

**Chairman, Richard Bradfield.**

### **Chairman's report 2020**

My second year as your Chairman commenced during the end of last year with considering plans for a Grand Summer Party during 2020 to mark the 10th Anniversary of our use of the Henfold Apiary. I was also welcoming newly recruited Geoffrey Pye as our External Local Shows Coordinator to help oversee an anticipated busy summer of village shows, promoting Beekeeping, RBKA, and selling our 900lb stock of 2019 honey.

A few of us had at least enjoyed an early traditional 'Spring Lunch' during February, courtesy of the organisation by Julie Thain at the Grumpy Mole venue; before the World began to change.

Geoffrey managed his first and what was to be our only Promotional and Sales stall of 2020 at Denbies during early March. By mid March your committee were planning for the Lockdown conditions that were about to commence.

We had to contemplate and plan for the closure of our apiaries to all but essential maintenance; with the immediate cancellation of preparations for the Summer Season and the likely cancellation or postponement of most if not all of our usual Summer activities and events.

A first immediate casualty was the indefinite postponement of the final session of our 2020 Winter Beginners Beekeeping course. But neither course presenter David Rudland, organiser Gill Simpson or the 'Class of 2020' gave up. Presented online in July.

From the outset of the lockdown, there was a determination to continue to provide some continuity for members with beekeeping support, education and networking. We needed to 'Go Virtual' and to do it quickly. Our existing Facebook RBKA Members Forum was redesignated as an RBKA Members Network group with Jim Cooper as lead moderator, providing a platform for members to share their own and other items of beekeeping news. A new RBKA Education Forum Facebook group was created and moderated by Andrew Cornwall as a platform to maintain and further the delivery of educational material to members. A WhatsApp group, moderated by Keith Mackie had its origins as a forum for regular Wednesday after meeting attendees of The Surrey Oaks

during the Summer or The BeeHive during the Winter. This morphed into the RBKA Crew WhatsApp group and rapidly became the messaging media of choice between smart phone using members. And of course, not to forget the continuing contribution made by Lisa Gallo's production of our monthly BeeNews in making available to all members reports about activities and timely reminders of upcoming events.

Meanwhile my alter ego, the Webmaster, hopes you have found efforts to keep the Members Website up to date, useful, relevant and ... timely. The need to be bringing members visually together for virtual meetings led to your committee testing the water on the 1st April, of all days, with a Committee Meeting via Zoom. Under experienced guidance from 'super host' and wing man Jim Wynn, no one spontaneously combusted during that pioneering meeting. The Zoom platform became the method adopted to provide a programme of talks and presentations to members for the early months of Summer, until we could continue with real meetings later.

The focus then switched to providing the content, for which Jim Wynn again and Andrew Cornwall sketched out an initial varied programme. Willing and able presenters were then variously invited or persuaded to put themselves in front of a webcam, talk over their slide show or even record and present video footage.

I do not believe that back in April, many of us fully expected to need to continue our weekly on-line Summer meetings right through to the end of September. Let alone the need, that eventually became clear, to also conduct our monthly Winter meetings and the AGM itself on-line. So, it has been an absolute joy during the last seven months to see so many members and guests alike, to be prepared to be directly involved in front of the lens, whether accomplished presenters or just prepared to have a go.

My immense gratitude goes to Jim Wynn for the considerable time and effort he has put into arranging and managing the programme, the behind the scenes coaching of presenters, and the calm running of each of the 25 such meetings so far. The AGM will be the 26th and that is without counting the more frequent Committee Meetings we have been holding to keep in touch with each other and events. We are also all indebted to our four Master Beekeepers, Geoff Blay, Adam Leitch, Bob Maurer and Celia Perry; our other very experienced 'keepers like Mike Hill and Vince Gallo; and undoubted rising stars, Colin

Clement, Trevor Keast and Keith Mackie. All, and more, have contributed greatly to providing online help and advice to members either in presentations or in responding to questions raised during meetings.

Meanwhile, as I hope you are aware, much has still been going on 'behind closed gate's' at our divisional apiaries. Henfold Apiary Mangers Karen and Simon Ford have quietly and efficiently got on with caring for the colonies. And the magnificent Groundsmen Duo of Peter Moore and Nick Clark have performed wonders on the grounds themselves. Land drainage remedied, carpark surfacing enhancements, shrub planting progressed, hedgerows and brambles managed, hive stands cast, external hand washing provided, a pagoda built to provide an outside classroom space and essential tree surgery carried out ... to pick out only the major item. Well done all.

