



Prof. Mike Edmunds, 31 July 1941 – 28 April 2015

The chairman of Sustainable Blewbury, Mike Edmunds, was diagnosed with an aggressive late-stage lymphoma in mid-April. He passed away peacefully two weeks later.

Mike was a hydrogeologist by profession, for 35 years at the British Geological Survey in Wallingford and then for the past 13 years at Oxford University's School of Geography and the Environment. He was an award-winning scientist and an inspiring teacher. In Blewbury, Mike was a joint founder of the Blewbury Village Society Environment Group in 1993, and became its chairman in 2002 when he retired from full-time work.

Always very aware of changes in climate and the environment, Mike's increasing concern, shared with others in the village, led to the formation of the Blewbury Energy Initiative in 2005. This was the first of a number of new village initiatives relating to sustainable living and coping with climate change. Mike led this expansion, and the Environment Group was renamed Sustainable Blewbury to reflect its wider role. This included networking with nearby communities through Oxfordshire Community Action Groups (CAG).

Mike was always a source of inspiration to the members of Sustainable Blewbury. He had a wide-ranging knowledge of the environment and always knew the right person to contact in any situation. He will be sorely missed.



The Origins of Sustainable Blewbury

In 1992 the Blewbury Village Society (BVS) was approached by a group of people including Mike because they were concerned about changes to the environment of the village. Mike's particular concern was the exceptionally low water level in the village wells and streams. Their concerns are summarised in the box below, taken from the September 1993 Bulletin:

The BVS-Environment Group was formed as a result of this concern. Mike was an active member of the BVS-EG, and became its chairman when he retired from full-time work in 2002.

BVS Environment Group

The Blewbury Village Society has formed an Environment Group and has appointed a committee to monitor:-

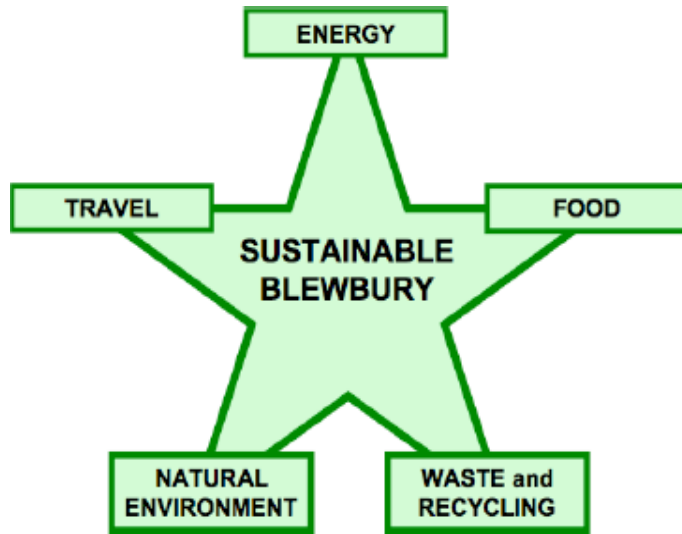
- * The fabric of The Village
- * Open spaces & footpaths
- * Springs, streams & the natural habitat
- * Local Area issues likely to have an impact upon Blewbury



Mike's main interest had always been in the environment of his beloved Blewbury, but he was aware of wider issues, so the Blewbury Energy Initiative (BEI) was set up in 2005. Its aim was to reduce the carbon footprint of the village by improving energy efficiency, introducing renewable energy technology and reducing fuel poverty.



21st Century Sustainable Blewbury



Under Mike's leadership the BVS-EG continued to expand into the new areas, grouped into the 5 themes named in the star. It was renamed Sustainable Blewbury in 2009 and became independent of the BVS in 2012.

SB joined the Oxfordshire Community Action Groups (CAG) network in 2009, benefiting from their support and the contacts made with other local CAGs.



Barrier at end of Watery Lane footpath

Historical note:

The barrier shown in the photo was voted the clear winner in an "anti-beauty contest" poll in 1992 – the most disliked piece of street furniture in the village.



The Millbrook

Blewbury is one of a string of villages that owe their origin to springs emerging along the base of the North Wessex Downs escarpment.

