



# BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

## THE VALUE OF OBSERVATION HIVES

In 1609 the scientist and beekeeper Charles Butler observed the King bee laying eggs and it wasn't until thirty years later when Jan Swammerdam settled the question of the sex of bees that the world of male beekeepers had to come to terms with the fact that most honeybees were indeed female, and the important 'King' bee was in fact a Queen!

An assistant in the early world of scientific discovery of honeybees was the glass walled observation hive and today these hives remain an important way of observing the behaviour of bees. They're also a popular way of sharing beekeeper's fascination and enthusiasm for bees with others.

Even carefully entering their citadel may disturb their normal behaviour. Undisturbed in an observation hive means we can see the various dances performed on the floor near the entrance to the hive; the food sharing behaviour to work out the hives nutritional needs; their behaviour around the queen; and much more.

The value of observation hives in informing visitors of the importance of honeybees and allowing them to observe their fascinating behaviour was recognised by the Warwickshire County Museum, located in The Market Place, Warwick, and Warwickshire beekeepers more than eighty years ago. It has remained as one of the few observation hives in the country



with bees all year round. It has also been enjoyed for such a long time that current grandparents, accompanied by their grandchildren, return today to the hive they first visited as children. The observation hive has been cared for by Warwick and Leamington beekeepers throughout the eighty years and in recent years with some involvement of the suitably trained museum staff.

The renamed museum, now known as The Market Hall, has the observation hive in a new setting on the first floor close to a model bronze age village with an adjacent display showing the importance of bees at that time, for example, the use of beeswax in casting of metal.

While the observation hive at The Market Hall Museum has been a very successful education tool and museum attraction, which is well worth a visit particularly on a wet day when we cannot engage with our own bees, a similar hive installed in the Glasshouse, Jephson Gardens, Leamington Spa has only received limited success. Shortly we will be meeting with the Warwick District Council (WDC) Green Space Officer responsible for Jephson Gardens to set out our plans including the possible involvement

**Above:** Jon Radley, Curator of Natural Sciences, and Laura McCoy, Collections Manager at The Market Hall Museum, with Mike Townsend, who has looked after the bees in the museum's observation hive for some 20 years.

**Below:** Clive Joyce installing the bees in the observation at Glasshouse, Jephson Gardens, Leamington Spa last year. The landing board is at the top right of the picture with the entrance to the hive via the 3in pipe into the top of the hive.



of the Warwick District Council Rangers and our own members to restock the observation hive and manage and more closely monitor it over the spring and summer months..

**Mike Townsend**

### IN THIS ISSUE

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# BUMBLE BEE NESTS AND MICE

Our January Members' meeting was a talk by Paul Hand of Bees and Trees from the Welsh borders of Shropshire. Paul regaled us with stories from his childhood where boys hunted for bumble bee nests in the Spring and took them home to keep as pets or to sell on to the boy down the street. Paul graduated to honey bees when he was 18 and still keeps both honey bees and bumblebees.

When Paul had a stand at the Gateshead garden show he discovered that beekeeping was also a common activity for boys of mining communities much farther north as one man approached him on the stand with a story of how he kept bumblebees in a large enamel teapot. I had no idea that keeping bumble bees was a childhood activity! Paul explained how he collects old mouse nests for his bumble bees and keeps them in old sweetshop jars. He ended the talk by bringing out some mice that he keeps as pets. Below you can see Phoebe Pepper getting acquainted with one of the mice.

Paul had a wealth of information to share and an original way of looking at the countryside. Thanks to Paul for a fascinating and hilarious talk that everyone enjoyed.

Next month is our Annual General Meeting. After the meeting the bar will be open and there will be refreshments followed by a talk by Scott Dwyer from University of Warwick talking about biological controls for Varroa. We hope to see you there on 13<sup>th</sup> February at 7.30pm at King's Hill Nurseries, King's Hill, CV3 6PS.

Rachel Dove



# WAX FOR CANDLE ROLLING

Those who help at our shows, and have seen how popular candle rolling is, have asked about the availability of unwired wax to make their own candles at home.

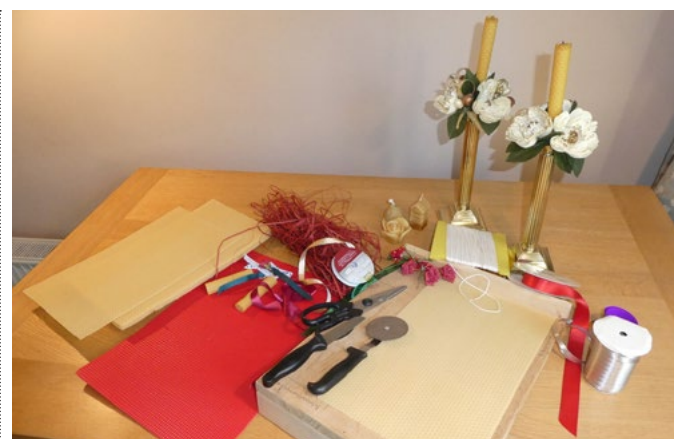
Unwired brood foundation is the most satisfactory to use as it can be cut many ways to get a variety of shapes from elegant candles to go in a candle stick, table decoration or used as candle lights.

