing extensive efforts to discover the causes of the loss of fly life on the chalk streams and our very own Phillip Ellis undertakes monthly invertebrate monitoring at Cheriton. He submits returns to the Salmon & Trout Conservation UK Riverfly Census and they are using these to negotiate local targets with the EA. These targets can then form

the basis for agreeing strategies and priorities to alleviate issues affecting the invertebrates.



In addition there is a lot of work going into catchment sensitive farming ..... looking at impacts on invertebrates such as run-off, sedimentation, increased phosphates and agreeing and implementing solutions.

Hopefully along with some of the recently announced government initiatives and with the outputs from the Test & Itchen Catchment Partnerships bid ('Watercress & Winterbournes') for a Landscape Partnership Scheme to the Heritage Lottery Fund all of this activity will bear fruit with improved fly life in years to come.

I am encouraged to see how many people are working toward maintain/improving good water quality, a healthy and diverse invertebrate and wild trout populations along with the ecosystems that surround them.

Let's hope 2018 will provide a great year's fishing. Please do try to get along to Cheriton to sample its delights. It is challenging fishing in a delightful spot, which makes it all the more enjoyable whether you catch or blank.

## ***Brown at the End of the Rainbow, Colin Duffy***

---

It was a fairly cold and blustery day at Possingworth with an occasional shower followed by bright sun. Vic and I arrived around 11 am for a few hours fishing – the first for a while after the summer months. Unlike my first slapstick visit here - which I wrote about in the last addition of the Piscator - I found the place without incident and we looked forward to a productive day. Certainly it started well enough with a rainbow of a couple of pounds or so in the first hour followed by one lost by Vic late on in the fight, but the rest of the day was a bit of a struggle.

It was one of those frustrating days with fish showing fairly regularly but not taking anything we offered. It reminded me of a day I had way back in time on Lough Currane in Ireland which my gillie called 'squally': "aye, they don't like it squally; fish don't know where to look"

Back then Currane was a very fine salmon, sea trout and wild brown lough but it was only my second-year fly fishing and my first in a boat so how special the place was didn't really register until a yard-long salmon porpoised over my line leaving me spluttering and tottering back in my seat, the gillie grinning widely at me. Currane, apparently is now a shadow of what it was so I'm glad I saw it when I did – although that too turned out to be a tough – and very, very wet - day.

Vic had to leave at 3.30pm but I thought I'd give it another hour so, after dropping him off at the jetty I rowed out to a spot I fancied not too far from either bank so I could cast easily towards both. Then something magical happened; a shower ran through on the breeze and the sun came out in a pocket of sky producing a magnificent rainbow in a perfect semi-sphere over the lake.



I amused myself casting towards the arch and contemplating pots of gold but a few minutes later I was into a fish – a surprise to both of us. It took my favourite Black and Peacock Spider and headed down. It felt pretty big. And it was then that I noticed that Vic had taken the net; I swore more than a little and tried not panic. Well ok, it's catch and release and I've been practicing unhooking without removing the fish from the water so it should be ok – but he does feel big.

And so it turned out to be a large and determined fish and whenever I got him near the punt he streaked away again. Eventually he tired and I had him quietly at the side of the punt but the hook was in an awkward place with line wrapped inside the scissors; he had to come on-board.

I felt it was going to be an ugly moment with the loss of fish, line, rod or dignity and maybe all four but I put the rod down, held the line tight and surprisingly easily scooped him onto the duckboards.



What a fish! Tail like the clichéd spade - I was so keen to get him back into the water I didn't even measure him but as my camera was still out after the rainbow, I took a couple of quick shots and got him back as fast as I could. He swam off looking healthy enough.

Possi rarely lets you down. Anyone know how wide those duckboards are?

## ***Back to the Future: 2017 in the Coarse Section, Keith Russell***

---

No startling revelations to begin the New Year and nothing as yet on the horizon of possible new lakes to fish to excite the membership. A few early New Year working days had been arranged at Pond Lye to continue the encroachment reduction over on the east side. Willows that had taken root, fallen over and then rooted again several times had reduced the bank space by 15–20m in places. Willows were cut down to stumps over approximately an 80m section and some large ground hollows we found at the rear of the east bank were prepared to take the excavated spoil. We would not start this excavation until later this summer when usually the lake drops a good few inches due to evaporation. This will help as less water in the spoil will make it easier to move.

Over at Wellingham Lake we had to replace a 50m section of fence. Actually the fence was non-existent. Rotted away and completely covered with brambles. I dislike brambles. They catch up in my clothing. Get tangled up not only in my fishing line but also rod tops and landing net. No doubt they have purpose apart from irritating anglers... However, back to Wellingham. A working day arranged with a dozen or so members attending. We were fortunate that a member donated the use of a small excavator for the day. The task for the machine was to clear bramble and what a terrific job it did. Far more than we ever expected. We also rescued a few hundred meters of buried stock fencing that had just be left lying around from the days when the lake had been excavated for the second time. Stock fencing had then somehow been crushed into the ground and lost. A good number

of small self-seeded trees were cut and vast numbers of fallen branches were collected from all around the lake and moved to a large bonfire. One tree that was at some point going to fall in the lake taking part of the bank with it was removed. All the waste cleared away. A few days later a contractor came over and replaced the fence. Normally we would have taken on the task ourselves but the combined cost of material and labour we could not match.

Early February and the first inspection of the dam at Pond Lye. The bulk of the inspection appeared to be on the dam's rear face where a number of rabbit burrows were found. These would have to be filled with clay or a substitute substance also part of the steeply sloping back face upgraded. Lots of dead wood required to be cleared which looks like it is a haven for those creatures that liked to make homes in earth banks. After the reservoir inspector had departed we decided to approach one of our new near neighbours who had a few hundred yards of river adjacent to her land. We had spoken to her whilst she had walked her dog along the public footpath at the back end of last year. We called over uninvited but she was pleased to see us again. It was also a good excuse for her to give the dog his afternoon walk, perhaps by a different route. River bank is approximately 800yds in length and rather untouched. Perhaps an afternoon's work for three or four members and a dozen swims could be made in the vegetation. A verbal agreement between us about walking access to the river and then a request by the owner to transport some cut logs that were piled by the riverbank fencing back





Member fishing at Pond Lye

to her home and we've got a new section of river to fish. A shame we are fast approaching the river close season.

Preparations were all in hand to send out renewals at the end of February. A good number of evenings were spent ensuring the membership data was correct and that all members had at least one membership card and vehicle disc in their file ready for posting once their new seasons subscription fee had been received.

An extremely large white poplar tree at Wellingham Lake required removal. The angle of growth concerned a good few members and as it was leaning across the footpath it was decided to have it taken out. A tree surgeon was contacted then hired and within just a few hours of work starting the entire tree was down and cut into short lengths alongside the footpath.

Some preparation work carried out at the new section of the River Adur at Streams Farm. Unfortunately it's now the close season but at least it'll make the accessible fishing areas easy to find when the vegetation is at full height in early June. We also moved the logs which is our payment in rent for this river section for the year. A further two afternoon working sessions to stabilize a field gate, some fencing and fix several lengths of white conduit over the top strand of barbed wire to make access easier to the river bank.

Plashett Top Lake was next. We had a quantity of Siltex we purchased some years ago lying idle. This we proceeded to spread over the entire top lake. Rather this, which will benefit SPS and the lake than just try to sell it at a giveaway price.



