Utopian England

Community Experiments 1900–1945

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Preface

A little more than twenty years ago I wrote a book on alternative communities in nineteenth-century England. Subsequent projects led me in different directions, but I knew that one day I would return to pick up this unfinished story. At last the opportunity arose and this is the outcome.

In one sense, of course, this book is a sequel, but in other ways the connections are tenuous. Not only is the subject itself different, and especially the historical circumstances of the early twentieth century, but so too is my own approach. Since writing the first book, some of my own ideas have changed. I retain a fascination for utopian ideas, and believe even more fervently that the kind of long-term and lateral thinking they encourage is as important as ever. But I have become less convinced that community experiments have as valuable a role in society as they had in an earlier political setting. Political and technological developments in the twentieth century, from the universal vote to the internet, exemplify some of the many new avenues for change. If nothing else, communities are less central to social progress than they were at times in the nineteenth century, when other ways forward were fewer.

One thing, though, that has not diminished is the intriguing tale that each of the experiments has to tell. Often based on fantastic ideas that can never be realized, attracting eccentric but compelling participants, and leaving an indelible mark on at least a small section of society, they are never without interest. In some cases, too, in spite of their failure as panaceas, they were remarkably successful in more localized aims.

As with the earlier project on the nineteenth century, it felt at the outset rather like looking towards a largely empty landscape, with just a few scattered landmarks in view. But as one looked closer, it was soon apparent that the evidence of communities was more extensive. Moreover, the practical experiments themselves were by no means isolated, for they were in turn loosely woven into a wider fabric of utopian ideas and contemporary opinion. The temptation to see patterns and to make sense of it all soon became irresistible, although I might have thought twice had I at the outset read the ominous words of Bernard Levin:

At the beginning, as the smiling utopians set off with the greatest confidence and the march gets into its stride, the bells in the valley will sound peacefully. Towards the end there will be heard a different sound, a sound composed of reality, of adjusted understanding, of real maturity: the sound is now carried on the wind, and the reader who listens closely will realise that the sound now says *Beware!* Beware, indeed.[1]

Experiment (1926) p. 4
(Dartington Archive).

124. *Ibid.*
125. *Ibid.*
126. Correspondence folder, T.E.
Lawrence, letter dated 25.2.30
(Dartington Archive).
127. Curry (1934).
128. *Ibid*, pp. 128-129.
129. See Blewitt (1934); Stewart (1968).
130. Letter from Neill, dated 4.6.27, in
File LKE General 24 (Dartington
Archive).
131. Kidel (1990) p. 33.
132. Dorothea, in George Eliot's
Middlemarch (1965 edition), pp.
251-252.

133. Young (1982) p. 252.
134. In Young (1982) p. 222.
135. Letter dated 15 November 1937
(Dartington Archive).
136. Young (1982) p. 237.
137. Liberal Land Committee (1925)
p. 6.
138. Kropotkin (1899).
139. Young (1982) pp. 319-321.
140. *Ibid*, p. 321.
141. Levin (1994) p. xiv.
142. Bonham-Carter and Curry (1958)
p. 120.
143. *Ibid*, p. 27.
144. Kidel (1990) pp. 152-153.
145. *Ibid*, p. 150.

Chapter Five

Sacred Places

The quest to create heaven on earth is never distant from a history of utopian communities; *Heavens Below*, the title of W.H.G. Armytage's seminal work on utopian experiments in England from the sixteenth century, is illustrative of the centrality of religious ideas in utopian history.[1] Religious belief is a potent force which periodically drives people to seek to match earthly conditions to their own high, if not impossible, spiritual ideals. Invariably, those who do so will join others to seek perfection within their own number, and in some cases will maintain a separation from the rest of society to ensure salvation. The sociologist, David Martin, has described this process in terms of colonies of heaven: 'For the members of the holy community its boundaries form a colony of heaven, and the world outside is an overgrown untidy garden within which sin and corruption rage.'[2]

Utopian history is rich in such examples: in some cases inspired groups turning totally inwards to seek salvation, in other cases venturing as well beyond their sanctuary to spread the gospel. In their various ways, such groups operate as sects, seeing themselves as the chosen few and being critical if not directly hostile to established churches. Though often short-lived, they typically act with an intensity that belies their fragility. From time to time, they sear the very fringes of society, challenging certainties and evoking emotions ranging from exultation to fear. Alternatively, they may more characteristically exist in quiet contemplation, less threatening to established institutions but also more enduring. Sometimes, too, religion is mixed with political ideas, creating boundaries between the holy and secular that are often ill-defined.

In the early twentieth century, religiously-driven utopianism in England is evident in a variety of quite distinct forms. One is that of the continuing monastic tradition; another is a movement emanating from a hybrid of religio-anarchist ideas; a third is probably the most complete example of radical religious communitarianism in this period, the Bruderhof communities; and a fourth is to be found in a cluster of spiritual communities formed shortly before and during the Second World War.

Communities of God

What life have you if you have not life together?
There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of God.[3]

As a model of holy community there is nothing to compare with the monastery. It is a model that has endured for centuries, and continues as a living force into a new millennium; it was evident in England in the early twentieth century, but is at the same time a universal concept with versions in most countries and most religions; and it embodies characteristics that are rarely present in such intensity in other forms of community – most notably, piety, asceticism and celibacy. It is in many ways the ultimate utopian community, a sanctuary in a troubled world, and offers for its members a unique balance of intellectual and physical activity. Although the derivation of the word, monastery, is to be found in the Greek *monos*, reflecting the individualistic, hermetic origins of the concept, its normal application is to groups and to a communal form of life. Such groups may be either men or women, the one in monasteries the other in nunneries, but the former are normally endowed within their own religions with superior status.

In spite of this gender division, and in spite of a system of leadership which frequently bestows on an individual that position for life, monasteries are commonly regarded as the purest example of truly communistic societies – a point not missed by G.K. Chesterton, in his observation that 'it is quite true in one sense that monasteries are devoted to Communism and that monks are all Communists.'[4] It is certainly the case that Christian monasteries are modelled on an understanding of the original community of Christ, where all things are shared and where life is wholly a service to God. It is also the case that there is no private property, and that rituals as well as work are a shared experience. To differing degrees, monastic communities are economically self-sufficient, as part of a deliberate policy to minimize reliance on the rest of society and as a way of attaining wholeness. Although centred on prayer, monks will frequently grow their own food, and engage in building and craftwork.

Historically, in England, monasteries once occupied a far more important place in society than they did at the start of the twentieth century. In their heyday, in the thirteenth century, there were some 20,000 monks and nuns in a population of about three million, although these numbers are less revealing than the fact the monastic orders owned at least a quarter of the country's land. Even before the Dissolution, instigated by Henry VIII in the sixteenth century, the monastic population had declined to about 12,000, and some of their original functions as seats of learning, hospitals and hostelries had been lost to new institutions. By 1540, all of the monasteries had been closed, and their considerable income transferred to the king. The later restoration of monasteries was piecemeal, and was never to lead to anything like the

same extent or significance that they had once enjoyed.[5] There was a brief revival in the early seventeenth century, but not until the nineteenth century, in the wake of a romantic idealization of mediaeval life that flourished as a counterweight to industrialization, were monasteries to attract sustained attention once more. In *Past and Present*, Thomas Carlyle uses the ruins of St Edmund's Abbey in Suffolk and a discovered chronicle to reconstruct a picture of an heroic age long past. The appointment of a new abbot heralds an era of faith and justice, in which all, beyond as well as within the walls of the monastery, are shown to benefit. An idyll is described, 'a green solid place, that grew corn and several other things. The Sun shone on it.'[6]

By the start of the twentieth century, the monasteries and nunneries that were thriving communities were relatively few in number, but still sufficient to merit interest as models of fellowship in a competitive and conflictual world. Moreover, some of these had been revived as recently as the end of the previous century after years of decay and neglect, and were centres of activity rather than mere monuments. Indeed, 'in the seventy years between 1890 and 1960 almost all the monastic bodies, save for a few which for centuries have lingered solely as local species, increased more swiftly than at any time since the early seventeenth century.'[7] A classic example of this modern community building is Buckfast Abbey in Devon, where the original site dated from at least the eleventh century. It changed over the years from a Benedictine monastery to Savignac and then, from the twelfth century, to the Cistercian Order, the last of these introducing an exceptionally rigorous regime. Its golden era was in the thirteenth century, when it was a centre for wool-making as well as enjoying a considerable revenue from its extensive land holdings. By the time it was dissolved in 1539, it had already passed its peak of activity. The main buildings were demolished at that time, and for the next three centuries Buckfast was without an abbey. In 1882, the private owner of the estate decided to sell it, with a preference for a new religious use; it was recommended as 'a grand acquisition could it be restored to its original purpose.'[8] Within six weeks, terms were agreed for its purchase by a group of French monks, who had over the previous two years been taking refuge in Ireland from persecution in their own country.

The venture enjoyed influential support amongst the English religious establishment, and a leading architect, Frederick Walters, was appointed to restore the abbey. Plans were prepared to restore the twelfth-century structures in their original form, and the first of the new buildings was completed in 1884. In the initial period, the abbey was affiliated to the French brotherhood to which the monks still belonged, but by 1902 the new era was marked by the granting of independent status. Although the monks were Benedictine, they followed a particularly strict routine not unlike the original Cistercian practice. The first abbot to be appointed was not French but German, and it was not until after 1918 that British monks were attracted on a regular basis to the community.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the development of the
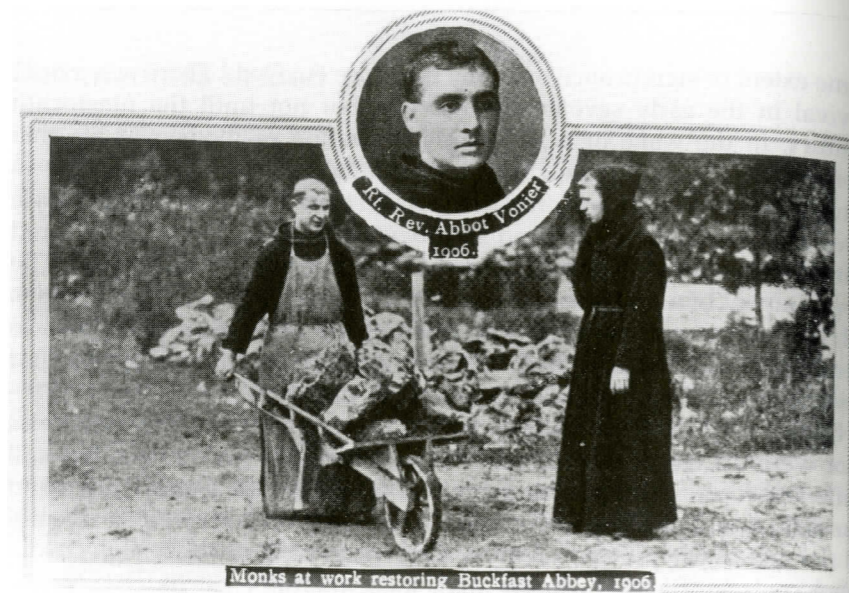
1906: Led by Abbot Vonier, work begins at Buckfast to build a new abbey on the site of the old. (*Courtesy*: Buckfast Abbey)

monastery is marked by two episodes. One, the more dramatic, was the building of the abbey church in its original form, the life work of Anscar Vonier, the new abbot appointed after his predecessor's premature death by drowning in 1906. With limited external funding, the abbot set about the major project with the help of usually four and never more than six of the monks. It took more than thirty years to complete, with the final stone of the tower laid in July 1937. Less dramatic, but assuring its long-term future, was the careful creation of a sound economic base. As well as being self-sufficient as a community, extra income was generated through the marketing of a popular tonic wine, cider, and honey produced from a unique strain of bees, and through the development of a significant tourist activity (much to the annoyance of local residents, who complained about the 'never ending train of motor cars and charabancs'[9]).

