

JANUARY 2024

WDBKA NEWSLETTER



Future newsletter articles would be most welcome, please feel free to send them to Graham at: wgh585@gmail.com



Editor's note:

You'd be forgiven for assuming that when you received the first newsletter from me back in February 2023 that this would be the start of many such publications! Alas, my performance as editor has been nothing short of pathetic.

This first newsletter for 2024 is a round-up of 2023's activities with contributions from association members.

The next one will look at upcoming events for the year ahead along with other association notices.

It would be great if members got in touch as and when something interesting / funny / disastrous occurs during their beekeeping year - perhaps even a photo and a couple of words about your apiary. I look forward to hearing from members!

All the best, Graham.



Apiary cleaning day - Saturday 11th March

The year got off to an enthusiastic start with several members turning out for a cleaning day for all our equipment in the apiary shed. We were fortunate to have a dry calm day to get through all equipment for what turned out to be an efficient conveyor belt of cleaning – whether in one direction for scorching, or the other for scrubbing in soda crystals. This year camp burners provided the hot water and this generally worked quite well to keep a supply going through the afternoon.



Jean and Grahame discussing
the year ahead for the garden?



Bee microscopy – Saturday 1st April

The Kirkland Mission provided the venue for 2023's first main event: bee microscopy. Delegates were treated to an all-star training team of Val Sullivan, Richard Robinson and Grahame Pinches.

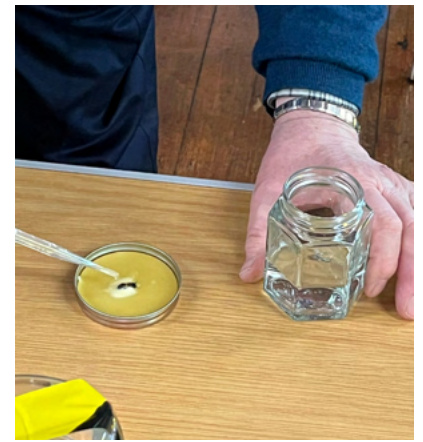
Val began the session with a talk about bee anatomy. This was particularly interesting with Val drawing comparisons between the bee and humans. Various drawings were given to delegates for the talk and available around the Mission for reference during the day.

The second session of the day was a talk by Richard on the different types of microscope. Stereo and compound microscopes were both discussed and various examples from member's own collections were available to have a look at and compare. For the practical session, each participant had a stereo microscope – the same model offered to members for purchase earlier in the spring. This model was chosen as it offers a solid performance at a very reasonable price. A good introductory microscope.

After lunch, safety aspects were discussed with regards to the dissection equipment, following which Grahame demonstrated how to position a bee in wax for dissection. It quickly became apparent this would be a fiddly and potentially frustrating start to the practical session. However, with a little practice, all managed to securely attach bees in wax.

The afternoon was spent 'unpacking' the bee - identifying key parts of the bee's anatomy. At the end of the day was instruction on how to prepare a bee for inspection for the presence of acarine mites.





Beginner's course weekend – Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th April

Once again, St. Bees village school hosted the annual beginner's weekend. This is an ideal venue with plenty of space to speak to trainees and demonstrate equipment.

Grahame Pinches welcomed the trainees and delivered his presentation on the natural history of the honey bee colony. Debbie Keighley followed with her presentation on a year in the life of a beekeeper - what a beekeeper can expect to be busy with over the course of not just the spring and summer when the bees are active and inspections and manipulations required, but what sort of jobs are necessary during the autumn and winter to look after the bees and prepare for the year ahead.

Alan Robson provided his guide to the equipment required to start beekeeping - demonstrating the parts of a national hive and talking about the whole spectrum of kit, from smokers to bee food. Andy Smith talked about the logic for choosing an appropriate apiary site - coupled with useful photographs.

Piers Manson talked about the essential topics of insurance and the benefits of becoming a member of the BBKA - and then spoke of that inevitable part of beekeeping: stings. What do you need in your first aid kit? Will you die? (Probably not, but you'll need to get stung to find out).

Sarah Richards finished off the day with a look at gardens and forage - what do bees eat and how can you help and sustain them with your gardening?

Sunday provided a opportunity to get into a bee suit at the association's apiary at Westlakes Science Park and, for some, experience the first time being amongst the bees and learning the key points of a hive inspection.



Alan explaining the parts of a national hive

The year at the apiary

Richard Robinson

It was a busy 2023 at the apiary. We lost 2 colonies over winter taking our hive count down to 4 Nationals and 1 top bar hive. Of the surviving colonies 2 of them had survived but were very weak at the beginning of spring, but after a short stint in a poly nuc both colonies bounced back and were soon growing well. The early part of the year was taken up with shook swarms and splits with a view of increasing the number of hives as well as preparing for another go at queen rearing.

