



# Southampton & District Bee Keepers Association

## August 2009

*Foragings*

## Newsletter

### Contact Details

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### Contributors this month

*Diane Burrows*

*Jan Margetts*

### Dates for the Diary

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#### **Sunday, 2nd August, 14.00**

Broadlands Apiary, Romsey

#### **Apiary Meeting**

Honey harvesting

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#### **Saturday, 8th August, 15:00 (food at 17.00)**

Wendy's House, Thistledown, Mill Lane, Nursling

#### **Barbecue**

Spend a pleasant afternoon beside the River Test catching up or meeting other members of the association in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. The more adventurous of us can take a stroll down the lane and see the Associations new apiary.

More details on page 3

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#### **Saturday, 8th August**

Deadline for entries to the S&DBKA Honey show

If you've forgotten to post your entry form, bring it along to the Barbecue and hand it in in person!

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#### **Saturday, 15th August, 14:00**

Pear Tree Green Church Hall, Woolston

#### **S&DBKA Annual Honey Show**

Come along and view the hard work of members of our association as they vie for one of the Association Trophies

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## PESTS & DISEASE

In line with the CSL guidelines the Varroa count for July

| Level and Control Required | Average Mite Drop per Day | Proportion of Infested Drone Pupae     |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Low<br>No Action           | 4 or less                 | Less than 1 in 20                      |
| Medium<br>Plan Action      | Between 4 & 8             | More than 1 in 20<br>Less than 1 in 10 |
| High<br>Take Action        | More than 8               | More than 1 in 10                      |

### *A History of Beekeeping:*

#### *Bee Boles*

*By Diane Burrows*

On holiday in Cornwall recently, visiting the Lost Gardens of Heligan, I noticed a large freestanding stone wall containing a double row of arched recesses. Some had closed wooden doors across the front, but two or three had what looked suspiciously like straw skeps placed within the recess. On reading the information plaque the recesses turned out to be 'bee boles' and dated from the mid 1800s. These were the forerunners of modern bee hives, and were used to house the skeps, sheltering them from the weather.



Heligan was at that time a large estate, with varied and productive gardens. The bee bole wall was situated along the outside edge of the vegetable gardens, facing south. According to Heligan's guidebook the bees were important to the economy of the estate. They provided wax for candles, honey for consumption and, most importantly, a means of fertilisation for much of the garden's produce.

I took a few photos and, on returning home, did a bit of investigation on the internet. Bee boles it seems, or remnants of them, can be found all over the country and many are much earlier than the Victorian ones at Heligan.

The International Bee Research Association (IBRA) holds a register of bee boles on the internet. They currently have 1,481 entries, many with photos, from all over the UK and dating from pre 1300 to newly built ones within the last few years. They come in various shapes - square, domed, arched, sometimes singly but more often in groups or rows, and were erected in specially built walls, or into the existing walls of houses, gardens or outbuildings.

Intrigued I looked up Hampshire on the register and found several entries. Of the ones accessible to the public, one single one exists in the garden of the Tudor House in Southampton, a set of four at Titchfield Abbey and several at Bishops Waltham Palace. Unfortunately Tudor House is currently closed to the public for renovation, so our first trip out was to find the ones at Titchfield Abbey. The abbey was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was later converted to a Tudor mansion. The grand Tudor gatehouse gives it an impressive façade, but it's pretty much in ruins behind. The four bee boles

have been filled in at some point, but were still quite easy to find, being situated in the red brick wall surrounding the abbey gardens which seems to be part of the Tudor renovations. The wall faces south, looking out over the elderly remnants of an apple orchard.

It's probable the medieval monks at Titchfield had kept bees before the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as did Buckfast Abbey in Devon, from a similar time period and which still has remains of bee boles in its grounds.



The Titchfield site is now very peaceful and quiet and it was easy to imagine those white cloaked monks going about their business in the gardens hundreds of years ago. It's a beautiful spot on a sunny morning, and I was glad to have been led there by my interest in bees. Bishops Waltham is next on our list!

### *S&DBKA Annual Honey Show*

15th August 2009

Peartree Green Church hall, Woolston, Southampton

Closing date for entries is 8th August Support your local honey show, the more entries the better the competition!

