

Swansea & District Beekeepers Newsletter Gwenynwyr Abertawe a'r Cylch



Sue, Gerti and Julian with their NDB course certificates.
My thanks to Gerti for the photo.

The NDB Course by Gerti Axtmann.

The National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB) organization offers the diploma to meet a need for beekeeping qualifications above the level of the certificates awarded by the UK National Beekeeping Associations. However, the short courses offered by the NDB are run to improve the quality of beekeeping knowledge so to enable beekeepers to take Modules and General Husbandry. Julian, Sue and I signed on to the 'Handling Skills' Short course.

Our tutors were Tony Harris and Alastair Welch, both experienced beekeepers and holders of the NDB award.

I liked it as there was a good mix of theory and practice. Some was revision like tools, separating boxes and record keeping but there was always something new to remember and to do better. I learned a lot about how to inspect a hive, the frame handling, frame manipulation and where to put the supers and brood boxes so that it is safe for bees and the beekeeper.

We looked at locating the queen, how to cage her, how to mark her and to clip her wings and how to make a nuc. We did so much it would be too much to list everything here.

I came away feeling that I know the basics after 4 years of beekeeping but there is so much more to learn.

Gerti.

Issue No. 122 July ~ August 2018
Editor: D. Salkilld

Bee Boles and Bee Shelters by Dave Salkilld.

In the last issue I wrote about straw skeps, which for centuries were used by beekeepers to house their colonies prior to the introduction of wooden ones we now use. These skeps had a good life span, indeed, some skeps are known to have lasted for many, many years but needed to be kept dry and weather-proof, otherwise they were subject to rotting.

Skeps were usually placed on wooden or stone bases, which had entrance ramps for the bees, although some skeps had entrance holes cut higher up into their sides.

There were a number of ways to keep them dry, for example:

1. Cover them with a hackle, a conical thatched cover placed over the skep, which provided both warmth and protection against rain.
2. A bee shelter, often a lean-to, built against a cottage, to give protection. Many were open sided structures but large enough to prevent rain blowing onto the skeps.
3. A bee bole, which is basically a niche in a wall, usually housing a single skep.
4. An alcove in a wall, similar to a bee bole but housing a number of skeps on shelves.
5. A bee-house, which could house a number of skeps. These were purpose built and are found only on the wealthiest of estates.

All had the same purpose, to keep the skeps dry, weather-proofed and protected from the elements. The most common was probably the thatched hackle because cottagers would have had easy access to straw but might not have been able afford to build a shelter or bee bole. Few hackles survive but examples are shown in early photographs.

Bee boles and alcoves provided protection from the elements above, on both sides and at the back. Access to the skeps was from the front, so the beekeeper would have needed some form of protective clothing when working them.

During winter they were often packed round with straw for extra warmth and the more elaborate bee alcoves were fitted with doors or movable shutters to provide even more protection.

In a nineteenth century report, one author mentioned that mice in wintertime and slugs in summertime were a problem in bee boles. It's nice to know that nothing changes!

In the booklet "Bee Boles and other Beekeeping Structures In Wales", eighty two bee boles and bee shelters are recorded and numerous others are known throughout the UK and Europe.

In her book "The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting", Eva Crane has a photograph of a vineyard wall, taken at a French Chateau in Vaucluse, which has 30 recesses in two tiers in it. Another photo in the same chapter shows an early seventeenth century painting of a farm wall in Somerset, which has 10 recesses in it.

Bee shelters were usually built of stone or wood with a thatched or slate roof and were large enough to hold a number of skeps. Many old photos show them as open sided lean-to structures, built against cottage walls. Some were stand-alone like the one at St. Fagans, shown in a photo on page 23 of the Summer 2018 edition of Welsh Beekeeper Magazine. It shows six skeps in place with space for others, or storage, at ground level.

Another stone built one is the Hartpury Bee Shelter, built to house 28 skeps and constructed of dressed stone. Its age is not known exactly but dates from about the 1830s, built by a stonemason named Paul Tuffey, or his son of the same name, in Nailsworth, Gloucestershire. A lot of research went into establishing its actual age because, until recently, it was thought to be of early or medieval origin. A Grade Two listed structure, it is 7.2m long and 2.1m high. Because its original site in Nailsworth was being developed, it was moved to Hartpury Agricultural College in 1968 and stayed there until it was moved once more in 2002 to its present location at St. Mary's Church, Hartpury. As it was a listed building, there was a lot of red tape to be circumnavigated before it could be moved, but as it had previously been relocated from its original site, permission was granted.

During the second move (2002) it was repaired and restored to its original condition using stone from the original quarry. It's well worth seeing if you are travelling through that part of Gloucestershire.

The ultimate bee shelter is a bee house, relatively rare in this country but very common in European countries. They keep the hives dry and warm and provide a space for the beekeeper to work the hives under cover. Today, the common hive in these bee houses is a long, horizontal hive. These don't have supers but are accessed from the back of the hive.

Ed: In this article, reference has been made to "The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting" 1999, by Eva Crane; "The Bee Shelter at Hartpury" 2002, by The Hartpury Historic Land & Buildings Trust; Bee Boles and other Beekeeping Structures in Wales" c1990s, by P. Walker and W. Linnard; "Bee Boles and Bee Houses" 1988, by A. M. Foster; "The Quest for the Perfect Hive" 2010, by Gene Kritsky.

"More About Bees" by Tom Davies.

A couple of months ago I was despairing about things in the garden due to our long, cold winter, but lately everything has changed. With the warm spell still going on, my dahlias are beginning to flower, the French marigolds as well, while in the kitchen garden my runner beans are climbing the sticks well and potatoes and beetroots are going well too.

