

## Notes from Local Interest Group 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022

**Present:** Maureen Lloyd (ML), Lucy Trench, Elizabeth Collingwood, Jonny James, Wendy Ozols, Sue Griffiths, Cherry & Victor Williams, Sylvia Bigglestone, Richard Harris, Roy Lloyd, John Price, Ann & Howard Dean, Jennifer Lewis, Elsa Harflett, Bronwen Jenkins, Lynda Aiano, Richard Thomas.

**Apologies:** Robert Collingwood, Dainis Ozols, Ivor & Penny Williams, Joan Lloyd, Avryl Lloyd, Tim Francis, Iris Lloyd, Edwina Griffiths.

### Visit to Lower Pengarth

ML welcomed everyone and introduced Lucy Trench, the owner of Lower Pengarth. Lucy apologised that Robert Collingwood, her husband, could not be present and offered his apologies for his absence. She introduced us to her daughter, Elizabeth Collingwood, and her partner Jonny James and grandson William. Lucy and Robert moved to Lower Pengarth in August 2019. They are not farmers; Lucy worked in a number of museums, including the V&A, and Robert was an architect. It is Jonny who farms the land, whilst Lucy does the applications for grants, etc and Robert "fixes things".

Lucy also introduced Sylvia Bigglestone, whose uncle, Milwyn Harley, used to own the farm. Milwyn was Sylvia's father's youngest brother. His family had moved to Lower Pengarth (from Craignant) when her father was a baby. Lucy pointed out one of the barns which Milwyn had restored.

Lucy then told us a little about the house. Lower Pengarth is probably an 18<sup>th</sup> century longhouse. However, inside there is an impressive solid oak screen, which it is believed came from the castle in Painscastle; this dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and so is older than the house. Recently, a dry stone wall specialist, Stuart Fry, came to do some work for them and he recognised one of the garden walls by the house as being of early medieval, and possible pre-Norman, origin. This might indicate that there has been a settlement here for a very long time. The previous owners of Lower Pengarth, Roger and Viv Luxton, converted the granary at the end of the house into an impressive dining room.

The farm is around 102 acres. It is at about 1000ft above sea level; this is generally taken as the limit of cultivation, with the animals being kept on the higher land and crops grown below. The Luxtons farmed organically but Lucy and Robert decided to depart from full organic status in order that Jonny can synch Pengarth and his family farm near Dorstone. However, the farm is still virtually organic, with no use of pesticides or herbicides. Recently, Lucy and Robert have planted 4.5 acres of trees, about 4600 in total. These will be protected by recyclable plastic tubes for five years to allow them to become established.

Lucy explained that the tour of the land would start in the orchard, but that we would then split into two groups, with an easier route and a slightly more challenging one for people to choose from. On the tour of the meadows, Bronwen Jenkins would be helping with the identification of plants. Bronwen is a botanist and volunteer with the Radnorshire Wildlife Trust.

### Orchard

Lucy explained that they cleared the orchard of docks, nettles and brambles by putting three pigs on the land. Then, in spring 2021, she raked the ground to a fine tilth and sowed a bought-in seed mix of grasses and wildflowers particularly suitable for a clay meadow. She also planted a hedgerow mix beneath the hedge and a woodland mix in the small wooded area. There are Bluebells in this plot in Spring. On our visit, there were Foxgloves and Ox-eye Daisies flowering, together with a number of different grasses, including Yorkshire Fog and Timothy. There was also some Common Sorrel in

flower. Lucy explained that she has a sickle mower which helps to make the process of mowing the meadow at the end of summer much easier.

At this stage, we split into two groups, with one group touring some of the meadows at the lower end of the farm and the other following easier tracks higher up.

### **Tour of Lower Meadows**

Lucy took us down the main farm track and into the first meadow. Here they have sown Yellow Rattle, much of it into the mole hills to help it get established. Yellow Rattle is partly parasitic on grass and so helps to weaken the grass and thus it allows the wildflowers to flourish.

