

FUNGI WALK and MEETING at NAPHILL COMMON on Sunday November 5th 2017

Penny Cullington

Today was not one of our run-of-the-mill walks and was a joint meeting with the many friends and colleagues of Jackie and Justin's from the Natural History Museum together with BFG members and Friends of Naphill Common. I think it quite probable that this was the largest number of people to attend a fungi walk in the UK this year: well over 100 people in all! We were well prepared, however, with a team of guest leaders raring to go, and having divided the throng into three manageable groups each was assigned a pair of experienced mycologists and a local member to lead us round the three pre-planned routes to cover as much as possible of this large area of woodland – it needed to be large to accommodate this many enthusiastic people!



One of the many groups of forayers on the Common today (PD)

We were blessed with a beautiful day: clear and sunny with no wind to speak of though on the chilly side - as good as it gets for Bonfire Night. This was just as well because everyone enjoyed the mature trees and beautiful Autumn colours in this lovely woodland despite the fact that the main object of the exercise (finding and discovering about fungi) proved a challenge to say the least! This year has been an unusual one for fungi in that the main autumnal fruiting

season kicked off really early (in July and August) and was already seriously tailing off by mid-October (normally the peak time). Consequently it was somewhat hard work collecting today and all three groups brought back a similar smallish range of rather dilapidated specimens with which to make our display in the Village Hall afterwards. As I suspected would be the case, the number of attendees far outweighed the number of species found (the final list somewhere around 80 species) but in fact this made little difference to the enjoyment and value of the occasion for various reasons.

With a group of people new to foraging, when there is a bountiful supply of different species on show with a constant string of unintelligible Latin names flowing from the mouths of the leaders, the whole experience can become not just mind-blowing but also utterly overwhelming, daunting and confusing. So in some ways it is less of a shock and much more

More forayers enjoying the day (PD)



encouraging if people can be shown a few very common species which they can then begin to pick up and recognise as they continue round. This was exactly the situation today and one species which was unusually common was *Panellus stipticus* (Bitter Oysterling), in fact I never remember seeing this on so many fallen trunks and logs as it was today – many people collected it. A small brown-capped bracket-like mushroom not unlike a species of *Crepidotus* (a genus with the same



English name, Oysterling, but in fact completely unrelated) it grows in clusters or tiers on fallen deciduous wood, has a rather prominent thick but short eccentric stem (one which is not central but emanates from the side of the cap) and somewhat crowded gills which, if one pinches the fruitbody between thumb and first finger, leave a slightly sticky or tacky substance which can be felt when one then presses thumb and finger together afterwards. This is in my opinion a much more useful character to check in the field rather than tasting it to see if it's bitter – the reason for its English name.

Panellus stipticus was probably the most prolific species found today. This photo was in fact taken here at the same event last year. (PC)

The highlight of the walk for many was when each group in turn was treated to a visit to the now famous Dew Pond where an enormous ancient Beech has collapsed, almost filling it. This



The magnificent *Herichium erinaceus* on the fallen Beech trunk at the Dew Pond, this photo taken here a few weeks earlier (SE)

particular Beech is host to several interesting species of fungi but one really special thing: the spectacular *Hericium erinaceus* (Bearded Tooth / Lion's Mane) – extremely rare in the UK and a wonderful sight with its generous white cascades flowing downwards. It has been recorded fruiting here for quite a few years now and luckily for us was putting on an impressive display today for everyone to admire.

Today's list of fungi added ten species new to the site, bringing the total number of species for Naphill Common on our county database to 336. Today we were, of course, focussing on sharing knowledge about this amazing kingdom of natural history rather than on recording and identifying, consequently only a very few species were checked at home later and virtually everything listed was identified by sight in the field though the level of expertise of our leaders today was exceptional. Seldom can three such expert field mycologists have graced an event in the county and we were indeed privileged to have the opportunity to learn from them. Richard Fortey, well known in this area and also on TV, has been leading this foray as a private event for Jackie and Justin at a variety of Buckinghamshire sites over many years. BFG has become involved over the last few years and the event has been based here since last year. It was a pleasure to welcome for the first time Thomas Laessoe from Denmark - author of many fungi books and with a well established reputation as one of the very best mycologists in Europe, together with Alick Henrici – a regular contributor to the international quarterly magazine *Field Mycology* and a much respected authority on fungi with a long-standing reputation amongst the UK mycological community.



Our three distinguished guest leaders today, from left to right Richard Fortey, Thomas Laessoe and Alick Henrici (PD)

We gathered afterwards at the Village Hall for welcome refreshments whilst an attempt was made to set out some form of display from our finds – not the most impressive showing, it must be said! Our three leaders together with some input from Derek and myself now embarked upon the popular 'Show and Tell' session which has become such an important and entertaining part of this event. This comprised a delightful mix of serious information about the various different groups of fungi interspersed with amusing anecdotes which naturally abound amongst such able and experienced speakers as these. They kept everyone spellbound for well over half an hour and it was gratifying to see even the children thorough enjoying the occasion. Everyone was then cordially invited back to Jackie and Justin's house in Amersham for a party – now an established part of this annual event together with the amazingly decorated and famous 'Fungus Cake'! Below are more photos of the day. It remains for me to thank all who attended for making

it such a successful and happy occasion. In particular I'd like to single out Peter, Chris and Trevor from the Friends of Naphill who so efficiently yet unobtrusively kept us under control for the duration, also our three guest leaders for giving up their time to be with us, to Jackie and Justin for planning and managing the event, and lastly to Peter Davis, Justin Warhurst and Sarah Ebdon for their photos included here. For more information on what we found see the detailed list.



Derek explaining the delights of the Inkcaps (JW)



Richard telling us about *Daldinia concentrica* and King Alfred burning the cakes. (PD)



Thomas checking up on one of the many species of *Mycena* we found. (PD)



Thomas amusing us with some explanation about the genus *Mycena*, one of his many entertaining moments. (PD)

Right, the assembled company thoroughly enjoying the 'Show and Tell' session. (PD)

. . . . and below to finish with, the famous cake which quite possibly had more species on show than we were able to find today – certainly they were more colourful! (JW)



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