

# Swansea & District Beekeepers Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch

Here's wishing you all a  
**Happy New Year.**

May all your wishes come true and  
your supers be full of golden honey.



**Gill Lyons & John Bellarby** receiving their Basic Assessment Certificates at a recent meeting. Our congratulations to them both. Well Done! See page 4. (Photo by Stephen Davies)

**Issue No. 119 January ~ February 2018**

Editor: D. Salkilld

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

In the August 1932 edition of “Gleanings in Bee Culture”, was a section called “Gleaned by Asking”, and questions were answered by a Mr. George S. Demuth.

One of the questions was ~ “How can I manage my bees in a small city so that they will not trouble the neighbours?” ~ Issac Philp, Michigan.

Answer ~ The bees should be so located that they will be compelled to rise to a considerably height before going to the fields, this can be done by means of a high fence or shrubbery.

It is also important to handle them carefully so that they will not be stirred up and made cross at any time, if possible, they should be handled only when they are gathering sufficient nectar from the fields to keep them in good humour. If any colonies are inclined to be cross, it will be well to replace their queens with queens of a more gentle strain.

During dry weather it is important to see that the bees are supplied with fresh water close by, to avoid them bothering neighbouring bird baths or other places where water would be available.

People who are not acquainted with the habits of bees become unduly concerned when they see them on their premises, so it is well to take every precaution to prevent grounds for complaint. More next time and Best Wishes for Xmas and the New Year! Tom.

### What the Papers say

Here's one that I received too late for the last newsletter, taken from the Daily Telegraph of 23 October, which was headed "**City Bees Produce More Honey Than Country Cousins**".

The paper reported that results from the BBKAs annual honey survey showed that bees kept in urban and suburban locations out-produce their 'Country Cousins' by about 20%. The figures given were:

Urban / suburban	27.5 lb average per hive.
Country	22.5 lb average per hive

The article went on to say that research had found that there was a richer, more diverse diet to be found in towns than in the countryside, because they visit a much wider range of flowers.

It went on to mention yields from the 1950s which could easily be up to 100 lb per hive, four times today's average. John Hobrough, of the BBKA said "Farmers in those days under-planted crops of clover to nourish the land, nowadays there just isn't time or space for this style of farming. It is having a huge impact on the honey crop by reducing the forage available."

The article had a superb photograph of an urban rooftop beekeeper in Hackney, London, showing his WBC hive set among flowers with views of the rooftops around him. I regret I can't reproduce this photo for you all to see.

*Ed: This mention of yields brings back memories of my early beekeeping days in Berkshire in the 1980s, where for the first eight years, till I moved to Swansea, I regularly had yields of 50 to 70 lb of honey from my hive. In those days, I only had the one hive and the bees worked superbly every year.*

An article in the daily Telegraph on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov. headed "**Bees split into left and right wing (but most are centrists)**" mentioned research done at the University of Queensland, Australia, on preferences bees have when faced by a barrier with a choice of gaps. Bees tended to steer towards the wider gap but when the gaps were of equal size, both were chosen with equal frequency.

Prof. Mandyam Srinivasan is quoted as saying, "Some bees display a strong left bias, others a strong right bias, and yet others have a weak or zero bias. We believe these individual biases help to improve flight efficiency when flying through densely cluttered environments. Flying insects constantly face the challenge of choosing efficient, safe and collision-free routes while navigating through dense foliage."

*Ed: Once again, my thanks to those who send me these interesting cuttings from newspapers.*

### Some Notes from the WBKA Council Meeting

Frank Gellatly updated us on the Asian hornet's nest found in Woolacomb. He stressed the importance of putting traps out in our apiaries next year. I learned that there are two types of trap available. One is a monitoring trap that doesn't kill insects and the other type does. With the monitoring type it is possible to release insects without harming them. (*Ed: In the spring, we hope to have a demonstration of constructing one of the more friendly traps*).

Frank also showed a slide of yet another bee, an Ivy Bee, *Colletes hederæ*. It is about the size of our honeybees but has distinctive pale grey stripes across its abdomen. You can see a picture of it if

you Google Ivy Bee. Its primary food is the ivy plant and though it is a solitary bee, it tends to nest in little groups. It causes no harm to honeybees or to the environment. Keep a lookout for them in autumn.

Harvest data showed that the average honey yield for hives in Wales was 27 lb.

The Chairman, John Bowles, appealed for volunteers to act as Trustees for the WBKA. He invited people to attend meetings, to observe without obligation, the workings of the trustees and the WBKA Council.

Wally Shaw, the WBKA's Technical Officer, reported that between 12,000 to 15,000 queens were imported into UK last year, many from Greece. There is concern that the small hive beetle will enter UK through bee imports but the most likely carrier would be in bee packages, not with queens.

