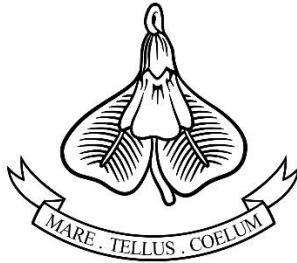


**Scenes from the Wilds
of
Berwickshire**



The Berwickshire Naturalists' Club

2022

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**Scenes from the Wilds
of
Berwickshire**

Michael E Braithwaite

Introduction

I have made a selection from my *Berwickshire BSBI Botanical Site Register 2013* of a series of sites, or groups of sites, which are particularly representative of the natural botanical diversity of the county. What I have written about each site, or 'scene', aims to tell a story, to place the botany in context with its history and geology. Sometimes botanists of earlier generations are an integral part of that story, so they are not forgotten.

The *Berwickshire BSBI Botanical Site Register* lists 233 sites of botanical interest. The *Site Register* was published in 2013 but was written over the period 2007-2013, during which all of these sites were recorded. Most sites have been recorded several times since 1960. A PDF of the *Site Register* is available for download at <https://bsbi.org/berwickshire>

No part of Berwickshire is pristine. The hand of man is everywhere and ongoing. It is not all negative. Most of the rich grassland habitats are the product of a long interaction between natural vegetation, man and his domestic livestock. The same is true of woodland and moorland.

Michael Braithwaite

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September 2022

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The Fourth Dimension

We look out on a country scene
We see the fields spread out afar
Rising hills complete the frame
Of what there is for here and now.

Look more closely to discern
The hand of time in all we see
The changing seasons in our mind
From summer growth to winter sear.

Look again for decade-marks
New trees, new stobs¹, a house or two
Maybe new crops introduced
Fields of yellow, fields of blue².

O'er centuries there's change again
Cottars' fields torn up, too small
The out-bye enclosed and ploughed
While drains have evened out the land.

Millenia too are there to see
Ice-scoured hills left bare, hid deep
Turn to green as glaciers melt
A few degrees are all it took.

The future will bring change again
A few more degrees – more sun, more rain?
How will the landscape patterns change
As man makes play with living things?

¹ Fence posts, ² Oilseed Rape and Phacelia

22 May 2022

**View from east end of
Little Thairn,
20 October 2007**



Longmuir Moss NT4750

Andrew Kelly taught at Cleekhimin
A tiny school in Lauderdale
He walked afar to botanise
A mire he found at Longmuir Moss
His flower-list has not survived
But he told a friend the jewel
Carex diandra, 'acres of it',
A 'new' sedge that thrives there still.



View south over moss from species-rich bank, 16 July 1988

On my old map Longmuir Moss
Was nowhere to be found, but
Longmuir Rig gave me my clue
By Leader Water's distant source
I walked out one October day
Past Threeburnford it came in view
Forty acres, narrow, long
Willow carr, fen, peat bog
A classic valley mire
Draining both north and south.

The next July I learned much more
The scrub's afloat but stable
The willows choice and varied
Orchids and Wintergreen below
The fen watery with Kelly's sedge
Marsh Valerian, Red Rattle, Bogbean.

Next the acid Sphagnum bog
With Heather, Heath and Asphodel
Excitement in the Deergresses
The common sort out on the moor
But by a spring upwelling
Clumps of the smaller northern sort
A choice find, unexpected,
Their hybrid across the bog between
No fruit but tiny plantlets
That fall to be wind-spread.

The south end fen again
Marsh Ragwort with *Parnassia*, plenty,
So different from the northern end
It completes a floral tapestry.

A moss so varied surely ranks
As an SSSI, official,
But no, it lies where two Regions meet
And that was enough to snarl the claim.

4 March 2022

Lauder Common NT44, NT54

It's just a chunk of moorland
Quite small as moorlands go
A thousand acres around a thousand feet
The Common Lands of Lauder's Burgh.

Sheep-grazed, it's seldom burnt
And is little cut by drains
So the flora has a chance to thrive
In heather, grass and mire.

There's Sphagnum with Bog Asphodel
Plenty, more like further west
Red Rattle where water trickles
Through the flushes on the moor.

Mountain Pansy's on a grassy slope
With Eyebright's stars of light
Two orchids in the wetter bits
Where *Parnassia* later shines.



Lauder Common *Richard Webb*

A track southward to Muircleugh
Has disturbed the peaty turf
Here spiky chains of Clubmoss
Have spread in recent years.

When the Common Riding horses
Troop to the Burgess' Cairn
Do they spy the Eildon Hills afar?
Does the plant-wealth pass them by?

2 March 2022

Gledswood and Gaitheugh NT5934

Gledswood, Gaitheugh, place-names of old
Each tells a tale, each paints a scene
The wood where Kites nested long since
The cliffs where Wild Goats hid high.

Gledswood stands on rich woodland soils
Gaitheugh's cliffs erode away
On upper slopes oaks grow alone
Below it's a mixture of trees.



View upstream to the scour on the river bend, 7 June 2001

Gledswood has the 'Big House' hard by
Some trees foreign, set out with care
Most are natives still favoured here
Oak, Ash and Elm, Hazel below.

Bluebell carpets glow in the spring
One autumn bloom, ne'er seen again
Toothwort clumps at the base of trees
Toothwort leafless, to roots a-fixed.

A strange bed of colour beside the Tweed
Green Alkanet, Tuberos Comfrey
Out from the house or down from upstream
They're residents now, like them you may.

The cliffs home to special things
Rock Whitebeam's grove long-known just here
Way up high, a white Lily ledge¹
Rockrose with profuse yellow blooms.

Riverside rocks hold surprises too
Northern Bedstraw, pale Meadow-rue
Juniper, Cowberry, good ferns
Spindle bushes, uncommon now.

You need a salmon-fisher's boat
To grasp the splendour of this place
Else stand at site of Old Melrose
The monks chose well – their abbey here.

¹Lily-of-the-valley

30 August 2022

The Hopes and Howes of Lauderdale *NT54, NT55*

The Leader boasts some fine hill burns
Kelhope, Soonhope – to Whalplaw twin
All U-shaped, ice-swept valleys
Some with deep cleughs, water-carved
Both hopes and howes, space at the head
Below the open rigs and laws.

