

REIGATE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION
Division of Surrey Beekeepers Association
Chairman's Report for the Year 2021/22 to the SBKA AGM

The Division has returned to what could be described as an enhanced near normal state. Normal in the sense that face to face gatherings, meetings and activities are all possible and being resumed as needed. But enhanced by the use, where appropriate and helpful, of newly acquired familiarity by many members of on-line resources and methods of communication.

With the benefit of hindsight, the problems we had experienced with colonies throughout the summer of 2021 compromised many in getting through winter, with high losses being reported by early spring this year. However, we have appreciated bumper honey crops this year, even if not all understanding where the bees have been finding the nectar in the middle of heatwaves.

Membership

Final numbers for 2021-22 were 208 members (219 for 2020-21) for all classifications of membership.

We closed 2021-22 with 159 BBKA Registered, 3 BBKA Partner Members and 46 Local Members (18 Trainees, 14 Associate, 1 Country, 2 Minor, 6 Friends, 1 Honorary & 4 undetermined.)

From the beginning of the 2021/22 year, we had piloted the creation of three BBKA Local classifications that attempted to differentiate between beginners without their own bees ('Trainees'), beekeepers fully registered with another association or Division, ('Associates') and non-beekeepers wanting only to be a part of the RBKA community (Friends). This proved to be confusing and wrongly applied by some existing and prospective members, and were not manageable within the eR2 system.

For 2022-23:

- The Local class of 'Trainee' has been withdrawn for three reasons.
 1. BBKA rules now require all candidates of assessments to be BBKA members. The Trainee class did not include BBKA membership so for any RBKA members who wanted to take an assessment there was a need for a mid-year upgrade which was administratively complicated.
 2. Only BBKA members have insurance. For trainees without their own bees, but handling bees at RBKA apiaries, only their mentors were insured against any unfortunate outcomes. As our mentors give so much already to our trainees, it was felt unreasonable to expect them to carry that responsibility as well.
 3. The Trainee class did not automatically include BBKA News magazine and BeeCraft magazine. These are particularly useful resources for people learning beekeeping, so it did not make sense to offer a trainee class that did not include the publications.
- The Local class of 'Associate' has been redefined to be only for Registered, Partner or Junior beekeeping members of other BBKA Associations or Divisions, i.e. already having BBKA insurance cover.
- Most RBKA members will now join or renew as BBKA Registered, Partner or Junior.
- The Local 'Friend' class has been renamed 'Social' for all non-beekeeping, friends, partners and ex-members etc. This is consistent with another division in SBKA and is a more meaningful name for the benefits of that class.

As at mid December 2022; paid-up membership, all classes, for 2022-23 is at 189.

Finances

2020-21 had seen a return to surplus after the previous year's loss. That progress continued for 2021-22 and we managed an above average surplus of some £10,000. Contributory factors mainly being that our activities have no longer been hampered by Covid-19 restrictions or social distancing. Thus, we were welcoming many of our members at Henfold, as well as resuming our presence at local fetes. These increased activities are reflected in increased sales of £8500 from our Henfold Quartermaster's stores (up from £4000) and honey sales totalling more than £9000. The Winter Beginners Theory course and the Summer Taster Day were also well attended, adding further to our income.

On the debit side of the ledger, apiary utility costs have risen from £500 to over £2000; all of this due to the increased cost of electricity, most of which is consumed heating water and the pavilion. While it would be unwise to expect these to return to pre Energy Supply crisis levels, these costs may not increase too much further and we look forward to a more stable situation through the year ahead. However, we should not, perhaps, anticipate the surplus continuing at the same level – 2021-22 was a good year.

Education Activities

- Beginners Beekeeping Theory Course

This year's course was conducted via weekly Monday evening online Zoom sessions presented by David & Celia Rudland, whilst caution remained about indoor meetings with the arrival of the Omicron variant of Covid.

Despite that, a face-to-face introductory meeting at Henfold was arranged for the 22 'Beginners' and well attended during the Saturday before the first on-line session the following Monday. That gave us the opportunity to introduce RBKA and to show them around our apiary facilities.

- Basic Assessment Study Group.

A 12 week program commenced in April for 20 students with 17 eventually taking and passing (12 with Credit, 3 with Distinction) the final assessments over 2 sessions in July. One hour on-line Zoom sessions were held during Monday evenings, with practical hands on sessions in two groups managing two hive stations on Wednesdays at Henfold, during our normal weekly evening meetings.

