



THE FEDERATION OF BERKSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATIONS

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Number 663

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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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The Apiary in April

The end of March and oil seed rape is coming into flower. Pollen is already coming in fast indicating that brood rearing is in progress, and your bees may be building up rapidly. If you haven't done this already, at least one super filled with comb or foundation should be in use. Put your excluder on when the bees have started working in it.

Where colonies are unexpectedly populous, suspect that another colony has absconded from your own, or someone else's apiary and may have joined forces, this happens more often than most people realise. Some beekeepers have found hives bereft of bees but with stores remaining, As yet, there is no positive explanation for this phenomenon, labelled, "colony collapse disorder". It is said that nature repays her debts so expect swarms.

Be ready for the unexpected, we do not know how the spring drought will affect us or how long it will last. A change in the weather could improve conditions and hopefully, result in a bumper harvest. However, try to prevent swarming.

Honey from oil seed rape is already coming in and should be extracted as soon as the super is capped. Extract it at once before the honey has time to cool. If it still won't come out, bad luck - you'll have to scrape it off with a spoon and soften it in some way before you can strain it. This is a pity because it means destroying the drawn comb which will have to be rebuilt by the bees. A big disadvantage of this early crop is that it sets almost as soon as it comes off the hive. Yet, we continue to have a love/hate relationship with the stuff!

As far as possible, old combs should be replaced with new foundation, better still, replace the entire brood chamber, instructions can be found on "BeeBase". Later in April you can make increase, either by division, or making nuclei, your tutor or mentor should be able to advise you, again consult BeeBase!

Add supers in advance of requirement, in spite of the drought, conditions can change suddenly catching unwary beekeepers out, particularly if oil seed rape is in close proximity. Remember, bees on oil seed rape can be touchy; indeed, Mediterranean strains can be very spiteful.

A spare hive, preferably fitted with new foundation can be useful if your bees do what is natural and swarm.

If possible, prior to purchasing bees (from a reliable source with a certificate of inspection), handle the bees that you are going to buy. A beginner is better off with a nucleus so that confidence will grow with it. Near native bees are usually easy to handle and are better able to cope with our conditions than many of the imported strains and are more frugal with stores. Take a lesson from the Scots, there was little disease found prior to recent imports of non-native strains. The dark near native bees will more readily reject sick larvae than any others.

Triad

NBU ADVICE for OBTAINING BEES:

JOIN BEEBASE

By joining BeeBase you can access beekeeping information and ask for advice or help from the Bee Unit: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>.

Your Regional Bee Inspectors are: -

Southern Region: Nigel Semmence at: nigel.semmence@fera.gsi.gov.uk,

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, tel: 01 904 462 510, email: <mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk> .

South Eastern Region: Mr Alan Byham, fax/tel: 020 8571 6450.

Wokingham and District Beekeepers' Association

Peter Seagrave welcomed everyone to the last winter meeting of the season and opened the evening with the following requests.

Rosemary Bayliss suggests that as many people as possible, take the BBKA's "Basic" assessment this year. This is aimed at the beginner/novice beekeeper. Dates available for our group are 16th June and 14th July and the venue will be local to our area. Further information and a guide to the sort of questions that will be asked can be found on the BBKA website. For those people who were not at the meeting, if you would like to take part please contact Rosemary or myself.

Peter advised that we are still looking for volunteers to run the apiary sessions on Sunday afternoons. Alex Atherton is our Apiarist with Bob Loades as her Deputy. Committee members have kindly agreed to run most of the sessions but we still need cover for some weeks. If anyone can help, please speak to Peter, Alex or any of the committee members. We are also looking for novices/helpers to take the notes. This is an ideal opportunity for new beekeepers to gain some experience of record keeping and what to look for in their own inspections.

