

WHATSTHEBUZZ



Raw, natural, creamed: are these banned descriptions for honey? A fresh look at the Honey Regs.

Beekeeping: one hobby or ten? Jen Ferry in the first of a new series on the many different versions of beekeeping.

Learning through mentoring: a two-way process, with fun and positive benefits for mentor and learner.

WHATSTHEBUZZ is the monthly newsletter of Medway Beekeepers Association.

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

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Follow us on Facebook. New posts appear all the time.

The MBKA website is kept completely up to date about the Association.

<https://www.medwaybeekeepers.co.uk>



Picture above: The sky in the east: you don't need to be up at 4.00am to see the sunrise in winter!

Hello to February, to goodness-knows-what weather, and to you all

How is your planning for the season progressing? Words such as vaguely, gradually, and getting there, may well spring to mind. If that is true for you, you might be glad to read in this issue a prompt to clarify your thoughts and act straightaway.

The bees, like everything in nature, do what they always do, and planning in the human sense doesn't come into it. Even this early in the year, life in the colony is all about growth. There was a time some months back when [that word was hijacked](#) to be the solution for the country's ails.

Fortunately there's nothing controversial about growth in nature even if it sometimes it doesn't fit with our plans.

We can talk about the number of honey bees on the planet another time. For now, it's enough to say that bees make more bees, and the more bees there are, the more honey they will collect. It happens naturally, but as a holder of livestock, you can help things along. If a colony is small, it will expand when nectar starts to flow in flowers. The energy of the colony will go into brood. So that nectar flow will be apparent in more bees, but not stored honey. Only when the colony has grown, will the bees store honey in serious quantities.

If you want, you can help a colony on its journey of growth. It is raising brood now, but foraging is restricted by cold and wet weather. Because they are active – honey bees don't hibernate, and they do keep warm – they need carbohydrates. That's why we have been feeding them sugar in some form throughout winter and must continue to do so for some months yet. But they also forage for pollen when they can. Feeding the bees pollen, or pollen substitute (whether a proprietary brand or home-made), will boost the size of the colony now, so that they are raring to go when the first spring flowers bloom.

Those who want to take advantage of an oilseed rape crop in their vicinity might feed this protein source in February. There's a question in the BBKA module exams on this somewhere! The same might be true for those who have bees near fruit trees. Flowering periods can be very short. It makes sense to help the colony get ready for the nectar harvest.

Earlier in winter, we saw bees flying in abundance. In the NW of Scotland, David Evans's frozen pipes have been thawed by balmy 11°C days. Here, we are still feeling the cold and the bees are staying inside. Who knows what February will bring?

In the normal course of events, we would expect that the cluster is loosening, brood is building up, and the bees are flying on sunny days for defecating trips, and to forage for pollen.

As their numbers increase, so does the rate of consumption of stores. For the next three months, check that the hive is not becoming light – and 'sugar-free'!

Where is this pollen to be found? Drive down *Ito Way* in Gillingham. The sides of the dual carriageway are walls of hazel. Elsewhere there is snowdrop, crocus, and willow.

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FROM OUR CHAIR

John Chapman, our Chair, talks about association and beekeeping issues that come to mind.

WHATSTHEBUZZ I imagine you'd like to tell us about the next two events on the calendar. You're the next star of the show with your talk on 1 February.

John Chapman Yes, that's right. It's called *Simple Showing*. I want to encourage people who haven't taken part in a show before to have a go. And I want to help them avoid elementary mistakes which will get them eliminated before their honey jar is even opened.

WTB So, what's the first step for people who haven't done this before?

JC Start with the show schedule, not what you want to show. Read the details of the classes, then see which ones you'll be able to enter with your honey / wax / photos / mead / crafts / cake etc.

WTB Schedules vary from place to place, don't they?

JC Many are very similar, derived and scaled down from the National Honey Show. Others have a much more informal approach. We've built up our show schedule over the years looking at what works for our members.

WTB I know some of our members get a bit fed up with judging being so strict over details, like using a particular kind of jar.

JC I can understand that, but because our show is in a public place, Elmcourt Garden Centre, then the Show itself must look good, so that we make a favourable impression on the public as they wander around our display.

WTB I guess people want the focus of the judging to be on the honey, not the packaging.

JC You do get classes in which only the honey inside the jar is judged. That keeps the judges on their toes. Suddenly most of the criteria they use to eliminate most entries is taken from them. And when they do choose a winner, everyone else is going to dismiss the result as the judge's personal taste – and irrelevant!

WTB Keeping standards up is essential if you're selling honey.

JC Yes, if you're selling honey, you're putting it on display. There is a parallel with showing, and the excellence that is

implied with successful showing is the same as what is needed when selling through retail outlets – or at the garden gate.

WTB Show schedules do need to be alert to the need to change with the times, don't they?

JC Indeed. There is a commercial class in which people can enter their honey the way they sell it to the public. And participants should feel free to say what changes they'd like to be considered.

WTB There's more to show than honey.

JC I'll cover most things a little. Mead, wax, candles and so on. There isn't time to talk about everything. I'll not be able to cover the baking classes!

WTB I'm looking forward to this talk. Now to the AGM. Has anyone come forward for Chair and Vice-chair jobs?

JC Sadly no. I really hope some people do come forward to help the committee, or to take on a job even without coming on the committee.

WTB I imagine it's important to find a new Chair.

JC Well, the main job of the Chair is to chair the committee meetings. Everything else is secondary. The Chair might take on other jobs as they come up, or they might just ensure that *someone* is covering these things. For me, chairing a meeting took all my attention. I found that I wasn't able to both Chair *and* present and discuss a new topic.

WTB I think you'll miss this connection with MBKA.

JC I've been on the committee for about thirty years now, and it's long past time that I stopped and someone else took over with a fresh set of ideas. I think the Association is quite healthy these days. We have a new apiary site, a good education system, a newsletter, and so on. And we seem to be keeping our member numbers up.

I want very much to see new people join the committee. Let's hope some come forward soon!



MBKA APIARY

Mark Ballard writes with his update of work completed, and planned for the near future, at the Association Apiary.

Activity at the Pavilion Apiary has quietened down mainly because of weather conditions. However, there was a short period when we had the severe frost when I was able to drive down to the Pavilion. This was helpful as I had five 12.5kg boxes of fondant to deliver. Checks for fondant levels are being carried out to make sure the bees have enough food. Also woodpecker damage is being checked.

