

High Wycombe and District Beekeepers Association

Registered Charity No. 299638

Chairman: Clive Hill 01494 526557

President: Will Steynor 01494 881205

Secretary: Sheila Borwick 01494 729315 shejont@waitrose.com

Treasurer: Edward West 01494 520874

Swarm Officer: Bill Bendyshe-Brown 07527 798659

Newsletter - April 2008

Diary

Forthcoming Events

- | | | |
|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 19th April | - | BBKA Stoneleigh |
| 25th April | - | Monthly Meeting, Roger Patterson |
| 26th April | - | Woodworking Day |
| 21st-26th July | - | FIBKA Summer Course |
| 30th May | - | Question Night - Environment Centre |

Saturday 19th April. BBKA Stoneleigh Spring Convention

Friday 25th April 19:30 Environment Centre.

Roger Patterson: "Lets Keep Beekeeping Simple". Roger says he will be trying to suit all beekeepers whatever their ability and knowledge. Not easy, and he's expecting to gauge the response from the questions. Roger says "my beekeeping methods are very simple and I have the minimum of equipment. When teaching others I try to get them to do the same, but of course there are the materialistic ones who have to have all the gadgets, and the most expensive at that!"

Saturday 26th April. PrincesRisboroughSchool: WoodWorking Day, led by Scott Rutland. See separate article

Friday May 30th 19:30 Environment Centre. Question Night - Beekeepers Question Time

Recent Event Reports

29th February - Linda Whitby - Hives Save Lives - Africa

Hives Save Lives is a registered charity which believes in providing economic opportunities directly to those who need it most.

Started in 2003, the charity works mainly in Uganda, but has been so successful in its work that they have been asked to provide help to governments in other countries.

Unlike some other charities and aid agencies, Linda Whitby explained that Hives Save Lives works to allow local people to become self-sufficient rather than aid-dependant.

Bee-keeping is an economic activity that takes up limited land area and does not compete with any existing agricultural activity, indeed additional pollination actually serves to enhance the existing agriculture with increases in crops of up to 30%.

In the equatorial regions there are two rainy seasons and 2-3 flows per year from the mainly coffee, tea and citrus crops.

There is a high local demand for honey and propolis as medicine as well as food.

Bee-keeping does not discriminate against age, gender or disability, and helps to cross cultural divides. It is a good tool against deforestation, provides nutrition, aids health and the income helps to combat the urban drift of local people to the big towns.

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Chairman's Chat

Our New Hon Sec

Christine Hazell has now relinquished her post as our Secretary after some three years in that role. I would like to thank Christine on behalf of our members, committee and myself for the large amount of hard work she has put in for the association during that time: and for her skilful re-jigging of the way we operate. Our new secretary is Sheila Borwick, who many of you will know, and who like Christine is a fairly new recruit to beekeeping. Welcome Sheila, we all look forward to working with you, in our happy, healthy and active association.

March Meeting.

Terry Clare came up from Kent (poor thing, it was a 3 hour drive, mainly round the northern part of the M25), to give us a very interesting talk entitled "Is there a best bee?" I'd expected as BIBBA Chairman, that he would be less even handed than he was, about the handling and working properties of the different subspecies of *A. mellifera*: the Caucasian, Carniolan, Linguistica, and North European Black bees, but he has working experience of all the races and put it to good use. *A. m. mellifera* (the black bee) was really his recommendation. During the 'Question & Discussion Time' he was very forthright about the need for careful sourcing and control of the Health, Handling Characteristics, swarminess etc of the bees which we supply to our Beginners. Swarms are cheap, but of uncertain genetics, health, swarminess, and docility: and Terry **was convinced** that we should be starting Beginners with proved nucleus colonies instead. Strong opinions were expressed on both sides of this discussion: particularly about the inherent nature of swarming as THE means of colony reproduction of honeybees.

Terry has set some of us wondering about forming a Queen Rearing Group. BIBBA has found these to be very effective at enthusing and motivating Associations and sub-groups at working to improve the qualities of the bees we **choose to use**, rather than put-up-with and tolerate. Terry is a firm advocate of finding and killing the queen in colonies that don't come up to scratch: and of using Hive Record Cards, with numerical scoring for working traits as being the best, and proven way forward. He has made an offer to return to speak to us again, and help us get

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The charity works by providing hives and equipment to local people but at a cost. Each hive costs about £35. Bee suits are about £12. The equipment is made locally, and this has actually led to the formation of another local industry. At the start, two people were employed building hives. Now 14 people earn a living providing equipment to others.

