

Invicta AGM Meeting March 2023

It was a miserable night weatherwise, so it was gratifying to have at least 25 members to start the meeting with the AGM. It all proceeded smoothly, made easier by the agreement of the committee to stand again in their posts for the coming year. There was limited interest amongst the audience to shadow existing committee members in order to facilitate a smooth change over in the future. I suspect that was due to the magnificent job the committee has performed over the past few years but we need to take this seriously. Much has been made amongst the angling community that we should stop the haemorrhaging of interest in fly fishing and that we should be trying to encourage more juniors into the sport. Our Chairman made the very sensible observation (and evidence) that new recruits are more likely to come from mid-life retirees. The suggestion that wives should be recruited was met with much mirth but it was pointed out that the UK was unique in that up to 70% of licences were issued to men whereas a 50/50 ratio was much more common elsewhere in the World. Colin Newton, under AOB, proposed that a sub-group was formed within the Invicta to specialise in regular fly-tying sessions. The matter will be examined by the committee.

The AGM was way for our guest who, as the Operations Anglian Water, set out future plans.

For some reason she much-quoted line *is much more than when we may return*

forefathers". As it was probably made 100 years ago, I think circumstances may have changed. Flyfishing is very much a dynamic activity and the objective for most participants is to catch fish!



concluded at 8.00pm to make speaker, Catherine Keating, Manager/Coordinator at to review the past season and

opened her presentation with a from Herbert Hoover *"Fishing fish. It is the great occasion to the fine simplicity of our*

Anyway, 2022 brought with it unprecedented temperatures and water levels dropping below 60% of the capacity of the reservoir. It almost reached a summer high of 40°C in Cambridge and dropped to -5°C in the run up to Christmas. High water temperatures drove the fish to the depths, potential food in the exposed bed died out, and refreshing with cool winter water probably disturbed the vitality of the fish.

The water level dropped so far that the normal layout of the harbour proved inadequate and considerable efforts by the rangers was necessary to maintain access to the boats. Chapeaux to all concerned.

Anglers will be able to book a permit and a boat on-line soon if a pilot scheme under evaluation proves successful. This will avoid frustrating phone calls and eliminate the queues in the lodge especially on match days. An e-mail address is required. A code will be sent for boat bookings which will be valid for a week before the proposed trip and then offered for resale. The code will be used on the day to allocate the boat via personnel in the shop or at the pontoon. Catch returns can be made electronically. The slide did not explain what happened with bank anglers. To start with, the car parks are only accessible at times which are totally inadequate for

successful fishing in the hot summer months. The universal opening time is 9am and the latest closing time is 8.0pm during May, June July and August. Is a car park code included during internet booking. How does it work if different car parks are used during the course of a session?

38,000 fish were stocked in 2022, a number slightly restricted by the hot weather. It is intended to stock 41,000 in 2023. This will include 1000 browns. 2000 blues were amongst recent stockings. Catch and release applies to all brown trout and will be universally suspended in the event of excessively high temperatures. 98.5% of fish were free from Cormorant damage last year. It was concluded, at Grafham at least, that Cormorants are feeding on silver fish and could even be beneficial!

The WiFi set up will be upgraded at the lodge which will greatly improve Zoom meetings.

Biosecurity was discussed. Most anglers will know about the so-called killer shrimp and applaud their presence on the basis that they probably provided extra food for trout and boosted their growth rate to the extent there were rumours that shrimp were deliberately introduced to other waters. They have now spread throughout the UK, Europe and indeed parts of the US: in my opinion, the role of anglers is trivial in their redistribution but Anglian Water imposes strict rules to ensure biosecurity. Check, Clean and Dry are the recommended measures: landing nets and drogues provided by AW are mandatory for boat anglers. It was reported that drogues were damaged by anglers failing to retrieve them from the water prior to motoring on to another drift! 10 landing nets were retrieved from the harbour during the drought.

