



## North of England Beekeepers' Convention

The 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of North East Beekeepers was held on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March, at the splendid new venue on Westgate Road, The Beacon. It was attended by more people than ever before, some 85, and there were 12 trade stands.

From a beekeeping point of view the day was tremendous, but there was on one great disappointment. The Convention was to be coordinated with a recording of the BBC Radio 4 programme Gardeners' Question Time, which was to take place immediately after the Convention finished, and Eric Robson, the GQT Chairman was to have chaired a question and answer panel as one of the items on the Convention programme. In the event, the day was bitterly cold and there was heavy snowfall in the west and the midlands, and Eric was snowed in. Many of those at the Convention had booked for GQT and many other keen gardeners were due to come later, which gave us quite a bit of extra sorting to do. But we managed, and people were very understanding.

There was a splendid variety of speakers for the programme, and it says much for how the event has developed that it attracts people who are so eminent in the field of apiculture. Keld Brandstrup chairs the Danish Association of Commercial Beekeepers, but, more importantly for hobby beekeepers, as most of us are, he has preserved and continued to develop the Buckfast strain of honey bee, furthering the breeding programme that was originally started by Brother Adam, a monk of Buckfast Abbey in Devon. He was fascinating, not only on his breeding and genetic work, but also on the ways Danish beekeepers are meeting the joys and problems of modern beekeeping.

Michael Badger MBE, is very well known in the British and European beekeeping world, and, indeed, further afield, too. He has encyclopaedic knowledge and experience. His talk on "Beekeeping for the Busy Beekeeper" was a splendid distillation of his tips of a lifetime.

There is a lab in the Department of Neuroscience at Newcastle University where groundbreaking work is being done on how bees behave and why. One aspect of this is research into how modern pesticides affect bees neurologically, and Dr Sally Williamson from the Department, spoke about the way her research is working and indicated some preliminary results. It is truly fascinating, though she left us aware that there is much more work to be done. People are coming to understand how vital the honey bee is as a major pollinator of our food supply, and the work of this Newcastle laboratory is crucial.

Dr Karin Alton works at the University of Sussex, specialising in bee behaviour and foraging in urban settings. She is also a botanist and an expert on the need to plant flowers that feed bees, not only in gardens, but wherever this is possible, in parks, roadside verges and grassland. Her address, which gave horrifying statistics on the loss of natural meadowland and hedgerows, was strongly backed by a statement from the floor by Willie Robson, of Chain Bridge Honey Farm, on the Tweed.

The tradestalls were much appreciated by the attendees, and added much to the ambience of the occasion.

The day had been opened by Brian Ripley, a notable personality in Northumberland beekeeping, and one time Chair of the British Beekeepers Association. He also closed it for us, with much deserved thanks for to the speakers and praise for the way things had been organised. And though Gardeners' Question Time was cancelled, the sandwiches which were ordered for those staying on still appeared, which gave the day a hearty finish.

The Beacon Staff did a magnificent job, and we remain most grateful to them.

*Ben Hopkinson*  
*29<sup>th</sup> March 2013*