

Winter Evening Report

Alan Briggs – 19/01/17



Salmon fishing with the Briggs family

One of the common questions raised at recent meetings was "How did you get into fishing?" Committee member, Alan Briggs, took the bait and decided to say something about his background.

He inherited his interest in the sport from his GP father, Dr Francis Briggs, born in 1924 and still going strong if not actively fishing. The Briggs family kept diaries to remind them of the good old days. But as Alan reminded us this might apply to the fisheries but not necessarily to the merits of modern clothing and tackle in general.

Dr Briggs was not a man for foreign holidays but managed to find himself in the west of Ireland where he was attracted by the culture. Reminds me of our son who went on a Uni field trip and didn't bother coming back!

Francis even managed to go on honeymoon near to the Erriff and was rumoured to have fished at least a day's fishing in! According to Alan, Francis was not a competent angler in those early days and, for example, tied flies to the leader with overhand knots!

Alan started fishing for trout at Weirwood Reservoir near his father's surgery. Originally, the head bailiff was one Ken Sinfoil of Sinfoil's fry fame (a prototype of the Polystickle). He (allegedly) was an aggressive character with a booming voice and a gammy leg. Hence the ticketless Alan had ample opportunity to escape his clutches! Naughty boy! No wonder it is now a coarse fishery!

Alan's first salmon came on a trip to the River Taw in 1965 when he was rewarded with a 15 pounder. This must have been a good fish for the river but his father managed to beat it by 4 ounces on the same trip.

The annual holiday became a family affair in the west of Ireland. I liked the group photos which had an air of Victoriana to them. It was noted that some participants were smokers, universally recognised as the best way to keep the midges at bay. Another shot showed a Kelly kettle in action.



The Erriffis a short spate river and photographs showed a rock strewn panorama. However, at least one stretch was distinctively sluggish and reminded me of the Great Ouse with lilies in the margins. However, even this beat could be productive providing the surface was broken up by a stiff breeze. Successful flies were generally dark such as the Hairy Mary, the Connemara Black and the Delphi.



Dr Briggs had a claim to fame when he improved the traditional Black Pennell by incorporating a seals fur body. The following is an extract from the www.

Another fly worth fishing is the Brigg's Pennell a dressing tied by another famous angler on the river Dr. Francis Briggs from East Sussex in England. Fished on the dropper, it will take both sea trout and salmon including spring fish. It is tied on a single hook size 10 or 12. It is a simple fly but it gives results - the body is black seals fur, the tail is Pheasant Tippet with a broad silver tinsel wound over the seal's fur. The hackle is black hen (soft) finished at the head with black varnish. This fly has now taken many fish for anglers on the fishery over the years.



Briggs Black Pennell



An alternative venue in the general area was Lough Fee. I was interested to learn that it was possible to catch Sea Trout in broad daylight. Alan reckoned that it was only in Wales where it was necessary to fish at night. The preferred method of attack was dapping. About a month or two ago someone wrote to Trout and Salmon magazine complaining that floss line stuck to the rod. The angler must have been using a full line whilst Alan showed that his tackle consisted of about 3 metres of floss which, when fishing, was well outside the rod.

Most of the audience had forgotten that dapping was allowed on Grafham even with live bait by which I mean grasshoppers and crane flies. Don't get too excited though for Alan maintained that artificials were much more effective – at least in Ireland.



So has the angling torch been passed on? Yes to his son, Adrian, who is a very competent fly fisher though he has very little opportunity for it, being at that stage of life when career and young family take up his energy. But he will be back. Alan will be visiting them in their new home in Seattle in the summer, and is confidently expecting they will find time to explore the rivers of Washington State together in search of a salmon.

DGJ Jan2k17



Badger Dapping Fly