I have had two severe woodpecker attacks on my hives at Loddington Farm resulting in losing them.

We do not anticipate much activity during February, other than checking fondant levels and woodpecker damage..

The MBKA 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

MBKA NEWS AND EVENTS

RECENT TALK

18 January David Evans on Zoom: Swarming and Bait hives.

This is the third time David has given a talk on Zoom to MBKA. And we have already booked him for a fourth talk in January 2024.

Feedback for this talk has been extremely enthusiastic! If you missed it, members are able to watch the talk only – not the Q&A – in the members' area of our website. Local BKAs were invited to join us and I'm sure some did. We had an audience of 89 – although it was more than that because a number of couples watched on one screen.

David said that he enjoys giving his Bait Hives talk most from the full range of his talks. His enthusiasm for the subject was palpable. It's one thing to lose swarms, but it happens to most of us, sometimes despite our best efforts. How much better to undo that loss, and capture swarms, hive them, and give them a fresh start with a much better chance of survival than if they were left to manage on their own.

David began with a survey of swarming; why it happens, how the bees achieve what they do, and how small their chances of survival are once they have left the hive. In an answer to a question, David explained that this was not a failure of evolution; rather an indication of the challenges that bees face in the world today with parasites, disease, and poisons making survival in the wild highly unlikely – at least in many parts of the world.

David described the research findings on how best to succeed with siting bait hives – or as they say more appropriately in the US, swarm traps. But he also stressed that we shouldn't get hung up on the details of these recommendations. For instance, it's recommended that bait hives should be five metres off the ground. As that creates more problems than it solves, David suggested that a few inches off the ground – on a hive stand, for instance – would be adequate.

To make the bait hive more attractive, David suggested inserting some empty old comb. And also some frames, possibly with bamboo skewers and tongue depressors to guide the bees to draw comb evenly, and in the 'right' places.

David's talks are quite long – about 80 minutes with a 5-minute break, but he is an engaging speaker, and peppers his spiel with jokes. The Q&A was quite extended with some very interesting questions and comments spoken from the audience.

If you're not familiar with David's beekeeping and professional work, he is the writer of [The Apiarist blog / website](#). He writes a post of c.3,000 words every Friday afternoon, and sometimes writes as much again in answers to comments sent in by readers. I heartily recommend you sign up to his weekly email giving a link to the latest post. You might buy him a coffee from time to time as a thank you. You can do that on the website.

He may be the most frequently read, and most prolific writer in English (or any language) on beekeeping, and, if

you use the search bar on his website, you can find wisdom, learning, and experience on almost any topic related to honey bee science and beekeeping.

WINTER EVENTS

1 February Wed 20:00-22:00 John Chapman, Simple showing. John speaks about his talk in the *From our Chair* article above.

18 February Sat 14:00-16:00 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by the MBKA QUIZ

15 March Wed 20:00-22:00 Film Night with Tony Edwards

COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

from the committee meeting on 17 January:

Archie McLellan (treasurer) asked about changing the method of drawing up the annual accounts and was given approval to modify the way these were presented in the annual report. The BBKA / BDI database (eR2) is now used for membership renewals. This simplifies the process, both for members at the time of renewal and the membership secretary / treasurer.

Archie was keen for the members to be aware that only £9.00 of their standard £32.00 Registered member subscription goes to MBKA. The rest pays for the BBKA subscription, BDI premiums etc. The committee agreed to ask the AGM to approve raising the MBKA component of the subscription by £4.00 with effect from 1 January 2024. They also agreed to proposing an early payment discount of £2.00 for those who renew their subscription by the end of January. New members would receive the early payment discount if they joined later in the year.

The MBKA subscription – less than £1.00 a month – pays for and gives access to all the association benefits and activities: the monthly events, the Association apiary, the website, WHATSTHEBUZZ (the monthly newsletter), and participation in public events (the English Festival, the Kent Show, the Ploughing Match, and of course our own MBKA Honey Show).

Archie attended the BBKA Annual Delegates Meeting on Zoom on 14 January and his account is on page xx. The minutes of the ADM will be published very promptly this year, following a request to speed up this process.

The MBKA AGM is at 14:00 on Saturday 18 February in Wainscott Hall. In the past, the secretary, treasurer,

website manager, and apiary manager have received an annual sum as 'expenses'. These sums are more properly described as gratuities. This means that income tax may be payable. However, payments for permitted expenses will always be covered when backed by receipts and a signed claim form.

The Annual Lecture is to be restored. It will happen on Saturday 29 April 2023 at Wainscott Hall. Admission will be £3.00 and neighbouring associations will be invited.

Mark reported on the Association Apiary, and his research into insurance for the buildings. The road and roof works have still to be done, and a new display sign (with our name) is needed for the front of the building.

The Education group reported on the Taster Day (20 May), on the Introductory Course which starts on 5 June, on the option to hold BBKA Basic Assessments, and that the Module 2 course is now at the half-way point. Some participants may opt to take the exam in March.

Paul Lawrence has tidied up the website and will support Sonia when she takes over from him after the AGM. Paul is looking into updating our Privacy and Safeguarding documents.

The date of the next meeting will be set at the AGM.

Minutes of past meetings and past editions of WHATSTHEBUZZ can be found on the MBKA website.

If you have any difficulty signing in to the members' area of the website, please contact Paul Lawrence.

paul.lawrence@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk

THE ADM

Archie McLellan represented MBKA at the Annual Delegates' Meeting (ADM) of the BBKA on 14 January 2023.

A request to the BBKA that the ADM minutes be published as soon as possible has been accepted. Those who wish to read a full account of the proceedings of that day will be able to do so soon.

Most of the delegates attended on Zoom. A small number attended at the BBKA office in Stoneleigh.

The proceedings are always very procedural to begin with. Delegates are logged in during the hour before the start and cast a test vote. After the usual agenda items such as Adoption of Standing Orders, Approving the previous minutes, and hearing about Executive actions on the 2022

ADM Resolutions, the meeting moved to the Trustees and Financial reports.

This was followed by the nomination of the previous president, Margaret Wilson, as an Honorary Member, and the election of four trustees. Dr Patricia Morgan died some weeks before the ADM. She was to have been nominated for election to the Examinations Board.

Surprisingly soon we reached the 15th and final item on the agenda: the propositions for consideration. This is by far the most time-consuming part of the day.