Buckfast became one of the acknowledged centres of the modern monastic movement, along with other important Benedictine monasteries at Ampleforth, Douai, Downside, Ramsgate, Worth, Prinknash and Quarr; as well the Cistercian house of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, and the Carthusian Saint Hugh's Charterhouse.[10] Each of these made their own distinctive contribution to the movement. Thus, at the Yorkshire monastery of Ampleforth (revived in 1802), the monks were renowned as teachers in their own Catholic public school of that name. The same was true of Douai in Berkshire, and Downside in Somerset, the former establishing itself in 1903 through the location of a community of monks expelled from France, and the latter in its Somerset location from the start of the previous century. The monasteries at Ramsgate in Kent, and Worth Abbey in Sussex (at first a daughter-house for Downside Abbey), also built their reputations around the success of associated Catholic public schools.

Prinknash in Gloucestershire was another modern creation, originating in 1906 as an Anglican religious community, the Reformed Order of Anglican Benedictines, on the island of Caldey in the Bristol Channel.[11] The members of the community converted to the Catholic faith in 1913, and lived according to Benedictine rules. In 1928, after the island was sold to Cistercian monks, they moved to the mainland, finding refuge at Prinknash Park, where, like Buckfast, there had been monastic antecedents before the Dissolution. Also like Buckfast, the estate had reverted to private hands since then, until its owner, the 20th Earl of Rothes, honoured the wishes of his grandfather in giving the house and 28 acres of parkland to the Benedictine monks of Caldey Island. The first six arrived in October 1928, and the rest soon followed, to form an initial community of twenty-five monks. Gradually, conversions were made to the buildings, and more land around the house was acquired to create the basis for a self-contained estate; one of the revenue generating activities was to be the making of pottery and other crafts. In 1937 the settlement was accorded the status of an abbey. The community grew steadily, but rather than accommodate all of the growth at Prinknash, in 1947 two new foundations were established, one at Farnborough in Hampshire, and one at Pluscarden in Scotland. Later, a new, modern abbey was built on the home estate of Prinknash.

Less dramatic than the building work, but essential to its sound economic base of Buckfast, was the day-to-day management of the abbey estate. (*Courtesy*: Buckfast Abbey)

Using traditional methods, and usually with no more than four to six monks working on the project, the final stone of the Buckfast tower was laid in 1937. (*Courtesy*: Buckfast Abbey)

The monastery of Quarr, in the Isle of Wight, was, like some of the other modern monasteries, a product of French Benedictines in the early twentieth century fleeing from anti-religious laws in their own country, and locating their new community on the site of a pre-Dissolution foundation. First occupied in its modern form in 1908, the monks, in addition to their religious duties, farmed the land and also acquired a reputation for various activities, including the composition of sacred music, painting, weaving, carpentry and book-binding. In addition to Benedictine monasteries such as Quarr, there were examples of other orders in this period. The Cistercian Mount Saint Bernard, in Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire, dates from the first half of the nineteenth century, and its buildings are distinguished by the exotic architecture of Augustus Pugin, as well as a new church completed just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Other non-Benedictine establishments active in the

early twentieth century include the Carthusian St. Hugh's Charterhouse, at Cowfold in Sussex; the Carmelite Priory of Aylesford, in Kent; and the Dominican Priory at Woodchester, in Gloucestershire.

There were also a number of Anglican monasteries, emanating from the application of Church of England doctrine to monastic principles in the second half of the nineteenth century. An important example of this movement was Charles Gore's Community of the Resurrection, better known as The Quarry, at Mirfield in Yorkshire.[12] The origins of this are to be found in 1887, with the formation by Gore, at Pusey House, Oxford, of the Society of the Resurrection, and the commitment of six members of this group to establish a religious community; this they did in 1882 while still in Oxford, moving to Mirfield five years later. There they dedicated themselves to live according to the message of Acts 2: 42 and 44: 'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . And all that believed were together, and had all things common.' It was a message that the monks of Mirfield interpreted as being not merely contemplative but practical and outgoing, and they devoted themselves equally to addressing social issues in the north of England.

Some of the monks, in fact, became influential proponents of Christian Socialism. J.N. Figgis, for instance, contributed to the theoretical basis of Guild Socialism, while another of the monks, Samuel Healy, encouraged the formation of the Church Socialist League (the outcome of a meeting at Mirfield) and went on to establish his own community, the Fraternity of the Imitation of Jesus. Even more influential was Paul Bertie Bull, one

of the original Oxford members of the Community of the Resurrection, who at Mirfield produced propagandist tracts for Anglo-Catholic socialism. 'The economics of the last century', he argued, 'taught that social life can only be based on self-interest. Christ teaches that it can only be based on self-sacrifice.'[13] Moreover, he believed that the Anglo Catholics laid proper emphasis on the corporate life as opposed to a Protestant emphasis on the individual; this, in turn, provided a rationale not only for the brotherhood of a monastery but also for the collective ideals of socialism. One visitor to Mirfield was attracted by news that the monks had welcomed Keir Hardie and allowed a socialist meeting in their grounds: it was obviously an advance, he concluded, on what had previously been described as 'a scheme for salvation by resident country gentlemen.'[14]

A different example of an Anglican experiment was in the south of England, at Hillfield in Dorset, where a group of priests set about the monumental task of reforming English society in the image of the Franciscan vision.[15] It was started by a pioneering Anglican Franciscan, Brother Giles, together with other Anglican friars and a group of destitute men. Their first task was physical as well as spiritual, in converting into a working community a former farm that had served for a while as an experimental rehabilitation centre for young offenders. They were joined in 1922 by Brother Douglas, who left his Anglican chaplaincy in Oxford to help transform Hillfield into a refuge for homeless men. In the wake of the Great Strike of 1926 and the depression years of the 1930s, this function grew and additional centres were established in other parts of England. Meanwhile, the organization was formalized during the 1930s so that the community became part of the Society of St Francis. Led by Father Algy Robertson, the Society 'started schools for maladjusted children, missions for lepers, and friaries scattered over England.'[16] During the Second World War, it offered refuge for German Jews and English children.

The experience of war added purpose to the mission of the Franciscans, and one of their number, C.C. Stimson, took the opportunity shortly before the war to show how their ideals were at least potentially consistent with the practice of Christian community life.[17] A prerequisite for the successful formation of a Christian community had to be the abandonment of private property and the profit motive, which served only to split humans one from another. This revolutionary change, he admitted would not be achieved overnight, but a start should be made with some demonstration projects.

Community living of the kind we are contemplating will be limited to a few interesting experiments till, by the ethical light of the Gospel, we can make the capitalist mode of living intolerable to the Christian conscience.[18]

Stimson himself belonged to a group, the Brotherhood of the Way, located in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, which espoused Franciscan ideals. Founded in 1927, the Brotherhood was based on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. Its members preached at meetings generally held in the open, asking their congregation for just enough money to cover their immediate needs; in that way they felt free to speak their minds, unlike the priests of 'Mammon-controlled churches'.[19] There were three Orders within the Brotherhood: a preaching Order, an Order of industrial guilds, and an Order of local groups. The practical aim of the second Order was to form Christian industrial enterprises, or *guilds*; while the third order was dedicated to the formation of communities as experiments in living with shared property. They were reminded that the spirit of St. Francis must prevail at all times, and that, if this were forgotten, even communal ownership could be divisive in relation to the outside world. The way to protect against this was to treat all material possessions as a sacrament: 'every brick, every wheel, every blade of grass must be part of the Body of Christ broken for mankind.'[20] Only when that could be achieved would the Kingdom of God be sighted.

In spite of the intensity of monasteries, and their unparalleled commitment to creating 'total community'[21], opinion on their value as a social model is divided. Celibacy is an obvious stumbling block to popular acceptance, as is, for some, the very centrality of religion that is the monastery's *raison d'être*. Limited contact with the rest of society is also seen as a high price to pay; playing the role of Devil's advocate, Bernard Levin questions whether it is really necessary to adopt a mediaeval style of life in order to find an 'inner reality' that others achieve without this degree of sacrifice.[22] But even the most critical observers seem unable to avoid being touched by elements of monastic life: the undeniable devotion, the balance in favour of doing good to fellow beings, the harmonious relationship with the environment, and the excellence of achievement in crafts, teaching and scholarship. Acknowledging the reputation of monks in good husbandry, Wordsworth could write that:

A gentler life spreads round the holy spires;
Where'er they rise, the sylvan waste retires.
And aery harvests crown the fertile lea.[23]

Others judge them less for particular achievements and more for the total experience, like George Ineson, in search of community, who believed he had at last found it within the walls of a monastery: 'here was a community life which worked in a way I had only dreamed of as possible.'[24] Monasteries also offered a more orderly existence than other community experiments, a conclusion drawn by Percy Redfern, who had visited mainly Tolstoyan colonies before discovering Mirfield: 'while the Tolstoyan and socialist colonies had gone to wreck, this community (and its fellows over the world) held together and would hold.'[25] In its order he found something that was 'simpler, yet infinitely august'.[26]

God without the State

The New Order can come by the cessation of all forms of coercion, and by the development of voluntary cooperation among free men.[27]

A distinctive *genre* of community experiments in the early twentieth century, driven by a common belief that the Kingdom of God was to be found on Earth, within the individual in true cooperation with others, has its origins in the 1890s. In that decade one can identify a powerful mix of religious and political ideas, broadly anarchist in nature, and leading to some practical experiments. From this *fin de siècle* experience of theory and practice evolved a number of communities that made their own distinctive contribution to the utopian tradition in the twentieth century.

The Kingdom of God on Earth

I believe [in] the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth: that is, the establishment of an order of life in which the discord, deception and violence that now rule will be replaced by free accord, by truth, and by the brotherly love of one for another.[28]

Those ideas based on a mix of religious and anarchist principles which encouraged the formation of communities stem from a variety of sources, but most notably from Leo Tolstoy. The attraction of Tolstoy was not only his personal charisma but more enduringly the case that his various writings made for peaceful revolution. For those who were reluctant to attach themselves to militant brands of anarchism and socialism, the idea of confronting capitalist organization by fraternal organization was especially appealing.

The Tolstoystan scholar, M.J. de K. Holman, has shown that outside Russia nowhere were Tolstoy's ideas more avidly received than in England.[29] Tolstoy's classic literary works (from as early as 1852 in *The Cossacks*, and later, for instance, in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*) contained various expressions of his love of Nature and of the enviable simplicity of peasant life. At a practical level, he was also, from 1880, to extend reforms on his own extensive estate of Yasnaya Polyana and to assume in his own dress a symbolic identification with the peasantry. But it was the product of an intensive spell of religious and political writing, during the 1880s and 1890s, that really attracted the attention of English idealists.

Religious and political beliefs were intertwined. From a religious starting point (in a series of works published between 1879 and 1882) he sought to prove that the established Church no longer accorded with the true meaning of the Gospels. In turn, this brought him into an intellectual confrontation with the State (the embodiment of all established institutions) and to the political question of asking what could be done. The subversive answers that evolved amounted to a call for a revolution of moral consciousness, and a parallel rejection of the State and its associated institutions. Some were to draw from this the conclusion that in communities lay the only means of reconciling both religious and political objectives.

Tolstoy's notion of Christianity (which was to nourish a subsequent generation of community activists) amounted to a return to the principles enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount, explained in his book, *The Kingdom Of God Is Within You: or, Christianity not as a mystical doctrine, but as a new life conception.*[30] In this, Tolstoy develops three principal ideas, proceeding from an understanding of the essence of Christianity to a call for social action. He starts by asserting that Christianity is not only the true worship of God and a doctrine of salvation, but is above all things a new conception of life which is changing the whole fabric of human society. He follows this assertion by claiming that in its history the true message of Christianity had been corrupted (largely by Established Churches), and from this he concludes that only through the individual (acting independently of 'what are regarded as the exigencies of family, society and the State'[31]) can the true spirit of Christianity be recovered.

