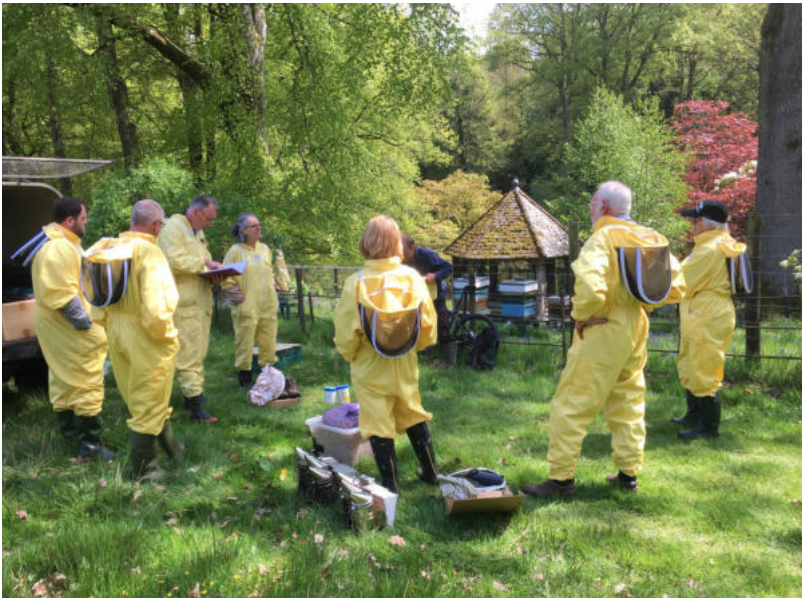
Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association

The BeeHolder

Summer 2022



The MBKA Apiary Team at Gregynog

Editorial

Do read Sian, our Membership Secretary's report on insurance for whether we sell honey or not it concerns us all. Read on to discover how our members are progressing through training and then find out all about the fascinating subject of queen rearing.

Further on you will find that our member for alternative beekeeping is asking if Montgomeryshire should become a voluntary black bee conservation area for the black honeybee. Do read this to find out more and then contact me through editor@montybees.org.uk to tell me your views on this or simply drop me a line on anything bee.

Jill Hill has gathered together news on bees from all over the world and some of it is stranger than fiction, who for instance, would believe that bees turn out to be as skillful as Hercule Poirot when it comes to detecting murder? Less sensational but a very cheering thought is the idea that some weeds are valuable as rich sources of nectar. There is more on flowers and fruit in sharing our harvest with the bees and the first of the series of autumn talks at Plas Dolerw is on cultivating our gardens. You can make a note of the talks and of the shows where we will be exhibiting too, which are listed in this issue.

Carolle

www.montybees.org.uk

Table of Contents

Editorial	2
WBKA Membership and Insurance	4
Vandalised Bees	5
2022 WBKA Basic Assessment Study Group	6
Dates for the diary	7
Beebase - Beekeeping information resource for Beekeepers	7
Rearing Queens - a Course to Remember	8
Autumn Planting for Pollinators	10
Should Montgomery become a VCA for the native Welsh honeybee?	10
The Garden - Sharing the Harvest	12
Bees in the News:	14
Another use for bees- finding dead bodies	15
Jersey prepares to fight Asian Hornets	16
Weeds can be good news	16
Do bees like salty flowers?	17
Volunteers wanted	17
In The Frame - David Moore	18
MBKA Commitee	20

Welsh Beekeepers Association Membership and Insurance

Montgomeryshire BKA is affiliated with the Welsh Beekeepers Association, which means when you join MBKA you also become a member of the WBKA. MBKA pays an annual capitation fee to the WBKA for each of its members and in return the WBKA provides Public Liability and Products Liability Insurance to members (and also the Welsh Beekeeper Magazine).

The Public Liability Insurance covers beekeepers for any damage caused by bees or beekeeping activities to another person or their property (including pets and livestock) and also covers the beekeeper when attending events to sell honey or other hive products.

The Product Liability Insurance covers the beekeeper for any damage caused by hive products that they sell to the public.

