

The Start of the Carp Society

by: Tim Paisley

I have been friendly with Rod Hutchinson since the late 1970s, a period when there were rumblings about Peter Mohan's dictatorial approach to running the CAA and BCSG. When you start carp fishing in the shadow of people like Rod, and Chris Yates, you are an eternal beginner, and I certainly was back then with just seven or eight years carping under my belt. I mention that because it came as a complete surprise when, out of the blue, Rod suggested that perhaps I should start another carp organisation. It was a 'Who, me?' moment. I slept on it for a year or two. Rumblings of discontent weren't really the basis for the founding of a new organisation.

The world of angling was run by the National Federation of Anglers (NFA) at that time, although there was a National Anglers' Council, whose role I never fully understood. I mention that because the actual trigger for the start of the Society was political. Carp and specialist anglers tended not to join the NFA, or be represented on the NFA board, so we were all (including the NASG) taken completely unawares when a motion was passed at national level banning live-baiting (for pike). The law was quickly rescinded when it was pointed out that maggots and worms are 'live bait', but the ban was a warning shot, emphasising what was possible if you ignored angling politics. Now we did have a reason to start another organisation because Peter Mohan was avowedly apolitical, personally and on behalf of his organisations.

There was still a 'Who, me?' element to taking it further, but the longer I live the more my actions tend to be guided by the principle that 'someone's got to do it' – if I feel it needs doing. I bounced it around for a while, and decided it needed doing. At that time the only other carp person I knew well enough to involve in the start of such an organisation was Greg Fletcher, who didn't hesitate when I asked him if he was willing to be the treasurer of a new carp organisation. I went to see fellow Sheffielder George Sharman and explained what was happening. As it happened there was some unrest in the North East region of the BCSG at the time, and George agreed to be chairman, although he was later rapidly elevated to president for reasons I'll explain.

I was writing for Coarse Angler at the time, and was friendly with Editor Colin Dyson. It was a close-knit community, with the Coarse Angler offices quarter of a mile away in one direction, and Fletch quarter of a mile in the other. Colin was a regular contributor to the weeklies, so when we organised an inaugural meeting for Saturday 25th May 1981 Colin was able to publicise it for us, which helped. We were on a wing and a prayer and had no idea what to expect.

What I didn't know was that the disaffection with Peter Mohan was more widespread than we could have guessed, and as a result the attendance at that first meeting in Sheffield read like a 'Who's Who?' of carp fishing, although as I didn't know who was who in carp fishing that was actually lost on me at the time. Hutchy gave his maiden public talk that day (he was terrified) and had previously enlisted his friend Chris Yates as his fellow launcher of the Society, and fellow speaker, which was an awesome coup. The attendance was of the order of 120, and we were up and running.

We had a meeting at lunch time to discuss the Society outline I had drawn up in advance, the bare bones of which included open membership, accountability, democratic elections, regional meetings, magazines, conferences, political representation, and the objective of eventually owning our own waters. Bob Davis sat in on that meeting, and impressed me with his presence. He was leader of the Savay syndicate, a friend of Kevin Maddocks – who was Peter Mohan's right-hand man at the time – and was willing to be chairman of the Carp Society. I can be big on expediency when it makes sense, and it made so much sense that George Sharman was instantly elevated to President, with Bob as Chairman. I was confirmed as Secretary, and Greg as Treasurer. Among those present at that first meeting were Del Romang, Derek Stritton, Micky Sly, Mike Wilson, Clive Diedrich, Malcolm Winkworth, the late Barry Griffiths (Fletch re-christened him 'Baz' later), Mark Summers and Bill Walford, in addition to the aforementioned Rod Hutchinson and Chris Yates, and many more.

The reaction to the start of the Society was remarkable. Bob Davis and Mike Wilson in particular were very influential in southern carping circles, and it was Mike's friendship with Dave Watson which led to the design and publication of the first half-yearly issue of Carp Fisher, launched at the Society's first conference in Luton in November 1981. The magazine had a massive impact, not just on carp anglers, but on magazine publishers, too!

By then the first Society regional meeting had already been held, organised by Roger Vanstone in Gloucestershire in late October 81. The speaker was the late Eddie Price, who displayed his Redmire tackle at the meeting. That first meeting was the start of a Society regional meeting crusade. If there was a regional meeting anywhere in the country you just had to be there! Four stand out in my mind.

Derek Stritton organised one in Essex. I think I had car problems on the way down, and by the time Greg and I arrived Derek was standing on a table in the middle of the bar holding forth about the merits of the new organisation, and encouraging people to join. ('Telling people to join' would probably be a more accurate description of his approach.)

There was a meeting Sheffield, and an aftermath in Greg's flat which was attended by numerous leading lights, including Hutchy at his most outrageous. He suggested that Jim Fielding's eyes were just made for make-up, and finished the evening crawling round in his underpants, and sleeping in the bath. Wilson, Davis, Fielding et al were in attendance, and the evening had quite an impact on all those present – and many who weren't, as the details leaked out. God knows where we all slept, if at all.

Martin Simmonds volunteered to be regional organiser for Norfolk, and there was a meeting at Waveney that winter, brimming with celebrities from that part of the world, and beyond. Ritchie MacDonald was part of the travelling circus by that time, and after we had all retired to our caravan quarters for the night he had a friendly altercation with Hutchy, or Bob Davis, which finished up with the main caravan window being smashed. It was a bitterly cold night and we froze the long night through, as a result.

The first Kent meeting was an occasion, with a whole host of new faces joining the crusade. My main memory is of Bob Davis getting hot under the collar because Colin Swaden had been 'talking down to him', having recently caught the Longfield forty. The Kent meeting was a watershed in Society affairs because Lee Jackson became one of the regional organisers, and was in the middle of the BCSG/Carp Society 'rivalry'. Peter Mohan hadn't taken kindly to the formation of the new organisation and an 'us or them' directive had gone out, which was largely ignored. That it was ignored by as high profile a figure as Lee, and then by his mate Alan Smith, was the icing on the cake as far as establishing the Society in the South East was concerned.

By the end of 1982 the membership stood at 580, and by the end of 83 at 883. The support for the new organisation was massive, and no praise can be too high for those who, by example, made that support happen. To check out where the Society went from there have a look at the two documents, 'The First Ten Momentous Years', compiled by me in the early 90s, and the 'The Next 10 Momentous Years', compiled by John Seal more recently when we were in the early stages of the legal battle with the deposed directors.

The one regret about those early days is that carp-fishing photography was in its infancy, and there are no photographic records of the inaugural meeting, or those auspicious early regional meetings. They were special occasions with an influence on affairs that extends to this day, largely because of the progress the Society has made in the intervening years, and partly because of the appointment of life members from those who furthered the cause of the Society. That those life-member appointments would later have such significance in terms of the rebirth of the Society – as explained elsewhere – certainly never occurred to us when the life memberships were created. The life members have become special people in the history of the development of the Carp Society twice over!

Tim Paisley, February 2017.

