

## FUNGI WALK at RUSHBEDS WOOD on May 7th 2025

Penny Cullington

Our small band of nine met up at the road junction and, having negotiated the large BBOWT vehicles unloading some fencing just over the railway bridge, we set off along the tramway to enjoy a delightful springtime stroll here on a bright and sunny morning. It was probably the driest we've ever seen this site – one that retains moisture well owing to its clay soil – so it was no surprise that between us we managed only an extremely modest fungus list, but the birdsong plus flora, a few butterflies and other insects provided interest, making for a thoroughly pleasurable morning.

In spring this site can always be relied upon to provide a few nice examples of *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet Elfcup) - until today! There was no sign of it that we could find, though previous spring visits have been in March or April so May's perhaps a bit late. I've been told by several that the species has been much in evidence in the county elsewhere this year despite the generally unfavourable conditions for fungi. Other species regular here in spring but missing from today's list were *Calocybe gambosa* (St. George's Mushroom), also *Morchella* or *Verpa conica* (ie any species of Morel), in fact if it wasn't for Sarah and Neil's valiant efforts in identifying the rusts and other plant pathogens found today our list would be even shorter. So I'll start off with some images of these as they are not often featured in my reports.

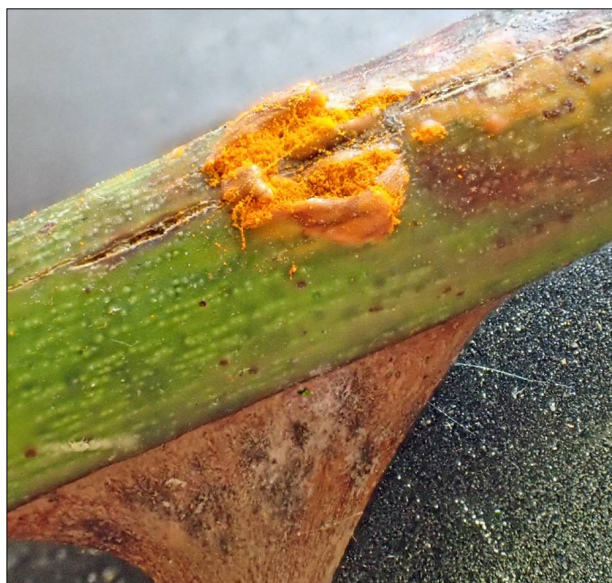
First onto our list was one we've recorded here for several years and is found on *Potentilla sterilis* (Barren Strawberry) – a plant of which grows very happily in the brickwork of the railway bridge at Rushbeds. It looks to the layman basically just like *Fragaria vesca* (Wild Strawberry) but I have it on good authority that there are distinct botanical differences, furthermore the rust *Phragmidium fragariae* only occurs on Barren Strawberry despite its epithet implying otherwise.

Right: *Phragmidium fragariae* (SJE)



Another of the same rust genus was noticed on *Rosa sp* (possibly Dog Rose) and appears not to have been recorded here previously.

Right: *Phragmidium mucronatum* (NF)



Left: *Melampsora rostrupii* (SJE)

Along the tramway path we soon came across the common rust which occurs on *Mercurialis perennis* (Dog's Mercury) though the species previously known as *Melampsora populnea* (Dog's Mercury Rust) has – like many other rusts - now been split into a range of species according to the



specific host plant on which each occurs. Thus this particular rust now goes by the name of ***Melampsora rostrupii*** (seen above).

Further along this path we came across another common rust, this one occurring on bramble stems in late spring and which can be pretty conspicuous coating the stems with its orange streaks.

Right: ***Kuehneola uredinis*** (PC)

Still on the tramway we spotted yet another such rust but this time it took us a little while to identify the all important host plant – if you know the name of the plant it makes its



pathogen far easier to

name. The shrub turned out to be *Euonymus europeae* (Spindle) which then led both Neil and Sarah to work out its identity independently, though this is another example of a species being recently split according to its host. Previously known as *Melampsora epitea*, the species found on Spindle at one stage of its development (and *Salix* - Willow at another stage) is now ***Melampsora euonymi-caprearum***, though it has been recorded from Rushbeds before under the previous name.

Left: ***Melampsora euonymi-caprearum*** (NF)



Turning onto the main central ride we found two different pathogens growing separately on *Filipendula ulmaria* (Meadowsweet), one a rust and the other a powdery mildew. ***Triphragmium filipendulae*** (Meadowsweet Rust) has been recorded here before, but ***Podosphaeria filipendulae*** appears to be new. The first example we found was completely coating the plant in 'white dust' – so much so that we struggled to identify the plant until a further example less affected was found.



Left: ***Triphragmium filipendulae*** and

Right: ***Podosphaeria filipendulae*** (SJE)

On now to what some might consider 'real fungi' rather than 'things on leaves etc'! (My apologies if I've gone over the top with featuring the rusts here but



mushrooms and the like were really few and far between today.)