WBKA has realised that a number of local associations, including MBKA, have been offering membership on a household basis. This has caused a problem with the insurance as the company that provides the insurance can only insure one named individual per policy. To overcome this and ensure that everyone has the insurance they need, from now on WBKA and MBKA memberships will have to be in one members name only – the 'main named beekeeper'. This means that if your MBKA membership was previously in joint names it will now be in the first members name only (please let me know if you would like the main membership to be changed to the second member's name)

The WBKA has created a new 'partner' membership category for spouses, partners and any other family members of the 'main named beekeeper' who also need insurance in their own name. The good news is that there will be no charge for MBKA partner membership this year nor in 2023 as WBKA will be funding all the additional insurance costs until 2024.

Who needs to have insurance in their own name?

If you handle the bees without the ‘main named beekeeper’ being present then you should have insurance in your own name.

If you attend events to sell honey or other hive products then you should have insurance in your own name

If there is more than one person named on your honey jar or product label (including names in the format of Mr & Mrs XXXX), then all persons named should have insurance in their own names.

If any of the above situations apply to anyone other than the ‘main named beekeeper’ in your household then please contact me to register the person as a ‘partner’ member so that they will be fully covered by the insurance policies.

As far as MBKA is concerned all household members are still very welcome to attend meetings and events and their contributions to MBKA will still be much appreciated.

Please get in touch with me if you have any questions

Sian (Membership Secretary)

Vandalised bees

As beekeepers, we all wait anxiously for spring hoping that our colonies have survived the winter and rejoice to see bees coming and going from their hive on an early warm spring day. Pity then the beekeeper in Shrewsbury who found the roof and straps had been removed from his hives in the middle of March and a chemical substance poured inside. Although the hives had only been open a few days when he discovered the vandalism, heavy rain followed by frosts as well as the chemical had killed the bees.

Understandably, the beekeeper was devastated, and his first reaction was to give up beekeeping. However, he set up a Crowdfunder to replace the bees and damaged equipment and within 6 hours, it had generated the sum of money he needed. A happy ending to a sad tale but also a reminder of the potential risk when keeping colonies in out-apiaries.

Shropshire Star 29 March 2022

2022 WBKA Basic Assessment Study Group

This year saw a larger number of MBKA members wishing to work towards the WBKA basic assessment certificate spurred on by the success of 2021 when Ferol Richards, Liz Childerley and Maia Wells all gained their certificate. Plans were discussed and very kindly Rachel, our training officer, agreed to host a number of sessions on Friday evenings at her home, commencing on the 1st April. Eleven people initially put their names forward.

It was agreed that we would swot up on a particular section, and then Rachel would proceed to ask questions that would typically be asked by the examiner. The sessions at Rachel's were great fun, with equal amounts of study and humour. The sections covered by the exam are, Manipulation and Equipment, Natural History and Bee Keeping, Swarming, Swarm Control and Effects, Disease and Pests. The exam takes approximately one hour, the first part being a practical session where you perform an inspection talking the examiner through what you are specifically looking at, this is then followed by the oral part of the exam were you are asked a range of questions from the sections stated above.

Most of us had not taken an assessment of any sort for many years, so the prospect of having our skills and knowledge tested was rather daunting on the day. But we all survived the ordeal. Congratulations to Paul, Karen, Mark, George, Laura, Simon, Jill,and Joy who kept Lynfa Davies busy over two days and all passed.

Mark Swain

The WBKA is keen to encourage members to undertake some learning, whether practical, theory, or both. Gaining a better understanding of bees and beekeeping practice helps us to manage and care for our bees and many beekeepers find undertaking some study both rewarding and stimulating.

