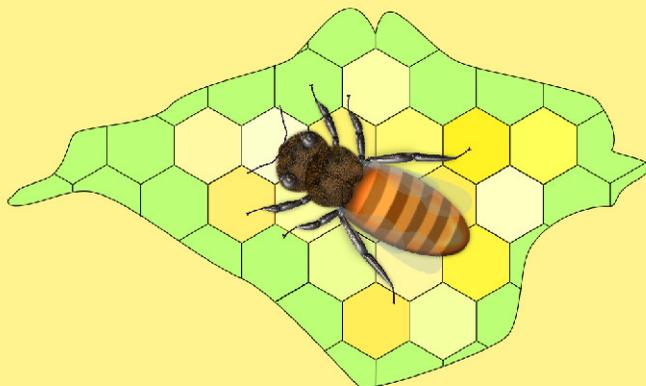


The smoker issue

The

# Wight Bee



April 2012

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Issue 101

Being a beekeeper is like being an expert in feelings of panic, relief and despair interspersed with brief moments of deep joy and contentment.

**Taken from Beekeeping Forum,  
Beekeeper from Carmarthenshire, Wales**

The Journal of  
The Isle of Wight Beekeepers Association  
[www.iwbka.org.uk](http://www.iwbka.org.uk)

We have a goodly number of contributors to this issue with a focus on smokers. It's a useful tool, if used appropriately. For some it's a necessary evil ; for others it's unnecessary apiary tear gas which encourages rioting as much as it pacifies. All views are represented in our Association so thank you to everyone who sent in their anecdotes and opinions.

As this issue was being prepared the annual auction took place. It was well attended despite the rather chilly April weather. We are very grateful to Helen Button and family for hosting the event, and also thank her and some of the members for organising the catering. There were over 180 lots, including five hives of bees. There were several excellent high quality items, while beekeepers with time to spare beyond the craft could also pick up wine and beer making kits, Kilner jars, a rotavator and a lawnmower. The event raised over £680 for the Association.

**Gillian Belben**

Mary Case is very grateful to all the people who are happy to receive the newsletter by email. She is now checking if they are being successfully received. If you expected but did not receive the April 2012 Newsletter by email please contact Mary on [GCase90337@aol.com](mailto:GCase90337@aol.com)

**[www.iwbka.org.uk](http://www.iwbka.org.uk)**

The members area of the website has details of how to order honey jars from IWBKA. As with last year we have put in a bulk jar order and can pass on the savings to members. If you cannot access our website, here are the basics.

Inclusive of VAT and freight:

Tray of 36 half-pound hexagon jars with gold twist-off lids      £10.00

Half gross box of 72 one-pound jars with gold screw-top lids      £20.50

Order from Gillian Belben, 721519 sheat3@btinternet.com

A pick up time and place will be arranged for May.

Punk wood is dried out rotten wood found on the forest floor, it's one of the best smoker fuels, particularly if oak.

Dried willow catkins after the pollen has gone and they have fallen to the ground also make a nice smelling, cool smoke.

## The Beekeeper

There stands the intrepid Apiarist,  
Defender of his Bees,  
With impenetrable protection  
From his head down past his knees.

Like knights of yore, his weapons  
Are for defence and attack,  
His hive tool is his lance,  
And his smoker guards his back!

The trusty steed that carries  
All his gear into the fray,  
Is an ancient battered barrow  
That has more than seen its day.

You may wonder at this enemy,  
Whose attacks he can foresee.  
Who is this foe with the deadly dirk?  
Why, it's the tiny little Bee!

Four or five years ago when we were doing a beekeeping marathon, we arrived at the last apiary and prepared to check supers and some broods. All the gear was removed from the motor and Terry lit his brand new stainless steel smoker.

All the gear was put in one place, and I reversed and then drove the car out of the flight paths of the colonies. I stopped the motor, switched off and returned to the site of our labours. With a face like thunder, Terry held up this two-dimensional smoker that dribbled a pathetic amount of smoke. I had reversed over it and then driven over it again when I moved the car.

