

Between 1929 and 1949 the first humus farming organisation to be established, split itself in two and then tried to rejoin. As there is no official or otherwise *History of UK and Ireland Biodynamic Practice* as yet, there is still quite some confusion over what actually happened. This is not helped by a certain down-playing of the timeline of separation partly through '*it didn't really matter*' for subsequent generations to consider, partly a certain guilt I would suggest. All these human personality questions distract from the main purpose of deepening the knowledge of Biodynamics in honour of Rudolf Steiner's great legacy of The 1924 Agriculture Course. There is even a strand of thought that says to talk about the human personalities and actions involved is pure indulgence.

Philip Conford, who has written widely on the History of The Organic Movement, suggested not very long ago that the story of The UK Biodynamic Movement was the '*elephant in the room*' in the organic narrative, and so it is vitally important that it is written up to try and understand the huge influence it has had on this history. 'Punching far above its weight,' the BD organisations need to tell the story for academic and social historians alike and this has been frustrated by the lack of an official or any other kind of history - so much so that a very muddled account of the early years of Biodynamics appeared in Conford's 2001 History of the Organic Movement with no mention at all of two organisations.

What actually did happen and who were the people involved?

In July 1928 Carl Mirbt came from Silesia and the Kobervitz Estate - the place of The Agriculture Course - to lecture on Biodynamics at the International Anthroposophical Conference in London organised by the then Anthroposophical Society Chair Daniel Dunlop. In The Friend's Meeting House on Euston Road, in between eurythmy performances and lectures on Steiner Education, he gave the BD Lecture in German and it was translated by George Adams who went on to translate The Agriculture Course into English the following year at Maurice Wood's farm in Yorkshire where he had started to use the BD preparations as a result of attending Mirbt's talk.

Dunlop was impressed and invited Carl and his family to England to start what became known as The Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation in 1929 the first humus farming organisation and a full 17 years before The Soil Association was established in 1946. It gained full charitable status in 1931. The Mirbt family first settled in Bray on Thames as the guests of Marna Pease who had a beautiful riverside garden which became with the establishment of the British section of The BD Experimental Circle there, the first centre with Office and Secretary for making the Preparations and furthering of Biodynamic knowledge in the setting of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy.

The BD Experimental Circle is an important subject for it was through this organisation that you could receive The Agriculture Course with a numbered confidential copy for study purposes - and here is the emphasis - that Biodynamics was still in a sense restricted to those making a commitment to study its content and you couldn't spray these Preparations unless "you were a card carrying Anthroposophist".

Five years later, with The AAF well established with newsletter and meetings, a major crisis hit The Centre of Anthroposophical activity at The Goetheanum near Basle in

Switzerland. Many aspects round Rudolf Steiner's legacy and the way it should be made available to the world caused this disagreement. The outcome was the 'dismissal' in very unfortunate circumstances of two very remarkable personalities who had made great contributions to the body of knowledge of Anthroposophy - Elizabeth Vreede as an astronomer and Ita Wegman as a doctor. The result was that those working with these two personalities were also deemed to be dismissed and their membership of The Anthroposophical Society rescinded. It was a great upheaval. Life-long friendships disrupted and a huge weakening of the work of Anthroposophy at a very critical time with the rise of Hitler's Nazi Party in central Europe.

The result of this here in Britain was that Carl Mier and his family - through their connection to Ita Wegman and her work at the Sunfield Children's Home in Clent with its newly established Biodynamic Farm in Broome - were all excluded and this included their connection to Rudolf Steiner House in London.

