



**FEDERATION OF  
BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS**  
President: Miss Margery Cooper

February 2010  
Number 639

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The Federation, its Council, and its Officers cannot be held responsible for the views expressed in the Newsletter or possible errors.

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## Future Events

Friday 12 <sup>th</sup> March	Leaver Memorial Lecture	See below
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## THE APIARY in FEBRUARY

The rather more typical January we've had, with snowfall making access difficult, particularly to those of us with out-apiaries. Finding the tops of our beehives with picturesque caps of snow will have turned the clock back for some of our more senior beekeepers. Actually, thick fluffy snow like this is potentially not as bad for a healthy bee colony, that is well housed in a sheltered location, as those in wet and driving rain, which has been our lot for many winters. When you do get through to your hives, you should see the roofs with melted spots from the colony's heat, you'd hope to see a good big melt spot right in the middle. This may take longer to appear where you are using WBC hives with their double walls and bigger airspace to the roof-point. If these conditions persist during February, you'll only want to take the roof-off if you consider it essential, do this briefly and make sure no snow or ice crystals are accidentally brushed onto the colony.

**Supplementary feeding.** This may be necessary. With our knowledge of the weight of the colony from our hefting in the autumn, which may have been on the light side, we may plan to put in some fondant. There are rather more recipes for fondant, also referred to as 'candy' than we may feel comfortable with: Please see here a recipe which has been successfully prepared and used by this beekeeper and is from a BBKA sponsored Internet link of a recent lecture by Brian Dennis, 'Management of Honeybees –Winter/Spring'

- Sugar 3lb
- Water ½ pint
- Cream of tarter pinch (optional)
- Salt pinch (optional)

Place sugar in a pan, heat the water separately to boiling. Stir over medium heat until the sugar is dissolved, making sure to avoid burning or scorching. Add the tartaric acid and salt if used, stir well and bring to boiling point. Simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to partly cool, then complete cooling while stirring, you can stir down in a water bath to speed cooling. When thick, pour into suitable containers (plastic 'takeaway' containers are ideal).

The fondant should be softish, you can start by placing downwards over the port in the crown board, if weather is milder, straight onto the frames with an eke and the crown-board on-top. I think one of the problems with making fondant is reliance on inaccurate cheap jam thermometers, these can be found for very little money these days in 'Morrisons' supermarket. These are the alcohol/glass tube type, the one I bought read 9 degrees Celsius low! So check your jam thermometer at 100 C when you are next boiling the spuds and make a calculation accordingly. The best temperature to be reached before you stop simmering for soft fondant candy is 114 C/237 F. Some recommend 117 C, though in this beekeeper's experience the result is rather hard.

The reason for the cream of tartar (tartaric acid) is to 'invert' the sugar, the bees do this naturally in their honey stomach's with the nectar they collect, apparently the very slight salt addition is preferred by the bees. Some authorities, including the redoubtable E.B.Wedmore, says these slight acidic and saline additions are bad for the bees.

Towards the end of February, in mild conditions start to feed light syrup, 1 lb/ 1 pint. If you are using Miller or Jiffy feeders float some bubble wrap covering the top of the syrup, this will virtually eliminate drowning. I prefer contact feeders for this reason.

Woodpeckers? Yes they're at it again! Members are reporting considerable problems. Buy some chicken wire, the smaller mesh type is best and construct a cage to cover your hives. Some beekeepers use netting, but be aware, you may find your woodpecker frozen to death tangled in the nets. Damage to your hives will need to be made good, but remember bees don't like winter disturbance and they've been traumatized enough already, so a little judicious patching-up, using plasticine and plastic wood will do until warmer weather when you can replace boxes etc., and do a more thorough job.

**Oxalic acid treatment:** The snows of January have possibly deterred us from opening up and trickling oxalic solution after the equinox as we may have planned. The reason for the timing is that it's best to attack the varroa when most vulnerable to decimation of their numbers, i.e. before their new generation in egg form, have been laid into uncapped brood cells, while the honeybee larvae is tiny. Best results are before the queen commences to lay again.

