

DARTINGTON HALL AND SOCIAL REFORM IN INTERWAR BRITAIN

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DECLARATION AND STATEMENT OF LENGTH

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

This dissertation is 79,796 words long and does not exceed the word limit for the History Faculty Degree Committee.

THESIS SUMMARY

In the wake of the First World War, reformers across the Western world questioned laissez-faire liberalism, the self-oriented and market-driven ruling doctrine of the nineteenth century. This philosophy was blamed, variously, for the war, for industrialisation and for urbanisation; for a way of life shorn of any meaning beyond getting and keeping; for the too great faith in materialism and in science; and for the loss of a higher, transcendent meaning that gave a unifying altruistic or spiritual purpose to individual existence and to society as a whole.

For many, the cure to these ills lay in reforming the liberal social framework in ways that made it more fulfilling to the whole person and that strengthened ties between individuals. Dartington Hall was an outstanding practical example of this impulse to promote holistic, integrated living. It was a well-financed, internationally-minded social and cultural experiment set up on an estate in South Devon in 1925 by American heiress Dorothy Elmhirst (née Whitney) and her second husband, Leonard, son of a Yorkshire squire-parson.

The Elmhirsts' project for redressing the effects of laissez-faire liberalism had two components. Instead of being treated as atomised individuals in the capitalist market, participants at Dartington were to achieve full self-realisation through a 'life in its completeness' that incorporated the arts, education and spirituality. In addition, through their active participation in running the community, they were to demonstrate how integrated democracy could bring about the perfection of individuals and the progress of society as a whole. The Elmhirsts hoped that Dartington would provide a globally applicable model for a better way of life.

This thesis is a close study of Dartington's interlinked constellation of experiments in education, the arts, agriculture and social organisation – experiments that can only be understood by tracing them back to their shared roots in the idea of 'life in its completeness'. At the same time, it explores how Dartington's philosophy and trajectory illuminate the wider reform landscape. The Elmhirsts' community echoed and cross-pollinated with other schemes for social improvement in Britain, Europe, America and India, as well as feeding into the broad social democratic project in Britain. Dartington's evolution from an independent, elite-led reform project to one split between state-led and communitarian reform matched the trajectory of other such enterprises begun in interwar Britain, making it a bellwether of changes in reformist thinking across the century.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED FREQUENTLY

DES	Devon Extension Service
IAAE	International Association of Agricultural Economists
LEA	Local Education Authority
NEF	New Education Fellowship
PEP	Political and Economic Planning
PPU	Peace Pledge Union
RCC	Rural community council movement
UCSW	University College of the South West
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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INTRODUCTION

'Dartington was represented, embodied in it because of all [the founders'] contacts, some of the great strands of utopian thought of this century – a utopian view about education, about the countryside, about the arts – very high hopes, and these high hopes came – they didn't just spring from them originally – I mean, they came out of a whole climate of thought.'

Michael Young (1978)¹

'I can see many aims and objects desperately tangled (e.g. helping lame dogs; helping your own family; showing the world; avoiding the world; having occupations, hobbies, even toys for yourself; trying to square communistic theories with the possession and enjoyment of great wealth; eating your cake and having it).'

William St John Pym (1931)²

In the wake of the First World War, reformers across the Western world were assailed by a sense that mankind had been 'drawn into a blind alley' or had 'run off the line'.³ The villain of the piece was deemed to be laissez-faire liberalism, the self-oriented and market-driven ruling doctrine of the nineteenth century.⁴ This philosophy was blamed, variously, for the war; for industrialisation and for urbanisation; for a way of life shorn of any meaning beyond getting and keeping; for too great a faith in materialism and in science; and for the loss of a higher, transcendent meaning that gave a unifying altruistic or spiritual purpose to individual existence and to society as a whole.⁵ Liberalism, with its conception of human experience that overemphasised 'the constituent atoms, parts, elements', treating individuals merely as atomised units in the economic market, was seen as broken and ripe for reform.⁶

For many, the cure to this age of division was bringing things together, which was to be achieved by pursuing an ideal of 'wholeness, synthetic, syncretism, integration,

¹ Michael Young, a pupil then a trustee of Dartington Hall, in an interview with Peter Cox, 9 June 1978, T/HIS/S20/D, Dartington Hall Archives (unless specified otherwise, all the following archival references are to this collection).

² William St John Pym, response to 1931 Dartington questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/E.

³ Leonard Elmhirst, one of the founders of Dartington, to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 1924, box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives, Columbia University.

⁴ The term 'liberalism' here will often be used as shorthand for the 'classic' laissez-faire individualist variant that prevailed in the nineteenth century. Many reformers connected with Dartington Hall explicitly rejected liberalism or wanted to reconfigure it in a more socialised form. Some saw themselves as grappling with narrower issues, such as against an education that promoted competition, even though their work formed part of the same liberalism-reforming tendency. Andrew Vincent, 'Classic liberalism and its crisis of identity', *History of political thought* 11 (1990), 143-161.

⁵ These fears are captured in correspondence between Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst in file LKE/DWE. For the wider picture, see Richard Overly, *The morbid age: Britain between the wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009) and Richard Vinet, *A history in fragments: Europe in the twentieth century* (London: Little, Brown, 2000).

⁶ William Boyd was a lecturer at Glasgow University, a supporter of the New Education Fellowship and friends with several of Dartington's participants. Boyd (ed.), *Towards a New Education: based on the Fifth World Conference of the New Education Fellowship at Elsinore, Denmark* (London; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1930), 350.

globalization'.⁷ The way in which people conceived this unifying ideal was messily diverse. It cropped up in a huge range of forms and places across the interwar years. Idealist philosophers argued that society was not an 'atomistic' aggregate, but a single organism with a shared purpose that was embodied in a 'general will'.⁸ Biologists adopted a holistic approach that emphasised the interrelation between physiological and psychological processes – called 'the mind-body unity'.⁹ Progressive educators tried to address the needs of the whole child, rather than dividing learning up into academic subjects.¹⁰ Artists seized on the project of unifying the various media, or the process of creation, or life with art.¹¹ Those who had lost their Christian faith sought syncretic alternatives that amalgamated spirituality with the findings of modern science.¹² The quintessence of the unity-seeking impulse, however, was not represented by any one of these disciplines so much as by the ambitious desire to join up all of these holistic approaches in a completely new model for how to live.

In Britain in the 1920s many believed that the entire liberal social framework – in the sense of both philosophy and everyday modes of behaviour – urgently needed reforming in ways that made it more fulfilling to the whole person and that strengthened ties between individuals. That conviction was renewed by the Wall Street Crash, which sent political, social and economic crises resounding through the 1930s. It was also fuelled by the Russian Revolution and the later rise of the fascist dictatorships; whether approved of or feared, they at least showed that the initiation of complete social alternatives was possible. The widespread sense that fundamental change was needed resulted in the instigation of an abundance of schemes that promoted integrated ways of thinking and living.¹³ Some of them addressed specific types of division or fragmentation – between the urban and rural; creative and economic;

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jose Harris, *Private lives, public spirit: a social history of Britain, 1870-1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 228. See also Sandra den Otter, "'Thinking in communities": late nineteenth-century liberals, idealists and the retrieval of community', *Parliamentary history* 16 (1997), 67-84.

⁹ John Parascandola, 'Organismic and holistic concepts in the thought of L. J. Henderson', *Journal of the history of biology* 4 (1971), 63-113. Mark Jackson discusses the adoption of holism in science more widely in this period in *The age of stress: science and the search for stability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ William Boyd and Wyatt Rawson, *The story of the New Education* (London: Heinemann, 1965).

¹¹ The Bauhaus, for example, strove to unite the rest of the creative arts under the primacy of architecture. Michael Saler writes about this unifying impulse in England in *The avant-garde in interwar England: medieval modernism and the London Underground* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹² Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British society between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of faith: mesmerism, spiritualism, and occultism in modern France* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹³ For examples, see Dennis Hardy, *Utopian England: community experiments 1900-1945* (London: E & NF Spon, 2000); Jay Winter, *Dreams of peace and freedom: utopian moments in the twentieth century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

spiritual and material; old and new; individual and community; nation and mankind.¹⁴ Others had a more totalising reforming ambition, to be an ‘ideal spiral of all feeding in’.¹⁵ Of these latter, Dartington Hall was an outstanding example.

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Insert from a 1941 pamphlet by W.K. Slater, ‘The Dartington Hall Experiment’.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives.

Dartington was a social and cultural experiment set up in South Devon in 1925 by an American heiress, Dorothy Elmhirst (née Whitney), and her second husband, Leonard Elmhirst, son of a Yorkshire squire-parson.¹⁶ Within a few years of its foundation it had come to consist of a school, a series of industrial and agricultural enterprises and an arts department, all part of a community on a once-traditionally-run estate. The Elmhirsts’ plan for their alternative model for society had two main components. The first was that all

¹⁴ These ranged from state-backed experiments such as the Land Settlement Association and nationwide initiatives like the Village Club Association to those specific to a particular place – the Quaker-run Brynmawr Experiment in Wales and Ditchling in Sussex – or united by one personality – Rolf Gardiner’s Springhead estate. Hardy surveys the geographically-specific intentional communities of this period in *Utopian England*. For an overview of the broader movements, see Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (eds.), *The English countryside between the wars: regeneration or decline?* (New York: The Boydell Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Leonard Elmhirst, untitled note, 27 January 1936, LKE/G/S9/A.

¹⁶ Leonard tended to be the mouthpiece for and executor of the couple’s shared ideas, while Dorothy’s influence on the shape of Dartington was clear but often tacit. To give voice to her role, the term ‘the Elmhirsts’ will often be used in this thesis where it was Leonard who was doing the actual articulation, but of a joint position. The founders will be called by their first names where they are referred to individually to avoid confusion between them.

participants in their community would have an existence that allowed them to be more than just economic units – they would contribute to a revived rural economy, but their days would also incorporate learning, creativity and a sense of spiritual communion, resulting in an existence of complete self-fulfilment. The second, conjoined principle was that Dartington’s participants would be fully involved in running the estate, creating a thriving social democracy that would both perfect them as individuals and bring about the unified progress of the community as a whole. The hope was that this ‘abundant’ experiment in integrated, democratic living would ‘set an ideal for all groups to work to’, in England and around the world.¹⁷

Dorothy and Leonard’s objectives, beyond the unity-seeking ideal, were never prescriptively spelled out. Their hopes for practical social and economic reform – whether deepening community democracy or regenerating rural industry and agriculture – intermingled with unitive spiritual desires. Their overarching ambitions were implied through the people they invited to join them and the enterprises they instigated, rather than set out in a manifesto. Just before they began, Leonard wrote to Dorothy of ‘a dream of what Graham Wallas calls “The Great Society”, and of what someone else called “The Kingdom of Heaven”’.¹⁸ More precise formulations usually related only to ambitions for one particular facet of their project – supporting amateur creativity, for example, or promoting lifelong learning. The abstract ambition to ‘make everything reciprocal and interdependent’ was what really explained the existence of so many apparently unrelated activities in one place.¹⁹ The openness of the founders’ ambition for Dartington allowed scope for a range of idealists and reformers, sometimes with conflicting agendas, to work at the same time towards their particular iteration of a better life in the ‘perfect playground’ of the estate.²⁰

Capacious vagueness was not the only aspect of the Elmhursts’ utopia-building that was unusual. In a period of economic uncertainty Dartington was well financed, Dorothy’s fortune allowing the translation of ideals into reality at a rate beyond most reformers’ wildest dreams.²¹ Dartington was also distinguished by its connectedness with other reforming

¹⁷ Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

¹⁸ This muddled, broad-brush combination of nineteenth-century Christian Socialism with Graham Wallas’ secular idealisation of Athenian democracy was characteristic of Leonard’s loose and omnivorous approach to ideas. Leonard to Dorothy, 27 October 1920, LKE/DWE/10/A; Graham Wallas’ *The great society: a psychological analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1914).

¹⁹ Anonymous response to 1931 questionnaire, LKE/G/13/B.

²⁰ Leonard, ‘Note for talk’, 16 May 1936, LKE/G/S8/F. His phrase is echoed in Michael Saler’s description of the fantasy worlds proliferating in the same period. *As if: modern enchantment and the literary prehistory of virtual reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

²¹ In 1925 Dorothy’s fortune was worth approximately \$35 million. Over the next eleven years she spent about \$8 million in America, and the same sum in England, mainly on Dartington. Despite this,

schemes. Over the interwar period it impacted on and was influenced by idealist projects in Europe, Asia and America, including the Bauhaus, Rabindranath Tagore's Sriniketan and the New Deal. Such interconnectedness was reinforced by the ardent internationalism that characterised both Dartington itself and the elite reforming milieu in which it arose – in part a reaction to the First World War, in part a reflection of universalistic Christian values.²² The estate shows how experimental communitarian projects – in one sense defined by their localism – grew together into a global movement, tied by the international exchange of ideas and people.²³ Dartington might be set in a conservative corner of rural Devon, but it was one of the 'building blocks' of private and governmental exchange that made up the 'emergence of international society in the 1920s'.²⁴

The undertaking fell into three phases. Beginning in 1925, the Elmhirsts concentrated on reform at a local level, and here they came closest to achieving their goal of demonstrating 'life in its completeness'.²⁵ Dorothy funded the project liberally. Participants' expectations were high. The community succeeded in merging its educational, spiritual and practical aims and activities and in attracting interest from progressives in Britain and across the world. The second phase, beginning in the early 1930s, was triggered by an influx of refugees fleeing totalitarian regimes in Europe. Their arrival coincided with a growing sense that Dartington should offer a more immediate, realistically costed and widely replicable model of community as an alternative to the totalitarian dystopias that were threatening abroad and to the seeming political stagnation at home. The Elmhirsts' drive became less towards local organic integration and more towards efficient administration and outside impact. Over the course of the 1930s, echoing the trajectory of other elites, they gradually moved away from a

and the effects of the depression, strategically diverse holdings meant her fortune was valued at \$45 million in 1936. Michael Young, *The Elmhirsts of Dartington: the creation of a utopian community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 299.

²² Daniel Gorman, 'Ecumenical internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches', *Journal of contemporary history* 45 (2010), 51-73.

²³ A study of Dartington speaks to research on the international cross-pollination of British and American communitarian progressivism, such as Daniel T. Rodgers' *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998) and Marc Stears' *Progressives, pluralists, and the problems of the state: ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). It also connects to Ruth Harris' work linking local, subjective experience to the large, abstract processes of global connectivity. 'Rolland, Gandhi and Madeleine Slade: spiritual politics, France and the wider world', *French history* 27 (2013), 579-99.

²⁴ Daniel Gorman, *The emergence of international society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

²⁵ The phrase is Rabindranath Tagore's, quoted in Uma Das Gupta, 'Tagore's ideas of social action and the Sriniketan experiment of rural reconstruction, 1922-41', *University of Toronto quarterly* 77 (2008), 992-1004 at 992.

vision of society as perfected through autonomous local groups to one in which reform was led from the centre.²⁶

The Second World War precipitated the enterprise's third stage. It brought to the fore a 'social-democratic' notion of democracy, led by an organised working class, which undermined the concept of having independent, elite-led social experiments at all.²⁷ The war also brought about the extension and centralisation of government. From this point onward, the Elmhursts began working mainly to turn Dartington into an outpost of research and development for the state – and they succeeded in making significant contributions to the government's construction of the welfare state. This shift did not mean that the notion of change being achieved through small, independent communities fell entirely by the wayside. Dorothy and Leonard went on, in the 1950s and 60s, to be involved in supporting the community development movement in Britain and abroad. Meanwhile, others at Dartington took a different route during and after the Second World War, withdrawing from democratic engagement in favour of more individualistic self-exploration. Several, like the writer and spiritual seeker Gerald Heard, moved to California, feeding into the American New Age of the 1960s and beyond.

Dartington's multiple experiments – while too easily written off as 'utopian' by contemporaries and historians – had effects and consequences in a variety of fields.²⁸ Its pioneering work in soil survey and its championing of access to the arts influenced post-war government policy. It contributed significantly to moulding twentieth-century traditions of handcraft, modernism, learning-by-doing, countercultural spirituality and communitarianism. While it is a moot question whether these disparate activities could have happened without the Elmhursts' initial utopian and holistic inspiration, one certainly cannot understand them individually without tracing them back to those roots – which is part of what this thesis does. Dartington merits close study as an intellectually-linked constellation of experiments in education, the arts, spiritualism, agriculture and social organisation that is rarely looked at in the round.²⁹

²⁶ For Christopher Lawrence and Anna-K. Mayer this shift in the locus of responsibility for regeneration in the interwar years was 'the road to the welfare state'. 'Regenerating England: an introduction', in Christopher Lawrence and Anna-K. Mayer (eds.), *Regenerating England: science, medicine and culture in interwar Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 1-24 at 2.

²⁷ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 533.

²⁸ For such criticism, see, for instance, William St John Pym, response to 1931 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/E and Hardy, *Utopian England*, 157.

²⁹ Victor Bonham-Carter's *Dartington Hall: the history of an experiment* (London: Phoenix House Ltd., 1958) and Michael Young's *The Elmhursts* are the two books that offer a full survey of the estate. Both authors were intimate with their subject matter: Bonham-Carter was appointed Dartington's

Dartington's philosophy and trajectory also illuminate a wider British reforming landscape. The Elmhirsts' desire to promote the 'altogetherness of everything' echoed the ideals of contemporaneous projects ranging from Rolf Gardiner's Springhead to Mass Observation.³⁰ Social democracy itself owes some of its zeal and efficacy to such holistic origins (which of course it combined with others). The Elmhirsts' hope for 'the discovery of some common philosophic basis for a comprehensive approach to problems of humanity in general' achieved a far more concrete expression than many such holistic schemes, their estate becoming a national and international rallying point for an elite trying to accommodate themselves to the emerging capitalistic, democratic society.³¹ Dartington's gradual bifurcation between communitarian and state-led reform matched the ideals and trajectory of many of other enterprises that began in the interwar period and extended beyond it. The estate therefore offers a window onto interwar British reformism, and a bellwether of changes in thinking in this field across the century.³²

This introduction begins with the ways in which historians have studied those critiques of laissez-faire liberalism that are most apposite to the Dartington project: cultural, social and political criticisms of excessive individualism and materialism. It follows with Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst's background and the inspirations that led them to set up Dartington. The final section gives an overview of the enterprise's development from 1925 to 1945, then concludes with a summary of how the Elmhirsts' holistic experiment will be disaggregated for the purpose of analysis in this thesis.

Historiography

The Elmhirsts' wide-ranging experiments in spirituality, education, the arts and rural regeneration stretched outwards in many directions. A comprehensive study of the historiography that touches on all parts of the estate would have some of the quixotic confusion of the enterprise itself – an exercise in the 'altogetherness of everything'. While

official historian by the Elmhirsts, his role being to document the estate's activities in great detail, rather than to analyse them in the wider context; Young was a pupil at Dartington School, then a protégé of the Elmhirsts and a trustee of the estate, signalling his commitment to the project by taking the title 'Baron Young of Dartington' when he was given a life peerage in 1978.

³⁰ The phrase 'altogetherness of everything' is Basil Blackett's – he thus described the ambition both of Dartington and of the Elmhirst-funded think-tank Political and Economic Planning, of which he was chairman. Quoted in Michael Young's interview with Max Nicholson, 6 April 1978, T/HIS/S22.

³¹ Leonard, 'Time budget 1934-5', 8 November 1934, LKE/G/S8/1.

³² A notable example of this is Mass Observation, which is discussed further below. See also Walter Harry Green Armytage, *Heavens below: utopian experiments in England, 1560-1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

subsequent chapters touch in more depth on the way particular elements of the Elmhursts' project relate to specific fields of historiography, this introduction is a broader discussion of some of the ways in which historians have studied the early-twentieth-century thinkers and activists who looked to forms of unity-seeking or holistic idealism to reverse the fragmenting effects of liberalism.

This section begins with a consideration of reforming-thinking that has been examined through the lens of a particular disciplinary field. It then looks at group studies of theorists, of artists and of those driven to more radical countercultural existences in their search for new, more integrated ways of life. It concludes with the small number of scholars who have used the evidence of practical reform projects to demonstrate that – in spite of Virginia Woolf's 'on or about December, 1910, human character changed' – there were many continuities between the nineteenth century and the interwar years in terms of the integrative panaceas deployed to combat the social anomie of industrial capitalism.³³

The welter of holistically-minded theories and plans that characterised the interwar years was not coherent or organised. It did not fit into any clear ideological category – liberalism, socialism or communism. It was closely linked to action and to change through everyday life. Tessa Morris-Suzuki, writing about contemporaneous Japanese efforts to create unity-oriented social alternatives to liberal individualism, usefully terms the phenomenon 'informal life politics'.³⁴ Dartington, which drew the interest of an extraordinary number and range of the thinkers and actors involved in this reforming sphere in Britain and further afield, gives an opportunity to study the informal life politics of the holistic reaction against liberalism across disciplines and groups, across theory and practice – and in an international context. It presents a larger overview than in-depth studies of any one field or group can offer.

Research on interwar responses to the so-called 'crisis of liberalism' is commonly divided up by discipline. One of the most live areas of study recently has been the history of the countryside. Historians such as Jeremy Burchardt and David Matless, revising the traditional interpretation of the interwar popularity of ruralism as backwards-looking escapism, suggest that this was also, or instead, part of a progressive re-imagining of modern society as a whole.³⁵ A second rich seam of analysis explores late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century

³³ Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', in *Collected essays*, vol. 1 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 319-37 at 320.

³⁴ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'Beyond utopia: new villages and living politics in modern Japan and across frontiers', *History workshop journal* 85 (2018), 47-71, at 51.

³⁵ Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson, 'Introduction', in Brassley et al (eds.), *The English Countryside*, 1-9. David Matless also associates ruralism and modernism in *Landscape and*

quests for fresh, unitive religious, spiritual or psychological frameworks that could replace orthodox Christianity and incorporate modern science.³⁶ A third, longer-established line of liberal-crisis historiography looks at modernism – whether in literature, art or architecture. Scholars, including John Carey and Michael Saler, debate the extent to which the movement was fuelled by the impulse to flee from the ‘mass everything’ of industrial democracy or to reform or ‘spiritualize’ it.³⁷ The least fully developed strand that relates to Dartington is that of progressive education, which has been written about mainly by pedagogic specialists who tend to make little linkage to wider historical developments.³⁸

The field-specific focus risks missing the broader holistic moment of which such phenomena as rural regeneration, spiritual searching, artistic modernism and progressive education formed a part. In each of these areas, there were different panaceas offered for different sorts of ills, but the basic problem distinguished was the same: the need to uncover an underlying essence that would restore unity and meaning in the face of social atomisation, excessive materialism, and sometimes also excessive reliance on science. Dartington – although it has been touched on by historians from a number of fields – has not been capitalised on for the opportunity it offers to draw conclusions across them all.³⁹ The present study of the estate’s multifarious projects brings together the unitive impulses historians have distinguished in ruralism, the arts, spiritualism and education. It draws attention to the broader holistic moment that they constituted – and to the common trajectory from a local (or ‘escapist’)

Englishness (London: Reaktion, 1998). Conversely, G.E. Mingay concludes that during the interwar years ‘[c]ountryside life became a special interest, a kind of escapist cult’. *A social history of the English countryside* (London: Routledge, 1990), 227.

³⁶ Michael Saler, *As if*, Mathew Thomson, *Psychological subjects: identity, culture and health in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Alex Owen, *The place of enchantment: British occultism and the culture of the modern* (Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Joy Dixon, *Divine feminine: theosophy and feminism in England* (Baltimore, Md.; London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

³⁷ John Carey draws together a corpus of interwar writers including T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf to illustrate an anti-democratic modernism specifically cultivated to ‘preserve the intellectual’s seclusion from the “mass”’. *The intellectuals and the masses: pride and prejudice among the literary intelligentsia, 1880-1938* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1992), vii and passim. Michael Saler delineates a group of artists and patrons he calls the ‘medieval modernists’, who sought to grapple with rather than withdraw from industrial capitalism. *The avant-garde*, viii.

³⁸ R.J.W. Selleck, *English primary education and the progressives, 1914-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) and W.A.C. Stewart and W.P. McCann, *The educational innovators, vol. 2: progressive schools 1881-1967* (London: Macmillan, 1968). Laura Tisdall is an exception to this tendency to focus on the history of education without touching on the broader history. ‘Teachers, teaching practice and conceptions of childhood in England and Wales, 1931-1967’, unpublished PhD, University of Cambridge, 2014.

³⁹ On modernist dancing, see Lorraine Nicholas, *Dancing in utopia: Dartington Hall and its dancers* (Alton, Hampshire: Dance Books, 2007). On rural regeneration, David Jeremiah, ‘Dartington Hall: a landscape of an experiment in rural reconstruction’, in Brassley et al (eds.), *The English countryside*, 102-15. On progressive education, Mark Kidel, *Beyond the classroom. Dartington’s experiments in education* (Devon: Green Books, 1990).

stance in the 1920s to one that engaged increasingly with the state in the lead-in to the Second World War. Such a cross-disciplinary project helps make sense of seemingly idiosyncratic figures such as A.R. Orage – editor of the *New Age*, who puzzles historians with his movement between guild socialism and social credit, communitarian mysticism and the occult – by framing them in terms of an overarching interwar life politics of holism.⁴⁰

Alongside these broad studies in the fields of the arts, education, rural regeneration and spiritualism, some historians look to how specific constellations of actors responded to their doubts about liberalism. Historians of intellectual or political thought (unsurprisingly) focus on intellectual searchers with a clear set of theories. Marc Stears, for example, analyses the ‘socialist pluralists’ in Britain, a coterie of intellectuals inspired by guild socialism, and who emphasised ‘communal harmony and social solidarity’ in place of individual competition or the extension of state powers.⁴¹ Tim Rogan looks at a trio of moral economists – R.H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi and E.P. Thompson – who argued that laissez-faire capitalism had caused an atomisation that left the poor demoralised beyond relief, and that it was not the state, but humane, low-key, informal solidarities (Thompson’s ‘moral economy’) that could re-integrate a more human economics back into wider society.⁴²

While historians of ideas demonstrate theoretical reactions to liberal individualism that promoted social integration as an alternative, Dartington – its ambitions ‘more latent than explicit, more practical than theoretical’ – adds to these intellectual-history narratives by showing how speculative ideas about reform fed into action.⁴³ The Elmhursts – far from being rigorous thinkers – nonetheless absorbed many contemporary theories and moulded their own activities according to them. Their practical enterprise demonstrates the contingency, the texture of individual personalities and the knots of tension and contradiction that intervene as ideas are turned into lived experiences. ‘Had it merely been in the realm of theory,’ wrote a visitor to the estate in 1929, ‘I might have been able to grasp it at least as an intellectual ideal, but its bigness as a reality defeats one’s practical conception’.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ After his editorship of *New Age*, A.R. Orage joined the Russian mystic George Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man outside Paris, spending a year in farm labour and religious study. Paul Beekman Taylor, *Gurdjieff and Orage: brothers in Elysium* (York Beach, Me: Weiser Books, 2001).

⁴¹ Stears, *Progressives*, 23. See also Stears, ‘Guild socialism and ideological diversity on the British left, 1914-1926’, *Journal of political ideologies* 3 (1998), 289-305.

⁴² Tim Rogan, *The moral economists: R.H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E.P. Thompson and the critique of capitalism* (Oxford and London: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁴³ Gerald Heard, ‘The implications of Dartington Hall to a visitor’, *News of the day*, supplement to the 500th number, 13 March 1934, MC/S4/42/F1.

⁴⁴ William McCance to Leonard, 30 January 1929, LKE/G/22/E.

Historians have also focused on another type of interwar group – the more practical ‘searchers’ or ‘seekers’: those who used the fabric of their own lives to rebel against the materialism, competition and bourgeois culture of Victorian laissez-faire individualism.⁴⁵ The two sets most commonly studied are the Bloomsbury group – who were occasional visitors to Dartington, although condemned there for their ‘intellectual destructiveness’ and insistence that ‘life means nothing’ – and the left-leaning literary intellectuals of the 1930s, who were later also occasional – and more welcome – weekend guests on the estate.⁴⁶ Equally important, as background to Dartington, were the international groups or movements (in the loosest sense of the term) who adhered to more esoteric countercultural creeds and who have attracted smaller followings of historians, passionate adepts who perhaps even subscribe to the panaceas identified by their subjects. For Martin Ceadel there are the pacifists.⁴⁷ T.J. Jackson Lears writes sympathetically about the ‘antimodern’ American spiritual ‘seekers’ of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁴⁸ Martin Green studies the ‘simple-life vagabonds’ who passed through the Swiss countercultural community of Monte Verita.⁴⁹

These groups of practical seekers followed divergent paths, but they were motivated by the same sort of stimuli: not only the apparent failure of liberal individualism as a way to promote human progress, but discomfort with a seeming crisis in the authority of their own (elite) class as universal suffrage dawned. Many of these groups’ members – intellectuals, artists and spiritual seekers; famous and obscure; British, American and European – found inspiration in the Elmhursts’ estate as a large-scale demonstration of how ideals could be made flesh.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ The term ‘seeker’ is used widely by historians writing about spirituality in this period, including T.J. Jackson Lears in *No place of grace: antimodernism and the transformation of American culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and Steven J. Sutcliffe in *Children of the New Age: a history of spiritual practices* (London: Routledge, 2003). For Dorothy’s close friend Eduard Lindeman, an American specialist in the theory and practice of community development, the interwar years were defined by millions of such people ‘earnestly searching for a new way of life’. Lindeman, ‘The place of the local community in organized society’, [n.d.], DWE/G/7/C.

⁴⁶ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 8 February 1933, DWE/G/6A. To list just a few books on the Bloomsbury group and 1930s left-leaning writers: Carey, *The intellectuals and the masses*; Virginia Nicholson, *Among the bohemians: experiments in living 1900-1939* (New York: William Morrow, 2002); Samuel Hynes, *The Auden generation: literature and politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976); Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Journey to the frontier: Julian Bell and John Cornford: their lives and the 1930s* (London: Constable, 1966).

⁴⁷ Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: the defining of a faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and *Semi-detached idealists: the British peace movement and international relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ Jackson Lears, *No place of grace*.

⁴⁹ Martin Green, *Mountain of truth: the counterculture begins, Ascona, 1900-1920* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 14.

⁵⁰ The estate hosted members of the Bloomsbury group – Roger Fry and Vita Sackville-West – and fringe associates such as Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells. Progressives from America continually advised the Elmhursts – in particular Eduard Lindeman and Herbert Croly. In the 1930s left-wing writers who visited the estate included W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender, and continental good-lifers included Rudolph Laban (whom Martin Green finds previously at Monte Verita).

Dartington gives an opportunity to study an intersection between various groups of theorists and practical seekers, usually looked at separately – a study which illuminates both a national moment of holism and the longer-term development of a rich, transnational counterculture, for which Dartington would continue to be a hospitable hub into the second half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Beyond field-specific and group-specific studies of responses to the problems of laissez-faire liberalism, a third area of historiography speaks to the social-reform milieu of which Dartington was a part. A small body of research into interwar practical reform draws attention to the continuities in belief and behaviour in the sphere of British social action from the 1880s to the 1930s. Seth Koven, Alison Light, Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler all emphasise how nineteenth-century Christian notions of public service evolved gradually and relatively harmoniously into new sorts of community-building, civilising mission in the twentieth century, in areas ranging from architecture to broadcasting, from managing servants to mission work.⁵¹

Interwar commentators, and historians subsequently, have grouped Dartington's participants with the radical seekers: they were defined as 'total rebels' and 'Micawberesque folk, who have made up their minds that everything is rotten and sigh for the moon'.⁵² Yet the Elmhursts' project was not about a complete rejection of the status quo but was, as with the reformers invoked by Koven et al, about adapting it gradually – 'so that,' as Leonard wrote, 'society moves on in a steady progress of evolution, and not in revolutionary fits and starts'.⁵³ This form of reforming culture – which emphasised individualism as well as gradualism – was held by many at Dartington and outside it to be distinct from and superior to revolutionary and collective forms of social change abroad.⁵⁴ Behind these British social-reforming movements lay a nineteenth-century radical Christianity that emphasised the process of individual conversion. To cite this gradualism as a crucial historiographical

⁵¹ Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (eds.), *After the Victorians: private conscience and public duty in modern Britain: essays in memory of John Clive* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Seth Koven, *The match girl and the heiress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) and 'The "sticky sediment" of daily life: radical domesticity, revolutionary Christianity, and the problem of wealth in Britain from the 1880s to the 1930s', *Representations* 120 (2012), 39-82; Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the servants: the hidden heart of domestic service* (London: Penguin, 2007).

⁵² R.A. Edwards, the vicar at the church next to the Dartington Hall estate, to Leonard, May 1945, LKE/DEV/1/K.

⁵³ Leonard, 'Extension at Dartington', 1940, LKE/EDU/7/B.

⁵⁴ Reformers who appear in *The match girl* and *After the Victorians* frequently had contact with Dartington: Dorothy was friends with Muriel Lester and her sister Doris, staying with them in London, for example, and the Garden City architect Raymond Unwin visited the Elmhursts' estate to give a lecture. For close reading of a British political culture characterised by 'faith in gradualism, constitutionalism and pragmatic reform' see John Bew, *Citizen Clem: a biography of Attlee* (London: riverrun, 2016), 105.

framework for Dartington is not to suggest that the estate did not also incorporate its fair share of ‘total rebels’. Rather, the Elmhursts’ capacious project illustrates the ambiguous relationship that seekers and social reformers had with the establishment in the interwar years. Some were for it, some against it, and many wavered uncertainly between these poles. It was an ambivalence that would only be resolved by the Second World War.⁵⁵

There are pluses and minuses to looking at one utopian community as representative of a reforming milieu. Dartington bears the peculiar imprint of its founders. Dorothy retained unusually close connections with America and Leonard with India. Leonard was idiosyncratically pre-occupied with the application of scientific techniques, Dorothy with her own spiritual journey and with the professional arts. Both of them were interested in the fate of the countryside, almost to the exclusion of the town. Dorothy’s huge wealth removed Dartington from the average run of social reform projects. In spite of these specificities, the estate allows an overview of responses to uneasiness about laissez-faire liberalism across specific fields and groups that have already been studied discretely, but lack connection to the larger span.

While allowing Dartington its peculiarities, the foregoing historiography shows that the enterprise was not, as utopian historian Dennis Hardy would have it, insular and unrepresentative – ‘a community of indulgence, a place of privilege, rather than an important social experiment’.⁵⁶ Rather, it was a significant nexus of a wider realm of holistic informal life politics. Study of Dartington illuminates and draws together such diverse interwar phenomena as whole-child oriented teaching, the workshop production of ceramics and theories about moral economics and communitarianism. The distinctive Dartington approach filtered into practical social reform as accomplished by the welfare state across a wide range of theatres.

The American heiress and the Yorkshire squire

Dorothy was born in 1887, youngest daughter of William Collins Whitney – a wealthy industrialist who had been Secretary to the US Navy and was described by Henry Adams as the man who had ‘satiated every taste, gorged every appetite, won every object until New

⁵⁵ Richard Weight, ‘State, intelligentsia and the promotion of national culture in Britain, 1939-45’, *Historical research* 69 (1996), 83-101.

⁵⁶ Hardy, *Utopian England*, 157.

York knew no longer what most to envy, his houses or his horses'.⁵⁷ She had an emotionally isolated childhood in 'a beautiful house in New York – a kind of Renaissance palace, with great salons and long galleries':⁵⁸ her three siblings, two brothers and a sister, were all more than a decade older than her and mostly away at boarding school; her forceful, socialite mother, Flora (née Payne), died when she was six, and her step-mother then died when she was twelve. In 1904 her father died as well, leaving Dorothy three-tenths of his fortune. When she came of age four years later, aged twenty-one, she was an heiress worth around \$8 million.⁵⁹

William Collins Whitney's fortune was derived, in part, from acquiring monopolies over public franchises – a practice much criticised by American progressives, with a series of scandals about it, one relating to the activities of Whitney himself, breaking when Dorothy was young.⁶⁰ A sense of the social responsibility conferred by her (dubiously derived) inherited wealth was one of the factors that drew Dorothy into a period of intense welfare work – a thriving field in turn-of-the-century America, as the progressive era of democratic reform came into full swing.⁶¹ She was also driven, like many other philanthropists of the era, by her Protestant upbringing. As a young woman, she put much money and effort into supporting settlement houses for the poor, as well as into educational and relief projects, while at the same time she followed the well-established round of debutante sociability and husband-seeking.⁶² Her major project during these years was establishing the Junior League House, an apartment house for working women; she was emphatic that it should be structured as a self-supporting organisation, rather than a permanent exercise in charity.⁶³ But this project, and her other philanthropic activities, were interrupted in 1911, when she married Willard Straight.

⁵⁷ Henry Adams, *The education of Henry Adams* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), 268. William Collins Whitney's colourful life is captured by W.A. Swanberg in *Whitney father, Whitney heiress* (New York: Scribner's, 1980).

⁵⁸ Dorothy, 'Background and foreground – a personal pattern', [n.d.], DWE/S/1/E.

⁵⁹ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 41.

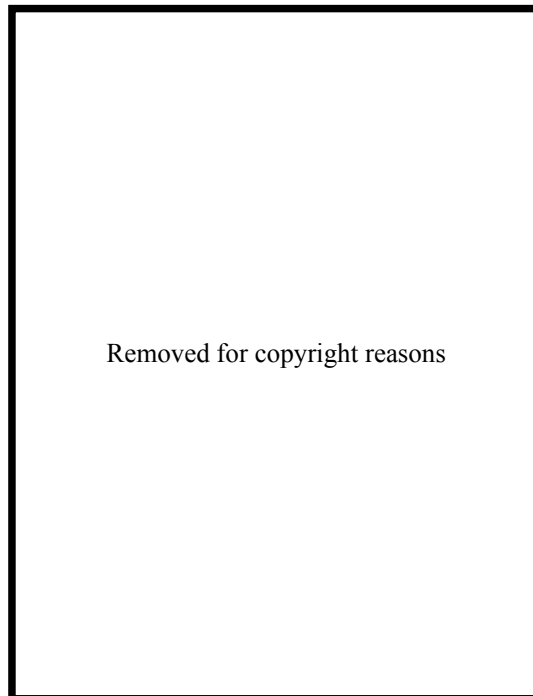
⁶⁰ Swanberg, *Whitney father, Whitney heiress*, 198-201. Michael Sandel discusses progressive 'trust-busting' in *Democracy's discontent: America in search of a public philosophy* (London: Belknap Press, 1996), 211-21.

⁶¹ Marc Stears, *Demanding democracy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); Steven J. Diner, *A very different age: Americans of the progressive era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

⁶² Jane Brown, *Angel Dorothy: how an American progressive came to Devon* (London: Unbound Digital, 2017), 28-30; Carolyn R. Gould, 'The modest benefactor', *Cornell alumni news* 3 (1975), 19-21.

⁶³ Eric Rauchway, *The refuge of affections: family and American reform politics, 1900-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 32.

Straight was an orphan, like Dorothy, and a diplomat and businessman whose chief interests were in China.⁶⁴ Aged twenty, Dorothy had said she could not ‘fall in love with a man who had no ambition and no aim in life because I feel a great longing to be part of his work’.⁶⁵ Straight had the requisite missionary streak, wanting ‘to create an American empire, based on capitalist tutelage and ultimate self-determination of colonized people’.⁶⁶ The couple lived in Peking (Beijing) for six months – until the revolution of 1911 – then they returned to New York where they financed the setting up of *The New Republic*. The journal was ostensibly run as a ‘gentlemen’s club’ headed by Straight but, in a demonstration of how progressive women extended their influence across the normative gender divide without necessarily altering conventional structures, Dorothy’s guiding hand was firm in the background – as it would be at Dartington.⁶⁷ In 1917 Willard Straight enlisted in the US army, and in 1918 he died of influenza while attending the Paris Peace Conference, leaving Dorothy, aged thirty-one, a widow with their three young children.⁶⁸



Dorothy Elmhirst photographed by Cecil Beaton.
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⁶⁴ After attending Cornell University, Willard Straight worked as a Reuters correspondent, then joined the diplomatic service before becoming the representative of J.P. Morgan and E.H. Harriman’s interests in China. Herbert Croly, *Willard Straight* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925).

⁶⁵ Dorothy quoted in Swanberg, *Whitney father, Whitney heiress*, 224.

⁶⁶ Whitney Straight quoted in Eric Rauchway, ‘A gentleman’s club in a woman’s sphere: how Dorothy Whitney Straight created *The New Republic*’, *The journal of women’s history* 11 (1999), 60-85, at 79.

⁶⁷ Rauchway, ‘A gentleman’s club in a woman’s sphere’.

⁶⁸ Their children together were Whitney Willard Straight (1912-1979), who became a racing driver and industrialist; Beatrice Whitney Straight (1914-2001), who was a successful actress; and Michael Whitney Straight (1916-2004), who was recruited at Cambridge by Anthony Blunt and worked as a Soviet spy – and later as editor of *The New Republic*.

To escape her unhappiness – ‘the hardest period of my life’, she wrote – Dorothy became even more thoroughgoing in her engagement with reform.⁶⁹ With John Dewey, she was one of six leaders chosen by a coalition of a hundred women’s organisations to attend the Disarmament Conference in Washington in 1922.⁷⁰ She took courses in economics, sociology and psychology. She read Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the leisure class* (1899), Bertrand Russell’s *Why men fight* (1916) and R.H. Tawney’s *The acquisitive society* (1920) – all indictments of liberal individualism’s damaging consequences.⁷¹ She volunteered with and gave money to the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the women’s trade union movement and the Junior League.⁷² Her faith in conventional forms of Christianity was fading through this period, and she looked both to non-orthodox forms of spirituality and to the social sciences in her desire for a new framework and field of social mission. She helped found the New School for Social Research to investigate applied social science – part of the wider shift in the social reform field away from elite philanthropy and towards professionalisation and the systematic application of science.⁷³ Through the New School and her ongoing involvement with *The New Republic*, Dorothy was drawn into close association with such leading progressives as Herbert Croly, Eduard Lindeman and John Dewey. Dorothy was particularly influenced by Dewey’s notion that ‘democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living’ – implying that the populace should continually participate in all aspects of social life, including the economy, education, culture and governance.⁷⁴

Leonard Knight Elmhirst, six years Dorothy’s junior, had very different beginnings. He was the second of the nine children of a devout Yorkshire squire and parson, a man whose estate, though not large, was sufficient to give him financial independence. Described by his friends as ‘knight-erranty’ even as a boy, Leonard was raised in a hierarchical country society of philanthropic parish visits, went to a conventional public school, Repton, and then to Cambridge, intending to become a parson like his father.⁷⁵ His doubts about Christianity

⁶⁹ Dorothy, ‘Background and foreground – a personal pattern’, [n.d], DWE/S/1/E.

⁷⁰ Gould, ‘The modest benefactor’, 20.

⁷¹ Ibid. Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the leisure class* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973 [1899]); Bertrand Russell, *Why men fight* (London: Routledge, 2010 [1916]); R.H. Tawney, *The sickness of an acquisitive society* (London: [n.p.], 1920).

⁷² Dorothy became the first president of the Junior League in 1921, after its various branches had been amalgamated into a national organisation. She was instrumental in shifting it away from philanthropic dabbling into more heavy-duty reform work. Brown, *Angel Dorothy*; Gould, ‘The modest benefactor’.

⁷³ Dorothy pledged \$10,000 a year to the New School for ten years. Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott, *New School: a history of the New School for Social Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 10-13. For more on the history of the social sciences in America and England, see chapter 1.

⁷⁴ John Dewey, *Democracy and education: an introduction to the philosophy of education* (New York: Free Press, 1999 [1916]), 101 and 256-9.

⁷⁵ Leonard was thus characterised by a friend – Gerald Heard to Leonard, 11 November 1924, LKE/G/17/E. See also Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 10-15. Leonard felt his choice of university was

began to grow, however – catalysed first by free-thinkers at Cambridge, including his tutor Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, and then by the war. The death of his older brother on the Somme in 1916 made Leonard heir to his father's estate, and, fortunately for his conscience, rendered his entry into the church unnecessary. After Cambridge, and failing to meet the health standard for fighting in the First World War, Leonard worked for two years for the YMCA in India. His ideas about community were most significantly shaped, though, by the five months he subsequently spent as secretary to Sam Higginbottom – a missionary and agriculturalist at Allahabad – and by a brief stint in 1919 in the army education service in Dublin, once the barriers to enlistment had been lowered.⁷⁶

While some historians argue that the shock of the First World War led to the withdrawal of the elite from public life, for many, including Leonard, its legacy was a memory of comradeship, and a sense of renewed social commitment.⁷⁷ Looking for new ways to contribute to the good of mankind, Leonard went to Cornell University on the advice of Sam Higginbottom to study agricultural economics.⁷⁸ A great impression was made on him there by the reliance placed on empiricism, experts and the extension service that linked Cornell to the surrounding farms.⁷⁹ 'After these two years Leonard had a bit of American in him,' Michael Young would later write. 'From then on he was always more a Cornell than a Cambridge man.'⁸⁰ It was through Leonard's work raising money for a student union for Cornell, subsequently the Willard Straight Hall, that he met Dorothy in 1920.⁸¹ He was immediately smitten – 'I clung to her and her ideals as my one "Rock of Ages"', he wrote – but it would take several years of determined wooing before she agreed to marry him, which she finally did in 1924.⁸² Much of the intervening time was spent by Leonard in Bengal. He had been invited there by poet and reformer Rabindranath Tagore to help with his work in rural reconstruction. Leonard wrote at length to Dorothy about the work there – whose aim

significant: 'training at Cambridge leads rather more to faith in measurements of all measurable factors as the best basis for developing ideas' as opposed to 'the Aristotelian tendency of the Oxford mind to float above the world in the realm of rather vague ideas'. Leonard to R.N. Armfelt, 5 May 1939, LKE/DCC/1/F.

⁷⁶ Leonard, 'Dartington Hall, Totnes, Outline', 1929, T/PP/P/1/A.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the legacy of war, particularly on masculine ideals, see Martin Francis, 'The domestication of the male? Recent research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century British masculinity', *Historical journal* 45 (2002), 637-52.

⁷⁸ Leonard took a two-year agricultural course at Cornell that placed much emphasis on practical research. Two of his brothers, Vic and Richard, also studied there before coming to Dartington, so that the university's influence on the community was strong.

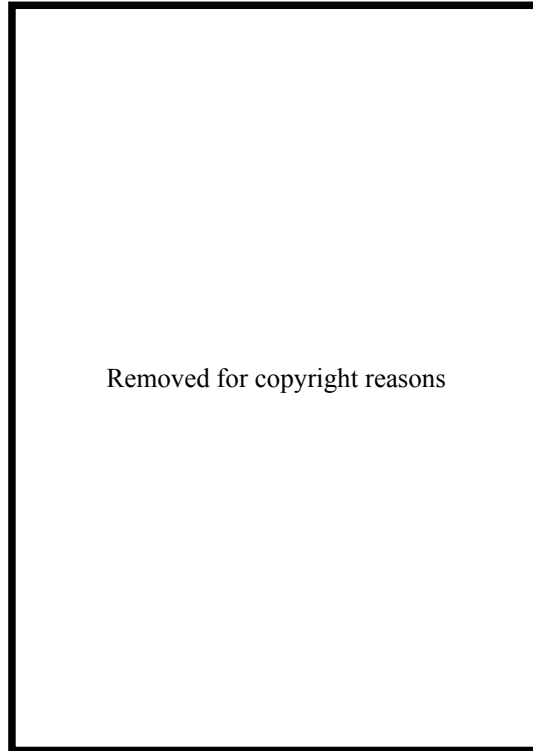
⁷⁹ Gould P. Colman, *Education and agriculture: a history of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1963).

⁸⁰ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 71.

⁸¹ Willard Straight left a bequest to make his college a more welcoming place for students. Leonard Knight Elmhurst, *The Straight and its origin* (Ithaca, NY: Willard Straight Hall, 1975).

⁸² Leonard, '16 August 1923', notebook, LKE/G/S17/C. Dorothy and Leonard's courtship was conducted chiefly by letter while Dorothy was in New York and Leonard was in Bengal.

was to bring back to the villages what Tagore called ‘life in its completeness’, a life of economic, social, creative and spiritual vibrancy – and the two of them began to evolve a plan for making a similar practical contribution to society of their own.⁸³



Leonard: ‘Self – idealist, socialist, anarchist, reformer, cutter down of privilege and surplus income, giver of support to all’.⁸⁴
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Like other marriages of progressives, the Elmhursts’ was one of ‘collaborative reformism’, built on a shared sense of social responsibility and desire for practical action.⁸⁵ ‘We’re both in a hole over the war,’ Leonard had written to Dorothy in 1921, ‘we’re both out on search, which is where we ought to be and some day between us we ought to find something.’⁸⁶ Once they had settled in Devon, Dorothy seemed to withdraw into a support role as she had with her first husband, calling Dartington ‘Leonard’s plan’ and letting him front operations in a way that aligned with the gendered norms of the time.⁸⁷ Yet this rhetoric was belied by her strong influence over all their projects, an influence, as with *The New Republic*, based on strength of character as much as her fortune. Dorothy ‘was inclined to talk in a rather airy-fairy way’, wrote those who knew her later in life, but she was nonetheless ‘more realistic

⁸³ Tagore quoted in Das Gupta, ‘Tagore’s ideas of social action’, 992. For the letters between Leonard and Dorothy, see file LKE/DWE.

⁸⁴ Leonard, notebook, 1917, LKE/G/S17/C.

⁸⁵ Rauchway, *Refuge*, 59.

⁸⁶ Leonard to Dorothy, 13 July 1921, LKE/DWE/10/B.

⁸⁷ Dorothy to Eduard Lindeman, 14 May [1925?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

than Leonard, and more ruthless with people'.⁸⁸ Both Leonard and Dorothy were conscious of stepping out of the typical marital roles. Dorothy berated herself for criticising rather than supporting her husband, as she believed she ought to.⁸⁹ Leonard was frankly in awe of her: 'She's magnificent,' he wrote to his brother. 'If I was 100% man she'd be too masculine for me: capable, vigorous, farsighted, a statesman in her way and one of those thoroughly international women that only America produces. But I'm not, and she sweeps me off my feet.'⁹⁰ Nonetheless – and in spite of Dorothy's early campaigning for women's suffrage, and her support for setting up a birth control clinic on the Devon estate – the feminist agenda would not figure largely at Dartington.⁹¹

Notwithstanding Dorothy's deep roots in American progressive circles, the Elmhirsts' practical contribution to social reform – the hopes for which they discussed throughout their courtship – was to be set in England. Leonard wanted to prove that Tagore's ideals were 'workable in other than a purely rural country'; and, with the Labour Party coming to the fore, he deemed England to be a nation more likely than America to be influenced by example.⁹² Dorothy agreed with him – with the proviso that there had to be a progressive school for her children on the estate.⁹³ By both the Elmhirsts in the 1920s, Dartington was conceived of as a part of a transatlantic reform project, no more English than it was American. They had 'crossed the boundaries of nationalism', as Leonard wrote.⁹⁴ The specifically South Devon location was chosen in part because Leonard wanted to put space between himself and his Yorkshire family; in part because Rabindranath Tagore, who had been there as a young man, revered the Westcountry; in part because it was simply where the land agent offered a suitable property.⁹⁵ Dorothy and Leonard moved into Dartington Hall in 1925.

⁸⁸ Victor Bonham-Carter, friend of the Elmhirsts and official Dartington historian, to Michael Young, 7 September 1980 [copy], LKE/PEP/1/A.

⁸⁹ A picture of the Elmhirsts' relationship early on can be gleaned from the letters between Dorothy, Leonard, Wyatt Rawson and Eduard Lindeman in box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

⁹⁰ Leonard to Richard Elmhirst, 25 June 1923, quoted in Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 95. Others were less comfortable with the Elmhirsts' blurring of normative sexual difference: for Leonard's brother Richard, Dorothy was 'aggressive', and made her husband 'passive and weak-kneed'. Michael Young's interview with Richard Elmhirst, December 1977, T/HIS/S20/D.

⁹¹ A birth control clinic was first held on the estate in 1934, with much discretion, so as not to antagonise locals. Under the aegis of Dartington, rooms were subsequently acquired for a regular clinic in the nearby town of Totnes. Dorothy's private secretary to Mrs Graham Murray, 9 October 1935, DWE/G/S3/C.

⁹² Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

⁹³ Dorothy to Leonard, 19 November 1924, LKE/DWE/12/A.

⁹⁴ Leonard to Dorothy, 13 October 1924, LKE/DWE/11/C.

⁹⁵ Rabindranath Tagore stayed at his sister-in-law's house at Torquay. Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds.), *Selected letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

When Dartington was founded, Dorothy was thirty-eight years old. She had been to England several times and compared her liking of it to that of Henry James' Anglophile heroes: 'There's no doubt James subtly understood what it means for a certain type of American to be returning, as it were, to his home – England!'⁹⁶ It was a country 'where an underlying freedom exists and where life itself and the quality of living count above other things'.⁹⁷ Nonetheless she did not expect, when she parted from her home country, that the move would be permanent.⁹⁸ 'We aren't leaving for good, you know,' she comforted her friends. 'Leonard's plan is to get something going over there – and then to return here.'⁹⁹ Her conception that they would be setting up Dartington on self-supporting lines before moving on to the next project was in line with a common strategy among big American philanthropic organisations like the Rockefeller Foundation.¹⁰⁰ In a sense, Dartington remained part of this international regime of American philanthropy.¹⁰¹ Yet it had a second frame, as an exercise in reforming residential land ownership on the traditional lines inculcated in Leonard by his squirearchical family background. Its straddling of these two frames led to moments of uneasiness and confusion – but also made it a potent symbol of commonalities between the American/internationalist and British reforming milieu. 'Sometimes Dartington seemed to me a synthesis of the whole universe, something that gave peace and happiness to my international mind,' wrote the visiting orientalist Andrée Karpelès. 'Sometimes, I liked to see in it just a symbol of "old England"'.¹⁰²

Influences that shaped Dartington

The primary inspiration for Dartington came from India. The poet and reformer Rabindranath Tagore – the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1913) – had first approached Dorothy in New York to support his establishment of the Institute for Rural

⁹⁶ Dorothy to Leonard, 24 October 1924, T/HIS/S20/A.

⁹⁷ Dorothy to Leonard, 14 September 1934, LKE/DWE/13A.

⁹⁸ Although Dorothy would go on to revoke her American citizenship in 1935, the motive was primarily tax avoidance rather than loyalty to England. Anthea Williams, 'Preliminary notes on finance and on Leonard's and Dorothy's US interests after 1925', [n.d.], T/HIS/S22/B.

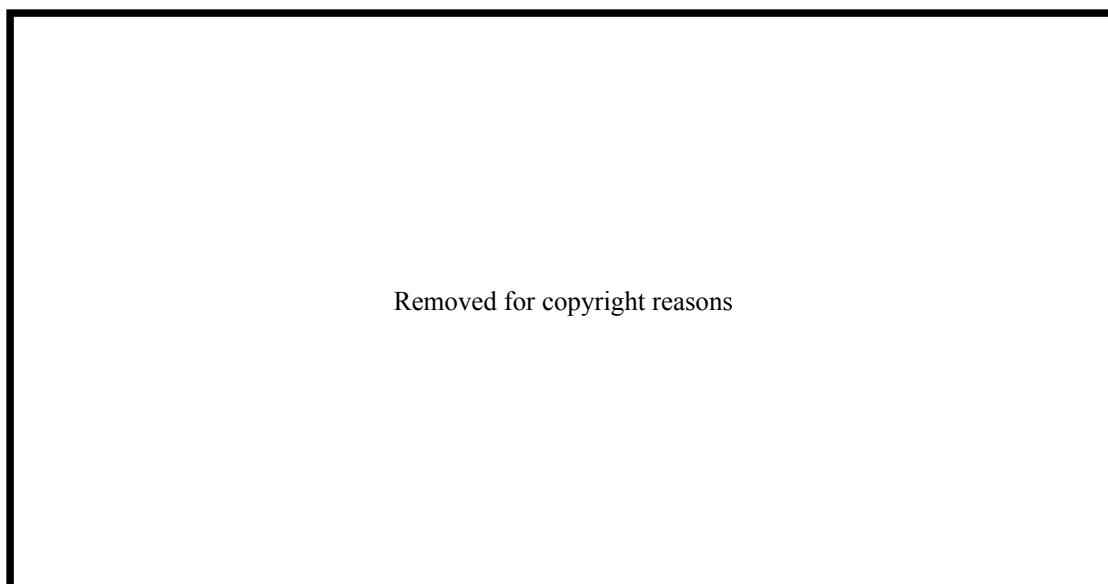
⁹⁹ Dorothy to Eduard Lindeman, 14 May [1925?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

¹⁰⁰ Emily Rosenberg, 'Missions to the world: philanthropy abroad', in Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. MacGarvie (eds.), *Charity, philanthropy and civility in American history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 241-57.

¹⁰¹ Dorothy maintained an international grant-giving fund in New York, the Elmhirst Committee on Commitments, which supported diverse pacifist, feminist, artistic and social reform causes. Its members included, at various times, Eduard Lindeman, Herbert Croly, Dorothy's close friend, the reformer Ruth Morgan, and her American private secretary, Anna Bogue. It ran until 1936, when it was reorganised and renamed the William C. Whitney Foundation. Information on its activities is available in file DWE/US.

¹⁰² Andrée Karpelès to the Elmhirsts, 3 June 1935, LKE/G/21/F. Andrée Karpelès, a painter, illustrator and translator, worked for a time at Sriniketan with Leonard. She later ran the Indian edition of the magazine *Messages d'Orient*, published in French in Alexandria.

Reconstruction in Bengal, while he was on a literary-cum-fundraising international tour. Dorothy was put off by the ‘wooliness’ of his ideas and not willing to give money to Tagore directly, but agreed to sponsor Leonard’s involvement in the institute instead.¹⁰³ It was, in part, a premarital test of his worth. Popularly known as Sriniketan, the institute was based in an old manor house close to Tagore’s other reforming projects, which included a school for elites, Santiniketan, and a university, Visva-Bharati.¹⁰⁴ The focus was on working with local villagers to teach them how to solve their social and economic problems themselves, from experimenting with crop types to improving local sanitation.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, Tagore hoped to enrich villagers’ lives by providing them with a school (separate to Santiniketan) and encouraging their creative self-expression and spiritual growth. For him, the aim was to liberate Indians from below: through the institute, protected from ‘out and out nationalists on one hand and orthodox officialdom on the other’, citizens would achieve self-realisation, social unity and the capacity to stand free of their colonial rulers.¹⁰⁶



Detail of a fresco by Nandalal Bose at Sriniketan, c. 1920. In the centre, Leonard passes a plough to Rabindranath Tagore to be blessed. © Dartington Hall Trust Archives

Leonard spent two years in India. Writing to Tagore in 1934, he told him that Dartington was based on ‘an ideal we owed entirely to one source, yourself’.¹⁰⁷ He absorbed Tagore’s belief in holistic fulfilment and in independent enterprise. When it came to solving the ‘world

¹⁰³ Her reaction was recalled in a letter from Leonard to Dorothy, 22 August 1955, quoted in Young, *The Elmhursts*, 75.

¹⁰⁴ For an overview of Tagore’s work, see Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: the myriad-minded man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Das Gupta, ‘Tagore’s ideas of social action’.

¹⁰⁶ Leonard to C.G. Stevens of the Indian Civil Service, 14 March 1929, LKE/IN/21/B.

¹⁰⁷ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 22 June 1934, LKE/TAG/9/A.

problem', he wrote to Dorothy as he courted her, 'little was to be hoped from politicians, governments, treaties, and conferences'.¹⁰⁸ The progress of civilisation lay not with conventional politics, but with talented individuals 'initiating schemes outside all the orthodox tracks'.¹⁰⁹ Dartington, he would later insist, 'has no politics'; party politics obstructed long-sighted approaches to finding the right social solutions.¹¹⁰ (Nonetheless, both the Elmhirsts consistently viewed Labour as 'the most balanced and the most idealistic' political party, making anonymous donations to its politicians and hoping Dartington would 'lend a hand to the Labour group'.¹¹¹) Dartington and Sriniketan – along with other contemporary communities inspired by Rabindranath Tagore, like novelist Mushanokōji Saneatsu's New Village in Japan – shared a paradox.¹¹² In theory, they championed grass-roots change led by local farmers and villagers, but they were also firmly embedded in the newly-burgeoning international regime of welfare reform, incorporating foreign ideas, expertise, funds and top-down operating principles.¹¹³ Tensions between local, nationalist and internationalist agendas would become more pressing for all of them in the lead-in to the Second World War.

The transatlantic debate between two groups that Marc Stears calls the 'socialist pluralists' and the 'nationalist progressives' provided a second ideological framework for Dartington.¹¹⁴ *The New Republic*, under its co-founders the political theorists Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann and Walter Weyl, became the influential mouthpiece of the nationalist progressives. It gave a voice to a progressive movement that opposed the competitive individualism of the nineteenth century and promoted social unity in the form of a state-centred 'new nationalism'. The group saw the extension of democratic mechanisms and the development of an educated, involved electorate as the necessary preconditions of a truly democratic polity. Doubting the immediate capacities of the mass of the population, however, they, like the British Fabians with whom they exchanged ideas, were prepared to allow significant political power to an elite dedicated to bringing about such social progress.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Leonard to Dorothy, 3 February 1922, LKE/DWE/10/F.

¹⁰⁹ Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

¹¹⁰ Leonard in the Dartington Hall news sheet, *News of the day*, 30 March 1928, T/PP/EST/1-8.

¹¹¹ Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C. Politicians whom the Elmhirsts assisted included Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson and the unsuccessful Independent Labour Party candidate for Totnes, Kate Spurrell. Leonard to Ellen Wilkinson, 15 October 1931, LKE/G/33/I; Elmhirsts to Kate Spurrell, 1 November 1935, DWE/G/S2/D.

¹¹² Morris-Suzuki, 'Beyond utopia'.

¹¹³ The same was true of the Gurgaon Rural Uplift Experiments of the colonial bureaucrat Francis Brayne and the Marthandam Rural Development centre started by the American missionary Spencer Hatch. Subir Sinha, 'Lineages of the developmental state: transnationality and village India, 1900-1965', *Comparative studies in society and history* 50 (2008), 57-90.

¹¹⁴ Stears, *Progressives*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 79.

‘Democracy does not mean merely government by the people, or majority rule, or universal suffrage,’ wrote Herbert Croly in *The promise of American life* – the book that first inspired Dorothy and Willard Straight to set up *The New Republic*.¹¹⁶

The New Republic’s vision of state-centred, elite-led reform was at odds with Leonard’s early notions of the ‘innumerable small experiments [...] out of whose walls the city of Jerusalem will have to be built’.¹¹⁷ In this sense, the initial ideas Leonard brought to Dartington were more akin to the views of another group of theorists, the British socialist pluralists, who included Harold Laski, G.D.H. Cole and R.H. Tawney. Although this group shared with the national progressives the dream of democratic social unity and a belief in the necessity of an informed, politically engaged citizenry to achieve this end, it was fiercely opposed to the centralised, bureaucratic state and to elite initiatives. Both out of distrust of the central state and out of a conviction that good citizens could only be made through early and direct community political participation, it saw ‘small, localized, and democratised associations as the agents and units of meaningful reform’.¹¹⁸

After the Elmhursts married and bought their estate, leading figures from both groups visited – not only the staff of *The New Republic*, who were naturally closely connected to Dorothy, but also Laski, Cole and Tawney, with whom Leonard collaborated on projects for adult education.¹¹⁹ Questions of whether the community should be self-guided or elite-led, centralised or local, played out in various forms as the estate took shape. Disagreement did not impede profitable dialogue between the groups, both on the international level and in the shaping of Dartington, since they shared much of the same motivation, inspiration and intellectual framework. The nationalist progressives and socialist pluralists were transatlantic-minded thinkers determined to escape the confines of academia and explore concrete proposals for social reform. They agreed that the problem of the age was the social atomism that had resulted from modern industrial capitalism, and they also agreed that decisions formerly made by individuals in the markets should now be negotiated by some sort of well-informed collective.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Herbert Croly, *The promise of American life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965 [1909]), 207.

¹¹⁷ Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 1924, box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

¹¹⁸ Stears, *Progressives*, 2.

¹¹⁹ G.D.H. Cole, for instance, stayed at Dartington several times while lecturing at the Fabian Summer School that the Elmhursts, whilst not wanting to be publicly affiliated with the movement, still allowed to be hosted there. G.D.H. Cole to Dorothy, 13 July 1944, DWE/G/1/E.

¹²⁰ Stears, *Progressives*, passim. See also Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings*.

The Elmhursts remained closely connected with American progressivism through the interwar years, returning to the USA every summer and receiving a drip-feed of newspaper clippings, books and letters from their circle of reforming friends.¹²¹ A glimpse of their engagement with American reform politics is given by one of several dinners they attended at the White House at the invitation of Eleanor and F.D. Roosevelt, this one in 1933.¹²² Other guests included Frances Perkins, Secretary for Labour, and Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, and the talk turned to Dartington and a community development experiment the Roosevelts were planning in West Virginia.¹²³ In the 1930s Dorothy and Leonard found, in the New Deal, a practical model for how grassroots democratic endeavour might be combined with enlightened central leadership without sacrificing the benefits of either. Among the New Deal's many elements – characterised by Daniel Rodgers as 'a great, explosive release of the pent-up agenda of the progressive past' – they were particularly drawn to a short-lived but distinctive phase in the agrarian New Deal.¹²⁴ Running from 1938 to 1942, this favoured a mode of rural 'democratic planning' that was state-driven and deployed expert knowledge, but also involved intense, on-going collaboration with citizens to plan and co-ordinate land use.¹²⁵

Dartington also evolved in dialogue with reformers closer to home. Leonard spent a brief time in Dublin with the Irish co-operative pioneer Sir Horace Plunkett (Theodore Roosevelt's favourite agricultural reformer abroad), who saw the forging of unity in the countryside through local co-operation as a necessary pre-condition to achieving Irish political independence, and who deemed Dartington 'destined to be historic'.¹²⁶ Following Plunkett's example, Leonard would experiment with agricultural co-operatives in the countryside around Dartington. The Elmhursts' interest in social democracy aligned them with the numerous left-leaning rural settlements that flourished in interwar Britain, but Leonard's belief in science

¹²¹ A particularly busy conduit was between Dorothy and Anna Bogue, the private secretary who ran her American households in New York and Long Island. See file DWE/US/1/A.

¹²² Dorothy worked closely with Eleanor Roosevelt in New York on various social schemes, including organising a welfare centre during the First World War. The two became lifelong friends. Brown, *Angel Dorothy*, 90 and passim.

¹²³ The dinner is discussed by Joseph P. Lash in a letter to the Elmhursts, 27 September 1968, LKE/USA/4/A, and is recounted in his book, *Eleanor and Franklin* (London: André Deutsch, 1972), 396. The West Virginia project, led by Eleanor Roosevelt, was called Arthurdale – a de-centralised, de-industrialised subsistence homestead that was intended to provide for unemployed coal miners, but was not a great success. C.J. Maloney, *Back to the land: Arthurdale, FDR's New Deal, and the costs of economic planning* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2011).

¹²⁴ Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings*, 415-6.

¹²⁵ Jess Gilbert, *Planning democracy: agrarian intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

¹²⁶ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 2 October 1921, LKE/TAG/9/A; Horace Plunkett to Leonard, 29 August 1929, LKE/LAND/7/B. Theodore Roosevelt's passion for Plunkett is flagged by Daniel Rodgers in *Atlantic crossings*, 321.

and economic efficiency, learned at Cornell, meant that he mostly spurned involvement with small-scale, uncommercial endeavours. Instead, he cultivated a loose network of large landowners – such as Christopher Turnor and Francis Acland – who shared his reforming aspirations.¹²⁷ Increasingly, too, as ambitions at Dartington turned towards making a contribution to state-led reform, the estate engaged in dialogue with the government on issues ranging from the application of scientific methods in agriculture to how to promote the arts in the countryside.

For many of Dartington's supporters and participants, the term 'utopia' carried heavy baggage. They were chary of its implications of impracticality – whilst at the same time using it frequently and conceiving of the estate in the light of diverse utopia-building exercises past and present. Participants consciously defined Dartington against Robert Owen's New Harmony, which they saw as 'not based on sound economics, or sound psychology',¹²⁸ against the late-nineteenth-century model villages of Bournville and Port Sunlight, which were deemed too paternalistic;¹²⁹ against the Cotswold Bruderhof Community and Welwyn Garden City, whose ambitions were criticised for being too narrow.¹³⁰ The spectre of 'failed' utopias, and of utopias that remained dependent on a paternalistic purse (which were interpreted as amounting to the same thing), was a strong factor in the Elmhursts' insistence that Dartington be properly costed, scientifically run and outward looking.

There were also frequent parallels drawn between Dartington and Russia. Early on, these could be in Russia's favour, with one employee demanding a Soviet-style "Five Years Plan" that would make the Elmhursts' long-term intentions clearer.¹³¹ As collectivist, totalitarian regimes arose across Europe in the 1930s, however, more emphasis was placed on

¹²⁷ Christopher Turnor was a social and agricultural reformer who admired scientific, continental models of land management and applied their techniques on his estate at Stoke Rochford. He was also extensively involved in adult education (Christopher Turnor, *Land settlement in Germany* (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd, 1935)). Francis Acland was MP for North Cornwall from 1932 to 1939 and an enthusiastic supporter of Dartington and of rural regeneration generally.

¹²⁸ Leonard to A.W. Ashby, 4 June 1934, LKE/LAND/1/B. The Welsh industrialist and social reformer Robert Owen set up the community of New Harmony on socialist principles in America in 1825. By 1827 it had been torn asunder by disputes over its governance. Ian L. Donnachie, *Robert Owen: Owen of New Lanark and New Harmony* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

¹²⁹ John Wales to W.B. Curry, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B. Port Sunlight was a model village built by the Lever Brothers in 1888 to house their workers. Bournville was a similar endeavour begun by George Cadbury in 1893.

¹³⁰ J.J. Findlay, *The Dartington community: a story of social achievement*, unfinished manuscript written 1937-9, LKE/G/13/B. The Bruderhof movement, started in Germany in 1920, promoted communitarian Christian living. In the 1930s, under pressure from the Nazis, its members moved to England, setting up in the Cotswolds. Welwyn Garden City, also founded in 1920, by Ebenezer Howard, was one of several garden cities intended as radical vehicles for social and environmental reform.

¹³¹ Anonymous response to 1931 questionnaire, LKE/G/13/B.

Dartington's being different from any such. While the Russians had revolutionary group socialism, Leonard argued that what America and Britain needed was the gradual evolution of 'socialised individualism'.¹³² His several tours of rural Russia served to confirm this point of view.¹³³ For American economist Alvin Johnson, Dartington was 'the real alternative to Russia – it is really a new way of life'.¹³⁴ At the same time as being compared to past and communist utopias, Dartington was shaped by its constant exchange of ideas and personnel with a very wide range of holistic-minded utopian projects abroad, from the German Bauhaus, established in 1919 to bring the arts together, to the International People's College, set up in Denmark in 1921 to promote global peace.

The Elmhursts' enterprise can be read in a number of different ways: as part of the history of utopianism, British rural regeneration or transatlantic progressivism; as a case study in the globalisation of American philanthropy or even of the Indian 'religious revival' of which Rabindranath Tagore was a part.¹³⁵ A consideration of these frameworks is necessary to make sense of the various elements that went into shaping the estate, but, overall, the experiment is best understood as a series of responses, sometimes overlapping, sometimes clashing, that sought to grapple with the inadequacies of Victorian liberalism. Overarching Dartington's many reforming projects – in psycho-spirituality, education, the arts and rural regeneration – was a single ambitious objective: to forge (or re-forge) society 'in one organic whole' in the face of social atomism and excessive materialism.¹³⁶

Overview of Dartington

When the Elmhursts bought the Dartington estate in 1925, it was made up of some 800 acres, looped round on two sides by the River Dart. Over the next two decades they would add 3,000 acres to it, much of it woodland, which was Leonard's particular passion.¹³⁷ The hall itself had once been given by Richard II to his half-brother, and had later remained in the Champernowne family for three hundred years, until financial pressures forced them to sell.¹³⁸ Its romantic history pleased Leonard, who was inclined to embroider it, and its near-ruinous state by the 1920s confirmed his view – widely-held in the interwar years – that the British

¹³² Leonard to Arthur Geddes, 24 February 1923, LKE/IN/6/D.

¹³³ Leonard Elmhirst, *Trip to Russia* (New York: The New Republic, 1934).

¹³⁴ Alvin Johnson quoted by Dorothy in a letter to Leonard, 1 October 1932, LKE/DWE/13A.

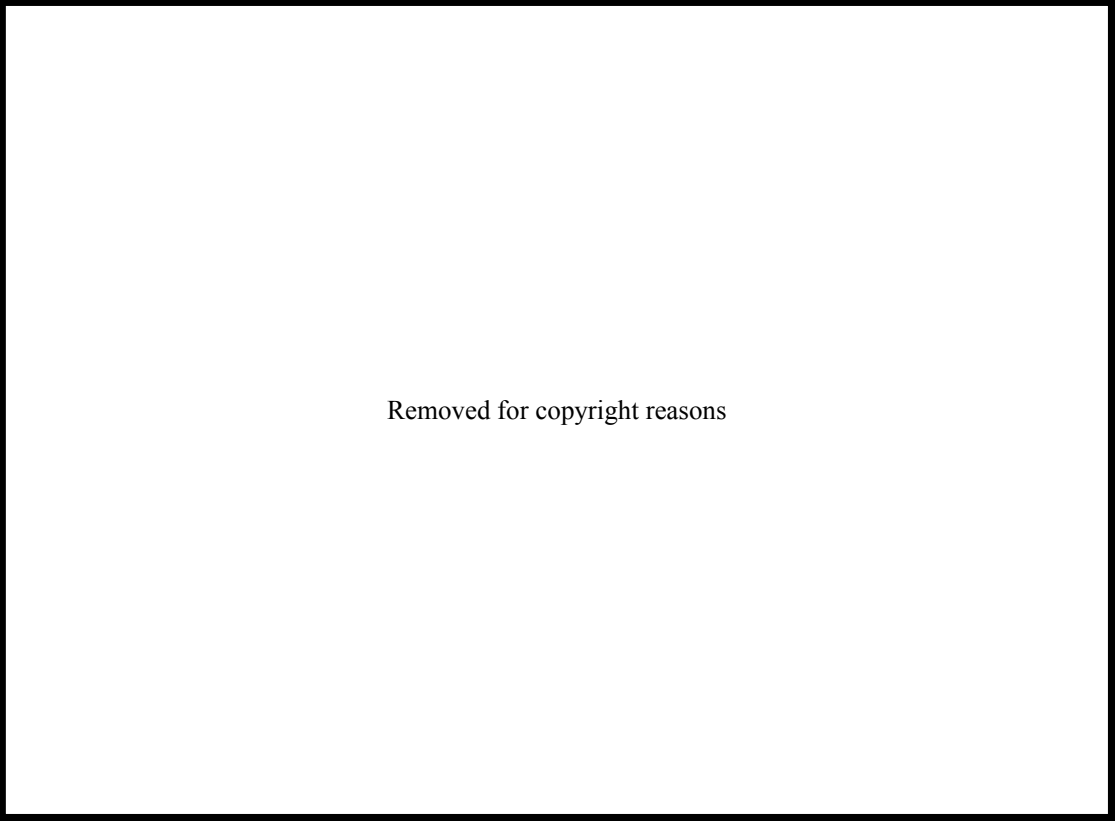
¹³⁵ For more on the globalisation of the Indian 'religious revival', see Harris, 'Spiritual politics, France and the wider world'.

¹³⁶ Leonard, 'Situation', September 1927, DWE/DHS/1/F.

¹³⁷ Victor Bonham-Carter gives a detailed overview of the contours of the estate in *Dartington Hall*.

¹³⁸ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Devon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989 [1952]), 311.

countryside was ‘depressed and broken’ and ripe for reform.¹³⁹ The nearest big towns were Plymouth and Exeter. Totnes, a smaller town with a train that ran direct to London, was right next to the estate and would become increasingly intertwined with it as the footprint of the Elmhursts’ activities grew. In the next two decades, an energetic but uncoordinated programme of restoration and building, incorporating Arts and Crafts, neo-Georgian and modernist architecture, would turn the once-failing fabric of the estate into ‘a paradigm of the tensions between reconstruction and modernisation’.¹⁴⁰



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Dartington Hall, 1941, with the Elmhursts’ private house prominent on the left-hand side.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

Devon shaped Dartington. It had a traditional, agrarian economy.¹⁴¹ This reinforced the Elmhursts’ conception of society as encapsulated in the village community, and their tendency to ignore the urban problems which pre-occupied many reformers of the period – unsurprisingly, as around eighty per cent of the English population lived in towns.¹⁴² Leonard’s attitude to cities was that they should be avoided as ‘no place to live in’.¹⁴³ they

¹³⁹ Alun Howkins, ‘Death and rebirth? English rural society, 1920-1940’, in Paul Brassley et al (eds.), *The English countryside*, 10-25, at 24.

¹⁴⁰ Jeremiah, ‘Dartington Hall’, 122.

¹⁴¹ John Sheail, *Rural conservation in interwar Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 25-6.

¹⁴² Approximately nine million out of a population of forty-five million lived in the countryside in 1931. Brassley et al ‘Introduction’, Brassley et al (eds.), *The English countryside*, 3.

¹⁴³ Leonard to Arthur Geddes, 24 February 1923, LKE/IN/6/D.

had ‘a devastating effect upon human nature’, inducing acquisitiveness and competition,¹⁴⁴ the ‘conditioning process of conscious communal life’ was only possible in the countryside.¹⁴⁵ His anti-urban feelings were shared by agrarian revivalists globally, but were particularly significant in England, one of the most industrialised countries in the world.¹⁴⁶ Devon – while increasingly altered by tourism – attracted others who prized traditional agrarian values, including Henry Williamson, author of *Tarka the Otter*.¹⁴⁷ Although the Elmhursts sometimes framed Dartington as ‘not a rural experiment as such but an attempt to set up a new balance between city and country’, their concerns were predominantly with reforming society by reforming the countryside.¹⁴⁸ This, in a sense, defined the edges of their project – their experiments could only work on a small scale and in a rural setting. It did not mean that they could not be scaled up, only that their configuration would then have to change significantly.

Socially, Devon was conservative and hierarchical, which impeded Dorothy and Leonard’s early ambitions for creating a community democracy, and would eventually lead them towards the idea of contributing to a centralised socialism instead. John Benson, a historian whom the Elmhursts invited to write the ‘folk-history’ of the Dartington parish, found that ‘the folk never had a history independent of the Hall’ – the community had always been in the ‘hands of the lords of the manor’.¹⁴⁹ The parish, he wrote, was ‘still hungering for the old patriarchal regime’ and the ‘demand at Dartington for self-expression, self-determination and “help yourself”’ was asking it ‘to walk before it has ever learnt to crawl’.¹⁵⁰ The Totnes constituency of which the estate was a part comfortably returned a Conservative candidate in the five elections between 1924 and 1945, with Labour never garnering more than thirteen per

¹⁴⁴ Leonard to Dorothy, 13 March 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

¹⁴⁵ Leonard to Professor Bartlett, 2 January 1934, LKE/G/S8/D.

¹⁴⁶ For explorations of interwar agrarianism in Germany and America, for example, see John Alexander Williams, *Turning to nature in Germany: hiking, nudism, and conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) and Rogers, *Atlantic crossings*.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Williamson withdrew from London to Devon after being deeply affected by his experiences fighting in the First World War. Henry Williamson, *Tarka the otter* (London: Putnam & Co., 1945 [1927]). Sam Smiles gives an overview of Devon in this period in ‘Refuge or regeneration: Devon’s twentieth century identity’, Sam Smiles (ed.), *Going modern and being British: art, architecture and design in Devon c. 1910-1960* (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1998), 1-14.

¹⁴⁸ Leonard, transcription of Sunday evening meeting, 23 September 1928, LKE/G/31/A. For the wider identification of ‘Englishness’ with the rural landscape in the interwar years, see Peter Mandler, ‘Politics and the English landscape since the First World War’, *Huntingdon library quarterly* 55 (1992), 459-76; and for the equivalent American tendency, Jackson Lears, *No place of grace*, 74-83.

¹⁴⁹ John Benson, who briefly taught at Dartington School in the 1920s, to Leonard, 1932, T/HIS/5/B. The Elmhursts’ desire for a ‘folk history’ echoes a broader interest in the history of everyday life among the interwar liberal middle class whose aim was to foster participatory democracy. Laura Carter, ‘The Quennells and the “History of Everyday Life” in England, c. 1918-69’, *History workshop journal* 81 (2016), 106-34.

¹⁵⁰ John Benson to Leonard, 1932, T/HIS/5/B.

cent of the vote until the Second World War.¹⁵¹ The Elmhursts had hoped to influence their neighbours with their progressive example, but found instead that they were cold-shouldered by most of them for failing to hunt, shoot, go to church or pay the usual visits.¹⁵² Devon's traditionalism was in contrast to other counties that attracted social experimentation. Essex, for instance, close to London and with substantial Labour support, was a hotbed of reforming schemes, including the modernist workers' estate at Silver End, Henry Ford's progressive farm on the Fordson Estate and the Bata Shoe Company's industrial settlement at East Tilbury.¹⁵³

Although Dartington's residents might ultimately prove to be unsatisfactory practitioners of local democracy, the first model for the estate was a self-governing socialist-pluralist community. It began, as the Elmhursts had planned, as a small, very informal community, oriented around a school and outside the orthodox tracks, a Sriniketan in England, 'drawing on India, America, China, – again a concentration, again education, again the fellowship of a few men of ideals and spirit, – not politics, or press, or even adult education, not public schools nor panaceas nor “isms”'.¹⁵⁴ The experiment gradually expanded its scope as the holistic impulse reached towards the logical conclusion. As well as the school, the estate comprised of the dilapidated medieval manor, a clutch of hamlets, extensive forestry and several farms.¹⁵⁵ These facilities were initially developed to broaden students' horizons, but soon they supported flourishing projects in their own right. Within five years there were departments of dance-drama, crafts, textiles, forestry, building, farms, poultry, gardens, orchards and research. There also were sporadic efforts to fuse these elements together through the creation of a common philosophy or mode of living, using principles derived from a combination of religion and the social sciences. Instead of being about integrated education, Dartington had become about integrating everything: a rural community in which the creative, spiritual and practical parts of life would be linked together.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ F.W.S. Craig, *British parliamentary election results, 1918-1949* (Chichester: Parliamentary Research Services, 1983 [1969]), 333.

¹⁵² The Dartington parish rector, J.S. Martin, was particularly outspoken in his criticism of the Elmhursts and their works, with his church acting as a rallying point for hostile locals.

¹⁵³ Craig, *British parliamentary election results*, 349-53; Louise Campbell, 'Patrons of the modern house', *Journal of the twentieth century society* 2 (1996), 41-50; Joanna Smith "'Work collectively and live individually": the Bata housing estate at East Tilbury', *Twentieth century architecture* 9 (2008), 52-68; Kit Kowol, 'An experiment in Conservative modernity: interwar Conservatism and Henry Ford's English farms', *Journal of British studies* 55 (2016), 781-805.

¹⁵⁴ Leonard to Dorothy, [July 1924?], LKE/DWE/11/E.

¹⁵⁵ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 102.

¹⁵⁶ Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

The staff was small enough to be housed in two buildings in 1925, but by 1930 it was several hundred strong. Despite the growth, there remained a vigorous sense of shared idealism and internal cohesion among employees.¹⁵⁷ Many were simultaneously involved in education and the arts, agriculture and industry. Estate meetings were held every Sunday to discuss progress and direction. A daily news sheet, *News of the day*, was issued to cultivate a sense of common ownership.¹⁵⁸ Yet, undermining these gestures towards self-government, the estate was being run from the top – Dorothy’s nationalist-progressive faith in elite guidance winning out over Leonard’s socialist-pluralist ideas of group direction. The Elmhirsts’ immediate hope of uncovering ‘in the people a deep faith in themselves, wherewith to set their own house in order, by their own effort’ shifted into a future register – democratic responsibility would first have to be learned.¹⁵⁹ They, like the national progressives, wished that ‘the common folk could have the chance to play their own hand and run their own show’ but feared they would ‘make a mess’ unless sufficiently prepared for their role.¹⁶⁰ The estate remained informal in its configuration, and most participants accepted it was still in ‘the planning phase’, which helped conceal the brewing tensions over control of the project, and between the disparate personnel and ideologies that were influencing it. It did not immediately matter that the Elmhirsts were constantly losing money; or that, as Dorothy wrote, ‘we haven’t yet as a group become conscious of our spiritual needs, nor have we yet developed any common philosophy or religious ideas which gives meaning to the whole enterprise’.¹⁶¹

Interwar Dartington drew in two kinds of participant. The first – who are not the main focus of this dissertation – were the ordinary workers, locals such as Frank Crook, a tenant farmer under the Champernownes who stayed on when the Elmhirsts bought the estate, or Herbert Mills, who first worked as a beater on the Champernowne estate and later joined the Elmhirsts as a jack-of-all-trades.¹⁶² Both men sent their large broods of children to Dartington

¹⁵⁷ J.J. Findlay, *The Dartington community*.

¹⁵⁸ *News of the day* was first published in December 1927 and was distributed to all the ‘feeding centres’ on the estate so that it could be read at mealtimes. It was also sent to some of Dartington’s more enthusiastic supporters outside, including Eduard Lindeman. T/PP/EST/1/001.

¹⁵⁹ Leonard to Ellen Wilkinson, 19 April 1927, LKE/G/33/I. This shift was similar, incidentally, to the diminishing fieriness of Leonard’s desire to do away with the British Empire, especially in India. It remained on his agenda but became a more far-off ambition than it was in the early 1920s, requiring untold levels of preparation.

¹⁶⁰ Leonard to Dorothy, 29 March 1926, LKE/DWE/12/D.

¹⁶¹ Dorothy to Ruth Morgan, May 1928, quoted in Rachel Esther Harrison, ‘Dorothy Elmhirst and the visual arts at Dartington Hall 1925-1945’, unpublished PhD, University of Plymouth, 2002, 126.

¹⁶² Michael Young’s interview with Mrs Crook, 23 August 1977, T/HIS/S20/D; Herbert Mills, reminiscences, 21 January 1970, LKE/G/31/E. Mills worked for the Elmhirsts constructing a reservoir and restoring buildings, then as the butler’s assistant at the Hall, and later in the arts department.

School, but were relatively little involved in the ideological life of the estate.¹⁶³ For many in this group, Dartington represented a welcome job in a time of high unemployment, and not much else. They were uninterested in the philosophical commitments, or ‘found the object too large’.¹⁶⁴ The enterprise’s experimental, idealistic nature made it sometimes a difficult place to work: as one employee complained, ‘the lack of a feeling of stability – a constant change of policy, change of people to work with, change of conditions to work under – produces a feeling of unrest and insecurity’.¹⁶⁵

The second type of participant on the estate, the protagonists of this study, are a group less easily summarised – but might be bundled together under the term ‘practical idealists’ or ‘modern missionaries’. They were not, for the most part, intellectuals – although they were passionate about issues and ideas. Nor were they purely technocratic – although some had leanings that way. They felt uncomfortable with the modern world, but still wanted to reform and improve it – an impulse that resembled missionary zeal, although most of them had departed from the orthodox Christianity of their upbringing. They were equivocal, even hostile, towards the state, but nonetheless remained close to it, part of the interrelated circle of the professional and ruling elite delineated by Noel Annan in fact and Anthony Powell in fiction, who would go on to become involved in state-building during and after the Second World War.¹⁶⁶

At first, they tended to be acquaintances close to the Elmhursts – three of Leonard’s brothers and several fellow students from his Cambridge days were among the first to arrive on the estate.¹⁶⁷ They were people like Wyatt Rawson, who had been at Cambridge with Leonard, and was relieved to be saved from school-mastering at his brother’s conventional prep school by the chance of joining ‘a community of sentiment and of purpose’.¹⁶⁸ Like the Elmhursts themselves, many of these Dartington participants saw liberal individualism as having been

¹⁶³ Frank Crook was so opposed to the Elmhursts’ social ideas that in 1946 he stood for the Conservatives against Leonard as county councillor. Leonard won the contest by 200 votes. Leonard, notebook, LKE/DCC/3/F; Young, *The Elmhursts*, 278-9.

¹⁶⁴ Herbert Mills, reminiscences, 21 January 1970, LKE/G/31/E.

¹⁶⁵ Marjorie Wise, response to 1929 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/D.

¹⁶⁶ Noel Annan, ‘The intellectual aristocracy’, in J.H. Plumb (ed.), *Studies in social history: a tribute to G.M. Trevelyan* (London: Longmans, 1955), 241-87 and *Our age: the generation that made post-war Britain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990); Anthony Powell’s series of novels, *A dance to the music of time* (London: Minerva, 1991 [series of novels, originally published between 1951 and 75]); Richard Weight, ‘State, intelligentsia and the promotion of national culture’.

¹⁶⁷ The three brothers were Pom, a lawyer, who became a legal advisor and trustee for Dartington and also ran the family estate in Yorkshire, which Leonard gave to him when he inherited it as the eldest surviving son in 1948; Richard, who followed Leonard to Cornell, then returned to run the Dartington poultry unit; and Vic, who also studied briefly at Cornell, then became an informal deputy for Dorothy and Leonard.

¹⁶⁸ Wyatt Rawson to Eduard Lindeman, July 1927, box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

proven hollow in the First World War; democracy as not providing an obvious role for them; and Christian faith as not giving sufficient meaning to the world.¹⁶⁹ Gradually, as Dartington's reputation spread, they came from further afield. As their numbers increased, this group became more distinct from the local workers, giving rise to a sense, uncomfortable both for them and for the local workers, that the estate's 'social functions are now definitely "upper-middle-class"'.¹⁷⁰ This did not mean a total loss of the sense of the estate's being different, and more egalitarian than the world outside it: for Yvonne Markham, a Welsh miner's daughter who had worked as a nursery maid in London before joining Dartington's domestic staff in 1934, the 'lack of division between people was the main thing, that was absolutely the main thing. I didn't realise there was such a life'.¹⁷¹

Dartington's participants were supplemented by a penumbra of non-resident supporters – politicians, social reformers, intellectuals, artists and society figures who came down on the train to stay at the Hall for weekends. Some of them were invited by the Elmhirsts, since it was key to their reforming mission that Dartington's activities be broadcast widely, particularly among the politically influential. With time, though, growing numbers of people wrote to Dorothy and Leonard asking to visit, or simply turned up unannounced. Their names are a 'who's who' of the progressive left of the interwar years: Ellen Wilkinson, Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, John Maynard Keynes, Stephen Spender, Barbara Wootton.¹⁷² Most were excited by what they saw – particularly in the 1920s when the embryonic nature of the estate's development allowed the widest range of readings of its purpose. A few, like William St John Pym, later Director of Staffing and Administration at the BBC, diagnosed muddled thinking and hypocrisy. St John Pym warned the Elmhirsts that their efforts 'to square communistic theories with the possession and enjoyment of great wealth' was 'eating your cake and having it'. They should, he suggested, stop purporting to be 'something "special"' and 'make a fresh start and a bold bid for normality' – paying calls, going to church, and hosting 'normal unfreaky uncranky good old Tory men of the world'.¹⁷³ By the mid-1930s, amid national and international political and economic tensions, criticism of the estate's wealth, its rarefied atmosphere and its lack of replicability were more common.¹⁷⁴ By this point too, however, the Elmhirsts' reform focus was shifting away from the local and

¹⁶⁹ Such practical idealists are seen, also, on the pages of Seth Koven's *The match girl*, Pedersen and Mandler's *After the Victorians* and Saler's *The avant-garde*. Ross McKibbin explores the broader causes of the elite sense of disenfranchisement in *Classes and cultures*, 52-5.

¹⁷⁰ John Wales to W.B. Curry, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B.

¹⁷¹ Memories of Yvonne Markham, a member of Dartington's domestic staff from 1934 to 1962, Maria Elena de la Iglesia (ed.), *Dartington Hall School: staff memories of the early years* (Exeter: Folly Island Press, 1996), 36.

¹⁷² Records of Sunday evening meetings, T/AE/3 and 4.

