

# Rolf Gardiner, English patriot and the Council for the Church and Countryside\*

by R. J. Moore-Colyer

## Abstract

With the seemingly inexorable advance of organicism from the fringes of 'muck and mystery' towards the core of current agrarian strategy, the career of Rolf Gardiner, one of the most original thinkers among the inter-war ruralists and an early propagandist for the Soil Association, is of considerable significance to modern agricultural and rural history. In reviewing aspects of Gardiner's earlier career, engaging with the difficult issue of his political allegiances, and considering his association with the Council for the Church and Countryside, this article seeks to portray Gardiner as a paternalistic patriot bent upon the regeneration of rural England.

Rolf Gardiner (1902–1971) farmer, forester, folk dancer, poet and visionary, has recently been the subject of considerable attention on the part of agricultural, ecological, political and social historians of the inter-war period. Interest has tended to focus in particular on his close association with the various German youth movements, his attempts to promote rural reconstruction by way of direct engagement with the land through physical labour, dance and music, and his role as an early enthusiast for organic farming and its socio-cultural ramifications. His motives for trying to create a centre for rural regeneration at Gore Farm, near Shaftesbury in Dorset (originally the property of his uncle, the composer Balfour Gardiner) and subsequently at the nearby Springhead estate which he purchased in the early 1930s, have been variously ascribed to eccentricity, an obsession with neo-feudalism, and a dark and devious attempt to subvert rural England and prepare the ground for fascism.<sup>1</sup> He stands accused of naziphilia and anti-Semitism and, together with friends in the Springhead Ring and Kinship in Husbandry,

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<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, R. Griffiths, *Fellow travellers of the Right. British enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933–39* (1983); A. Bramwell, *Ecology in the twentieth century: a history* (1989); M. Chase, 'Rolf Gardiner: an inter-war cross cultural case study', in B. Hake and M. Chase (eds), *Adult Education between Cultures* (1992); D. Matless *Landscape and Englishness* (1998). P. Wright, *The village that died for England* (1995) refers extensively to Gardiner and his activities. Malcolm Chase has explored Gardiner's environmentalist and racialist ideas in 'Heartbreak Hill: environment, unemployment and "back to the land" in inter-war Cleveland', *Oral Hist.* 28 (2000), pp. 33–42. Gardiner himself includes many biographical details in *England herself: ventures in rural restoration* (1943) while Andrew Best includes selections from Gardiner's enormous volume of writing (much of it unpublished) in *Water springing from the ground. An anthology of the writings of Rolf Gardiner* (1972). In addition to various books and chapters quoted below, Gardiner published his thoughts in a variety of works emanating from Springhead including *Wessex: Letters from Springhead*; *North Sea and Baltic*; and the *Springhead Ring Newsheet*, all of which are to be found in the Gardiner archive in Cambridge University Library.

of attempting to formulate an obscurantist and extreme right-wing political and social agenda under the guise of promoting organicism.<sup>2</sup> Rolf Gardiner's achievements as a forester (in which subject he trained at Dartington Hall in the early 1930s), a supporter of the Young Farmers Clubs, a promoter of the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, a founder member of the Soil Association, a folk dancer of great skill and understanding, and an ecologist and practical farmer, have hitherto received little attention in the literature.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, his dedication to the family business in London and his involvement with the family estates in Nyasaland (Malawi), to the social and economic development of which country he made a considerable and recognized contribution, have rarely been acknowledged. Gardiner unquestionably held some extreme views as a younger man. Although he continued to cling to his belief in the rectitude of traditional rural values and the appropriateness of a paternalist approach to rural development, his opinions evolved and mellowed over the years.

While the present article is essentially concerned with his activities in youth and middle age, a future biographer will be able to show that as a thinker and man of action, Rolf Gardiner's achievements in a variety of enterprises, to some degree facilitated by his youthful experience, substantially transcended what some would regard as the political naïvety of his earlier years. Drawing upon a variety of sources, including Gardiner's own writings and the Gardiner archive in Cambridge University Library, this article seeks to redefine the man as a passionate English patriot; an engaging, warm-hearted individual with an abundance of energy who genuinely craved a self-supporting rural England within a northern European confederation. It also examines in some detail just one of his many activities and enthusiasms thereby to illustrate the extent of his concern with the vital business of rural reconstruction.

## I

The argument that urban industrial 'modernism' was a chief cause of social ills (which abstract academic intellectualism was incapable of comprehending) was an important political sub-culture on the British Right in the inter-war period. Rolf Gardiner was among the first anti-urban ruralist writers and activists with a genuine understanding of the practicalities of farming to question the propriety of an economic policy which demanded cheap food for the industrial population at the cost of ecological devastation abroad and profound agricultural depression at home. With the repeal, in 1921, of the Agriculture Act of 1920, Britain had become exposed

<sup>2</sup> For the 'Kinship in Husbandry' see R. J. Moore-Colyer, 'Back to Basics: Rolf Gardiner, H. J. Massingham and the Kinship in Husbandry', *Rural Hist.* 12 (2001), pp. 85–108; M. Reed, "'Fight the Future". How the contemporary campaigns of the UK organic movement have arisen from the composting of the past', *Sociologia Ruralis* 41 (2001), pp. 131–145.

<sup>3</sup> It is worthy of note that in the last year of his life Gardiner was made an Honorary Member of the Institute of Landscape Architects and was awarded (as part of the Europe Prize for Landscape Husbandry) the Peter Joseph Lenné Gold Medal for services to European youth,

for his forestry work in Dorset and Malawi and his contribution to the European Working Party for Landscape Husbandry which he had founded in 1963 (Best, *Water springing*, pp. xiii–xiv). For Springhead see R. Gardiner, 'Springhead. A centre for rural restoration in Wessex', *J. Soil Association* 9 (1957), pp. 3–16; 'Seven years at Springhead', *North Sea and Baltic*, new ser. 7, Midwinter, 1940–1. Gardiner and his wife Marabel spent the first year of their marriage in 1932–3 at Dartington Hall where Marabel pursued a secretarial course (personal communication from Mrs. Rosalind Richards).

once again to the realities of world market forces and, as she increasingly became the dumping ground for international food products, home prices began to decline while production costs spiralled inexorably upwards.<sup>4</sup> The inevitable concomitants of agricultural dereliction, the decay of craft skills and rural depopulation, were a matter of indifference to many politicians and most of the public, the former realising that the farming interest represented only 6.7 per cent of the voting workforce, and the latter believing in the indefinite continuity of what appeared to be almost limitless supplies of cheap food. Indeed, serious questions were raised as to whether farming was even a necessary component of the economy of a great industrial power.<sup>5</sup> Agitation for tariff reform and government assistance throughout the 1920s fell largely on deaf ears as successive administrations refused to allow agriculture to become a charge on public funds.<sup>6</sup> However, despite the anti-protectionist polemics of Beveridge and his colleagues, the 1931 National Government, with its powerful Tory membership, embarked upon a policy of subsidized support. As *laissez-faire* was steadily abandoned, a raft of protectionist measures were put into place.<sup>7</sup> Even so, overseas sources still supplied some 65 per cent of British food by 1937 and while some sectors began to recover, the agricultural industry remained generally depressed and the problem of rural depopulation continued unabated.<sup>8</sup>

To ruralist writers and activists like Rolf Gardiner, H. J. Massingham, R. G. Stapledon and others, the betrayal of agriculture and its abandonment to world market forces had been a standing reproach.<sup>9</sup> Gardiner, in particular, wanted to create a vibrant, productive rural England where quality was paramount and where men were taught to understand the basic reality of farming as a sacramental act whereby a closeness to the earth and a holistic understanding would ensure long-term sustainability. He was, above all, a man of action. As an eighteen year old student of modern languages at Cambridge, he wrote (setting out what was to remain his lifetime philosophy), '... to live means to live in the body, in the physical, live, tangible world of sense, to be part of the sensual rhythm of life, with its birth, marriage, parenthood and death, with spring, summer, autumn and winter: to try and live in pure thought is to live in death'.<sup>10</sup>

If a single over-arching theme to Rolf Gardiner's lifetime aspirations were to be identified, it would be that of rural regeneration; of the imperative to reverse the progressive deterioration of the fortunes of English agriculture after 1920.<sup>11</sup> In this context it is perhaps hardly surprising that he found some facets of the early rural programmes of German National Socialism highly

<sup>4</sup> E. H. Whetham, 'The Agriculture Act 1920 and its repeal -- the "Great Betrayal"', *AgHR* 22 (1974), p. 48; A. F. Cooper, 'Another look at the "Great Betrayal"', *Agricultural Hist.* 60 (1986), pp. 80-104.

<sup>5</sup> For details see R. J. Moore-Colyer, 'From Great Wen to Toad Hall. Aspects of the urban-rural divide in inter-war Britain', *Rural Hist.* 10 (1999), pp. 105-7.

<sup>6</sup> M. Tracy, 'Fifty years of agricultural policy', *J. Agricultural Economics* 17 (1976), p. 332.

<sup>7</sup> Id., *Government and Agriculture in Western Europe, 1880-1988* (1989), p. 161; W. H. Beveridge (ed.), *Tariff: the case examined* (1931).

<sup>8</sup> T. Rooth, 'Trade agreements and the evolution of British agricultural policy in the 1930s', *AgHR* 32 (1985),

p. 190; J. Saville, *Rural depopulation in England and Wales* (1957). For some of the means of adjustment to the new realities see R. J. Moore-Colyer, 'Farming in depression: Wales between the Wars, 1919-1939', *AgHR* 46 (1998), pp. 177-196.

