



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS  
ASSOCIATION**

# **The BeeHolder**

**Spring 2025**



**Thrum Head Primroses**

# Editorial

If you missed the AGM you can read Joy Sisley's report and discover plans for the year ahead. If you were there then you will find much to stir your memory on Joy's overview of the apiary and training. Talking of the apiary, In the Frame features Mark Swain who has just retired from the post of Apiary Manager but is still a very much appreciated member.

Ann Thompson, the head gardener at Gregynog gave us a talk which is summarised here and you will also find a feature on our three native primulas together with a Turkish cousin. All of them are loved by bees at a time of year when forage is scarce.

There is lots to get involved with this year. We will be taking a stand for Monty Bees at shows and Gregynog for World Bee Day and your help would be hugely appreciated. There is a notice about our annual dinner held this time, in Montgomery's Town Hall. We have printed the menu to tempt you if you are still thinking about it.

In Ghana school children not only learn about bees and other pollinators but through 'Buzz Clubs' they care for bees in the schools' apiaries. Our feature on Bees for Development in the last issue could only briefly mention it but Laura Grey who works for the charity, tells us much more.

**Carolle**

[www.montybees.org.uk](http://www.montybees.org.uk)

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## Table of Contents

Editorial	2
Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association AGM	4
Chair's Report The shape of Things to Come	6
Gregynog Apiary An Overview	7
Training Beekeepers of the Future	8
Events	10
MBKA Intermediate Training Course	12
Down the Primrose Path	14
Ghana's Children are Buzzing	16
In the Frame	18
Committee	20

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# Montgomery Beekeepers' Association A.G.M. 2025

Our A.G.M. took place at Plas Dolerw on Monday evening, 17th February, a jolly affair with the Chair, Joy Sisley opening proceedings with an inspirational report, extracts from which you can read in this issue as 'Chair's Report' where you will find interesting and exciting news for the year ahead. Look too at Joy's summing up in 'Gregynog Apiary an Overview' which will introduce you to the working of our teaching apiary and the people who give so much of their time. The same can be said Joy's report in 'Training Beekeepers of the Future' which will tempt anyone who has yet to come along and study bees in depth.

Our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Sian Jones followed with reports which underlined that the Association is in very good heart and in very good hands too. It was no surprise then to find that Jill Hills, Sian Jones and Joy Sisley were re-elected unopposed as Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary, and Chair respectively. The committee itself was voted back en bloc with an invitation to anyone who would like to join the committee simply to come forward.

With the reports and formalities over Joy turned to the enjoyable task of inviting our President, David Morris to present certificates to members who have taken BBKA modules and practical assessments.

David was then asked to present the Roy Norris Legacy Award, which is in the form of a bronze bee to Jill McAloon our Events Manager who has worked hard to make our presence at such events as World Bee Day at Gregynog and Newtown Food Festival so successful. Jill does a brilliant job as our Events organiser, and in tribute to that, the MBKA won a cup last year for the best stand at the Bodfach Hall.

Incidentally she has asked that if anyone would like to come forward to help in this year's events, she would love to hear from you. You'll find her contact details on the back cover.



It was time for tea and coffee and the raffle before our guest speaker, Ann Thompson took to the floor. Ann, pictured here, is head gardener at Gregynog. It is no exaggeration to say that Ann left us all stunned as she smiled and pointed out that with the help of just five volunteers who help out one day a week, she cares for and is, in fact, in the process of restoring Gregynog's somewhat neglected garden, all 250 acres of it.



At one time Ann owned a top bar hive in Cumbria so she is no stranger to honey bees and, as became evident, she is very well aware of the needs of pollinators. She highlighted the garden's heather banks and showing us an image of the walled garden which is still in the very early stages of restoration, although she could point out the newly planted apple trees. These, of course, are for the benefit of the estate as much as the bees but the single specimen of a Manuka bush, *Leptospermum scoparium*, with a promise of more to come, is for the bees.

**Carolle Doyle**

# Chair's Report - The Shape of Things to Come

There is as always much to celebrate in the life of the Association and we have been sharing stories in The Beeholder during the year. Our colonies and the Apiary generally are in excellent shape thanks to the energies of the Apiary team. To discover more do look at 'Gregynog Apiary an Overview' where I talk about the changes that have been made. Looking to the coming season, as a committee we have been thinking a lot about sustainable beekeeping, how we can apply this in the Apiary, and how we can encourage our members to adopt sustainable practices in their own apiaries. We are adapting a document on the BBKA website to be more relevant to beekeeping in a rural context. Here are some highlights, some of which we are already promoting through our training programmes.