It is worth following the fortunes of the Mirbt (now Mier) family as part of The AAF as a result of all this disruption. Carl had been visited at Bray by Laurence Easterbrook, a Sussex farmer and agricultural correspondent of a national newspaper the News Chronicle, and he is amazed by this different approach to agriculture and writes about it to much acclaim. Meanwhile looking after this family that has been cast adrift by splits becomes the responsibility of Sunfield and the Wilson family. Later they find a family home in Birmingham and then as part of a new initiative, The Sunfield Agricultural Centre. This centre included Broome Farm and Dereyk Duffy working there with the older children's home students. Clent Cottage nearby is offered to the Mier family where, to support their large family, a guest house is established. Sunfield had become a thriving centre for Anthroposophical study, astronomy, child study, Biodynamics. Parents visiting and holidays in the Clent Hills were also on the list to build this children's home community of shared incomes and ideals so accommodation demands were high. Gertrude Mier is busy! Preparation making, vegetable growing, guest house keeping, family upbringing! Kitty, one of their daughters now in her nineties and living in Pickering after a life in Botton Village, will tell you all about it!!

While all this Anthroposophical activity around the north Worcestershire village of Clent is taking place, a new Biodynamic Association is being established in 1935 as a result of the so-called Split and it is centred around a new Steiner inspired School at The Priory, Kings Langley in Hertfordshire, and is directly connected to Rudolf Steiner House in London. There are two Miss Cross's - one the Headmistress of the School and the other who becomes Secretary of this new organisation. It begins just as a group of individuals. Unlike the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation it is not a charity with its income tax and fund raising advantages, just an association that called itself The Biodynamic Association for Soil and Crop Improvement.

This group has some remarkable responsibility from the start. It was the conduit so to speak of Dr Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's visits to Britain at a critical point when he publishes his conclusive findings on the efficacy of the Preparations and the first move was the relinquishing of the ready-to-be-printed text of Pfeiffer's Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Book from the Anthroposophical Agricultural Association which thought it had the copyright. Actually due

to rearrangements It was in favour of The BDA. This book, translated from the German, was for English audiences a joint venture of the BDA and its sister organisation in the USA and was published there in 1938.

The BDA also published a News Sheet which majored on Pfeiffer's visits to Britain and listed centres where BD work was carried out - namely in the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Its emphasis seemed more 'farmer wanting data' orientated and the invitation to find out about Biodynamics more open to anyone with an interest in farming or market gardening. It seemed more 'secular' in approach keeping Anthroposophical terminology and middle European roots to a minimum and I could be mistaken but studying the Agriculture Course although important is partnered with 'just doing it' with the preparations.

It is at this time that there is the awkward encounter by Pfeiffer with arguably the most influential organicist, Dr Albert Howard - two giants in their field. The newly formed BDA is involved in this gathering at Middle Wallop in Hampshire early on in the BDA history. We shall see another very influential organicist is involved as a BDA Council Member, that of Kinship of Husbandry Founder, Dorset Forester and workcamp inspirer and controversial thinker, Rolf Gardiner.

It is remarkable just how these 2 organisations move ahead on different trajectories involving people at different addresses. In the late thirties Sunfield and Bray are AAF centres with the addition of Huby Mill in Yorkshire while Kings Langley becomes the centre for the BDA.

There doesn't seem much communication between the two, certainly on an official level. For instance, Barbara Saunders Davies in a letter to Ehrenfried Pfeiffer says she keeps out of the politics. Remarkably The BD Experimental Circle remains common ground. It has seen its own drama with the resignation of Gloucestershire farmer Maye Bruce and her development of a plant-based compost starter (based upon the plants of the BD preparations) with the addition of honey called QR - Quick Return - written about enthusiastically also by Laurence Easterbrook and marketed very successfully by the Chase Cloche Company and their catalogue. It is a major 'confuser' for compost heap gardening: many thought they were using the preparations but as the BD Preparations were not so available to the general public and QR is very readily available it became a sort of convenient misunderstanding. Without the animal parts they were definitely not BD preparations! This was one of the big challenges in early UK Biodynamic history and noted with much regret by Pfeiffer later on.

A good example of the different personalities and organisations is Lord Robert Northbourne's 1939 Betteshanger Summer School. Following a meeting with Pfeiffer in Switzerland, Northbourne is in touch with the BDA in organising this summer school at his country estate near Deal - a week-long series of lectures in July and visits by Dr Pfeiffer and colleagues. Northbourne also invites Dr Scott Williamson to contribute, one of the so called Peckham Doctors from the then famous south London Pioneer Health Centre with its organic farm which majors on family health and nutrition.

