

## THE BERKSHIRE RECORDS OF JOB LOUSLEY (1790-1855)

By J. EDWARD LOUSLEY

Detailed accounts of the flora of small areas over a century old provide an important source of information for the study of changes but such accounts are unfortunately rare. My great-great-grandfather, Job Lousley, left unusually detailed records of the flora round Blewbury and Hampstead Norris. He included for most species, frequency, precise localities, distribution and sometimes habitat requirements, assessment of status, and other observations, and this at a time when few local botanists took an interest in such matters. Less than a third of his records have been published, and a lot of valuable information remains in manuscript.

Job Lousley, the eldest son of Joseph Lousley, was born at Moreton House, near Didcot, in 1790. His early life was spent at Blewbury, and his stay at boarding school was cut short so that he could manage one of his father's farms at West Hagbourne. Joseph died in 1825 and left him, together with other property, the freehold of an estate at Hampstead Norris. When the lease expired at Michaelmas 1827, he married, and moved into the Manor House, living there until his death in 1855.

Job's botanical experience thus fell into two distinct phases. The first, up to 1827, as a young man with no help except from books, exploring the Vale of Berkshire round Blewbury, Upton Hagbourne and Aston; the second, after 1827, gaining an intimate knowledge of his own estate round Hampstead Norris and Hermitage in the "Hill Country". He continued to make visits to the Vale where he had property and friends, but essentially his knowledge of this area was botanically immature, while his records of the hill country were all made when he was older and closely associated with Dr. Joseph Bunny, surgeon and doctor of Newbury, W. Hewitt, a surgeon of East Ilsley, and W. Hewitt, junior, his son. These friends sometimes led him astray, but he was no longer working in complete isolation. Throughout his writings, Job preserved a sharp distinction between Hill and Vale, and contrasted differences in their floras.

My ancestor had other interests besides botany, and these are reflected in his records. He was an authority on agriculture and contributed monthly reports to *Bell's Weekly Messenger* and other London papers for over 30 years. Many of his keenest botanical observations were on weeds, grasses, trees and other plants of special interest to the farmer. He was a leading opponent of the repeal of the Corn Laws and his views attracted nation-wide publicity and respect. He was an avid book collector,

and amassed a library of at least 30,000 volumes of which an account is in the Press. He was also a keen antiquarian and wrote the accounts of four parishes for the *History of Newbury*. His visits to antiquities, and other antiquarians are reflected in his plant records.

His biggest contribution of printed botanical records appeared in the *History of Newbury*, published in 1839. This was an important collective work edited by E. W. Gray and mainly devoted, as the title suggests, to the history and antiquities of Newbury and the immediate neighbourhood. It was decided to include also an account of the flora, and a list of species was supplied by Mrs. Anna Russell. This lady was a competent botanist, but her contribution was drawn up after only "a very short acquaintance with the neighbourhood" on visits to a relation and, as she herself recognized, was very imperfect. The publishers, therefore, appealed to Job for help, and provided him with an interleaved copy of Hooker's *British Flora*, edition 2, 1831, which is still in the possession of the family. In this he entered his records, perhaps copied from an earlier notebook. Then a few entries for W. Coles, 1837, were added, and then further records by J. Bunny, W. Hewitt and W. Hewitt, junior.

Someone with literary skill, but little knowledge of botany, then edited these records—his pencil marks are still in the manuscript. Some 150 species not listed by Mrs. Russell were added to her account on Job's authority with localities extending far beyond the neighbourhood of Newbury. Since Mrs. Russell gave only the names (with few exceptions), and made no distinction between Hampshire and Berkshire plants, the resulting compilation is a curious hotch-pot including a number of dubious records. Druce, in his *Flora of Berkshire*, 1897, republished almost all the records given in this account, "Russell's Catalogue" as he called it, attributing ten first records for the county to Job Lousley. His transcription was accurate, and his comments appropriate in the light of the information available to him, but it seems that he did not have access to the manuscript which would have explained many of his problems.

"A Catalogue of Plants found in the Neighbourhood of Newbury", as the chapter in the *History* was entitled, was also issued as a separate publication. After the work had gone to Press, Job added numerous records to the interleaved book in 1839, 1840, and 1841 and corrected some of the earlier entries. He continued to make occasional additions, and further entries were made by his son Luke as late as 1883. The entries of the various contributors are clearly distinguished by handwriting, ink, initials and dates. Here I am concerned only with Job's own records which covered 459 species and gave about 1,200 localities. A few further records appeared in William Hewitt, Junior's *History . . . of the Hundred of Compton*, 1844, and these are all in the manuscript. There are a few others scattered through my ancestor's agricultural writings and letters to James Hardy.

