

Really Wrecked SAC newsletter

Number 57, December 2019



Right. Let's get this over with. Not the newsletter obviously, as that has taken up the best part of seven months of my life in preparing, writing, editing, honing, adding jokes, removing rude words, taking out insurance against litigation, and waiting fruitlessly for the creative juices to start to flow, and now it's your turn. Your turn to attempt to wade through the 30,000 words that would, under any other circumstances, count as a novella or a PhD thesis. Not a very good one, but that's not the point, if you think of it as art, or science, then you can claim the brownie points and wow your literary friends. Though if your literary friends are the same as your fishing friends, then you need some new friends. Anyway, if you can remember as far back as the beginning of this paragraph, and then have any mental capacity left to think back still further to a previous email I sent out, helpfully labelled a Really Wrecked begging letter, which 67.2% of you opened, I promised in that epistle that anyone who responded in any way positively to my pleas would get a well-deserved paean of praise right here, from me.

So that's what I have to get over with, the hideous knowledge that I have, in some way, to find something nice to say about the lowlives who replied positively to my email. It sticks in my goat and gets my craw, I can tell you, but it is a creative challenge worthy of my skills, so here goes...

In praise of our lovely members

Now, a promise is a promise, even from someone as slippery and untrustworthy as me, and I did promise a good write up for any members who didn't ignore my plea for subs, or who bought club merchandise from this or previous years or who just put their hands in their pockets and gave the club some money. Obviously this pathetic cry for help was rightly ignored by most of you, seeing as this club is a total waste of your valuable time and even if you had any spare cash, which you don't, you wouldn't squander it on something as pointless and annoying as this. I'm not saying that as a group you're tight, just that I can get the words "mean-spirited" and "misanthropic" out of my head. Look them up. They appear under "Neil

Cook" in the Urban Dictionary. Or they would if their obscenity filter wasn't quite so sensitive.

However, there are some notable exceptions to this rule, or at least a number of you who acted out of character and who didn't throw my request in the bin where it belongs. These lovely folk include Kevin Renton, Colin Shury, David Simpson, Clive of India, and Phils Pepper and Boxall, all of whom coughed up actual sums of money for T-shirts and caps. And a special mention must go to Chris Grant who has obviously come to see the club as a tax write-off and just sent money, expecting nothing in return but for Adam and I to doff our caps whenever he comes aboard and call him "sir" while offering to cut his bait and ushering him to the best and most comfortable parts of the boat from which to fish. If that's the kind of service you'd like, then please pay your subs, which are, after all, only a tenner, for which you get... well I forget what the benefits are, but it is only a tenner.

Other club notices

It's the most wonderful time of the year; the time of year when you have to start thinking up excuses not to come to the **Annual Club Dinner**. This year, in a break with tradition, it will be held in the Dorset Arms on the last Saturday in January (i.e. **Saturday, January the 25th**). As this is Burns night, the dress code is kilts or tartan trews, and we'll be setting Adam alight after pudding. Please do all of the following:

- 1) Return your trophies to Adam ASAP so we can get them engraved with details of the various crimes committed by club members this year, and,
- 2) Contact Adam via text, phone or email to book your places on this unforgettable night. It is destined to be the best night of your life. I know that's not saying much, as none of you have the slightest idea of how to have, or be, fun, but even so, the more, the um... Merrier? Messier? More miserable? Something beginning with 'm' I expect, though definitely not magnificent, marvellous or mung beans. Well... maybe mung beans.

If any of you have a fish or event you think might be trophy- or medal-worthy, please send details to Adam or me, so that we can dismiss it out of hand. Of course, we won't actually do that, as we are your support team, your fishing enablers, and we exist merely to service your piscine dreams.

Fishing trip dates for 2019

Another tedious chore you have to undertake is to select from the following smorgasbord of angulatory delights, and tell us which ones particularly delight and excite you and for which you would like to reserve a space. Remember to let us know if you'd like us to book you a bed at a B&B the night before the Weymouth trips.

Friday February 7th: Weymouth: Lyle: offshore pollack

Friday February 28th: Brighton: Terry: offshore pollack

Monday March 9th: Weymouth: Lyle: offshore pollack

Monday March 16th: Littlehampton: Martin: bass or plaice

Friday March 27th: Brighton: Terry: offshore pollack

Friday April 17th: Weymouth: Lyle: rays and spurdog

Monday May 18th: Littlehampton: Martin: bass or black bream

Monday June 1st: Littlehampton: Martin: black bream

Monday June 29th: Brighton: Terry: offshore conger

Monday July 20th: Littlehampton: cod and bass or rays and turbot

Friday/Saturday 31st July, 1st August: Lyle: Summer trip

Monday August 10th: Littlehampton: Martin: big tope and blondes

Friday August 28th: Brighton: Terry: offshore conger

Monday September 14th: Weymouth: Lyle: rays, bass, bream, turbot etc

Monday September 21st: Littlehampton: Martin: bream, triggerfish, bass

Monday October 5th: Littlehampton: Martin: huss, conger

Monday October 26th: Brighton: Terry: rays, huss, conger, bream, bass

Monday December 7th: Littlehampton: rays, huss, whiting, cod, bream and bass

I've tried to get a mix of Mondays and Fridays and a mix of species throughout the year. Pick your favourites and sign up.

Trip reports

Right then. Batten down the hatches, it's time for the trip reports, and fuck me sideways with the 6' piece of 2 by 4 with which you've just beaten the shit out of me, but it turns out this is the first newsletter in a million years, and I am actually as useless as Adam tells me I am on a weekly basis, and there are *literally* a trillion of these bastard trips to get through. No. They won't be entertaining. No. I'm not kidding. But if I've had to suffer the indignity of remembering them and writing about them, then you deserve the misery and pain of reading about them, or at least of pretending to. Or, if you live in an area such as the Fens, where writing hasn't yet been invented, of pretending to be a witch and able to glean meaning from the magical symbols, and then being half drowned and burnt alive by your neighbours, which is, let's face it, less painful than actually reading the trip reports. So, with very little additional ado, here they are, in no particular order. Other than by date.

October 8th 2018 Littlehampton

This trip report, which is now well over a year old, will be mercifully brief. Not because I feel any sympathy towards you, the humble club member, battling illiteracy and microcephalitis, but simply because there is no report or notes from this trip, and no-one other than Rich can remember a thing about it. He said it as a jolly pleasant day, in which plenty of bream were caught, with most returned. There was some bassing too, with larger baits, but all that was caught on those were a few small straps. Sounds like a decent enough day to me, even if Rich is the only person in the entire world to remember a single second of it.

Annual Dinner 2018 (held in January 2019)

Yes, okay, this was not a fishing trip, as such, but it was nonetheless a magical mystery tour of the club year, and a great night out, if you have absolutely no social life or friends. Anyway, this dinner was as much fun as any I can remember. The food was good, and the long dull bit at the end, where I prattle on and hand out trophies, went as smoothly, quickly and amusingly as I can ever remember. There were *special new RWSAC medals*, meaning that if you catch a specimen fish now, it's even more worthwhile telling Adam and I about it. If you don't, you're relying on Adam (mind addled by drink and drugs, and it wasn't much of a mind to start with) and me (doesn't really care about anything except himself and sexy Tik Tok videos) to remember what fish you caught, which is laughably stupid at best. On the other hand, as

a club, 'laughably stupid' is pretty much our *modus operandi*, so by all means keep it up.

The multimedia experience you've now come to expect at the dinner worked better than ever before. There were photos for most of the awards, and many of them were actually quite funny. After almost 25 years of doing this, I do believe we might be getting the hang of it. On the other hand, after such a hubristic announcement, you can expect nothing but embarrassing pauses, exploding tech and tedium this coming January.

