

80 years on.

Making a birthday of the Translation of the Agriculture Course into English 1930 – 2010

By Vivian Griffiths

There are many human strands which brought a Yorkshire Quaker builder turned farmer, a German citizen, now with an English surname and a young scientifically trained estate manager from Silesia together to a farm in the millstone grit influenced rolling countryside between Leeds and Harrogate in Yorkshire in 1930. This was to translate the Agriculture Course into English, which had been given in 1924 by Rudolf Steiner on the Koberwitz Estate near Breslau, now Poland.

Looking at the strands, which brought them together, you see the first influence of the Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society of Great Britain, Daniel Dunlopⁱ encouraging the establishment of English speaking Spiritual Science through summer schools, study groups and a remarkable event the London World Conference on Spiritual Science in the summer of 1928.

The Summer Schools had brought Maurice Wood from Huby Farm to Anglesey in 1927 where he had met George Adams (formerly Kaufmann) and a special friendship had begun with the discussion of the Agriculture Course series of lectures. As a farmer by ideal who had to master the art consciously and also 'change his ways' from being a builder Maurice Wood was immediately taken by biodynamics and it is Huby Farm where he moved after the First World War in 1919 that receives the accolade of Britain's first biodynamic farm in 1928.

The strands continue with the arrival of Karl Mirbt (later Mier) sent by Count Keyserlingk from Koberwitz (the place where the Agriculture Course was given) to lecture on biodynamics at the London World Conference in

1928. His talk on Agricultural Depression and ways to overcome this in the light of the Agriculture Course impressed Maurice Wood who came to the conference. The scene was then set to invite Karl Mier to England as guest at Huby Farm to establish biodynamics and to ask George Adams, a major organiser of the World Conference to the farm with his command of the German and English languages and bring the Agriculture Course to the English speaking world.

Thus while Maurice Wood attended to his farming duties during the morning, it is related by George Corrin

the BDAA's first Fieldsman, George Adams would sit in the farmhouse translating. Then after lunch and a cup of tea, George would read what he had written to see if it sounded all right to a farmer's ear! Maurice is recorded as saying 'These were the most thrilling days of his life – like living in a new world.'

It is important to mention the context in which the Agriculture Course



Maurice Wood and his Huby Mill

was appearing in its English prose. The World Conference brought people from mainland Europe to Britain and extended the Anthroposophical work into British society. Among those who attended was Dr Karl Konig who was to return to England as a refugee ten years later to begin the Camphill Communities with a group of colleagues. Alfred Heidenreich came from Germany to help with the establishment of the Christian Communityⁱⁱ and the first Act of Consecration of Manⁱⁱⁱ was spoken in English in 1929 at a service on the Sussex coast.

Daniel Dunlop had established the British Weleda Company near Pershore^{iv} and the bold statement of Rudolf Steiner House^v next to Regents Park in London 'for all to see' was being completed. The practical deeds of anthroposophy which were close to the 'doing' character of the ▶

British 'Folk Soul'. were being established from the first Waldorf School in south London, to the Sunfield Curative Home first in Birmingham and visited by Ghandi no less and then in the North Worcestershire Hills at Clent near Stourbridge. This work was greatly encouraged by Rudolf Steiner's colleagues Ita Wegman who came to England regularly from her medical base at Arlesheim, Switzerland establishing as she saw it from her perspective to renew the doctor's connection to the 'Mysteries' and to this end she sought to establish centres near places of pilgrimage, centres of spiritual awareness. Thus Clent near the site of pilgrimage of the death of the boy king St Kenelm was an important place for her.

The catalyst of the English Agriculture Course was to prove remarkably active. From his stay at Huby Farm Karl Mier established the Anthroposophical Agricultural Association with its Newsletter 'Notes and Correspondence'. Soon he was staying at Bray in Berkshire where the first biodynamic garden was established and within three years the purchase of Broome Farm^{vi} brought Karl and his family to the Midlands by young idealistic Oxford undergraduate named David Clement whose farm was the setting of pioneering biodynamic work with Sunfield students and Derek Duffy. Duffy was to pioneer BD Research work connected with the 'reading' of a cow's urine to measure health or disease. The Agricultural Correspondent of the News Chronicle was an early visitor to Broome and impressed with what he saw with the Compost Preparations soon made biodynamic work available to a wider audience. At the outbreak of the second world war the AAA was to make a clear statement to the Minister of Agriculture was made reminding him of the dangers of soil damage and depletion if a chemical based agriculture was pursued to the last in our striving to be self sufficient in produce and livestock rearing.

Eighty years is a strange birthday – a long lifetime perhaps it marks with the successes and frustrations, lost opportunities and challenges that the Anthroposophic Agricultural Association and later the Biodynamic Agricultural Association has had to face whether explaining the Compost Preparations to an enquiring audience or helping to demonstrate the efficacy of the Horn Manure and Silica Sprays. In many ways the enquiring mind of Maurice Wood, Quaker, an eternal student full of the wonder and awe of life who had experienced the worst humanity could throw at a person in his experiences in the trenches of the First World War was a

role model for biodynamic work. He had the ability to work in committees and soothe troubled meetings with his down to earth approach. He was a dour Yorkshireman sprinkled with wit and wisdom and we are all the better for this unsung pioneer who went on to develop one of the best mills for grinding carefully the particular qualities for biodynamic wheat into the flour that was sent out to many appreciative customers over a 20 year period.

It is also interesting to note that all three of the pioneering land holdings, Huby Farm in Yorkshire and Mill, Bray in Berkshire and Broome Farm, Worcestershire have since been sold handing the biodynamic work on to new generations of family farms, communities and businesses working out of the ideals of anthroposophy.^{vii} ■

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ⁱ Daniel Dunlop (1868-1935) founder of the World Power Conference, friend of James Joyce writer, Rudolf Steiner and WB Yeats poet and AE (George William Russell) born in Scotland, died in London. Huge influence of the establishment of Anthroposophical Society in Great Britain widely respected in the new technical engineering world for his work and bringing people together wanted to see an English spoken Anthroposophy.

ⁱⁱ Christian Community – established by a prominent group of German priests with Rudolf Steiner mostly from the Lutheran tradition in 1922.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Sacrament of the Act of Consecration of Man renewing Christianity. Seven Sacraments of baptism, confirmation, marriage, last anointing etc

^{iv} Weleda, the company first established in Germany and Switzerland in the 1920s to manufacture and sell medicinal preparations associated with anthroposophical medicine but also teas, tinctures and creams for supporting health.

^v Rudolf Steiner House, 35 Park Rd, London NW1 6XT. The home since the 1920s of the Anthroposophical Society of Great Britain. It has a hall, bookshop, meeting rooms and café and is a remarkable public place next to Regents Park and is used by members and non members for plays, performances of eurythmy, meetings and the governance of Anthroposophy in Great Britain.

^{vi} Broome Farm and David Clement, for a full description of the life and work of David and the BDAA see interview by Richard Swann in Star and Furrow.

^{vii} I am indebted to Bernard Jarman's very comprehensive article on Maurice Wood in Star and Furrow no 100, Winter 2004, where he outlines the life and work of this Leeds builder turned farmer. This article was for an important book in German – 'Anthroposophie im 20. Jahrhundert: Ein Kulturimpuls in biografischen Porträts' edited by Bodo von Plato and published in 2003 by Verlag am Goetheanum. A book of 600 written biographies on the development of Anthroposophy in the 20th Century.

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