¹⁷³ William St John Pym, response to 1931 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/E.

¹⁷⁴ Andrée Karpelès to the Elmhirsts, 3 June 1935, LKE/G/21/F.

towards the national, so that imperfections in the community itself were of less significance to them, or at least easier to ignore.

From the beginning, the estate also cross-pollinated vigorously with an immense array of other independent reforming enterprises abroad: progressive pedagogic experiments in America and Europe that treated the needs of the whole child; rural regeneration schemes such as Henry Morris' village colleges; international groups of idealistic artists from institutions like the Cornish School in Seattle. Ideas and methods were exchanged and so, too, were personnel. An influential handful of advisers and employees came over temporarily or permanently from America in the 1920s – Eduard Lindeman, for instance, presided over the first meetings about the shape the estate should take, while Gustave Heuser, Professor of Poultry at Cornell, helped Leonard's brother Richard set up a model poultry unit while on sabbatical. The Americans were swamped, in the 1930s, by an even larger contingent of refugees from continental Europe. By the summer of 1938, there were some sixty foreign artists, mostly Europeans, working and studying in the arts department alone.

As the number and variety of participants at Dartington grew, so did the tensions. Many incomers, especially later on, were more pre-occupied with outward-facing, professional agendas – making an impact in the world of modern dance, progressive education or agrarian science – than with subsuming their vocational ambition to a holistically unified collective. There was also antagonism between those who wanted to prioritise the profit-making of their department and those who were interested in Dartington as a place of education, a source of artistic patronage or an integrated mode of life beyond 'the cash nexus'.¹⁷⁵ One observer, the organicist Rolf Gardiner, complained that the estate 'constituted a sum of addition instead of a sum of multiplication', its innumerable departments and experts having little in common and surrounding 'a vacuum, a hollowness' rather than a spiritual centre.¹⁷⁶ But it was not just the absence of a clear, unifying religion or philosophy that was the problem. Like other utopian enterprises, the Elmhursts' integrative vision was hampered by fractious personal relationships, commercial realities and day-to-day practicalities. Leonard compared the estate to a biological organism 'which grows and in so doing differentiates itself', losing its 'original ("naïve") unity' as each department undergoes 'a gradual "extraversion", a growing adaptation to the needs and standards of the world'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ John Wales, *News of the day*, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B.

¹⁷⁶ Rolf Gardiner to Leonard, 16 June 1933, LKE/G/15/B.

¹⁷⁷ Leonard Elmhurst, untitled note, [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/B.

The Elmhirsts had hoped Dartington could succeed ‘without resorting to a great deal of organization’, but it became increasingly clear that it could not.¹⁷⁸ This was not only because of the conflicting priorities of those involved, but because Leonard was determined to prove the estate’s economic viability so that it could provide a blueprint for others – and poor management and endless changes of tack meant it was haemorrhaging money.¹⁷⁹ To resolve these problems, after a series of brief, unsuccessful experiments with management by committee, Dartington Hall Ltd was formed in 1929, its board of directors controlling the commercial departments.¹⁸⁰ Two years later Dartington Hall Trust was set up, an educational foundation with charitable status, governed by trustees and intended to foster the wider ideas behind Dartington.¹⁸¹ Dorothy and Leonard hoped the company-and-trust formation would offer a model that could be replicated by others, and would ensure the continuity of their enterprise after their deaths.¹⁸² The innovation can be read as part of the Elmhirsts’ wider experiments with promoting community autonomy – the trust was a touchstone for English interwar intellectuals wishing to defend group rights against the scrutiny or encroachment of the state.¹⁸³ Alongside this consideration, however, it was important to the Elmhirsts that the trust was a charitable one, offering exemption from income tax. Leonard was chairman of both company and trust, and he and Dorothy were trustees, but day-to-day guidance of the estate was increasingly devolved to a collection of managers under a managing director, W.K. Slater (appointed in 1929), breaking down the early sense of democratic collaboration.

Dorothy had written that the fact that Dartington was ‘a community of ordinary people’ was ‘really the most important fact about it’.¹⁸⁴ But the paradox at the heart of this supposedly egalitarian community was the Elmhirsts themselves, whose lifestyle was never other than upper class.¹⁸⁵ The household at the Hall was run along the same aristocratic lines as

¹⁷⁸ Dorothy to Ruth Morgan, May 1928, quoted in Harrison, ‘Dorothy Elmhirst’, 126.

¹⁷⁹ Leonard, untitled note, [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/A.

¹⁸⁰ This was a private limited company with an initial capital of £65,000, later raised to £125,000. Leonard had 64,999 shares and Fred Gwatkin, one of the Elmhirsts’ lawyers, had one. Dorothy had none. Victor Bonham-Carter, *Land and environment: the survival of the English countryside* (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), 141; Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 298.

¹⁸¹ The trust began in 1931 as three trusts – one holding the land, one managing the school, one promoting research and holding shares in the company. In 1932 they were merged into one, the Dartington Hall Trust, of which Leonard was chairman until 1972. Bonham-Carter, *Land and environment*, 141.

¹⁸² Leonard, ‘Summary of Dartington constitution’, April 1931, LKE/G/SG.

¹⁸³ In particular, the philosopher F.W. Maitland saw trusts as a way that groups could prosper autonomously. For an overview of the history of theories of the trust and group rights, see Julia Stapleton’s ‘Introduction’, in Julia Stapleton (ed.), *Group rights* ([n.p.]: Thoemmes Press, 1995), ix-xxxix and Julia Stapleton, ‘Localism versus centralism in the Webbs’ political thought’, *History of political thought* 12 (1991), 147-65 at 162.

¹⁸⁴ Dorothy to Ruth Morgan, May 1928, quoted in Harrison, ‘Dorothy Elmhirst’, 126.

¹⁸⁵ The Elmhirsts’ domestic orthodoxy was in stark contrast to the experimental living arrangements of many progressives of the period – see, for example, Nicholson, *Among the bohemians*.

Dorothy's previous establishments in American, albeit rather less grandly.¹⁸⁶ To begin with it had twenty staff: a butler, Walter Thomas, previously employed by the Marquess of Bute, along with a 'footman, cook, odd man, four housemaids and two kitchen maids; a head gardener with several assistants; a nurse and nursery maid; two chauffeurs and a car man'.¹⁸⁷ The gardens were laid out in grand style with the assistance of American landscape architect Beatrix Farrand, one of England's largest private garden projects of the period.¹⁸⁸ Dorothy's children, as was customary among the elite, spent much time away from their parents; the children Dorothy and Leonard later had together – Ruth, born in 1926 (Dorothy had a miscarriage the year after) and Bill, born in 1929, when Dorothy was forty-two – were left to chiefly to a nanny in a nursery at the top of the house.¹⁸⁹ It was unsurprising that many local employees, even with a more formal machinery of government in place, saw the Elmhirsts, rather than the managing director or trustees, as the ultimate authority at Dartington. The Dartington vicar told Dorothy and Leonard that in 'one of the most conservative rural areas of England', people could not conceive of them as anything other than the traditional 'big-house-centre'.¹⁹⁰

The middle-class idealists who joined the enterprise found it particularly difficult to resign themselves to the Elmhirsts' being in part their comrades, in part their employers. There was an 'awkwardness of situation – being both of, and not of, your house parties', Wyatt Rawson complained to Dorothy – of being 'as it were, at your beck and call' and not 'able to live a life that is really my own'.¹⁹¹ Musician Imogen Holst, brought up in thoroughgoing socialist circles, was 'worried by the richness of Dartington', with its hierarchy of servants, and was only reconciled to the estate when she went to work there in the late 1930s by the knowledge that the arts needed money to survive.¹⁹² Leonard's squirearchical Yorkshire background made it relatively easy for him to get on genially with people and to seem to ignore the social hierarchy he was so familiar with. 'He used his acute sense of class to keep class in its place,'

¹⁸⁶ Michael Young's interview with Paula Morel, 23 August 1976, T/HIS/S22.

¹⁸⁷ Michael Young's interview with Marjorie Fogden, 15 September 1976, T/HIS/S22.

¹⁸⁸ The estate's garden was Dorothy's great passion, as forestry was Leonard's. It was designed in consultation, first, with Harry Tipping, an English designer and a journalist for *Country life*, and, later, with Beatrix Farrand. It managed more harmoniously and more consistently than the rest of the estate to be a meeting place for art, education and commerce. Dorothy was determined that it would combine styles too – 'the classic with the romantic, the formal with the informal' – relating all the old and new elements of the estate 'in organic harmony'. Dorothy, 1960, quoted in Reginald Snell, *From the bare stem: making Dorothy Elmhirst's garden at Dartington Hall* (Devon: Devon Books, 1989), 73-4.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Young's interview with Richard Elmhirst, December 1977, T/HIS/S20/D.

¹⁹⁰ R.A. Edwards to Leonard, May 1945, LKE/DEV/1/K.

¹⁹¹ Wyatt Rawson to Dorothy, [1927?], DWE/DHS/2/F.

¹⁹² Imogen Holst's father, the composer and adult educator Gustav Holst, was a follower of William Morris and a conductor in the Hammersmith Socialist Choir as well as a teacher at St Paul's Girls' School. Michael Young's interview with Imogen Holst, 21 March 1977, T/HIS/S22/A.

according to one of his close friends.¹⁹³ He nonetheless was seen to have the rich person's characteristics of expecting "to buy the answer" to problems, by hiring an expert rather than letting solutions evolve slowly, and of suspecting his staff of complacency about the need for departments to turn a profit.¹⁹⁴

Dorothy, negotiating both a foreign country and a new class system, fared less easily in the erratically egalitarian, experimental social environment of Dartington. The English 'rarely ask questions and don't seem to care what one feels', she wrote on her arrival in Devon, 'it is going to take me some time to get on to them'.¹⁹⁵ She continued to find her position an awkward one, even after twenty years of life in England – refusing to play the benevolent 'squire's wife' but being 'frightened of the too personal relationships' which seemed to be the alternative.¹⁹⁶ She developed a small number of close friendships with artists and fellow spiritual seekers, but most staff and visitors found her a difficult companion. She retreated into 'forest-primeval-murmuring' when uncomfortable.¹⁹⁷ Her excessive efforts to be 'inconspicuous and unnoticed' – by going last through doors, taking the worst chair and the worst cut of meat – made even her own children uneasy.¹⁹⁸ Her wealth inured her to the reality of employees' financial situations: she gave a bicycle to her secretary one day, then re-gifted it to a visitor the next – not realising the significance of the loss.¹⁹⁹ These everyday, granular tensions that accompanied the effort to live the good life echo the friction and unease surrounding the domestic experiences of many of the progressive elite across England. Supporting democracy but not reconciled to being 'ordinary people', they grappled with what Virginia Woolf termed – with mixed feelings of horror and exhilaration – 'Our Transition Age'.²⁰⁰

¹⁹³ Michael Young's interview with Max Nicholson, 6 April 1978, T/HIS/S22.

¹⁹⁴ Victor Bonham-Carter to Michael Young, 7 September 1980 [copy], LKE/PEP/1/A; Leonard to Fred Gwatkin, 28 September 1934, LKE/LF/16/A.

¹⁹⁵ Dorothy to Eduard Lindeman, June 9 [1925?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

¹⁹⁶ Dorothy to Leonard, 16 August 1942, LKE/DWE/13/F; Dorothy, response to 1929 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/D.

¹⁹⁷ Mrs Stanley Young to Mark Tobey, [1940s], 159/3, Nancy Wilson Ross Archives, Harry Ransom Center.

¹⁹⁸ Beatrice Straight to Nancy Wilson Ross, 7 June 1936, 156/2, Nancy Wilson Ross Archives. There are strong similarities between Dorothy's habits of self-denial and what Seth Koven calls the 'technique of Christian living' among the philanthropists of Kingsley Hall in London. 'Radical domesticity, revolutionary Christianity', 42.

¹⁹⁹ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 302.

²⁰⁰ Virginia Woolf quoted in Alison Light. Light portrays such everyday tensions in the relations between the Bloomsbury circle and their servants (*Mrs Woolf and the servants*, 207). Seth Koven explores this realm in the context of philanthropy in the East End of London, with an emphasis on changing notions of Christian behaviour ('Radical domesticity, revolutionary Christianity').

How did this knotty, complicated social experiment appear from the outside? While it was their intention to influence society at large, the Elmhirsts disliked enterprises which ‘spread their religion in an organized way’, and refused to write about Dartington themselves.²⁰¹ They even tried first to forbid and later to vet articles written about the estate by others.²⁰² Nonetheless, the estate did crop up frequently in the press, first locally, and then nationally and internationally, and also in books – and the commentary was near-unanimous in its enthusiasm (although often inaccurate).²⁰³ In part, this positivity may have been a sign of the Elmhirsts’ influence in progressive elite circles: when, for instance, Professor J.A. Scott Watson wrote an unauthorised and mildly critical article on Dartington for *The Listener*, suggesting its farms were over-capitalised, Leonard used his contacts to make sure his displeasure was clearly felt and soon received an apology.²⁰⁴ Positive press coverage also reflected a widespread desire for an alternative rural ‘design for living’ – and how, in the absence of ‘written charters, creeds, constitutions’, writers were free to project their hopes for this on the Elmhirsts’ estate.²⁰⁵

The conservative local press reviewed Dartington positively, as ‘a revival of the old patriarchal system when the country squires were the natural leaders’.²⁰⁶ The Elmhirsts appeared in such papers as *The Western Morning News* in the guise of squire and lady, opening fêtes and village halls and supporting worthy causes while their employees participated in intra-parish sports and livestock shows.²⁰⁷ Conversely, for the intellectual Gerald Heard, writing for the progressive London-based journal *The Architectural Review*,

²⁰¹ For British worries about the potential for propaganda to be used exploitatively, a fear which gathered strength in the 1920s and 30s in the light of Soviet and Nazi tactics, see Mark Wollaeger, *Modernism, media and propaganda: British narrative from 1900 to 1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁰² Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 192[4?], box 3, Eduard Lindeman Archives. The Elmhirsts considered then set aside the idea of setting up an evangelising printing press (Leonard to Sir Henry Lopes, 14 February 1928. LKE/DEV/3/D).

²⁰³ Dartington’s activities were regularly reported in short columns in the *Western morning news*, *Exeter and Plymouth gazette*, *Western times* and *Western daily press* (British Library Newspaper Archives). Articles in national publications included Sir William Beach Thomas, ‘Dartington Hall – a great rural experiment’, *The listener*, 29 November 1933, 809-13; Gerald Heard, ‘The Dartington Experiment’; Christopher Hussey, ‘High Cross Hill, Dartington, Devon’, *Country life*, 11 February 1933, 144-9. The estate also appeared in the *New York herald tribune*, among other American newspapers, and in H.J. Massingham’s book, *Country – Dartington was ‘recapturing the art of living as a self-dependent local community’* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1934), 132.

²⁰⁴ The exchange of letters between Leonard, agricultural economist John Maxton and Professor J.A. Scott Watson in 1933 are in LKE/LAND/3/F; J.A. Scott Watson, ‘Rural Britain today and tomorrow – vii: tradition and experiment in the West’, *The listener*, 22 November 1933, 797.

²⁰⁵ *Nottingham journal*, 16 August 1935, British Library Newspaper Archives; Dorothy to R.A. Edwards, 2 August 1942, DWE/G/S3/G.

²⁰⁶ *Western morning news*, 16 June 1932, British Library Newspaper Archives.

²⁰⁷ The *Western morning news*, *Exeter and Plymouth gazette*, *Western times* and *Western daily press* all reported regularly on Dartington, with the first being the most prolific (British Library Newspaper Archives).

the estate was the very opposite of backward-looking and squirearchical – it was uncovering a novel, egalitarian social format, the ‘brick out of which the reconstructed national house can be built’.²⁰⁸ In later decades, as Dartington’s aspirations became concrete activities that did work in the outside world, its ability to be all things to all men declined. Inevitably, the result was disenchantment. Rolf Gardiner, an early supporter, launched a scathing attack on the estate in a 1941 essay: it was ‘a supreme warning’ of ‘how not to do’ rural reconstruction; it had given its ‘soul to the ungodly trinity of “planning”, chemistry and cost-accountancy’, overthrowing its early commitment to self-sufficiency and spiritual unity.²⁰⁹ His disapproval may have, in part, stemmed from envy; the Elmhursts had far more influence as a result of this ‘selling out’ than he ever did.

Outside print media, gossip gives a different sense – of high levels of local hostility towards and misunderstanding of Dartington from the start. Criticism reported from within a forty-mile radius included that it was a nudist colony, ‘an American firm, with American money and Communistic ideas’, that it was ‘not a genuine business’ and was undermining those that were.²¹⁰ The Elmhursts, as Dorothy’s son Michael later recalled, failed ‘to take note of the existing power structure’ and of the need to explain themselves to ‘local gentry, the village tyrants, the reactionary farmers’.²¹¹ Dartington church and village hall, both on the doorstep of the estate, became rallying points for a local community life that defiantly resisted being annexed to the Hall.²¹²

With a few benign exceptions, like the Liberal MP for Cornwall, Francis Acland, the Westcountry gentry were similarly unenthused by the Elmhursts’ vision. Their number included Conservative MP for Plymouth, Nancy Astor, who visited several times but was ‘so full of her own ideas’ that the Elmhursts found it impossible to ‘get through to her anything of what we are really after’.²¹³ Hostility extended to London, particularly in the 1930s as events abroad raised the political stakes. Captain Arthur Rogers, a leading member of the far-right Liberty Restoration League, spoke against the estate in Parliament and spread rumours about the Elmhursts that ended in their bringing a court case against him.²¹⁴ Relations between

²⁰⁸ Gerald Heard, ‘The Dartington experiment’.

²⁰⁹ Rolf Gardiner, ‘Rural reconstruction’, in H.J Massingham, *England and the farmer* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1941), 91-107, at 91.

²¹⁰ Robert Cowan gathered the gossip he had heard locally in a report for Dartington’s sales manager James Harrison, 27 January 1936, T/PP/P/1/G.

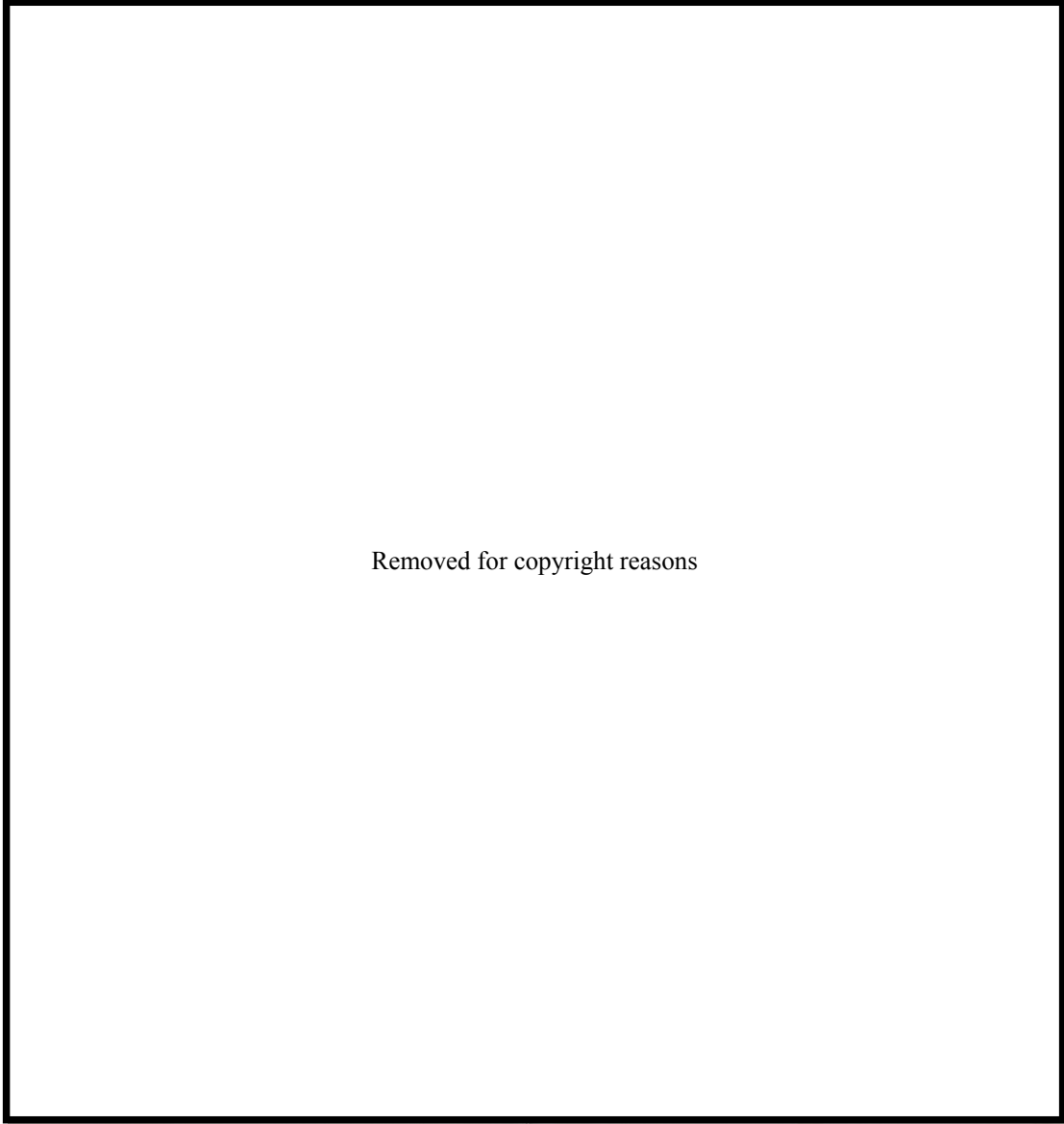
²¹¹ Michael Straight to Michael Young, 11 September 1980, T/HIS/S22/D.

²¹² R.A. Edwards to Dorothy, 10 August 1942, DWE/G/S3/G.

²¹³ Leonard to Gerald Heard, 8 November 1929, LKE/G/17/E. Nancy Astor, MP for Plymouth from 1919 to 1945, visited Dartington several times but never warmed to it.

²¹⁴ [n.a.], ‘Report of a speech by Captain Arthur Rogers, O.B.E, Honorary Secretary, Liberty Restoration League, at a private meeting of Members of both Houses of Parliament’, June 1938,

Dartington and the local community improved in the 1930s, by which time many local families had at least one member in the Elmhursts' employ, but it was only the travails of the Second World War and the nationwide utopia-building moment during and after it that brought Dartington and its surrounds significantly closer together.



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Map of the estate drawn by craftsman Rex Gardener, 1932. © Dartington Hall Trust Archives

In spite of local resistance, by the mid-1930s Dartington was being fêted nationally and internationally: it offered a timely alternative to the totalitarian dystopias looming on the continent; and it was heralded as 'The New Rural England', an antidote to the 'present low

LKE/LF/18/C; Arthur Rogers, *The real crisis* (London: Liberty Restoration League, [1938]). Richard Griffiths gives the background of the Liberty Restoration League in *Patriotism perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club, and British anti-Semitism, 1938-40* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015 [1998]); Valentine Holmes, legal opinion, 28 November 1936, LKE/LF/18/C.

state of English agricultural and of rural life'.²¹⁵ Yet, while its external impact grew, the original hope of the estate itself modelling the fully integrated, rural 'good life' receded. The different elements – the school, the arts, the spiritual seeking and the commercial departments – failed to combine. Utopian social unity – the kind of decentralised, holistic, bottom-up autonomy Tagore had hoped to achieve in India, or the socialist pluralists in Britain – drifted further and further from the estate's grasp. The Second World War was in some ways a timely *deus ex machina*: its economic demands made Dartington profitable for the first time and the ascendance of a new social-democratic politics meant that the Elmhirsts could comfortably repurpose their vision of Dartington as a pre-figurative example of 'life in its completeness' into one of the estate as a research and development station in the national effort to construct a unified welfare state. For the head of Dartington's research department, J.R. Currie, by 1950 the estate's activities were 'congregated here mainly for administrative and practical purposes, and not as part of a prototype for the structure of society'; it was the 'synthesis of Dartington's experience that is the valuable product as far as the outside world is concerned'.²¹⁶

By the mid-1930s Dartington was also already starting to make the transition from a locus of community reform to a tourist stopping-off point. To its stream of reform-minded visitors, it added a more dispassionate species – the touring motorist.²¹⁷ A semi-formal permit system was introduced, accompanied by an estate map.²¹⁸ 'Seldom a day passes when an estate worker is not disturbed by a party, large or small, peering at or passing by his particular piece of work,' ran the estate newsletter in 1934. But it cautioned against irritation – visitors paid sixpence, bought estate products and spread the idea of Dartington 'in fields wider by far than any advertisement department could possibly cope with'.²¹⁹ Dartington was included in John Betjeman's *Shell Guide to Devon* in 1936.²²⁰ A 1937 Mass Observation survey entry by Leslie Ernest Charles Hughes recorded his stop-in at Dartington on a 'short motoring holiday', which included a tour of the departments, a visit to the estate showroom and 'devonshire tea in apple garden attached'.²²¹ While the Elmhirsts and various specialists based at Dartington contributed to national reconstruction in the decades that succeeded the war, the

²¹⁵ [n.a.], 'The new rural England', *The architect and building news*, 30 June, 14 July, 21 July 1933.

²¹⁶ J.R. Currie to Leonard, 22 December 1950, LKE/G/S13/B.

²¹⁷ For the interwar rise of the 'motoring pastoral' see David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 95-101 and David Jeremiah, 'Motoring and the British countryside', *Rural history* 21 (2010), 233-50.

²¹⁸ Jeremiah, 'Dartington Hall', 119.

²¹⁹ *News of the day*, 28 September 1934, T/PP/EST/1-8.

²²⁰ John Betjeman, *Devon: Shell guide* (London: Architectural Press, [1936]). Dartington was described as 'a unique scheme for combining rural life with industrial, which, though sounding Utopian, is made possible', 27.

²²¹ Leslie Ernest Charles Hughes, Day survey, 12 August 1937, S49, Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex.

estate itself was becoming a product to be consumed rather than a locus for utopian living – an identity it took forward into the second half of the twentieth century.²²²

The tangible realisation of the nationalist-progressive vision, and the transmogrification of Dartington into a tourist attraction and retail venue, should not obscure a second strand of purpose that threaded through from the Elmhirsts' enthusiasm for grassroots, socialist-pluralist reform in the 1920s to their support for local communitarian reform in the post-war period. Until their deaths – Dorothy's in 1968 and Leonard's in 1974 – the Elmhirsts gave extensive support to the post-war community development movement which flourished in England and overseas.²²³ Other participants involved with the Devon estate in the interwar years had more radical responses to the rise of social democracy, withdrawing from efforts at democratic engagement in favour of a more individualistic self-exploration which fed into the American post-war counterculture.²²⁴ This fracturing into parts echoed the trajectory of other reforming projects, like Mass Observation, whose founders had begun in the interwar years with the ideal of its being an independent connecting-it-all enterprise, but were divided by the pressure of the Second World War over whether and how to participate in the narrower, state-led project of social reform.²²⁵

This thesis, which investigates Dartington as a window onto responses to the crisis in liberalism, has a simple structure of four parts covering the main fields of activity on the estate, each tracking a different iteration of the same shift in integrative reform-thinking from localism to contributing to the central state. The first chapter is a study of the various approaches taken to reorganising and reunifying the affective, spiritual or social framework of society. The next looks at how progressive education was used as a tool to create citizens who were fulfilled and socially responsible. The third chapter is about the effort to deploy the arts

²²² For an overview of Dartington's more recent history, see conclusion.

²²³ The Elmhirsts gave funding for Michael Young's Institute of Community Studies, formed in 1954. Leonard was a consultant on the Indian Damodar Valley Corporation and a member of the council for Rabindranath Tagore's Visva-Bharati University. See chapter 4.

²²⁴ For instance, the public intellectual Gerald Heard, for several years closely involved with promoting Dartington and H.R.L. Sheppard's pacifist movement, withdrew to California in 1942 to found Trabuco, a meditational 'missionary college'. Along with Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, he became a significant figure in West Coast New Age spirituality. Laurence R. Veysey, *The communal experience: anarchist and mystical communities in twentieth-century America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 270-80.

²²⁵ Mass Observation began with the aim of informing citizens about their own society, blurring the line between the professional ethnographer and the ordinary citizen by encouraging the latter to observe themselves. It combined this with a surrealist manifesto that tried to 'discern "the unconscious fears and wishes of the mass" and to draw out its poetic dimension in a scientific manner'. The shock of the war, along with the pressure of conventional academic ethnography, meant that this 'ethnographic surreality' yielded to more narrowly empirical work. Jeremy MacClancy, 'Mass Observation, surrealism, social anthropology: a present-day assessment', *New formations* 44 (2001), 90-9.

as a source of synthesis in an age of specialisation and division. The final section treats the Elmhirsts' efforts to regenerate the countryside by reforming agriculture and industry, and above all by promoting democratic social participation. Each of these sections builds outwards into its own specific field, both nationally and internationally, but their division is to a degree artificial: the sum meaning of Dartington was more than its parts – it was the effort to join them together, and the connection to the wider informal life politics of holism. 'I really don't know what appealed to us the most,' wrote a visiting couple who decided to leave a legacy to the estate, '– the whole, I suppose, without any possibility to analyse one thing separately'.²²⁶

²²⁶ Andrée Karpelès to the Elmhirsts, 3 June 1935; C.A. Hogman, Karpelès' husband, to Leonard, [n.d.], LKE/G/21/F.

1. THE ‘PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL’ QUEST

‘People must have meaning to their lives, a sense of purpose and significance, an idea that they belong – it’s not only that we all need a mother symbol in our lives, but in G[reat] B[ritain] especially we’re burdened with a sense of universal social responsibility which must find channel and expression [...] How are we to express these ideas in political form and action? [...] somehow D[artington] H[all] still stands out like a beacon.’

Leonard Elmhirst (1945)¹

‘[O]ut of this cul de sac! – out of this shell! – off with our pride and let us try again!’ Leonard Elmhirst wrote to Eduard Lindeman in 1924.² The dead end was the self-oriented, market-driven version of liberal freedom that had been dominant in the nineteenth century – privileging ‘business, empire and war’, science and materialism, and compounded by a hypocritical rhetoric of altruism and Christian mission which enabled certain groups ‘to get and keep’.³ It had left individuals with no deeper purpose and a society lacking the crucial ties of ‘direct relationship and responsibility’.⁴ The way out was to set up ‘innumerable small experiments in order to explore that great region of “society” – a society that would be ‘radiated with the spirit of love’.⁵ These experiments, of which Dartington was one, would find ‘the road to that true mysticism of the future which will unite intellectualised feeling, ethics in fact, with the primitive longing to act purposefully and to sacrifice the self in a positive endeavour’.⁶

Leonard’s misgivings about the effects of liberal individualism, fuelled by the First World War, were widely shared across the Western world in the early twentieth century and they gave rise to a panoply of efforts to construct new models of self and society.⁷ While reformers had a common sense of the problematic – social atomisation, excessive materialism, the loss of transcendent purpose – the panaceas they pursued were widely divergent. These included experimenting with existing religions, whether reforming Christianity or adopting Eastern faiths such as Buddhism; the replacement of traditional religion with more elastic sorts of spiritualism (or ‘alternative religions’) that perpetuated ideas of transcendence and telos but

¹ Leonard to Dorothy, 1 February 1945, LKE/DWE/14/B, Dartington Hall Archives (unless specified otherwise, all the following archival references are to this collection).

² Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January [1924?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Papers, Columbia University Archives.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Leonard to Gerald Heard, 27 July 1935, LKE/G/18/A.

⁷ John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of faith: mesmerism, spiritualism, and occultism in modern France* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2008); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No place of grace: antimodernism and the transformation of American culture 1880-1920* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Martin Green, *Mountain of truth: the counterculture begins, Ascona, 1900-1920* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989).

rejected orthodox rituals and doctrines; and solutions which promoted affective or social fulfilment – dealing with happiness, love, self-realisation – and tried to harness the social sciences to these ends.⁸ Often, it was not a single one of these models that was chosen, but several, the languages and frameworks indiscriminately intertwined in the search for social harmony. Between the certainty of Victorian Christianity and the secular scientific modes that came to dominate after the Second World War, this was a fleeting moment of ideological and methodological syncretism. The search for a new framework of meaning and living was characterised by holistic ideas that emphasised the oneness of the self and of society, rather than any discipline-specific solution.⁹ Dartington, which the Elmhursts made a protected space for such experimentation, gives a window onto this moment of holistic psycho-social seeking, showing how it blossomed then faded in the first half of the twentieth century.

Historians have largely come at the interwar phenomenon from one of two angles, looking at efforts to reconfigure the spiritual or religious, or at the development of the sciences. Max Weber's famous 1920 statement that the 'disenchantment of the world' was the universalising tendency of modernity, has been convincingly challenged.¹⁰ Instead of a one-directional process of desacralization, Michael Saler finds that in the twentieth century there was a 'widely felt need for forms of wonder and spirituality'.¹¹ Since the established church had not met the challenge of countering the atomised anomie produced by nineteenth-century liberalism (Leonard echoed many others when he wrote that the church was 'dying rapidly throughout England'¹²) a new spiritual mode was needed, a 'modern enchantment' that would supply moral, social and religious meaning for the modern age.¹³ Studies of this search for modern enchantment tend only to span 1870 to 1914, and to focus on one manifestation, such as occultism or theosophy.¹⁴ Dartington adds to their story by showing that the pursuit of a new spiritual mode was not just the arcane preserve of religious questers, nor was it only a

⁸ See, for example, Alex Owen, *The place of enchantment: British occultism and the culture of the modern* (Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Mathew Thomson, *Psychological subjects: ideas, culture and health in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁹ Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 42.

¹⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (1920) quoted in Anthony J. Carroll, 'Disenchantment, rationality and the modernity of Max Weber', *Forum philosophicum* 16 (2011), 117-37, at 119. Callum G. Brown identifies the 'death' of Christianity as a phenomenon of the 1960s. *The death of Christian Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹¹ Saler, *As if*, 7.

¹² Leonard to Dorothy, 12 September 1921, LKE/DWE/10/C.

¹³ The idea of 'modern re-enchantment' is Saler's. *As if*, 6.

¹⁴ Examples include Alex Owen's study of occultism, *The place of enchantment*, which runs from 1880 to 1914, and Joy Dixon's examination of theosophy in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, *Divine feminine: theosophy and feminism in England* (Baltimore, Md.; London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001). Thomson's *Psychological subjects* is wider ranging in chronology and breadth, and sets the interpenetration of psychology, spiritualism and humanism in the broader intellectual landscape.

pre-war phenomenon – the hope of discovering ‘the solvent for all wars’ in the 1920s gave it fresh life.¹⁵ Rather, it was integral to the wider reforming mentality of the interwar years – part of a ‘problem consciousness’ that sought to address the imperfect legacy of the Victorian age.¹⁶

The quest for re-enchantment belonged to the same palette of solutions to the perceived crisis in liberalism as did efforts to revise and develop the social sciences.¹⁷ Pioneering practitioners in the fields of sociology, anthropology and psychology struggled to define their social role – debating, in particular, over whether they ought to be objective – confining themselves to empirical fact-finding – or purposively involved – by personally helping to create a better society. Mark Smith delineates the conflict between ‘objectivist’ and ‘purposive’ social scientists in America.¹⁸ Andrew Jewett explores the persistence of the belief in American universities that science carried with it a set of ethical or quasi-religious values capable of providing a direction for a democratic culture.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Anne Harrington tracks the rise of ‘re-enchanted science’ in interwar Germany – focusing in particular on the holistic approach of Gestalt psychology.²⁰

No similarly overarching survey exists for Britain, but a number of works on specific scientific disciplines show the intermixing of science and quasi-religious ideas of transcendence, holism and telos.²¹ In the minds of some purposive scientists – although not the majority – the way in which social science could improve the lot of mankind was part of the search for a ‘new religion’.²² This crossover between professional science and the spiritual

¹⁵ Leonard, ‘The new religion’, 1 March 1935, LKE/G/S8/F; Leonard, ‘Time budget 1934-5’, 8 November 1934, LKE/G/S8/1.

¹⁶ The term ‘problem consciousness’ is Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s. ‘Beyond utopia: new villages and living politics in modern Japan and across frontiers’, *History workshop journal* 85 (2018), 47-71, at 51.

¹⁷ ‘Social sciences’ is here used very loosely, as it was at the time, to encompass psychology, sociology and anthropology, disciplines whose delineations were all under negotiation. Stefan Collini, ‘Sociology and idealism in Britain 1880-1920’, *Archives européennes de sociologie* 19 (1978), 3-50, at 34. A wide-ranging survey of efforts to revise the human sciences across Western society in this period is given in Dorothy Ross (ed.), *Modernist impulses in the human sciences, 1870-1930* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Mark C. Smith, *Social science in the crucible* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1994).

¹⁹ Andrew Jewett, *Science, democracy, and the American university: from the Civil War to the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁰ Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted science: holism in German culture from Wilhelm to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 103.

²¹ Christopher Lawrence and George Weisz (eds.), *Greater than the parts: holism in biomedicine, 1920-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Thomson, *Psychological subjects*; Roger Smith, ‘Biology and values in interwar Britain: C. S. Sherrington, Julian Huxley and the vision of progress’, *Past and present* 178 (2003), 210-42. Mike Savage, also offers some cross-disciplinary analysis of the social sciences in the interwar period in Britain. *Identities and social change in Britain since 1940: the politics of method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²² Social scientists who took this route include Carl Jung, who interwove spiritualism and psychiatry, and the anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer, who had a brief flirtation with mysticism before reverting to

quest was echoed by the tendency of the wider pool of reformers to deploy the languages and strategies of the quasi-religious and social-scientific simultaneously.²³ Aldous Huxley, representative extraordinaire of the interwar intellectual zeitgeist and a frequent visitor to Dartington, epitomised this impulse when he announced in a lecture to the estate in 1935 that what was needed was to forge ‘a practical mystical religion acceptable to all scientists, logical in thought and yet embodying a kind of mysticism that is not apart from life’.²⁴

For Huxley, the ideal life was something akin to that of Albert Schweitzer, a French-German who was combining theology with practical, scientific work as a medical missionary in West Africa.²⁵ Dorothy and Leonard agreed with Huxley that the new religion ‘must grow out of everyday life’, and must offer a practical guide to daily behaviour.²⁶ The forging of this religion was an essential part of the wider ambition to make Dartington ‘a pattern which will be worth handing to the macrocosm outside as a way of life, good in all its parts, inner and outer’.²⁷ Yet, in spite of their hopes, the Elmhursts often found themselves ‘haphazard in our devotion of time, effort, or endowment’ in the discovery of this new religion.²⁸ Dorothy, deeply pre-occupied with her own inner life, tended to share it with only a small circle of intimates. To his own frustration, Leonard was distracted by the ‘escape mechanism of a multitude of exterior activities’ relating to the estate’s economic side – the Edwardian, outward-facing concept of manly public duty in a sense trumping his undoubted interest in the more internally-focused concepts of self that were gaining purchase in this period in Britain.²⁹ The tension between making the estate spiritually self-sustaining and economically self-sustaining would recur through the interwar years.

Perhaps because of the Elmhursts’ failure to focus on what they deemed to be a crucial cause, or because of their uncertainty and disagreement over which direction to take it in, the project

more orthodox academia. Alex Owen, ‘Occultism and the “modern” self in *fin-de-siècle* Britain’ in Martin Daunt and Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of modernity: Britain from the late-Victorian era to World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 71-96, at 86.

²³ The apparently ‘wrong-headed’ turns towards mysticism of otherwise ‘respectable’ intellectuals such as A.R. Orage and Aldous Huxley are less puzzling in the context of this widespread, restless and ecumenical quest for meaning, which often took individuals beyond the range of any single framework. On Orage, see Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 80. On Huxley, Jerome Meckier, ‘Mysticism or misty schism? Huxley studies since World War II,’ *The British studies monitor* 5 (1974), 165-77, which notes that most Huxley critics have relied on the ‘two Huxley theory’ – the notion that the Huxley of the early novels and the Huxley of the later spiritual works are irreconcilable.

²⁴ Sunday evening talk given at Dartington by Aldous Huxley, 10 February 1935, LKE/G/18/A.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Leonard, untitled note written at Visva-Bharati, [n.d.], T/DHS/A/3/A.

²⁷ Margaret Isherwood to Leonard, [n.d.], DWE/6/C2.

²⁸ Leonard, ‘Time budget 1934-5’, 8 November 1934, LKE/G/S8/1.

²⁹ Ibid; Michael Roper, ‘Between manliness and masculinity: the “war generation” and the psychology of fear in Britain, 1914-1950’, *Journal of British studies* 44 (2005), 343-62.

of ‘psycho-spiritual’ or ‘psycho-social’ seeking (as it was termed) developed variously and without co-ordination at Dartington. The way in which it wove through the projects of promoting good education and creative expression – both activities deemed to have a spiritual dimension – will be addressed in chapters two and three. The harnessing of the social sciences to promoting community spirit is touched on in chapter four. The present chapter is concerned with the diverse collection of psycho-spiritual questers that the Elmhursts recruited to help them – mystic-minded thinkers and passionate scientists wanting to put theories into practice. The focus will be on two contesting approaches that were advanced by these social and inner-life specialists, each trying to combine spiritual transcendence and science into a practical guide for living, and each connecting to wider aspirations and activities among reformers outside the estate.

One was a planned regime of ‘psycho-physical hygiene’, to be deduced on the basis of scientific research and expert advice, but incorporating spiritual telos.³⁰ Championed by Leonard, this eventually fed into state plans for post-war reconstruction. The other model, supported by Dorothy, was advanced by the public intellectual Gerald Heard, a self-proclaimed ‘scientific humanist’, who advocated advancing mankind through group spiritual exploration, and pursued this ambition for several years at Dartington before deciding that the estate had become too materialistic in its focus. Heard then continued his spiritual quest in California, where it segued into the New Age counterculture of the 1960s. Dartington’s contribution to the sphere of psycho-social questing was, perhaps inevitably, less tangible than the results it achieved in the spheres of education, the arts and rural regeneration. It certainly did not culminate in the creation or adoption of any single new system of belief. Yet the estate offers an unusual example of the psycho-social search intersecting with a large-scale practical reform project, and a rich display of the varied efforts of interwar reformers to find an alternative to the philosophical and religious frameworks of the century before.

Both at Dartington and in the wider world, the Second World War brought to an end a ‘messy’ interwar moment of syncretic scientific and spiritual experimentation.³¹ The danger of the political mobilisation of scientists had been demonstrated during the war, not least by the nuclear bomb. As a result, most practitioners retreated to the safety of a more firmly objectivist, empirical definition of their field.³² Reformers, including the Elmhursts, who had been engaged in a diverse and idiosyncratic set of psycho-spiritual projects in the period

³⁰ Leonard, note on setting up a community council, 14 March 1939, LKE/G/S8/A.

³¹ The idea of ‘messiness’ is used by Mathew Thomson in his discussion of how psychology in this period sat with other, less scientific understandings of modern self. *Psychological subjects*, 77.

³² Smith, *Social science in the crucible*, 261.

between the wars, now focused their energies instead on the construction of a centralised social democracy.³³ The elite, whose desire for ‘psycho-social re-organisation’ was in part driven by a sense of being unmoored from an old identity based on culture, morality and inheritance, settled into a new one oriented around technical proficiency in planning, administration and science.³⁴ Some reformers, including Dartington School alumnus Michael Young, still perpetuated a more spiritualised, or affective, vision of the role of the social sciences after the war, but they were in the minority.

Spiritual seeking went into retreat. When it re-emerged in force in the 1960s, it was as a more isolated, countercultural enterprise. In these later decades, Dartington again became host to a range of seekers, but they tended to be more individualistic than their predecessors, at a remove from the project of reforming democracy and from the acceptance of the dominant culture of the state. Like the American New Age that Gerald Heard joined, they formed part of a commoditised therapeutic culture that, rather than seeking to reform the modern world, provided an eclectic marketplace of spiritual refuges that eased accommodation with it. As T.J. Jackson Lears notes, the struggle to find a spiritual alternative to nineteenth-century laissez-faire individualism ‘unknowingly provided part of the psychological foundation for a streamlined liberal culture appropriate to twentieth-century consumer capitalism’.³⁵

Scientific enchantment in context

‘Turning down the Church, shutting up the Bible, refusing the enormous daily release and support of morning and evening prayers at the bedside, these probably meant a losing of anchorage that destroyed some of the self-confidence that went with them. Always I was looking for an idol, and always finding clay in the idol’s feet.’

*Leonard Elmhirst (1939)*³⁶

A comprehensive list of the psycho-spiritual seekers who found a foothold at Dartington would be of bewildering length and diversity. This section takes the experience of three key figures, Dorothy, Leonard and Gerald Heard, as a paradigm for a heavily populated part of the spectrum. All three were disenchanted with laissez-faire liberalism and saw the liberal Protestant church and Christian framework of social ethics they were brought up with as insufficient for the needs of the post-war world. They strove to re-purpose some of Christianity’s principles, drawing on the wider sphere of hybrid spirituality that flourished in

³³ Richard Weight, ‘State, intelligentsia and the promotion of national culture in Britain, 1939-45’, *Historical research* 69 (1996), 83-101.

³⁴ Savage, *Identities and social change*, 78-9.

³⁵ Jackson Lears, *No place of grace*, 6.

³⁶ Leonard, notebook, April 1939, LKE/DWE/18/E.

the interwar years as a way to reconfigure their notions of inner life and society, and in particular to promote pacifism. All three were concerned, to different degrees, with how the scientific could be incorporated into the effort to construct a new religion or affective regime. Their quests were driven by the sense that society was fragmenting and would continue to fragment without a holistic individual and societal philosophy to replace orthodox Christianity. As members of the socially-minded elite, they were also motivated by a sense of threatened identity as democratisation challenged their traditional ascendancy.³⁷ In uncovering ‘a new synthesis of faith and works’ at Dartington, all three hoped both to reintegrate society and reconceptualise their own positions as its moral leaders – though Dorothy, Leonard and Heard did not reach the same conclusions about how this should be done.³⁸

Leonard and Heard had very similar trajectories from orthodox Christianity to a life of psycho-social questing. They were both sons of clergymen who expected to follow their fathers’ vocation. At Repton School, Leonard was particularly influenced by the impulse of his headmaster William Temple – later Archbishop of Canterbury and convenor of the Malvern Conference promoting the church’s involvement in society – to relate theological principles to social action.³⁹ Leonard and Heard took the Historical Tripos at Cambridge, studying under ‘Goldie’ Lowes Dickinson, a humanist scholar whose passion for the improvement of mankind was manifested in his involvement in developing the idea of the League of Nations.⁴⁰ Dickinson’s unresolved search for spiritual meaning, which was mystic rather than Christian, catalysed in each of his students an incipient religious doubt. Nonetheless they both went on to begin the Divinity Testimonium needed for ordination.⁴¹ In

³⁷ Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler, ‘Introduction’, in Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (eds.), *After the Victorians: private conscience and public duty in modern Britain: essays in memory of John Clive* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-30.

³⁸ Dorothy to Waldo Frank, 28 June 1938, DWE/G/4/C.

³⁹ As a young man, William Temple was committed to socialism, joining the Workers’ Education Association and, briefly, the Labour Party. Later, through his book *Christianity and social order* ([S.I.]: Penguin Books, 1942) and the Malvern Conference (1941), he did much to ensure that the Church of England welcomed the welfare state – and was credited with the first use of the term ‘welfare state’ in print. LKE/G/S14/B; John Kent, ‘William Temple, the Church of England and British national identity’, in Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (eds.), *The right to belong: citizenship and national identity in Britain, 1930-1960* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 19-35.

⁴⁰ The son of a prominent Christian socialist, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932) was a fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, who was heavily involved in the University Extension Scheme. He was driven to political activism by the outbreak of the First World War, playing a central role in the international pacifist Bryce Group. D. E. Martin, ‘Dickinson, Goldsworthy Lowes (1862–1932)’, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32815>, accessed 20 February 2018].

⁴¹ Michael Young, *The Elmhursts of Dartington: the creation of a utopian community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 22; Paul Eros, “‘One of the most penetrating minds in England’: Gerald Heard and the British intelligentsia of the interwar period”, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2011, 3-4.

1913 Heard had a crisis of faith and left Cambridge to work as a private secretary. In 1916, a year after one of his brothers was killed in the war in North Africa, he had a complete nervous breakdown.⁴² Leonard worked for the YMCA in India during the First World War, but then his brother, too, was killed, on the Somme in 1916. The prospect of inheriting his father's Yorkshire estate – which, though not large, offered eventual financial independence – confirmed his desire not to enter the church.⁴³

Leonard and Heard lost their faith, but, following the classic moral path described by Beatrice Webb – ‘the transference of the emotion of self-sacrificing service from God to man’ – they retained a Christian ‘longing to act purposefully and to sacrifice the self in a positive endeavour’.⁴⁴ Like Webb, both turned to practical social work. For Heard, that meant becoming the private secretary to Sir Horace Curzon Plunkett, a semi-retired Irish statesman and pioneer of the Irish agricultural co-operative movement.⁴⁵ Leonard worked for a time with Sam Higginbottom, an English missionary devoted to rural community development in India.⁴⁶ Higginbottom spurred him to increase his social usefulness by getting a practical agricultural education at Cornell University – an institution whose pioneering work in agricultural extension had, since the 1890s, emphasised not just efficient, scientific farming, but also the moral ‘awakening’ of farmers as good citizens.⁴⁷

In a two-year course in agricultural economics, Leonard absorbed a peculiarly American faith in science – and in particular in the social sciences – as an alluring new, catch-all discipline

⁴² Alison Falby, *Between the pigeonholes: Gerald Heard, 1889-1971* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 9.

⁴³ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 27.

⁴⁴ Beatrice Webb, *My apprenticeship*, vol. 1, (London: Longmans & Co, 1926), 153; Leonard to Aldous Huxley, 27 July 1935, LKE/G/18/A. Thomas Dixon explores how altruism as an ethical doctrine came, in the later-nineteenth century, to be adopted by the non-religiously orthodox. *The invention of altruism: making moral meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008), 113. Stefan Collini, too, argues that there was a widespread early-twentieth-century need to re-theorise the Victorian Christian moral scheme – that ‘selfish purposes, whether religious or secular, could not sustain the necessary load’. *Public moralists: political thought and intellectual life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 64 and 84.

⁴⁵ Horace Plunkett had been forced by ill health and civil unrest in Ireland to move to England. Philip Bull, ‘Plunkett, Sir Horace Curzon (1854–1932)’, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35549, accessed 17 April 2018].

⁴⁶ First arriving in India as part of a Presbyterian mission, Sam Higginbottom (1874-1958) went on to study farming at Ohio State University and then to found the Allahabad Agricultural Institute in 1919. Funded by a consortium of churches based in New York, the institute's purpose was Christianity-infused research and training in agriculture and veterinary sciences. Sam Higginbottom, *The gospel and the plow, or the old gospel and modern farming in ancient India* (London: Central Board of Mission and Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921).

⁴⁷ J. Peters Scott, ‘“Every farmer should be awakened”: Liberty Hyde Bailey's vision of agricultural extension work’, *Agricultural history* 80 (2006), 190-219.

that might bring about democratic social regeneration.⁴⁸ As he wrote later, ‘economics and psychology have begun to offer us yardsticks of measurement, clumsy as yet, that the old utopias never possessed’.⁴⁹ Whilst science had, ‘up to the present, done so much to upset the balance of things’, it could be ‘harnessed and used for the benefit of the community, bringing new life to the group’.⁵⁰ Leonard’s view reflected the widespread faith among early-twentieth-century American progressives that ‘the human sciences could remake American culture and thereby restore the conditions for self-government’.⁵¹ At the same time Heard, who had been exposed to anthropology and psychic research at Cambridge, had begun a career as a writer, taking as his main theme the quest for a spiritual-scientific ‘third morality’.⁵² Like Aldous Huxley, Heard and Leonard saw reconciling religion with science as a vital part of re-building a world shattered by war.⁵³ Writing to Heard in 1934, Leonard reflected on how the pre-war effort ‘to turn Christ into a religion, to check action and situation against him’ was ‘not a real escape from the challenge that science and psychology and the war were to make to us’.⁵⁴ The late-nineteenth-century Christian ideals – modelling behaviour on Christ and trying to build ‘a kingdom of heaven on earth’ – would continue to figure large in each man’s landscape, but they needed incorporating with science into a new faith and pattern of behaviour for a new age.⁵⁵ The belief in self-sacrifice and spiritual telos that Heard and Leonard retained from Christianity would nonetheless continue to frame their social ambitions. For Leonard, by the 1920s, religion had come to mean everything that related to ‘the search for the highest good’.⁵⁶

Dorothy Elmhirst, too, was raised in a tradition of liberal Protestantism. Christian conscientiousness – intensified by a sense that her father’s fortune had been ill-gotten – drove her from the social volunteer work that was routine for society women, to a more thoroughgoing engagement with welfare reform.⁵⁷ After the death of her first husband Willard

⁴⁸ Andrew Jewett surveys the efforts of interwar progressive scientists in American universities to promote scientific democracy in *Science, democracy, and the American university*. Dorothy Ross concentrates on progressive social scientists’ contribution to the evolution of ideas of American exceptionalism, with science offering an accelerated path to a golden future. *The origins of American social sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴⁹ Leonard, 1934, quoted in Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 100.

⁵⁰ Leonard, Sunday evening meeting, 23 September 1928, LKE. LKE/G/31/A.

⁵¹ Jewett, *Science, democracy, and the American university*, 109-37.

⁵² Eros, ‘Gerald Heard’; Falby, *Between the pigeonholes*.

⁵³ Aldous Huxley, *Ends and means: an inquiry into the nature of ideals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1937).

⁵⁴ Leonard to Gerald Heard, 26 December 1924, LKE/G/17.

⁵⁵ Although philanthropy based on Christian belief had already begun being supplemented by ‘quasi-religious’ social service based on a ‘Religion of Humanity’ in the previous century. Gertrude Himmelfarb, ‘The age of philanthropy’, *The Wilson quarterly* 21 (1997), 48-55.

⁵⁶ Leonard, Sunday evening meeting, 23 September 1928, LKE/G/31/A.

⁵⁷ From the age of eighteen, Dorothy was involved in settlement houses and social, health and educational work, often through the volunteer organisation the Junior League. Jane Brown, *Angel*

Straight in 1918, Dorothy began to give more attention to the theory underlying efforts at social reform, attending lectures in economics, sociology and psychology at Columbia University.⁵⁸ Through her studies, her financing of *The New Republic*, and her close friendship with reformers such as Eduard Lindeman and Herbert Croly, she kept abreast of American purposive social science. This was considerably in advance of the discipline's emergence in Britain; the Elmhursts' precocious faith that social progress could be achieved through social science is in part explained by their transatlantic connections.

At the same time, like many others coming to grips with losses sustained in the First World War, Dorothy was dabbling in Christian Science and séances.⁵⁹ This was the beginning of a lifetime of religious exploration that led her from orthodox Christianity to an ecumenical belief that 'the spirit of man is connected with a larger spirit that infuses all life'.⁶⁰ She was always more 'religious', at least in a pantheistic way, than Leonard. While she rejected the 'forms and dogmas' of the church, she consciously held onto a belief in 'the spirit of goodwill and selfless service to others that Christ so insistently proclaimed'.⁶¹ She was also more preoccupied than Leonard with the spiritual significance of creativity, setting great store by the possibilities of revelation presented by Dartington's artists. Her emotional journey can be followed through a trail of notebooks filled with poems, biblical extracts, hymns, prayers, cuttings on theology, the arts, psychology, philosophy and education, as well as with her own thoughts and feelings.⁶² When social scientists began to visit Dartington, she folded their guidance into her spiritual practice, writing, for example, that the psychologist William Sheldon had 'shown me what an underlying tenderness can be – I have always been so harsh – so unable to feel compassion [...] I hope this hard icy core is beginning to thaw out'.⁶³

Dorothy: how an American progressive came to Devon (London: Unbound Digital, 2017), 28-30; Carolyn Gould, 'The modest benefactor', *Cornell alumni news* 3 (1975), 19-21.

⁵⁸ The educator and philosopher John Dewey, a leading proponent of the American school of pragmatism, was a particularly strong influence on Dorothy. She absorbed his view that knowledge – and progress towards participatory democracy – came from the active adaptation of the individual to his environment. John Dewey, *Democracy and education: an introduction to the philosophy of education* (New York: Free Press, 1999 [1916]); Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁵⁹ Seth Koven traces a similar transition from Protestantism to spiritualism in the life of philanthropist and peace-campaigner Muriel Lester (though this was not precipitated by the war). Dorothy was friends with Muriel and her sister Doris. She stayed with them in East London, donated to their charitable work and was introduced by them to various figures in the pacifist movement. Muriel Lester to Dorothy, [n.d.], 28 April 1936 and 5 September 1936, DWE/G/S2/A; Doris Lester to Dorothy, 22 May 1933, LKE/G/22/A; Seth Koven, *The match girl and the heiress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 212-9.

⁶⁰ Dorothy to R.A. Edwards, 2 August 1942, DWE/G/S3/G.

⁶¹ Dorothy to the secretary of the Dartington Parochial Church Council, 16 July 1948, DWE/G/S3/B.

⁶² Dorothy, 'Form of meditation for daily use', [n.d.], DWE/G/S3/A.

⁶³ Dorothy, 'Notes on talk by Bill Sheldon', [n.d.], DWE/G/S7/E/7.

Evidently social science satisfied more than spiritual and social aspirations – it touched affective ones, too, which straight ‘science’ might have been thought not to.

More than Leonard and Heard, Dorothy attempted to fit orthodox Christianity into her life. She saw the importance of St Mary’s Church, which stood just beyond the boundaries of the estate, as a local institution. She tried to attend church on Sundays to avoid creating ‘unnecessary barriers between myself and the village’ – although the conservative rector, J.S. Martin, did his best to make the church a focal point for opposition to the estate and it was not a habit that stuck.⁶⁴ It was only when Martin was replaced by the more open-minded, left-leaning R.A. Edwards in 1940 that there was a rapprochement between church and estate, with Dorothy eagerly embracing the clergyman’s spiritual guidance both in her own life and in plans for the estate.⁶⁵

Many interwar reformers saw in the East, ‘the chance for redemption from the decadence that had led Europe to the destructive end of the world war’.⁶⁶ Men like the French intellectual Romain Rolland saw ‘the West representing science and materialism’ and moral decline, and ‘the East spirituality and the search for transcendence’.⁶⁷ Dorothy was no exception. She enthusiastically consumed books such as Cyril Joad’s *Counter attack from the East*, an account of the ideas of the Hindu philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.⁶⁸ She had briefly lived in China during the early part of her first marriage, and together with Willard Straight had founded *Asia* magazine in New York to further Western knowledge of the East.⁶⁹

Leonard and Gerald Heard, too, were infected by Eastern enthusiasm – unsurprisingly, in Leonard’s case, given that his mentor, Rabindranath Tagore, was one of the chief advocates of the revival of Indo-Asian spirituality.⁷⁰ At Tagore’s Sriniketan the vision of a utopian ‘life

⁶⁴ Dorothy to R.A. Edwards, 2 August 1942, DWE/G/S3/G; R.A. Edwards, ‘Dartington: A report for the Bishop of the Diocese’, January 1948, DWE/G/S3/G.

⁶⁵ R.A. Edwards lectured at Sunday evening meetings and was involved in making plans for the post-war estate. ‘Dartington: A report for the Bishop of the Diocese’, January 1948, DWE/G/S3/G.

⁶⁶ Priya Satia, ‘Byron, Gandhi and the Thompsons: the making of British social history and unmaking of Indian history’, *History workshop journal* 18 (2016), 135-70, at 138. Other reformers with a notable passion for the East include Herbert Croly in America and A.R. Orage in England.

⁶⁷ Ruth Harris, ‘Rolland, Gandhi and Madeleine Slade: spiritual politics, France and the wider world’, *French history* 27 (2013), 579-99, at 584.

⁶⁸ Cyril Joad, *Counter attack from the East. The philosophy of Radhakrishnan* (G. Allen & Unwin: London, 1933); Dorothy to Leonard, 19 November 1924 and 19 February 1934, LKE/DWE/6/B.

⁶⁹ *Asia* magazine, begun in 1917, ran articles on Eastern policy, commerce and culture. After Straight’s death Dorothy continued to support it until 1941, when its editor Richard Walsh and his wife, writer Pearl S. Buck, bought it from her. It folded not long after.

⁷⁰ Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: the myriad-minded man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995).

in its completeness' included making the spiritual part of the day-to-day.⁷¹ For Leonard, as for other reformers, Eastern spirituality represented the opposite pole to the formal institutions of modern Western Christianity. 'Unlike the West, the East has avoided drawing any decided line between what is secular and what is religious,' he wrote. 'Both Hindu and Buddhistic tradition – and their counterparts, Taoism and Zenism, have succeeded in linking all the acts of ordinary daily life with the mystic idea of a common end and purpose to life.'⁷²

Throughout the interwar years, Dartington received regular infusions of Eastern influence: Tagore and the orientalist Arthur Waley visited and both dedicated books on spirituality to the Elmhirsts;⁷³ the estate hosted artists who followed the Baha'i faith;⁷⁴ and Sunday evening meetings ranged frequently into the realms of Eastern mysticism.⁷⁵

As well as looking to the East, to traditional Christianity, alternative spirituality and the social sciences, the Elmhirsts and Gerald Heard also took the medieval period as a model. They saw it as a time when the religious could 'grow out of everyday life', embodied in music, dance and drama as well as in the Christian church itself.⁷⁶ For all three reformers, the hope was to make mysticism and modernity, religion and science one and indivisible – and to make them an integral part of everyday life.⁷⁷ '[F]or all practical purposes,' wrote Dorothy, 'it is a way of life we need'.⁷⁸

The appetite for a new framework of values was pervasive at Dartington, with participants nudging the Elmhirsts to turn the estate more explicitly into a spiritual system: 'Let us have the word out,' potter Bernard Leach urged Leonard, 'this is faith, and as I see it a religious

⁷¹ Leonard Elmhirst, *Rabindranath Tagore: pioneer in education. Essays and exchanges between Rabindranath Tagore and L.K. Elmhirst* (London: John Murray, 1961).

⁷² Leonard, 'Talk for Plymouth Playgoers' Circle', 10 March 1935, LKE/G/S8/A.

⁷³ Rabindranath Tagore's collection of lectures on spirituality, *The religion of man*, was dedicated to Dorothy (New York: Macmillan, 1931); Arthur Waley's *The way and its power: a study of the Tao Tê Ching and its place in Chinese thought* was dedicated to both the Elmhirsts (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934).

⁷⁴ These included Mark Tobey and Bernard Leach. The Baha'i faith, founded in nineteenth-century Persia, emphasises three unities. To summarise roughly: there is only one God, the source of all creation; all religions have the same source and come from that God; and all humans are equal, unified in their diversity. It was popular among idealists of the time, including Richard St Barbe Baker, rural conservationist and founder of the reforestation organisation Men of the Trees.

⁷⁵ [n.a.], Notes on Sunday evening meetings, [n.d.], T/AE/4/G.

⁷⁶ Leonard, untitled note, [n.d.], T/DHS/A/3/A; Leonard, 'Talk for Plymouth Playgoers' Circle', 10 March 1935, LKE/G/S8/A. T.J. Jackson Lears remarks on the frequency of this twin use of the Eastern and medieval touchstones in his study of spirituality in turn-of-the-century America. *No place of grace*, xiii.

⁷⁷ For Peter van der Veer such syncretic early-twentieth-century spirituality 'enabled the inclusion of a variety of traditions under the rubric of universal morality without the baggage of competing religious institutions and their authoritative boundary maintenance'. 'Spirituality in modern society', *Social research* 76 (2009), 1097-120, at 1106.

⁷⁸ Dorothy, 'Notes on talk by Bill Sheldon', [n.d.], DWE/G/S7/E/7.

issue. Can Dartington be tackled on any other basis?’⁷⁹ Leonard’s brother Vic Elmhirst wanted ‘some kind of religion – in the deepest sense – for all of us folks who have lost what we had’.⁸⁰ For a number of visitors and observers, it was the Elmhirsts themselves who should be generating this religion. It was problematic that Dorothy’s spiritual quest was in large part a private one, relying on communion with a few kindred spirits, and that Leonard’s involved the consultation of experts rather than his own transformation into a modern priest. The organicist Rolf Gardiner criticised them both for failing to kindle a sufficient ‘flame of whole (holy) belief’ at the heart of their project – though the spiritual flame he hoped for was oriented around the ‘organic rebirth of a nation’ rather than what he called the ‘dingy cosmopolitanism’ that motivated the Elmhirsts and many others involved in their estate.⁸¹

Examination of efforts to put psycho-spiritual theory into practice at Dartington calls up questions of how the quest for scientific enchantment intermeshed with the Elmhirsts’ ambitions to deepen democracy and strengthen community. The idea that each individual was on their own spiritual search at times harmonised with the Deweyan democratic agenda of freeing the individual to think and act.⁸² Dorothy insisted that there was to be no religious teaching at Dartington School, as exposure to the fossilised forms and nostrums of the church would ‘rob the child of the right himself to search for the truth’.⁸³ Leonard agreed that, instead of ‘labelling ourselves in an effort to find some short cut, some easy alibi, some safe anchorage’, they should all be taking ‘the long view’ and finding their own meaning.⁸⁴ At other times, however, the spiritual quest could produce an impulse to subsume the individual will to the group spirit and the guidance of gurus – an impulse that was feared by some to be akin to the totalitarian regimes that were arising abroad in the 1930s.⁸⁵ Clashes at Dartington over whether the individual- or group-oriented inner-life quest could best strengthen democracy reflected the problem of balancing individualism and collectivism that was endemic to British idealist philosophy at the time.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Bernard Leach to Leonard, 20 December 1932, T/AAP/3/A2.

⁸⁰ Richard Elmhirst to Dorothy, [n.d], DWE/S/1/C.

⁸¹ Rolf Gardiner to Leonard, 16 June 1933, LKE/G/15/B; Rolf Gardiner, ‘Germany: a personal confession’, in *Tomorrow*, the Dartington School magazine, July 1933, T/DHS/B/23/E.

⁸² As John Dewey wrote, ‘my own life of thought has been a struggle to get liberation – freedom from a tradition inherited and still embodied at least in the formulae of civilization’. Quoted by Mark Smith, *Social science*, 37.

⁸³ Dorothy, statement on religion, [1928?], DWE/DHS/1.

⁸⁴ Leonard, ‘The long view’, 27 June 1936, LKE/G/S8/A.

⁸⁵ Leonard pondered over how to ‘train the individual to act and think as member of a group’, but, like others at Dartington, he grew increasingly wary in the late 1930s of groups following a ‘intuitive personality’ such as Hitler and Mussolini. Leonard, ‘The long view’, 27 July 1930, LKE/G/S9/A.

⁸⁶ The debate echoed the one that the British philosophical idealists had in the context of the First World War: did exaltation of the ‘general will’ rob the individual of independence and sanction acquiescence to dangerous state initiatives, or did it contribute to peace by affirming the universal

The solution that frequently arose, both at Dartington and in the wider world of reformist thinking, was to focus on the importance of the individual in the well-integrated community. The growth of the individual to ‘ultimate perfection’, wrote Leonard, was ‘dependent upon the growth and continuous progress of the society within which that individual moves and lives’; ‘these two growths or progressions must go forward together, climbing spiral fashion’.⁸⁷ The pervasive philosophy at Dartington was that salvation lay in integration – be it of individual and collective, transcendence and social science, or the quest for the spiritual with practical social and economic regeneration. Understood in this sense, it can be seen that interwar interest in the psycho-spiritual was not – or not only – a form of escapism, as some historians have understood it to be, but rather part of reformers’ efforts to address the shortcomings of liberalism, to re-integrate an atomised market-based society and to revitalise the elite with a new self-understanding and social purpose.⁸⁸

Leonard Elmhirst’s search for purposive social scientists

Dorothy’s search for meaning revolved predominantly around spirituality and creativity and was shared with only a few fellow travellers. In his younger years, Leonard’s quest manifested itself in similar introspective form. Like Dorothy, he kept notebooks that followed diverse lines of inquiry – in his case entries encompassed psychology, animism, Montessori, H.G. Wells and Francis of Assisi.⁸⁹ From his time at Cornell, however, his focus turned to how ‘scientists and psychologists’ could offer a better psycho-social plan for the world at large.⁹⁰ This section tracks the way he tried to harness such specialists at Dartington: first, and unsuccessfully, attempting to integrate them within the community; later on, leaning on the suggestions of outside advisers. Whilst the latter approach still did not produce results that united the estate, it prefigured the significance that the social sciences, and social planning more generally, were to acquire for reformers in the years following the Second World War.⁹¹

connection between all individuals? Sandra den Otter, “‘Thinking in communities’: late nineteenth-century liberals, idealists and the retrieval of community”, *Parliamentary history* 16 (1997), 67-84.

⁸⁷ Leonard, ‘Agricultural economics, a means to what end?’, 25 May 1934, LKE/LAND/8/C. The language in which ‘individual growth was an inescapably social affair’ – where individuality and communality were interrelated rather than in conflict – was a familiar one in progressive, and particularly idealist thinking. Marc Stears, *Progressives, pluralists, and the problems of the state: ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59.

⁸⁸ Joy Dixon, for example, notes a shift to a ‘radically privatized spirituality’ in the 1920s, with an emphasis on the therapeutic rather than ethical dimensions. *Divine feminine*, 228-9.

⁸⁹ Leonard, notebook, 1 January 1920, LKE/G/S17/C/23.

⁹⁰ Leonard to Dorothy, 12 Sept 1921, LKE/DWE/10/C.

⁹¹ Savage, *Identities and social change*, 78-9.

As a young man, influenced by William Temple, Leonard's reforming hopes revolved around reinvigorating the church, leading to his working for the YMCA. By the time he set up Dartington with Dorothy, they had shifted to a scientific 'neo-psychology' that would promote 'community feeling' and 'mutual responsibility' – while by no means shaking off the Christian-missionary framework of wishing to be of public service.⁹² It was Leonard's vision of social-spiritual well-being – based on a pattern divined by scientific experts and achieved in community groups – that had the greatest imprint on schemes for reforming inner life carried out at Dartington. The reliance on experts sat unusually and sometimes uncomfortably with the Elmhursts' simultaneous emphasis on the estate's being an organic community growing from the grass-roots up; but as Dorothy and Leonard's model of reform shifted into one of more centralised reconstruction, the notion of inner-life planning by social scientists came to fit more naturally. Dartington, Leonard had begun to think as early as 1934, could be a government test-bed for 'psycho-social discovery as the case method is to the openminded physician'.⁹³

The Elmhursts' first expert was Eduard Lindeman, an American social activist and academic specialising in sociology, adult education and community development, and a close friend of Dorothy from her years overseeing *The New Republic* in New York.⁹⁴ He was present for Dartington's early stages, and remained closely interested in the estate until his death in 1953. Lindeman's strategy for social reform revolved around 'the resurrection of the autonomy and the social responsibility of local community units' – taking inspiration from G.D.H. Cole's decentralised guild socialism.⁹⁵ He thought that in the organisation of Dartington and other communities there should be no leaders, not even social scientists, but 'a conscious effort on the part of the community to control its affairs democratically', which might or might not involve turning to outside specialists for advice.⁹⁶ In place of Christianity there would be 'mutuality' and 'a system of morality supported by the organized community'.⁹⁷ Many participants at Dartington seized eagerly on the ideal of an egalitarian community of 'amateur adventurers',

⁹² Leonard, untitled note, [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/B; Leonard, note on neo-psychology, July 1932, LKE/G/S17/C.

⁹³ Leonard, 'Time budget 1934-5', 8 November 1934, LKE/G/S8/1.

⁹⁴ Eduard C. Lindeman (1885-1953) had a career that encompassed practical work as a community organiser with academic teaching and writing. He was close to Dorothy when she lived in New York and remained so after her marriage to Leonard. For a long period, the Elmhursts held a mortgage on his home in New Jersey. His daughter Betty attended Dartington School.

⁹⁵ Eduard Lindeman, 'The place of the local community in organized society', [n.d.], DWE/G/7/C. See also *Social discovery. An approach to the study of functional groups* (New York: Republic Publishing, 1924).

⁹⁶ Eduard Lindeman, *The community: an introduction to the study of community leadership and organization* (New York: Associated Press, 1921), 129.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

with everyone, whether adults or children, intellectuals or labourers, sharing equally in building the 'community of sentiment and of purpose'.⁹⁸

Lindeman's vision of community spirit did not amount to a plan for a complete faith. Dorothy, who wanted such a thing, was distressed that, two years into the Dartington project, 'we haven't yet as a group become conscious of our spiritual needs, nor have we yet developed any common philosophy or religious idea which gives meaning to the whole enterprise'.⁹⁹ Her friend, the schoolteacher Margaret Isherwood, concurred. Dartington had the 'machinery' for 'all the arts, and the crafts and the intellectual pursuits. What about the life of the spirit?'¹⁰⁰ Dorothy's response to this lack of a community philosophy was to withdraw into private spiritual exploration with a few chosen intimates, and also to focus on supporting the arts, which she saw as a possible vehicle for advancing spiritual development. Leonard agreed that at Dartington there was 'still a big gap somewhere – represented by the word religion – an aspect that is blank'.¹⁰¹ But his solution was to outsource the search by recruiting social scientists who could help construct a blueprint for the 'hygiene of the soul'.¹⁰² His strategy was unusual. In interwar America it was commonly thought that 'progress lay in science' – but not integrated with the spiritual realm; in Britain, social science was often a 'theoretical, philosophical, humanistic, and outward-looking project' with 'a mystical dimension' – but lacking practical applications.¹⁰³ Leonard tried to synthesise social science and religion, theory and practice, 'research and laboratory, specialist, general practitioner and intelligent layman' to find 'the best modern approach to human problems'.¹⁰⁴

Leonard hoped for a permanent psychologist for Dartington, but the 'one amateur, one specialist children's and two professional' psychologists he employed in the first ten years caused 'all kinds of trouble'.¹⁰⁵ First there was the problem of internal resistance to social scientists observing a community whose 'purpose was to be a group working together'.¹⁰⁶ Schoolteacher Margaret Isherwood warned that on the estate there were those 'who say we must not only not look into ourselves but must not allow others (anthropologists) to come and

⁹⁸ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 10 November 1925, LKE/TAG/9/A; Wyatt Rawson to Eduard Lindeman, July 1927, DWE/G/7/C.

⁹⁹ Dorothy to Ruth Morgan, 28 May 1928, DWE/G/S7/E/7.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Isherwood to Leonard, [n.d.], T/DHS/B/15/D.

¹⁰¹ Leonard, response to 1929 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/D.

¹⁰² Leonard to Israel Sieff, 23 August 1948, LKE/PEP/5/B.

¹⁰³ Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 57, 68 and 72. One indication of the difference in outlook either side of the Atlantic was the failure of the more rigidly mechanical behaviourism, and also of Freudianism, to take hold in Britain as it did in America. The Americans had more of an 'engineering' approach.

¹⁰⁴ Leonard, note on setting up a community council, 14 March 1939, LKE/G/S8/A.

¹⁰⁵ Leonard to Frederic Bartlett, 20 July 1936, LKE/G/13/B.

¹⁰⁶ Transcription of Sunday evening meeting, 23 September 1928, LKE/G/31/A.

look at us'.¹⁰⁷ Leonard approached Sir Frederic Bartlett, Cambridge's first professor of experimental psychology, to help with this difficulty, inviting him to visit the estate.¹⁰⁸ Bartlett agreed on the danger of 'introducing into the group anybody whose predominant interests were in social and comparative values, unless in some more apparent and practical manner he could pull his weight in the community plan'.¹⁰⁹ The difficulty spoke to broader debates among social reformers about whether it was legitimate for specialists to have a superior, leading position in the emerging democratic order.¹¹⁰ There was also the problem at Dartington of finding a social scientist who was willing to 'initiate for us some positive synthesis and offer us some clue to a source of power through which we may achieve a wider horizon of consciousness and the vision of a new world'.¹¹¹ Most specialists did not think, like Leonard, in terms of a higher consciousness aimed at advancing connectedness and spiritual telos – although a notable exception was Boshi Sen, an Indian scientist whose research was funded in part by Dorothy, and whom the whole Elmhirst family delighted in as 'a rare combination – a scientist with a deep religious sense'.¹¹²

In response to these conceptual and practical difficulties, the question of a resident social scientist was shelved.¹¹³ Instead, Leonard bombarded passing specialists – contacts from Cambridge, from America, continental refugees – with requests for their views on psycho-social development. Dartington offered a rare chance to try theories outside the laboratory, and many were keen to offer advice: Sir Frederic Bartlett saw the 'bane' of psychology in

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Isherwood to Leonard, [n.d.], DWE/6/C2.

¹⁰⁸ Leonard to Frederic Bartlett, 2 January 1934, LKE/G/13/B. Bartlett's contributions to psychology have been widely recognised. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1932, and later created C.B.E. and knighted. D.E. Broadbent, 'Bartlett, Sir Frederic Charles (1886–1969)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30628>, accessed 30 April 2018].

¹⁰⁹ Frederic Bartlett to Leonard, 16 July 1936, LKE/G/13/B.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, the debate on whether a directing technocrat elite was necessary, which was then being conducted between socialist pluralists – who thought they were not – and nationalist progressives – who thought they were. Stears, *Progressives*, 79.

¹¹¹ Leonard, note, [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/F.

¹¹² Beatrice Straight to Nancy Wilson Ross, 11 October 1935, 156/2, Nancy Wilson Ross Archives. Dr Basiswar (Boshi) Sen (1887–1971), a friend of Rabindranath Tagore, was a plant physiologist and founder of the Vivekananda Laboratory – dedicated to plant science – in Calcutta. His omnivorous interest in the psycho-spiritual took him to visit Carl Jung, Romain Rolland and Albert Einstein. See file LKE/IN/16.

¹¹³ Although more candidates were tried – notably, Karl Duncker, a German refugee psychologist who suffered a breakdown at Dartington and had to be sent for psychiatric treatment himself; the South African social psychologist Dr. O.A. Oeser, who taught at Dartington School for a time before becoming Professor of Psychology at Melbourne University; and German refugee Heinrich Jacoby, whose work on self-development was to be a major influence on the Esalen Institute in California in the 1960s. Oeser to Dorothy, 26 May 1938, DWE/G/S1/F; Richard Trahair, *Behavior, technology, and organizational development: Eric Trist and the Tavistock Institute* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, 2015), 77; Heinrich Jacoby to Dorothy, 29 March 1939, DWE/6/D.

Britain as ‘the too complete removal of theory from practice’, and here was the remedy.¹¹⁴ These experts’ suggestions, delivered in person or by letter, were aired at the Sunday evening meetings that the Elmhursts encouraged estate members to attend, replacing churchgoing with communal good. The following section looks at the advice of two psychologists, Sir Frederic Bartlett and the American William Sheldon. Their suggestions for Dartington – often indefinite, impractical, eugenically deterministic or imbued with nebulous spirituality – look, like British psychology generally in this period, to be an ‘aberration’ or outright failure if they are examined against the social sciences as they developed after the Second World War.¹¹⁵ Yet, the willingness to cross from the theoretical and scientific to the practical and even spiritual, establishes these psychologists firmly within a widespread, syncretic project to negotiate the effects of modernity on the psycho-spiritual wellbeing of humankind.

Professor Bartlett visited Dartington in 1934, after which Leonard sent him the results of a questionnaire that he and Dorothy had conducted in 1931 to assess employees’ views of the estate.¹¹⁶ Leonard asked for the professor’s comments on the responses, for his advice on how to create a good community, and, more specifically, on how man could be offered ‘a oneness of life as he leaves the family and an ever increasing boundary to that oneness until it includes the whole of mankind, not in a woolly kind of upliftedness but in an ascending acuteness of consciousness’.¹¹⁷ The distance between Leonard’s belief in spiritual telos and the way social scientists tended to think at the time was clear in Bartlett’s bemused reply. ‘I am afraid that the definite questions that you put there are so phrased that, with my perhaps deplorably empirical habit of mind, I find the greatest difficulty in envisaging them clearly.’¹¹⁸ He nonetheless told the Elmhursts that he found Dartington ‘by long odds the most valuable and hopeful social experiment that I have ever seen’, offering a series of observations which gave them ‘a feeling that there could be a meaning to all our struggles’.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Frederic Bartlett to Leonard, 22 February 1935 LKE/G/13/B. Some of those Leonard applied to were not so enthusiastic. He made an unsuccessful effort to get a ‘social audit’ from Captain L.F. Ellis, secretary of the National Council of Social Service. Leonard to Ellis, 10 February 1931 and Ellis to Leonard, 20 February 1931, LKE/LAND/1/H.

¹¹⁵ Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 75. Stefan Collini finds the same ‘failure’ in sociology. Like the more scientific psychological schools, it was impeded by its incongruity with the idealist world view – it was seen as embodying natural science’s concern merely with ‘dumb facts’ and mechanical causation, and thereby as going against a project that turned on the idea of the unified will of society. Bernard Bosanquet, quoted in Collini, ‘Sociology and idealism’, 22-3.

¹¹⁶ Leonard conducted the questionnaire with the help of Margaret Isherwood. ‘Questionnaire, January 1931, Dartington Hall, Totnes: papers and answers’, LKE/G/13/B.

¹¹⁷ Leonard to Frederic Bartlett, 2 January 1934, LKE/G/S8/D.

¹¹⁸ Frederic Bartlett to Leonard, 22 February 1935, LKE/G/13/B.

¹¹⁹ Frederic Bartlett to Dorothy, 11 November 1933, DWE/G/S1/F; Leonard to Frederic Bartlett, 10 February 1934, LKE/G/9/A.

Dartington's approach to scientific enchantment cross-fertilised with ideas from America, Europe and India. The Elmhursts initially were interested in building a new psycho-spiritual model that could be applied the world over, and that would contribute to international peace. Yet, especially as alternative psycho-social models were offered by totalitarian regimes in the late 1930s, their ideas and those of their advisors became tinged with national specificity. Bartlett wrote to Leonard that 'you can't successfully impose a Viennese psychology on an English group without running for a fall'.¹²⁰ Leonard doubted that Karl Duncker, a young German Gestalt psychologist recommended to him by Bartlett, would be able to comprehend the 'anarchic habits' of England and of Dartington in particular.¹²¹ These views align with Mathew Thomson's findings that the introspective Freudian-type model then popular on the continent was seen as problematic in early-twentieth-century Britain.¹²² To Bartlett, Freud's premise that 'everyone who is sound and normal' would talk about everything to everyone would not suit Englishmen's 'locked lips'.¹²³ Instead, he suggested characteristically 'English' solutions to Leonard: to maintain vigour, Dartington ought to make more contact with 'neighbouring social communities' through 'games contacts, aesthetic contacts, discussion contacts, administrative contacts'.¹²⁴

From Leonard's point of view, the trouble with Bartlett – and by extension with other English social scientists – was that they were not sufficiently purposive. Leonard was shared his mentor Rabindranath Tagore's reservations about such scientific experts – they tended to be more interested in 'extracting statistics, the statistics that deal with fragments of dissected life' than in 'the principle of life and completeness'.¹²⁵ And it is true that Bartlett saw in Dartington a source of anthropological data rather than the prospect of participating in a utopian endeavour. Visiting it, he wrote, gave him 'something of the same excitement I had when I was sitting in the kraal of the queen-mother in Swaziland', and he encouraged Leonard to 'work up the data' into a paper for the *British Journal of Psychology*, of which he was editor.¹²⁶ Leonard, who wanted Dartington to be a utopia advanced by scientific methods,

¹²⁰ Frederic Bartlett to Leonard, 22 February 1935 LKE/G/13/B.

¹²¹ Karl Duncker (1903-1940) worked at the Psychological Institute at the University of Berlin until he was exiled from Germany. He spent a brief period under Bartlett's supervision in Cambridge then another short period at Dartington, proposing a study of the factors 'making for the arisal [sic] of a "sense of unity"' and writing a paper on the social modification of children's food preferences, before suffering a nervous break-down. It is possible that Bartlett had felt a Gestalt psychologist would be easier for Dartington to engage with (because both had a holistic outlook) than would a Freudian. Gregory A. Kimble and Michael Wertheimer (eds.), *Portraits of pioneers in psychology* (New York and London: Psychology Press, 1998), vol. 3, 165-9; Frederic Bartlett to Leonard, 16 July 1936, LKE/G/13/B; Karl Duncker to Leonard, 31 January 1937, LKE/G/9/A.

¹²² Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 77.

¹²³ Frederic Bartlett to Leonard, 22 February 1935, LKE/G/13/B.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Rabindranath Tagore to Leonard, 3 September 1932, LKE/TAG/9/A.

¹²⁶ Frederic Bartlett to Leonard, 7 February 1934, LKE/G/S8/D and 22 February 1935, LKE/G/13/B.

not a goldfish bowl for scientists, had to turn to America to find a more complete commitment to progressively intentioned science.

An American academic without portfolio, William Sheldon, stayed at Dartington for six weeks in 1934 as part of a lengthy European tour during which he met Sigmund Freud and the German psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer, and studied with Carl Jung.¹²⁷ He told the Elmhursts that neither Christianity, 'academic psychology' or 'cultish psychoanalysis' could provide modern society with a 'vision of purpose and order'.¹²⁸ What was required was a new breed, the 'Promethean' psychologists, who would redeem humanity by re-orientating individuals and society as a whole, chiefly through categorising people on the basis of 'orientation panels' relating to their economic, social, sexual, moral and inner balance.¹²⁹ Sheldon's depiction of these new psychologist-saviours endowed them with the powers of an authoritarian dictator as well as with a redemptive, Christ-like role of advancing Christian telos.¹³⁰ He saw Dartington as the 'psychological nursery' in which to train this new type of psychologist.¹³¹ It offered a space for them to experiment 'well beyond the intenser straitened illumination of academic thought'; they could practice on the Dartington School pupils; grounded as the estate was in real life, 'in long range agricultural economics' and 'the opportunity for natural aesthetics', it was a real place rather than a laboratory – 'the only really valid kind of setting for experimental psychology that can ever exist'.¹³²

¹²⁷ William Sheldon (1898-1977) wrote his PhD at the University of Chicago and then worked at various other American universities. After his visit to Europe, the Elmhursts, along with the Rockefeller Foundation, supported him on and off for several years, including a stint from 1936-7 researching 'Promethean psychology' at the Chicago Theological Seminary. Patricia Vertinsky, 'Physique as destiny: William H. Sheldon, Barbara Honeyman Heath and the struggle for hegemony in the science of somatotyping', *Criminal behaviour and mental health* 24 (2007), 291-316, at 295.

¹²⁸ William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 28 January 1935; William Sheldon to Dorothy, 3 November 1934, DWE/G/9/E.

¹²⁹ William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 1 and 28 February 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

¹³⁰ William Sheldon's worldview was delineated in his first book, some of which he wrote while at Dartington: *Psychology and the Promethean will: a constructive study of the acute common problem of education, medicine and religion* (New York; London: Harper & Bros., 1936). Following Plato, his 'Promethean' concept was based on the story that Prometheus ('fore-thinker') and his brother Epimetheus ('after-thinker') were tasked with distributing the natural qualities among men and animals. Epimetheus gave them all to the animals, leaving mankind unprotected. Prometheus then stole the fire of creativity from the workshop of the gods and gave it to men. Sheldon wrote that the 'difference between the Promethean and radical [...] is simply that Prometheus is the far-sighted guardian of the general good, the unhonored prophet of the future.' The Epimethean was more workaday. William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 1 February 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

¹³¹ William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 1 February 1935, DWE/G/9/E. Sheldon's views echo Stefan Collini's identification of a species of 'intellectual' American who 'defined their own careers in opposition to the perceived narrowness of the burgeoning academic disciplines'. Collini quotes sociologist and literary critic Lewis Mumford, who declared that the task facing the intellectual was to 'think and live not as "the specialist" but as "the whole man"'. *Absent minds: intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 225.

¹³² William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 28 January 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

For a time, Dorothy and Leonard responded warmly to Sheldon. Dorothy wrote down his ideas in her notebooks.¹³³ Leonard tried, without much success, to combine the American's orientation panels with the advice of Professor Bartlett.¹³⁴ He envisaged 'new Graduate Colleges' for 'differentiating the young on the basis of their special gifts', channelling the 'Epimetheans' – the less radical thinkers, in Sheldon's terminology – into the civil service while the 'Prometheans' were 'pointed into pioneering and research'.¹³⁵ Ultimately, however, there was no room in the Elmhirsts' vision of a mutually striving, democratic community either for Sheldon's biological determinism or for psychologist-dictators who were 'the far-sighted guardians of the general good'.¹³⁶ In America, during the Second World War, Sheldon continued to work on interrelating 'the morphological and structural, and the physiological and mental components of the human being' in a controversial system of somatotyping.¹³⁷ He was influenced in this by his godfather William James, a pioneer in assimilating mental science and biology, and by Ernst Kretschmer's work on the physiological explanations of psychological temperament. But where these mentors retained enough grounding in psychiatry to go on being well-regarded by the academic establishment, Sheldon's reactive, reductionist schema was discredited in the scientific community – made particularly distasteful by the international politics of the 1940s.¹³⁸ Leonard, who had once desired 'a little score card measuring' to prevent 'unfitted, unexplored, un-understood personalities' from imperilling Dartington, by 1939 distanced himself from Sheldon's eugenicism completely.¹³⁹

In part because Leonard's enthusiasm for the deployment of social science in guiding society was before its time in England, in part because his impulse to infuse science with spiritual telos was unusual among specialists, he found few in the interwar years to help further his idiosyncratic vision of democratic-minded psycho-spiritual reform.¹⁴⁰ The think-tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP), for example, which the Elmhirsts helped found as an

¹³³ Dorothy, notebook, [n.d.], DWE/G/9/E.

¹³⁴ Leonard, notes, 17 May 1936, LKE/G/S9/A.

¹³⁵ Leonard to Gerald Heard, 26 December 1934, LKE/G/17.

¹³⁶ William Sheldon, 'Panel-picture', 1 February 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

¹³⁷ [n.a.], 'Memorandum to the Elmhirst Committee concerning the Ruth Morgan Memorial experiment in psychology, 19 January 1937', DWE/G/9/E. Sheldon's work, although largely forgotten now, was influential both within psychology and more generally. Figures as well-respected as anthropologist Margaret Mead were intrigued by his somatotyping. Vertinsky, 'Physique as destiny', 306.

¹³⁸ Sarah W. Tracy, 'An evolving science of man: the transformation and demise of American constitutional medicine, 1900-1950', in Lawrence and Weisz (eds.), *Greater than the parts*, 161-88. Sheldon went on to compile a guide to his somatotypes in an *Atlas of men* (New York: Harper, 1954), illustrated with nude photos of undergraduates, and to begin an *Atlas of women*, which was aborted due to the growing unpopularity of the subject matter. Vertinsky, 'Physique as destiny', 310.

¹³⁹ Leonard, 'On character', 13 January 1935, LKE/G/17.

¹⁴⁰ Similar efforts at reform did, however, enjoy mainstream popularity in the USA. A key aspect of the New Deal was the idea of a more 'purposive' social science that could ease – though not control – the democratic transformation. Jess Gilbert, *Planning democracy: agrarian intellectuals and the intended New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 179.

instrument for social planning, was unreceptive to his mention of Sheldon's 'orientation panels'; so too (unsurprisingly) was the World Council of Churches, which he attended in 1940, representing PEP.¹⁴¹ Leonard went on hoping, however, 'whether as a County Councillor or an employer or a parent, or as a Trustee for a school and mixed social experiment', that a "citizen's guide to psycho-hygiene" would be forthcoming'.¹⁴² He would have to wait until after the Second World War for this hope to blossom. Even then, rather than forming part of a toolkit to strengthen organic local communities, it would bifurcate either into a social science that contributed to the centralised planning of social-democracy or into part of a commoditised, individualistic culture of self-improvement.¹⁴³ In particular, social science would go on in the post-war years to provide a renewed social role for the elite. It offered the middle class, in place of an inherited, gentlemanly identity, a 'natural' leadership role as experts and advisers based on 'technique, skill, and expertise' and on helping shape a rational welfare state.¹⁴⁴ For the most part, however – with the exception of a single purposive strand which will be explored in the last part of this chapter – the post-war social sciences lacked the streak of religious mission, the yearning to promote some form of transcendental unity, which characterised the efforts of Leonard and his contemporaries.