There is a notice of the upcoming Conference in The BDA News Sheet and thanks is offered to Northbourne by Miss Cross but no report of this important conference is published in the News Sheet, only a purchased leaflet which is strange indeed and nothing in Notes and Correspondence of course. I think it is an important aspect to study further.

The war takes over, so to speak, and meetings of the two groups are curtailed 'for the duration' but AGMs of the groups still happen sporadically.

Carl Mier has to go as a German Speaker to work at the BBC's translation centre at Caversham and the Sunfield Agriculture Centre has been curtailed by Dereyk Duffy's move to Scotland and David Clement taking on Broome Farm by order of the Worcestershire War Ag Committee. Many of the Sunfield coworkers are interred on the Isle of Man and the work severely disrupted. Undaunted Doris Davy and Maria Pease keep the Notes and Correspondence issues coming despite print rationing and restrictions on travel. With the Battle of Britain raging overhead Lady MacKinnon, from her home in Edenbridge, is methodically registering the Biodynamic Agricultural Association as a Registered Company Limited by Guarantee with active help from legal firms. There is a lot to clarify and the process follows correspondence on how much land can be owned and what would be the value of being a charity. The BDA doesn't follow that path, in contrast with The AAF, limiting its fundraising potential.

The different characters of the different groups continue. Lilly Kolisko is advertised as writing about The Working of the Stars in Modern Mystic Magazine with Dr Karl Konig. Mrs Merry and a Russian Princess in an advertisement in a 1940 Notes and Correspondence and Dr Eugene Kolisko who had just died is honoured by a collection of essays he wrote on Reincarnation also advertised in N&C - nothing in the BDA News Sheet.

Meanwhile the News sheet of The BDA follows Pfeiffer's work in The USA, reviews C Alma Baker's 1939 book *The Labouring Earth* which is a clarion call for Biodynamics, and also carries an article by Michael Graham on liming and its consequences after the war. He is author of *Soil and Sense* a pragmatic 'organic with some chemical input' book featured incidentally in a seminal film made in 1943 called *A Canterbury Tale*. This deals with three modern pilgrims on their way to The Cathedral and their 'touching' the soul of a landscape, (in this case Kent) and the strange but ultimately understandable ways of a local land owner and justice of the peace in defending this landscape from invasion, not just physically as in war but in soul and spirit as well.

After the war the AAF at its original address of Maria Pease at Bray publishes A Notes and Correspondence in October 1945. It is a seminal issue paired back by print rationing but in it an account of 2 Experimental Circle Meetings. The first (since 1942) taking place at Rudolf Steiner House to coincide with three lectures on BD Agriculture given by Dereyk Duffy now developing The Westhall Farm Schools in Aberdeenshire. There are tributes to Marna Pease. In the second meeting there is a proposal to hold a weekend of meetings to discuss the relationship between the AAF, the Experimental Circle and the BDA. This actually got postponed but the BD Experimental Circle continued with its meeting undaunted and you get the feeling that much of the BD influence was carried in this group, remembering that

1946 is the date for the start of The Soil Association. (What connections were existing there would be another line of research.)

The next issue quickly moves to Carl Mier back as Secretary of the AAF in their new but temporary home in Warminster, Wiltshire. By 1947 the Mier family are back in Clent Cottage as the Secretary's address complete with guest house but no Sunfield Agricultural Centre. Marna Pease retires and dies. Carl Mier has this quality of writing a very personal tribute illuminated by impressions of life at The Old Mill House with its Office, Lecture Hall and Preparation Making Facility for Members.

Meanwhile in contrast The BDA News Sheet of June 1945 highlights Dr Pfeiffer's Presidency and a message from him from America in which he encourages the establishment of small self-sufficient BD farms for those returning from the war. We also see Rolf Gardiner in a similar vein encouraging forestry as a post war career.

