

R.B.M. Gem Series of Salmon Flies

Robert Bright Marston was owner and editor of The Fishing Gazette for the last quarter of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th. The son of a publisher and founder of The Flyfishers' Club of London, Marston was part of the fly fishing elite of his era. Along with his contemporaries, who included Halford, Skues and Kelson, he had a huge influence on the development of fly fishing as we know it today.

One of Mr Marston's ideas, from the 1890s, was the use of celluloid, or xylonite as he then called it, for the bodies of flies. He, to quote one of our esteemed fly tying experts, '*considered the advantages of this material to be, first, that it was made in very thin sheets in every possible colour, and that as the colour was added when the material was in liquid form, it was permanent. Second, that it was very tough and pliable, and was not affected by being wet, unlike silk or wool. Third, that it could be cut into very thin strips and wound on in the same way as other materials such as quill. Fourth, he thought it could be used as wings for flies such as midges and stone flies, as well as for coloured tags. Fifth, because the specific gravity of celluloid is only a little more than that of water, flies made with it floated well and dried quickly.*'

He tried it himself, liked the result and in 1899 asked professional fly tier Mrs Richardson of Kingston upon Thames to tie some patterns for him.

In March of 1900 he applied for Patent 4119 which was accepted in December of that year -

N° 4119



A.D. 1900

Date of Application, 3rd Mar., 1900
Complete Specification Left, 23rd Nov., 1900—Accepted, 31st Dec., 1900

PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION.

Improvements in Artificial Flies.

I, ROBERT BRIGHT MARSTON, of St. Dunstan's House, Fetter Lane, London, E.C., Publisher and Journalist, do hereby declare the nature of this invention to be as follows:—

This invention relates to improvements in artificial flies, and is designed primarily with the object of providing an artificial fly for angling purposes, which shall not be affected by moisture; will float well, dry quickly and be non-absorbent, while furthermore, with the material which I employ in making the artificial flies in accordance with this invention, any species of fly can be accurately reproduced, no matter what shade of colour or degree of transparency is necessary in the perfect attainment of such reproduction.

5 In accordance with this invention employ strips of thin celluloid or xylonite, preferably of high transparency, which strips, (which may be of any desired width) in making the body of a fly, are wound on in the same manner that the strips of quill are at present employed for this purpose.

10 If desirable these celluloid or xylonite strips may be wrapped around the fish-hook and over a suitable coloured foundation.

The ends of the aforesaid celluloid or xylonite strips are tied down neatly and each preferably cut to a blunt point and shaved thinner than the rest of the strips.

15 In applying my invention to the making of wings and tags for artificial flies, I form such wings and tags of pieces of transparent celluloid or xylonite shaped and coloured as found desirable or convenient.

20 In addition to forming an effective substitute for dyed gut, fish scales and similar materials or substances heretofore employed in the making of the bodies and wings of artificial flies, experiments have shown that perfectly transparent glass-like, very thin celluloid or xylonite can be employed to great advantage as an external covering and protection for bodies of flies, covered with gold and silver leaf.

Dated this 3rd day of March 1900.

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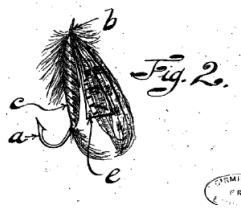
HUGHES & YOUNG,

55 & 56, Chancery Lane, London, W.C., Agents.

The premise was to use celluloid in the creation of 'an artificial fly for angling purposes which shall not be affected by moisture, will float well, dry quickly and be non-absorbent ...'

and

'Artificial flies. - The body c is made of a strip of celluloid, tapered towards one end, which is wound around the shank on any suitable foundation. The wings and tags e may also be formed of celluloid, coloured or not.'



To again quote fly tying expert friend - *'In the early 1900's Marston gave the production of these flies to Allcocks, who sold them as "Marston's celluloid-bodied flies". They appear to have tied generally fairly standard patterns, with suitably coloured celluloid bodies. Marston was not, however, happy that Allcocks were doing a good enough job, and in 1912 he moved production to his friend Percy Wadham's Dreadnought Casting Reel Co. on the Isle of Wight. The same year, 1912, a new series of flies, called "The R.B.M. Series of Salmon and Sea Trout Flies" was introduced. They were described as having "the new Fishing Gazette Metallic Celluloid Bodies", and there were twelve patterns; the material was noted as being "more brilliant than silk", "just as iridescent whether wet or dry", "untarnishable and translucent, and so reflecting light better than silk", and it was claimed that the bodies were better wearing than silk ones. Wadham's firm also offered to tie, with celluloid bodies, almost any other pattern of salmon or sea trout fly, as they could manufacture the material in almost any colour or shade, including eight shades of gold, which was claimed to be "much richer in appearance than ordinary gilt tinsel, and absolutely untarnishable"*

In 1892 Marston had published Captain J.H. Hale's book on salmon dressings. The second edition, delayed by WW1 and published in 1919, included the 344 dressings from J. J. Hardy's 1907 "Salmon Fishing", Hardy's "Scott Series" and the dressings for the "R.B.M. Series of Gem Salmon Flies", with reference to The Dreadnought Casting Reel Co. The twelve flies, as originally introduced in 1912, were called the Amethyst, Cat's Eye, Cornelian, Crysoberyl, Emerald, Garnet, Opal, Pearl, Ruby, Sapphire, Turquoise, and Yellow Diamond.

Many years ago a good friend in Canada and I bought the remains of a fishing tackle collection from the great grand-daughter of Sir George Drummond of Montreal. Sir George was a Scottish-Canadian businessman, senator and VP of the Bank of Montreal. He and subsequent members of his family were all keen fly anglers, fishing regularly in the U.K. Canada and the U.S.

All the fishing kit we bought was of top quality. Much of it had been bought in the UK, most likely from Hardys and Farlows in London. Amongst this kit was a Farlow's black japanned reservoir containing many gut eyed salmon flies.



In early 2017 I asked fly tying friends if they could identify some of the flies in the box. One recognised that the box contained many original examples of the 'Gem Salmon Flies'. (These are not flies which regularly appear at auction, or anywhere.)

After much discussion and examination we put together two full sets of the Gem series. One set has, appropriately given the founder, gone to The Flyfishers' Club' and I'm lucky enough to still have the second one.

