

# THE BETTESHANGER SUMMER SCHOOL: MISSING LINK BETWEEN BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURE AND ORGANIC FARMING

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*“Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer ... will be in charge of demonstrations, assisted by members of the Bio-dynamic Association and others ... As Dr. Pfeiffer’s activities are world-wide, the opportunity of securing his services for a full week is a rare and important one”* Lord Northbourne (1939e, p.1).

## Abstract

Biodynamic agriculture and organic farming have been regarded as having different provenances and having arisen independently. The present account introduces the ‘missing link’ between the two. In 1938 Ehrenfried Pfeiffer published the milestone book on biodynamics: *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*. In 1940 Lord Northbourne published *Look to the Land*, the work that introduced the term ‘organic farming’. In the summer of the intervening year, Pfeiffer travelled from Switzerland to Northbourne’s estate in Kent, UK, and presented for British farmers a nine day course on biodynamics, the Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamic Farming, 1-9 July 1939. Pfeiffer was supported by the pre-eminent biodynamic scholar-practitioners, Otto Eckstein and Hans Heinze. Dr Scott Williamson of the Peckham Experiment was the sole British lecturer at the Betteshanger Summer School. For the UK Bio-Dynamic Association, the Betteshanger Summer School was the highlight of the year. Northbourne and Pfeiffer had collaborated on the Farleigh Experiment in 1938, and Northbourne had travelled to Switzerland in January 1939 to arrange Pfeiffer’s visit. War broke out less than eight weeks after the Betteshanger Summer School. Northbourne’s manifesto on organic agriculture, *Look to the Land*, was published in May of the following year. The book took the Steinerian and biodynamic view of ‘the farm as an organism’ as its central tenet and adopted it as the nominative motif for ‘organic’ farming. The book offered to the Anglophone world an account that was secular and distanced from any Anthroposophic or Germanic roots. Subsequently, Northbourne sought to bring Pfeiffer to the UK but Pfeiffer’s next and final visit was in 1950. The Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on biodynamics has been otherwise unreported. As this account demonstrates, Betteshanger was a stepping stone from biodynamics to organics. Northbourne sponsored Pfeiffer’s visit and the Betteshanger biodynamics conference in 1939, and the following year he introduced his term ‘organic farming’ and its philosophy in his book *Look to the Land*.

**Keywords:** Organic agriculture, biodynamic farming, conference, ‘Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening’, ‘Look to the Land’, Lord Northbourne, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Viscount Lymington, Earl of Portsmouth, Otto Eckstein, Hans Heinze, Albert Howard, Farleigh Experiment, Haughley Experiment, Kent, Bio-Dynamic Association.

## Introduction

Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (1899-1961) published *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* in 1938 (Plate 1). It was the culmination of a decade and a half of experimental agricultural work of the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophical Farmers in which the indications of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) were put to the test and the results formalized (Paull, 2011b). Steiner had presented his Agriculture Course of eight lectures plus associated discussion sessions, to an audience of 111 attendees from six countries, over a ten day period, 7-16 June 1924, in Koberwitz (now Kobierzyce, Poland) (Paull, 2011a). Steiner described it as: “a course of lectures containing what there is to be said about agriculture from an anthroposophical point of view” (Steiner, 1924b, p.9). He stated that “the lectures should be considered first of all as hints, which for the present should not be spoken of outside this circle, but looked upon as the foundation for experiments and thus gradually brought into a form suitable for publication” (Steiner, 1924b, p.10).

Pfeiffer was, at this time, the Director of the Bio-chemical Research Laboratory of the Natural Science Section of the Goetheanum, also known as the Free University for Spiritual Science (Lorand, 1996; Pfeiffer, 1938a). The Goetheanum, located near Basel is the international headquarters of Anthroposophy. The Natural Science Section had been charged by Rudolf Steiner with the task of developing the “hints” of his Agriculture Course at Koberwitz through to public dissemination (Steiner, 1924b). It was Pfeiffer who, with his book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* published in 1938, brought the “hints” of the Agriculture Course

into “a form suitable for publication”. The course itself had, in the meantime, been transcribed and translated from the notes of course attendees (Steiner, 1929).

In the period from 1924 to 1938 the name ‘bio-dynamic’ was evolved and the practices were tested and formalized. Pfeiffer’s book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* was the ‘coming of age’ as well as the ‘coming-out’ of bio-dynamics. The book was published in 1938 in at least five languages: English (Pfeiffer, 1938a); Dutch (Pfeiffer, 1938b); German (Pfeiffer, 1938c); French (Pfeiffer, 1938d); and Italian (Pfeiffer, 1938e). Steiner had presented his Agriculture Course on a single occasion in the summer of 1924; a few months later on 28 September he entirely withdrew from public life due to illness; and he died on 30 March 1925 (Collison, 1925; Whitehead, 2010). His injunction to the Koberwitz group had been to put his ideas to the test, and, when there were empirical results to share the proven practices with the world. Pfeiffer took on that mission and it became his life’s work.

Lord Northbourne (1896-1982) published *Look to the Land* in 1940 a book in which he coined the term ‘organic farming’. The book was a manifesto of organic farming, and he wrote of the contest of “organic versus chemical farming” (p.81). Northbourne’s terminology of ‘organic farming’ was promptly adopted internationally. Jerome Rodale published the first ‘organic’ journal, *Organic Farming and Gardening*, in the USA in 1942. The Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society was founded in Sydney in 1944 (Paull, 2008). Eve Balfour (1943) quoted Northbourne’s book extensively in her best selling book *The Living Soil*. Composting advocate, Albert Howard (1944), adopted the ‘organic’ terminology as did Pfeiffer (1952).