It just shows that given good weather, what can be accomplished, and with all the extra life that the local weeds have been showing, there must be plenty of forage around for the bees, so I hope that you all get some honey this year.

I've also seen quite a lot of greenfly around lately, so this could be an aid to getting dark honey if there are conifers near your hives. So keep an eye out for it, and if you do get some, it would be nice to see it on the show benches.

With the rapid build-up of colonies this could be one of those "swarm years", and in the issue 200 of the "Welsh Beekeeper", the treatment of them is well covered by Wally Shaw, an excellent article.

While swarms can be pleasant at most times, I used to slip a veil on to have a look at them first, and if they appeared to be on the small side, I would assume them to have come from a tree or other restricted space and they would be a bit touchy and I would put the full gear on before removing them.

More next time,

Tom

Topical Tips

The main honey flow, which started in late June, is now in full swing and, hopefully will continue well into July, so keep a lookout in case more super space is needed. However, only put another super on when the top one is well on the way to being filled. Too much space encourages the bees to spread their stores thinly up the centre of the hive without filling all the combs. In this country, the main flow only lasts for two to three weeks after which stores come in in dribs-and-drabs, so too much space means the honey may go uncapped until September. However, if you are going away on holiday at this time, take the precaution of giving them enough space or have a friend keep an eye on them.

Remember that in a good year, a strong colony can easily put in 30 lb. of honey in a week. Let's hope that they do!!

In past years, I have experimented with natural foundation, putting a starter strip about 2 cm deep at the top of frames, and letting the bees draw their own comb down from that. This was cut from a sheet of unwired worker foundation. It works well when there is a good honey flow. The fascinating thing is the size of cell they make, varying from standard, as bought, to drone size, and everything in between as they build it. Also, the 'vertical' sides of the hexagons in this comb are not always produced vertically!

Its good for cut comb and I have no trouble spinning it, though I am careful not to use too high a speed lest the comb all flies out. It's worth a try if you want some cut comb. Good weather is the main essential for a good honey crop and this year we have it. There is a correlation between temperature and honey yield. The hotter the summer, the higher the yield.

It is also possible to have a late crop if conditions are right. I remember our late Secretary, Mike Cram, telling me once that after harvesting his honey he put the supers back on the hives for clean-up and the bees filled them again. He had a bumper late crop that year from Himalayan Balsam! I know that environmentalists are against this invasive plant, but we old beekeepers hope there is some within flying distance of our hives. By the way, it makes a beautiful honey.

Thinking ahead to the time after harvesting your honey, check the varroa count and prepare for treatments if they are necessary. I note that beekeeping suppliers have half a dozen different varroa treatments in their catalogues, all of them, no doubt, effective, but do check varroa numbers and don't use unnecessary chemicals if they are not needed.

D. S.

Forthcoming Events

July

Tuesday 10th Talk, "Honey Bees Foraging on Salt Marshes", by Kate Davidson.

Weekend of 13th, 14th & 15th, WBKA 75th Anniversary Summer School

To be held at Aberystwyth University. Information on the programme, costs and booking form is available on the WBKA website.

Monday 23rd to Thursday 26th Welsh National Honey Show, to be held during the Royal Welsh Show at Builth Wells.

Tuesday 31st Pre-Gower Show meeting at New Lodge. 31st July. Gill Lyons will be there to receive show entries and give out show passes.

August

Friday 3rd Start preparation of marquee in the Gower Show.

Saturday 4th Continue set up, stage exhibits, Judging starts at 2.00 p.m.

Sunday 5th Gower Show day.

Wednesday 8th Bee Tent outing Vale of Glamorgan Show, Fonmon Castle.

September

Tuesday 11th Talk, "Preparing for Winter", by Stephen Davies.

October

Tuesday 9th Talk, "What the Exam Qualifications Are", by Stephen Davies.

Saturday 20th Second Skep Making day course.

November

Tuesday 13th The Society Honey Show.

December**Saturday 1st** Christmas Dinner at the Rake & Riddle.**Contact Numbers****Chairman: David O'Carroll dsocarroll@yahoo.co.uk****Secretary: Post vacant****Treasurer: John Gale 07855 451 781****“When Bees Were Bees”** by Tom Davies

More from the 1906 booklet on How To Use Bee Appliances by Mr. E. H. Taylor.

I always thought that the Porter Bee Escape was a fairly recent invention, around the time I took up the craft, but they are described in this booklet. Apparently there were quite a few designs of them in use ,

So a season in which all the forms that were in use at that time were sent out to many expert keepers, and at the end of the season the form selected was the one in use these days.

The booklet describes in detail all of the equipment in use at that time. The section on skeps described their making, usually made from wheat or rye straw, bound with cane, but briar and osier could be used.

Mr. Taylor saw the use of a skep as ideal for the taking of a swarm, but only for a short time while waiting to be hived in a bar frame hive, as the bees will start to build comb in the skep.

Something I had never heard of – Mr. Taylor wrote that skeps could be sent by rail or post, providing that a thin cloth, allowing air to pass through, is fastened over the top, and a piece of perforated zinc is nailed over the ring on top of the skep. Also, room in the skep could be increased by the use of an ‘imp’, which is a straw ring placed under the skep. Skep covers could be bought, made of tin or zinc, also supers for skeps, together with a roof to keep the super dry.

More next time, Tom.

In the Next Issue: Ancient Egyptian Beekeeping

The deadline for articles / items for the next issue is **16th August.**