

# Albert Spragg: Clocking up One Hundred

Peter Seagrave, Chairman, Wokingham Beekeepers' Association

*We congratulate a remarkable beekeeper on his one-hundredth birthday*

**A PLAQUE commemorating his dedication to beekeepers throughout the region has been presented to Albert Spragg by Wokingham Beekeepers' Association on the occasion of his one-hundredth birthday. He also received a 'bee friendly' window box from the Federation of Berkshire Beekeepers' Associations.**

Albert Spragg was born on 1 April 1908 to strict parents, at Holly Green, Worcestershire. His first gardening job was in 1922 for two old ladies who owned about two acres at Holly House, Holly Green. This was his first encounter with beekeeping. He found some skeps under a sheet of corrugated iron in a quiet corner of the garden, but there were no bees, the Isle of White disease decimating colonies at that time. Later he found six tall jars of candied honey in the stables. He was told it had gone bad and to bury them in the garden. He says had he known then it was simply granulated, and good food, he would have kept it. It would be some years later when Bert was re-introduced to bees.

## REQUEENED TWICE

Bert was married three times or, as he mischievously says, he requeened twice! He moved to Lasborough near Tetbury on the Cotswolds as the Head Gardener, because this position came with a stone cottage. When war broke out, he was promoted to Foreman. They had to plough up 300 acres of sheep grazing land for wheat to support the war effort. When extra labour was needed, Bert was allocated Land Girls and also Italian Prisoners of War from a nearby camp.

## WORKING FOR SIR WILLIAM

His wife was prone to ill health and died when she was 38, soon after they had moved to Filkins, Oxfordshire where Bert was Head Gardener for Sir William Goodenough, Chairman of Barclays Bank. On his very first day, Her Ladyship announced, quite casually, that they had beehives and tending them would be Bert's responsibility. It was a case of learning quickly and Bert got most of his first steps in beekeeping from FS Stewart's *Beekeeping Practice*.

Bert married for the second time to a local Filkins' girl, Anne Scriven, and continued to live happily at the Lodge, Filkins Hall, working for Sir William. However, this was to be a tragic time. Anne died in hospital, after a routine operation and Bert's daughter was sent to Bristol, temporarily, to live with his brother John's family. Then, soon after, Sir William fell from his horse while hunting and died several days later. It was not long before Her Ladyship summoned Bert to tell him she could no longer afford a gardener, even though his wage was just a few shillings above the farm labourer's rate of £2 per week.



Albert Spragg (centre) receives his gifts from (l to r) Rosemary Bayliss, Michael Blackburn, Bert's daughter Dorin, Hazel Blackburn and Peter Seagrave

Bert moved to Long Ashton, Somerset, to be near to his daughter. By now bees were an established part of his life. He went to beekeeping classes at Clevedon and joined the small beekeepers' association there.

## WAS IT LEAP YEAR?

During the long years on his own, Bert kept contact with Freda Hobbs, a dear friend of his second wife. Bert always was a very sprightly, charming and dapper man. In time, perhaps not surprisingly, Freda became Bert's third wife, but this time she asked him to marry her! In 1962, they settled into a bungalow on London Road, Wokingham. He also acquired the first bees he had ever owned himself.

He became Association Apiarist and thus started his long and loyal service to the beekeepers of Wokingham. With his friends, Frank Napper and George Hawthorne, Bert was very much involved in rebuilding the splendid Victorian octagonal Bee House in the grounds of Berkshire College of Agriculture, Burchetts Green.

Bert took the position of Association Apiarist very seriously. He organised regular beekeeping demonstrations on a Sunday morning and collected and sold the honey, which was always a major source of income to the Association. In 1986, he was appointed Honorary President – and still is today.

## BERT'S ADVICE

Bert is now living happily at Warren Lodge Care Home in Finchampstead, Berkshire. When asked the secret for living to 100, his advice is to work hard and have a little bit of honey on your cornflakes or toast every day.

We wish Bert a very happy centenary year. ☘