The highlight for me, though, came courtesy of some brilliant Mick Deacon sleuthing, and is a genuinely lovely story. Mick, as you may know if you ever bother to follow anything I write, or listen to conversations between other club members (though why would you do either of those? They sound really boring), works for *Saltwater Boat Angler*, writing and taking photographs, and has a general historical interest in old pictures of people with fish. When he heard about a load of old pics that had turned up in an attic sale, or car boot sale, or on Facebook, or something (I think it was the latter, but, following my own advice, I rarely listen to what anyone says), he was straight on to them and came back from rooting around in someone's bins or whatever, with two boxes of old photographs and negatives.

Being the engaged and interested bloke he is, Mick then looked through his treasure trove of Sussex angling history and what did he find among the pics of grizzled old men standing knee deep in pollack and cod and ling on the decks of boats that make *Bonwey* look like its description on the Deepsea web site as a "fast, modern" craft? What he found was a picture he remembered very well indeed. It was a picture of a 12-year-old Mr Frost with a 14lb pike caught in Pells pool, which Mick had landed for him, cementing a lifelong distrust and desire to avoid each other. The picture was taken on the steps of Denis' tackle shop and appeared in *Angling News*. Mick had a nice copy of it printed up, the club framed it, and at the dinner, it was presented to a teary-eyed Adam, as he tried to remember what it was like not being old and cantankerous, but youthful and moody instead.

It was a lovely end to the evening, and one that I hope we can top every year, with increasingly cringe-making baby shots of club members. Though perhaps baby shots is a bit optimistic, given that photography wasn't invented until most of the club were well into their thirties.



Adam showing that his style has hardly changed over the years

11th of February, Weymouth

This was our first pollack trip out with Lyle Stantiford on *Supanova*, so it was a real test for the lad, to see how well he could do with a crew of our quality. Of course, among lesser crews, he does have something of an excellent reputation, both as a skipper who knows how to find the fish, and as a human being who actually cares enough to want to try as hard as he can. We though, as a crew, have more than enough about us to properly test a skipper's mettle in both directions. Just to clarify things for any fishing historians and students of the noble arts in years to come, who will undoubtedly be poring over these newsletters as possibly the most significant documents from the pre-post-fish era, I'd like to point out that what I mean by this is that we are both appallingly bad anglers, and terrifyingly bad human beings, thereby testing Lyle in both his skill at getting us catching, and in giving a shit how we do. Apologies to the club members reading this, who obviously already know this to be true both of themselves and of their fishing companions.

Sadly, due to a national shortage of age-appropriate ragworm, despite having pre-booked a pound of the wriggly so-and-sos, the Weymouth Angling Centre were unable to furnish me with any livebait and sent me away with the sound of cruel laughter ringing in my ears. This meant we were unable to try our sneaky tactic from the previous year of fishing a ragworm a few turns off the bottom over slack water to see whether the pollack we caught then had been a fluke.

The target wreck, or wrecks, was, or were, about 35 miles to the South East of Weymouth, which meant, given the fairly large swells left from a few days of north westerlies, a pretty punchy couple of hours ride out. However, with the direction of the swells being mainly with our direction of travel, it wasn't as rough as some journeys out that we've had, and even Steve barely muttered any of the following words "lunchtime", "back", "be", "by", "in" or "we'll".

On the other hand, a nice swell sneaking up the arse of the boat (this is the technical term, some of you less nautical types may know it as the "stern"), makes for an interesting and quite unusual ride and one which one of our generally more cast-iron-constitution-types found relatively uncomfortable in a way reminiscent of, say, a Robin, perching on a floating pontoon on the morning of a day out fishing in Weymouth, (again, for the benefit of any angling scholars from the post-species-diverse age, I'd like to explain that the Robin in question is not a bird of the species *Erithacus rubecula*, extinct, along with everything else apart from cockroaches and pouting in your time, but one of the anglers in our club who famously failed even to make it as far as the boat before being sick as a dog [see later notes on *Canis lupus familiaris*], the large item of upper-body-outer-wear-with-buttons-and-a-collar-generally-intended-to-clothe-people-identifying-as-female that he is). This member, who we shall refer to only as "Tom Fowler", has never before shown the slightest inclination to re-examine his breakfast, or give his supper from the night before the benefit of a second chew, but in the face, or arse, of this unusual swell, he kindly agreed to nominate himself for the Breakfast Revisited Shield, a task to which he then dedicated himself with no little enthusiasm and skill.

After a thoroughly enjoyable couple of hours watching Tom suffer, we finally arrived at a wreck and started drifting over it. The weapon of choice this year were Sidewinder Skerries, which do look absolutely fucking brilliant in the water and in your hand, more like a real sandeel than Andy Selby looks like Sontaran Commander Strax, or Steve

like Sid James. The standard 6" version was most popular, but the 4" version also scored well.



Andy Selby at the NFSA awards dinner, yesterday.

After a slowish start, during which Steve did his best to keep our spirits buoyant with a relentless stream of complaints, most of us had had at least one or two fish, though nothing to get excited over, with most being around 7lb I reckon. Adam, despite starting as slowly as anyone, was clearly on some kind of drugs, probably lithium or some other mood stabiliser, as he was cheery and helpful to a fault. Whatever it is he was taking, I want some.

As the tide picked up, or possibly fell away, or perhaps switched direction, who's to say? I mean I don't take notes or anything and it was a very long time ago now, but it was certainly a different part of the morning from the first bit, so the odds are the tide was doing something a bit different, bites picked up, and by now everyone had had a fish or two, except Steve, who'd lost one and was alternating between being pathetically sad to try and elicit sympathy, and grumpy at having to share the boat with the rest of us. On the latter point, I think we can all sympathise with him. Eventually though, the great god of fishing took pity on him and sent him three pollack in quick succession, the largest of which Steve had weighed and which, at thirteen and a half pounds was a nice fish, and possibly the largest Really Wrecked fish of the day.

This cheered Steve up no end, and had the added bonus of slightly annoying me, as it was clearly larger than my biggest fish which, till then, had been the biggest on the boat. At least he had the decency to do this early, unlike Clive who beat me to the best fish of the day on the same trip in 2018 with the last drop down - and in fact, well after Clem had shouted the "Up you come boys!". Not that I bear a grudge, or anything.



New boy Derby with a nice pollack. Or it might be someone else whose name I have forgotten.

Along with Adam, Tom, Steve and Clive (whom I shall not mention except to say that yes, the fucker did catch well as usual), we were joined by a couple of Lyle's regular individuals, Bill and Derby, both of whom fished very well. Bill caught the biggest fish of the day, at over 15lb, but as he's not an RWSAC member, I just don't care either way. I mean, I'm happy for him, obviously, as much as a maladjusted misanthrope can be, but I'm neither super-excited, not extra-jealous. Actually, Lyle caught a sixteen, for the *actual* biggest fish, but seeing how he caught it on one of his only two drops of the day, and, by rights, it should have been my fish, as I was fishing right next to him, I'm going to draw a discreet veil over the whole incident, lest I say something I regret about the cunt, and he cancels all our trips for this coming year.

Derby also caught well and I think has signed up to our mailing list as a result of the day, so, given that this is his first newsletter, I'd best not be too hard on him. Normally at this point I'd contradict myself and call him all kinds of undeserved names in search of a cheap laugh, but as he didn't seem like wholly bad company or actively evil, and let's face it, this club has precious few like that, I think I'll save it for next time.

All in all, we had just under 40 pollack, with everybody catching at least three, Lyle was his usual lovely self, and there was lots of sunshine, tea, coffee and jolly chatter so yes, it was a lovely day and one we'll try and repeat this spring.

29th of March, Brighton

This was our first trip out with Terry Lee and was our second pollacking trip of the year. It was grey

and dull (like most of us, these days) but pretty much as flat calm as you can expect in spring, so calm that even notorious lightweight Tom Fowler would probably have coped without heaving up all over the boat, not even once.

