

# Koberwitz (Kobierzyce): In the footsteps of Rudolf Steiner

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“Now once again we have made a great step forward!” exclaimed Rudolf Steiner on the drive back from Koberwitz (Wachsmuth, 1929, p.1). “Seldom have I seen him so joyfully moved after the completion of a task as in this moment after the agricultural conference” (Wachsmuth, 1989, p.552).

Koberwitz can fairly be regarded as the birthplace of biodynamic agriculture. Rudolf Steiner delivered eight lectures there in German in the summer of 1924 (7-16 June). There were 111 attendees listed, 30 women and 81 men, who came from six countries: Germany, Poland, Austria, Switzerland, France, and Sweden. The audience included farmers, estate managers, doctors, priests, teachers, artists, and engineers who all came to hear Steiner’s vision for agriculture (Paull, 2011a).



**Image 1: The Chateau at Koberwitz, venue for Steiner’s Agriculture Course, with the main entrance in the centre and the vestibule entrance on left.**

Steiner explains: “My subject was the nature of the products supplied by agriculture and the conditions under which these products grow. The aim of these lectures was to arrive at such practical ideas concerning agriculture as should combine what has already been gained through

practical insight and modern scientific experiment with the spiritually scientific considerations of the subject” (1924b, p.9).

Count and Countess Keyserlingk provided “their home at Koberwitz” as the course venue (Steiner, 1924b, p.9). Countess Johanna von Keyserlingk recalled that “Sunshine lay over all, over the house, the park and the flower gardens. It was real Whitsuntide weather” (von Keyserlingk, 1949, p.62). The Koberwitz Chateau still sits in park land, is surrounded by agricultural land with some urban encroachment, and it is now the local municipal offices (Image 1).

Of the course location, Steiner wrote: “Count Carl Keyserlingk manages a large agricultural estate on model lines ... It seemed only natural to speak about agriculture just there, where those who had assembled for the meetings were surrounded on every hand with the things and processes to which allusion was being made. This gives tone and colour to such a gathering” (1924b, p.9).



**Image 2: The meeting room of the Koberwitz Chateau with the door to the vestibule on the right.**

The Countess wrote of the course preparations: “the lecture-room had been got ready. In the dining room and vestibule 130 chairs had been set out, and the lecturer’s desk stood in the centre between the two rooms” (von Keyserlingk, 1949, p.62). From the description provided by the Countess, it appears that the course attendees were accommodated by using both the meeting room (Image 2) and the vestibule (Image 3), thereby creating an L-shaped space with the speaker positioned in the elbow of this L-shaped space (so that the chairs would have been facing in the opposite direction to the present day configuration of Image 2).

Of the course schedule, Steiner wrote: “The early part of the day, from 11.30 till 3 o’clock, was devoted to agriculture” (Steiner, 1924b, p.9). Most of the participants commuted daily, by train, from the nearby city of Breslau (von Keyserlingk, 1949). Meanwhile, Steiner, along with wife Marie, were provided with the Keyserlingks’ bedroom on the upper level of the chateau (von Keyserlingk, 1949) which was accessible through the foyer (Image 4) and up the staircase leading to the landing of the upper level (Image 5).

Of the course content, Steiner wrote: ”I completed what I had to say on agricultural matters with certain explanations about fruit growing, animal nutrition, forestry, agricultural pests, and plant diseases so-called” (Steiner, 1924a, p.17).



**Image 3: The vestibule opens to the gardens of the estate.**

An immediate outcome of Steiner’s course was the formation, at Koberwitz during the course, of the Agricultural Experimental Circle. Steiner wrote of “a Farmers’ Association ... founded at a meeting of the assembled farmers ... the Association was declared to be a union of persons attaching themselves to the Natural Science Section of the Goetheanum; its meetings were to be presided over alternately by Count Keyserlingk and Herr Stägemann. The experimental work should be given definite aim and be continuously guided by this Section of the Goetheanum” (1924b, p.10).

Without the persistence of Carl Keyserlingk, Rudolf Steiner’s Agriculture Course is unlikely to have materialised. These eight lectures were the only agriculture lectures that Steiner ever delivered, and by that time he was mortally ill. Steiner withdrew from public life from 28 September

1924, and died at Dornach, Switzerland, on 30 March 1925 (Wachsmuth, 1989).

The Koberwitz course was translated into English by George Kaufmann and was promptly disseminated throughout the Anglo-world - including Australia, New Zealand, Britain, USA, and South Africa (Paull, 2011c). The Anthroposophical Agricultural Association was founded in Britain in 1928, and the diffusion of the Agriculture Course in English began that same year (Paull, 2011c). George Kaufmann was a British citizen, his father was born in Australia, and his mother in England (Adams, 1958). However, bearing a Germanic name was not an asset in WWII Britain and Kaufmann adopted his mother's surname, and consequently his name appears as 'George Adams' in later printings of the Agriculture Course.



**Image 4: Foyer and stairs of the Kobierzyce Chateau.**

Steiner had written 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). Ehrenfried Pfeiffer manifested this directive by publishing his book, *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*, in 1938 in five languages: English, Dutch, French, German and Italian (Paull, 2011b; Pfeiffer, 1938).

The name 'Koberwitz' has generally been erased from modern maps. The region was relinquished by Germany to Poland after WWII, and 'Koberwitz' is now 'Kobierzyce' and the nearby city of 'Breslau' is now 'Wrocław'. ('Kobierzyce' is pronounced 'ko-bee-air-zhit-zay' where the Cyrillic 'ж' is pronounced as the 'su' in pleasure; 'Wrocław' is pronounced 'vrots-warff').



**Image 5: Stairs, landing, and *trompe l'oeil* (*di sotto in sù*) ceiling of the upper level of the Koberwitz Chateau.**

The full text of Steiner's Agriculture Course is available free from the Rudolf Steiner Archive at: <http://www.rsarchive.org/>

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