



Mayfield





The Nature of Mayfield

by Steve Plant

July 20th 2013 was *optimistically* forecast as sunny and warm. Optimism is a wonderful thing, but unreliable! It was, on the day, cloudy and coolish although it just about stayed dry.

It was a pleasure to lead the attendees around the village I grew up in, much changed today, not all for the better. Knowing that Betty now lives in Mayfield it was great to have her along, especially as she is more up to date with the history of the village, greatly expanded in recent years by the excellent work done by the village heritage group.

Years ago, one field bordered by a stream which runs through the village used to have masses of lady's smock, an alternative name being may flower. Could this be the origin of the village name?

Setting off from the meeting point the first two fields we passed through, at some time 'improved', had a mix of grasses but little else. When I were a lad they were owned by an old farmer who managed them as hay meadows, using a horse, cart and pitch fork to collect the hay. The hay meadows, like so many, have now gone along with the old traditional farmers. Odd patches, such as a hollow where a Wellington bomber came down in the Second World War, are too wet and marshy for modern machinery and so still retain fine displays of umbellifers and meadowsweet.

In the churchyard, a bit too *tidied* for much nature but, as is often the case in old churchyards, there are some fine yew trees. If they could talk what stories could they tell us? Then we walked one of the lanes, mostly bordered by old hedges mainly of hawthorn, with wide verges in parts. I suspect these have unfortunately been sprayed recently as the plants were limited to the coarser grasses and tougher vascular plants.

We entered a field in the floodplain of the nearby river Dove which hosts lady's smock occasionally but it is often at its most attractive when packed with dandelion blooms. The Dove eventually meanders to meet the path. The flood defence embankment along much of this stretch used to be a good vantage point for the river. Today it is fenced, probably to protect it from damage by grazing cattle. This has, however, allowed brambles, thistles, willowherbs etc., to establish between the hawthorns atop the embankment. Despite the cool grey conditions, the flowers were attracting various flies, including hoverflies, the odd sawfly, a difficult to identify moth and a peacock butterfly, amongst others.

A little further on we passed through a wide gateway with two hornbeams of the same age and size and almost

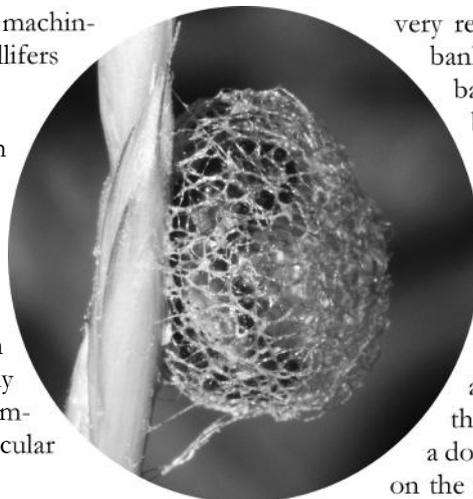
certainly planted rather than self-set due to their alignment and relative position to the gateway. Not a great deal further on is Calwich Lake and the site of the now long gone Calwich Abbey. Handel reputedly wrote his Water Music while resting by the lake. The two hornbeams could have marked the position of a gateway and the route of a safe carriage route through the flood plain. Across the next field and we came to the very aptly named Horseshoe Bend on the River Dove. The fields themselves have again at some point been *improved* so, sadly, only minimal flora. But, again, the fencing off of the river bank, although narrow, provides a refuge for nature. At this point on my practice walk just days earlier (and, typically, a much better day), there were mayflies in biblical proportions! There are 47 species in the UK and most of those encountered had been *Ephemera danica*, the green drake, the commonest UK species. There were so many on the hedge-row that the bushes looked ghostly and even more in the air, resembling dancing fog!