On the right I have shown a cutting board with a raised end to hold the sheet of wax in place but have found the cutting board from HobbyCraft satisfactory. A small knife can be used but a pizza cutter wheel is an ideal easy-to-use alternative.

You may have read that the candle wick needs to be dipped in liquid wax but it's not really necessary: simply make sure the wick is tightly rolled into the start and when lighting allow plenty of time for the liquid wax to make its way up the wick.

Gently warm the wax with a hairdryer but don't overdo it. When rolling all you need to remember is only the final roll over will show so any thumb marks will be hidden.

Keep your odd lengths of ribbon as they are ideal for dressing a pair



of candles with a nice bow binding in a few flowers out of the garden or, again, HobbyCraft offers a good selection of artificial flowers.

Unwired brood wax can be ordered on our website. Candle wick can be bought from Thornes, but if you twist my arm I can probably find some for you.

Mike Townsend

# NEW WLBK LOGO

Calling all would be and established illustrators, graphic designers and arty types in general to help us come up with a branch logo. We want a new logo to add to our presentational material e.g. banners, posters, flyers, powerpoints, stationery etc. to make them our own and thought we would invite ideas from our amazingly talented membership.

**Generally** - The logo should be simple, be easily recognised and capable of being reproduced in various formats.

**Theme** - The logo could reflect beekeeping or the locality or possibly something abstract. With a name as long as "Warwick and Leamington Beekeepers" it is likely that we will need to find an abbreviation.

**Size** - It needs to be legible within a 20mmx20mm window but capable of being enlarged for banners etc.

**Shape** - It does not have to fit any particular shape or have geometric or, for that matter, any borders although hexagons are associated with bees.

**Colours** - There is no need to be restricted to honey colours.

**Existing Logos** - Both the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association (left) and British Bee Keeping Association (right) have logos illustrated below, from which ours should be distinct. The County flower is, coincidentally, honeysuckle, by the way.



If you are thinking of having a go please let us know. Designs should be submitted by 29<sup>th</sup> February to [messengerbee@outlook.com](mailto:messengerbee@outlook.com) for appraisal by our committee. The top entries will be posted in Bee Talk.

Bernard Brown\*

\* whose last art report was ..... "tries, but obviously has no talent"..... so do help us please.

# MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

Thanks to the 169 members who have already paid your membership for 2020.

There are still a number of members (114 in fact), who have yet to pay.

An e-mail with a link personal to you will be sent in the next few days to enable you to renew on line so do keep an eye on your inbox. This is by far the preferred method of renewal.

PLEASE let me know before by e-mail, [val.dillon@outlook.com](mailto:val.dillon@outlook.com) if you will NOT be renewing your membership and I will remove your details and won't contact you again.

For those of you who wish to renew, PLEASE do so as soon as possible and no later than 29<sup>th</sup> February to ensure your insurance continues.

Val Dillon

# EVENTS

## TALK AT STRATFORD BEEKEEPERS

Stratford-upon-Avon Beekeepers have invited us to a presentation by Jo Widdicombe, President of BIBBA (Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association), on how he keeps and breeds his bees on the Ramm Peninsular in Cornwall. Jo is well known as the author of 'The Principles of Bee Improvement'. He is also a Bee Farmer and an ex Bee Inspector. With that CV, it is bound to be an interesting and informative talk. Everyone is welcome, just turn up!

**Venue:** Luddington Village Hall, Stratford-Upon-Avon, CV37 9SD

## FRAME CLEANING

We are firing up our Frame Cleaning Tank and holding another frame cleaning session on Sunday afternoon 9<sup>th</sup> February. Time slots are limited so they will be allocated on a first come first served basis. If you want to come along, please use the Google form [here](#) to express your interest.

Please note that 30-35 frames can be dealt with in the half hour time slot but, if you have more than this to do, you will need to book additional slots. There is provision for this on the form as there is for an approximation of the number of frames involved.

It is essential that you remove all comb and scrape as much wax from the frames as practicable before coming to site. Our branch Steam Wax Extractor is available for home loan for this purpose. Contact Bernard Brown at [bernardbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardbrown@outlook.com)



# BBKA SPRING CONVENTION

This year's Spring Convention for BBKA members is being held between 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> April at Harper Adams University near Newport, Shropshire.

Billed (erroneously as it so happens) as the Beekeeping Event of the Year - they obviously haven't heard about WLBK's summer bar-be-cue - the programme includes lectures from world-renowned experts at the cutting edge of research into our girls as well as by expert practitioners of our craft. There are also workshops covering the more practical aspects. For those who were unable to attend or, are kicking themselves for not buying those bits of kit you were musing over at, Bee Tradex, there is a Trade Show with most of the usual firms there.

For those interested, this is an event well worth attending, not only to improve your knowledge and skill, but also to network with other beekeepers just as keen you are. There is usually a contingent of WLBK members there and some even giving lectures - well, ..... one... actually.