The charity offers a complete and ongoing training, marketing and support service, unlike many of the other aid programmes. There is a field officer who can be brought in for advice, and who also brings the necessary equipment for honey extraction at harvest time.

Markets for the honey are sought and contacts made with other groups or wholesalers to enable the locals to fully benefit from the economics of their crop – the projects are run to be economically sustainable locally which is why recipients of the equipment are expected to pay back the costs over a number of years. Monies returned can be used to help other people to work their way out of poverty.

Each hive produced is numbered and comes with a log book so that the charity is able to keep track of the success of the hives and of the overall projects.

The hives are Langstroth-type, or a 19 frame long Langstroth. These are preferred over the more traditional types as they are more productive even though they require the honey to be extracted.

The bees, as you may expect, are very aggressive, but are more easily managed using this type of hive than the traditional log hives.

The biggest pests in these areas are ants, but these can be managed with the use of adapted hive stands. Other problem animals are honey badgers and chimpanzees. Varroa, although present, is not a major problem!

Funding for all the projects is by donation. More information can be found at www.hivessavelives.com. It is also possible to donate while shopping on-line, as a number of companies will donate on your behalf if you order from them via www.buy.at/hivessavelives.

Combating poverty through apiculture.

Tim Fountain

28th March Terry Clare – Is their a best bee?

Terry is currently the chairman of BIBBA – Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders' Association.

He started off by admitting that his talk had a contentious title, but carried on to give us his own criteria as a starting point when considering bees.

He also discussed briefly whether the impact of global warming might lead us to need a different bee in the future, and also to say that management of our bees is still more important than breeding: 1. ultimately we shouldn't need swarm control 2. bad management negates good breeding or selection.

Terry's priorities were listed as follows:

Docility – perhaps even more important now with the rise of the urban or sub-urban beekeeper.

Non-swarming – as point 1 above

Hardiness – not all bees thrive in our climate

Disease Resistance - he describes nosema as the "silent killer", and a new version is on its way

Economical – bees that you don't need to keep feeding

Production – Honey is not always the main reason for keeping bees

Terry explained the current thinking on the historical distribution and characteristics of the main sub-species:-

Caucasica – From Georgia rather than Russia as had been believed.

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underway, if we decide to start a Queen Rearing Group. I've attached a Hive Record Card that was recently shown at a meeting of Chalfonts BKS. It is one of many patterns, or you can devise your own, as long as it gives you the aide-memoire you require. This design is reproduced by courtesy of Chris Jackson, Derbyshire BKA.

More News from the Bucks BKA Seminar - March 1st

We now know the Seminar had a surplus of income over expenditure of some £150, and the raffle raised £161 for the BBKA CB Dennis Bee Research Trust. An important part of the day was the awarding of "BBKA 50 Years of Beekeeping Certificates" to three of the Bucks County Senior members: Ken Gorman of North Bucks, and our own Donald Thomson and John Crick. Each Award had a Citation, giving a little glimpse of that person's involvement with beekeeping over the years. Each was fascinating and I'm sure that the framed certificates will be much treasured. Our congratulations to Donald and to John. I wonder if I'll be able to achieve this award? only another 15 years to go!

Beginners Classes update

This year's classes are now well underway, with 32 people booked onto the course. Each evening several of our experienced beekeepers, and some novices, have come to the sessions to chat about beekeeping during tea break (~8:30 – 9:00). The students get a great deal from this informal learning, and it makes them much more likely to take up our interest. From the 'old hands' side of the exchange, it is great fun to meet them, and you only have to chat and give them comments from your own 'real-life' perspective. There are only two of these 'Theory Sessions' left now, but if you can spare a little time, please come along and join in. If the entrance door is shut, key in 7958 to open it. The Dates are: April 8th and 15th. Later, you could get involved with helping, or just joining in, during the practical apiary work sessions.

