

## Interview with D Clement

*David Clement was Chairman of the Biodynamic Agricultural Association for nearly half a century. For much of that time he also managed and farmed Broome Farm near Stourbridge in Worcestershire. Last November I visited him in his bungalow to hear his story.*

*2004 sees not only the commemoration of 80 years of the worldwide biodynamic movement; it is also 75 years since its beginning in this country. From what you know and remember, could you tell us about your memories?*

### First beginnings

I suppose it all started with Mr Daniel Dunlop organising a World Anthroposophical conference in London in 1928. He invited anthroposophists from all over the world who were actively engaged in anthroposophy to come and speak. The majority came, but some could not. Count Keyserlingk was invited to talk about the new Spiritual Impulse in Agriculture. He could not come, and anyway could not speak English, so he sent Carl Mirbt (he later changed his name to Mier) who spoke English well and was his scientific advisor at Koberwitz. He gave a good lecture, which was very much welcomed. A group of people, anxious that he should come again, spoke to Dunlop who was then given the task to go to Dornach and invite Mirbt to England. He came over in 1929 with his family and so that is when biodynamics started in this country.

The leading person of that group was Mrs Marna Pease, the wife of one of the Pease bankers in Otterburn in Northumberland. Carl went up there straight away to see her. He confessed to her that he had never made the Preparations before and had never seen them made! So they started from Steiner's description in the Agricultural Course and they have been made every year since then. When her husband died, their place was sold and as she did not inherit a lot of money, she went to live in Bray on Thames. She was a very good gardener and also lectured at the ladies gardener's association. She was a cultivated person - a violinist and poet and had a great knowledge on ancient oriental literature

There was a farmer at Sleights Farm near Harrogate who was a builder who turned to farming after the First World War. He met anthroposophy and he was one of those people whose whole life changed the day he met anthroposophy. His farm was small - about 50 acres or so. His name was Maurice Wood and George Adams took an active interest in him from the beginning. He was part of the first committee of **The Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation** with Mrs Pease, George Adams and one or two others. (The word biodynamics was not 'invented' in those days.) The Foundation was a very small group - about a dozen people. The Experimental Circle also started at about the same time - it was called the **Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Gardeners and Farmers**.

Carl was a very enthusiastic and warm man. He met many, many people and he was always interested in them. In those days, in the 30s, the main people who were worried about the future of agriculture were the big landowners. Lord Limmington and Lord Northbourne wrote several books about their concern that farming was going down hill. They were against what was starting to become chemical farming.

The ordinary farmer however accepted things as they were. It was pretty bad in the 1930s – this was also the time of the Wall Street crash in the USA. Carl met all these people and had a tremendous capacity to interest them and to talk to them. I remember accompanying him to the Royal Society when Albert Howard first came from India to speak about the Indore system of composting. We went with Duncan Skilbeck, who was the principal of Wye College and who then became good friends with Carl.

In 1934 I bought Broome Farm. It was not because I wanted to farm - I was a London boy and had no knowledge of farming - it was to grow food for the Sunfield Children's Home. I became interested in anthroposophy just after the World Conference in 1928. Two hundred people visited that conference in the course of the 10 days and I was absolutely smitten. I was still at school then - I was 17 or 18. By the time I was 19 I was a member of the Anthroposophical Society, as was Adam Bittlestone whom I went to school with. We were 'knocked down' by anthroposophy. In the holidays we went to Gloucester Place (which used to be the Anthroposophical headquarters) where we met old ladies who were kind to us and gave us things to read. We were very enthusiastic. We later went to Oxford together.

I talked of nothing else in those days. I could not stay in Oxford as I could not deal with what was being taught. I wanted anthroposophy and so I went to see Dr Wegman one Christmas time. I told her I must work in anthroposophy. Where should I go? I told her about an experience I had when bicycling over the Mendip Hills during the holidays. My brother had been at the same school as me. We were very close and he 'devoured' anthroposophy in the nine months he was in London before joining his regiment. He ordered every book that was published, as well as taking lessons in German, eurythmy etc. I said that you have all your life to read them why are you in such a hurry. He said that you can't do too much too quickly. Just after that whilst in India in 1922 he died.

