

The Tackle Fair.

All the regulars were there - the reprobates, the cheats and the nice guys. Some with deep pockets and short arms; others with deep pockets, long arms and fat wallets.

The tweed wearers; and assorted silly hats. The loud, braying types, and the bitter old hands. The genuine collector and the new seeker mingled.

They pick up and examine every reel, looking for cracks ... and who knows what?

Occasional bursts of joviality, reserved for friends who we see maybe twice a year. Eyes that don't meet because of some long ago disputed transaction.

Some of the traders are trying to earn a little extra, to supplement their pension, or unemployment benefit. Others are after bigger fish.

Known fakers and cheats wander around pretending to be everyone's friend.

They display a brazenness normally reserved for MPs and TV's lowest level of scum.

Yet, the symbiosis of some of these relationships would, if common knowledge, stop anyone getting into vintage tackle collecting. The trade needs the classic reels. The auction houses need the collectors, and the dealers. The dealers, in turn, need decent stock, and punters. Collectors need to feed their addiction.

The fakers need money, and, oddly, the recognition of their peers. They usually sneer at the world from internet forums, revelling in skills which any first year old style engineering apprentice should be capable of. One well-known faker has turned a once respected forum into his personal blog. The fairs are their excuse to pop out of their dark forgery shops to make their public appearances.

An old friend once said of one of the better known cheats - *"It's best to take an instant dislike to him, it saves time later"*

Like everyone else I wander around, almost aimlessly. Stopping, looking, occasionally picking up, then rejecting, offerings with wildly exaggerated price tags. I politely exchange pleasantries with stallholders.

I arrive at an interesting stall with a cross section of angling paraphernalia. We've chatted at other locations. We shake hands. Weather, trade, politics and the roads are all discussed at some length. He bends down and produces a small bag. The lid opens to reveal maybe eight compartments. He pulls out a shiny reel.

"What do you think of this?"

I dismantle a Hardy Bougle. It has 1904 check-work and a nicely worn finish, almost like an original. I re-assemble it and hand it back. He then hands over a delicate little all brass Perfect. It is probably 2 1/2" diameter, and sweet to hold ~ if correct it would be one of the "must have" reels. I caress it, turn it over a couple of times, not daring to open it for fear of brass balls all over the floor. I hand it back saying *"Nice"*.

At no stage does he say that any of the reels are anything other than reels. There is no pretence that these are original, or not. The scam relies on the greedy punter adding 2 and 2 and getting £5000. I didn't bite, knowing full well what I was handling and who had probably produced it – others aren't so lucky.

Caveat emptor