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**Tim Paisley
in the Carp Room**



A Look Back at the Carp Society through the 1980s

By Tim Paisley

The inaugural meeting of the Carp Society took place at the Kenwood Hotel, Sheffield on 24th May 1981. The organisation was first suggested by Rod Hutchinson to founder Tim Paisley in the late 70s. In early 1981 Tim got together with friend Greg Fletcher. With moral support from George Sharman, and considerable assistance from Rod Hutchinson the launch meeting was called, and was attended by over 100 carp anglers from all over the country.

The inaugural meeting consisted of talks by Chris Yates and Rod Hutchinson, and a committee meeting of interested parties who discussed the Aims and Objectives drawn up by Tim – and assessed them as acceptable for the basis of the new organisation. The Society was up and running. The first officers were President, George Sharman; Chairman, Bob Davis; Treasurer, Greg Fletcher and Secretary Tim Paisley. The initial Society address was Greg Fletcher's flat at 6, Ashland Court, Nether Edge, Sheffield 7.

The initial subscription was £5.00. Membership stood at 20 after the inaugural meeting and there was a steady flow of new members through the first summer. Mike Wilson was at the inaugural meeting and offered to get involved in the running of the new group. The early committee meetings were in Mike's house at High Wycombe, and in Bob Davis's swim on the banks of the Conservative Club at Maple Cross! Initial priorities were the first magazine and the first conference. Mike knew Dave Watson, a long term carp angler involved in print brokering, magazine design etc. and Dave was enlisted to design and produce the first magazine. Dave had actually been involved in the production of BCSG magazines and books in the mid 70s when he lived in Norfolk, and was friendly with Dick Weale and Len Bunn.

The magazine was named Carp Fisher out of deference to BB and his book 'Confessions of a Carp Fisher'. Mike was featured on the front cover with a stunning shot of a Savay fish. This was at a time when the water was first being fished by a syndicate, and was much talked about.

Mike had been fishing it, and involved in running it, as a Ruislip Club member for many years.

The first regional meeting of the Society took place in Gloucestershire in October 1981. It was organised by Roger Vanstone, and the speaker was fifties Redmire angler Eddie Price, who brought all his original tackle along to the meeting. Further regions and regional meetings soon followed Roger's lead.

Carp Fisher was launched at the first Carp Society conference at the Chiltern Hotel, Luton in November 1981. Up to that point specialist group magazines were low key black and white affairs but the impact of Carp Fisher was such that the NASG promptly launched Specialist Angler, and the Carp Anglers' Association responded with Carp Catcher!



Chris Yates caught the record fish the year before the Society started, so his support, and appearance at the inaugural meeting helped the Society on its way

Speakers at the first conference included Fred Wilton, and a panel consisting of Colin Swaden and Peter Springate, among others. The first annual general meeting was held and the initial officers re-elected to continue their positions for a further year.

Carp Fisher and the first conference confirmed the status of the new Society in the eyes of the carp scene and offers of help followed. Structuring the administration was a question of trial and error. The ongoing committee was known as the Steering Committee and included the officers, plus Derek Stritton, Del Romang, Mike Wilson and Dave Watson, among others.

The rally to the cause in the regions was remarkable, with some high profile anglers throwing their names behind the Society. There was real conflict between the upstart Carp Society and the existing CAA and BCSG (or the hierarchy of same to be more precise!) in the early days which made the rapid growth in strength of the Society all the more remarkable. Early regional organisers included Derek Stritton and

Del Romang in Essex (later to be replaced by Mike Kavanagh and Vic Cranfield); Bill Walford and Mark Summers in North Kent (later replaced by Lee Jackson and Alan Smith); Ted Hadaway in South Kent (Ashford); Pete Barker in the North West; Chris Currie in Hampshire; Ken Townley in the South West; Roger Vanstone in Gloucestershire; Jim Fielding and Tim Paisley in Yorkshire; Baz Griffiths in the Midlands; Roger Smith and Bob Jones in Hertfordshire; Clive Diedrich and Malcolm Winkworth in Middlesex; Martin Symonds in Norfolk; Rod Hutchinson and Brian Hankins in Lincolnshire.



Rod Hutchinson fishing Savay the year the Carp Society started.
Picture by fellow Society pioneer Chris Yates

Initially the overall ruling body of the Society was known as the Representative Body, which met twice yearly and consisted of the Steering Committee and the regional organisers. This system had to be quietly ditched when it was discovered that all the deliberations of the steering committee had to be relived at representative body meetings, and the representative body wanted to take decisions that might be based on insufficient knowledge, and not necessarily in the Society's interests. So the Representative body came to make representations to the steering committee for further consideration.