The corruption that Tolstoy believed had occurred was as much a product of monarchs and governments as of the Church, but nowhere does he invoke more invective than for the adoption of capitalism. An economic system based on unbridled competition had widened intolerably the inherent contradiction between one's inner consciousness and the conditions of everyday life. The class system was at the heart of it, imposing not simply material inequalities but also, morally, the pain of knowing that one was part of an unfair system.

The revolutionary message of Tolstoy was in his call for a return to the Christian foundations of life – equality, love of one's neighbours, community of goods, resistance of evil by non-violence – all of which could only be recovered by the removal of capitalism and the State itself. Moreover, he added a messianic note in his prophecy that the time had come for action: 'each man has but to begin to do his duty, each one has but to live according to the light within him, to bring about the immediate advent of the promised Kingdom of God, for which the heart of every man yearns.'[32]

For those yearning for a new system but eschewing violence, Tolstoy offered timely inspiration; by some his words were interpreted as a rationale for community formation. In like-minded communities not only could one experiment with particular aspects of Christian fellowship, but also such communities would in themselves represent the first building blocks of a new social order.

Tolstoy was the most celebrated source of religious anarchist ideas in this period, but there were various figures in England who shared many of the same precepts and who interpreted and applied these in their own cultural milieu. Three such figures were Thomas Davidson, J. Bruce Wallace and J.C. Kenworthy.[33]

Davidson, a former teacher and educational theorist, had travelled widely in Europe and North America, and had at one time lectured with Henry Thoreau's mentor, Ralph Emerson. Apart from an inherent love of Nature and a belief in the simplification of life, he aspired to a new form of communistic society composed of people spiritually purer than was commonplace in a world increasingly dominated by capitalism. His dream was of the triumph of the spiritual over the material, and the

development of a perfect character in everyone. To promote his ideas, in 1883 he formed a group, the Fellowship of the New Life (later known as the New Fellowship), which sponsored a publication, *Seed Time*. Links were made with Tolstoy's writings, and a consistent theme was to stress the role of individual conscience in social revolution. Articles were generally philosophical, but the periodical also carried reports of outings to experience the joys of Nature and lectures around the country.

Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis saw in the Fellowship an opportunity to make the case for greater sexual liberation; the Liberal M.P, Henry Salt, used the platform to publicize his own Humanitarian League; and a future Labour Prime Minister, J. Ramsay MacDonald, was attracted to the circle, until he realized it would do little to further his own political ambitions. The Fellowship also preached the virtues of life in community. A house in Bloomsbury was organized on cooperative lines, and others were encouraged to live near each other in associated colonies. Croydon proved to be a particular stronghold, with various experiments established there.[34] But it turned out to be a scattergun approach; the Fellowship dispersed ideas but was not systematic in seeing them to fruition. In 1898 the last edition of *Seed Time* was published, and in that same year the organization was dissolved.

Paths overlapped, and the second figure of note, J. Bruce Wallace, was familiar with the ideas of Davidson. Wallace, a social mystic, was described as 'a man of intensely devoted and spiritual nature, who was convinced that it was possible to establish some kind of cooperative system in place of the present capitalistic system and commercialism generally.'[35] His main contribution was to publish from 1887 a magazine, *Brotherhood*, which reported on social issues and community experiments in England and elsewhere (and which, remarkably, he continued to produce for nearly fifty years), and to establish the first Brotherhood Church, in north London. Through the pages of his magazine and from the pulpit, Wallace was tireless in his advocacy of a future cooperative commonwealth, and was sufficiently pragmatic to work with Ebenezer Howard for the formation of garden cities as well as to champion more purist versions of his philosophy.

The third figure, J.C. Kenworthy, was an avowed Tolstoyan and had firsthand experience of the American anarchist movement. As well as preaching from the pulpit of the Brotherhood Church, he was a frequent contributor to *Seed Time*, urging the formation of communities as a step towards the transformation of society. In 1894, as well as starting a new Brotherhood Church in Croydon, he joined with Wallace to establish the Brotherhood Trust, designed to create a voluntary cooperative system in England. Profits from cooperative ventures were to be used to buy land for new communities. The Trust had high, but misguided, hopes of enlisting a million supporters within the first four years. Undaunted, Kenworthy in 1895 launched a new magazine, *The New Order*, which reported on related activities around the country and showed how individuals could begin to revolutionize their lives by buying goods produced by cooperative methods.

Overthrowing Babylon

Equality (the socialist idea), fraternity (the communist idea), freedom (the anarchist idea), honest labour (the way of salvation), spreading the truth (the way of Jesus); their fulfilment in practice means revolution to the lives of all who have their places in this unjust and unhappy state of society, the Mammon System. But in time the principles they express will revolutionise society altogether, and overthrow Babylon to bring in the New Jerusalem.[36]

It was probably inevitable that such a rich mix of ideas combined with the presence of individuals prepared to put them into practice would lead to a variety of experiments in the ensuing years. From the 1890s until 1914 there is some continuity in various schemes that formed loosely around the ideas of Tolstoy and his English disciples. In different ways they tried to lead the life of Christ and his own disciples, eschewing material wealth and seeking to live in peace in true community.

From about 1890, a group of like-minded cooperators engaged in various activities at Croydon. *Seed Time* and later *The New Order* were published there, and Kenworthy's Brotherhood Church and Brotherhood Trust were a focus for experiments.[37] *The New Order* advertised the availability of the Croydon Brotherhood Store, which supplied groceries and other products, offering a weekly delivery to customers by cart each Friday. Details were also given of the Croydon Brotherhood Dressmakers, organized by the Secretary, Nellie Shaw. Meetings were held in the Brotherhood Church, attracting the pick of London's 'cranks' in the 1890s: 'Atheists, Spiritualists, Individualists, Communists, anarchists, ordinary politicians, Vegetarians, Anti-Vivisectionists and Anti-vaccinationists – in fact every kind of *anti* had a hearing.'[38] There were also talks by those (including Kenworthy) who had made the pilgrimage to see Leo Tolstoy on his estate in Russia; the stories of those who had done so according to Tolstoy's doctrine of 'no money' were especially colourful.

Croydon was an important focus of activity, but it proved to be transitional and in the second half of the 1890s the movement became more dispersed. Some of the Croydon Brotherhood, led by Kenworthy, decided that the time had come for more radical action, and in 1896 set about forming a community at Purleigh in Essex.[39] Purleigh was an important experiment, maintaining direct links to Tolstoy, and was to be but one of three such communities in the same county, the others being formed at Ashingdon in 1897 and Wickford in 1898. Elsewhere in England, in industrial districts, Tolstoy's brand of anarchism attracted keen interest, and new communities and cooperative experiments were started – in 1897, the Brotherhood Workshop in Leeds, and in 1899 the Blackburn Brotherhood (the latter distinguished by the total rejection of the use of money).[40] The two northern communities were simply evidence of a much wider network of anarchist activity, as reported in a new publication, *The Free Commune*, a quarterly magazine of libertarian thought. Most of these communities had largely petered out by the end of the decade, and others of the same ilk were similarly shortlived.

Vladimir Chertkov, who had spent some time at both Croydon and Purleigh, and who set himself the task of disseminating Tolstoy's ideas to a wider audience, formed one such community at the start of the century at Christchurch in Hampshire.

In contrast with the ephemerality of most of these experiments, one which endured well into the twentieth century was the Whiteway Colony.[41] This was, undoubtedly, the most significant Tolstoyan experiment in England. Its provenance is to be found in Croydon and Purleigh, and, specifically, in a group that broke away from the latter on the grounds that the organization of the community (referring, implicitly, to the dominant influence of Kenworthy) had become too doctrinaire and exclusive in its membership. Whiteway, in contrast, was at the outset less under the influence of any one member, and sought to organize affairs communally, as closely as possible to Tolstoy's beliefs. Theory and practice were brought together, as illustrated by the symbolic burning of the title deeds of the estate as the first act of the community. Vegetarianism, non-resistance, the rejection of money and property, free union instead of marriage, and a refusal to acknowledge State institutions, were all adopted to differing degrees in the new colony. To Leo Tolstoy and Jesus Christ were variously ascribed the 'rules' that guided the colonists.

Whiteway dates from 1898, when 42 acres of inauspicious land was bought in the Gloucestershire countryside, just a few miles from the town of Stroud. The land was hilly and dry, with thin soil and without a single tree; in the middle stood a plain, stone house. The first settlers, who came from Purleigh and Croydon, were undaunted by what they found. They knew that the achievement of their ideals would not come easy; like the Kingdom of God, perfection on Earth could only be approached by hard climbing.[42] In spite of difficult material conditions, in their first years they tried to avoid compromise, living together in the house and working the land communally on the basis of voluntary cooperation. One of the pioneers records, Nellie Shaw, that women could enjoy more freedom than in conventional society. She spoke of women doing the same work as the men (though not of men undertaking domestic tasks), of the wearing of what was termed 'rational dress', and of the choice of entering into free union in preference to marriage – whereby 'according to law, a woman became a chattel, being ringed and labelled as a man's property, losing even her name in marriage.'[43] However, the high ideals which ignited Whiteway proved too difficult to live by in full, and by the end of the first year communal living was abandoned in favour of a more individualistic system. New houses were built, and the land was worked in small parcels by the different households.

It was in that form, as a colony of smallholdings, but largely inhabited by idealists still attached to Tolstoy, that Whiteway entered the twentieth century. Thereafter, until 1914, Shaw recalls changes brought about by successive newcomers. After the pioneers, the colony attracted some settlers who were vaguely opposed to conventional society but who were themselves guided neither by a coherent set of ideals nor by a propensity to work. Later arrived some young married people, for whom the idea of building a house and living simply on the land appealed; these, Shaw recalls, were generally sincere and earnest. Then, shortly before the war, Whiteway was the destination for a group of anarchists from elsewhere in Europe, 'materialistic and psychoanalytical' in their thinking and ready to challenge the Tolstoyans.[44]

Although throughout this period some of its settlers continued to match the practical guidelines of Tolstoy with his essentially religious doctrine, the drift of Whiteway was in a more secular direction. It also became more pragmatic, and, at the expense of some its more impossible aims, it managed to survive as a colony if not a community. For others in different parts of England, however, who could also trace their roots to a marriage of religious and anarchist ideas, a separation of the two was more strongly resisted. A.G. Higgins, for most of his life a member of the Brotherhood Church, has dug deep into personal archives to fill a gap in our knowledge of this form of communal living.[45] He shows that when the Purleigh colony broke up in 1904, two of its members, Tom and Lilian Ferris, were amongst those who returned to the north of England, settling in their case in the Beeston district of Leeds. As well as writing leaflets and campaigning, Tom Ferris joined with a few others to form a cooperative for manufacturing stockings. Together they gained some notoriety not for their working in common but for their unwillingness to conform with State conventions.

Various incidents attracted publicity. Thus, when one of their number gave birth to a daughter, the father, Arthur Taylor, and Lilian Ferris (who had administered the birth), refused to register it, on the basis that the child had been born into the Brotherhood Church rather than the State. The two were promptly jailed for a week. Later, in 1911, Tom Ferris attracted the attention of the authorities when he refused to complete a Census return, and followed this act of defiance with a leaflet deploring the intrusion of the State. Starting in 1912, two of the parents, Arthur Taylor and Alfred Kitson, engaged in a running battle with the local education authority, being repeatedly prosecuted for not sending their children to school. Typically, Taylor lambasted the magistrates, accusing them of being part of a State which had 'organised a great system of false education to maintain the whole tyranny of sham, and to train the children into subservience to its authority, so that they may have no higher outlook than your foul laws permit, and may bow down to the prince of this world instead of the Son of God.'[46] Finally, with the outbreak of war in 1914, all members of the group refused to fight, and Tom Ferris wrote a series of leaflets opposing the conflict, with titles such as 'The Sanctimonious Crime', 'The Will of God in Hell' and 'Liars and Fools', which led to his prosecution and several months in jail.

