

## THE TRUE ORIGINAL JOCK SCOTT - ALL THREE OF THEM.

By J. David Zincavage

The article entitled "The Original Jock Scott" by the late Colonel Joseph D. Bates, Jr., published in the Fall 1990 issue of THE AMERICAN FLY FISHER, develops a theory that Lord John Scott's eponymous gillie dressed the original version of the most famous of all salmon flies using the Titian-colored hair of his employer's wife for the rear portion of the body. The article proceeds to assert that as the fly became known publicly, commercial tyers first dressed the rear portion of the body with orange silk, attempting to match as closely as possible the hue of the original dressing.

Colonel Bates reached this conclusion on the evidence of a "booklet" or "publication" by R.T. Simpson, "Collection of 'Wroth Silver'", dated 1884. The Welsh salmon fly tyer and aficionado Brian Fabbeni, we are told, discovered this booklet, and xeroxed "pages" from it. The reader conjectures that "Wroth Silver" was perhaps the name of an estate belonging to Lord John Scott, although, because of the brevity of the description given, he is left wondering uneasily whether the booklet might really primarily describe a number of platters and serving pieces once owned by the Scott family.

Despite the mention of xeroxed pages, we are given only a brief paragraph:

"Lady John [n,e Alicia Anne Spottiswoode] at the time of her marriage (1836) was a noted beauty, and had glorious Titian hair, from a strand of which on one occasion a salmon fly was made, now celebrated among fishermen under the name of 'Jock Scott' fly, an enlarged model of which was presented by the writer to the Reading Room at Dunchurch, given by her Ladyship while resident at Cawston (near Rugby)."

The paragraph quoted gives no indication whatever what part in the dressing of the famous pattern the "strand" of Lady John Scott's Titian-colored hair was supposed to have played. A woman's hair could be wound around the hook to form the body of a fly, or a portion thereof, but the construction of a such a body would have been most unusual

then, as it would still be now. It would seem more natural to suppose that some of the Lady's hair might have been used for the wing, if one were inclined to believe the story of its use at all. A few early precedents for the use of hair in the wings of salmon flies \_can\_ be found: e.g. the famous fly-tyer and pattern inventor James Wright, of Sprouston, used some yellow hairs from a customer's pet in the wing of a pattern known as The Minister's Dog, also called The Garry (Yellow) Dog.

Bates notes correctly that Kelson's famous Little Inky Boy had a body made of wound hair. The Inky Boy however was tied with a body constructed of hairs from a horse's tail. Horse hair is considerably thicker in diameter than human hair, and is therefore far easier to work with, and a much more logical choice for a body material. It should be observed also, that this use of horse hair by Kelson in the Inky Boy was among the innovations in which Kelson took the greatest pride, and that the Little Inky Boy was certainly invented many years after the Jock Scott.

Infatuated with his theory, Bates writes:

"I studied a few dozen Jock Scotts dressed during the last half of the past century and found that in a few of the earlier ones, the rear half of the body was orange, or more so than yellow. In them, there was no evidence of hair, which may indicate that this original phase in the fly's development was very short-lived. But the presence of the orange body seems to confirm the truth of Lady [John] Scott's part in the fly's history."

I am skeptical that the late Colonel Bates could, or that anyone living can, with any great accuracy "date" salmon flies to "the last half of the last century", or even more discriminate "the earlier ones" out of such a group. Steeled-eyed flies were in use by the middle of the Nineteenth Century; gut-eyes retained the favor of some anglers and continued to be tied until just before World War II. A pattern dressed with the same materials tied in 1925, though only 66 years old, may be gut-eyed and bleached and stained by the elements, and can look older than an unused or little-used fly tied 50 years before. Why should it not? It could easily have been tied using precisely the same materials and the same techniques of tying out of the same recipe book on the same hook! The hook is always the best

clue as to a fly's age, but we must remember that large supplies of fly-tying material including hooks can be saved for decades and passed down to other generations. There are individuals today who tie salmon flies with authentic materials of hooks over a hundred years old. If any of these flies were subjected to immersion in water, and the teeth of fish, in a very short time, they would be indistinguishable from ancient examples.

I own and still use for fishing a large number of old salmon flies, tied at least prior to 1939. It is true that some well-used old Jock Scotts have orange-colored rear bodies. If yellow silk becomes wet and soiled, the silk will proceed to oxidize, and as a result it darkens and begins to appear, forsooth!, as orange. The rusting of the hook can undoubtedly also contribute to that characteristic tint. Neither effect has ever caused me to believe the original color of the silk to have been anything but yellow.

