

MICROSCOPE WORKSHOP at the AMERSHAM FIELD CENTRE – September 12th 2026

Penny Cullington

This was our first event of the autumn season and also our first visit to the Amersham Field Centre near Mop End. It turned out to be an ideal venue both indoors and outdoors and we very much hope this will prove to be the beginning of a regular association between BFG and AFC, with hopefully a repeat workshop as well as a separate walk for the group here next year.

The 13 attendees comprised a complete mix of old hands and novices with a scope, and after setting up our equipment and books we set off for an hour's walk in the grounds to collect specimens to work on. Having searched about for material with little success in our own local areas the day before, we were pleasantly surprised at what we managed to turn up here today, and the good mix of grassy areas, pathside verges and substantial woodland having both mature conifer and deciduous trees provided enough for our needs. (It soon became apparent that this site has the potential for a full morning's exploration by BFG, especially as the centre is clearly keen to receive fungal records and has not been previously forayed.)

Right: the delicate *Parasola auricoma* (Goldenhaired Parasol) found in a grassy verge (SJE). Below left: the tiny frilly-edged *Deconica crobula* found in damp vegetation in the woodland path edge (LS). Below centre: the immature bracket *Phaeolus schweinitzii* (Dyer's Mazegill) found at the base of several Larches (LS).



Below right: *Scleroderma citrinum* (Common Earthball) found under deciduous trees (LS)



Back at the lab we then set out the samples for people to work on as they wished. Then for those who needed it there followed some basic instruction on how to prepare a slide for viewing under the compound scope, stressing the first vital lesson: 'Less is more!' ie the smaller you can make your piece of gill edge / cap cuticle / or whatever, the more detail you'll be able to see at higher magnification.



Below: a selection of our collected samples (JL)

There were several of us on hand to demonstrate the various techniques to achieve a good 'prep', to advise on the use of stains and chemicals, and those both with and without scopes were encouraged to 'have a go'. It was great to see their results with not only spores and cystidia successfully found but even cap cuticle sections made from a specimen of *Pluteus*

salicinus (Willow Shield) with the dreaded and often elusive clamps then located – not bad for first-timers!

Right: Penny's slide preparation demonstration in progress (SJE)

There was coffee, tea and biscuits available throughout the day, and our lunches were eaten in the warm sunshine at the convenient picnic tables with continual chat and exchange of ideas and issues relating to fungal microscopy and identification. Good use was made of the wide selection of reference books we'd brought along though sadly Bob's set-up to link his scope to the available screen could not be persuaded to co-



operate. We worked through some keys to make some identifications and everyone was absorbed and busy throughout the day either on their own or sharing / learning from others. Claudi's valued experience with scopes came into its own with advice on the set-up of one or two scopes which had been causing problems, and Sarah even added a new species to the county list.

Below: the miniscule *Periconia byssoides* found on a dead stem of Nettle and identified by Sarah, new to the county today (SJE)



Everyone helped to clear up at the end and by 4.30 we were all packed up, tired but feeling inspired that the day had been so much enjoyed. Thanks go to Sarah for the efficient organisation of the whole event (and for researching and locating this excellent venue), and thanks also to Steve and Jenny from AFC who were so welcoming and helpful throughout the day. What a gratifying and encouraging start to the season! Below are a couple more photos which give a further flavour of the day.

Photographers

JL = Jesper Launder; LS = Linda Seward; SJE = Sarah-Jayne Ebdon



Left: Back at the lab – a hive of activity (JL)

Right: In the field, the discovery of the impressive but somewhat inaccessible example of *Fistulina hepatica* (Beefsteak Fungus) (LS)

