

## Bewdley Quayside Flora

BRETT WESTWOOD



Denise Bingham, John Bingham and Brett Westwood, Bewdley, 4 October 2015

Rosemary Winnall

A Dipper was flipping pebbles on the Severn shore near Lax Lane car park in Bewdley when Denise and John Bingham, Rosemary Winnall and I met on October 4th 2015. We chose our date to take advantage of the very low water levels which had enticed the Dipper downstream from Dowles Brook and which would allow us to sample the plants growing on Bewdley's sandstone quays.

The Severnside quays stretch either side of Thomas Telford's new bridge, built in 1798 to replace the old bridge which was swept away by the flood of three years before. As we walked along their walls, we saw modern metal plaques set into the sandstone, each depicting an item of trade that would have arrived at or departed from the quays: timber, leather, wine and spirits, pewter, charcoal and many more. These commodities, transported by trow between the Severnside towns were shipped downstream to Bristol and far beyond, a reminder that the quays were an international link to this small Worcestershire town.

The quays are a meeting place for plants as well as commodities. Their porous sandstones and mortars are footholds for a wide range of plants, some of them transient, others more persistent. Our survey was an informal one, walking first along the base of the walls exposed by low water and then across the tops where a trimmer seemed to have removed most vegetation.

In all we recorded 104 species of vascular plants in a couple of hours. Many such as Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* and assortment of willowherbs *Epilobium* were species which you'd expect on

a riverside wall. Others, including a bewildering collection of young hybrid willows *Salix* sp. posed tougher identification problems. Two native species are significant on a county scale. Green Figwort *Scrophularia umbrosa* is a local plant with a national stronghold along waterways in Worcestershire and Shropshire where it seems to be spreading, especially along the Rivers Teme and Severn. (Maskew 2014). It's easy to overlook as Water Figwort *Scrophularia aquatica*, but the whole plant has a fresh green tint and broadly-winged stems: the leaves are neatly and precisely-toothed rather like fleshy nettle leaves. This general appearance will help to distinguish Green Figwort from Water Figwort whose leaves often have small leaflets at the base of each and whose stems and foliage are usually tinged with maroon. The flowering spikes of Green Figwort are 'busier' with narrower gaps between each whorl of flowers: in Water Figwort these gaps are often wide with comparatively long sections of bare stem. We found a large colony of Green Figwort on the quay south of Telford's bridge and occasional rosettes in the walls of Severnside South where seeds had been swept downriver.

The other local speciality would be easy to miss in October, had we not known where to look. Rue-leaved Saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites* is a spring-flowering annual which grows in very shallow substrates on roof-slates and dry ground. Here, squatting low against the ground, it basks in the reflected warmth from the stones and so is known as a thermophilous (heat-loving) annual. Its reddish stems and delicate white flowers are easy to overlook in April and May, when they can be common on the sandy wall-tops



of Severnside South. By June flowering is over and in October, as we discovered, all that remains are the desiccated seed-heads, which have already sown next spring's generation. The saxifrage will germinate in late winter, to flower again in April and May. In Worcestershire this is now a very local plant of older man-made structures and the Bewdley colony is a strong one. It often mingles with the fleshy leaves of Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*.



Rue-leaved Saxifrage, Bewdley Quay, 16 May 2015 R. Winnall

October 4th is not a date on which you'd expect to find another thermophilous annual in full bloom, so we were surprised to see Common Whitlow-Grass *Erophila verna* flowering on the walls of Severnside North, five months before its snow-white flowers usually appear. This member of the cress family has the delicacy of true Alpines, but is so small - several plants can fit onto a penny - that it is often overlooked in March and April. In quantity, it can resemble light frosting at the untrodden sides of tracks and roads. What prompted this early-flowering, we do not know, but the two plants we found were surprisingly lush.

The previous species are natives, but a town quay is bound to attract aliens and garden escapes. Michaelmas daisies *Aster* sp. are native to North America, but can be very hard to identify to species or, as is often the case, hybrids. The plants we found in bloom had very pale lilac flowers and were



Common Whitlow Grass *Erophila verna* in bloom, Severnside North, October 2015 Brett Westwood



*Aster* sp. Bewdley Quay

Rosemary Winnall

probably *Aster lanceolatus*. The other escaped daisy which is increasing in Bewdley's walls is the Mexican Fleabane or St Peter Port Daisy *Erigeron karvinskianus*, a delicate, low-growing plant with reddish buds and white flowers. Until relatively recently this was a scarce plant in Worcestershire, often eliminated by low temperatures but seems to be flourishing in walls and pavements, thanks to milder winters.

The tops of the walls had been scoured by street-cleaners by the time we arrived, but a week before one of us (Brett Westwood) had recorded three grasses on Severnside North quay. Maize *Zea mays*, Common Millet *Panicum miliaceum* and Cockspur Grass *Echinochloa crus-galli*. Only a few remain



Tiny plant of Maize *Zea mays* on Severnside North, just a couple of cms tall and still in flower! Sept 2015 B. Westwood

were left of these transient annuals, broadcast here by duck-feeders, but they're a sign that other exotic species from bird-seed mixes could turn up here in future. Although large plants when mature, these grasses can produce seeds when only one or two cm tall, on these well-trodden wall-tops.