Gerald Heard's generating cell

'This then is the answer to those who ask "What holds you together at Dart[ingto]n? What is your substitute for religion?" No substitute, but a "religion" which is at once more abstract and more concrete than the partial religions of the organized churches; more abstract in that its only dogma is assertion of the underlying unity of all men and all things; more concrete in that it has its roots in a shared experience of that unity. Humanity is today at the cross-roads. A "united front" against the militarist, the death-bringer would save it.'

Margaret Isherwood (a member of Heard's cell, c.1935)¹⁴⁵

Leonard Elmhirst attempted to draw social science into supporting his formulation of a community psycho-spiritual blueprint, conceived as one of a pluralistic patchwork of spiritually-infused local experiments. Most professionals in the discipline resisted such a purposive role. In the 1940s, both he and they were pulled into state social planning – a project based on building a 'rational', centralised kingdom of the good. Gerald Heard charted a very different course in the realm of scientific enchantment. First, he placed less faith in

¹⁴¹ Leonard to Dorothy, 8 June 1936, LKE/DWE/13B and 31 January 1940, LKE/DWE/13D. The formation of Political and Economic Planning is discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁴² Leonard to Dr C.P. Blacker of the Ministry of Health, 31 August 1943, LKE/PEP/1/A.

¹⁴³ The 1950s and 60s, writes Mike Savage, were a time 'in which social science became vested with unprecedented hopes and aspirations', becoming a quintessential part of the modern state. *Identities and social change*, 20.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 216.

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Isherwood to Leonard, [c. 1935], DWE/6/C2.

specialists, seeing modern meaning as something to be discovered by independent ‘seekers’ like himself.¹⁴⁶ Second, he moved away from, rather than towards, the establishment. While his psycho-spiritual ideology and his geographical journey – each of which is further explored below – were idiosyncratic, his general trajectory was echoed by a disparate, multinational group of early-twentieth-century ‘cultural rebels’.¹⁴⁷ These were men and women like those whom Martin Green finds passing through the Swiss utopian community of Monte Verita, driven by dissatisfaction with mainstream frameworks to a series of lifelong quests for meaning. Their quests were ‘diverse in origin, and indeed in direction and final purpose’, but drew them all into an ‘alternative’ global countercultural network.¹⁴⁸ For such ‘cultural rebels’, including Gerald Heard, Dartington in the 1920s and 30s represented a significant co-ordinate in a network of places that permitted – and even promoted – radical experimentation with lifestyle.¹⁴⁹ Such people and places laid the foundations of a ‘loosely institutionalised constituency of “seekers” practising a hybridised lay “spirituality”’ that would be further built on in the 1960s and 70s.¹⁵⁰

As seen, Gerald Heard had a similar background to Leonard, Dorothy and many others of their generation. His Christian faith was replaced by a broader belief in spiritual telos and service to society that he saw as needing to be translated into a new framework of philosophy and behaviour that combined spirituality with science. He was driven more explicitly than the Elmhursts were by pacifist ambitions, and he prioritised the spiritual where Leonard prioritised the scientific, but he shared the Elmhursts’ drive to replace nineteenth-century competitive, laissez-faire liberalism with an integrative psycho-spiritual framework more conducive to social harmony. Heard first met Leonard in the early 1920s in his capacity as private secretary to Sir Horace Plunkett, but when he became a regular visitor at Dartington in the 1930s, he was closer to Dorothy.¹⁵¹ Dorothy’s son Michael Straight remembered that Heard was one of a succession of intimates she relied on for guidance in the ‘life of the spirit’ – other such were the painter Mark Tobey and the actor Michael Chekhov. Her relationship with these men echoed the relationship of their many followers to such spiritual guides as G.I.

¹⁴⁶ Steven J. Sutcliffe, writing about the New Age, uses the term ‘seeker’ to describe those who used alternative spirituality to pursue an ideology of radical personal transformation – but it can be applied equally appositely to the interwar fraternity of more socially-minded psycho-spiritual questers. *Children of the New Age: a history of spiritual practices* (London: Routledge, 2003), 37.

¹⁴⁷ Green, *Mountain of truth*, 71.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 14 and 156.

¹⁴⁹ The Swiss community of Monte Verita was another such coordinate. One cultural rebel, the choreographer Rudolph Laban, moved from Monte Verita (via Germany) to Dartington. Martin Green calls Dartington ‘a genteel and protected version of Monte Verita’, *ibid*, 122.

¹⁵⁰ Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*, 35.

¹⁵¹ Gerald Heard and Leonard were in correspondence from at least 1923. Gerald Heard to Leonard, 20 June 1923, LKE/G/17/E.

Gurdjieff, Jidduh Krishnamurti and Meher Baba in this period, with the tension between the cult of the leader and the democratic impulse reflecting a central theme of the interwar years.¹⁵²

Heard had a more theory-driven approach to the psycho-spiritual problem than either Dorothy or Leonard, drawing together the languages of philosophical idealism and biological evolution into a hybrid ideology. His hybrid was not rigorously logical – he has justly been called a ‘one-man Committee of Fuzzy Thinking’ – but the combination of idealism and evolution was not uncommon in interwar Britain.¹⁵³ From idealism, Heard absorbed the notion that society, rather than being an aggregate of individual units as it was in liberalism’s ‘atomistic’ characterisation, was an ‘organism’, a ‘group of interdependent rational beings with a common moral purpose embodied in a “general will”’.¹⁵⁴ Social evolution, predicated on progress being determined by material forces rather than rational will, was not an obviously complementary theory, but Heard posited that the gap between the purposive immaterialism of idealism and evolution’s mechanical materialism – the ‘division between value and reality’ – could be closed by the development of ‘the complete and homologous consciousness’, reuniting ‘the objective and subjective sides of the “mind”’ and reasserting the interconnectedness of all things – religion and science, the individual and society, the soul and the cosmos.¹⁵⁵ While physical evolution had come to a halt, he believed, teleologically, that the evolutionary process itself continued in the realm of this complete consciousness or general will – or would do, if liberal individualism was not obstructing it.

At first, Heard stuck to promulgating his hybrid as an antidote to social fragmentation and war in theory only. In the four books and many articles that he wrote in the 1920s and early 30s, he elaborated on the underpinnings of a new system of psycho-spiritual organisation, drawing on anthropology, sociology and psychology, on history and on various spiritual schools.¹⁵⁶ Unlike with Leonard, this was a personal synthesis of his own, rather than one that

¹⁵² Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 78; Paul Heelas, *The New Age movement: the celebration of the self and the sacralization of modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 44-8.

¹⁵³ Stefan Collini, *Common reading: critics, historians, publics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38. Although the philosopher G.E. Moore famously denounced the false conflation of natural science and human culture in *Principia ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1903]), the synthesis was widespread, evident in fields as different as biology, city planning and political thought. Patrick Geddes, for example, ‘incorporated both evolutionary biology and Hellenistic idealism into his designs for a rational, organic, cosmopolitan “Eutopia”’. Jose Harris, *Private lives, public spirit: a social history of Britain, 1870-1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 230.

¹⁵⁴ Harris, *Private lives*, 228. See also Den Otter, ‘Thinking in communities’, 67-84.

¹⁵⁵ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 5 August 1932, DWE/G/6A.

¹⁵⁶ The books were *The ascent of humanity* ([S.I.]: Cape, 1929); *The emergence of man* ([S.I.]: Cape, 1931); *The social substance of religion* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1931); and *The source of civilization* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935). Heard wrote frequently for such progressive publications as *Time and Tide*.

required expert assistance. Mankind's prehistoric ancestors had been held together by a tribal sense of 'co-consciousness' in which each constituent of a community was in 'telepathic communication' with the rest of the group.¹⁵⁷ This had since been displaced by the aberrant 'Hobbesian outlook' that 'man is an individual' and 'communities only constructs of and for his personal convenience' – an outlook that had been responsible for the First World War.¹⁵⁸ Harnessing the idealist notion of intentional corporate advance towards teleological perfection, and extending the evolutionary mechanism into the psychological sphere, Heard argued that the key to social progress was the deliberate evolution of human consciousness, returning individuals to their connection to a modern version of the tribal co-consciousness, which he termed the 'superconsciousness'.¹⁵⁹

By the early 1930s, theory was no longer enough. Like other intellectuals of the age, including his friend Aldous Huxley, Heard had become determined to 'take some part in the social life of the world and not be merely a writer living detached in another country'.¹⁶⁰ Analysis was not a valid *raison d'être*.¹⁶¹ He viewed Dartington as a prime place to achieve a more tangible social impact with his psycho-spiritual model, since the Elmhursts, too, were 'striving to build up a complete, purposive, fully conscious social organism (a thing which has never existed before)'.¹⁶² He began to visit the estate frequently, gave talks there and publicised its doings in London, as did many other metropolitan intellectuals who lent the their support to the project in the interwar years. He even considered moving down to live in Devon permanently, but was detained in London by his ongoing work for the BBC, the South

¹⁵⁷ Gerald Heard, *Ascent*, 15. Heard's ideas of the distinctions between the conscious and unconscious (or subconscious), as well as about tribal consciousness, were strongly influenced by W.H.R. Rivers, Cambridge Professor of Psychology, who published *Instinct and unconscious* and also shaped the thinking of Professor Frederic Bartlett (Cambridge: University Press, 1920).

¹⁵⁸ Gerald Heard, 'Men and books', *Time and tide*, 26 October 1935, 1545-6.

¹⁵⁹ Gerald Heard, *Ascent*, 6. He described this spiritual 'superconsciousness' in scientific terms, as 'made up of the interrelatedness of constituent individuals, even as each cell's electric field and life makes up the single field and life of the complete organism'. The idea was influenced by William McDougall's immensely popular *Introduction to social psychology*, which emphasised the importance of instincts as a basis for social life (London: Methuen & Co, 1908). Like Leonard Elmhirst, Heard was also influenced by Graham Wallas, who sought to integrate the study of politics and of human nature in *The great society: a psychological analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1914).

¹⁶⁰ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 8 June 1934, DWE/G/6A. Aldous Huxley moved from a detached, often cynical, observer of society of the 1920s to a more engaged pacifist and mystic in the 1930s, his novel *Eyeless in Gaza* representing this shift (London: Vintage, 2004 [1936]).

¹⁶¹ Samuel Hynes presents the intellectual who wanted to make himself 'strong and effective in the public world of crises' instead of 'the introspective neurotic' as belonging to the post-war 'Auden Generation', but the phenomenon was prevalent even in the war generation, as is evident in men such as Heard's anxiousness to transfer their psycho-spiritual quest to the sphere of practical social reform. *The Auden generation: literature and politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976).

¹⁶² Gerald Heard, 'The Dartington experiment', *Architectural review* 449 (1934), 119-22.

Place Ethical Society and the Peace Pledge Union.¹⁶³ He acquired an official role at Dartington in 1932 as lecturer on ‘Current Events’ – but, for him, the sole way in which the Elmhursts’ community would succeed was through the experimental ‘generating cell’ he had begun to conduct there, a way of working out the mechanics for accessing mankind’s ‘superconsciousness’.¹⁶⁴ ‘Dartington’, he wrote, ‘is only the outward form at best and as it is but a provisional experiment of a Vita Nuova, must in the end, if it is not to be a mirage, be a Vita Aeternitas.’¹⁶⁵

Since the individualistic outlook had robbed people of an awareness of being part of the general will, the aim of Heard’s cell was to work out how the individual consciousness could be re-subsumed into it. ‘Life to be good must be anonymous. The moment that one realises that one’s own thread is woven into the general tapestry, then one begins to see the eternal life.’¹⁶⁶ He had observed, through Horace Plunkett’s promotion of economic co-operation among Irish farmers, the value of the small community group working together. He used this model as the basis for his work at Dartington, gathering together a small group after the estate-wide Sunday evening talk, whose members would use spiritual and scientific techniques to seek connection with the general will, and then spread their new sense of connectedness in the wider world.¹⁶⁷ This generarting cell would, ultimately, be one of many groups across the world all in ‘telepathic’ connection, their harmonious integration preventing there ever being another world war.¹⁶⁸ Heard’s vision overlapped with that of William Sheldon’s of a ‘psychological nursery’ producing social leaders. Indeed, Sheldon, who joined some ‘generating cell’ meetings and stayed in touch with Heard after his stay at Dartington, saw Heard as a Promethean soul, possessing excellent psycho-spiritual judgement and ‘the quick wisdom of the immediate and recent progress of intellectual affairs [...] that one finds in first class academic minds’.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Heard worked for the BBC delivering a fortnightly talk, ‘This surprising world’, a round-up of recent scientific advances; he lectured for the South Place Ethical Society and, from 1936, spent more and more time campaigning for the Peace Pledge Union. For Heard’s career, broadcasts and publications, see Eros, ‘Gerald Heard’ and Falby, *Between the pigeonholes*.

¹⁶⁴ Gerald Heard admitted that any ‘psychological cure’ would not be efficacious ‘if it still leaves the economic symptom unaffected’, but, like many of the idealist philosophers, he mainly disdained serious discussion of economics (Heard to Dorothy, 9 August 1934, DWE/G/6A). His enthusiasm for Dartington lay in the fact that unlike other ‘partial and incomplete’ schemes for social regeneration which were ‘at the mercy of the economic subsoil’ he perceived, at least at first, that it had spiritual foundation ‘which can make it stand safely’ (Heard to Dorothy, 18 September 1932, DWE/G/5/D).

¹⁶⁵ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 17 December 1932, DWE/G/6/F1.

¹⁶⁶ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 1932, DWE/G/6/F1.

¹⁶⁷ Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 15 June 1932, DWE/G/5/D.

¹⁶⁸ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 21 November 1932, DWE/6/F1.

¹⁶⁹ William Sheldon to Dorothy, 17 March 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

Gerald Heard's generating cell, which met regularly from 1932 to 1935, usually included Dorothy Elmhirst, the Dartington schoolteacher Margaret Isherwood, and other more transient visitors. Heard's method was to put forward some element of life, and to scrutinise it for its usefulness in assisting the group's members, and mankind generally, to escape their individual consciousnesses and fuse with the 'superconsciousness'. That way, the group worked through techniques and ideas from the world religions, 'from early Benedictinism to late Quakerism' and the 'advanced Inner Life' of the East, dwelling especially on Buddhism. They discussed the social sciences, in particular the psychology of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud and William James. They also sat around the record player listening to American jazz and African folk music, such art being deemed likely to be a link back to the tribal 'co-consciousness'.¹⁷⁰ The range of resources they drew on demonstrates the vast array of spiritual and scientific modes of self- and social understanding that were available and deemed potentially compatible in this period.¹⁷¹ In between meetings, the group's members exchanged letters of advice and spiritual confession, and followed a catholic reading list prescribed by Heard, which included John Dewey, Eastern spiritual leaders such as Rabindranath Tagore and Kahlil Gibran, as well as the simple-lifer Edward Carpenter and internationalist and academic Goldsworthy Lowes Dickenson.¹⁷²

For a brief moment, there was a sense among the cell's participants that it would provide the new framework of spiritual values that many – not least Dorothy – believed Dartington was missing. For Heard himself it was a project that 'redeems the time' and would make 'a sociological advance which will be as remarkable and far more useful than the great physical inventions of the 19th century'.¹⁷³ Apart from anything else, it gave him a clear social role: rather than an 'irrelevant "hole-in-corner"' intellectual, he could be an 'outsider' and guide, 'telling people on the job what a big piece of work they are on', and at the same part of the job itself, his individuality subsumed to the corporate mind of the community.¹⁷⁴ The practical work as a group helped Heard to understand the world as having 'a complete meaning as a whole of which I am a cooperating part'.¹⁷⁵ This dual identity – both belonging and directing – allowed him to avoid the observer problem distinguished by Leonard and Bartlett in implanting social scientists at Dartington.

¹⁷⁰ [n.a.], notes from 17 November 1934 meeting, LKE/G/S9/A; Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 9 August 1934, DWE/G/6A.

¹⁷¹ Such syncretism is discussed in Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 77.

¹⁷² Gerald Heard, 'Group readings', [n.d], T/AE/4/F.

¹⁷³ Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 30 September 1932, DWE/G/5/D.

¹⁷⁴ Gerald Heard to Leonard, 19 December 1934, LKE/G/17/E; Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 23 March 1933, DWE/G/5/D; Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 18 September 1932, DWE/G/5/D.

¹⁷⁵ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 26 March 1934, DWE/G/6A.

Yet debate arose on the estate over whether the generating cell was contributing sufficiently to Dartington's wider, practically-minded reform mission – a problem encapsulated in Leonard's blunt question to Heard, 'is Yoga running away from social duties?'¹⁷⁶ For Heard, those like Leonard who questioned the prioritisation of collective psycho-social salvation over all else were automatically classed as "economic rationalists" who 'think if Dartington makes itself pay and gives each individual a really good standard of life it has succeeded'.¹⁷⁷ He identified their viewpoint with the nineteenth-century liberal individualism he was trying to supplant. Sensing Leonard's weakness for social science, he tried to get around him by suggesting to Dorothy that they clothe the group experiment in the terminology of 'sociological planning', which, he said, would lead naturally to 'the best way of psychological cooperation and so to what used to be called Religion without using that taboo word'.¹⁷⁸ He also tried to explain away any opposition on the flattering basis that some 'exceptional people', including Leonard, had 'secret subconscious sources of power, and recharge their wills without having to set time aside for it', but that this facility was not available to most.¹⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Leonard continued to see the cell as 'too empty and too much like uplift' – a word that he used to condemn all imprecise, unscientific thinking.¹⁸⁰ He steered clear of it after joining in for a few sessions. The survival of the experiment for several years is testament to Dorothy's strong, if often tacit, influence on activities at Dartington.

As the 1930s progressed, the growing threat of powerful alternative psycho-social structures abroad heightened the significance participants read into the conflicts over socio-spiritual frameworks for Dartington. 'If we don't find the larger meaning then Germany, Communism, Fascism will force on us who have to construct the more embracing arch, their narrower crouched span', Heard warned.¹⁸¹ He had initially supported the Elmhursts' policy of 'Rousseauian liberalism' – their openness to multiple schools of psycho-social questing and their hope to 'win the good life through lack of coercion', but now he began to see the strategy as 'dangerously deficient'.¹⁸² Across Europe, totalitarian regimes were training up foot-soldiers, he cautioned, and 'we must train as they train', actively converting people from nationalism and individualism to 'the international and devoted life'.¹⁸³ For others, and in particular for Dartington School's charismatic headmaster, W.B. Curry, a fervent individualist, libertarian and agnostic, events abroad were exactly the reason not to let Heard

¹⁷⁶ Leonard quoted by Gerald Heard in a letter to Margaret Isherwood, 8 October 1934, DWE/6/F2.

¹⁷⁷ Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 30 September 1932, DWE/G/5/D.

¹⁷⁸ Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 1933, DWE/G/5/D.

¹⁷⁹ Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 7 November 1932, DWE/6/F1.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 15 August 1933, DWE/G/6A.

¹⁸² Gerald Heard to W.B. Curry, 21 October 1935, T/DHS/B/2/H.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

promote a spiritual group-think that was dangerously akin to the ‘semi-mystical ideas of fascists’.¹⁸⁴

The estate had recently had a demonstration of such group mysticism when rural reformer Rolf Gardiner visited with a troupe of performers who ‘paced round the hall solemnly singing only the most highbrow church music in Latin or German’.¹⁸⁵ Although Curry, like Heard, was a pacifist internationalist, agreeing that ‘the process of aggregation into larger and larger units is the plain trend of human evolution’, for him, the point of pacifist internationalism was to protect individual freedom.¹⁸⁶ Others agreed. Bertrand Russell, who was a frequent visitor to the estate, warned that because of Heard, ‘Dartington was in danger of some sort of theosophical superstition tarnishing its bright rationality’.¹⁸⁷ Affairs were brought to a head in 1935 when Curry had an affair with a school housemistress and divorced his wife, an event that shook Dartington and sent shock-waves as far as London.¹⁸⁸ Heard took the affair – and Dorothy and Leonard’s failure to eject Curry from the school in consequence of it – as proof that individualism, a ‘materialist atmosphere’ and a ‘conventional, national and orthodox’ psychological outlook had triumphed at Dartington.¹⁸⁹ In spite of promising beginnings, it had become ‘a society without agreed moral principles’, he complained to Margaret Isherwood, a place in which economic questions were ‘paramount’, as they must be ‘if the purposive life isn’t being lived’.¹⁹⁰

On top of the sense that Dartington had succumbed to materialistic individualism, Heard had begun to doubt whether his version of the psycho-spiritual quest – conducted in snatched weekends at Dartington in between his more conventional life in London – was sufficient to yield the results that would bring about the unity of mankind and secure world peace. ‘Perhaps it will be necessary to take to a completely new way of life – a new way of earning one’s living, of associating with others, of eating, sleeping, marrying, before the new and

¹⁸⁴ [n.a.], notes from Sunday evening meeting, 25 February, LKE/G/9/A.

¹⁸⁵ Kay Starr to Leonard, 22/23 September 1933, LKE/G/31/A.

¹⁸⁶ W.B. Curry, *The case for Federal Union* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), 119.

¹⁸⁷ These comments were discussed in letter from Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 29 October 1934, DWE/6/F2.

¹⁸⁸ Talking about relations between W.B. Curry and his wife, Ena, sister of Margaret Isherwood, William Sheldon wrote: ‘It is astounding how outside people know everything that happens at Dartington’. William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 7 May 1935, DWE/G/9/E. Michael Young notes the furore the divorce caused on the estate (*The Elmhursts*, 177-9), and there are many agonized reflections in the Dartington Hall archives. For discussion of the early-twentieth-century link between elites’ private behaviour and public morality, see Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (eds.), *After the Victorians: private conscience and public duty in modern Britain: essays in memory of John Clive* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁸⁹ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 17 December 1933 and 6 May 1935, DWE/G/6A.

¹⁹⁰ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 17 May 1935, DWE/G/6A.

juster world can come.¹⁹¹ From this point on he did not appear again on the Elmhirsts' estate.¹⁹² Some of Dartington's participants were as scornful of Heard's lack of pragmatism as he was of their compromised idealism. For Margaret Isherwood, he had 'bungled' the challenge of weaving 'the applied science of the inner life' into 'the fabric of daily living' – which included the need to earn the daily bread.¹⁹³

In the 1920s, in the wake of the First World War, pacifism was a central factor driving the psycho-spiritual quest, both at Dartington and more broadly. War was seen as the crudest expression of the un-integrated individual consciousness – the 'symptom of a diseased individualized civilisation'.¹⁹⁴ If the individual were integrated with the wider community – whether in the practical, social-scientific sense of Professor Bartlett's healthy group life, or through Heard's scheme of transcendent connection with a purposive 'superconsciousness' – a repetition of the First World War could be avoided. The late 1930s brought a period of intense agony over how to adapt the universalising, pacifist aspect of the psycho-spiritual quest to an international context of aggressive militarism. Dorothy, who had supported the foundation of the British Anti-War Council in 1932 and donated to the Peace Pledge Union, decided in 1940 that world events had made it impossible to remain a complete pacifist and began to support the war effort.¹⁹⁵ She would continue her psycho-spiritual exploration over the following decades, but in a manner that was more isolated. She was a 'mystic', her son Michael recalled, who 'lived and moved at levels of consciousness which the rest of us barely discern'.¹⁹⁶

By contrast, Heard could not bring himself to abandon or compromise his ideals of pacifism or the hope of setting up a group cell to promote it. For a short period after leaving Dartington he tried to re-purpose his cell model to support H.R.L. Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union. His efforts were ill-received – more immediate, practical measures being wanted by most other participants – and soon he migrated to America.¹⁹⁷ Other seekers who had idealised Dartington as a place of promising experimentation earlier in the decade followed the same

¹⁹¹ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 8 February 1935, DWE/G/6A.

¹⁹² 'Compromise is no use, as far as oneself is concerned', Gerald Heard wrote to Dorothy Elmhirst, 14 May 1935, DWE/G/5/D.

¹⁹³ Margaret Isherwood to the Elmhirsts, [n.d.], T/DHS/B/15/D.

¹⁹⁴ Gerald Heard, 'The significance of the New Pacifism', in Gerald K. Hibbert (ed.), *The New Pacifism* (London: Allenson and Co. Ltd., 1936), 13-22, at 17.

¹⁹⁵ The British Anti-War Council was launched in Amsterdam in 1932 at the World Anti-War Congress, attended by two thousand delegates from around the world. Dorothy donated to it. John Strachey, treasurer of the British Anti-War Council to Dorothy, 8 December [1933], DWE/G/S2/A; Dorothy to Canon Morris, 29 May 1940, DWE/G/S2/C.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Straight to Michael Young, 11 September 1980, T/HIS/S22/D.

¹⁹⁷ Eros, 'Gerald Heard', 115.

path: Aldous Huxley moved with Heard to California in 1937, where they were joined by Christopher Isherwood; W.H. Auden, who visited the Elmhursts' estate several times and saw it as a sign that 'the Mayflower has returned at last', settled in New York.¹⁹⁸ Ena Curry, W.B. Curry's ex-wife, went to live nearby to Heard, and was later joined by her sister, the Dartington schoolteacher and generating cell participant Margaret Isherwood.¹⁹⁹

In California, Gerald Heard founded Trabuco, a pacifist 'missionary college' that aimed to combine 'the world-wide concern and zeal of the old missionary with the psychological and social knowledge of the present day'.²⁰⁰ His mood was more sombre than when he arrived at Dartington. The publicity pamphlet began, 'Humanity is failing'.²⁰¹ Unlike in the 1920s and early 30s, where Heard had represented his work in a semi-democratic light, he no longer saw himself as part of a group struggle for psychological advance, but only as a guide, one of a rarefied 'new race' of spiritual leaders, the 'Brahman', who would be 'the completely publicised servants of the whole'.²⁰²

Diverging paths: therapeutic counterculture and the social-scientific state

'Gerald Heard [...] Jung, Dr Sheldon, Professor Bartlett, our Sunday afternoon meetings, Margaret Isherwood's teaching and letters, W.B. C[urry]'s book – all are concerned with this very vital matter of ultimate human purpose and aim, as well as of immediate human relationship [...] But this field is still very much of a No Man's Land.'

*Leonard Elmhirst (1934)*²⁰³

Like Dartington, Gerald Heard's Trabuco College was born of the impulse to unite the spiritual and scientific in a framework that would provide transcendental meaning and a practical basis for social reform. Its first pamphlet explained that it was 'as specialized as a laboratory and as unworldly as a church'.²⁰⁴ Heard insisted that its uncompromising regime of meditation, prayer, manual labour and study was not escapist retreat: the mystic, beside the 'economically obsessed' ordinary man, was 'a realist and a daring man of action'.²⁰⁵ Yet the

¹⁹⁸ W.H. Auden to Dorothy, 3 April 1932, DWE/G/1/A/3. David Robb give an account of these seekers after a 'new, modern, syncretic spiritualism'. 'Brahmins from abroad: English expatriates and spiritual consciousness in modern America', *American studies* 26 (1985), 45-60.

¹⁹⁹ Margaret Isherwood's spiritual explorations at Dartington and then in America led to her writing *The root of the matter: a study in the connections between religion, psychology and education* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1954).

²⁰⁰ Gerald Heard, Trabuco pamphlet, September 1942, LKE/G/17/E.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Eros discusses Heard's changing conception of himself as a public servant in 'Gerald Heard', 94, 228 and passim.

²⁰³ Leonard, 'Time budget 1934-5', 8 November 1934, LKE/G/S8/1.

²⁰⁴ Gerald Heard, 'The way of life at Trabuco', T/DHS/B/15/D.

²⁰⁵ Gerald Heard, 'Is mysticism escapism?', in Christopher Isherwood (ed.), *Vedanta for the Western world* (Hollywood: Marcell Rodd Co., 1945), 30-2. For a vivid account of daily life at Trabuco

endeavour – which lasted less than five years, closing in 1947 – also prefigured and fed into the more commoditised, less socially-minded cults of inner experience that characterised the New Age.²⁰⁶ Although the interwar psycho-social explorations at Dartington were, in a sense, also part of the attempt to achieve accommodation with a secular, market-oriented society, latter-day psycho-spiritual models have tended to function more openly within the neo-liberal marketplace, selling ‘authentic’ therapeutic experience as part of, rather than as an alternative to, the dominant culture of consumer capitalism.²⁰⁷

After selling Trabuco to the Vedanta Society, a Hindu movement with which he had become increasingly involved, Heard remained in California, becoming, with Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, a significant figure in the West Coast counterculture of the 1960s. Heard played a significant role in the founding of the Esalen Institute, which remains open to the present day.²⁰⁸ For Alan Watts – another, younger, Englishman and populariser of Eastern philosophy who moved to the US – Heard, Huxley and Isherwood were ‘the British Mystical Expatriates of Southern California’.²⁰⁹ Dartington would, like the Esalen Institute, become a ‘network hub’ for alternative spirituality in the 1960s and beyond.²¹⁰

While Heard’s interwar experiments with psycho-social progress at Dartington blossomed into Californian counterculture, Leonard’s ideas bore fruit in the field of post-war policy-making. Jose Harris argues that the anti-essentialist framework of idealism – the vision of the state as a social organism advanced towards a teleological good by an ethical, participative citizenry – had fallen out of favour in social and political thought by the 1940s, ‘ignominiously deposed by various forms of positivism’ – in particular the benchmarks of

College, see Don Lattin, *Distilled spirits* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 136-82 and Laurence R. Veysey, *The communal experience: anarchist and mystical communities in twentieth-century America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 270-86.

²⁰⁶ For the transition from early-twentieth-century to New Age spiritualism, see Jackson Lears, *No place of grace*, xvii and Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*, 37.

²⁰⁷ Historians of the counterculture often lament the shift to ‘a therapeutic orientation within the dominant culture’ from the 1960s onwards, but T.J. Jackson Lears argues that, even at the start of the twentieth century, most seekers’ relationship with secular culture and with the marketplace was ambivalent, or even accommodating, rather than wholeheartedly critical. *No place of grace*, xii and *passim*. See also Van der Veer, ‘Spirituality in modern society’.

²⁰⁸ Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the religion of no religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 86 and 91-2.

²⁰⁹ Alan Watts, *In my own way: an autobiography* (London: Cape, 1973), 167.

²¹⁰ Schumacher College, established on the Dartington estate in 1991, led by social and environmental activist Satish Kumar and inspired by the environmentalist and economist E.F. Schumacher, has become the centre of this activity, an internationally-recognised hub that hosts courses on subjects ranging from sustainability to spiritual holism. Dominic Corrywright, ‘Network spirituality: the Schumacher-Resurgence-Kumar nexus’, *Journal of contemporary religion* 19 (2004), 311-27; Kosc Grzegorz, Clara Juncker, Sharon Moneith and Britte Waldschmidt-Nelson (eds.), *The transatlantic sixties: Europe and the United States in the counterculture decade* (Bielefeld: [transcript], 2013).

economics.²¹¹ Yet Lawrence Black and Lise Butler find, in looking at the Socialist Union, an ethical socialist group within the Labour Party, and at the New Left of the late 1950s, that a significant socialist contingent continued to be concerned with the nebulous questions of ‘happiness, wellbeing, fellowship, and community’.²¹² Paralleling Leonard’s efforts in the 1930s at Dartington, some in this contingent drew on social science to re-animate idealist notions of organic spiritual community and ethical citizenship.²¹³ This reprise of method and objective was not coincidental: Michael Young, a pupil at Dartington School from 1929 to 1933, a protégé of the Elmhirsts and eventually a trustee of the estate, was a key figure in the later political project.²¹⁴

As a pupil, and then on his frequent visits from London later on, Young witnessed the struggle at Dartington to find a psycho-social model that would balance community and individual and hold up against the fragmentation that seemed to be the chief threat of modernity. He was close to Dorothy, on her quietly persistent spiritual quest, and to Leonard, whose enthusiasm for social science Young enlarged for himself into an influential career in sociology and social entrepreneurship.²¹⁵ As Leonard had conducted an amateur sociological survey of the community feeling of estate members in 1929 and 1931, so Young, in 1953, formed the Institute of Community Studies with Peter Willmott as a base for research into the social factors that influenced individual and community wellbeing in East London.²¹⁶ Even before this, Young had used the Elmhirst-funded think-tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP) – he was its secretary from 1941 to 1945 – as a vehicle for analysing the conditions for democratic political participation and good community life using social science.²¹⁷ It was an approach he elaborated on further when he left PEP to direct the Labour Party’s research department. Michael Young’s linking of social science to holistic moral and ethical issues rather than materialist ones was fairly unusual in the post-war decades, but his embrace of the social sciences was not. As Mike Savage observes, expertise in social science became part of

²¹¹ Jose Harris, ‘Political thought and the welfare state 1870-1940: an intellectual framework for British social policy’, *Past and present* 135 (1992), 116-41, at 136.

²¹² Lawrence Black, ‘Social democracy as a way of life: fellowship and the Socialist Union, 1951-9’, *Twentieth century British history* 10 (1999), 499-539; Lise Butler, ‘Michael Young, social science, and the British Left, 1945-63’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2014, 7.

²¹³ Butler, ‘Michael Young’, 5-8.

²¹⁴ Michael Young overlapped with the New Left and was, for a time, a member of the Socialist Union, but he remained distinct from both groups.

²¹⁵ Many of the letters between Young and the Elmhirsts are in the Dartington Hall Archives, chiefly in files DWE/G and LKE/G. See also, Asa Briggs, *Michael Young: social entrepreneur* (London: Palgrave, 2001).

²¹⁶ Butler, ‘Michael Young’, 156.

²¹⁷ Butler, ‘Michael Young’, 64; Daniel Ritschel, *The politics of planning: the debate on economic planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 145-83; Abigail Beach, ‘Forging a “nation of participants”: political and economic planning in Labour’s Britain’, in Weight and Beach (eds.), *The right to belong*, 89-115.

the armoury of the elite, whose existence was increasingly justified on the basis of their being the natural ‘bearers of rational modern planning’.²¹⁸

A related development, during and after the Second World War, was the reintegration of the ‘left/liberal intelligentsia’ – often distanced from policy-making in the interwar years in consequence of their flirtation with radical politics – back into the establishment.²¹⁹ The Elmhirsts were no exception. They had begun by conceiving of Dartington – as well as of PEP – as a node in a socialist-pluralist landscape of ‘countless nuclei’ that ‘collected, collated, digested and utilised’ social experience so ‘the whole world of man is a hive of maturing experience, so that no unforeseen obstacle ever impeded again the grandeur ridden march of mind towards its goal of higher and ever higher consciousness’.²²⁰ By the time of the Second World War, however, Dartington was no longer being envisaged as an organic local community, but as part of the national structure. Michael Young wrote to the Elmhirsts that while ‘the woolly minded’ were putting forward unfounded plans for post-war reconstruction, Dartington was ‘a laboratory specimen; it is itself just one of those controlled experiments which PEP would wish the Government to sponsor’.²²¹ The approbation was reciprocal: Leonard saw Young’s treatise ‘Social science and the Labour Party programme’ – which argued that party policy should incorporate not only modern economics but the other social sciences to support the ‘emotionally inspired aims of socialism’ – as ‘a charter for free human beings in a free society’.²²²

Dorothy and Leonard were firm that, in reforming society, it was ‘basically a moral issue that is at stake’.²²³ ‘[N]ew professorial terms, economic this, psychological that and sociological the other’ were a central part of this, Leonard told the local vicar in 1942, but so too was ‘the courage and imagination with which Christ faced the world of his day’.²²⁴ Both science and religion fed into a psycho-social framework that aimed to nurture community feeling. Ironically, it was commonly felt that community feeling at Dartington was in short supply. The Elmhirsts’ hope that the answer to their spiritual questing would emerge from the way their community lived and would then somehow spread through contact with other communities, did not work, since Dartington never achieved a coherent and distinctive psycho-social life of its own. There were perennial complaints about the lack of ‘a nucleus, a

²¹⁸ Savage, *Identities and social change*, 78-9.

²¹⁹ Weight, ‘State, intelligentsia and the promotion of national culture’.

²²⁰ Leonard to Gerald Heard, 26 December 1934, LKE/G/17.

²²¹ Michael Young to the Elmhirsts, 27 October 1942, LKE/G/35/A.

²²² Leonard to Israel Sieff, 23 August 1948, LKE/PEP/5/B.

²²³ Leonard to R.A. Edwards, 27 January 1942, LKE/DEV/1/K.

²²⁴ Ibid.

centre, an agreed symbol of what it all stands for'.²²⁵ Dartington was too scattergun and indefinite in its approach to formulate a coherent set of inner-life values or practices, or to assemble a cohesive body of personnel. As well as Gerald Heard and eccentric, spiritually-minded social scientists like Bartlett and Sheldon, it attracted the socially irresponsible – 'mere "rebels",' as the local rector complained, 'who are uncertain of exactly what they hope to achieve'.²²⁶ It also drew those, like headmaster W.B. Curry and arts director Chris Martin, who saw the estate as founded – in opposition to religion and group-think as well as to fascism and communism – only on the 'negative virtue' of individual freedom, so that it was hardly even a community, 'in the strict sense of that word'.²²⁷

Like other utopias, the enterprise offered less a perfect psycho-social model in the here-and-now than a way of making sense of and trying to improve society, a negotiation with 'how to be' that was not supposed to achieve its consummation in the immediate. In one sense, it was like the Christian faith that it aspired to repurpose or replace. Professor Hugo Fischer, a philosopher and sociologist who had fled Germany, wrote to the Elmhursts in 1945 that 'Dartington Hall radiates and that its radiations cover an ever wider distance [...] you realise ultimate values'.²²⁸ The array of idealistic methods it attracted – individualism and communitarianism, religion, spiritualism and science, the abstract and practical – makes Dartington thoroughly representative of the eclectic psycho-social quest in interwar Britain, even if it was not conducive to the creation of a single new orthodoxy. The personnel it sent out – whether Gerald Heard to countercultural America or Michael Young to London to lobby for the affective use of social science in policy-making – were missionaries of its vague holistic faith. Their paths illuminate how the psycho-social quest evolved during and after the Second World War into both 'alternative' and 'establishment' branches. If Dartington didn't succeed in producing, as the Elmhursts had once hoped, a complete modern faith or perfect example of the good life to be replicated in wider society, they did not for this reason deem it a failure. It melded Christian and idealist notions of joined-togetherness, self-sacrifice and social service together with the insights of social science to offer new, inspiring ways to be in the modern world. 'The proof,' as Heard frequently asserted, 'is in the life'.²²⁹

²²⁵ Raymond O'Malley, a teacher at Dartington School in the 1930s and 40s, to Michael Young, 5 January 1983, T/HIS/S20/D.

²²⁶ R.A. Edwards to Leonard, 26 July 1942, DWE/G/S3/G.

²²⁷ Chris Martin, 'Dartington Hall – a social experiment', [1936], T/AA/1/I.

²²⁸ Professor Hugo Fischer to Dorothy, 1953, DWE/G/4/D.

²²⁹ Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 14 May 1935, DWE/G/5/D.

2. EDUCATION

'Is it not possible then to give freedom to the children to try out their own experiment and to build out of the experiment something of permanent value in the very field where we need endless experiments of all kinds? But neither school nor ultimate community can afford to be in water-tight compartments and so each must grow as a vital part of the world around them, the rural or village life in that neighbourhood where they have set up their shrine to nature.'

Leonard Elmhirst (1925)¹

For the Elmhirsts and many other reformers across the globe after the First World War, the possibility of progress for civilisation lay not with conventional politics, but with 'the educational systems of the world'.² Late-nineteenth-century educational progressivism – a reaction against the rigid orthodoxies of mainstream public schools – was revitalised by the widespread and acute feeling in the interwar period that society as a whole was broken and that reformed education was the only means of fixing it.³ For Leonard and Dorothy, conventional education, underpinned by a competitive, laissez-faire belief system, had, at best, failed to teach people 'citizenship and its responsibilities' or how to 'work out a definite purpose or ideal of life either for themselves, their own nation, society as a whole or the world in general'; at worst, it had contributed directly to the militant nationalist mind-set that led to the Great War.⁴ They envisaged a new model of education as the fulcrum of a harmonious society, one made up of citizens who were fulfilled, socially responsible and educated in such a way as to prevent there being another war.⁵ The Elmhirsts had three priorities for their new, democratic, pacific education: it must be centred on the holistic needs of the learner; it must be rural; and it must reach from the cradle to the grave.

¹ Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 192[4?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives, Columbia University Archives.

² Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C, Dartington Hall Archives (unless specified otherwise, all the following archival references are to this collection). Fascists, as well as pacifist internationalists, saw reformed pedagogy as the quickest route to constructing utopia. Alessio Ponzio, *Shaping the new man: youth training regimes in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).

³ The definition of progressive education used by W.A.C. Stewart, 'unorthodox', best suits the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when the movement ran counter to the norm. By the 1930s, when it moved closer to the mainstream, 'child-centred' is a useful further way of defining it. (W.A.C. Stewart, 'Progressive education – past, present and future', *British journal of educational studies* 2 (1979), 103-10). The literature on the progressive education movement is extensive; key surveys are R.J.W. Selleck, *The New Education, 1870-1914* (London: Pitman, 1968); *English primary education and the progressives, 1914-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); and W.A.C. Stewart and W.P. McCann, *The educational innovators, vol. 2: progressive schools 1881-1967* (London: Macmillan, 1968).

⁴ Leonard to Michael Sadler, 11 December 1917, LKE/G/28/A.

⁵ Leonard to John Wales, one of the teachers at Dartington School, 21 March 1930, T/DHS/A/2/F.

The learner-centred, whole-child aspect of the Elmhursts' project was a diffuse idea that pervaded progressive education schemes in England, Europe, India and America.⁶ The renewed strength and internationalism of progressivism was evident in the rapid growth of the New Education Fellowship (NEF), a London-based, transnational organisation founded in 1921.⁷ While the Elmhursts themselves were never members of the NEF or any other educational organisation, their school flourished in the same environment of humanitarian internationalism, with ideas and experts crossing frontiers faster than ever before.⁸ Both the NEF and Dartington were inspired, in particular, by the East: Beatrice Ensor, one of the NEF's founders, was a theosophist, who, like the Elmhursts, drew on the teaching of Rabindranath Tagore.⁹ Both enterprises also operated in a milieu rich in transatlantic and European connections, exchanging teachers, pupils and philosophies with diverse progressive educational institutions.¹⁰ From this *mêlée* of international progressivism, the Elmhursts took the principles that children must have the freedom of broad, self-directed learning, rather than having the meaning of the world parcelled into subjects and fed to them, and that children must learn to be responsible citizens by participating in a democracy at school. As in other areas, Dorothy and Leonard's views on education were a gradually evolving hotchpotch of ideas and practices; they did not hold dogmatically to a particular school or theory, as many New Educators tended to do.¹¹

In spite of sharing the NEF's democratic focus, global network and internationalism, the Elmhursts differed from the majority of progressive educators in that their interest in education was entwined with their ambitions for rural regeneration; it was a means to an end

⁶ See, for example, the rapid international diffusion of Rudolf Steiner's holistically-minded Waldorf education system. John Paull, 'Rudolph Steiner and the Oxford Conference: the birth of Waldorf education in Britain', *European journal of educational studies* 3 (2011), 53-66.

⁷ By the 1937 the NEF had branches across America, Europe, Asia and Australasia and an estimated 30,000 members worldwide. Prominent members included John Dewey, Sir Fred Clarke, Lionel Elvin and Maria Montessori. Celia M. Jenkins, 'New Education and its emancipatory interests (1920-1950)', *History of education* 29 (2000), 139-51.

⁸ A taste of this internationalism is given in the collection of essays edited by Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, showing the rapid acceleration in the transmission of ideas and practice in everything from socialist internationalism to healthcare. *Internationalisms, a twentieth-century history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁹ Theosophy, a non-sectarian religion based on the doctrine of reincarnation, focused on education as the way to access the 'spiritual powers latent in every child, powers which if released could create a new world where all might find true happiness'. William Boyd and Wyatt Rawson, *The story of the New Education* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 67.

¹⁰ No work covers the interchange on progressive education between England and the USA specifically, but Ann Taylor Allen's *The transatlantic kindergarten: education and the woman's movement in Germany and the United States* gives an idea of the rich cross-pollination of philosophies between Europe and America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹¹ The pages of the NEF journal, *The new era: organ of the New Education Fellowship*, attest to the prevalence of theory-driven disputes between New Educators (from 1930, it became *The new era in home and school*).

rather than a project in its own right.¹² For many progressive educators in Britain, the country childhood was chiefly a distant, reified symbol of ‘a traditional way of life that ought to be retained at all costs’ – part of the central importance of the rural life to national identity in the interwar and post-war periods.¹³ For the Elmhursts, the ‘natural’ childhood was not an abstract or nostalgic concept deserving of such Rousseauian veneration. For Leonard, brought up in rural Yorkshire, the countryside could ‘in itself be just as much of a prison to a child as a home in a city slum’.¹⁴ Rather, children were ‘pioneers and experimenters’ in a wider project of progressive rural regeneration.¹⁵ As in Denmark – whose folk high schools the Elmhursts looked to as a model – the school at Dartington was intended to be ‘the spiritual adjunct to, if not the spiritual motor for, the day-to-day business’ of practical, forward-looking rural revival.¹⁶ The Elmhursts’ aim was not to reform education, but to reform the countryside through education. In spite of this hope, Dartington School attracted conventional progressive educators and gradually moved away from integration with the Elmhursts’ rural regeneration project to follow a trajectory of its own. In the 1930s, under a NEF-affiliated headmaster, it became distanced from the local community and turned towards catering to an international audience of progressive, metropolitan elites.

The Elmhursts’ educational aspirations also extended beyond the NEF’s child-centric focus in that they thought education was ‘not just for the young’; it must ‘touch every individual within range’, resulting in a ‘continuous widening field of consc[iousness] from cradle to grave’.¹⁷ In part inspired by the importance given to continuing education by progressives in America, in part by Leonard’s experiences working with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Workers’ Education Association (WEA) in Britain, there was a strong sense, particularly in Dartington’s early years, that the estate should be not merely a novel system of education for children, but the model for democratic, lifelong learning.¹⁸ The Elmhursts’ early efforts in this field attracted the approbation of pioneering community

¹² For the internationalism of education, see Eckhardt Fuchs, ‘Educational sciences, morality and politics: international educational congresses in the early twentieth century’, *Paedagogica historica* 40 (2004), 757-84.

¹³ Laura Tisdall, ‘Teachers, teaching practice and conceptions of childhood in England and Wales, 1931-1967’, unpublished PhD, University of Cambridge, 2014, 186-7.

¹⁴ Leonard, ‘Situation’, September 1927, DWE/DHS/1/F.

¹⁵ Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 192[4?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

¹⁶ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998), 357. Inspired by nineteenth-century reformer N.F. Grundtvig, the Danish folk high schools were (and are) institutes for adult education, intended to enlighten the people democratically and spiritually, rather than to promote academic achievement or training for a career.

¹⁷ Leonard, ‘Aims of Dartington’, 3 November 1935, LKE/G/S8/F. This was very much following in the footprints of John Dewey for whom life-long learning was a key tenet.

¹⁸ John Wales, ‘A letter from Dartington’, January 1927, T/DHS/A/2/F. For an example of the American progressive ideas that influenced Dartington’s continuing education, see Eduard Lindeman, *The meaning of adult education* (New York: The New Republic, 1926).

educators such as Henry Morris, secretary of education for Cambridgeshire, and the American Eduard Lindeman.¹⁹ The hope was ‘to educate heads, foremen and every individual worker, so that every department becomes a school’, and to find a more ‘vivid’, participative educational style to replace the ‘academic approach and the lecture habit’ of the WEA.²⁰ Ultimately, however, this task proved as difficult to achieve as integrating Dartington School with the local community, and the project of continuing education, failing to mesh with the other enterprises on the estate, became more marginal in the 1930s.

Education at Dartington had two phases. In the first, from 1926 to 1931, it was inchoate, but steered closest to the Elmhirsts’ vision of putting democratic, participative learning for all at the heart of their work to regenerate rural society. Dorothy and Leonard concentrated on building the school up in symbiosis with the estate – Leonard, in particular, wanting life and education so intertwined that he pledged ‘never to mention the word school from the start’.²¹ The diversity of their internationally-derived pedagogical ideas was increased by the input of visiting and resident idealists – artists, psychologists, philosophers, social planners whose interest indicated how closely reforming education was bound up with wider hopes for social progress in the 1920s.²² At this early point, the Elmhirsts saw social reform as stemming from ‘schemes outside all the orthodox tracks’ rather than from central organisations and government politics, and they made little effort to broadcast their endeavours more widely. The result, in the first few years, was a small and informal educational community, governed by committee rather than headmaster, with pupil numbers rising gradually from ten to thirty, their lives closely integrated with the rest of the estate.

The first stage pattered to a halt between 1929 and 1931, when the Elmhirsts, who were enthusiastic commissioners of specialist reports, received several that criticised child welfare and teaching standards at the school. There was also growing tension between the school and the other rapidly developing estate departments. Workers complained that its chaotic organisation and reputation for libertarianism were undermining their objective of demonstrating commercial viability. There was dispute over the experimental, learning-oriented aspects of the commercial departments and the requirement that they make a profit.

¹⁹ The work of Henry Morris, secretary of education for Cambridgeshire from 1922 to 1954, in setting up a pioneering series of village colleges is further discussed in the main text below.

²⁰ Leonard to John Wales, 21 March 1930, T/DHS/A/2/F; Leonard, ‘Extension at Dartington’, 1940, LKE/EDU/7/B.

²¹ Leonard to Wyatt Rawson, 8 February 1925, T/HIS/S22/B.

²² Richard Overy interprets the interwar faith in educating the next generation as one of the few ways to build a better future as a symptom of a ‘morbid age’ imbued with anxiety, but there was a strong sense of optimism among the supporters of Dartington’s educational project, at least until the late 1930s. This was a solution for the here-and-now, rather than a last-ditch hope for future salvation. *The morbid age: Britain between the wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

As part of a general re-organisation of the estate, Dorothy and Leonard decided to separate the school off more clearly and to appoint a headmaster, who would also be responsible for adult education. At the same time, however, their perception of where the locus of social reform lay had begun to shift. In place of organically-arising, local schemes outside the orthodox tracks, they were increasingly looking to co-operative educational endeavours with the local or central state.

Under the guidance of headmaster William Burnlee Curry, an Englishman who had taught at progressive schools in England and America, Dartington School acquired a clearer shape and direction and gained more traction in the wider progressive educational community. Curry was a member of the NEF and saw the school as the place to prove with as great a fanfare as possible that New Education could usher in a brave new world. In pursuit of this, he curtailed some of the school's radicalism, increased pupil numbers to over two hundred, wrote and lectured extensively and succeeded in placing Dartington at the centre of an international network of elite progressivism. He envisaged his endeavour as independent from the Dartington estate and local community, however, considering his audience to be an international society of enlightened progressives. Of the Elmhirsts' three priorities in education – to be student-centred, rural and lifelong – only the first was fully served by their first headmaster. Nonetheless, he remained in charge of the school until 1957.

Leonard wrote disconsolately in 1935 that he had hoped Dartington School would have 'roots in the neighbourhood', but 'at present it tends to root and blossom in Bloomsbury'.²³ The Elmhirsts' response was not to dethrone Curry – who had injected new life into what seemed to be a failing project. He was 'a great educator' and 'an extraordinarily fine human being,' Dorothy wrote. 'Leonard and I simply don't know how to thank our stars for him.'²⁴ Instead, the Elmhirsts worked to contribute to rural regeneration through education outside the school, including supporting the local village school, setting up schemes for school leavers, and even toying with the idea of building a state school for the surrounding community. In the sphere of adult education, they piloted innovative schemes in collaboration with the WEA and the University College of the South West (UCSW). As plans for reconstruction after the Second World War seemed to promise the mainstream adoption of progressive values in education, the Elmhirsts' attention shifted again, away from these regional undertakings and towards contributing to state reform.²⁵

²³ Leonard to Professor Bartlett, 21 May 1935, LKE/G/13/B.

²⁴ Dorothy to Anna Bogue, 10 April 1932, DWE/US/3/D.

²⁵ In fact, Laura Tisdall finds that progressive ideas of child-centred education had already come close to state orthodoxy by 1939 – educational change before the Second World War 'was primarily stymied

Education at Dartington has been analysed mainly in the context of the history of progressive pedagogy.²⁶ In that regard it was not enormously original, since it was driven more by social ideals than pioneering education technique. It was, as an early teacher, John Wales, wrote, ‘less an educational than a social experiment, an experiment in the art of living’.²⁷ Potentially innovative plans, such as a laboratory-cum-nursery that combined lessons from the practical experience of Rachel and Margaret McMillan in caring for deprived children in London with American-style scientific study of child development, never took off fully. Nor did the school have a significant impact on the direction of progressive education in the state system, although it foreshadowed a national move in the same direction – so much so that its trustees in the late 1960s worried that it no longer seemed progressive enough in an era of radical national ‘de-schooling’.²⁸

It is when the educational project is looked at as part of a movement for rural reform that it holds most interest. Ideologically plastic, unfettered by economic necessity and well-connected, it was the only progressive educational scheme begun in interwar England as part of a larger social experiment. As such, it offers a singular demonstration of the intense cross-fertilisation of progressive education with other holistically-minded programmes that sought to re-think the competitive liberal philosophy of the previous century. This cross-fertilisation yielded a place where ruralists, socialists, eugenicists, pacifists and internationalists could imagine, and sometimes see put into action, their hope that reformed education would be a fast-track to utopia.

by limited funds’ (‘Teachers’, 20). For the pervasion of progressive values in the interwar years, see also Selleck, *English primary education*.

²⁶ For example, Mark Kidel, *Beyond the classroom. Dartington’s experiments in education* (Devon: Green Books, 1990) and Maurice Punch, *Progressive retreat: a sociological study of Dartington Hall School and some of its former pupils* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

²⁷ John Wales, ‘A letter from Dartington’, January 1927, T/DHS/A/2/F.

²⁸ Laura Tisdall finds that radical educationists such as A.S. Neill, Homer Lane and W.B. Curry had more influence on pedagogy between the wars than they did after the Second World War but were by no means critical to shaping progressive thought even at this point. ‘Teachers’, 260-3.

Inspiration

'[A] school such as has not happened yet, drawing on India, America, China, – again a concentration, again education, again the fellowship of a few men of ideals and spirit, – not politics, or press, or even adult education, not public schools nor panaceas nor "isms", but fellowship, children, service, and a hoping for results after 25 years.'

*Leonard Elmhirst (1924)*²⁹

In the early 1920s, Leonard Elmhirst helped Rabindranath Tagore establish the Institute for Rural Reconstruction (known as Sriniketan) in Bengal.³⁰ The institute was intended both to educate villagers in economic self-reliance and to bring back 'life in its completeness', with drama, song and dance made part of the day-to-day.³¹ A key component was the system of education for rural children developed by Leonard and Tagore and later called Siksha-Satra ('multi-purpose school'), which drew on inspiration as diverse as Robert Baden-Powell's English Scout movement and the American 4-H movement, and would go on to influence Gandhi's nationalist scheme of 'Basic Education'.³² Siksha-Satra had two main elements. Children had an individually-chosen, practical 'home project' – such as poultry-raising, food preserving or calf-rearing – intended to fuel their desire to learn naturally and in their own way. Alongside this, they were part of a 'scout' organisation that did welfare work in the community.³³ Students were, to a degree, self-governing, with emphasis put on the 'cooperative principles which will unite the teachers and students in a living and active bond'.³⁴ Instead of 'moulding them into one pattern', wrote Leonard, each child was allowed to 'develop along his own line within certain social bounds' – a principle of 'socialised

²⁹ Leonard to Dorothy, [29 July 1924], LKE/DWE/11/E.

³⁰ For an account of this experience, see Leonard K. Elmhirst, 'Siksha-Satra', *Visva-Bharati bulletin* 9 (1928) 23-39 and *Poet and plowman* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1975). See also Uma Das Gupta, 'Tagore's ideas of social action and the Sriniketan experiment of rural reconstruction, 1922-41', *University of Toronto quarterly* 77 (2008), 992-1004 and 'In pursuit of a different freedom: Tagore's world university at Santiniketan', *India international centre quarterly* 29 (2002-3), 25-38.

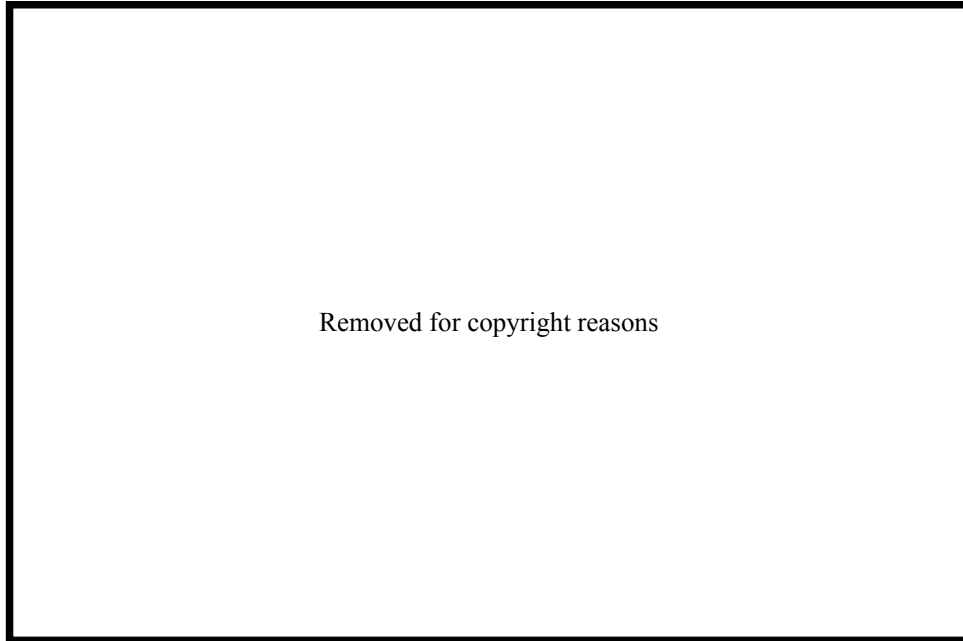
³¹ Leonard Elmhirst, *Rabindranath Tagore: pioneer in education. Essays and exchanges between Rabindranath Tagore and L.K. Elmhirst* (London: John Murray, 1961).

³² The Scouting movement sprang to life in England 1908 in response to the publication of Robert Baden-Powell's handbook, *Scouting for boys*, and was rapidly embraced by children across the world. The 4-H movement – its name standing for the hope of developing the heads, hearts, hands and health of its members – began in 1902 in America, to promote the education of rural youth. Mahatma Gandhi helped raise funds for Tagore's school and adopted elements of it in his work on village reconstruction (Rathi Tagore to Leonard, 13 February 1937, LKE/IN/21/D). Gandhi's 1930s scheme of 'Basic Education' promoted Indian self-sufficiency and autonomy by making productive crafts, usually the preserve of the lower castes, central to the teaching programme in place of such 'colonial' or 'elite' skills as literacy and academic knowledge. Unlike Tagore, Gandhi rejected any emphasis on creativity, art and science.

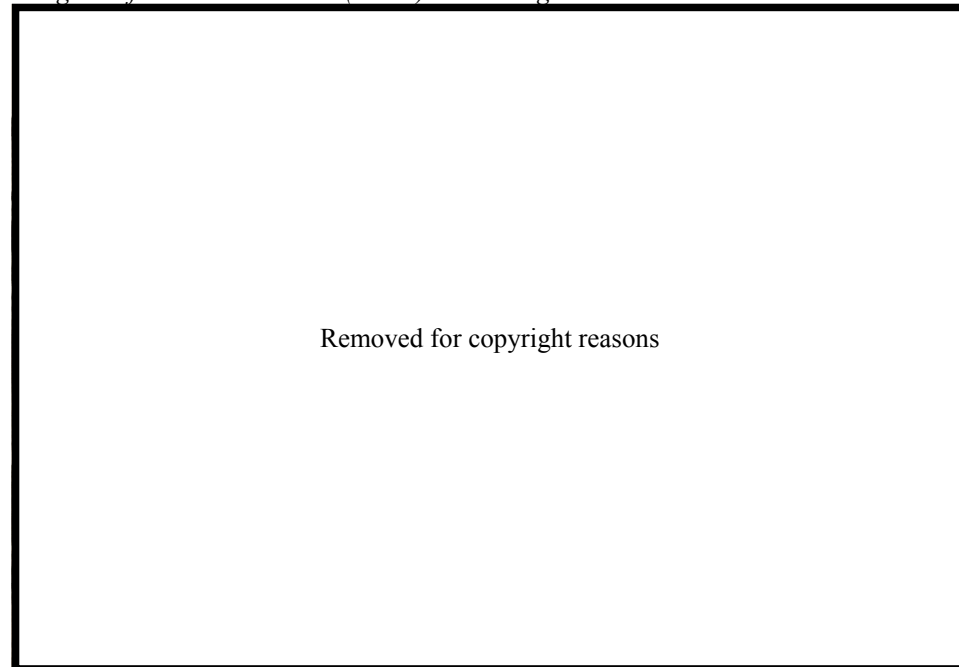
³³ Santidev Ghosh, 'Sikshasatra and Naitalimi Education', in Santosh Chandra Sengupta (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore; homage from Visva-Bharati* (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1962), 121-37, at 121.

³⁴ Rabindranath Tagore quoted in Ghosh, 'Sikshasatra', 121.

individualism' which would also be central to Dartington.³⁵ A second more exam-focused educational institution ran alongside Siksha-Satra, at nearby Santiniketan, symbolising an admission that the parents of middle-class children demanded academic success as well as holistic fulfilment for their offspring. But Tagore's hope was that the village school 'will be the Real School, the ideal school, and the other one will be neglected'.³⁶



Siksha-Satra: outdoor learning at Santiniketan (above) and administering quinine to villagers infected with malaria (below). © Dartington Hall Trust Archives



³⁵ Leonard Elmhirst, 'The robbery of the soil and rural reconstruction', in Sengupta (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore*, 12-4; Leonard to Arthur Geddes, 24 February 1923, LKE/IN/6/D.

³⁶ Rabindranath Tagore quoted in Ghosh, 'Sikshasatra', 121.

For Tagore, the aim of Sriniketan was to liberate Indians from below. Through education, disenfranchised rural citizens would achieve self-realisation and social unity. The subsequent cooperation between races, castes and religions would give them the capacity to stand free of their colonial rulers. Tagore was not driven by overt nationalism; he opposed Gandhi's *Swaraj* campaign and anything else that strengthened the 'hungry self of the Nation'.³⁷ His utopian ideal, held in common with many other interwar reformers, was to bring mankind together in global fellowship, and he saw grass-roots education as the place to start.³⁸ It was 'chiefly because of the international ideal' that Leonard was drawn to Sriniketan.³⁹ There he received a practical grounding in how to start a school that was integrated into the surrounding villages but also looked out globally – a bottom-up project in international community building.⁴⁰

In the early 1920s Leonard found his hopes for internationalist, democratic education echoed in many other quarters. It was, as Sir Michael Sadler, vice-chancellor of the University of Leeds and a pioneer in the university extension movement, remarked to him, part of a global phenomenon – a 'new temper of mind towards education, especially in its relation to life'.⁴¹ World unity had been the main pre-occupation of Leonard's tutor at Cambridge, the humanist scholar 'Goldie' Lowes Dickinson – manifesting in his advocacy of a league of nations (a term he is believed to have coined).⁴² It was also central to the work of another of Leonard's acquaintances, Peter Manniche, who founded the International People's College at Elsinore in Denmark in 1921, an institution that was intended to strengthen local community life and to build bridges between nations.⁴³ The pioneering city planner Patrick Geddes, whom Leonard met through his work in India, set up the Collège des Ecosais in Montpellier as an 'international hall of residence whose occupants would promote world citizenship'.⁴⁴

³⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1976 [1916]), 80.

³⁸ Mohammad A. Quayum, 'Imagining "one world": Rabindranath Tagore's critique of nationalism', *Interdisciplinary literary studies* 7 (2006), 33-52. For the range of internationalist models put forward as alternatives to nationalism, Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants without swords: idealist liberalism and the spirit of empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁹ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 3 April 1921, [transcript], LKE/TAG/9/A.

⁴⁰ Leonard to Dorothy, 3 February 1922, LKE/DWE/10/F.

⁴¹ Michael Sadler to Leonard, 21 December 1921, LKE/G/28/A.

⁴² For Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson's career, see footnote 40, chapter 1.

⁴³ The Elmhursts corresponded with Peter Manniche through the 1920s, made donations to his projects and were influenced by his book, *The folk high schools of Denmark and the development of a farming community*, written with Holger Begtrup and Hans Lund (London; Kjøbenhavn printed: Oxford University Press, 1929). The folk college movement in Denmark was primarily inspired by nineteenth-century Danish writer Nikolai Frederick Grundtvig, who was also an important influence on Eduard Lindeman. Grundtvig had visited utopia-builder Robert Owen at New Lanark and brought back Owen's ideas about the importance of community schooling. He advocated a network of self-governing folk high schools, a 'common centre [...] to gather and unite all the energies of society'. Max Lawson, 'N.F.S. Grundtvig', *Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education* 23 (1993), 613-23.

⁴⁴ The college was based on the Collège des Ecosais that had provided a base for Scottish Catholics in Paris in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The venture foundered in the Second World War and was converted into a training centre for educational administrators. Hugh Clout and Iain Stevenson,

Rabindranath Tagore was made president of a subsidiary institution of Geddes' school, the Collège des Indiens, which aimed to 'realise in common fellowship of study the meeting of East and West'.⁴⁵ Leonard was surrounded by people who believed that education could bring about a better world, and that a better world meant a more democratic and more internationally unified one. For many of them, including Tagore and Manniche, self-directing local communities were the key building blocks in this pacifist, democratic, internationalist vision.

Pedagogical ambitions at Dartington were also strongly influenced by America, where education, adult education in particular, was part of a series of Progressive-Age experiments intended to tame industrial capitalism.⁴⁶ Before Dorothy met Leonard, progressive education was a pillar of her philanthropic work in New York, much of which revolved around connecting scholarship and social action to promote democratic education. Like many American reformers, she was strongly influenced by John Dewey, whose philosophical ambition revolved around replacing the individualistic psychology of laissez-faire liberalism with a recognition that individuals were part of an interrelated whole – and for whom education was an important way to 'get the social organism thinking'.⁴⁷ Dorothy had attended Dewey's lectures, published him in *The New Republic*, and absorbed his views that progress towards democracy came from the active adaptation of the individual to his environment, a progress that education must advance by promoting critical, inquisitive thinking and participative behaviour.⁴⁸ As with Tagore's holistic focus on 'life in its completeness', Dewey's pedagogy centred on the idea of the 'unity of knowledge' – meaning that the acquisition of knowledge was inseparable from the full range of real-world activities.⁴⁹ A great deal of emphasis was placed on generalised 'learning by doing', rather than on subject-

'Jules Sion, Alan Grant Ogilvie and the Collège des Ecosais in Montpellier: a network of geographers', *Scottish geographical journal* 120 (2004), 181-98, at 182.

⁴⁵ Prospectus of Collège des Indiens, [n.d.], LKE/IN/6/E.

⁴⁶ Andrew Jewett, *Science, democracy, and the American university: from the Civil War to the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 196-223. Adrian Wooldridge finds that 'the international nature of educational psychology is one of its most interesting features. New ideas about children and education, and about the proper relationship between the two, flourished on the continent and in the United States, and were eagerly watched and rapidly absorbed in Britain.' *Measuring the mind: education and psychology in England, c. 1860-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9. A particularly strong transatlantic tie was the grant from the Rockefeller Foundation that largely funded the New Education Fellowship between 1921 and 1946.

⁴⁷ For an overview of John Dewey's philosophy, see Louis Menard, *The metaphysical club* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux), part four (quote at 299). Dewey's most important work on education is *Democracy and education: an introduction to the philosophy of education* (New York: Free Press, 1999 [1916]).

⁴⁸ 'Oh Leonard – the psychology courses are *such* fun!' Dorothy wrote to Leonard, 24 October 1921, LKE/DWE/10/D. See also Dorothy, notes on John Dewey's lectures, [n.d.], DWE/G/S7/E/3.

⁴⁹ Menard, *Metaphysical club*, 322-3.

specific teaching – including learning to be a democratic citizen by engaging in group discussion and decision-making.⁵⁰

Dorothy was instrumental in starting the New School for Social Research in 1919, part of whose aim was to be a model for adult education, allowing ordinary citizens to learn from and exchange ideas with intellectuals, particularly in the sphere of the human sciences.⁵¹ Along with John D. Rockefeller, she also sponsored and helped shape The Inquiry, a group set up in 1921 to investigate group-discussion methods and promote them in church groups as a way to encourage social equality.⁵² The network of scholars and reformers who surrounded her in these activities – including Eduard Lindeman, who joined the New School; Walter Lippmann and Herbert Croly of *The New Republic*; and academics including John Dewey who were associated with Columbia University – provided a formative backdrop for Dartington, in their ideas, advice, and occasional visits in person.

Dorothy's experience did not just cover adult education. She sat on the General Education Board, a philanthropic organisation founded by John D. Rockefeller to promote American public education, especially in the countryside.⁵³ She also helped to establish the Lincoln School, a 'laboratory' for experimenting with education methods that was attached to Teachers College, Columbia University.⁵⁴ The Lincoln School was in the vanguard of American interwar educational reform. Paralleling and often incorporating John Dewey's

⁵⁰ John Dewey, *The school and society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), 44. Many of Dewey's ideas were worked out in practice at the University Elementary School of the University of Chicago (known as the Laboratory School), which he opened in 1896.

⁵¹ Dorothy pledged \$10,000 a year to the New School for ten years. The school drew on the intellectual resources of both *The New Republic* and Columbia University, and early participants included John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, Herbert Croly and Thorstein Veblen. Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott. *New School: a history of the New School for Social Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 10-13; Jewett, *Science, democracy and the American university*, 213-4.

⁵² The Inquiry – originally called the National Conference on The Christian Way of Life – was set up in 1921 by the Federal Council of Churches in Christ. Co-ordinated by Teachers College, Columbia University, its work became increasingly activist in the 1920s, seeking to mediate labour disputes through small-group discussion (William M. Keith, *Democracy as discussion: civic education and the America Forum Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 123-4). Dorothy sat on several of its executive and administrative committees and contributed around \$25,000 a year (Richard Pfaff Douthit, 'A historical study of group discussion principles and techniques developed by "The Inquiry", 1922-1933', unpublished PhD, Louisiana State University, 1961, 155-7).

⁵³ James H. Madison, 'John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board and the rural school problem in the Midwest, 1900-1930', *History of education quarterly* 24 (1984), 181-99.

⁵⁴ Established with funds from John Rockefeller's General Education Board and sustained by further philanthropic donations, the celebrated Lincoln School (1917-1940) was intended to test and develop progressive teaching methods. Those involved included former Harvard president Charles Eliot, his protégé Abraham Flexner and Otis W. Caldwell, professor of science education at Teachers College. *The Lincoln School of Teachers College: a descriptive booklet* (The Lincoln School of Teachers' College: New York City, 1922); Elmer A. Winters, 'Man and his changing society: the textbooks of Harold Rugg,' *History of education quarterly* 7 (1967), 493-514.

principles, it emphasised the social nature of education – pupils were to develop ‘self-control and self-direction’ and the ability to co-operate.⁵⁵ Its theories and its scientific methods – joining academia with practical experiment – fed directly into Dartington School, as did Dorothy’s three children by her first marriage, all of whom had previously been attending the Lincoln School. The provision for her children through the construction of a similarly progressive school was one of the conditions of Dorothy’s agreeing to move to England. The concept of a progressive school as a ‘laboratory experiment’ would be taken up, developed and debated as Dartington evolved. As with the idea of bringing in an estate psychologist, it implied the separation of experimenter and subject, or teacher and pupil, rather than the egalitarian ‘society of searchers and strugglers after truth’ that Leonard had initially envisaged.⁵⁶ A laboratory also implied self-containment, running counter to the idea of the school as existing symbiotically with the rural community in which it was located.

Community-minded beginnings, 1926-1931

“‘When is a school not a school?’ might well be asked of us at Dartington, and we should I think make answer – ‘when it is a community’.”

*Dorothy Elmhirst*⁵⁷

In September 1926 a group of twelve met on the Elmhirsts’ newly acquired estate for a five-day discussion about setting up a school.⁵⁸ The chairman of the group, Eduard Lindeman, an academic specialising in adult education and community development, had been brought over by Dorothy from America specifically to help with planning.⁵⁹ He was part of the ‘colonisation in reverse’ that shaped the school and estate in the interwar years.⁶⁰ The rest of the group was made up of those who would lead the school for the next five years. There were two formally trained teachers, Wyatt Rawson and Marjorie Wise; both had spent time in

⁵⁵ Unlike most English progressive schools, the Lincoln School placed strong emphasis on the need for a curriculum ‘adapted to the needs of modern living’, focusing on maths, science and industry. *The Lincoln School of Teachers College: a descriptive booklet*, 7-9.

⁵⁶ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 7 December 1923, LKE/TAG/9/A.

⁵⁷ Dorothy, ‘Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devonshire’, [n.d.], T/DHS/A/1/A.

⁵⁸ Eduard Lindeman, ‘Report of meeting held to discuss plans and purposes of Dartington school’, 11 September 1926, T/DHS/A/1/A. Those at the meeting including Eduard Lindeman, Marjorie Wise, Maude Ridgen, Wyatt Rawson, Roger Morel, Gustave Heuser, Christian Nielsen, Douglas Watson, Vic Elmhirst, P.W. Woods, along with Leonard and Dorothy.

⁵⁹ Eduard C. Lindeman, who was closely associated with the *The new republic*, viewed community and group work as vital to maintaining a healthy democracy. He promoted this through practical work – as a community organiser, extension worker and academic teacher – and through writing books including *The community: an introduction to the study of community leadership and organization* (New York: Associated Press, 1921), *Social discovery. An approach to the study of functional groups* (New York: Republic Publishing, 1924) and *The meaning of adult education* (New York: The New Republic, 1926).

⁶⁰ The phrase is Michael Young’s, *The Elmhirsts*, 142.

America, although they were English by birth.⁶¹ No one else taking part had taught before – they were mostly workers on the estate. This reflected Leonard’s intention that Dartington would be an egalitarian community of ‘amateur adventurers’.⁶² There was to be no division between the school and the estate, nor between teachers and pupils – they were called ‘seniors’ and ‘juniors’ and they were to share equally in the process of learning.⁶³

The discussion group had two main pre-occupations: how to build a school that would be the ‘foundation for democratic life’ and how the estate and school could be ‘fused into something vital’ that would promote rural regeneration.⁶⁴ Following Dewey’s ideals – that teaching social precepts apart from practice was ‘teaching the child to swim by going through the motions outside the water’ – they decided that each pupil must learn to be a good democratic citizen through ‘life as an active member of a self-governing commonwealth’.⁶⁵ This ideal of self-governance ushered in years of school meetings that would cover everything from ‘why have a meeting’ to rules for swimming in the nearby River Dart and the supplies of biscuits.⁶⁶ The subsequent, heretical complaint of several students that there were ‘too many meetings’ would go unheeded.⁶⁷ The principle of participatory democracy extended to the staff structure; instead of a headmaster, there was to be an education committee with a rotating membership and a series of sub-committees populated by estate employees to make decisions on such areas as health, the curriculum and the library.⁶⁸ As with the pupil meetings, this time-consuming mode of direction produced occasional resentment – particularly since there was a sense that ultimately ‘the answers lay with Leonard and Dorothy’ anyway.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Wyatt Rawson was an undergraduate with Leonard at the University of Cambridge. He taught at Brown University in America before moving to his brother’s preparatory school in England, described by Leonard, who very much disliked his own childhood experiences in such an institution, as like being ‘back in prison again, little cots and cupboards and jerries [W.C.s] all in neat rows’ (Leonard to Richard Elmhirst, 27 October 1923, LKE/IN/6/I). Marjorie Wise studied at Columbia University and was recommended to Dorothy by a lecturer at Teachers College (Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 141).

⁶² Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 10 November 1925, LKE/TAG/9/A.

⁶³ Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 139.

⁶⁴ Eduard Lindeman, ‘Report of meeting held to discuss plans and purposes of Dartington school’, 11 September 1926, T/DHS/A/1/A; Leonard quoted in ‘Third meeting to discuss school’, September 1926, T/DHS/A/1/A.

⁶⁵ John Dewey, *Moral principles in education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, c.1909), 14; Leonard, ‘Outline of an educational experiment’, 1926, T/DHS/A/5/E.

⁶⁶ Leonard, ‘Second meeting for school’, T/DHS/A/1/A; Book of Juniors’ Friday meetings, 1 June 1928-June 1931, T/DHS/A/3/B.

⁶⁷ Dorothy’s son Whitney Straight, quoted in Dorothy’s diary, 25 September 1926, DWE/G/S7/E/7.

⁶⁸ Leonard, ‘Second meeting for school’, T/DHS/A/1/A. Both the Elmhirsts were involved in these committees, with Dorothy, in particular, monitoring everything from fuel supplies to catering, cleanliness and domestic staff. Household and health committee minutes, from September to December 1927, T/DHS/A/9.

⁶⁹ John Wales, ‘The present position of the school’, 1 March 1930, T/DHS/A/1/C.

If, for Lindeman, the discussion group's main aim was to decide how to create a 'sense of collective spirit' in the school, for Leonard it was just as important to ensure the interrelation of school and rural community.⁷⁰ At Sriniketan, students came from the surrounding villages, were taught skills to take back to those villages and, even while they studied, contributed to the community – whether by marshalling fêtes or helping with healthcare.⁷¹ This was how Leonard envisaged Dartington: as a village school for 'the children of parents with moderate means' that would form 'a dynamic centre' for the neighbourhood.⁷² Extending Dewey's precepts of learning democratic citizenship by practising it, children must learn 'the social and economic responsibility that life demands' by engaging with agriculture and industry from the go-get.⁷³ A school inspector, visiting informally in 1927, noted that the Elmhirsts 'did not want to draw children or apprentices from outside, but were anxious to use the local families and gradually organize them, through apprenticeship, into employment in local occupations'.⁷⁴ Leonard explained to the Labour Party politician Ellen Wilkinson, a visitor to the estate, that behind Dartington lay 'a conviction that the villages of England, as also of India [...] have yet to come into their own. That is why, for us, it is our relation to the Village School which is to be the crux of the problem, and through it, to the parent and the labourer'.⁷⁵ The methods to be used for integrating the progress of the school, estate and village, however, were not explicitly laid out in the early discussions, and were gradually pushed to the edges of the agenda.

When the first six pupils – several of them local – arrived to join Dorothy's own children and a boy from the estate in the autumn of 1926, their accommodation, which was eventually to be around the estate's central courtyard, was unfinished.⁷⁶ They lived for the first term with the Elmhirsts at the Hall.⁷⁷ There were few formal classrooms and learning was intended mainly to be done around the estate or in the summerhouse in the gardens.⁷⁸ The Elmhirsts were certain that they wanted all the parts of Tagore's ideal of 'life in its completeness' brought in – 'Garden, farm, workshops, weaving, dyeing, carpentry, pottery, exploring

⁷⁰ Eduard Lindeman, 'Report of meeting held to discuss plans and purposes of Dartington school', 11 September 1926, T/DHS/A/1/A.

⁷¹ Leonard thought that, with practical training, three-quarters of rural ill health in India could be eliminated by children. Stewart and McCann, *The educational innovators*, 130; Leonard Elmhirst, 'Siksha-Satra'.

⁷² Leonard, 'Prospectus', 1926, T/DHS/A/5/E.

⁷³ Leonard, 'The school in relation to life', T/DHS/A/1/A.

⁷⁴ Edgar H. Fowles, county inspector of schools, to Leonard, 25 July 1927, LKE/DCC/6/A.

⁷⁵ Leonard to Ellen Wilkinson, 19 April 1927, LKE/G/33/I.

⁷⁶ These were Keith and Mary Ponsford, Michael Preston, Lorna Nixon, Louis Heindinger and Oliver [no surname]. Dorothy, diary, 24 September 1926, DWE/G/S7/E/7.

⁷⁷ Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 130.

⁷⁸ Maria de la Iglesia, *Dartington Hall School: staff memories of the early years* (Exeter: Folly Island Press, 1996), 14-5.

(geography and history), map-reading and making, worship, and festival, music, drama, dancing, colour and freedom' – but they were less certain about the nuts and bolts of teaching.⁷⁹ What emerged, beyond the prospectus's promise to 'release the imagination, to give it wings, to open wide the doors of the mind', was a structure loosely based on two popular American schemes: the Dalton Plan and the Project Method.⁸⁰

Both Dalton Plan and Project Method dictated that children should learn by pursuing their own interests rather than a set curriculum. The practical result was that lessons at Dartington were optional. Children, overseen by a supervisor, decided on individually-directed projects which could take place in any of the departments of the estate.⁸¹ This holistic approach, part of the wider Dartington philosophy, was a Deweyian tilt against 'subjects' dividing the world up arbitrarily – the 'specialization' that, Leonard wrote, 'tends to over run so much of modern life'.⁸² Following the example of Siksha-Satra, the Elmhursts gave the project method a socially-minded twist. Each pupil was to have three projects: one of use to the community, one 'connected with his dominant interest' but still also useful to 'the life of the group as a whole' and one 'which concerns his individual growth'.⁸³ Some lessons were conducted with a semblance of a system – Leonard took those who wanted to learn history rambling among local remains and then encouraged them to give talks on their findings, 'experience replacing textbooks'.⁸⁴ More often, however, the inexperienced supervisors were confounded by the task of encouraging students to plot their own, self-governed educational path in the estate community. Dorothy, supervising Keith Ponsford, found 'great difficulty in getting him to initiate any suggestions [...] his mental indefiniteness is baffling'.⁸⁵ The challenging teaching proposition which Dartington School presented – demanding not only dedication to nebulously-defined progressive teaching, but to the estate and society at large – was reflected

⁷⁹ Leonard to Dorothy, 12 December 1924, LKE/DWE/12/A.

⁸⁰ In England, the most popular of the several progressive American schemes that advocated the project method was the Dalton Plan. Conceived by Helen Pankhurst in 1920, it re-imagined classrooms as 'sociological laboratories' and children as self-guided experimenters. It was adopted by an estimated 1,500 English schools in the 1920s, from West Green Boys' School, a state elementary school in north London, to progressive boarding schools such as Frensham Heights and Bedales. Selleck, *English primary education*; Lesley Fox Lee, 'The Dalton Plan and the loyal, capable intelligent citizen,' *History of education* 29 (2000), 129-38; Boyd and Rawson, *The story of the New Education*, 39.

⁸¹ Leonard, 'Outline of an educational experiment', 1926, T/DHS/A/5/E. Supervisors were instructed to 'help in relations between Junior and Community; To keep a friendly watch over Junior's welfare; To present a written report once a week to Recorders' Meeting; To secure a knowledge of the home situation for the Junior and arrange to keep parents informed of the Junior's development'. Minutes of recorders' meetings, 31 October 1927, T/DHS/A/4/B.

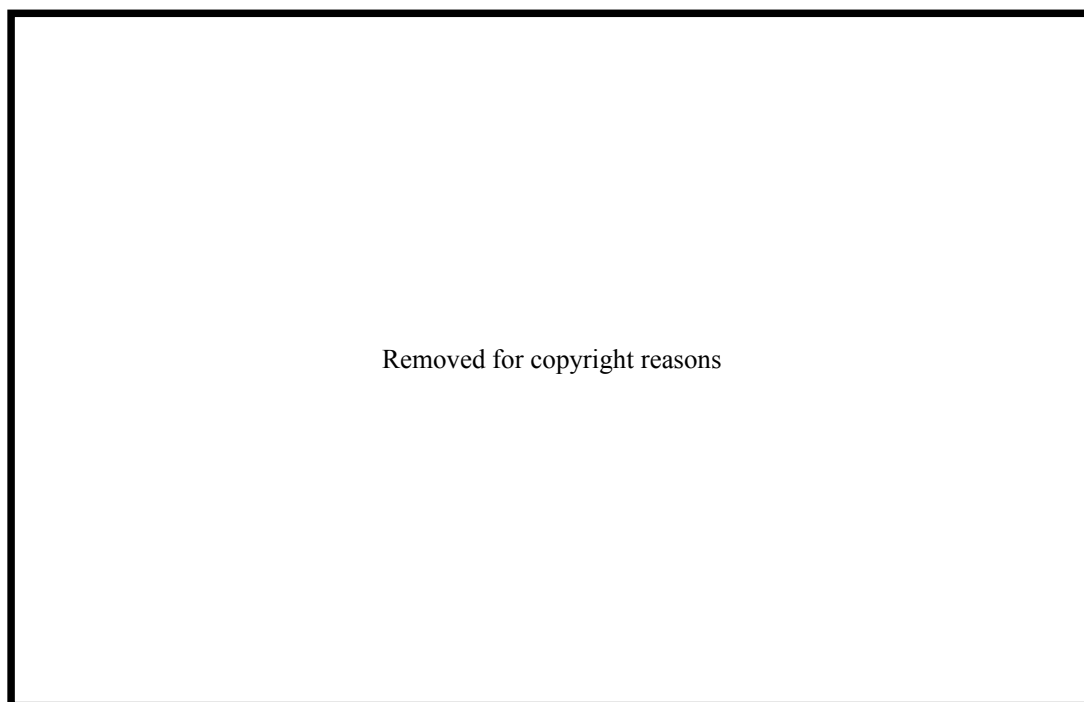
⁸² Leonard, 'Situation', September 1927, DWE/DHS/1/F.

⁸³ Leonard, 'Outline of an educational experiment', 1926, T/DHS/A/5/E.

⁸⁴ Dorothy, note on the school, [1927], T/DHS/A/1/A.

⁸⁵ Dorothy, diary, 15 October 1926, DWE/G/S7/E/7.

in the rapid staff turnover, with twenty-two teachers passing through the school in its first five years.⁸⁶



The estate and school in 1927. Dorothy seated in second row from the front, fifth from left, with Leonard next to her. © Dartington Hall Trust Archives

Embedding their holistic, project-based education system in the rural community was, for the Elmhursts, part of the process of reversing the fragmentation of modern society: a way of ‘bridging the gap that exists today between education and life’, a division which was responsible for ‘a gap in our national life between the artist and the factory or craft, between the man of science and the humanist, and between the life of the town and the life of the country’.⁸⁷ Many educators – including John Dewey – harked back to a traditional rural life where ‘everyone had a pretty direct contact with nature and the simpler forms of industry’.⁸⁸ At Dartington, the Elmhursts were unusual in actually ensuring that children were ‘in touch with people who are spending their lives and earning their livelihood in a variety of ways and in perfect natural surroundings’.⁸⁹ There was regular contact between children and employees through the projects conducted on the estate.⁹⁰ This symbiosis extended into the ‘delightfully social’ evenings, with pupils’ activities shared with estate residents. During one week,

⁸⁶ Stewart and McCann, *The educational innovators*, vol. 2, 135.

⁸⁷ Leonard, note, [n.d.], DWE/DHS/1.

⁸⁸ John Dewey quoted in Jay Martin, *The education of John Dewey* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

⁸⁹ Leonard, ‘Situation’, September 1927, DWE/DHS/1/F. John Dewey, too, thought that knowledge of the processes of production was ‘an indispensable instrument of free and active participation in modern social life’ (Dewey, *Democracy and education*, 72-6).

⁹⁰ Leonard, notebook, ‘Problems’, August 1927, LKE/G/S17/C/23.

Dorothy wrote, there was sewing for ‘boys as well as girls’, dancing classes, chorus singing, boxing and a ‘thrilling’ physiology demonstration by a visiting poultry expert from Cornell.⁹¹ Sunday evenings lectures – aimed at all estate personnel – deliberately included talks that drew pupils’ education together with progressive ideas of ‘real’ life: at one, Dartington’s clerk of works described how his father had built his own cottage eighty years before; at another a film was shown on ‘the Miner and his Life’; a third saw Dorothy’s friend Ruth Morgan give an eyewitness account of a meeting of the League of Nations.⁹²

The success in drawing together the activities of school and estate did not, as had been hoped, extend to the wider neighbourhood. Fees were set relatively low – at £100 they were ‘just half the boarding fee of other private schools,’ wrote Leonard, ‘with room I hope for the children of local farmers’.⁹³ A few local children, such as the offspring of farmer Frank Crook and general factotum Herbert Mills, did attend Dartington School.⁹⁴ But from the beginning, the intake was skewed in favour of the children of the progressive elite. This seems, in large part, to do with local suspicion about the enterprise; even a series of increasingly generous local scholarship schemes was not enough to attract many pupils in.⁹⁵ Two local children were taken away in the first term because of the absence of formal Christian teaching and, as the school expanded from ten to thirty pupils in the 1920s, the middle-class bias in its intake only increased.⁹⁶ Leonard complained that the teaching staff did not understand his point of view – that the scholarship children represented ‘all the children of England’ and were more of a crucial responsibility than the middle-class fee-payers.⁹⁷ Yet even as he criticised, he was shifting his initial conception of the school. To begin with, he had maintained that it should avoid ‘providing “luxury” opportunities’ so that its lessons could be applied by every village school (even while Dorothy was furnishing the boarding houses from the fashionable London

⁹¹ Dorothy, note on the school, [1927], T/DHS/A/1/A.

⁹² The film was probably Charles Urban’s *A day in the life of a coal miner* (1910, Kinetograph); Leonard, ‘Report on education experiment, Dartington Hall, September to December, 1926’, DWE/DHS/1.

⁹³ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 10 September 1925, LKE/TAG/9/A. His assertion is approximately borne out by the interwar data on school fees collected by W.A.C. Stewart and W.P. McCann (*Educational innovators*, 315-9).

⁹⁴ ‘Mrs Crook did not worry about the school having outlandish ideas, which she felt did not make their appearance until after [W.B.] Curry’s arrival’. Michael Young interview with Mrs Crook, 23 August 1977, T/HIS/S20/D. Herbert Mills sent four children to the school and was satisfied that they had become ‘individualists and very progressive in their ideas for development’. Herbert Mills, reminiscences, 21 January 1970, LKE/G/31/E.

⁹⁵ Scholarships were, at first, offered on an informal case-by-case basis. In 1929, and again in 1944, more official schemes were set up. There was recurrent disagreement over whether scholarships should be offered on the basis of need or of academic merit (Education Committee minutes, 22 February 1929, T/DHS/A/4/C; Punch, *Progressive retreat*).

⁹⁶ Leonard to A.S. Neill, 9 June 1927, LKE/G/24/B; Dorothy, draft statement on religion, included in letter to Leonard, 30 October 1927, DWE/DHS/1/F.

⁹⁷ Leonard to Dorothy, 1 November 1927, LKE/DWE/12/E.

store Heal's).⁹⁸ By 1930, he was allowing that, rather than providing an immediately transferable model, Dartington might be understood as an experimental institution, rather like the Lincoln School. On this basis it could be justified in having a larger expenditure than the village schools it sought to reform – and perhaps also could be justified in being less integrated with and of less immediate use to the community around it.⁹⁹

Leonard admitted early on to educator A.S. Neill that 'we are fumbling beginners in the art of meeting children fearlessly on their own ground'.¹⁰⁰ In spite of this, he was optimistic when it came to drawing up a report after the school's first term. Building a chicken house had 'led directly to intellectual questions, such as those of mathematics, decimals, fractions, areas and cubic contents'.¹⁰¹ The 'large Staff engaged on Estate and school work' had settled down in a 'spirit of co-operation and sincerity'.¹⁰² Dorothy agreed, writing (apparently with enthusiasm), 'though we have only fifteen pupils they present as many and as interesting problems as if we had a hundred [...] how encouraging and splendid it all is'.¹⁰³ The school was chaotic; it was not fully integrated with its surroundings; but it seemed to be realising some of the democratic unity of the much-idealised self-governing rural community. One early pupil, Dougie Hart, remembered it was 'like being with a big group of friends'; he got only a 'little bit of education', but 'a love and respect for the community in general'.¹⁰⁴

The prospectus and the first term's report were sent to the Elmhursts' acquaintances across the world.¹⁰⁵ For George Montagu, founder of the Little Commonwealth, an innovative self-governing institution for delinquent youths established in Dorset in 1913 under the superintendence of American educator Homer Lane, Dartington was 'admirable'.¹⁰⁶ Town-

⁹⁸ Leonard, 'The school in relation to life', 1928, T/DHS/A/1/A. The radical schoolmaster A.S. Neill presciently warned the Elmhursts that 'you will sooner or later be up against the problem [...] the tables or the children? [...] It may arise that for the development of his soul a boy must smash a wonderful machine.' (4 June 1927, DWE/DHS/2/D). The Heal's furniture did quickly become dilapidated and it was not replaced.