It was a pretty small tide, so not ideal for pollack, but we'd booked up with Terry quite late in the day, so we took what was available. Because of the small tide, Terry took us a long way off to try and put us on some fish, so we had a couple of hours steaming to reach our destination about 35 miles offshore. We did stop at a couple of wrecks at around the 20-mile mark to see whether there was anything there to catch, but nothing doing.

Sea Breeze III (that's Terry's boat, not the third in a series of weird, briny, runny, french cheeses) is a lovely big catamaran, with a big fishing area, lots of room in the cabin, and plenty of sheltered seating behind the cabin for those of us excluded from the seating inside by the selfish pigs occupying two seats each with their Rees-Mogg-like sprawling. Terry was excellent value all day, fully engaged with us, offering tips to help us catch and providing plenty of tea and coffee. And I'm not just saying that because he's currently standing behind me with a filleting knife pressed into my back around the kidney area.



Steve's thirteen. Yeah yeah. Enjoy it for now.

Because of the small tide, light and fluttery lures, such as jelly worms, proved most successful. I bet that ragworm would also have been good, but we never got the chance to try because the assistants in the tackle shop in Brighton Marina told me there was no call for ragworm at that time of year and that only a total idiot would think they'd be able to buy any. They were right about the last part of that, at least.

The fish were all small - about 2-5lb - but because of the small tide, you could get away with 6lb class gear if you wanted, which meant even small fish had a chance to rip some line off the spool and pull back a bit. Even Adam dropped down to 50/80lb class gear to give the fish a chance, and as a result, generally took about 45 minutes to land anything over 6oz in weight. If any of you are getting tired of this oft-repeated trope (or "meme", as we authors of the technology underpinning the 21st century like to call them) of Adam taking forever with his fish, I advise you to come out fishing with us. There's a reason it's oft-repeated.

As slack water approached, I got out my slow jigs and had a few drops, which produced a bonus bass of around three pounds (returned, as all bass caught in spring had to be returned). Steve then joined me slow jigging and had a better bass, which, tragically, was lost at the net, leaving me still sitting pretty on the Bass Cup, though Phil Pepper also had a bass of around the same size as mine on a jelly worm, so I expect he'll try and claim it as his.

Rab and Robin, the Chuckle Brothers of the fishing world, actually took time off from their endless tedious bickering (which is actually one-sided, as Rab does both voices) to catch some fish, and did best of the crew, with five apiece, so well done them. Admittedly, Rab can't count past zero and Robin is easily led by his Fenland brother (round those parts, everyone's related unless they're weekenders), but I'm prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt and credit for a good performance on the day.

On the way back in, Jay, Terry's friendly and helpful crewman, filleted the 20 or so pollack we kept, which was very nice of him. We returned several of the smaller pollack, along with the two bass, a wrasse and a gurnard.

Weymouth 29th April

Things went wrong even before this trip started. On the Saturday beforehand, three of our club members saw sense and decided they couldn't bear the thought of a day out with the rest of us and cancelled, leaving me to spend the rest of the

weekend running around trying to fill the spaces, something I love doing, as you know. I failed, which I also love. Lyle did manage to fill a space with one of his regular individuals, so that meant we had a crew of eight instead of ten.

To complicate things further, this was the trip I'd decided to blood a couple of friends, Stew and James, who were new to charter boat fishing but keen to give it a go. Even better, when I spoke to Mick (No Dogs), while trying to fill the spaces, instead of saying "Yes", he said "Why don't you write about it for the magazine?". So now whenever I wasn't running around looking after my friends, I was going to be taking pictures of everyone else having fun. Oh well, I never liked fishing anyway.

On the other hand, the weather forecast, which had looked all fives and sixes when I'd first looked on XCWeather, had gone mad. Instead of getting steadily worse as the week wore on, leading to the inevitable weary ring round the day before, cancelling things, it improved to the point that, on Saturday, despite Storm Hannah being in full force, we knew Monday was a goer.

Just to vaguely cover myself against one of the many lawsuits this newsletter will call into being, I'd like to say that large portions of this report first appeared in *Saltwater Boat Angling* issue 38, July 2019. Well, I'm too lazy to write another whole report. That's a valid legal defence, isn't it? In any case, as I have not yet invoiced them for the work, I expect I still own the copyright, or something.

So, with a load of frozen mackerel and squid on board, there we were at 6:55am, ready for a day after blonde rays, spurdogs and turbot, or blanking and grumbling. We do failure with such *élan*. Lyle gunned the motor and we were off under the bridge, which we negotiated without snapping off a single rod tip, so that was good.

First up were the blonde rays on the Kidney Bank. We tackled up our 30lb class gear with anticipation. Or rather, everyone else tackled up their gear with anticipation, I tackled up three separate sets of gear, explained tactics to my pals and then spent the rest of the time taking photos of people tackling up, with as much good grace as I could muster, which, as you know, isn't much.

The flood tide was just starting when Lyle set the anchor, so we could get away with 12 ounces of lead to start with. Bait was half a mackerel fillet, tipped with a whole squid, on a 6/0 at the end of 3 foot of 150lb leader. I'm not sure how impressed James and Stew were with the rigs I tied on for them. I had spent a couple of hours making up some new ones the night before, but some others, well, they might have been a little "pre-used". Yes,

yes, I know you're supposed to throw away hooks after you've used them once, but 6/0 and 8/0 O'Shaughnessys? Really? When you've spent all that time crimping them to 150lb or 250lb line? A bit of rust on the shank just helps hold the bait on securely, and it's nice to be able to look at a rig when tying it on and think "Ah... caught a few nice conger on that... still good for a few more," as you check the roughened line by the hook to make sure it won't snap like cotton at the first hint of interest from a 2lb ray.

Down went our baited rigs and we waited for the fish to find them. Steve, our place-filling individual was first in, bringing a lovely doggie up through the depths. It turned out we were already acquainted with Steve, as it was none other than Steve Clements, ex-England boat angler and our ex-host at the Sailor's Return. Yes, he remembered us all right. I was quite surprised he didn't just turn straight round and head home to finish that little bit of DIY he'd been putting off, to be honest.

Clive was the first of us into a proper fish, a nice ray of around 14lb. Clive, please do us all a favour and go on another one of your runs of blanks. This competence is getting a bit old now.

Phil was next into a fish, another low double to the man who'd travelled all the way down from Formby for a day out with us. Some people will do anything for some civilised company. Phil, on the other hand, is just plain stupid. Then Steve had a blonde, followed by Adam, and then Chris hooked a submarine. The tide hadn't got away properly yet, but still he was really struggling to shift this fish. Chris, as Alain knows only too well, doesn't take crap from anyone, or from fish, and he doesn't believe in 'persuading' his captures to the boat, unlike Adam, who is able to spend an entire trip negotiating the meanest pouting or codling to the surface.

Chris believes that the shortest route from A to B for a fish involves it being hauled up as fast as he can wind, and it should be grateful he shows it that much consideration. In this case however, the fish seemed to be resistant to his charms and would not budge. Blondes do that "stuck to the bottom" thing when you first hook them which makes them very hard to move, but this one seemed to be doing an "I am the bottom" thing, prompting the less observant among us, who hadn't seen the rod tip nodding like crazy, to enquire whether Chris hadn't somehow managed to find a snag on a sandbank.

He hadn't. Suddenly the monstrous ray was on the move and Chris was hauling it, inch by inch, towards the surface. This was no easy task, it

seemed. I hadn't seen Chris so pained since I told him he couldn't have a half share of the new club conger record just because he'd tangled my line and done half the work bringing it to the surface. Then, after a few minutes of panting and grunting for a few meagre inches, something we've all done at one time or another, the ray went all immovable again.

