



NHBKA October 2015 Newsletter

Gary welcomed us to our first meeting after the summer with a full agenda. It would be our penultimate meeting at Howgills, but more of that later. With the refreshments responsibilities assigned, Gary recalled the events we had participated in since our last meeting. North Herts took the lead at the Herts Show in May. It went well, with other Herts branches helping on the several different stalls. In what was probably a first for a beekeeping group, we won a Silver Gilt for our bee-friendly garden display. We organised a Bee Disease Day that was managed by Chris Mercer and attended by beekeepers from as far away as Cambridgeshire. We were also at the Triangle Garden Open Day and their Apple Day in Hitchin, in the Hitchin Market Square, the Magna Carta Fair in Walkern (Gary and Dr John Hill using the opportunity for a bit of medieval dressing up), St. Francis' College Fair in Letchworth, and Butterfly World in St. Albans. The latter was the launch pad for the Bee Awareness Day that we recently ran in Letchworth. It could be said that Butterfly World put the Bee in WC as their public conveniences are large WBC hives with frames hanging inside, surely an unnecessary distraction for half the population. There was also a small social gathering at the Lavender Fields in Ickleford and we crossed the county to be part of the Wimpole Produce Fair. Gary was the driving force behind most of these events and was helped on many of the stalls by Peter McKenna. Peter seems to be one of only a few members this summer who had any honey to sell. Next year we have asked Anne Harvey to act as our events co-ordinator providing a focus for any events we attend.

As well as the events, we had two apiary visits. The first to Pat Veasey in July with a splendid afternoon tea and the second with a BBQ held at the Association apiary on the Hillbrow allotments in Letchworth.

The main part of the evening before the tea and coffee break (as usual refreshments seems to be a recurring theme), Paul Jiggins, chairman of the Welwyn and District Historical Society gave a thoroughly absorbing presentation about Taylor's Bee Hive Works of Welwyn. Apparently, Taylor's crops up quite often in questions to the Society, and though a historian and not a beekeeper, Paul guided us through the rise and fall of the Bee Hive Works.

The Works were not in Welwyn but sited next to what is now Welwyn North Station in Digswell, and initially they were not called Taylor's. In 1800, honey was an important foodstuff and beekeeping was an important part of the industrial scene. The company which later became Taylor's was started by Thomas Bates Blow (b. 1854), who was a tradesman known in Welwyn. His father was a carpenter and Thomas helped with the carpentry as well as developing an interest in photography. He had several different occupations but his abiding interest was in nature, particularly botany and biology. At 14 he was already keeping bees in skeps. Thomas, unsurprisingly, started to make wooden hives and other equipment and in 1880 set up a business in Mill Lane (next to what is now the fish and chip shop). His business was very successful and in a shrewd move in 1893 he purchased land from Cowper (Panshanger House) next to Welwyn Station (now Welwyn North). He employed 40 men and built his own gas works rather than buy gas from the Welwyn Gas Works. Two houses would eventually be built on the site, the St Ives, and The Chalet, and were used initially by the owners and later by the general managers. As well as the manufacturing plant Thomas Blow established a large apiary of 50 or more hives on the site. A testament to his business acumen was that he employed children to chop up waste wood to sell as firewood, selling 20,000 bundles per week. The scale of this by-product gives some idea of the size of the main business. He received accolades at various exhibitions, at Paris for example. Thomas travelled widely and became a Fellow of the Royal Society and was engaged as a consultant to government and academia. One of his trips took him to Japan and he returned with a Japanese wife. Thomas eventually decided to sell the business to concentrate on his academic pursuits.

In 1900, Edward Henry Taylor, who was working at Blow's as an apprentice was able to buy the business and it became Taylor's. In 1905 there was a major fire at the works possible started by cinders from a passing steam train. The event is recorded in the British Bee Journal of the time

*'DISASTROUS FIRE at Mr. E. H. Taylor's Hive Works, WELWYN. British Bee Journal 1905
Much sympathy will no doubt be felt for Mr. E. H. Taylor, who has for the second time had his well-known bee-hive works adjoining the station at Welwyn burnt down. The fire broke out a few minutes after the workmen had left on the evening of Wednesday, the 26th ult., and was first noticed by the driver of a passing train, who drew attention by blowing his whistle. The contents of the place were almost wholly bee-*

hives and woodwork generally, and within ten minutes of the alarm being given all was in flames. The entire contents of the office were destroyed except the safe containing the ledgers, but four cottages, occupied by a few of the forty workmen employed, though in great danger, were eventually saved. The entire damage is estimated at over £7,000, and is only partly covered by insurance.'