From childhood I have known some of the rarer species growing in the places where Job found them, and two years ago I decided to make a systematic search to try to confirm as many of his localities as possible. I was soon impressed by the quite remarkable persistence of many species in exactly the same spots. This is, of course, well known for some of the rarer and more conspicuous species such as *\*Pulsatilla vulgaris*, *Fritillaria meleagris*, and *Colchicum autumnale*, *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* and *Polygonatum multiflorum* which occur in great abundance in the same woods, but I soon found that it applied equally to commoner plants. During the past 125 years *Astragalus glycyphyllus* on Cholsey Hill must have come perilously near to extinction from road widening and road-making on many occasions. *Parietaria diffusa* must have been often threatened by maintenance work on the tower of East Hagbourne church, and one would hardly have expected *Euphorbia lathyris* to have survived the weeding of Hampstead Norris gardens for so long. In some cases, such as *Vinca major*, I refound the plant before I realised it was one of Job's localities. In others, like *Papaver somniferum* at Ashridge, and *Populus canescens* at Blewbury in damp meadows, the old records add a new significance to modern occurrences and suggest that Druce's statements on status need reconsideration.

At first I hoped that an overall statistical comparison of the floristics would be possible, but marking up Maps Scheme cards for 1839 and 1963 revealed serious difficulties. Most of my ancestor's records were made on his own land which he walked over as a matter of routine at all seasons of the year. My own visits, though numerous, entailed six hours' travelling for each day's work, and the property is now in the hands of many owners. Hence my search could never be as thorough. An even greater difficulty is that taxonomic standards have changed so greatly in the last century. Hooker's *British Flora* lumped many well-marked species such as *Silene dioica* and *S. alba*, *Ononis repens* and *O. spinosa*, *Trifolium dubium* and *T. micranthum*, *Sonchus asper* and *S. oleraceus*, *Prunus cerasus* and *P. avium*, besides all the lumping in such genera as *Arctium*, *Betula*, *Crataegus*, *Platanthera*, *Melilotus*, *Polygala* and *Viola*, and the splits in other groups which we no longer recognize. Marking up the cards also made it clear that there were considerable gaps in Job's records, some of them in genera like *Carex* and *Juncus* which required critical knowledge, but others in common easily named plants like thistles which he did not take the trouble to record. Although my cards show more species they do not indicate a general increase in the flora since 1839; for a valid comparison it is necessary to consider individual species.

By far the greatest changes have taken place in the Vale, and

\*Scientific names are given as in Dandy (1958), and the spelling of place names is in accordance with modern usage.

the least in the woodland of the Hill Country. The downs have suffered greatly in loss of natural vegetation but sufficient turf remains to support representatives of most chalk grassland species and the alterations in the weeds of arable there are in quantity rather than plants present. The area is exceptional in that it has suffered very little from industry and building and overspill from towns. The major factor has been changes in agricultural use.

Job lived at a time when the standards of agriculture were improving rapidly under the pressure of the Industrial Revolution. Enclosures led to the ploughing of "waste", that is to say rough grazing, while drainage and better cultivation resulted in the destruction of many interesting plants. More recently, the replacement of horses by machines, and hence larger fields, the immediate ploughing of stubble, and cleaner cultivation, have changed the face of the countryside. Higher standards of clean seed, and lately the use of toxic sprays in great quantity are other factors reflected in changes in the flora.

Drainage has destroyed most of the interest of the wet area north of Blewbury. In this, West Hagbourne Moor produced such plants as *Pinguicula vulgaris* and *Pedicularis palustris* in Job's time but it is now far too dry, and has been further drained and treated with toxic sprays recently. Similarly it is unlikely that *Parnassia palustris* can be refound in the meadows below Aston, and it is doubtful if *Fritillaria meleagris* persists in the district.