Northbourne stated in *Look to the Land* that “the 'bio-dynamic method evolved in accordance with the recommendations of the late Dr Rudolf Steiner. The ... method has been highly developed in the course of some fifteen years' work on the Continent, and its effectiveness may be said to be proved, though its supporters would be the last to claim that there is no more to be learnt about it” (p.173). He included in his “Select Bibliography” (p.195) Pfeiffer’s *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*. Other than the two aforementioned references to biodynamics by Northbourne, there is otherwise no indication of any linkages between the authors or the books.

The present account reveals the ‘missing link’ between these two milestone books for biodynamics and organics. A nine day Summer School and Conference was organised by Northbourne and held at his estate in Kent. The chief presenter was Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and he was assisted by leading bio-dynamics advocates of the day from ‘the Continent’. Pfeiffer’s book appeared in 1938; the joint Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamic Farming was held in 1939; Northbourne’s book appeared in 1940.

## Betteshanger preparations

Lord Northbourne met Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, though not for the first time, in November 1938. Northbourne wrote in a letter to Viscount Lymington:

“I got an opportunity to meet Dr. Pfeiffer in Kent ... I am left wondering how it might be possible to induce Dr. P. to spend more time in England. He is worth anything. I hope in time to form an interested group in E. Kent. We have plenty of lively people - genuine farmers” (Northbourne, Lord, 1938a, pp.1-2).

Northbourne wrote that:

“I am tremendously interested in the plan for getting Pfeiffer over here in the summer; and prepared to do all I can to bring it about ... I could make a firm offer to run it here, and to take responsibility for administrative details” (1938b, p.1).

He wrote of his enthusiasm, that “this is the most attractive idea I have come across for some time, & I will do all in my power to promote it” (Northbourne, 1938, p.2). He added that “I am not aware of any established bio-dynamic farm or garden nearer than 43 miles” although “Hugh Finn (10 miles) is starting” (p.2).

It appears that Northbourne had been preparing for the Betteshanger Summer School for 12 months prior to the event. Of his farm, he states in a letter that:

“Neither the farm nor its attached market garden had hitherto been run on the bio-dynamic method ... Nevertheless some thirty-six heaps of very varying materials, size, shape and age were available for inspection ... Experimental work on the farm and market garden had been started nearly a year previously, so some mature examples were available” (Northbourne, 1939a, p.9).

Six months before the Betteshanger Summer School, Northbourne travelled to Switzerland to meet Pfeiffer. He reported that:

“I had a very good day with Pfeiffer in Switzerland on the 20th of this month [January 1939]. I have now got fairly complete details of lectures and the general arrangement of the Course; also work which it is desirable to do on the farm by way of preparation. I am making arrangements for the necessary assistance from the B.D.A.”<sup>1</sup> (Northbourne, 1939b, p.1).

## Betteshanger announcements

In February 1939 Lord Northbourne announced a: “Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamic Farming” to be held at his estate: “Home Farm, Betteshanger” in Kent, from “Saturday 1st July to Sunday 9th June 1939, inclusive” (Northbourne, 1939e, p.1).

The invitation advised that: “The purpose of the School is to give some British farmers the opportunity of meeting Dr. Pfeiffer and his colleagues, and of learning something of their work” (p.1). The number of attendees “will be limited to 40” (p.1), and those “by invitation only” (p.2). The “chief feature of this work has been the practical application of every-day farming problems of a remarkable insight into the processes of nature, and sympathy with living things ... The School will have primarily a practical basis” (p.1).

Northbourne drew up a “Preliminary List for Invitations”. That list included five lecturers (Table 1) and 50 potential invitees. These 50 were classified into three sets as: “Suggested by B.d.A. (London)” [sic] (N=22); “Suggested by Lord Lymington” (N=8); and “Suggested by Lord Northbourne” (N=20) (Northbourne, 1939d).

**Table 1. Scheduled lecturers for the Betteshanger Summer School (Source: Northbourne, 1939d). (In the event, Schamhart did not appear).**

Lecturer	From
Dr. Pfeiffer	Switzerland
Dr. Eckstein	Switzerland
Dr. Scott Williamson	England
Dr. Heinze	Holland
Dr. Schamhart	Holland

Pfeiffer's visit had been announced six months previously in the bi-annual *News Sheet of the Bio-Dynamic Method of Agriculture*, the “Organ of the Bio-Dynamic Association (B.D.A.) for Soil and Crop Improvement” (BDA, 1938). At the Second Annual General Meeting of the Bio-Dynamic Association, the Betteshanger Summer School was identified as the key biodynamic event of 1939:

“The main feature of 1939, the Secretary said, was the impending visit of Herr Pfeiffer, which would be entirely devoted to a Summer School to be held at Lord Northbourne's estate near Deal, Kent. About forty farmers and gardeners, all invited, were expected to attend the school, the aim of which was to promote the knowledge of the application of the bio-dynamic methods to the special conditions of Great Britain. Herr Pfeiffer would give daily lectures and conduct demonstrations and visits; the list of lecturers would include: Dr. O. Scott Williamson (Peckham), Dr. E. O. Eckstein (Dornach) and Dr. O. Heinze<sup>2</sup> (Loverendale, Holland)” (BDA, 1939, p.5).

The UK *Bio-Dynamic Association* had, at this time (June 1939), 111 members of whom 55 “were active farmers or gardeners” (BDA, 1939). The Meeting acknowledged Northbourne's initiative and expressed “its gratitude to Lord Northbourne for the trouble he has taken in arranging the Summer School for July and to wish the School every possible success” (BDA, 1939, p.6).