<sup>9</sup> Moore-Colyer, 'Back to Basics'; id., 'Sir George Stapledon (1882-1960) and the landscape of Britain', *Environment and History* 5 (1999), pp. 221-36. For Massingham see id., 'A voice clamouring in the wilderness: H. J. Massingham (1888-1952) and rural England', *Rural Hist.* (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> *Youth* 2 (11), Oct. 1923.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Moore-Colyer, 'Farming in depression'.

appealing, only to become disenchanted when these were, as H. J. Massingham put it, '... sacrificed to the Baal of war'.<sup>12</sup> Suspicious of mechanisation and reductionist science, anti-collective and pro-peasant, Gardiner's complex world view had its roots in the thinking of Ruskin and William Morris, while echoes of the polemics of William Cobbett can readily be detected in his writings. The various Catholic back-to-the-land movements of the inter-war period also attracted his attention, and the views of Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton with their phobia for state power and fascination with the efficacy of the self-contained 'organic' community also struck a common chord.<sup>13</sup>

In March 1920 a group of Cambridge undergraduates launched the journal *Cocoon*, which shortly afterwards changed its name to *Youth* and was in the main engaged with Labour party politics and Guild Socialism. But in the Cambridge of the 1920s, domestic social problems and the shenanigans of politicians of various hues were of less immediate interest than a kind of mystical internationalism which found expression in the German youth movements with their louche fascination with hiking, nudism and other arcane aspects of what Arthur Marwick has termed '... the swinging Weimar Republic'.<sup>14</sup> This was meat and drink to the bilingual Gardiner who had belonged to the Social Credit Study Circle which had launched *Cocoon*.<sup>15</sup> When he took over the editorship of the journal early in 1923 he immediately set about the process of re-orientating the 'International Quarterly of Young Enterprise' towards the prime objective of forging closer links between the various youth movements of England and northern Europe.<sup>16</sup> English interest in continental youth activity was focussed primarily upon the Bünde, fellowships of young men which had emerged from the *Wandervögel* and *Pfadfinder* traditions of the years before the Great War. Apolitical, idealistic, and dedicated to work-service (*Arbeitsdienst*), the essentially bourgeois and *völkisch* Bünde were contemptuous of the libertarianism of Weimar and scathing of its artificiality, insincerity and materialist obsessions. Self-consciously masculine, disciplined and controlled, the Bünde grouped themselves around a variety of charismatic leaders associated with the Deutsche Freischar and in addition to hiking, singing, dancing, and attendance at work camps, they managed to effect a number of solid achievements, including the establishment of the influential *Musikheim* at Frankfurt-an-der-Oder under the direction of Rolf Gardiner's close friend Georg Götsch.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-1920s Gardiner was a regular visitor

<sup>12</sup> H. J. Massingham (ed.), *England and the farmer* (1945), p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> J. M. Corrin, *G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. The battle against modernity* (1981); J. L. Spear, *Dreams of an English Eden: Ruskin and his traditions in social criticism* (1984).

<sup>14</sup> A. Marwick, 'Youth in Britain, 1920-1960; detachment and commitment', *J. Contemporary Hist.*, 5 (1970), p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> Gardiner's father was the distinguished Egyptologist Sir Alan Henderson Gardiner and his mother Hedwig was of Austro-Hungarian and Swedo-Finnish ancestry.

<sup>16</sup> Although *Youth* was published in London, Gardiner had been offered the use of a private press owned by friend and fellow undergraduate C. H. Waddington who was eventually to become a geneticist and embryologist

of international renown, to say nothing of holding a CBE in addition to his Fellowship of the Royal Society. Waddington called his press 'The Loft' whence issued, in 1925, a slender volume entitled *Fanfreluche* which contained poems by himself, Gardiner and Vernon Watkins among others (Cambridge University Library (hereafter CUL), Rolf Gardiner MSS, C4/3/3, C4/3/1). In his first editorial Gardiner launched a full-frontal attack on J. M. Keynes and 'the metallist thinkers of Bloomsbury and Kings', only to receive a disarming note from Keynes congratulating him on the excellence of his editorial (Best, *Water springing*, p. 18).

<sup>17</sup> W. Laqueur, *Young Germany. A history of the German youth movements* (1962). As Laqueur points out, when the Bünde were abolished by the Nazis in 1933, many members joined the Hitler Youth, although

to Germany whence he travelled with his folk-dance group and became closely involved with various youth organizations, arranging reciprocal exchanges with English groups, and establishing linkages which were to prove increasingly fruitful over the years as the Springhead venture got underway. He found in the middle and upper middle class youngsters who made up the bulk of the Bünde, an idealism and commitment sadly lacking in England, writing in 1928, 'The new Germans are young, brave, ardent, enthusiastic, alive. The modern British are mature, cautious, over-critical, over-prudent, tired. We are so terribly refined and so overweeningly self-conscious that we can no longer commit ourselves'.<sup>18</sup> As he attended the work camps in Silesia or engaged in work service elsewhere in the Weimar Republic, Gardiner built up a network of close friends who were long to hold a powerful influence over him. These included the Islamicist and Prussian Education Minister, Carl Heinrich Becker (1876–1933), the youth leader Ernst Buske (d. 1930), Director of the Musikheim, Georg Götsch (1895–1956), the academic Eugen Rosenstock (1888–1944) who left Germany in 1933 to teach at Dartmouth in Vermont, and Adolph Reichswein (1898–1944) whose implication in the 1944 plot to kill Hitler led to his execution. To these men, all deeply involved with the education aspects of the youth movements, Gardiner was a vitally important link to kindred movements in England. As Laqueur noted, '... his name stood high in the esteem of youth movement circles long after the severance of relations between the two countries'.<sup>19</sup>

Malcolm Chase has admirably described Gardiner's attempts to introduce the work camp to England in the 1930s by way of land reclamation schemes for unemployed ironstone workers in Cleveland. The work camps were seen as vehicles of community training and service, instruments of social and political change and as a sort of platform of reconciliation between different social groups. Through physical labour, music and intellectual exchange, differences would be broken down, bonds formed, and a sense of common purpose attained. Gardiner recorded these activities years later (along with close descriptions of his musical tours of northern Europe), all of which were aimed at establishing mutual understanding which, in the long term, would counteract the tendency to a future war which the conditions of the Versailles agreement had made a distinct possibility. The Cleveland work camps, Springhead harvest camps and other enterprises were entirely voluntary, and Gardiner hoped, would develop countrywide to begin the task of national reconstruction and renovation. As work service camps helped clean up the mess left by industrialisation, engaged in land reclamation and provided

there is no evidence of these movements being precursors of the Nazi youth model. Indeed, in Hitler's mouth, the term 'Wandervogel' was an insult (p. 241). The Musikheim was a college of the social arts founded in 1929 under the auspices of Carl Heinrich Becker. The arts were taught (in a building designed by Otto Bartning) through various rhythmical forms, the idea being that community living could best be learned by way of music, dance and movement, with much emphasis on health and wholeness. The philosophy of the Musikheim (if such a vague set of notions can be so-described) influenced Rolf Gardiner throughout his life. (See R. Gardiner, 'The Story of the Musikheim, Frankfurt/

Oder, 1928–1933', in *Wessex: Letters from Springhead*, sec. ser., 3, Harvest 1947.)

<sup>18</sup> R. Gardiner and H. Rocholl (eds), *Britain and Germany. A frank discussion instigated by members of the younger generation* (1928) p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*, p. 41. Reichswein, a socialist pedagogical expert, was a member of the 'Kreisau Circle' of plotters against Hitler who had rejected Nazism from an early stage. They drew their inspiration from the German youth movements and Christian philosophies, looking forward to a future in which national sovereignty would give way to a federal Europe. (I. Ker-shaw, *Hitler, 1933–1945, Nemesis* (2000), p. 666.)

labour for numerous farms, so they would become '... the university of wholeness and renewal which we need within each nation and between nations essentially akin'.<sup>20</sup> Gardiner's concept of the importance of service had essentially been crystallized in the early 1920s as he grappled with *Youth*. In 1924 he joined John Hargrave's Kibbo Kift Kindred, an organisation of almost impenetrable philosophical outlook which had arisen as a breakaway movement from the Boy Scouts.<sup>21</sup> Beyond the mysticism and woodcraft mumbo-jumbo, the Kibbo Kift was fundamentally internationalist and pacifist, seeking a world of democracy, peace and distributive justice. Concurrently, rather like the Bünde with which it maintained close contacts, the Kibbo Kift emphasized the creation of an élite corps of leaders, setting up a training programme from childhood to adulthood which would recapitulate the primitive phases of human development so to evolve a new élite physically and mentally superior to its predecessors.<sup>22</sup> Gardiner rapidly rose to the position of 'Gleemaster' to the Kibbo Kift although, in common with many others in the movement, he became increasingly disillusioned with Hargrave's cunning deviousness and autocratic and hectoring style of leadership. He soon convinced himself, moreover, that the Kibbo Kift was over-obsessed with theoretical abstraction and had '... no living roots in the earth of England, no blood-contact with the living part of English earth'.<sup>23</sup> Shortly before he resigned from the movement in 1925, he produced (in a typically Gardinerian gesture) an anti-Kibbo Kift broadside entitled *Suburbia Defenda Est*. 'The Kibbo Kift is the supreme instance of suburban idealism trying to create order out of the chaos of its own excreta. Behind its whole creation there is a ghastly vacuum and absence of belief, belief of the blood and the soul. Never can man create from the will, save to produce forms which have no meaning, no real content'.<sup>24</sup> From now on he would pursue his own efforts to mobilize English youth.