This is only a small selection of the plants we found (see full list overleaf). Bewdley's combination of old buildings, sunny niches and sheltered riverside position will no doubt combine to swell our initial list even further during the coming seasons.

## Bewdley Quays: Plant Species Recorded on 4th October 2015

John and Denise Bingham, Brett Westwood and Rosemary Winnall

<i>Asplenium trichomanes</i>	Maidenhair Spleenwort	<i>Impatiens glandulifera</i>	Indian Balsam
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	Lady Fern	<i>Lamium album</i>	White Dead-nettle
<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>	Broad Buckler	<i>Lapsana communis</i>	Nipplewort
<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>	Male Fern	<i>Lobelia erinus</i>	Garden Lobelia
<i>Phyllitis scolopendrium</i>	Hart's -tongue Fern	<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Common Rye-grass
<i>Polypodium agg.</i>	Polypody Fern	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	Purple Loosestrife
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow	<i>Matricaria discoidea</i>	Pineapple Weed
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	Ground-elder	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	Black Medick
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent-grass	<i>Mycelis muralis</i>	Wall Lettuce
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Alder	<i>Myosoton aquaticum</i>	Water Chickweed
<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	Wild Angelica	<i>Panicum miliaceum</i>	Common Millet
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley	<i>Parietaria judaica</i>	Pellitory-of-the-wall
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False Oat-Grass	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	Reed Canary-grass
<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	Mugwort	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain
<i>Aster sp</i>	Michaelmas Daisy	<i>Plantago major</i>	Great Plantain
<i>Barbarea vulgaris</i>	Winter-cress	<i>Poa annua</i>	Annual Meadow-grass
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy	<i>Poa nemoralis</i>	Wood Meadow-grass
<i>Betula pendula</i>	Silver Birch	<i>Persicaria maculosa</i>	Redshank
<i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>	Wood False-Brome	<i>Polygonum aviculare</i>	Knot-grass
<i>Anisantha sterilis</i>	Barren Brome	<i>Potentilla anserina</i>	Silverweed
<i>Buddleia davidii</i>	Butterfly Bush	<i>P. Potentilla reptans</i>	Creeping Cinquefoil
<i>Cardamine flexuosa</i>	Wavy Bitter-cress	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup
<i>Cardamine hirsuta</i>	Hairy Bitter-cress	<i>Rorippa sylvestris</i>	Creeping Yellow-cress
<i>Carex remota</i>	Remote Sedge	<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Common Sorrel
<i>Centranthus ruber</i>	Red Valerian	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	Broad-leaved Dock
<i>Cerastium fontanum</i>	Common Mouse-ear	<i>Rumex sanguineus</i>	Wood Dock
<i>Cerastium glomeratum</i>	Sticky Mouse-ear	<i>Sagina procumbens</i>	Common Pearlwort
<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>	Rose Bay Willowherb	<i>Salix cinerea</i>	Grey Willow
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Creeping Thistle	<i>Salix cinerea x viminalis (S. x smithiana)</i>	Silky-leaved Osier
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle	<i>Salix viminalis</i>	Common Osier
<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	Canadian Fleabane	<i>Saxifraga tridactylites</i>	Rue-leaved Saxifrage
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Smooth Hawk's-beard	<i>Scrophularia auriculata</i>	Water Figwort
<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>	Ivy-leaved Toadflax	<i>Scrophularia umbrosa</i>	Green Figwort
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot Grass	<i>Sedum acre</i>	Biting Stonecrop
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Wild Carrot	<i>Sedum album</i>	White Stonecrop
<i>Elymus caninus</i>	Bearded Couch-grass	<i>Senecio aquatica</i>	Marsh Ragwort
<i>Epilobium ciliatum</i>	American Willowherb	<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Common Ragwort
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	Hairy Willowherb	<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel
<i>Epilobium roseum</i>	Pale Willowherb	<i>Silene dioica</i>	Red Campion
<i>Erigeron karvinskianus</i>	Mexican Fleabane	<i>Sonchus asper</i>	Prickly Sow-thistle
<i>Erophila verna</i>	Common Whitlow-Grass	<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	Smooth Sow-thistle
<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>	Hemp Agrimony	<i>Stellaria media</i>	Common Chickweed
<i>Fragaria x ananassa</i>	Garden Strawberry	<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>	Tansy
<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Ash	<i>Taraxacum officinale agg.</i>	Dandelion
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Goose-grass	<i>Trifolium dubium</i>	Lesser Trefoil
<i>Galium mollugo</i>	Hedge Bedstraw	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover
<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dove's-foot Cranesbill	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White Clover
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb Robert	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	Coltsfoot
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Herb Bennett	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire Fog	<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>	Common Valerian
<i>Hypericum maculatum</i>	Perforate St. John's Wort	<i>Vulpia myuros</i>	Rat's-tail Fescue
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Cat's -ear	<i>Zea mays</i>	Maize



# Wyre Forest Study Group