As founder and initial Secretary my early concern was for the future of the Society when the initial impetus was lost. Would democracy actually work? Where would the future officers come from? The concern was soon put to the test when Greg Fletcher made it clear he had had enough as treasurer, and Bob Davis wished to step down as chairman. Essex filled both positions, and it has done so on numerous occasions since.

Paul Gower's is not a name that is strongly associated with the growth of the Society, but his appointment was pivotal as far as the Society's credibility was concerned. One of the major misgivings about the CAA/BCSG organisation was that no accounts were ever forthcoming, so there may have been some initial scepticism that the initial treasurer and secretary of the Society were two friends from Sheffield.

I was fishing Waveney when I first met Paul Gower (from Hanningfield in Essex), and already knew that Greg had had enough. Paul and I got to talking about the Society, and I offered him the post of Treasurer, which he accepted without hesitation! The public-spirited Derek Stritton took over as Chairman from Bob Davis, the changes taking place at the November 1982 AGM held, I think, at the Queensway Hall, Dunstable.

The transition from a number of people getting together to form a group to a democracy starting to work on a national scale had been made, and represented a major step forward in the establishment of the Society's credibility.

Paul Gower burnt himself out in the Society cause. He worked harder than any officer I have known for a year, and brought some much needed order to the Society filing and indexing. Then he in turn retired, handing the treasurer's reins over to Paul Willis, from Paul's neck of the woods. Derek later retired as Chairman, to be replaced by Roger Smith, and the Society continued to make progress in terms of growth and impact.

In the early years steering committee and representative body meetings took place in a succession of meeting places. These included Mike Wilson's house, Albert Romp's pub at Slough, hotels in Dunstable and Luton, a pub at Amphill (the meeting place for some years), and Roger Smith's front room after he became chairman.

Carp Fisher continued to be a success but after the initial effort at the Chiltern Hotel conferences weren't one of the Society's strongest suits. Matching numbers attending and commercial exhibitors' requirements to the available premises has always been a problem, and for some years the Society's conferences didn't rival those staged by the CAA. The Hatfield Polytechnic just off the A1 was the conference venue throughout most of the eighties.



Fred J. Taylor during the period when he was proud to be the Society President

Greg Fletcher took the conference bookings for some years, although the actual arrangements were something of a team effort, initially no one Conference Organiser stamping his ability on this essential area of the Society's affairs. For many years a midday meal was part of the admission price, which made costing and making a profit from these occasions doubly difficult.

One notable first was achieved at a Society conference, and that was the showing of the first carp video! This was the prototype of the Richworth videos compiled by and starring Clive Diedrich and Malcolm Winkworth, and was watched by an enthralled audience packing the hall at the Hatfield Polytechnic, either in late 1982. or early 1983. Actually there were two such film premieres at Hatfield. One year long-time Society supporter Jim Davidson turned up at Hatfield with a film which also first saw the light of day at a Carp Society show.

There was a Society shake-up in the mid-80s. I was still Secretary and Carp Fisher editor. The book Redmire Pool was published in 1984 and the Redmire committee of the time wanted to reply to conduct the interview and arrange for it to be published in Carp Fisher! What a scoop for the Society this represented at the time. Redmire was still very much a closed-shop, fished by a syndicate of ten. I went to Redmire, taped the interview, transferred it onto paper, laid it out for Carp Fisher, then started to get opposition to it appearing in print. I had no idea what was going on! There was clearly opposition to the printing of the interview inside and outside the Society committee. I felt so strongly about it all that I edited that issue of Carp Fisher, then resigned as editor, and as Secretary.



Clive Diedrich at the time he started running Redmire in the Mid 1980s

Baz Griffiths was appointed Secretary, and Dennis Gander, a friend of Bob Jones and Roger Smith, was appointed Editor of the Society magazine.

Dennis was a famous tournament caster on the fringes of the carp scene. He edited two issues of the Society's magazine, which was renamed Carp Fisherman for those two issues, a decision I wasn't party to and never fully understood.

Gradually fresh blood filtered into the Society regional organisation, and onto the steering committee, most significantly Mike Kavanagh and Vic Cranfield, both from Essex. When Baz Griffiths was appointed Secretary he was given the title General Secretary, while Vic Cranfield filled the new position of Membership Secretary. From the mid 80s Vic's address at Covert Road, Hainault was the Society's address.

Dennis Gander gave it his best shot as Editor but his appointment wasn't a success, and I was invited by chairman Roger Smith to resume my position as editor of Carp Fisher – and accepted. The invitation came at a successful Northern Conference held at the Hallam Towers Hotel in Sheffield in May 1986 (to celebrate the Society's fifth anniversary) at which the speakers were Jim Gibbinson, Paul Boote and Roger Smith.