Throughout this period, and like many others of his generation, Gardiner had been profoundly influenced by D. H. Lawrence whose sensual fascination with nature-worship and the earth and whose fundamental anti-urbanism struck a profound chord. The two men corresponded regularly from 1924, meeting for the first time in London in 1926. In the winter of 1928 Gardiner stayed with the Lawrences at Les Diablerets.<sup>25</sup> It was probably Lawrence, with his

<sup>20</sup> *The Springhead News Sheet*, 54, 1957. He described the work camp principles in detail in 'The triple function of work camps and work service in Europe', (*North Sea and Baltic* 2, Harvest, 1937) and identified distinctions between the German volunteers attending the Springhead harvest camps. 'Among the Germans moulded by the regimentation of National Socialism ... we noticed tendencies towards a certain hard emptiness and mechanical enthusiasm which the Freischar had never shown, it seemed to us a warning against the dangers of the will to be this or that, an inevitable weariness resulting from over-insistence and the mechanising of customs'.

<sup>21</sup> Gardiner relinquished the editorship of *Youth* in 1924, after which the periodical was relaunched under the same name as the mouthpiece of the British Federation of Youth, in which guise it managed to struggle on until the autumn of 1929.

<sup>22</sup> J. Springhall, *Youth, empire and society* (1977), p. 113; P. Wilkinson, 'English youth movements, 1908-30',

*J. Contemporary Hist.* 4 (1969), pp. 12-24. Long after Gardiner had left the Kibbo Kift, the organisation espoused the anti-mercantilist philosophy of Social Credit pioneered by C. H. Douglas (J. L. Finlay, 'John Hargrave, the Green Shirts and social credit', *J. Contemporary Hist.* 5 (1970), pp. 58-9).

<sup>23</sup> Gardiner to Hargave, 17 June 1925, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, C6/1/15.

<sup>24</sup> CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, C5/2. He was later to dismiss the Kibbo Kift as 'mummery'. Nevertheless he remained in contact with several of its officers throughout the 1930s and despite his acrimonious break with Hargrave, the two men met again many years later at Springhead as they both approached old age. Their relationship will be considered in a future article.

<sup>25</sup> On 12 Feb. 1928, Lawrence wrote to Dorothy Brett from Les Diablerets, 'Rolf Gardiner came up for three days to see us - the young man who does morris dances and all that. He's very nice, but not much in my line!'

acerbic criticism of John Hargrave, who finally persuaded Gardiner that he should abandon the Kibbo Kift. If youth are going to take action, wrote the older man from New Mexico in August 1924, let it be youth on the warpath, free of '... wandervogling and piping imitation nature tunes to the taste of a cake of milk chocolate ... all this blasted snivelling of hopelessness and self-pity and stars and wind among the trees and campfires and witanagemotry – shit!'.<sup>26</sup> This was strong meat indeed and typical of the 'brotherly and fortifying concern' which Gardiner divined in Lawrence's letters. Lawrence, it seems, persuaded Gardiner that Gore Farm might become a centre for rural revival, even suggesting that the two men collaborate in the enterprise. Sceptical of Gardiner's work camps, which he regarded as being little better than going to prison for two weeks' hard labour, Lawrence emphasized the need for '... a little ark somewhere in a quiet place ... like the oracle at Delphos, where one can always come to'.<sup>27</sup> A decade later Springhead was to become that very centre, supported and sustained by the 'Springhead Ring', comprising the sort of individuals whom Lawrence had proposed in 1928; 'You need to have a few, very few who *are* conscious and willing to be conscious ... a silent, central flame. Keep the core sound and the rest will look after itself'.<sup>28</sup>

In the later 1920s Gardiner was occupied with the refurbishing of Gore Farm (with the assistance of work camp volunteers from England and Germany), although by linking this mundane work with music and dance in such a way that labour, leisure, comradeship and co-operation were somehow conflated, he saw this task as yet another means of developing a sense of purpose for the young. Music, dance, rhythm, and physical labour, as the *Musikheim* had showed, were also inherently important in the training of élite leadership. In this respect the form of the music was crucially important. For Gardiner, the development of the concert hall and 'the bourgeois opera house' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had detached music from society so that it eventually came to be written for an essentially passive audience, offering opportunities for individual artistic self-expression and egocentric display.<sup>29</sup> This would

(J. T. Boulton *et al.* (eds), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (7 vols, 1979–93), VI, p. 293). Even so, Lawrence wrote at least nineteen letters to Gardiner, some of these of considerable length. The correspondence petered out in 1928, due, as Gardiner readily admitted, to his own busyness and neglect (*Wessex: Letters from Springhead*, 4th ser., 4 (2) (1959)).

<sup>26</sup> Boulton *et al.* (eds), *Letters of Lawrence*, V, p. 93.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, V, p. 96. The Springhead archive contains a letter written by an elderly Frieda Lawrence to Gardiner's daughter Mrs Rosalind Richards, in which she explains that Rolf Gardiner was one of the few young men who gave Lawrence hope for the future (personal communication from Mrs. Rosalind Richards).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, pp. 257–8. Gardiner describes the activities of the Springhead Ring in Best, *Water springing*, pp. 143–53 and pp. 204–5. The Ring was a circle of friends from a wide social and cultural spectrum united by the cultivation of music, the development of land service camps and the fostering of cultural relations between England and northern Europe. During the post-war years it

became increasingly devoted to music, attracting many national and international figures to its gatherings. Gardiner's son, the distinguished musicologist and conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner currently lives at Gore Farm while his daughter, the violinist Rosalind Richards, resides at Springhead which is run (via the Rolf and Marabel Gardiner Trust) as an educational centre for ecological, rural and musical courses. In all its facets Springhead continues to foster the ethos of holism and organicism.

<sup>29</sup> Writing of Chopin and Schumann in his diary on 7 Aug. 1927, Gardiner noted that it was '... odd how I instinctively reject this romantic music now. It plays with our emotional machinery and stirs up sentiment; but I feel the process to be somehow indecent' (CUL microfilm 9631). Gardiner's friend, the professional musician Christopher Mayson, reckoned that his knowledge and appreciation of music ended with Bach and upbraided him for the dogmatic way in which he dismissed music post-Beethoven. (CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, CS/1/1, Mayson to Gardiner, 30 June 1927).

never do. Music should not be an end in itself, a titillator of sensation or excitement, or an opiate for the masses, but an essential and organic part of the daily workaday world. Thus '... the ritual dances and mumming plays were essential to the tilling of the land and good husbandry; the masques of the Tudor and Stuart courts did veritably ennoble and intensify the power and glory of government'.<sup>30</sup> Before the seventeenth century, Gardiner argued, music demanded individual self-effacement in the interests of group emotional totality. Since polyphonic forms compelled obedience to a rigidly controlled structure, this was essentially 'statebuilding' music. Precisely the same principle applied to folk dancing which offered both 'a liberation of the spirit' but at the same time had a clearly defined hierarchical structure which ultimately required individual display to give way to group harmony. Gardiner had long been suspicious of the 'Folk Revival' spearheaded by the English Folk Dance Society under Cecil Sharp and subsequently Douglas Kennedy. The 'Travelling Morrice' which he founded in 1924 with Arthur Heffer (1900–31) attempted to perform the authentic and potently symbolic forms of morris and sword dancing. This contrasted starkly with the sanitized and stylized offerings of the EFDS who rather disapproved of Gardiner's wild excursions. 'The EFDS don't like my dancing', he lamented to his diary in May 1923, 'bad cess to them. To hell with their fiddly-fuddly blundering bourgeois technique. Of course I'm eccentric in this point, and glad to be ...'.<sup>31</sup> As far as Gardiner was concerned, the *real* traditional dance formed powerful bonds between the male group which, by some indefinable chemistry, would become the vehicle of arcane powers and equipped with the skills to form the nucleus of a new society. Through the association of the dance with the ultimate realities of the earth, they would achieve a profound insight of true organicism which would ultimately refresh and invigorate English culture.<sup>32</sup>

If rural leadership were to emerge in England from among those deeply immersed in the land and rural culture, this would not necessarily be leadership within the traditional aristocratic context. Keen as he was to preserve the aristocratic ethos where there remained some cultural vitality among landowning families, Gardiner did not consider rank, titles and money to be sufficient qualifications in themselves. He looked forward to the day when a new aristocratic leadership would arise from among those of all classes who had contributed to work-camps, involved themselves in exchanges with northern European groups and undergone appropriate apprenticeship on traditional farms and estates. Only through mutual co-operative service would men and women of innately superior character earn affection and allegiance, thence to become an élite – a genuine aristocracy of free, independent spirits unshackled by petty codes and strictures, who would be in a position to co-ordinate the various and sometimes conflicting interests in the countryside. There was, he believed, no room in the countryside for absentee landlords, foxhunting squires, or the *nouveaux riches* townsmen who failed to bear the full burden of rural responsibility. As he developed these thoughts over the years, Gardiner became

<sup>30</sup> 'Reflections on Music and Statecraft', a paper read to the English Mistery by Gardiner in October, 1933, in Best, *Water springing*, pp. 95–100.

<sup>31</sup> CUL, microfilm 9631. Interestingly enough Douglas Kennedy (1893–1988) makes no mention of Gardiner in his *English Folk Dancing* (1954) although as an RAF pilot during the Second World War he became a member of

the 'Kinship in Husbandry' of which Gardiner was a prime mover. (For 'The Travelling Morrice' see *North Sea and Baltic*, new ser., 4, High Summer, 1938.)