For more information about assessments and courses run by the WBKA please look at their website: https://wbka.com/exams-and-assessment-2/

Dates for the diary

5th September: Carolle Doyle "Plants for pollinators"

3rd October: Lynfa Davies "Reading the bees"

21st November: Liz Childerley "BiBBA". Liz will also tell us about her journey to becoming a SBI this year

Beebase - Beekeeping information resource for Beekeepers

Signing up to BeeBase as a Beekeeper will enable you to take advantage of the free services offered just go to nationalbeeunit.com. No charge is made for an apiary visit by a fully qualified Bee-inspector. The inspector will check for signs of disease or pests, and will provide you with help and advice on good husbandry, and how to tackle any potential problems they may find. All have extensive experience of managing colonies of bees and are keen apiarists themselves. They will always try and keep any disruption during a visit to an absolute minimum and provide you with up to date information and advice. You will also have access to all the latest information regarding disease and pest outbreaks and the results of various research projects and latest advisory information.

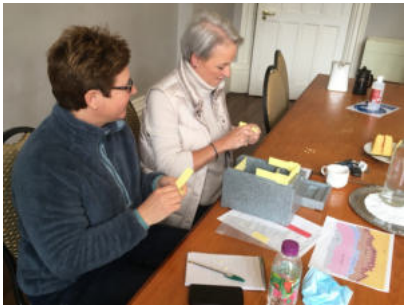
Beebase - Beekeeping information resource for Beekeepers (nationalbeeunit.com) is the link to view and update your record if you have already registered.

The NBU booklet 'Foulbrood Diseases of Honeybees' which includes photos of what to look out for can be viewed using this link https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=7

Rearing Queens - a Course to Remember

I joined Rachel Kellaway's introduction to the Miller method of Queen rearing at the MBKA Apiary in Gregynog this summer. The Miller method is a practical and low cost approach to queen rearing and improving the quality of your colonies. The advantage of this method is you don't need a great deal of kit. However, since it relies on the natural mechanisms of colony reproduction, it does require commitment to a strict timetable once you start the process.

At our first meeting Rachel introduced the terms used in the Miller method, the timing of the various stages of the process, and the kit, which can include an Apidea or small poly mating nuc.

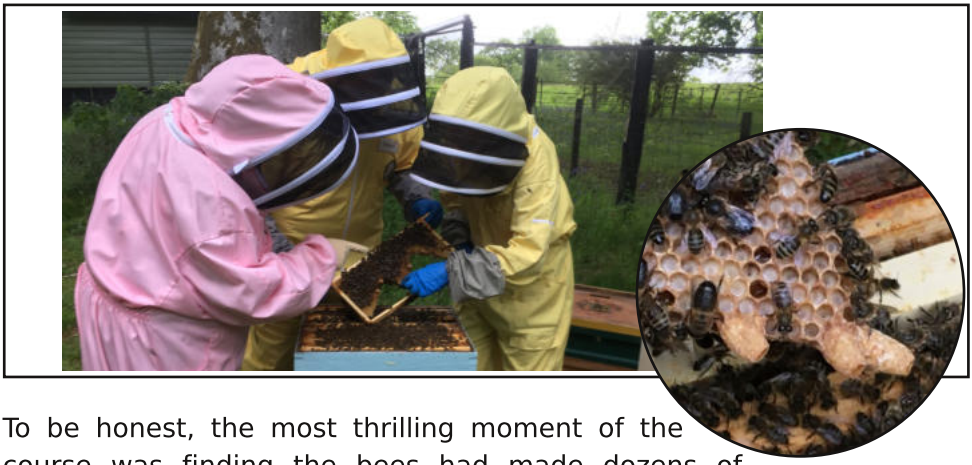


We spent a happy half hour putting together the Apideas that Rachel had bought for the course and understanding how they worked.

After that, we moved to the apiary to prepare our donor and cell raiser colonies. Stage one: pick your colonies. Both need to be strong, and the donor colony from which your new queens will be raised will possess all the good traits you want to encourage in your colonies. Rachel had already chosen our donor colonies from two strong hives with calm, productive bees. Some of our group were a bit squeamish about squishing emergency cells in the cell raiser colony, but needs must if you want a queenless colony in which to introduce a frame of three day old eggs from your chosen donor colony.

