

# CHESHIRE BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

## Stockport Branch Report 2024

Branch Chair	Peter Carefoot	Show manager	Francesca Pilkington
Vice Chair & Librarian	Paul Wheeldon	Education secretary	Liz Sparkes
Secretary	Vacant	Programme manager	Margaret Charlton
Apiary manager	David Lilley	Treasurer	Alistair Taylor
Assistant apiary manager	Dermot Carty	Schools liason officer	Alan Towse
Other members	Amanda Dixon Mark Davis Tony Shield Susan Payge		

At the end of the year, the branch membership was 261, a decrease of seven at the same time last year.

Brian Gee, Tricia Watkins, and Sue Payge stepped down from their committee positions. Alan Towse stepped down as the Education Secretary to take up a new role as Schools Liaison Officer.

Margaret Charlton joined as Programme Manager, Francesca Pilkington as the Honey Show Manager, and Liz Sparkes became the Education Secretary.

Thanks to Trisha Watkins, who stepped down as the Programme Manager. She had already organised the year's events with her usual attention to detail. With the support of branch members, particularly the Committee, she delivered an impressive schedule of events.

The year 2024 was another tricky year for Stockport beekeepers. The early spring weather was alright; bee colonies could build good-sized brood nests. A handful of beekeepers extracted some spring honey and had a good crop. The wet and windy weather in late spring restricted foraging, and the large colonies prioritised consuming the forage rather than storing it. Some beekeepers had to feed to keep colonies alive and the queens breeding. With the warmer mid-summer weather, colonies began to store nectar, mostly willowherb, brambles, and not forgetting

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the ubiquitous balsam, which had flowered early and was abundant.

The teaching year began with 34 students completing the 9-week Beginners' Course at the new excellent venue next to the Woodbank Apiary. Most of these students also signed up for the practical sessions at the Apiary, with some continuing their education by supporting the weekly colony checks when the course ended. In addition, there was a Beekeeping Taster Day in July; again, this popular event was fully subscribed, with seven attendees signing up for the 2025 theory course. As usual, the apiary was open to all members on Wednesday evenings during the main season. The WhatsApp group worked very well at keeping members updated on what was happening at the apiary. A special thank you must go to Alan and Linda Towse, who, for many years, have organised and managed the education programme efficiently and now take a well-earned rest.

Once again, David Lilley and Dermot Carty have done an excellent job in a challenging year for beekeepers. Only two of the 14 colonies taken into winter failed to make the spring. Keeping the colonies queen-right with multiple swarms and poor weather hindering queen mating was challenging. The apiary was used for basic exam assessments and two basic husbandry course sessions. At the end of 2024, fourteen colonies and one nuc have been prepared and bedded down for the winter. The wooden apiary fence posts must be replaced soon. Steel replacement posts have been sourced, and a contractor will be recruited to start the work before the spring of 2025. Relations with the Kindling Trust gardeners, who share the site, remain sound despite the occasional stings and swarms.

The branch honey extraction night on September 23rd was at the new venue of Woodbank Association Centre, where the facilities were significantly better and only a couple of hundred metres from the apiary. A new twelve-frame spinner replaced the old nine-framer, making extraction much more manageable. The yield was 431 lbs. With so many supers to de-cap and spin in one night, much of the honey remained in the wet frames to be fed back to the bees.

Woodford Community Hall was the venue for the annual Honey Show on Saturday, November 9th. The number of entries was 95. Judges John Goodwin and Jane Barlow commented standards were once again of high quality. Thank you to everyone who helped with the

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setting up and everyone involved in putting the show together. A special thanks to Sue Payge and especially Pat Booth, who stepped in at the last minute to ensure a smooth flow to the proceedings. And thanks to everyone who entered.

Alan has now successfully established small apiaries at six schools in the Stockport area. There is a waiting list of eight schools considering keeping bees in 2025. Alan can only accommodate two of these, so there will be some disappointment for those who must wait another year. SBKA buys the initial equipment for schools, and pupils help to make the hives. They have also had fundraising events to finance the setup. The honey produced at these schools continues to command premium prices at Parents' Evenings. Alan continues to support HMP Manchester and the ARC Rehabilitation Centre, Manchester, which had a record honey harvest this year.

The SBKA website now has the functionality to take orders from members and process the finances into the SBKA current account, making Alistair's role a little easier. Stocks of jars sold very quickly, which probably indicated the heavy honey harvest in part of the region. Sales of syrup and fondant remain steady.

SBKA remains in a solid financial position. The electronic transfer of money is now more timely and robust in complying with Charity Commission requirements and protecting SBKA funds. The transfer of funds from the WIX website into the SBKA current account is robust, and there are complete and detailed reports to help Alistair. The main purchases were syrup, fondant, and honey jars. These were available at cost prices from the website shop for the first time. After a long search, Alistair recruited Ann Longmate as the new accounts examiner.

Congratulations to Dermot Carty (with distinction), Bradley Fryers, Simon Perry and Nigel Wimpenny, who passed their Basic Beekeeping Certificate. Margaret Charlton passed Module 2 with distinction, and Michael Dale passed Module 8 and Advanced Theory Certificate.

The Hot Pot Supper at Woodford Hall was the last social event of the year. Thirty-nine members enjoyed the excellent food, prepared again by Carl Nicholls, a seasonal quiz, and a raffle. Thanks to Joan Richards and Marge Owen for their excellent organisation. It was a festive treat.

Peter Carefoot

Chair