

Foray at Mousells Wood, October 19th 2014

Penny Cullington

Sixteen of us (members of both BFG and Frieth Natural History Society) met up in the hope that the recent rain would at last have spurred some species of fungi into action. It was a bright warm morning and as often happens here we spent quite some time searching on the roadside verge before entering the wood proper. The floor was liberally sprinkled with small species growing either on the leaf litter or on fallen wood: the miniscule but bright white *Marasmius setosus* (no common name but a common species of Beech litter) was easy to find once you got your eye in. *Mycena crocata* (Saffrondrop bonnet) with its bright orange juice soon became familiar even to the least experienced and was everywhere in good numbers, also several other species of *Mycena* (Bonnets), in particular *Mycena arcangeliana* (Angel's bonnet) was sprouting in nice fresh clusters on the fallen Beech, showing its typical purplish stem colour when young though this feature becomes less obvious as it ages.



Young *Mycena arcangeliana* on a Beech log today. (photo PC)

This woodland has in previous years produced an impressive list of mycorrhizal species (those which grow in symbiosis with trees) with several rare things turning up here including a few new to Britain. Sadly the very dry September this year seems to have deterred many of these fungi from fruiting, and although we found today that a good many smaller saprotrophic species were making the most of the damp conditions and were busy getting on with accelerating the decomposition process (their main function in the natural cycle), we found very few of the larger gilled fungi which add the 'wow' factor to any foray. Disappointingly no species of *Amanita* were found, also no *Hebeloma* or *Scleroderma*, only one *Boletus*, one *Lactarius*, one *Tricholoma*, one

Cortinarius (though this was a new species for the wood) and very few *Inocybe* species turned up. The two youngest forayers (my grandchildren) found the only two *Russula* species we saw, giving me the opportunity to demonstrate the use of a ferrous sulphate crystal to aid identification of this tricky genus known as Brittlepill. One was the common *Russula ochroleuca* (Ochre brittlepill) with a normal rusty orange reaction on the stem when rubbed with a crystal, and the other was a rarity which turns up regularly here: *Russula*



The rare *Russula faginea* found today. (photo from this wood last year PC)

faginea (no common name), a

chunky species restricted to mature Beech and having a smell of crab or fish. When a crystal is applied, it is one of just a few species of *Russula* in which the stem turns dark green in a few seconds (seen in photo), then eventually blackish, and which share this distinctive smell.



Above: typical specimens of *Clitocybe geotropa* (photo NF) and below: *Clitocybe nebularis* looking confusingly similar. (photo PC)



numbers. Obviously it must be enjoying the present conditions as several of us had noted it elsewhere recently as well, so one to look out for at the moment when you're out and about in woodland.

Left: *Coprinopsis picacea* showing nicely today. (photo JD)

Another interesting species was found by Alan Gudge who knows the site really well and led us round today: this was the attractive *Rhodotus palmatus* (Wrinkled peach) living up to its common name well and found on a fallen trunk of Wych Elm. Being host specific, this fungus has become increasingly rare with the demise of Elms in this country, so it is always a pleasure to find it.



Right: *Rhodotus palmatus* – a beautiful species. (photo PC)

Returning again to saprotrophic fungi, two largish species of *Clitocybe* were in evidence: the edible *Clitocybe geotropa* (Trooping funnel) and the poisonous *Clitocybe nebularis* (Clouded funnel). Typical fruitbodies of these two superficially similar species are (with experience) quite easy to separate, but as with most organisms atypical specimens occur and mistakes can be made in the field. If you like to eat wild fungi, please be cautious: never eat anything if you are in any doubt as to its identity and preferably always get it checked first by an experienced mycologist. (Even then, the risk is always there and the responsibility is always entirely yours!)