## Betteshanger lecturers

The biodynamics lecturers that Northbourne recruited for the Betteshanger Summer School were the leaders in their field. Three of the lecturers were the pre-eminent biodynamic scholars of the period. Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and Dr. E. Otto Eckstein travelled from the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland, and Dr. Hans Heinze travelled from the Loverendale biodynamic farm at Walcheren in Zeeland, the Netherlands.

Ehrenfried Pfeiffer had recently published *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* (1938a). In his invitations for the Summer School, Northbourne echoed Pfeiffer's book title: ‘Summer School on Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening’. Pfeiffer's book was the first comprehensive account of bio-dynamics to be published and it was the outcome of fourteen years of intensive experimental collaborative research by anthroposophic farmers and researchers.

<sup>1</sup> Bio-Dynamic Association (B.D.A.) for Soil and Crop Improvement; Great Britain, sometimes contemporaneously abbreviated as B-d.A.

<sup>2</sup> ‘O. Scott Williamson’ should have read ‘G. Scott Williamson’; ‘O.Heinze’ should have read ‘H. Heinze’, (Hans).

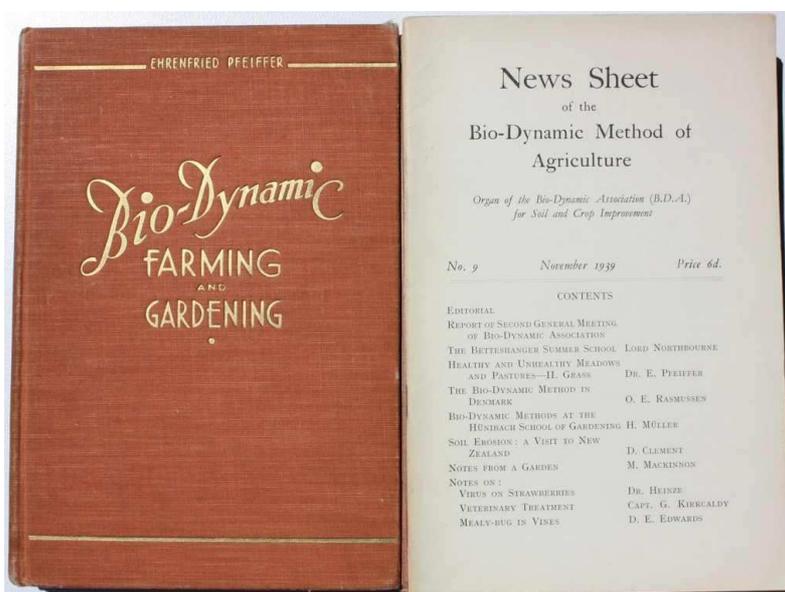
Pfeiffer states that: "The bio-dynamic movement developed out of the co-operation of practical workers with the Natural Science Section of the Goetheanum", and he named Otto Eckstein and Hans Heinze as two such co-workers in that development (Pfeiffer, 1958, p.9).

Hans Heinze worked with Pfeiffer at the Natural Science Section, Goetheanum, Switzerland from 1928. He was appointed as Director of Holland's biodynamic showcase farm, Loverendale, in 1936 (von Plato, 2003). Loverendale was one of the first farms in the world to convert to biodynamics, that decision being made in 1926, and it occupies a proud place in the history of the theory, practice and development of biodynamics (Loverendale, 2009; von Plato, 2003).

Members of the UK's *Bio-Dynamic Association for Soil and Crop Improvement* (BDA) (established 1938) would have been familiar with Pfeiffer from his regular contributions to their *News Sheet of the Bio-Dynamic Method of Agriculture* (established 1935, and predating the BDA), and also from Pfeiffer's previous visits to the UK in 1936 and 1938 (M. MacKinnon, 1936, 1939). Otto Eckstein and Hans Heinze were both contributors to the bi-annual *News Sheet* (e.g. Eckstein, 1938; H. Heinze, 1939) (Plate 1).

The fourth lecturer at the Betteshanger Summer School was Dr. Scott Williamson (1884-1953) who was the co-founder, with his wife Dr. Innes Pearse, of the Pioneer Health Centre (1926-1950) at Peckham (London). The pair practiced biodynamic farming (Reed, 2003), and they advocated for an awareness of the close link between diet and wellness (Pearse & Williamson, 1931). With the Pioneer Health Centre they put their philosophy into practice. The record of the Centre's implementations and outcomes were presented in *The Peckham Experiment* (Pearse & Crocker, 1943). The authors asked: "Have you ever thought that health may be infectious? That it might spread through a community? ... It happened at Peckham" (Pearse & Crocker, 1943, dj). Theirs was a memetic approach, that wellness memes could be contagious, and contrariwise, that poor dietary choices could also be a matter of imitation and contagion:

"The child, quick to imitate, tends to esteem the 'prepared' foods above those which are derived from more natural sources. His values are all disturbed ... Whim and the shopkeeper become his guides to nutriment" (Pearse & Williamson, 1931, p.56-57).



**Plate 1. Pfeiffer's 1938 *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* (left) and Northbourne's 1939 report of the Betteshanger Summer School in the *News Sheet of the Bio-Dynamic Method of Agriculture* (No.9) (right) (Photo: J. Paull).**

It was an enviable line up of talent that Lord Northbourne recruited for the Betteshanger Summer School of July 1939. Although not foreseeable at the time, it was one that was never to be repeated, and, in the chronicle of UK biodynamics history, it remains an event without peer.