The anarchist community in Leeds was clearly a thorn in the side of the authorities, though in terms of numbers it was always small. A newspaper report in 1913 described it succinctly as 'a small group of families, who in the main model their principles and ideals on those of Tolstoy and live communistically together in a number of small houses at

Beeston.'[47] Although it was a small group, it was also part of a network; as well as involvement in earlier experiments in Leeds and Blackburn, members of the Beeston community had variously participated in or visited other important landmarks in the utopian network, at Purleigh, Whiteway and Letchworth.

For A Far Better Land

If every person in this country lived as you lived and must have practised your religion, the whole land would have been a far better land.[48]

Both Whiteway and the Leeds group survived the First World War, and, indeed, could record new developments in the following years, albeit (at least in the case of Whiteway) at the further cost of some of its original principles. Joy Thacker describes how, in the interwar period, Whiteway continued to attract new settlers and flourished in its own way.[49] The little homes built at the start of the century and since then were well maintained and improved, and the various plots were largely cultivated as gardens, with a rich foliage succeeding the previously barren landscape. The social and economic life of the settlement was also enriched. In 1920 a school was opened, its progressive educational philosophy reflecting the free-thinking character of the residents. Children were encouraged to cooperate in their learning. For Whiteway children admission to the school was free, subsidized by the payment of fees by outsiders. Its tenuous economic basis led to its closure two years later, and another educational venture, the Whiteway Summer School, was similarly shortlived. However, a committee was formed to launch a modified scheme for the children, and this led to a school, with teachers from within the community, that continued until 1936.

Although its original ideological intensity had been lessened, Whiteway continued to value communal life, and in 1925 celebrated the building of the Colony Hall. This became the natural focus for a wide variety of social and cultural activities, including lectures, folk dancing, drama productions, and that stock-in-trade of communities in the 1930s, Esperanto classes. Lecture titles 'ranged widely from *Experiences in Poland* to the *History of Russian Literature*, a mesmerizing talk on *Hypnotism* one week and the revelations of *The Unconscious Mind* the next.'[50] A catering committee was formed to provide for the many visitors to Whiteway, sometimes in large groups from Cooperative Societies and the Labour Party.

Whiteway also broadened its economic base in this period. A small group of settlers moved from another colony, Holt in Norfolk, bringing with them various craft skills. A Handicraft Guild was formed, and a workshop was adapted from a redundant Royal Air Force hut. In the workshop and in their own homes, various crafts were developed – making leather goods, weaving, knitting, metal work and carpentry. The quality of some of the work was nationally acknowledged, and it is interesting to see that one member, Alan Evans, learnt his trade as metal

(*Left*) Roadbuilding at Whiteway, 1924. (*Courtesy:* Joy Thacker)
(*Right*) One of several workshops in the colony in the 1920s. (*Courtesy:* Joy Thacker)

worker in the workshops of another Cotswold community enterprise, that of Gimson and the Barnsleys at Sapperton.[51] Exhibitions were held in London, but reporters who came to visit Whiteway were invariably distracted by the unusual appearance of the place and its inhabitants.

Through avenues of beech and larch we drove to the roof of Gloucestershire, and then, on either side of a by-road, came suddenly upon bungalows and shacks, wonderfully variegated, and apparently dumped down haphazard over an area of 40 odd acres. It was like stumbling on a No-Man's-Land of civilization . . . [there] I found another bearded, sandalled man of striking appearance. Books were open on the table, which was covered with a cloth of fine sacking. We sat for more than an hour in the room of that centrally heated frugally furnished shack, its walls lined with bookshelves and adorned by handicraft ornaments.[52]

Whiteway continued as a slightly eccentric settlement, contrasting especially with the trim appearance of neighbouring Cotswold villages. It offered refuge to a group of Spaniards from the Civil War, and subsequently some of its members claimed conscientious objector status in the Second World War. Undoubtedly, amongst the books that lined the walls of their homes were copies of Tolstoy, but by the end of the 1930s that was no longer the distinguishing feature of the colony. Whiteway had survived by jettisoning its more doctrinaire practices, but it also managed to retain more than a vestige of cooperation and tolerance. As such, it remains as an important landmark in the community movement, straddling beliefs as well as time, a testimony to idealism tempered with common sense.

(*Above*) Nearing completion of the Colony Hall, 1925. (*Courtesy*: Joy Thacker)

(*Below*) The teacher, Ivy Adams, with children from the Colony school, *c*.1930. (*Courtesy*: Joy Thacker)

Meanwhile, the anarchists in Leeds (who kept in touch with some of those at Whiteway) also found a way to survive. With the ending of the First World War, the group was again able to make a reasonable livelihood with their cooperative knitting business. But one of their number, Sidney Overbury, believed that their interests would be better served by moving out of the city and onto the land. There were plans to join with a small group of colonists at Holt in Norfolk, but a visit in 1920 and subsequent correspondence revealed that it was too much under the control of one man, referred to as Durham.[53] Later that year, with the help of a small legacy donated by Lilian Ferris, a second search led to an estate, at Stapleton, near Pontefract in Yorkshire, that was being sold in small parcels of land. A price of £210 was agreed for one of these, but Lilian Ferris wrote to the vendor to explain that their religious principles prohibited them from having a legal conveyance of the land. Thus, in February 1921 the land (seven and a half acres in extent) was conveyed in good faith, and the Stapleton Colony was established. Overbury and his family were the first to make the move from Leeds, but others soon followed. Using timber from the former Stapleton Hall, the first house was built, and a well was sunk nearby. The knitting machines were not brought from Leeds for another five years, and so the first colonists relied on their own produce, supplemented by a small income from casual labour on larger farms in the neighbourhood. In the first summer a field of barley failed because of the dry conditions, but there was more success with horticulture, and the produce of poultry, goats and bees.

As in their earlier history, the colonists continued to confront the authorities on points of deeply-held principle. They believed fervently in the idea of Brotherhood, which constantly guided their actions. Some of these confrontations attracted popular interest. Thus, soon after Overbury had completed his house in 1921, the local authority intervened, requesting that retrospective permission be sought for the building. Tom Ferris, on behalf of Overbury, rose to the bait, and opened a lengthy sequence of correspondence, describing the authorities as 'servants of falsehood and injustice' and refusing to respond to their request 'in the name of Christ who I serve'.[54] Although that particular case was dropped, the local authority retained a keen interest in developments, and in 1927 when Alfred and Nellie Higgins built their own home a notice was served warning of possible demolition. The response of the householders was equally provocative, contending that the Brotherhood Church had never agreed to the Council's bye-laws, and that the only laws they recognized were those of God. Demolition duly followed, and some readers of newspaper reports, outraged by the heavy-handed official approach, donated money for the Higgins family, who had been forced to move into a henhouse. The irony of destroying perfectly habitable housing at a time of national shortage was not lost to a sceptical public: 'I have never heard of any harm they did to anyone and I should define them as good people with a kink.'[55] Unrepentant, the Council repeated its action when a second house was built, and a pamphlet, 'Christ condemns the Pontefract District Council', was

distributed to win more public support. This time the Higgins family were forced to live in a wash-house, while the Ferris family moved into a shed with only half a wooden floor.

Other disputes kept the colony in the news. A refusal to send their children to State schools; to pay rates after the houses had been demolished; to complete Census returns; and to be liable for an outstanding tithe payment, were just some of the sources of confrontation. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the remaining few colonists supported the Peace Pledge Union, and symbolically refused to accept ration books or to adhere to any other special arrangements. The outbreak of war was clearly a denial of all the colonists believed in, but by then they had become all too familiar with the sickness of society. Stapleton was an act of faith, achieving no significant material feats but flying the anarchist flag proudly in the face of overwhelming odds. Ideas were its currency, and women, most notably, Lilian Ferris, took their place equally alongside men such as Tom Ferris, Sidney Overbury and Alfred Higgins. They all remained remarkably true to their original religio-anarchist beliefs, so much so that the colony became something of an anachronism in modern Britain. Its contrast with Whiteway is striking; the latter adapted and flourished as a lively community, whereas Stapleton remained stubbornly beyond the pale of mainstream society. Stapleton was also in marked contrast with another set of experiments, the Bruderhof communities, which derived their inspiration less from a mix of religion and anarchism and more from an undiluted religious pedigree.

The Cotswold Bruderhof

We represent a different social order, that of the Communal Church as it existed in Jerusalem, when its members gave up all private property and shared everything of their own free will.[56]

The sectarian group known as the Bruderhof, or Society of Brothers, has its origins in the doctrine and practice of a German radical Christian, Eberhard Arnold. With his wife Emmy, he embarked in 1920 on a series of community experiments in Germany and Liechtenstein, before coming to England in 1936. In this latter episode, before the Second World War two communities were established in the Cotswolds, one at Ashton Keynes and the other a few miles away at Oaksey.

The story of the Bruderhof is both of the twentieth century and yet outside it, a strange mixture of primitive Christianity, German peasant culture and modern politics. Born in 1885 into a bourgeois, Lutheran household, Arnold's beliefs were derived from those of primitive Christianity, eschewing material wealth and seeking to restore the community of Christ. In spite of the inherent communism of these beliefs, he rejected the political doctrines of Marx (just as he rejected the established Church) in favour of a rediscovery of the true Christian faith. Like others in this tradition, he drew inspiration from the Sermon on the Mount and the Acts of the Apostles. He saw himself as a messenger of God, not simply preaching to others but proclaiming his beliefs through the example of communities based on the ethical teachings of Christ and organized according to principles of pure communism. He shared with contemporary German critics of conventional Church doctrine a fundamental belief in the original message of Christ, in the shared material deprivation that went with it, and the total supremacy of the will of God. Inspired by religious affirmation but also by the anti-urban romanticism of German youth movements, he attached fundamental Christian beliefs to the aspiration of community.

In his study of the Bruderhof, Whitworth explains the essence of Arnold's doctrine in terms of four characteristics: his understanding of the nature of evil; his interpretation of primitive Christianity and the Early Churches; the idea of organic community; and his conception of mission.[57] Although Arnold died quite early in the movement's history, in 1935, his teachings remained the bedrock of subsequent practice, his successors doing little more than reaffirming and reinterpreting accepted doctrine.

For Arnold, the world had to be rescued from the Anti-Christ, which manifested itself in a variety of anti-social behaviour, including warfare. It is no coincidence that his ideas took shape in the years immediately after the First World War. Additionally, he reserved some of his fiercest criticism for the pervasive influence of capitalism, and in particular for the 'poisonous root' of private property. Under such a system, humanity was forced into selfish individualism and a yearning for material wealth, separated from each other and from the Kingdom of God. He acknowledged that others, like Marx, had already revealed the evils of capitalism and its imminent demise, but Arnold parted company with secular idealists in his belief that only through the action of Jesus Christ could salvation be achieved. His vision of redemption was, in spite of his assertion that utopias were unrealistic, classically utopian.