Vic Cranfield's appointment as Membership Secretary proved to be an enlightened one. The Society was growing and the membership record system was still a manual card-index affair. Vic converted the cupboard under his stairs to an office, installed a computer, learnt to use it, and gradually converted the membership index to computer-based.

There was an obvious problem looming for the Society through the mid to late 80s. Vic was actually a chippie by trade, but had become a refuse collector so he could carp fish. Throughout the period he was acting as membership secretary he was off work with back trouble. Up to this point all Society work had been voluntary – with expenses being paid – but the organisation had grown to the point that it was putting too much reliance on the goodwill of unpaid, overworked, voluntary officers. It was getting too big and unwieldy to be run on a voluntary basis.



Les Bamford, pictured on the dam wall with two of the Richardson brothers, took over the running of Redmire in 1988 when the Diedrich Rent-a-Week scheme fell through

The decision to appoint Vic as the first paid Administrator was discussed over a period of time before the step was finally taken. For some time the Society continued to be run from the office under Vic's stairs, but eventually the move was made into more suitable premises in Ilford.

Through the mid-80s the Redmire saga was rumbling on as a background to the Society's affairs. Clive Diedrich's wildly inflated bid took Redmire off the sundicate, which had run since the late sixties, and Clive ran what proved to be an ill-fated Redmire booking scheme.

Les Bamford was appointed Society chairman in 1986. A number of us felt that the Diedrich scheme wasn't viable (didn't stack up financially), and approaches were made to the owners by Les and Len Arbery on the grounds that the Society would be interested in taking over the running of Redmire if the Diedrich scheme fell through.

That happened in the close season of 1988. Clive was unable to raise the rent and Les took on the lease at very short notice. The Society had a Waters Fund, but there were insufficient funds in it to meet the required rent figure, so Les took on the lease, which would be on behalf of the Society while he was chairman and able to oversee the running of the venue.

1988 was an auspicious year for the Society with the appointment of its first paid employee, the running of the Mike Kavanagh-inspired and organised Dick Walker Remembrance Conference at Dunstable, and Les Bamford taking on the Redmire lease on the Society's behalf.

By the end of that year membership stood at an all-time high of 3,260.

To digress somewhat, 1988 was a big year for me personally. I'd packed in work in 1984 in an effort to make it as 'a writer'. It was madness really, although in terms of what artists who eventually make it really big in the real world are concerned having no car for a couple of years was a



The Richard Walker Remembrance trophy was a Society quiz prize in the 80s. In picture, future president Fred J Taylor, Chris Ball, Brian Mills and Len Arbery

minor inconvenience. What I would have done if it hadn't worked out I can't – and couldn't – imagine. In 1988 it started to come together when Carpworld was finally accepted by the magazine trade, and my first two books, Carp Fishing and Carp Season were published. (My first book was actually Carp Amid the Storm, but that book wasn't published in the early 1990s.) Bill Cottam was a tower of strength for me during the years when I had no car and by 1988 our joint venture Nutrabaits was getting into its stride.

Then I got diverted into publishing and Bill had to make other plans with other partners. My life was changing for the better, although the best was still to come. At the end of 1988 Mary Dean joined the company to look after its financial affairs. As life-changing experiences go it proved to be a far-reaching one.

One other event of note from this era and that was the publication of the Society's first book, For the Love of Carp, in 1989. The line-up of contributors read like a Who's Who and Angling at the time, let alone of carp fishing!

By the end of the 1980s the Society was rapidly expanding, and urgently looking to fulfil its long-term ambition of owning carp waters.

The increased workload of the Redmire bookings – handled by Vic Cranfield through the Society office – on top of the administration of a growing membership, plus running the

conferences, plus the half-yearly publishing of Carp Fisher – was putting a strain on the administration and Mike Kavanagh was appointed Commercial Manager, to work in tandem with Vic.



The popular and prolific Horseshoe Lake became the focus of Society dreams as the 1990s started

Horseshoe Lake was a prolific day-ticket water at that time, popular with a number of Society committee members. Word came down the grapevine that Horseshoe was for sale. Moving into the 1990s membership stood at 4,500, and the seemingly impossible dream of the Society actually owning this prolific 68-acre day ticket was born, and pursued.



Historically out of sequence but the only shot I have which includes Vic Cranfield (2nd left), Paul Willis, to Vic's left, and Mike Kavanagh (signing)

More of that and the ups and downs of the Society through the 1990s some other time...