

Pacifist Farming Communities in Lincolnshire in World War Two.

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Abstract:- This study considers farming communities set up by conscientious objectors in and around the village of Holton Beckering, Lincolnshire, during World War Two, between the years 1940 and 1948.

1.

You cannot farm without capital.

A.G.Street, quoted by Max Plowman in his prospectus for Langham Farm at the Adelphi Centre, Colchester, Essex, and the Community Land Training Association at Holton Beckering. **Adelphi** magazine, March 1941 [1 & 4]

Already by the summer of 1940, wherever land was neglected, sodden or sterile enough to be cheap, groups of young men and women, as liberally endowed with energy and idealism as they were deficient in funds and experience, were diligently establishing 'new patterns of living'...

Frank Lea [2]

In the early part of World War Two the prominent man of letters, and Editor of the weekly journal **Peace News** during the war years, John Middleton Murry (1889-1957) [1] helped to create two farming communities where pacifists, whose conscientious objection to bearing arms in the Second World War had led them to be directed to find work on the land, could be employed. The history of the community in Suffolk was written by Murry himself in his book **Community Farm** [3], but the story of the "Community Land Training Association", at Holton Beckering in Lincolnshire and set up by Murry and Max Plowman (1883-1941) [4], with the backing of Wilfred Wellock (1879-1972) [5] and the assistance of the Peace Pledge Union, is less well known. The history of a parallel group, the "Lincolnshire Farm Training Scheme", based initially at Collow Abbey Farm, between Market Rasen and Wragby, and started about a year earlier than the CLTA, has received little attention.

The main movers behind the LFTS at Collow Abbey, near East Torrington, were Richard "Dick" Kinahan Cornwallis (1915-1969), an accountant, and Roy Broadbent (1915-1972), a trained architect (both providing capital), assisted by local farmer John Brocklesby (1901-1963) [6]. The physical proximity of the two pacifist farming groups, about two miles apart, and their nearly identical anti-war philosophies (though the CLTA was Christian based, the LFTS was not) ensured that they became inextricably entwined in and around the villages of Holton Beckering and Legsby, and passed the war years almost as one large community, working to some extent co-operatively, on several farms totalling over 1,200 acres. [7]

2.

The assiduous cultivation of kitchen-gardens is the only realistic alternative to the singing of Rule Britannia.

Ronald Duncan [8]

On October 16th 1934, attempting to harness the widespread conviction that another world war must be avoided at all costs, the popular London preacher Canon H. R. L. "Dick" Sheppard (1880-1937), an Army chaplain in World War I but a pacifist since 1927 [9], sent a "Peace Letter" to the national and provincial press inviting young men to send him a signed postcard saying "I renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will I support or sanction another". Within a fortnight thousands did, and after six months over 50,000 men had done so. A Peace Demonstration at the Royal Albert Hall, London, on July 14th 1935, building on this extraordinary response, was attended by 7,000 people and addressed by Sheppard, Dr Maude Royden, Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) and Brigadier-General Frank Crozier (1879-1937). After the meeting the Sheppard Peace Movement was launched. This in turn became the Peace Pledge Union, which was founded on May 22nd 1936 and was sponsored by, among others, Vera Brittain (1893-1970), Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), George Lansbury (1859-1940), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Sassoon and Rev. Donald Soper. By 1937 the PPU had a membership of about 118,000 (Sheppard having offered the Peace Pledge to women in July 1936) though its largest number of adherents was 136,000 in April 1940 [10], with around 300 local groups. Its weekly publication, "**Peace News**", launched in 1936, had a circulation of over 6,000.

At the outbreak of war in September 1939, and after the re-introduction of Conscription in May that year, and especially following the Emergency Powers Act of 1940, while some PPU members abandoned the absolutist stance as set out in the 1934 "Peace Letter", pacifists generally had to adopt appropriate roles for the new situation [11]. The PPU leadership itself expressed different approaches, as is evident from the formation of two sub groups, the "Forethought Committee" and the "Forward Movement". Max Plowman was a key figure in Forethought, along with other advocates of community living, such as Murrey, Vera Brittain, Mary Gamble and Wilfred Wellock. Andrew Rigby has called the three strands he detected in pacifists' responses to the outbreak of war, "relief, resistance and reconstruction". Those who advocated the first of the three responses would "...confine their activities to humanitarian relief work". The second group's duty "...was to do all in their power to bring the war to an end [for example by offering to]...provide positive policy proposals with regard to issues of immediate concern" such as peace settlements. The third group, the 'reconstructionists', were those who:

... emphasized the role of pacifists as a redemptive minority, bearing witness to a higher order of morality and pointing the way towards a new order of communal life [so that] the true role of the pacifist in wartime was that of planting the seeds of a new civilization within the barbarism and insanity of a world bent on destruction. Rigby, p109. [12]

One strand of the 'reconstructionist' response was the setting up of a large number of agricultural communities and other communal experiments throughout the UK, many of whose activities, underlying ideas, trials and tribulations were reported extensively in the Community Service Committee's occasional publication, the **Community Broadsheet**, published two or three times a year between 1940 and 1946. [13]

What was the local, Lincolnshire, pacifist response to this call for community living based on farming? Some felt that, as agriculture was a "reserved occupation" and that farmers might well not need extra hands (and if they did, young, totally untrained "conchies" from the cities would be the last people they would want to take on) the answer lay in separate CO agricultural holdings, run and managed by COs themselves.

