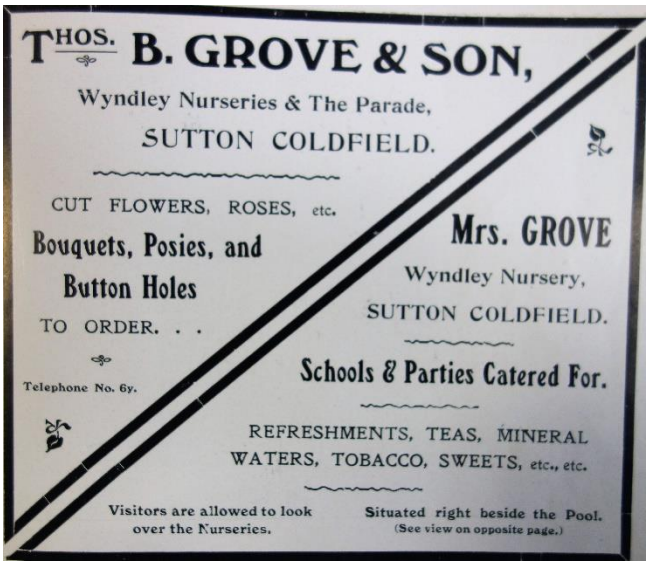
"The Conchology[1] of Sutton Coldfield"

An original paper by Albert Wood of Midland Lodge, Sutton Park

Foreword by Roy Billingham

Those of you that have read my work "Two Remarkable Tenants" in the "Research" section of this website will be familiar with the name of Albert Wood who was tenant of Midland Lodge in Sutton Park from 1892 until his death in 1917. This Dudley-born gentleman lived the last thirty years of his life in retirement at Sutton Coldfield. He lodged for a number of years with Mr and Mrs T.B. Grove at their Wyndley Nursery in Wyndley Lane, Sutton Coldfield, prior to taking up the tenancy of Midland Lodge, where, over a period of many years, he developed a renowned alpine rock garden of rare species which attracted hundreds of visitors.

Thomas Beale Grove, F.R.H.S., was a nurseryman with an extensive nursery situated between Clifton Road and The Royal Zoological Gardens which were in the Crystal Palace. grounds. "Besides being a naturalist of no mean order, he was an authority on the botanical treasures of this district"[2]. So, Thomas Grove and Albert Wood shared many interests in common, not the least being that they were both members of The Vesey Club. Thomas Grove's wife, Marion, ran a successful refreshment rooms business at their Wyndley establishment that was a popular venue for visitors to the adjacent Wyndley Pool and Sutton Park (see the contemporary advertisement on right of this page). This site is now occupied by the public swimming baths and athletics track.



Advertisement from p.40 of the "Sutton Coldfield Official Guide 1907"
Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, SH 97 SUT

Apart from his interest in alpine plants, Albert Wood, who was a chemist by profession, was also a naturalist and a conchologist. He amassed a remarkable collection of British birds' eggs, an acceptable hobby in Victorian times; it was reputed to contain specimens of the eggs of every British bird, both migratory and otherwise, excepting the Great Auk. He had, too, an extensive collection of mollusc shells, both land and freshwater varieties. In his garden at Midland Lodge he established over the period of his tenancy a unique and very valuable collection of rare alpine plants of national recognition.

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[1] **Conchology:** *n.* the study and collection of mollusc shells. (Collins English Dictionary, Third Edition, (1991), Glasgow, Harper Collins Publishers).

[2] Sidwell, G. & Durrant, W.J., *"Popular Guide to Sutton and Park, 1890"*, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library Ref. SH 97 SUT, p.29 (Walk 1).

I discovered this short paper by Albert Wood in Chapter X, pages 22-24, of *"The Popular Guide (with map) of Sutton and Park, 1900"* by G. Sidwell and W.J. Durrant (Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, Ref. SH 97 SUT), which is produced in full, below, with some minor additions.

The Conchology of Sutton Coldfield

"In a scattered and ever-varying district like Sutton Coldfield, with its huge rolling hills, its wide valleys, its extensive woods, and numerous pools, streams and water courses, one would naturally expect to find shells in abundance. But the absence of lime or chalk renders the greater part of the district entirely unsuited to the maintenance of a large number of the land species, especially of the great family of Helix, though this is partly compensated for by the abundance of material adapted to the Hyaline species that need but little lime or chalk for their shell structure, hence, whilst we find only seven out of the twenty-six species of Helix, we find ten out of the eleven species of Hyaline, and of the seven species of Helix three are certainly only imported, and four more or less Hyaline in the structure of their shells.

Of the freshwater shells there are, as might have been expected, a very great quantity and a very fair assortment, and the varied species seem pretty evenly distributed through all the pools, the notable exceptions being *Unio pictorum*, which was confined to Skinner's Pool[3], but was introduced (1896) into Keepers and Bracebridge Pools by the Author, Skinner's Pool being filled up. *Planorbis corneus* is found only in Lindridge and Langley Pools; *Planorbis parvus* in New Hall moat; though Mr. Jas. Maddison, of Birmingham, says it used to be found in all pools in the park, I have failed to discover it in recent years.

Albert Wood (1840-1917) in 1910
Photo by Benjamin Stone

Of course, knowing where to look, how to look, and what to look for are *the* three essentials in the successful pursuit of any branch of natural history, and if to these we can add diligent and plodding perseverance, gratifying results are almost sure to follow.

