



Cotswold Bruderhof

Oaksey

Cotswold Bruderhof's New Estate

Oaksey Park estate, on the borders of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, has been purchased by the Cotswold Bruderhof.

The estate is only about three miles distant from the large settlement occupied by the German colonists at Ashton Keynes, where farming, printing and other industries are carried on by the 200 members of the community.

The Bruderhof is a religious community holding all goods in common. They arrived in the locality in the spring of 1936.

Western Daily Press Saturday 29 October 1938

The Cotswold Bruderhof

Mr Robert Perkins asked the Minister of Labour the total number of British persons unemployed as a result of the purchase of Oaksey Manor and Park Farm, near Cirencester, by the German colony known as the Cotswold Bruderhof.

Mr E Brown in a written answer said he was having an inquiry made.

Gloucester Chronicle Monday 21 November 1938

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir

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

Wilts and Gloucester Standard Saturday 28 January 1939

Why it Wants to Purchase Oaksey Park Estate

Contrary to expectation, the meeting arranged by the Cotswold Bruderhof, and held at Oaksey Village Hall, passed off quietly.

A petition has recently been signed by residents of Oaksey and Ashton Keynes against the proposed purchase of Oaksey Park Estate by the Bruderhof, but nothing was mentioned about this petition at the meeting.

The hall was filled by villagers and members of the Bruderhof with their bearded faces and costumes of stockings, breeches, and course jacket.

Mr Arnold Mason presided, assisted by Mr Bruce Sumner. Both are British members of the community, and after their remarks, Mr W B Wilson, one of the keenest opponents to the Oaksey Park purchase, criticised the members for having sought shelter in England when they would not, because of their pacifist beliefs, defend England if she were attacked.

Mr Mason replied that the members who came from Germany fled from that country because they could not adopt the Nazi teaching; they were not, however, as had been suggested, members of the Communist movement. The Bruderhof had no interest whatever in politics.

Mr Mason outlined the history of the Bruderhof, and stated that the movement started in Wiltshire in 1936. At present the brotherhood farmed 310 acres of land at Ashton Keynes, about 210 acres being the property of the members, while the rest is rented. There was a herd of about 50 TT cows, 140 sheep, and 3,000 laying birds.

There was also a printing, publishing and bookbinding department, and various workshops. The sale of products helped to support the members. There was a school for the children of members and also for those children who were orphans.

The expenditure on maintenance and production during the three years that the organisation had existed at Ashton Keynes was about £15,000. Expenditure on building alone, apart from other capital expenditure, had so far been £12,000.

It had been asked, Mr Mason said, where the money came from. He said it came from members who had given all their possessions to the movement, and from friends in different parts of the country who had made contributions.

Speaking of the purchase of the Oaksey Park Estate, he explained that it had been found necessary to buy further property because of the increase in the number of the English members.

Mr Oliver Greenslade, of Hankerton, accused the Bruderhof of purchasing property in isolated places in order "to hide something."

Mr Mason replied that Mr Greenslade appeared to have been wrongly informed. The farm at Ashton Keynes was on the main road, and the fact that it had been visited by the Chief Constable of Wiltshire and the Bishop of Bristol did not coincide with the suggestion that the brotherhood sought privacy.

Western Daily Press Friday 17 February 1939

Cotswold Bruderhof and Oaksey Villagers

Members of the Bruderhof met villagers from Oaksey at a meeting in Oaksey village Hall on Wednesday evening. The hall was crowded and many stood. Mr Arnold Mason of the Bruderhof presided and the speaker was Mr Bruce Sumner another member of his group. He explained that their history goes back to the first Christians. They hold all in common and give to members according to their needs. They came to Ashton Keynes in 1936. The Home Office were acquainted with the nature of their work and the Ministry of Agriculture advised them on farming questions. It is an economic advantage to the neighbourhood with over 3,000 visitors. Financial help comes from the USA, Holland and Switzerland. They have bought Oaksey Park Farm to allow for an increase in English members. The existing workers can stay until they find work. The Bruderhof are ordinary people with a number of families. They are law abiding and loyal to the King and honour the government of the country we are in. There are 230 people in all, 80 married people, 70 British born subjects and some 60 aliens including 144 Germans (misprint?)

