

# **Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch**

## **Notes from the AGM**

At the AGM, held on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. Nicola Oulton stood down as Chairman after her two-year spell in the post. Likewise, Stephen Davies, Vice Chairman stood down also. We would like to say a very big thank you to both of them for all the hard work they put into these positions over the past two years.

The appointments were filled by David O'Carroll as Chairman and Paul Lyons as Vice Chairman. We give them a warm welcome to the posts and look forward to working with them for the benefit of the Society.

On the night, Nicola was not feeling well and had to leave early. We send her our best wishes and hope she will soon be better. Also on the night, our Secretary, Julian Caruana, indicated that he is contemplating a move away from the area to be nearer to his family. If anyone in the Society would like to take on the post of Secretary, there is an opportunity to understudy Julian for a while with the aim of taking over when he leaves. Please get in touch with him if you feel you would like to do this necessary job.

Dexter and Jackie Ford have stepped down from the Committee and we thank them for their good work over the past years. Happily they will still be working with the Gower Show team on this year's Centenary Show. Their places on the Committee have been taken by Martin Davies, the new Bee Tent supervisor, Karen Squires and Sue Lawrence.

Our Events Secretary, Gerti Axtmann, will be assisted by Karen Squires.

After the formal part of the evening, Ade Bowen gave a talk on winter feeding, stressing that brood rearing at this time of year necessitates consumption of stores and, if it is cold, the bees in cluster can't move even a few inches to reach them. The simple solution is to move a frame of stores next to the brood and score the surface so that the bees can get the honey.

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Editor: D. Salkilld

## **When Bees Were Bees** by Tom Davies.

Continuing on from my last article about the number 3 issue of the “Welsh Beekeeper Bulletin”, quite a few people had written in letters of congratulations and comments and here are a few.

From a letter to the editor that had been sent in by a doctor condemning the use of carbohydrates to the extent of overuse was a reply – “A sweet tooth may be the worst thing for one’s health, but must be controlled rather than ignored. Honey is expensive so is less likely to be over-indulged in than sweets. Honey is the essence of all that is delightful in summer”.

In praise of the new Bulletin – *“The second Bulletin is certainly an improvement on the first and appears to be the type of publication we want, with observations from the Council Meeting, it certainly keeps members in touch with Council activities”.*

*“I must congratulate you on the last Bulletin, the article by our doctor friend was very interesting”.*

*“Concerning the quarterly Bulletin, at our last meeting the chairman was not interested, anyway, please send me six copies, after they see them they be more interested”.*

*“Welsh beekeeping has its own character! Why shouldn’t its own journal be as interesting as those of other association’s? I feel there are signs we can develop something good”.*

Well today the Welsh Beekeeper has developed into something good, a credit to all the people that have had a hand in its development, as well as the many contributors who have taken the time and effort to send articles in for publication.

On that, let’s hope for a good season in 2017. Tom.

## **Topical Tips** by David Salkilld

Following on from ‘Topical Tips’ in the last newsletter, Thorne’s website article on insulation, written by their anonymous ‘Expert’ went on to discuss the use of quilts in spring. For those of you new to beekeeping, ‘quilts’ is a term for insulation placed under the roof of a hive, the term deriving from the time when quilting was actually used. Today, builder’s polystyrene material is more often used. A word of caution, bees will eat away at polystyrene insulation unless it is the sort with a thin aluminium coating on one side, even then, if they can get around the sides, they will nibble at it.

Anyway, their ‘Expert’ wrote that March-April is the time to put quilts on because that is the time of year when day and night temperatures are at their extreme. During this time, bees are expanding the brood nest and foraging during the warmth of the day but when there is a cold night, they go back into cluster and can’t cover all the brood, resulting in brood at the periphery getting chilled and dying.

Use of a quilt also allows young bees to start generating wax for comb building and repair, an energetic process which can see bees’ temperature reach as much as 42° C.

He goes on to say that quilts can stay on all summer as they help keep heat out of the hive during extremely hot weather.

