

# Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch



My thanks to Nicola Oulton for this photo.

Members of this year's Beginners' Class  
photographed during one of their training  
sessions at the Society Apiary.

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Editor: D. Salkilld

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

Queen mating was described in "Gleanings in Bee Culture", published in May 1930. The article described the method used being sent into the magazine by a very well known bee breeder and writer of that time, a Mr. Jay Smith, of Vincennes, Indiana, U. S. A.

Mr. Smith had been a guest of Connecticut Beekeepers' Association, and after a meeting with them he was invited to the home of a Mr. Allen Latham, of Norwich, Connecticut, to observe Mr. Latham's method of queen mating.

Mr. Latham, for his bee mating, used small boxes some 5 inches deep, 5 inches wide, 8 inches long but no bottom. This was a separate piece, made to hold a slab of candy and had an entrance block to shut in or release the bees, allowing mating of the queen.

To the top of the box, Mr. Latham poured some melted wax to allow a ripe queen cell to be fixed, after which a cupful of bees was poured in, the top placed on the bottom board, entrance closed, and the boxes set aside for 2 days before taken away to the mating site.

Mr. Smith queried the use of such small mating hives in Indiana as the hot summer sun would melt any comb built by the bees, but Mr. Latham's reply was that Connecticut and surrounding areas were not known as "New England" for nothing and he was more concerned about possible chilly weather, even sometimes in July.

On arrival at the mating site, the entrances would be opened at dusk only to ensure that no drifting of the bees would happen and mating would take only a few weeks, so the hives would be returned to the home apiary for queens to be used.

More on Mr. Latham next time, Tom

*Ed: In another of Tom's magazines, Mr. Latham was advertising unmated queens for sale at 80c each, 6 for \$4 or 50 for \$31. Tom pointed out to me that "Gleanings" was, and still is, a magazine with both national and international circulation and Mr. Latham must have been rearing vast quantities of queens to be able to meet demand for them. By comparison, we're just hobbyists.*

### **Topical Tips** by David Salkilld

**Foundation.** By now your hives should have had their Spring Cleaning with new foundation in at least one third of the brood chamber. Years ago I developed a habit of replacing at least four frames each year, though sometimes more were changed, dependent on the circumstances I found when opening up for the first inspection.

This year, however, I have done something different and put an extra brood chamber on to each hive. These had all new foundation bought at the recent WBKA Spring Convention, with a feeder to give them a boost whilst the comb was being drawn. It's amazing how quickly they drew it out. The queens are happily laying in both brood boxes.

**Excluders.** Throughout my beekeeping years I have always used queen excluders but this year is different!! I am dispensing with them and letting the queen have free range inside the hives. As some of you will know, I use Langstroth hives, which have plenty of room in the brood chamber (roughly about brood and a half size) and this year they will each have two brood chambers. Once in the past did I use two brood chambers on a hive and that year had my best ever crop of honey. If they don't swarm this year, and if the weather is kind, who knows, I might have another bumper crop.

**Swarms.** Talking of swarms, May and June are predominant swarm times, although we have known swarms much earlier and much, much later. Just be ready in case your colonies decide to swarm. Regular inspections will tell you the state of the colonies and, with experience, you can detect the first obvious signs (though the colony may have made the decision long before you see those signs). I always look for a change in drone production rate. To me, this is the first indication that swarming is likely to take place.

Once this is noticed, I inspect very regularly at a maximum of seven days. **You can't stop their swarming instinct**, after all, it is their way of procreation. However, you can minimise the disruption to your neighbours and to your beekeeping by using an artificial swarming method. There are many of these and I am sure Stephen's swarming sessions will have given you the basis of different methods. We beekeepers are eternal optimists and look forward to a bumper season.

## The Centennial Gower Show

Enclosed with this magazine is a schedule for the Honey Section of the, Gower Show, held on the first Sunday of August. For those receiving this newsletter electronically the schedule is attached or can be downloaded from [here](#). This event is our Society's premier honey show and is a wonderful opportunity for us to show off the best of local honeys to the general public. As always, anyone who exhibits or stewards at the show can sell honey, wax, candles or other beekeeping related items on the day with a small percentage being taken by the Society.

