

A Foot in the Chilterns Visit to Grim's Dyke Wood*

with Richard Fortey
organised by Anthea Osborn-Jones



1st September 2020

***Part of Lambridge Wood, Henley**



The wood has been part of the estate of Grey's court since Saxon times so Richard began by telling us a little about its history.

The de Greys: soldiers and churchmen 1086 – 1485

The Knollyses: Courtiers and Politicians 1514 – 1688

The Stapletons: Plantation Owners and Local Gentry 1724 – 1934

(Briefly Evelyn Fleming) The Brunners: Homemakers and Campaigners 1937 – 1969 (2003)

Miss Stapleton Pelargonium

Miss Catherine Stapleton had a cultivar named after her in 1837.



Pelargonium 'Miss Stapleton'

There is also a purple-pink flowered pelargonium known as 'Miss Stapleton' which is very similar in growth to *P. echinatum*, apart from the colour of the flowers. It will also be noted that there are blotches on the lower petals and feathering on the top two petals. In her book, *The Pelargonium Species*, Diana Miller says 'Miss Stapleton' is the only named hybrid remaining today. Although it was thought to be a form of *P. echinatum*, it has been suggested 'Miss Stapleton' is the result of a cross between *P. echinatum* and *P. cortusifolium*. Raised from seed collected at Colvill's nursery and first flowering in 1823, it was named for Miss C Stapleton - a lady much attached to the Geraniaceae'.



The Binfield Hundred

Saxon shires were divided into 'Hundreds' – based on the notional resources needed to support 100 families. These were then arranged into long thin strips to make the parishes.

The parish of Rotherfield Greys extended Eastwards to include its own river frontage, so important as trade grew. The old road through the parish runs from the river up Friday Street, then up Greys Hill.

THE Notebook

In this notebook, Richard recorded his observations of the wood, which after several years formed the basis of the book.

The leather-bound book was given to him by Mariella Frostrop, for a TV interview for which he received no payment, only a goody bag!

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History of the Wood

For most of its recorded existence Lambridge Wood was part of the manor of Greys. The wood was used for building houses, ships and then for beech furniture.

In 1922, Lambridge Farm and 160 acres were sold to George Shorland, a farmer and entrepreneur.

By 1938 Shorland had sold to the Star Brush Company who made vast quantities of solid beech-back brushes.

In 1969, Lambridge Wood was sold to Sir Thomas Erasmus Barlow Bt, and his family owned it until 2010.

Lambridge Wood has been subdivided into about six plots of different sizes. Richard's four acre triangular plot was named, Grim's Dyke Wood after the ancient monument that passes through the wood.

Richard and his wife, Jackie, took ownership of the wood on 4 July, 2011.

Holly Walking Stick

Made by Richard from holly from the wood.

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Cherry trees

The cherry log beside Anna, now almost rotted away, is the one Richard sat on to write his notes for the book. The one in the foreground was felled more recently, and is the one he sits on now.

Richard seasoned the wood of one cherry tree and Philip Koomen has made a cabinet for him to display treasures from the wood.

Cherry trees grow particularly tall and straight in the wood as they have to compete for light with the tall dominant beech trees. There are about 18 cherry trees in the wood.

Cherry bark is distinctive because the rings are horizontal. It is also very tough – the wood inside rots away leaving the bark still intact.

