

The HBA Library – Its history, current facilities and content

This year marks the 140th anniversary of the founding of our County Association in 1882. One of the first tasks of the Committee was "to set about bringing together a library of specialist books for its members".

The first Library Catalogue listing just 25 items was printed in 1884 as part of the first Report of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Beekeepers Association. In 1961, the words "H P Young Memorial" were added to the library's title, in recognition of Mr Young's work as County Bee Instructor 1920-37 & 1939-46. Later, with the loan of Frank Vernon's photographic slides and research notes together with the addition of videos and CDs, the Frank Vernon Audio Visual Library became part of HBA's Library.

Our Association was born out of a nationally, and locally held wish to 'better the lot of the poorer classes of society. Education by "encouraging humane and profitable beekeeping amongst the poor of the county" was seen as the key to achieving that goal. By 'learning and earning' it was thought that social discontent and civil unrest could be avoided!

During the first half of the twentieth century, books were ferried around the county and locally held 'Library Nights' run by the County Beekeeping Instructors, were held to encourage good beekeeping practice and Experts were available to identify disease. By the middle of the twentieth century more books had been donated to the Library and the Library flourished.

However, in 1966, the Bee Department in the College of Agriculture where the Library was held, was destroyed by fire and many books were lost. By 1968, thanks to donations, a new catalogue of 166 titles together with some duplicates could be offered to members from the Library in its temporary accommodation at the college. However, security difficulties and the nonreturn of books at the college, resulted in the Library being moved to the home of a professional librarian in Broughton. Subsequently other HBA members cared for the Library in their own homes and further boosted the range of resources available to HBA members. However, by 2015 the Library was homeless but in response to pressure from the general membership of HBA, it was saved in its entirety and rehoused at the [Sustainability Centre](#) in East Meon, initially in a small room in a disused accommodation block. This arrangement was originally a temporary measure and, while it was not ideal, the Library was able to begin the task of

re-establishing itself to become a useful and valued part of HBA's service to its members and the wider community.

The Staff at the Centre were very helpful and supportive towards the library. With its clear emphasis on education, the Library fitted in well with the ethos of the Sustainability Centre and it soon became an acknowledged part of the site. As a 'tenant partner' at the Sustainability Centre, The HBA Library is in a more prominent position to promote HBA's charitable aims of outreach and engagement with its members and the public.

During the initial setting up of the room we had many offers of practical help from members including offers of furniture, help with painting and decorating, as well as offers of help with skilled repairs and restoration of books in the collection. Many of these Friends of the Library still take an active interest in supporting the library. The loan system for the borrowing of books was restored, and Open Days were offered for small group visits. Interest in the Library was reawakened and donations of books, past periodicals and beekeeping ephemera were gratefully accepted.

Since then, the Library has moved twice more to different locations in the Sustainability Centre. During the pandemic the Centre was closed to the public and very little work could be done in the Library. Moreover the use of shared work facilities was not ideal but finally an office was offered to the Library as a permanent 'home' and it became known as the "Library Room". This accommodation is secure, dry, and easily accessible. Being in the main block allows easy access to toilet facilities and refreshments are available at the Beech Café.

A visit to the Library can be a very flexible event with the opportunity to read/study onsite or to choose items to borrow for home study. Space for large numbers of visitors in the actual library room is limited but the Centre, its grounds and café offer additional interest to accompanying friends and families. If larger organised groups e.g. a group of members studying for the modular exams, wish to hire space within the Centre for a Study Day, the Librarian would ensure that the Library was open and available for use. Opening times are flexible, by arrangement with the Librarian, but the Centre staff cannot be responsible for supervising casual visits to the Library.

The Library comprises of nearly one thousand books and other printed items, available for loan to HBA members together with 120 reference books, which

may only be viewed in the Library. In addition, there are also audio-visual items, periodicals and magazines available for loan to members. The full catalogue is on the HBA website.

The items available in the Library, range from, books dating from before the creation of the Library to very recent research reports and texts supporting BBKA's Modular Examinations; historically important items by Hunter, Cook, Cheshire and Cotton stand alongside more recent 'classics' of Crane, Morse, Showler, Winston, Sawyer and the like add to the expanding list of specialist beekeeping books available to HBA members.

In terms of the use of the Library, it is difficult to quantify exactly how many HBA members are accessing the Library's resources. At present 21 items are on loan but I suspect that most of the items issued are shared with other HBA members at formal or informal training sessions, so the actual number of members benefiting from what the Library has to offer, is likely to be much greater than the recorded figures.

As Librarian, I try to engage with the membership both informally and formally by offering a Library stand or Used Bee Book Stall at local and county wide beekeeping events, and this has been much appreciated. Also, it is worth noting that during the recent periods of isolation there has been an increase in the number of enquiries from the general public regarding the bee keeping history of Hampshire and offering information about former members of HBA and asking for information about the Association. Latterly, because the Library is now situated more 'in the public eye' at the Sustainability Centre, there has been a greater opportunity to raise awareness of the history and current practice of beekeeping in Hampshire and of the role of HBA.

I would like to record my thanks to all the Members of HBA who have supported, and continue to support, 'Their Library', and to the Staff of The Sustainability Centre who have welcomed the Library so whole heartedly to their site. Finally, to those who have not yet visited the Library, I invite you to "Come and See" – I think I can guarantee that every member of HBA, will find something useful and of interest in the HBA Library!

Avril Tillman, HBA Librarian