### Betteshanger programme

The programme for the Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamic Farming included the opening address "Essentials of the Bio-Dynamic Method" by Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer. Further lectures by Pfeiffer included "The Soil a Living Organism" and "The Farm a Biological Organism" (Northbourne, 1939e,

p.3). The lecture topic of Dr. Scott Williamson of the Pioneer Health Centre at Peckham was "The Biological Requirements of the Human Organism" (p.3) (Table 2). Albert Howard was intentionally not invited. Northbourne in considering a "British non-B-d A<sup>3</sup> lecturer" wrote that: "On the whole I think not Sir A. Howard" (Northbourne, 1939c).

Northbourne wrote of the biodynamic Summer School that:

"About forty people attended ... They formed an admirably diversified assembly. There were people already familiar with the bio-dynamic method and those who had hardly heard of it. There were farmers and gardeners of very varied experience with a sprinkling of members of College<sup>4</sup> and Advisory staffs" (Northbourne, 1939a, p.8).

The nine day programme of the Betteshanger Summer Course included, besides the formal lecture content, "four mornings and two afternoons ... devoted to practical work" (Northbourne, 1939a, p.8) and "Two days were occupied by excursions to farms" (p.9).

**Table 2. Programme of lectures for the Betteshanger Summer School (Northbourne, 1939e, p.3).**

Date	Topic	Presenter
1 July	Essentials of the Bio-dynamic Method	Dr. E. Pfeiffer
2 July	The Soil as a Living Organism	Dr. E. Pfeiffer
3 July	The Farm as a Biological Organism	Dr. E. Pfeiffer
4 July	The Biological Requirements of the Human Organism	Dr. Scott Williamson
5 July	The Health of Livestock and its Dependence on Feeding the Soil	Dr. E. O. Eckstein
6 July	Discussion of Lecture	
7 July	The Fertility of the Earth: Its Preservation and Renewal	Dr. E. Pfeiffer

Farm visits included: "the nearest bio-dynamic establishment"; "a large scale intensive mixed farm"; "a large-scale mechanized farm"; and the University of London's teaching farm at South-Eastern Agricultural College, Wye (Northbourne, 1939a, p.11). As the then Vice-Chairman of the governing body of the South-Eastern Agricultural College (SEAC, 1940), Northbourne was well positioned to claim, of the College farm at Wye, that: "This is remarkable as a commercial mixed farm which has made a handsome profit for a succession of years" (Northbourne, 1939a, p.11). The programme included a demonstration of the biodynamic treatment of fruit trees. Northbourne mentions the use of the biodynamic preparations: #500, #501 and #508. He comments that the stirring procedure "tends to arouse a certain amount of mystification and even skepticism in the uninitiated" (Northbourne, 1939a, p.10).

Northbourne (1939a) comments that "there was plenty to do" and also: "plenty to say". Relating the conviviality of the event, he commented that:

"It is extraordinary how many nice points invariably arise when a few are gathered together to perform any of the absorbing tasks associated with bio-dynamic farming and gardening" (p.10).

Discussions were scheduled to follow all lectures. Field work "will be carried out on the farm" (Northbourne, 1939e, p.3). Northbourne advised that: "Although the farm has not hitherto been worked on bio-dynamic methods, the necessary material for field work and demonstrations will have been prepared in advance" (p.3). Field work would additionally include "opportunities for instructions to farm workers" (p.3).

Viscount Lymington (writing later as the Earl of Portsmouth) described the Betteshanger Summer School:

"It was one of the most exciting weeks I ever spent. We would work part of the day on his bio-dynamic methods, and then both for recreation and refreshment Pfeiffer would lecture to us in the evenings" (Portsmouth, 1965, p.84).

Northbourne describes Saturday 8 June 1939 as a festive event:

"The last Saturday afternoon and evening were occupied by a large party at The Home Farm for members and all farm and estate workers and their families, in all some 200 souls. Sports and games, tea, a play given in the barn by the boys of Betteshanger school, supper and dancing provided a gay and harmonious conclusion to what must remain, at least to most of those who were present, a very memorable week" (1939a, p.11).

In the shadow of the unfolding international events of the time, Northbourne wrote of:

<sup>3</sup> 'B-d.A' is the UK Bio-Dynamic Association.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Northbourne was at the time a Governor of South-Eastern Agricultural College, Wye and Chairman of the Board of Governors of Swanley Horticultural College.

“... the spirit of friendliness, happiness and unity which prevailed. That was a striking and perhaps not the least important feature of the school. It is true to say that for nine days the possibility of war was scarcely alluded to; things more real and more constructive absorbed attention” (1939a, p.8).

## World War II

By the time Northbourne's account of his biodynamics Summer School appeared in print (November 1939) the bucolic memories of the proceedings must have seemed like a visitation from a distant era. Europe had by that time plunged into a bloody maelstrom from which it would not emerge for six grim years<sup>5</sup>.

The following year (1940) the Bio-Dynamic Association lamented that “the conditions of war have made it impossible to hold meetings or to arrange conferences and lectures”. They nevertheless proclaimed that “the knowledge of the bio-dynamic methods has steadily spread” (BDA, 1941a, p.11). At the Third Annual General meeting of the BDA (20 April 1940): “The Chairman expressed his regret at the absence of Dr. Pfeiffer who had been unable to obtain a French transit visa for his journey from Dornach” (MacKinnon, 1941, p.4). The proposal that “Dr. Pfeiffer should be appointed official adviser to the Association” was “unanimously adopted” (p.4).

## Biodynamic Praise for *Look to the Land*

The Editorial in the *News Sheet of the Bio-Dynamic Method of Agriculture* of the wartime joint issue dated November 1940 and April 1941, urged its readers to read Lord Northbourne's “recently published” book *Look to the Land*, “and also to make it as widely known as possible among their friends by recommending its inclusion in public libraries” (BDA, 1941c, p.3).