The first proposition was controversial and set the tone for some of the other propositions. It sought to allow, 'that in exceptional circumstances declared by the BBKA President, the pre-meeting election of ... members be accepted as a substitute for a vote at the ADM.' The problem for many speakers among the delegates was that, in this instance (the nomination of M Wilson as an Honorary Member) the 'exceptional circumstances' were declared to be the pandemic, and there was now no pandemic – as admitted by the Chair of Governance. This proposition was passed despite the unease of some delegates. Their concerns were assuaged by the fact that later propositions would address the matter more fully.

The second proposition (from Cornwall BKA) required the Exam Board to discontinue their move towards online only modular exams, and to continue to offer local venues for these exams. The case was strongly made and received overwhelming support.

The third proposition was then withdrawn. It was to survey the members about moving to fully online exams.

Next, the delegate from Worcestershire proposed that the BBKA lobby the authorities to allow beekeepers to obtain an auto-injector (EpiPen) without a prescription. The discussion on this, which included a number of contributions from medical professionals, was wide-ranging, authoritative, complex, and challenging, with no

obvious support either for or against. It was clear that it would not be appropriate to vote so soon on such a detailed subject and the executive will now research this matter and present options for the future.

Proposition five was about educating the public about the benefits of local honey. It was not at all clear that there were any simple actions that could be taken on this. Nor was it clear if actions that were taken would necessarily be a benefit to the public or to local beekeepers and farmers.

Next, 'beekeeping needs to demonstrate it is not contributing to global warming'. As I recall, this was a fairly insubstantial discussion. The minutes will soon be available for you to peruse.

Proposition 7 was crunch time. It asked for a change to the constitution which required a 75% vote in favour. This time, the matter of the lack of definition or precise description of the nature of the 'exceptional circumstances' which the President could use to allow a pre-meeting vote to be carried without reference to the ADM came up against some serious opposition. The vote received only 63% support – well short of what was needed to pass. As is their right, one delegate asked for a membership vote. This means that the members' votes represented by a delegate are counted, rather than a single vote to each delegate. Yorkshire, for instance has over 2,000 members. However, the voting software had just crashed, and it was not possible to hold this vote. The meeting was adjourned.

The meeting will reconvene on 20 February. Meanwhile, voting on the controversial proposition has reopened. The clause including the phrase 'exceptional circumstances' has been removed, as have the remaining two propositions, also on constitutional changes.

Delegates are able to vote now (I voted FOR this time), and there is no need to attend the next Zoom meeting.

The minutes will soon be available for those who wish to read about the proceedings in full.

TIMES AND DATES

Please note there are some changes to the dates for the Module 2 Winter study course.

Unless stated otherwise, all events are at Wainscott Memorial Hall, 16-18 Holly Road, Wainscott ME2 4LG

1 February	Wed	20:00-22:00 John Chapman, <i>Simple showing</i>
6 February	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 8, Module 2

18 February	Sat	14:00-16:00 AGM
20 February	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 9, Module 2
6 March	Mon	19:30-21:30 Winter study, Session 10, Module 2
15 March	Wed	20:00-22:00 Tony Edwards, <i>Film Night</i>
15 April	Sat	09:00-17:00 English Festival, Riverside Park
13 May	Sat	14:00-16:00 Barbeque, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
20 May	Sat	10:00-15:00 Beekeeping Taster Day, MBKA Apiary, Lee Green Road, Cliffe Woods ME3 8EX
5 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 1/6
10 June	Sat	14:00-16:00 Event at the Association Apiary (Theme?)
12 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 2/6
19 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 3/6
26 June	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 4/6
3 July	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 5/6
6 July	Thu	10:00-18:00 Set-up Day for Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF
7-9 Jul	Fri-Sun	08:30-18:00 Kent County Show , Kent Showground, Detling, ME14 3JF Judging Friday morning Clear-up on Sunday afternoon after close at 17:00
10 July	Mon	19:30-21:30 Introduction to beekeeping Course 6/6

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF BEEKEEPERS

Bob Smith writes with news of the CABK events. Members and non-members welcome to attend. There is no fee.



13 February 2023, 7.30pm [The Perilous Life of a Drone – a talk by Alison McAfee](#). Drone honey bees get little attention from workers, queens or even researchers! Yet they are clearly a vital resource for

a healthy colony.

11 March 2023 [Spring Meeting 2023, Norton Priory, Runcorn](#). The CABK Spring Meeting travels around the country – 2020 in Arkendale, North Yorkshire, 2022 in Nottingham and we are delighted to announce that the 2023 event will be held at Norton Priory, near Runcorn, Cheshire.

14 March 2023, 7.30pm [CABK Annual General Meeting 2023](#). The 78th AGM of the Central Association of Beekeepers will be held, on-line, on Tuesday 14th March 2023, starting at 7.30pm. Details of how to attend this online event will be circulated to members during February.

Fuller details of all events are available [from the CABK website](#) and registration for all events is now open.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION



Cambridgeshire BKA has hosted the longest running series of beekeeping Zoom talks in the UK. Starting just a few months after MBKA(!),

the audience size for their series has grown and continues to tune in even though the pandemic is over.

Their huge library of talks is available in their YouTube channel for members. You can become an associate Member for £7.00 – possibly one of the best buys in beekeeping!

WEST SUSSEX BKA ANNUAL CONVENTION

9:30am to 4:30pm, Saturday 25 February, Lodge Hill Centre, Watersfield, Pulborough

Main lectures

- ‘Even healthy bees have to eat’ – Professor Francis Ratnieks
- ‘Varroa Control 2023’ – Bob Smith NDB
- ‘The Colony Mind’ – Graham Royle NDB

Seminar 1 (You can attend one of these)

- What the Heck is That? – Graham Royle
- All things Queens – Christine Coulsting
- The Diverse World of Honey Bee Communication – Dr Elli Leadbetter

Seminar 2 (You can attend one of these)

- Pollen, Propolis, Water – the other things bees collect – Bob Smith NDB

WORDS

RAW, NATURAL, CREAMED

Why are trading standards unhappy about describing honey as ‘raw’? Laurence Edwards of Black Mountain Honey was told by Trading Standards not to label his honey this way. It is illegal, they said, and Andy Pedley, author of *Food Safety for Beekeepers* writes a full page in the latest issue of BBKA News to say that in his opinion, TS are right. Read the article for the full story if you like. Here’s the law on this, in a nutshell. There are eleven so-called reserved descriptions for honey: blossom (or nectar) honey, cut comb in honey (aka chunk honey), baker’s honey etc. For example, blossom honey must be labelled ‘blossom honey’, or ‘nectar honey’ or ‘honey’, and you are not permitted to use these terms if the honey is not obtained from the nectar of plants.

