



WHATSTHEBUZZ

March
2022

Hello to March, to expansion (and starvation?), and to you all

I'm always surprised and delighted by the enthusiastic responses you give when I send out an email to a group of you asking for your thoughts on a particular topic. And, like all newsletter editors, I'm constantly dreaming (!) up ways to encourage people to write without my asking... or nagging.

One way is to find a topic that you might specialise in, resulting in a little article each month. I'm delighted to say that Sonia Belsey has been delving into the history of Medway BKA. Her first article (of many?) is in this issue.

Is there a topic that engages you – to the extent of writing a monthly article? The usual ones are Bee of the month, Flower of the month etc. Perhaps you'd be more persuaded by a monthly diary of your beekeeping, or your experiences of cooking with honey, or perhaps a photo diary linked to your beekeeping. This could go in many directions, such as bees at the hive, microscopy, forage, and DIY.

Speaking of DIY, I've finally put together my notes and pictures on making wooden nucs. I did know in advance that Richard Rickitt was going to do the very same topic in BeeCraft this month, and he has created a stunningly beautiful and comprehensive piece of journalism. My article is at the other end of that spectrum (no false modesty there, as you'll see) but I hope I'm not deluded in thinking that my DIY nucs are every bit as serviceable as Richard's, and being done differently, give you some options to consider.

On to beekeeping: it's probably not a good idea to do anything that the bees notice in March; just a quick check to see if bees are present, and feed if necessary. March is starvation month (along with several others!),

but as the colony expands at this time, so too does the consumption of stores. A colony can starve within a few days. Many experienced beekeepers have sad tales. 'There were plenty of stores – and then there were just dead bees.' Check to see if pollen being gathered, remove mouse-guards and woodpecker protection, and keep entrances clear. Monitor for varroa, now and forever.

Inside, the cluster has broken up, the queen laying, and the bees are foraging for nectar and pollen, while using up stores. And the winter bees are dying.

Outside, there is crocus, willow, pear, plum, and more.

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From our Chair

John Chapman, our Chair, speaks to the members each month, sometimes about the Association, sometimes about the bees.

WHATSTHEBUZZ We had the AGM a few days ago. Were you pleased with how things went?

John Chapman Yes, very pleased indeed. At the next committee meeting I hope we'll be able to sort out everyone's roles and responsibilities and we can go into that in detail in the next issue of WTB.

WTB So let's talk about March for beekeepers.

JC At the moment your bees are using only a small proportion of your equipment. But that will soon change. Now is the time to check that spare brood boxes and all your supers are cleaned, strong, and ready to go. We need frames and these have to be waxed up. Perhaps our supers are 'established' with the comb drawn, but most of us replace some frames in brood boxes each year as comb gets old or damaged.

WTB It can be hard to make yourself order stuff early!

JC If you haven't got your new equipment more or less ready, you're leaving a bit late, but [BeeTradex](#) is coming up in March. Sheila (our Secretary) has some free tickets if anyone wants to travel up to Stoneleigh for the day. Bee Equipment bought up the show a couple of years ago but this is the first time they've been able to run it for real.

WTB Is it suitable for small-scale beekeepers?

JC There's an interesting variety of people. Sometimes you hear large orders being placed! How many 1000s of jars was did you say!?

WTB Apart from boxes and what we put in them, is there anything else we should keep in mind?

JC It's time to think about the flowers in your area. What kind of forage is going to be available in this early part of the year and will your bees need some additional feeding. As the weather gets warmer and brood rearing increases, keep checking that they've got enough food. With the peculiar weather we've been having it's possible that the level of food in some hives could dwindle significantly. You don't want to end up suddenly finding that the hive which you thought at the beginning part of February was perfectly okay is now getting to the point of starvation.



WTB What's your position on feeding pollen or pollen sub to boost brood rearing?

JC I'm not particularly for it or against it. I've only ever tried it once and our stroppey bees didn't want to know anything about it! But probably there was enough fresh pollen for them to forage and they didn't need it. I've heard other people say they've found it a great advantage. It might be that a feed of syrup could be just as advantageous. You're not just giving them sugar. You also giving them water. If they're not doing much active flying, that might help them use up old stores. I do wonder if water helps them consume stored pollen too, but I've never actually heard anybody say that. But they do store the pollen with some sugars around it.

WTB What have you seen flowering recently?

JC At the moment, early prunus – plums – are flowering. We have some early Victorian ones. The problem with such early flowering is, what is going to pollinate them and will it be successful. But if the bees get out on a warmish day, there's something for them.

WTB When would you start opening hives?

JC It's not really the time yet to be going through your hives. Perhaps a quick look to see how many seams of bees are there and possibly take out a frame to see what they're doing with their stores.

WTB Thanks as always, John. 🐝

History of Medway BKA

This is the centenary year of the MBKA. For 100 years, we have supported beekeepers and beekeeping in and around the Medway Towns – but where did it all begin? Being a history lover, I decided to delve into the origins of the Association. I explored social media, trawled through the documents in the Kent Archive Centre, and read many articles. I found a rather more dramatic story than I would have expected!

Kent Beekeepers Association (KBKA) was started in 1916. Over the next few years, the Association was divided up into smaller units – East, West, South, and North, from which we originated. There are many rumours about the reasons for these splits, such as disagreements over a honey show or an argument over a show cup. Happily any disagreements of the past are long forgotten. And the story that I found was quite different.