The Welwyn Fire Brigade attacked the fire, pumping water from the nearby Mimram. By 21:00 they were losing the battle and the fire was spreading to the nearby cottages. The call went out to another brigade in Hertford and by midnight the fire was under control. Taylor was only insured for part of loss and it took time for the business to recover. Being part of the food industry, the business did well in WW1. In 1916 conscription started and Taylor managed to gain exemptions for his employees, no doubt his chairmanship of the employment tribunal added a little weight. At the end of the war, Taylor's employed 80 people and Taylor paid for a phone line from the Welwyn exchange to Digswell. By 1919 Taylor was ready to retire and the business was sold to investors and Bill Laudnum was employed to run the works. Bill stayed until 1926 when William Gavin took over. The company opened several large apiaries around the area, one opposite the Clock Hotel on the original A1, and apparently noted by the Queen on her way to Sandringham. At its height, the company was selling 3000 hives per annum, mostly for export, with a marketing department in Westminster. A contemporary picture of the time shows the Taylors Mobile Film Unit in 1933, advertising itself as the 'Largest Supplier of Hives and Appliances in the British Empire'. In 1980 the company celebrated 100 years in business but the business was starting to fail. It finally closed in 1984 and was sold to Thornes who stripped the buildings and took the contents to their Wragby site. A Taylor's archive is still available at Wragby. So the company, much like the fire that almost destroyed it, grew from a spark lit by Thomas Blow, burned brightly for over a century, and was then extinguished. No trace of the Taylor's business exists now; the site is a housing development, although there is a tiny clue to the history of the site - the name of the estate is Honeymead.

Derrick Richardson remembers attending a course at Taylor's; the course (every day for a week) was free if you bought a hive and bees. Frank Everest also visited the site towards the end and saw stockpiled cedar wood for hives but it was clear to him that the business was unlikely to remain a going concern and it stopped trading shortly afterwards.

A big thank you to Paul for a very informative presentation about an important part of our local beekeeping history.

After the break, Dave Fewell entertained us with his experience of BBKA examinations. He opened with a quote for all the aspirational examinees among us

'The capacity to learn is a gift / The ability to learn is a skill / The willingness to learn is a choice'

A slide of the various BBKA examinations and their interrelationships looked rather like a flowchart for a nuclear reactor process (http://www.bbka.org.uk/files/library/exam_framework_1442232628.pdf). It charts a route from the (essential) Basic Assessment, through the Modules and the General and Advanced Certificates in Beekeeping Husbandry to Master Beekeeper, with Microscopy and a couple of others.

Dave's caveat in small print would say that putting in the time and effort (and the expense) is obviously no guarantee of success however, by taking the exams you gain a worthwhile qualification, challenge yourself, gain confidence, and probably learn new skills.

The Basic Assessment is essential for any further examinations and consists of a practical and an oral test in a local apiary, and lasts about an hour. It is very helpful to new beekeepers who must have kept bees for a year before taking the exam.

The Modular examinations are written exams with an invigilator in exam conditions (i.e. no conferring!). They last 90 minutes and are based on 100 marks; 60 for a pass, 70 for a credit, and 80 for a distinction. Each examination is divided into three parts; Part A – 10 quick fire questions with one or two word answers, 1 mark for each correct answer; Part B - 4 longer questions that can be answered by short notes or bullet points for 15 marks each; Part C - one essay type question for 30 marks. The Modules are 1 - Honey Bee Management, 2 – Honey Bee Products and Forage, 3 – Honey Bee Pests, Diseases and Poisoning, 5 – Honey Bee Biology (i.e. anatomy) , 6 - Honey Bee Behaviour (inc swarming), 7 – Selection and Breeding of Honey Bees, and 8 – Honey Bee Management, Health and History (a summary of all the Modules).