Did someone say the process was relatively straightforward? Of course, the bees hadn't read Lynfa Davies' useful booklet "Practical small scale queen rearing using the Miller method". Before we had even made it to the apiary the bees had re-arranged our programme. Four colonies

had decided to create swarm cells, so the apiary team had had to ‘bank’ four queens leaving their colonies to hatch a new queen, during the weekly apiary inspections on Sunday. Since colony 11 had already been made queenless, Rachel chose that for our cell raiser colony. But her carefully prepared programme to make sure the critical manipulations were on a Sunday when those of us on the course could take part went out of the window. Three days after preparing the Miller frame and introducing it into the cell raiser colony, we returned to check our frames.



To be honest, the most thrilling moment of the course was finding the bees had made dozens of emergency queen cells along the edges of the cut. After ‘tickling’ the bees out of the way, we ruthlessly culled the queen cells to just eight from which we would eventually make up four mating nucs. A week later we returned to cut out the queen cells and put them in the nucs. It was a rather dreary Wednesday evening, and the bees weren’t happy to be disturbed, but as Rachel warned us ‘the bees dictate’. Finally, we took a ‘cupful’ of bees from another colony for each Apidea and left them to get on with raising our new queens.

For a first try, it wasn’t hugely successful; two queen cells failed, and one mini colony absconded mysteriously after the queen hatched, leaving us with just the one. But I found the course both interesting and rewarding and I’m hooked. I will definitely try this at home next year.

Joy Sisley

Should Montgomery become a Voluntary Conservation Area for the native Welsh honeybee?

Tell us your views.

So what would a Voluntary Conservation Area (VCA) look like? It simply means a declaration of support by the MBKA, our membership organisation, for the concept of breeding from locally-adapted bees, and the value of that approach to bee improvement and queen-rearing. As is already the case, MontyBees will continue to apply this philosophy to its own bee-rearing programme, and will provide help, support and encouragement to members seeking to do the same.

Our indigenous bees have flown in this land since the first forests of the last Ice Age, when we were still physically connected to the European land mass. Over time natural selection favoured those bees that could adapt best to survival in our geography and climate especially our cold and damp Atlantic winters. This bee Apis mellifera mellifera (Amm) is what we see in their descendants the ‘Welsh Black Bee’, and research at Bangor University suggests high Amm purity in honeybees throughout much of Wales.

But why are they not completely pure? For the last 150 years other sub-species of honeybee have been imported into the UK and have interbred with them eroding local adaption. For example, the Italian honeybee is coveted for its fulsome honey production, but conversely is entirely unsuited to surviving our harsher climate. Consider too the Buckfast Honey Bee. After years of dedicated interbreeding between British and European (especially Italian) honeybees, Brother Adam produced a fine bee that did very well in its Devon home in those pre-varroa days. But how many people know that Buckfast Abbey now no longer breeds Buckfast Bees, preferring instead to breed a more locally-adapted variety? The breeding of Buckfast Bees as set out by Brother Adam continues amongst enthusiasts worldwide, and their diligent efforts are admirable, but beware occasional less scrupulous dealers who will offer you what might be better described as ‘FastBuck’ bees!

Seduced occasionally by fine marketing literature, individuals can be

forgiven for believing that they will be in receipt of something superior if they import a queen. The Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) however summarised a very substantial international research project thus “locally adapted strains of honey bee consistently performed better than the ‘foreign’ strains”. You can read more about this research here: https://bibba.com/local-bees-better/ A second problem that has arisen as a result of bee importation is that of the novel pests and diseases that they can bring with them. There is current concern about hive beetle, and before that it was varroa - and we all know how that turned out!

The WBKA made its support for local bee development clear with this statement “WBKA recommend sourcing locally-adapted bees” and the BBKA News in July 2020 stated: “Readers are reminded of the BBKA's position of discouraging the importation of queen bees and colonies from outside the UK”. Some countries offer legal protection for indigenous bees, though we do not currently have that luxury in Wales which is why Wally Shaw, Technical Officer of the WBKA stated at the 2018 WBKA Spring Convention in a talk on: “self-sufficiency, locally-adapted bees and apicentric beekeeping” that the protection of our local bees “really is in our own hands”.