Both Gill and Bill separately found two of today's mushrooms, though I suspected these were both the same species of *Psathyrella* (Brittlestem) – wrongly as it turned out. Both were good spots and were very small and 'mycenoid' – no more than 1cm across at most, but the darkening greyish gills gave away their genus. The first, in the tramway, was as I suspected *P. corrugis* (Rededge Brittlestem) – a common species though the gills lacked a red edge which seems to be a variable feature. (I was at this stage so pleased that any mushroom had been found that I pounced on it for a photo to include in this report!)



Left: ***Psathyrella corrugis*** – can you spot the even tinier cap in the photo?! (PC)



The second, in the central ride, was equally small and looked very similar to me but microscopic examination – always needed to identify this genus – showed much smaller spores (in fact half the size) and cystidia of a different shape too. It's sod's law that I took a photo of the common species but didn't bother with this second one which is likely to be much more interesting! At home I failed to tie it down to any particular species and have dried it in the hope that sequencing will produce a definitive name – by no means always the case.

For me the most exciting find of the day was Jenny's *Russula* (Brittlegill) spotted growing on an old stump, possibly Oak – an extraordinary find for May especially at this site which has relatively few of this genus in its species list though they tend to be interesting species and ones we don't meet that often, presumably owing to the soil and trees here differing in range from the Beech dominated Chilterns. This collection had to be carefully extricated through wire fencing to avoid damaging the two specimens, and once this was achieved it was immediately obvious from both the gill and cap colour that this was no ordinary *Russula*. At home I worked for several hours in an attempt to name it but as with the little *Psathyrella* I eventually decided it should be dried for sequencing. At least we have a photo of this one, also the smaller specimen obliged by dropping a good spore print which proved, as I suspected it would, to be the darkest orange shade possible for the genus. Even so I just couldn't key it out – very frustrating!



Above: *Russula* sp. – awaiting sequencing. (pc)



Meantime, while the *Russula* was being collected several of our group were well behind having been summoned by Sarah to admire a species she knew to look out for here. ***Hymenochaete corrugata*** (Glue Crust) is found exclusively on Hazel where it likes to affix dead or dying twigs together which in effect prevents them from falling to the ground to be infected by any competing fungus – a clever strategy which retains the dead wood, keeping its nutrients for itself – a sort of 'Dog in a manger' fungus! Hazel happens to grow in profusion at Rushbeds, hence this interesting fungus is a regular on our lists. Here it can clearly be seen with its black growth firmly attaching the dead stick to its neighbour. Good spot, Sarah!

Left: *Hymenochaete corrugata* (SJE)

On the fallen Birch we found several examples of *Fomitopsis betulina* (Birch Bracket), almost always present wherever its host tree occurs. However, not always present is the ascomycete which is found exclusively on the pores on the underside of older brackets of this species, and Derek found a nice example of this today. ***Trichoderma pulvinatum*** (Ochre Cushion) – better known by its previous name *Hypocrea pulvinata* – starts out white but matures into these bright yellow little puffy blobs, both stages showing well here below.

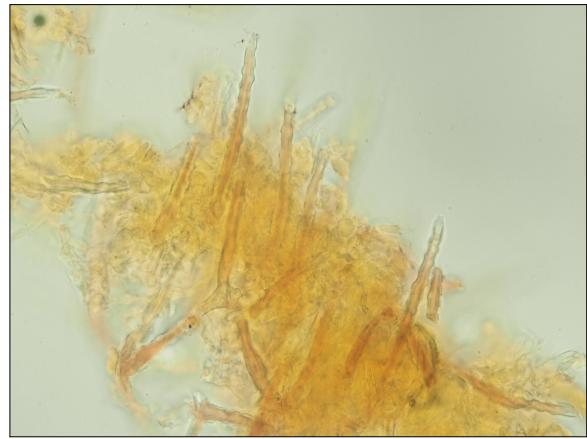


Right: *Trichoderma pulvinatum* (DJS)

We kept Claudi busy as usual with offerings of possible corticoid species (ie flat splodges, usually whitish, on damp fallen wood); some he accepted and some he rejected depending on their apparent freshness and the likelihood of spores being produced – an essential ingredient of any identification of these tricky fungi. One he was able to get a name for was *Subulicystidium longisporum* (no English name) and though it looks unexceptional in the field and similar to many others, under the scope it has some interesting features. Not only are the spores very long and thin (not seen in his photo) but the cystidia are quite distinctive, tall and thin and covered in spirally arranged crystals giving a regular bumpy effect along their length.



Below: *Subulicystidium longisporum*, left in the field, and right under the scope x 400 magnification. (cvs)



Our list of just under 30 species is pretty meagre, but of those several were new additions to the site list and a couple were new to the county list. Hopefully the intriguing *Russula* and small *Psathyrella* which both went unnamed (as did several other things) will provide interesting results which I'll update here as and when – but don't hold you breath! These things are never quickly resolved. Thank you to all for coming and contributing to the enjoyable morning; thank you also to Neil, Sarah, Claudi and of course Derek for both identifications and photos. For more details of what we found see the separate complete list.