

Reflections

MIKE BLOXHAM

Mike Bloxham has been a member of the Wyre Forest Study Group since the early days. In his time as Chairman Mike helped us to draw up a constitution and arranged our insurance. He also suggested that we hold an annual Entomology Day and organised our first one in 2004. His many and varied talents have benefitted several different organisations and he has been very involved in the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Scheme (BWARS), British Plant Gall Society (BPGS), Dipterists Forum (DF), Sandwell Valley Naturalists (Sandnats), and he is a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society (RES). His meticulous artwork and informed writing have been used in many papers and books. He was the illustrator of the widely used British Plant Galls FSC key by Margaret Redfern and Peter Shirley. Mike tells us here how his lifelong interest in natural history began.



Mike Bloxham and Georgie

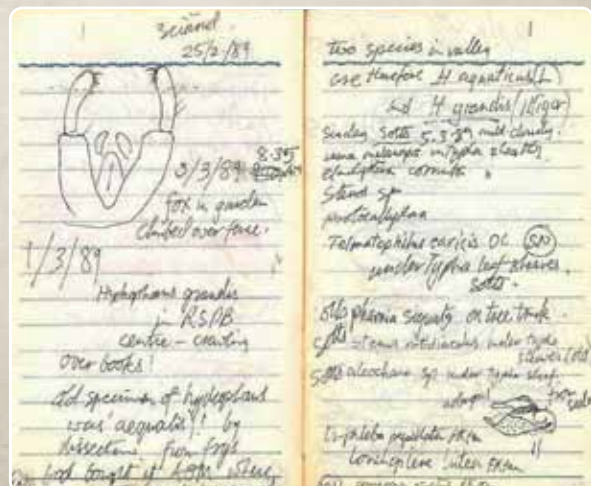
As an adopted child, I was amazingly lucky. The parents who were to guide me through my early life were very loving and undoubtedly spoiled me. I grew up in a beautiful Georgian house with a large garden. Father loved it and was an expert on roses and fruit trees. As an only child in beautiful surroundings, I found myself enjoying solitude on many occasions because Father was always out collecting insurance money for the 'Prudential' and mother was devoted to three things: the church where she cleaned and produced different and magnificent flower arrangements throughout the year, art (she painted porcelain and knew some of

the artists at the famous Worcester works), and the Women's Institute in Worcester where she was a much loved member of the committee and had a WI stall below Foregate Street Station. I used to help during school holidays and always found time to race round to the newsagent's stall to collect the weekly copy of the 'Eagle'.

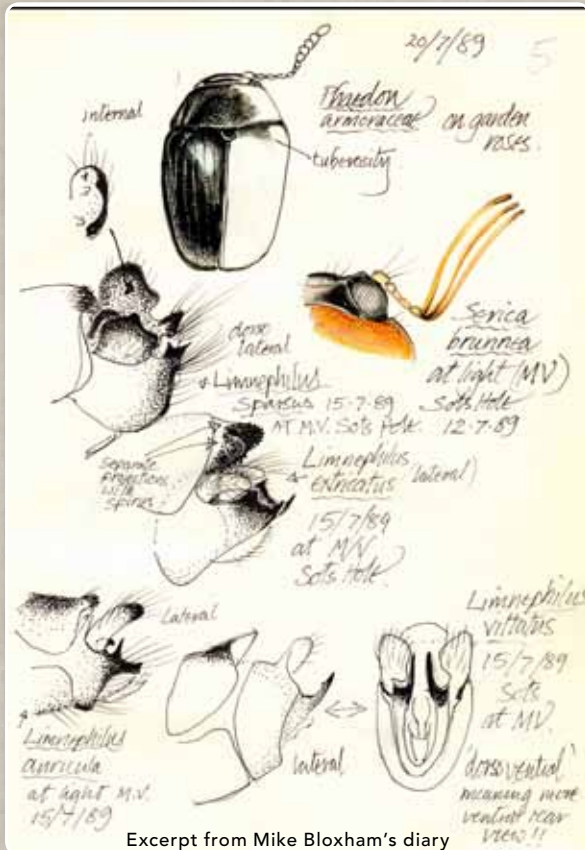
As you might guess, all the flowers for the church arrangements came from our garden as did a lot of the produce sold in Worcester. Mother was keen on daily activity and I had to accompany her on lengthy walks along Worcestershire lanes to visit friends during my earliest years. We would collect wildflowers and she would always insist on giving them familiar vernacular names. If we were not sure of these we would invent some ('Purple Delight' was Rosebay Willowherb). A dog was our invaluable companion on many of these boyhood expeditions.

