

WHATSTHEBUZZ



The Grand Opening of the new Association Apiary: who was there and how they celebrated!

Selling your honey, making customers happy, and keeping on the right side of the law.
Plus a shopping list.

Association events, our Honey Show, and a look about all these recent articles in the bee magazines on Going Treatment-Free

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers Association.

Please send your PICTURES, ARTICLES, and IDEAS by 23rd of each month.

If you'd like to comment on anything in or about this issue, please email me.

Archie McLellan, WHATSTHEBUZZ compiler archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



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Photo above: John Chapman, our Chair, welcomes members and friends to the occasion of the Opening of our new Apiary

Hello to August, to the end of one season and the start of the next, and to you all

Typically, this is the slot where I make some shallow comments about the month that has passed and look forward to the next few weeks, starting with jobs for the beekeeper, then looking at the activity of the colony, and finally the plant life around us.

But today, my mind is full of memories of the wonderful afternoon yesterday, when around 70 of us gathered together in a special space, and enjoyed good food, and the company of each other; and there we finally declared our new apiary OPEN.

There's much about that occasion in this issue, and some photos. We're all looking forward to being able to use our facilities – including a wonderful extraction room – and working out in time how best to use our facilities as a teaching apiary.

A quick run-down, then, of beekeeping in August. Read elsewhere if you'd like to understand more about each of the following topics.

You'll probably now be removing most of your remaining supers and extracting the honey. And as you remove honey, you have to think about feeding with sugar. You can use plain granulated sugar, or syrup, or fondant. Whichever you use, you must feed in bulk to encourage the bees to make stores for the winter. If you feed in dribs and drabs, they'll simply consume, and not store. And you won't have done anything to prepare them for winter. The best winter food is what they've accumulated in their stores in the combs. Jeremy Quinlan in this month's BBKA writes well on how much to feed.

August is the time for the major varroa treatment of the year. As most treatments (the exception is formic acid) cannot be applied when supers are on hives, the removal of the summer crop is often the time to bulk feed AND treat with a miticide. Because colonies will likely have sealed brood, treatments at this time of year take place over several weeks. The exception is oxalic acid by sublimation (vaping) where repeat treatments are needed to expose mites in sealed cells. If using oxalic acid, take any supers off while vaping, and put them back on again after.

Finally, you can't fail to have noticed that the wasps have arrived – quite suddenly it seems. Reduce your entrances to a the minimum.

Inside the hive, the colony starting to contract, the queen's laying rate slows, and there is no new drone brood. There is a little paradox here, in that supersedure often takes place in late summer. It is still possible for queens to get mated in late summer, though the success rate is diminished.

However, it's likely that the workers retain the old queen until the new queen is laying well. They need this precaution because the workers stop feeding drones around this time, and in this weakened state, they are able to turf them out of the hive.

Train journeys are opportunities to see what's flowering in undisturbed areas. Last year I travelled in a train through a corridor of camomile the length of the country. This year it was rosebay willow herb. In the local bee shop, Adrian told me that people say these swathes of purple indicate that we are near the end of the season. But here there's still clematis flowering, with ivy, Michaelmas daisy and golden rod still to come. People would normally say that the gardens will keep the bees going for a while yet. This year, with the driest July for well over a century, I'm not so sure.

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FROM OUR CHAIR

John Chapman, our Chair, talks about the Grand Opening of our new apiary which took place yesterday, 30 July 2022.

We have arrived! Our new Association Apiary is up and running and our official opening yesterday (30 July 2022) coincided with our 100th anniversary – Medway Beekeeping Association was founded in 1922. Sonia Belsey has created a display in the Apiary building with photographs and articles from 1922. There are also ‘before and after’ photographs of the present site and building.

We were finally able to leave our City Road apiary this year, and want to express our thanks to Margaret Patching for the use of that site. Our departure was much delayed due to Covid. We have to thank Bob Smith for initially finding this new site with its buildings including the old pavilion, which had been the Mockbeggar Cricket Club.

We negotiated with the local tenant farmer, John Myatt, for the use of the building and a piece of the field for the apiary. So our thanks must go to him for offering us this site.



The design of the apiary area and the renovation of the pavilion is due to the determined leadership of Mark Ballard, our Apiary Manager. He was helped over the long months of renovation by a determined and enthusiastic team of volunteers. Our sincere thanks must go to all of them.

I hope you have had an opportunity to tour the inside of the building! It is a versatile space with a range of facilities. It is wonderful that MBKA now has an amazing and fully operational teaching apiary.

We have had a message of congratulations from the Wax Chandlers Guild. As some of you will remember Pip Blaxland, one of our older members, is a member of the Wax Chandlers and a Past Master. He is held in great affection by them so they want me to pass on their good wishes for the success of our Association Apiary.



We were delighted that Councillor Elizabeth Turpin, her husband (also a councillor), and two of her children were able to join us for the afternoon. Elizabeth cut the ceremonial ribbon to declare the Apiary open, and gave a warm and supportive speech.

After this, we were able to honour the memory of our first Education Officer, Terry Clare. Terry’s widow, Pat, was with us and planted a tree beside the Apiary. Obviously we chose a bee-friendly tree, *Amelanchier*, which has white flowers in the early spring. And we have a dedicated the bench to Terry with a plaque which celebrates his work in beekeeping education.