Our new PC Projector

We have just invested in a new PC Projector, which has already been used on two occasions. Not only is it smaller and very considerably quieter than our previous one, but also **much** brighter too - so at last the audience can see photographs clearly. Many thanks to Stan Grierson, and Kenn Shearer, who gave considerable help as we decided what to buy.

Swarms 2008

Bill B-B's article on the HWBKA plans for Swarm Collection in the coming season was published last month. Please be prepared to help with the tasks to help spread the workload. We plan to do some training sessions on Swarm Collection. Watch the newsletter for further details.

The Environment Centre Observation Hive

The hive is still going, following the mishap to the queen. The colony set to and raised an emergency queen cell - in February! It gave the centre's volunteers a whole new topic to talk to the visitors: and has also been a 'hot topic' in a BFP article. Once the weather allows active beekeeping the colony will be replaced and it will be possible to have a marked queen again.

Honey Jar Bulk Purchase

Don't forget to order sufficient honey jars, so you are fully prepared for your honey crop. Please see the article in the February and March Newsletters by Phil Wiggins, and contact him before his April 12th cut off date.

Special Honey Jar Labels

Ron White is investigating the economics of joint commissioning the printing of self-designed honey jar labels. By the sound of things, this could prove an excellent way of getting individualised labels at great prices. Ron already has several people showing interest: so if you'd like to join in, get in touch with him ASAP. Contact details are elsewhere in this Newsletter.

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This explained why these bees do not cope well with our winters.

Terry described this bee as “cuddly”. Very gentle It has a very long tongue which allows it to reach the parts that other bees can’t reach!

It makes heavy use of propolis, is prone to suffer from nosema and is prone to drifting if hives are placed in a line. Suitable for a small to medium size hive.

Terry pointed out that putting them in a big hive won’t stop swarming, as the larger area is filled with stores, which tend to go unused and therefore go hard, thus rendering a big hive back to a medium hive!

Carnica (Carniola) – From Germany/central Europe. Here, all the spring flowers come out at the same time which is why this bee wakes up with a bang!

They are quiet and gentle which allowed Terry, in his earlier beekeeping career, to work these bees while stripped to the waist.

They have a rapid spring build-up and so are very prone to swarming. It is recommended to replace queens every year.

They may have some resistance to foul brood, do not drift and are suitable for a medium hive.

Ligustica – From Italy, although now better know from New Zealand.

Most popular sub-species, adapted to the mild, wet winters of the Med.

Requires large winter stores and lays heavily into late winter/early spring.

Suffers from a slow spring build-up and requires heavy feeding. Swarms easily, but is docile, uses little propolis, but tends to drift and rob other hives.

May suffer more from nosema and acarine.

Suitable for a large to very large hive and is an excellent race for a skilled beekeeper with plenty of time in the summer, but is not recommended for a weekend beekeeper.

Mellifera – Our native race, derived from the Iberica bees of south-western Europe

Some non-selected strains can be defensive, especially when crossed with other strains, otherwise they are gentle.

Very winter hardy, and seem to need minimum winter preparation.

In winter, the small fist-size cluster needs minimal stores.

Easily stimulated to produce a strong colony in April, they will work early morning to late evening unlike some.

They will fly at 6C rather than the usual 10C, and also in wind and light rain

Small colonies, does not swarm readily.

Small to medium hive – the ideal hobbyist bee

Other races of bee that Terry talked about included:-

Buckfast/Greek crosses – prolific and easy to handle (until crossed with local bees!)

Hybrids – bees crossed with closely related strains or different strains of the same bloodline.

Mongrels – “Heinz 57” variety – these give you no idea of their future progeny

Following the tea break, Terry discussed basic queen rearing methods and the Q&A session that followed ended with a lively “discussion” on the merits of swarming – Terry suggested that bees had been bred to swarm more, as early beekeepers could not extract honey or increase colonies without use of swarms and that this had no place in modern beekeeping. Some members of the audience “disagreed”!

Tim Fountain

HWBKA Website - link to HSL-A

We’ve now had 1071 separate direct visitors to our HWBKA website. And we were so impressed with what Linda Whitby told us about Hives Save Lives – Africa at our February Meeting, that we have installed a link to the HSL-A website on the HWBKA one.