⁹⁹ Leonard, 'The school in relation to life', 1928, T/DHS/A/1/A. In confirmation that the school was a research centre as well as a model, when it was settled with an endowment in 1930, the sum was divided into the 'cost of ordinary school' and the additional cost of 'experiments in education'. Education Committee minutes, 28 March 1930, T/DHS/A/4/C.

¹⁰⁰ Leonard to A.S. Neill, 9 June 1927, LKE/G/24/B.

¹⁰¹ Leonard, 'Report on education experiment, Dartington Hall, September to December, 1926', DWE/DHS/1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Dorothy to Helen Page, 16 March 1927, DWE/G/8/E.

¹⁰⁴ Dougie Hart (at the school from 1929 to 1933) quoted in David Gribble (ed.), *That's all folks: Dartington Hall School remembered* (Credon: Gribble, 1987), 16.

¹⁰⁵ Leonard, 'Prospectus', 1926, T/DHS/A/5/E and 'Report on education experiment, Dartington Hall, September to December, 1926', DWE/DHS/1.

¹⁰⁶ The Little Commonwealth was inspired by philanthropist William Reuben George's work at the Junior Republic, Freeville, New York. George Montagu (later the Ninth Earl of Sandwich) to Leonard, 19 October 1925, T/DHS/A/1/H.

planner Patrick Geddes, whose son had worked with Leonard at Sriniketan, wrote that he had discussed the prospectus with American educator Professor Charles Hanford Henderson and with an Indian teacher who had worked at Gandhi's school and the Rousseau Institute in Geneva and they were all three 'without criticism to speak of'.¹⁰⁷

Others, pre-occupied with British social welfare concerns rather than progressive pedagogy, were more equivocal. Phyllis Potter, a director of the Caldecott Community nursery, criticised the lack of social mission, regretting that Dartington was clearly not 'for the children of the people' when 'so few people are in a position to found a school for these'.¹⁰⁸ Albert Mansbridge, co-founder of the WEA and Leonard's long-time acquaintance, warned that creating an 'ideal school' was not enough; the Elmhursts must show 'how you are going to weave it in to the education system as it is' to make it 'an example for every county'.¹⁰⁹ For the young political scientist George Catlin the school was a distraction from Dartington's central purpose – 'too abnormal from the run of schools' to be relevant – and the Elmhursts should concentrate on building a 'small, approximately self-sufficient voluntary community' that offered a real alternative to 'the curse of a large-scale industrial civilization'.¹¹⁰

Dorothy and Leonard pondered these viewpoints, conscious that they were on the nursery slopes of their experiment. Although they were asked frequently to contribute articles and give talks on their school, including by NEF founder Beatrice Ensor, they refrained, insisting that 'we are much too near the beginning of things to be able to be of use to anybody else'.¹¹¹ Their sense that they were not, on their own, managing to effect the integrated educational system that they wanted was hinted at by their attempt, in 1929, to recruit Kenneth Lindsay – a young Labour politician who had just published *Social progress and educational waste*, advocating national educational reform – to take charge of all education at Dartington.¹¹² As

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Geddes to Leonard, 15 January 1926, LKE/IN/6/E.

¹⁰⁸ Phyllis M. Potter to Leonard, 26 October 1925, LKE/G/S4/E. The Caldecott Community was a nursery started by Leila Rendel in 1911 in London to look after deprived children. During the First World War it moved to Kent. Its emphasis on freedom and the individuality of each child echoed the philosophy of Dartington and there was a short-lived suggestion of building a Caldecott house on the Dartington estate for 'the real co-education of middle class with "working class" children'. Margery L. Spring Rice to Leonard, 5 February 1929, LKE/G/S4/E.

¹⁰⁹ Albert Mansbridge to Leonard, 10 November [1925?], T/DHS/A/1/H.

¹¹⁰ George Catlin to Leonard, 29 December 1925, LKE/G/4/E.

¹¹¹ Beatrice Ensor to Leonard, 1 June 1926; Leonard to Dorothy Matthews of the NEF, 16 January 1927, T/DHS/B/10/A. There was some early publicity – Dorothy wrote 'Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devonshire, England' for the *Junior League magazine* in March 1928 (DWE/DHS/1). There were also non-Elmhirst-sanctioned articles published in everything from the *New York herald tribune* (April 1926) to the *Western morning news* (26 and 27 June 1926, February 1927) – extracts to be found in file T/DHS/A/9.

¹¹² Kenneth Lindsay (1897-1991) had been an admirer of Dorothy's before she met Leonard. He worked at Toynbee Hall, was the first General Secretary of the think-tank Political and Economic Planning, and later an Independent National MP and secretary to the Board of Education. His *Social*

well as the school, the proposition was: ‘300 to 400 working men, 30 to 40 apprentices in from the neighbourhood, rural teachers building up a new kind of secondary education which should unite technical with general and general with social education.’¹¹³ Pre-occupied with changing state policy, Lindsay refused the post. But the rejected offer marked the end of the first phase of Dorothy and Leonard’s efforts to fit progressive education with their wider mission of rural regeneration and the beginning of a new era in which specialists focused on progressive pedagogy would shape the direction of the school.

The years of crisis, 1928-1931

To begin with, Dartington pupils were conceived as equal partners in a democratic enterprise: ‘over and over again,’ wrote Leonard with satisfaction, ‘the Juniors have themselves forced our hand along what I think of now as the right lines’.¹¹⁴ By the late 1920s, however, the sense that the school lacked ‘coherence and continuity’ was enough to persuade Dorothy and Leonard to bring in educationists and psychologists for advice.¹¹⁵ This was in line with a general move on the estate towards importing specialists; and echoed the wider process in Britain in the interwar years by which ‘professionalism was gaining the upper hand’.¹¹⁶ The trend was underscored at Dartington by the influence of a peculiarly American faith in scientific expertise.¹¹⁷ The input of these professionals, who did not share Leonard’s pre-occupation with the connection between education and rural regeneration, precipitated the school’s transition from an egalitarian, self-governing group which blended with the rest of the Dartington estate, into a more conventional progressive educational institution that grew at a tangent to the Elmhursts’ overarching focus on how to revive the rural community.

The first experts to arrive were Professor and Mrs Frederick Gordon Bonser, educationists who visited from Teachers College, Columbia University.¹¹⁸ They approved of Dartington

progress and educational waste: being a study of the “free-plan” and scholarship system, etc. (London: Routledge & Sons, 1926) concluded that the chief barrier to a good education was poverty, and that a new system of secondary schooling was needed that was free and catered for all children based on their desires and the needs of production, rather than just preparing the upper echelons to rule.

¹¹³ Leonard to Kenneth Lindsay, 24 April 1929, LKE/PEP/4/J.

¹¹⁴ Leonard to Michael Sadler, 17 March 1927, LKE/G/28/A.

¹¹⁵ Leonard, ‘The school in relation to life’, [1928], T/DHS/A/1/A.

¹¹⁶ Wooldridge, *Measuring the mind*, 43. For philosophical debates about the place of experts in a democracy, see Tom Arnold-Forster, ‘Democracy and expertise in the Lippmann-Terman controversy’, *Modern intellectual history* 1 (2017), 1-32.

¹¹⁷ Stefan Collini, comparing twentieth-century English and American intellectual life, finds the former hostile to the idea of the specialist for its implication of narrowness and partisanship and the latter more likely to celebrate it. *Absent minds: intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 225 and 454.

¹¹⁸ Professor Frederick Gordon Bonser (1875-1931) – a schoolteacher before he joined Teachers College – was a strong believer in child-centred education and also developed a system of social-

School's philosophy, in which, like many other visitors, they saw an echo of their own ideals. It offered an 'organic unity' of 'all the best that has been discovered, accepted and advocated by the foremost students of psychology and educational theory in recent years'; the Elmhursts understood that the 'unfolding of forces within the child' was best promoted in a rich natural and social environment and under the stewardship of good teachers.¹¹⁹ The Bonsers' criticisms were reserved for the way these ideals were being applied. The school staff lacked a proper knowledge of progressive education. Better records should be kept of 'items which throw light upon the workings of the theory as it develops into practice' so that school was 'as genuinely scientific as the experiments with forestry or farming'. Although, in theory, a 'more hopeful and satisfying environment could scarcely be imagined' for testing educational philosophies, the relationship between the estate and school was not what it should be. In a long report, they recommended a more regulated interface between the two. Younger students needed purpose-built practical activities that were 'less technical and complex' than those that the commercial enterprises offered. Older students needed more constructive ways to connect 'occupational and community life' with academic work.¹²⁰

At the same time as consulting educationists, the Elmhursts were considering the relevance of psychology. Psychological theory was popular among interwar progressive educators; both disciplines began with the assumption 'that the mind to be educated, not the tradition to be transmitted, is the proper starting point of all instruction'.¹²¹ At Dartington, teacher Wyatt Rawson liked to analyse his pupils' dreams with tools roughly fashioned from Freud.¹²² The Bonsers discouraged his efforts, explaining, in an echo of the advice about community-building given to Leonard by Professor Frederic Bartlett, that in a life 'filled with wholesome, interesting, educational and recreational activities' the emotional side would 'take care of itself'.¹²³

Leonard was torn. He was dubious about the current state of psychology as a discipline – he feared that 'analysed, laid out in front of us in pieces, recorded in files', its subjects tended to become 'pieces of human disintegration' – but he also saw its potential to achieve 'positive synthesis, and offer us some clue to a source of power through which we may achieve a wider

industrial education that he propounded in *Industrial arts for elementary schools*, co-written with Lois Coffey Mossman (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

¹¹⁹ Professor and Mrs Frederick Gordon Bonser, 'Observations and suggestions relative to the educational experiment at Dartington Hall, 1-20 June 1928', T/DHS/A/1/G.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Wooldridge, *Measuring the mind*, 55. For more on the relation between psychology and progressive education see Mathew Thomson, *Psychological subjects: identity, culture and health in twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 110-31.

¹²² Michael Straight to Michael Young, 11 September 1980, quoted in Young, *The Elmhursts*, 141.

¹²³ Professor and Mrs Frederick Gordon Bonser, 'Observations', T/DHS/A/1/G.

horizon of consciousness and the vision of a new world'.¹²⁴ At the suggestion of Eduard Lindeman – now back in America – the Elmhirsts imported an American child psychologist, Helen Mayers, to report on the school and to see whether it would benefit from employing a psychologist permanently.¹²⁵ This was not a great success. In making her report, Mayers admitted that she had failed to connect meaningfully with the children. She also pointed out a general insecurity among school staff about what they were supposed to be doing: they lacked a 'central idea' or 'unity of aim'.¹²⁶ The idea of having a psychologist was dropped, and, distressed by the specialists' reports, the Elmhirsts began to look for another kind of specialist, a full-time headmaster, instead.

In the meantime, the school's education committee of the late 1920s was deeply puzzled over how to translate so much expert advice into practical measures – especially when this advice was conflicting. Should psychoanalysis be used or avoided? Should the Bonsers' advocacy of freedom be followed, or should they obey another report, written by the local doctor, that warned that 'freedom is not the natural condition of the child' and was giving students 'chronic mental fatigue'?¹²⁷ The Elmhirsts tried drafting in yet another specialist, Clarice Evans from Teachers College, to help with the process of incorporating expert recommendations, but she merely made the situation worse by using the 'turgid jargon of "child-centred" education', which no one understood.¹²⁸ The quandary foreshadowed the crisis of confidence in English education in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a deluge of 'fashionable theories' from progressive educationists and left-wing sociologists, few tested and some mutually incompatible, resulted in widespread uncertainty about how to proceed.¹²⁹

The disorientation was exacerbated by the departure of Marjorie Wise and Wyatt Rawson, the only two of the school staff with any training in education. In 1927 Wise and Rawson, both unmarried, had been seen kissing in the garden at Dartington while Leonard and Dorothy were in America. The education committee decided to sack them and to appoint the head gardener, P.W. Woods, in their place.¹³⁰ On the Elmhirsts' return, they persuaded the committee to rescind the decision, but from then on, frustrated by tensions within the

¹²⁴ Leonard Elmhirst, untitled note, [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/F.

¹²⁵ Dorothy to Lindeman, 29 January 1930, box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives; [n.a.], 'Particulars of research with reference to Miss Mayers', [n.d.], DWE/DHS/2/D.

¹²⁶ Helen Mayers, 'Memorandum to the Education Committee', 18 November 1929, DWE/DHS/2/D.

¹²⁷ Dr S.R. Williams, 'Observations, criticisms, and suggestions', May 1930, T/DHS/A/1/C.

¹²⁸ John Wales, 'Personal note on extant records', September 1973, T/DHS/A/2/F.

¹²⁹ Adrian Wooldridge, 'The English state and educational theory', in S.J.D. Green and R.C. Whiting (eds.), *The boundaries of the state in modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 231-58, at 251.

¹³⁰ Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 151.

committee and by the absence of a consistent pedagogical line, Rawson and Wise began to turn their energies to the wider educational field.

In 1929 Rawson moved to London to work for the New Education Fellowship (he continued to receive money from the Elmhursts, who saw this as a ‘natural outgrowth of our own work’).¹³¹ Wise embarked on a survey of Devon village schools, intended both to shape Dartington’s engagement with its surrounds and to be of general use to educational reformers.¹³² The survey attracted the interest of the Board of Education and the Local Education Authority, although it was conducted independently of them.¹³³ Rawson and Wise’s activities were a step towards Leonard’s hope that Dartington could be of use to the educational world outside, but their departure, along with the Elmhursts’ increasing pre-occupation with other estate departments, meant the school itself lost momentum. The failure of the self-governing dimension of the enterprise had never been clearer.

At the same time, there was growing tension on the estate between the school’s educational objectives and the for-profit aims of the commercial enterprises burgeoning around it. Employees resisted having to supervise student projects. The managing director of the newly formed Dartington Hall Ltd, W.K. Slater, demanded efficiency from every department and was hostile to anything that interfered with it. Lacking a strong champion or a certain direction, the school sank ‘from the position of being the focus of the whole experiment, to that of a poor and rather disreputable relation’.¹³⁴ Observers, many of whom had seen possibilities of social salvation in the school’s prospectus, now complained that all the Elmhursts had to show for their ideas was ‘a handful of children not larger than many a mid-Victorian family, to whom a staff of master, mistresses, matrons etc. – nearly as large – are (from a decent modern social or democratic standpoint quite unjustifiably) devoting their lives’.¹³⁵

¹³¹ At the New Education Fellowship, Wyatt Rawson worked as founder Beatrice Ensor’s assistant, balancing work on an international commission on the application of psychology in schools with co-ordinating four psychology commissions and sitting on the examinations committee. He later became joint director of the English section of the NEF. Wyatt Rawson to Leonard, 14 May 1930, T/DHS/A/5/C; Leonard to Wyatt Rawson, 26 May 1930, T/DHS/A/5/C.

¹³² On the back of this, Marjorie Wise published *English village schools*, which presented the result of a survey of 200 schools, mostly in Devon (London: L. & V. Woolf, 1931).

¹³³ Education Committee minutes, 17 May 1929, T/DHS/A/4/C.

¹³⁴ John Wales, ‘The present position of the school’, 1 March 1930, T/DHS/A/1/C.

¹³⁵ William St John Pym, response to 1931 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/E.

The Elmhirsts resorted to full re-organisation.¹³⁶ They separated the school more definitely from the estate. Having been housed around the central courtyard, it was now divided into a primary school and a main school (catering for pupils up to the age of eighteen) and moved into new, more distant buildings.¹³⁷ Each subject was given its own centre – library, pottery, garden, music, kitchen, laboratory – independent of the estate departments.¹³⁸ Finally, after a three-year search, they secured their headmaster.¹³⁹ The appointment of W.B. Curry signalled the letting go of the idea of the school as part of a joint, democratic project between children and adults to build an integrated utopia. In the 1930s, debates about ideology would turn on a more conventional tension in progressive education – between freedom and social responsibility – rather than on how to integrate education with a mission of rural reconstruction. The school's departure from the Elmhirsts' original vision for it in the 1930s gave fresh impetus to their efforts to use education as a tool of social regeneration beyond its bounds.

Beyond Dartington School: continuing and state education

For both British and American interwar progressives, adult education was one of the tools in the push towards democracy – a 'new means of liberals', as Eduard Lindeman put it in *The New Republic*.¹⁴⁰ To Dorothy and Leonard it had additional significance as a way of reinvigorating cultural life in the countryside, preventing the departure of the young to towns.¹⁴¹ In Leonard's early experience of continuing education – working with the YMCA, the WEA and, briefly in 1919, with the School of Agriculture at Dublin University to prepare soldiers for demobilisation – he had found that while 'every abstruse angle' was covered by lectures, there was little effort to engage with participants or offer them instruction that was practically useful.¹⁴² His ambition for the reform of adult education was therefore to uncover a mode specifically suited to country-dwellers: 'the idea has got abroad that by lecturing we pave the road to Paradise,' he complained to Henry Morris, whereas he believed rural people

¹³⁶ According to Leonard's brother Richard, the Elmhirsts also considered closing down the school entirely at this point. Interview with Michael Young, December 1977, T/HIS/S20/D.

¹³⁷ These buildings were called Aller Park and Foxhole. Victor Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall: the history of an experiment* (London: Phoenix House Ltd., 1958), 50.

¹³⁸ Leonard, 'Note on scheme for the re-organisation of the educational departments, Dartington Hall,' 21 July 1928, T/DHS/A/1/A.

¹³⁹ While the Elmhirsts were finding a head, the school was directed by temporary joint heads, Vic Elmhirst and John Wales. John Wales, 'Personal note on extant records', September 1973, T/DHS/A/2/F.

¹⁴⁰ Eduard Lindeman, 'Adult education: a new means of liberals', *The new republic* 54 (22 February 1928), 26-9.

¹⁴¹ The Elmhirsts' hope that education would prevent rural youth migrating into towns was not unusual – it was, for instance, shared by Henry Morris, and by O.E. Baker of US Department of Agriculture (O.E. Baker to Leonard, 19 April 1934, LKE/PEP/1/A).

¹⁴² Leonard, untitled note, October 1946, T/AG ECON/1/B.

learned through “‘Passionate perception’” – which for him was something akin to Dewey’s ‘learning by doing’, but with more spiritual overtones.¹⁴³

Leonard also wanted to get beyond the WEA’s top-down model to a self-directing mode of educational organisation that would make each village more ‘autonomous’.¹⁴⁴ To Leonard, it was not so much what was studied that mattered as how it was studied. While chapter three looks at methods tried at Dartington to evoke ‘passionate perception’ through the arts, this section considers some of the Elmhirsts’ initiatives to make the estate part of an infrastructure for democratic education, both for adults and children. The focus, as in the Elmhirsts’ reform-thinking generally, panned gradually outward from making the estate itself a model community to contributing to state-run schemes. In part this was because the educational initiatives at Dartington, whilst suggestive of new possibilities and echoing broader efforts to shift the adult education model from a paternalistic to a social democratic one, never coalesced into a co-ordinated alternative scheme.¹⁴⁵

The Elmhirsts’ initial intention was that all Dartington’s commercial departments would have an educational component organised by their workers, but soon it became clear that profit-making would be a challenge for them even without this additional component ‘upsetting their economic running’.¹⁴⁶ Education was displaced to the realm of clubs and classes. By 1933, the numerous offerings on the estate, advertised in *News of the day*, included plumbing, dance technique, shorthand and international relations.¹⁴⁷ Some classes were organised in conjunction with the WEA or Local Education Authority (LEA), some were based in the nearby town of Totnes, but most were run at Dartington and by its staff. Soon the lively adult education scene met with difficulties. As their numbers grew, more and more workers lived off the estate and were reluctant to attend classes in the evenings.¹⁴⁸ The relatively small scale of the estate meant that – as journalist H.N. Brailsford found with a group he took for modern

¹⁴³ Leonard to Henry Morris, 1 July 1934, T/HIS/21/A. The phrase was borrowed from John Maynard Keynes, a close associate of the Elmhirsts, who argued for the cultural responsibility of welfare capitalism ‘to furnish those few, who are capable of “passionate perception”, with the ingredients of a way of “good life”’. Leonard’s interpretation of the phrase was more democratic, implying community growth rather than elite leadership. Maynard Keynes quoted in Alan Sinfield, *Literature, politics, and culture in postwar Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 50.

¹⁴⁴ Education committee minutes, 1928-36, LKE/G/S17/C/24. In spite of his reservations about the WEA, Leonard continued to support it, making a large donation during a financial crisis in the organisation in 1932 and being awarded with ‘a benedictory duet’ from R.H. Tawney and J.J. Allon, the warden of Toynbee Hall, who wrote that ‘in the obscurity Dartington Hall is a lighthouse’ (J.J. Allon to Leonard, 11 January 1932 and 18 February 1932, LKE/G/22/F).

¹⁴⁵ Lawrence Goldman, ‘Education as politics: university adult education in England since 1870’, *Oxford review of education* 25 (1999), 89-101.

¹⁴⁶ Leonard to Rathi Tagore, 9 December 1929, LKE/IN/21/B.

¹⁴⁷ Supplement to *News of the day*, 17 January 1933, T/DHS/B/18/H.

¹⁴⁸ Education committee minutes, 19 February 1930, T/DHS/A/4/C.

history – classes were ‘too small, and too varied in age and development, to attain the best results’.¹⁴⁹ The main problem, though, was the absence of any overarching ideal or direction in the programme of activities.

From his arrival in 1931, the first Dartington School headmaster, W.B. Curry, was nominally in charge of adult education, but he was unenthusiastic about the role, refusing to comply with WEA ‘red tape’ or to let the school, which he saw as a bastion of socialist idealism, be associated too closely with the commercial departments that aimed merely at the ‘betterment of their employees’.¹⁵⁰ The result was that, as the estate grew larger, adult education grew more chaotic. A plan drawn up at Leonard’s request by WEA tutor-organiser F.G. Thomas for a workers’ council to control it was blocked by Curry and the estate’s managing director W.K. Slater, on the basis that the workers were not ready for such self-government.¹⁵¹ A suitable democratic structure was never found and, although continuing education remained a concern for Leonard and Dorothy, this became a matter for external, rather than estate-based endeavours.¹⁵² In consequence of Curry’s neglect, Dartington’s adult classes became the responsibility first of the arts department then, in the 1940s, of a separate, arts-oriented adult education centre built to serve the local community.¹⁵³ This solution, reached in conjunction with the local authority, echoed a short-lived post-war movement, led by the newly-formed Arts Council, to build arts centres in every small town in Britain.¹⁵⁴

Leonard’s second scheme to turn the estate to good educational account was to use it for vocational training for school leavers.¹⁵⁵ He thought that the permanent removal of rural youth to universities would ‘guarantee the unlikelihood of their returning’: ‘men of the soil’ should be trained in situ, exposed to the ‘lore that creeps into the countryman’s very bones’.¹⁵⁶ The Education Act of 1918 prescribed the establishment of part-time continuation classes for school leavers, but these remained ‘virtual dead letters’ in the interwar years because of the economic slump.¹⁵⁷ The few exceptions were the continuation schools

¹⁴⁹ H.N. Brailsford, ‘For the Dartington Hall Report,’ December 1928, DWE/G/1/C.

¹⁵⁰ Letters between W.B. Curry and J.G. Trevena, district secretary of the WEA, 1933, T/DHS/B/9/A; W.B. Curry at Sunday evening meeting, 25 February 1934, LKE/G/13/B.

¹⁵¹ F.G. Thomas, scheme for workers’ council, 25 May 1933, LKE/EDU/2/B.

¹⁵² Mark Kidel, *Beyond the classroom*, 2; Stewart and McCann, *Educational innovators*, 141.

¹⁵³ Leonard, ‘Conclusions from the Dartington experiment’, c.1954, LKE/G/S8/1.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Weight, ‘“Building a new British culture”: the Arts Centre Movement, 1943-53’, in Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (eds.), *The right to belong: citizenship and national identity in Britain, 1930-1960* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 157-80.

¹⁵⁵ The school leaving age was raised to 14 in 1921 as a result of the 1918 Education Act. ‘School leavers’ tended to be defined as children from the age of 14 to 16.

¹⁵⁶ Leonard, ‘Education and the farmer’, 25 May 1942, T/AG ECON/3/C.

¹⁵⁷ David H. Parker argues that there was continuing interest in the expansion of practical and vocational education among some Local Education Authorities in spite of the economic slump – as part of an impulse to promote national efficiency. ‘“The talent at its command”: the First World War and

supported by private enterprise – one in Rugby, which was dependent on local industry; another at Bournville, built by the Cadbury family in 1925.¹⁵⁸ The Elmhirsts experimented with informally setting up ‘a kind of continuation school’ through a ‘part-time earning, part-time learning’ apprenticeship scheme with boys from the local villages and the estate school.¹⁵⁹ Without definite rural training of their own there was concern that ‘drudgery and monotony’ would settle on village girls and they would ‘rebel against country life’, so a parallel residential course in domestic science was set up for them, based around running a guest house and a hostel where several of the estate workers lived.¹⁶⁰ Its inspiration and its supervisor, Gudrun Larsen, came from Ankerhus College, Denmark’s first centre for training domestic teachers.¹⁶¹

The girls’ course, in particular, was seen as a social experiment as well an educational one, aiming at ‘a democratic mingling of two groups, – the eight girls and the eight or so adult residents’ of the hostel, who joined each other for meals and some recreation.¹⁶² The hostel’s residents disagreed over whether this was successful. Roger Morel, head of the orchards department, thought it made the girls ‘all better citizens’.¹⁶³ For Leonard’s brother Richard, it failed because ‘our outlooks and methods of life were so entirely different that both girls and residents could not act spontaneously, and all of us had, with rare exceptions, to force our weekly gatherings until they at last dissolved’.¹⁶⁴ Richard blamed the ‘mentality of the girls’, which was ‘of the subservient village type’ and ‘a relic of feudal times’: ‘they had been brought up and educated to give lip-service to those about them’ and could not adjust to a community of equals.¹⁶⁵ Christian Nielsen, a progressive farmer brought in from Denmark,

the vocational aspect of education, 1914-39’, *History of education quarterly* 35 (1995), 237-59, at 237; G.E. Sherington, ‘The 1918 Education Act: origins, aims and development’, *British journal of educational studies* 24 (1976), 66-85.

¹⁵⁸ H.W. Bull, ‘Industrial education at Cadbury in the 1930s’, *The vocational aspect of education* 94 (1984), 59-62.

¹⁵⁹ Leonard to Douglas Rous Edwardes-Ker, 3 February 1927, LKE/LAND/4/F; Leonard to J.R. Currie, 24 September 1929, T/AG/ECON/1/A.

¹⁶⁰ Ruth Morgan, note, [n.d.], DWE/DHS/1; [n.a.], ‘Training course in domestic science for girls from fourteen to sixteen years of age’, [n.d.], T/AE/1/A; Gudrun Larsen, ‘Report on the domestic science training experiment at the Old Parsonage, Dartington, from June 1928 to December 1929’, March 1930, T/AE/1/A.

¹⁶¹ Ankerhus College was set up in 1902 by Madgalene Lauridsen, a pioneering feminist who also founded the innovative Soro School of Home Economics. Former Dam, Lauridsen’s stepson, was scheduled to visit Dartington, but was ultimately replaced by Gudrun Larsen, who, on the basis of recommendations from Folmer Dam and Peter Manniche of the International High School, was appointed supervisor of girls’ training. Folmer Dam to Leonard, 26 July 1926; Leonard to Gudrun Larsen, 9 December 1926, T/AE/1/A.

¹⁶² R.C. Morel, ‘The domestic science training experiment at the Old Parsonage, Dartington’, March 1930, T/AG/ECON/S7/A.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Elmhirst, ‘Domestic training experiment, the Old Parsonage, 1928-1930’, 6 March 1930, T/AG/ECON/S7/A.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

put the responsibility rather on the other side, suspecting that the girls ‘had the feeling that they were being made the object of study, experimented with, and regarded by us somewhat as curiosities, and used for some purpose that they could not clearly understand’.¹⁶⁶ What the girls themselves thought is not on record, but the apparent discomfort of all concerned reflects the difficulties that progressives across Britain were encountering in trying to live out their theories of social equality.¹⁶⁷

Neither the boys’ nor the girls’ continuation scheme lasted more than a couple of years. Their closure, blamed on heavy administrative costs and the failure to formulate a ‘definite policy’, was part of an overall shift on the estate towards making enterprises pay their way.¹⁶⁸ In the 1930s the Elmhursts looked to support government initiatives in continuing education rather than to instigate their own. When Leonard visited Rugby, for instance, he was ‘delighted’ by their day continuation school and recommended the unrolling of the scheme across the country.¹⁶⁹ He wrote to Lord Halifax, president of the Board of Education, pushing for state-supported continuation schools (Halifax’s response, if any, does not survive).¹⁷⁰ The Elmhursts also gave money and equipment to the new South Devon Technical College and supported the County Agricultural Organiser, Colin Ross, who pioneered a model of travelling teaching units for giving instruction to young people in agriculture, with the option of students’ progressing afterwards to a full-time course at Seale Hayne Agricultural College.¹⁷¹

The problem of how best the Elmhursts could contribute to the wider educational landscape was tied up with the question of rural social control – whether lying with church or squire, with the local community or the central state.¹⁷² After a 1927 visit to the village school neighbouring the Dartington estate, in a rare use of the traditional terminology of

¹⁶⁶ Christian Nielsen, ‘The domestic science training experiment at the Old Parsonage, Dartington’, March 1930, T/AG ECON/S7/A.

¹⁶⁷ Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the servants: the hidden heart of domestic service* (London: Penguin, 2007); Seth Koven, ‘The “sticky sediment” of daily life: radical domesticity, revolutionary Christianity, and the problem of wealth in Britain from the 1880s to the 1930s’, *Representations* 120 (2012), 39-82.

¹⁶⁸ Gudrun Larsen, ‘Report on the domestic science training experiment at the Old Parsonage, Dartington, from June 1928 to December 1929’, March 1930, T/AG ECON/S7/A; Roger Morel, response to 1929 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/D.

¹⁶⁹ Leonard to Max Nicholson, 12 March 1935, LKE/PEP/3/C.

¹⁷⁰ Leonard to Lord Halifax, 27 March 1935, LKE/DCC/1/B.

¹⁷¹ R.N. Armfelt to Leonard, 9 June 1932, LKE/DCC/1/B. The scheme is detailed by Lynne Thompson in ‘Agricultural education in the interwar years’, in Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (eds.), *The English countryside between the Wars: regeneration or decline?* (New York: The Boydell Press, 2006), 53-72.

¹⁷² Jeremy Burchardt, ‘State and society in the English countryside: the rural community movement 1918-39’, *Rural history* 23 (2012), 81-106.

landownership Leonard complained that it was in a ‘disgraceful state’ and that it was ‘vital to us and especially to me as Lord of the Manor’ that it be reformed.¹⁷³ The Elmhursts organised several fêtes to raise money for rebuilding and tried to arrange for the village school children to use their own facilities for projects as the estate school children did, gaining practical experience in ‘dairying, orcharding, crafts and domestic science’.¹⁷⁴ English education in this period was only loosely directed by central government – Adrian Wooldridge calls it ‘a shambles rather than a system’ – and in theory the Elmhursts might have had a strong influence on the village school.¹⁷⁵ Their efforts, however, were blocked by local hostility, and in particular by a key figure on the school’s governing board. The Dartington vicar, J.S. Martin, was firmly opposed to cooperating with an enterprise that he deemed to be opposed to the church.¹⁷⁶ Leonard was appointed to the village school board in 1935, but his efforts to enact cooperative schemes with the estate were continually stymied by Martin, who suggested frequently that Leonard was too busy to be involved and should just ‘cut us out of your programme’.¹⁷⁷

The notion arose of setting up a second, state school at Dartington, initially proposed by Leonard in response to the mooted re-organisation of the state secondary school in nearby Totnes. Two different visions put forward for it encapsulate another aspect of interwar tension over the locus of rural social control – between the local community and central state.¹⁷⁸ In 1927, Leonard had written that ‘the ultimate school is the small one’.¹⁷⁹ With Rabindranath Tagore, he saw the ideal educational unit as a self-run ‘miniature community’.¹⁸⁰ By 1929, however, he was proposing to the County Council Education Committee a larger, less autonomous model – ‘a central rural school at Dartington collecting the 11 plus children from the ten neighbouring villages’.¹⁸¹ He drew on America for inspiration in his plan for this school. In particular he pointed out Waterville central school in New York state as ‘the high water mark in centralised schools in small country towns in America’.¹⁸² Waterville was

¹⁷³ Leonard to Edgar Fowles, 9 August 1927, LKE/DCC/6/A.

¹⁷⁴ Leonard to Mr Miller, 30 June 1927, LKE/DCC/6/A. ‘We had 700 people from the neighbourhood here on Saturday, for a Fete in aid of our own local village school, and, I believe, raised nearly £100. This is our first big co-operative effort with the village, and everybody seems to have been very happy over it.’ Leonard to Anna Bogue, 18 July 1927, DWE/US/2/B.

¹⁷⁵ Wooldridge, ‘The English state and educational theory’, 232-3.

¹⁷⁶ Leonard to Edgar Fowles, 9 August 1927, LKE/DCC/6/A; Dorothy, note, [1928?], DWE/DHS/1.

¹⁷⁷ J.S. Martin to Leonard, 21 August 1937, LKE/DCC/6/C.

¹⁷⁸ Burchardt, ‘State and society in the English countryside’, 81-106.

¹⁷⁹ Leonard, manuscript note in the margin of a letter from T.E. Johnston, secretary of the Rural Industries Bureau, 10 June 1927, enclosing evidence that it might be economically desirable to centralise the rural school system, C/RIB/1/A.

¹⁸⁰ Leonard, ‘Siksha-Satra’.

¹⁸¹ Leonard to Pitman, 16 October 1929, LKE/DCC/8/A.

¹⁸² Leonard sent information on Waterville Central School to Mr Draper, 14 October 1930, LKE/DCC/8/A.

inspired by a study of education in New York which recommended closing down smaller, grass-roots rural schools and building a more efficiently co-ordinated programme centred on a large high school that would be closely monitored by the government.¹⁸³

The Elmhursts' offer of Dartington land for a state high school was not taken up in the 1920s. The idea of a new school resurfaced in 1936, when Dartington School's headmaster made a push to exclude day pupils, by that time numbering about fifty, because their parents, estate workers and locals, tended to want 'greater orthodoxy' and more certification than was on offer at Dartington.¹⁸⁴ In response, Jean Sutcliffe, a McMillan-trained nursery teacher working at Dartington, suggested setting up a separate, state day school on the estate – but this time one which would 'grow out of the real desires of the working class people' and 'fit the children of the workers in this rural area for the part they should play as adults in the community'.¹⁸⁵ Sutcliffe envisaged this school as a 'centre for the locality', with a hall, workshop, classrooms and library used by adults out-of-hours, 'a grand mixing ground for all types and conditions of people'.¹⁸⁶ Above all, it would not be an 'imposition from above'. It would have an endowment and would initially be overseen by W.B. Curry, but 'the community should become more and more responsible' and it would be 'run eventually largely by the workers themselves'.¹⁸⁷ The Elmhursts were keen supporters of Henry Morris's village colleges, from which Sutcliffe's plan took its inspiration, but they did not adopt her idea, and the Dartington day pupils excluded by Curry went to study in Totnes instead.¹⁸⁸ In 1936, when Leonard's offer of land for a school was finally accepted by the Board of Education, the result was a large, conventional, state-controlled senior school that opened in 1939 where Dartington land bordered Totnes, rather than in the heart of the estate as he had initially hoped.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ The study involved Cornell University and a number of state institutions. G.A. Works and others, *Rural school survey of New York State*, vol. 1, 208-11, cited by Julian E. Butterworth in 'A state rebuilds the schools of its rural areas: the Central Rural School District of New York', *The journal of educational sociology* 14 (1941), 411-21. See also Tracy L. Stegges, *School, society, and state: a new education to govern modern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 106-8.

¹⁸⁴ W.B. Curry, untitled statement, June 1936, DWE/DHS/3/A.

¹⁸⁵ Jean Sutcliffe, 'Proposal for the foundation of the day school which might possibly become the nucleus of a social centre for the workers within the Dartington rural development scheme', November 1936, T/DHS/B/18/A.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ W.B. Curry, untitled statement, June 1936, DWE/DHS/3/A.

¹⁸⁹ Leonard was appointed to the management committee of the new school and spoke at its opening. 'New Senior School', 25 February 1939, *The Totnes times and Devon news*, British Library Newspaper Archives.

The fact that, by 1931, Henry Morris, the county education secretary for Cambridgeshire, saw Dartington as approaching education ‘from the intensive psychological point of view’, rather than ‘dealing with the schools and public services of an actual local government area’ was a source of disappointment to the Elmhirsts.¹⁹⁰ Yet their lavish sponsorship of Morris’ village colleges – a series of state institutions that combined the conventional function of a school with educational, social and cultural functions that served the entire community – was a sign that they had dropped the hope of building a model for a locally-useful educational hub themselves.¹⁹¹ Morris’ colleges were intended as centres of community integration and life-long learning that ‘a child would enter at three and leave only in extreme old age’.¹⁹² Although they were state-controlled, Morris was keen to emphasise that they were ‘not a foreign organisation thrust on the rural community’ but ‘a union of *local* social services’.¹⁹³ The Elmhirsts paid for a ‘mechanical workshop’ to be added to Sawston Village College, among other donations.¹⁹⁴

A final education scheme, for rural teachers, was inspired by the Elmhirsts’ attendance at a teachers’ conference on the estate of the reforming landowner Christopher Turnor in 1925.¹⁹⁵ Five residential courses for teachers were held at Dartington between 1928 and 1933 in conjunction with the Board of Education and the Local Education Authority – a demonstration of one type of compromise between centralised/state and local/private control over education.¹⁹⁶ Leonard envisaged teachers coming, not for a discrete academic or agricultural course, but for a holistic experience that would involve the arts and crafts, enlarge their outlook and offer contact with the rural workers they were preparing their students to

¹⁹⁰ Henry Morris to Leonard, 25 November 1931, LKE/EDU/10/E.

¹⁹¹ Sawston, Bottisham, Linton and Impington Village Colleges opened in 1930, 7, 8 and 9 respectively. They provided the model for many post-war developments in community education, including Countesthorpe Community College. Henry Morris laid out his principles in *The village college, being a memorandum on the provision of educational and social facilities for the countryside, with special reference to Cambridgeshire*, which appears in Harry Ree, *The Henry Morris collection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). See also T. Jeffs, *Henry Morris: village colleges, community education and the ideal order* (Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press, 1998).

¹⁹² Henry Morris, *Memorandum*.

¹⁹³ Henry Morris to Jack Pritchard, 3 March 1936, LKE/G/25/D.

¹⁹⁴ The Elmhirsts’ contribution to Sawston was prompted by their view that ‘the whole enterprise looked far too bookish, and the new rural worker, especially in the Cambridge area, will have to be mechanically minded’. Leonard to David Owen, 1 October 1934, LKE/PEP/2/A.

¹⁹⁵ Leonard to Christopher Turnor, 22 June 1931, LKE/LAND/2/H. For Turnor’s activities, see footnote 127 of Introduction.

¹⁹⁶ The courses were jointly funded by the Board of Education, LEA and the Elmhirsts. The first two were for Devon teachers, then three bigger courses were held for teachers from the whole of the South West. Teachers training at the University College of the South West also spent time on the estate, observing the school and nursery, which the Elmhirsts hoped would further spread Dartington’s holistic approach. ‘Report on short course for rural teachers at Dartington Hall’, 10-20 April 1928, T/AE/1/C; Extracts from five essays on Dartington Hall School, written by Exeter University College students who visited in 1934, T/DHS/B/15/A.

become.¹⁹⁷ Seale Hayne Agricultural College already offered courses for rural teachers jointly with Devon County Council, and there was some consternation when the Elmhursts decided to do the same.¹⁹⁸ Leonard soothed its principal, Douglas Rous Edwardes-Ker, promising that Dartington was not ‘trying to put up a rival show’ but was offering a complementary one.¹⁹⁹ The first course, taught by Professor L.M. Roehl while on sabbatical from Cornell, modelled its aims on the Federal Board of Vocational Education in America, ‘enlarging the outlook and improving the teaching of men whose schools are rightly influenced by a marked rural bias’.²⁰⁰

In a sign of the on-going negotiation between the government and the private and voluntary sector in the countryside, the teachers’ courses ended in the early 1930s amid acrimony over who was in charge of them – the county authorities or the Elmhursts – and whether they were relevant to teachers in the state system.²⁰¹ Subsequently, in 1932, an independent teacher-training department was opened at Dartington.²⁰² Shaped by Froebel principles rather than those of rural reconstruction, its broad curriculum was intended to link ‘the problems of education and family life to the social and economic structure of the world’.²⁰³ Efforts to get it accredited by the National Froebel Union so that its students could teach in the state sector failed and in 1942, having trained sixty teachers, it too closed down.²⁰⁴

Through the 1930s and into the Second World War, the Elmhursts continued to look for ways that their estate could be used to reform national education.²⁰⁵ Leonard suggested, in vain, that Dartington might collaborate with the New Education Fellowship to co-ordinate a survey of

¹⁹⁷ Leonard to Mr Howard, 20 December 1927, T/AE/1/C.

¹⁹⁸ Minutes of Devon County Council, 18 November 1931, T/AG ECON/1 and 2; Alston Kennerley, *The making of the University of Plymouth* (Plymouth: University of Plymouth, 2000), 13.

¹⁹⁹ Leonard to Douglas Rous Edwardes-Ker, 19 December 1927, LKE/LAND/4/F. George Lambert, MP and executor of the will of Charles Seale Hayne, which paid for the Seale Hayne Agricultural College, saw Dartington as having a similar and complementary purpose to Seale Hayne (George Lambert to Leonard, 15 October 1934, LKE/G/22/A).

²⁰⁰ Board of Education, South West Division, ‘Report on short course for rural teachers at Dartington Hall’, 10-20 April 1928, T/AE/1/C. The Federal Board of Vocational Education, set up in 1917, provided federal funds to train those preparing to enter agriculture, industry and home economics.

²⁰¹ The County Agricultural Officer tried to wrest control of the course away from the Elmhursts (Leonard to Fred Gwatkin, 22 November 1932, LKE/LF/15/F). Leonard later recalled this incident in a letter to L.C. Schiller (22 May 1952, T/DHS/B/18/C).

²⁰² It was led by Margaret Isherwood, who had trained in psychology at Cambridge, lectured at the Froebel Educational Institute in London for six years and worked in America.

²⁰³ Pamphlet on teacher training department, June 1934, T/DHS/B/15/A.

²⁰⁴ The failure to be approved was largely due to the training department’s being so small. ‘Visit of Miss Monkhouse to Teacher Training Department’, 28 October 1935, T/DHS/B/15/A; Margaret Isherwood, ‘Dartington Hall School Teacher Training Department’, [n.d.], T/DHS/B/15/A.

²⁰⁵ Leonard to L.C. Schiller, 22 May 1952, T/DHS/B/18/C.

‘the educational system and needs of the country’.²⁰⁶ During the war the estate sent evidence in to the Luxmoore Committee on agricultural education, and a group of committee members visited Dartington.²⁰⁷ The initial hope, however – that the integration of education into the estate’s activities would foreshadow the use of education to reinvigorate rural democratic communities generally – largely faded. In part, this was because of Dartington School’s divergence into another sort of progressivism, leaving a hole at the centre of the education project. J.J. Findlay, a retired professor of education who spent his last years making a social survey of Dartington, was one of many who condemned the ‘deep cleavage’ between Dartington’s rural reconstruction work and its ‘highbrow’ school, whose ‘children and teachers could be put into charabancs and transplanted to Kent or Essex without any serious disturbance to the social outlook’.²⁰⁸ Eduard Lindeman advised that Dorothy drop her sponsorship of experimental schools altogether (the Elmhursts’ philanthropic fund in America supported progressive institutions including the Lincoln School and the Little Red House School) – their ideas about educational style had now been sufficiently demonstrated and were only benefitting the middle class.²⁰⁹ She should concentrate instead on how to ‘spread the newer methods of education in such a manner as to make them available for all children’.²¹⁰ In spite of Dartington School’s failure in the 1930s to fit in with the Elmhursts’ hopes for tying education and local rural regeneration together, they nonetheless saw the institution as integral to their desire to promote holistic, pacific and democratically-minded education. They continued to give it their full support.

²⁰⁶ Leonard’s suggestion is discussed by W.B. Curry in his letter to Dr H.G. Stead, another member of the New Education Fellowship (29 July 1942, T/DHS/B/10/F).

²⁰⁷ ‘Evidence to be placed before the Luxmoore Committee by the Dartington Hall Trust’, 21 October 1942, C/DHL/5/C; Dorothy to Ronald Ede, 12 June 1942, T/AG ECON/3/C; Ronald Ede, ‘Luxmoore Committee’, *News of the day*, 2 September 1942, T/AG ECON/3/C.

²⁰⁸ J.J. Findlay, *The Dartington community*, LKE/G/13/B. Before retiring, Findlay occupied the Sarah Fielden chair of education at Owens College (later the University of Manchester) from 1903 to 1925; served on the Bryce Commission on educational reform in 1894, visiting America to prepare a report for it; and drafted the curriculum for the progressive King Alfred Society School in Hampstead. Ron Brooks, ‘Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City education, 1897-1913’, *History of education* 21 (1992), 161-78). See also J.J. Findlay, *The school and the child* (London: Blackie, 1906) and *Educational essays* (London: Blackie, 1910).

²⁰⁹ Lists of the Elmhirst Committee’s diverse and extensive commitments can be found in DWE/US/4.

²¹⁰ Eduard Lindeman, memorandum on ‘Experimental schools and childhood education’, 24 June 1932 in ‘Agenda for meeting of Committee of Commitments, 14 August 1932’, DWE/US/4/A.

W.B. Curry's school, 1931-1945

'A modern school is one which recognizes that the social order must be radically changed if civilization is to survive at all and which also recognizes that education will have perhaps the most difficult and the most important part to play in the changes which must come about.'

W.B. Curry (1934)²¹¹

In 1929 the Elmhursts – busy with work in other fields and stung by critical reports on their school – had decided that visiting experts were not enough. The time had come to yield their control of Dartington School to 'someone with a name and definite educational status that would be recognised by the outside world'.²¹² Their new appointment, the Englishman W.B. Curry, previously headmaster of Oak Lane Country Day School in Pennsylvania, did not turn out to share their vision of education as part of a joint project between children and adults to build a self-directing rural community.²¹³ Once they had yielded control of the school to him, however, Dorothy and Leonard gave him their full backing, accepting that this was 'the beginning of a new era at Dartington'.²¹⁴ It was their usual approach when they brought in experts – and was one of the reasons that Dartington grew in so many different, sometimes contradictory directions at once. They had never intended to devote their lives to the school anyway – or indeed any other aspect of the estate – hoping that once they had laid the foundations it would 'run right ahead'.²¹⁵

Curry was a man of flamboyant, controlling disposition more inclined to dictate than to cooperate.²¹⁶ He was also a socialist, pacifist, atheist and all-round iconoclast who, in common with many reformers in the turbulent 1930s, viewed reforming education as being as much about averting dystopia as building utopia. 'The alternative to disaster for mankind is the deliberate creation of a cosmopolitan co-operative commonwealth.'²¹⁷ Convinced that psychological and political change must go hand in hand, Curry hoped that progressive education – rational, co-operative and emphasising individual freedom, respect and love –

²¹¹ W.B. Curry, *The school and a changing civilisation* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head, 1934), xii.

²¹² Education committee minutes, 23 December 1929, T/DHS/A/4/C.

²¹³ W.B. Curry (1900-62) taught for four years at Bedales in England, before becoming headmaster of Oak Lane Country Day School, which was founded in 1916 by a group of businessmen who wished to apply John Dewey's principles.

²¹⁴ Dorothy to Anna Bogue, 10 April 1932, DWE/US/3/D.

²¹⁵ Leonard to Anna Bogue, 17 February 1927, DWE/US/2/B.

²¹⁶ W.B. Curry's extravagances included owning two Rolls-Royces, a Bentley and the Hispano-Suiza later used in the film *The Third Man* – unusual for such a committed socialist (Maurice Punch, 'W.B. Curry (1900-1962): a re-assessment', T/DHS/B/1/I). Many colourful character sketches are given by staff and students in De la Iglesia, *Dartington Hall School* and Gribble, *That's all folks*.

²¹⁷ W.B. Curry, 'The School', in *News of the day*, supplement to the 500th number, 13 March 1934, MC/S4/42/F1.

would take the fire out of competition and nationalism and produce democratic citizens fit to populate a sane, peaceable world.²¹⁸ His interest was very much in using Dartington School as a demonstration, a way of advertising his pedagogical message to an international progressive elite. This was a long way from the Elmhursts' sense of their educational scheme in the 1920s as a tentative, on-going, organic experiment which they would carry out 'far enough so that it would demonstrate itself and not have to be talked about'.²¹⁹

Curry insisted, as a condition of his appointment, on full control of all aspects of the school.²²⁰ On his arrival in 1931, he immediately began to assert this right. The previous year, the English architect Oswald Milne had designed a new building, Foxhole, for the school when it was decided to house it away from the main courtyard.²²¹ Milne's creation resembled a traditional university college (in 'rather feeble, formal neo-Georgian', according to architecture historian Nikolaus Pevsner²²²) and Curry condemned it as a 'missed opportunity'; he considered progressive education and modernist architecture to 'speak the same language', both 'discarding dogma, taking nothing for granted' and working with the whole, whether it be the whole child or the whole building.²²³ He insisted on a free hand in overseeing the construction of future school buildings as well as in selecting staff and running school affairs. He persuaded the Elmhursts to bring in the Swiss-American modernist architect William Lescaze to design a headmaster's house and three new boarding houses, praising Lescaze's method of 'working from function outwards rather than from façade inwards'.²²⁴ Curry thought his new modernist model home would 'almost rival the Hall itself as a showplace'.²²⁵ Lescaze's designs for Dartington School, some of the earliest in Britain to be built in the international modern style, were enthusiastically received by the architectural press and he

²¹⁸ W.B. Curry, 'The school' in Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 202.

²¹⁹ Leonard to Sir Henry Lopes, 14 February 1928, LKE/DEV/3/D.

²²⁰ W.B. Curry explained that his departure from Oak Lane was because of this once-in-a-century opportunity for complete control. W.B. Curry to Jerome J. Rothschild, one of Oak Lane's trustees, 16 October 1930, T/DHS/B/1/A.

²²¹ Oswald Milne (1881-1968) was a pupil of Edwin Lutyens and one of four architects who were responsible for most of the new buildings on the Dartington estate in the 1930s. The others were Louis de Soissons, William Lescaze and Robert Hening. Before them, most design was done by William Weir, an Arts and Crafts architect whose speciality was restoring historic buildings. Victor Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 112.

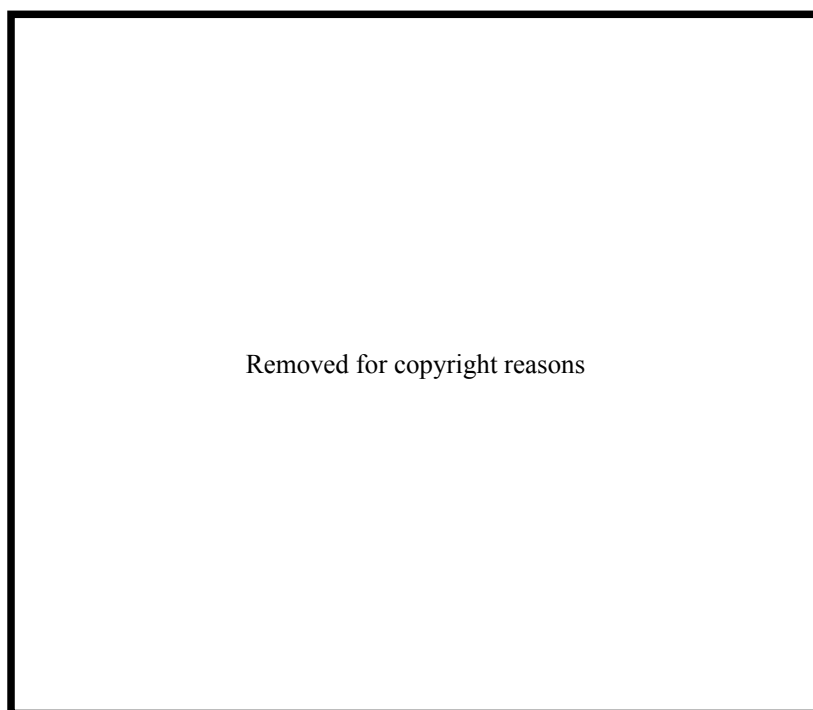
²²² Nikolaus Pevsner, *Devon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989 [1952]), 315.

²²³ W.B. Curry, 'Modern buildings for new schools', *The survey* 41 (1931), 496-8, at 497; W.B. Curry to William Lescaze, 19 December 1930, quoted in Gaia Caramellino, *Europe meets America: William Lescaze, architect of modern housing* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 134.

²²⁴ W.B. Curry 'The School', 180. Curry met William Lescaze when the architect designed Oak Lane Day School in 1929. Lescaze had an international reputation and his work was included in the 'Modern Architecture: International Exhibition' at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1932.

²²⁵ W.B. Curry to William Lescaze, 1 September 1931, T/DHS/B/13.

went on to be adopted by the Elmhursts for a series of other projects including the construction of the estate's central office.²²⁶



William Lescaze's modernist boarding houses, 1936.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

Curry sacked all but two of the old, mostly unqualified staff and brought in a combination of American and British teachers. Some had a background in progressive education. Margaret Isherwood, a psychologist, came with him from Oak Lane. Fred Seyd was brought in from Bedales.²²⁷ Others, like the very left-leaning Raymond O'Malley, were recruited directly from university.²²⁸ Curry, principally concerned with the school itself, actively discouraged his staff from integrating themselves with the rest of the estate. A few rebelled against this stricture – Seyd insisted on running gym classes for the Chekhov Theatre Studio in spite of Curry's admonitions.²²⁹ For others, though, Curry's project was the only thing of value on the estate. 'I couldn't throw myself into the larger Dartington', wrote O'Malley, who found it difficult to accommodate his radical ideals with the estate's wealthy founders and profit-oriented commercial departments. 'I could never get Leonard to do anything but talk *at* me',

²²⁶ They were featured in international publications such as *Country life* 27 (1933, 548-53), *Architectural record* 75 (1934, 384-5) and *The architects' journal* 82 (1935, 477-86). Other buildings designed by Lescaze included a house for Kurt Jooss and part of the Churston estate, the Elmhursts' community housing project on the Devon coast (further discussed in chapter 4).

²²⁷ Fred Seyd had been educated at Bedales and Oxford, then returned to work at Bedales before joining Dartington. Fred Seyd, 'History', [n.d.], T/DHS/B/31/A.

²²⁸ Cambridge University was a popular source, with three teachers, Raymond O'Malley, David Lack and John Hunter all moving from there to Dartington.

²²⁹ Beatrice Straight to Fred Seyd, 1 October 1936, T/DHS/B/31/A.

while Dorothy was unreachably cocooned in the ‘unreality generated by money’.²³⁰ The arrival of Curry, who claimed to see no ‘logical connection’ between the school and commercial departments except that they had the same founders, marked the definitive abandonment of the involvement of the school in the rural reconstruction mission of the rest of the estate in favour of a focus on the progressive education movement.²³¹

New Education, as Curry interpreted it, was not rigorously technical or method-based.²³² The definitive adoption of it provided the school with a more coherent theoretical basis than hitherto, but many practices stayed the same, albeit running with less ‘nervous strain’.²³³ The project method continued – one pupil at the school, Michael Young, tried poultry farming, motorcycle repair and market gardening.²³⁴ Students’ activities remained broad, ranging from pottery and film-making to outdoor swimming and expeditions to Dartmoor and the sea. Curry increasingly tried to ensure that his students were insulated from the estate, however; for example, by running a separate school farm rather than giving them the freedom of the varied estate agricultural ventures.²³⁵ Self-government continued, but Curry placed less reliance on the school council than the Elmhursts had, writing privately that he did not ‘believe in self-government to any extent’ in schools – the council merely provided a point of view, rather than an ultimate authority.²³⁶ Pupils remembered, anyway, that their headmaster had a ‘quasi-dictatorial role’ and ‘could out-argue anyone [...] so he always got his way, regardless of our so-called democracy’.²³⁷

There were other significant changes. The classic dilemma for progressive educators was whether freedom would stymie worldly success. Even so radical a Dartington parent as Aldous Huxley worried that the school would turn his son Matthew into ‘a man with the desirable spirit and opinions but lacking in the efficiency required to make that spirit an

²³⁰ Raymond O’Malley to Michael Young, 5 January 1983, T/HIS/S20/D.

²³¹ Sunday evening meeting, 25 February 1934, LKE/G/13/B.

²³² Celia Jenkins characterizes the New Education as a ‘pedagogic bricolage’ which, like Dartington School, adopted an eclectic mixture of ideas and practices and gradually changed over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. ‘New Education and its emancipatory interests’, 149.

²³³ W.B. Curry to Margaret Isherwood, 21 March 1932, T/DHS/B/15/C.

²³⁴ Gribble, *That’s all folks*, 12.

²³⁵ W.B. Curry, ‘The school’, 173.

²³⁶ W.B. Curry to Margaret Crallan of the Progressive League, 28 October 1936, T/DHS/B/11/D. These councils, in which every pupil and member of staff had an equal vote, still continued to make rules about bedtimes, rest, washing and bullying. They also settled disputes, meted out punishments and even experimented with alternative forms of government. Kidel, *Beyond the classroom*, 31.

²³⁷ Memories of Peter Turner (at Dartington 1934-6) in Gribble, *That’s all folks*, 44. At the similarly progressive Beacon Hill school, too, adults dominated the school council. Bertrand Russell, who founded the school with his wife, later complained that ‘there was a pretence of more freedom than in fact existed’. Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography*, vol. 2, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 155.

effective force for good'.²³⁸ Receiving his son's poor report card, Huxley chided Curry that libertarianism was all very well, but 'no educational system can afford to ignore the facts of the present and probable future social order', in which getting a good job required qualifications.²³⁹ Curry, in fact, was inclined to agree. He prized freedom but wanted his students to 'prove to the world that what people considered a crank school could win scholarships to Cambridge'.²⁴⁰

The new school prospectus, printed in 1932, mentioned exams and university preparation for the first time.²⁴¹ Teaching for the school certificate was 'done in a conventional way,' students remembered; 'teaching methods lagged considerably behind ideas on almost every other facet of School society'.²⁴² Children who did not take the certificate were 'comparatively neglected'.²⁴³ Students in the late 1930s regretted the change. The school had 'become less of a protest' against the existing order; they envied the time when 'it was an experiment: being part of it gave us a sense of being part of something really significant'.²⁴⁴ The Elmhursts, too, lamented the rise of 'all those examination aims and ideals which a place like Cambridge dangles in front of the professional headmaster'.²⁴⁵ Like many other progressive schools in the 1930s, Dartington softened its radical edge in favour of offering a 'sound' education and achieving mainstream impact.²⁴⁶ Since, at the same time, progressive values were increasingly adopted in state education, the school's distinctiveness was diminished.

Dartington nonetheless continued to attract more outré idealists. One such was the American proto-eugenicist psychologist William Sheldon, who, staying on the estate in 1934, hoped to turn Dartington School into a 'psychological nursery' for educators who would learn how to

²³⁸ Aldous Huxley to W.B. Curry, 31 December 1934, T/DHS/B/67/B. David Bradshaw gives an account of Huxley's tortured relationship with progressive education in general and Dartington School in particular in 'Huxley and progressive education: Daltonism and the Dartington Hall débâcle', *Aldous Huxley annual* 15 (2015), 1-20.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Leonard, quoted by Maurice Punch in 'W.B. Curry (1900-1962): a re-assessment', T/DHS/B/1/I.

²⁴¹ W.B. Curry, 'Prospectus', April 1932, T/DHS/A/5/G.

²⁴² Michael Young, interview with Dartington School ex-pupils, sent to Kay Starr, 11 July 1944, LKE/G/35/A.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Leonard to Professor Bartlett, 21 May 1935, LKE/G/13/B.

²⁴⁶ The same increased emphasis on 'sound' i.e. exam-oriented education was evident in the advertisements of other progressive schools in the 1930s. Middle-class parents, although espousing New Education, were 'not prepared to sacrifice standards to principles'. This based on Celia M. Jenkins' analysis of the schools advertising in *The new era*. 'The professional middle class and the social origins of Progressivism: a case study of the New Education Fellowship 1920-1950', unpublished PhD, Institute of Education, University of London, 1989, 169.

categorise children by typology.²⁴⁷ Aldous Huxley, who made friends with Sheldon, went on to popularise this system of ‘endomorphs’, ‘ectomorphs’ and ‘mesomorphs’ through his essays and fiction.²⁴⁸ His last novel, *Island*, portrays a utopia based on Dartington, in which children are classified into the types they will become as adults.²⁴⁹ W.B. Curry, like Leonard and like many progressive educators, was interested in measuring and mental tests – seen as ‘the most effective means to prevent the standardization of educational method’ by furnishing knowledge of individual needs.²⁵⁰ Yet he rarely allowed the intervention of outsiders in the school. Sheldon’s methods were not applied, though Curry did institute regular intelligence testing using the Stanford-Binet tests imported from America.²⁵¹ Sheldon complained to the Elmhursts, with a frustration frequently heard among Dartington’s employees and visitors, that Curry had ‘utterly incoordinate ambitions’ and was ‘building for his own ends’ not for ‘the wider plan that really underlies the thing that he has been entrusted with doing’.²⁵²

Eugenics lingered at the edges of Dartington School as they did around interwar progressivism generally.²⁵³ Students were subjected to idiosyncratic intelligence tests developed by Raymond Cattell, who taught biology there in 1932 before leaving to write ‘one of the most controversial works of psychology of the inter-war period’ as a research fellow at the Eugenics Society.²⁵⁴ Another Raymond, the literary critic Raymond Mortimer, thought

²⁴⁷ William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 1 February 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

²⁴⁸ L.G.A. Calcraft, ‘Aldous Huxley and the Sheldonian hypothesis,’ *Annals of science* 37 (1980), 657-71.

²⁴⁹ Bradshaw, ‘Huxley and progressive education’, 17. In 1963, the year he died, Huxley visited Dartington and talked to Leonard about Tagore. He called Dartington ‘one of the few places in the world where one can feel an almost unqualified optimism’. In his utopian novel *Island*, the educational outline echoes Dartington’s in the 1930s, emphasising cooperation, peace and internationalism, connecting school life to the outside world and respecting children’s individuality (London: Vintage, 2005 [1962]).

²⁵⁰ W. Boyd (ed.), *Towards a New Education: based on the Fifth World Conference of the New Education Fellowship at Elsinore, Denmark* (London; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1930), 273. See also Wooldridge, *Measuring the mind*, 207.

²⁵¹ Although not widely deployed in Britain, intelligence tests had become standard references for interwar American psychologists, especially within the education system. Adrian Wooldridge attributes their particular popularity in America to the rapidly expanding school population, the heterogeneity of its members and the education system’s decentralised structure which called for some method of easy, mass comparison (*Measuring the mind*, 159-69).

²⁵² William Sheldon to Leonard, 9 May 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

²⁵³ John Maynard Keynes, for example, thought Britain’s problems lay in the weakness of its leadership and saw quantitative and qualitative control of the population as part of the solution (David Roth Singerman, ‘Keynesian eugenics and the goodness of the world’, *Journal of British studies* 55 (2016), 538-65). For the place of eugenics in progressive thinking, see also Chris Renwick, *British sociology’s lost biological roots: a history of futures past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), especially chapter 2; and Michael Freeden, ‘Eugenics and progressive thought: a study in ideological affinity’, *Historical journal* 22 (1979), 645-71.

²⁵⁴ Raymond B. Cattell’s apocalyptic vision in *The fight for our national intelligence* of a nation plunging towards disaster, undermined by the decline in the intelligence of its population, split opinion even among convinced eugenicists (London: P.S. King & Son, 1937). He went on to continue his work

that since a utopia should be the preserve of a strong and healthy race, ‘all subnormal or very odd children’ should be excluded from the school because they would ‘handicap the place most unfairly’.²⁵⁵ For retired educator J.J. Findlay, ‘the problems of human “stock”’ was ‘one of the greatest issues facing mankind’.²⁵⁶ Under a draft chapter in his survey of the estate headed ‘Will Dartington breed true to type?’ he bemoaned that ‘cultured populations’ were in decline because they were more pre-occupied with entertainment than reproduction. It would be ‘the crowning victory of the Whitney-Elmhirst control if this miasmatic atmosphere’ could be lifted by ‘the clean pure atmosphere of good eugenic family life’.²⁵⁷ For W.B. Curry, though, as for the Elmhirsts, eugenic theories were antithetical to progressive education, which was all about the protection of the ‘genuine freedom’ of the individual.²⁵⁸ Here, at least, was a point of view that he shared with most other members of the wider Dartington project.

(a) The school versus the estate

In his first eight years as headmaster, Curry increased the school from thirty to two hundred pupils.²⁵⁹ Rather than trying to attract local villagers, he aimed at it being the ‘village school of the Bloomsbury intellectual’.²⁶⁰ Bertrand Russell and Aldous Huxley, Victor Gollancz and Ernst Freud, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson were among those who sent their offspring there.²⁶¹ It was not only Bloomsbury intellectuals that were catered for – by the later 1930s the roster included the children of progressives from sixteen different countries, a number of them refugees from totalitarian regimes in Europe.²⁶² Unlike the Elmhirsts, Curry was comfortable catering to an elite subculture that had already espoused progressive values and wanted to prepare its children for a future of more of the same.

on theories of intelligence and personality measurement at Columbia University (Wooldridge, *Measuring the mind*, 145).

²⁵⁵ Raymond Mortimer to Dorothy, 30 November 1932, DWE/DHS/2/D.

²⁵⁶ J.J. Findlay, *The Dartington community*, LKE/G/13/B.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. Findlay suggested the personnel department should only admit ‘sound pedigree stock’, and that it should ‘induce a different disposition so that consciously and of set purpose’ its families would breed.

²⁵⁸ W.B. Curry, ‘The school’, 203.

²⁵⁹ Maurice Punch, ‘W.B. Curry (1900-1962): a re-assessment’, T/DHS/B/1/I.

²⁶⁰ Ex-pupil interviewed for Punch’s *Progressive retreat*, 35.

²⁶¹ Aldous Huxley, for instance, refused to subject his son to orthodox teaching because he blamed it for ‘the newspaper-reading, advertisement-believing, propaganda-swallowing, demagogue-led man – the man who makes modern democracy the farce it is’ (Aldous Huxley, *Proper studies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), 115). For more examples of the widespread enthusiasm for educational reform among interwar progressives see the writing of Bertrand Russell, Anthony Powell, Christopher Isherwood, W.H. Auden and H.G. Wells.

²⁶² Most foreign students came from America and Europe, but some from as far afield as Egypt. Etain Todds was sent from India in 1937 by her father, a Zoroastrian and a meteorologist, who was a great admirer of Tagore. Author interview with Etain Todds (née Kabraji), 17 May 2015.

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W.B. Curry and pupils. © Dartington Hall Trust Archives

The ease of his task is illustrated by the trajectory of few of his pupils: Matthew Huxley, son of Aldous, would go on to become an anthropologist; Breon O'Casey, son of playwright Sean O'Casey, joined the artists' colony at St Ives, Cornwall; Susan Williams-Ellis, daughter of architect Sir Clough – designer of the eccentric holiday resort of Portmeirion – opened Portmerion Pottery, one of the first retail companies to exploit the notion of the lifestyle consumer.²⁶³ Ann, daughter of American educator Alexander Meiklejohn – founder of the University of Wisconsin Experimental College – took a doctorate in psychology and joined Berkeley's Institute for Human Development.²⁶⁴ By contrast, the younger children of Frank Crook – among the few Devonian natives still attending the school in the 1930s – went on to local jobs similar to those that might have been expected of those of their socio-economic background had they not gone to an experimental institution.²⁶⁵

The new headmaster vigorously promoted the school and its philosophy outside the estate. Throughout the 1930s he lectured on 'Education and peace' and 'Education and democracy' everywhere from the WEA to the Hampstead Heath Babies' Club.²⁶⁶ He crossed the Atlantic several times to attract students and 'interpret Dartington for America' and he broadcast about

²⁶³ Anne Pimlott Baker, 'Ellis, Susan Caroline Williams- (1918–2007)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/99216>, accessed 25 Sept 2017].

²⁶⁴ The Experimental College (1927-1932) was a self-governing community of students seeking to link Greek democratic values with modern America. Adam R. Nelson, *Education and democracy: the meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn, 1872-1964* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 144 and 221.

²⁶⁵ Michael Young interview with Mrs Crook, 23 August 1977, T/HIS/S20/D; Herbert Mills, reminiscences, 21 January 1970, LKE/G/31/E.

²⁶⁶ For a selection of invitations and speeches, see files T/DHS/B/8/A and B.

education for the BBC.²⁶⁷ He generally refused requests by others wanting to publish on the school – ‘It is difficult for it not to err in emphasis, if not in fact, if we do not write it ourselves’ – and instead wrote about it himself, most notably in *The school and a changing civilisation*.²⁶⁸ By the mid 1930s he was at the centre of a web of correspondents and visitors – students of education; teachers from as far afield as Sweden and America wanting advice or jobs; parents, including one of an unborn child, wanting guidance on how to bring up their children in the progressive mould.²⁶⁹ He succeeded in turning Dartington into a New Education show window and in making himself ‘one of the best-known names in progressive education’.²⁷⁰ In an indication of the importance of reforming education to progressives more broadly, the school also continued to draw significant interest from idealists in realms ranging from city planning to utopian philosophy and art.²⁷¹

Curry’s dominating personality narrowed down the opportunity for other educational experiments at Dartington, even when they were supported by the Elmhursts. The nursery was a case in point. Prompted by the birth of her children Ruth, in 1926, and Bill, in 1929, Dorothy wanted to turn the informal nursery that had begun in the estate’s earliest days into a more substantial educational enterprise.²⁷² Like other reformers and politicians, including Dora and Bertrand Russell and Stanley Baldwin, she had visited Margaret and Rachel McMillan’s open-air nursery school in Deptford and been impressed by the tying together of

²⁶⁷ W.B. Curry visited the USA in 1932, 1933 and 1934, speaking to such organisations as the Junior League and the League of Women Voters. The arrangements were made by Dorothy’s secretary in America, Anna Bogue, who did not find it easy to rouse enthusiasm on the American end but enthused to Curry that ‘your coming to talk on progressive education is rather coincident with the spirit of the New Deal’ (Anna Bogue to W.B. Curry, 20 April 1934, T/DHS/B/8/F). Curry delivered a BBC lecture, ‘What is progressive education?’, and took part in a radio debate, ‘The child, the parent and the teacher’, with the headmaster of Christ’s Hospital (broadcast 20 April 1932 and 29 November 1934, T/DHS/B/18/G).

²⁶⁸ W.B. Curry to Dexter Morand, 1 August 1934, T/DHS/B/18/D; W.B. Curry, *The school*.

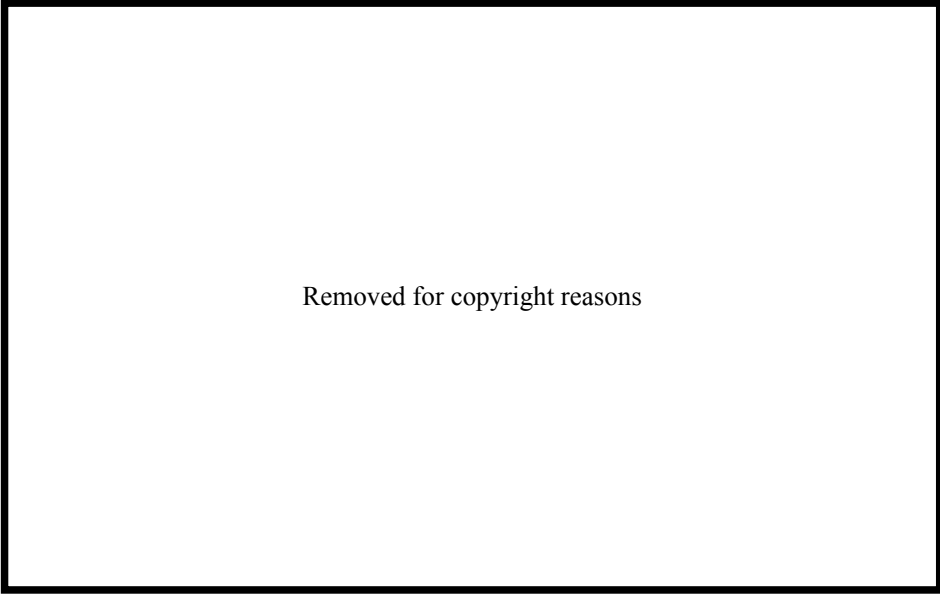
²⁶⁹ Particularly close correspondents included Konni Zilliacus, an internationalist and Labour politician working with the League of Nations secretariat in Geneva; his brother, Laurin Zilliacus, a central figure of progressive education in Finland; and Hugh Heckstall-Smith, a Quaker, farmer, agricultural economist and schoolmaster who sent his son, Dick Heckstall-Smith to Dartington. For many visitors it was not just Curry’s educational policy but his political attitude that impressed. The left-wing author Geoffrey Trease enjoyed the presence of the *Daily worker* and the *Moscow weekly news* in the library. Geoffrey Trease to Curry, 16 March 1935, enclosing ‘An impression of Dartington Hall’, T/DHS/B/2/C.

²⁷⁰ Stewart and McCann, *The educational innovators*, 137.

²⁷¹ Those who came to talk at the school at Curry’s invitation included Barbara Wootton (who spoke on ‘Federation and socialism’), Herbert Read (‘Art and nature – unity or contraction’), housing consultant Elizabeth Denby (‘New Towns for old’) and Karl Mannheim (‘The diagnosis of our time’). T/AE/4.

²⁷² The first nursery school was run Marjorie Wise (T/PP/EST/1-8). Nancy Astor, the first female MP to take her seat in Parliament and an American heiress turned Devon-based social reformer with a background similar to Dorothy’s, also campaigned for improved nursery school education in the 1930s. Although her ‘Ten year plan for children’ is in the Dartington archives, there is no direct evidence of her discussing it with the Elmhursts. Kevin J. Brehony, ‘Lady Astor’s campaign for nursery schools in Britain, 1930-1939: attempting to valorize cultural capital in a male-dominated political field’, *History of education quarterly* 49 (2009), 196-210; LKE/EDU/11/D.

child development theory and socialism.²⁷³ She hoped to combine its example with an American model in which higher education institutions such as Teachers College worked closely with nursery schools.²⁷⁴ To achieve this she recruited Winifred Harley, an Englishwoman who had been teaching at the Merrill-Palmer School in Detroit, to establish a department of child study that would set high standards ‘percolating through the whole of primary education’.²⁷⁵ Just as Leonard had hoped when he recruited psychologists to support Dartington’s community-building, the intention was that it would achieve the synthesis of academe and practical experience that England lacked, ‘bringing together the results of specialists in different fields of study, planning research where it is needed, and passing on scientific knowledge not only to nursery school workers but also to parents in all classes of society’.²⁷⁶



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Winifred Harley’s short-lived nursery, 1932, with furniture made by Dartington’s sawmill and carpentry workshop. © Dartington Hall Trust Archives

²⁷³ The institution also trained teachers and nursery nurses and had, since 1919, been supported by the LEA. Dorothy donated £100 and remained in sporadic contact with Margaret McMillan and E. Stevenson, a teacher at the nursery. Dorothy to Margaret McMillan, 17 November 1927, DWE/DHS/2/D; Pam Jarvis and Betty Liebovich, ‘British nurseries, head and heart: McMillan, Owen and the genesis of the education/care dichotomy’, *Women’s history review* 24 (2015), 917-37.

²⁷⁴ Dorothy to E. Stevenson, 24 February 1928, DWE/DHS/2/D.

²⁷⁵ The Merrill Palmer School was founded in 1920 on the basis of a bequest from Lizzie Pitts Merrill Palmer. A ‘Child Development Laboratory’, it offered academic programmes in child development and family functioning and served as a training site and community resource. It was used as a model for similar institutions across the country. Winifred Harley, ‘The English and American nursery schools contrasted’, *New era*, November 1930, T/DHS/B/15/E.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Harley arrived in 1931, and by 1932 the nursery had seventeen children and was, she thought, ‘the only one in England definitely incorporating American ideals’.²⁷⁷ It used Merrill-Palmer tests to assess the progress of children – a psychologist at the University of London was set to re-standardise the American material for English use.²⁷⁸ The progressive experimentalism at the nursery was short-lived, however, because Harley and Curry were at opposite ends of the spectrum of progressive pedagogy and the Elmhursts had yielded Curry full control of education on the estate. For Curry, freedom was at the root of education; Harley’s concentration on rules, theories and science was anathema to him. A row broke out over Harley’s making a ‘moral issue of “clean plates at meals”’, a policy, Curry wrote, which ‘runs counter to the principles upon which I have been trying to build the rest of the school’.²⁷⁹ He refused to direct the nursery with Harley running it and she was forced to resign.²⁸⁰

Curry also firmly resisted efforts by the Elmhursts and others on the estate to re-attach the school to the wider project of rural regeneration. He allowed that ‘the educational and industrial aspects of Dartington [were] but different aspects of the same problem’ – each was creating ‘civilised, competent and creative products’ for a better world.²⁸¹ While the commercial departments were peddling economic goods and were indiscriminating about who they sold to, however, Curry’s stock-in-trade was values, and his market was an international society of enlightened elites. He was not interested in contributing to the life of the estate or surrounding society. He did not mind that he had ‘no local friends other than those connected with the school’ and that ‘most of my outside contacts are much further afield, and are mainly in London’.²⁸² He humorously told friends that the locals thought that his school was ‘under the influence of Moscow’ and that he was ‘the direct agent of the devil’ – his response in sharp contrast to the Elmhursts’, who continued to be depressed by their failure to build cooperative relations with their neighbours.²⁸³ He was equally unconcerned about his pupils’ lack of local integration. Looking back, they remembered an idyllic education, but one that was insular and did not prepare them for life.²⁸⁴ One recalled

²⁷⁷ Winifred Harley to Harvey Walker, 2 June 1932, T/DHS/B/15/G. The nursery was to be staffed by teachers, a psychologist, part-time doctor, nurse and dietician as well as a secretary and household manager. It employed two American-trained assistants, Hilda Bristol and Jean Sutcliffe, and another, Jennifer Sutcliffe, trained by McMillan in England. Peggy Wales, recollections, June 1988, T/DHS/B/24/I.

²⁷⁸ Stewart and McCann, *The educational innovators*, 136.

²⁷⁹ W.B. Curry to Winifred Harley, 10 November 1932, T/DHS/B/15/G.

²⁸⁰ The nursery would continue without her, but along far more conventional lines.

²⁸¹ W.B. Curry, ‘The school’, in *News of the day*, supplement to the 500th number, 13 March 1934, MC/S4/42/F1.

²⁸² W.B. Curry to Claude Scott, 1 March 1939, T/DHS/B/2/D.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Michael Young, interview with ex-pupils, sent to Kay Starr, 11 July 1944, LKE/G/35/A. Only Clement Freud said he had not been happy: ‘no one told us how good the lessons were nor how to work

regarding the neighbouring town of Totnes as ‘foreign territory, ordinary and boring’.²⁸⁵ There was ‘a lot of elitism’ and difficulty, after leaving, in ‘finding out what ordinary life was about’.²⁸⁶ This, for Curry was part of the point – he was preparing elite children for an elite culture, not for ‘ordinary’ life.

In consequence of Curry’s lack of conciliating spirit, and of the divergent objectives of education and industry, tension between the school, the estate and the country around mounted. Libertarian educational policies, including mixed-sex living for pupils, nude bathing and sexual freedom, clashed with a push by Dartington Hall Ltd in the early 1930s to increase the sales of its products, from seeds and milk to modernist chairs.²⁸⁷ The company’s managing director W.K. Slater complained that his customers were put off by ‘salacious rumour’ about the school: its politics – communist; its morality – too liberal; and its religion – non-existent.²⁸⁸ The company sales manager, James Harrison, estimated that the school cost the company £1000 a year in fees to ‘the Editorial Section of the London Press Exchange merely as a defensive measure, to prevent, as far as we can, the Yellow Pages from champing its jaws over sensational tit-bits’.²⁸⁹ It was not only a case of reduced sales; Curry received numerous complaints from estate workers and locals about vandalism and theft by pupils.²⁹⁰

Curry’s private life brought these tensions to a head. For many progressive educators, the threat of authoritarianism lay not only in government and schools, but in paternal authority within the family.²⁹¹ Some progressive educators in England – among them Dora and Bertrand Russell, and Jack and Molly Pritchard – saw their schools and their relationships as models of how to reform the family, promoting sexual liberation and gender equality.²⁹² The

at things one did not like’. Conrad Russell, the youngest son of Bertrand Russell (not in Young’s interview) also did not like the school and was moved to Eton instead (Young, *Elmhursts*, 173).

²⁸⁵ Author interview with Etain Todds (née Kabraji), 17 May 2015.

²⁸⁶ Ann Wolff (née Hope) (at Dartington 1934-41), in Gribble, *That’s all folks*, 32.

²⁸⁷ Victor Bonham-Carter, *Land and environment: the survival of the English countryside* (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), 146. Where in the 1920s there had been separate accommodation for boys and girls, W.B. Curry had them sharing quarters.

²⁸⁸ W.K. Slater, ‘Questions for Mr Curry’s talk on Sunday 1 March 1936’, 25 February 1936, T/DHS/B/18/A.

²⁸⁹ James Harrison to W.K. Slater, 29 February 1936, T/DHS/B/18/A.

²⁹⁰ For example, R.S. Lynch of the gardens department complained to W.B. Curry about thefts from his locked stores (14 June 1937); and James Harrison decried an ‘anti-social experiment’ by a child who threw a missile at his car “‘To see if it would bounce off’” (20 October 1937), T/DHS/B/24/B.

²⁹¹ Not all New Educationists were in favour of the dilution of the traditional family. Some in the NEF in the 1930s saw the ‘stable family unit as the cornerstone of democratic nations’. Jenkins, ‘New Education and its emancipatory interests’, 140-6.

²⁹² Dora Russell wrote that ‘a wider atmosphere than that of the family is needed by the child in our closely knit society where cooperation and mutual help should replace the old competition of family against family’ (‘Beacon Hill’, in Trevor Blewitt (ed.), *The modern schools handbook* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1934), 29-42, at 41). The Pritchards had an open marriage and set up their nursery school to permit Molly to go on working as a psychiatrist. The community they established alongside the

Elmhirsts mainly steered clear of this area of progressivism. They were domestically conventional. Their home life was typical of the upper middle class. Their relationship was apparently monogamous and their children saw little of them, spending their early years in the nursery and later ones at school.²⁹³ Although Dartington accepted as pupils many children whose parents were separated, at first Curry was of the view that association with ‘bohemian’ morals could ‘give the chief reactionary press free ammunition’ against liberalism.²⁹⁴ When he began an affair with one of the school’s housemothers, Marsie Foss, and divorced his wife, he found he had to change his tune.

Curry’s affair revealed how much hostile scrutiny Dartington was under, locally and nationally. A neighbouring villager warned the Elmhirsts that the vicar and ‘a certain MP in Devon’ were plotting to ‘shut the place up’.²⁹⁵ Gerald Heard, who acted as an informal representative for Dartington in London, reported that rumours were spreading fast through town.²⁹⁶ What was at stake, he wrote, was the whole cause of progressivism: ‘should a scandal break out then not only would Dartington suffer but liberal education and indeed all liberalism’.²⁹⁷ In 1936, the Elmhirsts called on Curry to defend his policies to the rest of the estate at a Sunday evening meeting.²⁹⁸ He emphasised eloquently that what would suffer if he were forced to leave was not his personal life, but the defence of individual freedom. Afterwards, Dorothy and Leonard, stood by their expert. The ‘emancipation of parts, or

school, the Lawn Road flats for ‘minimal living’, became a haven for the leaders of the Modern International movement in the 1930s after the Bauhaus was forced to close in Germany. Jack Pritchard, *View from a long chair: the memoirs of Jack Pritchard* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); Alexandra Harris, *Romantic moderns: English writers, artists and the imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 38-9.

²⁹³ Michael Young, half adopted into the Elmhirst family, thought Dorothy and Leonard were ‘more at home with other people’s children than their own’. *The Elmhirsts*, 119.

²⁹⁴ Five out of nine of the old pupils Michael Young interviewed in 1944 came from broken homes (Michael Young, interview of ex-pupils, sent to Kay Starr, 11 July 1944, LKE/G/35/A). Curry’s comment was in relation to the divorce of Dora and Bertrand Russell in 1934 which, he said, risked damaging ‘all the causes and ideas and institutions with which they may be identified’ (W.B. Curry to H.G. Wells, 5 June 1934, T/DHS/B/2/B).

²⁹⁵ Sydney R. William to the Elmhirsts, 4 July 1935, T/DHS/B/1/H.

²⁹⁶ Talking about gossip about W.B. Curry, William Sheldon wrote: ‘It is astounding how outside people know everything that happens at Dartington’ (Sheldon to the Elmhirsts, 7 May 1935, DWE/G/9/E). Young remarks on the furore that the divorce caused (*The Elmhirsts*, 177-9) and there are many agonized reflections on it in the Dartington Hall archives. For discussion of the close link between private behaviour and public morality, in spite of domestic experiments by intellectuals in the 1920s, see Pedersen and Mandler (eds.), *After the Victorians*.

²⁹⁷ Leonard went to London to meet with Gerald Heard and a parent, Felix Green. They discussed rumours, not only about Curry’s behaviour but also about ‘irregular sex relationships’ among staff and students and the morphine addiction of a housemother. Notes from meeting, November 1935, LKE/G/17/E.

²⁹⁸ W.B. Curry to W.K. Slater, 22 February 1936, T/DHS/B/18/A.

divergence of sub-ends', wrote Leonard, was natural and would not detract from 'the psychological reality of the "common end"'.²⁹⁹

(b) *The New Education Fellowship*

'[W]holeness, synthetic, syncretism, integration, globalization, then, would seem to be the keywords of the new education view of mind: suggesting negatively, antagonism to any conception of human experience which overemphasizes the constituent atoms, parts, elements, and neglects or denies the significance of the whole fact – thing, crystal, life, mind, spirit – in which the parts have their being.'

William Boyd (1930)³⁰⁰

Alongside his work as headmaster, W.B. Curry drew Dartington School into the mainstream of international pedagogical progressivism through his association with the New Education Fellowship, making the school a testing ground for New Education ideas and working closely with the organisation until the late 1930s.³⁰¹ The NEF, with its journal, *Education for the new era*, was the closest that the often discordant progressive education movement came to having a common mouthpiece in the interwar years.³⁰² Formed at a conference in Calais in 1921, like many other reforming organisations between the wars its ethos was strongly international.³⁰³ It held seven conferences before the Second World War, each in a different country, drawing together professional educators, administrators and academics as well as lay people interested in education.³⁰⁴

The NEF's philosophy had two strands, one emphasising the Rousseauian freedom of the individual child, the other concerned with education that would create a more humanitarian race, promoting international, democratic reconstruction.³⁰⁵ The first strand prevailed in the 1920s, when the NEF was at its most visionary and detached from the political mainstream. Although the organisation gradually and deliberately distanced itself from its theosophist

²⁹⁹ Leonard Elmhirst, untitled note, [n.d], LKE/G/S8/B.

³⁰⁰ Boyd (ed.), *Towards a New Education*, 350.

³⁰¹ For letters relating to W.B. Curry and the New Education Fellowship, see file T/DHS/B/10/C.

³⁰² In part because its archives were damaged by an air raid in 1941, histories of the NEF are in short supply. The most comprehensive account remains *The story of the New Education* by William Boyd and Wyatt Rawson, both of whom played a key role in it. More recent studies focus on specific aspects: Kevin J. Brehony, 'A New Education for a new era: the contribution of the conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the disciplinary field of education 1921-1938', *Paedagogica historica* 40 (2004), 733–55; Celia Jenkins, 'New Education and its emancipatory interests' and 'The New Education Fellowship 1920-1950'; Christopher Clews, 'The New Education Fellowship and the reconstruction of education: 1945 to 1966', unpublished PhD, University of London, 2009.

³⁰³ The NEF had its headquarters in England. National branches were affiliated to it with varying degrees of closeness. Members were either world fellows, paying their dues to London, or full fellows, who paid and were attached to their local branch. Clews, 'Reconstruction', 192.

³⁰⁴ Brehony, 'Conferences', 734.

³⁰⁵ Jenkins, 'The New Education Fellowship 1920-1950', 74-82.

roots, in the early years it still focused on spiritual notions of ‘oneness and wholeness’ and creative fulfilment.³⁰⁶ It also emphasised children’s individuality and freedom, often imagined in a romanticised rural setting that represented escape from modern urban industrialism.³⁰⁷ When Curry brought Dartington into close association with the organisation, however, it was after the change of inflection that arose at the end of the 1920s, away from ‘radical and cranky’ escapism and towards a more politically engaged approach that concentrated on preparing children for the economic, social and political problems of a modern democracy.³⁰⁸ This reflected a urgent sense among progressives generally in the 1930s that they needed to grapple with ‘real world’ problems.³⁰⁹ As a strict rationalist, Curry also approved of the NEF’s 1930s move away from its religious roots towards positivism and empiricism, incorporating psychology and mental testing.³¹⁰

Even within the New Education Fellowship, British progressive pedagogy spanned a wide spectrum.³¹¹ Trevor Blewitt’s *The modern schools handbook* and L.B. Pekin’s *Progressive schools*, both published in 1934, demonstrate progressive education’s growing traction and the range of schools identified with the movement.³¹² At one end were moderate institutions like Bedales whose headmaster, J.H. Badley, continued to uphold many public school traditions.³¹³ At the other extreme were the libertarians A.S. Neill – founder of Summerhill – and Dora and Bertrand Russell – founders of Beacon Hill.³¹⁴ This latter group has come to be identified by historians as ‘figureheads of child-centred education’ in the interwar years but in

³⁰⁶ Boyd and Rawson, *The story of the New Education*, 67; Margaret Mathieson, ‘English progressive educators and the creative child’, *British journal of educational studies* 38 (1990), 365-80, at 376.

³⁰⁷ At the NEF conferences of the 1920s, themes – from creative self-expression to new psychology and mental testing – mainly related to individual development rather than to society at large. W.A.C. Stewart, *Progressives and radicals in English education, 1750-1970* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 360.

³⁰⁸ The change was illustrated by the amendment in the NEF’s constitution. When first drawn up in 1921, it began: ‘The essential aim of all education is to prepare the child to see and realize in his own life the supremacy of spirit’. In 1932 it was amended to read: ‘Education should enable the child to comprehend the complexities of the social and economic life of our times’. The conferences of the later 1930s were more socio-politically focused, turning on the educational foundations of freedom in a free community. Stewart, *Progressives and radicals*, 362.

³⁰⁹ Martin Green, *Children of the sun: a narrative of ‘decadence’ in England after 1918* (Constable: London, 1977), 309.

³¹⁰ Much of the impetus for empirical research came from the USA. Brehony, ‘Conferences’, 743; Jenkins, ‘The New Education Fellowship 1920-1950’, 280.

³¹¹ Maurice Punch divides the English progressive schools into Friends’ schools; ‘marginal’ progressives, often single sex and relatively traditional – including Abbotsholme, Bryanston, Rendcomb; the ‘moderate’ progressives, retaining orthodox elements – uniform, emphasis on academic success – but still at the centre of progressivism, such as Bedales, Frensham Heights, St Christopher’s; and the ‘radical’ progressives – including Summerhill, Dartington, Beacon Hill, Monkton Wyld, the Malting House and the Little Commonwealth (*Progressive retreat*, 9-10).