It all began on 27 January 1921 when an open letter from Rev Newman of Ashford to *Beecraft* (the publication of the KBKA) was published in the British Bee Journal. When *Beecraft* asked for constructive criticism in an earlier edition they probably never imagined the responses they would receive.

In his letter, Rev Newman pointed out that there was no practical support for the member beekeepers, and no expert in the Association who could visit members' apiaries to detect and deal with diseases. He likened the Association to 'an Italian stock of bees; it had swarmed and swarmed to a stage of weakness.' He suggested that decentralisation was needed and that smaller groups should be formed. Months passed and there was no reply or acknowledgement from KBKA in either *Beecraft* or *The British Bee Journal*.

Then, in April 1921, an article entitled 'Kent Beekeepers Association versus Constructive Criticism' appeared; the writer was Mr George Bryden, a high ranking member of the Northern Division. George claimed that the lack of response from KBKA was a sure sign that Rev Newman had 'taken the wind from their sails', and that his criticisms could obviously not be answered or explained away.

Mr Bryden suggested that although KBKA was currently a leading beekeeping association, it would not remain so unless changes were made. He claimed that



members were critical of what they were receiving for their membership, and poor organisation had left beekeepers feeling isolated. There were no meetings or talks by experts (like those of Herrod-Hempsall in former years), no annual meeting, and no financial report. Bryden then turned his criticism onto *Beecraft* which was expanding its readership into the neighbouring county of Surrey. This expansion did not amuse Bryden and he suggested that the Surrey Associations should produce their own papers if they wanted them.

Bryden concluded with three suggested actions which might stop KBKA falling into 'extinction':

- drop the divisional arrangements and have one executive committee, with separate districts, each with their own councils
- organise inspections of all beekeepers' hives, whether invited or not
- stop 'fooling about with *Beecraft*' so that those involved could divert their energy into something more useful. He even accused KBKA of using members' cash so that they could play at being journalists! (Given that *BeeCraft* has developed into the magazine we now know and love, I think we can say that he may have misjudged that one!)

Did George Bryden's efforts spark a change in the Association? All will be revealed in next month's WTB. If you have any history of the association, old photos, stories or memories, please contact me at sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk
Sonia Belsey 🐝

MBKA news and events

The AGM

If a committee is like a car, then the AGM is like its annual service. Before modern manufacturing with its maintenance-free components, you could look forward to driving your car after the annual service. It ran so much better, and you really noticed the difference.

This AGM was a bit old-fashioned like that. John, our chair, said he was very pleased. The committee had shrunk a little, as had the work it had been doing – both a consequence of the pandemic. But just as, at the start of the pandemic, people took sensible steps before they were told to do so, so now, there seems to be a feeling that the time has come to return to the life and activities we had before – even though we'll use Zoom sometimes for the opportunities it gives us to join in, when we can't manage the journey.

The big result of this AGM is that there are now three new committee members: Ian Halls, Robert Frost, and Nigel Rawlins, and the Treasurer post has been filled by Archie McLellan.

The new expanded committee meets for the first time on 10 March, and the roles and responsibilities of the individuals will be defined then.

In the April issue of WTB, we'll cover this in detail: who the committee members are (with photos), their contact details, and their roles in the Association.

Annual MBKA subscription

If you haven't paid yet, best do so soon. The cut-off period is not far off.

The next talk in the Series...



... (as you probably know from a recent email) is on Wednesday of this week – **March 2, when Adam Leitch will be talking at Wainscott**, but also on Zoom for those who can't be there, on *Honey bee biology, and why it matters*

in practical beekeeping. For more information, including venue and Zoom details, click [here](#).

Prince Charles at the Dockyard



Vicky Hazlehurst writes: Chloe Wilson (also a member of MBKA) and I both work at The Historic Dockyard Chatham. We also look after their bees along with our mentor Paul Lawrence. We currently have four hives in a lovely area of the Dockyard away from the main visitor attraction, although visitors and residents can walk round the fence and see what we are doing. I have been looking after them for about two years now and Chloe started with me about a year ago.

On Wednesday, 2 February, HRH The Prince of Wales visited the Dockyard and we were lucky enough to be asked to present him with a gift of some honey from the Dockyard apiary. The box was designed and made by our ship's department. We chatted to Prince Charles for a few minutes and he seemed very enthusiastic about our bees and said he was really looking forward to tasting our honey!



The Prince was shown around the Dockyard including the Command of the Oceans gallery and the exhibition, *Diving Deep: HMS Invincible* in No. 1 Smithery.