The queen will be deterred from laying in cold weather, treat if the temperature permits, you can open at min 2 degrees Celsius. Apply at 5 miles per seam of bees, don't double dose, the oxalic strength is sufficient to damage the mouth parts of the varroa mite, double dosing could cause damage to the honeybee. Unfortunately, recommended solution strengths for oxalic acid solution, vary nearly as much as recipes for fondant. From Internet gleaning, an active ingredient level of a maximum of 3.5 % oxalic seems most recommended (even though Thornes solution is 4.2 %). The oxalic acid crystals that beekeepers may have obtained from Thornes are 72 acid 35water and being deliquescent may have picked up more water on storage. Therefore a sensible recipe would appear to be: -

- 750 ml Distilled water (battery top-up water obtainable from Halfords etc) warmed
- 47 grammes oxalic acid dihydrate as supplied by Thornes.
- 200 grammes sugar.

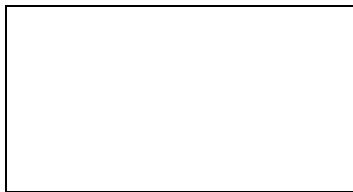
Dissolve the oxalic acid and sugar in the warmed distilled water and then top-up to 1 litre with cold distilled water.

Use within 2 weeks, store cool but try to warm-up a little e.g. by placing container close to a radiator before applying. If you've not got a syringe, worry not; a good size teaspoon is 5ml! Incidentally Danish beekeeping Authorities who have published methods for oxalic acid trickling as an anti varroa measure on the internet refer to it as a 'spring treatment' so presumably in those more northern climes they expect the queen bee to start laying considerably later than January! Good luck for the new season.

Triad.

## **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

It is with great sadness that we have to announce the death of the Wokingham President and former Federation President, Bert Spragg, on 9<sup>th</sup> January at the Royal Berks Hospital. He had suffered a fall and broken his hip. He underwent surgery and seemed to be recovering but died a few days later. He was not far short of his 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday. A full obituary will appear in a later issue of the Newsletter.



## **BCA Beekeeping Courses**

Those who have been keeping bees for 1-3 years and wish to extend their skills may be interested to know there is an 'intermediate' beekeeping course beginning in March.

It will include a variety of swarm prevention and swarm control measures, selecting desirable characteristics to improve stock, queen rearing, keeping bees healthy, disease recognition, preparation and presentation of honey.

There are still some spaces on this course, if you are interested there are more details on the BCA website [enquiries@bca.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@bca.ac.uk) under 'short courses'

In line with changes to beekeeping and technology the courses have been evolving at the college.

Additional sessions were added last year; a 'taster' opportunity for those wishing to view inside the hive before deciding to go further and an opportunity to check out the bees made ready for winter.

Winter theory courses are now supported by PowerPoint presentations (made available to students via moodle) DVD clips and photographs are used to illustrate a variety of aspects relating to beekeeping via an interactive white board.

The college apiary has been expanded so that there are more bees available for students to handle.

The emphasis on the practical course is on student manipulation of the colonies. In order to achieve this numbers are kept small and there are two tutors allocated to each session. This results in the places quickly becoming taken.

Each course is planned to provide new beekeepers the knowledge and skills required to keep their bees successfully.

All students are recommended join their nearest association in order to meet other beekeepers in their neighbourhood, extend their skills and gain BBKA insurance and benefits.

## **Letters to the Editor**

Response to Phil Chandler's article "British beekeeping sold to Syngenta".

