

The Work and Publications of Dr. Eva Crane

by Richard Jones

Eva Widdowson was born on the 12th of June, 1912 and became Eva Crane when she married Jim Crane on the 14th of July, 1942. She grew up in South London and throughout her school days showed ability in many subject areas, regularly gaining book prizes that became part of her library, a library that never ceased to expand during her lifetime. Always modest, she attributed her school success to the quality of instruction she received from dedicated teachers. A combination of their teaching and her intelligence won her a scholarship to Kings College, London where in two years she obtained a BSc (Hons) in mathematics followed just two years later, in 1933, by a similar qualification in physics. An MSc in the then groundbreaking field of quantum mechanics soon followed, and she was awarded her PhD in nuclear physics in 1937.

The concept of women having a career path such as this may not have been recognised in the 1940s, but if it had been then Dr. Crane was certainly bound for academic heights when she took up lecturing posts in Hull and then at Sheffield Universities. It was 1942 when, almost by accident, a simple purchase had the effect of shaping the rest of her life. She acquired a hive of bees. The initial reason was purely practical: the provision of honey to give sweetness at a time of national sugar shortage.

Although bees were kept in hives in most parts of the world there seemed to be no way to access information on the subject. In the space of a few years, the business of collecting, collating and disseminating information about bees and beekeeping became the dominant force in her life, and in January of 1949, she set up the Bee Research Association (BRA). This organisation became a clearinghouse for beekeeping information and research from all over the world. International from the very beginning, her organization added the word to its title in 1976, becoming the IBRA.

In 1950 she took over editorship of the well-established journal *Bee World*, and made it the link between beekeeping science and practice, always making sure that material was accurate and worthy of inclusion. Out of this journal grew a second, called *Apicultural Abstracts*, which had the express aim of linking isolated workers and research institutes, beekeepers and the research that would help them. In its 55-year history it recorded over 60,000 abstracts and remains a valuable and comprehensive database. It was only at the beginning of the 21st century that this wonderful service was superseded by the Internet, although the material available through this latter medium does not undergo the rigorous verification that applied to *Apicultural Abstracts*.

Access to a large part of this treasure trove of information is available and searchable through the Eva Crane Trust website (www.evacranetrust.org). You have to register to log in but there is no charge. Furthermore, if having found an interesting abstract, the reader wishes to look at the original paper, there is, for most examples, a service to obtain copies provided by the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth (<https://www.llgc.org.uk/>).



Dr. Crane turning to greet me as I arrived in her study.

Photo by Richard Jones

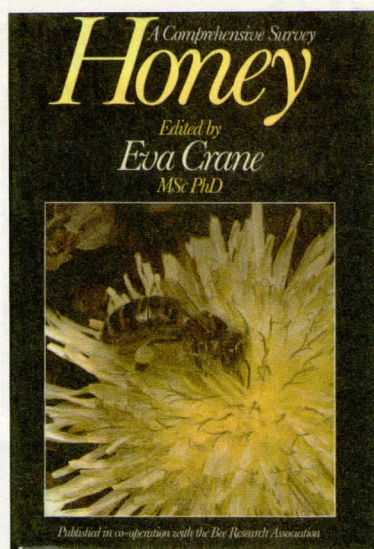
In 1962 a third journal was established, the *Journal of Apicultural Research*, which remains to this day the premier English language vehicle for the publication of cutting edge apicultural research. The verb "to Google" was unknown to Dr Crane. Equally, in this age of instant electronic access it is almost impossible for the young generation of researchers to realize the importance of these paper-based journals. The material they contained made possible the careers of many scientists, often working in isolation in a world divided by an Iron Curtain, Apartheid and other political and economic difficulties.

Dr. Eva Crane was Director of the International Bee Research Association (IBRA) for 35 years and a towering figure in the world of apicultural research for over half a century with some 330 published books, papers and articles to her name. Retirement from the IBRA only meant she could concentrate on her writing and she still continued her travels.

Dr Eva Crane's Major Books

Dr Crane had over three hundred publications on the theme of honey bees. Most of these can be found on the website of the Trust that bears her name www.evacranetrust.org

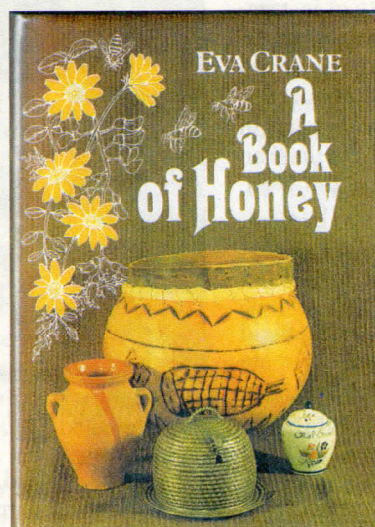
However, she is probably best known for the five or six major works that she produced between 1976 and her opus magnum, *The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting*, in 1999. All, except the last named, are now out-of-print and have proved to be an investment to those who had the interest, and foresight, to buy their copy when it first published. Prices on internet auction sites and in book auctions everywhere have really escalated; some now ten, twenty, or even more times the original price.