Both hopes and howes once summer homes
Shielings where the shepherds stayed
Sheep and cattle across the slopes
While down at foot their hay was made.

The grassland is home to simple blooms
Bird's-foot Trefoil, scented Wild Thyme
Oak Fern hiding in open screes
Rockrose yellow on craggy banks.

Juniper still in rocky cleughs
Rowan berries out o'er the burn
Tall tufted ferns by waterside
With birks sparse-spread on open banks.

Water trickles through mossy swards
Spring-fed and cold from far below
Marsh Marigold's dwarf golden bowls¹
Hairy Stonecrop with stars of pink.

There's heather wide on upper slopes
Crossed by sikes where Sphagnum grows
Lesser Twayblade, an orchid scarce
Tucked away from prying eyes.

What changes can we soon expect?
Less sheep, more trees – but of what sort?
Windfarms across the higher tops?
Moss-less spring heads with rushes full?

¹ A distinct montane variety *Caltha palustris* var. *radicans*

27 July 2022



**View of the upper part of Whalplaw Burn,
9 November 2002**

Boon and Blythe NT54, NT55

The boundary twixt Merse and Dale
Runs Leader with Boon Water next
Then Brunta Burn, the upper Boon,
While Blythe Water's all Lauderdale.

The names are old but all mixed up
The map survey by Englishmen
Boundary to false 'Boondreigh'
Boon's boundary in true Scots tongue
Peaceful Cromwells is old *crum-weil*
A deep pool in a twisting stream.

Boondreigh has haughs that open wide
There's scrub above grass, marsh and pools
Fine Bird Cherry with Guelder-rose
Yellow Iris with Mimulus.



Cromwells, Brunta Burn, June 1995

Brunta Burn's next to Cromwells' knowes
A secluded meadow, herb-rich
White Saxifrage, Rockrose yellow
Scarce orchids, Soft Hawk's-beard rare.

Blythe Water's home to Juniper
Now mixed-in with planted stock
There's birchwood on the steeper banks
Wood Crane's-bill in more open grass.

The Wheel Burn has the finest *weils*
Natural springs from deep below
Bog Pimpernel, Parnassus-grass
The dwarf montane Marsh Marigold.

These hill burns now no way pristine
But much remains, they've treasures yet
Restoration has come at last
Now climate change's the constant threat.

29 July 2022

Bemersyde Moss NT6133

Bemersyde Moss is nutrient-rich
Open water, mire and willow carr
Come for its birds, winter wildfowl
But Black-headed Gulls breed no more.

The south bank with bird-watching hide
Built as far out as we dared
Access by a well-screened ramp
Viewing slits keep all concealed.

I took two nieces, expecting naught
Then one pointed, whispered 'what's that?'
A Harrier quartering the moss
A first for them, it made our day.

Once fifteen thousand pairs of gulls
Some eggs taken, packed in crates
For sale in distant London town
The birds re-laid; no harm was done.

It's mystery why the gulls have left
It's happened too on other sites.
Could otters have been the cause, or
Maybe a quirky change of mind?



View southeast across the moss, 3 November 2003

The plant list is fairly short
Diverse willows, Bay Willow fine
Bur-marigold growing round the edge
With Water-plantain's pale pink flowers.

Recently some incomers too
The scarce Cowbane a great surprise
A Yellow-cress from way up north
Brought maybe by migrating geese.

23 August 2022

The Kelso Traps – Gerrick NT6638

North of Kelso, a lava field
A flow dating from aeons past
Now dipping gently north to south
And with some minor humps and bumps.

The ice age scoured much away
The lava left eroding slow
So, the soils are thin and sandy
They soon dry out in summer sun.

Some flowers thrive in just such soils
Annuals quick to set their seed
Stork's-bill, Knawel, Forget-me-not
Some Clovers, Spring Vetch, Squirrel-tail.

Herbaceous Rockrose, Prickly Sedge
Choice Maiden Pink, its true refuge
Restharrow, Meadow Saxifrage
Lane-side Scabious, Agrimony.

The best place for this floral mix
Is Muckle Thairn with Little Thairn
The lavas end on rocky slopes
Where the Eden twists down below.

Round Gerrick, Blinkbonny near
Low knowes turf spared the plough
Still hold the basalt flowers
There for now, but for how long?

12 August 2022



**View west from
rocky outcrop
over old
grassland, scrub
and burnside,
20 October 2007**

The Kelso Traps – Hareheugh Craigs *NT6839, NT6840*

Kelso Traps more than lava field
Volcanic plugs, of basalt too,
Stand lone, their flanks all worn away
One of this group is Hareheugh Craigs.

A magnet for the hand of man
Iron Age fort the summit marks
An ancient farmstead come and gone
Pre-war roadstone quarry stalled.



View west from craigs, 22 July 2000

Now lava fields are mostly plough
For plants Hareheugh's their refuge true
Rock face and screes, grass slopes and whins
Thin-soiled summit, lower springs.

Screes with Rockrose and Pricky Sedge
White Burnet Rose and Maiden Pink –
Berwickshire's best, a sight indeed
When flowers come, most in July.

Violas rich – two Violets
Mountain Pansy on north-face slopes
The rare hybrid with Field Pansy
A yellow-white display unfolds.

Annuals come in varied mix
Knotted Clover and Small Cudweed
The scarce Long-stalked Crane's-bill with
Near bell-shaped flowers of pink.

The quarry face with tall Hawkweeds
Two tiny springs habitat for
Water Whorl-grass, more often seen
In rivulets on sandy shores.

Hareheugh Craigs is Homebyres farmed
Sheep and cattle graze the slopes
Rested for chosen summer months
So that the wildflowers set seed.

16 August 2022

Gordon Moss NT6342

Once the Borders greatest wetland
With mire, moor, bog and pools
Long a Mecca for the naturalist
The ancient fens of Gordon Moss.

They lie in a shallow valley
Drained by a reed-filled burn
Once held back by a barrier
A whin sill of resistant rock.

Then in eighteen-twenty
The barrier was cut away
The burn was straightened
With a cross-cut web of drains

It is hard to guess the pattern
Of what was there before
But open pools survived
The railway's bank-top line.

Bladderwort is now no more
Nor Globeflower's golden orbs
Of a true peatbog flora
The merest fragments now survive.