<sup>32</sup> These issues are explored in some detail in G. Boyes, *The Imagined Village. Culture, identity and the English revival* (1989), pp. 154–60.



sceptical of the value of formal systems of rural education offered at universities and colleges, believing that the landed estate itself should form the focal point of agricultural training and of rural reconstruction. Here a working landownership would offer opportunities for land settlement, co-operation, apprenticeship and profit-sharing, at the same time sponsoring craftsmanship, and contributing to social and cultural life.<sup>33</sup> As he indicated in his memorandum of evidence to the 1942 Scott Committee on Land Utilisation, statutory bodies and salaried administrative officials would never advance the cause of rural regeneration which would be far better left to leader-landowners who would nurture and enliven a local area and its interests. 'Such planning would repose on existing or submerged realities rather than be imposed ruthlessly from above and without; it would cause a redevelopment of English traditions instead of their obliteration; it would protect those two great characteristics of England – local self-reliance and *genius loci*?<sup>34</sup> His memorandum was studiously ignored.

Since he was a young man Gardiner had distrusted bureaucracy, a distrust which became almost paranoiac over the years. Rows with the Ministry of Agriculture over such diverse issues as the flax industry, mechanization and rural education convinced him of what he perceived as the iniquities of bureaucratic intransigence.<sup>35</sup> So great was the danger of the creation of 'an ersatz aristocracy of smooth commissars and bureaucrats', he warned the Country Landowners Association in the summer of 1943, that a post-war conference of estate heirs should be held to consider ways of countering the dead hand of the bureaucrat in devising the future shape of the countryside.<sup>36</sup> There can be little doubting Rolf Gardiner's paternalist and ultra-conservative perspective. He craved order and strong government committed to rural and by implication national, regeneration. He believed, with many others of his contemporaries, that only authoritarian government could properly deliver the sort of reforms required to revitalize a depressed countryside without bolshevik collectivisation. But yet, unlike his friend, the ecologist and plant-breeder R. G. Stapledon, or the ruralist early Welsh Nationalist Ambrose Bebb, Gardiner had little time for fascism as such. Bebb, for example, proclaimed the need for a Welsh Mussolini, a man of strength and power, '... the only things that count in the myriad troubles and battles of this iron age'.<sup>37</sup> Stapledon waxed lyrical over the Duce's reclamation schemes, while several of his books carry chilling hints of an eugenically determined future.<sup>38</sup> Others of Gardiner's friends either overtly or covertly espoused the fascist course. A close, and much-valued personal friend Gerald Wallop, Lord Lyminster (and subsequently Earl of Portsmouth) published a number of works replete with fascist, pro-German and anti-Semitic elements, while another associate, Jorian Jenks, was agricultural advisor to Mosley's British Union of Fascists

<sup>33</sup> He struggled manfully, but to no avail, to persuade the authorities to provide financial support for the development of Springhead itself as 'a rural University'. (See 'On the functions of a rural university', *North Sea and Baltic*, special issue, 3 Sept. 1933).

<sup>34</sup> R. Gardiner, 'Estates as pivots of regional development'; Memorandum of Evidence submitted to Lord Justice Scott's Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas, 1942. (Also 'Estates as centres of rural reconstruction, *North Sea and Baltic*, new ser. 7,

Midwinter, 1940-1).

<sup>35</sup> For the saga of the Slape Flax Mill, Fontmell Industries and the argument over quality (Gardiner) versus quantity (the Ministry), see *England herself*, pp. 98-124.

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, 31 July 1943.

<sup>37</sup> D. H. Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party, 1923-1945: A call to nationhood* (1983), p. 97.

<sup>38</sup> For Stapledon see Moore-Colyer, 'Sir George Stapledon, (1882-1960) and the landscape of Britain'.

and one of the Front's leading propagandists.<sup>39</sup> The best-known Mosleyite ruralist of them all, Henry Williamson (who injudiciously decorated his Norfolk farm with the BUF symbol), was among Gardiner's correspondents and the two men met from time to time.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, despite Jenks' cajolings, Gardiner was careful *not* to invite Mosley to Springhead after the latter had been released from internment.<sup>41</sup> He was particularly keen to avoid further embarrassment at Springhead where the local gentry were convinced of his Nazi associations and besides, he regarded Mosleyite fascism as '... the pathetic attempts of suburbia to re-establish itself in the soil'.<sup>42</sup> Like H. J. Massingham, C. Henry Warren and other contemporaries, Gardiner's writings are anti-urban, anti-industrial and deprecatory of a left-wing policy which viewed agricultural progress in terms of ever-increasing mechanization and expanding production targets. So what was Gardiner, an unreconstructed élitist, trying to achieve? How close were his views, to those of the Freikorps officers who stalked Germany in the 1920s, and of whom many embraced National Socialism?<sup>43</sup>

## II

Rolf Gardiner was an unashamed Germanist despite his references to the 'fanatical impatience' of Nazism and 'the paranoia of Hitlerism' once war had broken out.<sup>44</sup> Yet in the early 1930s he divined Hitler's vision in almost mystical terms, and while he had reservations over many aspects of Nazi policy, he saw within the concept of National Socialism the seeds of a united Europe. Thus he strongly urged the reorientation of English geopolitics away from the Empire and in the direction of Europe. This would be an 'organic' Europe where men lived according to natural law, '... the subjection of ourselves and our tools to a large organic authority, the authority of the Natural Order, which is based on rhythmic law'.<sup>45</sup> Germany, of course, had

<sup>39</sup> Described by Bramwell, *Ecology in the twentieth century*, p. 122 as 'an extraordinary patriot and adventurer', Portsmouth supported the idea of benevolent dictatorship within a united Europe. He had led the English Array and founded the English Mystery in 1936, the latter being an organization of mainly landowners and ex-officers who opposed war with Germany and were much-concerned with matters of soil fertility and environmental pollution. The issue of a balanced agriculture was uppermost in his maiden speech in the Lords as Earl of Portsmouth in 1943 (*Hansard*, House of Lords, 129, 143). He met Mussolini in 1932 and Hitler in 1939 and by his own admission was lucky to avoid wartime internment. (See his autobiography, *A Knot of Roots* (1965).)

<sup>40</sup> Williamson to Gardiner, April 1941; 31 July 1945; 30 Dec. 1949 (CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5).

<sup>41</sup> Jenks to Gardiner, 14 Aug., 2 Sept. 1945 (CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5). Jenks, a farmer, had been BUF candidate for Horsham and Worthing in 1936 and was interned in 1940. He wrote a weekly column for Mosley's *Action* from 1937 until the Autumn of 1940 and was an unashamed apologist for fascist land rights policies. Although still serving on Mosley's Union Movement after

the war, he became the first editorial secretary of the Soil Association's journal, *Mother Earth*. His numerous books seem to cross the corporatist/organic divide, and by 1950 had become completely committed to the organicist cause, having shifted from a belief in totalitarian teamwork to the idea of the virtues of the small family farm unit.

<sup>42</sup> R. Gardiner, *World without end. British politics and the younger generation* (1932), pp. 33-9. While he deplored war with Germany, Rolf Gardiner immediately applied to join the Home Guard. Such were the suspicions of the authorities, however, he was refused - to his continued chagrin and disappointment (personal communication from Mrs. Rosalind Richards).

<sup>43</sup> Boyes, *Imagined village*, p. 157.

<sup>44</sup> Gardiner, *England herself*, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. In 1935 Gardiner had become a regular contributor to Lymington's *The New Pioneer* which, among other issues, addressed back-to-the-land ideas. The physical health of the English people was conditioned by a healthy soil, and ultimately the history of civilisation was the history of the soil itself. (Bramwell, *Ecology in the twentieth century*, p. 168).

had a long philosophical tradition of turning to nature for guidance, and while most fascist governments emphasized forward-looking technological planning, the radical agrarian wing of National Socialism sought national salvation in land settlement and the recreation of a strong peasant economy. The Judaeo-Christian tradition, it was obliquely argued, had cut off Germans from the world of nature, while local autonomy and self-sufficiency had been sacrificed on the altar of the production of finished industrial goods. Given that the industrial world, its infrastructure devastated by the events of the Depression, was inherently unsustainable, the solution was ruralization. Thus would the nation be restored to the true peasant roots of her cultural tradition. In 1939 both Gardiner and Lymington met Walther Darré, the Nazi agriculture minister from 1933 to 1942, and were impressed by his organicist, ruralist vision, shared in its essentials by Rudolph Hess, a homeopath, naturist, and enthusiastic follower of Rudolph Steiner.<sup>46</sup> To Gardiner, Darré's inspired concept of 'blood-and-soil' defined an inescapable mystical relationship between race and soil. Since the soil belonged to the 'folk', so could man, living close to the soil, express his own life-force through husbandry, dance, song, and poetry. The return of the community to the land and the restoration of customary performance of song and dance would ultimately rekindle ancient lost values which lay at the very roots of the organic qualities of leadership and community. An arresting vision no doubt, but one which was inevitably subject to the very extremes of Nazi distortion. As the War drew to a close, the scales began to fall from Gardiner's eyes and he came to recognize that Germany had failed to live up to the ideology of restoring '... the experience of blood and soil to a rapidly urbanized nation'.<sup>47</sup> Instead, as H. J. Massingham concluded, National Socialism had become the ultimate expression of absolutism, decadence and contempt for the individual; all urban in origin.<sup>48</sup>

Gardiner had had some inkling of the seductive effects of Nazi rhetoric at the 1936 Bauerntag conference to which he had been invited by the Reich Food Ministry. Here Goering made a rabble-rousing speech to the assembled farmers and their associates. After he had finished speaking,

A current of mass fervour surged through the vast room, overpowering and effacing every individual, swamping all personal thought and reflection. It was for me a terrifying experience. For I felt that blind, irresistible forces were being let loose. There was in this fervour no restraint, no self-criticism, no kindness, no humanity. History and fate swept over man in this hour like the wings of vast Genii; and they bore with them reckless power but not a trace of patience, nor of forbearance, nor of love.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, there was, or so it seemed to Gardiner, a youthfulness and vibrancy about National Socialism which, in some aspects at least, echoed the philosophy of the Bünde which he believed to represent the bulk of German youth.<sup>50</sup> He had no time for the uniformed and

<sup>46</sup> Goering, Goebbels and Bormann were implacably opposed to the organic vision and following the Deputy Führer's flight to England in 1941, other Nazi officials associated with the organicist outlook became suspect, and the biodynamic movement was banned.