**Anne Willis**

The best smokers come from the USA and are made by Dadant. They can be obtained from Thornes. I have always used hessian as fuel (sometimes reinforced with dry and rotten wood) In Germany they use *Comfrey* and this is said to be the best fuel of all. 3

**Stephen Palmer**

## Official launch of the Quarr Teaching Apiary on 17th March

It was a cold day but a decision had been made prior to the event that no hives would be opened on the day due to the possibility of persons wandering into the apiary with grumpy bees about.

The apiary opened its doors to show off some of the items purchased with our two amazing, generous and quite frankly, from my point of view, unexpected grants. These came from the **Awards for All** scheme run by the **National Lottery** and the **Sustainable Development Fund** administered by **IW Area Of Outstanding National Beauty**. The combination of these two grants has certainly mobilized the apiary and given it real potential.



**Father Finbar, Father Nicholas and Father (sorry—Dave) Cassell  
at the QTA launch enjoying a post-tea and cake moment**

The event was well supported by benefactors, local Councillors, the media, VIPs and beekeepers who had been invited by Quarr Abbey and the Training Apiary to attend. Everyone gathered in the new tea room where they were welcomed with refreshments including some beautiful cakes made by the ladies of the association and members' wives.

The speeches were made and thanks given to the providers of the grants, and also to the monks for the opportunity to facilitate this joint venture which we hope will benefit both parties. A special thanks was given to the monks of Quarr for allowing us to share their gardens.

Thanks were also given to the apiary team who have put so much into this project over the past year. It seems impossible that all this has been achieved in a little over twelve months. We are now to working towards our aim of providing healthy nucs for members to purchase and in doing this help fund the Teaching apiary.

**Dave Cassell**

If you want a soothing and nice smelling smoke, use Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthum*). Pick it at the end of the season, dry it in winter and use it the year after. You will find that it keeps the bees tranquil and the smell is agreeable both to you and the bees.

**Harry Carter**, courtesy of Cambridgeshire BKA Newsletter

### Recipes with honey

#### **Honey and Almond Muffins from the QTA Launch**

**220 g caster sugar**

**120 g soft butter or good margarine**

**2 drops vanilla essence**

Cream sugar, butter and vanilla together until pale and fluffy. Then mix the following into the creamed mixture, leaving it a bit rough in texture:

**2 eggs**

**2 tsp baking powder**

**275 g plain flour**

**285 g plain yoghurt**

**2 tblsp honey**

**150 g flaked almonds**

Divide mixture into 12-15 muffin cases, and cook at 180°C for 20-25 minutes until golden brown. It will be very light and soft. The muffins will become stickier over a few days.

**Anne Willis**

## Island beekeeper interview—Ann Denness



Ann Denness's calm, laid-back approach to beekeeping is backed by her thirty-five years of experience; her modest review of her 'easy' years with bees shouldn't be underestimated.

Keen on biology at school, Ann can remember taking an interest at the time in social insects. She was brought up in the North of England and as a young adult trained as a dispensing optician but retrained as a teacher when she was a young Mum, bringing up her daughter alone. She met Bruce, her second husband, in Newcastle, and inevitably (since he was an Islander) they gravitated back here.

Teaching at Wroxall, Ann and her colleague Betty Timmons were chatting one break-time when the topic turned to beekeeping and they found they had a shared interest. They decided to do it together, joined the Association, and spent a year learning the basics before David Belben gave them a Nuc, and they were off.

Ann and Betty progressed from the Nuc to Nationals from the Auction, eventually building to six or seven colonies. Theirs was a calm, relatively non-interventionist style of beekeeping, relying on watching and reading the bees, and they collected honey simply for themselves and their families, rather than to sell. After a while they moved to Commercial hives as an easier option than Nationals and a half, and worked the heavier boxes by dealing with a few frames at a time.

They hosted an association meeting when they were still quite inexperienced, and the demonstration was to be the re-queening of one of their colonies. The gentleman (Arthur Johnson) who did this for them was keen to breed British black bees and they were rewarded with a queen who produced the most aggressive, 'followy' bees they ever had; Ann and Betty reverted to their original stock as soon as they could.

Badgers brought about their worst disaster some years ago, destroying all six hives completely, with everything chewed up and scattered over a huge area. They started again, but subsequently were meticulously careful never to leave anything around the hives that might excite curiosity, not a shred of wax, a drip of honey. It was suggested that spreading urine around the apiary site might act as a deterrent, but they couldn't quite bring themselves (i.e. Bruce!) to put it to

the test! From then on they kept things to a gentle scale, with two or three colonies at most. This year the threat is from woodpeckers and Ann is covering the hives with chicken-wire.