In another Community Service Committee publication, "**Community in Britain**", rev. ed., January 1940, [14] Dick Cornwallis, writing from "Dick Sheppard House", (the Peace Pledge Union's Pacifist Service Bureau), at 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1, in an Appendix written prior to October 1939, what he envisaged the "Farm Training Scheme" in Lincolnshire would offer. It was to "...train conscientious objectors in agricultural work". Land work would offer pacifists "...the means of freeing themselves from the false standards set up by modern civilisation" and enable them to "...return to a simpler and truer life in an agricultural community." By doing productive work "...they believe that the best practical witness of their faith and the most effective challenge to the destructiveness of war can be made". The aim was to "...help conscientious objectors to obtain sufficient knowledge to find land work for themselves". Later on he foresaw a need "...to adapt it to a training scheme for unemployed men" and "...start training in carpentry and other skilled manual work", p234.

Beginning in late 1939, with the assistance of Nancy Richardson at the Pacifist Service Bureau office, contact was made with two sympathetic Methodists [15], the Brocklesby brothers Bert and John, who offered Cornwallis and Broadbent the sub-tenancy of one of their farms, Collow Abbey, while John himself agreed to become their agricultural adviser or manager. The farm had no electricity or mains water. The two partners and their wives then had about a week to prepare for the first trainees. An advertisement in "**Peace News**" for a decorator led to the arrival, on April 15th 1940, of Joseph Downend, an unemployed painter, by bicycle from Grimsby 25 miles away. He became, after helping to decorate the premises, their first proper trainee.

Collow had about 200 acres, with Lincolnshire Red Shorthorn cows, pigs, Lincoln Longwool sheep, chickens, geese, a few goats and horses. Trainees were given board and lodging, plus a small amount of pocket money (about 13/6d or 67.5p according to one of the early trainees, Arthur Adams) for working a 56 hour week plus overtime during harvest. Compare this with the full agricultural weekly wage in January 1941 of 48 shillings or £2.40. It rose to £3 in December 1941 and eventually to £4 in July 1946. Percy Wilding, a CO land worker during this period, was sure that existing farm workers "...benefited by the move to land work of many workers who had been used to better wages and conditions, and many of whom joined the Agricultural Workers Union". [16] More holidays, local sick pay schemes and work clothing also became available later in the War.

The basic training period was to be 3 months and in that time, depending on the seasons, they would have to learn to milk a cow by hand, feed chickens and pigs, harness and groom horses, to plough, harrow and drill and to drive both tractors (steel-wheeled Fordsons) and horses. Early rising, the noise and smell of farmyard animals and working right through the day at tedious, back aching jobs like singling sugar beet, were at first very difficult for the many physically unfit trainees. Naturally, shopping trips into Market Rasen or Lincoln, using one of the three farm vehicles, were very popular.

According to the Collow Abbey Register of Trainees [17] a total of six COs arrived in April 1940, three in May, four in June, one in July, nine in August, three in September, two in October and one in December of that year; 29 in all, with more arriving during 1941. Since often, in those early days, as many trainees left as arrived, the total at Collow at any one time, apart from the three partners and two paid professional farm labourers, was ten or twelve.

For the 44 trainees listed in the Register, five ages on arrival were not recorded. Of the 39 whose ages were given, 20 was the youngest age; 35 was the age of the oldest and nearly half (18) were aged 20 or 21. As for their home addresses, the London area accounted for the highest number with nine, while Sheffield and the county of Lincolnshire itself came joint second with five each. No home addresses were given in four cases, and this is perhaps not surprising as it is clear that there were a number of young men "on the run" or whose whereabouts they were not keen to advertise for various reasons, during this period of social disruption. Three came from Hertfordshire, two each from Norfolk and Yorkshire, while one trainee came from each of Birmingham, Cheshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxford, Essex, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham, Hampshire, Cambridge, Warwickshire, Surrey, Kent and Lancashire.

Previous occupations were asked for on arrival, though six had none listed. There were 10 clerks of various sorts, plus four engineers, three students and three teachers. There were two each of printers, accountants, artists and journalists, plus an ironmonger, a boiler house attendant, a typist, a decorator, a pilot, a bookbinder, a tailor, a shop assistant, a machinist and a grocer.

The first trainee to arrive was, as noted above, Joseph Downend on April 15th 1940 and the latest date of leaving given in the Register is Malcolm Wilson, on May 9th 1942. The duration of training periods varied greatly, from eight days in one instance to two years in another, though the latter

trainee probably worked at other sympathetic farms in the area, such as the Ings Farm. Reasons for the variable duration of a stay might be moving to another farm job, joining a County's War Agricultural Committee or being taken on as a permanent member of the farming community.

A visitor to Collow Abbey Farm during this period, William J. Wren, writing in "**Community in a Changing World**" [CCW] [18] published by the Community Service Committee, 1942, p176, noted that the training period was normally three months and was "... directed more towards breaking people in to farm life rather than attempting to make them into qualified farm-hands, which naturally takes a few years". Wren was there for a fortnight, during harvest time in 1941, and noted the long days of labour, from 6am to after sundown "...loading barley in the light of the harvest moon". He described "...a really fine spirit of fellowship ...everyone seemed happy, everyone worked hard, everyone ate heartily". The long periods of hard work did not prevent trainees from attending meetings en masse in Lincoln. Speakers came to address the community and discussions "...full of 'pep' [covering] the world from philosophy to film-stars" took place at meal times. Added to that, trainees had the benefit of "...a first-rate collection of gramophone records", property of Robert Walshaw, an early trainee.