Fish caught during River Adur stock survey

The recovery of the vegetation at Firlie after the recent excavations has been way past expectations. Some small self-seeded trees are now showing in all the sectioned off areas. The recovery has been amazing to many who thought the lake surrounds would be ruined. However I always knew that with a little help in the right areas, nature would always take over.

Early June and the punts were returned to Burton Mill Pond after a close season revamp. This water always looks so stunning on glorious sunny days where the bottom of the lake can be quite easily seen in four feet of clear water with numbers of fish moving around ... it's quite captivating.

A fish survey carried out by the EA on both Wineham and Twineham sections of the River Adur that we rent. A hundred-meter marker is set out, exactly the same section as in previous years, and fish caught measured and numbered in total. The most interesting result was that Dace were registered in the captures this year which is a first recorded for a good number of years. It's considered this to be a result of the complete weir removal at Twineham and rotten weir boards removed at Wineham. These river sections

now being much faster in flow which no doubt encourages Dace to take up residence. It was also interesting to note that later in the year the numbers of Sea Trout seen moving through these river sections.

Work by the Plashett Estate started on the bottom lake dam. All but a few trees were left standing. The southern secondary spillway will now see sheet steel piling inserted in front of the current overflow. The brick constructed spillway is literally full of holes and can no longer retain water at the level required. The bulk of the work will be completed by late summer with a further upgrade of the main spillway starting sometime in 2018.

Juniors Day 2017. Another well attended day for juniors of all ages. Everyone caught fish which is always very pleasing. BBQ was a superb again, thanks to Nina and Roger. Although the EA cannot now attend due to finances not being available the equipment donated to a former member Tony King for junior days use was brought along for all those taking part. Instruction always available on how to use and set up for those who needed some angling education.



Trial pit excavation in the field north of Pond Lye car park. September 2017 (left) and December 2017 (right). Water approx. 5ft.

Pond Lye work continued along the east bank where many willow trees had encroached into the lake surrounds. Our regular contractor plus excavator and a dumper were hired for five days. An extremely generous offer from a member setting aside five days to drive the hired dumper for the Society. Many trees of all sizes were "ripped out" roots and all from the lake surround and the vast encroached reed and silt transported to a deep excavation in the embankment behind the east bank. Further work in the field just north of the existing car park was undertaken.

Two excavations approximately four feet deep to gauge the soil content and see if water was present to fill the excavations. Water started to fill the southernmost excavation immediately the other remained bone dry for 24hrs. This was then back filled as it was pointless to leave it open any further length of time. The excavation that immediately started to fill with water remains full and overflowing into the field surrounds. Depth now approximately 5 feet (31/12/17.) A tremendous amount of unmanaged bramble and tree growth removed from

this field and piled ready for burning later in the year.

Our next project was to clear the back face of the dam. Numerous years of cut tree branches and the old boat house burnt timber remained littering the ground. We have to expose the many rabbit warrens. These we will have backfilled with grouting under high pressure which has now been specified. Early 2018 will be the target date for this project. Two full day working parties were arranged to clear the dams back face of waste which was burnt on site then it was arranged to have the local Ferreter's over to evict the rabbits from their warrens. This was successful over a wide area although only one rabbit was at home in the dam's rear face.

The closure of the section of the River Ouse we rent at Barcombe due to a Blue / Green algae bloom prompted us to monitor our other river sections plus lake venues. Only Wellingham Lake appeared to take on a colouration of green in the water which after testing proved negative however a month or so later it turned a horrible grey colour. This we had tested by the EA and the results confirmed an extremely high ammonia reading.



Wellingham Lake, by drone



Splash pumps at Wellingham Lake ensure oxygen content in the water is high

The source then confirmed to be a faulty waste digester from our closest neighbour. The EA now became more heavily involved and the Society ensured that the oxygen content of the water remained as high as possible by placing our splash pumps within the lake. These were turned on in the evenings and off the next day, mid-morning. The generator refilled ready for the next night. Meter readings of oxygen content in the water were taken almost daily within the initial stages.

After some considerable excavating by hand and a spade to expose sections of the 130m waste pipe then further testing from outside contractors with pressure pumps also a camera viewing within this waste pipe it was found the contaminated waste was leaking through faulty pipe joints which meant the vast majority of waste was finding its way into our lake through ground seepage. We are now at the end of December, a full three months from the original contact with the EA. Still nothing completed to satisfy the SPS that

digester waste will bypass our lake and flow directly into the stream that feeds the River Ouse. We are now in the hands of the Highways Agency. Their response appears to be just as slow as the EA.

Although it could appear from the outside that maybe not a lot has happened this past year members can be assured the workload within committee plus the waterkeepers continuous work is immense. Much of the maintenance work on our waters is carried out within regular visits therefore unseen to the majority of members. Currently a number of mid-week small work parties are ongoing at Pond Lye where the massively stacked bonfires are slowly being broken up and burnt. The amassed clay around many of the root systems makes it impossible to burn all together therefore the need of little and often makes more sense. The spring of 2018 will see a major upsurge of work at Pond Lye in preparation for the dam crest raising and the rear face of upgrade restoration this year.



The remains of a Horse Chestnut that partially across the road at Firle Lake. Normally a vehicle parks here, but luckily not that day.

## ***Trout and Grayling Fishing the River's Test and Itchen, Iain Mortimer***

---

My fishing career started on one of the very rare occasions when a major tantrum was rewarded. A tantrum brought about by the fact that every other person on our annual holiday to the Norfolk Broads was fishing, while I was deemed as being too young. The person in charge was my Uncle, a very keen fly angler and he clearly saw a budding angler in the making and so with no rod being available, a metal coat hanger was opened out, line tied to the end, and my fishing career started with the first, wriggling, silvery roach to grace my grubby little hands.

On our return to Scotland it was only a few days before I was the proud owner of a Woolworths fishing kit that was to serve me well for a few years. During that time, I was also taken to wild Scottish lochs to dap for equally wild trout. Wee buttery things that fought like demons having succumbed to the temptation of a Loch Ordie fly, a fly now threadbare and rusty but one that still lives in my collection for the memories it holds. During those trips, my Uncle would regale me with tales of chasing the silver tourist. The most sought after of fish, the salmon. A secretive and challenging fish that he'd chase for hours or sometimes days without success. Then finally, having cast an impossibly heavy and long line, with a ridiculously large and gaudy fly, everything would tighten and a long fight would ensue. This would often see him careering wildly across treacherous rocks, past fast and deep pools just trying to keep up with his quarry before finally finding a quieter pool where he could slide a large silvery salmon up onto the bank. The scene of these

exploits would invariably be one of the big rivers in Scotland, the Spey, Tay or Tweed. Needless to say, my appetite was whetted and often I dreamed of being there myself although sadly, following an enforced move to England, it was to be many years before I was to take on that challenge.

“What has that to do with the Test or Itchen?” you may quite rightly ask. Well I'm coming to that. You see while I was unable to fish those great waters, I read everything I could find about them and so when we moved to England I began to do the same for trout rivers. It was therefore only a matter of time before I came across writings about the Test and the Itchen. Those hallowed banks where the greats of our sport, G.E.M. Skues and Frederic Halford, had argued over the rightness of nymph versus dry fly and in doing so developed much of our modern thinking. Those exclusive waters which like in Scotland, were often fished by the rich and famous and with the guidance of a seasoned ghillie. These were the waters that now grabbed my attention. That I now dreamed of. That one day, I vowed, I would find a way to fish. These are the waters that we have access to through our membership of the Sussex Piscatorial Society. In fact, on the Broadlands beats, in the hut by the long bridge that gives its name to the upstream beat, there is still a photograph of a young Prince Charles proudly holding up a large Salmon. There is therefore something a little special about fishing these waters, that sense of history, of walking in the footsteps of our fishing forefathers.



