

## **Edinburgh & Midlothian Beekeepers and the Royal Highland Show**

The late George Smith, East of Scotland Beekeeping Advisor, who worked out of Bush House Midlothian, and as nearest full time member shouldered most of the responsibility for the organisation of beekeeping in all its aspects at the Royal Highland Show throughout Scotland. When the RHS gained a permanent show ground at Ingliston he for many years organised the show with the help of the Edinburgh & Midlothian Beekeepers' Association. The members assisted by running the small retail stall, providing two stewards, and giving valuable advice and assistance to visiting beekeepers. Mr & Mrs Fairley and Mr & Mrs McLean provided almost non-stop support during the shows. A visit to the 'Honey Tent' was not complete without the purchase of some Mary McLean's wonderful honey fudge!

During the fifties and early sixties Edinburgh & Midlothian Beekeepers shared premises at the Highland Show with the butter and cheese exhibitors. The accommodation was limited but EMBA members managed to maintain a full display of honey and wax classes, a retail stall, a small table to advertise and recruit SBA members, and at least one observation hive. The Steven sisters for many years looked after the SBA show stand for Bob Brown the then SBA Publicity Convener. The show material was comfortably carried in a suitcase. Una Robertson was one of the leaders of a large number of EMBA members who put in many long hours to make the stall an annual success and a fertile recruiting ground for both local and SBA members.

By the late sixties it was obvious that the accommodation was insufficient, and EMBA members had a nomadic existence for a number of years – as did the appliance dealer Steele and Brodie who were usually in the neighbouring tent.

George Smith by this time had retired and Ian Will, and some years later Bob Marks, took on the responsibility of the 'Honey Tent' which was growing by the year. When Steel and Brodie retired the beekeeping dealer Bob Simpson from Cupar stepped in and the EMBA shared a marquee with him until his eventual retirement.

In 2002 the Royal Highland Show and the Scottish Beekeepers' Association saw the opportunity to further education in beekeeping and a large marquee was allocated to the SBA for the purpose, with the SBA Shows Convener assuming responsibility for the again enlarged marquee. EMBA members still provide active support and stewards for the show, and the links forged by the EMBA and RHS are still evident today.

To give some idea of the expansion over the years we have progressed from a small building and tents to one of the largest marquees on the best site at Ingliston. Stewards have increased from two to over twenty per day. The original SBA stall carried in a suitcase now requires a 5 cwt van and the 'Honey Tent' is the most popular children's venue at the show (RHS Marketing Survey). Many youngsters who make a visit with their school on the Friday bring their parents along on the Sunday with the prospect of making yet another beeswax candle.

The 'Honey Tent' is an international meeting place for beekeepers from all over the world, and every year there are visitors from the Americas, India, Africa, and the EU. Each year the SBA meet with the RHS officials in January to hammer out the educational theme for the year and to ensure that there is a mutual support for all beekeeping activities.

The Royal Highland Show is a show case for Scottish Honey and Scottish Beekeepers, and the Edinburgh and Midlothian Beekeepers' Association can be very proud that their early initiative the 'Honey Show' has grown to its present proportions.

Iain F. Steven, Scottish Beekeepers' Association Coordinator, December 2008