

THE FLORA OF EVERSLEY AND BRAMSHILL FIFTY YEARS AGO.

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In these days of rapid change—when within a few years we see quiet rural districts with their villages of scattered houses, converted into semi-suburban areas, and their wild commons and moorlands cut up into villa lots, or, if not quite so bad as that, into little “places” of a few acres—none of the wild original inhabitants suffer and disappear as completely as their flora. For the birds still cling tenaciously to their accustomed nesting places; and even the voles and “such small deer” survive the advent of cats and dogs, of gardeners and boys, with remarkable courage for many years. Therefore it is well to record as faithfully as possible, what was the flora some 50 years ago of each locality, now vanishing year by year before the ruthless footsteps of the builder.

In such a parish as Eversley the change in the flora has been most marked; and for two reasons. First, the many houses which have grown up since the enclosure of the commons in 1869, have gradually drained the bogs by tapping their springs for water supplies. And secondly, the terrible fires, which wrought such destruction a few years ago over hundreds of acres of forest and moorland, have well-nigh completed the work.

The charm of Eversley and Bramshill is still great. But it was far greater in those earlier days. Eversley is a real forest parish, as we may still see when any bit of land is left to itself, such as the moorland part of the glebe beyond the Mount, which since 1870 has, from open moor, reverted into dense woodland. For the Royal Forest of Eversley linked together that of Windsor on the east with Pamber Forest on the west, and was of great extent. Hackwood was included in it, as in 1280, William de

Brayboeuf was licensed to make a park at Hackwood in the Forest of Eversley. Its ranger or "Warden," took his name, as was common in those days, from the forest. And Gilbert de Eversley, who died in 1252, was, curiously enough, an ancestor of relations of my father, the Eversleys of Barbadoes. Two little patches only of this forest survive untouched in Eversley and Bramshill. They are absolutely primæval, having never been disafforested—namely, the Mount, the wooded knoll rising in the Rectory glebe, and the beautiful little bit of ancient oaks and hollies, at the corner of the Heckfield road and the lane turning up to the gate into the Reading Avenue of Bramshill Park. The great oak on the Mount was considered by my father, Sir Charles Bunbury, Mr. Johns, and other well-known authorities on trees, to have been a sturdy tree at the time of the Norman Conquest.

Gravel—the excellent golden gravel which made our Eversley roads famous before the advent of motors and tarmac—forms the soil, under a hard iron pan, of the upper moorland of Hartford-bridge flats; while in the low lying moor of Eversley and Bramshill Commons it is varied by streaks of blue clay. On the upper moorland little but heaths, white reindeer moss¹ and the charming scarlet cup moss² flourish, save in small unexpected grassy oases of better soil, where a hawthorn or holly tree is wreathed with honeysuckle, and a rare plant of Butchers Broom³ finds shelter beneath them.

But the point where cultivation ceases in the poor stony "starve-donkey" fields, is marked outside their crumbling banks by a delicate growth of turf—short, crisp and springy, especially when 50 years ago it was close-cropped by the wandering cow or the gipsy's donkey, and made the most velvety lawns imaginable. And dainty things grew in this moorland turf. The Eyebright with its yellow eye in the tiny white flower; the Milkwort, blue, white and pink; the Birdsfoot Trefoil, and the graceful Hairbell. The Chamomile as one trod on it after a shower, gave forth its

¹ *Cladonia rangeriferina*.

² *Cladonia extensa*.

³ *Ruscus aculeatus*.

pungent aroma with double strength. On a burning hot day the air was scented with Wild Thyme. And in places, on the heather itself, in early summer appeared a web of multitudes of finest red threads and clusters of minute waxen flowers—the Lesser Dodder.¹

But as the dry moorland sinks away to the valley we get a very different flora. Each tiny spring that had eaten its way through the hard gravel in the course of ages, formed a hollow sometimes half-a-mile long, filled with deep bog. Several of these bogs were some hundreds of yards in length and breadth. One—a famous one on the southern slope—now supplies Hartley Wintney with water; and Castle Bottom bog on the north is nearly dried up by giving water to Kits Croft—with results to the flora that may be easily imagined. Another just behind the Mount was a true quaking bog; and in our youth we tried over and over again to touch the bottom with long poles, but never succeeded; while a luckless cow on one occasion, and a reckless hunter's horse on another, had to be dragged, half dead, from its depths by men and cart ropes. But when last year I made a pilgrimage to the quaking bog of our childhood, I found only about a sixth of it remained. Fir trees and water supplies had sucked it nearly dry. And as I stepped across from hummock to hummock of tussock grass, it was quite a consolation to make a false step and find enough bog was left to wet my shoes.

