

Tom Moran - obituary

Tom Moran was a master-craftsman who hand made world-beating split-cane fly-fishing rods in his council house at Redditch

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Tom Moran in his workshop Photo: ANDREW HERD

6:47PM BST 27 Jun 2014

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Tom Moran, who has died aged 66, created exquisitely-fashioned split-cane fishing rods, and was regarded as a master of his craft.

While many fly-fishermen today favour rods made from graphite or fibreglass, the heavier, traditional split-cane models offer a slower, more relaxing action; they also have an aesthetic quality that the more modern rods cannot match.

Moran's bamboo rods were constructed by the delicate process of sealing together strips of cane under heat and pressure to form a single taper. Varying from 6½ft to 8ft in length, they were for trout fishing, particularly on small streams and brooks.

He came to his craft by accident, and was entirely self-taught. He had enjoyed coarse fishing as a boy, but had never cast a fly; and until adulthood he had no idea that he was gifted with his hands.



Examples of Tom Moran's rods

Thomas Moran was born on February 25 1948 in Penang, Malaya, where his father was traffic manager of the port; his mother, Clara, was a Filipina. Aged two, Tom was sent to live with his grandmother at Southport, Lancashire, thereafter seeing his parents only every other year when they were able to come to Britain on leave.

After education at Meols Cop secondary modern school in Southport, Tom went to a college for potential Merchant Navy officers and trained as a marine wireless operator. He then travelled the world in tramp steamers, serving as a seaman and cook.

Back in Britain he dabbled for a time in carpentry, but felt that he was not cut out for "normal" jobs. One day, while walking on the sand dunes near his grandmother's home in Southport, he knelt and prayed that he would find an occupation that he could make his own. On returning to his grandmother's house he picked up a book, Richard Walker's *Rod Building for Amateurs*, that he had been given years earlier by the owner of his local fishing tackle shop.

The conviction that this should be his path was reinforced when he was on holiday in the Lake District. In the house where he was staying someone had left behind two Hardy Brothers cane rods; Moran was immediately struck by their beauty, and resolved to make rod-building his life's work. He studied the work of other rod makers, and acquired machinery and a supply of cane. At first, in the mid-Seventies, he was based in Scotland in partnership with Mike Jordan, with whom he built rods commercially after

buying a milling machine from Malcolm Grey (of Greys of Alnwick). To make ends meet, Moran also worked as a lumberjack. When the partners' business failed, Moran worked for three years (1981-84) as foreman of the rod-building division of Partridge's, a Midlands company, while also building his own rods.

By the mid-1980s he had the confidence to set up on his own. He and his wife and their two children were living in a three-bedroom council house at Redditch, Worcestershire. Their daughter Emma's room was requisitioned as a workshop (Emma "bunked up" with her parents), while part of their son Toby's room was set aside for varnishing — Moran cut holes in the floor to accommodate the varnish dip tanks, which protruded down through the kitchen ceiling below. The family had to tiptoe around the house not to stir up dust, and baths were often forbidden to prevent steam affecting the drying varnish. Gradually these privations began to pay off as Moran's craftsmanship became well-known among fly-fishermen. His constant mantra was "Form Follows Function", and he was meticulous in his work: every part of the rod was handmade, and he refined his tapers to ensure the delivery of the line in a smooth cast.

In time, Moran was selling across Europe, as well as in the United States and the Far East. But although his rods were not cheap (by the end of his life they would fetch up to £3,500 apiece), it was a precarious life financially: Moran used only the finest Tonkin cane, and made all the components (including the "snake guides", the "eyes" through which the line passes along the rod) from scratch; it could sometimes take several months to build a single rod.

In 1992 Moran decided to go to America to work for the eminent rod-maker Thomas and Thomas. He returned three years later, and set up on his own near Southampton. In 2010 he joined Hardy at Alnwick, Northumberland, supplying rods to order.

Tom Moran, who had been suffering from cancer, was separated from his wife, Janis (née Duckett), whom he married in 1970; she survives him with their son and daughter.

Tom Moran, born February 25 1948, died May 12 2014