A five-page review of *Look to the Land* in *News Sheet of the Bio-Dynamic Method of Agriculture* expressed the favourable and hopeful view:

“Lord Northbourne has not been tempted to seek for a superficial solution in the form of palliative schemes. He has endeavoured to keep in view the situation as a ‘whole’, and to lead the way to a saner outlook on life and a truer sense of values as the only secure basis for reform. It is a stimulating book, and we hope that it will find a place, not only on the bookshelf, but in the minds of all who have the good of the land and the people at heart” (BDA, 1941b, p.17-18).

## The Farleigh Experiment

Leading up to the Betteshanger Summer School of 1939, there were two precursor events, namely a summer weekend at Farleigh, and the Farleigh Experiment. These events served as feedstock for the process leading to the Betteshanger Summer School.

Personal correspondence between Lord Northbourne and Viscount Lymington reveals that here was already, in 1938, a 3-way experiment underway in Britain comparing various farming methods, namely; “Sir Albert Howard's methods”; the Steiner method under the direction of Dr. Pfeiffer”, and thirdly, “the most approved and up to date methods of fertilisation with artificial manure only”. (Lymington, 1938b).

The plans for this experiment date back to 1936 (Lymington, 1936). Lymington stated in personal correspondence that “just under 100 acres of ordinary farmland” was devoted to the experiment (1938b). Regarding the inclusion of “artificial manure” in the comparison, he elaborated that “it is entirely necessary to include the latter because until one gets a side by side comparison your over intellectual skeptic will never be convinced” (1938b).

The “Farleigh Experiment” (so called by Northbourne, Lord, 1938c) was the outcome of an initial meeting, on 11 August 1936, at Farleigh Wallop of eight participants including Albert Howard (Lymington, 1936, p.1). A longitudinal multifactorial experiment was proposed: five fields x five different crops x three management styles per field x seven years (1936-1942)<sup>6</sup> (1936, p.1-2). There was a further planning meeting on 15 November 1936 which included both Pfeiffer and Howard (p.4).

There was subsequently a summer weekend meeting in 1938, at Farleigh, with twelve participants, which included Lymington and his wife Bridget, as well as Northbourne, Howard, Pfeiffer, and George Stapleton (Portsmouth, 1965, p.88, 89). Lymington described this as: “The point at which we began to coalesce” (Portsmouth, 1965, p.88).

<sup>5</sup> WWII: 1 September 1939 - 2 September 1945.

<sup>6</sup> i.e. a 5x5x3 factorial design x7 years.

The Farleigh Experiment was a venture with joint input from Lymington, Northbourne, Howard and Pfeiffer. Recalling those events, Lymington wrote of the discussions that:

“Walter Northbourne’s quiet way of enunciating a wise but unpalatable thought on a stubborn fact we had overlooked gave weight and direction” (Portsmouth, 1965, p.89).

Recalling the diplomacy and the quiet contestation of the occasion, Lymington noted: “At one moment Howard said to Pfeiffer, ‘Which of our two methods will give the best results?’ to which Pfeiffer replied, ‘I think they will be much the same’” (Portsmouth, 1965, p.89)<sup>7</sup>.

Of these bold plans, Lymington wrote that:

“... two things prevented us going further than the second year with it. It was only in the spring [circa March 1939?] following our summer meeting [c. June 1938] that we could begin to apply the compost to the planted crops. Before the autumn [c. September 1939] of that year war-clouds were lowering” [dates added] (Portsmouth, 1965, p.89).

Besides the impediments of timescale and impending warfare: “The other inhibitor was lack of money. We could get no official scientific backing. We ourselves, singly and collectively were anything but rich” (p.89). The Farleigh Experiment was viewed as providing impetus for a later similar venture: “The Haughley experiments ... under Lady Eve Balfour, were an indirect result” of Farleigh (Portsmouth, 1965, p.89).

Northbourne was not involved in the establishment of the Farleigh Experiment. Northbourne introduced himself to Viscount Lymington in a May 1938 letter in response to Lymington’s newly published book *Famine in England* (Northbourne, 1938). Of the book, Northbourne wrote: “To praise it would be presumptuous. To say that it is timely would be to put the matter far too mildly” (1938). Of himself Northbourne wrote: “I have been a farmer at heart all my life, and one in practice since 1921”. He commented that “I have become increasingly convinced” of the need for “reform of our monetary system and ideology”, although he added that “I am not a ‘social creditor’ nor a ‘fascist’” (1938). Northbourne’s own views on the subject appeared that month as ‘A Plain Approach to World Economy’ in the anthroposophic journal *The Present Age* (Northbourne, Lord, 1938e).

Lymington’s *Famine in England* was critical of “the school of artificial manuring” (1938a, p.157). The book urged that “we must return to and improve on the practice of our ancestors” (p.128). Like Steiner before him, and Northbourne after him, Lymington cited Kings’ 1911 book *Farmers of Forty Centuries* (Lymington, 1938a, p.138). *Famine in England* railed against the most recent directions that agriculture was taking where “the natural heritage of ten thousand years is wasted in two generations” (p.201).

*Famine in England* warned of “the dangers of treating plant growth as a chemical mixture”, adding that “sulphate of ammonia and many other artificial manures are likely to kill the earthworm and bacterial life of the soil” (Lymington, 1938a, p.158). Lymington claimed that “we have in the last thirty years introduced a system of soil and plant poisoning unequalled in folly” (p.159). He stated: “That right feeding of soil and animal can make disease negligible has been proved by Sir Albert Howard in India, and Dr. Pfeiffer in Holland, and elsewhere” (p.159).