The General Certificate assessment is held at the beekeeper's apiary and overseen by 2 BBKA inspectors. It takes more than 3 hours and you get no feedback during the assessment. You need to provide 3 jars of

clear honey and 3 jars of set honey. Dave thinks you probably need 10 hives available for the assessment; for starters you need 3 queen right colonies and a nuc. Also the place where you extract the honey (usually the kitchen) is examined (Dave recommends a deep clean!). The assessment requires a demonstration of techniques like a Bailey Comb Change, hence the extra hives. In addition there is an oral examination. It's considered to be the hardest exam of all!

The Advanced Certificate assessment leads to a Master Beekeeper qualification and requires a pass of the General Certificate assessment. The Advanced assessment is held at Stonleigh. The participants must present a lecture and complete a 30 minute interview. This is the Black Belt of Beekeeping, the summit of the beekeeping mountain. One examinee was asked to manipulate an imaginary hive and apparently failed when he stood in front of the entrance. This leads one to suspect that at the highest level, beekeeping is an almost spiritual experience with beekeepers communing with the bees on a mystical level, intoning a long melodic 'Beeee' as they contemplate their virtual hives (from the side of course, not the front).

Dave had a few words of advice for aspiring beekeepers. Modules have questions from some areas that come up every year in slightly different forms, some areas never come up. Past papers are available free to members on the BBKA website. Use the internet, bee blogs, and chat rooms too assist your revision. If you query the examination result (for a Module), you can get a model answer, these can be found on the web. Use study notes, Dave highly recommends a Mid- Bucks Beekeepers site, <http://blog.mbbka.org.uk>. Use internet resources, Wikipedia, BBKA Information Leaflets, and speak to other beekeepers.

To help members with BBKA examinations in the future, Dave had a few ideas that we might like to implement - a library of reference books, a library of all past papers (BBKA don't have them all), mentoring from previous examinees, and training opportunities for the General assessment. Not all of us like taking exams, especially for something we see as an enjoyable hobby, but going through the process will improve your knowledge, give you more confidence and understanding, reduce the number of mistakes and possibly help you recognise issues earlier, and you never know, it might make you enjoy your beekeeping more.

A big thank you to Dave for an inspirational presentation, I hope it will encourage more of us to tackle the BBKA examination challenge.

Gary offered his services to help develop a set of slides if any member was keen to deliver a presentation.

Gary mentioned the training course for new beekeepers we are running in March 2016 (details on the web site). There are other training courses run by Welwyn and St. Albans next year - new season preparation, swarm collection, and a Basic Assessment preparation course.

We need volunteers on Saturday, 7th November to plant trees at the Hillbrow site. The trees were provided by the Woodland Trust and are a mixture of hazel, blackthorn, crab apple and elder whips. We are also looking for volunteers to tidy up the flower beds that have been planted on the Cambridge Road. NHDC has agreed to erect signs in the flower beds to indicate that they were sponsored by NHBKA, so good advertising for the Association.

Finally, a few dates for your diaries,

- The National Honey Show, Thurs, 29th October - Sat, 31st October, <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/>
- Bee Tradex, Saturday, 5th March, <http://www.beetradex.co.uk/>,
- BBKA Spring Convention, Fri, 8th April - Sun, 10th April, http://www.bbka.org.uk/news_and_events/spring_convention_2016
- Herts County Show, Sat, 28th May - Sun, 29th May

As I mentioned at the start of the Newsletter, this was our penultimate meeting at Howgills, in 2016 we are moving to the Mrs Howard Memorial Hall in Letchworth for our indoor meetings and training sessions. It provides better parking and access and we hope a slightly better venue.

If you need to purchase fondant for feeding, we are organising a bulk purchase. The current price is £15.19 for 12.5 kg. Let me or Gary know (cc'd on this email) how much you need in units of 12.5kg. We will be placing the order at the beginning of w/c 26th October so please let me or Gary know your requirements by Monday, 26th October.

The next indoor meeting is on **Tuesday, 17th November 2015, 7:30 pm**, at Howgills, The Friends Meeting House in Letchworth - 42 South View, Letchworth SG6 3JJ.