The R.T. Simpson account is an early one and an interesting one; it is, however, but one account. It cannot simply be accepted as the final word on the matter, but must be evaluated in the light of all the other available evidence. I propose to do exactly that. In the course of examining all the Nineteenth Century sources, I will not restrict myself merely to quoting material which contradicts Colonel Bates's thesis, but will also put down anything written about the Lord, the gillie, or the fly that seems worth repeating.

The first written discussion of the Jock Scott that I am acquainted with appears in Francis Francis's "A Book of Angling", first published in 1867. Francis calls it: "a peculiar fly and the only one of its sort... It is a good Tweed fly, and is one of the most useful general flies we have elsewhere". The Jock Scott is not known to Tolfrey ("Jones's Guide to Norway", 1848), Ephemera ("The Book of the Salmon", 1850), or Blacker ("Art of Fly Making", 1855), which is significant to theories concerning the fly's date of invention, or at least the date of its public availability. Not surprisingly, no woman's hair is mentioned in Francis's version of its dressing, which calls for "gold-coloured floss" for the rear half of the body. Francis does not favor us with any particular details of the fly's history, though his classification of the Jock Scott as a Tweed fly confirms

its association with that river.

"A Book of Angling" went through several editions. By the fifth (1885), the Jock Scott's popularity and prestige had obviously increased, and Francis was moved to include an illustration. In this colored engraving, the rear body portion does indeed appear as reddish-orange; however, since this contradicts the written instructions for the fly's dressing, it would seem we must attribute this to a colorist's error rather than design.

The next discussion of the Jock Scott in print was the publication of the dressing by George M. Kelson in his series "Standard Patterns", part of "On the Description of Salmon Flies" in THE FISHING GAZETTE, Vol. 10, p. 273, 6/13/1885. In this article, Kelson advises us the rear half of the body is to be dressed with "light-yellow silk".

The dressing of the Jock Scott appears again along with some short historical description provided by George M. Kelson in the chapter on "Salmon Fishing with the Fly" written by Major J.P. Traherne for the volume on "Salmon and Trout", part of a two volume work, "Fishing", edited by Henry Cholmondeley-Pennell for the Duke of Beaufort's Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes Series. Kelson notes the pattern's preeminence among salmon flies:

"No one will dispute that Jock Scott, when dressed correctly, is the most remarkable of all our standard patterns, and therefore entitled to the precedence it has been here accorded. It is probably the best known fly that 'swims' throughout the length and breadth of the three kingdoms,... this splendid specimen... has won an almost superstitious veneration among salmon anglers. Whether used in rushing streams, or in still, sluggish, oily pools, its appearance seems to be equally attractive and its success assured. It was invented by the late Lord John Scott's water bailiff some forty-two years ago [1844]."

Once again, the dressing calls for "light yellow silk" for the rear body.

Also, in 1886, in his second series of salmon flies published in LAND AND WATER, George Kelson writes on the Jock Scott and its variations in a two-part article published in

Volume 42, p. 476, 11/13/1886 and p. 499, 11/20/1886. Kelson again affirms the pattern's excellence, quoting "an old rhyme" penned many years ago by "Light Cast":

"In spate or clear, full or wee  
Auld Jock Scott's the flee for me."

Again, "light yellow silk" is specified.

Another 1886 title, "How and Where to Fish in Ireland" by "Hi-Regan" [J.W. Dunne], a valuable reference concerning salmon flies that is too little appreciated, gives the pattern for the Jock Scott among its list of "Standards", and once again the pattern given calls for light yellow silk for the rear half of the body.

Major A.T. Fisher in the neglected title, "Rod and River", and Captain Hale in the opportunistic "How to Tie Salmon Flies", also published in 1892, both simply repeat Kelson's previously published dressing.

Jock Scott, Lord John Scott's former "water bailiff", the inventor of the famous pattern, died January 24th, 1893. With his death, the man, rather than the fly, finally began to attract the attention of writers. The first of the articles to appear was noticed by Colonel Bates. It was the obituary of Jock Scott by "Punt Gun" which appeared in THE FIELD, No. 2095, p. 242, 2/18/1893. From "Punt Gun" we learn that Jock Scott was born at Branxholme, Roxburghshire, in February of 1817; that he entered the service of the Marquis of Lothian when he was thirteen [1830]; that he learned there to tie flies under the famous Keeper, Robert Kerross. According to "Punt Gun", he remained in that service only two years [1832] before meeting "that prince of border Sportsmen" Lord John Scott [1809-1860] who "took a fancy to him" and hired him; Jock Scott's service with Lord John Scott, we are told, lasted 27 years [1859], to within a short time of his Lordship's death. Jock Scott then spent a year or two tying flies before becoming keeper to the Earl of Haddington, in whose service he died, at a shooting lodge belonging to the Earl: Langshaw Cottage, "overlooking the valley of the Tweed".