Harper Adams is about one and a half hours drive away so it is quite feasible to attend for just one day but, if you want to stay longer, then there is accommodation at Harper Adams itself and at nearby Wolverhampton University. Also, there is space for camper vans, or there are local hotels. We got a deal on a Travelodge in Telford.

You can book to attend any combination of the three days by going to : <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/britishbeekeepersassociation>

Prices are £26 for the 3 days; £13 for Friday; £17 for Saturday only; £12 for Sunday; £5 for the trade show (on the day only).

Lectures are free with no booking required but workshops and seminars attract a charge and must be pre-booked.

Full details can be found at:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/2020-spring-convention-everything-you-need-to-know>

See you there!

**Bernard Brown**

# HINTS AND TIPS: DRONE FOUNDATION IN SUPERS

The cell size of the wax we put in supers is commonly 'worker' cell size but, following a request by one of our members, the COOP purchasing page of our website now also lists 'drone' size cell super foundation.

What is the difference and why should we bother?

In the Spring, particularly, with egg laying racing away and a plentiful supply of pollen, the workers may look for extra space to store it which means they may start packing extra pollen in the supers. This is commonly seen as an arc of pollen in the first super above the queen excluder and means you will end up with a lot of pollen in the extracted honey. Putting drone foundation in the first super will minimise this.

Using 'drone cell' foundation also means the bees have to produce less wax for the same amount of honey stored. I cannot recall any work done to quantify the difference in the amount of wax used and estimated additional honey yield.

A further advantage is that a frame of honey for showing may be judged more favourably.

I have no experience to inform you but I am told the comb may be a little more fragile when spinning the honey out.

Putting drone foundation in the brood chamber to stimulate an increase in the drone population is a method of reducing varroa mite population as drone brood is more attractive as a breeding ground for mites. Once capped over the drone brood can be removed from the hive, along with a concentration of mites, and discarded. Timing is very important as you must discard the drone brood before the mature drones start to emerge carrying loads of mites, meaning you will have actually achieved the opposite of what you set out to do which was to reduce the mite population!

Drone cell foundation is on our website for you to try and sales will help us decide to continue to stock it.

**MIKE TOWNSEND**

Helen Essex will be back next month with more hints or tips for you, if you have any that you would like to share, please send them to [h.essex@virgin.net](mailto:h.essex@virgin.net)

# BUZZ FOR VICTORY

It's 75 years since VE Day and to encourage celebrations the May Day Bank Holiday has been moved to Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May. Celebrations in Warwick will be focussed on the racecourse where it is anticipated that some 6,000 people will attend a spectacular family event that is being staged. As an opportunity to promote our craft, this is too good to miss so we have booked a stand at the show.

In keeping with the spirit of the event, we are planning to have a "Buzzing for Victory" display chronicling the role of bees and their products in warfare throughout the ages and during WWII in particular.

With the help of some of our senior beekeepers who, although having memories of the original VE Day itself, but were too young to be keeping bees at the time, our research has thrown up some interesting facts, which we can use and which hopefully will provide an article for Bee Talk in the future. We could do with some more, so if any member can contribute any information, anecdotes or artefacts on this subject please do send them to Bernard Brown at [bernardbrown@outlook.com](mailto:bernardbrown@outlook.com).

Whilst *conscriptio* might be more pertinent to the theme of the event, we will be calling for volunteers to help on the display nearer the time so please make a note of the date in your diary.

**Bernard Brown**

# ATTEND BEE TRADEX

Come and join over 2,500 other beekeepers in the biggest beekeeping show on 14<sup>th</sup> March from 9:00am to 4:30pm. Held right on our doorstep in Hall H2, Stoneleigh Park, all the major suppliers are represented with show specials together with new suppliers who have their own, often innovative, equipment for you to examine and purchase.

Whether you are an experienced or novice beekeeper, there will, from past experience, be plenty to interest and encourage you in our craft.

You can buy tickets on line for £6 or £7 on the day but bee warned, there are long queues to buy tickets on the day, so buy online to avoid missing the bargains. Once there, you will bump into many of our members, so get your bargains before you indulge in "Bee Talk".

Tickets are available at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/beetradex-2020-tickets-58667444907>

For full details try :- <https://www.beetradex.co.uk/>

**Bernard Brown**

# NEE BAB-BEE

Josie Cassell, who manages our WLBK twitter account ([@warleambees](https://twitter.com/warleambees)), gave birth to a baby boy on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020. Weighing 3.49kg (7lb 11oz) baby Nicholas, "Nico", is, according to his mum, doing very well and is already growing lots. Congratulations Josie!



# BEE LINES

We have dug up some fascinating facts about WLBK that many of our members may not know and may find interesting. We'll share a few of these in each issue.

- Our extraction unit at our resource centre on Hurst Farm, Kenilworth proved very popular last year being booked on 80 days by members. What a valuable facility it is for us, not only for honey production but for its contribution to domestic harmony!
- Our purchasing co-op received and fulfilled 678 orders for the 8 tonnes of Ambrosia alone in 2019.
- The gift aid received back from the tax man on your subscriptions amounted to £1800 in 2019. That's 14% of our income.

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver. Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28<sup>th</sup> of each month: [tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk)

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