

From left to right: **Chris Fent, Mark Reacord, Steve Bown and Billie, Gary Picken, Stephen Loquens, Charles Deverill, Amber (Fred's dog), Frank Michelangeli, Lewis Webb, Fred Rollins**





{ CLUB FISHING }

# A TASTE OF WORCESTERSHIRE SOURCE

Nestled in the lee of the Lickey Hills, Barnt Green Fishing Club  
offers members quality sport in private surroundings  
once the playground of the rich and famous



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**T**HE MILLS OF REDDITCH and Studley, just south of Birmingham, were at the heart of Britain's manufacturing revolution during the early 20th century. Famous for its needle-making industry, the area also has a rich history of producing fishing tackle and was once the home of Allcock, Partridge and Shakespeare. The mills required water to drive them and the reservoirs of Upper and Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub were built in 1833 to supply the Birmingham and Worcester canal system and the nearby works. These reservoirs gave life to the River Arrow and Barnt Green Fishing Club (BGFC), yet had the railways and steam that replaced water as the primary source of power arrived four or five years earlier, the reservoirs and the BGFC would never have existed.

Founded in 1883, BGFC was created by a small number of wealthy industrialists for their own recreation and kept under the radar. Even today, the club remains constitutionally bound to 56 full members, although it is looking to expand its membership with 14 associate members.

Club membership secretary Steve Bown said,

"The club used to be closed and secretive. You could not get a membership without an invitation and an interview prior to being accepted, which was never a given. Times and the sport have changed and our newly appointed committee is looking at all aspects of how we can improve as a club. This will include expanding the membership, more frequent stocking and better facilities, supported by the additional funds."

Despite its industrial past, the club's trout waters, 23-acre Lower Bittell Reservoir, five-acre Mill Shrub Lake and one-acre Upper Arrow Pool, all sit in the tranquil Barnt Green Waters Estate, a designated 178-acre Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). On joining, members are given a key to access the estate, where they may come and go as they please.

"We are a friendly club and our rules are sensible, but we expect members to behave in an appropriate manner," said Steve. "Members can fish up to four times a week, with a catch limit of ten fish per visit, of which a brace can be kept. There is a requested maximum of 50 fish taken per year."

In addition to trout fishing, membership gives access to excellent coarse fishing on the 80-acre Upper Bittall reservoir and one-acre Lower Arrow

Lewis Webb fishes Upper Arrow pool with help from more experienced members. The coloured water was a result of Storm Darragh



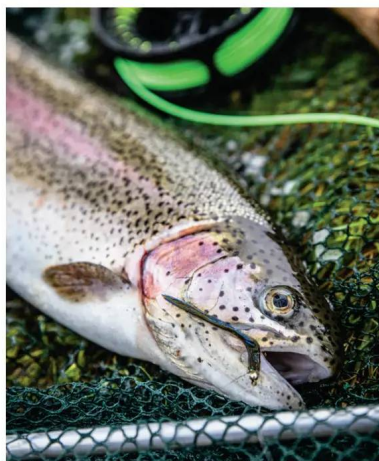




Members meet at the Lower Bittell hut before heading for the boats

Pool, which with those lakes previously mentioned form the largest area of open water in Worcestershire. Many members are all-round anglers who fish for whatever species suits the weather and time of year. In fact, former members include legendary 1980s coarse match angler Kenny Giles, who became a fine fly-fisherman in his latter years and holds the fishery record with a trout weighing more than 16lb.

Besides fishing, members can access the estate to simply relax and enjoy nature, with families and well-controlled dogs welcome. The reservoirs are nationally important sites for over-wintering wildfowl as well as many other bird and wildlife species. Rare breed English Longhorn cattle graze around Upper Bittall Reservoir on grasses and wild shrubs, and they ➤



Left: A nice rainbow from Upper Arrow Pool.



