

Guildford Division's Chairman's AGM Report 2020

I'm going to get the depressing part out of the way first and tell you what has had to be cancelled for Guildford Division during the past year due to Covid19:

Practical Course, Basic Exams, most of Project 100, Centenary Celebration event, Taster Day, Wood Street Fair, Guildford in Bloom, The Wood Fair and our Christmas Dinner. I am sure there are other things that I have missed out, but think that is plenty for anyone!

Before the dreaded C- word came into our vocabulary the Division's year got off to a cracking start:

Pauline Lane and I were invited to drinks at the Guildhall in Guildford by Guildford in Bloom and presented with a "Certificate of Merit" for the Division's involvement in this lovely annual event. We had already decided that we would try to purchase children's beesuits so that we could present the winning school with the prize of 15 children having a visit to Birtley Brook Apiary. We were made very welcome and our prize was accepted. I would like to mention here that David Reeve applied to the Betty Riseley Trust and secured a grant from that trust which enabled us to purchase those suits and child sized gloves!

In December last we held our annual Dinner at the Drift Golf Club and I think I can safely say that a good time was had by all. Many thanks to Catherine Carr, who has since moved to the West country, for organising that.

2020 dawned and early January saw our Theory Course start with around 25 attendees. All very well run by Susan Kimber, Pauline Lane, Mel Robertson and Jacqueline Tolley.

Before the new season had begun, we launched a "Donations" page on our website. This was just before swarm season got going. What a success it has been! We have had donations for all sorts of reasons, but a great deal have been from grateful members of the public following swarms collected as well as from our own members who have been very glad to take an unwanted swarm having lost their bees. Thank you to all of GBKA's swarm collectors.

Pauline Lane led a workshop at the apiary to launch Project 100 which was to be our big project involving Guildford area schools to celebrate our Centenary. It got off to a flying start with 6 different schools being given talks before lockdown. Once schools were back after the summer holidays another school was visited until everything to do with the project was stopped until 2021. I must add here that David Reeve secured another grant, this time from Guildford Borough Council, to provide equipment including a new laptop especially for Project 100. Well done, David.

Work also progressed on the much-needed toilet facilities at the apiary. Many people were involved, but I must mention Ian Carmichael, Alastair Heslop, Sharon Campbell, Pauline Lane and Derek Joy. All these people were much involved with the construction and painting. Then Lou Major presented us with a delightful Plaque to go on the outside. Thank you everyone.

February arrived and Stephen Bowers gave us a very interesting talk on Mead Making and, dare I say it, consuming! I think some taxis had to be ordered that night.

Early March and our own Master Beekeeper, Andrew Gibb, presented a talk on Queen Rearing. This was of such interest that Andrew is now running a queen rearing course for us next year. It was a full house for both of these talks and I thank both Stephen and Andrew for their time and expertise.

You may think that was the end as lockdown had arrived, but bees still need looking after. We had an amazing apiary team going to the apiary on different days in the week so that they were never breaking the social distancing rules. This lasted for the whole season. They include Susan Kimber, Angela Massie, Ian Carmichael, Pauline & Geoff Lane, Alastair Heslop & his daughter, as things eased there was also Mary – Jane Hanna-Brown and Jacqueline Tolley. I am sure that I have left people out and I'm sorry if I have because everyone deserves praise.

We got ourselves into the Telegraph in July as following an email to me from a photographer based in Shalford called Jason Alden, he came to take photos at Birtley Brook Apiary. Very good they were too.

In early August we knew that some of those on our Theory Course had gone ahead and got themselves bees. This was a worry with the practical cancelled. So, it was decided that those on the apiary team looking after the hives could manage one person each per visit. This was organised and 7 new members came through the weeks to get at least some experience of handling bees properly and what to do preparing for winter. They have been very grateful for the experience and help given.

The apiary team have had cleaning sessions in October, of course we have been unable to invite members generally for obvious reasons. The team will continue with similar throughout the winter so that things will be ready for next year.

In mid -summer our first photographic competition was launched culminating with the winning photo and all entries being turned into a calendar by Pauline Lane. This is delightful and I hope that you have all bought one!

A special mention also goes to our newsletter editor, Peter Smith, who took over the role in 2019 and a grand job he has made of it. Thank you, Peter.

I also want to thank Peter Jones who quietly runs our WhatsApp group so well. Thank you Peter.

At this point I want to thank everyone who has helped in any way, but especially the committee and our Trustee – Pauline Lane, David Reeve, John Bainbridge, Lou Major, Sue Keystone, Steve Cotney and Malcolm Clarke. They have all been an enormous support this year and without a committee GBKA wouldn't exist at all. I also want to thank Graham Morrow who, despite his own trying year, has again examined our accounts.

So that was 2020. A very strange year, but one that I am immensely proud of on behalf of Guildford Division. As always GBKA members have risen to the challenge no matter what has been thrown at them. I am always aware that all of us are volunteers and that there is only so much that you can do, but by golly I think that GBKA members can be very proud of what they have done.

So, although I won't be your Chairman in 2021, I know you will give your support to your new one.

Well done Guildford.

Marilynne Bainbridge