

*Dvl. Arch.  
Cotswolds*

THE STRANGER IN OUR MIDST

by

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THE STRANGER IN OUR MIDST

An account of the development of the  
Cotswold Bruderhof near Cirencester.

by  
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Chapter 1

THE WILTS. AND GLOS. STANDARD 5th. NOVEMBER 1938

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

Re the announcement in your paper of the sale of Oaksey Manor and Park Farm to the Bruderhof.

There are many in this district who by virtue of their love of England as the home of the English look with increasing anxiety on the encroachments of the Cotswold Bruderhof and the growing incursions of aliens of all nationalities in our midst. The foreign population in this country everywhere creeps up silently in numbers. Can this state of things tend to our ultimate good as a nation? Is it not time that some strict and very definite limit should be imposed? We are well aware of the hardships to which refugees are exposed - those expelled from Germany, Italy, Austria and Czechoslovakia but is there any reason why a small and already overpopulated England should be expected to receive, welcome and aid all the rest of Europe's unwanted?

With a steady increase in our own numbers of unemployed, in spite of rearmament works, is it likely there can be any chance for foreigners to make a living? With the alarming decrease in agricultural workers, due largely to the fact that agriculture and home supplies seem to be matters of small concern to the Government, does it seem that where men are in regular employment on the land they should be driven off it through the competition of aliens?

Through the advent of the Bruderhof this has occurred at Ashton Keynes and will now occur at Oaksey. It may be argued that the Bruderhof is a quiet hard-working Community and has therefore a right to existence. That is quite true, but surely the English worker should take precedence in his own homeland. His is the prior right by

birth, by tradition and by generations of service to his country.

I am voicing in this letter some of the questions which are continually put to me by many in the district :

- (1) On what grounds is the Bruderhof allowed here by the Home Office ? If as they assert they have no money how can they find thousands to buy farms and a manor house.
- (2) Where do the purchasing funds come from ? Who is behind the movement and what is its object ?
- (3) Why should these people, openly pacifists come and settle down here in the midst of an armed camp with three large British aerodromes in close proximity ?
- (4) As a community and according to their own assertions 'self supporting' is this brotherhood an asset to the country ? Is it contributing a full share to the general welfare of England ? Or is it existing simply for its own benefit ? Again - supplied on the farm and in every department with the newest and most up to date appliances - whence again come all the funds ?

It may be said " You may give and assist where you please." Yes but not to the detriment and loss occasioned to your own countrymen - not if you are a genuine Englishman.

W.B. Wilson

Fairhaven Oaksey

October 31st. 1938

Thus began a correspondence in the local press serving the Cirencester area which was to last from 1938 through to 1941. The letters concerned a revolutionary commune which had developed from a

farm in the Cotswolds within a few miles of the source of the river Thames. By the time of the Dunkirk disaster in 1940 the population of this establishment had exceeded three hundred men, women and children, mostly of German or German speaking origin.

One would hardly associate this rather unspectacular conservative area of the Cotswolds with anything of a revolutionary nature, but for one brief moment, the fertile soil of the Upper Thames bore within it more than simply the seeds of one year's harvest. Seeds were being sown, which had they been given the chance to germinate, might have grown and blossomed into a lifestyle as near to perfection as human nature would allow. Perhaps by delving deeper into the origins of the commune we may answer some of Mr. Wilson's questions and criticisms and unravel some of the fascinating aspects of this interesting experiment at one of the most critical periods in European history.

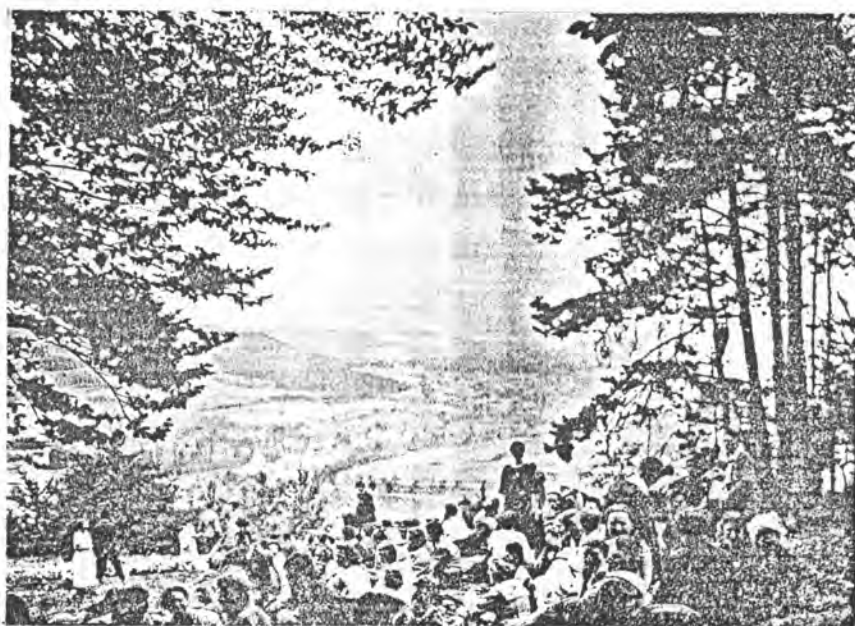
We must first go back to a Europe devastated by the Great War, to a Germany filled with despair, disillusionment, depression and industrial and economic turmoil. The state had lost its way and many were exploring new political and moral theories in an attempt to come to terms with the consequences of the Treaty of Versailles. It was at this time that the spores of Nazism were being spread and its sinister tendrils began to reach out silently beneath the ruined foundations of German society. In the 1920's however Nazism was only one of the ways being explored, there were other minds at work beside Hitler's. Amongst the others were various Christian groups particularly within the young educated classes who had even been somewhat disillusioned by the main stream Christian churches with their willingness to seek God's blessing on the carnage of the trenches a few years earlier.

Some found their ideas being drawn towards the development of communal living. One such group developed in a small village named Sannerz near Schlüchtern between Frankfurt and Fulda. This was in the home of a young couple, Eberhard and Emmy Arnold. Eberhard had been born in July 1883 in Königsberg, East Prussia, the son of Karl Franklin Arnold of Williamsfield Ohio in the U.S.A. At the time of Eberhard's birth, his father was a teacher in the Grammar school in Königsberg. Later he became Professor of Theology and Church History at the University of Breslau in Silesia. Eberhard's mother, Elizabeth Voigt also came from Academic stock. Emmy, Eberhard's wife, was born on Christmas Day in 1884 in the old Hanseatic city of Riga. Her father Johann Heinrich von Hollander was the son of the last governing Major of Riga. With the Russianisation of Riga, the Von Hollander family emigrated to Germany, first to Jena, living off the income from their estates in Latvia. However this income dried up after the first Russian Revolution of 1906 and the family had to move to Halle to live off Johann Heinrich's position as Professor of Law at the University.

Their academic backgrounds did not prevent Eberhard and Emmy from indulging in the usual rebellion of youth but there was also a youthful idealistic commitment to the Christian faith. Among the influences which came to bear on them were the works of Zinzendorf the Moravian, the educationalist Pestilozzi and the practical Gospel of a Captain in the Salvation Army who frequented the home of Eberhard's uncle. The force which actually drew them together was the Student Christian Movement. Once Eberhard had concluded his university studies the families gave their permission and Eberhard and Emmy were married at Emmy's home on December the 20th, 1909. Right from the beginning of their life together they



EBERHARD AND EMMY ARNOLD THE FOUNDERS OF THE BRUDERHOF



14 26  
THE WITSUN YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE AT SCHLUCHTERN

had a determination to take a great deal of life on trust as they  
travelled out from their home, first in Leipzig then Halle, to the  
nearby cities of Berlin, Dresden and Hamburg. Here Eberhard lectured  
on subjects ranging from Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity to the  
current sufferings of the people and the application of early Christian  
values in the contemporary situation. As well as the lecturing Eberhard  
took to writing but there was no regular income on which they could rely.  
Much of their financial support came from people wishing to help their  
work. For their part they determined not to gather personal riches and  
on the 31st of December each year they would reduce their bank account  
to sufficient for the coming month, giving the rest away to the needy.  
By the end of 1913 (their third child Johann Heinrich <sup>reverse order</sup> jnr. had been born  
and because Eberhard had contracted tuberculosis the family moved to  
a small rented house near Bolzano in the Tirol. They stayed there for  
eighteen months during which time Eberhard studied the Anabaptist  
movement in depth. With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 Eberhard  
was conscripted and Emmy and the children returned to Halle. Eberhard's  
poor health meant an early discharge from the services and he returned  
to his writing and lecturing. Eventually in 1915 he was called back to  
Berlin to take up the post of Secretary to the German Student Christian  
Movement. He stayed in Berlin until 1920 building up the Furche-Verlag,  
the publishing side of the Union's work. It was during the period from  
1918 to 1920 that Eberhard and the Student Movement began seriously  
through conferences and meetings to explore the possibilities of  
alternative society structures. During all this searching, disagreements  
were inevitable and Eberhard found himself at odds with the directors of  
the monthly magazine, 'Die Furche' which he edited and also with the  
Christian Student Movement. This rift eventually led to resignation



from his post with the Union and to a new position with a group known as the *Freunde des <sup>neuen</sup> Werkes* (*Friends of the New Work*). It entailed yet another move for the young family when in June 1920 they set up home in Sannertz. This home consisted of three small work rooms in an outbuilding of the 'Zum Stern', the local inn. This stood opposite a large house called 'the Villa' which, together with its nine acres of land, stables and barns they hoped to rent or buy from the owner. This agreement never did materialise but they were able to persuade him to rent them one room, which became the office of the 'Neuwerk-Verlag' the group's publishing house, from where Eberhard supervised the publications of 'Das Neue Werk!'.  
Sannertz

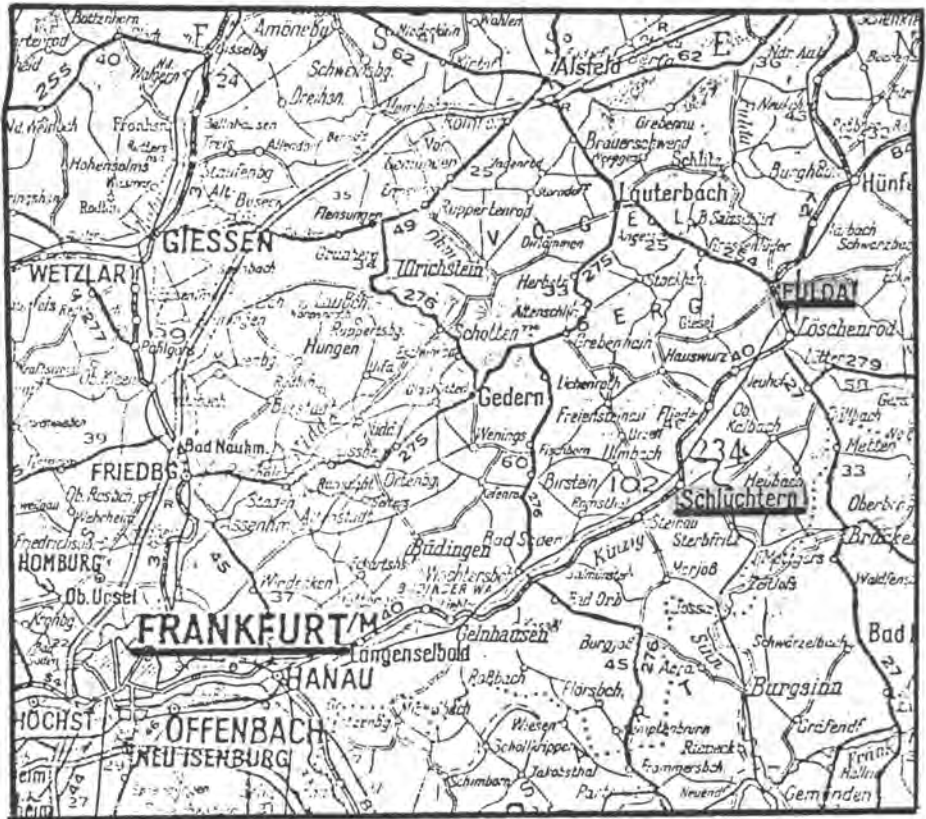
Eberhard and Emmy had hoped for solitude in Sannertz but it soon became known where they were and they were visited by a steady stream of professors and pastors, Quakers from England and the U.S.A. as well as people of all kinds who were in trouble and needed help. As the publishing side of the work expanded helpers came and a small communal household developed with all those involved pooling their salaries to provide finance for the venture. Much of the work published at this time and a great deal of the thinking of the group was influenced by the writings of the Anabaptists and fundamental Christian doctrines. 'The sermon on the mount' became their inspiration and from it they began to try and define their new order of society. Once again however their new ideas set them at odds with others including some other members of Das Neue Werk and the Sannertz group were asked to leave the movement. The publishing business was divided in two and Eberhard set up the Eberhard Arnold Publishing House.

Now that the Sannertz group were on their own they were free to develop their religious philosophy unhindered. 'The sermon on the mount'

gave them their main structure with its emphasis on peace, surrender, material poverty and generous love. Conversely they were against industrial capitalism, national militarism, the teaching of violence and man-made religious doctrines. From their communal life they wanted room to breathe, freedom to witness and to educate on the basis of their religious ideas. All this coupled with self sufficiency borne out of working together, pooling resources, finances, skills and ideas.

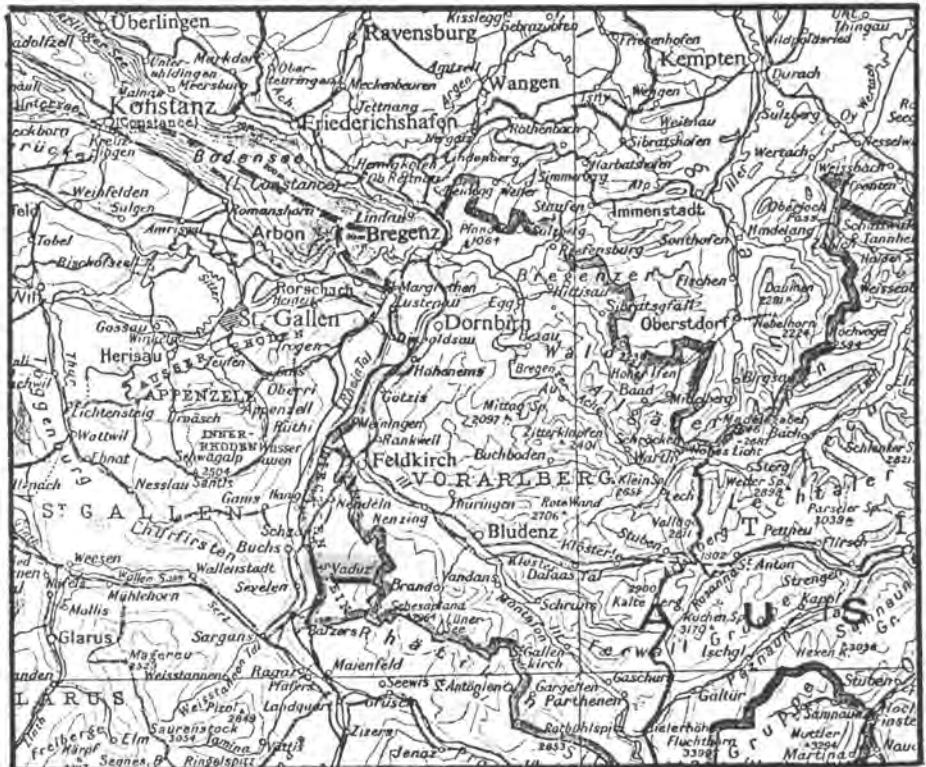
Between 1922 and 1927 the group prospered on its own being greatly influenced by the many works from the time of the reformation which they were republishing. In 1922 a Doctor Robert <sup>Friedemann</sup> Liefman, scholar of the Anabaptist movement, published a pamphlet on the Hutterian communities in North America. Eberhard had met him in Vienna in 1921 and in 1926 he contacted him in order to in turn make contact with Elias Walter the leader of the Hutterians in Alberta in the U.S.A. Thanks to Doctor <sup>Friedemann</sup> Liefman this was done, and Eberhard received documents and information on their organisation and way of communal living which were to have a great effect on the future of the Sannertz group.