Stoneleigh Bee Convention

This Convention is a wonderful day out – and if you’ve not been before, will greatly expand your beekeeping horizons. However, it is an exceptionally busy place and people who tire easily would find it too much. See BBKA News, Beecraft, or www.britishbeekeepers.com for further details. We are expecting to be arranging lifts for some of the beginners: so if you need a lift, come along to the teabreak chat session at the last of the beginners classes, on the 15th April.

‘Frame of Honey’ Competition – 2008. Run honey too?

John Crick tells me we’ve had some 18 entries to the competition so far. See his article about it for further information. He’s also suggested that we could consider holding a ‘Blacked-out jar of Honey’ Competition too. Further details will be in May Newsletter.

Clive Hill

Honey Jars for the 2008

Just a reminder about ordering your honey jars for the coming season which will be with us all too soon.

Please note:- In case you are uncertain about the number of your hives that have successfully come through the winter

Standard 1 Ib Honey Jars with Metal lids
£30.30 per gross

Standard 1 !b Honey Jars with Plastic lids
£31.93 per gross

For further product availability see the February newsletter

Last opportunity to order

Closing Date April 6th

Phil Wiggins

01628 482110 or philwiggins@tiscali.co.uk

HONEY JAR LABELS

Your labels printed to your own design or photo
Printed in four colours by a commercial printer

Price depends on how many ordered to print
but would range from 4p each down to 2p each

If anyone is interested in sharing
a print run with me

please contact , Ron White

on 01494 712640 for more details.

Seasonal Tips and Reminders April 2008

- Keep a close eye on the level of stores
- Remove Mouse Guard & adjust entrance size.
- Provide water close to the hives – but not under the normal flight path.
- Monitor the daily Varroa mite drop rate.
- Make first brood nest checks – Care: don't chill the bees!
- Keep an eye on alighting board activity.
- White bee pupae there - a sign of brood killed by chilling.
- Get your comb replacement policy organized.
- Start your hive records.

I've much to tell you, because April is the month which sets trends that last the season right through: and it should also be the end of 'Winter'. I've been lucky, and my colonies have all come through OK ... so far! We've heard reports of some colony losses, but not at a disastrous level. The prolonged cold weather has meant that colonies have probably consumed a higher than normal amount of their stores. The weather forecasters are predicting a return to cold weather again this weekend - so do make sure you keep an eye on the colonies and if in doubt, give them a quick feed. (See below for details.)

On good weather days my bees are pretty active and have been collecting water from the wet gravel tray I keep in the apiary. This week I've put the first super on the strong colonies: and a good many beekeepers will already have supers on now: but this will be colony strength dependent, and location dependent.

After a reasonably wet winter the local chalk streams are flowing well; so we ought to be at low risk of a drought this summer. In the last month, we've had a real mixture of weather; a few really warm days, but lots of cold ones in between. Looking back at my notes from April last year, I would say we are about a month behind that very early spring of 2007 and so it's arrival is still a bit tentative. In terms of bee-forage, the Crocuses and Hazel are spent; Daffodils, Prunus and Cherry-Plum going over, as are many Sallow bushes: and the Blackthorn now in flower. Bumblebee queens are nest searching, although this will continue for some weeks yet: and *B. terrestris* is much the commonest species.

If you haven't done it yet, your first beekeeping job will be to remove the mouse guard, then adjust the entrance to an appropriate size. Also remove any matchsticks you used to prop open the crownboard for ventilation. Check that the Varroa Screen Floor is properly clear, to let the mites drop. Put the screen board in to make a check for level of Varroa infestation by natural mite drop down. Follow the guidance given in the DEFRA booklet 'Managing Varroa' PB10859 (it has a large picture of a single Varroa mite on the cover). The NBU Beebase database is full of information on this and many other topics. Go to <https://secure.csl.gov.uk/beebase/> Hopefully mite levels will again be low in the colonies this spring. We now expect our beekeepers to use Integrated Pest Control, to maintain mite populations at manageable levels with minimal use of control chemicals: and open mesh floors are now an essential part of Varroa control. So are frames with removable drone brood areas.

