

# George Claridge Druce (1850-1932), botanist, businessman, burgher, and benefactor<sup>1</sup>

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## Summary

Druce was the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire's leading member for half a century (and treasurer during nearly all of that time); he refounded it and wrote its journal almost single-handedly; he gave 73 lectures to it, including a long series of entertaining Christmas presentations for youthful audiences. Some twenty years ago the Society paid a major tribute to Druce, on the occasion when it refurbished his gravestone in Holywell cemetery. My chief reason for revisiting him now is the further commemoration of him by the award of an Oxfordshire Blue Plaque.<sup>2</sup>

In that connection I've been looking at a small part of the huge quantity of papers which he left, alongside a munificent benefaction, to the University of Oxford. But I've been drawn to him too through an arresting portrait from his last years, painted by one of the foremost society artists of the day. I shall return to the doyen Druce later; but let me start with some facts of his career which will already be well known to some.



**Figure 1. George Claridge Druce by Philip de László 1931.  
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## From lowly beginnings to high society

Druce was born in 1850 in a Northamptonshire village, probably Yardley Gobion; his mother was unmarried. The child had a correspondingly modest country upbringing.



**Figure 2. Druce's probable birthplace (right-hand house) at Yardley Gobion**

In his teens he became apprenticed to a pharmacy in Northampton – the inventors of Jeyes' Fluid (though that product was developed elsewhere).



**Figure 3. Jeyes the Chemists, at Northampton and district**

Meanwhile he trained himself as a more or less autodidact botanist. By his twenties Druce was rising in the firm, and also organizing local natural history activities: experiences and contacts that must have helped him greatly as he composed the first version of his *Flora* of Northants.



**Figure 4. Druce as a young man c 1879, Oxford University Herbarium**

In 1879 ambition brought Druce to Oxford, because he could not advance his career quickly enough in Northampton. At 118 High Street he established a chemist's business where he was ably supported by his mother, till her death in 1892.



Figure 5. Druce the Chemist 118 High Street

**G. CLARIDGE DRUCE,**  
Pharmaceutical Chemist,  
118 HIGH STREET, OXFORD.

Large assortment of Hand Cameras in Stock ready for immediate use. All the best makes of Plates kept in stock, in various rapidities. Amateurs' negatives developed in a few hours.

**SOLE MAKER of "SMOKO," the CELEBRATED  
SMOKER'S TOOTH POWDER.**

*When Preparations through their intrinsic merit become widely known, imitations are frequently made; and as this Preparation has been imitated both in name and appearance by unscrupulous persons, the Proprietor cautions purchasers to see that his Trade Mark is on each Box or Bottle.*

**Every Requisite of Modern Pharmacy for Travellers and Invalids.**

*English and Foreign Prescriptions dispensed with accuracy and despatch,  
and forwarded to all parts of Great Britain, post free.*

**Figure 6. Advertisement for Druce the Chemist**

He never married, and acquired wealth enough to purchase a large house in Crick Road.

By that time he was well known as a tireless botanist hereabouts and further afield. His *Flora* of Oxfordshire appeared in the 1880s and of Berkshire in the 1890s. He assembled his own large herbarium and also took curatorial charge of those in the university. Soon after arriving, he co-founded an Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club, then at the turn of the century led some like-minded colleagues to merge this with the moribund Ashmolean Society and thus constitute the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire.

By that stage Druce had entered Oxford politics: he was a Liberal councillor for South ward from 1892, sheriff of the city in 1896/7 and mayor in 1900/1. Over many years he chaired committees dealing with health and sanitation, education, and libraries. He counted as a complete local factotum. Yet he had much wider horizons too, especially from 1905, when he could leave management of the shop to others. He ran the Botanical Exchange Club as a national body, compiling most of its extensive annual reports, and building it up into almost a mass organization by the 1920s. He travelled widely, now not just on rigorous botanical forays, but at international conferences, with scientific delegations, and on official tours. He had his finger in many pies across the land, including, as we shall see, nature conservation.

Botany, however, remained central to Druce's life. He completed his *Floras* of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire (in a revised edition). He wrote thousands of articles, short and long (238 in the *Journal of Botany* alone),<sup>3</sup> ranging from local finds at a myriad sites across the country and beyond to global issues of classification and

nomenclature. He published important descriptions of the university herbaria which rendered them accessible for the first time; and this proceeded *pari passu* with his own academic recognition, from an honorary Oxford MA in the 1880s, through an MA by decree, to an examined DSc (though his only honorary doctorate would be granted him by St Andrews). National appreciation culminated in his election as FRS in 1927. That year his friends designed an elaborate bookplate to reflect some of his many and varied interests, and the array of those friendships is further on display in a large bound folio volume to commemorate Druce's eightieth birthday, when so many messages were sent to him that Oxford Post Office had to employ extra staff to deal with them.<sup>4</sup> There followed the portrait, commissioned as a further tribute, and the many obituaries on his death in 1932, among them an extended (but unpublished) biography by Frank Bellamy. The huge bequest to the University of most of his property set the seal on Druce's public service.

## The pharmacist

Druce's upbringing was formative but awkward.<sup>4</sup> He later covered up his illegitimacy, naturally enough (even in official records)<sup>5</sup> but he made much of his middle name, 'Claridge'. Evidently that connoted respectability for him: his father was probably the son of a local farm bailiff of that name. It is not quite clear where the young George and his mother lived, and when: Yardley Gobion for sure (and maybe at 13 Chestnut Road), and the larger neighbouring settlements of Potterspury and Old Stratford for a time. Nor do we know the extent of his formal education; but he attended school at Yardley and evidently enjoyed some extra coaching, apparently by ministers at the Congregational chapel.<sup>6</sup> Druce's affection for Yardley was shown much later, both in the plaque which he placed to his mother in the church there and his funding of an extension of the graveyard to that modest Victorian building, as well as in the name he gave to his (much less modest) Oxford house: Yardley Lodge.<sup>7</sup>

