

The First Edition of the Agriculture Course in English:

Typed by Marna Pease, incinerated by the Goetheanum

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The earliest editions of the Agriculture Course of Rudolf Steiner in English were hand typed and bound and shipped around the world by Marna Pease (1867-1947) (Fig.1). As the Centenary (in June 2024) of Koberwitz approaches, we ask: have any survived in the UK?

To get an Agriculture Course typed by Marna Pease, a candidate needed to be a member of the Anthroposophy Society and to sign a non disclosure agreement (NDA). The NDA required that the book be relinquished when the recipient left the Society or died.

The German edition of the Agriculture Course was a commercially printed and bound book (issued from 1926).^[e.g. 1]

The English Agriculture Course was translated by George Kaufmann (later Adams) (1894-1963).

The first edition in English were each typed by Marna Pease on just one side of the sheet, and then assembled and hand-bound by her and mailed to recipients (from 1928). The author's copy is bound in mustard-coloured cloth with gilt embossed title (Fig.2).

The text-block is side-stitched with four-hole stab-binding. The paper size is 198x246mm. (The second edition of the Agriculture

Course in English was the first printed English language edition and appeared in 1938).

In 1924, Rudolf Steiner required of the Koberwitzers that they do not share the contents of the Course. Steiner founded the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers and Gardeners at Koberwitz. The task of the Experimental Circle was to test what Steiner called "hints", to find out what works, and to publish the results.^[2] The 1938 publication of Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's book 'Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening'^[3] arguably satisfied Steiner's directives and thereby extinguished the NDAs.

The NDA for the Agricultural Course evolved over time. The NDA for Edward Maurice Wood, of Huby near Leeds for his Agriculture Course #193 (in German) states (in English):

"I accept it on loan for my own personal use in carrying out experiments... within the Agricultural Experimental Circle of the Anthroposophical Society ... I hereby undertake to preserve the strictest secrecy in all quarters as to the content of the aforesaid Lecture-course. I will conduct the experiments in such a way as to exclude all possibility of imitation; and I undertake to lay the same obligations of silence on any of my fellow workers. Moreover I undertake to burn after use any extracts or notes which I may make from the aforesaid Lecture-Course ... In the event of my leaving the Agricultural Experimental Circle or the Anthroposophical Society itself, I undertake to return the aforesaid reprint immediately and free of charge. In the event of my death I hereby lay upon my relatives, executors and heirs the strict injunction to ... return the aforesaid copy No. 193 of the Reprint of the Agricultural Course immediately and free of charge to the Natural Science Section at the Goetheanum, Dornach near Basle, Switzerland."^[in 4]

It appears that the English Agriculture Courses that were relinquished to the Goetheanum, under the terms of the NDA, were incinerated. Australian Ruby Macpherson sent her Agriculture Course (# E 50) in 1960 to the Goetheanum: "I am returning my Agricultural Course ... I am too old to be of any further use in this field, though I will Always continue to take a great interest in the work, which is of such vital import for Mankind."^[5] The letter, but not the book, survives in the Archives of the Goetheanum.

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Fig.1. Marna Pease in her Biodynamic garden at the Old Mill House at Bray



Fig.2. First English edition of the Agriculture Course: Front cover

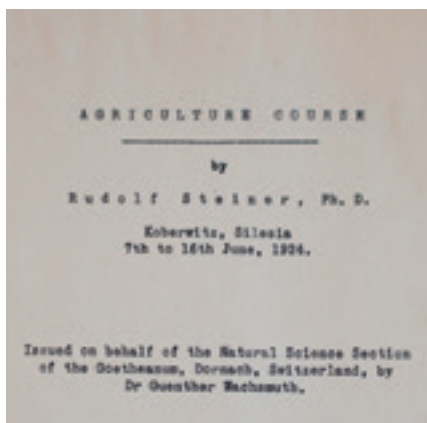


Fig.3. First English edition of the Agriculture Course: Title page, includes number & recipient name

The Marna Pease Agriculture Courses were individually numbered and inscribed with the name of the recipient (Fig.3). The Lectures were individually numbered (e.g. VI/8 = Lecture 6, page 8) (Fig.4). The numbering of the English Agriculture Courses were differentiated with an 'E' to distinguish them from the German editions which were also numbered and inscribed with the recipient's name.

