

JOHN WEDGWOOD WOODCOCK

Since we are evolving, what are we evolving toward? -- and what do we, each and all, need to do about it?. It was at a crucial moment in his already long-established search for workable answers to such questions — a personal imperative to move beyond 'theory of evolution' into a life practically responsive to it — that John Woodcock found his way, in 1958, to Braziers Park School of Integrative Social Research (BPSISR). John had recently been feeling discouraged -- in danger even of 'apostasy' — in his struggles to answer 'the great question: how do we know what we should do?', but the encounter with J. Norman Glaister's vision 'was a revelation to him' [EW]: here was the grounding he had been seeking, the interface between theory and practice. He threw himself into Braziers' concerns and activities immediately — though he was never to limit himself to them — and the relationship became central to the rest of his active and questing life. He served on the Committee of Management continuously from 1960 to 1996, at one time or another holding every formal post on it except the Secretaryship, while his involvement with the Sensory Committee (and the whole 'sensory' side) and with Braziers' functioning as a college was similarly both extensive and intensive.

A letter written by John Murrell to the *Sunday Times* first brought Braziers to JWW's attention. The paper had published a series of articles on 'The Destiny of Man', to which Julian Huxley contributed an evolutionary perspective, and JM's letter drew attention to Braziers' practical interest in attempting to live-out evolutionary insights via small groups and community. JM reports of JWW that 'his thought processes were often highly abstract, but the help which he gave to me and my family, and I think to Braziers as its oft-time Chairman, was practical and productive.' (Others too have privately paid tribute to JWW's observantly kind helpfulness, as unobtrusive as it was practical.)

Within a year or so of their meeting, both JNG and JWW were to be mightily encouraged by the publication in English of Teilhard de Chardin's major work *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), with its introduction by Julian Huxley. Teilhard - related courses, which were to become a long-running series, soon appeared on Braziers' curriculum, convened by JNG, during his last years, and JWW, later joined by R. Glynn Faithfull. (When the British Teilhard Association was formed in 1963, JWW, RGF and other Brazierites were active participants, John and Glynn later holding specific posts within the Association.)

Within a few years more, John had cause to thank Braziers for the advent of another central and stabilizing element in his life, for in 1962 Evelyn Curtis came there several times as a visitor. They were married in 1963, and Evelyn joined John in the London group-house, at 14 Haslemere Road N8, which John had co-founded and in which he had been living since 1960. Francis, their first child, was born in 1964, and the family decided to move out in 1965 for space reasons. (It is interesting that both the Braziers of 1950 and the Haslemere Road of 1960 appear to have been founded, implicitly at least, as virtually adult-only communities.) Their second child, Alison, was born in 1967; thus, if John's dedicated interests might, in a bachelor, have carried some danger of narrowness, he was saved from it by his rounding-out into a happy family-man. The effective mutuality of John and Evelyn's partnership was particularly evident to those who enjoyed their ready hospitality, which during their Caversham years (1973-99) regularly extended to the entire Braziers houseteam. The importance of their dialogue of minds, throughout their four decades together, took longer for friends to perceive, though Evelyn's role as a sounding-board for John's developing ideas, and sharpener of their written formulations, gradually emerged quite distinctly.

Braziers' early Statement of Aims includes the aspiration 'to make conscious in ourselves the shape of the process of which we are a part', and John's self-nurtured ideas placed him among those who seek that shape in its largest scope yet with immediate applicability to our current life. So, he especially found in Teilhard's work further encouragement to view the existence of evolving life on Earth as no isolated local-planet quirk of biology but as typifying,

characteristic of, a process shaping the Universe. Scientific cosmology in the decades since Teilhard has amply underlined the validity of speaking of cosmic evolution. Biological evolution appears as but one particular instance of such a process, albeit the most intricate and complexified manifestation known to us. To adapt JWW's own words (in his self account):

Each phase of this irreversible sequence has given rise to the next, as its diverse structured forms have become the coordinated parts of the forms of the next phases (for example, atoms in molecules and cells in organisms)... after countless false starts and obstacles on the way... Strangely, this revelation of phased maturation has not yet been taken as an indication of how the human species might facilitate the emergence of the next phase on planet Earth.