Druce's youth was full of nature and wildlife, especially exploring the remains of the ancient Whittlewood, just across Watling Street (the later A5) from his home. He says he recognized hundreds of flowers before he could name them, even in English. In fact, butterflies seem to have attracted him first, before their food plants commanded his attention.<sup>8</sup> Druce recollects his childhood in lyrical vein in the introductions to his *Floras* and elsewhere. In later years he made a special study of John Clare, cataloguing all the poet's references to flowers and penning a poignant account of his life, ending in the asylum at Northampton: 'He was occasionally allowed to go into town, where he would sit under the portico of All Saints Church, watching the children play; or as I remember once seeing him when I was a boy, as a little pathetic distraught figure gazing into the sky.'<sup>9</sup>

Pharmacy was likewise a real passion and a vocation. Under Philadelphus (II) Jeyes – elder brother of John, who invented the Fluid – Druce soon earned promotion to shop manager. Displaying his organizational acumen even as a trainee, he set up a Northampton Chemists' Assistants and Apprentices Association, out of which grew a Natural History Society, with various local churchmen to balance out Druce's fervently Darwinian co-founder, and with 'men eminent in science' as honorary members, including Darwin himself and Huxley.<sup>10</sup> Jeyes invited him to join in family trekking holidays, and Druce duly became an indefatigable walker: companions recall long arduous hikes covering up to thirty miles, in the intermissions of a strenuous business life.

Then with the Oxford shop he could build a network of business and professional connections, as well as at least peripheral academic ones. He evidently enjoyed contact with the university's great and good: Druce himself later listed among them the future statesmen Curzon, Rhodes, Birkenhead, Simon, and Goschen; the clerics Temple, Benson, Lang, Stubbs, Pusey, and Liddon; the poets Bridges, Newbold, and Noyes; the writers Hardy, Wilde, Pater, and Belloc; the artists Burne Jones and Holman Hunt; and the great critic John Ruskin, of whom more below.<sup>11</sup> As the *Oxford Mail* drily observed of Druce's emporium: 'His prescription for restoring the havoc wrought by over-indulgence brought him considerable popularity.'<sup>12</sup> In due course Druce became president of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. At two successive gatherings of the British Pharmaceutical Conference, in 1901-2,<sup>13</sup> at Dublin and Dundee, he dwelt learnedly and scientifically on its history and traditions and on its links to botany. Into his old age he continued to write for pharmaceutical journals such as the *Chemist & Druggist*, both on professional matters and on his travels, in Africa, Turkey, America, and right round the world.

## Druce and Oxford

Druce rapidly became a conspicuous figure in Oxford's civic life. As councillor he was hard-working, respected, above all highly visible – and also audible: he acquired one of the first telephones in the city (no. 12). As sheriff, he beat the municipal bounds at his own expense: 25 miles across swamps, over hedges, through houses, carrying the corporation mace, with fife and drum, all in a single day.<sup>14</sup> Druce presented further regalia to enhance the dignity of the office. As mayor he was still more energetic: he entertained Boer-war troops, the yeomanry, local druids, a thousand visiting members of the YMCA, a further thousand photographers, and many more, besides presiding over the solemnities for the death of Queen Victoria.



**Figure 7. Oxford Town Hall opened 1897**



**Figure 8. Druce as Mayor of Oxford May 1900 - May 1901, Oxford University Herbarium**

He engaged in a hectic round of dinners and associated speeches; and he altogether enlivened ‘a gay council chamber’, as one report had it.<sup>15</sup> He also sought to bridge town and gown, though he always belonged more to the former than to the latter (he was a member, but not – as sometimes asserted – a fellow, of Magdalen).<sup>16</sup>

From 1905 Druce gave up his day-to-day involvement in the shop; he moved to the spacious Yardley Lodge, where cousins joined him as housekeeper and chauffeur.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 9. Crick Road Druce's 'Yardley Lodge', by Robert Evans**

This freed him up to throw himself into high-profile activities such as the Oxford Pageant of 1907.<sup>18</sup> He was a prominent freemason: a long-time Provincial Grand Warden, then an Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies (an honorific title bestowed for his charitable work).<sup>19</sup> Druce helped run local clubs and associations, especially in his South Oxford ward – not least, for obvious reasons, the Grandpont Horticultural Society and the South Ward Allotments Association, which he chaired for decades. He served for many years as a justice of the peace and as chairman of the parish council at All Saints on the High, at that time the City Church. He gave a bell for its tower (a new species of *Campanula drucei* perhaps?), and altogether showed a keen interest in ecclesiastical architecture and decoration. Among other associative and community roles Druce – ever the collector and classifier – was president of Oxford Philatelic Society.

Oxford in his time was not a highly politicized place; but it retained a Tory majority. One of Druce's few reverses occurred in a bruising aldermanic contest of 1911 between the parties (only in 1920 did he finally secure election to that largely honorific position).<sup>20</sup> Countrywide, however, municipal Liberals were at the zenith of their influence in his time. He displays few signs of the 'new' or 'social' liberalism; rather he remained a liberal imperialist. At the time of the Boer War we find Druce speaking before the Oxford Caledonian Society on 'Imperial Forces', recommending rifle clubs and conscription.<sup>21</sup> He was correspondingly keen to export British political values to places like the Near East; for example he later recalled – bizarrely – how 'one of earliest meetings of the Young Turks was held in Oxford in the Drill Hall', and he himself 'had the pleasure of taking the chair at it'.<sup>22</sup>

In any event, Druce showed plenty of dedication to improvement. He chaired the city's Health and Sanitation committee for thirty years, as well as the Finance and Library committees (opening the new facility at Bury Knowle in Headington proved to be his last public appearance). And he backed progress: at the second annual dinner of the Oxford Automobile and Cycle Agency he spoke in favour of 'automobilism' for the benefit of all (with a certain WR Morris acting as vice-chair).<sup>23</sup> At a Bristol

