



This paper comes from my quest to trace the origin & development of the organic idea.

I have looked at “organic” as a meme, i.e. a unit of cultural transmission.

This paper is about the world’s first “organic farming” association.

The results are surprising to me, let’s see if they are surprising to you.



So, this is a detective story.

If you were looking for the world’s first “organic farming” association,

ie the first association to call itself an “organic farming” association,

where would you start, where would you look,

& who are the candidates? Is it the UK, USA, Europe, Asia, Africa, or even NZ?



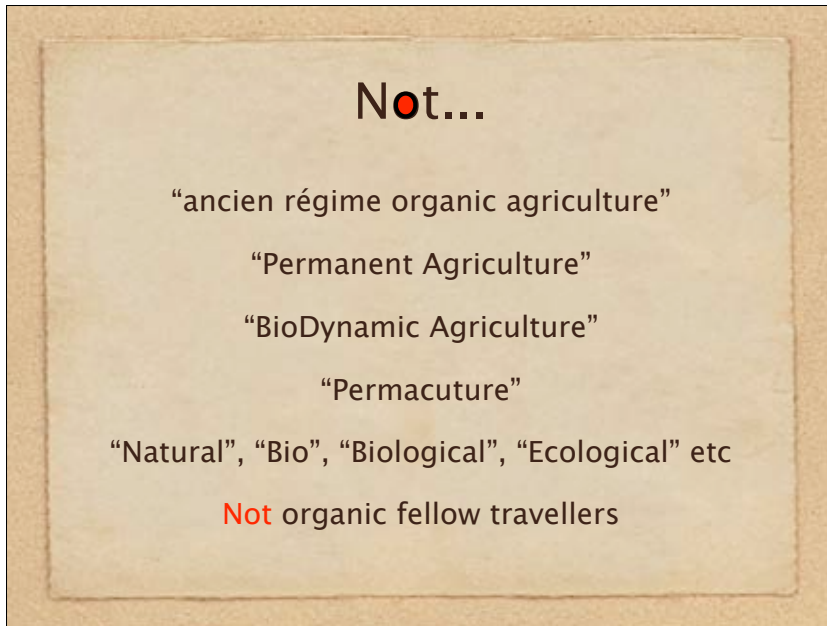
3

To put it in context:
 This year organic farming statistics were reported from 138 countries;
 The world organic market was valued at A\$60 billion;
 & organic food is either produced or sold in almost every country.
 I have looked back to the beginning of the organic idea, the organic meme.



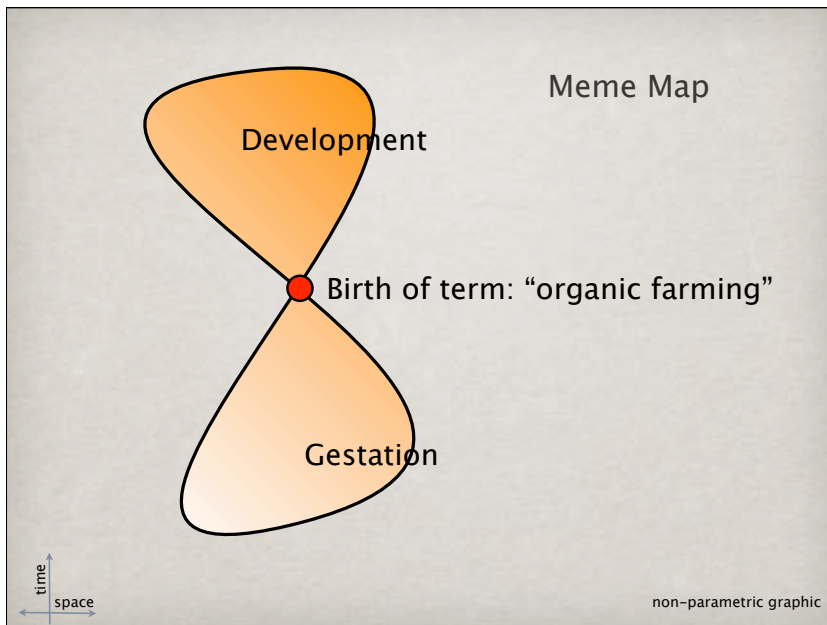
4

At the outset I want to make some acknowledgements & some exclusions.
 Rudolf Steiner presented his Agriculture Course in Poland in 1924.
 That led on to BioDynamic Agriculture & that predates the term organic.
 I want to acknowledge Biodynamic,
 but that is not what I am looking at here.



5

This is a disclaimer.
I’m not looking here at 10,000 years of organic agriculture, what I call ancien régime Organic Agriculture,
& I am not looking at Permanent Agriculture, BD, Permaculture, Natural, Bio, Biological, Ecological, etc.
I am looking at when do we get the term “organic farming”,
and then its diffusion, and its uptake,
over time & space.



6

There was a time & place where the term “organic farming” was coined.
SO the first question is where & when was that?
Before the idea was born, what of the gestation of the idea?
& afterwards, what of the development?
These are issues that I’ve been toying with.
So AFTER we receive the term “organic farming”, one question is:
How quickly - or slowly - does it blossom into an association? and where?
& these are questions that I am addressing in this presentation.

US Organic myth...

- ♦ “ ... organic farming, the American publisher J. I. Rodale is responsible for coining ... the defining term in 1942, in his magazine Organic Farming and Gardening”

Silver, L.M., Challenging Nature, 2006, p.230

USA 1942

7

There is an organic myth that the term “organic farming” was coined by an American publisher Jerome Rodale. Now Rodale made up various things, including the name Rodale, but he didn’t make up the term “organic farming” in 1942 as claimed by Silver, or in any other year for that matter.



UK “organic farming”
1940
Lord Northbourne

Paull, John (2006) The Farm as Organism: The Foundational Idea of Organic Agriculture. *JBDT* (80): pp. 14-18.

8

My research is that the first occurrence of the term “organic farming” is in this book “Look to the Land”. It was written in 1939, and published in 1940, in London. The author is Lord Northbourne. He has received little recognition for his achievement.



Oxford University 1920s

9

Oxford University used to have a school of agriculture,
& it was here that
Lord Northbourne studied & later taught agriculture.



