



Wyre Forest Study Group

Upper Arley, Seckley Wood, Dowles Brook & Bewdley

Tuesday, 21st October, 1862

WORCESTERSHIRE NATURALISTS' CLUB

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The fifth and last meeting for the season 1862 was held on Tuesday, 21st October, at *Upper Arley*, on the banks of the Severn, which locality was reached by aid of the Severn Valley Railway. The railway forms a cutting through the *Wyre Forest Coal Field*, near the bridge over the Severn at *Arley*, the section exhibiting carboniferous beds on either side to the height of above 50 feet, but with only isolated and broken veins of coal; but nearer the *Station* the base of the formation is seen resting upon marl of the Old Red, and above 18 feet of conglomerate appears a bed of dark-coloured marl, in the midst of which is a thin vein of coal, which thickens suddenly as it descends beneath the railway bridge. The strata appears to be considerably disturbed at this point by an anticlinal lift, but the general dip of the beds is in a northerly direction. On the spoil bank above the deep cutting some remains of ferns were observed, though in a decomposing state, and some capital specimens of *Stigmaria*, but converted into stone, were collected. After the geological noting had been made, the party proceeded into the grounds of *Arley Castle* to view a Sorb Tree, which was understood to have arisen from a graft taken about forty years ago by Earl Mountnorris, from the celebrated old Sorb in *Wyre Forest*, lately burned down. This was viewed with much curiosity, and specimens of its hard pear-like fruit, formerly an object of superstition, taken to examine. This kind of tree was formerly called the Whitty Pear Tree by the country people, a derivation probably taken from its supposed virtues in protecting from the influence of malignant witchery - *witten* being an old English word signifying knowledge, while *Witega* was a Saxon term for a prophet. In former days the old Sorb Tree in the *Forest* was greatly venerated.

The church of *Arley* was next examined, comprising nave, north aisle, and chancel, partly Early English, but there is little of interest about it in an architectural point of view save the timber roofing of perpendicular date. There is also the tomb of a cross-legged knight, and slabs in memory of Sir Henry Lyttelton, Bart., of Frankley, 1693, and the late Earl of Mountnorris and his son Lord Valentia, who were, it appears, descended maternally from George, the first Lord Lyttelton. Some of the party ascended the church tower, from whence the towers of *Arley Castle*, now the residence of R. Woodward, Esq., with the windings of the Severn, an islet in it, and a beautifully wooded and undulating country charm the gazing eye. After refreshing at the

Valentia Arms, the naturalists next crossed the river, and, under the guidance of Mr. E. Baugh, advanced through *Seckley Wood*, whose beechen shades, tinged with autumn hues, and contrasting with dark solemn indigenous yews, offered many points of remarkable and artistic beauty. The ground was rendered vivid in colouring by a crowd of various Fungi, comprising the esculent species, *Hydnum repandum*, distinguished by its teeth beneath, and the orange-coloured *Cantharellus cibarius*. The rarest of the fungoid tribes gathered was the curious *Helvella mitra* = *H. crispa*. On arriving at *Dowles Brook*, which was much swollen by the late rains, and therefore not, as usual, fordable, a detour had to be made to a foot-bridge higher up the stream, and the intricacies of *Wyre Forest* were entered upon. The members subsequently assembled at the *George Inn, Bewdley*, for dinner, after which the following gentlemen were duly proposed and elected members of the Club:- The Rev. C. G. Lane, of Great Witley; G. A. Sheppard, Esq., of Worcester; and John Rose, Esq., M.D., Kidderminster. Mr. G. Jordan, of *Bewdley*, produced a last relic of the celebrated Sorb Tree of the *Forest*, so shamefully burned down, and it is intended to form from it a cup or goblet, that may be used at Club festivities.



Sorbus domestica, Arley Arboretum 2011 Rosemary Winnall