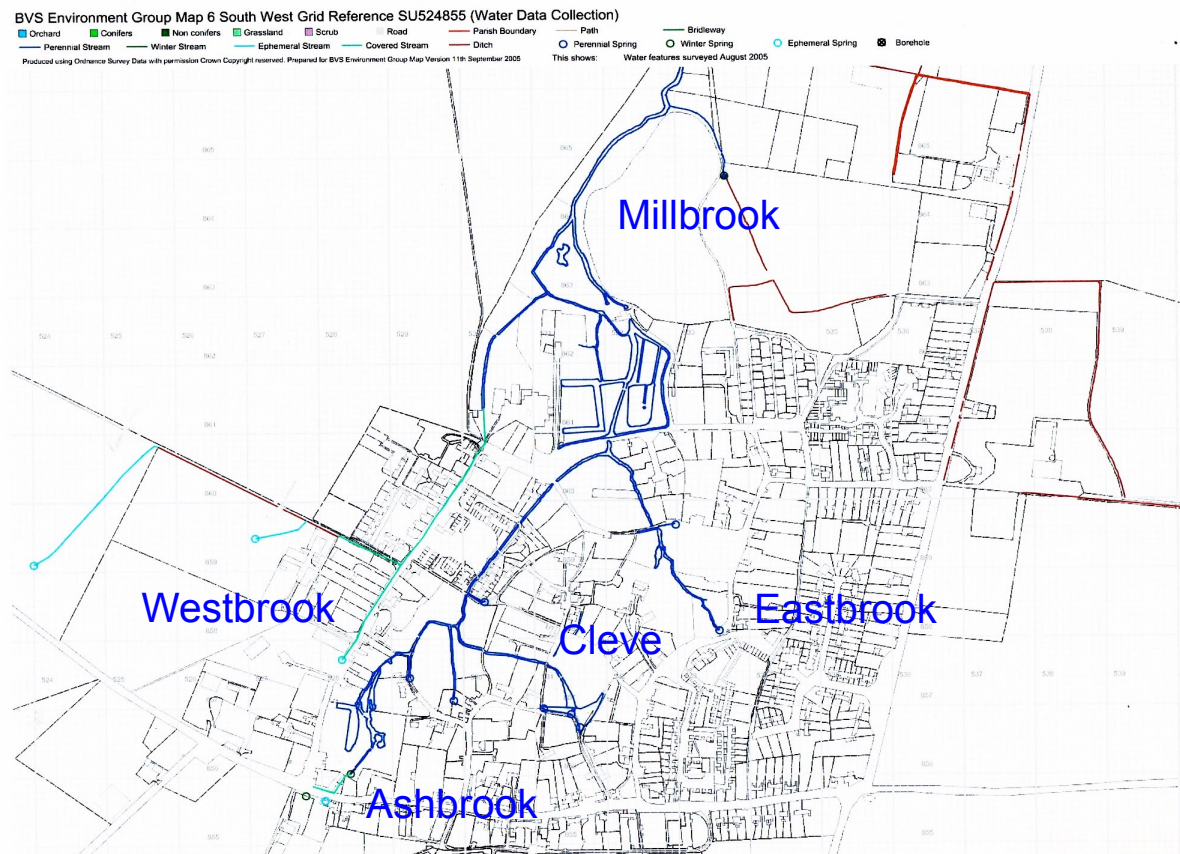
The springs originate from rainfall on the downs, and the resulting streams flow north-east towards Wallingford. The streams have supported settlement for at least 4,000 years.

The Lower Chalk from which the springs issue has been used in mortar for walls and buildings in the village.

Mike led and oversaw studies of the hydrology and biodiversity of the whole of the Millbrook in Blewbury Parish (including surveys which involved Blewbury School) of invertebrates and fish. Water voles have also been seen.



Invertebrate monitoring



Blewbury is recorded in the Domesday Book as containing a church, 89 households and four water mills – two of which were in the current Parish.

This water wheel was installed in the late 19th century by Eli Caudwell to provide electricity for Ashbrook House. It was the first use of electricity in the village.

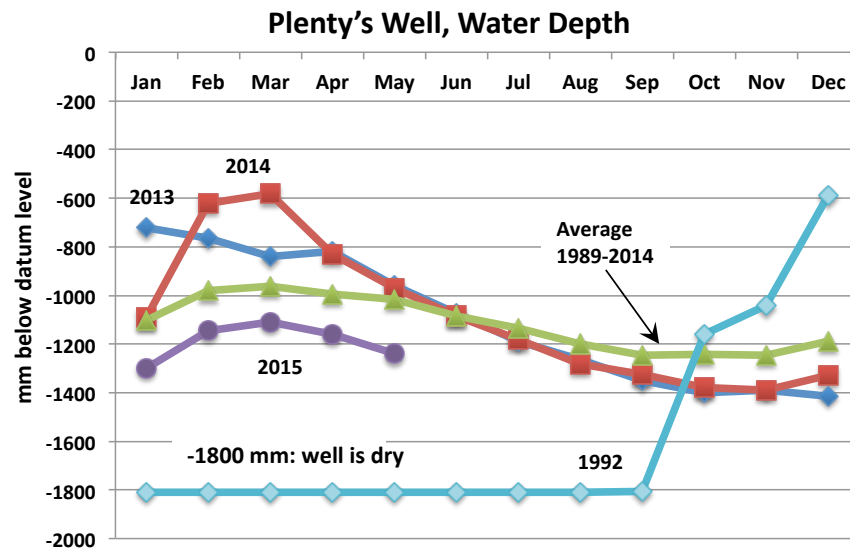


When the streams ran dry!