Pat Clare then gave a speech about Terry’s 25 years of running beekeeping courses, and how much she appreciated that he and his work would be remembered. In fact Terry was active throughout the country. When [David Evans](#) gave one of his talks to us on Zoom, he mentioned that he had made his start in queen rearing after a talk by Terry in Warwickshire. David was quite unaware – until we told him! – that Terry had been a member of MBKA.

Terry’s large apiary site with its wide range of facilities on the Isle of Sheppey is in the care of two of our members, Derreck Stevens and Mick Hare, both of whom were present yesterday. It is a busy and thriving operation.

And then it was time to relax in each other’s company, and enjoy the wonderful sandwiches, cakes, and tea provided by Sheila and John Stunell.

Around 70 people came together for this occasion. Members brought partners, grandchildren, and friends, including some from our neighbouring association, Mid-Kent. It was a glorious day, and not just because of the weather!



Planting the tree; Pat doesn't need a lesson from Mark on how to use a space!

Paul Lawrence with Ken Beevor's daughter, Linda

Pat Clare shares a joke with Hilde Koets



MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

HONEY SHOW, 3-4 SEPTEMBER

Sue Chapman organises our annual Honey Show. Here she writes about the spirit of the Show, about entering some of the competitive classes, about the resources the Association has to support you when taking part, and about helping with the setting up and running of the Show.



I hope you had a chance to be at the Kent County Show and see the honey show and that it 'whetted your appetite' to take part in our own show at Elm Court Garden Centre, Capstone Road, ME7 3JQ, on Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th September.

Our judge this year is Rodger Thompson of Thanet Beekeepers who is an experienced exhibitor as well as having a keen interest in bumblebees.

The schedule is on the website and entries have already started to come in so don't miss out.

There is a wide variety of classes so please sit down, read the rules, and decide which of your hive products, craft, or cooking skills you would like to show off, and get your entry to me by **Thursday 25th August**.

TIMES AND DATES

24 August	Wed	7.30pm BeeChat at The Pier pub, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA
25 August	Thu	Closing date for entries to the MBKA Honey Show. Details here .
27 August	Sat	2.00-4.00pm Barbeque at Cliffe Apiary

If you have any queries, if you need standard 1lb. squat jars, or if you would like to borrow one of the MBKA frame cases to use in class 6 or 7, please get in touch.

The show is a wonderful opportunity to have friendly competition for our trophies and display the huge range of honey and hive products we all produce. Being in the garden centre gives us a steady stream of visitors who stop to look, chat, learn more about bees, and often buy a jar of honey or a candle or two.



As usual help is needed to 'get the show on the road'.

Would you be able to come to the Show at any of these times:

- Friday 2 September: 4.00-5.30pm to set up tables etc.
- Saturday 3 September: 9.00-12.00pm and 12.00-5.30pm.
- Sunday 4 September: 10.30-12.00pm and 12.00-4.00pm when we dismantle the show.

Please let me know by email if you can help. Thank you.
Susan.Chapman@care4free.net.

Sue Chapman (Honey Show Secretary)

Finally, John, our Chair, has asked me to mention that the Association sells members' honey and other hive products. Please contact John or Sue about bringing goods for sale to the Show.

31 August	Wed	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 4, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
3-4 September	Sat-Sun	MBKA Honey Show, Elm Court Garden Centre, Gillingham ME7 3JQ. Details here .
7 September	Wed	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 5, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
12 September	Mon	Closing date for National Honey Show entries to essay, video and photography classes
14 September	Wed	8.00-10.00pm, Introductory Course, Session 6, Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
17 September	Sat	10.00-1.00pm Work party at the Cliffe Apiary, weather permitting.
24 September	Sat	Ploughing Match, Ringshill Farm, Wouldham ME1 3TP Info here
28 September	Wed	7.30pm BeeChat at The Pier pub, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA
10 October	Mon	Closing date for National Honey Show entries (except early entry classes, due on 12 September).
17 October	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 1, Module 2,. Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG
27-29 October	Thu-Sun	National Honey Show, Sandown Park Racecourse, Esher, KT10 9RT
31 October	Mon	7.30-9.30pm Winter study, Session 2, Module 2,. Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG

KENT BEEKEEPING ASSOCIATIONS AT THE KENT AGRICULTURAL SHOW 2022

John Chapman, our Chair, is the secretary of the Kent Honey Show Committee. Here is his report on this year's Show.

The beekeepers from the five associations in Kent (Dover, Kent, Laddingford, Medway and Thanet) came together to provide an exhibition showing how we keep bees and the range of the activities that covers. We wanted to introduce the general public to bees and beekeeping and to explain some of the importance of bees to the economy and our diet.

We were in the Maidstone Hall as part of the Garden Life area. As well as a display of entries for the Honey Show, we had tables with items of interest to the general public: products of pollination, examples of bee friendly plants, the process of hive to jar (covering how the honey is extracted), a display on bumble bees and other insects, candle making, badge making, and opportunities to purchase honey and wax products. The observation hive in the porch area was, as ever, very busy. The Bumble Bee, Wasps and Hornets area always draws a lot of interest and we were again pleased to have the assistance of the Bumble Bee Trust volunteers. Beekeepers and potential beekeepers were not

left out as our Education and Information stand was very busy.