Vicky Hazlehurst

TIMES AND DATES

1 March	7.30pm Module 6 (Bee Behaviour), study group, session 10 (final session), on Zoom (leaders Chris, Sue C, Paul)
2 March	8.00pm, Winter Series Talk 6 at Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG, and also on Zoom, Adam Leitch, NDB, <i>Why anatomy matters to practical beekeeping</i>
12 March	10.00am Work party at the Pavilion Apiary, weather permitting. Details below.
16 March	8.00pm, Winter Series Talk 7 at Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG, Sarah Wyndham Lewis, <i>Honey in its many complexions and my work as a Honey Sommelier (includes a honey tasting)</i>
19 March	BBKA Module exams
23 March	Introductory Course 1, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
26 March	10.00am Work party at the Pavilion Apiary, weather permitting. Details below.
30 March	8.00pm, Winter Series Talk 8, Richard Rickitt on Zoom, <i>From Rolls Royce to Rajasthan</i>
30 March	Introductory Course 2, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
6 April	Introductory Course 3, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
24 August	Introductory Course 4, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
31 August	Introductory Course 5, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG
7 September	Introductory Course 6, 8-10pm, Wainscott Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscot, ME2 4LG

Murray McGregor at Medway BKA

Britain's biggest bee farmer visited Medway BKA for a talk in our Winter series on 16 February. Murray McGregor drove 490 miles from Perthshire – but thankfully managed to fit in a delivery too!

It was immediately apparent that the evening would be too short. Murray's approach is to start talking about his heather honey and queen rearing operation, and hope that the audience will direct him to particular topics. Jolanta Modliszewska (his work partner, not life partner as he likes to make clear) was with Murray and ready to answer questions on her queen rearing outfit. Jolanta is the person behind the now famed *Jolanta* queens, raising around 2.5k queens every year plus another 1.2k nuc colonies. In the event, this fascinating talk was something of an unstoppable tide. When we paused for tea and cakes, Murray sat at his table and demonstrated some of his methods using the kit he had brought with him. His frames do not have slots, nor is his foundation wired. He stretches wires across

the frame, then lays a piece of foundation on top, and uses leads from a car battery (or charger) to heat the wires for a few seconds to bond the wax. The operation took about 20 seconds. The foundation was flatter and more firmly held than any conventional method with slotted frames and wired foundation. The Q & A after tea was vibrant and illuminating. It felt that it was just getting going when our Chair had to bring proceedings to a close. At which point Murray brought out his industrial grade oxalic acid vaporiser!

Over 60 people came this event, many from other associations. Although the evening was little more than a taster for the wisdom and experience that Murray can impart, he is, thankfully, a big presence on Beekeeping Forum where he is known as *Into the lions den*, and on Twitter, where he describes the daily events of his beekeeping year. 🐝

Future talks in our Winter Series

The final four talks in our Winter Series are at fortnightly intervals: Murray McGregor was here two weeks ago, **Adam Leitch** is coming in a couple of days' time, and **Sarah Wyndham Lewis**, honey sommelier

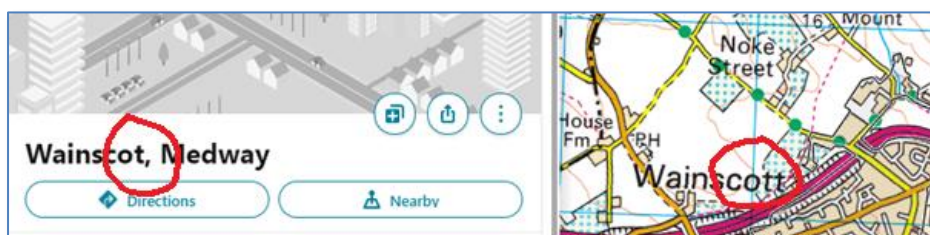


and writer of a monthly column in *BeeCraft*, will be at **Wainscott at 8.00pm on Wednesday 16 March**. Her talk is *Honey in its many complexions and my work as a Honey Sommelier with chefs, bartenders, and honey producers all over the world*. The distinctive feature of this this event is a **honey tasting!** Because Sarah needs an idea of how much honey to bring to this event, **please drop me an email to say that you would like to come**.



The series winds up with **Richard Rickitt's** follow-up to his immensely entertaining talk about his bee-oriented travels around the UK at the end of last season. His talk on **Zoom will be at 8.00pm on Wednesday 30 March** and it is called *From Rolls Royce to Rajasthan*. He will tell us about his experiences of 'Traveling in style from the jungles and deserts of India to the birthplace of the theory of evolution, stopping off at the site of some illegal beekeeping skulduggery and taking a peek at a little local royalty along the way.' 🐝

Trivia



Web browsers and internet maps seemed to have settled one T (Wainscot), but everyone else, including the Ordnance Survey, seems to think it should be Wainscott – double T. 🐝

MBKA Apiary

Report from the Pavilion Apiary, 26 February 2022

City Way Apiary is on a watching brief only with the barest minimum of maintenance taking place. We anticipate moving out of City Way at the end of March/beginning of April depending on weather. The three active colonies will be relocated at the Pavilion Apiary, Cliff Woods.

We are still working at the Pavilion Apiary. The working groups meet every fortnight. The next meeting will be Saturday 12 March.

We had disappointing news on Friday evening (25th Feb). A neighbour reported that youths had gained entry to the Pavilion and caused a lot of damage and splashed paint everywhere. As it was close to dusk there was little we could do until the following day.

The damage was not as bad as we had imagined. Paint had indeed been splashed around but – thankfully – only on the ground outside. The vandals had also thrown items from the inside to the outside.

We had a good turn out on the 26 Feb. when ten people turned up for work. The first job to be done was clearing up the paint and damage created by the vandals. We could not do any painting internally because all our paint had been emptied out.