The ownership was curious
All divided into strips
The minister and feuars
Each with a claim to peat.



**View along open ride in the moss
with Iris, 25 June 1988**

Peat cutting ceased at last
When the railway brought in coal
A rich new flora blossomed
In the ditches cut for turf.

The orchids were amazing
Before the birches closed right in
Some thrived on in shade
Others were soon curtailed.

Then Professor Bellamy decreed
A hundred-metre grid
Rides cut through the birches
To keep a check on things.

Unplanned, the grid lines
Soon became an orchid haven
Then sadly dwindled, as
Their upkeep fell away.

Springs keep the birchwood wet
With willows of different kinds
Tussock-sedge marks water flow
Sphagnum where all lies still.

Coralroot grows in Sphagnum
Wintergreen in drier shade
Melancholy Thistle in former fen
With Butterfly Orchid not far away.

The butterflies prefer the open ground
Across the Hareford Burn
While adders, once frequent,
May no longer be around.

Change started by peat cutting
And drainage of the burn
Continues, so the vegetation
Is not the same for long.

18 May 2022

Dogden Moss *NT6749*

Dogden Moss a peat bog
As boring as can be
It's a shallow dome of Sphagnum moss
From here to eternity
It's over ten feet thick
Measured with a rod.

It's home to Cranberries
Once gathered for the mart
So, I thought I'd see how much there was
By walking strip by strip
I crossed ninety-six hectares
It was found in all but seven –
That's without the lagg surround
It's area half as much again.

It's home too to Deergrass
With a history to tell
First came a northern species
Then one from western Spain
They crossed and it is the hybrid
That spread over Dogden Moss
The northern one's there but rather rare
The southern one's across the drier moor nearby.



**View west from kaims over north margin of Dogden Moss,
6 October 2007**

There were no trees on the moss
Except for birch, a very few
But now there are plantations
A little to the west
The wind-borne Sitka seeds
Seemed set to do great harm
I pulled out every sapling
Back in two-o-o-seven
Miracle – the same was done again
Nine years later by a team!

Boring but magnificent
What does Dogden's future hold?

1 June 2021

The Dye Water NT65

Longformacus leafy riverside
Boasts Bird Cherry, Wych Elm mixed
Rocks – Golden Rod, Wood Horsetail – nooks
Wood Crane's-bill blooms in lilac drifts.

Upstream opens to rocky knowes
Heather joins grass to set the tone
The moorland now not far away
First Horseupcleugh, farmhouse and farm.

Here Pates farmed for many years
In an old-style true upland way
Without design wildflowers thrive
Still today, as in former times.

Old 'Ettie' Pate was wildflower sharp
She kept notebooks, had wildflower friends
Her granddaughters were taught her lore
One learned well, turned gardener.

There are grassy banks near the farm
By the Dye and up the burn
Fragrant Orchid and fine Rockrose
Wood Bitter-vetch scarce on steep slopes.

Then to Byreclough, Roxburghe estates
Will keeper let our party through?
Mister Howitt in his old Rolls
The sign to make him doff his cap!



**Horseupcleugh, bank with Wood Bitter-vetch and
Fragrant Orchid, 21 June 2008**

We spurn a foray to the tops
Where Cloudberry grows in the peat
Instead, we scour Green Cleugh's *weils*
Hairy Stonecrop the prize we seek.

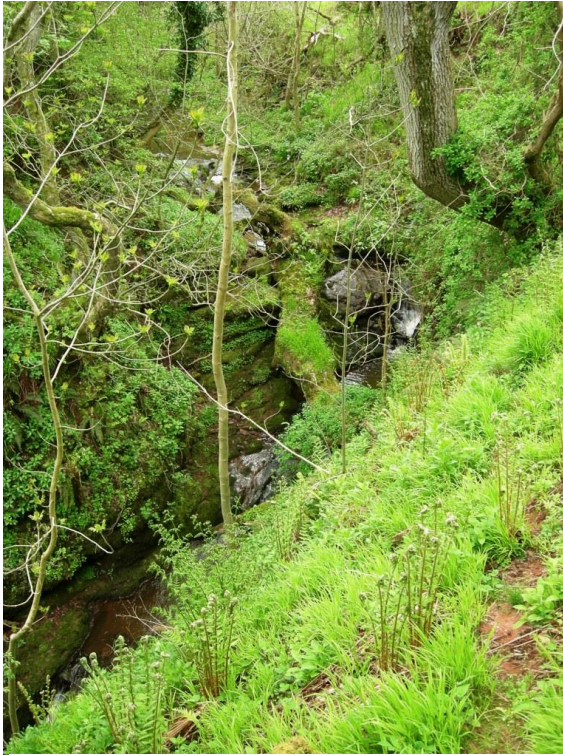
There's mystery, Dye Water cleughs
Lack Juniper, by other burns
Lost to muirburn, or just cut down
Maybe in quite far-distant times?

11 August 2022

Langtonlees NT7452

The Langton Burn near all bears woods
From next its source to Gavinton
The upper cleugh long renowned
Ice-melt scoured, it's narrow, deep.

Once set in moorland, almost gone
The last fragment tree-planted now
No longer Small-white Orchid, nor
Marsh Saxifrage, once treasure here.



**View into upper part of Lees Cleugh,
16 May 2008**

The cleugh is secluded, quiet
Each footstep soft: it's hallowed ground
The plant-list good but not immense
All still laid out, just as once was.

First Purple Orchids in the spring
With Bird Cherry – tassel flowers –
Wood Melick-grass, Oak Fern, Primrose
Giant Bellflower, an Aspen grove.

A tall thistle with varied leaf
Stone Bramble, just on one wet ledge
The bright red fruit of Guelder-rose
Well, others tell me it's still there.

I sought Guelder-rose in the fog
Waited long till shooting ceased
Walked in over rushy ground
And found a partridge lying dead.

I saw the guns and gave it in
'Have you a wife at home?' they ask
'Yes'. 'Take it – here's another one'
A right good meal: no Guelder-rose.

25 August 2022

Duns Castle NT7754

Duns Castle's pleasance a wide extent
Laid out and tended over many years
Parkland, woodland and Heron Pool
(Some wag trimmed it to Hen Poo).

The Hays long heed the town hard by
With access on a gen'rous scale
To a network of paths and rides
Benches, steps and bird-watching hide.