Lord Northbourne

Photo: J. Paull of an original photograph in Wye College Archives

10

This is a photo of Lord Northbourne.
That's him on the far left.
This was 2 decades after publishing Look to the Land.



UK: Soil Association 1946

11

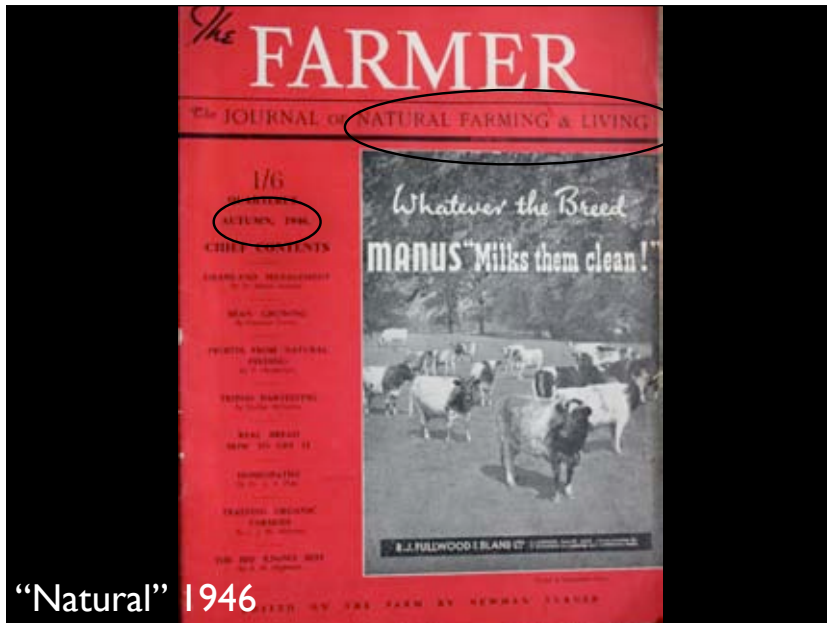
It was from that point in 1940 that the organic idea has diffused through time & space.

Before we get to the FIRST “organic farming” association, let me touch on some context:

The UK’s leading Organic Association is the Soil Association, it was founded in Nov 1946.

2 points:

1. it didn’t choose organic in the name &
2. this was 6 1/2 years after Look to the Land was published.
(Eve Balfour & Albert Howard)



“Natural” 1946

12

Another early player in the UK was Newman Turner.

He was the editor of The Farmer.

You see here that in 1946 he hadn’t yet adopted the organic terminology.



Then in 1947 Newman Turner adopted “Organic” into the masthead of the Farmer as you see here.

13



UK’s leading organic charity is the Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA), and this year is the 50th anniversary - (Lawrence Hill, 1958) Once again “organic” wasn’t originally in the name & it was 18 years after Look to the Land.. Henry Doubleday only very recently adopted the name Garden Organic.

14

NZ/Aoteroa... getting there...

The Humic Compost Club May 1941

⇒ Compost Club Magazine 1942

Humic Compost Society 1947

NZ **Organic** Compost Society 1953

The Soil & Health Association 1972

NZ: Humic pioneer

There is a New Zealand claim that NZ started the first organic farming association.

That claim is based on this chronology:

... maybe the world's first Humic Compost Club was founded in 1941 ...

For its 1st 30 years it was a compost society.

So I think the claim for organic primacy for NZ is equivocal at best, & is rather an interesting case of of anachro-morphism, ie reframing some past activity into some present-day terminology.

Now let's get back across the Tasman.

15

Australia?

“**Organic Farming Australia**”

“**History and Institutions**”

“**In the early 1980s ...**”*

NASAA March 1986

BFA 1987

* Wynen, E., 2007, Organic Farming Australia, in Willer & Youssefi, *The World of Organic Agriculture, Statistics and Emerging Trends 2007*, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), Bonn, Germany.
(see also Wynen 2006 & 2008).

Aus “1980s”

For Australia:

There are multiple accounts of the development of Organic agriculture in Australia.

These accounts place the beginning of organics in Australia in the 1980s.

Now I'm going to put to you some evidence that these accounts are mistaken by 4 decades.

16



17

Here is an Australian publication from 1946.
 The Organic Farming Digest was 1st published in Australia in April 1946.
 To put that in context,
 The Soil Association in the UK wasn't founded until 7 months later.



18

It gets more interesting.
 The Organic Farming Digest is a journal of
 The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society which
 was founded in October 1944
 (by way of reference that is > 2 years before the UK Soil Association was
 founded).

“Purpose and Objectives”

1. The Society holds that overstocking, overcropping, monoculture and the excessive use of *chemical fertilisers, poisonous sprays* and dusts have resulted in erosion and serious loss of soil fertility in Australia ... and the *pollution* of rivers and streams.

Synthetic fertilisers & pesticides

1. The Society holds that man flouts a return to the soil, which is the usual...
2. The Society is convinced that by upsetting the balance of Nature ... disease will continue to take a heavy toll of crops, animals and man, despite palliation by medicaments, which attempt to cope with effects whilst neglecting causes.
3. The Society therefore recommends the use of...
4. The Society holds that man flouts a return to the soil, which is the usual...
5. The Society holds that of birdlife now present...
6. The Society maintains that those phytochemicals, therefore, condemn its micro-organisms, their natural vitality...
7. The Society considers extraordinary pre-emptive bushfires under a... to guard against use of fire.
8. The Society advocates foster bird-life, and...
9. The Society considers that in towns and cities... Such economic use...
10. The Society holds that not be viewed as... catchment areas... protection, dams... This, in turn, will...

19

The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society produced a 10 point statement of Purposes & Objectives. The present claim is that this is the world’s first “organic” farming association & here is the world’s 1st institutional statement of organic farming purposes & principles.