As always, we made some progress:

- The door frames/architraves have been rubbed down ready for undercoating.
- A heavy-duty work bench has now been constructed and is installed in Garage no.2.
- Some of the guttering to the rear elevation has now been re-aligned, ready to discharge into a large water storage tank.
- The stud wall forming the farmer's storage room has been completed.
- The new door frame to Garage no 1 was repositioned so that we can now fit a pair of off the shelf wooden Garage doors. These are now in at the builders merchants and are waiting to be collected. Hopefully we will have them on site this coming week ready for priming and fitting on the 12 March.



Once the Garage doors are fitted, we can move all the equipment from City Way to the Pavilion Apiary

We had already straightened the side walls to Garage no.2, thus making it an ideal area to make frames, assemble hive boxes and clean used wooden equipment.

Sheila carried out yet another test to the kettle and grill (tea and bacon rolls); the tests were successful!

At the next two work parties on the 12th and 26th March, we plan to:

- Fit Garage doors
- Re-align second section of rear gutter
- Prepare and paint external woodwork
- Prepare and paint internal ceilings, walls and woodwork
- Construct stud wall, door frame and door to 'home team changing room' to make an internal secure room. (Hives presently being stored in this room will be moved to the Garage when the doors are fitted.)
- Clean both Ladies and Gents Loos. The cold water has been turned back on and we do not appear to have any frost damage.

Work party sessions are at 10.00-1.00pm fortnightly on Saturdays (wp). Call or text me if you have any questions (07802 762121). **The Pavilion Apiary is at Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX. The entrance to the field is 2nd left off Lee Green Road.**

Mark Ballard, Apiary Manager 🐝

Getting to know you: this month, Peter Kimber

A series in which WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with MBKA members about beekeeping and life in general. This month, WHATSTHEBUZZ chats with Peter Kimber

WHATSTHEBUZZ Welcome, Peter. How long have you been keeping bees and how did you get started?

Peter Kimber I actually started back in secondary school where I joined a beekeeping club. I found it so interesting: the smell of the wax and just watching the bees. I'd only been in beekeeping for a couple of weeks when I was taken out of class to deal with a swarm in the school garden. I found the swarm, but I had no idea really what to do with it. But the image of this colony of bees hanging from a branch stayed with me for years.

WTB What was beekeeping like in your school?

PK I remember what we wore for protection: just a hat and a veil. You buttoned up your blazer, tucked your trousers in your socks, and wore a pair of gauntlets.

WTB And when you left school?

PK When I finished school, that was it. But when I was coming up to retirement, I knew I needed to do something to keep myself busy. So I did a training course with Terry Clare in 2014. For nearly a year and a half I thought about what hive to get, what equipment to get, and where to get the bees. And I learned as much as I could till I got bees in 2016.

WTB Where did your bees come from?

PK I got bees from Paul Lawrence. But he told me he had an ulterior motive! I ended up writing a blog for the newsletter for a year, telling about my experience of being a new beekeeper, what was involved, and the stories of what happened to me.

WTB I got my bees from the other Paul – Paul Newman. He put a colony in my garden because it backed on to an apple orchard. When the bees swarmed, I had my hive ready and got my first bees.

PK I've got 6 hives in my garden. Five are mine and one belongs to a new beekeeper, Nikki Brown. I'm her mentor.

WTB Six hives in your garden!

PK I've got high hedges and trees around my garden – and no neighbours! If any colonies do swarm, I can catch them from a nearby bush and put them in a nuc.

WTB Any apiary plans?

PK One of my aims for this year is to get an out apiary, somewhere else to put bees, and to move splits.



WTB What's the forage in your area?

PK There's gardens, fields and orchards. Cherry, apple, hawthorn, blackberry. Last year there was an oilseed rape field nearby. My garden has an 8-foot high fence and I could see them disappearing in that direction. It was the first time I got a spring crop. I checked the honey in the supers with a refractometer and as soon as it was down to 18 or 19%, I took them off and extracted. You can't hang about with that honey. It solidifies so quickly.

WTB What's your approach to swarm control?

PK I take out a frame of brood and a frame of stores and put them in a nuc with the queen – assuming I can find her. It's simple but it seems to work. I have to remember to remove queen cells after a week to prevent cast swarms.

WTB Is there 'Peter Kimber' way of doing things?

PK Not really. Regular inspections with as little disturbance as possible. I find if you're a little bit too heavy handed, they tend to let you know pretty sharpish that they're not happy. But they can change a lot in a week.

WTB Are there things you really could do without in beekeeping?

PK You mean, apart from getting stung? I really don't like losing brood. If I have to replace frames, I try to make sure they're empty of brood. I did try a Bailey comb change last year but they seemed to take ages to move over.

WTB Do you have a bee book to recommend to us?

PK One of my favourite books was given to me by my daughter. She did a thesis on bee-farming in Denmark for her degree. The book is called *The Benevolent Bee* by Stéphanie Bruneau. It's a fantastic book with so much info about all the hive products: honey, pollen, propolis, royal jelly, beeswax, and bee venom. It gives lots of snippets about the what and how of bee foraging.

WTB Do you like honey?

PK Absolutely! Yeah. I sell it to friends and relatives. One of them has an extractor – which is very handy for me!

WTB Tell me about your family.