By Dr Juliet Osborne

I am the Principal Investigator of the honeybee project that I believe Phil Chandler is referring to at the start of his article and I want to clarify and correct some points made and implied in his article. Firstly, he says "If you have not already heard, the giant pesticide manufacturer Syngenta has positioned itself as overseers of UK research into honeybee problems." This is untrue and therefore very misleading. Syngenta are not in charge of UK bee research – although they are certainly helping to get the issues recognised and supported. The UK government, via various initiatives, is putting millions of pounds into research concerning honeybee and other pollinators. The recent project that has been announced ([Link to Press Release](#)) is a collaboration between Rothamsted Research and University of Warwick. The majority (90%) of the funding for this project comes from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC); Syngenta are contributing £120K of the £1.1M awarded to this project. Rothamsted guards its independence and charitable obligation to publish research finding vehemently, and ensures that this is enshrined in all our contractual arrangements with funders and collaborators alike.

Leadership for this project rests firmly with myself and not with Syngenta (as implied by Phil Chandler's article). The project proposal was written by myself and my collaborators, although the original idea of building a multi-factorial mathematical model to incorporate a variety of factors affecting bees did come from a modeller at Syngenta who is fascinated by animal behaviour and populations. The research council funding application process entails review by three independent expert reviewers to ensure that the project meets the strict standards for excellence, relevance, impact and capability required. At no point have we felt unduly influenced by the funders- in any other way than to meet these strict criteria.

To explain the remit of the project, it is a complex one examining the multiple factors and the complexity of interactions between these different factors affecting honeybee colonies, whether these are within the landscape or within the hive itself. If there was a simple answer – there would be no need for this approach (see, for example, the recent EFSA report on "Bee Mortality and Bee Surveillance in Europe"). The project involves both models and experiments. The experimental part currently focuses on nutrition and disease, as these are two components that have been highlighted by a plethora of studies as playing an important role in honeybee colony health. Our expertise lies in these areas, so it makes sense for us to write a project based on these factors. However, that does not mean that we will ignore pesticides. The modelling aspect of the project will utilise information on all possible stressors that have been studied within large datasets from across the world that will be available to us. Many of these are surveys and monitoring studies by academic or government institutions in which pesticide exposure has been included amongst the factors considered. The advantage of using a modelling approach is that we can explore the relative importance of, and interactions between, the multitude of factors that affect honeybee colony strength and survival in the landscape, without having to do experiments on each factor individually nor repeat studies for which a multitude of data already exists. In the detail of the project we also explain that, should the modelling highlight alternative factors that are affecting honeybee survival or gaps in the data relevant to the analysis, then we will ensure they are integrated within the experiments. This project will not be done in isolation: it will benefit from the expertise of several internationally renowned bee researchers who have agreed to act as advisors on the project, including Dr Peter Neumann (leader of COLOSS, the European network on colony losses), Dr Peter Rosenkranz (chair of the German Bee Monitoring Programme), Dr Steve Martin (University of Sheffield) and Dr Keith Delaplane (University of Georgia, USA). Expert ecological modeller, Dr Volker Grimm (UFZ-Leipzig, Germany) will guide the mathematical elements of the project. My own belief is that if we narrow our options to just one possible factor (for example pesticides) we risk missing the bigger picture.

Secondly, I would like to counter Mr Chandler's claim that "This means that we can wave goodbye to any truly objective British bee research". We are scientists who have spent our working lives seeking objective truth through rigorous experimentation, and thoroughly analysed evidence. That is how we will do this project and the results will be published as normal, in an unbiased fashion, in peer-reviewed journals. Our aim is to help provide answers for beekeepers. That, and the pursuit of evidence-based knowledge, is why we are doing the work.

Syngenta's contribution is welcome to this project as it broadens the means to communicate findings from the project to those most able to influence potential solutions. Syngenta are already investing in a 5-year European & USA programme, Operation Pollinator, to increase forage resources available to pollinators in the arable landscape. Through their relationship with farmers, there is a clear potential to take points learned during the project to improve conditions for honeybees in the landscape. Better understanding of honeybee foraging behaviour also offers Syngenta a direct opportunity to improve their understanding of exposure of honeybees to pesticides in the agricultural landscape and to build these into their own assessments of environmental risk. Rothamsted Research and Warwick HRI will publish the findings, without influence, in both peer-reviewed journals and stakeholder-relevant publications enabling others to assess the finding alongside other independent research. My hope is that commentators, as well as scientists, try to keep a clear and unbiased viewpoint so we can really get to the root of these problems.