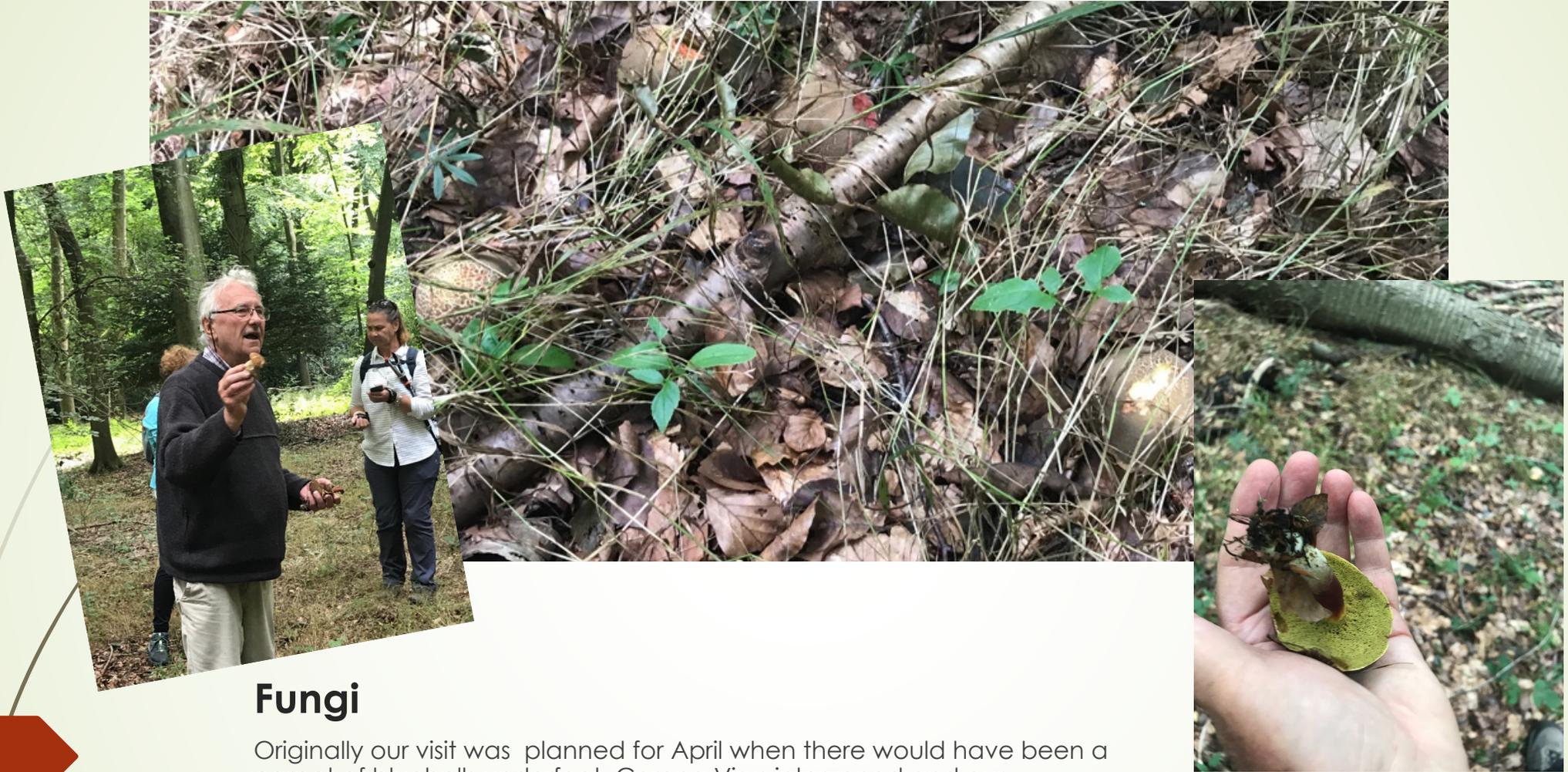
Cherry picker

Richard hired a cherry picker to go above the canopy and see the view the red kite has. He also invited entomologists from the Natural History Museum to sample the insects that live in the leaves.

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Jenny, Bridget, Trevor and Anna



Fungi

Originally our visit was planned for April when there would have been a carpet of bluebells underfoot. Corona Virus intervened and our reconvened walk had a carpet of fungi instead as later slides show! Richard is very knowledgeable about fungi and has identified more than 300 species in the wood!

Boletes

These photos show boletes which do not have gills on the underside but a spongy surface, composed of many tiny tubes.

The King and Queen beech trees

By ring counting felled trees, Richard estimates most of the beech trees to be about 80 years old. These have a diameter of about 50cm and can be comfortably hugged.