This earth will become like one land, one garden, where one righteousness and justice and one joy, one truth and one purity of mutual relationships, hold sway; so that only then shall joy really begin on this planet. This planet, the Earth, must be conquered for a new kingdom, for a new order, for a new unity, for a new joy.[58]

Arnold looked back for inspiration to the simplicity of Early Christianity, where, prior to the accumulation of rituals and a Church establishment, it was popularly assumed that people had been able to live according to their holy principles. Charity, humility, poverty, purity, communism, pacifism and unity were essential beliefs practised by the apostles, and these should be the foundations for a new order. He believed that the family was the proper unit for upholding these values; although it has to be noted that Arnold's assertion that men would enjoy authority runs counter to any suggestion of complete equality. The State was tolerated as a temporary measure, but true believers were exhorted not to participate in governance or acts of aggression. The challenge to

the established order was that Arnold preached neither individual salvation nor redemption in the life hereafter. Instead, the way forward was through association and within one's own lifetime on earth, the ultimate ideal being for human existence to be organized in the form of an organic community. This, in turn, could be disaggregated into smaller communities with shared values: the *hof* of the Bruderhof. In a powerful statement, Arnold proclaimed that 'life is the conquest of isolation through community.'[59]

Arnold defined for his followers the task of living unblemished lives in communities, and of converting others to their cause. The Bruderhof were to be witnesses in establishing the life of God on earth, while at the same time beating back the forces of the Anti-Christ. There was, therefore, a dual but related challenge of setting an example through their own practice and actively evangelizing beyond their community boundaries: a commitment both to 'creative withdrawal' and to 'outreach'.[60]

These essential beliefs evolved over a number of years, in a dialectic with practice, to provide a simple but challenging manifesto for future action. Arnold's own venture into community dates from 1920, at Sannerz in Germany, where he and his family took a lease on a large house with an orchard and smallholding, and were joined initially by five others. There they cultivated the land, engaged in craftwork and started a publishing house, in the shared belief that this was the start of a new order. Numbers living at the community increased to as many as fifty, and their doors were always open to visitors. In the summer months groups of young men in hiking shorts and women wearing peasant skirts and blouses, their hair garlanded with daisies, arrived to listen to Arnold and to sing and dance. To the sound of guitars and violins they joined the residents in a joyful celebration of Nature and the simple life.

Like utopians before them, the communitarians were better at ideas than action, and found difficulty with the practicalities of earning a livelihood. But through perseverance and the support of sympathizers they achieved viability. Members left but others replaced them, and, in spite of periodic crises, the community not only survived but reached a point where a larger site was needed. Thus, in early 1927, the group moved to a rundown farm on high ground in the Rhön mountains, to form what became known as the Rhönbruderhof. Once again the community suffered from its inability to make an adequate living from the land and from limited craft skills, and for five years eked out no more than a meagre existence in the mountains.

Spiritually, during this period, Arnold gained inspiration from the example of the Hutterites (or Hutterian Brethren), descendants of the pacifist Anabaptists dating back to sixteenth-century Germany. Arnold had for some time taken a keen interest in Hutterian writings, and in 1930, against the wishes of some of his followers, he made a visit to the farming communities in the prairies of Canada and South Dakota, where some 5000 Hutterites lived and prospered. Both parties gained from

Eberhard Arnold's visit to a Hutterite community as part of his North American tour, 1930, which led to a merger between the two movements. (*Courtesy*: Bruderhof Communities)

dialogue, and a merger between the two sects was proposed and agreed. Arnold himself was invited to serve as the Hutterian Church's Bishop in Germany, a role that was designed to bring the Bruderhof communitarians closer to the ways of their new Hutterian brethren. While gaining from the economic support of the more established communities, the Bruderhof were forced to sacrifice some of their own customs. The men, for instance, took to growing beards and wearing the black dungarees and blue shirts of sixteenth-century Tyrolean peasants, while the women wore long skirts and head scarfs. More controversially, they were forced to give up their musical instruments and choral singing, as well as pictures and ornaments, and smoking was banned.

With its new strictures, but invigorated in other ways, the mountain community continued in being, until in 1933 the new Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler resulted in the closure of their school and a threat of further controls. Anticipating the worst, refuge was found in 1934 in neighbouring Liechtenstein, where some left to make a fresh start in a community known as the Almbruderhof. Arnold died in the following year, but not before a search had been started for yet another refuge, this time in England. The search was timely, as in 1937 and 1938 the Nazis moved in to close both the Rhönbruderhof and Almbruderhof.

Salvation in England took the form of Ashton Fields Farm, a 200-acre estate at Ashton Keynes in the Cotswolds, purchased for the group in 1936. In the following year, a further 103 acres of adjoining farmland was rented to cope with growing numbers. By the end of the first year there were 170 members at Ashton Keynes, including forty who had stayed on at the Rhönbruderhof until they, too, were forced to flee from intolerable
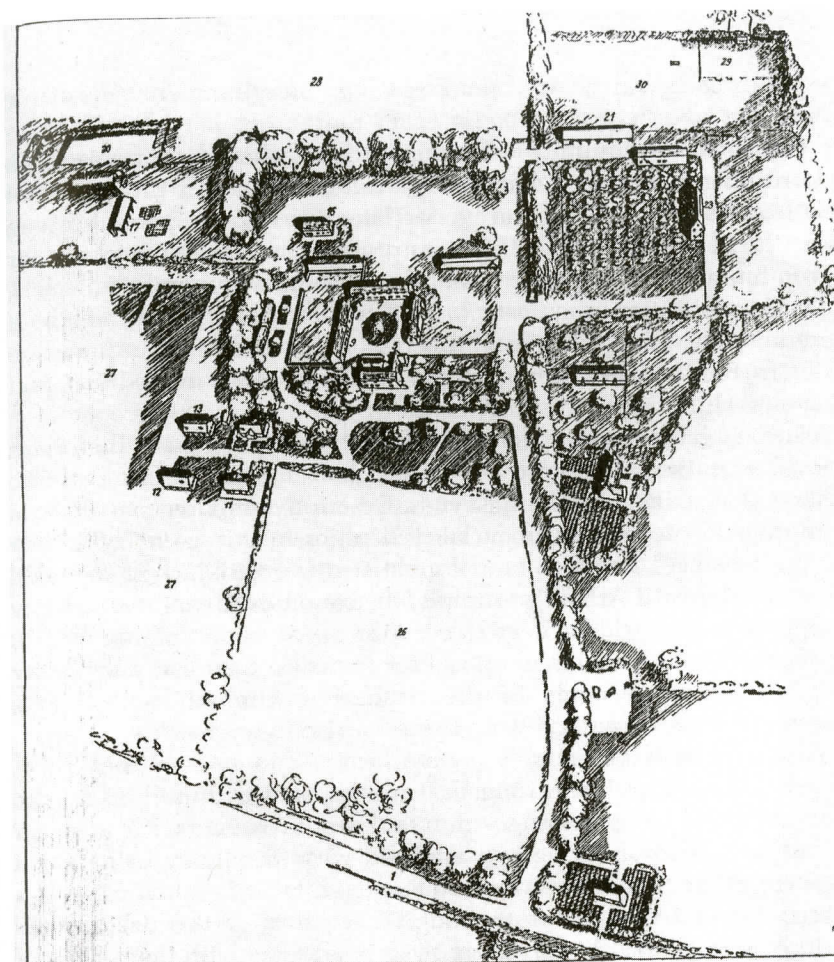
restrictions in Nazi Germany. Joy was expressed at the reunification of the whole brotherhood in one place, with the prospect that 'united we could work with increased power at the task of building up a City of Peace.'[61] In early 1939 numbers in the community had grown to 250, one hundred of whom were children (including two adopted babies from English slum housing). Some of the newcomers came from abroad, particularly from the Sudetenland (in the face of Nazi occupation) and from Holland. Others were from Britain, fellow pacifists sheltering from the oncoming storm clouds of war. Particular satisfaction was gained from the arrival of seven communitarians from Birmingham, known as the Handsworth Group, who had decided to close their own project in favour of amalgamation with the Bruderhof.[62]

Bruderhof community in Liechtenstein, c. 1936. (*Courtesy*: Bruderhof Communities)

Much of the early history of settlement in the Cotswolds is occupied with accounts of building suitable accommodation for the sizeable community and of establishing a viable means of livelihood.[63] Local builders were brought in to work alongside those of the community who could be spared for this labour. Old buildings were renovated and new ones created for a variety of uses: for school rooms, a small hospital, workshops, laundry and power station. The original farm kitchen was enlarged to cater for the whole community, and stables were converted into living accommodation. A gravel pit on the estate was excavated to provide supplies for new roads, and mains water was extended from the site boundary to the main buildings.

Farming was the mainstay of a mixed economy, which included craftwork and publishing. Compared with both the Rhönbruderhof and Almbruderhof, the Cotswold countryside was relatively fertile and within easy reach of local markets. A rotation system of livestock and

Description.

1. Road to Ashton Keynes.
2. and 3. Cottages.
4. Dining-room.
5. Dwelling house and communal kitchen.
6. Stone barn.
7. Former byre, now rebuilt as dwelling house.
8. Former stable, now dwelling house.
9. Turning shop.
10. Baby house.
11. Kindergarten.

12. and 13. School.
14. Railway carriages used as dwelling rooms.
15. Poultry-brooding house and run.
16. Hospital.
17. Shed for making concrete blocks.
18. Dutch barn.
19. Stable.
20. Gravel pit.
21. Smithy, carpenter's shop, cart shed.

22. Laundry, sewing, spinning and weaving rooms, small power station.
23. Printing, bookbinding and publishing house, office.
24. Orchard.
25. Open shed.
26. Arable land.
27. Garden.
28. Pasture land.
29. Bee garden.
30. Chicken meadow.

Plan of the Bruderhof community at Ashton Keynes, 1938. (*Courtesy*: Bruderhof Communities)

arable was used, and the land was systematically fertilized. A dairy herd was the main source of income, and the community gained from the presence in their number of a trained veterinary surgeon. As well as cattle, a healthy balance of stock was assured by the provision of poultry, a small herd of sheep and a few pigs. Wheat, barley, potatoes and rye were grown in the fields, and a large market garden was tended for vegetables and fruit as well as bee-keeping. Rye was used to bake the

type of bread which was favoured by the dominant Germanic contingent.

A few in the community were engaged in craftwork for sale, both wood turning (where four men worked full-time) and the production of book markers from galalith and ivory. There was also a small publishing house, the Plough Publishing Company, which specialized in works for the community and for other groups in Britain with similar interests. One such publication was *Community in Britain*, an important review of community ideas and schemes in this period.[64] A separate enterprise, the Hutterian Brethren Publishing House, was the centre for editing and publishing Hutterian works in England.

Financial accounts were not published, but it is unlikely that these various activities alone provided sufficient income to sustain the numbers that settled at Ashton Keynes. Descriptive reports contribute to an impression of constant financial difficulties in this period; the year 1938, for instance, 'has been one of great struggle with lack of capital.'[65] Following Eberhard Arnold's example, the community continued to rely on support from outside to keep the venture afloat, and, typically, in 1938 respite was found through an appeal for funds. In this case, a company was formed, the Friends of the Bruderhof Limited, with shares redeemable over twenty years. There is also reference to the 'considerable help of two friends'.[66]

For financial as well as evangelical reasons it was important for the group to spread the message and to keep in touch with a wider constituency. The publishing house helped with this, though circulation lists were never that extensive; by the end of its first year there was a subscription list of 500 for the English version of the Bruderhof's quarterly journal, *The Plough*. There were good links with the Society of Friends, and especially as the likelihood of war increased the network was extended to include other pacifist groups and individuals. Of no less value than publishing was the impact of a continuing programme of meetings and lectures to interested groups, both locally and around the country. At these they offered a witness to the possibility of a life of complete brotherhood. One of the English pioneers in the community, Bruce Sumner, recalled that in 1938 they were able to speak at more than fifty meetings, mainly in large cities such as London, Birmingham, Bristol and Nottingham, and in the neighbouring towns of Cirencester, Swindon and Cheltenham. In Birmingham they used as a base the house vacated by the group which had moved to Ashton Keynes, and normally three or four members were located there, 'giving talks to various groups, visiting meetings of other movements, and selling our woodwork, and during that time they visited countless friends, both old and new, to whom they sought to give a simple testimony of the need and the possibility of a practical witness of love and brotherhood.'[67] There were also visits to Switzerland, where contact was made with friends associated with the Almbruderhof in neighbouring Liechtenstein.