The island of Ireland is most advanced in the development of VCAs to protect its own version of their indigenous Apis mellifera mellifera, with 18 Irish BKAs already having signed up to the cause there. In Wales this prerogative has been led by Lleyn and Eifonydd BeeKeeping Association (L&EBKA) who published a statement detailing their reasons for formally adopting this initiative in the Spring 2021 edition of Gwenynwyr Cymru/Welsh Beekeeper. MBKA committee discussions have been positive about adding our backing to this movement in Wales, but as a membership-based organisation, it would mean a lot to us if we felt the broader membership wanted to share in and take ownership of this decision too. We would welcome your thoughts and comments - please address them to our BeeHolder editor.

Mal Shears

The Garden - Sharing the Harvest

If you are sowing or planting your garden with honeybees in mind there is no reason why you can't enjoy the fruits of your labour as much as the bees. Quite literally in the case of blackberries for you can pick on until October when the Devil spits on the berries. It's the devil's own job to know why but in late in autumn they do, indeed, lose their flavour.

You can pick wild blackberries in the hedgerows but there are a number of cultivars that are well worth growing not the least because the widely available 'Loch Ness' is thornless and as it grows on short upright canes it needs little support. The equally thornless cultivar 'Chester' follows on from mid-August until the first frosts. 'Tiny Black' lives up to its name and can be grown in a pot on the patio.

Blackberries aren't the only crop to share with the bees at this time of year for many of the herbs that we grow to flavour our dishes are loved by bees. Amongst those that flower throughout the summer, borage, with its starry flowers of Mediterranean blue should be in every garden. We grow it for its cucumber flavoured leaves and most especially for those heavenly blue flowers which can be sprinkled on salads but for the bees, this annual herb is foremost in providing nectar, which it replenishes regularly and pollen. Should you see your bees returning with navy blue pollen then you know that they have located borage.

Lemon Balm melisa officianalis is a terrific self-seeder so be prepared for those green leaves and tiny white flowers to appear throughout the garden which, as a beekeeper, will prove to be a very good thing. Since ancient times beekeepers have grown this herb to draw bees to a newly constructed hive for lemon balm has a secret it shares the same chemicals that are found in bee pheromones which is why any lemon balm will be a magnet to bees. The leaves also make an excellent tea which calms and aids digestion.

Sweet marjoram and oregano are two herbs that are herbaceous perennials beloved by bees and flowering on for many weeks in summer. So closely related that only a botanist examining the plants would tell them apart and yet, any cook will recognise the stronger, spicier flavour of oregano. Marjoram may well be the milder cousin but it is still a worthwhile herb being sweeter although it, too, has been at the spice jar.

Carolle Doyle

Bees in the News

Further progress on finding the holy grail of beekeeping: varroa-resistant bees

A paper published in Scientific Reports at the beginning of April describes the results of comparing a stock of bees specifically bred for varroa resistance with commercial Italian colonies. The research was carried out across the states of Mississippi, South Dakota and California. “Pol-line” bees demonstrate enhanced varroa-sensitive hygiene behaviours (such as the removal of mite-infested brood and the removal of phoretic mites by allo-grooming) but otherwise have the same traits as conventional Italian bees (large colonies, docile behaviour, and prolific honey producers). Previously, the apparently “varroa-resistant” bees have been associated with small colonies and with a tendency to frequently swarm, not traits which are favourable to commercial bee-farming.

Survival of the Pol-line bee colonies was twice that of conventional colonies. Interestingly, the research conclusions included the loss of colonies was not primarily because of varroa-vectored viruses (Deformed Wing Virus A and B, and Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus). The actual damage inflicted by the mite on the larvae and adult bee when feeding on the fat bodies, important organs associated with numerous functions including immunity and food storage, has been under-estimated.

Varroa is implicated in many colony losses so any progress in the emergence of bees which can survive the presence of this ectoparasite, with a reduced need for chemicals, is good news. In 2018-2019, there was a 37.5% mortality in commercial beekeeping operations in the USA alone.

Another use for bees- finding dead bodies

The Honey Bee Initiative and the Forensic Sciences Research and Training Laboratory at Georgia Mason University in Virginia are working together to investigate whether bees, and the honey they produce, can help in solving old crimes by identifying the location of long-buried corpses.

