

Epsom Division of Surrey Beekeepers
Chairperson's Report
23rd November 2021



Another, very different beekeeping year has come to an end. All the processes that we put in place last year have been continued and, in addition, we have completed the beginners' theory and practical courses. Next year, we are hoping to return to face to face sessions but will do so in a cautious way. Our first step is this AGM - and it will be amazing to see you in person!. Yet again, the committee and a small group of volunteers have risen to the challenge of keeping the club going. In addition, a large number of you have attended the online education sessions and even more have purchased from the shop following all the rules. I am very grateful to all of you for what you have done and how you have supported us.

You can see the reports from the various sections of the club below but I would just like to emphasise some of the highlights.

The team looking after the apiary (Mike Hanly, Ellie Lodge, Chris O'Brien (welcome back!), Jane Bush, Jane Powney and Liz Knee have done an amazing job in looking after our colonies despite the inclement weather and Covid restrictions. Other members of the committee joined in to extract, jar and label the honey ready for sale. There have not been any events for us to sell the club or members honey but, once we could, the shop opened up to members of the public and has been doing a roaring trade.

A separate team (Phil Shepherd, Fiona Dowle and Derek Dowle) looked after the Queen rearing colonies and , despite all the obstacles they encountered due to the weather and fewer new beekeepers, raised 11 nucs for sale.

Liz Knee continued to run our education programme over Zoom and with the support of Helen Worwood, Sofia Welsby and an external speaker, ran a varied and extremely interesting programme. Most of the sessions have been recorded and are available to view on the Epsom Beekeepers Youtube channel. I will publish a full list of links in the next newsletter. Several members have successfully taken BBKA exams and Liz will continue to provide support for members who would like to take these.

The shop team, led by Helen Worwood, has continued to keep the shop open and the booking system is working well. So far, no-one has been pinged! kept the shop open. The team (Helen Worwood, Jenny Breese, Ellie Lodge, Linda Hughes, Kate Kellett, Sofia Welsby and Diane Middlecoat) have opened the shop every Saturday during the summer months and twice a week for the rest of the year. The sale of the club and members' honey has been particularly successful and has increased by 93%! So successful that the number of jars bought by each customer had to be limited.

If you have visited the club, you will see that the kitchen has been cleared out new cupboards have arrived to provide much needed storage for the club records. Thanks to Liz for organizing the clear up and to Sam Nicol for procuring the cupboards.

We have not progressed on redoing the kitchen as stated below and are in the process of having the floor at that end of the building checked out.

The grass and weeds continued to grow and I would like to thank Linda Hughes for keeping the grounds tidy and doing more planting. Hopefully, we will all see the fruits of her efforts in the spring.

As part of our planning for next year, we would like your views on what you would like for the future. If you haven't yet taken part, it is only 4 questions, the link to the survey is: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5V39B8J>.

In addition to the above, I would like to thank the remaining committee members for carrying on with their roles. Kate Kellett, as well as being part of the shop team, has continued to manage our finances and produce the attached accounts. Kim Broughton has kept on top of the membership and kept our Instagram presence going. Fiona Dowle and Ellie Lodge have managed the joint role of secretary between them as well as the other activities described above. In particular, Fiona has been responsible for all the communication regarding courses. With all the changes taking place, this has been a bigger and more complicated task than usual. Diane Middlecoat as trustee has represented Epsom at Surrey meetings and organized the shop team schedule. Sofia Welsby has been part of the shop team and has given talks to schools. She has also acted as a steward at the Surrey honey show and gave us the benefit of her experiences and how to show your honey at the October education session.

Below are the reports from the different areas of the club.

I would like to finish by saying thank you again. The club could not survive, even in normal times, without all your support.

Gill Futcher

Education and Teaching Apiary - Liz Knee

We began January 2021 with the Theory Course being delivered via the medium of Zoom! This was a mix of new students and those invited back from 2020 as a refresher. Sadly, we had to cancel the Practical Course in 2020 and we had a backlog of Beginners ready to start as soon as restrictions allowed in 2021. Therefore, to ensure numbers were limited we did not take on full new cohort onto the Theory/Practical Course and the 'back log' cleared.

The 'covid beekeeping team' (comprising myself, Mike Hanly, Jane Powney, Ellie Lodge, Jane Bush and Chris O'Brien) continued to manage the colonies during the winter of 2020 and into Spring treating the bees to knock back levels of phoretic varroa via oxalic acid sublimation and monitoring food and health.

All the colonies came through winter well and the team worked hard to clean and prepare all the necessary equipment for the season ahead. We would normally start the Practical Course in April but due to continued restrictions this was delayed until May.