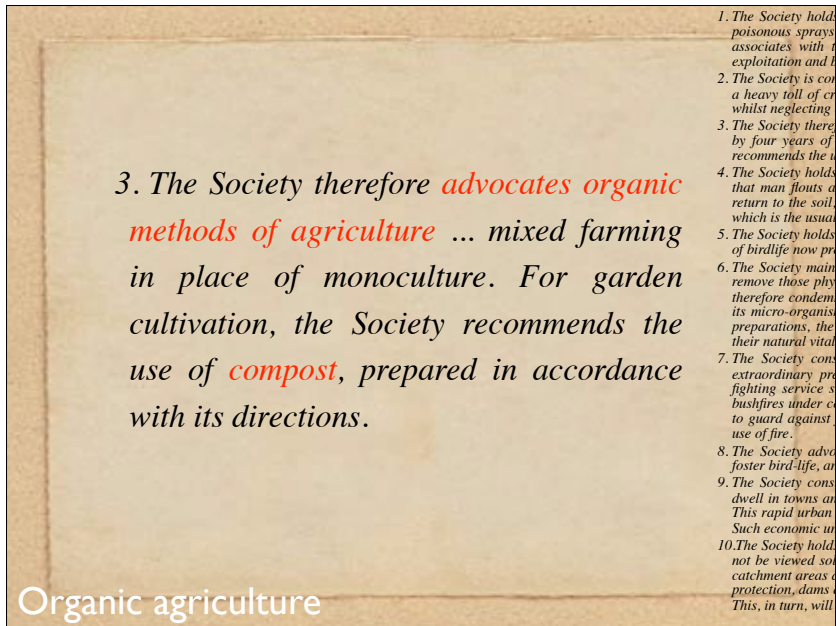
2. The Society is convinced that by upsetting the *balance of Nature* ... disease will continue to take a heavy toll of crops, animals and man, despite palliation by medicaments, which attempt to *cope with effects whilst neglecting causes*.

Balance of Nature

1. The Society holds that man flouts a return to the soil, which is the usual...
2. The Society is convinced that by upsetting the balance of Nature ... disease will continue to take a heavy toll of crops, animals and man, despite palliation by medicaments, which attempt to cope with effects whilst neglecting causes.
3. The Society therefore recommends the use of...
4. The Society holds that man flouts a return to the soil, which is the usual...
5. The Society holds that of birdlife now present...
6. The Society maintains that those phytochemicals, therefore, condemn its micro-organisms, their natural vitality...
7. The Society considers extraordinary pre-emptive bushfires under a... to guard against use of fire.
8. The Society advocates foster bird-life, and...
9. The Society considers that in towns and cities... Such economic use...
10. The Society holds that not be viewed as... catchment areas... protection, dams... This, in turn, will...

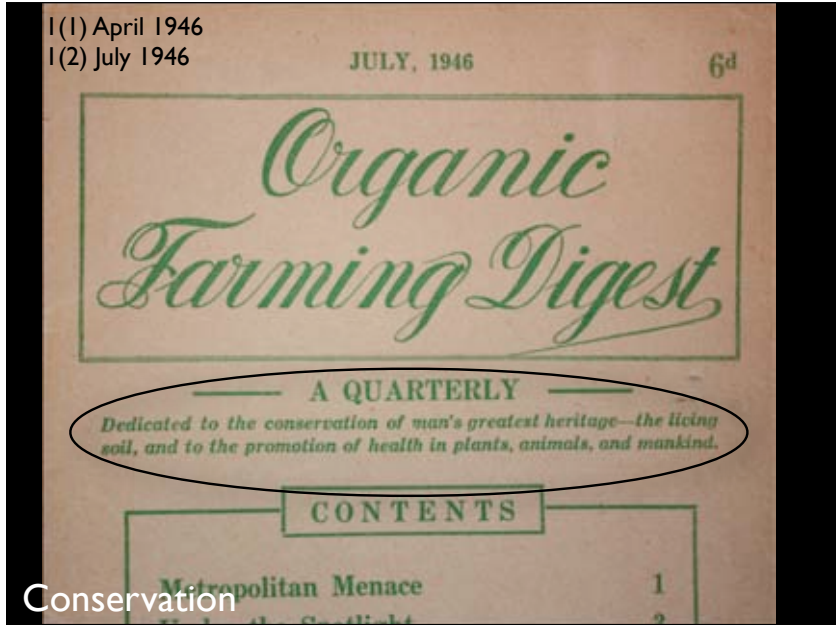
20

The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society warned about upsetting the balance of nature & asserted that dealing with effects rather than causes was the wrong approach.



21

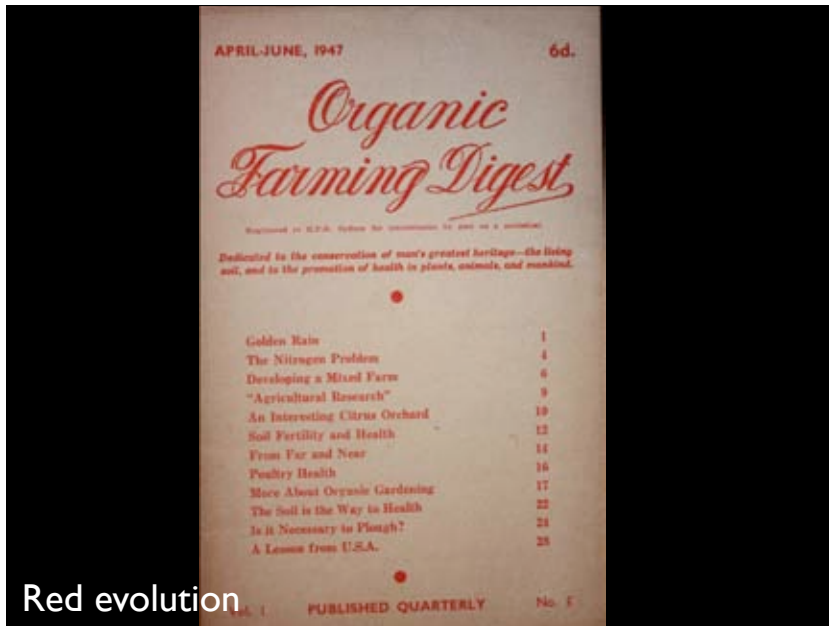
The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society very specifically advocated organic methods of agriculture & that is reflected in their choice of name & in their statement of principles.



22

The masthead of the Organic Farming Digest identified that it was dedicated to conservation, to soil as our greatest heritage, to soil as a living entity, and to the promotion of health, of plants, animals & humans.