I was bicycling over the Mendips and he was in my mind all the time. I looked out over the plain of Avalon towards Glastonbury Tor to the west of me. The sun was just setting behind the Tor and I had the extraordinary impression that the Tor was the base, the church tower the stem and the sun the cup (because the cloud took the top out of the sun). I was riveted. This was a picture of the Grail and my brother was showing to me what should I do. I told this to Dr Wegman and asked 'What should I do?' She asked me what was my most important problem. I said 'How to find your way into life and that is the way of my generation now. We do not follow our fathers any more but we have to find our own way'. So she said that I should ask one or two experienced anthroposophists to help organise a conference for young people. She said that if I arranged it properly it with 'proper people' she would come. So we did and it was held in Glastonbury in 1932.

I was absolutely astonished that Dr Wegman came, as did many other well known anthroposophists both from England and the continent. About 100 people came. I was absolutely shattered. I had to organise it with the help of the people at Sunfield where Dr Wegman had suggested I should go. When I arrived at the conference they said that I should take the chair. I was scared stiff but everyone was very kind. Now, when my brother died he left about two or three hundred pound and my mother gave me £100. That's all the money I had, I normally managed on 10 shillings a week.

When I paid the bills and came to settle up at the end, I found that I owed nothing and it had cost £100 exactly! I felt that was a confirmation that it was right.

Dr Walter Johannes Stein lectured every morning on the history of the world and we had no programme apart from this lecture. We then met in the evening with Wegman and reflected on the conversations we had had that day and formed the programme for the following day. We had one day devoted to education, agriculture medicine and so on.

### **Broome Farm**

In 1934 I bought Broome Farm to grow biodynamic food for the children. Carl was living in the town, so we moved he and his family into the farm and he became the manager. We then thought that we would start biodynamic farming 'proper'. My mother had died in a motor accident and that was where we got the money to buy the farm. Carl moved in with his family. However, we had some difficulties. The farm men, of whom we had about half a dozen, were typical English farm workers. They had mostly fought in the First War. Carl was anxious that his children could speak German, and so only German was spoken in the farmhouse. This led to a near revolt. So Carl had to move out after 3 years.

Derek Duffey then came to Sunfield together with his wife and a few other people and we ran a sort of Emerson College - a 3 year course in anthroposophy. At the end of a year Fried Geuter asked each of them what they wanted to do and they all wanted to work in anthroposophy and agriculture. So they moved into Broome Farm and Carl moved into Clent. He continued as the adviser for the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation and was also a lecturer and writer. He was busy enough and travelled. So we bought him a little car and he visited where he could. There were probably about a dozen (BD) gardens and farms altogether then. We were financed entirely by the private gardeners like Mrs Pease. The gardeners made it possible for the farmers to exist biodynamically. We were terribly poor. It was terribly difficult to find enough money to keep Carl and his family.

Then came the war and everything quietened down. Carl was naturalised as a British citizen and he became a monitor for the BBC in Reading, listening to and translating German broadcasts. David Duffey was here with his family and others. David was a person with tremendous ideas and energy - a very charismatic person. He developed the Sunfield Agricultural Centre. He had a household of 20 students, all learning biodynamics, an experimental garden with a trained scientific person and a laboratory with a trained scientist. He wrote a book with Mrs Hauschka on the 'Early Diagnosis of Diseases in Cattle'. He did a tremendous lot and unbeknown to me it was at the expense of the farm. When the war came the Agricultural Committee came round to examine farms and when they came to Broome they were horrified. They said the farm was so poor and they said that they would dispossess us. The crops were so poor. The students valued their time with Duffey, but the farm was not considered.

