

WHAT WAS IN THEIR MINDS BEFORE BRAZIERS?

Hilda Salter B.A. Fellow of Braziers Park School of Integrative Social Research: has been officially declared a long term resident of Braziers for short periods. She has edited 'Research Communications' for many years and has researched the archives of the School and Community. She was made a Fellow of the School in 2007.

“Norman Glaister and Sensory Process before the Founding of Braziers Park”
[see above] described the thought and action that resulted in the formation of Sensory Committees in two movements. The intention was that a sensory partner to the existing committees could improve the exchanges between two types of people that tend to irritate each other in making decisions. In this paper, reviewing the way the new committees were introduced into The Order of Woodcraft Chivalry and Common Wealth required highlighting sensory activity, so less attention was paid to the subjects discussed. The correspondence so far scrutinised had offered no answers to the question of what had finally led to the purchase of Braziers Park. This was a formidable gap. The boxes labelled “Friends of the Future” would perhaps fill in the wider scene.

In this second paper, therefore, an attempt is made to redress the balance. Repetition, it is hoped, will be kept to a minimum.

Common Wealth

In the late 30's, Norman Glaister and his friends appear to have been involved with Our Struggle, a social and political movement whose name was to reflect opposition to Hitler's “**Mein Kampf**”. They were concerned with the idea of a people's war and the means to social improvement. Sir Richard Acland, Prof. John Macmurray, Kingsley Martin and (I think) H.G. Wells were on the committee. When Sir Richard Acland conceived the grander scheme of Common Wealth, in 1941, it would appear that Our Struggle either merged with, or became the new, specifically political organisation which had branches nationwide and ultimately achieved one Member of Parliament. At some point Dorothy Glaister makes mention of their taking part in Forward March, but I have found no details of this.

A new organisation, with no history of long, established procedures, naturally presented Norman Glaister with a fresh challenge. This association would deal with the now and the future, whereas in the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, concern with recapitulation theory had involved to some extent a looking back to relieve aspects of early civilisations which had caused problems. This new opportunity to establish a sensory committee perhaps had a better chance of a longer life than in the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry. and would reach out to more people.

It surprised me at first that Wilfred Trotter's name appeared rarely in the relevant Braziers archives until letters from Hubert Wilson, the Chairman of the Hornsey Rise and Wood Green Common Wealth Group, referred to the word “sensory”. Norman Glaister, in avoiding Trotter's term “unstable”, had used “sensory” as an analogy with the sensory /motor system in the body, the sensory element constantly feeding impressions to the brain and the brain executively deciding on action. However, Wilson's letter suggested that sensory was too medical a term to use, and the important thing was to establish the principle of creating a second committee first. That was difficult enough. Opposition to a second committee asserted that such a body would delay decision making; only executive minds were needed - in fact they were the only minds that existed; two bodies would become rivals and cause conflict;

a body that encourages feelings would make for weaker decisions. There was even denial of the fact that, as part of judging an issue, people naturally thought in opposites. The exchanges gave an illuminating picture of the resistive mind in that period!

Names influence reactions so, when the new committee was under discussion, the suggestions used at different times included "second", "adaptive" and "advisory" which had been the name of the second body in the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry before any change in function had been suggested by Norman. "Sensitive" was another alternative. Curiously, the executive side, partly one suspects to disparage and belittle the committee's function, suggested "digestive" because it would predigest material before the executive made decisions. Ultimately the word "advisory" was abandoned partly because it might be thought to claim superiority for the second committee, but also because a second committee would not be voted in under that banner. "Sensory" was finally the preferred choice.

The term "resistive" does appear at intervals in our archives of this period and seems to attract no negative comment. The executive mode was so well established and approved that the word was probably seen to convey firmness and positivity. Its sparse use, however, also raises the question as to whether, in establishing the principle of introducing a second committee first, there had as yet been no attempt to outline Trotter's theories to general members. Discussions centred on the proposed committee's nature, scope and function, which meant that it was always a group, not an individual that was under discussion, so there was less reason to describe particular people who might be suited to a "sensory" committee. It is ironic that its establishment took much the same length of time as it had in the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, even though that body already had a second committee and only an enlargement of function was required.