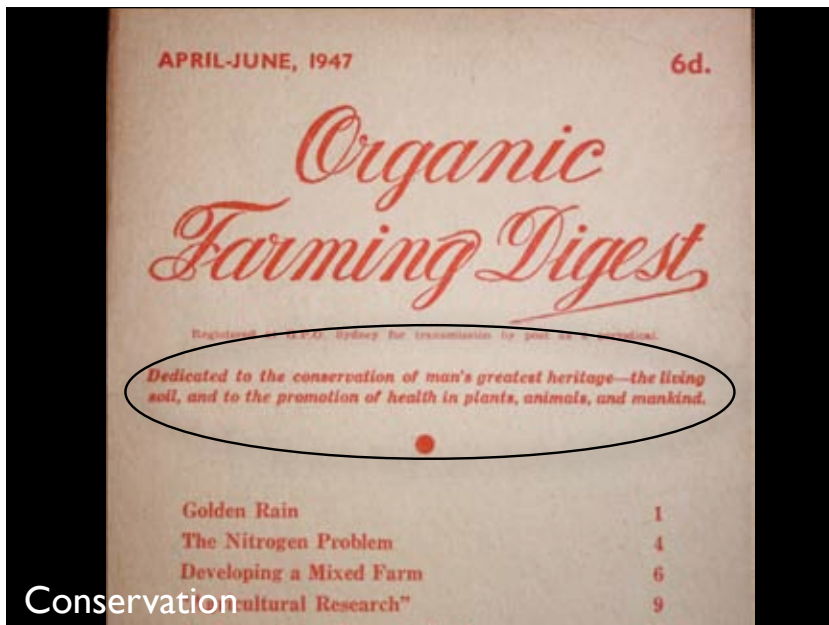
Conservation



Red evolution

23

Changing the cover from green to red was the first of a series of changes that the Australian Gardening & Farming Society made as they tinkered with their journal.



Conservation

24

The core message of the journal however never changed.

4. The Society holds that the “law of return” or the returning to the soil of all organic “wastes” is a natural law that man flouts at his peril. It therefore advocates the treatment of all organic urban wastes, to permit their return to the soil ...

Law of return

1. The Society holds that man flouts a heavy toll of crime whilst neglecting the law of return. It therefore recommends the use of return to the soil, which is the usual practice of birdlife now present. The Society maintains that those who remove those phytoplankton, therefore condemn their natural vitality. The Society considers that extraordinary preparations, such as bushfires under control, to guard against the use of fire. The Society advocates foster bird-life, as well as the rapid urban dwell in towns and cities. Such economic use of the land. The Society holds that not be viewed as a catchment area for protection, dams and such. This, in turn, will

25

The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society advocated the law of return, & that the soil was not something to be mined.

5. The Society holds that the natural function of birds is to keep insects in check. It deplors the wanton destruction of birdlife ... which gives rise to periodic plagues of insects e.g. locusts, etc.

Birds

1. The Society holds that man flouts a heavy toll of crime whilst neglecting the law of return. It therefore recommends the use of return to the soil, which is the usual practice of birdlife now present. The Society maintains that those who remove those phytoplankton, therefore condemn their natural vitality. The Society considers that extraordinary preparations, such as bushfires under control, to guard against the use of fire. The Society advocates foster bird-life, as well as the rapid urban dwell in towns and cities. Such economic use of the land. The Society holds that not be viewed as a catchment area for protection, dams and such. This, in turn, will

26

The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society also advocated the valuing & protecting of birds; this is still a cause of conflict between farmers and conservationists.

6. ... The Society... *condemns the use of poisonous sprays and dusts as such preparations injure the soil by killing its micro-organisms, also the earthworms, bees and birds that are in the vicinity... the Society advocates enriching the soil with compost, thereby providing plants and trees with their natural vitality to resist infestation.*

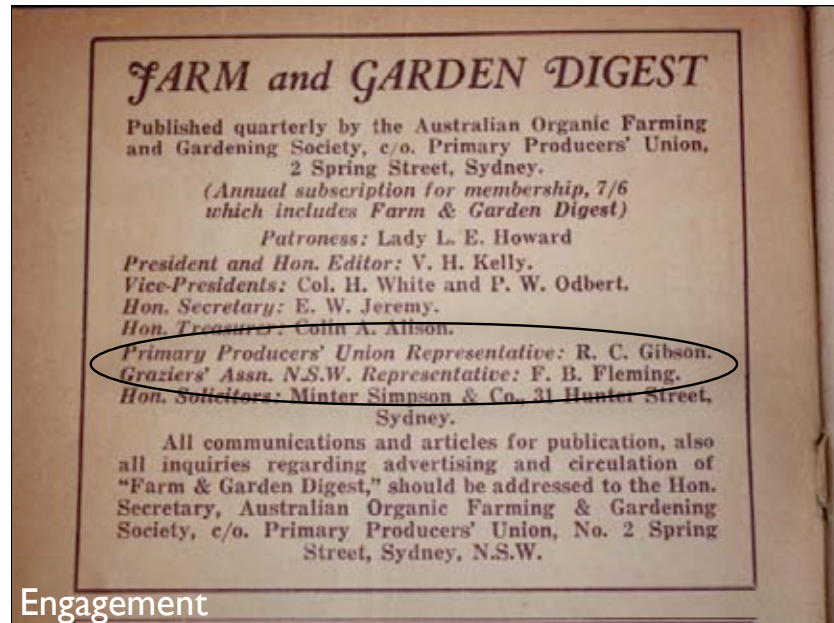
1. The Society holds poisonous sprays associates with exploitation and
 2. The Society is con a heavy toll of cr whilst neglecting
 3. The Society there by four years of recommends the u
 4. The Society holds that man flouts a return to the soil, which is the usual
 5. The Society holds of birdlife now pr
 6. The Society main remove those phy therefore condem its micro-organis preparations, the their natural vital
 7. The Society cons extraordinary pre fighting service s bushfires under a to guard against use of fire.
 8. The Society advo foster bird-life, at
 9. The Society cons dwell in towns an This rapid urban Such economic ur
 10. The Society hold not be viewed soa catchment areas c protection, dams c
 This, in turn, will

The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society condemned the use of poisons, pointing out that they damage the soil, micro-organisms, bees & birds. This was 20 years before Rachel Carson & 40 years before Francis Chaboussou's Trophobiosis Theory (1985). Healthy Crops: A New Agricultural Revolution, French National Institute of Agricultural Research (INRA).

