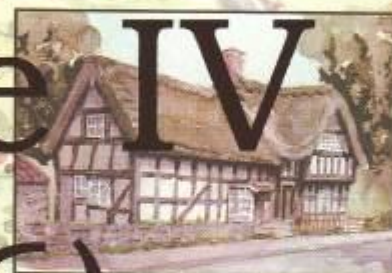


Living History

Yarpole Group Parish
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NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2006.



Various plants flowering out of season, in fact the lavender hedge is flowering for the second time. Photographs taken on 20/10/06 by Rita Shaw.

War Memorial: Amongst those commemorated on the War Memorial (junction of Welshman's Lane with the B4362) is Pte. W. Perkins, said to be of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps; from our ongoing researches we now know that this is incorrect; in fact, William Perkins, formerly of Bircher Common, was in the Canadian Infantry, Alberta Regt., was killed on the 29th Sept. 1918 and is honoured on the Vimy Memorial.



You may therefore wish to correct the entry for Pte. William Perkins in the Article on the War Memorial (Christian names), published in Sept. 2006.

We will be publishing a full Article about William Perkins in the New Year.

"Patty Lane" as mentioned in the Interview with Cyril Griffiths (attached) is actually "Putty Lane" which runs up towards the Common off the B4362 about 150yds east of the junction with Welshman's Lane.

Chairman's Report for A.G.M (2006):

Lots of good articles, nature and news items have kept newsletter going despite slight hiccup when John Gunson stood down as Chairman. This is mainly due to Ian's outstanding editorial skills! We could urgently do with more contributors.

We have some very good recordings done recently which will not only produce their own articles but contribute to more general articles on Land Girls and wartime experiences. Thanks to Ron and Rita for organising that.

Thanks also to everyone who helped at the Fete and for John Gunson's efforts at the Family History Fair in Hereford.

Graham continues to add to our photograph collection and great strides have been made in identifying W.I photo subjects.

Thanks to Audrey Bott for keeping our finances in order.

Unfortunately we didn't get the monumental inscriptions finished as planned, but will hopefully do so in the Spring.

Our next big project could be to start on house histories.

Thanks to everyone who has kept the group going and for your continued support.

This' Newsletter marks-up four years of publication with the issue of the 36th Article, and in an effort towards 'indexing' the Articles, and for those who choose to file them consecutively, we suggest separating them into four annual 'Volumes' each headed by the relevant Contents Page from those which are attached. Members are reminded that the special presentation folders are still available from Ian (on 780788) for £2.00.

Copyright: To ensure that we conform to copyright conventions, members and Friends are reminded that these *Living History* Articles and Newsletters may only be reproduced, by photocopying or 'scan and print', for the sole purpose of personal research.

The SUBSCRIPTION for 2007 will remain at £5 per year for local members or £12 per year for country members.

The subscription falls due on 1st January 2007 and should be sent or given to Ron Shaw, Membership Secretary, 3 Green Lane Crescent, Yarpole. Cheques should be made payable to "LIVING HISTORY GROUP".

The next meeting will be on **TUESDAY, 23rd of JAN '07** in The Bell at **8p.m.**

Slime Moulds:



Observant walkers in the surrounding fields or on Bircher Common may have noticed in recent weeks large blobs of a substance which looked rather like scrambled eggs or porridge clinging to grass stems. They might have been forgiven for imagining it was something the sheep had coughed up. This is in fact a cluster of fruiting bodies which is part of the reproductive phase of a particular species of slime mould.

The slime moulds are a group of fascinating organisms which show features of both plants and animals. They are not fungi, despite the name, and are not always slimy and are not closely related to any other group. They are classified in a separate Kingdom called the Protoctista which includes all the small organisms with nuclei such as amoeba, protozoa and algae and they are now believed to be the most important organisms in the soil

There are three main groups of slime moulds; plasmodial (called the Myxomycota, of which there are at least 500 species), cellular and acrasid. The accompanying photographs, taken on Bircher Common at the end of October, are of the fruiting or spore bearing bodies of a plasmodial slime mould; possibly *Muciturbo crustacea*. In its feeding stage the organism is hidden, moving about in the soil or under stones and logs as a mass of slimy jelly-like protoplasm called a plasmodium. The protoplasm of the cells has fused together but the nuclei have remained separate and the organism feeds by engulfing bacteria and other organic matter. Research has shown that the largest living entity is a slime mould many miles across with the individual 'amoebae' living as a multicellular mass communicating by chemical signals and behaving as a single animal.

Slime moulds have been shown to exhibit a form of intelligence making them capable, for instance, of negotiating mazes in search of food.

When starvation threatens or in response to other environmental factors the plasmodium moves to the surface from the soil on to blades of grass where it gradually turns into frothy or powdery white or cream coloured fruiting clusters called sporangia. When the sporangia have matured they rupture and release tiny walled spores which are then dispersed by the wind. These in time germinate to produce an amoeboid cell thereby repeating the life cycle.

Such a humble form of life with a particularly unattractive name may seem of little value but the peculiar behaviour of slime moulds has made them of especial value in several fields of experimental research including, importantly for us, that of pharmacology.

Compiled by Norman Taylor (2006).

Interview with Cyril Griffiths:

Cyril starts his account with reminiscences about the Second World War and life in the village at that time.

Land girls were based at Bircher Hall and American troops at Berrington Hall, mostly under canvas with the officers in "the big house"

Both groups used to frequent the Bell at Yarpole. The Americans had the advantage over the local lads as they were paid more (about £10 a week compared to £2) and provided with sweets and other goods which made their courting of the girls easier! They tended to take over the Bell and some of the girls used to drink a lot more than they were used to. Local dances were another opportunity to meet and they would be jitterbugging until some of the girls had to be carried out.