That last sentence shows the convergence of JWW's thought with JNG's 'belief that there is for humanity a practical evolutionary task: the "next step", involving not individuals alone, but interthinking groups' [EW]. Braziers' hope was to experiment with the cooperative co-functioning of dedicated individuals, viewed as self-conscious 'cells', toward their effective integration as newly-structured self-conscious 'multimental organisms'. Such mentally coherent units might find themselves entering those new levels of consciousness toward which evolution could be seen as striving and directing humankind to strive. Some of us thought of such levels as already glimpsed or intuited on occasion throughout history (under whatever names of creed, poetry, philosophy, mysticism) though never yet stabilized in human thought-community. Others felt those further levels to be as yet largely unattainable, almost by definition hidden from us, though none the less compelling — John seems to have been of that persuasion, as perhaps was JNG himself. Certainly both men, and the early Braziers groups in general, however hopeful, were prepared to face those 'countless false starts and obstacles on the way'.

Such is the larger picture within which John's life, including all the particular facets of it mentioned in this publication, makes unusually consistent sense.

The following, occasionally linked, are extracts from appreciations of JWW's contribution in Braziers and beyond :-

John was such a major presence in the mental world of everyone involved with Braziers, as well no doubt as in his larger world beyond, that there will be a big gap for all of us... I had always tended to think of him as a great oak in our landscape... During the last few years I had also become increasingly aware in talking to John that the intellectual attitude contained in Norman's writings was accompanied in practice by a sort of benevolence that seemed to permeate it and gave a very endearing human warmth to its expression in the life of Braziers: the two combining to form a twin foundation for the place's enduring attraction... This attitude was shared entirely by John and reflected by him. It has I think been due to him more than anyone that this double inheritance has been recognized and preserved and will (I hope) survive as the foundation of Braziers' identity. [Alan Kipps]

The immediate and overriding impression was of an optimistic man, with serious interests, who was very willing to share his ideas. The time was ripe for mankind to be more responsible in shaping the future, and such was the complexity of the contemporary world that only groups — rather than individuals — working well together would be able to succeed. For John, one experiment was not enough, and certainly research relies on comparisons. He set up an experiment in group living in Haslemere Road, Hornsey, London, with different expectations about contributions and practicalities, but with integrative elements from Braziers. For him, information and ideas should always rely on a two-way process. Sometimes this involved him in study, as in joining P.W. Martin's dream-group or learning about the Myers Briggs system of personality typing. Always, it involved reporting back on his findings so that Braziers could be enriched by the new experience, as when we used the

Transdisciplinary Forum method of deepening discussions, first pioneered by John at the Teilhard Association, or adapted the discipline of Discernment to a matter of serious import. Admittedly it sometimes seemed that John was being over-enthusiastic or going off at a tangent, but one came to see that, in fact, these forays were entirely consistent with his view of Braziers' purpose — even his involvement with a business run as a workers' cooperative, which resulted in Braziers instituting an annual social audit. [Hilda Salter]

John's enthusiasm and ideas illuminated our meetings and activities, and often made us think carefully about what Braziers stands for. Many people will remember his courses, especially his lectures on evolutionary change. His regularity of attendance at meetings allowed him to note if a sensory component was beneficially added to the executive function of COM or if sensory meetings were becoming dominated by executive functions and needed renewal. His contribution to Braziers was enormous over the years. His generosity in accepting the ideas of other people made our discussions more vital. [Jean Robertson]

