



BEE TALK

Warwick and Leamington Branch of Warwickshire Beekeepers

ADVENTURES AT THE HEATHER

The bacon sandwiches in Bakewell were enough to tempt me back to the Derbyshire heather moors at the end of August but I did actually go for another purpose - to have a quick visit to see how our girls were doing up at Rod Knoll Farm. At least it wasn't raining this time, but definitely on the chilly side still. According to Francis, our farmer host, the weather had been "atrocious" in August.

There was not a lot of activity around the hives. So, with a little trepidation, I opened mine up only to find.....HONEY. Yippee! I moved on to take a peek inside one of Bernard's two hives only to find barely any honey and hardly any bees. Reporting back to Bernard that evening, we resolved to rescue our girls and salvage what we could of the honey crop.

Alan, the third member of our heather expedition, couldn't join us but, being nice people as all beekeepers are, we offered to pick up his hive and bring it back with ours. And so it was that we once again found ourselves trundling up the M1 in the wee small hours.

What a contrast! This time the weather was dry, still and warm. After drinking in the spectacular sun-kissed scenery, we closed up the hives. But it was only when we loaded them onto the trailer that we discovered a pile of dead bees under one of Bernard's hives. With nothing to be done we turned our attention to retrieving Alan's colony, which he had thoughtfully placed on the far side of a decidedly boggy area, which had extended to some 10m wide following all the rain.

Despite having a trolley, it still proved somewhat of a challenge. Unlike the one-wheeled barrow shown on page 3, which is easier to manoeuvre on sloping ground, our two-wheeled version was tilting sideways at an



Two of the hives on location at the Derbyshire heather moors

alarming angle as we dragged and pushed it one tussock at a time across the bog. Despite our boots getting stuck at almost every step we managed to drag the trolley across without falling into the mire.

All loaded up, we headed back down south. It was a busy day, challenging but most enjoyable and the good news is we all ended up with some honey - Bernard and Alan got a full super each and I was pleased with my half a super.

Although both Bernard's colonies were broodless, when inspected a few days later they were fine, but he never did find a reason for the dead bees he left behind.

No doubt others got a lot more honey than we did, but this isn't just about jars of honey - it is the adventure, the team work, the special effort required to prepare colonies for the exercise, being in the Peak District and the recovery of the



Bernard with the hives all strapped up and ready to head home

hives, knowing that, typically, only one year in six is fruitful. Oh, and the bacon sandwiches!

Join us next year on our heather adventure. Meanwhile, I think I'll just wander off and see if I can find a 4x4.

David Faulkner

MESSAGE FROM WLBK'S CHAIR

It has been a pretty good honey year and I have extracted a few buckets, and even bottled some for my family and friends. I have also taken off some of the Branch Honey for our rent payment. However, I have been waiting patiently to book the branch apimelter so we can melt out a few granulated supers. The apimelter is a wonderful piece of equipment that uses a heat gradient to melt out honey and wax at optimum temperatures. It keeps both the wax and the honey in good condition. It is an expensive piece of kit and a great asset for us as a branch. Bookings for the extraction unit are spaced out for Covid-19 safety and I didn't book early enough to get a September slot, but slots have opened up now and booking can be done either via the website or contacting Clive Joyce.

Extracting the granulated honey from some late spring supers and melting down some of the late summer supers, which have only been partly filled, is the start of a big winter clean-up that can be tackled at a leisurely pace.

Last month I mentioned the wealth of videos and webinars available right now. This month our Secretary Chris Cox reminded me about podcasts, which scan the whole range of bee interests. I particularly enjoyed **this one** by Jane Horrocks and Ester Coles where they discuss weekly inspections.

But why confine yourself to one? There are many great podcasts and you should try some of these, if you haven't before, and they're all free:

- Beekeeping | Short and Sweet (The Norfolk Honey Company)
- The Hive Jive | Beekeeping Podcast
- Beekeeping Today Podcast
- The Barefoot Beekeeper (do not imitate)
- Keeping Backyard Bees (American)
- Hive Mind the podcast for Beekeepers by a Beekeeper
- kiwimana | A Beekeeping Podcast (A NZ perspective)

All of these can be listened to whilst you are extracting honey or melting wax, or both at the same time. Enjoy!



Jane tucking her bees in for winter



Jane Horrocks and Ester Coles

If you need help with your bees, contact me or any other member of the committee at warleambees@warleambees.org.uk. Stay safe!

