

A Potted History by the Current Editor Val Sullivan

I took over the editorship of the Cumbria Bee Times in May 2009 because David Bates, who had produced the bi-monthly newsheet for Cumbria Beekeepers since July 1999 had to give up for pressure of time. Prior to that John Skinner had been editor for some 21 years from 1978. In his tribute to John Skinner, (in issue 202) David Bates wrote

“John will be a hard act to follow. He is not going to be idle as he has been elected to the National Executive committee of the BBKA. It is good to know that Cumbria’s interests will be represented at the highest level. My aim is to produce six issues a year and I hope they will come out in a fairly regular pattern. If you have any items for the newsletter—diary dates, comments, anecdotes, etc. —I’d be delighted to receive them.”

John took over from Mr Dodd, the CBKA President, who issued 100 editions over 16 years aided by the Secretary Mr Edmondson. John wrote of Mr Dodd’s

“No-one could expect to replace Mr Dodd’s knowledge and experience of bees and beekeeping in Cumbria and the future of the Bee Times will very much depend upon your support and help. Please send in contributions either direct to me or to your local Branch Secretary and remember that we accept advertisements free!”

The newsletter began in early 1957 as “*News and Views for Novices*” and from February 1957 editions were numbered and now had a new name — “**News and views of the Cumberland and Westmorland Beekeepers Association**”

Annual Subscription to the C&WBKA was 5 shillings (25p) at this time and the newsletter was produced for members free of charge. The editor used the publication for notification of forthcoming events; review of each season’s beekeeping, weather, etc. and for advertisements pertinent to beekeepers. For example the famous beekeeper Eva Crane was enticed to come to Cumbria on 11th November 1957 to give a talk at the Viaduct Hotel in Carlisle. Unfortunately no mention was made of the topic or the attendance figures in the subsequent edition of News and Views.

In December 1958 it was noted that the year had been a terrible one for weather with bees starving in mid-summer. Nuclear testing was cited as a possible cause for the record rainfall, though Mr Dodd’s also noted that his own Father, also a beekeeper, told of very poor summers in 1879, 1883, 1890, 1892 and 1903, and his uncle had written of deep driving snow on 26th May 1864 when sheep were entombed by the drifts! In 1958 it was further reported that the Whitehaven Honey Show only fielded two classes.

In May 1961 there was another change of name to the Bee Times, after the amalgamation of Westmorland into Cumberland. Prior to that its’ full title was **The Official Organ of the Cumberland and Westmorland Beekeepers Association**.

Notification of forthcoming events was particularly important before the days of instant communications (no e-mail, internet, mobile phones, nor even telephones in many houses)

The archives contain almost every edition of the Cumbria Bee Times from 1957 to the present with fascinating detail of weather, honey yields, diseases relevant to Cumbrian bee-

keepers and in most editions advice for both novice and more experienced beekeepers. It is a marvellous record of County beekeeping, and needs to be preserved.

It might be possible with a regular CBT article to look back on a regular basis at Beekeeping from 50 years ago if there was an interest among members of CBKA through excerpts from each edition.

I took over the editing of the CBT in May 2009, because I did not want to see the bi-monthly newsletter die out. I had no skills whatsoever in publishing a regular news sheet, and it was a rather daunting task. I had invaluable help from David Bates, the retiring editor for which I am extremely grateful

The first comments on my efforts were criticism of the size of print I was using (Beekeepers know how eyesight gets a little challenged with age) It was that size (and it WAS tiny) because I had no idea how to alter it! With the help of classes at Adult Education sessions some of the problems have been ironed out. I try to keep the issues filled with notices of forthcoming events, reports on recently held events and always hope for input from the Branches. However like my predecessors I find it nigh impossible to motivate beekeepers to contribute.

It would be most helpful to have feedback, contributions and suggestions (even about the typeface!) And now that we have the luxury of computing I will always include relevant pictures- in colour too. It would be of value to know if the membership wants the CBT to continue for another 50 years.

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