Blewbury is a spring-line village at the foot of the North Wessex Downs. The springs originate from rainfall on the downs, and their flows are influenced by the height of the water table.



© Bernard Mattimore



In the spring of 1992, Blewbury's streams and wells were dry and the Cleve was empty. The previous 3 years had been unusually dry, and Thames Water was also taking water from boreholes south of Blewbury.

The chart shows how atypical 1992 was: compare 1992 to the 25-year average (green line). Plenty's well was dry for *10 months*, the first time in living memory it had been dry.

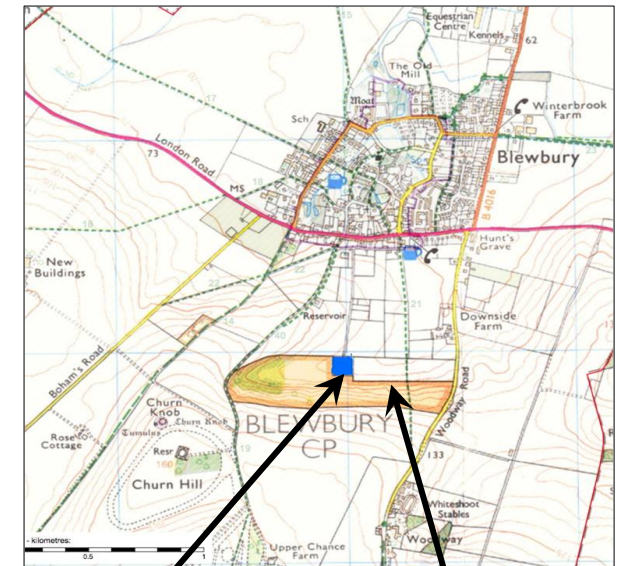
Mike was very concerned about lack of groundwater feeding Blewbury springs, and with Bernardine Shirley-Smith formed a BVS Action Group to restore the springs and streams. A petition signed by 850 people was presented to Thames Water in February 1992 asking them to stop pumping the Blewbury boreholes as soon as possible.

Our streams were flowing, but why?



Blewbury pumping station at Lids Bottom

The March 1992 Bulletin stated that traces of carbon tetrachloride had been found in the Blewbury borehole, and the July/August bulletin said that the concentration was steadily rising and Thames Water would need to take action to provide an alternative supply. This even made the national newspapers.



Pumping station

Open-access land

Thames Water connected the Blewbury reservoir to a high-quality supply at Gatehampton, near Goring. The chart on the previous page shows that the water level in Plenty's well started to rise in September 1992.

So was it the BVS/Parish Council's actions that got Thames Water to turn off the Blewbury borehole, or was it the contamination?

Probably both, but the important thing is that the threat to the environment was one of the concerns that led to the formation of the BVS-Environment Group in September 1993.

Historical note:

A special meeting of the Parish Council was held in September 1934 because the wells along the London Road were dry. A month later, a Parish Meeting decided to ask for a piped water supply, and this came to pass in 1937.

The Cleve

The Cleve is a dynamic spring basin, fed by over 20 individual springs. In recent years the Cleve has been neglected and thick oxygen-poor silt has accumulated, degrading its ecological state.

Aided by a small grant from the Trust for Oxford's Environment and surveys by the Environment Agency, Mike developed a project to restore the Cleve and improve its aquatic biodiversity and landscape.

The project had to be suspended pending agreement by all property owners bordering the water. However, in memory of Mike the project is now being revived and modified in order to make it acceptable to all.

The silt will be removed. As far as possible the Cleve will be restored to a near natural state, with attention to landscaping and increasing its biodiversity.



© Bernard Mattimore



Annual Cleve clearance



Sampling the silt



Wells for India

www.wellsforindia.org

Wells for India is a charity that has supported projects in Rajasthan, NW India, since 1987. 70 million people live in these dry lands, 75% of them in poor rural communities.



Wells for India specialises in sustainable water, and here water is the key to enabling people to improve their lives, their life-chances, and their environment.