Jane Medwell, WLBK Chair

WLBK APIARY MANAGER NEEDED

It is a truth universally acknowledged that looking after bees is fun. Even looking after someone else's bees can be a pleasure, particularly if you have help to share the load.

This is what a Branch Apiary Manager will find at our Kings Hill Nurseries Apiary. With the help of two assistants plus a cohort of experienced trainers and their trainees, there are plenty of eager volunteers to undertake the bulk of the inspections and reporting.

So, what is there for the Apiary Manager to do?

Well, the main task is to oversee that the colonies are of sufficient numbers and suitable temperament for the needs of the training team. With so many different people involved at the

Apiary there is a need for consistent oversight and necessary husbandry for which the Apiary Manager will be responsible. Liaison with the training team will be vital in order to be aware of their requirements. So too will be the development of an annual plan, preparation of budgets to implement it and the monitoring of its expenditure.

We have, by applying the "many hands make light work" principle, re-structured this role to make it more manageable. We are looking to get someone in post now to prepare for next season.

Should this role appeal, please contact secretary@warleambees.org.uk in the first instance.

Chris Cox, Branch Secretary

IN THE APIARY

Having been completely wrong in suggesting the season had ended early, I fed my bees in early September, then watched them enjoying the ivy and having a population explosion. I will heft and top up if necessary. The home-made entrance Barry Meatyard gave me did a great job and I have not lost any colonies to wasps. This month is all about winter protection:

- Protect from mice. I remove the entrance block and put on a mouseguard with drawing pins (right). If you leave the block in, make sure it is "smile up" so that dead bees do not block the slot.
- Protect from woodpeckers. Chicken wire cages or, my preference, a roll of plastic clematis netting around the hive-will foil their dastardly attacks. However, remember nucs do not have a metal roof, so you need to tie the top of the plastic netting to keep woodpeckers out.
- Protect from weather. To insulate or not to insulate, that is the question? After Tom Seeley's CABK talk, I am putting a sheet of insulation over my crown board in the top of the roof. I am cutting a removable rectangle into it to allow me to add fondant at Christmas. That's my big job for October.
- Protect from thieves. Strap up - the traditional brick may not be enough. For security, you may want to strap to a block or tether.

If you still have mite strips in, remember to remove them - longer is not better and only promotes mite resistance.

It's a lovely feeling to have the apiary all tucked up!

Jane Medwell, WLBK Chair



FREE TO GOOD HOME

Two national poly nuc boxes with feeding eke. Contact Bernard Brown:

bernardnbrown@outlook.com

HIVE BARROW



To get to the Branch Heather Apiary, which is located on a remote farm in the Peak District National Park, involves carrying hives across a very damp field. While the Thornes hive barrow can traverse across most 'normal' ground conditions, the ground conditions at our heather site can be beyond 'normal' and so Clive Joyce kindly modified the barrow so that a larger front wheel could be fitted (as shown above). The very sturdy BMX wheel was donated by 'The Bike Repairer', a Kenilworth charity.

Advice on how to use the barrow and its availability at our heather site will be included in the briefing note on going to the heather next year.

HONEY WANTED

Having entered the world of beekeeping two years ago I've produced enough honey to gift jars to family and friends but have also been overwhelmed with requests to purchase local honey from a wider audience. I was unable to keep up with the demand due to only having a few hives, so I contacted some other small-scale beekeepers in the area with the proposition of creating some kind of local honey production team. This birthed the creation of "The Leamington Honey Company". We have only recently launched but have so far had a very positive response from local cafes, delis and shops who are keen to stock our honey. .

My request is that those who have excess honey or who cannot meet demand to please get in touch. You can find me on Instagram

[@theleamingtonhoneycompany](https://www.instagram.com/theleamingtonhoneycompany) or via email on dani.i.black@hotmail.com

Dani Black



BEE LINES

2020 sees then following members performing roles in the running of the County Organisation:

President – Peter Spencer

Immediate Past Chairman – David Blower

Treasurer – Jane Brown

WB magazine editor – Katerina Prokopiou

Education Co-ordinator's team – Barry Meatyard

Examination Secretary – Jane Medwell

Branch Trustee - Chris Cox

Branch Trustee – Bernard Brown

Quite a contribution you may think, but WLBK does, after all, make up 30% of the County Membership.