Apparently more than 600,000 people go missing every year in the USA. While most are found, many thousands remain missing and about 4,400 unidentified bodies are discovered each year. Honey contains proteins related to the plants on which the bees have foraged, including pesticides. Using this discovery has led to the hypothesis that chemical compounds from buried decomposing human remains could transfer to honey from flowers growing on top of them (urgh!). Experiments are being set up, using donated human remains, to explore this. https://www.newsweek.com/how-honey-bees-could-help-find-missing-people-1693100

Neonicotinoids use likely to continue in the US

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is expected to permit the continued use of imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, clothianidin and dinotefuran in America for at least another 15 years, despite the clear evidence of the damage it causes to insects. Neonicotinoids are used on 150 million acres of crops. Farmers in Florida have been allowed to spray clothianidin on 125,000 acres of citrus fruits under an “emergency request” for the 8th consecutive year, suggesting the emergency exemption criteria is being misused. A spokesperson for the EPA states it is “working aggressively to protect pollinators, including bees” but environmentalists are concerned about the lack of progress in banning these toxic chemicals

Jill Hill

Weeds can be good news

A study led by Dr Balfour and Professor Ratnieks from the University of Sussex has shown that three native wildflowers currently classed by the Weeds Act 1959 as ‘injurious weeds’ actually attract a greater number and variety of insect pollinators than the plants designated by DEFRA as pollinator-targeted agri-environmental plants like red clover and wild marjoram. The three species include ragwort and two types of thistles and produce four times the amount of nectar sugar than those plants recommended by DEFRA.

About £10 million is spent on controlling weeds by bodies such as local councils, Natural England and Highways England, and about £40 million on the pollinator-targeted agri-environmental flowers in the UK. Ragwort is viewed in the same way as the invasive Japanese Knotweed despite attracting the most conservation-listed insects in the study. The Sussex team are hoping that the Environmental Land Management Scheme which is due to be introduced at the end of 2024 will provide incentives to land managers to tolerate weeds.

Jersey prepares to fight Asian Hornets

Eight Asian Hornet queens had already been destroyed in Jersey by the end of March. Three were caught in traps by trained volunteers and another five were caught and killed by vigilant members of the public. Over a 100 islanders have agreed to have an Asian Hornet trap installed in their garden, supported by trained volunteers, to catch Asian Hornet queens before they are able to make a nest. Over a 100 queens were trapped in 2021 and 63 nests were found and destroyed.

Do bees like salty flowers?

Insects, like humans, require sodium ions for healthy cellular fluid balance and muscle function. Some beekeepers have noticed their bees seem to prefer dirty water to drink rather than clean fresh water and this may be because the former has a higher salt content. A team of ecologists at the University of Michigan investigated whether pollinators preferred flowers which produced nectar with a higher salt content. The study involved removing nectar from 5 species of flowers and replacing it with an artificial nectar. Half of the flowers for each species received nectar with 1% salt and the other half received a non-salty nectar. The flowers were placed in a meadow and the pollinators (bees, ants and butterflies) visiting the flowers were recorded.

For all five species of flowers, those with the salt-enhanced nectar attracted a greater number of insects than those with the unsalted nectar. The salty flowers also attracted a greater diversity of pollinators: twice as many. The salt content of nectar varies from plant to plant so the study poses the question whether some plants actively increase salt content to attract pollination.

Jill Hill

Volunteers wanted

It's show season and MBKA will be ' hosting' a stall at 3 shows this year. The stand will be selling a number of different bee-related items including honey from the MBKA apiary at Gregynog.

We need help setting up the stall, 'manning the stall', and packing up at the end of the day.

If you can help, even if just for a short while, please contact Jill McAloon at equipment@montybees.org.uk , or phone on 07786063857

Details of shows:

Show	Date	Setting up	Duration of Show	Packing up
Berriew	27 August	26th August 6pm	9am – 5pm	5pm
Newtown Food Festival	3rd -4th September	2nd September (time to be decided)	10am – 5pm each day	4th September at 5pm

In The Frame - David Moore

David Moore smiled when I called him an unintentional beekeeper because that is how his involvement with bees began although, with five WBC hives, a lot of beekeeping courses under his belt, not to mention mentoring novices and catching a fair number of swarms David's beekeeping has been far from unintentional. He was one of Montgomeryshire Beekeepers' own until a heart bi-pass closed down that part of his life ten years ago although he still takes a great interest in all things bee.

