



Sussex Branch Newsletter



JANUARY 2020

Lower Itchen Fishery report *By Andy Wood*



I've wanted to fish the Lower Itchen for a while because I love chalk streams. Before starting out fly fishing I always had that classic image in my head that such rivers represented the pinnacle of the sport. This was at least in part down to the fact that for 5 wonderful years I was lucky enough to live within walking distance of the Upper Avon at Durrington, just off the Countess roundabout on the A303 and close to Stonehenge.

I didn't fly fish at the time, but spent many a happy hour trotting maggot for grayling with a float and centre-pin reel a little further downstream at Amesbury. Twenty or more good size Grayling was an entirely realistic expectation for a couple of hours on an Autumn Sunday morning. Being a member of the Salisbury club (Coarse only) at the time, I have some very fond memories of both fishing and exploring many miles of the river Avon and its tributaries above Salisbury.

I can well remember walking my Golden Retriever along some of the trout beats of the Upper Avon, Nadder and Wyle on spring and summer evenings, watching the fly fishermen and soaking up the beauty of these unique habitats.

When this year's trip to Wherwell fell through, I thought I might miss out on my yearly chalk stream fix. So, when Ray Burt kindly offered me a place on one of the Lower Itchen trips he organises for the Tunbridge Wells guys, I jumped at the chance.

When I was offered the choice of the weekday or weekend trip, I opted for the weekday one. I reasoned that the fishery would be quieter, but completely overlooked the travel implications. From a journey perspective it was, of course, anything but quiet on a workday morning. There was some sort of issue on the M27 that reduced traffic to a crawl, increasing the journey time to almost two and a half hours. However, on arriving at the fishery and seeing the river for the first time, that all became a distant memory. Despite the recent wet weather, the river was running crystal clear and the sun was shining, with virtually no wind. Probably less than perfect conditions for fishing, but one of those days when it's simply sufficient to be out there and taking it all in. After a challenging drive up river – it felt like I was in it at times - where I got to wondering whether my breakdown cover would extend to some river bank in the middle of nowhere, we arrived at the 'fly only' stretch and parked up

I quickly got my gear together, while taking in a couple of tips from Ray, and the four of us went our separate ways in pursuit of the 'Lady of the Stream'. There was plenty of beautiful river bank to explore. I saw signs for at least 5 different trout beats on my travels and I think we had the entire fly-only part of the river to ourselves that day. Note that, although I never got that far, you can unofficially fish the coarse only beat as long as you are respectful towards any coarse anglers.

Engaging stealth mode, I wandered slowly upstream looking for likely spots and signs of fish. I covered a lot of river bank before hitting the upstream fishery limit and saw many quality fish to cast a fly at. I tried to tempt monster chub, good sized carp and bream, together with the more expected grayling and trout. I must admit that I am no purist when it comes to fly fishing, I just like to catch fish, whatever the species. In particular, I spent quite a long time trying to tempt a big bream, but it wasn't having it. I don't think my lack of success was down to any issues with stealth though.

At one point on my travels, I walked around a bend in the river to find a pair of deer standing directly in front of me. I don't know who was more startled, me or the deer!

Although I did set up a 4-weight rod with a floating line and small Klinkhammer, I never got around to using it. I was totally preoccupied with my preferred setup for grayling chalk-streaming, consisting of a 10' 3 weight, Euro-nymph style leader and a pair of heavy nymphs. I am no expert with this particular method of presenting a fly, but for some reason I really enjoy it. Perhaps it's because it feels not dissimilar to working a trotted stick float, a potentially deadly method in the coarse world. It's possible to explore a lot of water once you've figured out how to control the rig – the longer soft rod, while not essential, helps a lot with this style. Casting a team of heavy flies on the end of what amounts to a length of nylon does feel very awkward though – forget everything you have learned about conventional fly-casting techniques!