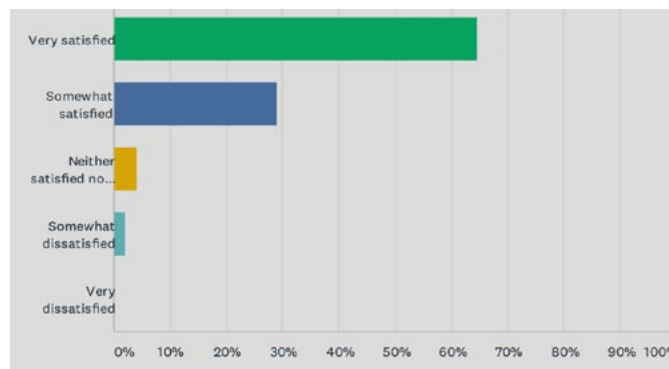
INITIAL WLBK SURVEY RESULTS

Members may have seen a branch survey pin into their inboxes recently. Hopefully you've seen it and completed it. We did carry out a similar survey in 2017, which, although helpful, was very partial in its response as the majority of the responders were the committee members themselves! So this time round we used a commercially available software package, Survey Monkey, which is user friendly and GDPR compliant.

The committee arrived at 17 questions to not only capture the membership views on how things are going, but also to identify the direction we should be taking in the future in providing for our membership. It also gave a unique opportunity to identify members who would like to be involved in roles that support the numerous branch activities and its background bureaucracy (surprising what is needed to run a volunteer organisation!)

The good news is that overall our members are very satisfied with how the branch is supporting their beekeeping (graph right).

The survey is yet to close and as things stand, we have had over



100 contributions from members. Clearly time will be needed to undertake a full analysis and to draw up actions to take on board from the responses given.

The committee would like to thank those members who have taken the time to respond and, if you haven't, there is still time.

Chris Cox, Secretary

FOR THE BOOKISH BEEKS OF WLBK

Our first Book Group will take place on Thursday 22nd October at 7.30pm by Zoom.

We will be discussing **The History of Bees** by Maja Lunde.

The blurb goes: "This dazzling and ambitious literary debut follows three generations of beekeepers from the past, present, and future, weaving a spellbinding story of their relationship to the bees, to their children, and to one another against the backdrop of an urgent, global crisis."

And here is a review:

'Is climate-themed fiction all too real? As scientists' projections about the effects of climate change have increasingly become reality, some works of apocalyptic fiction have begun to seem all too plausible. Maja Lunde's first book chronicles three generations as they exploit, try to save and eventually mimic bees.'

NEW YORK TIMES

Don't be shy - come along and share what you liked or disliked about the book, or, if you prefer, just join us and listen to the book chat - it's bound to make for an interesting conversation.

Topic: Bee Book Group

Time: Oct 22, 2020 07:30 PM

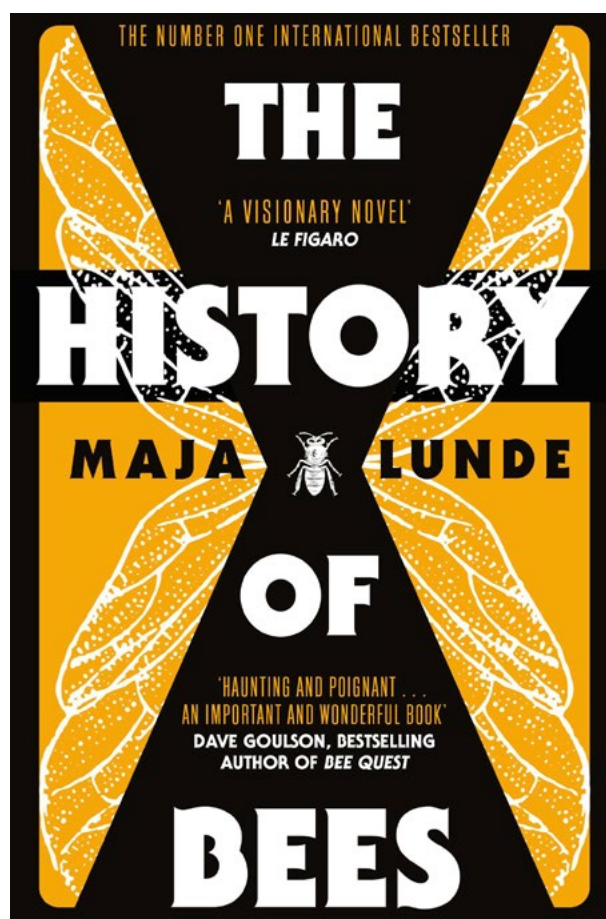
Join Zoom Meeting: <https://zoom.us/j/94300421792>

Meeting ID: 943 0042 1792

Passcode: 406442

Any questions please email Jane: fjordie@btinternet.com

Jane Ford, Librarian



SEPTEMBER'S MEMBERS' MEETING

September may be an early start to our Winter Programme of talks but Jim Vivian-Griffiths was insistent that the plans we put in place now will reap benefits in the season ahead. Jim's talk took us through the autumn treatments for varroa and he also introduced an amazing contraption for vaping bees called a Varrojet (above).