Neil Marshall, our Hon Treasurer, then presented his report for the year ended 30th September 2011. Copies had been circulated electronically before the meeting and paper copies were available on the night. Full members are up from 53 to 77 which is good news. We have six friends, one Partner and one Honorary Member, making a total of 85. Neil thanked Bob Loades and John Edwards, who inspected and signed off the accounts as Examiners, Jeff Parsons for erecting the post and rail fencing around the hive and Wally Smallbone for the re-roofing of the donkey shed. He also thanked the Wokingham Bowls Club for the use of their venue, which they provide at a very reasonable rent and Maurice Hempson and Paul Aylett for their sterling work in opening the club, running the bar and generally making sure each event runs smoothly. Maurice and Paul have agreed to carry on for the next winter season, so we are especially grateful as it means we can continue to use the Bowls Club.

At the moment we have six colonies, all on 14" x 12" brood boxes. We collected approximately 160lbs of honey last spring but due to poor weather in Hurst there was no late summer crop. Money from the sale of this honey has been invested in the club.

Neil proposed increasing the subscription fees for next season from £27 to £28 for full members and from £12 to £13 for friends of the Association, as the BBKA will be increasing their annual fee by £1. This was carried unanimously but was officially proposed by Ted Buckingham and seconded by Maurice Hempson.

Our financial position remains strong and cash reserves are adequate to meet our financial commitments in the future.

Adoption of the accounts was proposed by Gerald Janes and seconded by Ted Buckingham.

Peter Seagrave then advised that the Club will be going ahead with the purchase of a microscope and associated equipment. Alex Atherton will be leading the group and if anyone would like to join please speak to Alex.

As the club has grown it was felt that we need some guidelines on how the apiary should be run going forward. A subcommittee of Alex, Bob Loades and Nigel Perkins have therefore put together a mission statement that includes time management. The plan is to make sure that each Sunday afternoon session lasts a maximum of two hours. The nominated beekeeper for that session will inspect the hives and will then run a Q & A session in the car park at the end of the session. This will limit the amount of time the hives are open. We also plan to run separate novice days, equipment building sessions and honey extraction workshops. Bob Loades kindly volunteered to be Assistant Apiarist.

The records will also be available online, so they can be updated easily and are available for all members to view. The summer season will run every Sunday from 1st April to early September. Alex thanked Bob and Nigel for their input into the report. Alex has copies if anyone would like one and if you would also like access to the online records please let Alex have your email address and she will add you to the Google Docs account.

We still have some packs of the notelets, which are available for £4.50 per pack to members. Bob has frame hooks available for £5 pair (WBC and nationals but can get others if needed).

We now also have an observation hive that has been donated to the club. Peter will look after it on behalf of the members. It takes standard National frames and is available free of charge for use by club members. Peter also kindly offered to help if someone does not know how to use it.

Our guest speaker for the evening was Roy Cropley on Commercial Bee Farming, in this particular case in New Zealand. The farmer in question had 600 hives in a country where everyone uses Langstroth. He only uses brood boxes, no supers, no crown boards and no queen excluders. When it comes time to extract the honey, the bees are removed by banging the boxes so most of the bees drop into the lower box. A frame is then removed so the remaining bees can be brushed from the frames, one by one, whilst they are in situ, into the box below. He uses black metal frames coated with a very thin layer of wax at a cost of about 50p/frame.

The season is September – April and the hottest week is Christmas. Avocado and Kiwi are the first to need pollination. He is paid £70 per hive. However, Kiwi does not provide nectar, so to encourage the bees they grow runner beans up them but it does mean the bees need feeding twice a week, otherwise they would starve, so it is quite onerous and the profit is not huge. Manuka also comes into flower at about the same time. It looks like a small daisy and it sets like a gel. It has a strong flavour and 20 years ago you could not give it away but since its medicinal properties were discovered it is very popular, although not all Manuka has the same enzymes so this particular farmer sells his for food only. It also requires very specific treatment to remove from the frames which Roy covered in some detail.

Interestingly, there are no bee inspectors in New Zealand so it is up to individual beekeepers to attend a three day course, where they learn all they need to know about AFB. They can then check their own hives, and those of their neighbours. If they find any affected hives then the bees are destroyed and the equipment burnt or sterilised at 160 degrees for 10 minutes. There is no EFB in New Zealand.