I also believe there is an added dimension in fishing a river that comes from the sounds and sights of moving water that just do not exist in a lake. The sunlight sparkling off the swirls of water as it weaves its way around weed beds, the fronds of weed waving in the current, the gentle rush of water against the bank and the sight of big, buttery, brown trout hanging in the current sometimes right under your feet. No need for wee, wispy #2 or #3 rods here such as you might use at Cheriton. No, these are relatively open and broad rivers where a rod around 9'6" and rated for a number 5 or 6 line is best used – the type of rod you probably already own for lake fishing. As the banks are manicured, you'll also find casting is relatively simple helped by the fact that your leader and tippet need only

be 12' long. What is different, and what often catches people out is the choice of fly, or perhaps not the choice, but the size for despite these being big trout and the wild stocks being supplemented by those introduced, they are all used to eating from a very well stocked larder. That larder is not filled by big, bushy things but with wee olives, sedge and mayflies best matched with flies tied on a size 18 through to 14 although in the case of *Ephemera Danica*, the species often thought of as THE mayfly, there is an exception where a pattern tied on a size 10 or even 8 is more appropriate. There is also no need to focus on dry fly fishing for as shown by Skues, nymphs are a highly effective way of fishing although you may be surprised to hear that it can be harder to use nymphs than dry flies!

Given the massive range of flies that are available, and the large number of flies that we all carry despite generally only using a handful of them, you may not be sure where to start.

So as a starter set, my suggestions are:

Nymphs size 16 and 14: pheasant tail, gold ribbed hares ear and something olive. All with tungsten beads to get down in the fast current.

Emergers: Klinkhammer or Deer Hair Emergers in size 18 to 14 with olive or hares ear bodies. A black dubbed body is also useful and if you add a wee tail of sparkly stuff to mimic the shuck, all the better.

Dry flies: size 18, 16 and 14: black gnats, olives and Adams.

To that list, you may also want to add a daddy long legs and a few very buoyant flies for use in a 'Klink and Dink' set-up.

These will serve you well all year round although there is one period of just a few weeks each year when you will want some specific patterns that are next to useless at any other time. The *Ephemera danica* hatch, duffers fortnight, THE mayfly time. This occurs from mid-May to early June every year with the peak generally around May 20th. The vast number of these flies hatching results in the fish tuning into these big, meaty morsels when they will often refuse anything else. This is often the first big hatch of any fly each year and coupled with the lack of angling pressure over the winter, the fish can seem to lose all caution when the hatch starts. Both the Test and Itchen have these hatches although the most dramatic and slightly earlier than the Itchen, are to be found on the Test where the adults will literally swarm like midge along the full length of the beat.



*Ephemera danica*





Trout caught on a dry mayfly

To be present at this time without a pattern to match can spell frustration and so this is the one time to go big, nothing smaller than a size 12 with a 10 or even 8 being more appropriate. It is also notable that while I carry nymphs, I don't have great success with them possibly because the naturals rise rapidly to the surface before starting to emerge as the adult. It is therefore at the surface that the trout seem to put most focus picking off the emergers, cripples and adults before they escape into the air. I carry just three patterns to cover those which are all tied on a size 10, an elk winged emerger that also serves well as a cripple, what is effectively a large Adams but with a single hair wing of squirrel, and an extended body mayfly. Due to the size of these flies, a tippet of at least 6lb breaking strain and commonly 8lb is used to avoid line twist or being snapped off as the fish hits the large fly and dives back down again. For the rest of the year you will mainly use a tippet of 6lb dropping to 4lb if the fish are proving hard to come by.

With a landing net, pair of polarising glasses and hat you have all the essentials, no waders needed as wading is not allowed. Some very useful additions to

those are fly and line floatant, tippet degreaser and an amadou patch or even just a supply of tissue to dry that fly you've just landed a fish on. I'm sure you'll add all sorts of other items too but do bear in the mind that the aim on these rivers is to be mobile and so you should try and fit all you need in your pockets or small hip bag.

So that's the tackle, what about tactics? Well I guess to start with is the fish finding for on the majority of days you are stalking fish rather than simply casting blind and a consistent rise may not start until mid-morning. As a result, you will need to be able to find them sub-surface. On a well-lit and reasonably calm day in spring or summer you should easily spot trout and grayling sitting in the cushion of still water that forms in front of weed beds or other obstructions to the flow. This allows them to expend as little energy as possible in holding position. In front of them is likely to be a clear patch of gravel which enables them to spot food drifting along in the current at a distance that enables a swift interception and return to the holding station. These are the prime spots and will hold the biggest fish although others will often be found on the same gravel patch. This is well worth remembering on those dull days when a breeze ruffles the surface making it impossible to spot the fish. At those times, in all but the very worst of conditions, these white patches of gravel will still easily be seen and so show you where to position the fly for any fish that may be in residence.

The next question is how do you know if they are feeding or on the fin as this is known. A rising fish is obviously a feeding fish but what of the rest? Well if you take your time and watch, you may

see the fish move to the side or up in the water before returning to its original position. You may see a flash of white as a nymph is engulfed or smaller fish may be chased off the prime spot and then you'll know for sure. However, don't ignore fish that seem to be asleep, doing nothing but lazily holding ground. They are still worth running a fly past and often in just such a situation I have had good trout shoot like a torpedo from the river bed to the surface to grab my dry fly solidly hooking themselves as they dive back down just as fast. If they don't after you know they've seen your fly two or three times they move on while making a mental note to try again later.



With the assumption that you've got all the gear, have found your fish but have never fished running water before, what's next? How do you go about this new style of fishing? The first thing to realise is that the fish are generally facing directly upstream to watch for food flowing down and so it is common practice to start from

the downstream end of the beat and work up.

This means you will approach fish from behind with the least chance of spooking them and you will also aim to cast from behind them but before you do just stop and watch. Is the fish staying subsurface and so feeding on nymphs, is it rising to the surface just creating a hump or dimple in the top layer in which case they are likely to be taking emergers or are they creating big swirls or visibly breaking the surface with just their nose or full-blown splashing with adult flies or duns as they're known being the target? Watch, assess and having read your guide to what is likely to be hatching that month you can then select a likely pattern. If that doesn't work and you haven't spooked the fish just back off, tie on another fly and try again.

If you do spook the fish you can wait a few minutes for it to start feeding again after considering if you're holding up anyone else that is fishing along behind you, or you can move on to seek another. It is worth noting at this time that you may be surprised at how hard it actually is to spook fish. On many occasions, I've caught my fly in the nearside vegetation while trying for a rising fish close in, crept along to recover the fly and then returned to my casting spot with the fish continuing to rise throughout and so don't let tales of super spooky trout stop you from visiting these rivers.

When selecting your fly, don't just take a nymph as it's the style you have most confidence with on still waters, for a dry fly is much easier to use. This is because you only have to worry about where the current will carry the fly when it lands and placing it far enough in front of the fish that it will be seen.

With a nymph, you have to calculate the sink rate against the speed of flow and depth to make sure that you cast far enough upstream for it to reach the fish before it is swept away. On top of that, the current direction and speed is likely to be different subsurface than it is at the surface. All of that makes up stream nymphing one of the most challenging forms of our sport, but I'll come back to that for there are simple ways to maximise your catch rate.