A few of the courses JWW convened or co-convened over the years are listed in the Chronology below, but he will be remembered for many more. For instance. *The Destiny of Man, Love-Hate and Human Harmony, Personal Relationships and Group Structure, Social Unity and Individual Values*, and courses on the importance of learning from one's dreams. An abiding recollection will be his regular, meticulously illustrated lectures on evolutionary change, with the essential conditions required for the next more complex organism to develop. Unity, diversity and stability were a regular theme. These talks also explored for us the gradual change in scientific thought as 'process' began to attract more adherents, until it could be announced that, in Rupert Sheldrake's words, 'the universe is a unitary process of growth'. Through these lectures one could see John developing his own unitary view of life, extending what had existed in Norman Glaister's work, and, on joining with Creation Spirituality's 'new Universe story', offering it to Braziers. [adapted from HS]

In closer focus on particular aspects: -

Another of John's skills was his intuitive interpretation of new trends or tensions in the group... which often clarified issues just ahead of their becoming urgent and so could nudge them to a positive outcome. When he saw Braziers' need to make sensory process available to more people, Sensory Committee minutes suggest a delicacy of approach, combined with a faithful adherence to agreed practices, which resulted in the long-lived Sensory Network. Yet another vital gift lay in John's development of the possibilities of the Round, to give everyone space and time in which to hear and contribute adequately to a fully democratic discussion. Such sharing of personal thought and feeling could free the mind for more effective group thinking. Drawing on his study of Teilhard de Chardin's work, John developed a form of this sharing into a ritual, the Centre to Centre meeting, designed to be accessible to people of any, or no, religious affiliation. It was used to great effect once or twice at Braziers. Its power is considerable and will find its own time and place, as it has over many years in the Teilhard Association. In John's eyes the Centre to Centre meeting could pave the way for, and actually was, multimentality — both at the same time. [Hilda Salter]

Alison Williams' account in her obituary of JWW for the *Teilhard Association Newsletter* (14, May 2003) is convergent here:- "Teilhard perceived that evolution proceeded by complexification in the direction of consciousness; that each higher level was achieved 'centre to centre... and *not otherwise*'; and he was keenly aware of the obstacle presented by our natural hostility to 'the other, quite simply as other'. Accepting these premises, John sought practical ways of moving with the grain of evolution toward its next step, human groups thinking and feeling as one in 'differentiated union'. [One such initiative for the Teilhard Association] developed into the Centre-to-Centre meetings which continue to this day, and were described by John himself thus: '*A Centre-to-Centre workshop aims to strengthen inner unity and unity with God through seeking a unity in depth between its members, despite their differences. We seek to do this in small groups, reporting to one, another in turn and accepting and separating the reports in silence during these 'rounds ...*

The workshops aim to suggest how an organised commitment to centred union might contribute to peace, and benefit the corporate bodies of our industrial society."[AW]

John adapted the idea of the Timewalk as an aid to understanding the evolution of the cosmos and it was so important to him that it became his millenium gift for the 50th anniversary, installed with Ken Chiba's artwork and invaluable help. It is now a feature of Braziers, incorporated into the woodland path. Most of us have enjoyed walking around it with John, stopping at the various points while he explained aspects of evolution or just standing quietly under the trees with him. [JR]

We close with two affirmative valedictions, the first from AW, the second HS's inspired re-application of Honor Fawsitt's tribute to JNG in 1961:-

John shared with Teilhard a mixture of frustration, disappointment and perhaps some surprise that so few people shared his vision. Why was it not clear to all that the cosmos has evolved toward ever-higher levels of consciousness, and that our contemporary humanity is on the threshold of something new, with a responsibility to prepare for the next step forward? Again like Teilhard John remained hopeful, committed to the personal and interpersonal effort required by evolution 'to make it work. because we know what to do.'

His personal achievement of dying without resorting to fantasy, remaining sensitive to himself and his environment up to his last conscious moment, speaks of his extraordinary devotion to the disciplines which he saw as essential to the survival of the human species, which must engage man in a higher form of life — until recently only envisaged in symbolic religious forms. And it was towards a new religion and a new-morality that he was looking as he handed over his responsibility.

[Alan Clark; rev. Easter Monday 2004]

Alan J Clark

'Alan first met Norman Glaister during the summer of 1956. He maintained his connection with Braziers through Honor. He was Hon. Treasurer of Braziers School of Integrative Social Research 1966 -1988, attending most COM, SC and house meetings. He convened a number of Braziers' courses on poetry and ecological topics.