Why had it taken so long? The idea had to be discussed generally at headquarters and in 18 branches through the country. In July 1944 a Sensory Committee Group was set up to make specific proposals about the concept. At one point the Branches were enthusiastic enough to go ahead immediately without noting that the issue had yet to be debated in conference in the following spring. By March 1945, *Why Sensory?* an essay in *Vital Democracy*, the final document, was sent to all conference delegates. An Experimental Sensory Committee was set up in November 1946 and the first meeting of the Common Wealth Sensory Committee proper was held April 26-27 1947. This formed the springboard for Braziers itself in that the thinking that informed *Why Sensory?* was sound enough for the document to form a basic statement for us.

The detailed sequence of events leading to the establishment of the new Sensory Committee can be read in "Norman Glaister and Sensory Process before the Founding of Braziers Park". So four months after its institution, the Common Wealth Sensory Committee, ran a week's Sensory Summer School. in Norfolk, on *Our Mutual Fear: Our Mutual Responsibility*. This event in 1947, proved to be the first of three such schools which were all recorded, typed up and cyclostyled in quarto form for people to buy and hand on. In the first booklet, there are naturally references to political issues.

Chiefly, however, L.L. Whyte, a major contributor, commented on the collective challenge the world faced because of "the crisis of foundations" determining the trend of human thought, understanding and therefore of behaviour. He believed the quantitative Newtonian approach that had brought precision and objectivity to

science, had lost touch with human aspiration and needs and led to the atom bomb. It would be replaced by a perspective founded upon Relativity and physics that reintegrates objectivity and subjectivity, and sees the world as a process of the development of form - inorganic, organic and mental - with all processes being the cumulative development of interactive forms within a single unitary process. Norman Glaister identified as part of the biological process a tendency in all organisms to adapt oneself to the environment (sensory method) or to adapt the environment to the self (resistive method). He cited Huxley's idea that evolutionary biological progress leads to the development of social progress, which, if more co-operative than competitive, could result in global federation. Norman also suggested the need for a "Ministry of Individual Approach" that, instead of deferring to the opinion of the electorate every five years, could give regular or continuous updates on public opinion.

The School's conclusion, expressed by Glynn Faithfull, was that a unitary approach was needed in philosophy. Greater attempts were needed to find common ground, to focus on positive attitudes in discussion rather than on disagreement, and to seek to resolve contentious issues by looking for a larger view of the situation in which the differences may be subsumed. (Dualisms may, after all, be different aspects of a single process).

The Sensory Summer School in 1948, also held at Reepham, Norfolk, was doubled in length. The theme, The Tension between East and West: a realistic approach to its solution, gave plenty of scope for unitary thought. Two sessions were held each day. Afternoons were free for official note takers to prepare full accounts of sessions; other people sawed wood or helped staff to prepare meals. Walks and social events like dancing, play-reading, music and coach trips also took place. With 25 sessions as well, they worked hard. Although the tensions in the title were discussed with regard to politics and religion, more general social themes like "Freedom and Society", "Positive Democracy", and "Social Discipline" were featured. Such titles suggest concern to explore both what changes in customary assumptions were necessary or possible and also how far the people present coincided in their views.

Then, almost as if for the first time (though this is hard for me to credit), the Resistive / Sensory concept was formally described, discussed and presented to show that the two elements, if balanced effectively, could achieve a new unitary process. There would be vivancy in the balanced team and the two functions would be complementary rather than antipathetic. Norman Glaister anticipated that good Resistive / Sensitive teams would proliferate and affect their environment in a way that would ensure suitable conditions to facilitate the emergence of multimental organisms.