Quagga and Zebra mussels are regarded as dangerous invasive species as they block water supply pipes. They both originated in Eastern Europe and have been established world-wide as the result of cargo ships emptying their ballast tanks. Both consume plankton and account for the crystal-clear water at Grafham: plankton is a significant part of fish diet. According to a member of the audience, the recent low water exposed vast areas of mussels at Grafham which is consistent with the evidence that they reproduce at a phenomenal rate.

Meanwhile, back at the fort, the shop opening hours are:

March-October	8am-4pm
November-January	8am-1pm
February	~ 9am-1pm

The Harbour View Café is open as follows:

Period	Days	Time
Jan-Feb	Mon-Sun	10-15.00
March-May	Mon-Sun	10-16.00
June-August	Mon-Fri Sat-Sun	10-16.00 10-17.00
Sept	Mon-Sat	10-16.00
Oct-Dec	Mon-Sun	10-13.00

The hours can be flexible in order to accommodate particular needs of competitions.

Anglers reported that they wanted better coffee, food, and beverages, plus a wider range of drinks. White & rose wines, pale ale and fruit cider are now available.

Anglers also have the exclusive use of a coffee machine in the shop. They have also secured a 10% discount on meals, valid for 7 days after they had fished.

The charges displayed in the 1st edition of Hooked are incorrect. The corrected costs (Jan 2023) according to the Anglian Water web site for Grafham are as follows:

Day permit	Grafham
8 fish C&R	£33
4 fish C&R	£29
2 fish C&R	n.a
1 fish sporting	£26
Senior 6 fish C&R	£29
Beginners 1 fish C&R	£18

Day boats	No. anglers	Charge
Full day	1	£19
	2	£26
Half day (±2pm)	1	£21
Sunset (6pm)	2	£15
Winter boat (Nov)	1	£15
	2	£20

Under the guise of marketing, it seems that anglers were asked what they wanted and the main response was that we wanted more website presence and easier access to newsletters. I have looked at the “www.anglianwaterparks.co.uk” web site which is indeed a bit flimsy on fishing info but the GWFFA and Invicta sites (and other Midland clubs) have public access and provide plenty of information and personal contacts. It was also suggested that the AW presence on social media channels has increased and that further media opportunities are on the horizon.

The most important request, in my opinion, was for regular meetings between anglers and AW. This has been set up for the 2nd Tuesday in the month starting at 4pm: the first meeting will be on 14th March with 2 representatives invited from each local club. Note that there has already been significant interaction between clubs and AW in determining the outcome of the dam ban.

Under AOB it was disclosed that 70,000 trees are to be planted to the west of Mander car park. One objective will be to create nature corridors to facilitate the passage of wild life through and around the reservoir. Dormice are to be reintroduced and I hear that Otters are already established. An Osprey pylon will be built presumably along the lines of the one at Rutland.

In response to a question as to why the water level at Grafham seemed to vary more than on other reservoirs, it was partly due to a problem with a pumping facility, low levels on the Ouse and also a commitment to supply water to Affinity to augment the flow of the chalk streams mainly in the Hertfordshire. I lived in the area up to 1960 and these rivers were already in serious decline. As Walker reported “all cheap sources of potable water were exhausted”. In other words, “source abstraction”. We all know that the very quality of the water depends on filtration through layers of chalk: I cannot understand how adding “processed” water, predominantly from Milton Keynes via the Great Ouse, will replicate the diminishing levels in these rivers yet maintain the quality of water previously filtered through chalk beds. It is also proposed to import water from the Lincolnshire area although one member of the audience questioned where this was actually coming from. Locally, I recall importing water from up north down to the Linton area also introduced some unwelcome plant diseases.

There will not be an Aqua Park at Grafham in 2023 but there is a proposal to build a mini golf course in the vicinity of Marlow car park.

Catherine delivered a really professional presentation with a get up and go attitude. I was particularly liked her intention to participate in one of Peter Hartley's fishing courses. I hope that she avoids the Herbert Hoover interpretation of angling! I await with great interest results from the AW – fishing club's cooperative meetings.