<sup>47</sup> R. Gardiner, 'Rural Reconstruction', in H. J. Massingham (ed.), *England and the Farmer* (1945) pp. 92-165.

<sup>48</sup> H. J. Massingham, *Men of Earth* (1943), p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> *Wessex: Letters from Springhead*, sec. ser. 4/5, Autumn, 1948.

<sup>50</sup> As Malcolm Chase notes, although the Bünde only accounted for a minor proportion of youth in the Weimar Republic. Gardiner failed to get in touch either with the numerous political groups or the large Catholic and Jewish organisations.

jack-booted beerhall crowds with their 'nonsensical racial theory' or for the posturings and music-hall cavortings of many of the leaders once they had achieved power. Yet aspects of the Nazi credo remained attractive. If 'the Fascist solution of authoritarian leadership and fanatical obedience is no solution', Gardiner rather hazily believed that elements of National Socialist philosophy could readily be incorporated into the idea of building families of nations with shared economic, cultural, social, and racial values.<sup>51</sup> Did 'racial' in this context imply 'anti-Semitic'? Perhaps it did. After all D. H. Lawrence had pointed out to him the inevitability of racial differences and the influence of 'spirit of place', and Gardiner himself had expressed remarks in publications of the 1920s which only the most generous of interpretations would deny to be anti-Semitic.<sup>52</sup> While his polemic against the nineteenth century new rich '... from the filters of alien races, the courts of the money changers, the halls of luxury trades and industries', might be read as an anti-urban diatribe, it is difficult to ignore anti-Semitic sentiments in several of the writings and pronouncements of this man, whose own mother was partially of Jewish extraction.

Writing in 1948 of his many visits to inter-war Germany to attend cultural events and to lecture at various universities, Gardiner offered a frank *apologia* for some of his views, activities and aspirations. Despite his admiration for National Socialist experiments in land tenure reform and marketing law and his concurrence with Darré's belief in the virtues of blood and soil, Gardiner deplored the centralist tendencies of Nazism, was sickened by the vulgarity of Ribbentrop, the absurd posturings of Goebbels and Goering and the 'demonic shamanism' of Hitler himself. When the Führer first came to power, Gardiner genuinely believed that he had the potential to become the 'Cromwell of the Reich' and to forge within Greater Germany a body which would ultimately foster a permanent European peace.<sup>53</sup> But even in 1935 the 'order and freshness' of the heady atmosphere of the new Germany carried about it a 'sniff of sulphur' and a 'haunting threat of evil', which would ultimately find expression in the excesses of the Gestapo. Nevertheless, Gardiner applauded the Anschluss with Austria in the interests of the creation of a Greater Germany and vigorously rejected the argument that the Anschluss was 'a rape committed *against* the will of the people'. Disillusionment only set in later when he realized that '... the abominable hubris of German pride and arrogance vitiated the entire world-picture of the National Socialist philosophy and spelled its inevitable doom'. On his numerous lecture visits to Germany between 1931 and 1935, Gardiner spared little effort in extolling the virtues of the pre-Nazi German youth movements which stood in stark contrast to the pagan Hitler Youth whom he regarded as, '... boorish, dogmatic, insensitive, entirely wrapped up in their preconceived Nazi ideas'. Understandably he became *persona non grata* with von Shirach's myrmidons although, ironically, he helped train some of them in folk dance in preparation for the 1936 Olympic Games.

Much of the suspicion of Gardiner as a Nazi sympathizer arose from a letter which he wrote to Goebbels at the behest of Götsch in 1934 commending the work of Götsch's Musikheim. To Gardiner's horror Goebbels promptly arranged for the letter to be published in the German

<sup>51</sup> Gardiner, *England Herself*, pp. 155-7.

<sup>52</sup> Boulton *et al.* (eds), *Letters of Lawrence*, V, pp. 98. See for example, R. Gardiner, 'Die deutsche revolution von England gesehen' in R. Gardiner, A. Aroderson and K. Wyser (eds), *Nationalsozialismus von Ausland gesehen*

(1933), pp. 15-18.

<sup>53</sup> 'Hitler's Reich and the real Germany (1929-1939)', *Wessex: Letters from Springhead*, sec ser., 4/5, Autumn 1948.

press as a piece of pro-Nazi propaganda, with the predictable result that Gardiner's English detractors seized upon this basically innocent epistle as evidence of his support for the National Socialist cause. The impulsive Gardiner offered a further hostage to fortune in his riposte to the Berlin correspondent of *The Observer* who had reported on his lecture to Berlin University early in 1934. In this lecture Gardiner (termed by the reporter, the 'English neo-Nazi') had 'burst into a song of praise for the potential fascist D. H. Lawrence'. In rejecting any suggestion that Lawrence had fascist leanings in his reply of 11 February 1934, Gardiner insisted that the root principles of National Socialism were based on the religious experience of the communal unit, and, apparently throwing caution to the wind, continued 'Anyone acquainted with the life of the German work-camps or of the finer contingents of the Storm Troops realize that'.<sup>54</sup> Injudicious perhaps, crass certainly, yet it has to be remembered that this letter was penned in 1934 before the full horror and bestiality of National Socialism became blindingly apparent. Nevertheless, his 1948 *apologia*, perhaps significantly, makes no reference to the Nazi's persecution of the Jews and others whom they regarded as ethnically beyond the pale.

Along with several of his friends, Gardiner attracted official suspicion as a result of his implacable opposition to war with Germany. The German people, he believed, initially seduced and ultimately entrapped by Hitler, would stand by their leader out of a sense of duty, but desperately wanted to avoid war. Men of goodwill had a bounden duty to avoid this catastrophe even if this entailed appeasement. Again, writing in 1948 of his support for the Munich agreement, Gardiner noted that, 'Even now, after the passage of seven terrible years and the criminal madness and death of Hitler and Mussolini, I feel that there was substance in this view, and that the deliverance out of sin and destruction was lost by the frailty of us all ... For there *was* another real Germany, alive even inside the mad-house of power-drunk Nazidom and the treacherous scheming of its pundits'.<sup>55</sup>

The jury should probably for the moment be undecided, but there remain several intriguing and enigmatic hints. 'Why you aren't locked up I can't imagine unless it be by one of the amiable inconsistencies which are so typical of English administration', wrote Colonel John Miller, GC, in the mid-summer of 1943. Yet, Miller went on, 'I still maintain that you were perfectly right before the war to try to establish a bond between the best on either side and I hope that the moment we stop fighting you will be able to take up the job again'.<sup>56</sup> Several years later, in December 1956, the Springhead Ring organized a memorial service for Götsch at the church of Saint Bartholomew-the-Great in Smithfield. Gardiner wrote to Ring members past and present reminding them of the event and received in reply a disturbing letter from his former associate Stephen Bone whose refusal to attend the service arose from his objection to Gardiner's view of Germany. 'In the days before the war you defended certain things that I considered quite indefensible ... even Auschwitz had no effect on your opinion'.<sup>57</sup> Juxtaposed alongside Gardiner's differences with Massingham over the issue of Nazi Germany, Bone's comment cannot be ignored in any assessment of Gardiner's world view. His writings and his friendships with many of the anti-Semitic Right, *despite* his protestations against Nazi racial

<sup>54</sup> E. Dalavenay and W. J. Keith, 'Mr Rolf Gardiner, "The English Neo-Nazi"; an Exchange', *D. H. Lawrence Review* 7 (1974), pp. 292-3.

Autumn 1948.

<sup>56</sup> CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, J1/2. Gardiner does not appear to have responded.

<sup>55</sup> *Wessex: Letters from Springfield*, sec. ser. 4/5,

<sup>57</sup> CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, 51/1.

theory, raise serious questions as to his true political, social and racial values which will only be answered after a full examination of his papers at Cambridge and Springhead.<sup>58</sup>

### III

The rest of this article seeks to explore Rolf Gardiner's association with a little-known wartime offshoot of ruralist activity, the 'Council for the Church and Countryside'. Unsurprisingly, in view of his youthful adulation of D. H. Lawrence and his flirtation with the Kibbo Kift, Gardiner's religious development was distinctly unorthodox. He soon rejected the standard public school Christian diet (which he later dismissed as 'fusty and academic ecclesiasticism') and gradually evolved a belief system which combined a baffling blend of esoteric Gnosticism and High Anglicanism with a belief in reincarnation and more than a dash of green primitive paganism. Like Massingham, who underwent a tortuous spiritual journey from agnosticism to Anglo-Catholicism, Gardiner believed that the story of Christ taught the virtues of humility before Nature and gave symbolic recognition to the ultimate truth that the roots of civilisation arose from an intimacy between men and earth. Thus, wrote Massingham, 'The pulse of wild Nature beats to the breath of God'.<sup>59</sup> If man was the link between nature and the Divine, then the kingdom of Heaven could be achieved on earth if man worked symbiotically with nature and regarded farming and husbandry as sacramental acts.<sup>60</sup> The human values associated with the Christian tradition, obedience to the laws of organic wholeness, and subordination of the will to that of a Higher Power would ultimately yield spiritual enlightenment. Intellectual speculation was to no avail, individuals were '... travellers groping our way on the road towards a new Grail of the Holy Spirit', and sectarian distinctions and definitions were largely meaningless.<sup>61</sup> Writing to a clerical friend in 1944, Gardiner was critical of the over-cerebral, scriptural orthodoxy of the parish priesthood who refused to accept that new realities had to be faced and squared with the eternal realities. Belief, he argued, could take a variety of forms and provided this was directed towards the efficacy of a Higher Power, the organisation of the belief system was irrelevant.<sup>62</sup> A year later Jorian Jenks was reminding him of the renaissance of belief among their mutual friends, '... a belief in Christianity in one form or another, in nature, in patriotism, and a profound mistrust of the slick, logical, mechanical, artificial kind of civilization which is being forced upon us in the name of an idealized Humanity'.<sup>63</sup>

Several men known both to Gardiner and Jenks had become members of the Kinship in

<sup>58</sup> Given the assiduousness with which Marabel Gardiner ordered and preserved her husband's archive, the argument that sensitive material may have been suppressed can hardly be sustained. While Gardiner's diaries are preserved on microfiche in CUL, there are no volumes for 1939–1944 and he probably thought it unwise to record his feelings throughout this difficult period.