Like the sensible lad he is, Chris applied steady pressure. No dice. He ratcheted up the tension, but all that did was make his rod bend even more alarmingly. Something had to give. Sadly, it was not the ray.

The silence was deafening. Probably not the best time for some cretin, who shall remain nameless, but who, in appearance, is not totally dissimilar to me, to ask Lyle how big the blondes on the Kidney Bank go. "Oh, they've had them well over 40lb in trawls," was his breezy reply. Chris took this in typically phlegmatic Scots fashion and slowly and thoughtfully set about tying on a new leader.

Luckily there was no time to dwell on what might have been, as the fish were coming thick and fast. Almost as one, my pals, James and Stew, hooked and landed a mighty dogfish apiece. Phew. Both had caught. My work was done. Perhaps I could concentrate on my own fishing. Except - more fish to photograph, more 'incidental' shots to take, and more futile attempts to catch Lyle doing something helpful or constructive.

Like an insane sausage machine, Clive was pumping out the blonde rays, with Adam not far behind him, while Steve, also catching well, managed to sneak in a bonus turbot. For some reason, when I wasn't tying rigs for others or taking photos of stupid people getting in the way of my camera lens, I seemed to spend most of my time involved in tangles with other people. And no, it wasn't my fault, it's just that sometimes a boat full of idiots needs a scapegoat and, generous to the last, I volunteered for the role.

Then, pure journalistic gold, as both James and Stew hooked into bigger fish. James was more of the Chris school of pump-and-wind-and-to-hell-with-the-consequences, while Stew took the more circumspect, Adam-based, piss-around-for-as-long-as-possible approach. So James won the battle of the novices to boat the first blonde, though not by much. Obviously, being the quick-thinking genius that I am, I made absolutely sure I'd photographed James' fish and returned it seconds before Stew's was boated, so there was no chance of a nice newbie double-header shot. Idiot.



New kid Stew shows off a nice blonde, while other new kid, James, pretends not to care. James actually caught the biggest blonde of the day, though, the ungrateful swine.

The final tally was 23 blondes, two turbot and almost a spurdog (no, Phil, 'lost at the net' is not the same as 'landed'), so an excellent day's fishing already and it was only half-time. Next up were the spurdogs. Weymouth has a good run of big spurs to over 20lb every spring. So we set off to catch the last of the flood at a secret location, hoping to get them on the feed as the flow dropped so we could fish light.

Lyle, when not on his phone like a teenager, or making terrible cups of coffee, does actually know his stuff and we arrived bang on time. We needed a pound and a half to hold bottom when we first arrived, but a couple of drops later 10 ounces was more than enough. It didn't take long for the spurs to get started, and Steve C was first into fish, though when his spur was netted, it turned out to be a smoothhound. Interestingly, it was bigger than our existing club record, but sadly Steve is not a club member. On the other hand, if he did want to write his name in the most illustrious of record books, a mere £10 would secure him a

much sought-after Really Wrecked SAC membership and possibly a retrospective record.

Next up was that man Clive again with a lovely 15lb 12oz spurdog. Since no spur had ever been caught on any club trip, as records went, this was one of the easier ones to break. Even Clive couldn't fail. His record lasted less than ten minutes though, as soon after, Phil boated a 19lb 8oz beauty. Then everything went a little bit berserk. If we thought it had been bedlam with the blondes, this was worse. And better. With the boat swinging round in the slackening tide and the spurs dancing back and forth, showing us what pretty knitting patterns they knew, they wove our lines into some of the most spectacular tangles it has been my privilege to see in a more years of fishing than you'd believe looking at my smooth, unlined face.

Several times, when braid met braid met braid met braid, Lyle leapt in to unweave us, no matter how long it took, only pausing in his task to go and net another spur. And the tangles didn't stop at the gunwales. Twice braid went ping somewhere in the middle, and twice we landed fish hooked on the lost rigs, by virtue of tangling with the trailing braid. In one case, I landed my own lost spurdog. Result.



Phil's lovely new club record – an impressive 19lb 8oz spurdog.

It was a mad three hours, with fish on everywhere, tangles, fools blundering about, Lyle on the phone (to his lawyer, I expect), and in the end, 29 spurs to almost 20lb with numerous doubles, one smoothie and one decent huss. That is good fishing in anyone's book, but thank goodness there were only eight of us. Ten on the boat? Don't even think about it. On the way back in we had a couple of drifts on the Shambles for

turbot. There was no fairytale ending, but on days like this, who needs fairytales? Lyle was fantastic - a friendlier, more helpful guy you will not meet - and he does know a bit about fishing. Everyone caught, and spent most of the day smiling or laughing. It doesn't get much better than that.

Brighton July 11th

I'm not 100% sure this ought to count as a club trip, as it was one that Mick organised under the auspices of his magazine, specifically to get himself free day's fishing for turbot. Who can blame him? I'd do the same if I were smart enough. A couple of club regulars were filling up the spaces, namely Adam and Clive, and also aboard were Kevin Renton and Ron, who have fished with us before. I think Ron is he of the enormous cod while someone lost a lobster, or he of the enormous lobster while someone lost a cod. Or perhaps he's just enormous, smells of cod and looks like a lobster. Can someone read all 56 previous newsletters and let me know?

Anyway, it sounds like it was a lovely day out with Dave Elliot on his new boat (good to have you back out fishing, Dave, and we all hope you're at it again next year so we can have a proper club trip out with you). A flat sea and sunshine later in the day meant T-shirts were spotted on a trip for the first time of the year.

The fishing was patchy, but fish came throughout the day, with 17 flatties to about three and a half pounds, and three undulates, topped by one of fifteen and a half pounds to Clive, who else?

Brighton July 15th

This was a proper big boys fishing trip for proper eels with a proper eeling skipper - Terry Lee. Sadly (for me anyway), I was laid up in bed waiting for two ankle bones to fuse after an operation, and was therefore in no fit state to battle the mighty conger, but that seemed to encourage a flood of applications for the trip, which was one of our most over-subscribed of the year.

Mackerel were a bit scarcer than they'd been at the beginning of the week for the turbot trip, so it took a bit more fannying around to get enough bait. It might have just been one of those things, but on the other hand, nowadays it seems like smaller tides mean that mackerel are harder to come by. Roll on a total ban on commercial mackerel fishing with nets, and bring back the 1970s, when you could walk to France on the mackerel shoals and if you didn't end a day's fishing with the boat deck waist deep in fish, you got your money back. I'm sure that had no effect on fish stocks. Note for our friends from the future,

I may or may not be being ironic here. And I'm not actually sure whether it counts as irony or sarcasm, or even what the truth is about anything.

The target wreck was about 20 miles off, to the south of the Rampion Wind Farm (where they grow wind, apparently). As the crew arrived about an hour before the tide had dropped enough to proper fishing at anchor, the day started with a little drifting for pollack. A few small pollack obliged on lures, and Phil had some bream on squid fished on a paternoster over the wreck, along with a lot of lovely pouting.

Adam though, had a close encounter of the altogether more delusional kind. I think what happened was this. Somewhere about half way up while retrieving at the end of a drift, a small, confused pollack took Adam's Rhubarb and Custard, surprising Adam, whereupon he kicked the reel out of gear and momentarily forgot how to engage it again, allowing the tiny fish to speed off in free spool. When Adam eventually collected himself and clicked the spool into gear, the ensuing jolt meant that our hero's poorly tied knots had no chance against a fish with any kind of a head of steam up, so the line parted.

