



Lady Evelyn Barbara Balfour 16 July 1898 – 16 January 1990

Born in London on July 16th 1898 fourth daughter of the Rt. Hon. Gerald Balfour, M.P, a nephew of the Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury. Her mother was Lady Betty, daughter of the 1st Earl of Lytton, late Viceroy of India and grand daughter of Bulwer Lytton. At that time her father was Secretary for Ireland. They lived in Dublin, and in London when Parliament was sitting.

Educated by governesses in East Lothian and Woking in Surrey, with bicycles and telephones, hers was an extremely privileged upbringing. At age eight, she decided to become a vegetarian, where-upon she was no longer forced to eat meat. Encouraged to study, at age 16 she passed her exams in History, Geography, French, German, English Literature and Scripture.

At age 17 she took the highly unusual decision, for a girl of her class and background to become a farmer. The syllabus included Farm Management, Agricultural Botany, Land Surveying, Book-Keeping, General Chemistry, Zoology, Geology, Physics, Meteorology and Veterinary hygiene. The syllabus then expanded in year two into Farm Economics, Live Stock, Dairy Farming, Land Drainage, Agricultural Law, Entomology and Practical Farming.



Among the first women to graduate in agriculture at Reading University in 1917, she secured work as manager of a farm in 1918. Letters from the period reveal that she was following the terms of the Woman's Suffrage clause in the reform bill, alongside the grind of food rationing.

In late 1919 she borrowed the money to buy a farm 'Newbells' in Haughley in Suffolk in partnership with her older sister Mary. A farm that had no running water, electricity or sanitation. The water supply was the moat around the house, one third water, two thirds mud. The farm made a loss for years, but Eve's father acted as the guarantor.

From 1929 to 1933 she found herself fighting a now largely forgotten battle against the payment of tithes to the church, an anachronism stemming from the payments due to the church by agricultural land-owners and dating back to the 16th century when they were instituted after the Reformation. A series of Parliamentary Acts had gradually abolished or reduced the power of the Church to charge tithes. By 1925 the so-called stabilizing Act was all that remained, but during the slump of the late '20's and '30's it had become manifestly unfair.

In court for riotous assembly one day and discharged, then presenting the case to the Royal Commission in 1935 as the UK campaign gained popular support, her experiences taught her how to champion apparently unpopular causes. She published a 22 page booklet, priced at 3d (All profits ... the the Suffolk Tithe-payers Association) entitled 'What Is All This About Tithes?' by Lady Eve Balfour.

The papers carried a great deal of news on the Tithe War as it was described. For instance TIME magazine for August 14th 1933 printed an article critical of the Tithes and wrote, somewhat to Eve's embarrassment:

'Last week for the first time an aristocrat popped up among England's time-embattled farmers. Lady Evelyn was among a crowd of more than 100 Essex and Sussex farmer who set upon a bailiff. After rescuing the bailiff police charged lady Evelyn and 36 farmers with 'unlawful assembly'. In Castle Hedingham court she protest that she had been trying to stop the riot. With the whole countryside smoldering indignation the court adjourned until after harvest time...

Eventually the charge was dismissed, but with over 1500 cases outstanding in East Anglia and several thousand elsewhere in the country the law was rapidly being brought into disrepute by such scenes and it soon became evident that a Royal Commission was required. It also became clear that when it arose Eve would be expected to present the Tithe-payers case.

Towards the end of November Eve was disturbed by the headway that the blackshirt movement of Sir Oswald Mosley appeared to be making in the countryside and she contemplated at one time trying to get a new political party on the move. Eve wrote:

'My work on the tithe question has for some time led my thoughts in a political direction and the ideas that have been turning round in my mind were finally crystallised by a speech I heard delivered a week or two ago by Oswald Mosley in Ipswich.



I think that a very large section of the community today feel the existing old political principles and the old monetary system inadequate to deal with present day conditions and that if the life and health of the nation is to be restored something new must be found. The Labour party represents international unity

of workers and the Conservative party which once represented the countryside now in the main represents international finance and is governed by the Bank of England and the City. Both of these parties seem to me to be pursuing their ideals at the expense of the home produce (by which I mean those engaged in industry and agriculture, whether employer or employed.) The home producer may go to the wall if it is better for the wage earner in Central Europe, or if the City can line its pockets in foreign dividends or by juggling with currency fluctuations. I think it is time that the home producers in this widest sense of the word, banded together and demanded a look in.