Although I know some people have inspected their colonies in March, on one of those scattered warm days, April is the usual time that really active beekeeping gets going.... weather and temperature permitting. But, at a time of very variable weather,

what does this mean? The late Harold Aplin, who kept bees for 60 years or more, used to say "Wait until you can be comfortable outdoors in rolled up shirt sleeves". His underlying meaning is that the beekeeper should be able to sense rapid temperature change – and it's consequences.

Think of things from the bees' viewpoint: there you are in a large house, with no central heating, and it gets pretty cold most nights. You're just managing to keep warm if you stay quite close to each other; and if it gets cold, you huddle together. Then some bright spark comes and takes the roof off – so all your meagre heat reserves whiz up into the sky that is not global warming, its global freezing! So work fast, keep the colony open for just a short time, and so minimise the risk of chilling brood due to heat loss. Chilled brood = colony hold-back. (Waste due to dead bees + food to produce them + fewer new bees to help grow the colony: so longer to get to a number strength at which honey surpluses can be achieved.) A sure sign of chilling is the presence of white bee pupae, or bits of them at the hive entrance, or on the alighting board – but a little of this can occur naturally.

When you make a brood chamber examination for the first time, limit yourself to a check on about five frames. Keep your eye out for the queen. With a small brood nest you're much more likely to see her. (So it could be a good time to mark the queen – she'll be much easier to spot afterwards.) Look also for eggs, larvae, and the presence of stores. The overall hive weight alone is not enough, since brood weighs nearly as much as stores. If the colony seems low on stored honey (at the tops of frames, and on the outer combs) feed them some sugar syrup. At this time of year the balance of adult bees to brood is very one-sided, and they can't bring nectar back to the hive as fast as they use it.

Get planning your comb replacement activities, because clean comb means healthier more productive bees. As a minimum, remove about three of the old brood frames, and replace them either with new drawn comb, or more likely with new frames of worker foundation. Put these at the side of the broodnest, with a stores comb outside them. Be careful not to split the brood area.

Even better, but much more risky in changeable weather, do a complete comb change: by putting a brood box of foundation over the brood chamber, then feed the bees copiously. After one week the bees should have drawn at least some of the foundation, and the queen will be up there laying. (Check!) Now you have a dilemma: save the brood in the old frames, or scrap it as part of the IPM Varroa control.

To save it, but keep the varroa, put a queen excluder under the new box, to trap the queen there. After another two to three weeks, all the brood in the original box will have hatched, so that box must be removed. Shake any adult bees off the combs back into the colony. Then scrap these old combs. Do it soon, because if you forget them wax moth is sure to get in! Thorns are now promoting Steamer units which can be used to recover the wax.

If you scrap the old frames with their brood, you'll greatly reduce the Varroa: but knock back colony strength appreciably – however, with a good late spring nectar flow, you may get some honey; and in any case the consequent major reduction in Nosema etc will mean that colony will be much stronger for the main summer nectar flow.

As soon as the broodnest starts to expand towards the outer combs, put on a queen excluder, and a first super above it. If the weather is changeable, put the super over a sheet of newspaper.

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Prick a few holes in it to help the bees chew it away so they can occupy the extra space as soon as they need it. This super will preferably have mainly drawn comb; and is added not only to give honey storage space, but also to cut congestion, and make bee-room in the brood chamber. If you need to put on some frames with foundation, put them at the centre of the box.

Take care when handling frames of drawn comb in cold conditions, since beeswax is then very fragile. When you start to get stored supers and frames back into use, it's important to check them over and to cull those with old or badly shaped comb. It's also a good time to check that the frame runners, or castellations are positioned correctly in the box. The frames should all align correctly and have the correct bee-space below (for bottom bee-space), or above (for top bee-space) the frames.

April is the month when population dynamics have huge effects on a colony. Once things really start, we're likely to get a sudden

rush of bee forage - with flows of nectar and pollen. An active colony in April will be foraging hard for pollen, water and nectar just as soon as it is available. We need continuing warm weather to get the maximum effect, but expect a sequence of useful flowers from Sallow and Blackthorn, Dandelion and trees like Cherry and Plum, then Sycamore and Horsechestnut. At the hive entrance, look out for Sallow (chrome yellow) Dandelion pollen (orange yellow) and greenish pollen from trees like Sycamore. Brick red pollen will be from Horse Chestnut, although it's usually May before that is in flower. The oilseed rape is just starting to colour-up, so I expect it will be at least mid month, perhaps May, before a rape nectar flow starts.