Honey – A Comprehensive Survey

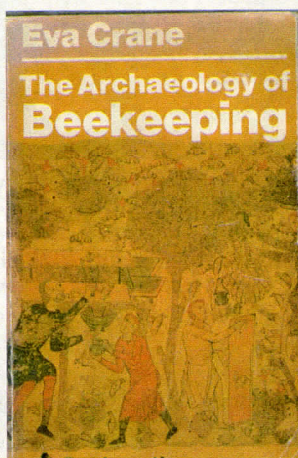
Edited by Eva Crane

1976, Heinemann (originally 15 GBP). This is a lively but authoritative book written by eminent world experts covering the whole subject of honey. The contributors cover the flowers that honey comes from; the role of the beekeeper; the chemical, physical and biological properties of honey; modern methods of processing, storing and quality control; legislation; world trade; its many uses, including its fermentation; the language of honey, and its history from early primitive societies to the present. Each chapter is almost a book in its own right. It may be 42 years old and could do with revision and updating but it still gives vital information that is relevant today. What is more it is a collector's item.



A Book of Honey

1980, Oxford University Press, paperback (original price 5.50GBP). Dr Crane always referred to the main scientific tome as "Big Honey" and this book as "Little Honey". It was in fact almost a casual spin off of the major work designed more for the lay reader and containing a lot of folklore, the uses of honey in social and religious settings and even some cooking recipes. I believe it was published in English, Portuguese, Spanish and German and there were a limited number of hardback versions but it was mainly sold as a paperback. The price for this little book, which Dr Crane considered as an entertainment, when you can find it on websites trading in second hand books, is quite phenomenal and by far the biggest pro rata return on an "investment".



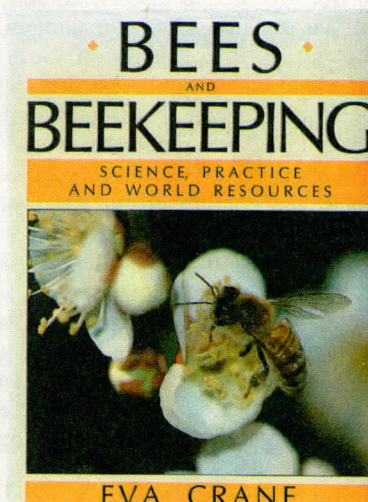
The Archaeology of Beekeeping

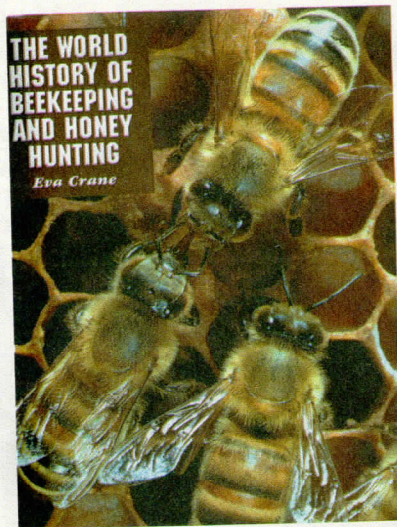
1983 Duckworth (originally 12.95 GBP). This covers the human association with bees and honey since the Stone Age. Information

has been gathered from rock art in Spanish caves, from tombs and temples which indicates that bees, or at least bee nests, have been hunted for their honey for over 10,000 years. Early horizontal hives, bee shelters and bee houses from different parts of the world are described along with the techniques used to harvest honey from earliest times up to the evolution of the moveable frame hive. It is fully illustrated throughout with black and white photos of carvings, paintings, manuscripts and ancient hives. It is a key reference book, scientific, detailed and totally absorbing.

Bees and Beekeeping, Practice and World Resources

1990, Heinemann Newnes (originally 85GBP). This impressive book describes the scientific principles underlying beekeeping as it is practised today in different conditions worldwide. Different sections are written at different levels according to how and by whom they will be used. It is in six parts: I. An account of Apis species; II. Modern beekeeping management; III. Traditional, modern, fixed frame and top bar hives; IV. Combating disease, pests and predators; V. Bee products; VI. Appendixes for equipment, bee organizations etc. A scholarly integrated picture of world beekeeping which probably could only have been compiled by Dr Crane based on her knowledge, research and travels.