That isn't how it began though for back in the summer of 1974 the Moore family lived in a cottage in the village of Marchwiel just outside Wrexham. On this particular day they had all just settled down to tea when David's 14 year old son Christopher announced that he had joined the Beekeeping Club in school adding that Mr. King, the General Science teacher, would be along any minute now with a hive of bees which they could keep in the garden.

Not with their garden adjoining the neighbours they couldn't but rather than disappoint his son by vetoing the whole idea David thought that the bees could take up residence on the far side of the wall that divided the garden from a field which was part of the Erdigg Estate owned, at that time, by the Yorke family. Consequently, when Mr. King turned up with a WBC hive they installed it by the wall which Christopher could climb over to tend the bees. Fortunately, the Yorkes proved to be understanding which is more than could be said for the curious cattle who promptly got stung on the nose until a fence was erected around the hive.

That might have been the sum of David's involvement but it turned out that Christopher was allergic to bee stings and so one rather traumatic visit to the hospital later, David found himself in charge of the bees. Mr. King mentored him and David was kitted out with a large hat, veil and home-made elasticated cuffs. Mr. King never used gloves and neither did David. He did get stung quite often though, on the nose because every time he bent down he ran out of veil or ran out of shirt with the result that the bees ended up on the wrong side of the veil.

Undeterred he joined the Wrexham Beekeepers and over the next few years attended as many courses as he could at the Agricultural College based in Ruthin. In 1978 his job was transferred to Welshpool and on moving to Guilsfield David discovered that his friend, Prudence Williams was President of Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association and so it was a matter of moments to agree to join. The hives, meanwhile, had been installed in an orchard just up the lane in exchange for the princely sum of two jars of honey a year. His honey crop peaked in the 1990s with 100 lbs a season but it came at a cost. A fine mist of honey coated every surface in the kitchen which wasn't popular in certain quarters. Still the decade was good not only for honey but for candle making and in spreading the word about bees with talks to interested groups.

Life as a beekeeper was fine until the village expanded and swallowed up the fields on the lane and after a few complaints about being stung David moved the hives to the edge of a little copse between Guilsfield and Meifod. Transporting the hives himself he blocked the entrances with foam and loaded the them into the back of the car and donning his bee suit as a precaution set off at dusk with the hum of the irate bees drowning out the noise of the engine. Still it was a good place for the bees and over the years Prudence and David helped each other with their colonies. For someone who had begun by default to help out a son bee husbandry had become part of the warp and weft of life, woven into David's world. He still has his bee suit of course and a fund of stories about the fascinating life of bees.

Carolle Doyle

MBKA Committee

PRESIDENT	David Morris
INTERIM CHAIR	Joy Sisley chair@montybees.org.uk
TREASURER	Sian Jones treasurer@montybees.org.uk
SECRETARY	Jill Hill secretary@montybees.org.uk
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	 membership@montybees.org.uk
EDITOR	Carolle Doyle editor@montybees.org.uk
EVENTS	Jill McAloon equipment@montybees.org.uk
ALTERNATIVE BEEKEEPING	Mal Shears natural@montybees.org.uk
APIARY INFORMATION	Ferol Richards spare3@montybees.org.uk
APIARY CONTACT	Mark Swain apiary2@montybees.org.uk
TRAINING AND EXAMS	Rachel Kellaway Simon Anderson training@montybees.org.uk
FACEBOOK	Marie Shirley Smith facebook@montybees.org.uk
SWARM COORDINATION	find a beekeeper near you on the WBKA swarm collection map: https://wbka.com/swarms-heidiau/

Please feel free to contact any member of the committee with any questions, or if you can volunteer time to help with any aspect of the association.

For website imput or issues contact David at webadmin@montybees.org.uk