Right: An ingenious roller fly-box, courtesy of member Charles Deverill

## BANKSIDE VIEW



*“The club is very inclusive and full of like-minded people. The nature is spectacular and the regular stocking keeps the sport fresh year round.”*

Gary Picken, BGFC fishery officer



*“I’ve been a member for nine months. I’d only done a little trout fishing before I joined, but the members have welcomed me with open arms. It’s great value for money.”*

Lewis Webb



*“When I first visited the lakes, I thought ‘Yes, this is just what I’m looking for.’ Mill Shrub is just heaven and my granddaughter Willow is very keen to fish it with me.”*

Stephen Loquens





Steve Bown lands a winter rainbow trout from Lower Bittell

*“They will be introduced in smaller, more frequent stockings, with the goal of maintaining consistent sport”*

naturally fertilise the ground. There is also a sailing club with which the anglers share a clubhouse and bar.

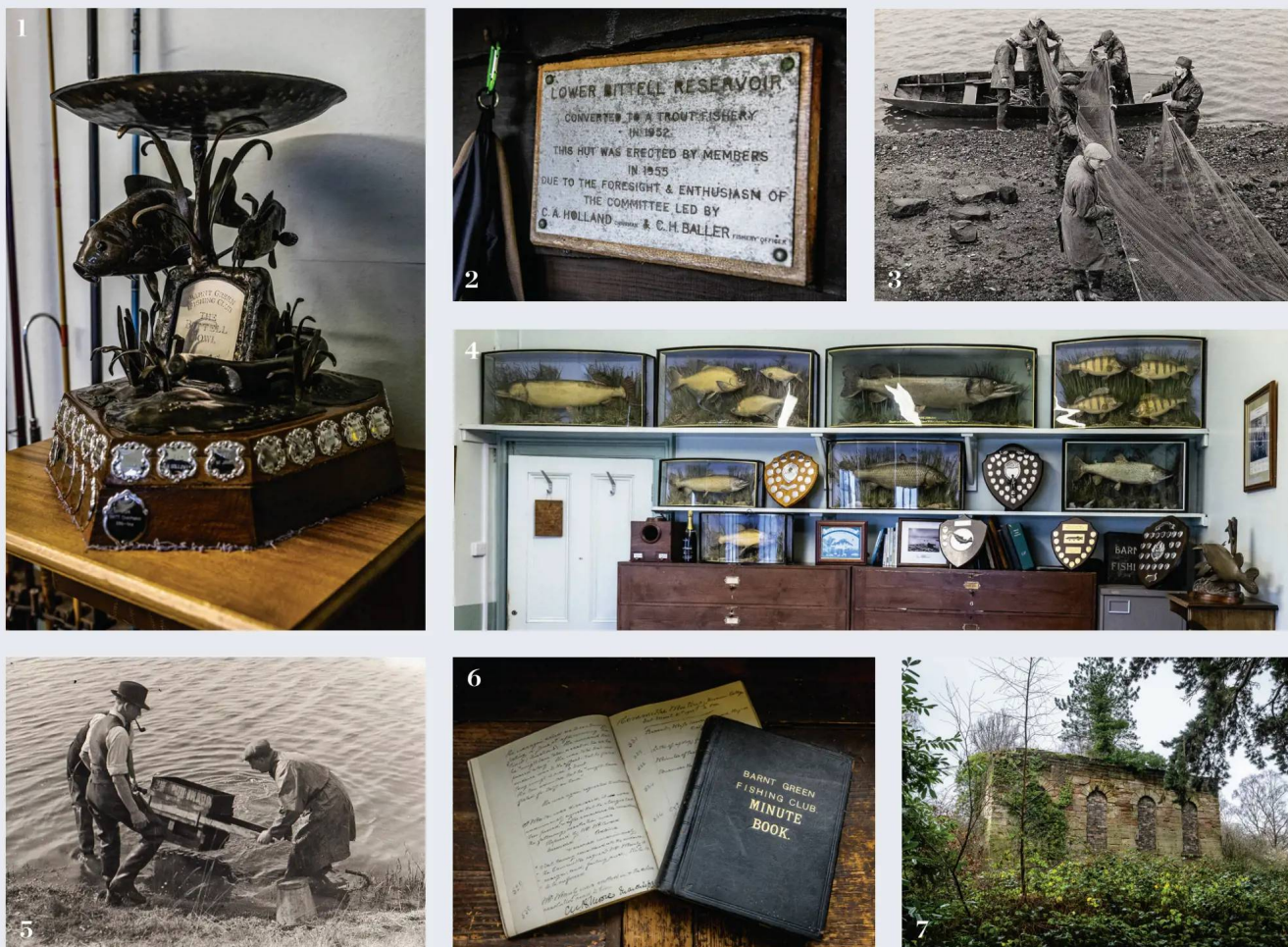
Early stocking records show that fish were raised on the estate as early as 1889 and stocked into its reservoirs and pools. The coming year’s stocking policy is for around 3,000 rainbow trout averaging 2lb-5lb, including the occasional bigger fish. They will be introduced in smaller, more frequent stockings, with the goal of maintaining consistent sport on all three fly waters throughout the year. Following a successful application to Natural England, the club is now able to stock sparcctic and tiger trout into Upper Arrow Pool, giving members even more variety. As with most stocked waters, the fishing can initially be easy and members are asked to give the fish time to settle, although fishing is always available on one of the lakes. The fish quickly disperse with no favoured areas other than the deeper water on bright days and the windward bank following a good blow.