- Instructions for building the Honeycomb – Vince Gallo
- Adult Bee Diseases – Christine Coulsting

Admission £30.00. Booking at www.westsussexbeekeepers.org.uk/convention.html or contact Viv Sallows on 01293 871092 or 07749265944 or email wsbkaconvention@gmail.com

BIBBA WEBINARS



Bee Improvers and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) have several webinars [available on their website](#).

BIBBA members can see the webinars live, and non-members can see all webinars, [at the BIBBA YouTube channel](#).

Most of these talks are given by Roger Patterson.

THE BRITISH BEEKEEPING SHOW

(Formerly BeeTradex)

09:00-16:00m Saturday 4 February 2023

A trade show with free lectures at NAEC, Stoneleigh
[Book tickets online](#) and get 2 for 1 tickets with code BBKS.

THE BEEKEEPING (TRADE) SHOW

See [The Beekeeping Show](#) – Saturday 25 February.

Supplementary information on the plant source and geographical location is permitted – if it is mainly applicable to the product. So it’s fine to say *heather* honey or *Meresborough* Honey if you are confident this information is true.

Now here’s the interesting bit. ‘The product name of a relevant honey may be supplemented by information relating to its *specific quality criteria*.’ (Honey Regs 17.5)

That little phrase tells you why it’s perfectly fine to state ‘creamed honey’ on your label, and not at all fine to describe it as ‘raw’ or ‘natural’.

Creamed honey is an alternative term for soft-set honey – though some would say that the process to make each is different. It describes ‘specific quality criteria’, attributes that makes this honey different from other honeys. It’s apt because *creaming* food is ‘to make food into a smooth,

thick liquid' (Cambridge Dictionary). As far as I can tell, it's not true that there has ever been any ban on describing honey as *creamed*. People say that the term was banned because it implied that honey was a dairy product. I find that difficult to believe. Yet lots of people believe that it is an illegal term. And if you don't read the Honey Regs. carefully, you might come away with the idea that only the reserved descriptions can be used, along with floral and geographical information.

I've heard and read many times that 'creamed honey' is an illegal description— mostly recently in a comment on an American blog by a UK beekeeper. But surprisingly, Andy Pedley himself hasn't come across this. He wrote in an email today: 'I agree creamed honey is a valid description (not that I'd had to think about it till your email).'

You will often see 'raw' and 'natural' honey for sale. But they are not permitted because they imply that these honeys are different from other honeys. But all honey has these attributes – or should have if it's legal.

Raw and *natural* do not describe 'specific quality criteria' because they are not *specific*; they can be applied to almost any honey.

Some producers would like to be able to use these terms because they hope to differentiate their honey from supermarket honey – and because some cookery books specify *raw honey* in their ingredients lists.

Many beekeepers ensure that their honey is produced without any warming above 45°C – the only temperature limit specified in the Regs.

Artisan honey producers want to be able to say their honey is different from supermarket honey.

Perhaps there are two distinct honey markets, and two groups of customers. Many people are happy with supermarket honey and would not pay extra for local beekeeper produced honey. Others care about honey and are prepared to pay extra. No doubt some of them are lured by words like 'raw' and 'natural'. However, it's better (and less complicated) in the long run to focus on what makes our honey really different and special, rather than use these vague terms

INSTEAD OF A QUIZ

You can probably see that something is not quite right in the picture below. What is unusual and why does it look like this? (Answer on [page 11](#))



HERE'S A THOUGHT

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND BEEKEEPING

I know a couple of vets who are beekeepers. They combine a scientific background in medicine and animal biology, with an ability to diagnose problems and come up with remedies. They are among the most knowledgeable beekeepers I know. Most beekeepers accept that, as holders of livestock, they have a duty of care for their bees.

I'm grateful to [Dani Akrigg, a retired vet and beekeeper](#), for this statement of the basic principles of animal husbandry:

- Proper feeding
- Providing safe and hygienic shelter
- Ensuring proper health and protection against disease.

A PROPER WELCOME

How's this for a warm welcome to a new beekeeper!

[A couple, Ian and Jill, have just posted on Beekeeping Forum](#), writing about their plans to start keeping bees. Of course, posts like this happen all the time and they are given a very warm welcome by a number of forum posters. (Click the link for a sample of the posts.) This particular one isn't special. It's just the most recent. I thought you might like to bask in the cosy warmth of the welcome greetings. And these BKF guys show us how to be genuinely welcoming.

However, you have to laugh at what happens at the end. Someone, with too much missionary zeal, takes the chance to post a controversial view which alters the tone of the whole conversation. He is slapped down by the moderator, but it brings the thread to an end. You can always rely on a bunch of humans to show a wide range of perspectives!

RECOMMENDED READING

[USING APIDEAS: HOW TO SET UP AND MANAGE APIDEAS FOR MATING HONEY BEE QUEENS, DAN BASTERFIELD](#)

I attended some of the Advanced Beekeeping webinars given by father and son NDB holders, Ken and Dan Basterfield. It was one example of how the pandemic created opportunities. I'm not keen on travelling long distances if I can help it, and the Basterfields live a long way away, deep in the south west.

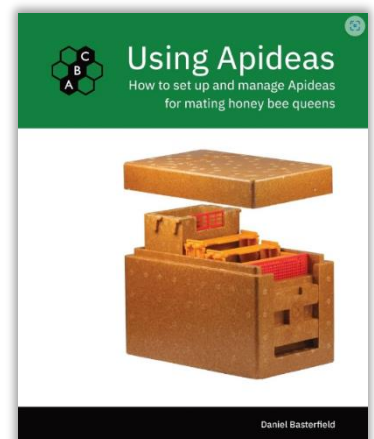
I remember well the Zoom talk they both gave on *Using Apideas*. There was so much information, such clear presentation, clear unfussy PowerPoint pages, and superb photographs. I felt I knew it all, thank you Ken and Dan, and I had a successful season using Apideas (and the cheap equivalents) for mating queens, even after the drone population had visibly diminished in mid-August.

