



Editorial

By the time you receive this journal we will be almost a quarter way through 2012. A New Year is a time when we look both forward and back, not just to immediate events but to past or forthcoming anniversaries.

To most beekeepers today a year ending with a 2 must almost certainly be associated with a Varroa anniversary for forty years ago, 1972, was when the mite manifested itself in Germany and south Eastern Europe and twenty years later, 1992, in Britain. Since then nearly all beekeeping countries around the world have waited in dread for its inevitable arrival. It is extremely rare that one single phenomenon changes completely and internationally the whole ethos of beekeeping and the management of bees. The only other such occurrence that comes to mind is the introduction of the moveable frame hive.

This event is credited to the Reverend Lorenzo Lorraine Langstroth. As he developed his interest in bees he acquired two colonies in wooden box hives together with some books including Edward Bevan's "*The Honey Bee*" and a leaf observation hive of the type used by Francois Huber when making his records for *Nouvelles observations sur les abeilles* published in 1792 (220 years ago this year). Langstroth set about creating his hive. He obtained the patent for it on 5th October 1852, 160 years ago, and published his findings in 1853 thereby introducing the world to the Langstroth Hive. The influence of Samuel Wagner, the might of the Dadant beekeeping and publication dynasty, the international use of the English language all combined to make this an almost indisputable landmark event.

However, moveable frame hives were not new. We can go back to another anniversary in 1682, 330 years ago, when Wheler published a full description of the top bar hives and their methods of management that he and Spon had found being used in Greece in 1675/76. Wheler reported that the bees fastened their combs along the sticks so that individual combs could be taken out intact. If this was indeed the case then perhaps more by luck than judgement the Greeks must have hit upon the exact natural spacing of the combs. Using these hives skilled beekeepers could not only remove, with comparative ease, comb from the hive they could exercise basic management manipulations.

In Russia twigs, on which the bees could attach their combs, had sometimes been placed across the tops of vertical

log hives. None of this was done in any rational way until Ukrainian, Peter Prokopovich (1775 - 1850) took up beekeeping in 1800 and by 1808 he had 580 hives. He kept detailed notes of his beekeeping and even acquired his own printing equipment to publish his findings but was not allowed to do so under the Tsarist regime. However, he did write in Russian beekeeping journals and in 1841 an article describing his 1814 design for a hive did get translated into French and German and had wide circulation.

The hive had three vertical compartments each with its own door at the back like the traditional log hives. Bees built brood comb in the lower two compartments without bars or frames. There were wooden frames in the upper compartment and Prokopovich obviously understood the requirements for spacing between combs but they were rather too close to the walls and so became attached there by the bees necessitating some cutting out. It is estimated that about 10,000 of these hives were made, probably making it the first truly commercial beehive.

Johannes Dzierzon (1811 – 1906) was a pastor in Silesia (the western part of modern day Poland). He would have been literate in both Polish and German but not English, which was the language of many burgeoning bee journals in the latter half of the 19th Century. Nevertheless in Eastern Europe he became known, and is still hailed, as the father of modern beekeeping. He was aware of Prokopovich's hive and devised his own tall hives made from wooden boards and worked from the back. In the 1840s he published (in German) descriptions of such hives fitted with one or more tiers of moveable frames. He dictated that the top bar must be 1.5 inches (38 cm) wide and showed great awareness for the need to have appropriate bee spaces. In 1850 or 1851 Samuel Wagner, in the USA, made a translation of Dzierzon's book. Before publishing it he visited the Reverend Langstroth in Philadelphia and encouraged him to write up and publish his own methods in place of the translation of Dzierzon's book – the rest, as they say, is history.

A belated Happy New Year to you all.

Richard Jones
Editor