



THE APIARY

THAT WE DIDN'T HAVE TO BUILD.

"I hope the bees appreciate it!" said Kev, as we put the tools away. Andy transferred the active hives into place a few days after we had taken the main photo. Jo and June are planting climbing jasmine at the base of the lattice to form a 'green wall' which will break the force of the strong, north wind and give the bees a nearby source of food. The hives have plenty of space for 'supers' to go on top of them as the bee colonies grow... "So what," you may ask, "is the point of all that?"

It's a fair question. We could have bought timber down at B&Q, poured a bit of concrete into the ground and banged a similar structure together in four weeks. Why spend four months on something we could have done more quickly and easily? The answer is simple: because we didn't have to. There are some things in life you have to start before you fully understand why you are doing them. I am told that marriage is like that and I know it holds true for the consecrated life too. It also applies to the way we built the apiary.

Work on consolidating a site for the bee equipment began in July and we pegged out the apiary's foundations in mid-August; but it was not until September that (under the government's rural affairs scheme) HOD finalised an agreement to use 15 acres of the community's land to grow pollinating flowers and 30 acres for wildflowers. That was when I discovered that the world's bee population has a problem. Because of a combination of monoculture, pesticides, disease and climate change, the number of bees in this country has declined by 30% to 40%; and as honey bees are a vital link in our food chain, we need to support them. Two months into the process, an apiary turned out to be a symbol of God providing just what the world needs.

FROM THE GROUND UP



But that doesn't fully answer the question. Derek (the builder) quoted Tom a figure of £750 for the job of constructing the shelter. His work would have been just as supportive to the bees and would have gone up faster and with much less effort than ours. Why not spend the money and save our strength?

Save our strength - for what? Building the way we did was a prophetic action, an act of faith that *together we have what we need for the tasks God sets before us*. 'Not by **money**, might or power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord (cf. Zechariah 4:6.) How often do we hear thoughts in our minds telling us that we can't do such-and-such a mission because we don't have people, finances, ability or time? Come on, admit it! You have had thoughts like that! They need to be thrown down at the feet of the Lord-our-Enabler. Building the way we did was slow and sometimes hard, but it brought with it several things which would not have come about the quick and easy way...

The first was the happy rediscovery of all the things which wise HODites had stored away in the past 'because they will be useful one day'. The concrete slabs we used to support the posts, the roofing tiles which formed the central walkway, the bags of sand or gravel lying around various parts of the property, lengths of wood carefully stored for a rainy day, and the roof itself, which had been neatly perched on top of the container down at the barn. It was all there!

Second was the pleasure of seeing old things in a new way. Knowing about the tree disease called 'ash dieback' and seeing dead ash trees in the hedgerows at the bottom of the track would not fill anyone's heart with joy; but seeing those bare trunks as a resource for the apiary would. Six trunks provided us with most of the material we needed, and the lives of six living trees were spared. It was the same with the gravel for the foundations. Simply noticing what God had laid beneath our feet every time we crossed the bridge over the stream was like a revelation. Free gravel from HOD's own river bed.

FROM THE TREES DOWN

Third was the fellowship. That was amazing. So many people turned up to work on the project just as the need arose that you would have to be a deeply entrenched atheist not to believe the Holy Spirit was organising our rather relaxed arrangements! Everyone working together on the project, HODites, guests and volunteers created the apiary for the community, but in the meantime we became more of a community ourselves. We wouldn't have found that if we had paid professionals.

Fourth was the savings. £750 was the original quote for a lower spec job. By the end of the (high spec) process we had spent about £300. The project management triangle illustrates our choice:



You can choose only two of the triangle's points at once: 'fast' and 'cheap' mean that the work will not be good; 'fast' and 'good' mean that the work will not be cheap. We chose 'cheap' and 'good' and we saved more than we spent. Thank you, Lord!

Finally, the fifth thing our building method brought was beauty. Getting muddy, digging sun-baked clay, losing light in the shorter days, aching limbs, sweating in the summer, freezing in the winter - what could be lovelier?! But the fruit of our labour was beautiful and we learnt how to care more about beauty. What is it that makes roundwood buildings so attractive? Irregular shapes, the natural forms, twisted angles? The finished structure 'does not cry out or shout aloud' but fits with its surroundings while simply fulfilling its purpose. ...It is not a typical build.

"So it made you happy, helped you see things differently, built relationships, saved money and looks nice? So what? I would have done it the quick and easy way." Oh well, I suppose we will never get everyone to agree!



GALLERY EXTRAS