We crossed a stile intended for fisherman to access this riverside nature refuge. The plants, including thistle, nettle, and dame's violet had largely finished. Even so, there were ladybirds, mostly 7 spot, some potato capsid (*Closterotomus norvegicus*) and a few varied flies; sadly little else, including birds. Otter have regularly been seen around this point too in recent times, along with martins, kingfisher, dipper and others all sadly missing on the day. The lack of birds etc., might

have been due to the bellowing voice issued from a very red and irate face on the opposite river bank - the local water troll, sorry, water bailiff. 'What are you doing in there?', he boomed. When Bill tried to politely explain what we were doing there, the bailiff boomed backed with 'I don't want to hear your backchat!' Sadly, we retraced our steps, before deviating onto another path where we stopped for lunch. Whilst taking the break we saw an orange tip butterfly pass briefly and quickly. The most interesting find of the walk, soon after lunch, was about half a dozen very small cocoons (picture on left), on the stems of grasses in just one small area.

They resembled cages that looked as though they were made from sugar strands, containing even smaller larvae. They were made by the larvae of *Schreckensteinia festaliella*, a micro moth species which feeds on bramble and raspberry foliage.

We left the fields again to cross the Ashbourne - Uttoxeter road and into one of the oldest parts of the village which is also home to the village wells. From here we walked up Hollow Lane. Much of the lower part of the lane is cut between deep, wet, sandstone banks with a small stream to one side. As it is dark and shady, it is mostly home to celandines in spring and mosses and liverworts for the remainder of the year. At the top the lane opens out giving views over the Dove valley. There is a small





cottage, currently being renovated, here too. Where the light does get in toward the top of the lane and on up to the cottage gate the grass is neatly trimmed, as per the cottage garden, but a small area between cottage gate and the stile at the top of the lane is a true hay meadow in miniature. It could have been sown but I suspect is natural as it doesn't have an extensive range of meadow flowers. The ones it does contain, ox-eye daisy, field poppy etc. and foxglove in the hedge bottom are all typical of the area; there is also a good mix of grasses. It would have been good to continue on from here but the footpath is in a poor state and a little precarious.

So we back-tracked to the bottom of the lane, and on toward Slack Lane. The village stream which runs down much of Slack Lane used to be brimming with three-spined sticklebacks. During the drought of 1976 the stream started to dry out so I rescued several of these wonderful little fish, relocating them in a specially built home pond. When the stream recovered I returned them, with many offspring. I am not sure how successful this was. Certainly, sticklebacks haven't reached the numbers once present. This 'green' lane could be very muddy at times and so has been 'canalised' for a short but now un-pretty stretch.

Near Moore's Cottage on the day of my practice walk, around two dozen gatekeeper and meadow brown were enjoying the bramble blossoms. On the proper walk we were not so lucky, but we were entertained by hawking dragonflies, probably southern hawkers, also an azure damselfly. From here we walked up hill to the highest part of the village appropriately named 'Upper Mayfield'. On the steeper part of the hill there were a mix of drying shorter grasses, further up onto the brow it had been cut, dried and baled. On the top is a nice sized pond, recently restored, so a bit lifeless. In my youth it was looked after by retired farmer Mr Fearn. He was in his eighties, had a gammy foot which had been trodden on by a shire horse when he was young and he made his own boots to accommodate his badly deformed foot. He loved the pond and kept it from becoming overgrown and infilling. In those days there were all three species of newt present, in good numbers.

From here the plan had been to go back to the valley bottom and take another path along the river Dove from Hanging Bridge but, with time moving on, a very generous and difficult to resist offer from Betty of tea and cake at her home, (Betty's tea room isn't in Harrogate, it is in Mayfield!), the plan quickly changed, probably just as well as there were a few spots of rain soon afterwards!

A return visit to the village, with probably a different route and hopefully brighter warmer weather might be more productive on the natural history front. The cold spell during the spring of 2013 hit many insect species numbers; this had to have an impact on the insect-feeding birds and mammals too. However, Betty Needham's up-to-date historical knowledge helped greatly to fill these natural history gaps. Thanks, Betty.

Mayfield's History

by Betty Needham

As I now live in Mayfield, I was determined not to miss the walk led by Steve Plant. Some interest was expressed in the old buildings that we passed, so I offered to do an account of their history.