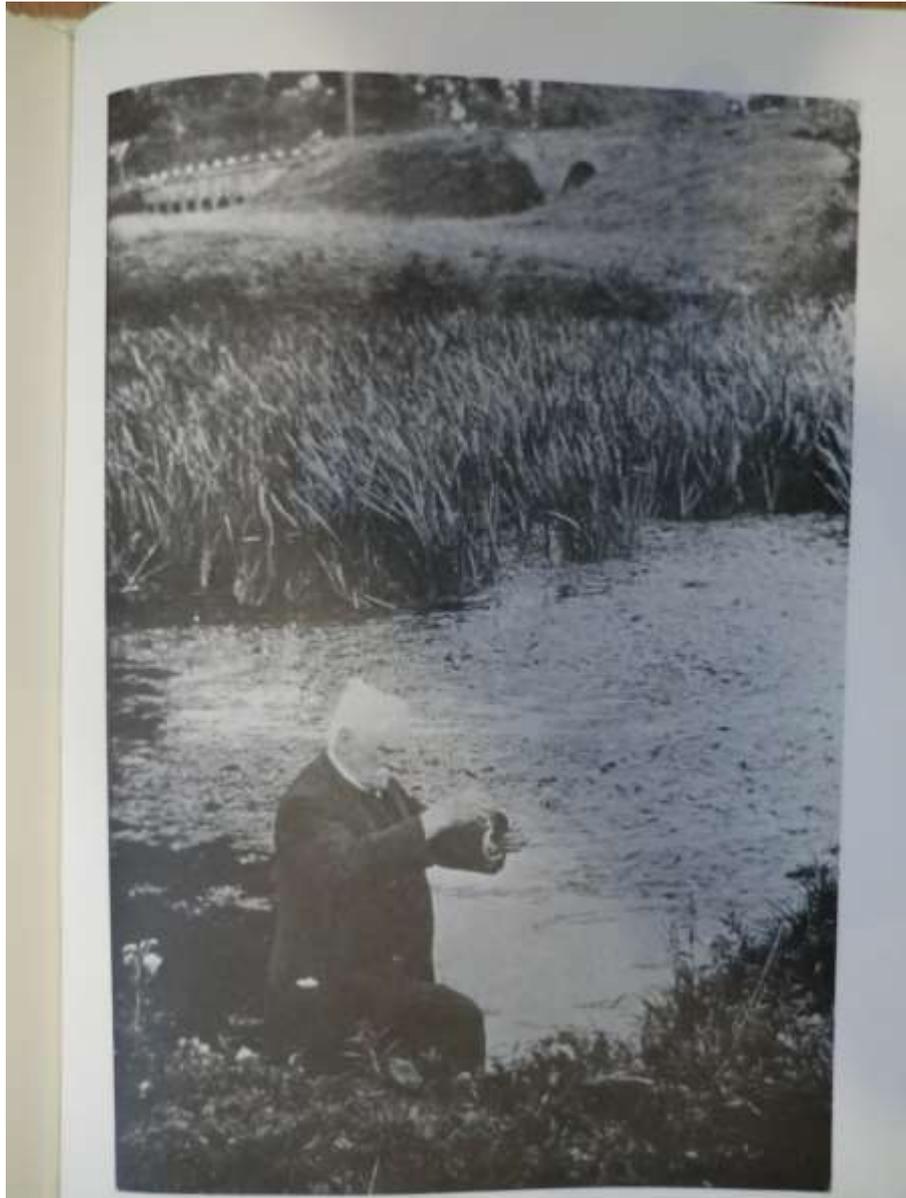
meeting in 1898 of the British Association for the Advancement of Science – in which he was also active - he received ‘a message in the Morse code which Marconi sent to him across the Grammar School at Clifton’.<sup>24</sup>

It’s instructive to compare Druce to Sir Edward Grey, fellow Liberal politician and another famous naturalist. Grey had been one of those gilded undergraduates who frequented the pharmacy on the High; and half a century later it was Sir Edward, by now Viscount Grey of Fallodon, who, in a ‘most delightful speech teeming with kindly expressions’, presented the bookplate to ‘one he’d known over so many years ...[as a man] of particular charm and sympathy’.<sup>25</sup> He did the same honours for Druce’s eightieth birthday, by which time Grey had become Chancellor of Oxford University. Druce was miles away in character perhaps from the languid peer; but each represented a distinctive blend of politician and naturalist. From naturalist to nationalist, we can find a further striking affinity with the Czech independence leader, Tomáš Masaryk, another self-made man born in the very same year as Druce, 1850. In 1920 Druce was an enthusiastic member of a delegation of journalists to the new Czechoslovakia, a state he evidently believed to embody his own liberal principles. There he met Masaryk, whose portrait stands at the beginning of Druce’s birthday book a decade later.

## Druce as botanist

For decades Druce assumed the central organizational role in the subject, as secretary of the Botanical [Society and] Exchange Club of the British Isles, compiling elaborate annotated species lists for some fifty years more or less single-handed.<sup>26</sup> Whereas his *List of British Plants* and regular re-editions of Hayward’s *Botanist's Pocket Book* helped make his name nationally, there is evidence of his European connections and significance – he was competent in French and German, as well as Latin – from the likes of the Czech Karel Domín and the German Karl Drude, who said Druce’s ‘knowledge of British floristic botany is unsurpassed’.<sup>27</sup>

Druce’s professional methods aroused some censure at the time. His autocratic handling of Exchange Club business alienated academic colleagues, and he became embroiled in controversies, mainly over nomenclature. Some thought he cut corners, especially in his later work.<sup>28</sup> Yet his overall contribution was magisterial. He augmented field botany’s phalanx of a few dozen trained insiders with an army of many hundreds of lay devotees. And he led by his own example of universal coverage. He visited all, really *all*, of the UK – and observed everything growing in it: ‘It’s been my infinite privilege to see every species of Flowering Plant ... known to exist in the British Isles’, as he wrote in *Wild Flower Magazine* in 1921.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 10. Druce examines specimens in a swamp, Oxford University Herbarium**