During my years as a beekeeper, I have never used a quilt, though there is certainly merit in the concept. If you take the natural state as a guide, a nest in a hole in a tree has plenty of insulation above it, and on all sides, all year round. My experience however, is that even in the coldest of UK winters, honeybees survive, and strangely, the colder the winter, the better they survive.

As I said in the previous article, with beekeeping, there are many, many different opinions. We just have to make a judgement as to which path we follow. In most cases the bees will survive whatever we do, after all, they have survived on this planet for about 30 to 40 million years, and may well be on the planet for another few million years to come.

## Apiary News by Steven Davies

The Christmas and New Year festivities are over and the work at the apiary begins. The season begins with the treating of the bees with Oxalic Acid, this year the vapor method was used by the members.

As we had a powerful battery we were able to use 2 vaporizers when the hives were next to each other. The work began early so that all the bees were in the hive whilst the vapour was used to provide maximum treatment. The entrance of the hive was closed up, safety vapour masks put on, the Oxalic Acid tablet placed on the vaporizer and inserted below the mesh floor so the vapour fumes ascended into the hive without the bees attacking the vaporizer. The whole method took less than 3 minutes. The foam was left in for 10mins and then removed.

The second task was to sterilize the frames of comb on site ready for the season, this was done to remove and Nosema spores and destroy any wax moth larvae which will destroy valuable comb. This was done by placing supers and brood boxes on a solid surface, adding an eke and then placing 140ml (per brood box or 2 supers) of Acetic Acid into a container with an absorbent pad. The stack of supers were sealed by a crown board and a roof and then wrapped in black plastic to prevent the escape of the fumes. The stack was left for approx. 2 weeks and then aired before use.

The final job for the day was to burn out some brood boxes, for this we used a plumbers gas torch to lightly burn out the wood to a chocolate brown. The next visit to the apiary will involve airing the treated boxes, checking the fondant of the hives and placing some pollen patties to help the bees build up for the spring. Many thanks to the apiary and education team who all turned up and made the job quick and easy and members who did the work. The apiary will be opening on a Saturday, at 1pm, once the weather is warmer and the season begins. Hope to see you all there.

Cheers, Stephen (Apiary Manager)

## Microscopy Evening

Pontarddulais Comprehensive School was the venue for the Society's first microscopy session. The members looked at setting up a microscope and making pollen slides from pollen loads from the bees and samples of pollen that had been stored in alcohol. The session went well with 8 members attending. I hope you all had a good time. The next session will involve testing your bees for Acarine and Nosema and the final one looking at dissection of honeybees and how to mount to form your own library of slides. The microscopy evening is fully booked but if you express an interest please let me know and your name can be added for the next course.

Many thanks to all who attended. Cheers Stephen ([stephendavies64@yahoo.com](mailto:stephendavies64@yahoo.com))

## War and Peace

In the well-known book by Leo Tolstoy, written between 1865 and 1869, are an interesting couple of pages in chapter 11 comparing Moscow to a queenless beehive.

*“Meanwhile Moscow was empty. There were still people in it, perhaps a fiftieth part of its former inhabitants had remained, but it was empty. It was empty in the sense that a dying queenless hive is empty.*

*In a queenless hive no life is left though to a superficial glance it seems as much alive as other hives.”*

*“... the bees do not fly in the same way, the smell and the sound that meet the bee-keeper are not the same.”*

*“From the alighting-board, instead of the former spirituous fragrant smell of honey and venom, ... comes an odour of emptiness and decay.”*

Napoleon had arrived in an empty city with no-one to around to claim his prize from. It was, indeed, like entering a dying hive. Perhaps the greatest irony is that Napoleon's motif was the honeybee!! Incidentally, the Russian hives were usually made from hollowed out tree trunks. It appears that Leo Tolstoy may have been a beekeeper.

My thanks to John Gale for spotting this gem, though he had to read over 700 pages before getting to this, the important bit of the book.

### **Margaret Charles**

It is our sad duty to report the passing of our late President, Margaret Hilda Charles, aged 87, who passed away peacefully on 28<sup>th</sup> January.