# *A compost swarm*

*By Jan Margetts*

Like many swarms it starts with a phone call from a swarm co-ordinator, who is always pleased to find an obliging beekeeper in and with whom he can off load a swarm. I could feel the 'sigh of relief' from Dave as I said "Yes" to his question "Can you deal with an established swarm, in a compost bin at Bitterne Park?"

The swarm co-ordinator's phone is buzzing (sorry) at this time of year and once he has past that swarm call on, he can return to his cool beer and friends. It's a relief for him to find someone who is 1. at home, 2. available (not just lighting the barbecue for the family) and 3. has a spare hive and site for the swarm.

So if you haven't already collected a swarm, I hope I can encourage you as you don't have to be an "old hand at it". I put my name on the list two seasons ago, after my first year.

Each swarm is different, as is the location like the guy who had a swarm in his attic and whose hobby was performing battle enactments. His home was cluttered with Napoleonic war memorabilia in every room, with the regimental uniforms for the Duke of Wellington and the Hussars. Oh, and I never did collect that swarm.

So your knowledge is tested and the enjoyment is safely housing the bees and hopefully reaping some honey benefits.

It all started on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June and I arranged to take a look on the Saturday. My initial thoughts said as it was an established colony the likelihood of them moving was small. Don't presume!, when we came to take the comb apart several days later, the bees were thinking otherwise, as Andy spotted a queen cup with an egg inside.

For that first visit I donned my gear and watched with alarm as the house owner approached a black dalek bin, opened the lid and peered in at the visible wild comb. Not to be out done I disrobed and apprehensively joined him.

"They are very docile" and I had to agree. But would they be like that when I ripped their home apart? (Actually they were)

For the "compost bin" colony I knew that I needed help as this colony had been established in the bin since last season with plenty of wild comb visible, enough it transpired to fill a medium sized plastic container.

So I made a call to Andy to ask his advice and he did me one better and agreed to help me on the Tuesday.

So if the task looks awesome there is always advice and help on the end of a telephone.

You don't just pick Andy up, without viewing his apiary, where his air traffic controller was having numerous problems that day with the number of incoming flights. The bees were certainly on a honey flow and as Tony was also there on another day off, he was voted in as the David Bailey, plus he had another mission afterwards with Andy.

Trying to think of everything you may need does come with experience and where it was useful having Andy onboard who thought of the buckets to transfer the bees into and additional ones for the comb and water to wash our gloves in at intervals.

The bin was situated beyond the 'astro turf lawn' and the patio and amongst some exotic tropical plants. With the patio so close the plan was to lift the bin onto it from the shrubbery and replace it with my hive which had a queen excluder under the brood box and my entrance aligned approximately at the same height as the one the bees were using in the bin. A flap, which Paul the house holder had lowered weeks earlier to give the bees a better entrance.

There was another surprise for as we lifted the bin it exposed a nest of Red Tailed Bumble Bees.

We started by cutting the wild comb out frame by frame, shaking the bees into one bucket and dis-

carding the comb into a separate plastic box. With all the visible top comb cut out we tackled the bottom comb after lifting the bin clear. We soon had some very sticky bees, patio and beekeepers.

It took us two hours to shake most of the bees into the hive and we were left with two clusters at our feet. Andy said he was convinced the queen was in one and again he was so right. She was caged and placed in the hive and the remainder of bees left on a sheet to run in.

Everyone was relieved when the opportunity came to rip off our suits as that afternoon was hot and the garden a sun trap.

I took the option to leave my hive in situ and return that evening with 2 pints of 1 to 1 feed.

As I write this paragraph on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> the colony had taken all the feed down in three days so another 2 pints were added.

The following Tuesday evening an inspection proved they had taken down the second 2 pint feed, so the hive was strapped up by 22.00hrs and the entrance sealed. Was the hive sufficiently strapped up? Obviously not, as with only one strap either way it moved enough when lifted to let out some angry bees, three at least bit me. "Learning the hard way"

The operation had to be postponed a day, but again it wasn't to be, as that evening the night shift had come on and a number of bees were still on the alighting board at 23.00hrs having an evening stroll. "Also I had no smoker with me" what did I say about coming fully equipped?