**Subject: Newsletter erratum: -**

I regret to advise you that the December 2009 edition of the Berkshire Newsletter contained some serious errors.

On page 2, under the heading 'From the Editor', the BBKA is accused in two places of endorsing pesticides that include neonicotinoids. This is entirely incorrect.

Many years ago, the BBKA gave its endorsement to pesticides containing pyrethroids, if properly applied by farmers. Pyrethroids are the same active ingredient as has been used safely by beekeepers in Bavazol etc for many years to treat varroa.

The BBKA does not endorse and has no intention of endorsing pesticides containing neonicotinoids. However, in order to have a balanced view of this matter, members should be aware that these products have yet to be shown by scientific research to be dangerous to bees if used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. The BBKA is urging the government to conduct that research in order to resolve this matter. Recently DEFRA issued a strongly worded statement, backed by scientific evidence, rejecting claims made by BugLife that these products are unsafe for bees and should be banned in the UK.

Members need to be aware that there are activists about who, although well intentioned in seeking to protect bees and other wildlife, have a tendency to make unfounded and occasionally misleading statements about pesticides etc and the BBKA's role in such matters. The BBKA takes bee health very seriously, as evidenced by the campaign it has been fighting on behalf of its members over the past three years. This campaign is not yet over.

Yours truly

Michael Sheasby - BBKA Vice Chairman and SW&MBKS Chairman

Switzerland is the latest country to ban the use of neonicotinoids..

**Your Regional Bee Inspectors are: -**

**Southern Region:** Nigel Semmence [nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk) Tel No: 01264 338694

The main website is: <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/public/Contacts/contacts.cfm>  
National Bee Unit, Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton, York. YO41 1 LZ  
01 904 462 510 <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk>

**South Eastern Region:** - Mr. Alan Byham. Fax/Telephone number: 020 8571 6450

**The Free Apis-UK newsletter is available at:**

<http://www.beedata.com/apis-uk/newsletters09/apis-uk0909.pdf>

Northern Bee Books have developed a new site to view and purchase books for beekeepers  
[www.GroovyCart.co.uk/beebooks](http://www.GroovyCart.co.uk/beebooks)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>C WYNNE JONES</b> Ty Brith Pentrecelyn Ruthin Denbighshire LL 15 2SR Tel. 01978 790279. Fax. 01978 790265 <a href="mailto:wynnejones@btconnect.com">wynnejones@btconnect.com</a> <a href="http://www.bottlesandjars.co.uk">www.bottlesandjars.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.beesupplies.co.uk/">http://www.beesupplies.co.uk/</a> PLEASED TO QUOTE FOR YOUR 2009 NEEDS SPECIAL PRICES ON APIGUARD - 30 HIVE TUBS A SPECIALITY VARROA TREATMENT - WAX FOUNDATION - AND MUCH MORE OUR PRICES WILL BENEFIT YOUR POCKET!! PLEASE ASK FOR OUR PRICE LISTS FULL OF SPECIAL OFFERS</p>
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Web: <http://www.berkshirebeekeepers.btik.com/>

Newbury Beekeepers' Association warmly invites you to the 28<sup>th</sup> annual Leaver Memorial Lecture, given by Dr Max Watkins who is research and development director at Vita (Europe) Ltd.

### What future for honeybees?

Max Watkins

Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010 at 7.30 pm  
The Sutton Hall, Stockcross, near Newbury, Berkshire

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01278 795147

## SOUTH CHILTERN BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

### Is Varroa, the black rat of beekeeping?

**Norman Carreck**, Bee Researcher at Sussex University took us through the latest work on Varroa, viruses and the likelihood that this combination was the key contributor to colony collapse disorder (CCD)

South Chilterns hosted the talk at their November meeting to a packed hall of 70+ people in Woodcote Village Hall.