The committee that puts the exhibition together includes Bob Smith (Sidcup), Lesley Fancote, Roger Thompson, James Salter and John Chapman. We are supported by volunteers who put-up the displays on the Thursday, manned them on the show days and dismantled them after the show. If you are interested in helping next year, look for information about stewarding at the show in your newsletters.

The Kent Honey Show attracted 84 exhibits from 19 exhibitors, which considering the lateness of the year provided a good show. This year, the show was judged by Claire O'Brien, who is a new judge. The first, second and third place winners of the classes in the show are on the attached table. The winners of the cups are shown on the list below:

- The Agricultural Society's Trophy (highest points in classes 1 to 15) – David W Keen (Weald Branch)
- Clive Watson Memorial Trophy (winner of Class for Medium Honey) – R (Bob) Smith (Sidcup Branch)

- Mead Cup (Overall winner in the Mead Classes) – John F Chapman (Medway Beekeepers Association)
- Reginald Tower Rose Bowl (best exhibit in candles) – James Salter (Laddingford Beekeepers Association)
- Subscribers Cup (winner of the Exhibition Class) – John F Chapman (Medway)
- Novice Cup (best exhibit in the 2 novice classes) – James Salter (Laddingford Beekeepers Association)
- Geoffrey Dixon Trophy (honey from a Branch or Association Apiary) – Medway Beekeepers Association
- Best Exhibit in Honey (Certificate of Merit) – R (Bob) Smith (Sidcup Branch)
- Margaret Calder Plate (Best Exhibit in Cookery Classes) – Sheila Stunell (Medway Beekeepers Association)
- Central Division Cup (Branch or Association Winning the most points in the open classes) – Medway Beekeepers

Here is the list of the Class Winners at this year's Show:

Class	Description	1st Place	2nd Place	3rd Place
1	2 jars light honey	Sue Payne- Gravesend	James Salter – Laddingford	David Keen – Weald
2	2 jars medium honey	Bob Smith – Sidcup	Sue Payne- Gravesend	James Salter – Laddingford
3	2 jars dark honey	Roger Simpson – Whitstable and Herne Bay	David Keen – Weald	
4	2 jars set honey	James Salter – Laddingford		
5	6 jars for sale	David Keen – Weald		
6	comb for extraction	Sue Payne- Gravesend	David Keen – Weald	Julian Newton – Laddingford
7	bottle of dry mead	David Keen – Weald	John Chapman – Medway	Sonia Belsey- Medway
8	Bottle of sweet mead	John Chapman – Medway	Sonia Belsey – Medway	David Keen – Weald
9	3 wax candles	David Keen – Weald	Thomasine Rudd – Westerham	John Chapman – Medway
10	3 plain candles	James Salter – Laddingford	John Chapman – Medway	David Keen – Weald
11	2 wax models	James Salter – Laddingford	John Chapman – Medway	
12	Cake of beeswax	David Keen – Weald	Mark Ballard- Medway	John Chapman – Medway
13	6 (27g) 1oz blocks	James Salter – Laddingford	John Chapman – Medway	
14	Exhibition Class	John Chapman – Medway	David Keen – Weald	
15	Photograph – general	Chris Farrell – Dover	Mark Ballard – Medway	Sonia Belsey – Medway
16	Photograph – close-up	Chris Farrell – Dover	Sonia Belsey – Medway	Mark Ballard – Medway
17	Novice –Clear Honey	James Salter – Laddingford		David Keen – Weald
18	Novice – Set Honey	James Salter – Laddingford		
19	Junior -Honey	no entries		
20	Junior Artistic Primary	no entries		
21	Junior Artistic Secondary	no entries		
22	Gift – Clear Honey	Medway	Lesley Fancote – Gravesend	James Salter – Laddingford
23	Gift – Set Honey	James Salter – Laddingford		
24	Gift – Honey Cake	Sheila Stunell – Medway	Bob Smith – Sidcup	Sonia Belsey – Medway
25	Gift – Honey Biscuits	Sheila Stunell – Medway		
26	Apiary	Medway	Laddingford	

MBKA APIARY WORK PARTIES

Work party sessions are at 10.00-1.00pm fortnightly on Saturdays (wp) **but we are having a break in August.**

Call or text Mark Ballard 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.**

COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

THE APIARY AND THE OPENING

At the meeting on 14 July 2022, much of the discussion was focussed on the Apiary, where there are eight colonies currently on site. The standstill following the outbreak of EFB has now been in place for 11 weeks, so we will call the Bee Inspector to make a return visit.

I'll omit the discussion on the Opening as it's now ancient history! A huge amount has been achieved in upgrading the Apiary buildings.

You would expect the occasional sting in the vicinity of an apiary, and it is true that sometimes a couple of followers follow those doing inspections when they return to the building. There have been instances of stings to residents in the nearby houses and walkers on the path near the apiary. The Association takes every complaint seriously. We want to maintain good relations with our neighbours.