PK I have three daughters, all scientists. The eldest, in Bristol, is a doctor of biological science, the next, in Cambridge, is a doctor of medical science, and the youngest, who has two degrees, works for Lego in Denmark. When she returns home, she helps me with the bees. The oldest two are married and have families. There are four grandchildren, all boys.

WTB What was your work life?

PK I retired in 2016. I was an air conditioning engineer, doing installations, repairs and so on. I had my own company for over 30 years. I like doing my own thing and being my own boss. You get the rewards for what you put in.

WTB Any non-bee interests?

PK I belong to a community choir – the Swale Singers. I'm the chairman. We sing in any style, and do events for charity, sometimes teaming up with other choirs. It's something I took up about 10 years ago. It was quite unexpected and it's great fun. I have a big interest in music and try a little piano and melodeon.

WTB How's MBKA doing, for you?

PK I think the association is doing well. It's a pity more people didn't come to the AGM but the committee has some new faces. I think the new apiary at the Pavilion will be a fantastic place for the association, for events and get-togethers.

WTB Many thanks Peter, good to chat to you. 🐝

For sale / swap – or wanted

Everyone should feel free to use this section devoted to exchanging equipment among members. We are always happy to post your items for sale / swap / freebie / wanted.

Jon Grey writes: 'I have a Langstroth hive for sale. As in the picture on the right, there is:

1 brood box, 5 supers (all with frames made up), a roof, a floor, and a stand. All reasonable offers considered.' (I think there's a plastic queen excluder in your picture, a National super.)

If this interests you please email Jon at jigrey62@gmail.com. 🐝



Quiz

1. What is the HAN UK? (This is more or less the opposite of the dreaded 'non-EU' label on honey jars, and it is very engaged with that problem.)
2. What is AHAT? (Another group set up to deal with a problem. A pest, not a product, this time.)
3. What is the NDB? ('Elite' is used all too readily of athletes nowadays, but if it were applied to a group of beekeepers, this would be it.)
4. What is the AKI-complex? If you know a basic list of bee viruses, you could make a stab at this one!
5. What physical characteristic makes a bee a bee, that its nearest relatives don't have?

Answers on page 15 🐝

Design and make your own wooden nuc boxes

A 6-frame 12x14 poly nuc with feeder from Maisemore now costs nearly £70. They've gone up a lot recently! You can save a tenner by getting a 12mm ply wooden nuc box with solid floor from [eBay](#). I needed to save a lot more than that with the number of boxes I needed to make.

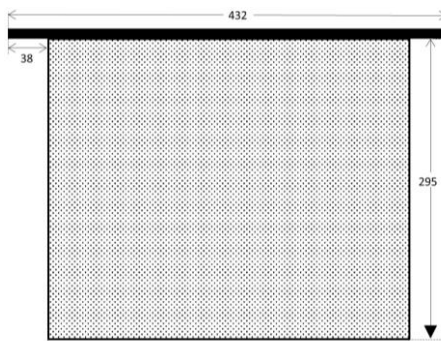
I've got an unexpectedly large number of hives to manage this year. Before I took them on last summer, I know that they had all swarmed in spring – except one, a lovely calm colony with a green (2019) queen. This year, I'd like to have a go at controlling all that swarming. Some spare brood boxes are available and I'll [Demaree](#) some colonies using those. But mostly I'll split colonies using nuc boxes – The Nucleus Method. Actually, I'm not sure if it's an *official method* and deserves these capitals. It's not mentioned in the BBKA Module 1 syllabus.



Returning from Morgan's, the wood shop. Now I just have to knock the pieces together. (In DIY, never trust anyone who uses the word 'just' in any of the instructions. Every job is more difficult than you expect if you haven't done it before.)

For my 5-frame boxes, I decided on 18mm (softwood) plywood and I got all the boards cut to size at [Morgan's in Strood](#). Each box has two sides, two ends, a crownboard and floor, and four small boards for the upper parts of the ends. The charge for cutting is £1 per cut, so you might decide to do the smaller cuts by hand. Collecting all these pieces gave me a (false) sense that this job would be like Lego. But no, if you haven't done this before, you have to work out a way to hold pieces in position to glue and screw them together.

Use an online [cutting optimiser](#) to work out the most economical way to cut your boards from 8x4 plywood sheets. Then take the printout to your timber merchant.

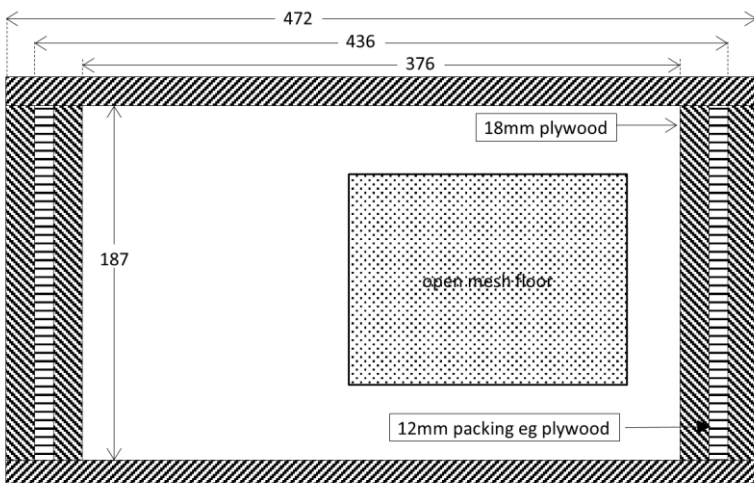
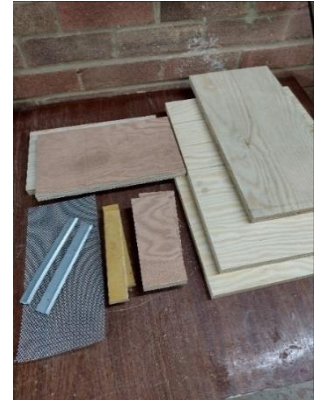


a 12 x 14 frame with measurements in mm.

