

My INIB 'Beekeeper of the Year' was born and bred in Co. Antrim.

He is a very special person, much appreciated by his relatives, friends, neighbours and acquaintances in his local area because of his many talents. For when it comes to designing, redesigning, developing, fabricating, building, dismantling, investigating, repairing, rebuilding, renovating, refurbishing just about anything under the sun, he is a fantastic and extremely capable and competent all-rounder: engineer, mechanic, electrician, welder, plumber, plasterer, tiler, heating engineer, builder, maintenance engineer, model maker – the list is endless! Basically, there is nothing he won't tackle or have a go at! He even has a go at restoring vintage machinery of all kinds.

He took up beekeeping more than 40 years ago and while he never attended any formal beekeeping courses or sat any beekeeping examinations, he nevertheless learned and absorbed the craft and became a competent and expert beekeeper whose knowledge and advice is sought after by beekeepers in his local area. He was - and still is – generous with his practical help to his fellow beekeepers, especially beginners: many of the latter got into beekeeping when he landed them with a swarm or a nuc in an old box!!

He has been involved with his local beekeeping association since he took up beekeeping. For many years HE WAS THE ASSOCIATION!! That is, if he didn't arrange, organise, set up and run such things as meetings, functions, outings, fund raising etc. – they just didn't happen!! He has held just about every office in his association – some of them more than once over the years. He is now in the revered position of elder statesman in his association and does his best to take a back seat and keep out of the limelight but at the same time pushes the younger generation and the newer members to play an active part in the association.

He is now retired but in his chosen career of engineer he travelled extensively abroad – but never stayed very long in any one place: you see, he was on the boats!

He is community minded and gives practical support to his local Community Association by helping to man the office. He is also very much involved with his local Ulster Scots Association and plays a major role in the organising of their annual festival – or 'gathering' to give it its proper title.

He lives in a beautiful house which he designed and had built to his specifications. It is built into a hillside with beautiful views over the surrounding countryside. In the basement he has an extensive workshop which befits a man of his many talents.

He is an avid user of the internet and is in constant contact with people all over the world. He is also a writer and raconteur of some note.

He is married and has two sons and a 6 year old granddaughter on whom he dotes and spoils rotten.

My INIB 'Beekeeper of the Year' is, of course - as you all, no doubt, will have guessed – is Dessie Blair from East Antrim.