He then moved on to feeding with syrup, fondant and, if necessary, pollen. He suggested books and Randy Oliver's website: www.scientificbeekeeping.com.

We learnt what 'wet or dry' larvae are - larvae needs to receive enough royal jelly to produce really healthy bees. We also discovered that vigorous assessment of hive performance, not only in bee behaviour and honey yields but also in quality of comb building could have far reaching effects.

The whole talk was full of useful information, advice and tips. I wonder how many of us assess the placing of pollen in the brood frame as an indicator of a hives productiveness? I will also definitely be trying castellated spacers in one of my hives next season to see if I agree with Jim that it is easier to work with.

At our next Members' Meeting on Thursday 15th October at 7.30pm we will be having a film night via Zoom. We'll watch 'The Pollinators' and then have a discussion afterwards. I hope to see you then.

Rachel Dove

NEW COMMUNITY APIARY IS READY

The new Community Apiary at the Natural Cemetery in Temple Balsall is now set up

and ready to go. It is complete with three hive stands with each stand being able to accommodate three hives.

There is room for another stand if needed. Before Winter sets in we've already installed three colonies at the Apiary. We hope that this will become a great resource for those members who would like to take advantage of it.

Alan Deeley



EVENTS

It was disappointing to have to cancel this year's **Introduction to Beekeeping course** but we are confident we can safely deliver the next one in 2021

Assuming that some form of restrictions will still be in place next Spring, we have assessed the conference room at Kings Hill Nurseries and feel that it can safely accommodate 20 trainees plus training staff to a maximum of 25 people, thus keeping numbers within government guidelines.

To be able to accommodate 40 trainees, we plan to run two identical weekend courses on 20/21 March and 27/28 March. These will be "full-on" days of beekeeping, combining theory, practice and a chance to meet the bees (weather permitting) Catering is an unknown but let's hope we can still share cake!

Due to concerns about holding such a large show under the cloud of Covid-19, this year's **National Honey Show** will now be a virtual event to which everyone is invited, both in the UK and worldwide.

This is a great opportunity for those who ordinarily may have been somewhat apprehensive about making the effort to travel South to be able to experience the events and its workshops and lectures from the comfort of their own homes.

Pre-recorded demonstration workshops and lectures with live questions and answers during the day are being planned.

The show runs across three days - Thursday 22 October to Saturday 24 October 2020. Registration will go live soon via honeyshow.co.uk, so keep an eye on your inbox for our prompt.

The County AGM, normally held in March but deferred due to Covid-19, was re-convened as a Special AGM held virtually via Zoom on 26th September. Over 50 members attended to listen to reports from various officers on activities during 2018/2019. Key points arising from what was an exceptionally slick operation, included the healthy state of the charity both financially and in terms of membership, much improved governance by the trustees, County subscriptions remaining unchanged, the election of Samantha Peckett (Rugby Branch) as chairman and our Jane Brown as treasurer. The 2020/21 AGM promises to be an interesting affair given the disruption of our activities currently being experienced. Income is expected to take a hit but can be compensated by the healthy state of the charity's reserves if necessary.

TRAP OUTS AND CUT OUTS

Like many beekeepers, I have collected several swarms this year which have been quarantined and assessed for suitability before adding to my ever growing portfolio of honeybee colonies. One or two have been exceptional, showing a calm temperament as well as being excellent honey producers. Others have been quite weak and so have been combined with proven colonies.



However, what do you do when a swarm has established itself into a new home and is in an inconvenient place?

I seem to come across this situation more frequently these days. Whether it's because people don't call the Swarm Line in the hope that the bees will move on, or if it's because they don't see the initial swarm settle. But when a swarm installs itself in a building or a tree it is much harder to remove than a regular hanging swarm, plus the bees are more defensive as they now have a new home to protect.

So what should we do in these circumstances?

1. Leave alone. The best and easiest option is to leave them be. Unless the bees are causing a nuisance to people or to the property then just let them settle and get on with things. This applies especially to chimneys where our beekeeping insurance does not cover us for any injury.