Another important change is the reduction of weeds of arable land. For example, my ancestor gave *Agrostemma githago* as "Common in cornfields at Hampstead Norris and at Blewbury, and nearly everywhere else. A pretty plant but a troublesome weed". This I have not seen recently in the area though I remember it at Streatley over forty years ago. *Centaurea cyanus* grew "On Long Meer Piece, Blewbury, and in cornfields near Eling, and at Hampstead Norris, in some places plentiful". *Bupleurum rotundifolium* he knew "on the ridge of hills above the Vale of Berks.—on Robin Hill and on Long Meer Piece, Blewbury—Rare, in many places". These I have not refound, but two aliens, *Veronica persica* and *Matricaria matricarioides*, which have come into the country since his time, are amongst the most frequent of the now scanty cornfield weeds.

Superficially, the woodland round Hampstead Norris has changed very little, and displays of spring flowers to-day are much as Job described them in a letter in March 1854. In Beech Wood, where there is a monument to his memory, I have found 29 out of the 42 species he recorded, and most of the remainder are plants like *Helleborus viridis* and orchids likely to be very local and difficult to find in a wood of 118 acres. In Down Wood, which is smaller, I found 12 out of the 13 species he recorded, and the missing one is *Polypodium vulgare*. In Park Coppice, 45 out of 61 is the score to date. But although so many plants may still be in the same woods, it is unlikely that they are in exactly the same spots. Management of woodlands means that species

have to move round to grow under the conditions they require, and it is the fact that these woods are so extensive that has made it possible for so many species to survive for so long.

Even in the Hampstead Norris woods there have been two major changes. Job's record of *Acer pseudoplatanus* reads "This tree is not very common. It grows in Lower Farm Close, Blewbury. It grows in my orchard, Hampstead Norris, and it grows in hedges in many places, but not anywhere very plentiful". The sycamore now occurs in the greatest abundance in his woods and is no doubt a great pest. Similarly, *Chamaenerion angustifolium* is now exceedingly common, and its flowers colour whole clearings after felling, but there is no record in Job's manuscript.

The acid heathy woodlands round Hermitage still produce most of his species. *Pinus sylvestris* which he says "grows by thousands from self-sown seeds in Eling Common and Courage Common and in many other places" still does so, but *Rhododendron ponticum* is a newcomer now established locally and spreading. *Juncus tenuis* on Eling Common is another increasing introduction unknown to him.

The Didcot to Newbury railway line was constructed partly on land acquired from Job's eldest son, but I am not aware of any localities for interesting native plants which it destroyed. However, it brought in several aliens such as *Senecio squalidus*, and natives like *Chaenorhinum minus*. Farther afield, *Ruscus aculeatus* is likely to have been a railway casualty. This he found on 17th December 1841 "by the side of the Turnpike Road going from Pangbourne to Reading just beyond the Roe Buck Inn on the bank". The Western Region main line was cut right through this locality. All the plants he knew from the old canal from Abingdon to Wantage are probably gone, and those from the Kennet and Avon Canal at Newbury were few. Road widening may account for the loss of an interesting assemblage of plants from sandy banks near Hermitage. Here *Jasione montana*, *Orobanche rapum-genistae* and *Turritis glabra* grew in Long Lane, which is now an important road.

Two native species I have failed to re-find are *Sorbus torminalis* which my ancestor found in Beech Wood and Park Coppice and thought the fruits "curious", and *Genista tinctoria*, which he, Hewitt and Bunny found in a number of places. A puzzling, apparent reduction is *Echium vulgare*, which I have failed to find even on Bezel Way, Blewbury, where it was particularly common. On the other hand, *Geranium pratense* and *Onobrychis viciifolia* have clearly increased. The latter he found "By roadsides on the hills above Blewbury but not very plentiful—exceedingly plentiful as cultivated". It is still by lanesides above Blewbury, but also in very many other places to which no doubt it has found its way as a relic of cultivation. *Euphorbia uralensis*, *Crepis biennis* and *Vicia tenuifolia* are well established aliens on Blewburton Hill which were unknown to him like *Crepis vesicaria* which is now abundant in many places.

Job was keenly interested in conservation. He deplored the grubbing up of woods, the enclosure and cultivation of commons, and the ploughing up of downs. He was also concerned about threats to individual species very similar to those with which we are faced to-day. He wrote that publication of the account in the *History of Newbury* “. . . soon caused a sort of rage for the study, and many young ladies and gentlemen, knowing from the list where many of the plants grew, took a great interest in Botany, and we now have many Botanists springing up around us, but I am sorry to say that some few of the rare plants are becoming nearly extinct owing to the constant visits and pilferings for specimens”. Incidentally, he had no herbarium of his own, except one he bought, and I have been unable to trace any specimens collected by him.