³¹² Blewitt (ed.) *The modern schools handbook*; L.B. Pekin, *Progressive schools* (Hogarth Press: London, 1934).

³¹³ See, for example, J.H. Badley, *Bedales: a pioneer school* (London: Methuen, 1923), 29, and Badley’s article on Bedales in Blewitt (ed.), *The modern schools handbook*, 48.

³¹⁴ Richard Bailey, *A.S. Neill* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

reality they were ‘positioned outside the mainstream of progressive educational thought’, being more concerned with social reform than with new educational theories and techniques.³¹⁵ Curry, and Dartington with him, was drawn into this group. Like them, his ‘central commitment was not to a certain vision of education but to the freedom of the child’.³¹⁶ Visits, students, staff and letters of advice were exchanged between Summerhill, Beacon Hill and Dartington – a form of ‘sponsorship’ common between New Educators, although Dartington was set apart from the other two by the substantial endowment the Elmhursts had settled on it in 1931.³¹⁷ In an indication of how this progressive milieu functioned, Neill, envious of Curry’s access to the Elmhursts’ seemingly bottomless pocket, wrote to him with characteristic bluntness, ‘crowds of people come round asking for jobs and to get rid of em I say sweetly: Now there is Dartington Hall. What about applying there? Sometimes I send em to Beacon Hill. Most of em I send to hell but not audibly’.³¹⁸

At all three schools, lessons were optional and freedom was central. Their heads eschewed the fine distinctions about method that were often the focus of the NEF.³¹⁹ Beacon Hill was ‘not run on Dalton lines, but in a much freer way’; Dartington was ‘not wedded to the Dalton Plan, the Project Method, or any other organized system’; and at Summerhill children were free ‘to live according their inner nature’.³²⁰ Neill’s guiding light was Freudian psychology, and he saw his school as a therapeutic community.³²¹ He was ambivalent about even belonging to the NEF because, as he wrote to Curry, ‘You and Dora R[ussell] and I talk a different language from them; we are the only ones who make child psychology the basis of our job. I can’t waste my time going to town to hear a lot of bilge about Self gov[ernment] and Montessori

³¹⁵ Tisdall, ‘Teachers’, 260.

³¹⁶ Ibid. By contrast, the Elmhursts had visited A.S. Neill’s Summerhill in 1927 and been ‘horrified at the mess and disorder and seeming chaos’. Joint diary of Dorothy and Leonard, 24 January 1927, DWE/G/S7/D.

³¹⁷ Teachers, such as the scientist Boris Uvarov, usually migrated towards Dartington, because it paid better. The students who moved there included the Russells’ own children, Kate and John, who transferred from Beacon Hill after their parents’ divorce (Peter Cunningham, ‘Innovators, networks and structures: towards a prosography of progressivism’, *History of education* 30 (2001), 444). The school was the personal financial responsibility of the Elmhursts until 1931, when a charitable trust was set up to administer the non-commercial side of the estate. In 1934 the endowment for the school was fixed at a level which provided generously for the school until after World War Two, when its value was eaten into by inflation (Curry, ‘The School’).

³¹⁸ A.S. Neill to W.B. Curry, 24 January 1936, T/DHS/B/21/C.

³¹⁹ A contrast is provided in the pages of *Education for the new era*, when specific educational methods such as the Project Method, the Dalton Plan, the Winnetka Technique and Platoon Plan are discussed at length.

³²⁰ Dora Russell to F.C. Needles, 7 December 1933, quoted in Deborah Gorman, ‘Dora and Bertrand Russell and Beacon Hill School’, *The journal of Bertrand Russell studies* 25 (2005), 39-76, at 70; W.B. Curry, ‘Prospectus’, April 1932, T/DHS/A/5/G; A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: a radical approach to education* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1962), 107.

³²¹ A.S. Neill, *That dreadful school* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1937); Neill was indebted for his view of the emancipatory powers of Freudianism to Homer Lane of the Little Commonwealth, whom he met while on leave during the First World War (Bailey, *A.S. Neill*, 24-5).

etc.’³²² He took Curry to task for not ‘making psychology nearly important enough. What is happening to your kids’ anal-eroticism, hate, destruction, parental complexes, masturbation guilts? My dear lad, I fear me they are repressing em.’³²³ It was perhaps fortunate for Dartington School’s already-strained relation to the rest of the estate that Curry toed a more moderate line, placing his faith in the curative powers of freedom and ‘good feeling’ (akin to Professor Bartlett’s bluffly English suggestions to Leonard for sustaining community spirit) more than in liberating pupils from their repressions.³²⁴

Curry’s pedagogical commitments were more like the Russells’. They, too, dabbled in psychology – in their case favouring behaviourism, which was popular in America – but they chiefly framed their educational work as part of a wider project of social reconstruction.³²⁵ Bertrand Russell hoped that education, by encouraging cooperation and giving ‘the mental habits required for forming independent opinions’, would make democratic, humane and morally responsible citizens.³²⁶ Dora Russell focused on the potential of education to redefine community relations and authority: ‘by rearing a child in a free democratic community, rather than in the restrictions and shelter of his family patterns or under a school autocracy, we will prepare him better for life in the modern world’.³²⁷ The aim for both was international harmony and worldwide democracy, held together by an underlying sense of the unity of man.³²⁸ Curry, for whom Bertrand Russell was something of a ‘spiritual father’, was equally convinced that education was a means to an end.³²⁹ For him it was not, as for Neill, primarily

³²² A.S. Neill to W.B. Curry, 25 November 1932, T/DHS/B/21/C

³²³ A.S. Neill to W.B. Curry, 18 February 1933, T/DHS/B/21/C.

³²⁴ W.B. Curry, *The school*, 28, 31; Maurice Punch, ‘W.B. Curry (1900-1962): a re-assessment’, T/DHS/B/1/I. Nonetheless, through the 1930s Curry corresponded on teaching strategy with the educational psychologist and psychoanalyst Susan Isaacs, head of the newly formed department of child development of the University of London and previously a teacher at the experimental Malting House School (1924-1927). Isaacs contrasted Curry’s approach – ‘free from doctrinairism’ – favourably with that of Neill and the Russells, who applied psychological theory in a way that she considered ‘far too simple to fit the facts’. Isaacs to Curry, 29 May 1934, T/DHS/B/22/B.

³²⁵ Bertrand Russell turned to the study of American behaviourism when imprisoned for pacifism during the First World War. He applied it to his own children’s upbringing and at his school, but later lost enthusiasm. Richard F. Kitchener, ‘Bertrand Russell’s flirtation with behaviorism’, *Behavior and philosophy* 32 (2004), 275-91.

³²⁶ Bertrand Russell, *Principles of social reconstruction* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971 [1917]), 144-5. His later views on education were laid out in *On education: especially in early childhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957 [1926]) and *Education and the social order* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932).

³²⁷ Dora Russell, ‘Beacon Hill’, in Blewitt (ed.), *The modern schools handbook*, 29-42, at 41.

³²⁸ Philip Stander, ‘Bertrand Russell on the aims of education’, *The educational forum* 38 (1974), 447-56.

³²⁹ W.B. Curry read Bertrand Russell’s *Principles of social reconstruction* in 1919, and it fuelled his dual interests in education and peace, in particular in its emphasis on the necessity of the ‘reverence’ of those in authority towards the young (Maurice Punch, ‘W.B. Curry (1900-1962): a re-assessment’, T/DHS/B/1/I). There was a Dartington School saying in the 1930s, remembered by Michael Young: ‘There is no God but Russell and Curry is his prophet’ (*The Elmhursts*, 164). Some condemned this adulation. Curry ‘thinks that he is following the Bertrand Russell star,’ wrote psychologist William

about liberating the individual child; it was about liberating the child in order to liberate the world. 'I have never been able to get excited over teaching methods', he wrote – explaining, in part, the school's failure to make much of a mark in the history of progressive pedagogy – in his view Dartington's 'pioneering significance' was its social organisation.³³⁰

It was because of this focus on the end-goal that the NEF's influence on Curry and Dartington did not last. From the mid-1930s the organisation's membership widened to include more mainstream pedagogues.³³¹ Curry complained that it had become detached from the bigger picture; it was turning into 'a forum for the exchange of ideas, no matter of what sort', just when the international political situation was worsening and the NEF's earlier role as 'a propagandist body aiming to spread a particular class of ideas' was most essential.³³² It had lost sight of its foundational belief that 'radical changes in education were necessary if there was to be any chance of organising a peaceful world'.³³³ Wyatt Rawson, former Dartington teacher and now joint director of the English section of the NEF with Beatrice Ensor, tried unsuccessfully to placate Curry by explaining that 'to capture and help transform education throughout the World' the organisation must engage with 'official England'.³³⁴ Curry could not be persuaded of this line.

Instead, Dartington's headmaster became 'more and more desirous of linking my education work with some such notion as the Wellsian Open Conspiracy'.³³⁵ The idea behind H.G. Wells' influential *The open conspiracy: blue prints for a world revolution* was of a loose, decentralised network of individuals, an educated elite, dedicated to bringing about a rational and progressive vision of a 'politically, socially and economically unified' world.³³⁶ Like A.S. Neill and Bertrand Russell, Curry joined 'The Open Conspiracy Society', set up in 1932 by

Sheldon, 'but Bertrand Russell at thirty-five had lived an utterly different kind of life, and had built in the solidest of intellectual and academic foundations.' William Sheldon to the Elmhursts, 7 May 1935, DWE/G/9/E.

³³⁰ Curry, 'The school', 218.

³³¹ A reconsideration of principles by the New Education Fellowship was brought about particularly by the fact that its ideas been adopted to promote fascism in Italy. Jenkins, 'New Education and its emancipatory interests', 143; Brehony, 'Conferences', 754.

³³² W.B. Curry to Walter Laffan, 12 November 1936, T/DHS/B/10/D.

³³³ W.B. Curry to Miss Soper, 9 December 1936, T/DHS/B/10/D.

³³⁴ Wyatt Rawson to W.B. Curry, 31 October 1932, T/DHS/B/10/B. The particular debate was over the NEF's honouring Dr Cyril Norwood, chairman of the Board of Education's Secondary School Examinations Council and headmaster of Harrow. Norwood was a conservative who favoured discipline, chapel and the ideal of the traditional English gentleman. Curry was also strongly opposed to Norwood's interest in merging private schools with grammar schools in an elite national state system – seeing it as a plan that would impinge on progressive education's independence.

³³⁵ W.B. Curry to Lord Allen of Hurtwood, a fellow committee member for the English Association of New Schools, an organisation set up in 1932 under the auspices of the NEF, 29 December 1932, T/DHS/B/11/A.

³³⁶ H. G. Wells, *The open conspiracy: blue prints for a world revolution* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1928).

H.G. Wells and Cyril Joad for ‘the demonstration of the inter-relatedness of many progressive causes’.³³⁷ For Curry, the school was no longer the most effective vehicle for effecting urgently needed social and political reform. Detached from the NEF, no longer the central focus of its headmaster, in the late 1930s Dartington School sank in importance in the progressive landscape, as, in the late 1920s, it had in the landscape of the estate.

Curry was distracted from the slow-burn project of education by the more immediate necessity of campaigning for pacifist internationalism. He joined a broad sweep of intellectuals on the eve of the Second World War who argued that the only solution to militant nationalism was replacing nation-states with world democratic federation.³³⁸ He stopped innovating at Dartington and stopped lecturing to educational organisations so that he could devote his attention to promoting the idea of federal union, both to the general public and to such pacifist groups as the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) and the World Union of Freethinkers International Congress.³³⁹ In 1939 he published *The case for Federal Union*, which sold over 100,000 copies in six months.³⁴⁰ The attention it aroused was such that Conservative MP Harry Selley tried, unsuccessfully, to get the book suppressed by Parliament.³⁴¹ After the Second World War began Curry’s views shifted further. He resigned from the PPU, ‘no longer able to feel 100% Pacifist about the present war’, but he continued to campaign for federal union.³⁴² The sense of approaching catastrophe, overpowering the appeal of pacifism, was widespread both at Dartington and across the country.³⁴³

³³⁷ Also known as the Progressive League and the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals, its members, all called ‘vice presidents’, included Vera Brittain, Julian and Aldous Huxley, A.S. Neill, Bertrand Russell, Rebecca and Geoffrey West, Leonard Woolf and Barbara Wootton. Curry spoke regularly for the organisation and was given its presidency in 1937 on the basis that ‘no lecturer who has appeared on our platform has been more appreciated’ (Hugh Leakey to W.B. Curry, 12 October 1937, T/DHS/B/11/D). He remained president until 1945. Lesley A. Hall, “‘A city that we shall never find’? The search for a community of fellow progressive spirits in the UK between the wars’, *Family & community* 18 (2015), 24-36.

³³⁸ Federal Union, founded in 1938, had around 10,000 members in Britain by 1940, including Barbara Wootton, Lionel Curtis, Lord Lothian and Lord Beveridge. Andrew Bosco, ‘Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union movement (1938-4)’, *Journal of contemporary history* 23 (1988), 465-502. W.B. Curry, *The case for Federal Union* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), 20.

³³⁹ For a selection of invitations and speeches, T/DHS/B/8/A and B.

³⁴⁰ Curry received a huge array of responses to his book, from Europe and America and as far afield as New Zealand. Most were enthusiastic – including from Norman Angell, Julian Huxley, the Archbishop of York, members of the NEF and a German refugee who advocated everyone learning Esperanto as a way of forwarding the plan. Some objected to Federal Union’s oversimplification and lack of practicality. T/DHS/B/5/C and D. For the background to federal union see Mark Minion, ‘The Fabian Society and Europe during the 1940s: the search for a “socialist foreign policy”’, *European history quarterly* 30 (2000), 237-70.

³⁴¹ *Hansard Parliamentary debates*, House of Commons debates, 20 November 1941, vol. 376 (1941), column 506W.

³⁴² W.B. Curry to Stuart Morris, 8 June 1940, T/DHS/B/11/F.

³⁴³ Richard Overly describes this late-1930s shift among progressives more generally in the second half of *The morbid age*. W.B. Curry’s misgivings about pacifism in the late 1930s were common at Dartington – see, for example, ‘Notes on meeting on peace’, 11 March 1936, LKE/G/S5/H.

In the 1920s Dartington School pupils had a sense of being part of a unique, shared experiment in rural community-building.³⁴⁴ In the early 1930s, under the full blast of Curry's attentions, they continued to have a feeling of being at the centre of something of wider importance; although no longer making a key contribution to building utopia in the here-and-now, they were members of a progressive international elite being prepared as leaders for a reformed society. Curry was opposed to Federal Union or any other political movement being promoted in schools, seeing it as 'anti-educational' to enlist children in causes when their minds should still be 'open and searching' – in the same way that the Elmhursts had decided not to allow religious instruction at the school in the 1920s.³⁴⁵ Nonetheless, his early students picked up on his interest in and optimism about politics, with many joining the Communist Party or becoming pacifists.³⁴⁶ In the late 1930s, however, with their school detached from the wider landscape of progressive education and with their headmaster often distracted or absent, pupils were affected by 'a mood of fatalistic disillusionment'.³⁴⁷ Curry returned from campaigning once to find placards saying 'Down with Federal Union. We want our headmaster'.³⁴⁸ Where, at the start of the 1930s, he had seen education as superior to politics as a way of addressing world problems, his justification for his behaviour now was that 'education was too slow a process' to effect a peaceful world settlement after the war.³⁴⁹

Into the future

During the war, many parents withdrew their children from Dartington School, which was vulnerably close to the Plymouth docks. There was discussion of evacuating the remainder to America or Canada – although in the end the difficulties of organising and paying for this militated against it.³⁵⁰ Instead, the diminished school retreated to a small part of its premises. The three junior boarding houses and upper floor of the school were taken over for military billeting and the classrooms leased to the Local Education Authority for use by schools evacuated from London, Gravesend and Plymouth.³⁵¹ Many teachers were called up, or set to

³⁴⁴ Michael Young, interview with ex-pupils, sent to Kay Starr, 11 July 1944, LKE/G/35/A.

³⁴⁵ W.B. Curry, 'The school', 210.

³⁴⁶ Michael Young, interview with ex-pupils, sent to Kay Starr, 11 July 1944, LKE/G/35/A.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 183.

³⁴⁹ Dorothy sent Leonard an account of the meeting where W.B. Curry was criticised by the trustees and defended himself, 20 February 1941, DWE/DHS/3/A.

³⁵⁰ Letters related to possible evacuation of the school to Canada or America, T/DHS/B/20/C.

³⁵¹ Minutes of a trustees meeting, 1 December 1940; Philip Connolly, *Evacuees at Dartington 1940-1945* ([n.p.]: Northfleet Press, 1990).

work on the land as conscientious objectors.³⁵² In response to shortages of labour, an hour of ‘useful work’ was introduced into students’ routine, helping with domestic or farm tasks after breakfast – Curry’s school inadvertently taking on an echo of students’ community service at Siksha-Satra.³⁵³

In theory, this moment offered another chance for the school’s – and Dartington’s – progressive ideals to be shared with a wider base of people. Evacuees and the refugee children from Europe who had trickled into the estate in the 1930s rubbed shoulders with burned airmen – sent to Dartington so that they could walk in the protection of its shady woods – and with refugee artists.³⁵⁴ Yet the Elmhursts were distracted by the war, making a long tour of the USA to drum up support for Britain, and Curry was preoccupied with political campaigning. In place of any active effort to integrate the newcomers, there was a prevailing passive assumption that the refugee and working-class children from the inner cities would simply thrive because they were in a healthy rural environment: Dorothy saw Dartington’s ‘greatest contribution to the war’ as ‘the change we have brought about in all the hundreds of evacuee children’. Journalist H.N. Brailsford enthused over children exchanging ‘the squalor of their slums’ for ‘one of the loveliest corners of our island’, calling it a ‘social experiment of great promise’.³⁵⁵

In reality, although some new arrivals found Dartington ‘a golden world’, others were less happy there.³⁵⁶ Pupils of Dartington School proper remembered being ‘far too self contained and selfish’ to mix with the disoriented new arrivals.³⁵⁷ Dorothy’s unsympathetic response to two children who showed a ‘refugee mentality’ and were ‘unprepared to take their share in the daily obligations of the community’ was that they should be sent to join the ‘less favoured’ children at the Totnes day school, which would ‘bring them up against reality which they seem unable to face here at Dartington’.³⁵⁸ The war years, with their national narrative of ‘self-sacrifice, social levelling and community spirit’, brought the hope that

³⁵² For example, Raymond O’Malley and his wife went to farm in the Hebrides. Author interview with Etain Todds (née Kabraji), 17 May 2015.

³⁵³ [n.a.], ‘Report to Dartington Hall trustees, January 1941’, DWE/DHS/3/A.

³⁵⁴ The artists included Oskar Kokoschka, an Austrian expressionist painter, and Naum Slutzky, a designer for the Bauhaus. Author interview with Etain Todds (née Kabraji), 17 May 2015; author interview with Mary Bride Nicholson, 23 June 2016. Connolly, *Evacuees*.

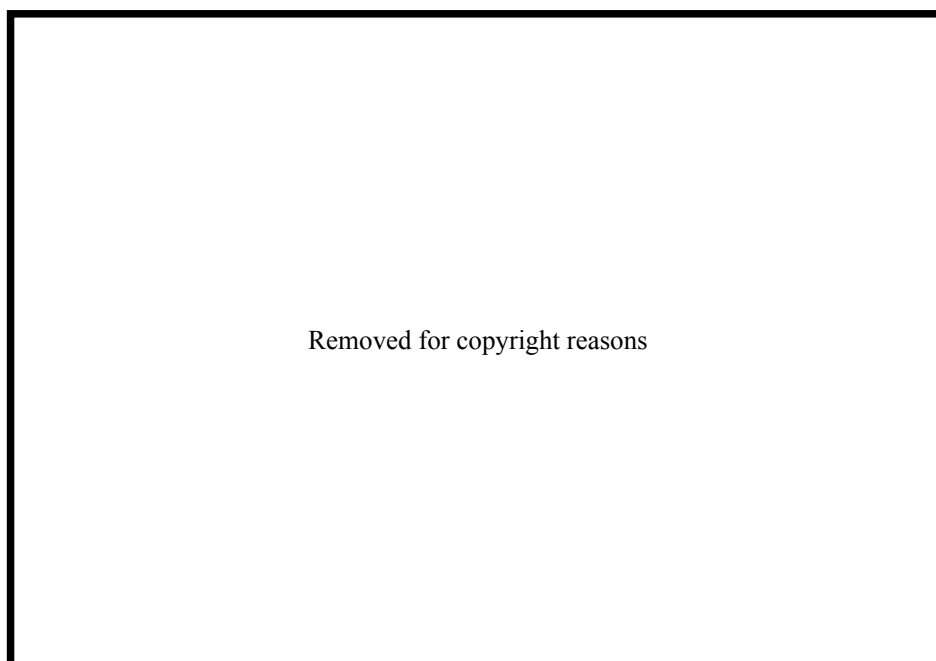
³⁵⁵ Dorothy to Simone Moser, 7 May 1941, DWE/S/2/B; H.N. Brailsford, ‘My American talk’, 1941, broadcast to the USA, DWE/S/2A/C.

³⁵⁶ Author interview with Etain Todds (née Kabraji), 17 May 2015. One evacuee drowned while swimming in the River Dart and was buried in the Dartington churchyard. Connolly, *Evacuees*.

³⁵⁷ Peggy Wales in De la Iglesia (ed.), *Recollections*, 22.

³⁵⁸ Dorothy to Mrs Margesson, 16 November 1940, DWE/S/2/A.

Dartington's ambitions were on their way to being writ large; dissent and uncooperativeness were not part of the programme.³⁵⁹



Newly-arrived evacuees by one of William Lescaze's boarding houses, 1940.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

The 1945 Labour victory seemed to promise that a reformed education would now be made available to all as part of an enhanced, egalitarian social order.³⁶⁰ Although Curry was still at the helm when Dartington School emerged, battered, from the war, his unwillingness to engage with the reconstruction of the national education system ran counter to the Elmhursts' growing desire to cooperate directly with the state.³⁶¹ He resisted government inspection. He explained his refusal in terms of the importance both of guarding the pedagogue's freedom to experiment and of resisting the 'modern tendency for the tentacles of the state to reach out further'.³⁶² The estate's trustees, conversely, saw engagement with central reconstruction as the way forward – while retaining its 'experimentalism', the school should be 'linked as

³⁵⁹ Jose Harris' suggestion that the concept of a socially-levelling, solidarity-building wartime should be taken with a pinch of salt is borne out by this kind of incident at Dartington. 'War and social history: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War', *Contemporary European history* 1 (1992), 17-35, at 17. Sonya Rose discusses the multiple, sometimes contending narratives of the Second World War in *Which people's war: national identity and citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁶⁰ Wooldridge, *Measuring the mind*, 253.

³⁶¹ 'The world is not visibly getting more liberal and I therefore feel that we should cling strongly to complete independence of action,' W.B. Curry wrote to Leonard, 18 May 1938, T/DHS/B/18/A. In the event, the first government inspection, carried out in 1950 under the 1944 Education Act, was not particularly critical, merely noting 'a peculiar difficulty about writing a report on this school since its life is determined by ideas about freedom'. Report by H.M. Inspectors on Dartington, 2 September 1950, T/DHS/B/18/C.

³⁶² W.B. Curry, 'Memorandum concerning inspection', [1949], T/DHS/B/18/C.

closely as possible with the Devonshire LEA and with the public school systems'.³⁶³ Their view was echoed by a new generation of educational progressives who would go on to concentrate their energies on state education rather than on autonomous experimental schools like Dartington.³⁶⁴ The New Education Fellowship, losing its centrality as a meeting place of progressive educators in consequence of this shift of focus to the state sector, turned its attention to international education instead, receiving funding from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, holding its post-war conferences in developing countries and, in 1970, renaming itself the World Education Fellowship.³⁶⁵

In 1965, the Elmhirsts' son-in-law Maurice Ash recorded an education colloquy at Dartington where accusations were made that progressive independent schools which cosseted their students in a protective environment and failed to engage with social injustices in the world outside were turning progressive education into an 'insignificant backwater'.³⁶⁶ The Elmhirsts, who by this point had far less faith in insular, independent experimentation than in 1925, agreed with this sentiment, but had to wait until the trustees appointed Dr Royston Lambert, a sociologist, as Dartington School's headmaster in 1968 before the direction of the school was altered in light of it.³⁶⁷ Lambert had undertaken research for the second Newsom Report, a government investigation that looked into integrating the private school and state school systems, and he wanted to increase Dartington's social integration both locally and nationally.³⁶⁸ His most successful scheme linked the school, through student exchanges, with Northcliffe High School in Conisbrough, a deprived coal-mining town in Yorkshire with which Leonard's family had close links.³⁶⁹ Elements of the Elmhirsts' early ambition for their

³⁶³ Michael Young to the Elmhirsts, 8 May 1944, LKE/G/35/A. Young later complained that W.B. Curry would 'not budge an inch when enduring another onslaught from me about the need for closer relations between Dartington and the general system of maintained school'. Michael Young, 'Progressive education at Dartington – 1930s to 1980s', the eighth W.B. Curry lecture delivered in the University of Exeter, 7 June 1984, T/DHS/B/1/I.

³⁶⁴ During and after World War Two, the NEF whole-heartedly engaged with planning post-war education. Jenkins, 'The New Education Fellowship 1920-1950', 121.

³⁶⁵ Selleck describes the NEF as 'another victim of fascism' (*English primacy education*, 25). Jenkins sees the move into world education as a response to the NEF's declining importance ('The New Education Fellowship 1920-1950', 131-2). The organisation's development after 1945 is covered by Christopher Clews in 'Reconstruction'.

³⁶⁶ Maurice Ash, *Who are the progressives now?* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.

³⁶⁷ W.B. Curry's morale and health declined during the Second World War, undermined by his sense that a 'world which appears to be so obstinately uninterested in its own survival is one in which long-term hopes for our sort of education are hard to sustain'. His resignation in 1957 was more-or-less forced on him by the trustees. He died in a car accident in 1962. Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 188-9.

³⁶⁸ Royston Lambert set out his plans in 'What Dartington will do', *New society* 13 (1969), 159-61.

³⁶⁹ The student exchanges lasted until the mid 1970s. There was also a scheme for raising the school leaving age by providing vocational education for fifteen-year-olds. The Conisbrough project was a touchstone for Michael Duane, head of the controversial Risinghill Comprehensive School in Islington, London, a rare and short-lived effort to build a radically progressive state school. Pat Kitto, *Dartington*

school to be useful to the wider community were finally realised, albeit not through supporting local regeneration.

Much in Dartington's direction of thought, as well as that of other progressive schools, was writ large in the post-war reform of the state system: the focus of teaching shifted 'from instructing students about subjects, to recognising students as subjects'.³⁷⁰ The prediction made to the Elmhursts by Sir Michael Sadler in 1927 that '[f]ifty years from now, the principles you are trying to establish will be recognised as inevitable in education' was not far off the mark.³⁷¹ Some of the groundwork for this development was laid in the state sector in the 1930s, but there is little evidence that Dartington and other independent progressive schools were directly significant in influencing government policy.³⁷² There were connections. In 1932, the Board of Education's official advisory committee on educational reform, led by Henry Hadow, catechised Wyatt Rawson about teaching practices on the estate and later produced six reports strongly infused with New Education philosophy.³⁷³ And when, in 1963, another review of primary education was set up, Michael Young, one of Dartington's pupils and then trustees, sat on the committee. The resultant Plowden Report widened many of the recommendations that Hadow had made – and Dartington had practised – in the 1930s, such as suggesting incorporating child psychology and experiential education into the state system.³⁷⁴ Overall, however, Dartington School was not a direct progenitor of progressive values in the state system. Nor did the Elmhursts' aspiration to tie lifelong education in with rural regeneration leave a significant practical legacy. The education schemes at Dartington, sitting amid a panoply of liberal and utopian ideas and projects in the 1920s and 30s, nonetheless foreshadowed and helped to temper the state mentality that would embrace progressive education after the war.

in *Conisbrough* (London: Libertarian Education, [2010]); Leila Berg, *Risinghill: death of a comprehensive school* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1968] 1974).

³⁷⁰ Thomson, *Psychological subjects*, 131; Harold Silver, *Education, change, and the policy process* (London: Falmer, 1990), 156.

³⁷¹ *News of the day*, 15 December 1927, T/PP/EST/1/001.

³⁷² Laura Tisdall finds that state-school teachers in the interwar years were often rather more whole-hearted in their embrace of progressive, child-centred theory than they were in the 1950s and 1960s, when they felt their position threatened by the 'permissive shift' in society as a whole. 'Teachers', 260 and passim.

³⁷³ Wyatt Rawson to Leonard, 23 October 1932, T/DHS/A/5/C. The six reports produced between 1923 and 1933 by Hadow's committee – whose members included Leonard's acquaintances R.H. Tawney and Albert Mansbridge – were strongly infused with New Education ideas. The most influential reports, *The education of the adolescent* (1926) and *The primary school* (1931), became standard handbooks for teachers. The latter, with strong echoes of Dartington's early educational ideals, introduced the school as 'not a place of compulsory learning, but a community of old and young, engaged in learning by cooperative experiment'. It recommended cross-disciplinary, project-based restructuring of the curriculum in 'closer correlation with the natural movement of children's minds' (*Report of the consultative committee on the primary school* ([n.p.]: H.M.S.O, 1931), xvii).

³⁷⁴ *Children and their primary schools* (Central Advisory Council for Education: London, 1967), 7.

3. THE ARTS

'[T]he Dance and Mime School, the Music and Drama undertakings at Dartington are not merely spires, finials and crockets, on a super-cowshed and factory farm, but are themselves essential parts of the structure.'

Gerald Heard (1934)¹

For the founders of Dartington, art was a source of unity in an age of specialisation, division and fragmentation. It was 'essential to any completeness' of life.² Yet there was considerable divergence in Leonard and Dorothy's understanding of the way the synthesising powers of art should be deployed. Dorothy followed the example of her father. William Collins Whitney was 'a lover of the arts', filling his house with 'Raphaels, Titians, Van Dykes' and holding musical soirées to support celebrated performers and young artists 'on the thresholds of their careers'.³ His youngest daughter became an avid collector and patron – in her case mainly of modernist art.⁴ She also, in the 1920s, began to see the creative process in spiritual terms, as a unity-seeking act that should be explored at Dartington alongside Gerald Heard's generating cell, part of the search for a central philosophy for herself and for the age. The professional artist began to take on a second guise for her, not the receiver of patronage, but a spiritual leader or guru. Once her close involvement with Dartington School came to an end on the appointment of the headmaster W.B. Curry, her main preoccupation became the nurturing of professional artists and her own creativity-driven spiritual self-exploration – the latter in the company of the former, insofar as possible.

This focus sat uneasily with the priorities of her husband. Leonard believed that art should be socially useful. While working with Rabindranath Tagore he had approvingly observed a community in which art was integral to the everyday, aiding 'the ultimate perfection of our relationship, first within our own complex personalities, then to one another as well'.⁵ Art was part of his overall ambition to regenerate the countryside by making life there as attractive as in the town – if not more so. Beyond its utility as a social unifier, he did not place a high value on it; it certainly did need not to be highly accomplished for it to be useful. Peter Cox,

¹ Gerald Heard, 'The Dartington experiment', *Architectural review* 449 (1934), 119-22, at 121.

² Dorothy, 'My talk in the Barn Theatre on the eve of my departure for Chekhov in America', [1939], DWE/A/15/E, Dartington Hall Archives (unless specified otherwise, all the following archival references are to this collection).

³ Dorothy, [n.d.], Sunday evening talk, 'Background and foreground – a personal pattern', DWE/S/1/E.

⁴ Dorothy's sister-in-law, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, was a similarly passionate patron of the arts, as well as a sculptor in her own right, founding the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1931.

⁵ Leonard, 'Dartington Hall and its department of the arts', [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/C. See also, Leonard Elmhirst, 'Personal memories of Tagore', in Kissoonsingh Hazareesingh (ed.), *A rich harvest: the complete Tagore/Elmhirst correspondence and other writings* (Stanley, Rose-Hill, Mauritius: Éditions de l'Océan Indien, c.1992).

Dartington's arts administrator from 1940 to 1983, thought that if Leonard had not married Dorothy he would have likely been content to have the arts embodied only in an education department.⁶

The Elmhursts' wealth and connections meant that their arts department drew in an international line-up that 'virtually comprises the creative and intellectual who's who of the period'.⁷ Along with British practitioners, artists came from backgrounds as diverse as the Cornish School of Music and the Chicago Little Theatre in America, the German Bauhaus, Danish International People's College and the *Mingei* ('art of the people') movement in Japan. Many of these artists shared the Elmhursts' interest in art's unifying potential. For some, that meant supporting Leonard's emphasis on the integrating power of amateur arts in the immediate community; for others, it meant pursuing their own professional careers with an eye to being spiritual leaders – along Dorothy's lines. The new arrivals also brought new variants on the theme of unity. There was the aspiration to unify the arts themselves – inspired both by the Arts and Crafts movement and by the influence of contemporaries such as Wassily Kandinsky and Rudolph Steiner. There was a desire to defend the unity of process, ensuring the craftsman remained in charge of his product from beginning to end, rather than being subordinated to the needs of industrial production. As the international political landscape grew stormy in the 1930s, there were, in addition, pressing debates over whether art ought to be a manifestation of the unified local community, the nation, or international society.

Whether oriented around individual fulfilment or community integration, or focused on spiritual, political or economic ends, hopes at Dartington for the completeness that was offered by the arts echoed aesthetic ideas and projects outside the estate.⁸ They were a part of a wider constellation of holistically-minded responses to developments of the nineteenth century: to rapid mechanisation, commercialisation and specialisation; to the sense that traditional religious forms were not enough; to the fears about a social atomism wrought by laissez-faire liberalism. The Arts and Crafts movement, which responded to these developments in the nineteenth century by holding up the figure of the artist-craftsman as a symbol of unity in an artificially fragmenting world, was a forerunner and inspiration for

⁶ Michael Young interview with Peter Cox, 24 May 1978, T/HIS/S20/D. Cox came to Dartington in 1940 and oversaw the arts department's transformation first into the Arts Centre in 1955, then into the College of Arts in 1961.

⁷ Sam Smiles, 'Refuge or regeneration: Devon's twentieth century identity', in Sam Smiles (ed.), *Going modern and being British: art, architecture and design in Devon c. 1910-1960* (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1998), 1-14, at 11.

⁸ Tom Crook, 'Craft and the dialogics of modernity: the Arts and Crafts Movement in late-Victorian and Edwardian England', *The journal of modern craft* 2 (2009), 17-32, at 26.

much that went on at Dartington.⁹ The artist-craftsman stood for unity – of the spirit, heart and hand; of the processes of production; and between community members.

In spite of a common sense that disunity, fragmentation and specialisation were the problems, the various artists and strands of thought about the purpose of the arts at Dartington butted against one another and were not easily reconciled. In particular, there was tension between Dorothy and Leonard's viewpoints, which to an extent exemplified a wider debate in the early twentieth century between modernist 'formalist' art – 'eschewing any wide social or historical meanings in its quest for self-sufficiency' – and avant-garde 'functionalism' which, building on Arts and Crafts ideals, 'worked to restore the medieval integration of art and life'.¹⁰ The failure to reconcile this and other tensions, and the difficulty in finding a coherent policy for the arts department, meant that in the late 1930s and the 1940s the Elmhursts gravitated away from making the estate itself a replicable model for how the arts should unite society – as they had at first hoped – and towards it contributing instead to centralised initiatives to reform the place of the arts. Between 1925 and 1945 diverse programmes were initiated at Dartington in drama, dance, music, arts education, film, crafts and the visual arts.¹¹ In this chapter, the focus is chiefly on theatre, dance and the crafts, as the disciplines that were most central to the debates on the estate about how art could improve society.

The development of the arts department falls into three distinct phases. At the beginning, the community-minded strand dominated. A series of artists arrived – dancers, musicians, potters, painters, mime-artists, sculptors – invited by Dorothy, by other people on the estate, or introduced by outside supporters. They slotted in, in a variety of ways: some were given significant grants or salaries, others cheap housing or studios and some nothing more than the opportunity to pursue their art in lively surroundings. In spite of a lack of close definition of their function and terms of engagement, they tended to share Leonard's view that the artist should contribute to the immediate community: they organised exhibitions, gave evening classes, taught at the school and offered their designs to estate industries such as furniture-making.

⁹ The transformation of Arts and Crafts ideals by the artists and craftsmen of the early twentieth century is covered by Tanya Harrod in *The crafts in Britain in the twentieth century* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1999) and by Michael Saler in *The avant-garde in interwar England: medieval modernism and the London Underground* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Michael Saler's term for the 'functionalists' is 'medieval modernists' in consequence of their desire to restore the integration of the Middle Ages to the present day. *The avant-garde*, 5 and 19. The 'old medieval sense of community solidarity and interdependence' was also a frequent device for framing ambitions for Dartington (John Wales to W.K. Slater, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B).

¹¹ A more exhaustive overview of all the arts is given by Victor Bonham-Carter in *Dartington Hall: the formative years, 1925-1957* (Dulverton, Somerset: The Exmoor Press, 1970). Peter Cox covers a later period in *The arts at Dartington, 1940-1983: a personal account* (Exeter: Short Run Press, 2005).

In 1929 the Elmhirsts established a central office to increase the efficiency and profitability of the estate. Along with this development came a more formal accounting system, a re-structuring of the departments and a managing director, scientist W.K. Slater. Soon after, the arts department, too, underwent formalisation. An arts administrator was appointed. Chris Martin's values differed greatly from those that had held sway in the department's informal first phase. They were closer to Dorothy's than to Leonard's – in the sense that he wanted to employ more professional artists and to make the estate a centre of international renown, instead of placing emphasis on amateurism and a holistically integrated local life. His appointment was an example of how Dorothy's views shaped Dartington, in spite of Leonard's influence being more evident in the estate's day-to-day running. Some of the early artists departed and were replaced by others with more established reputations, many of them refugees from Europe. The new arrivals also hoped their art would promote social unity, but in a more abstract sense that was often related to questions of spiritual transcendence and unity between the arts. They tended to understand their ideals as best furthered by their excelling at their own practice and promoting it to a wider audience, rather than by their engaging with locals and estate employees.

The onset of the Second World War brought this second phase to a close. The refugee artists were either interned as aliens, or ordered by the government to leave the estate – as Dartington was close to the coast and to the Plymouth docks. Leonard's notion of the arts as socially useful returned to the fore – this time, however, oriented not to the local community group, but to integrating the arts into the reconstruction of the post-war state. The culmination of this was the Elmhirsts' sponsoring of the Arts Enquiry, a uniquely comprehensive investigation into the state of the visual arts, music and film in England and Wales.¹² It had a significant influence on arts policy in the late 1940s and contributed to Dartington's becoming an esteemed hub for arts education after the war.

In the unity-seeking ambitions for the arts at Dartington up to the end of the Second World War there were recurring themes. Each will be woven into this approximately chronological survey and elaborated on at the point at which it came forward. The earliest arising was the debate between formalism and functionalism (roughly, Dorothy versus Leonard), which was intertwined with ideas about art's spiritual role. The second was the tension between the craftsman-controlled, unified production process and more commercially-oriented notions of

¹² The Arts Enquiry, *The visual arts: a report sponsored by the Dartington Hall trustees* (London: PEP, 1946).

the relation between art and industry – with the latter gradually winning out. The third was the question of unifying the art forms themselves, which became central to the shape of the arts department in the 1930s. Also arising mainly in the 1930s, there was the issue of the type of community that art was intended to unify – whether it should be the local ‘folk’, the nation, or a harmonious, global society. An emphasis on the ‘altogetherness of everything’ joined all these interconnecting themes, opposing itself to the fragmenting tendencies of modernity. The medieval community was a common touchstone throughout the years and themes – harking back to a time when ‘the church or the churchyard served as the national theatre’, ‘music, dance and drama’ were drawn together and the arts were not ‘special subjects’, but ‘part and parcel of a way of life’.¹³

Community-minded beginnings

For Leonard, art was a unifying force both psychologically and socially – he saw the arts as ‘increasing our own sensitivity in every direction’.¹⁴ But it was the social aspect that he identified as being of most use to Dartington. In the first years, when Dorothy was pre-occupied with the school, she allowed his aims to prevail in the promotion of amateur art, at the same time herself building up a collection of the artwork of less socially-minded modernists.¹⁵ Creative pursuits twined into the life of the estate in a typical week:

We have a Dancing class every Tuesday night which is great fun. It consists of the older boys in the school, the school staff, some of the workers on the Estate, the maids in the house, and one or two outsiders [...] Then on Wednesday evenings we all sing together in a big chorus [...] Here again, the Estate people join us, the farmer, the gardener, etc [...] Before Christmas, we, as school staff, have a play, ‘The Importance of being Earnest’, for all our own people on the Estate.¹⁶

Many of the artists and other residents arriving on the estate in the early years also viewed art as something that would contribute to integrating the community. A rich adult education

¹³ Leonard, ‘Talk to Plymouth Playgoers’ Circle’, 10 March 1935, LKE/G/S8/A.

¹⁴ Leonard, ‘Dartington Hall and its department of the arts’, [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/C.

¹⁵ Many of the artists she collected were members of the Seven and Five (later, 7 & 5) Society, some of whom spent time at the artist’s community in St Ives, Cornwall, relatively close to Dartington. In the 1930s the Society mostly focused on abstract art – seen as a symbol of liberation from the constraints of everyday life, and therefore very much at a remove from the socially constructive ideals for art at Dartington. Dorothy’s collection included work by Christopher Wood, Frances Hodgkins, Winifred and Ben Nicholson, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Henry Moore, Eric Gill, David Jones, Graham Sutherland, John Piper, Alfred Wallis and Jacob Epstein. H.S. ‘Jim’ Ede, a collector himself and a curator at the Tate, encouraged Dorothy to start a public gallery at Dartington, but although she showed interest, the idea never took off. Jim Ede to Dorothy, 11 October 1935, DWE/A/1; Rachel Esther Harrison, ‘Dorothy Elmhirst and the visual arts at Dartington Hall 1925-1945, unpublished PhD, University of Plymouth, 2002, 76 and 80-1; Alexandra Harris, *Romantic moderns: English writers, artists and the imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), 18-9.

¹⁶ Dorothy to Frances ‘Blix’ Livingstone, 11 February 1927, DWE/G/7/A.

programme sprang up. The school music teacher, Nevison Robson, ran an estate choir; Erica Inman, the school secretary, started a drama club. By 1930, thirty people belonged to the drama club, ten to the competing drama group and thirty-five to the singing club.¹⁷ At the estate Sunday evening meetings, discussion about and performance of the arts were central. Leonard wrote that these meetings should ‘be devoted to the kind of subject and interest that is not a part of our daily lives; and should be designed to carry us into the fields of music, art, literature, ideas, religion and so on’.¹⁸

The expressionist dancer Margaret Barr embodies the philosophy of these years.¹⁹ Prior to arriving at Dartington she was at the Cornish School in Seattle, set up by Dorothy’s friend Nellie Cornish to promote integrated education in the arts.²⁰ With Leonard’s backing, Barr worked in Devon to promote village drama. F.G. Thomas, an adult educator employed by the Workers’ Educational Association, helped her run a pioneering drama class in the Dartmoor village of Liverton. Their aim was for the villagers ‘to create directly from their own every day experiences’, instead of ‘having plays thrust upon them out of their sphere’.²¹ With Leonard, both Barr and Thomas saw drama as a better way of drawing country people into adult education than the Workers’ Educational Association’s (WEA) ‘lecturitis’ and ‘too frequent worship of the idea of “discussion”’.²² Their view spoke to a wider concern among interwar adult educationists that, while the WEA approach had served urban areas well, a more vividly experiential alternative was needed for rural dwellers.²³ ‘It was a question not of applying to rural the precedents of urban areas, but of striking out a new line,’ wrote R.H. Tawney.²⁴

¹⁷ Education committee minutes, 19 February 1930, T/DHS/A/4/C.

¹⁸ Sunday evening meeting committee minutes, 4 October 1929, T/DHS/A/4/C.

¹⁹ Margaret Barr, born in India to American-English parents, was heavily influenced by the nationalist, modern American dance of Martha Graham. Her own dance style received high acclaim while she was at Dartington, and even more so at her subsequent base in London. Victor Bonham-Carter, *Land and environment: the survival of the English countryside* (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), 142.

²⁰ Established in Seattle 1914 as a music school, the Cornish School quickly expanded to encompass drama, dance and the visual arts, Nellie Cornish believing that artists were best educated through exposure to all art forms. In 1977 the school was fully accredited to offer degrees and to continues to the present as the Cornish College of the Arts. Ellen Van Volkenburg Browne and Edward Nordhoff Beck (eds.), *Miss Aunt Nellie: the autobiography of Nellie C. Cornish* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964).

²¹ [n.a.], ‘Report of year’s work, Sept 1932-July 1933’, T/AD/2/A.

²² Leonard quoted in F.G. Thomas, ‘Birthday party at Hay Tor’, *Western times*, 2 December 1927, British Library Newspaper Archives.

²³ ‘Villages think differently from townspeople’, wrote F.G. Thomas, they ‘ruminate’. ‘Notes on the village centres’, 1928, LKE/EDU/1-9. Lawrence Goldman, ‘Education as politics: university adult education in England since 1870’, *Oxford review of education* 25 (1999), 89-101.

²⁴ R.H. Tawney discusses this in the introduction to F.G. Thomas, *The new learning: an experiment with educational films in the county of Devon* (Worker’s Educational Association: London, 1932), 8.

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Margaret Barr's Funeral and Wedding, performed in Dartington's main hall, 1931.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

Barr also ran a small professional group of dance and mime on the estate, which was dedicated both to unifying the arts and to unifying the estate community by drawing in amateurs. 'She has all of us dancing, workmen, apprentices, and even the children in the village school,' wrote Dorothy.²⁵ Barr hoped to create something more vibrant and unified than was offered by formal theatre – to 'visualize a new Theatre-form springing from movement, sound, form, light and colour'.²⁶ More than this, she wanted her group to produce art that was connected to ordinary people's everyday lives, contributing to 'the liberation of the workers by means of culture and self-expressiveness'.²⁷ The group's choice of subject included *The People, The Factory, Funeral and Wedding* – political and cycle-of-life dramas that drew on communism, laced with critical messages about economic and social conditions and populated with such figures as 'capitalist smoking a cigar' and 'papal figure and people working like a machine in a papal factory'.²⁸ The group's performances with amateurs were expressly not about the paternalistic setting of high professional standards: art was 'born of the community itself – not projected in from the outside'.²⁹ Margaret Barr's activities adhered more closely to Leonard's ideals than Dorothy's, although her intensely political viewpoint

²⁵ Dorothy to Anna Bogue, 7 October 1930, DWE/US/2/F.

²⁶ Margaret Barr and group to the Elmhursts, 'General principles', July 1934, T/AD/2/B.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Leonard in transcripts for 'Man alive', a programme for the BBC transmitted 29 November 1972, editor Adam Clapham, producer Richard Thomas, LKE/G/S13/L.

²⁹ Margaret Barr, 'Dance-mime work', 1933, T/AD/2/B.

meant that she never truly fitted with either of the Elmhursts: ‘she was too far out – left’, another dancer remembered, and Dorothy and Leonard preferred to conceive of their social improvement in more apolitical terms.³⁰ Once the professional phase of the arts began at Dartington she fell out of favour, leaving in 1934 to work in London.

A second central figure in this period was the first head of the visual arts, the potter Jane Fox-Strangways, who was passionate about ‘trying to get people to realise the artistic side of whatever they were doing’.³¹ She opened her studio to the whole estate and held regular ‘Design and Workmanship’ exhibitions. These exhibitions, of ‘any portable work done on the Estate by anyone of any age, which has been made with an eye to beauty of design’, emphasised that ‘craft’ could extend even to the act of typing or polishing boots.³² Her ideological position was one that united all available media – ‘tinged with Bauhausian ideas on the unity of the arts’ – although it manifested more in practical work in the community than in high-level theorisation.³³ Fox-Strangways shared Dorothy’s sense that creativity was a quasi-religious act, almost ‘as necessary as breathing’;³⁴ she also shared Leonard’s belief that art could and should be socially and economically useful. If all were taught creative expression, she wrote, ‘artists will no longer be a race apart, and the improvement of commercial design no longer a problem’.³⁵

In these first days, both Dorothy and Leonard conceived of Dartington in contradistinction to surrounding institutions; it was one of the ‘schemes outside all the orthodox tracks’ that would help reform civilisation in the wake of the Great War.³⁶ They were reluctant to publicise their early efforts at using art as a means of community building, just as they were reluctant to commit to working with outside institutions in the field of education. They were still experimenting. Dorothy put off a request for an article by Geoffrey Whitworth, founder of the British Drama League – an organisation which also aimed to promote the relationship between drama and the life of the community. She explained that the process by which

³⁰ The comment is Paula Morel’s, quoted in David Edward Hilton, ‘Film and the Dartington experience’, unpublished PhD, University of Plymouth, 2004, 35. Lorraine Nicholas discusses Barr’s radical politics in *Dancing in utopia: Dartington Hall and its dancers* (Alton, Hampshire: Dance Books, 2007).

³¹ Education committee minutes, 25 October 1929, T/DHS/A/4/C. Christened Sylvia, although she was always known as Jane at Dartington, Fox-Strangways was recommended to the Elmhursts by Bernard Leach, with whom she worked at St Ives. Her involvement in the arts department from 1927 to 1929 was brought to an end by ill health, but she remained friends with Dorothy.

³² *News of the day*, 9 October 1928, T/PP/EST/1-8.

³³ David Jeremiah, ‘Beautiful things: Dartington and the art of the potter and weaver’, in Tanya Harrod (ed.), *Obscure objects of desire: reviewing the crafts in the twentieth century* (London: Crafts Council 1997), 163-76, at 166.

³⁴ Jane Fox-Strangways, ‘First art studio at Dartington Hall’, 1927, T/AAP/3/A.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

professional artists and estate workers were ‘finding in dance and drama the imaginative explanation of their lives’ was ‘still in its infancy’.³⁷ J.G. Trevena, district secretary to the WEA, who suggested Leonard give a lecture on the arts and adult education, got even shorter shrift. ‘Our whole experiment at present is dependent for its success on our keeping our mouths shut in public’, Leonard wrote in 1927.³⁸

If, in these early years, Barr and Fox-Strangways stood mostly for Leonard’s hope that art could strengthen community, the American painter Mark Tobey represented Dorothy’s growing perception of creativity as a source of spiritual succour – that ‘through the arts, man finds the unity and harmony that his soul is forever seeking’.³⁹ Besides pursuing his own art, Tobey gave estate drawing classes, taught at the school, worked with Barr’s dance-mime school and with a group exploring documentary film.⁴⁰ In all of this, he was fuelled by a fervent spirituality. He was a Baha’i. He gathered a group of other faith-seekers around him, including Dorothy and the potter Bernard Leach, who set up a workshop at Dartington in 1932.⁴¹ One of Tobey’s teaching methods, which charmed many, was to emphasise the connection between body and spirit by pinning up huge sheets of paper in the studio and asking students ‘to experience the whole being making marks with chalk to music’.⁴²

Leach and Tobey, like many others who came to Dartington, saw their objective as artists in society as being to feel towards a spiritualised ‘human synthesis’.⁴³ As well as integrating the material and spiritual worlds, this meant overcoming perceived divisions between the artist and the rest of society, and between the various art forms themselves. Their work at Dartington offered the possibility of bridging that gap through reforming art education. For Tobey, conventional education systems invoked a ‘feeling of separateness resulting in specialized avenues of thought’.⁴⁴ He was determined that his teaching role was not to make ‘artists in the more or less accepted views’, but to help his pupils ‘towards the realm or identity of being’, so that they became ‘better equipped to know of what a real unity is

³⁷ Dorothy to Geoffrey Whitworth, 25 November 1931, DWE/A/11/C.

³⁸ Leonard to J.G. Trevena, 3 November 1927, LKE/EDU/1/A.

³⁹ Dorothy to R.A. Edwards, 2 August 1942, DWE/G/S3/G. Mark Tobey, dubbed ‘the Sage of Seattle’, came from the Cornish School like Margaret Barr, and was at Dartington from 1931 to 1938. His problematic relationship with the arts department’s new administrator Chris Martin then resulted in his return to America. He painted Cubist-style landscapes and still lives and later became a pioneer in mining traditional Asian culture as a resource for Western modernist art.

⁴⁰ Hilton, ‘Film and the Dartington experience’, 35; Beatrice Straight describes the success of Tobey’s drawing classes in a letter to Nancy Wilson Ross, 11 October 1935, 156/2, Nancy Wilson Ross Archives.

⁴¹ Beatrice Straight to Nancy Wilson Ross, 1 January 1937, 156/2, Nancy Wilson Ross Archives. See chapter 4 for more on Bernard Leach’s work at Dartington.

⁴² Martin Sharp, *Michael Chekhov: the Dartington years* (DVD, Palomino Films, 2002).

⁴³ Bernard Leach, *A potter’s book* ([n.p.]: Faber & Faber, 1940), 9.

⁴⁴ Mark Tobey, ‘What is an artist?’, 10 May 1936, MC/S4/42/F1.

composed – not uniformity – but unity of related parts’.⁴⁵ He was the first of a number of artist-gurus to whom Dorothy would turn for guidance in seeking spiritual unity.

In the absence of a shared religion, or a comprehensive manifesto from the Elmhirsts about what they were trying to do, art in the 1920s offered a centre for the community. The artists drawn to the estate realised Leonard’s dream of improving society by joining together school pupils, employees and the surrounding villagers in creative endeavour, and Dorothy’s of exploring quasi-religious possibilities. The apogee of this was a production of Milton’s *Comus* in 1929, organised by two Americans, theatre producer Maurice Browne and puppeteer Ellen van Volkenburg, both founders of the progressive Chicago Little Theatre.⁴⁶ The Elmhirst family, along with other amateurs from the estate, took central roles.⁴⁷ The play incorporated many of Dartington’s dancers, musicians and designers. It drew a considerable local audience, who sat cheek-by-jowl with visitors from London and abroad on wooden boards that had been laid out on the lawn.⁴⁸ Leonard was confident that it had ‘lifted us out of ourselves’, giving a truly utopian ‘glimpse of what might be’.⁴⁹ Afterwards, he sent round a questionnaire that summarised his ambitions for the arts: ‘All down the ages the Church has used drama to bring focus to bear on the deeper meaning of life. Do you think drama can yet be made, in any way, an expression of the deeper significance of our life here as a community?’⁵⁰ The surviving answers were cautiously optimistic. Wyatt Rawson thought that, while the estate was establishing itself, ‘not much energy can wisely be diverted into such a field’, but at the same time thoroughly supported ‘the idea of drama (i.e. symbolic action) as an opportunity for common self-expression’.⁵¹

The next decade saw a swing away from these early, amateur-oriented ideals, towards professional values and ambitions for success on the national and international stage. A large motivation behind the bringing in of Chris Martin, the arts administrator who instigated this shift, was Leonard’s concern to make sure that the arts department, like every other department on the estate, was contributing to the economic life of the community.

⁴⁵ Mark Tobey, ‘paper for reading to first drawing class’, 1931, T/AV/1A.

⁴⁶ Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg were part of the America-wide Little Theatre Movement, established in 1912, which sought to free experimental theatre from the limitations imposed by the need to make money. Browne’s play *The unknown warrior* was performed to great acclaim in London and at Dartington. The Elmhirsts then backed his subsequent production of R.C. Sherriff’s *Journey’s end*, one of the few arts endeavours which made them significant money. Donald F. Tingley, ‘Ellen Van Volkenburg, Maurice Browne and the Chicago Little Theatre’, *Illinois historical journal* 80 (1987), 130–46.

⁴⁷ *News of the day*, 24 May 1929, T/PP/EST/1.

⁴⁸ Herbert Mills, reminiscences, 21 January 1970, LKE/G/31/E.

⁴⁹ Leonard, notebook, 14 July 1929, LKE/G/S17/C/23.

⁵⁰ Leonard, 1929 questionnaire, 4 November 1929, T/ADR/2/A.

⁵¹ Wyatt Rawson to the Elmhirsts, November 1929, T/DHS/A/5/C.

(a) *Arts and Crafts or art for industry?*

'In my mind I have defined your estate, its communal, industrial and educational life as a refined and sand-papered microcosm of the world [...] I have tried to place the artist in relationship to this microcosm. He is a terrific difficulty...'

William McCance (1929)⁵²

For Dorothy, as for her father, the artist's relationship with the economy was simple: 'great artists' should be sheltered from it by their patrons – their role was not to contribute to the financial wellbeing of society but to its spiritual or purely aesthetic health.⁵³ The Scottish artist William McCance, who tried to join the estate, articulated the opposite extreme: for McCance, the artist was 'a misfit in any commonwealth which is based on utilitarian and economic values, and every commonwealth must be of this nature'.⁵⁴ Instead of being 'a dead weight on the young community', the artist must 'drop his artistic identity into the will of common effort' and take up 'ordinary' work 'amongst the actual workmen'.⁵⁵ Leonard, while not going quite this far, certainly preferred to think of Dartington as a blueprint for how art could be made integral to the life of every village, rather than a 'rich man's phantasy' of subsidised professionals.⁵⁶ McCance's stance resonated with him and he offered him a starting post as a smithy's apprentice. McCance did not take it – perhaps put off by the prospect of hard graft, perhaps by Leonard's warning that 'readiness of tongue might lead you into trouble with a number of practical minded people on the Estate' – but Leonard went on looking for ways to make the arts department a source for economic as well as social integration at Dartington.⁵⁷ As a side note: in spite of a wider feminist engagement with the crafts in interwar Britain, they remained a peculiarly male province in the interwar years at Dartington, which is reflected in the language of the following.⁵⁸

⁵² William McCance to Leonard, 30 January 1929, LKE/G/22/E.

⁵³ Dorothy, 'The arts at Dartington', 21 February 1950. DWE/A/4/E.

⁵⁴ William McCance, painter, teacher and art critic, worked in Wales for the Gregynog Press but flirted briefly with the idea of moving to Dartington. The ambitions of Gregynog founders Gwendoline and Margaret Davies bore a close resemblance to those of the Elmhursts. They wanted their estate to become both an arts community and a centre for social improvement. Although the printing press was the only craft enterprise to take off, the sisters were energetic patrons of the arts – endowing the Aberystwyth Arts and Crafts Museum and helping establish the National Council Music. Their social reform work included supporting the Welsh School of Social Service, the League of Nations Union Advisory Educational Committee and the Distressed Areas Conferences. Dorothy A. Harrop, *A history of the Gregynog Press* (Middlesex: Private Libraries Association, 1980).

⁵⁵ William McCance to Leonard, 30 January 1929, LKE/G/22/E.

⁵⁶ Leonard, note on Dartington's financial structure, January 1931, LKE/G/S11A.

⁵⁷ William McCance to Leonard, 30 January 1929 and Leonard to McCance, 6 March 1929, LKE/G/22/E.

⁵⁸ The notable exception was weaver Elizabeth Peacock, who between 1933 and 1938 created a series of banners for the Great Hall representing each department of Dartington. But her stay on the estate was very brief and she was largely based at Ditchling even when making these banners, working with

In spite of Leonard's demands for facts and figures, and his push for cooperating with industry, Dorothy's view tended to predominate in the case of the arts proper. The crafts were a different matter. As a potential part of the commercial side of operations, Leonard saw them as subject to the 'economic yardstick'.⁵⁹ In the 1920s, the crafts were carried out on a sufficiently small scale that disagreement over the formalist and functionalist views of their role did not become a central issue. It was understood that they were there as much to expand the horizons of the school's pupils as to create rural jobs. Pottery, the school prospectus declared, would demonstrate 'an art which is directly related to the needs of our life': 'A department definitely engaged in the production of pots for use, as well as in the research that is necessary for building up an old handicraft, can play an important part in the following out of our ideal of education.'⁶⁰ In the 1930s, however, tensions started to mount. With the appointment of a managing director to oversee the tightening of estate finances, there was a definite schism between those who envisaged artist-craftsmen as industrial technicians and those who saw them as the last bastion against the advance of mechanised industry and mechanised, economics-driven life in general. Of the main three crafts on the estate, furniture-making was relatively lucrative and therefore less uncontroversial. The other two, a weaving enterprise and a pottery, both continuously lost money and became battle grounds between those who saw financial success as a *sine qua non* and those for whom Dartington should be a source of patronage or of a mode of artistic life beyond 'the cash nexus'.⁶¹

Arguments over the position of artist-craftsmen at Dartington were connected to other efforts to adapt Arts and Crafts ideals to the economic and social realities of the twentieth century, both in Britain and further afield.⁶² Bernard Leach, for instance, was a member of the Japanese White Birch Group, a coterie of artists and intellectuals inspired by, among others, William Morris and Rabindranath Tagore, and who were concerned with the preservation of creativity in labour.⁶³ The group set up Atarashiki mura ('the New Village') on the outskirts of Tokyo in 1918, a utopian community endeavour combining education, the arts and agriculture in a

fellow women weavers including Ethel Mairet. Lucy Delap discusses the intersection between crafts and feminism in *The feminist avant-garde: transatlantic encounters of the early twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapter 6.

⁵⁹ The 'economic yardstick' or 'measuring stick' was a favourite idea of Leonard's, picked up during his time at Cornell University. His insistence on such measurement was noted, for instance, by Bernard Leach. Leach to Leonard, 6 December 1932, T/AAP/3/A2.

⁶⁰ [n.a.], untitled note on the school 'as an extension of our statement in the prospectus', [n.d.], T/DHS/A/1/A.

⁶¹ John Wales to W.B. Curry, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B.

⁶² Tanya Harrod gives an account of these in *Crafts in the twentieth century*, 95 and chapter 3, as does Michael Saler in *The avant-garde*, *passim*.

⁶³ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 'Beyond utopia: new villages and living politics in modern Japan and across frontiers', *History workshop journal* 85 (2018), 47-71.

fashion notably similar to Dartington. Leach also had close links with the crafts community at Ditchling in Sussex, where the weaver Ethel Mairet, calligrapher Edward Johnston, sculptor Eric Gill and others hoped to demonstrate a unified craftsmen's community along Morrisian lines.⁶⁴ At Ditchling and Atarashiki mura, the objective was integration – of the creative process with the economic, the spiritual with the material, the individual with the community. Eric Gill complained that the lack of creativity permitted to factory workman meant that they became 'obedient tools, ants rather than men'.⁶⁵ Leach agreed: the craft tradition alone represented the 'unifying culture out of which fresh traditions can grow'; it was the counterbalance to all the objectionable divisions in modern society – the rupture between work and leisure, craftsmanship and industry, art and religion, East and West.⁶⁶

This was a strand of thinking that wove through interwar social and economic thought across Britain – but it was not uncontested. For some reformers, the way to heal the rifts generated by industrialism was not to escape to a craft utopia, but to 'spiritualize capitalism' with art.⁶⁷ London Transport manager Frank Pick thought the 'transcendent spirit of art' could restore a moral dimension to capitalist society.⁶⁸ He commissioned Edward Johnston of Ditchling to draw up a London Transport alphabet and sought out artists and architects to design posters and stations that would integrate good design with the everyday.⁶⁹ The economic slump of the 1930s gave fresh impetus to such efforts; artists, pushed into poverty, were forced to diversify into industry and commercial activity.⁷⁰ The government picked up on the idea. It saw the lack of integration between design and industry as a significant factor in exacerbating Britain's economic difficulties and set up the Council for Art and Industry in 1934 to improve design in the products of industry, making Pick the first chairman.⁷¹ There was, however, on-going ambiguity over how the crafts fitted into this new organisation: for some, the Council was intended to incorporate hand-makers; for others – including the refugee Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius – it should stand for the success of a brave new world of modernist design,

⁶⁴ Emmanuel Cooper, *Bernard Leach: life & work* (New Haven, Conn; London: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁶⁵ Eric Gill, *Art and a changing civilisation* (London: John Lane, 1934), viii; for more on Eric Gill's views see Fiona MacCarthy, *Eric Gill* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1989).

⁶⁶ Bernard Leach laid out his ideas about the place of the craftsman in contemporary society in *A potter's book* ([n.p.]: Faber & Faber, 1940), 4 and 10.

⁶⁷ Saler, *The avant-garde*, vii.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 92-6.

⁶⁹ John Elliot, 'Pick, Frank (1878–1941)', rev. Michael Robbins, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35522>, accessed 28 May 2018].

⁷⁰ Andrew Stephenson, 'Strategies of situation: British modernism and the slump, c.1929-1934', *Oxford art journal* 14 (1991), 30-51.

⁷¹ Saler, *The avant-garde*, 122-5.

opposed to the ‘dilettante handicraft spirit’ which should now be set aside.⁷² The difficulties at Dartington of reconciling craft ideals and commerce reflected these national and international debates.⁷³

The pottery enterprise established in 1932 by Bernard Leach indicates the general trajectory of the estate’s craft industries.⁷⁴ Leach saw his aim as twofold: to make goods whose utility and simplicity of design were ‘of human quality for daily use’; and to ensure they were designed and produced from start to finish by one artist-craftsman in a ‘completely unified human expression’.⁷⁵ In his early years, he was convinced that making by hand in a workshop was the mode of production most likely to achieve these ends; the factory had ‘split the human personality’ while the workshop contributed to social unity and the ‘organic’ unity of the production process.⁷⁶ By 1931, however, the finances of his workshop in Cornwall had reached rock bottom, and he was willing to concede that the prospects of an isolated craftsman ‘working by hand in a machine age’ were ‘desperate’ and some amalgamation ‘with science, and machinery, and organisation, and distribution and the capital’ might be necessary.⁷⁷ The shift echoed that of Leach’s hero William Morris towards factory production in the previous century.⁷⁸ At this juncture the Elmhirsts, who had been buying Leach’s pots since the 1920s, invited him to establish a pottery at Dartington.

For Leach, at first glance, the estate represented ‘the best environment I have seen’ to experiment with small-scale factory production while retaining ‘the conception of work as responsibility and enjoyment’ instead of ‘industrial serfdom’.⁷⁹ There was a community to supply, the next generation to educate, and ‘a sympathetic and progressive spirit’.⁸⁰ He hoped to combine hand-making, mechanical mass production and teaching at the school: ‘the knowledge of a century could be gathered round the new craftsman – the factory to him

⁷² Walter Gropius, ‘The formal and technical problems of modern architecture and planning, *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 19 May 1934, quoted by Tanya Harrod, who covers the debate between crafts and modernist design in *Crafts in the twentieth century*, 118–21.

⁷³ Dartington was cited as an inspired example of ‘the formation of new factories’ by Roger Fry in his essay for the 1932 Gorrell Report on the promotion of good design in Britain – but the internal workings of the estate did not bear out this optimistic reading. *Art and industry: report of the committee appointed by the Board of Trade under the chairmanship of Lord Gorrell on the production and exhibition of articles of good design and everyday use* (London: H.M.S.O, 1932), 15.

⁷⁴ Bernard Leach first met the Elmhirsts in 1925. He kept his own workshop in Cornwall running under a series of deputies at the same time as setting up a studio at Dartington.

⁷⁵ Bernard Leach to Leonard, 11 December 1931, T/AAP/3/A2; Leach, *A potter’s book*, 4.

⁷⁶ Leach, *A potter’s book*, 258.

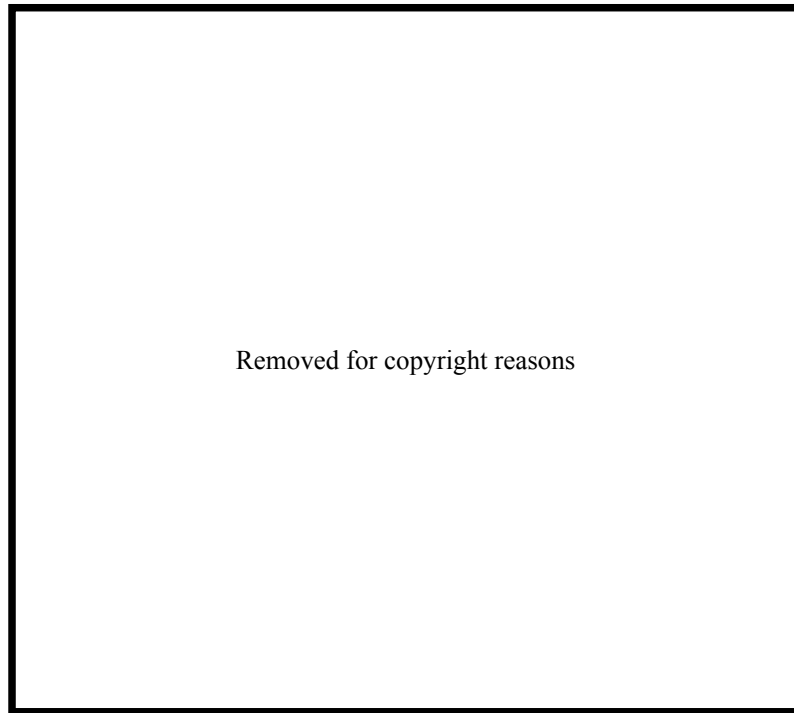
⁷⁷ Bernard Leach to Leonard, 11 December 1931, T/AAP/3/A2.

⁷⁸ Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: a life for our time* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015); Charles Harvey and Jon Press, ‘John Ruskin and the ethical foundations of Morris & Company, 1861–96’, *Journal of business ethics* 14 (1995), 181–94.

⁷⁹ Bernard Leach to Leonard, 11 December 1931, T/AAP/3/A2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

instead of him to the factory'.⁸¹ In response to Leonard's warnings about financial accountability, Leach conceded the necessity of the "economic yard-stick" as an antidote to experiment which is costly and time taking and which gets labelled "idealism".⁸² The Elmhursts in turn agreed that such a pottery as Leach suggested could 'find its natural place as an art, a science and a utility as well as in the education scheme as an introduction to formal design'.⁸³



Bernard Leach at work on the estate, c. 1935.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

Within less than a year Leach was disenchanted. He complained that there were 'two main trends of thought in School and Estate, the one towards science, intellect, and plan, the other towards art, intuition, and warmth of human relationship', and that the former risked the 'sacrifice of essential human relationship and also of quality of product'.⁸⁴ He butted heads with the managing director W.K. Slater, whom Leonard increasingly used as a mouthpiece to insist on tighter budgeting. As with his own pottery at St Ives, Leach's small experimental pottery at Dartington lost money. Slater imposed strict monitoring on its designs and finances. In response, Leach delayed the promised move from workshop to factory production. He spent much of his time away from the estate, including making a long trip to Japan in 1934,

⁸¹ Bernard Leach quoted in Harrod, *Crafts in the twentieth century*, 142.

⁸² Bernard Leach to Leonard, 6 December 1932, T/AAP/3/A2.

⁸³ Leonard to Bernard Leach, 3 December 1931, LA5832, Leach Archive, Crafts Study Centre, University Centre for the Creative Arts.

⁸⁴ Bernard Leach to Leonard, 6 December 1932, T/AAP/3/A2.

paid for by the Elmhursts, to research how to produce stoneware in large quantities.⁸⁵ While he was away, his son David, who worked with him, was encouraged by Leonard and Slater to undertake a period of technical training in factory production on Stoke-on-Trent. David went, much to the fury of his father who deemed the factories to be making exactly ‘the wrong kind of pottery’.⁸⁶

When Bernard Leach returned from Japan he promised again ‘to step out from the studio, shall I call it, towards the small factory where quality of design and material is preserved, while science and organisation are put to the service of the artists and craftsman’.⁸⁷ Yet he also continued to insist on autonomy of technique and design. Slater wrote him a stern memorandum, ‘Report on the centralised control of the artist craftsman’, which emphasised that the artist-craftsman was a ‘technician’ whose value lay in ‘the improvement of design’ and suggested that Leach take advice on consumer taste from the newly established Dartington sales department, rather than relying on his own judgement.⁸⁸ To Leonard, Slater complained that Leach seemed to imagine himself ‘in a fool’s paradise’, expecting the same kind of ‘freedom on design and technique’ that he would get if Leonard were ‘patron to a studio’.⁸⁹ Indeed, the lavish way that the Elmhursts financed Leach’s activities and bought his work did suggest an art-patron relationship rather than a profit-driven business. The gap between rhetoric and practice (in part a reflection of the divide between Dorothy’s patronage and Leonard’s commercial urge) was indicative of the lack of unified thinking about the place of the artist-craftsman. A frustrated journalist asked Leonard in 1933 to clarify whether or not the ‘William Morris school of thought’ had been ‘abandoned in favour of styles associated with modern machine production’ – and how Leach, ‘one of our ablest exponents of the primitive or peasant school’, fitted into this.⁹⁰ He did not get an answer – and perhaps, outside of a broad, unity-seeking ambition, there wasn’t one at Dartington. In the national arts, however, people like Frank Pick and initiatives like the Design and Industries Association were demonstrating that there need be no absolute dichotomy between an ‘Arts and Crafts’ philosophy and one that harnessed machinery and took account of consumer taste.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Bernard Leach to Kay Starr, 20 December 1923, 2542, Leach Archive, Crafts Study Centre, University Centre for the Creative Arts. For full details of this journey, part of which he undertook with Mark Tobey, see chapters 8 and 9 of Cooper, *Bernard Leach*.

⁸⁶ Leonard to Bernard Leach, 15 January 1935, T/AAP/3/A4. David Leach trained at the North Staffordshire Technical College in Stoke-on-Trent from 1934 to 1936.

⁸⁷ Bernard Leach to W.K. Slater, 19 December 1935, T/APP/3.

⁸⁸ W.K. Slater, ‘Report on the centralised control of the artist craftsman’, 2 December 1935, T/AAP/3/A4.

⁸⁹ W.K. Slater to Leonard, 3 December 1935, T/AAP/3/A4.

⁹⁰ Christian Barman, industrial designer and editor of *The architectural review*, to Leonard, 10 March 1933, LKE/G/S3/D.

⁹¹ Saler, *The avant-garde*, passim.

Sidestepping the problem, in 1937 Leach arranged to receive £3,000 from the Elmhirsts over the course of three years to experiment with stoneware at his own pottery in St Ives. It was only when his son re-joined him with his newly learned production skills that the enterprise finally became solvent. Further development of Leach's rural factory at Dartington was quietly dropped.⁹² He nonetheless retained a base, in the form of a caravan, on the estate up until 1949 and produced the most tangible outcome from his time at Dartington, *A potter's book*, with Elmhirst funding between 1939 and 1940. This was a potter's manual, a seminal contribution to the philosophy and practice of British twentieth-century handicraft, which enjoyed huge popularity in the 1960s, attracting disaffected members of the counterculture with its promise of the possibilities of an independent, contemplative 'craft life'.⁹³ It placed a heavy emphasis on self-fulfilment – indicating the broader therapeutic turn taken by the crafts by this point – and did not mention his factory plans at all.

As well as the Arts and Crafts movement, a modernist European strand of unity-seeking design thinking fed into estate ambitions to unite craft and industry. There was a suggestion that Walter Gropius would take up a year-long contract to build up a group of designers, establish links with industry and 'secure a unified character for the Dartington products' – but in the end his salary requirements were deemed too high and his methods too experimental.⁹⁴ Craft economics had been analysed at Dartington and found wanting. Instead of modelling a craft community on the estate, the Elmhirsts outsourced their support for the discipline. In conjunction with the Rural Industries Bureau, an organisation founded by the government in 1921 to preserve and develop rural industry, they sponsored a survey of craftsmen and tradesmen in Devon by Rex Gardner, previously a craftsman on the estate.⁹⁵ Following this, again with the Elmhirsts' support, Gardner worked towards the formation of an Agricultural Trades Guild for South Devon, and, in 1938, arranged the first Devon Agricultural Industries Conference at Dartington 'with the object of raising the status and working conditions of the crafts'.⁹⁶ More than 160 attended – reflecting the relative success, in terms of tangible impact,

⁹² [n.a.], 'Memorandum on the re-organisation of the Leach Pottery', 21 June 1937, T/AAP/3.

⁹³ Harrod, *Crafts in the twentieth century*, 221.

⁹⁴ Walter Gropius to W.K. Slater, 6 January 1935, T/EST/7/D; 'Minutes', 20 March 1936, C/STAV/1. The hopes of other Bauhaus figures, including Fraulein Otti Berger, head of the Bauhaus weaving department, of joining Dartington also came to nothing – in part because during the 1930s the estate was inundated with applications from refugees, in part because it did not seem sufficiently clear to these artists what their role would be. Charles Ross to Leonard, 29 January 1933, LKE/USA/6/G9.

⁹⁵ Architect-craftsman Rex Gardner arrived at Dartington in 1927 and was responsible for designing buildings, then running the crafts studio. His survey of Devon, running from 1934 to 1936, resulted in a card index of a thousand businesses and was maintained until the outbreak of World War Two. E. Havelock of the Development Commission to W.K. Slater, 3 May 1935, C/RIB/1/A; Rex Gardner, 'Rural trades in Devonshire, organizer's report to 28 February 1937', C/RIB/1/A.

⁹⁶ 'Preliminary draft agenda for Devon Agricultural Trades Conference', 19 June 1937, C/RIB/1/A.

of the Elmhursts' contributions to centralised initiatives by comparison with their early efforts within the bounds of their estate.⁹⁷

In 1952, Bernard Leach, too, returned to Dartington, to organise the first International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles. This gathered practitioners to discuss the role of the craftsman in the contemporary society and, like Gardner's Conference of Agricultural Industries, was indicative of Dartington's move away from isolated experimentation and towards co-ordination with wider groups and institutions. Although there was much mention at the Conference of the importance of building links with industry, the fundamental tone was anti-industrial.⁹⁸ An accompanying exhibition of pottery and textiles then toured the country with government sponsorship. To outsiders, it had an archaic quality – the critic Robert Melville wrote that 'the general effect is of an ethnographical exhibit of the remains of a lost civilisation'.⁹⁹ By the end of the Second World War, the project of integrating the ideals of the artist-craftsman into modern industry had largely fallen out of favour politically and in arts circles. Efforts to stimulate post-war economic recovery emphasised quantity over quality, fulfilling consumer desire over the holistic life of the producer, and the arts themselves moved towards exploring values of 'plurality, ephemerality, and contingency'.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless the workshop spirit would continue to be kept alive by a range of alternative groups through the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰¹

The 1930s: 'a great interrelation centre'¹⁰²

In 1929 the commercial departments of Dartington were moved onto a more formal footing by the creation of a company, Dartington Hall Ltd.¹⁰³ Two years later, Dartington Hall Trust was constituted, an educational foundation with charitable status that would oversee the running of the non-commercial branches – the arts, education and research. This restructuring was prompted in part by the fact the various departments had grown to a complexity and size beyond which the Elmhursts wanted to oversee themselves. More than this, though, Dorothy and Leonard hoped the new constitution would offer a model that could be replicated by others, and would ensure the continuity of their enterprise after their deaths.¹⁰⁴ This kind of

⁹⁷ *News of the day*, 25 June 1937, C/RIB/1/A.

⁹⁸ Peter Cox, Michael Cardew, Marguerite Wildenhaim, Patrick Heron, Robin Tanner, John Bowers, *The report of the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles at Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon, July 17-27, 1952* (Totnes: Arts Centre, 1954).

⁹⁹ Robert Melville, 'Exhibitions', *Architectural review* 112 (1952), 343-4.

¹⁰⁰ Saler, *The avant-garde*, 172.

¹⁰¹ Harrod, *Crafts in the twentieth century*, part II.

¹⁰² The term is sculptor Willi Soukop's. Interview with Michael Young, 1 April 1979, T/HIS/S22.

¹⁰³ Victor Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall 1925-56: a report*, vol. 1., 'Introduction', 4593Z/1.

¹⁰⁴ Leonard, 'Summary of Dartington constitution', April 1931, LKE/G/SG.

trust formation was an innovative measure in the cultural sphere.¹⁰⁵ After the Second World War, several rural cultural enterprises conceived in the interwar period along similar lines to Dartington, such as John Christie and Audrey Mildmay's opera festival at Glyndebourne, would follow suit in turning themselves into trusts – though this related more to a desire to perpetuate the founders' intention and to avoid tax, rather than to strengthen the local community.¹⁰⁶

Following the establishment of the Dartington Hall Trust, arts and adult education briefly became the responsibility of Dartington School's newly appointed headmaster, W.B. Curry. He showed little relish for the job, however, and unaccounted spending, 'quarrels, jealousies and a sense of complacency' continued unabated.¹⁰⁷ In 1934, one of the new trustees, solicitor F.A.S. Gwatkin, instead insisted on the constitution of a proper arts department with an administrator and a finite endowment that was separate from the rest of the estate. Chris Martin, an orderly-minded young man just down from Oxford and a nephew of the local (Dartington-averse) rector J.S. Martin, was appointed as the head of the new department.

At first sight Chris Martin was an odd choice. He was uninterested in community-building amateur art. He defined amateurism disdainfully as 'the placing of work and results in a category second in importance to personal predilections and personal comfort'.¹⁰⁸ He saw Dartington as 'a very loose association of people all working within one enterprise, and not a community'.¹⁰⁹ The estate's aim should not be internal integration, he thought, but, through 'a whole hearted striving for results worthy to stand with the best either in England, America or on the Continent', to become an international centre of excellence that would elevate the way people thought of culture.¹¹⁰ This was a long way from Leonard's amateur-art-for-local-unity model, but it provided a solution to a problem that he increasingly recognised. Dartington had 'two dialectically, i.e. essentially antagonistic aims: to be as good a community as possible,

¹⁰⁵ Leonard, in 1935, thought that the closest parallel he could find to Dartington was London Zoo (Leonard to Fred Gwatkin, 8 October 1935, LKE/LF/16/D). In reality, a number of general-purpose philanthropic trusts of vast scale preceded it in America, many of them supporting cultural enterprise. One of the biggest was the Carnegie Corporation of New York (1911), mandated 'to promote the advancement of knowledge and understanding' (Frederick P. Keppel, *The foundation: its place in American life* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2017 [1930])). What was more unusual about the Dartington Hall Trust was its connection to a specific practical community.

¹⁰⁶ The Glyndebourne Arts Trust was formed in 1954 to perpetuate the work of John Christie and Audrey Mildmay who had founded the opera festival in 1934 – and who consulted Leonard about trusts in the 1930s (John Christie, founder of Glyndebourne to Leonard, 15 December 1938, T/ADR/1). Another example, the Springhead Trust, was set up in 1973 in memory of Rolf Gardiner, who had bought the estate for his farming and cultural projects in 1933.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Cox, *The arts at Dartington*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Chris Martin, 'Report to Dartington Trustees', 14 July 1934, T/AA/1.

¹⁰⁹ Chris Martin, 'Dartington Hall – a social experiment', [1936], T/AA/1/I.

¹¹⁰ Chris Martin, 'Report to Dartington Trustees', 14 July 1934, T/AA/1.

and to be a spring of values recognized by, and in their turn raising, the standards of the world at large'.¹¹¹ A new policy that envisaged art's unifying function on a larger canvas might go some way to reconciling the two. Rather than focusing on uniting everyone on the estate, Dartington could, he decided, incubate a 'maximal culture' which would 'transcend' its bounds, being 'a cooperative product of mankind'.¹¹² The elite artist would inspire society at large – guiding and drawing people together in a fashion akin to Matthew Arnold's 'great men of culture' – and rendering marginal the issue of communal unity at Dartington itself.¹¹³

Martin's policy was given strength by an influx into Dartington of refugee artists from the continent. Their high standard of work and the immediate national attention they brought to the estate meant that the Elmhursts, with many other calls on their time and no desire to tie themselves to micromanaging Dartington, fell in with Martin's hopes for the arts department as they had with W.B. Curry's for the school. Nonetheless, the sheer number of new arrivals, each with their own agenda and career, made it difficult for Martin to manage them. His position was further complicated by the Elmhursts' propensity to respond to artists' appeals for support over his head; and by the difficulty of keeping spending within the sums generated by the endowment when more, and more costly, artists kept appearing. Nonetheless, 1934 ushered in a new, more professionalised phase in the history of the arts department: from this point and until the war, it was focused on more abstract notions of the unity that could be achieved by the arts – relating to the spiritual and the relations between the arts themselves, rather than to how to integrate the estate and local area through making creativity part of everyone's everyday life.¹¹⁴

(a) '*Arts – place of escape or share in community*'?¹¹⁵

Between 1934 and 1939, projects promoting local community through the arts were significantly reduced – although, as discussed later, Leonard still found opportunities to encourage community art outside the estate. Mark Tobey, finding his spiritually-oriented methods incompatible with those of the new arts administrator, moved to the Far East. Martin tried to dissolve Margaret Barr's professional group and make her responsible for adult education only, on the basis that her group's work was 'of a low standard' and that the estate was not big enough to support more than one dance troupe.¹¹⁶ She put up a fight, protesting to

¹¹¹ Leonard, untitled note beginning 'to appreciate what Dartington has achieved', [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/B.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and its enemies', *Cornhill magazine* 16 (1867), 36-53.

¹¹⁴ Chris Martin, 'Arts administration: report to Dartington Trustees', 21 November 1941, T/AA/1/G.

¹¹⁵ Leonard, untitled note, 21 February 1935, LKE/G/S9/A.

¹¹⁶ Chris Martin, 'Report to Dartington Trustees', 14 July 1934, T/AA/1.

the Elmhursts that 'our whole line of action has been based on the knowledge we are not a professional dance school, but rather [...] exploring the potentialities of the community', but, as with W.B. Curry, Dorothy and Leonard stood by their new appointment and Barr eventually left to work with left-wing theatre groups in London.¹¹⁷

In place of the old guard, Dartington began to fill with professional, mainly European artists, many of them fleeing the Nazis. Among them were the Germans Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder, with the dancers, musicians and designers of the ballet school and touring company they had run in Essen.¹¹⁸ Rudolf Laban, a leader of German modern expressive dance, was attached to their group, as was the stage designer Hein Heckroth. German conductor Hans Oppenheim arrived to take charge of music; Willi Soukop came from Austria to carry on his sculpture; the Russian Michael Chekhov (nephew of playwright Anton) established a theatre school; Uday Shankar (Ravi's brother) stayed for a summer with his troupe of Indian dancers.¹¹⁹ Instead of the earlier expectation that artists on the estate would find niches for themselves, incomers were now given formal contracts.¹²⁰ Sometimes their duties included teaching at the school or giving evening classes, but more often their work was oriented around building up professional studio-schools and preparing for national or international tours. The studio-schools they ran, at least in theory, offered more structured courses than hitherto, preparing students for professional life as an artist.¹²¹ The Dartington Hall Trust spent disproportionately huge sums ensuring that the Jooss-Leeder Dance School, the Ballets

¹¹⁷ Margaret Barr and group to Elmhursts, July 1934, T/AD/2/B. She received a grant of £1000 from Dartington to set up her group in London. Later she went on to promote the development of indigenous modern dance in Australia. Nicholas, *Dancing in utopia*, 86-7 and 112-6.

¹¹⁸ Kurt Jooss choreographed for Rudolf Laban before starting a dance school with Sigurd Leeder. He became the director of dance at the Folkwangschule in Essen-Werden, moving his school with Leeder there. He achieved international fame as the winner of Les Archives Internationales de la Danse's first choreography competition with *The green table*, which parodied the posturing of politicians at the Versailles Peace Conference with in a masked dance of death. He then formed a touring company, the Ballets Jooss, but when he refused to dismiss its Jewish members as required to by the Nazis he and Leeder were forced to flee the country. Ann Hutchinson Guest, 'The Jooss-Leeder School at Dartington Hall', *Dance chronicle* 29 (2006), 161-194; Andy Adamson and Clare Lidbury, *Kurt Jooss: 60 Years of the Green Table* (Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁹ Hans Oppenheim, formerly of the Deutsche Musik Bühne, was Jewish and fled Germany in consequence in 1933. He worked as an assistant conductor to the Glyndebourne Opera Company before joining Dartington. Willi Soukop was invited to Dartington in 1934 by the Elmhursts' secretary Kay Starr, previously studying at the Viennese Academy of Fine Arts. Michael Chekhov had to leave Russia after refusing to comply with the Soviet government's insistence on a social realist style.

¹²⁰ In spite of this ostensible formalisation, confusion over artists' roles remained a feature. Willi Soukop, for example, was given no salary but used space in Rex Gardner's workshop and took wood from the sawmill in return for giving evening classes. He began to work as a paid teacher at the school in 1937, but also worked at other schools in the area. Michael Young's interview with Willi Soukop, 1 April 1979, T/HIS/S22.

¹²¹ The Jooss-Leeder Dance School claimed to offer a three-year course with examinations at the end for a teacher's certificate to teach amateurs, and, after further tuition, a diploma to teach professionals. In reality, all the schools tended to diverge significantly from their written programmes.

Jooss, the Theatre Drama Studio established by Michael Chekhov and Hans Oppenheim's Music Theatre Studio each had suitable premises and their director a salary to match his international status.¹²² The groups, who performed at Dartington, in London and on national and international tours, put the estate 'firmly on the professional map'.¹²³

Partly because of Martin's outward-looking philosophy, partly because of where they were coming away from, many of the new artists were of the opinion that they owed their loyalty not to the estate or local community or nation, but to their own work. Leonard complained that 'the idea of the Patron still holds and especially in the German outlook' – the 'old court tradition holds out against group thought and planning and responsibility'.¹²⁴ Kurt Jooss was a notable adherent to this 'courtly' tradition. He saw the Elmhirsts as successors to the 'princes of the church and the world', duty bound, in consequence of the fate that had put wealth in their hands, to give no-strings-attached support to the artists whom they needed to turn their 'cultural wishes into lasting values'.¹²⁵

Jooss' lack of investment in the life of estate – it was merely a 'refuge', he told Dorothy, where his art might grow 'undisturbed by the worries of the day' – was such that he campaigned, unsuccessfully, to be allowed to remove all references to Dartington in Ballets Jooss publicity material.¹²⁶ Dartington smacked of 'amateurism or provincialism', he complained to W.K. Slater, and the association could damage his company's reputation in London.¹²⁷ Other artists were equally sniffy. Viennese sculptor Willi Soukop, while impressed by what he had witnessed of Mark Tobey's ability to engage artistically with all comers, believed that 'Art cannot be of great interest to everyone – only to the few'.¹²⁸ He disliked giving lessons at the school – 'A boy would look in and say "I'll come later", or ask the pupils to go riding. I could not compete with a horse'. He preferred the better-regulated, more conventional Westcountry private schools like Blundell's and Bryanston, where he also gave lessons, and where there was 'an atmosphere of work'.¹²⁹

¹²² The average annual cost to Dartington of the Jooss-Leeder Dance School and the Ballets Jooss between 1934 and 1937 was £10,000, which constituted the entire annual budget of the arts department. The Elmhirsts had constantly to supplement the department's formal endowment. Chris Martin, note on financial position of the arts department, [1942], T/AD/1/C.

¹²³ Chris Martin, 'Plan for the Arts Department', 1941, T/AA/1/H.

¹²⁴ Leonard, 'Confidential memo', 29 December 1937, T/AA/1/F.

¹²⁵ Kurt Jooss to the Elmhirsts, received 8 December 1933 [translation], T/AD/1/A.

¹²⁶ Kurt Jooss to Dorothy, 13 March 1941, DWE/A/9/C; Kurt Jooss to W.K. Slater, 17 September 1935, T/AD/1/A.

¹²⁷ Kurt Jooss to W.K. Slater, 17 September 1935, T/AD/1/A.