All this was too much for me. David asked why I did not farm it myself. I said 'I can't turn you out, you are the manager here'. All the time I had been visiting the farm I had become more interested. (I was living in Sunfield at the time). I got in my car and went to Worcester to see the Chief Executive Officer of WARAC (War Agricultural

Committee) and I said that I would take it on myself and asked: 'If I promise to cooperate with you with the war efforts may I keep it'. 'Certainly you may' he said 'but you must work with the farming advisor who we will send to you and if you cooperate with him it will be alright'. They sent this man and he turned into being a very good friend and helped me tremendously. I provided a home in one of the cottages on the farm and we had a friendship that went on well after the war. He had the knowledge and he was a farmer. We very quickly then became an 'A' farm.

*You came from two different approaches. How did you bring them together?*

He was quite sympathetic to what I wanted to do. He was not at all enamoured with chemical farming. In those days there was so little. There was plenty of nitrogen, which we only used when a crop was failing, as when you have a tot of whisky to pull you together. Potash was very short and they would only allow you a little bit for potatoes, for example. Phosphate was also scarce but not as scarce as potash. There were also no sprays at all - no fungicides or pesticides. In the war we had dairy cows and we reared their progeny. We kept a bull, a flock of sheep; pigs and we also had poultry, which provided eggs for the Home. We grew potatoes and wheat. It was light land so we could grow any arable crop such as barley and oats. We used to grow 'mixed corn' of oats, barley, wheat, peas and beans and in those days we would cut it when the oats were ripe and then let them ripen in the stook. It made a wonderful feed. We were much more 'biodynamic' than we were afterwards when combine harvesters came. The wheat was grown and then milled for the Sunfield bakery. We also grew vegetables and fruit (apples, pears and cherries). We supplied them with a great deal of food. Biodynamics was a very difficult thing in those days. We started with 180 acres and ended up with 250. How do you then stir and spray for that? I did it only once with a knapsack sprayer for the whole farm. I otherwise did it bits the time. We had no mechanical means at all, until Pfeiffer came after the war with his washing machine stirrer. Later George Corrin made a beautiful one made of copper and then we sprayed everything regularly.

In Broome Farm we had no tractor, only horses – 3 pairs of ploughing Shire horses. It was a wonderful atmosphere. We only had ordinary farm men, of course. The biodynamic spraying I did myself as I did not feel that I could ask them. They expected me to tell them things I couldn't so I had to do them myself. The same was with the compost preparations. We built all our manure into long windrows, which I prepared every year. We did it better as time went by and as we did it all by hand - forking it onto a horse drawn cart - it was very slow. Later we bought machines to help with this.

We bought our first tractor around 1936 -7 and the men did not know how to use it. It was a Fordson, which were the only tractors in those days. The men were all horsemen so they had no idea. They ruined it! After the war, in about 1960 or so, no one knew how to handle a horse, but everyone knew how to manage a machine. We stopped working with horses in the about 1960. They were phased out and we then had two tractors, which improved things tremendously. We squared up the fields and got rid of awkward corners. Eventually we had ten fields each of about 20 acres – the smallest was 18 and the biggest 24. They were all rotated and they were all arable. We then had 50 acres of permanent grass where we also had ponds and woods. We planted trees around and hedges round every field and made it into one of the most

beautifully arranged farms you could possibly imagine. Everything was workable and there was no wasteland at all. In our rotation we used to grow a grass ley for 3-4 years, followed by wheat and potatoes and then one year ley of red clover and so on. We had a rotation of 10 years which went round the ten fields. It was terribly slow. They say you need three lives as a farmer: one life to learn, the second life to practise and the third life to teach. Well that is exactly what I feel.