Druce's wider curiosity was insatiable. Accompanying an international phytogeographical excursion round the British Isles in 1911, he discovered a second locality for *Stellaria dilleniana* [i.e. *Stellaria palustris*, marsh stitchwort] in Norfolk, 'a peculiar variety of the Cornish groundsel', a water-lily and viola new to Ireland, and various novelties in Scotland.<sup>30</sup> North of the Border his expertise was startling, even and especially in its remotest regions, from the Mull of Galloway to Caithness, and included notable treatments of Wester Ross, of the Shetland Islands (his *Flora Zetlandica*), and of the Cairngorms, above all Lochnagar (with its Spout gully which he explored many times).<sup>31</sup>

Another attractive and distinctive feature of Druce's research was his fascination with the historical perspective, with what he called 'botanologia'. He took delight in the pioneers of the subject, especially if they had been outsiders like himself, and wrote extensively about them. He began at home, with the botanists of Northants, from the learned cleric John Morton of Great Oxendon (1671-1726) onwards. Then he

increasingly looked further afield, again especially towards Scotland. For decades Druce pursued the traces of a neglected master, George Don (the elder) of Forfar, hunting for his plants in the glens of Dole and Clova at least six times,<sup>32</sup> till he was eventually able to mastermind a monument to Don, unveiled in his home town in 1910 with Druce as the chief eulogist.<sup>33</sup> Hence, in part, the later academic recognition for Druce at nearby St Andrews.

Druce's sensitivity to botany's diachronic dimension showed itself also in his promotion of a 'principle of priority' in respect of nomenclature,<sup>34</sup> as well as in the value he placed on biographical information about his contemporaries (he was an outstandingly conscientious obituarist). At times it could yield unexpectedly rich insights. Druce's *Adventive Flora of Tweedside*, compiled jointly with a local amateur observer, offers so much more than its title might suggest. It is in fact a mini-history of the Galashiels woollen industry, whose fleeces, imported from across the globe, carried with them all manner of exotic seeds to leave their mark on the ecology of that corner of the Scottish Borders.<sup>35</sup>

## Druce in his local setting

For all his exotic forays, the bulk of Druce's botanizing had necessarily to be adjacent to Oxford. Given his energies, the whole of the south Midlands lay well within range for regular expeditions: recall his four complete *Floras* of the surrounding counties, including the two editions of Oxfordshire, which some have reckoned the best. His own favourite (though it had its critics), the *Flora of Berkshire*, brings together Druce's own observations and all the known earlier ones. He tells us he had to manipulate 20,000 references – imagine that in the age of the card file!

Many of Druce's surveys were very local. On the fateful date of 28 June 1914, for instance, he was visiting the saline spring at Marcham with a hydrologist friend – no mention of the assassination in Sarajevo.<sup>36</sup> Prompted by that outing to Marcham, let's follow Druce briefly to those favourite haunts of his in the northernmost corner of old Berkshire just across the Thames from Oxford. He visited this area often and loved its landscape, in a vein still heavily influenced by Matthew Arnold: 'The summit of Boars Hill affords one of those views which are to be seen only in England, a view which extends over a broad expanse of country that is at once well wooded and yet highly cultivated, and which has a special feature in the spires and towers of a classic city set like a gem in its centre; such a view, when seen in an evening in late summer, before the corn is gathered in, astonishes the beholder with the revelation of beauty which it presents to the gaze.' He also vaunted the botany: 'It is probable that a walk from Oxford over Foxcombe Hill to Cothill and Marcham, and from thence to Abingdon, and through the Radley and Kennington meadows, back to Oxford, would yield as large a gathering of plants as any district of similar extent in Britain.'<sup>37</sup>

To convey that rich diversity Druce catalogues 293 plants to be found in the hills and woods around Cumnor, and a lot more on the adjacent river meadows. Some are favourites. Thus 'the local *Gagea*' (Druce prefers the Latin names [in this case Yellow Star of Bethlehem]), which he insists, against a fellow authority, is native to Cumnor Hurst; 'the curious *Lathraea*' [Toothwort], 'still plentiful' in a neighbouring copse; *Trifolium medium* [Zigzag Clover], 'on the left-hand side of the road going up Cumnor Hill'; *Astragalus glycyphyllos* [Wild Liquorice], 'in Cumnor fields'; *Cnicus eriophorus* [i.e. *Cirsium eriophorum*, Woolly Thistle], 'common on the coralline oolite, abundant in Jenny Bunting's Parlour on Boars Hill'. And so on. It all sounds idyllic. Yet there is a darker side: 'At Chawley Hurst the Kimmeridge Clay is

extensively excavated for brick-making, and this industry threatens the fir-capped Hurst.’ And of the whole area Druce already notes how ‘building operations threaten to destroy some of the country which was most prolific in rare plants’.<sup>38</sup>

Above all, perhaps, Druce doted on the botany of Wytham. He mentions it regularly throughout the exhaustive detail of the *Flora of Berkshire* and its several later supplements. He tends to work with three habitat divisions there. First are the meadows, ‘of a more interesting and marshy nature’ than the surrounding ones: he lists ten characteristic species.<sup>39</sup> Then comes Wytham Wood, ‘by far the richest spot in the district ... situated on the bold headland of Wytham Hill, round which the Thames sweeps in a curve of great beauty as well as of considerable geological interest ... [whence] very extensive and charming views may be obtained of Blenheim Palace, the Yarnton meadows, of the spires and towers of Oxford and of the vale of Eynsham.’ Druce names nine special flowers of the clay-to-oolite transition; then another ten on the ‘more open ground’; fourteen for the ‘ponds and marshy places’; and a further five on the higher ground.<sup>40</sup> Finally, Marley (or Merley) Wood often appears separately: inter alia it’s ‘remarkable for the abundance of that most graceful sedge, *Carex pendula*, [Pendulous Sedge] and for its fine specimens of *Equisetum maximum* [i.e. presumably *Equisetum telmateia*, Great Horsetail]; here too occurs the local *Paris quadrifolia* ... [Herb Paris]’<sup>41</sup>