The NDA has long since lapsed. A century has transpired since Rudolf Steiner delivered the Agriculture Course at Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce) in the summer of 1924. The full text of the Course is now available free on the [www \(rsarchive.org\)](http://www.rsarchive.org), and as a book in several printed English translations.

Marna was the Johnny Appleseed of Biodynamics for the Anglo world. She shipped her Agriculture Courses around the world, including approximately 11 to Australia,^[6] 13 to New Zealand,^[7] 33 to the UK,^[8] and 15 to USA.^[9]

The data (sequestered at the Goetheanum) on the diffusion of Agriculture Courses are incomplete for a multitude of reasons. The records were kept by multiple hands over multiple decades. The Goetheanum and the General Anthroposophical Society have been in (more or less permanent) financial crisis for a century. There were particular disruptions, some self-inflicted, including the Great Purge of 1935 that saw many expulsions, orchestrated by the Society headquarters at Dornach, including of prominent Anthroposophists and the national society, the Anthroposophy Society in Great Britain. The Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation (AAF) was thereby alienated from

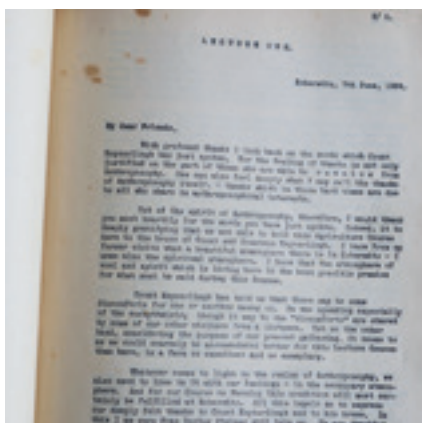


Fig.4. First English edition of the Agriculture Course: Lecture 1, page 1

Dornach. There was also the extra-mural turbulence of the times, including: the Depression, the rise of the Nazis in Germany, and the mayhem of WW2.

Marna Pease was the founder of the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation (in 1928) and she was Secretary until 1946. She kept the BD project afloat and growing through difficult and turbulent times.^[10]

Finding the UK Marna Pease typed Agriculture Courses?

At present there are no known extant UK-destined Marna Pease typed Agriculture Courses (i.e. none known to the author nor to the BDAA). How many have survived the passage of almost a century? As we approach the centenary of Koberwitz (in June 2024) knowledge of surviving early Agriculture Courses would be welcome. Information can be shared with the author (j.paull@utas.edu.au) and/or Richard Swann, the editor of Star and Furrow (rswann@biodynamic.org.uk).

How many copies?

It appears there were less than 100 typed Marna Pease Agriculture Courses and less than 100 recipients. Number E67 may have been the highest number issued (# E67 was sent in June 1937 to Florida, USA). There were more recipients than actual books because some copies were shared between recipients, and some were recycled (i.e. returned and reissued to a fresh recipient). No records of a number later than E67 are identified in the Goetheanum Archives. The Agriculture Course previously reported, by the present author, as recorded as #118 in the library index of the BDAA (but not sighted) appears

(in the light of the above) to be a German edition [4]. The data on the recipient of #118 are missing from the records held in the Goetheanum Archives (the records are incomplete).

Acknowledgement

The kind assistance of the archivists at Dokumentation am Goetheanum, Bibliothek, Dornach, is acknowledged. The copy of the Agriculture Course (# E52) imaged here was issued by Marna Pease in January 1936 to Ileen Macpherson (1898-1984), an Australian pioneer of Biodynamic farming. Ileen treasured her collection of Steiner books which she housed in a timber glass-doored bookcase; it was the sole fine piece of furniture in Ileen's otherwise simply and sparsely furnished home. Ileen specified in her will that her modest home, built to accommodate her disabilities (from pernicious anaemia), be demolished promptly after her death and the land donated to the community as a public park. Those instructions were honoured by her executor Peggy Macpherson. Peggy subsequently gifted Ileen's Agriculture Course to Peter Rathjen in 2000, and Peter gifted it to the present author in 2018. At least three of the 11 Marna Pease Agriculture Courses shipped to Australia have survived.

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