

Frank Hynes is a resident of Eyre Street in Galway and a long-standing member of the Commercial Boat Club in Galway city. He was interviewed for a Commercial club newsletter in 2003 and was happy to have that article reproduced for the Federation website. So here it is...

On the evening of Sunday 21st July 2002, the celebration of the Mixed Grill competition was winding down in the Commercial Boat Club bar. Frank Hynes, as is his habit, landed quietly by the slipway. He then laid three beautiful trout on the quay, taken in a rise off the islands about half-past six. Frank is one of the quiet fishermen of the club, but clearly there was something to be learned from him. He agreed to talk.

When did you start fishing the lake?

Nineteen forty-two, with my grandfather Martin Hynes. He started on the lake around 1920 – he came to Galway in 1889. My mother's grandfather was Michael Kinneavey who was born on Inchagoill. They built boats and you can still see the ruins of the house beside the graveyard, and the remains of the old steam boiler they used to work the saw. My grandfather Martin Hynes died in the early 1950s and then I was only allowed up the lake with Jack O'Toole, Michael O'Toole and Mike McGreil. They were the ones who used to go up with him. Two men would row with a pair of oars each. My grandfather rowed up to the age of 95, the year before he died. He was a strict man and wouldn't allow you to stand up in the boat: "sit down you humbug!"

I could name nearly everyone who fished the lower lake in the '40s. From the Commercial: John O'Connell; Tommy Courtney; Tommy Morris; Dicky Burke; Mr Fahy; Martin Hynes. From the Galway Rowing Club were Paddy Hickey; Con Hickey; "Kruger" Moloney; Mr Shaughnessy; Archie Moloney. From the Corrib Club: Mick O'Donnell; Connie Fleming; Percy Kelly. Bertie, Jack, and Michael O'Toole used to keep a boat across on the Dangan side around where the new bridge is now. There were three characters called the "three wise men" who used to go out together: McHugh, Rycroft, and Condon. I'm sure I must have left some others out, so I apologise for the omissions. Kevin Folan in the club is possibly the oldest now who fished back then, with his brothers, Paddy especially.

They were times when people didn't have much. You had just enough to live on. People in the

country had nothing either but they could keep hens and a garden. In town you had to buy everything.

It was all coarse fishing then: pike and perch. It'd be a big thing if you caught a trout. People used big spoons: Wagtails, Phantoms and Kidney spoons. Fellas like Paddy O'Toole will know what I am talking about.

In the 1940s there were only two private boats in the Commercial, one my grandfather's. There were a lot of club boats: maybe 27 or 28 "randans", two fishing boats and one yacht. In the club rules were very strict. Junior members weren't allowed keys or to take a boat out unless a parent was with them.

My grandfather's boat was the first boat I owned. I inherited it from him. It was built in the 1920s by a man called Walsh in Galway and cost £7-0-0. My second boat I bought from Con hickey in 1952, and that cost £32. In 1964 I bought a boat from Frank Kavanagh and Hickey who were in Co. at the time, which cost £84. The last boat I got a couple of years ago for £1550, a 17-foot Burke boat.

After the war a lot more people took up the lake. The first engine in the club belonged to John O'Connell, Maurice O'Connell's father who was from Woodquay like many I've named above. It was a Scott Atwater engine and that was after the war, 1947 or 8 or 9.

John O'Connell was one of the few fishing for trout then. He used to dap in Moycullen Bay. He used also go to the upper lake. He'd get the loan of a club boat and it would be brought up to Cornamona in the back of a turf lorry for a few weeks. Percy Kelly fished for trout too. He was a great caster and he was casting for trout on the lower lake when no-one else was doing it.



You said your grandfather owned the first hut on Hurney's.

He did. It was an old Connemara bus from the '20s and '30s. He bought it from the Galway Omnibus Company, or maybe it was the Post Office, and did it up and put it on the point. A few of them got it out there, I don't know if it was by land or by water. Mr. O'Leary from Forster St. and Mr. Mulvea were two of them. There's a picture in the club of them and my grandfather putting out fingerling trout under the auspices of the Galway and Corrib Anglers' Association. The name was "Anglers Rest". The people from the village of Clooniff used come into the hut chatting with my grandfather and it was all in Irish. I'd be sent outside and they would be in there gabbing away. Now if you are at the Braithreacht hut there is a cypress tree down from it where that old hut used to be. If you go under the bushes there you can see some of the foundation and the steps up to it. Some of the hut ended up making repairs to Hurney's glasshouse after Hurricane Debby in 1962. I've a hut of my own up at Hurney's now and I spend a lot of time there.

