RECORDS FROM THE PAST

lt is to clergymen we must turn for these, as we have to for much of the early recorded natural history of Shropshire. During the years 1647 to 1747, the Reverend Littleton Brown was recording and naming fungi near Bishops Castle. He noted the Common Stinkhom *Phallus impudicus* (fig. 1), Dryads Saddle *Polyporus squamosus* (fig. 2), and the Peppery Milkcap *Lactarius piperatus* (fig. 3).

Figure 1

ln 1786 the Reverend Edward Williams became perpetual curate of Battlefield and Uffington near Shrewsbury. He recorded the unmistakeable *Phallus impudicus* in 1799 on nearby Haughmond Hill and at Bayston Hill as well as in some local woods. He also recorded the much smaller orange-tipped Dog Stinkhorn *Mutinus caninus* in these three places as well as the Common Morel (fig. 4) at Eaton Mascott near Berrington, this latter fungus *Morchella esculenta* is sought after by chefs in many parts of the world today.

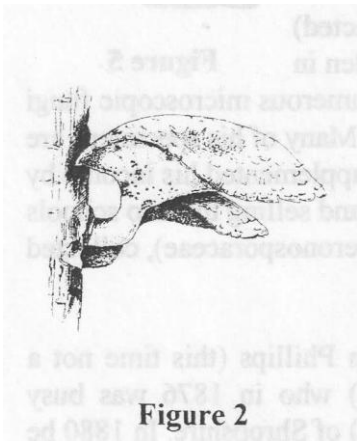

Figure 2

Some clergymen had microscopes and thus began records of microscopic fungi in Shropshire. The Vicar of Oswestry, Thomas Salwey, was identifying rust fungi on leaves in 1838, and his specimen of the rust fungus on the Tufted Sedge, *Carex elata*, from Morda Pool near Oswestry is one of the earliest of this group of fungi held in the herbarium at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. This form of *Puccinia caricina* lives alternately on the common nettle *Urtrca dioica*. Salwey collected *P. caricina* on nettle and sent it to Kew in 1838 from somewhere "in Oswestry"! Other important Shropshire rusts collected by Salwey were *Puccinia adoxae* on Town Hall Clock, *Adoxa moschatellina*, in Oswestry 1842, *Puccinia calcitrapae* on Common Knapweed, *Centaurea nigra*, Oswestry 1838, as well as rusts on poplar, birch, and roses in his vicarage garden. Salwey was busy recording larger fungi too. Cathrall's *History of Oswestry* (1855) contains a list by him of fungi found near Oswestry. This includes the Sulphur Polypore or Chicken of the Woods, *Laetiporus sulphureus* on a yew tree in Oswestry Churchyard, "but not found every year" - the fungus has been seen recently, in 1990, possibly on the same very ancient tree

Figure 3

Fungi like the Fly Agaric *Amanita muscaria* (fig. 5), Sulphur Tuft *Hypholoma fasciculare* (fig. 6), and lnk Caps such as Lawyer's Wigs *Coprinus comatus* (fig. 7), and the places where they occurred around Oswestry, were well known to Salwey in the first half of the nineteenth century. Salwey recorded many lichens, which are now classified with fungi, and their precise localities.

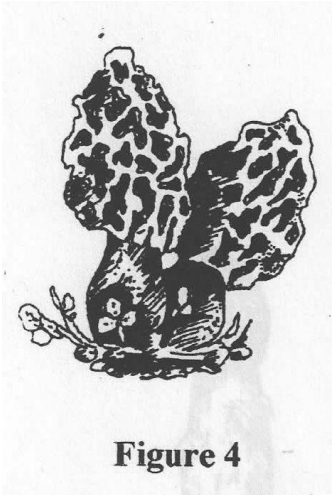

Figure 4

In 1851 W. A. Leighton produced an important book on lichens which covered the British Isles but has many Shropshire records. Leighton was originally the curate of St. Giles Church in Shrewsbury but resigned to devote his time to fungi and plants (he had published his *Flora of Shropshire* in 1841). Leighton did enormous amounts of work with his microscope. He too collected rust fungi, e.g. *Phragmidium tuberculatum*, rose rust, in Shrewsbury in 1833; *Phragmidium fragariae* on *Potentilla sterilis* at nearby Pulley in the same year - both in the Kew herbariurn. In 1846 Leighton was near Haughrnond Hill collecting the one-inch high Bog Beacon, *Mitrula paludosa*. He took it home and drew the spores in detail - his drawing is in the Local Studies Section of Shrewsbury Library.