Typical of the community movement, which attracted a regular flow of visitors, Ashton Keynes was a mecca for visitors in search of their own

salvation as well as those with a broader interest in finding solutions to society's ills. The Bruderhof encouraged such visits, in the hope of demonstrating the value of a community of God, as well as to learn from others. Sometimes it all seemed overwhelming: the Workers' Educational Association in Swindon organized a visit by 300 with an interest in community, while another group, the Folk House, brought ninety from Bristol. Many came from overseas, sometimes just to visit and at other times to join in the work of the community. Thanks is recorded in a report for the contribution of seven members of the International Voluntary Service for Peace, who helped for six weeks to construct a new sewerage system. From time to time, *The Plough* carried advertisements calling for others to volunteer their labour for particular projects. In July 1938, a summer camp was organized for those 'interested in a Christian community life' to dig ditches and to help in building new houses, farm buildings and a road. Women workers were also welcome, but, reflecting the division of labour in the community as a whole, for them it was for 'kitchen and household work and for harvesting'.[68]

Meanwhile, the number of permanent residents in the community continued to grow. Some of the visitors decided to stay, and were required to undergo a period of probation before being fully admitted. There were also new births in the community, and children who reached adulthood stayed on, 'a testimony that the childlike nature, when unspoiled, has this longing of a life of service to others.'[69] The main increase, though, was due to the influx of refugees from the Nazis, the main group coming from the troubled Sudetenland. Child refugees were also taken in, and temporary respite was offered to nineteen Jews from Vienna. By the autumn of 1938 there were some 230 members in the community, and numbers increased further the following year. The question considered, as a matter of 'burning importance',[70] was whether to extend the buildings at Ashton Keynes or to establish a new settlement.

Guidance was taken from the example of their partner Hutterite communities in North America. There, with four centuries of experience, the Hutterites recommended that the number in a community should not normally exceed 150 to 200 adults and children. A maximum of this order was seen to be sufficient to avoid the dominant influence of any one person, yet small enough to allow everyone to know each other: 'to share all joy and sorrow with his neighbours.'[71] It was also seen to be a good number for the organization of work and for the provision of education. The ideal arrangement, concluded the Cotswold Bruderhof, would be for an additional community close to the present one so that some facilities (such as a bakehouse and a school) could be shared. To some extent these arguments might have been post-rationalization, for the community knew for a year of the existence of a farm, little more than four miles away, that had been on the market for some time. With 320 acres and a fine collection of buildings (including a manor house with ten rooms and a farm house with another ten rooms), the estate, Oaksey Park Farm, matched to perfection their requirements. The price seemed financially beyond their reach, but 'the whole brotherhood

(*Above*) Building work at Ashton Keynes (*Courtesy*: Bruderhof Communities)

(*Below*) Cotswold Bruderhof members folkdancing, late 1930s. (*Courtesy*: Bruderhof Communities)

decided unanimously, in faith in God's help and guidance, to try to buy the farm. Shortly afterwards the necessary means were placed at our disposal.'[72] The source of this benefaction is not revealed, but close links with the Society of Friends suggest that it might well have been from that body.[73]

At a practical level, plans were laid to farm the land in four branches, with a herd of sixty dairy cattle, a poultry branch with 800 laying hens and 400 young birds, a pig farm with 130 stock, and 40 acres of cultivation (mainly fodder for the cattle). But amidst such practical reports no opportunity was lost to emphasize the underlying spiritual significance of it all. On the day on which the deeds passed into their hands, the whole community gathered on the estate, 'filled with the inner longing that this piece of earth from now on might be placed wholly in the service of God and ruled by the strength of his love, with the prayer that here only the brotherly justice might reign.'[74] Here, they believed, lay a message of hope for the future of all mankind: 'it is indeed a wonderful thing in this earnest and torn time that a new place should be won to serve the coming order of peace and justice.'[75]

Understandably, in view of their own circumstances, the Bruderhof had a keen sense of the historical place of their work. Against a backcloth of growing fascist militancy in Europe, and a prospect of international war, community experiments such as their own acquired a new meaning as sanctuaries for refuge and for the nurturing of threatened values. Those who joined had to be prepared for 'an uncompromising surrender to the one aim of the brotherhood of mankind in the Kingdom of God.'[76] The transition to community was likened to stepping over a threshold, by leaving an old world and entering a new. For fanciful utopians, this could not be seen as an 'escape or entrance into a paradise', but as a 'real life, a life of continual and hard struggle'.[77] In the manner of a true sect, no compromises were offered; to join the brotherhood required a total rejection of evil and a turning to all that is good. Life would be organized as 'voluntary communism in poverty and simplicity', with a 'peaceful and harmonious cooperation based on the experience of an inner unity of mind, heart and soul.'[78] Following the outbreak of the Second World War, they declared their pledge of loyalty to the cause of brotherhood rather than to national affiliations. We are firmly resolved, they proclaimed, 'in no wise to take part in the evils of war, of mammonism, and of the worship of man and the state – whether it means life or death, and wherever it may lead us.'[79]

In spite of the purity of their beliefs and their totally non-aggressive stance, the Cotswold communities were rarely immune from contention. Such groups will always attract an element of suspicion, if not fear, and their continued growth in a rural area would hardly have gone unnoticed. At the time of the purchase of the Oaksey estate, some neighbouring landowners objected, and petitions were sent to the Home Office and to Parliament opposing the sale of English land to German nationals. But, maintained the Bruderhof in proceeding with the purchase, the land belonged to God and they were mere custodians.

They were fortunate in winning the support of the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, who dismissed objections with the argument that the Bruderhof had earlier been given permission to settle in England, and that in any case the communities included a growing number of British citizens who were able to find work there. In April 1939 a letter was sent by the Bruderhof to the Home Secretary to thank him for his courageous stand on their behalf.[80]

Even with the outbreak of war, the government continued to tolerate their independent existence, and elsewhere their pacifist beliefs won qualified support. The Bruderhof again expressed gratitude for the tolerance they enjoyed, and, while not condoning the war, pledged to provide healthy farm produce to assist the local population. Step by step, however, a hold on their activities tightened; first, the German nationals were restricted to the county boundaries, and then to a radius of five miles of their homes. More inhibiting was the growth of local anti-German opposition, ignoring the fact that the group was not only pacifist but also anti-Nazi. A clergyman, the Reverend Wells, purporting to speak on behalf of his anxious parishioners, offered a barely concealed warning of vigilante action if nothing more were done. The Member of Parliament for nearby Swindon accused the pacifists of cowardice, hiding behind the backs of the nation's armed forces. What started as mild criticism soon developed into xenophobic hysteria, with the Bruderhof being accused of organizing their communities on Gestapo lines and even of colluding with the enemy. Letters to local papers called for their detention in internment camps, and questions were raised in Parliament. The Duke of Devonshire, in a debate in the House of Lords, tried to pour oil on troubled waters by exposing some of the accusations as sham. As an ex-intelligence officer he remarked that 'the last person I should dream of employing as a German spy would be one who spoke little, if any, English and wore a long beard and a long dressing gown.'[81]

But as the situation deteriorated and internment became ever more likely, the Bruderhof made the momentous decision in the summer of 1940 to close their two communities in the Cotswolds and to seek permission to leave the country. North America, where contacts were strong, was the most obvious destination, but neither Canada (where the Hutterites offered help) nor the United States were keen to accept a large group of German pacifists, for the very reasons that Britain was happy to see them leave. In the event, a fortuitous contact led them south, to the remote land of Paraguay, where they were given permission to settle. Towards the end of 1940 the farms in England were sold, and passages were arranged for 350 to sail in six groups to Buenos Aires and from there to Paraguay. In spite of the dangers of the voyage in the midst of the war there were no fatalities, and a new chapter in the history of the movement was started.[82]

Meanwhile, a few of the English members of the group had remained in the Cotswolds to complete the sale transactions and to tie up any outstanding business, and these were soon joined by a number of other pacifists. Rather than follow the main group to South America, a decision was taken instead to start a new community in England, where they could live according to Bruderhof ways and serve as a refuge for like-minded pacifists. Thus, in 1942 a farm was bought near Bridgnorth, in Shropshire, on the Welsh borders, and what became known as the Wheathill Bruderhof grew to a population of some 200 by 1950. A second community, Bulstrode, was formed in 1958 in a different part of the country, near Gerrards Cross, Buckingham. The former community lasted until 1960 and the latter until 1966. After a gap of five years, the link with England was restored in 1971 with the formation of a Bruderhof community at Darvell in Sussex. In spite of this continuing presence in England, it was, however, the United States that after the war became the main locus for new Bruderhof settlements.

The history of the Bruderhof since the Second World War is one that is as eventful as that of its first phase, with communities at different times in South America (Paraguay and Uruguay), North America (the United States) and Europe (Germany and England).[83] As well as the volatility of individual communities, between 1959 and 1962 the movement worldwide was shaken by what Yaacov Oved terms 'the great crisis', a time when fractures divided it on grounds of deviation from the original ideals, growing secularization amongst some members, and varying styles of leadership.[84] It was an acrimonious episode, and as a result many left the movement, some temporarily and some for good, although in the longer term membership levels recovered.

On all counts, the two Cotswold communities are representative of experiments in the early twentieth century. Their organization and beliefs were shaped by the aims of the movement of which they were a part; at the same time, their own local history was linked to international events between two world wars. The two communities are also exemplars of sectarianism, in which religious groups find their own way to salvation and a higher level of being, typically by withdrawing from the rest of society. They flourish especially at times of unrest and uncertainty in the world.[85] The authority on sectarianism, Bryan Wilson, has identified some sects that are more likely to withdraw to communities than others. These he terms introversionist sects, and cites the examples of the Hutterian Brethren (and by inference the Bruderhof), the Rappites, the Doukhobors, the Amana Society and the Amish Mennonites.[86]

In the history of the movement, twenty-three Bruderhof communities were established in seven countries, and some of these still flourish. In his reflective work on their history, Yaacov Oved concludes that there are a number of questions unanswered but that overall the movement has stood the test of time and continues to offer a source of inspiration.[87] Certainly, in England between the wars, the Bruderhof demonstrated that a different way of life was possible, based on cooperation rather than competition. And, especially for those already inclined towards pacifism, the two communities offered an organized setting as well as spiritual inspiration. The communities were sizeable in themselves, but in relative terms their own exacting standards served to limit overall

numbers. The requirement to sacrifice 'everything, freedom as well as possessions, both materially and spiritually'[88] ensured that only the most dedicated were to join.

Salvation and Renewal

Again the rains are descending and the floods are out. What will emerge when the waters have subsided none can know. But the green blade of new life has been breaking for long past through the crust of the old things that are passing away. The Spirit of God is eternally creative and for men and women of vision the day of distress is also the day of promise.[89]

The 'green blade of new life' referred to above tells of a remarkable occurrence of community formation, towards the end of the 1930s and during the years of the ensuing war. In the eyes of Christians, the rains had, in fact, been descending well before that (taken to *extremis*, since the fall of Adam and Eve), but the downpour that evoked this new phase of activity was that of, first, widespread unemployment and, later, armed conflict. People reacted in different ways to these circumstances, but for many Christians there was something biblical about the scale of the afflictions. Humanity itself was imperilled, and the time had come not only to seek forgiveness but to rebuild the very foundations of faith and values. The floods were out, and just as the community of the Ark had once before saved God's living species, so too could communities of their own making rise above the waters to await better times. Or that, at least, was the spirit that fired numerous projects in this period, many of them driven by a strong sense of spirituality and embracing pacifist beliefs. Salvation was their first aim, but from this would later come revival.