"Punt Gun" says the famous fly was invented at Makerston, by the Tweed, in 1850, "a rather unfortunate year for the angler". Jock Scott "set himself to devise something

really new and taking", a goal which we can agree he succeeded in reaching. At a time unspecified, though one may reasonably infer it would have been during his period of employment as a professional fly tyer [circa 1860-62, following Lord John Scott's death], Jock Scott gave the pattern to John Forrest of Kelso, proprietor of the famous firm, "who one day - I think at Bemirride [sic: should be Bemersyde]- after trying a lot of flies in vain, put it on, and with such marked success that he thereupon named it after the inventor: and 'Jock Scott' it will remain while salmon swim in the Tweed".

Jock Scott's death called forth a commemorative article in THE FISHING GAZETTE, Vol. 26, p. 439, 6/10/1893, titled: "Three 'Jock Scotts'" by E.M. Tod. The three "Jock Scotts" referred to were: the Lord, the gillie, and the fly itself. Tod gives an account of the meeting of the Lord and the gillie:

"Lord John was taking a country walk during which he met a lad, who it now appears, was then in the service of the Marquis of Lothian, and aged 15 [1832], and whose face attracted Lord John's notice. Asked his name the lad replied, 'Jock Scott, sir.' Lord John replied, 'I'm Jock Scott mysel', adding 'Would you like to enter my service?'"

Tod mentions having often seen Jock Scott in the neighborhood of Lord John Scott's house, "Kirkbank", a fishing and shooting box near the Teviot.

The Lord took a great liking to the young man, according to Tod, who tells us he made him his gillie, his valet, and even his sparring partner. The matches between master and man could become heated and competitive (when Lord John was losing, he would go and lock the door, "and then the feathers flew!"), but pugilistic rivalry did not jeopardize their relationship. The lessons he received in boxing from his master evidently stood Jock Scott, who was a little man, in good stead in quarrels with his own social peers.

Tod tells us a charming anecdote of "Jock Scott", the Laird:

"Lord John Scott was going from Kirkbank to Dalkeith... With his usual eccentricity, he went third

class amongst the small farmers, and kept them all in roars of laughter till they arrived at the junction (Dalkeith), they going on to Edinburgh. At last 'the best of friends must part', and Lord John had to get out, when one of the farmers said to him, 'Eh, man, but ye are a droll chiel! Now wha will you be I wonder?' To which Lord John, still keeping up his assumed character of a brother farmer, replied, 'Oh, man, I'm juist Jock, the Laird's brither!' How surprised and delighted at his ready wit the men must have been, when they found that he was the brother of that nobleman on whose estate probably most of them resided, the Duke of Buccleuch."

Tod also tells us of Lord John Scott's keenness as a sportsman:

"One day, when out with his brother's hounds, he tried to jump 'in and out' of a pigsty - the horse fell, and he sustained a shocking fracture of the ankle. He was laid up promptly at the farmhouse adjoining and, the doctor being called for, his leg was set.

"Time hung heavily on his hands; and one day when he was left alone, the hounds passed the farm. He heard - and was at once upon the floor, dragging his broken leg, splints, and all, to the window. Alas! for his foolish enthusiasm. The bones were again displaced, and for the rest of his life his foot was turned outward almost at a right angle; on horseback it was peculiarly noticeable. Old hunting men will smile at the above story, which is genuine enough."

Tod believed Lord John Scott's devotion to "sport of all kinds, salmon leistering, otter hunting, fox hunting, shooting, and everything else" was responsible "for shortening his days".

1895 was counted as the fiftieth anniversary, the "Jubilee" year, for the Jock Scott, at least by Charles H. Alston. His first of two articles: "The Jubilee of the 'Jock Scott' Salmon Fly", appeared in THE FISHING GAZETTE, Volume 31, p. 424, 12/21/1895. Alston is the source for what may be called the Norway Theory. He writes:

"In the year 1845 Jock Scott accompanied his master to Norway, and to wile away the tedium of a stormy voyage

occupied himself with dressing flies for the approaching campaign; one result of his labours was the fly which has made his name famous among salmon fishers the world over. It must have been blowing hard on that first birthday; for it is recorded that on his master finding him so occupied, he abused him as 'an old rascal tying flies, when you ought to be saying your prayers!'"

The joking banter sounds characteristic enough, but the "old rascal" would have been only 28 at the time.

