

The Cambridgeshire Group

The meetings of the Cambridgeshire Group are not regularly reported in *Field Bryology*. Although we get a great deal of pleasure in exploring v.c. 29, our fortnightly meetings are probably too frequent and our local excitements too banal to entertain a national readership. However, it might be worth making an exception for the 70th Anniversary Excursion. The Group first met on 5 February 1938 as a party from the Botany School, Cambridge, led by Paul Richards and with the young Harold Whitehouse in attendance. They travelled by coach to Little Widgham Wood south of Newmarket (see Richards & Whitehouse, 1988). It was to celebrate this anniversary that we met on 10 February 2008.

Fourteen of us met at Brinkley church (TL65SW) on a wonderfully sunny winter day. The churchyard proved to be in almost ideal condition, not excessively tidy and with plenty of gravestones and monuments. The 35 species recorded included a couple of very uncommon plants, *Hygrohypnum luridum*, growing in the open on a low oolite kerb, surrounded by grass which doubtless shades it in summer, and *Tortula marginata*, detected by Nick Jardine on heavily shaded brickwork at the foot of the north wall of the church.

We then went on to Little Widgham Wood (TL65NE, SE). It was coniferized in 1957–60, but it is not intensively managed (Fig. 1). Stumps and decaying trunks of fallen conifers (some blown down in the gale of 1987) provided a number of calcifuge species which are rare in the county, including *Lepidozia reptans*, *Campylopus flexuosus*, *C. pyriformis*, *Herzogiella seligeri* and *Plagiothecium denticulatum*, and Mark Hill found some scattered

stems of *Polytrichum juniperinum* amongst much *Campylopus introflexus* on soil on the exposed root plate of a fallen conifer. Also of interest were *Dicranum tauricum* on willow bark, and *Fissidens bryoides* and *F. exilis* on the ground. Having worked our way through the wood, we looked carefully at its southern edge, the north side of the parish boundary ditch which separates it from the deciduous Plunder Wood. Here there are many old field maples and a few ash trees, supporting frequent *Neckera complanata*. *Porella platyphylla* was frequent on one maple and very scarce on one ash, and a small patch of *Plagiochila asplenioides* was spotted on the south-facing ditch bank. As we were making our way back to the entrance of the wood, Simon Damant, in a dramatic *coup de théâtre*, caught up with the party and showed us vigorous shoots of *Plagiothecium undulatum* from a large patch he had found on damp ground in an open area under brambles. In all we recorded 61 species in the wood, adding 19 to the list for the site, but failing to record 16 species seen previously. We refound five of the eight species last seen on the inaugural excursion in 1938, including *Neckera complanata* and *Porella platyphylla*. On the 50th Anniversary excursion in 1988, Mike Lock had made only the second 20th century record of *Ulota bruchii* in the county in the nearby Great Widgham Wood, one of the first indications of the return of the epiphytes. We are now accustomed to seeing species such as *Cryphaea heteromalla*, *Orthotrichum lyellii* and *Ulota bruchii*, all found in Little Widgham Wood on the 2008 visit. The only habitat we had perhaps expected to see but did not was disturbed soil suitable for ephemeral species –

70th Anniversary Excursion

▷ Fig. 1. Bryologists at Little Widgham Wood, 10 February 2008. *Left to right:* Tom Charman, Peter Reynolds, Pete Michna, Alison Jukes, Jo Denyer, Mark Hill, Oliver Rackham, Robin Stevenson, Jonathan Graham, Simon Damant, Chris Preston and Nick Jardine. Stephen Hartley was also present. *Richard Fisk*



there were no rutted rides and the numerous tracks made by fallow deer were too heavily trampled to mud to support any bryophytes.

There was time at the end of the day for a small celebration. Mark Hill cut a cake illustrated by a picture of one of our more memorable excursions (kindly provided by Robin and Wendy Stevenson), Chris Preston poured small tumblers of 'fizz' and Robin distributed commemorative fridge magnets. The day was an enjoyable and bryologically rewarding way of marking the Group's birthday. Thanks are due to Mr W.J. Gredley for kindly giving

us permission to revisit Little Widgham Wood on this occasion.

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REFERENCE

Richards, P.W. & Whitehouse, H.L.K. (1988). Fifty years of the Cambridge Bryological Excursions. *Nature in Cambridgeshire* 30, 41–49. Reprinted in *Bulletin of the British Bryological Society* (1990) 55, 39–47.