Dave Jones March 2023

I am often asked by colleagues why they have not seen me fishing. I have not fished at Grafham for probably 30 years or even more: I think that I now qualify as a beginner and if I wanted to fish I have only a limited idea what to do other than turn up at the lodge (if you know where it is) and make enquiries. "Hooked" provided no information for the newbie. When can you fish? What are the rules? Are you restricted to the opening hours of the car parks? Where are the kit disinfecting washers? Can day ticket bank anglers use the on-line booking system? How do day ticket anglers participate in using different car parks in the course of a session?

So, in order to understand my present reluctance to fish Grafham, it is perhaps worthwhile to look at the history of the reservoir.

I started fishing Grafham in the 2nd season. By the 1960's, the rivers including the Ouse, Ivel, Cam and Lea were in terminal decline thanks to abstraction and over-zealous dredging. Grafham was a revelation to the coarse fishing fraternity and, to be honest, I don't think many anglers realised that trout could thrive in still waters. It attracted hundreds of anglers to the extent that if you wanted to fish a prime spot on opening day then it was necessary to sleep on the bank overnight. Buying a ticket was simple. There were no car park charges and anglers would roll up at the lodge, fill in the fishing docket and post it in an envelope along with a ten-bob note, into the box. I think fishing could commence half an hour before sunrise. I recall catching a fish on one occasion under a cloak of morning mist! A feature of the fishing in the early years was the evening rise which attracted loads of anglers. It was then decided to remove the remains of the hedgerows around the reservoir. As a result, the banks started to erode and the relatively deep water, previously accessible within a few rod lengths casting distance, was no more along with the large fish which patrolled the edge. Another effect was that the mud slick around the edge, generated by high winds, incrementally extended further into the reservoir until, I understand, now rapidly achieves a total coverage. The popularity of still water trout fishing promoted the development of kit, particularly rods. On the other hand, anglers were making their own specialist lines which are now available off the shelf. Conflict between traditionalists and the "new generation" of anglers caused several problems notably that, for many years, boat seats were banned from competitions. There was a massive interest in fly tying, the standard of which is now quite outstanding. The Invicta club spawned from evening classes on fly tying run by Cambridge tackle dealer Les Beecroft. He introduced us to traditional patterns such as the Greenwell's which I discovered some years later, could be a deadly pattern. He also told us about the other reservoirs such as Pitsford and Eyebrook: alas, on reflection, Grafham acted as an invisible barrier to driving the extra miles. The quality of the fishing slowly declined as the water "naturalised". Fishing became quite hard and anglers moved away to smaller waters such as Elinor. The final straw, from my point of view, was the chemical treatment of the water with the intention of preventing snails and the like blocking the water treatment pipes. This was devastatingly effective:

the G buoy bank felt like a gravel path, inches thick, which was composed of millions of shells of dead molluscs. I am not sure if it was at the same time but the water was treated with ferric sulphate which gardeners will recognise as a treatment for eradicating moss. This wiped out the water weed especially at the western end of the reservoir. The residue was a black stinking mess covering the bed. Fish failed to grow on. The diving duck population collapsed: I was interested to hear that the population of one such species, the Tufted Duck, is now on the increase which may indicate that, over 30 years on, weeds are slowly getting re-established.

My personal circumstances changed in the mid 80's and for the next 15 years I only had limited spare time to fish. By the time I had retired, although I was still very interested in all forms of angling, I found I had a limited inclination to visit Grafham having known it in its former glory. As you can read in the opening paragraph, I have obviously lost touch with the procedure to follow when starting to fish. As an octogenarian I find it is quite stressful to fish all day yet the minimum cost of a basic day ticket is I think, £26. No thanks! Compare this with the waters run by Ifor Jones where they offer an evening ticket (C&R) for the last 4 hours of the day for £11.50. I get the impression that AW have little interest in bank anglers!

Dave Jones March 2023