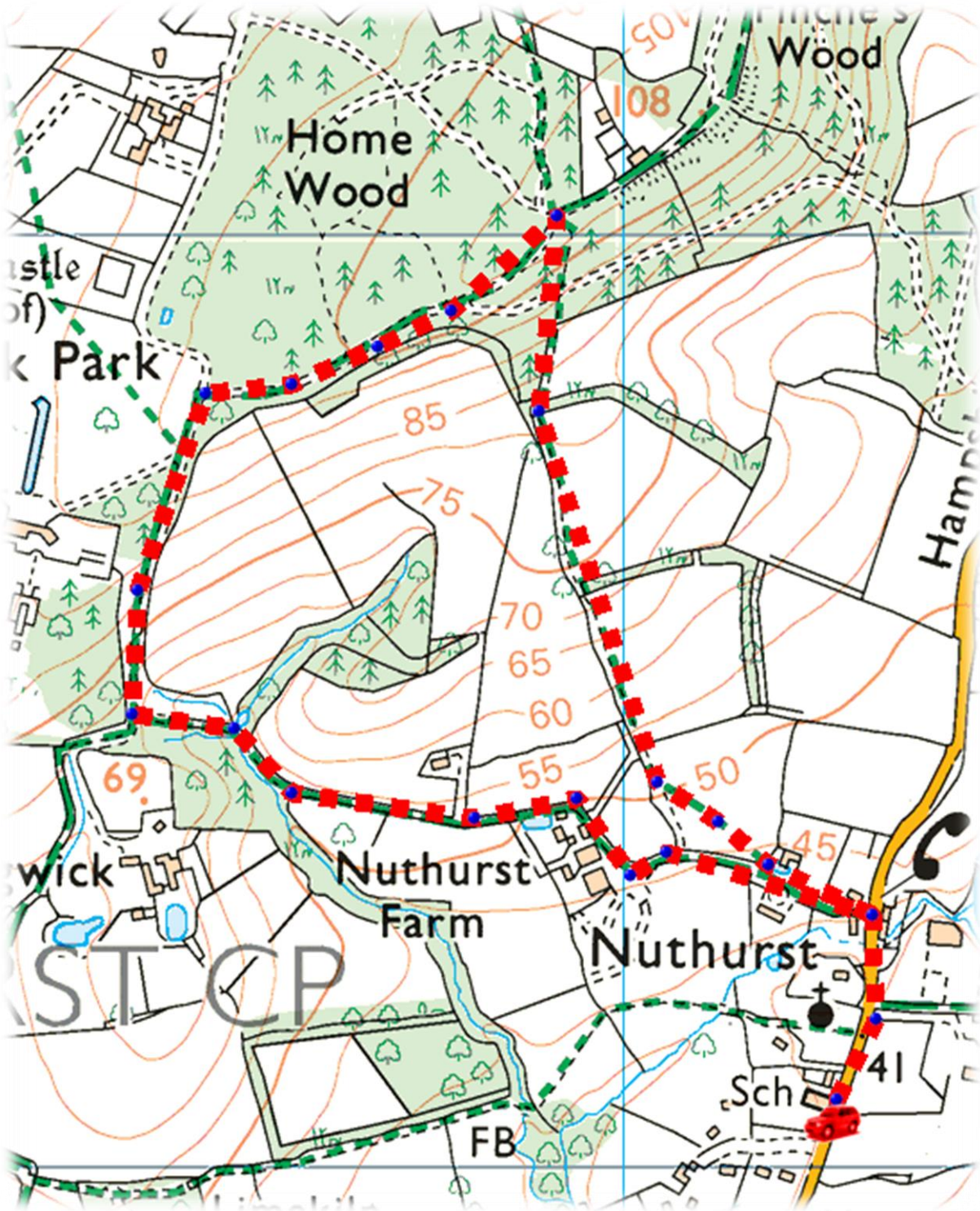


The Nuthurst Autumn Parish Walk

3rd October 2021

Leader: Owen Hydes **Guide:** Jonathan Simons

We strolled from the School past the church and up the lane opposite the Black Horse to Sedgwick Park. We headed towards Finche's Cottage and then descended from the ridge through the fields – less than two miles but so full of interest it took nearly two hours!