Groups come for guided walks
For birds, flowers and all that's wild
Visitors from across the globe
Mix with townsfolk's daily stroll.

Habitats for many flowers
Woodland-edge in good supply
So scarce in managed woods today
The water-edge half mire, half trees.

The Wood Crane's-bill's magenta show
Wintergreen lurking under seats
Broad-leaved Meadow-grass, Wood Millet
Both introduced from foreign parts.

The lake has introductions too
But British plants not out of place
Yellow Water-lily, Sweet-flag
Two Bulrushes, Club-rush, Spearwort.



View southwest across parkland to Hen Poo, 1992

Leopard's-bane brought to the woods
Now, sadly, rather out of hand
Few-flowered Garlic runs amok
Visitors' feet the likely source.

The Hen Poo's best claim to fame
George Johnston's stringy Waterweed
Traced at last to Canada
It came long years ago and spread
Then it lessened year by year
Now just a green unnoticed thing.

23 August 2022

The Whiteadder Oakwoods *NT76*

A river's twists and turns
May meander across a plain
Or cut right through the hardest rocks –
Can we trace out the Whiteadder
Through ages past?

The Monynut drains moorland of
The Lammermuirs' great ridge
Twisting where once ice and water
Was steered by contorted rocks.

Till it joins the Whiteadder at
The northern flank of Cockburn Law
With Stoneshiel Hill once a granite
Barrier to more southward flow.

The glacier ran on eastwards
Till the ice wore the granite down
Then water made the final cuts
At Elba's chasm and Hoardweel's pool.

The east bank of the Monynut
Is mostly steeper than the west
And here stand ancient oaks
Through Godscroft to Bankend.

The oaks a puzzle to be solved –
Even-spaced, but not in rows
If natural, why so even-aged?
Why are seedlings so scarce?

Was there once a felling
Then a dense undergrowth
The brushwood cut away
The best trees left to grow?

The old oaks were mostly saved
When great Storm Arwen blew
Tucked in on the leeward side
Unlike the matchstick conifers.

There are two oaks in these woodlands
With their acorns stalked or not
Are the sessile on the steep slopes –
Stalked on richer soil below?



View northwest over Brush Wood, 5 June 1998

It's not simple, there are hybrids
No pattern is clearcut
There's history unfathomed
In their genetic source.

The wild flora beneath the oaks
Is much what you'd expect
Primrose, Stitchwort, Anemone
Still Juniper in places

Near the water, Bird Cherry's found
Fragrant blossom very much on show
Wood Crane's-bill grows in purplish drifts
But it's never quite a meadow.

By Monynut, Crooked Bank
Has Rockrose out on show
Scented Wild Thyme not far away
At Bankend rocks with Golden Rod.

Butterwell Wood by Whiteadder
Boasts Toothwort on Wych Elm
Then below The Retreat
Cow-wheat grows 'neath the oaks.

Rocky islets bear rare willows
Bluebells carpet Wild Wood nearby
Where Guelder Rose survives
With Beech Fern up the slope.

Then at Elba's Strait Leap
A grove of aspen and
Hawkweeds cling o'er the gorge
With aged Juniper nearby.

A first for twenty-twenty-two
The Purple Hairstreak butterfly
Long-hid in oak-tree tops, came down
For its photo on Elba's rocks.

18 Aug 2022

**Purple Hairstreak
Elba, 15 July 2022**

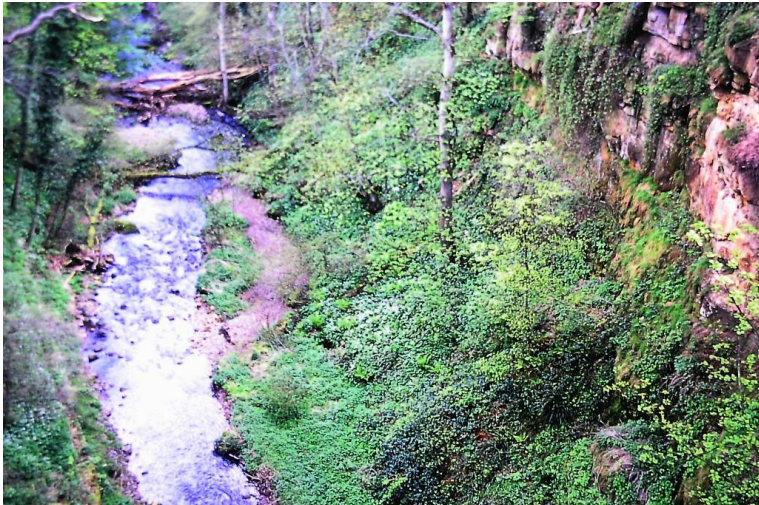
Hannah Shell



Dunglass Dean NT7671

You wish to travel north or south
And shun the moorland road?
Dunglass Dean's deep defile's
A barrier all must cross.

It's bridged four times now:
The low bridge to the mill
The trunk roads old and new
The railway viaduct.



View up dean from old bridge, 25 April 1998

The sandstone cleft is ice-age old
Meltwater beneath the glacier shelf
With ice and rocks that cut and grind
Till they reach the level of the sea.

The Dunglass mansion lies twixt this dean
And the Bilsdean, a short way north
Parkland laid out in stately style
By Halls and then the Usher clan.

Sadly, the hand of man
Lies heavy on the woodland trees
The ancient oaks long-felled
Replaced by planes¹ and beech.

The elms all hit by Dutch disease
Their fallen trunks make passage hard
For those who'd climb along the burn
And scorn the rock-cut steps above.

Hart's-tongue Fern drapes the cliffs
Drooping tassels of sedges fine²
Adorn the narrow ledge below
With Ramsons and Fuchsia gone wild.

Beneath the bridges more foreign plants
The dreaded Few-flowered Leek
With tiny bulbs among the flowers
Carpets slopes right to the sea.

Finally, a sandy spit of land
With Sea Buckthorn's spiny stems
A hazard for those who thought
They had come safely to the end.

¹ Sycamore, ² *Carex pendula*

26 May 2022

Pease Dean and Pease Bay NT7970

Two burns, two deans, Pease and Tower
Meet near the sea, ford and footbridge
While upstream, Pease Burn's viaduct
Spans high, dwarfing tall trees below
Tower Burn flows in railway drain
Concrete bridge for the A1 Road.