His view is that the root of **these problems are associated with varroa and its role as a vector for disease transfer.**

He discussed this year's hot topic – colony collapse disorder especially in the USA. We were asked to think about how the symptoms for CCD are defined namely:

- ✓ Rapid loss of adult worker bees
- ✓ Few or no dead bees in the colony
- ✓ Colonies dead with excess brood
- ✓ Small cluster with the queen present

We have had these listed before. In 1995 – 1996 varroa arrived in the UK and the described symptoms were identical.

Colonies were found with high infestations of varroa mites – some survived and others died out? Mr Carreck posed the question why the variation in mortality?

The family of viruses including Kashmir Bee Virus (KBV) was suggested with conviction to be contributing factors to colony loss. Mr Carreck gave a good account of why this was the case demonstrating that the time lines fitted with when these viruses were found to be present and colony losses occurred. Experiments at Rothamstead also gave a positive correlation between KBV and colony loss.

In the USA, KVB is more prevalent in colonies suffering from CCD than those that are not. The considered opinion is that CCD is a complex of many factors. The KBV and related viruses are prominent in instances of CCD and are certainly strongly correlated.

Hygiene was proposed as the most important weapon to combat CCD along **with a toolbox of husbandry techniques** needing to be used, as there is no one, easy answer – especially with increasing resistance to many products.

One of the most promising solutions being tried is at Sussex University where they are breeding bees with enhanced Hygienic behaviour.

If you were able to breed these bees, then you may well reduce varroa infections. The consideration is that it is an inherited trait but not controlled by 1 gene so likely to be very complicated. This is simple in theory but not so easy in practice.

**His team hope to start rearing queens from this colony early next year so watch this space!**

Questions

- Have they sequenced all the candidate viruses? – yes Opinion is that many of the same virus has been given lots of different names by different researchers – likely to be the same virus and not different.
- Asked whether a move to using Apiguard in the spring and not in the autumn, as the second tray may take too long to be taken in – the 15-degree window may not last long enough. There is also a problem with when it gets too hot, the thymol evaporates and the bees abscond.
- What next? A European wide group has now been set up **COLOSS**. Carreck is a UK member of the management group. Looks into the factors causing CCD and is trying to standardise techniques and definitions of this problem. **The Journal due out in January 2010 is collating current research**

Is Oxalic acid any good with varroa? Don't know – no empirical evidence on this but you should know that Mr. Carreck uses it on his own bees!

Heidi Sheriden

Next Meeting: February 17<sup>th</sup> "Which Bee" by Terry clare.

Acting Secretary: - Joanna Shanagher. 01189 721067

<http://www.southchilternsbeekeepers.org.uk/>

## **SLOUGH, WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD BEEKEEPERS' SOCIETY**

As regular readers may remember from recent newsletters, our December meeting was the start of our campaign to persuade and help as many of our members as possible to 'have a go' at the BBKA Basic assessment in Beekeeping.

Tony Wolstenholme, our Education Officer, has been the driving force behind this and, as I have previously mentioned, we have mapped out a series of evening meetings to cover the syllabus in preparation for the optional assessment next summer. I don't think that any of the committee had any doubt that this would be of immense value to the new, fledgling beekeepers that have joined the Society in recent years, but how would the long-term, very experienced members feel about this?

Well, no one needed to worry! We had a huge turnout, a record attendance for at least 12 years – and the really rewarding part was that many of our very experienced experts attended, as well as a very large number of beginners, it turned out to be a fascinating evening. Tony managed to cover all of the first two sections of the syllabus, the natural history of the honeybee, basic equipment needed for beekeeping and some information about local foraging for the colony throughout the season.

There was a great mix of slides to support the talk – factual ones supporting the syllabus, produced by the BBKA, and some amazing photographs to illustrate the lecture and add some ‘awe and wonder’ to the evening.