Wren described the community as having no rules, merely a few conventions such as taking off muddy gum-boots before entering the sitting room. Also, there were no bosses "...just three leaders, John [Brocklesby] being the farmer, Dick [Cornwallis] and Roy [Broadbent] running the community." As for the daily farming business:

For the day's work the trainees are usually divided into two groups each with a group leader who is responsible for collecting his men, seeing that the required tools are procured and so forth; this position is taken in turn. Each group has its work arranged for the day, one perhaps working in the fields the other milking, swine herding, etc. Everyone is given as wide a variety of experience as possible...

He concluded:

There is great flexibility about the whole scheme: an excellent quality, as it allows for experiment, and development as an organism. This must in the end produce more satisfactory results than a rigidly organised group.

CCW, p176.

The surrounding villages were not always at ease with their pacifist neighbours and certain activities made the Collow group an object of suspicion. Blackout was a problem with twelve or so people who might be wandering around the house with candles during night hours. Also, butterfly hunting with white nets during the day, and moth catching with torches at night (both enthusiasms of Dick Cornwallis), led to the suspicion that the "conchies" were signalling to enemy aeroplanes. Residents of Collow Farm were unaware of threats of invasion and injunctions to look out for strange behaviour, for they had effectively cut themselves off from "normal" society. Added to this was the trainees' appearance, bearded, uncut hair, any sort of clothing, such as cricket blazers, evening suits etc., quite unlike farm labourers' usual attire. All of which led to the events of the early morning of June 6th 1940, in the midst of the "Phoney War" and at a time of widespread fears of an imminent invasion, when a detachment of over one hundred soldiers surrounded the farm, entered the buildings and arrested the whole group, while a thorough search was made and three shotguns, binoculars and cameras were temporarily confiscated. The residents were taken to Louth police station in military trucks, where they were questioned, one by one. At length, when the officers had decided they were harmless, all were taken back to Collow. At about the same time that morning Bill Brocklesby's Ings Farm, where some of the COs slept, was almost the scene of a "friendly fire" incident as two separate army detachments, on a similar mission as at Collow, came within moments of firing on each other (as reported in the **Market Rasen Mail**, June 22nd 1940). These incidents were looked back on with some hilarity, and were celebrated each year.

3.

You say "after all, the problem is to stop war". I say it's not. There's no such problem. The problem is how to live like a human individual in order that you may live socially and communally.

Max Plowman to Jack Common, Dec 1st 1935. [19]

A basic difference in the manner of farming between the Collow approach and the Murry variant lay in their contrasting attitudes to mechanisation and the benefits or otherwise of its uses in agriculture. Murry felt that (as he put it in a speech to trainees at the opening of the Community Land Training Scheme at Holton Beckering in 1941) the war had been caused by a

desperate need to find a solution to the "... deep-rooted disease of unemployment", however "... war is only a temporary and diabolical solution of that problem" [20] and afterwards the jobless problem would remain. He saw 'community' or 'social living' as the solution because "...it cuts at the very root of the disease of unemployment. It aims at putting at least two men to work where one worked before." In going against the trend for "industrial rationalisation" a price had to be paid because "You must accept a reduction in what is called 'the standard of life'" and lose all ambition for the "amenities of middle-class life" and understand that "...the community movement is an effort to realise a life that really is, in the deepest ethical sense of the word, a good life indeed". [21]. He gives the rationale of his ideal community as being "...towards agricultural self-subsistence" with the aim of "...relative self-sufficiency" and the intention of "...being able to trade its food surpluses for the other necessities of life". What was required at the Holton Beckering community was "...small-scale mixed farming and horticulture". His own formula, developed at his farm in Suffolk though never put into practice there, was a mix of capital and previously acquired training, that is;

... a group of six persons ... [of whom] three should have actual capital of £200 each, and the other three the training that will enable them to contribute their £200 in three years. With that they can tackle a small farm of from 30-60 acres and ... be sure of success. [22]

Murry gave some pointers on the nature of his ideal community. It was not to be a "...political democracy. It should achieve a spontaneous combination of natural leadership and ... genuine community-consciousness ... a new kind of social consciousness, in which each member... 'will tender the whole'", i.e. each member would have regard to the well-being and success of the whole enterprise. The aim should be the "...re-creation of the village-community of the Middle Ages at a new level of social awareness and also at a new level of technology" [23] with families living in privacy, workshops, a community centre, a hall and a theatre. Murry saw this as a Christian enterprise.

Dick Cornwallis had a similar standpoint, in that the intention behind the Collow Abbey experiment was, as he wrote in his chapter for **Community in a Changing World**, "Co-operative farming and village community", to "... change the driving-force of life from self-interest to the communal interest, from

competition to co-operation." With this in mind "... every person should have a real interest and responsibility in the enterprise of which he is a member" and "Every man must feel that the fruits of his work are his in a sense that they were not when he was employed by, and worked for, a 'boss'". To that end there should be "... equality of authority and responsibility within the community and economic equality according to need." [24]

Looking beyond Great Britain to the world outside, Cornwallis considered that the U.K. could not assume that cheap foreign imports of food would continue after the war and would have to rely much more on its own resources. Agricultural production would have to rise and his solution, like Murry's, was to increase production by employing more men on the land, but, using a radically different approach from that of Murry, this was to be done "...by increasing the productivity of each man by equipping him with the most efficient machinery". And this applied not just to tractors and their implements but "...all kinds of technical equipment such as artificially heated glasshouses, soil-sterilisation plants and overhead irrigation instalments". [25] He considered whether 'community' could fit into "... this pattern of large-scale intensive production without losing its essential features", for did not working on a large scale simply mean perpetuating the existing evils of capitalism?