And with that in mind, we are inviting our neighbours to the Opening on 30 July.

EVENTS

We have had some events this summer, though perhaps these have been overshadowed by the all-consuming work of renovating the Apiary buildings and site. For next summer, we have decided to start planning events in January 2023.

There have been two public events already, The English Festival, and the Kent Show, and we're looking forward to the Ploughing Match in late September where MBKA has a stall and sells hive products. People say it's always a great day.

The visit to Tony Edwards's apiary was very disappointing as only three people attended. Tony had gone to some trouble to make this day special, and the farmer had provided cherries from the orchard for visitors.

Later in the year, there will be the Association Annual Supper. Before the pandemic, this was always a delightful evening, and we look forward to sitting down to a meal together again.

EDUCATION

Those doing the introductory course at HMP Rochester bought their bees from Bee Equipment at Canterbury. There was some discussion about this and the thorny question of how and where to get your bees from to get started.

Those who have been on recent introductory Courses will have the opportunity to take part in our Winter studies Module 2 course, ten sessions fortnightly from 17 October. And if it is not over-subscribed, the Course will then be open to all members.

The Education Team have ideas to revamp our Introductory Course. Next year, it will start with a Taster Day in spring. This would include practical session such as frame making, types of hives, protective clothing, lighting a smoker, cleanliness and hygiene, and face to face contact with the bees. We would expect this to cost approximately £175. Following this the Introduction to Beekeeping course would be a stand-alone course with a discount offered to those who have completed the taster day. It would take place in June and July so that the sessions with bees can be an integral part of the course. Applicants to this course would get Associate Membership for a year and the course book included in the cost of the course (yet to be decided).

On Thursday 21 July the committee met to check that plans for the Grand Opening of the Pavilion Apiary and the Centenary Celebration were all in place.

And they are! No need to go over the myriad of details that were mentioned. Hopefully by the time you read this, the event will have taken place and been a riotous success.

MBKA HONEY SHOW 2-4 SEPTEMBER

John Chapman has asked Roger Thompson from Thanet to judge this year's honey show. There's lots more about the Honey Show below. Please read it, and really consider taking part. We are hoping for 100 entries in this our centenary year. That will be a first! There are so many varied ways of doing so. If the style of assessing the honey entries irritates you, you can skip the honey classes. There are lots of other classes which reflect the variety of ways in which we can engage in the craft of beekeeping. Honey, of course, but wax products, photography, cooking... Have a look at the schedule below.

The beekeeping season is short and flies past. So do chances to fit in outdoor Association events. So we've scheduled a barbeque for 2pm on Saturday 13 August. There will be no charge for this – look out for another RSVP invitation!

WINTER PROGRAMME

We haven't filled the post of 'Winter Events' organiser yet. (Yes, yes, I did say earlier that the post had been filled but that was wrong.) This position need not be a committee

GEORGE PONDER

It is with great sadness that we learned that our member George Ponder died on Wednesday 19 July. George and his daughter Mary-Anne visited us a few weeks ago at the Pavilion Apiary and had a cup of tea and shared memories of the early days of Medway Beekeepers. He and Mary-Anne had hoped to come to our Grand Opening on 30 July but sadly he didn't make it. Our thoughts and prayers go to Mary-Anne and the rest of his family. Rest in peace George.

Sheila Stunell

WORDS

INFECTION AND INFESTATION

Do these words mean the same thing? Do varroa mites infect or infest your colonies?

Infection is from Latin meaning to taint. *Infestation* is from Latin meaning to attack. So we have somewhere to start. Tainting implies that something has changed within, or inside; attacking happens on the outside, at least initially.

Infections happen when viruses and suchlike start to work on the internal body tissues.

post – it wasn't in the past – but until we have one or two people running the Winter events, we are open to members' suggestions for speakers they would recommend and who might be available. We might even be able to persuade some of our experienced members to give a talk too.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sheila asked if we might discuss once again the method by which we have a list of folk who would like to sell honey. Messages come to the admin email address so the secretary has become the person who deals with them. This may lead to others feeling left out or ignored. The same is true for requests for speakers at schools, scouts, WI's and other organisations. There's a danger that we will have few really experienced speakers while others don't get the opportunity to learn the job. We'll be discussing this more fully at the next meeting.

Date of next meeting: 7.30pm, Tuesday 9 August at Wallace Road.

Minutes of past meetings and past editions of WHATSTHEBUZZ can be found on [the MBKA website](#).

Infestations happen when relatively large (compared to viruses) organisms attack the outer body tissues.

So what do varroa mites do? Definitely, they *infest* colonies, to begin with. But they carry with them viruses which then *infect* the insides of the bees. *Deformed wing virus* is the famous one. It does what it says on the tin.

Ultimately, it's the virus that kills the colony, though it wouldn't have reached the quantities needed for it to be lethal without the mite as *vector* (or carrier; think *vehicle*).

JULY IN THE APIARY

From Sheila Stunell July in the apiary has been a challenge. Working in the heat from very early in the day and with little respite if you wait until the evening. However, the bees have had a very productive time and we can look forward to the hard labour of lifting and spinning now.

