

A voice from the past – Davey Wotton

I particularly like the Facebook pages which deal with still water trout fishing where contributors relate their recent experiences. Davy Wotton cropped up recently: he was probably the first professional tier we had encountered and he mesmerised us not just by his skill but the speed with which he could produce a series of all identical patterns. He was so enthusiastic I think he would have stayed all night, and he nearly did! An entertaining evening ended around midnight with Colin Brett giving his car a tow start on what must have been one of the coldest nights ever in Cambridge at -20°C!

He was a frequent contributor to Trout Fisherman but emigrated across the pond and that was the last I heard of him. I was delighted to see that he is still alive and kicking!

For what it is worth, here is a note on the Invicta meeting dredged from the archives of the early 1980s, composed before the advent of home computers and word processors, never mind digital cameras, almost 40 years ago!

3. Davy Wotton

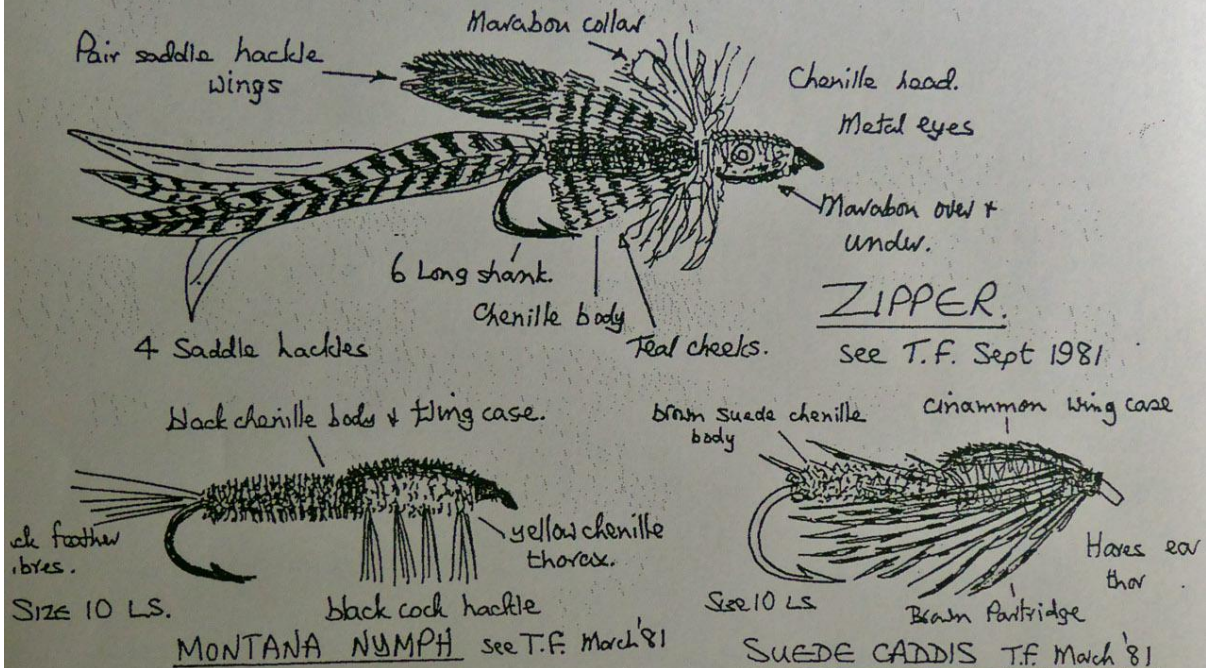
Davy Wotton braved some bloody awful winter weather to travel the 300 mile round trip from Margate. Sad to say some of our members had trouble travelling from Cambridge. Thus we were a bit thin on the ground but it was our members loss.

Davy Wotton originated from the Bideford area of Devon and his first introduction to fishing was with the aid of a certain farming implement in the river passing near his farm home. His interest in flies came from selling them in a local post office and it wasn't long before he was rolling his own. He originally and still does, to a certain extent, earn his living from playing music. His first love is still playing blue grass on the banjo. He moved to Kent and found there was extra money to be made tying flies for local shops. However, he soon found that fly tying 10-14 hours a day was not an easy way of earning a living so he decided to employ others. There was great difficulty in finding tyers who shared his quest for perfection. Not only that but the UK angler was not prepared to pay an economic rate for quality flies. Thus 85% of his output goes abroad especially to the USA. Customers prove to be tremendously finicky about features in a particular fly. Thus repeat orders are common and it is not unusual for private individuals to order £600 of flies a season. All this action generates not only a tremendous background knowledge of techniques from all over the world but also provides valuable personal contacts in the event of a foreign trip.

He hasn't got much time for modern synthetic materials in flies - it lacks the iridescence of natural undyed materials. Hence the more natural feather and fibre incorporated in a fly the more killing it is likely to be. He only uses about ten different patterns in the whole of the UK and only occasionally finds the need to use a special. The average angler, according to Davy, doesn't know what he is doing and 80% of the fish are caught by pure accident. His approach is to develop standard flies to a degree which makes them consistent killers throughout the country. Don't make them too fancy. You might as well fish a baby doll as a RW mayfly nymph. Colour is important. How else can you account for the relative effectiveness of 5-600 patterns which are basically the same shape.

He considers that some of the finest trout fishing is to be had in the wilder areas of southern Ireland. It is not uncommon to be able to see the bottom of lakes in 20 ft of water. Trout have to be enticed to the top. Flies before seem to need that bit more life than the equivalent pattern in England. This is achieved by incorporating extra seals from diffuse the overall silhouette.

Americans seem to want patterns that no-one else along with the Yugoslav's will pay for quality flies, those which are technically difficult to tie. Thus a black St tied to pattern on a 5/0 complete with gut loop might take even Davy Wotten 30 minutes to produce, would retail at ~£8.00 each!



We then got into a slide show to look at some of the flies Davy ties and uses. My puny drawings do them no credit whatsoever and are included in case they should inspire a few ideas. Davy then demonstrated his phenomenal ability to tie quality flies at high speed. You can't tie flies without good materials and examples of some of his produce were examined. Subsequent orders placed by club members confirmed that the quality was not just confined to the samples.

Concern over the weather forced us to an early end at ~12 midnight. Down we trooped to load up the car. The cold outside was intense and penetrating. The inevitable happened, Davy's car would not start! Pushing was to no avail anymore than the driver hanging onto the starter while the battery rapidly drained. Thanks to a length of braided rope found washed up on the bank at Grafham and Colin's tow bar we got him going. It subsequently turned out that the temperature was -20°. A memorable evening in more ways than one!

He has developed into a super-star as a perusal of his web site will show. <https://www.davywottonflyfishing.com>.

Although he resides in the Ozark Mountains region of Arkansas, he now has an International reputation not least because of his successful role as coach for the USA squad who have won trophies on the European and World stage. Incidentally, he invented the Davy knot. I think it is fair to say that the US has been kind to him!