It was a very inter-active session, with many discussions about the various aspects of the syllabus. As anyone knows, there are almost as many ways of approaching beekeeping as there are beekeepers, and our meeting was no exception. After quite amazing agreement on most matters, the relatively simple matter of how to pin together a frame left the audience very divided! There is obviously more than one effective way of doing this, but maybe we should practice the one approved by the BBKA, even if we only use it for the practical assessment!

I am sure we all appreciated the way Tony was able to cover these initial elements so quickly and efficiently. He has also offered to email out the notes and presentation slides to any members who would like them. In the list I saw, almost everyone signed up for this offer. If you were unable to attend the meeting and would like to receive them, please email Tony on [tonywolstenholme@aol.com](mailto:tonywolstenholme@aol.com).

Can I take this opportunity to remind you that there is no regular evening meeting in January – instead we are celebrating the festive season with our Annual Dinner, which will be held in Windsor on the 29<sup>th</sup> January. If you would like further details of this, or would like to book places, please contact Don Church on [donchurch@talktalk.net](mailto:donchurch@talktalk.net) or phone him on 01753 831939.

Our next regular evening meeting will be held on February 9<sup>th</sup>, when Tony Wolstenholme will again be leading the discussion, this time on colony management, the second part of our ‘Bee Basics’ course. I do hope we will see many of you there. In case there is anyone who has not joined us before, the meeting begins at 8pm. at All Saint’s Parish Church Hall in Alexander Road, Windsor SL4 1HZ. The Church is on the corner of Frances and Alexandra Roads and there is a small car park on site. However, because of new parking restrictions around the hall, if the car park is full it is advisable to park in Bolton Avenue, just a short walk away, where they do not apply. This is the next but one exit from the nearby roundabout and just before the exit for the hospital.

All details of our meetings and the shows can also be found on the website [www.wherecanwego.com](http://www.wherecanwego.com). - click SL4 + gardens + nature ( boxes ).

Can I also take the opportunity to wish everyone all best wishes for 2010?

All details of our meetings and the shows can also be found on the website: - <http://www.wherecanwego.com>. - click sl4 + gardens + nature (boxes)/

Newsletter items: Liz Juby Windsor (01753) 859382 [mail to](mailto:)

Chairman: Michael Sheasby, Farnham Common (01753) 642656. [mail to](mailto:)

## **READING & DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS’ ASSOCIATION.**

On Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December Reading beekeepers met for our final meeting of the year at Caversham Heights. We had a winter warming session with mince pies and a drop of warmed spiced cordial and we had the very great pleasure in enjoying a talk and demonstration by Martin Buckle. over many years he had judged, run numerous bee colonies on farm land, become expert in beeswax preparation, candle making and modelling where he has won many prizes at National Honey Shows.



Martin began by demonstrating how he cleans beeswax, reserving his best cappings and also utilizing less promising scrap beeswax, and how using his own design based on a traditional foundation press, can speedily produce foundation and the thin beeswax sheets he uses for producing his own amazing beeswax models, including traditional farm wagons, the powerful steam locomotive and coloured beeswax floral displays. With thin beeswax sheets he had produced, he demonstrated, using his modified electric soldering iron, the hollow cylinders and cubes that are the foundations of his structural modelling. It is amazing how, from a thin sheet and a few dabs of well applied heat delicate but strong structures can be produced. Beeswax is amazing material, as we know well from what our honeybees can build from it. Candle rolling and moulding followed, tips and demonstrations on prize-winning standard beeswax blocks. There was a chance to handle some of Martin's prize winning wax models, which as always, produced sounds of amazement from beekeepers seeing these for the first time, Martin gave us an opportunity for questions and answers.

Martin is a highly innovative and skilled person, and now produces beautiful beekeeper's skeps using the traditional bramble and straw, all of which he forages and prepares himself. You can see more on Martin's web site [martinatnewton.com](http://martinatnewton.com) , thanks to him and to all who attended.

Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2010. Caversham Heights Methodist Hall, We would like to thank our speaker David Charles for traveling from Somerset to be with us, and for Reading Beekeepers for attending in good numbers to greet David and receive from him a fascinating and detailed talk, fully illustrated with pictures, many reproductions of original photographs from 150-100 years ago. David's Subject, whom he has studied in detail, was the venerable and far famed innovating beekeeper and long-time chairman of the BBKA, William Thomas Cowan. W.T. Cowan finished his beekeeping days (d1926) as president of Somerset Beekeepers Association who have David's membership, at the time W.T. Cowan was president of the BBKA, but had been chairman virtually since the founding in 1874 until 1922, and having written a highly successful book 'British Beekeeper's Guide' which ran into many editions and widely translated, became owner and editor of 'The British Beekeeping Journal' which will be remembered well; again virtually from its inception in the 1870's until the 1920's.

W.T. Cowan spent the first 14 years of his life in St. Petersburg Russia, son of a civil engineer who was working on a long term contract, building up what was then in the 1840's, a virtually new city. Returning to the UK, following his father into engineering, Cowan married well and had considerable support from his wealthy father-in-law, another civil engineer and entrepreneur. He became interested in the movement to improve British beekeeping, converting the craft from straw-skeps to removable frame hives. He developed the Cowan pattern hive along with other innovators in this field, the first functional microscope for beekeeping use, suitable for identifying foul-brood spores and successfully developing Cowan pattern centrifugal extractors, which were sold in the USA and Canada, in their final form they can still be found today. David gave us great detail of W.T. Cowan's eventful life, his visits to Canada and the USA (he became a resident in California for a time and set up his son as a fruit grower and processor there).

The tragic loss the SS Mohegan in 1898 on the Manacles rocks off Cornwall, where two of his grown-up children returning to Britain were among the 120 people drowned. Incredibly, David, has on permanent loan to him and shown to us, a gold headed ebony walking cane presented to W.T. Cowan by the city fathers of Montreal Canada while a guest there for the first Canadian Great Exhibition, where beekeeping was featured, following Canadian visits to a BBKA honey show at the British and India exhibition at south Kensington. He was very much a man of his time and one of the driving forces in modernizing beekeeping. He is now considered something of a controversial figure. We are not likely to see another like William Thomas Cowan for many a long year! We were very grateful for such a talk by David, his sequence of pictures showing the evolution of 'teaching children beekeeping' was highly thought provoking, starting 100 years ago with no protection, just turned-up collars through to netting tied over girls hats, but bare legged, to the 'little spacemen' of today! We are much the wiser, and with expanded minds on the last 150 years of our craft thanks to David Charles.

Woodpeckers! Hazel and Michael Blackburn had some information for us on their struggles with the green woodpecker this winter. Two of Michael's seven hives at Cross Lanes apple farm have been more or less under constant attack. They are visiting the hives every two days to untangle these birds from nets being used as protection. We had a look at a photo of Hazel holding one of these impressive but destructive birds having just been untangled. Dangerous looking beak, according to Hazel they haven't been trying to peck or even struggle very much when handled, but Michael informs us that they can peck through his aluminium mesh with 2mm foil beneath that he's been using at for temporary repairs!

Our next meeting at the usual venue is on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February starting at 7.30. We are privileged to have a talk by Reading beekeepers association member and world authority Dr. Michael Keith-Lucas. Subject: Pollen in Forensics. Be there!

[www.rbka.org.uk](http://www.rbka.org.uk)

Secretary: Mr. R. Kiff, Tel. 0118 966 5358


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## Wokingham & District Beekeepers Association

We had a very good attendance at the AGM on November 11<sup>th</sup> with 26 people present. Our Chairman, Peter Seagrave, welcomed everyone and he was pleased to see some people who have come back into beekeeping after a break. He outlined the year's activities at the Club apiary and said that from one hive at the start of the year, we now had five colonies.