In a community enterprise, he says, the workers' wages are no longer to be kept down while employing the fewest men possible, with labour-reducing machinery. In such an enterprise, wages "... have become the variable margin that it is the problem to increase, for the margin is the net income of the enterprise which is all divisible between the workers." And the wage bill becomes "...the highest possible that the enterprise can bear" meaning "...a higher standard of living for all and more workers". [26]

How should such an enterprise meet the objection that huge businesses are invariably soulless, and too large to engage the interest of workers, and merely contribute to the monotony associated with specialisation? The solution must lie in "...large-scale co-operative groups of farms". There would be groups of such farms,

...each working as a separate unit to the extent of its own production and each man working on his own particular unit and thus gaining a full closeness of interest, but owning machinery and other capital goods jointly, buying and selling co-operatively and operating generally as a large-scale enterprise. [27]

Such groups might comprise some large arable farms, a couple of dairy farms, stock rearing farms, pig and poultry farms, fruit farms and market gardens, each alone unable to acquire the best modern machinery but together able to use all these advantages by joint planning and co-operation, while around them would probably grow a blacksmith's, a machine shop, a cobbler, a general store, a school and so on. This would be the:

...rebirth of the village community...based on equality and a good standard of living for all through co-operation and a true sharing of the interests of life, and providing for the ordinary man a chance to take a full responsibility in the direction of his own life and so fulfil himself. [28]

4.

In the "**Community Broadsheet**" of Summer-Autumn 1941 it was noted that the Collow Abbey group had changed its address to Bleasby Grange Farm, effective from October 1940. This was half a mile away, near Legsby village, with Bleasby the HQ and Collow for sleeping quarters, according to Arthur Adams (one of the original trainees, in conversation with the writer, November 2002). In a subsequent issue, dated January-March 1942, the Broadsheet contained a long report from Dick Cornwallis looking back over two years of progress (p27). He noted that the LFTS had bought two farms in early 1941, Bleasby and Floral, and that they were made up of "...286 overworked acres and two delapidated houses". They would be run as mixed farms based on "...a rotational system of two-year leys" [i.e. two years of grass, followed by two years of arable crops] in order that fertility could be slowly brought back to the land, with "...a dairy herd and a small area of market-garden".

A larger core of permanent members was formed, with each responsible for one section, and (again according to Arthur Adams) while Howard Crapp was farm manager and John Brocklesby the agricultural advisor, Francis Cammaerts was put in charge of sheep, Keith Linday of tractors and Robert Walshaw of cows, while others led arable, horses, market-garden, transport, buildings, finance, household and social sections. The group's size at this time was 22, including four women and two children, so the committees were small. Committee reports were posted on a wall newspaper, as were "... criticisms, suggestions, literary efforts and ... anything anyone wants to

publicise". However "... the number of trainees at any one time was usually about five".

"Community aspects" were put aside during the pressure of summer work but already the permanent members had become an "...income pooling group" whereby all adult members received pocket money, and a maintenance allowance was made for each of the children. As autumn arrived it was felt that general farming responsibilities needed to be spread among more members and that the length of training should be reviewed. The initial short training time of three months suited that stage early in the war when many inexperienced men were unable to find jobs on the land, but by this time (Spring 1942) the number of applicants had fallen sharply and it was agreed that the training should be made longer and more thorough. A normal training period of one year was chosen.

Looking back over the first year at Collow Abbey Farm, Cornwallis felt there were certain handicaps which would not recur so acutely as time went on. The derelict state of the land and the delapidated buildings required heavy expenditure at first. The inexperience of most workers reduced production and some errors of judgement were made. The cropping plan had been over ambitious but "... we came through the year with a small but very welcome balance on the right side".

He noted that contacts with Legsby village were friendly. There had been two football matches and regular visits by villagers to their gramophone recitals, and it was intended to start lending books to anyone interested. He also wrote that contacts had been made with the Holton Beckering pacifist farming group, based at The Laurels Farm, and that "We are already helping each other by occasional exchanges of labour and implements, and hope that we shall co-operate increasingly as time goes on". Finally in this first year report, he recorded their intention of continuing the "system of leys" and of building up a first class milking herd of Friesian cattle. Trainees would continue to come, with new ideas, leaving with more ideas to pass on to others. More accommodation would be needed for the residents.

5.

The origins of the Community Land Training Association at The Laurels Farm in Holton Beckering, less than two miles away from Bleasby and Collow Farms [29] lay in the Adelphi Centre, at Langham, near Colchester in Essex and in the thinking of John Middleton Murry [2], Wilfred Wellock [5] and

Max Plowman [4]. Training in land work was essential because, wrote Plowman to Murry in December 1939,

...unemployment naturally passes from the unemployed to the pacifist; & the P[ease] P[ledge] U[nion], having won the adherence of these twenty-year-olds, tells them in effect to live in vacuity - not in gaol for the govt. won't trouble to put them there, but in the void, upon air..., [19]

Bridge into the Future, p692.