In the old days the bog was a rich hunting ground for the botanist and entomologist. Its surface was white with the snowy tassels of the Cotton Grass, orange in late autumn with the seed spikes of Bog Asphodel.² And as one crossed it, springing from one hummock to another to gather the fragrant white flowers of the Lesser Butterfly Orchis,³ or the Spotted Orchis,⁴ one brushed against a bush of Bog Myrtle⁵ filling the air with fragrance. Marsh and Dwarf Red Rattle⁶ grew in wet places; and the slender trailing stalk of the Bog Pimpernel⁷ crept over the damp

¹ *Cuscuta epithymum*.

² *Narthecium ossifragum*.

³ *Habenaria albida*.

⁴ *O. masculata*.

⁵ *Myrica*.

⁶ *Pedicularis palustris* P. *sylvatica*.

⁷ *Anagallis tenella*.

earth. But our favourite among all the bog dwellers was the little carnivore, with its exquisite two-inch spike of white flowers, and its cruel red hairy hands—the Sundew,¹ or Flycatcher. The Sundew, whose drop of clear nectar at the end of each red hair, tempts unwary flies on to the red hands that close on them, squeeze them to death, and suck their bodies as dry as paper, is an easily domesticated pet. A soup plate full of wet mud, plenty of light and air, with a generous diet, is all that this little half-animal needs; and it will live happily for months eating small flies and tiny morsels of raw meat with avidity.

Though our Hampshire bogs, unlike those of Ireland and Scotland, are not peat-yielding, they have their uses; for they are rich in Sphagnum of many species, which is now proving so useful for hospital dressings.

In the bogs are—or were—two species of Lycopodium—the common Club Moss,² and here and there the rarer Fir Club moss.³ But where is the noble Stagshorn Moss⁴? It grew freely above the old sandpit on the way up to Bramshill Park, and clothed the line of ruts among the heather of the ancient pack horse way on the Flats, with its long trails as well grown as any that ever came from Scotland. In vain have I sought for a plant in either place since the great fires of 1909. It used to be the delight of small children of experimental mind, to gather it when the antlers, standing erect above its creeping branches, were ripe and full of powder; then, following the example of stage managers of bye-gone times, they would make sham lightning by shaking the yellow dust into a lighted candle.

Down in the valley, on the deeper and more swampy land of Eversley and Bramshill commons, the flora is far more varied than on the Flats above. The Heather⁵ grows more richly; the Fine-leaved Heath⁶ is deeper in colour; the Bell-heather or Cross-leaved Heath⁷ more abundant. And among these grow the

¹ *Drosera rotundifolia*.

² *Lycopodium Selaginoides*.

³ ———— *Selago*.

⁴ ———— *Clavatum*.

⁵ *Calluna vulgaris*.

⁶ *Erica cinerea*.

⁷ *Erica Tetralix*.

Dwarf Furze,¹ and the charming Petty Whin.² While in rare spots I will not indicate, the exquisite *Gentiana Pneumonanthe* brings visions before one's eyes of its yet more glorious cousins, *G. acaulis* and *G. Bavarica* on far away Alps, only exceeded in intensity of colour by the blue of *Lythospermum prostratum* on the slopes of the Pyrenees.

But the pride of our moorlands is the Gorse³ which borders every road, so that in spring one drives through a golden glory, the air filled after a shower with a scent as of ripe apricots; and as it fades it is succeeded by the almost equal brilliancy of the Broom⁴. But the Yellow Broom is colder in colour, lacking that touch of real gold which gives the Gorse its strength.