During the years 1864-1865, Mrs Sarah Price of Bitterley, near Ludlow, produced two books with hand-coloured plates called *Illustrations of Fungi*. These books are in Ludlow Museum. Almost every plate has a clear caption giving the location near Ludlow where the specimens were collected, the majority near Bitterley. In 1871, Leighton produced his major work *The Lichen Flora of Great Britain and the Channel Isles* - naturally it contains many Shropshire records. This reached a third edition in 1879. Several fungi and lichens were named after Leighton.

Figure 5

During the years 1870-1890, a very remarkable (and much neglected) clergyman, the Reverend J. E. Vize was busy in his vicarage at Forden in Montgomeryshire recording and examining with his microscope numerous microscopic fungi collected in Shropshire and in the Welsh borderland near his parish. Many of his specimens are at Kew and are the earliest of some groups of fungi held there. He supplemented his income by making collections of microscope slides of these microscopic fungi and selling them to schools and colleges. He sent many Shropshire rusts and downy mildews (Peronosporaceae), collected in Shropshire, to Kew between 1875 and 1888.

Figure 6

A close friend of Leighton was William Phillips (this time not a clergyman but a tailor in Shrewsbury!) who in 1876 was busy recording the Slime Fungi (Myxomycetes) of Shropshire. In 1880 he produced his important list of toadstools and mushrooms, *Hymenomycetes of Shropshire*, with locations. In 1887 he produced his much more important book, on Cup Fungi, the *Manual of British Discomycetes* containing many Shropshire records. In 1891 the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club commenced its *Record of Bare Facts*, the first source of all natural history records in the County. Phillips was the prime mover and referee in matters mycological until his death in 1905.

lt seems certain that another vicar, the Reverend William Houghton FLS, a very great Shropshire naturalist, may well have been the key

Figure 7

figure in starting the study and recording of fungi in Shropshire (and now, like Vize, almost forgotten). Houghton was for many years Vicar of Preston upon the Weald Moors, near Wellington. William Phillips wrote of him: "I would like to express my obligation to William Houghton who gave me my first lessons in mycology".

Houghton was bom in 1828 and died 1895. He was a classical scholar as well as a naturalist and interested himself for example in references to fungi by Greek and Latin authors. His writing on this topic (1885) is of importance in the history of mycology according to Ainsworth (1976). Though active in the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club of Hereford, we have relatively few documented instances of his mycological activity. At least three fungi were named after Houghton following Shropshire finds: *Clitocybe houghtonii*, *Pezicula houghtonii* and *Hygrophorus houghtonii* (now *Hygrocybe laeta*). In 1868 he told the Woolhope Club about his finds of what are now called *Lyophyllum fumosum*, *Gymnopilus sapineus* and *Coltricia perennis*. This list of special finds by Houghton in Shropshire goes on; White Truffle *Melanogaster variegatus*, in Lilleshall Woods near Wellington (1869); the edible *Sparassis crispa* from Chetwynd Firs close to Newport (1870) and so on. William Houghton wrote very many scientific papers on insects, molluscs, polyzoa, leeches, flatworms, sea cucumbers, etc.. It seems most of his serious scientific work was on animals, especially fishes, not on plants or fungi. *His British Freshwater Fishes* was an ambitious major work. He had a great interest in antiquities, especially in gleaning as much natural history from these as possible. Another important work (1884) was a book entitled *Birds of the Assyrian Monuments*. He was clearly a giant intellectually, and had great influence on all who came into contact with him, like the young William Phillips. He also wrote popular natural history books specifically aimed to interest children, eg *Sea-side Walks of a Naturalist*, and before that in 1869, *Country Walks of a Naturalist with his Children*. All this work seems to have been done at Preston upon the Weald Moors Vicarage, during the years 1860 to 1894.