Two conferences at the Adelphi Centre (to where Plowman moved with his family in October 1939 and was its Warden until his death in June 1941), in November and December 1940, considered how to set up and fund agricultural communities for COs during the War and it was decided, at the second conference, to form a society called the "Community Land Training Association" which would buy and run a farm for training pacifists. Two sympathetic farmers in Lincolnshire, John and Bert Brocklesby (again), were instructed to look for such a farm, and an appeal for funds was set up through "**Peace News**". By the spring of 1941 the 310 acre Laurels Farm at Holton Beckering had been bought for £8,500, a price Plowman felt was too high, for, as he wrote in a letter to Herbert Richardson on February 7th 1941,

...the 'land-racket' has already begun. Interest-bearing capital is looking for a funk-hole & finding it in the land ... those who need land for real purposes can hardly set about looking for it too soon. [19]

Bridge into the Future, p752).

The purchase of nearby farms eventually raised the area under cultivation to 1,000 acres.

In the "**Community Broadsheet**" of Summer-Autumn 1941, the Laurels Farm at Holton Beckering is described as "250 acres arable and 60 acres grassland ... managed by John Brocklesby ... Crop yields estimated for this year include 105 tons potatoes, 150 tons sugar beet, 2 and half tons dried peas, 12 tons wheat, 9 tons oats, 6 tons barley; 300 lambs and ewes may be added and milk production is increasing. Ten trainees are accommodated in a large farmhouse". The anonymous writer added that "A West of England farmer [Gerald Vaughan] ...has purchased a neighbouring farm [Holton

Grange] to be occupied rent free for seven years, thus doubling the trainee capacity". (p31) [30]

Laurels Farm, unlike Collow or Bleasby Grange Farms, had been bought by public appeal, not by one or two people's money, and so auditors were required to prepare accounts of the money spent and acquired. This was to be the first major accounting project of Victor Farley, previously employed at the Adelphi Centre, Langham and one of the early trainees with the LFTS at Collow Abbey Farm between August and November 1940, according to the Register of Trainees [7]. He and his wife Phyllis moved to Holton in May 1941. Later on, as accommodation became tighter the group rented Mid Farm at Lissington, which the Farleys moved to in early 1942. There Victor had the farm office, with his Secretary Miss Spinney, and...

They were often approached by local farmers and neighbours to assist with official letters and documents, a service which helped dispel some of the remnants of suspicion about the pacifist communities. [31]

In a subsequent **Community Broadsheet**, dated Autumn-Winter 1942, p20, are extracts from the first annual report of the "Community Farming Society Limited", which the CLTA had now become. The report was written by Victor Farley, and he recorded substantial progress. Trainees here also normally stayed for a year, they acquired skills and stamina, farm talks were arranged and cropping plans discussed. Instead of committees there were Farming Groups which looked after the houses and gardens. He did not mention wages or pocket money but noted that "The farm income supports over forty men, women and children living in two farm houses and nine other houses and cottages in the district". Here also, there was an encouraging response from the neighbours:

We both borrow and lend machinery, and the villagers come to the farm dairy for milk. A branch of the County Library has been opened at one of the farm-houses, and the barn functions as a village social centre on occasions. We have entered into [a] co-operative labour and machinery [arrangement with] a pacifist farming unit of 20 folk working 285 acres nearby, p20.

About a year later, in the **Community Broadsheet** of Winter 1943-4, Wilfred Wellock wrote that the Community Farming Society felt that, as

the trainees were asking for more responsibility in running the farms and households, they needed a nucleus of more permanent members:

We therefore decided to retain as 'continuity' men, trainees who felt they could find a vocation in remaining on the farms, and who were deemed suitable to assist in the work of training men. The personnel now consists of 50% trainees and 50% 'continuity men.' p15.

Further, he urged that:

... pacifists should evolve a system of agricultural production which satisfies the full demands of the human person who contributes to it, and yet provides wholesome food for the community at a reasonable or just price. p16.

Wellock was greatly enthused by this evidence of new and real community life:

In the midst of the biggest and most devastating war in history, steps were being taken to build a more stable and enduring civilization on new foundations. By 1941 I was devoting all my time to this purpose. Every month, I spent several days at Holton Beckering to help in its work, and strengthen the faith of the men working there. In addition I visited as many of the new communities spread about the country as I could, and in the meantime wrote articles for Peace News, in whose pages Middleton Murry and I were perpetually expounding the wider aims and implications of the community concept. [32]

6.

The crucial link between the two groups of like-minded pacifists on the land in this part of Lincolnshire at this time was John Brocklesby (1901-1963), of Top Farm, Lissington. A Methodist and pacifist, he had guided the Collow Abbey group from the outset in late 1939 and now, about a year later, he became a key member of the CLTA in Holton Beckering. Brocklesby was a breeder and show judge of Lincoln Longwool sheep all his farming life, firmly maintaining his faith in them as one of the world's foundation breeds and playing a key role in a major sale of such sheep to Russia in 1962. He was

called "the singing farmer", being as much at home on the concert platform, with his fine tenor voice, as in the stock rings and livestock markets. [33]

He had a cousin, also called John (c. 1890-c. 1963), who had been an "absolutist" pacifist in World War 1 ("a Quaker who preferred prison to murdering 'enemies'" - was the message on a Christmas card he sent in 1923) [34] and was shipped to France with 15 companions (the so-called "Richmond Sixteen") by the Army, probably with the intention of having him and them shot for disobeying orders. Cousin John was a teacher in Scunthorpe for 22 years from 1933 and it was through him that one of the first Collow trainees, Robert Walshaw, heard about the LFTS, cycled to Collow Farm and asked to be taken on. (Farley, p10) [31]

7.