<sup>59</sup> For Massingham and Gardiner's relationship, see Moore-Colyer, 'Back to Basics'. Since this article went to press Philip Conford's admirable *The origins of the organic movement* (2001) has appeared, and contains extensive reference to the Council for the Church and Countryside in context of the Christian roots of organic

husbandry.

<sup>60</sup> Rather as prehistorians are finding to have been the case in Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain where there was little distinction between sacred and secular economic activities. (A. Grant, 'Economic or Symbolic? Animals and Ritual Behaviour', in P. Garside *et al.* (eds), *Sacred and Profane: Archaeology, Ritual and Religion* (1991), pp. 109–14.)

<sup>61</sup> *Springhead Ring Newsheet*, 49, 1950.

<sup>62</sup> Gardiner to George Every, 10 June 1944, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS G/5/1.

<sup>63</sup> Jenks to Gardiner, 8 July 1945, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS G/5/1.

Husbandry, an unofficial, informal grouping from a variety of backgrounds, who shared a common interest in organicism and a distrust of the highly mechanized, chemically-based agriculture perceived by officialdom to delineate the path of progress. I have written elsewhere of Gardiner's role in the founding of the twelve-man Kinship which first met in Edmund Blunden's rooms at Merton College Oxford in September 1941 and subsequently came together four times annually at various venues before its last meeting in August 1947.<sup>64</sup> In essence the Kinship saw itself as an informal working party concerned with influencing the evolution of post-war agricultural and rural policy and, as such, was able to impinge upon the development of such groupings as Montague Fordham's Rural Reconstruction Association, the Biodynamic Association and, most importantly, the Soil Association. The Kinship published the proceedings of the symposia, *Return to Husbandry*, edited by Blunden in 1943, and *The Natural Order*, edited, two years later, by Massingham, while most of its members regularly produced books and articles furthering the cause.

Among the various issues exercising the minds of the Kinship was the contemporary role for the Church as an organ of rural regeneration. For the Kinship, agriculture was a sacramental activity. It had always been so; pagan cultivators had farmed within a ritual context, and in the medieval world the church had blessed the fields, allowed its open nave to be used for the various festivals associated with the land, and been visibly and undeniably the centre of village life. This had all come to an end with the Laudian suppressions and Puritan aggression by pastors '... entirely without breeding or social authority' who '... preached doctrines which would sound strange in the ears of mild English rustics'.<sup>65</sup> For centuries the Church had ceased to have any intimate association with the cultivation of the soil and ways had to be sought whereby she could be recruited to foster an understanding of country life and to promote the vital rural qualities of '... patience, courage, faith, wisdom and manual skill'.<sup>66</sup> This issue was also of concern to a variety of other bodies including the Farmers' Action Council, the Church Union, the Church Social Action Committee, and the Rural Reconstruction Association, and a gathering of representatives met at Abbey House, Westminster towards the end of January 1943. After a great deal of discussion the meeting (co-ordinated by the Rev. Patrick McLaughlin, secretary of the Church Union) agreed that a deputation be despatched to the Church Assembly in March to raise with the assembled bishops the issue of the Church in rural England. Interestingly enough, the delegation comprised almost entirely members of the Kinship in Husbandry and two of its associates. The group was led by Rolf Gardiner, accompanied by the Tory historian Arthur Bryant and the Kentish landowner Lord Northbourne, author of the influential *Look to the Land*, both of whom were prominent Kinsmen. There were joined by Lord Bledisloe and R. G. Stapledon, but the final nominee, Sir Albert Howard refused, for reasons of his own, to be part of the enterprise.<sup>67</sup> The bishops were sufficiently impressed to direct Gardiner's delegation to a further

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm Chase has described the Kinship as an 'organised core' of ruralists whose most original thinkers were Gardiner and Lymington. He incorrectly claims that Howard and Stapledon were members, when in fact they were mere associates of the Kinship ('"This is no clap-trap", this is our heritage', in C. Shaw and M. Chase (eds), *The Imagined Past: history and nostalgia* (1989), p. 138.

<sup>65</sup> G. A. Birmingham, in A. Bell (ed.), *The legacy of England* (1947), pp. 186-7. Several Kinship members contributed to this rather wistful volume.

<sup>66</sup> Alexander Penrose to the Bishop of Hereford, 21 Oct. 1943, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/6.

<sup>67</sup> McLaughlin to Gardiner, 12 Feb. 1943, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

meeting with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York at Lambeth Palace the upshot of which was the establishment of an Advisory Council for the Church and Countryside.

In view of the heterogenous makeup of the Advisory Council, which included Gardiner, Portsmouth and other ruralists under the chairmanship of the theologian Maurice Reckitt, there were bound to be conflicts as to aims, objectives and modes of operation.<sup>68</sup> Gardiner himself wanted a priesthood which would speak a new dogma in a living language relating man, earth and Holy Spirit, and he wanted an essentially 'bottom up' approach to reform. Yet, from the very first meeting of the Advisory Council, disillusionment began to bite. Writing to Philip Mairret in October 1943, he noted that the Council had fallen into the fatal error of trying to change the world by *diktat* from the top. Life, after all, '... grows from little local roots of creative endeavour and example' and no amount of 'formless, undignified unreligious' intellectual formulation could change that simple fact. But what could one expect, he felt with 'The motherly but uninspired old Bishop of Hereford benevolently opening the proceedings, Reckitt with his harsh crackly voice urging points like a circus-manager out of humour, "Cardinal" McLaughlin flapping his soft white hands and issuing a flow of facile exposition, ironically unaware of the absurdity of his stage-clerics manner'.<sup>69</sup> According to another participant, there was too much theorising about dubious agrarian doctrines, too many grandiloquent generalisations about love of earth, soil erosion and nostalgic emotionalism, and insufficient attention to the job in hand; that of building spiritually-enriched communities in rural England.<sup>70</sup> From the outset, the Advisory Council was confronted with serious and seemingly intractable spiritual difficulties. Gardiner, Portsmouth and their friends, in urging that the Christian approach to the countryside be rooted in the ecology of the natural world, were introducing a disturbingly pagan flavour unacceptable to many ecclesiastics and theologians.<sup>71</sup> This became even more alarming when it was proposed that T. S. Eliot be approached to evolve a 'Rite of Earth' which could be incorporated into Church services devised to commemorate rural festivals.<sup>72</sup> The Kinsmen wanted a dynamic 'revolutionary' Church which would genuinely engage with rural issues, would attempt to influence public opinion about the fundamental importance of farming to the nation, would reintroduce the old ploughing and harvesting services and would ensure that its ordinands undertook genuine farm work so as to understand the needs and aspirations of rural labour. To ecclesiastics sitting in the comfort of Abbey House this last demand would have seemed alarming and churchmen accused Gardiner, in particular, of defending obsolete methods for sentimental reasons and of positively promoting a dangerous pagan doctrine.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Reckitt, heir to the fortunes of Reckitt's of Hull, was co-founder of the Church Socialist League. He was a regular contributor to the *New English Weekly*, and the writer of worthy tomes on the social movement in the Church of England. It was through the Council for the Church and Countryside that Massingham met Reckitt who was to help him greatly with *The Tree of Life* (1943), a strange work which meditates upon the historical role of the Church in the English rural tradition.

<sup>69</sup> Gardiner to Mairret, 19 Oct. 1943, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander Penrose to the Bishop of Hereford, 21

Oct. 1943, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

<sup>71</sup> David Peck to Gardiner 10 July 1945, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

<sup>72</sup> McLaughlin to Gardiner 4 May 1944, CUL, Rolf Gardiner, MSS, G/5.

<sup>73</sup> Jenks to Gardiner 15 July 1945, CUL, Rolf Gardiner, MSS G/5. Nearly ten years later Reckitt wrote rather sniffily to Gardiner that he was less interested in folkish revivals than in discovering new ways of expressing and preserving the vitality of the local and regional. Reckitt to Gardiner, 28 Dec. 1954, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.