It was a shame Derek was not with us today because we found quite a few species of Inkcap, *Coprinopsis picacea* (Magpie inkcap) in particular turned up in quite good

We listed just under 70 species in all for the day, of which 13 were new to the site and one of these I found particularly interesting and I've saved till last: Towards the end of the foray Greg handed me a largish agaric (a fungus with a cap, gills and stem), all parts pure white, the stem firm and long, and having a mealy smell with a sweet component. At the time it didn't seem at all familiar and the nearest I could get to genus was to suggest perhaps *Tricholoma* (of which there are several white species). Whilst driving home a bell began to ring and I remembered a considerably smaller pure white fungus collected a couple of weeks earlier at a private foray in Beaconsfield – this had been a struggle to identify even with Derek's input and had completely mystified both of us. In fact it was only by chance that I'd come across the solution whilst browsing through my trusty copy of Phillips 'Mushrooms and other fungi of GB & Europe'. This earlier Beaconsfield collection had one redeeming feature: under the microscope the spores were white, ellipsoid, without colour reaction in iodine, and remarkably ornamented with distinct warts all over. This ornamentation together with the other spore characters immediately eliminated many genera including *Tricholoma* and left very few possibilities, one being *Lyophyllum* which, when I asked for his help, Derek strongly favoured. Problem: following the best available key none of the white species of *Lyophyllum* had ornamented spores. It was then that whilst looking for inspiration as a last resort I chanced upon a species tucked in between *Tricholoma* and *Lyophyllum* in Phillips. Bingo! There it was, *Tricholoma leucocephalum*, and it ticked all the boxes including the ornamented spores. With a bit more research I discovered that this relatively unusual species, first described in 1796, has previously been placed in no less than 5 different genera with various different species names, but now resides in a genus all of its own, as *Tricholomella constricta*. Clearly its unique combination of characters prevent it from sitting comfortably within an existing genus, and no wonder its identity caused us such confusion.

The Beaconsfield specimens had been quite small, cap only 2cm across, and were in open grassland whereas the Mousells Wood specimen was nearer 7cm with a long sturdy stem and in woodland, so I failed to connect the two straight away but the penny had dropped (apologies for the pun!) by the time I got home. Sure enough, when I checked the spores they were a perfect match for *Tricholomella constricta*, furthermore Phillips gives the cap size range up to 6cm, and the key in *Funga Nordica* up to 10cm, so clearly this species can get to a good size, a fact which I hadn't registered with the first collection. (You can access good photos of this species online by clicking on Images and then googling the Latin name. This is a useful method for fungi and often gives you a much wider range of views than is available in books, but please be aware that there are often errors and not all the photos which come up will be of your species!)

My tale is nearly told, but not quite! I had informed the forayers at Beaconsfield that *Tricholomella constricta* was new to Bucks, making the Mousells collection the second county record. Not so! When browsing through my miscellaneous fungi photo file a few days ago I came across a set dated 15.10.07 and labelled 'Mystery white fungus from the garden'. There it was: this same species with a photo of the ornamented spores, and checking my notes for that year I'd made all the same observations about the pure white fruitbodies, the mealy smell, the lack of other interesting microscopic characters apart from those spores. It was really nice to be able to solve an earlier mystery, though of course I had absolutely no recollection of the find! So my Amersham garden gets the first record for Bucks and Mousells Wood gets pushed into third place! Some photos follow on the next page, though I readily admit they aren't the greatest as by the time I realised I had something interesting the specimens were not at their best.

Many thanks to all the attendees, and also to Joanna for her photo of the Magpie Inkcap. Lets hope our last couple of forays continue the improved collecting and that things are on the up again now after such a disappointing season.

See the complete list for more details of what we found.



Left and below: Today's specimen of *Tricholomella constricta* found by Greg Douglas, with cap 7cm across and stem about 10 cm long. (photo taken later at home PC)



Left: my mystery garden fungus of 2007 solved, *Tricholomella constricta* again, caps 2.7cm across.

Below: the ornamented spores of this unusual fungus which maybe is not that rare but gets misidentified or not identified at all! (photos PC)