The year 1943 brought important changes to the Collow/Bleasby group. A large bequest to Roy Broadbent from his father led him to enquire, via the wall newspaper at Bleasby Grange, what his fellow COs thought he should do with the money so that it might be used in a morally acceptable way. The debate that ensued, because some members wanted a different approach, resulted in a "splinter group" leaving Bleasby Grange Farm in October 1943 and moving to Holton Beckering where Broadbent bought the former vicarage, Holton Rectory, and Ivy Lodge Farm. The idea was to cease being paid pocket money and change to profit sharing, and to work in co-operation with the existing CLTA pacifist farming group based at the Laurels Farm. A number of the Bleasby group joined Roy, his wife Dee and their first child: they were Keith Lindsay, Fred Willis, and Vicki and Noel Makin, with a child on the way. The co-operative nature of the venture is clear as all the farm workers in the two groups at Holton Beckering were expected to gather in the barn of Laurels Farm each morning at 7am to receive their orders of the day from "Charlie" Clark, (c.1882-1945) the Laurels foreman and "...a white haired veteran of Lincolnshire farming" [35], before going to work growing and harvesting sugar beet, potatoes, wheat and barley, mangels, swedes, turnips, grass for hay and silage (a recent innovation for feeding cattle in winter). Sheep, milking cows and pigs constituted the livestock.

The schism led to some resentment among those remaining, still noticeable to Phyllis Walshaw when she arrived at Bleasby Grange Farm in 1945 (in conversation with the writer, November 2002). None of this is hinted at in Cornwallis' brief report on the Bleasby group in the **Community Broadsheet** of Winter 1943-4, in which he notes that the group is

flourishing and that "... our policy of ley-farming to restore lost fertility to this previously derelict farm is already showing good results in greatly increased production" (p22).

Meanwhile the CLTA based at the Laurels Farm was itself changing. Here also there was a move away from payment by pocket money and it looked for ways to make itself more profitable. The name of the association was changed to the Community Farming Society and it was made a limited company under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1928. Its Board of Directors included Murry, Alex Wood (1879-1950), the Rev. Henry Carter (1874-1951) [5], Wilfred Wellock, John Brocklesby, Dick Cornwallis, Stuart Morris (1890-1967) and Robert Kirkham. Holton Hall was purchased by CFS in 1943 from the Army, to increase accommodation for single men, while cottages and farmhouses were kept for married couples, especially those with children.

Naturally, the two CO farming groups were well aware of each other's presence, as was shown by Wilfred Wellock's report in the same issue of the **Community Broadsheet**:

In the neighbourhood of Holton Beckering there exists another pacifist farming scheme which operates on similar though differentiated lines from ours. Very soon it will be working nearly 400 acres. Much co-operation already takes place between the two schemes, and proposals for increasing it and even unifying the two schemes are being considered. Big issues are thus involved which require careful thought. (p15).

With about 1,000 acres of arable land between them there was huge scope for experimentation and development. For example, should it operate centrally, or in close co-operation or as a series of specialised units, such as dairying, arable, sheep, pigs, poultry, horticulture and market gardening?

8.

By the time of the appearance of the Spring-Summer 1945 issue of the **Community Broadsheet** Dick Cornwallis was able to report (p7) success on all sides in their approach to community farming, writing:

The co-operative farming venture at Bleasby Grange continues to develop steadily and with a more settled population, [after the departure of Roy

Broadbent and others to Holton Beckering, JLM] now that the training scheme has been abandoned...the first home-bred heifers are now entering the Friesian herd as milkers ... we have harvested the first crops grown on ploughed up leys [and] it has been easy to see the great improvement to the productive capacity of the land brought by the ley-farming system.

The Community Farming Society's annual report, printed in the **Community Broadsheet** of Spring-Summer 1945, and written by its Secretary Victor Farley recalled, on page 22, that:

...the Society was constituted at the outset as an agricultural training body in a co-operative framework...looking towards the eventual growth of a co-operative village community. [however the CFS had now become] ...a large-scale enterprise comprising three farms and an aggregate of 1,000 acres ultimately controlled by a board of directors responsible to the subscribers of the loan and share capital.

It was clear that as the War was ending circumstances were changing and many new developments had to be considered. In the same report is Farley's account of a two day gathering at Holton Beckering in early December 1944, called the "Aims and Purposes Conference", to debate the way ahead for the Society. Using as their texts two papers by Wilfred Wellock "The Values of an Industrial Civilisation" and "The Values of an Integrated Society", plus the views of two Society directors, a group of CFS Christians, a group of CFS humanists and a memorandum by CFS women, the Conference sessions were chaired alternately by the Rev. Henry Carter [7] and Dick Cornwallis. The recommendations, for the Society's directors to consider, were as follows:

- a. The Society advocates for each individual the maximum scope for self-expression in the fulfilment of daily functions, having regard to his freedom of conscience and his responsibilities to his fellowmen.
- b. The policy of the Society will be to foster the formation of autonomous groups co-operative within and between ourselves.
- c. Recognising the evils inherent in a society based on interest-bearing

money, one of the objectives of this Society should be to help free itself and society from this evil. It further aims to encourage the process of this emancipation from interest within its autonomous groups.

- d. The Society is committed to the service of the land through the practice of good husbandry. (p22)

The gathering closed with a statement by Rev. Carter on the acquisition by the Society of Holton Hall and the "...improved domestic amenities that should result"

9.