Yet, Jenks (who became part-time secretary to the Advisory Council following McLaughlin's breakdown in 1945) thought it might be helpful if the Church attempted '... to Christianize this new paganism, and itself be revitalized in the process'.<sup>74</sup>

Towards the end of 1945 the Advisory Council was presiding over the formally-constituted Council for the Church and Countryside, established under the auspices of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York with its headquarters at St Anne's Church House, Dean Street, of which the ailing McLaughlin was warden. The presidency was held by the Bishop of Hereford, assisted by several vice-presidents among whom were Lord Bledisloe, Montague Fordham, Massingham and Sir Albert Howard, while the Advisory Council itself continued to be chaired by Maurice Reckitt. As Secretary, Jorian Jenks carried the burden of the work of the Advisory Council whose essential role was to promote the establishment of Diocesan Associations which would further the work of the Council on a more local basis. Indeed, the hand of Jenks is readily detectable in the Council's briefing documents to Diocesan groups. In essence the Council emphasized the sacred nature of husbandry and underscored the importance of conservation measures, for since the land was a gift from God, sins against the land were sins against Creation. Equally the Council resolved to uphold the rights of the rural community since '... the certainty that a robust rural society, with its roots in the earth, is the necessary repository of certain values both cultural and spiritual which an *over-urbanized* and *over-industrialized* society, with its emphases upon the inorganic and the mechanical, is in danger of losing to the great imperilling of its vitality'.<sup>75</sup> Thus, working in concert with other groups the Council would help stem rural decline and the drift from the land. With Rolf Gardiner's prompting they accepted that financial problems, low wages and lack of decent housing and amenities were part of the problem, yet '... this problem cannot be solved by importing urban mass-amusements or transporting the countryman to them; but only by building up anew, and with new materials, the organic life of the village'. To achieve this noble objective, Diocesan groups would not merely include the representatives of the usual 'official' bodies and conventional clergymen who subscribed easily to the Thirty-nine Articles, but others like Gardiner who were brimful of heterodox but nonetheless valuable ideas. Indeed, 'it is perhaps the specific Christian task to bring such ideas to a specifically Christian focus', and to this end the Advisory Council drew up appropriate forms of service for Lammastide, Rogationtide and Plough Sunday all of which carry about them a powerful whiff of Gardinerian nature mysticism.<sup>76</sup>

Although an officially-constituted body, the Council was expected by the Church to operate without any specific allocation of funds, so that, as Jenks put it, '... our financial position can

<sup>74</sup> Jenks to Gardiner 15 July 1945, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5. Jenks was becoming a very busy man, serving also as part-time secretary for the Rural Reconstruction Association and the Economic Reform Club and becoming involved with the Soil Association towards the end of 1946. Pressure of work and the need to live near London had forced him to move with his family from Barnstaple to Seaford in Sussex in 1945. Here he had lived in McLaughlin's country house which had been occupied by the army during the war. The Jenks's were to be 'improving tenants' of the property (Jenks to Gardiner,

17 July 1945, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS G/5).

<sup>75</sup> British Library WP. 15088 (Miscellaneous Pamphlets, Council and Church in the Countryside).

<sup>76</sup> Details of the services were published by the SPCK and may be found in British Library 3409. GG. 35 and 3409. GG. 24. Gardiner himself was closely involved in the development of the Rogationtide service. The Council also published a series of Occasional Papers including *England, home and beauty* (by Massingham), *British agriculture and industrial trade* (by Jenks), *Earth and heaven* (by David Peck) and *The rural ministry* (by Reckitt).

best be described as incipient insolvency'.<sup>77</sup> This apart, several of the prime movers, including Gardiner, Massingham and the Rev. David Peck, had insufficient time to devote fully to the task. Even the redoubtable Jenks, who consistently bombarded Gardiner with complaints about ecclesiastical intransigence and the irritating nature of the priesthood in general, found his task increasingly burdensome and by midsummer of 1948 was looking forward to the day when the Council would employ a full-time organisational secretary.<sup>78</sup> Until then the enterprise would blunder on in a typically English amateur fashion.

Doctrinal difficulties lay at the heart of the Advisory Council's problems, and these were inevitably visited upon the Diocesan groups who, theoretically, were in the front line of the movement. As a practical man of action Gardiner himself found the Church representatives' obsession with academic abstractions and '... endless talk and intellectual analysis' profoundly frustrating, while constant argument made life difficult for the Diocesan groups who had begun to act.<sup>79</sup> Clerics like McLaughlin and Peck were concerned more with argument than fulfilment and Reckitt, for all his intellectual qualities, lacked any real understanding of the deeply spiritual issues involved in engagement with the natural environment and agricultural work and seasonality.<sup>80</sup> Gardiner strenuously argued that only by training its ordinands in the realities of farming could the Church realistically expect to aid the cause of rural regeneration. He had personally helped and encouraged the Rev. Ralph Bowman, vicar of Ashbrittle in Somerset, to farm his own glebe with the result that Bowman was now using his rectory as a base for farm training courses for students of theology.<sup>81</sup> But the Advisory Council regarded as derisory the prospect of ordinands working with their hands, and preferred to take academic counsel from Sir William Gavin who suggested that the way forward might be to 'ruralize' the priesthood by offering lectures in rural economy at the theological colleges. Gardiner dismissed this as farcical and beyond contempt. Since the future of Christendom in an increasingly industrial and secular world depended absolutely on relating faith and worship to the practical realities of working the land in conjunction with the natural environment, he held that academic lectures would be as worthless as they were futile.<sup>82</sup>

Among the few ecclesiastics who genuinely shared Gardiner's views and agonized over the lack of spiritual commitment of the Advisory Council was Neville Lovett (1869–1951), seventy-first Bishop of Salisbury. Lovett a simple, and godly man 'whose intellectual abilities were not of the kind that distinguished many previous holders', had been elevated to the See in 1936 and became widely renowned for his sincerity, common sense and genial character.<sup>83</sup> He was one of the few bishops to bring alive the concept of the Council for the Church and Countryside in his own diocese where he instigated Farm Sunday and Plough Sunday services and led

<sup>77</sup> Jenks to Gardiner 26 Sept. 1946, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS G/5.

<sup>78</sup> Jenks to Gardiner 30 June 1948, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS G/5.

<sup>79</sup> Gardiner to Bishop of Chichester, 4 Mar. 1946, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS G/5.

<sup>80</sup> Gardiner to Peck, 11 Mar. 1946, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS G/5.

<sup>81</sup> Bowman to Gardiner, 23 Sept. 1944; Gardiner to Bishop

of Salisbury, 2 Apr. 1946 CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

<sup>82</sup> Gardiner to Bishop of Chichester 4 Mar. 1946; Gardiner to Bishop of Salisbury 2 April, 1946, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5. Gardiner set out his views on the role of the country parson in *Wessex: Letters from Springhead* 3, Spring 1943.

<sup>83</sup> Obituary in *The Times*, 10 Sept. 1951. Gardiner also commemorated Lovett in 'A Wessex bishop', *Wessex: Letters from Springhead* 4th ser., 4 (3), Whitsun, 1954.

Rogationtide processions.<sup>84</sup> Springhead itself was the focal point of the Fontmell Magna Rogation service in 1944 where the physical fact of water springing from the ground was employed as symbolic of divine dispensation, of life, of the spirit. As the bishop processed around the parish, followed by Gardiner, his friends, estate workers and other villagers, prayers were intoned and hymns sung at nine different locations, each representative of some aspect of the farming world. This was a fully participatory service with readings and lessons offered by farmers and their workers at the various halts; in a meadow, a cornfield, on the village green, at a farmyard or elsewhere. Pagan associations apart, the overall tone of what was by all accounts a moving service was undeniably Christian, and in thanking the Bishop several days later Gardiner wrote, 'I felt that under your simple guidance of our thoughts and feelings something in this place and in the hearts of the people was opened to receive a Divine Blessing and Encouragement'.<sup>85</sup>

While doctrinal disagreements, ecclesiastical intransigence and over-indulgence in theological abstractions meant that the Council for the Church and Countryside in reality achieved very little, one event, carried out under its auspices, did enjoy considerable success. Initiated by a suggestion of Gardiner and organized (almost single-handedly) by Jorian Jenks, this was 'An Encounter', a debate between representatives of the organic school of husbandry and those of mainstream agricultural officialdom, including the farmers' and agricultural workers' unions and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Gardiner approached the 'Encounter', (scheduled to take place at the Alliance Hall, Caxton Street in London on 16 November 1945) in a state of great excitement. The rapid mechanization of agriculture during the War and the growing influence of external capital over its fortunes had lent to the adherents of organicism a high degree of urgency and coherence. The 'Encounter' would be a defining moment for the organic proselytes and would establish the serious intent of the Kinship in Husbandry. To the Earl of Portsmouth, who was returning from a business visit to the USA for the occasion, Gardiner wrote breathlessly, '... We shall face the intelligentsia of the farming world and we must therefore not only stick to our guns, but fire them accurately and with telling ammunition'.<sup>86</sup> Lord Justice Scott had enthusiastically agreed to chair the event, so much so that in an unprecedented gesture he adjourned his Court on the day of the 'Encounter'. Gardiner made sure that Scott was well-briefed by both proponents and opponents and in sketching out the organic case he was at pains to emphasize that his side were *not* opposed to technological progress, but merely insistent that technology and automation '... should be subordinate to human and social problems of true welfare, health and balance'. The 'Encounter', he continued, would inevitably comprise a clash between faith and insight and practical expediency. 'The danger is always that the self-styled "practical men" oversimplify and thereby ridicule the pleas

<sup>84</sup> Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Gardiner received numerous letters from rural parsons who, under his inspiration, had revived Lammas, Plough Monday, and other services. Some, keen to establish a symbolic link between earth and Church, had contrived to have their bread baked from wheat grown in the parish. Among the ruralists and organicists of the inter-war and wartime periods there was an almost mystical obsession with the locally-baked loaf. Hence Massingham, 'Through the

watermill, the bridge between field and home, England can take root again in her own earth; through the watermill, the bread that was once a symbol of communion between the divine and the human will be a mockery no more' (*Where man belongs* (1946), pp. 210-2).

