

## FUNGI WALK and MEETING at NAPHILL COMMON on Sunday October 21<sup>st</sup> 2018

Penny Cullington

This our annual jumbo event was for the third consecutive year at Naphill Common at the kind invitation of the Friends of Naphill Common and was held a couple of weeks earlier in the season than previously, resulting in not only a wide variety of fungi on show but also a beautiful almost balmy autumn day – the Common was looking stunning and a walk here would have been a delight for the assembled company even if the fungi had disappointed. This would indeed have been the case if we'd visited before the desperately needed rain which fell two weekends earlier: fungal fruiting in the Chiltern area seems to have been on hold following our hot dry summer and exceptionally dry September, consequently our species lists have been considerably down this autumn and some really common things have been conspicuous by their complete absence.



It was suggested today that this has to be the largest meeting of its type in the country. There must have been in excess of 100 attendees today: once the throng had been divided roughly into three a quick head count of the group assigned to Derek and myself exceeded 50! The other two groups were privileged to be led by fungal VIPs Richard Fortey and

Geoffrey Kibby ably

**Above, a typical woodland scene today as we set out. (JL)** assisted by Mario Tortelli and Jackie (our amazing event organiser). Many of the attendees were work associates of Jackie's from the Natural History Museum, others were members of BFG, of the Friends of Naphill Common, friends of Jackie and Justin's or people who'd discovered the event on our website and contacted me to ask if they could come along.

All the leaders were kept busy and were bombarded with interesting questions about fungi as well as specimens to name – some in pristine condition and much admired, others less so and in a somewhat questionable state of dilapidation, but all were collected and brought back to the Village Hall for the 'Show and Tell' session afterwards. The



**Right, busy activity amongst Derek's and my group this afternoon. (JL)**



children amongst us probably found more fruit bodies than anyone else with their sharp eyesight and natural inquisitiveness (no doubt urged on by the desire to find more than their friends!)

Left, Richard with his group exploring the pile of ancient Beech recently extricated from the dew pond. (11)

On our two previous excursions here we'd been treated to a wonderful showing of the rare *Hericium erinaceus* (Lion's Mane / Bearded Tooth) growing as it was on the 'Great Beech' – a venerable ancient tree which had finally succumbed to old age and fallen into the dew pond, the fungus still continuing to fruit on it, however. With much fear and trepidation that the removal of this revered Beech from the pond would detrimentally affect the fungus, the decision to do so was eventually taken and much of the tree's bulk was left some yards away from the pond in the hope that fruiting would continue. We were therefore thrilled to find this year that it is indeed apparently thriving with impressive tiers of white delight to be seen not only on several of the felled and piled branches but also on the remaining trunk still left in situ beside the pond. If ever there was evidence that the fruiting body of a fungus is only the small and visible part of the whole organism living within the substrate, then this surely must be it! Clearly the mycelium of this fungus has spread throughout the bulk of this massive old tree, proven by its fruiting not only on its branches now severed and yards away but also on the undisturbed trunk.

Right, the stunning waterfall of tiers of *Hericium erinaceus* we were privileged to see today. (11)



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Moving on now to the Village Hall, once we had all reconvened it was time to set out our finds as best we could to form a display in some semblance of order whilst refreshments were enjoyed. No mean task, this, with basketfuls of mixed fungi in various states of chaos needing to be identified and sorted, but eventually it was achieved and the patiently waiting fans were then rewarded with some fascinating and entertaining talks from our esteemed leaders.

Richard set the ball rolling with a resumé of the various genera we'd collected, using amusing anecdotes and demonstrations to keep everyone intrigued.

Left above, Richard talking about the archetypal mushroom *Amanita muscaria* (Fly Agaric), and below not praying as it might appear but demonstrating a large *Lycoperdon perlatum* (Common puffball) doing what it says on the tin! If you look carefully the cloud of spores expelled when he squeezed it is just visible against the curtain background. (JL)

Geoffrey then expounded on the fascinating discoveries now being made about fungi using DNA sequencing to shed further light on how these amazing organisms should best be divided up at genera and species level. He touched also on the opportunity for mycologists at all levels to contribute to our knowledge of this unique kingdom of natural history by discovering new species not only to Britain but also to science.

Right, Geoffrey plus Fly Agaric holding everyone's attention today. (JL)



After Derek had told us a little

about the genera loosely known as the Inkcaps (this being his specialised subject for which he's now the recognised British authority) things became a little more light-hearted when I challenged our three experts (for a fiver) to name to species a specimen I'd found the day before. Though it was extremely atypical (as can sometimes happen with fungi) I knew its name having worked on it with a microscope and it belonged to the genus *Inocybe* (the Fibrecaps) where my level of expertise is at its best. I knew my money was safe though they did get to genus having badgered me for a few vital clues: this was a normally entirely brown mushroom but in an albino form..



**My challenge! First Geoffrey tested the smell, then Derek took a close look followed by Richard. Then back to Geoffrey again before they gave up. The mushroom was a very rare albino form of *Inocybe asterospora* (Star Fibrecap), as far as I know not reported from anywhere in Europe other than my three collections from the High Wycombe area. (JL)**



It was then time for Justin to wind up the proceedings and thank all involved with the planning and execution of today's very successful and enjoyable event. Firstly the three amazingly patient Friends of Naphill Common who again managed to lead our three groups round without (apparently) losing anyone; secondly BFG and our talented guest leaders, particularly Richard who, prior to BFG becoming involved a few years back, has now led this event for Jackie and Justin for every one of its 20 years' existence; finally Jackie who has taken upon herself to manage the event through thick and thin – what an achievement that is.

I sat down at home later to make a list of the species we'd been able to identify, knowing that the Friends of NHC would appreciate the records. On an occasion such as this it becomes impossible to note down everything at the time, also very few of the many specimens

unidentifiable in the field are taken home to work on, so the list tends to comprise those commoner species we can safely name at the time. Nevertheless we amassed 85 species of which 10 were new to the overall site list which now stands at 351 species. This may sound a large number but is not so for a woodland site of this size – we’ve probably barely scratched the surface! Thank you to all those who attended and contributed to the success of the day, and especially to both Justins (Long and Warhurst) who supplied me with the photos included here. Details of what we found are available on the separate list. See you all next year!



Above, Justin congratulating Richard on his 20th consecutive year of leading this event. (JL)



Left, Mario and Claudi discussing the array of Boletes on the display table (JL)

..... and below to finish with .....

..... that amazing cake! (jw)