20 years before Rachel Carson
 40 years before Chaboussou's Trophobiosis

Paull, John (2008) Trophobiosis Theory: A Pest Starves on a Healthy Plant. JBAA (76):pp. 51-54.

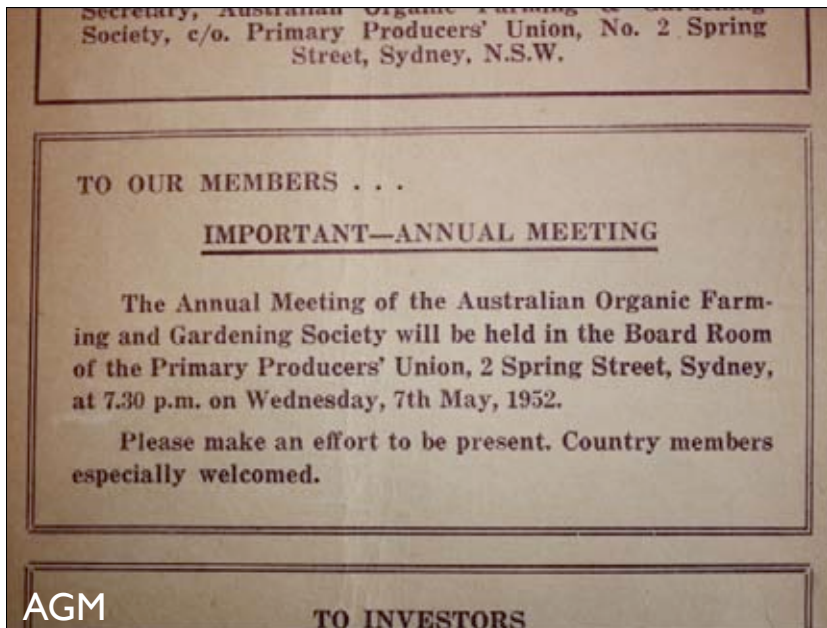
27



As you see here the Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society was engaged with mainstream agriculture including the Primary Producers Union & The Graziers Association.

Engagement

28



Annual General Meetings of the Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society were held in the Board Room of the Primary Producers Union.

29



In an effort to broaden the appeal of the journal The Organic Farming Digest was rebadged as the “Farm & Garden Digest”, The colour of the cover was changed to brown & a rural graphic was added & the price doubled.

30



With the change of name,
the dedication remained unchanged,

Conservation

31



and the Organic Farming Digest
retained a place as an element on the cover.

FGD incorporating OFD

32

Who's Who...

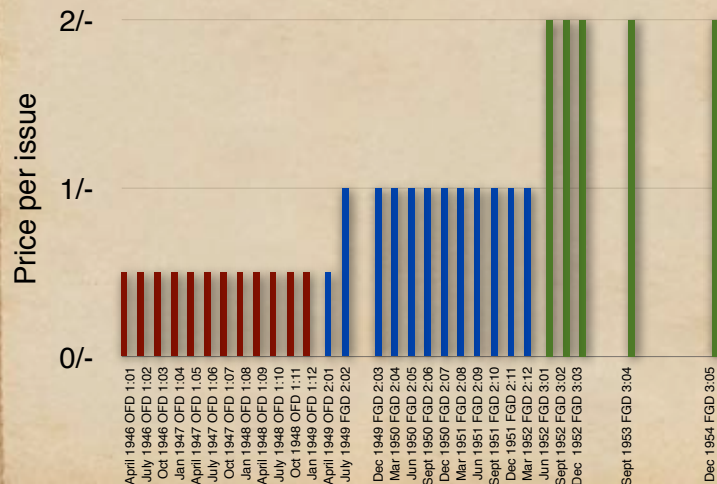
Office	1946 (1:1)	1952 (3:2)
Patron	Sir Albert Howard	Lady L E Howard
President	K H Cox	G M Kilby
Treasurer	H W Atkinson	Colin A Alison
Editor	V H Kelly	<i>nil</i> ; (C. Chapman, 3:3)
Secretary	E W Jeremy	E W Jeremy
Solicitor	Minter Simpson & Co.	Minter Simpson & Co.
Vice Presidents	<i>nil</i>	Col H White & P W Odbert
Primary Producers Union Representative	<i>nil</i>	R C Gibson
Graziers Association NSW Representative	<i>nil</i>	F B Fleming

Office bearers

33

The patron at the beginning was Albert Howard (in the UK) and after he died Lady Louise Howard. Office bearers changed over the years except for the Secretary, E W Jeremy.

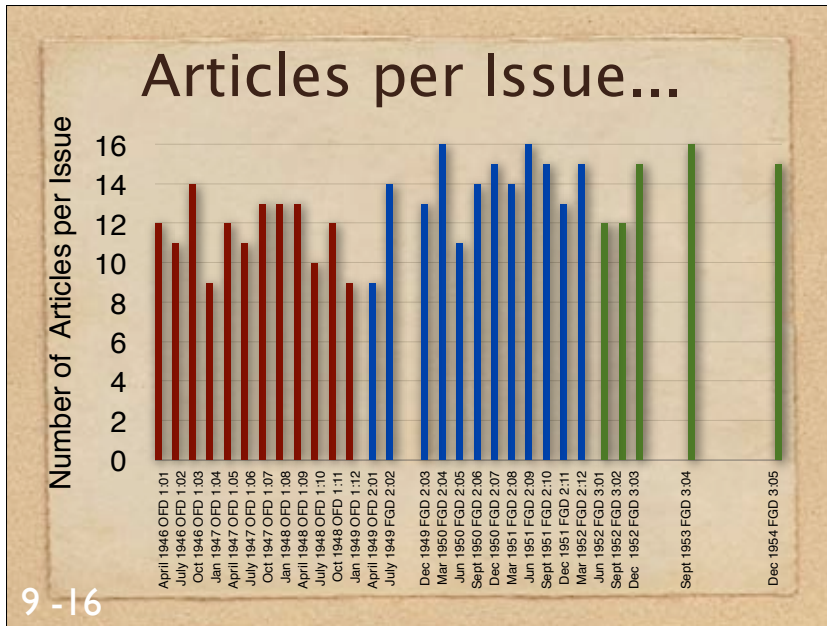
Dates & Prices History...



