

Bio Dynamic work in England¹

Alan Brockman to Herbert Koepf in Nov 1990

Having been asked to contribute what I could to The history of the development of the Bio-Dynamic work in England I have sifted through back numbers, reports etc. connected with this. The result, although not complete in many details, produces the following picture of those early days.

Maurice Wood, a farmer in Huby Yorkshire, had formed with a strong feeling for self-sufficiency for ten years, fell ill with shingles. This led to him attending the 1927 Anthroposophical Conference in Anglesey. There he became acquainted with Steiner's work & also with George Adams (Kaufmann) As a result, in 1928, when DN. Dunlop was organising a 'World Conference for Spiritual science' Mr. Carl Mirbt (later Mier) was invited to Huby. Carl Mier had been sent by Count Keyserlingk, since he himself had not able to accept Dunlop's invitation to present Dr Rudolf Steiner's agriculture work at the conference,

Carl's English needed practice and he also required time to prepare his conference lecture entitled 'Agricultural Depression - its causes and means for its relief.' Huby thus became a 'growing point' for the BD work in the UK.

At the 1928 Conference it appears that a few of those present were already connected directly to the Dornach 'Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and gardeners'. This British group met in the evening following Carl Mier's lecture, with Dr Wachsmuth Dr Pfeiffer and Dr. Miers to discuss how BD work could be developed in the UK.

Further meetings during the conference were arranged and although Dr Wachsmuth had to return early to Dornach it could be reported that Carl Mier had been asked to stay and direct the work and that he had offered his services free for 6 months. Maurice Wood's invitation of hospitality for this period was supported by spontaneous donations to cover costs. George Adams was closely involved in all this, chairing the meetings which were also attended by Dr E Vreede, the Countess Keyserlingk, Miss Cross, Mrs Howard Pease (later mentioned as Marna Pease), John Sargeant, and some 70 people altogether.

As a result of this notes and Correspondence was started in 1929. This was a duplicated newsletter containing articles, notes, letters, etc concerning B.D. work. In the meantime George Adams had been invited to stay at Huby (Sleights Farm) where he translated the agriculture Course into English. Maurice Wood had therefore the possibility of becoming one of the first, if not the very first, BD farmers in England. This led to his wheat being milled locally and sent all over England by post. The need to mill on his own farm led eventually to his designing the Huby stone mill in 1939 for flour production on farmers' own premises. In addition he persuaded the local MP to get a private members bill through parliament to protect this right of milling on the Farm.

¹ Transcription of handwritten and overlapping photocopy of the original in 2021

In 1929 the anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation' was started with D.N.Dunlop, General Secretary of AS in GB, acting as chairman, Carl Mier as Agricultural advisor, Marna Pease as Hon. Sec, and Lloyd Wilson as Hon treasurer. During those first years Members of the council included L.L. Binnie, Mrs E.M Bruce, Mrs Cameron, Miss Cross, George Adams Mrs Mier and Maurice Wood.

In 1931 it was realised that a regular members subscription would have to replace the voluntary donations which had hitherto supported the work. 'Notes and Correspondence' was then printed instead of duplicated. This then ran under that title until 1953 when it became 'Star and Furrow.'

Editorship lay with Carl Mier and Marna Pease until the war when Doris Davy took over from Carl. Marna Pease shouldered a particularly heavy load as not only was she co-editor of Notes a Correspondence and Hon Sec, but took on the work of Hon Treasurer in 1937. By 1933 membership had increased to over 130 from a total of 70 in 1932. It seems that up until 1933 the office was located a Demeter House Stechford Birmingham but moved to The Old Mill Horse Bray Maidenhead in 1934. This home of Marna Pease become an active centre for meeting and visits even finding room for a small experimental laboratory for Mrs Koliko in 1938. Marna herself was not only an active gardener but also kept bees and made regular contributions to notes and Correspondence

- 1934/35 was a period of much change and activity, Broome Farm was taken into BD working under Carl Miers' guidance: difficulties arose within the General Anthroposophical Society which led to a split within the agricultural work in this country and the beginning of a second journal entitled " xxx" [Biodynamic News sheet??]