During the fortnight, more than interesting reflections were made. A new society which had been created in May, 1948, The Society of the Friends of the Future, and consisting pro tem of the same people who met in Common Wealth, had been able to discuss its viability, its aims and programme. Its remit would not be purely political. It would have a Resistive / Sensory governance and would employ from the start what the Common Wealth Sensory Committee was learning about improved democratic techniques of discussion. Maurice Roth's paper, Friends of the Future is very relevant here. In it he reports on some correspondence between Norman Glaister and Dr. James Parkes in which the language that the aims and policy are to be couched in is

painstakingly refined to mean precisely what all agree on. Reading the necessary exchanges reveals Braziers' ideas in the making.

New techniques were applied. If sensory discussion was new to some of the conference, then the way it arrived at conclusions was important and participants should be aware of the process. Two recorders, therefore, were appointed, on a rota, to each session, one to record the content and major points of the lecture - an executive activity. The sensory observer noted ways in which the dialogue took shape and also the interplay of positive and negative reaction. It was found that the greater length of the School gave more scope for people to appreciate "the experiment of living, thinking and working together". Confidence grew so that in one session a largely executive discussion was interrupted by the sensory observer to make a request for the balance to be redressed. Consequently, after a sensory period, a resistive mode was resumed. Time was allocated for these reports to be read back to the group. It must be said that, though it seemed successful and interesting at the time, the method was ultimately abandoned, since it could cause disagreement.

Final assessments of the fortnight showed an appreciation of the way discussions had broadened people's political views; the sensory way was not the quickest way from A to B but was the safest. There had been a wholeness about the interplay between the lecturers and the listeners which made people feel that this sharing and mutuality should be taken out into the world. Integration was to be attempted on every level, beginning with oneself. People felt they understood more about Resistive / Sensitive ideas. The society "Friends of the Future" would be brought into more active existence, but full plans would not be instituted until after 40 members had joined.

Friends of the Future

It is fascinating to consider what can be achieved in a year if the sensory preparation and will are in tune with each other. It had taken five years to achieve a Sensory Committee in Common Wealth. (248 people had voted when a Sensory Committee was accepted by the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, but, when the vote was taken by Common Wealth, a much larger number of delegates, representing the 18 Branches in Great Britain, were involved.) So, in 1948, people who had been through this process, felt the need to widen their scope to encourage the use of "feeling intelligence" or "intelligent sensitivity" beyond the field of politics, now that the war was over: The Society of the Friends of the Future was set up in May.

At this point I must apologise that until 2005 I'd neglected that box of archives since, when consulting Glynn Faithfull about the title years before, he'd been vague and slightly dismissive. The society had not lasted long and had been superseded by Braziers was the impression he'd conveyed. The reason? People had found it too difficult to try, on their own, to convert a group of people to the sensory method when that was not the reason for which they had joined the group in the first place. And further problems arose when they tried to maintain full support of both Common Wealth and Friends of the Future as well as earn a living.

So it was chiefly in response to Maurice Roth's insistence that there must have been some other discussions, correspondence or meetings between the third Common Wealth Sensory Summer School and the setting up of Braziers which prompted me to tackle the neglected box. A selection of "Friends of the Future" papers in Maurice's hands inspired him to comment very profitably on correspondence involving Norman Glaister, Bonnie Russell, Glynn Faithfull, and the Rev. James and Dorothy Parkes.

(The latter lived in the vicarage at Royston only a few miles from the Nuthampstead Zodiac). These letters are vital since they revealed the shaping of some aims which clearly show Braziers' philosophy in the making. Maurice Roth's paper reveals this clearly and includes the new society's "Statement of Aims" with a section on "Principles" which is, in my view, essential reading.

The year's achievements were that plans for the notion of the new society were agreed in Sept. 1948 just after the second Sensory Summer School, but there would only be full planning if more than 40 people wished to join. Between Jan. 1949 and Aug. 49, the time of the third Sensory Summer School, the "Statement of Aims" had been drawn up, there had been a planning weekend at Leatherhead, and three bulletins had been published.