29 issues; 3 vols, 6d, 1/-, 2/-

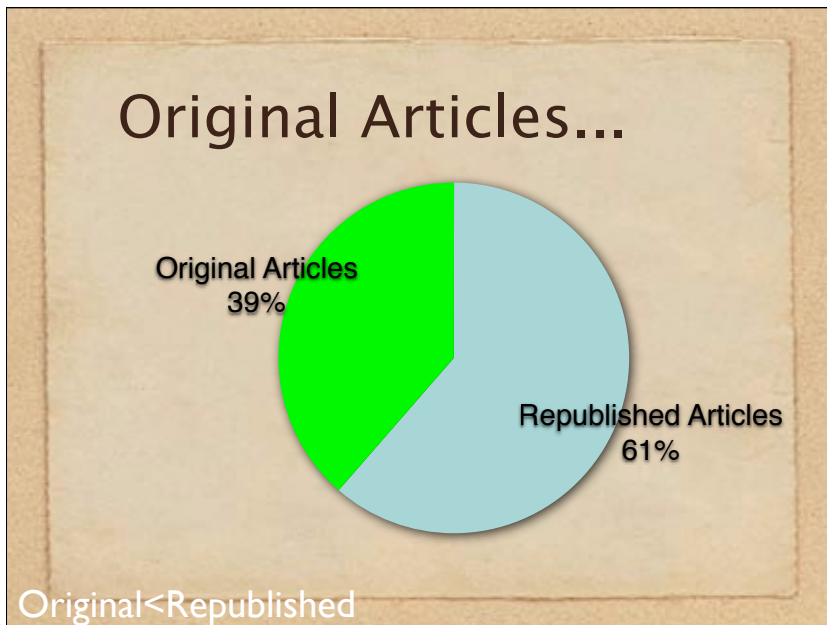
34

The journal was published quarterly & on schedule for the first 7 years. Then only 1 issue appeared in 1953 & the final issue appeared in Dec 1954. Over that time the price doubled from 6 pence to 1/-, and again from 1/- to 2/-.



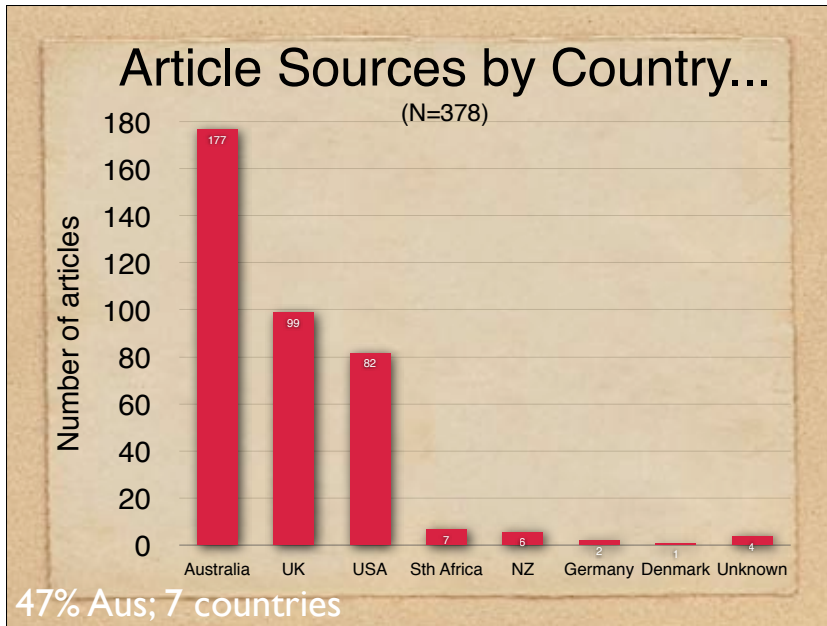
The number of articles per issue varied from 9 to 16 articles. There were 12 issues in volume 1 (shown in brown on the graph), 12 issues in volume 2 (shown in blue here), and there were 5 issues in Volume 3 (shown here in green).

35



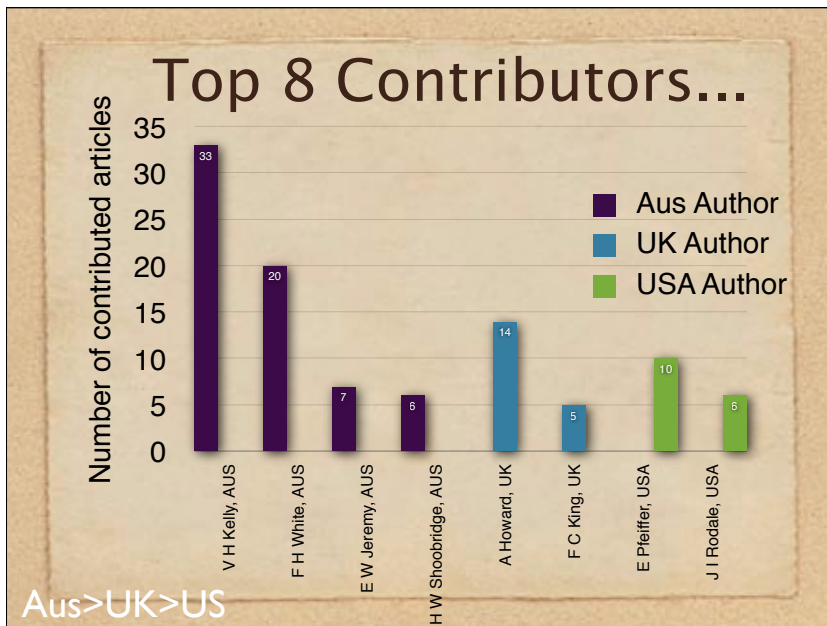
39% of articles were original to the journal, 61% were republished from elsewhere.