¹²⁸ Michael Young, interview with Willi Soukop, 1 April 1979, T/HIS/S22.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Some new arrivals responded with enthusiasm to the community-arts ethos they found at Dartington. They saw in it the unique opportunity to realise their ideal of the arts having direct social, economic and spiritual functions.¹³⁰ Hein Heckroth, wrote one of his life-drawing students, was ‘prepared to break down the barriers of the artists’ trade union for the delectation of the philistine’, seeing the results as of value to the students ‘themselves, to their jobs, and to the world at large’.¹³¹ The conductor Frederic ‘Fritz’ Waldmann, an Austrian refugee who worked as a music director of the Ballets Jooss, put forward a plan for ‘building up a real musical culture based on a natural unity of professional musicians and the population’.¹³² The estate would be inducted into the European tradition of *Hausmusik* (‘community music-making’); professional musicians would organise an estate choir and orchestra; music courses would be conducted in the ‘favourite Inns of the workmen’; groups would tour Devon’s villages with a music programme design to engage and educate, giving ‘detailed explanation in the programme’ and engaging the audience through voting and through whistling competitions.¹³³

Whilst such ambitious projects as Waldmann’s were not acted on, the arts department of the 1930s continued to be seen from outside as a place of interest for those who wanted to bring out in modern art ‘the actual, good work done, and its relation to the whole social structure and to life in general’, rather than focusing on famous ‘personalities’.¹³⁴ It received a steady stream of visitors, many of whom, like Aldous Huxley and John Maynard Keynes, saw culture as an essential component of a good society.¹³⁵ The sculptor Barbara Hepworth, whose son Paul Skeaping joined Dartington School in 1934, petitioned headmaster W.B. Curry to contribute an article to a new review, *Circle: international survey of constructive art*, published in 1937 – not about amateur arts in schools, but about ‘artistic values *in relation to contemporary life*’.¹³⁶ Curry agreed, but never wrote it in spite of his usual enthusiasm for evangelism, perhaps because education, not the arts, was his province.

¹³⁰ For the broader debates about this idea in England, see Charles Harrison, *English art and modernism* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), 238.

¹³¹ Quoted in Harrison, ‘The visual arts’, 151.

¹³² Frederic ‘Fritz’ Waldmann, ‘Plan for the organisation of the musical life at Dartington Hall Estate, of Devonshire and for the distant future’, 22 July 1935, T/AM/1/A.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Barbara Hepworth quoted in Harrison, ‘The visual arts’, 151.

¹³⁵ Dorothy, for instance, arranged for John Maynard Keynes to meet Kurt Jooss and watch the Ballets Jooss perform. Keynes to Dorothy, 21 January 1935, DWE/6/E.

¹³⁶ Ben Nicholson to W.B. Curry, 30 July 1936, T/DHS/B/4/B. Prior to the Second World War, constructivism attracted little interest in England apart from the few involved in *Circle: international survey of constructive art*, a journal which accompanied an exhibition of constructivism – the first of its kind in London. It was organised by Hepworth’s then-husband, painter Ben Nicholson, jointly with the Russian sculptor Naum Gabo and the architect Lesley Martin. After the war, constructivism’s focus on the synthesis of architecture, painting and sculpture in the creation of a new environment for a technological society became more popular. Harris, *Romantic moderns*, 38.

While there was some enthusiasm for local engagement among a few of the new arrivals, there was a gulf between their theoretical community-building ideas and the overall direction of the arts department. Members of the estate might be told that they were welcome in the main courtyard where the arts were based, but most of the artists did not go out to the estate, or seek to connect with the wider local community.¹³⁷ Hans Oppenheim, who was supposed to take over musical direction on the estate, ‘didn’t really know how to go about it, nor did he have any interest in the encouragement of amateurs’.¹³⁸ Leonard hoped that he would engage with the school’s students and locals, and Martin that he would unite the resident artists, but he did neither, preferring to concentrate on building up his own professional group and stating obstinately that ‘real enjoyment from the arts can only be *earned* by hard work over a long period’.¹³⁹

When Leonard urged them to do so, Jooss and Leeder found it equally difficult to address the needs of locals – either in working with them or performing for them. ‘If Leeder could bright up the folk dancing somehow, add a few foreign ones, and a little colour [...] with the village orchestra to play, we might be getting somewhere,’ wrote Leonard wistfully. ‘It’s the gap between antiquarianism and the Jooss Ballet, full blast on tour, that somehow Leeder, Oppenheim and Kurt ought to find some way of filling’.¹⁴⁰ The arts department was set to become an elite institution with wide renown – in 1934 some of its concerts began to be broadcast by the BBC – but with little relevance to its immediate surroundings.¹⁴¹ This external focus was, in part, enforced by the impossibility of achieving internal harmony with such an influx of artists, each with their own ambitions.

The new configuration of the arts department bemused or incensed the rest of the estate. Dartington was supposed to be egalitarian, but artists were accorded greater privileges than everyone else. There was particular grumbling in the 1930s about the ‘great revelation’ Dorothy expected from professional foreign artists, ‘especially if their English was not too

¹³⁷ This period is described by Nicholas in chapter 3 of *Dancing in utopia*.

¹³⁸ Michael Young, interview with Ronald Anderson, 8 October 1977, T/HIS/S20/D. Anderson was a pianist who arrived at Dartington in 1938.

¹³⁹ Hans Oppenheim, note to W.B. Curry, 12 July 1938, T/DHS/B/22/D.

¹⁴⁰ Leonard to Dorothy, 20 November 1937, LKE/DWE/6/B.

¹⁴¹ Ronald Biggs, director of music, to Dartington trustees, 13 January 1934, T/AM/1/A. This was seen, apparently on both sides, as a preliminary to ‘much more hand-in-glove’ cooperation between the organisations, with the BBC suggesting broadcasting a tour of the Elmhursts’ estate. This did not materialise in the interwar years, although the concerts continued and a BBC Third Programme was made on Dartington in 1950. Chris Martin to Leonard, memorandum, 15 July 1935, T/AM/1/A; Leonard interviewed by Victor Bonham-Carter, transcript of recording of BBC Third Programme on Dartington Hall, recorded 19 June 1950, transmitted 13 August 1951, LKE/G/S13/A.

good'.¹⁴² An element of xenophobia crept into this, as into the 'psycho-social' questing of the same period – a view that Europeans had a 'determination in pursuit of self-interest which is strange to the Englishman'.¹⁴³ Leonard, who had initially striven to be candid about estate finances as part of his overall ambition to build a democratically-run community, was increasingly uncomfortable in the light of these tensions over disclosing figures about spending on the arts: '£100 is as much as many men expect to earn in the year,' he noted confidentially. 'How can you explain in a few words the school of dance, the ballet, and the endowment of the Arts Dep[artmen]t?'¹⁴⁴

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Group outside the estate's White Hart inn. Back row, left, are Cecil and Elizabeth Collins. Michael Young sits behind the table with a cigarette. © Dartington Hall Trust Archives

The informal give-and-take between departments of the early years was replaced by petty wrangling over boundaries: the school's headmaster complained to Chris Martin that no payment was made when his chairs were borrowed by the arts department for performances, and to Hans Oppenheim that those coming to teach music seemed to consider it 'a sort of mere by-product of what is going on in the Arts Department'.¹⁴⁵ Dorothy gave the artists some protection, but when English painter Cecil Collins was criticised for the pointlessness and incomprehensibility of an exhibition of his work, he tried to defend its utility in *News of the day*. It aimed 'to feed and sustain' the 'real life deep in each person,' he explained: 'Thus my art is truly functional'.¹⁴⁶ Despite efforts to bridge the gap between the formalist and functionalist aims, these years signalled a definite step away from Leonard's hope that art

¹⁴² Michael Young, interview with Ronald Anderson, 8 October 1977, T/HIS/S20/D.

¹⁴³ Chris Martin, 'Plan for the Arts Department', 1941, T/AA/1/H.

¹⁴⁴ Leonard, 'Confidential memo', 29 December 1937, LKE/G/S8.

¹⁴⁵ W.B. Curry to Chris Martin, 24 October 1934, T/DHS/B/20/A; W.B. Curry to Hans Oppenheim, 25 September 1941, T/DHS/B/20/B.

¹⁴⁶ *News of the day*, 25 June 1937, T/PP/EST/1/019.

would contribute to knitting Dartington itself into a holistic community. Rather, the lavish spending on foreign artists motivated by their own work was a source of internal fragmentation.

(b) Seeking spiritual unity: Dorothy's quest

'Art is always a bringing together: a synthesis; and that is why we need it so desperately in this age of division: of specialisation: of breaking up more and more into less and less: this difficult mechanised age when we focus on the atom. We need the other process, the process of integration, that art provides. We need the great artists; but we need also to be artists in our own way.'

Dorothy Elmhirst (1950)¹⁴⁷

In the unifying utopian thought of the interwar years, Michael Saler finds that art was part of 'a common quest for underlying essences that could restore harmony, stability, and spirituality to a "modern" world that appeared increasingly fragmentary'.¹⁴⁸ This could mean knitting together community; another ambition was to access the underlying unities of the spirit. This section considers this integrative hope through the prism of Dorothy Elmhirst's experiences. The two sections that follow it pan out from personal questions of psychological and spiritual unity. The first looks at the connected aspiration that the underlying spiritual and social unity of mankind could be promoted by joining together the art forms themselves. The second explores the competing national and international visions of unity that different artists on the estate sought to support. In the professional phase of the arts department, these more abstract forms of unity-seeking seemed to many foreign artists more compelling than promoting the unity of the community in which they were living; their presence at Dartington was a necessity rather than a choice.

Brought up Christian, Dorothy had migrated to a more ecumenical type of spirituality. She wrote to the local vicar when explaining her non-attendance at his church that 'from the point of view of gaining spiritual help or insight I admit I find this elsewhere – I find it in talking with you and with other friends who are attempting to live the life of the spirit, I find it in books, in poetry, in nature, in art, in the goodness of human beings, and in any experience that opens my heart to reverence and to the wonder of life'.¹⁴⁹ Over the course of the interwar years, more and more she came to believe that the arts were the domain where 'man finds the unity and harmony that his soul is forever seeking'.¹⁵⁰ Art became less a realm in which to

¹⁴⁷ Dorothy, 'The arts at Dartington', 21 February 1950, DWE/A/4/E.

¹⁴⁸ Saler, *The avant-garde*, 6.

¹⁴⁹ Dorothy to R.A. Edwards, 2 August 1942, DWE/G/S3/G.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

exercise patronage, and more a sacred activity; the means by which ‘everyone everywhere, could transcend the boundaries of self and enter into a communion with what lies behind the surface’.¹⁵¹

As with Dorothy’s political philosophy – in which, following the nationalist progressives, an elite leadership was a necessary component of democracy – so too, in the field of spiritualised creativity, whilst everyone should participate in the arts, enlightened leaders were required and should be cultivated at Dartington.¹⁵² Her advocacy for professionalism, high standards and protecting the artists from economic constraints echoed the views of other patrons of the arts of the period such as John Maynard Keynes, although the spiritual element was unusual.¹⁵³ It was a long way from Leonard’s 1920s’ view of amateur art as the glue holding together a group of pioneering equals at Dartington, but it retained a view of art as having a unifying, public-serving, even missionary function. With a ‘deeper life of the imagination,’ wrote Dorothy, ‘there might indeed be a new synthesis of faith and works even in our generation’.¹⁵⁴

Dorothy shared her intense inner world with a small group of fellow travellers of the spirit. Coming and going on the estate, her familiars included the artists Mark Tobey and Jane Fox-Strangways, schoolteacher Margaret Isherwood and intellectual Gerald Heard.¹⁵⁵ At generating-cell meetings and by exchange of letter, they drew art and religion together to inform their attempts to access the spiritual unities – a method of self-scrutiny that echoed the cults of inner experience that were blossoming across the interwar world.¹⁵⁶ For Dorothy, the more powerful successor to this group experiment was her involvement with the Russian actor-director Michael Chekhov.

Chekhov was influenced by the Austrian philosopher and social reformer Rudolf Steiner.¹⁵⁷ Steiner’s ‘spiritual science’ of anthroposophy stressed the importance of intuitive spiritual

¹⁵¹ Michael Young, *The Elmhursts of Dartington: the creation of a utopian community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 216.

¹⁵² Dorothy to Leonard, 27 August 1921, LKE/DWE/10/C.

¹⁵³ Anna Upchurch, ‘John Maynard Keynes, the Bloomsbury group and the origins of the Arts Council movement’, *International journal of cultural policy* 10 (2004), 203-17.

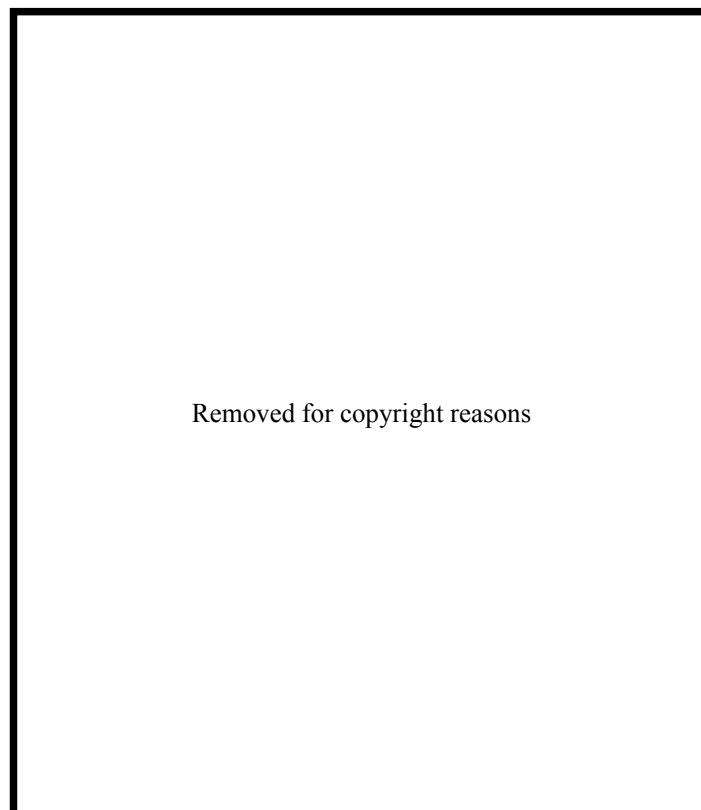
¹⁵⁴ Dorothy to Waldo Frank, 28 June 1938, DWE/G/4/C.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Elmhirst, interview with Michael Young, December 1977, T/HIS/S20/D; Michael Straight, *After long silence* (London: Collins, 1983), 67.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, George Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. Set up outside Paris in 1920 to promote his spiritual philosophy, the ‘Fourth Way’, this deployed art to unite individuals and the community in the form of ritualised dance.

¹⁵⁷ Rudolf Steiner, anthroposophy and Rudolph Laban were subjects frequently touched on in Chekhov’s acting lessons, as attested by Dorothy’s class notebooks (DWE/G/S7/E/019) and by early drafts of the handbook, *To the actor* (MC/S2), which Chekhov began writing at Dartington in 1938. This was published as *To the actor: on the technique of acting* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2002 [1953]).

knowledge, free from priests and religious dogmas. He believed that the arts were an aid to spiritual development, a path away from the everyday self with which we normally identify and towards the creative 'higher ego'.¹⁵⁸ For Steiner, it was the mission of artists to 'penetrate the mysteries of the universe and reintegrate humanity with it to achieve universal love'.¹⁵⁹ An equally important inspiration for Chekhov was the abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky. Like Steiner, Kandinsky sought to represent the underlying unity of mankind and envisaged the artist as a 'priest of beauty' who 'sees and points the way'.¹⁶⁰ Chekhov saw his artistic exploration of inner experience as the creative counterpart to Steiner's spiritual quest, and viewed his own role in Kandinsky's terms, as being a spiritual leader with a duty to guide society to a pinnacle of enlightenment.



Dorothy (centre) with Michael Chekhov and a fellow student.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

Dorothy's daughter Beatrice met Chekhov in New York and recommended him to her mother for the estate. In spite of his speaking practically no English, he was eager to join and, after studying the language for several months, he opened the Chekhov Theatre Drama Studio at

¹⁵⁸ Valerie Preston-Dunlop, *Rudolph Laban: an extraordinary life* (London: Dance, 1998), 10.

¹⁵⁹ Steven G. Marks, 'Abstract art and the regeneration of mankind', *New England review* 24 (2003), 53-79, at 56.

¹⁶⁰ Wassily Kandinsky, trans. M.T.H. Sadler, *Concerning the spiritual in art* (New York: Dove Publications, 1977 [1914]), 4 and 55.

Dartington in 1936.¹⁶¹ Chekhov's three-year course aimed to teach students to communicate 'inner realism' through physical gesture.¹⁶² At the suggestion of her daughter, Dorothy joined his group of students and soon fell headlong under his influence. 'Beatrice urged me to join the group for an hour a day. I did this with grave misgivings, but soon it was two – three – four – five – six – hours a day and even more.'¹⁶³ Dressed in the long blue gown he insisted his students wear, she spent these hours doing rigorous exercises with the theatre group to strengthen the body, spirit and emotions.¹⁶⁴ Chekhov's ambition, in place of the contemporary naturalistic theatre that he saw as too superficial and imitative, was to reprise theatre's roots in the medieval mystery plays, aiming to see the world 'from some new and more spiritual point of view'.¹⁶⁵ 'All technique must be rescrutinized, and respiritualized,' he wrote – only then, would the capacity to present the audience with spiritual truths be re-acquired.¹⁶⁶

For Chekhov, an artist was 'the servant of the highest in humanity'; but he perceived the social function in abstract terms, with his studio having little to do with the day-to-day life of Dartington, or with the realm of politics and Britain more generally.¹⁶⁷ Early proposals for his co-operating with the estate's other enterprises and providing classes for locals as Margaret Barr had done came to nothing.¹⁶⁸ After taking tea with him in 1937, Dorothy recorded his detached view of art's role in the face of European totalitarianism: 'Role of Theatre. Social work. Not personal. Today we are hypnotised by politics, by Hitler, etc. – we can no longer see the real forces around us – necessary to take the long view – to have different conception of time and space. Should be able to laugh at Hitler!'¹⁶⁹ The spiritual responsibility of art was not to the community in which it was practised. This view did not appeal to everyone at Dartington. Leonard was not enthusiastic. Nor was the Irish playwright Sean O'Casey, who had moved to Totnes to send his children to Dartington School, and whose own works were marked by realism, by socialist politics, and by the importance of words. For O'Casey,

¹⁶¹ Michael Chekhov had previously acted in the Moscow Arts Theatre under the direction of Konstantin Stanislavsky. He then directed the Second Moscow Arts Theatre. Out of sympathy with the socialist realism that became the approved mode of art in Soviet Russia, he went into exile in 1928. Anthea Williams, 'DWE and the theatre', T/HIS/S22/B.

¹⁶² Michael Chekhov, *Chekhov Theatre Studio, Dartington Hall*, 1936, DWE/A/15/A; Thomas Cornford, 'The English theatre studios of Michael Chekhov and Michel Saint-Denis, 1935-65', unpublished PhD, University of Warwick, 2012.

¹⁶³ Dorothy, [n.d.], 'Background and foreground – a personal pattern', DWE/S/1/E.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, *Angel Dorothy*, 170-1. This emphasis on repetition followed Kandinsky's lesson that 'the spirit, like the body, can be strengthened and developed by frequent exercise'. Kandinsky, *Concerning the spiritual*, 36.

¹⁶⁵ Michael Chekhov, 'Chekhov Theatre Studio, Dartington Hall', [n.d.], DWE/A/15/A.

¹⁶⁶ Michael Chekhov, untitled notes introducing the Chekhov Theatre Studio, [n.d.], T/ADR/1.

¹⁶⁷ Michael Chekhov, 'Chekhov Theatre Studio, Dartington Hall', [n.d.], DWE/A/15/A.

¹⁶⁸ [n.a.], 'Proposed plans for theatre school at Dartington', 8 April 1935, T/ADR/1.

¹⁶⁹ Dorothy, 'notes on tea with Mischa', 29 April [1937], DWE/A/15/B.

Chekhov's concept of the intuitive, spiritual 'entirely modern' play was 'an impossible experiment, and a waste of time'.¹⁷⁰

Like other refugees at Dartington in the late 1930s, in spite of his desire to laugh at Hitler, Chekhov was acutely conscious of the growing threat from Germany. In 1938 he relocated his studio to the safety of an empty schoolhouse in Ridgefield, Connecticut. By then, Dorothy's work with him had been the main focus of her life for almost two years. In March 1939, after agonised indecision, she left England to join him. She justified the move as being necessary to equip herself as a drama teacher for Dartington, and to continue her role in their current production, *The Possessed*.¹⁷¹ She seems, however, to have been as much drawn by the 'creative, unifying experience' that the work was offering her.¹⁷² Chekhov – 'the Master', as his students called him – brought her to 'a different dimension from ordinary life [...] free of the narrow limits of one's own personality'.¹⁷³ Up to this point she had relied, first on Willard and then on Leonard for a demonstration of 'what it means to be a whole person'.¹⁷⁴ Now Chekhov was her guide.

Recognising that her husband's jealousy over her altered loyalties was not unreasonable, Dorothy thanked him for his patience 'during this strange new experience of concentrating all my energies on one thing, one idea'.¹⁷⁵ 'There is,' she wrote to him from America, 'a certain intensity and single mindedness about it all that seems to act as catharsis'. It was 'the perfect pattern for monastic life, a group without restriction of age or sex, intent upon a task, and under the direction of a great leader'.¹⁷⁶ She was urged on in her experimentation by her former confidant Gerald Heard, who had moved to America in the late 1930s to continue searching for a pacifist utopia and had a similar enthusiasm for monasticism. Her work with Chekhov, Heard told her, promised the 'rendering of a real philosophy and art of living in the vernacular of our contemporary lives'.¹⁷⁷ While Heard would follow his quest to its extreme conclusion of detachment from the mainstream, plunging into the alternative lifestyle of the

¹⁷⁰ Christopher Murray, *Sean O'Casey: writer at work: a biography* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004), 250.

¹⁷¹ Anthea Williams, 'DWE and the theatre', T/HIS/S22/B.

¹⁷² Dorothy to Anna Bogue, 13 August 1936, T/HIS/S22/B. She wrote to her son Michael that Chekhov 'has opened such a rich world of feeling and imagination to all of us that sometimes I want to sit down and cry, for the sheer wonder of it'. 3 October 1937, T/HIS/21/E.

¹⁷³ Dorothy, 'My talk in the Barn Theatre on the eve of my departure for Chekhov in America', [n.d.], DWE/A/15/E.

¹⁷⁴ Dorothy to Leonard, 15 July 1931, LKE/DWE/12/E.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Young, *The Elmhursts*, 368. There was some speculation that Dorothy was in love with Chekhov – certainly it seems that Leonard was jealous of him. Paula Morel, interview with Michael Young, 23 August 1976, T/HIS/S22.

¹⁷⁶ Dorothy to Leonard, 9 April 1939, T/HIS/S22/B.

¹⁷⁷ Gerald Heard to Dorothy, 12 July [1937?], DWE/G/5/D.

post-war Californian counterculture, the outbreak of the Second World War drew Dorothy back to Dartington, her husband and a position that was far more engaged with mainstream society than before. Chekhov, meanwhile, moved to Hollywood, where one of his most famous students, Marilyn Monroe, would later find in him the same spiritual inspiration as Dorothy had, writing that ‘with Michael Chekhov acting became more than a profession to me. It became a sort of religion.’¹⁷⁸

(c) Seeking spiritual unity: uniting the arts

Alongside Dorothy’s quest for spiritual wholeness through creativity, a more general spiritual ambition drove the arts at Dartington and fed into its community-building ideals. This was to join the different art forms themselves into a synthetic whole. A diverse range of influences fed into this. One was the Arts and Crafts movement, which idealised medieval workshop traditions where artists strove together to express the common spiritual ideals of the organically integrated community.¹⁷⁹ This ambition informed Bernard Leach’s work at Dartington, as well as the formation of a short-lived Craftsmen’s Studio, led by Rex Gardner, a former employee of the Arts and Crafts furniture maker Ernest Gimson.¹⁸⁰ Another influence was, again, Wassily Kandinsky, who assumed correspondence between the various branches of art – ‘that painting could replicate the psychological effect of music or poetry and vice versa’ – and that all, combined, could achieve a spiritual effect that would bring the viewer closer to the universal.¹⁸¹ Rudolf Laban, who fled from Germany to Dartington in 1938, had, under Kandinsky’s inspiration, already experimented earlier in his career with the concept that movement could unify the arts under the rubric of *Tanz, Ton, Wort* (dance, sound, word).¹⁸² Dartington seemed to offer the possibility of realising Kandinsky’s theories on the grander scale.

The third and most significant shaper of the ambition to unite the arts at Dartington was the German Bauhaus, where Kandinsky had briefly taught.¹⁸³ Walter Gropius, in his Bauhaus

¹⁷⁸ Marilyn Monroe quoted by Simon Callow in ‘Foreword’ to Chekhov, *To the actor*, xxvii.

¹⁷⁹ Saler, *The avant-garde*, 11. Printer and puppeteer H.D.C. Pepler, part of the Arts and Crafts community at Ditchling, tried without success to interest the Elmhursts in sponsoring a cooperative theatre where ‘design, interpretation, costume, lighting, music, the dance, and pure mime’ would all be ‘adapted to a unified purpose’. H.D.C. Pepler to Dorothy, 2 July 1937 and 12 July 1937, DWE/A/10/G.

¹⁸⁰ For an account of the craft studio, see chapter 4.

¹⁸¹ Wassily Kandinsky would paint a watercolour, give it to a musician to ‘play’ into music, and then to a dancer to ‘dance’ to both watercolour and sound. Marks, ‘Abstract art and the regeneration of mankind’, 55; Kandinsky, *Concerning the spiritual in art*.

¹⁸² Preston-Dunlop, *Rudolph Laban*, 19–21.

¹⁸³ Nikolaus Pevsner traces the connection between the founding fathers of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Bauhaus in *Pioneers of the modern movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936).

manifesto of 1919, advocated unifying all the creative arts under the primacy of architecture: 'Let us strive for, conceive and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come.'¹⁸⁴ The Arts and Crafts movement was an inspiration for the Bauhaus vision – though where William Morris extolled the romance of hand-making in small rural communities, Gropius and his fellow artists embraced machine manufacture for the modern city. With the closure of the Bauhaus under pressure from the Nazis in 1933, its ideals were widely disseminated – its members contributing to the founding of Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1933 and the Institute of Design in Chicago in 1937.¹⁸⁵

Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy both went briefly to Dartington, where they found an enterprise that they recognised.¹⁸⁶ Gropius, first visiting in 1933, thought that the estate mirrored his own hopes, 'the junction of all parts and details and the bringing them into relation to the whole life was my principal aim too'.¹⁸⁷ The Elmhursts commissioned him to redesign the Barn Theatre – but his presence on the estate was opposed by several incumbent artists who were concerned that he would overshadow their own efforts. The project was only partly completed.¹⁸⁸ Instead, Dorothy and Leonard supported his collaboration with Maxwell Fry and Henry Morris, Secretary to the Cambridgeshire Education Committee, in designing a village college at Impington – the only complete example of his work in Britain. Although Gropius' mark was not set obviously on the fabric of the estate, the Bauhaus ideals fed into the hope in the 1930s 'to bring together the four schools of drama, dance, design and music theatre'.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Walter Gropius, *Manifesto and programme of the Weimar State Bauhaus*, 1919. [<https://www.bauhaus100.de/en/past/works/education/manifest-und-programm-des-staatlichen-bauhauses/>, accessed 19 May 2018].

¹⁸⁵ Albert and Anni Albers emigrated to America, where they taught at the experimental Black Mountain College. László Moholy-Nagy eventually went to the Chicago, via Dartington, opening the Institute of Design in 1944. JoAnn C. Ellert, 'The Bauhaus and Black Mountain College', *The journal of general education* 24 (1972), 144-152. Fred Turner describes the refugee artists from the Bauhaus coming together in America with intellectuals and artists to create a 'democratic surround' that would go on to feed, more distinctly than in Britain, into the counterculture of the 1960s. *The democratic surround: multimedia and American liberalism from World War II to the psychedelic sixties* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

¹⁸⁶ In addition to Gropius and Moholy-Nagy, there was further contact between the Dartington and the Bauhaus, for example two (anonymous) letters on lessons at the Bauhaus, 22 October 1932 and 17 December 1932, DWE/G/S4/D. Dorothy's friend, the writer Nancy Wilson Ross, who was at the Bauhaus in the early 1930s, visited Dartington several times and saw the projects as closely connected. Nancy Wilson Ross, interview with Anthea Williams, 25 April 1977, T/HIS/S22/A.

¹⁸⁷ Walter Gropius to W.K. Slater, 21 July 1933, T/EST/7A/D1.

¹⁸⁸ David Elliott, 'Gropius in England', in Charlotte Benton (ed.), *A different world: emigré architects in Britain 1928-1958* ([London]: RIBA Heinz Gallery, 1995), 107-24.

¹⁸⁹ Leonard to John Christie, 9 February 1938, T/ADR/1.

Sam Smiles writes that, because Dartington retained a strong element of the backward-looking, of the Arts and Crafts tradition, it missed ‘fulfilling its potential as an artistic community, a British Bauhaus uniting all the arts and crafts with architecture and progressive education in a truly radical enterprise’.¹⁹⁰ This reading misses the Elmhursts’ overall aspiration, which was to regenerate the countryside, rather than to promote an artistic movement per se. The seeming schizophrenia resulting from Dorothy and Leonard’s desire to incorporate as many socially- or spiritually-minded aesthetic schools as possible is visible in the heterogeneous buildings that they commissioned for the estate: international modernist creations like William Lescaze’s Bauhaus-inspired white-cube house for the school’s headmaster sit alongside Arts-and-Crafts buildings by Oswald Milne and the medieval Hall, carefully restored in the craft tradition by William Weir.¹⁹¹ As Leonard wrote later, ‘it was not easy to find architects who had specialised in the needs of children, or of cows, or chickens, or of wage earners or of factory buildings, between the years of 1928 and 1935’.¹⁹²

Even though no one aesthetic school of unity-seeking theory – Bauhaus, Arts and Crafts or otherwise – was ever fully embraced at Dartington, for a brief moment in the late 1930s the ideal of integrating the arts did come close to realisation, with the formation of a Music Theatre Studio in 1937 under the direction of Hans Oppenheim and the Art Studios in 1939 under Hein Heckroth. The Music Theatre Studio – planned as both a school and a touring group – was intended to establish a new form of ‘modern operatic theatre’: ‘the world on the stage must as regards sound, rhythm and dynamics be perfectly blended with the world of the orchestra, to form a unified, living and harmonious cosmos’.¹⁹³ Hein Heckroth would give lessons in stage and costume design; Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder in musical mime; the Chekhov Theatre Studio in acting; and there would be further classes in expressive movement and body control.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the Art Studios were to offer a three-year course run by Hein Heckroth, Bernard Leach, Cecil Collins and Willi Soukop. They would provide direction in painting, sculpture, pottery and a ‘working knowledge of practice and basic principles as these have existed in all art from ancient to modern masters’.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Smiles, ‘Refuge or Regeneration’, 11.

¹⁹¹ David Jeremiah gives an account of interwar architecture on the estate. ‘Dartington’ – a modern adventure’, in Smiles (ed.), *Going modern and being British*, 43-78; and ‘Dartington Hall – a landscape of an experiment in rural reconstruction’, in Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (eds.), *The English countryside between the Wars: regeneration or decline?* (New York: The Boydell Press, 2006), 116-31.

¹⁹² Leonard to Nikolaus Pevsner, 1952, quoted in Nikolaus Pevsner, *Devon* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989 [1952]), 314.

¹⁹³ Hans Oppenheim, ‘A singer’s studio at Dartington’, T/AM/1/D.

¹⁹⁴ [n.a.], Introductory pamphlet for the Music Theatre Studio, [n.d.], T/AM/1/B.

¹⁹⁵ [n.a.], ‘Dartington Art Studios’, [n.d.], T/AV/2.

Soon after the instigation of Oppenheim's and Heckroth's studios, however, the Second World War began and many of the European artists were interned, ordered to leave by the government, or decided to go of their own accord. The Art Studios were disbanded before they could properly begin. The Music Theatre Studio managed one production, Handel's opera *Rodelinda*, performed at Dartington and the Old Vic in London, before it closed down.¹⁹⁶ Hans Oppenheim had hoped to revive a specifically English syncretic tradition of art, following in the footsteps of Henry Purcell, 'who wrote music and words in a single composition that involved dance, chorus, drama, opera and orchestra, and an intimate understanding of all five'.¹⁹⁷ But his aim had also been that his Music Theatre Studio would combat 'political cramps' by joining together a 'ring of similarly-thinking minds around the world', whose 'new and genuinely creative life' would bring 'a resurrection of a new Mankind'.¹⁹⁸ The advance of these political cramps had put a quick end to his nationally-specific but internationalist project. He was not alone in his desire to combat international tensions – in the 1930s, the Dartington arts department was a testing ground for a range of communitarian and internationalist ideas for social salvation.

(d) International and national visions

'Troupes of dancers and actors from Chelsea, Boston and the more exotic cultural capitals of Europe disported in the numerous theatres and dancing arenas, but endeavours to develop an indigenous artistic tradition satisfying the needs of the countryside petered out.'

Rolf Gardiner (1941)¹⁹⁹

When, in 1934, Leonard drew up a 'Time budget' listing his and Dorothy's fields of interest in order of importance, 'world peace' came top of the list – seen to derive from 'the discovery of some common philosophic basis for a comprehensive approach to problems of humanity in general'.²⁰⁰ For the Elmhursts, the harmonious progress of civilisation lay not with the nationalist mentality – which they, like many of their generation, deemed responsible for the First World War – but with communities that were simultaneously universally-minded and rooted in their locality.²⁰¹ Their pacifist internationalism was shared by a large number of

¹⁹⁶ Peter Cox, 'The Dartington Hall Arts Department and its Music Training Centre', 1 February 1945, T/AM/1/F.

¹⁹⁷ Hans Oppenheim's ambitions were decried by Leonard in a letter to H. Gee of the Ministry of Labour, 30 June 1937, T/AM/1/C.

¹⁹⁸ Hans Oppenheim, 'A singer's studio at Dartington', [n.d.], T/AM/1/D.

¹⁹⁹ Rolf Gardiner, 'Rural reconstruction', in H.J. Massingham (ed.), *England and the farmer: a symposium* (London: Batsford, 1941), 91-107, at 106-7.

²⁰⁰ Leonard, 'Time budget 1934-5', 8 November 1934, LKE/G/S8/I.

²⁰¹ Leonard, Notes on Dartington, January 1931, LKE/G/S11A.

liberals in the 1920s, and with many of the artists drawn to Dartington.²⁰² The 1930s introduced a more complex dialectic: the rise of totalitarian regimes and the arrival of refugees fleeing them meant that some began to see nationalism as not only culturally desirable but also necessary for defence. There was passionate debate on the estate – over whether utopia should be international or national, and whether such social ideals would be most effectively promoted through amateur art in the local community or through professional performance on a larger stage.

Kurt Jooss was representative of the large-stage and internationalist side of the argument. In Germany, in response to Nazi nationalism, he had developed a modernist choreographic style that was ‘an internationally focused fusion of ballet and modern dance’.²⁰³ Both he and Leonard hoped that the Ballets Jooss would further Dartington’s agenda by promoting international unity, carrying its ideals ‘right across national bounds’ and contributing to the ‘the building of one commonwealth of nations recognizing one common weal’.²⁰⁴ The company, performing successfully in London, Europe and America, and the dance school, drawing a diverse array of students, certainly put Dartington firmly on the international map.²⁰⁵ Yet Fritz Cohen, the Ballets’ composer, saw a problem: the company would be ineffectual at propagandising in foreign countries unless it was properly integrated with the estate: ‘to lead far reaching propaganda for Dartington Hall ideas [...] We all have to become much more a part of Dartington Hall’. The ‘spirit of the group’ might identify with Dartington ‘but the spirit alone is not enough: it has to work in flesh and blood [...] within the much wider order of the Arts Department and the entire estate’.²⁰⁶ Leonard agreed with Cohen that internationalism should begin with building a unified society on the local scale, but Jooss did not, and his extrovert ambitions for his group tended to pull the arts department ‘out of shape’.²⁰⁷

Other observers thought the foreign artists and internationalist agenda of the 1930s were anathema to Dartington’s original ambition – which they interpreted as being to discover a good standard of English rural life. For theatre director Rupert Doone, who had tried and

²⁰² Jeanne Morefield details the variety of liberal plans for furthering internationalism in *Covenants without swords: idealist liberalism and the spirit of empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁰³ Ramsay Burt, *Alien bodies: representation of modernity, ‘race’ and nation* (London: Routledge, 1998), 106.

²⁰⁴ Leonard, Ballets Jooss programme, 1939, T/AD/1/A/G.

²⁰⁵ In 1936 twelve students were Dutch, five Swedish, five German, two American, two Swiss, two Polish, one Danish, one Romanian, one French and one Russian. ‘Jooss-Leeder School of Dance Register 1934-6’, T/AD/1. Hutchinson Guest, ‘The Jooss-Leeder School’, 168.

²⁰⁶ Fritz Cohen to the Elmhursts, [extract], 1938, DWE/A/9/B.

²⁰⁷ Chris Martin, ‘Report to Dartington Trustees, 21 November 1941’, T/AA/1/G.

failed to get the Elmhursts to adopt his own theatre group, Dartington should be ‘a realistic experiment which may provide the basis upon which the big landlord-estates may be liquidated [...] not a “Pleasaunce of the Arts” and of international talent’.²⁰⁸ It was not that Doone condemned the ‘internationality of aesthetics’ per se. Nor did he think that artists ought to be excluded from the estate. He only argued that, in order to align with the Elmhursts’ wider objective, they must be representative of the locale, rather than turning the place into ‘a camp in which artists are to be concentrated regardless of their affinity for the country or their ability to represent it’.²⁰⁹ Doone’s ideas about indigenous art echo those of the interwar folk revival movement, with village dances and songs seen as the means of regenerating “Merrie England”.²¹⁰

The arts administrator Chris Martin was satisfied with a situation in which his department represented a collaboration between Dartington and ‘the best elements in the theatre of Weimar Germany’, and had even become ‘something new’ that was ‘neither German nor English’ – but some refugee artists agreed with Doone.²¹¹ The object of art was ‘to develop the particular traits of the natives and the land’.²¹² Art’s purpose was inherently nationalistic – or at least locale-specific. Oppenheim hoped to revive the English ‘art of music theatre’ that had been pursued by Henry Purcell before the ‘national tradition and school of music fell prey to fashion from abroad’.²¹³ Rudolph Laban, one of the foremost theorists of modern expressive dance, had been practising a systematic approach to nation-building dance in Germany and saw in Dartington the perfect opportunity for continuing with his radical experiments in this sphere.

For Rudolph Laban, art was a source of social and spiritual unity: a means of achieving ‘a right functioning of our individual as well as community life’ and a ‘connection and communication with the life-force’.²¹⁴ From 1912, in the Swiss utopian community of Monte Verita, he had run a summer school that offered movement, nature and spiritualism as

²⁰⁸ Rupert Doone’s criticisms were quoted by W.B. Curry in a letter to Chris Martin, 21 May 1936, T/DHS/B/20/A. Rupert Doone’s own Group Theatre (1932-53) was a socialist experiment founded with Robert Medley and intended to create ‘realistic fantasy’ that would provide a commentary on modern life. It attracted the involvement of Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender and W.H. Auden. Julian Symons, *The thirties: a dream revolved* (London: House of Stratus, 2001 [1960]), 64-73.

²⁰⁹ Rupert Doone quoted by W.B. Curry in a letter to Chris Martin, 21 May 1936, T/DHS/B/20/A.

²¹⁰ Georgina Boyes, *The imagined village: culture, ideology and the English folk revival* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 65.

²¹¹ Chris Martin, ‘Report to Dartington Trustees’, 18 May 1939, T/AA/1/E.

²¹² Rupert Doone quoted by W.B. Curry in a letter to Chris Martin, 21 May 1936, T/DHS/B/20/A.

²¹³ Leonard to H. Gee of the Ministry of Labour, 30 June 1937, T/AM/1/C.

²¹⁴ Rudolph Laban to Leonard, 10 March 1939, T/AD/3.

antidotes to modern society.²¹⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, he developed this culture of dance into a more elaborate community-building ideology in Germany. Its mainstay, the movement choir (*'Bewegung-schor'*) – a choreographed 'folk' celebration – was intended to draw in amateurs. Laban's ideology, along with the broader *völkisch* movement of which it formed part, was gradually co-opted by the Nazi state – turning folk into race.²¹⁶ While he himself was more interested in strengthening organic community than aggressive, fascist-style nationalism, he cooperated in this process.²¹⁷ 'We want to place our means of expression and the language of our eager energy in the service of the great tasks which our nation is fulfilling.'²¹⁸ In 1936, he choreographed a large dance demonstration for the Berlin Olympic Games.²¹⁹ Soon after, he fell out of favour with the regime. Accused of being a Freemason (true) and homosexual (not) he was forced to flee the country.²²⁰

When Laban arrived in Devon in 1938 to recover his health and write a book, he continued to pursue his hope of nation-building through communal creativity – seemingly not minding that it was a different nation he was now supporting.²²¹ He suggested to Leonard 'a splendid idea to join the marvellous unfolding of the professional dancing at Dartington [to] an organisation of the modern community dance chorus' – apparently not concerned that many of the professional artists were refugees from the regime he had until recently been supporting.²²² He imagined that this could be linked to the organisation of national fitness.²²³ He presented to Leonard a scheme similar to his earlier plans for a state dance college in Nazi Germany, although now he was more suspicious of the state.²²⁴ He thought that such a movement should grow locally, 'in an organic way' – 'the laws of movement cannot be forced upon anybody by

²¹⁵ This was called *Schule für Lebenskunst* ('School for the Art of Life'). On Laban's early years, see Patricia Vertinsky, *Disciplining bodies in the gymnasium: memory, monument, modernism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 277.

²¹⁶ John Alexander Williams, *Turning to nature in Germany: hiking, nudism, and conservation 1900-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

²¹⁷ There is broad consensus that Rudolph Laban was either apolitical or politically naïve and did not fully comprehend the implications of the association of his cultural efforts and with the Nazi regime. This is discussed by Martin Green in *Mountain of truth: the counterculture begins, Ascona, 1900-1920* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1989); by Valerie Preston-Dunlop in *Laban*; and by Carole Kew in 'From Weimar Movement Choir to Nazi community dance: the rise and fall of Rudolph Laban's "Festkultur"', *Dance research: the journal of the society for dance research* 17 (1999), 73-96.

²¹⁸ Rudolph Laban quoted in Vertinsky, *Disciplining bodies*, 286.

²¹⁹ Preston-Dunlop, *Laban*, 189-98.

²²⁰ Patricia Vertinsky, 'Schooling the dance: from dance under the swastika to movement education in the British school', *Journal of sport history* 31 (2004), 273-95.

²²¹ Born a Hungarian, Rudolph Laban obtained German nationality in 1935 and from 1938 spent the rest of his life in England – his trajectory perhaps influencing his sense that national loyalty might be easily transferred.

²²² Rudolph Laban to Leonard, 10 March 1939, T/AD/3.

²²³ Rudolph Laban, 'Practical outlook', [n.d.], T/AD/3.

²²⁴ Rudolph Laban to Leonard, 10 March 1939, T/AD/3.

a violent and spasmodic effort'.²²⁵ Nothing came of Laban's idea, but it says much for Dartington's ideological capaciousness that it could simultaneously support his nationalistic urges and other refugees' pacifist internationalism. The only practical outcome was a 'dance chorus' that Lisa Ullmann, Laban's assistant, organised under the auspices of the WEA in Plymouth. Unlike Margaret Barr's earlier WEA drama outreach, this was not closely connected to the estate.²²⁶

Nationalist art gained little traction at Dartington in the 1930s because the Elmhursts' approach was fundamentally internationalist. Nonetheless, the estate was brushed by the interwar enthusiasm for national regeneration through folk art.²²⁷ Rolf Gardiner, who trained in forestry at Dartington and then went on to build a multi-faceted rural regeneration project at Springhead in Dorset, saw folk music and dance as the 'unifying magic of a purposeful society'.²²⁸ He returned to the Elmhursts' estate with a touring troupe to give a 'semi-mystical' folk performance at a Sunday evening meeting – for him, a demonstration of how authentic folk culture could counter the bankruptcy of a materialist, individualist civilisation.²²⁹ Leonard's secretary spoke for a wider response among the audience when she recorded her puzzlement over the religious solemnity of the occasion, after which the audience was not permitted to applaud. 'For the people who like that sort of thing,' she wrote, 'that's the sort of thing they like.'²³⁰ Gardiner, 'chilled' by his reception, complained that Dartington lacked the 'fire of dedication': the arts department, full of 'good Americans who feel far more at home in New York', would never generate a 'living tradition of dance and mime' until it was 'based on fundamentally English, northern instincts of carriage and socially on the life and occasions of the estate'.²³¹ Dartington's participants, he wrote, thought of art as 'production or performance' put on for them, rather than 'festival solidarity'.²³² He would perhaps have looked with more approval on the 1929 community performance of *Comus*.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Peter Cox, 'The Dartington Hall Arts Department and its Music Training Centre', 1 February 1945, T/AM/1/F. After the war Laban set up an 'Art of Movement' studio in Manchester with the Elmhursts' sponsorship, and his ideas about dance entered the curriculum of many British schools. Vertinsky, 'Schooling the dance'.

²²⁷ Boyes, *The imagined village*; Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley (eds.), *Rolf Gardiner: folk, nature and culture in interwar Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

²²⁸ Rolf Gardiner, 'Reflections on music and statecraft', first published in 1934, compiled in Andrew Best (ed.), *Water springing from the ground: an anthology of the writings of Rolf Gardiner* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1972), 95-100, at 97.

²²⁹ For more on Rolf Gardiner, see Patrick Wright, *The village that died for England: the strange story of Tyneham* (London: Vintage, 1995), 151-63 and 176-202.

²³⁰ Kay Starr to Leonard Elmhurst, 22/23 September 1933, LKE/G/31/A.

²³¹ Rolf Gardiner to Leonard, 16 June 1933, LKE/G/15/B.

²³² Rolf Gardiner to Leonard, 28 September 1933, LKE/G/15/B.

Outside the European context, the Elmhirsts were more willing to support cultural nationalism. They welcomed the visit of the Japanese potters Yanagi Soetsu and Hamada Shoji, whose *Mingei* ('art of the people') movement advocated turning back to the functional beauty of everyday goods made by unknown traditional craftsmen as the basis for constructing a new national culture for Japan.²³³ Dorothy and Leonard also consistently supported the work of Rabindranath Tagore, whose university of Visva-Bharati was a touchstone for regenerating the national arts.²³⁴ And, after the Indian dancer and choreographer Uday Shankar had used Dartington as a base in 1936 for successful European and American tours with his troupe, Dorothy and Leonard provided £20,000 for him to set up a school for arts education in the United Provinces in northern India.²³⁵ Shankar was celebrated by supporters of the Indian cultural renaissance, including Tagore, for his embrace of a pan-regional style of Indian ballet, 'developing the indigenous arts as symbolic carriers of nationhood'.²³⁶ His short-lived school in Almora promised an 'all-India character' and intended not to take on any Western students for the first five years.²³⁷ Promoting European nationalism, in the shadow of the First World War and then the Second, ran against the Elmhirsts' vision for Dartington as a hub of world unity; supporting cultural nationalism in non-European countries seemed to them a very different proposition. This contradiction, not uncommon in the interwar years, bore a flavour of primitivism – there was a sense that non-European nations were ahistorical or apolitical; that they were lower down or separate in the world order and unlikely to harm the project of building an international utopia even if they developed an independent identity.²³⁸

²³³ The association was through Bernard Leach, who was central to the early *Mingei* movement, offering information on Western culture – especially on William Morris, John Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts movement. Yanagi Soetsu to Leonard, 4 August 1929, T/AAP/3/A; Yuko Kikuchi, 'The myth of Yanagi's originality: the formation of *Mingei* theory in its social and historical context', *Journal of design history* 7 (1994), 247-66.

²³⁴ The Elmhirsts supported Tagore until his death in 1941 and continued to advise and give money to his Institute of Rural Reconstruction up to 1947, when it was taken over by the Indian government.

²³⁵ The troupe was called 'Uday Shankar and his Hindu Ballet'. Initially Dorothy's daughter Beatrice Straight, one of Shankar's most enthusiastic students whilst he was at Dartington, was going to put up the money for the Uday Shankar India Culture Centre. She also briefly considered marrying him. In part to protect her, her parents took over the funding. The centre flourished briefly, attracting the interest of the Indian government, but within five years internal tensions and financial problems forced it to close. Correspondence between Shankar and the Elmhirsts and papers relating to the Uday Shankar India Culture Centre are in file LKE/India/19/A-D and DWE/A/8/A; Ruth K. Abrahams, 'Uday Shankar: the early years, 1900-1938', *Dance chronicle* 30 (2007), 363-426, at 365.

²³⁶ Rabindranath Tagore cited Shankar as the cause of the re-establishment of dance as a legitimate public art form in India. Rabindranath Tagore, 'Tagore's tribute to Shankar', trans. Basanta Koomar Roy, *The American dancer*, February 1937, 13; Nicholas, *Dancing in utopia*, 93.

²³⁷ Uday Shankar to G.B. Pratt, the Premier of the United Provinces, [n.d.], LKE/India/19/A.

²³⁸ The intersection of primitivism, nationalism and imperialism is explored in the French context by John Warne Monroe, 'Surface tensions: empire, Parisian modernism, and "authenticity" in African sculptures, 1917-1939', *American historical review* 117 (2012), 445-75. Morefield discusses the contradiction between universalism and the hierarchy of colonial and colonised countries in *Covenants without swords*, 2, 131 and passim.

Looking outwards and looking forwards

The high point of the professional era of the arts department was the summer of 1938. There were some sixty foreign artists working and studying at Dartington. Chekhov's Theatre Studio, the Ballets Jooss and Oppenheim's Music Theatre Studio were building the estate's international renown as an arts centre.²³⁹ Dartington modelled in miniature the effect that sculptor Barbara Hepworth saw émigrés having nationally. 'Suddenly England felt alive and rich – the centre of an international movement [...] We all seemed to be carried on the crest of this robust and inspiring wave of creative energy. We were not at that time prepared to admit that it was a movement in flight.'²⁴⁰ When the Second World War began and most of the foreign artists on the estate left, Chris Martin found himself with 'a mere skeleton of a Department and a depleted endowment'.²⁴¹ Dorothy, coming back from her work with Chekhov in Connecticut, channelled her energy into promoting Anglo-American unity as part of the war effort, rather than into stabilising the arts department.

At this point, Leonard's unifying ideal came back to the fore: not high standards, but community utility; not the Ballets Jooss' international success, but how 'to train other Mark [Tobey]s to start groups in the villages and schools'.²⁴² Experimentation with community involvement stretched back through the 1930s, when Leonard had pursued it in Devon independently of the main arts department. When war broke up the professional status quo, Chris Martin shifted his position to follow Leonard's lead. His new focus was to make the estate a training centre for teachers taking arts to the surrounding countryside.²⁴³ There would be schools of dance, drama, music and the visual arts, each with a small performing group to give students experience by making tours of the regions and working with amateurs. Rather than the earlier, local initiatives of the 1920s – the socialist pluralist model of social improvement through autonomous units – this iteration of the community-building ideal leaned towards national progressive collaboration with state organisations, culminating in

²³⁹ Chris Martin, 'Plan for the Arts Department', 1941, T/AA/1/H.

²⁴⁰ Barbara Hepworth, *A pictorial autobiography* (London: Tate, 1985). A vivid overview of this effect can be found in Daniel Snowman, *The Hitler emigrés: the cultural impact on Britain of refugees from Nazism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002).

²⁴¹ Cox, *The arts*, 11. Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder were sent to the Isle of Man; Hein Heckroth was transported to a prisoner-of-war camp in New South Wales; Rudolph Laban and Lisa Ullmann escaped imprisonment, but their movement was restricted. Of the students and the remnants of the professional groups, some stayed on at Dartington for a while, but most gradually drifted away. The reformed Ballets Jooss performed with the newly-established Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts in the 1940s but was disbanded in 1947.

²⁴² Leonard to Dorothy, 20 November 1937, LKE/DWE/6/B.

²⁴³ Chris Martin, 'Plan for the Arts Department', 1941, T/AA/1/H.

Dartington's sponsorship of a nationwide enquiry into the state of the arts. The next section looks at the work that Leonard did to support community arts outside the professionalised Dartington arts department in the 1930s. The section after follows these efforts to their culmination in cooperation with the state during and after the Second World War.

(a) Leonard and community drama in the 1930s

Leonard had supported the Workers' Educational Association since his youth in Yorkshire, attending lectures and donating funds. He was nonetheless chary of committing Dartington to a 'fixed mode of cooperation' with this or any other external, reform-minded organisation in the estate's radically experimental early stage.²⁴⁴ In the 1930s, once he and Dorothy had become more open to collaboration, the problem became the limited structures available with which to work. They were frustrated by organisational chaos in adult education: 'the WEA, Women's Institutes, County Council, University College, local institutions such as our own, all try to attack this vast problem from different angles'.²⁴⁵ In a letter to R.H. Tawney, Leonard compared it to 'the field of marketing': 'Between competitive retailers and middlemen, the public is getting neither quality nor quantity'.²⁴⁶ Further complicating matters, Leonard's experiences at Sriniketan, with the YMCA and then at Dartington, had led him to disapprove of the WEA's general mode of approach in the countryside: rather than through lectures and discussions, he wrote, rural people actually learned through "Passionate perception".²⁴⁷ This meant through the arts.

The vehicle he found for furthering this agenda, once the arts department itself took a professional turn, was the Devon Extension Scheme (DES). Established in 1927 as a collaboration between the WEA, Devon County Council and University College of the South West (UCSW), its central figure was F.G. Thomas, the tutor organiser appointed to head up its operations.²⁴⁸ Thomas worked to marshal dramatic organisations in Devon – the British Drama Society, the UCSW, various local repertory companies – into cooperating to hold classes and put on plays and festivals.²⁴⁹ Leonard spoke at the first DES conference, sat on its

²⁴⁴ Leonard to John Murray of the University College of the South West, 25 December 1927, LKE/EDU/1/A.

²⁴⁵ Leonard to John Murray, 30 April 1929, LKE/EDU/1/C.

²⁴⁶ Leonard to R.H. Tawney, 27 February 1928, LKE/EDU/10/B.

²⁴⁷ Leonard to Henry Morris, 1 July 1934, T/HIS/21/A. The phrase 'passionate perception' was borrowed from John Maynard Keynes. See footnote 143, chapter 2.

²⁴⁸ A fuller account of the work of F.G. Thomas and his wife Irene is given by Mick Wallis in 'Drama in the villages: three pioneers' in Brassley et al (eds.), *The English countryside between the Wars*, 102-115.

²⁴⁹ F.G. Thomas to Leonard, 23 March 1928, LKE/EDU/1/B.

governing committee and then, in 1935, became its chairman.²⁵⁰ He supported and advised Thomas, sharing with him a sense of the importance of the arts in extra-mural extension programmes and of helping ‘all the various activities of the village which are making for the good of the community as a whole’ rather than supporting one particular educational organisation.²⁵¹ For Thomas, community drama was a form of adult education superior to lectures, radio or film because it was universal, crossing class and intellectual barriers, and because it was ‘centripetal’, bringing villages together and demonstrating their unity.²⁵² He also saw drama as particularly suited to the ‘countryman’ whose ‘mode of thought is not by abstractions based on wider generalities of knowledge’ but is ‘an exploration of new experiences’.²⁵³

When Leonard took up chairmanship of the DES, he hoped he would be presiding over ‘a pioneer experiment’ in bringing education to ‘the isolated rural population’, free from the ‘petty squabbings’ which he had experienced in other areas of local activism.²⁵⁴ He was to be disappointed, however, and was soon comparing the work to being ‘back in India discussing communal representation’.²⁵⁵ Interwar adult education was a shifting field. There were tensions between district and centre.²⁵⁶ The WEA, county authorities and universities jockeyed for power.²⁵⁷ Thomas was caught in the crossfire. His post was funded by the Carnegie UK Trust for its first three years, but he remained attached to the WEA and his pioneering approach roused the wrath, first of the WEA district secretary, J.G. Trevena, then of the WEA’s central bureaucracy.²⁵⁸ The WEA tried to tie Thomas down to teaching orthodox, grant-earning tutorial classes and to restrict his collaboration with other organisations working in the villages.²⁵⁹

Leonard put considerable effort into pulling the institutional strings required to allow Thomas to go on doing ‘just the kind of educational work that is most needed’.²⁶⁰ He asked the National Council of Social Services to review the situation, accusing the WEA, UCSW Extra-

²⁵⁰ F.G. Thomas, ‘Birthday party at Hay Tor’, *Western times*, 2 December 1927, British Library Newspaper Archives.

²⁵¹ [n.a.], ‘Weekend school to be held at Pinchaford Farm’, 19-20 November 1927, LKE/EDU/1/A.

²⁵² F.G. Thomas, *The new learning*, 115.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵⁴ Leonard, ‘Time budget 1934-5’, 8 November 1934, LKE/G/S8/1. For Leonard’s work in with local private and state reforming organisations, see chapter 4.

²⁵⁵ Leonard to E. Green, organising secretary of the WEA, 21 February 1935, LKE/EDU/3/A.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Wallis, ‘Drama in the villages’, 111.

²⁵⁸ E. Green of the London WEA warned Leonard of the danger of Thomas’s work impinging on that of the WEA district secretary, J.G. Trevena, 20 February 1935, LKE/EDU/3/A. Trevena himself also strove throughout the 1930s to curtail Thomas’s remit.

²⁵⁹ See files LKE/EDU/1-10.

²⁶⁰ Leonard to J.G. Trevena, 28 March 1928, LKE/EDU/1/B.

Mural Department and county authorities of deliberately failing to cooperate.²⁶¹ He helped Thomas in his successful application for a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship to get experience in better-organised American extra-mural education.²⁶² When Thomas returned from this trip, his path had been smoothed by a chance change in Board of Education regulations, so that he could be transferred to working directly for the UCSW.²⁶³ Earlier, Leonard had supported the idea of multiple independent schemes for social reform – a form of socialist pluralism – but his experience with Thomas and the DES pushed him to towards championing a planned, centralised system for adult education and the social services more generally.

Leonard also supported Mary Kelly, founder of the Village Drama Society, in his search for dynamic ways to promote community arts. Kelly began the society after the First World War in her home village and helped it to expand, but she always insisted, like Thomas, that not too much should be imposed from above – on ‘the growth of this village movement from within, rather than the application of imitative drama from without’.²⁶⁴ The Elmhursts were regulars at her ‘folk drama’, which included plays and pageants.²⁶⁵ In 1935, at Leonard’s instigation, Kelly was appointed the honorary director of drama for the DES, working alongside F.G. Thomas. In an indication of the untidy nature of adult education, despite this appointment, the British Drama League (into which the Village Drama Society was incorporated in 1932), still had to pay her salary.²⁶⁶ Kelly’s trajectory closely echoed that of the Elmhursts and other elites in the voluntary sector: beginning as ‘a gentrywoman exercising class patronage’, she moved to collaborating with the state and charitable agencies in the interwar years, and by the 1940s was working for a publicly funded institution – but through all she retained a sense of being a ‘natural’ leader of society.²⁶⁷ It was not an uncommon path or point of view, and James Hinton finds that even the Second World War, for all its democratic rhetoric, just as often

²⁶¹ Leonard to Captain Ellis of the National Council of Social Services, 23 February 1928, LKE/EDU/1/B.

²⁶² F.G. Thomas’ emphasis on community-building rather than the acquisition of intellectual knowledge in adult education reflected the attitude of many progressives in America. Joseph F. Kett, *The pursuit of knowledge under difficulties* (Stanford: U.P., 1994), 313-5.

²⁶³ Under Article XI of the amended Regulations of 1931, universities were given funding for the salaries of full-time tutors delivering pioneering work as well as tutorial classes. Mick Wallis, ‘Drama in the Villages’, 113-4.

²⁶⁴ Mary Kelly was referred to the Elmhursts by Geoffrey Whitworth of the British Drama League. The Elmhursts gave her a gift of £50 and guaranteed an overdraft on the bank. Mary Kelly to Dorothy, 13 July 1932, DWE/A/11/C.

²⁶⁵ Dorothy to Thelma Cazalet MP, 3 May 1940, DWE/A/11/C.

²⁶⁶ Mary Kelly to Leonard, 6 August 1935, T/ADR/2/B.

²⁶⁷ Mick Wallis, ‘Kelly, Mary Elfreda (1888–1951)’, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/69833?docPos=1>, accessed 15 May 2017]; Mick Wallis, ‘Unlocking the secret soul: Mary Kelly, pioneer of village theatre’, *New theatre quarterly* 16 (2000), 347-58.

reinforced the authority of traditional social leaders as it stimulated radical challenge from below.²⁶⁸

Leonard hoped that the Dartington arts department would contribute to the efforts of the DES. The gulf between the ideas of such community organisers as Kelly and Thomas and those that were dominant among Dartington's professional artists in the 1930s, however, was indicated by Michael Chekhov's reaction to seeing a performance put on by one of Thomas' drama groups: 'I imagine you must have many different aims for your work, and that you do not mean to try to make actors [...] if this were so they would have to have long and serious training'.²⁶⁹ Although Thomas had asked for constructive feedback, Chekhov saw village drama as so far from his own work that it scarcely registered on the same scale of analysis. In consequence of the difficulty of knitting Dartington into broader efforts for adult education, and of Leonard's unsatisfactory experience of co-ordinating the patchwork of private and public organisations working in Devon, in the late 1930s he increasingly turned his mind to a new fulcrum of social reform. This would be oriented around strong central or regional planning, with adult education properly coordinated by the universities or county councils.²⁷⁰ He hoped Dartington could lead the way in the development of this centralised system.

(b) Supporting the national arts: the war years – and after

With the outbreak of war, Chris Martin began to think that 'the foreign musician or man of the theatre' would 'not easily find himself at home in England' and that Dartington should turn its attention 'to the amateur and educational world'.²⁷¹ Just as he had wanted his professional foreign artists to be nationally renowned, however, in this new turn to community arts he hoped to replace the extemporised local activities of the arts department's early years with long-term, large-scale collaborative projects with government and voluntary organisations. He also saw such collaboration as an opportunity to access more money. 'We ought to make every effort to depart from our position of splendid isolation and forge a link between ourselves and other individuals and organisations working in the same field,' he wrote in a 1941 plan for the arts department, 'particularly those working with public money'.²⁷² He imagined Dartington as 'a type of centre which does not exist anywhere else in England', combining a close-textured knowledge of 'the problems and difficulties in the

²⁶⁸ James Hinton, *Women, social leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁶⁹ Michael Chekhov to F.G. Thomas, 27 April 1936, LKE/EDU/4/B.

²⁷⁰ F.G. Thomas, 'The basis of an extension department of the UCSW, Exeter', 1935, LKE/EDU/3/D.

²⁷¹ Chris Martin, 'Plan for the Arts Department', 1941, T/AA/1/H.

²⁷² Ibid.

areas' with links to national organisations.²⁷³ This national-scale vision absolved participants of the need to make the arts part of a holistic community at Dartington; instead the arts – and Dartington – would do social service in helping to integrate British society as a whole, dovetailing in with the war-years' vogue for central planning.²⁷⁴

Busy with war work the Elmhursts asked Chris Martin to take over liaison with the DES, and to collaborate with the Local Education Authority (LEA) to set up the Devon County Committee for Music and Drama.²⁷⁵ This committee, which also involved the UCSW and representatives of local organisations, was to promote arts classes in villages and schools and organise festivals and courses, effectively taking over the work that F.G. Thomas had pioneered.²⁷⁶ It was the start of a connection between the Dartington arts department and the state that would grow over several decades, culminating, in 1974, in the department's receiving national funding as a college of arts.²⁷⁷ The work brought Martin into contact with others all over the country who were promoting arts in rural areas, including the Rural Music Schools Association and the Carnegie UK Trust.

In the interwar years, 'public expenditure to subsidize the performing arts in Great Britain was widely perceived as objectionable'.²⁷⁸ The tendency towards the nationalisation of culture under the Nazis and in Soviet Russia confirmed this prejudice against what seemed to be a manifestation of totalitarian centralisation. The propaganda requirements of the Second World War, however, along with the desire to shore up the national framework of culture during wartime, radically altered this view.²⁷⁹ The result was the setting up of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in 1940, and the launch of an ambitious project to take visual art, music and drama to audiences throughout the country.²⁸⁰ Initially,

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ If politicians 'don't do some thorough planning now it will be too late when the war ends,' Leonard wrote to Professor Stanley Watkins of University College, 10 January 1940, LKE/EDU/7/A. Daniel Ritschel explores the interest in planning in *The politics of planning: the debate on economic planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

²⁷⁵ The DES was paid for by the University Extra Mural Board and a grant from the Elmhursts. It tried to negotiate funding from the Carnegie UK Trust for the salary of a director but was deemed 'too grandiose a scheme' for Carnegie to sponsor. [n.a.], Note on Devon County Committee for Music and Drama, [n.d.], DWE/A/6/B.

²⁷⁶ Chris Martin, 'Report to Dartington Trustees', 7 February 1941, T/AA/1/G.

²⁷⁷ Sam Richards, *Dartington College of Arts: learning by doing. A biography of a college* (Totnes: Longmarsh Press, 2015).

²⁷⁸ F.M. Leventhal, "'The best for the most': CEMA and state sponsorship of the arts in wartime, 1939-1945", *Twentieth century British history* 1 (1990), 289-317, at 289.

²⁷⁹ Brian Foss, *War paint: art, war, state and identity in Britain, 1939-1945* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2007).

²⁸⁰ The War Artists' Advisory Committee (established in 1939), had a similar impetus to CEMA – as well as recording the war, it was intended 'to raise public taste, foster a national culture, and lay the groundwork for post-war patronage of art by the state'. Foss, *War paint*, 9 and 193.

although CEMA operated under the supervision of the Board of Education, it was paid for by the Pilgrim Trust, a philanthropic organisation set up in 1930 by American millionaire Edward Harkness.²⁸¹ By the end of the war it had transitioned to being wholly funded by the state. The change in the Dartington arts department's direction at this moment coincided with the change in the government's – in part because they were by this point closely linked.

Chris Martin was in close contact with CEMA from the start, and it was even suggested that Dartington might become the organisation's headquarters.²⁸² Although this did not happen, other more transient proposals for co-operation did reach fruition, many of them related to music. In 1940, under a scheme co-organised by the arts department and the Devon LEA, Hans Oppenheim's Dartington Hall Music Group played for eleven schools; the same year, in collaboration with CEMA, it toured local towns and villages.²⁸³ Another group, the Dartington Hall Piano Quartet, also gave touring concerts, funded by a combination of the Pilgrim Trust and CEMA. Despite, or perhaps because of, the privations of war, Dartington's arts programme was finally integrating with the community in the way the Elmhursts had always hoped.

These disparate small endeavours were drawn together, in 1942, by the arrival of musician Imogen Holst.²⁸⁴ The daughter of composer and adult educator Gustav Holst, she first came to Dartington temporarily as one of CEMA's Music Travellers – a band of musicians charged with organising musical activities among amateurs in rural areas during the war.²⁸⁵ Chris Martin was impressed by her skill in combining amateurs into a vibrant music community within a few weeks, and invited her to remain and start a training course at Dartington, primarily for rural music teachers and county music organisers.²⁸⁶

²⁸¹ Edward Harkness and Dorothy both made substantial gifts for student buildings at American universities, owned mansions on the same avenue in New York and supported the arts in Britain – but do not seem to have been intimate. Roger L. Geiger, *To advance knowledge: the growth of American research universities 1900-1940* ([n.p]: Routledge, 2017), 119 and 128.

²⁸² Cox, *The arts*, 12.

²⁸³ Chris Martin, 'Report on the visit of the Dartington Hall Chamber Music Group to LEA schools in Devon', [1940], T/AM/1/E; Chris Martin, Memorandum, 14 January 1941, T/AM/1/E.

²⁸⁴ Imogen Holst was member of the English Folk Dance and Song Society from 1923, part of the English folk revival. After leaving Dartington in 1951 she went to Aldeburgh, Suffolk, remaining there for the rest of her life to run the Aldeburgh Festival, a celebration of English classical music founded by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears.

²⁸⁵ Gustav Holst was for a time director of music at Morley College, a philanthropic adult education institute set up in South London in 1889 to improve working class access to 'good' culture. The Music Travellers were the invention of musician and broadcaster Sir Walford Davies. They were originally intended just for Wales but were subsequently applied to the whole of the country. They were first funded by the Pilgrim Trust and then taken over by CEMA during the war.

²⁸⁶ Cox, *The arts*, chapter 4.

Holst's socialism made her initially sceptical of the wealth of Dartington, but she was reconciled by how egalitarian she found its day-to-day functioning, and over the next eight years she established the foundations of a music school.²⁸⁷ It would be one of the chief components of the post-war arts department.²⁸⁸ She also represented Dartington at Devon County Music Committee meetings, spreading its influence more widely, and contributed to turning the estate into 'an arts centre for the locality' by launching a full programme of music, from gramophone recitals to composition lessons and an amateur choir and orchestra.²⁸⁹ A pupil at Dartington School remembered playing the cello on open strings next to Leonard, who had started learning at the same time as herself: 'Everyone, but everyone was involved in playing music'.²⁹⁰ In 1961, the arts department was transformed into the Dartington College of Arts on the foundations that Holst had laid. This part-publicly, part-Dartington-Hall funded institution offered courses that prepared students for a career of teaching in the arts – the first to do so for state-school students.²⁹¹

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Imogen Holst – centre, back, in patterned dress – with community singers, 1940s.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

²⁸⁷ Imogen Holst, interview with Michael Young, 21 March 1977, T/HIS/S22/A.

²⁸⁸ The music school began with students aged sixteen to eighteen. The forty-three students who had graduated from the course by 1949 went on to become rural music school directors, music teachers, administrators or professional performers. In 1951 a drama course was launched to parallel the music course, but it quickly failed and from then on drama was mainly continued through association with such external institutions as Bath Academy. T/AM/1/G.

²⁸⁹ Holst's activities are detailed in Peter Cox and Jack Dobbs (eds.), *Imogen Holst at Dartington* (The Dartington Press: Dartington, 1988).

²⁹⁰ Author interview with Etain Todds (née Kabraji), 17 May 2015.

²⁹¹ Richards, *Dartington College of Arts*, 15.

Another aspect of Dartington's contribution to a new phase of national reconstruction was its custodianship for the duration of the war of a library of educational films belonging to the Area Film Council of the South West and the Ministry of Information.²⁹² Documentary and educational film had been an interest on the estate since 1933, when a Ciné Group was set up by the schoolteacher Bill Hunter. The group at first concentrated on informing the estate departments about one another's lives and recording 'what Dartington is'.²⁹³ Its ambitions to be of 'social service' then expanded outward, to making 'documentary, advertising and classroom films' which would 'advertise a new, experimental, and progressive undertaking'.²⁹⁴ By 1940, the film unit was bringing in more money than most other arts department endeavours through sales and bookings from schools, institutes and LEAs.²⁹⁵ Although it secured a commission from the Ministry of Agriculture to produce a film on Artificial Insemination, grandiose hopes of its rivalling the popularity achieved by the GPO Film Unit never transpired and it was wound down in 1949.²⁹⁶

Art and theatre took a back seat to music during the war, but similarly moved towards local and national community participation. Exhibitions and courses were held in collaboration with the LEA and various community organisations. In 1940, Dartington hosted two public exhibitions in conjunction with the London Gallery, 'the first major showing of surrealist work in a British provincial gallery'.²⁹⁷ In 1949, a successful 'Teacher and the Arts' course was run for the LEA, bringing together ninety teachers and cementing a permanent relationship with the LEA.²⁹⁸ Dartington's arts department formed close links with other bodies, new and old. It supported the Devon Guild of Craftsmen, founded in 1955. It ran a 'Made in Devon' exhibition in 1950 at the behest of the County Federation of Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds, which wanted to help its member organisations prepare for the Festival of Britain. Walter Gropius' Barn Theatre became the home of a new

²⁹² The South West was the first region to establish a Film Council and an Area Film Library. G. Patrick Meredith, 'Film Council of the South-West: the Area Film Library and other developments', April 1941, T/AF/1/A; Chris Martin, 'Report to Dartington Trustees', 7 February 1941, T/AA/1/G.

²⁹³ Vic Elmhirst to Dorothy, 16 May 1934, T/AF/1/B.

²⁹⁴ Bill Hunter to Leonard, [n.d.], T/AF/1/B.

²⁹⁵ Chris Martin, 'Report to Dartington Trustees', 7 February 1941, T/AA/1/G.

²⁹⁶ The Post Office film unit was established in 1933 to create socially useful documentary film, to cultivate good public relations and to educate staff. Its well-received work was effectively nationalised during the war, and in 1946 it formally became part of the newly created Central Office of Information. Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell (eds.), *The projection of Britain: a history of the GPO Film Unit* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁹⁷ With the outbreak of war, Roland Penrose and E.L.T. Mesens of the London Gallery decided to locate their collections at Dartington, allowing them to be used in public exhibitions. Six exhibitions were planned, but only two took place, 'Panorama', a survey of modern art, and 'Before Cubism, Negro Art, Cubism and Chirico', both in 1940. David Jeremiah, 'Dartington' – a modern adventure', 68.

²⁹⁸ Cox, *The arts*, 81-2.

community theatre group, the Playgoers Society, and was also used by a patchwork of amateur and university drama groups, and as an annual meeting place for county drama organisers.²⁹⁹ The move back to community-oriented, collaborative arts initiatives undertaken by Chris Martin at the onset of the Second World War defined the shape of Dartington's activities for decades to come, yielding more tangible and far-reaching results than the first, inward-looking iteration of the same philosophy in the 1920s had managed to achieve.

(c) *The Arts Enquiry*

The Arts Enquiry was the apotheosis of the community-utility approach to the arts at Dartington. It was a survey launched by the Dartington Hall Trust in 1941 with the cooperation of a range of public and private organisations to make a comprehensive investigation into the state of the visual arts, music and film in England.³⁰⁰ Over the course of eight years it brought together arts professionals, artists, philanthropists and public thinkers in specialist committees to look at the social value of the arts, their place in education and their economic structure. It was funded by the Dartington Hall Trust, published by the Elmhirst-sponsored think-tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP), and represented significant private sector involvement in arts policy research for policy formation.³⁰¹ Its influence on the Labour Party's arts policy after the war was substantial.³⁰²

The Enquiry stemmed in part from Leonard's burgeoning interest in national planning. This interest reflected a wider vogue for planning, which moved from being 'the foremost radical panacea of the day' in the 1930s to become, during the war, a government pre-occupation that would define the shape of the post-war British state.³⁰³ Chris Martin was more specifically inspired to organise the enquiry by his friendship with Labour intellectual G.D.H. Cole. Cole was the director of the Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey, an investigation into

²⁹⁹ Joan Chissell, 'Dartington', *The musical times* 91 (1950), 337-41, at 40.

³⁰⁰ The members of the investigation into visual arts included F.A.S. Gwatkin (Dartington Hall trustee), G.D.H. Cole (Nuffield College), M.C. Glasgow (CEMA), M.A. Hamilton (Reconstruction Secretariat), B.I. Evans (British Council), A.D.K. Owen (PEP), J. Wilkie (assessor to the Carnegie Trust) and Julian Huxley. To begin with, Chris Martin was the director and Peter Cox the secretary.

³⁰¹ The Elmhirsts spent £19,000 over the course of the six-year Arts Enquiry. Upchurch, *The origins of the Arts Council movement*, 95-8.

³⁰² There was also a more personal connection between Dartington and post-war Labour arts policy in the form of Michael Young. The former Dartington school pupil and protégé of the Elmhirsts drafted the 1945 Labour party manifesto for the general election, *Let us face the future*, which emphasised the need 'to assure our people full access to the great heritage of culture in this nation' (London: Labour Party, 1945), 9. When Labour was elected, its commitment to building art into the democratic state was confirmed by its turning CEMA into a permanent body, the forerunner of the Arts Council of Great Britain.

³⁰³ Ritschel, *The politics of planning*, 4. See chapter 4 for further discussion of the popularity of planning in the 1930s and 40s.

the location of industry, distribution of population, education, government and social services.³⁰⁴ Martin feared that, in post-war reconstruction, ‘industry and professions, education and the social services will all put forward plans for their own betterment and claims for some measure of state support’, but that the arts would have no unified platform.³⁰⁵ He therefore proposed an investigation of the arts as supplementary to, though unaffiliated with, the Nuffield Survey.

The government did not back the Arts Enquiry directly, but it sent a representative from the Reconstruction Secretariat to sit on its committee and requested interim and final reports of its findings. As well as undertaking the survey for the purposes of contributing to national planning, both Leonard and Martin saw the enquiry as a way of gathering information that would provide a fresh direction for Dartington itself.³⁰⁶ In that sense, the motivation behind the project had two strands. One was about helping the government. The other, part of a wider culture of surveying that Dartington had supported since its instigation, was about being a community project whose example and investigations would help other like-minded people and operations to help themselves.³⁰⁷ Nationalist progressive and socialist pluralist aspirations for the unifying powers of the arts were combined.

There were four projected areas of investigation: the visual arts, theatre, music and factual film.³⁰⁸ The first became the most substantial. With Chris Martin as the committee chairman, *The visual arts* was intended to be ‘an objective and fact-finding survey of the present situation’, a yardstick against which to measure the merit of a ‘multitude of schemes in the air’ for the future of the arts.³⁰⁹ Soon after work began, Martin fell ill and overall direction of the Arts Enquiry was taken over by his assistant, Peter Cox. Martin’s position as chairman of

³⁰⁴ The Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey, begun in 1941 and based in Oxford, was an attempt to foster cooperation between academics, politicians and business leaders in planning reconstruction. It had government backing and prepared reports at the request of government departments.

³⁰⁵ ‘The Arts Enquiry’, [n.d.], T/AAE/1/B.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ The surveys conducted by Dartington – for example J.R. Currie and W.H. Long’s *An agricultural survey in South Devon* (1929) – were connected to a wider movement for regional survey in Britain between 1918 and 1939 that was inspired, in particular, by Patrick Geddes. As is discussed further in chapter 4, Geddes saw regional surveying as a means of utopia-building: both making the most of an individual place and encouraging participative citizenship, giving the individual the sense of being ‘at once a local, national and world citizen’. David Matless, ‘Regional surveys and local knowledges: the geographical imagination in Britain 1918-1939’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 17 (1993), 464-80.

³⁰⁸ *The visual arts* was published in 1946. *Factual film*, published in 1947, and *Music*, in 1949, had less impact. A projected fourth on theatre was never completed.

³⁰⁹ [n.a.], ‘The Arts Enquiry’ [n.d.], T/AAE/1/B.

the visual arts was given to Julian Huxley. Long associated with the Elmhursts through his work with PEP, Huxley had very different ambitions for the survey to Martin.

Huxley had been inspired by the state sponsorship of artists he had seen in the 1930s in New Deal America under the Federal Arts Project. Rather than just collating facts, he wanted the enquiry to advocate a similar model of reconstruction; state funding should replace private patronage and art should be used to give ‘society a consciousness’.³¹⁰ Huxley succeeded in widening the scope of the Arts Enquiry to making recommendations, but in doing so he alienated some members of the committee. CEMA’s representative, Mary Glasgow, objected that the expectations of her own organisation and of the government – that the enquiry would be concerned with objective fact-finding – were being betrayed.³¹¹ The enquiry was claiming to have official support, whilst being ‘a purely private venture’ sponsored by Dartington.³¹² The consequence of this disagreement was that the central visual arts committee was disbanded, but not before the bulk of research was complete and the writing-up phase begun.³¹³

The specialists who reported to the visual arts committee, based at CEMA’s offices in London, called attention to many of the diverse, sometimes incompatible, ambitions that the Dartington arts department had tried to cultivate since its inception. The architecture historian and German refugee Nikolaus Pevsner, for example, argued that the arts and crafts should be taught together, and with an eye to the needs of industry; that there should be a planned building up of ‘a school-cum-workshop-cum-sales organisation’; that people should be encouraged to engage with art through ‘an enlightened policy of exhibitions and museum display, concerned with objects of everyday use’.³¹⁴ This last suggestion spoke to the long-running debate at Dartington over whether to support popularly-accessible standards and amateur creativity or paternalistically to raise the level of mass taste through professional

³¹⁰ Julian Huxley quoted in Harrison, ‘The visual arts’, 214. Julian Huxley’s views on the international social function of art – put forward in his capacity as secretary-general of the UNESCO preparatory commission – can be found in *UNESCO, its purpose and its philosophy* ([London]: Preparatory Commission of the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1946).

³¹¹ Mary Glasgow would be the fulcrum of the organisation for over a decade, becoming secretary-general, first of CEMA then of the Arts Council. ‘Discussion between Miss Glasgow and Peter Cox’, 29 March [1943], T/AAE/1/B.

³¹² [n.a.], ‘Minutes of 30 May 1944 Arts Enquiry’, T/AAE/1/B.

³¹³ It was decided that, since the Arts Enquiry had devolved from ‘a little body of non-experts’ into ‘many panels of specialist opinion’, the central committee should not have to sign off on the final report before publication. [n.a.], ‘Minutes of the Arts Enquiry Group meeting, 2 May 1944’, T/AAE/1/B.

³¹⁴ Nikolaus Pevsner, ‘Memorandum of the position of the designer for British industries after the war’, [n.d.], T/AAE/2/A.

example. Did democratising art mean ‘the democratic acceptance of different taste cultures’ or the Arnoldian ‘co-opting of “the people” into the interests and expectations of the elite’?³¹⁵

Kenneth Clark, director of the National Gallery, and economist John Maynard Keynes were two notable exponents on the visual arts committee of the high-standards school, effectively seeing popular taste as bad taste.³¹⁶ Conversely, Philip Hendy, Slade professor of art history at Oxford and director of the Leeds City Art Gallery, warned Julian Huxley that, since ‘the whole of the organisation for consuming and producing art’ was at present ‘essentially oligarchic’ – including the committee members themselves – it was crucial that they fought against the danger of replicating rather than reforming that model.³¹⁷ He contrasted the cultural paternalism of England unfavourably to the more consumer-oriented approach in America, where market research was used to determine public desire.

Ultimately, although the will of the people was referenced reverently, the Arts Enquiry tended towards a dismissal of popular standards in favour of fostering artistic excellence and raising public taste through a system of state patronage. ‘The majority of people do not know how to look at works of art,’ ran the report. ‘They need help and guidance.’³¹⁸ It was an elitist approach that reflected Dorothy’s overall philosophy more than Leonard’s – although such paternalist proponents of high culture as Clark and Keynes had neither the modernist nor the spiritually unitive aims that had been put forward by their analogues at Dartington in the 1930s. The ‘raise or spread’ debate – whether to put money towards improving exemplary professional performance or towards broadening the amateur arts – would recur within the Arts Council, CEMA’s successor organisation, for many years to come.³¹⁹

The Arts Enquiry’s recommendations significantly influenced post-war policy.³²⁰ The chief suggestion, setting up the Arts Council and the Council for Industrial Design, substituted ‘a permanent and organic relationship of the State to the fine arts for the haphazard policies of

³¹⁵ Brian Foss, ‘Message and medium: government patronage, national identity and national culture in Britain, 1939-45’, *Oxford art journal* 14 (1991), 52-7, at 56.

³¹⁶ Leventhal, “‘The best for the most’”, 289. Their views influenced both CEMA and the Arts Enquiry.

³¹⁷ Philip Hendy to Julian Huxley, 31 December 1942, T/AEE/2/A.

³¹⁸ The Arts Enquiry, *The visual arts: a report sponsored by the Dartington Hall trustees* (London: Political and Economic Planning, 1946), 27.

³¹⁹ Nicholas, *Dancing in utopia*, 131.

³²⁰ Rachel Harrison and Anna Upchurch both argue that the influence of the Arts Enquiry on government policy has been underestimated by historians. Harrison, ‘The visual arts’; Anna Upchurch, “‘Missing’ from policy history: The Dartington Hall Arts Enquiry, 1941-1947”, *International journal of cultural policy* 19 (2012), 610-22.

the past'.³²¹ State patronage of the arts was, by the 1950s, widely accepted, and only a few lone figures like Herbert Read still held that it risked Nazi-like state control.³²² Other suggestions from the enquiry that were taken up by the government included improving professional arts schools; elevating the position of the arts in the school curriculum; and increasing the public's access to art by such measures as incorporating concert halls, theatres and art galleries in new town plans.³²³ The central argument, that 'the visual arts are integral to a civilisation', was a case of Dartington's ideals writ large.³²⁴ After much experimentation, the Dartington arts department had managed to combine some of Leonard's ideas about community engagement with Dorothy's hopes for high standards and spiritual renewal (albeit with the spiritual being interpreted in a more affective than religious sense). The resulting vision and practical prototype of arts administration was convincing enough to influence policy-makers and contribute substantially to national reconstruction. It was indicative of how influential Dartington's thinking and practical example had been that it received government funding to become a College of the Arts in 1961.³²⁵

³²¹ Extract from *The Times*, 9 May 1946, 'Artists and Patrons', T/AAE/1/C. The recommendation to set up a permanent arts organisation, in fact, already been carried out by the time the report was published, but the process of the enquiry had had a strong impact on thinking about it.

³²² Foss, 'Message and medium', 56.

³²³ The Arts Enquiry, *The visual arts*, passim.

³²⁴ Ibid, 42.

³²⁵ Richards, *Dartington College of Arts*.

4. RURAL REGENERATION

'[W]hat could stay the annual exodus of 50,000 farm labourers and smallholders to the towns and the general breakdown of rural life, and what future was there in the countryside except as a playground for the wealthy or as a vast national park for urban and suburban communities?'

Leonard Elmhirst (1939)¹

For Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, regenerating the countryside was a way to deepen democracy, with democracy construed in John Dewey's sense as participation in all aspects of social life that maximise self-realisation – the economy, education, culture, governance.²

They hoped to build an integrated community that would involve its members in reinvigorated agriculture and industry, lifelong learning and creative expression – and above all cultivate in them a sense of direct relationship with one another, of collective ownership and responsibility. Through this project, they would provide a model for a new pattern of life that would help to draw a fragmented society back together again, reversing the atomising effects of nineteenth-century laissez-faire liberalism – the division, the specialisation, the trend towards lives of urban anomie, the loss of transcendent purpose. Leonard wrote, before starting Dartington, that society had found its way into a cul de sac that resembled 'that Hell of which I think Dante speaks', and the only escape was to 'try whether we have not missed the road, and whether there is not another way out'.³

The Elmhirsts' intended scope for their community-building project was international but they saw a small patch of countryside as the test bed for their remedies – the essential social unit. It was a perspective they held in common with many other reformers of the era in Europe and America.⁴ The village was deemed to have the potential to be re-forged as a true community in a way the town did not. 'The social pattern of the countryside was the root pattern,' Daniel Rodgers writes of the transatlantic focus on rural reform: 'To mold it into more "sociable" forms, to infuse it with more intensive "collective social action", was to take hold of a nation's core historical template.'⁵ This was the age of the telegraph, of radio and

¹ Leonard quoted in 'Dartington Hall', *The lady*, 28 December 1939, 802, clipping in DWE/G/S4/D, Dartington Hall Archives (unless specified otherwise, all the following archival references are to this collection).

² John Dewey, *Democracy and education: an introduction to the philosophy of education* (New York: Free Press, 1999 [1916]); Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³ Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 192[4?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

⁴ Jeremy Burchardt sees the reconstructed ideal of the village in interwar Britain as strongly influenced both by American ruralist thinkers and by English idealists such as T.H. Green. 'Rethinking the rural idyll,' *Cultural and social history* 8 (2011), 73-94.

⁵ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998), 326.

rapidly expanding international transport. Ideas and people were moving faster than ever before. All these idealists struggled to reconcile their idealisation of the self-reliant rural community with the context of intensifying globalisation and urbanisation – although it was this very context that fuelled their valorisation of the small-scale, local and ‘traditional’.⁶

In the mid-1920s, Dorothy and Leonard envisaged regeneration being achieved pluralistically, through ‘innumerable small experiments’ – each a localised, organic social democracy, of which their estate would be one.⁷ Their early plans prioritised the social and spiritual implications of setting their community in the countryside rather than focusing on Dartington’s economic growth. The enterprise – first chiefly imagined as an educational community because children were ‘the best of pioneers and experimenters’ – would be set in Devon, despite Dorothy’s wholly urban background, so that ‘nature will grow in and around us and contact with the soil will produce a self-respect and a reverence for her that nothing else can’.⁸ Influenced by the self-governing ideals of guild socialism, and by the rural co-operatives promoted by Horace Plunkett, it was deemed crucial that the community be controlled by its participants, ‘self sufficing and self supporting’ – referring frequently to the ideal of medieval villages as independent, socially integrated collectives.⁹

More-or-less as soon as Dartington became a reality, this rhetoric of its being a localised, socio-spiritual collective was complicated by the project’s quick growth and diversification. Within a few years, the estate had become a multifaceted endeavour incorporating separate departments of the arts, agriculture and industry as well as the experimentation with spirituality and the original school. By 1933 Leonard estimated that there were 846

⁶ Some of these tensions are touched on, for instance, by Jess Gilbert in *Planning democracy: agrarian intellectuals and the Intended New Deal*, although he deals chiefly with the tensions between community-strengthening and central state intervention, rather than between community and global forces (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). Most scholars writing about this subject focus on a later period – including Roland Robertson, who draws attention to how the local can be strengthened and altered by global forces, rather than merely atrophied. ‘Glocalization: time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity’, in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global modernities* (London: Sage, 1995), 25-44.

⁷ Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 1925, box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

⁸ Ibid; Leonard to Wyatt Rawson, 8 February 1925, quoted in Anthea Williams, ‘Preliminary notes on Dartington Hall School’, T/HIS/S22/B. Leonard was influenced by romantic ruralists from William Morris to Rabindranath Tagore and Knut Hamsun, author of the classic primitivist novel, *Growth of the soil*, and by his own upbringing on an estate in Yorkshire. Leonard to Dorothy, 17 April 1922, LKE/DWE/10/G; Knut Hamsun, *Growth of the soil*, trans. W. Worster (London: John Lane, 1935 [1917]).

⁹ Leonard to Dorothy, 12 December 1924, T/HIS/S20/A. The guild socialist G.D.H. Cole was part of the coterie of socialist pluralists who influenced early ideas about Dartington (Marc Stears, ‘Guild socialism’, in Mark Bevir (ed.), *Modern pluralism: Anglo-American debates since 1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40-59). Leonard visited Horace Plunkett in Ireland shortly before setting up Dartington.

employees, 124 tenants and over 3,000 customers.¹⁰ Unlike the small group of idealists who had begun the project, many incomers privileged outward-looking or economic goals over the ideal of a holistic, integrated community: Dartington should be a collection of exemplary rural businesses for others to take as a model; a blueprint for how big landowners could revive their economic fortunes; a research centre, leading the field in agricultural and industrial experimentation. Whilst all of these new activities and objectives were still contained within the Elmhirsts' expansive ambition to deepen democracy, they struggled to form them into a coherently functioning project. The formation of Dartington Hall Ltd in 1929 – to oversee commercial operations – and of Dartington Hall Trust in 1931 – to coordinate education and the arts – formalised growing fissures between the economic and social aspects of their experiment and interrupted the early sense of group collaboration.

By the 1930s Dartington was emerging as neither a democratic, socio-spiritually fulfilled community nor as a model for an economically profitable industrial-agricultural estate. At the same time, the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe and of economic and social unrest in Britain produced an urgent feeling that the estate should be offering an immediate political and social alternative. Dorothy and Leonard's response was to spend the 1930s gradually revising their ideas of how democratic regeneration came about: instead of organic, localised social democracy, they concluded that it would be better effected through co-ordinated action by the government. Dartington was reconceived as an outpost contributing to a central plan for national transformation that would encompass the economy, culture and social welfare. This revision coincided with the expansion of state control during the Second World War and the newly imagined Dartington dovetailed into the war effort and plans for national reconstruction. All the same, state participation did not mean the total eclipse of the localised, social democratic ideal; this re-emerged in the decades after the war in the Elmhirsts' contributions to the new field of community development, both in Britain and in post-colonial India.