In 1937 a conference was held at Bath, organized by a group of concerned Christians who subsequently formed the Community Service Committee. At the conference, common ground was found for a wide range of interests. All were agreed with the reasons for their gathering, the failings of society and the threats posed by international competition that might yet evolve into war; and all were willing to subscribe to a general label of 'Christian Pacifists'. There was also agreement that both Church and State had failed in vital ways: 'the churches have failed to stand for all the things that Christ taught; the ballot box has produced governments of tacticians and opportunists rather than leaders of the people.'[90] If those were the basic reasons for meeting, there was agreement too that the time had come to make a stand, to give witness to the beliefs they professed. For most of those gathered at Bath, the way of doing this was to work and, in many cases, to live with others, in 'cells, groups and colonies of men and women led by the spirit of Christ, living freely and gladly in accordance with His teaching and, in accordance with that spirit and teaching, committing themselves fully to one another.'[91] And the purpose of all this was nothing less than the beginnings of a new society. They were harbingers of regeneration rather than revolution, 'advance posts of a new order pushed out to the very fringes of the old.'[92]

The Bruderhof were well represented at the conference (and published the proceedings through their own press), as were Quakers and other Christians, all of whom also carried banners for one or more of pacifist, community service, voluntary socialist, youth and international causes. They spoke of community principles and told of numerous experiments around the country and overseas. Some recounted their tales factually; others regaled their audience with dire warnings coupled with a vision of hope, as if from a pulpit. E. Burton Reeves came from the Land Colonisation and Industrial Guild in Norfolk, to share fifty years of Christian experience. He warned that there was no value in forming communities unless one first understood the essential teachings of Christ. The time had come to go into the wilderness, as the so-called civilized world was no longer 'good enough for those who have seen the vision of Christ and His Kingdom.'[93]

John Middleton Murry was there too, speaking of his Adelphi Centre in Essex as a place for preparing people for community, but also taking the opportunity to provide a biographical account of his denouncement of Marxism in favour of community-based socialism tempered by Christian belief.[94] Another stronghold of Christian socialism in Essex was Thaxted, from where R. Woodifield came to tell of the Order of the Church Militant, a society within the Church of England with a Catholic socialist tradition. Woodifield explained that the movement was not, unlike most of the gathering, pacifist, as sometimes there was a need to defend good against evil; nor was it primarily a community movement, although members were encouraged to form groups 'to try and live now in the spirit and according to the values of the Christian social order.'[95]

As well as those who came to expound general principles, there were representatives of working communities. Eberhard Arnold described progress amongst the Bruderhof, Nellie Shaw spoke of Whiteway, and Alfred Higgins travelled from Yorkshire to tell of the Brotherhood community at Stapleton. Another working community brought to the attention of the conference was Hugh's Settlement. Formed in 1928, on a holding of 120 acres at Quarley in Hampshire, it was described as an experimental community for the development of rural settlements in England and overseas. The name of it was derived from a man who was killed in the First World War, and whose friends decided to commemorate his death by positive action based on his ideas. Before settling at Quarley they learnt the skills of house building, poultry farming, market gardening, bee keeping, rabbit breeding and craft work, and they made contact with other groups interested in production for use. But when one of the founder members, Brinsley Nixon, spoke about it he portrayed a rather bleak picture of a group trapped in a familiar quandary, wanting to free themselves from the rest of society yet soon discovering the impossibility of doing that in one community alone. We are 'grimly holding on', he confessed, before asking an important question: whether it was better to form one or two settlements, and to 'allow these, when full, to swarm like bees for the creation of new hives', or to think instead in terms of a federation of communities, each with different interests.[96]

The conference also attracted various exponents of community service, much of this activity based on attempts to combat the worst effects of unemployment and to demonstrate alternative principles of economics. Bert Over described his Community Fruit Service at Bleadon in Somerset, a cooperative venture run without the use of money; Hilda Chapman , Margery Gray and Mary Osborn spoke, respectively, on community projects in Salford, Mid-Rhondda, and East London; and Margaret Corke, in recounting her experience of establishing a centre at Riverside, Parkgate in Cheshire, spoke for them all in her belief that 'we can begin at once to live out in small groups and in all sorts of ways the vision of human community which we have seen.'[97] There were also accounts of the Grith Pioneers, sponsored by the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry to establish camps to encourage local employment and to fly the flag of pacifism; the Brotherhood Trust Extension Society, formed to acquire land and tools for cooperative communities and to assist in the transfer of surpluses between each other; and the Production for Use League, which aimed to give the unemployed the opportunity of producing for their own use the goods they needed.

The Bath Conference was something of a landmark event in bringing together for the first time representatives of so many groups. No doubt many of those who attended were heartened to discover that they were not working in isolation; no doubt, too, they were strengthened by a common feeling of righteousness, battling together against the rising tide of war, unemployment and lost values. There were tales of failure as well as achievement, but it was the latter that most speakers emphasized. The words of one delegate, Howard Whitehouse, aptly captured the mood of the event:

Really what we are all scheming for is Utopia. We shall not build it suddenly. Perhaps gradually we can lay a few foundation stones.[98]

Following the Bath event, the Community Service Committee was formalized as a clearing organization, and a second conference was soon organized for the following year, at Bow in East London. The subsequent report (published in January 1940) covered much the same ground as the first one, but differed in certain respects. For a start, the imminence of war at the time of the Bow conference and its outbreak during the preparation of the report added to the sense of mission attached to community initiatives: 'all who stand for peace in these times are called to a living fellowship of active witness.'[99] A second difference from the first report was that it was (in spite of the note of urgency) in some ways more reflective, with a series of articles on conceptual aspects of community organization. The Community Service Committee itself prepared some of these articles, on themes of how communities evolve, on aspects of production and sharing, and on the organization of a community shop. Other contributors discussed the ideal size for a community seeking self-subsistence, and explored specific themes such as the relationship with art, with architecture and with youth.

The report also described new communities that had been formed or were otherwise omitted from the first publication, in Britain and internationally.[100] Amongst the new projects for land settlement were the Peace Service Community, at Ropley in Hampshire; the Richmond community, near Ross-on-Wye in Gloucestershire; and a variety of small ventures, with strong pacifist commitments, and either land-based or community houses in cities. One of the newer ventures, Elmsett in Suffolk, was attributed to inspiration generated by the conference itself, attended by its founder, Edmund Cocksedge. Typical of this new generation of communities, the beliefs on which Elmsett was based linked an opposition to war to principles of social and economic justice, and to an understanding of Christianity that allowed each member to relate their individual experience. A farm was bought, and in January 1939 a declaration was issued:

We realize that it is useless to try to re-design the superstructure of the old system while the foundations are at fault, and have decided that we must help to lay the foundations of a new order based on the principles of brotherhood and co-operation of all mankind. We therefore renounce the selfishness of the old order, and this can only be done by sharing our life together in a true community, working not for personal reward, but for the benefit of the whole, and holding all our material goods in common.[101]

In some ways, Elmsett was more ambitious and comprehensive than other communities formed at that time, working a larger area of land and priding itself on the soundness of its organization. Farm buildings were restored, and a mixed farming regime introduced. Livestock was included, though it was planned to phase this out as the community developed along vegetarian lines. Community council meetings were held, and decisions were taken with the consent of all members. Unskilled work was shared equally between all members, men and women alike, although individuals were also encouraged to develop specialist skills. A library was organized, and there were study groups, Peace Pledge Union meetings, and Sunday evening services. Ways were sought to make links with neighbours, contact was made with the regional cooperative society, and each week members sold copies of Peace News in the streets of Ipswich. Through careful organization and good local relations, the community hoped to demonstrate in a practical way 'the soundness of community as a new order of voluntary and non-violent communism.'[102]

A third conference was in due course convened by the Community Service Committee, and the report in 1942 carried news of further developments around the country. Together, the record of the three conferences illustrates vividly the spirituality of the community experience in this period. Many of the communities formed in response to the rising tide of threatening evil proved to be ephemeral, but in a few cases there is a stronger thread of continuity. One such thread is to be found in the successive experiments of George Ineson, who aptly described his experience as a 'community journey'.[103] The story of Ineson is, in fact, one of a lifelong quest for community, his own journey

crossing the paths – moral, religious and political – of others of his generation. The son of a Methodist minister, and a trained architect wedded to the rationality of modernism, Ineson set about his quest for a better world while still an architectural student in London in the mid-1930s. He wrote of adopting socialism and pacifism as his guiding lights, and of worshipping a variety of 'saints', including Jesus Christ, St Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi and George Lansbury. 'Our doctrine was the equality and brotherhood of man; our morality to accept no privileges, possessions or power beyond the common lot of mankind, to pursue actively the dissemination of this doctrine and to be prepared for unemployment and prison as a result.'[104] The Spanish Civil War tested his dual belief in socialism and pacifism, leading him to an exclusive commitment to the latter. He joined the Peace Pledge Union and became an even more enthusiastic follower of Gandhi than before. Under influences such as these, Ineson's quest for community was based on an emergent belief that change must first come from within.

We have to begin with ourselves as we are, with humility and flexibility – it is of no use to weave abstract intellectual Utopias – we must reach the creative source in ourselves.[105]

As a newly qualified architect in 1937, Ineson first entertained the idea of community formation, thinking in terms of building a group of timber houses somewhere on the outskirts of London. A friend warned him that 'it would become a clique of bourgeois intellectuals'[106] (which undoubtedly it would have done) and he dropped the idea for the time being. Instead, he moved to Cornwall, where, on the windswept western peninsula around Penzance he met like-minded souls in search of alternative lifestyles. With the outbreak of war, and his registration as a conscientious objector, he turned again to the possibility of a community, this time not least of all as a way of making a living. An offer was made by a nearby pacifist, Gerald, to share his smallholding (originally 8 acres but with 5 acres added to it), and Ineson and his wife and several others moved in. Though largely unskilled, they worked the land and tackled the even harder task of working communally rather than as individuals. A legacy enabled Gerald to buy more land, and the community grew to holdings of about 42 acres with twelve members scattered in different households. An unsuccessful attempt was made to find a single farm to consolidate the project, and a minority of the members (including Ineson and his family) left Cornwall to join another community, near Ross-on-Wye in Herefordshire.

That, too, proved to be only a temporary move, and in 1943 (again with the help of Gerald's investment) a farm, Taena, was bought for a new venture in the Forest of Dean. Learning from experience, the few pioneers who moved in started by drawing up some common principles and guidelines. The tone was moral rather than overtly religious, decrying the disintegration of society and speaking of clearing the ground and digging the foundations for a new order: 'we are concerned to build up a new society on the basis of an active belief in the brotherhood of man.'[107] Anyone thinking of joining them was warned that the first thing was to give oneself unreservedly to the community, not just personal possessions but also private decision making. Only by making such sacrifices was there any hope of building a new life. In its organization, decisions should be taken through consensus, time should be allocated for communal events (such as meals and meetings), visitors and external contacts should be encouraged, and education for the children should be provided within the community.

After the euphoria of moving to Taena Farm (described by Ineson as like 'reaching the promised land'[108]), the hard work began. The farm itself was not large (just 55 acres), much of it wooded and the fields difficult to work because of slopes and a rocky soil and also because the community had to make use of outmoded implements and machinery. Some of the original members soon left to join other communities, and rules were abandoned in favour of building the community simply on the basis of friendship and common interests. Gradually, others came to fill the vacant places, although numbers by the end of 1944 were no more than seven. Ineson was aware that this was not how he had envisaged Taena, yet reflected that perhaps community was built of more basic materials than theorists suggested.

The seven of us, so strangely thrown together, began to settle down to a comparatively quiet and interesting life – the work on the farm, meetings for discussion, listening to gramophone records, and evenings at the Traveller's Rest, where they still sang the old Victorian ballads. Perhaps, after all, community would happen like this – growing up in the interstices of everyday things, lit up by the cherry blossom in spring and the golden light on the silver birches in the autumn.[109]

Such moments of optimism were overshadowed, however, by continuing doubts of how to effect the essential change from individual to communal living; Ineson could not delude himself for long that the change required would be a product of pain as well as pleasure. Repeatedly, he experienced crises of confidence in the rightness of what he was doing, and was led to seek answers from first one potential panacea and then another. A long period of Jungian psychoanalysis sessions in London was supplemented by other recourses for hope from various brands of Eastern philosophy, mysticism and meditation. Time and again, when these failed to provide sufficient light, and the economic basis of Taena remained dire, he wondered whether it was not the community itself that was the problem. Poverty and depression are recurring themes in its record, and there is little sense that their introversion brought contentment; they neither experienced satisfaction in contributing in their own way to the war effort, nor did they express relief and joy in being at peace. Ironically, although pacifism was a motive force in the community's formation, their internal problems narrowed rather than widened their involvement in society beyond their own farm boundaries.

