



John Whitwell *A personal site of professional interest*

The Cotswold Bruderhof

The farm at the Cotswold Community was the home for the Cotswold Bruderhof from 1936 – 1942.

The following is a brief description of the “bruderhof movement” written by a member of their organisation.

“Bruderhof” means “a place where brothers live”. Since 1528 the brothers and sisters called Hutterian have lived in Bruderhofs in Europe and, for the last hundred years, in the western United States and Canada. Our Christian communities in the eastern United States and England, formerly known as the Society of Brothers, united with the western Hutterian Brethren, who have a history of sharing all things in common for over 450 years.

Germany was suffering widespread material and spiritual devastation after the catastrophe of the First World War. At that time, over sixty years ago, a small community, inspired by the early Christians, was started by Eberhard and Emmy Arnold with a few others. Despite the

longing to live a simple life in peace as brothers and sisters, our communities have more than once been at the mercy of political forces. Expelled from Hitler's Germany as "undesirable" in 1937, the community had to leave wartime England a few years later. Many years were spent in Paraguay, South America until a new Bruderhof was started in the United States in 1954, and by 1961 all could leave South America.

We are thankful that we can now live in a country where we are free to follow the teachings of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount – sharing our goods, our struggles, and our joys – and where we can witness to a new society in which all men of goodwill can live in peace and justice regardless of race, nationality, education, or social background. In addition to the western Hutterian brethren, who number about 30,000, we are now over 1,500 brothers, sisters, and children, living as families and single people in our communities at Rifton and Ulster Park, New York; Farmington, Pennsylvania; Norfolk, Connecticut; and in England at Robertsbridge in Sussex. We earn our living working communally by manufacturing educational play equipment (COMMUNITY PLAY THINGS) and equipment for therapy of handicapped children (RIFTON EQUIPMENT for the HANDICAPPED).

Home News – COMMUNAL LIFE ON A FARM.

Extract from the Times – Sept 6th 1938. The Cotswold Bruderhof. German Peasant Colony. From our Special Correspondent. ASHTON KEYNES, Sept 5

Along the road between Ashton Keynes and Somerford Keynes, villages on the Wiltshire and Gloucestershire border, is a turning which leads at once into a scene that might be a village in Germany.

The appearance of the 200 inhabitants, nearly all of them German-speaking, indefinably old-fashioned; you feel they would look at home in almost any age but this. The men are bearded and bareheaded; they wear coloured shirts, breeches gathered tight below the knee, homespun stockings (unless their calves are bared), and heavy boots. The ample peasant costume of the women is often blue, and worn with a kerchief or bonnet of the same colour.

These people are the Cotswold Bruderhof, a religious community holding all goods in common and living mainly by farming. They are orthodox Christians in the sense that they accept the ordinary Evangelical beliefs, but they refuse all military service, do not render oaths, and, on the model of the Church in Jerusalem, reject all forms of private property among themselves. Their settlement at Ashton Keynes, though it resembles a village in its many industrious activities, is fundamentally a farm, covering 211 acres belonging to the Bruderhof and another 100 acres which they rent. They speak of themselves as one household.

OFFSHOOT FROM FANKFORT

At their head are four “servants of the Word”, whose duties include the celebration of marriages. Other officers are a steward, who keeps the common purse, a distributor of the work, and responsible officials called witness brothers. But all matters of weight are discussed and settled in the circle of the whole community. The members are withdrawn physically, but – as you soon discover – not intellectually, from the wider world. They show an informed interest in its doings. During meals, which are eaten in common, one member or another addresses the rest on topical affairs. They study languages, economics, and history. They have a library of 10,000 or 11,000 volumes, including valuable sixteenth-century manuscripts. They publish (and print) a quarterly journal, “The Plough: Towards the Coming Order”, the editor of which is one of their leaders, Mr E C H Arnold. He is a son of the late Dr Eberhard Arnold, who founded the Bruderhof in Germany in 1920. The Bruderhof arrived in England in March 1936, as an offshoot of the parent community near Frankfort. It was probably lucky for them that they established their settlement in Wiltshire when they did, for a year later the Nazis turned them out of Germany at 48 hours’ notice and confiscated their property. This year a branch in the small Principality of Liechtenstein has also had to close down, chiefly through unofficial but growing Nazi hostility, but also because its situation, 5,000 ft up in the Alps, made life unduly difficult for a community of any size. The whole brotherhood are now united at Ashton Keynes, except for a small group housed in a poor part of Birmingham.

