



Wyre Forest Study Group

Arley, Eyemore Wood, Coldridge Wood, Birchwood, Blakeshall Common and Wolverley Friday, 15th May, 1863

WORCESTERSHIRE NATURALISTS' CLUB

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The first meeting for the season 1863 was held on Friday, the 15th May, at Arley, where on arrival the members first examined the remarkable cutting that here intersects the *Bewdley Coal Field*. The excavation is about 40 feet in depth, through carboniferous strata, exhibiting some coal-smuts alternating with thick and massive shales. When the cutting was made, many relics of fossil ferns were brought to light, but none could now be found, exposure to the atmosphere having broken up the stones that contained them. From the *Victoria Bridge* the unobstructed stream of the Severn is seen rapidly gliding by and encompassing a verdant islet, while above it wood-crowned cliffs that belong to the ancient forest of Wyre show their leafy heads, (this is now known as Seckley Wood) forming a scene of sylvan beauty; while on climbing to the top of the railway cutting, a most exquisite prospect of the Severn valley, with *Arley Church*, and the towers of its castle, justly claims admiration. Having got out of the direct road, the party had now to defile over pleasing uplands, and through watery dingles, into *Eymore Wood*, where the botanists commenced a prying search without any important results, excepting the pretty appearance of the flowering Bilberry (*Vaccinium Myrtillus*), and the red-blossomed *Pedicularis sylvatica*. Ferns appeared in some luxuriance, but only *Lomaria* deserves record. The march to *Shatterford* was up-hill work, but here the *Kidderminster* contingent was in waiting, and the united squadron at once advancing to action, soon effected lodgment in some basaltic quarries, which proved of extraordinary interest. The basalt dyke of *Shatterford* forms a narrow ridge that breaks into and disrupts the *Bewdley Forest Coal Field*, and has overturned the Permian deposits above them. At the quarry inspected this is instructively shown, and the massive basalt has a stratified appearance, though the columnar and jointed structure was very apparent in one place, but the columns formed cubes instead of being quadrangular or hexagonal, and were closely jammed together. Their structure and position were remarked upon by Professor Beckett, who was of the party, and Messrs. Mathews and Thompson, in relation to the theory of the cooling of basalt and the crystallization of its exposed surfaces. Among the spoil banks of this quarry a search was made for coal plants, or their impressions in stony matter, and various specimens were found. The best was an elaborately sculptured *Sigillaria*, exposed by Mr. Lees, and Mr. Thompson obtained some massive stems of *Stigmariæ*.

The basaltic rock expands considerably in its course eastward into *Coldridge Wood*, breaking forth at several points, and in one place in the very heart of the dismal coverture, an elevated mass forms a most striking apex, densely shadowed on its sides by the solemn foliage of an ancient yew-tree. The story of this rock, which bears the name of Munster or Monster, excited some curiosity, and as it was determined to scale it forthwith, a storming party was formed for the purpose. But for a long time it truly seemed to be a forlorn hope, for though the yew covert was seen in the distance cresting the ridge, so thick was the underwood that it was only penetrated with labour and difficulty. The party got separated in this wearisome scramble, and several were either "thrown out," or abandoned the attempt in despair. In this difficulty an enterprising gentleman climbed to the summit of a tall oak, and succeeded in effecting an accurate observation. The mystic yew-tree was reported as not far off, and another struggle was made through the thorns and under-wood towards it, but the Club were completely baffled among the snapping branches of the thick covert, and the demon of the grove grimly smiled. The attempt was nearly given up, when as a last effort it was resolved to press on to a pit on the edge of the wood, where some miners had been noticed, and obtain some assistance from them. Once again a traverse was made through the wood, and this course, which led along a watery ravine where a brook gurgled in numerous water-breaks over slabs and masses of broken basalt, presented a truly wild, exciting, and picturesque aspect. The miners were well acquainted with the Monster rock, and one being secured as a guide, the ascent was now made with success. This great rock was found to be an uplifted mass of very compact basalt, containing a considerable amount of iron, and very sensitive to the magnetic needle. On its southern side it is broken and precipitous, while a solemn old yew-tree spreads its tortuous roots among the interstices of the rock, like a bird of prey transfixing its victim, and invests its base with twilight umbrage. Here a great slab has fallen from the summit of the rock, and various-sized masses lie confused around. The spot has a savage aspect, and was probably one of those un-hallowed places where in heathenish times the power of evil was invoked, and curses muttered "not loud but deep" against an enemy. Such places there were in Celtic times, remembered even now in the "Cursing-well of Elian" in Wales, and the Hailstone or Helstone rock of *Rowley Regis*. A malicious demon was believed to dwell at such localities, who was sacrificed to, and his power of mischief directed where to fall. The naturalists,



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having satisfied their curiosity, instinctively hurried down the steep, breaking through the thorns, and all declared never to be tempted to visit so uncannily a spot again, unless the ground was cleared.

