

## **Dr Ahmed Abushady and the Bee Farm, Benson by Peter Clarke**

Those who take a stroll up the field path towards the Horse and Harrow, Roke Marsh, on a fine sunny evening are probably quite unaware that they are passing a house which, half a century ago, was famous amongst beekeepers.

Port Hill House — the white double fronted house halfway along Braze Lane— was the home of Dr Ahmed Abushady, an Egyptian scientist, poet, and humanist who at the age of 34 had settled there with his English wife.

According to the records of the Bee Research Association, he was a talented man with widespread interests who carried out much research into the breeding and keeping of bees. He and his biographer, Leonard Harker, had more than two hundred hives on the double plot of land — The Orchard was not built at that time. They planted many soft fruits to provide blossom for the bees and also sowed wild flower seed along the hedgerows. They persuaded more than one farmer to plant white clover and rape in the neighbourhood. The lime trees in Mr and Mrs Morgan's garden at Roke were put in at the Doctor's request.

In order to make his researches into beekeeping more widely known, in 1919 the Doctor produced *The Bee World*, a monthly magazine which he published from Port Hill House. He formed the Apis Club and had a private company dealing in bee products and beekeeping equipment. In 1920 the company became a public trading company which took various names and continued as Apis.Ltd till 1951 when it was wound up. The Doctor's main aims were to establish international and impartial organisations of research and education. He hoped to guide the cottage industry of beekeeping on to scientific lines.

From the early work and the founding of the Apis Club sprang the Beekeeper's Association which celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1975. Some people may remember seeing a facsimile of the Apis sign outside Port Hill House on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting of the Research Association at Berinsfield. About thirty or forty beekeepers came on pilgrimage to see Dr Abushady's old home — some from as far away as Australia and New Zealand. Alas, though the Association had lent some old books, photographs and early copies of *The Bee World*, our only genuine souvenir was a metal disc from an early hive. Not a skep in sight!

Mr Webb, down at Quaker's Corner, was able to fill in some personal details as Dr Abushady's Egyptian assistant married the late Mrs Webb's sister. She returned to Egypt with him and Mr Webb was able to show us photos of her and her children in their new home.