The wood has about a dozen giant trees that have circumferences of more than 250cm. Richard has named some of these; three are the King, the Queen and the Elephant. His estimates suggest that these are 140-180 years old.



Sawpit

This is a well preserved sawpit, that was probably in use in the 1950s.

To process the log into boards it was placed across the the pit. A two-man crosscut saw was used. One man was above (the top dog) and one man below (the underdog). The underdog got all the sawdust in his eyes!

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Hazel coppicing



The coppicing was not done at ground level because ground level new shoots are too attractive to deer. Higher up Richard believed they were less likely to be eaten – and they weren't!

The wood is not troubled by much deer damage in general. Richard attributes this to the large number of dog walkers who regularly use the wood.

Hazel poles are used for fencing, as bean poles and originally for wattle and daub.

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Grim's Dyke

On the south-western edge of the wood there is a bank a few feet high. Running alongside it, is a shallow depression. The gully extends a long way through Lambridge Wood and appears again at Nuffield. Part of a Saxon structure that may originally have made some kind of line across the county – or even country as ten counties have 'Grim's Dykes' (variously spelled Grime's or Grymes).

Its purpose is not known but is probably some kind of boundary marker, but if that's the case then at the time it was constructed there can have been no wood! At that time Grim's Dyke Wood was Grim's Dyke Down!

Richard believes that the woods were reestablished in mid-Saxon times.

Grim's Dyke is not a footpath – though many dog walkers believe it to be so.



Last felled beech which allowed ring counting and confirmed the trees to be about 80 years old.

Grey Squirrels

There is nothing good to say about the grey squirrel, an invader from North America that many believe may bring an end to beech forests.

In spring and early summer, squirrels sit on high branches and strip the bark to drink the sugary spring sap. From below the branch looks fine but on top there may be considerable damage. This may be the reason some large branches fall earlier than expected.

Squirrels also damage the bark close to the base of the tree and many of the beeches showed scars from squirrel wounds.

Andrew Ingram at Christmas Common was equally worried about the damage caused by them when he took us on a walk through his woods.



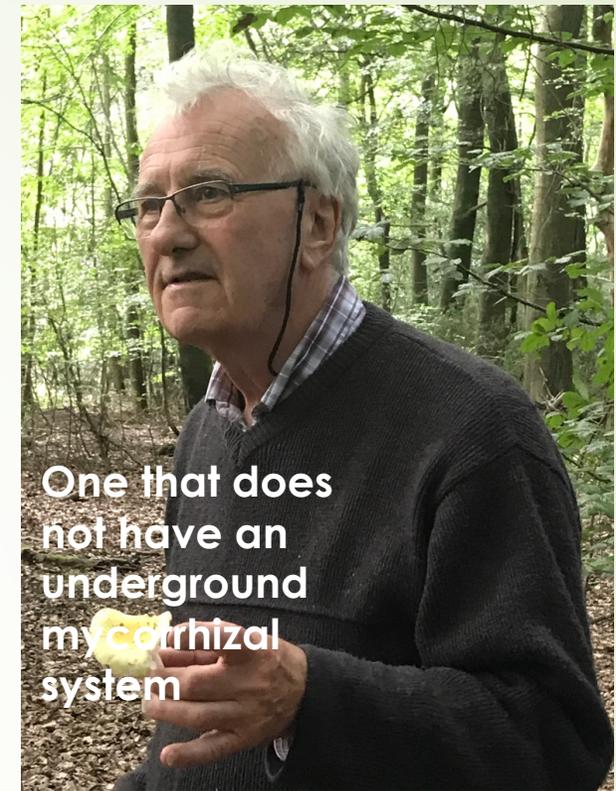
More fungi!



Shows the underside turning blue when exposed to oxygen



Fungus on fungus



One that does not have an underground mycorrhizal system



Red mushrooms in general are poisonous

Chicken of the Woods Fungus

This dramatic fungus is edible when young. The photo Sue was taking is to the right!