Lymington drew close to, but did not quite reach, a formulation of, and the coinage of ‘organic farming’. He wrote of Germany’s:

“... pioneering work as the protagonist of artificial fertilizers. The appalling result of this showed in 1914-18 when a large part of her population starved ... This could not have happened if she had farmed her land *more organically* ... If we were to return to good and only semi-intensive *organically manured agriculture* we would be saved from that disaster, and would be independent of artificial aids in future crises [italics added]” (1938a, p.137).

Lymington, like Steiner before, and Northbourne after, made the point that “The soil is not a factory ... It is a living thing” (p.52). Lymington’s writings had the benefit of input from his viewing the practical application of biodynamics, as well as feedback from Albert Howard. He wrote that:

“Every year from 1935 until the war I would do a pilgrimage to the lovely little Dutch island of Walcheren. There Pfeiffer, as Steiner’s agricultural lieutenant, had charge of two biodynamic farms [Loverendale] ... Once I took Sir Albert Howard with me” (Portsmouth, 1965, p.85).

<sup>7</sup> On 10/2/1943 Viscount Lymington (Gerard Wallop) succeeded to the title of the Earl of Portsmouth (Rayment, 2008) and was thereafter known as Lord Portsmouth.

## Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, 1940

The year after the Betteshanger Summer School there was a failed attempt to get Pfeiffer back to the UK. The effort was ultimately thwarted by the refusal of the French authorities to grant Pfeiffer a transit visa (he would have been coming from Switzerland).

Viscount Lymington (1939b) wrote to Pfeiffer that:

"I am Vice-Chairman of the County War Agricultural Committee which is responsible for the whole farming policy of about a million acres. The line I am taking is to try and snatch some form of salvation from disaster and encourage a type of cultivation which will enable us to have the land after the war in a better state of fertility with a more natural balance than it has today ... I have many times in the last few weeks longed to have you here and to ask your advice on many of the questions coming up".

Lymington assured Pfeiffer that:

"... we will do our utmost to see that you get a visa. Please do not hesitate to quote myself or Lord Northbourne as an introduction. I am certain also that the Ministry of Agriculture could be got to approve" (1939b).

Lymington had previously written to Northbourne that:

"I think it would be possible to go privately straight to the ear of the Minister, as I am fairly confident that he, at least, is thoroughly sympathetic" (1939a).

Lymington advised Lady MacKinnon, the secretary of the BDA, that he had written to Pfeiffer in New York and Dornach and for her to be assured that:

"I would pull every string possible to get him a visa to come to this country to advise us during the war. Personally, I can think of no more important visitor we could have than Dr. Pfeiffer" (1940a).

Northbourne received a letter in April 1940 indicating the frustrations of wartime travel: "It is sad now that Pfeiffer cannot come - but there it is" (Lymington, 1940c). Lymington had planned for 21 April, 1940 "a practical demonstration in the making of compost ... for a small garden or allotment ... all garden waste and refuse can be used to make thoroughly good humus" (Lymington, 1940b). In that letter, he described Pfeiffer as "a very great gardener and farmer from Switzerland" who is "not only one of the greatest agricultural experts alive but also a most practical man" (Lymington, 1940b). That meeting never happened:

"Our Allies, the French, with whom we have such perfect co-ordination and understanding, have refused the transit visa to Dr. Pfeiffer. Quite why, I cannot think, for anyone less politically minded I have never met" (Lymington, 1940c).

It appears that Pfeiffer's 1940 visit was scuppered only by the French. Pfeiffer was advised that:

"I had got the Minister of Agriculture to agree to come to meet you ... I think the Minister fully realises the importance of your work ... We are still carrying on your work" (Lymington, 1940d).

The planned demonstration eventuated, despite the absence of Pfeiffer (Lymington, 1940c).

## A Preference for Biodynamics, 1942

In a presentation at Oxford in 1942 Northbourne advised the meeting of his preference for biodynamics:

"You will see that I am prejudiced in favour of the B-D [Bio-Dynamic] method, and if asked 'how best can our ideas be expressed in terms of farm management ideas' could only answer accordingly; though I don't pretend to understand it fully" (Northbourne, 1942, p.6).

He related to the group that: "I have spoken of organic farming as if it were something clearly defined, without reference to the actual processes employed" (1942, p.6). He declared that: "I think we can adopt two principles. It is, of course, their translation into practice which is difficult". His principles were, firstly, "The need for diversification, and the inherent value of self-sufficiency within a limited area"; and secondly, "The necessity of maintaining fertility by organic manuring alone". (Northbourne, 1942, p.5).

Northbourne identified three methods of practising organic farming

1. "The first I will dismiss rather briefly, calling it for convenience the Wibberley method";
2. "The second category I call the Indore-Hunza-Chinese method - Chinese for short"; and
3. the third is the Bio-dynamic method of Rudolf Steiner" (1942, p.6).

This Oxford meeting that Northbourne addressed and before which he declared a 'prejudice' for bio-dynamics was of "agricultural philosophers" or "ecological thinkers" (Portsmouth, 1965, p.77). It was the third meeting of the group "A Kinship in Husbandry" (Gardiner, 1942, p.2).

A brief account of the informal group called the Kinship in Husbandry is given here to partly counterbalance Conford's (2001) account, which, seems to the present author, to place more weight on this group than its character, chronology, function, intent, and output would appear to warrant.

The Kinship dates from 1941, a year after *Look to the Land*. According to Rolf Gardiner: "The first document was a letter sent out on April 22, 1941, to twelve men who, at the time, were not known to one another even by name, and who have become the nucleus of the Kinship" (1942, p.1). A later account states more circumspectly that: "Not all were known to each other personally before we met" (Gardiner, 1972, p.198).