Now, it's all in a book. And so much more. Success is guaranteed. The Basterfields have discovered over nearly half a century how to make Apideas work for mating queens, and they're handing all that info and experience to the readers of this book.

It's a generous gesture, and the book is worth every penny of its £25.00 cover price.

As you might expect, not all beekeepers subscribe to this stockholder approach to beekeeping. An alternative view for '[treatment of injured and/or failing wild animals is:](#)
[1\) Never help a wild animal; and](#)
[2\) Everything deserves its chance.](#)'

This is the approach taken by some beekeepers who are against treating for varroa – because it deprives the bees of the chance of evolving / adapting to a way out of the varroa / DWV problem by themselves.



ANSWER TO 'INSTEAD-OF-A-QUIZ'

There are only five frames of bees in the centre of this box. The outer spaces are filled with large dummies. I made these with pieces of Correx, some aluminium tape, and a couple of top bars. Each is three frames wide. This is the technique used in the Ben Harden method of rearing queens.

WRITE DOWN YOUR PLANS!

Well, have you?

No? Neither have I. So here goes:

- Now that the hives are Standard Nationals (not 14x12s), make the most of options that are now available.
- Inspect efficiently and minimally, with least possible disruption to the bees – and to family life!
- Act quickly when Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus (CBPV) is seen – because it will definitely return. Requeen and remove the floor for a few weeks.

- Build on queen-rearing success with mini-nuc boxes for mating; possibly sell queens or nuc colonies – or at least take more nucs into winter.
- Find one or two more outlets and/or markets.
- Enter the MBKA honey show again – but start preparing earlier!
- The season is desperately short; don't put off till later what you can do now.

Would you care to draw up your list and share it with us? It only takes a few minutes. Please send you plans for the coming season to include in next month's WHATSTHEBUZZ.

Archie McLellan

BEEKEEPING: ONE HOBBY OR TEN?

There are so many ways to be a beekeeper.

Over the next few months, Jen Ferry will explore some of the many facets of beekeeping with her own experiences and stories. From markets to microscopes, from photography to Facebook, from raising queens to raising young beekeepers, Jen has delved into most areas of beekeeping. Today, Jen writes about her beginnings in beekeeping and the discovery of the wealth of opportunities that lay ahead.



When I attended an Introduction to Beekeeping course in 2011, I felt as if I was stepping into a new world. Keeping bees was a big departure from my day job in the NHS, and I found it both engrossing and an escape. I was living in Cambridgeshire at the time and my first few seasons of beekeeping were a bumpy road. Forage was poor. Huge open green fields drenched with agrichemicals, scant hedging and very few trees on the edge of the Fens offered poor forage. I struggled to keep colonies going and if I got them through the winter, I often lost them in the spring. A honey crop was a distant dream.

But others got a harvest. It became clear that I was not doing things right.

When I moved to Upnor, I needed somewhere to put my hives. I asked around for a local beekeeper and was directed to Michael Bucknall. One quick phone call later, and I was on his farm checking out sites where he could accommodate me and my bees until I found an apiary of my own. That chance introduction to Michael changed everything. The site we selected was within sight of Michael's house, in

a quiet corner on the Hoo Peninsular. Michael's own bees were on the other side of his farm, and with such rich forage they were not in competition with mine. And this is where I really learnt to be a beekeeper.

When I inspected the bees, Michael would see me arrive and would wander over for a chat. He would watch me working and ask me questions. He would suggest methods of management and talk through what I was looking at. This was the gentlest form of mentoring that you could imagine. His many, many years of beekeeping experience and his

engaging style had me hooked. I needed to learn more about managing these fascinating creatures. He taught me a great deal, but I was also stimulated to learn more. I joined MBKA and managed to convince them to let me join the Winter Study group.

This started an ongoing journey of beekeeping study that continues today (I've just ordered yet another book...). Amazingly, as my learning progressed, my bees learned to overwinter, and they even gave me a honey crop!

In the last twelve years, I have read many books, attended several study groups, been away for weekend courses both in the UK and abroad, been to honey shows, helped at the apiary with open sessions, sat exams and been part of the Education team at MBKA, but beyond doubt, the one thing that made the most impact was Michael's informal mentoring where I was guided and supported on my early beekeeping journey.

Since then, I too have enjoyed mentoring new beekeepers. It is rewarding and fascinating, and I soon found out that whilst we all might assume this is for the benefit of the newbie, I learned lots in the process! Not only that, but, as being a beekeeper is usually a solitary pastime, it has been a real pleasure to work alongside others and share time with them and the bees.

My curiosity with bees and their products is never quite satiated, and this has led me learn to expand and grow my



One of Jen's apiaries. Photo: Jen Ferry

colonies through selective queen rearing and swarm collection. I harvest and produce honey for shows and for selling. I also harvest wax and use it for candles, wax wraps, soaps, lip balms and creams. I have increased my interest in countryside stewardship as I have looked at forage and competition among pollinators. In order to build and maintain equipment, I have developed DIY abilities I never imagined I would have. These diverse interests and skills are all a spin-off from beekeeping. Over the next few issues of WTB I will explore some of these interests and hobbies that I have taken up since becoming a beekeeper. *Jen Ferry*

REGISTER AS A FOOD PRODUCER ?

Do you need to Register with the local council as a food producer to sell your honey?

Go to [Food business registration on the .gov website](#). Key in your postcode to be taken to your (our) local council. The first thing you'll read is:

'When you start a new food business or take over an existing business, you must register with your local authority.' It continues:

'Who needs to register? A food business is anyone preparing, cooking, storing, handling, distributing, supplying or selling food.'

This is looking very much as if we, as producers and suppliers of our local honey, will have to register with the Council as a food business. But when you scroll down a bit, it's less clear that we are included. It will be a bit of a squeeze to fit into any category.

During the pandemic, I filled out an online form to register. I got a call from the council, the gist of which was that the

lady I was speaking to didn't know if I needed to register, and could I help her? We let it drop as low priority, especially during the pandemic, and I could contact them again if I wished to when things returned to normal.

Then Andy Pedley's book [Food Safety for Beekeepers](#) came out. It's one of those books which is going to be the source for answers on this topic for years to come. Many specialisms have such a book. I have a minor career in music typesetting. The massive tome and go-to book for the answers to every question that could come up in printing sheet music is called 'Behind Bars'. Get it?

