

The "Honey Home" National hive

Up to the 1970's and notwithstanding its vulnerability to rot, pest and disease, most beekeepers considered that wood was the only material suitable for making hives, with Western Red Cedar being the material of first choice. At that time, Neville Dearden was researching the possibility of a hive made from material that was dimensionally stable, of consistent quality, lightweight, easily sterilisable, vermin proof, and, of course, totally accepted by honey bees.

Working with ICI Chemicals and a plastics fabrication company based in South Yorkshire, Neville applied for what is believed to be the first patent for a "plastic" hive – soon to be named the "Honey Home". At that time the material used, "integral skinned polyurethane foam", was new technology, though now it is used in a vast range of products from car dash boards to wall protection for barns and more. It consists of a tough outer skin which surrounds very lightweight high insulation value foam. This "sandwich" makes the material very strong, light, stable and, unlike polystyrene, it withstands hive tool levering very well indeed.

The Complete Specification of the patent was filed as, "Improvements in or relating to Bee-Hives" under number 35554/74 by Hulse and Co, Chartered Patent Agents. These were filed on 13th August 1974 and rightly name the inventor as "Neville Dearden". The specification covers both top and bottom bee spaced hives though only bottom bee spaced were ever made.

During the development stage, the opinion of Dr Colin G Butler, then head of the research station at Rothamsted, (the lead organisation for matters apicultural in the UK at that time) was sought. Dr Butler, an expert beekeeper in his own right, was responsible for many bee related discoveries including the existence of "Queen substance". Although an advocate of the wooden hive, Dr Butler was enthusiastic about the Honey Home and received one of the first production units at Rothamsted.

All this research and opinion seeking culminated in the Honey Home being presented with the National Honey Show's prestigious award of the "Best invention in Beekeeping" in the mid-70s!

Initially the Honey Home hive was not greatly favoured by many beekeepers, as it was not made from wood, but within a few months several beekeepers were using one or two Honey Homes experimentally alongside their wooden counterparts. The hives were much lighter and met all the claimed criteria, as they could easily be chemically sterilised and had no joints or gaps into which unwanted organisms could hide.

As varroa was not a problem then, the floors were solid and a complete Honey Home hive consisted of a floor, brood chamber, two supers and a roof. All dimensions were to the then British Standard. No crown boards or entrance blocks were produced, as the hive accepted wooden versions of these, which were cheaper than if made from the plastic used for the main hive components.

Honey Homes can be successfully painted and several are known to be still in use after 40 years! (There is one in use at the BBKA apiary at Stoneleigh in 2015 - see photo below).

Initial versions did have one problem in that the roofs warped (see photo below). This did not affect their functionality, but the distortion showed and was due to differential stresses in the roof section, a problem that was overcome in later manufacturing.

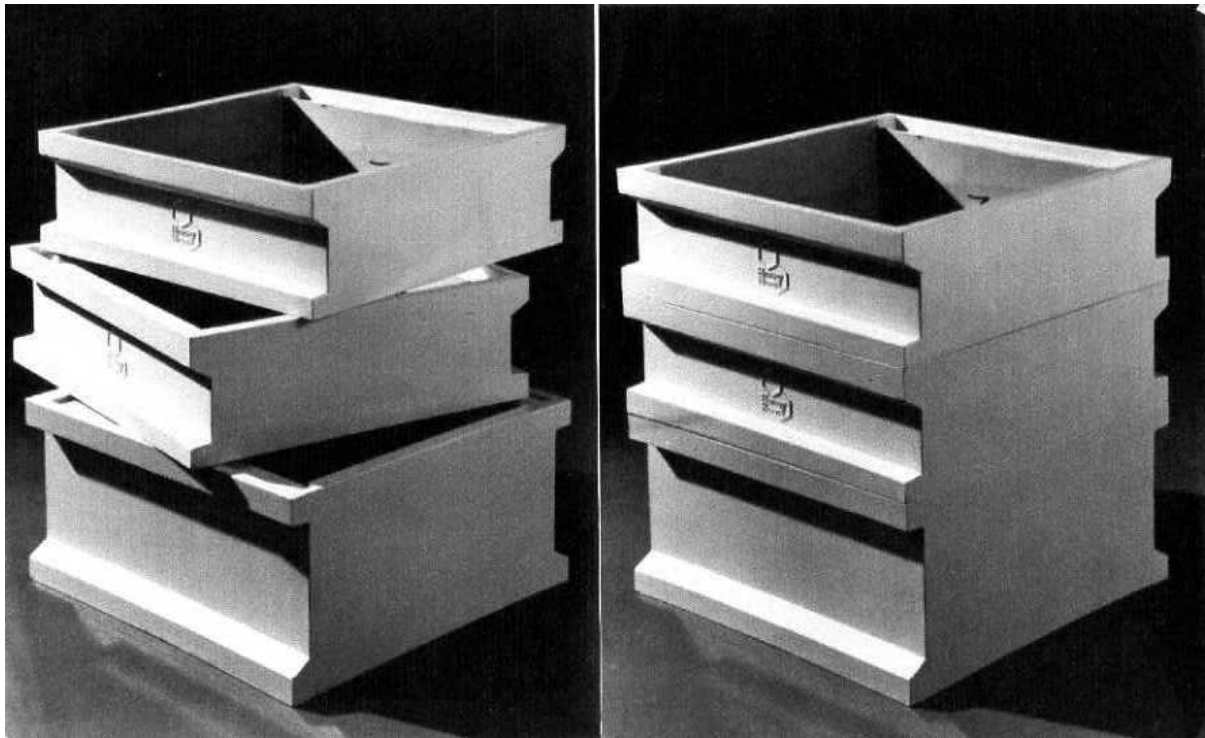
Honey Home was applauded in 2014 for the accuracy of its bee spacing by Adrian Waring NDB in an article published in Bee Craft (Page 35 column 4. August 2014) in which he states:

"I worked for a while as assistant to the Beekeeping Advisor for the North of Scotland. This gentleman, Bernhard Möbus, had one polyurethane hive of the British Standard type, made by a company called "Honey Home". The horizontal bee space in this hive was perfect. There was never any brace comb built there."

The dimensional stability of the material from which Honey Home was made rendered this accuracy possible, whatever the temperature, weather and humidity.

The manufacturer of the Honey Home closed down in the late 70s and all the moulds and most of the manufacturing experience was regrettably lost.

Neville Dearden. 24th November 2015.



Above: Original photographs of production Honey Home hives

Left: Prototype of Honey Home. Note the wooden floor, super and roof

Photo credits: Neville Dearden



Honey Home brood box in use at the BBKA apiary Stoneleigh, Warwickshire. May 2015.
This shows the compatibility with wooden floor and super

Photo credit: Roger Patterson.



Honey Home brood box and two supers. These were sold at the West Sussex BKA Auction in 2014 by auctioneer Roger Patterson. These had been painted and were still in very good condition.

Note the slight woodpecker damage under the logo on the brood box.

Photo credit: Roger Patterson.





Above two photo's.

Honey Home brood box and two supers. These were sold at the West Sussex BKA Auction in 2015 by auctioneer Roger Patterson. These had been painted and were showing signs they had been well used, but still in very good condition, despite being 40 years old.

Note the distortion of the roof mentioned by Neville Dearden in the text above.

Photo credits: Roger Patterson.

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