**Queens:** we are all aware of the benefits of keeping locally adapted bees and we raise all our new queens in the Apiary a Gregynog. We will also be looking more selectively (using records from our inspections) at which colonies to use for queen rearing to promote hygienic, calm, and healthy bees.

**Recover and Recycle:** Another recommendation we are thinking about taking forward in our Association is to encourage beekeepers to recycle frames and wax. Thornes will take your recycled wax in exchange for fresh foundation. For those of you especially who only have a little bit of wax, we are considering rendering any wax you donate to us to exchange for new foundation for the Apiary.

**Treatment:** As an Association we encourage approaches to Integrated Pest Management to avoid the use of chemical treatments. This is covered in our training programmes and we prefer to use oxalic vapour to treat for varroa in the Apiary. Since the last outbreak of EFB in the Apiary, we have also introduced a range of stronger biosecurity measures. It may be early days, but we've noticed some of our colonies appear to be developing a resistance to varroa.

Training has been a key part of our activities in the Association. Our

training plans for next year include some new departures so please go to my report 'Looking at Training' where you will find information on future topics including double brooding and first aid training amongst other things.

It has been my privilege to chair this organisation for the past few years, and I thank you for your confidence in electing me again this year. My thanks go to the dedicated volunteers who work so hard to support the Association as members of the committee, the Apiary team and people who volunteer on our stand at events, not to mention members who have contributed items for our raffle at the winter talks. Last but not least our thanks go to Chris Leach for printing the Beeholder and Dave Hughes who keeps our web site up to date. And of course Dave Morris, our President, who is always on hand to support and encourage.

Thank you and best wishes for a good season this year.

**Joy Sisley**

## **Gregynog Apiary An Overview**

Last year we made a few changes to the way we manage the Apiary at Gregynog. Mike Ashwell, who joined the Apiary team and committee last year as Apiary Maintenance Manager is responsible for the upkeep of the Apiary grounds, the upkeep of our equipment and any other essential jobs that always seem to crop up. Rachel Buckley is now the Apiary coordinator and in charge of the shed and apiary supplies and together with Mike is the energy behind developing what I hope will be a sustainability policy for the association later this year. It was due to Rachel's imagination and her skills in project management that the revamped viewing shelter came about and I would urge you to go along and see it if you haven't yet done so.

Rachel Kellaway who is responsible for training with Simon Anderson, is now our colony manager, and who better could we have to care for our

bees? Jill Hill, Jill MacAloon, Chris Wyton, Brian Norris, Paul Barnes and myself complete the team. I would add that some of the main beneficiaries of such a strong team of experienced beekeepers are members who are taking advantage of our training and who get to gain hands on experience at our regular inspection days during the season.

You will note too that with regard to disease we use oxalic vapour to treat varroa. And since the last outbreak of EFB in the Apiary, we have also introduced a range of stronger biosecurity measures. It may be early days, but we noticed some of our colonies appear to be developing a resistance to varroa.

All members are welcome to come along to colony inspections at the apiary, you just need to get in touch with Simon Anderson if you want to come.

**Joy Sisley**

## **Training Beekeepers of the Future**

Training has been a key part of our activities in the Association and we continue to develop and share our knowledge through our beginner, improver and intermediate programmes run by Rachel Kellaway and Simon Anderson. Some of our members have been taking the BBKA module exams and practical assessments. Pictured here, members receive their certificates from our President, David Morris at our recent AGM.

Our thanks go particularly to Rachel Kellaway who not only sets an example by taking many of the BBKA practical and written assessments, but also for encouraging and supporting many of us to study beekeeping more deeply. There are now several groups who have been studying together to gain the BBKA qualifications. While many of us cannot remember the last time we actually sat an exam, we all agree that it is the learning that is so beneficial.





*From left to right: Joy Sisley, David Morris, Rachel Kellaway, Karen Mitchel, Jill MacAloon, Rachel Buckley (also receiving for Lizanne Muller)*

Our training plans for next year include some new departures. Some of us attended an interesting lecture by Dan Basterfield) on double brooding, partly as a way to build strong colonies and also as a form of swarm control. It should be noted that Dan himself is based in Devon and is a Master Beekeeper and examiner for the BBKA and NDB. The apiary team will be given training on double brooding and vertical splits as part of how we manage our colonies in the Apiary. We are also looking to offer an advanced training course for three years plus, beekeepers. So look out for an announcement about that.