By 1927 the group had outgrown its facilities at Sannertz and a small farm, <sup>Sparhof</sup> Veitsteinbach, was bought nearby in the Rhön mountains, or Rhoen. This consisted of 135 acres of arable land, pasture and woodland. The whole group moved in and became known as the Rhön Bruderhof; Bruderhof (Brotherhood) a term familiar in the Anabaptist movement. The early years at the Rhon were marked by poverty, hardship and hunger but by 1930 the Bruderhof had developed considerably. The farm and garden work had been augmented by small industrial workshops serving as a smithy, carpenters and small craft shop. From the beginning in Sannertz they had taken in children from difficult backgrounds. At the Rhön Bruderhof this branch



THE SANNERTZ AND RHON BRUDERHOFS WERE SITUATED NEAR SCHLUCHTERN IN THE FULDA VALLEY .

*Rhön or Rhon  
Schluchtern or  
Schluchtern*



THE ALM BRUDERHOF WAS SITUATED IN THE MOUNTAINS ABOVE VADUZ THE CAPITAL OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LICHTENSTEIN.

of their work was expanded with the building of a children's home  
*including an accredited school where these children were educated*  
alongside the children of the members of the Bruderhof. Being organised  
on a communal basis there was a communal dining room where everyone apart  
from the children under twelve years met for meals. The latter were  
<sup>a</sup>  
catered for separately apart from Sundays and special occasions, when  
the whole community dined together.

## Chapter 2

At the beginning of 1930 Eberhard accepted an invitation to visit the Hutterian communities in the United States and Canada spending a whole year touring the thirty communities. During this time it became clear that the Rhon Bruderhof and the Hutterians had a great deal in common. The latter based on the teaching of Jakob Hutter leader of the Anabaptists in 1533. This teaching was in essence based on the Apostle's Creed, baptism of adult believers, the Lord's Supper as a meal of remembrance and the holding of all goods in common. Leadership was to come from the church, with the church administering discipline. There was to be no military service, no holding of public office or the swearing of oaths. Marriage was deemed to be sacred and divorce inadmissible. All these ideas fitted closely the developed beliefs of the Rhon Bruderhof and in consequence, on the 9th of December 1930, the Bruderhof was incorporated into the Hutterian communities.

Eberhard returned from North America in May 1931 and the Rhon Bruderhof enjoyed two and a half years of building up until there were one hundred and thirty people in residence. However late in 1933 the community began to be directly affected by the rise of Nazism in Germany. On the 16th of November a mixed force of about one hundred and forty S.A. (Brown Shirts) and police raided the premises. This raid was afterwards found to have been the result of the members of the Bruderhof refusing to take part in Hitler's plebiscite of November the 12th 1933. When the raid occurred Eberhard was incapacitated, having broken his leg in October he lay on the sofa in his study. In the dining room the Gestapo officer in charge scanned the room, his eyes fell on the Von Hollander family coat of arms. He inquired if anyone by that name was in the house. Emmy immediately spoke up explaining about her father's post in Halle.

The officer was proud to inform her that he had been one of those chosen to carry her father's coffin to its last resting place. After this he bowed, clicked his heels and then left. The raid was over. Although no further direct action was taken, for the time being, documents found at a later date showed that the Nazi government appreciated that the Bruderhof represented a radical alternative to their state and ideology and therefore must be 'dissolved'.

Gradually however life in the community became more difficult.

<sup>T</sup> the local schoolmaster visited the school to give the children a political test. He found that among other things the children were unable to quote the 'Horst Wessel Song', the Nazi anthem, so the school was closed. The Arnolds were informed that Nazi teachers would be sent in after Christmas to give the children a proper education. The children, that is, of members of the Bruderhof. All the children whose parents were not in the community would be 'taken away'. The leaders of the community met for urgent discussion and it was decided that ~~as~~ so many children whose parents or guardians gave consent would be moved to neutral Switzerland. Some were unable to go but those who could arrived in Switzerland in January 1934. <sup>A</sup> When the Nazi teachers arrived at the Rhon Bruderhof they <sup>↑</sup> found no children so the school never reopened.

<sup>hear</sup> Further restrictions began to impinge on the life of the community. There was a curb on visitors, <sup>hear</sup> no one was allowed to stay overnight and only members who were willing to stay for at least half a year were allowed to join. Financial pressure was also brought to <sup>hear</sup> bare and all state funds were cut off. The young people also suffered pressure to join the Nazi Youth organisations and were threatened by conscription. The latter threat forced the group to think of dividing again. This in

fact they decided to do but unfortunately Switzerland could not take those <sup>a</sup>affected. The Swiss authorities at the same time required the children that they had been sheltering to be moved, as the original agreement had been a temporary one. Thus a new home had to be found but outside the influence of German National Socialism.

<sup>m</sup> <sup>10</sup> Eberhard and Emmy decided to visit the Pricipality of Lichtenstien despite the fact that Eberhard's leg was still injured as the bone had not set properly. Above the capital city Vaduz they discovered a Summer hotel at Silum five thousand feet above sea level. In order to examine it they had to travel part way by sleigh. The last part of the climb was even too steep for this and they finished their journey to the top on foot, Eberhard still using his crutches. They found the hotel, a nearby Swiss cottage and group of mountain huts suitable for their purposes reckoning on room for one hundred people. The hotel owner agreed to rent <sup>crow</sup> the sale and the finance necessary to set up the venture was obtained from a friend. In its high mountain position the new Alm Bruderhof, as it was named, was an ideal sanctuary from the onslaught of Nazism.

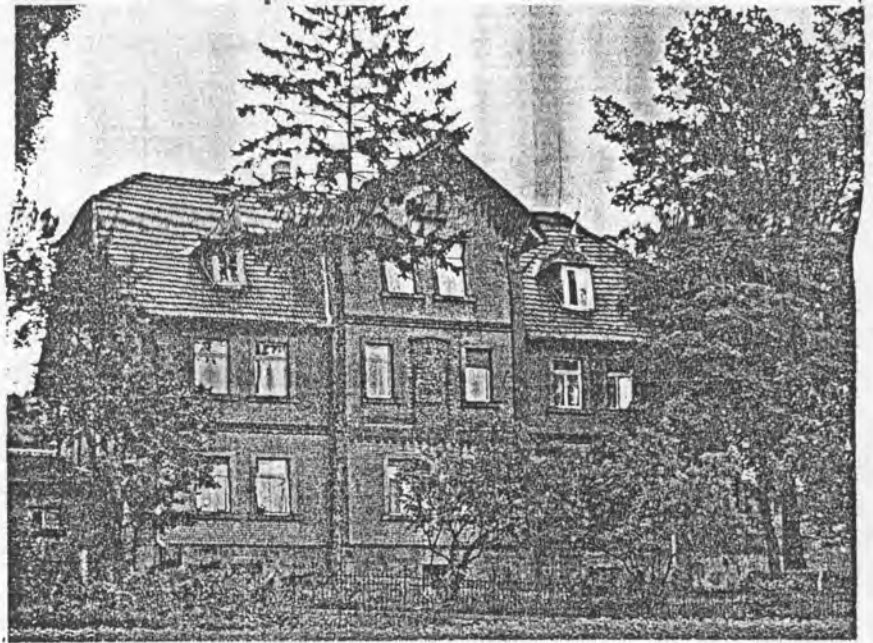
Once the new Alm Bruderhof was established a wood turning shop was set up together with the school and the number of members began to swell, particularly as the number of young men eligible for conscription fled from the Rhon Bruderhof. However in addition one of Eberhard and Emmy's sons, Hardi, who had been studying in England, returned to continue his studies in Zurich. He brought with him a group of English people who wanted to join the Bruderhof. These were a young married couple, Arnold and Gladys Mason, Kathleen Hamilton and Winifred Bridgwater. The latter had brought her mother and father with her so that they could acquaint themselves with the group which she wished to join. This

English connection was ~~due~~ to have a profound effect on the Bruderhof  
*and introduce to the Cotswold countryside the most tangible evidence of*  
Nazi oppression.

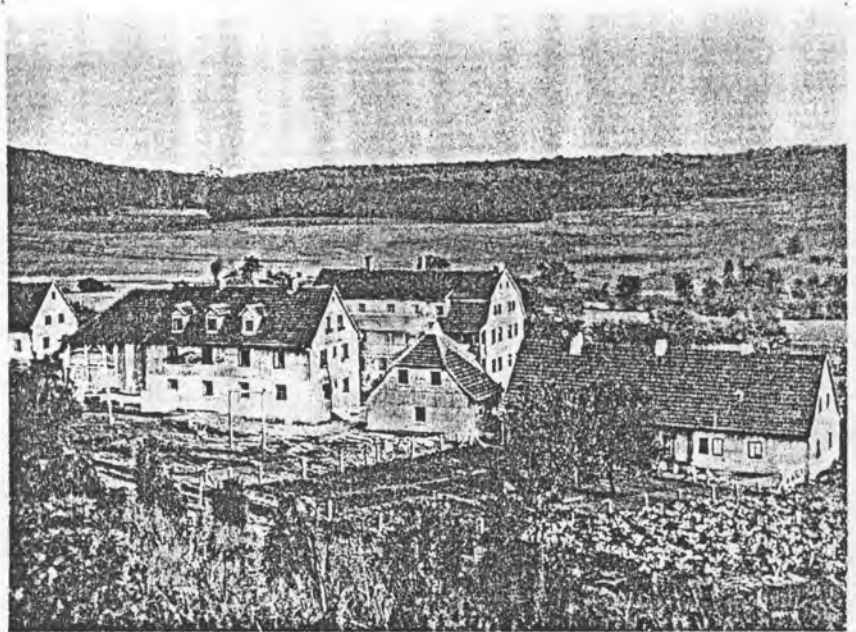
For their part the Arnolds were most impressed by their first  
residents from England and it was decided that Eberhard should visit  
Holland and England to look at new possibilities of setting up  
communities as well as to assist the Alm Bruderhof to gain a more stable  
financial base. Hardi was to accompany Eberhard as the latter's leg had  
still not healed and also because Hardi had connections in England from  
his student days. The visit proved useful and they returned to the Alm  
having gained useful financial support. The greenhouse financed by the  
Quakers was of particular value in the short mountain Summers while a  
further £900 went to finance the lease of some land a thousand feet  
below the Alm Bruderhof in the Rhine valley.

The effect of the expansion of the Alm Bruderhof was to diminish  
the one in the Rhon<sup>e</sup> mountains. One result of this was a certain amount  
of dissent at the Rhon<sup>e</sup> Bruderhof so that Eberhard found it necessary to  
make numerous journeys between the two communities to sort out problems.  
(These were usually of an ideological or philosophical nature.) Gradually  
however these journeys became extremely arduous as Eberhard's injured  
leg still troubled him. In October and early November 1935, just when  
he was needed most, things became so difficult that his old friend and  
doctor, Professor Paul Zander, decided that an additional operation  
was essential in order for the leg to heal. Even this would leave  
one leg shorter than the other. The operation was to take place under  
the personal supervision of Doctor Zander at his hospital in Darmstadt  
on November the 16th. Unfortunately the operation was not an immediate <sup>success</sup> ~~immediate~~

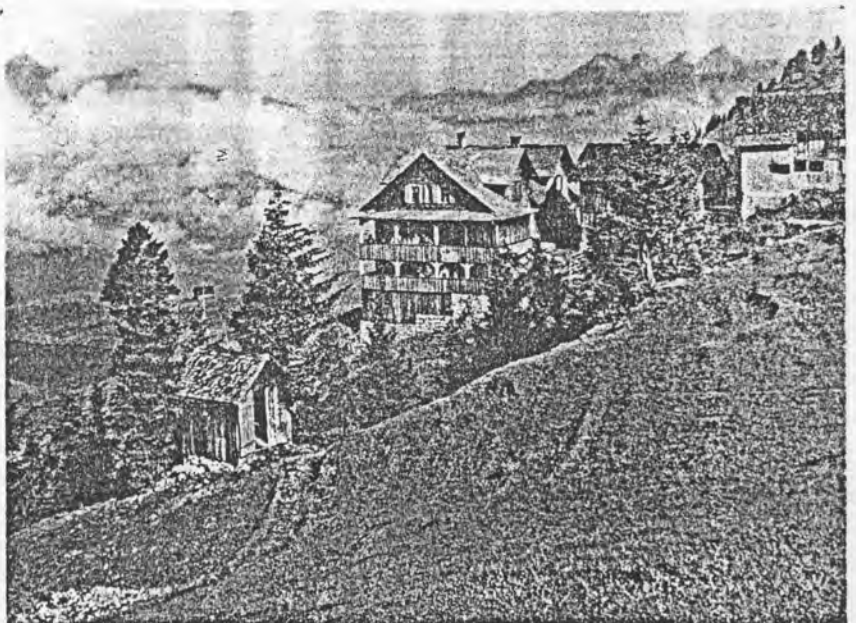




SANNERZ BRUDERHOF



THE RHÖN BRUDERHOF



THE ALM BRUDERHOF

and after a few days it was realised that amputation would be necessary.

*This was duly completed but it was too late. Eberhard died peacefully*

at four o'clock on the afternoon of November the 22nd 1935 in the

presence of members of his family. He was buried in the burial garden

*h<sup>e</sup>* of the Rhon<sup>e</sup> Bruderhof where the brothers built a dry stone wall around  
the garden, planting spruce trees along three sides.

### Chapter 3

There were those who thought that with the guiding influence of the founder gone, the movement might fall apart. The opposite in fact happened. The death of Eberhard drew the communities together, they realised that to survive they must settle their differences. Much of the reconciliation was <sup>due</sup> down to the guiding influence of Emmy who by this time was known as the 'house <sup>H</sup>mother'. Eberhard himself had been given the title of 'word <sup>W</sup>leader'. This new unity came none too soon as greater testing was on the way once again from outside forces. In the Spring of 1936 the Lichtenstein government approached the Alm Bruderhof in secret to inform them that Hitler's German government had asked them to extradite all the young men of the Bruderhof who were eligible for military service. They did not wish to do this but explained that they were far too small a nation to resist the might of Nazi Germany. Although the people of Lichtenstein were powerless to help in any other way, this timely warning did give the Bruderhof a short time in which to make arrangements to move the young men out. But to where?

By this time one of the other senior members of the Bruderhof, Hans Zumpe, had been designated 'word <sup>W</sup>leader' to <sup>C</sup>succeed Eberhard. This was done on the authority of the leading members of the Rhon <sup>pe</sup> and Alm Bruderhofs. They also decided that he should be despatched to England where with Arnold Mason and Winifred Bridgwater he should make efforts to find a site suitable for the founding of further Bruderhof communities and also obtain Home Office permission for the scheme. They took their journey as a journey of faith. Hiring a car they toured England to find suitable premises to rent or buy. They had no real finance and no permission for the foreign members to stay in England. After inspecting a number of places they came across

Ashton Fields farm on the Wiltshire-Gloucestershire border some five miles from the town of Cirencester and about a mile and a half from the village of Ashton Keynes on the upper reaches of the river Thames.