Rolf Gardiner (1902-1971) was the 'founder' and sometime chronicler of the Kinship in Husbandry (Gardiner, 1972). He was, unfortunately, a careless writer prone to intemperate and exaggerated statements, and so his reportage needs to be considered as provisional. The editor of Gardiner's posthumous anthology states that "Often ... the writing has a quality of superabundance which time and discipline in the craft of writing would have curbed" (Best, 1972, p.xii); there is no suggestion that such temperance ever materialised. Oxford historian, Arthur Bryant (1899-1985) wrote of Gardiner, that, despite "all his great virtues", he was "incurable", "childishly illogical, intemperate and wrong", and that he was possessed of an "incurable itch for putting pen to paper - a thing he is ... little fitted for by training, discipline and experience" (Bryant, 1943).

The first meeting of the Kinship group was on Sunday 21 September 1941 at the University of Oxford in the rooms of historian Arthur Bryant, at Queen's College. The final meeting was on Friday 28 February 1947 in London (Gardiner, 1972).

The purposes of the Kinship were essentially agrarian. They did not specifically mention, by name, or advocate specifically for, either bio-dynamic or organic farming. The statement of Purposes of this loosely structured group included:

- \* "To define and strengthen post-war opposition to every activity that treats man as a machine and earth as an inanimate factory plant";
- \* "To show how unbalanced and monocultural [sic] farming ... is robbing the earth of health and man of vitality";
- \* "To advocate ... the virtues of husbandry ... and the conservation by the living of that which they inherit from the dead and hold in trust for the unborn";
- \* "To set the need for fresh, unprocessed food ... above profit-making" (Kinship, 1942, p.1,2).

The purposes of the Kinship group also spoke directly against "Germany's schematic brainsickness [sic]" which "is destroying civilization" (Kinship, 1942, p.2).

A copy of the statement of purposes held at King's College, London, annotated in the hand of Arthur Bryant, bears the inscription "A Fellowship of Ecology" as an alternative name for the group. The statement clarifies that:

"The Kinship is in no sense an executive or political body but merely an association of those who in their private or public capacities are seeking a common goal ... are waging the same isolated fight against abstract tyrannies and are reaching by different roads the same conclusions ... against a mechanistic and destructive organisation of society" (Kinship, 1942, p.3).

The Kinship was "a living society of friends" (Kinship, 1943, p.1). E. F. Bozman, editor at J.M. Dent book publishers, wrote that "we are an informal association and there is no machinery for dealing with this question of membership" (1943b). Northbourne wrote to an associate: "How can you suggest 'resigning' and what would it mean? I can't see the Kinship as the sort of thing one joins or resigns from" (Northbourne, 1943b).

The Kinship group was a source of fellowship for Northbourne. Bozman described his role: "Northbourne ... he is the moving spirit behind the Kinship" (1943a, p.1). According to Northbourne, it was Rolf Gardiner "who after all invented it if anyone did" (1943d, p.1). That concurs with Portsmouth's statement that: "It was Rolf who was the prime instigator in forming the Kinship in Husbandry" (1965, p.90).

For Northbourne, the Kinship offered the company and fellowship of other contrarian agrarian writers. Northbourne wrote of the important role that this fellowship played for him:

"I am rather on the 'quietest' side ... I value very highly the effect on individual members of the fact of association in the kinship [sic]; no doubt because it has saved me from so much feeling of loneliness. If it has done as much for others, the repercussions of its mere existence must be appreciable and may be great" (Northbourne, 1943c, p.2).

A meeting was described by Northbourne as "not only friendly and enjoyable but also purposeful" (Northbourne, 1943a, p.2). Of the group at least three, Northbourne, Lymington and Gardiner explored and practiced, to some degree, biodynamic farming.

### **Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, 1944**

Pfeiffer had moved to the USA late in 1940 with his family (Selawry, 1992). The Pfeiffers had been invited to settle at Kimberton, Pennsylvania, by Alarik and Mabel Myrin, and to manage 335 hectares of their farmland on biodynamic principles, and with the opportunity of setting up a biodynamics training facility (Koeppf, 1991).

By early 1944 there had been an irreconcilable falling out between Myrin and Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer (1944, p.1) wrote that:

"It was a hard blow both to me personally and to the cause of biodynamics in this country that I had to separate from the Kimberton Farms project. The owner of this place however has become rather difficult recently".

There was an attempt to induce Pfeiffer to set up biodynamic demonstration farm in the UK. Contemporaneous with the falling out between Pfeiffer and Myrin in the USA, Northbourne and Lord Portsmouth were exploring options for inducing Pfeiffer to move to the UK. Northbourne wrote that "I feel a bit uncertain on the financial side", and he stated that "Pfeiffer would need to be assured a living wage". Northbourne suggested sounding out Pfeiffer on such a move (1944, p.1).

The Secretary of the Bio-Dynamic Association, Mabel Murchison, responded to a proposal letter from Northbourne, "thank you for the encouragement that your letter has given one" and assured Northbourne that he could "depend upon the full support of the B.D. Association in such a scheme as you outline" (Murchison, 1944, p.2). She added that "good work could be done in England if it should be possible to get Dr. Pfeiffer here" (p.1).

A few days after receiving Northbourne's correspondence, Portsmouth (1944a) wrote to Pfeiffer with a proposal:

"I have seen both Lady MacKinnon and Northbourne ... I learn that your great experiment at Kimberton has taken a disappointing turn. Now the point of this letter is really to make a very tentative suggestion. ... Roughly it is this. As you know there are many of us who would deeply welcome the idea of having you more or less permanently with us. Would you be willing to consider such a possibility? Naturally it would be a question of ways and means".