Mike joined Wells for India as a trustee in 2002, bringing his expertise in ground water quality and recharge in arid and semi-arid areas around the world, along with an ability to simplify science for the betterment of poor people.

He had a deep love of India and Wells for India was a charity chosen for support in the 2013 Festival.

Mike was a great motivator for Wells for India, and also for his students, many of whom participated in projects.





BLEWBURY – AZHAGIAMANAVALAM LINK

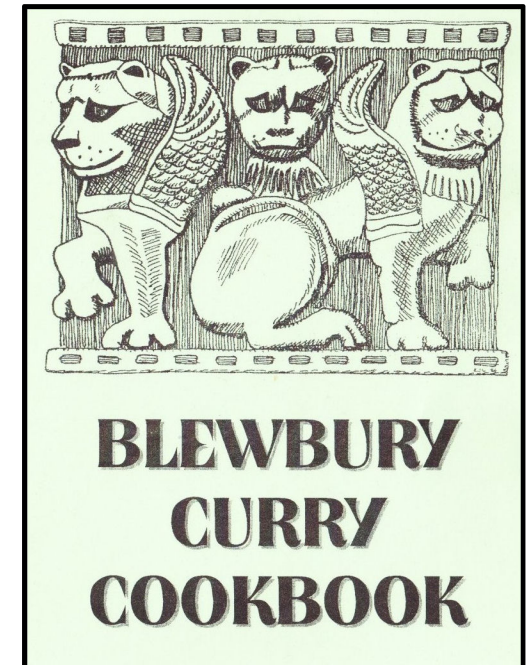
In 1983 there was a proposal that there should be a link between Blewbury and a village in the developing world. Mike showed great enthusiasm and provided a great deal of the energy needed to make it happen. Azhagiamanavalam is a village in Tamil Nadu, and it was unique that two small villages were twinned in this way.

We raised money to help the community, but the link was also a friendship link and so there were visits and exchanges between the people of the two villages, and also links between the two schools. The link lasted until 1991.

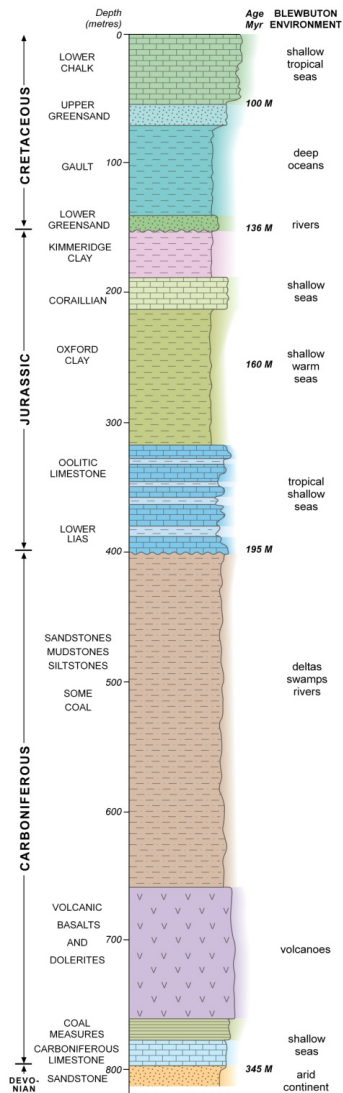


© Bernard Mattimore

There were a number of cultural events in our village hall, and curries were served – these have evolved into the regular Curry Lunches during Blewbury Festivals. Many of the recipes appear in the Blewbury Curry Cookbook, which was published by Mike and Robert Long.



A View from the Hill

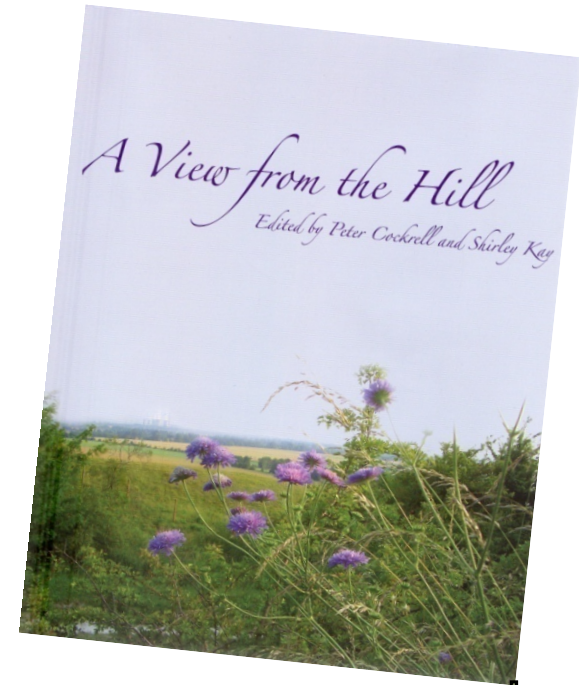


A View from the Hill is a fascinating and beautifully presented collection of articles about Blewbury, its surroundings and its history, all linked by the one thing that has changed very little in 10,000 years: Blewburton Hill.