Coldridge Wood and Birchwood that adjoins it presented some floral pictures of great beauty in brilliant spreads of the yellow Weasel-snout (*Galeobdolon luteum* = *Lamium Galeobdolon*), the silvery heads of Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), and azure patches of the rarer Forget-me-not, *Myosotis sylvatica*. Here, also, in traversing the thickets, the curious Birds'-nest Orchis (*Neottia Nidus-avis*) was discovered, the creeping *Veronica montana*, and the tallest specimens of *Paris Quadrifolia* ever seen. In the course of the route taken from Birchwood to Drakelow, the singular parasitical Toothwort (*Lathraea Squamaria*) was observed under a Witch-hazel, and the White Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) and Wild Sage (*Salvia Verbenaca*) on sandstone rocks. *Geranium lucidum*, Navel-wort (*Cotyledon Umbilicus*), and the Adder's-Tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), were also observed and gathered, as well as many *Carices*. The programme included an examination of *Kinver Edge*, but though that eminence came boldly into view, there was no time left to climb it, and therefore only *Blakeshall Common*, which is a dependent sandstone eminence, was examined, and excited some curiosity and attention from the remarkable appearance of many cottages or caverns, here excavated out of the solid rock, with chimneys peering above it. Amidst this sandy wilderness, a brick obelisk has been reared to commemorate Baxter, the Puritan minister of *Kidderminster*, "about 1650," as the inscription states, and further suggests two of his well-known books to be read. A church or chapel has been lately erected here, and the glen below is called "*The Happy Valley*" in the Ordnance Map, for some whimsical reason, for it is not the original name. However, a female resident, questioned on the subject, admitted that she was happy enough there, so that it might be better called the Valley of Content. But the naturalists now becoming weary, were not content to stay there, but with one accord pushed rapidly on to *Wolverley*, where, at the *Queen's Head*, a substantial dinner was provided, after which the usual business of the Club was proceeded with, and the accounts passed. The Hon. and Rev. W. H. Lyttelton was unanimously elected president, and Mr. E. Lees was re-elected vice-president, and Mr. W. Mathews hon. secretary.

The Rev. E. Horton, who was left behind entomologizing in *Eymore Wood*, has favoured us with a list of the

Lepidoptera he captured, from which, as the most interesting, we may mention the pretty Fritillary *Melitaea Euphrosyne* = *Argynnis Euphrosyne*, which was abundant; *Thanaos Tages* = *Nisoniades Tages*, *Herminia barbalis* = *Pachypogon barbalis* (uncommon), *Melanippe hastata* and *Eupithecia plumbeolata*, both rare, and *Panagra petrarica*, very local. Among the Micro-Lepidoptera there was taken the uncommon *Capua ochraceana* = *C. flavillaceana* and *Lobesia reliquana*, and *Incurvaria allionella* = *Micropteryx aureatella*, not previously observed in *Worcestershire*.

At this meeting the following gentlemen were proposed and duly elected members of the Club :- The Rev. G. Green, *Little Witley*; Dr. Hearder, *Asylum, Powick*; John Fraser, M.D., *Wolverhampton*; Edgar Lowe, Esq., *Foregate Street, Worcester*; - Linton, Esq., *Lansdown Crescent, Great Malvern*; Mr. C. H. Birbeck, *Worcester*; and Mr. Robert Newman, *Bewdley*.

Comments from Tony Simpson (2012) on lepidoptera mentioned in the article above:

'Fritillary *Melitaea Euphrosyne* = *Argynnis Euphrosyne* abundant' Pearl-bordered Fritillary, now *Boloria euphrosyne*.

'*Thanaos Tages* = *Nisoniades Tages*' Dingy Skipper, now *Erynnis tages*.

'*Herminia barbalis* = *Pachypogon barbalis*, uncommon' Common Fan-foot, *Pechipogo strigilata*, now rare in UK and localised to Wyre area in West Midlands.

'*Melanippe hastata*, rare' Argent & Sable, *Rheumaptera hastata hastata*, now rare and probably recently extinct in Wyre at its last Worcs. site.

'*Eupithecia plumbeolata*, rare' Lead-coloured Pug, very local in ancient woodland especially Wyre.

'*Panagra petrarica*, very local' Brown Silver-line, *Petrophora chlorosata*, now very common

'*Capua ochraceana* = *C. flavillaceana*, uncommon' Tortrix micromoth *Capua vulgana*, common in woodland, especially in north Worcs.

'*Lobesia reliquana*' Tortrix micromoth, local and uncommon mainly in Wyre area and an ancient woodland indicator species.

'*Incurvaria allionella* = *Micropteryx aureatella*' now *Microperix aureatella*, fairly common in Wyre and a few other woodlands in north of Worcs. associated with acid woodland with Bilberry.