Despite occasional difficulties like this, Ann speaks of their years of beekeeping as having been a lot of fun, sharing plans and discussing what they would do, and working together around the hives. Sadly Betty died last year and Ann is continuing single-handed.

However, her life is hardly uneventful away from the bees. House renovation and decoration has been an ongoing interest, together with her husband Bruce, and over the years they have restored several houses from a near-derelict state and returned them to beauty and usefulness. After her years of teaching at Wroxall and then Sandown St. John's, Ann has been busy travelling, last year doing the Comino de Santiago, the year before Anapurna Base Camp in Nepal, and the English Coast to Coast Trail. Next month she plans to walk in Ethiopia, then two trails in Italy in May. This is as well as trips to Australia where her daughter now lives, and Durham to visit her Mother. Combined with some voluntary work, gardening, reading and cooking, this has led to a very full life in retirement.

Ann's quiet and unassuming demeanour belies the energy that she shows by her achievements; beekeeping must suit her.

**Stella Ridley**

**From a fellow beekeeper on the mainland**—we'll start at the out-apiary:

This is where I found things had gone decidedly pear shaped. I was only a matter of 40m or less up the hedge from the car, but when I arrived back it was burning well, Must have been lighting my smoker that did it. I was not worried about the surroundings as it was decidedly damp, but my bag of shavings may well have collected a hot ember and gone up. There was no chance of saving anything - I considered it, but it was not safe to open a front door to reach my best bee suit and my personal belongings, as the back windows blew out.

A passing driver had seen the smoke and thought someone was trying to top themselves as there were boards propped against the bumper (he thought they were over the exhaust). He had dialled three 9's before I appeared. We waited and steadied the traffic as it was an inferno (car full of honey, wax (in frames), supers, a brood roof, floors and excluders (the only non-flammable item!).

Then the engine started and it trundled across the road into a hedge. Panic! It trundled into the wide hedge, turned 90 degrees, and then went along the centre for about 10-15m before jamming under a fallen tree and continued to set fire to the hedge.

Eventually the fire brigades dealt with the blaze. Nothing left of the car or contents except a smouldering shell.

Cont. on page 8

## **(No longer) beginner's blog Spring 2012**

Rather like their keeper, my bees are lazy lie-abeds. When others were reporting their bees up and about and enjoying the Spring flowers, mine were nowhere to be seen. Eventually they trickled out, but they were very slow to get going, I was only seeing a handful at a time, and I wondered what I would find when opening the hive. Thanks to the Thymol syrup I'd given them in the Autumn there were no tell-tale nosema streaks across the landing board, and there was still a little fondant in the tray under the insulation, so I guessed they were OK. When they decided to get going they did so enthusiastically. I was careful not to inflict too early an inspection on them, and didn't open them until it was really warm and they were so busy I became anxious that they might be short of room. When I did open up they burst out of the box, and apart from the two outside frames of stores it was full of brood at all stages. Not a Queen cell in sight, so I could stop being anxious that they were about to swarm and leave me. The only action needed was the removal of a few inches of drone brood which I found (true to type) had evidence of varroa within, despite zero to low drop rates, and a super to go on top. This was drawn and filled within five days to my amazement! However when crowing about this I was reminded by Mary that they may have moved stores up from those two frames below which could have contained thymolised syrup. Oh dear, perhaps best saved to give back to them later in the year then. I have given them another super to play with while this sort of flow is on. Back now to the happy routine of inspections - few enough not to disturb them unnecessarily but often enough to be effective in swarm and disease control. With a bit of luck in a few weeks I can perhaps perform a split and be up to two colonies.

I am really looking forward to the Summer, and hope you all are too.

**Stella Ridley**

### **Now let's see what was happening with his wife:**

By now I had rung my wife and told her I was 'car-less' and asked her to pick me up. She duly arrived to find my predicament, to her horror. Things then went from bad to worse. A bee stung her on the top of her head. I scraped the sting out and told her to sit in the car (safer). A matter of a very few minutes later she got out of the car, said something like 'I'm not feeling very well' and promptly went out like a light. Collapsed unconscious by the car. Firemen administered oxygen and the second emergency service was called. After what seemed like an age the ambulance arrived and took her to Peterborough, stopping, en route, to administer adrenaline.