"The Future of Humanity"

A growing desire for realistic action, perhaps, may be read into this title for 1949, The Preface speaks of a sense of achievement, of days of "companionship and shared endeavour" as well as of the 23 sessions held at Abbey House, Glastonbury. It ends with a poem conveying satisfaction and hope. "An Approach to a universal Religion", "An analysis of the Nature of Managerialism", "The Environmental Factor" "Economic Relationships and the Future of Humanity", "Decentralisation of Power" were some titles revealing a broad sweep of concerns. These were balanced by presentations of Trotter's and Glaister's ideas as in "Herd Instinct in Relation to Group Discussion", "Is Leadership Still Necessary?", "Resistive / Sensitive Organisation", "The Herd of Leaders" and "The Multiplication of Sensory Organisations". The group is clearly extending its knowledge of the ideas that inspired Norman Glaister and his later thought.

Individual comments are illuminating. People should work to extend the number of sensory organisations. "We are out to seek truth not win arguments." "You can't solve a problem within terms of itself, only in terms of something greater than itself." There is a growing desire for realistic action, with the specific aim "to produce a technique by which small groups could exploit the possibilities of mutual understanding as a means of social organisation". All could learn to teach. Possible alternatives take shape: a form of life – higher than that of individuals – is going to be a commercial organisation, but non-profit-making, controlled by a group organised on Resistive / Sensitive lines. This could provide a centre with the best possible social life for those that could afford to pay for it.(!) Another idea was that small groups might form a limited company, again on a Resistive / Sensitive principle, with entertainment outside the home since ordinary houses are less fitted to accommodate numbers. But balance is needed too; eating and entertaining together are also a fundamental need. Specific, more executive type, planning is increasing. Another plan is suggested: this is of a centre where people could meet or just drop in, eat together, and there would be a programme for learning and discussions. Something like a café? Or something that offered the possibility of a social life to balance the intellectual content. People seem to want more continuous contact – more than two weeks a year. The experiment of living, thinking and working together is gaining strength but the point about the importance of social activity is stressed; it's a mistake to assume people join associations like Common Wealth simply for the intellectual content. And there's a conviction that, if several Resistive / Sensitive groups came into existence, they would naturally contact each other and the practice would spread.

On a purely personal level, final contributions show the importance of these summer schools to individual participants and both an increasing reliance on a group (in fact a group aiming to become whole?) and the richness they felt in belonging to it. Comments include: “the pleasure of taking a holiday from resistive work”, “a permanent Resistive / Sensitive community could have great therapeutic value”, “the importance of symbols and ceremonials which could be integrate but which also needed to be spontaneous”. One person regretted that the companionship, the harmonious co-operation and a degree of unanimity of feeling were left behind between Summer Schools.

Transition

However, the move from these ideas to the founding of Braziers is not a simple progression. The year before, Norman Glaister had already shown a prospective buyer round Chertsey, but we have nothing to suggest whether he was serious or simply testing the water. But, two months after the end of the 1949 Summer School, Norman Glaister, Glynn Faithfull, Bonnie and Madge Russell and Chrystal Cates all entrained for Scotland to look at a property with a view to its suitability. So far from London? Norman felt people did not value what they didn't need to work hard for! Rooms in London which they had considered for lectures at about the same time had proved “dull”, whereas a house they had seen in the Chilterns was “surprisingly ugly outside, but very nice within”. This was Braziers. In fact negotiations began on Nov.21 1949 and the purchase was completed early in 1950. Awareness of the possible use of hydrogen bombs in the future may have made the distance from a world centre seem prudent.