Hurney's is an island of course; you have to cross a bridge to it. The right name is Annagh Island and it's the biggest island on the lower lake, bigger than Fly. It used to be a great place for people going up and having picnics – bring all the family up for a day out. Maybe it's my imagination but we seemed to have better days in the summer that time. The Hurneys were very good to the anglers. Mr. Pat Hurney was there when we went up first. His son and family were very good to the anglers too. His son John, some years before his death contacted Braithreacht na Coiribe and said we'll have to fix up that bit of property where the hut is. So the Braithreacht paid for the solicitor and so on and the title and right of way to the Braithreacht hut were sorted out properly.

Back in the Commercial club:

People did a lot of work in those days. The shed with the lockers was all built by members. Some put up casing during the day, and other fellows came in the evening after work and mixed concrete with shovels and packed it into the casing. A lot of members took part in that. Larry Elwood had a lot to do with it. He and a man called Glynn, a taxi driver, put up casing. Dick Connor put up the roof with the help of members. He was an old man even at that time.

The ash tree was protected when all that building was going on. It was a sapling when I was a boy. It should never have been knocked down.

When did people get interested in fishing for trout?

When the Braithreacht na Coiribe was founded, and that was in 1953 - I'm a founder member. It was founded for the Lower Lake, for upkeep and stocking. They'd bring fingerling trout to Hurney's and thirteen or fourteen boats might go up and put them out all along the shallows. I think the stocking helped trout, and I think when the bottom of the Clare river was drained a lot of fish came out into the lake.

From 1953-54 the Braithreacht hut was built on Hurney's. I remember going up with Pop Flaherty on the engine, Joe Lardner in the bow and me on top of blocks, sand and cement with the boat loaded to a few inches from the water.

The Braithreacht were really dedicated to the lower lake. It was a really strong bonding, a brotherhood of men together, like the name says. Outstanding men, I think. At first they held their events on the Lower Lake, then extended up to Annaghdown. Now they have a competition out of Greenfields. I know they look on it differently now, but I'd like them to stick to the Lower Lake.

And where used people fish the Lower Lake?

Hag's walk to the Cut, off Muckrish, Fly, Hurney's. During the dap Muckrish was alive with fish. When the trees at Muckrish were cut and the scrub was cleared the Mayfly went. I suppose if they had to go further in to find bushes they could come back to the lake anywhere.

Tell me about your fishing now.

I fish strictly for trout. I troll and I dap. I love trolling although the casters disagree with it, it's a different form of fishing. I say casting is just walloping the water! To be fair, casting is an art in itself. Percy Kelly and Malachy Hanley used to cast on the lower lake and I admired them for it. But I didn't agree with the Braithreacht when they stopped trolling in competitions.

The buzzer fishing is a lazy man's way of casting. Look at the Upper Lake, every shoreline is full of boats. If they all go on buzzer fishing they will decimate the trout.

The deep fishing for big trout should definitely stop. Those fish are a special breed and there

aren't too many of them. Fishing deep with dead bait should be out. If you get one to come up to a fly, well and good – you deserve him.

Any special flies?

I take any fly as it comes. I think it's all pot luck. When there's a rise of a particular type of fly they'll go for that. But otherwise you could fish two sets of flies, and one day the old-fashioned flies will catch trout and the next day the new flies will work. I believe that trout like to eat, if they're hungry they'll eat anything, and you'll get them feeding at some time of the day. Evening time is great after the dap.

I make up flies myself. I made one up called the Moorhen. It has a black body, a black head hackle, red head and a white tag. They are the same colours as the bird. I put a gold rib on it. I have to be honest, I hooked a lot of small trout with it but no big one. I did get good trout with another simple fly: black body, a piece of white wool tied along the top to give it a white back, ribbed with black thread and with a black head hackle.

What changes have you seen?

The lake has got dirty. When I go up I bring water with me to drink. I remember a time when you could fish all along the Anglingham side of the Cut all year. Now you couldn't even row around it with the weed. Look at the stones at Hurney's and Fly. If you take up a stone below the water line and scrape it you'll see the scum. There was a biologist twenty years ago and he warned us in the Braithreacht that if we didn't take on what was happening the lake would be destroyed.

What was your best fish ever?

The biggest was a 25 pound pike. The best trout was 6lbs 1oz. I caught him dapping Mayfly out from the monument at the point of Lime. He frightened me he came up so fast at it, up out of the deep.

Last words.

The Lower Lake. I could go up the lake easily because I have plenty of cousins in Oughterard. There isn't the same stock of trout down here or the same beauty with the mountains, but I love it. When you're born to it you can't get it out of you.

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