Although I thoroughly enjoyed the day, it wasn't too successful from a fishing point of view. I had the smallest grayling I have ever seen and, of all things, a gudgeon! When I was later chatting about my surprise catch with the river-keeper he did point out that this was a good indication that my flies were well down on the bottom! I also lost 3 decent trout (not targeted I hasten to add), each of which were on the line for what seemed like a minute or so. I might be wrong but I put this down to barbless hooks. My 3-weight rod is ultra-soft and does a great job in absorbing the lunges of a hooked fish. These were not break-offs, but hook pulls. I find this quite frustrating as, for other types of angling, I thought I had moved on from the barbed versus

barbless debate, having full confidence in barbless. For trout specifically, I now have my doubts. I remember a conversation with John Plowman, where he expressed a similar view on barbless hooks for trout. I'd be interested to hear other thoughts on the subject - the jury is still out for me.

The rest of the party did a little better than I did. Ray Burt managed six grayling to around 32cm, while Tony had a further eight. I'm not sure how many Alan caught as he left early. Ray later told me that it was a bit more challenging than he had expected. Apparently, based on his previous year's returns, ten or so fish would have been a more typical expectation for a day on the Itchen. I didn't feel too hard done by though – although I only managed a tiny grayling, I had the distinction of being the only rod to catch a gudgeon!

It's a shame that the Grayling trips are not better attended. I do understand geography dictates that chalk stream fishing is always going to involve relatively long journeys for Guild members. It's also difficult to ignore the relatively high price tag of a day ticket, especially considering you won't be taking anything back for the table. For £45 you can get change from a 4 fish trout ticket on our usual Sussex venues. However, I don't know any venue that comes anywhere near the beauty of a classic chalkstream. In much the same way as you pay extra for a hotel room with a view, for me at least, I don't mind paying for the view.

Andy Wood

LAST CHANCE FOR THE "BIG FISH TROPHIES"



Fish must have been caught before 31st December 2019 from a Sussex water.

Trophies will be presented at the End of Season Gathering on 2nd April 2020.

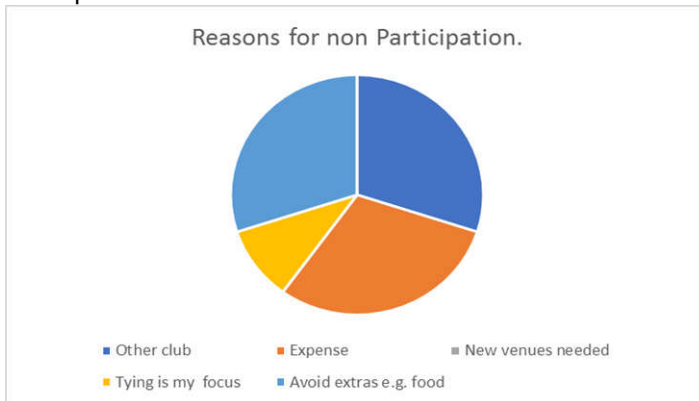
Enter via e-mail fdgsussex@gmail.com, phone 01273 581519, by hand or mail to Roy Gurney, at 29 Capel Avenue, Peacehaven, BN10 8NB.

This article was intended for the December issue but suffered from lack of space!

Fishing Programme **Questionnaire**

Although members will have the full analysis of results emailed out to them (paper copies available if requested) I thought this end of the year was a good time to reflect on the findings. Although the original focus was on events which were struggling, it initiated conversations with a range of members and people outside of the club which opened up more general insights about our events. Around 30 members responded which is a high percentage of our active fishers/tiers

The graphic below was based on those who said they participated in only a few or no events & this and other comments have led to the key bullet points below:



- AW will be looking at ways of reducing costs of events wherever possible, though with some events the food element is something of an integral part.
- It is noticeable that the biggest participation in the year is at the cheapest event-Brass Monkeys.
- Whilst the range of venues seems to be acceptable, there may be opportunities to broaden them if we can keep travel costs down, though the programme, in the months where most want to fish, is fairly crammed. Perhaps a member's suggestion about having smaller "buddy groups" might work in investigating some of these alternative venues.
- AW has reacted to another suggestion that more detailed information might be needed about the club's various competitions for newer members by producing "A Guide to Sussex Fly Dressers Guild Fishing Programme" which will be available shortly.