The scene is set in a post war renewal of activity to finally bring the two organisations together. One of the reasons for the renewal is the huge interest in composting afforded by the war where nothing is wasted. We shall see a huge opportunity lost according to Pfeiffer. The proposed amalgamation is outlined in detail in a number of papers found in a brown envelope at the BDA Office in Stroud entitled - Papers Relating to The Amalgamation of The Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation and The Biodynamic Association 1950-1951.

They are titled :-

Suggestions For The Merger of The BD Association for Soil and Crop Improvement and The Anthroposophical Agricultural Association dated September 14th 1950. Biodynamic Association

It is followed by :-

Scheme For The New Society for Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association also dated 14 -09-20 and named E E Pfeiffer. Biodynamic Association

Secretary's Letter No 28 October 1950 from The Anthroposophical Agricultural Association.

The final story starts with the 10th AGM of the Biodynamic Association on 13th July 1950 at The Alliance Hall London SW1. Dr Pfeiffer attended as part of a UK Tour, the first for ten years in the UK. The Chair Rolf Gardiner welcomed him to the meeting. His address was challenging and dramatic saying that he would definitely resign as President and the work should be carried by British staff. He went on to say - and it is faithfully reported in the Minutes - that his influence in The USA was such that a manager of a large Fertilizer Company had said that if we accept your ideas some 300,000 persons would be unemployed - the bottom would have fallen out of their lives - and you have to take care of the unemployed. A deeply responsible approach in some ways because Pfeiffer goes on to say that to guide things in the right way it is necessary not only to transform industries but also to assume social responsibilities. Then a bombshell when he says that social responsibilities are what The Anthroposophical Society has not assumed.

He goes on to chide the two organisations for always looking at differences and not acknowledging achievement - in a living organism the organs do not criticise, but help one another.

He then prescribed how the two organisations might be united. He thought the BD News Sheet should be carried on as the one more suitable for the outside work and the public whereas the magazine of the AAF might be more for internal work and a refining of what we present outwardly. He is very complimentary of David Clement and Broome Farm. He thought he should be representative for Farmers whereas Rolf Gardiner Forestry and later on in the text mentions Carl Mier for BD Gardening. Different aspects of the work of the 2 organisations coming together should come under the headings of Science, Publications, Preparations and Gardening and Farming each with its own Chair yet having a central Secretary. He thought the BDA in America had been too idealistic in advising biodynamic conversion and had caused financial hardship in some cases. We had to take on materialism in science and agriculture and go through the eye of the needle with this aspect with our fellow human beings, Parsifal was his hero - surviving huge challenges.

It certainly challenged the audience: you must acknowledge each other's achievement and we also have to blame ourselves that Rudolf Steiner's concepts of the working of cosmic forces into earthly substances have not been accepted in the organic world. He cited the example of the failure to properly explain The QR Method and its limitations by not showing enough of the efficacy of the proper BD Preparations - it was our fault. No use blaming Maye Bruce! (Author's comment!)

There was some conversation in which Carl Mier said he could not speak on behalf of the AAF but he liked what he heard and would write a letter to the Members of The AAF recommending a meeting of the 2 organisations with a view to accept proposals. It is interesting to note that the minutes are followed by a summary of remarks by J.E Jefferies which highlight the challenges, especially that the fact that Biodynamics - although accepted in some quarters - doesn't seem to be liked! He also reflected on the troubled situation of Biodynamics in the disrupted Europe that Pfeiffer described.

A month later with Pfeiffer back in the USA, an air-mail paper letter dated September 14 came with Pfeiffer's 'Suggestions for the Merger of The BD Association for Soil and Crop Improvement and The Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation.' It is interesting to see that he describes the two organisations thus:- *One to work with the outside farmers or gardeners who know nothing about Anthroposophy, but gets interested in and want to know more about the responsibility of applying the BD Method.* (Presumably the BDA.)
The other *to intensify the anthroposophical work in connection with agriculture* - the AAF.