Question Time

Mr Wilson thought that their religious principles were quite beside the point. "You say you were refugees driven out of you own country. Is it right to say you were outlawed because you refused to obey the regulations of the one who is set in authority over Germany who suspected you also I imagine of being more or less Communistic. Did you not come to England because you knew it was a safe country to?" He also went on to say that their principles prevented them defending this sheltering country Mr Mason – said they could not include NAZI teaching in their school. Everything they had said that evening made it obvious that they had no Communist or any political connection.

Mr Wilson – How can you justify yourself in taking the bread out of the mouths of Englishmen?

Mr Mason – We have tried to show that the Bruderhof is not a liability but an asset.

Mrs A D Godwin – What is your attitude towards dumb animals.

Mr Mason – We treat them as decently as possible, as decently as you all here would.

Mrs Godwin – Would you object to a visit from the RSPCA.

Mr Mason – We would welcome it very much.

Mr Oliver Greenslade – Why buy property away from the highways?

Mr Mason – The Ashton Keynes Bruderhof was right by the main road.

Another asked what they would do if attacked by an enemy.

Mr Mason – They would not take life.

Mr Wilson – What would happen to the Bruderhof if war broke out.

Mr Mason – I have no idea, we should very much like to know.

Wilts and Gloucester Standard Saturday 18 February 1939

Letter to the Editor

Bruderhof Meeting at Oaksey

Sir, By an overwhelming majority the inhabitants of Oaksey petitioned against a Bruderhof settlement in our village. The Rector of the parish signed the petition. The Bruderhof held a public meeting in the village last week The Rector was present. The Vicar of Kemble a parish some 4 miles away accorded a very hearty vote of thanks to the Bruderhof for their "sincerity of purpose". From a clerical point of view what an indiscretion indeed, what a farce. Perhaps the Vicar of Kemble might give the Bruderhof in view of their "sincerity of purpose" a pressing invitation to have the settlement in his parish instead of Oaksey.

Yours etc. Petitioner Oaksey

Wilts and Gloucester Standard Saturday 25 February 1939

Bruderhof

RCH Arnold of the Bruderhof expresses love and gratitude to the British Nation and Government. He gives a brief history of how the commune in Germany was broken up in 1937 property and land was confiscated and there was expulsion for the German members. He was thankful to the British Government for tolerance not shown by Hitler. In recompense and to show loyalty and the importance of agriculture they have put a further 100 acres under the plough at Ashton Keynes and Oaksey since Autumn of last year. At the same time keeping 100 cows in milk and more than 50 young stock on each farm. Our garden produce is in great demand especially in and around centres such as Bristol where great numbers of evacuee women and children must be fed. If we can assist neighbouring farms we will be glad to do so. We will do what we can for evacuee mothers and children. May we repeat that we entirely disapprove of the ways of the Nazi regime in Germany (which deprived us of our home and property) and that we on the basis of Christian teaching owe allegiance to the Government of Britain to whose people and institutions we feel deeply attached and indebted.

Wilts and Gloucester Standard Saturday 23 September 1939

The Future of the Cotswold Bruderhof

The future of the Cotswold Bruderhof, a community of people of various nationalities who live a communal life at Ashton Keynes, has been linked up during the week-end with the report that half of the members are planning to move and make a new home in Paraguay, South America.

The possibility of a public utility undertaking being formed to carry on the management of the Bruderhof has also been suggested.

When we rang up the Bruderhof to-day, we were told that no definite plans had been made.

"We have been thinking very much about our position and what the future has for us," said one member of the community. "Like most people, we feel that it is difficult to say anything about the future, and we are carrying on at Ashton Keynes."

The Oaksey part of the Bruderhof Estate was recently disposed of by auction, and all the members of the community are now at Ashton Keynes.

Gloucester Echo Monday 18 November 1940