- Module Study Groups

Jointly funded and in conjunction Croydon division, members from both Reigate & Croydon have between them organised and run fortnightly online Zoom study sessions, free to participating members. Study notes, recordings of sessions, presentations, past exam papers and resources from previous groups have also been readily available on-line for review or catch-up study by participants.

- BBKA Module 2 (Honey Products & Forage) Study Group commenced October 2021
Five Reigate members Passed the module exam in March 2022, one with Credit and two with Distinction.
- BBKA Module 1 (Honeybee Management) Study Group commenced May 2022
- BBKA Module 3 (Honeybee Diseases, Pests & Poisoning) Study Group commenced November 2022

- **Practical Tutored Hive Experience**

To compliment the Module study groups, one, and latterly, two of the twelve pairs of hive stations at Henfold were allocated to and managed by Reigate participants of the groups under the supervision of their group leaders and designated as Improvers hives.

Remaining hive stations were allocated to Beginners 'graduating' from the Theory course and working in small groups around hives under the guidance and instruction from designated hive tutors.

- **Taster Day**

Necessarily later in the summer than usual or preferred, the 16 attendees (short of our maximum of 20) provided very positive feedback on their day. A morning classroom session was followed by a live 'induced' swarm demonstration. Then after a ploughman's lunch, hive inspections were conducted, followed by a set of presentations on honey with tastings, mead making and tasting, cooking with honey and tasting and candles, lotions and potions.

Public Shows, Honey Stocks and Sales

RBKA were involved with or invited to 21 public events between May and September, 13 of which we were able to attend with at least a stall, honey to sell and usually an observation hive. Varying in size, footfall, style and ranges of activities and other stalls present, most had been regular events on the calendar pre-covid.

Perhaps the most notable differences this year have been:

- the public's expectation to be able to make payments by credit card - only.
- the need to factor in the availability/strength and capacity of wifi connections at venues and ensure card reader and smart phone batteries last the duration of the events, when managing our attendances at such events.
- the acceptance of our honey jar prices during the year of £7 per 12oz and £8.50 per lb.
- an increased (post Covid?) reticence in members offering to run and help on our stall.
- The dire shortage of members own honey to supplement RBKA's own honey and offer for sale at events.

At the end of 2021 we took the difficult decision to start reducing the number of retail outlets we had been supplying during the pandemic and by May 2022 we ceased all wholesale sales to focus our dwindling stock on promoting RBKA at the various shows and fetes. We had started 2022 with a stock of 289 kgs of 2021 honey, and that was completely exhausted by September.

Brockham & Buckland apiaries provided a 2022 Spring harvest, banked for use next year, and a further substantial August harvest. All topped up with modest yields from Mickleham and Henfold apiaries. Combined, we start 2023 with stock levels of 2022 honey in excess of 900kgs (~2000lbs). We are slowly ramping back up supply to some of our retail outlets. However our primary focus for 2023 will be on supplying honey to shows & fetes and promoting both bee keeping and RBKA.

Total honey related sales in 2022 were in excess of £9,000; mainly generated through sales direct to outlets and at the various shows and fetes attended, plus sales commission on members products coupled with a small amount from RBKA made and branded wax wraps.

Honey Shows

We recommenced our annual public Beekeeping Show this year, returning the United Reformed Church Hall, Dorking in mid-September. Although we continued to hold our Honey Show as a separate event at Henfold three weeks later, in October.

The Beekeeping Show was, without incorporating the Honey Show, much simpler to arrange and quicker to set-up, run and break down again - all within the one day. It also allowed our focus to be on demonstrating bees and beekeeping and promoting RBKA and the sale of our honey to the public. It was unfortunate that the chosen date was two days after the death of Queen Elizabeth II, with the inevitable sombre atmosphere and reduction in footfall as a result.

Our own Honey Show this year was then successfully held for a third time at Henfold. Achieving Blue Ribbon status with 121 entries, we welcomed back NHS Judges Sue Carter & Bill Fisher. Our (current) star show bench exhibitor scooped up 4 of our 10 trophies, plus the Blue Ribbon, and his daughter picked up one of the remaining 5th trophies.