Pease Dean is deep and full of ferns
The trees classic oak, ash and elm
The elms are back, less Dutch disease,
The ash suffer from 'die-back' new.

Beneath the trees a floral mix
Highlights Soft Shield-fern and its kin
Giant Horsetail, Great Bellflower blue
Purple Orchids, but just a few.

Two unwelcome incomers new
Few-flowered Garlic from upstream
Indian Balsam, not so bad,
But still resented by a few.

The woodland is being restored –
For long by Harry Edie's crew
But he passed away, progress
Now slowed down, more needed soon.



**View southwest over caravan park to the foot of Pease Dean,
20 April 2002**

Below the trees lay open sands
Still open, but with caravans
In a massive park behind
So, children come to sport and play.

Modest dunes bear Marram Grass
Other grasses, creeping Sand Sedge
The foreshore with patches of pink
Sea Rocket came back, once but few.

19 August 2022

The Hirsell NT8240

There's a plenitude
About this place, The Hirsell
With the land which won them wealth
The Homes care-crafted new with old.

The house is huge but grew in parts
Comfort mixed with grand design
The Leet was there with hazel banks
So, trees were added age by age.

Paddocks were iron-railed around
Paths laid out and bridges built
A valley here amidst the Merse
Secluded, green, a peaceful place.



**Varied woodland structure
alongside path, 15 May 1983**

A mire lay broad and close at hand
Part-drained, deep-dug and dammed
A sparkling lake fulfilled a dream
Fringed with reeds a place for birds.

Then, when Rhodos became the rage
Some hundred carts of peat laid out
Made Dundock Wood beyond the lake
A sight, a source of wonderment.

In this broad scene I search for gems
Plants that still make it their home
Cowslips out on shady banks
Saxifrage with double flowers.

Marsh Ragwort at the riverside
Clustered Dock with Meadowsweet
Bittersweet in lakeside sedge
Least Duckweed new-arrived.

Two Birches native in the woods
Silver, just here in the Merse,
And Downy, right out to the muirs
Hidden Oak Fern and Wintergreen.

Dundock-rides are Bugle-rich, but
Watch out for Pirri-pirri burs!
While hated Few-flowered Leek
Is now spreading from the tracks.

Grass verges with Hedge Bedstraw
Alchemilla of three kinds
Wall Lettuce on walls and rocks
Escaped from old walls in the town.

The grounds are now a Country Park
Shared generously with all who come
A golf course, Leet-side walks
The lake, its birds and Dundock Wood.

1 August 2022

Billie Castle NT8559

Extract from Scenes of Boyhood by George Henderson relating to the track he walked daily between his father's smallholding at Draeden (Draden) Burn to the village school in Auchencrow. The track crosses the Lint Burn by the ruins of Billie Castle.

Nor less remember'd is the path remote,
Which to the school we travers'd from our cot;
Oft careless, there we loitered by the way,
To pluck the flowers, or chase the insects gay;
'Midst the wild bracken, and the meadow's-queen¹,
We've rang'd the dell – a truant band unseen;
Or 'mong the whins, with yellow blossoms drest,
We sought the lintwhite's² and the yorlin's³ nest;
Or climb'd the braes the liquorice knots⁴ to dig;
Or chas'd the peesweep⁵ o'er the braided rig⁶;
Or scaled the trees to harry rooks and daws⁷;
Or roam'd the dean to gather hips and haws;
Or by yon banks we lingered night and morn,
To hook the minnows from the wimpling⁸ burn;



View east from the ruins of Billie Castle, 3 July 2012

And where the ancient tower in ruins red⁹,
 'Mong yon tall trees is by their branches hid,
 We paused, with awe, the fallen dome to view,
 And thought on days of old, when Earls⁹ there withdrew:
 O'er the green mounds that skirt the castle wall,
 Oft have we scampered at the evening's fall;
 Or trac'd the moat that hemm'd the tower around,
 Till the long shadows darkened o'er the ground;
 There deeds of blood, and martial feats were done,
 When these old walls were often lost and won
 In the wild Border times of turmoil and dismay,
 While banners waved above the noisy fray.
 Down by the burn-side where the alders grow,
 Trains of fair ladies there might haply go
 To pluck the daisies in the lonely dean,
 Or golden pilewort¹⁰ on yon sloping green;
 There, mailed knights have stalk'd across the glade;
 Arm'd with the glittering spear and sparkling blade;
 And there, at night, the roving bands have met,
 When flower and grass with heavy dew were wet,
 To march across the Tweed, the border dales to scour,
 And drive their booty to this northern bower: -
 Long, long the actors in these scenes of dread,
 Have mouldered low among the countless dead;
 And here the revel, and the minstrel's strain,
 Shall ne'er be heard by lords or knights again;
 The hemlock¹¹ sad, now blossoms in the hall,
 And nettles wave above the desolate wall!

¹ Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*

² Linnet

³ Yellowhammer

⁴ Bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius*, which has tuberous roots. This was known to Henderson near Warlockbank, at the east end of Buncle Edge, and, seemingly, on a bank nearer to his home. It is likely to have been Arnut (Pignut *Conopodium majus*) that was dug for at Billie Castle

⁵ Lapwing

⁶ Cultivated strip of land

⁷ Jackdaws

⁸ Meandering

⁹ The ruins of Billie (Billy) Castle. Billie was an ancient seat of the Earls of Angus

¹⁰ Celandine *Ficaria verna*

¹¹ Hemlock *Conium maculatum*. A valued, but dangerous, medicinal herb that has a remarkable ability to survive on ruined buildings

Billie Castle NT8559

All cereals – that’s Billie Mains
Waving wheat on well-drained land
What habitat could there remain
Unseen now for two hundred years?

Billie Castle lies unchanged
In ruins as in ‘Boyhood’s Scenes’
The stonework hid by grassy sward
So, no Hemlock with poison seeds.

Ancient Alders grow by the burn
Ragged Robin in marshy spots
Greater Stitchwort prefers the banks
Pignut – but with no boys to dig.

The open grass is species-rich
Spotted-orchid, Lady’s-mantle
And Celandines, yes, in the spring
None gathered, all left to be.