36



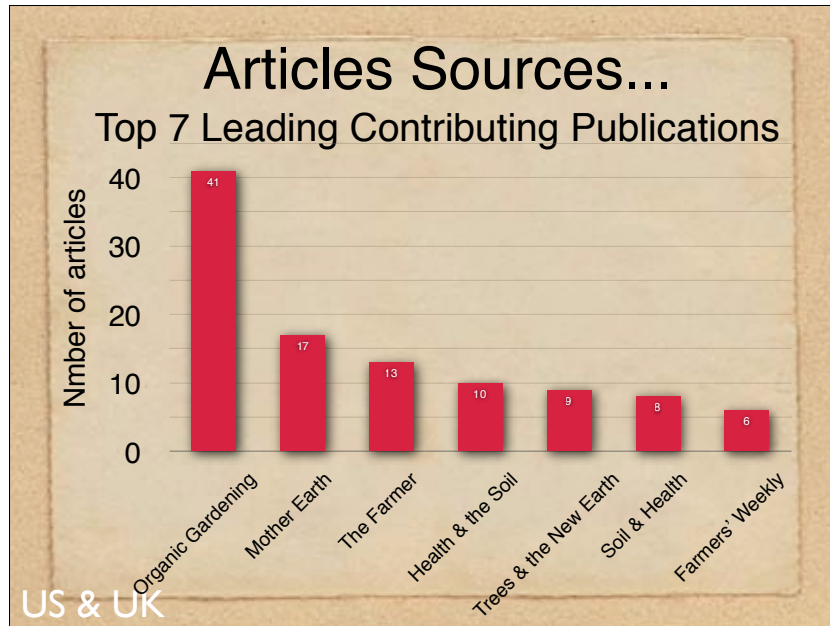
Contributors came from 7 countries, with nearly 1/2 the contributions coming from Australia, with the UK in 2nd place & USA in 3rd place.

37



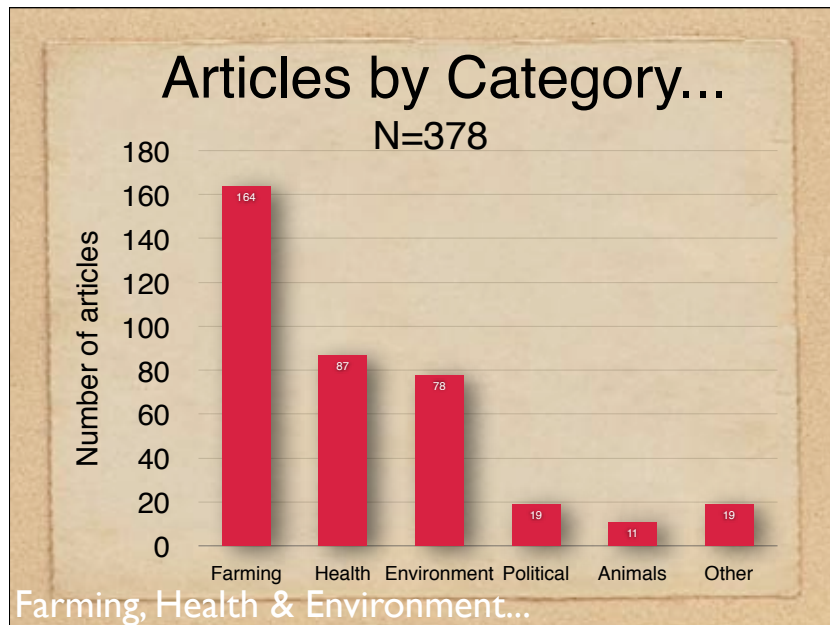
The top 2 contributors were Australian, V H Kelly & Colonel FH White. The leading UK contributor was Albert Howard & the leading US contributor was Ehrenfried Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer was the major proponent, in the English speaking world, of Biodynamic Agriculture of the time.

38



Reprinted articles in the journal were sourced broadly, mostly from like-minded periodicals in the UK & the US.

39



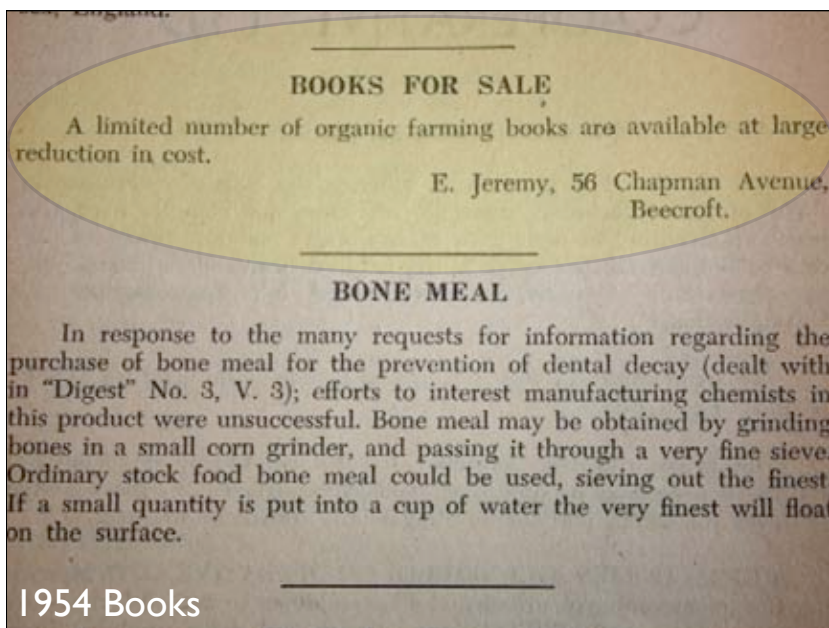
A great many articles were about practical farming issues, Health & Environment were both prominent article topics.