By the time I gave up in 1987, that is when I sold up, I felt just ready to start. We used homoeopathical remedies, which weren't otherwise used then. They are extraordinarily effective on animals. For the New Forest disease of eyes that cattle get in the summer time from flies, there is no cure. Antibiotics get rid of it one day and then it comes back the next, whereas with the homoeopathic treatment you could put it in the water troughs. Every field was fenced and watered for any kind of stock. It made wonderful unity

*How was that in the eighties when you had to sell up and it all came to an end?*

Patricia Thompson took it on herself to save Broome Farm and she did everything in her power. The farm however wasn't my own as we had bought it with my mother's money and it was in trust for my children. It wasn't for me to sell it, as I had to have the children's agreement. Patricia came and tried to save it for the Biodynamic movement. I was only farming because it was biodynamic. I didn't farm because I wanted to farm, it was the anthroposophical impulse that meant everything to me. I was practically farming from the forties until 1987 - I was in the farmhouse with my wife for 47 years. She was a wonderful host. We had our Council meetings on the farm and we had the Circle meetings very often there. She made it possible and she did it very well. They were very warm human occasions.

I felt that my time was over. I had been at the farm for 54 years and I was very grateful. Dr Koepf came here and said how sad it was to lose the place when it had been treated and prepared. I said that you must remember two things: there are always new places coming in and when it has once been treated maybe all is not lost. Mrs Pease's garden and Maurice Wood's farm have all gone. Now many of the farms are in Trusts, like the one in Forest Row (Plaw Hatch) and of course the Camphill farms and that is very good. To begin they were all privately owned and that is where we started and with ordinary employees. No one joined me because of biodynamics until much later on. I had no difficulty spraying with younger men in later years, but earlier on I had to do it all on my own.

## **BDAA**

### **The Biodynamic Association**

Mrs Pease was the secretary of the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation in the 30's and she was excellent. She kept the thing going and I am sure she put money in to keep it solvent. In 1947 after the war, when she was in her eighties, she wrote to me and said 'David would you take on my job if George Adams is beside you'. I said, 'If I can, of course'. I remember Maurice Wood went up to stay there while George translated the Agriculture Course. Everyday when he came home from work, George would read to him what he had translated that morning. And Maurice said you can't

imagine what that meant to me those were the golden days of my life. Those days when I came in and I heard what Dr Steiner had said and what he said next and so on. And he said it was most wonderful experience.

Maurice was a fine person and very devoted to George Adams. He had no scientific training, but had a scientific mind.

In 1935 the whole English Anthroposophical Society felt itself expelled with Vreede, Wegman and Zeylmans etc. Certain people also felt more of a connection with the Goetheanum. They called themselves the **Biodynamic Association**. A Miss Cross was one of the main figures there as well as Lady McKinnon and Kate Thornton. They were genuine sincere people. In about 1950 they wrote to us to ask if they could come to a Circle meeting here in Clent and we wrote back to say that we would be very pleased. That was the beginning of our coming together. It was 20 years or so before the Anthroposophical Society as a whole came together. I welcomed them to the Circle meeting, and they felt welcomed. Dr Pfeiffer then came over later after I had written to him to ask him if he would visit me. He was the most outstanding biodynamic person in the world. He agreed as long as no Anthroposophical politics are discussed. To which I said that I was not interested, I am only interested in the job in hand. So he came. We had a very nice visit to the farm here and he was encouraging. I can only look back with gratitude that he came and he spoke so openly and freely with me.

We then became the Biodynamic Agricultural Association. We put in the word Agriculture because I think that at that time a Polish Cardinal was tortured under the 'biodynamic methods of torture', so we thought that we should put **agriculture** in so that no-one would think we are connected with torture!! This was sometime in the 50s and I continued to be chairman. I offered to pass it on but there was no-one to take it on. For forty years I was chairman. The office and so on were in Broome Farm. In the 1950s Carl Mier moved to Camphill to join Dr König so we took George Corrin on. He was completely new but was a sound person. In the 60s Cynthia Chance was the secretary.

At one particular Council meeting Doris Davy said something that upset Cynthia and I said something in defence of Doris. The result was that Cynthia then resigned straight away. I was left high and dry with no secretary, I had to do it all myself. I had to cancel the conferences as I was occupied with Sunfield. I was also involved with the founding of Elmfield and I had my own farm. I had more than enough. I employed a typist one day a week. All letters accumulated for a week and one day a week I dictated answer to everybody as best I could. This went on for six years. I had to stop a lot. In her time Cynthia had arranged trips to the continent. I could not do this .