The Twentieth Century

During the opening years of the twentieth century, Mr W. B. Allen of Benthall near Ironbridge, recorded many fungi in his vicinity and especially from Broseley, aided by Phillips. Many of these are Shropshire 'firsts', and one of these was the large White Truffle fungus *Choiromyces meandriformis* pushing up through the grass at Benthall in 1905. As an aside, he notes that this rare fungus had been seen by the Reverend W. Houghton at Lilleshall in 1875! Clearly Allen, like Phillips, had access to Houghton's records, but these have not survived in printed form. The first volume of the 1908 Victoria County History of Shropshire contains a list of Shropshire fungi, without locations. It was prepared by Phillips and up-dated after his death by Allen.

In 1909 a very significant event occurred: the British Mycological Society (BMS) held a Spring 'Fungal Foray' based on Shrewsbury. This yielded a long important list of fungi from specific sites, published in the Transactions of the BMS, authenticated by experts from other parts. The BMS returned in 1917 with a similarly documented Autumn Foray based again on Shrewsbury. Some foggy outline of the possible wealth of fungi in this, the largest inland county of the British Isles, began to emerge! Most places in Shropshire were (mycologically) awaiting exploration.

Another change was occurring about this time - to have a very significant effect on the fungal records of Shropshire. During the 1914-18 war, records were made of the fungi attacking farm crops and garden produce, and the results were permanently recorded in printed reports prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture. In the first of these reports (1917) many records of fungi from the County, checked microscopically at Harper Adams Agricultural College, Edgmond near Newport, are listed. Later, mycologists based at the MAFF laboratory at Wolverhampton examined and recorded masses of material from Shropshire affected by fungi. Government economies reduced this work to a small amount in the 1970s, but the largest mass of microscopically confirmed records of fungi from the County is to be found in the record books of MAFF mycologists. Most of these men (and later women) were also active in the BMS in their spare time, and were authorities on groups of larger fungi too!

From the interests of classically fluent clergymen, the focus in Shropshire had changed to the needs of farmers and gardeners. W. B. Allen died at Benthall whilst still a relatively young man. This was, in retrospect, a severe blow to the recording of fungi in Shropshire. After his death, there are few records of larger fungi in the Proceedings of the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club. The BMS held further national Forays at Ludlow in the Spring of 1932 and the Autumn of 1937. The printed records from these (and the 1909 and 1917 Forays already mentioned) are central to fungal records for the County. From 1937 until the 1970s occurred the Dark Age of Shropshire Mycology. Other counties continued their records, notwithstanding the 1939-45 war, but with the final ending of publication of records by the Caradoc and Sevem Valley Field Club in 1973, Shropshire mycology seemed doomed. But about this time a group of members of the BMS, drawn mainly from the South Staffordshire Naturalists' Society and the Birmingham Natural History Society began systematically to record the fungi of the Dudmaston Estate, near Bridgnorth. This has continued with minor gaps to the present time. This was part of a more general survey of the Estate's flora and fauna, at the invitation of the owners, Sir George and Lady Labouchere. Records were also made from other sites in the County but less intensively. Ted Blackwell of Ludlow co-ordinated these forays and has meticulously kept the records.

In the early 1990s there has been a boost to the identification and recording of Shropshire fungi on courses run at the Preston Montford Field Centre near Shrewsbury, by Dr. Derek Reid, formerly at Kew. As with the Dudmaston recording, this work was done from outside the county. Also in these years, intensive recording of microfungi, especially of Rusts (Uredinales) has been done by T.F. Preece in the north-west of the county near Oswestry.

The formation of the Shropshire Fungus Group has provided a nucleus for present recording in the county and its members are now the main source of new records.

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