It is beautifully illustrated, written by local experts, and edited by local environmentalist Peter Cockrell and historian Shirley Kay.



Fossil Ammonite in Chalk
Size about 15cm.



The article on Blewbury's geology and water resources was written by Mike, an acknowledged international expert in hydrogeology.



Blewbury Garden Market

In 2010 we started a weekly produce stall at the Garage, every Saturday morning from May to October.

The aim was to promote local food and home growing by helping people to sell surplus garden and allotment produce, including plants and seedlings, fresh fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, preserves, free-range eggs, local honey, home-made bread and cakes.

In 2012 we were able to buy a large, sturdy gazebo and some tables with a generous grant from Didcot Power Station.

During the 'off-season' we have bread and cakes for sale at the Post Office on Saturday mornings, and some preserves and winter produce are available much of the time.



Winter: Bread, pastries, preserves and seeds at the Post Office



2012: Grant from Didcot Power Station

Woodway Permaculture Orchard Garden

We are creating a garden from 0.44 acres of grassland

- Exposed and windy, with chalky, alkaline soil
- Planted a mixed shelter-belt hedge on S and W sides
- Provides nourishment and shelter to wildlife

Planted a rich variety of fruit trees, fruit bushes, and ground cover, including interesting leaves and herbs

- Many plants donated from local gardens
- Some produce sold at the Blewbury Garden Market
- Has become a beautiful and pleasant place to visit

Mike was keen to show what a rich variety of food, some of it quite unusual, could be produced



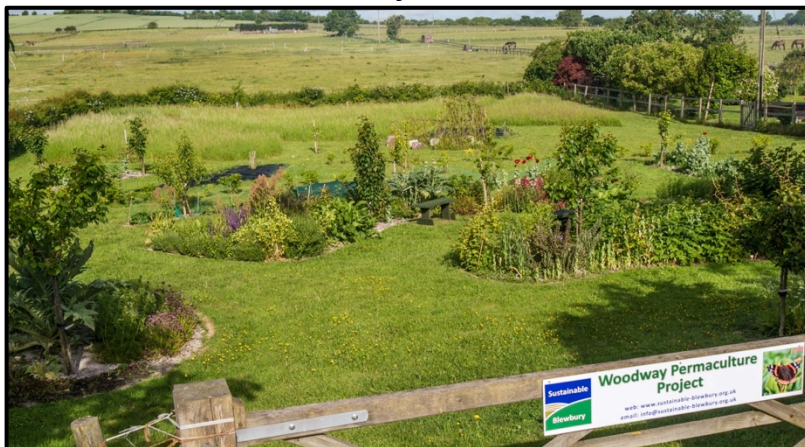
Working party 2013



Winter 2011, before we started



Summer 2014



Summer 2015



Open day 2014

Woodway Permaculture Orchard Garden

February 2013

Living willow shelter



In February 2013, aided and guided by the expertise and hard work of Lawrence Graham, a living willow shelter was constructed. The willow will grow and give a shaded, green space where we can sit and enjoy the site.

Weaving willow in this way is an old village skill and Mike was very enthusiastic about reviving it.



May 2013



May 2014



Reskilling: Willow Workshop

Mike was interested in the rural crafts that are now disappearing: willow basket and hurdle making was an ancient and essential rural craft in the Downland areas. This 2014 workshop was led by Kathy Edmunds' cousin Lawrence Graham, a craftsman from Norfolk.

He had already visited Blewbury in 2012 to lead work on a willow shelter on our Permaculture site and Mike suggested the workshop.

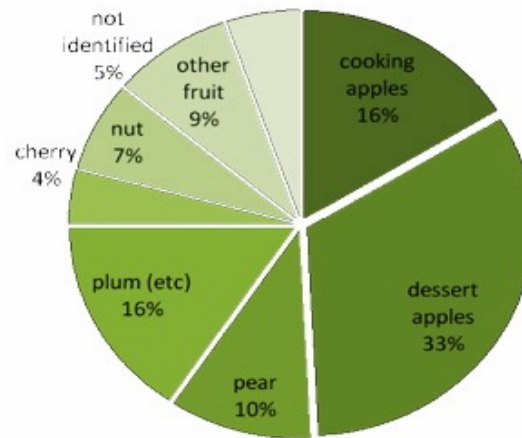
The materials were provided from sources in Norfolk, but our local green "crack" willow was used in the past. As recently as the 1930s women were making baskets from the line of pollarded willows that can still be seen below Blewburton Hill.