He mentioned a severe increase in varroa mites, reported throughout the UK, and thought that a strain of varroa may have developed which is able to resist current treatments.

Wally finished with the information that Natural Resources Wales would be taking over responsibility for beekeeping in Wales.

The Treasurer, Graham Wheeler, presented the accounts, which look healthy. It was decided that there was no need to raise capitation for 2019.

Jill Wheeler, the Events Secretary, advised that preparations were well in hand for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration at Aberystwyth University.

The three principal speakers will be Professors Tom Seeley, Francis Ratnieks and Robert Pickard. Booking will open in spring 2018.

## Topical Tips

**Varroa** It's winter-time and there's not much to do in the apiary except treat for varroa. Of the available treatments, we usually use oxalic acid, which is formulated so that it kills the mites without harming the bees. However, oxalic acid will kill brood and because of this fact, we always aim to treat colonies in the coldest weather when no brood is present.

There are two main types of oxalic acid treatments, as a vapour or in a sugar solution. Ready-made solutions, as were previously used, are not available nowadays but have been replaced by an oxalic acid based powder, Api-Bioxal, which is added to a home-made syrup. This is trickled on seams of bees between frames at a rate of 5ml per seam. When trickled onto the bees, the syrup **MUST** be warm, otherwise it will chill and kill the cluster.

The vaporiser uses either Api-Bioxal powder or oxalic acid crystals. They are powered by a 12 volt car battery. I tried other smaller batteries last year but my vaporiser didn't reach a high enough temperature, so in the end I had to use the car battery.

If you want to see the vapour system used before using it on your own colonies, there will be a demonstration at the Society apiary on **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> January** when the Society's colonies are treated. Meet Stephen at **10 am** in the Llys Nini car park. Stephen writes "Using Oxalic Acid this way requires protective clothing so you need to bring with you a vapour mask (FFP3 rated) as well as gloves and eye protection if you wish to participate." Stephen is also hoping to do an Acetic Acid demonstration as well. With either of the treatments, it is always easier when done by two people. With two people, treating can be accomplished in less than a couple of minutes if you both know your specific tasks. Beginners particularly are advised to go along to the apiary to see it done before attempting it themselves. Whichever treatment you decide on, work with another beekeeper and keep the opening time to a minimum.

Winter-time is ideal for sorting out and cleaning / sterilising your equipment and planning for next season. You might also want to refresh your knowledge by sitting in on some of the beginners'

lessons to reinforce particular aspects of the craft. This will also have benefits for the beginners who will be able to meet some of the members.

**Starvation** If starvation is going to happen, it usually occurs during February when the colony is starting to raise brood. We all know that brood temperature is much higher than cluster temperature and must be raised by the nurse bees who get energy by consuming their stores.

So they start eating their winter stores and if there is a shortage, the colony often dies out. We can help by regularly checking the weight of the hive and, if it feels light, give them some winter feed. This is best done by feeding them fondant. You can make your own but it is much easier to buy ready-made fondant from beekeeping suppliers. An alternative is to use bakers fondant which is basically a block of icing. In the cold weather do not use a liquid feed as the bees can't evaporate the water content.

## **The Price of Honey**

Lately, I have been swept off my feet by the price of honey in up-market shops. At Daylesford Organic Farm in the Cotswolds, 227g jars of London Honey were selling for £14.99. In London the other week, we went into Fortnum & Mason (our annual pilgrimage to see their exotic honeys), only to find that London Honey was on sale at £20 for a 227g jar!!! Wow, I thought, it's worth relocating there, but I'd probably miss the hassle of negotiating Swansea's numerous traffic schemes.

Then, the other evening, I heard that the National Trust shop at Rhossili was selling honey at £8 per half pound. Then Rod mentioned Manuka honey he had seen in New Zealand at \$169 NZ for a 1 lb jar, equivalent to about £100 sterling. I might relocate to New Zealand instead.

## **Basic Certificate Presentation.**

Back in newsletter No. 117, we mentioned that Gill Lyons and John Bellarby had both passed their WBKA Basic Assessment Exams with excellent marks. At a recent meeting, David O'Carroll, our Chairman, congratulated them for their success and presented the certificates.

If you think you would like to take this exam, or take any of the module exams, please have a word Nicola Oulton who, with Stephen Davies, will be holding preparation sessions for them.

## **The Society Christmas Dinner.**

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December saw us at the Society's Christmas Dinner, held this year at the Rake & Riddle on the North Gower Road. We had a good turn-out and a section of the restaurant was reserved especially for us. The food was just delicious, plenty of choice and there was a lot of it together with crackers, good company and good cheer.