At our first pause, at the bottom of the Sedgwick Park Lane, we considered the abundance of **Hawthorn** berries and their partner the **Rosehip**. My mother would gather 'hips and haws' to make nourishing jelly. I think it was something that they did '*In the WAR, dear*'. Our leader also remembered that children in his district were paid to gather rosehips. The hips were then sent away for commercial manufacture of the jelly which was rich in vitamin C. The 'haws' we saw were from the **Common Hawthorn** with just one pip. The Midland Thorn, to be found in old woodland is blessed with two pips.



Here also was a small **Wild Service Tree** poking out of the top of the hedgerow. The leaves have the palmate shape of a maple. The tree is also known as the Chequers Tree from the chequered pattern of the bark. Nuthurst has a good supply of these trees which are indicative of ancient woodland. The brown berries were used in the past to flavour beer. Pubs named making beer in this way were often named 'The Chequers'.



There does seem to be a dearth of acorns this year. Under one English Oak we found what could have been acorn from last year significantly afflicted by the Knopper Gall. The Knopper gall wasp has a remarkable life cycle, requiring one year on the Turkey Oak before transferring its attentions to English Oak. We saw many substantial Turkey Oaks at the top of the drive with just a few of its characteristically hairy acorns (pictured below). This is an introduced species that has thrived. Unfortunately it has a bad reputation as host to the Knopper Gall wasp and there have been threats to fell them in parts of the country.

The park drive leads past an impressive line of **Plane Trees** but we saw none of the distinctive bobbly fruits. **Holly** berries were doing better here than on my home ground. At the turning to Lower Sedgwick Farm we saw a very picturesque **Hornbeam** with its bunches of hanging keys turning to gold.



Opposite was a more modest **Field Maple**. This has small bunches of winged fruits like a sycamore. One or two **Hybrid Limes** were carrying their oddly shaped fruits which hang on a stalk below a supporting leafy bract. The small-leaved lime is frequent in the Maplehurst area but the large-leaved lime is very rare. The commonly found lime is a hybrid between the two.



Walking towards Finche's Cottage we came across a **Crab Apple** with some very unappetising fruit. A little further on there were better colours among those dropped to the forest floor. I remarked that the best show I had ever seen of this phenomenon was on the east bank of Abinger Hill to the south of Maplehurst.

Those in the party who had attempted crab-apple jelly attested to the back-breaking effort required.

Up on 'the Ridge' we noticed a number of clumps of juicy red berries. First the **Wayfaring Tree**, a species of *Viburnum*, then the climbers **Bittersweet** and **Black Bryony**, which is pictured below with its characteristic mix of colour. Two shrubs had small black berries: **Privet** and **Dogwood**. The **Honeysuckle** was still in flower and we did not see its fruits.



As we descended on the footpath at the edge of the fields we enjoyed the delightful view over Nuthurst and beyond, with trees as far as the eye could see. A calming and healing scene after all the upsets of recent years.

I remarked that Fungi had not been much in evidence yet, apart from some old brackets on oak, probably a **Ganoderma** species. Immediately I spoke our leader was discovered to have just trodden on a small delicate mushroom. It seemed to be the **Pleated Inkcap**, *Coprinus plicatilis*, otherwise known as the Little Japanese Umbrella. Soon after we found the equally delicate **Petticoat Mottlegill**, *Panaeolus papilionaceus*, developing on buried dung. A third similar species then appeared in the grass, it had mottled gills but no petticoat.

The ash trees all along the route were definitely suffering die-back. The scene will have changed completely with their disappearance. They are independently prey to the magnificent **Shaggy Bracket**, *Inonotus hispidus*. We saw an old spongy one and then a bright new example a little later on. It was probably this that led to the departure of the ash on Maplehurst green a few years ago.



One of the party discovered a brown wooden spherical object about the size of a marble on the ground under an oak. It was a **Marble Gall**, home for the grub of another wasp. I cut it open and you could see the cavity inside where the grub had been.

As we approached one of the lower gates we noticed what might have been a large blackthorn with a lot of sloe-like fruits. Although we could not reach it seemed not to have any spines like the common blackthorn. I considered the fruits to be too small for a damson and so proposed that it was a **Bullace**.



Our final significant encounter was with a maturing cowpat which had started to bloom with a yellow fungus rash. Life is so tenacious. What is waste to one species is an essential requirement for another. I suppose 'that's the way God planned it'.

Jonathan Simons 3/10/21