We adhered to all the current covid regulations and advice and made the decision to run

the course over two days - Wednesdays at 5.30pm (8 candidates) and Sundays at 9.30am (6 candidates) so we could split the group into as small a number as possible. These groups were then halved - each group inspecting one half of the apiary colonies with two tutors! With me so far?!

The reduced number of Beginners enabled us to run the course with minimal additional support, but I would like to thank John Fitcher and Helen Worwood for providing 'holiday cover'.

All our meetings were conducted outside with the Beginner Beekeepers arriving ready dressed in their bee suits and indoor access limited to the bathroom only. As restrictions relaxed further small groups were allowed into the workshop to make up frames, boxes etc. The season was a challenge with poor weather causing all sorts of head scratching scenarios and, sadly, a reduced honey crop - but most of the colonies fared well and we did harvest about 100lbs of honey for sale!

One positive result of the pause/change that covid created was the opportunity to think carefully about ways to improve delivery of future Beginner Practical courses. As a result, we will now....

- Reduce the group of Beginners to 12 to ensure quality of learning
- Running the course as a 'complete package' of combined Theory and Practical
- Use a small group of regular tutors to ensure consistency of teaching
- Open the hives once a week only to reduce colony stress

I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank to Helen Worwood (Theory Course Tutor) and to Mike Hanly, Jane Powney, Ellie Lodge, Jane Bush and Chris O'Brien (Practical Course Tutors) for their continued commitment and time to enable this to happen. Also not forgetting all the Beginner Beekeepers who attended regularly to learn and assist with the seasons management.

The regular meetings for members were reduced to twice monthly and again we had to use Zoom to deliver these sessions. As you are all probably aware, this is not my preferred method so I am hoping we can begin face to face meetings in January 2022. The meetings were a mix of 'Teaching Apiary' updates, topics, and outside speakers. Again, I would like to thank the membership with their continued patience and support.

The BBKA made the decision to hold the exams and assessments due to relaxed restrictions during the summer and I am delighted to report that seven members gained their Basic Assessment certificates and three members their Honey Bee Health certificates - well done! We also have members due to take written modules in November - good luck!

Looking forward to 2022

- Already advertised and filled places for the combined Theory/Practical Course
- Advertised a one day 'Experience Day' for May 15th
- Started to develop a new programme of Tuesday Topics to include a monthly practical session (as weather allows)
- Will be offering support members wishing to take further written modules and practical assessments

Buildings and Grounds

Prior to the covid pandemic we had begun the process to inspect the demountable classroom, kitchen and bathroom with a view to carrying out some renovation and remedial works. The original foundations under the building were rudimentary and although we had major work completed on the main classroom floor, the kitchen and bathroom end were left untouched and will need some attention.

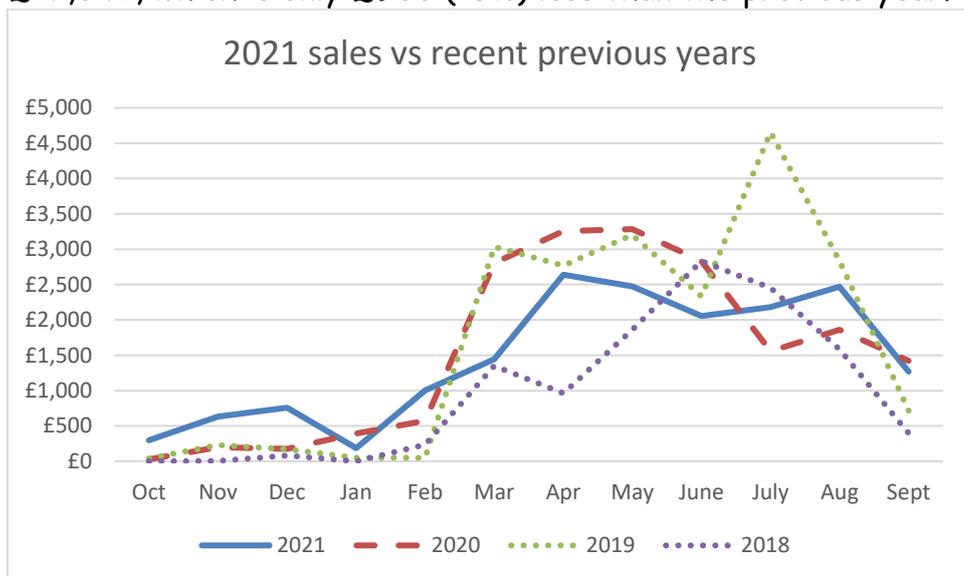
Earlier this year we had a skip delivered and a small group of us spent a morning going through every shelf and cupboard to clear out all the 'rubbish' that had accumulated over the years - very satisfying!

The grass and borders have been mown and tidied throughout the season by Linda Hughes and I would like to say a big thank you to her for not only keeping areas neat but adding to the planting with 'bee friendly' plants and bulbs.