6 July 2022

Lumsdaine Dean NT8569

An extract from George Johnston’s Natural History of the Eastern Borders pp 250-252

On the western verge of Coldingham moor, you may, perchance, fall on a spot covered with coarse herbage, which lures the botanist to examine it with some degree of hope. He finds the ground partly occupied by a pond¹ of considerable size, from three to five feet deep on the far side, but shallowing on the upper to a few inches, and mingling its water with the herbage in a doubtful strife. Beyond this there is a large extent of rushy ground², either dry and hard, or slumpy and wet, according as the season has been ‘spiry’ or ‘saft’. Many plants grow here to gratify and pleasure the explorer. There are Carices³ of sorts, elegant Grasses, the Butterwort, the pretty *Spergula nodosa*⁴, the white Galiums⁵, The Grass-of-Parnassus, the marsh Loosestrife⁶, the little Lycopodium⁷, many mosses, a soft cushion here and there of the Sphagnum, and, in the ruts, the little bulbous Rush and the ever-green *Montia*⁸. The pond

itself is less prolific. One side is margined with a little forest of Paddock-pipes⁹, and from their shelter the Pickerell-weeds¹⁰ throw out their oval or elliptical leaves that float so lightly on the surface; and on the side opposite, in a corner, the *Glyceria*¹¹ grows green and fresh, as if it felt not the unclouded sun that glistens on all around, and is very hot on these muirs.

From the pond a runlet issues, to which art has given its first direction. After a very short course, the drain leads the water along the bottom of a shabby hedge¹² which scarce hinders the cattle of the moor from trespass on the newly reclaimed fields. The hedge is passed; and we gladly enter, with the burn, a green pasture never touched with the plough¹³. The field is breezy and slopes westwards; it is covered with a short perennial grass, rises into banks on either side, has many knolls, and some of these are bare rocks partly spotted with embrowned patches of the Stonecrop¹⁴, and, it may be, emblazoned with the white blossoms of the Saxifrage (*S. granulata*)¹⁵. The burn runs in a hollow down the centre of the field. The hollow is at first narrow, and there are, near the top, several well-heads which add a purer water to the stream. This hurries along as the gape deepens, and becomes, at every step, more declivous; and it murmurs on its way, for the channel is rocky and uneven. You follow down, and are soon lost between the deepening banks. First there are a few stunted grey Willows with Meadow-sweet intermingled, and the bank underneath is carpeted in moss, – much of it tinged of a reddish colour. Again the sweet herbage comes down to the water-course; and then again succeeds a swampy spot, covered with *Hypnum*¹⁶ relieved with marsh *Epilobia*¹⁷, the Butterwort, the Forget-me-not¹⁸, and such like. Now a tiny linn¹⁹, over which the water leaps sparkling, arrests you for a space; and not far aside a stony brae with its peculiar weedy vegetation, – the Sheep's-Sorrel, the *Gnaphalia*²⁰, several Hawkweeds, a few dwarf plants of the Foxglove, and the half-withered *Airae*²¹. But the hollow has insensibly grown into a dean²². You can now stroll in its secrecy unseen by the bondagers²³ in the fields alongside, or the herd who basks in the sun on the bank. The water has got increase, and has more force and velocity, and it runs impatient in the rough channel. Hazel mingles with the Willows, Wild Roses and Brambles entangle the brake, a copse-wood of Sloe-thorn occupies the top of the bank succeeded by a space covered with the Bracken; and the opposite north bank bears a cover of the Whin, gemmed with the herblets (*Stellaria graminea*²⁴, *Orob. tuberosus*²⁵, &c.) which delight in its shelter, and run up amidst its branches. This is a pleasant spot, full of botanical riches; and we leave it with regret, for the steep banks that succeed are planted with wood, – with beech, elm and plane-tree²⁶ and with a few Scotch-firs. There is not much here to interest us; but as we emerge from the shade of this plantation the banks nigh each other, and their fronts become rocky and abrupt, and form a narrow passage through which the water must force itself. This it does in a rumbling fashion. It falls first over a linn²⁷, about a yard in height, into a circular caldron of pure water; and then it hurries away in a troubled

stream, leaving on one side a little gravelled edge, and running on the other under a projecting ledge. Ferns from both sides, and from every crevice, overhang the darkening chasm. Above, the Polypody leans over the bank in a dark-green fringe; below, tufts of *Aspidium lobatum*²⁸ project from under shelving rocks; and the little elegant *Asplenium*²⁹ hang out their pretty fronds everywhere, and in a manner that no pencil can delineate. The Lady-Fern grows here often in large tufts; and the *Aspidium dilatatum*³⁰ is sure to be looking out alongside of its narrow fronded ally³¹. The Botanist lingers here long, – there is much for his study, and more for his admiration. When at length he emerges from the gloom, he finds on one side an old quarry³² not without its peculiar interest. The bottom is rough with broken stones grown over with docks and nettles; in a corner there is a thicket of Sloe-thorn, with a glorious bed of *Stellaria holostea*³³; at the base of the rocky face are tufts of the Male-Fern and *Aspidium dilatatum*³⁰, and in the chinks of the face itself tufts of the Blue-Bell³⁴, the stately Foxglove, the showy Viper’s-Bugloss, and a hanging bush of the Whin, one mass of gold in its season. – I follow the burn no further, for here it loses the dean³⁵, and pursues its future course through cultivated fields that vary their character yearly at man’s will.

