



The Koberwitz manor of Count Keyserlingk, venue of Rudolf Steiner's *Agriculture Course*

The PIONEERS of BIODYNAMICS in NEW ZEALAND

Dr John Paull reveals the history of how Rudolf Steiner's teachings entered Aotearoa.

New Zealand's pioneers of biodynamic farming signed a confidentiality agreement with the Goetheanum, Switzerland. New research reveals those pioneers.

Rudolf Steiner delivered his Agriculture Course, eight lectures, in the late spring of 1924, in the quiet little German village of Koberwitz, near the city of Breslau. The territory was ceded to Poland after World War 2, and that village is now Kobierzyce, near Wrocław.

Steiner advocated for a return to a more natural style of farming and a rejection of synthetic chemicals. He told attendees that his course offered "hints" and that they should put them to the test, and when they found out what worked they should tell "everyone" (Steiner, 1924).

Steiner declared 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). The

confidentiality agreement signed by the New Zealand pioneers of biodynamics stems from this injunction.

At Koberwitz, Steiner founded the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners. There were no Kiwis – nor any Anglophones at all – at the Agriculture Course. However, some course attendees signed up on the spot, so the Experimental Circle was immediately an international research entity. The Experimental Circle then quickly expanded – including to New Zealand, in 1930.

From the Natural Science Section of the Goetheanum, Dr Ehrenfried Pfeiffer coordinated the work of testing Steiner's agriculture ideas. Pfeiffer took to heart the imperative to tell the world. In 1938, he published his book *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening*, in five languages (Paull, 2011a, 2011b).

From the original records held in the archives of the Goetheanum, we can now reveal the names of the earliest pioneers of biodynamics in New Zealand, those who joined Steiner's Experimental Circle from 1924 to 1938, the years of omertà (Table 1).

Each of these 15 members of the Experimental Circle submitted a signed confidentiality agreement and was

Table 1: New Zealanders who joined the Experimental Circle of Anthroposophic Farmers and Gardeners, in chronological order of joining (1924-1938).

| Name | Place | Date (dd.mm.yyyy) | Number |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--------|
| Bernard Crompton-Smith | Havelock North | 15.02.1930 | 12E |
| George Bollard Winkfield | 29 Clonbern Rd, Remuera, Auckland | 24.07.1930 | 15E |
| James Coe | 19 Lucerne Rd, Remuera, Auckland | 26.07.1930 (duplicate dated 25.06.1931) | 16E |
| Clarence H Jones | 8 Kowhai Terrace, St Martins, Christchurch | 24.09.1930 | 10E |
| Henry William Golden | 56 Penrose St, Lower Hull | 21.04.1931 | 31E |
| Ivon Maurice Fry | Sturges Estate, Sturges Rd, Henderson, Auckland | 22.05.1931 | 29E |
| Ada Williamson | 30 Lucerne Rd, Rumuera | 31.03.1932 | 34E |
| Thomas Cecil Rhodes Jackson | Dunslade, Woodville | 31.03.1932 | 35E |
| Alice Ruth Wilson | Havelock North, Hawke's Bay | 03.04.1932 | 9E |
| Mary Jean Elder Bauchop | Havelock North, Hawke's Bay | 07.04.1932 | 33E |
| George R Bacchus | c/o Rhodes Jackson, Woodville | 18.04.1933 | 562 |
| Mr S Crompton-Smith | Uru Rakau, Havelock North | 11.09.1935 | 12E |
| D W S Mackenzie | 6 Cornwall Rd, Papatoetoe | 15.11.1937 | 14E |
| Esther M Avery | Pukekua Station, Havelock North, Hawkes Bay | 20.02.1938 | 30E |
| N A Avery | Pukekua Station, Havelock North, Hawkes Bay | 20.02.1938 | 30E |

issued with a numbered copy of the *Agriculture Course* at the time of joining. Thirteen individual copies were issued; the Compton-Smiths shared copy #12E, and the Avery family shared copy #30E. The 'E' suffix indicated that the copy was an English-language edition (sometimes the 'E' appeared as a prefix). The copy to Bacchus was #562 (without a suffix), indicating that it was the German-language edition. From the outset, the German editions were typeset printed editions, whereas the English editions, in this period, were all hand-typed editions of the translation of George Kaufmann. Printed English-language editions of the *Agriculture Course* appeared in 1958.

German-language editions were issued in numerical order from the Goetheanum. But the English editions were not issued in exact numerical order, as we see in Table 1, because some were issued from England and some from Switzerland. Also, some returned copies were reissued.

For each numbered copy of Steiner's *Agriculture Course* that a member received, the agreement stated: "I accept it on loan for my personal use in carrying out the experiments undertaken by <me> within the Agricultural Experimental Circle of the General Anthroposophical Society." Within the agreement, there was no explicit commitment to remit the results of experiments back to the Goetheanum (or elsewhere).

Whether the New Zealand Circle members recorded their biodynamic experiments and sent the results to Dornach is unknown. By publishing his *Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening* in 1938, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer arguably met Steiner's instruction that his ideas, having been practically tested, were to be published and shared with the world – and at the same time extinguished Steiner's injunction to secrecy in the interim. Pfeiffer relocated to the USA at about this time. An archive of Pfeiffer's papers does not appear to have survived in the archives of the Natural Science Section nor of the Goetheanum, and it appears that Pfeiffer's papers surviving in the US do not include reports from Experimental Circle members.

The agreement of Experimental Circle members was that the numbered copy of the *Agriculture Course* was to be returned to the Goetheanum should the recipient leave the Experimental Circle or the General Anthroposophical Society, or on the death of the recipient. In this way, some returned copies were reissued (under the original number); for example, #14E had previously been issued to C McDowell, Sydney (on 23.07.1929). It appears that later on, copies returned to the Goetheanum (under the terms of the agreement) were destroyed. So it is unclear how many, if any, of the original thirteen numbered copies issued to New Zealand may have survived.



The lecture hall where Rudolf Steiner presented the Agriculture Course at Koberwitz.

Further research

The names and locations of these earliest pioneers of biodynamics in New Zealand may serve as a stimulus to uncover and relate their stories. Did their personal copies of the *Agriculture Course* survive the intervening years? Were their copies of the *Agriculture Course* marked up or annotated? Did these pioneers leave any written accounts of their biodynamic experiments and experiences? These are questions for further research, probably best done in New Zealand.

Acknowledgments

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