2. A Trap Out. If the bees are in a location where there is only one possible entrance then I have used a Trap Out method. This involves placing a nuc box with a Porter Bee escape on one side and then sealing around the hole to ensure the bees can only go through the escape. Some good advice from Clive Joyce is to put some drawn comb in the nuc box and a frame containing brood and eggs. This encourages the foraging bees to remain in the nuc box. The box is left

in place for the full brood cycle of 21 days when it can be removed. The problem with this method is that the Queen is highly unlikely to leave the brood nest, so she needs to be coaxed out either by smoking the nest or inserting a cloth which has been wiped with Carbolic soap. I have done two of these removals recently; one in a tree on a golf course (below left), which was next to a tee. Another was in a wall cavity inside a factory where an outlet pipe had not been sealed and the bees were bothering the employees.

Once the bees are removed, then it is important to seal up the hole to avoid another colony moving in.



3. A Cut Out. This method is useful when there are multiple potential entrances to the nest, so blocking one entrance will just mean the bees will find another. The method I use was patiently explained to me by the late Tim Foden, for which I have always been grateful. The Cut Out requires a lot of planning to ensure you have all the equipment needed, and it involves using a 'Bee Vac' to gently suck the bees out from the nest and directly into a brood box.

As the name suggests, this method involves locating the nest and then cutting an access hole to enable the comb to be safely removed. Any comb with brood can be cut to the size of an empty brood frame and then held in place with a large rubber band. Any comb with stores can be removed.

The bee vac is basically an adapted box with one hole to connect a vacuum cleaner and another hole to connect a smooth flexible hose. Crucially, the box has a mesh barrier to avoid the bees going into the vacuum cleaner! Sitting above the Bee Vac is a brood box with drawn comb so the bees can climb up safely. If you see the queen whilst you are vacuuming the bees, then catch her in a queen clip and keep her safe (don't forget to keep one handy!).

Once all the bees and comb are removed, any entrances should be sealed up and the hive placed as close to the original entrance as possible. Open up the brood box with an entrance/floor and if the queen has been caged then release her into the hive. Leave the brood box in place overnight and hopefully the bees will have adjusted to their new home, and they can then be safely removed.

We used this method recently when a colony of bees had set up home in the cavity of a residential garage (photos above) and the bees were entering along a window frame which had not been sealed when it was installed.

4. The very last resort is to **kill the bees**, but I am fortunate that I have never had to do this.

Alan Deeley

BEE FRIENDLY PLANTS: IVY

Well, is your ivy in flower? Everything has been early this year, in particular the blackberry, and now the ivy. On sunny days, our bees have been out collecting the lovely yellow pollen and struggling back to the hives with their little baskets brimming over. It's such an important source of protein for brood rearing at this time of year and in the early spring. The nectar, however, tends to produce a rock-hard honey which the bees cannot use as



stores during the winter.

On opening a hive in the spring, you may find frames part filled with hard, dark, waxy looking honey.

Did you know that in folklore, the Ivy (officially named Hederer) has long been associated with good luck, fun and happiness? Growing it over the walls of your house is said to bring good fortune. Bacchus, the god



of wine, wore a garland of ivy in his hair (as shown in the image on the left), and innkeepers hung garlands of ivy around their doors to show that good wine could be found within.

For a man to dream of his future bride, he must pick an ivy leaf on 31st October and place it under his pillow. For a woman to dream of her future husband, she must collect ivy leaves and recite this poem

*"Ivy, ivy I love you
In my bosom I put you
The first young man who speaks to me
My future husband he shall be"*

Sweet dreams everyone!

Maggie Curley

FINDING THE QUEEN: PART TWO

In part one in last month's Bee Talk I explained the need to be relaxed about finding your queen because you will then be more likely to find her. So long as you can see day old eggs and there are no queen cells you can try another day.

However, if she remains elusive, place a spare empty brood chamber inside the upturned roof. Take a couple of frames out of the hive and place in the empty hive, placing them close together but spaced about 50mm from the wall of the brood box. Repeat this with further frames keeping the pairs about 50mm apart until you have three pairs of six frames spaced out in the box.

Space out the frames in the original hive in the same way and leave both brood boxes for a few minutes. The queen usually wants to move into the dark so if you now lift out pairs of frames and open them like a book you should find her.

Another method is to shake all the bees into your empty brood box, returning the frames cleared of bees back into the hive. Place a queen excluder over the brood box the bees have been shaken

into and put the original brood box with all the frames on top but have a really good look at all the frames and walls of this box to make sure the queen isn't there.

Leave the hive for an hour, or even the next day. Open the hive and put the brood box with frames and most of the bees to one side. The bees will have risen up into the top box to care for the brood. Carefully lift the queen excluder as she should be clinging to the underside.