- The Charity Pairs is affected by the declining number of boat fishers and disappointment with Bewl as a venue. However, there is little in the way of an alternative, so we must pin our hopes on better weather, possibly a slightly different date and more co-operation with other clubs to boost attendance. AW and Ray Love are currently liaising with several people to this end.
- One useful suggestion was the use of more experienced boat anglers to coach those who have had less experience at various events and we will discuss subsidies for this from club funds.
- Wherwell will no longer be a venue for grayling fishing due to distance and cost but combining with other clubs should allow those who want to continue or start this branch of fly fishing to do so at the cheaper and more consistent Lower Itchen fishery.
- The committee will approach a potential speaker to run a session on the gear, flies and tactics involved with grayling fishing in the month prior to these trips. (another good suggestion from a member's comments).
- Suggestions that we lack inclusivity in our programme are taken on board but this is an issue for fly fishing as a whole rather than just our club. However, we can make attempts to improve through our demonstrations at shows and perhaps liaising with local venues to provide "open days" for young and female prospective fishers and tyers.

The club echoes the general trends in having a declining and ageing membership (indeed our stats are slightly better than many other local branches), so combining events with other local clubs and finding new members are key points for the future. Anyone with ideas please let me know at tying nights or by email and I will endeavour to put good ones into practice.

Tight Lines & all the best for the New Year

Alan Wells

FLY-TYING COMPETITION

Once again we will be following the Main Guild patterns. However we have given optional hook and material choices for our internal competition for novice and intermediate, but they would be good practice if you wish to enter the main Guild competition too. We would encourage all to have a go at them (or at least one of them) to join Noake, Alan W., Jim H. et al on the roll of honour!

Our Rules are:

- Novice** – for those having no more than one year's experience
 - Intermediate** – for those having no more than three year's experience
 - Open** – for any Branch member
 - Salmon** – for any Branch member
 - Saltwater/Pike** – for any Branch Member
- Members may enter for as many classes as they choose above their lowest qualifying standard.**

The patterns for this year are:

Novice **The Red Zebra Devil Nymph**
PATTERN - see Autumn 2018 "Flydresser"
Substitute grub hook #12 and grizzle
For Coq de Leon if you don't have it

Intermediate **The Adams**
PATTERN - see Autumn 2018 "Flydresser"
Substitute hare's ear if you don't
have muskrat

Open **The Rubber-legged Stonefly Nymph**

PATTERN - see "Fly Tying Bible" – p 146-7

Salmon **The Cascade**
PATTERN - see Spring 2014 "Flydresser"

Saltwater/Pike **Grey Mullet**
PATTERN - see Summer 2019 "Flydresser"

Three identical samples of each fly should be submitted by **Thursday 12th March 2020** to **Brian Hendry** or **Alan Middleton** or to Roy Gurney if they are not around.

Christmas Outing

Brick Farm 1st December 2019

Many thanks to the new owners who made us very welcome with good food and free tea and coffee all day.

The weather was overcast with no frost, and the sun came out at about 11, though a chilly breeze persisted.

The fishing was hard with a few caught on lures early on. It then died till the sun came out and the fish turned to taking small flies – Diawl Bachs and buzzers – in the last hour.

Peter Winder had the best fish of 4 lb 7 oz, with John Plowman taking runner-up with 3 lb 2 oz.

Peter also had best bag of 11 lb 5 oz, with Cliff Brown having 7 lb 12 oz and Sally Page 5 lb.

Mary Carden caught a fine brown of 5 lb 1 oz from Well Lake.

In total, 20 fish were caught - 15 from Brick, 4 from Stag and one from Well.

Peter Winder

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held on 5th December 2019

Not having found a successor and with no volunteers from the 30 or so attending the AGM, Chairman, Tony Woolnough, reluctantly agreed to continue in the role he has so successfully filled for the past 12 years until a successor is found. No such problems with our Secretary, who handed over his duties to Simon Rickard. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Paul Bond for his sterling work over the past twenty plus years. Fortunately he will be available to help out. and help Simon to "bed-in".

The Treasurer reported a small excess of income this year, afforded mainly by the very successful auctions, and added that due to personal reasons he would be standing down at the end of the financial year, handing over to his successor (volunteers required!) till elections at the AGM.