Andy has produced a chart which tells you if you need to register as a food business. Let's try out the chart with Joe / Jean Blogs's honey. Starting at the top, their honey is

- prime produce
- honey
- processed in Beekeeper's own premises
- in small quantities
- sold directly at the gate and markets

So registration is NOT required

But if we change things a little and they tell us that, in a good year, they also sell honey in buckets to a wholesaler, then they are in the category of

- indirect or bulk sales

And registration IS required.

Finally, and this accounts for most of their sales, Joe / Jean sell honey in jars to a couple of shops. This is the category in the grey box (I wonder why it's grey!) and refers to

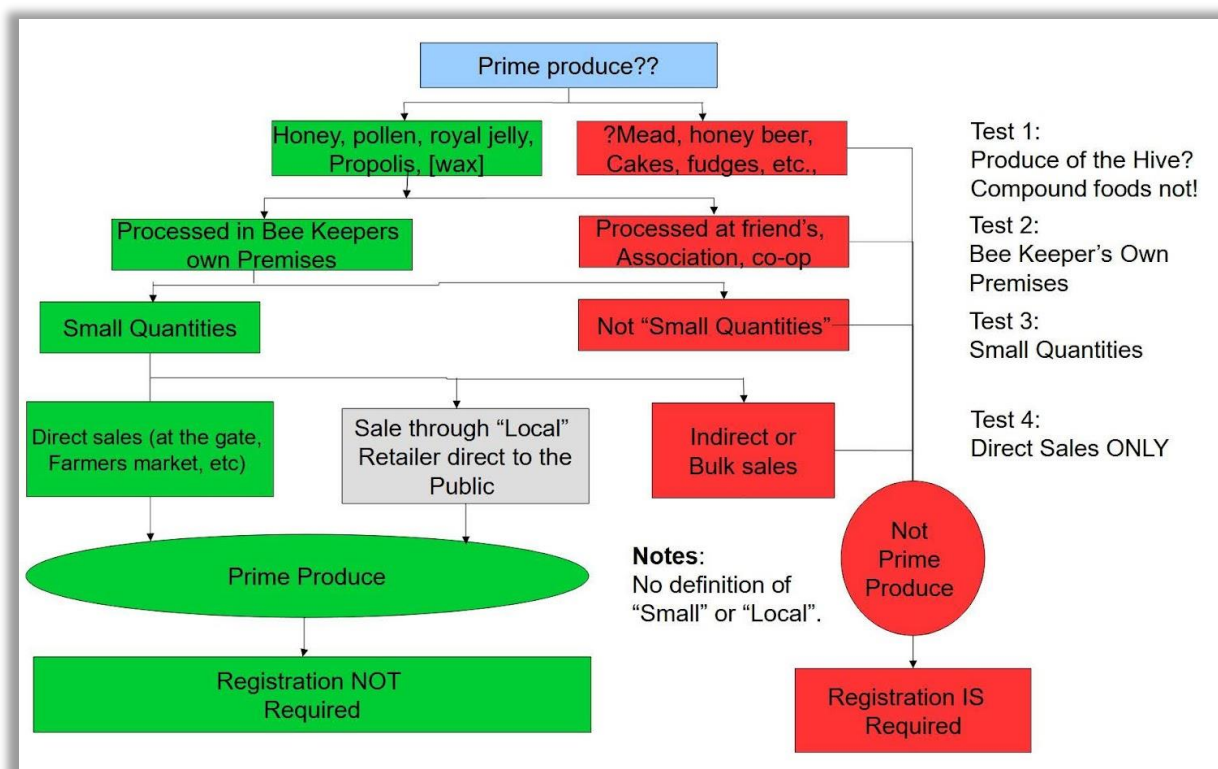
- sales through a 'Local' retailer, who of course sells direct to the public

Andy has coloured this box grey – for a grey area. No one knows what exactly small or local means.

So it would seem that you can sell honey in this way without being registered, though you might decide you'd like to anyway. You can tell your retailers that you are registered as a food business because that implies that you have met standards for hygiene in the workplace and in your working practices, that you know how to store honey properly, that you can package it without any contamination, and with strict adherence to the Regulations vis-à-vis labelling. You might also decide to do an online food hygiene course for the same reason.

However, these are things you might do to impress others. Another option if you learn piecemeal is to read through the 80-odd posts in [this thread on Beekeeping Forum](#).

There is a mountain of information there and if anyone posts anything dubious, plenty others will be quick to correct them. But possibly the most comprehensive way to learn about honey and producing it for sale is to study the BBKA Module 2 course which looks in depth at everything to do with honey – its constituents and production for sale .



SHOPPING

OXALIC ACID VAPING TORCHES

Vaporising (sublimating) oxalic acid is a popular varroa treatment, especially during periods of little or no brood. But is it used much in our association? I don't know. Perhaps you could tell me.

I balk at the cost of an electric sublimator, and I've never been happy at the prospect of carrying a car battery or field generator to the apiaries. So the ever-popular GasVap, recommended by Paul Newman (one of our members) is just the ticket for me. But, and it has been a very big but, the recommended blow torches for the GasVap have caused me much grief. I have gone through three now, and they were always unsatisfactory, even before they broke.

So I decided to look for a torch with the correct diameter nozzle (22mm) which I could fix on to a standard butane cannister. This is a change from the usual GasVap set-up

which uses small chef's torches, which are filled from the bottom from a lighter fuel can. Filling up is a real pain. But – to be fair – these torches aren't designed for the heavier work involved in vapping lots of hives, storing the torch in a cold car etc.

Here's my solution. I found a torch head (with 22mm nozzle) which clips on to a bayonet-fitting butane cannister. It might be more powerful than a chef's torch, but the heat specification is the same: 1300°C. Anyway, that doesn't matter, because even with a chef's torch, the GasVap instructions state that the torch should be turned down after it heats up, and before inserting any oxalic acid. I've used it for one session on 30 hives, and it worked a treat. Warm up the torch before fitting the GasVap, or take the can indoors overnight, to minimise flaring when first lit.



[JDHON Blow Torch, Butane, Adjustable Flame – £14.99](#)

[Four butane gas canisters - £8.75](#)



I posted my findings on Beekeeping Forum and received a number of useful responses. One person suggested spending a little more money for a more robust set-up from

Screwfix. A torch with a brass nozzle, and a butane cannister with a 7/16" standard screw fitting. Take your pick!