Alston confirms earlier statements of the pattern being given to John Forrest of Kelso, but goes on to say: "\_the\_ original fly remained in the possession of old Jock Scott until the year 1886 or or 1887, when he gave it to Capt. C. Erskine, Friars Hall, Melrose; by him it was given, in 1888, to John G.K. Young, of Glendoune, Ayrshire, in whose possession it now is [1895]". Alston had a thorough opportunity to examine the fly, as well as its accompanying label which stated the fly's history, and proceeded to make a water-colour sketch of it. This illustration was published with the article, and comparison with a photograph of the same fly, in Sir Herbert Maxwell's later book, shows the sketch to be superior to the photo for illustrative purposes, and proves it to be an excellent likeness of the actual fly.

Not only did Alston provide an illustration of what is allegedly the original Jock Scott fly, he also provided a written description:

"The fly is in excellent preservation, although the colours are somewhat faded, and the tinsel tarnished. It is dressed on a hook of much the same shape as the modern 'Limerick', 2 9/16 in. long from the end of the shank to the extreme bend. [This would be approximately a 7/0, a great big fly. Such a size does support the Norway Theory.] It has a loop of twisted gut; the body is somewhat spare, and the wings conspicuously short, although possibly these may have been shortened by the teeth of fish... The black section of the body is fully 1 in. in length, with only some three turns of broad tinsel; the yellow section about 1/2 in., with four turns of narrower twist. There is no hackle except at the shoulder, and that is sparse and very short."

Alston continued in THE FISHING GAZETTE, Volume 32, p.



146, 2/29/1896, with the article: "How the 'Jock Scott' Came by its Name." His article of the previous December, elicited a response from Mr. George Forrest, of Kelso, the contemporary head of the famous tackle firm, and son of John Forrest. Mr. Forrest wrote to Alston an account of the fly's receiving its name, which Alston published forthwith:

"I read the article in the FISHING GAZETTE, and I have no doubt the fly was the original one tied by Jock Scott in 1845, but it was some years after that that it was so named. When the late Lord John Scott died, Jock was thrown on his own resources; he naturally came to my father, who had opportunities of knowing of vacant situations for fishermen and gamekeepers. Jock being a fair salmon-fly dresser, he gave him a job to keep him going.

"One day at that time Robert Honeyman, fisherman at Bemersyde [on the Tweed], came down to the town, and asked my father if he would not come up and have a cast for salmon, as he knew of two or three lying in a stream [meaning a current in the River] which was overlooked by a high bank. He decided to go, and selected three or four flies which Jock had been dressing.

"The water was low and clear at the time, so that the fish could be seen at the bottom. From the high bank where Honeyman placed himself he could see all that occurred. On the fly coming within reach of the first fish he gave a shout; the tightened line and boil on the water at the same moment gave the fisher the delightful sensation one feels in well hooking a fish. After landing it, the other two were not long in being laid on the bank.

"My father was so pleased, that he thought the fly should be named; and none could be more appropriate than the name of the dresser who had been so long in the employment of Lord \_John Scott\_.

"Perhaps to Honeyman, more than to anyone else, belongs the credit for bringing the fly into repute, for every man that had the chance of fishing with him had to get a supply of Jock Scotts."

Mr. Forrest had the original Jock Scott photographed, so

that copies would be available to salmon fishing enthusiasts. These photographs were offered for sale both by Forrest, of Kelso, and by the firm of Francis Walbran, of Leeds.

One month after Alston's second article, in March of 1896, appeared George Mortimer Kelson's long awaited book, "The Salmon Fly", whose title page bears the inaccurate date of 1895. Kelson wrote of the inventor:

"'Jock' was no giant, but he had a big heart and a constitution of iron. Second to none at other sports and pastimes in the North, his soul was chiefly in fishing and most of his time was spent in the water without waders. Admired by many, respected by all, trustworthy to a degree [Although today this would mean "trustworthy \_only\_ to a degree", in Victorian times the earlier connotation of the phrase was still extant, and it should be taken to mean: "to the \_highest\_ degree".], good at fishing, excellent at fly-making, he distinguished himself for his inventive genius in connection with this particular pattern."

Kelson, it so happens, writes specifically to the point Colonel Bates makes regarding the color of the rear portion of the body:

"Not long before his death (he had been my attendant when young) he gave me a specimen of his own make, and said that he set about the original in 1850. 'When you are too old [meaning to tie your own salmon flies], Sir', he added, 'send to Kelso for them. Neither Forrest nor Redpath [another well-known Tweed-side tackle firm also located in Kelso] ever have that nasty dark coloured silk in front (meaning in the order of construction) [i.e. the rear portion of the body] and know how to keep yellow silk a good colour when put there by themselves."