On the other hand, what Adam reported was as follows - you decide which you think is more likely. "At about 45 turns up - after all, any half decent angler tries lots of different numbers of turns on the retrieve to find out where the fish are feeding - anyway, at about 45 turns off, I got a huge, smashing take from what felt, to me, like a double figure bass, and a decent double at that, not some 11 or 12 pounder. So this enormous fish smashes into my lure, I could tell it had been following it for at least 20 turns from the slightly different feel of the lure through the water - the bow wave from a very large predator interferes with the action of a lure's tail, as anyone who really knows fishing will tell you. Anyway, this huge bass, possibly a new British record, I can't be 100% sure, but probably well over 20lb, dived and dived hard for the wreck. I applied exactly the right amount of pressure to stop the fish before the wreck without risking my extremely fine and sporting line, but this fish, almost certainly an upper twenty, was even more powerful than it had any right to be, and managed, with its last lunge, to pull the line over an exceptionally high section of superstructure, breaking free. Obviously I didn't care anyway, cos I hate bass, which are shit fish, and this was definitely a massive one, probably a forty."

Once the tide had slackened a bit, Terry got the hook down, and out went the mackerel flappers to work their magic... And magic they did indeed work, although mostly in somehow attracting a lot

of snags, causing quite a bit of gear to be lost. It must have been a fairly messy wreck, with rubbish strewn about all over the place, much like Steve's tackle shed. Terry did try very hard to get our useless heroes to catch fish, repositioning the boat several times as the tide changed, and moving to another nearby wreck. Eventually his efforts paid off, as a few, generally small, eels came to the boat, the largest being a 45-pounder to Colin.

Overall, it was another decent day out with Terry, though the fishing was not spectacular. It would have been a different story had Adam landed his fifty-pound bass on the drift though, which just goes to show that it's those fine margins that make all the difference at the very top end of elite sport.

Weymouth 2019

This was our 20th year of Weymouth pleasure, during which time we had seen off many, many skippers, eaten many, many curries, climbed the odd rigging and even caught an occasional fish. To celebrate this tremendous feat, the T-shirt was the same basic design on a white T-shirt as our very first model, with some of our more notable achievements on the back. If you want one, they are a very reasonable £12, which is a little more expensive than usual because I splashed out on slightly higher quality shirts for this special year.

My own personal Weymouth was made extra special by coming right at the end of nine weeks in a plaster cast and then an orthopaedic boot brought on by my ankle operation. This meant I was clumping about even more gracelessly and clumsily than usual, both on the boat and when tottering around from eatery to pub and back again in the evenings. It also meant that I was unable to drive myself down and was forced to throw myself on the mercy of the club for a lift to and from our favourite resort.

Steve and Scoop answered the call, with Steve taking me down and Scoop returning me home. Despite the predictions from some club members, who shall remain nameless, that I would not be able to afford a lift from Steve and that I'd be better off hiring a helicopter made of gold to take me down, Steve was more than happy to do it in return for about an hour's float fishing in my garden (though I did force a burger on him later, as a small thank-you). That hour was relatively productive for Mr Newham, with 15 trout to about two and half pounds, three roach and a grayling. It seemed to augur well for the weekend.

Once in Weymouth, for a change, the plan to put tackle on the boat, pick up keys and meet up

in the Rock seemed to go quite smoothly, right down to the Rock having had a facelift and not being quite as grim as in previous years. Even the beer was drinkable. We were all very disappointed to find that expert angler and all-round sexy-but-shy-and-retiring-heroine, Cat, was not in attendance, but we took this on the chin, and tried to hide our disappointment as best we could with a couple of additional rounds punctuated by raucous laughter.

This was also a tremendous year for innovation. After listening to what some people had had to say (innovation number 1), I decided to put our Friday night eating destination to a democratic vote (innovation number 2), offering a choice between the traditional (Gurkha) and the radical (Tuga, a Portuguese restaurant serving "the best steak in Weymouth", according to a Mr. A. Selby. Though since this same Selby also says that the Weymouth Angling Centre sells "the most alivest ragworm and hermit crabs in Weymouth", we perhaps ought to take what he says with a pinch of salt). When the results were in, the score was a resounding 6-2 in favour of Tuga, with one abstention. In fact the scores were 6-1, but one camper claimed to have sent an email voting for the Gurkha, but as it is not to be found in my inbox, or spam filter, I can't help but suspect that his "vote" was a political one, due to him sharing a lift down with the other Gurkha-voter, a man so hidebound by tradition that he continues to make regular demands that we return to Room 5 in the Sailor's Return (if you've ever stayed there, you'll know it to be a marginally less pleasant place to spend the night than Clem's fish hold - when filled with live conger) and that we book Ken for day 1 of the summer trip, despite Ken, may he rest in peace, disturbed only by Brooksie and his angelic anal beads, having long gone to drop his celestial draincover on the great turbot banks in the sky.

Adrian, flushed with the success his triumphant cleaning of Clem's head, last year, was so excited by the prospect of not going to the Gurkha, that he could not resist going to Tuga for supper on the Thursday night as well and, when he joined us in the Rock, proceeded to astound us with tales of the most amazing chicken peri peri ever eaten. What made this all the more amazing was that this culinary tour de force had set Adrian back a paltry £9.50. Nine pounds fifty! NINE POUNDS AND FIFTY PENCE!! That's all. You may be blasé and pretend not to care, but deep down, you know that your mouth is watering and your heart is racing, though I doubt you can be as excited and thrilled as we were when Adrian related the tale to us for

the third time over his second sip of his first glass of red wine.

Actually, that was only my second favourite Adrian anecdote of the evening. My favourite was when he recounted the great day we had on the banks for flatfish with Dave, a day when he triumphed with dozens of large turbot and brill, alongside the much-missed Brooksie (we raised several glasses to the foul-mouthed bastard over the course of the weekend), while Adam blanked, failing to record a single fish of any sort. Adrian later grudgingly revised this total to a single small turbot, in the face of Adam's howls of protest. If you go back and re-read newsletter 43 (yes, I actually checked), you'll see that after Adam's well-documented initial struggles, the newsletter clearly states that he starts catching flatfish, the very strong implication being that this meant more than one flatfish, singular. But history is written by the victors, and Adrian is the historian.

All that remained of the evening was to await Andy Barker's very late arrival, down a swift final three pints, smoke a dozen more fags, and then return to the Marden where sweet dreams, entirely uninterrupted by loud snoring, awaited.

Breakfast was delicious, as always, cooked by the lovely Jan, and brought through to us by her glamorous assistant, Gary. It was made all the more mouth-watering by Adrian's appearance in the dining room, where he really got our digestive systems going with tales of the most amazing peri peri chicken from Tuga, at the ridiculous price of just £9.50. Can you fucking believe it?

Our first day aboard Lyle's lovely cat *Supanova* dawned bright and clear, with the merest hint of a cooling zephyr to help prevent heatstroke. No really, it actually did, as summer made a belated return after autumnal winds had blighted all but one of our trips since May. Lyle had warned me that mackerel were in short supply, so I bought two packs of frozen mackerel per angler, along with the usual 5lb box of squid. This cost a very reasonable arm and a leg from the Weymouth Angling Centre, although I was slightly sceptical about the claims that the packs of mackerel counted as livebait (though, thinking about it, they did seem slightly closer to life than the delicious purée I was sold as ragworm). [I would just like to point out to anyone new to these newsletters, or to our many members suffering with dementia (you know who you are, though, actually, in most cases, you no longer do), that the Weymouth Angling Centre knows perfectly well the difference between live and frozen bait, and the pound of ragworm I bought from them were fresh and lively, and a good size, as they always are, and that this

scandalous slur on their bait is what passes for a running joke in the club. I would also like to thank the club legal team for drafting that disclaimer and insisting I print it, and also for insisting that I point out that none of our members actually have dementia, and even if they did, it is no laughing matter, and making jokes about it shows an insensitivity that borders on hate crime. They are also keen to point out that virtually everything else in every single one of the club newsletters comes under that heading, but they are, to a man, woman and gender-fluid entity, a bunch of cunts, and fictional at that, so fuck them, I say.]

