

# The Pilgrimage 2019



The 2019 event was as enjoyable as ever with the chance to re-new some old friendships and see familiar faces. Regrettably time is taking its toll on most of us now but when you have known people for 35 years change is inevitable, 35 years ago there were almost 40 people fishing the Pilgrimage.

Being with the old crowd does invoke a lot of memories, particularly of our early days at Chew when I was relatively new to fly fishing and the fishing was spectacular. Norman Shippey first took me down and I found myself fishing against many

Scottish and Welsh International Fly fishermen and fishing on a reservoir where the fishing was nothing like I had experienced before.

I was in awe of the fish and the ability and skill of the opponents. The place and people made such an impression on me that the Chew trip was the first dates that went into my diary each year and since we sailed a lot at that time the sailing had to be planned around the Chew dates. I have tied many a fly at sea, sailing around the Southern coast of Ireland, on our way to Orkney and in the Mediterranean when the sailing trips came before the Pilgrimage.

The fish were like nothing I had ever seen before, on our first outing Norman and I had droves of fish coming up the wind all day but we did not know how to catch them.

When we did learn from the people around us the next problem was not hooking a fish but keeping it on the line. The takes were something else and we were broken off repeatedly, especially fishing dry flies.

At the time we were fishing with fibre glass rods and that green Drennan line, in reality they were no match for the fish. It is hard to keep in touch with a large fish that you have successfully hooked on a dry fly when it is cartwheeling into the distance dragging 75 yards of your backing behind it. Norman and I famously lost 11 Shipman's buzzers in a twenty minute spell one morning, we just could not stop being smashed up.

When it came to the fisherman that was another revelation; many of them were exceptionally talented and two of them stick out in my memory.

Firstly the late, great Welsh Wizard, Tony Bevan who could strip line all day and at speeds that I would have had to go into training to achieve. It was reported that he wore the sleeves off Barber coats and I could well believe it.

My Superhero at the time, and still is, was the one and only Bill Patrick, what a dry fly fisherman. I watched in amazement one evening when Bill hooked and landed three fish over three pounds in weigh in five minutes between 9.55 and 10.00pm in the dark, incredible.

It was not just the quality of the anglers but also their stamina. In those days we fished from 10am to 10pm, the late finish was essential because the trout started rising to flies in the last half hour on most days. After twelve hours on the water we packed up and headed for the pub, had a couple of beers, dinner was served around 11.00pm, then back to the digs, clean and freeze any fish that we caught and up for breakfast at 7.30 am to do it all again.

The opposition went back to where they were staying and kept on drinking until the early hours; still don't know how they did that for six days, three days was enough for us.

The Leslie and Llanilar boys still try to maintain this tradition, even in their advancing years and when we arrived at Grafham on the Thursday morning they were all subdued because someone had encouraged them to drink a lot the previous evening. I asked my Superhero after dinner that evening how he still managed to cope with five days of fishing, with still one more day to do, and Billy said you mean ten days of fishing. Since I did not understand what he meant he went on to explain that he had already done 5 days of fishing in the LEXUS event at Rutland the previous week and that the lads had picked him up on the Saturday on their way down. After two days Bob and I were knackered, doing a total of 11 days fishing in 12 days, plus drinking every night is way beyond my ability and my comprehension.

All in all a great couple of days and I will be left with my memories of old friendships and fabulous fishing from the past.

I would like to thank everyone who took part and I sincerely hope that we are all well enough to enjoy Pilgrimage 2020 next May.

*Steve Middleton*