

If you looked at Star and Furrow issues of the mid 1990s the address for correspondence was c/o Rudolf Steiner House, London. No longer the Clent Office at Woodman Lane on the site of the Sunfield Children's Home in the rural hinterland near Stourbridge where the BDAA had operated as a national natural farming and gardening organisation for many decades.

This change of address belied many changes at The BDAA after the sale of Broome Farm in 1987 and included a retirement of Secretary Ann Parsons in 1993 - part of the Clement Family, two Chairs Joachim and Tyll, the drawing to an end of Pat Thompson's (then MacManamon) long running tenure as Editor of Star and Furrow and the closure of not only the office but also the retail sales section of the organisation. It coincided with the ceasing of trading of The Caradoc BD supplies business. Memories of rooms at the old Natural Science Section building at Clent stacked with leaflets, books, exhibition materials waiting to go into storage and rooms where desks and tables and chairs strewn with papers abide, no longer the site for meetings and AGM gatherings in Middle England. It was actually quite a sad sight. A national organisation, the first humus farming charity to be formed way back at the start of the 1930s now looking for a new home.

It is a small but significant chapter of BD History that describes a moment at this time when a group of Gloucestershire Biodynamic Practitioners wondered if actually a national home and office for The BDAA was even necessary: why do we wear out secretaries and staff, travel huge distances and encourage motorway building across our green and pleasant land (remember Swampy and The Newbury Bypass) when we have perfectly good BD Farms and Gardens to visit in most if not nearly all regions of The UK. Why not a regional approach to Biodynamic Practice, do away with a national office altogether!

This Gloucestershire Biodynamic Group which included Bernard Jarman and Oakland's farmer Tim Harmsworth wrote to Council on this matter and could certainly show how a region could be demonstrated. Oaklands Park on the edge of The Forest of Dean was a Camphill Community, a pioneer Agroecology centre boasting a Biodynamic Farm and Garden run as a Community Supported Agriculture project in the economic and social spheres with a huge fruit and vegetable growing distribution business. There was also Camphill Water a remarkable project using the flowforms created by John Wilkes at Emerson College to clean sewage water with the help of reed beds.

In the cultural sphere an active Christian Community Congregation. All in all a demonstration farm, garden and food producing project. And across the Severn Ruskin Mill was developing land based college activity with a fishery and market garden with the students at Nailsworth as well as William Morris House not far away at Eastington with its student gardens, the rise and rise of Stroud as a centre of community land projects and the established centres of Wynstones Rudolf Steiner School with its Kolisko Farm named after Eugene and Lilly Kolisko who had come to England in the 1930s with remarkable scientific knowledge on the efficacy of the BD Preparations. The region presented itself especially when you added a farm apprentice training scheme for BD, Hawkwood College and its adult education Programmes and gardens and a regular celebration of the seasonal festivals on the land with the making of The Preparations in the autumn and their digging up in the spring.

A brief look at other regions showed that the south east of England had the farms like Tablehurst at Forest Row in Sussex, The Sheiling School Ringwood, the Bradleys at Hungary Lane, and Trinity IFarm in the East Midlands, Botton Village on the North York Moors with Larchfield Community developing on the edge of Middlesbrough. In Scotland BD centres near Aberdeen and Edinburgh

not to mention a herb nursery on The Black Isle near Inverness. And in Ireland a separate BD Association was establishing itself in Co Kilkenny. You could say that you were never too far from a Biodynamic land project to visit and get involved so why all the necessary fuss of a national office?!

To add to the situation, there is so much "what if" going on around this mid 1990s point - a couple of figures Hamish McKay (Treasurer) and Charlie Wannop (Secretary) who showed so much promise in the BDAA Council melted away to other lands as quickly as they had come but they left an "if only.." flavour on The Council because of their natural land charisma and the subsequent team had to work very hard to gain credence in the aftermath I would suggest - I think that is a fair statement to make - but also to add to the mix the rise and rise of a competent Demeter Standards Office in Edinburgh started by Jimmy and Pauline Anderson and continued by Timothy Brink with Fiona Mackie as Secretary. So a national office had a question over its head!

Towards the end of the 1990s the question of a demonstration Biodynamic farm and garden in a community setting had begun to come to the fore again with memories of the Broome Farm sale only ten years distant. This came about because of the possibility of purchasing Kolisko Farm which was owned by Wynstones School and presented itself in 1996 as a community land project with productive walled gardens with a box scheme and a small farm with buildings for offices beside teachers houses for the School. A utopian dream you might say and certainly this home of BD in the UK would have been a vibrant little land community between Gloucester and Stroud nestling below The Cotswold scarp in a truly beautiful setting.

After quite some negotiation and meetings with the School Trustees at Wynstones the idea was not accepted and this caused some frustration. As a result the thought that maybe just concentrate on a Stroud town based office for The BDAA where people could come and visit and no more highly ambitious farm based schemes. After all within a stone's throw of the office BD farms and gardens could be visited.

So it was in readiness for the new century The Biodynamic Agricultural Association opened a national based office in The Painswick Inn Project on Gloucester Road very near the BD Garden to be developed at Upper Grange and just across from Hawkwood College.

Perhaps it became a reluctant national office by necessity, The Soil Association was having a moment of glory as the world took notice of organic farming - from margin to mainstream it was called - and in all this the question around The BSE crisis which asked about what you fed animals and reflected on Rudolf Steiner's comment that if you fed a cow with its own meat then it would go mad.

If organics was going mainstream with organic produce finding a home on supermarket shelves and Patrick Holden - soon to become Patron of the Biodynamic work appearing regularly on TV and in the Press - then maybe a national office was needed again with regular hours, secretarial support and response to the media and to an increasing membership.

Yet perhaps this office begun in a strange environment of many retirements and stepping away of key personnel and had its challenges mapped out to rebuild a BD national awareness. A new A4 sized Star and Furrow with a new editor Richard Swann was an early result as well as a comprehensive leaflet outlining the Biodynamic approach and featuring a range of books and contacts available to all enquirers and well designed!

If there was to be a national office then there were to be healthy regional centres as well emphasised by the start of travelling AGMs going all round the country and taking place on a Biodynamic centre of activity.

The office, well set out with new furniture had certainly its work cut out with an early challenge with The Foot and Mouth pandemic of 2001 especially when for perfectly sound reasons Oakland's Park refused to allow the government vets to slaughter the herds of the farm and making national headlines as a result. The interest in the case had the office flooded with enquiries and much information was shared. Other incidents like film star Elizabeth Hurley's like of Biodynamic Sausages from Tablehurst also caught the imagination and enquiries rolled in once more as well from features on Radio 4's The Food Programme.

So the office provided a touchstone but it's Secretary Jessica Standing who was appointed in 1999 just after it began always emphasizes that the office itself can't exist without regional support and activity and that philosophy continues to this day!

Vivian Griffiths
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Sources include personal interviews, Star and Furrow Council Members Lists and the author being on The BDAA Council from 1997 into the new century.