CHILDREN FIRST

Not counting guests, who come and go at will and pay what they like, there are now 121 adult members and 92 children in the community, including 40

families. About half are Germans, 40 or so British, the rest Swiss, Swedish, French, Dutch, Latvian, Italian – and one Turkish in nationality, but of Russian origin. On the whole it is a young community; most of the married couples are under 30. Many young people who joined about 10 years ago were then between 18 and 24 years old, and all these have since married within the Bruderhof. As limitation of the size of families is forbidden, the proportion of children is large and is increasing. It is further swelled by the systematic adoption of orphaned or destitute children, who are cared for and educated with the members' children.

The Bruderhof speak of education as their first and noblest task; "We don't save on the children", Mr Arnold assured me. Their school gives a 10 years course, continuing to the age of 15. There are 14 trained teachers among the Bruderhof – Germans, a Swiss, and seven or eight English, these last all women, and most of them from Birmingham. Hitherto the school has been German-speaking, but it is now becoming bilingual, and the intention is to let the more talented children go forward to universities if the parents wish it.

The community bought their farm with the aid of friends, and have already done wonders in equipping and developing the settlement. The original farmhouse, virtually all that was habitable when they took possession, is now a dwelling-house and communal kitchen. The old byre and the old stable have been rebuilt as flats – bed-sitting-rooms. The community have built their own school, kindergarten, hospital, and communal dining-room, usually from concrete blocks made by themselves out of gravel dug from their own pit. They have now 100 acres under the plough, 11 acres of kitchen garden, about 50 milk cattle – the tuberculin-tested standard was attained three months ago – horses, 120 sheep, and over 1,000 hens. The cattle and poultry are managed according to systems by which fowl-pens and milking-sheds are moved to fresh ground at short and regular intervals, so manuring the fields systematically, with noticeably good effect in these two years. This year's harvest has yielded 47 tons of cereals. The Bruderhof grind their own corn, and henceforth will bake their own rye-bread – a new bakehouse has just been completed. A small electric plant is working, making current to drive machines during the day and to light some buildings at night. There is a laundry, with machinery for the heavy work.

HAPPY IN HARD WORK

The women work in the communal kitchen, the laundry, among the children, in the office, and at household duties among their own families. Farm and garden and various crafts occupy the men. The children are well cared for; they have their own gardens, paddling-pools, sand-pits, and “baby house”, besides the schools, which are inviting and airy. Posted up in the kitchen are lists, in German, of various duties, with the names of those allotted to them daily; and one regular duty is to mind the children in their houses while the parents are eating together or attending meetings in the evenings.

A hard-working, frugal existence is the lot of the Bruderhof, yet they seem to be happy in it. They embrace it of their own free will, but there is first a period of novitiate, and no-one becomes a member without feeling called to this way of life for the rest of his or her term on earth. Among those who were adopted as orphan children by the Bruderhof were about a dozen who are now between 20 and 30 years old. At the age of 15 or so they were sent away to learn a trade or calling – perhaps carpentry, secretarial work, nursing, or teaching; and it is said that with very few exceptions they all chose voluntarily to resume the devout and simple life lived by the Bruderhof. As for the economic side of their undertaking, the main difficulty at present is lack of capital for building and development. In an endeavour to meet it a society called Friends of the Bruderhof was formed only a few days ago. Its purpose is to provide the Bruderhof with capital at 4 per cent interest, to be repaid over a period of 20 years.

The first of the following photos was taken in the mid 1930s when the Bruderhof Community first arrived, the second was taken in the 1990s, of the same building.