How much of this derived from personal observation by Druce? References unadorned with the name of a correspondent may well be his own. The majority of these are bald locations. But that *Carex pendula*, he notes, is ‘one of our most graceful plants when growing as it does in Wytham Wood, in the greatest luxuriance and abundance, it affords a most beautiful appearance’; or the *Paris quadrifolia*, he tells us, is ‘still plentiful there, and plants bearing three, five, six and seven leaves have been noticed’.<sup>42</sup> There are other clues too: the ‘single large bush of *Rosa agrestis* [Small-leaved Sweet-briar]’, which in 1886 Druce found ‘in a hedge bordering one of the grassy rides near the summit of the hill’; or the variegated form of *Euonymus* [Spindle], ‘abundant and untouched by the rabbits’; or the ‘very fine specimens’ of *Atropa belladonna* [Deadly Nightshade] in the park and woods; or the variant of *Ranunculus parviflorus* [Small-flowered Buttercup]; or the ‘very splendid growth’ of *Typha latifolia* [Reedmace] ‘in a pond on the southern side of the hill’; or the *Pulicaria dysenterica* [Fleabane], var. *longiradiata*, whose ‘specimens from Wytham were distributed by me through the Botanical Exchange Club in 1887’.<sup>43</sup>

What about access to places like Wytham? The *Flora* acknowledges much help from colleagues, but makes no mention of landowners. For most of Druce’s life Wytham still belonged to the earls of Abingdon; after Montagu Bertie the fifth earl, who died in 1854, came Montagu Bertie the sixth earl, then from 1884 Montagu Bertie the seventh earl and his second wife, Gwendoline Mary Dormer. Now Druce had an affinity for aristocrats, as we’ve already seen most purely evidenced by his friendship with Sir Edward Grey. But he was equally capable of trespass (as we shall also shortly see). Maybe he began with the latter and ended with the former? At all events he notes of the *Gagea fascicularis* [i.e. *Gagea lutea*, Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem], ‘the Countess of Abingdon found this in Wytham Wood in 1901 (probably in Lightfoot’s locality of 1780)’.<sup>44</sup>

Druce certainly accompanied others to Wytham – and at least once secured written permission from the earl to do so.<sup>45</sup> Of *Tolypella glomerata* [Clustered Stonewort] he writes: ‘first found in Berkshire by the author... [s]paringly in a small pond on the

south side of Wytham Hill where I found it when botanizing with Mr H E Garnsey.<sup>46</sup> Or again: *Lolium perenne x multiflorum* [Perennial x Italian ryegrass] 'at Wytham, with Dr Domin, who showed it me'.<sup>47</sup> And we know he brought back specimens. No one could begrudge him the humble sycamore leaf, which supplies enduring evidence of this in his collection, even if that tree was much less common in Wytham than now.<sup>48</sup>



**Figure 11. Druce's sycamore leaf from Wytham, Oxford University Herbarium**

All this too formed part, for Druce, of a great tradition, and in botanical mode he asserted Wytham's place in the continuing record from early times. I adduce three examples from the *Flora*. Thus he finds a passage in Thomas Johnson's re-edition of Gerard's Herbal: '*Hippuris coralloides*, Horse Taile Coralline. My friend Mr Leonard Buckner was the first that found this plant and brought it to me; he had it three miles beyond Oxford, a little on this side Euansham ferry, in a bog upon a common by the Beacon Hill neere Cumner wood, in the end of August 1632.' Druce comments that this was probably the earliest British record of *Chara vulgaris*, which can still be found nearby. From Christopher Merrett's *Pinax* of 1666 he cites: '*Helleborine multicaulis radice perplexa*. By Cumner Wood in the way from Oxford to Eynsham Ferry, Mr Pink' (Druce thinks this was most likely *Epipactis latifolia*, i.e. *Epipactis helleborines*, Broad-leaved Helleborine). Finally he reports that William Sherard had already noted *Vicia orobus*, Wood Vetch, (*recte sylvatica*, says Druce) in the upper part of Merley wood. Druce adds: 'also seen there by Mr Boswell in 1859 and by myself up to 1892 and probably still existing.'<sup>49</sup>

## Druce the conservator

What of Druce and the complex of issues we would nowadays describe as nature conservation? He was an avid collector, amassing some 200,000 specimens in all; and intrepid in his pursuit of them. Once we catch him on Killin pier at the head of Loch Tay in the rain: 'Yelling to my friend to keep the train waiting, I rushed into the swamp and hurriedly gathered a handful of what proved to be a new British variety of *Deyeuxia neglecta*'.<sup>50</sup> In 1887, armed only with mackintosh and broolly, he evaded the telescopes of keepers in a mist to climb Ben Eighe, where he found a new form of *Agrostis canina* var. *scotica* ...<sup>51</sup>

On another occasion Druce's record of botanizing in Snowdonia with Bellamy 'slipt into the little lake of clear water above the Twl Dhu [*sic*] and was fast disappearing, our combined efforts assisted by the ubiquitous umbrella rescued the book, which took weeks to dry ...' That was a trip to find *Lloydia* on the mountain-tops, when they failed to alight at Bangor, were carried on to Holyhead, and promptly set off on foot in the small hours for South Stack lighthouse instead.<sup>52</sup> Nearer home, in September 1898 on a drive to Northants (early automobilism in action!), already at Evenley 'I noticed in a deepish dyke of water ... some plants of *Chara hispida* [etc.] ... When I was reaching over the stream to gather them my attention was called to a plant of *Daphne mezereum* ... with disastrous results to myself, for the bank gave way and I found myself floating in the water; however the ducking enabled me to gather more perfect specimens of the *Chara* than I otherwise should.'<sup>53</sup>

Back in Oxford, Druce tended to the treasures gathered in by him and his predecessors at the university herbarium. There, in the words of Bellamy, 'the tedious, toilsome, and yet most congenial occupation of the re-mounting, rearrangement and classification and identification with the modern nomenclature of many tens of thousands of specimens was to a very great extent the work of Druce from 1889 to 1932.'<sup>54</sup> He thus remained squarely within the tradition of assembling and preserving dried plants as the key task of botanical studies.