Throughout its time the CFS at Holton Beckering had lost money (loans were now being called in and gifts were no longer being made) and it would lose more as the economy switched to a peace-time footing and some of the protection afforded to wartime food production began to disappear. The last trainees began to return to their former jobs, if still available, or to continue their education. CFS could not last in its existing form. Consequently the Board of Directors of CFS agreed to break it up and rent land to people closely connected with the Scheme, so that one day they could buy the land and farm for themselves.

Victor Farley gave his report in the **Community Broadsheet** of Spring-Summer 1946 on what by then had become Holton Beckering Estates Ltd, still based at the Laurels Farm. The vital task had not changed, it was still the "...maximum production of food". He noted the two objects of the original Society, "...to provide opportunities for training of members in agriculture" and for the "...formation and support of approved co-operative groups in agriculture", p11. He reported that, over the four and half years of the group's life, nearly 60 men had been trained and that, as the demand for training had been greatly reduced, it was time to take on the second task. In preparation for this, the group had decided to decentralise farm administration in order to "...facilitate the change-over to a system of co-operation between smaller farm units". These units would not be small in size but rather "...in the nature of group or family holdings of from 150 to 300 acres, with smaller holdings only where they proved particularly suitable". They would be let to tenants "...eager to encourage schemes of internal co-operation on their holdings. As well as direct production there would be a

support system "...to provide stores, workshops, purchasing and marketing facilities for the farms, and housing and amenities for those living on the Estate". There would continue to be a training unit for "...men and women who desire to take up farming as a career, especially young people". But a major requirement was for building workers, to meet the housing needs of larger numbers of workers. A joiner and a rural woodcraftsman were already present, a blacksmith's shop and farm machinery repair shop (later known as Holton Engineers) had been set up and he felt that the demand existed for "...a general shop and post office, a laundry, regular transport to shopping centres, a nursery school and village college". Incomers would settle in an "...environment of decentralised administration, where experienced men could take responsibility". Once a group was sufficiently sure of itself, it could propose "... to make a proposition for a tenancy, it would pool all its available capital, form itself into a small co-operative society or co-partnership, and approach the Company for any additional financial assistance needed", p12.

By 1948, only two years later, the Laurels had been let to Howard Crapp & Bernard Woolcock. This was not a success and after Bernard left, the farm was sold to Howard. Ivy Lodge Farm was sold off to Messrs. Ballard and Sternfeld. Holton Grange Farm was let to John Brocklesby in 1947 and later sold to him. Holton Hall was disposed of to the Makins as a separate business housing farm workers, and Holton Power Farmers Ltd, owned by Victor Farley, was created on the WAAF site. Roy Broadbent developed his pet project, Holton Builders.

Victor Farley remained Secretary of CFS and agreed with the Directors that he would farm bits of land left unsold and keep any profit. Eventually, with Roy Broadbent's help, he bought 50 acres of poor land on Mill Field that Ballard and Sternfeld had not wanted and began farming on his own. The Broadbents and Farleys, each couple with 2 children, lived together in Holton Glebe (formerly the Rectory) until May 1947 when the Farleys moved into Stockfield, a small bungalow they had built by Holton Builders. Bleasby Grange and Collow Abbey Farms, meanwhile, flourished as a mixed arable and dairy company, owned and managed by Dick Cornwallis and Robert Walshaw. On January 1st 1948 the Makins moved into Holton Hall to run it as a business providing accommodation for local farm workers.

Conclusion:-

The communal living experiments within an agricultural context, as described here, were only two of many such attempted during the war years - bringing together groups of like minded persons, not simply biding their time until conflict ceased and using community life as a protective bolt hole but "...building life in community as a means to an end" (Tyldesley, p23). [36] The conflict could not be stopped, war having become the normal activity of capitalist society, declared Max Plowman, so the motto should be "Pursue the purpose, take care of the work, and the community will take care of itself", [37]. Further, they would have to "...discover the means of living within the interstices of a totalitarianism that will be like chain-mail & handcuffs to freedom of thought", wrote Plowman, quoting Murry, after the Emergency Powers Act came into force in May 1940. [19, p671]

Many of the experiments failed, as reports in the **Community Broadsheet** make clear, lacking money, farming skills, leadership, local knowledge, business experience or combinations of all these. Those around Holton Beckering certainly had their troubles, their schisms, their differences with the surrounding populace, but something kept them going through the War, including the Christian faith behind the CLTA/CFS or the pragmatism and adaptability shown by the LFTS. A major positive aspect in favour of the CLTA and LFTS was that both had money behind them from the start, and this was a hugely important matter as restoring buildings and replenishing neglected, sodden, worn out farmlands required capital.

Notes and References

1. John Middleton Murry (1889-1957), writer, literary critic and farmer. He edited the **Athenaeum** 1919-1921, the **Adelphi** 1923-1938 and **Peace News** from July 1940 to October 1946, during which time **Peace News** "...gave strong support to the growing movement among pacifists to form income-pooling communities", P. Brock & N. Young, **Pacifism in the twentieth century** (1999), p153. Married four times, he wrote essays and criticism (on Keats, Shakespeare, D. H. Lawrence, Blake, Swift) that strongly influenced young intellectuals of the 1920s.

