

FUNGI WALK at HOCKERIDGE WOOD on Saturday September 27th 2025

Penny Cullington

Following our promising midweek walk here last year after a gap of 10 years we decided to visit this year at the weekend thus increasing the number of attendees. This worked well and paid off. Our group of 18 had a thoroughly enjoyable morning and we were delighted to welcome seven new members who were quickly involved, showing genuine interest with intelligent questions and proving their worth with some interesting finds. I was particularly grateful for Jesper's presence which meant not only that most of the boletes we found were identified but that we were able to confer over many collections making my life much easier.

We started off with a bang when a rarity was soon found (by one of our new members!) on the end of a bare Beech log. ***Hericium cirrhatum*** (Tiered Tooth) is one of three members of this very rare genus, though this one is probably the least rare of the three. All are large creamy white 'brackets' having long fine spines (teeth) in place of gills or pores thus placing the genus amongst the 'hydroids'. Most of our 10 county records for this species are from Burnham Beeches with just 3 other sites known, so this was a very nice find.

Right: *Hericium cirrhatum* (PC)



The genus *Amanita* featured quite prominently throughout the morning which gave the less experienced a good opportunity to pick up on the 'vital statistics' of this important genus – in the news of late through the scandalous Australian story of deaths due to the deadly toxins present in a couple of species. In fact early on a pure white *Amanita* was handed me with the question 'Is this the Destroying Angel?' Out came the bottle of KOH (Potassium Hydroxide) which uniquely turns instantly golden yellow when a drop is placed on the cap of that species, *A. virosa*, to prove that it wasn't! ***Amanita citrina* var. *alba*** (False Deathcap) is – as its name suggests - often suspected of being one of

the deadly species but has a distinctive sharp smell of fresh potato peelings which instantly sets it apart. Both *A. virosa* (very rare locally) and *A. phalloides* (Deathcap and frequently found locally) have a very different sickly sweet smell with a honeylike component. There are further field differences but the smell should be sufficient and the KOH test is the clincher! Later on it was useful to see the common ***Amanita rubescens*** (Blusher) now fruiting prolifically, giving the opportunity to recognise its various guises at different stages of development.

Left: *Amanita rubescens* (PC)



Quite early on we found a few tight clumps of bright orange mushrooms sprouting out from the base of a large Beech. ***Gymnopilus junonius*** (Spectacular Rustgill) is indeed a striking species though here it was only young – the largest cap around 5 cm across, but a few days earlier at Wotton Park

Estate we were treated to the real spectacle with a fully expanded cap around 15 cm across. (See the photo included in that report.) Nevertheless today's fruiting was much enjoyed. (It is often the case that when one species is reported to be fruiting locally it then simultaneously pops up in different areas – this has been proven over and over again though our Members' Finds webpage.)

Right: *Gymnopilus junonius* (PC)



I mentioned boletes earlier and we have 5 species on today's list though confusingly none now bear the genus name *Boletus*! Thanks to molecular sequencing this large group of mushrooms (those with stems but pores underneath instead of gills) have been split into around 20 different genera – some with names obviously connected to the original (eg *Neoboletus*, *Rubroboletus* etc) but some not (eg *Leccinum*, *Suillus*, *Xerocomellus* etc). A few species still remain in '*Boletus*' though only one of these is common around here (*B. edulis*) and we didn't see it today. This situation, though progressing our scientific knowledge of the development and relationships between species, does nothing to help the confidence of the beginner floundering in a sea of strange-sounding names, but at least when these changes happen the English names remain unchanged! We have to be thankful for small mercies! Sadly we have no photos of today's boletes to share but checking the separate species list (where I've included the previous genus names in the RH column to help) then going to our Members' Finds and using the search facility in the index should take you to a good range of examples.

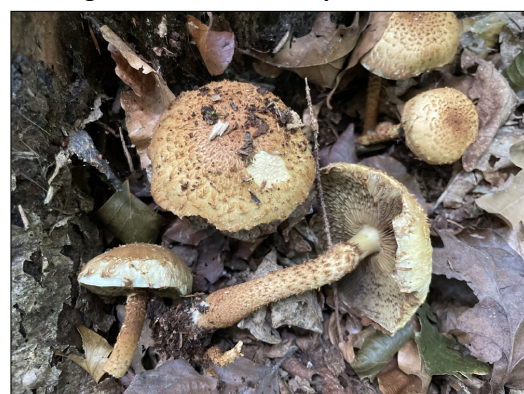


Left: *Megacollybia platyphylla* (JL) with insert showing an example of the mycelial strands (PC)

We found good numbers of a very common but often misnamed brown mushroom which inhabits deciduous woody litter, but if you know to search for the unique thick white mycelial strands which attach the stem base to its substrate then its identity is revealed. *Megacollybia platyphylla* (Whitelaced Shank) also sports widely spaced adnate creamy white gills (separating it from the crowded free pink gills of the genus *Pluteus*) and a rather grainy fibrillose cap surface (separating it from the radially wrinkled surface of *Hymenopellis radicata* (Rooting Toughshank) which lacks the strands but has a single extended 'tap root').