The Hospital put it down as a severe allergic reaction, but the ambulance was summoned for a suspected anaphylactic shock. The ambulance crew arrived from some twenty miles or so distant. She is now recovering at home, thankfully. Cont p11

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## **A comprehensive list of useful tips from Mick Dunn**

Cardboard used in delivery packaging is excellent, easy to light and long-lasting. Collect petrified wood when walking the dog, make sure it's dry, (leave in a greenhouse/shed/garage before using).

Do not forget to puff during inspections even when not actually using on the hive to keep the air flow up.

Carefully extinguish before driving off in car!

The surface stays hot after use and bare skin will burn.

Try not to over smoke bees.

Practice lighting the smoker and gauging how long it will last, (more for novices!)

Use a long handle match/gas ring lighter—making it easier to start the smoker.

Take your lighter and spare fuel to the apiary, don't leave it in the car.

Couch grass and hessian sacking make a cool smoke that lasts.

If really struggling - as a last resort and the most expensive -buy smoke pellets from a bee supplier.

If after finishing the bees persist in 'pinging' you use the smoker on yourself and suit.

Observe others on apiary visits/Quarr teaching apiary days.

## Landmarks of the Isle Of Wight

### Defending Shanklin (41)

In 1940 a very real possibility existed that the Island would be the first target for an invasion by the German Army and preparations were made for this eventuality. In Shanklin the Home Guard stood ready for an onslaught whether it should come by sea or overland. Short of guns and ammunition it certainly had enough to cover the approach from the South and as the picture shows, the rifle positions to cover this are still in existence close to St. Blazius Church.



Shortage of hand grenades did not prevent throwing practice and one group assembled in the upstairs rooms of the Black Cat tea rooms for a simulated attack on a passing lorry using swede turnips. However, it was realised that the Home Guard might not be enough to repel the advancing troops and plan B was prepared. Captain Dick Wheway, the local radio repair man, recruited a

clandestine band of local men who were ready to operate as guerrillas should the worst happen. Their operations would centre on a secret underground cavern they had excavated under the cover of darkness in the America woods. In preparation it was stocked with explosives, detonators and emergency supplies. The local army units erected miles of beach defences consisting of a framework of scaffold poles which stretched from Yaverland to Luccombe. The pier was a possible landing point so a cunning strategy was put into action. A vast gap was blown into the pier deck and if a battalion should land there and try to march ashore, disaster would ensue.

After the war the breach in the pier was repaired with reinforced concrete.

Ironically this was the only part of the pier to survive after the storm of 1987

when all of the iron structure was washed away.

**Rob Marshall**



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### **Mary's lucky escape**

After an afternoon's beekeeping I left my smoker which had been 'put out' with a piece of foam, in the car. After enjoying a cup of tea with the farmers wife I returned to the car to find it completely full of smoke.

It takes a while to clear the smoke but the smell will always be there!

### **Mary Case**

#### **And now for the reflection:**

What a day. I went back later that pm and picked up the box of extra deeps I had forgotten about in the melee. Amazingly, it was not being robbed out by many bees. I will never be sure whether it was the smoker fuel bag (replaced in the car after lighting the smoker) that had a smouldering ember blown into it, my gas smoker lighter not turning off completely, a simple electrical fault in the car wiring, or even mischievous/malevolent ghosts. I never light my smoker inside the car, so that was not the cause, and it was with me, so not left in the car while still alight. I now need to seriously re-appraise my hobby.

### **Size matters**

I had two of the smaller smokers that always went out, as soon as I bought the bigger smoker the problem stopped. I have often gone home for my lunch and forgot to put the smoker out and when I came back it was still going.



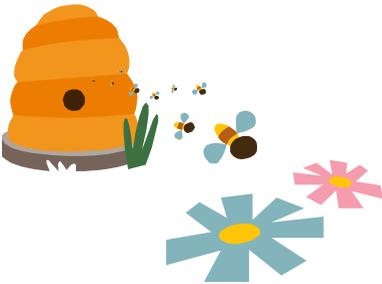
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When the smoker was going well, my father used to pick a handful of green grass, and jam it into the lid before closing the top down. Immediately cool, thick, white smoke emerged and we were ready to go. We also had a new pope.