One day in the garden on a hot day in late September, I inspected some fallen pears. We were fond of 'Mellow' ones and on this particular day I turned over a number. One contained a deep excavation within which was a magnificent orange and yellow apparition. It crawled out onto my hand and I raced into the kitchen to show it to my mother. She gently but firmly ushered me outside and blew on my new companion with all her might until it relinquished its grip and unsteadily hummed off on its orange wings. She took me to inspect a book on common insects. I instantly recognised the Hornet.... Father, on hearing of the incident, told me that some years ago near Shrawley, a ploughing horse had been killed by Hornets as it disturbed a dead tree containing a nest.

My interest had been truly aroused. What an insect! Inspection of trees banks and hedges became a regular feature of my life and whilst I only found a few Hornet nests, dozens of wasp nests were located and I got badly stung on one occasion when I stumbled



Excerpt from Mike Bloxham's diary in 1989



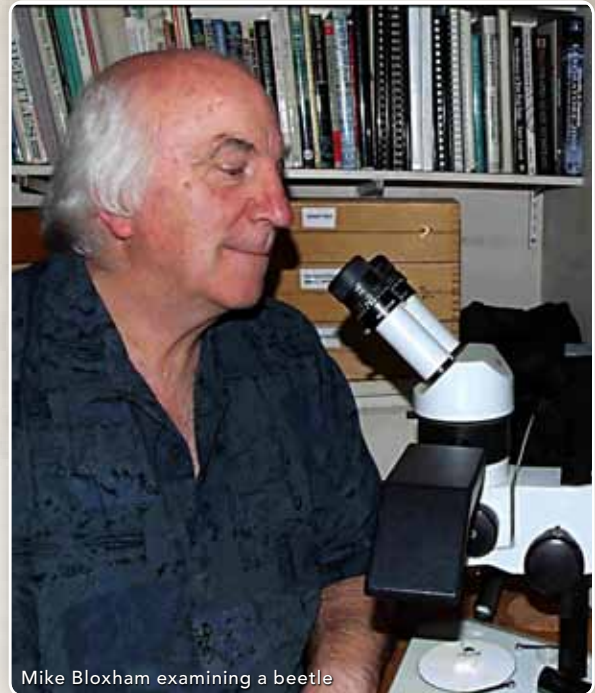
on diggings at the corner of a field where the ruins of a nest indicated that a Badger had probably been searching for the tasty larvae in the cells.

School at Bromsgrove in the medical sixth form under the eye of my teacher W.R.Lyttelton saw me elected as Secretary of the Natural History Society. Illustrious predecessors included Phil Drabble (a pioneer in the introduction of sheep dog trialling on the television). Alas! The Society was in its terminal years and no longer produced magnificent printed reports of yesteryear. I lost my position because several accounts of activities were not completed....

Subsequently my life has been devoted to a more dedicated study of insects. Even in this, much has been disorganised. A busy life as a teacher has seen many wildlife records hastily scribbled in old notebooks and now even the writer finds it difficult to interpret what was going on!

I urge recorders to contact living naturalists for data as a priority, rather than waiting until they have died, when one might encounter unintelligible stuff such as this! The extract concerned came from a period when school responsibilities were most pressing.

On the other hand, school holidays sometimes provided a heaven-sent opportunity for more formal notebooks when time allowed for some expansive work.



Mike Bloxham examining a beetle

I hope the ghosts of past members of the Nat. Hist. Soc. at Bromsgrove may be mollified at least to some extent if they are somehow able to view the more recent efforts of their ex-secretary. On reflection, we owe so much to a host of people who have helped us understand at least a tiny part of the wonders of the natural world. In particular I have to thank all the members of the Study Group for their unbounded enthusiasm and generosity in sharing knowledge. This relationship would probably never have developed if Rosemary Winnall had not written that letter in 1991 inviting me to join them in their wonderful new venture!



Mike Bloxham hunting flies at a pond margin