Even as they were finding this possible site some of the young people including members of the Arnold family were arriving in England finding temporary accommodation with friends including Quakers and members of a number of pacifist groups. One of the young men, Werner Friedemann Arnold, who was visiting Switzerland from the Alm Bruderhof to sell craft products, attempted to escape to London from Zurich by air. However unfortunately he was turned back when he reached Croydon airport because there had been a breakdown of communications between the Alm Bruderhof and the English connection. Failure of this direct method of escape meant that there was a desperate need for devious methods. A plan was soon devised to help the original escapee and another small group led by Hans Meier, a Swiss, one of the leading members of the ~~Alm~~ <sup>Rhön</sup> Bruderhof. They disguised themselves as a group of strolling musicians and with their lutes, guitars and flutes set off for England, this time via Italy, the only neighbouring country without entry restrictions for Germans.

The original intention was to travel overland to Genoa then by sea to England. However this was thwarted as Italy was under a League of Nations embargo imposed after the invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. An alternative land route was then decided upon which followed the Mediterranean <sup>e</sup> coast towards the French frontier. An attempt would then be made to cross the Alps into France beyond Ventimiglia. At first this proved to be successful as they travelled on foot, slept in a small tent and lived mostly on bread dipped in olive oil. However (when) they were unable to obtain visas for entry into France in Milan, Genoa or Ventimiglia

and were warned in all three places not to attempt the Alpine crossing. This was because the borders were occupied by the military and deemed to be out of bounds.

Hardly had they set foot in the border regions when they were arrested on suspicion of being spies. They were interrogated by a senior police officer who threatened to return them to Genoa from whence they would be repatriated to Germany and consequent military service. Somehow however this man was touched by their story. He sent them off with two policemen who pushed them over into France with an exit stamp from Italy on the last page of their passports. This was all done at night under cover of darkness and they still found themselves needing to cross 'No man's land'. Providence however was certainly smiling on them, for when they reached the frontier post, the border guards on the French side failed to notice that they were dealing with German passports, looking only at the exit stamp on the last page.

Thus they were allowed into France and travelled the next day by train to Paris using money leeked out by the brothers in the Alm Bruderhof. This however rendered them penniless so they had to sleep in the open, in the park beneath the Eiffel Tower. They made contact with <sup>the Coe Brud</sup> Annemarie, Emmy's daughter-in-law, who was already in England and money was sent to them by telegraph so that they could complete their journey. This last stage was not without incident. Once again the immigration officer questioned their lack of exit permits and threatened to return them to Germany but on hearing their story he personally stamped their passports to allow them to sail from Le Harve to Southampton. They almost managed to disembark at Southampton without incident until a very alert official noticed the stamp on

<sup>Friedemann's</sup>  
Werner ~~Arnold~~'s passport from when he had been refused entry at Croydon. He was about to question their right to enter Britain when Arnold Mason arrived on the scene to successfully explain the situation. Eventually a permit was issued by the Home Office which allowed the group to stay in the country for at least two months. After their eventful journey the erstwhile strolling musicians made their way to Ashton Keynes where efforts were being made to set up the new community. They arrived in fact just in time for the opening of the Cotswold Bruderhof as the new community was to be called.

The pioneers at Ashton Keynes had occupied one of the cottages at Ashyton Field farm, known as the 'Grey Cottage', even before they had officially begun renting it. This was due to the fact that an ever increasing number of young members of the Bruderhof were having to flee from the mainland of Europe. However despite the premature occupation, the owner agreed to rent them the farm for five years as from the 29th of September 1936 with an option to buy. So from March onwards they set about the task of restoring and adapting the buildings and cultivating the land. At the outset there were seventeen people who began the task of cultivating the first twenty acres of land which made up the farm, together with the farm house, four cottages, other buildings and a bungalow.

At this time the brothers did a great deal of travelling around Britain to secure finance and help from friends and sympathisers. It must be said at this point that there were other reasons for setting up the Cotswold Bruderhof other than to simply provide a refuge for European dissidents. It had long been felt by the pacifist movement in Britain that such a community could also benefit their cause with its anti-

military creed. Also there were those in this country who were *keen to experiment with alternative modes of living.*

Work was far enough advanced by September 1st for a News Letter to be published from the Cotswold Bruderhof to explain the aims of the community to friends and would-be supporters. It also gave a brief history of the group and an account of the first five months of development. Even in such a short time and with only seventeen occupants the farm was sown with three acres of potatoes, five acres of cereals and two of vegetables. The land also supported a small herd of cows and ten pigs. As well as simply renovating the buildings they were also able to set up a turning shop for the production of bowls, candlesticks etc. There had been connections over the previous six years with the firm of Heal and Sons of Tottenham Court Road, London who had purchased goods from the Alm Bruderhof. Interest was also being shown by a retailer in Bristol, Messrs E.G. Gane and Company. Difficulties in the British machine tool industry held up the arrival of two lathes, a band saw and engine and driving equipment. However with the financial help of friends and the initial difficulties overcome the turning business soon began to make headway.

As the situation in Europe deteriorated, contingency plans had to be made in case it became necessary to evacuate the Rhon Bruderhof and maybe even the Alm. It was decided in early September that an attempt should be made to purchase the farm at the original agreed price of £5,350. This was done by raising a mortgage for a large part of the sum and then making an appeal to interested groups and individual supporters. In the first five months alone over three

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hundred visitors had actually stayed at the community for a few days, others for weeks and there had been numerous locals paying casual visits. The former came from as far afield as Scotland and as diverse origins as Bryanston school and the Priory of St. Francis at Cerne Abbas.

The visitors paid nothing for their keep but were encouraged to enter into the life of the community and thus help to support in a practical way. One early venture was the repairing of the drive leading from the main road to the farm buildings. This entailed repairing a length of three to four hundred yards. The repairs were completed with the aid of gravel from beneath the community's own land. This material was to be a valuable asset in the production of concrete and concrete blocks for the construction and renovation of many of the buildings. As well as the drive, the gardens around the main house and the cottages were in a dilapidated state, but with a concentrated effort over some weeks they were soon brought up to standard and began to help the community become self sufficient in vegetables. Other areas of neglect included the drainage and sewer system. These were soon tackled, again with an eye on the possibility of more permanent members. In addition to help from visitors they were able to call on the local Ministry of Agriculture representative Mr. McLees and the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester, to say nothing of the Wigan and District Subsistence Production Society. On the building side they were helped by Hubert Lidletter, a Quaker responsible for the design of the 'Friend's House' in London. They also numbered among their group many capable people including George Barth, the group leader with special skills in architecture and design, both put to good use in planning future buildings and designing art and craft work. He



was assisted at this time by Eberhard Arnold (jnr.) who was of *particular use in working in the world outside the community as he* had studied in Birmingham in 1933 and 1934. His mother Emmy was House Mother who in turn was assisted by Annemarie, Heinrich's wife. Heinrich, who had studied at agricultural collage in Switzerland had responsibility for all farming and gardening activities. The business side of things and sales were ably controlled by Arnold Mason. It is amazing to think how this small group of dedicated people and their supporters achieved so much in just five months. They had found and bought the farm, begun an expansion programme, become financially stable and most important of all gained the British Government's blessing through the permission granted by the Home Office.

One secret of their success may have been that they were an open community. There was no suggestion of cutting themselves off from the outside world and there was free discussion of events in Europe and all the normal problems of any group of individuals trying to live in community. This was summed up in their first News Letter of 1936 which states, 'The continued stream of guests always keeps us in contact with the movements and problems of our time and helps us not to become narrow minded and sectarian, but to keep and always to find afresh a broad outlook on life.' This same news letter ended with the hope expressed that a publishing house could soon be set up to help spread the group's ideas in English speaking countries.

## Chapter 4

The frantic building and renovations during 1936 proved to be absolutely necessary as back in the Rhön mountains the position was becoming increasingly difficult until the Gestapo walked into the Bruderhof on the 14th of April 1937 to confiscate it. They ordered the members to leave within twenty-four hours, save for three of the leaders, Hannes Boller, Karl Keiderling and Hans Meier. These three were taken into protective custody in Fulda to face charges under the 'Law for the protection of the state against violent communistic attack'. The rest of the group were made to leave the country altogether after an initial threat that they would be dispersed across Germany. This was not before all their rooms had been searched and all cash, keys and books confiscated. Fortunately they were able to get word to England and the Alm Bruderhof of what had happened through Arno Martin the steward of the Alm who had been visiting and was about to leave for Lichtenstien at the time of the Gestapo raid. Without their leader the remainder of the members packed what food they could and put their belongings into bundles. They ate their last meal at 5p.m. on the 16th of April then met together for prayer for the last time at the Rhön.

After this they set off to walk over the hills for a mile to where transport was waiting to convey them to the station where they would board a train to Holland. This journey on foot was rather harrowing as, weighed down by their bundles and the smaller children, some of whom were ill, as was one of the older women, they took their last look back at their former home which they had created so lovingly. Some went to Eberhard Arnold's grave to pay their last respects to their founder. Hans Meier's wife had given birth to a child only days before, making her journey particularly difficult when combined

with the anxiety about her imprisoned husband. Once at the railway station they boarded a train and left en route for Holland and temporary shelter kindly offered by the Dutch Mennonites. Their ultimate destination was to be the Cotswold Bruderhof in England.

While all this was going on their leaders were beginning a period of indefinite incarceration in Fulda. After a few days the original charges against them were dropped in favour of a charge of criminal bankruptcy. The reason for this was purely one of propaganda. The Gestapo had realised that there had been two Hutterite brothers from Canada at the Rhon at the time of the dissolution. The seriousness of the original charges, which were manifestly untrue, might well have encouraged the North American visitors to publish charges of persecution against the Nazi Government at a time they were anxious to portray a policy of civilisation to the outside world and particularly the U.S.A. They based their new charges on false evidence extracted under threat from a creditor who was 'persuaded' to say that the community had defrauded him. He later retracted the evidence. However when the three brothers protested against the accusation the Gestapo officer laughed and said that even if the judge let them go free they would still be taken from the prison to a concentration camp because they were a danger to the Nazi state.

They were given decent treatment in the prison, being allowed to stay together and only receiving the threat of a week's solitary confinement on bread and water. This was for speaking up for a fellow prisoner who had been falsely accused. However the punishment was never enforced. One evening the warden announced that Karl Keiderling would be physically examined the next day to see if he was

fit for military service. Before Karl was taken away the three composed a letter laying down their beliefs and emphasising their objections to military service. Karl took this letter with him when he was led away under escort the following morning. After an anxious three hours he returned not having undergone the examination. With true Gestapo efficiency they found that they could not do the examination because the letter of appeal was addressed to the senior officer and he was away until the next week. Karl never did have the examination for on the Saturday morning the warden announced that all three were to leave the prison. From his previous statement about the concentration camp this must have caused them some concern. They were told that a car would be waiting for them outside the prison to take them they knew not where. Before they left they were taken to the prison office and given all the chocolate cakes and other things which had been sent to them by friends in Switzerland. They gave everything they had been given to their fellow prisoners.

It was three months since they had entered the prison, now as the iron door clanged shut behind them they stood facing a sinister black car. They had no desire to enter any vehicle which was likely to transport them to a concentration camp so Hans Meier approached it to speak to the driver. The driver handed him a white envelope which was from their lawyer. They immediately jumped into the car pulling the curtains across the window so as not to be seen as they were well known in Fulda. The driver then set off at high speed towards Frankfurt on Main. After an hour they stopped and found themselves in the middle of a forest. Was this to be the end of their journey and perhaps their lives? Such things were known to happen. The driver

told them to get out - but then he simply drove away so as not to be *seen with them.* *They stood in the middle of the forest and read the* lawyers letter which told them to go to Königstein in the Taunus mountains and to a certain hotel where he would meet them during the next week. Included with the note were twenty marks and the instruction to destroy the note as soon as they had read and memorised it. This they did then set out on foot for the nearest railway station. Here they took a train bound for Königstein.

They actually found themselves aboard an express travelling from Munich to Frankfurt which was packed with men travelling to a National Nazi party meeting in Frankfurt. S.A., S.S., other Nazi and police uniforms were everywhere. The three brothers in their distinctive Bruderhof dress were eyed with some suspicion. However when asked where they were from, they answered truthfully, "From the Rhone". They of course omitted to add any further details such as their recent prison experience. Fortunately for them the train arrived in Frankfurt before they could be further <sup>harassed</sup> harassed and all the uniformed hoards got off to be about their more pressing business. Arriving at the hotel in Königstein at ten o'clock at night the man at the front door refused them entry. However a few minutes later he let them in at the back door and here they met four Quakers who were known to them, two from England and two from Germany. They tried to persuade the three brothers to stay for a few days but the latter thought it would be wiser for them to be on their way to England as soon as possible. Agreeing, the Quakers gave them a hundred marks to help them on their way. The next stage was not to be that easy, neither Hans Meier nor Karl Keiderling had a passport and Hannes Boller's was no longer valid. Karl had the added complication of requiring a military permit which

was impossible to obtain since the authorities were still looking *for him, unsuccessfully, in the prison.*

It is worth noting at this point that their journey on the Nazi crowded express train was part of a calculated risk on the part of the judge who had tried their case. This judge had not been a Nazi at heart and he had known their own lawyer well. He had been unable to find anything criminal against the brothers but had been told by the Gestapo not to let them go without informing them, that is the Gestapo, first. The judge had let them go on the Saturday in the full knowledge that the Gestapo chief would be attending the same party rally at Frankfurt. He then fulfilled his obligations by informing a subordinate that he had released them. He knew that by the time the chief found out what had happened the fugitives would have at least two days' start.

In order to overcome the passport problem they decided that Hans Meier as a Swiss should go to the Swiss consulate in Frankfurt to try and obtain a new Swiss passport and at the same time through the embassy try to inform their brothers in England about what had happened and to ask them to send Karl's passport which was a joint one with his wife. She had taken it to England during her escape three months earlier. As far as Hannes was concerned, he would have to risk travelling on his outdated one. When Hans reached the Swiss consulate and told the Consul that the Gestapo had taken his passport the Consul did not hesitate in providing a new one. Hans was also allowed to contact England. While this was happening Karl and Hannes had made their way to Kleeve near the Dutch border where all three were due to meet that evening.

Hannes had in fact risked going into Holland to Rotterdam where

where he managed to get his passport extended. When he returned he told the others that a Dutchman named Gildermeester was bringing Karl's passport and would meet them at Cologne. This man had connections in high places and might be able to obtain a military permit for Karl. Unfortunately, in the event, his connection in the Cologne police had been replaced so the brothers would have to take the risk of crossing the border into Holland without the vital document.