Apiary Shop - Helen Worwood

Starting this report with two "Thankyous" - firstly to you, our members for sticking with the email and collect appointment system, we have managed to keep trading throughout the season and have had no "pings" from the track and trace system; and secondly to our hard working crew of volunteers Jenny Breese, Kate Kellett, Sophia Wellsby, Ellie Lodge, Linda Hughes and Diane Middlecoat. Sadly Kate is stepping back from shop duties - though we haven't given up all hope of persuading her back at some future time.

Who would have guessed that the shop sales would be so challenging this year. The coldest April and wettest May on record for many years are clearly visible in the solid blue line of sales performance in the graph below. At the end of September, we had taken an amazing £17,342, which is only £966 (-5%) less than the previous year.



The sales of honey continue to provide a valuable source of income for the association and provide a service to the public. We sold £4,673 of honey during the year, £2,119 worth of apiary honey and £2,554 worth of members honey through the shop. This is £2,336 (+93%) more than last year and wouldn't be possible without the support of members letting us sell

some of their crop, I hope this continues as a win: win for both the association, our members and the honey buying public.

You may recall that last year I proposed extending the Epsom Members discount to the whole of Surrey BKA membership in the hope of growing our income by securing more customers. It is difficult to assess if this has had the desired effect. We certainly have not seen a large inflow of members from other Surrey divisions, and as mentioned above sales have held broadly level - thanks to honey sales, rather than increasing sales of beekeeping equipment.

I have joined the Ewell Village 12 month regeneration challenge team and it appears we are close to agreeing that a regular market can take place in "the grove" next to Ewell Grove school. If we can run a regular stall there I think we will have a great opportunity to further increase our profile and promote bees and beekeeping more regularly to the community around us.

The Queen Rearing Project - Phil Shepherd

The Covid-19 pandemic has now seen two full seasons of beekeeping pass with a low interest in members wanting bees. The QRP did pass on 11 nucs to new members and the stocks of bees did well despite an indifferent season for nectar collection in general. Once again the maintenance of our stocks was extremely well managed by Fiona and Derek Dowle with their weekly inspections of the 8 stock hives. The low level of interest for nucs meant we produced over half of the nucs made in the late spring and early summer by splitting those stocks showing signs of swarming, the rest came from one grafting session. The year has ended with 8 stocks and 3 nucs for back up in the event of a difficult winter to come. The coming season will hopefully be more active for us and so we intend doing more grafting work in early May 2022.

Membership - Kim Broughton

We have had a steady stream of new members joining over the year. The current membership stands at:

Registered: 96

Partner: 15

Country: 7

Junior: 1

Friend: 5

Honorary: 1

Total: 124

We also say goodbye to a few leavers who have decided to hang their bee suits up and enjoy watching the bees rather than managing them, we wish them well.

Unfortunately, due to increases in prices by both BBKA and Beecraft, we had to increase our subscription prices this year.

We created a survey to get some feedback about what our members wanted for the future, although we did get some responses, a few more would be nice. If you haven't yet taken part, it is only 4 questions, the link to the survey is: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5V39B8J>.

To all who have responded offering help, we will get back to you if you have left your email address.

Instagram - Kim Broughton

Our Instagram page has grown significantly - we now have 196 followers. From what we can see of their profiles most are beekeepers and not necessarily in the Epsom area, some are from around the world including Germany, America & Australia . I have tried to find and follow some of our members, who show on Instagram their beekeeping adventures, but some profiles have obscure names, so if you do have an Instagram page which you are happy to share, please let me know.

It is a dynamic way of showing interested people that we are an active association. We have been able to share posts from the BBKA about various topics including information about the Asian Hornet. It is a public page, so anyone can check it out.

<https://www.instagram.com/epsombeekkeepers/>

Newsletter and Website - Gill Fitcher, Graham Hunt and Nick Fry

Over the last year, the newsletter has been produced twice monthly so that we can keep our members in contact with what is happening at Epsom and around the rest of the Surrey beekeeping associations.

In April this year, we took the decision to change our website and email hosts. This was done for both cost and technical reasons. After heroic efforts by Graham Hunt and Nick Fry, we have been using the new platforms for over 6 months and it is all working well. I would particularly like to thank Nick for the many hours he spent transferring the website contents and the email addresses and messages.