From Archie McLellan I've been making preparations for a move from National 12x14 to Standard Nationals. I like the idea of freedom to extend the brood nest upwards with double or even triple brood boxes, as recently described by Dan Basterfield in *BeeCraft*. I'm also thinking I'll move to *single-size box hives*; in other words, both supers and brood boxes would all be deep Nationals (8.5" x 14").

However, after recently taking off this deep super (ie same as a Standard National brood box – see

photo below), and with me not being particularly strong, I've decided not to sell my shallow supers yet! This photo shows a deep box with 11 frames, and the weight on the scales is... wait for it... 70.4 pounds.



From Paul Lawrence July has been an exceptionally busy month for my bees and myself. I have never experienced a nectar flow like it. Mainly due to lots of local lime trees, the bees were filling a complete super within a week and, as the temperature soared, they were capping it off in only a few days after filling. All four colonies had at least four supers on the top and one ended up with six! I nearly ran out of kit; as fast as they filled and capped it, I had to take a super off, spin it out and then replace it.

The colonies themselves expanded rapidly from April onwards so I have also been busy requeening all four to hold them up, and avoid swarming. So far so good. What a year! Brilliant!

ON ETHICAL BEEKEEPING

Rusty Burlew, if you don't already know, is the world's most celebrated blogger about beekeeping and bees. She writes at different times for most beekeeping periodicals, and



these articles later appear in her blogs. Working through all her blog posts would be a *very* long read. I've tried it, and failed. But I have read many, many posts, and I know that one stands out as the most thought-provoking and challenging piece of writing I have ever come across in beekeeping literature.

[What is ethical beekeeping?](#) That's the title and I'll not demean it by attempting to summarise it.

Many readers were moved to comment on this piece, and their thoughts often shed further light on thorny issues for which there is never a clear, definitive answer. One wrote that an instructor at her son's 'hunter safety course' started with ethics, saying that 'good ethics is doing the right thing even when nobody is watching and you are all alone.'

Much of our time beekeeping is spent alone; these are good words for us.

Much of this issue of WHATSTHEBUZZ is devoted to producing and selling honey. It's an area in which it would be so easy to say one thing and do something completely different. Rusty includes issues relating to home-produced honey, but so much more. Here's a little taster of the questions she raises, often with case studies which make them more immediate.

Planting for bees becomes an ethical consideration, when these plants are invasive and non-native weeds consequently reduce biodiversity. Bees, unlike other livestock, are free to roam where they will. But what if they affect public land and make it less available for the public good. Few of us manage to keep bees long-term in our gardens if we have neighbours nearby. The consequences of introducing bees where there were none before can be

very unexpected. Rusty's own bees were ultimately responsible for her neighbour's old fruit trees collapsing under the weight of all the fruit they started to produce in their old age. There are so many other topics: contamination of honey by varroa treatments, treatment-free beekeeping, culling diseased colonies, protecting other pollinators... it's an engaging read. This paragraph neatly encapsulates much of the wisdom of this writer:

Beekeepers will derive no benefit from making enemies of homeowners, businesses, conservationists, or government agencies. We will be better served by trying to understand our own footprint and allowing other pollinators their space. Leave the conservation areas to wildlife, treat your neighbors with respect, and be empathetic toward those who don't understand your fascination with bees.

GOING TREATMENT-FREE

There has been a lot of talk about treatment-free beekeeping in the BBKA News and BeeCraft recently, indeed, some might say, a disproportionate level of coverage with no less than three articles in a single issue of BBKA News.

Some beekeepers are fortunate to live in locations where varroa is a minor pest compared to most parts of the UK – or the world! They are indeed fortunate. But for them to understate the significance of their geographical location is somewhat disingenuous. One could be forgiven for inferring that their zeal for converts to their cause overrides the message that 'treatment-free beekeeping requires work and knowledge.' (Prof Stephen Martin)

Indeed Stephen Martin stated that dipping one's toe in the water of treatment-free would involve doubling the frequency of one's monitoring the mite-load in a hive. One of the speakers in last year's winter series, Philip Argyle from Hampshire, is treatment-free, but he insists that it



takes hard work and luck, and is definitely not for new beekeepers.

This is a million miles away from the approach of some beekeepers who take the view that treatment-free means that they don't need to monitor for mite count, because they will not treat their bees regardless of what they find.

Randy Oliver, among many others, finds this approach inhumane and downright cruel. When asked in a podcast interview about beekeepers who are completely treatment-free, and adopt the attitude, *If they live, they live, if they die, they die*, he replied:

'Here's what I what I feel. Honey bees are a managed livestock. And when you manage and take an animal under your care, you have an ethical responsibility to care for that animal. If you know that most colonies right now will die this ugly death from deformed wing virus if you don't treat them, I think it's unethical to not treat them. As Tom Seeley says, if they're going to die, euthanize them, so they don't suffer, and before they spread that parasite, that virus, and those mites to all the other colonies around.'

SELL YOUR HONEY!

A significant number of our members are asking themselves for the first time what to do with all this honey they are accumulating. In this article Archie McLellan is writing mainly for them. But no beekeepers do things exactly the same as each other so what follows might well stimulate (or enrage!) experienced members too.

