



## News from the History Group Research Team .....

Whilst I was looking through the 1841 Tithe Map, I especially noticed how many of the farms and homes within the centre of St. Tudy had orchards. I used to keep bees, so my thoughts went straight to having bees to pollinate these.

In England beekeeping was carried out from pre-Roman times, and probably introduced from continental Europe into eastern England then spreading west from there. Anglo-Saxon documents make reference to beeswax, honey and mead, including the use of honey to pay rents and other dues. Large trees were hollowed out, and beekeepers would cut out small sections of the tree to make protective wood panels with flight entrances for the bees, for easy access. In return, this provided protection from bad weather and predators for the bees. It was also common for the tops of the trees to be cut off in attempts to reduce the height and thicken their trunks, so it was possible to carve out more artificial cavities in the trees. The "bee forests" were usually owned by the Church or aristocracy. The Domesday Book of 1086, contains several hundred entries about honey, showing that beekeeping was widespread in England, so why not here in St. Tudy, possibly at Polrode, Tinten, Lamellen and Trewen which are named in the Domesday Book. The bees that were kept there probably would have been our own native bee to Cornwall which are appropriately black and white, like St. Piran's flag!

As the "bee forests" were very time consuming, other methods developed like keeping bees in log hives and skeps which gave the benefit of being able to move them around. Then came Bee Boles, where a skep was placed in a recess in a wall. They were often erected in south or south east facing walls near orchards and gardens to protect them from wind and rain. We have a very rare survival of bee boles in St. Tudy at Ian Whitehouse's home at Fradds Meadow dating from mid 19c. Ian put bee bricks into the cob walls of Fradds when he had them renovated recently. An Ordnance Survey map of the centre of St. Tudy from 1880, shows various properties with orchards, one of which is the aptly named "Little Orchard", also Hill View, the Pub and a few fruit trees at Sparehill.

In Victorian times, they did what all Victorians did, and tried to maximise output from the hives and developed the Langstroth Hive. However, in the 1920's, most of Britain's native been population was wiped out by the deadly Isle of White disease, but luckily native bees still survive in small pockets in Cornwall, and efforts are being made to breed from these stocks. The Cornish honey bee is actually a variant of the British Black Bee, but importantly they have slight evolutionary adaptations which mean they are naturally better adapted to our Cornish climate.

It is interesting to see that one of the first methods of beekeeping by the Anglo-Saxons has now come back into fashion in the modern day guise of the "top bar hive", which replicates a hollowed out trunk of a tree. This method is less stressful on the bees than the Victorian hives, you may have seen Monty Don using this type of hive.

Bees were a part of St. Tudy life in the past. Thanks to beekeepers like Rob, who keeps his bees in Top Bar Hives, they are still at Sparehill today and are here in St. Tudy for the future!

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