

BLUE-BUTCHERS AND GRANFER-GRIGGLES

When I was a boy, there were fields within or along the edges of Wychwood which had not been ploughed or mowed for many years, which soon became dotted with scrubby thorns and briars, interspersed with patches of rough grass which was seasonally grazed by sheep. Apart from the fact that this formed an ideal habitat for nesting birds such as warblers and linnets, and later, in one particular field, mushrooms in season, it is the flora of this type of rough pasture which I remember most vividly, especially now, when following war-time reversion to arable with the use of modern agricultural chemicals, one of the most interesting flowers which abounded there, the Green-winged Orchis, is now a comparative rarity. In its usual purple form, this species is often confused with the somewhat similar Early Purple Orchis of open woodland, a few of which do still survive in The Forest. The woodlander is larger and has spotted leaves, whilst the meadow-dweller has green leaves and green veins in the 'wings' of its flowers. What made the forest colony, consisting of hundreds of plants so special, was the fact that a high proportion of them were colour variants including pure white, pale and deep pink, mauve and sometimes a half-and-half mixture of any two.

By a piece of unintentional conservation one such mixed patch of fine specimens still survives - the tubers or seeds must have been in the turf used to cover the flat top of the pyramidal reservoir just on the edge of the forest at Finstock, and although safely fenced in, one can see the blooms against the sky-line from the entrance at the roadside. In this locality, as perhaps older residents may recall, both the Early Purple and the usually purple Green-winged species were known as 'Bloody-butchers', or to the more genteel as 'Blue-butchers'. On my first discovery of the mixed colony near my home, my father, who had lived in Dorset, told me that in that county they were known as 'Granfer-griggles' and, as in the case just mentioned, it was applied to both purple species. Many years later, on discovering a colony of the mixed type on the deliberately neglected lawn in the south of our county (where I had the pleasure of seeing over a thousand blooms this May), a lady to whom I showed them said "Oh, Granfer-griggles - I haven't seen them since I was a little girl in Somerset".

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