WHY YOU SHOULD SELL YOUR HONEY

Many beekeepers have had a good year – in the admittedly rather narrow sense that their bees have produced a lot of honey. And it's likely that quite a few beekeepers will have more honey than they need for themselves or can use up by giving away. So what's to be done?

I don't propose to get philosophical or – perish the thought – *ethical* here, and will not enter a discussion about how much (if any) honey to leave for the bees over winter. I'm picturing that you have honey now, or soon will have, and it's a larger quantity than you anticipated harvesting, and you are quite understandably thinking about recouping some of your costs in setting up and maintaining your bees.

There's another reason to sell honey. There is a world shortage of honey, resulting in colossal fraud on a global scale (second only to olive oil) with fake honey and adulterated honey. Thanks to one of our readers who sent me this link on [manuka honey fraud](#).

Get your honey out there, and help in a tiny way to reduce food transport costs, and the demand for an imported, inferior product.

Do you have questions about selling your honey? Such as: Am I allowed to sell my honey? How do I keep on the right side of the law? Should I charge less because I'm newish to beekeeping? What does a professionally produced product look like? And what do I say to retailers whom I hope to persuade to buy my honey?

Read on for some answers!

HOW DO I PRODUCE HONEY FOR SALE?

The short answer is to extract, jar, and label honey to the standards required by the [Honey Regulations 2015](#) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

Much of this is covered in BBKA Module 2, *Honey bee products and forage*, and many of you who have not already done this course will have the opportunity to study it in the coming months in our Winter Study evenings. But, of course, you need answers now, and what follows is a quick survey of the issues.

Hygiene is central to all handling and processing of food. Your work space (kitchen?) should be *really* clean, and so should you! Some people cover the floors, and wear overalls of some sort over their clothes. They also wear gloves. Others feel that none of these are appropriate if everything is clean. I feel that gloves (nitrile) are a BAD IDEA. They desensitise you to the state of your hands and you end up spreading honey everywhere. Clean up honey drips and spills continuously, and wash hands whenever they get at all sticky.

You might remember Mel Henbest writing about hygienic extraction routines last August, and she knows this stuff professionally. She talks about the importance of an efficient flow from frames in supers, through decapping, to extraction, and returning frames to supers.

Some of our members have done online Hygiene Courses. Mel recommended those by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, or the [Royal Society for Public Health](#) as accredited courses.

The water content of your honey must be below 20%. Expect a reading of around 18% on your refractometer. You will find this if the honey is capped, but if some cells are open, do the 'shake' test. Vigorously shake the frame holding it horizontally. If no drops of liquid leave the cells, the honey will likely be less than 20% water. Which is good.

Decapping can be done with a knife or a hot-air gun. Those of us who use the latter ([click to see this video](#)), swear by it, but it's not for everyone.

Strain the honey as it leaves the extractor, or at a later stage, with coarse and fine sieves. This is not regarded as *filtering* which might be seen as removing some of the ingredients of the honey; rather you are simply removing non-honey particles (wax, bees legs etc) from your honey.

Most people allow honey to settle in a food-grade plastic bucket before jarring, though if your quantity is small, you can extract and jar on the same day. Of course, you'll be

cleaning your buckets before use, even if you stored them clean after the previous use.

Most beekeepers have moved away from 1lb 'squat' jars and now sell honey in 340g (12oz) jars, in hexagonal or square shapes. Even if you don't see an instruction from the supplier to wash jars before use, you should do so. You can put them through the dishwasher, then lightly dry them before placing in the oven to heat and dry properly.

Use digital scales to fill honey jars. Place the jar on the scale, set to zero (tare), and fill the warm jar, initially at an angle, like a beer glass; best to add a couple of grams over the designated weight.

APPEARANCE MATTERS

An eye-catching label should get your honey noticed, and therefore, hopefully, result in more sales. So, yes, appearance matters. But there are other matters that you must get right when labelling your honey.

Here's my label (below); it goes round three sides of a square 340g honey jar. Can you tick off the five points



specified in the Honey Regulations 2015 for honey jar labelling? They are:

1. The description of the product ('Honey'). This may be supplemented with information about location, topography etc. ('Meresborough'). It is also permissible to add information about the floral source if the honey is 'wholly or mainly from the indicated source.
2. The name and address of the producer.
3. The country of origin; ie where the honey was harvested.
4. A 'Best before' date and a Lot mark. A Lot mark is not needed if the 'Best before' date includes the day, month and year. On this label, the date would be handwritten in the white space. Some labels are printed with sequential numbering. Others state 'Best before: see base of jar' and stick a label there with the full date.

5. The weight. For this weight of honey, the weight numbers must be 4mm high.

Here, there is also a voluntary warning about not giving honey to infants, and guidance on storage and granulation. And other stuff.

More info on labelling [here](#) and [here](#).

WHAT TO CHARGE?

You may feel that as a beginner you should charge less, even if it means you are undercutting others in your area. The thing is, your honey, properly produced, is every bit as good as any other beekeeper's honey. The bees are not amateurs. They know how to make perfect honey. 30 million years is a lot of practice!

It is natural and understandable that you might want to set a low price. But your honey is an artisan product, and as such it fits into a certain price category. Too low and it's not perceived as artisan.

