

Bee boles in the Cartmel Peninsula

A note by Peter Le Mare.

Before the wooden bee-hives we know today were introduced by bee-keepers in northern Europe in the 19th century, bees were kept in skeps, usually made of coils of grass or straw. They had the disadvantages that the bees could not be inspected and the honey was not easily extracted, there being the possibility of destroying the colony of bees. For protection from the weather the skeps containing the bees were often kept in bee boles, recesses in walls, which usually faced a southerly direction for warmth from the sun. Often the boles were in orchards and gardens so that the bees had plenty of flowers to produce good yields of honey and at the same time pollinate the flowers and blossom.



A skep in a bee bole

There are bee boles throughout the country and the International Bee Research Association maintains a register of them; it can be seen at <http://www.ibra.beeboles.org.uk/>. Each entry of the register is numbered, gives information on location, possible access to view, date of construction and a description of the boles including dimensions. The easiest way to find boles in our area is to go to the Search page of the IBRA website and put *Cumbria* into the first box for our county and *Lancashire* into the second box for the traditional county; then press Search. This selects the sites in the old Furness District of Lancashire from which one can select the sites in our area. I have done this for the Cartmel Peninsula, shown in the table below. Our oldest bee boles date from the 18th century but a bee shelter at Hampsfell Hall is from the 16th century. There are many more entries for the rest of Furness.

IBRA number and structure	Location	Access	Century
0156 (L - bee shelter)	Well Know, Cartmel.	demolished	1701-1800
0601 (B - bee bole(s))	Orchard Rise, Cartmel.	private	1801-1900
0797 (B - bee bole(s))	Beckside House, Cartmel.	private	1801-1900
1079 (B - bee bole(s))	Stone Croft, Priest Lane, Cartmel.	private	not known
1213 (B - bee bole(s))	Greenfield House, Lower Allithwaite.	private	1801-1900
1215 (L - bee shelter)	Hampsfell Hall, Field Broughton, Cartmel.	private	1501-1600
1257 (B - bee bole(s))	Cornbrook House, Clogger Beck, Cartmel.	private	1801-1900
1258 (B - bee bole(s))	Greenfield House, Station Rd, Flookburgh.	private	1701-1800
1267 (B - bee bole(s))	Holly Cottage, Cartmel.	private	1701-1800
1268 (B - bee bole(s))	1 Fern Cottages, Back Rd, Lindale.	private	1701-1800
1304 (W - winter storage)	Witherslack Hall Farm, Witherslack, Grange-over-Sands.	private	not known
1312 (B - bee bole(s))	Waingate, Flookburgh, Grange-over-Sands.	private	not known
1339 (B - bee bole(s))	Aynesome Mill, Cartmel.	private	not known

I have been in correspondence with Penny Walker, Voluntary Curator of the IBRA Bee Boles Register, about my bee boles (N^o 1213). She has asked me to inform her of any bee boles in the area that are not registered so I shall be grateful for help from members of CPLHS. If anyone is aware of bee boles or shelters in our area, or elsewhere in Furness, that are not registered, or of which records can be updated, please let me know at Greenfield House, Flookburgh Road, Allithwaite; telephone 015395 32174; or by e-mail at phl@phonecoop.coop.

For more detail see 'Bee Shelters and Bee Boles in Cumbria' by Penelope Walker and Eva Crane: *Transactions Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, XCI, 1991, 237-262.