This section first sets Dartington amid the many and varied projects for rural regeneration and social reform with which it cross-pollinated, looking in particular at its dialogue with ruralists in India, America and England. It focuses next on the efforts made in the fields of agricultural and industrial revival – the economic side of rural regeneration – and finally on the wider ambition to promote socio-spiritual welfare and communal participation. Each of these areas had their own idiom, but their fundamental path was similar: beginning with a cluster of localised projects that aimed to 'set an ideal for all groups to work to' – be it a poultry factory

¹⁰ Leonard to John Mountford, 11 December 1933, LKE/LAND/2/B.

farm or a democratic discussion group – and ending by making contributions to national reconstruction – ranging from surveys and plans to the direct employment of departmental personnel by the state.¹¹ The estate's long-lasting impact was less as an autonomous model than in its gesturing to projects that could be taken up outside. Both Dartington's overall trajectory and the tensions it encountered on the way – between top-down and bottom-up reform; between economic efficiency and social and spiritual welfare – echoed and interacted with a multitude of other reform projects and theories across the first half of the twentieth century. Their common elements were the search for a more fulfilling, holistic life, and the belief that decisions formerly made by atomised individuals in the markets should now be deliberately negotiated by some sort of a collective.

The countryside in context

The British countryside after the First World War was deemed by most observers to be 'depressed and broken'.¹² The challenge arising from cheap overseas production since the 1870s, momentarily alleviated by the First World War, was renewed afterwards. Agricultural depression was given fresh impetus by the post-war withdrawal of guaranteed cereal prices and the collapse of world primary commodity prices.¹³ Rural culture as a whole seemed in danger of terminal decline, ground down by factors ranging from the withdrawal of the aristocracy from the land, to the economic and cultural allure of the town and the impact of mechanisation on village crafts.¹⁴ The countryside attracted the attention of reformers who were both right- and left-leaning, and both backward- and forward-looking. Concern about the state of rural society was compounded by a long-standing tendency by many to define Englishness as a whole in terms of the countryside.¹⁵

¹¹ Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

¹² Alun Howkins, 'Death and rebirth? English rural society, 1920-1940', in Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (eds.), *The English countryside between the wars: regeneration or decline?* (New York: The Boydell Press, 2006), 1-25, at 24.

¹³ On changing agriculture see Edith Whetham, *The agrarian history of England and Wales, vol. 8: 1914-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

¹⁴ Peter Mandler, *The fall and rise of the stately home* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), chapter 6; Brassley et al (eds.), *The English countryside*. The lament over rural decline became a characteristic interwar genre – see, for example, A.G. Street's elegiac writing about farming life, including *Farmer's glory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959 [1932]).

¹⁵ 'The country and country-life are and must be the basis of national life' wrote W.R. Lethaby, Arts-and-Crafts architect and educator (quoted in David Jeremiah's 'Dartington Hall – a landscape of an experiment in rural reconstruction' in Paul Brassley et al (eds.) *The English countryside*, 116-31, at 121). The tendency to conflate Britain and the countryside was a cultural phenomenon that was limited and contested, however, rather than the universal rule that has sometimes been portrayed (Peter Mandler, 'Against Englishness: English culture and the limits to rural nostalgia, 1850-1940', *Transactions of the Historical Society* 7 (1997), 155-75).

It was in the English countryside that Dartington evolved, but the primary influence on the project's rural regeneration work came from farther afield – in India. From the late nineteenth century, American missionaries and academics, British colonial officials and Indian nationalists diagnosed agrarian poverty and social fragmentation as India's most pressing problems, and looked to the traditional village as 'both a model of the good life and a road map for getting there'.¹⁶ The result was a series of village experiments that integrated 'ideas, expertise, funds, personnel, and operating and legitimating principles' from across the globe.¹⁷ One such was Rabindranath Tagore's Institute for Rural Reconstruction in the village of Surul in Bengal, which, for two years in the early 1920s, Leonard had helped to set up.¹⁸

The Institute aimed to join social and economic regeneration together with creative self-expression and spiritual growth.¹⁹ It attracted an international cast of participants and drew on Irish cooperative methods, British education and American rural survey techniques.²⁰ The paradox at the heart of this and other such village experiments was that, while they were all nodes in an international network of expertise on rural reform, they championed a model of locally-driven regeneration.²¹ For Tagore, the objective was to liberate Indians from below.²² Arthur Geddes (son of Patrick), who worked with Leonard at Sriniketan, pointed up the problem of this 'crab-like organisation' – with 'Regional and International Ideals' in planning and sociology and practical work in the locality so little aligned that 'it walks to one side or [the] other'.²³ Geddes, a geographer, was torn between helping villagers directly and

¹⁶ Subir Sinha, 'Lineages of the developmental state: transnationality and village India, 1900-1965', *Comparative studies in society and history* 50 (2008), 57-90, at 70. Leonard tended to see the 'village problem' in England and in India as similar. Others, such as the Punjab bureaucrat Francis Brayne, saw English villages as already possessing the principles that should be applied to India. *The Indian and the English village* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

¹⁷ Sinha, 'Lineages of the developmental state', 70.

¹⁸ For an account of this experience, see Leonard K. Elmhirst, *Poet and plowman* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1975) and *Rabindranath Tagore: pioneer in education. Essays and exchanges between Rabindranath Tagore and L.K. Elmhirst* (London: John Murray, 1961).

¹⁹ Uma Das Gupta, 'Tagore's ideas of social action and the Sriniketan experiment of rural reconstruction, 1922-41', *University of Toronto quarterly* 77 (2008), 992-1004.

²⁰ Other villages experiments had similar set-ups: the Gurgaon Rural Uplift Experiments of the colonial bureaucrat Francis Brayne and the Marthandam Rural Development centre started by the American missionary Spencer Hatch. Sinha, 'Lineages of the developmental state'; Sunil S. Amrith, 'Internationalising health in the twentieth century', in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (eds.), *Internationalisms, a twentieth-century history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 245-64, at 252.

²¹ The global reconfiguration of philanthropy from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries, which 'transformed the scale and intensity of interregional connections in the shaping of health and welfare in Asia', was epitomised by the expanding work of the Rockefeller Foundation. Established in 1913, the foundation had an unprecedented global reach by the 1920s. In international health alone, it funded study tours, scholarships and consultancies, along with large-scale research-driven public health campaigns in Europe, South America, South Asia and China. Amrith, 'Internationalising health', 247.

²² Rabindranath Tagore, quoted in Das Gupta, 'Tagore's ideas of social action', 992.

²³ Arthur Geddes to Leonard, 24 April 1923, LKE/IN/6/D.

practically, and concentrating on developing planning theory in dialogue with academics. The task of re-defining what it meant to reform a local community in a modern, increasingly globalised age would prove an equal challenge for the Elmhursts.

After Leonard left Sriniketan, he and Dorothy continued to support it, hosting Tagore at Dartington in 1930, visiting several times and pouring large amounts of money into it until the Indian government took over control after independence. Dartington itself was founded, as Leonard later wrote to Tagore, on ‘an ideal we owed entirely to one source, yourself’.²⁴ Like Sriniketan, it began as a small-scale experiment outside the mainstream; it combined a rhetoric of bottom-up reform by farmers and villagers with international ideas and participants; and it aimed, ultimately, to be of international service, a ‘great outpouring’, that ‘gradually encircled the world’.²⁵ The Elmhursts wanted to prove that Sriniketan’s ideals were ‘workable in other than a purely rural country’ – but nonetheless they continued to view the rural community as the essential social unit, almost ignoring the town and rarely talking about the relationship between town and country.²⁶ Nor did they directly acknowledge the different social problems that might affect Indian and English society since the latter was one of the world’s foremost urban industrial nations. Others foresaw that failing to recognise these differences could lead to difficulties; Tagore cautioned Leonard against ‘translating’ Sriniketan directly into English, a language that was ‘too rich and mature’, with ‘condensed, ready-made phrases that are sure to obtrude and clog the spontaneity of creative outflow’.²⁷

While he was in India, Leonard met an English missionary-turned-rural-reformer called Sam Higginbottom, who recommended he study farming in America.²⁸ During his subsequent two-year course in agricultural economics at Cornell University, he absorbed two further lessons that would underpin the approach to rural regeneration taken at Dartington. The first was that, rather than treating farming as ‘a Science, or a Hobby, or a tradition’, the English must run it as a ‘National Business’, employing efficient modern industrial methods and scientific experts.²⁹ Leonard’s faith in expert input and his emphasis on economic efficiency as the benchmark of success would infuriate those at Dartington who were more wedded to the Tagore-type ideal of a spiritually-infused self-governing community insulated from external

²⁴ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 22 June 1934, LKE/TAG/9/A.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Leonard to Dorothy, 19 May 1923, LKE/DWE/11/C.

²⁷ Rabindranath Tagore to Leonard, 11 October 1925, LKE/TAG/9/A.

²⁸ On Sam Higginbottom, see footnote 46, chapter 1.

²⁹ Leonard to Seebohm Rowntree, 29 December 1921, [extract], LKE/IN/24/A. On agricultural education at Cornell, see Gould P. Colman, *Education and agriculture: a history of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1963).

interference and the commercial imperative – although it would also lead the estate into pioneering and influential work in agricultural technique and survey.

Leonard's second lesson was Cornell's usefulness to the surrounding countryside. The university had a thriving agricultural extension scheme. Instead of the previously-tried top-down extension teaching methods – lectures and correspondence courses – this revolved around demonstration work run as a collaboration between academics and farmer-students.³⁰ It was part of a nationwide interwar agricultural extension movement in the USA that was notably more successful than equivalent projects to educate the English farmer.³¹ A large part of the aim of American agricultural extension was to promote scientific methods and greater profit-making. But for many reformers, like Liberty Hyde Bailey, leader of agricultural extension at Cornell, the movement was also meant to reform the quality of rural life in a more affective or spiritual sense, revitalising community spirit in the face of the seeming growth of atomistic individualism in the countryside.³² Leonard was equally attracted by both economic and socio-spiritual elements. At Dartington, and in debates about interwar rural regeneration generally, the challenge of nurturing 'traditional' community spirit simultaneously with promoting economic modernisation would be on-going.³³

Over the course of the 1930s, as the Elmhursts' estate in Devon struggled to achieve either economic efficiency or social cohesion, America provided them with another model – this time for how grassroots democratic endeavour need not be autonomous but could be combined with central leadership. Through his time at Cornell and his marriage to Dorothy, Leonard built strong relations with many American agriculturalists – not only professors at Cornell, but official figures including Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, who became Vice President in 1941, and M.L. Wilson, Undersecretary of Agriculture and later director of federal extension – who played a key role in formulating a short-lived but distinctive phase in the agrarian New Deal.³⁴ This phase, which Jess Gilbert terms the 'Intended New Deal', ran from 1938 to 1942, when funding was cut by Congress.³⁵ It favoured a distinctive mode of

³⁰ Joseph F. Kett, *The pursuit of knowledge under difficulties* (Stanford: U.P., 1994), 301-6 and 316-9.

³¹ Colin J. Holmes, 'Science and the farmer: the development of the Agricultural Advisory Service in England and Wales, 1900-1939', *The agricultural history review* 36 (1988), 77-86; Lynne Thompson, 'Agricultural education in the interwar years', in Brassley et al (eds.), *The English countryside*, 53-72.

³² Liberty H. Bailey, *The country life movement in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1911).

³³ Philip Conford, 'Finance versus farming: rural reconstruction and economic reform 1894-1955', *Rural history* 13 (2002), 225-41; Leo Marx, *The machine in the garden: technology and the pastoral ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1964]).

³⁴ See files LKE/USA/7/F and LKE/USA/7/I and Jess Gilbert, 'Rural sociology and democratic planning in the third New Deal', *Agricultural history* 82 (2008), 421-38, at 423. Henry Wallace was also an editor of *The new republic* from 1946 to 1947.

³⁵ Gilbert, *Planning democracy*.

rural ‘democratic planning’ that was state-driven and deployed expert knowledge, but also involved intense collaboration with local citizens. The practical outcome was a national network of local organisations, combining farmers, adult-educators, social scientists and administrators to plan and coordinate land use. To Dorothy and Leonard, contributing to this kind of decentralised democratic planning provided an increasingly attractive role for Dartington. Frequent trips by agriculturalists and by the Elmhursts themselves to and fro across the Atlantic meant that Dartington developed with close reference to the USA.³⁶

The estate also evolved in dialogue with reformers closer to home. Dartington, never fully defining its own manifesto, attracted the interest of ruralists from across the political spectrum and from both progressives and nostalgics.³⁷ The Elmhursts’ desire to promote democratic community aligned them politically with the various left-leaning rural settlements flourishing in interwar England, their pedigree stretching back to William Morris through the middle-class anarchist and socialist communities of the 1880s and 90s.³⁸ Leonard’s belief in the need for American-style economic efficiency, however, meant that he spurned collaboration with such un-commercial, small-scale and backward-looking endeavours.³⁹ He gave short shrift to ‘thatched cottage sentiment’ and to those who idealised traditional smallholdings and family farms.⁴⁰ He rebuffed requests for support from ruralists like Montague Fordham, founder of the Rural Reconstruction Association, who sought to involve him in a smallholding resettlement plan that would ‘absorb about 2,000,000 persons into work’.⁴¹ He was equally dismissive of government smallholding plans: Lloyd George put forward rural resettlement as part of a wider platform for social reform after the First World War, and in the 1930s the idea of resettlement surfaced again, to combat the high level of unemployment.⁴² Such models chimed with the Elmhursts’ belief that a rural existence was a more holistically, spiritually fulfilling one – but they did not fulfil Leonard’s modernising objectives.

³⁶ Agricultural economist W.I. Myers toured the estate with Leonard prior to purchase; Gustave Heuser, Professor of Poultry at Cornell, helped set up a Dartington poultry unit; C.E. Ladd, Director of Cornell Agricultural Extension, helped establish the estate’s agricultural economics research department.

³⁷ Before the 1929 elections, for example, the leaders of the three main political parties published a joint letter affirming that, in spite of their differences, they agreed ‘in advocating the preservation of our countryside in its rich personality and character’. Quoted in Griffiths, *Labour and the countryside: the politics of rural Britain, 1918-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 81-2.

³⁸ Susanna Wade Martins, ‘Smallholdings in Norfolk, 1890-1950: a social and farming experiment’, *The agricultural history review* 54 (2006), 304-30.

³⁹ E.S. Shaxson, for example, a disenchanted London broker who set up a farming cooperative in 1932, got no welcome from Leonard when he tried to recruit his support, though Dartington was the inspiration for his endeavour. LKE/LAND/2/F.

⁴⁰ Leonard, ‘Introduction’, [n.d.], LKE/LAND/8/C.

⁴¹ Montague Fordham to Leonard, 16 September 1933, LKE/LAND/7/C. The Rural Reconstruction Association, founded 1926, was a guild-socialism-influenced and pro-protection rural reform group that wanted to revive agriculture, redress the balance with industry and increase protectionism.

⁴² Andrew Fenton Cooper, *British agricultural policy 1912-1936: a study in Conservative politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 45 and 70.

Leonard instead strove to associate Dartington with the growing impulse to subject the countryside to a vigorous process of economic modernisation.⁴³ Increasingly, in the 1930s, this led to dialogue with the state, both with officials in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Development Commission, and with the government-funded Rothamsted Experimental Station – where modern industrial methods, along with intervention in the countryside generally, were more and more being embraced.⁴⁴ Leonard also cultivated a loose network of large landowners, agents and tenants who shared his reforming aspirations – discussing plans with them and exchanging visits. Landowners or agents who toured Dartington included Lord Trent, Christopher Turnor, Rolf Gardiner, Philip Oyler and John Drummond.⁴⁵ Leonard did not overlap with these men in all their beliefs: Turnor, for instance, admired Hitler's 'plan to use the land as a means of regenerating the nation', using scientific experts to nurture 'new self-supporting hereditary peasant farms'.⁴⁶ Gardiner, too, favoured a feudal system with a 'modern peasantry' rather than a social democracy, and he railed against the Elmhursts' privileging 'scientific calculative over inductive lore'.⁴⁷ Dartington was able to accommodate association with many dissonant agendas, up to a point – in part because its founders were themselves torn between positions. Wanting to reverse the 'breakdown of cooperative village life in competition for profits' and to defend a spiritual notion of the wholesomeness of the traditional country community, they still believed that efficient modern business methods must be applied to all aspects of rural life.⁴⁸ Theoretically in favour of localised social democracy, they nonetheless often behaved like traditional landowners themselves, and leaned heavily on the outside guidance of an international community of experts.

⁴³ Cooper, looking at Conservative Party policy, suggests that the interwar years were the first time that agricultural policy was subordinated to economic progress, rather than tied to considerations of social stability. For Leonard, in spite of his focus on economic efficiency, the ultimate objective continued to be reinvigorating rural society in a more general sense. *British agricultural policy*, 2.

⁴⁴ Sir John Russell, director of Rothamsted Experimental Station, visited Dartington and encouraged Leonard to write 'a detailed account which would serve as guidance to other landowners anxious to develop their estates', 28 February 1938, LKE/LAND/4/E. Griffiths, *Labour and the countryside*, 13–4.

⁴⁵ '[T]he first bite we had had of this kind from an intelligent landowner', rejoiced Leonard at Lord Trent's visit (Leonard to Sir Henry Bunbury, 11 December 1936, LKE/PEP/1/A). Philip Oyler, a founding member of the Soil Association, visited at the recommendation of Lord Sandwich (Oyler to Leonard, 10 January 1934, LKE/G/24/G). John Drummond, 15th Baron Strange, who was in the army with Leonard in the First World War, wounded him by calling Dartington 'a place to play Trianon' (John Drummond, draft chapters for unpublished book, LKE/DEV/3/C).

⁴⁶ Christopher Turnor, *Land settlement in Germany* (London: P.S. King & Son Ltd., 1935), 16–8.

⁴⁷ Rolf Gardiner to Leonard, 16 June 1933, LKE/G/15/B; Rolf Gardiner, *England herself: ventures in rural restoration* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1943).

⁴⁸ Leonard to Arthur Geddes, 24 February 1923, LKE/IN/6/D. See also, Leonard to Seebohm Rowntree, 29 December 1921 [extract], LKE/IN/24/A.

Agriculture

Rabindranath Tagore drilled into Leonard that the role of ‘specialists, with the equipment for detailed analysis and statistics, should be to serve the makers of history’; science ‘must never be hardened into a scientific laboratory but be a living growth and an active service of love’.⁴⁹ Dorothy Elmhirst, in a moment of impatience in 1931, asked her husband ‘whether there was any sign that what we were doing here was likely to have any effect on the local farmer – if not, when, if never, why were we doing it?’⁵⁰ The two sentiments, taken together, summarise both the ambitions and the problems of agriculture at Dartington. The aim was to regenerate the local countryside economically, and thus to contribute to the Elmhirsts’ hopes of reshaping mankind into a harmonious collective. The difficulties were with making expert-led practical enterprises work at all, with linking them to the rest of the estate – in particular its socio-spiritual agenda – and with connecting the estate with the surrounding community.

The result of these hopes and difficulties was a series of costly projects that seemed at times, even to their instigators, to be unconnected to Dartington’s fundamental purpose – although in hindsight several have proved pioneering. Problems with making agriculture work on the estate itself meant that the focus in this area gradually panned outwards, moving away from experimental business enterprises to contributing, through surveys and conferences, to increasing the knowledge capital of agriculturalists more generally. The shift from local doing to national and international advising increased Dartington’s impact: by the mid-1930s observers including M.L. Wilson of the New Deal and Sir Anderson Montague-Barlow, chair of a royal commission on the location of industry in Britain, were heralding the Elmhirsts as ‘the only folk with the experience that [we] are most in need of’.⁵¹

The agricultural enterprises at Dartington were meant to provide replicable examples of how to do scientific farming. Alongside the individual businesses, the Elmhirsts set up a research department, whose function was to experiment in co-ordination with the businesses in order to develop and publicise new techniques. ‘The best insurance against insularity is our expenditure on Research,’ wrote Leonard in 1931. ‘This is our means of touch with the outside world [...] The more Research the more the advance guard of society and the more

⁴⁹ Rabindranath Tagore to Leonard, 3 September 1932, LKE/TAG/9/A.

⁵⁰ Dorothy’s manuscript comment on Leonard, ‘Notes for J.R. Currie’, 11 November 1931, T/AG ECON/1/A.

⁵¹ Leonard mentioned M.L. Wilson’s remark in a letter to J.R. Currie, 19 September 1933, T/AG ECON/S1/A; Sir Anderson Montague-Barlow to Dorothy, noting that J.D. Rockefeller ‘spoke in glowing terms of what you and your husband were doing at Dartington’, 6 January 1938, DWE/G/S3/C.

international in spirit we are like to be.⁵² The diverse enterprises that ran alongside the research department – including forestry, poultry, orchards, mixed and dairy farms – reflected those traditionally found in rural England.⁵³ They were framed in terms of a two-stage process: planning and fine-tuning would be followed by the demonstration of profitability and the production of results useful to the outside world.

By and large, stage two was not reached. The Elmhursts were bad at choosing managers and often changed approach before results were yielded. The depression of the 1930s put the estate ‘in the somewhat unfortunate position of trying to build up a sound economic basis to the experiment at a moment when nothing in the world has such a basis’.⁵⁴ The greatest problem, though, was the attempt to combine small-scale, multifarious, experimental work with large-scale, economically successful farming. By contrast, the research centres that did produce useful results in the period – Rothamsted and Long Ashton Experimental Stations, for example – were just for research, not profit-making.⁵⁵ In addition, whilst, like Dartington, they were originally founded by the privately wealthy, in the interwar years they were taken up by the government; if the Elmhursts had not had the socialist-pluralist aspiration of building an independent, community-serving enterprise, the history of their agricultural enterprise might have looked more like that of these research stations.

The Elmhursts hoped the research department could imitate the close relationship in America between agricultural research institutions and surrounding farmers, providing an ‘informal local extension agency which could try out improved methods of agricultural production, and if they worked out promote their prompt adoption’.⁵⁶ More broadly, Leonard wanted Dartington’s research department to show ‘the kind of channels along which scientific discovery should flow easily towards the increase of human welfare’.⁵⁷ It would be an example of how experts could make themselves socially useful, contributing to – but not directing – democratic progress. Unfortunately, the agricultural economist chosen to coordinate the research department, J.R. Currie, was ill-suited to the job. He composed

⁵² Leonard, ‘Notes on Dartington’, January 1931, LKE/G/S11A.

⁵³ Leonard, ‘Dartington Hall as a research centre’, 9 January 1927, C/DHL/1/B. See also Michael Young, *The Elmhursts of Dartington: the creation of a utopian community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 291.

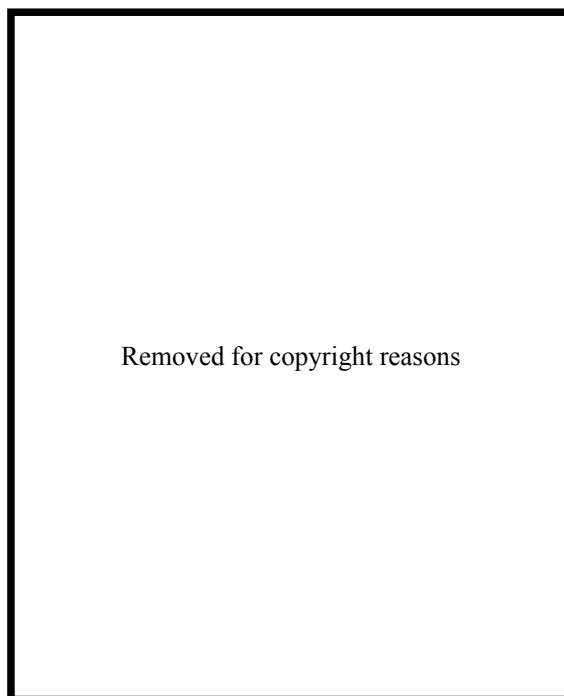
⁵⁴ Leonard, ‘Dartington Hall’, [n.d.], LKE/G/S8/A.

⁵⁵ Paul Brassley, ‘Agricultural research in Britain, 1850-1914: failure, success and development’, *Annals of science* 52 (1995), 465-80.

⁵⁶ W.I. Myers described Leonard’s early aims to Jock Currie, 4 December 1962, quoted in Anthea Williams, ‘First draft of C7’, March 1979, T/HIS/21/A. Leonard was influenced particularly by C.E. Ladd’s work at Cornell and that of Professor H.C.M. Case at the University of Illinois. Leonard, ‘Notes for J.R. Currie’, 11 November 1931, T/AG ECON/1/A.

⁵⁷ Leonard to Rathi Tagore, 28 June 1937, LKE/IN/21/D.

numerous memoranda on the tasks he could potentially perform – studies on farm management, on cost accounting, on markets and consumers, including consumer co-operatives – but he failed to do most of them or to win the confidence of the workers and surrounding farmers.⁵⁸ ‘I noticed that the Danish manager of one of the farms at Dartington Hall (where we called on our homeward journey) had made a clean sweep of his banks,’ wrote author J.A. Scott Watson on a tour of Devon. ‘But I could see nobody following his example.’⁵⁹



The research laboratory, 1936.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

The research department was not without impact – but only once it shifted its sights away from serving the estate and local community. In 1929 Currie was joined by a scientist, J.B.E. Patterson, whose more productive work included analysing products from the estate ranging from milk to dye, conducting fertiliser trials and stocking the estate science library.⁶⁰ By the late 1930s Leonard was sending off his findings to Sir Thomas Middleton, an advocate of scientific farming and secretary of the Development Commission, set up by the state in 1909

⁵⁸ For examples of J.R. Currie’s many memoranda, see ‘Functions of the research department’, [n.d.] and ‘Outline of the work being carried out by the Economics Research Department’, 1929-30, T/AG ECON/1/A.

⁵⁹ J.A. Scott Watson, ‘Rural Britain today and tomorrow – vii: tradition and experiment in the West’, *The listener*, 22 November 1933, 797.

⁶⁰ The estate science laboratory was founded in 1927. W.K. Slater was director from 1928-9, then was succeeded by J.B.E. Patterson until its closure in 1946. Young, *The Elmhursts*, 276.

to promote agricultural research.⁶¹ Patterson's outstanding achievement at Dartington was opening the first soil-fertility analysis service for farmers, which was, in 1939, parlayed into a soil survey for England and Wales, undertaken for the Ministry of Agriculture. Dr L.L. Lee, who had set up an experimental soil testing station for farmers in New Jersey, crossed the Atlantic to help Patterson begin the Dartington survey.⁶² In an indication of how avant-garde the estate was in this area, when Patterson left Dartington in 1946, it was to join the newly-established National Agricultural Advisory Service, which sought to help British farmers in the way the Elmhursts' research department had long been trying to model.

The heart of the agricultural experiment was a comparison between two farms. One was run by a local, Frank Crook, as a traditional mixed Devon farm; the other was managed under the newest theories of dairying by Christian Nielsen, whom Leonard had met in Denmark – a country that led the field in modernising peasant production.⁶³ The modern farm received much outside attention – the modernist architect Maxwell Fry, for example, thought its 'nearly factory-like' organisation instructive for farmer, manufacturer and architect alike, pioneering architecture 'based on organisation and economy' – but it lost money; the traditional farm made money – not the result Leonard wanted.⁶⁴ In addition, the two farmers did not get on, putting little effort into the project of comparison so that the overall experiment was largely worthless.⁶⁵ The achievement in dairying that most aligned with the Elmhursts' ambition to influence rural regeneration more widely was the establishment – after Leonard had been impressed by seeing artificial insemination techniques on a visit to the Soviet Union – of a cattle-breeding centre 'to educate the farmers in the neighbourhood', from which developed the nationwide use of artificial insemination.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Leonard to Sir Thomas Middleton, 16 November 1938, LKE/LAND/2/B; Paul Brassley, David Harvey, Matt Lobley and Michael Winter, 'Accounting for agriculture: the origins of the Farm Management Survey', *Agricultural history review* 61 (2013), 135-53, at 139.

⁶² *News of the day*, 25 Oct 1929, T/PP/EST/1-8; Leonard in transcripts for 'Man alive', a programme for the BBC transmitted 29 November 1972, editor Adam Clapham, producer Richard Thomas, LKE/G/S13/L.

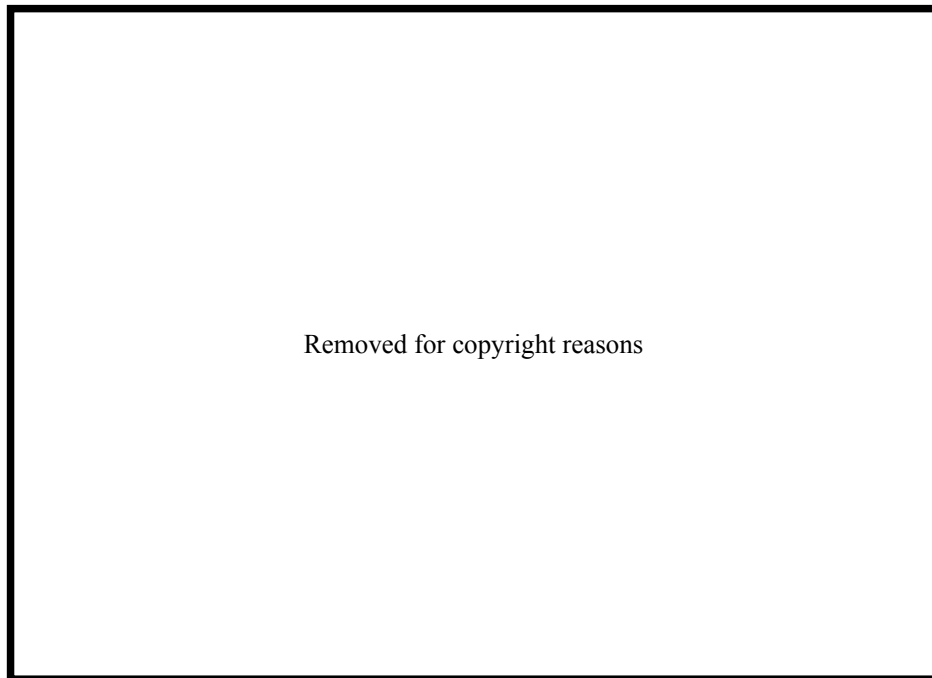
⁶³ Frank Crook ran a traditional mixed dairy and livestock farm. Christian Nielsen tore out hedges to create large, prairie-style fields for mechanised farming, designed new farm buildings and concentrated on cultivating a selectively-bred herd of South Devon cattle. Young, *The Elmhursts*, 273; Ingrid Henriksen, 'The contribution of agriculture to economic growth in Denmark, 1870-1939' in Pedro Lains and Vincente Pinilla (eds.), *Agriculture and development in Europe since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2009), 117-47.

⁶⁴ Edwin Maxwell Fry to Leonard, 22 November 1932, LKE/PEP/1/B. The buildings featured in architectural and farming journals and several of them were reproduced at the Agricultural Research Council's farm at Stafford.

⁶⁵ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 277.

⁶⁶ Leonard visited the Soviet Union in 1932. On his return, he contacted Dr John Hammond who was experimenting with artificial insemination at the School of Agriculture in Cambridge. Trials were made at Dartington in 1933 and 1943, before the breeding centre was set up. [n.a.], 'The basis of fixing rent for the Dartington Hall Artificial Insemination Centre', 1944, T/AG ECON/1/B.

Many of the other agricultural schemes on the estate encountered difficulties. Leonard's brother Richard set up a model poultry factory farm with the help of Gustave Heuser, a visiting Cornell professor.⁶⁷ It flourished briefly, selling 200,000 eggs a year at its peak.⁶⁸ One visitor, Avice Trench, who was working to set up jobs for unemployed miners in the Rhondda in Wales, thought it exemplary.⁶⁹ But it hit a stumbling block – the flock, kept in close confinement, was repeatedly swept by disease. In the 1930s the project gradually moved from commercial production to smaller-scale experimentation, then, with the quality of the birds still deteriorating, it was closed down at the end of the Second World War.⁷⁰ Like Christian Nielsen's dairy farm, the poultry factory foreshadowed the large-scale, intensive style of farming that would be widely embraced after the war, but it failed to prove its economic case.⁷¹



*The pioneering poultry barn. 'It is extraordinary,' wrote Leonard in 1927, 'the effect that an ordinary poultry house has upon the mind of a man who is heresy hunting, and out to smash crank schemes.'*⁷² © Dartington Hall Archives

⁶⁷ The government, wanting to commercialise British poultry production, tried several times to poach Gustave Heuser to head up the British National Poultry Institute. Leonard to Mr Irons, 15 July 1927, LKE/USA/3/K.

⁶⁸ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 274. The co-operative was called the Poultry Farmers of Devon Ltd, and later Devon Egg Producers Ltd.

⁶⁹ Avice Trench to Leonard, 14 May 1929, LKE/G/32/A.

⁷⁰ Victor Bonham-Carter gives a detailed history of Dartington's agriculture and industry in *Dartington Hall: history of an experiment* (London: Phoenix House Ltd, 1958), chapter 3.

⁷¹ Andrew Godley and Bridget Williams, 'Democratizing luxury and the contentious "invention of the technological chicken" in Britain', *The business history review* 83 (2009), 267-90.

⁷² Leonard to Gerald Heard, 13 April 1927, LKE/G/17/E.

Other ventures struggled financially in a similar fashion, including experiments with pigs, sheep and soft fruit. Even the more successful schemes – the 2,000 acres of carefully managed forestry, for example, which were Leonard’s particular hobby – still failed to turn a profit.⁷³ The serial failures were echoed by a parallel agricultural project of the period – John Spedan Lewis’s experiments in producing pigs, eggs and soft fruit on the same enlightened business principles that he applied to his department stores. This did not yield positive results either.⁷⁴ Agricultural experimentation at the slow-paced rhythm required of anything involving the natural world did not harmonise with the large-scale, scientifically-efficient, profit-making business that both Leonard and Lewis urgently wanted their farms to demonstrate.

Leonard was acutely conscious, ten years after Dartington had started, that he had still not proved the capacity of science to reform English farming, often repeating the ‘wish that we had been going a little longer’ so that ‘we can back our faith with actual figures’.⁷⁵ In his focus on making specific projects meet financial benchmarks, he was not able to appreciate the constructive impact of Dartington’s agriculture on the wider world, especially from the later 1930s. These included not only pioneering artificial insemination, soil survey and poultry factory-farming, but devising a scheme for state support of private forestry owners which fed into the Forestry Acts of 1947 and 1951.⁷⁶ As early as 1930, external observers were impressed by the Elmhursts’ agricultural department, seeing it as a useful model – diplomat James Grover McDonald wrote to Lord Lothian that if Dartington were a template, ‘Britain would reduce her unemployed by tens of thousands, and at the same time reduce her yearly imports of butter, eggs and other dairy products by millions of pounds sterling’.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the nuts and bolts of the individual experiments never quite aligned. In the absence of proven results – in spite of the urging of supporters like Rothamsted’s Sir John Russell – the Elmhursts made little effort to publicise them as examples.⁷⁸

⁷³ Israel Sieff wrote in his autobiography, ‘I suppose anybody might glean something profoundly true about Leonard by noting his recreation in *Who’s Who*: it is “care of trees”. That is his recreation; but his vocation has been the care of his fellow men’. *Memoirs* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 192. Wilfrid Hiley gives an account of Dartington’s forestry department in *A forestry venture . . . foreword and chapter ‘The venture in perspective’ by L.K. Elmhirst* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964).

⁷⁴ Roy Brigden, ‘Leckford: a case-study of interwar development’ in Burchardt et al (eds.), *The English countryside*, 200-11.

⁷⁵ Leonard to Max Nicholson, 14 December 1935, LKE/PEP/3/C.

⁷⁶ Leonard’s scheme, the culmination of a sustained interwar effort to make the Forestry Commission give more help to private owners, was submitted to the government in 1944. Young, *The Elmhursts*, 297.

⁷⁷ James Grover McDonald, chairman of the Foreign Policy Association, to Lord Lothian, 15 October 1930, LKE/USA/4/I.

⁷⁸ Sir John Russell to Leonard, 28 February 1938, LKE/LAND/4/E.

There were growing tensions, in the 1930s, between those like J.R. Currie who saw Dartington as an experiment whose aim was to produce findings, and others for whom it was a business whose success would be indicated only by profit.⁷⁹ The Elmhursts themselves continued to support both viewpoints – inasmuch as both research and model production units could contribute to the economic revival of the countryside. At the same time, however, beginning to feel that neither estate-based research nor agricultural enterprise was proving wholly satisfactory as a way of assisting regeneration, their focus turned outward. Instead of experimenting in an autonomous community, their interest shifted, first, to co-operating with local groups, and then to contributing to national and international schemes to improve agriculture.

Inspired by the Irish co-operative pioneer Sir Horace Plunkett, Leonard tried building local producer co-operatives – ranging from a central store on the estate to an egg packing and distribution centre for the local area.⁸⁰ Thinking ‘more and more that the future lies in the hands of the Consumers’ Cooperatives’, he also put out feelers about setting up such a cooperative at Totnes.⁸¹ His efforts drew the interest of members of the Co-operative Union, who saw in Dartington rich possibilities of uniting distribution, production and ‘the social, artistic and educational requirements which are the necessities of co-operative life’.⁸² However, after a few failures, Leonard’s enthusiasm for cooperation waned. ‘Wash out any great hopes of co-op by or with farmer. 90% still are prepared to cut others’ throats for sixpence’, he scrawled after one meeting – although, in the British farming community as a whole, enthusiasm for working collectively was on the rise.⁸³ Relations with local farmers were not helped by Dartington’s paying a higher labouring wage than the average.⁸⁴ Interest in cooperation re-emerged at Dartington in the late 1930s, but revolved around the idea of a local agricultural marketing collective selling goods through London-based Marks and

⁷⁹ John Maxton to Leonard, 9 February 1937, LKE/DCC/6/C. One Dartington trustee, Fred Gwatkin, suggested resolving the tension by dividing Dartington Hall Ltd into an agricultural side, concerned with ‘general experiment for the nation at large’, and an industrial side for conducting research of direct use to the estate. Memorandum, ‘Dartington Hall Ltd – proposed reconstruction’, 26 May 1937, C/DHL/1/B.

⁸⁰ Sir Horace Plunkett saw the forging of unity in the countryside through local co-operation as a necessary pre-condition to achieving political independence (Plunkett to Leonard, 29 August 1929, LKE/LAND/7/B). Early cooperative efforts at Dartington are described in a letter from Leonard to Mr Greenwood, 11 February 1929, LKE/LAND/5/C.

⁸¹ Leonard to J.R. Currie, 10 December 1927, T/AG ECON/S1/A.

⁸² George Walworth of the Cooperative Union to Leonard, 13 November 1929, LKE/LAND/5/C.

⁸³ Leonard, ‘Rural ownership’, 4 December 1934, LKE/LAND/8/B; Griffiths, *Labour and the countryside*, passim.

⁸⁴ Memories of Peggy Wales in Maria de la Iglesia (ed.), *Dartington Hall School: staff memories of the early years* (Exeter: Folly Island Press, 1996), 19. Frank Crook’s wife remembered that the local farmers were ‘very bitter’ against the Elmhursts because they paid workers thirty-two shillings a week compared with the usual fifteen. Interview with Michael Young, 23 August 1977, T/HIS/S20/D.

Spencer, rather than catering to locals.⁸⁵ In 1945 the South Devon Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association was finally set up, but by this time Leonard had begun to think that the limitations of agriculture – farmers’ individualism, their lack of capital, the uneconomic size of farms – could be better combated by concentrating on ‘some element of central direction and control’.⁸⁶

A more productive initiative with local farmers was a survey of the farms around Dartington, conducted jointly with Seale-Hayne Agricultural College and published in 1929.⁸⁷ It was inspired by Leonard’s experience of the American survey method – popular at Cornell but yet to be widely taken up in agriculture in Britain – and involved farmers in mapping land-use and analysing the efficiency of different farming methods.⁸⁸ The democratic, grass-roots ethos of agricultural extension and the New Deal in America was reflected in the Dartington survey: it was to be a self-help initiative for farmers, part of a desire to create around Dartington ‘a miniature version of the agricultural extension service which radiated information from Cornell to farmers in New York State’.⁸⁹ At the same time, echoing the way in which the New Deal surveys were supposed to feed back into state planning, it was hoped that the Dartington survey would influence public policy. American agriculturalist W.I. Myers suggested to Leonard that it would be a way to dissuade the British government from spending more ‘millions of pounds’ creating uneconomically-sized smallholdings.⁹⁰

Such data collection techniques were soon adopted by the British government as a way of deciding on agricultural interventions. The Farm Management Survey, set up by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1936, became a permanent part of its portfolio during and after the Second World War – part of a growing perception that data was needed by a modern state.⁹¹ W.I.

⁸⁵ Leonard, ‘Proposed marketing centre for fruit and vegetables’, March 1939, C/DHL/8/F; [n.a.], ‘Notes on conference with representatives of Messrs. Marks and Spencer, County Agricultural Department, Dartington Hall and others’, 1 November 1938, T/AG ECON/S7/E.

⁸⁶ [n.a.], ‘First annual general meeting of the South Devon Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association’, 23 February 1945, C/DHL/8/F; [n.a.], ‘The blue book’, [n.d.], T/PP/P/1/A.

⁸⁷ J.R. Currie and W.H. Long, *An agricultural survey in South Devon* (Seale-Hayne Agricultural College and Dartington Hall, 1929); J.R. Currie, ‘A review of fifty years’ farm management research’, *Journal of agricultural economics* 11 (1956), 350-60, at 357.

⁸⁸ The Cornell Agricultural Experiment Station surveyed farms in New York State in 1911 and developed the idea of ‘efficiency factors’ such as output per labour unit. Edith H. Whetham, *Agricultural economists in Britain 1900-1940* ([Oxford]: Institute of Agricultural Economists, University of Oxford, 1981), 25-9.

⁸⁹ Young, *Elmhursts*, 275. Although J.R. Currie transported the data from the Dartington survey to Cornell ‘for statistical treatment, discussion and editing’, so it was not as local as all that. Leonard to J.R. Currie, 13 July 1928, T/AG ECON/1/A.

⁹⁰ W.I. Myers to Leonard, 5 April 1928, LKE/USA/4/K.

⁹¹ Paul Brassley et al, ‘Accounting for agriculture’, 152. Rather than being carried out by the civil service, the farm management survey has always been the responsibility of an independent university-based research staff working under government contract.

Myers wrote to Leonard that he was ‘especially pleased that the Farm Management survey of Devonshire has resulted so quickly in the obtaining of a government grant for similar projects in other regions. I am firmly convinced of the value of this study to the individual farmer and to the nation as a whole’.⁹² The Elmhursts’ move from on the ground experimentation in agriculture to broader work outside the estate led to far more definite achievement. The survey of South Devon also marked a moment of harmonious compromise between bottom-up reform – working with and for local farmers – and top-down reform – deploying scientists and contributing to state policy.

The Farm Management Survey was the first point at which provincial agricultural economists were brought together by the state to work on a national basis, but Leonard had been involved in building bridges between agricultural economists since 1929, when the International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE) had its first meeting at Dartington. Those who attended the first conference saw it as ‘the beginning of a new era in the development of agricultural economics, in which the world economy as well as farm economy and national economy will receive more attention’.⁹³ Like other organisations, such as the League of Nations, the International Federation of University Women and the New Education Fellowship, the IAAE was fuelled by the high enthusiasm for all things international that characterised the interwar years.⁹⁴

As well as having an international outlook, the young discipline of agricultural economics provided a forum for a whole gamut of issues relating to rural regeneration, from rural social services to decentralising industry to speculations about better configurations of land ownership.⁹⁵ The IAAE therefore gave Leonard an outlet for his combined desires to plan for integrated rural regeneration and to promote peaceable international fellowship.⁹⁶ As

⁹² W.I. Myers to Leonard, 19 February 1930, LKE/USA/4/K.

⁹³ Comments in *News of the day* after the first conference in agricultural economics, 5 Sept 1929, T/PP/EST/1-8. At the 1929 conference there were fifty attendees from eleven different countries. The next conference was at Cornell in 1930 and there were three others between the wars, the last held in Canada. The regular conference turned formally into the International Association of Agricultural Economists in 1964. By 1980 it had over 1,600 members worldwide. Brassley et al, ‘Accounting for agriculture’, 153. See also J.R. Raeburn and J.O. Jones, *The history of the International Association of Agricultural Economists: towards rural welfare worldwide* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990).

⁹⁴ Daniel Gorman, *The emergence of international society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹⁵ Correspondence between Leonard and A.W. Ashby, who held the first chair in agricultural economics in Britain (1929-46), LKE/LAND/1/B; Whetham, *Agricultural economists in Britain*, 72-3.

⁹⁶ Leonard, ‘The role of agricultural economists in the promotion of world order’, paper for Agricultural Economics Society meeting, 30 June to 3 July 1939, LKE/LAND/9/A. Finance for the IAAE came from membership fees and grants from such US foundations as Kellogg, Ferguson, Ford and William C. Whitney as well as from the Elmgrant Trustees, the British Council and individual governments.

president of the conference, his duty was to visit agricultural economists and farming districts worldwide: in 1932 he made a trip to Russia, on the basis of which he wrote a book critical of the effects of collectivization; in 1937 he toured seventeen countries in six weeks.⁹⁷

Agricultural economics – ‘objectively and dispassionately studying inter-relations and measuring changes in the economic structure’ – became for Leonard, like Dartington itself, a universal blueprint: something he hoped ‘statesmen, bankers, industrialists, housewives, town and country planners’ would adopt, as it offered a way ‘to distinguish between scientific diagnosis on the one hand and on the other the many short-term remedies offered by various governments and national systems for the ills of society today’.⁹⁸ Like the agricultural extension scheme at Cornell, it was not merely about promoting profit-making, but about cultivating a holistic way of rural life.

Leonard’s optimism was vindicated by the increasing popularity of agricultural economics both during and after the Second World War, although this went hand-in-hand with its narrowing into a more empirical discipline, and one less infused with affective or spiritual aspirations. He campaigned in vain for ‘a more rounded approach. He wanted man to be the centre of the whole field, but this view attracted progressively less sympathy than it did once’.⁹⁹ At the 1955 IAAE conference he emphasised that ‘technical change by itself, leading to higher productivity, is not enough [...] All change should be geared to an integrated process of development concerned as much with social and cultural as with technical and economic values’.¹⁰⁰ His views foreshadowed the idea of socially appropriate or intermediate technology – as opposed to unlimited technology which ‘ravishes nature’ and ‘mutilates man’ – which would be introduced in the 1970s by economist E.F. Schumacher in his book *Small is beautiful. A study of economics as if people matter*.¹⁰¹ Leonard’s statement also reflected his ongoing search for the balance never quite found at Dartington – between the large-scale and the local, and between the imperatives of commercial efficiency and the wider, holistic regeneration of rural society.

⁹⁷ Leonard K. Elmhirst, *Trip to Russia* (The New Republic, Inc.: New York, 1934); Leonard, ‘The role of agricultural economists in the promotion of world order’, paper for Agricultural Economics Society meeting, 30 June–3 July 1939, LKE/LAND/9/A. He remained president of the IAAE until 1958.

⁹⁸ Leonard, ‘The role of agricultural economists in the promotion of world order’, paper for Agricultural Economics Society meeting, 30 June to 3 July 1939, LKE/LAND/9/A.

⁹⁹ Ken Hunt, Director of Agricultural Economics Institute, interview with Michael Young, 10 December 1977, T/HIS/S22. Leonard nevertheless played a large part in the growth of the IAAE after the war. In 1964, in testament to this, a book was published in his honour, to which economists from twenty-four nations contributed (R.N. Dixey (ed.), *International explorations of agricultural economics* (Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1964)).

¹⁰⁰ Anthea Williams, ‘LKE and agricultural economics’, 15 August 1978, T/HIS/S22/B.

¹⁰¹ E.F. Schumacher, *Small is beautiful. A study of economics as if people matter* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973), 293; Pauline Madge, ‘Design, ecology, technology: a historiographical review’, *Journal of design history* 6 (1993), 149–66.

Industry

Reflecting the early interest in self-sufficiency and integration, the industrial enterprises at Dartington were, at first, intended to process its agricultural output. They included a textiles department, a sawmill, a cider factory and a craft studio – but by the 1930s they had quietly become international, calling for Scandinavian wood for furniture-making, French apples for cider and New Zealand wool for weaving.¹⁰² They were also intended to offer a way of ‘mopping up’ those put out of a job by modern, labour-saving farming that would be an alternative to the unemployed migrating into towns.¹⁰³ Strong industry was also a necessary component, in the Elmhirsts’ view, of a Deweyan, social-democratic rural community; Dewey harked back to a traditional rural life where ‘everyone had a pretty direct contact with nature and the simpler forms of industry’.¹⁰⁴

Within this framework, however, two competing visions of industry’s place in the countryside co-existed uneasily, one of which prioritised the creation of an organically integrated community of makers, the other of which concentrated on the recurring issue of commercial viability – and, increasingly, on the consumer rather than producer as the key actor in a newly emerging form of social democracy.¹⁰⁵ The main champion of the first was the craftsman Rex Gardner. Trained in the Arts and Crafts tradition, he envisaged a series of co-operative communities of independent artist-craftsmen, each maker achieving self-realisation in controlling the complete production process, from designing to manual labour.¹⁰⁶ The second view, which Leonard upheld along with many of the managers he brought in in the 1930s, was that rural industries must learn ‘through their own inherent efficiency’ to match their urban and international competitors, and if not, that they should be closed down.¹⁰⁷ This process might require dividing production into several stages, of which a worker would only experience one, as well as paying more attention to turning out what consumers wanted,

¹⁰² Leonard, ‘Dartington Hall as a research centre’, 9 January 1927, C/DHL/1/B; Young, *Elmhirsts*, 291.

¹⁰³ Leonard to Joe Lash, 18 October 1968, LKE/USA/4/A.

¹⁰⁴ John Dewey quoted in Jay Martin, *The education of John Dewey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁰⁵ The two viewpoints were termed by Leonard the ‘romantic’ and ‘the socio-economic’. ‘Rural industries’, 27 March 1939, LKE/LAND/8/A.

¹⁰⁶ Rex Gardner to Leonard, 17 June 1930, C/DHL/9/A. Rex Gardner arrived at Dartington in 1927 and was responsible for designing buildings then running a crafts studio. He had trained with the architect-craftsman Ernest Gimson and worked at the Hampshire House workshops, part of the Hampshire House Club, a long-running social and educational enterprise set up by printer Hilary Pepler with his neighbours in Hammersmith. H.D.C. Pepler, ‘Hampshire House workshops’, *Blackfriars* 31 (1950), 70-4; Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 30-1.

¹⁰⁷ Leonard, ‘Rural industries’, 27 July 1939, C/RIB/1/A.

rather than creatively fulfilling producers. Leonard cited Henry Ford's decentralising of car production into a series of 'village industries' as an admirable example.¹⁰⁸ If the industrial departments were not set on a profitable footing, he worried they would never be of wider use – Dartington would be a mere 'rich man's phantasy'.¹⁰⁹

The tension between these two viewpoints echoed wider debates in Britain about the place of industry in society. In particular, the group of artists, patrons and reformers that Michael Saler terms 'medieval modernists' sought 'to spiritualize capitalism, infuse mass commodities with soul, and reshape an increasingly fragmented and secular culture into an organically integrated community' – although this group was mainly urban, seeking to infuse the city with rural spirituality, rather than, like the Elmhursts, to modernise the countryside itself.¹¹⁰ At Dartington, the tension manifested in a series of skirmishes over methods of production and organisation, while – as in the country at large – the socio-spiritual viewpoint slowly yielded to the economic.

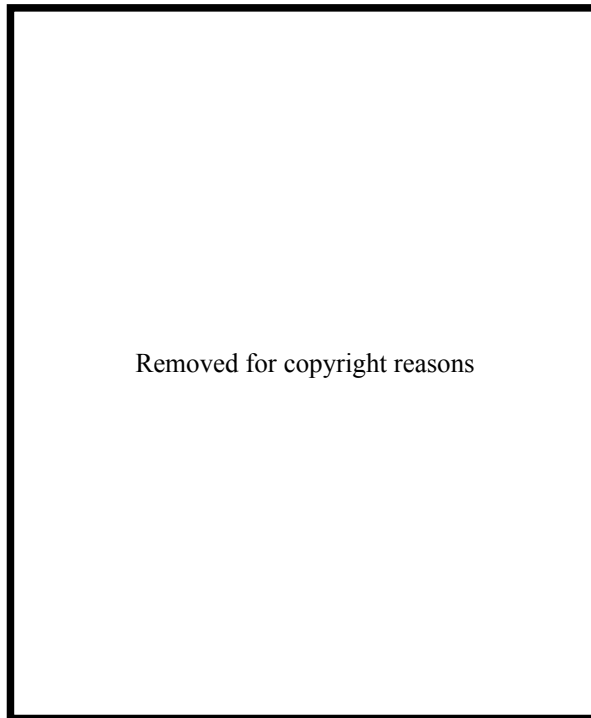
In spite of the triumph of commercial priorities, the estate's industrial departments still failed, with a few exceptions, to turn a profit until the Second World War altered the rural economic landscape. In part because of this failure, in part because of the incompatibility of commercial and social ideals, and in part because of the migration of their sense of the right arena for action, the Elmhursts, by the mid-1930s, had begun to concentrate less on improving local modes of production and more on consumers as an up-and-coming political constituency that might prove a new agent of social reform. Regardless of the economic problems of the industry at Dartington, their experiment nonetheless interested such far-flung figures as the New Deal economist Rexford Tugwell, sent by Eleanor Roosevelt to 'see whether the same general pattern might be applicable in West Virginia', and Alfred Striemer, a German government economist hoping to apply the Elmhursts' model to his own scheme to help the unemployed.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Leonard 'Rural industries', 27 March 1939, LKE/LAND/8/A; Leonard, 'Agricultural economics, a means to what end?', 25 May 1934, LKE/LAND/8/C. Between 1920 and 1944 Henry Ford opened nineteen 'village industries', small plants for producing car parts that were located within sixty miles of the Ford Motor Company headquarters in Michigan. They were part of a number of projects in interwar America promoting decentralised industry as a way to reverse urban industrialisation, with its associated low quality of life.

¹⁰⁹ Leonard, 'Note on Dartington's financial structure', January 1931, LKE/G/S11A.

¹¹⁰ Michael T. Saler, *The avant-garde in interwar England: medieval modernism and the London Underground* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), viii.

¹¹¹ Leonard to Joe Lash, describing Rexford Tugwell's visit, 18 October 1969, LKE/USA/4/A; Dr Alfred Striemer to Leonard, 29 August 1937, LKE/LAND/1/I.



The textiles department, 1936.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

The textiles department was a typical example of the difficulties of reconciling romantic ideals of craftsmanship with successful commerce. An Irish weaver, Heremon ‘Toby’ Fitzpatrick, was brought in to amalgamate independent village workers and centralised machine production.¹¹² He built a small water-powered textile factory modelled on those he had seen in Wales on a research visit paid for by the Elmhirsts, and he intended to outsource part of the labour process to cottage hand-weavers.¹¹³ The plan for cottage weaving never materialised. The factory proved a liability, with low textile quality and little market for its output – though this did not stop Leonard trying to lure Mahatma Gandhi to stop by on a visit to England to see a model of ‘a service centre for the supply of yarns, looms and orders for material to people living around in the neighbourhood’.¹¹⁴ At all times the Elmhirsts hoped their local work was contributing to a global discourse on regeneration. The mill was later mechanised, but still served to highlight the recurring problem of Dartington’s industry, diagnosed by David Jeremiah: ‘too big for the craft-based production with which they had started, and not large enough for the industrial-scale output that they were to move towards’.¹¹⁵ It was only turned into a sound business proposition when a new manager, Hiram

¹¹² Dorothy to Leonard, 22 July 1925; Toby Fitzpatrick, untitled note, 14 May 1929, TEX/C/1/A.

¹¹³ *News of the day*, 13 December 1927, T/PP/EST/1/001. Wales was held to be ‘the last stronghold of water power hand loom weaving’. Fitzpatrick’s visit was in line with a number of somewhat quixotic research projects that the Elmhirsts funded, including Bernard Leach and Mark Tobey’s tour of Asia.

¹¹⁴ Mahatma Gandhi showed some interest, but in the end was too busy to visit. Leonard to Mahatma Gandhi, 24 September 1931; Mahatma Gandhi to Leonard, 30 September 1931, LKE/IN/6/B.

¹¹⁵ The second mill was designed by O.P. Milne and built by Staverton Builders Ltd, the spin-off company from the Dartington building department, on a river whose volume was so uncertain that the

Winterbotham, outsourced much of the operation to a larger, better-equipped mill in Hampshire, thus undermining the ambition for industry to drive local regeneration.¹¹⁶

The history of the crafts department at Dartington shows the ways in which the tensions between the ideal of an organic community of craftsmen and that of commercial efficiency led the Elmhursts to shift their focus from the village community to the individual consumer. In 1930, Rex Gardner set up a crafts studio that he envisaged as a 'centre to gather together all the small efforts of individuals to a common focus for teaching, for exhibitions, and for sales'.¹¹⁷ It did not matter, in his model, that Dartington's craftsmen were producing expensive goods: they were in charge of their own process, which was both satisfying for them and set an example 'which promotes good taste even among both the workers and consumers whose pocket compels them to resort to mass-produced goods'.¹¹⁸ Following the ideals of William Morris, they were happy at their work and in their community, and were leading consumer taste in an enlightened direction.

As the industries became more centralised and commercially-driven, Gardner's production methods and crafts studio came under scrutiny: it was no use workers being fulfilled by an integrated production process and having autonomy over design if the estate could not pay its way. This view reflected that of Saler's medieval modernists: Morris' model of luxury craftsmanship was inadequate because it would never reach enough people: enlightened mass production was the path of the future.¹¹⁹ In 1933, a Dartington Arts and Crafts Advisory Committee of experts was set up to meet in London and co-ordinate marketing and design.¹²⁰ The estate craftsmen revolted. It was impossible, they insisted, to 'follow up every prospect of making revenue' and at the same time maintain 'a high standard in design and workmanship'.¹²¹ This echoed earlier warnings by makers including potter Bernard Leach, of the risk of the 'sacrifice of essential human relationship and also of quality of product' to economic efficiency.¹²² When the Advisory Committee's leader, J.R.I. Brooke, died suddenly, its recommendations were temporarily shelved – but in 1935 Rex Gardner, criticised for his

power it produced had to be supplemented by electricity, and in a space that was cramped between water and a steep hill, not allowing any future expansion. Jeremiah, 'Dartington', 129; Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 99-102.

¹¹⁶ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 292-3.

¹¹⁷ Rex Gardner to Leonard, 17 June 1930, C/DHL/9/A.

¹¹⁸ J.J. Findlay, *The Dartington community: a story of social achievement*, unfinished manuscript written 1937-9, LKE/G/13/B.

¹¹⁹ Saler, *The avant-garde*, 13.

¹²⁰ Its members included J.R.I. Brooke, director of the Rural Industries Bureau, Muriel Rose, founder of the Little Gallery, and the publisher and typographer Noel Carrington. 'Minutes of a meeting of the 'Brooke Committee'', [n.d.], C/DHL/9/B.

¹²¹ Bernard Leach, Adrian Kent and Roger Morel, 'Memorandum', 16 November 1933, C/DHL/9/B.

¹²² Bernard Leach to Leonard, 6 December 1932, T/AAP/3/A2.

non-commercial methods and for ‘the expression of political opinions during work hours’, was transferred to working to help the Rural Industries Bureau survey and support Devon’s craftsmen.¹²³ The Elmhursts sponsored his role, paying half his salary while the other half was covered by the Development Commission.¹²⁴ This allowed them to continue to promote the notion of the independent, politically-engaged artist-craftsman, but at a distance and in collaboration with the state.

Meanwhile, a revived Design Committee put in place a formal design procedure at Dartington to cater better to consumer demand.¹²⁵ The Committee ruled that it was ‘outside the province of a commercial organisation’ for ‘an artist to produce unsaleable work in attempting to achieve an ideal’; instead, Dartington’s workers must make what people wanted to buy.¹²⁶ Dartington was to follow the consumer, rather than to lead them – though, in order not to lose sight of what was ‘basically good’, the committee appointed German refugee Hein Heckroth, an ‘artist in whose emotional response they had confidence’, to oversee design.¹²⁷ Even though Leonard recognised that ‘from the point of view of making life within the community as “full” as possible it may in many cases be wiser to minister to the less developed needs of its members than to those of selected customers in New York’, the committee envisaged wealthy, urban and sometimes overseas consumers.¹²⁸ The new Design Committee, separating designer, producer and customer, represented a fragmentation of Gardner’s Arts-and-Crafts ideals. The Committee’s one tangible outcome did point towards a new sort of synthesis, however, drawing together several departments on the estate. Heckroth, with the architect Robert Hening, designed an innovative ‘Lamda’ easy chair. The fabric came from the estate textile mill, the prototype was improved in the carpentry shop attached to the sawmill, and the

¹²³ W.K. Slater to Rex Gardner, 24 April 1934, C/DHL/9/A. Rex Gardner remembered in an interview with Victor Bonham Carter, conducting a ‘running fight with W.K. Slater over his principles in 1935’ (21 May 1956, C/RIB/1/A). For Gardner’s work with the Rural Industries Bureau, see footnote 95, chapter 3.

¹²⁴ [n.a.], ‘The relation of the Dartington trust to rural industries’, 13 May 1935, C/RIB/1/A. The Rural Industries Bureau (RIB) was founded in 1921 by the Ministry of Agriculture as a result of an enquiry conducted on behalf of the Development Commission. It was intended to encourage and assist in the development of rural industries. In consequence of Gardner’s work with the RIB, in 1938 the first Devon Agricultural Industries Conference was held at Dartington with Leonard as chairman. Over 160 people attended. ‘Preliminary draft agenda for Devon Agricultural Trades Conference’, 19 June 1937 and *News of the day*, 25 June 1937, C/RIB/1/A.

¹²⁵ ‘Memorandum on the position of design in the commercial departments at Dartington’, 24 November 1936, C/DHL/9/C.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Leonard, untitled note, LKE/G/S8/B, [n.d.].

chair was marketed through a catalogue that was given flair by Heckroth's design and photography.¹²⁹ Some of these chairs were sold – but then the war put an end to production.

At the same time as the Design Committee was established, the conclusion was reached that it was 'not desirable to have a craft shop which depends for its success upon handworks, associated with a large industrial unit such as Dartington'.¹³⁰ The crafts studio was re-opened as a bigger retail shop with a tearoom and car park. Selling products from outside as well as inside the estate, the shop pointed towards the tourist boom after the war and became Dartington's most successful industry.¹³¹ The divergence from the early model of an integrated community of craftsmen echoed William Morris' failure, in the previous century, to reconcile utopian ideas of production with commercial imperatives in his own business – although, as Michael Saler and Vicky Long find, others in the interwar generation found new sorts of syntheses to rectify the disjunct between them.¹³²

The changing focus in the crafts was part of a wider shift on the estate to concentrate on efficiency, sales and consumer desires rather than on creating an organically integrated community of makers.¹³³ From a newly-built central office designed by William Lescage, the company's managing director W.K. Slater – appointed in 1929 – demanded facts, figures and healthy returns from all departments. For Slater, Dartington's activities were congregated 'mainly for administrative and practical purposes, and not as part of a prototype for the structure of society'.¹³⁴ Employees were fired when enterprises did not meet their targets – usually when the Elmhursts were away.¹³⁵ Price Waterhouse & Co was appointed 'to set on foot a system of costings'.¹³⁶ Standardisation was the order of the day: correspondence must

¹²⁹ Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 93; David Jeremiah, 'Dartington' – a modern adventure', in Smiles (ed.), *Going modern and being British: art, architecture and design in Devon c. 1910-1960* (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1998), 43-78, at 64.

¹³⁰ [n.a.], 'The relation of the Dartington trust to rural industries', 13 May 1935, C/RIB/1/A.

¹³¹ 3,500 customers were served in tearoom in 1935, 5,000 in 1936 (P.M. Paynting to W.K. Slater, 14 January 1937, C/DHL/9/D). For the rise of rural tourism generally, see David Jeremiah, 'Motoring and the British countryside', *Rural history* 21 (2010), 233-50 and David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998), 95-101.

¹³² Vicky Long, 'Industrial homes, domestic factories: the convergence of public and private space in interwar Britain', *Journal of British studies* 50 (2011), 434-64, at 435; Saler, *The avant-garde*, 61-75. New sorts of synthesis were evident, for example, in the Design and Industries Association, formed in 1915, which combined a dedication to industrial production with an emphasis on the importance of the role of the artist in the production process – elevating public taste and therefore performing a unifying spiritual and social function.

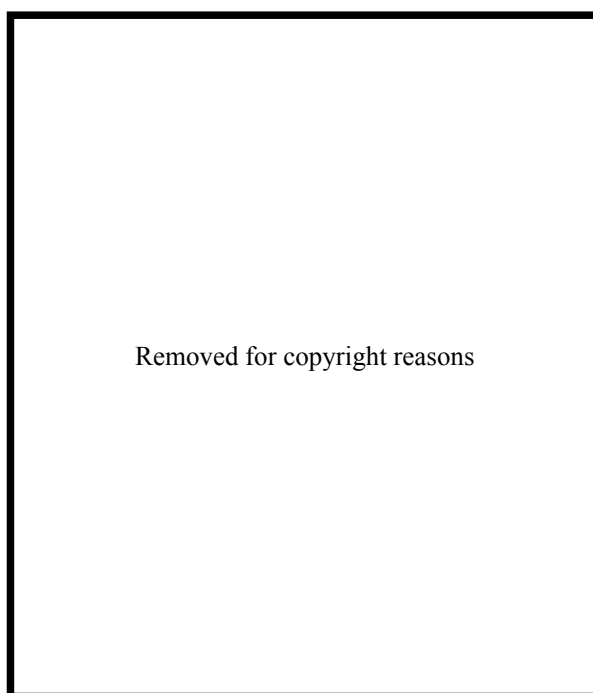
¹³³ J.R. Currie, 'Report upon marketing policy', 2 March 1931, C/DHL/8/A; J.R. Currie, 'The function and scope of economic research at Dartington Hall', [n.d.], T/AG/ECON/1/A.

¹³⁴ W.K. Slater, 'Notes on conclusions arrived at, Management committee', 27 July 1931, T/PP/P/1/A. W.K. Slater was first appointed as estate scientist on the recommendation of A.V. Hill, a friend of Leonard's from Cambridge, then was promoted to managing director of Dartington Hall Ltd in 1929.

¹³⁵ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 276.

¹³⁶ *News of the day*, 1 January 1930, T/PP/EST/1-8.

be in the house style and pass through the central office; advertising was only to be done by the sales department; instead of an organically-evolving co-operation between departments; function charts delineated every role.¹³⁷ Slater warned personnel that although ‘originally all letters were written in an extremely personal and friendly style’ that was ‘eminently suited to the early days’, they must now ‘adopt an entirely conventional form’.¹³⁸ One observer in the 1930s remarked that the production processes were ‘monotonous and mechanical and very much like work in a factory’, a departure from the early small units, ‘where workers understand the whole process’.¹³⁹



W.K. Slater in his office, 1936.
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‘Does it pay?’ wrote the organicist Rolf Gardiner. ‘This, after the first years of idealist extravagance, became the sole criterion.’¹⁴⁰ Other observers and employees who had conceived of the estate as a unique refuge where ‘monetary return was important, and only important, in so far as it might make the “social” experiment possible’ were also disappointed.¹⁴¹ Rabindranath Tagore admonished Leonard that ‘life and completeness’ was

¹³⁷ W.K. Slater, ‘To all departments’, 29 November 1934, C/DHL/1/B; W.K. Slater, ‘Memorandum of the proposed scheme of centralisation’, 1932, C/DHL/1/A; W.K. Slater, ‘to all departments’, 10 August 1934, C/DHL/1/B.

¹³⁸ W.K. Slater to J.R. Currie, 14 October 1931, T/AG ECON/S7/B

¹³⁹ Felicity Palmer, ‘Dartington report’, 1938, LKE/G/25/A.

¹⁴⁰ Rolf Gardiner, ‘Rural reconstruction’, in H.J Massingham (ed.), *England and the farmer* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1941), 91-107, at 106.

¹⁴¹ John Wales to W.B. Curry, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B.

not dividing things ‘into compartments’.¹⁴² For the Elmhirsts, however, life and completeness had to mean an attempt to integrate Dartington into society as a whole, and therefore into the consumer-capitalist system then beginning to take shape. By turning out high quality goods at Dartington, they would make the producer socially useful – and therefore satisfied; and they would also improve consumers’ taste, elevating the public socially and spiritually, as well as materially.¹⁴³ The artist would be integrated into the good community in a revised, enlarged version of William Morris’ communal visions of the Middle Ages. Yet John Wales, who had been at Dartington from the beginning, in vain advocated a proper analysis of the high turnover of casual labour and the professionalisation of management ‘(a) in relation to the idea of a community; (b) in relation to rural reorganization as opposed to urban proletarianisation in a rural area’. Instead of building a community outside the ‘cash nexus’, he complained, increasingly the estate’s ‘techniques and motives are those of the commercial world’.¹⁴⁴

Ironically, it was at this fractious period that the ‘Dartington idea’ of unified local community became something to be marketed: rather than trying to live the dream, they would sell it. In 1934, a sales department was established.¹⁴⁵ The new manager, James Harrison, found his role ‘far more satisfying than the array of noughts parading to the right’ that had been the aim at his previous post at Lever Brothers, and hoped to see ‘a continued merge into one multinucleated unicellular community’.¹⁴⁶ The advertising copy was to emphasise ‘the sociological angle’ rather than the commercial, on the basis that those ‘who know and admire the Dartington ideal are the people who will demand Dartington goods’.¹⁴⁷ Harrison’s tactics, however – appointing an advertising agent and renting an office and salesroom London – did little to advance internal integration.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Rabindranath Tagore to Leonard, 3 September 1932, quoted in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (ed.), *Selected letters of Rabindranath Tagore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 413.

¹⁴³ This view was akin to that of many of Michael Saler’s ‘medieval modernists’. *The avant-garde*, 73.

¹⁴⁴ John Wales to W.B. Curry, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B.

¹⁴⁵ W.K. Slater to James Harrison, 11 May 1934, C/DHL/8/C.

¹⁴⁶ James Harrison to Leonard, 18 July 1935, C/DHL/8/C. Lever Brothers were well-known for their care for employee welfare, building the model village of Port Sunlight in 1888 to house workers – but this was paternalistic, top-down care, with little of the rhetoric of democratic community that enveloped Dartington.

¹⁴⁷ London Press Exchange, ‘Editorial publicity for Dartington Hall, April-September 1935’, C/DHL/7/B.

¹⁴⁸ The advertising agent was the London Press Exchange. In 1936, a friend of Leonard’s from Cambridge, A.R. Pelly, was appointed as the estate’s London representative, with a staff of seven. From this point all estate sales, except timber and farm products, had to be made through the sales department. Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 301.

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Pioneering lifestyle consumption – pages from Dartington Hall’s 1937 sales catalogue.
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There was fierce criticism on the estate, both of inaccuracies in the marketing material and of the sheer idea that Dartington’s aims and should be represented ‘in marketing terms’ at all.¹⁴⁹ For those of a commercial bent, however, it was evident that the consumer, whether a figure to be manipulated or catered to, was increasingly a force to be reckoned with: ‘the consumer’s need, preference and demand should ideally be fed back to and guide the whole procedure from the production end’.¹⁵⁰ This marketing of Dartington as a utopia prefigured shifts in other similar enterprises. The village-cum-holiday-resort of Portmeirion, initially intended to show what good community planning could achieve in the countryside, became a springboard for its founder’s daughter – Susan Williams-Ellis, educated at Dartington School – to launch Portmeirion Pottery after the Second World War, one of the first retail companies to exploit the notion of the lifestyle consumer.¹⁵¹ Dartington showed, wrote one commentator in 1934,

¹⁴⁹ It was objected that that the estate was falsely represented in publicity materials as ‘already a paying concern’; that there was no ‘educational ladder’ for all employees to rise to the top of their profession as the copy claimed; and that the trust structure was not, as purported, an idealistic measure – it had been set up to avoid tax. John Wales to W.B. Curry, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B; Anonymous responses to 1931 questionnaire, LKE/G/13/B; Arthur Bridges to Leonard, 9 April 1935, LKE/LAND/4/A.

¹⁵⁰ [n.a.], ‘Memorandum on the marketing of fresh vegetables, fruit and flowers, in Great Britain, and especially in Devon and Cornwall’, [n.d.], T/AG ECON/S7/E.

¹⁵¹ Susan Williams-Ellis began running the Portmeirion gift shop in 1953 and parlayed this into the launch of Portmeirion Pottery. Will Farmer and Rob Higgins, *Portmeirion pottery* (Oxford: Shire, 2012).

that enlightened management could make an estate ‘as good an investment as the manufacture of soap, motor cars or any other commercial enterprise’.¹⁵²

The shift away from improving conditions of production to concentrating on what the consumer wanted reflected the early stages of the broader consumer-driven democracy which would flourish after the Second World War. The Elmhirsts were early supporters of this – in part because their effort to re-model production had not worked, and in part because they were in close contact with developments in the USA, which was several decades in advance of Britain in this field.¹⁵³ Through the Elmhirst Foundation, Dorothy gave \$10,000 to the American Consumers’ Club – set up in 1927 to support consumer activism.¹⁵⁴ The Elmhirsts later helped found the British think-tank, Political and Economic Planning, which, seeking a basis of citizenship not already tied to an existing organisation or interest associated with what it saw as an out-of-date political and economic system, increasingly put the consumer – as opposed to capital or labour – at the heart of its initiatives.¹⁵⁵

Both organisations believed ‘in the ability of information, expertise and rational individualism to modify the market, society and the economy to the needs of the people’.¹⁵⁶ Their faith foreshadowed that of the consumer organisations in England in the 1950s: Michael Young, ex-Dartington pupil and long-time trustee, who set up the Consumers Association in 1956 – again funded by the Elmhirsts – saw the consumer as ‘the centre of a political movement which would enable the concerns of ordinary people to filter through into political expression’.¹⁵⁷ In place of Rex Gardner’s happy craftsmen, working in a socially and spiritually fulfilling rural community and producing objects to raise the taste of society as a whole, socio-spiritual as well as economic regeneration might be led by the demands of the masses, promising far wider and more rapid reform.

¹⁵² Nigel de Grey, *Dartington Hall*, [Totnes, 1934], 125/7b, Nancy Wilson Ross Archives.

¹⁵³ Christopher Beauchamp calls the New Deal ‘a testing-ground for consumer politics’. ‘Getting your money’s worth: American models for the remaking of the consumer interest in Britain, 1930s-1960s’, in Mark Bevir and Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Critiques of capital in modern Britain and America: transatlantic exchanges* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 127-50, at 129.

¹⁵⁴ The Consumers’ Club, set up by Frederick Schlink and Stuart Chase, was incorporated as Consumers’ Research in 1929. Charles F. McGovern, *Sold American: consumption and citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 182-4.

¹⁵⁵ In the late 1930s PEP investigated the possibility of publishing independent tests of manufactured goods to empower consumers in making choices. The project failed due to concerns about British libel law. In 1934 they published *What consumers need* as a starting point for discussion about market reforms to strengthen the influence of shoppers. Matthew Hilton, ‘Michael Young and the consumer movement’, *Contemporary British history*, 19 (2005), 311-9, at 312.

¹⁵⁶ Hilton, ‘Michael Young’, 311.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 317; Michael Young, *The chipped white cups of Dover: a discussion of the possibility of a new progressive party* (London: Unit 2, 1960), 11, 18-9; Lawrence Black, ‘Which? Craft in post-war Britain: the Consumers’ Association and the politics of affluence’, *Albion: a quarterly journal concerned with British studies* 36 (2004), 52-82, at 55.

Social participation and social welfare

For both the Elmhursts, the ultimate aim of rural regeneration was not to encourage healthy industry and agriculture in the countryside – though that was a *sine qua non*. Rather, it was the Dewey-inspired project to deepen collective fulfilment and democracy, increasing people's participation in all aspects of social life in order to reverse the individualistic self-seeking and the loss of moral meaning that seemed to threaten modern society with fragmentation. As a young woman in New York, Dorothy had campaigned for female suffrage and enrolled in courses on sociology and psychology to learn about the 'theory underlying social efforts'.¹⁵⁸ In 1927, Leonard explained to Labour politician Ellen Wilkinson that behind all his and Dorothy's work, past and future, abroad and at Dartington, lay 'a conviction that the villages of England, as also of India' had 'yet to come into their own'.¹⁵⁹ He told Wilkinson that his and Dorothy's aim was to help uncover in the people involved in their community – and by extension in ordinary villagers across the world – 'a deep faith in themselves, wherewith to set their own house in order, by their own effort'.¹⁶⁰ Dartington, he wrote, was 'trying to pull off the nearest thing to a communal estate that I believe is at all comparable to what is being attempted in theory, at any rate, in Russia'.¹⁶¹

The Elmhursts' enthusiasm for grassroots democracy in theory was accompanied by an ambivalence about it in practice that ultimately did as much to shape the estate. Dorothy had been raised in New York high society; Leonard as a traditional English squire; they were for the people, but not quite willing to be of them – a problem that plagued many early-twentieth-century intellectuals and reformers.¹⁶² Like the national progressives of *The New Republic* that they funded, the uneasy compromise that the Elmhursts eventually found was to combine their faith in ultimate democratic participation as the way to heal the effects of competitive individualism with the view that the elite could – and indeed should – take the lead in steering the masses in the right direction until they were ready to govern themselves.¹⁶³ Leonard envisaged historical progress as 'the hauling up of a load of stones from the bottom of a cliff,

¹⁵⁸ Dorothy quoted by Eric Rauchway, 'A gentleman's club in a woman's sphere: how Dorothy Whitney Straight created *The New Republic*', *The journal of women's history* 11 (1999), 60-85, at 66.

¹⁵⁹ Leonard to Ellen Wilkinson, 19 April 1927, LKE/G/33/I.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Leonard to Ellen Wilkinson, 28 April 1930, LKE/G/33/I.

¹⁶² For some equivalent biographies, see Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (eds.), *After the Victorians: private conscience and public duty in modern Britain: essays in memory of John Clive* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶³ Marc Stears, *Progressives, pluralists, and the problems of the state: ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

– a few strong men, paternalistic, enlightened, tugging and hauling by main force and the vast population on the basket sitting tight [...] plastic and immobile'.¹⁶⁴

On their estate, the vision of a group-run community quickly gave way to a reality of top-down rule; the impulse to model an ideal society split into a number of other, outward-looking social reform projects. This section looks first at the governance and society of Dartington itself as it moved from the ideal of collective democracy to the reality of a hierarchical company focused on employee welfare. It then follows the Elmhirsts' efforts to work out how best they could contribute to social democratic reform if they could not model it themselves. They tried to make the estate a regional hub, achieving much in the surrounding villages but encountering problems with disapproving locals and with local officials. They became involved with parish and county government, looking for ways in which these official instruments could be effectively coordinated with the efforts of private activists such as themselves. When neither regional hubs nor private-public co-operation worked out satisfactorily, the Elmhirsts' sense of the proper mode of reform shifted still further away from the organic and local. They embraced central planning, sponsoring the think-tank Political and Economic Planning and contributing to state-led schemes for post-war reconstruction.

As with the areas of agriculture and industry, Dorothy and Leonard struggled throughout this evolution in their ideas and activities to reconcile their faith in the importance of the local, the grassroots and a vaguely-defined idea of community spirit with their belief in the efficiency of the large-scale, scientific and centralised. And as with agriculture and industry, and with the arts, their most influential contributions were made as surveyors of the field of action and as advice-givers on bigger projects, rather than as builders of a democratic utopia on the ground. Even as their interest in the theory of central planning was hurried into practical fruition by the Second World War, however, they remained pre-occupied with the importance of localised, grassroots democracy. This strand of thinking would re-emerge in their enthusiasm for the post-war community development movement, both in Britain and in India.

¹⁶⁴ Leonard to Dorothy, 4 October 1921, LKE/DWE/10/D.

(a) *Self-governing community or benevolent business?*

'Unity of intention or purpose, community of feeling, has never been fully achieved here, and in consequence we have had to fall back upon a form of autocracy. There was no general agreement upon the purpose of education, the object of life or the nature of the good.'

Wyatt Rawson (1927)¹⁶⁵

In the first few years, when the estate revolved around a small school and involved relatively few people – many of them the Elmhirsts' relatives or friends, who were closely aligned to them ideologically – there was a strong sense that Dartington was, or soon would be, 'a group working together', a model for social democracy.¹⁶⁶ The estate's ambitions were shaped by the self-transformative ideal Leonard had seen working with Rabindranath Tagore in India. Sriniketan aimed to be 'one village where the old Hindu spirit of democracy and individual responsibility has been re-established'.¹⁶⁷ Another strong influence in the founding phase was Eduard Lindeman, an American expert in the theory and practice of adult education who owed much to the philosophy of John Dewey. His ideas were adopted by both the Elmhirsts, although, early on, his sway over Dorothy made Leonard inclined to jealousy.¹⁶⁸

Lindeman presided over the first meetings about the shape Dartington would take, held between the Elmhirsts and a handful of their intimates, and stamped the plan with his view that the vital unit of a healthy democracy was the local community or group.¹⁶⁹ He was opposed to centralised 'collectivist nationalism' which threatened 'to submerge the individual'. He was equally opposed to the idea of an 'intelligence bureau' of elites interpreting democracy for the masses – an idea that was popular among a considerable, transatlantic constituency of progressives, including Walter Lippmann in America and the Fabians in England.¹⁷⁰ Social progress, for Lindeman, would come from 'disintegrated community groups' being drawn together from within and 'playing an active part in democracy'.¹⁷¹ The Elmhirsts, like many other of the early participants at Dartington, shared Lindeman's quasi-

¹⁶⁵ Wyatt Rawson to Eduard Lindeman, July 1927, DWE/G/7/C.

¹⁶⁶ [n.a.], transcription of Sunday evening meeting, 23 September 1928, LKE/G/31/A.

¹⁶⁷ Leonard to Rathi Tagore, 13 March 1929, LKE/IN/21/B.

¹⁶⁸ Eduard Lindeman and Dorothy were sufficiently close for the former to dedicate a book to her. There is some indication that he had romantic hopes that were quashed when she met Leonard. Wyatt Rawson to Eduard Lindeman, 16 May 1927, DWE/G/7/C; Joan C. Tonn, *Mary P. Follett: creating democracy, transforming management* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2003), 350-4. For Lindeman's life, see footnote 59, chapter 2.

¹⁶⁹ 'Report of meeting held to discuss plans and purposes of Dartington school', 11 September 1926, T/DHS/A/1/A.

¹⁷⁰ Stears, *Progressives*, 79.

¹⁷¹ Eduard Lindeman, 'The place of the local community in organized society', [n.d.], DWE/G/7/C.

religious idea that they were on a quest to be ‘a group in the sense of collective spirit or personality’.¹⁷²

As soon as theoretical discussions about the shape of the estate were replaced by practical activities, however, it became clear that informal democratic direction was not going to work. The ‘experiment in democracy during the autumn of 1926’ was ‘wholly unsuccessful’, wrote one participant. ‘In 1927 ‘we started with an autocracy’.¹⁷³ The Elmhursts, the experts they consulted and the workers who increasingly formed the bulk of the community were not magically going to achieve the ‘subconscious homogeneity’ or ‘common will’ that would allow the enterprise to be collectively directed.¹⁷⁴ Such initiatives as Gerald Heard’s generating cell and Leonard’s consultations about group spirit with passing social scientists showed little chance of yielding corporate unity. Nor did Dorothy and Leonard ever manifest much sign of really wanting governance taken out of their hands – although when they began they had insisted that they meant only to ‘treat [Dartington] as ours until the different elements are firstly able to make a “go” of their own show, and then show ability to combine with the other elements to make a “go” of the whole thing’.¹⁷⁵

The ideal of a democratic estate was rapidly abandoned in favour of a hierarchical structure of control – topped, informally at first, by the Elmhursts and a rotating cast of often American advisors, and then by a board of directors and trustees. Dartington Hall Ltd was formed in 1929, its board of directors controlling the commercial departments. Two years later the Dartington Hall Trust was set up, an educational foundation with charitable status, governed by trustees and intended to foster the wider ideas behind Dartington.¹⁷⁶ Leonard was chairman of both company and trust, and he and Dorothy were trustees, but day-to-day guidance of the estate was increasingly devolved to an echelon of managers, decisively breaking up the early sense of democratic collaboration. Several of those involved with the estate since the beginning lamented the move from an ‘attempt at living in a group’ to something ‘more conventional, national and orthodox’ in which ‘you are free to do anything save fall below your costings keep’.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² [n.a.], ‘Report of meeting held to discuss plans and purposes of Dartington school’, 11 September 1926, T/DHS/A/1/A.

¹⁷³ Anonymous response to 1929 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/D.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Leonard to Dorothy, 29 March 1926, LKE/DWE/12/D.

¹⁷⁶ Victor Bonham-Carter, *Land and environment: the survival of the English countryside* (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), 141.

¹⁷⁷ Gerald Heard to Margaret Isherwood, 17 December 1933, DWE/G/6A.

Even though top-down control had been definitively brought in, the expectation lingered on among participants that social control, at least, would gradually be shared through a system of committees, yielding ‘a democratic result’.¹⁷⁸ The Elmhursts themselves, torn between ‘dictation by trustees or democracy’, experimented with a series of measures that fed this expectation of increased self-government.¹⁷⁹ These ranged from works councils, through a short-lived ‘Public Relations Committee’, to an estate committee formed during the war ‘to effect interchange of ideas between the Trustees and those living or working on the Estate’.¹⁸⁰ At Leonard’s request, the WEA tutor-organiser F.G. Thomas drew up a scheme ‘for the democratic organization of the adult and social life of the workers on the estate’ via a workers’ council ‘with statutory authority from its inception to devise, finance and organise’.¹⁸¹ The idea was blocked by the managing director W.K. Slater and the headmaster W.B. Curry – the former because self-government seemed antithetical to making a profit, the latter not wanting his freedom of action as an educator limited.¹⁸²

The Elmhursts’ ongoing lack of clarity about what they themselves wanted was a distinct irritation to some of the estate’s participants: Slater, finding his position as managing director frequently undermined by personal appeals to Dorothy and Leonard, vainly begged them either to put in place ‘the democratic methods of control through a rigidly observed committee structure’ or to accept that Dartington was ‘an autocracy founded on financial control’.¹⁸³ In spite of their unwillingness to do either explicitly, the estate drifted more and more towards the latter position. When a permanent joint council of trustees and managers was formed in 1945, the managers were appointed by the trustees rather than elected by the workers, and the council’s role was weak and advisory.¹⁸⁴ ‘[T]he ideals of Dartington could only be achieved by efficiency,’ stated the newly-appointed trustee Robert Appleby. ‘You would not get efficiency by molly-coddling the workers’.¹⁸⁵

Regardless of who was in control, as Dartington expanded, the Elmhursts were determined ‘to make “good-will” keep pace with “structure”’ and tried various means to promote social participation and collective identity.¹⁸⁶ In the absence of truly democratic government, social participation was the crucial component of democratic rural regeneration. Measures tried

¹⁷⁸ Anonymous response to 1929 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/D.

¹⁷⁹ Leonard, jottings, 21 February 1935, LKE/G/S9/A.

¹⁸⁰ See files T/PP/P/1/B and C.

¹⁸¹ F.G. Thomas, scheme for workers’ council, 25 May 1933, LKE/EDU/2/B.

¹⁸² W.K. Slater to Leonard, 28 June 1933, T/AE/2/D.

¹⁸³ W.K. Slater to Leonard, 22 September 1939, C/DHL/5/B.

¹⁸⁴ Meeting between trustees and heads of department, 19 November 1945, C/DHL/1/E.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Leonard quoted in *Tomorrow*, the Dartington School magazine, July 1933, T/DHS/B/23/E.

included a successful daily news sheet, *News of the day*, a short-lived experiment with a library extension service and an equally short-lived attempt to run an estate transport service.¹⁸⁷ One employee likened *News of the day* to the newly-established BBC, both drawing together ‘an audience with many points of view’.¹⁸⁸ Estate meetings were also held every Sunday to discuss progress and direction – an echo of the New Deal’s promotion of civic discussion groups to foster democratic citizenship.¹⁸⁹ Meant to show ‘in visible form the Dartington folk as a living group’, some felt the meetings excluded the “‘coats off” workers’ who lived at a distance, had family responsibilities in the evenings and found the abstract nature of discussions inaccessible.¹⁹⁰ Socially, the tone was increasingly set by the minority of educated, confident ‘black coated workers’.¹⁹¹ Newcomers, particularly local ‘maids and workmen’, as opposed to metropolitan middle class idealists, complained of a lack of understanding of what Dartington was all about. They asked for ‘a sort of estate year-book, with maps and history’.¹⁹²

The Elmhursts saw building affordable modern housing both as a means of fostering community spirit by encouraging workers to live on the estate, and as a counter-measure to the general tendency for people to move from the countryside and into towns because living standards were higher. They sponsored an ambitious programme of house-building, but they employed no overall architect or planner. The disappointment of visitor John Drummond at the result – he wrote that there was ‘no new interpretation or message in architecture, design, or country planning’ – was frequently echoed.¹⁹³ The Dartington building programme drew in a diverse array of idealistic architects, from the Arts-and-Crafts-influenced Rex Gardner to Louis de Soissons, the planner of Welwyn Garden City, and the modernist Swiss-American William Lescaze.¹⁹⁴ The houses they designed were cheap, providing a model for other landowners, as Leonard intended, but they were also criticised by their inhabitants for looking cheap and feeling cheap to live in.¹⁹⁵ And in spite – or perhaps because of – the number of architects involved, the new residential settlements also tended to be scattered about and out

¹⁸⁷ *News of the day* was first published in December 1927. Other measures are described in *Tomorrow*, July 1933, T/DHS/B/23/E.

¹⁸⁸ G.H. Thurley, response to 1931 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/E.

¹⁸⁹ Gilbert, *Planning democracy*, 142.

¹⁹⁰ J.J. Findlay, *The Dartington community: a story of social achievement*, unfinished manuscript written 1937-9, LKE/G/13/B; the complaint came from J.W.B. Butterworth, a worker in the plant nursery, in a letter to Leonard, 22 February 1937, LKE/DEV/1/D.

¹⁹¹ J.W.B. Butterworth to Leonard, 22 February 1937, LKE/DEV/1/D.

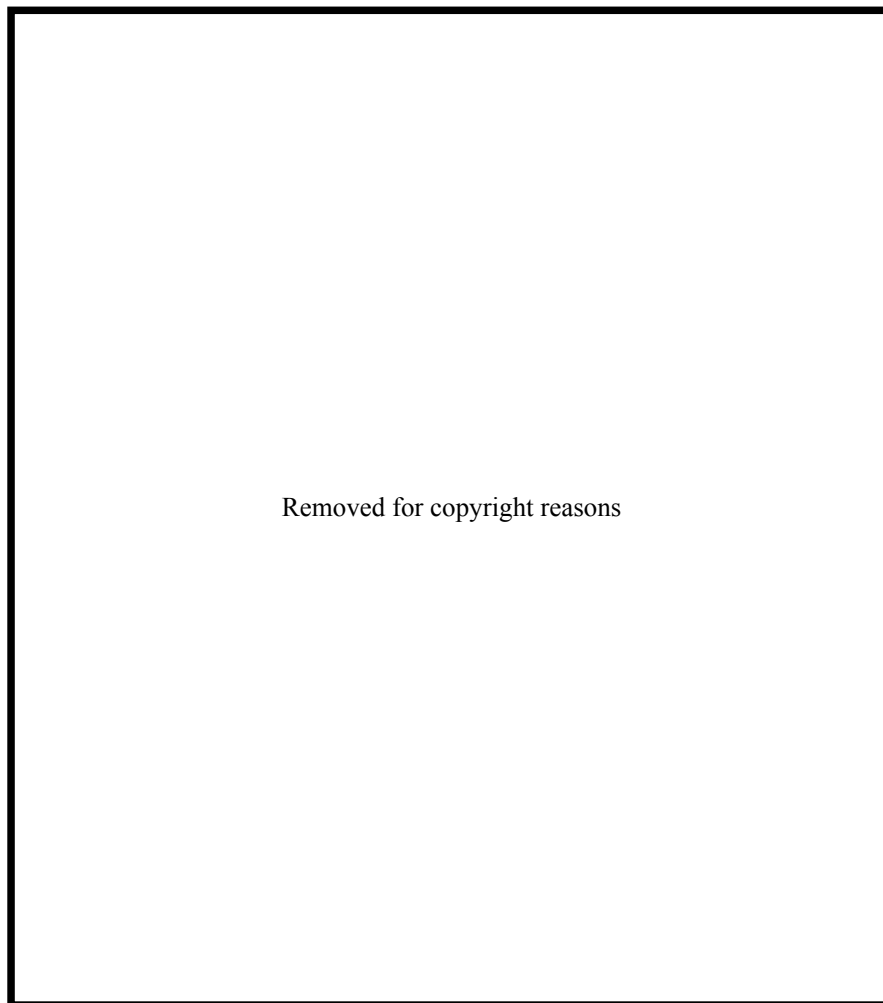
¹⁹² Anonymous response to 1931 questionnaire, LKE/G/13/B.