<sup>85</sup> CUL, Gardiner to Bishop of Salisbury, 16 May 1944, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

<sup>86</sup> CUL, Gardiner to Portsmouth 17 May 1945, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

of those concerned with values and long-term effects and dub them "idealists". It is so very easy to generalize and fail to listen to the qualifying arguments of these endeavouring to present profounder views than those in fashion'.<sup>87</sup>

The 'Encounter' took place, according to Jenks who wrote the introduction to the edited proceedings, 'between men of undoubted goodwill and religious sincerity'.<sup>88</sup> After Lord Justice Scott had concluded his rather ponderous opening remarks, Portsmouth launched into a full-frontal attack on the unnatural excesses of modern farming, arguing that the burden of proof '... lies with the proud innovators of modern technical progress that what they are inaugurating will not harm unborn generations'.<sup>89</sup> The argument was further developed by Kinship member J. E. Hosking, farmer, seeds merchant, Director of English Flax and President of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany. Hosking advanced the view that mechanization of agriculture should be employed to reduce human drudgery and should invariably be subordinated to human skill. Deploring the economic concept of 'output per man', he strenuously argued that output in terms of quantity and quality per unit of land should be the fundamental criterion of agricultural progress. Gardiner himself took up the theme of manpower on the land. Science, 'abstract agricultural education', an indifference to the 'society of the fields, woods and workshops' and an obsession with bringing urban amenities to the countryside would merely exacerbate rural decline. Only local self-sufficiency, the development of land settlement and the concentration on practical, estate-based rural apprenticeships with prospects of advancement towards yeoman ownership would achieve the desired result. In his patrician manner he flowed towards his peroration;

Let our talents be applied as human mycorrhiza feeding the very tissues of rural life rather than as spreaders of inorganic intellectual fertilizers! What is needed is a religious vocation, an espousal of the cause of the land for its own sake, a realization that the life of the earth cannot go on unless there are those who feel called and chosen to cultivate the soil. Economic, that is to say cash inducements, plus amenities and a little culture is not enough. Men want duties.

Given the European political situation in 1945, the acute food shortages throughout the continent as a whole, and the compelling need to maintain the thrust of food production at home, it was going to be a Sisyphean task indeed to convince the sceptics of the longer-term social and cultural benefits of agro-ecological sustainability. Gardiner was roundly condemned by W. A. Hill, Public Relations Officer of the National Farmers Union (NFU) for his 'Merrie-Englandism'. He had fallen into deep error; 'He hears the music of country life and loves it – for itself; he would sacrifice the purpose of agriculture to his love of its aesthetic delights'. Portsmouth's engagement with humus and the iniquities of the inorganic world were all very well, retorted G. K. Knowles, General Secretary of the NFU, but agriculture had to progress in

<sup>87</sup> CUL, Gardiner to Lord Justice Scott, 28 Aug. 1945, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

<sup>88</sup> *Encounter: Agriculture or Agri-Industry* (a copy at British Library 8288 f. 81), p. 26.

<sup>89</sup> He also descanted on the theme of environmental despoliation of overseas countries to satisfy the demand

for food from an industrialized England, echoing his comments in the preface to Carey McWilliams', *Ill fares the land* (1945) p. 11, 'Those of us who sat down to eat our cheap imported food before the war were in fact too often eating ruined homes, ruined lives and ruined soil'.

the interests of the country and, in any case, good farmers always plied their craft with the interests of nature in mind. Man had the sacred duty to produce affordable food in amounts adequate for all, observed the Technical Officer of the NFU, G. D. Stevenson. Moreover, he had a sacred duty to reduce drudgery and fatigue among his fellows thereby to free their minds and bodies for leisure and reflection. Thus Man should '... seek the bounteous gifts that Nature has in store through the agency of mechanization and use them to the common good'. A rather different perspective was brought to bear by Frank Rollinson, representing the agricultural workers' union. The workers, he claimed, *demand*ed the machine and desired a highly mechanized and efficient agricultural economy. Gently reminding the patrician opposition that the country was about to enter an era of planned economy under a Labour government, Rollinson pulled no punches in declaring that the time was fast approaching when landowners and farmers would no longer be allowed to do as they wished, but would be forced to realize that ownership implied stewardship. Accordingly they would have a bounden duty to produce the best crops and livestock for the community and to ensure that those labouring for them enjoyed the same educational and economic facilities as city workers. As the fundamental principle of the Kinship in Husbandry was to stand four-square against any vision of a planned economy, these words would have struck a hollow note with its members.

Jorian Jenks believed the 'Encounter' to have been a success in the sense of establishing the Kinship and the Church and Countryside movement as serious players in the post-war rural debate, but very little in the way of concrete progress seems to have been achieved.<sup>90</sup> Gardiner, for all his initial enthusiasm as a member of the Advisory Council for the Church and Countryside, resigned from the body in the spring of 1946, although he continued to correspond regularly with its various executives. Together with Philip Mairet (who was shortly to become editor of *The Frontier*, the journal of Sir William Moberley's Christian Frontier Council), he persistently cajoled the Council to co-opt more practical men to its proceedings rather than relying upon the dubious advice of academics. But it was all to little avail. The Council for the Church and Countryside, despite its good intentions, failed to become more than a minor footnote in the history of rural development.<sup>91</sup> Or, so it appears at first glance. During the post-war years a number of Christian organizations, including the Federation for Rural Evangelism and the Rural Theology Association were quietly emphasising the parallels between the rhythm of the seasons and the rhythm of disciplined prayer, alongside the wholesomeness of digging the garden and the theology of work. In the meantime the Rural Studies Department of the Luton Industrial College, a Methodist endowment, was urging its student pastors to give full practical support to those involved with stewardship of the land and with small rural industries.<sup>92</sup> How far the earlier body's activities influenced these later initiatives it is difficult to determine, although it is probably significant that no reference to the work of the wartime

<sup>90</sup> Jenks to Gardiner, 17 Nov. 1945, CUL, Rolf Gardiner MSS, G/5.

<sup>91</sup> Perhaps, as C. S. Orwin observed in 1949, the physical isolation, general demoralization and inadequate stipends of many rural clergy may have limited their enthusiasm for the extra effort demanded by Diocesan groups formed under the Advisory Council. (C. S. Orwin,

*Country planning: a study of rural problems* (1949).

<sup>92</sup> R. H. Luke, *The commission of the church in the countryside. The Charles Coulson lecture, Luton Industrial College* (1982). The function of the College was 'To make the Christian Faith relevant in the realms of technology, industry and commerce'. It exists no more, its building sadly relegated to a nightclub.

Council appears in the 1990 Anglican report, *Faith in the Countryside*.<sup>93</sup> This weighty volume, which drew evidence from a very wide range of sources, nonetheless nods a tribute to Rolf Gardiner and his fellow ruralists in all but name. It urges rejection of the view that the environment exists merely for the gratification and delectation of the human species and while recognising their pre-Christian roots, insists that Rogation and Lammas Days, along with well-dressing, bound-beating and other esoteric rural activities be marked by Church services. Such would cement bonds within the rural community and 'offer an enormous evangelistic opportunity'.<sup>94</sup> Gardiner would have been delighted, and even more so by the Report's frank admission of the failure of theological colleges to present the rural ministry to ordinands as challenging and exciting, and its insistence that in the future Dioceses should ensure that their rural clergy were exposed, via formal courses, to the practical realities of the lives of those whose living depended on the land.<sup>95</sup>

#### IV

In much the same way as the view of Rolf Gardiner and his associates as to the development of the rural economy were out of tune with the times, so was their quasi-mystical Man/Earth/Heaven thinking out of kilter with a Church whose attention was increasingly focussed on the squalid conditions of the inner city, and a declining proportion of whose ministers were themselves from rural backgrounds. But the timbre of the ruralist message today rings very differently, especially in middle-class England where organicism, holism and ecologism (admittedly shorn, for most people, of their transcendental implications) hold centre stage and where the Soil Association is among the most respected of national institutions. Perhaps Gardiner recognized that this would come to pass as he continued to ram home the organicist theme in post-war lectures and lecture tours at home and abroad. Certainly his farming and forestry work at Springhead and Cranborne Chase, for which he was to receive international recognition, attracted a great deal of attention, and over the years many visitors (including, in 1961, a group of African farmers) made their way to Fontmell Magna. Gardiner's personal energy remained undiminished. Besides being closely involved with family business concerns in London and Nyasaland (Malawi), he continued to sit on a variety of bodies concerned with landscape, forestry and rural industries and was engaged in the 1950s with the co-ordination of opposition to atomic research. In parallel with these activities, he took pains to nurture the Springhead Ring whose dancers and singers maintained their contact with Germany during the early post-war years by way of reciprocal exchanges. As dancing had given the younger Gardiner such profound pleasure, so the Springhead Ring music concerts largely organized by himself and his wife Marabel, became of increasing importance as the years went by. Ring concerts, primarily of choral and baroque music, were held at Springhead, London, and other venues in England and Germany, and as they attracted international performers, so they attracted the interest of the broadcasting authorities.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> *Faith in the countryside. A report presented to the Archbishops of York and Canterbury* (1990).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>96</sup> Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas' and Handel's 'Acis and Galatea' were performed at Springhead in 1961 and 1965 respectively, each with a distinguished cast.

This brief paragraph does little more than hint at the scope and scale of the enterprises with which Rolf Gardiner was involved before his unexpected death in November 1971 following a hip operation. He was a rare and engaging man; a free spirit of high intelligence, profound sensitivity, passionate sincerity and an absolute belief in his own convictions. Whether or not he was 'Mr Rolf Gardiner, the English neo-Nazi' remains open to question and will only be resolved after careful and exhaustive examination of his papers. For the moment, however flawed and even reprehensible some aspects of his world-view may have been, he stands revealed as an enigmatic and complex English paternalist and patriot whose intellectual and practical influence on later generations of organicists has been profound, and whose original thinking on issues of rural development and sustainability are now becoming common currency.