Alan found his vocation as librarian during 1957. He was with the Royal Society from 1969 – 1996, latterly as Deputy Librarian. His catalogue of the Society's historical library was published in 1982. Since 1970 Alan has had a special interest in the American writer Laura (Riding) Jackson (1901 – 1991) whose posthumous work he helps to edit, and on whom he has published a number of articles and a bibliographical check list (Revised 2001).'

John Wedgwood Woodcock (1924-2002): Chronology

1924, 22 April JWW born in India: parents Arthur and Mildred (née Adey). Arthur Wedgwood Woodcock, a wool-broker, is distantly related to Charles Darwin, whose mother and wife were Wedgwoods. (JWW later felt that knowledge of this connection may have helped arouse his own interest in evolution.) JWW's grandfather was sometime mayor of Islington.

1924-29 Parents and children travel between India & England annually.

1930 (aet 6) Mother and children return to London, and live with maternal grandparents. In this crowded household of 8 – 9 people. JWW is able to have model railway in his attic bedroom (a lifelong hobby). The family attend United Reformed Church, but does not indoctrinate junior members.

1932 (aet 8) Father dies in India.

1933 JWW awarded 'presentation' (bursary) to Christ's Hospital (his mother had perseveringly located the presentation-holder concerned). Becomes a boarder until 1940.

1934 Mother re-marries, to Leslie Walker, who runs established family business of A.E.Walker, manufacturing stationers: loose-leaf books etc. Their factory is in North London.

1940 (aet 16) JWW leaves Christ's Hospital & takes up apprenticeship with G.N.Hayden, heating & ventilating engineers. Qualifies AMIHVE.; remains with Hayden's until 1952.

1943-45 Serves in Fleet Air Arm. Still training as a pilot; when WWII ends.

1946 (aet 22) Begins personal 'evolutionary scrapbook'.

1947/8 Writes for a RADA student-group a radio piece on 'Ibsen's Attitude to Women' (broadcast to Norway; group invited to tour an Ibsen programme).

1948, Spring Submits resolution to annual conference of British Drama League: "That drama's primary role is as a positive evolutionary force". Interviewed by the BDL's Director (E. Martin Browne.).

1948, April JWW goes to Turkey —to work on heating / ventilation of new Parliament building. Returns to UK only in 1952 ('living for four years at close quarters with a distinctively different culture provided a further stimulus to examining one's beliefs': JWW). Private study-reading, often evolution-related: e.g. Lecomte du Noüy, *Human Destiny*, 1946. Discusses such ideas with a Swedish friend encountered in Turkey, Hans Lundstrom, who later marries Eva — regular visitor to Braziers for many years.

1952 (aet 28) Returns to England when asked to become Managing Director of firm of A.E.Walker (until 1976), on retirement of stepfather Leslie Walker.

1958 First comes to Braziers (BPSISR) and meets JNG (in response to letter written to the *Sunday Times* by John Murrell apropos a series of articles, 'The Destiny of Man', to which Julian Huxley contributed). JWW had for a while been 'tending to lose his sense of evolutionary commitment' (as he later records).

1958-59 Becomes Associate of BPSISR, made Active Associate.

1958-60 Attends London Braziers Group meetings.

1959 Braziers begins a long series of courses on Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* JWW a leading convener/contributor - at first with JNG, later with Glynn Faithfull.

1959 Discussions with mainly London-based Brazierites (including Margaret Kipps [Faithfull] and Elsie Gibson [Ridley] and others named below) about acquiring a 'community house' in London.

1960-65 Purchase by JWW and Phyllis Jones of shared house at 14 Haslemere Road, Crouch End N8, 'Braziers' London house' (co-residents at various times include Phyllis Jones, Bernard Stiles, Marjorie Avery-Jones, John & Ann Murrell, Brian Moss, Joy Daneman, Yvonne Coenca, Hamish).