Anyway, back in the real world of the fishing trip (because everything I write here is real and true and verbatim and what actually happened, despite what your so-called 'memories' may be trying to tell you), our first stop was at the entrance of Portland harbour to see whether any mackerel would ignore their self-imposed exile and would throw themselves onto our feathers. No dice. Not of any kind. Not even common or garden six-sided dice in a mackerel pattern and shape. Especially not them.

We were joined on day one by Tom, filling in as Andy Selby's stunt double, as Lord 'Andrew' Selby of Hermit Crab managed to come up with not one, not two, but an entire series of different feeble excuses to prevent him having to take up his allotted place on the trip and avoid spending any time in our company. On the Friday, there was a last minute EFSA meeting because you know how these national committee things just get arranged on a casual ad hoc basis. On Saturday there was the similarly spontaneous National Airsoft Festival, thus ensuring that we now know that in terms of Andy's priorities, we come below running around in a Realtree™ outfit, firing Nerf guns at other grown-ups. On the Saturday night, when Andy and Charlie traditionally join us for a curry, there was a 50th birthday party, for which I assume the club invitation was lost in the post. But what about Friday night? Could they perhaps join us in Tuga, which does, after all, serve "the best steaks in Weymouth" (A. Selby) and "the most incredible peri peri chicken - only £9.50" (A. Colliver). The conversation went something like this.

Me: "Well how about Friday night at Tuga, then, Andy?"

Andy: "Oh, I'm not sure about that. I think we have to go and (indistinct mumble)."

Me: "Sorry, what was that Andy?"

Andy: "I said I think we have to go and (indistinct mumbling lasting a bit longer)."

Me: "Right. Okay. Well, if that gets cancelled, would you like to join us in Tuga?"

Andy: "Oh definitely. If that doesn't happen we'll be there. Okay, gotta go and (indistinct mumble) now. See you, Ben. (*Lower level*). It's okay Charlotte, I think they bought it (*click*)."

Apparently sophisticated technologies such as diaries, calendars and honouring commitments made to your friends have not yet reached Weymouth. Anyway, I'm not hurt, or offended, or sad, or upset. Just disappointed. You think you know someone, but you realise you never did and they were just using you to get their web site upgraded on the cheap.

Anyway, Tom was just as useless as the rest of us at catching mackerel so after that triumph, we headed off round the Bill towards the tope hole. This, as its name suggests, is a deep hole in the sea floor, up to 200m deep, filled entirely with tope, virtually to the top of the hole. Only, when we dropped our frozen mackerel fillets and flappers and other bits of fishy goodness over the side, what came up initially was conger eel after conger eel. The first fish of the trip over the gunwales, taken by as modest, handsome and generous an angler as you could hope to meet, was a pathetic conger. So small and feeble was it, that if it were a personality trait, it could only be Steve's conscience. Other, slightly less feeble eels followed, but nothing over about 25lb.

Tope, on the other hand, were in very short supply, with only Steve scoring the target species, landing a nice 25-pounder. Others in the crew did manage to land small sharks too, but they were of the huss variety, and nothing troubling the ten-pound mark. So, with most of our whistles whetted in some way, Lyle took us to the nearby Seven Mile Ground, which is a patch of rough ground about seven miles from Weymouth Marina. I wonder how it got its name? We usually do quite well there, catching a mix of species, so while most of us dropped down with large mackerel baits on 8/0 and 6/0 hooks for eels, huss, rays and tope, some tried smaller hooks with squid for bream.

We couldn't get on to Lyle's preferred spot though, because it was directly in the path of some scallop dredgers working the area, so he anchored up on another nearby mark. After a few minutes, the bites started, and soon Adam was taking far too long over a medium-sized eel, while the rest of us made short work of huss and eels, with the odd small tope.

The small baits for bream didn't produce much other than pouting, except, irritatingly enough, for a few mackerel from close to the bottom. Why couldn't they make an appearance when we were actually fishing for them? Lyle's answer is that on smaller tides around Weymouth, the mackerel

tend to split up and hang out close to the bottom. Has anyone else noticed anything similar at other venues? It is annoying to struggle for bait. It makes me miss the 1970s even more. My headmaster, and everyone else, might have been a paedophile, but the seas were full of mackerel, and in fact all kinds of fish.

The other things in short supply were the rays. Generally we can rely on the undulates, with the odd thornback coming along for variety, but this time, the bigger baits were mainly chomped by small and medium-sized eels, with no rays whatsoever.



Steve caught the only half-decent tope that came out of the tope hole.

After a couple of hours of this, Lyle moved us again, this time to a small wreck close by, where he reckoned there was a chance of a few bigger bream. He recommended single-hook rigs, preferably running legers, fished with a light enough lead to allow you to keep bouncing the bait back towards the wreck. The method was to drop down, and, having trotted back a few times, if there was no bite after 30 seconds, to raise the rod tip and trot back further, continuing until the bites started. This is pretty much the same as Clem's technique in a tide run, although he favours using only just enough lead to hold bottom at all, which makes it more about feel, and slightly harder to get right i.e. well beyond our capabilities.

Lyle's bait recommendation for the bream was one or two bits of squid on a size 1/0 hook, tipped with a small strip of mackerel. Obviously Steve demanded that I return to the tackle shop and buy some prawns because he wanted to use them instead, and well... why not spend more club money on pointless bait? I can report that both the 30 second/lift technique and the

squid/mackerel cocktail baits worked, and we did enjoy a decent run of good bream to over 3lb, which was excellent fun. I think I caught the biggest, but Tom is absolutely certain that his was larger and better in every way. I suspect he's compensating.

Adrian introduced us to a slightly different technique for bream at this point too, and one which he employed with equal success throughout the trip for a variety of species including huss, rays, tope, eels and everything else. Borrowing from the Jonathan cannon, he selects a lead at random, checking only that it is much too light for the job. Then having attached this to a boom, he sits down close to the cabin, drops his gear over the side, leaves it there for half an hour, without walking the boat, before winding in eventually to allow others to untangle themselves from his gear. This saves all the hassle of having to rebait regularly, hold the rod to feel for bites, and of unhooking fish. In the absence of Jonathan, or his suave sidekick, Smed, it's good to have a stand-in waiting in the wings.

In addition to bream, we also lost several lively fish to bite-offs. Given the species we caught most of all weekend, it's likely that these bad boys were conger or tope. Most of the money was on tope at the time, but now, from the comfort of my desk, and with no way of being proved wrong, I think the number of eels we caught suggests that they were the culprit but in the end, who knows, and frankly, who cares?

While we were anchored up over the wreck, Adrian's mate, Russell, who's too good an angler to fish with our club, really, decided that rather than fish for bream, he'd drop a rhubarb and custard Sidewinder over the side, wind it up 20 turns, drop it back and repeat this until his lure had gone past the wreck. It didn't work. First time he tried it, his lure was nowhere near past the wreck when a big, fat summer pollack grabbed it and whizzed off. It's quite interesting to see exactly how hard a decent pollack can fight against an angler at anchor as opposed to when you're drifting over the wreck. The fish took a lot of line before Russell finally subdued it and brought it aboard. It looked a good ten or eleven pounds - a very fine pollack for summer indeed. Several others joined in the fun after that, but despite their best efforts, no more pollack were forthcoming. It certainly makes you think about what we might catch if we tried different things.