[ROTHENBERGER ROFIRE propane & butane blow torch \(82945\) – £29.49](#)

[Butane gas cylinder, 7/16" - £6.99](#)



BUYING FROM BBWEAR?

[BBwear](#) have a discount on protective clothing for members of BKAs till 31 March. Use these codes when ordering.

- Polycotton range 15% discount code: BKAPOLY15 (case sensitive)
- Ultra range 10% discount code: BKAULTRA10 (case sensitive)

THE ULTIMATE HIVE FLOOR

Taking a leaf out of a recent post on The Apiarist website boldly called *The Ultimate Hive Stand*, WHATSTHEBUZZ is delighted to present *The Ultimate Hive Floor*.

Here is a hive floor which has the features and advantages of both solid floors and open-mesh floors; which allows monitoring for varroa from the debris below the mesh; which allows for full control of ventilation from 0-100% flow through the floor; which has the entrance under the floor; which is mouse-proof; which is more wasp-proof than a typical entrance on the front of a hive; and which provides a lobby outside the entrance without any projection from the vertical face of the box.



Showing the front porch or landing area

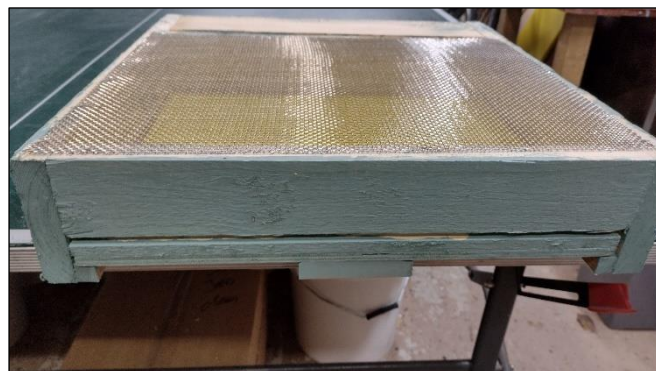
Recommended (but optional) for use with this (or any) floor: a 50-75mm eke between the floor and the bottom box fitted with 20x20mm strips in line with the frames above – a so-called *slatted rack*. This provides a gathering or milling around space at the level of the entrance, and a space for ventilation and humidity control which the bees will not fill with comb.



The 8/9mm gap in front of the mesh is the entrance. The bees come up from the landing board below and enter the hive from under the floor.



This retractable board of 9mm ply gives full protection from draughts through the mesh. It might be used only in cold weather. The yellow Correx board is placed on the plywood drawer and greased with Vaseline when monitoring varroa.



The drawer in place, with a strip on the board to fill the gap and minimise draughts and 50mm strip under the board as a grip / handle to pull the drawer out.

FROM THE NHS, BBKA, NBU...

THE BBKA SPRING CONVENTION 2023

[From the BBKA website: Five good reasons to attend the Spring Convention:](#)

1. Great lecture programme for all beekeepers
2. Practical workshops to learn new skills
3. Amazing bargains to be had at the trade show and maybe try on that new beesuit for size
4. Chat to other beekeepers and enjoy a break in one of the five conveniently located cafes
5. Listen and join in with the debates in Speakers' Corner



There will be limited overnight accommodation at Harper Adams, available for three-night dinner, bed & breakfast only, and likely to sell out quickly. If you plan to stay, there are many other opportunities in the surrounding area.

ACCESS TO ACADEMIC PAPERS

Are you a member of the Central Association of Beekeepers? If so, you can skip this item. If not, let me tell you about a useful tip I read in the January newsletter, produced by the Chairman, Bob Smith – also of MBKA.

How many times have you followed a link to a scientific paper only to discover that only the abstract was visible, and that the *Download pdf* button brought up a significant demand for payment. Even if you don't intend to plough through the entire paper, it's likely that you would read bits of it carefully and skim the rest.

However, all is not lost. The website [Access to Research](#) gives *free, walk-in access to over 30 million academic articles in participating public libraries across the UK. Start now by viewing which articles and journals are available from home, then find a participating library where you can view the full text.*

Start by checking on their map that your local library is part of the scheme. When you find a paper you wish to access, take a memory stick to the library and download the file for free. If your library is not part of the scheme, you can ask them to sign up. It won't cost them anything.

THE FIRST VACCINE FOR INSECTS

The US Dept for Agriculture (USDA) has approved a vaccine for American foulbrood (AFB) in honey bees. It's the first time a vaccine for insects has been approved in the US. At the moment, the only treatment for AFB is destruction of the bees, comb, and hives by burning in a pit. If this vaccine were to be successful, it would be a valuable protection for honey bees against this virulent and long-lasting bacterium.

What was your first thought on reading this? How can the vaccine be administered to so many individuals? Are needles and syringes involved?

The vaccine consists of dead *Paenibacillus larvae*, the bacterium that causes AFB. It is added to royal jelly because only one individual – the queen - has to consume it. When the vaccine reaches the queen's ovaries, the developing larvae have immunity to AFB.

For an independent assessment of this, and what it might promise, go to ['Hype or hope?' – a recent post on The Apiarist website.](#)

LEARNING THROUGH MENTORING

Earlier in this issue, Jen Ferry wrote about her experience of beekeeping with Michael Bucknall as an informal mentor. She wrote: *This was the gentlest form of mentoring that you could imagine. His many, many years of beekeeping experience and his engaging style had me hooked.*

It is wonderful when a mentoring relationship works as well as this one did.

You would expect to grow as a beekeeper with the guidance of a mentor, while taking responsibility for your own beekeeping education.

But the other side is that you never really know something until you can express it to someone else. In other words, mentoring, like teaching, will be a learning experience for the mentor too.

It is not the same as teaching. The mentor is not there to provide answers to all the questions the learner is able to dream up. Rather the mentor role is to guide the learner – possibly with counter-questions – to find the next step on their journey for themselves.

Mentors need to be good talkers, and even more, good listeners; in other words, good communicators. Both the mentor and the learner need to start with, and maintain, mutual respect.

For the mentor, this means constantly reminding themselves that there are several ways to achieve the same result in beekeeping, and that the bees are much less fussy than us about some of the things that we rate so highly. Mentors need to be honest and open about their mistakes too. Boasting about achievements is rarely a positive contribution to the relationship.

For the learner, this means constantly reminding themselves that the mentor has their own life, and that they, the learner, must take responsibility to educate themselves about the bees and caring for them.