Yet Druce also led the establishment of the first nature reserve in the Oxford area, and one of the earliest in the country. This grew out of conversations in 1901 between Druce and his philanthropist friend Henry Willett of Brighton.<sup>55</sup> They discussed Wicken Fen, near Cambridge, recently acquired by the fledgling National Trust as its first site for wildlife protection, cast around for a local equivalent, and identified

Cothill, a wetland habitat in the vicinity of Cumnor and Wytham much invoked in the *Flora of Berkshire*. Druce supplied the public with a lyrical evocation of its charms; Willett came up with the money. They acquired ‘Hurst Close’, as the place was hitherto known, in two stages – the second cheque was for £93-1-6 – and donated it initially to the ANHSO, with a strict prohibition on removing plants, under penalty of expulsion from the society (one wonders whether Druce felt a twinge of hypocrisy). Willett had been, in Druce’s words, a ‘devoted disciple and friend of Ruskin’; hence the attachment of the latter’s name to this now safeguarded ‘Plot’, as it was initially called.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 12. Ruskin Reserve, Cothill, November 2016, by Robert Evans**

Trusteeship was vested in Druce and his zoologist colleague Edward Poulton. The Ruskin Plot at Cothill passed by gift to the National Trust in 1916.<sup>57</sup> By that time Druce was heavily involved in a wider conservation movement. He became friends with Charles Rothschild and served as a founder council member of Rothschild’s Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves [SPNR] in 1912.<sup>58</sup> A love of orchids first brought them together. Druce had close dealings with Rothschild in establishing and prospecting the initial schedule of sites for protection (which included Cothill).<sup>59</sup> Actually it was Druce who proposed to Rothschild the designation of the SPNR’s own first reserve, another fen, at Woodwalton near Huntingdon.

## **Druce the man**

Finally, Druce as a person. Was he the classic small man made good? Certainly his sheer hard work and extraordinary stamina counted for much. So did his winning manner and shrewd deployment of his expertise. He was renowned for his good humour and wit, or what passed for it in the circles in which he moved. At a Gasworks Athletic Club dinner in 1928, he ‘kept his hearers in roars of laughter with

some witty remarks', e.g. that 'it was a change to be connected with that kind of gas after the gas they got in municipal and parliamentary life ...'<sup>60</sup>

Widely learned, but practical, Druce always had much to offer his social superiors. It's as such that he figures in literature. Max Beerbohm, another customer at his shop, introduced him into his zany Oxford romance, *Zuleika Dobson*, as a voice of sanity. Appearing under his own name, 'Mr Druce the chemist' tends the wounds of the love-sick Duke of Dorset. "‘‘Might have been a very nasty accident, your Grace’", he said. "‘‘It was’", said the Duke. Mr Druce concurred.' The Duke confesses he has a cold too. 'Mr Druce suggested the Mixture – a teaspoonful every two hours. "‘‘Give me some now, please, at once’", said the Duke. He felt magically better for the draught ... "‘‘Why not two teaspoonfuls every hour’", he suggested ... but Mr Druce was respectfully firm against that.' This combination of erudite servitor and confidant, with his miraculous day-after pick-me-up, suggests to me a more lasting literary association: even if P G Wodehouse didn't go to Oxford, Bertie Wooster did. Could Druce be one of the models for Jeeves?

Throughout his life Druce was highly gregarious; and he grew increasingly well connected. In his prime he spoke at an endless series of dinners, annual general meetings, and other such events. He definitely liked to mix with elegant and genteel society; and we can hardly acquit him of all taint of vanity: why otherwise keep in his albums *every* printed reference to his activities? However, he was genial, helpful and supportive to amateurs of every sort, especially the young. That comported with a continuing sense of his own outsider origins and the store he set by self-improvement. Druce's *Times* obituarist recorded a charming scene: 'I can recall him walking down a Wiltshire lane surrounded by girl guides and one little boy, all of whom were gathering flowers and grasses and bringing them for him to name, which he did with the same attention as if he had been talking to the most eminent botanist.'

There is a similarly attractive tribute in the appreciation of Druce by the university orator, in Convocation on 4 March 1932: he was an 'ornament of the University and an illustrious citizen who, exquisitely skilled in botany, had in his nature much of the simplicity, utility and sweetness of the plants he loved'.<sup>61</sup> By that stage the extent of his largesse towards the university would have become apparent – contrasting, it might be felt, with its rather niggardly treatment of Druce during his lifetime. At all events, it was with the natural world that he felt most in harmony: it lies at the heart of the revealing autobiographical fragments, wistful and evocative, but unsentimental, that Druce inserted into some of his later work, particularly the prefaces to his *Floras*.

Maybe we can discern something of all this also in the 'official' portrait, when Druce sat for Philip de László at the age of 80.<sup>62</sup> The artist left his London studio to paint his ailing subject, and proclaimed himself pleased with the 'very English' result. Druce appears suitably dignified, wise, and intense; but there is a clear hint of the rugged, outdoor individual and his still mercurial subject. Certainly Druce remained quirky to the very last. Having been born on 23 May, the birthday of Linnaeus, he died on 29 February in a leap year.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Revised and expanded version of a talk given to the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire in December 2016.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://anhso.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Fritillary/fritx-druce.pdf> and contribution there by David Allen, who also wrote the entry for Druce in the *O[xford]*

*D[ictionary of] N[ational] B[iography]* [last accessed 10.7.2019]. The plaque was unveiled on 28 April 2018:

cf < <http://www.oxfordshireblueplaques.org.uk/plaques/druce.html> > [last accessed 10.7.2019].

<sup>3</sup> Frank Bellamy, 'George Claridge Druce: a Memoir of his Botanical Life', Druce Archive: Box No. 147 Sherardian Library of Plant Taxonomy, University of Oxford, 109.

<sup>4</sup> This 'Birthday Book' is held in the Sherardian Library of Plant Taxonomy, University of Oxford. Cf < <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/e74ddaf0-85cd-371e-965e-a2ac059968fa> > [last accessed 2.3.2019]

<sup>5</sup> Druce's Oxford matriculation form, dated 1902 (why did he need one just then?), gives his father's name as 'Claridge Druce' and his year of birth as 1851, surely a deliberate error to cover his traces. My warm thanks to Simon Bailey for sight of this document from the University Archives.