Eventually, Ineson found the answer he was seeking in Catholicism,

and others (including his wife) in the small community turned also to the Church of Rome. He knew of Eric Gill's earlier efforts to marry Catholicism with community, and followed a comparable path in introducing religious ritual into the daily regime. His architectural skills were used to design a chapel, and time was set aside each day for communal prayer. Visits were made to monasteries, which Ineson believed offered an inspirational model of community:

an order which was life-giving instead of rigid, a relaxed peace which was the result of facing problems instead of covering them up, a reservoir of available energy which neither overflowed nor ran dry. I could see that this life had its origin in the community act of High Mass; for a number of years now we had been looking for just such a central rite in our own community life, but with no suspicion that we should find it in the Christian Church.[110]

Taena continued, always with small numbers (usually less than ten) until 1952, when a move was made to Whitley Court in Gloucestershire, a small estate just a short walk from Prinknash Abbey. The move (forced on the community by the expiry of their lease) was seen as the spiritual fulfilment of their long journey, for as well as being geographically close to the abbey they submitted themselves to a Benedictine way of life modified to their special circumstances. It was to the abbey that they all looked for spiritual direction. What had started as a rejection of institutional religion and a search for a rational basis for cooperation had, over a period of some fifteen years, turned full circle and more.

Notes

1. For the full title, see Armytage (1961).
2. David Martin, in Foreword to Whitworth (1975) p. ix.
3. Eliot (1934) p. 21.
4. Chesterton (1926) p. 56.
5. There are numerous histories of the monastery in England, most notably, Knowles (1969). Use has also been made of the Ordnance Survey maps published as *Monastic Britain* (second edition, 1954).
6. Carlyle (1843) p. 43. Within the volume, Book II is entitled *The Ancient Monk*.
7. Knowles (1969) p. 183.
8. In a letter to *The Tablet*, written by a friend of the vendor, Dr. James Gale, on 6 September 1882, in Clutterbuck (1994) p. 23.
9. Letter to the *Western Morning News*, in 1928, in Clutterbuck (1994) p. 31.
10. The list of leading monasteries is provided by Milliken (1967) p. 111.
11. Helpful factual information on Prinknash has been obtained from the monastery's web site.
12. Jones (1968) pp. 228-229.
13. *Socialism and the Church*, Manual No.4, n.d., in Jones (1968) p. 231.
14. The visitor to Mirfield was Percy Redfern, and his quote was from Father Bull: Redfern (1946) p. 120.
15. McCord (1989) pp. 124-125.
16. *Ibid*, p. 125.
17. C.C. Stimson, 'The Franciscan ideal in relation to Christian community life', in Community Service Committee (1938) pp. 107-109.
18. *Ibid*, p. 108.
19. *Ibid*, p. 109.
20. *Ibid*.
21. Howells (1975) uses this phrase as the title of his book on the monks of Caldey Island.
22. Levin (1994) p. 18.
23. In Howells (1975) p. 29.
24. Ineson (1956) pp. 99-100.
25. Redfern (1946) p. 120-121.
26. *Ibid*, p. 120.
27. J.C. Kenworthy (1895) in Higgins (1982) p. 6.
28. Leo Tolstoy, following his ex-communication in 1901, in Marshall (1993) p. 372.
29. Holman (1978) p. 194.
30. Tolstoy (1894). The book was first published in Russia in the previous year.
31. *Ibid*, Preface.
32. *Ibid*, p. 285.
33. Much of the following material on the 1890s is drawn from earlier research by the author, in Hardy (1979) chapter 5.
34. Pease (1918) p. 36.
35. Shaw (1935) p. 19.
36. J.C.Kenworthy, in *The New Order*, January 1897.
37. This episode is dealt with more fully in Hardy (1979) chapter 5.
38. Shaw (1935) p. 21.
39. For a detailed account of Purleigh, see especially Holman (1978).
40. The Blackburn colony was visited by Percy Redfern (1946) pp. 96-97. He also visited a group of anarchists in Derby, the Brotherhood Circle.
41. Material on Whiteway is gleaned from Shaw (1935); Hardy (1979); and Thacker (1997).
42. *The New Order*, June 1898.
43. Shaw (1935) p. 128.
44. Shaw (1935) p. 229.
45. Higgins (1982).
46. Taylor, in a letter dated 4 October 1912, in Higgins (1982) p. 25.
47. *The Daily News*, 15 November 1913, in Higgins (1982) p. 30.
48. Judge Essenhigh (1938) in a case on the payment of tithes by the Stapleton Colony, in Higgins (1982) p. 75.
49. Thacker (1997), see especially chapters 11 to 13.
50. Thacker (1997) p. 114.
51. Thacker (1997) p. 107.
52. Report from *The Daily Chronicle*, in Thacker (1997) pp. 104-105.
53. Higgins (1982) p. 47.
54. Higgins (1982) p. 57.
55. From a report in *The Leeds Mercury*, in Higgins (1982) p. 87.
56. Eberhard Arnold, in Oved (1996) p. 48.
57. Whitworth (1975) pp. 174-178.
58. Arnold, in Whitworth (1975) p. 175.
59. *Ibid*, p. 176.
60. *Ibid*, p. 178.
61. 'The Cotswold Bruderhof', in *The Plough*, Vol.2, No.1, Spring 1939, p. 16.
62. Godfrey Pain, 'Birth of a community group', pp. 76-80, in Community Service Committee (1938).
63. An important source of accounts for this period is to be found in the quarterly publication, *The Plough*, produced in the community and dating from March. It was described in its frontispiece as 'an instrument for uniting more closely those who are seeking here and now to live by the standards of the Coming Order of justice, love and brotherhood.'
64. *Community in Britain* was published in 1938 (revised in 1940 and 1942) by the Community Service Committee, and first printed at Ashton Keynes.
65. Bruce Sumner, in *The Plough*, Vol.2, No.1, Spring 1939, p. 21.
66. *Ibid*.
67. *Ibid*, p. 19.
68. *The Plough*, Vol.1, No.2, July 1938, p. 71.
69. *The Plough*, Vol.2, No.1, Spring 1939, p. 18.

70. *The Plough*, Vol,2, No.2, Summer 1939, p. 50.
71. *Ibid*, p. 49.
72. *Ibid*, p. 51.
73. Whitworth (1975) p. 90, also indicates that the Quakers were at various times the most likely source of financial support.
74. *Ibid*.
75. *Ibid*.
76. 'The basis of the community life', *The Plough*, Vol.1, No.1, March 1938, p. 31.
77. *Ibid*, p. 32.
78. *Ibid*, p. 31.
79. 'Our pledge', *The Plough*, Vol.3, No.2, Summer 1940, p. 33.
80. This episode is recounted in Oved (1996) p. 100.
81. In Oved (1996) p. 107.
82. The episode in South America is most comprehensively dealt with in Oved (1996).
83. See, especially, Oved (1966).
84. Oved (1996) chapter 8.
85. Hardy (1979) pp. 120-125.
86. B.R. Wilson, 'An analysis of sect development', p. 28, in Wilson (1967).
87. Oved (1996).
88. 'The Cotswold Bruderhof', *The Plough*, Vol.1, No.1, 1938.
89. Community Service Committee (1940) p. 9.
90. Community Service Committee (1938) p. 9.
91. *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.
92. *Ibid*, p. 12.
93. E. Burton Reeves, 'Back to realities', in Community Service Committee (1938) pp. 102-106.
94. J. Middleton Murry, 'The new community', in Community

95. Service Committee, 1938) pp. 110-119.
95. R. Woodifield, 'The Church and the Social Order', in Community Service Committee (1938) pp. 120-124.
96. Brinsley Nixon, 'Hugh's Settlement – an experiment in collectivity', in Community Service Committee (1938) pp. 31-34.
97. Margaret Corke, 'A community conference house', in Community Service Committee (1938) pp. 85-87.
98. J. Howard Whitehouse, 'A co-operative commonwealth', in Community Service Committee (1938) pp. 128-131.
99. Community Service Committee (1940) p. 9.
100. *Ibid*, pp. 226-254.
101. Note on the Elmsett Community, in *The Plough*, Vol.2, No.2, Summer 1939, pp. 45-49.
102. Community Service Committee (1940) p. 204.
103. This is, in fact, the title of his book: Ineson (1956).
104. Ineson (1956) p. 20.
105. From a speech to London Anarchists, in George Ineson's autobiography: Ineson (1956) p. 115.
106. *Ibid*, p. 25. Ineson retains the anonymity of his longstanding friend by referring to him as 'K'.
107. *Ibid*, p. 44.
108. *Ibid*, p. 47.
109. *Ibid*, p. 54.
110. *Ibid*, p. 100.

Chapter Six

The Politics of Nowhere

The idea of devolving power and organization to communities is, in a capitalist system, politically untenable. Were this to happen in practice, the new system would replace established State controls, concentrated wealth and large companies with a contrasting network of small, cooperative units operating according to completely different values. In the words of the old adage, the world would be turned upside down. Yet this has at various times been attempted, with a close link between the community movement (often termed communitarianism) and emergent socialism. Communities have served the socialist cause, either as demonstration projects to encourage others to do likewise, or as a utopian end in itself.

This link between socialism and the communitarianism was especially strong in the first half of the nineteenth century, when there were numerous examples of community advocacy and experiment, and when political options for radical change were still limited. Indeed, at times, albeit brief, the idea of social progress through community formation was in the very mainstream of socialist movements. Yet, well before the end of the century (and, more precisely, after 1906, with the formation and development of the Labour Party), political attention was directed away from local schemes and more towards the prospect of winning a working-class majority in Parliament, and of gaining democratic control of the nation's means of production and distribution. In this new political setting, communitarianism became increasingly marginalized, although, as will be seen in this chapter, in defiance of an inexorable trend towards collectivism, it never entirely disappeared.

If community schemes became something of a political sideshow, they were certainly not without colour. Some lined up under the banner of socialism, while others took a more independent stand. Socialism provided a backcloth for at least three community-minded movements: Guild Socialism, Christian Socialism and Syndicalism. In contrast, a different political movement, Distributism, was formed around the ideas of Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton. More loosely associated with

England in the early part of the twentieth century was rich in utopian ventures – diverse and intriguing in their scope and aims. Two world wars, an economic depression, and the emergence of fascist states in Europe were all a spur to idealists to seek new limits – to escape from the here and now, and to create sanctuaries for new and better lives.

Dennis Hardy explores this fascinating history of utopian ideals, the lives of those who pursued them, and the utopian communities they created.

Some communities were fired by a long tradition of land movements, others by thoughts of more humane ways of building towns. In turn there were experiments devoted to the arts; to the promotion of religious doctrine; and to a variety of political causes. And some were just "places of the imagination".

It is a story peopled by literary, intellectual and artistic icons of the first half of the twentieth century. From George Bernard Shaw to George Orwell, from H.G. Wells to D.H. Lawrence, from Eric Gill to Virginia Woolf – some as protagonists, others as antagonists – they weave the way amongst a myriad of visions and a multitude of alternative lifestyles.

This book is about just one episode in the perennial search for perfection, but what is revealed has lessons that extend well beyond a particular time and place. So long as there are failings in society, so long as rationality is not enough, there will continue to be a place for thinking the impossible, for going in search of utopia.

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STUDIES IN HISTORY, PLANNING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Cover illustration: Fitzwater Wray's 1923 cartoon, Castle Corset. (*Courtesy*: First Garden City Heritage Museum)