We had a member, John Soper, who was a Director of Agriculture in Tanganyika. He had been a member since before the war and had been interested in and been reading about biodynamics for more than 10 years. He had been retired, as in the tropics they retire you in your mid 50s because of the heat. I met him in London and said 'Please before you take on anything don't forget me'. He said 'I won't'. I am so glad that I had the fortune to meet him, because Lady Eve Balfour was after him a few days later to ask him to take a post with the Soil Association and he told her that he was already committed, to which I thank God.

Then began the best time for me in all my time as chairman. He and George worked well together splendidly. He had an experimental garden in the farm, a little laboratory and his own office. For about 10 years that was very good, it took a weight off me. They arranged weekends teaching people how to spray, make compost, the Preparations etc They used to meet at Wynstones once a year and they built up a clientele - people who would come again.

We were 500 members when I took over in 1947 and nearly 600 when I gave up at the end. We were very slow in growing, as we got new members old ones disappeared. In this country people are very slow to change. Although many are sympathetic they won't take the plunge. But today things are so bad, the whole of nature is being killed and that's waking people up. They realise that they have take part in this and that nature is saved. I hope that this is a great help to the BD Movement. Maybe a spiritual movement is needed to reverse this. Maybe the time has come to see that the BD is not only organic, but a manifestation of the supersensible

*What sorts of issues in your time in the Biodynamic Association were the key issues?*

For me in the first years it was survival - just survival. Not of biodynamics, but that the Association and Experimental Circle would go on. I had people coming to me wanting me to dissolve the Experimental Circle, because it wasn't doing anything. I always gave the same answer. 'If a thing isn't perfect, you can always improve it. If you dissolve it that's the end'. There's no dissolving anything as far as I'm concerned. We are going to improve them and if we can't then we keep them going as long as we can until we can improve. Often with the Biodynamic Association I feared for the future whether we could continue to exist because at times too much fell on one person. But it was alright, we survived we came through helped by the spiritual world, there's no doubt about it. If your striving is there the spiritual world helps tremendously and you don't realise it necessarily until afterwards when you ask yourself how you survived and then you realise that without our relationship to the spiritual world you wouldn't have survived. You did and that's all that matters. I felt like that when John Soper arrive. The spiritual world brought me to meet him in London at that time.

*In the 60s and 70s what were the issues. You produced 'Studying the Agricultural Course'?*

Yes there was John's book on gardening, George was a great help there. We didn't have the same terrible crises we have today. Then we asked ourselves: How can we find our way to more people who belong to us? How can we wake them up to enable them to see that this is what they want? The summer conferences started in the early 50s. Cynthia Chance arranged four at Holmebury St Mary's and Hoddeston (?). There wasn't a Hawkwood in those days. And Peredur was a host for us on a number of occasions then later Hawkwood more and more. We had an annual conference there for 10 years or more which that was a great help.

## **Future**

*What is your feeling about the present and future situation in biodynamics?*

In the literature that we have, there is one paper called Anthroposophy Worldwide. In that they tell you of a brave attempt of BD initiatives all over the world, they are mostly poverty stricken and are lacking in people with real knowledge. They must however shine from the spiritual world like stars all over the world. All these anthroposophical initiatives are without any outer support. They are entirely the initiatives of brave people and I think that means more than we can realise. From the spiritual world one can see all these attempts, whether in South America or wherever, to bring about eurythmy, education, medicine, farming, whatever, all over the world. These are the important things. They contain the future even though they may be killed out by the opposing powers the germ won't have died. That initiative will be there and that will build more. This feels to me to be the future. In vain we look around to see who is there who can transform the world like Steiner never attempted to. No he wasn't like that. He spoke soberly and it is up to every individual. It is the individuals all over the world who are creating the future, which from the physical point of view is nothing but from the spiritual point of view is everything. That's how I see it.