In 2023, the club installed sonic probes on the larger trout waters to disperse water-borne algae and improve water clarity. It also invested in a solar aeration system on Lower Bittell that ensures an oxygen-rich environment, protecting stocks in the ➤

Billie, the apple of Steve's eye and source of the Billie Bob Booby







1. The wonderfully modelled Bittell Bowl Trophy. 2. A commemorative plaque on Lower Bittell hut. 3. Netting coarse fish from Lower Bittell Reservoir in January 1954. 4. Cased fish caught from BGFC waters. 5. Stocking trout into Lower Bittell, 1954. 6. Club record books. 7. The old engine shed that once housed the steam pump used to move water between the lakes

## A POTTED HISTORY

Upper and Lower Bittell reservoirs, Cofton Lake and the Arrow Pools, including the canal arm, known as Jacobs' Cut, were originally part of the Windsor family, Earl of Plymouth's Hywell Grange Estate.

One of the country's premier sporting estates, it was visited by many prominent guests, including prime minister Lord Salisbury, speaker of the House of Commons Sir Charles Manners-Sutton and Prince Arthur, the 1st Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, third son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

The land was leased (for 99 years) from the estate by the Sharpness New Docks and Gloucester and Birmingham Navigation Company, the predecessor of today's Canal and River Trust. Thankfully, the 1st Earl, Robert Windsor-Clive, and his trustees of that time had the foresight to exclude the sporting rights on the land. This allowed Mr M. Milward, part of the prominent needle-making dynasty, Henry Milward & Sons, Redditch, also owners of Milward's Fishing Tackle Company 1730-1965, to purchase the fishing and shooting rights, along with other industrialist friends of the then Earl, and found Barnt Green Fishing Club in 1883.

The formation of the Sailing Club on Upper Bittell followed in 1911; both originally private members clubs with new members having to be invited to join. The fishing club had rules informing members that there should be no 'advertising of their membership or catches if they wish to retain their membership', a rule that stood until it was rescinded in the 1980s.

In 1920, a limited company, Barnt Green Waters Ltd, was formed to manage the estate with a membership of 56 full members in each of the clubs. Cofton Reservoir was sold in 1950.

Lower Bittell's 23 acres became the estate's major trout water in 1952, with larger Upper Bittell remaining a mixed fishery with a large head of bream, roach and pike.

In 1985, the estate became a designated SSSI, with the Friends of Bittell, a group of passionate individuals interested in preserving the estate's environment, created in 2018. As of 2023, the company (Barnt Green Waters Ltd) entered a new five-year Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England to assist with the maintenance of the SSSI.