Mentoring will probably be at both the learner's and the mentor's bees at different times. The mentor should stand back, at least when at the learner's hives, and guide the learner to making their own decisions about managing the bees. And the learner should talk about what their main focus in beekeeping is: to get a honey crop and make the hobby pay for itself, or just to enjoy watching the bees and studying their behaviour.

In our association, the education group allocates mentors to learners. Tony Edwards is in charge of this work. But it's a free world and you should feel able to approach anyone in the association to ask about a buddying or mentoring relationship. It's probably a good idea too to sort out details about when to make calls, about paying fuel expenses for travel, about how often to meet, and so on.



Tony Edwards

I was fortunate indeed to have Paul Newman as mentor when I started beekeeping here in 2018. Paul called me every week and we met at each other's hives regularly. He gave me my first bees from a swarm, and has been on hand ever since to help out when needed.

You won't be paid to do beekeeping mentoring. But by most accounts, mentoring is rewarding for all concerned.

Archie McLellan

HOW TO OPEN A TALK ON ANTS

In a recent talk on Zoom at the CABK, we heard about research on ants and their amazing population across the planet. If you missed the talk, here's a sample: there are 20 quadrillion ground ants (tree ants are too difficult to count); that's 2.6 million ants per human. In terms of biomass, these ants weigh 20% of the weight of the human population!

Scientists, and public speakers in general, use stunning facts like these to grab the attention of the audience at the beginning of a talk. In distracted moments this afternoon, a little time on Google led to this: apparently ants weigh 1-5mg. At 5mg, 2.6m ants weigh 13kg, which is roughly a fifth of the weight of an average human – which is what we were told at the end of the previous paragraph!

Now, would someone care to work out how many honey bees there are on the planet please? Email me.

BBKA NEWS, LATEST ISSUE

The February issue of BBKA News arrived today. It is special, with a number of excellent articles. However, one paragraph in Karl Colyer's monthly column, *In the Apiary* has caused a storm. He recommends *open feeding with warm syrup on milder days*. It's generally accepted that open feeding – leaving sugar in some form out in the field or garden – is not good practice in the UK. It is done in other countries but the density of hives in the UK means that there is a serious risk of spread of disease.

No doubt Karl intended this advice for February only, but he did not say so, and it's possible that readers may assume that this could be done at any time of year.

This has caused [an almighty explosion on Beekeeping Forum](#). It's not pretty, but if you have the stomach for it, you'll find some excellent posts among far too many 'unrestrained' comments. Here's a selection of the best:

@pargyle (who came from Hampshire to give us a talk during the pandemic) wrote: *It's mayhem .. bees are opportunists and it's not just your bees that will find it – within no time at all every bee within miles will be there. There is carnage as bees crawl over each other and fight to get at the food source.*

@Wilco (who is a vet) wrote: *Why create extra bee:bee contact between you bees and those from unknown colonies when there are other methods to feed which don't result in that and can be tailored to those that need it. It poses a potential threat both ways – unknown bees to yours*

COMMENTS

TO POST A COMMENT, PLEASE EMAIL WHATSTHEBUZZ.

Beekeeping is fertile ground for opinions to grow, and there are lots of them in WHATSTHEBUZZ. Does what you read here fit with your opinions and experience? Do write to let our readers know.

From Jason Cakebread I noticed the article on theft of hives. My experience was not a theft but vandalism. A few weeks ago, I had three hives knocked over. They had been individually driven into, damaging the stands, and tipping over the hives. The farmer where the apiary is located called me. I went there in the snow to stand the hives back

and yours to the unknown ones. Biosecurity is really important as part of good husbandry.

@JamezF cautioned that ... *you don't know that you're only feeding your own bees. There could be another beekeeper's bees turning up, or feral bees. In*

fact you don't even know that you're only feeding honey bees. Wasps, ants, hornets and others will surely turn up as well. All in huge numbers.

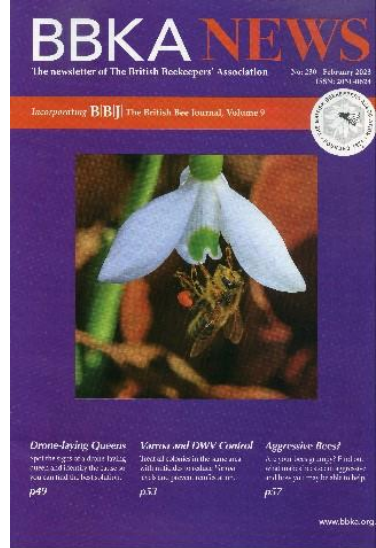
So really you have no idea what's going to turn up at the feeders and some visitors are sure to be carrying something you don't want in your hives, or perhaps spreading between your hives. In all likelihood there will be fighting, insects will die and bacteria/spores/fungi/whatever carried both on the outside and inside will circulate very easily in the syrup solution.

There's also the problem that stronger colonies may get a disproportionately greater share of the food than the weaker ones when in fact you might want to ensure that the weaker colonies definitely get sufficient.

@jenkinsbrynmair adds that *we all forget the effect on the human population in the vicinity of this feeding frenzy, people who may feel uncomfortable in the presence of a solitary inquisitive bee, let alone a cloud of bees behaving like a gaggle of Woolworth shoppers during the beginning of the January sales.*

up. There were no footprints or badger tracks, but later, when the snow melted, tyre tracks could easily be seen leading to each of the hives. I asked around and heard that some people were seen leaving the orchard just before the snow. They claimed they were 'looking for a lost dog'. The timing fits with the discovery of my disturbed hives. 😞

WTB That's a shame, Jason. Such a stupid and pointless thing to do. I hope the hives were well strapped so that the boxes stayed together.



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.](#)



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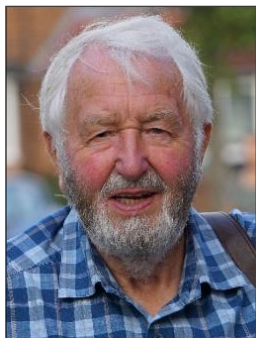


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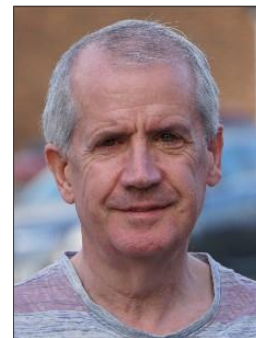


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