A Pale Watery

When do you start to cast do not false cast over the fish as it may be spooked if the line flashes in the sun or is a bright colour. Instead, extend your cast to one side, changing direction to the target only when you're going to allow it to land. When casting a dry fly to a rising fish, you want the fly to land 2 or 3' in front of where the fish is lying at rest and so before casting allow the fish time to return to station after it has risen. As the fly drifts back towards you, retrieve line at the same speed as the current without moving the fly. If your cast was inaccurate or the fly is dragging across the surface, do not make the mistake of immediately lifting off and recasting. Instead let it drift 3 or 4' past the fish before you lift off, this also applies when nymphing. If the fish is lying

deeper allow for the extra depth it has to rise by casting a little further upstream allowing for maybe 5' of drift for a fish lying 6 to 8' deep. If you've picked the right fly, presented it in the right position and have a little luck, the fish will rise and take the fly but you must not immediately react! That can be the hardest bit but instead, steel yourself for a second, let the fish turn back down and at that point, as the tippet starts to move down into the water and the line begins to tighten, then you can lift the rod into a healthy curve as the fish fights for freedom. React to early and you will pull the fly from its mouth. Be warned though, at times instinct will win and you will pull the fly away which is something I still occasionally do!



Mayfly crippled emerger

If you've never caught on a dry fly please do try it, even if just on one of our still waters for I know of no one that hasn't tried and on their first success, wished they'd been indoctrinated years before.

In essence, you will fish a nymph in exactly same way and may even see a fish take the fly, but most of the time you will not. As a result, having cast your nymph so that it runs through perfectly you now have the hardest part to do, detect a bite.

Unlike on a stillwater where the line will be roughly straight from rod tip to nymph, and where due to retrieving you are immediately aware of resistance; on a river, you have to watch the end of your leader where it submerges to the fly. Most of the time it will drift along at the same speed as the current and so you are looking for a sudden change in direction or it may just stop dead. Immediately lift into what is hopefully a fish but may also be a weed bed or just a vortex that has dragged your line down. Not quite knowing does however add to the excitement!



Size 18 tungsten beaded bugs

When using a nymph, bite detection can be simplified by using a 'Klink and Dink' set up which the river keepers will tell you enables you to spot the 8 out of 10 bites you'd otherwise miss! The only downside to this method is that its only suitable for fishing shallower runs and glides up to perhaps three feet deep. However, it is a method that you may be very familiar with from our still waters where brightly coloured bite indicators are used under which a fly, commonly a buzzer, is suspended at a set depth. For Klink and Dink, the bite indicator is simply swapped for a very buoyant dry fly such as a deer hair sedge or big bushy klinkhammer with foam 'wing' which is tied to the end of the tippet as you would for dry fly fishing.

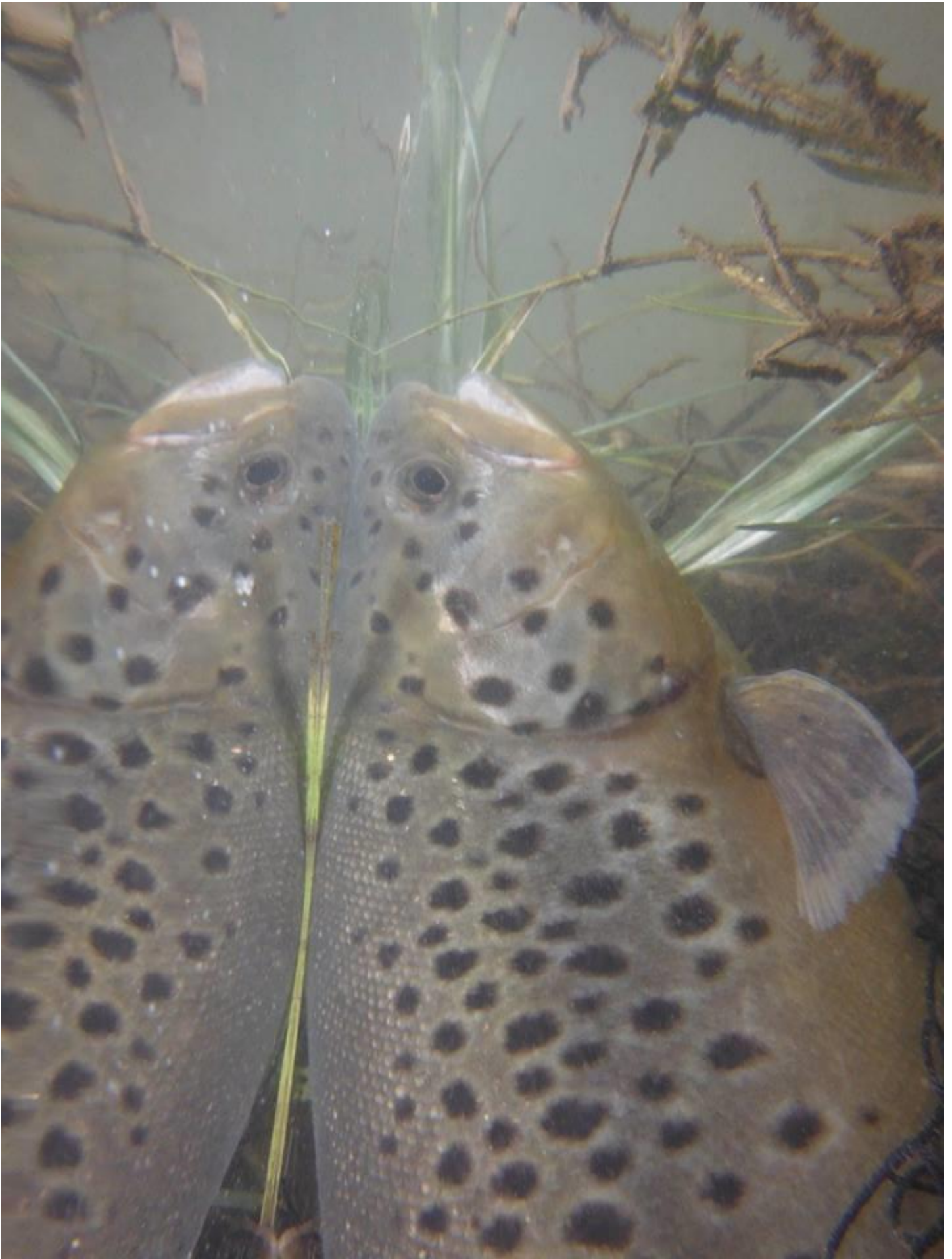
A length of tippet is then tied to the bend of the dry fly hook which acts as the bite indicator, and finally a nymph is tied on at the desired depth. This is a very sensitive method for as soon as any fish takes the nymph the dry fly is dragged under and you can strike. It also has the benefit of offering the dry fly which will at times result in a bonus fish or two.



Mayfly caught trout

If that has whetted your appetite but you still feel a little unsure I strongly suggest you book onto one of the river clinics being organised next year. The water keeper Jon is a lovely chap and in addition to the methods described above which will catch you trout and grayling, you will learn how to salmon fish on a chalk stream. Finally, you will have the opportunity to fish for a few hours to practice what you've just learned with advice never far away. The salmon fishing is something that space prevents me from talking about here but having completed one of these sessions last year I will definitely be seeking a salmon during 2018.

I wish you all a very good year of fishing and hope to see you on the banks of a river one day, with a dry fly of course...



