



**Eva Crane Trust**

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**TITLE:** Brother Adam Kehrle.  
(Obituary)

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# Obituary

## Brother Adam Kehrlé

Brother Adam, one of the best known beekeepers of the twentieth century, died on 1 September 1996. He was born Karl Kehrlé in Württemberg in 1889. In 1910 he was sent to England, where St Mary's Abbey — founded by Canute in 1018 at Buckfast in Devon — was being rebuilt by Benedictine monks. In 1914 he became a novice and in 1915 he was put to work with the Abbey's bees, because of his poor health, under brother Columban. In 1919 he became a full member of the community as Brother Adam, and also took charge of the apiaries, then with about a hundred hives.

By that time, the tracheal mite *Acarapis woodi* had caused the death of many bee colonies in Britain, and no satisfactory treatment had been found. In 1919, Professor L Armbruster in Berlin published *Bienenzüchtungskunde* (The science of bee breeding)<sup>1</sup> based on Mendel's work. Following Armbruster's approach to the subject, Brother Adam imported queens of the Italian bee (*Apis mellifera ligustica*) which was thought to be more resistant to the tracheal mite than the native British bee (*A. m. mellifera*). He undertook a successful programme of cross-breeding, using isolated mating apiaries established on Dartmoor near the Abbey.

From the 1950s, Brother Adam made a series of journeys in Mediterranean countries 'in search of the best strains of bee' for his breeding programme. He published accounts of his journeys in a number of articles in *Bee World* between 1951 and 1965, and described his beekeeping and bee breeding in 1950 and 1954,

respectively; books based on these subjects were published later. In 1981 Brother Adam went to Tanzania to collect queens of African bees (probably *A. m. monticola*), but these bees did not survive transport to England.

Brother Adam continued his bee breeding programme until the early 1990s, and Buckfast queens were reared and distributed in other countries. In some European countries the beekeepers who used the Buckfast bees formed societies to exchange knowledge and experiences, and a periodical *Der Buckfastimker* was published in Germany.

Brother Adam received many honours including the OBE in 1971, the *Verdienstkreuz* in 1975, and honorary degrees from the Universities of Uppsala in Sweden and Exeter in England. He was active in the International Bee Research Association, as a member of Council from 1964 to 1972 and as a Vice-President from 1971 until his death.

More than anyone else I have known, Brother Adam had a special skill in handling bees, and also in assessing the potential merits of bees he examined, whether in his own hives or in those he investigated in the course of his travels. He had a great influence on bee breeding and beekeeping in many countries, and he has also been much valued for his own personality. I, too, appreciated his friendship for more than forty years.

EVA CRANE

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<sup>1</sup> ARMBRUSTER, L (1919) *Bücherei für Bienenkunde* 1: 1-120; reviewed in *Bee World* 3(4): 101 (1921)