Portsmouth then ventured some specific thoughts on the "ways and means". He nominated a farm of 136 acres, which he said included 30 acres of woodland, and that he had "recently put in order and have since been farming myself". He clarified to Pfeiffer that:

"We would require to find you, or build you a suitable dwelling house close to the farm. It is of course quite possible that we might find an even more suitable farm for you than this ... If it could take place, naturally we should like it to be a long term demonstration and as permanent as possible a centre for the diffusion of bio-dynamic knowledge of farming and of farming practice" (Portsmouth, 1944a, p.1).

Nothing came of this plan. Pfeiffer had, in the interim, borrowed funds in the USA and purchased a 300 acre farm near Chester in New York State. Pfeiffer wrote that:

"The farm will be managed according to our ideas and will become in due time just what we want to demonstrate: namely a self supporting family farm on the biodynamic basis. We are on the new farm since April ... My thoughts are very often with you and your country, and I only hope that the recent undertakings will soon lead to a final breakdown of the german [sic] opposition and Nazism" (Pfeiffer, 1944).

Portsmouth responded to Pfeiffer's letter that:

"For our sake over here, I was deeply disappointed to read its contents, but on the other hand I am more than glad that your work in America has not been brought to an end ... We shall not give up

hope of being able to run one small farm here in post war years under your supervision and instruction. In the meantime, we are getting weary of civilization's long drawn out *felo de se*<sup>8</sup>. We can only hope that the end will soon be in sight" [italics added] (Portsmouth, 1944b).

Post WWII, the opportunity for revisiting the proposal to have Pfeiffer emigrate to Britain never resurfaced. In the USA Pfeiffer suffered some health challenges which compounded his financial situation, and which at one point he described as "terrible" (Selawry, 1992, p.32). Pfeiffer did revisit the UK once, in 1950, during which time he toured "as President of the Bio-Dynamic Association" and attended a "European Husbandry Meeting" that had been organised by Lord Portsmouth (Gardiner, 1972, p.199). According to Hans Heinze (1962), the 1950 visit was Pfeiffer's last visit to Britain.

### **The Secularization of Biodynamics: *Look to the Land***

In 1938, both Northbourne and Pfeiffer had expressed aligned sentiments. Pfeiffer stated that "the cultivated field is a living organism, a living entity in the totality of its processes" (Pfeiffer, 1938a, p.35). Northbourne had written that: "The starting and finishing point of the process is the soil, itself a living thing" (Northbourne, 1938d).

This confluence of sentiments came to a head with the Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamic Farming. However, less than eight weeks after the Betteshanger Summer School, Britain was at war with Germany and the opportunity for Anglo-Germanic co-operation was severely truncated. When the second edition of Pfeiffer's *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* was issued in 1940, the original title-page inscription, "Translated from the German by Fred Hecke!" had been erased in its entirety.

There was also the apparent handicap of biodynamics being coupled with Anthroposophy. This mystical element was a cause for disparagement. Albert Howard derogated biodynamics as the 'muck and mystery school' according to Clunies-Ross (1990, p.126). Rudolf Steiner had been aware that the entanglement of a differentiated agriculture (the yet to be named 'biodynamics') with the esoterica of Anthroposophy was a potential impediment to its uptake. Steiner's own solution was to prescribe that everything be put to the test prior to embarking on any advocacy and to let the results speak for themselves (1924a).

When proffering a review of Pfeiffer's *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* to the *National Review*, Lymington declared that: "I feel that it is a book well worth having some notice taken of it". He simultaneously disavowed and endorsed: "I am not a Steinerite, and indeed know nothing of their various esoteric theories, but I have known Pfeiffer for some years as a very wise and practiced farmer, and an acute observer of nature" (Lymington, 1938c).

Northbourne's *Look to the Land* delivered a message congruent with Pfeiffer's 1938 book and with the 1939 Betteshanger Summer School, while nevertheless excising any Germanic or Anthroposophic heritage, although his book did acknowledge (on page 173) the efficacy of biodynamic practices. Northbourne's was a secularized British manifesto which presented fresh insights while drawing much from biodynamics including its nominative core motif of 'the farm is an organism'.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Rather than biodynamics and organics arising independently, a direct unbroken lineage can be drawn from Koberwitz, Poland, via Dornach, Switzerland, to Kent, UK; and from Rudolf Steiner, via Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, to Lord Northbourne.

The Betteshanger Summer School and Conference on Bio-Dynamic Farming was hosted by Lord Northbourne at his farm in Kent. Betteshanger was the stepping stone from biodynamics to organics. A year before Betteshanger, Pfeiffer had published *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*, finally manifesting Steiner's 1924 injunction to bring the Koberwitz 'hints' into 'a form suitable for publication'. Then, less than a year after the Betteshanger Summer School, Northbourne published *Look to the Land* in May 1940. It was a secularized account of issues raised by Pfeiffer's book and the Summer School. Excised was any evident Germanic, esoteric, mystical or Anthroposophic provenance. *Look to the Land* jettisoned the rituals and recipes of biodynamics, as well as any Steinerian framing of the Betteshanger Summer School, while nevertheless propagating much of its essence.

Northbourne's *Look to the Land* provided a practical and philosophical underpinning for 'organic farming'. It was fully decoupled from Anthroposophy, and it pitted 'organic farming' versus 'chemical farming'.

<sup>8</sup> Anglo-Latin: suicide.

Northbourne stood on the shoulders of both Steiner and Pfeiffer to see further, and to project his organics meme to a broader and worldwide audience. Northbourne presented biodynamics as one way of practicing organics, and that is the view that has prevailed.

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