Our efforts in queen rearing did not go according to plan, although we are consistent in our efforts with a 100% failure rate, better luck next year. Val Sullivan was keen to try grafting with some limited success although again we failed to raise queens to maturity. The rest of the year was taken up with general bee husbandry with plenty of challenges thrown our way by the bees. We are now well into the winter closed the year out with 6 Nationals and the top bar.

Turnout at the apiary was generally good although in the later part of the year numbers fell off coinciding with school holidays and a change to the parking arrangements on site. We now have a workable solution in place to retain our free parking.



27th May 2023



1st July 2023



5th August 2023

Visit to Northumberland Honey Company - 23rd May

The association arranged a visit to Luke and Suzie's Northumberland Honey Company in Haltwhistle.

We were shown around their unit whilst they talked about each aspect of their business, including a detailed insight into how they rear queen bees - breeding strategies and methods, success rates, record keeping and even an introduction to AI techniques.

We looked around the wider unit at some of the equipment they use and how they manage such a



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huge amount of equipment.

Finally we arrived in the honey processing area and mead manufacturing.

There was a huge amount of information to digest (and enjoy) whilst sampling some mead in the reception area. A thoroughly worthwhile, and highly recommended trip.

[I suppose I should really have taken a selfie of us all in front of their unit and then I'd have a photo to include!]

WDBKA Honey Show 2023

Val Sullivan

The Whitehaven and District Beekeepers Association Honey Show was held at Bigrigg Village Hall on Saturday 21st October. There was a good turnout, although the number of entries to the various classes were slightly fewer than in 2022.

The show also included a demonstration (with hands on participation by attendees) of honey frame management for extraction of various types of honey.

Jean Clements stepped into the breach to introduce the show due to family commitments of the Chairman. She welcomed new and experienced beekeepers, spectators and exhibitors, and explained the way the afternoon would run. Refreshments were offered including honey flapjack. The 6 classes of exhibits were judged by Val Sullivan.

The Novice cup was won by Ishbel Cook with her first attempt at showing honey.

The Clear honey class had several very worthy entries - clear, well filtered honey filling the jars to the correct level and presented in clean glass with blemish free lids. The cup winner for this class was Hilary Steele but unfortunately due to a clerical error the cup was initially presented to another competitor. We hope to make amends to Hilary with her correctly annotated First-place certificate and of course, the "Raymond Heckles cup for honey".

The Gosforth Show cup for Set Honey was won by Andy Smith who also won the Honeycomb frame category with a faultless exhibit.

The honey cakes were well presented, correctly sized, and tasted delicious. The winner was Hilary Steele.

Product from the hive category was won by Alan Robson and the final award for Best Exhibit in Show was won by Andy Smith with his frame of honey.



While judging was being done, Richard Robinson and Peter Broadbent demonstrated methods of extracting the honey harvest. Richard showed the various types of tool used to open the capped cells before the spinning of the frames. There were both hand driven and electric extractors to be tried. Peter demonstrated a honey press for use in extracting heather honey and oilseed rape honey, both notoriously difficult to collect if using conventional extractors.

The afternoon concluded with Jean reminding the audience the date and venue of the next Association AGM at The Gather in Ennerdale Bridge.



AGM 2023 - 9th November

The AGM once again took place at The Gather in Ennerdale Bridge. The evening began with a fascinating insight into the history and production of mead by Andy Smith. He provided really interesting detail into the ingredients and variables that create different results. All present were then invited to try two meads Andy brought along to the meeting.

The meeting continued with a round-up of another successful year for the Association. All current committee members were re-elected to their role for another year. Those interested in joining the committee the following year are very much encouraged to do so.



Apiary gardening morning - 18th November 2023

The willow trees never stood a chance when members of the Association descended on the apiary for a gardening (clearing out?!) morning. The weather stayed fine, plenty of power tools were used, the caramel shortbread was excellent (thanks Richard) - and the canvas was cleared for 2024.



Balms and salves - 2nd December 2023

Debbie Keighley

37 attendees from across Cumbria were expected, but snow and black ice on the day prevented 13 from reaching the hall. An entertaining and informative presentation, and a demonstration of making lip balm and body butter, were given by Esther Gigli. All those present found the course both enjoyable and useful, and went home with some recipes to try at home. Those who had paid the course fee, but were unable to attend due to the weather, were sent an email with the handouts, so they too could try making balms and salves.