This method is well described in beekeeping books but when I first tried it out I found the queen is often surrounded by a bunch of bees which you have to break up using your finger and this gets her running about too. What works for me is to leave one frame of brood in the bottom box and even I can usually find the queen on this one frame!

One of the reasons for wanting to find the queen is to manage swarming. It is possible to carry out swarm control without finding the queen and I will explain how to do this early next year.

Mike Townsend

PROFILE: DAVID STOTT

David Stott was ready for a sit down and a cuppa when I came over to visit him on a Monday morning in mid-September. The previous day he'd brought his hives back from the Derbyshire moors where the bees had been foraging on heather for a couple of months. Having unloaded the heavy boxes the night before at his home at Thorn Furlong Farm near Stockton he justifiably was going to take it easy the next day.

David has been keeping bees since 1993 and what started out as a hobby soon grew into a commercial business. One of the eminent beekeepers in our branch, he has a few tales to tell from his experiences in growing his Tomlow Bee Farm brand from just a handful of hives to well over 300.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

While David showed an interest in his father's beekeeping hobby, which he took up once retired and kept the hives at their home in Lancashire, it was only when David and his wife Mary decided to move to Thorn Furlong Farm in the early 1990s that he had the opportunity to pursue the hobby himself.

"After we'd been here for about a year and had bought some chickens and sheep I thought I'd try keeping bees too. I bought three colonies in WBCs from John Taylor in Moreton Morell in April 1993. He helped me move them into the garden and said that they'd be fine all I needed to do was look at them every weekend.

"I hadn't joined a beekeeping branch at that stage or done any training and so I wasn't in a position to recognise what was a good or bad colony, but looking back on it I obviously got three very good colonies because within a matter of a week or two they had completely filled the single super. I removed these supers and somehow extracted the honey without any equipment and then put them back on the hives only to find that the next weekend they were full again. I just couldn't believe it and I thought to myself, I'm going to do a lot more of this," laughs David.

From there he slowly increased his hive count through buying colonies from various local beekeepers. He had by then also joined WLBK but admits that it was more for insurance purposes than for meeting fellow beekeepers. It took a hospital visit for him to become a more active member.

"I had to go into Warwick hospital to have an operation on my knee. There were three or four other chaps on my ward and when the chap opposite got discharged he came over to say goodbye and it was only then that he saw what my surname was. He asked whether I was a beekeeper, which I thought was the weirdest question to be asked out of the blue.

"He then went on to tell me he was Bernard Collins, one of the great members of WLBK, and had recognised my name and told me that now that I'd joined WLBK I had to come to the meetings," recalls David.

And that's what he did. In those days only around four or five members turned up for the meetings out of a membership of around 20. It wasn't long before David became treasurer of the branch, a role he took on for 12 to 14 years before handing the baton on to Val Dillon.



David doing something other than beekeeping

SETTING UP A HONEY COOPERATIVE

After a few years of keeping bees and increasing his stocks, David became a member of the Bee Farmers Association. Then through an advert he spotted in one of the beekeeping magazines he also became involved in a honey selling cooperative. He remembers that the advert was placed by Sam Greenback in Sutton Coldfield who was asking for expressions of interest from beekeepers to start a cooperative.

"It was the mid 1990s and English honey in bulk was changing hands at such a low price that it was hardly worth selling and what Sam Greenback had discovered was that for this reason many small scale and medium scale beekeepers had been storing their honey for years in garages and even attics. Following a meeting with other interested beekeepers like myself he started what became the first honey cooperative.

"I was secretary for quite a long time and by the time I left we had around 200 members. So, members would join and we would bottle their honey and supply it to the likes of National Trust shops, Tesco and Essential Trading, a wholesaler of health foods," describes David.

Through his role as secretary, David met many commercial beekeepers and so when he finished his full-time job around eight years ago he thought he'd try his hand at becoming a bee farmer. He already had about 100 hives and soon increased this amount by approaching local farmers and asking whether he could keep bees on their property. Today, while it tends to fluctuate, he generally has about 300 to 350 hives.



The hives set up for fruit tree pollination

THE BENEFITS OF QUEEN REARING

To increase his stocks, much like other commercial beekeepers, David started out by buying in queens to head up splits he made early in the season. However, with a disappointingly large proportion of these queens failing, he decided that a better solution was to raise his own queens, which is an aspect of beekeeping he has concentrated on quite a lot.