Hans set off by train for Holland to try and help the others to obtain entry with the help of a Dutch Mennonite pastor. In the meantime however Karl and Hannes decided to cross the border illegally. Between Kleve and Nijmegen there is a forest which straddles the border between Germany and Holland. They decided to attempt a border crossing through this forest by night. On the first attempt they lost their way and ended up back in Germany. Their second attempt took place after midnight. After creeping through the forest for some time they felt certain that they were in Holland when suddenly they were confronted by a border guard who had spotted them by the light of his torch. To their great dismay he was a German guard. He asked them what they were doing in the forest at that time of night. They explained truthfully that they had lost their way earlier and that the friends they were due to meet in Holland would be worried. This was what some government spokesman today might term 'being economical with the truth.' Hannes did most of the talking in his Swiss German dialect then after some time the guard looked around to see if anyone was watching. When he was sure that noone was looking he showed them the way to the nearest Dutch village. (Shades of Hans Meier's experience with his strolling musicians the year before). Within hours

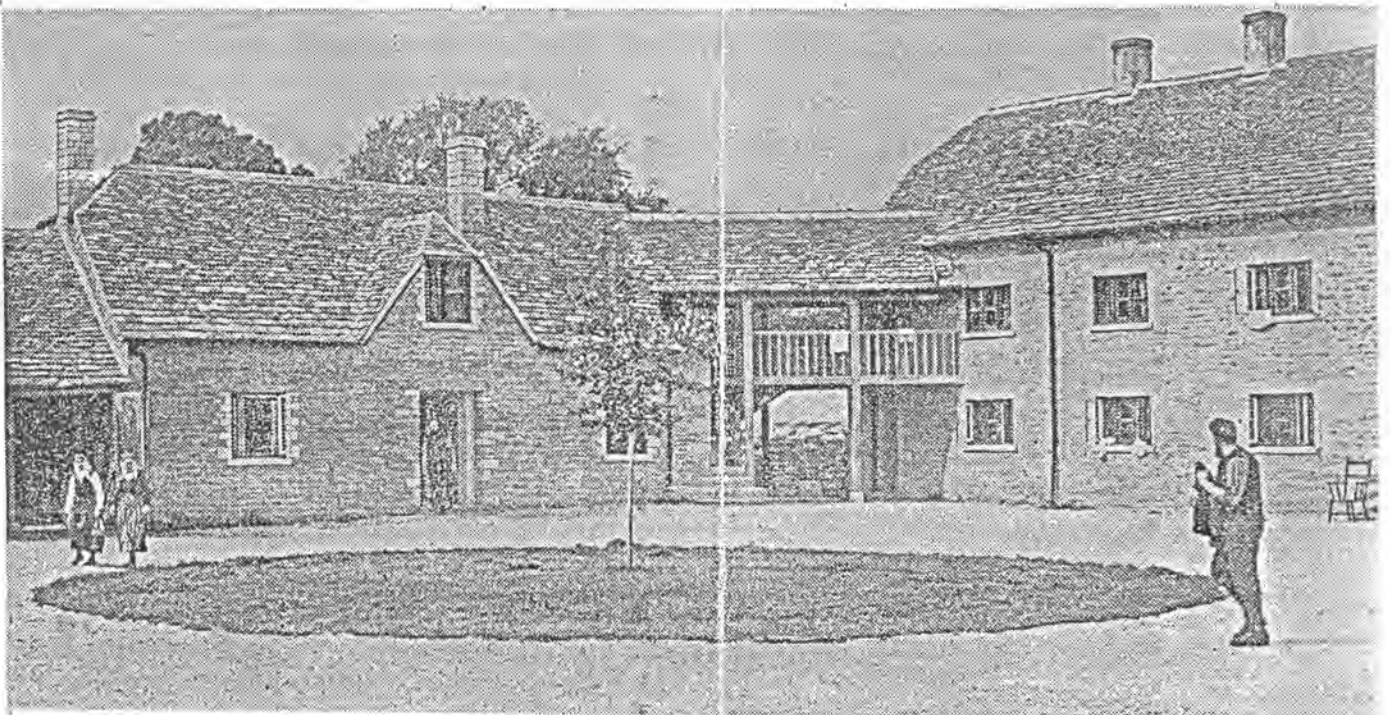
the three were reunited in Nijmegen from where they travelled to Rotterdam to be cared for by a Mennonite pastor and his family. One of the sons of this family was later shot dead in the street for carrying a revolver while trying to help Jews to escape from the authorities and almost certain death. This however did not happen until after Hans, Hannes and Karl had been helped on their way to freedom in England at the Cotswold Bruderhof.





Rhon or Rhoen

THE MEMBERS OF THE RHON BRUDERHOF ARRIVING IN HOLLAND  
FROM THE DUTCH NEWSPAPER 'DE TELEGRAAF' APRIL 25th 1937



THE MAIN FARM BUILDINGS AT THE COTSWOLD BRUDERHOF 1938

## Chapter 5

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The three brothers had been separated from their colleagues from the Rhon Bruderhof for over three months, but they arrived to find everyone safe and well. The evacuation of the Rhon increased the Cotswold Bruderhof numbers by forty five but with others who had become interested in the community the overall population by the end of 1937 was at least one hundred and thirty. In order to support this new influx it was necessary to bring all two hundred acres of the farm into cultivation and in addition another one hundred and three acres of land was rented in the July from the nearby Old Manor farm. This enabled the community to expand the farming activities of cattle, pig and sheep rearing, vegetable growing and the keeping of poultry and bees. The woodcraft also began to expand, the education work develop and the building and renovation work tried to keep pace with ever increasing demand for domestic and other accommodation.

As Hitler and his friends in Europe continued to flex their muscles more problems loomed for the Cotswold Bruderhof. The Alm Bruderhof was finding life more and more difficult with financial problems increasing along with other restrictions. They were being directly affected by the number of able young men having to leave to escape conscription to the German war machine which continued its relentless build up. Things however came to a head on the 12th of March, the day of the Anshluss when Austria succumbed to the might of Germany and the Nazi troops marched across the border. On this fateful day the remaining members of the Alm Bruderhof bade farewell to their home in the mountains and set off for England to increase even further the numbers seeking refuge at the Cotswold Bruderhof.

By September 1938 the numbers at Ashton Keynes had risen to two hundred and thirteen. There were one hundred and twenty one adults and ninety children. This included forty families. About half of the population were Germans, there were about forty British, the rest were Austrian, Swiss, Swedish, French, Dutch and Latvian and there was one Turkish national of Russian origin. Most of the married couples of this cosmopolitan group were under thirty years old, many having joined the Bruderhof in their youth, marrying within the community. The influx of so great a population of foreign nationals into such a rustic neighbourhood was considerable. However in the Cirencester area at the time there was, as in so many other places, a desperate attempt being made to come to terms with the dangerous situation developing in Europe. There was wide debate through various pacifist groups such as the Peace Pledge Union and the Society of Friends as to whether war was avoidable or inevitable and what part Christians should play.

There was a constant flow of visitors to the Bruderhof and the members mingled freely in the wider community mainly in the course of business and when invited to speak of their aims and objectives to local societies and church groups. On the whole they were well treated and their way of life respected. The British preference for the underdog found expression in the admiration for these strangers particularly the refugees who were given something of an air of celebrity. Members of many of the churches and chapels in Cirencester still speak with affection of their visits to the Ashton Keynes community. High in their memory is the warmth and friendship of the welcome they received. There was a particular bond between the Quakers and the Bruderhof mainly through direct contact with each other during the difficult times at the Sannertz

16 Rhon and Alm Bruderhofs. Another link from the early days was with the *Salvation Army although this was renewed again through the small Bruderhof* group in Birmingham when the first members arrived in England. By 1938 this link had grown to include the Salvationists in Cirencester and Swindon.

A correspondent of 'The Times' newspaper reported on a visit to the Bruderhof in September 1938. This report gives an accurate picture of what any visitor would have found at Ashton Keynes at that time. He describes the first impression of coming across a scene more typical of a village in Germany than a farm in rural England. There was something 'indefinably old-fashioned' about people. The men wore beards and for the most part went bare headed although they were sometimes seen in Summer time wearing wide brimmed straw hats decorated with wild flowers. They also wore coloured shirts, knee length breeches, home-spun stockings and heavy boots. It is hardly surprising then that they were well known in Fulda and so conspicuous on the Munich to Frankfurt express. The women's ample peasant costumes were mainly blue and worn with a blue headscarf or bonnet.

The same 'Times' correspondent also described the building progress which had been made by the time of his visit. The original farm house had been converted to a dwelling house and communal kitchen. The old byre and stable had been rebuilt as flats and bed sitting rooms. New buildings had been erected to house the school, kindergarden, hospital and communal dining room. Much of the latter group of buildings were built from concrete blocks made by the community from their own gravel pit.

By this time also one hundred acres of land had been put to the plough,

producing forty seven tons of cereal. They were able to grind their own corn so some of the cereal was used to make rye bread baked in their newly constructed bakery. The farm was organised on a five year rotation with the cattle and poultry being kept on arable land in order to provide natural fertilizer which was ploughed back into the ground when it was prepared for planting. The fowl pens which accomodated over one thousand hens were moved about the fields at regular intervals in order to give an even distribution of this natural fertilizer. The milking sheds which were operated on the Hosier open air system with mobile bale and folding units were moved around in the same way. The dairy was in fact the largest source of income at that time, with sixty milking cows. A Dutch member Dr. Gerret Fos, who was a vet, worked from his own laboratory in the community and did so with such skill that by June 1938 the milking herd was up to Tuberculin Tested standard. By this time also the sheep flock had been built up to sixty.

The gardens were being constantly enlarged so that by September 1938 eleven acres were devoted to the growing of vegetables. The vegetables were grown principally for the consumption of the community itself but the surplus was taken to market in nearby towns. Orchards and areas of fruit bushes had also been developed together with a thriving bee garden. The latter had actually been created a year earlier. It can be pointed out that despite a lack of familiarity with the vagaries of the British weather the farm and gardens were fast becoming a successful enterprise.

Despite their rather quaint appearance there was nothing old fashioned in their methods or thinking as far as farming was concerned. They were at the forefront of developments which might have been one reason for the coolness of some of their neighbouring farmers. At that

time with maximum production becoming a priority, as war was becoming a distinct threat, many new ideas were be experimented with. One of these was the production of cattle fodder<sup>from</sup> straw pulp, which would normally have been simply ploughed back into the soil. The basic process was to soak the straw in a vat of caustic soda, this broke down the outer fibrous layers to release the nutrients within. Although it would not keep for long, it could produce a useful food supplement for the winter. There was wide publicity for the method in the farming press at the time and the Bruderhof were quick to take the idea on board. They were also not slow to introduce a small electricity generating plant into the scheme of things. This provided electrical current to drive the machinery during the day and to light some of the buildings at night. Mains water had been laid on to the boundary of the community's land by the Rural District Council but the brothers had to be responsible for laying supplies on to the various buildings. This was an important addition to their basic services, particularly as far as the laundry was concerned. Again there was no suggestion of old fashioned methods in the laundry, they had the assistance of machinery to do the heavy work. Most of the men were occupied in the farming and building work while the women spent more time in the laundry, kitchen, communal dining room and in the care of the children. The care of the children included not only the school facilities but they had their own garden, paddling pools, sand pits and a 'baby house'.

Another venture which concerned mainly the men was the printing and publishing house. By 1938 they had established a press which produced various religious works, the quarterly journal of the Bruderhof 'The Plough' edited by Eberhard Arnold (jnr.) and periodic news letters. Later on

they were producing more mundane things such as the printed cardboard *milk bottle tops*. *Closely associated with the publishing work was the excellent library boasting over ten thousand volumes including priceless works from the time of the reformation.* It was a great boon to their educational work and also provided extensive reference material when discussing and dealing with the problems of the world. It also provided a great deal of source material for the study of languages, economics and history.

The visitor to the Bruderhof would receive a courteous welcome with no question of pressure to join or payment for hospitality. They would find an ordered friendly community dedicated to self reliance for physical things and a faith in God which thus far had seen them through many trials and tribulations. The organisation of the group was identical to that of the Alm and Rhon Bruderhofs. There were four 'servants of the word' whose duties included the celebration of marriages, there was a steward who looked after the common purse, another official responsible for the organising of the daily work and a group called witness brothers. The hierarchy, appointed by the members, was responsible mainly for the everyday running of the community. Any matters of major importance were put before the whole community. Although it may have seemed to those outside that the community was physically withdrawn from the world in general, they had a very keen interest in world affairs, not least because their very existence depended on what was going on in mainland Europe. During mealtimes in the common dining room they would be addressed by one of the members on matters of topical interest, something after the manner of a monastic community.

## Chapter 6

The refugees amongst the members of the Bruderhof must have viewed with some trepidation the comings and goings at the end of September as the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain clutched at straws and bits of paper. The original pre-Munich panic does not seem to have caused much feeling one way or another towards the community. It seems that most local people's worries were with the Nazi party rather than the German people in general. For their part the Nazis were obviously interested in the Bruderhof. As early as 1936 Hans Meier had returned to Germany on business and had had to present himself at the police station in Kassel. He was taken aback when an official of the Gestapo showed him a map of Britain on which the Cotswold Bruderhof had been clearly marked!

*Air Raid Precautions*

The Munich Crisis itself had many effects on the British public. Locally the A.R.P. organisation was put on a war footing with anti-gas trenches being dug in Cirencester during one weekend and the local press published plans and instructions for the construction of Do-it-Yourself air raid shelters. As well as panic evaluation from the cities which filled the roads around Cirencester on Wednesday the 27th. of September with cars and vans loaded with furniture and effects, and nowhere to stay, opinion was polarizing between those who favoured conflict and the pacifists. Regular meetings were held in Cirencester to discuss the matter. Pacifist leaflets were circulated by the Peace Pledge Union and the 'Wilts. and Glos. Standard' carried articles and running battles in the correspondence columns on the subject. This polarization which was going on all over the country led to a further increase in those wishing to join the Bruderhof at Ashton Keynes.



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The increase once more put pressure on the accommodation and resources available at the community. The only solution was to expand even further by looking for a new site or sites for other Bruderhof settlements. In the event the answer was very near at hand. Oaksey Manor and Park farm about two miles from the Cotswold Bruderhof became available, so with financial help from the U.S.A., Holland and Switzerland the members completed the purchase and so founded the Oaksey offshoot of the Cotswold Bruderhof. It was the purchase of this property which prompted the first letter from Mr. Wilson, published on Guy Fawkes night 1938 in the 'Wilts. and Glos. Standard'. The main criticism in this seems to be that members of the Bruderhof were unwanted in their own countries and by inference in Britain too. They were taking employment from our own unemployed and seemed to be able to obtain considerable sums of money from unknown supporters. Their attitude to pacifism was particularly selfish as they rather ironically sought refuge sheltered by three large nearby airfields. One can assume that here he was alluding to the Flying Training School two miles to the North East at South Cerney and Kemble Maintenance Unit three or four miles to the West. The third site is hard to fix as the nearest sites under construction or completed in 1938 were Aston Downs and Hullavington both over ten miles away from Ashton Keynes.

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The letter not lacking in innuendo, marks a change in the attitude of some of the local people, mainly it must be said, local landowners with vested interests. Up until now all the publicity given to the Bruderhof had been of a positive complimentary nature. Within a few days of the criticism however Eberhard Arnold (jnr.) was defending the Bruderhofs position at a meeting of Cirencester Rotary Club, a body with some influence within the town.

After outlining the background to the community he went on to answer *some of Mr. Wilson's queries.* He pointed out that they were not taking jobs from anyone but in fact had been using English workers in their building and farm work. It had been necessary to use local building firms to help with the expansion in 1938. Eberhard also pointed out that the local farmers could not get labour, not because of the Bruderhof but because the government was employing local labour in the construction of R.A.F., Army camps and other military establishments. As far as their tendency to live near airfields was concerned, it seemed to him that it was hard to find anywhere which was not near an airfield. He made no secret of the fact that their finance<sup>came</sup> from supporters in Britain, mainland Europe and from the Quakers and other supporters in the U.S.A. As far as having influence in high places was concerned, they had to have their Home Office permit renewed each year.

When these matters were reported in the press they ruffled a few feathers. Mrs. Gertrude Wood a member of the Council of the Guild of Empire took the opportunity to write in the next week in support of Eberhard's statement. A counter blast to this came from Mr. Cuss of Cricklade supporting Mr. Wilson. Mrs. Wood then retaliated supported by Mr. Rimes a local pacifist mill owner. On the 3rd. of December Mr. Wilson again wrote to 'Wilts. and Glos. Standard' unsatisfied by the answers from the public debate and undeterred by any criticism. This letter simply reiterated his previous queries.

