

# The Telegraph

## Jim Hardy

Jim Hardy, who has died aged 85, was the last of his family to be involved in running the great Hardy fishing tackle business.

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5:14PM BST 06 Aug 2012

### Comment

The Hardy products, fashioned by hundreds of dedicated craftsmen, became famous around the world, and the firm has held at least 10 royal warrants. On one occasion a letter arrived at the company headquarters at Alwick, Northumberland, having been addressed to “Hardys, c/o the King, England”. On another, when George V wished to mark the birthday of the novelist and poet Thomas Hardy with a congratulatory telegram, he absent-mindedly sent it to his favourite tackle manufacturer.



Jim Hardy

James Leighton Hardy (always known as Jim) was born at Alwick on March 4 1927, the son of a former joint managing director of the business, William Hardy, whose father, also William, had set up as a gunsmith in the town in 1872. William Snr soon went into partnership with his brother, John James (JJ), and within a couple of years they had branched out into “superior River and Sea Fishing tackle”. JJ was the “ideas man” in the partnership, and even in retirement would grapple with the design of new products such as the Hardy angler’s pipe — irking his sister Emma, who had to put up with him smoking his prototypes in the house.

At first the brothers bought in most of their tackle. Then, in 1891, they came up with their famous “Perfect” reel, which was an instant success and has been made by the firm, with occasional interruptions, ever since. The following decades saw the design and production of other reels, among

them the Zane Grey multiplier (1928-57) — now among the most collectable of all Hardy reels — and the Jock Scott multiplier (1938-52).

Hardy made everything from rods and flies to lures and floats (it ran a substantial coarse fishing business up to the outbreak of the Second World War), and in the first half of the 20th century its catalogue was thicker than the average novel.

In 1897 the brothers opened a shop in London, at 61 Pall Mall, run by JJ's son Forster, and by the late 1920s the business had a worldwide presence, with a network that stretched from Europe to China and Australia.

Jim Hardy was the last member of the family to enter the firm. After education at Uppingham, he served with the Derbyshire Yeomanry in North Africa and the 15th/19th King's Royal Hussars in Palestine. Then, in 1948, he undertook an engineering apprenticeship with Vickers Armstrong in Newcastle before joining the family firm, spending a year "working at the bench" and learning the ropes in various departments.

In 1959 "Mr Jim", as he was known, joined the board as works director, and in 1967, shortly after the firm was bought by the Harris & Sheldon Group, was appointed marketing director. It was partly due to his efforts that Hardy's fortunes improved dramatically in the home and overseas markets.

He also helped to develop the use of revolutionary new materials in the late 1960s, setting up the plant which made the firm's glass fibre and carbon rods. When he retired in 1992, the firm found itself without a Hardy at the helm for the first time in 120 years.

Paradoxically, it was Hardy's commitment to quality that had hastened its demise as an independent concern. In the 1960s it was still having all its salmon flies tied in the hand (that is, without using a vice) at its factory in Alnwick, when most other firms had adopted the cheaper option of contracting out the work to India or Africa.

In 1985 the firm was renamed House of Hardy, and in 2004 became Hardy and Greys, after Hardy had purchased a rival built up from nothing by one of its former employees.

In retirement, Jim Hardy spent many years researching the history of the company, resulting in a book, *The House the Hardy Brothers Built*, published in 1998.

Like all his family, he was a devoted and knowledgeable fisherman. He had a formidable reputation in the world of competitive casting: he was three times world champion and took 35 British and all-comers professional casting records.

He fished all over the world, and in Alaska once caught 112 sockeye salmon in a single day. But he was equally content with a day's fishing for salmon or trout on the Coquet in his native Northumberland. He married, in 1960, Gwynne Rowell, who was also a keen angler. She died in 2011, and he is survived by their son and daughter.

**Jim Hardy, born March 4 1927, died July 28 2012**