Now the only party claiming to put forward a policy to uphold the producers' interests is Mosley's party and I think that there is a very grave danger that if he remains the only party with such a policy the whole of rural England will go black-shirt. I view this prospect with alarm.... Cheap foreign food which ruins the English farmer and increases unemployment does not in the long run benefit the urban worker... The flood of cheap Argentine meat and manufactured foreign goods which undercut our markets only benefit the men who have sent money to the Argentine or invested in foreign finances and their profits consist of money which does not exist, while real wealth ceases to be produced. This is not right.

All these views are held and preached by Mosley and people forget his ghastly methods, his antisemitism, his intolerance. I want to see a new party emerge that can legislate with the same end in view, but without dictatorship....'

Eve's burgeoning political strategy, was held back by the business of running the farm and the constant financial struggles faced by all farmers in those depression years.

With the encouragement and support of her long standing friend, Beb Hearnden journalism increasingly became one of her means of earning a living. Eve, also founded a largely female jazz band, and co-authored a number of crime thrillers under the pseudonym of Hearnden Balfour. These activities helped the household to survive the slump created by the Governments decision to allow the unrestricted import of American corn and overseas butter, beef and mutton, and imitated Eve in to the disciplines of writing and dealing with publishers.

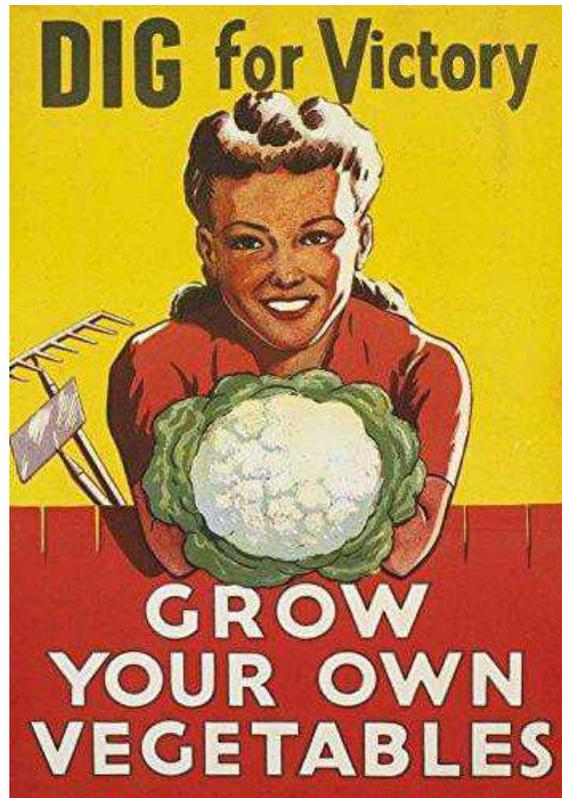
Another outcome of the slump, what that Eve's neighbour Kathleen Carnley, owner of the 80-acre Walnut Tree Farm sold her farm to her for the foreclosed price of five shillings an acre and introduced her to a friend Alice Debenham who agreed to farm the sites in conjunction. This helped eased the financial pressures.



The challenges created by the agricultural slump led Eve to question the accepted methods of farming, and she became interested in the works of Sir Albert Howard, Robert McCarrison and others, suggesting a coherent link between the Soil, Crops and Human and Animal Health, then a revolutionary concept. In 1938 in a remarkable gesture she donated her farm to 'The Haughley Research Trust' to test her theories on this relationship, accepting the wages of a farm labourer as manager.

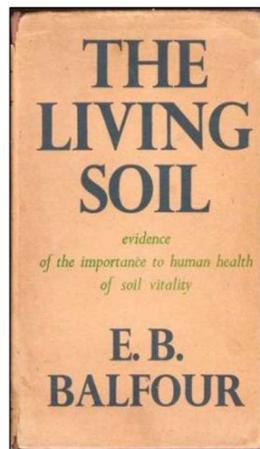
In the process of setting the whole scheme in motion, initially with a view to raising finance for the project, Eve wrote a Monograph on the subject. This was by far the most ambitious piece of writing she had so far produced. Including 35,000 words, with a number of forewords, including one by Viscount Bledisloe, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture (1924-28), this was to become a historic document, elevating Lady Balfour, from titled farmer and national protestor to a visionary at the forefront of a vitally important international message.