"When you buy queens they've generally been hanging about outside a hive for quite a few days and I just don't think that works very well. So I much prefer to produce queen cells, which I then keep in an incubator for the last four days of their development and then graft some more every four days. This means that for the period I need them I will always have ripe queen cells that I can use to make splits and nucs," he explains.

Being a commercial bee farmer David decided to sell his own branded honey, which he called Tomlow after the small hamlet where his farm is located near Stockton, and bottling it and selling it independently of the honey packers. This has proven a successful route for him.

"I think there is definitely a very significant added value to something that comes from a small supplier and I'm always surprised at how many people make the effort to get in touch to say how much they enjoy the honey," says David.

Bottling the honey himself also became far easier (and also meant he no longer had a sticky kitchen floor) when he was able to set up his own extraction facility at his farm through funding from the European Union's Rural Development Scheme. With around 40% of the cost covered by the EU, David invested in some decent extraction equipment. Alongside making his own operation easier, when a fellow beekeeper asked whether he could extract his honey, David has since offered an extraction service to local beekeepers for



Delivering the hives at the heather moors

a small fee (which, I for one, am very grateful for as it keeps the stickiness out of my kitchen!).

BEEES ON THE MOVE

While David's apiaries are located within a 20 mile radius of his farm, he does move some for pollination. Early in the season, he takes up to 130 hives to Kent for apple and pear pollination, and then later in the season hives will go to the Derbyshire moors for the heather or to Norfolk for the ivy.

And it's during these trips whilst moving bees that David recalls his most amusing or interesting beekeeping anecdotes. The first was when he was helping a good friend Jim Hopkins, who has since passed away but was well known in the branch, move 12 of his hives back to Warwickshire from borage fields in Lincolnshire. With the recent advent of polystyrene hives, Jim decided to put his woodworking skills to the test and made these 12 hives from polystyrene that he'd purchased. Having recently come out of hospital after a major operation and not being able to lift anything, David offered to go with Jim to Lincolnshire and help lift the hives on and off the trailer.

"When we arrived at the site I was looking at these polystyrene hives and I asked Jim what he used to paint them with because it looked like there was this corrugated paint that was all falling off. He said it was just normal paint that was in his shed but when I lightly tapped the outside of one of the hives with my hive tool, I noticed that the layer of paint was still there but what wasn't there was the polystyrene as the bees had chewed through it all. So, basically all there was in one hive in particular was 12 brood frames with a thin layer of dried paint surrounding them," says David.

"Jim was chuckling to himself in the front seat of the truck saying, 'you've got a problem there boy'. I ended up transferring those bees into a makeshift hive I'd made by stacking two supers on top of each other. Once the bees had calmed down, I strapped them up and we drove home. That's the kind of problem you just don't anticipate."

On another occasion he again went to collect bees. This time it was from the Derbyshire moors with another beekeeper friend, Brian Smith. It was late September and the 30 hives being brought back were on a very chilly bit of exposed moorland. David decided that the bees wouldn't be flying in this weather and so they wouldn't bother plugging up the entrances, they'd just put the hives on the trailer and drive home. What he failed to remember was that the temperature would increase the further off the moors they got. At midnight when they drove the bees onto the field where they were going to overwinter they were met with a surreal sight.

"I remember getting out the van and not being able to figure out what was going on as the hives and trailer floor were alive with a carpet of bees. There were bees absolutely everywhere. I didn't know what to do for the best but decided that we should unload the hives and put them on the stands and just brush all the bees off the trailer onto the grass.

"I came back early the next morning and thought I'd encounter a mass of dead bees, but I didn't spot a single dead bee anywhere. I don't know whether they'd gone back into the right hive but they were all in hives and I don't think they lost any queens either. It was quite remarkable really," recalls David.

With another beekeeping season drawing to an end, David reflects back on the year, which has brought with it a bounty of heavy supers and it's this strenuous side of beekeeping that makes him look towards retirement. But it won't be for another couple of years and as we know from having profiled other bee farmers in these pages, retirement means downscaling not stopping.

Tanya Weaver

BEEKEEPING IN THE 1960'S

A friend clearing out his father's house thought of me when he came upon a Young Farmers' Club Guide (Booklet No 2; No 1 being 'The Farm') entitled 'Bee Keeping'. Borrowed, or maybe lifted, long ago, from the library of Wiveliscombe Secondary Modern School in Dorset, it was accompanied by a catalogue from Taylors of Welwyn (1960), stamped by their local agent, 'Hawkes and Sons Ltd., Engineers and Ironmongers'.



