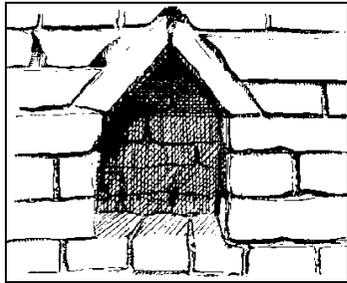




# BEE BOLES

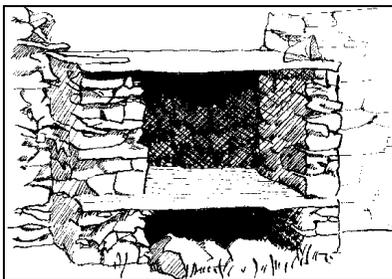
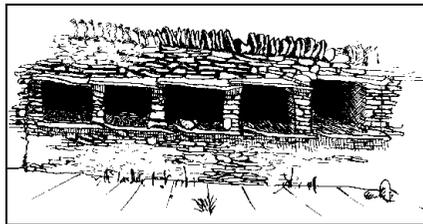
## General Information

Until the late 1800s bees were kept in straw skeps, mostly on benches in the open, or on a shelf in an open-fronted shelter. But in wetter and windier parts of Britain, some beekeepers kept them in *bee boles*. These are recesses built in a wall specifically for housing skeps, usually around 45cm by 45cm by 35cm deep, although there is considerable variation. A few bee boles are wide enough to hold two or three skeps. The opening is rectangular, or may have a curved or pointed arch at the top.



Bee boles were built mostly in walls of stone, but where stone was not the common building material (e.g. Kent), they were made in brick walls. The wall often bounded a garden or orchard. The bee boles usually faced south to south-east so that the bees would be warmed by the morning sun. The base of the bee boles was often two to three feet from the ground, thus at a convenient height for working, although skeps of bees were rarely handled except when the honeycombs were harvested.

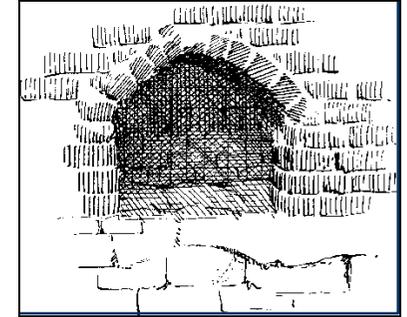
A set of bee boles (those built into one wall) usually contained from three to six recesses although larger sets are known. Bee boles have survived in walls dated to every century from the 1100s to the 1800s.



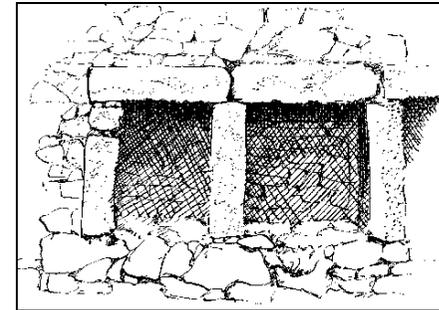
The skeps sometimes stood on a flat stone slab with a projecting lip to provide a landing place for the bees. The top could also be a slab. Where large stones were not available, arches or pointed roofs could be formed. Frequently the roof and base had overhangs to provide additional protection. A few examples of styles are shown in this leaflet. Further details in the online Register, <http://ibra.beeboles.org.uk>

## Location of Bee Boles

Bee boles seem to have been a speciality in Britain, where over 1280 sets have been recorded. If you know of any bee boles, or other structures that may have been used for housing bees, please record them for the IBRA *Bee Boles Register* using the form overleaf, and send it to the DSWA office at the address below. Alternatively, you can request a digital version of the form by emailing IBRA on [mail@ibra.org.uk](mailto:mail@ibra.org.uk)



## Building or Repairing Bee Boles



Those who have bee boles within walls on their property are encouraged to preserve these structures. Dry stone wallers are interested in projects involving the repair or construction of any unusual features. Some beekeepers have recently commissioned boles following traditional designs, although the detailed construction is left to the craftsman's inspiration, local style and available material.

It would be helpful for records of newly built bee boles to be sent on the form overleaf. DSWA is also interested to learn of bee boles that are constructed in dry stone – new or old.

*Illustrations by Sheila Jones*

For more information about the work of the Association, please contact:



**Dry Stone Walling Association**  
Lane Farm, Crooklands,  
Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7NH  
Tel: 015395 67953  
[www.dswa.org.uk](http://www.dswa.org.uk)

Registered as a charitable organisation in England and Wales: 289678

**IBRA Bee Boles Register**  
(including bee shelters, bee houses, winter storage)

Email: [mail@ibra.org.uk](mailto:mail@ibra.org.uk)

Please post completed forms to the DSWA office address overleaf

Reported by:		IBRA Ref.No:
Address of Boles:		County:
		Parish:
Postcode:		Grid Ref:
Is property listed? (give Grade):	State of repair:	
Visited by:		Date form completed:
Number of recesses:	Shape:	Distance apart:
Shape of back of recess (flat, rounded, arched?)		
Height:	Breadth:	Depth:
Height of shelves above ground now:		
Height of shelves above ground originally, if known:		
Wall made of:	Shelf made of:	
Does shelf extend to form a sill?		
Direction faced:	Wall location (garden/field/building):	
Date: certainly/probably	Evidence to prove date:	
Local name for recesses:		
Any other information, e.g. when last used, references in documents, etc:		

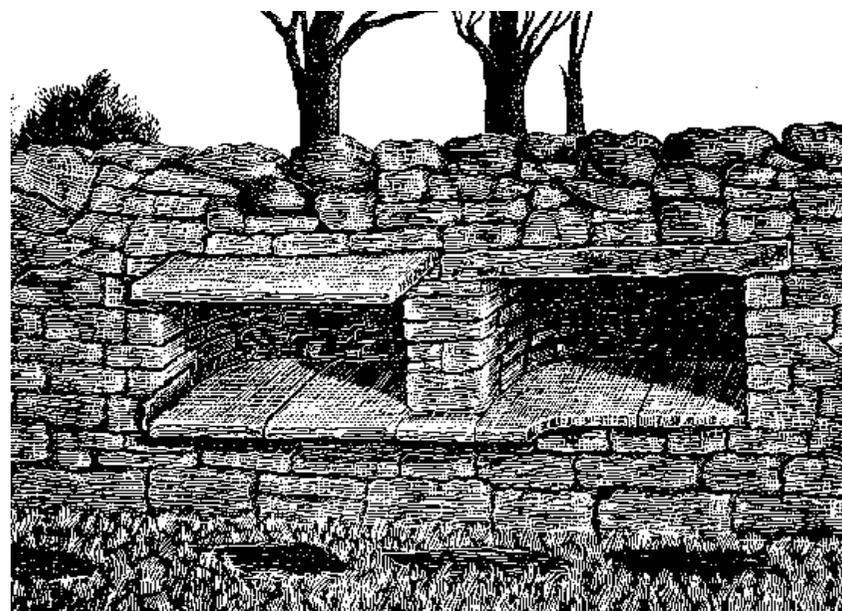
Please include with this form a rough plan to show wall in relation to house, garden, etc., and indicate north. Also, please attach photographs if possible: one to show setting and one a close-up of the bee boles.

For more information about the work of the International Bee Research Association visit the website, <http://www.ibrabee.org.uk>

# DRY STONE WALLING ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN



## BEE BOLES



*Scraper board drawing, c1950, courtesy of the IBRA Bee Boles Register, No 0187*

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the IBRA Bee Boles Register

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