The next week the 'Standard' reported a wedding which in a number of ways highlighted the difficulties which were spilling over from Hitler's activities in Europe to those seeking refuge in Britain. This wedding involved two 'guests' of the Cotswold Bruderhof. They were not members

but they had escaped from Austria to seek refuge there assisted by the Quakers. *The bride was Baroness Alexandra von Guttenburg and the bridegroom, Herr Fritz Kanitz from Vienna.* Like so many people in Germany and Austria at this time the young couple had had to face the problems caused by Hitler's anti-Jewish obsession.

Herr Kanitz was classed as a non-Aryan while his bride-to-be was an Aryan when they became engaged and were both living in Germany. Hitler's Nuremberg Laws of September the 15th. 1935, which included the banning of marriage between Aryans and Jews however made their marriage impossible. Fritz Kanitz accordingly left Germany for Austria to take up the study of political science at the University of Vienna. Shortly afterwards the Baroness also moved to Vienna so that they could be near each other. Unfortunately they delayed their wedding a little too long, for when the Anschluss occurred the Nuremberg prohibition came into play once again. Their only hope was to leave Austria and head for a safer refuge. They decided that at that time England seemed to offer the most safety, being separated from mainland Europe it had for centuries provided a sanctuary for those fleeing from the East. In order to obtain permission to leave Fritz Kanitz had to sign a legal declaration that he would never again return to Austria. For the Baroness's part, her father Baron Wilhelm von Guttenburg had most of his estate confiscated. Such was the minimum price of non-conformity and once the sacrifices had been made the couple set off for England and the Cotswold Bruderhof.

The wedding itself was not at the Cotswold Bruderhof but at Holy Cross church in the village of Ashton Keynes. The congregation included many of the villagers and some twenty other Austrian refugees. Unlike the



BARONESS ALEXANDRA VON GUTTENBURG AND HERR FRITZ KANITZ GUESTS OF  
THE COTSWOLD BRUDERHOF WHO WERE MARRIED AT ASHTON KEYNES DECEMBER 1938

bridegroom, the Baroness did not speak English, so the vicar, the Rev. R.H. *Wells addressed her in German and both bride and groom made their vows in German.* There was a moment of irony when during the ceremony the bride and her non-Aryan husband processed down the aisle to the 'Bridal March' from Richard Wagner's 'Lohengrin'. Could this have been the one part of the service which might have struck a chord with the Arch Persecutor.

The service must have been particularly poignant for the best man. He had found himself in a similar position to the bridegroom, he too being a non-Aryan. Unfortunately he had married an Aryan and been living in Austria at the time of the Anschluss. When the Nuremburg laws came to bare it meant the end of his marriage. His wife had not fled with him to England but in order to retain her 'rather remunerative post' had decided on divorce. Even then in order for him to obtain permission to leave Austria his exwife had to sign a declaration that he would never again return to Austria. It is difficult to imagine the emotion of this occasion with so many unpleasant memories and unfulfilled hopes and aspirations exposed to public gaze, albeit a sympathetic public. The reception was arranged by the vicar's wife and daughter and took place at the Vicarage. This is a house of some character in Church Walk which is linked to the Norman church by a tree-lined footpath which still today winds across pasture land and on entering Church Walk crosses over a small stone bridge over the infant river Thames. The scene on that December day as the bridal party made its way to the reception, greeted by many of the villagers and their fellow refugees, must have presented a picture in stark contrast to the scenes which many of the latter had witnessed in their homelands. Yet for most refugees the spectre of fear seems to be ever present.

This was undoubtedly the case here for none of the refugees was mentioned *by name in the wedding report, not even the best man.* The bridegroom's occupation is listed as 'clerk' a strange title for a university man whose father had been agricultural adviser to the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture. Others amongst the guests were, 'a medical man, a medical student, a doctor of laws, a commercial artist, several Vienna University undergraduates and other professional men or men preparing for professional careers'. Their *anonymity* anonymity was probably preserved to prevent victimisation of relatives and associates back in their homelands, although it was too late to help one of the men whose parents were already in concentration camps. The feelings of these Nazi victims resonate from the last paragraph of the wedding report. 'In the speeches - in German - the speakers said they were overwhelmed by the goodness of the English people, declaring that never had they experienced such mercy and kindness in their own country'. They had obviously not been too offended by the recent *de*clarations of Mr. Wilson. This point is further highlighted by events at the end of the day, for the report notes that since the wedding the bride and groom had been guests of the same Mr. Wilson at Fairhaven farm Oaksey ! The couple did not return to the Bruderhof but the community had obviously provided them with another haven on their journey as it was to do for so many.

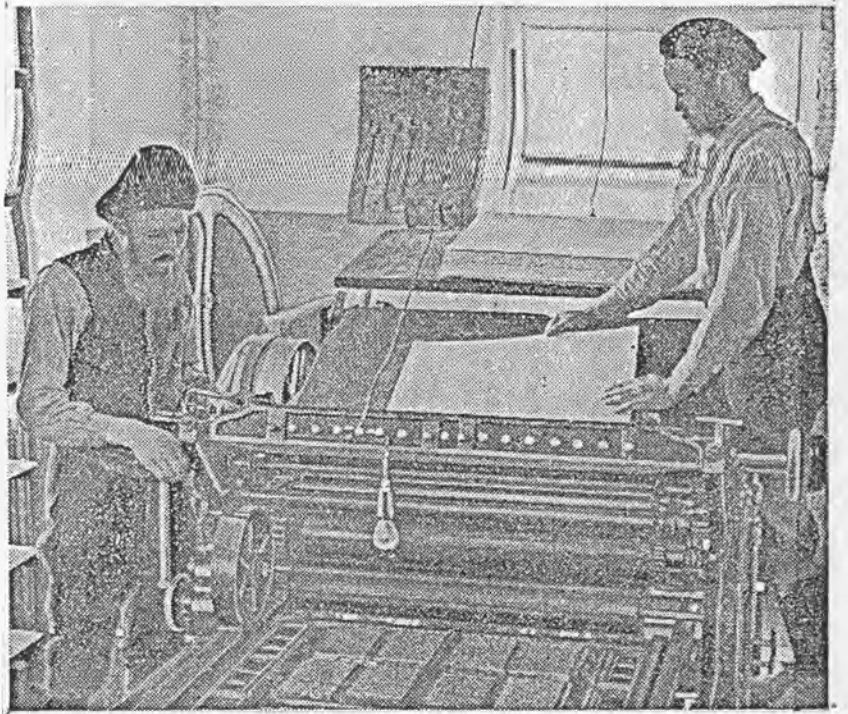


OX CART AND TYPICAL COTSMOLD BARN AT THE COTSMOLD BRIDDERHOF 1938

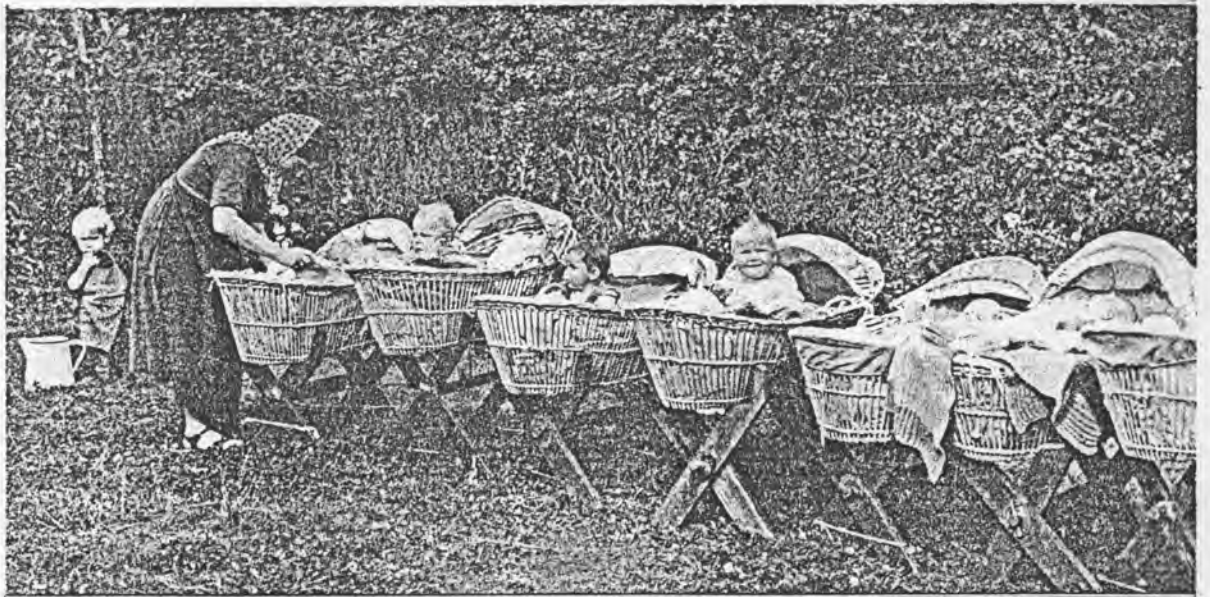


WORKING IN THE FIELDS AT THE COTSWOLD BRUDERHOF 1938





THE PRINTING PRESS AT THE COTSWOLD BRUDERHOF 1938



CARING FOR THE CHILDREN AT THE COTSWOLD BRUDERHOF 1938



## Chapter 7

Prior to the Munich Crisis plans had been drawn up by Sir John Anderson's A.R.P. Committee for the evacuation of certain civilians from major cities. Although the need seemed to recede with the appearance of Mr. Chamberlain's piece of paper, the plans remained in place and the local W.I.s travelled their districts asking for volunteers who would give accommodation to mothers and children. There were those who of course viewed the prospect of a further influx of, as one put it 'aliens and semi-aliens', with some misgivings. These included a number of Cirencester's local worthies, mainly from the rural area. One put forward the suggestion, which was backed by others, that special camps should be constructed for the evacuees. This led to a rather scathing report on 'Cirencester Snobs' in one of the National Daily papers. It was in the defence of these so called snobs that once more Mr. Wilson set pen to paper in January 1939. At the same time however he took the opportunity of having another go at the Bruderhof. He suggested that as pacifists in time of war they would be a hinderance and a burden. They would have to be put under guard in camps. Their building could then be used for a large children's centre. So much for the proximity of airfields now!

As feelings locally began to polarize on the subject of evacuees and refugees Mr. Wilson continued his opposition to the Bruderhof and its supporters. On the 18th. of February he attacked two leading local pacifists, Mr. Rimes and Mr. Hayward, saying that the standards of the Bruderhof did not find acceptance with the average Englishman. If war broke out he said that the Rimes-Hayward-Bruderhof axis would put up a poor show against the

Rome-Berlin axis. Once again he ended by criticising pacifist aliens *hiding behind the forces of the host country.* *This attack appeared in the press only four days after a meeting had been held in Oaksey village hall.* The meeting, to which the public were invited, had been called to allow representatives of the Cotswold Bruderhof to try to allay the fears of the local people following the Bruderhof's purchase of Oaksey Manor and Park farm. The hall was crowded with members of the public so that eventually there was standing room only. The meeting was chaired by Arnold Mason of the Bruderhof with his colleague Bruce Sumner as the main speaker. The meeting opened with Mr. Sumner giving a brief history of the community and explaining their basic philosophy. He once again emphasised the fact that they had Home Office and now Ministry of Agriculture backing. There was no question of them being a financial liability in fact they were an asset to the local economy, with over three thousand visitors to date there must have been a considerable spin off for local business. He pointed out that their purpose in purchasing Oaksey Park farm was to allow for an increase in the number of English members. The existing workers would be allowed to stay on until they could find alternative work. He told how the Bruderhof now numbered two hundred and thirty in all, including eighty married couples. There were seventy British subjects and sixty aliens. They were all law abiding and loyal to the King and government. This initial talk was followed with a question and answer session.

It is hardly surprising that Mr. Wilson was the first off the mark with a question. Before he asked his question however he pointed out that in the matters under discussion the Bruderhof's religious beliefs were beside the point. He questioned their right to call themselves refugees since they had been outlawed for refusing to obey the regulations, 'of the

one who is set in authority over Germany who, he imagined, suspected them of being more or less communistic'. Mr. Mason in reply said how they could not include Nazi teaching in their school and also everything that had been said that evening made it obvious that they had no communist or other political connections. Following a new line Mr. Wilson then asked how they could justify taking the bread out of the mouths of Englishmen. Mr. Mason again replied that he thought that they had tried to prove that the Bruderhof was not a liability but an asset. A lady in the audience, Mrs. Godwin, then asked what their attitude was to dumb animals and whether they would object to a visit from the R.S.P.C.A. Mr. Greenslade of Cloatly farm in nearby Hankerton asked why they bought property away from the highway. It was pointed out to him that Ashton Keynes Bruderhof was right by the main road. Another member of the audience asked what they would do if attacked by the enemy. Mr. Mason answered that they would not take life. This gave Mr. Wilson chance to ask what would happen to the Bruderhof if war broke out? Mr. Mason had to admit that they had no idea but would very much like to know.

*the meeting*  
It is hard to know whether the meeting calmed the fears of the villagers in general or whether the critics were in the majority. It certainly did not silence the latter, for next week in the 'Standard' Mr. Greenslade continued to press home his point about why the Bruderhof did not buy farms near the main road, this despite the previous answer that he had been given. It seems that he was inferring that there might be spies in the Bruderhof. He reminded his readers how during the Great War 'We were swarmed with spies'. He also pointed out that the attire of the members of 'this mysterious community' was grotesque. He then went on to relate how several of them who were unable to speak English had got lost and arrived at a farm in nearby Minety between seven and eight o'clock in the morning. He asked his readers

to imagine what would happen if a woman in 'a certain condition' opened her door to be confronted with such a spectacle. The result he assured them would be serious. At the meeting he had told Mr. Mason that it was the custom to put bells on sheep which strayed. Mr. Mason had said that he would do so in future. Mr. Greenslade then pointed out that at the meeting he had said that if he caught them straying they would be dealt with summarily. He had no room for or sympathy with people who would not fight to protect the country which foolishly gave them shelter. Another Oaksey 'parishioner' in the same issue of the paper reported that the vast majority of the inhabitants had petitioned against the Bruderhof settlement. He or she also complained that although the rector of Oaksey had been present, it had been the rector of Kemble who had given the hearty vote of thanks. Perhaps he might have volunteered for them to set up a colony in his parish !

Following this series of anti-Bruderhof <sup>statements</sup> of support were forthcoming from others such as Mr. Goodie. He complained that Mr. Greenslade's attack was incoherent. It was not a crime to grow a beard or to ask the way and since the district was used to the sight of these people, the hypothetical woman would be unmoved except with a desire to help. He regretted that it was no longer the custom to put masks on chatterboxes. Also on the point of the Bruderhof's possible spying activities, he said that spies remained inconspicuous, this could hardly be the case with members of the community. As for Mr. Greenslade's point about spies in the last war, he in turn pointed out that the spies were quickly rounded up but unfortunately the spy catchers were not and got in the way of the security forces.

Despite the critics and the threatening war clouds which hung over Europe, both the Bruderhof communities worked on improving their land, building up their resources, expanding the craft and market garden facilities

and providing a home for the refugees from the continent and the deprived and disillusioned of this country. *All the time requests were being made* for them to give sanctuary to victims of Nazism. It was a great struggle to remain solvent and this was an important condition of the renewal of their Home Office permit.