The measurements in the diagrams here are in millimetres for a 5-frame 12x 14 nuc box.

Design your hive from the inside out. Start with the measurements of the frame and allow 10mm around each outside edge for beespace. Add 5mm extra underneath it.

Nuc boxes use top bee space. The frame (lug) rest area is 25mm below the top of the box.



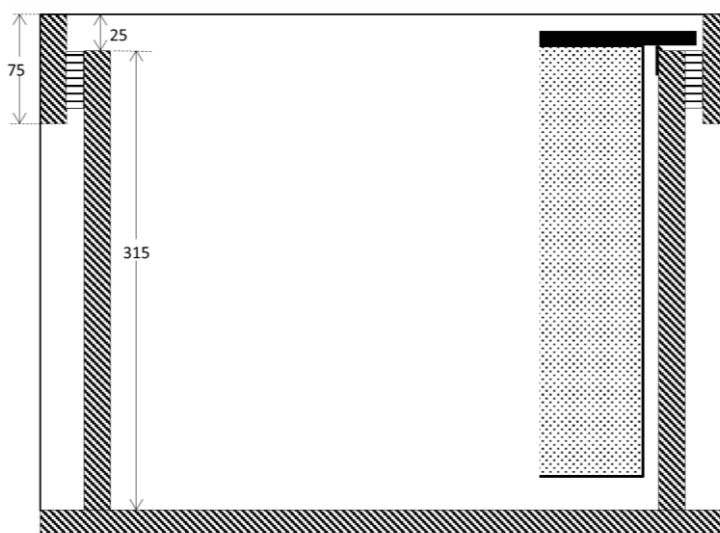
View from above showing measurements for the frame space, the lug rests, and exterior.



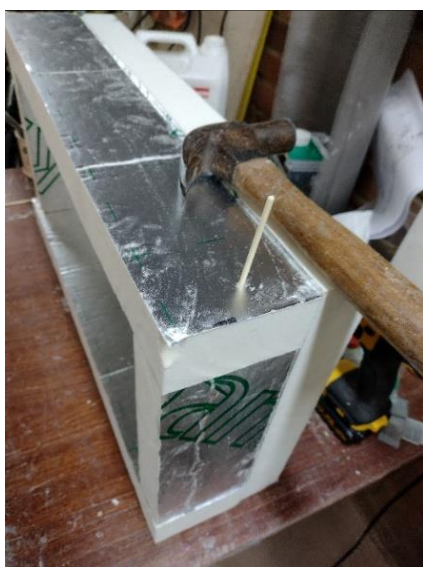
Despite the perspective of this picture, the ends are, of course, parallel. The 'ends' consists of three pieces which were glued and screwed first, then fastened to each hive 'side'. (The board at the back is a 'side'.) The floor was screwed on last. These boards are hardwood plywood; the shop must have run out of softwood and completed my order with hardwood ply!



Showing a frame with the lug resting on a rail which supports it about 5mm clear of the frame rest.



Side view showing part of a frame (on the right) with the lug resting on a metal rail, raising it c.5mm clear of the frame rest.



Roofs / lids made from [50mm Kingspan PIR insulation](#). The pieces were cut from the 2400 x 1200 panel (not 2440 x 1220!) using a plan created by the same optimiser I used for the plywood. It is important to make perpendicular cuts! The pieces are glued with ample PVA, secured with skewers tapped in, and then all exposed edges covered in [aluminium tape](#). Like nuc boxes in ply or wood, these must be painted. They are surprisingly strong.

However, if strapping a nuc box all round to hold it together, reinforce the edges of the PIR roof with some [Correx](#) to spread the stress on the edges / corners of the lid.

Roofs can be made of plywood of course. Allow 5mm clearance between the inner sides of the roof and the sides of the nuc box. Make a weatherproof cover with [4mm Correx](#) (plastic corrugated card used for Estate Agent signs) and staple it in place on the sides over 'envelope' corners. Then fit 50mm of insulation inside the roof, and glue it in place.

Poly nucs have feeders, and wooden nucs often have large roofs with space for feeders above the crown board. My preferred option is to make space for a feeder with an eke. I place fondant on top of a piece of queen excluder on top of the frames, or place a syrup feeder over a crownboard with a hole.

Make a circular hive entrance with a [25mm flat drill bit](#), with the bottom of the hole about 20mm above the floor. Then screw a [plastic](#) or [metal circular entrance disc](#) over the hole.

Do you find you can't decide between an open mesh floor or a solid floor? Then stay sitting on the fence, and cut out a smaller area for a mesh floor. Mesh comes in two forms: [stainless steel wire](#), and [galvanised welded mesh](#).