As becomes a forest country, the great variety of trees in Eversley and Bramshill strikes a new-comer. Among flowering trees the Wild Cherry, growing here into a forest tree, the Crab-apple, the Mountain Ash, the Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Elder, Guelder-rose and Dogwood are abundant. Of forest trees the Oak is predominant; while the Elm is common in hedgerows with the Ash; and the Silver Birch spreads its graceful foliage over the heather-clad slopes of the valleys. Lombardy and Balsam Poplars, Hornbeam and Lime have evidently been planted. The Beech, however, is rare, it does not love our poor soil, and specimens only—such as those in the Reading Avenue at Bramshill—are to be found. Down by the river the Alder grows to a considerable size, and with it are many varieties of Willow. While in the hedgerows the Maple and the charming Spindle tree⁵ give colour of leaf and brilliant seeds in the autumn. But the Scotch Fir after its introduction 300 years ago, must now be counted as indigenous. For it is to James I. and his undeviating habit of planting Scotch Firs at every place he visited, that we owe the great Fir tree invasion of the South of England. And from the noble Jacobean trees at Bramshill, and those of the same date at Eversley Rectory and Elvetham, the whole

¹ *Ulex nanus*.

² *Genista Anglica*.

³ *Ulex Europæus*.

⁴ *Cytisus scoparius*.

⁵ *Euonymus Europæus*.

district has been populated by the useful Fir tree—so invaluable to the country at this moment.

Of certain flowers which were comparatively rare in Eversley, its soil is to blame. I only remember one plant of Cowslip—which was regarded as an inexpressible treasure—in the Mount field. While for the Water Avens¹ we had to go to the Mattingley meadows. In the same way the White Water Lily of the Loddon was never seen on the brown stream of the Blackwater, though *Nymphaea Lutea* flourishes there. One plant, however, for which my father had searched for many years, knowing that it ought to grow in the parish, came to light under curious conditions. When the "New Road" to Bramshill Park (now the main way) from the lane beyond the Rectory was completed, a new bank had been made from the gate up to the fine old group of 16th century cottages. And as a small child, waiting for my father who was visiting a sick woman in one of them, I came across a little plant I had never seen before, in the freshly made bank. Showing it to him, he gave a shout of delight. It was the Lesser Mousetail, *Myosurus minimus*; and here it was, growing in profusion in soil that could by no possibility have been disturbed for several hundred years. The next year we found a few specimens again in the same place. The third year there were none; and we have never seen it since. The buried seeds had strength to grow for one season as soon as light and warmth brought them to life. A few, evidently very sturdy ones among them, had seeded. But their flickering life could not continue the race.

As far as possible, the appended list will give a pretty complete idea of what the flora of Eversley was 50 years ago. But I have not attempted to include all the distracting umbelliferous tribe; and have probably omitted others which I may have forgotten.

It is arranged according to families in Mr. Johns' delightful "Flowers of the Field."

¹ *Geum rivale*.

1. *Thalictrum flavum*.
2. *Anemone nemorosa*.
3. *Ranunculus*, *aquatilis*, *hederaceus*, *Lingua*, *Flammula*.
Ficaria, *auricomus*, *sceleratus*, *bulbosus*, *repens*, *acris*,
hirsutus, *arvensis*, and *parviflorus*.
4. *Myosurus minimus*.
5. *Caltha palustris*.
6. *Nymphaea lutea*.
7. *Papaver argemone*, *hybridum*, and *Rhceas*.
8. *Chelidonium majus*. Hampshire^o Pride.
9. *Corydalis claviculata*. In bank under Eversley Wood.
10. *Fumaria capreolata*, and *officinalis*.
11. *Capsella Bursa Pastoris*.
12. *Draba verna*.
13. *Coronopus Ruellii*.
14. *Cardamine pratensis*, *amara*, and *hirsuta*.
15. *Arabis thaliana*.
16. *Barbarea vulgaris*.
17. *Nasturtium officinale*.
18. *Sisymbrium officinale*.
19. *Erysimum Alliaria*.
20. *Sinapis arvensis*.
21. *Viola odorata*, *canina*, and *tricolor*.
22. *Drosera rotundifolia*.
23. *Polygala vulgaris*.
24. *Lychnis Flos Cuculi*, and *dioica*.
25. *Agrostema Githago*.
26. *Spergula arvensis*, *media*, *Holostea*, and *graminea*.
27. *Linum angustifolium*. Not indigenous.
28. *Malva sylvestris*.
29. *Althea officinalis*.
30. *Hypericum perforatum*, and *humifusum*.
31. *Acer campestre*.
32. *Geranium Robertianum*, and *molle*. This last was introduced in fodder by the Romans.
33. *Oxalis acetosella*.