With respect to the distribution of the land shells, it should be noted that *Helix Aspersa* and *H. Hortensis* are only to be found on railway banks, hedge banks, gardens, or situations where man's agency is quite evident, and are quite absent from the park. The Hyalinia are mostly on the dryer parts of the bogs and alder copses, the Vertigo's in moist situations where the spotted Orchis thrives, the Classilias are confined to one small spinney, and are evidently of recent introduction, and perhaps the greatest anomaly of all the surprises you are likely to meet with will be *Pupa cylindracea* in a reeking bog, where a false step may plunge you up to your knees or waist in black mud, and thus supply you with a surprise of another kind.

The following list is the result of many years careful investigation, and specimens from each locality are preserved by the author to verify their right to appear in this list."

[3] **Skinner's Pool** and the adjoining Jerome's Pool were drained and became the site of the old *ABC Empress* cinema.

Arion ater (*L.*)
v. alba (*L.*)
v. rufa (*L*)
v. brunnea *Rbk.*
* v. bicolor *Rbk.*
v. pallescens *Moq.*
Arion subfuscus *Drap.*
v. aurantiaca *Loc.*
* v. succinea (*Bouil.*)
* v. grisia (*Cllege.*)
Arion minimus *Simr.*
Arion hortensis *Fér.*
* v. fasciata (*Moq.*)
Arion circumscriptus *Johnst.*
* v. flavescens *Cllge.*
Limax maximus *L.*
v. ferrussaci *Moq.*
Limax cinereo-niger *Wolf.*
Limax flavus *L.*
Limax marginatus *(Mull.)*
Agriolimax agreatis *L.*
v. alba (*Ckll.*)
* v. Grisea (*Cllge*)
Agriolimax lævis *Mull.*
Vitrina pellucida (*Mull.*)
Hyalinia cellaria (*Mull.*)
Hyalinia glabra (*Studer*)
Hyalinia alliaria (*Miller*)
Hyalinia nitidula (*Drap.*)
Hyalinia radiatula (*Alder*)
v. ?
Hyalinia pura (*Alder*)
v. margaritacea (*Jeff.*)
Hyalinia crystallina (*Mull.*)
Hyalinia fulva (*Mull.*)
Hyalinia nitida (*Mull.*)
Hyalinia excavata (*Bean*)
v. vitrine (*Fér*)
Helix rotundata *Mull.*
Helix pygmæ *Drap.*
Helix aculeata *Drap.*
Helix aspersa *Mull.*
Helix memoralis *L.*
v. albolabiata *Von Marl*
v. hyalozonata *Taylor*
v. undulata *Gent.*
Helix hortensis *Mull.*
v. coalita (*Moq.*)
Helix hispida (*L.*)
v. ?
Pupa anglica (*Fér*)
Pupa cylindracea (*Da Costa*)
v. ?
Vertigo antivertigo (*Drap.*)
Vertigo substriata (*Jeff.*)
Vertigo edentula (*Drap.*)
Clausilia perversa (*Pult.*)
Clausilia laminata (*Mont.*)
Azeca tridens (*Pult.*)
v. crystallina (*Dup.*)
Cochlicopa lubrica (*Mull.*)
v. lubricoides (*Fér*)
v. ?
Acicula lineata (*Drap.*)
Carychium minimum *Mull.*
Succinea elegans *Risso*
Planorbis fontanus (*Lightfoot*)
v. albida *Nelson*
Planorbis nautileus (*L.*)
v. crista (*L.*)
Planorbis albus (*L.*)
Planorbis parvus *Say*
Planorbis spirorbis *Mull.*
m. atavic sinistral (*Taylor*)
m. atavic dextral (*Taylor*)
Planorbis vortex (*L.*)
Planorbis carinatus *Mull.*
Planorbis umbilicatus *Mull.*
Planorbis corneus (*L.*)
Planorbis contortus (*L.*)
Physa fontilanis (*L.*)
Limnæa peregra, various (*Mull.*)

v. labiosa *Jeff.*
Limnæa auricularia (*L.*).
Limnæa stagnalis (*L.*).
v. ?
Limnæa palustris (*Mull.*).
Limnæa truncatula (*Mull.*).
Ancylus fluviatilis (*Mull.*).
v. albida *Jeff.*
Velletia lacustris (*L*).
Bythinia tentaculata (*L.*).
v. decollatum *Jeff.*
v. ?
Valvata piscinalis (*Mull.*)
Unio pictorum (*L.*).
v. latior *Jeff.*
Anodonta cygnea (*L.*)
v. arenaria (*Schröter*).
Anodonta anatina (*L.*).
v. ventricosa (*C. Pfr.*).
Sphærium Corneum (*L.*).
v. flavescens (*Macgill*).
v. scaldiana (*Norm.*).
v. nucleus (*Stud.*).
Sphærium lacustre (*Mull.*).
v. brochoniana *Bourg.*
Pisidium amnicum (*Mull.*).
Pisidium fontinale (*Drap.*).
v. henslowana (*Shepp.*).
v. pulchella *Jenyns.*
Pisidium pusillum (*Gmelin*).
v. obtusalis (*Lam.*).
Pisidium nitidium *Jen.*
Pisidium milium (*Held.*).

Varieties marked * are inserted on the authority of Mr. W.E. Collinge, F.Z.S.
Varieties marked ? are at present unidentified.

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