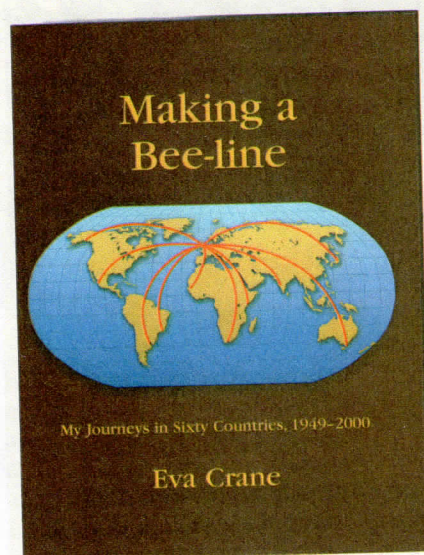




The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting

1999, Duckworth (Originally 90GBP) This is the first book to document such a broad history of man's relationships with bees. The 54 chapters are grouped under the following headings: I Setting the scene; II Opportunistic honey hunting by man; III History of collecting honey from owned or tended cavity nests; IV Honey bees that nest in the open: tending and beekeeping; V History of traditional beekeeping using fixed-comb hives; VI History of practices in both traditional and movable-frame beekeeping; VII Development of beekeeping using more advanced hives; VIII Development of beekeeping using movable-frame hives; IX History of bee products; X Bees in the human mind. There are two Appendixes: (1) China: References to bees, beekeeping, honey and beeswax, from 2000 BC to AD 1600; (2) List of some beekeeping museums.

This synthesis presents a vast amount of information in a very readable text, which is supported by some 2,000 references to other publications and sources. The book has nearly 500 illustrations of rock paintings, manuscript drawings, woodcuts and engravings, and photographs of activities and equipment worldwide. There are 53 tables and four detailed indexes (personal names, peoples, geographical and subject). The book was brought out with two different dust jackets; the content is identical. The book first went on sale at Apimondia in Vancouver in 1999 at 90GBP. If you missed out then a second edition (2011) has been printed and may still be available from a source like Northern Bee Books in the UK at around 110GBP – a first edition will cost a lot more.

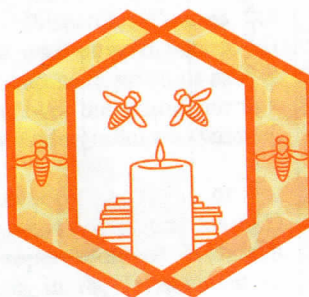


Making a Bee-line, My Journeys in Sixty Countries 1949 – 2001

2003, IBRA.
This was Dr Crane's last major publication. She refused to write an autobiography as she insisted that she was not of any interest, it was the people she had met and the places she had visited that were of real interest. She was Director of the International Bee Research Association from its establishment in 1949 to her retirement in 1983 and continued to travel in her retirement. Everywhere she went she sampled the life of the local people, sometimes in very remote areas and involving arduous journeys. She writes vividly of her experiences and the book is well illustrated with photos from her own collection of over 6,000 slides.

Dr Crane would be delighted to see the upsurge of research that is going into bee conservation and preservation and equally delighted with the increased interest being shown in beekeeping including urban beekeeping. A new generation of beekeepers is becoming involved in apiculture, a generation that is familiar with the Internet, eager to access new knowledge and the latest research to improve the effectiveness of beekeeping. They are standing where Eva Crane stood 70 years ago, but much groundbreaking work has been done. To them I say check it out and build upon it.

A good place to start is to visit the web site of the Eva Crane Trust (www.evacranetrust.org) where there is not only access to the information stored in Apicultural Abstracts but also a chance to look at, and search by country, Dr Crane's own photographic record of her travels and discoveries. Furthermore, a good number of her papers and monographs are also available on the site which is being added to and continually developed. ❀



About the author: Richard Jones is a Geographer by degree, and was a head teacher before moving into international public relations and fund-raising. This experience then brought him to the International Bee Research Association (IBRA) in 1996, the organization founded by Dr Eva Crane in 1949. As Director for almost 16 years he had the opportunity to travel widely in order to learn about, and promote bees and beekeeping worldwide. In 2002 Dr. Crane asked him to become chairman of the Eva Crane Trust: www.evacranetrust.org.