<sup>6</sup> On his matriculation form (previous note), Druce fills in the box for 'School or other place of education' by writing 'J and T B Slye'.

<sup>7</sup> Crick Road itself furnished, fortuitously, another Northants connection. It was named in the 1870s after the parish of Crick, a living of St John's College, the landowner.

<sup>8</sup> 'Hobbies': 'Papers by Druce' (12 colligata with numbered documents by or relating to Druce, mainly printed, in Oxford University Herbaria, Dept of Plant Sciences), 4, no 64 [newspaper cutting].

<sup>9</sup> Druce, 'Northamptonshire Botanologia. John Clare', *Northamptonshire Natural History Society & Field Club* 16, no. 130 (1912): 183-214, 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 6, no 6.

<sup>10</sup> Druce, 'Formation of the Northamptonshire Natural History Society', *Northamptonshire Natural History Society & Field Club* 19, no. 154 (1918): 131-42, 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 7, no 14.

<sup>11</sup> Druce, 'Thoughts from a University City', reprint from *The Chemist and Druggist*. 7 January 1928: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 9, no 13. Edward Grey and Max Beerbohm were on the list too, cf below.

<sup>12</sup> Bellamy, 'Druce: a Memoir', 132.

<sup>13</sup> Druce, 'President's Address', *British Pharmaceutical Conference*: copies in 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 2. [reprints]

<sup>14</sup> Bellamy, 'Druce: a Memoir', 140 f.

<sup>15</sup> 'Oxford's New Mayor and Sheriff. A Gay Council Chamber': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 6, no 75 [newspaper cutting].

<sup>16</sup> Magdalen was named as his college for matriculation purposes (see above, n 7). Presumably he belonged to the common room there. There appears to be no record of Druce in the college archive.

<sup>17</sup> Sylvia K Chandler at < <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/yghg/people/DRUCESylvia.html> > [last accessed 2.3.2019]

- <sup>18</sup> *Souvenir of the Oxford Historical Pageant*, 1907 (Banbury, 1907), with a photograph of Druce; cf, in general, Angela Bartie et al, 'Historical Pageants and the Medieval Past in Twentieth-Century England', *English Historical Review*, 133 (2018): 866-902
- <sup>19</sup> 'Bro. G. Claridge Druce, D.Sc.': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 10, no 13, [page 669 reprint from unknown]; no. 42 [newspaper cuttings].
- <sup>20</sup> 'The Vacant Aldermanic Chair': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 5, no 19 [newspaper cutting]; 'Oxford City Council. The Aldermanic Vacancy. Exciting Contest. A Divided Conservative Party'. *ibid* 6, no. 76 [newspaper cutting]; 8, no. 20, 21 [newspaper cuttings].
- <sup>21</sup> 'Oxford Caledonian Society': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 4, no 40 [newspaper cutting].
- <sup>22</sup> 'Oxford Oddfellowship. Dinner of the Loyal St. Lawrence Lodge': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 4, no 49 [newspaper cutting].
- <sup>23</sup> 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 2. [Newspaper cutting between numbers 28/29].
- <sup>24</sup> 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 9: [first newspaper cutting]. 'British Association for the Advancement of Science Oxford Meeting 4-11 August 1926'; cf 'Papers by Druce', 10, no 9 [programme].
- <sup>25</sup> *Botanical Exchange Club Report for 1925* (1926): 933-8, Bellamy, 'Druce: a Memoir', 137a.
- <sup>26</sup> David Elliston Allen, *The Botanists: a History of the Botanical Society of the British Isles through 150 Years* (Winchester, 1986), is thorough and balanced, but a bit ungenerous on Druce's role.
- <sup>27</sup> 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 6, no 34 [cutting]. Druce was one of the phytogeographical tourists in 1911 (see below), who had 'die lehrreiche wie humorvolle Unterhaltung des weitbekannten englischen Floristen G Claridge Druce zu ihrer Verfügung': *ibid*.
- <sup>28</sup> Allen in *ODNB*; the main culprit was Druce's *The Comital Flora of the British Isles* (Arbroath, 1932). Its wordy subtitle reads: '... the distribution of British, including a number of non-indigenous, plants ... with the place of growth, elevation, world-distribution, grade, chief synonyms, and first names by which the plants were recorded as British'.
- <sup>29</sup> Druce, 'A Foreward from Doctor Druce', *Wild Flower Magazine*, 1921, 2-5: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 8, no 33.
- <sup>30</sup> 'The Phyto-geographical Excursion to British Isles. Mr. G.C. Druce's discoveries': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 5, no 22 [newspaper cutting].
- <sup>31</sup> 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 2. Various reprints from *The Annals of Scottish Natural History*.
- <sup>32</sup> Druce, 'A visit to Glen Clova and Callater': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 7, no 9 [reprint].

<sup>33</sup> Druce, 'Address on the unveiling of the monument to George Don at Forfar', 1910: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 5, no 16 [pamphlet], 'Monument to Forfar botanist. Don's great work': 31 [newspaper cutting].

<sup>34</sup> Cf esp Druce, 'The Nomenclature of British Plants', *Annals of Scottish Natural History*, Oct 1906: 217-29, Oct 1907: 641-4.

<sup>35</sup> Ida M. Hayward and George Claridge Druce, *The Adventive Flora of Tweedside* (Arbroath, 1919).

<sup>36</sup> Druce, 'The saline spring at Marcham', *Report of the Ashmolean Natural History Society for the Year ending December 1914* (1915): 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 7, no 2a.

<sup>37</sup> *The Flora of Berkshire* (Oxford, 1897), lxiv, lxii.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, lvii ff passim and plant gazetteer s.v.

<sup>39</sup> *Menyanthes trifoliata*, *Orchis latifolia* [i.e. *Dactylorhiza incarnata*], *Pedicularis palustris*, *Eleocharis multicaulis*, *Viola canina*, *Valeriana dioica*, *Oenanthe silaifolia*, *Thalictrum flavum*, *Poterium officinale* [i.e. *Sanguisorba officinalis*], *Ranunculus lingua*.