Once the tide had slackened enough to make trotting even just a few ounces of lead back virtually impossible, the bream bites pretty much dried up, and Lyle decided it was time to take us

to some rough ground at the back of the Shambles. Having fished there many times before, I am surprised to find myself wondering why I never thought to question where exactly this is - North, South, East or West of the Shambles - and why it is considered the back of it. Can a sandbank have a back? How many other body parts does it have? Does it have legs? If so, what kind of trousers does it prefer? Certainly not Adam's waterproof trousers, composed as they are, of 92% fish oil aged for over 10 years, which is the main reason why we like to keep the diesel engines running at anchor.

Yes, yes, before you get all excited at how stupid I am, I realise that of course the Shambles doesn't have legs, and "the back" probably just means the bit on the far side from the Weymouth, but next time we're out I'm definitely going to have Lyle show me on a chart. Once there, wherever 'there' is, Lyle got the anchor down and we went about our task with the grim efficiency for which we are so well known. As I'm sure you all know, on marks with mixed species including bream, the best tactic is to go down with big baits, which create a decent scent trail, drawing in the bream and then, once the rattling bites have started in earnest, those that want to catch bream, can go down with small hooks and baits.

This is pretty much what happened, but, as is traditional, a couple of us, more rugged types, stuck it out with the bigger baits. I was particularly keen to catch a ray, so I asked Lyle what the best bait would be, and he suggested either a mackerel frame, or a squid and mackerel cocktail. A mackerel frame is just a mackerel with the two fillets removed, from which you then remove the tail, leaving the head, guts and lightly fleshed skeleton. We had lots of these left over, and as mackerel were in short supply, this seemed like an excellent plan to me. I am pleased to say that among the small and medium-sized conger, my mackerel frame did indeed produce an undulate of around 10lb, which proved to be the only ray of the day.

I would also like to point out that whatever his other shortcomings, and there are plenty, at no point did Lyle attempt to superglue any part of me to any part of his boat, or spray Barker with fake ordure. On top of that, he was actually heard to ask, towards the end of the day, "You boys aren't in any rush to get back this evening are you?" and not in a sarcastic way, as he was talking about giving the tide a little bit more time to get going properly at the last mark. If he's not careful, he may find it quite hard to get rid of us.

Then it was back to the Marden for a lovely, refreshing shower, a little doze and to watch the highlights of England's reply to the Australian 179 all out. You remember the one, where Denly top scored with 12, out of our grand total of 67. That made cheery watching, and fully prepared us for the evening to come. As we set off for the venue that is set to become our new traditional Friday night eatery, Tuga, Adrian stunned us by revealing that the place in which we were about to have supper served the most delicious peri peri chicken imaginable, for a quite ludicrously low price of £9.50. You should ask him about it on the next trip. It is sensational, apparently.

Once ensconced at our table, most of us plumped for the Tuga Skewer, a dangling kebab packed with delightful ingredients, but some went with Andy Selby's recommendation and had the steak, while Adrian, you'll be as surprised as we were to hear, chose the peri peri chicken. We asked him later how it was, but he wasn't forthcoming. We also indulged in plenty of delicious Portuguese red wine, which fuelled Adrian's outrageous flirtation with our age-appropriate waitress. There were some raised eyebrows at the club Lothario's antics, and I was beginning to wish I had my wingman, Tony, to help me drag Adrian away before he proposed or offered to buy a bottle of champagne. It turned out that his motives may have been less romantic and more underhand, as after paying for the meal, he did his utmost to wheedle a complimentary bottle of wine from our hostess. He might have succeeded too, had his lily-livered companions not insisted on leaving after his 20th entreaty to the poor woman, which came with an offer to throw in some floor mats, a free tank of petrol and a kiss.

We then adjourned to the Boot for a quiet couple of pints. Well, we almost all did. Obviously on the way there, Adrian found himself unable to resist the charms of The Duke of Cornwall, which, you may remember from the previous newsletter, is a pub so noisy and music-filled as to make normal conversation impossible within a 400m radius. Adrian does like a karaoke, however, and reckoned they needed to hear his *Hi Ho Silver Lining*. We tried to stop him. We told him we would not be joining him. But he was undeterred and dived in, not to be seen again until breakfast. To be fair, Russell, who felt responsible for Adrian's wellbeing, did feel quite guilty for the rest of the evening, but honestly, there is nothing to be done with Adrian when he gets his karaoke head on. The next morning, Adrian did have the good grace to accuse us all of bailing on him. At some point I must explain to him the way that bailing works,

and that when the entire party, other than a single member, does something, then it is the single member who is doing the bailing. Just sayin'.

The forecast for Saturday had not been for more of the same gorgeous flat calm that had done its best to spoil our Friday by forcing us to focus on the fishing, without the excuse of a sea to blame for our poor catches. The wind had been due to rise till it had fives in it, and rise it did, but thankfully it never got much above a gentle four, so while there were some white horses, it was still pretty pleasant, company excepted.

Lyle, who'd had a day to size up exactly what kind of crew we were, and the sorts of skill levels he could expect from us, initially recommended a visit to the Sea Life Centre, followed by the pub and then a trip to Switzerland where apparently they have clinics that could help us. I explained that the club budget could not stretch that far and despite Lyle offering to pay for everything out of his own pocket, we persuaded him he'd be better off anchoring up on any old bit of rough ground and having a bit of a kip, which is what he did.

Again we struggled for mackerel, but after about half an hour round the Bill we had at least picked up a few to supplement our stock of frozen bait. More thrillingly, Scoop was fishing so deep that he picked up a stray rough ground codling, which made him very happy. First off, Lyle took us back to the back of the Shambles, where we'd finished up the night before. Again, he recommended we start with big baits, and wait for the bream to come on as the tide slackened. We picked up a couple of small eels and a mini-tope, but it wasn't long before the bream found us, and suddenly it was breaming bedlam. Any large bait was shredded within a couple of minutes, and there was none of that 'drop it back until you find the fish' nonsense, it was just a case of dropping your gear over the side and winding in a bream. Everyone was catching, even Adam, though, as Adrian pointed out, he wasn't catching as many as the rest of us.

I say everyone was catching, but I must confess, that with the bream being of only average size - perhaps a pound and a half at best - I was not tempted by this after my huge fish of the day before, and put on some mackerel feathers, to try and catch some bait for the rest of the day, with a slow jig acting as the sinker, just in case a rogue bass or pollack happened by. On my first drop down, I came back with a full string of four mackerel and, hugely encouraged, I kept slow jiggling for the rest of the stay at the mark. Sadly, I did not sniff another mackerel, let alone the double-figure bass my efforts deserved. Oh well,

as we all know, the god of fishing is not a just god. If he were, we might all have found nice people to fish with instead of each other.

Everyone else was having a tremendous time though, with bream after bream putting up a plucky struggle. Some were even returned, once people realised that if they continued to retain all their fish, they might possibly have emptied their freezers by Christmas (also known as 'by the time Ben gets the newsletter out') – as long as they ate bream for breakfast, lunch and supper, seven days a week, with three for lunch on Sundays.

Next up was the Kidney Bank, there to fish for blonde rays. This has generally fished well for us in the past, especially in recent years, so we were looking forward to it. I say "we" but there is no "we" in "bunch of selfish bastards", or "looking forward to it" in "bunch of miserable really wrecked so-called anglers", so actually, we headed there in our usual state of gloom and bad-tempered pessimism.

For once, our mood music was completely in tune with the fish. On the first bank we anchored up over... oh yes, I learned something interesting - the Kidney Bank is in fact a series of banks in increasingly deep water - and we first anchored on the edge of the second shallowest, to fish down the bank with the tide, where is where Lyle reckons the blondes usually are. Like he knows anything about anything. Lyle's recommendation for bait for blondes, and indeed most rays, goes as follows. Take a fillet of mackerel and halve it lengthways. Hook it twice flesh side first (i.e. put a twist in it after hooking it the first time), then take a squid and remove its head. Impale the tail end of the squid on your hook and finally hook the head separately through the eyes. This magnificent concoction outfishes everything else for ray, and also make a tasty snack, if Adam has purloined your sandwiches, as he is wont to do.