Some of you attended an interesting and informative talk by Russ Colman on First Aid in the Apiary. Assisted by Jill Hill as his dummy. Russ is a qualified paramedic and able to certify a First Aid qualification. He will be giving a refresher course for the Apiary team, but has also offered training to Association members who may be interested.

Don't forget that our strong team of experienced beekeepers who form our Apiary team hold regular inspection days during the season. This is hands on training at our Gregynog Apiary and all members are welcome to come along too, you just need to get in touch with Simon if you want to come. His details can be found on the back-cover.

**Joy Sisley**

## Events 2025

This Season's Final WBKA evening meeting at Plas Dolerw 22nd April is our honey show where we sample our bee products and take part in a light hearted quiz.

Do bring along your honey for this enjoyable evening which begins at 7.00 p.m.

Plas Dolerw, Milford Road, Newtown, SY16 2E

Our Association will be present with its stands filled with all things bee and lots of information and advice for the general public. All of the events listed here are well worth your time and, needless to say, Jill McAloon our events manager who has arranged our presence, will love to hear from you if you can spare some time. Do give her a ring on 07786 063857.

### World Bee Day

25th May This, our third World Bee Day at Gregynog will include honey tasting, children's activities and sale of bee products and plants. We would love you to come along and help but if you can donate a jar of honey for the tasting or plants for our popular plant stand, we would be very grateful.

### Bryngwyn Hall Summer Fayre

31st May This will be our first attendance at Bryngwyn's fair so we are looking for volunteers to man our stand. We also need plants for pollinators so if you do have some spare plants or seeds for that matter, we would love to have them.

### **Berriew Show**

23rd August One of our county's agricultural shows where our stand has generated a lot of interest over the years. If you can volunteer then please get in touch.

### **Newtown Food Festival**

6th,7th September. As ever we need volunteers in setting up and taking down and manning the stand. It's a grand day out so please contact Jill if you have some time you can spare.

### **Monty Bees Annual Dinner**

Sunday 27th April Montgomery Town Hall 12.00 noon for 12.30 p.m.

Our annual dinner will take place on the first floor of the town hall and there is a stair lift if necessary. The dinner, listed below is being provided by the nearby Dragon Hotel and will be served at tables of 8. There is also a well-stocked bar.

#### **Menu**

Roast Beef

Salmon in White Wine Sauce

Vegetable Wellington

All serve with seasonal vegetables

Apple Crumble and Custard

Cheesecake

Crème Brulee

Followed by tea and coffee

£25.00 per person

Parking in front of and behind the town hall and on the streets.

# MBKA Intermediate Training Course, Saturday 1st March 2025.

The intermediate training course was hosted at Plas Dolerw by Rachel Kellaway and Simon Anderson on the morning of Saturday 1st March for those of us now entering our third year of beekeeping and who had previously attended the Beginners and Improvers courses.

The topics covered were:

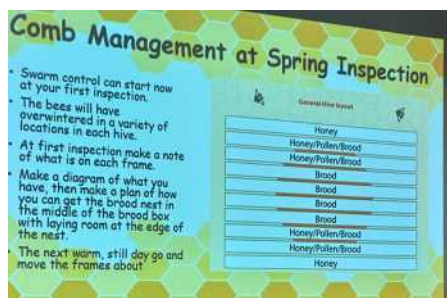
Planning for the year and a recap of what to do for the First Inspection

Comb Management and Frame Replacement

Sustainable Beekeeping

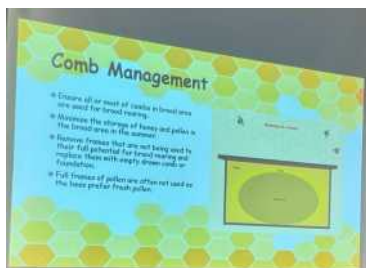
Bee Communication

The initial topic had been covered in last year's 'Improvers Course', but it was good for everyone attending to have a brief refresher and an important reminder to make a plan of what you are going to do before opening the hives, particularly given it's been a year since our last spring inspection.