This year's event, as I mentioned in the last newsletter, marks a highlight. Although the first Gower show was held in 1905, none were held during war years or when foot and mouth disease was around, so this will be the 100<sup>th</sup> show and we want to make it a special event.

In the schedule there are entry classes for newer beekeepers:

Class 9 ~ Novice Class, Two Jars of honey of any sort.

Class 16 ~ Novice Class, Six 28g blocks of beeswax.

These classes are open to exhibitors who have not previously won a prize for honey / wax (as relevant) at any honey show.

***Someone has to win, so please have a go, it might even be you!!***

There is also a new class in the schedule:

Class 27 ~ A Craft item using a Product of the Hive.

This is for products such as soaps, creams, polishes, embroidery etc. which use either beeswax or honey in their production.

**Stewarding.** Gill needs stewards to be in the marquee throughout Sunday. If you can steward for half a day, you will get a free pass into the showground. Please let her know your preference for a morning or afternoon session, also for the marquee, the Bee Tent or either.

**Set-up.** As usual, the marquee will be set up on Friday and Saturday morning ahead of the show, putting the tables up, covering them, putting the Bee Tent up, etc. Your help on these days will be appreciated. Remember, judging takes place on Saturday afternoon, so exhibits need to be staged and the marquee cleared of people by 1.30 p.m. on Saturday in readiness for judging.

## What the Papers Say

**Even enemies have their uses!!** The Daily Telegraph, 26<sup>th</sup> April, ran an article on "waxworms", or as we know them, wax moth larvae. Scientists have suggested that these little creatures can help solve the world's plastic bag problem by eating their way through the material. Apparently, they have the ability to break down even the toughest plastics. From personal experience I can say that this is true having put old comb in a plastic sack for disposal, only to find holes in the sack where larvae have eaten through.

The Telegraph article, based on a study published in the journal *Current Biology*, went on to say that the waxworm's potential was discovered when biologist and amateur beekeeper, Dr. Federica Bertocchini, of the Institute of Biomedicine and Biotechnology of Cantabri, Italy, put some of the larvae in a plastic bag and noticed how soon they riddled the bag with holes. To confirm it was not just the chewing mechanism degrading the plastic, researchers "mashed up" some larvae and smeared them on polythene bags, which achieved similar results.

It seems they have enzymes in their saliva or gut which attack plastic's chemical bond, much in the same way as they digest wax found in beehives. Tests indicate that these enzymes can break down plastic materials at 'uniquely higher speeds' than previous biotech methods. If a single enzyme is responsible for this chemical process, its reproduction on a large scale using biotechnological

methods should be achievable. A possible scenario is one whereby recycling plants could be adapted to biodegrade mass quantities of plastic bags using the enzyme.

**Neonicotinoid insecticides** are in the news again. Matt Ridley, writing in The Times, April 17<sup>th</sup>, said that the European Court of Justice will shortly hear an appeal against the ban on neonicotinoids. As a farmer, already using them on his wheat crop, he is against this ban and quotes a report by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre which concluded that the EU's 2013 ban on neonicotinoid insecticides (for seed treatments and other uses on bee-attractive crops) had been disastrously counterproductive, resulting in an increased use of more damaging pesticides, mainly pyrethroids, which are sprayed on rather than seed-treated. These sprays, the article goes on to say, are worse for beneficial insects and are especially harmful to aquatic life. The report apparently found that the ban had no actual benefit for bees. (*Ed. I can't really believe that*) From the article, we gather that the European Commission is refusing to release the report until after the appeal is heard, for fear of losing the case. The article further suggests that the Commission intends to push forward with a full ban on these treatments except in greenhouses. Watch this space!!

### **At the WBKA Convention**

I was pleased to see that the National Botanic Garden of Wales had a stand at the WBKA Convention in March. Those of you who attended our own Conference back in October will remember the talk given by Dr. Natasha de Vere, about completion of her project to catalogue the DNA of every plant native to Wales. At that talk, she went on to explain how, with modern technological wizardry, it was possible to analyse the DNA in honey samples and find exactly which plants the honeybees had visited.