I had a five minute walk to the car park meeting point but the rest of the group, coming from Derby, would travel from Derbyshire to Staffordshire via Hanging Bridge over the River Dove. They probably never gave it a thought because, as it stands, it dates from 1937. However, beneath it are the grey stone arches of the original 14th century bridge which is Grade II* listed. Why Hanging Bridge? Many of Bonnie Prince Charlie's soldiers, retreating from Derby on 7th December 1745, terrorised the local Mayfield population. Some of the troops shot the local innkeeper and also a Mr Humphrey Brown who refused to hand over his horse to them. Villagers hid in the church behind the West door which still bears the bullet holes showing where Scottish soldiers fired through the door. Here comes that familiar 'legend has it', that many of the Scots were caught, tried and hung from gibbets on the old bridge. However, further into the village is Gallowstree Lane suggesting that those to be hung went their way via the bridge and Gallowstree Lane to Gallowstree Hill. Members would also have driven past the remains of the Rock Houses, demolished in 1922. The rear walls of these were built into the rock at the back. Evidence of the cellars can still be seen and even traces of some interior wall colour.

From the car park, we set off across the fields where Steve pointed out the crash site of a Wellington bomber that came down in a thunderstorm. In 2011 the Mayfield Heritage Group erected a memorial to the crew. Our path led us through the churchyard. There are forty scheduled listed monuments in Mayfield. The only Grade I is the church. This has a late 12th century core which was remodelled and extended in the early 14th century, the West Tower added in 1515, the north aisle extended in 1854. The tower was built by order of the Lord of the Manor, Thomas Rolleston. An inscription on the West face reads "AINSY ET MIEULX PEULT ESTER" meaning "Thus it is and better could it be." In the churchyard, under the ancient yews, is another listed monument, a medieval cross. It was moved to the churchyard in 1852 from a site opposite the Hermitage (more anon). Once through the churchyard, it was a short walk to a stile taking us into the fields and to the River Dove. The path eventually led us to the main Mayfield/Uttoxeter road and into Middle Mayfield. Here, I should point out that there are four Mayfields: Mayfield, Church Mayfield, Middle and Upper Mayfields. We were now in Middle Mayfield, the most historic.

One of the first buildings to attract attention was Old Hall Farm (Grade 2*), a fine 17th century farmhouse, remarkable for the plaster ceiling in the 'parlour', dated



to 1630. This wasn't seen by the group but I have and it is reminiscent of what you'd see in a minor stately home. The dairy extension of 1740 is also listed along with the garden wall and the gate piers. In the farmyard is what looks like a standing stone but is actually a "rubbing post" for the cattle, once a legal requirement on farms and one of the few to survive. The barn is a scene of great activity in June when the panels for the village well-dressings are prepared. Nearby is Mayfield Cottage (Grade 2), not my idea of a cottage, as it is a two-storey 18th century house. It was built for John Barr, an iron-master, hence the decorative cast-iron railings and gate partly enclosing a small front garden. Next door is Brook Farm (Grade 2) a handsome stone-built house of the late 17th century with stone mullioned. The mullions continue to form blind panels between the ground and first floor windows. Brook Farm is opposite Hollow Lane, the site for the three wells "dressed" in June.

Continuing beyond Hollow Lane, we reached Mayfield Hall (Grade 2) which is built in land granted by William the Conqueror to Henry de Ferrers and then passed by his grandson to the Priory of Tutbury. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the priory and its possessions were surrendered to Henry VII, who gave the Hall to Sir Edward Aston in 1543. The present hall was built in the early 18th century but the deeds, signed by Henry VIII, are still retained by the current owners. The fireplace is dated 1608 and beneath the hall are cellars and passages reputedly dating from 1157, their purpose remaining a mystery. They have been cut out of the sandstone and are wide enough for four people to stand abreast or for a cart to be pulled through. Incidentally, the owner of the hall is Lord of the Manor at all times.