The Membership Secretary did warn that due to the falling membership, whilst unchanged for 2018-9, is down to 59 paid-up members, a loss of 10, half of which were due to moving away or death, with 3 or 4 "regulars" who pay late. Recruitment is vital, or subscriptions will have rise – probably by £3 – next time.

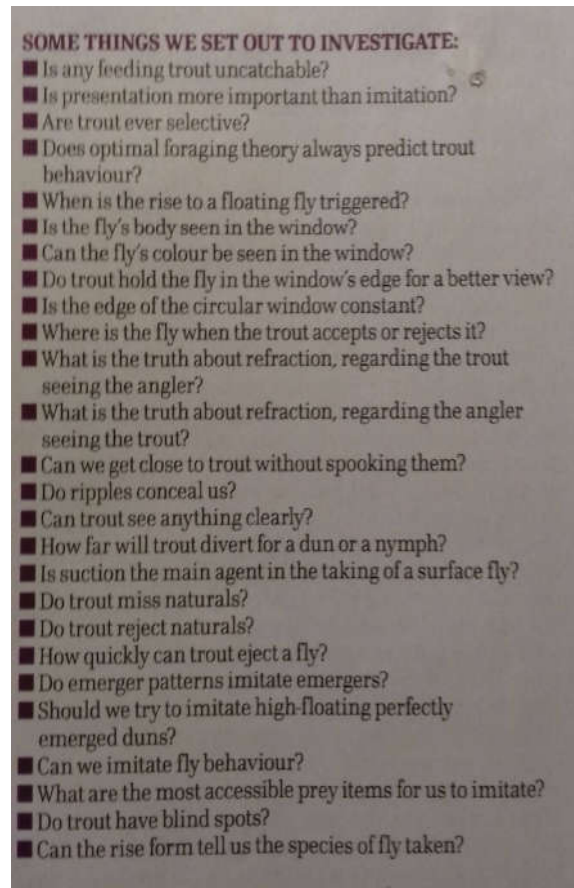
All the other officers and committee members were re-elected and there were no major items of dispute.



The **JONATHON GLOVER TROPHY** for services to the Branch was awarded to **Tony Harrison** (presentation by the Chairman above) and the **ALBERT HORNE MEMORIAL TROPHY** for services to fly-tying was awarded to **Jim Harris**.

Changing Views

Having just bought at the auction and read Brian Clarke and John Goddard's "The Trout and the Fly- A New Approach" (1980) I was intrigued by an article by Peter Hayes and Don Staziker in December's *Trout and Salmon* called "A Closer Look". As a late comer to fly fishing (I've only been at it for 15 years) BC & JG's is a classic of its time, which explained some things about trout behaviour which I had not entirely understood and quite a few remain sound advice. However, a key phrase here is "of its time". Peter and Don's premise for their article and forthcoming book is that underwater digital photography in the trout's true habitat challenges many of the "known truths" of flyfishing developed when the technology was far more primitive. The T & S article deals briefly with just 2 of the list below which they aim to tackle in their new publication:



Whilst quite a few of these are relevant mainly to river fishing, there are enough to make it interesting for the mainly stillwater fisher like me, so I for one will be spending the £9.99 for the Kindle Reader version of their book which has links to video evidence collected over 4 year's of research and filming. Notification of the availability of the book can be received by contacting Don on don@staziker.co.uk

Alan Wells

Chairman's Chat

Here we are at Bridport with a set of gates which serve the Brewery. The gates are on the River Frome which truncates into two channels immediately above the gates. The gates were built to retain and divert water to the Brewery (the channel on the left) for cooling and the operation of the water mill which provided motive power for the machinery. The pass is located by the bank for ease of maintenance (and poaching?). As you see the pass is of the bottom baffle type designed for a minimum flow of 5 – 10% of Average Daily Flow. Obviously the shield is to deflect debris from the pass. The whole fish pass was prefabricated at our works near Eastbourne and swung into place by a very long reach crane onto a pre-prepared concrete base.