Blewbury Orchard Survey

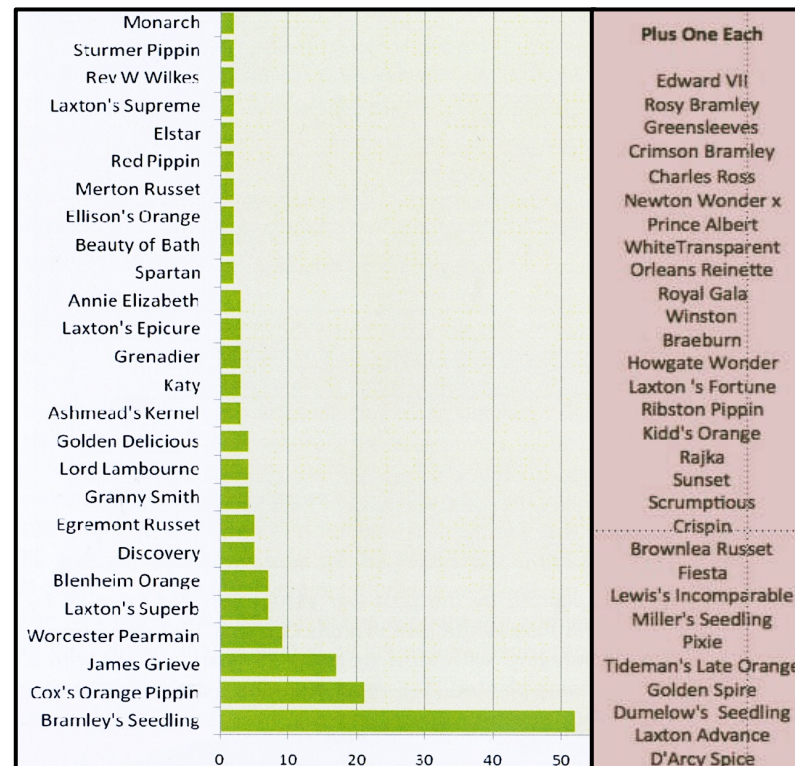
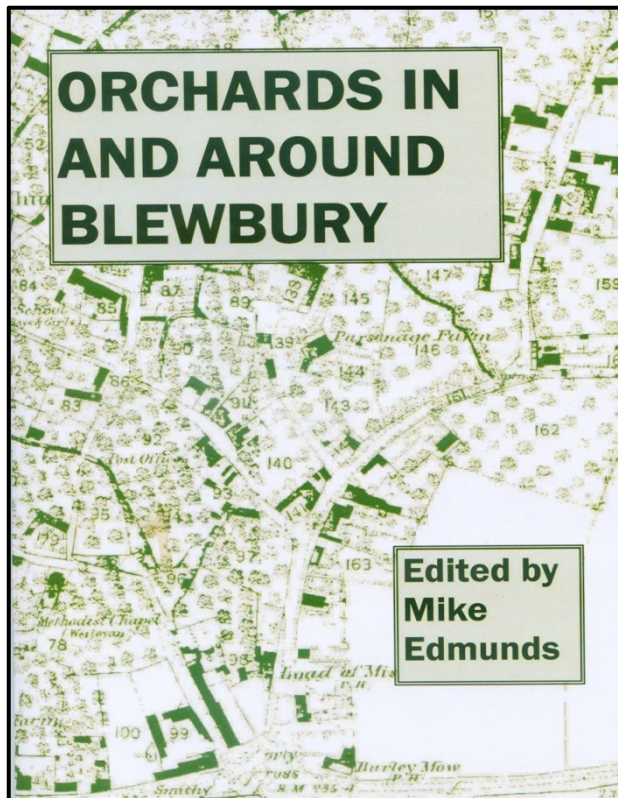
In 2010, Mike surveyed apple orchards in and around the village. He produced a 28-page booklet about Blewbury's orchards for our first celebration of Apple Day.

It covers the history, current situation, apple varieties, apple recipes, local cider and much more. Some copies are still available.