Braziers Park School of Integrative Social Research

It is interesting to note that Norman had written to Eva Faithfull early in November 1949 commenting that there was “a demand for an educational centre, a sort of permanent summer school. It might be called a School for Sensory Social Studies.” (See Maurice Roth's “**Friends of the Future**”) Later in the letter he hopes that Glynn and she will be able to join in. As Marianne was already born, I think Norman was trying to ensure Eva would sanction Glynn's visits both as part of a family and on his own.

Finally, we come to the activities of the first year at Braziers from which to judge what was in people's minds. The first **Braziers Park Quarterly**, printed in spring 1951, reveals that “a wide field of possible study in weekend lectures and discussions” was explored. Whether this was relaxation from cleaning and preparing the house for visitors, we do not know. A Sensory Summer School was held but I have no detailed report of it at home. However, for the first recorded time in connection with Braziers, “experiments in artistic expression” were held and proved very successful since they were followed up in the autumn and winter months by separate weekends on painting, dance, drama and music. Jeannie and Alfred Cannon led part of this and I saw them at work at a conference for The New Education Fellowship later on, so I know they were inspirational at a time when art in education - and writing just afterwards - were being liberated. The official opening was held on Nov.11 1950, when Alexander Farquharson, M.B.E., M.A., who was an original member of the Sociological Society, spoke. He and his wife were joint wardens of Le Play House, Ledbury. More than 90 guests attended including L.L. Whyte and Marian Milner (Joanna Field). Through the winter several weekends on Trotter, and the

implications of non-violence were held, presumably in preparation for a wider publication of the programme in 1951.

Handlist for Spring and Summer 1951.

The Handlist for the first Spring and Summer terms is interesting. Four weekends were left free, one was earmarked for the Research Council to meet, and the other thirteen weekends featured either one or two themes, presumably to increase numbers of visitors, or to offer something even if there were no takers for one subject. The following figures represent the number of times a subject featured:

Education 3; Literature 3; Social Integration 3; Social Psychology 3; Painting 3; Experimental Dance and Experimental Drama 2; Music 1; The Contemporary Crisis 1. This makes 19 courses. There was also a weekend shared with the Personalists, a group which became the Progressive League who still come to Braziers as far as I know, Gordon Silberman being one member I know who still visits. To sum up, the curriculum consisted of psychology and social philosophy as thinking topics, creative self expression in art, and movement as well. It must be remembered that these details are taken from the Handlist and we have no record of how many takers there were or how many courses did not function. A Sensory Summer School and a September “Arts and Drama Weekend” were also planned. It must also be noted that Maurice Roth has found a more detailed list of titles for weekend courses in 1950, which shows the reliance on members and friends of the group as leaders of discussion weekends.

The Sensory Summer School in 1950 was entitled “Our Responsibility: The Development of Mankind as a Social Organism”. The work that the group was attempting and the threat of the hydrogen bomb looming in the background must have made the chosen title real, demanding and urgent however inspirational it felt on a different level.

What was in their minds, of course, is also presented much more directly in the official records of the Committee of Management and Sensory Committee which are held in the archives where they may be read. Activities must have included the publication of “The Brochure of 1950” which had taken so long to prepare as “Why Sensory?” There followed eight issues of “**The Braziers Park Quarterly**” which then gave way to the home-produced “**Braziers Park Social Research Papers and Bulletin**”. So communication of the ideas was of paramount importance.

Courses advertised for 1951 and for a number of years afterwards, in my view, still illustrate what I’ve argued here. Programmes were described as concerned with thinking, artistic expression and movement, and these, throughout festival weekends, tended to be held simultaneously, being arranged so that people could follow more than one theme. Later on they could be interpreted as feeding and using head, heart and hand, the emphasis being on wholeness both for the individual and for the group. This was stressed particularly, years later, in a memorable talk on Jan Smuts, given by Glynn Faithfull. In this he also pointed out that, although “integrative” had been selected to convey the School’s intention in the 50’s, had the foundation occurred a few years later, then the preferred word would probably have been “wholistic”.

(First version Feb 2006 – redrafted Sept 07.)