

ALAN EVANS-JONES INTERVIEW

Alan Evans-Jones recently retired, after a distinguished career as deputy headmaster of Lancing College, and came to live in Blagdon. Although his acquaintance with Bristol Water's fisheries dates back a long time, 2002 was the first year that he had held an All Waters season permit. Not one to be idle in retirement, Alan has taken over the reins from Chris Cavill, and is now Honorary Treasurer of the BRFFA. Steve Taylor interviewed him for The Buzzer.

Have you always been a fisherman?

Yes, since the age of ten. My father started me off: he was a very keen fly fisherman, but the first time I was taken fishing with my twin brother it was bucketing with rain, and we fished with worms. My brother caught a 3lb brown trout, and I broke my rod. My twin brother has never fished since: I'm the one who's carried on fishing. My father was partly disabled and we always did boat fishing, on Trawsfynydd and other lakes in North Wales. Then when I was 14, as I recall, we came down to Blagdon on holiday. We stayed in the Mendip Hotel, and we both fell in love with Blagdon. We fished mostly Blagdon, though as a treat we'd occasionally come over to Chew, which in those days was more up-market, and the boats had motors on them (even though they were those old Seagulls - which weren't the easiest things to operate). Of course our stays were confined to the school holidays. Very hot sunny days in August - not a fin to be seen all day usually - but then there were very good evening rises, though that didn't mean that we were always successful.

We were very much traditional fishermen, but my father and I always read Trout & Salmon magazine - almost from its inception - and there'd be a reference, an article perhaps, on buzzers or buzzer fishing, so we'd kit ourselves out with buzzers, not really knowing how to fish them, because we were so used to fishing loch style.

My father had a great friend, a chap called D.M. Jones whom we called Uncle Dai: I think it was he who introduced us to Blagdon, and quite often I'd be the gillie as my father and Uncle Dai fished.

Have you any particular memories of those days?

My father used to like drifting across from Cheddar Water towards Butcombe, but we'd go all over - not so much up the Top End though, it's a very long row!

I remember Lawrie Williamson, and Danny McNicol, the chap who had The Bell at Ubley - which is no longer a pub, sadly. Blagdon was so much quieter in those days. This was in the Sixties when I started coming here with my father - there were very few boats then it seemed to me - maybe no more

than a dozen. I have a strong memory of hearing the Blagdon church bells being rung while we were out on the lake - magical! My father and I, and my younger brother also, became very fond of Blagdon. When I grew up and was working I used to come down here for the summer half-term to meet my father. Later, after he'd died, my wife and I would come down with our caravan and stay for the half-term. It became our dream to come to live here, and now eventually we've managed it, and we are very pleased and happy to be here.

What changes have you noticed over the 50 or so years between then and now?

As I said, it's been a very limited experience - only a few days a year - often at not very good times of the season. Certainly the equipment has changed a lot: my first rod was a Greenheart, very good, but very heavy compared to the carbon fibre of today. We fished almost exclusively floating lines, as I still tend to do today. I do tend to fish nymphs mostly nowadays, along with emergers and dries. The one thing I do think is that fish don't seem to be as free-rising as they used to be: the bird life has increased vastly - gulls on Chew and geese on Blagdon - and I wonder if they have upset the balance of the ecology of the lakes, both by the effluent they drop in the water, and I often see gulls taking insects off the surface.

I tend to fish with barbless hooks nowadays. I don't believe in automatically killing everything I catch and I don't eat fish myself. So unless I want one for somebody I usually let them go. I haven't actually found you lose more fish by having barbless hooks and it's so much easier to unhook them from yourself or your clothing as well! Provided trout are handled safely and carefully they recover and swim away absolutely fine.

I think it has become quite a bit busier around the lakes generally - not just more fishermen, but birdwatchers, dog walkers on Butcombe, more sailing boats, and the restaurant and café on Chew attract far more visitors.

Do you have any favourite techniques or fly patterns that you rely on, or that you fall back on when conditions are tough?

Oh yes. I read somewhere that 90% of the fishes' diet consists of buzzer pupae of one kind or another, so I think, failing all else, a buzzer pattern is as good as anything. I do tie my own, very inexpertly. I enjoy doing it very much. I'm not very good at it, but there's nothing like the feeling of catching a fish on a fly that you tied yourself.

My typical cast would be a black Superglue buzzer on the point, and another, a red or olive one, on the middle, and a Diawl Bach on the top dropper. And that would do me practically throughout the season, boat or bank, and on a floating line. I tend to be very conservative in that respect.



How has it been to retire to live in Blagdon?

It really has been a dream come true. My wife doesn't fish at all, but she has always loved the area and was very happy to move here when we eventually found a house overlooking the lake, (which was part of the dream) and we're both very happily settled there. It's wonderful to be able to look out over the lake every morning and feel the temptation to go down to fish. I now fish almost exclusively from the bank, and I enjoy that; I've got to know quite a number of the regulars and it's nice to have a chat with them. These days I view a boat as very much a treat, being a pensioner! I mainly fish Blagdon, but I do occasionally come over to Chew, and, if I am going to treat myself to a boat, it might as well be a Chew one with a motor!

However I am hoping that when my two grandsons are a little older they may oblige by rowing me around Blagdon, in exchange for teaching them to fish - I'd love to do that!

How are you finding your duties as Treasurer of the BRFFA?

That's interesting too. I came along to a couple of meetings and there was a plea for people to join the committee. I felt that, having had so much pleasure out of fishing over the years, I ought perhaps to try to put something back - that's the reason I volunteered - I don't profess to have any financial expertise at all. I enjoy being involved and seeing a different aspect to fishing. I'm very impressed with the competitions that the BRFFA run - very good sponsorship, very well attended and well run. I have to admit that competitive fly fishing isn't really my thing, but I have enjoyed being involved and taking part. I tend to stick to exactly the same flies and methods I always use: I haven't developed any competition styles or flies- no Blobs for me!

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