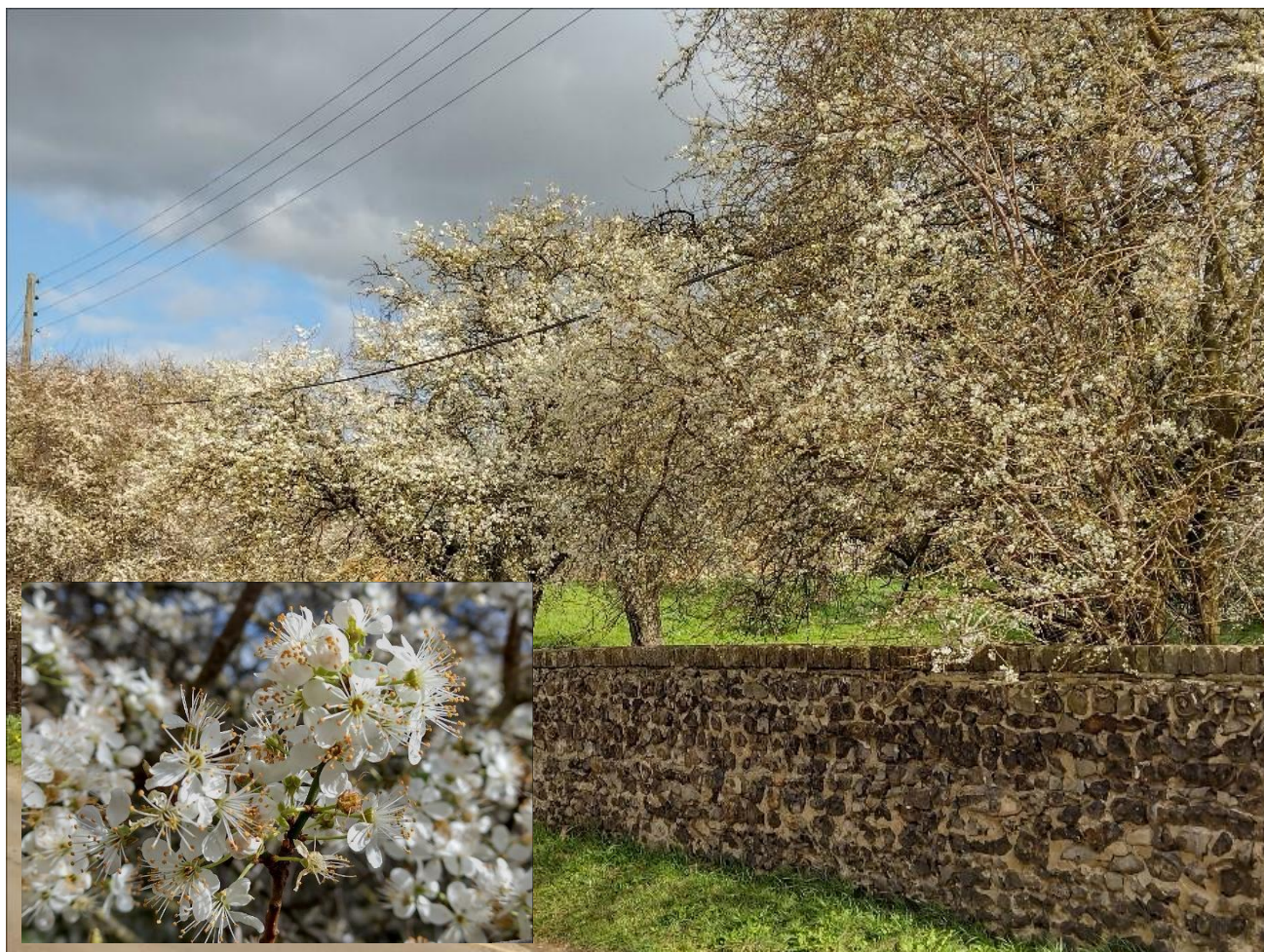
It is advisable to raise the plywood floor clear of the hive stand. This can be done with four blocks as 'feet', or two runner-strips from front to back, glued and fixed to the underside. Finally, and importantly, paint the box and the roof properly with undercoat and top coat. Plywood needs good weather protection, or it will open up.

The cost? Per box, 18mm softwood plywood cut to size £20, roof / lid made from Kingspan 50mm PIR insulation £7, s/s wire mesh £1.25 (four pieces from a 450mm sq panel costing £5), entrance disc £0.50. Total £28.75.

Archie McLellan 

24 February, Higham

It was a gorgeous morning, and I had a bike ride round the Peninsula with some friends. I passed a couple of apiaries and possibly others that I didn't notice) and I took these pictures at Higham. *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn), I thought, and indeed [pl@ntNet](#) confirmed that. But John, our chair, (who didn't see the photo), thought it was a little early for Blackthorn, as he mentions in his chat this month. Indeed, [pl@ntNet](#) had a number of other suggestions such as various cherries (eg *P. Cerasus*) and, in line with John's opinion, *P. Domestica* (European plum). Looking at the flowers alone, I find it very difficult to tell the difference! (Photos A McLellan) 🐝



Handy Hints

One of the things we hope to do in early inspections (early April or later?) is to find and mark (and possibly clip) the queen. But queens can be hard to find because sometimes they're not on the frames but hiding in the box. Nationals (which most of us use) provide queens with places they can hide that simpler boxes like Langstroths don't have.