1960 Elected Member of BPSISR; elected Treasurer at same AGM (serves until 1966)

1960/61 onward Becomes interested in Jung, through Bernard Stiles; studies P.W.Martin's *Experiment in Depth* (1955); meets Martin, joins discussion- and dream-group based on his book. Meetings are initially all-male: later mixed groups, which Evelyn in time attends. Dreamwork remains a lifelong interest for both.

1962 Meets Evelyn Curtis, at Braziers.

1962-63 Assists Gailean Davidson and John & Ann Murrell in forming company to manage 66 Hornsey Rise, London N19, as another group-house.

[1963 British Teilhard Association founded by Renée-Marie Croose-Parry & others]

1963 Marries Evelyn. Both live at Haslemere Road until 1965. J & E move to Whetstone with Francis W (b. 1964).

1966 Alison W. born.

1967 Elected Vice-Chairman of BPSISR (serves until 1968) [AJC becomes Treasurer]

1968 Elected Chairman (serves until 1978).

[1970s JWW sells controlling interest in Walker's (to makers of "Monopoly"); but JWW remains in charge.]

1971 Becomes an Executor of Norman Glaister's Will.

1973 J&E move to Reading. Walker's have a second factory, at Didcot. This was bought by JWW as Managing Director.

1976 JWW made redundant from A.E. Walker Ltd.

1977-80 JWW and Tom Lupton (of Industrial Common Ownership) assist a workers' takeover of a small firm, Caversham Closures, creating a co-ownership structure in which JWW encourages adoption of regular all-worker meetings. JWW becomes more active in Teilhard Centre for the Future of Man (later British Teilhard Association).

1978 At BPSISR AGM relinquishes Chair (to Jean Robertson); elected Vice-Chairman for second time (serves until 1996).

1981-88 Serves as Secretary of Teilhard Centre in London (moves office to Maria Assumpta Centre, Kensington Square). Organizes Transdisciplinary Forums (drawing inter alia on Braziers' experience) and Annual Lectures by e.g. Bernard Towers, Claude Curling, Paul Davies.

1984 Initiates 'Centre To Centre' meetings at Teilhard Centre in London and at his home. See e.g. flyer ca 1990, 'A Forum for Unity through Diversity', and statement, July 1993, 'Some Implications of an Evolutionary Cosmology'. Extra-Braziers group-interests from this period on include work with 'University of the Third Age' (U3A) Reading.

1988, Oct Note for BPSISR COM: 'Auditing Social Values'.

1990s, early J & E explore possibility of renting & rebuilding Webb's Bungalow in Braziers Lane, but the idea proves impractical.

1993 Elected Trustee of BPSISR.

1994. 16-18 Sept. Co-convenes, at Braziers, 'The Theory and Practice of Teilhard de Chardin' (with Fr Richard Brüchsel).

1995. Jan/Mar Convenes 'Evolutionary Spirituality' (two connected weekends at Braziers).

1996. 25 Feb Gives BPSISR Norman Glaister Lecture: 'Norman Glaister and Multimentality' (*Research Communications*, 16, October 1996, pp.2-9)

1996, 18 May At AGM retires from all posts and leaves COM after 36 years.

1999, 27 March Gives talk 'Reassessing Braziers Vision' during 'New Universe Story' seminar (*Research Communications*, 19, October 1999, pp.14-19)

1998-2002 Advocacy of Timewalks concept; attempts to promote interest in a Time Walk at Christ's Hospital;

1999, Oct As a Millenium gift, assists installation of a Time Walk at Braziers with artwork by Ken Chiba (see *Research Communications*, 19, October 1999, p. 1, cover, & insert); John leads walk-around during 1999 Members' Weeekend, 29-31 Oct.

2000, Feb J & E move to Norwich.

2001-2 Participates in 'Future of Braziers' discussions; co-proposes (with John Murrell) motion for 2002 AGM.

2002, 3 July JWW dies.

[2002, Nov. Quiet Meeting and Time Walk walk-around with Evelyn and Alison in memory of John, at 2002 Members' Weekend.]