Commercial bee keepers also re-queen every year to avoid swarming. If you reuse a queen cage Roy recommends washing it in warm water and soda before reuse, in case the last bees carried Nosema and this way you don't transfer to the new occupants of the cage.

Roy then gave a couple of very useful tips for introducing a queen into a hive, usually with very good results. Make a deep paper envelope with newspaper. Scoop about 100 bees into the bag and turn the top over. Shake gently to upset the bees and then quickly pop the queen in, and shake again. Put it closed in the centre of the hive and leave them to eat their way out.

By the time they escape the queen will smell the same and they will accept her. The second way, without removing the existing queen, is to introduce a ripe queen cell, with the sides protected but the bottom open, into the hive. This means they are unable to kill the queen larvae as they only sting through the side. When she emerges the bees think they have superseded. He usually achieves a 75% success rate using these methods.

He also recommends changing all combs every year, (early April) including disposing of any honey and brood (treat like a swarm). Shake the bees on to fresh foundation, feed with a gallon of syrup and put a queen excluder under the brood box to stop the queen absconding. If he keeps any frames he treats with acetic acid. To round off his talk Roy gave us a couple of interesting facts - A colony eats approximately 300lbs of honey and 50 lbs. of pollen every year. Thanks go to Roy for a great and informative evening.

Following Beulah's talk last month, when she mentioned a Snelgrove Board and its uses, a number of us had asked how it worked. Ted Buckingham had kindly agreed to give us a quick demonstration of his own home made version, which he has been using for a number of years. This proved very useful and timely as we are coming up to the start of the swarming season. Thank you Ted. Your explanation was very clear.

As I mentioned before, this is our last winter meeting so we wish everyone a successful summer season.

Lynn Janes. Hon. Sec. Mobile: 07721 338833

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Reading and District Beekeepers' Association

Saturday 17th July Reading & District Beekeepers Associations 4th Annual Bee Day at Trench Green Hall, Mapledurham.

A red-letter day for Reading Beekeepers, following our very well attended and successful bee-keeping courses in January, which is extended with a two session practical lesson in hive construction etc. in March. New members joining us to take-up the craft of beekeeping continues to increase. The attached photos show Reading Beekeepers Committee Member, Trudy Prynne manning our reception desk with Michael Blackburn's beekeeping stand in view behind. The other photo shows one of our speakers Ron Hoskins, well known to many Berkshire beekeepers for his Swindon Honeybee Conservation Group, and the innovative work on breeding hygienic bees he does there.



Ron gave an update on progress on this and a comprehensive illustrated talk on setting up and selecting an apiary, including Swarm Control. Much good advice there. Ron's site with its numerous nuclei takes care that returning bees can find their way home, many of us probably line-up our hives too closely, Ron aligns his in opposing directions even if not all can be south facing, and makes a visible characteristic mark on the hives which he believes, helps the bees to avoid 'south westerly drift' etc. Another salient point from Ron; he avoids 'purchased' beeswax foundation, potentially contaminated with low levels of pyrethrins (from a decade or more of Bayvarol and Apistan used by beekeepers), he uses plastic foundation frames, we probably tend to associate these more with bee farmers here but Ron buys in red or black ones from Europe, he's found the bees take to these more readily than the white we usually see, in fact some of his bees tend to 'build-away' from white plastic surfaces when he uses them.



Another demonstration was from Caroline Cavill, from Bee Good Handmade Products, 'From Hive to Boudoir' Using honey & beeswax from her own bees, and demonstrated very neat wax cleaning methods she formulated and made-up 'lip balm' and bath bombs'

Most of the other ingredients were available from supermarket shelves or by speedy on-line contact.

We had a splendid day with a very good attendance, plenty of enthusiastic newcomers, including a couple who plan to keep bees on their Bulmershe allotment. They walked to Trench Green from Cemetery Junction a good 4 miles! We were able to offer them a lift home.

