



**Eva Crane Trust**

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## HONEY HARVESTS, PAST AND PRESENT

SIR,—Referring to the article on English beekeeping ("It Started with Honey Hunting") in your July 4 issue, a number of readers have enquired whether honey harvests have been increasing or decreasing in England. No precise figures are available for the past century, but the book referred to (*Honey, A Comprehensive Survey*, to be published by William Heinemann in co-operation with the Bee Research Association) provides some examples for the period since the First World War.

Scale-hive records made from 1917 to 1936, by Edwin Walker at Street in the Vale of Glastonbury, are reproduced with the following comment: "On English standards, the area was good for bees, one flow following another throughout the rather short honey season. In May there was fruit blossom, dandelion and chestnut; instead of the 'June gap' there were flows from alder buck-thorn (*Frangula alnus*) and charlock; clover and blackberry provided a third main flow in July . . . As well as the year-to-year variations there is also a general decline, which has continued in the area since 1936. The orchard trees that flowered in May have been grubbed out to make way for houses; effective weed killing has cleared up the charlock that gave a June flow; the July flow from the hedgerow brambles has largely disappeared with the hedges themselves." The 1917 take—never to be repeated—was 309lb; the next highest was 145lb in 1933. The three poorest years were 1924, 1930 and 1931, with 13, 16 and 9lb respectively.

The book also records the average honey yields of a number of hives

in Gloucestershire between 1945 and 1971

These are less notable for any general trend than for year-to-year fluctuations (the highest was 76lb per hive in 1961, the lowest 5lb in 1954). In general beekeepers have managed to work to a higher and higher efficiency as honey sources have become harder to find. The number of hives kept gives some indication of the profitability of beekeeping, and this has decreased steadily since the end of the last war. In Gloucestershire it dropped from 11,932 in 1945 to 4,795 in 1971; in England and Wales as a whole, from 369,387 to 158,219 in the same period.

Now, however, the price of honey on the world market has increased dramatically. It should therefore be possible to sell English honey at a price that makes beekeeping profitable even with honey crops lower than those achieved in the past.—  
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