So I had to crack it Friday. Andy had phoned to ask how I was progressing? "Well it's like this". He reasoned that maybe the bottom queen excluder was preventing entry flow, so that had to be removed before the evening move.

This went without incident, well only a minor one. The hive was placed on a cover board in the back

## *A History of Beekeeping: Skeps*

*By Diane Burrows*

My bit of research into the use of bee boles started me investigating how beekeeping with skeps actually worked. Before the development of the movable frame hive that we all know and love, beekeepers kept their colonies in inverted baskets known as skeps (which is an old Anglo Saxon word meaning basket). Most often made of straw or wicker they were also constructed out of reeds or sedges, depending on what was available locally. Nowadays they are usually only used for catching swarms or often just for decoration. Even though it's over 100 years since they were in common usage the perceived traditional image of a beehive is still a conical woven straw skep rather than a National or a Langstroth!

As far back as Roman times beehives were being woven from willow or hazel twigs and covered with a protective layer of cow dung. Gradually these were replaced by the straw basket type. The location of bee boles still in existence proves that honey bees were maintained by religious communities in the medieval period and beyond. At that time the most important product from the hive was the wax, the church candles produced from beeswax being far superior to the cheaper tallow ones used by ordinary people. This, along with honey's uses as a sweetener and as a basis for mead, must have been worth the risks posed by beekeeping without modern equipment.

The skeps were quite small, typically holding 6-8 vertical combs, probably to encourage swarming

which was important in order to replace the colonies destroyed during harvesting. Sometimes they would have a 'cap' added to the top which, like our supers, made it possible to harvest some honey without destroying the brood comb below. If this didn't provide enough space an extra ring of straw known as an 'eke' would be added below the cap. This apparently is where the term 'to eke out' originated.

For those early beekeepers without access to bee boles, protection from the weather was through the use of a conical wigwam-shaped construction of straw that was placed over the skep to ward off the rain. This was called a 'hackle'. According to one website this is the origin of the term 'raising the hackles' - though it seems to me more likely it came from the way a dog's shoulder hair or hackles stand on end when it's angry!

Beekeepers would need expertise in hefting the skeps, in order to decide which colonies to harvest and which to leave over winter. Both the lightest, which may not have survived the winter, and the heaviest would be harvested. The middle weight ones would be left for the following year.

The only way to effectively harvest the maximum honey and wax from a skep was to kill the bees. This could be done either by asphyxiating them with sulphurous smoke, or drowning them by immersing the skep in water. Either way care had to be taken not to taint the honey.

## *A compost swarm continued*

of my car so I was surprised to see it covered with bees when I lifted the hive out. Were they leaking out of somewhere? No they had secured a ride on the under side of the open mesh floor.

The last thing to happen that night was the ratchet strap would not release, it had been a long day but so worth while. For the effort I had a strong colony of bees filling a super as I type and I've gained a lot of knowledge from my own mistakes and working alongside Andy. Ted Hooper can't give you that "hands on" experience.

## *Another Blue Ribbon for the Association*

At the recent New Forest Show, S&DBKA member, Andy Willis, managed to gain a third Blue Ribbon for best in show.

The winning entry was 'three jars of honey as for sale'. This is a very tricky class to win as not only do you have to first rate honey, but the presentation is taken into account as well.

His prize was awarded by the New Forest & District Bee Keepers Association Show secretary, Sylvia Poulton at the end of the show on Thursday.

Congratulations also to Tony Mabe and Janice Roper who claimed places at the show as well.

Congratulations to you all.

## *Summer BBQ*

*Saturday 8th August, 15.00hrs (food served at 17.00hrs)*

*£10.00, dietary requirements catered for.*

*This year Wendy has offered to host the bbq for the association at her picturesque home alongside the river test in Nursling.*

*If you wish to join us then contact Diane Burrows on (023) 8022 1840 or email at [secretary@southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk](mailto:secretary@southamptonbeekeepers.co.uk) asap*