## Chapter 8

Back in 1938 Eberhard Arnold (jnr.), appealing for funds, emphasised the problem of receiving and dealing with appeals for help from all directions. These included a man returning from the Spanish civil war who could not find employment and two poor Indian pedlars who wanted their five year old child to be educated so that, 'he should learn to love his fellow men' and two cases of epilepsy whose relations thought that they would benefit from life in a community such as the Bruderhof. While they would help these kinds of cases, Eberhard pointed out that vast numbers needing help was an indictment of modern organised religion. Also those asking for help for others were often in a better financial position to help than the Bruderhof.

In the same 1938 News Letter appeared a number of letters which had been received at the Bruderhof which illustrate some of the problems which presented themselves. They had often been written in sheer desperation, as was the following extract from a musician : "I turn to you in the very greatest need. I am a composer, I was thirty years a choirmaster, the director of an orchestra and a teacher of the theory and history of music. My wife was a certificated teacher, and understands all about housework. We have a daughter of eleven. When Hitler came, I had to give up my livelihood. I have written in vain to nine countries for help. Then I realised that perhaps my family and I could be saved, so I turned to you. Please accept me. Allow us to live with you, or my days are numbered. Please help us. I beg you, wringing my hands."

A second letter came from Vienna : "I have an aunt and uncle in Vienna. My aunt is about fifty-eight years old, and my uncle is not yet fifty. They have no money, but they want work. My uncle is healthy, and enjoys work. My aunt has a defect - she is deaf - but looks well, and for years

has done all the housework herself. Many years ago she published a lot. *Both are people who have been interested mainly in literature, music and other cultural pursuits.* During the war he was all the time at the front, and in the meantime she, as the result of malnutrition, could not nurse her baby. Cow's milk was not to be got, so the child literally died of hunger. They have suffered unspeakably through poverty, and now do not know where to go, and in a few days they will have no roof over their heads. As neither were ever Jews in faith, but have only a moral and ethical belief in God, there should be no difficulty in this direction. Quite other, however is the matter of permission to come to England. How can one get permission? Do you also accept people without money? Of course I cannot make any arrangements with my relatives, for I can neither write anything concerning actual conditions, nor, for reasons known to you, can I write saying I am corresponding with you. Just yesterday I heard over the wireless that all Czecks and Jews must leave Vienna within a short time, but where are they to go? The whole of South America is closed to them. North America has already exceeded the contingent and everywhere a prohibitively high security is demanded."

"I have also in Vienna an aunt of sixty-three who told me herself that she would work, work and work and not be a burden to anyone, if only she might live in quiet. Can you possibly do anything for her? Perhaps she could contribute something, if only a small sum. As is always the case, the poor are much harder hit than the rich. If it <sup>is</sup> at all possible, do help. Do save the lives of three people, who otherwise are lost. Perhaps the time will soon come when Jesus Christ will walk again on earth. There was never more need for him than now. Perhaps the countless prayers for help and salvation will bring him to this. If it is at all possible



please answer soon. It is for me as important as a verdict for life or death, for three lives are dependant on your answer."

These are but two of the appeals to the Bruderhof which literally did involve a matter of life and death. They received many more from those attempting to escape from what seemed the inevitable conflict rapidly developing on the continent. By the end of March 1939, the Germans had annexed Bohemia, Moravia and Memel and entered Prague, while Fascism had gained ground in Spain with the fall of Madrid on the 28th. To say nothing of Mussolini's antics in Italy. In the light of all this Britain entered into its fateful agreement with Poland on the 31st of March. While such threats of war were a concern and worry to most people in Britain there was something of an air of unreality about it and a desperate hope that it might never happen.

## Chapter 9

The majority of the members of the Bruderhof were under no illusions regarding Hitler's threat to peace. They had had direct experience of the Nazi menace, particularly those of Jewish origin who had already witnessed the brutality of 'Chrystal Nacht' and the beginnings of the concentration camps. Many others had found it necessary to flee their homelands leaving all but a few possessions behind. Yet despite all their privations at no time do their writings or public statements speak of revenge or go back on their pacifist convictions. This of course created an impression which their critics interpreted as cowardice. However with the benefit of hindsight we can see that they were amongst those who would have suffered most had Hitler achieved a successful invasion.

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By September 1939 it was another invasion which turned history inevitably towards war. In fact secret German documents relating to a meeting held in the study at the Chancellery in Berlin on May 24th 1939 show how Hitler already knew that war was inevitable: "There is no question of sparing Poland and we are left with the decision ; to attack Poland at the first suitable opportunity. We cannot expect a repetition of the Czeck affair. There will be war. Our task is to isolate Poland. Success in isolating her will be decisive". His confidence in the fact that it would not be another Czeck affair stemmed from Britain's treaty with Poland. This treaty came into play on the 1st of September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. With Hitler's refusal to back down, time ran out for everyone and Mr. Chamberlain had to announce to the nation on the morning of Sunday the 3rd of September that Britain was at war with Germany.

For the members of the Cotswold Bruderhof and its Oaksey offshoot this *was a particularly tense time.* By the time of the outbreak of the war their numbers had increased to over three hundred, making them a significant presence in the neighbourhood. Their population even rivalled that of some of the surrounding villages. They were by now self supporting which gave them security as far as their Home Office permit was concerned and despite the political situation and a few persistent critics, their neighbours were generally friendly towards them. There was much coming and going of visitors both local and from farther afield. September the 3rd however almost brought a disasterous visitation.

A Quaker friend intent on visiting the Ashton Keynes community stopped in the village itself for a snack in one of the pubs. Here he overheard a group of people, who were the worse for drink, plotting to go up to the Cotswold Bruderhof to burn it down. He immediately went to the police to tell them of what he had heard and then went on to the Bruderhof to warn the members. When night came some of the members of the Bruderhof went down the drive to the main gates to head off the gang in order to persuade them not to attack. However when they got to the gates they found the police already there remonstrating with the gang and eventually they persuaded them to return to their homes. A potentially dangerous situation had been defused.

This ugly incident was the only one in the early months of the war, the majority of the people in the surrounding area still seem to have considered that their arguement was with the Nazis rather than the whole German nation. This attitude persisted throughout the early months of the war which, because of its lack of activity as far as Britain was concerned, was christened the phoney war or 'Sitz Krieg'. During this time members of the Ashton Keynes and Oaksey communities were out and about travelling the

length and breadth of the country. Their travels included a large number of towns and cities :- Cirencester, Stroud, Swindon, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Bristol, Bath, London, Birmingham, Oxford, Barnett, Kettering, High Wycombe, Maidenhead, Bournemouth, Brighton, Cambridge, Ipswich and East Anglia, Leicester, Wolverhampton, Rochdale, Manchester, Preston, Lancaster, Morecambe and Kendal. These visits invariably included public meetings and the main speakers on these occasions included Stanley Fletcher, Bruce Sumner, Eberhard (jnr.), <sup>Arnold and Johann Heinrich</sup> Johanne, Hienrich and Hardi Arnold. Others including Arnold Mason, Herman Arnold and Jan Fos made many private calls to speak to groups and individuals. From this it can be seen that there were no restrictions placed on where they could travel other than those places restricted even to British citizens. This applied even to those of the Bruderhof who were of German origin.

The early moths of the war were also marked in the communities by the bringing in to production of yet more land. By the end of 1939 eight hundred and twenty acres were productive. Increase in grain production gave enough surplus for bread to be produced beyond that required by the communities. This enabled them to start a bread round in Swindon. The increased vegetable and poultry production also gave surpluses which were sold in the surrounding villages and towns. Their efficiently run Tuberculin Tested milking herd provided surplus milk for two milk rounds, one in Swindon the other in Wroughton.

In order to allay any public disquiet at this time, Eberhard Arnold (jnr.) wrote once more to 'The Wilts. and Glos. Standard'. He said that he wished to express the love and gratitude of the community towards the British nation and Government. The latter had shown much greater tolerance than Hitler. In recompence and to show loyalty and the importance of agriculture, they had put a further one hundred acres under the plough at Ashton Keynes and

Oaksey since Autumn the previous year. They were now keeping one hundred *cows and fifty young stock on each farm.* *The garden produce was in great demand especially in and around centres such as Bristol and Bath where a great number of evacuee mothers and children were requiring food.* He said that they were anxious to help the latter and also they volunteered to help local farmers. Once again he repeated that they totally disapproved of the ~~of the~~ ways of the Nazi regime which had deprived them of their homes and property and reiterated that on the basis of Christian teaching they owed allegiance to the Government of Britain to whose people and institutions they felt deeply attached and indebted. Another refugee writing to the paper that week was Fritz Kanitz, whose wedding had made such an impression on the village of Ashton Keynes the year before. By this time he was living at North End farm and in his letter he pointed out that not all refugees were pacifists like the Bruderhof. Many like himself had volunteered to fight in the British forces. In defence of the Bruderhof however he pointed out that he had only once heard the criticism that the English were fighting while refugees enjoyed safe areas. He too was very grateful to England for the kindness and generosity shown to him.

Neither the hostilities which were occurring in Europe nor the travel restrictions imposed on the borders of most of the other countries on the rest of the continent, ended the flow of refugees to Britain. On the contrary more and more groups and individuals were finding themselves at odds with the Nazis and thus in need of a safe refuge. By the beginning of March 1940 the population of the combined Bruderhofs was three hundred and eighteen including one hundred and fifty three fully committed members who had passed through a noviciate or testing time of from six to eighteen months. Their main worry in fact was not how many they could cope with,

for they believed that God had provided for them thus far and would continue to do so, nor were they worried about what might happen to them personally. What was uppermost in their minds was the fact that events were moving too fast, and to quote from an article in the Spring edition of 'The Plough' 1940 : "How few (they were) in face of the great need of the world; and how few compared with the greatness of the task!"

## Chapter 10

The men who were subject to National Service, the upper age limit of which had been raised from twenty seven to forty-one years in the previous September, found themselves with particularly difficult decisions to make. The full members of course chose to register as conscientious objectors and many others in sympathy with the Bruderhof's principles found their consciences leading them in a similar direction. The German members of course had an even more difficult task in that they had to prove their 'friendliness' towards Britain when placed before the Tribunal for 'enemy aliens'. It is a mark of their esteem in the eyes of the authorities and the genuineness of their claim to be victims of Nazism, that all of the so called 'enemy aliens' were given full exemption from all restrictions imposed on Germans and Austrians at the outbreak of the war.

The Spring edition of 'The Plough' emphasised that their objection to war was based on the belief that it was no solution to the problems of the time, only love was paramount. This even transcended the law of the state where it conflicted with the love of God and their fellow men. This could not have been the most popular of philosophies in some quarters at the time when jingoism and patriotism were in the ascendancy. However, as with the enemy aliens, those British subjects who were eligible for National Service but chose to become conscientious objectors also convinced the tribunals of their sincerity and were given unconditional exemptions. Perhaps the example cited in 'The Wilts. and Glos. Standard' of June the 8th 1940 will illustrate a typical case. The piece is entitled 'The Bruderhof and Military Service'. :- The story of a young law student who became a solicitor then threw up his profession to become a member of the Bruderhof was told last

Wednesday in Bristol when Edward Guy Johnson, bearded and in the rough spun *apparel of the Cotswold Society* appeared before the South West Tribunal and asked for absolute exemption from all forms of military and national service.

L" Johnson's statement read ---" I have held the absolute pacifist position since November 1934, in which month I wrote to the War Office to the effect that the Certificate 'A' which I gained as a boy in the school Officer Training Corp should be cancelled, as in the event of a future war I could not offer myself for military service. My pacifist conviction at the time was limited to the simple rejection of war and I became a member of various peace organisations such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the League of National Nations Union and the Peace Pledge Union. But all these had little connection with my daily life as a law student and later as a solicitor. In the last three years however this pacifist conviction has deepened so that now I know that I am called as a follower of Jesus Christ to seek to express the love which he brings in helping to build up a life, where not only war but social injustice and greed are entirely overcome in a brotherly way of life, with a common working together in peace and unity as friends of this love of Christ. In 1938 accordingly I decided to join the Brotherhood of the Cotswold Bruderhof giving up my work as a solicitor. I honour the state for I recognise law to be a necessity for men who refuse to live in the Spirit of Love, and I recognise too that the State depends on the law, and the law depends upon the sanction of force. But the way of Christ is altogether different from the way of the State. His call to all men at all times and his call to me now, is to go His way of absolute love and brotherhood in all circumstances and at whatever cost. My request to the Tribunal therefore is that I be granted unconditional exemption within the meaning of the act."

Another member of the Brotherhood from the Bruderhof bore testimony



to the applicant's sincerity. Judge Wethered said that the Tribunal had investigated the Bruderhof applications before and Johnson would be retained on the Conscientious Objectors Register without condition.

The Government and the various tribunals might well have looked favourably on the principles espoused by the members of the Bruderhof but not all were equally at home with them. By April 1940 they found themselves at odds once more with some of the local farmers and traders who accused them of unfair trading. It was said that as they paid no wages and were not affected by military call-up this had given them an unfair advantage in the purchase of two milk rounds in Swindon area. Some of the local milk vendors made it known that they were going to raise the matter in Parliament. The Bruderhof defended their position by saying that their milk rounds were selected from a number which had been available to anyone and in fact some were still available ! They continued to press home the point that the Home Office and Local Authorities were aware of the nature and character of their work. In fact they were being urged by the local War Agricultural Executive Committee to maximise food production in common with local farmers. This they were determined to do. As far as wages were concerned, each received according to his need and contributed by his labour. An open door was kept for the poor and needy, especially destitute children.

## Chapter 11

Their open door policy almost backfired on them, for it allowed one man who had come to the community in the Summer of 1939 with his family and then fallen out with them, to publish an attack in the press. Had this attack not been refuted by independent observers it might have done untold damage to the Bruderhof's local standing. The main charge he brought against them was one of hypocrisy. The land they so 'generously' farmed for the nation yielded £2 per acre government subsidy, from a government they would not fight for. They called themselves Christian but derided all other Christian denominations. They referred to the English working class as Bourgeois. They constantly derided capitalism yet borrowed thousands with interest to pay on the loan. They would also refuse any transaction which did not yield a profit. People gave them things like furniture which they would sell for not less than market value. They sold their craft products to visitors and still asked for money to support the cause. Of their three hundred or so members thirty were Zionist youths for whom the Zionist movement paid ten shillings a week for each individual. These youngsters, he said, worked eleven hours a day and struggled to obtain the elementary amenities of life. Ten shillings a week had to be guaranteed from some source before destitute children would be taken in.

Guests visiting the place had to pay for their own keep and work all day every day of the week and most Sundays without any return. The inner circle mainly consisting of Germans were the only ones privileged to visit adjacent towns where they spent money on themselves, on good food at the best cafes, good cigarettes and tobacco and beer at the Bear Inn Cirencester and other

taverns.

The downtrodden, overworked, undernourished brothers and sisters, especially would-be novices and guests work - work - worked under the eye of a Gestapo which spied on their every movement.

The bedrooms would only lock from the inside so that on leaving your room the door remained unlocked. Punishment was meted out by the inner circle. This punishment could include solitary confinement. He cited the case of an artist who, with his wife, decided to leave the community after three weeks. He asked for his art materials and bedroom articles to be returned but this request was denied. The final criticism was that at least half a dozen of the German members had been members of the Hitler Youth.

From later evidence it would seem that it was no coincidence that in the same edition of 'The Standard' there was the following letter from Mr. Wilson :-

Dear Sir,

Readers of your paper may recall the fact that some eighteen months ago I wrote several letters calling the public's attention to the many potential dangers involved in the unrestricted presence of aliens in England, dangers greatly enhanced by the establishment of community settlements and their growth in the district.

