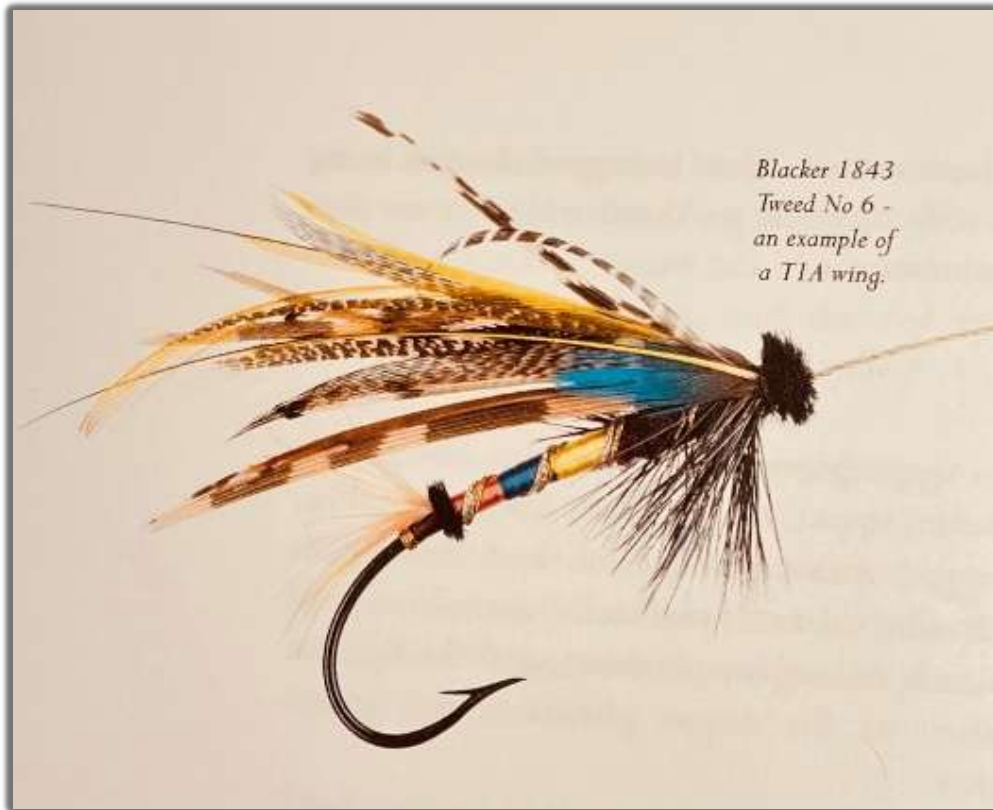


NORTHWEST ATLANTIC SALMON FLY GUILD

Handout for February 2026 Meeting

We will be tying two flies originated by William Blacker in the 1840's. We will be using his "mixed" wing method instead of the "built" or "married" wing methods which became standard in the late 1800's.

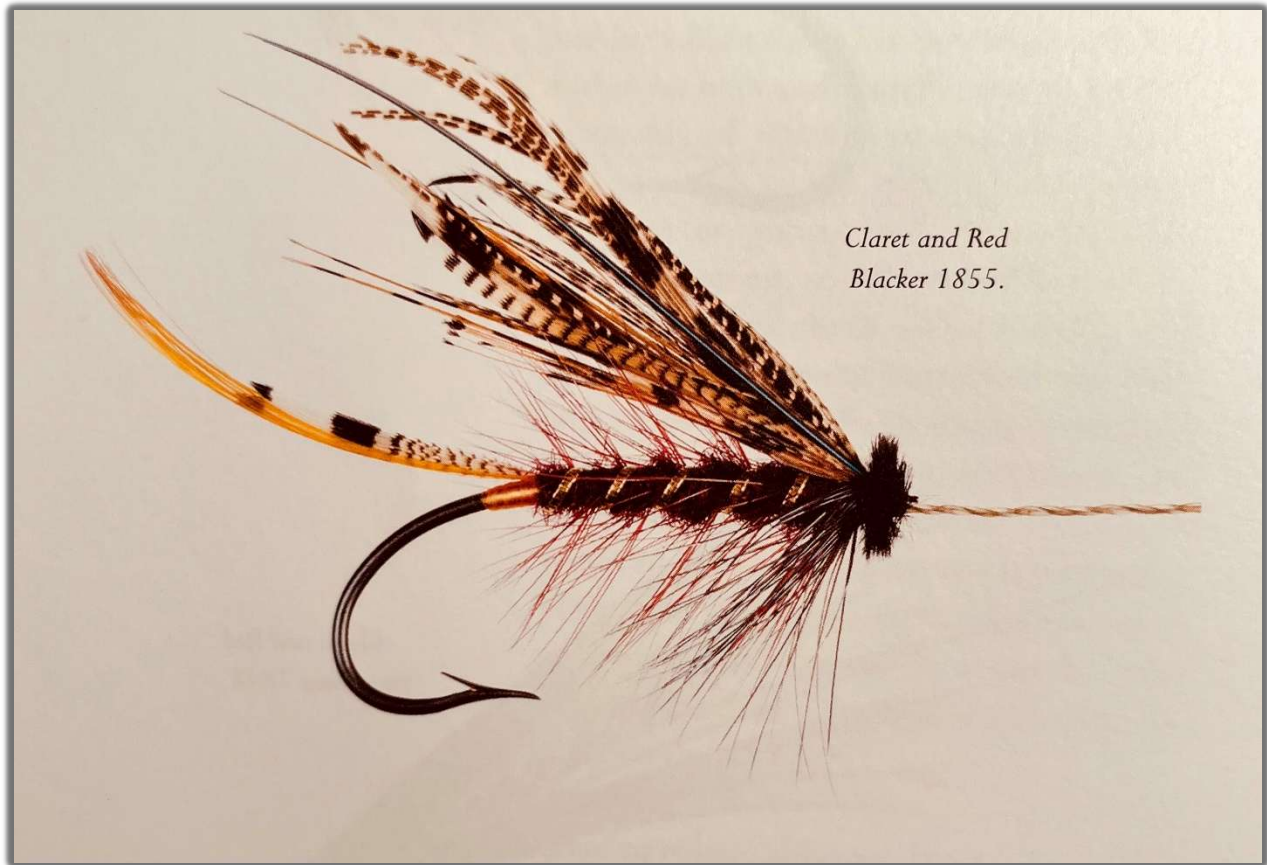
Fly No. 6 for the River Tweed (Wing Type 1A)