She was the ex catering manager of Morrision Hospital and, in 1992 compiled a 72 page booklet of recipes by herself and colleagues for the hospital's Golden Anniversary.

Margaret was a long-term member of Swansea & District and, in recent years an Honorary Member. She was ever present at the Swansea and Gower Shows where she was Senior Steward, bringing a lot of pleasure to visitors with her stall selling pieces of delicious honey fruit cake and honey-orange juice. She was one of the real characters that beekeeping brings up now and then.

We send our condolences to her daughter, Julia, and her family.

### **The Centenary Gower Show**

At the Show, our Society has a marquee provided by the Show Authorities to stage a honey show and promote our craft to visitors. The marquee is one of the highlights of the show and has been called by show visitors "the best tent on the showground". It is recognised as such by the Show Committee who, in recognition, have given us an even larger marquee, 60 feet x 40 feet, this year for its Centenary Show.

In order to do justice to that honour, we are aiming to provide an even more attractive day out for the visitors, many of whom come from far afield. This will include a special prize winning display from the National Honey Show, children's competitions, Bees Abroad as well as our usual Blue Ribbon honey show, microscopy and Bee Experience,

This will need a lot of members for stewarding duties and, as usual, there will be free entry passes available to those who can guarantee stewarding in the marquee for half the day. If anyone would like to be a general steward or Judges Steward, please get in touch with Gill Lyons directly on 01792 233169.

## **Forthcoming Events**

Please note that all meetings (unless notified otherwise) are held at **The New Lodge Independent Social Club, Alexandra Road, Gorseinon SA4 4PE**

**Meetings** are held on **2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays** of every month from 7.00 pm onwards. On the second Tuesday we aim to have a speaker or demonstration. There is plenty of parking space, drive around to the back of the club. All are welcome. We look forward to seeing you there.

### **March**

**Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Talk & demonstration by Catherine Clark (Honey Bee Beautiful) - "Soap Making".

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup>** WBKA Spring Convention at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Showground, Llanelwedd, opens at 08.00am. and features trade stands and some very interesting lectures.

### **April**

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup>** BBKA Spring Convention, Harper Adams University.

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Talk by Ian Roberts - "How to Assemble a Hive".

### **May**

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Talk & demonstration by Rhona Toose - "Batik".

### **June**

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Talk by David Salkilld - "Preparation of Honey & Wax for Showing".

### **July**

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup>** Disease Workshop in conjunction with West Glamorgan BKA.

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Quiz Night.

### **August**

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup>** The Centenary Gower Show. More details in later editions.

## **Contact Numbers**

**Chairman: David O'Carroll** [dsocarroll@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:dsocarroll@yahoo.co.uk)

**Secretary: Julian Caruana** **07985 328 910**  
[sdbks.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:sdbks.secretary@gmail.com)

**Treasurer: John Gale** **07855 451 781**

## **“More About Bees”** by Tom Davies

The second week of February, time seems to be racing along, weather very wet and I have been unable to do anything in the garden as yet, but hoping that things will improve soon.

My seeds for this year have arrived, I'll start off at the end of this month with tomato seeds, one of the varieties will be “Gardener’s Delight”, a cherry type that is the favourite of one of my great grandsons, who looks forward to them every year, and he likes to see their progress as they come to the ripening stage.

Browsing through the winter issue of “Welsh Beekeeper”, I came to the article “A Winter’s Tale” by Celia Davies, a good article, stressing the need to be aware of the problems that can lead to the loss of colonies over our long damp winters.

One line caught my eye and brought to mind an incident which happened to me in one of the winters of the early eighties – “Do not leave the queen excluder on”. I had taken candy for each hive on an out-apiary on a bitterly cold mid-January day and when I came to one of the hives I had left an excluder on.

It was too cold to run the risk upsetting the bees so I removed a few combs from the centre of the super to allow me to place the candy on top of the bees. How I came to miss this one hive I don't know, but these things happen so you learn to be careful. Happily, the colony survived.

More next time.

Tom