I should like to restate here my personal attitude to all genuine refugees from tyranny and oppression in other countries. I have the deepest sympathy for all who are genuine and I claim to have given practical proof of my sincerity in this respect. I am not animated by any personal feelings against those of other nationalities or creeds or forms of belief which may differ from my own; at the same time I am an Englishman and the safety and general welfare of my country is a matter very dear to me.

Since my letters to your newspaper, war has broken out and it has been *more than ever clearly demonstrated how important it is to be vigilant and* mounting a close and watchful guard against every insidious enemy working within the home camp. I will give one instance that will suffice - Norway, betrayed from within, her gates thrown open by a brutal enemy. It is of course a fact that there are many genuine aliens in this country, but it is also an undoubted fact that there are many unprincipled scoundrels working for the overthrow of the Empire under the guise of being harmless refugees from foreign tyranny. These are the well known German "Fifth Legion" which includes in its ranks, English traitors. This "column" constitutes a dangerous menace from within, the enemy established in the home front and capable of doing an infinite amount of damage. They are lurking everywhere in factories and shipyards and work generally on the edges of aerodromes, in business and in private life and why not in community centres, which lay such stress upon their love and peacefulness? When I wrote my former letter I referred chiefly to the Bruderhof and I had two points especially in mind.

(1) The danger inherent in such a community of being a likely centre for the establishment of German espionage, possible even without the knowledge of its existence by the community itself.

(2) The obvious disadvantage to our English countryside caused by the establishment of an utterly foreign community in naturally ever increasing numbers, what would be the outcome in the future?

A crowd of foreigners fleeing from the oppression of their own countries and seeking refuge beneath the brave old flag of England, yet who refuse to share the danger of her sons who keep the old flag flying while the gentle alien sows and mows and reaps the fields of English farmers in full security

with all the latest machinery that money can buy - despite the 'Evening Standard' with its charming but delusive picture of the 'simple peasant ploughing with his oxen.' !

Eighteen months ago I made the strongest representations to all Headquarters in authority - to the Home Office to M.P.s and even direct to the War Office and Secretary of State but with no result beyond the usual official - "A kindly attention will be paid to the matter, it will receive full consideration." In plain English this means "You are talking drivel. We are the country's Guardians, we know our business without the aid of your well meant interference."

Now the war is on - the country is awake to what may constitute a grave danger to its well being - are the authorities yet fully awake to what may constitute a grave danger to its well being - are the authorities yet fully awake or do "onlookers" seek to lull our people into a false sense of security? I doubt if the authorities are yet awake, they have been whipped up a bit by the force of public opinion and the alarm aroused in many minds, but scourges, and not whips will be required in order to make them take the fullest precautions.

One question I would like to ask : Where does the money come from which enables a foreign community to flourish and extend in a few short years? If it is due to the generosity of English donors then I say that it might better and more justly be bestowed. If it comes from foreign sources, does there not lurk some sinister purpose behind the gifts? I am confident that any English farmer would agree that it is never made off the land. You cannot support three hundred and twenty grown up people and children off a couple of farms with all the expenses involved in the installation of up to date machinery, electric lighting and all the other

latest improvements for agricultural purposes. Cars, breaks of various kinds, buses and driving horses are expensive items to maintain, more so now than ever, for one thing a very considerable supply of petrol is required and seems to be available in the case of a foreign community! Many an honest English farmer, who has toiled hard to make ends meet, and has been driven into closing down or into bankruptcy court, would have been more grateful for a small share of that assistance meted out to a foreign community on English soil.

Our brave men at the front, on the sea and in the air keep constant watch against a common foe. They too hate war and strife, but they seek to defend the right, while the gentle pacifist tills the land beneath their care these men stand on guard at the gates of Empire. Shall not we men and women on the home front, who cannot share in their immediate and constant peril, see to it that we keep our vigil too on their behalf and ours, remembering that "they also serve who only stand and wait." Such waiting implies watchfulness and readiness to act as the occasion may require.

Fairhaven Oaksey

W.B. Wilson

He ends his letter with a P.S. quoting from a letter written by the M.P. Ben Tillett to the 'Daily Telegraph' the previous month which amounted to :- "Put all traitors out of action, be they Fascist, Communist or others in whatever position in life they are."

It would seem that with the fall of Norway, signalled by the escape of King Haakon VII, the war was brought close enough to England for spy scares to get out of hand. What evidence there was that they were lurking everywhere is not clear. Perhaps those who were 'standing and waiting' were getting a little impatient. It is quite clear from the correspondent who had been a guest at the Bruderhof, that he had been a spy in their midst! He openly

admitted that he had made notes on various conversations and was collecting evidence for an 'authoritative book' on the subject. This book, as far as I am aware, never reached a publisher. What did materialise however were counter attacks in defence of the Bruderhof. A couple who had been staying at the Ashton Keynes community for nine weeks and had visited there on numerous occasions, pointed out that no charges were made but of course donations to help keep the doors open to all were gladly accepted. They cite the Gestapo idea as fantastic, noting that the people are driven by their convictions not threats. They report that the Zionists were quite happy finding the work easier than other farms on which they had worked and it was undertaken in a much better atmosphere. This couple, Geoffrey and Phylis Welham, also said that there was complete freedom to come and go but as they found such absolute brotherhood they had decided to remain.

We do not just have to take the word of Mr. and Mrs. Welham in the matter of the Zionists. Werner Wiess wrote to the press on behalf of himself and his fellow Zionists. In this letter he set out clearly the situation concerning their position. He refutes the correspondents allegations on all counts and explains that in July 1939 they had approached the Bruderhof to ask if they would accept them for a period of training as farmers and artisans. They actually numbered twenty and not thirty as previously published. They were financed by the Zionist Committee who paid ten shillings per head by agreement, which was the committee's usual practice. However since January the committee had been unable to pay but the Bruderhof had continued to maintain them. They had been driven out of Germany by Hitler but they had found in the Bruderhof a settlement prepared to give them a good training for their proposed work in Palestine in the future. They had no complaint against the brothers because they did exactly the same work.

The critical correspondent was further put in his place by Mr. Fry of *Latton near Cricklade*. He defended the *Bruderhof* as an outsider and could not understand how anyone could leave the *Bruderhof* with such a 'warped judgement and so full of bitter hatred and venomous malice'. He said that it was hard to believe that the correspondent had entered the community as a friend but more as a spy. He pointed out that if the 'Gestapo' existed within the community he would not have been able to undertake his spying activities. The only activity which might have vaguely resembled observation of the members was the careful observation of novices and others wishing to enter into a complete commitment to the *Bruderhof* way of life. This was a perfectly acceptable way of testing such a person's vocation. Obviously like all institutions it had its imperfections and did without doubt dabble in capitalism. Who didn't? They may have claimed to be the only true church but so did the Roman Catholic and Four Square Gospel Churches. However none of these facts seriously supported the charge of hypocrisy. The hypocrisy charge might well have been placed elsewhere since the correspondent knew that his libels were protected by the fact that the *Bruderhof* had a policy of not taking people to court. Mr. Fry ended his letter with a rather prophetic message. Putting this severe criticism along side the more reasonable one from Mr. Wilson had the appearance of being part of a campaign to send the *Bruderhof* on its travels again. He asked, 'If such a campaign succeeds in doing what Hitler had already done, what would Britain have left to fight for?'

The original severe critic then hit back at Mr. Fry asking why he, Mr. Fry, was not a 'brother'. Was it that he was the Mr. Fry of the Peace Pledge Union of pacifist fame? The writer lets it be known that he had been an officer in the last war and was not likely to take aid from any



disinclined to serve their country in the cause of humanity. One wonders *why he accepted their help in the first place when he came to them in some difficulty, with his wife and two children during the previous Summer !* He went on to suggest that the Bruderhof members might be interned in one of their own farms and if they voluntarily allowed their mail to be censored and their innermost activities to be investigated this would prove to everyone that they were no fifth columnists. There seems to be some tempering of the tone of his previous accusations, they are still present but put in the form of questions rather than authoritative statements. And, he actually said that he regretted 'making it unpleasant for the Zionists'. The questions he asked also included some asking why certain named individuals had left the community and a further rather enigmatic one asking, 'What punishment was given to the Russian Prince ? - was it not solitary confinement ?' Who the Russian Prince residing at the Bruderhof was and what happened to him is at the time of writing still a mystery.



fig (1)

**LAND AND BUILDING USE AT THE COTSWOLD BRUDERHOF ASHTON KEYNES -1940**

- |         |                                           |    |                                                                     |
|---------|-------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1       | Road from Somerford Road to Ashton Keynes | 16 | Hospital                                                            |
| 2 & 3   | Cottages                                  | 17 | Shed for making concrete blocks                                     |
| 4       | Dining-room                               | 18 | Dutch barn                                                          |
| 5       | Dwelling house and communal kitchen       | 19 | Stable                                                              |
| 6       | Stone barn                                | 20 | Gravel pit                                                          |
| 7       | Byre converted to dwelling                | 21 | Smithy, carpenter's shop and cart shed                              |
| 8       | Stable converted to dwelling              | 22 | Laundry, sewing, spinning and weaving rooms and small power station |
| 9       | Turning shop                              | 23 | Printing, bookbinding and publishing house and office               |
| 10      | Baby house                                |    |                                                                     |
| 11      | Kindergarten                              |    |                                                                     |
| 12 & 13 | School                                    |    |                                                                     |
| 14      | Railway carriages for dwellings           |    |                                                                     |
| 15      | Poultry brooding house and run            |    |                                                                     |

## Chapter 12

Despite the rising tide of anti-feeling, the community continued to maintain its position as a haven for the homeless refugees, the destitute and those opposed to military service. It is true that at the outbreak of the war they had had to register their foreign nationals and all the German, Swiss, Austrian and Swedish were classified as neutral aliens. They had to have police permission to travel outside a five mile radius of the communities but these permits were usually easily obtained. All along the British authorities were behind them. The coalition government was friendly towards them defending them in Parliament against accusations with a recommendation that they should be left in peace. Even with this official approval they still managed to suffer from beaurocratic problems. At this time when everyone was being registered, rationed and classified, one of the English 'sisters' married a German 'brother'. Accordingly she automatically became an 'enemy alien' and was interned in a camp on the Isle of Man for six weeks. After this she was reclassified as a 'neutral alien' and allowed to return to her husband at Ashton Keynes. For the Bruderhof's part it has to be said that they showed no hostility towards their critics and refrained from any form of recrimination.

An examination of the sketch map fig. (1) shows clearly how far the Cotswold Bruderhof had developed at Ashton Keynes by 1940. From the initial farm, gardens and a few habitable buildings they now had sufficient living accomodation for over two hundred men, women and children. This included, it must be said, some converted railway carriages. A large acreage of land had gone under the plough or was being used by the cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry for pasture and meadow land. The gardens were now enlarged to

include orchards which helped to service the bee garden. The building was *achieved with the aid of the gravel pit and concrete block works.* The wood turning shop and the sewing, spinning and weaving rooms had their commercial spin offs as did the carpenter's shop and the smithy helped to keep all the machinery working efficiently. The printing, bookbinding and publishing house was an important outlet, responsible for many volumes of religious and historical works and the periodical volumes of 'The Plough' etc. The hospital and baby-house were very important welfare facilities and perhaps their greatest triumph was the Kindergarten and school. It is remarkable how all these facilities had developed in less than four years. The school however symbolised their hope for the future. For although they dressed in what might be described as old fashioned ways and studied ancient writings, there was nothing old fashioned in their thinking. They were constantly looking to the future, a future, they believed, planned by the Almighty.

History however can be impatient and events in Europe could not wait for the Bruderhof's ultimate plans to come to fruition. During the late afternoon of Friday the 31st of May, the roads around Cirencester were filled with an assortment of lorries heading from the South. A vast convoy was bringing thousands of men of the British Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier Brian Horrocks to a large tented camp in Cirencester Park and other billets around the area. These were the men of the British Expeditionary Force who had witnessed the horror and tragedy of the Dunkirk disaster. Eye witness reports describe how quiet and sober many of the passengers in this convoy were, many who had lost everything including their uniforms were clad only in towels or blankets. What brought the tragedy even closer to home was the fact that many local families had menfolk who had been involved

in the evacuation and the rearguard, some were injured, some missing and others known to have been killed. South Cerney aerodrome was immediately put on an invasion alert. The families of the trainee pilots were moved out to make way for some of the victims of Dunkirk. At the same time mechanical diggers were put to work churning up the surrounding fields to prevent the landing of German J.U.52 gliders.

As one of the older aerodromes in Britain, South Cerney was obviously known to the Germans. In fact captured German maps issued to air crew showed clearly the radio transmitter at the station and also the telephone lines from Bristol to Cirencester. Had 'Operation Sea Lion', Hitler's invasion plan taken place, South Cerney and Kemble together with the other local airfields would have been vital facilities to capture in the drive to form a front from Gloucester to Oxford in order to isolate and overrun the South East of England, including of course London. As previously mentioned the Cotswold Bruderhof at Ashton Keynes was known to the Nazis even before the war started. Their position would have been particularly precarious.

It was Dunkirk and the threat of invasion immediately afterwards which led to the fulfilment of Mr. Fry's prophecy. Britain at that time was virtually defenceless save for the unarmed remnant of the B.E.F. and the L.D.V., later renamed the Home Guard on the land, the overstretched R.A.F. trying to protect convoys, radar stations and airfields, and the Navy spent an ever increasing amount of time and resources trying to protect food and other vital supplies. From this time on the members of the Bruderhof felt more and more isolated. Hans Meier writing after the events tells how they experienced the mass psychosis of fear and mistrust of foreigners which later the Japanese Americans were to experience after Pearl Harbour. Neighbours who had been friendly before turned their backs and closed their

doors to them.

*aggravated*  
What aggravated the situation further was the fact that a large number of the English members were now present at the Bruderhof all following the pacifist line. What had been a matter of philosophy had now become a matter of reality. Invasion was not a possibility, it was a probability. This led to the charges of treachery against those who refused to stand and fight. As a result of this animosity, by July they were prevented from selling their milk and poultry or the produce of their gardens and bakery. A group led by Arnold Mason went to meet Mr. M.W. Wakefield, M.P. for Swindon to try to gain his support but he accused them of doing nothing but hide behind 'our soldiers, sailors and airmen and try to pinch the business interests of the men called to the colours'. After further discussion, Mr. Wakefield said that he had no sympathy with them and would fight to prevent them taking fighting men's business.

Back at the two communities they were now subject not only to police searches but also Home Guard inspection. These inspections by the Home Guard often exceeded their brief and could in retrospect be construed as ~~harassment~~ <sup>harassment</sup>, although at the time this was more likely down to overzealous 'Dad's Army' tactics. The latter might also be the only way of explaining a nasty incident one night when two brothers were making their way between the Oaksey and Ashton Keynes communities. They were ambushed by the Home Guard and only escaped by hiding beneath a hay stack. One local landowner and Home Guard member had a real fright when visiting the Cotswold Bruderhof with a colleague to allay local fears. The visit went well but as they were returning home in the dark, they suddenly heard running footsteps and turned, pistols at the ready. A voice with a heavy German accent hailed them and a figure with a torch approached. "Will you please sign our guests' book?"

the figure said. "We don't have many visitors nowadays!"