You hear about people spending 45 or 60 minutes searching for the queen. Nobody likes to disturb the bees any longer than necessary with an inspection, so Mike Townsend from Warwick and Leamington BKA suggests this:

- bring a second brood box, and transfer almost all the brood frames into it, shaking the bees back into the original box
- place it above the original box with the queen excluder in between
- at the next inspection most of the bees will be with the brood above the excluder and the queen should be easier to find in the lower box. 🐝

Dudley, Eunice, Franklin...

For us in the south east, Eunice was the big one. My weather app warned of Force 12 gusts. That's 120mph, and sure enough, it did happen on the Isle of Wight. I have a few hives at the side of a field which had no protection from the south west winds and sure enough, one stand was blown over. When I saw the damage, I remembered I'd run out of adhesive to bond the cement blocks together. The wooden rails were stuck to the upper blocks effectively. So the whole structure keeled over. Fortunately, the ratchet strap held the hive with bees together, so the bees weren't exposed to the elements. I haven't asked them yet, but I'm sure they're none the worse for the experience.



The hive with bees is on the left. On the right is a stack of empty boxes. No bees were harmed in the making of this picture! (Photo A McLellan) 🐝

Apiary density within 10km of your hives?

If you log in to [BeeBase](#) and look up 'My apiaries', one column in the table shows *Apiary density within 10km*.

Apiary Id.	Name & Address	Location	Apiary density within 10KM
		Kent	178

I have bees in a Nature Reserve west of Chatham on the far side of the River Medway. Apparently there are 178 apiaries within the 10km circle surrounding my hives. That seemed a lot, so I wanted a better idea of what this geographical area included. I clicked on my apiary location on Google Maps, then right-clicked and selected 'Measure distance'. I was able to see that 10km to the east takes me into Rainham, then up to Cliffe, then over to Tilbury in Essex, and down to West Malling. Suddenly 178 apiaries didn't seem so many over such a large area.

At least there should be plenty drones for queens on mating flights! Archie McLellan 🐝



Murray McGregor with a can of air-freshener, something he uses a great deal, when uniting colonies. One box is placed over the other, but before being fully lowered into position, the top of one and the bottom of the other are given a spraying. By the time the bees have cleansed themselves of the aroma, they have lost track of the differing aromas of their two colonies. He doesn't select queens when uniting queen-right colonies finding that 80% retain the younger queen, 15% the older, and 5% retain both. 🐝

Shopping

Breathable and Waterproof Gloves

Some of our members recommend [these gloves](#) for people who don't like (or adversely react to) the build up of moisture inside nitrile gloves. These gloves are breathable and self-wicking, yet still allow a degree of fine control for handling bees.



Hive floor with under floor entrance (UFE)

Many beekeepers choose under floor entrances rather than front entrances on the floors in their hives. They give protection from pests such as wasps and mice, and those who make their own can choose a solid or mesh floor, or, more usually, a bit of each. But you can buy them on [eBay](#) too.

Uncapping plane

What about an [uncapping plane](#) for ultra-efficient cappings removal? This one costs about £37 inc delivery, though it retails for much more in the US. Decide for yourself from [this video](#). (There are lots of other videos. Search Maxant uncapping plane.) 🐝



Comments

TO POST A COMMENT, PLEASE EMAIL WHATSTHEBUZZ.

Was there anything that caught your attention in this issue? Perhaps you read something that you'd not thought of before, or saw something that didn't feel right to you. If so, do please write a sentence or two for

this Comments section. Items from readers are always good to hear.

From (placeholder – living in hope!) 🐝


From the BBKA

The 44th BBKA Spring Convention is back at Harper Adams University, Shropshire, on Friday 8, Saturday 9, Sunday 10 April 2022. With 20+ lectures and 40+ workshops, the programme offers topics for beginners through to experienced apiarists and something for non-beekeepers too. [More info and the link to the full Programme here.](#) 🐝



*Spring 2022
Convention*

Answers to the quiz

1. [Honey Authenticity Network](#) (also [Honey Authenticity Project](#))
2. [Asian Hornet Action Team](#)
3. [National Diploma of Beekeeping](#). This is the highest qualification in beekeeping in the UK. Which will come first: the NDB reaches its 100th birthday, or 100 beekeepers gain the Diploma. Of course, it will be the latter, but it remains a very difficult qualification to achieve. Did you know that one of our members, Bob Smith, is a member of this elite group?
4. The AKI-Complex refers to this group of viruses: Acute bee paralysis virus, Kashmir bee virus and Israeli acute paralysis virus.
5. It has branched (or plumose) hairs – like feathers. Prof Robert Paxton is the source for this question in a lecture at the NHS called [Origins and Evolutionary History of the Honey Bee](#). Bees have both branched and straight hairs. The branched hairs are for gathering pollen, and the straight hairs have a sensory functions like sense vibrations, navigating, feeling other bees, etc. 

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Please send your PICTURES, ARTICLES, AND IDEAS for the next issue of WHATSTHEBUZZ by 23rd of each month. And if you'd like to comment on anything in or about this issue, please email me.

Archie McLellan, WHATSTHEBUZZ compiler 