In 1840 he complained that several species, including *Fritillaria meleagris* and *Daphne mezereum*, were “getting very scarce in consequence of being taken up for gardens”. But his great enemies were the herb collectors, and here he was able to take effective action. There was a great demand from London quacks for the roots of *Daphne laureola* for the treatment of venereal diseases, and in several letters he described how he chased the men out of his woods when they sneaked in to collect the plant. Similarly *Atropa belladonna* was raided to such an extent that he said it could hardly be found except on premises where the herb collector dare not trespass. *Marrubium vulgare* was amongst other species he says were heavily raided, and it may be that *Sambucus ebulus* “of great use for the dropsy” became extinct in both his stations because the demand exceeded the supply.

Nevertheless, a comparison of his records and notes with the present flora clearly indicates that the threats to individual species which concerned him have been shown by the passage of time to have been of far less importance than the destruction of habitats. *Pulsatilla vulgaris* still grows in some quantity in two of his localities in spite of repeated and increasing raiding for 125 years, while the Ilsley station was ploughed up long ago. *Fritillaria meleagris* was still abundant at Burghfield when I last looked, and at Blewbury, drainage and agricultural changes were the main threat. *Daphne laureola*, from its present size and plenty, evidently recovered completely in my ancestor's woods and others in the district, while *Atropa belladonna* is far from scarce.

My work on Job Lousley's records has not produced any surprising results but it has proved a useful exercise with three aspects of general interest. First, it has demonstrated the danger of taking records from second-hand sources and the importance of interpreting them by the floras used by the recorder. Second, it has provided factual evidence of changes in the flora of this part of Berkshire and the increase or decrease of individual species. Third, it indicates that threats to species often prove of less long-term importance than seems likely at the time, and may

divert effort from the essential work of conservation of habitats. There is still much to be learned from the examination of work of previous generations.

I am grateful to the officers of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club for making available the volume of the Hardy MSS. containing letters from Job Lousley, and to Mrs. Arnott Betts for lending me the interleaved *Flora* with his records.

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**SENECIO SQUALIDUS L. IN THE BRITISH ISLES—  
4, SOUTHERN ENGLAND (1940→)**

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The spread of the alien, *Senecio squalidus*, from Oxford along the railway systems of southern England up to the year 1939 has been previously outlined (Kent, 1960). The distribution in East Anglia up to 1956 has also been given (Kent, 1957).

At the outbreak of the Second World War the species was firmly established, often in large quantity, in the vicinity of railways, particularly in and near industrial areas.

The razed sites resulting from the bombing of many southern English towns, especially areas devastated by fire, provided ideal conditions for the germination of the air-borne fruits of *S. squalidus* and vast colonies soon appeared in the City and central London (cf. Fitter & Lousley, 1953), Bristol, Plymouth (Phillips, 1946), Canterbury (Kent, 1951) and elsewhere. The clearing of the sites and subsequent dumping of much of the debris into gravel pits in rural areas aided the dispersal of the species which soon began to spread to adjacent waste ground, roadsides, canal paths and walls.

In N. Essex, *S. squalidus* was apparently unrecorded until 1940 when specimens were collected at Wickham Bishops. During 1942 it was noted at Dunstable, Luton and other localities in Bedfordshire (Dony, 1946), and was gathered also at Cassington, Oxfordshire. In 1943 it was seen at Fyfield, N. Essex, and was reported to be spreading along the canal path at Rickmansworth, Herts., probably from adjacent gravel pits. During this year it was collected also from a roadside verge between Eynsham and Woodstock, Oxford. This spread into rural Oxfordshire is of some interest as Turrill (1948) has recorded his failure in attempting to establish the plant artificially by transplants or fruits on walls at Woodstock in the early years of the present century.

During 1944 it was gathered on the banks of Wilstone Reservoir, Tring, Herts., and appeared in new localities in Bedfordshire (Dony, 1946). In the same year a few plants appeared in the bombed shell of a church in Canterbury, E. Kent, and the species rapidly colonised the ruins of the fire damaged city (Kent, 1951). *S. squalidus* had not been recorded from the Canterbury area since 1875 (Hanbury & Marshall, 1899), and it seems probable that it was re-introduced by means of seed accidentally imported on fire-fighting equipment brought in from the Rochester area where the species is abundant. In 1945 it was noted to be increasing rapidly at Penzance and had spread to Hayle, W. Cornwall. In the extreme south-east of the country