The 'Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation' was more connected with the ASinGB, whilst a twin organisation the 'Bio-Dynamic Agriculture Association' (BDA) was more connected with the General Anthroposophical society in Dornach, gradually formed itself.

The BDA grew out of a number of information centres set up at Kings Langley by Miss Cross, at Edenbridge by Lady Mackinnon, and in Pentre, Pembrokeshire by Miss Saunders-Davies. These supplied information and preparations to enquirers and led to the formation of the B.D.A. in 1938 with some 66 members and associates.

In 1936 Dr Pfeiffer visited Kings Langley and Pembrokeshire where BD work had begun on several farms and gardens. Mr LL Binnie gave an account of his 5 years' experience in changing over a farm to BD methods of the Kings Langley meeting.

After the 1938 official founding of the BDA in April a general meeting in June led to Lady Merthyr being elected President H. Collison and F. Ferguson become vice Presidents, O.W. Saunders-Davies Chairman and Dr H. Popplebaum Hon. Sec & Treasurer. Other council members elected were Lady Mackinnon, Miss M Cross & G Bacchus.

Dr Pfeiffer addressed the 'British Section of the General. Experimental Circle' in November 1938 This group connected directly to Dornach met at High Quarry, Lady Mackinnon's home

in Edenbridge. He then visited Larkfield Hall Maidstone where an information centre had been set up and farms in Cheshire and Scotland.

Also in 1938 Carl Mier resigned from the council in order to take on work of the Sunfield Agriculture centre. In 1940 Dr Kolisko who had been a frequent lecturer at meetings of the Experimental Circle died. It was not until 1946 that his book, written together with his wife, [was published due to the war??]

[In 1946, a meeting of the experimental ?] circle, the first since 1942 took place on July 1st. Derek Duffy who had been active in agricultural training work at Clent and West Hall Farm Schools in Oyne reported on his work. At a second meeting on 9th September George Adams suggested week-end meetings including one for members of all agricultural groups (including associates). This initiative seems to have been the beginning of a uniting of the BD work in the UK.

Also in 1945/46 Marna Pease had to relinquish the co-editorship of Notes and Correspondence as well as her other work as Hon Sec & Treasurer. As a mark of respect and appreciation of her devoted work for the association she was elected President. At this time Carl Meir took on the secretarial work of the Association based at Longbridge House, Warminster. Marna Pease died on 31st August 1947 at Bray and in this period the office was moved to Clent where an active centre had formed around the Sunfield Children's Home, Broome Farm and the Science Foundation.

An important event at this time was a joint initiative by the members of the two Experimental Circle Groups to work under the auspices of the Soil Association in having a stand at the Chelsea Flower Show in May 1947 and at the Royal Agricultural Show in July at Lincoln.

In 1950 Dr Pfeiffer on a visit from the USA, expressed a wish that the BDA & the AAF would be able to unite. In the spring 1951 the names of the two groups, The AAF & the BDA appeared for the first time on the cover of Notes and Correspondence. This event signalled a final healing of the split which had so grievously held back the work in the UK. It was about this time that George Corrin took on the advisory work for the Bio-dynamic Association.

David Clement*, Maurice Wood, Doris Davy, Marian Millett and other stalwarts piloted the BDAA through the next few years. In 1960 Maurice Wood died and this ended an era. How much the BDAA owes to such pioneers is difficult to express. Without the ideals - guiding stars one would like to call them - there would be little hope for mankind. Only when those who find themselves in a position to contribute something to an ideal, grasp the fact that there are many who cannot, will the responsibility of their opportunity become clear. Our present generation have been handed the baton. Let us hope the some love for these ideals will find a place in their hearts.

*The great contribution that David Clement has made to the BD work in the UK cannot be overstated, Broome farm became the pivot point for the whole work for many years, not only the office but preparation making and dispatch, council meetings and farm visits.