A trout being returned to the stream

## Tales from the Trout Section, John Baker (Part 3)

---

### Wildlife

The first time I saw a mink was when I was on holiday in mid Wales. It was walking along the road and was completely un-phased by my presence. So much so that my son and I easily caught it, taking care not to be bitten ! In the 1970s and 80s, mink were fairly common at Wiston; and in the spring, their presence was readily confirmed by the complete absence of the moorhens, coots, dabchicks and ducklings that were normally commonplace. We successfully trapped many, even catching some in unbaited traps. I am not sure whether they took many trout but am pleased that they are much less common today.

The first cormorant seen on our waters appeared at Possingworth in the autumn and stayed for two or three weeks. This was before the days of protection and licences. Peter Truman (armed with 410) and I went down one Saturday but could not get within shotgun range. We then heard from Colin Harvey that the cormorant spent much of its time sitting on a dead tree at the north eastern end of the island.

Peter and I revisited, with me clad in chest waders, cartridges in one pocket and binoculars in the other. I carefully waded across the narrow strip of water to the island with the shot gun (unloaded) held over my head. When I arrived at the island, I realised that both the cartridges

and binoculars had been submerged on my journey across !



The growth of small trees on the island was quite dense but I could just make out the cormorant sitting on a dead branch at the tip of the island. I was presented with two dilemmas: was it safe to use a cartridge that had been immersed; and should I risk disturbing my prey by pushing through the thicket of trees to get closer ? I decided to risk the cartridge but not to push my way through the trees. So I loaded, took aim and fired through the trees. When I recovered from the recoil (no previous experience of firing a shotgun) I could see no sign of the cormorant. I pushed my way through the thicket but could find no trace of a dead cormorant.

So Peter and I went home not knowing whether we had "got our bird". At home, I dismantled my waterlogged binoculars, dried the prisms and lenses and reassembled. But they were never the same again. A week later, Colin rang

to tell me he had found a dead cormorant in the water !

When cormorants first arrived at Wiston, one or two were shot by Terry Jackson using a high-powered air rifle. He developed an interesting but successful method rather like the bouncing bomb – aim at the water just in front of the bird. It worked !

If anyone is thinking of reporting to the authorities, they should remember that cormorants have probably devoured well in excess of a thousand of our fish (possibly more) and that these events took place well over 30 years ago !

Living in Horsham, my visits to Wiston were more frequent than Possingworth and over the years I saw and heard lots of interesting wildlife. In the 1970s, barn owls were still fairly common and we had a resident bird at Wiston that often quartered the field on the south side of the lake in the evening and sat on an old fence post.



We also had nightingales in thick scrub some distance south east of the lake and I remember late one May evening my son and I followed our ears and were delighted to see a singing nightingale on a low tree silhouetted against a full moon. For two or three years, we had a lesser spotted woodpecker nesting in a hole in a dead tree on the south bank of Wiston. Lesser (as opposed to greater) spotted woodpeckers are now quite rare.

Bert planted some waterlilies in shallow water on the south side of the lake. When fishing early in the season, I thought I saw the young, curly red leaves emerging from the roots – but then they moved and I realised it was a small shoal of little goldfish. They were seen again several times and also I believe some carp but I have no idea what happened to them.

In a wood to the north of Wiston – on the other side of the main road - there used to be a very large colony of toads that every spring crossed the road to spawn in Wiston Pond.

Unfortunately there was a high mortality on the road and toad tunnels were fitted across the road by a local conservation group. The toads were directed into these with very long sheets of polythene on each side of the road. These were about a foot wide and fixed vertically on each side of the road, with gaps leading the toads into the tunnels. In spring, the lake was sometimes filled with millions of black toad tadpoles and later

in the year (in August I think) huge numbers of toadlets emerged from the lake to make their way to the wood on the north side of the road. I remember walking down the track (the car park was then at the top by the road) and having to pick my way very carefully to avoid treading on toadlets !

We also had a very large population of eels at Wiston. These could often be seen on the bottom in sunshine when the water was clear : and they used to come to the surface late on warm summer evenings and sip, rather like trout. I occasionally caught one on fly and suspect they were feeding on tiny chironomids. We were concerned that the eels were competing with trout for food and after some investigation contacted a professional eel fisherman. He laid a very long tube shaped net along the middle of the pond, with an entrance at each end allowing eels to enter but making it difficult for them to leave the net. His catch was enormous and we did not have to pay him – he paid us about £300 I think. Most of the eels were about three quarters of a pound and the biggest was five and a half pounds. Sadly the migrations of eels from the Sargasso Sea have declined hugely since those days and I doubt that Wiston now has many eels.

Wiston was always host to a hobby or two in the summer, feeding on the prolific dragonflies and I suspect they still come.

My last major project as secretary was managing the creation of Lower

Buddington (more on this later). A year or two after it was completed, Gordon Rippin rang (knowing I am a keen amateur botanist) to say he had found some rosettes of leaves amongst the grass on the dam and thought they might be wild orchids. After looking, I agreed. We marked the rosettes with canes and protected them with chicken wire. In June, we were delighted to see that these were indeed orchids – and magnificent specimens too. They were bee orchids which grew to nearly 12" and each had up to ten flowers – very unusual. They bloomed again the following year but not subsequently.



Our landlord at Possingworth until just after the Great Storm of 1987 was Mr Pugh. He owned the fishing rights and most of the bank of the lake but a length of wooded bank on the north side was separately owned by Guy Mountford who was a co founder (with Peter Scott and others) of the World Wildlife Fund. He introduced mandarin duck (not a native but now naturalised in many parts of England) to Possingworth. The mandarin is brilliantly coloured with a magnificent crest - a most beautiful bird.



Guy Mountford put up nesting boxes in the trees as mandarins are tree nesters. He wrote several books on birds and wildlife and was awarded an OBE for services to ornithology. His land was later

purchased by Lord Chelwood and after his death, Lady Chelwood continued to allow us access through and parking on her premises.

---

## Travellers

Towards the end of my stint as Secretary, problems with travellers started at Possingworth. There was an agreement between the landowners around the lake that the tracks should be unobstructed for the benefit of the local driving (pony and trap) club. The travellers took advantage of this and came in transit vans parking at the rear of the dam. They brought with them bolt cutters and fishing gear so that they could cut the chains and locks on our boat moorings and oars locker and use our boats to fish. They were known to the police and most had records of GBH and had served time. We were made aware they could be violent (the local bobby was scared of them) and were advised not to challenge them. The police were completely ineffective in stopping them, even after they were caught red handed. We moved the oars to the car park area but they smashed the duckboards in one of the boats and used these as paddles. They then sank one boat in the middle of the lake. The Police diving unit came to our rescue and recovered the boat.

Mr Pearce was initially reluctant to seek the agreement of other landowners to place obstructions on the tracks.

Eventually he relented but his “obstructions” were in our view (which was quickly shown to be correct) totally ineffective. First, a padlock on the gate from the road providing access to the tracks lasted about two days; and second, hydraulic posts sunk into the ground, installed at great expense lasted only a little longer. John Sayer (Lady Chelwood’s forester) had a more sensible idea – using a large tractor and trailer, he shifted a big tree trunk to the track and laid it across. This lasted a good deal longer. A mobile phone was kept permanently on charge near the car park courtesy of Lady Chelwood, for members to ring the police – very few members had mobiles in those days. We had some help from the police : Steve Long and a couple of his colleagues from the Sussex Police angling club were given a few complimentary tickets to fish; and Steve arranged for signs to be erected reading “Caution : Police dog training”. When I gave up as Secretary of the TS these problems were at their height and continued for a while after Julian Millerchip took over as Secretary. About this time, John Evans became chairman of the SPS and was personally responsible for bringing these dreadful problems to a

conclusion. John describes how this came about in his own words. "It was at this time that I became Chairman of the SPS and aware of the very serious problem that existed at Possingworth. As a teacher, I had come across travellers in many areas and, fortunately (depends how you see that), had very good working relationships with many groups. Knowing the travellers well, much of the approach by the SPS et al was having the response I would have expected. However I was rather reluctant to "cross over" anything that the police were trying to achieve.