The Vigo Apiary team have continued to care for and bring on their colonies, under Suzy Stevens leadership.

Whilst both Brockham and Buckland apiaries have responded to Richard Ramsden's attentions by yielding a magnificent 1460 lbs of Honey from their 12 hives this year.

Another big success has been our rolling Online Auction. Operated by Vince Gallo, the very first on-line Lot was opened to bidding at the end of May and the virtual hammer came down on the 57th and final Lot by mid September, grossing £2847 in total hammer prices.

Just a week before the Lockdown commenced, we took delivery of the magnificent 'Ambrose' donated new equipment. The decision was taken then to not press it into immediate use. Instead we wanted to wait until we could have members back at the apiary to enjoy and appreciate seeing and using the equipment. If only to start to create some storage space, a start has however been made in disposing of currently unused old equipment. Serviceable items being first offered to our other apiaries as needed or otherwise offered for sale by auction. Another casualty of the lockdown had been our fully booked Taster Day. But many subscribers declined immediate refunds and were prepared to wait until we could run the course. The feasibility of running a slightly modified and socially distanced version of the event was carefully considered by Course leader Colin Clement and his team for up to 12 participants only. The course was successfully delivered during August, with much praise received from the participants for both the

content and the Covid safe measures in place. Well done to Sue Hickson for all the risk assessment work behind the measures that were followed in the preparation and running of the day.

Our Annual Honey Show could also have been a victim, but we persevered and provided a Show Bench event that looked great, was well supported by my members under the difficult circumstances and impressed our NHS Judges. Thanks to Celia Perry for managing the entries and Simon Ford for his help on the day and previous evening; and to the volunteer couriers of show entries between the collection points and the venue at Henfold.

Sadly, the passing of Roy Cottington robbed us of another gentleman beekeeper who will be greatly missed. We also learned of the passing of Adrian Randag, a prominent and valued past member, mentor and friend of Reigate Beekeepers for many years.

Looking forward to 2021, it remains far from certain just when and how we will be able to return to some form of 'normal' activity at our training apiary. Consequently, your newly re-elected officers and committee members will be attempting to plan for a combination of more of the same for as long as needed, with also getting back around the hives as safely, feasible and as soon as possible.

I have proposed changes in the operation of the division, to take the focus away from the expectation or perception that only Committee Members can or need to be directly running all activities. I have proposed five appointed 'Liaison' posts for Education, Apiaries, Finance & Facilities, Membership and Public Relations. The posts may or may not be held by an Officer or Member of the Committee, but they would all be responsible to the Committee's scrutiny and policy direction. Importantly, the broad range of current and some new aspects of Information and Training will be brought together under the one Education Liaison role. This is intended to optimise and integrate what and how we deliver educational content across all activities such as; local shows, internal and external courses, all levels of practical training, mentoring and study groups etc. One thing we have all learned during the last 7 months is the need to adapt methods and utilise hitherto new technology.

You may have noted in the AGM Agenda that Andrew Cornwall has stood down as a committee member. Andrew has also chosen to withdraw from direct involvement in our Education programme. I thank

Andrew for his inputs. In particular, for his work over a number of years now in coaching new beekeepers to take their Basic Assessments and more recently in establishing Study Groups for more advanced qualifications. I trust that Andrew will feel able at sometime to take a part once again in providing input to the broadening scope of RBKA's Education plans.

Finally, my thanks to all the Officers, Committee members, role holders, ad hoc sub-committee members and general get-stuck-in-and-help members working in the background; for all that you have done and will hopefully continue to do for Reigate Beekeepers.

And a particular thank you to all members who have either logged-in to our online presences or downloaded recordings to catch up or re-view ... and especially to those who and gone on to express your appreciation of what is being provided. That above all makes it all worthwhile.

I do not see a let-up in the pace of changes we have already seen and needed to embrace. So, whilst the year ahead will undoubtable be as challenging as this one, I believe they can also be exciting times.

Richard Bradfield  
November 2020