I used to visit a goat farmer for milk and cheese, giving him honey in exchange. A bee inspector then told me that goat pellets were the best smoker fuel he knew. So the next time I asked the farmer for a few pellets to try out. The inspector was right, they were brilliant.



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### From the archive—adapted from a letter to the Editor—Spring 1988

Having after years of research perfected what I consider to be the greatest innovation in beekeeping since the invention of the movable comb, I am now free to acquaint your readers with this breakthrough in modern apiculture. Those who have had to cope with smoker, hive tool and frame simultaneously with but one pair of hands will have felt the need for a handleless smoker. It is this invaluable piece of equipment that has now become available to beekeepers. All that is needed by the handy enthusiast who wishes to construct his own are a few odds and ends which may be purchased for a trifle at the next car boot sale.

You need to acquire an old dustbin and three legs, some flexible hose as used by hospital anaesthetists and a bit of smallish horse. Construction details can be left to the ingenuity of the constructor. Leaky joints can be made tight with judicious use of Elastoplast. Before making this public announcement I felt the need to experiment with various types of fuel for my smoker. My professional duties give me access to unlimited supplies of discarded cigarette ends but these gave trouble from the outset. The



old dustbin and three legs, used by hospital anaesthetists as a smallish horse. Construction details can be left to the ingenuity of the constructor. Leaky joints can be made tight with judicious use of Elastoplast.

Before making this public announcement I felt the need to experiment with various types of fuel for my smoker. My professional duties give me access to unlimited supplies of discarded cigarette ends but these gave trouble from the outset. The bees very soon became addicted and even on sunny days most of them stayed at home for the chance to inhale the smoke. To cure this habit I loaded the smoker with a mixture of crushed eggshells and rubber. This was quite successful but after a few applications I discovered groups of bees gasping on neighbouring hedges waiting for the air to clear. At present I am using corrugated paper impregnated with Old Spice.

I will not conceal the fact that the device is not easy to operate and a dexterity is required to produce the well directed puff. Although not entirely satisfied with my own performance I have now overcome a tendency to inhale sharply when stung. This did have unfortunate side effects during the crushed egg and rubber stage of development.

I am now in a position to demonstrate and will gladly do so at any of your forthcoming summer gatherings. I had intended to patent my invention but because of a certain perverseness on the part of the patent office it has been impossible for me to reap the rewards of my ingenuity in this way. I shall therefore need reluctantly to make a nominal charge for my demonstrations and suggest that your treasurer contacts me to negotiate a suitable fee.

**Sam H Rollinbars**

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## Beekeepers from the Royal Naval College, Osborne

This photograph was taken during the First World War, they seem to be debating the merits of a new fangled smoker over the more traditional pipe smoking approach to pacifying the bees.

Use a wine bottle cork, whittled down to fit the smoker spout. It stops the smoke and the fire goes out. Better still find a sherry-tipler and ask for the plastic topped variety, they're much easier to take in and out.



**IWBKA Honey Labels**  
**Number 6 — Martin Long**

It is interesting to compare bespoke labels designed by the beekeeper or a professional designer with those from a supplier catalogue. Martin contacted the one with the widest range of off-the-shelf designs; Thorne currently have 10 pages of labelling designs for a range of products and containers. This is one of the most popular and Martin was very happy with how easy he found the process. It also offered good value for money and he has peace of mind because the template complies with UK honey labelling regulations.

2011 was Martin's first honey-producing year and so far he has supplied family and friends only, so found it convenient to order just 100 labels, working out at just over 5 pence each. Now his details are on the system at Thorne so if he repeats his order they only need to change the Batch Number (above right). Name and address must be on the label so that you can be found, but Martin chose not to add a phone number.

The most interesting part of the process was negotiating the required 'best before' date for the label. There are no country-wide standards, and different environmental health areas will give different advice. Generally though anything between 2 and 5 years is being used. Martin chose 4 years, so that when that huge honey harvest comes in this year he just needs to push the best before date on the label forward for the next batch.