When a member was threatened, I felt I had to do something. So one memorable afternoon I went to greet a gathering of travellers on their grounds, thus giving them respect and expecting it in return. We sat drinking tea and having a very "frank" conversation about my desire to provide something special for the SPS and the countryside, which seemed to be undermined by the attitude of some members of the traveller community.

The tea was good and they all sat quietly listening to my points and, I think, somewhat embarrassed that they had offended me (they didn't know of my connection with Possingworth). Their spokesman apologised for my inconvenience, and for causing one of our elderly members to feel endangered. It was then announced that all fishing by them would stop and a couple actually asked if they could have membership and act as bailiffs for us. I had to decline the offer.

After that everything went quiet and I know that both Hastings and Eastbourne police all knew of me. I won't quote the strange turn of events that subsequently occurred at Hastings when my name was once mentioned. On one occasion when I sat out in the punt at Possingworth I was questioned by a sergeant as to my credentials and name given. I think I gained some sort of "brownie points" or the title "stupid!"

---

### **Lower Buddington – how it happened**

For almost all my time as Secretary, Harry Goring was our landlord at Wiston, although I briefly knew his father, John Goring. Harry is a gentleman and was always concerned about the welfare of his tenants. He was for many years unwilling to let us drain and dredge Wiston in order to address the long standing problem of excessive weed growth - but with a valid

reason. He was concerned that sediment dumped on the south side of the lake would be an eyesore for years, especially to the many who parked by the road to admire the view across to Chanctonbury Ring. Some years after I finished my Secretary stint, he relented and gave the TS permission to go ahead with draining and dredging.



Whilst I was Secretary, Harry was well aware of our concerns about weed growth and how it adversely affected the fishing. In the early 1990s, he invited me to explore the Estate to see if we could find a suitable site for a new lake. Bert and I perused the 2.5 inch OS map and came up with a few ideas finally settling on a site to the south east of Wiston. This was surveyed by one of our members (Peter Bariff) and we concluded that we could create a new lake using the same water supply as Wiston with an area of about one acre and a maximum depth of about 16 feet. An area of water deeper than Wiston was essential to avoid major weed problems.

We then had to outline an agreement with the Estate. The outcome of discussions with Harry was that we would meet all the costs of creating the lake except perimeter fencing; we would have an agreement for 10 years with a peppercorn rent; and after that would pay a normal commercial rent. The lake and fishing rights would of course be owned by the Estate. We decided, having had preliminary estimates of the build costs, that we would be getting value for money out of the deal. So we signed up to the agreement and started work on creation of the new lake which Harry was invited to name. There had been an old cottage 50 yards or so west of the site called Lower Buddington and Harry chose this name for the new lake. Some remains of the foundations and a few broken bricks were still visible the last time I looked.



A283 Washington Road, Wiston (left), Lower Buddington (right)

There then followed a lot of work that fell largely on my shoulders : drawing up plans and a spec for the lake; finding a contractor; obtaining various consents from the EA; and getting planning permission from Horsham DC. We were very fortunate in having a suitable contractor as a member of the TS – Brian Richardson - who gave us the best quote and did a fantastic job in creating our new water. There was a memorable incident when I was discussing design of the dam with someone from the EA : he said we would need to create a secondary spillway capable of coping with a 1 in 150 year flood. I asked him how big this should be and he said we would have to employ a consultant to find out. I said “Hang on a minute – you must know how big the spillway should be to decide whether or not to consent our application. If you

won’t tell us, what about if we build it 15 feet wide and 18 inches deep ?” Embarrassed, he agreed that this would be OK ! The cost of creating Lower Buddington was partly met from savings that had been accrued by the TS but mainly from a loan generously given by the SPS from its building society investments (which were then worthwhile – I remember having a Sussex County Building Society account which for a time yielded 12% interest !). The loan was repaid back over the next three years or so.

The work of building the lake was completed in the summer of 1996 and it was filled during the autumn and winter of 1996 – 7. There was still much to be done to get this new water “up and running” and we should be especially grateful to

the Rippin family who made the lake such a beautiful and enjoyable place to fish; and also to Tim Duffield who oversaw construction of the footbridge. We did a lot of planting including a hawthorn hedge along the fence at the western boundary and planting around the perimeter with soft rush (collected from the field to the west of the lake) to prevent bank erosion by wave action. The Rippin family did

quite a lot more planting over the next few years. Malcolm Rippin (who tragically died as a young man in a house fire) was our first water keeper here, ably assisted by his father Gordon and his mum Ann; Gordon continued as water keeper for some years after his son died. Gordon died just two or three years ago. I resigned as Secretary soon after Lower Buddington was completed and was succeeded by Julian Millerchip.

---

### **Cheriton Mill**

I have fished the Itchen for almost 50 years, initially at Itchen Stoke, then at Abbotts Barton, a brief spell on the river Alre just below Alresford and since the early 1980s, the Tichborne stream. The Tichborne stream is fishable for about two and a half miles and is one of the three Itchen feeder streams that join west of Alresford to form the main river – the other two being the river Alre and the Candover brook. When I first fished here, rods were let by and the fishing managed (badly) by the Estate. After several years of trying, I was able to negotiate an

agreement with the Estate setting up a syndicate to manage and fish the Tichborne stream. The top stretch of the stream (above Cheriton Mill) had not been managed for some years and was rarely fished. The remaining water downstream was plenty for the new syndicate, so we decided not to include the Cheriton Mill stretch in our agreement. John Evans, the then Chairman of the SPS was keen for the Society to have access to some chalk stream fishing and it was arranged that the Society should be offered the Cheriton Mill stretch.



Prior to the great winter floods of 2000 – 2001, the mill stream above the mill carried the main river flow and was an important part of the fishery. It was an artificial channel with raised banks and the water level was higher than the land in the adjacent meadow. There was a hatch just above the mill that, when fully opened, allowed some flow to bypass the mill. The mill had recently been renovated and let and when the great winter floods came, the building was threatened with inundation, even with the hatch fully open. This was an emergency and, without any of the necessary consents, the Estate breached the bank of the mill stream at its upstream end, allowing the river to bypass the mill stream and flow through the adjacent meadow - probably

its original course before the mill was established. The mill stream now carried a much lower and variable flow of water and no longer provided suitable habitat for adult trout.

The SPS tenancy started shortly after these events and one of the first tasks was, where the flow divided, to try and control flows entering the meadow (which we wished to fish) and the old mill stream : this was always difficult and a source of contention with the tenants at Cheriton Mill. We also had to build a footbridge to cross the mill stream in order to gain access to the meadow stretch; to set up somewhere to keep tools; to put up new fencing; and to do a lot of tree work.