Some beekeepers here charge £6.50 for 340g, and reduce that by a pound when selling to retailers. The retailer may then add £1.00 to £2.50 for their margin. Oddly enough, the more expensive jars sometimes have the greater volume of sales!

There's a discussion on what to charge [here](#).

WHERE TO SELL?

Local shops with counters (butchers, fishmongers) are a good place to begin. But they may well already have a supplier. No need to deride your competitor. Simply describe why your honey is so good. And remember that beekeepers tend to think their own honey is the best in the world.

You could also market your honey on social media, such as Facebook Marketplace. [Here's one ad](#) from last year. Be aware of using the word 'raw'. Trading standards now seem to be prepared only to accept it for comb honey. (Some think that's a little unfair. 'Raw honey' in recipe books refers to honey that has not been heated. This is the what happens at an industrial level to ensure that granulation will not occur while the honey is still on the shop shelf. Incidentally, that's why you should jar in quantities that will be sold soon.)

JARS: REUSE, RECYCLE...?

There is a huge debate about the reuse of honey jars. Some customers like to bring back jars because they are of a mind to avoid wastage, and want to recycle where possible.

However, it is not easy to demonstrate that reused jars are safe because they have been out of your view since you sold them. And because of this, unlike the 'closed loop' system for milk bottles, it has been assumed that honey producers should only use new jars. However, a [FSA spokesman did say on Radio 4](#) that glass was safe and inert, and common sense might allow jars to be reused.

In his book *Food safety for Beekeepers*, Andy Pedley is not in favour of jars being reused (p57ff). In an exchange of letters in BBKA News, he did not back down from this position, though it was difficult to prove. He was, after all, commenting on an interpretation of an interpretation of the law.

If your customers return jars to you, you can graciously accept them, even if you put them into the recycling bag.

Murray McGregor made a recent appearance on Beekeeping Forum at a time of year when he is usually too preoccupied with his thousands of bee colonies. [He wrote:](#)

'On use or reuse... washing etc... especially round the top edge of the thread... contact can introduce microcracks you cannot see. It's not common but it is significant, and little shards of glass can come off and into the product. On a micro scale the chance is small, but you will NEVER find packers of any size reuse white flint glass. The legal consequences of an injury claim from glass fragments are severe, and as you have used glass contrary to the directions for use of white flint glass. You will also find your insurance failing to fully (or at all) cover you.'

[Somebody replied:](#) 'Thanks Murray. Perhaps now we can settle this argument once and for all.'

[Only to be countered a few minutes later with:](#) 'doubt it.'



Spring seems a galaxy away from Summer, not least after the driest July for over a century.

HANDY HINT

In the US, it is now permissible to vape colonies with oxalic acid *while supers are on the hive*. This is not the case here in the UK. However, [it's no great problem](#). As we're not allowed to vape with supers on, we take them off. You can put them back on as soon as you've finished.

If you do choose to treat with oxalic acid at this time of year, remember that it's likely that colonies will have sealed brood, so repeat treatments will be needed (typically three times at five-day intervals, but check mite drop on the board).

SHOPPING

KIT FOR PRODUCING HONEY PROPERLY

Click on the blue text or the product image for links to retailers of each product.



1. **Refractometer.** An inexpensive device to check the water content of your honey. It must be less than 20%, and capped honey is usually around 18%. But sometimes you'll choose to extract honey which is not capped. You can do a 'shake test' – (vigorously shake a frame held horizontally; if no liquid drops are released, the honey can be extracted safely. But it is also sensible to regularly monitor the water content of your honey with a refractometer.



2. **Honey bucket with tap.** Placing the bucket on a tipper, possibly like this one from [The Apiarist](#), makes the jarring process a lot easier.



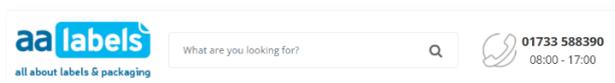
3. **Digital scales.** Honey jars for each particular weight category (eg 340g / 12oz) do not all hold the same amount of honey. Fill each jar on scales like these. Add 2g to be confident that you have the specified weight.

4. Jars. Explore the [Freeman and Harding website](#), and if you have time, compare with other jar suppliers like [Bottle Company South](#). Traditionally, beekeepers used so-called 1lb squat jars, but these days, 340g (12oz) and 227g (8oz) are popular sizes.



5. A **silicone spatula** (left) is useful for scraping the ~~degs~~ precious last drops out of honey buckets.

6. A **nylon mesh bag** (right) is what you need to spin the honey out of the cappings when you're all but finished for the day. Or you can use supermarket veggie nets.



7. **Labels** from AA labels (matt white, permanent adhesive). If you can provide a label design, your honey will look distinctive, and stand out from jars using standard bee-retailer labels. AA Labels do a colossally large range of labels for a design you submit to them, but the website is friendly and ordering quite straightforward.