<sup>40</sup> *Clematis vitalba*, *Daphne laureola*, *Lithospermum officinale*, *Lathyrus sylvestris*, *Vicia sylvatica*, *Astragalus glycyphyllos*, *Euonymus*, *Campanula trachelium*, *Poa nemoralis*;

*Atropa belladonna*, *Hyoscyamus niger*, *Helianthemum chamaecistus* [i.e. *Helianthemum nummularium*], *Erythraea centaurium* [i.e. *Centaurium erythraea*], *Echium vulgare*, *Myosotis versicolor*, *M. collina* [i.e. *M. discolor*], *Ranunculus parviflorus*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*, *Inula conyza*;

*Samolus valerandi*, *Pulicaria dystenterica*, *Lysimachia vulgaris*, *Typha latifolia*, *Scirpus pauciflorus* [i.e. *Eleocharis quinqueflora*], *Eleocharis multicaulis*, *Calamagrostis epigejos*, *Tolypella glomerata*, *Chara contraria*, *C. hispida*, *Zannichellia*, *Carex flava*, *C. echinata*, *Menyanthes trifoliata*;

*Hypopitys*, *Cephalanthera pallens* [i.e. *C. longifolia*], *Ophrys apifera*, *Habenaria conopsea*, *Orchis pyramidalis* [i.e. *Anacamptis pyramidalis*].

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, lvi f.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 545 f., 496.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, lvii, 200; 124 f; 362; 23; 506; 280 f, cf *Botanical Exchange Club Report*, 1887, 184.

<sup>44</sup> *Flora of Berkshire*, 495.

<sup>45</sup> Druce Archive, Box 15, Sherardian Library of Plant Taxonomy, University of Oxford: 4. 'Abbeystead, Lancaster 26.6.99: Dear Sir, I have great pleasure in giving permission for you to conduct your party through Wytham Woods next month. This will be the authority for the gatekeeper to pass you by any of the lodges. Yrs Abingdon'

<sup>46</sup> *Flora of Berkshire*, 621 f.

<sup>47</sup> *Journal of Botany*, 1910, 201.

- <sup>48</sup> Numerous further examples at < <http://herbariaunited.org/specimenssearch/?taxon=&taxonid=&collector=duce&colid=&role=prov&from=&to=&search=search&Country=gbie&VC=all&place=wytham&laceid=&Inst=all&search=search#searchlist> > [last accessed 4.4.2019]
- <sup>49</sup> *Flora of Berkshire*, xcix, cf 620; cviii; cxx, cxxx, 152 f.
- <sup>50</sup> i.e. *Calamagrostis stricta*, narrow small-reed. Druce, 'A Foreward from Doctor Druce'. *Wild Flower Magazine*, 1921, 2-5: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 8, no 33.
- <sup>51</sup> i.e. *Agrostis vinealis*, brown bentgrass. Bellamy, 'Druce: a Memoir', 105.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 76: 113 f.
- <sup>53</sup> Druce, 'Notes on the Botany of Northamptonshire, made during a drive through that county in September 1898': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 11, no 15 [reprint].
- <sup>54</sup> Bellamy, 'Druce: a Memoir', 19.
- <sup>55</sup> Druce, 'The "Ruskin Plot", presented by Mr. Henry Willett', *Report of the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire 1903*: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 2, no 26 [reprint]; Druce, 'Obituary. Henry Willett', *Report of the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire, 1906*, 3: *ibid* no 21 [reprint]; cf 'The Ruskin Reserve, June 7, 1905', *ibid* 4, no 56 [newspaper cutting]; F.A. Bellamy, *A Historical Account of the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire, 1880-1905* (Oxford, 1908): 417-34.
- <sup>56</sup> Documents about acquisition of the reserve and the Ruskin connection: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria 4, no 56. For the cult of the latter, see Stuart Eagles, *After Ruskin. The Social and Political Legacies of a Victorian Prophet, 1870-1920* (Oxford, 2011).
- <sup>57</sup> 'The Ruskin Reserve. Transfer to the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty:': *Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire, Proceedings and Report for 1916*: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 7, no 36 [reprint].
- <sup>58</sup> *The Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves*: 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 6, no 48 [printed leaflet]; 'Nature Reserves. Formation of a new Society', reprinted from *The Times*, *ibid* 6, no 49; 7, no 11.
- <sup>59</sup> Druce, 'Obituary. The Hon. N. Charles Rothschild', *Journal of the Northamptonshire Natural History Society*, 22 (1924), 135-41. Cf Miriam Rothschild and Peter Marren, *Rothschild's Reserves: Time and Fragile Nature* (Colchester, 1997). The reserve actually appears twice, as 'Cot Hill, Berks' and as 'Ruskin Reserve Oxon' on the Rothschild list: see < <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/about-us/rothschilds-list> >. The description is at < [https://issuu.com/wildlifetrusts/docs/231-ruskin\\_reserve-cothill-nr\\_oxford-berks\\_rothschild](https://issuu.com/wildlifetrusts/docs/231-ruskin_reserve-cothill-nr_oxford-berks_rothschild) > [last accessed 17.2.2019].
- <sup>60</sup> 'Oxford Gasworks United A.A.C. An Enjoyable Dinner': 'Papers by Druce', Oxford University Herbaria, 9, no 5 [newspaper cutting].
- <sup>61</sup> Bellamy, 'Druce: a Memoir', 146.
- <sup>62</sup> Money collected for Druce's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday was originally intended for purchase of a further reserve near Oxford, with a rare plant on it; but the owner refused to sell, so a

painting was commissioned instead. It hangs in the Bodleian Library: see <  
<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/Discover/Search/#/?p=c+2,t+druce,rsrcs+0,rsp+s+10,fa+,so+ox%3Aort%5Easc,scids+,pid+2b580fad-67f3-4fb4-aa45-4b08d150fee1,vi+>>. There is a copy in Oxford Town Hall. Druce's correspondence with de László is inserted at the start of the Birthday Book. On de László, see Owen Rutter, *Portrait of a Painter. The Authorized Life of Philip de László* (London, 1939).

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