This meadow is not mown; it is grazed by sheep during the winter and they help to distribute the seed. We saw many Meadow Brown and Ringlet butterflies in this field, as well as grasshoppers. Sylvia found the chrysalis of a Burnet Moth on a grass spear. The list of wildflowers we saw was long: Lesser Stitchwort, Common Mouse-ear, Pignut, Yarrow, small amounts of both Red and White Clover, Common Sorrel, Creeping Thistle, one of the many Hawkweeds, Foxglove, Bulbous Buttercup, Cocksfoot, Germander Speedwell, Red Champion, Cat's-ear, Bird's-foot Trefoil, St John's Wort, Musk Mallow, Black or Common Knapweed, Lady's Bedstraw, Willowherb, Spear Thistle and Sheep's Sorrel (on an anthill). (Interestingly, apparently anthills have different species growing on their sunny and shady sides.) Quite a list! In the ditch at the bottom of the meadow there were Hemlock Water Dropwort and Hogweed. Amongst the grasses, the following were identified: Yorkshire Fog, Rye Grass and Bent Grass. We also saw some Pixie Cup lichen. Lucy told us that everything in this meadow was natural, except the Yellow Rattle.

The next meadow we went into gets mown in late Summer. This allows the wildflower seeds to set before mowing. The field is then grazed. Lucy explained that a friend of theirs gives them some "green hay" to scatter in the field and this provides them with seed to enhance the meadow. The wildflowers we saw here were: Meadow Buttercup, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Bulbous Buttercup, Red and White Clover, Self-heal, Sheep's Sorrel and Foxglove. The grasses included: Dog's-tail Grass and Sweet Vernal Grass. Near the pond, there were: Brooklime, Marsh Bedstraw, Hemlock Water Dropwort, Water Mint and Marsh Thistle. Lucy told us that they will drag some of the vegetation out of the pond in order to maintain some open water. Adjacent to this meadow, they have planted a small spinney in a corner where the mower cannot go. All the trees that have been planted are natives, such as Rowan, Cherry and Crab Apple. In amongst the spinney that we looked at were Ribwort Plantain, Meadow Buttercup and Yellow Rattle. There are also some very old Hawthorn trees at the edge of this field. Lucy mentioned two other recently planted spinneys, one with Sweet Chestnut for coppicing in years to come.

From here, we walked back along the field edge to join a track and the other group, and then back to the house.

### **The Higher part of the Farm**

Jonny started by talking about some of the livestock. He said that they had mostly Texel cross Mule ewes, as well as some Elan Valley Welsh ewes. They have purchased a Stabiliser Easy Dam Ram, a hybrid of NZ Texel, Romney, Landrace and British Milk; he is a very big white ram. They also use a Suffolk x Charolais Ram. The cattle herd has been reduced due to TB, but now, thankfully, they are clear. It consists of mainly British White cows, with one or two Angus, but Elizabeth felt that the British White were more suited to the farm whilst the Angus did not seem to thrive.

The easier route took us along the track above the house and garden, along what Stuart Fry identified as a medieval wall, and up through the side of the valley where most of the farm could be viewed. Several hedges had been renovated with new plantings and one new hedge had been inserted alongside an ancient hedge line in order to divide a field to help with the management of the sheep and cattle. We passed through a new heritage ley which had been planted last year. It had an abundance of Clover, both red and white, and Jonny said there were over 30 varieties of Clover in the seed mixture. There was also Chicory, which was growing well. However, the Sainfoin had failed to germinate as he felt the soil was too acid for this lime-loving plant. The advantage of a heritage ley was that the plants could fix nitrogen from the air and so there was no need for added fertiliser, and Elizabeth felt that the British White cattle were especially suited to a low input system of grassland management.

As we approached the top of the hill, out below us was Llanbwchllyn Pool, the largest natural lake in Radnorshire. This is probably one of the best views of the lake as it is surrounded by trees. It is owned by Welsh Water and leased to Radnorshire Wildlife Trust. The reserve is 26.5ha (65.5acres). The lake is popular with anglers, with the main fish being Perch, Pike and Rudd. There are lots of birds in and around the lake, including Reed Bunting, Coot, Water Rail, Great-crested Grebe and several varieties of duck. Plants are abundant including white and yellow Waterlilies, Greater Spearwort and Reed Mace, whilst the woodland has Bluebells and Wood Anemones in Spring. The small meadow is home to Marsh Orchids, and the 'fen meadow' has various Orchids, Globeflowers etc.

At the end of the tour, we went back to the house where we were treated to delicious cake and refreshments. ML thanked Lucy, Elizabeth and Jonny for the most interesting and informative tours, as well as their generous hospitality. It is amazing to see how much they have done on the farm since taking it on less than three years ago. The variety of wildflowers we saw was wonderful and the tree and hedge planting will be an amazing legacy on the land. We are most grateful to them all for giving so generously of their time and for ensuring that we all had an enjoyable evening.