Thanks to John Belcher who attended and answered queries from his stand, Marion Dabbs and Karen Challis for a busy time with our popular refreshments and to Tim Whitaker for booking the venue and for help setting-up (and cleaning-up). In fact Reading Beekeepers Association committee members and others should feel pleased with themselves for a good job done and hard work and donations of comestibles, raffle prizes (some of them they won-back!) and their time and enthusiasm..

April Meeting: - Mike Dabbs Apiary at Long Lane Tilehurst. On Sunday 22nd April, starting at 11-30. Mike and Marion have a number of colonies in their garden apiary; this is a follow-up visit to the previous one last summer. The Dabbs bees were healthy, vigorous, productive and even tempered; an ideal start for our 21012 summer programme, particularly for newer beekeepers. Contact Mike or any other committee member for full address. See you there!

.Jon Davey

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Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead Beekeepers' Society

At our February meeting, Norman Hughes presented a technique for raising queens using only a single hive. The Basingstoke and District BKA has been successfully using this method for quite some time. Norman went through the step-by-step process in great detail and described the equipment needed, with some entertaining beekeeping stories along the way! We are now considering raising our own queens at the Society's apiary using this technique.

Nigel Semmence (Southern Regional Bee Inspector) came to talk to us in March. His topic was 'bee health' - as you might imagine, this is a very wide ranging subject! However, Nigel managed expertly to convey a broad range of information, whilst also diving deeper into some important specifics, and fielding questions from the large audience at the same time. So as well as advising on apiary hygiene, describing the main brood diseases, varroa management, notifiable diseases and exotic pests, Nigel also presented initial data from FERA's Random Apiary Survey (RAS). The RAS was designed to establish the prevalence of honey bee diseases and pests in England & Wales by conducting risk-based inspections over 2 years - the aim being to gather enough data to be statistically robust. Some 14 diseases including variations of Deformed Wing Virus were tested for. Nigel's No.1 recommendation for bee health is the use of the shook swarm method to achieve regular replacement of combs (30% per year recommended).

We were disappointed to have to cancel our first apiary meeting of the season due unsuitable weather. Hopefully the sun will be shining on Saturday 31st March when the next apiary meeting is scheduled.

Our next talk will be 'Swarm Management' by Clive Winslow on Tuesday 10th April.

As always, details of all our meetings, topical articles and much more are on our website at: <http://www.bbka.org.uk/local/slough-windsor-maidenhead>

Secretary SWM BKS: Neil Coxhead

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South Chilterns Beekeepers' Association

Adrian Waring March meeting 2012

Many of you will already know Adrian Waring, by reputation and by his excellent books, written in conjunction with his wife, Claire (who also edits BeeCraft magazine). He has very long experience of beekeeping – so long, he tells us, that he's stopped buying jackets on the grounds he may not get to use them, and he commended us on our faith in booking him to talk at our meeting a year in advance. He gave his first talk at school in 1948 at the age of 8, and it was all about.....ants!

Adrian began a very entertaining and informative talk by showing us a slide of a brick-built bee hive; only the brood box was brick, but it was an illustration of what an eccentric lot beekeepers are. This is why he claims that telling people to use any particular strain of bee is going to invite (or incite?) controversy and contradiction. He's come across three different beekeepers over the years who put the supers on upside-down; we're a contrary lot, so one bee isn't going to suit everybody.

Using a series of excellent pictures, Adrian went through a range of strains of bee that have been tried in the UK – even the African bee, responsible for earning the epithet “killer bees”. In fact the worst bees he ever handled were in Scotland, when he had to brush them off the veil in order to see, and his eyes were left stinging from the proximity of the venom as they stung the veil. Apparently letting the veil slide against the back of the head results in 30 simultaneous stings, which feels like a mighty kick in the head, and is not recommended!

The Eastern honey bee has also been tried in Germany as an experiment, with the sad outcome of introducing varroa to Europe. They are very stripey with a patchy brood nest, fan facing outwards instead of nose-in to the hive, and have the interesting characteristic of hissing at you if roughly handled.