He suggests 5 working sections:

1. Information Office - Farm
2. Information Office - Gardens
3. Information Office for Anthroposophical Farms and Gardens.
4. Central Library and Information Services
5. Publications Committee.

He assigns people as mentioned before but leaves out Miss Cross! He thinks a responsible editor is needed for each section for the 2 publications. He confirms that we have thrown open the content of The Agriculture Course, the knowledge of the BD Preparations and that has now become public property. Challenging statements!

He hopes that the main activities will be in the group's and sections and local sub groups and regional meetings should be encouraged. Don't make the new organisation too heavy!

There is a letter to Carl Mier from the Hon Secretary Katherine Thornton writing from Cobham, Surrey full of complications about publishing information and in what order. It ends by saying "One realises when reading the Karma of the A.M. Lectures as I am doing at present, that one's difficulties and inadequacy to deal with things is not unfounded." With quite some pressure from Pfeiffer and the BDA Carl Mier now writes to the members of the AAF looking forward to the AGM in December and outlining the idea of the amalgamation proposal but not going into detail. Reading between the lines Miss Cross's position is under review and much of the new staff positions should be from the AAF, Clement, Mier etc. A new name is suggested - The Biodynamic Foundation - but this as we shall see runs into problems, as does how the publications should be organised. The huge advantage of The AAF being a charity comes into focus here.

The Autumn 1950 publications come out! Nothing is mentioned about proposals in the AAF Notes and Correspondence, a detailed Amalgamation Proposal in the News Sheet 29 of the BDA! It doesn't get sent out after much delay at the printers and discussion at Council.

The AAF AGM takes place in December and the two organisations exist side by side into 1951 while legal and technical issues were ironed out including the status of The Biodynamic Association Trust, the cancellation of a BDA News Sheet due to Miss Cross' 'misunderstanding', new headings, and the name which exercised the new Council with David Clement in The Chair into the spring - strong objections to *The Biodynamic Agricultural Union* idea being voiced.

Meanwhile the new office in the out-buildings of Clent Cottage was approved and material from the BDA moved there.

In June 1951 the new letter heading appeared. Biodynamic Agricultural Association stood proud at the top centre with in slightly smaller print the words underneath - "Founded on The Work of Rudolf Steiner"

Secretary - Dr CA Mier ; Address - Clent Cottage, Clent. Stourbridge, Worcs. Tel Hagley 2818

A new chapter had begun and new challenges immediately arose namely whether the new BD AA would want to be part of a "Wholefood Mark" along with a number of bodies including the Soil Association. Another story is probably the reflection there and it is fair to say that various issues still had to be solved including Notes and Correspondence being under the heading of both organisations in 1951. A new name Star and Furrow heralded the amalgamation of the two publications in 1953 with Doris Davy continuing from Notes and Correspondence as Editor.

Trying to read between the lines with these minutes and correspondence is a challenge and a deeper research might reveal a clearer picture. I think it is fair to say that a new post war mood wanted to see the 2 organisations coming together but their different legal set ups - one a charity, one a company - provided technical challenges and the name question and the merger of the publications took time. Also there is the loss of some key personnel who retired, namely Rolf Gardiner a keen organicist. Perhaps it is fair to say that a stretch of blue water now existed between the BDAA and The Soil Association. With Rolf Gardiner serving on both councils previously - the Soil Association and The BDA - that was not then so emphasised. You could also say that most of Pfeiffer's suggestions were ignored - maybe as too expensive - and that most of the leading roles of the newly formed BDAA went to AAF staff, Clement and Mier. Notes and Correspondence became Star and Furrow under the same Editor.

Was that just retirement as the BDA is wound up or something more, Is Miss Cross cross I wonder, where is Pfeiffer in all these changes!

I would say that the papers that I have been examining need further study with a well trained academic mind and I would suggest copy made and sent to Professor John Paull at the University of Tasmania.

Vivian Griffiths January 2021