Sue's perfect fungus!



... and yet more fungi!



Tree species in the wood



The best oak in the wood

The trees in the wood are predominantly beech. There are 2 oaks that grew in the wood, the one here is a fine specimen, the other less so. It's straight and tall because it has to compete for light with the beech. Other species and numbers (at the time the book was written) are

- Wild cherry – about 18
- Ash – 3
- Wych elms – lots
- Yew – 2 – Richard thinks these grew from seeds dropped by birds after the great felling 80 years ago.
- Field maple - 1
- Birch – 2+
- Understory trees - Holly and hazel

Burrowing bees

These little holes are made by badgers digging up the honey made by burrowing bees. The sett itself is not in Richard's wood.



Legacy trees

Three trees have been planted in memory of close friends of the Forteys.

One is an English oak, not grown from a Grims Dyke Wood acorn but a purchased 'handsomely proportioned young oak'. It has been planted in a space with plenty of blue sky above and protected from deer damage by coppiced hazel stakes and chicken wire.

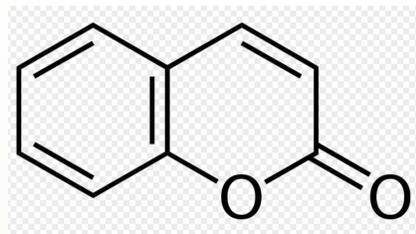
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Sweet Woodruff

Eight delicate leaves to a whorl. Its Latin name is *Galium odoratum*. The plants' sweetness grows as it is dried. In former times it was placed in bedding, sweet-scented bedstraw. The chemical is *coumarin*.

Coumarin is a colorless crystalline solid with a sweet odor resembling the scent of vanilla and a bitter taste. It is found in many plants, where it may serve as a chemical defense against predators.



Wych elm



There are some healthy Wych elms in the wood, although some have been affected by Dutch elm disease. The fungus is spread from tree to tree by a small bark beetle which only attacks mature trees.

Wych elm is more resistant to Dutch elm disease than the English elm. Richard thinks that enough trees will develop resistance to the disease to allow the elm to survive.

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Beetles

Apparently beetles are the most diverse group of animals on earth!

There are certainly more than 100 species in the wood – maybe twice that. However, no stag beetles have been found to date.

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Mosses

This beautiful photo shows one of many different types of mosses in the wood.

Change...

Ten years ago, when Richard acquired the wood, this stack, close to the entrance to the wood, was shoulder height!

It is slowly returning to the soil and hosts a myriad of creatures and fungi.





The future?

This is probably the longest period since Saxon times that the wood has not been a working wood. That must be bringing its own changes.

There are many threats hanging over woods generally including climate change, squirrels, deer damage, human intervention, loss of biodiversity, pollution ...

Hopefully many small woodlands are receiving similar loving care.

Regeneration

Jenny beside a young beech tree. This one has sufficient light availability to grow to maturity. Many others will not.

Clay and glass from the flint

A Dutch friend of the Forteys made these tiny clay tiles from clay in the wood. The glass samples are made from different colour flints, fired by the same friend at a much higher temperature. Flint is just silica. The samples have pride of place in the Koomen cherry wood display cabinet. The geology of the wood is clay with flint. There is no chalk – although there is chalk close by.



Book signing!

Richard's book about the wood is '**The Wood for the Trees** – the long view of nature from a small wood'.

ISBN 978-0-00-810469-6

Richard was happy to sign copies of his book that we had carried around with us. My second-hand purchase of Richard's book turned out to be a winner. It is a first edition and has full colour photos, unlike the current edition where the plates are only b&w.

The numbers on the slides are page references to where the topic is covered in the book.



Thank you!

Richard has planted this Wild Service tree close to the entrance to the wood. It is a new species for the wood.

This marked the end of our wonderful visit. Thank you, Richard, thank you, Anthea and thank you Ann for suggesting the visit!

Linda Glithro

September 2020



Linda, Anne and Pauline