In our northern latitudes with climatic variations as wide as ours, there are 20-30 subspecies of bees to try out. Even *Apis dorsata* has been tried in the UK, but not successfully as they prefer being very high up in the open. Though normally pigmented yellow, Adrian also showed us a northern variant in Nepal, *Apis laboriosa*, which is black, and a bee on a royal palm in Bangkok with brown, black and white stripes. Body proportions change with a wide geographical range; the further north or higher in altitude, the larger and blacker the body and the smaller the wings. Adrian explained that although polar bears appear to defy this law, they actually have black skin to absorb maximum heat under all that fur, which is white to let the sun through....

Also in Europe many subspecies have developed through a thousand years of being isolated by geographical features and climate. *Apis mellifera carnica* was illustrated, showing bands of grey hairs wider than our native bees have. Reputedly docile, they are also reputedly swarmy - though we were warned of the terminology problem, and not to assume everyone means the same thing by this word.

Regimented rows of German beehives were shown to us, with hives stacked touching each other like a block of flats. For these bees, that's considered quite normal.

“Bee fever” first started around 1859 when the first Italian bees were imported into the UK. This Ligurian bee was different from all the others; having come from so high up in the Alps it should have been called *Apis Helvetica*! These good, hard-working prolific bees earned a good reputation, but then anything with yellow bands from anywhere in Italy were sold for high prices as desirable Italian bees. Who would have owned up if their specially-bought expensive bees turned out not quite as expected? So the reputation persisted, and being prolific became all the rage.



Adrian came across a chap who was proud of his pale lemon bees, obtained in order to improve the yellow colouring of his strain, but they were actually just a Cordovan variation. Only a proportion of the next generation would retain this colouring, as offspring of other drones are normal colouring. They also produce no honey, so the effort was largely vain.

Prolific bees seem to encourage beekeepers to tinker. Another friend of his in Hampshire wanted an entire brood nest in one frame, and created one out of a Dadant deep and Langstroth shallow that was so heavy it needed a reinforced top bar to stop it sagging. As the hives were 2 feet deep he had to make them only 7 frames wide. Unless the foragers found a huge surplus, the bees didn't go into the supers at all. The design needed a very prolific queen, but then there were more workers who ate more anyway, so there was no net gain in honey produced; "prolificacy" becomes a liability. (I didn't know that word existed!)

Adrian told us a little about his meeting Brother Adam of Buckfast, famous for his cross-breeding activities with prolific bees, and in Adrian's opinion, a "damn liability". His Dadant hives were intended to take 12 frames, but with this many the bees wouldn't enter the supers, so they had to be run with fewer frames. In fact they held no more honey than any normal size hive, and the bees had eaten half the crop in a week or so anyway. If a native colony in his apiary at Buckfast could carry 10 supers, why breed prolific bees? How Brother Adam could maintain a pure Buckfast strain is a mystery, as he was adding exotic strains from other countries, such as Saharan Morocco. Adrian did remark that the Buckfast bees were very docile and tolerant of the crowds of people milling around, as his pictures proved, but they must by now be such a complex hybrid that it's not possible to reproduce it yourself – so you can only buy another queen from them! Brother Adam lived to the age of 96, so we hope beekeeping similarly improves our own longevity.

Next Adrian came to pictures of our native bee, still extant in most places in the UK. The genome has been fully mapped: they have a big body, short tongue and wings, with a big thorax to enable rapid wing-beats, and short-hair banding. Although they are non-prolific compared with imported bees, this is not important; they are suited to our climate, foraging in cooler weather and surviving lower temperatures and what we need are bees that can produce honey.

The original standard brood box is often described these days as not big enough, but in fact it was designed to hold only the brood. In the 1930s BeeCraft magazine published Wedmore's series of articles on the bee of the future – a standard brood box with 7-10 combs, collecting lots of honey. Bees that are long-lived more than compensate for "prolificacy". Adrian's next slide showed us one of his own hives with 7 supers, almost hidden in the undergrowth, proving it's possible to get a very good crop on a single standard brood chamber. In fact his best ever was a stack of 10 supers in 1995, but 6 is quite common for him. There is a record of 700lb of honey being produced from 400 colonies in Australia, but in the UK the record was the best part of a couple of tons of honey from 17 colonies, or 240lb per colony. According to Adrian, that was just a case of getting lucky, but those bees were not good tempered. He has not had to feed any of his hives for 10 years, which attests to his good management.

