

WEST SUSSEX HONEY FESTIVAL 20-21 Sept 2003

It is felt by some that honey shows in their current form are in terminal decline and West Sussex Beekeepers Association are attempting to address the situation. A sub-committee was formed and a brainstorming session was held, but before trying to change anything we looked at the current situation. We made comparisons with, say, 40 years ago. This was not to look back at the "Good old days" but to try and tailor our approach in order to make honey shows much more appealing to both exhibitors and visitors. We found that little had changed and came to the following conclusions.

The classes are largely the same

Apart from the decline of sections and addition of soft set classes this is largely true. Why do we have to confine classes to hive products anyway?

The average beekeeper has less colonies.

At one time there were many beekeepers with 20+ colonies. It was obviously easier for them to find a frame for extraction or be able to enter in all colour classes. Perhaps a move towards classes that don't rely on colour would be possible.

The average age of beekeepers is much older

Their children have grown up and will not get involved. There is little support for junior classes as a result.

Beekeepers now do more with their hive products

Honey is used in the kitchen much more and wax is used creatively.

Communication is much better

Can we attract entries and visitors from other counties?

There are less beekeepers

This does mean we may have less entrants but by diversifying we may reduce the number of classes they *can't* enter. We will also need to attract the non beekeeping family members and friends.

People expect to be entertained more

Those who do things would rather do it for fun than with a purely competitive attitude.

We then looked at the whole concept of Honey Shows and established a few facts.

- Honey Shows are really only of interest to beekeepers and in particular those taking part.
- There is little or no interest to the general public.
- The exhibits are largely "overprepared" just for the showbench.
- There is little benefit to beekeeping in general.
- Very few people will go to a Honey Show and pay to get in.
- There are major opportunities missed.

Armed with these thoughts we then set about planning an event that would :-

- Not only be competitive but enjoyable as well.
- Satisfy the traditionalist Honey Show exhibitor.
- Attract those who for whatever reason do not currently support Honey Shows

- Diversify into bee and honey related classes to attract non beekeeping family members and the public.
- Provide an opportunity to advertise and sell British honey.
- Educate the general public in all aspects of bees and honey.
- Attract visitors especially families who may have attended for another reason.

We have created a radical schedule that includes most of the traditional classes and many others that we hope will not only get beekeepers to exhibit but non beekeepers as well, whether they be family, friends or members of the general public. Amongst these are :-

- "Honey For Sale" that will be judged by a commercial buyer simply on visual appeal and taste (with a honey judge confirming that the exhibits are fit for sale)
- Domestic classes including honey preserves, chutneys and sauces.
- Floral art with a bee or honey theme
- Item of verse
- The heaviest comb built from a frame of foundation that will be supplied
- Gift pack

The event will be called the "West Sussex Honey Festival" and will be held at Manor Nurseries, Runcton, Chichester on Saturday and Sunday 20-21 September this year. As well as the competitive classes the Festival will include observation and demonstration hives, demonstrations of honey extraction, a presentation of beekeeping equipment "through the ages" (and if any reader has historic equipment they are able to loan, please contact one of the addresses below), photographic displays on honeybees, bumblebees and wasps and, of course, honey tasting and sales.

To generate a closer social link between beekeepers, a Festival Awards Dinner will be held at the venue on the Saturday evening of the event.

For those wishing to make a day or even a weekend there are many attractions in the area including Arundel Castle, Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, Uppark, Fishbourne Roman Palace and the city of Chichester.

If any reader would like more information or a schedule of classes, please contact me, Roger Patterson at r.patterson@pattersonpressings.co.uk 01403 790637, John Stevens at ieem@compuserve.com. 01243 533559, or Entries Secretary Mrs Sue Cooper, Malthouse, Lower Street, Pulborough, Sussex, RH20 2BH. Woodbugs@pgen.net 01798 874061