Within minutes of lobbing my squid and mackerel cocktail over the side, I had some very definite interest, which I allowed to develop for an age, but when I wound down, the telltale weight of a hooked ray was entirely absent, to my great disappointment. Chris was also getting a bite, but when he wound down, he felt something kick. It didn't seem enormously heavy, but when it came to the side of the boat, it was a 5lb 6oz turbot - well worth having, the jammy fucker.

That, sadly, was that. After a blank half an hour, Lyle moved us from that bank to the next one, to fish into a slightly deeper downslope, but no luck, no rays, nor anything of any kind of interest whatsoever. After about an hour catching virtually nothing, Lyle had us retrieve our gear and took us

back to a mystery location on the Three-Mile Ground. The exact mark was not one he had fished before, and was an unusual ledge in that it ran in the same direction as the tide. In most cases, the ledges run at right angles to the tide, so you're either fishing up against the ledge, or, if the tide is running in the wrong direction, trying to bump your lead just over the ledge, which is never ideal, either in terms of landing fish or avoiding snags.



Nice turbot. But we were supposed to be fishing for blondes, Chris. You should have given it to me in shame.

With this friendly ledge running along the tide, we were able to fish up against it and trot back along it, which would probably have been an advantage with a half-decent crew composed of fewer useless cunts. That's not us, though, is it? We did however manage a few more bream, a huss and several eels, including a conger so ludicrously small that not only did it easily beat my tiny conger from day 1 for most pathetic fish of the year, it beat every other tiny conger we've ever landed in this club. Steve was obviously delighted

with his capture and was already planning where to put our lovely fishtank-based Feeble Fish award, when Chris landed an eel so amazingly miniscule, Steve's would have had it for lunch, as would any mildly peckish redband fish, immature sandeel, sea cucumber, cnidarian or reasonably beefy member of the zooplankton. The photo is here for all to see, and though Chris' powerful frame makes it hard to grasp the truly miniature scale of his capture, it does give some idea of the kind of angler this man is. Scoop also continued his assault on all club mackerel records with a fish that very nearly threatened our long-standing mackerel record of 2lb. It was a beast, but not quite enough of one.



Chris with the size of conger he generally feels comfortable handling.

Eventually though, Lyle tired of our hilarious banter and his thoughts, and indeed boat, turned homeward. Overall, our 20th year's expedition to Weymouth had been a good one, with lots of fish caught, especially bream and conger, but with fewer rays and tope than we might have hoped for. You can't have everything though, and Lyle showed us why he is one of the South Coast's most popular skipper. He really put a shift in trying to get us on some fish, made loads of tea and

coffee, gutted all our bream for us on the way in, and completely omitted to play any pranks on his crew or glue them to anything. On that subject, I would just like to offer Clem some career advice and suggest that if he does ever end up a windsurfing instructor in some sunny location, it would be best not to superglue your novice pupils' feet to their windsurfing board, lead them 10 miles offshore before spraying them with rubby dubby and abandoning them. Many progressive water sports schools frown on this kind of harmless prank in this namby-pamby era of #MeToo and #PleaseDon'tFeedMeToTheSharksClem.

Back ashore, it was time for a shower, to take in the scale of the latest Ashes horror on Channel 5 and then head out to our traditional end of trip finale at the Weymouth Balti House. This time, sadly, Steve decided he really couldn't bear any more of our company, and who can blame him? So he set off home about the time that certain porky club members were tucking into their chicken chat starters. The dinner passed without incident, though Russell managed a club first by ordering a ham, egg and chips instead of a proper curry. Doesn't he like traditional British cuisine?

The only other innovation of the evening was that I was deprived of my usual role of bill-collector-in-chief with Adrian seizing control of both the bill and all cash proffered in payment of it. You'd think that not having to undertake the tedious chore of extracting money from perhaps the tightest group of skinflints ever to enter a restaurant would come as a relief to me, but you are forgetting that Steve had already gone home. In addition, the fact that it was Adrian that had assumed the mantle of 'grown-up in-charge' only generated more anxiety, as I pictured our man using the leverage of his control of several hundred pounds to try and sell the head waiter a second-hand Kia Ceed. On top of that, it was clear that after three bottles of wine, he could barely tell the difference between a tenner and the after-dinner mints.

There was also the general non-specific worry that if Adrian had willingly put himself in line for this onerous task, there had to be some kind of underhand motive, probably involving complementary bottles of wine or a toilet cleaning supplement. Being the control-freak I am, I kept an eye on Adrian all the way through to payment where it turned out that his motive was the relatively benign one of wanting to pay the whole bill with his Amex card, as American Express were running a special "Quintuple Air Miles for all curry-based payments made on the South Coast after two days' fishing in August" promotion. Adrian

now has enough air miles to be able to go fishing in Malindi three times next year.



As this sign outside The Closet testifies, Mr Hodges has clearly been looking for new ways to spend his retirement.

We adjourned to the Boot, as we generally do, and Adrian did his best to get lost on the way, as he generally does, only to be collected on his rambles around the fleshpots of Weymouth by club member Martin Arnold, who was there for an entirely unrelated trip and who joined us for a swift one or two, which was very nice. Then it was time for bed and to reflect on another very enjoyable trip. True, there had been no skinny-dipping, no midnight mackerel fishing and not even a single, solitary marriage proposal made to a Weymouth stripper, but even so, the old boys done good, and Adrian proved himself a legend of the club, though a lot of the credit for that must go to his carers, Russell and Martin.

Scoop took me home the next morning, and, like Steve, availed himself of the fishing in my garden where he caught lost of fish, including a lovely big trout which joined the bream in his coolbox. I hope it was tasty.

Littlehampton, December the 2nd

This was our first trip out with Martin Donald, who has replaced Neil French as the owner of *Spirit of Arun*, and who is our new Littlehampton skipper. Yet another new skipper in a year of new skippers, and yet another skipper that we've seen off. We ought to come with a health warning "This club can put you off fishing for life". He comes highly recommended, mainly by Clive, make of that what you will, so we're looking forward to seeing how many huge bass, bream and other species he can find us over the coming year.

The weather for this trip was very pleasant, and Martin proved to be a friendly and competent skipper, but the fish were less friendly, other than the friendliest of them all, the lesser spotting dogfish, who were extremely obliging. A few whiting also turned up, but let's face it, small whiting are practically pouting, and we don't see too many eaters these days, tasty though they are when they get big enough. Clive did manage a 4lb-ish bass, which was returned unweighed, which puts it on a par with the two other unweighed bass caught on club trips this year, though as Adam has pointed out, it being Clive, there is very little chance of the wise and noble club committee awarding this fish even a share of the Bass Cup.



Chris' last gasp ray set off a small nuclear explosion on the Isle of Wight behind him.

Steve had a very nice double-figure huss, which he wrestled manfully to the boat, and Chris caught a last-gasp thornback of around 6lb, just as the sun was going down in spectacular fashion. The crew did manage to make themselves useful, unusually, when the capstan stopped working when it was time to come home, and they hauled up the anchor, rope, chain and all, through 80 foot

of water. Adam tells me he is on course to make a full recovery from the effort by late March.



Last word of the newsletter goes to everyone's favourite, Mr Newham, with a lovely eleven pound huss.

Thankfully, that is it for the trip reports, and we're now bang up to date. If any of you has read this far, you deserve a reduction in your club subs. However, deserving and getting are two entirely different things, so please do pay your subs this year, as the club is basically run on your contributions, and our stupid trophies don't engrave themselves, and B&B and boat deposits don't pay for themselves. Okay, enough begging. Have a great New Year and see you all in 2020, I hope.

Love and Happy New Year,
Ben x