Chapter headings like 'The Occupants of the Hive', and 'The Usefulness of the Bee', date the book charmingly. And the illustrations, all black and white photos of smiling, Brylcreemed middle-aged men in tank tops, one of them assisted by his interested little boy, are very evocative.

In none of them is the beekeeper shown wearing any sort of protective clothing – not even gloves. You wonder if bees have become more aggressive in the past 60 years. Although a smoker is shown in action, the most significant piece of protective equipment is a curly pipe. No women beekeepers are shown; perhaps smoking the pipe put them off?

Yet all the information and advice that I have read in the booklet is sensible, practical, and completely relevant. The craft is unchanged, and apart from some dated wording ('bees can be found in some queer places') the booklet would be an excellent guide to a starting beekeeper today.

The new beekeeper, however, would welcome the prices in the



catalogue. Taylors Modified National Hive in flat pack is seventy shillings and eightpence (or seventy-eight shillings and sixpence, made-up). A honey extractor like mine is eight pounds; the 'Whirlwind' electric extractor ('Mark IV' – you wonder what went wrong with the previous three) is £34, including a four-speed motor.

There is protective equipment modelled here. Veils, to be worn with a trilby of course, are available in a variety of styles. Somehow, they bring back to me the science fiction stories of 'Quatermass' on-black and-white television. The wearer of the 'combined hat and veil' looks distinctly threatening; heaven help any bee stinging him. There are no bee suits – not even tops, advertised. A collar-and-tie was clearly enough to keep the bees at bay.

The books came my way because my friends brought his three children to see my hives. With child suits for them, and an adult one for Dad, they were treated to an impressive display by my bees, and they went home with a jar of honey.

Maybe one day these beekeepers of the future will find some of our present practices just as archaic.

John Stringer

If any of our WLBK members have similarly come across some interesting beekeeping material from the past, please do share it with us as it always makes for fascinating reading. Email our editor Tanya at tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

EXTRACTING HEATHER HONEY

Most members came back from our Branch heather apiary this year with some honey and we have to remember that even if there wasn't a surplus in the supers the brood box is likely to be well stocked with winter feed. We now have extracting the heather honey to look forward to. Heather honey is rather different because being thixotropic means it needs to be squeezed out of the comb.

The cost of a heather press is hard even for the most enthusiastic beekeeper to justify, so again our members benefit from the resources we have in the branch in the form of a powerful press normally used in the vine industry.

The combs of honey are cut out from their frames and wrapped in special cloths, stacked between racks of wood before the giant press squeezes the honey out.

The photographs below show this operation witnessed by a reporter from the BBC Radio 4 'Farming Today' programme. Their journalist tracked the whole process, with Clive Joyce taking her up to the very wet heather moor, before returning to the Branch extraction facility together with their sound recordist and his fluffy mic. Having been rain soaked twice she asked 'is it really worth it?' As the honey was squeezed out, the unit was filled with the heady perfume and she was able to tell her listeners that 'yes it was'.

Mike Townsend



HINTS & TIPS

- Your colonies should have the required 20kg/40lb of stores for the winter by now. As the weather gets colder the bees find it too difficult to process the sucrose into stores. If you do still have a feeder on then check if the syrup is being consumed. If not, remove it and any empty brood or super boxes that have been used as feeder cases. Any remaining sugar will ferment and go mouldy and leaving empty boxes on top of the brood box will dissipate heat over the winter and so cool the colony.
- The 20kg of stores will be consumed over the winter and if fully digested will generate some 20 litres of water. Some of this water will be recycled in the hive but most of it has to be disposed of outside the hive. It will be too cold for the bees to carry it out so the only means of reducing the humidity in the hive is through good air circulation. Ventilation is vital so check the roof ventilation mesh to make sure it is free of propolis and ensure the varroa board is removed once you have monitored the levels. Check you have taken the porter bee escapes out of the crown board and when you open the hive for oxalic acid treatment in December you can place a match stick under each corner of the crown board to further aid airflow.
- Painting the runners of frames with Vaseline. I do this when I flame and re-paint the frame each winter and it stops the bees propolis-ing the whole super or brood box into one lump. It makes the runners much easier to clean as well. These are metal runners- I don't use plastic (Many thanks to Jane Medwell for this timely tip).

HELEN ESSEX

If you have any hints or tips that you would like to share, please send them to Helen on h.essex@virgin.net

The editor of Bee Talk is Tanya Weaver. Please send content for the newsletter to her by the 28th of each month:
tanyaweaversa@yahoo.co.uk

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OF WARWICKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
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