

Shopping for fly fishing materials in London –

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By

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I have visited family in London about 4 times in the last twelve years, each trip being two to three weeks in duration. We did the touring and sightseeing bit on our first two trips, but the focus each time has been on the family. On each trip however I have managed to sneak some shopping of my own, mainly for fly tying materials. My favourite shop has been Farlows in Pall Mall which has a wonderful range of fishing equipment and apparel which I so dearly wish I could afford.

I should mention that on these trips I try and treat myself to a day's shopping/browsing without the girls present, meeting them later for a cup of coffee or lunch. My "free" morning usually starts in Charring Cross Road, looking for books in the second hand bookshops of which there are many. The shops are quite tiny, with nooks and crannies filled with books on all topics. I have been lucky to have found some lovely books. Then I head into Soho where I browse the music stores, again, small shops with shelves packed with CDs, often without any separation of genre or artist, requiring a lot of poking around, looking for rarities and bargains. And then I head for Farlows, after which I meet up with the girls. By this time my gammy knees are shouting out for painkillers and anti-inflammatories, so after a cup of coffee and a bite to eat we head off home. I should also add the charity shops, where I have found some interesting books. I found a gem, called "Game Pie", which is nothing to do with food, albeit having a few stories about game food, but is "An Anthology of Shooting, compiled by Eric Carter". It was first printed in 1927 and was reprinted in 1977, with some additions by Lord Tweedsmuir.

On this trip however there was no "free" morning for me as I only had a small window of opportunity to go shopping, and because of its convenience, opted to go to Grangers Fishing Shop in South Kensington. It is a shop which I had passed on a previous trip, on our way to the National Museum, but at the time, was not permitted to enter (by my family), but managed to go there on a subsequent trip. Although a small shop, I was quite impressed with the materials that I had bought. So I hopped on to the overland train from Chessington and then changed to the tube for South Kensington Station. Grangers is virtually attached to the tube station.

I should also mention that, before leaving on my trip, I had put together a wish list of fly tying materials, but did not want to spend my valuable Pounds on materials which are readily available in SA (exchange rate was R18 to the Pound), so I scoured local web sites and Farlows and Grangers web sites to see what items were available in London but not locally, or which might have been cheaper in London than over here (our local products were all cheaper). Both Farlows and Grangers have internet shopping sites and the range of products is pretty extensive. I managed to put together a wish list, and true to form, **left it behind**. So I had to rely on memory when shopping.

This time, Grangers disappointed me because the range in the shop was less than shown on the internet shopping site and there seemed less choice than when I had been there before.

Despite this, I managed to get a few materials which I had not seen in our local shops. I had particularly been looking for the small rings used for connecting droppers, but alas nothing in stock and nothing on their web site. So that was that I thought, only a handful of items. I then made my way back home, getting back in time for the planned afternoon trip.

But, another opportunity arose when Jenny and Christine wanted to go and see the BP Portrait Awards and also the National Gallery which Jenny visits on every trip. At the National Gallery she loves to view her favourite artists, the Impressionists. The plan was to go to the National Gallery and then the Portrait Gallery. So off we went, Christine, Jenny and I, emerging from Charring Cross Station and made our way to the National Gallery, where I surprised the girls by saying that I would have a look at Farlows whilst they visited the gallery, and would meet them afterwards at the Portrait Gallery. They laughed, understanding then why I was quite happy to tag along to the National Gallery, which I had visited a number of times. Farlows, of course is barely 400 m from the National Gallery. What a choice?



Figure 1 FARLOWS ON PALL MALL

Farlows is located on Pall Mall, in a magnificent listed building and one of the first things that you see at the entrance is the Prince of Wales warrant, announcing “By Appointment to H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Suppliers of Fishing Tackle and Waterproof Clothing. Farlows Group Ltd, London”. When I entered I was reminded of the traditions and history of country pursuits in England. Farlows is a fishing and shooting shop, and in the entrance hall were a number of ties with fishing motif, tweed jackets and caps. They provide not only for the game fish of Salmon and Trout in Britain, but they also stock for all fishing options. Brits travel throughout the world to fish, for bonefish and permit in the Bahamas, to trout in New Zealand and America, Salmon in Russia , Iceland, and Alaska. And Farlows provides flies and tackle for all these options, and more. Visit their web site (www.Farlows.co.uk) and you will see how impressive the shop is.

I did not have too much time for browsing so I headed straight to the tying materials section and found some adhesive sheet- lead, one of the items which I remembered from my list. I also found some black fritz chenille, which is truly black, unlike the dark green material which

claims to be black that I found in all the shops back home. There were no dropper rings – perhaps there’s been no demand and they have been discontinued? I bought a nice sized packet of CDC feathers and on the way to the counter saw a very interesting fly style among the streamer patterns. I had not seen this before, and promptly bought a Gummy Minnow and a Gummy Streamer (to keep as samples). These cost me £3 and £4 respectively. They are beautiful flies and look certain to tempt the saltwater fish which I will hopefully be targeting at Cape Vidal in November.



Figure 2 GUMMY MINNOW

When I asked an assistant (they are all smartly dressed and wear ties) how it is tied he promptly led me to the rack from where I bought two kits of Gummi tape, which comes complete with material and instructions. I have not had a chance to open the packet yet, but await an opportunity to tie up a few flies with it.

So that was it. I did not have enough time to window shop further, maybe next time? Fortunately (?) there was not enough temptation to stretch my Rands, and I came away with a few products which I felt made my trip to Farlows really worthwhile. I joined the girls as they entered the Portrait Gallery, so my timing was just right.

If you get to London, I would strongly recommend a trip to Farlows and hopefully you will have the time to see the full extent of what they have to offer, and experience the “traditional” feel of the shop in the country from which so much of our flyfishing heritage comes.