

A Brief History of the Salmon Fly

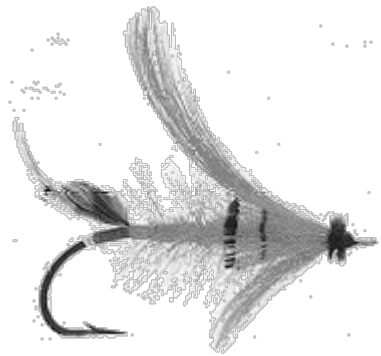
It is not my intention to go into a great amount of detail in regards to the history of the Classic Salmon Fly. It is however my intention to introduce the newcomer to the art of tying classic salmon flies with some of its origins in history. In the section on "Past Tiers" we will look at some of the old masters that had the greatest impact on the subject.

The history of the salmon fly, like all flies, has its origins rooted in the flies and lures of ancient times. Stone carvings in Egypt show fishing was being done with a pole and crude reels before the birth of Christ. The first flies used for fishing were made with feathers or wool tied first on pieces of bone or wood. It wasn't until the fifteenth century that iron hooks were first introduced in the British Isles. In the 1700s what we today call "Classic Salmon Flies" began to take shape. It wasn't until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that most of the well known classics were introduced and written about by such authors and George M. Kelson, Dr. T.E. Pryce-Tannatt and Francis Francis.

It was during this time that England was a great colonial power and had its subjects in areas through out the world. From locations like India, South America and Africa came the many exotic birds that fed the appetite for the fashion industry of the Victorian Age which eventually found their way onto a salmon hook. Birds such as the Florican Bustard, Speckled Bustard, Golden Pheasant, Chatterer, Cock-of-the-Rock, Toucan, Macaw and Jungle Cock were all relatively easy to obtain during this time and all were to become an important part of the classically dressed salmon fly.

Not all salmon flies we regard as classics today had their origins in England but it was the British that wrote most of the definitive literature we have today on the subject of classic salmon flies. It is for this reason when one talks about classic salmon flies one always thinks of the old British masters. Authors such as Captain Richard Franck in his book *Northern Memoirs* (1694) first suggested using silver tinsel for bodies. William Blacker's book, *Art of Fly Making* (1855) described many flies and how to build them. Flies such as the Ballyshannon seem to come to life between its covers.

Many times different authors describe the same flies with slightly different dressings which can lead to some confusion as to the original dressing the fly first used. Flies such as The Colonel could be found described by authors such as Francis Francis, W. Earl Hodson and George M. Kelson in their books, all of which had slightly different dressings. Some flies such as the Parson series, designed originally by Pat McKay, were beautiful in their simplicity. However, later versions of the Parson series of flies by tiers such as William Larket and Michael Rogan are similar to the original only in name. One major difference in Mr. Rogan's version of the Parson was that he used seven or eight toppings as the main part of the wing and they were tied in such a way as to make them curve up from the tie in point, in other words concave side up.



All this might sound confusing to the novice trying to learn a little of the history of salmon fly tying. To me it only means that even the old masters could look at the same fly and see it tied differently. Today with all the modern materials we have you are seeing more and more versions of some of the old classics. In my heart I truly believe if Major Grant could see the many ways his creation, The Green Highlander, was being tied today he would be pleased.