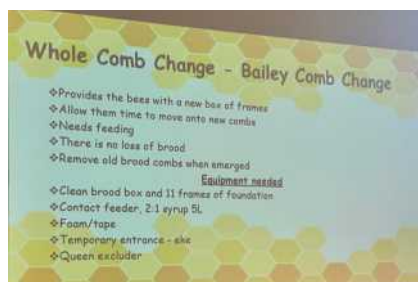
On to the main event and, just when I foolishly thought we were starting to get to grips with the whole concept of managing bee hives, we moved onto the subject of how to manage comb and change the frames within our occupied hives. For most of us attending the course, the frames and hives are now entering their third year of life and may well be starting to look dirty, potentially harbour disease and be less efficient for the queen to use.

However, Rachel showed us how to gradually remove the old comb over a period of time and replace this with new foundation in a way that won't be stressful for the bees, was easy to understand and will hopefully be as easy to achieve when we come to do this ourselves!



As well as the information shared by Rachel and Simon, we were also given another of Wally Shaw's excellent reference booklets called Comb Management, which is downloadable from the WBKA website (<https://wbka.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/wbka-comb-management-english-web.pdf>)

It was fascinating to learn how to perform a Bailey Comb Change and Shook Swarm and we will hopefully get to practice this later in the spring at Gregynog Hall Apiary as part of our practical training sessions.



As always, Rachel and Simon's infectious enthusiasm and detailed knowledge was a real inspiration and, given the current beautiful spring weather at the time of writing, we are all excited to start afresh in this new beekeeping year and put our new-found knowledge into practice!

**Tracey Van-Gent**

## Down the Primrose Path

If I take a bee's eye view of the primroses that cover the bank beneath my birches I will see that each fat clump of primrose yellow flowers with their egg-yolk yellow centres is composed of either thrum-heads or drum-heads. The cunning primrose has evolved to attract the bees with nectar so that when it visits a thrum-head some of the pollen shaken from the anthers will cling to its body only to be dislodged onto the glistening pin of the drum-head.

It's a neat trick that has served both bees and primroses well and for us gardeners we can enjoy one of our most beloved spring flowers. It goes without saying that you should never dig these up from the verges where they clot the grass with their creamy curds. They can be bought from good garden centres labelled 'Primula vulgaris' and once you have them you will discover, as I did, that they will quickly form large clumps that can be pulled apart after flowering and replanted. They also seed themselves around of course which is why my garden is so primrose rich.



*P thrum head*



*P drum head*



*P sibthorpii*

The primroses on my sunny south facing bank begin flowering in February, a full month before the lane dwellers. Still, they have been pipped to the post by a Turkish cousin. 'Primula vulgaris Sibthorpii' paints the Turkish earth in a delicate lilac. It is very well worth buying this variant because it readily forms enormous clumps and seeds itself around too.

There are two more native members of this family that are very well worth seeking out both for the bees sakes and our own. 'Primula veris', which we all know as cowslip is a denizen of meadows and consequently is quite at home in grass and in my own garden that amounts to the grass that is kept long in the orchard. I mow broad paths through the orchard but by keeping the grass long until late summer or early autumn I can encourage all manner of flowering plants. Here are snowdrops by the million turning the ground white but as they melt away such lovely spring flowers, like the cowslip come into play.

My favourite, which is rare in the wild and rarer still in cultivation, is 'Primula elatior' the oxlip with its pale flowers that shyly fall to one side. Unlike the chrome yellow cowslip its cousin sports the same pallor as the primrose. Pictured here it is easy to see why our shy little native is so desirable. Incidentally if you possess both primroses and cowslips you may find a newcomer amongst their ranks that closely resembles the oxlip. Look closely for cowslips and primroses may very well be visited by your busy bees and that stranger may well be the 'false oxlip'. An unfair name for the pretender which is larger and sturdier than the little oxlip.



*P elatior*

That said, we have been selecting and crossing primroses since the middle ages. Fascination with primroses reached its peak in Elizabethan times with such oddities as 'Hose in Hose' with one flower inside another. I'm not at all sure what the bees would make of that.

**Carolle Doyle**

## **Ghana's Children are Buzzing**

We featured the inspirational charity 'Bees for Development' in our last issue but with limited space could only mention 'Buzz Clubs' which, at that time, had been created in ten of Ghana's schools where apiaries have been set up and the children learn through practical, hands on experience. Laura Grey of Bees for Development takes up the story for us, giving us an insight into this terrific project and how it works.

The charity has recently established five new Buzz Clubs across the Kwahu Afram Plains, furthering its mission to promote sustainable beekeeping and environmental stewardship among young people. These newly established clubs will directly benefit about 100 children in five schools taking the number of Buzz Clubs established in Ghana to fifteen clubs.