During the evening a raffle was held which raised £50.00 towards the Society funds. Martyn did a great job selling tickets and there was a very good selection of prizes.

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, there had been a slight hitch with arrangements because the Welcome to Town restaurant, where Gerti first booked, closed down at the end of October, so our booking had to be cancelled. As Gerti said during the evening, the Rake & Riddle was her second choice but it turned out to be a great evening.

Our thanks go to Gerti, Karen and Martyn for organising the event, for all who came along and so generously gave raffle prizes and bought raffle tickets.

## Forthcoming Events

### **January 2018**

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup>** Oxalic acid (vapour method) demonstration at apiary. See article on page 3.

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup>** 7p.m. Talk on How to Make Mead, by Sue Black. I hear that samples may be available!!

### **February 2018**

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>** 7p.m. The Society A.G.M. Details, agenda and minutes of last year's meeting will be forwarded by email shortly. A buffet supper will be available. We are trying to arrange a demonstration of making an Asian Hornet trap, details will be sent by email.

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup>** Skep Making, 10 am to 4 pm. Cost £50 pp, includes tuition and all materials. The class will be limited to 8 people on a first come, first served basis. Contact Gerti Axtmann on 01792 296418.

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup>** 7p.m. to 9p.m. Beekeeping Classes start at Pontarddulais Comprehensive School. Contact Nicola for information.

### **March 2018**

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>** WBKA AGM. Details of this meeting will be given later.

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>** 7.p.m. Talk on Remote Hive Monitoring.

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup>** WBKA Spring Convention at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells. Speakers include Susie Hill, Dr. Paul Cross and Kirsty Stainton. As always, there will be trade stands, refreshments and exhibitions.

### **May 2018**

**Weekend of 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>** A short course on Handling Skills will be run by the NDB at Pontarddulais Comprehensive School. This is an intensive two day course tutored by Tony Harris and Alistair Welch. According to the NDB website, these courses are aimed at beekeepers with some experience of the craft, they are not aimed at novices. I understand that there will be both theoretical and practical beekeeping involved. See the NDB web site for details of booking etc.

### **An Invitation to Bridgend BKA Meetings.**

Shirley Myall, Secretary of Bridgend & District BKA, has sent this open invitation to attend their monthly meetings, held on Monday evenings at the Coytrahen Community Centre, Coytrahen CF32 0EB, not far from J36 on the M4 but do note that as this is an area postcode. Sat nav may indicate you have arrived before you actually have, keep driving until you see the sign indicating you have entered the village of Coytrahen, the hall is on the left hand side set back from the road; if you reach the Nicholls Arms you have gone a few yards too far!!! The talks start at 7.30 p.m. and tea/coffee etc are available at the end of the evening.

8 January 2018: Simon Bilsborough from Welsh Assembly, talking about the Wales Pollinator Strategy

12 February 2018: Ian Glastonbury, beekeeper from Newport, talking about Natural Beekeeping.

12 March 2018: Falko Drifjhout from Keele University, talking about the latest research into the effects of Neonicotinoid sprays on bees.

9 April 2018: Francis Ratnieks from Sussex University, talking about 'Hygienic Bees' which have been bred to resist the Varroa mite.

14 May 2018: Prof Robert Pickard, "Beekeeping in Egypt, Mexico and Japan"



Shirley writes, “We look forward to meeting some of your members, do tell them to let us know where they are from so we can welcome them properly”.

*Ed: These are some of the best beekeeping speakers available and the lectures should be fascinating. It's only 40 minutes down the motorway and well worth the effort to attend.*

### **Contact Numbers**

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

2017 has got to be one of the most weird years on record for its weather. For any beginner to our craft it must have caused them to wonder what they have let themselves in for, but we can only hope for better times for the future.

According to a report published in 1928, advising members of the Glamorgan Beekeepers Association of their AGM, to be held at Ye Olde Pavilion Café, Friars Point, Barry Island, at 3.45 o'clock prompt. It was stated that 1927 was held to be the most disastrous year in living memory to date, so bad years happen from time to time.

The AGM was to be held on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1928, tea being provided at Mrs. Winters' Tea-rooms, and all beekeepers were invited to attend. The report went on to express the satisfaction that so many ladies were taking up the craft and also new members were enrolling, keeping the numbers of members up.

Also in the report were rules of the association and rule V was ~ Donors of £5.00 or more in one sum shall be life members, ordinary members 5 shillings annually, artisans 2 shillings and sixpence annually and agricultural labourers 1 shilling annually, all subscriptions payable in advance and due on January 1<sup>st</sup> annually.

The report included thanks for the valuable work done by the Bee- Inspectors over 1927, which was most appreciated due to it being a difficult year.

Till next time - Tom.