A picture of a bee with tattered wings prompted Adrian to remark on the school of thought that perhaps each bee is born with a maximum distance it can fly in its lifetime, but longevity is definitely a characteristic of the native black bee. His longest-lived queen made it to 5 years old without ever trying to swarm, with her progeny following suit. He thinks the world record queen lifespan is about 8 years.

So we can import special bees, but the strain still all depends on the drones, which can mate indiscriminately. Crosses can produce hybrid vigour, and the strain you bought has now changed. The first lot might be good-tempered, but the next generation with crossed drones can prove bad-tempered – perhaps worth it if they give a good honey crop, but that's not likely to persist the following year. When selecting bees for crossing it is worth choosing a colony where all the drones are alike, as it reduces the chance of mixtures.

So Adrian's two rules would be:

1. ban importation of queen bees
2. get rid of the worst 40% of colonies every year to go into winter with only the best – next year's drones will then be the most desirable.

A thousand years of evolution with indifferent springs means our native bee likes pollen and will collect any available; Adrian calls them "pollen hamsters". Italian bees collect less pollen. Once, having been given an Italian queen, Adrian introduced her, secretly hoping the bees might kill her. They didn't, and she produced a very large number of bees which collected no pollen. They starved within two weeks.

With pictures of a bee collecting it, we were shown that our native bee also likes propolis, which has fungicidal properties of great use to both bees and people - especially elsewhere in Europe where it's collected and sold for medicinal purposes. Bees can cover chalk brood mummies with it, which Adrian likened to sweeping dust under the carpet, but it does isolate the problem. He's even found a ball of mouldering bees from a dead colony covered in propolis.

Another native black bee characteristic is the propensity to "run about" when the hive is opened; this might make it harder to spot the queen, but at least you can see the brood, as it's not completely obscured by bees. The time at which seeing the queen would be useful is in swarming season when an artificial swarm is needed, but Adrian gave us a quick run-through of this process which works whether you see her or not - you just need to know which box she's in.

A colony comprises three parts: queen, brood and flying bees. All artificial swarm methods perform the operation of separating one of these components from the other two. Adrian told us of a method whereby you make up a new nucleus box containing a frame of brood in all stages but with no queen cells, and no bees, positioned where the original brood box was. Then replace the queen excluder and supers and put the original box containing everything and everybody else, including queen cells, on the top of the stack, but turned so that the entrance faces in a different direction. The flying bees will be lost from this box as they return home to the bottom one, so the remaining house bees will pull down the queen cells and the queen will start laying again.

The flying workforce which has returned to the new box at the bottom of the stack will utilise the brood in the comb you provided, choose a larva of the right age in the right place and make a new virgin queen in the bottom box. Adrian says there is no such thing as a "scrub queen", but make sure you only let them keep one queen cell. You can swap the boxes around again in due course. (Note - there is a slightly more complex version of performing an artificial swarm when you can't find the queen in Adrian and Claire's new book, the Haynes Bee Manual).

Adrian went on to talk about bee diseases, inviting us to identify the two present on his slide: (chalk brood - easy to spot - and American Foulbrood – less obvious in the picture). His opinion is that we should be letting the bees deal with varroa themselves rather than dousing them with chemicals.

Apparently there are now two types of nosema which all colonies, even healthy ones, have to some extent. Although last winter wasn't too bad, Adrian still lost some colonies to nosema, but he feels that it's better for a colony to die out if it is too weak; a colony should look the same in March as it did in September, and bees need to be able to get through winters on their own. For this reason he regards spring feeding as a mistake, taking away laying room. But as they shouldn't be allowed to starve either, this is a fine call to make! Having for years called the national brood-and-a-half system "an abomination", Adrian illustrates personally that it's always worth trying something new; he's tried it now and discovered that if the half is filled with food, and it's all left there for the bees for the winter there is no need to feed at all. In fact none of his colonies in that condition tried to swarm.