The Christmas dinner, which was held at the Three Frogs, had been a great success. 38 members and spouses were present. Peter said he would organise a dinner at the same venue for late in December and that he had been to see Bert Spragg that very day, although Bert was now 101, he was still active and talkative. Peter said that the Club is doing well and the finances are in good health, for which he thanked Neil Marshall for his work on the accounts. He also mentioned the Tuscany trip, which will be the subject of a meeting in 2010. In conclusion, he thanked various members for their work for the Club, such as Rosemary Bayliss for catering at our meetings, John Edwards for his work with the web site, and Eric Thompson for putting frames and hives together.

The Christmas dinner was held on December 23<sup>rd</sup> which was the day after a heavy snowfall. We had a good turn out with about 25 members and spouses present. The food was generally very good and everyone enjoyed themselves.

A hitch discovered at the last minute regarding the speaker booked for the 9<sup>th</sup> December meeting, meant that he could not come, but would be coming in March. I volunteered to do the talk I was booked to do in March. This was entitled 'Equipment Assembly'. I took along various items from the Black Museum of old equipment culled from the Club's hives after I had cleaned them up. The worst examples of frames hardly held together with bits of old wood and 3" nails acting as lugs were duly broken up to show how weak the wood had become. Ancient spilt top bar frames were shown to the audience as examples of equipment that must be 40 or more years old. Such equipment has no place in any modern hive, as it makes it difficult to manipulate the frames, and they tend to fall apart when prised out of the boxes. A great controversy broke out when I said that bottom bars should never be nailed together. Some members agreed and some disagreed. When more than two beekeepers are gathered together, they can never agree unanimously on how to do anything! Everyone seemed to enjoy the evening, which was a relief to me, as I had to stand in at short notice.

We had all been looking forward to the 13<sup>th</sup> January meeting, which was to have been an illustrated talk by John Edwards on the trip to Tuscany, which was organised by Neil Marshall. However, the snow, which fell in the days just before the meeting, meant we had to cancel it as the car park at the hall was still covered in slush and could have resulted in cars getting stuck. We tried to let everyone know by email or telephone and Neil took the trouble to put a notice on the door of the hall to advise anyone who had not received the message. Our apologies to anyone who did turn up that night. We will be having the talk as an extra meeting on the programme on 14<sup>th</sup> April. Do try to come along as the talk promises to be very interesting (see important announcement below).

Now that our numbers are increasing, we have found the room at St Paul's Church Hall to be too small. After a long search, we have secured a new venue, courtesy of Maurice Hempson, who is one of our new members. From February onwards we will be meeting at Wokingham Bowls Club, Reading Road, RG41 1EG. This is located almost opposite the hall we have been using so it will be just as convenient to get to but it has the advantages of having a larger room, it is cheaper to hire and it has a bar! Many thanks, Maurice, for obtaining the agreement of the Bowls Club. So make sure you go to the new venue from now on.

[www.WDBKA.ik.com](http://www.WDBKA.ik.com)

Derek Porter Hon. Sec. 0118 979 0326

### **A Reminder:**

**If your membership renewal has not been updated, third party and foul brood insurance cover has ceased. If lapsed, foul brood cover will not be effective until after 40 days from renewal.**

**See also:** <http://beebase.csl.gov.uk/pdfs/fbleaflet.pdf>

**Watch bees on-line at** <http://www.sysonby.com/beecam>

**Varroa jacobsoni** (Varroa destructor). Early research, updated.

**Contributions**, this includes **E-mails**, to arrive with the Editor by the **FIRST POST** (Around 10.00am) on the twentieth of the Month for the Following Month, Contributions received after this will be held over for a later month.

To enable the Advertisement Manager to place adverts with the Editor for the 20th of the month deadline; adverts should be sent well before this time.

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**Bees for sale.** 5-frame nuc's, marked queens. Collection only. Tel. 07076 621 907. Ian Davison