The quality of the habitat for wild trout in the fishery today owes much to Phillip Ellis who was until recently our water keeper,

and to our river maintenance man Pat Moyle. Although the river is small and our stretch of fishing short, we are fortunate in having our own piece of chalkstream only a little more than a mile below the main springs, with high water quality and habitat for wild trout. So many other chalkstreams have been adversely affected by discharges upstream from treated sewage, trout farms and water cress beds; and from degraded habitat. We suffer from none of these problems and have a healthy and self-sustaining population of wild browns – but, in common with the rest of the upper Itchen, numbers of aquatic invertebrates including gammarus, are worryingly low.



*This concludes John Baker's story. Parts I and II are in the previous issues of Sussex Piscator. I'm very happy to send them over as pdfs if anyone missed out. Thank you, John, for contributing such a fascinating series. Jon S, Editor*

# Pulse Trawling: A Threat to British Sea Fish Stocks..?

---

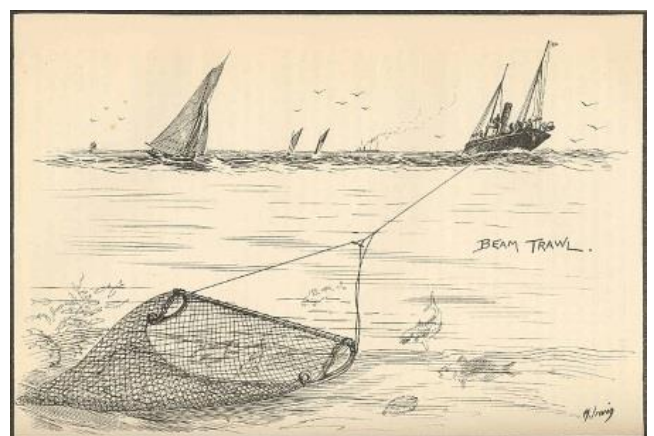
Pulse trawling (also known as electro trawling and electric pulse trawling) was in the news at the time of writing. Following a contentious EU parliament vote in January 2018, it now seems that -- sooner or later -- this practice will be banned in European waters. It's a complex issue that has caused a lot of discussion between recreational sea fishermen and professional trawler operators. For many hobby anglers and environmentalists, the EU decision offers a welcome lifeline ... assuming it is confirmed and enacted. Of course, here in the UK we're *apparently* about to leave the EU, so everything is still very much up in the air – and, as such, this issue won't go away post-Brexit.

## What is pulse trawling?

Pulse trawling is a technologically advanced – and highly controversial – method of commercial fishing which has only been used on an experimental basis up until now, but appears to making a major breakthrough into mainstream commercial fishing across Europe's fisheries. Little research has been carried out into the long-term impact of this type of fishing and there are serious concerns over what pulse trawling does to fish stocks and the wider environment. Recent years have seen much debate about whether pulse trawling should be allowed to expand and become a mainstream commercial fishing method in European waters.

## Development of Pulse Trawling

Pulse trawling is an adaptation of beam trawling, a method of commercial fishing which has been used for over one hundred years. Beam trawling is used to catch demersal species (those that live and feed on or near the seabed). The mouth of the net is held open by a solid metal bar and up to twenty 'tickler chains' thrash the seabed in front of the net to stir up fish (especially flatfish and prawns which bury themselves under the sand and silt of the seabed) which then allows them to be scooped into the net. Beam trawling is considered one of the most environmentally destructive forms of trawling by environmental groups such as Greenpeace due to the very high levels of bycatch and the damage to the seabed that this type of fishing causes.



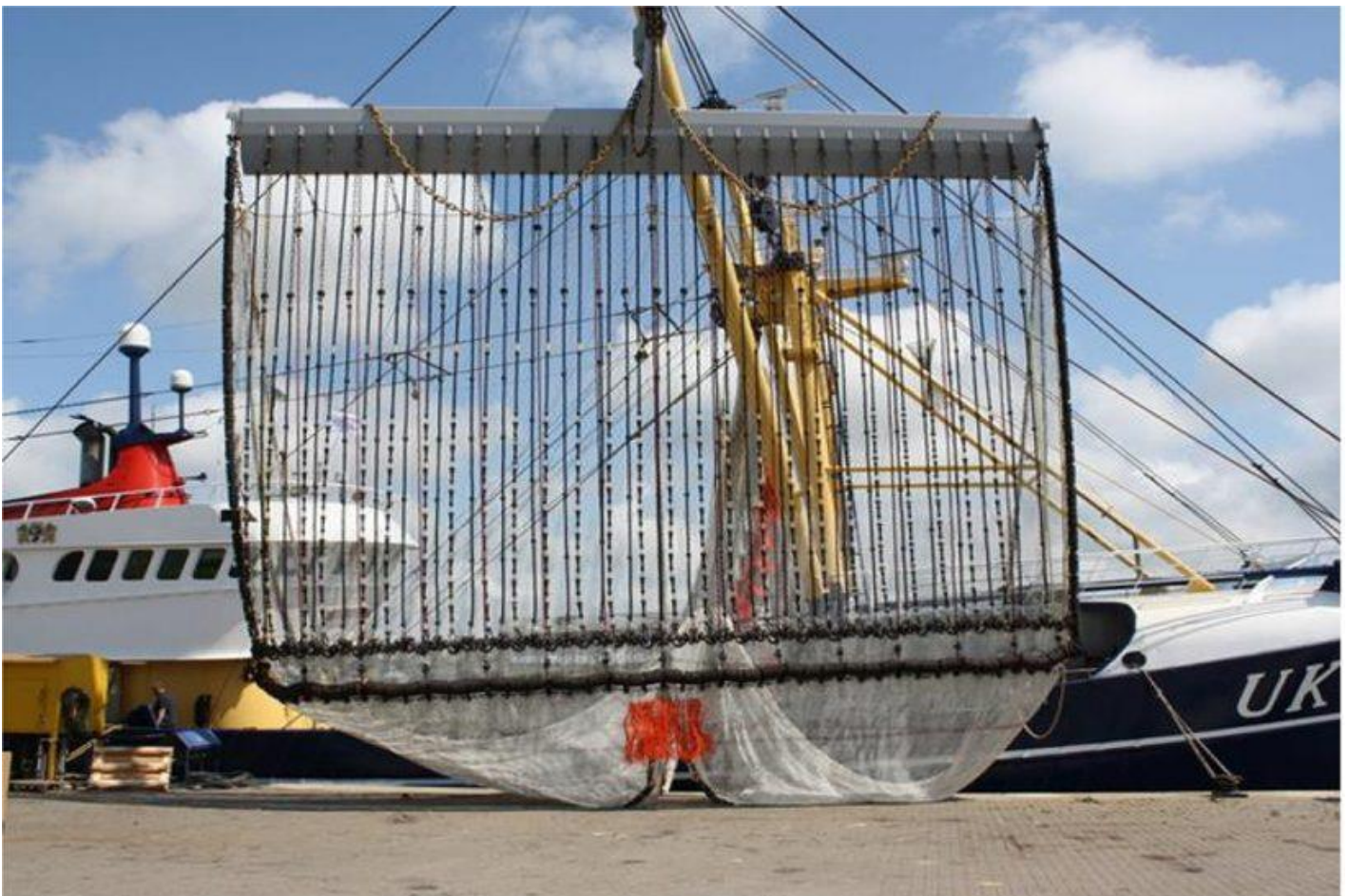
Old-fashioned beam trawler, 1893

The pulse trawling system invented in the Netherlands in 1992 is an adaptation of beam trawling. This method of fishing replaces the tickler chains of traditional



beam trawling with a series of electrical drag wires mounted into the net. These wires send electrical pulses into the seabed which cause the muscles of fish to contract and which forces the fish upwards and out of the seabed and into the net. The Dutch have remained the biggest proponents of pulse trawling and have advanced the use of this technology, claiming that pulse gear has less contact with the seabed meaning that there is more of the target species caught, lower levels of bycatch, less damage to the

seabed and fish that are caught are in better condition and therefore reach a higher price at market. Furthermore, and the point that is of most interest to commercial fishermen, is that pulse trawls are up to ten times lighter than traditional beam trawl gear, meaning that fishing with pulse gear uses much less fuel than traditional beam trawling. Although it costs around £300,000 to convert a beam trawler to a pulse trawler and retrain the crew to use the new equipment, the savings that can be made mean that this investment can soon repay itself.