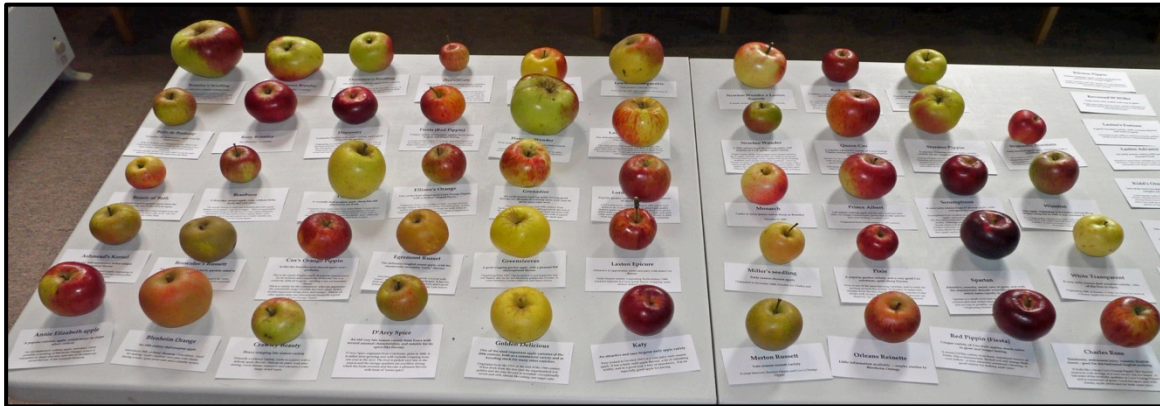


Orchard (William Blandford Fletcher, 1858-1936)

What's in the modern Blewbury orchard?



Apple Day



Blewbury's apple varieties



*Apple variety tasting**



Cider with Rosie

Apple Day is an annual celebration of apple, orchards and local distinctiveness, initiated in 1990.

We held our first Blewbury-wide celebration of Apple Day in October 2010. Results of our survey of orchards in Blewbury, put together by Mike, were on display as well as samples of almost all of the 57 varieties of apple we'd found in Blewbury up to then.



*Mike with Robert Fitchett of Upton Cider**



Making a clove apple

Apple Juicing

Mike loved everything 'apple', and with so many apple trees in Blewbury he was keen to make juice from all the fruit that was otherwise being wasted.

In 2011 we borrowed apple juicing equipment and held public events to produce juice from trees in the village.

In 2012 we purchased our own equipment (apple shredder, apple press) and a pasteuriser so that the juice could be kept for up to a year.

The juice we make tastes wonderful, ranging from dry to sweet depending on the variety of apple.

We run sessions from August to early November, and combine them with events such as Apple Day.



Watery Lane Footbridge ...

Watery Lane Footbridge was one of Mike's favourite places in Blewbury. When he heard in February that the footbridge over the Ashbrook was to be repaired he emailed OCC to *"request the repair is in keeping with this natural environment – especially that wood is used ..."*



"... Watery Lane Path, the bridge and the streams form one of the most sensitive landscapes in the village. It is one of the rather special quiet places in the village ."

The OCC engineer agreed with Mike, saying that the repair would be like for like, in keeping with the original. Unfortunately only 3 days later the wooden railings were replaced by metal scaffolding railings!

... becomes the Mike Edmunds Footbridge

What followed was typical of Mike – a string of polite but persistent emails reminding the engineer of his promise that the bridge would be entirely of wood. The conversation continued until Mike passed away.

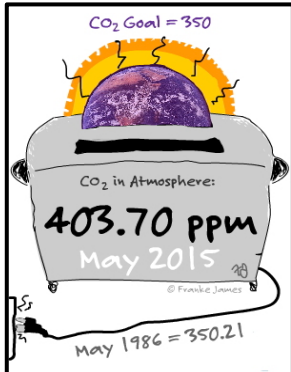
A member of our Core Group emailed to suggest that “to replace the recently-fitted scaffold pole-type structure with a wooden bridge would be a fitting tribute to a man who did so much to look after this village and the people who live here.”

The OCC reply assured us that the metal railings *would* be replaced, and that the bridge will be known in county records as “The Edmunds Footbridge”

The work was completed on 1 July 2015; the sign was added in August.