**BGFC's most recent member Chris Fent shares flies with his fellow club mates**



**Former chairman and club historian Charles Deverill**



warmer months. Future plans include the planting of reedbeds at the lake's inlet, which will act as a natural bio-filter, creating a balance of water clarity and weed growth. With good water quality comes excellent hatches of aquatic and terrestrial insects; larger fly patterns, such as damsels and daddies, are often successful. Owing to the age of the lakes and their long-established silt beds, buzzer fishing can be exceptional. Teams of Buzzers straight-lined or on a

*“A solar aeration system on Lower Bittell ensures an oxygen-rich environment”*







Is that dinner, Dad?

washing line can be deadly, while good catches on dry-fly are also common. Excellent sport can be had on summer evenings when large falls of olive spinners encourage the trout to rise into dark.

Five- to seven-weight rods are the most popular with members, and floating and midge-tip lines are preferred for all but the deepest areas. Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub can be fished from the boat or bank, while the spring-fed Upper Arrow Pool is compact enough to be covered solely from the bank. Boats with oars are available on both waters; these have recently been fitted with automatic draining systems to stop members having to waste valuable fishing time bailing them out. Should new members be unsure about boat fishing, one of the established members will always be happy to help out.

Lower www has a refurbished fishing hut and there are plans to build another on Mill Shrub within the next year. Testament to the estate's long history, full-time bailiff and gamekeeper Fred Rollins is the fifth ➤

Tucking into Warwicks Butchers excellent produce in the club's historic committee room



## MEMBERS' FLIES



Charles Chaser by Charles Deverill



The Copper John by Lewis Webb



The Billie Bob Booby (tied with a wing of Billie's hair) by Steve Bown



Member Mark Reacord puts out  
a good line on Lower Bittell



*“It has an enthusiastic committee and members are keen to look to the future”*



Estate bailiff  
Fred Rollins

generation of his family employed on what was originally the Hywell Estate prior to the construction of the reservoirs.

While the club embraces its history and traditional values, it has an enthusiastic committee and members are keen to look to the future. This year, it has instigated the use of online software such as Clubmate to administer the membership, which it plans to extend to enable the payment of guest tickets and membership fees. Members are now kept informed via email and a members-only Facebook page where general discussion, news and club events are shared.

Steve said, “We have recently launched a suggestions scheme where all members can have their say and provide ideas to improve things for the future. There’s a very positive feel about the way the club is now being run, with many longstanding members saying they have never felt so engaged.” ■

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** RICHARD FAULKS

### Factfile

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Email: [barntgreenfishingclub@gmail.com](mailto:barntgreenfishingclub@gmail.com)

Web: [barntgreenwaters.co.uk/barnt-green-fishing-club](http://barntgreenwaters.co.uk/barnt-green-fishing-club)

#### JOINING THE CLUB

Annual fees for Barnt Green Fishing Club are £599 per year with a share option of £100 taken by Full Members in the first year. Full Members have access to all five lakes and can fish up to four times a week, year round. Trout catch limit is ten fish per visit, two can be kept, up to a maximum of 50 per year. The Associate Members fee and fishing is the same as the Full Members, but without the £100 share option. A link to the BGFC Membership Enquiry Form can be found on the club website.

All members can bring their children to fish under instruction free of charge. The club secretary is looking into establishing a safeguarding policy so that they can run more events for children to encourage them into the sport. There are various club events throughout the year including The Bittell Bowl coarse match, Tony Solloway Memorial Pike Trophy and the annual Trout Trophy where the winner is the first to catch the ten-fish limit. These are communicated to members via the club's Facebook page.

Boats on Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub are on a first come, first served basis and are equipped with oars and an anchor. Electric outboards are allowed and there is a solar charging facility for leisure batteries in the Lower Bittell fishing hut. Members are required to provide their own lifejackets.

#### POPULAR LOCAL HOTELS AND PUBS

The Barnt Green Inn: [barntgreeninn.co.uk](http://barntgreeninn.co.uk)

Coach and Horses Inn at Weatheroak Hill:  
[coachandhorsesinn.co.uk](http://coachandhorsesinn.co.uk)

The Crown Inn at Alvechurch:  
[thecrowninnalvechurch.co.uk](http://thecrowninnalvechurch.co.uk)

Alongside its award-winning meats, Warwicks Butchers in Barnt Green also does a fine selection of pies, burgers, sausage rolls and scotch eggs.