For a second year, Reigate hosted the Surrey Honey Show in the pavilion at Henfold in October, that produced an impressive 208 entries. No apologies for our star member once again winning the **Composite Cup** for 'Surrey member with Most Points', or for Reigate itself retaining the **Vincent Challenge Cup** for the 'Surrey Division with Most Points'. It is now only the eighth occasion that we have won that challenge. So we are still only catching up with other divisions tallies.

In addition to success at the National Honey Show for some members (well one in particular); a modest number of entries in the Divisions name got into the points. A 3rd Place for our BeeNews editions in the Newsletter Class, a VHC for our Reigate Honey jar labels and a Commended for a pair of jars of medium honey from one of our Apiaries were all very welcome.

Swarm Team

A brilliant group of 12 experienced swarm collectors cover our 'patch'. Not as busy with actual swarms this year, but an increased incidence of callouts to colonies established in buildings, some possibly since 2020; and latterly to frenetic foraging! Between them, the team took some 200 calls, with around 100 requiring attendance. Some 50 swarms were caught and removed, whilst many call-outs were to swarms that had already moved off or were confirmed to not be swarms or honey bees.

House & Grounds

Frustratingly, the significant work undertaken by our Grounds team (of two) in painstakingly preparing and retreating the outside of the pavilion, has been undermined by the failure of the treatment specified by its supplier. The already blistered and ineffective coatings will now have to be fully removed at our cost by sand blasting, before a correctly specified treatment, being supplied foc. can be applied.

Regrettably, further tree surgery has been required this autumn to address the combined consequences of Ash Die-Back, age and proximity to hives and footpaths.

First Aid

We took delivery of a fully automatic defibrillator during the year after a prolonged delay in supplies of these items being restored. Purchased with funds donated by a member for this specific purpose, training of members in its use will be undertaken during early 2023.

In Remembrance

Alec Bourhill - With great sadness we received news in January of the passing on 31st December 2021 of Alec Bourhill, aged 95.

An Honorary Member of Reigate Beekeepers, Alec had served as Vice Chairman in 1992/3, was Treasurer from 2000 to 2004 and managed our Buckland Apiary until a just few years ago. Alec had remained an active beekeeper until the end and only stood down from participation in our Swarm Collecting team two years ago.

Officers & Committee

I thank again our Officers and Committee members who have all contributed directly through their often-multiple roles and provided advice, guidance or simply support, during the past year.

Regrettably, in April, for personal reasons **Jim Wynn** stood down from the Committee and his role as Education Programme Coordinator, as well as from his role of Reigate Representative on the Surrey Council. Jim had put a tremendous amount of his time, energy and education & communication experience into the division's activities throughout the two years of the pandemic. Happily, he remains willing and very able to remain as our AHAT Leader and as SBKA's AHATs Coordinator, as well as supporting his wife Mary in her management of the Mickleham Apiary.

Sue Hickson has stepped down from the Committee, having only remained a Committee Member during 2021-22 to support Simon Ford in his taking up the role of Membership Sec. and to complete the review of the Division's Rules. Sue remains a key player in leading our precious Catering Team who keep us fed and watered, including at events such as this AGM.

Gill Simpson agreed in April to be co-opted into the role of Reigate's Representative on the Surrey Council and remains on our committee for 2022-23 with that role, amongst others.

To provide Education Programme coordination within the make-up of the Committee, both **Janet Kay** and **Colin Clement** accepted nominations to stand and have been elected onto the 2022-23 Committee.

Janet has a particular interest in providing structure to the ongoing training of beekeepers perhaps with their Basic Assessments passed but wanting to build greater confidence in the application of those basic skills before progressing further.

Colin is already active in steering the Taster Days, driving the Basics Study and practical groups, and in coordinating the Beginners Tutors.

Both will also be in a good position to liaise with **Keith Mackie** who drives the Improvers activities.

With no other changes, **Mike Hill** remains as our President, **Richard Bradfield** as Chair, **Liz Jackson** as Hon Secretary, **Vince Gallo** as Hon Treasurer, **Simon Ford** as Hon Membership Secretary, and **Bob Maurer & Celia Perry** as the other two of the five Committee Members.

Richard Bradfield is nominated for 2022-23 as Reigate's Trustee of SBKA, and **Gill Simpson** has been elected as Reigate Division's Representative on the Surrey Council.

Richard Bradfield
22th November 2022