

# Obituary: Stuart Ching

**Penny Forsyth** pays an admiring tribute to a historian, archivist, editor and friend

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Stuart Ching, who died recently after a long and stoical battle with illness, was a man of many parts and many talents.

Stuart was perhaps best known for his roles as NBKA Archivist, published author of our official history, and as a former Editor of *Beemaster*. That is only part of the story, however, a story that began long before I came to know and work with him, long before I even became a beekeeper. This is my tribute to the Stuart Ching I knew and admired.

My early encounters with Stuart were at Council meetings where he showed zero tolerance of errors and omissions and was quick to bring up points of order. At almost every meeting he fulminated against the lack of contributions for *Beemaster* from members and lambasted those who had had their offerings published elsewhere after he had rejected them as unsuitable by his high and seemingly arcane standards. His editorials were often in the same vein and I thought he must be an impossibly prickly person to work with, so it was with great trepidation that I accepted an offer of help from him to run a stand showcasing NBKA and *apis mellifera* at the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Entomological Society's annual conference at Brackenhurst...

I needn't have worried: it was a very different Stuart who turned up part way through the morning with an impish grin ("sorry, can't lift things") and wearing a rather disreputable floppy cotton hat bristling with badges, pins and patches showing the insignia of clubs and organisations from across the globe. This hat was his signature, I discovered, and helped me to locate him when he went walkabout, sometimes drawn by academic interest but frequently captured by an almost childlike glee and delight in the absurd and outlandish. He switched effortlessly from academic debate to engagingly clear, simple and humorous interaction with the many children and their parents keen to know more about bees.

In conversation I learned of Stuart's mission to document the history of the Nottinghamshire Beekeepers' Association from the earliest references to the present day and gained an insight into the utter dedication, tenacity and attention to detail this mission entailed. I began to see that Stuart's often waspish demeanour and exacting standards sprang from his personal conviction that a thing was only worth doing if it were done well and to the limits of one's ability.

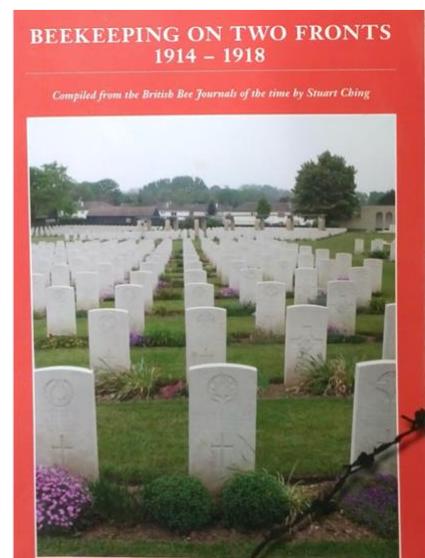
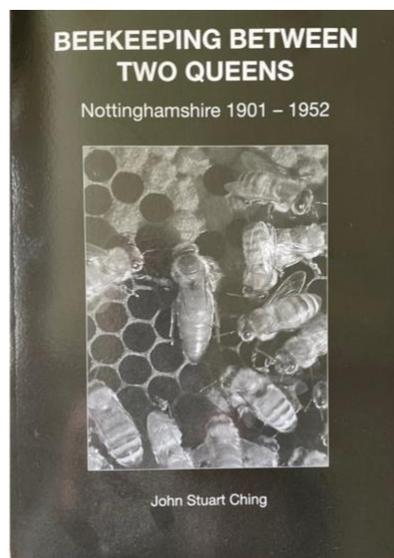
This almost military approach to efficiency and organisation was evident throughout his 22-year tenure as NBKA's Newsletter Editor. Articles that did not meet his standards were summarily rejected and Stuart was an absolute stickler for both deadline and publication date – at the time the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of the month respectively – and he deemed 9pm to be a late enough cut-off point to receive copy, not a minute later.

Stuart's meticulous planning extended to his intended length of tenure as Editor: he would serve 25 years and stated his intention to retire in 2019 at the 134<sup>th</sup> AGM. When illness forced him to step down three years short of this target and the role passed to me, his daughter Jane sent me the draft copies he had prepared of every issue up to his retirement date, many of them complete. In the course of the next few months I received several archives of articles, photographs, cartoons, poems and curiosities collected over the years with a view to inform, educate or amuse his readers.



Stuart had close connections with beekeeping organisations in the US and regularly featured articles from their newsletters in *Beemaster* (and often some excruciating puns and cartoons, which he loved). He was, I believe, something of a linguist, often translating items for inclusion when he had insufficient material, and I very much suspect that a charming collection of unattributed drawings and cartoons I found in one of his archives was his own work, too. Stuart was also an avid collector of stamps with a beekeeping theme and produced a gloriously illustrated collectors' guide; he was a compiler of crosswords, producing four books of puzzles for Northern Bee Books; and an enthusiastic amateur archaeologist, spending weekends searching out history in the ground beneath his feet.

A man of many parts, then, but it is for his painstaking documentation of the history and achievements of our Association that Stuart will perhaps be most remembered. These two volumes, **Beekeeping in Victorian Nottinghamshire 1837-1901** and **Beekeeping between Two Queens 1901-1952** draw on many sources, from Minute Books to newspaper articles, from newsletters and reports to the faded ink of hand written letters and pencilled notes in margins, all diligently and tirelessly sought out, researched and verified by Stuart. They give a fascinating account of our own history and, indeed, of the history of beekeeping itself which, with its hierarchies and rivalries and mistrust of new thinking, closely mirrored the first stirrings of social change that were soon to be magnified by war and national hardship. These two themes were the focus of Stuart's earlier book **Beekeeping on Two Fronts 1914-1918** which related the parallel struggles of Sgt Atwell, a beekeeper and soldier trying to save abandoned colonies on the battlefields of northern France, and those of two beekeepers in Derbyshire trying to save theirs from the dreaded Isle of Wight disease which wiped out thousands of colonies at this defining period of both our national and our beekeeping history.



Historian, archivist, editor, friend: I will remember Stuart with admiration for his absolute commitment and dedication to every task he undertook. I will remember with a smile his delight in a new fact uncovered, a connection made, a conundrum solved; I will remember his hat, his impish grin, his love of terrible puns; and I will remember with fondness and gratitude his unfailing and uncritical support during my years at the helm of his beloved *Beemaster*. From Stuart I learned to always go the extra mile; that "good enough" was rarely ever good enough; and that the greatest pleasures in life often come from the smallest things. Thank you, Stuart, I will miss you.

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