Contemporary pulse trawling system

## **Pulse Trawling: in the EU**

Officially, pulse trawling is already banned by the European Union. Article 31 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 850/98 covers unconventional fishing methods and states: "The catching of marine organisms using methods incorporating the use of explosives, poisonous or stupefying substances or electric current shall be prohibited". Technically, this makes pulse trawling, or any kind of fishing using electricity illegal anywhere within the waters of the European Union. However, a legal exception allows pulse trawling to be carried out for "research purposes".

This legal loophole has been heavily exploited by the Dutch fishing industry. They have lobbied to allow greater freedom to use pulse and electrical trawling gear and in 2010 they were partially successful in getting the restrictions on pulse trawling eased – a maximum of 5% of the Dutch commercial fishing fleet was allowed to use electrical fishing gear. This effectively meant a quadrupling of the number of vessels fishing with pulse trawls. Over one hundred fishing vessels – the vast majority from the Netherlands – have been converted into pulse trawlers despite the supposed EU ban on this type of fishing

still being in force. Some of the conversions to transform fishing boats into pulse trawlers have even been funded by EU money.

Dutch fishing vessels fitted with pulse trawls are theoretically allowed to fish anywhere within EU waters. This means they can operate up to twelve miles away from the British coastline. As the UK government still controls the twelve-mile zone around the Britain it has been able to stop pulse trawling from taking place within British inshore waters, but this changed in 2015 when news emerged that twelve UK registered vessels had been equipped with pulse trawls and could therefore fish within the twelve-mile zone which the UK still controls. An article in the Guardian stated that at least some of these vessels had been financed by Dutch fishing companies.

It is not difficult to see why the Dutch fishing industry is pushing forward with pulse trawling, and why fishermen from other countries may also be keen to adopt the technology. The lighter fishing gear means huge fuel savings with one Dutch fisherman telling the BBC that he went from taking home €30,000 per year to €70,000 after equipping his fishing boat with pulse trawl equipment.

---

## **The Impact of Pulse Trawling**

With the EU allowing – and in some cases funding – the expansion of pulse trawling many people would assume that it has been fully tested and proven to be a safe

and low-impact method of fishing. However, many commercial fishermen, environmental campaigners and marine scientists point to the growing evidence

that this is not the case, and highlight the worrying lack of research into its medium and long term impact. Commercial fishermen working out of ports in Kent and Essex reported that they were catching unusually high numbers of dead Dover sole and other flatfish in their nets in 2012. A Sunday Times article reported on this, with the fishermen interviewed placing the blame squarely on the Dutch pulse trawling fleet:

[It's like] "fishing in a graveyard...What they don't catch they annihilate...Virtually everything is dead." – Tom Brown, Secretary of Thanet Fisherman Association.

"This is absolutely devastating for us because we never caught so many fish that [were] already dead...It's a waste of time going to that area now." – Jeff Loveland, owner of two fishing boats operating out of Ramsgate, Kent.

"I have fished there for 30 years and never seen anything like it. I think the pulse is killing the food in the seabed. Three years ago I caught 40 tons of sole in those grounds in one year. It was the best year we've ever had. There is nothing there now that I can catch." – Roger Free, commercial fisherman from West Mersea, Essex.

There are also serious concerns that the spawning grounds of southern North Sea sole could be exploited by pulse trawling. This species comes into the soft ground in and around the Thames estuary to spawn – an area which is inaccessible to heavy

traditional beam trawls. However, the lighter pulse trawls can work across very soft ground, and there is currently no way to stop Dutch pulse trawlers which have a quota to catch sole from fishing in this area during the spawning season.

Campaign group Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) are also seriously concerned about pulse trawling, pointing out that very little serious research has been carried out into the long term effects of fishing with electrical pulses, or the impact that it has on the wider marine environment. Prominent environmentalist George Monbiot is also critical of the repeated claim that pulse trawling is less damaging than traditional beam trawling, not because it is untrue but because "beam trawling is so fantastically damaging to the seabed" that it is very easy to create a commercial fishing method which causes less damage. An article published in the Independent in 2016 compared pulse trawling to fracking. Both are supposedly clean and safe but little research has been done into the medium and long term effects.

One serious impact of pulse trawling which has been verified by peer-reviewed scientific research is that large gadoid fishes (cod and related species such as haddock and whiting) which come close to pulse trawl gear can suffer from haemorrhages and muscular contractions which cause breakages of the spine. Tammo Bult, Director of the Wageningen Marine Research told the BBC that species such as shellfish, flatfish and sharks and

rays did not appear to be affected by pulse trawling, but large cod which come to near to the pulse trawl gear can “have

breakage of the spine ... in that size of cod their own muscles break the spine”.

---

## **Push for Pulse Trawling to Become a Mainstream Fishing Method**

In July 2017 it was reported that pulse trawling was set to “get the green light” after a special meeting at the EU parliament, with the European Commission and Dutch fishing industry pushing for regulations limiting pulse trawling to be lifted. Elisa Roller, the Head of Unit at Directorate General Maritime and Fisheries Affairs of the European Commission was quoted as saying that pulse trawling was the “the most innovative, most researched and most fuel-efficient gear” and was satisfied that enough research and testing had been carried out to make pulse trawling a mainstream fishing method throughout European Union waters.

Subsequently, in November 2017 the European Parliament Fisheries Committee voted to re-classify pulse trawling as a conventional fishing method, meaning that it will be able to be licenced in the same way as normal fishing methods.

Then, on 16th January 2018 the European Parliament voted by 402 to 232 votes (with 40 abstentions) to ban electric pulse trawling in European waters, defying the

European Commission which backed the Dutch fishing industry’s plans to expand pulse trawling. Dutch fishermen will be able to continue to fish with their “experimental” pulse trawling gear until the ban comes into force.

Now, the looming issue of Brexit brings new complications. World-renowned fisheries scientist Professor Daniel Pauly, a prominent critic of the way that the EU has managed its fisheries, believes it presents an opportunity not only to ban pulse trawling, but also to rebuild domestic fish stocks:

“The opportunity you have now is to do better than the EU has done . . . Trawling is very destructive gear, pulling everything in and destroying habitat and so on . . . But you can make things worse. You can add insult to injury by electrifying this thing. So the animals that would slip under the net get a spasm of electricity. They jump up and they are caught. So you can add to the things that you catch: the last worm, the last little shrimp in the sea. That is literally scraping the bottom of the sea”.

*Reprinted with permission from [BritishSeaFishing.co.uk](http://BritishSeaFishing.co.uk) which also contains a fully-referenced version with links to all sources cited. [BritishSeaFishing.co.uk](http://BritishSeaFishing.co.uk) is a superb news resource for sea angling enthusiasts and I recommend it to any SPS member looking for news on the subject. Thank you, Chris, for permission to use this piece.*