Having barely started the research on the farm, when the 1939-45 War broke out, Haughley Research Farms Ltd. Naturally prove something of a headache to the local War Agricultural Committee throughout the war years. The important environmental fact was that they were exempted from the wartime regulations and were not forced to use artificial fertiliser. However, the general shortage of staff meant that the farm ran on unskilled labour of both genders, including some German Jewish refugees. War-time tasks included enforcing black-out in the district and postman alongside farm responsibilities. In order to set up 'The Trust', Eve leased the building and bought a horse-drawn gypsy caravan.



During the cold grim days of 1941 when it seemed Germany was triumphant everywhere, Eve found time to begin the write her best-seller 'The Living Soil' outlining her organic beliefs, first published in 1943 it continued to be updated until the 1960's.

On June 12th 1945, along with 60 Founder members the Soil Association was created with Eve as the chair. A role quickly handed to Lord Teviot. Eve herself conceding that she talked a lot, and was always happy to debate, but paid little attention to the running of meetings. Her organising skills were better suited to running the research farm and touring the main agricultural shows.... in a 1928 Rolls Royce Silver ghost with a large caravan body.



By 1950 the Soil Association had 3,000 members, and as Organising Secretary and Consultant she devoted the next thirty years of her life to propagating her views against a hostile and powerful chemical lobby led by ICI and Fisons and industrial agricultural industry which had the ear of government. As with so many pioneers she was described as a crank, but in the words of E.F.Schumaker, a crank is a small, useful and inexpensive instrument which causes revolutions.

In 1961, at the age of 63 she bought a cottage in Theberton, near Leiston, in Suffolk and undertook major renovations. Although continuing as Field Director from 1964 onwards she was well past the retirement age of the time. She became Honorary Vice President in 1967.

In 1970 the Earl of Bradford, who had been President for many years, resigned and Dr Ernest F. Schumaker, whose book, 'Small is Beautiful', which when published in 1972, made as much impact as Eve's 'Living Soil'. Lady Balfour and Dr. Schumaker shared a mutual respect for each other's work and liked each other.

In 1976, Eve's old friend KC died. As fellow workers on the farm and for the Soil Association, despite KC's Yorkshire forthrightness, she possessed a tact and unobtrusive but sensitive judgment which undoubtedly aided Eve greatly on many occasions. As her companion on many of the tours, she fulfilled all the invaluable housekeeping and domestic duties.

In 1977 it came as a considerable shock when Ernest Schumacher died suddenly on a train in Switzerland.

At the age of eighty, she began to cook. Finally retiring when nearly eighty five. Even then, whenever possible, she continued promoting her faith in the Organic Movement around the world until her death from a stroke in January 1990, aged 92.



Quotes from 'The Living Soil – Eve Balfour.

“My subject is food, which concerns everyone; it is health, which concerns everyone; it is soil, which concerns everyone, even if he does not realise it – and it is the history of certain scientific research linking these three vital subjects.

Now since it concerns health, and food, and soil, and science, it also concerns the legislator, the politician, the voter, the tax-and-rate-payer; the farmer, the gardener, the veterinary surgeon, the doctor, the sanitary inspector, the public health authority, the school teacher, the priest, 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor.... - in fact, the Citizen. “

“For out of the soil are we fashioned, and by the products of the soil is our earthly existence maintained. If we destroy our soil – and it is not indestructible – mankind will vanish from the earth as surely as has the dinosaurs. “

“There cannot be any doubt that so far as the modern growth of deserts is concerned it is not natured but man who is the desert maker. It is not unlikely that most of the great deserts of the world are of his making. When we consider how he sets about it not in conjunction with the fact that traces of high civilization are found in many areas now desert, the probability of his past guilt becomes greater. And the exhaustion of the fertility of the soil is no new thing, nor is the temptation to practice it for immediate gain. The feature in the situation is that man has recently enormously extended his physical powers by the use of mechanical devices. One man can now do what used to be the work of dozens or even hundreds, and can do it faster. “

“By ignoring the law of return man has weakened the thread called decay. It is perilously near breaking. If we let it break beyond repair we face starvation. 'Out of the earth are we and the plants and animals that feed us created and made, and to earth we must return and things whereof we are made if it is to yield again foods of a quality suited to our needs.”