¹ NT840692, ² NT843689, ³ Sedges, ⁴ Knotted Pearlwort *Sagina nodosa*, ⁵ Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*, Fen Bedstraw *G. uliginosum*, ⁶ Ambiguous, probably Yellow Pimpernel (Wood Loosestrife) *Lysimachia nemorum* rather than Water Purslane *Lythrum portula*, ⁷ Lesser Clubmoss *Selaginella selaginoides*, ⁸ Blinks *Montia fontana*, ⁹ Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*. A paddock is a frog, ¹⁰ Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans*. A pickerell is a small pike that might well hide in wait for prey under a raft of such leaves, ¹¹ Sweet-grass, ¹² NT842690, the hedge is gone, ¹³ NT847690, ¹⁴ Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*, ¹⁵ Meadow Saxifrage, ¹⁶ Mosses, ¹⁷ Marsh Willowherb *Epilobium palustre*, ¹⁸ Creeping Forget-me-not *Myosotis secunda*, ¹⁹ NT853691, ²⁰ Small Cudweed *Filago minima*, Common Cudweed *F. vulgaris*, ²¹ Silver Hair-grass *Aira caryophyllea*, Early Hair-grass *A. praecox*, Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, ²² NT858691, ²³ Bondagers were farm workers hired by a yearly bond at a hiring market. They were mostly women, ²⁴ Lesser Stitchwort, ²⁵ Bitter-vetch *Lathyrus linifolius*, ²⁶ Sycamore, ²⁷ NT858693, ²⁸ Hard Shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum*, ²⁹ Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantrum-nigrum*, Maidenhair Spleenwort *A. trichomanes*, ³⁰ Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, ³¹ Narrow Buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*, ³² NT861693, ³³ Greater Stitchwort, ³⁴ Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, ³⁵ NT863695

Bondagers
‘The forgotten workers’
Adam Fletcher



Lumsdaine Dean NT8569

Johnston walked in Lumsdaine Dean
In the full heat of a summer's day
The Bird Cherry flowerless, unseen
Seven orchid sorts – all to seed –
Yet he saw there a haven rare –
His pen-portrait tells out his care.

All is yet but little changed –
True, the pond is now half-drained –
Sheep and cattle graze it still, the
Inner pasture yet unploughed
But its worth not recognised
Not enough for SSSI.

Extra riches have there been found
A Broomrape on the scented Thyme
Hound's-tongue on the open screes
White Burnet Rose, sweet Eglantine –
Enjoy it now, while yet it's there
Leave changes for another year.

13 July 2022



**View with a mixture of woodland, scrub, cliffs and screes,
21 July 2001**

Coldingham Loch NT8968

On 19 August 2011, I hired a boat and, with permission, 'fished' for pondweeds with a grapnel

A loch fed by natural springs
Not now what it used to be
The fields around resown or whins
All the margins now fenced off.

The loch looks clear and welcoming
Underwater life's disturbed
The Trout are Rainbows, put and take
Fed with pellets, they soon grow huge.

The aquatic flora is rich
Pondweeds of many kinds, stoneworts too
But they're all cut-back, none spared
Lest any angler snags his flies.



Weedcutter used unsparingly on Coldingham Loch, 19 August 2011

Who knows how fare invertebrates
Beetles, flies and smaller sorts?
They must surely all suffer much
The web of life now under stress.

There's Yellow Iris at the edge
With Bogbean and Marsh Cinquefoil
But plants of trampled mud have gone
With no cattle watering there.

I'm told of change since I was there
A fishing club is now in place
I hope it's now untrue to say
It was, not now, maybe again.

23 August 2022

Dowlaw Dean NT8670

Dr George Henderson of Chirnside captured the spirit of Dowlaw Dean in a poem, which I reproduce below:

The glen is wild, and savage, lone, and deep,
Its shattered rocks are all with lichen grey,
And prickly brambles o'er their fragments stray;
The ivy green waves on the giddy steep.
And hawthorns hoar their nooks of shelter keep;
The lowly rose-wort¹ decks the rugged brae,
The dark green alder o'er the brook does weep,
And the tall willow-herb² its rosy flowers display.

How sweet a place it is for hermit, or for bard
To sit on some rude cliff above the water's fall,
Where the loud voice of ocean's waves are heard,
And muse on Nature's work, so wondrous all!
Such lone recess I love, far from men's haunts debarr'd,
And feel my heart refresh'd from care and sorrow's thrall.

Written in Dulaw Dean, near Fast Castle, in July 1835

¹ Roseroot *Sedum rosea*

² Rosebay Willowherb was a scarce plant of cliff ledges in Henderson's day



Dowlaw Dean, view northeast to sea with *Sedum rosea* on screes, 28 May 2012

Hilton Bay NT9659

A horseshoe bay confronts the sea
At Hilton Bay. The grassy slope
A change from towering cliffs
The rocks softer, rich in lime.

It's Mecca for botanists
There're so many scarce species here
Eroding rock leaves inviting gaps
Quick-growing shoots avoid the thugs.

Salad Burnet, Carline Thistle
Cowslips, Early-purple Orchids
Silky Lady's-mantle, it's rare
First found in nineteen-ninety-nine.

The railway runs near Hilton Bay
Eroding slopes, danger, unsafe
So, granite blocks along the beach
A riprap revetment placed.

Above the beach a concrete wall
Above the wall spread heavy nets
Erosion stops, but at a cost
Whins invade the treasured plants.



View north over Hilton Bay with imported rock prominent on the black beach, October 2005

South, a runnel with Butterwort
Lesser Clubmoss, Parnassus-grass
Agrimony in taller grass
Sea Spleenwort on sea-sprayed shelf.

Venture on beneath the cliffs
Wood Vetch hangs in scented sprays
Dewberry scrambles over rocks
Giant Horsetail in a few wet spots.

An Aspen grove on high cliff-ledge
Pendulous Sedge beneath the cliff
It's rugged here, no pathway clear
England's Border reached by few.

29 August 2022

Coldingham Bay NT9166

At the seaside by Coldingham
There's yellow sand except where grey
Beach huts kept safe under lock and key
An ice cream hut on sunny days.

Families staked out on the sand
With deckchairs for the older ones
While the young go to the sea
For paddling, maybe to swim.

There's the shadow of wellie boots
Walking along the high tide mark
Has someone lost his senses
To look so out of place?

No, flotsam at the high tide mark
Is where choice plants are out on show
Sea Rocket, knobbly Orache –
Which sort is very hard to say.

The shadow boots next pause a while
Hard by the beach huts on the sand
Where scruffy plants of yellow-green
Give notice of a Chickweed rare.