¹⁹³ John Drummond, draft chapters for unpublished book, LKE/DEV/3/C.

¹⁹⁴ Bonham-Carter, *Dartington Hall*, 116.

¹⁹⁵ Young, *The Elmhursts*, 265.

of walking distance from the main centre, contributing little to the development of community spirit.¹⁹⁶



*Image by Rex Gardner from the 500th edition of News of the day, 1934.
© Dartington Hall Archives.*

Initially, there was a feeling that measures to promote social welfare – which included not only cheap houses to rent but ‘water and electricity laid on, insurance, pensions, the nursery school’ – were not the gifts of a generous employer or paternalistic landlord, but an essential part of a democratically-conceived community jointly striving to raise the standard of rural life.¹⁹⁷ Along with the effort to make education and the arts part of everyone’s everyday life, they were seen as a genuine alternative to alienated labour. With time, however, as one unimpressed observer noted, their quality moved away from the ‘socialistic and communistic’

¹⁹⁶ Louis de Soissons, for example, designed housing estates at Huxhams Cross and Broom Park that were inconveniently distant from the estate’s commercial departments and isolated from the social centre formed by Dartington Hall and its immediate grounds.

¹⁹⁷ Felicity Palmer, report on Dartington, 1938, LKE/G/25/A.

and towards ‘commercialised feudalism’.¹⁹⁸ There was mounting ambiguity about whether welfare measures were designed to improve social participation and wellbeing for their own sake, to increase commercial efficiency, or merely offered as a sop to make up for the ‘mechanised and stereotyped jobs’ that had arisen in place of integrated work – effectively easing the transition to industrial capitalism.¹⁹⁹ The Laban Lawrence Industrial Rhythm, for example, which was developed by choreographer Rudolph Laban and pioneered in various Dartington departments, was meant not just to diminish physical strain, but also to speed up production.²⁰⁰

Dartington’s managers looked to the successes of such new management techniques as the ‘propaganda’ in the Bata Shoe Factory in Essex, where even ‘the office boy is encouraged to demand information on such important points as profit or loss’, while Dartington was ‘barren of concrete information’ and therefore not maximising its workers’ commitment and efficiency.²⁰¹ Dartington had become ‘less rather than more’ than George Cadbury’s Bournville and Sir William Lever’s Port Sunlight, wrote a disenchanted employee in 1936; at least these paternalistic industrial villages were clear what they stood for, while Dartington, beginning with higher ideals of democratic government and social participation, was now ‘distinguishable from other industrial undertakings merely by its inefficiency’.²⁰² Part of the difference between the efforts to promote democratic community spirit at Dartington compared with these other progressive, if paternalistic, projects lay in its location – in deep Devon, rather than on the fringes of London (Bata), Liverpool (Port Sunlight) or Birmingham (Bournville). As one observer warned the Elmhursts, the farms and hamlets which formed Dartington had never had a ‘community life’ independent from the owner of the Hall; they

¹⁹⁸ William St John Pym, response to 1931 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/E; Vicky Long writes about the interwar narrowing of nineteenth-century utopian ideas of integrated work into a concentration on industrial welfare, seeing it in part as a response to trade unionism and ‘industrial warfare’. ‘Industrial homes’.

¹⁹⁹ Meeting between trustees and heads of department, 19 November 1945, C/DHL/1/E. Efficiency and worker welfare were similarly entwined in such enterprises as Rowntree. Jointly emphasised, they provided a convenient way of fulfilling the company’s Quaker ideals of service to employees and to consumers at the same time. Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the marketing revolution, 1862-1969* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 218.

²⁰⁰ This system was developed by Rudolph Laban in cooperation with Frederick C. Lawrence, a Manchester engineer. It was first used at Tyresoles Ltd in Manchester then, in the 1950s, attracted other clients, including Mars Confectionary. Evelyn Doerr, *Rudolf Laban: the dancer of the crystal* (Lanham, Md; Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 196-7; F.C. Lawrence to W.K. Slater, 22 May 1942, T/AD/3; ‘Report upon Miss Newlove’s visit to Dartington Hall Ltd. 10-21 May’, 4 June 1942, T/AD/3.

²⁰¹ Hiram Hague Winterbotham, ‘Memorandum’, 1936, C/DHL/1/B; Joanna Smith “‘Work collectively and live individually’: the Bata housing estate at East Tilbury’, *Twentieth century architecture* 9 (2008), 52-68.

²⁰² John Wales to W.B. Curry, 4 March 1936, C/DHL/1/B; Hiram Hague Winterbotham, ‘Memorandum’, 1936, C/DHL/1/B.

were used to being part of ‘the old patriarchal regime’ – and did not necessarily hunger to be freed of it.²⁰³

While the structure and overall tenor of the estate shifted from group endeavour to enlightened business, much of the time the Elmhirsts’ lives resembled those of traditional wealthy landowners. They lived in the Great Hall among masterpieces and a large staff, travelled a great deal abroad, hosted a stream of visitors and held squirearchical events like fêtes and Christmas parties for the estate children.²⁰⁴ They seemed, to some employees at least, unreachably cocooned in the ‘unreality generated by money’.²⁰⁵ Whilst theoretically in favour of social democracy, they never engaged with the class problem head on – assuming, rather, a fundamental harmony of interests between classes, and a future in which the masses would be raised to the level of the elite.²⁰⁶ This tension between ideology and practice was evident in the lives of elite reformers across England in the interwar years – detailed by Alison Light, for example, in the relations between the Bloomsbury group and their servants.²⁰⁷

Some visitors, like political economist George Catlin, saw Dorothy and Leonard’s top-down methods of furthering democracy as exemplary: ‘the dissolving of class division’ was ‘a task to be performed from above, in a useful unostentatious community open to those who like its ways, not from below by force and envious proletarian legislation’.²⁰⁸ The craftsman Rex Gardner agreed that ‘democracy will only be possible when the weapons have been forged by autocracy. That is my interest in D[artington] that it is an autocratic scheme’.²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, Leonard was uncomfortably aware that “‘Big capital’” could “‘loosen” the very idea and principle of democracy’.²¹⁰ He compared Dartington somewhat enviously with the Brynmawr Experiment, whose truly self-governing model meant that its participants were more invested in the enterprise as a whole.²¹¹ He half-wished that Dartington was constructed on the same

²⁰³ John Benson to Leonard, 1930 and 1932, T/HIS/5/A.

²⁰⁴ Paula Morel, interview with Michael Young, 23 August 1976, T/HIS/S22; Michael Straight to Michael Young, 11 September 1980, T/HIS/S22/D.

²⁰⁵ Raymond O’Malley to Michael Young, 5 January 1983, T/HIS/S20/D.

²⁰⁶ The Elmhirst-sponsored think-tank Political and Economic Planning similarly predicted ‘the shaping of a world without a proletariat’ in a universal process of ‘grading up’. [n.a.], ‘Post-war reconstruction group’, 28 August 1940, LKE/USA/11/C.

²⁰⁷ Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the servants: the hidden heart of domestic service* (London: Penguin, 2007).

²⁰⁸ George E.G. Catlin to Leonard, 7 September 1925, LKE/G/4/E.

²⁰⁹ Rex Gardner, response to 1929 questionnaire, T/PP/P/1/D.

²¹⁰ Leonard to R.A. Edwards, 1 January 1947, LKE/DEV/1/K.

²¹¹ Leonard, untitled note, LKE/G/S8/B, [n.d.]. The Brynmawr Experiment to revive the fortunes of a Welsh mining town involved a survey of the district made by its inhabitants. Afterwards, a Community Study Council was set up, drawn from all sections of the community, to put in place a series of recommendations that included establishing new industries, a children’s group, adult education and a

democratic model as Brynmawr – but never quite brought himself to admit openly that it was not. To escape the conundrum of wanting collective government but not judging people able to effect it, the Elmhursts turned from building a micro-democracy at Dartington to considering how the estate could serve local society as a local ‘mother village’ instead, as ‘in Saxon times a parish sometimes took on the creation of a new sub-parish under its wing’.²¹²

(b) Dartington as a ‘mother village’

In India, Leonard had seen the single village as ‘too small a unit to withstand attack of city and world markets’; Dartington, he increasingly thought in the late 1920s, must be like Sriniketan – a ‘coordinating centre’ for the villages and hamlets.²¹³ This conception of the region – rather than the village or the nation as a whole – as the effective unit of rural regeneration echoed the decentralised, elite-led regionalist ideals of such conservative ruralists as Rolf Gardiner. Yet, while the Elmhursts might seem to fulfil Rolf Gardiner’s vision of rural regeneration stemming from regional centres run by ‘a new *elite* rooted in the soil’, part of a re-invigorated, paternalistic landowning class, their own view was still the Deweyan one that social reform could only be brought about by ordinary people.²¹⁴ Dorothy and Leonard’s efforts to further their citizen-led vision began, first, with their looking to support the nearby Dartington village hall as a way to revive and unite the social life of the estate and village. When this work foundered, they turned to helping other local villages in their efforts at social improvement, before backing a citizen-survey of the region as a whole, conducted as a preliminary to forming a plan for concerted regional reform.

The new Dartington vicar, R.A. Edwards, taking up his post in 1940, reported being ‘assailed with stories of the Estate’s misdeeds, of anything from a Nudist Colony to the Black Mass’.²¹⁵ While he may have exaggerated local opprobrium to spotlight his own achievements as a go-between for the estate and village, the Elmhursts had certainly found the Women’s Institute, the parish council, the cricket club, the village hall and church resistant to their overtures from the moment they arrived in Devon.²¹⁶ It was the peril of setting up a radically

library. Echoing Dartington, it aimed at ‘a new relationship – a coordinating of varied interests, as parts of a whole rather than as opposing and self contained units’. ‘The Brynmawr experiment, 1928-1933’, pamphlet, [n.d.], LKE/G/S4/B; letters between Leonard and Peter Scott, one of the originators of the Brynmawr Experiment, are in file LKE/G/S4/B.

²¹² Leonard interviewed by Victor Bonham-Carter, transcript of recording of BBC Third Programme on Dartington Hall, recorded 19 June 1950, transmitted 13 August 1951, LKE/G/S13/A.

²¹³ Leonard to Arthur Geddes, 24 February 1923, LKE/IN/6/D.

²¹⁴ Rolf Gardiner, *England herself*, 171.

²¹⁵ R.A. Edwards, ‘Dartington: A report for the Bishop of the Diocese’, January 1948, DWE/G/S3/G.

²¹⁶ Francis Acland to Leonard, 10 October 1936, LKE/DEV/1/B; R.A. Edwards, ‘Dartington: A report for the Bishop of the Diocese’, January 1948, DWE/G/S3/G.

progressive experiment in the heart of a county that was a bastion of traditional values.²¹⁷ To the church, Dorothy and Leonard gleefully returned the cold shoulder – seeing it an out-dated, fossilised institution. But they wanted the village hall, standing just beyond the boundary of their land, to be a joint centre of estate-village life. Like other interwar ruralists, they saw village halls as having particular ‘community-forming properties’ – as places of civic discussion, self-education and democratic participation.²¹⁸

In spite of their hopes, the Elmhursts found the local hall controlled by a band of wealthy local Conservatives – ‘not a village hall in the true and democratic sense at all’ judged Leonard disparagingly.²¹⁹ After making an ill-received suggestion that the villagers should borrow capital and buy these men out, the Elmhursts instead mooted the idea of Dartington’s founding a new, properly democratic village institute itself.²²⁰ Tellingly, the construction of this centre was delayed until after the Second World War by local concerns that it would be a top-down affair superimposed by the Elmhursts, rather than ‘part of the normal community managed simply by the people who belong to it’.²²¹ When it was finally built, just after the war, the Dartington vicar complained that its ambition ‘to serve as a central Institute for a wide rural area’ was part of an undesirable new ‘Town and Country Planning idea’ that would further contribute to the ‘degrading of village life’.²²² For some, Devon’s traditionalism should be guarded rather than reformed in line with modern social democracy. The institution was, nonetheless, widely popular, chiefly as a centre for adult education.²²³

Beyond Dartington itself, the Elmhursts worked with several nearby villages through the interwar years, encouraging Rattery, for instance, to expand into new types of farming and to build itself a village hall, and suggesting schemes at Dittisham for better transport and sewage facilities, a school and a playing field.²²⁴ More ambitious but less successful was the speculative development of a ‘community of housing with [a] utopian agenda’ – a new ideal community that was to be built from scratch in the nearby parish of Churston Ferrers. Only

²¹⁷ Sam Smiles, ‘Refuge or regeneration: Devon’s twentieth century identity’, in Sam Smiles (ed.), *Going modern and being British: art, architecture and design in Devon c. 1910-1960* (Exeter: Intellect Books, 1998), 1-14. For celebration of ‘traditional’ Devon see John Betjeman, *Devon: Shell guide* (London: Architectural Press, [1936]) and Stephen Reynolds, *A poor man’s house* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911).

²¹⁸ Jeremy Burchardt, ‘Reconstructing the rural community: village halls and the National Council of Social Service, 1919-39’, *Rural history* 10 (1999), 193-216.

²¹⁹ Leonard to R.A. Edwards, 1 January 1947, LKE/DEV/1/K.

²²⁰ Ibid; Leonard to R.N. Armfelt of the Devon County Education Committee, 20 May 1940, T/AE/5/A.

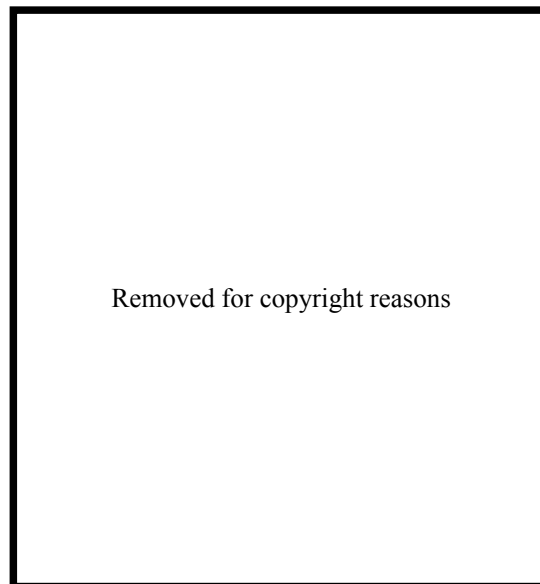
²²¹ R.A. Edwards to Leonard, 16 November 1946, LKE/DEV/1/K.

²²² R.A. Edwards to Leonard, 16 May 1947, T/AE/5/A.

²²³ Leonard, ‘Conclusions from the Dartington experiment’, [c.1954], LKE/G/S8/1.

²²⁴ A.A.L. Caesar, ‘Visit to Dartington Hall, March 17-19’, 24 March 1944, LKE/LAND/2/G.

ten of the five hundred planned units were completed before the war.²²⁵ Proceedings were slow because the Elmhursts employed a construction team that spanned the Atlantic, including pioneering American urban planner Henry Wright – part of an internationalisation of planning practices still in its early stages.²²⁶ What was as much of a problem as speed, though, was the lack of purchasers for the houses. People were put off by the expense and novelty of the modernist designs, and by the suspicion that they would be required to live a ‘communal life’.²²⁷ The pitfalls of superimposing a utopian community design drawn up on another continent and without reference to local preference were made expensively apparent. Many who wanted to live in Devon did so precisely because it was a repository of traditional values. When Wright died in 1936, Leonard searched America in vain for another planner to make the project ‘the experiment it ought to be’; after the war, he resigned himself to design along more orthodox lines and finally found buyers.²²⁸



Churston Ferrers, with William Lescaze's unpopular modernist houses on the horizon, right, 1935. © Dartington Hall Trust Archives

²²⁵ The houses cost over £1000 each when the average price for the area was little over £500. W.K. Slater to Henry Wright, 5 December 1935; W.K. Slater to William Lescaze, 27 February and 15 March 1934.

²²⁶ Other architects and planners involved in the project included, in America, William Lescaze and Beatrix Farrand, and, in England, Oswald Milne and Staverton Builders Ltd, the spin-off company from the Dartington building department. Churston minutes, 3 May 1933-17 January 1935, quoted in Gaia Caramellino, *Europe meets America: William Lescaze, architect of modern housing* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 145; Stephen V. Ward, ‘A pioneer “global intelligence corps”?’ The internationalization of planning practice, 1890-1939’, *The town planning review* 76 (2005), 119-41.

²²⁷ Dartington trustee and lawyer Fred Gwatkin tried in vain to warn William Lescaze that the ‘retired merchants, bank officials, Army officers and the like’ who might live in Churston would be put off by any suggestions of its having utopian aims. Gwatkin to Lescaze, 30 August 1933, C/CDC/9/H.

²²⁸ Leonard to Mr Ross, 6 October 1936, LKE/USA/6/G. Ultimately, a more conservative architect, Louis de Soissons, took over from Lescaze after the war, instating a more conventional style and making it a reasonable financial success. Caramellino, *Europe meets America*, 160-1.

In the late 1930s, Leonard, as chairman of the Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes – an alliance between the University College of the South West, the Local Education Authority and the Workers Educational Association – supported a ‘listening project’ in the villages of the South-West run by tutor-organiser F.G. Thomas.²²⁹ Groups were formed in forty-three villages to fill in questionnaires after listening to a series of regional BBC broadcasts by prominent local figures on the subject of ‘the changing village’.²³⁰ The survey, which involved ‘no statisticians or skilled investigators, but an affiliation of village people’, was part of a movement for regional survey in the interwar period that took much of its inspiration from Patrick Geddes, the Scottish planner and social evolutionist whom Leonard had met and admired in India.²³¹ David Matless writes that, for Geddes, people’s participation in surveying ‘would generate good local, national, and world citizenship’ and promote healthy participation in a devolved regional politics.²³² The aim of F.G. Thomas’ survey, as set out by Francis Acland, MP for Cornwall, in the introduction to the pamphlet of findings, was ‘making citizenship not simply a matter of being governed but a thing to be lived’.²³³ It was back to John Dewey again: social reformation meant deepening active participation in democracy; teaching social precepts apart from practice was ‘teaching the child to swim by going through the motions outside the water’.²³⁴

Thomas was inspired by his success to suggest a comprehensive agricultural, economic and social survey of Devon and Somerset by its inhabitants, financed by the BBC, supported by Dartington, and providing information both for broadcasters and for use by ‘economists, sociologists and by legislative bodies’.²³⁵ He had seen American extra-mural work at first hand on the back of a Rockefeller Foundation travel scholarship that the Elmhursts assisted him in securing, and he pushed Leonard to help because of his own ‘unique knowledge of this type of work both here and in America’.²³⁶ Leonard, too, admired the social survey of

²²⁹ J.G. Trevena to Leonard, 10 January 1935, LKE/EDU/3/A; Leonard to John Murray, 28 March 1935, LKE/EDU/3/A.

²³⁰ F.G. Thomas, ‘First annual report of the Rural Extension Scheme’, 1936, LKE/EDU/4/B.

²³¹ ‘Development of Devon rural life’, clipping from unknown newspaper, 18 September 1935, LKE/EDU/3/F. Leonard worked with Patrick Geddes’ son Arthur at Sriniketan and exchanged letters with Patrick, admiring ‘the way in which you launch forward into all kinds of fields’ – which he saw as similar to his and Dorothy’s ambition of meeting ‘problems on every side, social, economic, agricultural’. Leonard to Patrick Geddes, 25 May 1926, LKE/IN/6/E.

²³² David Matless, ‘Regional surveys and local knowledges: the geographical imagination in Britain, 1918-39’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 17 (1992), 464-80, at 472-3.

²³³ F.G. Thomas, ‘The changing village’, pamphlet with foreword by Sir Francis Acland, LKE/EDU/3/F.

²³⁴ John Dewey, *Moral principles in education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, c.1909), 14.

²³⁵ According to a letter from F.G. Thomas to Leonard, the BBC was enthusiastic about the plan. 3 February 1936, LKE/EDU/4/A.

²³⁶ F.G. Thomas to Leonard, 19 August 1936, LKE/EDU/4/C. The application was made in 1933. The Elmhursts contributed funds so F.G. Thomas’s wife could go too.

America, and he was in correspondence with central figures in the agricultural New Deal who were embracing practical survey by citizen-researchers as part of their programme of reform.²³⁷ The ‘two-handed commitment to democracy’ that Jess Gilbert distinguishes in these New Deal surveys – a belief in the state as a means of progressive reform combined with the view that federal authority should decentralise to local citizens – represented the ideal of collaborative bottom-up/top-down reform at which the Elmhirsts themselves were now arriving.²³⁸

Thomas’ idea for a comprehensive survey also reflected the popularity of civic survey in Britain, with numerous such endeavours taking place in the 1920s and 30s, not least Mass Observation, which began in 1937.²³⁹ Thomas saw his work as a preliminary to regional planning – the means to establish ‘the nucleus of the necessary machinery’ to ‘initiate the first practical planned re-organisation of selected parts of a given area’.²⁴⁰ The scientifically-minded research department at Dartington, however, argued that a survey ‘by local groups of school children or adults who have not been specially trained’ would be of no use to planners.²⁴¹ The Elmhirsts themselves, while increasingly inclined to see planning as better than organic local community development, also tended to see professional social scientists and the government as necessary participants in this process. Thomas’ plan did not go forward.

The Elmhirsts’ focus in their experiments with Dartington as a regional co-ordinating centre progressed from the local village hall, to the nearby villages, and finally to the South West as a whole. Their activities – as Dorothy’s irreverent, communist son Michael Straight recalled – were hampered by their difficulties in communicating their ideals to ‘the local gentry, the village tyrants, the reactionary farmers’.²⁴² They also encountered problems in fitting themselves, as elite philanthropists, into the democratic self-improvement that they idealised. It was mostly the schemes that they sponsored from a distance – F.G. Thomas’ village survey or the birth control clinic that Dorothy helped set up in the nearby town of Totnes – that had the most social impact and were the least complicated as to the politics of control. The realisation that they were better at advising and supporting than demonstrating on the ground,

²³⁷ See files LKE/USA/7.

²³⁸ Jess Gilbert, ‘Rural sociology and democratic planning’, 423.

²³⁹ Denis Lineman, ‘Regional survey and the economic geographies of Britain 1930-1939’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28 (2003), 96-122; Gilbert, *Planning democracy*, 245.

²⁴⁰ F.G. Thomas to Leonard, 19 August 1936, LKE/EDU/4/C.

²⁴¹ Research department, note on F.G. Thomas survey, 17 February 1936, LKE/EDU/4/B; W.E. Hiley to Leonard, Memorandum, 2 March 1936, LKE/EDU/4/B.

²⁴² Michael Straight to Michael Young, 11 September 1980, T/HIS/S22/D.

and that this was a way to accommodate themselves as elites into the social-democratic project, contributed to reshaping the Elmhirsts' hopes for Dartington. They began to consider a small, isolated community, or even regional, experiment as too insignificant to bring about reform; what was needed was a way to harness their estate's work to wider efforts at rural regeneration.

(c) Experimenting with a public-private rural regime

The First World War, which, Jeremy Burchardt writes, 'energised voluntarism and stimulated the development of state sponsored social services', also raised questions about the relationship between government and the voluntary sector in the countryside which resonated through the interwar years.²⁴³ In the 1930s, when the Elmhirsts were looking for a way to re-purpose Dartington as something other than an independent community experiment, Leonard became involved in local government. At the same time, he briefly flirted with the rural community council movement (RCC), which encapsulated the multi-sided nature of the project to reconstruct the rural community. The RCC, set up in 1920, aimed to meld villager self-help, state social services and philanthropic organisations into a democratic pattern that would supersede a rural society led by the landed elite.²⁴⁴ After a very short consideration of the value of 'trying to combine charity, voluntary-ism and efficiency', however, Leonard decided that social reform would be better run by the government and social scientists along centrally planned lines, saving 'a lot of toil and trouble'.²⁴⁵

In 1931 Leonard was elected to Dartington's parish council, with education as his chief focus.²⁴⁶ In 1937 he was elected as county councillor for the Harberton Electoral Division.²⁴⁷ His experience of local politics did not give him a strong faith in it – he felt that most of the time it was achieving little. Although David Cannadine argues that, by the 1930s, the county councils were 'a professional hierarchy and structured bureaucracy', Leonard, at least, was frustrated by the paternalism, conservatism and amateurism of his colleagues – an experience echoed by Winifred Holtby's depiction of the workings of local government in *South*

²⁴³ Jeremy Burchardt, 'State and society in the English countryside: the rural community movement 1918-39', *Rural history* 23 (2012), 81-106, at 81. See also, Margaret Brasnett, *Voluntary social action: a history of the National Council of Social Service 1919-1969* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1969).

²⁴⁴ Burchardt, 'Rethinking the rural idyll' and 'State and society'.

²⁴⁵ Leonard to R.N. Armfelt, secretary to the Local Education Authority, 5 February 1938, LKE/FIT/1/B.

²⁴⁶ Leonard to Bryan Miller, clerk to the county council, 29 April 1931, LKE/DCC/1/A.

²⁴⁷ Leonard to Francis Acland, 23 February 1937, LKE/DCC/1/D.

Riding.²⁴⁸ He was upset not only by the absence of co-operation within the councils, but with other government bodies, and most particularly with independent or voluntary bodies such as Seale-Hayne Agricultural College and Dartington.²⁴⁹ He turned towards the notion that the rural regime needed to be reformed more fundamentally.

One route that Leonard considered was the formation of a rural community council in Devon.²⁵⁰ After a brief moment of enthusiasm, however, he decided that it risked being dogged by the same ‘old Norse belief in the enterprising amateur’ as the existing modes of social service provision.²⁵¹ Instead, he recommended the RCC idea be evolved into a regional survey – rather like that suggested by F.G. Thomas, but led by the local university and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research instead of by rural citizens. It would give ‘a comprehensive picture of where the social structure falls short’ and, driven by ‘the powerful combination of research and laboratory, specialist, general practitioner and intelligent layman’, would be the basis for a holistic regime of ‘psycho-physical hygiene which regards the human being as one comprehensive organism and not as a series of specialist functions’.²⁵² For Leonard, this could lead to ‘all round improvement from the bottom upwards’ (while leaning heavily on the elite) – involving government, universities and the church, but starting with ‘John Citizen – and all his voluntary Clubs, Societies, Associations and Unions, which for a democracy represent the very life blood of any freedom’.²⁵³ He cited as a parallel a social survey in Bristol that had just been completed by Herbert Tout.²⁵⁴ This notion of a complete reform of the social system informed by social science was one that would be realised in England, albeit in a heavily top-down form, after the Second World War.

²⁴⁸ David Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (London: Papermac, 1996 [1990]), 167; Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (London: Collins, 1936).

²⁴⁹ A.J. Withycombe, clerk to the county council, to Leonard, 8 March 1938, LKE/DCC/1/E; Leonard to Bryan Miller, 29 April 1931, LKE/DCC/1/A; Leonard to Sir Henry Lopes, chairman of county council, 27 February 1937, LKE/DCC/1/E.

²⁵⁰ R.N. Armfelt passed the suggestion from the National Council of Social Services on to Leonard, asking for his advice, 22 October 1938, LKE/DCC/1/E and 10 March 1939, LKE/DCC/1/F.

²⁵¹ Leonard to R.N. Armfelt, 14 March 1939, LKE/DCC/1/F.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Herbert Tout, *The standard of living in Bristol: a preliminary report of the work of the University of Bristol Social Survey* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1938).

(d) Political and economic planning

'The gathering of all available and relevant facts and the digestion and interpretation of these in the light of social and economic trends within the framework of a policy which politicians can grasp and parliaments approve is the process we here describe as Planning.'

*Leonard Elmhirst (1940)*²⁵⁵

Carol Aronovici, a Romanian-born city planner based in New York, visited Dartington in 1931 and warned the Elmhirsts that their managers were not 'inspired by the "force idea" as the French sociologist calls it, which is the mainspring of your undertaking'; that staff were not 'conscious of working for a specific social purpose'; and that the surrounding community was 'to a considerable extent sceptical, ignorant and unsympathetic about your project and aims'.²⁵⁶ The same year, the Elmhirsts circulated a questionnaire on their estate, asking whether Dartington could have a bearing on the way the country was governed. The general view of respondents was that it was 'too far off from the mainstream political parties to have an impact'.²⁵⁷ The estate's 'bold, clean, fundamental principle of community living' and 'the very unification of its planning with its proposed balancing of industries (Farm, School, Factory, etc.)' meant that Dartington would only be 'of great use to an organization state, one that owns, controls, and regulates the necessities of existence'.²⁵⁸ Dorothy and Leonard – their early faith in social reform stemming from 'innumerable small experiments' anyway shaken by their practical experiences – had to find another way to promote social progress.²⁵⁹

Meanwhile, centralised planning was proliferating across the world – be it the economic reforms of Russia's Five Year Plan, the New Deal or Hitler's Four Year Plan for wartime self-sufficiency. At home, the perception was that the British government was failing to offer a 'constructive outlook' as an alternative to these: it was concerned 'with retrenchment, and hardly if ever with planned development'.²⁶⁰ The Elmhirsts took the view, like many other reformers in the 1930s, that Britain, too, needed to adopt the panacea of planning.²⁶¹ The particular trigger for Dorothy and Leonard's whole-hearted promotion of 'the planned research and the research-based plan' was the appointment of a National government in 1931.²⁶² They saw it as 'a step back': the politicians 'have, for lack of figures and facts about

²⁵⁵ Leonard, 'The place of research and planning in the process of government', 10 August 1940, LKE/PEP/S/F.

²⁵⁶ Carol Aronovici, 'Tentative suggestions for Dartington Hall', 17 July 1931, T/PP/P/1/A.

²⁵⁷ Anonymous response to 1931 questionnaire, LKE/G/13/B.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 192[4?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives, DWE/G/7/C.

²⁶⁰ Leonard, untitled note, 13 May 1933, LKE/LAND/8/A.

²⁶¹ Leonard, 'Agricultural economics, a means to what end?', 25 May 1934, LKE/LAND/8/C.

²⁶² Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 15 December 1931, LKE/TAG/9/A. In early 1931, the minority Labour government seemed unable to cope with the unfolding economic crisis, while the Conservatives

national income, trade, and earning power had to appeal to national sentiment and quietly haul down the flag of progressive social reform'.²⁶³ In the absence of state leadership in the field of collective social planning, they saw it as their duty to step into the breach and drum up momentum.

In moving from the ideal of an organically-grown local community to that of a centrally planned society, Leonard was also continuing a quest that he had been pursuing since his time at Cornell to work out how social scientists could be incorporated into the project of regeneration. He saw social science – interpreted widely to include such fields as agricultural economics, planning and administration – as an alluring, new, catch-all discipline that might bring about 'life in its completeness'. 'Hitherto,' he wrote, 'the social service meekly followed in the wake of problems already created by industry and individuals, but now society itself is, for the first time in history perhaps, in a position to give a lead.'²⁶⁴ Government policy was dominated by 'old conservers'; university research was 'dead and pointless'; what was needed was a new kind of graduate school where 'social experience might be collected, collated, digested and utilised and the findings extended back in to the world again'.²⁶⁵ Perhaps because his enthusiasm for the deployment of social science in guiding society was before its time, the limited support he found for this idea came mainly from America, where the vision of the role of social science was already more socially purposive – its responsibility being seen as to advise, even to lead, rather than just to analyse.²⁶⁶ Ultimately, however, Leonard did find the English vehicle to combine his interests in social science and in centralised social reform – though it was not an administration college but the capitalist think-tank Political and Economic Planning (PEP).

PEP was conceived in 1931 by the editorial team of the *Week-End Review* – a product of the prevailing frustration at seeming political inertia in the face of global economic depression

were riven by internal discontent and the Liberal Party was marginal and divided. From August to October a cross-party National government was formed under Ramsay MacDonald, which also included figures with no party affiliation.

²⁶³ Leonard to Dorothy, 26 August 1931, LKE/DWE/12/E.

²⁶⁴ Leonard, 'Social trends in rural areas: administrative problems', [n.d.], LKE/LAND/9/A.

²⁶⁵ Leonard to Gerald Heard, copied in a notebook, 26 December 1934, LKE/G/17.

²⁶⁶ A key aspect of the New Deal was the idea of a more 'purposive' social science which could ease, without controlling, the democratic transformation (Gilbert, *Planning democracy*, 179). For more on the development of the social sciences in America and England, see chapter 1. Leonard's idea of a public administration college received some support from Mansfield Forbes, Cambridge academic and leader of the modernist Twentieth Century Group, and more from American psychologist William Sheldon and from Carl Ladd, Director of Agricultural Extension at Cornell (Mansfield Forbes to Leonard, 30 October 1930, LKE/G/14/A; Leonard to Gerald Heard, copied in a notebook, December 1934, LKE/G/17; Carl Ladd to Leonard, 13 March 1937, LKE/USA/4/B).

and domestic instability.²⁶⁷ The group hoped to create a comprehensive and detailed plan for regenerating Britain – ‘the sort of society we want as an alternative to Hitler’s New Order on the one hand and to our old selves on the other’.²⁶⁸ Its activities were underpinned by three assumptions: that experts – social scientists in particular – could understand problems and identify solutions in a way that transcended politics; that government intervention and the greater concentration of power within industry would be beneficial; and that policy-making and social progress more generally could be advanced by circulating research and reports among the interested public.²⁶⁹ The organisation attracted leading figures in business, government and academia, including Basil Blackett, a director of the Bank of England; the biologist Julian Huxley, later the first director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; Max Nicholson, ornithologist and environmentalist; Gerald Barry, editor of the *Week-End Review* and later director-general of the Festival of Britain; and the clothing retailer Lawrence Neal.²⁷⁰ Along with Israel Sieff, the managing director of Marks and Spencer, Leonard and Dorothy provided it with long-term sponsorship and support.²⁷¹ There was mutual approval between it and Dartington; both were concerned with the ‘altogetherness of everything’, as Basil Blackett remarked, and PEP was seen as ‘an organization which might take up Dartington ideas and make them much more generally applicable’.²⁷²

PEP was part of a dedication to state planning in Britain in the 1930s that spanned the political spectrum: Oswald Mosley launched the New Party in 1931 on a national planning platform; planning was embraced by the Next Five Years Group led by J.A. Hobson, H.G. Wells, Siegfried Sassoon and Seeborn Rowntree; and the commitment of the leftist

²⁶⁷ PEP first met in March 1931 under the chairmanship of Sir Basil Blackett. It published reports, broadsheets, and a journal, *Planning*, and was active until 1978, when it merged with the Centre for Studies in Social Policy to form the Policy Studies Institute. John Pinder (ed.), *Fifty years of Political and Economic Planning: looking forward 1931-1981* (London: Heinemann, 1981); Daniel Ritschel, *The politics of planning: the debate on economic planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 145-183; Sieff, *Memoirs*, chapter 9.

²⁶⁸ Max Nicholson to Dorothy, 5 July 1941, DWE/G/8/B. Their initial programme, entitled ‘A national plan for Great Britain’, was drafted by Max Nicholson and published in February 1931 as a supplement to the *Week-end review*.

²⁶⁹ James Vernon, *Modern Britain, 1750 to the present* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 367.

²⁷⁰ R.C. Whiting, ‘Political and Economic Planning (act. 1931–1978)’, *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/95962>, accessed 13 March 2018].

²⁷¹ Leonard was chairman and vice-president at various times up to his death in 1974. Israel Sieff gave direction in the early years and chaired the industries groups. Sieff shared the Elmhursts’ ambition to make businesses both efficient and humanitarian – and also to ‘weave into all our work the relationship between the eternal values of the spirit and our material gains’. Israel Sieff to Leonard, 12 February 1940, LKE/PEP/3/F.

²⁷² Basil Blackett’s comment was quoted by Max Nicholson in an interview with Michael Young, 6 April 1978, T/HIS/S22.

Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals was signalled by the title of their monthly journal, *Plan*.²⁷³ The common element between them was the belief that decisions formerly made by individuals in the market should now be administered by a collective. As in Leonard's community-building work using public and private organisations in Devon, on the national scale he also advocated co-operating and information-sharing with other organisations where possible.²⁷⁴ They were all part of what he saw as 'the general movement towards rationalisation and centralisation'.²⁷⁵ 'The old order, dominated by the principle of self-interest tempered by humanitarianism, is obsolete and must give place to one based on the dual conception of service to the community and the constructive use of manpower and material resources.'²⁷⁶

Leonard's public commitment to the general idea of planning was such that Dartington and PEP were conflated with the Next Five Years Group, the Fabians, the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals, Zionism and the Soviet state in the minds of some anti-planners. Captain Arthur Rogers, a leading member of the far-right Liberty Restoration League, spoke against Dartington in Parliament and included it in a pamphlet warning of a general planning conspiracy that could only be averted by 'private enterprise and full private ownership'.²⁷⁷ The Elmhursts brought a slander case against Rogers – eventually settled out of court – for spreading rumours about them. At a London dinner party, Arthur Rogers and Alexandrina Domville, wife of pro-Nazi Admiral Sir Barry Domville, accused the Elmhursts of dabbling in black magic. The charge apparently arose from the fact that a journalist who had heard that a man named Croly was staying at Dartington took this to be occultist Aleister Crowley, when in fact it was Herbert Croly of *The New Republic*.²⁷⁸

²⁷³ For the broad interest in planning, as well as Ritschel's *The politics of planning*, see Arthur Marwick, 'Middle opinion in the 1930s: planning, progress and political agreement', *English historical review* 79 (1964), 285-98; Matthew Worley, 'What was the New Party? Sir Oswald Mosley and associated responses to the "crisis", 1931-1932', *History* 92 (2007), 39-63; Juliet Gardiner, "'Searching for the gleam": finding solutions to the political and social problems of 1930s Britain', *History workshop journal* 72 (2011), 103-17; Richard Overy, *The morbid age: Britain between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 76-84.

²⁷⁴ Leonard to Max Nicholson, 20 February 1934, LKE/PEP/3/B.

²⁷⁵ Leonard, 'Rural industries', 27 July 1939, C/RIB/1/A.

²⁷⁶ [n.a.], 'Post-war reconstruction group', 28 August 1940, sitting under the auspices of PEP, LKE/USA/11/C.

²⁷⁷ [n.a.], 'Report of a speech by Captain Arthur Rogers, O.B.E, Honorary Secretary, Liberty Restoration League, at a private meeting of Members of both Houses of Parliament', June 1938, LKE/LF/18/C; Arthur Rogers, *The real crisis* (London: Liberty Restoration League, [1938]). Richard Griffiths gives the background of this movement in *Patriotism perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club, and British anti-Semitism, 1938-40* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015 [1998]).

²⁷⁸ Valentine Holmes, Legal opinion, 28 November 1936, LKE/LF/18/C; Leonard in transcripts for 'Man alive', a programme for the BBC transmitted 29 November 1972, editor Adam Clapham, producer Richard Thomas, LKE/G/S13/L.

Leonard was proud of the English as a peculiarly planning-minded nation – in particular of Sir Thomas More ‘for the most adventurous planning of all, Utopia’ – but his interest in planning was international.²⁷⁹ He corresponded with and gave support to economist Lewis Lorwin, founder of the National Economic and Social Planning Association in Washington in 1931.²⁸⁰ Notably similar to PEP in its organisation and aspirations, the Association drew participants from government and business, published a magazine, *Plan Age*, and became the nucleus of a national movement to promote ‘collective forethought and conscious social guidance’.²⁸¹ Leonard and Lorwin, unlike many planners in Britain and America – even within PEP – shared a belief that planning should be more than a national measure.²⁸² Lorwin proposed a ‘world planning institute’.²⁸³ Leonard saw ‘no place for nationalistic barriers’ in planning.²⁸⁴ The ultimate aim was a ‘programme for world peace’ based on the ‘continuous examination of social and economic affairs in all countries’.²⁸⁵ Leonard envisaged linking such private organisations as the Rockefeller Foundation, PEP and Dartington with state instruments such as Roosevelt’s ‘Planning Board’, all collating and publishing research, ‘a continuous searchlight thrown on all dark corners of the world’.²⁸⁶

Their global vision of planning involved a redefining rather than a rejection of the local: the local now meant ‘countless nuclei’ responsible to their own communities ‘for research, for digesting and regurgitation’, and at the same time fuelling the universal ‘grandeur ridden march of mind towards its goal of higher and ever higher consciousness’.²⁸⁷ Instead of being an insular utopia, Dartington was reconceived as one such nucleus, and between 1933 and 1963 PEP held many weekend gatherings on the Elmhursts’ estate. ‘[F]rom the beginning I have believed in and tried to act on the spirit of Dartington,’ wrote one of PEP’s founders, MP Kenneth Lindsay. ‘As an example of rational planning based on a spiritual ideal I have used Dartington hundreds of times’.²⁸⁸ This was the same Labour politician whom the

²⁷⁹ Leonard to Miss Iredale, 27 June 1941, LKE/G/19/A.

²⁸⁰ See file LKE/USA/S2/A. Claude Misukiewicz, ‘Lewis L. Lorwin and the promise of planning: class, collectivism, and empire in US economic planning debates, 1931-1941’, unpublished PhD, Georgia State University, 2015, 71-8.

²⁸¹ Lewis Lorwin, ‘The twentieth century – the plan age’, *Plan age* 1 (1934), 1-3.

²⁸² Israel Sieff describes the clashes within PEP between a global view which advocated international planning and a protectionist one that wanted to restrict it to national and imperial interests in *Memoirs*, 168.

²⁸³ Lewis Lorwin, ‘A proposal for a world planning institute’, 1935, LKE/USA/S2/A; Anna Bogue, ‘Brief report re attendance of Mr Lewis Lorwin, Chairman of National Economic and Social Planning Association at meeting of Mrs Elmhurst’s Committee on February 19, 1935’, 8 April 1935, LKE/USA/S2/A.

²⁸⁴ Leonard to Rabindranath Tagore, 15 December 1931, LKE/TAG/9/A.

²⁸⁵ Leonard, ‘A group suggestion from D[artington] H[all] for a constructive peace policy’, [October 1938], LKE/G/S5/H.

²⁸⁶ Ibid; Leonard to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 4 April 1937, LKE/USA/5/E.

²⁸⁷ Leonard to Gerald Heard, 26 December 1934, LKE/G/17.

²⁸⁸ Kenneth Lindsay to Elmhursts, 21 April 1931, LKE/PEP/4/J.

Elmhirsts had tried in vain to recruit to their estate to coordinate education on their estate in the 1920s.²⁸⁹ Lindsay's approval of what Dartington had become by the 1930s represented a wider view among outside observers that it was in its later, outward-facing iteration that the enterprise had achieved its apotheosis. Although PEP's ideas had 'limited' impact in the 1930s, the passion for planning of which it formed a significant part 'helped to prepare high-level opinion for the changes of the 1940s'.²⁹⁰ During the war, many of PEP's senior figures would be recruited to helping with the war effort or with post-war planning.²⁹¹

(e) Dartington as a land trust

Political and Economic Planning's central scheme was an economic model of industrial self-government, but in the 1930s it was its idea of re-organising the nation's land that had greatest influence on the Elmhirsts' evolving idea of their estate. Dartington could be not only a research nucleus, but a test-bed for a new model of land management.²⁹² Following PEP's faith in business-led economic rationalisation, the scheme was put forward that private landowners should co-operate in the formation of land trusts – units grouped into joint stock companies.²⁹³ In return for participating landowners agreeing to principles of good trusteeship, the companies would support them with professional management, research, development, marketing and loans. Dartington, run by a company and a trust, both foreshadowed this model and offered the opportunity for further refining it. The Elmhirsts' interwar efforts to negotiate the transition from traditional forms of elite landownership to something more suitable for a social democracy had parallels elsewhere. Rural land nationalisation was a central feature of Labour's agricultural programme in the 1920s and 30s.²⁹⁴ Labour supporter and big landowner Charles Trevelyan, who regarded himself as merely a 'trustee of a property which under wiser and humaner laws would belong to the community', opened his estate in Northumberland to visitors free of charge, letting it be used as a centre for adult education.²⁹⁵ Closer by, the Acland family – Westcountry allies of Leonard in his push for rural modernisation – were also deliberating over what to do with

²⁸⁹ Leonard to Kenneth Lindsay, 24 April 1929, LKE/PEP/4/J.

²⁹⁰ Paul Addison, *The road to 1945: British politics and the Second World War* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 39.

²⁹¹ Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *British think-tanks and the climate of opinion* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 31.

²⁹² Daniel Ritschel, 'A corporatist economy in Britain? Capitalist planning for industrial self-government in the 1930s', *The English historical review* 106 (1991), 41-65.

²⁹³ Leonard, 'Observations on the proposals for a land trust', 12 December 1934, LKE/LAND/8/B.

²⁹⁴ Griffiths, *Labour and the countryside*, 230-6.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 297-8.

their large estate.²⁹⁶ Ultimately, both the Trevelyan and Acland properties would be left to the National Trust (in 1941 and 1944 respectively).²⁹⁷

When Leonard aired the idea of the land trust at Dartington, some approved.²⁹⁸ For others, however, including the socialist headmaster W.B. Curry, it was a “‘save the landlord”” measure that did not go far enough; what was needed was the full nationalisation of land under the government.²⁹⁹ Leonard himself thought that ‘[o]wnership doesn’t matter two hoots management is everything’.³⁰⁰ Whether run by a public land trust or a series of trusts under reformed private management, the key was that land must be treated as a ‘national asset’ with ‘the least possible red tape and the most possible room for initiative and enterprise’.³⁰¹ This was, for him, a way back to the England of the Middle Ages and of William the Conqueror – to a time when landowners were more than ‘mere rent collectors’, but had social responsibilities and duties of ‘direct service to the state’.³⁰² The land trust more closely resembled the top-down, corporation-run rural regeneration schemes that formed a part of the main New Deal, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (or, indeed, the National Trust in England), rather than the collaborative top-down/bottom-up planning favoured by the short-lived ‘Intended New Deal’ phase promoted by men like M.L. Wilson. Leonard’s enthusiasm for it was a sign of how far he had come from his socialist pluralist beginnings.

For the Elmhursts, the idea of a land trust, as with Dartington itself, was not just about agricultural management – it was another vehicle for achieving ‘life in its completeness’. The land trusts would ensure the ‘proper use, development and enjoyment of the resources and amenities of the land’ for current and future generations, and could act as referee between farming, industry, housing and amenity.³⁰³ Each trust would have ‘an Institute of Research and Planning’ at its heart, based in a university and folding in a state planning board with voluntary organisations such as the National Trust.³⁰⁴ Over-large towns would be ‘green ribboned’; overly small and uneconomic settlements and farms would be dispensed with.³⁰⁵ For the first time in the evolution of the Elmhursts’ ideas about social regeneration, this

²⁹⁶ Mandler, *Stately homes*, 322.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 335. For more on how landowning progressives addressed the problem of their property holding in the 1940s, see conclusion.

²⁹⁸ [n.a.], Minutes of meeting on rural ownership, 4 December 1934, LKE/LAND/8/B.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Leonard to George Wansborough, 26 June 1936, LKE/G/S1/K LKE; [n.a.], Minutes of meeting on rural ownership, 4 December 1934, LKE/LAND/8/B.

³⁰¹ Leonard, ‘The land charter’, [1938?], LKE/LAND/8/A.

³⁰² Leonard, ‘Some problems facing the future of land ownership’, 1 March 1935, and ‘Rural industries’, 27 July 1939, LKE/LAND/8/A.

³⁰³ Leonard, ‘The land charter’, [1938], LKE/LAND/8/A.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Leonard to Max Nicholson, 3 March 1937, LKE/PEP/3/D.

scheme confronted – if only glancingly – the fact that England was not all countryside. Planning must be as much about the town as the country: a ‘system of balance, as between the purely rural and the purely urban and industrial, that will give man the maximum field of opportunity for growth, for initiative in adventure as well as the increase of his consciousness’.³⁰⁶ It would provide the blueprint for a nationwide ‘community, civic and industrial plan’.³⁰⁷

The land trust did not get far. It did little practically to influence the shape of Dartington. By the late 1930s, PEP’s remit had retreated from holistic society-planning to independent research, in spite of Israel Sieff’s urging that the organisation should not be distracted by the ease of composing ‘an excellent report on some of the narrow isolated problems’ and should continue to try to discover ‘the needs of the community in terms of body, mind and spirit’ and how ‘man’s material and psychic wants are harmonised’.³⁰⁸ Regardless of its lack of real-world impact, the land trust was a stepping stone in the Elmhursts’ transition from thinking of their estate as one of a series of independent, socialist-pluralist experiments to conceiving of it as an outpost of government. During the war, Leonard complained to Lawrence Neal, PEP member and deputy secretary of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, that despite the evermore voluble talk about planning, ‘we seem to hesitate to use it on a chunk of this island’.³⁰⁹ He put forward Dartington as a ‘nucleus’ for such a state-led experiment. It was, Leonard emphasised, a socially-minded company whose trustees controlled investment, laid down the principles on which the estate operated, and decided between conflicting claims on the land.³¹⁰ Others on the estate agreed. For arts director Chris Martin, Dartington could be used to demonstrate ‘a new nucleation’.³¹¹

³⁰⁶ Leonard to Frederic Bartlett, 2 January 1934, LKE/G/S8/D.

³⁰⁷ Leonard, ‘Town and country planning’, [1939], LKE/LAND/8/A.

³⁰⁸ Ritschel, *Planning*, 145-83; Israel Sieff to Leonard, 12 February 1940, LKE/PEP/S/F.

³⁰⁹ Leonard to Lawrence Neal, 18 May 1945, LKE/PEP/2/A.

³¹⁰ Leonard, ‘Some problems facing the future of land ownership’, 1 March 1935, and ‘Rural industries’, 27 July 1939, LKE/LAND/8/A.

³¹¹ Chris Martin, ‘Dartington Hall – a social experiment’, [1936], T/AA/1/I.

(f) State planning and community development

'We have been steadily moving towards the sort of society you have pioneered for years, but it's coming immensely faster now, and there is going to be a desperate race to make sure that the social discoveries you are making are fully recognised in our plans of reconstruction.'

*Max Nicholson (1941)*³¹²

The 1940s marked a split in the Elmhirsts' ideas and activities. On the one hand there was the completion of the move from a vision of perfecting society via local, democratic units – of which Dartington was be one – to social improvement through state direction, to which Dartington and the Elmhirsts would contribute. On the other there was a renewed sense of the importance of community democracy, in part a reaction to the strengthened central state in England after the war, and in part a response to the perceived need of newly decolonised countries to build up the unity of their independent populations from the ground up.

The Elmhirsts' new idea of Dartington as an outpost of central planning coincided with the expansion of state control during the Second World War, so that the estate's newly-imagined role was quickly actualised in its contributions to the war effort and plans for national reconstruction. The estate's arts director, Chris Martin, worked for the Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey and conducted the nationwide Arts Enquiry.³¹³ Dartington's research department provided evidence for the Scott Committee on land use in rural areas and considered the status of post-war agriculture in collaboration with the Standing Committee, the Association for Planning and Regional Reconstruction and the Economics Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.³¹⁴ In 1944 a group from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning visited Dartington, were given a sketch of 'our experiments, failures and successes, in the planning of our enterprise as a piece of rural reconstruction', and in much secrecy discussed the future development of Devon.³¹⁵ Dartington trustee Michael Young, in the thick of policy-making in London, urged the Elmhirsts to produce a history of their work, which, in its ideas on social planning, 'represents something of a long term experiment whose results can test the feasibility of some of the relevant ideas which are now being raised in rather hazy form'.³¹⁶ This idea came to nothing – until Young wrote the history himself many years later.³¹⁷ But the estate's wartime contributions reflect Richard

³¹² Max Nicholson to Dorothy, 5 July 1941, DWE/G/8/B.

³¹³ [n.a.], Memorandum for the Ministry of Information, 23 February 1942, C/DHL/5/C.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ [n.a.], 'Note in preparation for the visit of members of Ministry of Town and Country Planning from 16 to 19 March, 11 March 1944', LKE/LAND/2/G.

³¹⁶ Michael Young, 'History of Dartington', 1941, DWE/S/2A/A.

³¹⁷ Young, *The Elmhirsts*.

Weight's finding of how the war re-integrated much of the left-leaning intelligentsia – disillusioned with radical politics in the 1920s and 30s – back into the national structure.³¹⁸

The Elmhirsts themselves were frequently away from Dartington in the national service during the war, called on particularly to further Anglo-American relations.³¹⁹ Leonard joined a Board of Trade mission to America and he and Dorothy toured the USA at the request of its Department of Agriculture to impress on farmers Britain's need for more food.³²⁰ Later, while Dorothy served as a volunteer speaker for the Ministry of Information, Leonard was part of a government mission to advise on mobilising food production in the Middle East; afterwards he assisted the governor of famine-stricken Bengal.³²¹ When he was offered a baronetcy for this work in 1946 by Clement Attlee, it marked the culmination of the Elmhirsts' move from independent experimentation to state collaboration. Yet Leonard refused national enshrinement, writing that, as his work had 'lain in the main among country people [...] in India, in the USA and in Devonshire [...] acceptance would neither be easy for me to explain nor easy for my friends to comprehend'.³²²

Nonetheless, Leonard continued to fit himself to the new opportunities offered within the post-war framework of an expanded state. He had reservations about the conservationist direction the state was taking: the post-war planning consensus that brought central planning into reality also enshrined the principle of preserving the countryside as national heritage and a source of urban amenity, rather than of exploiting it economically.³²³ Yet he chaired the Footpaths and Access Special Committee, part of the National Parks Committee established to carry through the Scott Report's recommendation for the creation of national parks; then, from 1949 to 1965, he worked as a development commissioner. Dartington's ideals also influenced state policy more widely through those who had visited the project in the interwar wars. W.E. Pride, introduced in the 1920s by Violet Astor when he was a young Home Office official, went on to propagate 'the novel idea of an agricultural-industries estate' within government for the next thirty years – helping to lay the 'groundwork at Brynmawr and Rhondda workshops and Board of Trade sponsored Teams Valley and the Treforest Trading

³¹⁸ Richard Weight, 'State, intelligentsia and the promotion of national culture in Britain, 1939-45', *Historical research* 69 (1996), 83-101.

³¹⁹ Dorothy called it their war work a 'great crusade' to 'defend the values we cherish'. Letter to Leonard, 13 March 1941 [excerpted copy], DWE/S/2/C.

³²⁰ For these activities, see file LKE/USA/12.

³²¹ DWE/L; LKE/DWE/18/A; Anthea Williams, 'Elmhirst, Leonard Knight (1893-1974)', rev. *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31072>, accessed 14 March 2019].

³²² Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 344.

³²³ Helen E. Meller, *Towns, plans, and society in modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chapter 5.

Estates' and to draft the 1945 Distribution of Industry Act to redevelop depressed areas, whose principles fed into 'the embryo Aid work of the United Nations'.³²⁴

In spite of their involvement with state planning, the Elmhirsts never renounced their faith in what they saw as the grassroots, communitarian principles of the New Deal: 'diagnosis, research and experiment and as a result the working out, with all the residents concerned, of a comprehensive yet simple programme in which each feels a part and a responsibility'.³²⁵

Leonard and Dorothy shared the post-war difficulties of Michael Young who, having helped to write the 1945 Labour election manifesto, struggled to reconcile Labour's focus on efficiency, nationalisation and 'bigness' with localised community democracy.³²⁶ Dorothy and Leonard's Elmgrant Trust gave funding for Young's Institute of Community Studies, formed in 1954 to promote the latter, and PEP's headquarters provided the Institute's first meeting place.³²⁷

A second strand of localised reform that the Elmhirsts continued to support alongside community development in England was community development abroad. In the 1920s Leonard had seen India as the cradle of spiritually-infused social experiment: 'Madmen still survive in the East and keep their faith,' he wrote to Eduard Lindeman, 'for, life being simple, it is easier to make ideals and practice, principles and daily life meet'.³²⁸ When the fervid years of British utopian planning in 1930s and 40s were over, the East, with its seemingly freer rein for idealistic experimentation, called him again. Those involved in agrarian experimentation elsewhere followed strikingly similar trajectories. When the community-oriented 'Intended' phase of the New Deal was over in America, some of the agriculturalists and social scientists who had been involved went on to apply their ideals in quasi-missionary careers in community development overseas.³²⁹ German agricultural economist Otto Schiller,

³²⁴ W.E. Pride to Leonard, 28 October 1968, LKE/G/25/A.

³²⁵ Leonard, 'Confidential memorandum for discussion by Dartington Hall Trustees Advisory Committee', February 1950, LKE/G/S8/1.

³²⁶ The tension is summarised in Michael Young, *Small man: big world* (London: Labour Publications Department, 1949). For the interest in communitarian democracy after the war, see Alexandre Campsie, 'Mass-Observation, Left intellectuals and the politics of everyday life', *The English historical review* 131 (2016), 92-121.

³²⁷ Funding also came from the Nuffield Foundation, the United Nation Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Ford Foundation. Lise Butler, 'Michael Young, the Institute of Community Studies, and the politics of kinship', *Twentieth century British history* 26 (2015), 203-24. Asa Briggs compares the communitarian thrust of the Institute of Community Studies to that of Dartington Hall in *Michael Young: social entrepreneur* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 110-54.

³²⁸ Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 192[4?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

³²⁹ M.L. Wilson, for example, with whom the Elmhirsts had discussed community-building during their visits to the USA, had a late career in international rural development, working with the Ford Foundation in India. Jess Gilbert, *Planning democracy*, 260; Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking small: the United States and the lure of community development* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2015), 55.

who had run experiments in peasant cooperation under the Nazis, could be found in the 1950s and 60s working as a development economist for the USA in India and Pakistan, still promoting peasant cooperation – but by this point as a way to counter the menace of communism rather than to strengthen fascism.³³⁰

Leonard was the consultant for the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) – set up by the Indian government after independence to plan a river basin both economically and socially. Akin both to the Tennessee Valley Authority and to PEP's scheme for land trusts, the DVC was established as an autonomous institution, 'clothed with the power of government but possessed of the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise'.³³¹ As a member of the council of Tagore's Visva-Bharati University, Leonard also continued to promote the ideal of the self-sufficient Indian village, albeit under the auspices of what was now a state-funded institution. Others who had been involved with Dartington also turned their sights on India. Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, who worked in Dartington's newly-established central office in the 1930s and then taught at the School of Planning and Research for Regional Development in London, went to New Delhi in 1954 as a United Nations advisor for an exhibition on low-cost housing, where she concentrated on emphasising the self-governing traditions of Indian villages.³³² For Leonard, Tyrwhitt and other such social reformers, India's 'otherness' went on offering the possibility of the purest realisation of a self-governing rural utopia long after experience had tarnished their hopes of the West.

Tyrwhitt's and Leonard's activities were just small elements of a burgeoning international field of community development that flourished from the 1950s to 1980s, supported in India, like the villages experiments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by philanthropic funds such as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, as well as by the United Nations.³³³ The movement, though it was fuelled by the competing efforts of Cold War participants to expand their spheres of influence, advocated a global pattern of democratic,

³³⁰ Adam Tooze, 'A small village in the Age of Extremes: the Häusern experiment', unpublished paper, 2014, 1-29, at 16-20.

³³¹ F.D. Roosevelt's description of the Tennessee Valley Authority, quoted by Ram Chandra Prasad in 'The organisation pattern of the river valley projects in India: a study of the board vis-à-vis the public corporation', *The Indian journal of political science* 22 (1961), 214-25, at 215.

³³² Ellen Shoshkes, 'Jaqueline Tyrwhitt: a founding mother of modern urban design', *Planning perspectives* 21 (2006), 179-197; Ellen Shoshkes, 'Tyrwhitt, (Mary) Jaqueline (1905-1983)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography*, Oxford University Press [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/106752>, accessed 25 March 2018].

³³³ In the 1950s and 60s Leonard had some dealings with the Ford Foundation representative in India, Douglas Ensminger, in relation to Sriniketan and to rural education (LKE/USA/S1/F). Kathleen D. McCarthy, 'From government to grass-roots reform: the Ford Foundation's population programmes in South Asia, 1959-1981', *Voluntas: International journal of voluntary and non-profit organisations* 6 (1995), 292-316; Leonard A. Gordon, 'Wealth equals wisdom? The Rockefeller and Ford Foundations in India', *The annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 554 (1997), 104-16.

‘co-operative, decentralized communities in harmony with nature’.³³⁴ The umbrella term coined for this and other enterprises that combine international organisation with promotion of the local community, ‘glocalisation’, implies a reconfiguring of concepts like ‘community’ and ‘local’ for the modern age.³³⁵ The local is not pitted against top-down, globalising forces – rather, it is reconstructed by them.³³⁶ Roland Robertson writes that ‘there is much to suggest that the senses of home and locality are contingent upon alienation’ in this new, globalised context.³³⁷ The Elmhursts, a globe-trotting Anglo-American couple with yearnings for the East, achieved a precociously reflexive consciousness of the meaning of local in a globalised age. Perhaps for this reason, their pioneering approach to rural regeneration in the interwar years, combining, as Leonard wrote, the ‘microscopic’ support for community life with the ‘macro-sopic or telescopic mode of approach’ which was international in its outlook, prefigured and helped shape the ‘glocal’ impulse of decades to come.³³⁸

³³⁴ Ellen Shoshkes, ‘Jaqueline Tyrhwitt’, 184.

³³⁵ Roland Robertson, ‘Glocalization’.

³³⁶ Mike Savage, looking at the effects of globalisation ‘on the ground’ in Manchester, argues that phenomenon might be congruent with increasing local attachment (with Gaynor Bagnall and Brian Longhurst, *Globalisation and belonging*, (London: Sage, 2005), ix).

³³⁷ Roland Robertson, ‘Glocalization’, 39.

³³⁸ Leonard, untitled note, October 1946, T/AG ECON/1/B.

CONCLUSION

'We could not determine what Dartington would be without you; at the moment it seems unthinkable. Theoretically that might be called its weakness – though no creation is independent until it is complete – but humanly your unfailing interest and helpfulness are its finest beauty.'

*Eva Blitzstein to the Elmhursts (1934)*¹

'[A] place too busy creating itself to have lapsed into the conventional trap of commemorating itself'.

*Maurice Ash (1987)*²

The sociologist Karl Mannheim, who lectured at Dartington in 1941, argued that utopias are always in dialectical tension with the existing order; for all their 'incongruity' with the status quo, they remain deeply embedded within a 'historically specific social life'.³ The fortunes of Dartington from its foundation in 1925 to the present day exemplify the messy vitality of the real-world exchange promised in Mannheim's formulation. While offering countercultural alternatives, the estate's communion with the outside world was heightened by its founders' willingness to allow their capacious ideal of promoting 'life in its completeness' to be inflected and extended by an international cast of outside collaborators and advisers. The Elmhursts' determination that Dartington would 'fit into the framework of an evolutionary democratic society, such as exists in England today' rather than 'preparing for some hypothetical community' of the future also increased the degree to which it developed in symbiosis with the wider context.⁴ This final section looks at how, in the ninety-odd years since its foundation, Dartington has expanded the social imaginary of the outside world, while being both sustained and constrained by this larger environment.

In the first decade of their enterprise, the Elmhursts' socialist-pluralist concept of social reform – of autonomous local groups working to improve themselves – meant that Dartington was at its most detached from the limitations of social context. 'I am afraid we see very little of the neighbours,' wrote Dorothy, 'but for the time being we are concentrating on building up a community life among ourselves.'⁵ As a result of this detachment, it was in this decade that Dorothy and Leonard came closest to achieving their goal of modelling 'life in its

¹ Eva Blitzstein to the Elmhursts, 15 April 1934, DWE/A/4/I.

² Maurice Ash, *The new renaissance: essays in search of wholeness* (Bideford: Green Books, 1987), 150.

³ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and utopia, an introduction to the sociology of knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Kegan Paul & Co, 1936 [first published, untranslated, 1929]), 210; Krishan Kumar, 'Ideology and sociology: reflections on Karl Mannheim's "Ideology and utopia"', *Journal of political ideologies* 11 (2006), 169–81. Mannheim's Sunday evening talk at Dartington was called 'The diagnosis of our time', 6 May 1941, T/AE/4/B.

⁴ Leonard, 'The blue book', [n.d.], T/PP/P/1/A.

⁵ Dorothy to Frances Livingtone, 11 February 1927, DWE/G/7/A.

completeness', where educational, spiritual and practical aims intermingled organically. While not having a great deal of mainstream impact, the estate attracted the interest of an international cast of idealists seeking social salvation in holistic 'schemes outside all the orthodox tracks'. The inner contradictions of Dartington's utopia rapidly began to manifest themselves, however – democratic rhetoric butting up against hierarchical reality; the idealisation of a spiritualised village community tugging in one direction and the desire for large-scale, profitable, scientific efficiency in another; the desire to involve everyone in everything proving difficult to reconcile with aspirations to make a mark in the outside world informed by experts. In consequence, a second phase began.

By the 1930s, the Elmhursts, like many other idealists, were inspired less by opposition to the mainstream liberal individualist mindset and the power of the central state – as they had been in the decade after the First World War – and more by opposition to the dystopias being consolidated in Russia, Germany and Italy. They had started to think that 'good hearted idealists' such as themselves must work out in a more 'realistic manner' how to have national impact, and that engaging more fully with the world they were trying to change and accepting some loss of autonomy might be the necessary price of achieving heightened influence.⁶ Their shift towards a more centralised, nationalist-progressive concept of social reform, which was in large part driven by their inability to integrate the various elements of Dartington into a well-functioning localised whole, coincided with a growing national appetite for integrated social planning. The result was a rapprochement between Dartington and the establishment.

In the mid- to late-1930s, government officials and mainstream organisations were more willing to engage with Dartington as a place which put reforming ideas of community planning into practice. The Elmhursts and their supporters, now seeing Dartington's place in the 'evolutionary democratic society' as being to influence and improve the shape of the central state rather than to oppose it, responded to this interest by experimenting more and more with using their community as a base for initiatives with wider social impact. By 1935, Leonard could already write with satisfaction that 'Dartington staff now penetrate out into the world in all kinds of ways and are members of public bodies and research and other enterprises, in a way that secures the enterprise from ever becoming an isolated, insulated, self-worshipping sect'.⁷ Following Karl Mannheim's theory, Dartington's concrete realisation of 'life in its completeness' had expanded the wider social imaginary – and had at the same

⁶ Leonard to Ben Nicholson, 15 March 1938, LKE/PEP/3/E.

⁷ Leonard, manuscript note on an article sent by Mrs Blitzstein, 25 April 1935, LKE/G/S8/A.

time been modified by the historical specificity of its context, away from autonomous, pluralist communitarianism and towards an ideal of social reform led by the state.⁸

The culmination of this shift towards nationalist progressivism came with the Second World War, when the British government began to play a more active, creative role in education, the arts and social improvement. This allowed Dartington to further its ideas on the national stage even more substantially – whether soil surveys to encourage scientific farming, the Arts Enquiry promoting creativity for all, or the general concept of holistic social planning. The Elmhirsts' integration with the state during the war was echoed by that of many other British idealists who, like Dorothy and Leonard, had been disillusioned with and aloof from mainstream politics in the 1920s.⁹ But the Elmhirsts were unusual in how much practical experience of social reform they had accumulated. Michael Young wrote to them that while 'the woolly minded' were putting forward unfounded plans for post-war reconstruction, Dartington was 'a laboratory specimen; it is itself just one of those controlled experiments which PEP would wish the Government to sponsor'.¹⁰ Dorothy, characteristically attributing this achievement entirely to her husband, rejoiced in his 'almost uncanny foresight' in anticipating the trend for multi-sided social planning.¹¹ She wrote to Leonard that the Second World War offered them the chance to 'recreate Dartington' more definitively along these state-supporting lines – 'our Second Phase'.¹² Since, at the same time, the state itself was so much more receptive to their idea of 'life in its completeness', it seemed momentarily as if Dartington had managed to 'break the bond of the existing order', and to turn its utopian ideals into the new status quo.¹³

After the war, the social democracy that had once been an ideal became a reality, albeit not in utopian form. The Elmhirsts were faced with the problem of how (or whether) their estate – or any form of independent, upper-class philanthropy – could be justified in this new landscape. Should they simply allow Dartington to be absorbed into the apparatus of the state? They had never conceived of their property along traditional, aristocratic lines, 'as anything to be handed on to heirs'. As Leonard wrote to Dorothy in 1926, 'there's enough of that already, and it often only hampers and confines'.¹⁴ Even if they were interested in this option, their offspring had turned out to be ill-suited to carrying forward a holistic utopia –

⁸ Mannheim, *Ideology and utopia*, 178.

⁹ Richard Weight, 'State, intelligentsia and the promotion of national culture in Britain, 1939-45', *Historical research* 69 (1996), 83-101.

¹⁰ Michael Young to the Elmhirsts, 27 October 1942, LKE/G/35/A.

¹¹ Dorothy to Leonard, 12 November 1940, LKE/DWE/13D.

¹² Dorothy to Leonard, 14 August 1944, LKE/DWE/14/A; Michael Young, *The Elmhirsts of Dartington: the creation of a utopian community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 314.

¹³ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and utopia*, 178.

¹⁴ Leonard to Dorothy, 29 March 1926, LKE/DWE/12/D.

each absorbing some elements of their parents' passions, but none their overarching interest in reforming society or building a 'life in its completeness'.¹⁵ At the opposite pole to familial inheritance was the alternative taken by the Trevelyan family (who had no heirs) and the Acland family (who did), both of whom donated their estates to the National Trust in the 1940s – an institution which was fast-burgeoning into the 'country-house museum-keeper to Socialist Britain'.¹⁶

Yet Dorothy and Leonard, while claiming to be 'entirely in sympathy' with the National Trust's aims, still retained some of their socialist-pluralist ideal of community independence from the 1920s, as well as some ambiguity or ambivalence about whether they were willing to commit to full-blown rule by the masses. Their compromise between family heredity and nationalisation was to consolidate the trust-and-company formation that they had put in place in the early 1930s.¹⁷ In theory, the trustees could be anyone – at last the Elmhirsts were enacting their early ambitions to give their estate to the people. In practice, the way that the trustees were appointed, by each other, meant that a certain type of person, socially as well as ideologically, remained at the helm. It was inheritance by elective affinity rather than by blood. Similar solutions were adopted later on by other elite, idealistic enterprises begun in the interwar years – Rolf Gardiner's Springhead and John Christie's Glynbourne – although these did not share Dartington's original aspirations to communitarian democracy.¹⁸ While Dartington's trust-and-company organisation had roots in the Elmhirsts' early ideal of the estate as a self-governing, egalitarian community, in reality it enshrined the control of a

¹⁵ The ideological ferment of the interwar years divided Dorothy's children. Michael was recruited as a Soviet spy by Anthony Blunt while studying at Cambridge; Whitney, a successful businessman, showed 'marked fascist tendencies'; their sister, Beatrice, determining on an apolitical acting career, remarked that her brothers were both 'criminals in their own lines' – 'I think we are a funny family.' (Beatrice Straight to Nancy Wilson Ross, 1 January 1937, 156/2, Nancy Wilson Ross Archives). Of Dorothy and Leonard's children together, William Elmhirst took up his mother's interest in esoteric spirituality – he was furious not to be permitted by Dartington's trustees to base his charity, Solar Quest, on the estate. Ruth settled close to Dartington, to a life of spinning, weaving and raising a family. Dorothy and Leonard settled large sums of money on their children via a family trust, but largely kept them out of the affairs of Dartington, with the exception of Ruth, who became a trustee and whose husband, Maurice Ash, was for some time chair of Dartington Hall Trust.

¹⁶ Peter Mandler, *The fall and rise of the stately home* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1997), 329 and 523; Mary Hilson and Joseph Melling, 'Public gifts and political identities: Sir Richard Acland, Common Wealth, and the moral politics of land ownership in the 1940s', *Twentieth century British history* 11 (2000), 156-82.

¹⁷ Left-leaning interwar idealists including Sidney and Beatrice Webb tended to support the views of such legal philosophers as F.W. Maitland and Neville Figgis that the trust, in providing a legal basis for a group of people, could free them from certain types of state regulation – and could also promote a group's cohesion and independence in a more metaphysical sense. David Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), chapters 3, 5 and 6; Mark Bevir, 'Introduction', in Mark Bevir (ed.), *Modern pluralism: Anglo-American debates since 1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-20, at 4.

¹⁸ The Springhead Trust was set up in 1973, two years after Rolf Gardiner's death; Glynbourne was structured as a company and trust in 1954.

narrow minority. This consolidation of the power of the traditional elite under new kinds of social-democratic rhetoric echoed a wider tendency in the post-war welfare state – another Mannheimian example of Dartington being shaped by the prevailing social winds, while perhaps also having an influence on the direction in which those winds blew.¹⁹

After the war, Dorothy and Leonard, energy declining in their later years, were never again as involved in running the estate. They initiated no new commercial endeavours themselves and spent more time on external pursuits, whether travelling to visit their far-flung children or supporting the International Association of Agricultural Economists and rural regeneration in newly-independent India. They showed the occasional flicker of disappointment that their Devon experiment had lost some of its radical edge. ‘Dartington is very peaceful these days’, Dorothy wrote to Margaret Isherwood in 1951. ‘I sometimes wonder whether we do not need more prodding and questioning’.²⁰ On the whole, though, they were content to sit back and see their holistic ideals pursued under the stewardship of their estate’s trustees. Many of these early trustees – the Elmhirsts’ protégé Michael Young and their son-in-law Maurice Ash in particular – were cast in a similar missionary mould to the practical idealists who had formed the backbone of interwar Dartington.²¹

When planning Dartington, Leonard had written to Eduard Lindeman that ideals had ‘their own cyclic appearance and market demand’: though they were in ‘a slump on the market’ in the 1920s, the wise would ‘invest in the oil of idealism before the demand suddenly arises’.²² Mainstream demand for the oil of idealism ticked up in the 1930s and 40s – with the appetite for holistic social planning – and Dartington had a moment of heightened outside impact. During the 1960s’ rise of the counterculture, demand for alternative ideals was again high, and again Dartington had an upsurge of intense activity and international popularity.²³ This

¹⁹ Mike Savage, for example, explores the ‘sidestep’ after the war from a defence of the elite ‘in terms of culture, morality, or aesthetics’ to one in which their managerial or technocratic contribution to the welfare state was paramount. *Identities and social change in Britain since 1940: the politics of method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 78 and 216.

²⁰ Dorothy to Margaret Isherwood, 8 September 1951, quoted in Young, *The Elmhirsts*, 316.

²¹ Asa Briggs dubs Michael Young ‘the Last Victorian’ (*Michael Young: social entrepreneur* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 329). Young combined supporting the Labour Party and advising Prime Minister Harold Wilson on the creation of the Open University with helping establish the Consumers’ Association and the associated *Which?* magazine, as well as the Institute for Community Studies. Maurice Ash was a farmer, writer and public administrator who was introduced to Dartington through his friendship with Michael Young. He married Ruth Elmhirst and was later chairman of the Town and Country Planning Association and of the Dartington Hall Trust.

²² Leonard to Eduard Lindeman, 7 January 192[4?], box 2, Eduard Lindeman Archives.

²³ Jeremi Suri, ‘The rise and fall of the international counterculture, 1960-1975’, *American historical review* 114 (2009), 45-68. Although there is no indication that he had Dartington in mind, Anthony Powell made the connection between participants of the interwar and 1960s’ counterculture in his series of novels *A dance to the music of time. Hearing secret harmonies* (1975), set in the 1960s, sees figures who have passed through the bohemian 1920s, and through a more ‘establishment’ phase

activity contained all the elements of the Elmhursts' founding ideal of 'life in its completeness' – promoting creativity, spirituality and social and economic reform. The arts department thronged with pupils from across the world. In 1961 it was transformed into Dartington College of Arts, a semi-independent entity within the national higher education system involving both Dartington trustees and representatives of the Devon Country Education Committee and of the Universities of Bristol and Exeter.²⁴ Beaford Arts Centre and Dartington Glassworks were set up to great acclaim in North Devon, to bring the Dartington model of arts and jobs into a poorer region of the county. Yet there was a significant departure from the interwar decades, in that the aspiration to synthesise all of these strands at a community level ranged between muted and non-existent.

For Dartington's trustees, particularly those who had not been involved in the estate's holistic interwar iteration and who were less intimate with the Elmhursts themselves, it was their prime duty to make the estate pay. They oriented Dartington's infrastructure more and more towards offering wholesome escapist sojourns and life-style retail products for the well-off. This tendency aligned Dartington with the wider commoditisation of the counterculture in the 1960s.²⁵ But even in this engagement with tourism, with Dorothy and Leonard still in the background Dartington retained an idealistic, evangelising tinge of mission. The Dartington Amenity and Research Trust (DART), which was set up in 1967 and did much work for the government as a consultancy unit in the area of rural recreation, harked back to the hope in the 1940s that Dartington would be 'a model' for how the post-war tourist boom should be managed.²⁶ In an indication of how the inter-war elite – and Dartington itself – had become an entrenched part of the managerial and technocratic arm of post-war social democracy, DART was run by Michael Dower, a scion of the Trevelyan family who had given up their own estates to the National Trust. Dower would go on later to become Director General of the Countryside Commission.

In the 1920s, when Dartington was opposed to the mainstream and consciously separate from it, it had the Elmhursts' vision and money to fuel it. From the 1930s to the 60s, it was sustained by a mutually beneficial exchange of ideas and personnel with centralised reform projects and with wider countercultural currents. In the 1970s, however, both its driving

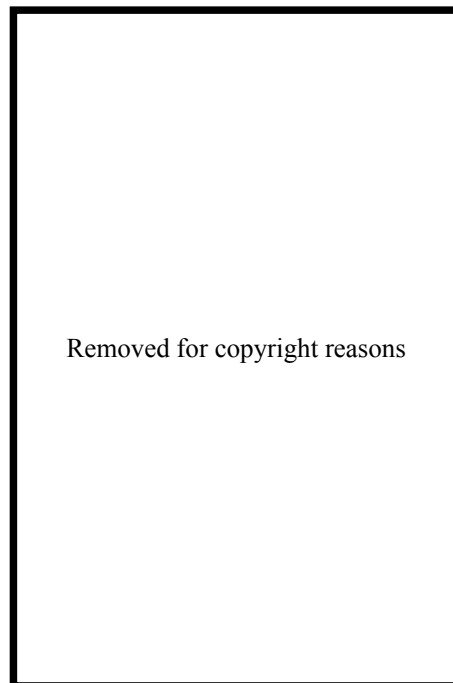
during the Second World War, embroiled in alternative culture in the form of a rural pagan cult (London: Minerva, 1991 [series originally published between 1951 and 75]).

²⁴ Peter Cox, *The arts at Dartington, 1940-1983: a personal account* (Exeter: Short Run Press, 2005). From 1961 teachers had their musical and dramatic training at Dartington and teacher training at St Luke's College, Exeter and Rolle College, Exmouth. Young, *Elmhursts*, 251.

²⁵ T.J. Jackson Lears discusses this absorption of dissent into the mainstream in *No place of grace: antimodernism and the transformation of American culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), xvii and 307-9.

²⁶ Michael Young to the Elmhursts, 8 May 1944, LKE/G/35/A.

idealism and its symbiosis with the wider culture came to a standstill. Dorothy died in 1968. Then Leonard married Susanna Isaacs, a Kleinian child psychiatrist who had gone to Dartington School, and he moved to Los Angeles in 1973, dying a year later. It became immediately evident how crucial the Elmhursts' vision had been to defining the parameters of the estate in the absence of any clear manifesto. Their deaths left Dartington's trustees with only a loosely-worded governing document to steer by. The meaning of this document became less and less self-evident as the practical-idealist type of trustee, driven by what Leonard termed 'a sense of universal social responsibility which must find channel and expression', was joined by trustees of a succeeding generation who had not known the devastation of two world wars, or what it was to strive to build up a holistic social democracy, and were less motivated by missionary-type ideas of self-sacrificing social service.²⁷



Dorothy and Leonard at a celebration to mark Dartington's foundation, 1967.
© Dartington Hall Trust Archives

²⁷ Leonard to Dorothy, 1 February 1945, LKE/DWE/14/B. James Hinton identifies this trend in his work on women's charitable associations, writing that the Victorian philanthropic ethos of self-sacrifice and service was finally overwhelmed by 'the global boom of the third quarter of the century', with the triumph of consumer capitalism and of 'more private, autonomous, and self-regarding notions of the self' (*Women, social leadership, and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 238-9). Similarly, Callum G. Brown characterises this period as bringing to an end 'Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities' (*The death of Christian Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 2 and chapter 8). Trustees have included Sir Nicholas Kenyon, also a trustee of the Arts Council and director of the Barbican Centre; Sir David Green, director of the British Council and chairman of The Prince's School for Traditional Arts; James Cornford, director of the New Labour think-tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research; and Vaughan Lindsay, employee of McKinsey and Company and a former director of Shelter.

The national climate of the last quarter of the twentieth century was not conducive to Dartington's brand of reform. As Leonard might have put it, demand for the oil of idealism had sunk low. The economic turmoil of the 1970s – from which Dartington's finances did not escape – was succeeded by a new climate of political conservatism in which the concept of Dartington as a research station for centralised reform was diminished by lack of central receptivity. Some of the trustees tried to revive a socialist-pluralist vision of Dartington as an independent community exploring countercultural objectives oriented around 'the wholeness of things'.²⁸ But they lacked money, a coherent vision, support in wider society, and the tradition of independent elite philanthropy that had sustained the Elmhursts' confident evangelism. Since the estate was now running at a large deficit, those trustees who prioritised solvency and corporate efficiency mostly won out.

Jobs were cut, grants to departments curtailed, and several of Dartington's businesses were spun off into independent companies.²⁹ The Great Hall began to host weddings and corporate functions rather than artistic and reforming ones. Everything, complained trustee Michael Young, became 'bigger, more departmentalised, more specialised, less amateur and with less of the enthusiasm of the amateur'.³⁰ In 1977 a cluster of shops, exhibition spaces and food outlets was opened, called the Cider Press Centre. Much of what was on sale bore no relation to the estate, although it was marketed under the banner of Dartington's founding ideals – part of the rise of spiritual materialism. As David Jeremiah writes, the centre 'took crafts retailing into a new age, a model of the good healthy life'.³¹

Maurice Ash resigned as chairman of the Dartington Trust in 1983, blaming his departure on Dartington's loss of a spiritual core.³² His complaint echoed Rolf Gardiner's fifty years before – that there was 'a vacuum, a hollowness' where the 'flame of whole (holy) belief' should burn at the heart of the Elmhursts' enterprise.³³ His job was taken over by a Bristol-based property developer, John Pontin, who instigated a more rapid and wholesale departure from

²⁸ Maurice Ash, *The new renaissance*, 86; Walter King, 'The lost worlds of Dartington Hall', *Totnes review* 2 (2007), 50-9, at 53; Peter Cox, *The arts at Dartington a personal account*, 351.

²⁹ Dartington's endowment policy – which was to supply a certain sum of money to each department for general use – was replaced by a system in which grants had to be applied for specific purposes. Staverton Construction, Dartington Plants, Dartington Glass and Dartington Tweeds were all spun off into independent companies but subsequently dissolved or merged with other businesses. King, 'The lost worlds of Dartington Hall', 55.

³⁰ Young, *Elmhursts*, 342.

³¹ Jeremiah, 'Dartington Hall', 131.

³² Noel Longhurst, *Twinned with Narnia? The postcapitalist possibilities of a countercultural place*, unpublished PhD, University of Liverpool, 2010, 174.

³³ Rolf Gardiner to Leonard, 16 June 1933, LKE/G/15/B.

the estate's original lines. Pontin began selling off trust assets to reduce its deficit.³⁴ This strategy, which was continued by his successors, resulted in the sale of the majority of Dartington's woodlands, of further acres for housing development and of most of Dorothy's modernist art collection.³⁵ The educational side of the trust also atrophied. In 1987, Dartington School closed – finally succumbing to tabloid scandal.³⁶ In 1989 Dartington College of Arts, facing bankruptcy, was turned into a department of Plymouth University; in 2008 the Dartington College of Arts was amalgamated with University College Falmouth and relocated to Cornwall.³⁷ The Trust continued to function at a loss.

Noel Longhurst, writing on the formation of 'alternative milieus', usefully suggests studying utopias and intentional communities as local, pluralistic networks rather than as bounded entities.³⁸ Such a pluralistic network had taken root around Dartington. Even as the estate itself struggled to define its late-twentieth-century identity, radical idealists, many of them former students of the Dartington School or College of Arts, settled nearby and began enterprises of their own.³⁹ By the late 1980s the surrounding countryside, which had once cold-shouldered the progressive Elmhursts, had become sufficiently progressive in its own right to merit mention in a satirical guide to New Age living: 'The area of Britain to live in is Devon. There are more natural healers, holistic health practitioners, alternative therapists and other inner-directed souls to the square mile in Devon than in any other part of the country.'⁴⁰

In a late flowering of Dorothy and Leonard's 1920s wishes, their enterprise had finally influenced the local community – to the extent that as Dartington shed fragments of its own radicalism, that community picked them up and took them forward. When Dartington School closed, Park School on the estate and Sand School in nearby Ashburton were founded to perpetuate its principles. Since 1985 a Steiner school has also stood on the edge of the estate. When Maurice Ash resigned as chair of the Dartington Hall Trust, it was to turn his own local estate, Sharpham, into a model 'for how life might be reordered within a disintegrating

³⁴ Peter Cox, *The arts at Dartington*, 369; King, 'The lost worlds of Dartington Hall', 50-9. John Pontin was chair of the Dartington Hall Trust from 1984 to 1997.

³⁵ King, 'The lost worlds of Dartington Hall', 50-9. Michael Young resigned his trusteeship in 1991 over the management of the trust.

³⁶ The scandal causing closure related to topless photos of the headmaster's wife, Beth Blackshaw, published in *The Sun* – but it came on top of several years of increasingly sensational publicity. David Gribble's *That's all folks: Dartington Hall School remembered* was produced as a memorial volume for the school (Crediton: Gribble, 1987).

³⁷ Sam Richards, *Dartington College of Arts: learning by doing. A biography of a college* (Totnes: Longmarsh Press, 2015); Peter Cox, *The arts at Dartington*, 369.

³⁸ Noel Longhurst, 'The emergence of an alternative milieu: conceptualising the nature of alternative places', *Environment and planning* 45 (2013), 2100-19.

³⁹ Longhurst, 'Twinned with Narnia?', 293; Philip Conford, "'Somewhere quite different': the seventies generation of organic activists and their context', *Rural history* 19 (2010), 217-34.

⁴⁰ Martin Stott, *Spilling the beans* (London: Fontana, 1986), 10.

society'.⁴¹ Ash's solutions, which included biodynamic agriculture, artisanal food production and combining Wittgenstein's philosophy with Buddhism, bore a strong flavour of pre-war Dartington's eclectic holism.⁴² In a sense, the micro-scale communitarian-minded social context trumped both the macro-scale context of political conservatism and the top-down, economically-oriented leadership by the trustees, keeping the holistic, democratic idealism of Dartington alive in a diffuse fashion that the Elmhursts might have relished.

Since the 1990s the appetite for exploring utopian alternatives to capitalist individualism is again on the rise.⁴³ Aspirations for ecological sustainability have been added to earlier hopes for spiritualised, creative community living. Dartington, embedded in a flourishing local alternative milieu, has re-emerged as a nexus of holistic idealism. The Schumacher Centre, founded in 1991 as a teaching centre in the 'spiritual ecology' movement, led by social and environmental activist Satish Kumar and inspired by E.F. Schumacher, has been a key component of this resurgence.⁴⁴ This 'point of renewal for The Dartington Hall Trust with a fresh focus on values and a "big idea" has drawn internationally-recognised figures including James Lovelock, originator of the 'Gaia hypothesis', and environmentalist and writer Roger Deakin.⁴⁵

As with earlier iterations of the Elmhursts' holistic ambitions, the turn to ecological social reform has both nationalist-progressive and socialist-pluralist aspects. The Schumacher Centre is embedded in state higher education, offering postgraduate programmes run in association with the Universities of Plymouth and Wales; it has an international following but it strives to remain small and locally relevant, opening its doors to locals on Wednesdays and cultivating links with nearby community-minded organisations such as Sharpham.⁴⁶ Dartington also works with the Transition Town movement, a decentralised, international charity based in the nearby town of Totnes, which aims to increase community resilience as a

⁴¹ Maurice Ash, quoted in Christopher Titmuss, *Freedom of the spirit* (London: Green Print, 1991), 84.

⁴² Maurice Ash's philosophy is laid out in *The new renaissance*.

⁴³ Davina Cooper, *Everyday utopias: the conceptual life of promising spaces* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Martin Parker, George Cheney, Valérie Fournier and Chris Land (eds.), *The Routledge companion to alternative organization*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Ruth Levitas, *Utopia and method: the imaginary reconstitution of society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁴⁴ Dominic Corrywright, 'Network spirituality: the Schumacher–Resurgence–Kumar nexus', *Journal of contemporary religion* 19 (2004), 311–27.

⁴⁵ Sir David Green, then chairman of the Dartington Hall Trust, in 'Foreword' to Anne Phillips, *Holistic education: learning from Schumacher College* (Totnes: Green Books in association with Schumacher College, 2008), 7. James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis' posits that the biosphere acts like a living organism that self-regulates to keep conditions right for life. James Lovelock, *Gaia: the practical science of planetary medicine* ([n.p.]: Gaia, 1991).

⁴⁶ Corrywright, 'Network spirituality'.

way to address climate change and economic crisis.⁴⁷ The Elmhursts' legacy is an estate which continues to engage with the challenge of what it means to regenerate and strengthen local community in the national context of centralised social democracy and in an international context of globalisation.

That Dartington still thrives – albeit more as a place of liberal, creative relaxation rather than as a forcing ground for social change – has much to do with the characteristics that made it so influential in the first place: its wealth, its strong connections with other idealist projects and its capacious ideology. One interwar visitor commented that the framework through which the Elmhursts had achieved the 'corporate embodiment' of their ideas was 'so elastic and adaptable that there is nothing to threaten their growth'.⁴⁸ In the 1930s and 40s, even as they emphasised the necessity of seeking unity, Dorothy and Leonard increasingly accepted that their lack of a definitive manifesto meant that Dartington would always be fragmented, with no-one, themselves included, having a whole view: 'there is a vertical Dartington which reaches from the earth far away into the sky [...] There is the horizontal Dartington, which stretches over certain fields of enterprise, [...] and each person has the quadrilateral shot of which he or she is capable [...] Out of this jigsaw Dartington builds and grows.'⁴⁹ Their enterprise was a means of negotiation with 'how to be' in modern society that was not supposed to achieve its consummation in the immediate, just like the Christian faith that it, in many ways, replaced. And for many, it provided an answer.

⁴⁷ Launched in 2006, with Totnes as the first hub, by 2014 there were 1,120 Transition Town initiatives in 42 countries. Derk Loorbach, Flor Avelina, Alex Haxeltine, Julia M. Wittmay, Tim O'Riordan, Paul Weaver and René Kemp, 'The economic crisis as a game changer? Exploring the role of social construction in sustainability transitions', *Ecology and society* 21 (2016) [<http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-08761-210415>, accessed 15 June 2018]. See also Rob Hopkins, 'New report: "So what does Transition Town Totnes actually do?"', *Transition Culture* (2010) [<http://transitionculture.org/2010/11/23/new-report-so-what-does-transition-town-totnes-actually-do/>, accessed 1 July 2018].

⁴⁸ Godfrey I.H. Lloyd to Leonard, [n.d.], LKE/G/22/A.

⁴⁹ Leonard to Fred Gwatkin, 2 October 1934, LKE/LF/16/A.

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