

Whitehaven Beekeepers Newsletter, March 2021

Apiary update.

Two of the hives at our teaching apiary at Westlakes Science Park have been flying on the few days of sunshine and warmer weather at the end of February. The cherry tree and Mahonia in the garden are in flower to provide them with some early forage, together with thousands of snowdrops in the surrounding woodland. The hive at our out-apiary is also doing well.

The clear plastic roof of the bee shelter has some damaged sheets, and a small working party to replace these is planned for the 13th of March. The option of making the shelter longer is being considered, to accommodate the new top-bar hive.

The Wednesday morning gardening sessions have re-started, and anyone who wants to come and help is very welcome. We meet from 10.00 -11.00, unless the weather is too wet.

Plans for starting Apiary Visits.

At the last committee meeting on 25th February, we discussed provisional plans for starting apiary visits. The national timetable for coming out of lockdown allows outdoor gatherings of up to 6 people from March 29th, so providing there are no changes to this, we aim to start weekly apiary visits for up to 6 members, beginning on Saturday 17th April. Further details will be available after our next meeting on 23rd March.

Beginners Course.

We plan to run a Beginners Course this year, but instead of our usual date in April we will have to delay until the restrictions on meeting indoors have been lifted. We have made a booking at The Gather in Ennerdale Bridge for Saturday June 26th in the hope that we can go ahead then. Most people who booked for last year's course are still keen to attend.

Membership.

At the last committee meeting, Piers reported that we have 35 full members, 1 country member and 13 friends of the apiary. Thank you to everyone for paying their subscriptions so promptly this year.

Fondabee slabs and Invertbee syrup available to buy.

There is a real risk of bees starving at this time of year, until there is more forage available, and the weather improves, so it is important to check whether your bees have sufficient stores. The Association has good stocks of bee feed, ie 74 cans of invertbee syrup and 17 slabs of fondant, so if you need either, please contact Val Sullivan at brackenwray@aol.com to arrange collection and payment.

Thanks to Piers Manson for the following article.

WDBKA membership – where does my money go?

Introduction

In recent years the BBKA and its insurers have moved on to an online system for membership records and for issuing insurance certificates. This has led to some questions from our members about what the certificates mean and how they get issued. Members will have noticed that our systems are not as slick as (say) Amazon, but we do have a smaller budget than they do. This note hopes to explain that. There are two sections – where does a membership fee go to, and how does this work to get your insurance certificate get issued.

Where the membership fee goes?

Full members

The membership fee is currently £30 and this includes insurance for up to and including 3 colonies.

This is split as follows:

1. WDBKA retain £6. From this, we run the apiary, the garden and in normal times we run teaching and training sessions in a village hall somewhere.
2. Cumbria BKA retain £3. This gives us access to county events, access to equipment for loan, the annual honey convention and input to control over the BBKA.
3. BBKA retain £19. From this, the main benefit for members is the monthly BBKA magazine and your indemnity insurance if your bees sting anyone and own up to it. BBKA also represent beekeeping and beekeepers and so have links to the Government and its various departments, and to the world of research into improving bees and beekeeping.
4. BBKA have a subsidiary company called Bee Diseases Insurance, and it is BDI who issue the membership receipt, though a computerised system. BDI does what its title suggests and they provide the bee insurance against loss as a result of disease. This is on a sliding scale depending on the number of hives that a member has. The minimum payment, for 1, 2 or 3 colonies is £2.
5. £6 + £3 + £19 + £2 comes to your £30 membership.

Friends of the apiary

If you join as a Friend of the Apiary, the fee is £5, and this is retained in full by WDBKA. A Friend thus does not get the BBKA magazine or any insurance services.

How does this work?

Full Members

On receipt of your fee the membership secretary uses the BBKA on-line system to register the payment and to issue the BDI certificate. As mentioned, this is both your certificate of insurance and your receipt of payment as a full member.

For membership applications sent in on paper and with a cheque, this works well. The membership secretary aims to register your payment with BBKA on the same day it is received.

We appreciate that we are now in the 21st century and some members no longer have cheque book accounts. For membership applications paid by electronic transfer of money, life is a bit more complicated. Making an electronic transfer only moves money from your bank account to WDBKA's bank account. Because we're not Amazon, this doesn't automatically inform either the membership secretary or the treasurer that the payment has been made and it doesn't automatically register the payment with BBKA and BDI. This is still done by the membership secretary. This is why we ask that members paying by BACS transfer do let the membership secretary and the treasurer know.

Friends of the Apiary

The subscription money is just paid into the WDBKA bank account. There is no automatic system to issue a receipt, but the membership secretary will send an e-mail of acknowledgement, provided they know about the payment. If the payment has come in through BACS without a form, it may take us a while to realise this.

Membership secretary and the treasurer

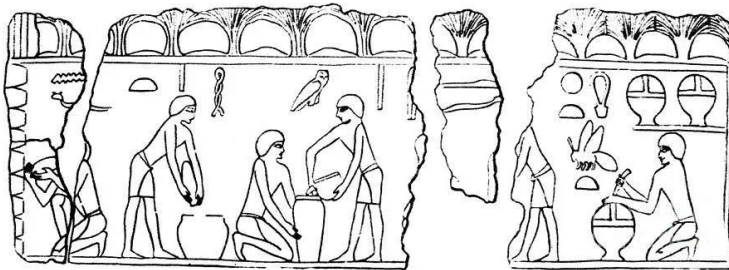
The membership secretary does the actions described above when the member's payment is received. Your payment is then passed on to the treasurer, who will put it in the bank. From time to time, the treasurer will transfer the appropriate payments to CBKA and to BBKA.