In summary, the “bee for Britain” is the one that is successful. Don’t import anything, look closely at what you’ve already got, and stick with it!

Meryl Toomey

Next meeting: The first of our apiary meetings – see your programme.

. Joanne Shanagher, Secretary. Tel: 01189 721067

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

From Roke Marsh to Rowse in 90 years

By kind permission of Peter Clarke

“Stands the church clock at ten to three? And is there honey still for tea?”

I hope I may be forgiven for quoting Rupert Brooke’s famous lines for this, my first article on Benson honey. I will return to the reason for the quote in my final article. Perhaps more fairly, I must describe it as “Benson and around” for this is a South Oxfordshire story. But its origins lie within our Parish.

I am much indebted to Laurie Keys for his comprehensive article on the subject, now in the Benson Archive. More information has since come to light.

It is an amazing story – from a garden near Roke Marsh, to the international business which is Rowse Honey today. Surprisingly, not a quintessentially English beginning, but here goes.

Laurie quotes. *“In 1919, Ahmed Zaky Abushâdy, describing himself as a physician, Egyptian Apiarist and Journalist, formed a private trading company with its headquarters at Port Hill House at Benson in Oxfordshire.”* This is the opening paragraph in the ‘History of the Bee Research Association’ handbook which describes the organisation’s early years. Dr Abushâdy, married to an English lady, started the ‘Apis Club’ whose purpose was to publish a monthly magazine called ‘The Bee World’. He, with another associate, Leonard Harvey, had an experimental apiary at Port Hill House, which is half way along Braze Lane towards Roke Marsh. There were over 200 hives. Soft fruit bushes to provide blossom were planted, and wild flowers sown in the hedgerows. Nearby farmers were persuaded to plant white clover and rape seed. He even persuaded a neighbour to plant lime trees for the same purpose. The front cover of his magazine appears to partly show the garden with bee hives under the fruit trees. Laurie can vouch for that, for he lived there for six years from 1978.

The picture was used until 1949 when the organisation became the ‘Bee Research Association’ and more recently the ‘International Bee Research Association’. Now based in Cardiff, it does important work publishing journals and papers for beekeepers throughout the world. ‘Bee World’ lasted until 2006 when it was incorporated into the Journal of Apicultural Research.

One other source is available to us on this gentleman’s dedication. George Gurney told Janet Burt that he also bred Queen bees for sale internationally. Some expert!

In the 1930’s when R.O.B. Manley and Tony Rowse were beekeepers together. It is unknown if they had learned their expertise from the Doctor. Between them they started what were to become two of the largest honey packing companies in the world. At that early stage beekeeping was very much the main business and their only source of raw material was English honey, collected from local hives within about a fifty mile radius of Benson.

Years later the beekeeping side had dwindled to nothing, or been sold off, and the main function of the businesses was importing and packing honey from all over the world. Both companies were so substantial that Benson and Ewelme became known as the epicenter of the honey industry in Laurie quotes.

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I now add an extract from 14 year old Gillian Pether’s delightful description of Benson, written in 1956. *“Manley’s English Honey is known the world over. Mr Robert Manley who lives in Preston Crowmarsh, part of Benson, is the founder of the firm and the honey is collected and bottled there. On the label is written “Manley’s English Honey from the Apiaries of R.B.Manley Benson Oxford, from the flowers of the Chiltern Hills” This firm employs local men too.*

Well, take a stroll down Preston Crowmarsh today, and you will soon locate Honey Farm. But today in name only.

R.O.B. Manley and Tony Rowse continued the beekeeping business together after the war but split up in the 1950’s and went their separate ways. ‘Separate ways’ were not very far apart as Rowse set up in Ewelme and Manley in Preston Crowmarsh. We referred last time to Honey Farm in Preston Crowmarsh. The old Rowse factory is now replaced by houses by The King’s Pond.

To be continued

Contributions, including emails, to arrive with the Editor by the 20th of the month for the following month. Contributions received after this will be held over for a later month.

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