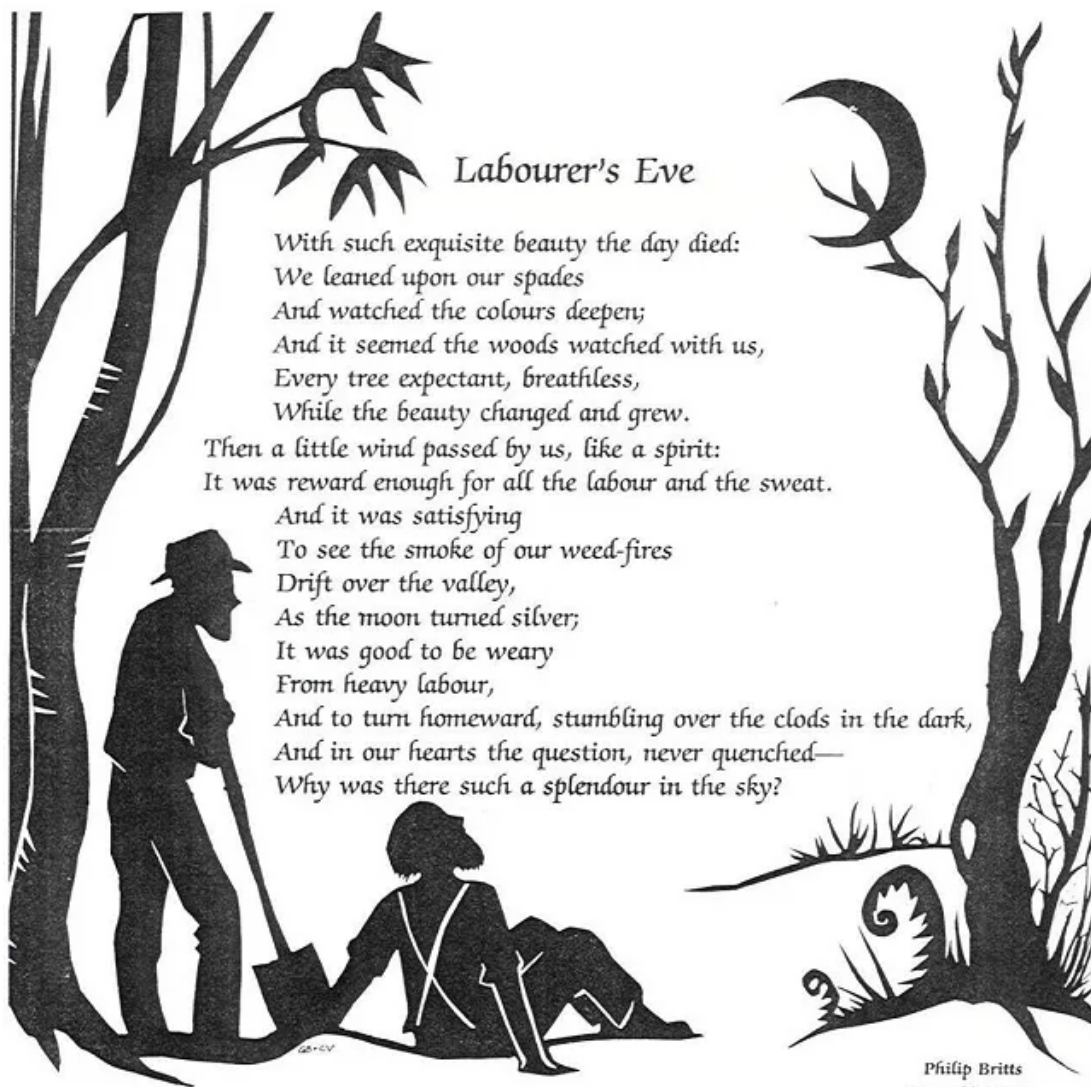


Labourer's Eve

With such exquisite beauty the day died:
We leaned upon our spades
And watched the colours deepen;
And it seemed the woods watched with us,
Every tree expectant, breathless,
While the beauty changed and grew.

Then a little wind passed by us, like a spirit:
It was reward enough for all the labour and the sweat.

And it was satisfying
To see the smoke of our weed-fires
Drift over the valley,
As the moon turned silver;
It was good to be weary
From heavy labour,
And to turn homeward, stumbling over the clods in the dark,
And in our hearts the question, never quenched—
Why was there such a splendour in the sky?



Philip Britts
Cotswold, 1941

Poem written during the life of the Cotswold Bruderhof.

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