2. F. E. Lea, **The Life of John Middleton Murry** (1959), p292.
3. J. M. Murry, **Community Farm** (1952).
4. Mark "Max" Plowman (1883-1941) freelance writer, editor, pacifist author, William Blake enthusiast and a key figure in, and first General Secretary (March 1937-March 1938) of, the Peace Pledge Union and a co-founder of the Adelphi Centre at The Oaks, Langham, Colchester, Essex. He edited the **Adelphi** magazine "...a de-facto pacifist journal", Tyldesley, p21 [36] from 1938 to his death. During World War One he had resigned his Officer's Commission in January 1918 and declared his pacifism.
5. Wilfred Wellock (1879-1972) "...the most remarkable Christian socialist pacifist of the inter-war period", *Ceadel*, p50 [9]. He was brought up in a family of Independent Methodists in Nelson, Lancashire, and was a young preacher in their chapels. Imprisoned as a CO in the First World War for 2 years, he spent the inter-war years organising the No More War Movement and the War Resisters' Internationalist and was briefly an MP, 1927-31. A keen advocate of the pacifist and community teachings of Tolstoy, Ruskin and Gandhi, in World War Two he encouraged the creation of pacifist agricultural communities.
6. **Kelly's Directory of Lincolnshire**, (1937), under "Farmers", lists four farms run by a Brocklesby, one in Osgodby, two in North Kelsey and that of "Geo. Brocklesby, The Ings, West Torrington, Lincoln", which is less than a mile from Collow Abbey Farm and was run by Bert Brocklesby, brother of John.
7. Nor were they alone in these kinds of activities. The "Christian Pacifist Forestry and Land Units", set up by the prominent Methodist minister and temperance campaigner Rev. Henry Carter, C.B.E. (1874-1951), from January 1940 onwards, had a number of groups working in nearby wooded areas, such as Willingham Forest near Market Rasen, to the North, and Chambers Farm in Bardney Forest, near Horncastle, to the South. See F. Goodall, **A question of conscience: conscientious objection in the two World Wars** (1997), pp 139-140, and L. Maclachlan, **C.P.F.L.U.: a history of the Christian Pacifist Forestry and Land Units, 1940-1946**

(1952), who notes that by late 1944 the CPFLU had its maximum membership of 900 men, working in about 50 Units around the UK, p32.

8. R. Duncan, **All men are islands: an autobiography** (1964), p249.
9. M. Ceadel, **Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: the defining of a faith** (1980), p67.
10. *ibid*, p 223.
11. About 59,000 people during World War Two took the momentous step of testing their conscientious objections before one of the 15 Local Tribunals in the UK and in so doing risked fierce public disapproval, see R. Barker, **Conscience, government and war: conscientious objection in Great Britain, 1939-45** (1982), p121, where she notes that they constituted 1.2% of the 5m "called up" for military service. See also D. Hayes, **Challenge of Conscience: the story of the Conscientious Objectors of 1939-1949** (1949), p382.
12. A. Rigby, 'Pacifist communities in Britain in the Second World War', **Peace & Change**, 15(2), April 1990, pp107-122.
13. **Community Broadsheet: an occasional collection of current Community News edited on behalf of the Community Service Committee**, Spring 1940 - Spring/Summer 1946.
14. Community Service Committee, **Community in Britain: a survey of community thought and work at home, with some indications of parallel activities from other parts of the world** (Rev. ed., 1940)
15. "More than other religions, pre-war Methodism was extremely outspoken on the subject of war and peace: among the many pacifists I have talked to, a remarkably large number said they owed their beliefs to Methodist teachers". C. Moorehead, **Troublesome people: enemies of war 1916-1986** (1987), p164.
16. P. G. C. Wilding, **A CO's war: the life of one English conscientious objector during the 1939-1945 war** (n.d.), p14.

17. R. K. Cornwallis, **Farm Training Scheme: Register of trainees, Collow Abbey, Wragby, Lincs** (1940-1942). Handwritten MS.
18. Community Service Committee, **Community in a changing world: a record of outlook, experiment and activity issued as a successor to 'Community in Britain'** (1942). [CCW]
19. D. L. P(lowman), **Bridge into the future: letters of Max Plowman** (1944), p547.
20. C.C.W. p131.
21. C.C.W. p132.
22. C.C.W p134.
23. ibid
24. C.C.W. p90.
25. ibid
26. C.C.W. p91
27. C.C.W. p92.
28. ibid
29. The C.L.T.A. was less than a mile from RAF Wickenby, which generated a constant traffic through the village of lorries, staff cars and bicycles, while overhead its squadron of Lancaster bombers engaged in nightly raids on targets in Germany. Relations between the military and COs were mostly good and were especially good between COs and the prisoners of war held at the nearby WAAF site, later to be the home of the Holton Players and the Country Theatre until 1960.

30. Gerald Vaughan also bought farms in Cornwall for pacifists to work on, see G. Ineson, **Community Journey** (1956), pp31-32.
31. S. Farley, Untitled and unpublished typescript describing the Collow Abbey farm project, and the CLTA at Holton Beckering (1981-82), p15
32. W. Wellock, **Off the beaten track** (1961), p70.
33. See the report of John Brocklesby's funeral in the **Market Rasen Mail** of October 1963.
34. <http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/SubjectFile/subjfile.cos.htm>
[Accessed 28/10/03]
35. S. N. Makin, Untitled typescript memoirs of his and his wife's time before the War, life as a CO farm worker in Upper Swell, Gloucs and Holton Beckering, Lincs (n.d.)
36. M. Tyldesley, 'Max Plowman's pacifism', **Peace & Change**, 27(1), Jan 2002, pp20-36.
37. **Peace News**, 1/3/1940, p5.

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