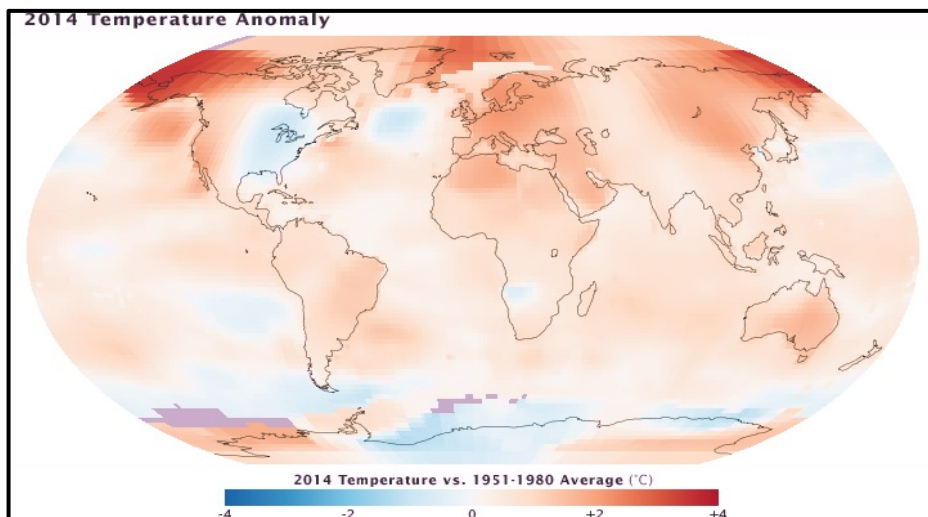
Climate Change



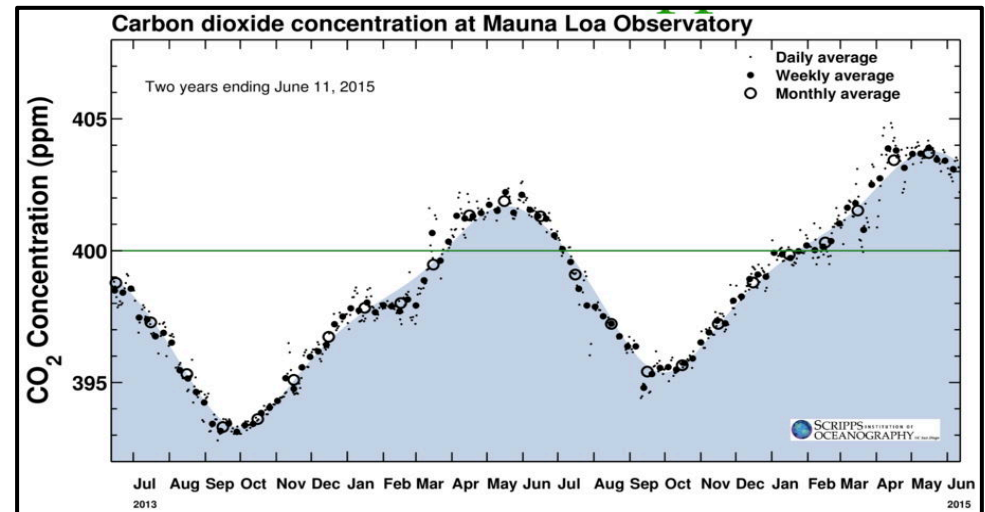
The BVS Environment Group was initially focused on the village environment. But as a scientist working on water resources, Mike was aware of the growing concern about climate change and could see evidence of some of its early effects.

This led to the founding of the Blewbury Energy Initiative in 2005, and then to expanding the role of the Environment Group and renaming it Sustainable Blewbury (SB)

Underlying many SB projects is the unifying theme of reducing our carbon footprint, while preserving natural resources and a good quality of life.



2014 was the warmest year on record. Note the Arctic – its greater warming is a factor in causing increases in extreme weather.



CO2 concentration in the atmosphere over the last two years, showing how it is increasing. It has not been this high for millions of years.

The Blewbury Energy Initiative website was started by John Richards. It contains a great deal of information on climate change, saving energy and renewable generation. It's at www.blewbury.co.uk/energy



New York taxis in the flooding following Hurricane Sandy

Fossil Fuel Divestment

New sources of oil and gas – deep undersea wells, the Arctic, fracking, and tar sands – are **very expensive**. Vast sums are being invested to exploit them. They would also cause serious environmental damage, as does coal.



Deepwater Horizon oil rig

But in order to limit global warming to the internationally agreed limit of 2°C, we can only burn a **fraction** of the known reserves of oil and gas. *Most of the known fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground.*

These huge investments could become worthless, which could de-stabilise the global financial system.



Divestment from fossil fuels has become a rapidly growing movement. Although some of the coal, oil and gas companies recognise that climate change is real, **none** have really tried to adjust to a future without fossil-fuels.

The rapidly growing divestment campaign aims to influence and shame company managements into rethinking their plans.

Mike started working to publicise the fossil fuel divestment campaign soon after it was started by 350.org.



Many public bodies, universities, churches, charities, etc. have announced that they will divest, some eschewing all fossil fuels and others the worst sources, such as coal and tar sand oil.



Oxford students