“Air, or rather oxygen, it can rightly be maintained is a part of the food. When the human being is in the womb, oxygen is not separated in any way from the other elements of food.”

“It seems that it is not only desirable for our own food, whether animal or vegetable, to be as fresh as possible, but for those foods themselves also to be nurtured on a living diet.”

“ Increase of production must not be confused with increase of fertility. Increased production for human use can be, and usually is, secured by cashing in on existing fertility and using it up with disastrous effects. Fertility, depends on humus. The accelerated growth induced by chemical fertilizers has the effect among others, of speeding up the rate at which humus is exhausted.”,

“William Beveridge, speaking to his proposals on social security, said that security against sickness was one of the two factors of post-war reconstruction that did not raise any big political issue, but that this would not be true if it were shown that the primary factor in the prevention of sickness lay in soil management, for in that event, any government, if it is to fulfill its duties of serving the common good, would have to exercise a wide control, not only of land utilization and management, but also over the whole range of subsidiary interests that at present handle the production and distribution of the nation's food supplies, as well as over the methods employed for disposal of municipal wastes. Among those concerned in this wide range of activities are some very powerful vested interests, and thus any programme for the promotion of health that was based on soil fertility would raise political issues of the first order.”

“If the nation's health depends on the way its food is grown, then agriculture must be looked upon as one of the health services, in fact the primary health service. 'It is important ...to outgrow the attitude of confining the term health services to what are really sickness services.’”

“ A nation cannot survive in a desert, nor enjoy more than a hollow and short-lived prosperity if it exists by consuming its soil. This is what all the new lands of promise have been doing for the last hundred years, though few as yet realise the full consequences of their past actions or that soil erosion is altering the course of world history more radically than any war or revolution”.

“If the farming profession were to be reorganised so as to fulfill its true function of serving the community, then the land could play an important part in this revival. .. For it seems to me that of the many attributes that man needs in life, four of the most important are: (1) sufficient humility to recognise that a higher authority exists than himself; (2) sufficient self-confidence and purpose to undertake great enterprise; (3) sufficient patience to take a long-term view, and (4) the will to fight. All four qualities are in the gift of the land. The life of the cultivator is one continual fight, but his adversaries (apart from such things as world markets, which should form no part of a farmer's hazard) are elemental things like storm, flood, and drought, so that – in contrast to human fighting – to win a battle is all triumph, and no bitterness: to lose it, no disgrace”,

“First we must determine the factors governing healthy food, and having done so, no private interest must be allowed to prevent such food being available to all sections of the public. Secondly, our attitude must change towards refuse. It must no longer be considered as useless and objectionable rubbish, to be got rid of as cheaply as possible, but on the contrary, as potential wealth. Thirdly, we

must educate our people to realise the interdependence of town and country, and that a nation's soil fertility is its most precious asset, And lastly, we must not overlook the implications of the definition of health arrived at as a result of the only scientific inquiry into the nature of Health in Man that has so far been made. (The Peckham Experiment, Pearse and Crocker (Allen and Unwin 1943)”).

“ We are the youngest of the world's species, and we have all the arrogance of youth. We have played havoc with the elaborate structure that was laboriously built up before we came, and now we find that we are not gods after all. We have been all-powerful in our destruction, but we cannot recreate the life we have destroyed. Human ecology demands that we should think less of our 'rights' and more of our duties to all other living things, including each other. We must start again, with a new and better attitude towards life. Indeed we must in some cases relearn that life exists”.

“ If only we were prepared to put into constructive arts of peace, the united effort in courage, sacrifice, labour and money, that we are prepared to exercise in the destructive art of war, we should be assured of a better world.”

Eve Balfour – Extracts of biography by Michael Brander.