40



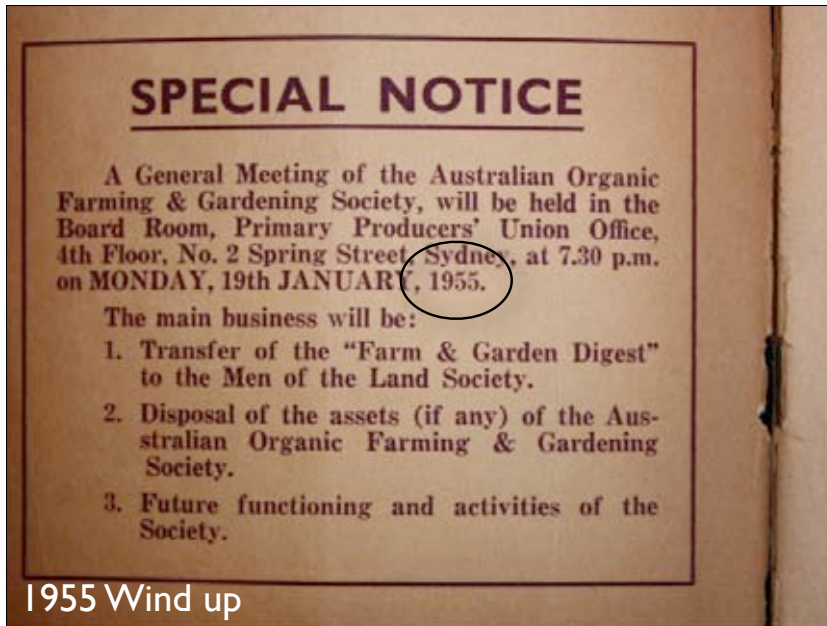
The last issue of the Australian Gardening & Farming Society's journal was December 1954. The reason cited was lack of money. The Society had at this stage publicised organic farming in Australia for a decade.

41



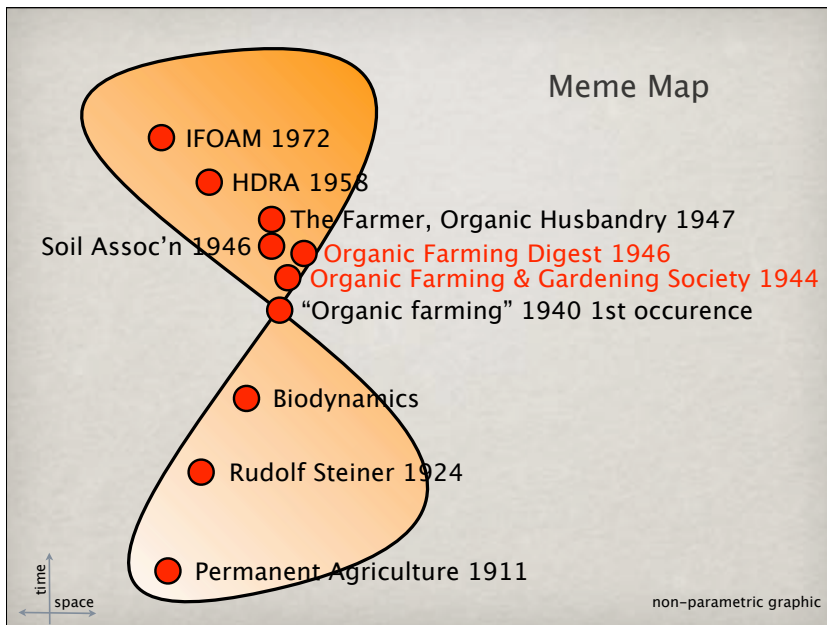
The secretary of the Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society advertised organic books for sale, "at large reduction in cost", but unfortunately no list of titles or prices appeared in that final edition.

42



The wind up meeting for the Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society was advertised for the 19th January 1955 - including the disposal of assets (if any).

43



A Meme Map presents a visual representation of meme events. Here I have plotted some key organic events, including - in red - the Organic Farming & Gardening Society & the Organic Farming Digest. I believe some primacy claims can be made for the Australian society & its journal.

44

The Australian Farming and Gardening Society (1944 – 1955)

- 1st “organic farming” **society** in the world
- 1st institutional statement of “organic” **principles**
- 1st “organic” **periodical** by an association

Primacy claims

The Australian Organic Farming & Gardening Society 1944-1955 has left us this legacy:
it seems it was the 1st “organic farming” society in the world,
it generated the 1st institutional statement of “organic” principles &
it published the 1st “organic” periodical by an association.

45



Thank you.
I’m sure you have some questions.

see also:
<http://orgprints.org/15089/>

46

Abstract: Readers of narratives of the history of organic farming in Australia will be familiar with such accounts beginning in the "1980s". In questing after the earliest organic farming society, and more particularly in pursuing the spread of the "organic" meme from its 1940 birth in Britain, it was therefore a great surprise to uncover the Australian Organic Faming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) founded in October 1944. This appears to be the world's first "organic farming" association. It also resets the organic clock for Australia back by four decades. Here was an association, pre-dating the UK Soil Association by two years, formed half a world away from the birthplace of "organic", in a country at war, under food rationing, and with its workforce under Manpower regulations. Yet organic farming principles were clearly articulated by this Australian Society, perhaps as clearly articulated as they have ever been, and particularised for Australia. The Society was constrained from publishing a journal due to wartime constraints on paper. The first appearance of the Organic Farming Digest (OFD) was in April 1946. Thereafter, for nearly a decade, the Australian Organic Faming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) regularly published a journal, with the last issue appearing in 1954. This paper explores the Society; its principles; its journals; its people; its interactions with key organic figures of the time including Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Eve Balfour, Albert Howard, and Jerome Rodale; its Australian contributors from five states, including Colonel Harold White and Professor Sir Stanton Hicks; its progress and ultimately its demise in 1955; and touch on how this history became lost.

47

Abstract: Readers of narratives of the history of organic farming in Australia will be familiar with such accounts beginning in the "1980s". In questing after the earliest organic farming society, and more particularly in pursuing the spread of the "organic" meme from its 1940 birth in Britain, it was therefore a great surprise to uncover the Australian Organic Faming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) founded in October 1944. This appears to be the world's first "organic farming" association. It also resets the organic clock for Australia back by four decades. Here was an association, pre-dating the UK Soil Association by two years, formed half a world away from the birthplace of "organic", in a country at war, under food rationing, and with its workforce under Manpower regulations. Yet organic farming principles were clearly articulated by this Australian Society, perhaps as clearly articulated as they have ever been, and particularised for Australia.

The Society was constrained from publishing a journal due to wartime constraints on paper. The first appearance of the Organic Farming Digest (OFD) was in April 1946. Thereafter, for nearly a decade, the Australian Organic Faming and Gardening Society (AOFGS) regularly published a journal, with the last issue appearing in 1954. This paper explores the Society; its principles; its journals; its people; its interactions with key organic figures of the time including Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, Eve Balfour, Albert Howard, and Jerome Rodale; its Australian contributors from five states, including Colonel Harold White and Professor Sir Stanton Hicks; its progress and ultimately its demise in 1955; and touch on how this history became lost.

48