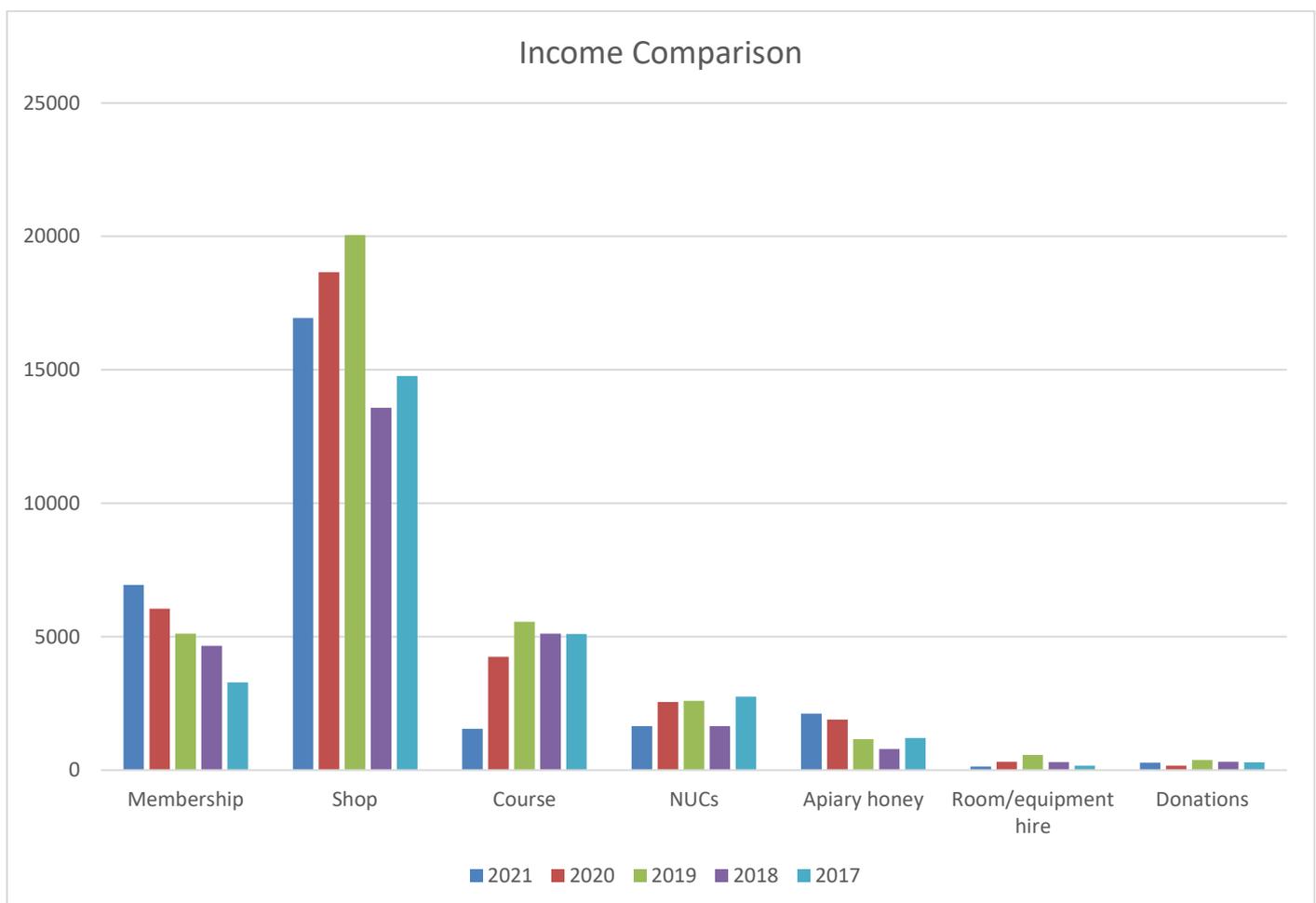
Financial Reports and Approval of Accounts - Kate Kellett

Cash Position

The financial year finished with a total cash balance of £32,413 (£5,000 of which is ring-fenced.)

Profit and Loss Account

Income received during the year has been generated through membership fees; courses; the shop; the Queen Rearing Programme; sale of Apiary honey; room/equipment hire and donations.



Annual costs incurred in running the Club (including tutor fees) the Apiary and the Queen Rearing Programme, amounted to £4,565. Included in these costs was a small financial outlay to purchase a wax extractor. There has been no major expenditure on the building during the year.

Overall for the year ended 30th September 2021, we made a profit of £1,600 (previous year was £1,425.)

I would like to thank Kate Kellett for her managing of the club finances and for preparing the audited accounts. I would also like to thank Donna Williams for auditing the accounts again this year.

The Committee

The committee usually meet 4 times a year to discuss and action everything required to run the EBKA, provide a pleasing environment and an interesting range of events to educate, inspire and retain its members as well as raising awareness of beekeeping within the local community. It is only through individuals continuing to donate time and effort that we can do this successfully. This year various sub teams have met more frequently to organize the Apiary, the changes to the website and email and discussing the education programme. We are extremely lucky to have an active committee and membership who are always willing to help, and I would like to encourage you all, particularly new members to join in and help to maintain this active association.