Pearson's Brewery pass

The pass was "built" in a day; the proposed debris boom was not adopted due to there being water voles (?) in the area of the support post – I am sure the voles were pleased. So we fitted the shield. The EA called for a resting pool at the fish intake to the pass which was very convenient, as it had to be built under water. We solved this with another aluminium fabrication filled with concrete. As you see the shield is vulnerable to metal thieves, so we riveted over the heads of the fixing bolts to make them almost impossible to remove.

Another day in the life of the UK's only Fisheries Engineer

Happy New Year,

Tony W

JIM SMITH

It is with great sadness we have to report the death of Jim Smith at the age of 75; river-keeper and bailiff well known to almost everyone who fishes in Sussex. Jim died in Eastbourne on 27th December – we will miss his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Ouse and Adur and remember fondly his time as bailiff at Barcombe

FEBRUARY SPEAKER

6th February 2020

- or rather speakers, as we welcome our own **Roy and Sally Page** who will tell us about their travels and fishing in the USA with lots of pictures (Sally's great photos have graced our pages on more than one occasion).

Ray's Ramblings

When I fished with Martyn Gray recently we got to talking about fisheries that over the years have closed. Both Darwell at Mountfield and Weirwood at Forest Row where I had my first few fly fishing outings are now coarse fisheries. Similarly Springwood at Flimwell, Bayham Lake at Lamberhurst Furnace Brook at Hailsham, and Ashbourne, where the branch used to hold an event, all no longer offer trout fishing.

Also no longer open for trout fishing are Peckhams Copse at Chichester, where I know Martyn used to fish a lot, Rooksbury Mill near Andover which was a clear water fishery where fish could be stalked and more recently Barcombe Reservoir a concrete bowl venue just outside Ringmer that was an ideal size to be able to fish all the way round and offered superb buzzer fishing.

Even more recently there has been a change of hands at both Chalk Springs at Arundel, where it is hoped that the increased charges will lead to bigger fish being stocked, and Brick Farm Lakes between Windmill Hill and Herstmonceux which has thankfully been taken over by the people who run Horam Manor Fishery - I've fished there a couple of times recently and they seem really nice and the present three lakes are all well stocked. The fourth lake is now full and will be stocked shortly and the venue will then offer even more varied fishing and of course there's the excellent lodge where food and drink is available.

Another water changing hands later this year is Duncton Mill, where again there is a variety of fishing in the various lakes and a comfortable lodge. It will be sad to see Martin Fleetwood go and we can only hope that the new people prove to be as personable as Martin and his wife Caroline have been.

Looking at the rivers, things have taken a similar trend. For nine years I had a season ticket on the Kentish Stour at Chilham but the chalk stream stretch was sold and no longer offers season tickets. I subsequently had tickets on both the Upper Medway at Hartfield and the Ouse at Balcombe but at neither was the fishing visual and so not so interesting.

On the Test where, I do a lot of my Grayling fishing in the winter, I used to be able to fish at Longparish, Middleton and Compton but no longer have access to any of them. This winter

at Wherwell the cost has now increased so much that a day there that takes into account the fuel for travelling will set me back close to a hundred pounds.

Another water where the cost increased significantly was the Kennet Carriers at Denford near Hungerford. A party of us used to go a few times each year in the Mayfly season and the daily cost was in the region of sixty pounds but after being sold the cost increased to over a hundred pounds and it then became difficult to get enough people to pay that sort of money to get the fishery to ourselves.

Let's just hope there are no more closures this year.

Ray Burt

PROGRAMMES

The fishing and general programmes for 2020 are in the process of being finalised and will hopefully be published in time for the February Newsletter (and maybe before that on the website).

SPRING AUCTION

19th March 2020

We are now in the process of organising the Spring Auction, so if you want to enter any of your spare tying gear, unwanted tackle, etc, let us have your entries by 19th February. Entry forms for lots are available for download from the website or from Roy Gurney (01273 581519 or e-mail roygurney33@gmail.com).

Seller's commission is 10% for members, 15% for non-members.

TAILPIECE :

Paddy charges into the benefit office; "I've been ringing 0800 1730 for two days now, why can't anyone be bothered to answer?"

The assistant replied; "How many times have we told you Paddy that these are our opening hours!?"

**See you on the 9th January 2020
when tying recommences**

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