Just across from the Hall is Holme Farm. The house, very impressive, with a long history, was once surrounded by a moat. It has three stories and was built of stone in the late 17th century, with an added kitchen of late 19th century, taken from the adjoining range of farm buildings. The first house was built on the site in the 12th century for the Steward of Tutbury Priory's estates. A stone cross can be seen at the apex of each gable end which indicates the buildings ecclesiastical origins. The present owner has family links with those early stewards. It is believed that this 12th century house was replaced in 1440 and that some part of the present house dates from then. Further down Hermitage Lane is The Hermitage (Grade 2). Unfortunately, only the back of the house and its impressive wood store is visible from the lane. The house is dated 1748 with an early 19th century addition. An inscription over the door of the older section reads 'William Bott in his old age built himself a hermitage'. One of the Victorian residents of the house was William Harrison who earned the nickname 'Treacle Billy'. A very religious man, he started a Sunday school at his home in the 1890's and built up a sizable attendance by giving his pupils treacle sandwiches!

One further house of interest in nearby Slack Lane is Stancliffe Farmhouse (Grade 2) now better known as Tom Moore's Cottage and dating from 1800. Tom

Moore, the Irish poet, came to Mayfield in 1812 looking for a new home for himself and his wife. In June 1813 he found 'Mayfield Cottage' which a friend described as 'a tiny house like a little caddy with one chimney in the middle of the roof' and Moore himself said 'Just the sort of thing I am likely to like, secluded in the fields, a mile and a half from the pretty town of Ashbourne. The rent is £20 and the taxes £4 more'. In 1815 their baby daughter, Olivia Byron Moore - Lord Byron, a great friend of Moore's, was her godfather - died suddenly. She was buried in Mayfield churchyard where her small gravestone can still be seen. Tom Moore's great literary work was 'Lalla Rookh', now long forgotten. However, some of his poems will be familiar to the older generation, 'The Minstrel Boy'; 'The Last Rose of Summer', 'Oft in the Stilly Night' and 'Believe Me, if All Those Endearing Young Charms'. Many of these have been set to music and conjure up pictures of a Victorian family gathered round the piano. Tom Moore left Mayfield in 1817 but returned to visit his daughter's grave and despaired to find his beloved cottage 'in a state of dirt and degradation.' He died in 1852. The cottage, I'm pleased to say, is now an enlarged, much loved, home and small-holding.

These are just a few of the attractive buildings to be found in the "Mayfields". The main one I missed out (because we didn't pass it) is Mayfield Mill, just mentioned as a corn mill in 1291. It became a cotton mill in 1793, burnt down in 1806 and stood derelict until 1816. It was then rebuilt in cast iron with brick vaulted ceilings to reduce fire risk. In 1866 it was leased to Simpson Brothers of Eccles (Lancashire) who modernised and enlarged it. They built six rows of terraces in Mayfield to house their workers. These are still occupied today, modernised and privately owned. The mill now operates as Mayfield Yarns.

So, from church to bridge, from large houses to cottages and even down to an 1850 listed cast iron mile post, Mayfield has its fair share of listed monuments. The longer I live there, the more I discover.

I should like to express my thanks to Mr. Pat Smith of Mayfield Heritage Group for supplying many of the details in this article.

KEY TO COLLAGE ON PAGE 40

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Green Dock Beetle
(<i>Gastrophysa viridula</i>) & dock
leaf eaten by larvae | 8. Amber Snail (<i>Succinia putris</i>) |
| 2. Nettle-tap Moth
(<i>Anthophila fabricianus</i>) | 9. Mayfield Parish Church |
| 3. A sawfly species
(<i>Tenthredo livida</i>) | 10. Greater Bindweed, pink
variety |
| 4. White Stonecrop | 11. Ground elder |
| 5. River Dove near Mayfield | 12. Damsel Bug (<i>Himacerus sp.</i>) |
| 6. Great Willow-herb | 13. A hoverfly species
(<i>Helophilus pendulus</i>) |
| 7. Yellow Stonecrop | 14. Yarrow |
| | 15. Nettle-leaved Bellflower |
| | 16. Common Green Capsid
(<i>Lygocoris pabulinus</i>) |