Beekeeping, from clay pots to hives with moveable frames

There is evidence that humans have exploited wild bees nests for honey as long ago as 8,000 BC. A cave painting from Spain dating around 8000 to 6000 BC shows an image of a person harvesting honey from a bees nest in a tree.

Pieces of Neolithic crockery from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa dating back 9,000 years bear chemical traces of beeswax. In the British Isles, the chemical fingerprint of bee products has been found on broken pottery at Neolithic sites in southern England.

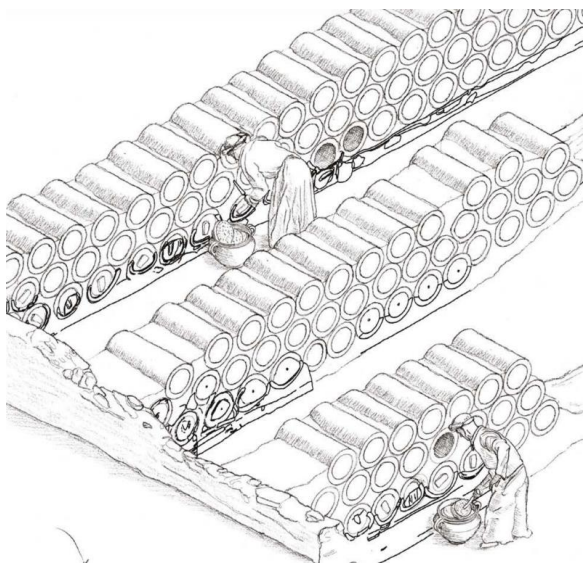
The earliest documented evidence of beekeeping, as opposed to taking honey from wild colonies comes from Egypt in 2,600 - 2,400 BC, where wall paintings and hieroglyphs show bees being kept in horizontal stacks of pipes.



The pictures also show that smoke was used to pacify the bees, and honey was extracted and stored in clay pots. Beeswax and pots of honey (still edible!) have been found during

excavations of tombs of the pharaohs.

The oldest surviving hives to be discovered date from 900 BC. They were found during excavations at a Bronze and Iron Age site Northern Israel in the Jordan valley. They were made of clay and straw and look very similar to the earlier images from Egypt. The drawing below shows how they were stacked in rows.



From these early beginnings it is thought that beekeeping gradually spread North and West across Europe. In classical Greece, Aristotle wrote the first known systematic account of honey bees in 350 BC. He described the workers, drones and the queen, how bees swarmed and how worker bees carry pollen on their legs but he remained doubtful about how bees reproduce, and believed that the bees were “ruled” by a king. The Roman poet Virgil also wrote about beekeeping.

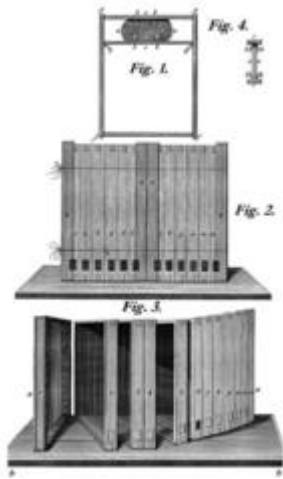
Since then, in Europe, bees have been kept in a range of hives, from hollow logs and wooden boxes, to wicker baskets and skeps made of straw. In Britain, bees were mainly kept in skeps until the mid 19th century. All of these hives are fixed comb hives, i.e. the combs are attached onto the inside walls, and the only way to collect the honey is to remove the bees and cut away the comb.

In medieval Britain, monasteries became centres for beekeeping as beeswax was highly prized for making church candles. Beekeeping was an important part of the rural domestic economy, with honey being used as a sweetener, and to make mead.



In wetter areas such as Cumbria, skeps were often kept in alcoves built into south-facing walls to protect them against wind and rain. These are called bee boles and some examples survive to this day.





The first movable frame hive was developed by a Swiss naturalist called Franz Huber in the 18th century. This featured wooded leaves filled with honeycombs that could be flipped like the pages of a book. Despite this innovation, Huber's hive was not widely adopted and simple box hives or skeps remained the popular choice for beekeepers.

In the first half of the 19th century, a Polish beekeeper called Jan Dzierzon researched bee-breeding, and also designed a hive with vertical, removable frames and recognised the importance of the correct spacing between frames.

In 1851, the Reverend Lorenzo Langstroth in America, building on these observations, invented a practical system of removable wooden frames suspended from the top of the box and spaced so the space between the combs was $\frac{3}{8}$ " or 5-8 mm, i.e. the "bee space". At this spacing, the bees can move freely across the comb and build parallel combs which remain separate from each other. This enables the beekeeper to lift frames out of the hive for inspection, without harming the bees or the comb, protecting the eggs, larvae and pupae contained within the cells. It also meant that combs containing honey could be gently removed and the honey extracted without destroying the comb. The emptied honey combs could then be returned to the bees intact for refilling.

Langstroth's classic book, *The Hive and Honey-bee*, published in 1853, described his rediscovery of the bee space and the development of his patent movable comb hive. Most hives in use today are derived from this design.

The BBKA was founded in 1874. The object of the newly formed association was to be: 'the encouragement, improvement and advancement of bee-culture in the United Kingdom, particularly as a means of bettering the condition of cottagers and the agricultural labouring classes as well as the advocacy of humanity to that industrious labourer, the honey bee'. In short, the task was to effect a general change from the use of the straw skep to the management of the wooden movable frame hive.