Another brown capped but very different mushroom we found was *Pholiota squarrosa*

(Shaggy Scalycap). This species forms tight clumps at the base of deciduous trunks (as in *Gymnopilus junonius* featured above) but both cap and stem are distinctly scaly. Others in this genus have moist or sticky to slimy caps but this, the commonest



Right below: *Pholiota squarrosa* (SJE)

species, has a dry cap and shares the rust brown gills of the *Gymnopilus* but never reached the same proportions as that whopper!

A couple of Polypores are on our list though not everyone saw these, I think. These are more like brackets than mushrooms but have a stem and, as the name suggests, pores underneath rather than gills. Unlike the softer thicker fleshed boletes they have firm leathery texture and grow on fallen wood. Note the scaly upper surface and rather widely spaced pores characteristic of *Polyporus tuberaster* (Tuberous Polypore) seen here.

Right: *Polyporus tuberaster* (SJE)

Two more 'non-mushrooms' to share with you: the first being *Abortiporus biennis* (Blushing Rosette) - an interesting and somewhat confusing 'bracket' type, sometimes found on fallen wood and sometimes apparently on soil though then in fact on the submerged roots beneath. When on wood it can form a pinkish rosette shape but today it was looking very atypical except for the blood red droplets which if present are a good character. There, however, is a very rare hydroid species (ie with teeth) which also can develop similar droplets but is unlikely to occur down south, being found in the Caledonian Pine forests of Scotland!

The second non-mushroom was found on a piece of rotting wood forming a soft white slightly cushioned line of tiny pores which confused us to start with until it was realised that when touched it gradually turns pinkish red. I eventually recalled the name: *Physisporinus sanguinolentus* (Bleeding Porecrust) – not that common and easily overlooked also.



Above left: *Abortiporus biennis*, and right: *Physisporinus sanguinolentus* (JL)

At one point Sarah excitedly handed me some tiny Bonnets she'd found on fallen conifer wood and then on close inspection she recognised the clear blue on the caps marking them out as the unusual *Mycena amicta* (Coldfoot Bonnet). It is unusual to see this species (found only on conifer wood) with such obvious and prominent blue and more often than not this colour is only just visible on the cap margin or only at the stem base (hence the English name) or even missing altogether. Then an

identification can only be made with a scope and no doubt it often gets overlooked or misidentified.

This is certainly the most positively blue collection I've ever seen!



Left: *Mycena amicta* (SJE)

Almost back to the cars I happened upon a small group of LBJs (Little Brown Jobs) in the soil at the edge of the path. (The term LBJ is affectionately applied to a range of genera which fit into the category of fairly nondescript small brown mushrooms that are often hard to identify and nearly always need a scope to do so.) These, however, had one distinguishing feature – a

stem with a small ring, thus placing it in a genus closely related to *Conocybe* (Conecap), in fact previously included in that genus but now separated off into *Pholiotina*. *Conocybe* is a challenging genus of many species which mostly look almost identical, but with *Pholiotina* one has a fighting chance with only around 20 species to contend with in the key. The microscopic features of this collection led me to *Pholiotina arrhenii* (Ringed Conecap), not at all rare but one I always enjoy finding and working on.



Right: *Pholiotina arrhenii* (PC)

Though our list of around 90 species sounds impressive, and of those 90 well over 20 were new to the site according to our records, most were pretty common species (except of course for *Herichium cirrhatum*!) and we had to search quite hard. Fungi were not exactly prolific but after the dearth of mushrooms we've experienced so far this year so far it was a delight to be out and finding things again today. Moreover when coming on these walks for the first time it can be utterly overwhelming and positively daunting when fruiting is really prolific, so today was pretty well perfect! Thank you all for coming; thanks also to Jesper for his valued help with identifications both in the field and afterwards; thank you too for the photos included here. For more details of what we found see the separate complete species list.

Photographers

JL = Jesper Launder; PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah-Jayne Ebdon