Then, as the first super starts to fill with honey, you'll smell the aroma from the nectar as the bees fan at the entrance A lovely time to sit beside a hive, listen, watch, relax and wonder.

Clive Hill

Comb for Extraction Competition

I have a confession to make. Like many other members I have no interest in spending many hours of valuable time in preparing entries for most classes in a honey show. These are the days when we are used to 'instant' activities and there are only two classes which appeal to me - the 'black' jar and the comb for extraction.

In a black jar class the criteria are taste and aroma, there is no need for countless filtrations or super accuracy in label positioning. It concentrates on good, wholesome honey for the customer.

Our 'comb for extraction' competition is intended to be a light hearted attempt at being master of our bees and thus is doomed to failure. At extraction time it is a wonderful feeling to lift up super frames which have been drawn out exactly as described in our books, full to the brim with excellent honey and sealed off without blemish. You feel very proud to handle such a product, but let's face it - the bees deserve all of the credit.

We will issue you with a set of woodwork to assemble a standard National, WBC frame and will validate the top bar with an entry number. If you use a non-standard frame i.e. Smith, Langstroth, Dadant etc. you must supply the frame and bring along the top bar to be validated. You will pay a £1.00 entrance fee.

At a determined date in September time we will ask you to bring along your completed frame for competitive judging and a prize

giving. Your frame may be transported in a display case or a plastic bag and our stewards will arrange for displaying - no names or further entry identification. Our inscrutable judge will only favour him/herself.

There can be no selection of your best entry - all responsibility rests with your own dear bees - you are purely the transporter.

Tip

Select your most promising colony - it could well be a swarm (Don't worry if you only have one colony - after all, you only have one entry.)

Mark the super so that you know where to find it!!

Place the frame in the centre of the second super.

Ideally start it off at the commencement of a honey flow and remove it as soon as it is completed. (That avoids staining from dirty feet)

If there is any brace comb you can cheat by carefully trimming off and putting back on the hive overnight for drying off.

Use unwired foundation since your frame will not be returned in time for extraction. You can use it for cut comb or chunk honey.

You can only fail if you forget to place the comb in the colony. No excuses now, we are looking for everyone to enter. Frames will be available at our March, April and May monthly meetings.

John Crick

Send contributions to

newsletter@hwbka.co.uk

The website can be visited at

www.hwbka.co.uk

If for any reason your copy of the Newsletter doesn't arrive do remember that it can be obtained from the website very soon after publication

usually around the 5th of the month

**For All Your Beekeeping
Equipment and Supplies**
contact our local Thornes agent

John Parslow
Bailiffs Cottage, Bledlow, Aylesbury

Tel: 01844 344948

Flat pack Construction Day

This year's woodworking day will be held at Princes Risborough Secondary School,
Merton Road, Princes Risborough, Bucks. HP27 0DT

**On Saturday 26th April (the weekend after Stoneleigh)
9am till 4pm**

Bring along with you,

Packed lunch,

What you would like to build.

Tools and materials

(Hammer, nails, glue, screws, screwdriver, etc).
There will be limited tools available at the venue

No electric power tools are allowed

For Beginners, Help and advice are on hand.

Hot and cold Refreshments will be provided.

There will be a small charge of £5.00 per person to cover the cost of the hire of the venue.

If you are interested in purchasing flat pack varroa floors and nuc boxes please let
Scott know by 21st March Latest.

For more information and to reserve a place

Please contact Scott Rutland on

scott@srutland.freeserve.co.uk

01494717032

07748788241

The HWBKA website can be visited at

www.hwbka.co.uk

If for any reason your copy of the Newsletter
doesn't arrive do remember that it can be obtained
from the website very soon after publication
usually around the 5th of the month

Items for publication will be accepted as hard copies (typed,
printed or handwritten) as long as they are totally legible.
Normally the closing time for material will be 7am on the 4th
of the month. Send them (preferably unfolded) to:

Newsletter, 22 Claremont Gardens, Marlow, SL7 1BS.

E-mails (**without attachments**) can be sent to:

newsletter@hwbka.co.uk

Website: www.hwbka.co.uk

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