8. Anti tamper labels from [AA Labels](#) or [Thornes](#).

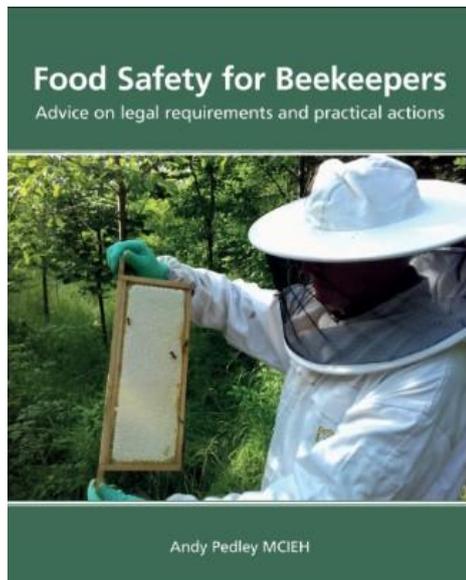


9. **Date price gun.** This is a dispenser (or gun!) which prints and fixes the *Best before* date to the base of your jar. A Lot no. is not needed if your best before date is stated as day / month / year. On your jar label will be printed: *Best before: see base of jar*. Then use this gun to print and stick a label on the base.



RECOMMENDED READING

FOOD SAFETY FOR BEE KEEPERS:ADVICE ON LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND PRACTICAL ACTIONS, ANDY PEDLEY



As those of you who are intending to study BBKA Module 2, *Hive products and forage*, will soon discover, the information and regulations on food safety comes from a wide range of sources. Or not. Andy Pedley has assembled everything you, as a small honey producer, need to know on the subject [in this slim volume](#). It is clear, concise, and thorough.

He starts at the hive, not the kitchen. This is where honey comes from and there are many ways to spoil it, long before you get to the stage of removing supers from your hive. First, use 'benign' smoke. Avoid anything that could contain toxins, such as wood shavings from tanalised timber. In this instance, it's the beekeeper's health that has more to lose than the quality of the honey. Keep honey boxes and frames off the ground. Feed sugar in such a way and time that there is no chance of it being stored (possibly later) in the supers.

I recommend this book for all small-scale honey producers, including those who've done module 2 and those who are hoping to do it soon. It can't have been easy to write. There are areas in the law which are not clear and have not been, nor are ever likely to be, tested in the courts. *Archie McLellan*

HOW WAS TUESDAY 19 JULY FOR YOU?

In case the date doesn't ring a bell, that was the day of the record temperatures. You probably experienced at least 38°C. that's 2°C above brood nest temperature, so no big deal for the bees. Some people were concerned that radiant heat might drive up temperatures inside the hives and so erected some shade from direct sun.

And what about you? Did you find a cool area deep in your house? I'd like to say that I had unusual foresight, but it was a coincidence. I had arranged to be sailing off the NW of Scotland on 18 and 19 July. I experienced a full-range of NW weather. Glorious sunshine, deep blue skies, wind, and heavy rain. Not all at once, of course. In the photo here, we are rounding Ardnamurchan point, the most westerly place on the British mainland. The rain is heavy, and the temperature is 12.8°C.



THE COMMITTEE

Please do feel free to get in touch with any member of the committee. We would be very pleased to hear your comments, questions, requests and suggestions.
The excellent [MBKA website](#) is here.



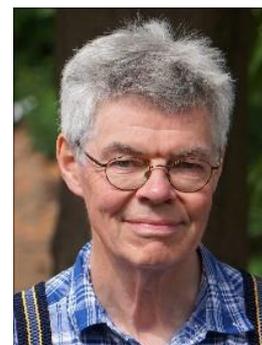
John Chapman Chair
john.chapman@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Paul Lawrence Vice-Chair, Website Manager, Membership Secretary, and eR2 Manager
paul.lawrence@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



Sheila Stunell Secretary
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Archie McLellan Treasurer
archie.mclellan@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



Tony Edwards Education Organiser
tony.ed@me.com

Ian Halls Committee member
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



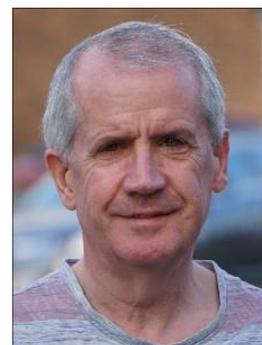
Mark Ballard Apiary Manager
apiary@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Robert Frost Committee member
robert.frost@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



Sonia Belsey Exams Organiser, Swarm phone, Social media
sonia.belsey@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

Nigel Rawlins Committee member
admin@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk



NON-COMMITTEE ROLES

Apiary Co-Ordinator | Elaine Laight | elaine.laight@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

BEE INSPECTORS

There are six Seasonal Bee inspectors (SBIs) covering the South East England. In Medway, it is likely that your SBI will be Danyal Conn. Go to [BeeBase](#), [click on Contacts page](#), and enter your postcode to find your nearest SBI. Do not assume you know before you have checked because the NBU have adjusted some areas for SBIs.

Regional Bee Inspector Daniel Etheridge
daniel.etheridge@apha.gov.uk | M: 07979 119376

Seasonal Bee Inspector Danyal Conn
danyal.conn@apha.gov.uk | M: 07584 202700

If you have not yet done so, join BeeBase now. If you haven't got bees yet, you can still enter apiary details with zero hives.

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- all photos by Archie McLellan, except the product images