At the National Botanic Garden, honey samples are taken each month from hives in their own apiary to build up a picture of honeybee activity and better understand foraging across a range of different habitats. A picture is emerging of honeybee preferences and this will aid the future planting of bee friendly habitats. In essence, what the DNA study found was that a relatively small range of plants provided the majority of forage; however, in every sample taken, there were traces of DNA from a huge variety of plants. It seems to me important that honey bees collect from a wide range of plants, as each plant will have widely differing characteristics, all of which have benefits for the colony.

At the Convention, a team, led by Laura Jones, were talking about their current work which is extending previous knowledge by looking at honey samples from all over Wales and indeed, extending their remit over the border into England. To obtain a wide range of samples, they were giving out small (30 ml) sample bottles and asking beekeepers to provide honey samples for analysis. These sample packs also had a questionnaire asking details of location, recent treatments, etc. etc. Details of their findings will be sent back to each beekeeper once they have been analysed.

I took one pack but, in hindsight, realised that I should have asked for extra packs to get information on spring as well as main flow honey.

If you would like to provide a sample of your honey for analysis you can get sample bottles from Julian Caruana ([sdbks.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:sdbks.secretary@gmail.com)) or from Laura Jones ([laura.jones@gardenofwales.org.uk](mailto:laura.jones@gardenofwales.org.uk) or tel. 01558 667128). If you are interested in the research work that has been done at the National Botanic Garden of Wales you can have a look at the [Garden's Blog](#) but if you would like to look at the research work in more detail have a look at [this](#).

## Forthcoming Events

Meetings at the New Lodge Independent Social Club, Alexandra Road, Gorseinon, 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. All are welcome. We look forward to seeing you there.

### May

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Talk & Batik Demonstration by Rhona Tooze.

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 21<sup>st</sup>** Royal Welsh Spring Festival, at the RWAS Showground, Builth Wells. This is a Bee Tent event.

### June

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Talk by David Salkilld on “Preparation of honey & wax for showing”

### July

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup>** Disease Workshop in conjunction with West Glamorgan. (Venue to be confirmed)

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>** Ammanford Carnival. This is a Bee Tent event.

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> - Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>** Welsh National Honey Show at the RWAS Showground, Builth Wells.

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** To be confirmed

### August

**Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> 7.30 p.m.** Gill Lyons will be at the New Lodge Club to receive any entries for the Gower Show.

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup>** The Centenary Gower Show. Honey Show & Bee Tent event.

### September

**Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> 7.00 p.m.** Talk on “Wax Moth” by Stephen Davies.

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 17<sup>th</sup>** MSWCC Conference, hosted by Gloucestershire BKA at the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester.

More details of these and other relevant events can be found on the ['Events' page](#) of our website.

## Contact Numbers

**Chairman: David O’Carroll**

**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

A lovely spell of good weather, it has given me a chance to catch up on jobs such as getting my garden tidy for the coming season.

My dahlias are beginning to sprout, tomato seedlings are coming on nicely, and my early potatoes are just breaking through the soil. If our weather keeps improving perhaps we will have a good 2017.

Looking at the weather maps on TV, it shows that the south-east of the U.K. has been, and still is, at the moment getting higher temperatures than the rest of us. I hope that it will not encourage the spread of the Asian hornet. Beekeeping here already has enough problems.

Lately I have seen a good many queen bumblebees about, also a few queen wasps, which was surprising as last season there were not many wasps about and with the long damp winter we have had, I thought they would have been scarcer than ever, but they seem to be still around.

Not seen any honeybees yet, though plenty of forage around. Perhaps they are having a lie-in as it were, until things are more suitable for them and, on that, I'm off to check on how some seeds that I have sown in trays in a couple of cold frames have come on!

Tom.

*Ed. Tom's right that our weather is somewhat colder than it is the South East of England. I was in London recently where wisteria were in full bloom, at least three weeks ahead of ours.*