

TT 13 Day 51 (The year of the honeybee)



The Guvnor only has one hive of bees left but what a hive! A strong, powerful, vibrant and fertile Queen who he has named Queen Elizabeth the 1st for reasons already apparent. She has been helped this year by a much warmer early summer than usual with the whole month of May dry and full of blossom that no errant frost could ruin. The Queen laid literally thousands of eggs which hatched into honeybees and who were then put to work filling a whole box of frames by the end of May. He took it off to his friend up the road who lends him his extracting drum and came away with 15lbs (in old money but his jars are all 1lb jars, so it is easier). He returned the frame to the hive and added another and within two weeks those clever and industrious bees had filled them up again. This time he took over 40lbs and it was only mid-June.

But, as he says so often to cover himself, "there's many a slip between cup and lip" and the bees have to face a phenomenon called 'the June Gap' when the spring flowers are over and the summer ones have not yet opened their petals to allow their pollen to be collected. Whatever happens between now and the autumn when the season ends, and it could be a marauding Asian Hornet that simply eats

our bees, or a wasp colony that robs the honey, or disease such as the Verroa bug that affects their wings so they can't fly or simple vandalism, he will have 50lbs of honey in his cupboard and that will last for a bit.

If all goes well, however, and the rest of the summer is reasonably fine, he could have a further 50lbs. We will wait and see, but for now he is a happy beekeeper whose bees seem to be happy too. I almost said 'whose bees seem to be thriving' but that will most certainly be the kiss of death and it wouldn't be the first time he has opened up the hive to inspect them only to find 50,000 dead bees in the bottom. So far so good this year but it is a tricky business and summed up by one of the Guvnor's favourite throw-away lines, "It's a dangerous business, life; you are lucky to get out of it alive."

The Guvnor's granddaughter has been isolating here with her vulnerable mother for the last three months has been home schooling at one end of the kitchen. The curriculum has been interesting and variable and the best the school can do in the circumstances but many children (and not a few parents, I suspect) really want to get back to the real thing.

It has not been without its lighter moments. Not here, but not a million miles away either, is the story of the maths question posed to young teenagers: "Harriet buys 21 bottles of red wine and 17 of white. She drinks 4 bottles of white and 2 of the red. What has she got now?" One young lady replied, "A shocking hangover" only to be scolded by her teacher, "X! Not the answer I was looking for." The Guvnor considered what the correct answer might have been - and drew a blank.