Bert Preece was the landlord of the Bell at the time. He had been gassed in the First World War and ran the pub with the help of his wife. The Crosses then had it. John and Margaret Lewis took on the pub after that. (Margaret was Bert's daughter) Cyril remembers big fitches of bacon hanging up in the Bell which were smoked not just by the fire but by cigarette smoke as well.

His uncle who lived in Leys Lane, however, was able to take advantage of the Americans by selling or hiring bicycles to them when they arrived and when they returned them at the end of their stay he was able to sell them again to the next group!

A popular pastime was to play quoits, this same uncle used to play at the Boot Inn and was a good player. The Americans wanted to join in but 9 times out of 10 Uncle and his friends would beat the Americans.

When the Yanks finally left the locals had a better chance with the Land Girls who tended to be city girls with a different experience to the local girls. Several local men married Land Girls, some of whom are still living in the village. (Bill Talbot's wife, Charlie Owens wife and his own brother's wife are all mentioned)

Cyril also recounts that a favourite spot for the Americans to take their girls was along "Patty Lane" off the Bircher Road, where there is a track to Woodfield Cottage. Under the hedge there they would do "what men and woman do together" often to the surprise of locals coming that way.

Charlie Owens was employed ploughing the common land up. The land girls and Italian prisoners of war were brought in to help harvest "spuds" on the common on land that had never been cultivated before. (see Emily Bayliss interview). They used Standard Fordson tractors and caterpillar track vehicles. Highwood quarry was then quite open. That was used as their base for fuel and tractors. The Italians were not on the tractors. Charlie Owens had worked for Bert Pinches and they and the Cads (Cadwalladers) of Bircher had German prisoners of war working for them. These men were allowed to walk about quite freely and would meet up on the common.

Cyril then goes on to explain his own wartime experiences.

"I was called up to KSLI (Kings Shropshire Light Infantry) for a specialist company. I was fit and active then and we were training at Shelton Road, Shrewsbury. We were training up on Almond Hill just outside of Shrewsbury, and the Wrekin. Part of the training was going through sewerage and rivers. We only had denim kit and it November, December time. I never had no illness. We was taking this place on top of hill.....we had to go through anything in our way- river, sewerage, wet fern crawling.. soaking wet and freezing. When we got there our clothes were frozen I contracted pleurisy which turned to effusion (a break out from the lungs) We went to Trentham

Park under canvas, but so much damage had been done to my lung that I was unfit for military service so I couldn't go to Normandy. I was called up in 1943 I wasn't 18. I come back. I had a small pension for a year as the damage was caused by war service until I was declared fit. I was interested in shooting so I bought the shooting rights from Orleton through to Berrington, Pritchards of Croft (traps were legal then) Bircher, Cads of Bircher through Gorbett. Teddy Brooks, Billy Brookes at Brook farm, Bircher Knoll, Leys Lane, the land along the footpath from the blacksmiths to Orleton.....

I was selling rabbits, pigeons, pheasants, dealers came buying anything eatable and took them to Birmingham.

One morning I went to go round the wires adjoining Fishpool valley and there were little gin traps. While the prisoners of war were doing the potatoes they put traps down in the afternoon and picked them up next day ...and they would cook them at Shobden along with some of the potatoes." They were not as well supervised as they might have been, as according to Cyril, the Sergeant looking after them had a girl friend locally!

After the war Cyril got a job with Griggs building a hostel to house workers at Rotherwas. They were cutting up tanks and Bren gun carriers coming in as new but they were already obsolete and were sold as scrap.

Cyril then goes on to describe some of the farming practices he had observed.

There were lots of pigs on the common and there was a notice on a tree by the bus shelter to say pigs must be ringed because the pigs would root up the fern, eat the roots and leave the turf in mounds. This made a mess of the common especially in wet seasons. Some would have little ones in the fern, they carried the fern in to bed on.

There were lots of pig cots around the cottages on the common, sties with a pound. The pig killer used to come from Brimfield. 3 or 4 fellows would heave him onto bench and cut the vein, they would hold him on one side but with his last kick some would get cut by the trotters.

One day someone let go and the pig ran in circles. He was soon dead.

Steam rollers with a thrashing box behind it would go round local farms. They would lug the shoffs (sheaves) on the field and when they had weathered a bit they would take them into the barns and wait for the thrashing box to come. It was driven by a big flat belt on fly wheel, a little one on inside with another belt to different parts to drive the other bits. Straw came out one side, corn down another shute with a bag over the shute to catch it. It was dried in shoffs, the straw on outside, corn on the inside.

When got towards bottom when they were thrashing it, it would be moving with rats, they used sticks and dogs to deal with them.

When they were cutting corn they used to go down to catch the rabbits coming out, it would be moving with rabbits and the lads that killed them were allowed to take some home. Colonel P., a Welshman would tell them when they had finished "cut away on now as fast as ee costs"

Other amusements that Cyril described included annoying "Shade Owens" who used to run the shop. He had a rusty pushbike he used to ride to the war memorial when he was working at the ammunition factory. Two local lads who had been at the Bell somehow managed to get the bike up a dead beech tree for a prank and it took some getting down.

The only 'trouble' that he remembers was a family that caused trouble in Leominster. One day some Welsh boys that his father was training to uses axes etc. got picked on in Leominster. The next time they went in they took a few bigger ones with them and gave the family a thrashing instead.