Thus, we find, at least according to Kelson, Jock Scott himself advising where one can be sure to get Jock Scotts with the rear of the body colored yellow, and not orange!

The final written source concerning the Jock Scott before 1900 is Sir Herbert Maxwell's "Salmon and Sea Trout", 1898. Sir Herbert repeats Alston's Norway account, describes the rear portion of the body in the dressing he gives as "golden floss", and publishes the photograph that George

Forrest had done of the allegedly original Jock Scott, complete with hand written label.

We thus find that there are twelve instances of the publication of the dressing of the Jock Scott or accounts of the fly's history published before 1900, besides the R.T. Simpson account. Not a single published version of the pattern calls for the use of a woman's hair, or even for an orange-colored rear body. Every single dressing specifies "gold" or "light yellow" silk for that part of the pattern. In addition, not one of the historical accounts, other than Simpson's, mentions Lady John Scott's hair as an element in the fly's dressing. The story of the use of a Lady's hair in a salmon fly is an appealing and romantic story, and it is inconceivable that Tod or Alston, "Punt Gun" or Kelson could have resisted rehearsing such a story, had they ever heard it.

Fishermen and inventors of patterns are at best- in the modern sense-: "trustworthy to a degree". Human wisdom at the remove of one hundred and fifty years from the famous fly's invention, nearly one hundred from its inventor's death can scarcely undertake to settle definitively all the questions in the history of the Jock Scott.

One might feel a slight preference for the later invention date of 1850 versus 1845, chiefly on the theory that a thirty-three year old gillie seems more likely to have invented the greatest of all patterns than a mere whipper-snapper of twenty-eight. The Norway account is more detailed than "Punt Gun's" Makerston House story, so perhaps it should be accepted. The fly's being named by John Forrest circa 1860 seems agreed upon by all, as are the circumstances in which the fly came to the great tackle maker's attention. This date is also logically compatible with the fly's being unknown to Tolfrey, Ephemera, and Blacker, and appearing in Francis in 1867 for the first time.

Whether the fly illustrated by Alston and photographed by Forrest is the real, original Jock Scott is a question I should hesitate to answer. The fly is certainly well tarnished and looks much chewed upon. It does not strain the imagination to believe the fly pictured to be forty-five or fifty years old at the time the photograph was made. On the other hand, it is only too easy to imagine the famous old gillie bestowing a well-aged "Original Jock Scott" upon one

admiring younger angler after another after a successful week on the Tweed, and accepting the inevitably generous gratuity that followed from each one with the same practised smile.

Bat Masterson, in his later days, as a New York sports writer, when visited by prosperous-seeming admirers, would produce from his desk drawer "the original Colt .45 revolver, which he had carried as a peace officer in Dodge City", adorned with a fair number of suggestive notches on the grips. He would confess himself to have fallen on hard times financially, and reluctantly allow himself to be persuaded to part with the historic pistol at an appropriately high price. On his way to the spree on which he would spend the sucker's money, Bat always stopped off at a convenient pawnshop, and got himself another historic Colt .45 revolver to be ready for the next time. It is interesting though to note that Mr. George Forrest and Sir Herbert Maxwell, who were not fools, were prepared to accept the fly's authenticity. Forrest lived at Kelso on the Tweed itself, where Jock Scott had lived and worked as a gillie and fly-tyer; Sir Herbert Maxwell lived at Monreith in Dumfriesshire, was a neighbor of Mr. Young of Glendoune, owner of the fly, and fished on the Tweed himself regularly. Both should have been in a position to know if the market were flooded with "original Jock Scott" flies. It is also true, that we do not today come upon "Original Jock Scotts" with the same regularity with which it is possible to find old Colts, with a genuine Masterson provenance.

We must inevitably accept that the specimen depicted is, if not the original Jock Scott, an early Jock Scott, of the original form of the pattern, tied by the inventor himself, which fact alone is more than adequate entirely to dispel forever the theory of the use of a Lady's Titian-colored hair, which Colonel Bates was willing to accept on so slight a basis.

It is possible though that there is some historic basis for Simpson's anecdote. Perhaps, on one occasion, Jock Scott, the gillie, did fabricate a salmon fly pattern using his Mistress's hair. The incident could have lingered in Lady John Scott's memory years later [she lived until 1900], and been confused with the famous pattern also invented by the same gillie. The incident could thus have been recounted with advantages to Simpson, a hired chronicler of family trivia, who passed down the confused account to posterity in

his obscure pamphlet.