

CHESHIRE BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

Stockport Branch Report 2023

Branch Chair	Peter Carefoot	Show manager	Sue Payge
Vice Chair & Librarian	Paul Wheeldon	Education secretary	Alan Towse
Secretary	Stephen Donohoe Resigned in July	Programme manager	Patricia Watkins
Apiary manager	David Lilley	Treasurer	Alistair Taylor
Assistant apiary manager	Dermot Carty	Other members	Liz Sparkes Brian Gee Mark Davis

At the end of the year, the branch membership was 267, an increase of 10 from the same time last year.

The year began with 32 students completing the 9-week Beginner's Course at Stockport Homes Group. Most of these students also signed up for the practical sessions at the Woodbank 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 many attendees signing up for the 2024 theory course—many thanks to Alan and Linda Towse, who have organised and managed the education programme efficiently.

The new SBKA website went live in May and is up and running with enhancements. There has been a lot of interest; most enquiries have been for beekeeping courses and dealing with swarms. The result is pleasing, and thanks must go to Steve Donohoe for his skill and guidance in putting this together.

David Lilley and Dermot Carty have done an excellent job in a challenging year for beekeepers. David initiated a WhatsApp group to summon people to the apiary's teaching and colony check nights, which has been a great success. Supported by Dermot, he has developed a team of branch members who regularly come to help out and learn at

the Woodbank Apiary. Through July and August, the wet weather pressured the weekly colony maintenance. It was a case of inspecting whenever the weather allowed it. At the end of 2023, fourteen colonies and one nuc have been prepared and bedded down for the winter.

The branch honey extraction night on September 27th was back at Woodford Memorial Hall, where the facilities significantly improved the restrictive space at the apiary. The yield was a disappointing 81 lbs from the 14 colonies, down from 269 lbs in 2022. The wet July and August saw the bees consume most of the stores collected during the warm spring and early summer.

The apiary moved to the current site eight years ago, and it was necessary to replace all the hive stands and strengthen the security fencing. Under David's direction, Paul Wheeldon and Brian Gee made the stands, and members helped to fit them. A special thank you goes out to all who helped.

Trisha Watkins 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 World Bee Day celebration in Stockport Town Centre was disappointing. Holidays and sickness prevented members' support; only three people could get there during the day. Poor communication with the town centre support team added to the problems. The public interest was again excellent, but the Shopping Centre Management reported an overall disappointment for the day's events. Special thanks go to Alan, Linda Towse, and Dermot Carty for their commitment and perseverance during the day.

Woodford Community Hall was the venue for the annual Honey Show on Saturday, November 11th. The number of entries was 91, which was lower than previous years. The organisers considered the reduced honey harvest to be partly responsible. Judges Ivor Flatman and Jane Barlow commented standards were once again of high quality. Thank you to everyone who helped with the setting up and everyone involved in putting the show together. And a big thank you to everyone who entered.

Alan has now successfully established small apiaries at five schools in the Stockport area. SBKA has bought initial equipment, and the schools have had fundraising events to finance the set-up. Once again, the celebration of World Bee Day was a delight for the kids and parents

involved. The highlight for the schools and pupils was the honey crop, which sold at parents' evenings.

During March, Alan taught the high-security HMP Manchester team members the basic principles of beekeeping. Alan introduced bees from captured swarms, and two strong colonies have entered winter.

SBKA remains in a solid financial position. The electronic transfer of money is now more timely and robust to comply with Charity Commission requirements and protect SBKA funds. The main purchases were syrup, fondant, and honey jars, once again available to members at subsidised prices. There was also a significant outlay on the refurbishment of the apiary.

Congratulations to Carolyn Slater, Andrea Toms and John Loud, who passed their Basic Beekeeping Certificate, and to Margaret Charlton, who passed her BBKA Module One. Also, Michael Dale passed Module 6 General Husbandry and Qualified Beekeeper Certificate.

The Hot Pot Supper at Woodford Hall was the year's last social event. Thirty-six members enjoyed the excellent food, followed by a seasonal quiz and raffle.

Peter Carefoot

Chair