**Dressing instructions for Fly No. 6 for the River Tweed
(page 101 of the 1843 edition of *Blacker's Art of Fly Making*):**

6. Body—gold tip tag of puce, orange, then blue, then yellow silk, then claret pig hair, and black at the shoulder, ribbed with gold and silver twist. Legs—a large dyed black cock hackle, struck on from the claret pig hair up, blue jay at trottle. Wings—golden pheasant neck and tail feathers, brown turkey tail, teal, guinea hen, brown mallard, macaw feeler, and blue king-fisher each side, a golden pheasant topping in the centre, or cock of the rock feather, broken, with yellow-green parrot tail, bustard, and peacock wing. Black head. Tail—golden pheasant crest, or cock of the rock.—*Hook, No. 6 to 9, Limerick.*

Fly No. 1 for the River Bann “Red and Claret” (Wing Type 0)



**Dressing instructions for Fly No. 1 for the River Bann “Red and Claret”
(page 158 of the 1855 edition of *Blacker’s Art of Fly Making*):**

THE FLIES to suit the Bann are as follows:—
No. 1. Body claret pig hair, ribbed with gold tinsel, orange tag, a topping, and a little wood-duck for tail; a dark claret hackle rolled up to the shoulder, and a blue jay above it; mallard wings, mixed with bustard—the dark small spotted bustard feather is best for this river, the light coloured for Scotland and Wales—golden pheasant tail and neck, peacock wing, wood-duck feelers of blue and yellow macaw, and a black head. Hook No. 8 or 9. This is a great favourite.

A word about the size of the hook: 60 years after Blacker's death, a *Fishing Gazette* columnist wrote:

It is not so very long ago since such a thing as salmon fishing in summer was unheard of, and only when a spate occurred in July or August was the long salmon rod again put up between the beginning of May and the middle of September. It was then thought to be impossible to kill a salmon with anything shorter than a nineteen, twenty or twenty-one foot rod, or to lure it with something less than a two-inch iron.

This mentality among Scottish anglers is why Scottish flies are so often tied on large (frequently heroically larger) than those used in Ireland. Blacker revealed to the angling community that salmon could be caught using patterns around a quarter of the size that was then thought to be appropriate in Scotland.

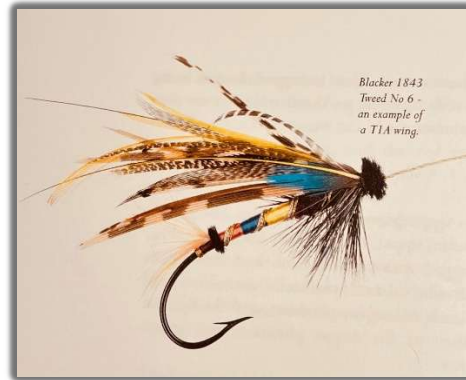
Tying flies in the William Blacker style of the 1840's

In 2017, Andrew Herd, Hermann Dietrich-Troeltsch, and Alberto Calzolari collaborated to create a summary of the differences between the three main editions of William Blacker's *The Art of Fly Making*. The result is a dramatic three-volume set of coffee table-sized books with high resolution photography and a knowledgeable dissertation titled *Blacker – Phantom of the Past* about how young Will Blacker tied flies at that time. The books highlight the dramatic differences between the editions and will be the subject of future guild newsletters.

Wing Types

Wing Type 1A: This sub classification of wings includes wings similar to the standard T1, But with some broader strips of feather fibres included.

A typical wing may include multiple feather strips of 6 to 10 fibres from each species. The T1 wings begin to appear in the 1843 edition and are even more common in the 1855 edition and could be regarded as a step on the way towards a married wing.



Wing Type 0: This type of wing is one of the earliest known forms of the mixed wing and there are very few references to the use of this method in the literature. The T0 wings are made by mixing all the feather fibres required to build the wing in a heap, splitting the pile in two parts with a needle and tying in the result, regardless of whether the split between the types of fibres was even between the two wings.

A T0 wing can be identified because the types of feather fibres seen on opposite sides of the wing of the finished fly are dissimilar. T0 wings were sometimes tied on without splitting the fibres into two wings, although this only appears to have been done for the most basic patterns. This method began to fade out as the supply of gaudy winging materials became more dependable, but the T0 wing is the ideal method for making a mixed wing with few exotic fibres in it quickly. Right is an example of a T0 wing tied by Blacker and tipped-in to one of the editions.



Final Note: Blacker tied his flies “in-hand.” His book explains how to do this! However, some of his flies are complicated and difficult to tie even with a vise. We are starting with patterns which include basic wing methods and are avoiding patterns with hard to find materials. You are encouraged to tie part or all of these flies in hand. There are many more Blacker patterns (The 1843 edition lists 12 flies for the River Shannon). Some of these are very complicated. We will likely devote at least one meeting a year to Blacker’s flies.