34. *Euonymus Europæus*. Known among the gypsies as
"skivering timber" for skewers.
35. *Ulex Europæus*, and *nanus*.
36. *Genista Anglica*.
37. *Cytisus scoparius*.
38. *Medicago maculata*.
39. *Melilotus officinalis*.
40. *Lotus corniculatus*.
41. *Vicia Cracca*, and *sativa*.
42. *Lathyrus pratensis*.
43. *Prunus spinosa*, and *Avium*.
44. *Spiræa Ulmaria*.
45. *Geum urbanum*. G. Rivale only on the White Water.
46. *Potentilla anserina*, *reptans*, and *Fragariastrum*.
47. *Tormentilla officinalis*.
48. *Fragaria vesca*. Not abundant.
49. *Rubus Idæus*, and *fruticosus*.
50. *Agrimonia Eupatoria*.
51. *Sanguisorba officinalis*.
52. *Rosa Canina*.
53. *Pyrus Malus*, and *aucuparia*.
54. *Cratægus oxyacantha*.
55. *Epilobium hirsutum*, *parviflorum*, and *angustifolium*
known here as Fire Weed.
56. *Lythrum salicaria*.
57. *Bryonia dioica*.
58. *Tamus communis*.
59. *Conium maculatum*.
60. *Bunium flexuosum*.
61. *Sium latifolium*.
62. *Cornus sanguinea*.
63. *Viscum album*. Not common.
64. *Sambucus nigra*.
65. *Viburnum Opulus*.
66. *Lonicera Periclymenum*.
67. *Galium Aparine*, and *verum*.

68. *Sherardia arvensis*.
69. *Fedia olitoria*.
70. *Sonchus oleraceus*.
71. *Hieracium*. Several species.
72. *Leontodon Taraxacum*.
73. *Carduus*. Several species.
74. *Eupatorium cannabinum*.
75. *Tanacetum vulgare*.
76. *Tussilago Farfara*. Introduced in fodder.
77. *Senecio Jacobæa*. Much used for rheumatism.
78. *Chrysanthemum Leucanthemum*, and *segetum*.
79. *Pyrethrum Parthenium*, and *inodorum*.
80. *Anthemis nobilis*.
81. *Campanula rotundifolia*.
82. *Jasione montana*.
Vacciniums are remarkable by their total absence.
83. *Erica Tetralix*, and *cinerea*.
84. *Calluna vulgaris*.
85. *Ilex Aquifolium*.
86. *Fraxinus excelsior*.
87. *Vinca major*, and *minor*, both blue and white.
88. *Gentiana Pneumonanthe*.
89. *Menyanthes trifoliata*. Used to be found in the pond on
the Nine Mile Ride, now a lake.
90. *Convolvulus arvensis*, and *sepium*.
91. *Cuscuta Epithymum*.
92. *Echium vulgare*.
93. *Symphytum officinale*.
94. *Lycopsis arvensis*.
95. *Myosotis palustris*, and *arvensis*.
96. *Solanum Dulcamara*.
97. *Orobancha major*.
98. *Digitalis purpurea*.
99. *Antirrhinum Orontium*.
100. *Linaria vulgaris*.
101. *Scrophularia aquatica*.

102. *Melampyrum pratense*.
 103. *Pedicularis palustris*, and *sylvatica*.
 104. *Euphrasia officinalis*.
 105. *Veronica Chamædrys*, and *officinalis*.
 106. *Verbascum Thapsus*. This, I think, was introduced.
 107. *Mentha sylvestris*.
 108. *Thymus Serpyllum*.
 109. *Teucrium Scorodonia*.
 110. *Lamium album*.
 111. *Nepeta Cataria*.
 112. *Glechoma hederacea*.
 113. *Primula vulgaris*, and *veris*, but the last very rare.
 114. *Anagallis arvensis*, and *tenella*.
 115. *Polygonum aviculare*, and *Convolvulus*.
 116. *Urtica dioica*.
 117. *Orchis mascula*, *pyramidalis*, and *maculata*.
 118. *Habenaria albida*.
 119. *Iris Pseud-acorus*.
 120. *Narcissus Pseudo-Narcissus*.
 121. *Ruscus aculeatus*.
 122. *Hyacinthus non-scriptus*.
 123. *Narthecium ossifragum*.
 124. *Alyssa Plantago*.
 125. *Typha latifolia*, and *angustifolia*. Bramshill.
 126. *Sparganium Ramosum*.
 127. *Arum maculatum*.
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