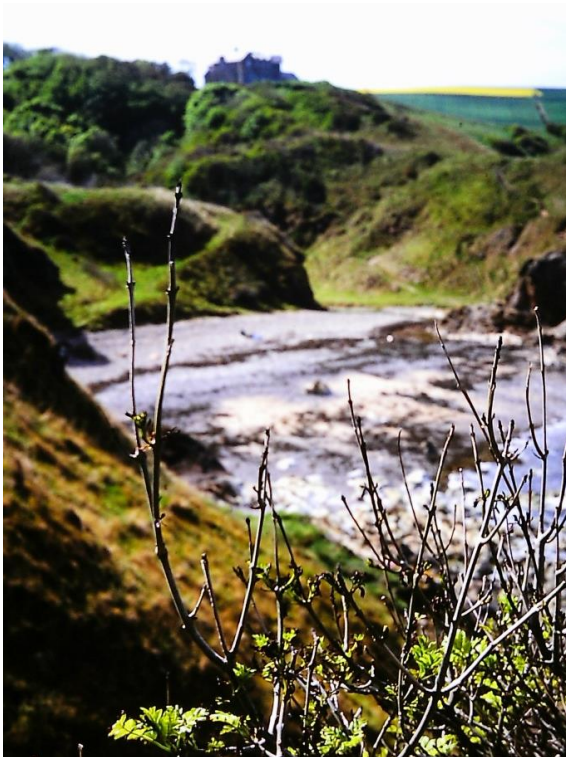
The grassy bank behind the sand
Once sheep-grazed or cut for hay
Now left rank, all the orchids gone
But Cowslips still just hold their own.

Homeli Knowe stands next the sand
'King o' castle' the game to play
Watch! Here're flowers of many sorts
Rockrose, Twayblade and Meadow-rue

Cross the burn and scramble on
To rocks and pools at Yellow Craig
Butterwort, Parnassus where it's wet
And huge Sea Kale on open sand.

Then on again to Linkim Shore
Where there's shingle in with the sand
Tall Bracken stands on braes behind
Hide Bluebell carpets in the spring.

2 July 2022



**View west to mouth of Milldown Burn,
probably 28 May 1994**

St Abbs Head NT9168

Stand on the Head and take it in
The cliffs below, the sea beyond
The coastline north and south
Farmland rolling in behind.



St Abbs village from White Heugh, 28 July 2006

Three dimensions, that's not all
A very present sense of time
Movement in the sea, the sky
Swirling seabirds in the wind.

Past ages too have left their mark
The coastline's cliffs are glacier-cut
The Head itself, nearly severed,
Stood and stands alone, apart.

Little wonder St Ebba chose
This place for her nuns' retreat
Her visitors in awe of God
Long before they knocked her door.

The long years since are ill-defined
Came first the salmon fishers' nets?
Then the lighthouse, the short golf course
Mire Loch dam-created from a fen.

The seabird city thrived all through
With foxes snatching edges' eggs
Once men and boys armed with ropes
Raided the seabird city streets.

Guillemots and Razorbills
Nest with Fulmar, Kittiwakes
With Shags on the lower ledges
Herring Gulls some way apart.

Thrift the flower that holds the eye
Rockrose too with Milkvetch rare
Cowslips, Orchids concealed below
Sandwort sun-kiss'd, Roseroot sun-shy.

Inland whins and brambles
Hide the migrant birds
A challenge for the line
Of watching telescopes.

Time's arrow still points
ahead
We know little how and when
Will fledglings be plastic-
fed?
Will flora soak or scorch?

19 May 2022



Minuartia verna colony on
'Minuartia Mound', 25 May 2002

Burnmouth NT9561

Back in seventy-nine, in fright
Asked to lead a week-long search
For floral gems in Berwickshire
Seaside Burnmouth our first foray.

The sea braes there are grassy slopes
Some mixed with protruding rocks
The basic soils mean fruitfulness
For many herbs of choicer sorts.

Our all-age party spread out wide
The young climb fast, grey hairs behind
Plant names called across the slope
Some unknown to their puzzled scribe.



**View southeast into harbour from overgrown sea braes,
12 June 2010**

Early-purple Orchids over
Cowslips likewise gone to seed
But fine Wood Vetch with tall Twayblade
Bloody Crane's-bill, Lesser Burnet.

Over beside the harbour road
Garden escapees going wild
Red Valerian, red, pink and white
Cotoneasters of three kinds.

Sad, since then these escapes have spread
With spiny sloes, brambles and whins
The choice grassland plants now at risk
SSSI, no management.

31 August 2022

Tweed's Aquatic Plants

There's an underwater world
Beneath the surface of the Tweed
Famous to all those in the know –
Not just for fish, for plants as well.



Tweed opposite Carham, a Pondweed, *Potamogeton x salicifolius*, in shallow water, 1 September 2007

With a liking for rock shelves
Where there is lime in good supply
The Pondweeds and Water Crowfoots
Have a trick that helps them survive.



**Tweed near Fireburnmill, view
southeast to Water Crowfoot beds
in stream between bank and island,
22 July 2006**

When a stem breaks, off and away
Snags up by chance under a rock
It roots down firm, a new plant now
No seed needed to reproduce.

Water Crowfoots loved by all
For their white carpet of flowers?
No: it's affront to fishermen:
Slashed back from all open pools!

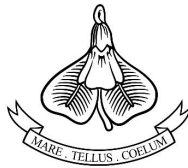
The Pondweeds are not quite the same
Different kinds, different tastes
Like it shallow, prefer it deep?
So, some obstruct more than the rest.

Water Crowfoots have chosen haunts
The Blackadder below Greenlaw.
Two hybrids, part-double flowers,
Latin 'Kelso' gives one its name¹.

Favoured by Tweed Pondweeds are:
Fireburnmill's island stream, Blount Bank
St Thomas's Island, south side,
Brackish shallows by Paxton House.

¹ *Ranunculus x kelchoensis*

1 September 2022



The Berwickshire Naturalists' Club

This booklet is published by the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club, which is active in the Scottish Borders, East Lothian and Northumberland. Members enjoy a varied programme of field trips and lectures and receive an annual journal.

The Club was founded in September 1831 by Dr George Johnston of Berwick upon Tweed, with the object of 'investigating the natural history and antiquities of Berwickshire and its vicinage'. The Berwickshire Naturalists' Club is the oldest continuously active Club of its kind in the UK.

We occasionally publish on subjects of special interest, such as this booklet. If you would like to join us or to offer original work to be considered for publication or inclusion in our journal, please contact us through our website: www.bnc1831.co.uk

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Michael Braithwaite

Front Cover – Map taken from Alexander Lowe’s *General view of the agriculture of the county of Berwick, 1794*

Above – Hareheugh Craigs by Jeanna Holl, on the cover of the book which is the source of the botanical detail used in this booklet