The Buzz Club offers the opportunity for school children in Ghana to learn about bees and other pollinators, the role of bees in food production, and biodiversity conservation. The children also learn the art of beekeeping to produce honey and other hive products as well as develop their entrepreneurial skills.

They discuss broader environmental and biodiversity conservation, emphasising the role of sustainable practices in protecting and preserving natural resources around them. Teachers include sessions about adding value to honey and beeswax by making products including mosquito repellents, lip balms, candles, cough mixture and fruit juice.

In January 2025, Janet Lowore, Project Manager for Bees for Development, had the pleasure of visiting the children of Donkorkrom EP Basic School's Buzz Club to see the Club in action! Janet listened to the pupils recite some bee poems they had made and answered their questions about bee swarms and beeswax.

To date, about 400 school children have directly benefited from the



Buzz Club project. Sixty children have already graduated from the clubs. The initiative is expected to have a lasting impact on the communities in the Kwahu Afram Plains, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility and sustainability from a young age.

Pictured here the placards that the children have made and are holding up spell out a simple but vital message. 'Stop deforestation, plant more trees, preserve our dying forest, stop bush fires'. It's a message that they take home to their communities and it is also a message that is being heard and acted upon.



Needless to say Bees for Development is looking to raise more funds, £10,000 for this project which has full time Buzz Club Coordinator providing ongoing support to the clubs and their students and teachers who follow a curriculum.

For more information about Bees for Development please visit [beesfordevelopment.org](http://beesfordevelopment.org)

## In the Frame

I dare say that Mark Swain's name rings a bell for until very recently he was our apiary manager. If you went along to Gregynog on a Sunday you would surely find yourself in Mark's friendly and knowledgeable company. Mark kept us all informed about the running of the apiary in these pages whilst he and the close knit team also gave beginners invaluable practical hands-on experience at the apiary. As Mark says of the apiary 'it is good for the future of beekeeping' which is something that he admits is, in its way, addictive and, as you can see from this picture of Mark with his colourful hives he is something of an addict himself.

As a matter of fact it wasn't until 2008 when the Swains returned to Mark's childhood roots and settled in a house surrounded by five acres that beekeeping could become a reality rather than a dream. Here was room enough for chickens and ducks and a peacock called Percy. It was a place where he could give full rein to a couple of long held ambitions, to keep bees and train a sheepdog. Well, the sheepdog has proved illusive but the bees are now part of his life.

Thinking back Mark believes that it was a conversation with John Bennett that prompted him to pursue beekeeping. At all events he joined the Association and attended a series of Saturday classes at Plas Derw. Still, the real business of keeping bees didn't begin until 2017 with the acquisition of a hive from his friend and mentor, John Bennett.

Why the long wait? I wondered. Well the hive coincided with retirement and as Mark is one of those people who doesn't like to commit to something unless he can give it his full attention, he waited for the right time. And as Mark tells me 'if one hive is fine two are infinitely better because you have something to compare and contrast and you will discover the different strengths between hives.'

Two, in the natural way of things turned into four until Mark was managing eight hives. Then came lockdown in March 2020 and as apiary manager Mark could legitimately visit the apiary in Gregynog

armed with a letter from DEFRA. It was a strange time, driving on deserted roads to a place that should have been filled with the hum of conversation, laughter and fellowship around cake and coffee that is all part of this tremendous teaching apiary.

Mark was happy when Rachel Kellaway could continue her classes and life in the apiary continued as did the interesting job of collecting swarms. As a member of the swarm coordination team he answered a call from Llanymynech Golf Club where a swarm of black bees had settled on the flag pole marking the fourth hole. Mark kept them and they are now one of his three current colonies. Before installing them in his own apiary the bees were quarantined at his parents' home which has proved to be an ideal quarantine site.



It was also an apiary for a time after his father, David took an interest in bee-keeping and joined the Association. David kept two hives until Mark's mother proved to be a magnet for bees, but not in a good way. Thinking back to those days Mark remembered a swarm that had settled on a rose bush in a neighbours garden. Mark and his father tackled it together and in the process of collecting the swarm cut the rose bush to pieces. The neighbour was forgiving helped no doubt by a gift of honey.

Thinking about his own apiary Mark nodded and commented that you need good neighbours when you keep bees adding, with a grin, that honey makes very handy Christmas presents. I am willing to bet that being a good neighbour is reciprocated and it isn't purely due to a honeyed gift.

**Carolle Doyle**

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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 input or issues contact David at  
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