*The zealous and sometimes overzealous local police and wardens were ever* on the look out for offending lights in the black out. It appears that the police around Cirencester had an unofficial competition to see who could catch people of the highest social standing showing a light. One titled lady was fined £10 as opposed to the usual £1 for <sup>committing</sup> the offence plus insulting the rural policeman in the execution of his duty. The Bruderhof however were even fairer game. On one occasion a light was accidentally shown from one of their buildings at Ashton Keynes which led to the accusation that they were signalling to the enemy. This was not helped by the fact that at that time during the Battle of Britain a number of German aircraft appeared over the area attempting to attack South Cerney and Kemble R.A.F. stations. In fact although at no time were there any fatal casualties, damage was done to both airfields and at Kemble a number of aircraft were destroyed. Despite some local ill feeling the charge against the Bruderhof was never followed through, however it may be no coincidence that they were forced to place large concrete blocks in their fields ostensibly to prevent the landing of enemy gliders and parachutists but as one of the members <sup>m</sup>comented afterwards, they also played havoc with the farming.

### Chapter 13

*In the early hours of Monday the 16th of September 1940, at the height of the Battle of Britain, the air above Ashton Keynes was disturbed by the rhythmic throb of enemy aircraft. Suddenly explosions shook the village as bombs fell on the Eastern side. One cottage, in Rixon Gate, was completely demolished, killing the occupant Mr. Sam Telling an eighty year old retired groom. A.R.P. workers and police attempted to rescue him but he was dead before they managed to extricate him from the ruins. A number of nearby cottages were also severely damaged ; in one a blind pensioner was buried under the rubble but unlike Mr. Telling, he was rescued completely unharmed. The events of this night and the aftermath caused great sadness in the village and not a little anger. However when Mr. Telling's funeral took place in the church on the following Thursday, there among the floral tributes was one from the Bruderhof. The friendship of some of the locals, although perhaps severely strained, seems to have been intact.*

The strain however was beginning to tell at higher levels. Public pressure and a near hysterical press campaign was forcing the authorities at Westminster to reconsider the position of aliens. Many of the inoffensive 'C' class neutral aliens similar to the Bruderhof had been interned as early as the 16th of May. During the Summer of 1940 the Government eventually gave way to the pressure of events and tide of public opinion. They approached the Bruderhof to tell them that they had their hands full trying to protect Britain from invasion and were now unable to guarantee their safety, even against unreasonable attacks from their neighbours. There were only two alternatives, the German members could be interned or they could all stay together and emigrate. The decision was not difficult to take. There could be no question of splitting the communities since they

*I think we made the suggestion to emigrate - (Stanley F.)*



had already achieved so much and sacrificed so much together. There was no *altenative but to emigrate, but to where?*

The first thought was the U.S.A. or Canada because of the links which Eberhard Arnold had forged with the Hutterite Brothers as far back as 1930. The task of obtaining immigration papers would have been difficult in normal times, in time of war it was doubly difficult. It was decided that if someone could get to North America the Hutterians could be contacted and with good fortune the relevant papers might be obtained quickly. Fortune was on their side for one of the brothers was a former merchant seaman who still carried his sailing papers and he managed <sup>to</sup> work his passage on a freighter bound for Canada. This gave him a stop over of just two days in Montreal. To take the journey at this time at all was no mean feat while the U-Boat blockade was tightening. To do it for just two days bordered on madness. During these two days however he was able to contact two of the Hutterians in Ontario by telephone. One of these was David Hofer Vetter who had been visiting the Rhon Bruderhof on the day when the Gestapo arrived to dissolve the community.

After this initial contact further steps were needed to get an English family over to Canada on the strength of their being Commonwealth citizens. A family was chosen but the permission from the Canadian High Commissioner in London was cancelled only hours before they were due to sail because the father was a conscientious objector. The next opportunity came again in a fortu<sup>i</sup>ous way. It involved the Dutchman, Gildermeester, who had previously tried to help Hans Meier and his friends to get from Fulda to Holland. Gildermeester had by this time opened an office in Vienna through which he helped persecuted Jews. The Cotswold Bruderhof had assisted him by taking in ten or twelve Jewish Children whose parents had been deported by the Gestapo,

probably to the concentration camps. The parents of one of these however *had actually managed to escape from the Gestapo and travelled to Venezuela.* They wanted to be reunited with their son but the problem was, how to get him safely to Venezuela. Overseas travel was especially difficult and the Jewish Committee in London had no one available to accompany him. The Bruderhof came to the rescue by offering to take him. This would at the same time give them the opportunity of going to New York to meet the Hutterites while they waited for a ship to take them on the next stage of their journey to Venezuela. Their offer was accepted and Hans Meier was once again chosen for the task along with another member of the Cotswold Bruderhof. Their first task was to obtain visas for entry into the U.S.A. from the American Consul in Bristol. The Consul decided to give them a ninety day visa to cover any delays caused by the shipping problems in the North Atlantic. Having filled in the necessary forms their venture almost foundered on their religious convictions. The Consul asked them both to swear on the Bible. They of course quoted their verses from Matthew chapter five and declined the offer to swear an oath. This rather set the Consul aback, forcing him to telephone his London Embassy for advice. His superiors however advised him that it was sufficient for them to affirm with the signing of the questionnaire. Thus with all their papers in order they set off for New York aboard the 'Sythia' on August the 1st, putting their trust in God and not knowing whether they would ever see their families and friends again.

The journey from Liverpool to New York took twelve days, with the ship zig-zagging all over the North Atlantic in order to avoid the U-Boats. They had one false alarm when a large grey whale was mistaken for a submarine. On the journey they had to leave the door of their third class cabin open as protection against being trapped by a torpedo attack. Their fellow passengers

were a very cosmopolitan group ranging from Polish Jews and a British Guianan ships crew on their way to take a ship out of New York, to Kerenski the Russian Menshevist and deposed revolutionary leader. He of course was travelling first class !

They arrived in New York on the 12th of August but because of the suspicions of the immigration officer, were not allowed to land until the Jewish Committee of New York had cleared their papers. This committee thought that it would be rather irregular for Christians to accompany the Jewish boy. It was therefore decided that he should undertake the rest of his journey to Venezuela accompanied by a Jewish nurse. Having said farewell to their charge the two 'brothers' were left free to attempt to persuade the United States authorities to allow their bretheren in England to emigrate to North America.

They tried many ways of contacting the correct authorities, relying on various old friends and acquaintances. These included Orie O. Miller of the Menonite Central Committee who introduced them to the American Friends Service Committee (A.F.S.C.). The latter had better connections at Federal Government level and were able to offer to contact the State Department and provide temporary accomodation at the International Student Home in Washington D.C. In the meantime however their Hutterian colleague Michel Vetter of the Bon Homme Bruderhof, South Dakota, offered to buy up the old property of a Bruderhof community which had moved to Canada. In addition he proposed stocking it for them with animals and machinery at his own expense. He also obtained an affidavit in support of the whole group from England, signed and sealed by the State of South Dakota. Senator Mundt of South Dakota heard of their predicament and promised to help. It seemed like an answer to prayer but intention does not always match action and after the initial

enthusiasm there was delay, with no answer to their application to the State Department.

Time dragged on so that other avenues had to be explored. Application for help was made direct to the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King. This was by way of a letter from friends of his in high places in England. They had become acquainted with the Bruderhof when one of their number had become a member. However this application proved fruitless and they were told in no uncertain terms that the Canadian Government did not want the Bruderhof to emigrate from England to Canada, as the Canadians were at war on England's side and already had enough difficulties with the Hutterites. This meant that time was of the essence and they would have to go back and renew their efforts in Washington D.C. Here they visited the State Department where the official who dealt <sup>with them</sup> said that he already ~~new~~ <sup>knew</sup> what they had been doing during their absence from the city as the F.B.I. had been watching and following them. The two tried telephoning Thurmon Arnold the Assistant Attorney General in President F.D. Roosevelt's cabinet, who was a distant relative of Eberhard Arnold. He refused to see them at first because as he said, his department was one of conformity, while the F.B.I. had reported to him that they were nonconformists. However after a month he telephoned Hans and his colleague and asked them to meet him at his office in the Department of Justice. When they entered the office he treated them like long lost relatives. He said that he had heard from the F.B.I. about their beards, knickerbockers and long stockings but in the meantime he had heard about them from a friend of the Amish persuasion and he was impressed. He was also proud of the fact that he had had such a courageous relative in Nazi Germany and promised to help them all he could. On a later occasion he asked about their non-military stance but came to the conclusion

that this attitude was not illegal as the United States draft allowed for conscientious objectors. The real blow fell when he asked whether they would be willing to salute the flag. The 'brothers' said that this was not possible according to their teachings. The Assistant Attorney pointed out that the Supreme Court had found against the Jehovah's Witnesses on this point, making the refusal to salute the flag a crime punishable by imprisonment. Although the Assistant Attorney did say that he disagreed with the decision, it was the law and they ought to reconsider their position. They left things at that !

Through Clarence Pickett a member of the A.F.C.S. who was a personal friend of President and Mrs. Roosevelt, they were advised to contact the President in person and arrange a visit to the White House. They decided not to act on this advice because of the complicated protocol involved in such a visit. However Clarence Pickett did use his good offices in one direction and they received an invitation to breakfast with Mrs. Roosevelt at her retreat in New York City. They accepted the invitation and had an interesting discussion, discovering that their minds were occupied with similar problems. She said that she thought that the United States could benefit from their witness and she promised to help them all she could while reminding them at the same time that she did not have the President's power. She recorded their visit in her famous syndicated column 'My Day' of September the 14th 1940. Despite all these promises and good intentions nothing was forthcoming until eventually they had a confidential answer to their application to the U.S. Government. This informed them that the current political situation was too sensitive to allow them to enter the country as a group. The United States had been brought face to face with the realities of war !

When Orie Miller heard the news he approached the Paraguayan Ambassador who in turn contacted his father-in-law President Estigarribia of Paraguay who invited the 'brothers' to visit him. He told them that their whole group would be welcome in Paraguay under the same law which covered all the other Menonite immigrants. This gave them freedom of organisation, use of language, mode of education and freedom from military service, these privileges passing on to their descendants. It was necessary, since Paraguay is land locked, to get permission to enter the neighbouring countries. Some difficulty was experienced in obtaining the money for entry into these countries but eventually this was resolved.

Contact was made with the Cotswold Bruderhof who instructed their emissaries to go to the Menonite colony at Fernheim where the Menonite Central Council had arranged for the members from England to live in the school houses which were unoccupied during the long Summer holidays. They would at the same time set to work to build their own houses on nearby land. Once financial and cross country travel arrangements had been made by Hans Meier and his colleague all that remained for them to do was to sit and wait.

Chapter 14

The news of the imminent departure of the Bruderhof, or in fact part of it, broke on the 16th of November 1940. The local press in Cirencester announced that part of the group was going to South America in the near future to make a new home in Paraguay. The announcement had first been made in the 'Peace News'. This report said that fifty of the community would remain and that there was a possibility of a public utility undertaking being formed to carry on the management. This would allow the remaining pacifists to continue work of national importance through agriculture. The members of the community who would remain, explained that they were carrying on but there were plans which they did not wish to publish at the moment. Already by this time the Oaksey property had been disposed of by auction.

Doubtless among the plans which needed to be kept secret were those pertaining to their travel arrangements. For the sake of safety during the submarine offensive neither the community nor the shipping company in Buenos Aires would divulge the sailing times even to the two waiting emissaries in South America. It was on December the 1st that Hans Meier learned that the first party from England had arrived safely in Rio de Janeiro. Their happy reunion took place a few days before Christmas 1940 in Buenos Aires. From Buenos Aires they travelled by boat up the river Parana for four days and nights, getting stuck on a sand bank on one occasion. They arrived at Asuncion on Christmas Day and celebrated New Year 1941 during a rest in the jungle on the wagon journey which formed the last sixty miles of their track to Fernheim. This first group consisted of about one hundred men women and children. They received a warm and friendly welcome to their new home. The rest of the group from England travelled to Paraguay in 1941. They arrived safely without mishap despite the very real danger of U-Boat attack. In all this they saw the hand of God, especially when they noted

*Must have been later John*

*82 83*

that nearly every ship they had travelled on from England to North America then on to South America, had been sunk by U-Boats as they returned to England carrying precious supplies.

16  
Mr. Wilson had the first say in this story, a story which includes the answers to all of his questions. Perhaps it would be interesting to end with another press quotation this time from the January 1941 number of the 'Gloucestershire Countryside', not a very revolutionary <sup>p</sup> publication! It said that from time to time this journal had recorded the activities of the Cotswold Bruderhof, that colony of refugees from Nazi Germany living at Ashton Keynes, who had been joined by many English men and women anxious to lead a communal life with the equal sharing of property and labour. Now the German members of the community had left the country and the rest had dispersed. Bitter feelings against the community had always been felt by local landowners, by the farmers and by many who were convinced of the subversive activities of the foreigners in the colony. It was only fair to say that the accusations had not been proved and the leadership of the Bruderhof had taken immediate steps at the outbreak of the war to clear their good name. Yet the Home Secretary's permission to allow them to continue their work as before had never seemed sufficient for local opinion clearly intolerant of an experiment so revolutionary to all accepted custom. Yet several hundred men and women holding everything in common and sharing a life of hardship sustained by an intense Christian belief had much to give the country that accepted them, just as those who became their neighbours had much to learn from so contagious an attempt at communal living in the spirit of Christian teaching. 'We may all have to come nearer to this way of living in the future'.



## EPILOGUE

The Bruderhof property at Ashton Keynes was sold off in July 1941. It was bought by the London Police Court Mission. At this stage the estate consisted of five hundred acres of land, houses, schools, bakehouses and a community dining hall, printing and other premises and a power station. The buyer took the equipment and the farm stock. Gloucestershire Standing Joint Committee on Juvenile Crime considered approaching the London authority to see if Gloucestershire delinquents could be held there. Viscount Bledisloe cited the Salvation Army training farms in New Zealand and thought Gloucestershire could pioneer one of these accommodated at Ashton Keynes. The property however changed its name to the Cotswold School and became an Approved school for young offenders. It is interesting to speculate how much the local community regretted the departing of the 'Strangers in their midst'. For the local press soon began to report the activities of some of the new inmates. In October 1941 for instance some boys 'escaped' from the school, stole bicycles and were eventually caught in London. Early in 1942 two more absconded, broke into a house in Oaksey and others at Hankerton and Minety. They made their getaway, only to be caught later at Falmouth.

The premises continued as an Approved school for over twenty years. However over the last twenty years the establishment has been renamed the <sup>90k</sup> 'Cotswold Community' and is one of the country's leading therapeutic centres for adolescent boys from unstable backgrounds. A cause no doubt near to the hearts of the Bruderhof. It is interesting to note that at the time of writing the authorities are debating how best to deal with some structural problems of the Bruderhof's original buildings.

The Bruderhof community itself remained in Paraguay until 1961 when changed feelings in the United States allowed them to move North where

eventually one thousand two hundred members formed four communities. In 1971 in more peaceful yet perhaps no less troubled times a group of members returned to England, including some who had been original members of the Cotswold Bruderhof. They were able to build up a new Bruderhof community at Darvell, Robertsbridge in Sussex. Here they continue to work on the same lines as before, living in brotherhood, working the land, educating etc. and the 'Plough' magazine continues in publication.

As for the people of Cirencester area, many of the older generation still remember the Cotswold Bruderhof. There are still those who despite any real evidence have the notion that a large number of the original members were involved in secret operations for the Allies. One gentleman who spoke recently to the writer is still convinced that they were members of the Nazi fifth column. He said that the buildings at the community were set out in the shape of the swastika to act as a pointer for German aircraft. One glance at an Ordnance Survey map puts this theory to flight. Taken back over forty years he would probably still be hunting for Nazi parachutists, heavily disguised, in the local convent !

One day all the old prejudice will be gone but if the Spirit which created such an impressive and viable community in less than five years is allowed to flourish in Sussex or wherever, its future seems assured.

